



themelios

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EDITORIAL

Subtle Ways to Abandon the Authority of Scripture in Our Lives

— D. A. Carson —

D. A. Carson is research professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois, and general editor of Themelios.

Recently Eerdmans published *The Authority of the Christian Scriptures*.¹ It is a rather big book, with about thirty-five contributors, all of them experts in their fields. The hope and prayer that guided the project were that this volume of essays would be used by God to stabilize worldwide evangelicalism—and not only evangelicals, but all who hold to confessional Christianity. More recently, however, I have been pondering the fact that many Christians slide away from full confidence in the trustworthiness of Scripture for reasons that are not so much intellectual as broadly cultural. I am not now thinking of the college student brought up in a confessional home who goes to university and is for the first time confronted with informed and charming intellectuals whose reasoning calls into question the structure and fabric of his or her Christian belief. Clearly that student needs a lot more information; the period of doubt is often a rite of passage. No, in these jottings I'm reflecting on *subtle* ways in which we may reduce Scripture's authority *in our lives*—and the “we” refers to many Christians in the world, especially the Western world, and not least pastors and scholars. If they then introduce intellectual and cognitive objections to the authority of Scripture in order to bolster the move toward skepticism that they have already begun, a focus on such intellectual and cognitive objections, however necessary, is in danger of addressing symptoms without diagnosing the problem.

It might be useful to try to identify some of these subtle factors.

1. An Appeal to Selective Evidence

The most severe forms of this drift are well exemplified in the teaching and preaching of the HWPG—the health, wealth, and prosperity gospel. Link together some verses about God sending prosperity to the land with others that reflect on the significance of being a child of the King, and the case is made—provided, of course, that we ignore the many passages about taking up our cross, about suffering with Christ so that we may reign with him, about rejoicing because we are privileged to suffer for the name, and much more. These breaches are so egregious that they are easy to spot. What I'm thinking of now is something subtler: the simple refusal to talk about disputed matters in order to sidestep controversy in the local church. For the sake of peace, we offer anodyne treatments of hot topics (poverty, racism,

¹ D. A. Carson, ed., *The Authority of the Christian Scriptures* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016). This editorial is a condensed version of a talk given to the Council of TGC in May, 2016.

homosexual marriage, distinctions between men and women) in the forlorn hope that some of these topics will eventually go away. The sad reality is that if we do not try to shape our thinking on such topics under the authority of Scripture, the result is that many of us will simply pick up the culture's thinking on them.

The best antidote is systematic expository preaching, for such preaching forces us to deal with texts as they come up. Topical preaching finds it easier to avoid the hard texts. Yet cultural blinders can easily afflict expositors, too. A Christian preacher I know in a major Muslim nation says he loves to preach evangelistically, especially around Christmas, from Matthew 1 and 2, because these chapters include no fewer than five reports of dreams and visions—and dreams and visions in the dominant culture of his country are commonly accorded great respect. When I have preached through Matthew 1 and 2, I have never focused on those five dreams and visions (though I haven't entirely ignored them), precisely because such dreams and visions are not customarily accorded great credibility in my culture. In other words, ruthless self-examination of one's motives and biases, so far as we are aware of them, can go a long way to mitigating this problem.

2. Heart Embarrassment before the Text

This is a more acute form of the first failure. Not infrequently preachers avoid certain topics, in part because those topics embarrass them. The embarrassment may arise from the preacher's awareness that he has not yet sufficiently studied the topic so as to give him the confidence to tackle it (e.g., some elements of eschatology, transgenderism), or because of some general unease at the topic (e.g., predestination), or because the preacher knows his congregation is sharply divided on the topic (any number of possibilities), or because the preacher simply really does not like the subject even though it surfaces pretty often in the Bible (e.g., hell, eternal judgment). In its ugliest form, the preacher says something like this: "Our passage this morning, Luke 16:19–31, like quite a number of other passages drawn from the life of Jesus, depicts hell in some pretty shocking ways. Frankly, I wish I could avoid these passages. They leave me distinctly uncomfortable. But of course, I cannot ignore them entirely, for after all they are right here in the Bible." The preacher has formally submitted to Scripture's authority, while presenting himself as someone who is more compassionate or more sensitive than Jesus. This is as deceptive as it is wicked—and it is easy to multiply examples.

Contrast the apostle Paul: "Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. Rather, we have renounced secret and shameful ways; we do not use deception, nor do we distort the word of God. On the contrary, by setting forth the truth plainly we commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God" (2 Cor 4:1–2).

3. Publishing Ventures That Legitimate What God Condemns

Recently Zondervan published *Two Views on Homosexuality, the Bible, and the Church*;² this book bills these two views as "affirming" and "non-affirming," and two authors support each side. Both sides, we are told, argue "from Scripture." If the "affirming" side was once viewed as a stance that could not be held by confessional evangelicals, this book declares that not only the non-affirming stance but the

² Preston Sprinkle, ed., *Two Views on Homosexuality, the Bible, and the Church*, Counterpoints (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016).

affirming stance are represented within the evangelical camp, so the effect of this book is to present alternative evangelical positions, one that thinks the Bible prohibits homosexual marriage, and the other that embraces it.

All who read these lines will of course be aware of the many books that proffer three views or four views (or two, or five) on this or that subject: the millennium, election, hell, baptism, and many more. Surely this new book on homosexuality is no different. To this a couple of things must be said.

(a) The format of such volumes, “*x* views on *y*,” is intrinsically slippery. It can be very helpful to students to read, in one volume, diverse stances on complex subjects, yet the format is in danger of suggesting that each option is equally “biblical” because it is argued “from Scripture.” Of course, Jehovah’s Witnesses argue “from Scripture,” but most of us would hasten to add that their exegesis, nominally “from Scripture,” is woefully lacking. The “*x* views on *y*” format tilts evaluation away from such considerations, baptizing each option with at least theoretical equivalent legitimacy. In short, the “*x* views on *y*” format, as useful as it is for some purposes, is somewhat manipulative. As I have argued elsewhere, not all disputed things are properly disputable.³

(b) Otherwise put, it is generally the case that books of the “*x* views on *y*” format operate within some implicit confessional framework or other. That’s why no book of this sort has (yet!) been published with a title such as “Three Views on Whether Jesus is God.” We might bring together a liberal committed to philosophical naturalism, a Jehovah’s Witness, and a confessional Christian. But it’s hard to imagine a book like that getting published—or, more precisely, a book like that would be tagged as a volume on comparative religion, not a volume offering options for Christians. Most books of the “*x* views on *y*” sort restrict the subject, the *y*-component, to topics that are currently allowed as evangelical options. To broaden this list to include an option that *no* evangelical would have allowed ten years ago—say, the denial of the deity of Jesus, or the legitimacy of homosexual practice—is designed simultaneously to assert that Scripture is less clear on the said topic than was once thought, and to re-define, once again, the borders of evangelicalism. On both counts, the voice of Scripture as the *norma normans* (“the rule that rules”), though theoretically still intact, has in fact been subtly reduced.

Inevitably, there have been some articulate voices that insist that adopting an “affirming” stance on homosexual marriage does not jeopardize one’s salvation and should not place such a person outside the evangelical camp. For example, in his essay “An Evangelical Approach to Sexual Ethics,” Stephen Holmes concludes, “*Sola Fide*. I have to stand on that. Because the Blood flowed where I walk and where we all walk. One perfect sacrifice complete, once for all offered for all the world, offering renewal to all who will put their faith in Him. And if that means me, in all my failures and confusions, then it also means my friends who affirm same-sex marriage, in all their failures and confusions. If my faithful and affirming friends have no hope of salvation, then nor do I.”⁴ But this is an abuse of the evangelical insistence on *sola fide*. I do not know any Christian who thinks that salvation is appropriated by means of faith plus an affirmation of heterosexuality. Faith alone is the means by which *sola gratia* is appropriated. Nevertheless, that grace is so powerful it transforms. Salvation by grace alone through faith alone issues in a new direction under the lordship of King Jesus. Those who are sold out to the “acts of the flesh ... will not inherit the kingdom of God” (Gal 5:19–21). The apostle Paul makes a similar assertion in 1 Corinthians 6:9–11:

³ D. A. Carson, “Editorial: On Disputable Matters,” *Them* 40 (2015): 383–88.

⁴ Stephen Holmes, “An Evangelical Approach to Sexual Ethics,” <http://tinyurl.com/jvfnwzd>.

Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. *And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God* (emphasis added).

In the context of Paul's thought, he is not saying that without sinless perfection there is no entrance into the kingdom, but he is saying that such sins—whether greed or adultery or homosexual practice or whatever—no longer characterize the washed, sanctified, and justified. In other words, it is one thing to affirm with joy that *sola fide* means that we appropriate the merits of Christ and his cross by faith alone, not by our holiness—that holiness is the product of salvation, not its condition—and it is quite another thing to say that someone may self-consciously affirm the non-sinfulness of what God has declared to be sin, of what God insists excludes a person from the kingdom, and say that it doesn't matter because *sola fide* will get them in anyway. The Scriptures make a lot of room for believers who slip and slide in “failures and confusions,” as Holmes put it, but who rest in God's grace and receive it in God-given faith; they do not leave a lot of room for those who deny they are sinning despite what God says. *Sola gratia* and *sola fide* are always accompanied by *sola Scriptura*, by *solus Christus*, and by *solus Deo gloria*.

Or again, one really must question the recent argument by Alan Jacobs, from whose books and essays I have gained a great deal over the years. In his essay “On False Teachers: Bleat the Third,”⁵ however, Jacobs argues that when we warn against doctrine that is so dangerous it must be labeled and condemned, one naturally thinks of 2 Peter 2, where Peter warns against false teachers analogous to false prophets in the old covenant, and 1 Timothy 4, where Paul warns us against doctrines of demons. What is remarkable, Jacobs argues, is that when Paul rebukes Peter in Antioch (Gal 2:11–14), he tells him he is not walking in line with the gospel, but he does not label him a “false teacher.” If Paul can be so restrained in rebuking Peter over conduct that challenged the very heart of the gospel, then should we not allow a very wide swath of what we perceive to be inappropriate conduct before we assert someone is a false teacher and expounding doctrines of demons? As Jacobs summarizes: “So if we can be as wrong as Peter was about something as foundational for the Gospel and still not be denounced as a false teacher, then I think it follows that if people do not ‘walk correctly’ in relation to biblical teaching about sexuality, they likewise should not be treated as *pseudodidaskaloi* [false teachers] but can be seen as brothers and sisters whom those who hold the traditional views patiently strive to correct, without coming out from among them, speaking with the patience and gentleness commended in 2 Timothy 3:24–25.” Against this, the following must be said.

(a) In Galatians 2:11–14, Paul is building off his argument (2:1–13) that Paul and Peter enjoy theological agreement. Peter's problem, Paul thinks, is that Peter's conduct is inconsistent with his theological commitments. This is all the clearer when we see that Peter's preference for eating with “those from James” has to do not with any alleged confusion in his mind about justification, but with this concern for the persecution his fellow Jews are enduring back home in Jerusalem at the hands of “the circumcision group.”⁶ In any case, this is rather different from the current situation in which some

⁵ Alan Jacobs, “On False Teachers: Bleat the Third,” <https://blog.ayjay.org/on-false-teachers-bleat-the-third/>.

⁶ D. A. Carson, “Mirror-Reading with Paul and against Paul: Galatians 2:11–14 as a Test Case,” in *Studies in the Pauline Epistles: Essays in Honor of Douglas J. Moo*, ed. Matthew S. Harmon and Jay E. Smith (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 99–112.

voices are insisting that homosexual marriage is not wrong. Paul is not saying that Peter's theology is wrong, but that his conduct is not in line with his theology. Incidentally, Jacobs assumes, probably correctly, that the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) occurs *after* this episode in Antioch, prompting him to comment, "... and of course Paul's view won out at the Council of Jerusalem (where, I have always thought comically, Peter presents it as his own view, with no reference to Paul having corrected him)."⁷ But there is nothing comical about Peter's stance at the Council: Paul himself insists that so far as their theological understanding goes, he and Peter are in agreement, so it is neither surprising nor comical to find Peter saying the same thing.

(b) It is not clear to me why Jacobs rests so much weight on the "false teacher" passage in Peter and the "doctrines of demons" passage in Paul. There are plenty of other passages that deploy quite different terminology and that insist that false doctrine or untransformed behavior keep one out of the kingdom: Matthew 7:21–23; 11:21–24; Luke 16:19–31; Romans 1:18–3:20; Galatians 1:8–9; Revelation 13–14, to name but a few.

(c) Despite the best efforts of bad exegesis, the Bible makes it clear that treating homosexuality as if it were not a sin, but a practice in which people should feel perfectly free to engage, keeps one out of the kingdom (as we have seen: e.g., 1 Corinthians 6:9–11). There is nothing more serious than that, and the seriousness is present whether or not a particular term, such as *pseudodidaskalos* ("false teacher") is used.

From time to time, expansion of the frame of reference of what has traditionally been called evangelicalism has been influenced by William J. Webb's trajectory hermeneutic, which argues that sometimes it is not what Scripture actually *says* that is authoritative but rather the direction to which it points.⁸ His favorite example is slavery; his favorite application of that example is the role of women. This trajectory hermeneutic has been adequately discussed elsewhere;⁹ it would be inappropriate to rehearse the hermeneutic here. What cannot be denied, however, is that this way of reading the Bible diminishes the authority of what the Bible actually *says* in favor of what the interpreter judges to be the end goal of the Bible's trajectory after the Bible has been written and circulated. One of the latest examples is the defense mounted by Pete Briscoe and his elders as the Bent Tree Bible Fellowship in Dallas embraces egalitarianism, a defense that specifically references Webb's work.¹⁰ Further, Briscoe says he has moved the debate over egalitarianism and complementarianism into the "agree to disagree" category, which may function well enough in the cadre of evangelicalism *as a movement*, but can only function practically at the level of the local church if one side or the other is actually being followed at the expense of the other. In any case, the "agree to disagree" argument nicely brings us to my fourth point:

⁷ Jacobs, "On False Teachers."

⁸ See especially William J. Webb's *Slaves, Women and Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001).

⁹ Wayne A. Grudem, "Review Article: Should We Move Beyond the New Testament to a Better Ethic? An Analysis of William J. Webb, *Slaves, Women and Homosexuals: Exploring the Hermeneutics of Cultural Analysis*," *JETS* 47 (2004): 299–346. See also Benjamin Reaoch, *Women, Slaves, and the Gender Debate: A Complementarian Response to the Redemptive-Movement Hermeneutic* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2012).

¹⁰ "The Future of Leadership at Bent Tree," April 2016, <http://tinyurl.com/h6pe4zj>.

4. “The Art of Imperious Ignorance”

The words are in quotation marks because they are borrowed from Mike Ovey’s column in a recent issue of *Themelios*.¹¹ This is the stance that insists that all the relevant biblical passages on a stated subject are exegetically confusing and unclear, and therefore we *cannot* know (hence “imperious”) the mind of God on that subject. The historical example that Ovey adduces is the decision of a church Council during the patristic period whose decisions have mostly been forgotten by non-specialists. At a time of great controversy over Christology—specifically, over the deity of Christ—the Council of Sirmium (357), which sided with the pro-Arians, pronounced a prohibition against using terms like *homoousios* (signaling “one and the same substance”) and *homoiousios* (signaling “of a similar substance”). In other words, Sirmium prohibited using the technical terms espoused by *both* sides, on the ground that the issues are so difficult and the evidence so obscure that we *cannot* know the truth. Sirmium even adduced a biblical proof-text: “Who shall declare his generation?” they asked: i.e., it is all too mysterious.

Nevertheless, the orthodox fathers Hilary of Poitiers and Athanasius of Alexandria assessed the stance of Sirmium as worse than error: it was, they said, blasphemy. They decried the element of compulsion in Sirmium’s decree, and insisted that it was absurd: how is it possible to legislate the knowledge of other people? But the blasphemous element surfaces in the fact that the decree tries to put an end to the confession of true propositions (e.g., the eternal generation of the Son). Practically speaking, the claim of dogmatic ignorance, ostensibly arising from Scripture’s lack of clarity, criticizes Scripture while allowing people to adopt the positions they want.

This art of imperious ignorance is not unknown or unpracticed today. For example, both in a recent book and in an article,¹² David Gushee argues that homosexual marriage should be placed among the things over which we agree to disagree, what used to be called *adiaphora*, indifferent things. He predicts that “conservatives” and “progressives” are heading for an unfortunate divorce over this and a handful of other issues, precisely because they cannot agree to disagree. He may be right. In all fairness, however, in addition to the question of whether one’s behavior in the domain of sexuality has eternal consequences, it must be said, gently but firmly, that the unified voice of both Scripture and tradition on homosexuality has not been on the side of the “progressives”: see especially the book by S. Donald Fortson III and Rollin G. Grams, *Unchanging Witness: The Consistent Christian Teaching on Homosexuality in Scripture and Tradition*.¹³ As Trevin Wax has pointed out, on this subject the “progressives” innovate on teaching and conduct and thus start the schism, and then accuse the “conservatives” of drawing lines and promoting schism instead of agreeing to disagree.¹⁴

A somewhat similar pattern can be found in the arguments of Jen and Brandon Hatmaker. Most of their posts are winsome and compassionate, full of admirable concern for the downtrodden and

¹¹ Michael J. Ovey, “Off the Record: The Art of Imperious Ignorance,” *Them* 41 (2016): 5–7.

¹² David Gushee, *A Letter to My Anxious Christian Friends: From Fear to Faith in Unsettled Times* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2016); idem, “Conservative and Progressive US Evangelicals Head for Divorce,” *Religion News Service*, 12 February 2016, “Christians, Conflicts and Change,” <http://religionnews.com/2016/02/12/conservative-progressive-evangelicals-divorce/>.

¹³ S. Donald Fortson III and Rollin G. Grams, *Unchanging Witness: The Consistent Christian Teaching on Homosexuality in Scripture and Tradition* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016).

¹⁴ Trevin Wax, “Can We ‘Agree to Disagree’ on Sexuality and Marriage,” *The Gospel Coalition*, 25 February 2016, <https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/trevinwax/2016/02/25/why-we-cant-agree-to-disagree-on-sexuality-and-marriage/>.

oppressed. Their recent move in support of monogamous homosexual marriage has drawn a lot of attention: after devoting time to studying the subject, they say, they have come to the conclusion that the biblical texts do not clearly forbid homosexual conduct if it is a monogamous commitment, but condemn only conduct that is promiscuous (whether heterosexual or homosexual), rape, and other grievous offenses.¹⁵ In his explanation of their move, Brandon testifies that after seeing so much pain in the homosexual community, the Hatmakers set themselves “a season of study and prayer,” and arrived at this conclusion: “Bottom line, we don’t believe a committed life-long monogamous same-sex marriage violates anything seen in scripture about God’s hopes for the marriage relationship.”¹⁶ Quite apart from the oddity of the expression “God’s hopes for the marriage relationship,” Brandon’s essay extravagantly praises ethicist David Gushee, and ends his essay by citing John 13:34–35 (Jesus’s “new command” to his disciples to “love one another”).

Among the excellent responses, three deserve mention here.¹⁷

(a) Speaking out of her own remarkable conversion, Rosaria Butterfield counsels her readers to love their neighbors enough to speak the truth.¹⁸ “Love” that does not care enough to speak the truth and warn against judgment to come easily reduces to sentimentality.

(b) With his inimitable style, Kevin DeYoung briefly but decisively challenges what he calls “the Hatmaker hermeneutic.”¹⁹ To pick up on just one of his points:

I fail to see how the logic *for* monogamy and *against* fornication is obvious according to Hatmaker’s hermeneutic. I appreciate that they don’t want to completely jettison orthodox Christian teaching when it comes to sex and marriage. But the flimsiness of the hermeneutic cannot support the weight of the tradition. Once you’ve concluded that the creation of Adam and Eve has nothing to do with a procreative *telos* (Mal. 2:15), or the fittedness of male with female (Gen. 2:18), or the joining of two complementary sexes into one organic union (Gen. 2:23–24), what’s left to insist that marriage must be limited to two persons, or that the two persons must be faithful to each other? Sure, both partners may agree that they *want* fidelity, but there is no longer anything inherent to the ontology and the *telos* of marriage to insist that sexual fidelity is a must. Likewise, why is it obvious that sex outside of marriage is wrong? Perhaps those verses were only dealing with oppressive situations too. Most foundationally, once stripped

¹⁵ See, for example, Jen Hatmaker’s interview with Jonathan Merritt, “The Politics of Jen Hatmaker,” *Religion News Service*, 25 October 2016, <http://religionnews.com/2016/10/25/the-politics-of-jen-hatmaker-trump-black-lives-matter-gay-marriage-and-more/>.

¹⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/HatmakerBrandon/posts/661677820673474>.

¹⁷ See also Justin Taylor, “The Only Four Things You Need to Read in Response to the Hatmakers,” *The Gospel Coalition*, 2 November 2016, <https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/justintaylor/2016/11/02/the-only-four-things-you-need-to-read-in-response-to-the-hatmakers/>. Taylor highlights the articles by Butterfield and DeYoung mentioned below.

¹⁸ Rosaria Butterfield, “Love Your Neighbor Enough to Speak Truth: A Response to Jen Hatmaker,” *The Gospel Coalition*, 31 October 2016, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/love-your-neighbor-enough-to-speak-truth>.

¹⁹ Kevin DeYoung, “A Few Brief Thoughts on the Hatmaker Hermeneutic,” *The Gospel Coalition*, 2 November 2016, <https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/kevindeyoung/2016/11/02/before-you-leave-behind-the-historic-understanding-of-biblical-sexuality/>.

of the biological orientation toward children, by what internal logic can we say that consensual sex between two adults is wrong? And on that score, by what measure can we condemn a biological brother and sister getting married if they truly love each other (and use contraceptives, just to take the possibility of genetic abnormalities out of the equation)? When marriage is redefined to include persons of the same sex, we may think we are expanding the institution to make it more inclusive, but in fact we are diminishing it to the point where it is something other than marriage.

(c) And finally, I should mention another piece by Kevin DeYoung, presented in his inimitable style as a “Breakout” session at T4G on 13 April 2016, titled, “Drawing Boundaries in an Inclusive Age: Are Some Doctrines More Fundamental Than Others and How Do We Know What They Are?” I have not yet seen that piece online, but one hopes its appearance will not be long delayed, and he has given me permission to mention it here.

I have devoted rather extended discussion to this topic, because nowhere does “the art of imperious ignorance” make a stronger appeal, in our age, than to issues of sexuality. By the same token, there are few topics where contemporary believers are more strongly tempted to slip away from whole-hearted submission to the Scripture’s authority in our own lives.

The rest of my points, although they deserve equal attention, I shall outline more briefly.

5. Allowing the Categories of Systematic Theology to Domesticate What Scripture Says

Most emphatically, this point is neither belittling systematic theology nor an attempt to sideline the discipline. When I warn against the danger of systematic theology domesticating what Scripture says, I nevertheless gladly insist that, properly deployed, systematic theology enriches, deepens, and safeguards our exegesis. The old affirmation that theology is the queen of the sciences has much to commend it. The best of systematic theology not only attempts to bring together all of Scripture in faithful ways, but also at its best enjoys a pedagogical function that helps to steer exegesis away from irresponsible options that depend on mere linguistic manipulation, by consciously taking into account the witness of the entire canon. Such theology-disciplined exegesis is much more likely to learn from the past than exegesis that shucks off everything except the faddish.

So there are ways in which exegesis shapes systematic theology and ways in which systematic theology shapes exegesis. That is not only as it should be; it is inevitable. Yet the *authority* of Scripture in our lives is properly unique. Systematic theology is corrigible; Scripture is not (although our exegesis of Scripture certainly is).

Failure to think through the implications of this truth makes it easy for us to allow the categories of systematic theology to domesticate what Scripture says. The categories we inherit or develop in our systematic theology may so constrain our thinking about what the Bible says that the Bible’s own voice is scarcely heard. Thus diminished, the authority of the Bible is insufficient to reform our systematic theology. Recently I was re-reading Exodus 7–11. After each of the first nine “plagues” with which God chastened the Egyptians, we read variations of “Pharaoh hardened his heart” and “God hardened Pharaoh’s heart” and “Pharaoh’s heart was hardened.” I could not help but remember with shame and regret some of the exegetical sins of my youth. Barely twenty years old at the time, I was invited to speak to a group of young people, and carefully explained the three stages: first, Pharaoh hardens his own heart; second, as a result, Pharaoh’s heart is hardened; and finally, God imposes his own final

sanction: he judicially hardens Pharaoh's heart. Of course, I was aware that the narrative did not display those three expressions in this convenient psychological order, but the homiletical point seemed to me, at the time, too good to pass up—it simply is the way these things develop, isn't it? So my theology of the time, shallow as it was, domesticated the text. Only later did I learn how commonly the Bible juxtaposes human responsibility and divine sovereignty without the smallest discomfort, without allowing the slightest hint that the affirmation of the one dilutes belief in the other (e.g., Gen 50:19–20; Isa 10:5–19; Acts 4:27–28). It is the part of humility and wisdom not to allow our theological categories to domesticate what Scripture says.

6. Too Little Reading, Especially the Reading of Older Commentaries and Theological Works

The more general failure of too little reading contributes, of course, to some of the paths that tend with time to hobble the authority of Scripture, paths already articulated. The obvious one is that we do not grow out of youthful errors and reductionisms; we prove unable to self-correct; our shallow theology becomes ossified. Thus too little reading is partly to blame for my irresponsible exegesis of Exodus 7–11 (#5, above), or to downplaying the cultural importance of dreams and visions in other parts of the world (cf. #1, above). But a more focused problem frequently surfaces, one that requires separate notice. Too little reading, especially the reading of older confessional material, not infrequently leads to in an infatuation with current agendas, to intoxication by the over-imbibing of the merely faddish.

Of course, the opposite failure is not unknown. Many of us are acquainted with ministers who read deeply from the wells of Puritan resources, but who have not tried to read much contemporary work. Their language, thought-categories, illustrations, and agendas tend to sound almost four centuries old. But that is not the problem I am addressing here, mostly because, as far as I can see, it is far less common than the failure to read older confessional materials, not least commentaries and theological works.

The problem with reading only contemporary work is that we all sound so contemporary that our talks and sermons soon descend to the level of kitsch. We talk fluently about the importance of self-identity, ecological responsibility, tolerance, becoming a follower of Jesus (but rarely becoming a Christian), how the Bible helps us in our pain and suffering, and conduct seminars on money management and divorce recovery. Not for a moment would I suggest that the Bible fails to address such topics—but the Bible is not primarily *about* such topics. If we integrate more reading of, say, John Chrysostom, John Calvin, and John Flavel (to pick on three Johns), we might be inclined to devote more attention in our addresses to what it means to be made in the image of God, to the dreadfulness of sin, to the nature of the gospel, to the blessed Trinity, to truth, to discipleship, to the Bible's insistence that Christians will suffer, to learning how to die well, to the prospect of the new heaven and the new earth, to the glories of the new covenant, to the sheer beauty of Jesus Christ, to confidence in a God who is both sovereign and good, to the non-negotiability of repentance and faith, to the importance of endurance and perseverance, to the beauty of holiness and the importance of the local church. Is the Bible truly authoritative in our lives and ministries when we skirt these and other truly important themes that other generations of Christians rightly found in the Bible?

7. The Failure to be Bound by Both the Formal Principle and the Material Principle

The distinction between these two principles was well known among an earlier generation of evangelicals. The *formal* principle that constrains us is the authority of Scripture; the *material* principle that constrains us is the substance of Scripture, the gospel itself. And we need both.

That the formal principle by itself is inadequate is obvious as soon as we recall that groups such as Jehovah's Witnesses and Mormons happily and unreservedly affirm the Bible's truthfulness, reliability, and authority, but their understanding of what the Bible *says* (the material principle) is so aberrant that (we insist) they do not in reality let the Bible's authoritative message transform their thinking. On the other hand, today it is not uncommon to find Christians saying that they refuse to talk about biblical authority or biblical inerrancy or the like, but simply get on with preaching what the Bible says. History shows that such groups tend rather quickly to drift away from what the Bible says.

In other words, to be bound by only one of these two principles tends toward a drifting away from hearty submission to the Bible's authority. If one begins with adherence to the formal principle, thus nominally espousing the biblical authority of the formal principle, and adds penetrating understanding of and submission to what the Bible actually says, the result is much stronger, much more stable. Conversely, if one begins with an honest effort to grasp and teach what the Bible says, thus nominally espousing the material principle, and adds resolute adherence to the formal principle, one is much more likely to keep doing the honest exegesis that will enrich, revitalize, and correct what one thinks the Bible is saying.

8. Undisciplined Passion for the Merely Technical, or Unhealthy Suspicion of the Technical

By the "technical" I am referring to biblical study that deploys the full panoply of literary tools that begin with the original languages and pay attention to syntax, literary genre, text criticism and literary criticism, parallel sources, interaction with recent scholarship, and much more. An exclusive focus on technical study of the Bible may, surprisingly, dilute the "listening" element: manipulation of the tools and interaction with the scholars of the guild are more important than trembling before the Word of God. Conversely, some so disdain careful and informed study that they seduce themselves into thinking that pious reading absolves one from careful and accurate exegesis. In both cases, the Bible's real authority is diminished.

A variation of this concern surfaces when students arrive at the seminary and begin their course of study. Often they enter with boundless love for the Bible and a hunger to read it and think about it. Soon, however, they are enmeshed in memorizing Greek paradigms and struggling to work their way through short passages of the Greek New Testament. What they are doing now, they feel, is not so much reading the Word of God as *homework*, and it is hard. Instead of simply reading the Bible and being blessed, they are required to make decisions as to whether a verb should be taken this way or that, and whether an inherited interpretation really can withstand accurate exegesis. Confused and not a little discouraged by the demand to memorize defective Hebrew verbs, they talk to sympathetic professors and ask what is wrong, and what they can do about the coldness they feel stealing over their hearts.

It is not helpful to tell such students that, on the one hand, they simply need to get on with the discipline of study, and, on the other, they need to preserve time for devotional reading of the Bible. That

bifurcation of tasks suggests there is no need to be devotional when using technical tools, and no need for rigor when reading the Bible devotionally. Far better to insist that even when they are wrestling with difficult verbal forms and challenging syntax, what they are working on is *the Word of God*—and it is *always* imperative to cherish that fact, and treat the biblical text with reverence. And similarly, if when reading the Bible for private edification and without reference to any assignment, one stumbles across a passage one really does not understand, one is not sinning against God if one pulls a commentary or two off the shelf and tries to obtain some technical help.

In short, one should not be seduced by merely technical disciplines, nor should one eschew them. In every case, the Bible remains the authoritative Word of God regardless of the “tools” one deploys to understand it better, and it functions authoritatively in our lives when we manage a better integration of technical study and devotional reading.

9. Undisciplined Confidence in Contemporary Philosophical Agendas

Many examples could be provided. For example, some of the choices offered by analytic philosophy wrongfully exclude structures of thought the Bible maintains.²⁰ Or again, the most recent book by Charles Taylor,²¹ written in the heritage of some forms of deconstruction and, like all his work, inevitably stimulating, argues that language is in some measure cut off from reality: it is not so much something that designates as the medium in which we exist. There is no fixed “meaning” to texts (which is very hard to square with the conviction expressed in Jude 3). One form of this approach to texts, often dubbed American Pragmatism,²² thinks of readers as “users” of the text. A “good” reading, for example, is one that meets specific needs in the reader or the community. There is much to be said in favor of this stance, but it becomes self-defeating when it says, in effect, that a “good” reading meets particular needs on the part of the reader or community, *and must not be thought of as conveying timeless truth*. Occasionally entire commentaries are today written out of this philosophical commitment. Yet as many have pointed out, the stance is self-defeating: American Pragmatism defends itself with an ostensible timeless truth about the virtues of American Pragmatism. Pretty soon the commentaries that work out of this tradition do not so much help us think about God and his character and work, as about what we think we need and how the biblical texts meet those needs. The door is opened to interpretations that are exploitative, merely current, sometimes cutesy, and invariably agenda-driven, but only accidentally grounded in responsible exegesis.

Not for a moment should we imagine that this is the first generation to make such mistakes. Every generation in this sin-addled world experiments with a variety of philosophical stances that can easily (sometimes unwittingly) be used to subvert what Scripture says—and thus the authority of Scripture is again domesticated. Students of history have learned to appreciate the contributions of, say, Aristotelianism, Platonism, Gnosticism, Thomism, Cartesianism, Rationalism—but also to allow Scripture’s voice to stand over them. It is more challenging to avoid the pitfalls lurking in the “isms” that are current.

²⁰ For an example, see my essay, “Biblical-Theological Patterns Needed to Support Faithful Christian Reflections on Suffering and Evil,” scheduled to appear in the Spring 2017 fascicle of *Trinity Journal*.

²¹ Charles Taylor, *The Language Animal: The Full Shape of Linguistic Capacity* (Cambridge: Belknap, 2016).

²² For a brief introduction, see Benjamin Sargent, “Using or Abusing the Bible? The Hermeneutics of American Pragmatism,” *Churchman* 130 (2016): 11–20.

10. Anything That Reduces Our Trembling before the Word of God

“These are the ones I look on with favor: those who are humble and contrite in spirit, and who tremble at my word” (Isa 66:2). “All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures forever.’ And this is the word that was preached to you” (1 Pet 1:24–25; cf. Isa 40:6–8).

The things that may sap our ability to tremble before God’s word are many. Common to all of them is arrogance, arrogance that blinds us to our need to keep reading and re-reading and meditating upon the Bible if we are truly to think God’s thoughts after him, for otherwise the endless hours of data input from the world around us swamp our minds, hearts, and imaginations. Moral decay will drive us away from the Bible: it is hard to imagine those who are awash in porn, or those who are nurturing sexual affairs, or those who are feeding bitter rivalry, to be spending much time reading the Bible, much less trembling before it. Moreover, our uncharitable conduct may undermine the practical authority of the Bible in the lives of those who observe us. Failure to press through in our studies until we have happily resolved some of the intellectual doubts that sometimes afflict us will also reduce the fear of the Lord in us, a subset of which, of course, is trembling before his Word.

11. Concluding Reflections

So that concludes our list of subtle ways to abandon the authority of Scripture in our lives. I’m sure these ten points could be grouped in other ways, and other points could usefully be added.

But I would be making a serious mistake if I did not draw attention to the fact that this list of warnings and dangers, an essentially negative list, implicitly invites us to a list of positive correlatives. For example, the first instance of subtle ways to trim the authority of Scripture was “an appeal to selective evidence”—which implicitly calls us to be as comprehensive as possible when we draw our theological and pastoral conclusions about what the Bible is saying on this or that point. If “heart embarrassment” before this or that text (the second example) reduces the authority of Scripture in my life, a hearty resolve to align my empathies and will with the lines of Scripture until I see more clearly how God looks at things from his sovereign and omniscient angle will mean I offer fewer apologies for the Bible, while spending more time making its stances coherent to a generation that finds the Bible profoundly foreign to contemporary axioms. It would be a godly exercise to work through all ten of the points so as to make clear what the positive correlative is in each case.

OFF THE RECORD

‘Just Mike’: A Tribute to Mike Ovey (1958–2017)

— Daniel Strange —

Daniel Strange is acting principal and tutor in culture, religion and public theology at Oak Hill College in London, England, UK.

Editor’s Note: The Rev Dr Mike Ovey was principal of Oak Hill College in London and served as consulting editor of *Themelios* from 2012 until his sudden death 7 January, 2017 at the age of 58. Ovey trained for ministry at Ridley Hall, Cambridge, was ordained in the Church of England, and earned a PhD at King’s College, London. He was author or co-author of several important books, including *Pierced for Our Transgressions* (Crossway, 2017), *Confident* (Christian Focus, 2015), and *Your Will Be Done* (Latimer Trust, 2016). This final installment of the ‘Off the Record’ column is Dan Strange’s tribute to his friend and Oak Hill colleague, first delivered at Ovey’s London funeral.

We loved him because he was just Mike. A wonderful and weird best possible gift to Christ’s church. A true steward of the mysteries of God.

Exciting, excitable, enigmatic, exasperating. Our leader and inspiration. My partner-in-crime. My mate. An utterly unique complex combination of juxtapositions and contradictions that explain the extraordinary outpouring of grief and gratitude.

He was just Mike, both scarily organized and disorganized.

We sat in awe at his ordered and forensic mind, the way he could break down an argument into tiny pieces, summarise the essence of a long conversation.

Distinguish, distinguish, distinguish.

He was the best kind of systematic theologian, seeing implications and applications of biblical truth that no one else seemed to be able to see. In his own words, he made doctrine ‘sexy’. His verve and joy were totally infectious. Towering brilliance. A theological savant.

But just Mike. One of my students prayed last week ‘Oh Lord, we thank you that we know where Mike is now’ and I thought ‘that’s more than I ever did.’ Well that’s not true. I did know. For as countless people have testified in the last few weeks, he was with them, listening to them, advising them, being an advocate for them, being lavishly kind to them. Mike was time rich, time extravagant, time ludicrous.

He never quite got the idea that the purpose of an ‘action point’ was actually to do something. And yet he was so often the quickest off the mark in a pastoral crisis, doing all he could above and beyond. Just Mike.

He was just Mike, both totally predictable and unpredictable.

Coffee with everything. Chips with everything. Gin-and-tonic and chips in Southgate after meetings at Ministry Division. The bets I won by accurately predicting that the closing song on a Mike-led chapel would be the Jewish styled, ‘You shall go out with joy.’ Predictable that Mike probably never got through a lecture handout.

The way his guffawing laughter would end up in him having a coughing fit bent over double. My last memory of him the day before he died: he gave me an awkward, seated high-five because of some plot that we’d hatched.

Every day he asked us to shoot him down in flames but we never did or wanted to because he was just Mike.

But with Mike you never quite knew what was going to happen. He would try anything in his teaching to get his point across as exhibits found in his office show. The sooty and sweep puppets to teach on the Trinity. The butcher’s meat cleaver that for months was sitting on a chair and that we eventually asked him to cover up because visiting church leaders were getting nervous.

His awful accents and impressions, terrible puns, his cringe-worthy and totally inappropriate off-the-cuff remarks. Just Mike who because reading excerpts from Beowulf at the faculty Christmas social had not gone down so well the previous year, decided the ‘entertainment’ for the subsequent festivity would be him reading the introduction of Adrian Bullock’s *Hitler and Stalin: Parallel Lives*.

And of course his ‘Woodhousesque’, ‘Pythonesque’ doctrinal problems surrounding that much-loved if incomparably feckless curate Reginald Twittering. I present for you the opening line of his posthumous doctrine exam: ‘Burly Celia Maltravers, head of philosophy and unarmed combat at Iscariot College, cracked her industrial-scale knuckles in an ostensibly amiable way.’ Just Mike.

He was just Mike, so clear in his teaching. Those numbered handouts that betrayed his legal background but which were just so beautiful to look at and needed no commentary. But just Mike, so oblique that sometimes (well quite a lot of the time) you had no idea what he was talking about and nervous laughter was the only response. Obscure literary references and philosophers that even seasoned academics had never heard of but which Mike assumed everyone would have. ‘Come on people!’ he’d bellow because our holiday reading had not been the French sociologist Michel Crozier on the theory of bureaucracies. You could learn his language in time. There were cricketing codes for interviewing potential faculty:

‘Military medium’ – candidate is solid but not spectacular

‘Spraying it down the leg side’ – candidate is dodgy doctrinally.

‘Moved it in the air and off the seam’ – candidate has exciting potential.

Mike was on a different planet, a planet that was inhabited by just Mike.

Just Mike, both inflexible and flexible, so steely and yet so fragile, so wise but with a childlike innocence. His physicality betrayed his state of mind. At times his tread was light, his gait jaunty, even sprightly. As times his tread was heavy, his gait burdened as if a great weight was on him.

Just Mike, in some ways so naturally a leader, in other ways so ill-equipped and needing to be led. Politically successful because he was so apolitical. So humble and with so little ego having no interest in personal self-aggrandizement.

Just Mike. Totally immovable on healthy historical Christian orthodoxy: biblical inerrancy, penal substitution, justification by faith alone. From the stands we'd cheer him on as time after time he'd deliver the killer blows against gangrenous false teaching and futile non-Christian worldviews. Boom! He was our theological heavyweight champion.

Just Mike. Unapologetically intransigent on the need for rigorous theological education against the constant pressure and temptation to dumb down and hollow out. Mike would not let us partake in the race to the bottom. He could be steely. He could be stubborn. He could get cross. When lecturing he always stared into some strange middle distance, and yet when he eye-balled you, birthmark pulsating, it was terrifying.

Just Mike. He'd do things way out of his introverted comfort zone, put up with people whom he didn't particularly like. He absorbed blows like the punch bag he worked out on, taking hits for us, for the college, for the gospel of 'repentance and the forgiveness of sins' that was so precious to him.

And then Jesus just took him. I can't fathom why our Lord has taken our best player off the pitch at the beginning of the second half and just when we'd worked out a playing system that would enable him to shine all the more. But he is good and wise and sovereign. There is a Creator-creature distinction: His ways are not our ways. And I know that in some incredible way, we will be made more like Jesus and his kingdom will be extended.

We laughed when Mike started saying we needed to be better than him, but he meant it. And we do. Mike was one of our best, but under God the college he shaped at Oak Hill is ours and we now must work in partnership to produce more and more, better and better gifts to the church. Our devastation must quickly turn to determination to build on Mike's legacy and carry on the mission he gave his life to.

See you soon mate ... and save us some chips.

Jerry Hwang has served as the Old Testament Book Review Editor for *Themelios* since 2013. Owing to other opportunities and challenges, this is his last issue as an editor. Succeeding him in this role is Peter Lau. He teaches Old Testament at Seminari Theoloji Malaysia. Peter completed his PhD at the University of Sydney and is the author of *Identity and Ethics in the Book of Ruth: A Social Identity Approach* and coauthor of *Unceasing Kindness: A Biblical Theology of Ruth*. He can be contacted at peter.lau@thegospelcoalition.org.

Stephen Eccher began serving as the History and Historical Theology Book Review Editor in 2015 and is now transitioning to focus on other pressing responsibilities. Jonathan Arnold succeeds Stephen in this editorial role. Jonathan completed his DPhil at Oxford University and teaches Christian theology and church history at Boyce College. He is the author of *The Reformed Theology of Benjamin Keach (1640–1704)* and contributes regularly to *Themelios* and other journals. He can be contacted at jonathan.arnold@thegospelcoalition.org. We will miss Jerry Hwang and Stephen Eccher and are grateful for their years of faithful, effective service. We warmly welcome Peter Lau and Jonathan Arnold to the editorial team.

Is *Every* Promise “Yes”? Old Testament Promises and the Christian¹

— Jason S. DeRouchie —

Jason DeRouchie is professor of Old Testament and biblical theology at Bethlehem College & Seminary in Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA.

Abstract: Which biblical promises are for Christians? God’s promises play a vital role in helping believers grow in sanctification and suffer with hope, but should we claim all OT promises as our own, seeing as God gave them to a different people and under a different covenant? This article considers why and how every promise is “Yes” in Christ and seeks to empower believers to faithfully appropriate OT promises without abusing them. In the process it supplies five foundational principles that clarify the Christian’s relationship to OT promises, and then it gives three guidelines for hoping in OT promises through Christ.

1. The Challenge and Need for Christians to Claim OT Promises

The promises of God—what we dread or hope for tomorrow changes who we are today.² This foundational Christian doctrine colors all of our lives as believers, both in times of temptation and trial. God’s promises motivate holiness and awaken expectation and confidence in our pursuit of the Lord. But which biblical promises are for us? Can Christians legitimately appropriate *all* Old Testament (OT) promises as our own, when God gave them to specific individuals or peoples in a different time and under a different covenant? In this study, I seek to answer this query, considering

¹ The author originally drafted this article as a special address in celebration of his promotion to full professor of Old Testament and biblical theology at Bethlehem College & Seminary (23 February 2017). The content of the study is a substantial expansion of materials first published in Jason S. DeRouchie, *How to Understand and Apply the Old Testament: Twelve Steps from Exegesis to Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2017), 460–81. The author thanks Joel Dougherty and Ryan Eagy for their help on some of the visuals, and he thanks Don Straka for reading through two different drafts of this paper and offering helpful suggestions. The video, audio, and Power-Point of the presentation are available at www.jasonderouchie.com or <http://wp.me/p8hxJ9-Ql>.

² See John Piper, *Future Grace: The Purifying Power of the Promises of God*, 2nd ed. (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah, 2012).

why and how *every* promise in Scripture is “Yes” in Christ. In the process, I hope to help believers know better how to faithfully claim OT promises as our own.

1.1. The Importance of God’s Promises in the Believer’s Life

The apostle Peter declares, “[God] has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire” (2 Pet 1:4; cf. Rom 4:18–21; 15:13).³ Both Paul and John make similar statements. “Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God” (2 Cor 7:1). “Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure” (1 John 3:2–3). Faith in God’s promises creates hope or dread, and what we anticipate tomorrow changes who we are today.

Stated differently, a fundamental way that we as Christians are to fight sin and to pursue holiness is by overcoming sinful desire by embracing higher, more beautiful desires. This is the primary thesis of Piper’s *Future Grace*. Sin makes deceitful promises that lure us away from God, and we battle the desires of the flesh by trusting God’s promises for a better tomorrow. We put our faith in the Lord’s promise of future grace, and in doing so we gain fresh power in our pursuit of godliness. God’s promises confront a whole host of sins.

If we are *anxious* about having enough, we turn from worry and heed Jesus’s call to “seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness,” confident that “all these things [food, clothing, shelter] will be added to you” (Matt 6:33). We engage in “prayer and supplication with thanksgiving,” trusting that God’s peace “will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Phil 4:6–7) and that “my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in Christ Jesus” (Phil 4:19). When *covetousness* rises in our soul, we nurture contentment and keep our lives free from the love of money by recalling promises like, “I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Heb 13:5). In our passion for sexual purity, we fight *lust* by remembering the promise, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matt 5:8; cf. 5:29–30). Similarly, to overcome seeds of *bitterness*, we remember Jesus’s warning, “If you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses” (6:15). Also, Paul motivates his charge to “repay no one evil for evil” and to “never avenge yourselves” by promising that God takes seriously all sins against his own people and will repay: “Leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord’” (Rom 12:17, 19). We fight *fear of man* by heightening our fear of God, recalling how valuable we are to him and recognizing that the consequence of not living for his pleasure is far greater than anything man can do to us. “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows” (Matt 10:28–31). Assurance that God is already 100% for us in Christ is fundamental to battling *fear of condemnation* and

³ When Peter speaks of God’s “promises,” he appears to be referring both to anticipated future *blessings* (e.g., 1 Pet 3:9, 14) and potential future *curses*. That the latter is included is clear when he asserts of the coming of future salvation of the righteous *and* punishment of the wicked, “The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance” (2 Pet 3:9).

to pursuing holiness. The only sins that we can overcome are forgiven ones, for we must move ahead in the power of blood-bought grace. Those in Christ Jesus trust that “there is ... now no condemnation” (Rom 8:1), for “Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us” (8:34; cf. 8:32; John 10:27–30). Finally, to battle *fear of failure*, we believe promises like, “He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil 1:6; cf. Jer 32:40; 1 Thess 5:23–24). Christians must recognize the importance of God’s promises for our pursuit of holiness.

But not only this, the psalmist declared, “This is my comfort in my affliction, that your promise gives me life” (Ps 119:50). When we face suffering, God’s promises in Scripture supply one of the bulwarks of hope for Christians.⁴ We trust that God *will* be faithful to his word and that in his good time he *will* act on behalf of his own.

When tears flow, we call to mind that, “He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.... The LORD lifts up the humble; he casts the wicked to the ground” (Ps 147:3, 6). When the darkness lingers, we believe that “the steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning” (Lam 3:22–23). So we “sing praises to the LORD ... and give thanks to his holy name. For his anger is but for a moment, and his favor is for a lifetime. Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes in the morning” (Ps 30:4–5 [34:5–6 MT]). When fear assaults, we remember God’s words, “Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand” (Isa 41:10). When worry grips the soul and we feel alone, YHWH’s pledge rings out: “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through the fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you. For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior” (43:2–3). And finally, when death’s shadow draws near, our soul finds rest knowing, “The LORD is my shepherd ... [and] even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will not fear, for you are with me” (Ps 23:1, 4).

1.2. Which Promises Are for Christians?

All these biblical texts are rich with divine promise, but all those related to hope amidst suffering are also from OT. Paul declares in 2 Corinthians 1:20 that “all the promises of God find their Yes in [Jesus].” But was he talking about the OT promises too—like those given to national Israel? Can we as Christians claim as our own the various promises God gave before the time of Jesus to specific individuals under different covenants? Should we have our kids sing these words?

Every promise in the Book is mine,
Every chapter, every verse, and every line.
All the blessings of his love, divine—
Every promise in the Book is mine.⁵

⁴ I say “*one* of the bulwarks of hope,” because God’s character and disposition toward the broken also give us hope: “O Israel, hope in the LORD! For with the LORD there is steadfast love, and with him is plentiful redemption” (Ps 130:7; cf. Exod 32:6–7; Deut 10:17–18).

⁵ The Sensational Nightingales, “Every Promise in the Book Is Mine,” *Let Us Encourage You* (Malco Records, 2005, orig. 1957).

The “prosperity gospel” has quickly answered, “Yes,” claiming that, if Christians have enough faith, God will reward them today with all the spiritual *and* material prosperity detailed in the old covenant blessings.

And if you faithfully obey the voice of the LORD God, ... blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the field. Blessed shall be the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground and the fruit of your cattle, the increase of your herds and the young of your flock. Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out. (Deut 28:1, 3–6; cf. 30:16)

Are these blessings from Deuteronomy something that we in Christ can or even should claim as ours today, already, by faith?⁶

Health and wealth teachers rightly affirm that “those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith” (Gal 3:9) and that “though [our Lord Jesus Christ] was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich” (2 Cor 8:9). What is missed, however, is that Paul’s “blessing” in Galatians 3:9 is focused on our receiving “the promised *Spirit* through faith” (Gal 3:14) and that Abraham was among those who “died in faith, not having received the things promised” (Heb 11:13). Furthermore, because the “poverty” of Christ in 2 Corinthians 8:9 is focused not on an abject material lack but on his incarnation (Phil 2:6–8), our “riches” point not directly to material prosperity but to salvation and all its benefits (1 Cor 1:4–8). How much these “benefits” relate to health and wealth in this life is what this paper section seeks to address.

1.3. The NT’s Application of OT Promises to Christians

My macro-purpose in this discussion is not to critique health and wealth teaching but rather to equip Christians to think through the lasting significance of OT promises.⁷ In responding to prosperity

⁶ By “prosperity gospel” I do *not* mean speaking and working to see people move from material, social, emotional, and spiritual poverty to prosperity, for such a desire is God-honoring and stands as a natural fruit of the gospel in one’s life (see Timothy Keller, “The Gospel and the Poor,” *Them* 33.3 [2008]: 8–22; cf. Craig L. Blomberg, *Neither Poverty nor Riches: A Biblical Theology of Possessions*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 7 [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999]; Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty Without Hurting the Poor—and Yourself*, 2nd ed. [Chicago: Moody, 2012]; Wayne Grudem and Barry Asmus, *The Poverty of Nations: A Sustainable Solution* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013]; Brian Fikkert and Russell Mask, *From Dependence to Dignity: How to Alleviate Poverty through Church-Centered Microfinance* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015]). Instead, what I mean by “prosperity gospel” is a type of teaching that replaces with worldliness the true good news that the reigning God saves and satisfies believing sinners by Christ Jesus’s life, death, and resurrection. For more, see the next footnote.

⁷ For two helpful, balanced, recent critiques of the prosperity gospel, see John Piper, “Introduction to the Third Edition,” in *Let the Nations Be Glad: The Supremacy of God in Missions*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 15–32; Maura, Michael Otieno, Conrad Mbwewe, Ken Mbugua, John Piper, and Wayne Grudem, *Prosperity? Seeking the True Gospel* (Nairobi: Africa Christian Textbooks Registered Trustees in partnership with The Gospel Coalition, 2015). As an initial response, I would say that a conscious or unconscious imbalanced belief in retribution theology—“what you sow you will reap in the here and now”—often bears devastating effects. The worldliness of prosperity theology is seen at least in the ways it (1) nurtures an entitlement mentality, (2) places undue guilt, (3) misrepresents God’s character, and (4) minimizes Christ’s saving work while exalting some at the expense of others. First, in my life and in the lives of many who are part of Western evangelical churches, prosperity gospel perspectives show up when we have wealth or health, expect to keep it, and get angry at God or at least very anxious when he takes it away. We feel entitled to a certain level of physical provision and protec-

teachers or in grasping for ourselves how OT promises relate to believers, it is not enough to say simply, “We are part of the new covenant, and therefore old covenant promises do not apply to the church,” for the NT apostles are very quick to cite OT promises and to apply lasting significance to them!

For example, consider Romans 12:19, where Paul charges: “Never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.’” Here the apostle cites the promise from Deuteronomy 32:35, which YHWH asserts over all who would oppress his people: “Vengeance is mine. I will repay!” (cf. Heb 10:30). Paul says that as Christians we gain power to love our enemies in the present because we can rest assured that God will indeed judge rightly in the future. And we believe this because of an OT promise.

Similarly, Hebrews 13:5–6 declares: “Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’ So we can confidently say, ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?’” Here the author cites one OT promise from Joshua 1:5 and one OT expression of confidence from Psalm 118:6. This NT author sees his OT Scriptures as lastingly relevant for the church. The psalmist proclaims Godward trust during a time of distress, and the author of Hebrews asserts that every believer can rest assured with the same truths. As for the promise, the author claims that we should not look to money for security *because* God has promised to always be with us! He cites the pledge YHWH gave to Joshua just before Israel’s conquest of Canaan: “No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you” (Josh 1:5). Somehow we can legitimately use this promise to help us battle giants like covetousness in our own lives—something that Achan in the days of Joshua should have done (see Josh 7:1, 20–21).

As Christians, we must have a framework for benefiting from God’s ancient promises like these, yet in a way that does not produce abuses. In the discussion that follows, I will offer five principles that should shape our thinking, all based on biblical texts, and then I will propose some biblical-theological guidelines for the Christian’s appropriation of OT promises.

tion right now. Oh, that we with Paul would live out the truth, “In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me” (Phil 4:12–13). Second, another subtle version of “health and wealth” thinking occurs when parishioners carry unjustified guilt or burden because they believe that their hardship or ailment must be due to their own lack of spiritual fervor. While possible (e.g., 1 Cor 11:29–30), both the story of Job and Jesus’s own teaching stress that some brokenness has nothing to do with our sin or the sins of our parents (Job 2:3; John 9:2–3). Third, prosperity preaching becomes full grown when popular personalities in North America, South America, Africa, and parts of Asia become rich by promoting a shallow, paralyzing, unqualified health and wealth message. They promise material riches or bodily wholeness for the here and now, if one has enough faith. But in doing so, as with idolatry in the OT age, they misrepresent God’s character and commitments, treating him as one whom we can manipulate and viewing material blessing as a wage-earned (e.g., Hos 2:12; 9:1; Mic 1:7) (somewhat comparable to the Eastern religious principle of karma). In contrast, the Lord “is not partial and takes no bribe,” and he “executes justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing” (Deut 10:17–18). Fourth, health and wealth teaching often fails to address the true core of the gospel—that the reigning God saves and satisfies believing sinners by Christ Jesus’s life, death, and resurrection. In failing to address sin and the need for a savior, they fail to clarify the only means of relief from eternal suffering. And in the end, the worldview repays little, except into the pockets of those who are not at all grieved over the ruin before them (Amos 6:6). God is not pleased with these destructive teachers, and to such as these he declared through Amos, “Prepare to meet your God!” (4:12). “Woe to you who desire the day of the LORD! Why would you have the day of the LORD? It is darkness, and not light!” (5:18).

2. Five Foundational Principles

I have noted the challenge and necessity for Christians to claim OT promises. Now I want to overview five principles that govern my thinking regarding how OT promises relate to new covenant believers.

2.1. Christians Benefit from OT Promises Only through Christ

Our first passage is from Galatians 3, wherein Paul confronts claims that for Gentiles to become full inheritors of God’s OT promises, they needed to submit to circumcision and, with that, the Mosaic law. In contrast, the apostle asserts that, while the old covenant law served as a “guardian until Christ came..., now that [the age of] faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian” (Gal 3:24–25). Furthermore, he claims that only identifying with Christ Jesus by faith secures inheritance rights for Jew and Greek alike. All must receive “adoption as sons” (4:5).

In his argument, Paul fluctuates freely between the singular “promise” of inheritance that includes God’s Spirit (3:14, 17–19, 22, 29; cf. 3:8) and the plural “promises” of offspring, land, and international blessing that God gave to Abraham and his offspring (3:16, 21). With texts like Genesis 12:3 and 22:18 in mind, he writes, “Know then that it is those of faith who are sons of Abraham. And Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, ‘In you shall all nations be blessed.’ So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham the man of faith” (3:7–9)—a blessing that he then says comes to us through Christ Jesus (3:14).⁸ Furthermore, apparently with the land promises in Genesis 13:15 and 17:8 in mind, he says, “Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, ‘And to offsprings,’ referring to many, but referring to one, ‘And to your offspring,’ who is Christ” (3:16). Paul recognizes that Genesis places the hope of the world not on a corporate Israel but on a representative, single, male, royal messianic deliverer. “And your offspring shall possess the gate of *his* enemies, and *in your offspring* shall all the nations of the earth be blessed” (Gen 22:17b–18). And now that this offspring has come, “if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise” (3:29; cf. Rom 15:8–9). For Paul, only in Christ can anyone inherit the OT’s promised blessings.⁹ This is what Paul means when he declares that in Christ alone all of God’s promises find their “Yes” (2 Cor 1:21).¹⁰

⁸ Genesis speaks of God’s blessing reaching all “the *nations* of the earth” through Abraham (Gen 18:18), his offspring (22:18), and through Isaac’s offspring (26:4). It speaks of the blessing reaching all “the *families* of the ground” through Abraham (12:3) and through Jacob and his offspring (28:14).

⁹ For a helpful synthesis of promise, offspring, and inheritance in Galatians 3, see David Starling, “The Yes to All God’s Promises: Jesus, Israel and the Promises of God in Paul’s Letters,” *RTR* 71 (2012): 187–89. For my reflections on Paul’s use of Genesis in Galatians 3:16, see Jason S. DeRouchie and Jason C. Meyer, “Christ or Family as the ‘Seed’ of Promise? An Evaluation of N. T. Wright on Galatians 3:16,” *SBJT* 14.3 (2010): 36–49. See also Jason S. DeRouchie, “The Blessing-Commission, the Promised Offspring, and the *Toledot* Structure of Genesis,” *JETS* 56 (2013): 226–29; Jason S. DeRouchie, “Counting Stars with Abraham and the Prophets: New Covenant Ecclesiology in OT Perspective,” *JETS* 58 (2015): 445–85.

¹⁰ For a helpful overview of Paul’s promise theology, see Starling, “The Yes to All God’s Promises.”

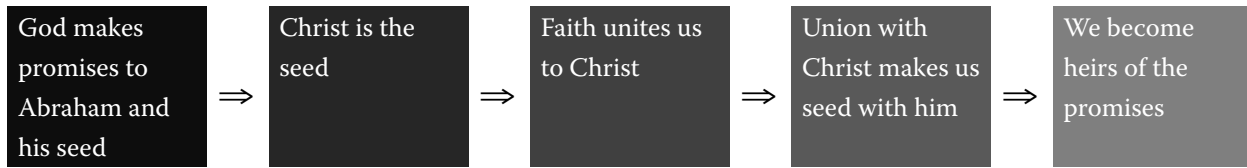


Figure 1. OT Promises Reach Believers Only through Christ.¹¹

2.2. All Old Covenant Curses Become New Covenant Curses

The next passage comes from Deuteronomy 30:6–7: “And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live. And the LORD your God will put all these curses on your foes and enemies who persecuted you.” Notice here that in the age of new covenant heart circumcision (already being realized in the church, Rom 2:28–29), God will take the curses of Deuteronomy—the very curses that served as warnings to old covenant national Israel (see fig. 2), and he will pour them out on the enemies of the restored community of God. What this suggests is that the old covenant curses become new covenant curses, which the Lord brings not on the members of the new covenant but on their enemies. As in the Abrahamic covenant, where YHWH promised to curse anyone who dishonored the patriarch and those he represented—“him who dishonors you I will curse” (Gen 12:3), so too the Lord will confront those who spurn his new covenant community. We see this reaffirmed in both Romans 12:19 and Hebrews 10:30, which recall Deuteronomy 32:35–36: “Vengeance is mine, and recompense, for the time when their foot shall slip; for the day of their calamity is at hand, and their doom comes swiftly.’ For the LORD will vindicate his people and have compassion on his servants.” Note that in all these passages *God* is the one who bears the responsibility to curse, not us. Our responsibility is to rest, trusting that he will work justice in the best time and in the best way. At times, initial expressions of his wrath will come through the political state (Rom 2:4; cf. 1 Thess 4:6) or through death (Acts 5:5, 10; 12:23), but the ultimate manifestation will come at Christ’s second appearing (2 Thess 1:8–9; cf. Isa 66:15).

Blessings	
1. YHWH’s presence / favor / loyalty (Lev 26:11–12)	6. General and unspecified (Deut 28:2, 6, 8, 12–13)
2. Confirmation of the covenant (Lev 26:9)	7. Peace and security in the land with no fear:
3. Be a holy people to YHWH (Deut 28:9)	a. General (Lev 26:5–6);
4. Rains in season (Lev 26:4; Deut 28:12)	b. From harmful animals (Lev 26:6);
5. Abounding prosperity and productivity:	c. From enemies (Lev 26:6)
a. General (Deut 28:12);	8. Victory over enemies (Lev 26:7–8; Deut 28:7)
b. Fruit of the womb (Lev 26:9; Deut 28:4, 11);	9. Freedom from slavery (Lev 26:13)
c. Fruit of the livestock (Deut 28:4, 11);	10. Global influence and witness (Deut 28:1, 10, 12)
d. Fruit of the ground (Lev 26:4–5, 10; Deut 28:4, 8, 11)	

¹¹ For this framework, see John Piper, “Isaiah 41:10: Are the Old Testament Promises Made to Us?,” <http://www.desiringgod.org/labs/are-the-old-testament-promises-made-to-us>; see also John Piper, “Which Old-Testament Promises Apply to Me?,” <http://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/which-old-testament-promises-apply-to-me>.

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Curses	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Anger and rejection from YHWH (Lev 26:17, 24, 28, 41; Deut 4:24–25; 29:20, 24, 27–28; 31:17–18, 29; 32:16, 19–22, 30) 2. Rejection and destruction of the cult (Lev 26:31) 3. War and its ravages: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. General (Lev 26:17, 25, 33, 37; 28:25, 49, 52; 32:23–24, 30, 41–42); b. Siege (Lev 26:25–26, 29; Deut 28:52–53, 55, 57) 4. Fear, terror, and horror (Lev 26:16–17, 36–37; Deut 28:66–67; 32:25) 5. Occupation and oppression by enemies and aliens (Lev 26:16–17, 32; Deut 28:31,33, 43–44, 48, 68; 32:21) 6. Agricultural disaster and non-productivity: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. General (Lev 26:20; Deut 28:17–18, 22, 40; 29:23); b. Drought (Lev 26:19; Deut 28:22–24); c. Crop pests (Deut 28:38–42) 7. Starvation / famine (Lev 26:26, 29, 45; Deut 28:53–56; 32:24) 8. Illness, pestilence, and contamination (Lev 26:16; Deut 28:21–22, 27–28, 35, 59–61; 29:22; 32:24, 39) 9. Desolation: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Of holy places (Lev 26:31); b. Of cities and towns (Lev 26:31, 33); c. Of the land (Lev 26:32–35, 43; Deut 28:51; 29:23) 10. Destruction by fire (Deut 28:24; 32:22) 11. Harm from wild animals (Lev 26:22; Deut 32:24) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 12. Decimation and infertility: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Of family (Lev 26:22; Deut 28:18, 59); b. Of cattle (Lev 26:22; Deut 28:18, 51); c. Of population generally (Lev 26:22, 36; Deut 4:27; 28:62; 32:36) 13. Exile and captivity: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Of the people (Lev 26:33–34, 36, 38–39, 41, 44; Deut 4:27; 28:36–37, 41, 63–64, 68; 29:28; 30:4; 32:26); b. Of the king (Deut 28:36) 14. Forced idolatry in exile (Deut 4:28; 28:36, 64) 15. Futility (Lev 26:16, 20; Deut 28:20, 29–31, 33, 38–41) 16. Dishonor and degradation (Lev 26:19; Deut 28:20, 25, 37, 43–44, 68) 17. Loss of possessions and impoverishment (Deut 28:31) 18. Loss of family (Deut 28:30, 32, 41; 32:25) 19. Helplessness and stumbling (Lev 26:36–37; Deut 28:29, 32; 32:35–36; 38–39) 20. Psychological afflictions (Deut 28:20, 28, 34, 65–67) 21. Lack of peace and rest (Deut 28:65) 22. Denial of burial (Deut 28:26) 23. Becoming like the cities of the plain (Deut 29:23) 24. Death and destruction (Lev 26:36, 39; Deut 4:26; 28:20–22, 44, 48, 51, 61; 29:20; 30:15,18–19; 31:17; 32:25–26, 35, 39, 42) 25. General and unspecified (Deut 4:30; 28:20, 24, 45, 59, 61, 63; 29:19, 21–22; 31:17, 21, 29; 32:23, 35) 26. General punishment, curse, and vengeance (Lev 26:41, 43; Deut 28:16, 20–21, 27; 30:19; 32:35, 41, 43) 27. Multiple punishments (Lev 26:18, 21, 24, 28)
Restoration Blessings	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Renewal of YHWH’s presence, favor, and loyalty (Lev 26:42, 45; Deut 4:29, 31; 30:3, 9) 2. Renewal of the covenant (Lev 26:42, 44–45; Deut 4:31) 3. Restoration of true worship and ability to be faithful (Deut 4:30; 30:6, 8) 4. Population increase (Deut 30:5, 9) 5. Agricultural bounty (Lev 26:42; Deut 30:9) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Restoration of general prosperity, well-being, and wealth (Deut 30:3, 5, 9; 32:39) 7. Return from exile and repossession of the land (Deut 30:3–5) 8. Reunification (Deut 30:3–4) 9. Power over enemies and aliens (Deut 30:7) 10. Freedom and restoration from death and destruction (Lev 26:44; Deut 30:6; 32:39)

Figure 2. Mosaic Covenant Blessings, Curses, and Restoration Blessings¹¹

2.3. As Part of the New Covenant, Christians Inherit the Old Covenant's Original and Restoration Blessings

Moses originally motivated those in the old covenant to loyalty by distinguishing blessings that would come for obedience (Lev 26:3–13; Deut 28:1–14) and curses that would result from disobedience (Lev 26:14–39; Deut 28:15–68). Being certain that Israel's stubbornness would produce their destruction (e.g., Deut 4:25–28; 31:16–18, 27–29), the prophet also looked beyond curse to restoration blessings, fulfilled in the period we now know of as the new covenant (Lev 26:40–45; Deut 4:29–31; 30:1–14; cf. Jer 31:31–34).

In 2 Corinthians 7:1, Paul declared, “Since *we have these promises*, beloved [Corinthian Christians], let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God” (7:1). Like Peter (2 Pet 1:4), Paul too saw God's promises as central to our pursuit of God-likeness. What is significant is that the promises to which Paul refers are all from the OT.¹³ At the end of chapter 6, Paul uses a string of OT texts to urge Christians to “not be unequally yoked with unbelievers” (2 Cor 6:14). The first of these citations is in 6:16, where the apostle writes, “What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, ‘I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.’” As we will see, Paul here cites both an original old covenant blessing (Lev 26:11–12) and a restoration blessing (Ezek 37:27). Figure 3 supplies a comparison of the texts.

We begin with the restoration blessing in Ezekiel 37:27. The chapter opens with the vision of the valley of dry bones. Far from doing the law resulting in life (Ezek 20:11, 13, 21; cf. Lev 18:5), the nation of Israel had disobeyed YHWH, resulting in their ruin.¹⁴ Their exile was equivalent to their death, and any future would demand a rebirth and new creation. This God promises to bring to them, joining the bones, adding flesh, and then placing his Spirit within them so they might live as if they were his temple (Ezek 37:1–14). And as in earlier days when the nations would come to see God's greatness at his temple (e.g., 1 Kgs 8:41–43; 10:1), now the nations would see the people and be pointed to the majesty of YHWH (Ezek 36:23; 37:28; cf. 36:27). Into this context, the Lord declares, “My dwelling place shall be with them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people” (37:27).

Paul's choice of the Greek ἐνοικήσω ἐν αὐτοῖς (“I will dwell among them”) in contrast to the LXX's καὶ ἔσται ἡ κατασκήνωσίς μου ἐν αὐτοῖς (“and my dwelling will be among them”) suggests that he is either quoting from memory or supplying his own rendering directly from the Hebrew **וְנִתְתִּי מִשְׁכְּנִי בְּתוֹכְכֶם** (“I will place my dwelling in your midst”). Regardless, the second half of the promise parallels closely the Greek translation. What is missing in Ezekiel, however, is any mention of God's “walking” among

¹² All references are from Leviticus 26, Deuteronomy 4; 28–32. No single prophetic book, except perhaps Isaiah, mentions all categories. The lists of “Curses” and “Restoration Blessings” are adapted from Douglas Stuart, “Malachi,” in *The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary*, ed. by Thomas E. McComiskey (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 1259–60.

¹³ In 2 Corinthians 6:16–7:1, Paul's citation of lastingly relevant OT promises includes reference to one original Mosaic covenant blessing (Lev 26:11–12 in 2 Cor 6:16) and a series of restoration blessings associated with the Davidic everlasting/new covenant (Ezek 37:27 in 2 Cor 6:16; Isa 52:11 and Ezek 20:34 in 2 Cor 6:17; 2 Sam 7:14 and Isa 43:6 in 2 Cor 6:18). For further reflections on these texts, see Starling, “The Yes to All God's Promises,” 191–93.

¹⁴ For a development of this contrast, see Preston M. Sprinkle, “Law and Life: Leviticus 18:5 in the Literary Framework of Ezekiel,” *JOT* 31 (2007): 275–93.

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2 Corinthians 6:16	Leviticus 26:11–12	Ezekiel 37:27
NA ²⁸	Ralphs LXX/NETS	Ralphs LXX/NETS
<p>τίς δὲ συγκατάθεσις ναῶ θεοῦ μετὰ εἰδώλων; ἡμεῖς γὰρ ναὸς θεοῦ ἔσμεν ζῶντος, καθὼς εἶπεν ὁ θεὸς ὅτι <u>ἐνοικήσω ἐν αὐτοῖς καὶ ἐμπεριπατήσω καὶ ἔσομαι αὐτῶν θεὸς καὶ αὐτοὶ ἔσονται μου λαός.</u></p>	<p>Ἐὰν τοῖς προστάγμασίν μου πορεύησθε καὶ τὰς ἐντολάς μου φυλάσσησθε καὶ ποιήσητε αὐτάς, ...¹¹ καὶ θήσω τὴν διαθήκην μου ἐν ὑμῖν, καὶ οὐ βδελύξεται ἡ ψυχὴ μου ὑμᾶς.¹² <u>καὶ ἐμπεριπατήσω ἐν ὑμῖν καὶ ἔσομαι ὑμῶν θεός, καὶ ὑμεῖς ἔσεσθέ μου λαός.</u></p>	<p>καὶ ἔσται ἡ κατασκήνωσίς μου <u>ἐν αὐτοῖς, καὶ ἔσομαι αὐτοῖς θεός, καὶ αὐτοὶ μου ἔσονται λαός.</u></p>
<p>What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, “I will make my dwelling among them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.</p>	<p>If you walk by my ordinances and observe my commandments and do them, ...¹¹ And I will place my tent [lit., “covenant”] among you, and my soul shall not abhor you.¹² And I will walk about among you and will be your God, and you shall be for me a nation.</p>	<p>And my encamping shall be among them, and I will be a god for them, and they shall be my people.</p>
	MT/ESV	MT/ESV
	<p>אִם-בְּחֻקֹּתַי תֵּלְכוּ וְאֶת-מִצְוֹתַי תִּשְׁמְרוּ וְעֲשִׂיתֶם אֹתָם: ¹¹ וְנָתַתִּי מִשְׁכְּנִי בְּתוֹכְכֶם וְלֹא-תִגְעַל נַפְשִׁי אֶתְכֶם: ¹² וְהִתְהַלַּכְתִּי בְּתוֹכְכֶם וְהָיִיתִי לָכֶם לֵאלֹהִים וְאַתֶּם תִּהְיוּ-לִי לְעָם:</p>	<p>וְהָיָה מִשְׁכְּנִי עֲלֵיהֶם וְהָיִיתִי לָהֶם לֵאלֹהִים וְהָמָּה יִהְיוּ-לִי לְעָם:</p>
	<p>If you walk in my statutes and observe my commandments and do them, ...¹¹ I will make my dwelling among you, and my soul shall not abhor you.¹² And I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people.</p>	<p>My dwelling place shall be with them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.</p>

Figure 3. Paul's Use of the OT in 2 Corinthians 6:16

his people, and this suggests that along with Ezekiel 37:27 Paul also has in mind the original Mosaic covenant blessing in Leviticus 26:11–12.¹⁵

The Mosaic law conditioned the enjoyment of its original blessings on perfect obedience. YHWH declared, “If you walk in my statutes and observe my commandments and do them, ... I will make my dwelling among you, and my soul shall not abhor you. And I will walk among you and will be your God,

¹⁵ For a similar view that Paul is conflating both Leviticus 26:11–12 and Ezekiel 37:27, see Peter Balla, “2 Corinthians,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 772.

and you shall be my people” (Lev 26:3, 11–12). Paul’s inclusion of the phrase *καὶ ἐμπεριπατήσω* (“and I will walk”) directly matches the promises in Leviticus 26:12, suggesting that the apostle had *both* Moses and Ezekiel’s words in mind.

Significantly, because Israel did not fully obey God’s instructions, the Mosaic covenant resulted in curse and condemnation, not blessing (2 Cor 3:9). Nevertheless, Paul says that all those in Christ are enjoying the inaugurated fulfillment of both the original and restoration blessings.¹⁶ Most likely, the apostle is seeing Christ’s perfect obedience to be wholly meeting for his elect the required loyalty needed to enjoy God’s blessing (cf. John 15:10; Rom 5:18–19; 8:4; Phil 2:8; Heb 5:8). The reason that we as the church are delighting in the presence of God today is because of what Jesus has done on our behalf and not because we have kept the law perfectly. In Paul’s words elsewhere, the inheritance “depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law [namely, Christ] but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all” (Rom 4:16).¹⁷

I draw two important observations from Paul’s application of OT promises in 2 Corinthians 6:16: (1) The restoration blessings of the old covenant include all the original blessings but in escalation and with never the chance of loss. This fact is suggested in the way that Ezekiel’s new covenant promise reasserts the original old covenant blessings from Leviticus 26. (2) The original old covenant blessings *and* the restoration blessings have direct bearing on Christians. Paul appears to draw together both texts, suggesting not only their close tie in the OT but also that, along with the new covenant restoration blessings, the original old covenant blessings do indeed relate to believers.¹⁸

2.4. Through the Spirit, Some Blessings of the Christian’s Inheritance Are Already Enjoyed, Whereas Others Are Not Yet

Paul highlighted in Ephesians 1:3, 13–14:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us *in Christ* with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.... In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory.

In Christ believers enjoy “every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.” Most scholars believe this expression refers to the blessings “pertaining to or belonging to the Spirit”—that is, all the blessings that the Spirit of Christ secures for the saints, whether those *already* enjoyed like election, adoption to sonship, redemption, forgiveness, and sealing or those *not yet* enjoyed like the full inheritance (Eph

¹⁶ Balla writes, “Since all of these OT references [in 2 Cor 6:16–18] are direct verbal prophecies or are set in a direct verbal prophetic context, Paul sees them having inaugurated fulfillment in the Corinthian community. Consequently, the Corinthians are the beginning of the prophesied end-time tabernacle or temple, and they are part of the dawning fulfillment of Israel’s restoration prophecies” (Ibid., 773).

¹⁷ For a development of this latter text, see Starling, “The Yes to All God’s Promises,” 193–95.

¹⁸ Starling writes, “Paul indicates by the way in which he merges the citations together [in 2 Cor 6:16–18] that the Sinaitic and Davidic covenant formulas are applied to his readers not directly but second-hand, refracted through the lens of the end-of-exile prophecies of Ezekiel and Isaiah” (Ibid., 192.).

4:4–14).¹⁹ All of these blessings fulfill the OT’s eschatological hopes associated with the promises of new covenant restoration (e.g., Deut 30:6; Isa 53:11; Jer 31:33–34; 32:40; Ezek 36:27; Dan 9:24). Therefore, while *all* God’s promises find their “Yes” in Christ (2 Cor 1:20), we enjoy some *already*, while others remain for the future. “[He] has put his seal on us and given us his Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee” (1:22).

Another text that teaches the same thing is 1 Peter 3:9–12, wherein Peter asserts that the divine favor in Psalm 34:12–16 (LXX 33:13–17) is lastingly relevant for the church:

Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing. For “Whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit; let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”

Psalm 34 holds out a vision of eschatological blessing for the righteous ones (plural) who pursue good and not evil, and Peter here claims that this hope still exists for believers today.²⁰ The retribution-principle that stands behind the psalm appears to build on the covenantal blessing-curse structure of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28, yet it colors these promises in eschatological hues. This future-orientation is clear in the fact that the psalmist knew that in the present many afflictions would come to God’s followers, and yet he was confident that “the LORD hears and delivers them out of all their troubles” (Ps 34:17 [34:18 MT]) and that those who serve YHWH and take refuge in him would not be condemned (34:22 [34:23 MT]). In contrast, God will condemn those who hate the righteous one (singular), which I believe is shorthand for the messianic king (34:21 [34:22 MT]; cf. 2:12). Peter too clearly recognized that obedient Christians suffer (1 Pet 2:19–23; 3:14, 17; 4:12–19), and he too remained certain that in time God would “restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you” (5:10).²¹

At one level, the “blessing” that is sought in 1 Peter 3:9 appears to be something that God-followers can enjoy already in light of its connection to the “living hope” into which saints are already born (1:3; cf. 1:22–24; 5:1). We see the present-nature of “blessing” in 4:14, when the apostle stresses, “If you are insulted for the name of Christ, *you are blessed*, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you.”

¹⁹ E.g., Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, WBC 42 (Dallas: Word, 1990), 19; Gordon D. Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 666–67; Klyne R. Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 46; Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 95. F. F. Bruce distinguishes the “spiritual blessings” from “material,” but I do not see this as justified in light of the reference in 1:14 to our full inheritance, which will include a transformed material creation. F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon and to the Ephesians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 253.

²⁰ Karen Jobes supplies the following list of allusions to Psalm 34 (LXX 33) in the first half of Peter’s letter: 1 Pet 1:3 (Ps 33:2 LXX [34:1 ET]); 1:6 (Ps 33:20 LXX [34:19 ET]); 1:17 (Ps 33:5, 8 LXX [34:5, 7 ET]); 1:18; 2:16 (Ps 33:6 LXX [34:5 ET]); 2:17 (Ps 33:10, 12 LXX [34:9, 11 ET]); 3:12 (Ps 33:18 LXX [34:11 ET]). Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 221–22. In 1 Peter 3:10–12 the apostle follows the LXX in an adaptive fashion, writing in third person rather than second. See D. A. Carson, “2 Peter,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 1037.

²¹ See John Piper, “Hope as the Motivation for Love: 1 Peter 3:9–12,” *NTS* 26 (1980): 212–31.

From this perspective, Peter stresses that we experience numerous present expressions of divine favor as we pursue right conduct by faith and in God's power (1:5).²²

At a greater level, however, most of the "blessing" for which we seek appears to remain not yet, for it relates to the future "inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you" (1:4). It relates to the hope that our faith may result "in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (1:7) and to "the unfading crown of glory" that we long to receive (5:4). We see this future-orientation in 3:14, which reads, "But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, *you will be blessed.*"

From Peter's perspective, the pursuit of "blessing" is in no way a works-righteousness, for Christ's work on the cross purchased not only our justification but also our sanctification. By God's "great mercy, *he has caused* us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead" (1:3). We "*by God's power* are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1:5). We serve "*by the strength that God supplies*—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ" (4:11). Our faithful pursuit of blessing today, therefore, is a fruit that points to the Lord's work in our lives.

2.5. All True Christians Will Persevere and Thus Receive Their Full Inheritance

My last text serves as a launching point for a broader discovery I have made in the book of Hebrews that addresses the role of Christian obedience for receiving what God has promised. The author reasons that every person—represented by the imagery of old covenant land—"that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God. But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned" (Heb 6:7–8).²³ He then asserts, however, "Though we speak in this way, yet in your case, beloved, we feel sure of better things—things that belong to salvation. For God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints, as you still do" (6:9–10). He then charges, "We desire each one of you to show the same earnestness to have the full

²² Wayne Grudem finds no less than ten "blessings" in this life that Peter stressed result from a Christian's right conduct: (1) loving Christ leads to utterable joy (1:8); (2) continuing faith leads to more benefits of salvation (1:9); (3) holy life with fear leads to avoiding God's fatherly discipline (1:17); (4) partaking of spiritual milk leads to growing up toward salvation (2:2); (5) trusting God and obeying leads to God's approval (2:19–20); (6) submitting to husbands leads to husbands won for Christ (3:1–2); (7) living considerately with one's wife leads to a husband's prayers not hindered (3:7); (8) enduring reproach for the name of Christ leads to a spirit of glory and of God resting on you (4:14); (9) casting one's cares on God leads to his caring for one's needs (5:7); (10) resisting the devil leads to God's restoring, confirming, strengthening, and establishing you (5:9–10). Wayne Grudem, *1 Peter: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC 17 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 157. To these I would add that humility before God leads to enjoyment of his grace (5:5). Cf. Leonhard Goppelt, *A Commentary on 1 Peter*, ed. Ferdinand Hahn, trans. John E. Alsup (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 230.

²³ George Guthrie notes how the harsh warning of Hebrews 6:7–8 falls "squarely in the context of Deuteronomy's "blessing and curse framework," echoing several elements from Deuteronomy: (1) the blessing of the land drinking rain (Deut 11:11; cf. Heb 6:7); (2) the blessed over against the cursed land (Deut 28:12; 29:18, 23–27; cf. Heb 12:15); (3) the burning of the land as an image of God's punishment (Deut 4:24; 9:3; 29:20; 32:22; cf. Heb 12:29); the nearness of God's judgment (Deut 32:35; cf. Heb 6:8; 10:30). He adds that the "thorns and thistles" from Hebrews 6:8 come from the curse text in Genesis 3:18, from which springs the imagery in Deuteronomy. George H. Guthrie, "Hebrews," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 962–64.

assurance of hope until the end, so that you may not be sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises” (6:11–12).

By using the conjunction “for” (γάρ) and referring to the time “when God made a promise to Abraham,” 6:13 identifies that the promises to which the author refers in verse 12 include those in the OT. The only ones who will inherit these promises are those who persevere until the end, maintaining a believing heart and not falling away by giving into sin’s deceitfulness (3:12–13). These alone are truly part of the new covenant, for it is these who truly share in the work of the new covenant mediator: “For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end” (3:14; cf. 8:6–7, 13; 9:15).

Like other NT teachers (e.g., Matt 5:8; 2 Cor 7:1; Rev 21:27), the author of Hebrews emphasizes that “without [holiness] no one will see the Lord” (Heb 12:14). Persevering loyalty is a necessary condition to enjoy the future inheritance, for future judgment will be in accord with (though not on the basis of) deeds we do in this life (Matt 16:27; Rom 2:6; 2 Cor 5:10; 1 Pet 1:17; Rev 2:23; 20:12). Thus Paul can urge Timothy, “Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers” (1 Tim 4:16). And elsewhere he can stress, “If you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live” (Rom 8:13; cf. 1 Cor 6:9–10; Gal 5:19–22; Eph 5:5).

But Paul makes clear that this new covenant call to persevere in faith is *not like* the old covenant’s call to obey in order to live: “If a person does [my statutes and rules], he shall live by them: I am the LORD” (Lev 18:5; cf. Rom 10:5; Gal 3:12). Speaking predominantly to the unregenerate, the old covenant charged Israel to pursue righteousness (Deut 16:20), and it declared that they would only be counted righteous and secure life *if* they met *all* the covenant’s demands (6:25; 8:1; cf. 4:1). Yet for Paul, “the very commandment that promised life proved to be death” (Rom 7:10). “The law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good” (7:12). Yet the majority in “Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law ... because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works” (9:31–32). Paul can thus declare that “Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes” (10:4), because by Christ’s perfect obedience in life and death God frees believers from sin’s condemning power (Rom 5:18–19; 8:1; Col. 2:14), declares us righteous and reconciled (Rom 5:9–10; 2 Cor 5:21), and enables us to walk in newness of life (Rom 6:4, 17, 22). That is, in the new covenant, righteousness and life becomes the foundation and not just the goal.

From the perspective of Hebrews, Christ’s priestly work as new covenant mediator provides an unprecedented “sure and steadfast anchor of the soul” (Heb 6:19) and “a better hope” than that of the old covenant (7:19). This is so for at least two reasons. First, unlike the sinful old covenant priests who themselves died, the high priest Jesus “always lives to make intercession” for those he saves (7:24), which means that we can “with confidence draw near to the throne of grace” expecting to “receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (4:16). The one with all authority in heaven and on earth is working for his own! Furthermore, by his death he not only “redeems [all his saints] from the transgressions committed under the first covenant” (9:15) but also “has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified” (10:14). Those in the new covenant *start* from the basis of being completely forgiven for all time (10:17–18), and this new foundation places our pursuit of holiness on a completely different footing than that of the old covenant. With this, God now writes his laws on our minds (10:16), moving us to follow his ways. Stated another way, because through Christ’s single sacrifice “we have been sanctified”

(10:10) “with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water” (10:22), we can now “hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering” (10:23), knowing that God is *already* 100% for us in Jesus (13:5) and that “he who promised is faithful” (10:23). We have already “come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem” (12:22), and he will “equip [us] with everything good that [we] may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever” (13:21).

All sins that true saints seek to conquer are ones that God has already forgiven in Christ. We will receive our future inheritance on the basis of Christ’s new covenant sacrifice alone. We must persevere and enjoy “the holiness without which no one will see the Lord” (12:14). However, by means of our past pardon, Christ’s present intercession, and the promises of future reward for the faithful and future punishment for those who fall away, God generates persevering faith, hope, and love and thus makes certain the endurance of all members of the new covenant.

3. Guidelines for the Christian’s Appropriation of OT Promises

God’s promises (old and new) are vital for Christians, and if we fail to appropriate OT promises, we will lose three-fourths of the life-giving words of truth that our trustworthy God has given us to nurture our hope. With this in mind, I want to offer some guidelines for the Christian’s application of OT promises.

3.1. Celebrate That in Christ, All God’s Promises (Old and New) Are Already “Yes”—Both Blessings and Curses

Paul stressed that “all the promises of God find their Yes in [Jesus Christ]” (2 Cor 1:20). This would include all the blessings, curses, and restoration blessings in the Old Testament.

With respect to *blessings*, Paul notes that “in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham [has] come to the Gentiles” (Gal 3:14). Furthermore, all the old covenant blessings and restoration blessings from Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 and 30 are the new covenant blessings that are *already* “Yes” in Christ (for a full list, see fig. 2). As Paul says, God already “has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places” (Eph 1:3; cf. 2 Cor 1:22).

As for *curses*, those in Christ will not experience curse in a punitive way, for Christ bears upon himself God’s curse against all believers. “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us” (Gal 3:13; cf. John 3:14–15; 2 Cor 5:17; 1 Pet 2:24). Christians can still experience God’s immediate “wrath” through human authorities (Rom 13:4), forms of his “judgment” (1 Cor 11:29–32), and the Lord’s fatherly “discipline” (Heb 12:7–11; Rev 3:19). All of these carry out the revealed purpose of biblical curses—to move people to repentance and to grow them in holiness (Lev 26:18, 21, 23, 27). Nevertheless, “Since ... we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the [ultimate] wrath of God” (Rom 5:9; cf. John 3:36). No level of earthly discipline or consequence calls into question the eternal security of any believer.

Old covenant curses become the new covenants curses (Deut 30:7) and are visible within the NT as warnings of punishment against apostasy and against all who stand at odds with God and his people. For example, new covenant curses are evident in (1) Jesus’s parable of the “sheep and goats” (Matt 25:31–46), (2) Jesus’s “blessings and woes” in the Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6:20–26), and (3) the numerous warning passages that dot the NT, especially in Paul’s letters, Hebrews, and Revelation. For example,

Paul said, “If we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us” (2 Tim 2:12). Finally, Hebrews emphasizes that “if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries” (Heb 10:26–27).²⁴

Within the new covenant, the old covenant curses are renewed for two reasons. First, they serve as a means of grace to the elect in order to generate within them reverent fear of God leading to greater holiness. Every sinner deserves death, and any experience of divine forbearance or even lesser punishment is designed to lead us to repentance (Lev 26:18, 21, 23, 27; Rom 2:4). When God disciplined in the old covenant, it was met by hardness rather than repentance (e.g., Amos 4:6–11), so YHWH declared, “Prepare to meet your God” (4:12). The new covenant Scriptures are loaded with warnings, and failure to trust and obey would God’s revelation would result in curse. Nevertheless, the author of Hebrews could declare of his audience, “We feel sure of better things—things that belong to salvation” (Heb 6:9). Indeed, whereas in the old covenant the majority never heeded God’s word, all true new covenant members will heed God’s warnings (not perfectly, but truly, in Christ), thus identifying their true connection with the new covenant mediator. “For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end” (Heb 3:14; cf. 6:11–12 with 8:6–7, 13; 9:15).²⁵

Second, old covenant curses are renewed in the new covenant in order to declare lasting punishment on all apostates and those who stand against the Lord and his people (cf. Gen 12:3; Deut 30:7). This role is very clear in the warning passages of Hebrews, where the author cites the new covenant curse text in Deuteronomy 32:35 and declares punishment on apostates who for a while looked as though they were a part of the new covenant but then turned on God: “How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has trampled underfoot the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace? For we know him who said, ‘Vengeance is mine; I will repay’” (Heb 10:29–30; cf. 2 Pet 2:1).

3.2. Affirm That While All the Bible’s Promises (Old and New) Are Already “Yes” in Christ, They Are *Not Yet* All Fully Realized

As highlighted, Paul affirms that God has already “blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places” (Eph 1:3). He stresses that the “blessing” is “in the heavenly places” and that the full inheritance is not yet ours though it is secured. He says that the Spirit of Christ in us “is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it” (Eph 1:14; cf. 2 Cor 1:20, 22).

Of all the blessings in Leviticus 26:3–12, verses 11–12 alone focus on the presence of God. The rest address various physical, material blessings of provision and protection. Paul’s use of Leviticus 26 in 2 Corinthians 6:16 (see above) suggests that old covenant original blessings matter for Christians.

²⁴ For more examples of new covenant curses, see Matt 6:15; Rom 8:13; 11:22; 1 Cor 6:9–11; Gal 5:4, 19–21; Heb 2:3; 6:4–8; 10:28–31; 12:15; Rev 2:5, 16, 22–23; 22:19.

²⁵ For this view of the warning passages in Hebrews, see Christopher W. Cowan, “The Warning Passages of Hebrews and the New Covenant Community,” in *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course Between Dispensational and Covenant Theologies*, ed. Stephen J. Wellum and Brent E. Parker (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2016), 189–213; cf. Christopher W. Cowan, “*Confident of Better Things*”: Assurance of Salvation in the Letter to the Hebrews (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012); Thomas R. Schreiner and Ardel B. Caneday, *The Race Set Before Us: A Biblical Theology of Perseverance and Assurance* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001); Thomas R. Schreiner, *Run to Win the Prize: Perseverance in the New Testament* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010).

Nevertheless, because the apostle focused only on the blessing related to God's presence in the midst of his people and not on the material sustenance and security, these latter elements are most likely identified with the future transformed earth. They are *already* our inheritance but *not yet* ours to enjoy in the fullness that we will in the age to come.

God does promise to "supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Phil 4:19). Yet as Paul stresses earlier, we must be willing to let the Lord define our needs, learning how "to be brought low and ... how to abound" (4:12). Today we look to the Lord for daily bread (Matt 6:11), trusting that he values his people and will give food, drink, and clothing in due measure to those who "seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness" (6:25–26, 31–33). We also rest confident in Jesus's command and promise, "Give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap" (Luke 6:38). Yet as was clear in Paul's own life, having great faith in the truth of these promises does not secure a life free of beatings, stonings, shipwrecks, dangers, toil and hardship, sleepless nights, hunger and thirst, cold and exposure (2 Cor 11:23–28).²⁶

Similarly, Jesus often healed physical sickness and charged his disciples to do the same (Matt 4:23; 10:6–8; Mark 2:8–12). Indeed, after a series of Jesus's healings (Matt 8:16–17), Matthew cites Isaiah 53:4–5, stating, "This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: 'He took our illnesses and bore our diseases'" (8:17). Nevertheless, in Jesus's first coming he mostly restricted his ministry to the Jews (10:6–8), he only raised three people from the dead (i.e., the ruler's daughter, Mark 5:35–36, 41–43; the son of the widow of Nain, Luke 7:12–15; Lazarus, John 11:38–46), and he did not right all the wrongs or relieve all pains (Luke 4:16–21; 7:18–23). There is a tension we must hold in this "already-but-not yet" period: "Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold *now in this time*, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, *with persecutions*, and *in the age to come* eternal life" (Mark 10:29–30). We must live today recognizing the truth of Christ's declaration that "some of you they will put to death," while always trusting, "But not a hair of your head will perish" and "by your endurance you will gain your lives" (Luke 21:16, 18–19).²⁷

Paul too healed only sporadically and does not appear to have expected that all would be healed in this age. He healed the crippled man in Lystra (Acts 14:10), the demonized girl in Philippi (16:18), many people in Ephesus (19:12), and Eutychus when he was taken up dead after falling out of a window (20:9–10). However, he couldn't gain relief from his "thorn," whether it be sickness or persecution (2 Cor 12:7), and he couldn't heal himself from the ailment that he had when he preached in Galatia (Gal 4:13–14). He also evidently couldn't heal Epaphroditus from his life threatening sickness (Phil 2:26–27), Timothy from his stomach ailments (1 Tim 5:23), or Trophimus whom he "left ill at Miletus" (2 Tim 4:20).

²⁶ Walter Kaiser observes, "Prosperity teachers tend to equate 'your Father knows what you need before you ask' (Matt 6:8) with 'everything our Li'l ol' heart wants.' But Jesus only pointed to three needs: food, drink, and clothing (Matt 6:8–32). Paul advised, 'If we have food and clothing, with these we shall be content' (1 Tim 6:8)." Walter C. Kaiser Jr., "The Old Testament Promise of Material Blessings and the Contemporary Believer," *TrinJ* 9.2 (1988): 165.

²⁷ Reflecting on Jesus's non-universal healings in his first coming, Kaiser notes, "Even if our LORD did perform a series of healing ministries as a fulfillment of what was spoken by Isaiah, was this more than a foretaste of the total restoration that was to come when our LORD returned the second time in all history? ... We conclude that there is healing in the atonement; we only contest how and when it is fully applicable. We think that believers will be finally delivered from the dread of disease only when our Lord has put all enemies under his feet, even death itself" (*Ibid.*, 167).

My point in all of this is to stress that the “living hope” into which God has caused us to be born relates “to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you” (1 Pet 1:3–4). The Spirit is *already* ours, but the inheritance is *not yet* (Eph 1:3, 13–14; cf. 2 Cor 1:22). Prosperity-gospel advocates are wrong in thinking that more faith will bring health and wealth today. They are also wrong not because they assert that old covenant blessings apply to Christians but because their eschatology is over-realized. They are wanting to bring the future into the present too quickly.

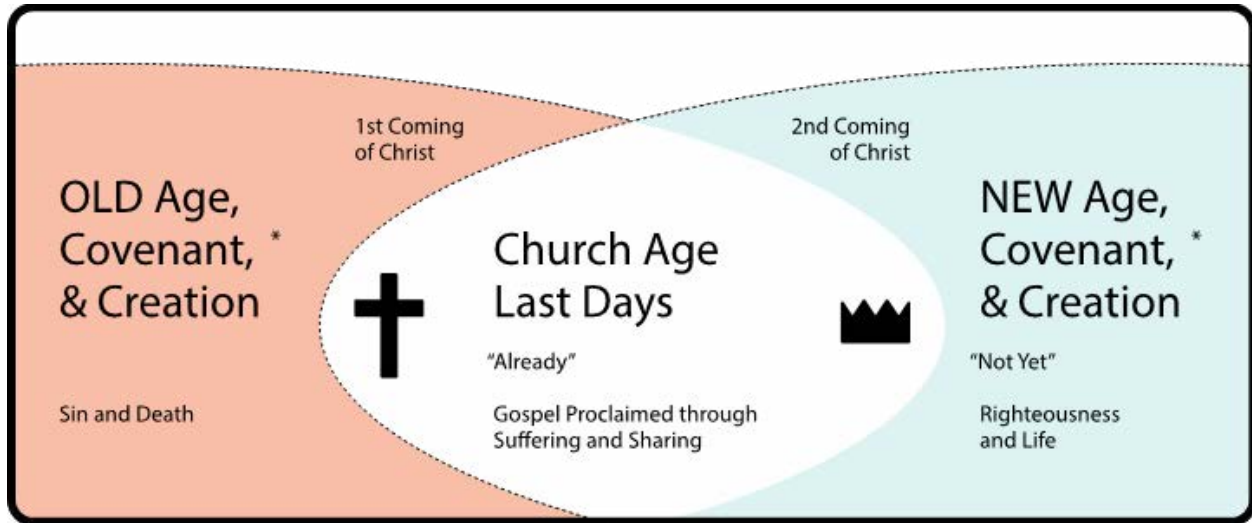


Figure 4. *The Overlap of the Ages*²⁸

In this overlap of the ages, our future destiny is secure in Christ, but our physical body still rests firmly in the old, cursed creation. Nevertheless, for believers, experiencing the effects of the old age’s curse is now holiness-generating rather than destructive.

- The battle with sin is still evident, but God has freed believers from sin’s enslavement and condemnation. Furthermore, rather than being “given over” (παραδίδωμι) to rebellion and a debased mind (Rom 1:24, 26, 28), God now “gives us over” (παραδίδωμι) to obedience and a renewed mind (6:16–18; 12:2; cf. 7:22–23, 25).
- The battle with brokenness and decay is very apparent with every cold and every bout of cancer, but such sufferings only develop our dependent faith in God and heighten our longing for the future (Rom 8:20–23; 2 Cor 4:16–18).

²⁸ At one level, the old and new covenants do not actually overlap, for Jesus “makes the first one obsolete” and “does away with the first in order to establish the second” (Heb 8:13; 10:9). At another level, however, because the old (Mosaic) covenant represents the age of death in Adam, the writer of Hebrews can add, “And what is become obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away” (8:13), noting that while “the end of the ages” is already upon us (9:26), the consummation of “the age to come” has not yet been realized (6:5; cf. 2 Cor 3:11). We see a similar statement regarding the overlap of the old and new covenants in 2 Corinthians 3:14–15, where Paul identifies that “to this day” a “veil” remains over the eyes of hardened, non-believing Jews when they read the old covenant, for “only through Christ is it taken away.” This visual image originally appeared in Jason S. DeRouchie, ed., *What the Old Testament Authors Really Cared About: A Survey of Jesus’ Bible* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2013), 39; used with permission.

- The battle with death looms over all of us, but in Christ the sting is removed and death becomes the channel to great reward. “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Phil 1:21; cf. Rom 5:17; 6:23; Rev 22:4).

The NT is clear that believers in this age are to expect suffering, tribulation, and affliction of all sorts. Jesus said, “If they persecuted me, they will persecute you” (John 15:20). He also stressed, “In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). Discipleship comes at great cost (Luke 14:33; John 12:25). Just as Christ had to endure the cross before enjoying his resurrection-body, so too the church as the body of Christ must carry our cross, identifying with Christ in his suffering, before receiving our resurrection-bodies (Mark 8:34; 1 Pet 4:13). God’s discipline in our lives nurtures holiness and righteousness (Heb 12:7–11), and we endure today knowing that something better is coming tomorrow (10:34; 13:12–14; 1 Pet 1:6–7).

Paul said, “Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22). God has granted that we “should not only believe in [Christ] but also suffer for his sake” (Phil 1:29). We are “destined” for “afflictions” (1 Thess 3:3), and “all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Tim 3:12). Paul himself experienced trials far broader than persecution—“afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, riots, labors, sleepless nights, hunger” (2 Cor 6:4–5; cf. 11:23–28). As he did, he said, “In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me” (Phil 4:12–13).

If you are a believer, I encourage you to boldly claim the promises of God in *all* of Scripture, following the pattern of the NT authors. Any promise related to God’s presence, favor, power, or pleasure is *already* something that we can enjoy, for they come to us today by the Spirit of Christ. All other promises addressing more physical, material provision and protection are something that will indeed be realized, but such blessings are only certain at the consummation of the new heavens and new earth when we will receive our resurrection bodies and when there will be no more tears, death, mourning, crying, or pain (Rev 21:4).

“With the LORD there is steadfast love, and with him is plentiful redemption” (Ps 30:7). In light of his character, God may still be pleased at any moment to bring our future hope into the present through a miracle-act of power. We must, therefore, continue to seek that others be relieved of poverty (Deut 10:17–19; 15:11; Ps 41:1; Gal 2:10; 1 John 3:17) and to pray that God would heal those sick and suffering (Jas 5:13–15; cf. 1 Cor 12:9), all for God’s glory and his kingdom’s advance. God is pleased to magnify his power, but he can do this both by removing the pain or by sustaining us through it. The Lord will bring relief according to his timetable, manner, and degree, but we can trust that he will work all things out for our good (Rom 8:28) and that the day is coming when all will be restored and God’s people will never again hunger or thirst (Rev 7:15).

3.3. Consider How Christ’s Fulfillment of OT Hopes Influences Our Appropriation of OT Promises

Jesus highlighted how he came not “to abolish” or to set aside the predictive anticipations of the Law and the Prophets but “to fulfill them” (Matt 5:17; cf. 11:13; Luke 16:16), actualizing what Scripture anticipated and achieving what God promised and predicted. Similarly, Paul emphasized that “all the promises of God find their Yes *in* [Christ]” (2 Cor 1:20). Indeed, “[God] has blessed us *in* Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places” (Eph 1:3). “*In* Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham [comes] to the Gentiles” (Gal 3:14). The OT promises become operative for believers only through

Is Every Promise “Yes”?

Jesus.²⁹ His death and resurrection give living hope that every promise will indeed come to pass (1 Pet 1:3–4), and his Spirit supplies the “guarantee” of our future inheritance (2 Cor 1:22; Eph 1:14).

In order to consider how OT promises relate to Christians, we must approach the promises through a salvation-historical framework that has Jesus at the center. That is, we must filter every promise through the lens of Christ in order to consider its contemporary relevance for us.³⁰ This filtering is important because the way Jesus fulfills the various OT promises is not static. Through Christ, God maintains many of the promises without altering their nature (as if they go through the center of the lens, gaining focus but not change). Of these, some find no new referents, whereas others extend to include new contexts and recipients in light of the way Christ redefines God’s people. When other promises channel through the lens of Christ’s fulfillment, they get “bent,” whether due to their already being completed or because Jesus in some way transforms them, trumping shadow with reality or bringing a type to its antitype (see fig. 5). In order to faithfully appropriate an OT promise, believers must faithfully consider its original historical and literary context and then assess how Christ’s salvation-historical work informs our appropriation.

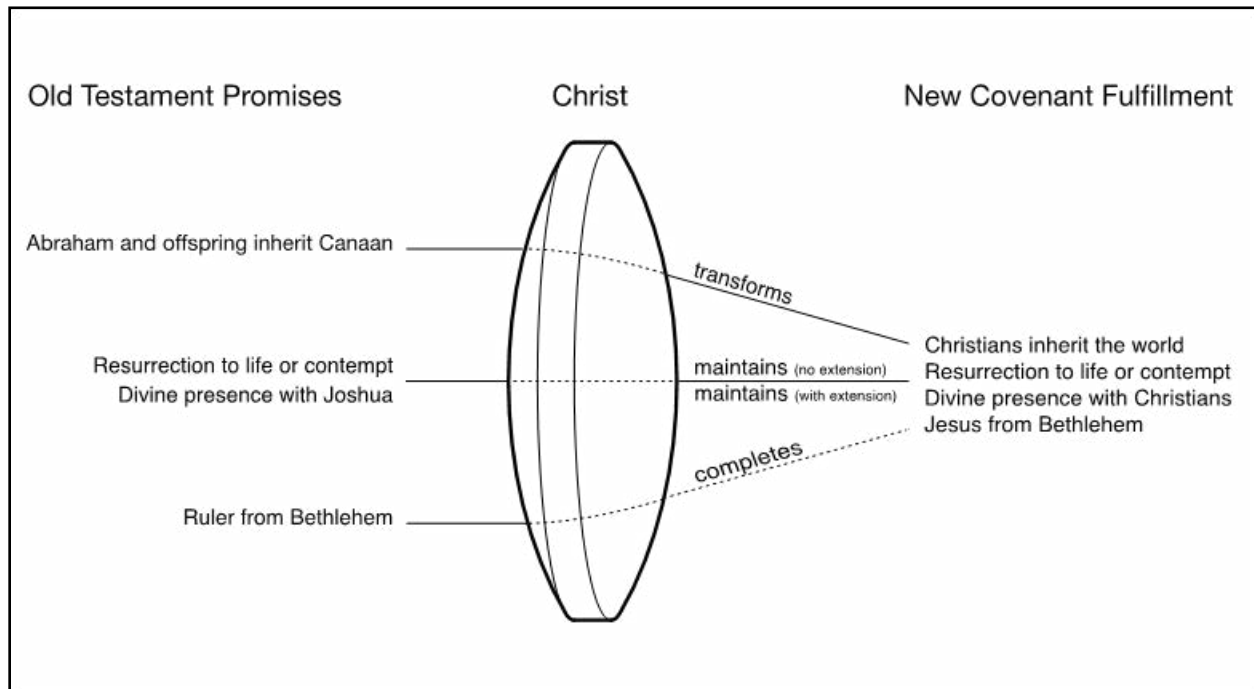


Figure 5. *The Fulfillment of OT Promises through the “Lens” of Christ*

²⁹ This is so because through his death and resurrection Christ purchased both common grace (Gen 8:20–21; Rom 2:4) and saving grace (Rom 3:24; 5:8–9), justifying every expression of God’s kindness, forbearance, patience toward sinners and identifying his just severity toward the same (3:25–26).

³⁰ Starling helpfully notes, “For Paul, the death of Christ is ... not only a soteriological event (reconciling Jew and Gentile to God) and an ecclesiological event (reconciling Jew and Gentile to one another within the ‘new humanity’ of the church) but also a hermeneutical event, transforming the relationship of his readers to the scriptural promise, law and covenants” (Starling, “The Yes to All God’s Promises,” 196). Disappointedly, Starling’s own hermeneutical proposal fails to work enough through a salvation-historical framework and to consider the way Christ’s promise-fulfillment impacts the Christian’s appropriation of OT promises.

3.3.1. OT Promises Maintained (No Extension)

Many of the promises that are *maintained* without any extension of referent are those that were already explicitly restoration promises and included a vision of global salvation after Israel's exile. Consider, for example, Daniel 12:2: "And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt." Likely alluding to this text, Jesus asserted, "An hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear [the Son of Man's] voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment" (John 5:28–29; cf. 11:11). Similarly, Paul said, "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed.... For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed" (1 Cor 15:51–52). Christians can hope in the future resurrection, claiming the promise of Daniel 12:2 as our own! We do so, however, recognizing that we will only rise because Christ was first raised. "Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.... Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ" (1 Cor 15:20, 23). As Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live" (John 11:25).

The OT identifies that the Messiah's resurrection would precede and facilitate our own. As Luke noted, "Thus *it is written* that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead" (Luke 24:46). Paul too claimed "that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on third day *in accordance with the Scriptures*, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve" (1 Cor 15:3–5).³¹ The OT portrays YHWH as one who would raise the dead: "I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal" (Deut 32:39). Speaking to a people that God had already torn and struck down, Hosea said, "After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him" (Hos 6:2). The resurrection of God's people would come *on the third day*. On this basis, YHWH questioned, "Shall I ransom them from the power of Sheol? Shall I redeem them from Death?" And he responded, "O Death, where are your plagues? O Sheol, where is your sting?" (Hos 13:14; cf. 1 Cor 15:55). Earlier, in the very context where Hannah prophesied that God would "give strength to his king and exalt the power of his anointed," she proclaimed, "The LORD kills and brings to life; he brings down to Sheol and raises up" (1 Sam 2:7, 10).

David, too, captured the Messiah's journey through tribulation unto triumph in Psalm 22, which opens with the king crying, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Ps 22:1; cf. Matt 27:46). He is "scorned by mankind and despised by the people," with some mocking him and wagging their heads (Ps 22:6–8; cf. 2:1; Matt 27:39, 43). His strength and mouth are dried up (Ps 22:15; John 19:28). He is encircled by evildoers who pierce his hands and feet and then cast lots for his clothing (Ps 22:16–18; cf. Matt 27:35; Luke 24:39–40; John 19:24), yet not one of his bones is broken (Ps 22:17; 34:20; John 19:46). He declares, "You lay me in the dust of death" (Ps 22:15), but he then proclaims, "You have rescued me from the horns of the wild oxen. I will tell of your name to my brothers" (22:21–22; cf. Matt 28:10; Heb 2:10–12).

³¹ For more on the OT predictions of Christ's third-day resurrection, see Mitchell L. Chase, "The Genesis of Resurrection Hope: Exploring Its Early Presence and Deep Roots," *JETS* 57 (2014): 467–80; Nicholas P. Lunn, "Raised on the Third Day According to the Scriptures': Resurrection Typology in the Genesis Creation Narrative," *JETS* 57 (2014): 523–35; Stephen G. Dempster, "From Slight Peg to Cornerstone to Capstone: The Resurrection of Christ on 'the Third Day' According to the Scriptures," *WTJ* 76 (2014): 371–409; Joel White, "He Was Raised on the Third Day According to the Scriptures' (1 Corinthians 15:4): A Typological Interpretation Based on the Cultic Calendar in Leviticus 23," *TynBul* 66 (2015): 103–19.

Isaiah 52:13–53:12 comparably promises the royal servant’s victory over death. Isaiah asserts:

Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. (Isa 53:10–11)

Our right standing with God and our hope is built solely on the death and resurrection of the Christ, who suffered as a sacrifice but who now sees and is satisfied in his saints.

The resurrection from the dead and eternal judgment are two of “the elementary doctrine[s] of Christ” (Heb 6:1–2). Daniel 12:2 gives Christians hope because Christ, who rose from the dead, has claimed us as his own. “For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his” (Rom 6:5).

3.3.2. OT Promises Maintained (with Extension)

While God maintains the nature of most OT promises on each side of the cross, at times Christ’s fulfillment extends the parties related to the promise. We see this operative in the way the author of Hebrews 13:5 applies to all Christians battling covetousness the promise of God’s presence given to Joshua regarding the conquest in Joshua 1:5. The Lord said to Moses’s successor, “Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you. Be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them” (Josh 1:5–6). The Lord gave this promise to Israel’s leader, and the implication was that if God was with Joshua, then those who followed him would also enjoy God’s presence.

In Hebrews, the OT’s wilderness and conquest narratives play an important role in magnifying the way Christ and the new covenant are better. Moses was faithful to God “as a servant,” whereas Christ was faithful “as a son” (Heb 3:5). Most in the exodus generation rebelled, hardening their hearts in unbelief, and because of this YHWH declared, “They shall not enter my rest” (3:7–11). Some like Joshua believed that God was able to secure rest, but all others died because of unbelief (4:2). Later Joshua did lead Israel into the Promised Land, but the rest he secured was only temporary and predictive of the greater rest that the more supreme Joshua (i.e., Jesus) secured for all (4:8).

Within this framework, if the Lord was with the first Joshua and all who followed him, how much more can we be assured that he will be with those identified with the greater Joshua! The original promise given to one man expands to be a promise given to all in Christ. We already share in Christ Jesus (3:14) but have not yet inherited the promises (6:12). But because God has promised, “I will never leave you nor forsake you” (13:5), we can rest secure knowing that our full inheritance will come. We are thus freed to live radically for God in the present, unencumbered by “the love of money” and finding contentment with all we have (13:5). Knowing that God is for us and with us helps us “lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely” (12:1). We look “to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising its shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God” (12:2). And as we consider “him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself,” we are helped to “not grow weary or fainthearted” (12:3). God’s presence and favor are our hope and our security. “For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one” (10:34).

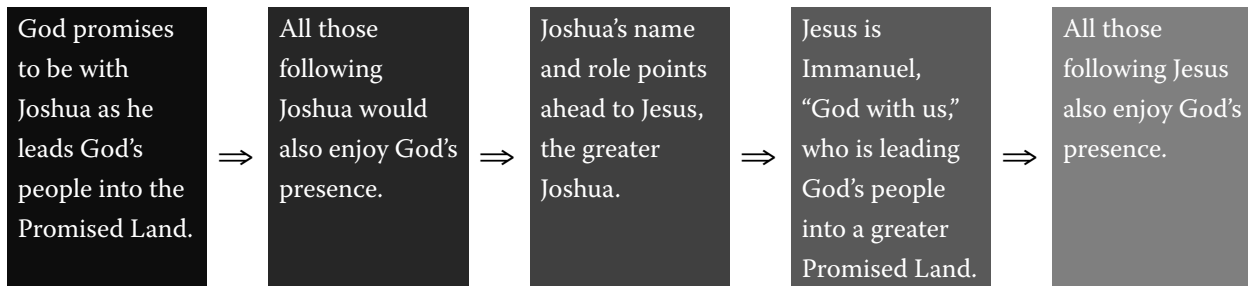


Figure 6. *God Maintains the Promise of His Presence While Extending It to All in Christ.*

Isaiah 49:6 supplies another example of an OT promise that Christ's fulfillment *maintains with extended referents*. In this third servant song, Isaiah portrays the coming royal deliver as speaking in first person. He says that the Lord called him from the womb, named him "Israel," and commissioned him as "his servant, to bring Jacob back to him; and that Israel might be gathered to him" (49:1, 3, 5). This is perhaps the clearest OT text that *Jesus is Israel*, the one representing the many in every way. Then in 49:6 we read YHWH's declaration, "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth." Through the coming Messiah, God would save not only ethnic Israelites but also some from the nations, thus fulfilling his earlier promises to Abraham (Gen 12:3; 22:18).

As we enter the NT, we find Simeon, who was "waiting for the consolation of Israel" (Luke 2:25), declaring by the Holy Spirit that Jesus was none other than God's "salvation," which he "prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel" (2:30–32). Similarly, Paul emphasized that both the prophets and Moses said that, following his death and resurrection, the Messiah "would proclaim light both to our people and to the Gentiles" (Acts 26:23). Both of these texts allude to Isaiah 49:6 and identify Christ as the direct fulfillment of this promise.

The extension of this promise comes in Paul's earlier words to the Jews at Antioch in Pisidia, where he declares with reference to him and Barnabas, "The Lord has commanded us, saying, 'I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth'" (13:47). What was a promise related to the servant Christ has now become a commission for all identified with him. As Isaiah himself anticipated, following the work of the one servant-king (singular) (Isa 42:1; 49:3, 5–7; 50:10; 52:13; 53:11; cf. Acts 4:27–30), God would commission many priestly "servants" (plural) from both Jews and the Gentiles to carry on the work of the Messiah (e.g., Isa 54:17; 56:6; 63:17; 65:8–9, 13–15; 66:14). Paul saw himself as one of these ambassadors (Isa 42:6–7 with Acts 26:15–18, 22–23; Isa 49:6 with Acts 13:45–48; Isa 49:8 with 2 Cor 6:1–4). Jesus's cross-work had purchased Paul's rescue from sin and God's wrath, and now the apostle was bound as "a servant" of his savior (cf. Rom 1:1 with 6:20, 22).

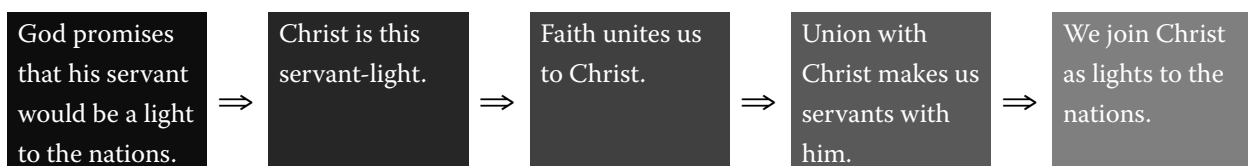


Figure 7. *God Maintains the Promise of Serving as a Light While Extending It to All in Christ.*

As a further example of an extended promise, we can assess Leviticus 26:11–12 that I cited above. It’s an old covenant original blessing (not a restoration blessing), conditioned on the nation’s obedience: “If you walk in my statutes and observe my commandments and do them, ... I will make my dwelling among you, and my soul shall not abhor you. And I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people.” Paul in turn cites this text as support for his claim that “we [the church] are the temple of the living God” (2 Cor 6:16). The promise stands, but through Christ its application gets extended. Christ is the ultimate temple (John 2:21; cf. 1:14), and when we unite with him by faith, we enjoy his tabernacling presence—we become the temple (1 Cor 3:16; 2 Cor 6:16).

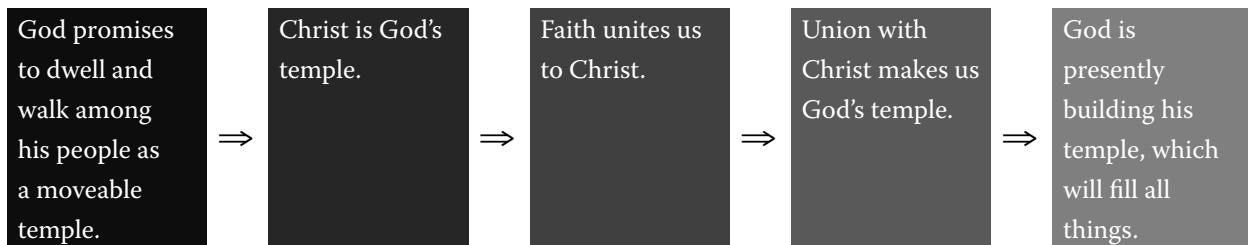


Figure 8. God Maintains the Promise of His Dwelling While Extending It to All in Christ.

In the days of Leviticus, YHWH was already inhabiting the material tabernacle, wherein he “walked” with Israel through the wilderness (Deut 23:14 [23:15 MT]; cf. 2 Sam 7:6–7). What Leviticus 26:11–12 portrays as *future* promise, therefore, likely points to a reality beyond the physical dwelling place (whether tabernacle or temple) to a grander manifestation on earth of the ultimate heavenly temple that served as the earthly tent’s pattern (Exod 25:9, 40; 26:30; 27:8; cf. Acts 7:44). Because what Moses, and later Solomon and Zerubbabel, built on earth was only a model of a heavenly reality (cf. 1 Chr 28:11–12, 18–19), the earthly “picture” bore a built-in obsolescence. The author of Hebrews touches on this fact when he writes, “[The old covenant priests] serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things. For when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, ‘See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain.’... Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf” (Heb 8:5; 9:24; cf. 9:11–12). Moses words in Leviticus 26:11–12 appear to anticipate that the pictorial earthly structure would be superseded when God’s obedient “son” would fulfill his covenant obligations.

The temporary quality of the earthly sanctuary is highlighted in the way the moveable tabernacle gives rise to a stationary temple. Then, after God’s presence departs from Jerusalem (Ezek 8–11), he lets the temple itself be destroyed (Ezek 33:21; cf. 2 Kgs 25). Yet the prophet also anticipated a day when the Lord would again dwell in the midst of his people, declaring that the transformed city would be called, “The LORD Is There” (Ezek 48:35). Echoing Leviticus 26:11–12 but now shaped as a restoration blessing, YHWH stated in Ezekiel 37:27–28, “My dwelling place shall be with them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Then the nations will know that I am the LORD who sanctifies Israel, when my sanctuary is in their midst forever.” Associated with this promise is that “David my servant shall be their prince forever” (37:25) and that the people themselves would operate as God’s temple, enjoying his indwelling presence and giving witness to God’s greatness before the onlooking nations: “And I will put my Spirit within you, and you shall live” (37:14), and again, “The nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Lord GOD, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes....

I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules” (36:23, 27). Earlier Isaiah had aligned the people with the city of Jerusalem, when he wrote, “And they shall be called The Holy People, The Redeemed of the LORD; and you shall be called Sought Out, A City Not Forsaken” (Isa 62:12). Similarly, Jeremiah identified the new Zion with both the temple and people, when he predicted that one day all of Jerusalem would be God’s throne (and not just the ark of the covenant), and that gathered there would be the redeemed from both the nations and a reunited house of Israel (Jer 3:16–18).

While Zerubbabel helped oversee the building of a second temple, Haggai looked further ahead to a greater glory, suggesting that the earthly temple would be transformed: “The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former, says the LORD of hosts. And in this place I will give peace” (Hag 2:9). Even more, Zechariah said that the coming Messiah would build this temple with the aid of “those who are far off,” and he would serve as God’s priest-king, reigning from God’s temple-throne: “It is he who shall build the temple of the LORD and shall bear royal honor, and shall sit and rule on his throne. And there shall be a priest on his throne, and the counsel of peace shall be between them both” (Zech 6:13, 15; cf. 1 Sam 2:35). The return of YHWH’s presence to the temple would happen at the day of the Lord (Mal 3:2).³²

As noted, the future tabernacling presence to which Leviticus 26:11–12 points was conditioned on the obedience of God’s covenant “son.” This conditional structure echoes YHWH’s earlier declaration: “Be a blessing, so that I may bless those who bless you ... with the result that in you all the families of the ground may be blessed” (Gen 12:2–3, author’s translation). Israel, as God’s corporate “son” (Exod 4:22–23), “dealt corruptly” with the Lord, so Moses declared that “they are no longer his children because they are blemished; they are a crooked and twisted generation” (Deut 32:5; cf. Acts 2:40; Phil 2:15). Because Israel failed to reflect, resemble, and represent God as a true son should, displaying his image and likeness (Gen 5:1–3), the Lord promised to curse them, asserting, “You were unmindful of the Rock that bore you, and you forgot the God who gave you birth” (Deut 32:18).

Nevertheless, YHWH had already identified that he would defeat the evil one that originally separated mankind from his tabernacling presence in the garden of Eden (Gen 3:8). He would do this, however, *not* by his corporate son (the nation) but by a single, male, royal priest-son. A male offspring of the woman would bruise the skull of the serpent (Gen 3:15). He would be a Shemite (9:26–27) in the lines of Abraham (22:17b–18) and Judah (49:8–10), and only in his day would the enemy gates be brought down and God’s blessing extend to the world (22:17b–18; 26:3–4; cf. 17:4–6). As God’s ideal priest-king, he would live righteously, embodying God’s character portrayed in his law (Deut 17:18–20; 1 Sam 2:35;

³² In light of the fact that the “messenger” that Malachi anticipates to prepare the way for the Lord is tagged “Elijah” (Mal 3:1; 4:5–6 [3:23–24 MT]) and refers to John the Baptist (Matt 11:10, 14; Luke 1:17; 7:27), the return of the Lord to his temple (Mal 3:2) likely points to the coming of Christ as the temple (John 1:14; 2:21). Nevertheless, there is at least some evidence that God’s presence may have returned to the second temple in a way similar to how he filled the tabernacle (Exod 40:34–35) and Solomon’s temple (1 Kgs 8:10–11; cf. 2 Chr 7:1–2). Specifically, Malachi’s older contemporary Zechariah, whose preaching helped motivate the building of the second temple, declared, “Thus says the LORD: I have returned to Zion [a persistent perfect *qatal* with present time implications] and will dwell [a *w^oqatal* with future sense] in the midst of Jerusalem, and Jerusalem shall be called a faithful city, and the mountain of the LORD of hosts, the holy mountain” (Zech 8:3). Similarly, Jesus seems to assume God’s presence in the earthly temple, unless he is speaking of the more ultimate heavenly reality for which the earthly temple was but a model: “And whoever swears by the temple swears by it and by him who dwells in it” (Matt 23:21). The story of Zechariah’s becoming mute when performing his high priestly role could also suggest that YHWH inhabited the second temple (Luke 1:11).

Isa 11:5 with 59:17). He would enjoy the power of God, sit on God’s throne, and enjoy faithful followers (1 Sam 2:10, 35; cf. Zech 6:13, 15). His exalted reign would make his people like a restored garden of Eden (Num 24:5–7), as his own new creational sprouts (Isa 6:13; 11:1; 53:2) would produce fruit (61:3, 11). As king, he would represent the people (cf. Num 23:24; 24:9), even bearing their name “Israel” (Isa 49:3, 5; cf. Hos 14:5–8). He would “crush the forehead” of his enemies (Num 24:17), and those who bless him would be blessed, whereas those who curse him would be cursed (24:9; cf. Gen 12:3).

This royal and priestly “son” of God (2 Sam 7:14; Ps 2:7) would be intimately identified with YHWH himself. The servant-king’s “law” (Isa 42:4) would be YHWH’s law (2:3; 51:4). The child-king would be Immanuel (“God with us”) (7:14), and his royal name would be “Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (9:6). He would operate as the Lord’s very “arm” working salvation (53:1; 59:16). Even more, like the ark in the temple’s Most Holy Place, “the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD” (11:2; cf. 42:1; 61:1). Isaiah seems to envision that the presence of God that once was separated from the people in the central sanctuary would now be connected to the people through this unique servant-son (32:15; 44:3).

Filling up all of these OT hopes, God’s eternal Son the “Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). Jesus identified himself as “the temple,” and the disciples recognized this fact after his resurrection (2:19–22). In Christ, worship of God is no longer centralized at any geographically located sanctuary. As Jesus told the Samaritan woman: “The hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father... But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth” (4:21, 23). Wherever people encounter Jesus, the temple is realized, for those who believe in him become “members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord” (Eph 2:19–21).³³

With a potential echo of Leviticus 26:11, we become “a dwelling place for God by the Spirit” (Eph 2:22). As Christ is the temple, so all who are in him become God’s temple (1 Cor 3:16; 2 Cor 6:16; cf. 1 Pet 2:5) and operate as priests who proclaim light and life in the dark world (1 Pet 2:9).³⁴ And the temple has expanded to fill the globe as Christians, filled with the Spirit of Christ, have borne witness to him “in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8). In meeting Jesus, believers have come to the heavenly Jerusalem (Gal 4:26; Heb 12:22), to “the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands” (Heb 9:11). Nevertheless, we still await the day when the holy city itself will come down from heaven, when “the dwelling place of God is with man” (Rev 21:2–3). Then the Most Holy Place will be all that we enjoy, for the temple of the city will be “the Lord God the Almighty and the

³³ Commenting on Ephesians 2:20–22, Timothy Gombis writes, “Verse 21 states that though the building has been built (ἐποικοδομηθέντες), it is ‘being joined together’ (συναρμολογουμένη) and is ‘growing (αὐξει) into a holy temple in the Lord. In verse 22, they are ‘being built up (συναικοδομεῖσθε) into a dwelling of God by the Spirit.’ So, while the church as the dwelling place of God by the Spirit is an accomplished reality, it is also a process which stands in need of being increasingly actualized” (Timothy G. Gombis, “Being the Fullness of God in Christ by the Spirit: Ephesians 5:18 in Its Epistolary Setting,” *TynBul* 53 (2002): 261.

³⁴ T. D. Alexander writes, “Since Christ’s body is the temple of God and since, as Paul repeatedly emphasizes, Christians are those who are ‘in Christ,’ it naturally follows that the church, as the body of Christ, is also the temple of God” T. Desmond Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem: An Introduction to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008), 71.

Lamb” (21:22). Then God will have made some “from every tribe and language and people and nation” into “a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign on the earth” (5:9–10).

In much the same manner, I would appropriate other promises that God gave to the broader old covenant community—promises like, “Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand” (Isa 41:10). And, “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope” (Jer 29:11). Through Jesus, all these promises given to Israel extend to the church—not to any geopolitical people or territory but to the church. Because Jesus fully represents national Israel in every way (Gal 3:16; cf. Isa 49:3, 6) and because no one inherits blessings apart from faith in Christ (Gal 3:7, 9), all those adopted into Christ by faith receive all the benefits of being part of his family, whether Jew or Gentile (3:29; 4:5). We are all “one in Christ” (3:28), “one new man” (Eph 2:15), together enjoying “adoption as sons” (1:5) with equal partnership in the “inheritance of the saints” (Col 1:12; cf. Gal 3:18; Eph 3:6). This structure of inheritance rights is no different than how my adopted and biological kids together enjoy every benefit of being a DeRouchie. As their parent, I do not try to give any preferential treatment, for all bear the same family identity and are truly my children. How much more is this true in the household of God, where *every* child of the king, both Jew and Gentile, are adopted into Christ.

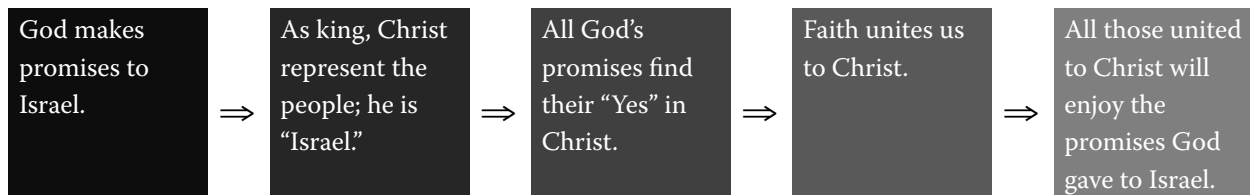


Figure 9. *God Maintains His Promises to Israel While Extending Them to All in Christ*

3.3.3. OT Promises Completed

There are some OT promises whose fulfillment is already fully *completed* in Christ. These promises play a significant role for believers, for their fulfillment supplies proof that God will indeed bring to completion all the rest of his promises (Deut 18:22; Ezek 33:33; cf. Rom 8:32). The lasting significance of these promises, therefore, comes in the way they nurture present confidence in God’s faithfulness and, at times, in the way their fulfillment bears a continuing impact. We see one such example in the prophet Micah’s prediction that a long-prophesied ruler in Israel would rise from Bethlehem (Mic 5:2), which Matthew identifies is fulfilled in Christ’s birth (Matt 2:6). There is only one Christ, and he was only born once. Nevertheless, his birth was to spark a global return of “his brothers,” and as king he would “shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD,” establishing lasting security and peace and enjoying a great name (Mic 5:3–5). All these added promises continue to give Christians comfort and hope, and Christ’s birth in Bethlehem validates for us the certainty of his permanent and global exaltation.

Another example is YHWH’s promise to Solomon that, because he asked for wisdom rather than long life or riches or punishment on his enemies, God would give him both wisdom *and* riches and honor (1 Kings 3:11–13). This promise was “Yes” in Christ in that on the cross Jesus purchased every divine bestowal of kindness, forbearance, and patience experienced in the realm of common grace (Gen 8:20–21; Rom 2:4; 3:25–26). Nevertheless, the specificity of the promise itself, being contingent on

one man’s request and including blessing related to one man’s specific reign, identify that this is not a promise that any person and at any time enjoys. Unlike YHWH’s promise to Joshua in Joshua 1:5, which was true for all who followed him (see below), this promise was unique to Solomon himself, with other benefiting only from the wisdom, riches, and honor he himself enjoyed.

3.3.4. OT Promises Transformed

The final way that Christ fulfills some OT promises is by transforming them. By this I mean that both the promise’s makeup and audience get developed.³⁵ These promises relate most directly to shadows that point to a greater substance in Christ or to OT patterns or types that find their climax or antitype in Christ. This discussion within the paper will likely be the most controversial in certain theological circles, but I will offer my understanding of how these promises are working.³⁶

Our main example will relate to God’s promise to Abraham and his offspring that they would inherit the land of Canaan, a promise that I believe is then transformed in the new covenant to include the church’s title to the whole world in the new earth. In Paul words, God promised “Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the *world*” (Rom 4:13).

Directly after asserting to Abraham, “I have made you the father of a multitude of nations,” YHWH pledged, “And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God” (Gen 17:5, 8). In Genesis, the land promise is directly associated with Abraham’s being the father of *one* nation, which we now know as Israel (12:1–2). The period of the Mosaic covenant saw the realization of this promise of land, in direct fulfillment of stage one of the Abrahamic covenant, wherein God’s people were to become a geopolitical nation (Exod 2:24; 6:8; Deut 1:8; 6:10; 9:5; 30:20; 34:4). Indeed, in direct echo of Genesis 22:17 and 15:18, the narrator declares in 1 Kings 4:20–21, “Judah and Israel were as many as the sand by sea. They ate and drank and were happy. Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the Euphrates to the land of the Philistines and to the border of Egypt.”

Yet the vision of Genesis looked ahead to the day that Abraham would be the father not just of a nation but of *nations*—something that would happen only when the single, male offspring would rise as an agent of global blessing. In the words of Genesis 22:17b–18, “And your offspring will possess the gate of his enemies, and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.” Here a single, male deliver would overcome the world’s curse, and in his day God’s kingdom territory would expand to include the once-enemy strongholds. We see a similar statement made to Isaac in 26:3–4. Note the distinction between the singular “land” and the plural “lands”: “Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you and will bless you, for to you and to your offspring I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham your father. I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and will give to your offspring all these lands. And in your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.” In 22:18, the “seed” that would serve as a channel of blessing was marked as *singular*, which suggests

³⁵ For more on the element of transformation, see my discussion in DeRouchie, “Counting Stars with Abraham and the Prophets,” 480–81 and note 98.

³⁶ For a recent exceptional overview of typology and transformation as I understand it, see Brent E. Parker, “The Israel-Christ-Church Relationship,” in *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course between Dispensational and Covenant Theologies*, ed. Stephen J. Wellum and Brent E. Parker (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2016), 39–68.

that this more ambiguous use of “seed” is also singular. Moses directly associates the promise of the “land” expanding to “lands” with the male deliverer, whom Paul identifies as Christ.

Relooking at a text that we have already meditated on, the apostle asserts in Galatians 3:16, “Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, ‘And to offsprings,’ referring to many, but referring to one, ‘And to your offspring’ [καὶ τῷ σπέρματί σου] who is Christ.” The highlighted Greek phrase occurs in the Septuagint version of Genesis in only three places, all of which are *land* promises (Gen 13:15; 17:8; 24:7). While the plural “promises” (ἐπαγγελίαι) in Galatians 3:16 suggests that *all* the promises of land, seed, and blessing find their fulfillment in Christ, the fact that Paul specifically cites the *land* promise from Genesis highlights how only in relation to Christ can we understand the land inheritance.³⁷ Furthermore, *all* in Christ would equally enjoy the promise of both the “land” and the “lands.” “And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise” (Gal 3:29).

A number of points in the NT highlight the global inheritance that Christ secures for his saints, all in fulfillment of the OT land promise. Along with Paul’s assertion in Romans 4:13 that God declared to “Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world,” we read in Matthew 5:8, “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.” Similarly, in Ephesians 6:2–3, the apostle motivates the command to honor one’s parents from Exodus 20:12 and Deuteronomy 5:16 with the promise, “that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.” By omitting the clause “that the LORD your God is giving you,” Paul appears to be supplying broader, more universal application to the promise.³⁸ Finally, in Hebrews 11 we learn that Abraham “was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God” (Heb 11:10). Indeed, folks like Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, and Sarah all recognized that their immediate earthly inheritance was *not* the ultimate hope. “They were strangers and exiles on earth.... They desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city” (11:13, 16).

This “city” is none other than “Mount Zion ... the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem,” to which all who are Christians have *already* come (12:22; cf. Gal 4:26). Nevertheless, we still await the day when “a new heaven and new earth”—that is, “the holy city, the new Jerusalem”—will come “down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” (Rev 21:1–2). In that day, “the dwelling of God” will be with mankind. “He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God” (21:3). In this city, all nations will find healing and rest forevermore in the presence of God (22:1–2).³⁹

³⁷ Paul’s explicit language of “inheritance” in Galatians 3:18 is most likely rooted in the OT “land” promise (e.g., Num 26:53–56; Josh 11:23) (so Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010], 230; cf. Ronald Y. K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, NICNT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988], 155). Cf. Num 18:20; 32:18–19; 33:54; 34:2; Deut 4:21, 38; 12:9; 15:4; 19:14; 20:16; 24:4; 25:19; 26:1; Josh 13:6–8; 24:28.

³⁸ So too Lincoln, *Ephesians*, 405; Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon and to the Ephesians*, 398; Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 444.

³⁹ For a concise synopsis of this approach to the land promises, see Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 703–16; Oren R. Martin, “The Land Promise Biblically and Theologically Understood,” in *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course between Dispensational and Covenant Theologies*, ed. Stephen J. Wellum and Brent E. Parker (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2016), 255–74. Cf. Paul R. Williamson, “Promise and Fulfill-

4. Conclusion

Isaiah declared that throughout the ages no ear has heard nor eye has seen a God like ours “who acts for those who wait for him” (Isa 64:4). The call of the biblical text, therefore, is that we would trust in the promises of God. Just before Paul asserted that “all the promises of God find their Yes in [Christ]” (2 Cor 1:20), he asserted “God is faithful” (1:18). “The LORD is faithful in all his words and kind in all his works” (Ps 145:13). “The Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one” (2 Thess 3:3). “If we have died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us; if we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself” (2 Tim 2:11–13). “Let those who suffer according to God’s will entrust [your] souls to a faithful Creator while doing good” (1 Pet 4:19). Remember also that, “if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). One day, God will complete all of his promises to us in Christ. And we will say in that day, “Behold, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the LORD; we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation” (Isa 25:9).

ment: The Territorial Inheritance,” in *The Land of Promise: Biblical, Theological and Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Philip S. Johnston and Peter W. L. Walker (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 15–34; T. Desmond Alexander, “Beyond Borders: The Wider Dimensions of Land,” in *The Land of Promise: Biblical, Theological and Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Philip S. Johnston and Peter W. L. Walker (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 35–50; Peter W. L. Walker, “The Land in the Apostles’ Writings,” in *The Land of Promise: Biblical, Theological and Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Philip Johnston and Peter Walker (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 81–99; Peter W. L. Walker, “The Land and Jesus Himself,” in *The Land of Promise: Biblical, Theological and Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Philip Johnston and Peter Walker (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 100–20; O. Palmer Robertson, “A New-Covenant Perspective on the Land,” in *The Land of Promise: Biblical, Theological and Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Philip Johnston and Peter Walker (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 121–41; G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 750–52; Oren R. Martin, *Bound for the Promised Land: The Land Promise in God’s Redemptive Plan*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 34 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015).

The Messianic Hope of Genesis: The *Protoevangelium* and Patriarchal Promises

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Abstract: In Genesis 3:15, the Lord announces the future coming of a “seed” (זֶרַע) who will bruise the head of the serpent. While many have long considered this verse the *protoevangelium*, or the first gospel, others have been quick to doubt its “messianic” intention. However, when one examines Genesis 1–3 in context, an anticipatory expectation emerges as the most viable option. Furthermore, once the interpreter understands the promise God gave to Abraham concerning his “seed” (22:17–18) as a contextual allusion to 3:15, it becomes clear that this verse stands as the fountainhead of the Old Testament’s anticipatory hope. Therefore, although the book of Genesis uses neither the noun מְשִׁיחַ nor the verb מָשַׁח to refer to this coming individual, due to the anticipatory hope found within, Genesis 3:15 is best understood as the *protoevangelium*.

The New Testament presents Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah; the Savior the prophets predicted. When Jesus began his ministry, the Jewish people seemed ready, waiting for and expecting the Messiah. For example, when Jesus called his disciples, Philip announced to Nathanael, “We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and *also* the Prophets wrote—Jesus of Nazareth” (John 1:44).¹ Additionally, the Samaritan woman asserted, “I know that Messiah is coming” (John 4:25). Even Jesus himself taught the prophetic nature of the Old Testament to the disciples on the road to Emmaus: “Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures” (Luke 24:27). Yet despite this professed messianic hope in the NT, one cannot help but wonder, does the OT *actually* present a messianic expectation?

Although many evangelical scholars are quick to answer this question in the affirmative,² many contemporary scholars of a more liberal slant are doubtful as to the OT’s true messianic anticipation.

¹ All Scripture citations are from the *New American Standard Bible* (LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995) unless otherwise stated.

² For example, see Walt C. Kaiser, *The Messiah in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995); Michael Rydelnik, *The Messianic Hope: Is The Hebrew Bible Really Messianic?* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman,

McConville aptly describes the situation: “Modern Old Testament scholarship has been largely informed by the belief that traditional Christian messianic interpretations of Old Testament passages have been *exegetically indefensible*.”³ In this view, the apostles cited the OT solely for apologetic value at the time—and therefore, not in accordance with true critical methods.⁴ Additionally, those who hold this view assert that those affirming the OT’s messianic nature are inconsistent in that they must read their NT beliefs back into the OT text.⁵ Yet contrary to this assertion, so long as the interpreter consistently applies the grammatical-historical method of interpretation, a thoroughly anticipatory view of the OT’s nature will emerge.

In order to achieve this goal—and establish the OT’s anticipatory nature—it is necessary to examine the OT’s use of the OT. This article will begin with a brief discussion of the nature of the term “Messiah,” the purpose being to understand what can legitimately be regarded as “messianic hope.” At this point, Genesis 3:15—often referred to as the *protoevangelium*, or “first gospel”—will be examined in context. Once the original meaning of this passage is discovered, the promises given to Abraham will be examined to identify contextual allusions to this first promise.⁶ Rather than focus solely on Genesis 3:15 as a stand-alone passage, through considering Abraham’s awareness of this promise, the overarching hope and anticipatory nature of the book of Genesis will emerge as strikingly evident. Ultimately, from start to finish, Genesis is revealed as an intrinsically anticipatory document.

1. Nature of the Term “Messiah”

The term “Messiah” (מָשִׁיחַ)—which refers to an “anointed one”—occurs only 39 times in the OT and is translated as “Christ” (Χριστός) in the Septuagint. This noun originates from the verb מָשַׁח—to “anoint” or to “smear.” According to Van Groningen, “The act of anointing conveys the idea of

2010); Gerard Van Groningen, *Messianic Revelation in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990); E. W. Hengstenberg, *Christology of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1970).

³ J. Gordon McConville, “Messianic Interpretation of the Old Testament in Modern Context,” in *The Lord’s Anointed: Interpretation of Old Testament Messianic Texts*, ed. Phillip F. Satterthwaite, Richard S. Hess, and Gordon J. Wenham (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 2, emphasis added.

⁴ Percy Gardner, *The Religious Experience of Saint Paul* (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1913), 215. Similarly Sheldon Tostengard writes of the NT authors’ use of Psalm 22, “The use that the suffering Jesus makes of this psalm wrenches it out of its setting as lament and places it squarely into the realm of the kerygmatic” (“Psalm 22,” *Int* 46 [1992]: 167). The point these individuals make is that the NT authors did not view the OT in a contextual manner and therefore, misapplied the text to Jesus as the Messiah in order to fit within their newly established “messianic” theological grid.

⁵ Worth noting are several scholars who, while appreciating Jesus’s role as the long-awaited “Messiah,” firmly argue for a non-contextual approach to the OT. In their view, the NT authors read their beliefs back into the OT. Among others, see Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005); Richard N. Longenecker, “Can We Reproduce the Exegesis of the New Testament?” *TynBul* 21 (1970): 3–38; and Martin Pickup, “New Testament Interpretation of the Old Testament: The Theological Rational of Midrashic Exegesis” *JETS* 51 (2008): 353–81.

⁶ The OT records two names for the patriarch: Abram (11:26–17:5) and Abraham (17:5–25:11). Following Stephen’s example (Acts 7:2), where the patriarch was referred to as Abraham while still in Mesopotamia, the name Abraham will be used in this paper.

designation, appointment, or election.”⁷ As an example, he writes, “When Samuel poured oil on Saul’s head and informed him that the Lord had anointed him a ruler, the first and foremost idea [was] that of informing Saul that he [had] been *appointed by the Lord* (1 Sam. 10:1).”⁸ Also, Kaiser traces the primary development of this term:

The way that the title *Messiah* gained its technical sense happened as Saul was being rejected as king.... Saul had been called the “anointed of the LORD” ... but now David was God’s “anointed,” and “from that day on the Spirit of the LORD came upon David in power” (1 Sa 16:13). David was called the Lord’s “anointed” ten times.⁹

Yet this concept was not only related to the appointing of kings, but also to the appointing of prophets and priests who had been anointed for service to the Lord.¹⁰ As such, in its initial OT uses, the term seems to simply denote an individual *set apart and chosen by God for service*.

Ultimately, the NT applies this term to Jesus as “Christ.” Again, Kaiser develops the transition of this term and how it took on a future-oriented eschatological meaning:

The relationship of Yahweh with “his anointed,” the king, was cemented in the Nathan prophecy of 2 Samuel 7. Here David and his line of kings assumed a unique position that guaranteed to him and to his reigning sons a kingdom that would be “established” by Yahweh “forever” (vv. 12–16). Without using the word *māšîaḥ*, Nathan represented a significant advance in the progressive revelation of what the concept of Messiah entailed.¹¹

With this in mind, one is able to see how the concept of Messiah began to develop and take on a more refined meaning. As such, it is evident that this term began to encompass the anticipatory hope and expectation held by OT believers.¹² While OT believers may not have been able to systematize all their eschatological beliefs into the official category of “messianic,” they certainly would have been able to recognize and identify these anticipatory elements found in the OT.

Related to this, a theme common to many modern treatments of the Messiah in the OT is the recognition that this study cannot be tied *solely* to the Hebrew term “Messiah,” but rather, must encompass criteria other than strictly terminological ones.¹³ Furthermore, although the label “messianic” may be the *most common* category into which to group the promises of God concerning this coming individual, many of these future oriented and eschatological promises do not specifically mention the

⁷ Van Groningen, *Messianic Revelation*, 23.

⁸ Ibid, 23.

⁹ Kaiser, *Messiah*, 16.

¹⁰ For example, see Lev 4:3, 5, 16; 6:22; 1 Kgs 19:16–21; Ps 105:15.

¹¹ Kaiser, *Messiah*, 17.

¹² Important to note here is that the term “Messiah” does not take on its technical meaning to refer to the deliverer sent by God until the post-exilic period (with the possible exception of Dan 9:25–26). Both Van Groningen (*Messianic Revelation*, 17–94) and McConville (*Messianic Interpretation*, 1–17) develop this concept in significant depth.

¹³ Several useful sources that develop this point as the basis for messianic study include McConville, *Messianic Interpretation*, 2; Rydelnik, *Messianic Hope*, 2; Kaiser, *Messiah*, 14–18; and Van Groningen, *Messianic Revelation*, 17–55.

term “Messiah.” Interestingly, Kaiser goes so far as to assert that perhaps a more accurate term for this individual than Messiah—based on word frequency alone—would be “Servant of the Lord.”¹⁴ Therefore, due to the variety of terms related to this “messianic” concept, it seems best to group all promises pertaining to this coming individual together under the category of “anticipatory.” This corresponds well with the NT proclamation of Jesus as “Christ,” because this NT term encompasses many OT concepts.¹⁵

If this is done successfully, and OT texts that use neither the noun מְשִׁיחַ nor the verb מָשַׁח are able to be grouped into this “anticipatory” category, then the OT will be found to contain vast amounts of information concerning this topic. As such, rather than develop the Jewish concept of Messiah solely related to the terms מְשִׁיחַ and מָשַׁח, it is vital to examine the OT in search of all future oriented, eschatological hope. Again, if done properly, Scripture will align with Scripture to reveal the intrinsically anticipatory hope of the OT.

One example of this—which will be examined in the remainder of this paper—is the book of Genesis. Since Genesis does not use either the noun מְשִׁיחַ nor the verb מָשַׁח to refer to a royal figure, some are quick to dismiss this book’s relevancy to the messianic topic.¹⁶ Alexander writes,

For the majority of contemporary biblical scholars the book of Genesis has little or nothing to say about the Messiah or associated concepts.... The expectation of a unique future king or Messiah is commonly assumed to be a late development in Israelite thinking, possibly arising as a result of the demise of the Davidic monarchy at the time of the Babylonian exile in the sixth century BC.¹⁷

However, when one examines the future oriented, eschatological hope found in Genesis, it becomes clear that this book contains *much* revelation concerning this coming individual. Ultimately, this conclusion allows the book of Genesis to be understood properly, as an intrinsically anticipatory document.

2. Genesis 3:15 as Protoevangelium?

When commentators discuss the anticipatory nature of the OT, they often identify Genesis 3:15 as the first promise of deliverance in the Bible. In this passage, God announces to the serpent, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your *seed* and her *seed*; he shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel.” From this passage, many commentators affirm the hope of

¹⁴ Kaiser, *Messiah*, 16. Other possible terms include: “Son of David” (2 Sam 7:12–16; Mark 12:35), “Son of Man” (Dan 7:13–14; Mark 10:45), “Lion of the tribe of Judah” (Gen 49:9; Rev 5:5), and “Lamb of God” (John 1:29; Rev 7:17).

¹⁵ The concept of Jesus as “Christ” (Χριστός) must not be limited strictly to the OT term “Messiah” (מְשִׁיחַ).

¹⁶ For example, see Westermann’s extensive three volume commentary on Genesis. Writing about this commentary, T. Desmond Alexander states unapprovingly, “Discussion of the Messiah or messianic age is restricted to three passages: 3:15, 9:20 and 48:8–12” (“Messianic Ideology in the Book of Genesis,” in *The Lord’s Anointed: Interpretation of Old Testament Messianic Texts*, ed. Phillip F. Satterthwaite, Richard S. Hess, and Gordon J. Wenham [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995], 20). Rejecting a messianic reading of 3:15 and 48:8–12, Claus Westermann only allows 9:20 to refer vaguely to the “Messianic era” (*Genesis 1–11*, trans. John J. Scullion [Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984], 487).

¹⁷ Alexander, *Messianic Ideology*, 28.

a coming “seed,” a concept that is ultimately developed further in the rest of the OT as the hope of a coming Messiah. For example, Kaiser states,

Genesis 3:15 has commonly been called the *protoevangelium* (the “first gospel”) because it was the original proclamation of the promise of God’s plan for the whole world ... it gave our first parents a glimpse ... of the person and mission of the one who was going to be the central figure in the unfolding drama of the redemption of the world. The “seed/offspring” mentioned in this verse became the root from which the tree of the OT promise of a Messiah grew.¹⁸

Quite a few biblical scholars agree with this point. For example, Aalders writes, “Genesis 3:15 has been rightly called ... the ‘protevangelium,’ the first proclamation of the gospel of grace.”¹⁹ Kidner asserts, “There is good New Testament authority for seeing here the *protevangelium*, the first glimmer of the gospel.”²⁰ Additionally, DeRouchie and Meyer claim that “Genesis 3:15 provides a ‘seed-bed’ of Messianic hope.”²¹ As such, Genesis 3:15 is frequently cited as the first anticipatory promise in the OT. However, this assessment of Genesis 3:15 as a Messianic promise is by no means unanimous.

Many other scholars firmly argue for the opposing viewpoint, namely that Genesis 3:15 does not offer any hope of a coming Redeemer, but rather simply describes a struggle in the “animal kingdom,” a struggle between humans and serpents.²² As such, these individuals claim that there is no semblance of a promise given. For example, Barr insists that “there is no Protevangelium here, no promise of a future struggle with evil, no promise of final salvation.”²³ Additionally, Preuss states, “Any interpretation [of Genesis 3:15] as a ‘protevangelium’ is out of the question.”²⁴ These scholars claim that there is no prophetic element to Genesis 3:15 whatsoever. As such, they argue that in order to see any future cosmic struggle between a coming “seed” and the serpent, one must read back into this passage later portions of Scripture. In essence, this perspective asserts that in order to view Genesis 3:15 as a promise, one must alter its original meaning in such a way that effectively distorts it beyond recognition.

¹⁸ Kaiser, *Messiah*, 37–38.

¹⁹ G. Charles Aalders, *Genesis*, trans. William Heynen, *Bible Student’s Commentary* 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 107.

²⁰ Derek Kidner, *Genesis*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries 1 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1978), 71.

²¹ Jason S. DeRouchie and Jason C. Meyer, “Christ or Family as the ‘Seed’ of Promise? An Evaluation of N. T. Wright on Galatians 3:16,” *SBJT* 14.3 (2010): 39.

²² Sigmund Mowinckel asserts, “It is quite a general statement about mankind, and serpents, and the struggle between them which continues as long as the earth [exists]. The poisonous serpent strikes at man’s foot whenever he is unfortunate enough to come too near to it; and always and everywhere man tries to crush the serpent’s head when he has the chance” (*He That Cometh* [Oxford: Blackwell, 1959], 11; quoted in Alexander, *Messianic Ideology*, 29).

²³ James Barr, *The Garden of Eden and the Hope of Immortality* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 115.

²⁴ H. D. Preuss, “*zāra’; zera’*,” in *TDOT* 4:150. Interestingly though, in this same article, Preuss recognizes the theme of “seed” as an important motif traced through Genesis: “The substantive *zera’* ... plays an important role in the patriarchal narratives ... where it appears primarily in the promises made to the patriarchs” (151).

Skinner claims that a messianic application of Genesis 3:15 “is not justified in grammar.”²⁵ Additionally, Vawter asserts that this “interpretation, which became extremely popular during the Middle Ages and has penetrated many ecclesiastical documents ... *we owe to the allegorizing of early Christian writers.*”²⁶ Von Rad agrees, “The exegesis of the early church which found a messianic prophecy here, a reference to a final victory of the woman’s seed (Protevangelium), *does not agree with the sense of the passage.*”²⁷ Therefore, those in the non-anticipatory camp claim that there is no legitimate basis to view this verse as the *protoevangelium*. As such, they assume that those in the early church allegorized this OT text in order to fit it into their Christocentric worldview.

Yet on the contrary, when one examines Genesis 1–3 *in context*, the hope of the *protoevangelium* emerges completely apart from an appeal to allegory. Ultimately, by applying the grammatical-historical method of interpretation to Genesis 3:15, an anticipatory understanding emerges as the most viable option.²⁸ Once this understanding emerges, and interpreters develop the OT’s anticipatory expectation, they can properly understand the patriarchal hope of “seed,” ultimately pointing to the hope of a coming Redeemer.

3. *The Context of Genesis 3:15*

In Genesis chapters one and two, God creates the heavens and the earth (1:1). As he progressively creates different features of the universe, the text records that after each day, “God saw that it was good” (1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). In his new creation, God freely dwells with his people—Adam and Eve—in an unspoiled earth (cf. 3:8–9). Yet into this perfect world, the serpent tempts Adam and Eve, and they sin against God by eating from the forbidden tree (2:17; 3:6). As a result, the universe plummets into chaos. In 3:14–19, the Lord describes the curse brought upon the world: “Cursed is the ground because of you ... for you are dust, and to dust you shall return” (3:17b, 19b).

However, into this seemingly hopeless situation, God declares to the serpent in the presence of Adam and Eve, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your *seed* and her *seed*; he shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel” (3:15). Here, God promises Adam and Eve “seed” or “offspring” who will one day bruise the serpent’s head.²⁹ Although some may

²⁵ John Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*, 2nd ed., ICC 1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 79.

²⁶ Bruce Vawter, *On Genesis: A New Reading* (New York: Doubleday, 1977), 83, emphasis added. Likewise, Hermann Gunkel labels the messianic view of Genesis 3:15 as “allegorical interpretation.” Gunkel goes further, claiming the account of Adam and Eve is a “myth [which] belongs to the category of myths and fairy tales very common in antiquity and among primitive peoples” (*Genesis*, trans. Mark E. Biddle [Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1997], 21).

²⁷ Gerhard Von Rad, *Genesis* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972), 93, emphasis added.

²⁸ Jason S. DeRouchie—4 refers to this anticipatory theme as the “future longing and persevering trust” (228), the “forward-looking, hope-filled theme of progressive productivity under the blessing of God” (240), and the expectation of a “single king in the line of promise who will perfectly reflect, resemble, and represent God and who will definitively overcome all evil, thus restoring right order to God’s kingdom for the fame of his name” (247) (“The Blessing-Commission, the Promised Offspring, and the Toledot Structure of Genesis,” *JETS* 56 [2013]: 219–47).

²⁹ While this pronouncement is given directly to the serpent, it is Eve’s “seed” that has a direct role in bringing it about. Therefore, while not primarily promised *to* Adam and Eve, since they have a stake in Genesis 3:15’s fulfill-

think it odd that the promise refers to the *woman's* “seed,” given the context in which the serpent had just deceived Eve—and thereby brought the curse upon all creation—it seems quite fitting that *her* “seed” should be responsible to bring punishment. However, this punishment will not be accomplished without both sides sustaining injury in the process. While Walton points to the repetition of the verb שׁוּף (“bruise”) to assert that the verse gives no hint of the victor’s identity nor of the eventual outcome, his argumentation seems at best tenuous.³⁰ Quite simply, for a human to שׁוּף (“strike”; or contextually “crush”) the head of a serpent implies a mortal blow, while for a serpent to שׁוּף (“strike”; or contextually “bite”) the heel of a human, *at most* suggests a potentially mortal blow. As such, it seems best to conclude that in this conflict, it is the “seed” of woman who will claim victory over the serpent. At this point, it is necessary to determine the identity of the serpent as well as the identity of the “seed.”

From the context, it is apparent that this serpent is no ordinary snake.³¹ When Genesis 3:1 first introduces the serpent, the text states, “Now the serpent was more crafty than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made.” Due to its supernatural ability to speak (and thereby tempt), even Adam and Eve would have likely recognized a difference between it and a natural snake. As such, although Adam and Eve may not have been able to identify the serpent as “Satan,” they would have been able to notice its abnormality among the rest of the animals. Commenting on this concept, Alexander states, “While the author of Genesis stops well short of identifying the serpent as Satan, it is clear that the serpent acts against God.... *The serpent is more than an ordinary snake.*”³² In similar fashion, when developing the identity of the serpent, Collins describes it as the “mouthpiece of a Dark Power” and concludes by referring to it as the “Evil One.”³³ At the very least, based on the context, the text presents the serpent as the “crafty” or “diabolical” one (3:1), as the serpent’s tempting—and Adam and Eve’s subsequent disobedience—ultimately undoes all that God had previously declared good (cf. 1:31). Although the text does not explicitly call the serpent the “evil one,” it does seem to be a fitting title, as through its tempting, the curse is brought upon creation. Again, while this evil one will attack the “seed” of woman, ultimately the “seed” of woman will be victorious.

ment, it can be said that they, too, are participants in this promise, albeit indirectly.

³⁰ John Walton writes, “While it is true that a strike to the head would appear more devastating than a strike to the heel, a serpent’s strike to the heel is another matter altogether. While not all snakes were poisonous, the threat provided by some, in the haste to protect oneself, attaches itself to all snakes ... an attack by any snake was viewed as a potentially mortal blow” (*Genesis*, NIV Application Commentary [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001]. 226). He concludes, “The verse is depicting a continual, unresolved conflict between humans and the representatives of evil” (ibid.). However, Walton’s view seems unsustainable, as he seems to base his entire theory upon the *possible* allusion to a poisonous snake. Even he acknowledges, “Of thirty-six species of snake known to the area, the viper (*vipera palaestinae*) is the only poisonous snake” (ibid.). To assume that the serpent of this verse is poisonous merely because one species of poisonous snake existed in the general region, seems far too speculative.

³¹ Those coming from a naturalistic perspective will likely disagree. For example, Westermann lists several possible identities of the serpent. When commenting on the standard conservative perspective (that the serpent is Satan in disguise), he claims that it “has been abandoned in modern exegesis” (*Genesis 1–11*, 237). Gunkel refers to this account as a “myth” (*Genesis*, 21).

³² T. Desmond Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem: An Introduction to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008), 104, emphasis added.

³³ C. John Collins, *Genesis 1–4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2006), 156, 176. Additionally, Kidner aptly summarizes this in that while Genesis presents the serpent as an evil individual, “only the New Testament ... unmask[s] the figure of Satan behind the serpent” (*Genesis*, 70–71).

Who then, is the “seed” of woman? In light of the serpent’s identity, the “seed” of woman is the one who will attack and be victorious over the serpent, the evil one. While the “seed” of woman will suffer a great wound (“bruised on the heel”), he will be the one to destroy (“bruise the head” or “crush the skull” of) the serpent. The Hebrew term זָרַע can refer to either “seed” (plural—as in *descendants*) or “seed” (singular—as in *descendant*). It is because of this flexibility of usage that many commentators take differing interpretations of this passage. For example, by taking this as a strictly collective promise, some rule out the possibility of any messianic relevance. For Westermann, the primary reason that Genesis 3:15 cannot be considered as *protoevangelium* is that “seed” *must* be understood collectively rather than singularly. Additionally, he claims that it is “not possible that such a form has either promise or prophecy as its primary or even as its secondary meaning.”³⁴ Barr calls Westermann’s assertion a “crushing rebuttal of all such suggestions.”³⁵ Yet one must consider if this really is a crushing rebuttal at all. Although it is true that “seed” (זָרַע) never occurs in the plural in the OT and therefore is frequently used collectively, those such as Barr and Westermann seem to arrive at conclusions far too quickly without truly considering the text. Therefore, their conclusions warrant examining the text in greater depth concerning whether the term “seed” should be taken as *singular* or *plural*.

4. Singular or Plural “Seed”

In Genesis 3:15, most modern English translations (NASB, ESV, NIV, HCSB, NLT) use the third person singular pronoun “he,” as in, “*he* shall bruise your head.”³⁶ Although this is a valid translation of the Hebrew *masculine* singular pronoun הוּא, for a proper understanding, one must consider the antecedent of this pronoun. Since Hebrew has only two grammatical genders (masculine and feminine) while English has three (masculine, feminine, and neuter), it is occasionally necessary to translate a Hebrew masculine or feminine pronoun as a neuter (it) where appropriate in English. In this verse, the antecedent of הוּא (he) is זָרַע (seed), which grammatically is *masculine*, but as Martin points out, “actually ... is a collective noun of which the natural gender is *neuter*.”³⁷ Therefore, Martin concludes that perhaps a more accurate translation reflecting the intent of the Hebrew הוּא should be either “it” (as in KJV) or “they,” rather than the standard “he.” In either case, the point must be made that the purpose of the pronoun is ultimately to refer back to the “seed” of Eve as announced in the first half of the verse. As such, from the Hebrew grammar of this verse, *at first* it seems that one is unable to argue either for or against an individual understanding of “seed.”

4.1. “Seed” in the Greek OT

As Martin points out, it is quite interesting to consider the Septuagint translation of Genesis 3:15. When the LXX refers back to the antecedent “seed” (σπέρμα), which is grammatically *neuter* in Greek, the translators use the *masculine* pronoun αὐτός (he) rather than the *neuter* form αὐτό (it). This is quite

³⁴ Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 260–61, who also cites the context of a pronouncement of punishment as evidence for a non-messianic interpretation.

³⁵ Barr, *Garden of Eden*, 140.

³⁶ Two translations which do not translate הוּא as “he” are the KJV, which uses the grammatically neuter pronoun “it” (“... *it* shall bruise thy head ...”), and the NET, which simply repeats the antecedent “her offspring” (“... *her offspring* will attack your head ...”).

³⁷ R. A. Martin, “The Earliest Messianic Interpretation of Genesis 3:15,” *JBL* 84 (1965): 425, emphasis added.

startling because while the Greek antecedent requires a *neuter* pronoun, the LXX translators *break the rules* of Greek grammar to translate this word as a grammatical *masculine*. Additionally, by tracing the 103 times the pronoun $\sigma\omicron\upsilon\tau\omicron\varsigma$ occurs in Genesis, Martin determines that “in none of the instances where the translator has translated literally does he do violence to agreement in Greek between the pronoun and its antecedent, *except here in Gen. 3:15*.”³⁸ Why then, do the translators render this verse in this way? Ultimately, Martin concludes by asserting that this was the translators’ way of indicating a “messianic understanding of this verse.”³⁹ Lewis agrees: “*Sperma* is a neuter noun in Greek and would have taken a neuter pronoun *had the translators not thought of an individual*.”⁴⁰ Therefore, the translators had in their mind the concept of a coming individual; a coming “seed.”

As such, it becomes evident that the translators of the LXX intentionally translated the Hebrew in such a way that Genesis 3:15 stands as the first pronouncement of the anticipatory and messianic expectation of the OT.⁴¹ However, at this point one must wonder whether or not the LXX translation is either a correct or an incorrect interpretation of Genesis 3:15. Based on prior understanding of the context as well as of Genesis as a whole, scholars differ greatly in their opinions. For example, even Martin, who pointedly argues for a messianic interpretation of Genesis 3:15 in the LXX, makes the concession that “such an interpretive translation by the LXX does not mean that this is the correct understanding of the Hebrew text. Rather this LXX translation is further evidence of the intensification of messianic expectations among the Jews in the centuries immediately preceding the birth of Jesus.”⁴² Likewise, Lewis, after recognizing the intent of the LXX translators, claims that this is likely the “earliest known” messianic interpretation of Genesis 3:15.⁴³ Therefore, while recognizing the messianic understanding of the LXX translators, both Martin and Lewis deny that these translators correctly understood the original meaning of Genesis 3:15, and rather, imported their own meaning.

While acknowledging that the LXX translation *could* be flawed and that (as Martin points out) the interpretive claims of the LXX *do not necessarily imply* a correct understanding of the Hebrew text, one cannot help but wonder, what if the Greek translators correctly interpret Genesis 3:15? What if (contra Lewis’s claim), these translators were not the “earliest to recognize” the anticipatory and messianic nature of Genesis, but rather, the original readers of Genesis were?⁴⁴ When one examines and traces the context of Genesis 3:15 and the development of the promise of coming “seed” throughout Genesis, it becomes evident that there was in fact anticipatory hope and expectation of a coming individual long before the LXX translators began their work.

³⁸ Ibid, 426–27, emphasis added

³⁹ Ibid, 427. For an opposing perspective, see Vawter, *On Genesis*, 82–84, who claims, “Jewish tradition knows of no ‘messianic’ exegesis of Genesis 3:15” (83). However, as the above discussion demonstrates, Vawter evidently does not include the LXX as a valid “Jewish tradition.”

⁴⁰ Jack P. Lewis, “The Woman’s Seed (Genesis 3:15),” *JETS* 34 (1991): 300; emphasis added.

⁴¹ Martin (*Earliest Messianic Interpretation*, 427) and Lewis (*The Woman’s Seed*, 300) are both convinced of the reliability of the Septuagint as well as the intentionality of the translators’ choice of pronoun.

⁴² Martin, *Earliest Messianic Interpretation*, 427.

⁴³ Lewis, *Woman’s Seed*, 300.

⁴⁴ Again, it is important to remember that the term “Messiah” never occurs in Genesis. The point is that the readers of Genesis would have been able to recognize the intrinsically anticipatory hope of this book.

4.2. “Seed” in the Hebrew OT

Since the LXX translators seemed to hold to an anticipatory and messianic understanding of Genesis 3:15, it is necessary to consider what the individuals in Genesis are recorded as having believed about this coming “seed.” Kidner argues that these OT individuals would have understood the coming “seed” to be both singular *and* plural. He asserts that this term “is both *collective* ... and, in the crucial struggle, *individual*.”⁴⁵ As such, Kidner develops the idea of an individual among the group. In other words, he asserts that the “head of the group” (or the “representative”) will be the one acting on the group’s behalf.⁴⁶ Related to this, Aalders states, “in the use of the words ‘head’ and ‘heel,’ both in the singular, we have a further indication that the conflict would ultimately be settled between two contestants.”⁴⁷ Therefore, Aalders seems to agree with Kidner in that while the passage envisions two groups, the textual evidence points to the ultimate victory being “gained by one individual among that seed of the woman.”⁴⁸

However, perhaps most conclusively, Collins has demonstrated through a syntactical analysis of each use of זרע in the OT that “when *zera’* [seed] denotes a specific descendent, it appears with singular verb inflections, adjectives and pronouns.”⁴⁹ He concludes,

From these data it becomes clear that, on the syntactical level, the singular pronoun *hû’* [he] in Genesis 3:15 is quite consistent with the pattern where a singular individual is in view. In fact, since the subject pronouns are not normally necessary for the meaning, we might wonder if the singular *hû’* in Genesis 3:15 is used precisely in order to *make it plain that an individual is being promised*.⁵⁰

This is intriguing on several accounts. First of all, it eliminates Westermann’s and Barr’s “crushing rebuttal” as an unfounded assertion. Secondly, it aligns perfectly with the interpretation of the LXX translators. And lastly, at the very least, it opens the door to a singular understanding of the promise of “seed” in Genesis 3:15 (while not necessarily excluding an element of collectivity).

This is even more relevant when one considers that the author of Genesis was not limited to the use of the singular pronoun with the antecedent “seed.” In fact, when developing the distinctly plural aspect of “seed,” the author employs the plural pronoun. This is evident in Genesis 17:9, which states, “God said further to Abraham, ‘Now as for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants [or “seed” (זרע)] after you throughout their generations.’” Notice the key phrase: “*their* generations” (לדורתם). Here, the masculine *plural* pronominal suffix is used to denote the multiplicity of Abraham’s “seed.” The plural pronoun/pronominal suffix is also used in reference to “seed” in 15:13, 17:7, and 17:8, while

⁴⁵ Kidner, *Genesis*, 71, emphasis added. Unfortunately, while providing ample supporting bibliographic information, Kidner himself does not develop this assertion in greater depth.

⁴⁶ Writing about collectivity and this ambiguity between the “one and the many,” James Hamilton writes that “this interplay could also be what opens the door to the possibility of one person standing in place of the nation, as when Moses offers himself for the people (Exod 32:30–33), or when we read of a servant who at places appears to be the nation (Isa 41:8; 44:1) and at others an individual (42:1; 52:13)” (“The Skull Crushing Seed of the Woman: Inner-Biblical Interpretation of Genesis 3:15,” *SBJT* 10.2 [2006]: 32).

⁴⁷ Aalders, *Genesis*, 107.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 107.

⁴⁹ Jack Collins, “A Syntactical Note (Genesis 3:15): Is the Woman’s Seed Singular or Plural?” *TynBul* 48 (1997): 144.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 145, emphasis added.

the singular pronoun/pronominal suffix is used in reference to “seed” in 3:15, 21:13, 22:17b, and 24:60. As such, the presence of both singular and plural pronouns used in reference to “seed” within Genesis indicates an element of choice. If the author of Genesis had desired to indicate multiple descendants (עֲרִי) in 3:15, he could have used the plural pronoun as in 17:9. However, his intentional choice of the *singular* pronoun in 3:15 serves to highlight the expectation of a single individual.

Ultimately, in light of Collins’s syntactical study, as well as a consideration of the plural pronoun in 17:9, it seems that the understanding of a coming individual—a coming “seed”—who will bruise the head of the serpent, is the most valid interpretation. At this point, it is necessary to test this hypothesis and determine how the individuals recorded within Genesis would have understood this promise. After tracing the term “seed” (עֲרִי) through Genesis, we will examine the promise given to Abraham in 22:17–18 and its connections to 3:15 in greater depth. The goal is to reveal the anticipatory hope of Genesis as seen through contextual allusions to 3:15.

5. Genesis 3:15 and Anticipatory Hope in Genesis

After God describes the curse brought upon the world in Genesis 3:14–19, he casts Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden (3:23–24). He forbids them from ever re-entering. However, in light of the promise given in 3:15, they are left with the hope of a coming “seed” who will defeat the serpent and the serpent’s “seed” (that is, the serpent’s followers, ultimately including the serpent’s influence in the world).⁵¹ Since—as discussed above—the serpent may be identified as the evil one, the promise of future victory over the serpent implies the defeat (or elimination) of the serpent’s negative influence from the world. In other words, this victory includes the future destruction of evil. In view of the previously perfect state described in Genesis 1–2, through this promise, it is evident that this individual’s victory will accomplish something great.⁵² Therefore, once the serpent is defeated and the world rid of its influence, the world will be able to be brought back to its Genesis 1–2 state (void of the effects of the curse—such as sin, sickness, death, pain).⁵³ Also, in view of God’s relationship with Adam and Eve prior to the fall—where he dwelt with them freely (cf. 3:8–9)—this promise seems to include not only a restoration of creation, but also a restoration of relationship. As such, from the content given solely in Genesis 3:15 (within the context of Genesis 1–3), the hope offered to Adam and Eve can be summarized as God’s promise to accomplish three tasks: (1) *Destroy evil* (defeat the serpent, its seed, and thereby destroy the influence of evil); (2) *Restore creation* (to the state it was previously, void of all evil, i.e. the Genesis 1–2 state—cf. 1:31); and (3) *Allow God to dwell with his people* (just as he previously dwelt with Adam and Eve in Eden—cf. 3:8). These three themes are alluded to and developed greatly throughout

⁵¹ Allen P. Ross states, “By New Testament times [the seed of the serpent] may have included all who rejected the Lord and opposed his kingdom (cf. ‘you are of your father the devil,’ in John 8:44). Along the way, we may say, *anything that represented the forces of evil could be included in the seed of the serpent*” (*Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996], 145, emphasis added).

⁵² Consider the words of DeRouchie and Meyer, “Genesis itself teaches that the curse of Adam would be eradicated and blessing would be enjoyed on a universal scale” (“Christ or Family,” 38).

⁵³ Consider the statement in Genesis 3:20, “The man called his wife’s name Eve (חַוָּה), because she was the mother of all living (חַיִּים).” For Adam to name his wife “Life” after they are given the sentence of death implies a degree of certainty in a future restoration.

the rest of the Bible. As such, from the very beginning, one can see that God’s first promise is to send an individual who will come to restore the world.

In these three tasks, God promises something great; he promises the future “restoration of creation”; the renewal of all things. Ultimately, in 3:15, God promises to bring the world back to the way it was in Genesis 1–2: very good (cf. 1:31). While nowhere in this passage is the term “Messiah” found, it is pointedly evident that Adam and Eve were given clear anticipatory and eschatological hope. Collins articulates this point nicely:

The rest of Genesis will unfold the idea of this offspring and lay the foundation for the developed messianic teaching of the prophets. We must remember that an author put this text here, and we suppose that he did so with his plan for this unfolding in mind; hence for us to ask whether this particular text is messianic may mislead us: instead, we may say that *Genesis fosters a messianic expectation, of which this verse is the headwaters.*⁵⁴

As such, while Adam and Eve would not have—by any means—been able to call this verse “messianic,” given the development of this future-oriented expectation throughout the rest of the Bible (later developed as the messianic hope), this verse clearly stands as the first anticipatory promise of the Bible, the *protoevangelium*.

Throughout Genesis, the notion of “seed” or “offspring” (זָרַע) is a major theme. Of the 229 times the word זָרַע is used in the OT, 59 occur in Genesis. As such, the author of Genesis develops the unique family line anticipating the serpent’s defeat starting with Adam and Eve. Likely, Eve first believed that Cain was the promised “seed” (4:1).⁵⁵ Yet once he proved to be a murderer (4:1–25), Eve replaced him with Seth, saying “God has appointed me another זָרַע in place of Abel, for Cain killed him” (4:25). Then, Genesis 5:1–32 traces Adam’s descendants to Noah (through Seth). When Noah is born, his father Lamech (who himself is in the genealogical line waiting for the promised “seed”) declares that Noah shall bring relief from the curse on the ground:⁵⁶

And to Adam he said ... (1) cursed [אָרַר] is the (2) ground [אֲדָמָה] because of you; in (3) pain [עֲצָבוֹן] you shall eat of it all the days of your life. (3:17 ESV)

[Lamech] fathered a son and called his name Noah, saying, “Out of the (2) ground [אֲדָמָה] that the Lord has (1) cursed [אָרַר], this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the (3) painful toil [עֲצָבוֹן] of our hands.” (5:28–29 ESV)

After the flood, when God makes his covenant with Noah, he states, “I ... establish My covenant with you, and with your זָרַע after you” (9:9). Subsequently, Genesis 11:10–26 traces this genealogy through Noah’s son Shem to Abraham.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Collins, *Genesis 1–4*, 157, emphasis added.

⁵⁵ This is evident through the wordplay of the term translated as “gotten” (קָנָה) and the name “Cain” (קַיִן). See Walter C. Kaiser, who, while not dogmatically holding to this assertion, claims that through Eve’s response to the birth of Cain (4:1), “the biblical text ... perhaps hints at the clear understanding she had of Genesis 3:15” (*Towards An Old Testament Theology* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978], 79).

⁵⁶ Additionally, Noah’s name is used as a wordplay (5:29)—note the similarity between the term “rest” (נָחַם) and “Noah” (נֹחַ). In 5:29, “the reference to Genesis 3:17 is patent,” according to Kaiser, *OT Theology*, 80.

⁵⁷ Kaiser comments upon the oracle given by Noah to Shem: “The meaning of Genesis 9:27 is God’s announcement that his advent will take place among the Shemites.... [Here] the germ of the messianic idea presses

Furthermore, as this term is traced through Genesis, it is interesting to consider its repetition among the patriarchs. After God promises Abraham a **יָרֵעַ** who will bless all nations (22:17–18),⁵⁸ he promises Isaac that through his **יָרֵעַ** “all the nations of the earth shall be blessed” (26:4). Similarly, God promises Jacob that through his **יָרֵעַ** “shall all the families of the earth be blessed” (28:14). After Jacob, the narrative account of Genesis 38:1–30 introduces the **יָרֵעַ** of Judah. Ultimately, through the repeated use of **יָרֵעַ**, the theme of a coming individual and the hope of future restoration becomes increasingly evident as the book of Genesis progresses. At this point, it is necessary to examine the life of Abraham specifically.

6. Patriarchal Promises (Genesis 22:17–18)

In Genesis 12:1, God commands Abraham to leave his homeland and journey to an unknown country. The Lord then promises that he will make Abraham into a great nation that will, in turn, bless other nations so that “in [him] all the families of the earth will be blessed” (12:2–3). Over the next few chapters, the Lord repeatedly makes promises to Abraham pertaining his **יָרֵעַ** (cf. 12:7; 13:15, 16; 15:5, 13, 18; 17:7–8; 22:17–18). He reveals to Abraham that he will ultimately bring blessing to all nations through this **יָרֵעַ**. In context, it is vital to consider the genealogical line as traced up to Abraham. Given his ancestral heritage, Abraham appears in the genealogical line through which God has promised the “skull-crushing and creation-restoring seed” to come. However, considering the quick descent of human morality from the days of the flood to Abraham’s time (9:18–28; 11:1–9), as well as the ever-shortening length of human lives (11:10–25), the author of Genesis presents Abraham as one who must have deeply longed for the day when God would fulfill his promise, destroy evil, restore creation, and dwell with his people. Waltke and Yu summarize this aptly, for at this point “the book of Genesis is in want of a *proper ending*.”⁵⁹ The promise had been given (first in 3:15), but up to this point, it had yet to have been fulfilled.

At this point, we must examine Genesis 22:17–18 in greater depth. In this passage, the Lord declares to Abraham,

I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring (**יָרֵעַ**) as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring (**יָרֵעַ**) shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in your offspring (**יָרֵעַ**) shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.⁶⁰

From this passage, two primary points are evident (and will be expanded below):

1. *Individual “Seed”*: Just as Genesis 3:15 was a promise of a coming individual “seed,” so too is 22:17b–18 a promise of a coming individual “seed.”
2. *Universal Blessing*: Within the Abrahamic account, the promise of universal blessing intrinsically relates to an “undoing” of the curse brought upon creation in 3:14–19.

itself upon humanity with tantalizing brevity. But the promise doctrine never shrinks back from this basic, but seminal concept” (*Messiah*, 45).

⁵⁸ This point is developed below in the section, “Patriarchal Promises (Genesis 22:17–18).”

⁵⁹ Bruce K. Waltke with Charles Yu, *An Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 62; emphasis added.

⁶⁰ ESV. As will be demonstrated below, it seems that the ESV translation is more accurate than the NASB.

In light of these two points, Abraham's extreme obedience to the Lord's commands becomes far more understandable (e.g. leaving family and country [12:1–4]; willingness to sacrifice his son Isaac [22:1–14]). For Abraham's call was not given in a theological vacuum, but rather in a *specific* historical context in which God offered him a very *specific* hope. It is now necessary to consider these two points in greater depth.

6.1. Individual "Seed"

This passage presents among Abraham's many "seed," one "seed" who will "bruise the head" of the serpent of Genesis 3:15. Although one might assume that each of these uses of זָרַע is a collective singular (i.e., a plural), Alexander makes a distinction between זָרַע in 22:17a and זָרַע in 22:17b–18a. He presents the case that 22:17b–22:18 refers to an individual and *not* to a group.⁶¹ He asserts that (like ESV and contra NASB) the first clause of 22:17 is broken from the second clause of 22:17 "by the imperfect verb ... preceded by a non-converting [waw];" this syntactical arrangement "leaves open the possibility that the זָרַע referred to in the final clause differs from that mentioned in the first part of the verse."⁶² From this perspective, while the first זָרַע refers to a large number of future descendants, the second זָרַע refers to a *single individual* who will be victorious over his enemies.⁶³ Additionally, since there is no distinction made between זָרַע in 22:17b and in 22:18, Alexander asserts that here, Abraham is promised an *individual* "seed" who will bring "blessing to all nations."⁶⁴

This is further reinforced when one remembers that the Lord had previously given a promise to Abraham in 17:9 which concerned his plural "seed." As discussed above, in 17:9, the plural pronoun is used to denote the multiplicity of Abraham's "seed." However, in 22:17b, the masculine *singular* pronominal suffix is used: "his enemies" (אֵיבָיו). If the author of Genesis had wanted to indicate plural "seed" here, he would have employed the same construction as in 17:9. Yet he does not do so. The point is that in 22:17b–22:18, the Lord promises a single individual who will come through the line of Abraham. All in all, the presence of the plural pronoun in 17:9 indicates that the inclusion of the singular pronoun in 3:15 and 22:17b was an intentional decision on the part of the author of Genesis.⁶⁵

Ultimately, based on the context of Genesis and the genealogical line through which this "seed" is traced, this individual "seed" must be understood as the same individual "seed" promised in 3:15; the

⁶¹ T. Desmond Alexander, "Further Observations on the Term 'Seed' in Genesis," *TynBul* 48 (1997): 364–68.

⁶² *Ibid*, 366.

⁶³ See also C. John Collins, "Galatians 3:16: What Kind of Exegete Was Paul?" *TynBul* 54 (2003): 75–86. Collins fully endorses and makes further developments based on Alexander's assertion that Genesis 22:17b–18a refers to a *singular* "seed." As additional evidence to prove his point, Alexander connects an allusion from Psalm 72:17b to Genesis 22:18. In the psalm, an *individual* is pictured as bringing blessing to all nations. Alexander contends that this psalm alludes back to Genesis 22:18 for its basis ("Further Observations," 366).

⁶⁴ Alexander, "Further Observations," 366.

⁶⁵ It is worth noting that this same construction (masculine singular pronominal suffix) is found in 24:60, "They blessed Rebekah and said to her, 'May you, our sister, Become thousands of ten thousands, And may your descendants [or "seed" (זָרַע)] possess The gate of those who hate them.'" While here, NASB translates אֵיבָיו as "hate them," a better translation is ESV, "hate *him*," as the author of Genesis uses the masculine singular pronominal suffix. The point is that here, a *singular* pronoun is used in contrast to a *plural* pronoun, as in 17:9.

same “seed” that God had promised would crush the head of the serpent.⁶⁶ The grammatical similarities between these passages are not coincidental—and Abraham certainly would have recognized this when the Lord revealed his covenant in 22:17–18.⁶⁷

Furthermore, Alexander not only offers grammatical support for the hope and understanding of an individual “seed,” but he also develops the contextual evidence:

Of significance is the fact that [Genesis 22:17–18 forms] part of a much larger picture in Genesis which centres around a *unique line of descendants*. The book of Genesis not only intimates that this lineage will eventually give rise to a royal dynasty, but also anticipates that a future member of this line will conquer his enemies and mediate God’s blessing to the nations of the earth.⁶⁸

Again, by the nature of this account (and of the hope progressively revealed within Genesis), the author of Genesis offers clear contextual allusions that Abraham’s promise is intrinsically related to the promise of 3:15. As such, God offers Abraham the hope of a coming “seed” who will bring the world back to its Genesis 1–2 state.

6.2. Universal Blessing

It is necessary to consider the curses of Genesis 3:14–19 in light of the blessings promised to Abraham. Hamilton presents the case that the curses of Genesis 3 “are matched point for point in the blessing of Abraham.”⁶⁹ He develops this assertion in part from Fishbane, who states, “It cannot fail to strike one that these three blessings [land, seed, and earthly blessing] are, in fact, a typological reversal of the primordial curses in Eden.”⁷⁰ In essence, Hamilton argues that the promise of the Abrahamic Covenant is a promise to *reverse the curse*. As such, the covenant given to Abraham must be understood as just that: the amplification and development of the first promise—the *protoevangelium* of 3:15—as the covenant is intrinsically designed to undo the curses of 3:14–19. For example, Hamilton cites *seed conflict* (3:15) as being undone when *all the families of the earth are blessed* (12:3; 22:18; 26:4); *gender conflict* (3:16) as being undone when *barren Sarah has a “seed” to make a great nation* (11:30; 12:2;

⁶⁶ Related to this concept, DeRouchie devotes significant discussion to the relationship of the *toledot* structure of Genesis and the promise of 3:15 (“The Blessing-Commission,” 225–29). Concerning the family trees and the progressively revealed line of descendants, he states: “Most foundationally, this distinction [between a godly and an ungodly line] appears to be grounded in the divine promise of 3:15, which contrasts the serpent and his offspring with the offspring of the woman” (227).

⁶⁷ See Alexander, *From Eden*, 105–20, 164–70 and Collins, *Genesis 1–4*, 178–80. As developed above, Collins and Alexander discuss the implications of the hope of a coming “seed” in light of the use of singular pronouns related to the collective noun “seed” first in Genesis 3:15 and then in Genesis 22:17–18. For an argument specifically against Alexander and Collins, see Walton, *Genesis*, 225–26, 230–39. Walton refers to Alexander’s work as “special pleading” (225n3). However, DeRouchie and Meyer critique Walton’s argument and find that his “rebuttal bears no substance” (“Christ or Family,” 45n21).

⁶⁸ Alexander, “Further Observations,” 368, emphasis added.

⁶⁹ James M. Hamilton, *God’s Glory in Salvation through Judgement: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 82.

⁷⁰ Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), 372–73. Although Fishbane rightfully presents the “blessings” as undoing the “curses,” his conclusion that this is fulfilled *typologically* seems to be an overstatement. This same connection can easily be supported through an appeal to a literal interpretive method, as demonstrated by Hamilton, *Salvation Through Judgement*, 82.

17:16); and *land conflict* (3:17–19) as being undone when *God promises to Abraham's "seed," "I will give this land"* (12:1–2, 7).⁷¹ In light of these promises, Abraham receives the hope that the fallen and sinful world will one day be corrected through the Lord's provision.⁷²

Therefore, just as the hope offered to Adam and Eve could be summarized in God's promise to accomplish three tasks—(1) *destroy evil*; (2) *restore creation*; and (3) *allow God to dwell with his people*—so too can the hope offered to Abraham be summarized in the same three tasks. The Lord promised to Abraham that he would: (1) *destroy evil* (defeat the serpent through the "seed" of Abraham—22:17b–18); (2) *restore creation* (bring blessing to all nations—12:3; 22:18); and (3) *allow God to dwell with his people* (dwelling with them forever—17:8). The same hope offered to Adam and Eve was the same hope offered to Abraham.⁷³

Additionally, even the concept of "universal blessing" or "blessing to all nations" (12:3; 22:17–18) alludes to prior revelation—Genesis 1:28. Beale develops this point in depth: just as God commissioned Adam and Eve prior to the fall to fulfill his mandate of universal dominion by spreading his fame to the far reaches of the world (1:28), God likewise commissions Abraham to accomplish the same task (12:3; 22:17–18).⁷⁴ Beale writes,

Recall that the commission of Gen. 1:26–28 involves the following elements, especially as summarized in 1:28: (1) "God blessed them"; (2) "be fruitful and multiply"; (3) "fill the earth"; (4) "subdue" the "earth"; (5) "rule over ... all the earth." The commission is repeated to ... Abraham: "I will greatly [1] *bless you*, and I will greatly [2] *multiply your seed* ...; and [3+4] *your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies* [= "subdue and rule"]. In your seed [5] all the nations of *the earth* shall be *blessed*" (Gen. 22:17–18). God placed Adam in a garden, and he promised Abraham a fertile land. God expresses the universal scope of the commission by underscoring that the goal is to "bless" "all the nations of the earth."⁷⁵

As such, the pointed grammatical and contextual allusions to Adam and Eve's commission (which was also given to Noah in similar form [9:1, 7])⁷⁶ undoubtedly serves to connect the promise of 3:15

⁷¹ Hamilton, *Salvation Through Judgement*, 82.

⁷² Hamilton states, "As the story of the Pentateuch unfolds, the Promised Land almost becomes a new Eden. The Lord will walk among his people in the land, just as he walked in the garden (Gen. 3:8; Lev. 26:11–12; Deut. 23:15, ET 14). Like the fertile garden of Eden, the Promised Land will flow with milk and honey" (Ibid., 81).

⁷³ Jason S. DeRouchie discusses the relationship between the "seed" promise and the concept of universal blessing, stating that בְּרָכָה is often used "to bring focus to the agent of global blessing." He argues that this is "stressed most directly in three texts that together clarify how a single, male 'offspring' of the first woman and of Abraham would serve as the instrument of worldwide salvation, conquering the evil one and overcoming the curse with blessing for some from all the families of the earth (Gen 3:15; 22:17–18; 24:60)" ("Counting Stars with Abraham and the Prophets: New Covenant Ecclesiology in OT Perspective," *JETS* 58 [2015]: 447).

⁷⁴ G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 46–48.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 45–46. Beale cites Gordon Wenham, who observes that "the promises to Abraham renew the vision for humanity set out in Gen. 1–2" (*Story as Torah: Reading the Old Testament Ethically* [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000], 37).

⁷⁶ See Beale, who traces this commission from Adam and Eve through Noah, Abraham, and subsequently throughout the entire OT (*Biblical Theology*, 46–52).

with the promise of 22:17–18. This allusion reinforces the anticipatory hope and expectation related to Abraham’s genealogical line. Furthermore, this allusion would have made it clear that for the commission of Genesis 1:28 to be fulfilled (a commission given prior to the fall), the curse must first be undone (as foretold in 3:15). Therefore, in light of this grammatical connection, God reminds Abraham that 3:15 is the solution whereby all nations of the world can truly experience God’s blessing. In light of the clear connections between Abraham’s promises and 3:15,⁷⁷ it is apparent that Abraham was given a very unique privilege.⁷⁸ He was given the promise that through him would come the long-awaited “seed” who would crush the head of the evil one and bring about the restoration of creation. Ultimately, through Abraham’s radical faith in God’s promise, the anticipatory hope and eschatological nature of Genesis 3:15 become pointedly evident.

7. Conclusion

Through examining the future oriented hope found in Genesis, one cannot help but be amazed at the consistency of God’s Word. In view of the diverse OT terms related to Jesus’s position as “Christ,” it seems best to use the term “anticipatory” as the category into which to group all promises pertaining to this messianic and eschatological hope. While Genesis uses neither the noun מְשִׁיחַ nor the verb מָשַׁח to refer to this coming individual, due to the anticipatory hope found within, Genesis certainly presents the hope of a future “seed” (זֶרַע) who will destroy evil and bring the world back to the Genesis 1–2 state. Just as God promised Adam and Eve, God likewise promised Abraham that his “seed” will: (1) *destroy evil* (defeat the serpent through the “seed” of Abraham—22:17b–18); (2) *restore creation* (bring blessing to all nations—12:3; 22:18); and (3) *allow God to dwell with his people* (dwelling with them forever—17:8). Therefore, in view of the anticipatory nature of the first promise of the Bible as well as the record of how the patriarchs understood this promise, one cannot help but appreciate Genesis 3:15 as the *protoevangelium*. As the first book of the Bible, Genesis stands as the unique book of beginnings; not only the beginning of humanity, but also the beginning of God’s restorative work.

⁷⁷ The assumption here is not that Abraham necessarily had access to a written creation account, but rather that the account of the fall (and the hope of “seed”) was passed down in one way or another (possibly orally) to Abraham and his family. See T. Desmond Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land: An Introduction to the Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 134–37. Alexander develops this concept specifically related to the genealogies and family lineage in Genesis.

⁷⁸ Although outside the scope of this article, it is worth noting that the Lord gives both Isaac (26:4) and Jacob (28:14) promises which are virtually grammatically identical to Abraham’s (22:18). It appears that the promises given to them also contextually allude back to 3:15 as the basis.

A Biblical Theology of Blessing in Genesis

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Abstract: This article examines the meaning of blessing as expressed in the structure and narratives of Genesis. After highlighting the pattern of blessings offset by curses embedded within the “generational” structure of Genesis, the nature of blessing is explored in its varying contexts. Given the quantity of blessings in Genesis, it is natural to expect fulfillments, partial or complete, of the blessings; thus, the article considers the degree to which readers are shown fulfillments and the degree to which they are pointed on towards future fulfillments. Finally, the human role in blessing is considered, both the human blessing of other humans as well as the human blessing of the Lord.

From the first chapter of the Bible to the last, God blesses humanity.¹ The blessing of God is a theme like few others in Scripture, encompassing the entirety of God’s goodness to humanity. Despite this, the blessing theme is not generally well understood in Christian usage.² Believers frequently ask God to bless them or their work without considering whether they are in a position to receive God’s blessing or whether they want to be placed in such a position. Noah was blessed by God when his faithful obedience condemned the world. God blessed Abraham when he told him to leave everything he knew; and though he obeyed in faith, Abraham has yet to receive the promises fully. Joseph received God’s blessing as a slave and a prisoner long before he received it as a government official. Thus, the believer’s proper desire for God’s blessing needs to be enriched with a biblical understanding of the nature of divine blessing. Genesis is the necessary starting place for gaining such an understanding as it contains nearly one sixth of all Scriptural references to blessing, by some estimates.³

¹ Genesis 1:28; Revelation 22:14–15.

² Even many conservative scholars have slighted this key component of Genesis, often relegating blessing to the sidelines of studies on the covenants. Meanwhile, it is difficult to find a thorough treatment of the blessing of God in Genesis which is not filled with references to “Israel’s older views of magic,” “superstitions,” “the inherent power of someone’s ‘blessing word,’” or other such shamanistic references.

³ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, WBC (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 275. On average, blessing occurs in 5.68% of the verses in Genesis (87) compared to 4.69% in Deuteronomy (45), 4.51% in Psalms (111) or 2.61% in Luke (30). Alternatively, A. Murtonen counts 45 “passages” of blessing in Genesis, compared to 37 in Deuteronomy and 58 in the Psalms (“The Use and Meaning of the Words *Lebârek* and *Berâkâh* in the Old Testament,” *VT* 9 [1959]: 159).

1. Blessing and Cursing in the Structure of Genesis

The motif of blessing has been masterfully woven through the narrative structure of Genesis. Structurally, Genesis can be broken down along the lines of the “generations” (תּוֹלְדוֹת), which yields a striking pattern with regard to blessing and cursing. The introduction is followed by ten generations which can be divided into major generations (which include extended narrative) and minor generations (with little or no narrative). The introductory section of Genesis (1:1–2:3) speaks of God’s blessing three times (1:22, 28; 2:3), giving special attention to its beginning upon earth, with no mention of a curse. The second section, “the generations of heaven and earth,” speaks of God’s curse three times (3:14, 17; 4:11) without direct reference to God’s blessing, thus emphasizing the beginning of the curse on earth. After this, each major generation is marked by a single mention of cursing⁴ and a minimum of one mention of blessing. As shown in Table 1, this consistent configuration of blessing and cursing reinforces the understanding that Genesis’ structure is based on the “generations.”

Table 1 – The Pattern of Blessings and Curses in the Generations of Genesis

Section in Genesis	Occurrences of Blessing	Occurrences of Cursing
Introduction (1:1–2:3)	1:22, 28; 2:3	-
Generations of Heaven and Earth (2:4–4:26)	-	3:14, 17; 4:11
Generations of Adam (5:1–6:8)	5:2	5:29
Generations of Noah (6:9–9:29)	9:1, 26	9:25 ⁵
<i>Generations of the sons of Noah (10:1–11:9)</i>	-	-
<i>Generations of Shem (11:10–26)</i>	-	-
Generations of Terah (11:27–25:11)	12:2 (2x), 3 (3x); 14:19 (2x), 20; 17:16 (2x), 20; 18:18; 22:17, 18; 24:1, 27, 31, 35, 48, 60; 25:11	12:3
<i>Generations of Ishmael (25:12–18)</i>	-	-
Generations of Isaac (25:19–35:29)	26:3, 4, 12, 24, 29; 27 (23x in this chapter); 28:1, 3, 4, 6 (2x), 14; 30:27, 30; 31:55; 32:26, 29; 33:11; 35:9	27:29 (2x)
<i>Generations of Esau (36:1–8; 36:9–37:1)</i>	-	-
Generations of Jacob (37:2–50:26)	39:5 (2x); 47:7, 10; 48–49 (15x in these chapters)	49:7

According to Hamilton, the pattern of generations in Genesis emphasizes “movement, a plan, something in progress and motion. What is in motion is nothing less than the initial stages of a divine plan.”⁶ Throughout Genesis, the narrative strikingly portrays the divine agenda of blessing and cursing, which endures throughout Scripture until the consummation of history when, finally, there will be “no

⁴ Gen 27:29 contains the word *curse* twice in a single mention of cursing.

⁵ Gen 8:21; 27:12, 13 contain a different Hebrew word which is also translated “curse.” These are not included in the generational pattern (cf. 12:3).

⁶ Victor Hamilton, *Handbook on the Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982), 18.

more curse” (Rev 22:3).⁷ Even at the cataclysmic condemnation in the Garden of Eden, the LORD made it absolutely clear that he would never abandon his people under the curse and its results. From Genesis 3 onward, the blessing and the curse both are intricately woven into the very fabric of human existence. In the generations of Adam, this intertwining of the blessing and the curse is forcefully depicted through their respective effects: men multiply, and they die.⁸ In the generations of Noah, hope twinkles at the edge of God’s catastrophic judgment of humanity as the creation blessings are expanded after the flood. Two minor generations then compound the post-flood disaster while tracing the line which God has selected (10:1–11:9; 11:10–26). By the time the reader reaches the generations of Terah, hope is scarce. Blessing has only been mentioned three times since the completion of creation (2:4). Meanwhile, the curse has been more plentiful and seems poised to utterly overwhelm the battered blessing. Then, God speaks blessing to Abram *five* times in just two verses, “And I will make of you a great nation, and I will *ble*ss you and make your name great, so that you will be a *ble*ssing. I will *ble*ss those who *ble*ss you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be *ble*ssed” (12:2–3; emphasis added). Blessing all around! In the final three major generations (Terah’s, Isaac’s, and Jacob’s), blessing will be mentioned eighty-one times, the curse only three.⁹ As James McKeown points out, “The blessing of Abraham is strategically positioned between the primeval narrative and the patriarchal narratives so that it marks a turning point in the book of Genesis – a turning point from an agenda dominated by cursing to one that is dominated by blessing.”¹⁰ The curse, however, is not forgotten in the Abrahamic blessing; it will rest on anyone who dishonors the blessed one.

One final structural area should be noted from Table 1. The four minor generations are shorter and primarily contain genealogies, with little or no narrative; they also have no direct mention of either blessing or cursing. These generations have a housekeeping role showing the narrowing pattern of selected and non-selected lines, which Ross calls, “a tidying up process of the line not chosen.”¹¹ Thus, the generations of the sons of Noah, of Shem, of Ishmael, and of Esau show selection and non-selection, rather than directly referencing blessing or cursing like the generations upon which the author focuses. They clarify where God’s blessing has been given and where it has not. Beyond that, the minor generations have an additional critical function, which will be explored further later: they demonstrate the actualization of God’s blessings, showing the multiplication of humanity, the fulfillment of God’s blessings which overflowed to Ishmael and Esau, and a few of the kings who were descended from Abraham. This brief consideration of the structure of Genesis and its relationship to blessing and cursing lays a foundation for considering the nature of blessing in Genesis.

⁷ Scriptural quotations follow the ESV.

⁸ As Claus Westermann says, “Despite man’s disobedience and punishment, the blessing given with the act of creation remains intact.... Man who is now far from God is always man blessed by God, and man’s life remains open to the future just because of the power of God’s blessing” (*Creation*, trans. John J. Scullion [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974], 104).

⁹ During the first three major generations (heaven and earth’s, Adam’s, and Noah’s), the blessing was mentioned three times, the curse five times.

¹⁰ James McKeown, *Genesis*, Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 222.

¹¹ Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 73.

2. The Nature of Divine Blessing and Cursing

Before considering further the intertwining of the blessing and the curse in the Genesis accounts, the nature of blessing should be examined. Why is a blessing frequently given as a command? What does it mean to receive divine blessing? What does it mean to be a blessed one? How can the aquatic and avian creatures, mankind, and the seventh day all receive God's favor in the same manner? While contexts vary, a basic definition of the nature of blessing, at least within Genesis, is possible. *Blessing is the bestowing of privilege, right, responsibility, or favor upon some portion of the creation, by God or by one whom he has blessed.*¹² In relation to humanity, to be blessed is to be one of God's own people with all the benefits that brings: in other words, the blessing of God is his relational presence in one's life.¹³ Such a definition requires some defense since many theologians equate the blessing of God primarily with life power, inner strength, or fertility.¹⁴ Certainly, the blessing of God includes life, strength, and fertility; but these are largely the manifestations, not the substance, of blessing.¹⁵ Cain understood this. Thus, after God cursed him, Cain summarized the curse as a loss of both benefits (being driven away from the ground) and access to God—"from your face I shall be hidden" (4:14; cf. 1 John 3:12–15). The curse of God alienates one from God's presence, while the essence of divine blessing is "I will be with you" (26:3).¹⁶

Significantly, at the beginning of the world, which Ross describes as "wrapped in divine blessing,"¹⁷ God came to walk with his people (3:8); after that, the godly are described as "walking with God" (5:22, 24; 6:9). Still later, God spoke to Abraham and promised his personal guidance on the journey "to the land that I will show you" (12:1). Additional confirmations to Abraham of God's enduring relationship with him came later, including the command for Abraham to walk before God (in his presence!) and the covenant that the LORD would "be God to you and to your offspring after you" (17:1, 7–8; cf. 22:2; 24:40; 48:15).¹⁸ In the lives of Abraham's descendants, this blessing presence continued. Twice, God said

¹² The normal OT Hebrew words for "bless" are all cognate to the word בָּרַךְ; though other words are sometimes translated "bless," בָּרַךְ is by far the most prevalent in Scripture. This writer has often heard it said rather generically that the "blessed man" is a "happy man," which suggests that "to bless" is approximately the same as "to make happy." (The alternate words אֲשֶׁר or אֲשֶׁרִי found in Job 29:11; Ps 1:1; 33:12, etc., do mean something similar to "happy" and are sometimes translated that way.) Samuel Horn has pointed out that this association of blessing with happiness is insufficient, instead commending the association of "blessed" with the word "approved." ("Partakers of the Divine Nature," sermon delivered at Northland International University, 5 May 2009). This helpfully points towards the relational nature of blessing, though it still may not go far enough, at least in the context of Genesis.

¹³ People's blessing of God will be dealt with later, but it clearly cannot fit exactly under this definition.

¹⁴ Johannes Pedersen, *Israel: Its Life and Culture*, repr. ed., 2 vols. (Atlanta: Scholars, 1991), 1:182, 190; John N. Oswalt, "(barak) to kneel, bless, praise, salute, curse." in *TWOT* 1:132.

¹⁵ James McKeown makes this clear in "Blessings and Curses," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 84–85.

¹⁶ Walter C. Kaiser Jr., writes, "Throughout the patriarchal narratives one more theme rang out as another part of the blessing of the promise. It was simply God's pledge: 'I will be with you'" (*Toward an Old Testament Theology* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978], 94). Cf. Rolf Rendtorff, *The Problem of the Process of Transmission in the Pentateuch*, trans. John J. Scullion, JSOTSup 89 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1977), 66–67.

¹⁷ Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 74.

¹⁸ "To walk before God means to orient one's entire life to his presence, promises and demands," according to Bruce K. Waltke with Cathi J. Fredricks, *Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 259.

to Isaac, “I will *be with you* and will *bless you*” (26:3, 24; emphasis added); immediately after the second time, Abimelech of Gerar explicitly linked God’s presence with Isaac to Isaac’s being “the blessed of the LORD” (26:28–29). The LORD expressed the Abrahamic blessing to Jacob in this way: “Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you” (28:15; cf. 31:3; 46:3–4). Over and over, the LORD proclaims to the reader of Genesis that blessing is preeminently about a right relationship with him. That is not simply a part of the blessing; it is the very core.

Blessing certainly has a broader meaning than “relationship with God” (though even if it did not, it would still be an incredible display of grace!), but blessing does not have a meaning *outside of* relationship with God. Whatever else it implies (fertility, life, riches, etc.), relationship with God is always the pivot point of blessing. However, each type of relationship may be distinct from the others. On the one hand, God blessed the seventh day and established an exceptional relationship with it (2:3). On the other hand, God gives externally similar blessings to the fish and birds on the fifth day and to the man and woman on the sixth day in Genesis 1.¹⁹ The distinction between these two blessings is beautifully crystallized by James McKeown:

These blessings are pronounced in a way that indicates two different levels of relationship. The blessing on the human beings was communicated “to them,” whereas the blessing on the fish and birds was simply pronounced and the words “to them” are missing. Although God blessed other creatures, it was the blessing on the humans that reflected the more intimate relations.²⁰

In contrast to the blessing, God’s curse signifies the divine shattering of relationship. The example of Cain has already been given; the other curses in Genesis demonstrate the point further. In the first recorded curse, perpetual enmity destroyed the previously good relationship between the serpent and mankind (3:14).²¹ Next, God broke the relationship which he had established between mankind and the ground: no longer could man eat freely of the earth’s bounty; now, he would labor and eat only with difficulty (3:17; 5:29; cf. 1:29–30; 2:5, 16). Later, Canaan’s normal filial relationships were shattered as he was separated from the blessing of God (9:25–27). Anyone who cursed Abram or Jacob would be separated from God’s blessing (12:3; 27:29); and, finally, due to their cursed actions, Simeon and Levi lost some of the natural family privileges of older sons to their younger brother (49:7–12).

It is of critical importance that God did not curse “man” after the fall. Rather, in what seems like a strange turn of events, God cursed the ground. In Genesis, God’s curse and his blessing never both fall on the same person, even when that would seem most natural.²² God had blessed Adam and Eve, and

¹⁹ These command-blessings are given to creatures in proper relationship with the Creator (1:22, 28; 9:1, 7). In a later case, God blesses Jacob by renaming him Israel, then identifying himself as “El Shaddai,” and commanding Jacob to “be fruitful and multiply” (35:9–11). In this way, command-blessings distinctly illuminate the relational nature of blessing. (In the paragraph immediately following the incident with Jacob, Benjamin is born in obedient, short-term fulfillment to this command.)

²⁰ James McKeown, *Genesis*, 222.

²¹ Henry Brichto supports this interpretation quite strongly, noting that in some places *curse* has the force of “banishment” (“The Problem of Curse in the Hebrew Bible,” *SBLMS 1* [Philadelphia, Society of Biblical Literature and Exegesis, 1963]: 83–85).

²² This theme cannot be pursued here, but the only person whom God both blesses and curses in Scripture is Jesus. This emphasizes the depth of the redemptive theme seen here. (Interestingly, the land animals were not

they could not be cursed. Similarly, Canaan was cursed instead of Ham, who had been blessed upon leaving the ark; Ham could not be cursed.²³ Finally, the curse of God (mediated through Jacob) was proclaimed upon the *anger* of Simeon and Levi, not on the blessed brothers themselves (49:7, 28). God *never* abandons the men and women whom he has chosen to bless with covenant relationship.

These observations are the first indicators that divine election and divine blessing are intertwined. As Friedrich Horst writes, “Who receives such blessing? God blesses human beings and, for their sake only, other beings. Election and blessing are closely related.”²⁴ These types of statements are likely to conjure up a variety of theological feelings, but the point here is simple: God gives himself in blessing-relationship only to those whom he has chosen as his own.²⁵ This might seem obvious when stated so baldly, but it must be said: God is the only source of blessing or cursing, and his actions are ultimately decisive.

3. Human Mediation of Blessing and Cursing

Many of the blessings in Genesis came directly from the mouth of God. In cases where a human spoke the blessing, Genesis only portrays it as effectual because God confirmed it either verbally or providentially through what followed. It is crucial to note these parameters of blessing because they fly directly in the face of the shamanistic interpretations often placed upon such passages.²⁶ Any “magic”

explicitly blessed in Genesis 1; thus, even the serpent that was cursed in Genesis 3 is not portrayed as receiving both blessing and cursing.)

²³ A number of scholars have seen the blessedness or righteousness of Ham as at least part of the reason that he was not cursed, minimally dating back to Justin Martyr, *Dial.* 139; cf. Gordon Wenham, “Family in the Pentateuch,” in *Family in the Bible*, ed. Richard S. Hess and M. Daniel Carroll R. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 201. Furthermore, the cursing of Canaan in Ham’s place should be regarded as a God-ordained invocation, what George Bush calls “*inspired foresight*” and “*denunciatory prophecy*” (*Notes, Critical and Practical, on the Book of Genesis*, 2 vols. [New York: E. French, 1839], 1:162).

²⁴ Friederich Horst, “Segen und Segenshandlungen in der Bibel,” *EvTh* 7 (1947/48): 23–27, quoted in Claus Westermann, *Blessing in the Bible and the Life of the Church*, trans. Keith Crim (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), 27.

²⁵ In a number of instances, blessings appear to overflow from one person to another without the second person being fully blessed in the deeper, relational sense of the word. Thus, Ishmael and Esau appear to be blessed because of their fathers’ relationship to the divine blesser (17:18, 20; 27:38–41; 33:11; cf. Heb 12:16–17); more obviously, Laban and Potiphar are blessed due to those who work for them (30:27–30; 39:5–6). As Kaiser describes Jacob and Joseph, “So blessed were these men that their benefits overflowed to their neighbors” (*Toward and Old Testament Theology*, 98). In two further incidents, patriarchs bless kings: Jacob explicitly blesses Pharaoh (47:7, 10), while Abimelech of Gerar seeks out a relationship with the blessed Isaac after Abraham’s death and God’s confirmation of Isaac as blessed (26:3, 4, 12, 24, 29). These overflowing blessings do not seem to require the same level of relationship from the blessed as is required for the blesser. As Kenneth A. Mathews points out, to some extent all nations are beneficiaries of the blessing as they are fruitful and multiply (*Genesis 1–11:26*, NAC 1 [Nashville: B&H, 1996], 298, 429). In other words, because of God’s blessed people, it is possible for others to receive the *benefits* of the blessing without necessarily implying that they are in chosen relationship with the LORD.

²⁶ Accordingly, W. Sibley Towner disagrees with “the familiar contention that, when a blessing is pronounced, a beneficent power or *dynamis* is released by the blesser upon the thing blessed. Perhaps ‘primitive psychology’ did apprehend the meaning of the act of blessing in some such way; however, it is not clear that the mentality of the biblical writers and traditionists was ‘primitive’ to this degree” (“Blessed be YHWH’ and ‘Blessed art Thou, YHWH’: The Modulation of a Biblical Formula,” *CBQ* 30 [1968]: 387).

in Genesis is the effective power of God. Humans are effective agents of blessing or cursing only when they align with the will of God.²⁷ This can be seen especially clearly in God's first blessing to Abram, "I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse" (12:3). Not only would people be unable to curse Abram, but also if they set themselves against him, they would themselves be cursed since the LORD would be against them.²⁸ The accounts of Melchizedek and Abimelech (chs. 14 and 20, respectively) illustrate these positive and negative aspects of the blessing in action.²⁹ Noah was actually the first man recorded to have invoked blessing and cursing in God's stead; and truly, Canaan was cursed (compare 10:15 to 15:16), and the LORD and Shem were bound in blessed relationship (compare 9:25–6 to 12:1–3). Years later, Abraham had no need to bless Isaac formally, since God had already made clear that he was blessed. Isaac, however, attempted to pass on the blessing; and through a rather convoluted series of events, he did bless God's chosen son Jacob, phrasing his blessing in such a way that it acknowledged God's role in actualization (27:27–30; 28:3–4). Jacob would eventually bless his sons as well, giving each son "the blessing suitable to him" (49:28). Thus, whether spoken directly by God or mediated by a human, *only* God's blessing is effectual, and it is *always* effectual.

4. Blessing Fulfillment in Genesis

If it is true that God is the ultimate source of all true blessing and that God has never blessed a person who did not receive that blessing, then one would expect to see frequent actualization of God's blessing in Genesis, since the book is littered with blessing statements. So, is the blessing of God realized in Genesis? If so, how? Is the blessing effective independent of human action, or must humans cooperate in order to receive blessing? The answer in Genesis may seem contradictory until it is illustrated by the lives of the patriarchs. God's blessing is always effectual, but it often awaits human obedience to become active. Adam and Eve rejected God's blessing and suffered under the curse. They themselves were not cursed, however, and received some blessings in chapters 3 and 4. Correspondingly, the major human characters in Genesis are consistently shown as flawed people with wrong desires, fears, ambitions, pride, and more. Each deserved the cursing which others received, but each also responded to God in faith. Noah walked with God; yet, through drunkenness, he initiated the events that revealed the twisted hearts of Canaan and his line. Abraham was blessed, and God protected his line even when Abraham wandered in fear.

Jacob may be the most interesting example as he inherited the Abrahamic blessing from his father (primarily in an incident separate from the deception of his father [28:1–5]). Shortly after that, the blessing was confirmed by God in a vision, *before the God of Abraham was his God!* Indeed, according to his own professions, Jacob may not have committed to the God of Abraham or claimed him as his

²⁷ This is poignantly illustrated throughout Judges 17–18 and neatly encapsulated within 17:2 where Micah's mother ineffectively attempts both to curse *and* to bless her son.

²⁸ None of this is meant to imply that blessing could not have been viewed as "magic," rather it is to say that Genesis does not present an effective "magical" blessing outside of the power of God. In this vein, Ferguson comments, "A curse directed against the elect could be turned into a blessing or even come back against the one who sent it." Paul Ferguson, "Cursed, Accursed," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. Walter Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 139. In Genesis, God is always the primary blessing.

²⁹ A not dissimilar incident happens when Laban catches up to blessed Jacob but is warned by God not to say anything good or evil to Jacob (31:24; cf. 27:29).

own until as late as his return to Canaan, particularly Bethel (28:20–22; 31–32; 35). Nevertheless, God had blessed him, and he was blessed. The external evidences of blessing were present, even to observers (30:27), but the beauty of obedient, trusting relationship was not. Thus, Jacob’s life until Bethel could be summarized as, “The LORD was with Jacob, but Jacob was not yet with the LORD.”

In the next generation, however, Joseph’s circumstances looked just the opposite. The LORD was with Joseph through many difficulties (39:2, 21, 23), and Joseph was with the LORD, seeking to walk rightly before him (39:9–10; 40:8). Furthermore, the LORD made him successful within the difficult situations of slavery and prison before placing him in an exalted and obviously blessed position.

At this critical point, Genesis climaxes with a series of initial fulfillments of the blessing-promises, indicating that neither the divine blesser nor Moses, the human designer of the book, have forgotten that the immense blessings still appear essentially meaningless as the book nears its end. Although some blessing promises have been fulfilled along the way, the closing chapters of Genesis seem particularly designed to show that the blessing promises were not forgotten even where they had not been fully realized.³⁰ The fulfilling of the LORD’s sweeping blessings had been initiated: he was giving Abraham’s seed the land (48:21–22; 50:24) and multitudes of descendants (47:27; 48:15–20)! Conversely, these blessings were still far in the future, visible primarily to the eye of faith. A few patches of land had been acquired by Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but these were simply pledges against the coming complete realization of God’s blessing.³¹ Abraham’s family had grown to dozens (46:5–27), but offspring “as the stars” were still far in the future. Most promising of all, the whole earth had begun to be blessed and the effect of the curse to be mitigated through Abraham, in the person of Joseph, as “all the earth came to Egypt to Joseph to buy grain, because the famine was severe over all the earth” (41:57; cf. 12:2–3).

Thus, the deathbeds of Jacob and Joseph give the final message of Genesis, as these aged patriarchs look forward with undimmed spiritual eyes to the *full* reception of the blessings. Most of all, they anticipated the guiding presence of God continuing to be with his people, blessing them as he had promised (48:15–16; 49:25; 50:24, 25). The closing chapters and verses of Genesis are like arrows pointing the reader onwards beyond “the beginning” to complete blessedness.

While the most far-reaching blessings are not, and in fact cannot be, *fully* realized within the Genesis narratives, many less complex blessings are either largely or completely fulfilled, as seen in Table 2.³² For example, the multiplication of Adam and Noah’s descendants on the earth in “the generations of Adam” and “the generations of the sons of Noah” has already been mentioned as realizations of God’s creation and post-flood blessings. In fact, each of the four “minor generations” can now be understood to be blessing-fulfillment records. Other blessings are fulfilled in the minor generations of Ishmael and Esau as Abraham is shown to be the father of a multitude of nations, and kings are listed as descending from Sarah. Meanwhile, the fulfillment of the blessing to Ishmael is also seen in his “generation.” Beyond these

³⁰ In fact, Moses stretches these themes throughout the Pentateuch, always urging the reader to look beyond. As Clines wrote, “*The theme of the Pentateuch is the partial fulfilment—which implies also the partial non-fulfilment—of the promise to or blessing of the patriarchs. The promise or blessing is both the divine initiative in a world where human initiatives always lead to disaster, and are an affirmation of the primal divine intentions for humanity*” (*The Theme of the Pentateuch*, 2nd ed., JSOTSup 10 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 30, emphasis original).

³¹ Andreas J. Köstenberger and Peter T. O’Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth*, NSBT 11 (Downer’s Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 32.

³² Although the set of curses is much smaller, the fulfillment of the curses in Genesis could be mapped in a similar fashion with the exception of the one in 49:7, which occurs very near the end of the book.

fulfillments in the minor generations, Sarah did have the son of her blessing in her old age; and Pharaoh was blessed by Jacob, with immediate effect. Moreover, in one instance, Rebekah's offspring quite literally possessed the gates of their enemies, quite beyond whatever deeper meanings the blessing she received might have carried. Thus, the reliability of the LORD's blessings, large or small, is demonstrated throughout Genesis.

Table 2 – Selected Blessings and Their Fulfillments in Genesis

Blessing	Bestowal	Fulfillment: initial or complete
Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth (Adam, Noah, Jacob)	1:28; 9:1, 7; 35:11	5:1–6:8; 10:1–11:9; ³³ 47:27
Subdue the earth and have dominion over the creatures	1:28	4:2, 17–22 ³⁴
Every plant and fruit to be food	1:29	4:2; 6:21
Every moving thing to be food	9:3	18:8; 43:16, 31–34
Blessed be the LORD, the God of Shem	9:26	11:10–12:3
Abram to be a great nation	12:2; 22:17	14:13–17; ³⁵ 46:8–27; 47:27
Abram blessed by God	12:2	14:13–24; 24:1, 35–36
Abram to be a blessing	12:2	14:19; (cf. 20:7; 48:20)
Blessing on Abram's blessers; curses on whoever dishonored Abram	12:3	12:15–20; 14:19–20; 20; (cf. 39:5; 47:13–26)
All families of the earth blessed in Abram, ³⁶ Isaac, and Jacob	12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14	33:11; 41:57
Sarah blessed with a son	17:16	21:1–7
Sarah to have nations come from her	17:16	36:1–43
Sarah to have kings come from her	17:16; (cf. 49:10)	36:31–39; 45:8
Ishmael to be fruitful, multiply, have 12 princes and a great nation	17:20	25:12–18; (cf. 28:9; 36:3–4)
Abraham's and Rebekah's offspring to possess the gate of their enemies	22:17; 24:60	30:43–31:16; 34:27–29; 45:8
Rebekah to become thousands of ten thousands	24:60	36; 46:8–27
Isaac blessed by God	26:3	26:12, 28–29
Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and their descendants to receive the land ³⁷	26:3–4; 28:4; 35:12; 48:4	33:19; 35:29; 48:22; 49:29–32; ³⁸ 50:13
Isaac and Jacob to be multiplied	26:4, 24; 28:3; 48:4; (35:11; 48:15–19)	46:8–27; 47:27
Esau to be away from the good land	27:39	36:6–8
Esau to live by the sword but not serve his brother forever	27:40	33:1–17
Jacob to father kings	35:11; (cf. 49:10)	36:31; 45:8
Pharaoh blessed (by Jacob)	47:7, 10	47:13–26 ³⁹

The very nature of God's major blessing-promises required a protracted timeframe beyond the range of the narrative for complete fulfillment; thus, the reader gets only glimpses of their fulfillments (especially in 41:57 and 47:27). These main blessing themes, however, will be continued throughout the Pentateuch, into the book of Joshua, and throughout the Old Testament, often explicitly referencing the blessings given in Genesis to the patriarchs. To take things a step further, the fulfillments of the patriarchal blessings themselves are ultimately fulfillments of the original creation blessings. This is what Clines means when he connects the patriarchal blessings to "the primal divine intentions for man."⁴⁰ Amazingly, as Genesis 35:11–12 makes clear, the purpose of this embryonic nation is indistinguishable from the seminal purpose of the entire creation: that purpose is to "be fruitful and multiply" and fill the land with a particular type of people for God Almighty.⁴¹

5. Blessing the LORD

One particular subset of blessing in Genesis should be examined briefly, people blessing the LORD. Three times in Genesis, people bless the LORD, with one account being repeated twice within the same narrative (9:26; 14:20; 24:27, 48). All three accounts can be seen as an expression of both thanksgiving and relationship, with the relational aspect being more central in the first example, while grateful praise shines through the other examples more strongly.

To illustrate, immediately after pronouncing the curse of God upon Canaan, Noah pronounced the blessing of God upon Shem (9:24–27). Instead of making Shem the object of the blessing, however, Noah blessed the LORD, recognizing the LORD as the source and substance of Shem's blessedness and reflecting the LORD's blessing back to him in praise. The sense of Noah's blessing seems to be "blessed is the LORD, who *will be* the God of Shem," thus indicating God's covenant devotion to the line of Shem as well as the Shemites' devotion to the LORD.⁴² Candlish brings out the import of this blessing, saying:

³³ Westermann, *Creation*, 24, 120.

³⁴ Westermann, *Creation*, 25.

³⁵ Here Abram is seen with allies, an army, and in numerical might. Consider Leon R. Kass, *The Beginning of Wisdom: Reading Genesis* (New York: Free Press, 2003), 303.

³⁶ Paul declared that this promise contained the essence of the gospel, tying this promise to the Gentiles' reception by faith of the indwelling, empowering Holy Spirit (Gal 3:7–14). Thus, intimate relationship with God is again found to be central to blessing. In fact, this section of Galatians is an exquisite extension of the blessing theology of Genesis (cf. Eph 1:3–6; 1 Pet 4:14).

³⁷ Esau was given territory as well, but in a different land (Gen 36:1–37:1).

³⁸ Wenham, "Family in the Pentateuch," 29.

³⁹ Waltke, *Genesis*, 592.

⁴⁰ Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch*, 30.

⁴¹ Nor is that seminal purpose different than the charge Jesus gave to his followers before his ascension to go throughout the whole world and make more followers, teaching them how to be like he had said to be.

⁴² C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch write, "Moreover it is true of the blessing and curse of Noah, as of all prophetic utterances, that they are fulfilled with regard to the nations and families in question as a whole, but do not predict, like an irresistible fate, the unalterable destiny of every individual; on the contrary, they leave room for freedom of personal decision, and no more cut off the individuals in the accursed race from the possibility of conversion, or close the way of salvation against the penitent, than they secure the individuals of the family blessed against the

The prophetic father, beholding afar off the highly-favoured descendants of his highly-honoured son, fixes his devout eye, not on their prosperous and happy state, but on the glory of that great and holy name, with whose honour their welfare is to be inseparably blended.... Jehovah, the God of Shem, is the blessed One; how blessed, then, he whose God Jehovah is!⁴³

Thus, this benediction by Noah was a proclamation of both praise and of relationship.⁴⁴

Later, both Melchizedek and Abraham's servant blessed the LORD in response to his faithfulness to Abraham (14:20; 24:27). They were expressing gratitude for the LORD's externally demonstrated faithfulness to Abraham, but they also recognized that the actions sprang from the covenanted relationship between the LORD and Abraham. In fact, Abraham's servant phrased his blessing in explicitly relational terms, blessing the LORD who had not "forsaken his steadfast love and faithfulness" towards Abraham. Thus, Towner is absolutely correct when he clarifies that "the blessing of YHWH is a cry of thanksgiving to him arising from manifestations past and present of his faithfulness toward his people."⁴⁵

6. Conclusion

If we are to come to any practical conclusion regarding the nature of God's blessing and people's blessing of God, Job 1:21, which Murtonen calls (with 1 Sam 3:18) "the summit of the whole Old Testament," may guide us: "The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD."⁴⁶ Job, having lost every external token of his blessedness, had arisen and worshiped. Because the gift of God himself was enough for Job, Job could still bless God in gratitude! For all who are blessed with divine relationship, ancient or modern, the loss of the tokens of blessing should pale beside the confidence of being the blessed of the LORD. The message of Genesis is not simply a message about blessed people who are prosperous like Abraham and Isaac were, nor is it primarily a message about blessed people who were oppressed, like Jacob and Joseph were. Rather, Genesis speaks to all those who would walk with God; it recognizes the promise of the blessing and the devastation of the curse to each person, calling each person to live based on those realities. Along with displaying a vast array of blessing-promises touching every family on earth through Abraham's seed, Genesis shows that God mediates his blessing to humanity through humanity itself. Genesis does not give the final results, but it points the way forward, giving numerous assurances through fulfilled blessings that the divine blesser will fulfill all the blessings that he has spoken. Finally, Genesis hints that the reader's worshipful response is to bless the LORD in reverent and intimate thanks.

possibility of falling from a state of grace, and actually losing the blessing" (*Commentary on the Old Testament*, trans. James Martin, repr. ed., 10 vols. [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson], 1:101).

⁴³ Robert S. Candlish, *The Book of Genesis* (Edinburgh: Black, 1868), 163–64.

⁴⁴ This is the first divine announcement narrowing the lineage of the Messiah: Canaan was cursed, but Shem would be blessed. What a comfort that the next time the LORD narrowed the line of blessing, he also guaranteed blessing for all nations without exclusion (Gen 12:2–3)!

⁴⁵ Towner, "Blessed be YHWH," 390. Also, "When an Israelite blesses with a formulary benediction, the intention is not to turn YHWH's 'power' upon himself, but rather to express joy in God's gracious acts and to proclaim those acts to the world." *Ibid.*, 387.

⁴⁶ Murtonen, "Lebârek and Berâkâh," 169.

Reflections on Handling the Old Testament as Jesus Would Have Us: Psalm 15 as a Case Study

— Dane Ortlund —

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Abstract: In appreciation of the renaissance of christocentric and redemptive-historical hermeneutics and homiletics in our generation, this article selects an OT text, Psalm 15, that appears on the surface to be maximally resistant to a Christ-centered reading and preaching of Scripture. The article makes five overarching preliminary reflections in approaching a text such as Psalm 15 in a whole-Bible way, and then offers several specific observations about the text as an offering of one way to handle a text such as this. The purpose of the article is to encourage readers and preachers to handle every nook and cranny of Scripture in light of Christ, yet to do so in ways that avoid errors such as crass moralizing or strict Lutherizing.

From every text of Scripture there is a road to Christ....
I have never found a text that had not got a road to Christ in it.

—Charles Spurgeon¹

A remarkable resurgence of Christocentric interpretation has emerged in recent decades, reflected in leaders, books, commentary series, conferences, and even websites.² This is not to say that a single, monolithic Christocentric hermeneutic has emerged among evangelicals. Yet amid the diversity, certain elements appear relatively stable among the various stripes of Christocentric interpretation: a conviction about the unity and coherence of the Bible, a sensitivity to the unfolding storyline

* I am grateful to Rev. Drew Hunter for his helpful comments on an early draft of this article.

¹ Charles Haddon Spurgeon, “Christ Precious to Believers,” in *Sermons* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, n.d.), 6:356; quoted in Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 153–54.

² I have documented this in the opening pages of Dane C. Ortlund, “Christocentrism: An Asymmetrical Trinitarianism?” *Them* 34 (2009): 309–21.

across redemptive history, a willingness to read texts in a genre-sensitive way, an impulse to resist moralistic and graceless readings,³ a belief in the validity of biblical theology,⁴ and above all a desire to responsibly connect every text to the Bible's redemptive climax, Jesus Christ.

"There is a typological link between every aspect of the Old Testament and the person of Jesus Christ," writes Graeme Goldsworthy.⁵ "All Scripture has a redemptive purpose," claims Bryan Chapell; "None of the Scriptures are so limited in purpose as to give us only moral instruction or lifestyle correction."⁶ "Every Old Testament text must be viewed in light of Jesus' person and ministry," says Craig Blomberg.⁷ And such assertions among contemporary evangelicals could be quickly proliferated.⁸ Yet it is one thing to affirm such statements in principle. It is another to take a text that does not transparently lend itself to such a hermeneutic and read it in accord with these kinds of statements. That is what this essay seeks to do, with Psalm 15 serving as the test case.

Practitioners will quibble here or there with how Christocentric interpretation is to be carried out, and different arms of the Protestant church will work out of distinct frameworks, even while equally claiming a wish to read the Bible in a Christocentric way. One immediate example of this would be the difference between Lutheran and Reformed interpretive presuppositions in how to handle the Psalms in an appropriately Christocentric way. Such diversity notwithstanding, it is worth asking how Jesus would have us interpret this psalm, doing so mindful of diverse emphases among conservative Protestantism.⁹

Jesus himself said that the Psalms (probably referring to all the Old Testament poetry) were "about me" (Luke 24:44). It is possible that Jesus meant "all that is said in the Psalms about me" but more likely that he meant "all that is said in the Psalms—which, taken together, testifies to me."¹⁰ The reference to what he had been saying to his disciples over the past three years, along with the threefold reference

³ This can be noted not only in conservative evangelical circles but also more broadly—such as in the work of Karl Barth a century ago, or in that of Douglas Campbell in our own time.

⁴ "Biblical theology" is controverted as a label, meaning different things to different people. In this essay I use it to refer to the study of what the Bible teaches about God, humanity, sin, and redemption by engaging the Bible in a historically-sensitive manner that traces motifs through the Bible. For a recent taxonomy of five ways biblical theology is practiced see Edward W. Klink III and Darian R. Lockett, *Understanding Biblical Theology: A Comparison of Theory and Practice* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), though this book draws the lines a bit too neatly without allowing sufficiently for overlap between their five categories of biblical theological method. My own approach to biblical theology draws something, more or less, from all five of Klink and Lockett's categories.

⁵ Graeme Goldsworthy, *Christ-Centered Biblical Theology: Hermeneutical Foundations and Principles* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 188.

⁶ Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Sermons: Models of Redemptive Sermons* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), xi.

⁷ Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 104.

⁸ A recent, wise treatment of reading and teaching the Bible in a Christ-centered, redemptive-historical way is Vern S. Poythress, *Reading the Word of God in the Presence of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), esp. 223–302.

⁹ D. A. Carson does something similar with Psalm 1, though at a more principal level of guidelines to bear in mind when tackling a text such as Psalm 1, in "Biblical-Theological Ruminations on Psalm 1," in Lane G. Tipton and Jeffrey C. Waddington, eds., *Resurrection and Eschatology: Theology in Service of the Church: Essays in Honor of Richard B. Gaffin Jr.* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008), 115–34.

¹⁰ See Edmund P. Clowney, *Preaching Christ in All of Scripture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2003), esp. 39–44; Rick Strelan, *Luke the Priest: The Authority of the Author of the Third Gospel* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 148–49; Benjamin R. Wilson, *The Saving Cross of the Suffering Christ: The Death of Jesus in Lukan Soteriology*, BZNW 223 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2016), ch. 5.

to the entire Tanakh, points in this direction. Moreover, earlier in Luke 24 on the road with the two disciples we are told that “beginning with Moses and *all* the Prophets, he interpreted to them in *all* the Scriptures the things concerning himself” (v. 27). These references to “all the prophets” and “all the Scriptures” seem to point in the direction of understanding Jesus to be referring to the entirety of the Old Testament and not merely select texts.¹¹

The question, then, is: How does Psalm 15 fit in to *that*? If Cleopas and his companion had asked the risen Christ on the road to Emmaus: “Lord, how would you apply what you are saying to, say, the fifteenth psalm?” what might Jesus have said?¹²

I am querying this particular psalm because it is a good example of one that on first reading could easily appear out of step with a Christ-centered or grace-centered way of reading the Bible. Here is the whole text of the short psalm. Verse 1 asks a question—in essence, “Who measures up?” The rest of the psalm gives the answer: “The person who acts in such and such a way, that’s who.”

1 A psalm of David. O LORD, who shall sojourn in your tent?

Who shall dwell on your holy hill?

2 He who walks blamelessly and does what is right
and speaks truth in his heart;

3 who does not slander with his tongue
and does no evil to his neighbor,
nor takes up a reproach against his friend;

4 in whose eyes a vile person is despised,
but who honors those who fear the LORD;
who swears to his own hurt and does not change;

5 who does not put out his money at interest
and does not take a bribe against the innocent.

He who does these things shall never be moved.¹³

At first sight this is a straightforwardly gospel-vacuous Old Testament text. Surely some texts give us the gospel while other texts, such as this, do not? Some might take this text as representative evidence that the Old Testament is “law” and the NT “gospel,” even though both law and gospel are found in both Testaments; one could even argue that the most sublime expressions of God’s love are found in the Old Testament and the most horrifying depictions of hell in the New Testament. But what about this exclusively hortatory text? It is one thing to read or preach Christ from Psalm 110 or Isaiah 53 or the many Old Testament texts explicitly quoted by the New Testament and correlated to some aspect of Christ’s person or work. Even texts about the failures of an Israelite judge or king can fairly clearly be

¹¹ A weakness of Vos’s *Biblical Theology* is that despite treating the whole Bible he effectively skips over the Psalms, moving from the Pentateuch to the prophetic literature (Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* [Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1975]). Richard Belcher argues that all the Psalms are fulfilled in Christ as opposed to only a handful of explicitly messianic psalms (Richard P. Belcher, *The Messiah and the Psalms: Preaching Christ from All the Psalms* [Fearn, Scot.: Christian Focus, 2006]), an argument with which the present essay is in sympathy.

¹² The apostles would have referred to it as the fourteenth psalm but we will call it the fifteenth psalm throughout this essay for consistency and clarity in accord with standard Protestant chapter numbering.

¹³ With the exception of the author’s translations, which are explicitly identified, Scripture quotations are taken from the English Standard Version.

plugged in to a whole-Bible trajectory culminating in Christ, the successful judge and king. And so on. But what about a Psalm 15 kind of text?¹⁴

In the rest of this essay I would like to suggest some ways forward for evangelical readers in general, and teachers and preachers in particular.

1. Preliminary Reflections

There are several broader discussions today that we will not be able to engage in detail in the scope of this short essay, but it is worth mentioning them and making some indication of where the approach of this paper falls with respect to such discussions. Five matters merit brief reflection.

First and most fundamentally, it is as vital as it is easily forgotten that the fundamental task in reading the Scripture in a faithful way is to *see what is there*. Unhurried, word-by-word consideration of what a text actually says (and not what we expect or hope it to say) is the great prerequisite to hermeneutical fidelity and insight. This is one reason teachers and preachers of the Bible who have this trait yet without formal Bible training sometimes demonstrate greater insight than formally trained teachers and preachers who do not discipline themselves to slow down and notice what a text actually says. A century ago the great New Testament scholar Adolf Schlatter commended this in his call throughout his writings and ministry to hermeneutical *Beobachtung* (“observation”) and *Wahrnehmung* (“perception”).¹⁵ Christocentric hermeneutics is a sophisticated enterprise and we all stand on the shoulders of others, but we should not talk about it as a new *gnosis*, a secret way to read the Bible that remains unavailable to the uninitiated. The basic key to healthy Christocentric hermeneutics, as to any particular hermeneutic, is simply to read the Bible—the whole Bible, and each part in light of that whole—and notice what you see.

Second, we recognize the wealth of literature among Old Testament scholars themselves on how to read the Old Testament. Should a text be read only in its immediate historical context? Should broader redemptive history—the unfolding storyline of the mighty acts of God in our space and time continuum to save a people to himself—be integrated into a reading of an Old Testament text? Should a text be read “once” or “twice”? That is, should we allow for a New Testament perspective on reading an Old Testament text, but only on “second reading,” after it has first been read on its own terms and in its own immediate context, as an original reader would have understood the text? From yet other hermeneutical quarters: Should a text be read “canonically”—that is, with respect to the entire finished form of Scripture, but without worrying too much about the historical process by which the canon has come down to us?¹⁶

¹⁴ In two other places in the OT we find a similar pair of questions and answers—Psalm 24:3–6 and Isaiah 33:14–16. Yet in both of these other texts, unlike Psalm 15, the summons to upright living is immersed in a context rich in celebration of the redemptive work of God. Psalm 15 therefore stands out as particularly challenging to handle in a redemptive way.

¹⁵ A theme of Werner Neuer, *Adolf Schlatter: Ein Leben für Theologie und Kirche* (Stuttgart: Calwer, 1996). One contemporary voice carrying forward this specific emphasis of Schlatter’s is Markus Bockmuehl, *Seeing the Word: Refocusing New Testament Study*, Studies in Theological Interpretation (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006).

¹⁶ A good place to begin to get a sense of the issues here would be Kevin J. Vanhoozer, ed., *Theological Interpretation of the Old Testament: A Book-by-Book Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008).

This is a constellation of discussion points in which it would be easy to get bogged down. In any case I am not an Old Testament scholar and my competence in these discussions would be minimal anyway. My main concern is more immediately practical: how the New Testament coaches us in reading a text such as Psalm 15, and how that informs our actual reading of the Bible and teaching and preaching of it. I will simply say for the sake of clarity that the approach of this paper is that it is not only permissible but obligatory that Christians read the Old Testament in light of the whole Scripture and supremely the coming of Christ, as sanctioned and modeled by the apostles' admittedly diverse use of the Old Testament. Jesus Christ himself is, as Motyer put it, "the master theme of the Bible."¹⁷ I further suggest that this is best done when the immediate historical and literary contexts are paid close attention. Thus the "micro" (grammatical-historical) and the "macro" (biblical-theological) dimensions to reading an Old Testament text are not in competition but complementary and mutually inter-dependent. Both are vital to interpretive fidelity. A Christian hermeneutic is grammatical-historical-biblical-theological. It is both exegetical and synthetic, focusing on both the trees (indeed, individual twigs) and the forest. But Jesus and the apostles leave us with the inescapable conclusion that the Old Testament is to be read as part of a whole and not on its own now that we stand on this side of Christ's coming.¹⁸ To read the Bible in this way is not allegorical, because Jesus and the apostles teach us to read the Old Testament as historically linked with the New Testament; an allegorical approach would be one that seizes on mere verbal or conceptual links that are ripped out of more meaningful organically historical linkage.¹⁹

Third, beginning to move more specifically to Psalm 15, it should be noted that this text is not quoted and probably not alluded to in the New Testament.²⁰ This raises the question of whether and how to understand Psalm 15 in the light of the New Testament, since we have no explicit apostolic

¹⁷ Alec Motyer, *Look to the Rock: An Old Testament Background to Our Understanding of Christ* (Leicester, Eng.: InterVarsity, 1996), 19. Motyer says Christ "is himself the grand theme of the 'story-line' of both Testaments, the focal point giving coherence to the total 'picture' in all its complexities. . . . He is the climax as well as the substance and centre of the whole" (ibid., 22).

¹⁸ Among the voluminous literature promulgating this general conviction one might look especially to Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999); Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture: The Application of Biblical Theology to Expository Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000); G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011). N. T. Wright makes the point that whether one takes the OT according to Hebrew or according to English book order, the OT is a story in search of an ending (N. T. Wright, *The Day the Revolution Began: Reconsidering the Meaning of Jesus's Crucifixion* [New York: HarperCollins, 2016], 90–91).

¹⁹ Leonhard Goppelt, *Typos: The Theological Interpretation of the Old Testament in the New* (trans. D. H. Madvig; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), esp. ch. 1.

²⁰ The listed OT citations in NA28 suggest Ps 15:2 ("He who walks blamelessly and does what is right and speaks truth in his heart") could be seen as echoed in John 8:40 (due to a reference to speaking the truth), Acts 10:35 (due to a reference to one who "does what is right and acceptable"), and Hebrews 11:33 (due to a reference to enforcing justice) (*Novum Testamentum Graece, 28th Revised Edition: Based on the Work of Eberhard and Erwin Nestle*, ed. B. and K. Aland, J. Karavidopoulos, C. M. Martini, and B. M. Metzger [Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012], 851). But these verbal associations are all of a sufficiently broad and general nature that it is unlikely these are deliberate allusions to this particular psalm in any deliberate way. The most one could say is that these NT texts function out of a common "encyclopedia of production," or shared universe of language and categories (Stefan Alkier, "Intertextuality and the Semiotics of Biblical Texts," in *Reading the Bible Intertextually*, ed. Richard B. Hays, Stefan Alkier, and Leroy A. Huizenga [Waco: Baylor University Press, 2009], 3–21). My comments in this footnote are informed by the work of Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale

treatment of the text to emulate. This tension causes some scholars, such as Richard Longenecker, to be hesitant about seeking to employ apostolic hermeneutical strategies with Old Testament texts not explicitly addressed in the New Testament. The present essay aligns instead with scholars such as Greg Beale, who argue that the apostles give us representative models for how to read the Old Testament—a diverse assortment of models, to be sure—and that the faithful reader under the guidance of the Spirit can confidently read the Old Testament mindful of Christ under this apostolic tutelage, even texts to which the New Testament does not itself explicitly refer.²¹ I read Psalm 15, in other words, through the guidance of the apostles extrapolated out to Old Testament passages not specifically engaged. We are coached in handling Old Testament passages that the apostles do not cite by paying close attention to how they handle those Old Testament passages that they do cite.

Fourth, the Bible is inexhaustibly rich and this essay is not meant to displace other possible ways to treat a text such as Psalm 15. Multiple valid perspectives or approaches to this text should be encouraged, of which this article is one offering.²² To speak of multiple valid perspectives on a text is not to fall into some sort of reader-response or poststructuralist hermeneutic that allows readers to find whatever they wish to see in the text in a way that is beyond critique. It is rather to acknowledge that every reader is located in time and space, with certain individual and community history, with a certain temperament, and so on. The text does not change; but the context in which it is read does change. Someone who has been converted to Christ out of a life of corrupt money-handling will find a certain force and meaning in that emphasis of Psalm 15. On the other hand, someone who has never borrowed or lent money but whose besetting sin is the use of the tongue may find that emphasis particularly meaningful. And so on.

Fifth and finally, and continuing to zero in on Psalm 15, there are two equally unhelpful ways to handle a text such as this. One extreme we could call a *crass moralizing* and the other extreme a *strict Lutherizing*.

By “crass moralizing” I mean a reading that extracts the ethical summons of the text without any broader recourse to the text’s place in redemptive history which culminates in Christ’s saving work, consideration of audience, and other indications of the redemptive backdrop against which such a text belongs. This approach functions out of a naïve anthropological optimism and simply asks what the text is instructing me to do, and then seeks to go out and do it. It is reading a text like an entry in a dictionary, in which context is irrelevant, rather than like a paragraph in a novel, in which context is everything. By “strict Lutherizing” I mean a hyper-focus on one’s inability to perfectly discharge the summons of the text. This is the hermeneutical tunnel-vision that reads every imperative in terms of the second use of the law, the law as a mirror in which one sees one’s own moral inability. It functions out of a dour anthropological pessimism. It is the refusal to maintain a distinction between meaningful if imperfect obedience, on the one hand, and perfect obedience on the other hand. Instead, sinful depravity and

University Press, 1989); idem, *Reading Backwards: Figural Christology and the Fourfold Gospel Witness* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2014); idem, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2016).

²¹ See the contributions of Longenecker and Beale and others in *The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts? Essays on the Use of the Old Testament in the New*, ed. G. K. Beale (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994).

²² We are helped here by the writings of Vern Poythress and John Frame; see esp. Vern S. Poythress, *Symphonic Theology: The Validity of Multiple Perspectives in Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2001); idem, *Redeeming Philosophy: A God-Centered Approach to the Big Questions* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), ch. 7; John M. Frame, *Perspectives on the Word of God: An Introduction to Christian Ethics* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1999); idem, “Backgrounds to My Thought,” in *Speaking the Truth in Love: The Theology of John M. Frame*, ed. J. J. Hughes (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2009), 9–30.

sinless perfection are the only two moral categories in play. This approach has difficulty retaining a category for, say, Noah in the Old Testament, or Simeon in the New: each of whom, while sharing in humanity's fallenness more generally, is described as a righteous, godly man (Gen 6:9; Luke 2:25).

The temptation toward either of these two inversely related errors lies in the fact that there is truth to each. It is not that each is completely void of truthfulness but rather that each grasps a part of the truth and erects it as the whole truth, creating a misshapen hermeneutic. We *should* take a text and ask what we are called to do in light of it—lest, as James says, we become hearers but not doers of the word (James 1:22). And we *should* be ever aware of our wayward diseased hearts and our inability to obey God perfectly even as regenerate Christians—it was of the covenant people that Isaiah remarked, “all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment” (Isa. 64:6). To take the text before us: Psalm 15 *is* richly moralizing, if what we mean by that is that it summons us into deeply moral realities and the dignity of real virtue. And Psalm 15 *is*, from one perspective, law-that-cannot-be-kept; no one does it perfectly. But neither of these is the only thing to be said. To take either as the exclusive message is one-dimensional and reductionistic.

And yet the alternative to either of them is not simply splitting the difference—melding together a bit of moralizing with a bit of the second use of the law. Psalm 15 and similar texts are indeed full and rich and deep in their moral summons, and this summons ought not to be watered down or avoided. And such texts do portray a godly integrity that sobers us with a reminder of our weakness and frequent failure to live consistently in such a way. The question is how to do justice to both realities.

2. Reflections on Reading and Preaching Psalm 15

What then of Psalm 15? How should we read it mindful of the entire sweep of Scripture? On the one hand, there is no rigid formula one can apply to a given Old Testament text. Wisdom is required, for each text will have its own unique texture, genre, and role in the canon.

Yet it seems there are a handful of fundamental steps to take to ensure that we read a text such as Psalm 15 the way Jesus would have us. I will suggest five. The first two steps apply to any passage; the latter three are specific to this text. Throughout what follows we will make recourse as appropriate to the five more general reflections adduced above.

2.1. Let It Land

First, we should let the full hortatory weight of this psalm land on us.²³ Because this psalm is heavy on instruction and apparently light on redemption, one temptation for today's “gospel-centered” generation would be to immediately find a way to squirrel out from under the moral instruction of the psalm. But there is no getting around the high calling of this psalm. Nor should we wish there to be. The summons of this psalm is a call to humaneness, to dignity, to integrity of life, to nobility, to the “glory and honor” with which and for which we were created (Ps 8:5). This summons thus lands especially on confessing believers depicting the photo negative of this psalm—deceptive, backstabbing, evil-loving, financially slippery, and so on. Why would we soften this summons? This is the kind of human living, and the kind of functioning society, each of us longs for. This is interpersonal beauty. It is shalom.

²³ Horbury speaks of Psalm 15 as an example of the “entrance-torot” (along with Ps 24:3–5 and Isa 33:14–17), developing the stipulations of Deut 23:1–8 beyond physical health and ancestry to include ethical purity (William Horbury, “Extirpation and Excommunication,” *VT* 35 [1985]: 26).

Therefore, we should not prematurely apply comfort to our own hearts or the hearts of others for the many ways we do not live out this summons. There is a kind of healthy homiletical and hermeneutical patience that lets a text ripen before bringing the gospel to bear on it. Running backs in American football are taught to be patient, waiting for the hole to open up as blockers do their job. If they try to hit the hole too soon, the play collapses. Preachers and teachers rightly enthused about the gospel of grace need a similar discipline of patience. One cannot run to the gospel or Christ too soon out of a fear of becoming moralistic. Let the play develop. Let the people hear that this is the life to which they are summoned. Let it land. If the immediate application in reading or preaching this psalm is to say, “Well, none of us can do any of this—but thank God for Jesus who did it in our stead,” we are hitting the hole too early.

After all, Jesus himself did not always give the immediate balm of forgiveness to those who came to him. He paraded before the rich young ruler a handful of the Ten Commandments (Matt 19:16–22). The comfort of the redemption that is the central message of the Bible lands most deeply on those who have first felt the weight of the commandments, and it is only those who have felt their utter inability to discharge the commandments out of their own resources who will ultimately be able truly to live them out.²⁴ Penultimate despair is often a vital ingredient in ultimate deliverance.

Even if it is true that no one lives out Psalm 15 perfectly, that is not the first truth to dwell on in teaching or preaching a text such as Psalm 15. Soak in the summons. Stretch your vocabulary to paint as beautiful a picture as you can possibly muster of the loveliness of a Psalm 15 life. Let people long for it. Let it land.

2.2. Remember the Original Audience

Key to a healthy reading of this psalm is self-conscious recognition of who is writing it and to whom it is implicitly written—namely, a leader of the people of God, to the people of God. The above point is a caution to avoid “strict Lutheranizing”; this point is a caution to avoid “crass moralizing.”

This is a psalm, an ancient hymn from Israel’s songbook for their own worship. It belongs (to use contemporary categories) to the realm of discipleship, not evangelism. It is something ancient Israelites would say to one another, not something they would say to neighboring nations. The earnest life of virtue presented in this psalm is for the redeemed. More sharply: It is a summons for those already redeemed, not a strategy for getting redeemed. The psalm’s audience is evident not only in its general presence in the Psalter but also more specifically in the psalm’s twofold use of “the LORD” (יהוה); vv. 1, 4), the covenant name of God, the name given to Moses in Exodus 3 which for generations after evoked the definitive redemptive event of the exodus.²⁵ The summons of this psalm is for the saved, not for salvation.

Understanding Psalm 15 in this way is reflective of the broader understanding that while the ethical vision of the wisdom literature as a whole often tends to reflect basic principles of how life works best, the wisdom literature was given to God’s people. In other words, the wisdom literature functions not

²⁴ A poignantly developed theme, worth pondering by preachers, throughout the writings of John Bunyan; see e.g. *The Saints’ Knowledge of Christ’s Love in The Works of John Bunyan*, 3 vols., reprint ed. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1991), 3:1–40.

²⁵ David B. Capes, *Old Testament Yahweh Texts in Paul’s Christology*, WUNT 2/47 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992), 3–5; Christopher R. Seitz, “The Call of Moses and the ‘Revelation’ of the Divine Name,” in *Word Without End: The Old Testament as Abiding Theological Witness* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2004), 229–47.

only in the salvation historical category of creation but also of redemption. This literature is covenantally circumscribed.²⁶ That includes Psalm 15.

It might be objected at this point that even if this text is for the redeemed, nevertheless the psalm opens with a question and answers that only those who act a certain way will make it. That is, the psalm appears to be all imperative and no indicative. The answer to this is that not only is this psalm implicitly given to the redeemed, but a careful reading of the wording of the question itself in verse 1 explicitly assumes a redemption already accomplished. Here we remember Schlatter's reminder to observe with unhurried care what is there. The psalm ponders who will "sojourn in" and "dwell on"—not merely, in a strict sense, *enter into*—God's tent and hill. The question appears to be not one of entrance into but of flourishing within God's gracious presence.²⁷ As Kidner puts it, verse 1 refers to "dwelling rather than gaining admission, for the qualities the psalm describes are those that God creates in a man, not those He finds in him."²⁸ This psalm portrays the character of those walking in glad communion with God, not the minimum bar required for God to bring someone into communion with him in the first place. As scholars such as Eichrodt have noted, there is an entire covenantal framework assumed in this psalm that is not always borne in mind in our various twenty-first century contexts.²⁹

2.3. Clarify What Verse 1 Is, and Is Not, Asking

At this point we must clarify exactly what the opening question is asking. On first reading it may sound like a bare challenge about who is good enough for God. Further reflection—unhurried *Beobachtung*—reveals that this psalm is drawing together redemptive-historically loaded language from God's mighty acts in Israel's history, language rife with whole-Bible significance.

Yahweh's "tent" (אֹהֶל) denotes not some generic camping structure but the tabernacle/temple motif. This is clear from the reference to "dwelling" on God's "holy hill." "Dwell" here (שָׁכַן) is the very Hebrew verb used to speak of God's templing glory, the noun form of which is *Shekinah*. Even by itself this verb would evoke the presence of Yahweh among his people in the wake of the exodus event, "dwelling" among them in the pitched tent. When one adds to this the reference to the "holy hill" (בְּהַר קֹדֶשׁ) we recognize that this cannot simply be presented in teaching and preaching as a vague reference to a sacred area of raised ground. The text could woodenly be translated "the mountain of your holiness"—the reference is to Mount Zion, the place of God's special dwelling to which the nations would one day stream (Isa 2:2–3; Mic 4:1–2). The tent/tabernacle theme in the early parts of the Old Testament matured into the temple theme in the latter parts of the Old Testament, with the presence of God being the point all the way through. Throughout the Old Testament the temple and the holy hill or

²⁶ On which see C. John Collins, "Proverbs and the Levitical System," *Presb* 35 (2009): 9–35.

²⁷ I am not at this point trying to align with E. P. Sanders's framework of "covenantal nomism," made famous in his *Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1977), the problems of which have been trotted out sufficiently over the past two decades or so (especially the problem with asserting that believers "stay in" by obedience). I am simply observing the language of the text.

²⁸ Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1–72: An Introduction and Commentary on Books I and II of the Psalms*, TOTC 14a (London: IVP, 1973), 82–83.

²⁹ Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. J. A. Baker, 2 vols. (London: SCM, 1961, 1967). Scott Hafemann rightly argues that explicit mention of the covenant does not exhaust the presence of the covenant as an implicit reality in a given text (Scott J. Hafemann, "The Covenant Relationship," in *Central Themes in Biblical Theology: Mapping Unity in Diversity*, ed. Scott J. Hafemann and Paul R. House [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007], 20–65).

mountain are closely associated, so that to speak of the holy hill is to imply the temple.³⁰ This very verb “sojourn” (גור), rendered παροικέω in the LXX [14:1], is used throughout the Old Testament to speak of the one who dwells as an alien/Gentile in the midst of Israel. Yet here it is used of Israelites. And the New Testament uses the root παροικ- to speak not only of Old Testament geographic exile (Acts 7:6, 29; 13:17) but also of believers’ present state of Christian “exile” (Eph 2:19; 1 Pet 1:17; 2:11). Even for God’s own people, then, in both Old Testament and New, to pass into Yahweh’s tent is to glimpse—as a foreigner, as it were—one’s true home. We are restored.

Verse 1 is asking: Who enjoys true fellowship with God under his covenant blessings? Who is on a path to enjoy Eden restored? Who will receive God’s promised inheritance? Who will be included in that final vision of which the physical temple is an echo, a glimpse, a shadow?

2.4. Take a Closer Look at Verses 2–5

A next step of simple observation is to clarify the nature of the traits outlined in the rest of the psalm.

While on first reading this may sound like an arid list of virtues to execute, these verses in fact focus on the inner state of the heart.³¹ Inner health and outer action are of course often closely linked in the Bible (Isa 29:13; Matt 12:33–35; Jas 1:26–27). But it is easy and natural to the flesh to exhort external moral conformity in a way that leaves the heart behind. The reason this is so natural to us is that it allows us to pacify the conscience through outer conformity while hanging on to cherished secret idols. Mindful of Jesus’s words about the inside of the cup and whitewashed tombs (Matt 23:27), we do well to explain that this psalm has in view a holistic integrity, inside and out, and not bare externalized action.

The psalm speaks of one who is truthful “in his heart” (v. 2); that is, one whose fundamental impulse is one of honesty, transparency, forthrightness. The animating center of personhood (the “heart”) emits truthfulness, consistency, integrity. We read of one “in whose eyes a vile person is despised” (v. 4). They have a certain moral internal compass or perspective. This is someone who “honors those who fear the LORD” (v. 5)—that is, this person lives in reverent devotion to the Lord, inside and out.

Not all the characteristics of verses 2–5 are clearly internal, but enough of them get at the heart to correct a view of these characteristics that would be exclusively behavior-oriented. When we consider the portrayal of this psalm in light of its references to the “heart,” what the “eyes” perceive, and the deliberate honoring of others, we begin to see that this person is functioning out of inner wholeness and health. The point here is that this psalm is not encouraging us to crowbar our behavior into forced alignment with a norm.

It should also be noted that “blameless” in both Old Testament and New refers not to sinless perfection but a pattern of conduct beyond the reach of public reproach. The Hebrew word used here in verse 2 (תמים) refers to wholeness, soundness, consistent internal harmony. Likewise, “does what is right” (פועל צדק; LXX ἐργαζόμενος δικαιοσύνην [14:2]) or “working righteousness” could promptly be put in the service of a strict Lutheranizing and interpreted as a perfection that no one can attain. But not only does this do violence to the sense of the text here in this psalm, we could also note that Acts

³⁰ Timothy Wardle, *The Jerusalem Temple and Early Christian Identity*, WUNT 2/291 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 16–18; G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 108.

³¹ Kidner, *Psalms 1–72*, 80–81.

10:35 uses the very same wording (ἐργαζόμενος δικαιοσύνην) to speak of healthy and upright walking with God.

Another angle readers and preachers might take to handle Psalm 15 in a healthy way is to zero in on the theme of one's *words* throughout verses 2–5. This is a man who “speaks truth” (v. 2), “does not slander with his tongue” (v. 3), “nor takes up a reproach against his friend” (v. 3), and “swears to his own hurt” (v. 4). Indeed, the most pervasive concern of the virtues of this psalm is uprightness of the tongue. This motif of words could be fruitfully tied in to the New Testament's strong teaching on the tongue as the truest indicator of the state of one's heart. While we must allow room for the reality of hypocrisy and deceit, the tongue is a truer gauge of inner health than any other single factor. One remembers, for example, the way Jesus concludes his teaching on a tree being known by its fruit in Luke 6. We tend to read this tree/fruit metaphor as a statement about our deeds, practically speaking; just as a healthy tree produces healthy fruit, so a healthy heart produces healthy deeds. Yet notice what Jesus actually says: “For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit, for each tree is known by its own fruit. For figs are not gathered from thornbushes, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, *for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks*” (Luke 6:43–45). The “good fruit” and “good treasure” that comes from a “good person” is defined *in terms of the tongue*.

Or consider the letter of James. From one perspective this epistle is a collection of wisdom sayings loosely strung together. Yet from another perspective the letter addresses our words, in one form or another, right through the letter.

The point I'm making is that the tongue and our use of words is a major biblical theme into which Psalm 15 could be plugged. The Bible begins with God speaking the universe into existence in Genesis 1–2 and ends with Revelation 22 bringing closure to the apostolic message by cementing “the words of the prophecy of this book” (v. 18). And the high point in between these two redemptive historical bookends is Jesus Christ.³² For as with all major themes in biblical theology, so with words, Jesus is the integrating culmination of the theme—he is *the Word* (John 1:1)—he is *what God has to say* (Heb 1:1–2)—and he is the only one who “committed no sin, *neither was deceit found in his mouth*” (1 Pet 2:22).³³

Another strategy for identifying intracanonial and intertextual connections is keeping the *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* within reach on your shelf.³⁴ When teaching or preaching an Old Testament text it is worthwhile flipping to the Scripture index in the back of this volume to see where that Old Testament text is connected to New Testament texts according to the contributors to this volume. Doing this with Psalm 15 we discover a finer point of application to what has just been said about the tongue above. Revelation 14 picks up the theme of blamelessness with one's mouth with respect to the redeemed of God that rings so clearly in Psalm 15 (along with Isa 53:9 and Zeph 3:13): “and in their mouths no lie was found, for they are blameless [ἄμωμοι]” (Rev 14:5).³⁵ Thus one direction to go in personal study or in teaching/preaching would be to reflect at some length

³² With a good dose of historical theology integrated into his biblical theological treatment of words see Peter Adam, *Hearing God's Words: Exploring Biblical Spirituality*, NSBT 16 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004).

³³ I am grateful to Brian Tabb for drawing this point to my attention.

³⁴ G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, eds., *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007).

³⁵ G. K. Beale and Sean McDonough, “Revelation,” in *ibid.*, 1132.

on the whole-Bible theme of blamelessness or integrity of speech. This could be fruitfully explored starting in Eden, where the crafty words of the serpent lead Adam and Eve to distrust the words of God, and then traced briefly through the Old Testament, culminating in Jesus, the true and final Word of God. He never spoke untruly (1 Pet 2:22–23) and yet offered up himself on behalf of all those who have (1 Pet 2:24)—so long as they humble themselves down into speaking truly about this very inability to speak truly (Rom 10:9). This could then be traced through the New Testament and conclude in Revelation 14:5 and then the final vision of that book, based on the “trustworthy and true” words of God himself in preparing a final place for his people (Rev 21:5; 22:6).

2.5. Say What Would Never Be Said in a Jewish Synagogue about Psalm 15

Finally, after wrestling with the text with a narrow-angle lens, it is time to zoom out. We have already begun to move in this direction in the last paragraph or two in the above section. After standing under the full weight of this psalm’s summons to the redeemed, we remember that the irreducible core of the Bible and the terminus of all of human history is Jesus Christ and his work of redemption—*his* work of redemption. Paul said the OT was written so that “we might have hope” (Rom 15:4) and to make us “wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim 3:15). As necessary as sound doctrine is, there is something deeper that makes a reading or a sermon truly Christian: there is a certain tone, an aroma, an oxygenating reality. This is a subjective assertion so I proceed with caution. But it is vital to Christian preaching. What makes a reading of a text fundamentally Christian is that it gives hope,³⁶ taking our eyes off of the limits of our own resources and lifting them to look upon the saving work of the Triune God. Such a hermeneutical instinct is not wishful thinking but rather is mandated by Christ himself (John 1:45; 5:39–46; Luke 24:25–27, 44–47). Truly Christian handling of the Bible, even a text such as Psalm 15, lifts, helps, strengthens. There is a certain buoyancy that is given to hearers of gospel preaching.

A Christian handling of Scripture sets itself off from every other handling of Scripture by focusing fundamentally on what has been done on our behalf in Christ. This does not mean we downplay the high moral summons of the text but that we place such summons in a framework of redemption.³⁷ A faithful treatment of Psalm 15 must make plain that there is only one person who ever really enjoyed the blessings of verse 1, and only one person who ever really walked the walk of verses 2 through 5. In other words, an understanding of a text such as Psalm 15 that would be palatable in a Jewish synagogue is not a Christian understanding.³⁸

As we wrestle with an Old Testament text in this way, however, we must work hard not to be trite or predictable. The connections we draw between the text and Christ must not be facile or flimsy or merely based on word-associations. In Psalm 15, for example, noticing the word “hill” in verse 1 should not prompt us to associate this with the “hill” of Calvary on which Christ died, for such an association is merely verbal and lacks any historical grounding; it does not plot onto a coherent and meaningful trajectory. Such a reading would therefore be fairly criticized as allegorical. Instead we should proceed

³⁶ An emphasis in Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005).

³⁷ Although we are dealing directly with an Old Testament text in this essay, these comments apply equally to the New Testament, which can be handled in just as Christless a way as the Old Testament.

³⁸ Cf. Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture: The Application of Biblical Theology to Expository Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 125–27.

in a textually responsible and convincing way, really working at the text and using our original language resources as deeply as we are able. Explore with a concordance; do some thoughtful searches in whatever digital software is available to you. Here are a few discoveries that arise to the surface with a text like Psalm 15, discoveries that could be leveraged in a context-specific way wherever we find ourselves reading or teaching the text.

Verse 1 speaks of sojourning in God’s tent, which as we have seen refers to the temple. Verse 1 also speaks of dwelling on God’s holy hill. Strikingly, this exact phrase is used earlier in the Psalter in what is according to the NT one of the most christologically charged psalms, Psalm 2. In Psalm 2:6 Yahweh says: “As for me, I have set my king on Zion, my *holy hill*” (הַר־קֹדֶשׁ־יְשׁוּעָה). In Psalm 2, though, God is not asking who will dwell on this holy mountain. He is declaring whom he has himself set there—a man the New Testament (especially Hebrews) identifies as Jesus Christ (Heb 1:5; 5:5).³⁹

Who shall dwell on God’s holy hill? Jesus. And, in him, both representatively (by imputation) and then actually (by his Spirit), believers.⁴⁰ That is, Jesus did Psalm 15 in our place, as the last Adam, the fully true human, the supreme keeper of the covenant. United to him, that record becomes reckoned ours. But it is also true that by virtue of our union with him and thus indwelt by his Spirit we now, in our stumbling ways yet truly, begin to reflect the virtue outlined in Psalm 15.

It is not a question, then, of whether *Christ* is the one who does Psalm 15, or whether *we* are; the answer is both, and in that order. To unpack that a bit more: We have said that to dwell on God’s holy mountain means to abide in the temple, remembering that throughout the Bible the mountain holds special significance as the place of God’s dwelling, first on Mount Sinai and then on Mount Zion, the latter of which is the site of eschatological fulfillment (Isa 2:2; Mic 4:1). But Jesus did not simply come to the temple (Mal 3:1); he came as the temple (John 1:14; 2:19–22). Jesus dwells on God’s holy hill not by entering a humanly-made building to meet with God but by entering a divinely-made body to meet with us. He “tabernacled” among us (John 1:14). He *is* what the temple was meant to do—restore man to God, rejoin earth to heaven, bring the “walking together in the cool of the day” of Eden back to sinful humanity once more.

But the New Testament then goes on to explain that believers are themselves part of that temple, of which Christ is the cornerstone (Eph 2:19–22; 1 Pet 2:4–8). It is not, then, simply that we now go to Jesus the temple rather than a temple building. United to him, we are ourselves part of the temple. We are, with him, the sacred intersection of heaven and earth, sacred and profane, a temple made up not of stones but of redeemed souls. The point in all this is that one cannot read Psalm 15:1 mindful of the whole Bible without seeing that the question about who shall sojourn in God’s tent and dwell on his holy hill is using temple language and categories that are only answered in Jesus and those in him—in an inaugurated way through his first coming and in a consummated way through his second coming in

³⁹ We remember here that when the apostles quote the OT they have in mind a broader OT context than the explicitly quoted portion of text; what is quoted is often the tip of the iceberg, and its use in the NT cannot be fully understood apart from consulting the broader OT context. The classic argument for this is C. H. Dodd, *According to the Scriptures: The Substructure of New Testament Theology* (London: Nisbet, 1961); more recently Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*.

⁴⁰ Peter Bolt usefully distinguishes between “inclusive” and “exclusive” place-taking by Jesus—there is an exclusive substitution for us that Jesus does in our place so that we need not, but there is also a derivative inclusive placetaking in which we follow him (Peter G. Bolt, *The Cross from a Distance: Atonement in Mark’s Gospel*, NSBT 18 [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004], 70, 132, 141).

which no more temple is needed as all that the temple meant to do will have been achieved in him and his people (Rev. 21:22).

Verse 5 merits particular attention in reflecting on how to handle Psalm 15 in a christocentric way. The conclusion to the psalm is: “He who does these things shall never be moved.” The verb “be moved” (מוֹט) here is the same verb (מוֹט) in the same form (niph'al) as “be shaken” in the very next psalm, at Psalm 16:8. “I have set the LORD always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall *not be shaken* [בְּלִי-אֶמוּנָה].” This is the very text Peter quotes in Acts 2 when arguing for Christ’s resurrection (Acts 2:24–28). A careful reading of what Peter does with Psalm 16 in Acts 2:24–33 indicates that Peter views Christ as the ultimate one of Psalm 16 who is “not shaken.” Right there in the immediate context of Psalm 15, then, is apostolic sanction to associate the notion of not being moved or shaken with the work of Christ. We should not read Psalm 16 into Psalm 15 (though recent scholarship on the Psalms is helping us to see the unity and coherence to the Psalter as a whole⁴¹). But we remember that the apostles coach us in reading the Old Testament not only by the specific texts they cite but by giving us parameters and a trajectory by which to interpret any text in the Old Testament. Taking our cues from how the apostles themselves understood the notion of being shaken in Psalm 16, we are encouraged to connect the notion of not being shaken in Psalm 15 ultimately with Christ.

The conclusion to which a Christian reading of Psalm 15 must finally bring us is therefore: Jesus did Psalm 15. He enacted it, recapitulated it, walked it out. And in that glad knowledge we the redeemed, in union with the true temple, are freed from the burden of doing Psalm 15 perfectly and at the very same time summoned into the life of light-filled joy and integrity portrayed in verses 2–5. United to and walking with Jesus, the friend of sinners, we will begin to manifest the humaneness of this psalm. So doing, we will never be moved.

3. Conclusion

Is Psalm 15 Christ-centered? No. The Bible is Christ-centered, and Psalm 15 plots onto a unified whole-Bible trajectory that culminates in Christ.

Various sub-themes surface in this psalm that could be meaningfully plotted onto a whole-Bible trajectory, including our use of the tongue, the heart, God’s mountain, or the temple.⁴² The purpose of this brief article is not to eclipse other strategies for approaching Psalm 15 in a whole-Bible way but to offer one way to handle this text in our reading of it and especially in teaching and preaching it. Even the approach offered here is only a suggestive outline. The Bible is endlessly rich and there would be multiple valid ways to handle the text or to fill out this approach, not least due to the diverse contexts in which it will be read and preached. But it is good to keep thinking together as the church, in these days

⁴¹ E.g., Gordon Wenham, *The Psalter Reclaimed: Praying and Praising with the Psalms* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013).

⁴² Though we do not have space to explore this at length, another approach to reading Psalm 15 in a whole-Bible way would be to consider the five major themes of the Bible that Dumbrell identifies: new Jerusalem, new temple, new Israel, new covenant, and new creation. Many and perhaps all of these five themes pass through Psalm 15 and could provide fruitful ways to plug Psalm 15 into the message of the whole Bible (William J. Dumbrell, *The End of the Beginning: Revelation 21–22 and the Old Testament* [Grand Rapids: Lancer, 1985]). The question could be asked of Charles H. H. Scobie’s four macro themes of God’s order, God’s servant, God’s people, and God’s way that he explores in one of the few truly comprehensive biblical theologies attempted in our time, *The Ways of Our God: An Approach to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

of renewed interest in biblical theology and gospel-rich hermeneutics, about how to read the Bible as Jesus would have us, including texts that may seem to resist such treatment.

Belting Out the Blues as Believers: The Importance of Singing Lament

— Robert S. Smith —

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Abstract: Many churches seem to have lost the art of singing lament. This article urges a recovery of this forgotten practice, firstly, by demonstrating from within the Psalter itself the importance of *singing* the psalms (including the laments) and setting them to music; secondly, by exploring some of the obstacles to singing in times of distress; thirdly, by examining the way in which lament enables a singing of pain and sorrow; fourthly, by investigating what can be known of the manifold powers of music and song (for proclaiming and recalling God’s word and consoling and uniting God’s people); and, finally, by articulating something of the important relationship between lament and praise.

The contemporary church, by and large, is neither adept nor comfortable with singing lament.¹ One reason for this is that many churches have long ago stopped singing the Psalter. There are exceptions, of course.² There are also numerous contemporary songs based on various biblical psalms or parts thereof. But, on closer examination, most of these are drawn from psalms of praise or thanksgiving, not psalms of lament. Furthermore, a decrease in psalm singing has led not simply to a lack of acquaintance with sung lament but to a loss of appetite for it. The chief reason for this, as Bonhoeffer once observed, is that when “read only occasionally, these prayers are too overwhelming in design and power and tend to turn us back to more palatable fare.”³ Added to this, there are very few contemporary congregational songs of lament. Again, there are exceptions (the Redmans’ “Blessed be Your Name” or Stuart Townend’s “How Long” come to mind), but they really are exceptions. This is in contrast to the balance of the Psalter, where 67 of the 150 psalms are typically categorised as laments— if not in whole, then in part. Finally, the neglect of many traditional “lament hymns” (e.g., “Abide with

¹ This article is a developed version of my essay “Singing Lament,” in *Finding Lost Words: The Church’s Right to Lament*, ed. K. Barker and G. G. Harper (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2017), ch. 15.

² Although even “in churches that maintain a Daily Office less psalmody is set than used to be the case, and the ancient tradition of systematically reciting the whole psalter in a regular cycle is now very rare.” A. G. Shead and A. J. Cameron “Singing with the Messiah in a Foreign Land,” in *Stirred by a Noble Theme: The Book of Psalms in the Life of the Church*, ed. A. G. Shead (Apollon: Nottingham, 2013), 164.

³ D. Bonhoeffer, *Psalms: The Prayerbook of the Bible* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1974), 25.

Me” and “Be Still My Soul”) has meant that the congregational resources for sung lament are negligible indeed. Not surprisingly, this “absence of lament in our life together has reduced to a dearth the speakers of its language.”⁴

There are also a number of cultural and theological factors at play. Doubtless, the “autonomous agent, who in self-sufficiency excels in all the gadgetry of the ‘Electronic Revolution,’ is reluctant to see him or herself as ‘despairing in absolute need.’”⁵ More significantly, a marked tendency towards an overly realized eschatology, fed by the lingering lure of the prosperity gospel, is hardly conducive to personal and emotional honesty, particularly in seasons of distress. The theology-praxis street also runs in both directions: just as poor theology creates anemic and imbalanced songs, so the singing of defective songs reinforces poor theology and further entrenches bad practice. Carl Trueman is therefore right: “A diet of unremittingly jolly choruses and hymns inevitably creates an unrealistic horizon of expectation which sees the normative Christian life as one long triumphalist street party — a theologically incorrect and a pastorally disastrous scenario in a world of broken individuals.”⁶

In light of this situation, my aim in this article is to argue for a recovery of the practice of singing lament. By this I don’t just mean reviving the practice of singing the biblical Psalter (although this would certainly help). I also mean finding (and perhaps writing) more hymns and songs that do what the lament psalms do—that is, help us belt out the blues as believers as we wait for the coming of Christ and the consummation of his kingdom.

I will make my case in five steps: firstly, by demonstrating from the Psalter itself the importance of *singing* the psalms (including the laments) and setting them to music; secondly, by exploring some of the obstacles to singing in times of distress; thirdly, by examining the way in which lament enables a singing of pain and sorrow—even singing about not being able to sing; fourthly, by investigating what can be known of the manifold powers of music and song; and, finally, by articulating something of the relationship between lament and praise.

1. Instructions Concerning the Singing of the Psalms

1.1. Were the Psalms Intended to Be Sung?

A careful reading of the Psalter reveals that a large number of the psalms were intended, by their authors, to be sung. This is clear, firstly, from the content of those psalms in which we find exhortations to sing (e.g., Pss 9:11; 30:4; 68:4) or from calls to join the psalmist in singing the Lord’s praise (e.g., Pss 34:3; 95:1–2; 118:24). It is also apparent from the historical information contained in the titles of a number of psalms. Psalm 7, for example, bears the title: “A shiggaion of David, which he sang to the Lord concerning Cush, a Benjamite.” The title of Psalm 18 is even more detailed: “For the director of music. Of David the servant of the Lord. He sang to the Lord the words of this song when the Lord delivered him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul.”

⁴ P. Bradbury, *Sowing in Tears: How to Lament in a Church of Praise* (Cambridge: Grove, 2007), 11.

⁵ B. K. Waltke, J. M. Houston and E. Moore, *The Psalms as Christian Lament: A Historical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 2.

⁶ C. R. Trueman, “What Can Miserable Christians Sing?” in *The Wages of Spin: Critical Writings on Historical and Contemporary Evangelicalism* (Christian Focus: 2004), 160.

In addition to this, if not from the point of composition, certainly by the time of the Psalter's compilation, a plethora of musical designations and liturgical directions are embedded in the psalm titles. For example, fifty-eight bear the description מְזִמֹּר (LXX: ψαλμός), meaning something like a lyric ode set to music and usually translated “psalm.” Fifty-four contain the address לְמַנְצֵחַ (LXX: εἰς τὸ τέλος), meaning “to the choirmaster” (ESV) or “to the director of music” (NIV).⁷ Twenty-nine employ the Hebrew designation שִׁיר (LXX: ᾠδή), meaning a song. Six psalms (Pss 16, 56–60) are nominated as a מְכַתֵּם (LXX: στήλογραφία), which appears to mean some kind of musical reflection or supplication. Psalm 7 (along with Habakkuk 3) is described as a שִׁירֵי זִמְרָה (LXX: ψαλμός), which also appears to be a musical or liturgical term, possibly calling for “an animated musical beat.”⁸ Psalm 145 has the designation תְּהִלָּה (LXX: ᾠδὴ), meaning a “song of praise (ESV) or “psalm of praise” (NIV) or “hymn” (HCSB).⁹

1.2. Were the Psalms Intended to Be Accompanied?

Building on these descriptors, a range of titles give specific directions regarding the use of musical instruments; notably, the נְחִילֹת or “flutes” (e.g., Ps 5) and the נְגִינָה or “stringed instruments” (e.g., Pss 4; 6; 54; 55; 61; 67; 76). Others refer to the employment of a particular tune (e.g., Pss 6; 8; 9; 12; 22; 45; 46; 53; 56; 57; 60; 62; 81; 84; 88). Additional instructions such as “According to Mahalath” (Pss 50; 88), “According to Sheminith” (Pss 6; 12), “According to Gittith” (Pss 8; 11; 84) and “According to Alamoth” (Ps 46) all seem to refer to “musical terms, possibly indicating melodic or rhythmic formulae which should be used.”¹⁰ References to various musical instruments—such as harps, lyres, tambourines, pipes, trumpets and cymbals—are also to be found within the body of a large number of psalms (e.g., Pss 33:2; 43:4; 49:4; 57:8; 68:25; 71:22; 81:2; 92:3; 98:5–6; 108:2; 137:2; 144:9; 147:7; 149:3; 150:3–5).

All of these indications simply reinforce the picture presented by the writers of Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah; that music played a major part in Israel's temple worship in both pre- and post-exilic times (e.g., 1 Chr 6:31–48; 15:16–28; 25:1–8; 2 Chr 5:11b–13; 7:6; 29:26; Ezra 3:10; Neh 12:35, 41, 46). As far as performance was concerned, this seems to have been entrusted mainly to the Levites who not only sang and led as a choir but also played the instruments (e.g., 1 Chr 16:4–42).¹¹ As far as congregational participation was concerned, this involved not only the periodic interjection of acclamations such as “Amen!,” “Hallelujah!,” and “Glory!,” but also the widespread communal singing of both praise (e.g., Pss 32:11; 33:1–3; 34:4) and lament (e.g., Pss 44:9–14; 60:1; 74:1–2).¹²

⁷ While the meaning of this term is disputed and has been variously translated (e.g., the LXX takes it to mean “to the end”), D. Kidner's verdict is difficult to gainsay: “If economy of a hypothesis is its strength, the familiar translation has little to fear from its alternatives” (*Psalms 1–72*, TOTC [Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1973], 40).

⁸ N. deClaissé-Walford, R.A. Jacobson and B. LaNeel Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, NICOT (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 2014), 111n6.

⁹ *Tehillim* is also the name given to the entire book in Hebrew.

¹⁰ D. P. Hustad, “The Psalms as Worship Expressions: Personal and Congregational,” *Review & Expositor* 81 (1984), 407.

¹¹ J. A. Smith, “Which Psalms Were Sung in the Temple?” *Music & Letters* 71 (1990), 167.

¹² Pace Smith, “Which Psalms Were Sung in the Temple?” See further A. P. Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory: Biblical Worship from the Garden to the New Creation* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2006), 258–59.

1.3. Which of the Psalms Were Sung in the Temple?

Although it is difficult to determine exactly how many of the psalms were used in temple worship, the historical books of the Old Testament show various psalms being employed at key junctures in pre-exilic Israelite history. For example, David's song of deliverance in 2 Samuel 22:2–51 is virtually the same as Psalm 18, 1 Chronicles 16:8–36 contains Psalms 105:1–15, 96:1–13 and 106:47–48, and Psalm 132:8–10 appears in 2 Chronicles 6:41–42.¹³ As far as the post-exilic period is concerned, evidence from the Mishnah, Tosefta and Talmuds confirms that many “were employed – wholly or in part – at annual festivals, on days of special distinction, at the additional sacrifices on Sabbaths, New Moon days and certain festivals, and as proper psalms for the days of the week.”¹⁴ These latter sources specifically nominate only fourteen psalms out of the entire Psalter (Pss 24; 30; 48; 81; 82; 92–94; 113–118). This, however, is hardly grounds to conclude that they were the only ones sung, for a much larger number of psalms contain references to singing in the context of temple worship (e.g., Pss 7; 9; 18; 27; 30; 33; 47; 49; 57; 61; 66; 68; 71; 81; 87; 89; 92; 95; 96; 98; 105; 108; 118; 135; 137; 138; 149). Such references strongly suggest that “the psalms in which they are found were themselves sung in the Temple.”¹⁵

What is of particular interest, for our purposes, is that out of the lists of psalms above, thirteen are generally classified as laments (Pss 7; 9; 18; 27; 30; 57; 61; 71; 82; 89; 94; 115; 137). In other words, it is not only praise or thanksgiving psalms that were sung communally but the lament psalms also.¹⁶ In fact, when the evidence of the preceding sections is brought to bear, a strong case can be made for concluding forty-three of the lament psalms found in the Psalter “are likely to have been sung in the Temple.”¹⁷ Given the plethora of musical descriptions, directions and instructions that we've identified, this is not really surprising.

In light of this evidence, the Psalter is rightly regarded as the “hymnbook” of the Second Temple and, no doubt, contains the First Temple's “hymnbook” as well.

¹³ For a more detailed treatment of the Old Testament material, both pre- and post-exilic, see G. J. Wenham, *Psalms as Torah: Reading Biblical Song Ethically* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 11–19.

¹⁴ Smith, “Which Psalms Were Sung in the Temple?” 167–68.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 170.

¹⁶ That lament was sung communally is also confirmed by *The Mishnah*. Moed Katan 3:9 says: “What is meant by ‘Sing lamentations’? When one recites and all of the others respond after her, as it is said, ‘Teach your daughters wailing and a woman her fellow a lamentation’ (Jeremiah 9:19).” Of course, some forty-two of the lament psalms may legitimately be classified as ‘individual laments’. This, however, does not mean that they weren't (or can't be) sung communally. Not only are communal tragedies experienced individually, but often a communal lament is put into the mouth of an individual. Furthermore, often the experience of an individual (particularly if that individual is the king) is, in some sense, the experience of the community.

¹⁷ Smith, “Which Psalms Were Sung in the Temple?” 173. By way of contrast, post-Christian Jewish liturgies favour the more “positive” psalms. Consequently, the laments do not play a dominant role in contemporary synagogue worship. See W.L. Holladay, *The Psalms through Three Thousand Years: Prayerbook of a Cloud of Witnesses* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 140ff.

2. Reasons Why Singing Can Seem Impossible

2.1. The Problem of “Distracting Emotions”

The Psalms, of course, do much more than simply provide us with information about how they were intended to be (or were in fact) used. In the process of unveiling the purposes of God through the historical progression of Israelite kingship, one of the chief aims of the Psalter is to teach God’s people about the trials and triumphs of the life of faith, and how to respond appropriately as they journey with the Messiah from suffering to glory, from lament to praise.¹⁸ Indeed, because the Psalms cover the whole gamut of human emotions, while at the same time giving us divinely inspired words with which to praise and pray to God, “the Holy Spirit gives us great encouragement and freedom to express all that we are thinking and feeling, whether those thoughts and feelings are about ourselves, others or even God.”¹⁹ For this reason, John Calvin had good reason to write:

I have been accustomed to call this book, I think not inappropriately, “An Anatomy of all the Parts of the Soul;” for there is not an emotion of which any one can be conscious that is not here represented as in a mirror. Or rather, the Holy Spirit has here drawn to the life all the griefs, sorrows, fears, doubts, hopes, cares, perplexities, in short, all the distracting emotions with which the minds of men are wont to be agitated.²⁰

Calvin’s list of “distracting emotions” clearly indicates that the lament psalms were uppermost in his mind as he penned these oft-quoted words. For the lament psalms reveal the manifold reasons why God’s children can feel agitated or aggrieved or (to use Brueggemann’s evocative terms) become “dislocated” and “disoriented.”²¹ What’s more, in such a place of dislocation and disorientation, singing praise can be (or at least feel) either impossible or inappropriate.

2.2 Dislocation: Psalms 42–43

Two psalms illustrate this. The first is Psalms 42–43, which are best treated as a single psalm.²² At the very heart of the psalmist’s lament is the fact that he cannot, for reasons that become clear as the psalm unfolds, “go to the house of God under the protection of the Mighty One with shouts of joy and

¹⁸ For helpful discussions of the purpose and shape of the Psalter and the structural significance of the kingship theme see A. E. Hill and J. H. Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 346–51; M. D. Futato, *Interpreting the Psalms: An Exegetical Handbook* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007), 57–116; J. Healy Hutchinson, “The Psalter as a Book,” in *Stirred by a Noble Theme: The Book of Psalms in the Life of the Church*, ed. A.G. Shead (Nottingham: Apollos, 2013, 23–45).

¹⁹ Futato, *Interpreting the Psalms*, 153.

²⁰ J. Calvin, “The Author’s Preface,” in *A Commentary on the Book of Psalms, Volume 1*, trans. J. Anderson, repr. ed. (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library), <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom08.vi.html>.

²¹ W. Brueggemann, *Praying the Psalms: Engaging Scripture and the Life of the Spirit* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007), 1–11.

²² The main reasons for this are as follows. (1) Psalm 43 has no title, which is uncharacteristic of Book II of the Psalter and therefore suggests connection. (2) A number of Hebrew manuscripts present them as a single psalm. (3) The identical question, “Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?,” is found in both 42:9 and 43:2. (4) They also share a common refrain (42:5; 11; 43:5). For an alternative interpretation, however, see deClaisse-Walford, Jacobson, LaNeel Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 404.

praise among the festive throng” (42:4). In short, he is lamenting the fact that he cannot praise. What then is his situation? He is evidently a long way from Jerusalem, for he is recalling the praises of the temple “from the land of the Jordan, the heights of Hermon—from Mount Mizar” (42:6). Furthermore, he appears to be the captive of “an unfaithful nation” (43:1)—oppressed by enemies (42:9), taunted by adversaries (42:10) and surrounded by men who are “deceitful and wicked” (43:1).²³

The psalmist’s deepest distress, however, lies in the fact that God appears to have “forgotten” (42:9) or “rejected” him (43:2). This is why he finds his enemies’ question—“Where is your God?” (42:3, 10)—so vexing. So as he beholds “the waterfall at the source of the Jordan near Paneas and the waters that dash headlong down the mountains round about ... he sees nothing but the mirrored image of the many afflictions which threaten to involve him in utter destruction.”²⁴ Hence his cry: “all your waves and breakers have swept over me” (42:7). Therefore, as much as he yearns to do so, he cannot sing the praises of Zion in such a place or in such a state. His only hope is that God will send forth his “light” and “truth” that they might lead him back to his “holy mountain” (43:3). Confidence that God will, in due course, bring this about is the ground of his threefold self-exhortation: “Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him” (42:5; 11; 43:5).

2.3. Disorientation: Psalm 137

Unlike Psalms 42–43, Psalm 137 has an identifiable *Sitz im Leben* or, at least, a clear historical point of reference: Israel’s experience of exile in Babylon. But whether it was written in exile or after having returned from exile is a matter of considerable debate. On the basis of the perfect tense verbs and the repeated adverb “there” in vv. 1–3, a number of scholars have argued that the psalm contains “the voice of exiles who have returned to live in the ruins of a Jerusalem not yet rebuilt.”²⁵ If this is correct, the psalm “reveals the sufferings and sentiments of people who perhaps experienced at first hand the grievous days of the conquest and destruction of Jerusalem in the years 587 BC, who shared the burden of the Babylonian captivity and after their return to their homeland now, at the sight of the city still lying in ruin, give vent with passionate intensity to the feelings lying dormant in their hearts.”²⁶ However, on the basis of historical-critical and text-critical indicators, Ahn has made a compelling case that the psalm cannot be post-exilic, but “is likely to have been composed after 587, but prior to the arrival of the 582 group.”²⁷

For our purposes, the question does not need to be settled. For regardless of precise provenance and date, Psalm 137 reveals the strong and painful emotions that were felt at the time of the exile itself. As Kidner writes, “Every line of it is alive with pain, whose intensity grows with each strophe to the appalling climax.”²⁸ The cause of this pain is twofold. Firstly, there is the memory of Zion (v. 1)—in

²³ It is for this reason that some have thought the setting of the psalm to be exilic. But it is more likely that this is the lament “of one cut off from his homeland while the royal cult still flourished.” P. C. Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, WBC 19 (Waco, TX: Word, 1983), 325.

²⁴ F. Delitzsch, *Psalms, Volume 2*, trans. J. Martin, repr. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 59–60.

²⁵ J. L. Mays, *Psalms*, Interp (Louisville: John Knox, 1994), 421. See also M. Dahood, *Psalms: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, vol. 3, Psalms 101–150, AB (New York: Doubleday, 1970), 269; L. C. Allen, *Psalms 101–150*, WBC 21 (Waco, TX: Word, 1983), 239.

²⁶ A. Weiser, *The Psalms: A Commentary* (London: SCM, 1959), 794.

²⁷ J. Ahn, “Psalm 137: Complex Communal Laments,” *JBL* 127 (2008), 274.

²⁸ D. Kidner, *Psalms 73–150*, TOTC (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1975), 459.

particular, the horrors of what had been done to it by the Babylonians (egged on by the Edomites) on “the day of Jerusalem” (vv. 7–8). The consequence of this painful memory is that Zion is no longer “a source of strength, as in Psalm 48, but a cause for tears.”²⁹ Secondly, there is the mocking demand of their captors and tormentors for “songs,” “songs of joy,” “one of the songs of Zion” (v. 3).³⁰ This immediately raises the question of v. 4: “How can we sing the song of the Lord while in a foreign land?” That is, given all that has happened both to Jerusalem and us, how can we possibly rejoice? The implied answer is that “we can’t!”³¹ The reason, suggests Brueggemann, is that “the songs of Zion are pornographic when they are sung among those who do not hope in Zion.”³² The lyres thus remain hung upon the willows (v. 2).

3. *Singing About Not Being Able to Sing*

3.1. The Song of Psalm 137

But that is not the end of the matter. Indeed Savran argues that v. 4 should be read not as a blanket refusal, but “as an preface to the response of vv. 5f (and vv. 7–9), saying essentially: ‘This is how we shall sing.’”³³ Even if this interpretation is questionable, vv. 5–6 clearly function as an oath of self-imprecation in the form of a personal “pledge song”³⁴—as is suggested by their chiasmic structure:

A If I forget you, O Jerusalem,

B let my right hand forget its skill!

B’ Let my tongue stick to the roof of my mouth,

A’ if I do not remember you, if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy!

The psalmist’s determination not to forget Jerusalem clearly includes not forgetting to sing of Jerusalem.³⁵ This is underscored by the references to “right hand” (v. 5) and “tongue” (v. 6)—the musician/singer’s tools of trade. To put it bluntly, should he ever forget to rejoice over Jerusalem, he

²⁹ G. Savran, “How Can We Sing a Song of the Lord?: The Strategy of Lament in Psalm 137,” *ZAW* 112 (2000), 45.

³⁰ It is obviously impossible to know what, if any particular, songs were in the minds of the “tormentors.” In fact, the request is indefinite (“one of the songs of Zion”). But in the minds of the author and those tormented the most likely candidates are so called “Zion songs,” i.e., Pss 48; 74; 87; 125; 126.

³¹ Savran, “How Can We Sing a Song of the Lord?” 49.

³² W. Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 75.

³³ Savran, “How Can We Sing a Song of the Lord?” 49.

³⁴ This is the one section of the psalm that is voiced in the singular, perhaps indicating that this is (or ought to be) the prayer of every individual Israelite exile.

³⁵ His focus upon Jerusalem has little to do with either nationalistic zeal or natural homesickness, but is almost entirely to do with “its sacramental role in God’s revealed purposes as reflection of the divine.” Loyalty to Jerusalem is thus a measure of his loyalty to Yahweh, and praise of Jerusalem represents praise of Yahweh. See Allen, *Psalms 101–150*, 242–243.

calls upon God to curse his ability to sing and play the harp.³⁶ The person who makes such a pledge can only make it in hope; the hope that Jerusalem's day will come again and the songs of Zion will once more be heard.

In fact, the psalmist's hope is so vivid that it leads him to reformulate his position on the possibility of singing. As Savran puts it: "Whereas Jerusalem was earlier recalled in mourning, and singing of Zion was considered an impossibility, the second person address indicates that Jerusalem is alive in the consciousness of the psalmist; it is this memory which animates the psalmist and allows him to keep functioning."³⁷ In short, because of his confidence in God and the ultimate triumph of his purposes, the psalmist is able to sing what Allen calls "a modified version of a song of Zion."³⁸

What, then, is this modified "song of Zion"? It is none other than Psalm 137 itself: a song about the inappropriateness of singing the songs of Zion in Babylon, and yet a song of Zion nonetheless. But it is more than that too. For it is a song that contains both a "pledge song," to sing of Jerusalem in hope of its restoration, as well as a "vengeance song" (vv. 8–9), in anticipation of the just judgment that will come upon Israel's enemies.³⁹ It is thus a song that expresses both faith in the present and hope for the future—albeit, even paradoxically, in the form of grief-stricken lament. And yet lament is vital to the nurturing of such hope, for just as "[h]ope that cannot lament denies the awful reality and the continuing power of death and sin,"⁴⁰ so lament that does not hope denies God's sovereign faithfulness. The practice of singing lament, then, is designed to awaken faith and inspire hope as God's people persevere through seasons of pain.

3.2. The Song of Psalms 42–43

Similar observations can be made regarding Psalms 42–43. Seven features mark it out as both a *song* of lament and a *song* of hope. Firstly, it is addressed לְמִנְצֵחַ; i.e., "to the choirmaster". Secondly, it is described as a מְשִׁכִּיל, which most likely means "an artistic or teaching song."⁴¹ Thirdly, it is the first of the psalms written by "the Sons of Korah," one of the levitical families who functioned as temple singers and musicians during the reigns of David and Solomon.⁴² Fourthly, as we've noted, it is a song about not being able to sing; or, at least, being prevented from singing "songs of praise" in "the house of God" (42:4). Fifthly, as we've also noted, it's a song of "trust" (יָחַל);⁴³ an expression of confidence that the psalmist will again be restored to worship in Zion. The basis for this hope is the Lord's commitment

³⁶ W. Brueggemann, and W. H. Bellinger Jr, *Psalms*, New Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge: CUP, 2014), 574.

³⁷ Savran, "How Can We Sing a Song of the Lord?" 50.

³⁸ Allen, *Psalms 101–150*, 241.

³⁹ Indeed, it is possible that the "highest joy" of which the psalmist speaks in v. 6 refers to the just retribution articulated in the "song" of vv. 7–9. See H. Lenowitz, "The Mock-*simchâ* in Psalm 137," in *Directions in Biblical Hebrew Poetry*, ed. E.R. Follis, JSOTSup 40. Sheffield: JSOT, 1987, 155–56.

⁴⁰ A. Verhey, *The Christian Art of Dying: Learning from Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 269.

⁴¹ deClaisse-Walford, Jacobson, LaNeel Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 399.

⁴² For a detailed exploration of the role and responsibilities of the Korahite clan, see M. Goulder, *The Psalms of the Sons of Korah*, JSOTSup 20 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1982).

⁴³ The Hebrew word יָחַל carries the ideas of "tarrying and confident expectation, trust.... This *yahal* hope is not a pacifying wish of the imagination which drowns out troubles, nor is it uncertain" (*TWOT* 373). In context, it could legitimately be translated as "trust" or "wait for."

to his people: hence the final words of the threefold refrain: “*my Saviour and my God*” (42:5; 11; 43:5). Sixthly, it is a paradoxical song. Calvin suggests that the author “represents himself as if he formed two opposing parties.”⁴⁴ Kidner (perhaps more helpfully) speaks of this as a “dialogue between the two aspects of the believer, who is at once a man of convictions and a creature of change.”⁴⁵ Finally, as a way of addressing this anthropological (and eschatological) tension, it is a song of both preservation and perseverance. This is clear from 42:8:

By day the LORD directs his love,
at night his song is with me—
a prayer to the God of my life.

Theologically, then, the song shows us the reality and necessity of both divine grace and human faith. The former is clear in that it is Yahweh who “directs” (*tzawah*) his “steadfast love” (*chesed*), sustaining the psalmist on his difficult journey.⁴⁶ The latter is clear in that by “praying to God by day and singing his praise at night he clings to the God who he imagines has forsaken him and chastises him.”⁴⁷ Here then is real faith in God; a faith that so grasps the promise of God that it sings God’s praise through the darkest night of the soul. It even celebrates his presence in the midst of the experience of his absence.⁴⁸ It is, thus, a faith that gives rise to hope: the hope that the psalmist “will yet praise him” (42:5; 11; 43:5).

But what is especially instructive is that such a song of hope takes the form of lament. This reveals something of the link between lament and praise (a link to which we will return) and the way in which the singing of grief leads to the strengthening of hope. It also shows how the articulation of hope frees the believer to genuinely grieve. As Verhey writes: “It is not just that we are not to mourn as those who have no hope. It is rather that hope mourns.”⁴⁹ The song of lament that genuinely grieves before God’s gracious throne powerfully exercises the muscles of hope: hope that our sovereign and merciful God will yet deliver us from evil and restore us to unhindered praise. It is, therefore, precisely the kind of song that God’s afflicted children must sing and sing again.

4. *The God-Given Powers of Music and Song*

As we established in the first section of this essay, a large number of psalms of all “types” “were intended to be *musical* worship responses.”⁵⁰ But why? What does music add? And what, in particular,

⁴⁴ 4–J. Calvin, *A Commentary on the Book of Psalms, Volume 2*, trans. J. Anderson, repr. ed. (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library), <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom09.viii.ii.html>.

⁴⁵ Kidner, *Psalms 1–72*, 166.

⁴⁶ As Mays puts it: “Pilgrimage, going to God, is not merely a human project; God must aid from the beginning. One comes to God with the help of God” (*Psalms*, 175).

⁴⁷ Weiser, *The Psalms*, 350.

⁴⁸ Along these lines, C. S. Lewis memorably depicts a true believer in God as one who “looks round upon a universe from which every trace of Him seems to have vanished, and asks why he has been forsaken, and still obeys” (*The Screwtape Letters*, repr. ed. (New York: HarperCollins, 2001, 40).

⁴⁹ Verhey, *The Christian Art of Dying*, 268.

⁵⁰ Hustad, “The Psalms as Worship Expressions,” 407.

is the advantage of *singing* lament rather than simply *speaking* it?⁵¹ Scripture answers these questions in several complementary ways (some more direct than others), and both historic Christian reflection and the human sciences provide further supporting insights. These answers and insights can be usefully gathered under the following headings: power for proclaiming, power for recalling, power for consoling and power for uniting.⁵²

4.1. Power for Proclaiming

In terms of the relationship between music, singing and proclamation, a number of Old Testament texts reveal a connection between music and the activity of prophecy. For example, in 1 Samuel 10:5, Saul is informed that as he approaches Gibeah he will meet “a procession of prophets coming down from the high place with lyres, timbrels, pipes and harps being played before them, and they will be prophesying.” He is then told that the Spirit of the Lord will come powerfully upon him and that he too will prophesy (v. 6). Similarly, in 2 Kings 3:11–19, when Elisha is called upon to prophesy, his response is “bring me a harpist.” Then, while the harpist was playing, “the hand of the Lord came on Elisha” (v. 15).

The clear import of these texts is that music was “one means of the hand (Heb. “hand, power”) of the Lord coming upon a person, whether to calm or control (as with Saul in 1 Sa. 16:16, 23).”⁵³ Reflecting on the “powers” thus divinely accorded to music, Luther remarked:

The Holy Ghost himself honors her as an instrument for his proper work when in his Holy Scriptures he asserts that through her his gifts were instilled in the prophets, namely, the inclination to all virtues, as can be seen in Elisha [II Kings 3:15]. On the

⁵¹ It has often been claimed that, in biblical times, speaking, reading and singing were not as clearly distinguishable as they are today. Foley, for example, argues that “the audible nature of all reading presumed rhythmic and melodic features that today would be more quickly classified as music rather than as speech. Public speaking, too, presumed a kind of chanting in cadence that fell some place between modern categories of speech and song” (E. Foley, *From Age to Age: How Christians Celebrated the Eucharist* [Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1991], 9). This may well have been the case, at least to some degree. And yet the line between speaking and singing is not merely cultural or subjective. As a number of neuroimaging studies have revealed, while the majority of sensorimotor processes for singing and speaking are the same, singing engages parts of the brain that speaking alone does not. See E. Özdemir, A. Norton and G. Schlaug, “Shared and distinct neural correlates of singing and speaking,” *Neuroimage* 33 (2006), 633; S. Brown, M. J. Martinez, and L. M. Parsons, “Music and Language Side by Side in the Brain: A PET Study of the Generation of Melodies and Sentences,” *European Journal of Neuroscience* 23 (2006), 2791–803.

⁵² In speaking of music’s “powers” it needs to be said that these are neither independent nor absolute. It is the word of God (special revelation) that directly and explicitly accomplishes God’s saving and sanctifying work. Music (as part of general revelation) can participate in this work only indirectly and implicitly. However, when music fulfils its true created function it acts as a witness to this word. In this sense it may be spoken of a “parabolic.” See F. Watson, “Theology and Music,” *SJT* 51 (1998), 462–463.

⁵³ D. J. Wiseman, *1 and 2 Kings*, TOTC (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993), 200. Although there is much that is unique about Old Testament prophecy, it is noteworthy that, in Ephesians 5:18–21, the apostle Paul similarly regards the singing of “psalms and hymns and spiritual songs” and “making music from your heart” (v. 19) as a means of being “filled with the Spirit” (v. 18). See T. G. Gombis, “Being the Fullness of God in Christ by the Spirit: Ephesians 5:18 in its Epistolary Setting,” *TynB* 53 (2002), 259–71.

other hand, she serves to cast out Satan, the instigator of all sins, as is shown in Saul, the king of Israel [I Samuel 16:23].⁵⁴

In addition to the association between music and the early prophetic tradition is David's appointment of "some of the sons of Asaph, Heman and Jeduthun for the ministry of prophesying, accompanied by harps, lyres and cymbals" (1 Chron 25:1). The nature of their prophetic ministry is amplified in v. 3 where we're told that they "prophesied, using the harp in thanking (*yadah*) and praising (*hallel*) the Lord."

Various reasons have been suggested as to why these singers are described as prophets and their praises as prophecy. Ross highlights the two most significant. First, as the canonical content of the Psalter reveals, the psalms written, collected and sanctioned by Asaph (et al) "were understood to be God's word to the people, that is, prophetic compositions."⁵⁵ Second, not only was the elevated poetic form of the psalms harmonious with the form of much divine prophecy, but "singing or rhythmic chanting was considered the most powerful form that prophecy could have and a form of prophecy itself."⁵⁶ In addition to this, it is clear from both Old and New Testaments that the concept of prophecy includes not only fore-telling (prediction) but also forth-telling (proclamation).⁵⁷ Prophecy, then, is an entirely appropriate rubric under which to gather all divinely inspired words, including praise and (as we shall argue below) lament.

Scripture provides no detailed analysis of the specific psychological or educational benefits of singing the Word of God. However, both the human sciences and human experience reveal that these are bound up with music's capacity to aid cognition and to express and evoke emotion. In terms of cognition, educationalists and therapists of various kinds have long been aware that "songs enhance cognitive processing by involving the brain in sequencing of information, short-term as well as long term memory storage, and motor learning as individuals respond to auditory cues."⁵⁸ In terms of emotional expression and evocation, this is more complex as both *intrinsic* factors (i.e., structural or melodic features of the music itself) and *extrinsic* factors (i.e., emotionally significant associations triggered by the music) are involved.⁵⁹ Whatever the precise blend of factors, the net result is that music is "one of the most emotionally potent media we know."⁶⁰

What is of especial interest at this point is the way the singing of meaningful words connects both the cognitive and affective dimensions of both singers and listeners. Key to this connection is the fact

⁵⁴ M. Luther, "Preface to Georg Rhau's Symphoniae iucundae, 1538," in *Luther's Works*, ed. J. Pelikan and H. T. Lehmann, trans. C. M. Jacobs, 55 vols. (Saint Louis: Concordia, 1955–1986), 53:323.

⁵⁵ Ross, *Recalling the Hope of Glory*, 257.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 257–58. To these reasons S. Japhet adds two more: The first is because "the appointment of the singers to their tasks was in accordance with God's command, delivered by the prophets, among whom the singers' fathers are included." The third is because their prophesying was not being ascribed to "isolated, unique phenomena, but to the permanent singing establishment, which is part of the cultic framework" (*I and II Chronicles: A Commentary*, OTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press), 1993, 440–41).

⁵⁷ W. C. Kaiser Jr, and M. Silva, *An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search for Meaning* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 139.

⁵⁸ D. B. Taylor, *Biomedical Foundations for Music as Therapy* (Saint Louis: MMB Music, 1997), 41.

⁵⁹ P. N. Juslin and J. A. Sloboda, "Psychological Perspectives on Music and Emotion," in *Music and Emotion: Theory and Research*, ed. P. N. Juslin, and J. A. Sloboda (Oxford: OUP, 2001), 91–96.

⁶⁰ J. S. Begbie, *Resounding Truth: Christian Wisdom in the World of Music* (London: SPCK, 2007), 294.

that the words of a song not only enable the communication and reception of the *cognitive content* of the song, but the singing of them facilitates the expression and evocation of the *emotional reality* of that content.⁶¹ This combination enables the words of the song to penetrate more deeply so that they “circulate through our system” in a way that they might not otherwise.⁶² Reflecting on this phenomenon, Luther again comments:

Thus it was not without reason that the fathers and prophets wanted nothing else to be associated as closely with the Word of God as music. Therefore, we have so many hymns and Psalms where message and music join to move the listener’s soul.... After all, the gift of language combined with the gift of song was only given to man to let him know that he should praise God with both word and music, namely, by proclaiming [God’s word] through music and by providing sweet melodies with words.⁶³

Such an understanding of the educational and emotional benefits of proclaiming the word of God in song is not confined to Old Testament. Paul’s instruction in Colossians 3:16 reveals that he shared this understanding.⁶⁴

The making of music and song, then, is one divinely appointed way of proclaiming the word of God. This is so even when the addressed directly to God and irrespective of whether it takes the form of adoration or praise, petition or lament. The flipside of this power to proclaim truth is the power to impart teaching and so to generate faith—vital keys to survival in times of deep distress.

4.2. Power for Recalling

Music and song not only enable God’s word to be proclaimed but his grace to be recalled. Once again, such recollection is not only a feature of the praise and thanksgiving psalms (e.g., Pss. 105:5; 143:5), but also a feature the laments (e.g., 42:6; 137:6). That music has the capacity to evoke memories is well recognised.⁶⁵ Both personal and corporate memories are embedded in music, so that often when the past is unrecoverable by other means, people can regain a sense of identity and hope by listening to or playing music. For the reasons given in the previous section, when the human voice is brought into the mix and truthful and meaningful words are articulated in song, the effect is even more powerful. The music, however, remains integral in this process. As Saliers writes: “The remembrance of the words is carried and prompted by the melody and sometimes the harmonic and rhythmic elements.”⁶⁶

⁶¹ R. S. Smith, “Music, Singing, and Emotions: Exploring the Connections,” *Them* 37 (2012), 469, <http://themelios.thegospelcoalition.org/article/music-singing-and-emotions-exploring-the-connections>.

⁶² J. Bell, *The Singing Thing: A Case for Congregational Song* (Chicago: GIA Publications, 2000), 57.

⁶³ Luther, “Preface to Georg Rhau’s *Symphoniae iucundae*,” 321, 323–24.

⁶⁴ Despite the fact that ψαλμός, ὕμνος and ᾠδή all appear, at various points, in the titles of the Psalms (in the LXX), it is unlikely that Paul uses all three terms to refer to the canonical Psalter. Given the flexibility of each of these terms in the New Testament, it is more likely that Paul’s expression covers the whole spectrum of Christian congregational songs, from the canonical psalms (at one end) to spontaneous songs (at the other). See R. S. Smith, “Psalms, Hymns and Spiritual Songs: What are They and Why Sing Them?” *CASE* 23 (2010), 26–29.

⁶⁵ An increasing number of psychological and neurological studies are seeking to better understand the connection. See, for example, C. Bergland, “Why Do the Songs from Your Past Evoke Such Vivid Memories?” *Psychology Today* (11 December, 2013), <http://tinyurl.com/hh2h5vc>, and P. Janata, “The Neural Architecture of Music-Evoked Autobiographical Memories,” *Cerebral Cortex* 19 (2009), 2579–594.

⁶⁶ D. E. Saliers, *Worship as Theology: Foretaste of Glory Divine* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 161.

This is one of the reasons why music and song played an important role in Israel's life of faith, particularly in times of distress. Singing of God's mercies toward the nation in days past—when (for example) they “groaned in their slavery and cried out” (Exod 2:23)—was a way of putting the present into perspective and also awakening hope for the future. In other words, the Israelites not only understood the connection between recollection and lament, but also the power of song to articulate grief in a way that ameliorates it. Accordingly, “Israel enacted and trusted liturgical practices that made the transformation of pain vivid, powerful, and credible. It did its singing and praying and praising in ways that shaped pain into hope, and grief into possibility.”⁶⁷ Chief amongst those liturgical practices was the singing of the psalms of lament.

Psalm 77 illustrates the point. Its title—“For the director of music. For Jeduthun. Of Asaph. A psalm”—tells us plainly that it is a song. It is also a song with a focus on remembering. This is clear from the repeated use of a series of related verbs—“remember” (זָכַר [x4]), “meditate” (שִׁיחַ [x3]), “ponder” (הִגֵּה [x1]), “consider” (חָשַׁב [x1]) and “seek” (דָּרַשׁ [x1]), all of which “indicate the energy the speaker is turning inward.”⁶⁸ But it is the structure or “journey” of the song that is of greatest interest. The first nine verses contain the lament of one who is in such distress that he can neither sleep nor speak (v. 4). At this point his memories only provoke his lamentation: “I remembered you, God, and I groaned; I meditated, and my spirit grew faint” (v. 3). In fact, remembrance of his “song (נְגִינָה) in the night” (v. 6),⁶⁹ forces him to articulate a series troubling doubts and painful questions (vv. 7–9).

But then, in v. 10, the psalm takes a dramatic turn. The psalmist decides to think back to “the years when the Most High stretched out his right hand” (v. 10); that is, to the Lord's deliverance of Israel at the time of the Exodus. So he vows in vv. 11–12:

I will remember (זָכַר) the deeds of the Lord;
 yes, I will remember (זָכַר) your miracles of long ago.
 I will ponder (הִגֵּה) all your works
 and meditate (שִׁיחַ) on all your mighty deeds.”

So what happens as a consequence? According to Brueggemann, “the psalm engages in concrete remembering which takes the mind off the hopelessness of self. The memory of hurt resolved contextualizes present hurt, as yet unresolved.”⁷⁰ Tate, however, doubts that the process of transformation and recontextualization is quite so complete. He suggests that the psalm leaves both speaker and reader waiting “for a new revealing of the unperceived steps of God through the great waters.”⁷¹ He has a point. The psalm certainly ends with only a historic reference to the Lord's leadership of Israel “by the hand of Moses and Aaron” (v. 20); no contemporary act of deliverance appears to have yet taken place. So, he concludes, the psalmist's recollection “does not bring an immediate end to doubt and waiting.”⁷²

⁶⁷ W. Brueggemann, *Israel's Praise: Doxology Against Idolatry and Ideology* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 136.

⁶⁸ M. E. Tate, *Psalm 51–100*, WBC 20 (Waco, TX: Word, 1990), 274.

⁶⁹ This, presumably, refers to happier days when he could sing the praises of Yahweh freely. See Kidner, *Psalms 73–150*, 278 and Delitzsch, *Psalms, Volume 2*, 351–52.

⁷⁰ Brueggemann, *Israel's Praise*, 138.

⁷¹ Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, 276.

⁷² *Ibid.*

This is both right and wrong. It is right in that “God moves on his own schedule and often the faithful must endure the anguish of waiting.”⁷³ But it is wrong in that the psalmist’s remembering directly addresses and resolves his doubt. In fact, by the end of the psalm, as Kidner notes, “the pervasive ‘I’ has disappeared, and the objective facts of the faith have captured all his attention and all of ours.”⁷⁴ Thus, the psalm does “what praise and confession are meant to do—represent the God of revelation as the reality and subject of truth in the face of all circumstances and contrary experience.”⁷⁵ In other words, despite his present affliction, the psalmist’s recollection of God’s redeeming grace in the past grants him a new perspective on the present and so awakens his hope for the future. This is the gift he offers to all who will sing his psalm. As Leslie writes:

The psalmist’s purpose is clear. Through this brilliant ending to his psalm he will say to worshipping Israel in its hour of deep dejection that the God of Israel’s ancient and glorious past is still leading His people through waters that threaten to engulf them and will still provide “shepherds” like unto Moses and Aaron.⁷⁶

In short, the process of lament has proved effective—not because it has removed the source of the psalmist’s distress, but because it has enabled a renewed trust the Lord in the midst of continuing trial. As Harrichand writes of the communal laments: “it is within the prayer of lament that Israel recalls its covenant relationship with God, which then gives rise to Israel’s hope.”⁷⁷

Furthermore, the musical form of the psalm is far from incidental in achieving this effect.⁷⁸ Not only are human memories and emotions profoundly intertwined, but music taps both the emotional and memory centres of the brain at once.⁷⁹ When divinely inspired truth (or what Wright calls “credo”)⁸⁰ is added to the mix and then articulated by being sung, the combination is indeed a potent one. For “[t]he ones who sing and recite can remember when it was not like it is now, and can hope for when it will again not be like it is now.”⁸¹

The practice of singing lament, then, is one divinely appointed way of recalling the grace of God in times past and so renewing trust in times present. This power to recall enables both the renewing of faith and the strengthening of hope.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Kidner, *Psalms 73–150*, 277.

⁷⁵ Mays, *Psalms*, 253.

⁷⁶ E. A. Leslie, *The Psalms: Translated and Interpreted in the Light of Hebrew Life and Worship* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1949), 240.

⁷⁷ J. J. S. Harrichand, “Recovering The Language of Lament for the Western Evangelical Church: A Survey of the Psalms of Lament and their Appropriation within Pastoral Theology,” *MJTM* 16 (2014–2015), 107.

⁷⁸ In fact, one recent neuropsychological study on those who have sustained brain injuries found that music was “more efficient at evoking autobiographical memories than verbal prompts.” A. Baird and S. Samson, “Music evoked autobiographical memory after severe acquired brain injury: Preliminary findings from a case series,” *Neuropsychological Rehabilitation: An International Journal* 24 (2014), 125.

⁷⁹ C. S. Pereiral, et al., “Music and Emotions in the Brain: Familiarity Matters,” *PLoS ONE* 6.11 (November 2011), <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3217963>.

⁸⁰ See G. E. Wright, *God Who Acts: Biblical Theology as Recital* (London: SCM, 1952).

⁸¹ Brueggemann, *Israel’s Praise*, 149.

4.3. Power for Consoling

As well as power to proclaim and recall, music and song have a pronounced and well-recognised ability to console.⁸² Research from a wide range of disciplines has demonstrated music's many therapeutic benefits in the areas of psychological, physiological, social, emotional and cognitive functioning.⁸³ What is of particular interest is the way music provides not only an outlet for expressing turmoil or grief but a means of processing sorrow and bewilderment.⁸⁴ This provision is seen most powerfully in the practice of singing therapy, where singing is used to assist those suffering trauma to release suppressed emotions and, by so doing, to help them "process the truth and reality behind their inner pain."⁸⁵ Aware of this power, Luther was unrestrained in his praise of music:

Next to the Word of God, music deserves the highest praise. She is a mistress and governess of those human emotions ... which control men or more often overwhelm them ... Whether you wish to comfort the sad, to subdue frivolity, to encourage the despairing, to humble the proud, to calm the passionate or to appease those full of hate ... what more effective means than music could you find.⁸⁶

Perhaps the earliest biblical instance of the consoling power of music is found in 1 Samuel 16. After the Lord afflicts Saul with an evil spirit (v. 15), his servants suggest he finds someone who is able to play the lyre. Their reasoning is as follows: "He will play when the evil spirit from God comes on you, and you will feel better" (v. 16). David is the man found for the task and, as they anticipated, whenever the "spirit" came upon Saul David played his lyre and not only would relief come to Saul, but "the evil spirit would leave him" (v. 23).⁸⁷

Not surprisingly, some have seen here "an early acknowledgment of the possibility of music therapy."⁸⁸ But not just any music. As Watson notes, "purely celebratory music would jar with the king's initial mood; it would not console, it would mock."⁸⁹ The only music that could have therapeutic impact would be "a music that acknowledges and encompasses the negatives of existence but nevertheless transforms them through the power of musical form and artistry, so that negativity gives way to

⁸² See J. Diamond, "The Therapeutic Power of Music," in *Handbook of Complementary and Alternative Therapies in Mental Health*, ed. S. Shannon (San Diego: Academic Press, 2002), 517–37.

⁸³ M. Boso, et al., write: "the musical experience – by reducing stress, and improving social relationships and wellbeing – is not only an important part of our own life, but could also play a role in the rehabilitation of a number of different neurological and psychiatric diseases" ("Neurophysiology and Neurobiology of the Musical Experience," *Functional Neurology*, 21.4 [2006], 190).

⁸⁴ See R. Bright, "Music Therapy in Grief Resolution," *Bulletin of the Menninger Clinic* 63 (1999), 481–98.

⁸⁵ Smith, "Music, Singing, and the Emotions," 469. This has repeatedly been shown to be the case with traumatized war veterans. See A. St John, "Iraq War Veteran Finds Healing in Singing," *KPBS* (January 2010), <http://www.kpbs.org/news/2010/jan/05/iraq-war-veteran-finds-singing-healing>.

⁸⁶ Luther, "Preface to Georg Rhau's *Symphoniae iucundae*," 323.

⁸⁷ Saul's affliction here appears to be a periodic depressive disturbance or inconsolable mood or, what R. P. Gordon calls "bouts of Kierkegaardian melancholia" (*1 and 2 Samuel: A Commentary*, Library of Biblical Interpretation (Exeter: Paternoster, 1986), 152).

⁸⁸ Hustad, "The Psalms as Worship Expressions," 408.

⁸⁹ Watson, "Theology and Music," 449.

consolation.”⁹⁰ This, in God’s kindness, is what happens to Saul. For as much as the Lord is the cause of Saul’s affliction, his gifts (of both music generally and David’s skill specifically) are also the source of his consolation.

Music’s power to console, however, deserves further probing. As we’ve already noted, “music connects with our emotions, expresses and evokes them, and makes them humanly liveable.”⁹¹ It does this not only by facilitating expressions of joy but also by aiding the expression of both difficult feelings and inchoate responses. This ability “to give structure to emotionally charged experiences is what makes music such a powerful aid to the process of mourning.”⁹² Jeremy Begbie calls this “representative concentration,”⁹³ explaining that “in music, emotionally significant bodily movements are embodied in a concentrated (musical) form, in such a way that the music can represent us and concentrate us emotionally as we are drawn into its life.”⁹⁴ In this way, music can “enable *a more concentrated emotional engagement with the object or objects with which we are dealing*.”⁹⁵

Sung lament is more powerful still. Being both instrumental and vocal, it draws on the therapeutic capacities of both music and singing, combing both “languages” (the cognitive and the affective) into one. While the dominant power ought to be located in the words that proclaim (particularly if it is God’s word that is being sung), the “music is by no means a superfluous addition to the words that might equally well convey consolation simply by being read. On the contrary, the music enacts the consolation of which the text speaks.”⁹⁶ Nor is it being “placed at the disposal of some purpose that is alien to its own nature: it exercises its power to console by purely musical means, although in conjunction with the text.”⁹⁷ What we are dealing with here, theological speaking, is the bringing together of the twin voices of the *opera Dei* (the works of God) and the *oracula Dei* (the words of God), the harmony between general revelation and special revelation.

The original tunes to which the biblical laments were sung are now lost to us. Nevertheless, the fact that many were written to be sung is highly significant, particularly in view of the powers of music and song to heal and console.⁹⁸ This does not make singing some kind of “silver bullet” for transforming pleading into praising. But it does highlight its God-given capacity of assisting us in the honest articulation of sorrow, the effective processing of pain and the awakening of genuine hope. For “the psalms of lament do not dismiss or deny or seek to avoid sorrow. On the contrary, they allow a grieving person to move more fully into the valley of the shadow; knowing on different levels, that no

⁹⁰ Ibid, 449.

⁹¹ E. J. Ramshaw, “Singing at Funerals and Memorial Services,” *Currents in Theology and Mission* 35.3 (2008), 206.

⁹² Ibid, 206.

⁹³ J. S. Begbie, “Faithful Feelings,” in *Resonant Witness: Conversations between Music and Theology*, ed. J. S. Begbie and S. R. Guthrie (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 349.

⁹⁴ Ibid, 352.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 350, italics his.

⁹⁶ Watson, “Theology and Music,” 451. Watson’s insights are offered in the context of a discussion regarding Handel’s *Messiah*. However, they are equally true, if not more so, in regard to the singing of the Psalter or any other part of Scripture.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 451.

⁹⁸ T. J. Stenhouse, “The Psalms of Lament in the Experience of Suffering Christians,” in *Stirred by a Noble Theme: The Book of Psalms in the Life of the Church*. Apollos: Nottingham, 2013, 194–195.

matter what, God is indeed present in the sorrow.”⁹⁹ But more than that, they point beyond sorrow; for even though their primary “focus is on *process* rather than *result* it must be recognized that there is a patent expectation, on the part of the psalmist, of some kind of resolution.”¹⁰⁰

Sung lament is, therefore, an exceedingly powerful force—both individually (e.g., Pss 42–43) and corporately (e.g., Ps 44). Indeed, because “the lament as such can be a movement toward God, it became a component part of worship. This assumes that the experience of profound suffering can bring one to God, provided the experience is verbally articulated in the lament.”¹⁰¹ Lament, thus, points to the possibility (if not creates the reality) of rejoicing in the midst of suffering. Consolation and hope cannot, thus, be separated. Consequently, “an ineradicable strain of hope and expectancy surrounds the lament.”¹⁰²

The making and singing of songs of lamentation, then, is one divinely appointed way of consolation. This power to console generates both the power to hope and the power to heal.

4.4. Power for Uniting

Finally, in addition to the ability to proclaim, recall and console, music and song have a remarkable power to unite. Singing, in particular, creates a sense of solidarity and belonging. As Ramshaw writes: “group singing bonds the community. Singing together is a physical as well as emotional and spiritual experience of unity: We enter into a common rhythm and we make one sound.”¹⁰³ Whilst this experience is not as widespread in western society as it may be in other less individualistic cultures, most westerners have known it at various points—perhaps as a disparate group of supporters rally behind their favourite team by singing the club song or perhaps, more dramatically, as demonstrators express their unified opposition to some form of oppression in a rousing protest song. In this latter scenario, the sense of unity can be palpable, encouraging and emboldening the participants. For in “the defiance that prompts the singing, there is the understanding that one is not alone.”¹⁰⁴

All corporate singing, to some degree, has this effect. In fact, a number of recent neurochemical studies have found that group singing increases participants’ oxytocin levels, indicating an experience of intense social bonding.¹⁰⁵ Given that the lament psalms were designed to be sung, it makes sense that almost a quarter of them are communal in form (i.e., written in the first-person plural).¹⁰⁶ However, the

⁹⁹ L. C. Jones, “The Psalms of Lament and the Transformation of Sorrow,” *The Journal of Pastoral Care & Counselling* 61.1–2 (Spring-Summer, 2007), 47.

¹⁰⁰ D. J. Cohen, *Why O Lord? Praying Our Sorrows* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2013), 78.

¹⁰¹ C. Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*, trans. K. R. Crim and R. N. Soulen (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981), 273n16.

¹⁰² R. E. Murphy and O. Carm, “The Faith of the Psalmist,” *Int* 34 (1980), 235.

¹⁰³ Ramshaw, “Singing at Funerals and Memorial Services,” 207.

¹⁰⁴ C. M. Hawn, “The Truth Shall Set You Free: Song, Struggle and Solidarity in South Africa,” in *Resonant Witness: Conversations between Music and Theology*, ed. J. S. Begbie and S. R. Guthrie (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 410.

¹⁰⁵ See, for example, J. R. Keeler, et al., “The neurochemistry and social flow of singing: bonding and oxytocin,” *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* (23 September 2015): <http://dx.doi.org/10.3389/fnhum.2015.00518>.

¹⁰⁶ For example, Pss 12, 44, 58, 60, 74, 49, 80, 83, 85, 89, 90, 94, 123, 126 and 129.

individual laments also have a long history of being sung corporately.¹⁰⁷ For not only are such psalms presented as “a model for how the community can express and resolve its doubt,”¹⁰⁸ but the ‘I’ of the individual psalms often has a representative function; i.e., it is a “Collective ‘I.’”¹⁰⁹

This insight highlights a point of major interpretive importance, which we have already touched upon but need to return to briefly. The book of Psalms is not, first and foremost, a book about either the believer’s or the community’s life of faith. Rather it is fundamentally concerned with the historic progression of Davidic kingship in light of the promise made to “the Lord’s anointed” (Ps 2:7; cf. 2 Sam 7).¹¹⁰ What this means is that the “I” of the Psalms is very often the “I” of the king, the Messiah, and so, in the fullness of time, the “I” of great David’s greater son, Jesus Christ. One of the implications of this, as Bonhoeffer saw, is that if we want to read, pray or sing the psalms, “we must not ask first what they have to do with us, but what they have to do with Jesus Christ.”¹¹¹

However, God’s Messiah is never to be thought about independently of “those who take refuge in him” (Ps 2:12). The king may be in the foreground, but his subjects are always in the background. The Psalter, then, also tracks the journey of the Messiah’s people. For this reason, believers are invited by Christ “to join in his words of trust in God, his words of longing for deliverance, his prayers for the overthrow of the enemies of the Lord and of his Christ, his joy in God’s salvation.”¹¹² Indeed, in the communal laments, the people step into the foreground and the Messiah sometimes seems to disappear from view! Yet even here, as Cameron and Shead observe, we are able “to see in the pattern of Israel’s national life a Christ-shaped echo.”¹¹³

Psalm 44 provides an example of this. The opening words (“O God, *we* have heard with our ears, our fathers have told *us*”) make very clear that this is a national lament: a “lament by the people and for the people.”¹¹⁴ It is also another “maskil of the sons of Korah” addressed “to the choirmaster,” and therefore a lament intended to be sung. What is unique about Psalm 44, however, is its clear profession of innocence (vv. 17–22): “All this has come upon us, though *we have not forgotten you, and we have not been false to your covenant*” (v. 17). In light of this Delitzsch comments: “In this psalm, Israel stands in exactly the same relation to God as Job and ‘the Servant of Jahve’ in Isaiah.”¹¹⁵ Thus we hear the “Christ-shaped echo.”

But we also hear a church-shaped echo. This is why, in Romans 8:36, Paul can cite v. 22 (“Yet for your sake we are killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered”) and apply it to Christians. Indeed, for Paul, “Christians are called to share in their Lord’s sufferings: sufferings foreshadowed in those of the righteous sufferer in the psalms, whose voice is heard in so many of the

¹⁰⁷ See Wenham, *Psalms as Torah*, 11–25.

¹⁰⁸ G.M. Stevenson, “Communal Imagery and the Individual Lament: Exodus Typology in Psalm 77,” *Restoration Quarterly* 39:4 (1997), 227.

¹⁰⁹ S. Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel’s Worship*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004, 42–46.

¹¹⁰ See Healy Hutchinson, “The Psalter as a Book,” 25–43.

¹¹¹ Bonhoeffer, *Psalms*, 14.

¹¹² J.W. Woodhouse, “The Psalms as Christian Scripture,” in *Stirred by a Noble Theme: The Book of Psalms in the Life of the Church*, ed. A. G. Shead (Apollos: Nottingham, 2013), 57.

¹¹³ Shead and Cameron, “Singing with the Messiah in a Foreign Land,” 168.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 174.

¹¹⁵ Delitzsch, *Psalms, Volume 2*, 6–67.

lament psalms, such as Psalm 44.¹¹⁶ This, then, is a lament that is sung by Christ through his persecuted people so that they might sing it back to him in their hour of need.¹¹⁷

Our chief interest, however, lies in the *communal* nature of this lament and the consequent importance of singing our prayers *together*. For singing “‘transports’ us not only to God, but connects us to the people with whom we are worshipping. Singing builds and strengthens the assembly.”¹¹⁸ Indeed, the cultivation of collegiality is one of the great gifts of the Psalter. As Bonhoeffer explains:

The psalms teach us to pray as a fellowship. The Body of Christ is praying, and as an individual one acknowledges that his prayer is only a minute fragment of the whole prayer of the Church. He learns to pray the prayer of the Body of Christ. And that lifts him above his personal concerns and allows him to pray selflessly.¹¹⁹

For this reason, the activity of singing “is both an enactment and an exposition of the church’s unity. Singing, we might say, is a sounding image of the unified church.”¹²⁰ This was certainly the view of Ignatius, bishop of Antioch (c. 35–c. 108) who wrote in his epistle to the Ephesians:

Therefore in your concord and agreeing charity, Jesus Christ is sung; and every single person among you makes up the chorus. That so being all consonant in love, and taking up the song of God, ye may in a perfect unity with one voice, sing to the Father by Jesus Christ; to the end that he may both hear you, and perceive by your works, that ye are indeed the members of his son (1:15–16).

Moreover, the reality of the unity fostered by communal singing has further implications. It lifts us above our need for personal authenticity and helps us to pray larger prayers, prayers more reflective of the needs of others, prayers more in line with the will of God. Hence Bonhoeffer again writes:

It does not depend, therefore, on whether the Psalms express adequately that which we feel at a given moment in our heart. If we are to pray aright, perhaps it is quite necessary that we pray contrary to our own heart. Not what we want to pray is important, but what God wants us to pray.¹²¹

This is not to downplay the fact that Psalm 44 was “a song in season” for national Israel (at least, at the point of its composition), as it has been for the churches of Jesus Christ at many point of persecution in the present age. It is not then a song for every season. But the key point is this: when it is time to mourn together we need such songs so that as we sing the word of Christ back to him, the bonds of our unity might be strengthened and we might know that we are not alone. Communal lament is, therefore, a great and gracious gift. For contemporary churches to lack the ability to make use of such a

¹¹⁶ Wenham, *Psalms as Torah*, 193.

¹¹⁷ T. Longman III, *How to Read the Psalms* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 71.

¹¹⁸ A. Werner Hoenen, “How Can I Keep from Singing? An Appeal to Christians to Sing the Faith,” *Journal of Lutheran Ethics* (1 October 2010): http://www.elca.org/JLE/Articles/254#_edn20.

¹¹⁹ D. Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (London: SCM, 1954), 38–39.

¹²⁰ S. Guthrie, “The Wisdom of Song,” in *Resonant Witness: Conversations between Music and Theology*, ed. J. S. Begbie and S. R. Guthrie (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 385.

¹²¹ Bonhoeffer, *Psalms*, 14–15.

gift is deeply lamentable and underlines the truth of Bonhoeffer's observation: "Whenever the Psalter is abandoned, an incomparable treasure is lost to the Christian Church."¹²²

The practice of singing lament, then, is one divinely appointed way of uniting God's people in seasons of sorrow "so that with one mind and one voice [we] may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom 15:6).

5. The Relationship of Lament to Praise

We come, finally, to the relationship between lament and praise. It is commonplace for the two to be viewed as polar opposites, as if one is the antonym of the other. Of course, there is an important truth contained in such a view and they are certainly juxtaposed in Scripture. The writer of Psalms 42–43, as we've seen, laments the fact that he cannot praise and thus longs for the day when he will be restored to praise and no longer have cause to lament. And yet, with this juxtaposition, there are profound connections between lament and praise that also need to be appreciated. In fact, there is even a case for regarding lament as a form of praise.

5.1. Lament as the Pathway to Praise

As we have already noted, the shape of the Psalter is governed by the historic progression of Israelite kingship in light of the promise made to David in 2 Samuel 7. After the introduction of Psalms 1–2, Book I begins with a series of laments, reflecting David's experience of persecution in the time of Saul (Ps 3–7). Books II–IV take us from the reign of Solomon through the exile and to the ground for Israel's hope. Book V climaxes with a celebration of redeemed existence under a new Davidic king (Ps 144–145), before concluding with an explosive catena of pure praise psalms (Pss 146–150). Therefore, although lament may be seen as the first word of the Psalter, praise is most certainly the last. As Miller writes:

To go through the Book of Psalms is to be led increasingly toward the praise of God as the final word ... The literary arrangement of the Psalter gives clear testimony to this reality as each book of the Psalter is concluded with doxology (Pss. 41:13; 72:18–19; 89:52; 106:48), and the Psalter as a whole ends in Psalm 150 with its fulsome call for everything to praise God every way that is possible.¹²³

What is true at the macro level of the Psalter is also true at the micro level of many particular lament psalms: they begin with pleading but end with praising.¹²⁴ As Jones writes: "a distinctive movement from plea to praise characterizes the lament psalm. This movement may be, at times, sharp and somewhat disjointed. It may be uneven. Nevertheless, this movement from plea to praise is essential in understanding the power of the psalms of lament."¹²⁵ The power of which Jones speaks is the power of reality: the reality of our pitiful plight (on the one hand) and the reality of God's game-changing grace

¹²² *Ibid.*, 26.

¹²³ P. D. Miller, Jr, "Enthroned on the Praises of Israel: The Praise of God in Old Testament Theology," *Int* 39 (1985), 8.

¹²⁴ Psalm 88 being the most notable exception to this "rule."

¹²⁵ Jones, "The Psalms of Lament and the Transformation of Sorrow," 48.

(on the other). As Jones puts it: “The depth of pain expressed in the laments is all too real. Yet so too is the possibility that this pain can be transformed, will be transformed, into praise.”¹²⁶

But what is the link between possibility and certainty? How is the singing of pain transformed into the singing of praise? According to Jones, we are never told: “A mystery occurs in the movement between plea to praise, from disorientation towards new orientation. There is no clear and certain answer as to what makes this movement possible. Nevertheless, it is a most remarkable transformation.”¹²⁷ Remarkable it certainly is, but perhaps not quite so impenetrable as Jones seems to think.

The transformation, as Westermann notes, lies in “lament’s function as an appeal.”¹²⁸ In other words, “lament is supplication; it is the means by which suffering comes before the One who can take it away.”¹²⁹ What this reveals is that the movement from plea to praise is actually a reflex of the sufferer’s movement toward God. This is why a change of mood often occurs within the lament psalm itself, even if it’s only a change in outlook and not yet a change in situation.¹³⁰ Otherwise put, lamentation is turned into praise not only by *the experience of deliverance* but also by *the expectation of deliverance*. This is because the honest articulation of need opens the door to the faithful reception of provision, even if only in anticipation. As we have seen, the key lies in the way that lament arouses faith and hope, and so enables the sufferer “to see the path leading to an alleviation of suffering.”¹³¹

A song of lament does not need to be autobiographical in order to have this effect. Singing the laments of other saints can be just as effective, if not more so, in helping us “express our frustrations and remind us that in them all God is present and “working for our good.” Then we may be free to join in a psalm of pure praise and thanksgiving.”¹³² In fact, as we’ve seen, the lament psalms of Scripture are ultimately none other than the words of him who “in the days of his flesh offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death” (Heb 5:7).¹³³ It is he who has given them back to us that we might sing them before his “throne of grace, that we might receive mercy and find grace in our time of need” (Heb 4:16). Little wonder, then, that the psalms of lament typically end with a vow of praise.¹³⁴ For true lament is none other than the divinely established pathway to praise.

5.2. Lament as Praising in the Dark

To sing lament, however, is not merely to begin a *journey toward praise*, it is itself to set foot on *the path of praise*. “As strange as it sounds, prayers of lament in a biblical pattern are actually a form

¹²⁶ Ibid, 49.

¹²⁷ Ibid, 52–53.

¹²⁸ Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*, 267. Indeed, “Lamentation has no meaning in and of itself. That it functions as an appeal is evident in its structure.... The lament appeals to the one who can remove suffering” (p. 266).

¹²⁹ Ibid, 273.

¹³⁰ Ibid, 267.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Hustad, “The Psalms as Worship Expressions,” 423.

¹³³ See the discussion in R. P. Belcher Jr, *The Messiah and the Psalms: Preaching Christ from all the Psalm* (Fearn: Mentor, 2006), 199–200.

¹³⁴ Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*, 267.

of praise to God and an expression of trust in his promises.”¹³⁵ After all, the whole Psalter is labelled *tehillim* (praises); the laments as much as every other “type.” As Shead and Cameron write: “Whatever a given psalm looks like – lament, instruction, thanksgiving, and so on – the act of taking it upon our lips becomes an act of praise.”¹³⁶ This can be seen in the way the lament psalms “express a fundamental trust in God in the midst of tribulation.”¹³⁷ Hence my description of lament above as “praising in the dark”! But even more than that, the laments “open us to the greatness of a God who not only can hear, but also can handle our pain, our self-pity, our blame, and our fear.”¹³⁸ They, thus, propel us toward “new and unforeseen breakthroughs in understanding who God is and how God can be trusted.”¹³⁹ In this way real lament leads to growth in the knowledge of God and thus serves to increase his praise.

In the larger frame, and this side of the consummation, praise and lament work together and need each other to keep the one honest and the other focussed. For, on the one hand, praise “can retain its authenticity and naturalness only in polarity with lamentation.”¹⁴⁰ Yet on the other hand, and as we learn from the content of Psalter itself, “Israel also mixes lament with praise, because they know beyond doubting that in God’s unchanging, unfailing love they will be saved in the end.”¹⁴¹ The same is true for the Christian church: lament we must, but only ever in hope! For “the spine of lament is hope: not the vacuous optimism that ‘things will get better,’ which in the short run is usually a lie, but the deep and irrepressible conviction, in the teeth of present evidence, that God has not severed the umbilical cord that has always bound us to the Lord.”¹⁴² It is this conviction that enables believers to sing their griefs before the throne of grace, confident that he will never leave or forsake us (Heb 13:6).

6. Conclusion

If there is truth in the dictum, “Tell me how you lament, and I will tell you how you are,” then many contemporary evangelical churches are in poor shape. In fact, the widespread lack of familiarity with the practice of singing lament is nothing short of tragic. As Trueman writes:

By excluding the cries of loneliness, dispossession, and desolation from its worship, the church has effectively silenced and excluded the voices of those who are themselves lonely, dispossessed, and desolate, both inside and outside the church. By so doing, it has implicitly endorsed the banal aspirations of consumerism, generated an insipid,

¹³⁵ J. Todd Billings, *Rejoicing in Lament: Wrestling with Incurable Cancer and Life in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2015), 45.

¹³⁶ Shead and Cameron, “Singing with the Messiah in a Foreign Land,” 170.

¹³⁷ M. Jinkins, *In the House of the Lord: Inhabiting the Psalms of Lament* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1989), 40.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 39.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 40.

¹⁴⁰ Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*, 267. Verhey speaks similarly: “Hope that cannot lament denies the awful reality and the continuing power of death and sin” (*The Christian Art of Dying*, 269).

¹⁴¹ Waltke, Houston, and Moore, *The Psalms as Christian Lament*, 10.

¹⁴² C. C. Black, “The Persistence of the Wounds,” in *Lament: Reclaiming Practices in Pulpit, Pew, and Public Square*, ed. S. Brown and P. D. Miller (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 54.

trivial and unrealistically triumphalist Christianity, and confirmed its impeccable credentials as a club for the complacent.¹⁴³

Of course, it's always possible that, like Paul and Silas in the Philippian gaol (Acts 16:25), the church's determination to sing praise in the midst of trial is a laudable manifestation of a resilient faith. As Brueggemann speculates: "It could be that such relentlessness is an act of bold defiance in which these psalms of order and reliability are flung in the face of disorder. In that way, they insist that nothing shall separate us from the love of God."¹⁴⁴ This may sometimes be the case. It is more likely, however, that "a church that goes on singing "happy songs" in the face of raw reality is doing something very different from what the Bible itself does."¹⁴⁵ Thus, the inability to lament is much more likely to be "a frightened, numb-denial and deception that does not want to acknowledge or experience the disorientation of life."¹⁴⁶

The only way to remedy such a tendency is through an acknowledgement of the problem, a genuine turning to God and a thoroughgoing change of practice. This will inevitably involve the recovery and reemployment of older songs of lament (principally the Psalter itself)¹⁴⁷ and the discovery (if not the writing) of fresh laments also.¹⁴⁸ The alternative is to deprive the people of God of a full knowledge of God himself. For as Jinkins notes: "We cannot expect a people's understanding of God to reach much higher than their hymn books."¹⁴⁹ Our singing, therefore, needs to reflect the fact that God is not only sovereign over our sufferings but also present with us in them. It also needs to express the christological reality (reflected in the shape of the Psalter) that just as suffering is the road to glory, so the path to praise passes through lament.

Given the manifold powers of music and song to aid us on the journey of discipleship, we would do well to harness them faithfully and make use of them for the sake of our souls, the health of the church and, above all, the glory of the triune God.

¹⁴³ Trueman, "What Can Miserable Christians Sing?" 160.

¹⁴⁴ Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms*, 51.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 52.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 51.

¹⁴⁷ The Psalter is key here. For, as J. C. Endres writes: "The Psalms tutor us in the language of prayer; they teach us new ways of praying and more expressive ways of articulating our hopes and fear, our joys and sorrows" ("Psalms and Spirituality in the 21st Century," *Int* 56 [2002], 154).

¹⁴⁸ To make a start in this direction, see the lists and links compiled by L. Shumann, "Lenting and Lamenting, Part II: Hurting with God," *Jucuthin: Justice, Theology & Culture* (26 February 2016), <https://jucuthin.wordpress.com/2016/02/26/venting-and-lamenting-part-ii-hurting-with-god/>; Bob Kauflin, "Songs for Hard Times, Pt. 1," *Worship Matters* (15 November 2005 v; Bob Kauflin, "Songs for Hard Times, Pt. 2," *Worship Matters* (16 November 2005), <http://www.worshipmatters.com/2005/11/16/songs-for-the-hard-times-part-2/>; Bob Kauflin, "Songs for Hard Times, Pt. 3," *Worship Matters* (17 November 17 2005), <http://www.worshipmatters.com/2005/11/17/songs-for-the-hard-times-part-3/>.

¹⁴⁹ Jinkins, *In the House of the Lord*, 34.

“For Your Sake We Are Being Killed All Day Long”: Romans 8:36 and the Hermeneutics of Unexplained Suffering

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Abstract: This article explores the function of Paul’s citation from Psalm 44:22 within the rhetoric of Romans 8:31–39. It offers a brief discussion of the meaning of Psalm 44:22 when the verse is read within its original historical and canonical contexts, then a summary and evaluation of the two main answers typically given by scholars to the question of whether and to what extent that meaning is retained in the verse’s new context in Romans 8. The final section of the article argues for a reading of Romans 8:36 in which the psalm-citation retains its original force and meaning as an expression of protest and lament, reinforcing the validity of the question in verse 35 before Paul answers it in verse 37.

One of the Old Testament’s boldest and most vigorous protests against unexplained suffering is Psalm 44, in which the community laments an event in which, they say, God has made them “like sheep for slaughter” (v. 11), scattering them among the nations and exposing them to derision and scorn. All this, they insist, has taken place, despite the fact that “our heart has not turned back, nor have our steps departed from your way” (v. 18). Read within the context of the psalm, there is no mistaking the tone of lament and protest in the declaration of verse 22: “Because of you we are being killed all day long, and accounted as sheep for the slaughter.”

Yet it is this verse that Paul quotes in the climactic final verses of Romans 8, in the midst of his rhapsodic assurance to his readers that nothing in all creation can separate them from the love of God in Christ. This paper will explore the function of this citation from Psalm 44:22 within the rhetoric of Romans 8:31–39 and the extent to which the lament and protest of the verse in its original context are intended to be carried across to the verse’s new home in Romans 8.

1. Psalm 44 in Historical and Canonical Context

Commentators offer widely divergent suggestions for the date of the psalm’s composition, ranging from the early monarchy to the Maccabean period, with a significant number gravitating toward a date of composition in the early exilic period, or in the years that immediately preceded the exile.

The strongest argument in favor of an exilic context for the psalm’s composition is the language of verses 11–12, which speak of the Israelites as having been “scattered ... among the nations” and “sold ... for a trifle,” along with the description of the people in verse 14 as “a byword among the nations, a laughingstock among the peoples.” Such language, as Samuel Terrien points out, not only suggests a defeat of catastrophic proportions, but also depicts it in terms that closely resemble the language of Jeremiah and his circle, writing in the context of the Babylonian invasions at the end of the seventh century and the beginning of the sixth.¹

The main difficulty with this proposal is the sharp disparity between the psalm’s vigorous protestations of the nation’s innocence and the verdict of culpability that had been pronounced by Jeremiah and his prophetic predecessors (even as they lamented and protested at the severity of the divine sentence). Terrien is left to conclude that the author of the psalm, despite the literary affinities between his language and the language of the prophet, had come to a starkly different theological conclusion about the meaning of the events that they had witnessed:

What does the psalmist mean by not forgetting the name of God or not worshipping a foreign deity? Does he ignore the ethical demands of the Sinai Covenant? Innocent of idolatry, Israel may not be blameless in social equity. Is the poet consciously divorcing cultic fidelity from communal justice and compassion? This seems to be the case, for he not only asks, “Why?” but he also implies that God alone is responsible for his people’s plight: “Is it not on account of thee that we are slain every day?” (v. 23)...

The singer of Psalm 44 was ... living during the last spasms of Judah’s agony. But he had not been convinced by the oracles of the great prophets, from Amos and Hosea, Isaiah and Micah, or Jeremiah, his contemporary (Jer 7:1–11). Perhaps he was one of his antagonists (religious superpatriots) who denounced him to the authorities.²

Terrien’s interpretation of the psalm is admirably blunt, and is to be preferred in that respect over the readings of others who assign the psalm to the same period without feeling the need to offer any comment at all on the discord that is implied between the psalmist’s perspective and the perspective of the prophets who had warned of the Babylonian invasion and exile and interpreted those events as a divine judgement on the sins of the nation.³ If the psalm is to be read as a response to Judah’s exile or to the events that immediately preceded it, then there is no avoiding the conclusion that the psalm’s interpretation of those events is diametrically opposed to that of the prophets (and, in addition, to the

¹ Samuel L. Terrien, *The Psalms: Strophic Structure and Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 361.

² *Ibid.*, 360–61. Cf. the similar interpretation of the psalm’s relationship to the “orthodox” tradition of Israelite prophecy and historiography in Dalit Rom-Shiloni, “Psalm 44: The Powers of Protest,” *CBQ* 70 (2008): 683–84.

³ E.g. Nancy L. DeClaissé-Walford, Rolf A. Jacobson, and Beth LaNeel Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 408–15; Gerald Henry Wilson, *Psalms: From Biblical Text to Contemporary Life*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 683–93.

perspective of the histories and history psalms that interpret the exile as a judgement on the sins of the nation and its kings).⁴ A reading of this sort strains the unity of the psalter, and of the Old Testament canon more broadly, to breaking point.

But the connection that Terrien and others draw between the language of the psalm and the events of the Babylonian invasion is not a necessary or compelling one. The language of verses 20–21 (if it is to be taken at face value) seems to imply the kind of protestation of innocence that is ignorant of any prophetic accusation, rather than a knowing rejection of the verdict of the prophets. Nor is the hypothesis of an exilic context necessary to explain the language of verses 10–19. The Babylonian invasion was not the first time that Israel had experienced the capture and deportation of prisoners (cf. Amos 1:6, 9),⁵ and the affinities of language and imagery between the psalmist and the Jeremican circle can be explained just as easily by the literary influence of either on the other (or by the currency of the language as part of the stock phraseology of lament) as by the hypothesis that they are contemporaries writing in response to the same events.

Alongside these considerations regarding the language and literary affinities of the psalm itself, it is also worth noting its placement in Book II of the psalter (which concludes with a prayer for the “king’s son” and a postscript, “The prayers of David son of Jesse are ended”), which may suggest that the editors of psalter intended the psalm to be read within a pre-exilic frame, before the shift of focus toward the exile in Book III.⁶

A more convincing reading of the psalm, therefore—both on its own terms and in terms of its relation to the surrounding context of the psalter and the Old Testament as a whole—is one that interprets it as a response not to the exile but to an unspecified event in the pre-exilic or post-exilic period, and takes its protestations of the nation’s covenant fidelity not as a rejection of the accusations of the prophets but as an expression of genuine bewilderment, voiced in the absence of any such accusations that might otherwise have explained the events that had transpired.⁷

⁴ In an earlier publication I attempted to avoid that conclusion by reading the psalm as referring to “the exilic ... sufferings of the righteous remnant within the nation”; cf. David I. Starling, *Not My People: Gentiles as Exiles in Pauline Hermeneutics*, BZNTW (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011), 147. This is an unconvincing reading of the psalm, however, since the lamenting “we” whose innocence the psalm insists on is also a “we” that is presented as possessing armies and fighting battles (vv. 9–10), descriptions that point unambiguously toward the nation as a whole, not a righteous remnant within the nation.

⁵ Note, too, the way in which the catalogue of curses in Deut 28:15–68 includes language about the defeat of the nation’s armies at the hand of their enemies, such that “you will come at them from one direction but flee from them in seven, and you will become a thing of horror to all the kingdoms on earth” (v. 25), within the portion of the curse-catalog that precedes the climactic paragraphs which speak of the nation’s final defeat and exile.

⁶ Cf. the discussions in Gordon J. Wenham, “Towards a Canonical Reading of the Psalms,” in *Canon and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Craig G. Bartholomew, et al. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 342–43, and David M. Howard, “The Psalms and Current Study,” in *Interpreting the Psalms: Issues and Approaches*, ed. Philip Johnston and David G. Firth (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 24–27. Admittedly, theories regarding the composition history of the psalter and the intentions of the collection’s editors are necessarily somewhat speculative, and a post-exilic date for the psalm, and for the composition of Book II, cannot be ruled out. The presence within Book II of Psalm 51 (the language of which—particularly the postscript in vv. 18–19 is so strongly redolent of exilic prophecy) is a reminder of the complexity of the relationship between the psalm titles, the contexts of their original composition, and the editorial understanding implied by their placement within the collection.

⁷ Cf. Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*, WBC (Waco: Word, 1983), 332–33; John Goldingay, *Psalms*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 2:49–50; Allen P. Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms*, vol. 3 (Grand Rap-

Within a context of this sort, the protest of the psalmist is that these events have come on the nation not because of their own sin but “because of you” (v. 22; Heb. **כִּי לְפָנֶיךָ**). The strong assertions earlier in the psalm (vv. 9–14) about the way in which God has “rejected and abased” his people suggest that the primary sense of the psalmist’s language in verse 22 is a negative one, attributing (ultimate) responsibility for what has happened to God, who did not intervene to defend his people from the attacks of their enemies. A negative reading of this sort is consistent with the immediately preceding context of verses 17–22, where the psalmist’s claim appears to be not that the disaster has happened *because of* the nation’s covenant fidelity but that it has happened *despite* it.⁸ The image in verse 22b, similarly, in which the people are depicted as having been “accounted as sheep for the slaughter,” retains the negative sense that was carried by the similar expression in verse 11.

A more positive reading, in which the sufferings are understood as something that the nation has endured (and has, perhaps, willingly chosen to expose itself to) “for your sake,” as an outcome of its covenantal loyalty to YHWH, is certainly a grammatical possibility. The decision of the LXX translators to render both the **לְ** of verse 22 and the **לְפָנֶיךָ** of verse 26 with the same preposition (ἐνεκα/ἐνεκεν), opens that door a little wider for readers who encounter the psalm in Greek rather than in Hebrew.⁹ There is a certain historical plausibility, too, about an imagined context of composition for the psalm in which considerations of covenant loyalty have dictated a foreign policy that has exposed the nation to vengeful reprisals from a neighbor, a suzerain-state or an imperial overlord.¹⁰ The rabbinic tradition that verse 23a was sung daily by the Levites during the time of the Maccabean uprising is consistent with a reading of the psalm that interprets verse 22 as a positive claim that Israel’s sufferings have been willingly embraced by the nation, “for the sake of” their God.¹¹ But the primary sense of the expression, read within the context of the complaint and protest in the preceding paragraphs, must surely be the negative one, which interprets the sufferings that the nation has endured not as the inevitable consequence of covenant fidelity but as a bewildering enigma—a disaster that God has brought upon the nation despite the fact that they have remained faithful to him.¹²

2. Psalm 44:22 in Romans 8:36

If this is the meaning of Psalm 44:22 and the function that it serves within its original context in the psalm, what does it mean and how does it function within the very different rhetorical context in which Paul cites it in Romans 8:36?

ids: Kregel, 2013), 40–41.

⁸ Assuming that the “yet” with which v. 19 (NRSV) commences correctly conveys the intended force of the **כִּי** that introduces the same verse (v. 20) in the Hebrew.

⁹ For an analogous example of ἐνεκεν used in a similar context and with a similar sense (translating the Hebrew **עַל-דִּבְרֵי**), see Abraham’s expression of anxiety in Gen 20:11 that “they will kill me because of my wife (ἀποκτενοῦσιν ἐνεκεν τῆς γυναῖκός μου).” Even on this reading, of course, the passive-voice form of the verb, in the Greek as well as in the Hebrew, does not imply a focus on the motivation of the community in “facing” or “enduring” death, but on the cause or motive for which they were “killed” by others.

¹⁰ For one such example, see the (admittedly speculative) suggestion in Harold M. Parker, “Artaxerxes III Ochus and Psalm 44,” *JQR* 68 (1978).

¹¹ Cf. *b. Soṭah 48a*, cited in DeClaisse-Walford, Jacobson, and Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, 409.

¹² Cf. the comments in Goldingay, *Psalms*, 47.

As most commentators recognize, Romans 8:31–39 functions as a kind of *peroratio*, drawing out the chief implications of the preceding chapters (either chs. 1–8 or, more specifically, chs. 5–8) and evoking an emotional response to them within the affections of the letter’s hearers.¹³ Having commenced this section of the letter with a bold assertion about the certain hope of those who have been justified by faith, enabling them to boast even in the midst of their present sufferings (5:1–11), Paul now concludes it by reasserting their status as those whom God has justified (8:33; cf. v. 30) and assuring them that “neither death, nor life ... nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (8:38–39).

The most obvious feature of the rhetoric of the paragraph is the sequence of questions that it strings together. Unlike the questions that Paul asks and answers in the diatribes of the earlier chapters,¹⁴ the principal function of these questions is not to advance an argument by introducing new ideas or anticipating possible objections; rather, as Jewett correctly suggests, they perform the recapitulative function of an ἐρώτησις, inviting the audience to join in asking (and, in some cases, answering for themselves) questions whose answers have already been given or implied earlier in the letter.¹⁵

Within this section of the letter, explicit citations of Scripture are extremely rare, compared with the far greater density of citation elsewhere in the letter: apart from 8:36, the only other direct quotation from the Old Testament in chapters 5–8 is the fleeting reference to the commandment against covetousness in 7:7. Why then does Paul choose this moment, right in the middle of the section’s climactic final paragraph, to break the flow of his rhetoric with a citation from the psalms? Commentators who suggest an answer to the question of how the psalm citation functions within the rhetoric of Romans 8:31–39 tend to propose one of two main alternative viewpoints: (i) that the psalm-citation functions within Paul’s argument as a proof for the proposition that sufferings are the expected lot of the people of God; or (ii) that the citation (reinterpreted in light of the gospel) is appropriated by Paul as a prophecy of the sufferings of the church.

2.1. Psalm 44:22 as Proof that Sufferings are the Expected Lot of the People of God

According to the first viewpoint, which is presupposed or argued for by the majority of commentators, the function of the psalm citation in Romans 8:36 is to serve as proof for the proposition that sufferings are the expected lot of the people of God. A string of almost identically-worded statements can be collated from major Romans commentaries, expressing this view. Thus, for example, Charles Cranfield suggests that the quotation’s main effect is “to show that the tribulations which face Christians are nothing new

¹³ Cf. Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 532, 535; Richard N. Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 744–49; see also A. H. Snyman, “Style and the Rhetorical Situation of Romans 8:31–39,” *NTS* 34 (1988): 227–28.

¹⁴ *Contra* Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, trans. G. W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 246; Ben Witherington III with Darlene Hyatt, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 231; and Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 745, all of whom read 8:31–39 as a further instance of diatribe.

¹⁵ Cf. Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary*, 533. See also the brief comments of the recapitulative function of ἐρώτησις in Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 3.19.5 and the similar observations on the function of *interrogatio* in *Rhetorica ad Herrenium* 4.22.

or unexpected, but have long been characteristic of the life of God’s people.”¹⁶ Douglas Moo reads it as an expression of Paul’s concern “to show that the sufferings experienced by Christians should occasion no surprise.”¹⁷ Joseph Fitzmyer sees the citation’s purpose as being “to show that the tribulations that Christians encounter are what have always characterized God’s people.”¹⁸ Ben Witherington, similarly, sees the point of the quotation as being to prove that “no danger that overcomes Christians is anything new or unexpected for the people of God.”¹⁹

The view is not a new one. Calvin, for example, acknowledges the possible objection that the oppression under Antiochus (which he sees as the likely occasion for the psalm’s original composition) was an unusual calamity, but insists that, nonetheless, “since they have first affirmed their innocence, and show that they are burdened by so many evils, we can fittingly argue from this that there is nothing new in the Lord permitting his saints to be exposed to the cruelty of the ungodly.”²⁰

But there are obvious objections to be raised against this interpretation of the psalm citation’s function within its context in Romans 8:31–39. To begin with, there is the fact that the immediately preceding verse, Romans 8:35, is a question, not an assertion: its function is not to assert that the people of Christ suffer, but rather (presupposing that this is the case) to ask whether those sufferings can have the effect of separating Christ’s people from his love.²¹

Then, secondly, there is the fact that the proposition asserted in Psalm 44:22 does not function simply to record the fact of Israel’s tribulations but to protest against them, and (within the larger context of the psalm) to cry out for their cessation. The originally intended force of the verse Paul cites from the psalm is hardly to normalize the experience of suffering (or, still less, to paint it as one of the indifferent things over which the wise man triumphs by his calm equanimity),²² but to scream out against it.

It is possible, of course, that Paul’s use of the psalm citation could have involved a transformation of its force and meaning so radical in its effect that the end result is one in which “the Lord of the church . . . removes the tone of protest from the psalm,” converting an anguished outpouring of lament into a bare statement of “the necessity . . . of unmerited suffering.”²³ There are certainly other places within his letters where a transformation of similar magnitude (though not, perhaps, the same nature) would seem

¹⁶ Charles E. B. Cranfield, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 2 vols., ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975–1979), 1:440.

¹⁷ Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 543–44.

¹⁸ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 534.

¹⁹ Witherington with Hyatt, *Romans*, 233–34.

²⁰ Jean Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Romans and to the Thessalonians*, trans. Ross Mackenzie, Calvin’s Commentaries (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1961), 188.

²¹ Although Paul’s intended readers are likely, on the basis of what they have already been told in 5:1–8:34, to have been capable of answering the rhetorical question of v. 35 for themselves (with a confident “no”), the shape of the paragraph as a whole suggests that the rhetorical question in v. 35 is intended to function not as a self-answering question but as one that is allowed to hang in the air for a moment, unanswered, until it receives its answer in vv. 37–39.

²² Cf. the depiction of the “invincible” (ἀνίκητος) philosopher “whom none of the things disturb which are independent of the will,” in Epictetus, *Discourses*, 1.18.21–23 (trans. George Long).

²³ Bruce K. Waltke, J. M. Houston, and Erika Moore, *The Psalms as Christian Lament: A Historical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 208.

to have taken place. But a conclusion of that sort would require a more careful reading of the way in which the psalm citation contributes to the rhetoric of its new context within Romans 8:31–39 than the proponents of the traditional view generally offer. A plausible explanation is needed, too, for why it is *this* text of Scripture that Paul has chosen to cite, when so many others could have proved the required point without the need for such a radical transformation of their original force.

2.2. Psalm 44:22 (Reinterpreted in Light of the Gospel) as a Prophecy of the Sufferings of the Church

In view of some of these difficulties and questions, a number of scholars in recent decades have proposed an alternative to the traditional view, arguing that the psalm citation in Romans 8:36 functions not as a proof that the people of God have always suffered in the manner that is presupposed by the questions of verse 35, but rather as a prophecy and redemptive interpretation of the sufferings of the church.

Perhaps the most influential proponent of this alternative view is Richard Hays, who includes it as one of the multiple levels of meaning that he hears evoked by the psalm citation, as Paul employs it within its new context in Romans:

Paul reads the Psalm as a prophetic prefiguration of the experience of the Christian church, so that the text finds its true primary meaning in Paul's own present time. The point is not that "righteous people have always suffered like this"; rather, Paul's point in Rom. 8:35–36 is that Scripture prophesies suffering as the lot of those ... who live in the eschatological interval between Christ's resurrection and the ultimate redemption of the world.²⁴

What makes the experiences of suffering that the psalm citation refers to in its new location distinctively *Christian* experiences is the note of participation in the redemptive sufferings of Christ that can (with hindsight) be read into the originally negative language in which the people of God are depicted as "sheep to be slaughtered" and their death is characterized as one that has been endured ἕνεκα σοῦ—"for your sake":

When Paul in Romans 8 quotes the words of Psalm 44,
 For your sake we are being killed all the day long;
 We are reckoned as sheep to be slaughtered

he is sounding a theme that reverberates in complex patterns with and against his letter's other images of election, faithfulness, and sacrifice. This quotation prepares the way for his direct exhortation in Rom. 12:1: "I beseech you then, brothers and sisters, through the mercies of God to present your bodies as a living sacrifice." That is what is required of the eschatological people of God; God's elect must suffer and groan along with—and even behalf of—the unredeemed creation....

²⁴ Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 58.

Those who have ears to hear will hear and understand that the people of God, reckoned as sheep to be slaughtered, are suffering with Christ (Rom. 8:17: *sympaschomen*) and thus living out the vocation prophesied for them according to the Scriptures.²⁵

There is much that can be said in support of a reading of this sort. The ἔνεκα σοῦ of the LXX, as we have already observed above, is certainly capable of being read in a positive sense, to speak of suffering and death willingly embraced by the community as an imitation of (and participation in) the redemptive sufferings of Christ. The description of the people of God as “sheep to be slaughtered,” similarly, can readily be converted into an image of cruciform participation in the saving mission of God, if it is heard in concert with the similar image in Isaiah 53:7.²⁶ The presence of these two phrases in close proximity within the psalm citation and their potential to be understood in this manner would help to explain why, on this reading of Paul’s intentions in Romans 8:36, he has chosen this particular verse to cite.

It is possible too, as Tyler Stewart suggests, that Paul could have anticipated that some at least among his intended readers in Rome might have been aware of the urgent summons with which Psalm 44 concludes (“Rouse yourself! Why do you sleep, O Lord? Awake, do not cast us off forever! ... Rise up, come to our help. Redeem us for the sake of your steadfast love”), and that they would have understood the summons of the psalm, in light of the gospel, as having been “answered by the God who raises the dead in the Christ-age.”²⁷

It must still be granted, however, that this reading, no less than the previous one, involves a thoroughgoing transformation of the original force of the text that Paul cites; it is, as Stewart puts it, “a radical rereading based on the turn of the ages that has occurred in Jesus’ death and resurrection.”²⁸ Such a possibility should not be ruled out. A re-reading of similar magnitude can be found, for example, in the modified quotation Hosea 13:14 in 1 Corinthians 15:55, where a summons to Death and Hades to come and execute judgement becomes a taunt over death, whose penal sting has now been destroyed by Christ. In that instance, however, the triumphant function of the citation within the rhetoric of the surrounding paragraph is made abundantly clear, and the warrant for the hermeneutical transformation effected in v. 55 is provided explicitly in v. 56. The same cannot be said in the case of the psalm citation in Romans 8:36.

We may also be prepared to grant the possibility, as Stewart goes on to claim, that on this reading of the psalm citation’s intended force within Paul’s rhetoric it is capable of functioning “simultaneously” as “an appropriate lamentation of affliction” and as “a declaration of the gospel of the crucified Lord.”²⁹ But it is difficult to see how, on this reading, the psalm citation can continue to carry any of its original

²⁵ *Echoes of Scripture*, 62–63. See also the similar conclusions drawn in Tyler Stewart, “The Cry of Victory: A Cruciform Reading of Psalm 44:22 in Romans 8:36,” *JSPL* 3 (2013): 44–45, Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary*, 548, Michael J. Gorman, *Cruciformity: Paul’s Narrative Spirituality of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 328–29, *Becoming the Gospel: Paul, Participation, and Mission* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 283 and Siu Fung Wu, *Suffering in Romans* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 2015), 193–94.

²⁶ See especially the discussion in Wu, *Suffering in Romans*, 207–21.

²⁷ Stewart, “The Cry of Victory,” 45. Cf. the similar suggestion in N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (London: SPCK, 2013), 635–36. On the question of the likely scriptural competence of Paul’s readers in Rome, see the brief discussion in J. Ross Wagner, *Heralds of the Good News: Paul and Isaiah ‘in Concert’*, NovtSup 101 (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 36–39.

²⁸ Stewart, “The Cry of Victory,” 44–45.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 45.

force as a *protesting* lament. It is difficult, too, to see how on this reading the ἀλλά (NRSV: “No..”) that commences verse 37 can retain its function as a strong disjunction within the rhetoric of the paragraph, if verse 36 is already serving as a radical reinterpretation of the sufferings referred to in the previous verse, and is intended by Paul to be heard as, in part at least, “an announcement of victory” and “a hopeful reminder of Jesus’ resurrection and the believer’s eventual participation at the parousia.”³⁰

2.3. Psalm 44:22 as a Lament to Which the Gospel Is a Response

In the remainder of this article I would like to propose a third alternative for how the intended function of the psalm citation in Romans 8:36 should be interpreted, building on the work of Sylvia Keesmaat,³¹ Mark Seifrid,³² and, more recently, Channing Crisler.³³ As Keesmaat, Seifrid and Crisler have all pointed out, the picture of the people of God as a community familiar with the experience of lament is already one that has been suggested in Romans 8, particularly in the description of believers in verse 23 as a people who “groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.”

The sufferings in view in this verse, which function as the occasion for the “groan[ing]” of believers, are not exclusively the missional sufferings which the church embraces as part of the cost of their solidarity with Christ; read in context, Paul’s words make best sense when taken as a broad reference to all of “the sufferings of this present time” (v. 18), which believers experience in common with the whole groaning creation. They include, therefore—in part, at least—the unchosen and unanticipated sufferings that come upon believers “without answer or evident basis,”³⁴ like the perplexing, unexplained sufferings that occasion the lament and protestation of Psalm 44.

On this reading, the original sense of the Psalm’s ἔνεκα σοῦ and its image of the people of God as “sheep to be slaughtered” can be retained,³⁵ as can the verse’s original function as an expression of lament and protest. The effect of the psalm citation in verse 36 is not to answer the question in the previous verse but to validate it and to intensify its force. In principle, given what Paul has already said in Romans 5:1–8:34, he could have safely made the assumption that his readers were capable of answering the rhetorical question of verse 35 for themselves, in the negative. But Paul’s purpose, it seems, is not for verse 35 to be heard as an easily and obviously self-answering question. Instead, he allows the question to linger unanswered for a moment, reinforcing its validity by giving it the endorsement of the psalm citation in verse 36, before answering it decisively and triumphantly in verses 37–39.

The implications of this reading are of great theological and pastoral importance. Lament, for Paul—even *protesting* lament—retains its validity as an authentic expression of Christian faith. It is

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Sylvia C. Keesmaat, “The Psalms in Romans and Galatians,” in *The Psalms in the New Testament*, ed. S. Moyise and M. J. J. Menken (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 149–52.

³² Mark A. Seifrid, “Romans,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 636–37.

³³ Channing L. Crisler, *Reading Romans as Lament: Paul’s Use of Old Testament Lament in His Most Famous Letter* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2016), 143–44.

³⁴ Seifrid, “Romans,” 637.

³⁵ As it happens, Seifrid does take the latter as a reminiscence of “Christ, the Suffering Servant, who likewise was led as a ‘sheep to slaughter’” (“Romans,” 636), but the identification of this intertextual echo does not require the conclusion that the total meaning of Christ’s sufferings is transferred to all of the sufferings of believers that the verse is referring to.

not faith's *last* word on suffering, but it is still a valid word to be spoken by God's people in response to sufferings that are unexplained and (at least from a human standpoint) inexplicable. Christians are to voice that which creation is unable to articulate—and when that fails, know that the Spirit is able to articulate for us that which we can say neither for ourselves nor for a groaning creation.

The message of the gospel does not explain the inexplicable, or restrict its comfort only to those sufferings that are uniquely Christian sufferings, experienced as the direct outworking of the faithfulness of believers. Nor does it work by a kind of hermeneutical alchemy to convert Old Testament lament into Stoic indifference or New Testament assurance. Its effect is not to silence the voice of lament or to convert it into some better, more Christian utterance; it is, rather, to offer assurance that the voice of the lamenter, and of the whole groaning creation, has been heard (and, indeed, that in the groanings of the Spirit the burden of the lament has been shared by God himself) and that it will ultimately find its answer through what God has already accomplished in the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Gospel Differences, Harmonisations, and Historical Truth: Origen and Francis Watson’s Paradigm Shift?

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Abstract: Claiming to stand on the shoulders of the later Origen, in *Gospel Writing: A Canonical Perspective*, Francis B. Watson makes a compelling case that *all* attempts to address alleged contradictions and establishing historical truth in and between the four canonical Gospels must be abandoned. Watson proposes that the later Origen’s preference for deeper spiritual and theological truth, in the wake of alleged empirical falsehood, should be embraced as a new paradigm and more ‘comprehensive approach,’ subverting and destroying previous approaches. In this article, I test Watson’s relevant interpretations of Origen, focusing on his *Commentary on John*, Book 10 (*Comm. Jo.*); *Against Celsus* (*Cels.*); and *On First Principles* (*Princ.*). In addition, I offer evidence challenging Watson’s claim that the later Origen’s return to addressing some contradictions and establishing historical truth in *Cels.* reflects popular apologetics for the wider public, in contrast to more radical thoughts on hermeneutics in Book 10 of his *Comm. Jo.* It is argued that a more comprehensive and persuasive understanding of Origen’s approach to Gospel differences and historicity, requires a close reading of his early and later treatises, resulting in a nuanced middle position.¹

In his 2013 volume, *Gospel Writing: A Canonical Perspective*, Francis B. Watson makes a compelling case that all attempts to address alleged contradictions and establishing historical truth in and between the four canonical Gospels—as necessary to establish truthfulness and the authority of Scripture—must be abandoned. After describing these practices in Augustine, the early Origen, modern harmonisations, various Gospels synopses, and quests of the historical Jesus, Watson offers the later

¹ A revised version of this article was presented at the 2016 British Patristics Conference in Birmingham, UK. Thanks must go to a couple Patristic specialists, including Prof Francis Young, who offered valuable advice. In particular, I have to thank Prof Wayne Coppins, who offered crucial comments on an earlier draft of this article.

Origen's rejection of harmonising contradictions, in the wake of alleged empirical falsehood, and the preference for a deeper spiritual and theological approach, as the only alternative.² In *Gospel Writing*, the latter forms the conscious hermeneutical background, as well as historical foundation, for much of Watson's own 'comprehensive approach' to Gospel differences.

In this article, I test whether Watson's 'more comprehensive' approach to Gospel differences, can legitimately claim the later Origen as its source and foundation, focusing particularly on key sections in his *Commentary on John*, Book 10 (*Comm. Jo.*); *Against Celsus* (*Cels.*); and *On First Principles* (*Princ.*). In addition, I engage with Watson's claim that the later Origen's surprising return to addressing some contradictions and establishing historical truth in and among the Gospels in *Cels.* reflects popular apologetics for the wider public, in contrast to more radical thoughts on hermeneutics in Book 10 of his *Comm. Jo.* I explore whether a more comprehensive and persuasive understanding of Origen's approach to Gospel differences and historicity, requires a close reading of his early and later treatises, contributing to a nuanced middle position.

The article is structured as follows. I start with Origen's *Comm. Jo.*, Book 10, and the methodological implications Watson draws from it. This is followed by explorations of harmonising contradictions and the historical credibility of the pluriform resurrection appearances in the canonical Gospels in *Cels.* Next a critique is offered of Watson's explanations for the later Origen's return to addressing contradictions and establishing historicity in *Cels.* In conclusion I explore relevant sections in *Princ.* and *Comm. Jo.*, Books 10–20, in an attempt to articulate a more comprehensive, nuanced, and persuasive understanding of Origen's approach to Gospel differences and historicity.³

1. Watson's Interpretation of Origen's Commentary of John, Book 10

In the early part of his *Comm. Jo.* Origen, like Augustine, engages in what Watson describes as the 'dubious practice of manufacturing separate sayings ... out of gospel variants',⁴ in order to reconcile differences between the Synoptic Gospels and the Gospel of John. This is done, in order to secure the evangelists' veracity, trustworthiness, and the authority of Scripture. For the Origen we encounter in the early stages of his *Comm. Jo.*, Watson argues:

There is no attempt to organize the parallel passages [in the Synoptic Gospels] into a single sequential narrative, as in a gospel harmony such as Tatian's. Nevertheless, the

² Henri Crouzel, *Origen* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989), 80, offers important insights into the complexities involved in understanding the various layers of meaning involved in Origen's 'spiritual exegesis' and allegorical method. However, I limit discussions of 'spiritual' and 'allegorical' meanings in Origen, to the way in which it is understood and applied by Francis Watson in *Gospel Writing: A Canonical Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013).

³ The primary concern of this article is therefore Origen and not an attempt to 'abstract Jesus from his own reception and to present him in the trappings of some preferred historical identity' (Watson, *Gospel Writing*, 607). It is also not an attempt to deny the inter-connection between reception, historical research, theology, hermeneutics, and the ongoing process of interpretation and reinterpretation. It is because I accept the inter-connection of these methods and approaches that it is possible to dialogue with Watson's interpretations of Origen, proposing re-adjustments and more nuanced refinements.

⁴ Watson, *Gospel Writing*, 548.

harmoniser's perpetual anxiety about *apparent contradictions*, passages that 'seem to clash' and that must be shown to be 'in agreement,' is also evident here.⁵

According to Watson, Origen is therefore not preferring one gospel above another, or constructing a 'single sequential narrative,' yet, in light of apparent contradictions he aims to show that they are in agreement. Examples where Origen attempt to do just that include John the Baptist's pronouncement that he himself was unworthy to carry Jesus's shoes in Matthew 3:11, in contrast with Mark 1:7, where he felt unworthy to stoop and untie them. What is crucial for both Origen and Augustine, according to Watson, is 'the incongruous historical claim that the Baptist must have spoken on different occasions both of untying and of carrying—one recorded by Mark, the other by Matthew—because otherwise the evangelists' veracity and trustworthiness would be compromised.'⁶

Thus, for the early Origen and Augustine, all apparent contradictions must be ironed out, 'resolvable into the singularity of a composite narrative,'⁷ on the assumption that 'the authority of the gospel narrative stands or falls with the possibility of successful harmonisation at the empirical-historical level.'⁸ Indeed, according to Watson, for the early Origen and Augustine, the 'plurality of the gospels is a threat to their credibility'.⁹

Later on in the commentary, specifically in Book 10, there is a dramatic change, as Origen finds it impossible to reconcile particular differences between the Synoptic Gospels and John's Gospel.¹⁰ In Book 10, Origen confronts, on the one hand, the Synoptic Gospels arguing that Jesus visited Capernaum after his temptation and John the Baptist's arrest (Mark 1:12–21; Luke 3:18–20; 4:1–31), whereas in John's Gospel, Jesus visits Capernaum before John's arrest and without any reference to the temptations (cf. John 1:29–2:12; 3:24). Instead of attempting to harmonise these accounts as he did earlier in his commentary, Origen now opposes this rationale,¹¹ putting 'his own former viewpoint to devastating critique,' as Watson puts it.¹² Because of the complexities of the fourfold text, Origen 'set[s] aside one set of interpretative tools and ... develop new ones.'¹³ Calling the differences in the four Gospels' reports

⁵ Ibid., 547, emphasis original.

⁶ Ibid., 548.

⁷ However, Watson also concedes that at times, Augustine can accept 'that canonical pluriformity discloses a degree of noncorrespondence to prior historical reality, and that this can be adequately explained not only psychologically but also theologically' (Ibid., 31).

⁸ Ibid., 549.

⁹ Ibid., 30.

¹⁰ Do Origen's quarrels with the Bishop of Alexandria have anything to do with this change? We know that Origen's ordination as presbyter while in Caesarea aroused the hostility of Demetrius, then bishop of Alexandria. This forced Origen to move to Palestine, where he established a new school (Annewies van den Hoek, "Origen. c. 185–253 AD," in *Dictionary of Biblical Criticism and Interpretation*, ed. Stanley E. Porter [London: Routledge, 2007], 249).

¹¹ Watson clearly adds some rhetorical spin to accentuate this change: 'Origen's anxiety attack when faced with his first significant gospel parallel is uncharacteristic. When he returns to this issue in Book 10 of his *Comm. Jo.*, he subjects his own earlier assumptions to radical criticism' (Watson, *Gospel Writing*, 548).

¹² Ibid., 552. See also David Laird Dungan, *A History of the Synoptic Problem. The Canon, the Text, the Composition, and the Interpretation of the Gospels*, ABRL (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 80–88, who discusses other examples not mentioned by Watson.

¹³ Watson, *Gospel Writing*, 542.

of exactly when Jesus visited Capernaum ‘dissonant plurality’, Watson shows how Origen rejects his previous quest for ‘empirical truth’ in favour of a deeper ‘spiritual truth.’¹⁴ Watson’s translation of Origen in this regard is as follows:

[The evangelists’] intention was, where possible, to speak spiritual and empirical truth together, and, where that was not possible, to prefer the spiritual to the empirical, frequently preserving (as one might put it) the spiritual truth in the empirical falsehood.¹⁵

The acknowledgement of empirical falsehood, the inevitable result of irresolvable difficulties in chronology between the four Gospels, leads Watson to conclude that numerous similar scenarios could be identified between the Synoptic Gospels and John’s Gospel, in light of which historical Jesus studies should be abandoned:

Faced with [this] dissonant plurality, there are just two possibilities: either to select one of the gospels as a historically reliable guide and to disregard the others, or to accept that the truth of the four is not to be found at the literal-historical level.... Thus the fourfold gospel marks the end of all attempts to reconstruct the life of the historical Jesus.¹⁶

It is important to underscore the weight and implication of what Watson is proposing here. Watson does not argue that there are cases of dissonant plurality which complicates attempts to explore and encounter the historical Jesus in and by way of the four Gospels;¹⁷ he claims categorically that the fourfold Gospel marks the end of *all* attempts to reconstruct the life of the historical Jesus.¹⁸ In fact, after mentioning various modern approaches and angles to historical Jesus studies, Watson argues:

¹⁴ Watson focuses on such issues as when Jesus visited Capernaum, and when the cleansing of the temple occurred (Ibid., 547–51). According to Origen, ‘the truth of these matters must lie in the spiritual sphere. Otherwise, if the discord is not resolved, our trust in the gospels must be abandoned and we may no longer regard them as true or divinely inspired or as the reliable record they are supposed to be. As for those who accept the four gospels but do not consider that the apparent discord is to be resolved analogically, let them tell us, in connection with the difficulties raised above about the forty days of temptation for which there is absolutely no room in John, when it was that the Lord came to Capernaum’ (Watson’s translation, *Gospel Writing*, 549–50; Origen, *Comm. Jo.* 10.2.10. Similar, Origen, *Comm. Jo.* 10.4.18–20).

¹⁵ Watson, *Gospel Writing*, 551; Origen, *Comm. Jo.* 10.4.18–20. However, take note of Markus Bockmuehl’s alternative translation: ‘preserving the spiritual truth “in the alleged literal falsehood”’ (‘Review of Watson, Francis B. *Gospel Writing. A Canonical Perspective*, *JTS* [2014], 206). Bockmuehl also argues that an anti-Lubacian agenda is conveniently served by Watson, whereby he removed “as one might put it” to the beginning of the phrase, thus yielding an Origen hermeneutically altogether untroubled about any “empirical falsehood” (206).

¹⁶ Watson, *Gospel Writing*, 564.

¹⁷ Attempts to explore and encounter the historical Jesus in and by way of the four Gospels, do not need to involve abstracting Jesus and the Gospels from reception, theology and hermeneutics. However, more work needs to be done in this regard.

¹⁸ This claim that the fourfold Gospel marks the end of *all* attempts to reconstruct the life of the historical Jesus, contradicts Watson’s claim in the prologue: a ‘new paradigm will not seek merely to subvert and destroy but will propose a more comprehensive framework *within which older results, insights, and perspectives may still have their place*’ (*Gospel Writing*, 2–3, my emphasis). Indeed, in Watson’s new scheme, there seems to be no more place for attempts to reconstruct the life of the historical Jesus, even more nuanced attempts from fresh new angles which could include insights from reception history.

What is undermined by gospel plurality or difference is direct access to a Jesus who is not yet or no longer what he is for Christian faith. From the standpoint Origen here attains, the assumption that difference threatens the gospel itself ... can only be regarded as perverse. The gospel is constituted by difference. The difference that problematizes empirical correspondence does so in order to open up the spiritual sense that makes the gospel gospel: good news bringing joy to the hearer on account of the ultimate well-being it promises.¹⁹

Before proceeding further, it should be noted that Origen's reflections on the gospel being 'good news bringing joy to the hearer' and what it promises, features particularly in Book one, chapter seven of the *Comm. Jo.* and not only in Book 10. In the former, the good news bringing joy is directly linked to a salvation-historical approach to prophesy and the historical figure Jesus of Nazareth who was crucified, raised from the dead and thereby the expected Messiah (cf. Matt 11:3; John 1:42–46; 4:25 and Luke 24:18–21).²⁰ Thus, in Book 1 the good news bringing joy is directly dependent upon literal-empirical claims about the person of Jesus of Nazareth, whereas in Book 10 the spiritual sense and good news functions independent of empirical correspondence among the pluriform Gospels. It therefore seems reasonable to argue that Origen's focus on a deeper spiritual meaning bringing good news and joy in Book 10, does not cancel out the historical basis for good news and joy in Book 1.

Watson's reading of Book 10 results in a striking dichotomy constructed between attempts to address alleged contradictions and establishing historical truth, and the complete abandonment of such attempts in favour of gospel plurality, the spiritual sense and well-being.²¹ Watson's detailed discussions and binary construal of an old paradigm (addressing contradictions and establishing historical truth) and new paradigm (spiritual and theological truth) seem to imply that Origen not only remained convinced about the methodological change he argued for in Book 10, but also, that he continued applying this new framework in subsequent academic treatise.²² If there was a major paradigm shift in Book 10, and if indeed the later Origen should be regarded as the catalyst and model for a new 'more comprehensive framework', that is, a theological and spiritual approach and quest for multiplicity, subverting and destroying an older harmonising and historical paradigm, then it needs to be explained why Origen would be returning to such 'perverse' harmonising practices and quests of historical truth *after* Book 10.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 550–51; 607–8.

²⁰ In Book 1, chapters 8–11, Origen focuses on Jesus himself being the 'gospel' as well as the 'sensible' and 'spiritual' gospel. Although there is a 'pure truth underlying' the perceptible, the former 'sensible' gospel is never excluded in Origen's discussion.

²¹ There are a number of instances where Watson's contrasting construal create the impression of two opposite and irreconcilable paradigms in Origen: 'a profound early reinterpretation ... [in contrast to] ... an existing interpretative practice'; 'former viewpoint' in contrast to a new viewpoint; 'wrong conception of "gospel truth"', implying a right conception (*Gospel Writing*, 552, 610). These contrasting construals are not only evident in Watson's engagements with alleged contradictions, but include more general sections dealing with historicity.

²² *Ibid.*, 2–3. In *Gospel Writing* there are no discussions or reflections on a *gradual development* from an old paradigm to a new paradigm in Origen. Nor is there any reflection on Origen initiating a new paradigm, but not always following through with it in subsequent projects (cf. *Ibid.*, 541–52).

2. Origen's Continued Quest to Address Some Contradictions in *Contra Celsum*

Against the background of Watson's description of a paradigm shift in Book 10 of Origen's *Comm. Jo.*, the most significant evidence that at least problematizes Watson's overall attempt to 'subvert and destroy' the empirical and harmonising paradigm of the early Origen and Augustine, is the later Origen's *Contra Celsum* (*Cels.*).²³ This volume of eight books and 622 chapters, Origen's comprehensive and sophisticated critique of issues raised by Celsus, the famous second century pagan sceptic, was written well after Book 10 of his *Comm. Jo.*²⁴ In Origen's attempt to counter Celsus's claims, he engages in a combination of harmonisations, a quest for empirical and historical truth, positive affirmations of historical and deeper spiritual truth, and at times respecting pluriformity of the canonical Easter narratives. We discuss examples of harmonisation and the quest to establish historical truth.

2.1. Harmonising Contradictions

In *Cels.* 2.69, Origen argues for the harmony of the Gospels in relation to Jesus being buried in Joseph of Arimathea's new tomb. In contrast to Celsus's claim that 'Jesus had disappeared after he had been put to death on the cross,' Origen describes the different reports of Jesus's burial, concluding that the four Easter narratives 'did not invent, as they [Celsus and his Jew] consider it ought to have done, any such instantaneous disappearance, but gave a true account of the matter' (*Cels.* 2.69). It is Celsus and his Jew who invent; the four Gospels offer historical truth. Although making the point that in another work he will expound various symbolical depths found in the Easter narratives (necessary to demonstrate the 'whole view of the truth'), Origen makes clear that for current purposes, he will counter Celsus's claims by focusing on 'the mere letter and narrative of the events which happened to Jesus.' Expounding the true accounts found in the Gospels, Origen argues it is

sufficient to notice the clean linen in which the pure body of Jesus was to be enwrapped, and the new tomb which Joseph had hewn out of the rock, where 'no one was yet lying,' or, as John expresses it, 'wherein was never man yet laid.' And observe whether the harmony of the three evangelists here is not fitted to make an impression: for they have thought it right to describe the tomb as one that was 'quarried or hewn out of the rock'; so that he who examines the words of the narrative may see something worthy of consideration, both in them and in the newness of the tomb—a point mentioned by Matthew and John—and in the statement of Luke and John, that no one had ever been interred therein before. (*Cels.* 2.69)

Indeed, despite differences in wording and perspective, Origen is able to move between the four Gospel accounts of Joseph's tomb in such a way as to secure extensive harmony and historical trustworthiness.

²³ Other evidence will be discussed later.

²⁴ According to Eusebius (*Church History* 6.34–36), the composition of *Cels.* should be placed during the reign of Philip the Arab in c. 244–49. If we can trust Eusebius that Origen died at the age of sixty-nine at around the same time as the emperor Decius (c. 249–51) (under whom he had endured imprisonment and torture), then it means *Cels.* was one of or even the last major work(s) he completed before his death (cf. Watson, *Gospel Writing*, 518).

A second example, remarkably similar to Augustine's attempts to reject contradictions and reconcile the differences in the reports of the angels in the canonical Easter narratives,²⁵ is found in *Cels.* 5.56. Contra Watson's claim that Celsus and Porphyry are 'more concerned with absurd or otherwise objectionable elements in the Gospels than with contradictions per se';²⁶ Origen decides to take up Celsus's claim of a contradiction between one angel in Mark 16:5 and Matthew 28:2; and two angels in Luke 24:4 and John 20:12:

Matthew and Mark speak of one, and Luke and John of two, which statements are not contradictory. For they who mention one, say that it was he who rolled away the stone from the sepulchre; while they who mention two, refer to those who appeared in shining raiment to the women that repaired to the sepulchre, or who were seen within sitting in white garments. Each of these occurrences might now be demonstrated to have actually taken place, and to be indicative of a figurative meaning existing in these phenomena, (and intelligible) to those who were prepared to behold the resurrection of the Word. (*Cels.* 5.56)

Notice Origen's clever move in the above citation: rejecting Celsus's insistence that the one angel in Mark 16:5 and Matthew 28:2, and two angels in Luke 24:4 and John 20:12 should be harmonised, Origen instead argues that none of these narratives contradict each other, as they narrate two separate historical events. They are not to be harmonised in the way Celsus demands, but they are nonetheless harmonious as they can be placed alongside each other without contradicting each other. Indeed, the Origen we encounter in this dialogue requires contradictions to be ironed out and resolved into the singularity of a composite narrative (*Cels.* 2.69).²⁷

2.2. The Historical Credibility of Pluriform Resurrection Appearances (Matt 28:9; Luke 24:41–43; John 20:19–29)

Origen informs us that Celsus and his Jew 'arbitrarily accepts' some positions of the canonical Easter narratives, 'in order to find ground of accusation' (*Cels.* 2.70). Thus, Celsus conveniently only selects those parts of the canonical Easter narratives that might suit his scepticism, ignoring those narratives and details that might provide answers for his scepticism. Elsewhere, Origen states that Celsus and his Jew 'arrange things differently from what they are', and that their selective reconstructions 'are deserving of ridicule' (*Cels.* 2.68). There are those who 'do not adopt certain portions merely of the narrative that they may have ground for accusing Christianity, and who consider other portions to be fiction' (*Cels.* 2.68). According to Origen, therefore, Celsus is employing at least three techniques: (1) he regards some events as credible in order to undermine the trustworthiness of others; (2) he rearranges events in order to discredit the actual sequences; and (3) he regards some portions as fictional from the start.

²⁵ Augustine, *The Harmony of the Gospels* 3.24.69; Watson, *Gospel Writing*, 38–43.

²⁶ Watson, *Gospel Writing*, 29n54.

²⁷ Origen provides interesting allegorical interpretations, one example being that the tomb was not built of stones gathered from various quarters, but carved out of one rock having a natural unity. The latter is of course Origen's own idea, nowhere hinted at in the biblical texts. Yet, the underlying reality is clear: Origen rejects Celsus's assertion that Jesus had immediately disappeared from the cross. Rather, Jesus's dead body was taken off the cross, buried, raised, leaving an empty tomb behind. The latter is the basis for a deeper spiritual meaning.

Against this background, we focus, on three separate resurrection appearances, and the way Origen describes Celsus's challenges, as well as Origen's counter responses.

2.2.1. Appearances to Mary Magdalene (John 20:11–17) or to Mary Magdalene and the Other Mary (Matthew 28:1–9)?

Origen's expositions of Jesus's appearances to women (Matt 28:1–10; John 20:11–17) are found in the context of Celsus's Jew who rejects the credibility of Jesus's resurrection because he should have appeared to the multitudes, not a small group of his own followers. Celsus's Jew argues that in contrast to addressing multitudes while still in the body, after his resurrection, Jesus appears only to one woman, and his own disciples:

while he was in the body, and no one believed upon him, he preached to all without intermission; but when he might have produced a powerful belief in himself after rising from the dead, he showed himself secretly only to one woman, and to his own boon companions. (*Cels.* 2.61)

Origen is quick to point out that Celsus's Jew did not read all the Easter narratives thoroughly. Whereas Celsus's Jew focused exclusively on the appearance to Mary Magdalene in John 20:11–17, Origen focuses on Matthew 28:1–9:

Now it is not true that He showed Himself only to one woman; for it is stated in the Gospel according to Matthew that 'in the end of the Sabbath, as it began to dawn towards the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene, and the other Mary, to see the sepulchre. And, behold, there had been a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord had descended from heaven, and come and rolled back the stone.' And, shortly after, Matthew adds: 'And, behold, Jesus met them'—clearly meaning the aforementioned Marys—'saying, All hail. And they came and held Him by the feet, and worshipped Him.' (*Cels.* 2.61)

Indeed, according to Origen, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary actually touched the post-resurrection body of Jesus.²⁸ Origen's verbatim citations, coming close to modern day proof-texting, are striking. Remarkably, the ease with which Origen cites Matthew 28:1, 9, where it is made clear that there were two Mary's, seems to imply that Origen finds no discrepancy or contradiction with what some could argue is an individual appearance to Mary Magdalene in John 20:11–17. Instead of addressing the latter possible discrepancy, Origen focuses on Celsus's Jew who claims Jesus should've appeared to the multitudes ('while undergoing his punishment he was seen by all, but after his resurrection only by one'), and uncovers a contradiction in his (that is, Celsus's) argumentation:

Observe here the manifest contradiction into which Celsus falls. For having said, a little before, that Jesus had appeared secretly to one woman and His own boon companions, he immediately subjoins: 'While undergoing his punishment he was seen by all men, but after his resurrection by one, whereas the opposite ought to have happened.' And let us hear what he means by 'ought to have happened.' The being seen by all men while

²⁸ Origen can even cite Acts 2:27 where Peter quotes Ps. 16:8–11, stating, for example, that 'My flesh shall rest in hope, and You will not leave my soul in Hades, and will not suffer Your Holy One to see corruption' (*Cels.* 2.61). It is at least interesting that Origen refers positively to the flesh in this context, since elsewhere, he rejects the Western view that the flesh will rise from the dead.

undergoing His punishment, but after His resurrection only by one individual, are opposites. Now, so far as his language conveys a meaning, he would have that to take place which is both impossible and absurd ... that while undergoing His punishment He should be seen only by one individual, but after His resurrection by all men! or else how will you explain his words, 'The opposite ought to have happened?' (*Cels.* 2.70)

Thus, after correcting Celsus's claim that the risen Jesus appeared secretly only to one woman (John 20; Matt 28), and to his own boon companions, Origen turns the tables, arguing it is Celsus's claims which are impossible and absurd. It is not the pluriform Easter narratives, but Celsus's claims which are contradictory.

2.2.2. Greek Mythology, Jesus's Divinity, and Eating Fish (Luke 24:41–43)

Origen's interpretation of Luke 24:41–43 is found in a section where Celsus questions the divinity of Jesus, on the grounds that he eats and is nourished, presumably unlike the Greek 'gods'. According to Celsus, 'the body of a god is not nourished with such food (as was that of Jesus) ... the body of a god does not make use of such a voice as that of Jesus, nor employ such a method of persuasion as he' (*Cels.* 1.70).²⁹

Interestingly, for the sake of argument, it seems Celsus accepts the credibility of Luke 24:41–43, but only to demonstrate that Jesus was not a 'god'. Origen responds, adamantly referring to: (i) Jesus 'actually' eating the Passover with His disciples (Mark 14; Matt 26; Luke 22; John 13); (ii) Jesus experiencing the sensation of thirst beside the well of Jacob (John 4:6–7); and crucially (iii) the risen Jesus eating fish ('it appears indubitable that after His resurrection He ate a piece of fish [Luke 24:41–43]; for, according to our view, He assumed a (true) body, as one born of a woman', *Cels.* 1.70).

Origen's strategy is to underscore Celsus's problem by highlighting the pre-resurrection Jesus's eating, being thirsty, and the post-resurrection Jesus eating fish. Instead of spiritualising these texts in order to counter Celsus's rejection of Jesus's divinity, Origen highlights their literal truth, preparing the way for his next clever move. Being thoroughly steeped in Greek mythology himself, Origen is able to show that Celsus's objections are not only trifling, but 'altogether contemptible', finding conceptually similar actions in Greek mythology. Origen shows that

he who is believed among the Greeks to be a god, viz., the Pythian and Didymean Apollo, makes use of such a voice for his Pythian priestess at Delphi, and for his prophetess at Miletus; and yet neither the Pythian nor Didymean is charged by the Greeks with not being a god, nor any other Grecian deity whose worship is established in one place. And it is far better, surely, that a god should employ a voice which, on account of its being uttered with power, should produce an indescribable sort of persuasion in the minds of the hearers. (*Cels.* 1.70)

To summarise, Origen's exposition of Luke 24:41–43 and related texts are remarkably historical and literal, even excluding deeper spiritual meanings. Indeed, an exclusively deeper spiritual meaning of the risen Jesus eating would have been helpful to refute Celsus's rejection of Jesus's divinity. On the contrary, Origen emphasises the historicity and literal truth of Luke 24:41–43, even invoking Celsus's Greek gods as witnesses.

²⁹ See also Origen's *Commentary on Matthew* 11.2.

2.2.3. Perverted Imaginations and Docetism: Doubting Thomas and the Emmaus Stories (John 20:24–27 and Luke 24:13–35)

In *Cels.* 2.60–62, Origen attempts to address a number of inter-related challenges raised by Celsus. According to Celsus, the appearances of Jesus were either (i) misinterpreted dreams; (ii) the actualisation of a desired image under influence of a perverted imagination; (iii) some kind of docetism, that is, after Jesus's death, he exhibited only the 'appearance of wounds received on the cross'; or (iv) non-bodily ghostly vanishings.

Starting with (i) misinterpreted dreams and (ii) a desired image under influence of a perverted imagination, Origen concedes that such things are indeed possible while one is asleep, but distinguishes the latter from what actually happened: 'Now it is not irrational to believe that a dream may take place while one is asleep; but to suppose a waking vision in the case of those who are not altogether out of their senses, and under the influence of delirium or hypochondria, is incredible' (2.60).

Repudiating Celsus for arbitrarily selecting the appearance to Mary Magdalene (including his dubious description of her character), in an attempt to refute any kind of docetism (iii), Origen unpacks the appearance to doubting Thomas, which is, probably, conveniently ignored by Celsus. Origen takes great care in trying to convince Celsus that Thomas could actually touch the scars of the risen Jesus's body (John 20:27): Thomas did not merely say 'Unless I see, I will not believe'; Origen emphasises what Thomas added: 'Unless I put my hands upon His side, I will not believe.' These words, Origen makes clear,

were spoken by Thomas, who deemed it possible that the body of the soul might be seen by the eye of sense, resembling in all respects its former appearance both in size, and in beauty of eyes, and in voice; and frequently, too 'Having, also, such garments around the person (as when alive).' Jesus accordingly, having called Thomas, said, 'Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side' (*Cels.* 2.61).

In what follows, as background for the claim of a non-bodily ghostly vanishings (iv), Origen emphasises that Jesus's resurrection was predicted (Job 17:14; Acts 2:27) and should be marvelous. Describing Jesus's miraculous ability to appear and disappear at will, Origen proposes that the risen Jesus 'existed in a body intermediate, as it were, between the grossness of that which He had before His sufferings, and the appearance of a soul uncovered by such a body' (*Cels.* 2.61).

Of course, this explanation is necessary, putting in perspective the miraculous and uncommon abilities of the risen Jesus's body. This is followed by a citation of John 20:26–27, where the risen Jesus appears in his disciples' midst while the doors were shut, inviting Thomas to touch his body. Without interval or elaboration, Origen expounds Luke 24:14–17, 31:

In the Gospel of Luke also, while Simon and Cleopas were conversing with each other respecting all that had happened to them, Jesus 'drew near, and went with them. And their eyes were holden, that they should not know Him. And He said unto them, What manner of communications are these that ye have one to another, as ye walk?' And when their eyes were opened, and they knew Him, then the Scripture says, in express words, 'And He vanished out of their sight.' (2.62)

The way in which Origen moves freely between John 20:26–27 and Luke 24:14–17, 31, suggests not only that there are conceptually similar themes in both accounts; but also, implicitly, that both accounts actually happened.

2.3. Summary

Origen takes seriously Celsus's approach and arguments in rejecting the resurrection of Jesus: (i) some events are held to be credible in order to undermine the truthfulness of others; (ii) events are rearranged in order to discredit the actual sequences; and (iii) some portions are dismissed as fictional from the start. Origen engages these issues as follows. First, alleged contradictions are harmonised (one angel in Mark 16:5 and Matt 28:2; two angels in Luke 24:4 and John 20:12). Second, Jesus appeared not only to Mary Magdalene but also to the other Mary (John 20:11–17; Matt 28:1–9). Third, contradictions are uncovered in Celsus's argumentation. Fourth, in support of the credibility of the risen Jesus eating (Luke 24:41–43), conceptually similar abilities of gods in Greek mythology is offered (the background is Celsus doubting Jesus's divinity). Fifth, countering Celsus's claims that the appearances are misinterpreted dreams, the actualisation of a desired image, some kind of docetism, or a non-bodily ghostly vanishing, Origen argues as follows:

- (a) the appearances occurred in daylight, not at night or while they slept;
- (b) countering docetism, Origen focuses on the physicality of Jesus's appearance to doubting Thomas (John 20:27; probably absent from Celsus's reconstruction);
- (c) addressing claims of a ghostly disappearance, the focus is on the resurrection being predicted and miraculous (Job 17:14; Acts 2:27); the risen Jesus possessing an 'intermediate' body; his supernatural ability to appear and disappear (John 20:26–27 and Luke 24:14–17 are both trustworthy), and believers' eyes were withheld from seeing the risen Jesus.

In conclusion, addressing Celsus's challenges in relation to the pluriform reports of the resurrection of Jesus in the four Gospels, Origen harmonises differences; rejects selective readings that compromise historicity; uncovers contradictions in Celsus's arguments; and offers external and internal evidence in support of the historicity and credibility of the resurrection of Jesus. Thus, exactly that which Watson submits to devastating criticism in Augustine and the early Origen's harmonisation program—that is, harmonising different gospel accounts, establishing historical truth, and even engaging in the 'dubious practice of manufacturing separate sayings ... out of gospel variants'³⁰—is done by the 'hero' of Watson's 'more comprehensive' 'new paradigm',³¹ long after Book 10 of his *Comm. Jo.*

3. *Popular Apologetics (Against Celsus) in Contrast to More Radical Thoughts on Hermeneutics (Commentary on John)?*

Watson's detailed critique, binary construal between an old and new paradigm, and the use of emotive words such as 'perverse' and 'destroy' in relation to Origen's harmonisation paradigm (in *Gospel Writing*), leaves the reader with the expectation that Origen's spiritual and theological paradigm (after *Comm. Jo.*, Book 10) replaced the old paradigm, and that he continued to follow through with the new

³⁰ Watson, *Gospel Writing*, 548; 40–43.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

paradigm in subsequent treatise. Although Watson can refer to the *supplementation* of an initial *a priori* hermeneutic, he also states that ‘Origen is compelled by the complex realities of the fourfold text to *set aside* one set of interpretative tools and to develop new ones.’³² It is precisely in the latter context that Watson relies on Origen, claiming that ‘the fourfold gospel marks the end of *all* attempts to reconstruct the life of the historical Jesus.’³³ The latter seems to imply that Origen never again attempted to address alleged contradictions and engage in serious historical Jesus reconstructions of the fourfold Gospel. Indeed, even in an earlier article, exploring the assumption that Gospel harmonisation is essential to the credibility of Christianity, Watson’s binary construal of an old and new paradigm is evident: ‘Augustine’s *De Consensu Evangelistarum*—a work whose enduring influence on western Christianity ensured that the *alternative* Origenist approach to gospel differences remained virtually unknown.’³⁴

Against this background, if Watson is correct to argue for an early and later Origen representing an old and a new paradigm (addressing contradictions and establishing historical-truth), and an exclusively spiritual and theological paradigm (destroying and subverting the former), then there needs to be persuasive evidence presented why the later Origen, at times, continued with the old ‘dubious’ and ‘perverse’ practice of harmonising contradictions and establishing historical truth between the Gospels in *Cels*. In the absence of such evidence, the claim of an old and new paradigm could be understood as an artificially imposed scheme not adequately reflecting a more complex and nuanced methodological and hermeneutical reality in Origen. In addition, the latter could call into question the alleged new ‘more comprehensive’ approach extensively articulated and defended by Watson in *Gospel Writing*, because Origen’s Book 10, *Comm. Jo.*, functions as hermeneutical framework for it. Yet, there are no discussions of the relevant issues in *Gospel Writing*.

In personal correspondence, Watson acknowledged being aware of Origen harmonising contradictions, and a quest to establish historical truth between the Gospels, in his extended critique of Celsus. He also indicated being aware that this critique was completed well after Book 10 of Origen’s *Comm. Jo.* Watson’s explanation for the methodological and hermeneutical differences between these works is that he would not expect Origen’s more radical thoughts on hermeneutics (*Comm. Jo.*, Book 10) to feature in a work of apologetics intended for a wider public (*Cels*).³⁵ Watson’s claim is therefore that Origen’s *Comm. Jo.*, particularly Book 10 and beyond, represents his more radical thoughts on hermeneutics, written for the sophisticated reader and not apologetic in nature, in contrast to his critique of Celsus, which represents the genre of popular apologetics for the less educated and wider public. These claims require scrutiny.

³² Ibid., 542, my emphasis.

³³ Ibid., 564. Interestingly, this coming to an end of *all* attempts to do historical Jesus research in relation to Gospel differences, seems to be rejected by Francis Watson: ‘The goal of the present argument is to show how the scholarly construct known as the “historical Jesus” can be *reintegrated* into the canonical image of the historic, biblical Christ’ (*Veritas Christi: How to Get from the Jesus of History to the Christ of Faith without Losing One’s Way*, in *Seeking the Identity of Jesus: A Pilgrimage*, ed. Beverly Roberts Gaventa and Richard B. Hays (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 101). Also, ‘The concrete traits of the historical Jesus belongs within an account of the “historic, biblical Christ” and should not be allowed to take on an independent life of their own’ (114). Watson does offer various qualifications under the heading ‘The Dynamics of Reception’, but it reflects a more nuanced view in comparison to *Gospel Writing*, 542–52.

³⁴ Watson, ‘Historian’, 64n39, my emphasis.

³⁵ In personal correspondence with Watson, after presenting some of the harmonisations found in *Cels*. and contrasting it with *Comm. Jo.*, Book 10 (22 October 2013).

3.1. The Absence of *Contra Celsus* in Gospel Writing

It is potentially significant that there is no mention of the later Origen returning to harmonising contradictions, and a quest to establish historical truth in *Cels.*, in Watson's *Gospel Writing*. One would at least have expected a footnote about the later Origen's return to addressing contradictions, as Watson refers to *Cels.* elsewhere when it suits his argument.³⁶ In his more recent *The Fourfold Gospel. A Theological Reading of the New Testament Portraits of Jesus*, Watson reflects briefly on Origen's *Comm. Jo.*, Book 10, summarising his more detailed discussions in *Gospel Writing*. Significantly, he includes a four page discussion of *Cels.*, calling it 'his great apologetic treatise',³⁷ but there is no mention of the way in which the later Origen harmonise Gospel differences in the four Easter accounts,³⁸ nor reference to his claim that *Comm. Jo.* contains radical thoughts on hermeneutics for the more sophisticated reader, while *Cels.* represents popular apologetics for the wider public. Of course, if indeed Watson is correct in claiming that Origen's *Comm. Jo.* contains radical thoughts on hermeneutics in contrast to apologetics intended for a wider public in *Cels.*, then it would not be significant that there is no engagement with the latter in *Gospel Writing*. Indeed, Watson would be vindicated. But that is what needs to be tested below.

3.2. Engaging Watson's Popular Apologetics (*Contra Celsus*) and Radical Hermeneutics (*Commentary on John*) Claims

Watson's claims seem to imply that apologetics intended for a wider and less educated audience in *Cels.* gave Origen the liberty to contradict an anti-harmonisation and spiritually informed methodology implemented in Book 10 of his *Comm. Jo.* It also seems to imply that the *Comm. Jo.* was not intended for the wider public and apologetic in nature, therefore explaining Origen's more radical hermeneutics, historical-criticism and spiritual expositions in Book 10. If Watson's claims and its implications are probable, then we can assume that Origen would be content to abandon his new 'radical' methodological principles developed in his *Comm. Jo.* (specifically in Book 10) in *Cels.*, knowing full well that bishops, educated Christians (not the 'wider public'), and sceptics in particular (Celsus?) would be able to detect and expose serious methodological inconsistencies in these two works, but that it would not matter, as they would be aware that *Cels.* is popular apologetics for the 'wider public', in contrast to the *Comm. Jo.* which reflects more radical hermeneutical insights for a small elite.³⁹

On the other hand, should one not allow for serious inconsistencies in Origen's different works? Tertullian and Augustine, we know, went through different theological phases (in relation to the

³⁶ Watson, *Gospel Writing*, 96n120; 402 n106. In Francis Watson, *The Fourfold Gospel. A Theological Reading of the New Testament Portraits of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016), there are four pages of reflections on Origen's *Cels.*, yet there are no acknowledgement or discussions of a return to addressing contradictions between the Gospels (175–79).

³⁷ Watson, *Fourfold Gospel*, 175.

³⁸ While Watson's claim that 'Celsus knows that a number of versions of the gospel are in circulation, but he is familiar primarily with the Matthean one' (Ibid., 176) is accurate in relation to the miraculous birth of Jesus, the same is not the case when it comes to the canonical Easter narratives (cf. *Cels.* 2.69; 5.56). In the latter case, Celsus introduces alleged contradictions between the four Gospels which Origen attempts to resolve.

³⁹ We know that Origen's ordination as presbyter during a visit to Caesarea aroused the hostility of Demetrius, the bishop of Alexandria. After a second return to Alexandria, Origen eventually moved to Palestine where he established a new school. Book 10 of his *Comm. Jo.* and *Cels.* post-dates the hostilities with the bishop. Cf. Watson, *Gospel Writing*, 516–24, 532.

resurrection body) that clearly highlighted significant development and contradictions in their work.⁴⁰ We also know that Philo of Alexandria, for instance, differentiated between the audiences he wrote for, and it had a significant impact on what and how he wrote.⁴¹ Could the same be true of Origen's commentary on John on the one hand, and his volume refuting Celsus on the other? We suggest there are credible reasons to doubt all these possibilities.

3.2.1. *Refuting Heracleon (Commentary on John) and Celsus (Contra Celsus)*

Both Origen's *Comm. Jo.* and *Cels.* are written against the background of what were held to be serious errors threatening the orthodox faith. In relation to Origen's *Comm. Jo.*, Watson rightly shows how Ambrosius, Origen's patron and publisher, was himself a convert from Valentinianism, asking Origen to devote special attention to refuting an earlier, heretical commentary on John. Jerome and Clement tell us that this commentary was written by Heracleon.⁴² Following Ambrosius's advice, Origen interacts with and refutes Heracleon's heretical claims up until Book 20 of his *Comm. Jo.* (which has been lost); thus, long after Book 10, in which he abandons harmonisation.⁴³ Origen is therefore writing a counter-commentary on an earlier Valentinian commentary, attempting to provide an important and useful tool that can provide guidance to searching and confused Christians. In Book 8 of his *Comm. Jo.*, Origen shows how the

heterodox are rising up against Christ's holy church with their pretended knowledge, producing works in many books that provide an exposition of the gospels.... If we remain silent and do not oppose them with true and sound teaching, they will get a hold on inquiring minds who, for lack of wholesome fare, would hasten after forbidden and truly unclean and hateful foods.⁴⁴

The context seems to suggest that the 'inquiring minds' Origen refers to, includes the wider public, who probably lacks the knowledge and ability to understand the difference between heresy and orthodoxy, and whose faith could easily be shaken.

By comparison, how does Origen describe the audience he is writing for in *Cels.*? In the preface to Book 1 Origen explains the background of the defense he is about to give. Likely his last scholarly work before his death, his maturity as a Christian scholar is evident, as he emphasises that the arguments and

⁴⁰ For Tertullian, see *Against Marcion* 3.25; 5.10 and *The Resurrection of the Flesh* 62–63. For Augustine, see *On Faith and the Creed*, *The Kingdom of God* and *Retractations*. In *Retr.* Augustine attempted to address tensions and contradictions between his early and later work.

⁴¹ See e.g. John C. Cavadini, 'Exegetical Transformations: The Sacrifice of Isaac in Philo, Origen, and Ambrose' in *In Dominico Eloquio—In Lordly Eloquence: Essays on Patristic Exegesis in Honor of Robert Louis Wilken*, ed. Paul M. Blowers, Angela Russell Christman, and David G. Hunter (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 35–49.

⁴² Watson, *Gospel Writing*, 525–28; See Elaine H. Pagels, *The Johannine Gospel in Gnostic Exegesis: Heracleon's Commentary on John* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1973). Pagels argues that the earliest known exegetical commentary on John's Gospel comes from Heracleon, which she dates to around c. 160–80. Even earlier, Pagels argues, the Naassenes (from around c. 100) and Peratae referred to the Gospel of John 'to the virtual exclusion of the synoptics' (*ibid.*, 16; cf. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1.8.5; 3.11.7).

⁴³ Watson, *Gospel Writing*, 525.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 524–25. We will refer to the same issue in *Cels.* later.

threats offered by Celsus should not shake the faith of even ordinary believers.⁴⁵ Yet, crucially, Origen goes on explaining that

since in the multitude of those who are considered believers some such persons might be found as would have their faith shaken and overthrown by the writings of Celsus, but who might be preserved by a reply to them of such a nature as to refute his statements and to exhibit the truth, we have deemed it right to yield to your [Ambrosius's] injunction, and to furnish an answer to the treatise which you sent us (Preface 4).

Explaining that his intention was to start by focusing on Celsus's principle objections, followed by brief answers, and then a subsequent systematic treatise of the whole discourse, Origen apologises for not being able to follow these procedures; offering as excuse that he should be economical with his time. With this in mind Origen states: 'I should in the following part grapple closely, to the best of my ability, with the charges of Celsus' (*Cels.* Preface 6). Origen is therefore taking very seriously Celsus's challenges, and the references to 'grapple closely' and 'best of my ability' suggest he is going to refute Celsus with some of the very best and sophisticated skills and tools available to him. Indeed, to be discussed below (3.2.2), the latter also indicates that the more sophisticated reader will benefit from Origen's critiques of Celsus.

Thus, Origen's reference to the 'heterodox ... rising up' and the prospect that they might 'get a hold on inquiring minds' if he does not oppose them (*Comm. Jo.*) on the one hand, and the reference to some whose faith might be 'shaken and overthrown by the writings of Celsus' should he not respond on the other, seems to suggest that both works are indeed apologetic, intended for the wider public, and aimed at refuting heresy. The former concerns Heracleon, the latter Celsus.

3.2.2. Criticising the 'Wider Public' in *Contra Celsus*

If one accepts Watson's claim that *Cels.* is popular apologetics for the wider public in contrast to radical hermeneutics for a more sophisticated audience in *Comm. Jo.*, then one would not expect Origen to severely criticize the beliefs and interpretive skills of the wider public (understood to be uneducated Christians) in *Cels.* The latter seems to be implied in Watson's relevant claims.⁴⁶ Watson also seems to suggest that Origen allowed himself the right to harmonise differences between the Gospels in *Cels.*, in order to meet the apologetic requirements of strengthening the faith of the wider public, while in a more sophisticated work for the intelligent believer, he rejects harmonisations (*Comm. Jo.*, Book 10). Against this background, I reflect on two examples in *Cels.*, where Origen criticizes the wider public.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Origen emphasises that Celsus's book was not composed for 'thorough believers', but either for 'such as are either wholly unacquainted with the Christian faith, or for those who, as the apostle terms them are 'weak in the faith.'" (*Cels.* Preface 5–6). However, the latter must include at least some rhetorical spin, as Origen also states that those who are not impressed or assisted by his 'powerful arguments', which he crafted to the 'best of his ability', are referred 'to men who are wiser ... and who are able by words and treatises to overthrow the charges which he [Celsus] brings against us'.

⁴⁶ Origen can defend the faith of the uneducated wider public at times (cf. *Cels.* 1.9), but my aim is to demonstrate that Origen's criticisms of the uneducated in *Cels.* rules out the binary construal that the *Comm. Jo.*, is for the educated elite and *Cels.* for the uneducated wider public.

⁴⁷ Underlying this claim is the understanding that it is less likely that a popular apologetic work for the wider public, would include various dismissals of views held by the wider public in the context of Christian beliefs. Relevant theological issues will be explored in what follows.

3.2.2.1. The Resurrection of the Flesh

Origen seems to blame less sophisticated believers for Celsus's wrong perceptions of the resurrection body: 'Celsus ridicules this doctrine because he does not understand it and because he has learned it from ignorant persons, who were unable to support it on any reasonable grounds' (*Cels.* 5.19; 7.32).⁴⁸ In dealing with Paul's seed analogy in 1 Corinthians 15:37, in contrast to the then popular claim that Paul's seed analogy implies that dust particles that remain following the decomposition of dead bodies will somehow be taken up, absorbed and transformed as part of the future spiritual body, Origen persistently argues the opposite. There is no connection between the future spiritual body and particles that remain following decomposition of dead bodies. For Origen, the latter represents the natural body (1 Cor 15:44) and flesh and blood (15:50) that will not inherit the kingdom of God. In an attempt to counter the misguided views of Celsus, the 'simpler class' and 'wider public,' Origen declared: 'Our hope is not the hope of worms, nor does our soul long for a body that has seen corruption' (*Cels.* 5.19). As hermeneutical framework for the latter perspectives, Origen incorporated the Platonic idea of the *eidos* and the Stoic terminology of 'seminal reasons' or 'structures' to designate the soul as the principle of continuity between the dying and resurrection body. Also, Origen utilized the ancient concept of the body as flux (the human person understood in terms of 'continual psychosomatic change'), expressed in the Galenic version of humoral theory to insist on the necessary transformation, discontinuity and radical change that will be characteristic of the future spiritual body.⁴⁹

Thus, when dealing with Celsus's misconceptions about the resurrection body, not only is Origen criticizing the wider public's belief in the resurrection of the flesh, he offers an alternative combining Middle Platonic, Stoic, Galenic and scriptural insights in a remarkably sophisticated way. The latter seems not to reflect popular apologetics for the wider public, but the kind of hermeneutic that would appeal to the more sophisticated Christian. Indeed, it was only Origen's sophisticated articulations of the resurrection body that would provide sufficient evidence to counter Celsus's claims.

3.2.2.2. A Sophisticated Interpretation of the Baptism of Jesus

Origen informs us that Celsus regards the Gospel of Matthew's reports of the virginal conception of Jesus and his baptism as pious fraud. In response, Origen articulates three methodological options remarkably close to the historical-criticism articulated in *Comm. Jo.*, Book 10. After exploring a number of examples from Greek mythology, Origen argues:

He who deals candidly with histories, and would wish to keep himself also from being imposed upon by them, will exercise his judgment as to what statements he will give his assent to, and what he will accept figuratively, seeking to discover the meaning of the authors of such inventions, and from what statements he will withhold his belief, as having been written for the gratification of certain individuals (*Cels.* 1.42).

Origen therefore identifies three basic options for assessing historical work. First, its historical claims are accepted as literally true. Second, rejecting literalism, a figurative or spiritual meaning

⁴⁸ There is little doubt that the wider public in the early church believed in the resurrection of the flesh. Cf. Caroline Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200–1336*, LHR 15 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 19–58; Brian E. Daley, "A Hope for Worms," in *Resurrection: Theological and Scientific Assessments*, ed. Ted Peters, et al. (Grand Rapids.: Eerdmans, 2002), 136–64, esp. 147–48.

⁴⁹ Bynum, *Resurrection*, 63–67; Daley, "Worms", 153–56.

is intended. Third, the story is invented for the benefit of particular persons. These methodological possibilities, Origen states, are lauded out

by way of anticipation respecting the whole history related to the Gospels concerning Jesus, not as inviting men of acuteness to a simple and unreasoning faith, but wishing to show that there is need of candour in those who are to read, and of much investigation, and, so to speak, of insight into the meaning of the writers, that the object with which each event has been recorded may be discovered (1.42).

Not the uneducated, but the more sophisticated believer is in a position to select the appropriate methodology for a particular text. After exploring various conceptually similar phenomenon in the life of Moses, Ezekiel and Isaiah (including the heavens being split open), Origen not only proposes that the heavens being split open in Matthew should be interpreted figuratively, he does so, knowing full well that the latter would be a stumbling block for the wider public:

I do not suppose that the visible heaven was actually opened, and its physical structure divided, in order that Ezekiel might be able to record such an occurrence. Should not, therefore, the same be believed of the Saviour by every intelligent hearer of the Gospels?—although such an occurrence may be a stumbling-block to the simple, who in their simplicity would set the whole world in movement, and split in sunder the compact and mighty body of the whole heavens (1.48).

3.3. Summary

To test Watson's claims, I focused on the potential significance of the absence of *Cels.*, in *Gospel Writing*, followed by a more elaborate engagement with the claim that *Cels.* is a popular apologetic work for the wider public, in contrast to the *Comm. Jo.*, written for the more sophisticated reader and containing more radical thoughts on hermeneutics. I offered evidence indicating that both works contain apologetics intended for the wider public, providing answers for believers whose faith might otherwise be shaken. In *Comm. Jo.*, Heracleon's heretical views are addressed while Celsus's claims are dealt with in *Cels.* Next I explored the significance of criticisms leveled against the wider public in *Cels.*, focusing on Origen's rejection of the popular view that the flesh will be raised in future, and his rejection of the literal truth of the events narrated in Matthew's story of the baptism of Jesus. In both instances, Origen articulated a sophisticated view siding with educated readers, openly rejecting the wider public's interpretations.

In light of the evidence presented, it could be argued that *Cels.* is not a work of popular apologetics for the 'wider public' and 'simple' Christians in radical contrast with Origen's *Comm. Jo.*, which is addressed to the 'more intelligent believer', containing radical thoughts on hermeneutics. Both are apologetic treatises, intended to address various heresies, equipping believers so their faith will not be shaken. Not only that, both Origen's *Comm. Jo.* (Book 10 and beyond) and *Cels.* contain more radical thoughts on hermeneutics, written for an audience that includes sophisticated readers.

4. A More Comprehensive Methodological Paradigm for Origen's Approach

Our explorations of Origen's *Comm. Jo.* and *Cels.* have shown that both these works contain apologetics for the wider public, as well as more radical thoughts on hermeneutics. However, in order to

provide an alternative and more nuanced alternative to Watson's construal of a 'comprehensive approach' in the work of Origen, we need to provide additional evidence. Thus, in addition to the evidence already presented in *Cels.*, we explore relevant examples from *On First Principles* and *Comm. Jo.*, Books 10–20.

4.1. On First Principles

In *On First Principles*—probably written between AD 220 and 230, and according to some, the first ever Christian systematic theology—Origen explores both deeper spiritual and literal interpretations of a variety of Old and New Testament texts.⁵⁰ Focusing on such commands as 'Salute no man by the way' (Luke 10:4); 'If someone strikes you on the cheek, offer him the other one as well' (Luke 6:29); and 'if your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out' (Matt 5:29),⁵¹ Origen skillfully demonstrates how such commands of Jesus should be interpreted spiritually. Probably anticipating questions about related texts making literal claims, Origen argues that 'very many of these are to be literally observed' (cf. 'honour your father and mother' and various prohibitions [i.e. 'you shall not commit adultery' and 'you shall not steal']). In the same context, Origen also deals with what he calls 'certain' unhistorical and a 'majority' of historical events:

Let no one, however, entertain the suspicion that we do not believe any history in Scripture to be real, because we suspect certain events related in it not to have taken place ... or that we do not believe those predictions which were written of the Saviour to have been fulfilled in a manner palpable to the senses.... We have therefore to state in answer, since we are manifestly so of opinion, that the truth of the history may and ought to be preserved in the majority of instances (*Princ.* 4.19).

Origen then goes on mentioning some of these 'majority of instances', primarily focusing on Old Testament texts (cf. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob being buried at Hebron; Shechem that was given to Joseph; Jerusalem being the metropolis of Judea and Solomon who built the temple), concluding that there are 'countless other [such] statements'. Origen concludes by claiming that 'the passages which are historically true are far more numerous than those which were composed with purely spiritual meaning' (*Princ.* 4.19).⁵² Applied to Gospel differences, the latter approach could imply that there are instances where a purely spiritual meaning is to be preferred (in light of dissonant plurality and alleged empirical falsehood), while there are far more instances where the Gospels contain historically true passages (and that alleged contradictions can be addressed successfully).

Even Watson acknowledges (before focusing on Gospel differences in Origen's *Comm. Jo.*) that Origen's hermeneutic is not everywhere the same. Criticizing those proposing that the distinction between literal-historical and anagogical-spiritual senses remain consistently the same in Origen,

⁵⁰ John A. McGuckin, 'The Scholarly Works of Origen' in *The SCM Press A-Z of Origen*, ed. John A. McGuckin, The SCM Press A-Z of Christian Theology (London: SCM, 2006), 25–44, esp. 36.

⁵¹ In *Princ.* 4.18, Origen speaks of 'the very soil and surface, so to speak, of Scripture—that is, the literal meaning—is the field, filled with plants and flowers of all kinds; while that deeper and profounder spiritual meaning are the very hidden treasures of wisdom and knowledge which the Holy Spirit by Isaiah calls the dark and invisible and hidden treasures'. Although Origen focuses on and favours a deeper spiritual meaning more often than the literal meaning, he does not give up on historical and literal readings alongside deeper spiritual meanings.

⁵² Cf. Dungan, *Synoptic Problem*, 81, 427n64–n65. In *Princ.* 4.16 Origen considered unhistorical Jesus's temptation in the wilderness (Matt 4:1–11), his triumphal entry into Jerusalem on a donkey (John 12), and his cleansing of the temple (Matt 21:12–17). See Dungan, *Synoptic Problem*, 78–88.

Watson underscores the reality that Origen's hermeneutic is affected by 'differences of genre among the scriptural texts or by specific issues arising in interpretative practice'.⁵³ Acknowledging there is a close relationship between hermeneutical theory and interpretative practice in Origen, Watson nevertheless concedes that 'it seems unlikely that exactly the same theory could determine the interpretation of texts as diverse as ... John, and Romans'.⁵⁴ It could even be argued that within some comparisons between the Synoptic Gospels and John's Gospel, it is unlikely that one theory (such as the complete abandonment of addressing contradictions) could determine Origen's interpretation of texts. This claim coheres well with the relevant examples discussed in *Princ.*

4.2. Historical and Literary Evidence in *Commentary on John, Books 10–20*

Five chapters after acknowledging possible historical falsehood and the preference for a deeper spiritual meaning (*Comm. Jo.* 10.4), Origen confronts Heracleon's claim that Jesus's going down to Capernaum (John 2:12),

means these farthest-out parts of the world, these districts of matter, into which He descended, and because the place was not suitable, he says, He is not reported either to have done anything or said anything in it (*Comm. Jo.* 10.9).

In what follows, Origen's theological aim is to counter Heracleon's deep suspicion of the value and goodness of the material world, which he superimposes on Jesus who 'went down' to Capernaum. The method employed is classic historical-criticism: multiple attestation and corroboration between the Gospels. According to Origen, had Jesus not been reported to have worked in Capernaum in the other three Gospels, 'we might have hesitated whether this view ought or ought not to be received.' Origen then cites Matthew 4:13; Mark 1:21–28; and Luke 4:38–41, concluding with a confident tone and challenge addressed at Heracleon:

We have presented all these statements as to the Saviour's sayings and doings at Capernaum in order to refute Heracleon's interpretation of our passage, 'Hence He is not said to have done or to have spoken anything there.' He must either give two meanings to Capernaum, and show us his reasons for them, or if he cannot do this he must give up saying that the Saviour visited any place to no purpose (*Comm. Jo.* 10.9).⁵⁵

The methodological tools Origen abandoned in 10.4—that is, harmonisation and the quest for historicity—is reintroduced successfully to counter Heracleon's theological claims and arbitrary engagement with the Gospels.

Harmonisations aside, even Watson discusses at length how, in Books 10–20 of his *Comm. Jo.*, Origen offers credible historical and literary evidence (often in combination with deeper spiritual truth) countering Heracleon's one sided claims. One example is sufficient.

In Book 13, exploring the Samaritan woman who left her jar behind (John 4:28), Origen defends the 'literal-ethical' or 'normal sense' in combination with a deeper 'anagogical, up-leading or uplifting sense', in contrast to dubious hidden senses articulated by Heracleon and modern commentators such

⁵³ Watson, *Gospel Writing*, 537.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 537n76.

⁵⁵ Cf. Matt 4:13; Mark 1:21–28; Luke 4:38–41.

as Raymond E. Brown.⁵⁶ In contrast to Brown's 'Potential amplification of the plain sense ... but only in order to be marginalized ... Origen's interpretation of the abandoned water jar is richer and more complex.'⁵⁷ According to Watson,

The depths from which the water jar is to be filled [cf. Heracleon's and Brown's interpretations] signify a profound teaching that is profoundly wrong, misstating or contradicting basic Christian beliefs about God and the world.⁵⁸

Indeed, it is possible to demonstrate from his *Comm. Jo.* (cf. 10.9.48–60; 10.9.222–24; 13.187–92; and 13.51.349–51) that Origen did not abandon completely the quest for historical and literal truth (in combination with deeper spiritual truth), as he continues addressing wrong teaching that contradicts basic Christian beliefs.⁵⁹

Thus, there are times when an exclusively deeper spiritual meaning (cf. Heracleon) would be a hindrance. In such cases, the plain sense should not be marginalized, but incorporated to provide a rich and more complex meaning to wear of one sided spiritual interpretations and arbitrary selections from Scripture. In fact, it could be argued that in such instances, rejecting the plain and literal meaning of key texts and Christian doctrines, can result in the gospel itself being threatened and can only be regarded as perverse. Indeed, although deeper spiritual meanings are of foundational importance to Origen, there are instances when a purely spiritual sense can obstruct what makes the gospel to be gospel: good news bringing joy to the hearer on account of the ultimate well-being it promises.⁶⁰

4.3. A More Comprehensive Approach to Gospel Differences

My explorations of Origen's *Comm. Jo.* and *Cels.* have shown that both works contain apologetics for the wider public, as well as more radical thoughts on hermeneutics. In order to provide an alternative to Watson's construal of a 'comprehensive approach' in the later Origen, I explored additional evidence from *Princ.* and *Comm. Jo.* 10–20. The evidence from *Princ.* indicated that there are instances where Origen prefers a purely spiritual meaning (in light of dissonant plurality and alleged empirical falsehood), while there are far more instances where the Gospels contain historically true passages (where alleged contradictions can be addressed successfully). Analysing relevant examples from *Comm. Jo.* 10–20, I demonstrated that Origen did not abandon completely the quest for historical and literal truth (in combination with deeper spiritual truth), as he continues addressing wrong teaching that contradicts basic Christian beliefs. In fact, there are instances when Heracleon's spiritual interpretations must be rejected, and a literal interpretation preferred, in order for the gospel to be good news.⁶¹

⁵⁶ Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John I–XII*, AB 29 (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 173. Cf. *Comm. Jo.* 10.9.48–60; 10.9.222–24; 13.187–92; 13.51.349–51 (Watson, *Gospel Writing*, 525–28).

⁵⁷ Watson, *Gospel Writing*, 527.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 528.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 525–28. Even if there are no more harmonisations of alleged contradictions between the synoptics and John following Book 10, it remains significant that at a number of intervals, Origen continues to defend the plain and empirical truth of some texts.

⁶⁰ Contra Watson, *Gospel Writing*, 550–51; 607–8.

⁶¹ Dungan, *Synoptic Problem*, 81, 427n64–n65. Related see Dale C. Allison, *Constructing Jesus: Memory, Imagination, and History* (London: SPCK, 2010), 446n35.

What Crouzel has argued in relation to Origen's doctrines in general, this article has attempted to demonstrate in relation to Origen's comprehensive approach to Gospel differences: 'To recover with certainty [Origen's comprehensive approach to Gospel differences] ... one must look for ... [it] in his own work, studied not in some particular text or other, but in his work as a whole'.⁶² It is only by working through the early and later Origen's treatise that one is able to come to a truly comprehensive understanding of Origen's approach to Gospels differences.

5. Conclusion

Watson's interpretation of Origen's *Comm. Jo.*, Book 10, and the hermeneutical implications extracted from it, forms the heart of his call for a new paradigm shift in biblical studies. The old paradigm, represented by Augustine, the early Origen, modern harmonisations, various Gospels synopses, and quests of the historical Jesus, must be subverted and destroyed, making way for a deeper spiritual and theological approach that respects irreducible pluriformity intrinsic to the fourfold Gospel. According to Watson, the fourfold Gospel marks the end of *all* attempts to reconstruct the life of the historical Jesus. In Watson's reading of Origen, we witness an *old* paradigm and *new* paradigm, an *early* Origen and a *later* Origen, an Origen *before* Book 10 and an Origen *after* Book 10 of his *Comm. Jo.* The problem with this binary construal, we discovered, is that the later Origen—especially in *Cels.*—harmonises differences, rejects selective readings that compromise historicity, uncovers contradictions in Celsus's arguments, and offers external and internal evidence in support of the historicity and credibility of the pluriform resurrection appearances of Jesus. Precisely that which Watson submits to devastating criticism in the early Origen is done by the 'hero' of Watson's 'more comprehensive' 'new paradigm', long after Book 10 of his *Comm. Jo.* Watson never mentions this, nor reflects on its possible significance in *Gospel Writing*. In personal correspondence, Watson explained that he would not expect Origen's more radical thoughts on hermeneutics for the sophisticated Christian (*Comm. Jo.*, Book 10) to feature in a work of apologetics intended for a wider public and simple believers (*Cels.*).

To test Watson's claims, I focused on the potential significance of the absence of *Cels.* in *Gospel Writing*, followed by engagement with the claim that *Cels.* is a popular apologetic work for the wider public, in contrast to the *Comm. Jo.*, which is for the sophisticated reader, and includes more radical thoughts on hermeneutics. I offered evidence indicating that both works contain apologetics intended for the wider public, providing answers for believers whose faith might otherwise be shaken. Next I explored the significance of criticisms leveled against the wider public in *Cels.*, focusing on Origen's rejection of the popular view that the flesh will be raised in future, and his rejection of the literal truth of the events narrated in Matthew's story of the baptism of Jesus. In both instances, Origen rejected simplistic interpretations and sided with more sophisticated readers. I concluded that both *Cels.* and the *Comm. Jo.* contain apologetics, as well as more sophisticated and radical hermeneutics. In order to provide a more nuanced alternative to Watson's 'comprehensive approach' in the work of Origen, I offered additional evidence, exploring relevant examples from *Princ.* and *Comm. Jo.* 10–20. The former highlighted that already in his earlier work, Origen acknowledged historical falsehood, but also argued that there are significantly more narratives containing historical truth. The latter confirmed that Origen's *Comm. Jo.*, Book 10, cannot be understood as a paradigm shift, as he continues to harmonise alleged contradictions and establish historical truth among the Gospels, when deemed necessary.

⁶² Crouzel, *Origen*, 163.

All the evidence considered, my conclusion is that Origen's approach to Gospel differences cannot be reduced to either a complete rejection of any attempt to smooth out tensions, harmonise contradictions to establish historical truth (often in conjunction with deeper spiritual truth), or the embrace of attempts to smooth out almost all tensions, and harmonise contradictions to establish historical truth (often in conjunction with spiritual truth). Rather, a more comprehensive approach to Gospel differences in Origen (compared to Watson's selective reading of Origen as hermeneutical framework for his comprehensive approach) would encompass a nuanced middle position rejecting both extremes.

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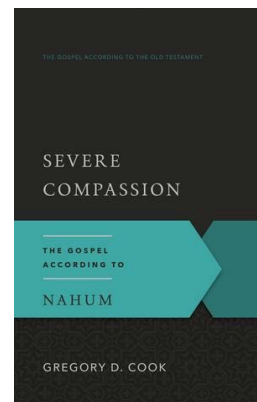
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— OLD TESTAMENT —

Gregory D. Cook. *Severe Compassion: The Gospel According to Nahum*. Gospel According to the Old Testament 18. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2016. xvi + 238 pp. £10.99/\$14.99.

This volume, part of the Gospel According to the Old Testament series, aims to bring to pastors and laypeople a Christocentric exposition of the book of Nahum. While being accessible to a general readership, the volume under review also educates its readers on numerous fronts so as to guide them toward a robust understanding of Nahum as Christian Scripture. It does so, among other ways, by introducing readers to prominent literary characteristics of Nahum (e.g., brevity, wordplay, and allusion or intertextuality; pp. 2–3), by integrating the exposition of each section of Nahum with relevant New Testament passages, and by concluding each chapter with questions for further reflection. The book thus resembles a series of well-structured homilies that exposit the text, make use of contemporary illustrations, and press the christological significance on the reader in pastoral but direct ways.



The book’s organization essentially follows the literary order of Nahum, with a chapter of roughly fifteen pages for each pericope (1:1–2; 1:3a; 1:3b–8; 1:9–12a, etc.). Cook situates the book between the fall of Thebes in 667 BC and the end of Ashurbanipal’s reign in 627 BC (pp. 6, 72–75), and integrates various aspects of the historical background throughout the volume (e.g., p. 70, where he ties the events of 1:11 to Sennacherib’s invasion of Judah in 701). With a nod to Manasseh in particular and to Judah’s religious aberrations in general, Cook contends that “Nahum has set his prophecy in the context of God’s covenant with Judah, Judah’s rejection of that covenant, Judah’s submission to Assyrian deities, and God’s resulting curse” (p. 7). The theme of God’s “jealous love” for his covenant people (cf. 1:2) orients the exposition of Nahum as a whole, and this choice allows Cook to avoid sundering God’s wrath and justice from his love and grace (pp. 8–9). On that basis, he answers the very practical question of how Christians are to respond to our enemies in terms of Romans 12: we are to “love and forgive” those who wrong us, believing that “God sees and that God will repay.... If we choose to ignore God’s justice because it makes us uncomfortable, we also lose the power to love our enemies” (p. 10). At the same time, Cook suggests that Nahum’s message was primarily intended “to bring comfort to God” (p. 13), and only secondarily to his people. In my view, such an approach may confuse the ultimate end of all things (God’s glory) with the authorial intent (on the parts of God and Nahum alike) to call Judah to repentance and faith by announcing Nineveh’s anticipated fall as the end of its covenantal punishment (cf. 1:12–13, 15; 2:2; 3:19). More on this below.

Cook’s exposition of the book is concise but solid, not surprising given that his doctoral dissertation, completed at Westminster Theological Seminary under Michael Kelly, also focused on Nahum. He carefully explores intertextuality within the Bible (e.g., the use of Exod 34 in Nah 1:3, pp. 16–17; the use of Ps 9 in Nah 1, which shows “that David’s prayer from Psalm 9 is now answered,” pp. 55–57) and outside of it (e.g., The Descent of Ishtar, pp. 42–43; various Assyrian royal inscriptions, pp. 68, 140 and elsewhere). Cook develops the historical and theological context in which Nahum is set in the chapters in which such issues are prominent, discussing the Sinai covenant as summarized in Deuteronomy 28 and the growth of Israel during Assyria’s decline in the first half of the eighth century, among other

topics. On the other hand, the claim that Judah was forced to give “allegiance and servitude” (pp. 86, 161) to Assyrian gods requires modification in light of studies like those of Mordecai Cogan, Steven Holloway, and Frederick Mario Fales. This is true also for the parallel claim that the religious element of Assyrian diplomacy “constituted spiritual rape in Nahum’s worldview” (p. 161) as well as the general idea of Judah’s forced submission to Assyrian deities (p. 7).

Cook is clearly convinced of the necessity of interpreting Nahum in a Christocentric manner (p. 31 and elsewhere), and the mention of 1 Pet 1:10–12 and Luke 24:45–47 in Iain Duguid’s series introduction reminds the reader of the propriety of this approach. Cook’s approach is well-executed in most cases, but not always. At one point Cook argues that God pursuing his enemies into darkness in 1:8b prophesies (ultimately) “the physical darkness at the crucifixion, but also Christ’s descent into hell,” with reference to the Descent of Ishtar and the Epic of Gilgamesh (pp. 41–44). This approach weakens the text’s relevance for its seventh-century BC setting (alternately an “allusion to Ishtar,” p. 43, and a prophecy of her destruction, p. 44) and depends on the presence of “ambiguity” in Nahum that enables the interpreter to “apply its message both to historical Assyria and to spiritual powers” (p. 44). This approach, however, seems to make hermeneutics do the work of biblical theology by pressing a primarily Christocentric referent upon the text in its historical setting, rather than moving from the text’s grammatical-historical sense to its progressive (and ultimately christological) fulfillment in redemptive history. Similarly, his conclusion that “the use of *Belial* suggests that Nahum believed that Judah had suffered from a malevolent spirit,” and the inference that this spirit was sent out from or by Ishtar (pp. 70–72), seem to force upon Nahum 1:11 a supernatural aspect (admittedly present elsewhere in Nahum, as in YHWH’s promise to destroy the Assyrian king’s gods in 1:14) and a degree of clarity with respect to demonology that is apparent only in the NT and very few OT passages (e.g., Dan 10:13). Here the hermeneutic behind the affirmation that “Nahum intended both the historical and the supernatural interpretations” of the departure of the “worthless counselor” (p. 70, with reference to Nah 1:11) requires further elaboration for the reader to understand and evaluate Cook’s interpretation.

Despite what may be a few unwarranted conclusions, the bulk of Cook’s work is exegetically convincing, hermeneutically clear, and doctrinally rich. He captures well the significance of Nahum’s Neo-Assyrian background, as when he explains the inversion of the Assyrian monarch’s leonine imagery and role in Nahum 2:11–13 (p. 131). He presents a Christocentric understanding of spiritual warfare and ably reflects at length on the ways that believers and the church combat Satan’s power by depending upon God (pp. 97–111). Throughout the work, his reflections draw upon a number of important Christian doctrines, including some that are neglected in study of the OT in particular (e.g., union with Christ, pp. 75–76; election, pp. 79–81; hell, pp. 148–51). Finally, Cook’s use of biblical theology in the Christocentric tradition of Geerhardus Vos, including the partial fulfillment of prophecy prior to Christ (p. 91), allows him to apply the gospel to his readers in numerous ways. This work deserves a wide readership and will inform, nurture, and guide all who give it the attention it merits.

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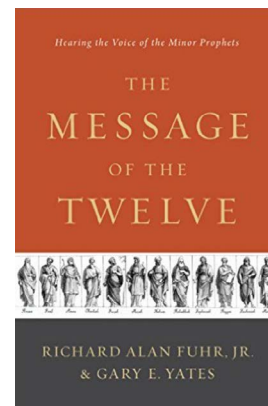
Richard A. Fuhr Jr. and Gary E. Yates. *The Message of the Twelve: Hearing the Voice of the Minor Prophets*. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016. xix + 360 pp. £28.71/ \$34.99.

Richard Fuhr and Gary Yates are colleagues at Liberty University Divinity School in Lynchburg, Virginia. Together they have written a fine introduction to the message of the Minor Prophets “for students, pastors, and all who seek to understand this neglected segment of God’s Word” (p. xiv).

Their book is in two main sections. The first comprises four chapters that seek to orientate the reader to the Minor Prophets. Chapter 1 provides an overview of the historical background and setting of the Prophets, focusing particularly on the Assyrian and Babylonian crises as well as the Persian period. Chapter 2 offers a succinct introduction to the role of the prophets as forth-tellers, foretellers, and authors. Chapter 3 looks at the way that the prophets communicated their message, giving an introduction to each of the main prophetic literary genres, while at the same time recognizing that “there is more to a literary reading of the Twelve than the recognition of subgenres and literary units” (p. 34). They identify and explain the four primary literary features of these prophetic books: “(1) rich imagery and figures of speech, (2) terse language with focused repetition, (3) irony and sarcasm, and (4) Hebrew wordplay” (p. 34). A final chapter in the first section of the book provides a brief orientation to recent scholarship that seeks to read the Minor Prophets as the Book of the Twelve. This includes a survey of early evidence for viewing the Twelve as a single book; a discussion of how the books of the Twelve have been organized (e.g., chronology, themes, and catchwords); and an overview of the major unifying themes of the Twelve (e.g., Israel’s failure to repent in response to the prophetic word; the Day of the Lord; the broken and restored covenant; the promise of a new David). They note that many scholars have attempted to reconstruct the compositional history of the Twelve, but leave aside these matters in the book (p. xvi).

The second section of the book contains chapters on each of the books of the Minor Prophets. These chapters fall somewhere between an OT introduction and a commentary. Each chapter has an introduction that seeks to set the book in its historical context (where possible) and to introduce its main themes. Then issues of the book’s structure are discussed and often a brief outline of the book is provided. The heart of each chapter is an exposition of smaller units of the prophetic book, highlighting significant literary features and exegetical issues, and identifying the main message of individual sections. Occasionally the authors offer excurses on important issues such as “The Working of the Holy Spirit in the Old Testament” (p. 105) and “Does the OT Sanction Nationalistic Hatred?” (p. 157), and they provide extracts from secondary sources that provide insight into the ancient Near Eastern context of the OT prophets. A final section of each chapter summarizes the theological message of the prophet, traces usage in the NT, and gives some direction for those seeking to apply their message today.

This book provides an excellent first step into the world of the Minor Prophets. Fuhr and Yates write in a clear and succinct way while synthesizing recent research on the Prophets well. The first section of the book provides a valuable introduction to the Prophets in itself. Their treatment of the individual books has a helpful focus on the literary features of the Prophets (I particularly enjoyed their observations on word-play and phonology). Their concern to address the theological issues raised by the Prophets and to apply their message to contemporary readers in light of them being Christian Scripture will be appreciated.



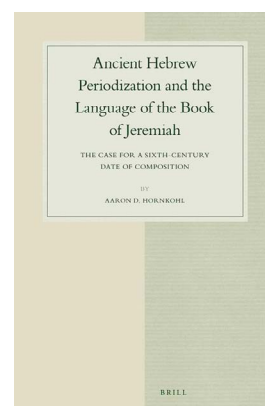
By its very nature, though, this book does have a few shortcomings. First, the biblical text is discussed, but not reproduced, so it needs to be read with a Bible at hand to follow clearly what is being said at times. Second, it is not a commentary, so differing interpretations of passages are rarely mentioned. Related to this, the authors' own theological views (e.g., pre-millennialism and a millennial temple, p. 267) sometimes surface without acknowledging alternative views. They also under-read the messianism in Zechariah 9–14, believing that “9:9–10 is likely the only [passage] that is a direct messianic prophecy in its original context” (p. 291). More substantially, I think their book really reads more as an introduction to each of the Minor Prophets than an introduction to the Book of the Twelve (the subtitle thus seems more descriptive than the title). Chapter 4 (18 pages) is really the only chapter in the book given over to the topic of reading the Minor Prophets as a collection. Perhaps when dealing with individual prophetic books, if there were a section on how each book is to be read in the light of the others, and what each book contributes to the message of the whole, it would have given more of a sense of “the Message of the Twelve.” A final small matter is that ANE sources are sometimes cited inconsistently and without references (e.g., on pp. 190 and 212 they seem to cite the annals of Sennacherib, but with very different translations).

This book is well-suited as recommended reading for a foundation-level course on the OT Prophets. It will also suit pastors wanting a brief orientation to research on the Book of the Twelve and/or an up-to-date introduction to the message of each of the Minor Prophets.

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Aaron D. Hornkohl. *Ancient Hebrew Periodization and the Language of the Book of Jeremiah: The Case for a Sixth-Century Date of Composition*. Edited by A. D. Rubin and C. H. M. Versteegh. *Studies in Semitic Languages and Linguistics* 74. Leiden: Brill, 2014. xviii + 518 pp. £133.00/\$210.00.

The disciplines of biblical studies and linguistics have long had a conflicted relationship. A previous generation of biblical scholars, who tended to employ word studies of Hebrew and Greek terms as support for theological conclusions about “Hebrew” and “Greek” ways of thinking, came under censure in James Barr’s “trumpet blast against the monstrous regiment of shoddy linguistics” (as memorably summarized by Moisés Silva, *Biblical Words and Their Meaning*, rev. and exp. ed. [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994], 18, referring to James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961]). Along similar lines to the linguistic fallacies exposed by Barr, both traditional and revisionist scholars of the Old Testament have often used the field of historical linguistics in service of their respective views on the composition of the Hebrew Bible. Where a conservative scholar might view features of an earlier stage of Hebrew as evidence of a text’s pre-exilic date, a critical scholar would instead argue that these “early” features are proof of a later scribe’s attempt to write in an archaic or formal style, while also pointing to the presence of “Aramaic” or “late” features in that same text as evidence for a post-exilic composition. The conservative scholar could then respond that the “Aramaism” in question reflects the biblical writer’s use of an obscure Hebrew idiom which is more common in Aramaic as well as a



Samarian Hebrew dialect (Samaria being closer to Aram than Judah is), or that a later scribe updated an ancient text to reflect the linguistic milieu of Second Temple Judaism.

The temptation of tit-for-tat circular reasoning is thus found on both sides of the debate over how Hebrew developed as a literary language in Israel's history. Whither next the diachronic study of biblical Hebrew? On what basis can the language of the Hebrew Bible be securely dated, given that "early" and "late" features of Hebrew are found to varying degrees in all its texts? Amidst these conflicting methods and conclusions, the present monograph by Aaron Hornkohl, who teaches Hebrew at Cambridge University, aims to reconstitute the study of biblical Hebrew on a solid foundation of historical linguistics. His book, *Ancient Hebrew Periodization and the Language of Book of Jeremiah*, is a revised and updated English version of a PhD thesis that was submitted to the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in 2011. And befitting its roots as a thesis originally written in Modern Hebrew at an Israeli institution, Hornkohl's work tabulates and analyzes a vast amount of data on the linguistic variations in every extant corpus of ancient Hebrew (e.g., the Masoretic Text, the Dead Sea Scrolls, rabbinical Hebrew) to situate the book of Jeremiah within a sophisticated taxonomy of how the Hebrew language changed over time.

After introductory chapters on methodology (ch. 1) and the language of the book of Jeremiah (ch. 2), Hornkohl develops his taxonomy in six chapters on variations in Hebrew spelling and pronunciation (ch. 3), morphology (for pronouns, nouns, and verbs in chs. 4–6, respectively), syntax (ch. 7), and lexical features (ch. 8). A brief discussion of this taxonomy's implications for dating the MT and LXX *Vorlage* versions of Jeremiah (ch. 9) is followed by a conclusion (ch. 10) summarizing his view that the book of Jeremiah represents a specimen of "Transitional Biblical Hebrew" which fits well within the sixth century BC. The influence of Avi Hurvitz's diachronic approach to Hebrew is evident throughout, even as Hornkohl adds the use of statistical analysis to offer quantitative support for Hurvitz's more qualitative methods.

The rather technical character of Hornkohl's work is difficult to capture in a book review, but his discussion of Hebrew syntax (ch. 7) may serve as a representative sample of his historical-linguistic and statistical approach. In this chapter of over 100 pages (the longest in the book), Hornkohl describes the patterns of distribution for twelve grammatical constructions as one moves from earlier to later texts in the Hebrew Bible. This presentation of multiple converging lines of evidence demonstrates Hornkohl's core principle in action: "Summary judgments regarding the date of a given composition based on only one or a few features must be avoided in favor of descriptions taking into account *accumulations of multiple features*" (p. 51, emphasis added).

On its own, for example, the move toward a non-standard sense for suffixed directional ה (usually "to/towards" in early Hebrew, but occasionally "at" in later Hebrew) could plausibly reflect the anomalies of a given writer, editor, or literary corpus of the Hebrew Bible. Hornkohl's statistical analysis indicates, however, that the increasing prominence of non-standard directional ה is paralleled by clusters of similar shifts in texts generally acknowledged as late (e.g., exchange of עַם for אֶם to mean "with," interchange of the prepositions עַל and אֶל, accusative use of the לְ preposition, perfective past *w^eqatal*, use of the infinitive absolute as a finite verb). Because the book of Jeremiah contains the classical use of directive ה (38x), but also evinces the non-standard use of this construction (12x out of 50 occurrences overall, or 24%) in a ratio greater than classical Hebrew texts (e.g., 14.1% in the Former Prophets; cf. 45.6% in the Dead Sea Scrolls), the most likely conclusion is that Jeremiah stands in the middle of these transitions in Hebrew syntax. It is therefore no surprise to find that a book like Jeremiah, which spans

the pre-exilic and post-exilic periods, reflects a fluid linguistic environment in which classical Hebrew forms are found alongside later ones.

The probabilistic methods of Hornkohl offers a plausible way out of the all-or-nothing, circular linguistic reasoning noted earlier. The cumulative character of his argument stands even as Hebraists might question how Hornkohl's explanations of how this or that feature of Hebrew evolved or came to be distributed across the biblical corpus. Though too difficult for those without advanced knowledge of Hebrew, his study will provide much fodder for scholars who work in the contested field of Hebrew diachrony. In particular, the discipline of OT studies awaits the rejoinder of Ian Young, Robert Rezeko, and Martin Ehrensward, the three scholars who have been most critical of dating biblical Hebrew using the approach pioneered by Avi Hurvitz.

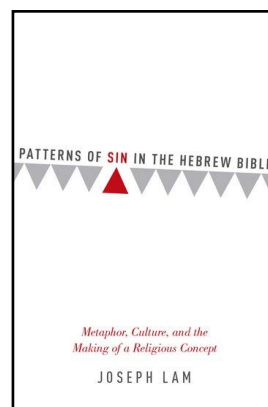
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Joseph Lam. *Patterns of Sin in the Hebrew Bible: Metaphor, Culture, and the Making of a Religious Concept*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016. xix + 308 pp. £47.99/\$74.00.

Joseph Lam serves as Assistant Professor of Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. This book, a revised version of his University of Chicago Ph.D. dissertation, “examines the ancient Israelite concept of sin through the most pervasive metaphors used to express the notion in the Hebrew Bible” (p. ix), namely “sin as a ‘burden’ carried by the sinner ... ; sin as an ‘account’ of deeds that is kept by God; sin as a ‘path’ or ‘direction’ in which one travels; and sin as a ‘stain’ or ‘impurity’ on the sinner” (p. xi). These are “conventionalized” metaphors which “point to aspects of shared understanding of the concept in the culture” (p. 5).

Chapter 1 outlines Lam's understanding of metaphor as “a mode of construal” (p. 7) involving “ad hoc conceptualization” (p. 8). He rejects “strong” conceptual metaphor theories which see concepts as “entirely structured by means of metaphorical mappings” (p. 12). Rather, Lam suggests that “the systematic relatedness of conventionalized metaphors is the result of the routinized selection of structural features similar in the source and target. In other words, metaphors that are particularly ‘apt’ for describing the target concept have a tendency to be used over and over by speakers” (p. 13). This reuse can eventually lead the metaphorical sense to become “detached from the original literal sense,” producing a new lexical meaning (p. 8). Lam argues that עוֹן (“iniquity”) and חַטָּאת (“sin”) in the Hebrew Bible represent such lexicalized senses, detached from the metaphors of “twistedness” and “falling short,” respectively, from which they perhaps arose (p. 9).

Chapter 2 explores the metaphor of sin as a burden, focusing especially on the use of נָשָׂא (“bear, lift up, take away”) in expressions such as עוֹן נָשָׂא, which can mean either “bear iniquity” (i.e., guilt and/or punishment) or “forgive iniquity.” Baruch Schwartz sees these alternative meanings reflecting a single conceptual metaphor of sin as a weight which may either be “borne” by the sinner or “lifted off” by the wronged party (“‘Term’ or Metaphor: Biblical חַטָּאת / פֶּשַׁע / עוֹן [in Hebrew], *Tarbiz*



63 [1994]: 149–71). In response, Lam argues that “various syntactic anomalies” and “highly idiomatic uses” point to “forgive” being a lexicalized and non-metaphorical sense of אָשַׁף, “dissociated from the spatial-physical meanings(s)” of the verb (p. 42). By contrast, he considers אָשַׁף in the alternative sense of “bearing” sin to be “higher on the continuum of metaphorical vitality,” and suggests that this usage arose later, influenced by Akkadian (p. 29).

Chapter 3 explores metaphors reflecting the idea of sin as an entry in a heavenly account. Lam points out that the language of God “repaying” (שָׁלַם) or “returning” (הָשִׁיב) sin suggests that the metaphor of sin as a debt is older than Gary Anderson supposes (*Sin: A History* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009]). Crucially, however, God is usually the debtor, not the sinner, and repayment takes the form of retribution rather than compensation (p. 114). Lam also examines other words reflecting the idea that God keeps records of sin and repays it, including זָכַר (“remember”), מָחָה (“blot out”), and פָּקַד, which Lam understands as “reckon” (to an account), but also as having a lexicalized sense “punish.”

Chapters 4 and 5 are much shorter than the preceding two. Chapter 4 considers metaphors for sin as a path or direction, which Lam argues “represent clusters of distinct expressions that share the profile of spatial movement rather than a single overarching schema” (p. 158). Chapter 5 discusses sin as a stain and impurity, highlighting “the need for careful attention to the terms of the comparison—the tenor and vehicle—in the recognition, interpretation, and appreciation of metaphor” (p. 191). For example, the characterization of sin as “impurity” in some passages involves a metallurgical metaphor, while in others it is ritual impurity to which sin is likened (pp. 191–98).

Chapter 6 offers a brief conclusion, which is followed by a short appendix, substantial endnotes and bibliography, an index of primary sources, and a general index.

The book is wide-ranging and contains a wealth of insight and analysis. It is well written and presented, and although it will be most accessible to readers familiar with Hebrew, others will be able to follow the argument. Hebrew texts and other primary sources are given in transliteration with English translation. Highlights for this reviewer were the thoughtful and careful discussion of theoretical issues in chapter 1 and the thorough treatment of the account metaphor in chapter 3. Lam’s theological reflections flow from his exegesis rather than constraining it. He argues that the metaphors of sin as a burden and as a debt to be repaid by God reflect the view that God, not the sinner, must deal with sin (p. 100). He also notes that the metaphor of sin as a record in the divine accounts expresses divine justice and undermines Klaus Koch’s idea of the act-consequence connection as impersonal and automatic (pp. 125–27; cf. Koch, “Gibt es ein Vergeltungsdogma im Alten Testament?” *ZTK* 52 [1955]: 1–42).

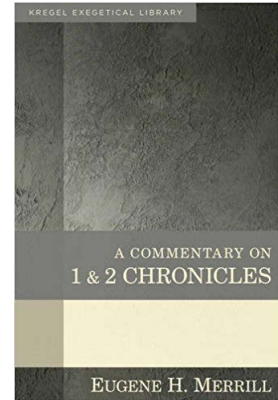
Although many of Lam’s conclusions are compelling, some are not so persuasive. For example, since אָשַׁף has a range of literal meanings and is not used exclusively (or even predominantly) with heavy objects, Lam is perhaps too quick to assume that the sense “forgive” originated in the particular metaphor of a weight being lifted off the sinner, or that the sin carried away by the scapegoat was conceptualized as heavy (see p. 50). In general, however, his methodological caution is commendable.

In summary, this is a significant contribution which will repay careful study by anyone with interests in the concept of sin or metaphor theory in the Hebrew Bible.

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Eugene H. Merrill. *A Commentary on 1 and 2 Chronicles*. Kregel Exegetical Library. Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2015. 640 pp. £26.99/\$39.99.

Eugene Merrill's work on 1–2 Chronicles adds to the Kregel Exegetical Library's growing series of Old Testament commentaries which already includes volumes on Exodus, Judges, Ruth, and the Psalms. Merrill is a venerable Old Testament scholar whose career has contributed fruitfully to our understanding of the OT. In this commentary, he expounds on 1–2 Chronicles with the goal of being "exegetically helpful for the scholar but theologically accessible and homiletically useful for the pastor" (back matter). The majority of the commentary is dedicated to the exegesis of 1–2 Chronicles. But in the course of his analysis, Merrill also explores three theological themes in a redemptive-historical framework that are central to the Chronicler's theology and purpose: David's historical and eschatological reign, the renewal of an everlasting covenant, and the restored temple as a symbol of a renewed people (pp. 57–68). Merrill observes how the Chronicler used these themes to give hope to the post-exilic community for a restored kingdom under a messianic ruler.



Those who find themselves struggling with the place or usefulness of 1–2 Chronicles will find Merrill a sympathetic guide. He thus sums up the feeling of many contemporary Christians: "Like countless readers of the Bible I had, at least in my youthful immaturity in such matters, tended to regard the Chronicler as a later historian who merely repeated the message of his principal sources, the books of Samuel and Kings" (p. 11). But Merrill's time immersed in the Chronicler's writings taught him of the unique message that the Chronicler offers: "From his unique platform as arguably the last of the Old Testament writers, he saw with his own eyes the ruinous outcome of the incessantly repetitive covenant violation of his fathers and supplied a fulsome theological interpretation of its disastrous results. But he envisioned as well and rendered interpretation of the eschatological restorative and redemptive plan of God for a new Israel and a new David, one who would reign in righteousness not only over Israel but over the whole universe" (pp. 11–12).

The format is fairly typical of modern commentaries. Merrill begins with a thorough introduction to 1–2 Chronicles: the name of the book, issues of authorship, canonical placement, genres, structure, sources, and text-critical matters. But Merrill's most detailed discussions are reserved for the historical and cultural setting (pp. 22–43), historiography (pp. 48–53), and theology of Chronicles (pp. 57–68).

Following the introduction is the heart of the commentary—exegesis and exposition. Merrill structures the commentary by citing the NIV along with text-critical notes, followed by his exegesis and exposition of the passage at hand. In addition, Merrill includes twelve excurses that readers may find beneficial for his discussions on the Chronicler's use of sources, the Davidic dynasty, and the ethics of "Holy War."

There isn't room in a short review to comment upon individual exegetical decisions. But greater attention to two issues of methodology would have improved the commentary. First, the commentary would benefit from a more thorough treatment of a *reading strategy* for 1–2 Chronicles. As Merrill notes in his preface, many Christians see Chronicles as only a supplement to Samuel–Kings. Having two histories in the canon of the Old Testament raises questions of how we are meant to read Chronicles in relation to Samuel–Kings. Are we to read Chronicles alongside Samuel–Kings, taking note of each way

in which the two histories diverge? Or should 1–2 Chronicles first be approached on its own merits as a book before considering what the Chronicler may have altered from Samuel–Kings (e.g., Rodney K. Duke, *The Persuasive Appeal of the Chronicler: A Rhetorical Analysis*, JSOTSup 88 [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990], 35–36)? Merrill briefly addresses this issue in Excursus 1, writing, “One can compare them for signs of various predilections, emphases, and interpretations of Israel’s past that add color to the overall texture of the Chronicler’s project” (p. 71). This is a standard approach to 1–2 Chronicles (e.g., Sara Japhet, *I and II Chronicles*, OTL [Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993]), but a more systematic discussion of how to read these historical books would have been a benefit to pastors and Bible teachers who struggle with how to preach and teach their distinctives without recourse to harmonizing them with Samuel–Kings.

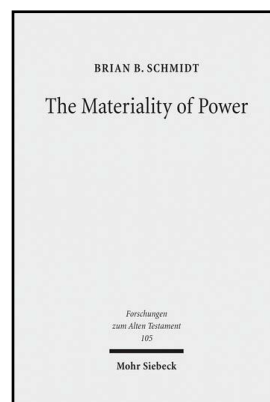
Another weakness is the lack of attention to literary features. For each section of the text, Merrill gives a basic outline of the selected section (e.g., pp. 189, 497), but omits any explanation of how the text’s structure is significant for its interpretation. The result is that the exposition moves from section to section without explaining the Chronicler’s larger flow of thought. Further, there is a lack of attention to the narrative character of the book, which is surprising given Merrill’s recognition that 1–2 Chronicles is a narrative text (p. 47). In this regard, biblical scholars have benefitted immensely from work on Hebrew narrative in the last several decades. So more attention to plot and characterization would have enhanced the exegesis and exposition in the commentary, as well as recovering the theological significance of Chronicles, which has been unduly neglected in discussions of the Hebrew Bible as literature.

That being said, the clear strengths of Merrill’s commentary are his attention to the historical and cultural setting of the book. This sort of focus is in keeping with his prior work on Israel’s history (Eugene H. Merrill, *A Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel*, 2nd ed. [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008]). Anyone wishing for sustained treatment on the historical dimension of 1–2 Chronicles and the theology that emerges will benefit from Merrill’s work.

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Brian B. Schmidt. *The Materiality of Power: Explorations in the Social History of Early Israelite Magic*. Forschungen zum Alten Testament 105. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016. xv + 258 pp. £119.48/\$149.00.

The publisher describes this book as “five case studies in which architectural spaces, artifacts, epigraphs, images and biblical manuscripts corroborate the existence of a robust daimonic realm ruled by YHWH and Asherah in late pre-exilic Israel and an embryonic pandemonium foreshadowing later demonological constructs” (<https://www.mohr.de/en/book/the-materiality-of-power-9783161533020>). The case studies at hand are well known in the field of Israelite religion: the inscribed pithoi from Kuntillet Ajrud, the tomb inscription from Khirbet el-Qom, the inscribed amulets from Ketef Hinnom, and biblical passages which hint at veneration of other deities or powers in Israel (Deut 32:8–9, 43; 1 Sam 28:13). The author, Brian Schmidt, teaches at the



University of Michigan and has published extensively on the contested field of reconstructing the socio-historical realities of ancient Israel as well as its neighboring societies.

As the preceding description makes transparent, Schmidt contends that inscriptional evidence presented in these case studies that preserve the phrase “Yahweh and his Asherah” are to be read as describing a divine couple—god and goddess—in Israelite religion. This position is crucial to Schmidt’s thesis that the inscribed objects upon which he focuses served an apotropaic (i.e., protection from evil) purpose. This in turn propels the conclusion that Yahweh and Asherah were protective deities, fulfilling the role of Egypt’s Bes and Beset to protect mortals from hostile daimonic powers in this world and the next.

Schmidt’s main service in this book is a very meticulous review of the archaeological, iconographic, and epigraphic issues for the inscriptions treated therein. On its own, this feature makes the volume attractive to anyone interested in the archeology of ancient Israel as it relates to religious practices. In particular, he interacts extensively with Pirhiya Beck’s thorough analysis of the Bes and Beset figures (“The Drawings from Horvat Teiman [Kuntillet ‘Ajrud],” *Tel Aviv* 9 [1982]: 3–68) and makes his own contributions, especially in his detailed discussion of how deities were iconographically marked (or not) for gender. The result of Schmidt’s investigation is that it would be difficult to deny that this material indeed presents Yahweh and Asherah (or with the suffixed Hebrew pronoun “his,” Asheratah) as a divine couple.

There is, of course, no need to deny this point. Evangelical scholars have devoted considerable attention to the inscriptions from Kuntillet Ajrud and Khirbet el-Qom, as well as personal and divine names more generally. Richard Hess, for example, has acknowledged the evidence that *some* Israelites believed Yahweh had a consort (*Israelite Religions: An Archaeological and Biblical Survey* [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007], 288). (“Some” is an important qualifier to which I will return). Likewise, Semitists have demonstrated that it simply is not correct to say that divine names cannot be suffixed, though this has been a common argument by some scholars for interpreting “Yahweh and his Asherah” as a reference to Yahweh and a cultic place or object, rather than the goddess (most notably Anson Rainey, “Syntax, Hermeneutics, and History,” *IEJ* 48 [1998]: 246–47).

One of the more noteworthy items in Schmidt’s discussion of the inscriptional case studies is that he offers new translations for some key lines. Whereas earlier translations have only Yahweh dispensing blessing (“May he...”), Schmidt has “May *they* (i.e., both Yahweh and Asherah) ...” (e.g., pp. 47, 49, 78). Schmidt notes that the relevant verb forms “may be plural with northern consonantal writing lacking the final *û* or these are singular verbs with a preceding (antecedent) compound subject” (p. 78). This is true of northern Israelite, but the Kuntillet Ajrud inscription was found south of Judah in the northern Sinai. The inscription also refers to Yahweh worship not just in the north (“Yahweh of Samaria”) but also the south (“Yahweh of Teman”). Schmidt’s appeal to northern consonantal writing is therefore not compelling.

After his discussion of inscriptional case studies, Schmidt turns to Deuteronomy 32:8–9, 17, 43, texts that he and many others consider evidence that early *biblical* (i.e., “orthodox”) Israelite religion had a pantheon and was henotheistic. This move fits his goal of viewing Yahweh and Asherah as equal partners in thwarting evil for their faithful followers. For those who find this idea new—namely, that Hebrew *עֲלִיּוֹן* (“most high”) in Deut 32:8 and *יְהוָה* in 32:9 are to be considered distinct deities (i.e., father and son)—this reviewer has addressed the exegetical and logical fallacies driving this thinking (Michael

S. Heiser, “Does Divine Plurality in the Hebrew Bible Demonstrate an Evolution From Polytheism to Monotheism in Israelite Religion?” *JESOT* 1:1 [2012]: 1–24).

One such fallacious example in Schmidt is illustrative. On p. 167, Schmidt assumes that the father : son → עֶלְיוֹן : יהוה equation is justified by Ugaritic El being described as “most high” and having many sons underneath his sovereignty. Yet Schmidt fails to cite any Ugaritic text for El as “Most High” (*ly*) for a good reason—there isn’t a single one. At Ugarit, only Ba’al bears this epithet (*KTU*² 1.16:III:6, 8; see Aicha Rahmouni, *Divine Epithets in the Ugaritic Alphabetic Texts*, trans. J. N. Ford, *Handbook of Oriental Studies* 1/93 [Leiden: Brill, 2008], 258, 374).

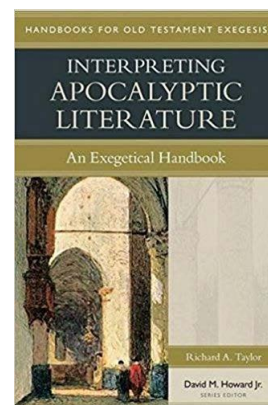
On a more positive note, Schmidt’s treatment of Deuteronomy 32:17 is excellent and, in some respects, ground-breaking. Rather than embracing the unsound notion that the ׀ִדִּים (often rendered “demons,” e.g., ESV) are not deities because they have no cult in Mesopotamia (from where the term ׀ִדִּים originates), Schmidt demonstrates the deep flaws of that assumption. His discussion is important, especially for English readers of the Bible for whom conventional renderings have obscured the language of divine plurality in the Hebrew Bible. Understanding how to think about this phenomenon of the text is necessary for addressing the common scholarly view that “orthodox” Israelite religion evolved out of polytheism into monotheism. While evangelicals could in theory accommodate this idea under the category of progressive revelation, the present reviewer has devoted a good deal of effort into making the case that such a decision is unnecessary. Schmidt’s work is helpful in reframing the important question of how to define “polytheism” and “monotheism” more accurately, though that obviously wasn’t his primary intention.

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Richard A. Taylor. *Interpreting Apocalyptic Literature: An Exegetical Handbook*. Edited by David M. Howard Jr. *Handbooks for Old Testament Exegesis*. Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2016. 205 pp. \$21.99.

Taylor has contributed a worthwhile volume to Kregel’s *Handbooks for Old Testament Exegesis* series, demonstrating an excellent grasp of the key features and themes of apocalyptic literature. Readers of his book will come away better equipped to face the challenges associated with interpreting this oftentimes confusing genre. Taylor serves as Senior Professor of Old Testament Studies at Dallas Theological Seminary, but his institution’s well-known focus on dispensational teaching is not strongly present in the book.

Taylor’s work is divided into six key chapters followed by a significant appendix. In chapter one, he focuses on the nature of apocalyptic literature, helpfully defining and distinguishing a number of key terms, including ‘apocalypse,’ ‘apocalypticism,’ ‘apocalyptic eschatology,’ etc. In chapter two, he introduces the reader to some of the key apocalyptic texts (both biblical and non-biblical) and unpacks some of their characteristic features and themes. Chapter three is designed to prepare the interpreter for engaging with apocalyptic literature, with a helpful discussion of figurative language (including



simile, metaphor, metonymy, hypocatastasis, and synecdoche). In chapter four he highlights some of the key paths to follow along with some pitfalls to avoid. These guidelines provide the basis for chapter five where he outlines a seven-stage, practical strategy for interpreting and proclaiming apocalyptic literature, which is then applied in chapter six to two sample texts that fall under Taylor's definition for this genre due to their use of figurative language (Dan 8:1–27; Joel 2:28–32). The book concludes with an appendix in which Taylor traces some of the antecedents of apocalyptic literature which have been suggested by modern scholars.

There is much in Taylor's work to be praised, and I would recommend his work to anyone who is scratching their head over descriptions of great beasts emerging out of the sea or images of cosmic judgement and upheaval. He has a pleasant, engaging style of writing that will work well for students. His terminological clarity, including his distinction between 'apocalypse' as a genre and 'apocalypticism' as a way of thinking (though I prefer the term 'worldview', which he does use occasionally), will be helpful for students as they attempt to chart their way through these challenging waters. Likewise, the cautions he provides on pp. 127–31 help to address some of the common problems that inexperienced exegetes face. I particularly liked his assertion: 'Few things are more essential for an interpreter of apocalyptic literature than a humility that admits the limits of our knowledge and refuses to go beyond the clear data of the text' (p. 128). The glossary, which is found at the back of the book, is an excellent inclusion and rounds the text out as a fine introduction to the genre, especially for beginning students.

This being said, I would highlight three concerns that detract from the work. Generally speaking, these are not significant issues, and may well reflect the personal preferences and predilections of the reviewer.

Firstly, I am a little confused about the scope of the book. The series is entitled 'Handbooks for *Old Testament Exegesis*' (emphasis mine), yet on the front cover the relevant texts are listed as 'Daniel, Prophets and *Extrabiblical Texts*' (also my emphasis). It is the place of the latter in particular that raises a question mark for this reviewer. While there is clearly a basis for including some discussion of these (Taylor himself provides a succinct apologetic on p. 27), I would question whether they warrant receiving the attention they do, given that (1) the text is primarily written for an evangelical audience whose focus is the biblical text itself, and (2) these texts were almost certainly written *after* the canonical OT examples of apocalyptic (or proto-apocalyptic). In my opinion, it would have been better for Taylor to focus more on the antecedents to apocalyptic literature (moving some of the material in the appendix to the main body of the book) as well as expanding his discussion of proto-apocalyptic material within the Prophets (especially Zechariah), as these provide the essential background and context for understanding the book of Daniel.

Secondly, I would want to push Taylor a bit when it comes to issues of application. For example, on p. 95 he argues that the *final* stage of handling figures of speech is to transform them 'into corresponding prose statements that clearly articulate their intended meaning in nonfigurative language' (p. 95). I would argue, however, that this is the *penultimate* stage; surely the ultimate goal should be to recast these figures in a contemporary way, which engages the audience in the same way as the original language did. Indeed, part of the power of apocalyptic literature comes precisely from the fact that it is *not* full of prose statements, but evocative language and imagery.

By contrast, I really like the format and process he later develops in chapter five ('Proclaiming Apocalyptic Literature'), which culminates in a section entitled 'Bridging to Application.' Here Taylor points out, 'Most listeners want to know what difference a biblical text should make in their personal

lives.... The question that believers are most interested in resolving as a result of biblical proclamation is: How should we then live?' (p. 150). Yet when he considers Daniel 7 (pp. 150–51), Daniel 8 (pp. 168–69), and Joel 2:28–32 (pp. 177–78), his discussions remain almost entirely at the level of the passage itself and do not go on to consider how the message of the passage might directly and practically impact the lives of its hearers. In other words, Taylor does not adequately address the key question which he himself has identified as central ('How should we then live?'). Unfortunately, it is precisely in this area—application that honours the teaching of the passage but which is grounded in the realities of contemporary life—that I think students need significant guidance.

Finally, on p. 108 Taylor claims that 'the biblical apocalypses ... should be studied within their historical, religious, and cultural settings' (a point he essentially repeats on p. 121, where he states, 'One cannot fully grasp portions of the book of Daniel without at least some understanding of the history of these times!') This is an important point. In light of this, I was surprised to find that Taylor's work contains no significant discussion of the history of the Second Temple period, a feature which would have aided students in their interpretive work. (Students may find the early chapters of Larry Helyer, *Exploring Jewish Literature of the Second Temple Period* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002], to be helpful in this regard).

Overall, however, Taylor has produced a valuable textbook that should find a place on the bookshelf of any student or pastor concerned with interpreting and preaching Daniel and other (proto-) apocalyptic sections of the OT.

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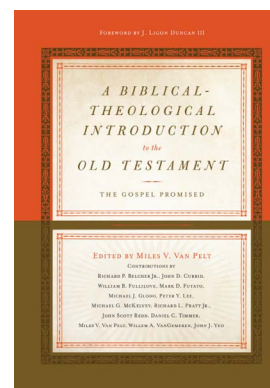
Miles V. Van Pelt, ed. *A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the Old Testament: The Gospel Promised*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016. 601 pp. £36.00/\$50.00.

A glance at the title of this volume might suggest it is a biblical theology of the Old Testament. In fact, the volume is more of an introduction to the Old Testament. The description 'biblical-theological' in the title is intended to identify it as an introduction to the Old Testament that is 'intentionally and self-consciously nuanced' (p. 14).

In his introduction Miles V. Van Pelt explains that the volume seeks to offer an alternative to the common view that the Bible expresses 'various and sometimes conflicting messages' (p. 23). Instead, the contributors set about to demonstrate the unity of the Bible and its message:

Our goal is not to dismantle the Scriptures into as many unrelated parts as possible but to show how the vast, eclectic diversity of the Scriptures has been woven together by a single, divine author over the course of a millennium as the covenantal testimony to the person and work of Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit according to the eternal decree of the Father. (p. 13)

Van Pelt explains how the Bible ought to be read as the work of a single (divine) author with a unified covenantal design and unified message as 'the testimony of God's good news in Jesus Christ'. To do this



Van Pelt divides his essay into three parts in which he explains that Jesus is the theological centre of the Old Testament, the Kingdom of God is its thematic framework, and the order of the Hebrew canon reflects a covenantal structure: Law (covenant), Prophets (covenant history) and Writings (covenant life).

The rest of the volume is written by Van Pelt and twelve other past or present faculty members of Reformed Theological Seminary. The volume covers the OT books in twenty-four chapters; most individual OT books receive their own chapter, though the books of Samuel, Kings, 'the Twelve' (Minor Prophets), Ezra-Nehemiah, and Chronicles receive a chapter each.

Each chapter is organised under six headings: Introduction, Background Issues, Structure and Outline, Message and Theology, Approaching the New Testament, and Select Bibliography. The lion's share of each chapter is usually devoted to the discussion of the message and theology of the biblical book under discussion. This is appropriate given the volume's intended audience of pastors, teachers, and students of the Bible. It is in the section 'Approaching the New Testament', however, that the contributors are most consciously seeking to achieve the volume's purpose of showing the unity of the biblical message.

The volume is rich with insights into the biblical text and provides plenty of help for the reader interested in how the Old Testament serves to anticipate the New Testament. The Reformed tradition comes through at various points, but only occasionally will the non-Reformed reader encounter in-house or unfamiliar language (e.g., the 'covenant of works'; p. 62). It is in the introduction, however, that the Reformed perspective is most evident as Van Pelt seeks to systematise the biblical material and show its covenantal structure. This will make the volume particularly attractive to a Reformed audience. However, there is plenty here for readers of other traditions both as a means of appreciating a Reformed perspective and benefitting from the insights that a Reformed approach provides.

As is to be expected in a volume with contributions from numerous authors, there is a good deal of variety in how the task is carried out. Some chapters, for example, are strong on detail. However, given the audience for this volume, and the existence of excellent detailed commentaries, the chapters that hit the mark are those that demystify unfamiliar terminology and ideas, and clearly articulate the essence of a book's theology and message. A number of the contributors manage to do this. Notable among them are Peter Y. Lee's deft handling of Jeremiah and his remarkable reflections on Lamentations. And the preacher or teacher embarking on a study of Chronicles will find the thematic approach by Richard L. Pratt Jr. a goldmine.

The book is certainly richer for having so many contributors. However, the risk of a team effort is that some subjects fall between contributors or receive scarce comment. Little is said, for example, about the role of the Law for the Old Testament people of faith. It is not until the chapter on Deuteronomy that John Scott Redd briefly clarifies for the reader, 'We should note that the Ten Commandments are enunciated first and foremost *in* response to divine benevolence, not *as the grounds* of divine benevolence' (p. 141, italics original; cf. p. 139).

On the other hand, two entries discuss the relevance of the Law for Christians, but in ways that are difficult to reconcile. John D. Currid finds that the Decalogue is permanent and eternal whereas the Book of the Covenant contains stipulations valid only for Israel in their ancient context (p. 84). Michael G. McKelvey, however, suggests the ceremonial and sacrificial laws have been abrogated whereas the moral and ethical commands remain obligatory for the believer (p. 103). Readers would benefit from seeing these and other views on this important subject brought into dialogue.

Such criticisms nonetheless pale when set alongside the strengths of what will no doubt prove to be a valued volume among preachers, teachers, and students of the Bible.

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— NEW TESTAMENT —

Robert J. Foster. *The Significance of Exemplars for the Interpretation of the Letter of James*. Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2/376. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014. 233pp. £91.94/\$120.00.

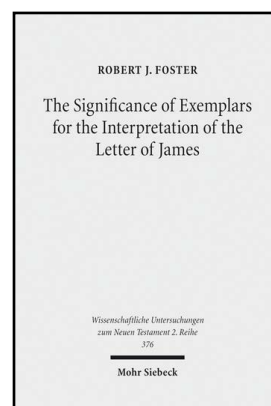
In this updated University of Birmingham thesis, Robert Foster examines the portrayal and role of the four named Old Testament exemplars in the epistle of James: Abraham, Rahab, Job, and Elijah. After investigating each figure in a range of documents, Foster inspects the role of the examples of these figures in James, formulating a framework for interpreting the letter of James as a whole.

After a brief initial chapter outlining his methodology, Foster's second chapter addresses the foundational issues of genre, structure, date, and authorship. Acknowledging the historical difficulties presented by these matters, he tentatively categorizes James as "paraenetic encyclical" (p. 14), dating James's letter between 40 and 62 CE (p. 24).

In chapter 3, Foster thoroughly examines James 1, positing that James is built around the themes introduced its opening, which link perseverance through testing to the goal of maturity-perfection. These themes are built around the "catchwords" *πειρασμός*, *πίστις*, *ύπομονή*, *ἔργον*, and *τέλειος*, with their corresponding cognates. Foster contends that the author of James draws the hearer back to the interrelatedness of these themes as they occur in seemingly isolated segments in the rest of the document (pp. 48–49). Foster then gives attention to James's eschatological view and the epistle's connection with the Jesus tradition.

Chapter 4 discusses Abraham, who is presented in James with regard to his offering of Isaac. Foster explores how Abraham has been depicted in the Hebrew Bible, deuterocanonical books, Jubilees, Qumran documents, Philo and Josephus, and other New Testament documents, before examining Abraham in James. Special attention is given to the *Akedah* and how it informs the interplay between faith and works. Foster concludes this section affirming that the reference to Abraham shows that the author of James is concerned with the audience's praxis (p. 103).

Rahab the harlot is the subject in chapter 5, presented in James as one who shows complete commitment to God. Foster investigates her portrayal in the Hebrew Bible, early Judaism, Matthew, Hebrews, and 1 Clement, before examining James. Notably, Foster proposes that Rahab is an example of hospitality to others, and that she did something that Abraham never did—entrust her own life to God (pp. 120–27).



In discussing Job in chapter 6, Foster surveys his portrayal in the Hebrew Bible, Second Temple Judaism, and rabbinic thought. He argues that the understanding of Job as an example of patience and endurance (ὑπομονή) is rooted in the *Testament of Job* rather than the canonical account. Job is an appropriate example in James because he achieved the end, being found complete, lacking nothing (Jas 1:4). Foster contends that Job, along with the prophets, fulfills the exemplary function of one who has perseverance (p. 163).

In chapter 7, Foster examines Elijah, commended in James 5:17–18 for his powerful prayer. The author inspects the narrative of 1 Kings 17–19, then surveys Malachi and Second Temple literature (especially Sirach) and New Testament documents. Foster notably points out that Elijah’s name means “My God is Yah[weh]”—a reflection of complete commitment to God, which is a central thrust of James. Notably, Foster focuses on the journey of Elijah, contending that God was not finished with him (1 Kgs 19:15–17), just like God has not finished with those who wander from the truth, as described in James 5:19 (pp. 187–91).

Foster concludes his book in chapter 8 by identifying what the four exemplars have in common: loyalty to God through testing, being outsiders to their communities because of their commitment to God, and reliance on God through testing. In James, they function as models of whole-hearted commitment to God and rejection of the world’s values. The hearers of James are called to emulate the figures in view of the coming of the Lord and the final judgment.

Foster’s well-researched, focused volume is a welcome contribution to the study of James. Foster’s clarity and humility make the book accessible for the average theological student and minister (assuming that they hold a moderate familiarity with biblical languages and extrabiblical sources). While consulting apocryphal sources to inform a hermeneutic must be done with care, Foster’s research compellingly fills out an understanding of Jewish thought regarding these particular Old Testament figures. His ultimate goal is clearly connected to his research, as he ties the “catchwords” in chapter 3 with his proposed framework for interpreting the epistle around the theme of “faithworks” as illustrated by the exemplars.

Specific aspects of Foster’s monograph stand out as especially strong. His exposition of James 1 adds a fresh and well-argued line of thought to the growing discussion of the epistle’s structure and coherence. In addition, his examination of the traditions concerning Abraham’s righteousness offers insights for the study of justification not only in James, but also in Paul’s letters. Foster’s treatment of Rahab is also especially strong, especially in light of the scant attention given to her role in James.

Although Foster’s book does not draw out the implications of his proposed hermeneutic throughout the entirety of James, it is a worthy contribution to a growing conversation regarding the study of the epistle. I recommend it for anyone looking to study the interpretation and communication of the message of James.

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David B. Garner. *Sons in the Son: The Riches and Reach of Adoption in Christ*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2016. xxvii + 366 pp. £24.50/\$24.99.

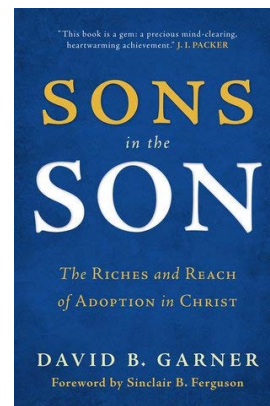
It is painful to consider how many books we will leave unread when we die. As a result, books need to be engaged at different levels for the sake of reading wisely. Some should be skimmed lightly to ascertain the basic argument but are not worth poring over. For others we will want to read a chapter or two that intersects with particular interests of ours. Some should be read all the way through, though quickly. And others, finally, should be carefully absorbed, sentence by sentence. For *Themelios* readers—students, pastors, teachers, and other church leaders—David Garner’s book on adoption is in this last category.

Garner teaches theology at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. The book reflects that context; its primary interlocutors are writers such as John Calvin, Herman Ridderbos, Geerhardus Vos, John Murray, and Richard Gaffin. Moreover, he distinguishes his views at times from those of Michael Horton and a way of framing the relationship between justification and union with Christ that has come to be associated with Westminster Seminary California (though the significant shared convictions between the two institutions should not be minimized). This makes the discussion feel at times a bit parochial (e.g. pp. 226n24, 258n11), but readers from any wing of evangelicalism will be deeply enriched through the book. And it should also be noted that Garner commendably interacts with a wide range of relevant monographs and even unpublished dissertations intersecting his thesis.

The book’s focus is the doctrine of adoption. The title, which cannot be improved upon, captures the thesis crisply: *Sons in the Son*. Believers are adopted sons who are in vital union with Jesus Christ the Son of God. A few opening chapters set the stage by addressing introductory matters and providing brief historical review of past treatment of adoption. The book then falls basically into two halves. The first half addresses the five Pauline instances of υἰοθεσία exegetically (Rom 8:15, 23; 9:4; Gal 4:5; Eph 1:5), and the second half synthesizes this exegetical spadework in terms of biblical and systematic theology.

The burden of the book is to lift believer’s eyes to see the macro-soteriological significance of adoption. Garner argues that adoption is a comprehensive, not a partial, gospel reality. Adoption should not be viewed as one link in the *ordo salutis* chain, but rather as permeating the entire *ordo*. This is because union with Christ, the umbrella concept for understanding Christian salvation, is union with the Son who was himself adopted in his resurrection (Rom 1:4). Adoption is as broad as union, Garner argues. This does not mean adoption and union are synonymous, but rather that adoption uniquely shows forth the full panoply of benefits granted in union with Christ. Thus neither justification nor progressive sanctification should be seen as a comprehensive soteriological reality in the same way as adoption; rather, both are distinct benefits of union with Christ. Adoption is more comprehensive than justification or sanctification because to be united with Christ is itself a filial reality through and through; salvation *is* sonship. “Biblical grace is filial grace” (p. 312). (For a quick overview of ten summarizing theses of the book the reader can consult pp. 298–300.)

My assessment of the book will fall into three broad categories: strengths, weaknesses, and further questions. Of these three categories, the strengths are the most numerous and most significant, so we will focus there.



As for strengths, the book's content is very good; one might even call it magnificent. Many readers will experience what I did: a wonderful correcting of an appreciative but impoverished view of adoption and its place in understanding the Christian gospel. Several subpoints could be mentioned here. First, Garner demonstrates the christological significance of adoption—in other words, he helps us connect the dots between the soteriological category of adoption and the person of Christ himself. Garner draws mainly on Romans 1:4 to argue convincingly that Christ was himself adopted, arguing for this in a way that does no injury to the eternal ontological status of Christ as Son of God.

Second, Garner connects adoption not only to Christology but also to redemptive history. With an eye toward Murray, Garner explains how the doctrine of adoption *applied* is entirely bound up with and dependent on the doctrine of adoption *accomplished*. Reinforcing a conviction that others in the Westminster tradition such as Gaffin have underscored, Garner reminds us that the *ordo salutis* is reliant upon the *historia salutis*. Adam was the first son of God. He fell. God then drew Israel to himself as his son (Exod 4:22–23). Israel too failed. Eventually God sent his own Son to succeed where Adam and Israel failed. The point of all this is that Garner shows clearly that our adoption as God's children is not just one more way to speak about salvation in systematic theological terms but is the culmination of the entire history of redemption and gathers up all that is true of us when the Spirit unites us to Christ.

Third, Garner rightly emphasizes the eschatological significance of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is not only for guidance and comfort personally but also the supreme sign of the dawning of the final days eschatologically. Garner recognizes this and accordingly helps us to see why Paul himself so closely associates the Spirit and adoption: what the Spirit does in this new age is unite us to Christ as fellow sons with him. All other functions of the Spirit flow from this umbrella role of ushering sinners into adoptive sonship as the promise of the final age. Inaugurated eschatology, the Spirit, and adoption are three mutually interdependent realities.

Fourth, Garner admirably weds the utter and marvelous gratuity of the gospel with the new moral life to which believers are summoned (see esp. p. 274). This is an especially salutary strength in light of recent debates around how the gospel fuels progressive sanctification. Garner does not “split the difference” or have a 50/50 balance in treating these two themes, but rather presses hard in both directions. To be adopted by God is a matter of utter gratuity. But to be adopted also necessitates (and enables) living in accord with one's new identity and the new power of the Spirit. Garner, following Paul's lead, lifts up both truths.

Fifth, in a day of scholarly hyperspecialization and especially an exaggerated distinction between the disciplines of exegesis and theology, Garner's holistic approach is refreshing. He engages the text, yet is unafraid to synthesize. Many scholars are good at one or the other. This book does both. He has one foot in biblical studies and the other in theological studies.

Many more strengths could be mentioned but I have a word limit on this review. In moving to any weaknesses we remind ourselves of the impertinence of critiquing an author who has spent far more time pondering his subject than we readers have. So I tread cautiously and mention just one area. The writing itself is at times an obstacle. There is redundancy, for example, both in concepts (several of the main themes are repeated over and over) and in individual words (such as “tethered”). And individual sentences are at times difficult to process (e.g., “Though the complaints about sexism might well be gagged purely by calling into question contemporary bias, Paul's gender-indeterminate solidaric theological framework muzzles any perceived male chauvinism on its own” [p. 53]). But I

remain cautious in critiquing the writing style since it is a subjective matter and may reflect personal preference as much as actual quality of writing.

I conclude with a list of some further questions that arose as I read. Garner must of course set limits on what he is seeking to do, and he himself mentions in the closing pages some areas of further study with respect to adoption (pp. 313–14). Other matters did however arise that could have been more substantially addressed in this book. First, what is the significance of the transfiguration (in which God declares Jesus to be his “beloved Son”) for Garner’s explication of the doctrine of adoption? Second, how does adoption relate to the new birth (regeneration)—since adoption and birth are the two ways children come into families and both are used by the NT to describe salvation? Third, why mention the New Perspective on Paul and the Federal Vision yet define the former and not the latter, especially given how much more provincial the latter is (pp. 223–30)? Fourth, how can we determine whether or not *υιοθεσία* was originally in the text of Romans 8:23 without any discussion of the actual manuscript evidence (pp. 134–38)? Fifth, if adoption is as central for Paul as Garner argues (e.g. p. 34), is it also this central for the NT as a whole? In other words, since Garner focuses only on five texts that are all in Paul, how programmatic for the whole NT is Garner’s thesis?

But any weaknesses of writing and any remaining questions are easily outdistanced by the great blessing this book will be to its readers. An unhurried absorption of this book will, for many readers, elevate the doctrine of adoption to a place it could not have had without this substantive, thoughtful, inter-disciplinary, worship-evoking treatment. Reduced to its core, what does it mean to be a Christian? *Who are we?* David Garner compellingly answers: We are sons in the Son.

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Gabriella Gelardini and Harold W. Attridge, eds. *Hebrews in Contexts*. Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity 91. Leiden: Brill, 2016. xxiii + 385 pp. £107.00/\$175.00.

This book, a collection of eighteen papers delivered at the Hebrews section of the SBL annual conferences between 2005 and 2014, analyzes Hebrews from numerous contextual angles: Jewish, Greco-Roman, spatial, and reception-history. As with all such collections, varied topics discussed with varied degrees of success make thorough review difficult, so here I focus on some overarching features of the collection as well as a few high points from particular essays.

Reading Hebrews from various contextual angles is undoubtedly a useful pursuit in theory, especially when the goal is expansion of contextual aids rather than new reductionisms (see Harry Maier’s fine explanation of this point on p. 134). In the end, though, such a pursuit’s usefulness is a function of its ability to illuminate the text of Hebrews itself, and in this respect I thought most of the essays fell short. I learned a great deal about Roman religion, for example, from Jörg Rüpke (“Starting Sacrifice in the Beyond,” pp. 109–27) and Harry Maier (“For Here We Have No Lasting City (Heb 13:14a,” pp. 133–52), but I am less certain that I learned much about Hebrews.



Even when the parallels between Hebrews and contemporary literature were nearly indisputable, as in Kim's comparison of Targumim on Psalm 95 with Hebrews 3–4 ("Jewish and Christian Theology from the Hebrew Bible," pp. 31–45), I remain unclear on the implications of this set of parallels for our understanding of Hebrews. And while Kim clearly demonstrated that some Targumim and the author of Hebrews were drinking from the same fountain, other parallels suggested in the volume were less convincing. Fritz Graf ("You Have Become Dull of Hearing," pp. 97–107), for example, notes that Heb 5:11 and Plato's *Theaetetus* are the only extant texts that use *νωθρός* ("dull") in educational contexts, both referring to those who "easily forget what they have learned" (p. 99). But on that sole basis, he claims that "the author [of Hebrews] *must have read* [*Theaetetus*] at some point" (p. 99, emphasis mine). The latter simply does not follow from the former.

Better, but still unconvincing (in my opinion), was Rüpke's interest in the relatively unusual phrase "great high priest" (*ἀρχιερεὺς μέγας*) in Hebrews 4:14. Given the typical "great priest" (*ιερεὺς μέγας*) of the LXX, and the closer *ἀρχιερεὺς μέγιστος* (*pontifex maximus*) used to describe Caesar vis-à-vis his cultic role, he argues that the description of Hebrews is a veiled critique of Caesar—Jesus, not Domitian, is the great high priest. First, however, *ἀρχιερεὺς μέγας* does appear twice in the LXX (1 Macc 13:42; 14:27), showing that the phrase cohered outside of a Roman context. Second, *ιερεὺς μέγας* (the usual LXX phrase) appears in Heb 10:21; thus, as in 1 Maccabees, the same person may be described as either a "great priest" or a "great high priest" with apparently little difference between the two except as a matter of emphasis (Simon receives both descriptions in 1 Macc 13:42; 14:20, 27; 15:2). Thus it is unlikely that one ("great high priest") and not the other ("great priest") serves as a technical term meant to evoke and thus critique a similar title given to someone else. Third, the clearly stated interest of the author of Hebrews is to compare the priesthood of Jesus with that of the Levitical cult; if his interest actually lies with criticizing Domitian, why not just say so? It will not do to say that "for legal reasons the reference is never explicit or by name" (p. 124). On the one hand, this suggests a bent toward avoiding persecution—a bent hardly in keeping with the practice of Jesus himself (whose example Hebrews frequently calls its recipients to follow). On the other hand, if this particular parallel is as easily identified as Rüpke makes it out to be, those outside the church would have grasped the author's point and persecution would have followed anyway.

Those interested in the cosmology of Hebrews (i.e., the "spatial" context), especially its depiction of a heavenly sanctuary and Jesus' high priestly work therein, will find the essays by Ken Schenck (pp. 238–56) and David Moffitt (pp. 259–77) a useful comparison of two contrasting positions: Schenck advocating a multi-faceted metaphorical reading with some affinities to Philonic depictions of material and immaterial realities ("Philonic" and "Platonic" should be not understood synonymously; Schenck both here and in numerous other publications has made it clear that Hebrews's cosmology is not Platonic), and Moffitt countering with a more concrete analogical approach that bears somewhat more likeness to Jewish apocalyptic literature. For both historical reasons (Hebrews's similarities to Jewish apocalyptic depictions of heavenly space) and theological reasons (the necessity of Jesus' bodily resurrection and ascension) I generally prefer Moffitt's perspective, but the real value of these essays lies in their succinct explanations of two major options on this difficult yet vital element of Hebrews's depiction of the work of Christ.

The last group of essays deals with the reception history of Hebrews. In my opinion the most interesting essay in this section is that by Craig Koester ("In Many and Various Ways": Theological Interpretation of Hebrews in the Modern Period," pp. 299–313), who surveys some major interpreters

of Hebrews in the 19th and 20th centuries: A. B. Bruce, James Moffatt, Otto Michel, Ernst Käsemann, and Albert Vanhoye. For each Koester asks two central questions: what did this interpreter think Hebrews was (centrally) about, and how was the answer to that question shaped by their own cultural and confessional context? Placing these two questions side by side helps us understand these particular scholars more deeply, but it is also useful for “promoting self-awareness” (p. 313)—we, like them, are culturally and theologically situated and will read Hebrews from those situations. This is not necessarily a bad thing, Koester suggests; rather, the scholars surveyed in his essay provide evidence that Hebrews spoke to their many and varied contexts, and we may be confident that it will continue to do the same in ours.

In the end, I applaud the attempt to widen our vision as we read Hebrews, and am thankful for what I learned about a variety of topics that might enhance our understanding of this epistle. But while I value in the pursuit, I do not yet think we have found the thing we are looking for.

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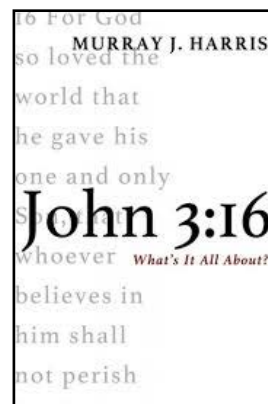
Murray J. Harris. *John 3:16: What's It All About?* Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2015. 54 pp. £7.00/\$10.00.

Murray J. Harris is professor emeritus of New Testament exegesis and theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. The twenty-five words in the Greek text of John 3:16 are what Harris calls the most famous sentence in all literature. The author in this volume has provided an excellent exposition of this passage, which is the heart of the gospel. One senses in reading the book that his students were blessed to be able to have an exemplary model of exegetical method in their professor!

One of the strengths of this volume is that Harris constantly emphasizes context. He begins by placing John 3:16 in the wider context of the Gospel of John and the narrower context of Jesus’s conversation with Nicodemus. He argues that verses 1–10 present a dialogue between Jesus and Nicodemus, which is then followed in verses 11–21 with Jesus’s monologue. He acknowledges that there is uncertainty whether Jesus’s words end after v. 15 or v. 21; Harris holds the latter position but argues that the text is equally authoritative whether they are Jesus’s recorded speech or the reflections of the apostle John (p. 33n7).

The bulk of the book consists in an examination of the words found in John 3:16 as translated in the NIV. Harris divides the passage into eight parts, usually providing two pages, but sometimes three pages of explanation in each section. The subdivisions are as follows: For God; so loved; the world; that he gave; his one and only Son; that whoever believes in him; shall not perish; but have eternal life. Each section is based upon Harris’s work in the Greek text, but the exposition would be intelligible without any knowledge of Greek. If a person is interested, there are copious endnotes that provide plenty of material for Greek enthusiasts.

Let me make a couple of observations regarding his treatment of this crucial gospel text. Harris contends that the word κόσμος, translated “world,” refers to “all humans without distinction or exception”



(p. 13). Warfield's exegesis is preferable; he maintains that "world" in this verse is a "synonym of all that is evil and noisome and disgusting" ("God's Immeasurable Love," in *Biblical and Theological Studies*, ed. Samuel G. Craig [Philadelphia: P&R Publishing, 1952], 514). Harris recognizes that in the Gospel of John "there are ominous, negative ideas attaching to the term *kosmos*" (p. 13), but he chooses to go with a universal and distributive meaning.

I do appreciate, however, his handling of the clause "whoever believes in him." Harris writes that there is "an open and warm invitation to all and every—'whoever believes'" (p. 19). Calvin understands the passage in the same way: "He has employed the universal term *whosoever* ... to invite all indiscriminately to partake of life" (*Commentary on John's Gospel* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans], 1.125). The general call is part of the good news without a doubt.

In connection with this universal invitation, Harris does an outstanding job in explaining what John is driving at in his distinctive idiom πιστεύων εἰς αὐτόν. What does it mean to "believe in him"? Harris answers, "To believe *in* Jesus is to have faith that is directed towards him, faith that is focused on him." "It involves the total commitment of one's whole self to the person of Christ as Messiah and Lord for ever" (p. 20). This indeed is the invitation of the gospel, to give ourselves in total allegiance to Jesus, to cast ourselves upon him completely for our salvation.

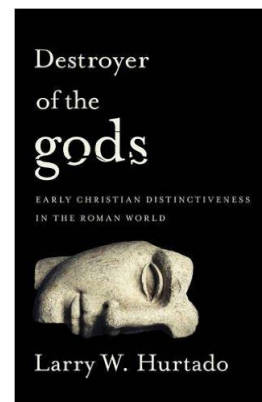
This volume is a scholarly and clear exposition of John 3:16, a book that we can share with people who need to know the love of God and the eternal life that is his gift.

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Larry W. Hurtado. *Destroyer of the Gods: Early Christian Distinctiveness in the Roman World*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016. xiv + 267 pp. £24.99/\$29.95.

The study of early Christianity within the Greco-Roman world is a crowded field. There are classic textbooks (e.g. Everett Ferguson's *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 3rd ed. [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003]) and detailed studies which illuminate areas of the discipline (e.g. Robert Louis Wilken's *Christians as the Romans Saw Them*, 2nd ed. [New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003]). But the most recent offering from one of the field's leading lights, Larry Hurtado, stands out for its accessibility and its interest in the distinctive contributions of early Christianity to the modern Western world. Hurtado says *Destroyer of the Gods* is "not a technical monograph" but a book "intended for a wide spectrum of readers" (p. xiii), which shows that many of our "commonplace notions" about religion originated "in the rambunctious early Christian movement" (p. 2). The book comprises five main chapters, the first being an introduction to outsiders' perceptions of the early Christians with the remaining four focusing on the movement's most distinctive traits.

The ancient figures surveyed in the first chapter include Tacitus, Pliny, Galen, and Celsus. Hurtado notes frequently-cited remarks such as Tacitus's observations that Christianity is a "deadly superstition" and it produces "hatred against the human race" (p. 21). But Hurtado is more interested in the even-



handed comments of Galen, noting with interest his observation that Christians are mostly of “subelite social levels” but nonetheless possess virtues that rival “genuine philosophers” (p. 27). Hurtado concludes that the attention given to Christianity by elite thinkers in the first two centuries CE highlights its departure from religious norms and its rapid social success.

The second chapter focuses on the nature of religious belief in antiquity, which was almost exclusively polytheistic. The Christian refusal to worship what they called “idols” was distinctive—in fact, the terms used in the New Testament for “idolatry” and “idol temple” are unattested in pagan literature (p. 51). Of course, Jews were monotheistic, but Christianity quickly spread to Gentiles, for whom there was no precedent for such exclusivity. The lack of images in early Christian worship highlighted the radical transcendence of their God. But unlike the transcendent deity postulated by philosophers, such as Plato, the Christian God could be engaged directly by humans because he loved them.

Another distinctive trait of early Christianity was its voluntary, trans-cultural nature. In antiquity, one’s religious identity was decided at birth. The Romans generally worshipped within their traditional pantheon which included Jupiter, Juno, and Mars. The only religious groups which were truly voluntary were the so-called “mystery religions” and the philosophical schools. But as noted earlier, one’s decision to join these groups did not entail the rejection of other religions as it did in Christianity. Hurtado concludes that Christianity’s unhinging of religion from ethnicity led to arguably the first declaration of religious liberty by Tertullian less than two centuries later: “It is a fundamental human right ... that everyone should worship according to one’s own convictions” (p. 103, quoting from Tertullian, *To Scapula*, 2).

In the fourth chapter, Hurtado traces the modern assumption that one’s religion is centered upon sacred scriptures to early Christianity—a “bookish” religion (p. 105). By contrast, Roman religions either did not have sacred texts or these were reserved for the priest and not to be read in group gatherings (p. 110). The Christian interest in texts translated into a literary output that was at once sweeping and detailed. For instance, between the preserved letters of Seneca and Cicero, the longest single letter is 4,134 words whereas Paul wrote several letters longer than this: Romans (7,101 words), 1 Corinthians (6,807 words), and 2 Corinthians (4,448 words).

Finally, Hurtado highlights the unique ethical demands of early Christianity. Although many pagans cultivated a rigorous ethic, such as the philosopher Epictetus, this was largely motivated by the avoidance of shame rather than responsibility for one’s self and others. The Christian insistence on holiness led to relatively novel responsibilities, including a new sexual ethic: fidelity to one’s wife and the rejection of child abuse. Elite pagan writers such as Juvenal and Lucian not only tolerated but celebrated sex with children, referring to the παιδεραστής (one who has sex with boys/children), a term which was altered by the early Christians into the pejorative παιδοφθόρος, meaning “destroyer ... of children” (p. 167). Most importantly, Christian standards of behaviour were corporate—there were no double standards for social elites.

Those interested in the distinctive qualities of the early Christian movement owe Hurtado a great debt. This volume covers the basic landscape illuminated by other books, but it does so in fewer pages, with arguably fresher insights, and in a manner that is easier to read. Most importantly, Hurtado succeeds in demonstrating how early Christianity has shaped, even created, the Western world. But lest some fear that Hurtado builds a false contrast between Christianity and other Greco-Roman movements, “distinctiveness” is, after all, a slippery historical term. It should be recognized that many resemblances between Christianity and other religions, especially Second Temple Judaism, are observed. What

emerges is an even-handed enquiry which only claims distinctiveness once other explanations have been considered (e.g. p. 82–94).

The main weakness of Hurtado's work is the lack of reflection on early Christian thinking relating to Jesus's death and resurrection. In particular, Hurtado fails to discuss how the earliest Christians were able to bravely face suffering and persecution by drawing inspiration from Christ's own death. A crucified deity was preposterous to the ancient mind (e.g. 1 Cor 1:22), even impious given the depiction of Christ as a donkey in the famous "Alexamenos graffito" discovered on the Palatine Hill in Rome. It seems that Christian approaches to suffering were at least as distinctive as the other values and behaviours considered by Hurtado. This volume also lacks a developed discussion of the Christian understanding of divine grace. Although the distinctiveness of this tenet is debated, this oversight seems more conspicuous than ever in light of John Barclay's recent *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), which highlights the novelty of Paul's emphasis on incongruous grace in the first century.

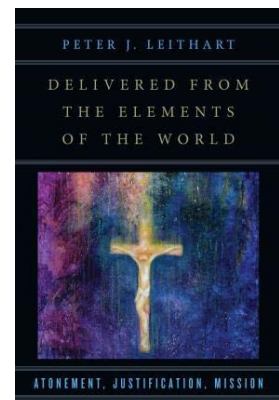
Despite these reservations, I think this book is a phenomenal work that deserves a wide readership amongst scholars, pastors, and interested laypeople. Although it is not written as a prophetic call to action, Hurtado's observations about the earliest Christians provide significant fodder for those interested in modern Christianity's cultural witness.

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Peter J. Leithart. *Delivered from the Elements of the World: Atonement, Justification, Mission*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016. 368 pp. £24.42/\$30.00.

Cur Deus Homo? 'Unlike Anselm,' says Peter Leithart, 'I have self-consciously asked *Cur Deus Homo* as a question of social and political theology, as an exploration of the cultural and public settings and consequences of the event of the cross and resurrection' (p. 13). Orienting his account from a base in Paul's allusion in Galatians to τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου, Leithart contextualizes Paul's thought in the 'social physics' of his world, whose preoccupation with purity and sacrifice was not just one preoccupation amongst others but the ground of social and religious cultures. Atonement not only in the wider cultural but in the explicit biblical context entails a social theory. This is what Peter Leithart aims to adumbrate.

Beginning with the theological significance of biblical 'flesh,' we are conducted through an interpretation of the function of Torah to the atoning ministry of Jesus Christ, whose life, death and resurrection must be grasped according to its unified purpose of demolishing the elements of this world so that he might achieve an atonement which constitutes a new order. Justice, justification and mission thematically head up the three parts of this volume, which follow an account of the socio-religious world until Jesus Christ came. Three appendices then wrap up the argument with discussion of the metaphysics of atonement, the natural and the supernatural and Romans. It all adds up to a rich and far-reaching exegetical, biblical and systematic theology which freshly and independently interprets the atonement, bringing treasures old and new into the construction of a theological temple



which is designed to show just one thing: the meaning of the work of him who forever undermined the old world of flesh and purity regulations and forever created a people delivered from the elements of this world.

Anyone who has read Peter Leithart's book will say that my account is (I hope) accurate, but (I am sure) practically vacuous. I have given no sense of its detailed content or wide range. It is a work of compelling excellence to which the open-minded reader must surely give serious consideration. Leithart is not only fully sensitive to the interplay of detailed exegetical and big-picture plausibility, he also has the scholarly ability himself to manage directly all the various elements in his argument and their relations while calling no man master. Some readers will understandably observe that if we indicate the new perspective on Paul, this may quite generally enable us to plot the broad direction of the author's thought, but this does no justice to the creative independence of approach, contribution or conclusion. Leithart's argument may be usefully supplemented at certain points. I give two examples. First, the claim that justification is a way of talking about the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ should drive Protestants back to the Scots Confession of 1560, which interestingly does not include a chapter on justification though John Knox had no doubt that it was at the doctrinal heart of theology and theological controversy. What the Confession does speak of is Jesus Christ and *Heilsgeschichte*. Second, Leithart's interpretation of modernity as a form of Galatian return to the elements of this world might usefully be brought into dialogue with Ivan Illich's contention in *Rivers North of the Future* (Toronto: House of Anansi, 2005) that modernity is neither the fulfillment nor the antithesis of Christianity but, rather, its perversion.

If this reviewer is not entirely persuaded by Leithart's argument, it is less on account of what is said (although in such comprehensive work we are all likely to disagree with something greater or lesser on that score) than on account of what is unsaid. If the unsaid were said, what significance would this have for the author's thesis? This is not the place to attempt the test. I have in mind the question of defilement which is (rightly) foundational in Leithart's approach. The great Old Testament text which requires consideration here is the prophecy of Ezekiel, yet the author hardly touches on it. Ezekiel it is who reminds us of the individual, while Scripture, Reformation and human experience alike alert us to the existential depths of the question of the defiled and cleansed conscience. It seems clearly to be in the background of Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo*, as a reading of Richard Southern's superb and memorable biography of Anselm brings to light. Leithart claims both that we have frequently interpreted atonement and justification too individualistically and that he is not expelling individualism. Granted on both scores. Nonetheless, Ezekiel is pre-eminent amongst the biblical books and texts which force the question of whether Leithart has altogether successfully worked his way from the question of defilement to the question of justice. (In pursuit of an answer to this question, comparison with Paul Ricoeur's tracking of defilement in *The Symbolism of Evil* [New York: Harper & Row, 1967] surely proves rewarding even if we cannot go along with everything in Ricoeur.) And has he got close to plumbing the depths of the defilement and cleansing of individual conscience?

Queries perhaps. One is rather reluctant to express the hope that this volume will generate a lot of thought and discussion because that smacks of regarding it as a consumer item – one more set of ideas paraded in print and destined for armchair reflection. This possibility haunts the production

of theological books today. Of course, the volume does deserve thought and discussion, but it also deserves better than that. Moreover, its author most certainly deserves our thanks.

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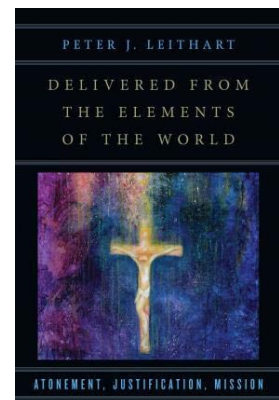
Peter J. Leithart. *Delivered from the Elements of the World: Atonement, Justification, Mission*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016. 368 pp. £24.42/\$30.00.

There are theological books that are satisfying to read because they sharpen one's view of how the puzzle pieces fit together, while leaving the overall picture intact. Other books are stimulating to read because they scramble and rearrange the pieces. Peter Leithart's book, *Delivered from the Elements of the World*, will fall into the latter category for most readers. This wide-ranging and "deliberately idiosyncratic" (p. 19) exposition of Paul's thought provoked many exclamation points, question marks, and hand-written notes in the margins of my hard copy.

In the first chapter, Leithart explains that he will focus on the sociopolitical dimensions of the atonement. He presents his book as "a biblical and Pauline revision of Girardian theory" (p. 20n7). The organizing theme of the book is the "elements of the world" from Galatians 4:1–7 (cf. Col 2:8, 20). Although this theme is admittedly a "marginal" one in Paul's letters, Leithart's assumption is that "staring hard at the marginalia of Paul's discussion of 'elements' will do much to illumine the center" (p. 19). Leithart then provides his criteria for a "successful, comprehensible theory of the atonement" (p. 19)—historically plausible, Levitical, evangelical, Pauline, inevitable, and fruitful—and offers the reader the chance to jump ship before sailing ahead (p. 21).

Chapters 2–5 describe the elements of the world, which are the "physics of the old creation" or the building blocks of ancient religious life: purity, temple, sacrifice. In the second chapter, Leithart argues that Paul has transposed the terms "nature" and "elements" from Greek physics into a "social, covenantal key" (p. 41). Chapter three is a well-researched yet fictional "travelogue" in which a Jewish man interacts with proponents of ancient Egyptian, Babylonian, and Greek religion. The dialogue demonstrates that "Gentiles had their own systems of sacred space, priesthood, purity and sacrifice, just as Israel did" (p. 66). The next chapter presents excellent biblical theologies of flesh and circumcision, the latter being "the first *stoicheion* [element] of Israelite social life" (p. 90). In the fifth chapter, Leithart describes how the Torah further constructed Israelite religious life with concepts and practices of sanctuary, purity, and sacrifice. He contends that "Torah is a form of *ta stoicheia tou kosmou*, and so it clearly cannot release anyone from fleshly subjection to *stoicheia*" (p. 116) and death. For Leithart, the Pauline phrase "works of the Law" means the deadly and condemning work that (an impotent) Torah does (p. 119).

Chapters 6–9 develop Leithart's doctrine of justification by explicating his understanding of "the righteousness (or justice) of God," the life of Jesus and his disciples, the reasons for Jesus's death, the "faith of Jesus Christ," the meaning of "justification" as God's "deliverdict" of Jesus, and the release of the Spirit over and against the elements of the world. Along the way, Leithart's sweeping account



of the atonement incorporates the church, the sacraments, and the end of the Jewish temple system (see pp. 172–74). Likewise, justification overcomes the curses of both Eden and Babel, and involves “a transfiguration of the elements and a reconstitution of the socioreligious physics of humanity” (p. 120). Thus, these four chapters show how the death and resurrection of Jesus is “*the* decisive event in the history of humanity, the hinge and crux and crossroads for *everything*” (p. 13, emphasis original). Leithart’s project is nothing if not ambitious.

Whereas previous chapters have depicted the gospel and its background, chapters 10–12 present its foreground, chapters that Leithart labels as “contributions to a theology of mission.” Chapter 10 explains how baptism and the Spirit transform human society and how the church challenges “preexisting socioreligious arrangements” (p. 238). Leithart demonstrates how ecclesiology and mission are inherent to his atonement theology. Chapters 11–12 map the “terrain of missions” in three regions: stoicheic societies outside the church, those on the “borderlands” (including Judaism), and “Galatianist societies” that have entered the Christian era and then reverted to the elements (including Islam and modern Western civilization). Chapter 13 is a 13-page summary of Leithart’s atonement theology. The book also includes two lengthy appendices on “the metaphysical and anthropological underpinnings of medieval and Protestant soteriology” (p. 295), as well as an appendix that supports Leithart’s understanding of justification with evidence from Romans.

Leithart’s work positions him in between theological camps, which means that he will likely draw fire from all sides. In particular, many readers of *Themelios* will take issue with various aspects of his presentation of penal substitution and justification. Here are a few points of criticism on other topics.

First, the formation of a just and mature human society seems to be God’s ultimate goal according to Leithart (see, e.g., p. 180). The glory of God is little discussed. It may be that God is conducting a war on the flesh throughout human history, but what about his program of self-revelation? Likewise, any reflection on men and women created in the image of God was conspicuous by its absence. Perhaps Leithart’s atonement theology is wide enough but not yet deep enough.

Second, I am not sure that Leithart escapes self-contradiction or at least confusion about any enduring role for the Torah. This may be exemplified in a sentence: “The Spirit comes to demolish Torah and to set up a new *nomos* where the requirements of Torah are actually fulfilled” (p. 194). Leithart claims that “laying aside the sacrificial knife and eating a bit of pork required an act of radical faith in Christ” (p. 42n39); but did Paul ever eat pork? At times Leithart implies “yes,” at other times he suggests “no”; for example, he states that “the first generation of Christians was a world of transition [*sic*]” (p. 170). Yet if Paul was willing to circumcise Timothy and fulfil a Nazirite vow at the temple, what kind of cosmos did he inhabit? Can Galatians 2:20 really indicate that Paul “comes to life with a new *physis*, no longer Jewish” (p. 192), when Paul refers to himself as a Jew “by nature” only five verses earlier (Gal 2:15)?

Third, it is unclear from Leithart’s account why it was necessary for Jesus to share in the *divine* identity for his work of atonement. Leithart comments on this matter in passing at the bottom of p. 159, but perhaps a discussion of the virgin birth could have at least partially addressed this lacuna and been integrated into Leithart’s broader discussion of flesh.

Finally, the book makes awkward use of transliterated Greek and Hebrew. In places, Leithart assumes an understanding of the original languages; why not use the Greek and Hebrew itself?

These criticisms notwithstanding, Leithart's book is a brilliant and comprehensive account of atonement, justification, and mission. I would highly recommend it to all students of theology.

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Michael R. Licona. *Why Are There Differences in the Gospels? What We Can Learn from Ancient Biography*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017. 309 pp. £22.99/\$35.00.

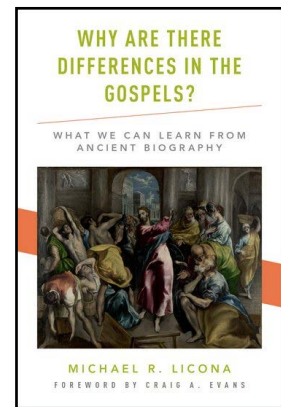
Licona's basic thesis is that the differences we find among the Gospels are similar to the differences we find in other ancient historians. These should not be considered contradictions or errors but simply part and parcel of the nature of Greco-Roman biography.

To test his thesis, Licona first turns to two Greco-Roman literary genres. The first is the literary textbooks known as *progymnasmata*, written by Theon, Hermogenes and others, in which rhetorical devices are introduced and discussed. The second, which Licona covers in much greater detail, is the writings of the first century historian Plutarch. Plutarch wrote more than 60 biographies, or *Lives*, of which 50 have survived. Forty-six of these appear in pairs, where a prominent Greek figure is placed beside a prominent Roman one. Licona chooses for his study nine of these lives: Sertorius, Lucullus,

Cicero, Pompey, Crassus, Caesar, Younger Cato, Brutus, and Anthony. These nine individuals lived at approximately the same time and most of them knew each other. This means the stories about them overlap and tend to be told again and again. From these nine lives, Licona examines 36 pericopes or events that appear in two or more *Lives*. He focuses especially on 30 of these which contain significant differences. His method is to first summarize the event in a kind of harmony of the various pericopes and then to identify and analyze the differences in Plutarch's various tellings. Through this analysis, we see the kinds of modifications and alterations that Plutarch considers appropriate and acceptable for his biographical historiography.

Not surprisingly, according to Licona, Plutarch operates from the perspective of biographical relevance. He provides more details in those *Lives* where the event has greater relevance to that character and fewer details and less emphasis on those events that have less relevance. Also not surprisingly, Plutarch utilizes many compositional techniques found in the *progymnasmata*, including using synonyms, different wording, different syntax, etc.

Other compositional devices Licona observes in Plutarch are also important for Gospel analysis. These include transferal (words or deeds of one character are transferred to another), displacement (an event is moved from one context to another), conflation (two or more events or people are combined and narrated as one), compression (events are portrayed as occurring over a shorter period in one instance than in another), spotlighting (one character is emphasized to the neglect of others), simplification (details are omitted or altered for the sake of simplification), expansion (details that were unknown are added to fill out a story in a plausible manner), and paraphrasing (something similar is said using different words).



After this detailed analysis of Plutarch, Licona turns to the Gospels. In chapter 4, entitled, “Parallel Pericopes in the Canonical Gospels,” he examines 16 pericopes that appear in two or more Gospels. He follows the same methodology as with Plutarch, first summarizing the event in a harmonistic fashion and then analyzing the differences. Licona finds many of the same compositional techniques in the Gospels as in Plutarch. In line with the compositional textbooks, the Gospels substitute words and phrases, alter syntax, change the inflection of a term from singular to plural (or vice versa), add material in order to intensify, clarify, explain or expand something. They occasionally change speakers, as when Matthew twice turns Jesus’s one-sided address to his antagonists into a dialogue between the two. The order of events is sometimes inverted, especially in Luke. Matthew occasionally transfers what one person says to the lips of another. Much more commonly he compresses events. Literary spotlighting occurs (especially in John and Luke), where one character is emphasized so that another disappears or is minimized. (Yet this is much less common in the Gospels than in Plutarch.) Licona concludes that only a handful of passages are not satisfactorily explained using specific compositional devices.

In chapter 5 Licona turns to the question of “synthetic chronology,” where an author creatively links stories together in a particular order for the purpose of literary artistry rather than chronology. Five examples from classical literature and five Gospel pericopes (two of which were examined earlier) are discussed here.

In his concluding chapter, Licona affirms that even the best historians and biographers of Jesus’s day were not committed to the kind of precision we often expect for historiography today. Writers told stories “in a manner that entertained, provided moral guidance, emphasized points they regarded as important, and paint a portrait of important people” (p. 198). Their adaptations were “not intended to distort the truth but to communicate it more effectively” (p. 198). Licona compares this to a photographer who touches up features of a romantic photograph not to distort it, but to bring out a “true representation” of the elements that were actually present. Details may be altered, but the truth is retained.

While the Gospels share many composition features with Greco-Roman biography, Licona also points out that the divergences among the Synoptics are much less dramatic than we find in other writers of the day. Furthermore, in common with Plutarch, differences in Gospel accounts of the same event tend to be limited to peripheral details, keeping the central message intact (p. 200).

Licona’s work is particularly helpful in placing the Gospels in their first century literary context. Most NT scholars today acknowledge that the closest first century genre to the NT Gospels is Greco-Roman biography. The Evangelists were not only Spirit-inspired writers, but also authors deeply embedded in their own time and place. Any study that looks more closely at this relationship is to be commended. Licona’s work is particularly innovative in examining the kinds of differences that arise in *parallel accounts* of the same events. Whether or not you agree with all of his conclusions, this is a fresh and original study that provides greater insight into the nature of the Gospels within their literary environment.

Licona’s work also rightly warns against extreme and far-fetched harmonization that sets up evangelicals for ridicule. At one point Licona reminds us that Harold Lindsell famously (or infamously) suggested that Peter actually denied Christ six times, three times before the rooster crowed for the first time (Matt 26:75) and then three more times before the rooster crowed a second time (Mk 14:72) (p. 159). Such harmonizing attempts do little to apologetically support the Gospels and give the impression that Christians are irrational and unreasonable. Licona sardonically notes that this kind of harmonization

amounts to “subjecting the Gospel texts to a sort of hermeneutical waterboarding until they tell the exegete what he or she wants to hear” (p. 201). Licona concludes that “a truly high view of the Gospels as holy writ requires us to accept and respect them *as God has given them to us* rather than to force them into a frame shaped by how we think he should have” (p. 201, italics mine).

I also found it refreshing that Licona’s conclusions are for the most part presented in a tentative and cautious manner. He offers possibilities and probabilities rather than dogmatic assertions. Take for example Matthew’s tendency to introduce two characters where the other Synoptics have one. Did Jesus heal one demoniac in Gerasa, as in Mark (5:1–20) and Luke (8:26–39), or two, as in Matthew (8:28–34)? Licona offers various possibilities: Matthew may be working from a different source; or, he may be illustrating the reality of multiple demons by introducing a second man. Or, there may have actually been two men, but Mark (followed by Luke) uses the technique of literary spotlighting to highlight the one. This last, of course, is the traditional way of harmonizing the episodes. But is it the only way? Or does Greco-Roman storytelling allow a wider range of options?

The challenge, of course, is whether “non-harmonizing” solutions— even if they were common in the Greco-Roman world—cross the line from literary license to outright error. Do they violate the evangelical doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture? One’s evaluation of Licona’s work will depend in part on their definition of inspiration and inerrancy and the qualifications one places on these doctrines. While many will find Licona’s conclusions reasonable and convincing (for the most part I did), others may conclude he has crossed a bridge too far.

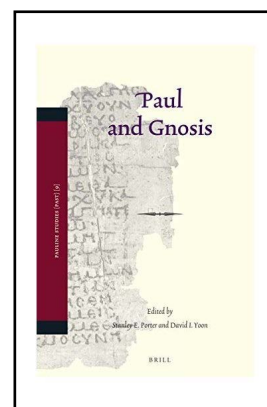
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Stanley E. Porter and David I. Yoon, eds. *Paul and Gnosis*. Pauline Studies 9. Leiden: Brill, 2016. xvi + 222 pp. £78.00/\$128.00.

In 2005 the first of the Pauline Studies series was published. Each volume is edited by well-known New Testament scholar Stanley Porter and a graduate student. Each book in the series is composed of scholarly essays devoted to key issues within the study of Paul the apostle. Previous books in this series concerned the Pauline canon, Paul’s opponents, theology, world, background, letter form, social relations, and pseudepigraphy. This ninth volume is devoted to the study of Paul and Gnosis.

Each volume within the Pauline Studies series begins with an opening article by the editors that orients the reader to the topic in question. The subsequent articles provide groundbreaking research in the area of Pauline studies under consideration. *Paul and Gnosis* contains ten articles and continues the tradition of high caliber scholarly essays in the particular sub discipline of Pauline research.

As in the other volumes, the editors have written the first article. This article entitled “Paul and Gnosis” provides a good overview of the field and the articles within the book. The editors point out that a variety of different topics could have fit under this particular subject, including the relationship



that Paul had with Gnosticism, whether Paul was a gnostic, whether his opponents were Gnostic, and whether there are elements of Gnosticism to be found within Paul, his followers, or his opponents. Another challenge for this volume is defining what Gnosticism really is. Questions concern whether this should be placed underneath heresy or heterodoxy within early Christianity or whether it should be limited to Mysticism, Esotericism, Docetism, or Encratism. Should Gnosticism be considered in terms of “Sethian Gnosticism” or “Classical Gnosticism”? Within this introduction, Porter and Yoon also refer to the history surrounding Gnosticism. This includes a brief discussion of views by Walter Schmithals, Rudolph Bultmann, and Elaine Pagels.

This volume, however, is not only concerned with Gnosticism but also with Paul’s appeal to knowledge. This includes Paul’s use of the term γνῶσις and also knowledge of himself and his experiences that led to his identity. It also includes Paul’s knowledge of particular topics and ideas including main theological terms.

Porter and Yoon acknowledge that this book covers a broader range of articles and ideas than previous volumes within Pauline Studies Series. They divide the articles into two sections: Paul and Knowledge and Paul and Gnosticism. This is a reasonable way to break down the different articles within the book, but if a reader was looking for a volume devoted to Gnosticism, he would be disappointed.

The five articles in section 1 (Paul and Knowledge) each provide fresh contributions in areas where there is lack of clarity currently within Pauline studies. The first article in this section is written by Stanley Porter, “What Do We Mean by Speaking of Paul and Gnosis/Knowledge?: A Semantic and Frequency Investigation.” Porter rightly challenges the identification of gnosis and knowledge by associating these exclusively with the word γνῶσις. Porter correctly states that the overall concept rather than the word alone must be considered. He investigates the sixteen entries in the subdomain “know” of the Louw-Nida lexicon and then records the occurrence of these words within Paul’s letters. He concludes that limiting study of γνο- root words does not take into account everything within this rich Pauline concept. This article will be an important one for those who continue to examine knowledge-related words within Paul’s writing.

In the second essay, David Yoon addresses Paul’s thorn in the flesh of 2 Corinthians 12. Instead of concluding that the thorn in the flesh is a medical problem, he concludes that it is a satanic messenger that was tormenting Paul with memories of his past. This is in partial agreement with Adolf Schlatter’s viewpoint from the early 1900s that Paul had some memories of past sins. Yoon’s article challenges the exegetical conclusions that link 2 Corinthians 12 with texts from Galatians. While he favors the satanic messenger as the thorn, he rightly concludes that one cannot fully know the understanding of the thorn.

In the third article, Andrew Pitts addresses Paul’s knowledge of the resurrection body from 1 Corinthians 15. In this article, he addresses Richard Carrier’s two-body theory, which proposed a resurrection body that is immaterial and the current body that is what people inhabit in this world. Pitts finds Carrier’s conclusions overly dependent upon reference to Rabbinic sources and basing his conclusions on a word-study fallacy rather than the grammar of 1 Corinthians 15. Pitts proposes instead that the resurrection body relates to the body that originates with God’s spirit.

Next, Adam Wright discusses potential allusions in Paul from the Old Testament and from Hellenistic literature in his article entitled, “Detecting Allusions in the Pauline Corpus: A Method.” He aims to identify allusions within Paul but then propose how allusions were identified within the ancient world. He identifies two means of identifying allusions: *mimesis* and *aemulatio*. He uses Romans 7:13–25 as an example, comparing with Plato’s *Phaedo*. Wright refers to many works within the field of Paul

and Scripture studies and interacts well with Hays and Hollander in particular. His article is particularly helpful for considering Greco-Roman ideas that made their way into Pauline writing. While the article points out a number of aspects for allusions, it is less clear how this article fits within the current volume.

In the final essay in this section, Chris Stevens compares Paul with Old Testament figures in “Paul, the Expected Eschatological Phinehas-Elijah Prophet Law-Giver.” Stevens rightly asserts that Paul viewed himself as an apostle and also as a prophet. While Paul is not called a prophet, he carries many of the characteristics of prophets from Scripture. He also connects Phinehas and Elijah together and sees Paul functioning similarly as one who was a prophet as well as a law giver, proclaiming Christ to people who were quite distant. This is a helpful article refining ideas of Paul prophetic self-concept and would be a helpful basis for further studies on Paul’s identity.

The second part of this volume concerns Paul and Gnosticism. It begins with an article by James D. G. Dunn with an article entitled, “‘The Apostle of the Heretics’: Paul, Valentinus, and Marcion.” The article reviews how particular Gnostics as well as heretics like Marcion used and received Pauline thought. Dunn provides reasons for what made Paul attractive to the gnostics and heretics, such as his reception of God’s message by revelation. Dunn then contrasts the Gnostic understanding of Paul’s words with a better understanding of words such as mystery, spiritual, natural, and flesh. Dunn believes that Marcion misread Paul’s message in terms of law and grace solely. According to Dunn, the complexity and subtlety of Paul’s thinking was too often resolved in an unbalanced way, and Marcion’s simplification of Paul’s thought led to his heretical viewpoint.. Dunn’s article provides a much needed perspective on the reception of Paul within second century circles.

In the following article, Hughson Ong addresses the question of heresy in the Pastoral Epistles in his article entitled, “Is There a Heresy in the Pastorals? A Sociolinguistic Analysis of 1 and 2 Timothy via the Ethnography of Communication Theory.” This heresy could have emerged from Gnosticism or proto-Gnosticism. It could also have emerged from a model/paradigm theory in which the Pastorals, which viewed the Pastoral Epistles to be written without a specific historical context. The lack of context would then provide a model for addressing heresies that might emerge in the future. From his sociolinguistic analysis, Ong rejects all three approaches to heresy. He distinguishes between the opponents of 1 and 2 Timothy through the use of Dell Hymes’s theory of ethnography of communication. He concludes that scholars need to reconsider the different situational contexts that underlie the Pastorals and their assumptions and methods of analysis. Ong’s article provides a strong challenge to those wishing to find the Ephesian heresy running throughout 1 and 2 Timothy.

Michael Kaler in “Paul at Nag Hammadi” provides a helpful overview of Pauline usage within the most extensive primary literature of primary gnostic literature, the collection at Nag Hammadi. Within his survey, he finds that most of the documents at Nag Hammadi do not contain any references to Paul. This includes. Some documents may contain Pauline thought or context, Paul’s figure or image, or Pauline themes, ideas, and/or passages. Kaler finds that the “heretics” seemed to read and use Paul like other Christians did. There is a particular use of “rule and authorities” language from Ephesians 6:12 within the Nag Hammadi collection, and it is used roughly in the same way within the Nag Hammadi references. Also, the most thoughtful Pauline material is found within the Valentinian writings. Kaler’s conclusion opens up a variety of possibilities for the future. Future studies should further consider “principalities and powers” language and the use of Paul in allegedly Christian or secondarily Christianized texts.

The following article by Tilde Bak Halvgaard is entitled “The Concept of *Fullness* in Paul and the Pauline Tradition: A Cosmological Approach to Paul and Gnosis.” Halvgaard pays particular attention to the word πλήρωμα, an important term used by Gnostic authors. She finds that Nag Hammadi authors speak about “fullness” in a way that corresponds to and develops the way that the term is employed in Paul’s letters and Pauline tradition (particularly Colossians and Ephesians). Besides her conclusions about πλήρωμα, Halvgaard’s article also offers a model for investigating other words through the Nag Hammadi collection.

The final essay by Panayotis Coutsoumpos addresses the strong and the weak in Corinth (“The Strong/Gnosis, Paul, and the Corinthian Community”). Coutsoumpos discusses various options for identifying the strong at Corinth from the perspective of Paul’s opponents who some view to be gnostics. Rather than concluding that the use of *gnōsis* should assume gnostic influence, Coutsoumpos finds that the strong from 1 Corinthians 8:1 were most likely not gnostic. Instead, they were more likely a group that had more knowledge or wisdom than the weak. He rightfully finds that the strong in Corinth should act in a loving manner to the weak.

Paul and Gnosis provides many essays of high quality just like the previous books within this series. This volume has fewer articles than previous books, and the articles are more diverse. A few more entries on Paul and his reception within Gnostic documents, such as those of Dunn, Kaler, and Halvgaard provide, would add greatly to the book. Some who may be expecting a volume devoted to Pauline interaction with second century material may be disappointed.

H. H. Drake Williams, III

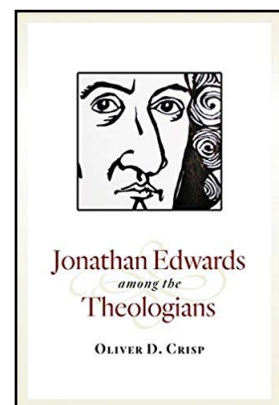
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— HISTORY AND HISTORICAL THEOLOGY —

Oliver D. Crisp. *Jonathan Edwards among the Theologians*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015. xx + 198 pp. £16.99/\$25.00.

When considering Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758), people tend to treat him monolithically as a pastor or scholar (ignoring one) or as a binary of the two (flipping back and forth as necessary). Each approach mistreats the reformed revisionist assembled by Oliver Crisp in *Jonathan Edwards among the Theologians*. Crisp, professor of systematic theology at Fuller Theological Seminary, presents an ensemble of essays found in other works, all revised with three fresh additions, that summarize what differentiates Edwards and makes him such a fascinating subject to study.

Crisp contends that Edwards was both “an heir to the Reformed tradition” and “a thinker ... rethinking the Christian faith” (p. xix), who reconfigured Reformed theology “in a new key” (p. xviii). As such, Edwards’s program is an exemplar of constructive theology, which “must always hold on to what has gone before ... whilst also dealing with the new and pressing challenges” (p. xix). In the ensuing chapters, Crisp validates his depiction of Edwards by comparing the eighteenth century preacher to others and by



measuring him against the plumb line of the Reformed tradition. In fact, Crisp's study is nearly as much a critique of reductionist notions of Reformed theology (cf. p. 80) as it is a reconfiguration of Jonathan Edwards, one of Reformed theology's lionized representatives.

Crisp positions Edwards in chapter one as a non-confessional revisionist whose "intellectual project" attempts "to re-envision Reformed theology using aspects of early Enlightenment philosophy" (p. 4). This led to the "New Divinity" legacy, which transmitted Edwards's method rather than his dogma. Though Edwards made doctrinal developments, his heirs frequently modified or rejected those developments in favor of their own.

From chapters two through nine, Crisp outlines Edwards's doctrinal developments, many of which, if Crisp's interpretations are accurate, lead readers to conclude that Edwards was much less orthodox than hailed by tradition. For instance, chapter two compares Anselm's doctrine of God to that of Edwards. Here, Anselm held to divine simplicity and aseity as essential. Important to Anselm in this was a triple layer of ontology called the "divine ideas" (p. 23); these ideas delineated distinctions between Creator and creation, maintaining strict aseity. Crisp observes that Edwards and Anselm held to similar doctrine in that they both believed in an infinite "being of maximal perfection ... beyond our comprehension" (p. 27). Whereas Anselm maintained a strict distinction between Creator and creature, Edwards perceived that creation is a communication or emanation generative of God. Crisp contends that Edwards's idea of emanation made affirming aseity tenuous. He calls Edwards' theological construction of God's deity "unguarded" (pp. 32, 35).

In chapter three Crisp explores Edwards's doctrine of the Trinity. Crisp interacts with other interpreters, but the bulk of his ideas depend upon Kyle Strobel, whom he commends for moving "the discussion forward in important respects," though "his conclusions are not always on target" (p. 38). This chapter critiques Edwards, surfacing three problems: (1) the dilemma of holding to both simplicity and Trinity, (2) explaining how the divine essence relates to the divine persons, and (3) how each person of the Trinity is *constituted* by the other two. Crisp concludes "that these problems present serious objection to the Edwardsean view" (p. 59).

Continuing in chapter four, Crisp juxtaposes Arminius to Edwards on the doctrine of creation. Here, Jonathan Edwards—"the supposed paragon of Reformed, evangelical theology" (p. 78)—is "more exotic" on this doctrine than Arminius, commonly considered Reformed theology's "antithesis" (p. 79). Crisp admits in this chapter that Edwards affirmed both divine simplicity and aseity (Crisp left Edwards's adherence to these doctrines with more ambiguity in chapter two), but he goes so far as to assert, "Edwards also embraces a doctrine of pantheism" (p. 75).

This pattern of presenting Edwards's theological constructions as departures from conventional Reformed theology continues in chapters five through nine. In chapter five Girardeau's libertarian Calvinism is more in step with Reformed Calvinism than Edwards's "determinism of the compatibilist variety" (p. 93). Chapter six uses Edwards's organic analogy for the transmission of sin, mediate imputation, continuous creation, and four-dimensional ontology to astonish readers with Edwards's "metaphysical elegance" (p. 120), which reconciles the problems of injustice and morality entailed in the doctrine of original sin. Chapter seven explains the narrative of how and why Edwards—who held to penal substitution—endorsed Joseph Bellamy's governmental view of atonement. Chapter eight examines Edwards's affective homiletics by studying his sermon, "The Excellency of Christ." And chapter nine concludes the project by assessing Edwards's orthodoxy.

If anything, Crisp gives readers the complex Edwards, who is worthy of imitation, but only if readers are open to "find themselves driven to more theological revision than they had anticipated" (p. xx). My

main misgiving is that Crisp misconstrues Edwards at times or puts him on the horns of a dilemma that many face today. Quite honestly, Edwards would be appalled to be considered a panentheist. I gather that Edwards simply put texts like Colossians 1:16–17 in terms of both a spiritual and ontological sense. Moreover, the problems that Edwards face, as outlined in chapter three, are those that theologians grapple with today. We are hard-pressed to find theologians who accounted for divine simplicity collapsing God’s attributes prior to Alvin Plantinga, William Lane Craig, and John Feinberg.

I am sympathetic to Crisp’s reading of Edwards. Crisp does what any good analytic and philosophic theologian does—puts his subject against the litmus test of logic. It is imperative not to sweep the peculiarity of Edwards’s exegetical and theological constructions beneath a rug because he is one of America’s greatest theologians; I compliment Crisp for not doing so. I appreciate that Crisp commends Edwards for breaking free from Aristotelianism, Thomism, and confessionalism as an experimentalist who wrestled with questions posed by natural philosophers in a British Enlightenment context.

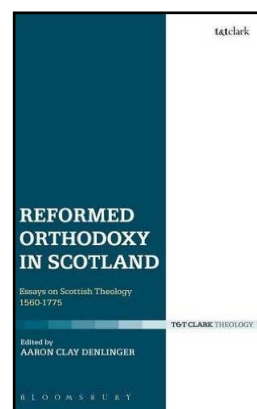
Also, I was taken by Crisp’s observation in the preface: “It may mean his interpreters must engage in theological repair as well as retrieval when assessing his work” (p. xviii). Crisp did not balk at this task. Still, it seems that Crisp’s portrayal does not do enough to present the Reformed Edwards as it does to present and repair the problematic Edwards. It is overreaching to say that he attempts to present the Reformed Edwards. Perhaps this was never Crisp’s aim. Maybe his interest is to present to Evangelical readers an exotic Edwards, who does not fit so neatly into the Reformed confessional box. Regardless, it is clear that Crisp does not intend to harm Edwards’s legacy. Rather, Crisp indicates that Edwards has “the mark of a great thinker: not that he always had it right, but that he saw the important issues clearly” (p. xviii).

Oliver Crisp offers an innovator worthy of imitation and does so carefully according to clear terms. Lay leaders, pastors, and others looking to get the best of Crisp on Edwards, on the cheap, may not find the Edwards they anticipate, but they will follow Crisp to the Edwards he has reimagined for us.

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Aaron Clay Denlinger, ed. *Reformed Orthodoxy in Scotland: Essays on Scottish Theology, 1560–1775*. London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2016. x + 290 pp. £28.99/\$39.95.

Recent scholarship has insisted that doctrinal continuity between the reformers and their heirs cannot be judged by locating a dogmatic “center” (e.g., predestination), and then documenting multiple, verbatim iterations across generations, nationalities, and institutional contexts. Scholars have instead stressed sensitivity to the unique ecclesiastical, political, and educative contexts that helped to shape the development of Protestant doctrine. These developments have also challenged the older model of reading the history of British and Irish Protestantism in relative isolation from the continent. In *Reformed Orthodoxy in Scotland*, editor Aaron Clay Denlinger has drawn together a formidable scholarly cast to reassess the significance of Scotland within the international landscape of early modern Reformed orthodoxy. In offering a more supple and



pliable picture of Scottish Reformed orthodoxy, he has provided a valuable addition to literature on the post-Reformation period more generally.

An introductory essay by Carl Trueman suggests three gaps that the collection aims to address. First, despite acknowledgement of the international character of Reformed orthodoxy, Scottish orthodoxy has failed to attract much interest in studies of British cross-pollination with the continent. This neglect becomes particularly striking given the centrality of Scotland for the formation of Reformed political theories, which constituted a distinctively Scottish contribution to the wider European conversation; therein lies the second gap. Thirdly, the book redresses a (Barthian) historiographical bias, stemming from T. F. and J. B. Torrance, that sees post-Reformation orthodoxy as a degeneration from the purity of the theology of the reformers.

Denlinger's volume comes in three heuristic parts. "Early Reformed Orthodoxy (c. 1560–c. 1640)" canvasses the period in which second generation reformers sought to reconstruct both church and university in the face of a resurgent Rome, in general, and of the considerable missionary and educative reforms of the Jesuits, in particular. Donald John MacLean challenges what he calls the "Knox versus the Knoxians' subplot," highlighting the international character of seventeenth century Reformed thought to account for the lack of direct appeals to Knox's influence. Ernest R. Holloway III looks at the Andrew Melville's responsibility for the introduction of the new learning at Scotland's medieval universities, particularly through the elevation of biblical Hebrew. Brannon Ellis conducts a double-barrel investigation of Robert Rollock's doctrine of election, scrutinizing federal theology's modern critics, on the one hand, and placing Rollock's distinctive view of the decree in relation to other Reformed thinkers, on the other. Nicholas Thompson considers the Aberdonian response to the revival of Roman Catholic interests in the first half of the seventeenth century. The editor in chapter 5 offers an intriguing reappraisal of the General Assembly's 1640 indictment of Robert Baron's theology. Denlinger's industrious research into an Aberdeen manuscript base indicates the essential orthodoxy of Baron's infralapsarian hypothetical universalism. Finally, Donald MacLeod lays out the political principles of Alexander Henderson, particularly concerning acceptable grounds of resistance to earthly rulers in matters of conscience.

The second section, "High Reformed Orthodoxy (c. 1640–c. 1690)," covers the period marked by "an increasingly fine-tool and diverse polemic" (p. 4), debates often stimulated by critical questions within the Reformed camp itself (e.g., Amyraldianism). Simon Burton delineates Samuel Rutherford's indebtedness to the ethics of Duns Scotus and Thomas Bradwardine. Aza Goudriaan analyzes Rutherford's views on possibility and impossibility, gauging his reliance on Bradwardine and tracing the subsequent reception of his own view. Guy Richard paints an evocative picture of the twofold threat of Roman Catholicism—embodied, for the Scottish orthodox, by episcopacy and Arminianism—as the background against which expositions of the Song of Songs by Rutherford and James Durham fanned Protestant devotion by appeal to the affections. Albert Gootjes demonstrates the lasting theological legacy of John Cameron, whose authority was claimed by both sides in the later Pajonist controversies. Finally, Joel Beeke argues for continuity between John Calvin and John Brown of Wamphray's doctrines of justification.

The final section, "Late Reformed Orthodoxy (c. 1690 Onwards)," examines orthodox theologians who attempted to navigate the challenges posed by Enlightenment metaphysics and epistemology, frequently through stylistic and methodological, if not substantive, accommodations. Paul Helm examines Thomas Halyburton's engagement with John Locke on the issue of the authority of Scripture.

Richard Muller argues for the essential orthodoxy of the views propounded by Thomas Blackwell, despite his rationalizing mode of reasoning, and juxtaposes him against the more scholastic style and method of the Marrow-men. Finally, Gerritt A. van den Brink argues convincingly that, through the mediation of Alexander Comrie, the soteriology of John Cotton made a lasting mark on modern theology drawn from the wells of Abraham Kuyper and Herman Bavinck—both of whom claimed Comrie as an authority (Kuyper citing him as standing in the line of Augustine, Calvin, and Voetius!).

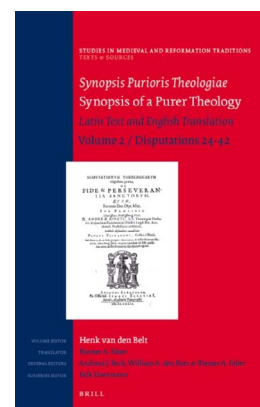
The dizzying range of historical and contemporary reflections invites further thinking. Several issues are brought to light—theological (new holes in Barthian criticisms of federal theology), historical (fresh insight on the seventeenth century conflation of Arminians with Roman Catholics, a practice that endured in Scotland far longer than in England), and confessional (engagement with the alleged secularizing impulse of Protestantism, recently proposed by Brad Gregory). These issues are of sufficient depth and interest to have warranted a concluding chapter, which might have synthesized the findings and offered a crisper clarion call for further research. Regardless, the book will be a stand-by resource for future study of Reformed orthodoxy, not least in Britain. I warmly commend it to those interested in better understanding the dimensions of Reformed thought for which the Scottish orthodox remain quietly responsible.

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Dolf de Velde, ed. *Synopsis Purioris Theologiae/Synopsis of a Purer Theology: Latin Text and English Translation, Volume 1/Disputations 1–23*. Studies in Medieval and Reformation Traditions 187. Texts and Sources 5. Leiden: Brill, 2014. xv + 659 pp. £95.00/\$154.00.

This Latin-English edition of the *Synopsis of a Purer Theology* makes available for the first time in English one of the seminal works of seventeenth century Reformed Scholastic theology. As the editor notes, this work was the standard handbook for students of Reformed theology in the seventeenth century Netherlands. It was published five times throughout the course of the seventeenth century (1625, 1632, 1642, 1652, and 1658), and once in the nineteenth century (pp. 1, 17). Readers will be intrigued to know that the final nineteenth century edition was actually edited by Herman Bavinck in 1881. Bavinck's own work, *Reformed Dogmatics*, was recently translated into English over four volumes, and has become one of the standard systematic theological textbooks in Reformed seminaries. Bavinck's editor, John Bolt, points out that Bavinck frequently cited the *Synopsis* and firmly planted himself in the historic Dutch Reformed tradition (Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics, Volume 1: Prolegomena*, ed. John T. Bolt, trans. John Vriend [Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003], p. 11). Therefore, readers of Bavinck's systematic theology would do well to follow his example and drink deeply from Bavinck's own theological fount as they engage with his *Reformed Dogmatics*.

This first of three projected volumes contains the first twenty-three of the *Synopsis*'s fifty-two disputations—with the remaining volumes slated for publication in the next few years (pp. xii, 5). These disputations are preceded by an excellent introduction by the work's editor, Dolf de Velde, who provides



not only an overview of the contexts of the work, but a window into the work's historical and theological context. This section will be an invaluable resource to any who are unfamiliar with post-Reformation scholastic disputation. For example, there we learn that the *Synopsis* was actually the result of a full cycle of faculty disputations that took place between 1620 and 1624 at Leiden University, and, consequently, sometimes called the Leiden Synopsis (p. 1). The four contributing professors—Johannes Polyander (1568–1646), Antonius Walaeus (1572–1639), Antonius Thysius (1565–1640), and Andreas Rivetus (1573–1651)—each took turns constructing doctrinal treatises that were used to instruct students in their “thinking power and skill in debate and discussion, and to help them digest what they learned” (p. 4). Even though each author composed his disputation independently, the work has a significant measure of theological unity, as was a deliberate intention of the authors (p. 27).

Turning to the disputations themselves, rather than giving a point-by-point summary of these theses—something the introduction does quite well—readers will be better served by looking to some high points of the treatise. Perhaps the most striking feature of these disputations is that they are saturated with Bible references. The authors were committed to the primacy of Scripture and this volume begins and ends with a treatment of the importance of the Word of God (disputations 1, 18–23). Another prominent feature of the work is the authors' dependence on the writings of earlier Reformed theologians. For example, Polyander's treatment of archetypal and ectypal theology (p. 33) bears a striking resemblance to Franciscus Junius's formulations in theses 6–9 of his 1594 work *A Treatise on True Theology*, which was translated into English just this past year. Similarly, as the footnotes demonstrate, Thysius's superb treatment of the divine incommunicable attributes—the simplicity, immutability, infinity, eternity, and immensity of God—in disputation 6 accords with the Italian Reformer Girolamo Zanchi's earlier work (pp. 165–69, especially p. 165). Likewise, Thysius's exposition of the self-authenticating quality of Scripture in disputation 3 is analogous to John Calvin's classic treatment of the subject (*Institutes* 1.7.5). These features serve to confirm Richard Muller's influential thesis that there was a congruency of thought between Calvin and later Calvinists. The authors also acknowledge their dependence on a number of early church theologians, especially Augustine. For example, Augustine's influence is apparent in Rivetus's disputation “On Original Sin” (p. 373), and Thysius's treatment of the four states of humanity. And the latter's exposition is analogous to our contemporary notions of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration (pp. 15–16, 416–31).

Riemer A. Faber's translation of the Latin original is lucid and promotes the four authors' collective goal of preserving a unified voice. Faber's translation not only makes the work accessible to English readers, but the appended glossary of particularly important Latin terms allows non-Latinists to understand the scholastic theological terminology of the original text (p. 19). The footnotes display the editor's impressive breadth of scholarship, and allow the reader's to link the primary text with the historical and theological context. A careful reading of the footnotes reveals the extent to which the authors of the *Synopsis* are responding to contemporary Roman Catholic, Anabaptist, Libertine, Socinian, and Spiritualist challenges to Reformed Orthodoxy in the seventeenth century (p. 2). For example, the authors defend biblical truth from Socinianism's attacks on orthodox understandings of the Trinity and the sufficiency of Scripture, and Catholic views regarding the authority of extra-biblical church traditions posited by the influential Jesuit theologian Robert Bellarmine (1542–1621) (pp. 201, 209). Finally, since the disputations were crafted in the wake of the quarrels in the Netherlands that culminated in the Synod of Dort in 1618–1619, an indirect aim of this work was to defend Reformed Orthodoxy from the encroachments of Arminianism. Of course, this is a crucial reminder that theological study must not be divorced from its historical context.

This volume will likely take its place on the shelf of those who are eager to study Reformed Scholastic theology in its original historical context. Most importantly, it allows contemporary readers to access the treasure trove of Reformed thought in the seventeenth century (much of which is still only available in Latin), without having to do all the “heavy lifting” of translation. Further, having a well-edited critical edition of this important primary text will permit readers to more easily trace the networks of Reformed thought across generational and geographical lines. Of course, one setback of the work is that it is extremely expensive. Although readers at some academic institutions will have electronic access to the book via BrillOnline, perhaps the publisher will eventually make this excellent resource available to a wider readership. We should expect that the two subsequent volumes will display the same high level of scholarship exhibited throughout this first edition, and that this volume (and eventually set) will be an invaluable resource to all who are interested in seventeenth-century Reformed Scholastic theology and history.

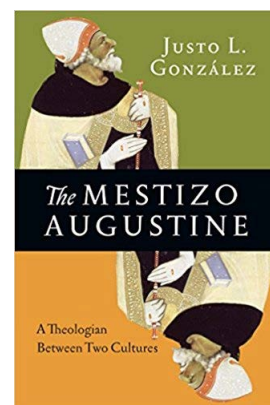
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Justo L. González. *The Mestizo Augustine: A Theologian Between Two Cultures*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016. 176 pp. £19.53/\$24.00.

When reading the history of the church, cultural context matters. As doctrine developed throughout the centuries, for better or worse, such development arose from contextual questions and cultural issues. Understanding such influences often yields clues towards better historical awareness. The personal experience of individuals also helps us decipher why they asked certain questions. Both context and personality are thus important for appreciating the church’s theology. Enter Augustine of Hippo.

Justo González is an eminent church historian and author of the two-volume *The Story of Christianity*, 2nd ed. (New York: HarperOne, 2010) and the three-volume *History of Christian Thought* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2014). In *The Mestizo Augustine: A Theologian Between Two Cultures*, Gonzalez proposes a lens for reading Augustine—*mestizaje*. This term, arising out of the Latin social experience, is Spanish for “mixed breed.” Like most pejorative terms, *mestizaje* eventually came to be embraced as a positive social marker. More recently the term conveys the “experience of someone in the overlap among several cultures and political and social entities” (p. 15). Gonzalez clarifies, “This means that when I study Augustine and his theology I do so in terms of who I am, how I understand myself, and the main concerns and interests not only of myself of an individual but also of the community which I belong” (p. 14).

Though we should seek to understand Augustine on his own terms, we can’t help but approach him (or any historical figure or event for that matter) from “the lenses of a Christian and of a Christian community in the 21st century” (p. 14). Gonzalez adds that *Mestizajes* “live amid several realities, many for them clashing among themselves” (p. 17). Gonzalez calls readers to approach Augustine and “the entire history of the church from the perspective of *mestizaje* and of the manner in which it points to the future” (p. 18).



Various cultural factors interacted in Roman North Africa and informed Augustine's theological and ministerial context. These cultural identities were "sometimes intermingling and sometimes in conflict" (p. 24). Punic, or Berber, culture mixed with Roman culture, though the relationship wasn't always amicable. Augustine's family existed between these two competing poles. One pole was his father Patricius and his Roman heritage. The other pole was his mother Monica, representing the dual heritage of Berber traditions and Christian faith.

Augustine's search for wisdom following his reading of Cicero's *Hortensius* set his trajectory as a philosophical *mestizaje*. Educated as a rhetorician, finding himself among the Manicheans, and steeped in Neoplatonic thought, the pre-conversion Augustine approached the Christian faith with a philosophical potpourri. In his encounters with the famed Ambrose of Milan (c. 340–397), Augustine signals his inclination towards Roman ideals of oratory. Augustine's early interest in the Christian preaching of Ambrose was simply to assess "his eloquence to see whether it matched its reputation" (*Confessions* 5.13.23). Bending his ear to Ambrose's preaching, Augustine began to resolve some of his doubts about the God spoken of within Scripture. Gonzalez writes, "Upon listening to Ambrose Augustine was able to join the Roman culture of his father to his mother's faith" (p. 44).

The conversion and public baptism of Marius Victorinus (a respected philosopher and rhetor) further exposed Augustine's conflicted heart. Augustine stood at another crossroads of whether to accept the "faith suited for such Berbers as his mother" or remain committed to "the beauties and wisdom of Greco-Roman knowledge and literature" (p. 47). It would be the culmination of these events which would lead Augustine, prompted by the ominous children's chanting of "take up and read" the words of Paul, to sense "the light of certainty" flooding into his heart in which "all dark shades of doubt fled away" (*Confessions* 8.12.26).

Gonzalez does well to focus on the pastoral life of Augustine. With a shepherd's crook in one hand and a pen in another, Augustine's pursuit of God would necessarily be a pastoral one. His pastoral task explains his various writings amid the Donatist and Pelagian controversies, as well as numerous sermons. Gonzalez notes that in his sermons "we see Augustine as a shepherd seeking to feed his flock and to instruct and correct it when necessary" (p. 72). Further invoking the mestizo motif, Augustine's time as a Manichaean "hearer" greatly aided his efforts to combat Manichaean errors.

In both the Donatist and Pelagian controversies, there are many mestizo characteristics on display. Gonzalez places a heavy emphasis on the clash between Roman identity and Berber identity noting, "The Donatist schism ... was not so much a matter of theology as of cultural, social, and economic conflicts" (p. 123). In the Pelagian controversy, the influence of Roman legal training upon Pelagius seems to have propelled his formulation of human responsibility. The disposition of Pelagius and Augustine, informed by their own personal history, couldn't be more dissimilar. One's willpower was on full, the other's on empty. For one grace was useful, and for the other grace was absolutely necessary.

In his *City of God*, Augustine fully embraces "the possibility of living Monica's faith within Patrick's culture" (p. 166). Believers in Christ are a community and society unto themselves, citizens of heaven, yet not as citizens unconcerned with the health and welfare of the earthly city. *City of God* served as a bridge-way text, informing the medieval age on antiquity as well as providing a foundation for how the church viewed itself and its place in the world. The mestizo Augustine, as Gonzalez argues, "served "as a bridge between the Greco-Roman past that was waning and the new regime that was dawning," namely, the entirety of Western Christendom (p. 166).

In *The Mestizo Augustine*, Gonzalez demonstrates the importance of understanding social history for the Christian theologian and historian. Augustine provides an archetypal example. Intermediate readers of Augustine will be familiar with most of the book's content. That said, I truly appreciated Gonzalez's focus on Augustine as pastor as the context for much of his theology. Additionally, he reminds us that our theology is never divorced from our cultural milieu and personal histories. There's no greater reminder of this than Augustine standing at the precipice of late antiquity looking over the edge to the next era of human history. Scholars should be cautious when seeking to dissect Augustine with the scalpel of social history. History is messy. Gonzalez flirts with this line at times, but still affirms Augustine's Christian identity as the primary guiding force.

This book is also for those who live in "mestizo" times. We live in a globalized society of mixed heritages, oftentimes competing. In 2008, America elected a president who himself represents a *mestizaje* of African and White heritage. In the 2016 presidential election, America witnessed a clash of cultures, resulting in a political upset. Changing times are ahead in our land, whether for better or worse. With news headlines of Brexit, an overwhelming Syrian refugee crisis, and global terrorism, questions of cultural/social/religious identity remain as relevant as ever. We've yet to see the full extent to how these cultural issues will inform our theology and gospel witness.

Gonzalez delivers a usable history for the next generation of Augustine readers, giving us permission to ask how our own *mestizaje* informs who we are and what we value.

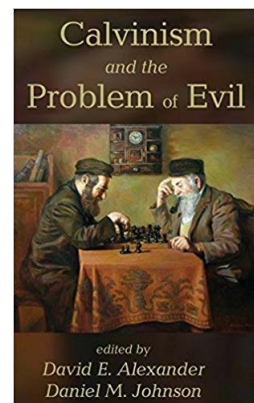
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— SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY AND BIOETHICS —

David E. Alexander and Daniel M. Johnson, eds. *Calvinism and the Problem of Evil*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2016. 308 pp. £28.00/\$37.00.

In the book, *Calvinism and the Problem of Evil*, David E. Alexander and Daniel M. Johnson, eds., have collected a group of first-rate scholars to evaluate claims for and against the historic Calvinist position on the problem of evil. This volume evaluates the following theses: (1) libertarian freedom, or Molinism, provides the best paradigm for Christian philosophers to address the problem of evil (p. 1); (2) Calvinism makes God the author of sin, therefore it is philosophically and morally unacceptable to address the problem of evil (p. 16); and (3) alternative theories to Calvinism must be fairly weighed in terms of their philosophical perplexities and advantages (p. 228). Throughout the book, some of the contributors are sympathetic to the historic Calvinist position, so they defend that model. On the other hand, others (who do not personally affirm the Calvinist position) point out what they consider to be weaknesses of the view, and offer their recommendations to strengthen the arguments in favor of the Calvinist interpretation.

Concerning the first thesis previously mentioned, Alexander and Johnson introduce the book by discussing libertarian and compatibilist accounts of human freedom and preparatory issues related to



determinism, free will defenses, and evidence for Calvinism (pp. 2–5). They claim, “Many Christian philosophers feel that they need a libertarian view of free will in order to handle the problem of evil, and philosophers have perhaps felt that need more keenly than theologians because they are more often engaged with non-Christian and anti-theistic philosophers and their arguments” (p. 2). The authors respond to this present-day trend against Calvinism, noting, “It isn’t as if Calvinist responses to the problem of evil have been thoroughly worked out and decisively refuted, though; for the most part, they haven’t been tried, at least in the contemporary literature” (p. 2). Therefore, this book seeks to justify the historic Calvinist position in the contemporary debate related to God being the author of sin, the first sin by Adam, and the specific axiological problem of evil.

To address the book’s second thesis, it is better to provide some of the traditional solutions offered by Calvinists to refute the claim that God is the author of sin. Alexander and Johnson suggest that historic Calvinists tend to (1) deny altogether that Calvinism entails that God causes or intends sin; (2) claim that it would not be contrary to God’s goodness if he did cause sin; and (3) utilize a *tu quoque* (e.g., you also) strategy, which argues that alternative non-Calvinist theories entail the same objectionable properties as Calvinism (p. 6). The scholars in this book incorporate these classic solutions and develop new arguments to defend Calvinist solutions to the problem of evil. The greatest strength of the book is its clarifications and development of arguments by interacting with present-day theories and literature. The following points serve as examples of both.

First, Greg Welty appeals to the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, both in its positive and negative claims, to demonstrate that historic Calvinism suggests (1) God ordains whatsoever comes to pass; and (2) the negative claims or “protecting clauses” entail: “(i) ‘neither is God the author of sin,’ (ii) ‘nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures,’ (iii) ‘nor is the liberty or contingency of second cause taken away . . .’” (p. 58). This first type of argument demonstrates that some libertarians misrepresent the historic *confessional* stance of Calvinism. In brief, sometimes non-Calvinists are not actually critiquing *Calvinism*, but their understanding and false interpretations of Calvinism.

Second, several authors attempt to clarify their terminology by noting the various definitions of “determinism.” They note how in the contemporary literature there is a distinction between natural or this-world determinism and divine determinism (p. 22). There is also a distinction between different types of causation (e.g., *a*-causation or divine causation and *b*-causation or intramundane causation) and models of providence (e.g., the Domino Model of Providence versus the Authorial Model of Providence) to explain why divine causal freedom does not entail that God is the author of sin (pp. 204–10). Each of these distinctions are made to recognize there are several *kinds* of determinism and models of providence Calvinists should and should *not* be committed (p. 204). James Anderson notes, “Calvinists need not be committed to *material* or *physical* determinism [causal determinism included]: the thesis that every event, including human decisions and actions, is determined entirely by prior physical events in conjunction with physical laws” (pp. 204–5). The Calvinist position should therefore not be confused with the claims *associated* with their position by non-Calvinists.

Third, since there is a Creator-creature distinction, divine causation is wholly different than creaturely causation. “Divine causation is *sui generis* and is thus related only *analogically* to creaturely causation.” Therefore, Anderson goes on to note, “For this reason, the use of phrases such as ‘first cause’ and ‘sufficient cause’ shouldn’t mislead us into thinking that Calvinism is committed to what we might call the *Domino Model of Providence*” (p. 207). Anderson also suggests that Aristotle’s notion of akratic action can further explain the relationship between the Divine first cause and Adam’s sin in the garden

(pp. 217–220). The value of this type of approach is that it attempts to synthesize the best of Calvinist philosophical theology, found in the works of individuals such as Jonathan Edwards, with the great theological and exegetical treatises comprised in the works of Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Owen, and the Westminster divines.

Fourth, Calvinists *can* and *have* appealed appropriately to divine mystery, skeptical theism, and divine glory defenses. However, several treatments in this book uniquely recognize and advance the Moore Switch as a distinct Reformed way to address the problem of evil (p. 15). The Moore Switch argues that the evidence for the existence of God is strong enough that the right way to react to our inability to understand God's reasons for allowing evil is not disbelief, but to conclude that God must have a good reason and has chosen *not* to reveal it to us. For example, some of the authors suggest that Reformed epistemology's claim to immediate knowledge of God grants enough strong evidence in favor of the existence of God that any skeptical conclusions to the contrary function as a *reductio ad absurdum* refutation of at least one of the premises for the problem of evil argument (pp. 15, 17, 50–52, 273–78). This distinctly Reformed epistemological approach, coupled with the traditional arguments for the existence of God, serves to demonstrate that the preponderance of evidence favors the existence of God, even though we do not understand the reasons God allows evil to persist.

The third thesis of this book suggests alternative theories must also be evaluated on their own terms according to their advantages and disadvantages. Greg Welty uses to his advantage a *tu quoque* argument against Molinism, arguing that its model of divine causation is “*sufficiently analogous* to [Calvinist] sufficient causation, such that Molinism inherits all the alleged Calvinist liabilities anyway, with respect to divine authorship of sin, responsibility, and blame” (p. 57). Consequently, the Molinist paradigm offers no moral advantage over the Calvinist position. Even though Molinism rejects divine *causal* determinism, it “nonetheless holds to a weaker form of divine determinism” (p. 224). Anderson agrees with Welty, suggesting, “On both the Calvinist and Molinist accounts, then, God *decreed* that Adam would sin and that decree *infallibly determined* that Adam would sin” (ibid). To sum up, these *tu quoque* types of arguments, alongside the other arguments and proper distinctions, seem to alleviate many of the libertarian, or Molinist criticisms against the Calvinist position.

Nevertheless, Alexander and Johnson's work is not without its own problems, even if they are merely surface level. First, this book markets itself as a text that offers a markedly *Calvinist* response to the problem of evil. But the problem is that some of the authors do not present or defend a Calvinist response to the libertarian alternatives. The editors admit “most of them (though not all of them) defend Calvinist responses to those arguments” (p. 2). This diversity amongst the authors *sometimes* presents a clouded view of Calvinism to its audience and could potentially confuse its readers (or objectors) about what constitutes *Calvinism's* response to the problem of evil. This volume would be strengthened by highlighting which arguments or persons deviate from the historic Calvinist position (perhaps in the introduction or in the particular chapters). This clarification could also ward off any misrepresentations or false characterizations of the Calvinist position by non-Calvinist alternatives interacting with the book. Second, for the most part there is an evenness of style on the part of the editors. But in other places there is not. For example, in some chapters they capitalize the masculine pronouns referring to God (p. 138) and in other chapters they do not. Some authors use Roman numeral outlines, and other authors do not. This book would be strengthened if later editions fixed these slight editorial features.

First things first, however. Alexander and Johnson (along with the other contributors) provide a highly detailed philosophical defense of historic Calvinism. They also offer several sophisticated

criticisms of incompatibilism, or libertarianism, that coincide with the biblical text and historic Reformed Confessions and Systematic Theologies. Philosophers of religion who embrace Calvinism owe a great debt of gratitude to Alexander and Johnson for synthesizing the multi-faceted tenets of Reformed theology into a philosophical defense of Calvinism and the problem of evil. For those philosophers of religion who do *not* embrace Calvinism, I am certain this book will present a new array of arguments to wrestle with in their defense of alternative positions. Regardless of one's philosophical or theological position, this book deserves to be on the shelf of all students interested in the problem of evil, the problem of divine and human responsibility, and historic Calvinism.

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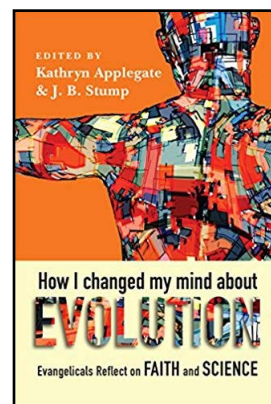
Kathryn Applegate and Jim Stump, eds. *How I Changed My Mind about Evolution: Evangelicals Reflect on Faith and Science*. BioLogos Books on Science and Christianity. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016. 196 pp. £10.99/\$16.00.

There is something uniquely compelling about a personal testimony that goes far beyond simple logic and evidence. Stories of transformation provide emotional reassurance in the face of uncertainty. Stories give us examples of people making difficult choices and living to tell the tale. It is no surprise then that the first book from a new collaboration between InterVarsity Press and the BioLogos Foundation is a collection of testimonies.

Edited by Kathryn Applegate and Jim Stump, *How I Changed My Mind about Evolution* presents the stories of 25 evangelicals and their favorable views on evolution (contributors include scholars like N. T. Wright, Richard Mouw, James K. A. Smith, Oliver Crisp, and Tremper Longman III). The authors include most of the usual names associated with BioLogos, including founder Francis Collins, current president Deb Haarsma, and biology fellow Dennis Venema. The book contains nothing surprising or novel to readers already familiar with BioLogos or Collins's *The Language of God* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006). The authors agree that evolution poses no fatal challenge to Christian theology, and some would claim that evolution enriches Christian theology and experience.

With that in mind, what can be said about this book's message that has not been said many times before? Indeed, reviewing someone's personal testimony seems oddly invasive and inappropriate, but above these personal elements, the reader will find broader themes that recur in many stories. These themes of theology, intellectual satisfaction, and personal conflict are well worth examining, regardless of one's own position on the question of evolution. In the interest of full disclosure, as a young age creationist, I am strongly opposed to the BioLogos position and the message of this book. Even still, there is much to be gained by carefully hearing the message of these brothers and sisters in Christ.

One of the most striking themes from the very beginning of the book is the pressure these authors feel to choose between science and faith. The reader again and again encounters this contrast, as if accepting young age creationism is equivalent to rejecting science itself. Put in other terms, evolution



is science in the same way that $2 + 2$ *is* 4. As a scientist and a young age creationist, I obviously find this to be a false dilemma and deeply insulting. If I follow their logic, I must conclude that I have rejected science altogether and have no intellectual integrity because I accept young age creationism. I suppose most creationists would stop at this offense and decry the falsity of the message, but these authors seem so profoundly moved by this dichotomy, I have to wonder why they believe this. Why do they think that young age creationism necessarily entails rejection of science?

From their stories, I discern at least three additional themes that help to explain this urgency of accepting evolution and rejecting young age creationism. First, the young age creationism presented is often the worst of creationist thought and research. Some authors mention the vapor canopy, which has largely been abandoned by young age creationism. Other authors express the notion that speciation contradicts young age creationism, even though speciation hasn't really been an issue in creationism for more than 70 years. To be clear, I have definitely heard these poor ideas promoted by some creationists recently, but the most knowledgeable creationists I know give no credence to the vapor canopy or species fixity.

An idea related to outdated creationism is the repeated assertion that young age creationism is either theologically novel or "bad theology." This is perhaps the most startling claim of the entire book, since young age creationist ideas can be found throughout church history and even before. Belief in Adam and Eve as the historical progenitors of humanity dates back at least to the writing of the apocryphal books (e.g., Tob 8:6; Wis 2:23–24; Sir 49:16) and the NT documents. The earliest church fathers summed the ages of the Genesis patriarchs to calculate the date of creation. Origen defended the historicity of Noah's ark, and Augustine claimed that Cain married his sister. Consequently, the repeated insistence that young age creationism is bad theology must reflect something other than these common creationist beliefs, unless these authors actually think that the pioneers of Christianity were also doing bad theology. What these authors think is bad about young age creationist theology is not always explicit in these stories, but the reader can surmise one claim that definitely troubles these authors: the use of young age creationism as a mark of orthodoxy. In other words, many young age creationists believe that to be a good Christian, one must be a young age creationist.

This notion of creationism-as-orthodoxy is the second major theme that informs these authors' experiences. The book contains several anecdotes of condemnation received by those who question creationist ideas. At the very least, a number of these authors were fearful or worried about how other Christians would react to their doubts about young age creationism. Indeed, a major theme of the entire book is overcoming this stigma and trauma of being an evangelical that questions creationism and accepts evolution. After all, the gospel as recorded in the New Testament says nothing about accepting a particular date of creation or even the historicity of Adam and Eve. Evangelicals surely need a better way to discuss important issues that are not gospel issues without blunt condemnation.

The final major theme is the reasonableness of evolution. In this, the authors and I are in close agreement. Despite the beliefs of many young age creationists, there is a decent case to be made for evolution based on a reasonable interpretation of scientific evidence. The repeated claims that "there is no evidence for evolution; all evidence supports creation" is completely false, despite their popularity. Given the compelling case for evolution and the hostility with which questions about creationism are met, the reader should not be surprised that these authors are willing to consider the "fact" of evolution, despite the occasional theological misgiving.

It is important to acknowledge that this brief sketch does not capture every essay in this collection, and some authors might even object to specific themes identified herein. Nevertheless, these themes do recur frequently in the creation/evolution debate. What lessons can we learn from them? First, young age creationists seem to be doing a poor job of presenting our position. Too many of these authors have an honestly mistaken perception of what young age creationism is. Second, many young age creationists need to change some of their rhetoric. Denigration of evolution and hostility towards those we disagree with should not be part of this conversation.

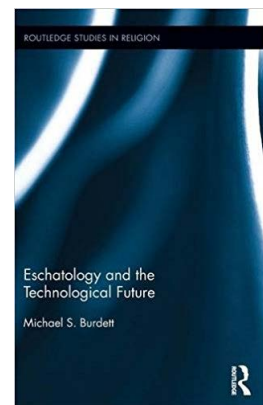
Finally, I am concerned that much of what is presented as young age creationism in this book is merely a poorly-informed strawman. Young age creationism is not a uniform position; there is much disagreement and nuance among creationists that is not represented in this book. The careful reader might even be surprised to discover how much this book resembles any book advocating young age creationism. Just as zealous young age creationists present their views as the *only* way to be a good Christian, these authors present evolution as the *only* way to be a good scholar and rational person. As the young age creationist might misunderstand and misrepresent evolution, so too these authors misunderstand and misrepresent young age creationism. Perhaps the greatest lesson we can learn is to listen more carefully to each other, not simply to gain more ammunition for the culture war, but to understand each other better. In doing so, we might discover that people on all sides of this debate have reasons for their positions, and we might even discover common values that could help us to move beyond the current stalemate.

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Michael S. Burdett. *Eschatology and the Technological Future*. Routledge Studies in Religion. New York: Routledge, 2015. xiv + 251 pp. £95.00/\$148.00.

While the last century saw a great deal of technological advancement, the pace of advancement seems to have accelerated in recent years. As but one example, in the less than ten years since the iPhone was first released (June 29, 2007), smart phones have, in many parts of the developed world, become very nearly ubiquitous. In addition, the *New York Times* recently reported, “80 percent of the people in the developing world currently have mobile phones” (Nathaniel Popper, “Cellphones, Not Banks, May Be Key to Finance in the Developing World,” 21 September 2016, <https://tinyurl.com/h37j4jz>). While the diffusion of smart phones and the increasing amount of time many spend on social networks such as Facebook and Twitter are a source of concern for some (see, for example, Sherry Turkle, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* [New York: Basic, 2011]), others enthusiastically embrace technological advancement and not only long for but are actively working toward a future where technology so transforms human life that it can rightly be called post human.

Michael Burdett, who has a background working in the aerospace and robotics industries and is currently a Postdoctoral Fellow at Oxford teaching philosophy and theology, examines how we, as Christians, might think about and respond to this transhumanist movement. Due to the future



orientation of transhumanism, Burdett turns to eschatology in order to frame a Christian theological perspective and response. Early on in this work he highlights a key distinction that Jürgen Moltmann and Ted Peters make between viewing the future as either *futurum* or *adventus* (p. 3). *Futurum* views the future as entirely and solely driven by what precedes it, while *adventus*, in contrast, looks to the future with an openness to the arrival of things not solely or entirely the product of what has come before. While one can draw a continuum between *futurum* and *adventus*, the case Burdett makes is that the technological futurism of the transhumanist movement is in fact solidly *futurum* (although that is not a term they use).

Before looking deeply at eschatology, Burdett looks back at the past two centuries of technological development, and at cultural representations of that development and of the technological future. Specifically, he highlights the ways in which utopian thinking has been evident as part of technological development as well as at ways in which the literature of science fiction has portrayed technology, technological development, and the technological future. Transhumanism did not develop out of thin air, but rather is in continuity with technological advancement and the technological imagination over the past 200 years, even if it does represent an extreme view of the possibilities of technology. In addition, reviewing this history and these cultural representations helps to reveal the close relationship between technology and religion. Indeed, Burdett suggests, “traditionally religious people in technological society ... need to reflect explicitly on their own participation in narratives of the technological imagination to see where they are drawing implicitly on the religious value of these narratives and whether they can be integrated successfully with their religious faith” (p. 69).

Burdett introduces the thinking and beliefs of the transhumanist movement by examining three key transhumanist figures: technologist Ray Kurzweil, cosmologist Martin Rees, and philosopher Nick Bostrom. While they represent a range of transhumanist perspectives, Burdett finds that ultimately all three are in agreement on at least three points: the overriding importance of the question of the future, the malleability of humanity through both biological and technological evolution, and the view that the future is entirely a product of the past. Importantly, transhumanism and religion overlap thematically on salvation (overcoming death through technology), transcendence (surpassing human limitations), transformation/glorification (transitioning into someone or something entirely post human), and hope (the power of technology to solve current and future problems).

Burdett turns next to theological views. First, he finds Pierre Teilhard de Chardin to be optimistic about technology and to balance *futurum* and *adventus* in his eschatology. On Teilhard’s view, the work of humanity builds toward the future (*futurum*) and Christ pulls the cosmos toward the future (*adventus*). Jacques Ellul, the second theologian he examines, is pessimistic about technology, holding that we are subject to a technological determinism that can only be undone by the inbreaking of God himself, which is entirely *adventus*. The third figure to whom he turns is Martin Heidegger, who, over the course of his career, left his Christian faith (although his beliefs at the very end of his life remain unclear). Nonetheless, Heidegger’s work emphasizes the importance of possibility that is not solely a product of nor limited by the actual present, which stands in stark contrast to the transhuman view that the future is entirely and solely a result of what precedes it.

In the final two chapters Burdett presents his own, constructive proposal, which draws upon each of the thinkers mentioned above while also pulling in additional sources in order to correct for weaknesses. He highlights two key themes: possibility and promise, both of which, importantly, rest upon the power of the Triune God, in whom possibility is opened up and promises are fulfilled, although often those

promises are fulfilled in unexpected ways which continue to point toward new possibilities in the future. In addition, Burdett's view affirms the importance and value of humanity's finitude as created beings, which are key aspects of our relationship to God, and, again, contrast starkly with the transhuman view that technology will allow humanity to overcome all finitude. In the end what Burdett is presenting is a distinctively Christian view of the future that relies on the powerful, personal, and relational Triune God by taking what Burdett sees as the best elements from a variety of thinkers.

I have not done justice to the detail and nuance of Burdett's work. The book is well written, although not always what all readers would term an easy read—he does, after all, delve deeply into Heidegger, whose thought is particularly complex. Some readers will be surprised if not disappointed that he draws upon Eberhard Jüngel in order to emphasize the theme of possibility, for Jüngel presents a very weak view of God. However, Burdett not only acknowledges that Jüngel's view weakens God, but criticizes him for it and seeks to correct that in presenting his own view.

There has been a good bit of Christian writing about and interaction with transhumanist thought over the past 10 to 12 years, but much of that work has been article or chapter length rather than book-length monographs (Brent Waters is author of two notable exceptions: *From Human to Posthuman: Christian Theology and Technology in a Postmodern World* [Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006] and *Christian Moral Theology in the Emerging Technoculture: From Posthuman Back to Human* [Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2016]). Burdett's book, then, is a welcomed addition to the discussion. He is certainly to be applauded for seeking to develop a perspective on and response to transhumanism that is distinctly Christian and attentive to a robustly Trinitarian view of eschatology. Not all readers will agree with the sources from which he pulls, nor with his ultimate conclusions. Nonetheless, Burdett's *Eschatology and the Technological Future* is a valuable read for anyone interested in better understanding the transhumanist movement, ways in which we might think about the place and role of technology in our lives, and even those whose primary interest lies in the study of eschatology rather than technology or transhumanism.

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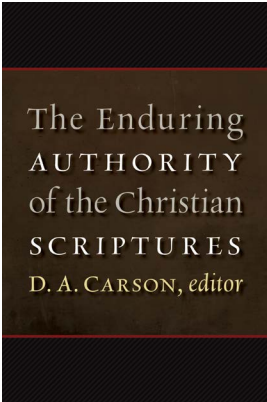
D. A. Carson, ed. *The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures*. Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, U.K. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016. xvi + 1240 pp. £44.00/\$65.00.

The mailman had to take a week off after delivering this hefty tome, and I have been laboring under its weight for some time, for a different reason. It is more of an encyclopaedia than your garden variety collected essays on biblical authority, and I imagine that many readers will use it thus, rather than reading it right through. Which is what I did, unashamedly, dipping randomly into articles here and there to get a feel of the whole, an entirely unsatisfactory procedure for a reviewer, I admit, but it allows me to offer a good tip to potential readers—one way into this complex map is to read the introduction, then the concluding FAQs, and you have the freedom of the highway.

Before specifics, some initial comments. Excepting a couple of foreign nationals active in North America, the book is an expression of the state of the authority of Scripture in the anglo-saxon evangelical world, six contributions coming from the UK, three from Australia, one from continental Europe, and the remainder of the thirty seven from North America, that is, over 70%. Perhaps this explains why one reviewer said that the collection was more about inerrancy than the authority of Scripture, an exaggerated claim. To be sure, the “dragon inerrancy” rears its head, but it is hardly the focus of the book, which shows the amazing pluridisciplinary vitality of evangelicalism in that catchment area (and also the influence of the Gospel Coalition). However, the above statistic betrays a certain cultural focus, and points to the need for nurturing top evangelical scholarship and institutions in the Majority World. This rider does not mean, of course, that the impact of the book will be limited to the First World and our hope is that the authority of Scripture will “keep showing up in many lands” (p. 33) and arm evangelicals in their struggle when they are a minority. The authority of Scripture self-asserts at different historical moments, in diverse cultures, and against the background of a variety of methodical approaches.

The preface indicates house and lineage, which explains somewhat the selection of contributors: The Henry Center at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and the setting from a generation ago, when some of the writers, particularly Carson and Woodbridge, worked to produce *Scripture and Truth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983) and *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986); so this volume is a reprise and enlargement of that context and those projects. It is interesting to note that the present volume was the object of a week’s peer review by the authors *in situ* in 2010, which is doubtless an important factor for overall quality and broad complementarity, and also that it has been a good time cooking before publication. There are, however, some absentees who have made important recent contributions in this field: G. K. Beale, John Frame, and Vern Poythress (mentioned for their publications), for example.

A classic Carsonian wide-angled Introduction sets the scene, with a survey of the state of play and an *apéritif* to what follows: sections on topics historical, biblical and theological, philosophical and epistemological, and comparative-religions, followed by a further Carsonian bouquet answering common questions about the nature of Scripture, with flashbacks to the preceding chapters. This is rather novel, but highly useful because anyone short of time can get a quick overview by reading the introduction (which itself would merit separate publication) and the concluding FAQs. The breadth



The Enduring
AUTHORITY
of the Christian
SCRIPTURES
D. A. CARSON, editor

of Don Carson's knowledge on the subject and his ability for synthesis demonstrated in these sections leave lesser mortals at the starting gate.

One of the useful features of the collection is that it makes available information on rather specialized and controverted subjects, which are often confined to specialised publications. Here responses to current theological mainstream flagships are brought into action: for example, the "Bauer thesis" that rises perennially from the ashes (cf. Bart Ehrman), regarding orthodoxy and heresy in harmony like ebony and ivory in the early church; the alleged pseudonymity of many of the texts of the NT; or the recent "invention" of inerrancy (should it not be 150 years ago and not 250, as on p. 22?). This collection gives academics who have written doctoral theses, or who have done detailed research in crucial areas, to take stage in a broader forum. This is certainly most valuable for reinforcing the dyke of evangelical theology against the strong tides running counter to orthodoxy.

Strange but true: I looked for a chapter presenting a biblico-theological definition of the authority of Scripture *per se*, and had to conclude that all the chapters are supposed to deal with it. Then I looked for, and failed to find, a working definition of what it is as such, the indexed entry under "Authority, God's Word" sending me mainly to a three page discussion on classical Christian orthodoxy as background to the "Old Princetonians." However, I was compensated by the Introduction, where a definition is built up in an indirect and cumulative way. Revelation (divine self-disclosure) was central to the patristic Fathers and the Reformers, assuring the truthfulness of the inspired Word and grounding its authority (p. 18), with the existence of a canon as a corollary of inspired special revelation. Rejection of revisionist views of biblical history is not incidental, because they undermine the Christian faith in a destined-to-fail attempt to establish a latter day "orthodoxy": "What saves us is not a set of ideas that fire the imagination, and call us to share a similarly imagined world, but the extra-textual realities to which the text points ... the ideas are about Jesus Christ, and he reconciles us to God.... Prove that Jesus never lived, never died, and never rose from the dead, or declare that historical details are unimportant ... and you have utterly destroyed Christianity" (pp. 28–29).

I found some omissions rather surprising in a book this size. Although many of the contributions refer to historical criticism (cf. pp. 4–9), an article about what it is, its presuppositions, and what it does to Scripture and Church would have been pertinent, particularly in the light of Michael Legaspi's "Enlightenment Bible." After all, with Islam, historical criticism remains *the* big challenge in spite of the harbingers of doom. It has undermined the Church in Europe, and with its various masks it remains perennially alluring for young evangelical Icaruses. It has not ended, but simply broadened its appeal by annexing new autonomous approaches to Scripture, as illustrated by David R. Law's 2012 apology *The Historical-Critical Method A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: T&T Clark). Another thorn in the side of evangelicalism is the present discussion around the status given to Ancient Near Eastern influences on the OT, which is of course touched on in Bruce Waltke's chapter on "Myth, History, and the Bible" (pp. 549–53, 567–73) and elsewhere, but is the conclusion that the "difference is so great that it points to the Bible's heavenly inspiration" (p. 576) methodologically satisfying, when many would deem the Bible's ethics not to be superior? The sticky issue of the autographs, referred to several times (pp. 396–400) in Peter Williams's fine analysis of Bart Ehrman and A. T. B. McGowan, might have merited a more detailed discussion in a context independent of these recent critics, although the final proposals (p. 406) and particularly the suggestion to speak of "authorial wording" rather than "original text" merit reflection. Similar remarks could be made regarding issues of dating, the increasingly vexed questions of the authority of Scripture in relation to the historical Adam and evolution/genetics (the

chapter on “Science and Scripture” makes one realize how fast things are moving), the use of the LXX in NT quotation (apart from pp. 739–45), pantheistic new-ageism, and gender issues. These might be sideshows at the fair, but they are important to people around us, believers or not, and are subjects of recurrent objections against biblical authority ... which brings me to a further point.

The issues in this book are mainly *intra*-theological ones, which is as it should be. However, the questions that call for examination concerning biblical authority are also ones we theologians are not always asking, the *extra*-theological ones raised by popular culture, viz., why and what is authority at all, why God chose *a* book, *this* book and *this* history as a means of revelation (in the light of Jacques Ellul’s reflections on *The Humiliation of the Word* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985], the sheer pastness and fixity of it, however could that foreign picture fit “me”, and a whole slew of challenges today about the choices and acts of (an inhospitable, masculine) God that were not raised in previous generations, when people generally had more formal respect for Scripture. Does anyone think it is “the Good Book” any more, as in *Chariots of Fire*? Why not? Many of these new issues are touched upon lightly in various places, but from an apologetic perspective, questions about authority are most fraught where the currents of hypermodernity run fastest in “the age of authenticity” (pp. 38–39), whereas evangelical theology, wary of changing horses in midstream, seems to remain tethered to its academic saloons and intramural dialogue. What does the absence from this volume of the great Christian apologists of the 20th century (apart from *one* reference to Francis Schaeffer) signify about the ethos of our evangelical way of doing theology?

Cruising this vast theological ocean is better than selecting one island, but some ports of call are compelling to the journey. A coherent view of the authority of Scripture today has some “musts”: God and Scripture, Christ and Scripture, and God and man in revelation and inspiration. Do the articles on these subjects cut the mustard?

Peter Jensen ticks the box with “God and the Bible,” replying to some of the issues raised in the previous paragraph. Since the Enlightenment, the tables have been turned on the hitherto accepted classic doctrine of inspiration, because of perceived theological problems (the old view is a danger to religion and public morals, quoting C. H. Dodd, and it is a bonus not to identify God too closely with *this* text) and anthropological ones (the authority of the Bible inspires coercion rather than freedom, terror rather than joy, p. 479). These problems motivate anti-abstractionist efforts that zero in on Christ as the personal Word (the Brunnerian encounter), without the straightjacket of the written word, and also on pneumatology with man as God’s junior partner in community (and consequently open theology). Jensen argues in reply that to uncouple the word of God from Scripture undermines the gospel, because the NT gospel itself has three propositions: “first, that Scripture is the word of God; second, that this inscripturated word is indispensable for true faith; and third, that this inscripturated word is indispensable for true obedience” (p. 481). Each of these three is demonstrated to be a *sine qua non* if we wish to take Scripture itself seriously, and to avoid falling into the ravine of contradicting the rock on which we are supposed to be standing. In fact, reducing Scripture to a witness to the Word not only contradicts Scripture’s own witness to its plenary inspiration, but canonizes the idea that “the Spirit” today inspires unscriptural teachings, particularly unethical ones in biblical terms, and that “it becomes a duty to disobey Scripture rather than obey it” (p. 494). So the church falls prey to “the human tendency to idolatry and our determination to be free of God, whose own freedom has been put at the service of our salvation” (p. 496). Arius and Pelagius look on from the wings and wink.

Secondly, Craig Blomberg's "Reflections of Jesus' View of the Old Testament" begins with reference to B. B. Warfield's *The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture* and John Wenham's *Christ and the Bible* (3rd ed. [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994]). However, both assumed the authenticity of Jesus' teachings and took it as established, which has its problems because of broadside attacks from form and redaction criticism and widespread scepticism, and recently almost nothing "has addressed in any detail the question of the authenticity of the texts needed to establish the historical Jesus' perspective on the inspiration or authority of the Bible of his world" (pp. 271–72). Blomberg examines, in a finely documented presentation, the quest for the plausibility of Jesus, the continuities and discontinuities with Judaism and early Christianity, and finds the criteria of dissimilarity and similarity for establishing authenticity adequate. He concludes that Warfield's and Wenham's syllogism still stands: Jesus's view of the trustworthiness of Scripture must be that followed by his disciples. However, the hermeneutical question remains, a search for an appropriation of Scripture with "balanced, creative, sensitive, contextualized, Spirit-filled applications of all parts of Scripture," demarcated from the positions of both Walt Kaiser and Richard Longenecker (pp. 699–700). Nor can Blomberg resist a parting shot against pharisaical leadership and a certain evangelical smugness: "Could it be that if Jesus walked on earth with us today, he would happily applaud this 'Scripture project' but then ask why we were not at least three times more involved in projects of more overt mission and mercy at home and worldwide?" (p. 701). From Europe we can only reply Amen, and look at our feet.

Thirdly, it is impossible to miss out of the cruise itinerary Henri Blocher's "God and the Scripture Writers: The Question of Double Authorship." Starting out from the present tendency to hermeneutical diversity and not forgetting that different literary forms or speech-acts (virtually indistinguishable from literary genres), are part of the Scriptures' perfections, but have often been overshadowed by the paradigm of the divine author (cf. Kevin Vanhoozer, p. 498), Blocher's quest is to explore "whether and, if so, how generic and illocutionary diversity affect the core affirmations of the doctrine of Scripture with reference to ... its 'double authorship'... or, in other terms, its 'divine inspiration'" (p. 499). We must certainly not be hoodwinked by Paul Ricoeur's caricature of orthodox bibliology, unworthy of a great thinker, as being "the authors repeating a word that was whispered into their ears"! (p. 513) With Nicolas Wolterstorff as a punctual ally (he takes critical distance later, as also with John Goldingay, for good reason, pp. 517–21), Blocher proposes that the ordinary biblical meaning of the word of God is *divine discourse*, and inspiration is a work that joins the divine and human authors. Leaving aside the classical analysis of the *concursum* of the divine Spirit and the human mind (because he has nothing original to add, p. 501n25), Blocher finely examines the evidence as to whether one dominant biblical genre, the prophetic one of classical theology, has not flattened the diversity of Scripture's genres, and with it, human agency. He concludes that there is warrant to extend this model to the whole Bible without this "degenerating into blind submission", because among other factors, "one can hardly doubt that the prophetic word in 2 Peter 1 is the entire collection of holy writings" (p. 513). From that standpoint the notion of prophecy is extended to the former prophets, to Moses, and then to the apostles. It is found that a structural relationship exists between the prophetic and apostolic ministries, the christological association being *latent* in the former and *patent* in the latter by remembrance and extension. The christological perspective, which comes to the fore in discussions concerning incarnation and inspiration, suits both the structure of salvation history, promised and fulfilled, and the role of the writers as human instruments: "they are attached to Christ's humanity since he is speaking as the God-Man, and it helps clarify the notion of authority. The Lord is speaking." Against the current distaste for "formal authority" (cf. G. C. Berkouwer/John Webster) Blocher boldly maintains that "the authority of

Scripture is the Lord's authority as he exercises it over us, and therefore it remains sovereign and prior to whatever effects the contents of the discourse may have on or in us" (p. 533). After a brief account of "the wise" and "the singers," a fine conclusion is reached in the memorable affirmation that "God is indeed the author in the sense of originator *and* fully efficient guide, overseer, signatory. The speech-act of the text should be counted as unreservedly his, and he is himself present in his word ... always making (men and women) more fully human than they would be apart from inspiration. The Holy Ghost is no 'ghost writer'" (p. 539). God *theopneusts* the discourse of human authors as his own.

This is a fine contribution. By his theological acumen, finesse of analysis and erudition, Blocher is a worthy successor of the great classical theologians, not least the more recent ones he has mined, Kuyper, Bavinck and Warfield. Two brief comments may be added. Firstly, it would be possible to strengthen this argument even further by a consideration of what *false* prophets are, as they have more than a cameo appearance in both testaments. Blocher refers to this (p. 502, cf. 527, 990). All that the false prophet is and does, the true prophet is not, which includes the question of discourse origin, truth, and the covenant breaking relation of the false prophet, an extremely serious matter. Secondly, and circumstantially, has Blocher done enough with the variety of expressions of the character and the formative nature of the contribution of the human authors of Scripture? Perhaps not, particularly for those who wish only to see Scripture as human witness, the exclusive human side of *concursum*. How might providential divine action relate to the human authors, how does God guide them, what could be said about their preparation, and the notion of suggestion, even if Alonso Schökel's rather crude "character creation" is rightly criticized? Are there variations of human input in the different genres of Scripture? No doubt Blocher has answers to these questions, and so much is already packed into his article that it is almost *gourmandise* to ask for more.

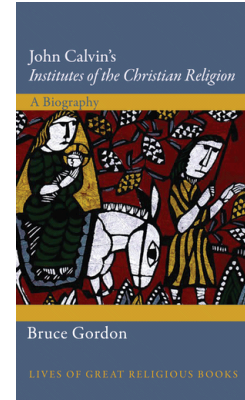
Finally, the indexes both of ancient and modern names and subjects and biblical references (without Apocrypha) are valuable tools. I am tempted to make a further remark about sources, as to who is referenced in these excellent indexes. A random check of the modern names gives the impression that the older stalwarts of the evangelical tradition are slipping rather rapidly over the horizon (Warfield excepted), whereas recent contributors to academic debate occupy center frame. Are we evangelicals also obsessed with the newest and the latest? Are the current trends the real questions? Is there not more to the evangelical heritage than the last fifteen years? It would be much better, or so it seems to me, that young evangelical theologians plough through Herman Bavinck, rather than surfing on Grenz, given of course that one should not exclude the other. But as Henri Blocher frankly remarks, "conformist pressures are high in the academic microcosm" (p. 501).

Let's hope then that the excellent stuff in this book is not shelf-bound fifteen years down the line, it deserves a lot more than that, and it should get it if another Donald Carson is raised up in the next generation to remind us that it is not all old hat.

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Bruce Gordon. *John Calvin's 'Institutes of the Christian Religion': A Biography*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016. 304 pp. £22.95/\$27.95.

The recent Calvin centennial of 2009 demonstrated the coexistence of two 'worlds' of Calvin study. On the one hand, 2009 made it possible for us to witness the rotation of the conservative evangelical/conservative Reformed 'world' of Calvin study. This is the world of 'Calvin 500', exemplified by the highly useful *Theological Guide to Calvin's Institutes* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008). Some, but not all who noticed these first proceedings were also aware of a second 'world' of Calvin study which featured conference papers and issued publications such as *Calvin and His Influence 1509–2009* (Oxford: OUP, 2011). So, ought we to speak of strictly parallel universes of Calvin study? Not quite. For these two orbits of Calvin discussion are not completely sealed off from one another. Select individuals such as Richard Muller, Herman Selderhuis and A. N. S. Lane enjoy the esteem of both 'worlds' and thus move easily between them.



Recognizing two distinct 'worlds' of Calvin study is a fundamental prerequisite for the appraisal of Bruce Gordon's *Calvin's 'Institutes'*. It becomes clear that Gordon – and his volume – reflect the second, wider discourse on Calvin and Calvinism in which conservative evangelicalism has gone under-represented. Gordon is aware of a second world of Calvin discussion parallel to his own; he makes an attempt to acknowledge its existence (such names as Hansen, Piper, Driscoll and Keller are mentioned in passing). But this is a world that he struggles to understand and about which he makes errors of interpretation. In fairness, let it be said that the narrower orbit of Calvin discourse maintained within evangelicalism just as regularly misjudges the orbit in which Gordon works and writes.

It is the contention of this reviewer that the 'biography' of the *Institutes* can only properly be told by a narrative which draws on *both* the narrower world of discourse (with which conservative evangelicals are most familiar) *and* the approach embodied in this admirable literary effort. One without the other misses important elements, without which the story fails at comprehensive explanation.

As the author of a now-standard biography of Calvin (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009) and a history of the Swiss Reformation (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), Gordon brings to his present task great gifts as an interpreter of the Reformation in its European setting. We need to take special note then, when he draws attention to a change of intellectual climate, roughly corresponding to the end of Calvin's career, which soon rendered the *Institutes* unsuitable for use even by those of undoubted orthodoxy. By 1600, the *Institutes* were achieving usefulness primarily in edited-down compendia. This soon, the full *Institutes* had become a kind of 'totem', an emblem of the Reformation era in its fullness. The Puritan age regarded it so, while soon coming to rely on more recent Reformed dogmaticians.

The following century, the eighteenth, was one in which the *Institutes* were largely neglected – at least according to Gordon's narrative. He grants that the Netherlands were one hold-out area. Yet some readers are aware that the *Institutes* were to be found in the library of the former slave trader-turned-preacher and hymn writer, John Newton. Evangelical historians are aware (while Gordon apparently is not) that the first 19th century translation of the *Institutes* in English was undertaken by John Allen in 1813 (a translation still in print well into the 20th century). Gordon is aware that the *Institutes* were reprinted at Geneva in 1818, but seems unaware that this took place at the instigation of the known-to-

meddle British evangelical banker, Henry Drummond, who had a fascination with Calvin's former city. Gordon's account turns up facts we may be unfamiliar with; yet evangelicals can supply details of which he seems unaware.

As for the nineteenth century, Gordon's focus (like that found in the recent volume, *Calvin's Theology and Its Reception* [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012]) is largely on Friedrich Schleiermacher, who used Calvin as a kind of foil for his own views. While this is undoubtedly true, Gordon's account tells us nothing about the labors of the Pietist theologian August Tholuck (1799–1877), who worked to re-issue a Latin edition of the *Institutes* in 1834. Tholuck was a major influence on the young Charles Hodge in his period of European study. Similarly neglected is the stimulus provided to the study of Calvin by the evangelical stirring at Geneva (Le Réveil), commencing in 1816 and spreading throughout Francophone Europe. The importance of the republication program of the Calvin Translation Society (c. 1841) is briefly noted by Gordon; yet the impression is left that its influence was short-lived. Yet Spurgeon was still telling his students in the 1880s to "sell their shirts" to acquire the C. T. S. volumes; these same Victorian editions have been kept in print to this day by various Grand Rapids, Michigan publishers. Somewhat predictably, Gordon turns to relate the trans-Atlantic quarrels of Charles Hodge and J. W. Nevin over Calvin's sacramental teaching. Yet we are left with the misimpression that Hodge's change-averse Princeton was overly deferential to Calvin, when it is quite well known that the seventeenth century Genevan dogmatician, Turretin, had early displaced him.

Some of the most stimulating material Gordon has unearthed pertains to the meaning of the Calvin centennial of 1909 (to which the Christian world owes both the 'wall of the Reformers' and the marking of the execution site of Servetus at Geneva). Both in Europe and America, the Calvin commemorated in that year was a mirror image of the liberal democratic ideals of the 'fin de siècle' transatlantic world. Gordon also underscores the interpretation, made earlier by John Hesselink, that the twentieth century owes its renewal of interest in Calvin (as opposed to Calvinism) to the neo-orthodox titans, Barth and Brunner, and their celebrated quarrels of the 1930s. But this valid emphasis of Gordon cannot, by itself, account for the widespread recovery of interest in Calvin and his *Institutes* in popular Protestantism since the mid-twentieth century. A proper recounting of that story would require that attention be paid to the career of the late London minister D. M. Lloyd Jones (1899–1981), who secured the republication of the *Institutes* by James Clarke & Co. in 1949 (simultaneous with their American republication by Eerdmans), of the *Banner of Truth* magazine and movement (also associated with Lloyd-Jones) and the late James Boice (1938–2000), who inaugurated the influential 'Philadelphia Conference on Reformed Theology' in 1974.

Not to be missed are Gordon's concluding chapters on the role of the *Institutes* in both Africa and Asia. Christian leaders in both cultures have found Calvin's doctrine of principled resistance to illegitimate authority a tonic in coming to terms with regimes (sometimes professedly Christian) which work injustice. This entirely legitimate appeal to the *Institutes* provokes the consideration that in the West, Calvin may have been domesticated by his loudest supporters.

All in all, Bruce Gordon's *Calvin's 'Institutes'* is recommended reading. His volume provides a needed corrective to evangelicalism's sometimes 'privileged' appeals to Calvin, which are the outworking of the tendency to exaggerate his influence beyond what the evidence will bear. But Gordon's volume is not

quite the whole story, for evangelical Christianity's ongoing relationship with Calvin and his *Institutes* has played a more significant role in the larger story than this account allows.

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Paul M. Gould and Richard Brian Davis, eds. *Four Views on Christianity and Philosophy*. Counterpoints: Bible and Theology. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016. 240 pp. £12.99/\$19.99.

The Church father Tertullian once asked, “What does Jerusalem have to do with Athens?” Christian philosophers Paul M. Gould and Richard Brian Davis have attempted to provide some contrasting answers to that question in their newly edited *Four Views on Christianity and Philosophy*, the latest addition in Zondervan's popular Counterpoints series. In the following I will briefly overview each of the four views, giving some critique along the way, and then give some overall thoughts on the book.

The first view of the book is called the *conflict model* of Christianity and philosophy. It is presented and defended by atheist philosopher Graham Oppy. Unlike many atheist popularizers, like Richard Dawkins or the late Christopher Hitchens, Oppy's work treats questions related to philosophy of religion as legitimate and serious. Yet, his conflict model basically claims that philosophy (or better, metaphysical naturalism) “trumps Christianity” (p. 21). Oppy's essay is interesting and scholarly. One of the strengths of his chapter is his discussion of what is involved in theory or worldview assessment and revision. Overall, I think Oppy makes an attempt at being fairly evenhanded.

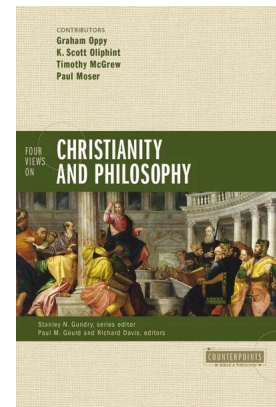
That being said, and as Oppy admits, his essay is hardly persuasive. If you're familiar with serious philosophical arguments against Christianity, Oppy does not say anything incredibly new here. And his three responders all bring up a similar critique against him, namely, that Oppy is not as neutral as he claims.

The other three views of the book take a more positive view of Christianity in relation to philosophy. And though there is much agreement between these latter three views, the contrasts between them bring up some very interesting differences.

The second view within the book is named the *covenant model*, presented and defended by K. Scott Oliphint. He argues that there is a “*theological* necessity of any philosophical activity that aims at truth” (p. 72). In short, Oliphint's view represents the classic presuppositionalist perspective. For those skeptical of philosophy being mixed with Christianity, I think there is much here that will be appreciated.

However, I often found myself confused by Oliphint's claims and intellectual moves. I rarely disagreed with him, at least directly, but it was sometimes not clear to me how he came to his claims. The other contributors' responses brought up similar concerns. I think Oliphint's essay was most helpful in thinking about philosophy from a deeply rooted biblical standpoint.

The third view is called the *confirmation model*, presented and defended by one of my former professors and mentors Timothy McGrew. McGrew claims that in his view “philosophy confirms



Christianity, and Christianity completes philosophy” (p. 124). His view represents the classic evidentialist or natural theology perspective. For those familiar with the usual debates between presuppositionalists and evidentialists, the contours of the disagreements brought up between Oliphint and McGrew here will come as no surprise. But McGrew’s presentation is, in my view, very biblically minded and very persuasive.

However, I did have some questions about this view that I don’t think McGrew adequately addressed. And, sometimes, I thought that the Oliphint and McGrew exchanges were simply “talking past” each other—not really addressing what the other was saying. But I think that those readers who might be more attracted to Oliphint’s covenant model should definitely see, at the very least, the merit of the confirmation model as a polemical tool for Christianity.

The fourth and final model is called the *conformation model*, presented and defended by philosopher Paul Moser. Of the four views in the book, this was the one that I was least familiar with, and I had the hardest time associating it with any prior touchstone in my mind. Perhaps Pascal? Moser “contends that wisdom and philosophy benefit Christian faith only when they are conformed to the lordship of God in Christ” (p. 176). I am not sure what Christian would disagree with that, but it seems that Moser is fairly radical in his interpretation of this claim.

My main concern with this view was that it was never clear to me that Moser made any distinction between the roles of evidence for Christians versus for non-believers. His comments and biblical references seemed to me to blur the two together. For example, to reference Romans 8:15 (“we cry ‘Abba! Father!’”) as an example of why “No intervening argument is needed” (p. 189) seems, at best, muddled. Though intriguing in many ways, there was much about this view that I did not quite understand.

Overall, this is an excellent volume giving a very good overview on many important issues in trying to think about what relationship should exist between Christianity and philosophy. Gould and Davis’s introduction and conclusion were also very good in this respect. For anyone who is *initially* trying to think about the relationship between Christianity and philosophy, I highly recommend this book. It is much clearer and more informative than other recent and similar introductory treatments.

However, as most any good introduction will be guilty of, I found the brevity of these chapters and their responses to be at times highly frustrating. At best, each contributor could only briefly introduce their perspective and bring up a few issues somewhat fleetingly. For example, one of the things that I think hurt Oppy’s presentation is that he brings up multiple overly brief criticisms against Christianity. After a couple of these cursory paragraphs, you just feel like you’re being given an index of poor arguments. But, if he had been allowed more space, I believe Oppy’s criticisms probably would have been much richer. I think it would have served his presentation perhaps only to focus upon one or two criticisms in a fuller way.

Similarly, I would love to have seen the interaction between the various views expanded. For example, as I claimed earlier, I think Oliphint and McGrew’s discussion often “talked past” each other, especially Oliphint’s responses. If both had had more space to work with, I think some of these issues may have been more profitably clarified. However, such is the nature of introductory books.

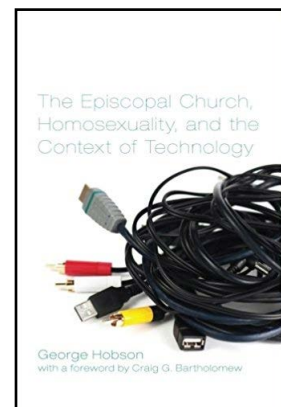
As I see it, this book has broad importance because of its far-reaching implications for Christianity. Not only does Gould and Davis’s book address the question of how Christianity and philosophy should relate, I think the discussions here can generalize to how Christianity should relate to anything outside of special revelation. Thus, for any Christian interested in how the Christian faith should be conceived in relation to anything outside of the Bible (especially philosophy), I think this book serves as an excellent

starting place. As such, this would be an exceptional introductory book for both college and seminary students. For those with more background in these issues, I think they would share my discontent at the brevity of the things touched upon here.

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George Hobson. *The Episcopal Church, Homosexuality, and the Context of Technology*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2013. 199 pp. £19.00/\$26.00.

In current debates about same-sex attraction, gay marriage, and the traditional view, it is increasingly clear that the social and historical background is all important. One of the most plausible arguments for departing from thousands of years of tradition is the civil rights narrative. Most of us know people, or have family members, who have lived in a closet until it became permissible to come out and be ... free. In a high profile "exodus" in 1991, the Rev. Peter Gomes, Chaplain at Harvard University, proclaimed himself to be a practicing homosexual, to the consternation of some, and the delight of others. "I am a Christian who happens as well to be gay," Gomes declared, adding that, "Those realities, which are irreconcilable to some, are reconciled in me by a loving God" (Mary Jordan, "A Chaplain Comes Out Swinging," *The Washington Post*, 8 August 1992, <http://tinyurl.com/hhpbr77>). The occasion was the publication of a rather thoughtful conservative student magazine which had suggested there was a better way than a same-sex lifestyle. Gomes resolved to devote his life thence forward to addressing the religious causes of homophobia.



As is well-known, even by folks outside the church, in 2003, the first practicing gay priest, Gene Robinson, was elected a bishop in the Protestant Episcopal Church in the United States, by a vote of 62 to 45. Robinson had been heterosexually married, but divorced his wife in 1986. His ordination became a *cause célèbre* inside and outside the entire Anglican Communion. He later divorced his partner, Mark Andrew, in 2014, citing, in a call for sympathy, that "life is hard, and it just keeps on coming, ready or not."

For those of us committed to defending the traditional view, we have commonly experienced a kind of stammering. Faced with the civil rights narrative, how could we decently propose "heteronormativity"? Faced with a man of the cloth for whom life has been hard, how can we take a position that seems cold and insensitive? And now, after the United States Supreme Court's *Obergefell et. al. vs. Hodges* decision on June 26, 2015 that recognized the legality of same-sex marriage, we appear not only against civil rights, a God of love, and cold-hearted, but also outside the law.

Perhaps the most surprising aspect of these radical changes is the speed with which they took place. Twenty years ago most of these developments would have seemed impossible, except to the most sanguine supporters of same-sex unions. So, what happened? George Hobson tells the story in a most compelling way. He connects the tidal wave to technology. That is, he describes the change of attitudes in many western people to a social context which has witnessed a sea-change in the definition of the

human self, of which technology is a primary exhibit. While the civil rights parallel appears compelling, it is actually quite misleading. Many African Americans actually resent the comparison. There has been homophobia and gay-bashing, of course, even in the church. Hobson acknowledges these and calls for repentance. But a deeper narrative concerns the shift in our very concept of the self.

Charles Taylor has argued that the West has moved, not in twenty years, but in five centuries, from what he calls the “porous self” to the “buffered self” (*The Secular Age* [Cambridge: Belknap, 2007]). In the Middle Ages it would have been unthinkable to deny the basic reality of a God who defines who we are, because, being porous, people could not help but let this truth permeate their being and worldview. But gradually, in a process he calls *reform*, the self has become resistant to such influences, because it has a self-directed strength, allowing it to receive blows, to be buffered, but without passive acquiescence. And so we are now in a world where not only is God not unthinkable, but he is merely an option, one among many. In short, we can choose who we want to be. In a similar way, George Hobson argues that technology has supported an autonomy of the self. We can be whatever we want to be, because we have the technique at hand to do so. Although he is clearly influenced by Jacques Ellul, the French sociologist who was a pioneer in the study of technology’s false promises, Hobson does not eschew the wise and judicious use of this God-given blessing. But he examines technology as a significant side-effect of a deep and radical philosophical change, the shift from the biblical anthropology, which tells us we are made after God’s own image, to the world of Nietzsche, where we can be the *Übermensch*, the overman who leads us from our alienation to a place of meaning, based on the power of the human will.

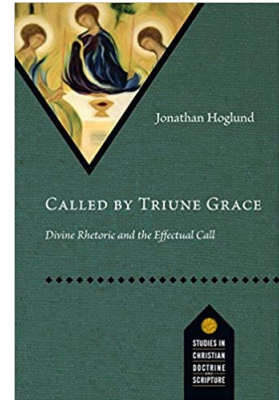
The point not to be missed is that we are facing a secular kind of anthropology, one that prizes choosing the person we wish to be, regardless of how we were made, that is, regardless of the framework we may have inherited. Hobson takes us through the pages of Genesis and comments on its view of humanity. Male and female are both equal and different. Such unity and diversity constitute the beauty of mankind made after the divine image. Among other fascinating supports he cites the classic study of Western literature *Mimesis* by Erich Auerbach. As readers of his illuminating literary analysis will remember, Auerbach begins by comparing the two different concepts of heroism, the Homeric and the Mosaic. Whereas Odysseus is celebrated for his pedigree, Abraham is remembered because he walked with God. Therein lies the glory of the human condition, according to Scripture.

The Episcopal Church, Homosexuality, and the Context of Technology contains rich considerations of biblical theology, the history of ideas, and interactions with current literature on same-sex attraction. The somewhat cumbersome title should not mislead us. Although there are references to the recent decisions in the American Episcopal Church and to this denomination’s particular liturgical practices, the book is a broad appeal for a better understanding of the issues. It is not only sharply critical of the modern turn of events, but theological, and indeed pastoral, in tone. Consequently, either directly or by implication, it covers the larger questions of human identity, which includes gender, children’s education, support of gay people as human beings, and the like. It would be a shame if this book became lost between the cracks. Hobson declares his desire to dialogue with anyone who is open to discussion. As Craig Bartholomew says in his *Foreword*, “one could not wish for a better dialogue partner” than George Hobson. So, will we be swept-up unthinkingly by the plausible liberationist narrative, or are we willing to interact with a most thoughtful presentation of the historic view on marriage?

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Jonathan Hoglund. *Called by Triune Grace: Divine Rhetoric and the Effectual Call*. Studies in Christian Doctrine and Scripture. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016. £28.49/\$35.00.

Jonathan Hoglund offers a fresh perspective on a traditional Reformed doctrine in *Called by Triune Grace*, the latest volume in IVP Academic's "Studies in Christian Doctrine and Scripture" series. Hoglund sets out to offer a "dogmatic account" of the effectual call, one that defines effectual calling as an instance of divine speech and relates effectual calling to regeneration (p. 4). The convergence of both of these purposes comes in Hoglund's unprecedented use of the term "converting change," which serves to highlight the fact that effectual calling in Scripture and in the Reformed tradition is a means of speaking about the divine cause of an individual's public and social conversion (p. 17).



In chapter one, Hoglund begins this retrieval project by summarizing previous Reformed work on the effectual call, non-Reformed challenges to it, and, most importantly, the particular lacuna which he seeks to address. While the Reformed tradition, according to Hoglund, "has most faithfully explored the biblical text" [with respect to the effectual call], he notes that it has continued to wrestle with how to adequately account for not only the divine causation of conversion but also its primary identification as speech in Scripture (p. 16). Hoglund seeks, therefore, to offer a dogmatic account of the effectual call via communicative theism by employing a method that treads the Websterian ground of biblical reasoning. This account is intended to explain the effectual call not only as divine action more generally but as divine action via divine speech, and to therefore explain the relationship between that spoken action and its result, regeneration.

Kevin Vanhoozer's and Michael Horton's work in this area of communicative speech, particularly as it relates to the effectual call and its twin affirmations of divine activity and human response, is the subject of chapter two. Hoglund uses these two Reformed authors both to ground his own understanding of effectual calling as divine converting speech and also to provide areas where his own study will contribute to this understanding. For Hoglund, Horton's account tends to emphasize divine action at the expense of human response, while Vanhoozer's account at times seems too intellectualized, minimizing the noetic effects of the fall (p. 39). The next two chapters then contain Hoglund's own communicative account of the effectual call, first via exploring the call in Paul in chapter three and then summarizing the call's content—"Jesus is your saving Lord"—in chapter four.

Two pairs of chapters explore two other biblical ways of referring to converting change in chapters five through eight. First, in chapters five and six, Hoglund examines the image of light and its usage in referring to conversion, both in terms of creation ("light out of darkness") and illumination. Second, in chapters seven and eight, Hoglund demonstrates that conversion is spoken of using new birth and resurrection language. Hoglund's conclusion after these four chapters is that these images, taken collectively, are all referring to the act of conversion, an act that is predicated on divine initiative and efficacy and also that is best defined via "communicative categories" (p. 168). In other words, these regenerating acts can and should be located dogmatically with the effectual call, since it is the effectual call of God that regenerates the human heart.

In chapter nine, Hoglund draws all these themes together—effectual calling, communicative theism, regeneration—by arguing that the effectual call is best described as an instance of triune rhetoric. In the call, God freely acts to dialogically but sovereignly speak with converting rhetorical force to

the unbeliever. While the unbeliever must participate in this communicative act via responding, this response, according to Hoglund, has already been drawn up into the larger communicative action of God. God's free act of converting speech therefore both precludes and includes the volitional assent of the human being. Hoglund here combines speech act theory with ancient rhetoric, describing this divine act of speech as God the Father, the authoritative *ethos*, uttering the locution via the illocutionary means of God the Word, the rhetorical *logos*, or argument. In doing so, God the Spirit ensures the perlocutionary force of this divine speech by serving as its *pathos*, its rhetorical force. The Spirit sovereignly persuades the hearer, who responds appropriately to the Father's perlocutionary intent—the hearer is converted, meaning he or she is regenerated by this call. This leads to a number of dogmatic conclusions regarding the *ordo salutis*, ones that remain firmly within the Reformed tradition, in chapter ten.

Hoglund's work is insightful, creative, and beneficial for all those who hope to understand what it means for God to call an individual to himself. *Called by Triune Grace* is what retrieval works should be—not simply retreading old ground, not departing radically from one's tradition, but exploring that tradition in fresh and exciting ways that lead both author and reader to new expressions of gratitude for God's triune grace. Hoglund demonstrates throughout a familiarity with his tradition as well as a commitment to understand the faithfulness of that tradition to its ultimate authority, holy Scripture.

Of course, if one does not share Hoglund's Reformed tradition and its doctrinal commitments, there will be areas of disagreement, some stringent. This is especially true in this book, since effectual calling is one of the sticking points that separate many non-Reformed traditions from Reformed ones. Those who hold to an Arminian or Molinist understanding of soteriology and the *ordo salutis* will, I think, remain unconvinced of Reformed understandings of salvation and particularly of the effectual call. Hoglund's exegesis, and the biblical warrant he gives for an irresistible call based on unconditional election, is relatively cursory and does not offer any real advance on other Reformed biblical defenses of those doctrines.

Hoglund also does not engage for long with his doctrinal detractors in this regard. That is not to say he doesn't engage them—he does—but it is to say that his purpose in the book is not really to convince non-Reformed theologians of Reformed soteriology. Rather, his goal is to provide an account of the Reformed doctrine of the effectual call from the perspective of communicative theism, with help from speech act theory and ancient rhetoric, to demonstrate that the call is an instance of converting change predicated on God's divine speech and resulting in human regeneration. And with respect to this purpose, Hoglund succeeds.

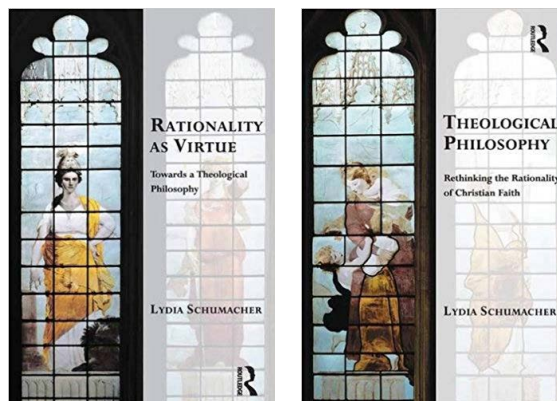
Those interested in speech act theory, the doctrine of conversion, and communicative theism should read *Called by Triune Grace*. While a non-Reformed reader may not agree with how Hoglund understands the effectiveness of God's call, his book is nevertheless beneficial in highlighting the rhetorical, communicative, and dialogical aspects of that call and how they relate to conversion and regeneration.

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Lydia Schumacher. *Rationality as Virtue: Towards a Theological Philosophy*. Burlington, VA: Ashgate, 2015. 242 pp. £67.99/\$112.00.

Lydia Schumacher. *Theological Philosophy: Rethinking the Rationality of Christian Faith*. Burlington, VA: Ashgate, 2015. 224 pp. £60.00/\$104.95.

The question of the Christian faith's rationality is often treated in isolation from the equally pressing question of what, if anything, makes rationality theological. Naturally, the danger in asking the first question without the second is that the terms of inquiry are so easily prejudiced against critical analysis of what constitutes "rationality" in the first place. In this ambitious, two-volume work, Lydia Schumacher laudably refuses to separate these questions and attempts to answer them both. To this end, the author pursues two tasks. The first attempts nothing less than "a full-scale re-configuration of philosophy ... to obtain a definition of rationality that is both amenable to faith and intrinsically more plausible than the definitions that tend to undermine faith" (*Rationality as Virtue*, p. 2). This "pro-theology philosophy" defines rationality in terms of a personal commitment to the *summum bonum*, which is upheld by the presence of certain intellectual and moral virtues. Equipped with this conception of rationality, the second task is to show how belief in the God of Christian faith in particular excels at—is even "arguably necessary" for—maintaining and fulfilling this conception of rationality (*Theological Philosophy*, p. 16).



From the outset Schumacher eschews "rationalist" and "fideist" approaches to demonstrating the rationality of faith, associating the former with natural theology. Voicing sympathies with projects like Reformed Epistemology and communitarian ethics, Schumacher desires to show how arguments for God's existence must acquire a moral determination with material distinctiveness. Hence, she pursues an account of rationality that finds its ultimate exemplification in the life of the church, which is "the truest and most persuasive evidence of the reality of the Triune, Incarnate God" (*Theological Philosophy*, p. 173). This in turn tills the ground for a future project aimed at cultivating a "Trinitarian philosophy," which seeks to demonstrate the "Trinitarian structure of all things" and its relevance for life (p. 192).

Rationality as Virtue sketches the "pro-theology philosophy" that becomes a "theological philosophy" in the second volume. The exposition hews closely to the thought of Aquinas and Aristotle, with varying degrees of proximity. She sets the stage by advancing a participatory ontology in which all creatures naturally develop or actualize their given potential and aptitudes over time. As rational creatures humans actualize this potential through acquiring knowledge, at which point Schumacher invokes Polanyi's account of "tacit knowledge" to underscore the developmental character of knowledge itself, which includes an irreducible if general element of "faith." Thus construed, knowledge progresses from expectant to fulfilled, and ultimately to informed "faith" (pp. 91–115). Since knowledge changes in this way, its progress or otherwise means a large role for the will, especially as one encounters reality through the passions. In order to maintain an objective encounter with reality, the cooperation of the intellect and will, along with the passions, must be regulated by intellectual virtues. Without such virtues, we are easily led to mistake the truth with our own predilections and ideologies. Intellectual

virtues are for the sake of moral virtues, and the latter ensure the proper functioning of the former: the end of self-actualization is promoted only to the extent that we are committed to serving the highest good, which in turn leads us to serve the common good. So while it may be possible for someone to be “rational” without moral virtue, they cannot remain so consistently. In this first volume, Schumacher essentially asks what reason is for and concludes that its intrinsic ordination as well as only context for flourishing is in a virtuous way of life.

Theological Philosophy seeks to show how “belief in God ... is needed to explain the very possibility” of the foregoing account of rationality (p. 189). Fundamentally, there are three “necessary conditions for theological philosophy”: transcendence, Trinity, and Incarnation. First, the existence of a single *summum bonum* that is not reducible to any of the finite goods we encounter in our experience is secured by divine transcendence in a classical sense alone (not its alternatives in pantheism, panentheism, polytheism, onto-theology, etc.). Here Schumacher invokes Aquinas’s teaching on divine simplicity (pp. 72–75). Second, the Trinity affirms “to the fullest possible extent God’s ability to express himself as the simple and indeed self-communicating God” (p. 80). Through a certain (Franciscan?) reading of the psychological analogy, and the necessity of the highest good being a self-communicating good, Schumacher argues that the Trinity discloses God’s ability to know, express, and will himself as the highest good. Third, the doctrine of the Incarnation reveals God as the Trinity and how “a rational life in accordance with the highest or common good is strictly speaking a life that involves imitating God’s Son by expressing the spirit received through his creative work to the glory of God the Father” (pp. 88–89). So construed, the Christian faith offers a “rationale for rationality”.

Schumacher proceeds to offer more detail about how faith in the Trinity revealed in Christ promotes the intellectually and morally virtuous life, which is, under the auspices of faith, synonymous with “life in God” (*Theological Philosophy*, p. 190). She devotes two chapters to what she calls “creedal reasoning” that seek to develop ways in which Christian doctrines promote the way of life revealed in Christ: we become what we are meant to be only by imitating the Son in expressing our “spirit” to the glory of the Father (it’s unclear what the parallel of “spirit” with “Spirit” does). Finally, the argument concludes in an account of how the theological virtues of faith, hope, and especially love solidify the intellectual and moral virtues to promote a “rational” existence (p. 163–85). Ultimately, this way of life is exemplified in the church as a community of love testifying to the reality of God in their midst.

There is much commendable and profitable in this work, but it prompted mixed reactions from this reader. Some of this owes to a discernable ambivalence in the text regarding its ambition and its moderation. Schumacher’s stated aim of offering a positive account of rationality without being “defensive” is fine as it goes, but something of a critical edge is missing without a searching assessment of the wider terrain. Resourcing the Thomist tradition to offer a solution to contemporary issues is welcome, but surely some engagement with the challenges to that tradition is necessary in a work that seeks “a full-scale re-configuration of philosophy” (*Theological Philosophy*, p. 2). These scruples aside, the first volume in particular offers a coherent and comprehensive account of a broadly Thomist construal of rationality’s and virtue’s mutual dependencies.

Another concern arises from the occasionally curious handling of doctrinal materials in the second volume’s discussion of “creedal reasoning” (chs. 4–5). Suffice to say, internal tensions—inconsistencies, even—threaten to undermine her accounts of suffering, human nature’s intrinsic goodness, and the reconciling purpose of the cross. Since it’s unclear whether this takes away from the work’s material claims vis-à-vis virtue and rationality, there is little need to dwell on these issues further.

More to the point of the author's concerns, I would like to raise a question about the possible role of the aesthetic with reference to theological philosophy's "necessary conditions." Schumacher claims that the doctrine of the Trinity, as revealed in Christ, "fully enacts" the possibility of human rationality and is therefore its "arbiter" (*Theological Philosophy*, p. 191). No doubt, Schumacher shows ably how faith in the Trinity is *conducive* to the life of virtue, and thus to rationality. However, this falls short of identifying the Trinity as a *necessary* condition of human rationality. Perhaps I've missed something in all of this. To be fair, Schumacher offers many qualifiers: the Trinity is "seemingly" or "arguably necessary," "provides an exceptionally profound explanation" for rationality, is "essential" to understanding the transcendent (pp. 192, 16, 95). Again: "there is a level on which an account of the reality of a single transcendent being necessitates an appeal to a Trinity of divine persons," and "only in terms of God's Trinitarian nature" may we say that God makes "himself known not only to himself but also outside himself, to us" (pp. 16, 74). One detects an almost transcendental argument for the doctrine in such statements. All the same, for Schumacher, the Trinity is a *necessary* condition of theological philosophy (p. 65). What are we to make of this?

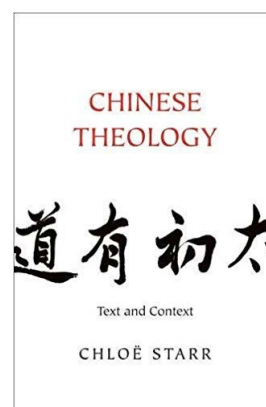
Depending on which of these qualifications is normative, there may be two ways of reading the argument. On the one hand, the argument may get no further than setting forth a notion of the transcendent, self-diffusive good as the necessary arbiter of human rationality (Schumacher doesn't establish that only trinitarian doctrine renders divine absoluteness and relativity self-consistent, though I think there is a way of making this argument). On the other hand, "necessity" might signal an implicit, albeit insufficiently clear, appeal to a principle of "fittingness." It seems to me the latter is the most plausible way to invoke the Trinity in this argument. Fittingness is, after all, a kind of aesthetic necessity that nevertheless keeps the intelligibility of the Trinity outside the ambit of "necessary reasons" (cf. Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* Ia.32.1.ad2). The author does locate her project within the context of a Christian culture, or "way of life"—*oikonomia*, one might say. And such contextualization is the prerequisite for discerning fittingness. However, absent any such appeal, I suspect Schumacher's proposal would easily share more in common with "rationalist" exercises in "natural theology," against which she positions her argument, than she admits or perhaps intends. I do not mean to suggest the proposal would fail on this account, only that its center of gravity would put it in orbit with projects that are not "necessarily" dependent on Christian distinctives. Schumacher's critique of analytic philosophers of religion and "natural theologians" is that they fail to make good on their aim of "forging a natural and necessary connection between beliefs about the Christian God and the object of attempts to establish the rationality of theistic belief" (*Rationality as Virtue*, p. 5). In pursuing greater material correspondence between the conditions for rationality and the articles of faith, however, does Schumacher wish to forge such "natural and necessary" connections? She states that theological philosophy offers "a larger framework in which the connection between theistic proof and specifically Christian beliefs is integral," where "proof" has a primarily moral, therapeutic, and pedagogical character (p. 5). But if this were Schumacher's aim, to what extent would the resultant project avoid such "rationalism"? This is not to say that I share the author's characterization of natural theology as inherently rationalist; both terms beg for nuance. I only wish to state the confusion, which might very well be entirely my own.

How far Schumacher’s proposed philosophy is “theological” therefore remains uncertain. Nevertheless, we may be grateful to Schumacher for posing the question and essaying an answer from which there is much to learn.

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Chloë Starr. *Chinese Theology: Text and Context*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016. xiii + 373 pp. £36.00/\$50.00.

Chloë Starr, associate professor of Asian Christianity and theology at Yale Divinity School, offers a fresh approach to studying the nature of Chinese theology. In this book, she situates Chinese theology—particularly its literary, academic and liberal manifestations—within the history of Chinese literary texts and its specific historical contexts. Starr argues that Chinese theology proceeded from and was necessarily interwoven with native literary genres and writing styles. In her view, it would be a mistake to interpret Chinese theology through the prism of Western systematic theology. In fact, Starr observes that Chinese theology seldom developed into systematic forms; even when it did, “its methods or interests may be unorthodox,” especially when seen through Western eyes (p. 280). Consequently, Chinese theology was “sinicized much earlier ... than church structures” (p. 40), as it was “organized and categorized along various [Chinese literary and philosophical] principles” (p. 280).



This monograph is generally divided into three chronological sections, comprising ten content chapters. Broadly, the three chronological sections are (1) Late Imperial to Republican China, (2) People’s Republic of China (PRC) from the 1950s to 1960s and, (3) PRC from the Reform era to present day. In order to highlight the tightly-knit relationship between theology and native literary forms, Starr devotes three chapters to in-depth discussions about the respective historical context of each period, examining the general state of theological thinking in connection with broader ecclesiastical, social and political circumstances. Her other seven chapters are case studies—in particular, textual and theological analyses—of prominent Christian thinkers and their writing(s).

The overall impact of such an approach is impressive. In particular, this can be seen in the first five chapters covering the writings of notable Catholics like Matteo Ricci and Xu Zongze, as well as prominent liberal Protestant thinkers like Zhao Zichen and Wu Leichuan. The case of Zhao is demonstrative of Starr’s adroit analysis. She illustrates how Zhao combined specific indigenous writing strategies with his theological views to produce an appealing native theology that resonated with intellectuals of his generation. Through his well-known work *Life of Jesus*, Starr shows how Zhao drew on the Chinese tradition of biographies to introduce a critical reading of a demythologized “historical Jesus.” By reconstruing Jesus as a human who gradually came to a self-understanding of his mission as Messiah, Starr observes that he produced a reinterpretation of the person of Christ that cohered with the Zeitgeist of the May Fourth era. This was strengthened by his employment of specific classical reading strategies that moulded Jesus into a “benevolent” teacher who could act as a “model for a constructive cultural engagement” (pp. 96–97).

There are several merits to Starr's approach. First, her inter-textual analysis is highly instructive as she draws on copious literary evidence and her deep knowledge of Chinese literature and philosophy to underline the extensive linkages that the selected theological texts shared with Chinese writings. Second, her analytical methods enable her to carefully evaluate the relationship between theology and texts. For instance, she shows how theology conformed to native textual forms while expressing its ideas with Chinese concerns in mind. Accordingly, this allows her to come to the conclusion that Chinese theological writings were considerable works that can be legitimately conceived as part of the Chinese textual tradition. In the end, I agree with Starr that there is a need for scholars to pay more attention to the textual sinicization of theology as written forms were one of the first avenues whereby Christian ideas were translated, negotiated and appropriated for the Chinese readership. Neglecting these issues would be akin to omitting the most fundamental episodes of the sinicization of Christianity in China.

One minor grievance can be raised about Starr's work: the case study presented in Chapter 9 ("Yang Huilin: An Academic Search for Meaning") about Yang Huilin, a pioneering figure in Sino-Christian theology studies, does not really meet the excellent standards of the other chapters (though she provides a useful overview of this new field). This is because her treatment of Yang's eclectic employment of Western and Chinese intellectual resources to understand Scripture does not enable the reader to fully grasp the major Chinese elements of Yang's interpretive toolkit; instead it reads more like a philosophical examination of his hermeneutics. It is only at the conclusion of the chapter where Starr observes that his "textual web" and "non-linear" hermeneutical model "reflects traditional Chinese textual practice in its patterns of thinking" (pp. 261–62).

A comment can also be made about one limitation of this study. Given that Starr is largely concerned with how "Christian thought is conceptualized in Chinese textual modes" (p. 11), the question of whether these writings had any influence on Chinese literary patterns has been generally neglected. Perhaps, an extended treatment of the texts on the basis of this question could enrich the book's conclusion, allowing her to evaluate how techniques like historical criticism may have played a role in altering or transforming Chinese literary patterns and genres.

Due to Chinese theology's lack of prominence in the English-speaking world, most readers of this journal might find the contents of this monograph unfamiliar. Nevertheless, Starr's work serves both as a starting point as well as a historical case study that allows readers to not only become acquainted with an important expression of East Asian Christianity, but to also better apprehend what renowned mission historian Andrew Walls has called the "infinitely translatable" capacity of Christianity when it enters new cultures (*The Missionary Movement in Christian History* [Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1996], 25).

Finally, it must be acknowledged that Starr's study is illuminating and innovative, making a noteworthy contribution to scholarship on Chinese Christianity. By contrast, most studies on Chinese theology have placed more emphasis on ideas and thought. Indeed, when compared to these older studies, Starr's primary argument about the interconnectedness of theology and text is provocative and refreshing, providing us with a methodological platform to deepen and widen our understanding of Chinese theology.

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— ETHICS AND PASTORALIA —

Sam Chan, *Preaching as the Word of God: Answering an Old Question with Speech-Act Theory*. Eugene: Pickwick, 2016. 292 pp. £26.99/\$35.00.

The Reformer Heinrich Bullinger asserted, “The preaching of the Word of God is the Word of God,” and he followed this with the claim, “Wherefore when this Word of God is now preached in the church by preachers lawfully called, we believe that the very word of God is preached, and received by the faithful.” (*The Second Helvetic Confession*, 1566)

Sam Chan’s book is a serious, comprehensive and contemporary study of this famous Reformation claim that preaching the Word is the Word. He begins with an instructive study of this claim in the theology of Martin Luther and John Calvin, and he shows the biblical and theological structure of this notion in their writings and ministry. He then turns to the Bible and uncovers material which supports this claim, promised in the Old Testament and fulfilled in the New, especially in the context of the proclamation of the gospel. He points to the preached gospel as the Word of God (p. 79). Next he investigates the intention and results of preaching as found in the Bible itself. All this covers material which has been studied by others, but Chan brings it together with particular clarity.

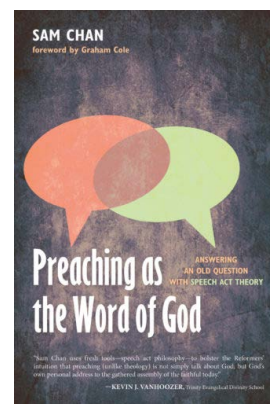
He then turns to contemporary speech-act theory, which investigates how human language functions. In particular, it shows that human language includes: *locution*, the act of saying; *illocution*, the act performed in saying; and *perlocution*, what is achieved by saying. Speech-act theory has been developed by J. L. Austin and J. R. Searle. Within Christian thought it has been variously used by Kevin Vanhoozer, Gordon McConville, and Nicholas Wolterstorff to develop a theology of how the Bible serves and functions as the Word of God. One of the great values of this approach is that it focuses on what the Bible was doing, or rather, what God was doing through those words. It is good to ask of a Bible passage, “What do these words mean?” It is even more profitable to ask “What was God doing or working to achieve through these words?” and, “What is God doing or working to achieve through these words to this congregation today?”

This is such a useful insight, as I think that the three great claims the Bible makes for itself are its power, authority, and truth/trustworthiness. If the Bible had/has no power, preachers would have to work very hard, and so would hearers! Sam Chan uses this speech-act theory to explain what happens when we preach the Bible, and in particular what happens when we preach the gospel:

To preach the gospel as the word of God is to re-locute and re-illocute the divine speech act, the gospel, which itself was once locuted and illocuted by the prophets, Jesus, and the apostles, and which now continues to be locuted and illocuted in the canonical Scripture.

On the same page he adds, “The preaching ought to have the same locutionary force, illocutionary force, and intended perlocutionary effect ... as that of the Bible passage being expounded” (p. 223).

All this is to say that when God speaks in human words, those words function in ways which conform to the way that other human words function. Of course they are also divine words, but they are



not less than human words in the way they function. We make a similar observation about the literary styles or genres of biblical literature. When used by God they commonly retain the normal patterns of their genres. The strength of Chan's book is to apply the insights of speech-act theory that has been applied to the Scriptures themselves to the preaching of those Scriptures. His study illuminates many aspects of preaching, and supports the claim that the preached word of God *is* the word of God. This claim reminds me of an apt description of the preaching of John Donne: "a projection of the eloquence of Scripture" (John Chamberlin, *Increase and Multiply* [Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press], 28).

The book demands concentrated reading, but is well worth the effort. For those who want to think further on these matters, the book prompted the following questions:

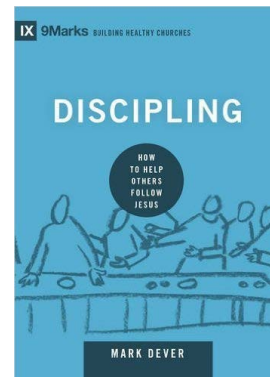
- There are some suggestions in Scripture that the God who originally spoke these words continues to speak them today (e.g. Matt 23:31–32; Acts 7:38; Heb 3:7; 1 Pet 1:23). When we read merely human texts, the authors are not now speaking them to us. But if God is still speaking the same words to us at the moment we read them, does this influence the functioning of these words?
- In most instances today, the Bible we study, read, and preach is a translated Bible. What effect does this have on the locution, illocution and perlocution of the text? What is lost in translation, and what effect does translation have? (This relates to both reading and preaching the Scriptures.)
- Literary style or genre is an essential element of rhetoric. The human rhetoric of the Scriptures was the product of divine verbal inspiration. So is it helpful to claim that the effects achieved by human rhetoric in other literature are replaced by the work of the Spirit in the case of the Bible (pp. 88, 204)? Did the Spirit not inspire and use the human rhetoric of the Bible?
- The same claim that Chan makes about re-locution, re-illocution and perlocution in regard to preaching the Scriptures could be made about reading them, especially their public reading in church. What are the differences between Scripture *read* and Scripture *preached*, according to speech-act theory?
- Furthermore, literary style or genre is an essential feature of locution, illocution, and perlocution. However, there is a difference between the straightforward *reading* of the Scriptures and the *preaching* of the Scriptures. In reading the Bible, locution, illocution and perlocution is preserved, whereas in preaching the style is changed, even if the preacher attempts to convey aspects of that style in the sermon. Does this influence the claims that we can make about preaching?
- Is not the rhetorical style of the Bible changed when the Bible is preached, even when the preacher attempts to retain some aspects of the original text by reflecting them in the sermon? For the rhetoric of the Scriptures is supplemented, complemented, and transformed (if not side-lined!) by the rhetoric used by the preacher in the sermon.

This is a worthwhile and stimulating book, and I recommend it highly.

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Mark Dever, *Discipling: How to Help Others Follow Jesus*. 9Marks: Building Healthy Churches. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016. 128 pp. £9.99/\$14.99.

Over the last several years, Crossway has published the 9Marks: Building Healthy Churches series of books. This series is by and large an explanation of the ministry that has grown out of Mark Dever's well-known ministry at Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, D.C. As I wrote in an earlier review of the first seven volumes in this series, these tools provide a concise and clear introduction to the centrality and importance of a healthy local church (*Themelios* 40 [2015]: 181–84, <http://themelios.thegospelcoalition.org/review/9marks-expositional-preaching-how-we-speak-gods-word-today>). The recent addition by Mark Dever, *Discipling: How to Help Others Follow Jesus*, is a worthy contribution to the overall goal of the series.



The structure of this short book is straightforward. In the first section, Dever defines discipleship, provides an explanation of it from the Bible, and answers some possible objections. In short, discipling is “helping others to follow Jesus by doing deliberate spiritual good to them” (p. 19), and the clearest pattern we see for this in Scripture is the example of Jesus and his apostles. Since this book is in the “Building Healthy Churches” series, it should not be surprising that in the second section Dever argues that the primary context for discipleship should be the local church. In the last part of the book, he outlines some basic patterns for discipleship and emphasizes that the discipleship process is the primary way to raise up leaders in the church.

The conclusion of the book is not actually written by Dever, but instead by the long-time Robin to his Batman, Jonathan Leeman. Even those who only know of Dever's ministry from a distance often hear about the pastoral internship program and other discipleship programs at Capitol Hill Baptist. Leeman explains how Dever's discipling ministry has been marked by “exercising authority and giving away authority” (p. 105). That is to say, Leeman explains how Dever models the way every disciple-maker and disciple should understand how to use authority to help others follow Jesus and to how to hand off authority to others for the same purpose. The proper use of authority (both in its exercise and its transference) is in short supply in the world today. If this book encourages better use of authority, it has served us well.

As I mentioned, this is a short book, so I do not intend to write a disproportionately long review. However, apart from what I have mentioned above, I would like to highlight one point and raise an additional issue a reader might consider while reading the book.

While there are many books on discipleship, it is unlikely that few of them emphasize the local church to the degree that Dever does in this book. While he does mention the need for parachurch ministries to submit their disciple-making efforts to the local church, he emphasizes the need for local churches to ensure that they are in fact committed to discipleship. “If it's unwise to do discipling without a church, it's worse to do church without discipling. Yet isn't that the case with many local churches?” (p. 52). Sadly, the answer is often yes.

Dever's solution is not to restructure the church or advocate for some new ecclesiological structure, but instead to lean into what the church was always supposed to do, *but with an eye toward discipleship*. The weekly gathering should help others follow Jesus. Baptism and the Lord's Supper should help others

follow Jesus. Our regular interactions with each other should help others follow Jesus. Being intentional about orienting these things toward discipleship should slowly transform the culture in a church.

Discipleship, however, does not stop with these “regular events.” Dever also encourages the intentional, focused relationships built around one-on-one meetings that have clear aims and outcomes in view. While I have benefitted greatly from being in both the “junior” and “senior” role in these kinds of discipleship relationships, my fear with this pattern is that we can check the discipleship box by having a 30-minute meeting every other week. But if we are truly rooting these relationships in the context of the local church, we can help fight against this tendency.

By bringing our discipleship relationships out of the corner table at Starbucks and into our Sunday morning gatherings and beyond, we will multiply the benefit of those Starbucks meetings exponentially. This is precisely the pattern Dever describes in *Discipling*. As you read this book, be careful not to separate the tips for how to disciple from the primary context for discipleship: the local church. All of the patterns of a healthy church complement and support each other, and when the practices taught in this short book are placed alongside the other healthy church patterns taught in this series, then you and your local church will benefit greatly as a result.

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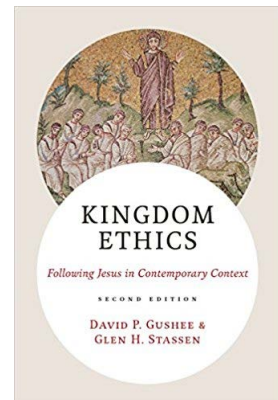
David P. Gushee and Glen H. Stassen. *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016. 550 pp. £28.99/\$40.00.

David Gushee and Glen Stassen present us an ethics text in the “Red Letter”/“Social Gospel” tradition. They met as student and professor, respectively, at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in the 1980s, and later served as colleagues at Southern in the 1990s, before moving on to other positions. Both found the changes wrought by the Southern Baptist “conservative resurgence” uncongenial, and the SBC comes under criticism in this work (p. 235).

The first edition was published by InterVarsity Press in 2003. As Gushee reports in the preface to this second edition, it has sold more than 30,000 English copies and been translated into eight languages. *Christianity Today* honored it in 2004 as the year’s best book in theology/ethics.

Stassen died in 2014, so Gushee has finished this edition alone, with occasional reference to Stassen’s thinking in recent years. (For that reason, when citing passages, I speak of “he” rather than “they,” since the version we have before us is ultimately Gushee’s.) Another signal development, reflected in this edition, is Gushee’s affirmation of homosexuality, which he explained in a 2014 book, *Changing Our Mind* (Canton, MI: David Crumm Media). This, of course, prompts fresh scrutiny of his approach to ethics, one that issues in conclusions so divergent from biblical tradition.

We see in Part 1 (chs. 1–9), that Isaiah 61 (the “good news to the poor” passage, with which Jesus identified in the Nazareth synagogue in Luke 4) and Matthew 5–7 (the Sermon on the Mount) are central to his argument that the Kingdom is the point to Jesus’s life and work. And by his account, the



“seven marks of this kingdom” are “deliverance/salvation, justice, peace, healing, restoration/rebuilding of community, joy, and the experience of God’s presence” (p. 10).

He insists that the Sermon on the Mount is not meant to spell out an impossible standard which drives us to a despair relieved only by God’s saving grace (p. 94). Rather, each teaching is triadic and socially hopeful, moving from “traditional righteousness” (“You shall not kill”), to a “sinful pattern” (“being angry”), and finally to a “transforming initiative” (“Be reconciled”) (p. 95). Even the seemingly daunting precept in 5:48 (“Be perfect”) is actually just a call to be ethnically sensitive across the board (p. 101).

He is equally impatient with those who take “render unto Caesar” as an excuse to quarantine Kingdom work, limiting it to personal piety, home, and church. Instead, he says that this teaching was merely meant to stave off violent revolution and not to delineate spheres of authority (p. 141).

His “red letter” approach marginalizes the Epistles, though he makes some effort to correlate Paul’s teaching with his agenda. In this vein, he flirts with the sort of fallacious “argument from silence” that claims the church should embrace the culture’s shifting views on sexuality because “Jesus never addressed this.”

By focusing on the pre-crucifixion/resurrection/Pentecost words of Jesus, Gushee marginalizes the evangelistic riches of Acts and the epistles. Indeed, he can be dismissive of those keen to ask, “If you died tonight, do you know you would go to heaven?,” those who favor “born again” and “other worldly” language, and who focus on “churchy accomplishments like baptisms and filled sanctuaries (pp. 18–19).” He argues that the spiritual action should be centered on justice and community, items before us in this world.

Gushee might have spent time reflecting on how “churchy accomplishments” of the “born again” (from Pentecost to the Great Awakenings) have generated vast social transformation through the centuries. But he needs to keep the revivalists and “Roman Roaders” at arm’s length if he wants to stay on track, since they have an annoying tendency to befuddle the masses with pietistic opioids and to arrive at ethical conclusions at odds with his. He communicates the sense that *Evangelism Explosion* results in Kingdom Implosion, and he has a following.

As he digs into the topics, he also demeans the “casuists,” who wish to provide a scheme for computing duties, but he’s crafted a scheme of his own, with “Key Method Elements for Kingdom Ethics” (pp. 190–91), whose tenets honor his “seven marks” of the Kingdom. Thus, we must factor in the voice of the disinherited and oppressed, personal character, Christ-centeredness, a rule/principle/base rubric, Sermon-on-the-Mount centrality, transforming initiatives, the cardinality of love, the cardinality of human dignity, and a “four-box” diagram (p. 173), useful for both analysis and prescription, which takes into account the complexity of “conviction sets” and passions and loyalties.

What you get is a “Swiss Army knife” with dozens of blades and tools, which Gushee may deploy at his pleasure, and we can only guess at which one he might deem appropriate for the issue at hand. And aren’t some tools missing? Where is the church-discipline-for-the-sake-of-congregational-integrity device? And should there be an index listing for “holiness” other than “Holy war/crusade tradition”?

Having laid out an ornate system of angles in the first half of the book, in Part 2 he offers a number of chapters on particular issues. In chapter 11, he argues for “restorative justice” instead of retribution (p. 232), thus opposing the death penalty. In this connection, he indicts us for systemic racism (p. 216) and observes that all executions in the New Testament were unjust (another argument from silence). Furthermore, he fails to engage the arguments of such capital punishment proponents as C. S. Lewis

and Bishop Joseph Butler, and, in discussing Genesis 9:6, he sticks to the first half of the verse, ignoring the part that grounds retribution in the *imago Dei* (pp. 221–23).

In chapter 12, he pleads the egalitarian cause, noting that Jesus elevated the status of women, putting the blame for lust on men (p. 237). Here, Paul doesn't fare so well, for he was laboring under the "deeply ingrained patriarchy" of his context (p. 238). Not surprisingly, hundreds of interpreters have "puzzled over the nuances of Paul's perspective" (p. 238). In this chapter, Gushee goes on to discuss gender-identity questions, and says that inclusion and concern for the "underside of history" commend the most accommodating stance to reduce their suffering (p. 249).

Regarding sexual ethics, in chapter 13, he states that "there must be sexual exclusivity in marriage," and makes application to pornography and inappropriate familiarity with a non-spouse. He affirms singleness and celibacy but apparently allows for some cases of premarital sex within committed relationships, appreciatively citing Karen Lebacqz's argument that ties sexual expression to "appropriate vulnerability" (pp. 263–64).

This chapter also follows Gushee's shift on homosexuality. Whereas the first edition read, "Homosexual conduct is one form of sexual expression that falls outside the will of God," he now takes a "revisionist," i.e., "affirming" position (p. 267n1), saying the conflict is a tossup, "with both loyalties [to Christian tradition and to LGBT people] capable of being grounded in some account of 'what the Bible says'" (p. 268). (Of course, that is true of any heresy or Scripture-twisting ethic.)

Regarding marriage and divorce, he ends chapter 14 inconclusively, having repeatedly disparaged "legalism or rule-and-exception casuistry" (p. 279), the approach taken by those who "demonstrate little sensitivity to the human context in which all Christian ethics is done and the chaos that is out there (p. 272)." So citing several Key Method Elements, including honoring Jesus's "manner" and human "experience," he pushes aside efforts to find criteria in Mark 10, Matthew 5, and 1 Corinthians 7, and *focuses* (an expression he uses repeatedly to hone in on what he likes and marginalize rules and principles he finds lacking) on marriage building and reconciliation, both of which are fine. But he leaves the pastor in the lurch when it comes to policy, whether the issue is remarriage or ordination. (By this time, one gets the impression that notions like justice, love, and experience, when deployed according to his wisdom, supply a universal solvent for dissolving traditional scruples.)

Writing on truthful speech in chapter 15, he defends lying to those who've broken the covenant of honesty, whether the offender is an evil regime or a slave master (p. 300). As for war, chapter 16, he opts for a form of just war ("just peacemaking"), but only after tortured discussion, consonant with the zealous pacifism Stassen espoused.

Chapter 17 commends prayer, and in chapter 18, he approaches economics in Sider-like fashion, disparaging greed, income inequality, globalization, consumerism, acquisitiveness, executive salaries, competition, capitalism, and "the idolatry of the market" (p. 372). His answer centers on redistributing wealth and applying Sermon on the Mount teachings to public policy. It is curious that, in pressing his point that "Jesus identified with the poor," he didn't engage, if only to marginalize, such warnings to the idle poor as Proverbs 6:11 and 2 Thessalonians 3:10.

On creation care (chapter 19), he shows his affinity with the Christians and Climate group, and distances himself from the Cornwall Alliance perspectives. On this road, he signed the former's Evangelical Call to Action (along with, for example, Leith Anderson, Andy Crouch, Timothy George, Brian McLaren, Richard Mouw, and Jim Wallis), and didn't sign the latter's Declaration on Global Warming (whose signatories include Wayne Grudem, Richard Land, Tony Perkins, R. C. Sproul, Bruce

Ware, and David Wells). In presenting his “earthkeeper stewardship” (p. 389), he faults a range of offenders, from the Gaia movement to the auto industry. (One assumes that the fossil fuels used by the trucks delivering his books and the chemicals needed to prepare and print the four-color, coated-paper cover, fell within Gushee’s guidelines for environmental acceptability.)

In chapter 20, he embraces “critical race theory,” which disparages “color blindness” and dwells on “white privilege.” The current chapter 21, on bioethics, combines three chapters from the first edition. In it, Gushee says we should act if the child were a person from the moment of conception (p. 423), but he is not so decisive when it comes to law, leaving room for disagreement (pp. 427–28); with circumspection, he defends the use contraception and reproductive technologies, such as in-vitro fertilization (p. 431, 434). Regarding end-of-life decisions, he opposes active euthanasia, with allowance for withdrawing or withholding care, making sure that the person is palliated (p. 440).

Reading this book, pencil in hand, makes for very slow going, as one stops again and again to make marginal notes, with a range of questions and challenges. For example:

- Does your no-exceptions approach to waterboarding (an issue he and I debated at ETS) honor your explore-all-the-angles program, or does it consign you to casuistic legalism?
- Is it really fair to say that Bonhoeffer’s attempt to assassinate Hitler “violated Christian character and commands about murder” (p. 83), when “murder” means the killing of an innocent person, which Hitler was not?
- Isn’t it a cheap shot to say that the vast majority of so-called high-use death penalty states rest within the former Confederacy? (p. 218)

I’ve used the image of a multi-tool knife, but I’d also suggest the idea of an exotic slot machine with windows for at least a dozen images. When it comes up all pineapples, you hit the jackpot. And, for example, that’s what happened for Gushee when he pulled the LGBT lever. All twelve of his criteria came through supportively, and he was ankle deep in coins. This satisfies some. But for most, he has performed an elaborate reduction to absurdity for the “multilayer, multimode model” he describes and commends in this book (p. 83).

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Paul R. House. *Bonhoeffer's Seminary Vision: A Case for Costly Discipleship and Life Together*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015. 208 pp. £11.99/\$17.99.

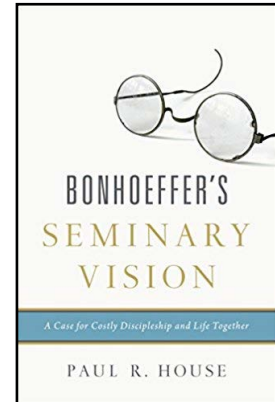
Paul House's book on *Bonhoeffer's Seminary Vision* grows out of his many years of investment in "personal, incarnational theological education" (p. 11) and his long-term interest in Bonhoeffer's life and writings. He sees in Bonhoeffer's seminary vision an example and perhaps a corrective to trends in seminary education today. This work aims to discern Bonhoeffer's "theology of seminary ministry and to consider if or how to apply his theology and practice to our current situation" (p. 15). House notes that with all the interest in Bonhoeffer, the focus is on him as a pastor, ecumenist, theologian, and member of the Resistance. His biographers tend to neglect his role as a seminary educator.

In chapter 1 House addresses this neglect by pondering the reasons why his biographers may have written so little on this important period in his life, and in so doing makes a valuable contribution to the study of Bonhoeffer's thought and labors. "This book attempts to do two things. First it tries to examine Bonhoeffer's theology and practice of theological education in their original context. Second, it endeavors to assert the biblical necessity of personal, incarnational, face-to-face education for the health of pastors and churches" (p. 29).

In the next chapter, House outlines Bonhoeffer's path to seminary ministry. House briefly sketches why he left the lecture hall to become a seminary director, introduces his students and the places the seminary met, the schedule the seminary kept, and the curriculum Bonhoeffer oversaw (p. 32). House quotes Bonhoeffer: "I no longer believe in the university; in fact, I have never really believed in it.... The next generation of pastors, these days, ought to be trained entirely in church-monastic schools, where the pure doctrine, the Sermon on the Mount, and worship are taken seriously" (p. 41).

Chapter 3, the longest chapter in the book, is House's effort to focus attention on *Cost of Discipleship*. The German title, *Nachfolge*, which is best translated, *Following*, better captures Bonhoeffer's intention for the book. In House's words, "Christian life and ministry require following Jesus, whatever that means at any concrete moment, according to what the Bible teaches" (p. 58). Themes of discipleship and the Sermon on the Mount had long gripped Bonhoeffer, but it was his first two years as seminary director at Finkenwalde where he brought it all together, teaching it, and preparing it for publication in 1937. This chapter insightfully unpacks this classic and shows how it was applied in its original context and how it applies to seminary life today.

Chapter 4 is devoted to helping the reader understand how Bonhoeffer's *Life Together* was written primarily with seminary life as the primary focus. House lets *Life Together* open the window on Bonhoeffer's convictions about "ministerial formation in visible seminaries" (p. 102). He unpacks the five chapters of the book and shows how Bonhoeffer viewed the seminary, like other communities of faith, as a visible community of the Body of Christ. In 1937 *Cost of Discipleship* was completed. Bonhoeffer's own experience of this cost intensified with the Gestapo closing down Finkenwalde and the Brother's House where "life together" was forged. The political situation leading to the outbreak of World War II was escalating. Amidst these pressures Bonhoeffer devoted four weeks to write the first draft of *Life Together*. House spells out what Bonhoeffer means by the seminary (and the church) being the visible body of Christ and how this community is both a gift and a challenge. House also pulls together what a day in the life of the seminary community looked like with its spiritual disciplines, its academic study,



its solitude, its service and its rest and recreation. He closes this chapter by drawing implications for seminaries today as incarnational communities.

In chapter 5, House moves beyond *Cost of Discipleship* and *Life Together* to focus on briefer writings such as sermons and letters composed by Bonhoeffer in the final phase of his service as seminary director (1937–1940). House calls them “short gems devoted to specific sequential aspects of the enduring, faithful life of Christian service” (p. 144). Bonhoeffer emphasized during this period the need for the Confessing Church and his former and current students to persevere in faithfulness amidst increasingly difficult circumstances. This chapter also includes Bonhoeffer’s decision to take an opportunity to go to the United States for a year. He went, but then returned after only a month. He regretted his decision to leave Germany and desired to come back to “the joy in the work at home.” A significant portion of this chapter recounts Bonhoeffer’s extended Christ-centered meditations on Psalm 119.

In the sixth and final chapter, House concludes his insightful and provocative study of Bonhoeffer’s seminary work reflecting on “some possibilities for incarnational seminaries” experiencing “life together today” (p. 183). He discusses the pitfalls of distance education, shares thoughts on the size of seminaries, the importance of church-based internship programs, the uses of electronic devices, and the list could go on. House’s passion for Bonhoeffer-inspired incarnational seminary education is summed up in this chapter but is woven throughout this excellent work.

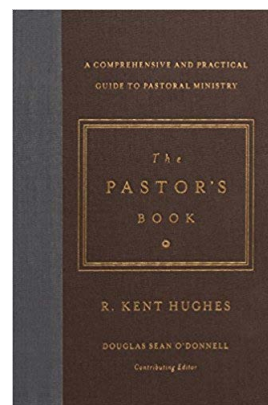
One cannot help but be inspired by *Bonhoeffer’s Seminary Vision: A Case for Costly Discipleship and Life Together*. Passion for the church and the preparation of its shepherds exudes not only from Bonhoeffer but from Paul House as well. Bonhoeffer’s vision resonates deeply with the vision of Bethlehem College & Seminary, the church-based school at which I serve. My hope is that in reading this work there will be a growing commitment to Bonhoeffer’s and House’s vision, to seek to experience “life together” while not shrinking back from the “cost of discipleship” as we seek first the Kingdom of God. May House’s book be read and contextualized by the movers and shakers in our seminaries.

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R. Kent Hughes. *The Pastor’s Book: A Comprehensive and Practical Guide to Pastoral Ministry*. Edited by Douglas S. O’Donnell. Wheaton, IL; Crossway, 2015. 592 pp. £26.99/\$45.00.

R. Kent Hughes, a well-recognized evangelical pastor and author of many valuable pastoral resources, has written *The Pastors Book* in order to provide guidance and outlines for the various tasks that pastors perform. While the book is broadly evangelical, with suggestions from several contributors of varying denominational affiliations, it assumes that the majority of its readers will be from the free-church tradition (p. 29).

Hughes divides his book into three sections: “Christian Gatherings,” “Parts of the Worship Service,” and “Ministerial Duties.” The lengths of these sections are 233, 203, and 77 pages respectively. In addition, Hughes provides an Appendix containing several sample wedding services, suggestions for further reading, and a few helpful online resources accessible through crossway.com.



Although Hughes authors most of the book, Douglas O'Donnell contributes three chapters, Robert Evans writes another, and several others contribute sections within the chapters.

The first section, "Christian Gatherings," contains chapters on Sunday worship, annual services, weddings, and funerals. The book begins by establishing a theology of worship that embodies all of life and is characterized by reverence for God and his Word. In contrast to proponents of the "seeker-sensitive movement," the contributors warn against letting pragmatism, not biblicism, dictate the Sunday morning service. The sample service outlines provide a window into how other churches structure a service and why they do so. Especially helpful are the sections discussing weddings and funerals. With extended explanations, Hughes answers difficult questions. For example, with funerals he advises that generally the casket should be open, the ceremony should be at the church, cremation is permissible, etc.

Part 2, "Parts of the Worship Service," contains chapters on the topics of public prayers, the historic Christian creeds, hymns and songs, baptism, and communion. Each section contains a brief theological explanation of the topic and rationale for the inclusion of each of these elements into the regular corporate worship of the church. These chapters are characterized by wisdom developed over decades of ministry. For example, in ch. 7 O'Donnell advises that lyrics of congregational songs (1) should reflect biblical lyrics, (2) should edify others and exalt God, (3) should raise religious affections, not ridiculous emotionalism, and (4) should be theologically comprehensive and balanced (pp. 344–51). Creeds should be included for at least these reasons: to affirm the essentials, to emphasize continuity with historic orthodoxy, and to provide a familiar reference for visitors from other Christian backgrounds (pp. 175, 317). In some of these sections, particularly on baptism (ch. 8), it is helpful to read the differing theological viewpoints of the authors, with Hughes being baptistic and O'Donnell being a paedobaptist. The 53-page chapter on public prayers is worth the price of the book. Instead of treating prayer as something that is always spontaneous and unprepared, Hughes challenges pastors to prepare their public prayers and provides samples of different types of prayers.

The third section, "Ministerial Duties," focuses on the duties of pastoral counseling and hospital visitation. The pastoral counseling section, spanning 57 pages and authored by Robert E. Evans, is saturated with biblical wisdom and practical advice. His view of pastoral counseling might be characterized as discipleship intensely focused on a particular or neglected area: "the faithful pastoral counselor works in cooperation with the Holy Spirit to help God's people live and grow into maturity in Christ" (p. 471). He provides advice on topics such as the arrangement of the pastor's office, establishing healthy boundaries, receiving referrals, how to begin a counseling session, guiding the session, setting goals, and how to conclude a session. Especially beneficial were the sections on handling emergency situations and when to make a referral. A helpful addition would be to advise on how to navigate the potential legal situations entailed when counseling about issues such as homosexuality and transgenderism. This chapter is a great introduction to pastoral counseling and should serve as an impetus for further reading and training. The brief section on hospital visitation outlines some principles and provides a catalogue of Scriptures relevant for this role.

I wish I would have read this book in my first month of ministry, and I am glad that I have read it now that I am several years into ministry. If I must offer some critique, there are some aspects of congregational life that are absent from this book. In the preface, the contributors note that some topics were omitted for the sake of brevity. But nothing is mentioned concerning the membership of the church which often figures (perhaps even ought to figure) into the Sunday morning congregational

gatherings. I felt an imbalance as 25 pages were devoted to the incorporation of poetry into a service and nothing was mentioned about a membership covenant. Moreover, a helpful addition would be to include some guidance concerning how to conduct a church meeting dealing with church discipline. Also it would have been helpful to have some guidance about the incorporation of church offices, such as (especially lay) elders and deacons, into the services of the church. Many churches also conduct ordination services, but instructions concerning this congregational service are also absent.

My small quibbles about omissions should not overshadow my overwhelming praise for this wonderful handbook. It is thoroughly evangelical, and it is especially helpful if one's denomination does not provide an order of service for formal events. The inclusion of sample services from several denominations gives the reader an insight into how other evangelical churches structure services. Each of the sections begins with a biblical-theological framework for the topic and then proceeds to offer helpful, practical, pastoral advice. I appreciate how the entire book is saturated with a compassionate pastoral heart. For example, the pastor is exhorted not to think of a wedding ceremony, premarital counseling, or a funeral as an interruption to his pastoral duties. Rather, these are portrayed as key moments in people's lives into which the pastor can speak biblical truth. This book also raises issues that a pastor might not think about regularly, such as emergencies in a counseling session, the use of poetry in a service, the incorporation of creeds into congregational life, or the inclusion of military honors at a funeral.

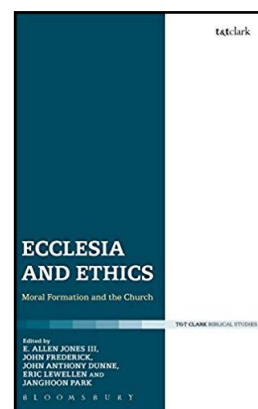
The Pastor's Book is an exceptional reference resource that provides theological understanding, sample structures, and practical advice for many of the tasks that a pastor would be called on to perform. This book will be one of your most treasured resources when you are preparing to perform your first wedding or when the family of a nonbeliever asks you to conduct his funeral. And it also provides new insight and refreshing thoughts for veteran pastors. This book sits in my section of ready reference-works, and it has proven indispensable for fulfilling my pastoral calling.

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E. Allen Jones III, John Frederick, John Anthony Dunne, Eric Lewellen, and Janghoon Park, eds. *Ecclesia and Ethics: Moral Formation and the Church*. London: T&T Clark, 2016. 232 pp. £69.99/\$122.00.

This volume contains thirteen essays gathered from the fifty papers presented at a 2013 conference on the church and ethics hosted by postgraduate students at the University of St. Andrews. The conference was truly international in scope as a "global webinar" that included representatives from many Western nations, but also countries uncommonly represented such as Costa Rica, India, Latvia, Japan, Iraq, and others.

The editors have arranged these thirteen essays into three parts covering different facets of what they call generally "Ecclesial Ethics." Part 1 ("Biblical-Theological Foundations for Ecclesial Ethics") comprises chapters by Dennis Hollinger, Michael Gorman, Brian Rosner, and Mark Baker that address biblical teachings that in some way relate to ethics. Hollinger explores the doctrine of



creation as the foundation for Christian ethics. Gorman offers a snapshot of his arguments for the fundamental cruciformity of Paul's theology. Rosner argues that the metaphor of the church as the temple in 1 Corinthians is central to Paul's ethical teaching and understanding the traditional indicative-imperative balance. Baker offers a brief argument that churches should avoid legalism by focusing on their theological center not theological boundaries.

Part 2 ("Virtue Ethics, Character Formation, and Ecclesial Ethics") contains chapters by Stanley Hauerwas and N.T. Wright, who both present a Christian virtue ethic reading. Hauerwas offers a discussion of the essential role of habituation in the formation and practice of ethics, via reflections on Aristotle and Aquinas. Wright brings together into one essay his thoughts on Paul's eschatology and ethics (adapted from *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013] and *After You Believe* [New York: HarperOne, 2010]).

Part 3 ("Exegesis and Application – Scripture and Praxis of Ecclesial Ethics") is the longest section. The seven chapters discuss a range of biblical texts and ideas and include contributions by Nijay Gupta, S. Min Chun, Mariam J. Kamell, John Frederick, Aaron C. Manby, Michael Rhodes, and Douglas A. Hume (the last of whom is inexplicably omitted from the "List of Contributors"). Gupta asks the question of whether Paul saw himself as aligned with the Great Commission in light of the unexpected lack of "discipleship" language in his letters, offering an affirmative answer with Paul transposing this language into "slaves of Christ" terms. Chun applies the story of Gideon and Abimelech to the contemporary Korean church, seeing strong and needed ethical applications. Kamell offers a careful exploration of the book of James, showing that the ethical habit of humility in relationships is key to ecclesiological health. Frederick uses Paul's cruciform theological ethics (especially from Colossians) to argue for the importance of pursuing reconciliation and love in our interactions on social media. Manby provides a survey of Christian pacifism in the Fathers and exhorts the church today to be involved in fighting social injustice in the same, non-violent way. Rhodes explores the OT habits of the manna narrative, the Jubilee, and the tithe-meal as re-appropriated in several NT texts as models for how the church today should continue to follow these practices regarding economics. Finally, Hume examines the virtues and habits of Acts 2 and 4 and uses the method of "narrative ethics" to encourage today's readers to experience the text deeply and be formed in character by evoking our imaginations.

Reviewing a volume of collected essays is always difficult for many reasons. One problem is that a main criterion for the evaluation of a book is whether there is a clear and pervasive thesis or argument that is being made throughout. Another criterion for evaluation is consistency and quality of the scholarship and writing, which proves challenging in any edited volume.

In terms of the latter (the quality and consistency of the writing), overall the essays in this volume are quite strong and interesting. Some deserve special mention, such as the typically lively prose and insight of Wright, the thoughtful and stimulating work of Gupta, the reflective and practical piece by Rhodes, and the brief but hermeneutically sophisticated suggestions of Hume. Many of the other essays are also very good, including Gorman, Hauerwas, and Kamell, each providing arguments that are obviously steeped in years of reflection and expertise in their subject matter. Highlighting these seven essays is not meant to disregard the other contributions, each of which offer value, though admittedly some essays are much better than the others.

Regarding the contributors, I note that, despite the noble intentions to have a truly global conference, the final selected essays barely represent this. Unless I am mistaken, it appears that only two of the essays have any direct connection with non-Western peoples (Gupta and Chun), and in both of these

cases the scholars have been trained in and continue to reside in Western nations. This is not so much a criticism as an observation. If these thirteen essays are the best of the fifty papers then they have done the right thing. But it is still a notable observation about the difficulty of being global in focus.

Regarding the contributions, it should be noted that several of them are distillations or slightly different explorations of work published elsewhere (e.g., Gorman, Hauerwas, Wright, Hume, and maybe others). There is in fact value in having essay-length presentations of larger works, but on the question of what original contribution this volume makes, this proves lacking.

And this leads to the other evaluative criterion mentioned—coherence and clarity in the thesis of the book—on which the volume falls considerably short, even relative to other collections of essays. While in some way each of the chapters can be connected broadly to ethics in the Bible and the Church, it is difficult to identify any note or perspective more consistent than that. Even the attempt at organizing the chapters into three distinct (and very uneven) sections is difficult to understand, as most of the essays deal with biblical texts both exegetically and in application. At the same time, even though each part of the book includes “Ecclesial Ethics” in its title, it is challenging to discern what this means beyond simply that these are ethical issues that Christians and the Bible wrestle with.

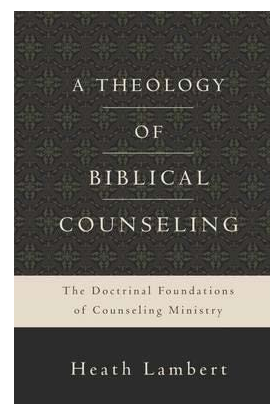
Most important, there is no attempt by the editors to provide an introduction or conclusion that actually addresses the *content* of the essays, seeking to put them into dialogue with each other, comparing and contrasting perspectives, providing some synthesis (or even summary), or suggesting what is meant by “ecclesial ethics” and how today’s reader might approach this topic and apply for moral formation. This is not an easy thing to do, I know, but the result is a paradox—a bad book with good essays. The chapters for the most part provide interesting and insightful vignettes on ethical readings of texts, and the contributors are to be commended for this. However, as a book, this volume is best seen as a cupboard of assorted individual essays to be accessed digitally or from a library shelf, especially in light of the (typically extravagant) T&T Clark cost of \$122.

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Heath Lambert. *A Theology of Biblical Counseling: The Doctrinal Foundations of Counseling Ministry*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2016. 352 pp. £18.99/\$24.99.

Theology is often considered irrelevant to everyday living. Many assume there is a wall of division between a cognitive discipline like theology, and the typical needs one faces in day to day operations of life. However, there are a number of thinkers that have demonstrated this is not the case, that in fact theology is eminently practical. Heath Lambert is one of the most recent to show that theology is connected to reality and needful to face life’s challenges.

Heath Lambert serves as the Executive Director of the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors (ACBC, formerly known as the National Association of Nouthetic Counselors). He also serves as a pastor at First Baptist Church in Jacksonville, FL and a faculty member at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.



As the Executive Director of ACBC, Lambert's convictions about counseling should be evident. He believes that the "Bible tells us everything we need to know from God about any topic" (p. 48). That conviction may be a bit hard to swallow in an age of exponential information advancement. But Lambert carefully and compellingly argues that much of what society views as necessary knowledge to the counseling process is really not necessary. For, in Lambert's view, counseling is a conversation regarding the exchange of wisdom, God's view of reality, for those seeking answers. Although information about neuroscience and inner brain function is available to our society today, these resources are not necessary or relevant for those seeking God's perspective on the issues of life.

Lambert has organized *A Theology of Biblical Counseling* around how biblical counseling relates to the classic systematic theological disciplines of bibliology, theology proper, christology, pneumatology, anthropology, hamartiology, soteriology and ecclesiology. He also includes a section specifically on biblical counseling and suffering. Approaching the topic in this way demonstrates Lambert's belief that counseling is at its root a theological endeavor.

One of the book's highlights is the inclusion in each chapter of a difficult counseling case study. For example, when considering biblical counseling and the doctrine of the church, Lambert details a reality-based example of an individual enslaved to pornography. He then proceeds to develop the doctrine of the church specifically in regard to what God had intended church eldership and church community to be. As an experienced counselor, he skillfully brings to bear how God's plan for a redeemed community is to be ministering to the pornography enslaved individual.

The book's three appendices contain ACBC's statement on mental disorders and medicine, Lambert's treatment of general revelation and common grace, and ACBC's standards of doctrine.

Lambert has produced a very readable, logical, practical, and compelling work that should stimulate Christians in the counseling field to consider how the Scriptures give the theological foundation for wisdom in all of life. This book is not a topical reference book for counseling, nor is it an updated version of Jay Adams's *Christian Counselor's Manual* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986) or his *A Theology of Christian Counseling* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986). Lambert has not written an academic systematic theology, or a counseling methodology book of biblical counseling such as Paul Tripp's *Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2002). Instead, Lambert invites the reader to consider how counseling is a theological enterprise. In accordance with the way he counseling as a "conversation" between those with life questions and those with answers, his book also feels like a conversation with the reader.

A Theology of Biblical Counseling is a very helpful and unique resource that will complement the growing biblical counseling movement that is calling for soul care to be placed back in the realm of the local church. Every pastor should engage the "conversation" Lambert's book offers and should lead his congregation to enter the conversation as well.

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Colin Marshall and Tony Payne. *The Vine Project: Shaping Your Ministry Culture Around Disciple-Making*. Sydney: Matthias Media, 2016. 355 pp. £9.99/\$19.99.

In late 2009, Colin Marshall and Tony Payne published *The Trellis and the Vine: The Ministry Mind-Shift that Changes Everything*, providing a welcomed approach to discipleship that was embraced enthusiastically by pastors and ministry professionals across denominational lines. With a subtitle that suggests measurable change and with content that provided a robustly biblical approach to cultivating disciples, Marshall and Payne's work proved successful almost immediately. On popular Christian blogs and through influential Christian conferences, *The Trellis and the Vine* became a go-to resource. Great books, however, often leave questions unanswered. This follow-up volume intends to provide answers to those readers convinced of Marshall and Payne's convictions, yet unsure of how to strategize for change.



In *The Trellis and the Vine*, Marshall and Payne urged ministry leaders to structure their ministerial methodology around cultivating disciples (the Vine), while keeping the programmatic work (the Trellis) as an organizational necessity while not making it the ultimate priority. In other words, structure and administration must support but not overtake the main mission of discipleship. As ministry leaders embraced this counsel, the logical question of implementation emerged with frequency. The authors were asked, “How can I change the whole culture of our church in the direction of disciple-making?” (p. 13). In the end, the authors produce a resource that is not so much a book to read and place on the shelf, but a project manual ministry leaders keep near as they cultivate leaders and shape ministry. In their introductory remarks, Marshall and Payne urge readers to view this resource as a project and to assemble a small team “starting from wherever you happen to be, with whatever strengths and weaknesses you happen to have” (p. 18).

Faithful ministry leaders desiring to cultivate healthy vines (to continue the book's metaphor), often choose to do so through one or more common methods: preaching a sermon series on disciple-making, utilizing one-to-one Bible reading plans, making better attempts to welcome new members, and even training Christians on how to share their faith (p. 30). While these activities are certainly beneficial in the life of a church, often ministry leaders grow impatient as they await discipleship growth from these activities alone. For whatever reason, the measureable change from these activities often falls below expectations. Marshall and Payne suggest this type of strategy resembles “trying to turn an ocean liner with a few strokes of an oar” (p. 30). The solution to this situation, according to Marshall and Payne, is to shift the direction of the church from a situational remedy to a process that cultivates disciples. Marshall and Payne suggest a five-step process to accomplish a culture of disciple making.

First, ministry leaders must sharpen convictions regarding the theological distinctives undergirding their ministry. In an effort to clarify discipleship, the authors believe theological constructs must be investigated because they will correlate to the shift this manual urges. It cannot be overstated how crucial phase one is for this discipleship methodology because theology drives ministry. Second, the authors urge readers to reform their personal culture to create consistency with their theological convictions. In other words, the readers must decide if their actions are consistent with their theological convictions. Third, readers are urged to undertake a loving, honest evaluation “of everything that happens in your church to see how well (or poorly) it accords with your convictions” (p. 37). This exercise exists to

expose the strengths and weaknesses of the corporate body. Fourth, readers are urged to innovate and implement the action steps crucial to addressing the weaknesses discovered in process three. And in the fifth and final step of the process, Marshall and Payne suggest readers monitor and review the status of the project, and they give detailed instructions how to do this well.

There are numerous strengths to this volume, but this review will focus on three. First, while the authors are building off everything they articulated in *The Trellis and the Vine*, this volume is written in such a way that newcomers to this perspective can read only this volume. Reading the first volume could help, but this project successfully captures the intent of the first by weaving it through these five processes. Second, ministry leaders appreciate books seeking to provide actionable steps corresponding to the book's argument. Marshall and Payne masterfully provide a workable manual, complete with discussion questions at the end of each chapter. Additionally, this project begins with Marshall and Payne providing a strategy for how a leadership group can approach and integrate this work in their ministry setting. Third, throughout the work, there is a subtle challenge, a nudge from Marshall and Payne, that ministry leaders not get comfortable with mundane discipleship ministry. Theirs is a compelling strategy reorienting one's attitude about the urgency and blessing of shepherding and shaping the church.

Finally, an additional strength of this project manual also lends to a critique. The authors intentionally wrote this volume to be adaptable to discipleship strategies in a local church or in a para-church ministry. Marshall and Payne wrote this for "any ministry that has the potential to have its culture changed in the direction of disciple-making" (p. 20). Thus, an established church or a new church plant will find this project beneficial, but so will parachurch ministries. The weakness emerging from this approach is that one will struggle to discern a robust ecclesiology in this text. Many ecclesiological questions are not asked or addressed, but that does not seem to be the aim of this work. Disciple-making must transcend many of the petty differences some ecclesiological distinctives create. Marshall and Payne are to be commended for this volume. Taking its processes seriously could lend to positive shifts toward healthy discipleship in and out of the church.

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R. Albert Mohler. *We Cannot Be Silent: Speaking Truth to a Culture Redefining Sex, Marriage, and the Very Meaning of Right and Wrong*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2015. 256 pp. £20.34/\$24.99.

As the title indicates, this book is a call to arms for Christians. The target is same-sex marriage and, more broadly, the sexual revolution of recent years. It is excellent as a polemic, because it is not only a polemic. Its call to arms is based on a carefully developed history of the sexual revolution and a sharp logical analysis of the issues.

It addresses my own bewilderment at the speed at which the same-sex movement has progressed: Mohler points out that in 2004 eleven states had referendums banning same sex marriage. In 2008, most thought homosexuality itself was immoral, and Proposition 8, an anti-gay marriage law in California, passed overwhelmingly. But by 2014 polls showed that the American public overwhelmingly supported same-sex marriage, and in the 2016 election candidates routinely attacked those who believe in traditional marriage as bigots. So in twelve years there was a vast change of opinion in the American electorate. How could this have happened so fast, regarding an issue that had been considered closed for thousands of years?

Mohler sheds light on this astonishing change by his longer term historical survey. In his view, the modern sexual revolution began with the growing acceptance of contraception in the early twentieth century, which separated sex from procreation. Then came no-fault divorce in the 1960s which, in Mohler's view, brought drastic and tragic changes to family structure. Eventually cohabitation came to replace marriage entirely in some circles. And advanced reproductive technologies like in-vitro fertilization detached childbearing even from sex itself.

Accompanying these historical developments was a new view of marriage, from traditional "conjugal" marriage (a covenant cemented by public vows, establishing kinship relations) to "revisionist" views (contractual, defined by a loving emotional bond).

And as views of marriage changed, so did views of homosexuality. Mohler defends the traditional biblical exegesis behind the view that Scripture condemns all homosexual unions, not only those that are oppressive. In that connection, he expounds the biblical view of sex in a broad context, from Genesis 2, to Paul's doctrine that marriage images the relation of Christ and the church, to the eschatological marriage supper of the Lamb.

But Mohler shows also the militant opposition to this theology that is part of the "gay agenda." Since the Stonewall riots of 1969, there was a deliberate movement by gay activists to destroy common criticisms of homosexuality. (1) Homosexuality is not "crazy." The activists successfully petitioned the psychoanalytic community to reverse its judgment that homosexuality was a mental illness. (2) It is not "sinful." Gay activists led the fight in liberal denominations to reinterpret or discard biblical prohibitions. (3) It is not "criminal." Although there were legal prohibitions of homosexuality as late as 2003, that same year the Supreme Court pronounced that such laws violated the Constitution. Justice Scalia said that this decision would lead to same sex marriage, and indeed it did. (4) It is not "subversive": literature, films, and TV sought to portray gays as normal, unthreatening people (though some gays protested that this new stereotype inhibited their freedom). These goals of the gay community were astonishingly successful, but only because the defenses of traditional marriage had already been weakened.



The logical and historical conclusion of this development, Mohler says, is the transgender revolution. This is not just a movement to give help to those with gender dysphoria, but a demand upon society to regard gender entirely as a social construct, unconnected to biological sex. The transgender movement goes beyond the homosexual movement as such: now the question is not who an individual desires to bed *with* but who one wants go to bed *as* (pp. 68–69). Taking a male or female role in sex, or some other role, is entirely up to the autonomous individual.

Hence the willingness of liberals to force the whole society to abandon its one-sex bathroom policy in the interest of the very small minority in the country who are gender dysphoric. To many of us, this policy seems to be a wildly disproportionate response to the problem of a very few. But to the LGBT activists, this is an important part of the revolution that must be imposed on society by force, not inhibited in the slightest by considerations of religious liberty.

So the issue is no longer about sex alone. It is an issue of worldview. Is the world created by God, an objective reality to which we ought to conform, or is it a world we ourselves have formed, malleable to whatever we may choose to be? Here we see the truly radical implications of the sexual revolution. And the totalitarian impulses of the LGBT movement will not tolerate dissent. Their goal is to force conformity of behavior, but also of mind, of language, of philosophy, and of theology. Arguments for first amendment liberties seem to be lost on the LGBT movement.

At this point, Mohler reprimands the silence of the evangelical community. The sexual revolution would overturn the entire biblical worldview, and many evangelicals have gone AWOL in this crucial fight.

My general view of this book is very positive. I learned a great deal from the historical analysis, and Mohler has persuaded me of the sharpness of the conflict between LGBT activists and the gospel of Christ. Sometimes in the book Mohler's critique goes farther than I think is biblically warranted; for example, he raises serious historical and moral questions about the use of artificial birth control. Mohler may be right, of course, that the loosening of the churches' opposition to contraception since 1900 allowed people to rethink their convictions about marriage. As a historical assertion, that is arguable. But Mohler makes this point normative, not just descriptive.

I also take a somewhat different position from him on new reproductive techniques such as artificial insemination and in vitro fertilization. There are moral dangers here, but I think it is possible to practice these techniques without breaking biblical law. (I would not make such a case for surrogate motherhood or for artificial insemination by donor. For my arguments about these, see my *Doctrine of the Christian Life* [Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008], ch. 40.) Again, it is possible that these developments have left some people open to the further loosening of the concept of marriage advocated by the LGBT community. That, I think, is unfortunate. But we should not be led by the great error of the LGBT movement to adopt views of reproduction that are more conservative than those of the Bible itself.

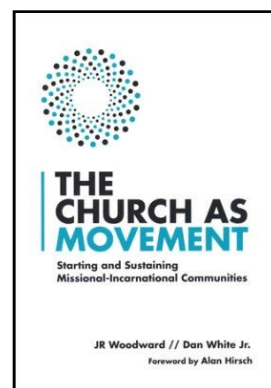
These "conservative" views are typically defended by natural law arguments rather than by biblical exegesis. Mohler commends natural law reasoning (p. 59–66), but he also commends *sola Scriptura*, the sufficiency of Scripture. Traditionally the former characterizes Roman Catholic thinking, the latter Protestant. There is some methodological overlap, of course, between the two communities. But there are, to say the least, tensions within any attempt to combine these two methods of ethical reasoning, and Mohler doesn't help us to reconcile them. (For my suggestions on these issues, see *Doctrine of the Christian Life*, pp. 239–382.)

For all of this, the rebuke we receive in the title of Mohler’s book rightly commands us to action. I hope that the Christian community will hearken to it. As Christian citizens, we must bring God’s word into the present deplorable situation, lest we be prevented from speaking it at all.

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JR Woodward and Dan White Jr. *The Church as Movement: Starting and Sustaining Missional-Incarnational Communities*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016. 256 pp. £16.28/\$20.00.

Among Christian millennials in the West, there is a growing discontentment with what authors J. R. Woodward and Dan White Jr. call “the church as industrial complex”—churches that “believe their survival and success depends on collecting and consolidating more resources, programs, paid staff, property and people in attendance” (p. 25). There are sociological influences behind this discontentment (e.g., the general move toward local living, working, buying), but there is also a biblically and theologically informed recognition that “big box” churches often produce shallow and unhealthy disciples because these kinds of churches tend to devalue the rich community and discipleship reflected in the life of Jesus and the early church. In *The Church as Movement: Starting and Sustaining Missional-Incarnational Communities*, Woodward and White—church planters and leaders in the V3 church planting movement—offer an applied ecclesiology that seeks to remedy this problem.



The express goal of the book is “to help people plant the kind of churches that reflect the viral movement of the early New Testament, fueled by the values of tight-knit community, life-forming discipleship, locally rooted presence and boundary-crossing mission” (p. 15). The authors present eight core competencies over four sections that move from the big picture of how missional communities should be distributed, to how to be and make disciples, how to design a missional framework and theology that will guide our disciple-making efforts, and finally how to practically do the work of community formation and mission.

The major strength of this book is the authors’ emphasis on discipleship as the core of a healthy and missional church. Key to their view of discipleship is the belief that a community of believers must learn to interact with one another in various types of gatherings or “spaces.” The church as industrial complex overemphasizes the large group gathering, but the church as movement thrives when disciples gather in smaller groups for accountability, mid-sized groups for community, as well as larger groups for celebration, all with the ultimate goal of living lives on mission for Christ in our neighborhoods and community networks. The book attempts to equip readers with the vision and values needed to fuel this particular way of doing church, as well as offering practical guides and tools for healthy discipling relationships at each of these levels. There are instructions here on how to start and maintain discipleship groups, how to promote openness and accountability within those groups, how to understand and practice the sacraments of baptism and communion in group meetings, and how groups can incarnate the love of Christ in practical ways within their neighborhoods and communities.

Many readers will also appreciate the emphasis in these pages on the need for shared leadership in the church—what the authors call “polycentric leadership—and the benefits of a community where every disciple is encouraged to discover and utilize his or her spiritual gifts. The church as industrial complex tends to lean too heavily on the giftings of top-tier leaders and personalities, while the church as movement relies on every member as essential to its internal health and missional effectiveness. This is one of the keys to maintaining a movement with discipleship at its core.

Woodward and White contribute a great deal of wisdom—a wisdom that is clearly tempered by experience—to the growing list of contemporary resources on discipleship and church planting. However, there are a few aspects of the book that give me cause for concern. For example, as a general observation, the authors very rarely engage in exposition of Scripture. There are references to passages of Scripture throughout, but I often found myself wondering if the ideas being propounded were stemming more from contemporary sociology than they were from biblical theology. At times, when the authors did engage more with the biblical text, the exegesis was questionable. As a result, some of the key ideas put forth in the book were misguided. For example, the authors argue that every believer is called by God to perform the role of at least one of the people-gifts listed in Ephesians 4:11—“the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers.” However, it’s best to see these offices as pertaining specifically to the leaders of the church who are then expected “to equip the saints for the work of the ministry” (v. 12).

Readers might also be concerned with the lack of clarity on the gospel message as presented in this book. Woodward and White do a fine job of explaining the cosmic scope of renewal promised in the gospel and how that should shape our view of vocation and mission. However, when it comes to the core of the gospel message itself there is very little explanation of the death and resurrection of Jesus. One would think that a manual on disciple-making would be a bit more explicit on this, especially given the fact that there is an entire section devoted to “Sharing a Holistic Gospel” (pp. 130–36). One wonders if the absence of an explanation of substitutionary atonement and justification, for example, is intentional or unintentional.

There are also weaknesses in the authors’ understanding of the essential nature of the church. For example, they make the common mistake of committing the etymological fallacy when defining the Greek word for “church” (ἐκκλησία), explaining that the word means “called out ones” since it is a compound word made up of the verb καλέω, “to call,” and the preposition ἐκ, “out of.” As most scholars would argue, however, a word’s meaning is derived from its usage, not from its etymology; and the use of the word ἐκκλησία clearly reveals that its meaning is “assembly,” not “called out ones.” The authors also make the mistake of assuming that a single church in a city was made up of multiple house churches, with each house church consisting of no more than twenty to fifty members. Recently studies have shown, however, that limiting a house church to this number is unnecessary, since many Greco-Roman houses could hold significantly more people than this. Along these lines, the authors also make the mistake of conflating the New Testament’s use of “household” with “house church,” when there is clearly a difference between the two (e.g., 1 Cor 11:22; 14:35). The reason these things matter is because our fundamental understanding of the essence and pattern of the New Testament church will shape the way we believe church should be done today, at least for those of us who believe New Testament church patterns are still normative in some way. If we understand the New Testament church wrongly, then we run the risk of modeling contemporary churches on patterns that don’t actually reflect those of the New Testament after all.

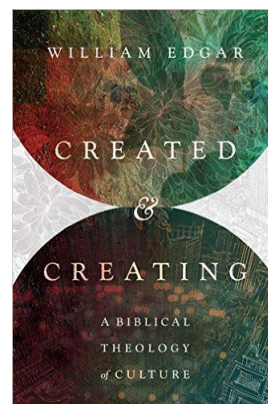
While this book would not be at the top of my discipleship and church planting list of resources, and while I would only recommend it to someone having first explained the aforementioned concerns, there is still much to be gained here.

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— MISSION AND CULTURE —

William Edgar. *Created and Creating: A Biblical Theology of Culture*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017. x + 262 pages. £19.55/\$24.00.

William Edgar holds the John Boyer Chair of Evangelism and Culture and is professor of apologetics at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. As such, he is no lightweight when it comes to speaking to issues related to culture. In *Created and Creating*, we follow a seasoned and highly respected apologist tackling a cultural and missiological theme. Edgar employs his extensive scholastic research to uncover what a plethora of writers, both secular and Christian, have posited about prevailing views on culture itself and subsequent cultural engagement. He states outright that this difficult-to-define-word (“culture”) is never mentioned in Scripture. Yet paradoxically, the Bible is the prime source to reference for properly understanding culture and the believer’s engagement of it.



Edgar informs us at the outset that the book proposes to survey the many ways in which the Bible addresses issues related to culture (p. 19). However, he does much more than that. The first two-thirds of the book barely touch on Scripture at all. Instead, Edgar reaches back into the writings and views of the most noted scholars and writers who have expounded views about what culture is, how it is to be framed, or the classical tension between Christ and culture that became prominent with the writings of Richard Niebuhr. Edgar’s book is worth reading solely for this survey of the field of related literature.

After meticulously surveying the non-biblical landscape, Edgar finally turns in earnest to Scripture itself starting at chapter 8. Beginning with Genesis 1:26–30, he gives a convincing overview of the theme of mankind’s cultural or “creation” mandate (p. 166), which he places under the broader concept of “The First Vocation” that threads its way through Scripture right to the end of Revelation. The major touching points include man created in God’s image, the Noachian covenant’s restart of the culture mandate, the “dark” Tower of Babel incident (p. 187), and the Abrahamic covenant. They lay the foundation for what the rest of Scripture says about the cultural mandate. For Edgar, this is the driving theme, found even in the Great Commission passages, of how God would have his people relate to culture throughout all ages.

Edgar’s main thesis on cultural engagement (and a good summary for the entire book) is found in his final paragraph of chapter 8:

Cultural engagement is the human response to the divine call to enjoy and develop the world that God has generously given to his image bearers. Culture includes the symbols, the tools, the conventions, the social ties, and all else contributing to this call. Cultural activity occurs in a historical setting, and is meant to improve the human condition. Because of the fall, culture can and has become sinister. Christ's redeeming grace moves culture in the right direction, ennobles it, and allows it to extend the realm of God's *shalom*, his goodness, his justice, his love. (pp. 176–77)

In chapter 12, Edgar offers perceptive insights on a topic that most other books on culture sadly omit: "Culture in Afterlife." In this final chapter, he deals with such topics as: what heaven is like, the resurrection, and redeemed cities. He concludes by stating, "To put it in terms of the major theme of this book, culture and cultural engagement are not suspended in the afterlife but given their full impetus" (p. 231).

Whenever I review a book, I keep three questions prominently in mind: Does the book have quality substance? Does it helpfully inform? Does it give direction? I can emphatically say that this book clearly does all three. One of the major strengths of the book is the prolific documentation of sources referenced from a wide variety of disciplines. Not only is Edgar well-read, he has masterfully applied his knowledge of other's writings to this topic.

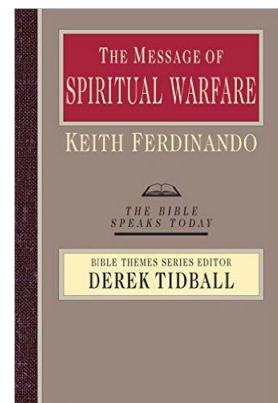
Not everyone will agree with all Edgar writes. For myself, I have difficulty accepting his "self-deliberation" view of the plurality found in Genesis 1:26. I prefer to see the seedbed and first hint of the Trinity in that verse. However, that is a minor matter compared to the overwhelming asset this book brings to the discussion of responsible cultural engagement by Christians.

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Keith Ferdinando. *The Message of Spiritual Warfare*. The Bible Speaks Today Bible Themes. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016. 320 pp. £16.02/\$20.00.

Reading books on spiritual warfare is like trying to breathe in a city with rampant pollution. It's risky business. Books on this topic are often filled with rash speculation and controversial "strategies" for engaging the enemy or overpowering demonic beings. Amid these extra-biblical discussions, Keith Ferdinando's biblical exposition is a breath of fresh, clean air. Ferdinando is associate pastor at Woodford Evangelical Church in England. As a former professor in the Democratic Republic of Congo, a place rife with animism, he is uniquely equipped to tackle this subject.

This book has four sections. The first considers Satan, his nature, and work in a fallen world. The second section looks at the person and work of Christ. He explains how Christ accomplished victory over Satan. The next section highlights the implications of Christ's victory for believers. Finally, the last part looks at how believers must fight sin and Satan in everyday life. In each of these sections, Ferdinando examines and unpacks specific biblical texts that relate to the theme of spiritual warfare.



One strength of Ferdinando's work is the fact he understands that spiritual warfare is neither first and foremost about believers nor about the response of believers to the world around them. In his introduction, he writes, "Before it is the warfare of God's people, however, spiritual warfare is the warfare of God himself" (p. 2). He then continues, "Satan, sin, and the world are all expressions of cosmic rebellion against the Creator and his will and purposes, and God himself addresses that opposition and brings it to nothing" (p. 2).

Ferdinando's God-centered perspective of spiritual warfare is refreshing, biblical, and it grows out of his understanding of the grand narrative of Scripture. He admits that the lack of biblical evidence related to Satan and the demonic realm leads many to "extravagant speculation" (p. 6); nevertheless, he himself adopts a posture of humility and awed wonder when attempting to answer the unanswerable. When addressing the nature of Satan's existence, he writes, "[God's] relationship to sin and Satan is certainly perplexing beyond human comprehension, but his perfect holiness is unquestionable" (p. 9). He then writes, "In the end everything is about [God] -- the whole drama of creation and redemption. And through it all, why does he do anything but to manifest his glory, to display his own being -- his eternal power and divine nature, his wondrous grace and truth?" (p. 9).

Another strength of this book is its detailed exposition. Unlike similar books, his book is not proof-texted. For each aspect of spiritual warfare Ferdinando covers, he focuses on one or two key pericopes. For example, in chapter 15, he argues that cross-shaped suffering is an integral part of the Christian life and a "central theme of the whole New Testament" (p. 180). To make his case, though, he doesn't pick and choose verses from the whole NT; instead he provides a detailed exposition of 2 Corinthians 12:1–10, arguably the most convincing passage in the NT in making this point. Such an approach enables Ferdinando to provide detailed exegesis of these texts.

Ferdinando deftly weaves together scholarly analysis of a text with the practical application that believers need. In chapter 2, he utilizes Gen 3:1–5 and John 8:44 to explain Satan's corrupted nature as a liar and murderer. He doesn't stop with an explanation of these texts. He then makes several applications for believers, like the fact all believers should recognize that "lies are always at the heart of every temptation" (p. 35). These teaching points help connect detailed exposition to the everyday life of the believers.

The book's primary weakness is that Ferdinando sometimes misses the opportunity to contradict or point out faulty understandings of spiritual warfare. In his exposition of Job, he relates Job's suffering with Paul's suffering in 2 Corinthians 12. He then alludes to the fact that many authors advocate the naming and engaging of demonic beings. While Ferdinando does state, "There is no suggestion in the text that [Paul] attempted any direct dealing with the demon responsible, either to bind it or drive it out" (p. 56), he never explains that many contemporary warfare authors advocate such an approach, nor does he reference them. Perhaps this lack of confrontation arises from Ferdinando's humility and mutual respect for other scholars. That is certainly understandable. Nonetheless, it would be helpful to have more direct interaction and discussion about how his views oppose or contradict the views of others.

Perhaps the best chapter in the book is chapter 13, in which Ferdinando ties together spiritual warfare and missions by unpacking Matthew 28:18–20. He not only explains why an understanding of spiritual warfare is so essential to the church's mission, but he also confronts faulty understandings about spiritual warfare, like the need to engage territorial spirits. The chapter's closing words serve both as an encouragement to all those committed to fulfilling the Great Commission and as an apt conclusion to this review. He says, "Far from their natural homes [missionaries] will face hostility, persecution, and

death, but as they go, they will never face these things alone – nor Satan, nor all the powers of darkness. Christ has conquered, Christ is Lord, Christ is with them – always and everywhere” (pp. 167–68).

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Timothy Keller. *Making Sense of God: An Invitation to the Skeptical*. New York: Viking, 2016. viii + 327 pages. £16.99/\$27.00.

Tim Keller’s 2008 New York Times bestseller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Dutton), first propelled him into the international spotlight. *The Reason for God* sought to make skeptics “doubt their doubts” about Christianity by holding them up to the same intellectual scrutiny to which skeptics held Christianity.

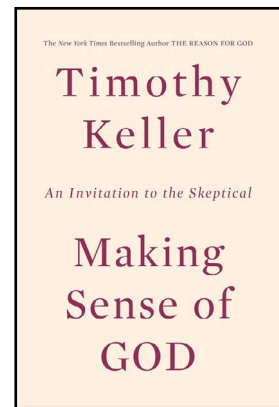
While *The Reason for God* impacted many interested in Christianity, Keller realized it was not written for those who do not deem Christianity “relevant enough to be worth their while” (p. 4). Such people would never pick it up but rather dismiss Christianity altogether as a “blind faith in an age of science, reason, and technology” or believing “fewer and fewer people will feel the need for religion and it will die out” (p. 4). Keller’s newest book, *Making Sense of God: An Invitation to the Skeptical*, is directed at those people, serving as a prequel to *The Reason for God*.

Keller’s main purpose for both books is to explain how Christianity makes sense emotionally, culturally, and rationally. Naturally, *The Reason for God* discussed the rational, while *Making Sense of God* focuses on the emotional and cultural, making the case for Christianity’s relevance in both spheres.

Making Sense of God addresses skeptics’ objections to faith by attempting to create a true secular “safe space” for those exploring faith and ideas. Keller argues that such space is needed since there is no “truly secular state” in which all beliefs and ideas can be presented in mutual respect and peace (p. 3). Keller frames this safe space:

Rather than unfairly asking only religious people to prove their views, we need to compare and contrast religious beliefs and their evidences with secular beliefs and theirs. We can and should argue about which beliefs account for what we see and experience in the world. We can and should debate the inner logical consistency of belief systems, asking whether they support or contradict one another. We can and should consult our deepest intuitions. (p. 50)

Making Sense of God is divided into three parts. Part 1 (“Why Does Anyone Need Religion”) exposes the erroneous impression that secularism and human advancement are swallowing up religion. Keller argues that secularism and religion are both founded on faith. Part 2 (“Religion Is More Than You Think It Is”) tests both skepticism and faith by examining their significance for our meaning in life, satisfaction from life, individuality, finding one’s true self, hope, morality, and justice—issues of profound importance for every person, regardless of worldview. Part 3 (“Christianity Makes Sense”)



does what one would expect: make the case for Christianity by first testing the reasonableness for belief in God and then belief in Christianity.

Keller doesn't typically explain the flaws of secularism and skepticism through use of Scripture but rather interacts with sources from a variety of fields. He cites scientists, secularist thinkers, philosophers, artists, and musicians. I appreciate Keller's generosity and humility in both seeking and describing truth. This generosity drove me to a deeper understanding of the nature of his critique. One example of this is his willingness to interact with Nietzsche, agree with true claims, and use Nietzsche's argument for Christianity. Keller also explains how many non-religious people are often more moral and kind than religious people because it is the immoral and broken people who often feel the need of religion more than those who consider themselves "good."

Many features of Keller's writing make it easy to see why he is a bestselling author, including clarity of argument, deep knowledge of the secular belief systems, a smattering of powerful illustrations and quotations, and a compelling presentation of the God who provides realistic and compelling answers to life's issues. Keller's writing both feeds the intellect and stirs the soul. While his interactions with influential works by agnostics and skeptics may prove long and cerebral for pedestrian readers, *Making Sense of God* and its nearly sixty pages of endnotes and bibliography will serve as an invaluable starting point for others desiring to delve into a Christian apologetic response to secular thought.

I pray many skeptics take Keller's invitation and enter the secular safe space he seeks to create. Readers will be helped by honestly thinking through Keller's analysis of secular worldviews, which can't explain the existence of values like courage and love, why we need morals, the basis for morality, and how secularism's pursuit of true satisfaction often breaks under the weight of suffering.

Skeptics who honestly engage with this book might find themselves like the skeptics and converts to Christianity who are mentioned in this book and thanked Keller for exposing flawed presuppositions and sharpening their grasp on reality.

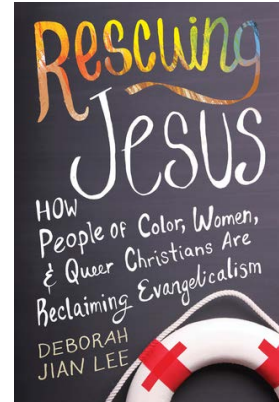
Like its predecessor, this book is a must read for believers who want to communicate the faith and live faithfully in a secular age. Readers will know how to engage skeptics better by understanding the thought processes that drive their beliefs and decisions. If they are like me, many people will also be convicted and discouraged to see how our secular culture has influenced us all.

Most important of all, Keller's work will make readers more confident that the God of Christianity is not only relevant for today but the only One that makes broken humans whole and human existence understandable in this crazy world. While the title *Making Sense of God* may be a misnomer, it proves a helpful tool in showing that the God of the Bible is not only possible, but profoundly compelling to a secular world.

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Deborah Jian Lee. *Rescuing Jesus: How People of Color, Women and Queer Christians Are Reclaiming Evangelicalism*. Boston: Beacon, 2015. 288 pp. £16.24/\$19.95.

In 2012, historian David Swartz, published *Moral Minority: The Evangelical Left in an Age of Conservatism* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press), which documented the beginnings of the Evangelical Left, sometimes known as “progressive evangelicalism.” Following his lead, journalist Deborah Jian Lee continues the story in *Rescuing Jesus: How People of Color, Women and Queer Christians are Reclaiming Evangelicalism*. In engaging journalistic prose, Lee offers readers a picture of progressive evangelicalism’s status today and how far it has come in championing its race-reconciling, egalitarian, and LGBTQ-affirming values.



Lee includes a few anecdotes from her own personal history as a former evangelical and fills in some helpful historical background from secondary sources. What drives the book, however, are the stories of leading progressive evangelicals. The narrative that she presents in three sections is a journey that starts from their “conformist” beginnings within the evangelical world, moves on toward an uneasy “skeptical” phase, and then finally proceeds to their transformation as “radical” change-advocating leaders of the progressive evangelical cause.

The first chapter of each section centers on the theme of race. They focus on the story of Lisa Sharon Harper. Lisa hails from an African American family with Democratic values and a history of civil rights advocacy. However, when she became a Christian at an evangelical youth group, she learned that “being Christian and Republican was a package deal” (p. 18). Hence, Lisa early on came to embrace many of the values of the Religious Right. At one point, when Lisa’s mother, shared with Lisa that she had an abortion when a recent pregnancy threatened her survival, Lisa looked her mother in the eye and responded: “They should have saved the baby” (p. 30). *Rescuing Jesus* tells the story of how Lisa came to regret this moment in her life. It recounts how she realized that her 4-Spiritual Laws Christianity, complete with anti-abortion activism, was far too small. It details how she switched her focus from abortion to homelessness and racial injustice. Today, Lisa is known as the founding executive director of New York Faith and Justice, Sojourners’ Chief Church Engagement Officer, and the co-author of *Left, Right and Christ* (Boise: Elevate, 2012) and author of *The Very Good Gospel: How Everything Wrong Can Be Made Right* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook, 2016).

The second chapter of each section focuses on the theme of gender, featuring the journey of Jennifer Crumpton. Jennifer grew up in the American South where “traditional gender roles” were constantly reinforced at home, in the wider society, and especially in the church. Jennifer recalls being perplexed and frustrated living in what appeared to be a world that preferred men. Still, she found herself constantly trying to live up to its demands. She competed in beauty pageants that subjected her to various constructed gender expectations. She grew up in a purity culture in which she felt partially at fault when she got raped by her boyfriend. And she was even called a whore by her “wholesome” Christian husband. Eventually, Jennifer had enough of that world’s gender norms.

Leaving the South for New York, Crumpton became interested in (feminist) theology and desired to attend seminary. She painfully recalls her visit to David Platt’s Southern Baptist church, where he argued against the nomination of women deacons and elders. Feeling unsatisfied with Tim Keller’s advice to take his seminary-like classes and *not* attend the outrageously liberal Union Theologically

Seminary, Crumpton decided to enroll at Union anyway. Today, Reverend Crumpton has found a voice advancing feminist values in the evangelical world. She is known for her book *Femmeevangelical: The Modern Girl's Guide to the Good News* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2015), contributes to numerous publications, and has also featured as a media commentator on FOX and CNN.

The third chapter of each part takes the reader into the Biola Queer Underground (BQU) and the emergence of LGBTQ-affirming evangelicals. BQU was started by two LGBTQ-affirming Christians, Will Haggerty and Tasha Magness, to offer a warm and private place of belonging and support for other LGBTQ students at Biola. It. Growing up in evangelical churches, most of these students learned that homosexuality is a sin. Although they came to recognize their attractions to those of like sexes early on, they still very much valued their evangelical upbringings. To them, Biola seemed like the perfect fit. However, Biola would not prove to be a place of great comfort. A handful of Biola students felt unsafe disclosing their sexual preferences there. In chapters 3, 6, and 9, Lee tells the story of BQU, its members, and how it made waves on Biola's campus, especially with the BQU Yearbook.

Let the reader be aware that Lee is a self-proclaimed ex-evangelical who does not share the same presuppositions as TGC and *Themelios*. The greatest strength of *Rescuing Jesus* is also a weakness. With its incredibly personal style, it does not read like an unbiased report on the progressive evangelical movement nor a carefully argued defense of its convictions on race, gender, and sexuality. Readers looking to engage the convictions of progressive evangelicalism at the level of biblical and theological arguments will be dissatisfied. Instead, Lee effectively presents people's personal transformation stories. This is valuable because, after all, people's transformations are rarely a matter of mere biblical and theological arguments.

I question Lee's choice of the word "reclaiming" in her book's subtitle (*How People of Color, Women and Queer Christians are Reclaiming Evangelicalism*). "Reclaiming" implies that evangelicalism has always been serious about racial reconciliation, or that it has historically affirmed egalitarian and LGBTQ-affirming values. Any historian of evangelicalism will testify this is not the case. While Lee demonstrates an awareness of evangelical history for the most part, her narrative of evangelicalism being transformed is probably overstated. It is more accurate to say the growth of progressive evangelicalism, rather than demonstrating a transformation of evangelicalism, indicates the growing fissure between evangelicals.

Additionally, her disagreements with conservative evangelicals can come across as uncharitable and intolerant. For example, Lee comments on Cru's decision to launch its urban mission program in addition to its previous anti-abortion activity. She offhandedly describes this as an "unintentional" merging of the Religious Right's agenda with progressive evangelicalism (p. 38). She says this like she knows Cru's motive and as if it were impossible for those sympathetic with the Religious Right's agenda to also care about the poor.

Lee tends to promote the liberal ethos of popular secular discourse: intolerant tolerance. She does not concede that conservative evangelicals have made significant strides toward loving and embracing those with same-sex attraction. For Lee, any attempt to love homosexuals that does not include condoning homosexual intercourse is "back-handed compassion" (p. 150). She supposes it is impossible to uphold the historic majority position on homosexuality in the Christian church and to genuinely love homosexuals. Furthermore, the stories of reprehensible evangelical behavior that Lee tells surely do not represent the best of evangelicalism. Rather, her examples seem to represent the nominal and cultural Christianity that has crept into much of evangelicalism.

All in all, I commend this book to anyone interested in the status of progressive evangelicalism in America. Lee tells stories in a personal and engaging way. Her interviews offer a wonderful window into the lives of real people struggling to make sense of their evangelical faith and the world. Since Lee does not write as a complete outsider, I often found myself smiling when Lee accurately described various elements from the American evangelical subculture.

At the same time, I read this book with a heavy heart. *Rescuing Jesus* is filled with stories recounting the regrettable and cringe-inducing behavior of professing Christians. There was the social alienation that Lisa experienced in her campus fellowship because her passion for combating homelessness and injustice against blacks surpassed her previous anti-abortion fervor. There was the sexual and verbal abuse that Jennifer almost believed she deserved because of her lack of a Y-chromosome. And there was the parental withdrawal of Will Haggerty's tuition, computer, and car because he continued to participate with BQU at Biola. Personally, *Rescuing Jesus* led me to repent, as I recalled various moments during my high school and college days when I affirmed some of the grievously insensitive attitudes and postures described in this book. For these reasons, I heartily recommend *Rescuing Jesus*. Conservative evangelicals will significantly disagree with much in this book; yet, we are reminded that we can and must do better.

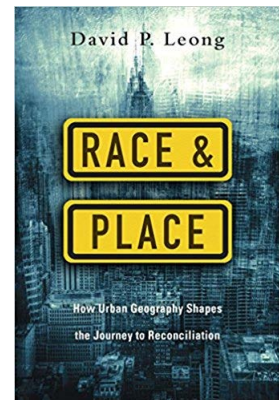
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David P. Leong. *Race and Place: How Urban Geography Shapes the Journey to Reconciliation*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017. 208 pp. £12.72/\$16.00.

Coming from an urban background in the Bronx (New York City), I know firsthand the pain, anger and disillusionment that poverty, prejudice and violence play in forming a person's identity. As a high school freshman, I walked from business to business to get a job so we would have food and was told, "We don't hire your kind." I attended funerals for friends who "got into it" with someone only to be shot and killed. I knew full well it could have been my funeral. I also know what it is like to be rescued out of such an oppressive way of life, out of a physical and mental isolation, by the gospel and the Church.

So, I deeply value the premise of *Race and Place* by David Leong, an Associate Professor of Missiology at Seattle Pacific University. The book surveys the vast space of American racial issues by looking at racism, classism and prejudice in its geographical history and urban landscape. Leong's work is a call for the Church to see issues of race and place as a missional and prophetic context.

Other texts have considered these themes, including Colin Flint's *Spaces of Hate: Geographies of Discrimination and Intolerance in the U.S.A.* (New York: Routledge, 2003), and Kris Rocke and Joel Van Dyke's *Geography of Grace: Doing Theology from Below* (Tacoma, WA: Street Psalms Press, 2012). Flint looks mainly at hate organizations and their histories. Rocke and Dyke follow people who offer theology, grace and help to the violent urban contexts. However, Leong's approach is different from both these books. His analysis is theologically driven and seeks to offer a "deep reading of Scripture



and the city” as “essential to understanding the signs of the time” (p. 28). The signs of racial prejudice, disharmony, and the need for reconciliation are obvious. Therefore, the mediating structure of Leong’s format is to “bring theology and geography into conversation,” taking a step back from the racist and prejudiced histories of our urban places to understand how our environments shaped our own views and how we can then “practice Christianity faithfully” in those places (p. 29).

The book is split into three parts. In the first section, Leong defines and explains such terms as “race,” “place” and “colorblindness” in the hope he will win over readers to understand the necessity of living in urban places with social conflict with more mission mindedness and social responsibility. It is here where he argues for a holistic view of place because “geography reveals how race [prejudice] works systematically and not just individually” (p. 41).

The second part surveys patterns of exclusion, particularly along racial and economic boundaries in urban areas. Leong examines multiple concepts, including walls of hostility, racial isolation, and patterns of geographic isolation among the urban poor and minority groups. On behalf of these issues, “Christian communities, especially those engaged in urban ministry, have a unique opportunity to practice and model meaningful reconciliation work” (p. 113). Leong critiques some answers given for these problems to these issues such as gentrification and attempts at education reform and housing. However, he stops short of making any clear proposals other than imploring the church to care and get involved.

The last section offers a redress for the myriad of racial and economic hegemony in urban areas by discussing “communities of hope.” Leong’s hope is for the Church (and others) to envision a “practical theology of reconciliation through the lens of family, communion and neighborhood renewal” (pp. 18–19). Leong returns to the theme of reconciliation, calling Christian communities to become “contrast communities” who point beyond themselves to God (p. 160).

One of the most telling aspects of the book is Leong’s insistence that Christians think of racial issues both communally and individually. Seeing race in individualistic terms blinds people from grasping the serious issues prejudice has wrought as a “twisted form of ‘discipleship’...where race shapes us into its rationale and ways of being” (p. 52).

The most baffling discussion concerns gentrification and hipsterism, which could be causing many social problems—but I have serious doubts about whether hipsters are the gentrifying trouble-makers, contra Leong (pp. 129–53). His discussion of his friend Chad Anderson’s experience “being on the receiving end of a drive-by yelling of ‘gentrification!’” was most puzzling too (p. 186). I can think of many other things one could yell and none involve that word. Stories of Chad and his scooter aside, I was lost as to whether Leong understands the complexities of hood life and violence in many urban areas.

I commend this book to churches, students and educators alike who desire to delve into serious discussion about homogeneity in the Church, urban mission and Christian presence in some difficult places in society. Along with Leong’s book, I recommend reading other works, such as Geoffrey Canada’s *Fist Stick Knife Gun: A Personal History of Violence* (Boston: Beacon, 2010) and Rodney Woo’s *The Color of Church: A Biblical and Practical Paradigm for Multiracial Churches* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2009). These texts keep readers’ heads out of the academic sociology clouds and focused on the real-mission—reconciliation in our Churches and not only in the neighborhoods of our Churches.

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Harold A. Netland. *Christianity and Religious Diversity: Clarifying Christian Commitments in a Globalizing Age*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015. xiii + 290 pp. £14.99/\$16.66.

As Professor of Philosophy of Religion and Intercultural Studies at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Harold Netland brings the necessary gravitas to the discussion of religious pluralism. Yet as a child of missionaries and a former missionary himself, he also demonstrates a reflexive view of other religions that is at once humble and unflinching in its approach.

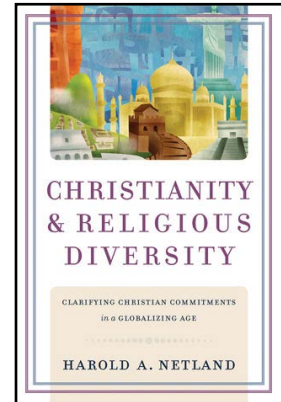
Netland divides the book into two parts. Part 1 examines the reality and nature of religious diversity in the modern globalized world (Chs. 1–4). Part 2 suggests ways in which Christians can uphold biblical truth claims in a world that has become wary of exclusive religious positions (Chs. 5–8).

Netland humbly grounds his proposal upon two crucial theses: first, “a theological definition of religion actually presupposes a phenomenological understanding of religion” (p. 9), and second, “neither cultures nor religions are completely self-contained, discrete, hermetically sealed systems that remain intact throughout time” (p. 37). This is a bold yet beneficial perspective, for it means that Christians “can be entirely faithful to the biblical witness and still acknowledge that there is some truth, beauty, and goodness in other religions” and thus seek to “be fair and honest, ... resisting language that incites fear or hatred” (pp. 180, 239). Indeed, such a perspective should encourage Christians to interact with “religious others” (Netland’s term) in a way that is respectful, compassionate, and open to learning (pp. 237–42).

Netland is unflinching in his claim that even though adherents of each religion are justified in believing their religion is true (in a propositional sense), there can only ever be one true religion (in an ultimate sense). In this way, “a religion is true to the extent that its core claims are true,” i.e., to the extent its “defining beliefs” correspond to ultimate reality (pp. 185–86). This distinction is important because—assuming Christianity is the one true religion—this means any defining belief of a religion that does not correspond to core Christian teachings “will be false or incomplete,” and yet “this does not mean that there are no truths embraced by other religions” (p. 180). Moreover, this view allows for the possibility that members of the one true religion may hold disparate or even false truth claims in relation to the core beliefs of the community.

There is much to praise about Netland’s proposal, but two sections particularly stand out for me. In chapter 2, Netland foregrounds his assertion that religions are not closed systems by examining the effects of modernization, globalization, and secularization on religious commitment around the world (pp. 41–70). He delves into the contemporary sociological debate and suggests that, contrary to traditional views, secularization is more of a Western European and North American feature than a global one, as religious belief across Latin America, Africa, and Asia continues to flourish. Yet he also argues that for people in globalized societies, culture and geography no longer serve as the sole determinate factor for religious commitment. Rather, many people now feel free to choose among religious alternatives—including pluralism (all religions are true) and secular atheism. Thus Netland’s survey provides a good reminder that while the truth of Christ is unchanging, we must continually adapt the ways in which we share this truth within an ever-changing epistemic environment.

Dovetailing with the previous point, another highlight is Netland’s section on the use of natural theology to “provide appropriate reasons” for Christian truth claims (pp. 220–28). He presents an



interesting proposal, because this apologetic method tends to take the form of a deductive argument based on the bald statement “God exists” and thus offers little more than a non sequitur in defense of theism. What makes Netland’s suggestion unique, however, is his call for a “cumulative-case approach” (p. 225). This approach seeks to reference “a wide variety of evidential data” from shared experiences and the physical world to demonstrate the sufficiency of Christian explanations about various common issues (p. 225). He states: “While none of these phenomena, either individually or collectively, entail the truth of Christian theism, the argument claims that Christian theism provides a more plausible explanation for these factors than other alternatives” (p. 226). Protestant theories of religion have long neglected the notion of natural theology. So I am keen to see others expand upon Netland’s reintroduction of this biblical concept.

While there are no glaring weaknesses in this book, I offer a few brief suggestions that might bring greater cohesion and clarity to certain key points. First, to demonstrate ways in which religions have influenced each other in this globalizing age, Netland provides supporting illustrations from Buddhism (ch. 3) and philosophical Hinduism (ch. 4). Yet he presents a stronger case in chapter 4 than he does in chapter 3. Whereas chapter 4 discusses certain modern Hindu thinkers and their view of Christianity, the references for chapter 3 have more to do with Buddhism’s encounter with Christianized Western culture than with Christianity per se. Thus, perhaps the main argument would be stronger if the examples in chapter 3 were similar in nature to those in chapter 4. For instance, he might evaluate major Buddhist assessments of Christian theism (see Gunapala Dharmasiri, *A Buddhist Critique of the Christian Concept of God* [Antioch, CA: Golden Leaves Publishing, 1988]; Keiji Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982]).

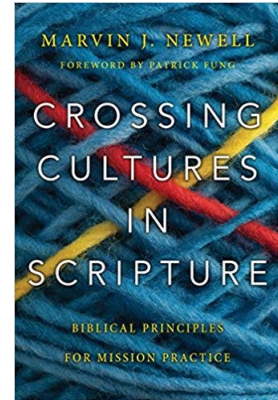
Second, Netland rightly asserts that an important first step in a phenomenological approach is to ascertain the “defining beliefs” of a religion, where the aim is not to identify beliefs accepted by all but those “regarded as mainstream” (pp. 185–86). However, as he seeks to show how one might determine the core beliefs of Christianity, he appears to undercut this premise by making 2 Corinthians 5:19 his only guiding referent (p. 188). Yet if the goal is to distinguish the “mainstream” beliefs of Christianity, then surely one must consider the primary dogmas held across time and traditions. To be sure, Netland appeals to this kind of confessional approach when noting the issue of whether other religions are salvific or if Jesus is the only way: “The mainstream, orthodox Christian tradition has consistently maintained the latter” (p. 190). Thus, if “mainstream, orthodox Christian tradition” serves as a controlled variable in defining Christian beliefs (and I think it does), then one would do well to include Nicaea and Chalcedon in the assessment.

Having said this, the above suggestions are minor and in no way detract from the overall success of this work. Netland’s monographs and articles have helped establish the evangelical voice in the philosophical and theological discussion of religions. *Christianity and Religious Diversity* offers another valuable contribution to this important endeavor. I recommend this book to all Christians who seek to make disciples in today’s globalized and religiously diverse world.

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Marvin J. Newell. *Crossing Cultures in Scripture: Biblical Principles for Mission Practice*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016. 298 pp. £16.28/ \$20.00.

Marvin J. Newell is a missiologist who served for twenty-one years in East and Southeast Asian cross-cultural ministry contexts. He is senior vice president of Missio Nexus and previously served as a professor at Moody Theological Seminary. Newell notes that while many books are written on the subject of culture from anthropological, sociological, and intercultural perspectives, he found no volume dedicated solely to providing a biblical theology of culture. This observation led him to write *Crossing Cultures in Scripture*.



The Bible is a cross-cultural book, from Genesis to Revelation, and records many cross-cultural encounters. Newell uses three foundational principles as a lens to examine these biblical cross-cultural encounters; namely, the Bible is a portrayer of cultures; a sculptor of cultures; and an appraiser of cultures (pp. 13–14). In *Crossing Cultures*, Newell takes a selection of mostly narrative biblical texts and draws principles for engaging in cross-cultural ministry. Newell’s biblical theological approach is similar to that found in the recent work by Dean Flemming (*Recovering the Full Mission of God* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013]).

Chapters 1–4 of the book set the scene for the rest and provides foundational principles concerning culture from Genesis 1–11. He provides a relatively standard definition of culture as “the distinctive beliefs, values, and customs of a particular group of people that determine how they think, feel, and behave,” (p. 17). Newell examines Genesis 1:26–27 and offers unique insight by grounding culture in the Trinity. He states that “the relationship among the three personalities” active at creation constitutes something of “a divine culture between them” (p. 23). He further adds that something of this divine culture was “bestowed” upon humankind at the creation of Adam” (p. 24). While the validity of this insight doesn’t impact the book’s overall thesis, it is nevertheless an intriguing hypothesis.

Chapters 5–20 of the book consider examples of crossing cultures in the Old Testament. Each chapter offers stand-alone principles that do not necessarily relate to or build on principles elucidated earlier. A consideration of one chapter, that of Abraham’s interaction with the Hittites in Genesis 23:1–19 illustrates the general approach of other chapters. Newell proffers, “Genesis 23 records the first extended conversation in Scripture between people of different cultures” (p. 57). The chapter is titled, “Needing a Favor in a Foreign Land.” Newell suggests seven principles from his cultural reading of this text: (1) admit your vulnerability (Gen 23:4), (2) remember who you are (Gen 23:4; Heb 11:8–10; 13–16), (3) build cross-cultural collateral (Gen 23:6), (4) show respect (Gen 23:7, 12), (5) don’t expect an exception (Gen 23:16), (6) get a record of the agreement (Gen 23:20), and (7) know your arrangement will have an effect on others (cf. Gen 49:31–32).

Chapters 21–36 examine the crossing of cultures in the New Testament. They mostly examine narratives in the Gospels and Acts, such as Jesus and the Samaritan woman (John 4), Jesus and Pontius Pilate (John 18:28–19:16), Phillip and the Eunuch (Acts 8); yet, this third section considers a number of passages from the epistles as well, from which Newell develops cross-cultural principles.

The book has some great strengths. Newell writes clearly, winsomely, and is easy to follow. Theory is grounded with experience. Most chapters begin with an example from the life of the author, another person, or world events that highlight the cultural issue the book chapter addresses. The book also

delivers on its subtitle, with each chapter articulating a number of clear principles that pertain to cross-cultural ministry.

However, I don't think the book always delivers on its premise of being a biblical theology of culture. Not every chapter from section two dealing with crossing cultures in the Old Testament demonstrates how the passage being considered is fulfilled in the New Testament, with the resultant impact on application and the derivation of principles. For example, consider Newell's examination of Genesis 23 concerning the exchange between Abraham and the Hittites. At one point Newell evaluates Genesis 23:4, and highlights its New Testament fulfilment through referring to Hebrews 11:8–10, 13–16, in order to derive his cross-cultural principle: "remember who you are." Yet his examination of Genesis 29 ("The Marriage of Jacob") doesn't reflect on the New Testament at all before deriving various cross-cultural principles. There are also occasions when I feel the elucidated principle, as helpful as it might be, is not legitimately derived from the particular biblical text. But overall, *Crossing Cultures in Scripture* is an excellent book that will benefit both the theological student and the preacher.

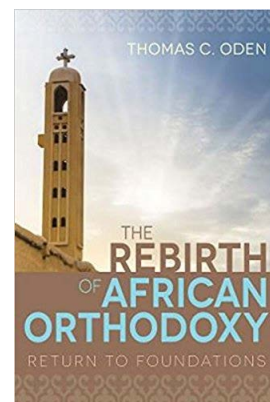
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Thomas C. Oden. *The Rebirth of African Orthodoxy: Return to Foundations*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2016. x + 174 pp. £19.73/\$24.99.

With the recent news of Thomas Oden's death, it seems, sadly, that *The Rebirth of African Orthodoxy* will be Oden's final work. Given the trajectory of his life and interests, perhaps it is fitting that it is a gift primarily for the churches of Africa.

Oden describes *The Rebirth of African Orthodoxy* as a sequel to *The Rebirth of Orthodoxy: Signs of New Life in Christianity* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002). The earlier work was penned for Western audiences and argued the thesis that many Christians across a gamut of traditions—Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant—are experiencing revitalization through a rediscovery of the Christian tradition that emerged in the early Christian era. This, Oden argued, offers a solid foundation for a new ecumenism focused on the truth embedded in early Christian tradition over against the moribund and institutional ecumenism of the World Council of Churches and the unmoored theological commitments underpinning it. The fact that this "paleo-orthodoxy" had deep roots in Africa was not lost on Oden, who subsequently wrote *How Africa Shaped the Christian Mind: Rediscovering the African Seedbed of Western Christianity* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007), where he called on a new generation of African scholars to re-engage with the early roots of African Christianity as the basis for African Christian identity.

This title of this present work does not imply a difference between orthodoxy and African orthodoxy. For Oden, orthodoxy is, in essence, African, i.e. the Christian tradition that emerged principally from North Africa in the first five centuries of the common era. Nor does Oden seek to offer a new thesis. Rather, Oden seeks to make practical his summons to African scholars to re-engage with early African Christianity by serving up a curriculum of ten "seminars." Though the book is described as



an international edition of *The Rebirth of Orthodoxy*, Oden reworks the content of the earlier book to highlight the African origins of the orthodoxy he believes is being reborn, not least in Africa. He has also re-packaged this material in order to be digested in group interaction out of an awareness that “learning in many parts of Africa is a social process” (p. 3). Very usefully, the book is being made available for free to African seminary students through a Kindle eBook loan program.

Three of Oden’s emphases require appraisal. First, Oden writes out of an urgent concern that Christianity in Africa eschew theological originality in favor of theological rootedness. For Oden, this concern is personal. He describes himself as someone who was once “in love with heresy” (p. 88) before experiencing a transformation under the influence of African Christian voices speaking before 400 AD. His explicit concern relates to the theological liberalism and its obsession with originality that led him astray in his younger years and has gained a footing in some quarters of Africa. But for many Christians in Africa, the threat of theological originality comes less from modernism and its theologies than from the myriad of self-styled prophets, apostles, and “wise men” now seducing vast crowds with claims of unique or anointed access to truth. Perhaps participants in these seminars would have been well-served had this latter threat been specified as the very real and present danger that it is.

Second, though Oden’s commendation of the African fathers is a welcome emphasis, perhaps some qualification would be in order. The theological views expressed by the early African fathers were by no means of one accord or equal in quality. Certainly, if the choice is between Augustine and Athanasius, on the one hand, and T. B. Joshua and David Oyedepo on the other, the preferred influence goes without saying. But perhaps the intended readers could benefit from some direction in avoiding the theological blind alleys that may be found in the fathers just as well as in later tradition. We benefit from following the fathers only to the extent that they were faithful to Scripture. Having taught students in Africa for nearly 25 years, I am always eager to point them to quality books written on the continent. But I never recommend the commentaries of the early African father Origen over those of, say, John Stott!

Third, for good and for bad, Christians did not stop doing theology after 400 A.D. Although foundations and roots can and should be found in early African Christianity, one wonders whether it alone can serve as the basis for the new ecumenicity for which Oden hopes. The problem is that the three major traditions represented on the continent—Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant—stand in the stream of developing theological traditions. In the case of the first two, the subsequent tradition developed over 1500 years is not simply an acknowledged influence but something to which they are ecclesiastically and theologically committed. I might wish that the Orthodox I know cherished Augustine, but the fact is that they do not. More importantly, because of their commitment to subsequent tradition, it is quite probable they cannot.

For its part, the evangelical Protestantism that is flourishing in Africa today is deeply indebted to the theological emphases of the Reformation. Evangelicals would not be well-served to surrender these or even de-emphasize them in order to focus more exclusively on the early African fathers. There are many riches to be gained from early African Christianity, but those riches mostly lie in the fields that were contested at that time (e.g., Trinitarianism, Christology). Shall we not also mine riches from fields that were contested in other times?

Despite these qualifications and questions, I remain quite convinced that Oden is on to something that augurs well for Christians in Africa. If, as Oden hopes, contemporary African Christianity sinks

roots deep into the fertile soil of early African Christianity, it may yet flourish as its predecessor did for many centuries to come.

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Benjamin C. Shin and Sheryl Takagi Silzer. *Tapestry of Grace: Untangling the Cultural Complexities in Asian American Life and Ministry*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2016. 197 pp. £20.00/\$26.00.

Ben Shin and Sheryl Silzer build their recent book, *Tapestry of Grace*, on a course they co-teach at Talbot School of Theology, “The Asian Church in American Society.” They write so that Asian American believers can experience the grace of God in church ministry and everyday life. The authors discuss how biblical truths interact with distinctive Asian values, primarily from Chinese, Japanese, and Korean cultures.

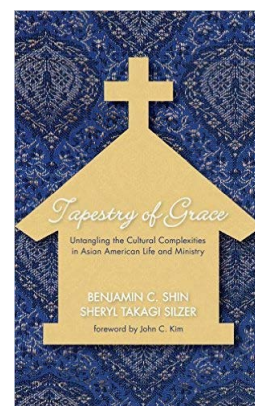
Tapestry of Grace is divided into three sections. In Section 1, Shin examines the various dynamics, ministry models, and expressions of spirituality in Asian American churches. After an appeal to bridge the divide between the traditional immigrant generation and succeeding American generations, Shin in Chapter 1 presents descriptions of nine models of churches frequented by Asian Americans. For example, the most common model, “Room-for-Let,” features an immigrant-led church with a small section reserved for English-speaking ministry. Shin provides visual depictions of each model, along with their strengths and weaknesses.

Chapter 2 focuses on the social dynamics of honor and shame, both in the New Testament and in Asian culture. Shin gives attention to the experience of shame among Asian Americans and how Christ’s work on the cross takes away shame and replaces it with honor.

Chapter 3 contains a discussion of the first-century understanding of grace, patron-client relationships, and reciprocity. Shin contends the Western notion of grace, which describes it as without obligation, differs from ancient understanding of grace. Building on recent scholarship, Shin describes “Bilateral Global Grace,” with its emphasis on reciprocity and relationship, showing its common threads with Asian cultural dynamics.

Chapter 4 offers an honest discussion of choosing between serving in an immigrant church or planting a new church, including the advantages and disadvantages of each. Shin rounds out Section 1 by comparing Korean and Chinese expressions of spirituality in Chapter 5.

In Section 2, Silzer describes how different cultural dynamics influence everyday life and church ministry. First, Silzer in Chapter 6 examines the doctrine of the image of God, building a biblical case for accepting others in the way God does. In Chapter 7, she utilizes a paradigm that employs an anthropological theory based on the dimensions of community and structure (p. 108). She distinguishes Asian “heirarching” (strong community, strong structure) from American “individuating” (weak community, weak structure). These differences in cultural values often make it a challenge for Asian Americans to experience grace in ministry and everyday life.



Chapter 8 contains a discussion of how cultural differences in language (including word choice, nonverbal behaviors, and use of questions) can be the source of frustration and conflict in Asian American relationships. In Chapters 9–10, Silzer explores the tenets of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism, highlighting filial piety, reciprocity, and their compatibility with biblical values.

Shin and Silzer share their personal journeys in Section 3. In Chapter 11, Shin describes how embracing the experience of being Korean-American, meeting the challenges of pastoring at a Korean church, and teaching at Talbot. In Chapter 12, Silzer shares her experiences of battling cancer, ministering with a mission organization, and navigating conflict as a Japanese American woman. The two authors conclude the book in Chapter 13 by encouraging the reader with vision for the future of the Asian American church.

Given the dearth of published resources that address Asian American ministry, *Tapestry of Grace* is a sorely needed book. Shin and Silzer draw on their ministry experience and research to clearly describe the unique dynamics within the cultural contexts of many churches. The book's content is especially helpful for those in immigrant contexts, to which belong the bulk of Asian-Americans in church ministry. Special attention is given to honoring those in the first generation and bridging the often-contentious gap between generations in Asian American churches. Discussion questions at the end of each chapter are an excellent resource for ministry teams and small groups to encounter together.

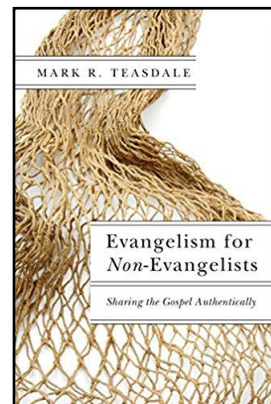
The book, however, has a few weaknesses. The authors' terminology is sometimes problematic, such as using "American" to refer to Western patterns of social interaction. Likewise, the distinction between "Asianized Americans" and "Americanized Asians" to describe two generations is confusing. Also, readers would be better served if the discussions of cultures in Section 2 were more readily related to practical ministry. Finally, the book's doctrinal content could be clarified further. The presentation of grace in Chapter 3 begs for more depth, especially for readers accustomed to traditional Reformed interpretations. The comparison of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism with biblical values could be filled out with discussions on deciphering which value system motivates behavior.

I echo John Kim's statement in the Foreword: "I've been eagerly waiting for a book like this" (p. xi). It will surely serve the English-speaking, Asian American churchgoer well. I hope to see this volume translated into Korean and Chinese to enhance its impact on the first generation. This book has the potential to spark helpful discussions and catalyze harmony where there has been much contention. I wholeheartedly recommend this book to those serving among Asian-Americans and anyone seeking to discuss the influence of culture on ministry relationships.

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Mark R. Teasdale. *Evangelism for Non-Evangelists: Sharing the Gospel Authentically*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016. 150 pp. £16.28/\$20.00.

Mark R. Teasdale is E. Stanley Jones Associate Professor of Evangelism at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary. He writes *this book* “not to convince you to adopt a specific way of understanding or practicing evangelism ... but to provide you with the tools to think through evangelism for yourself” (p. 4). The aim is to navigate readers to an “authentic understanding and practice of evangelism” (p. 4). But *Evangelism for Non-Evangelists* avoids being a map with specific directions. Instead, it is a guide to finding a path that is “uniquely yours” (p. 4).



Teasdale defines “evangelism” as “a bias for the good news” (p. 5). What is this good news? Teasdale explains, “God is redeeming the world through Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit and that we are invited to participate in that redemption process” (p. 6). This statement would readily fit in confessional traditions. But we also get the idea that Teasdale won’t impose his version upon readers. That is something readers should discover for themselves.

The book offers four tools. The first tool is a “starting point” (ch. 2): “We are sharing something we have found to be good” (p. 32), namely, God’s activity and nature (p. 41).

The second tool is “theological reflection” (ch. 3): “reflecting on our beliefs through as many of these [theological] traditions as we can” (p. 46). If we are unaware of our traditions, then we repeat the mistakes of “well-meaning evangelists ... who dedicate their lives to spreading the gospel but do it as agents of social, political and economic forces” (p. 57).

The third tool is having “contextual awareness” (ch. 4): knowing how context impacts us and those with whom we want to share the good news. I appreciate the claim that “Jesus Christ is translatable without loss of meaning or power” (p. 74). Hence, it’s not just individuals who can share in God’s goodness but entire cultures and social structures.

The fourth tool is the “creative practice” of evangelism (ch. 5). Here I appreciate the power of art, in its various forms, as a means of storytelling the good news (p. 103). I also welcome the section on hospitality, reconciliation, and stewardship, as ministries related to evangelism. In my upcoming book on evangelism, I similarly argue that hospitality provides the space and permission for people to talk about their deepest beliefs.

By the end of the book, Teasdale hopes we will see evangelism as more than revivalism, best practices, and the conversion of souls. He summarizes: “Evangelism has long been connected to the Christian idea of salvation. To engage in it is more than to work for the salvation of individual souls. Evangelism is an act by which we work to save the world” (p. 113).

The value of this book is its holistic understanding of evangelism. Evangelism is shaped not just by method but by understanding. The gospel offers not just entry into heaven but also participation in the Kingdom of God.

For many readers, the book might prompt as many questions and concerns as answers. (1) The book contains caricatures and straw-man arguments. For example, “The kingdom itself will be a place of love and compassion, not one where people submit out of fear that they will be condemned by an

insecure God who rules by force” (p. 49, my emphasis). Also, “Nowhere are we charged to tell people they are wrong, stupid or foolish in their thinking” (p. 37).

(2) Teasdale’s approach leaves readers with questions related to the gospel message itself. What exactly is the “good news”? What are people being “saved” from? What is this “kingdom of God”? What is God’s plan for the universe? The book is light on these details for two reasons. First, it is an exercise in prolegomena. It paints in the broadest of all possible brushstrokes. It self-consciously resists being specific. Second, the book tries to accommodate a wide range of theological traditions, so it doesn’t specify details lest it alienate any tradition. For example, Teasdale suggests,

Without trying to minimize these differences, consider how powerful it would be if all Christians started by recognizing that all other Christians believe that God is good and God wants to share that goodness with others.... In recognizing this unified wish to invite people into God’s goodness, we will find that many of our differences are complementary. Living in solidarity with the poor, offering people the chance to receive Jesus as Lord and Savior, and living according to a rule of life, for example, are not mutually exclusive. (p. 59)

But what is the basis for accommodating some traditions but not others? Not all differences can be complementary. Even if we think they can be complementary, some devout adherents of these traditions might not agree.

(3) The book hints that the traditional view—that there will be condemnation for those who don’t accept the good news—has no place in evangelism. For example, “Evangelism also does not seek to condemn people for the metanarratives they already accept” (p 37). Does this mean not all traditions and their differences can be accommodated equally?

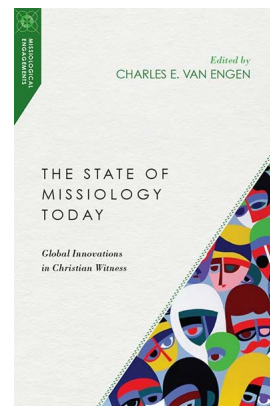
(4) Teasdale mainly uses Scripture in the second half of the book, as a source of examples for creative practices of evangelism. But perhaps it could have been used in similar proportions for the first half of the book to define evangelism, provide the starting points, and critique our theological reflections.

All in all, this book is good for discussions about prolegomena. It is also a helpful overview of how different traditions broadly understand evangelism. It offers a fresh perspective that needs to be heard, understood, and respected. But in accommodating a wide range of traditions, there is less to offer in terms of particular examples of what authentic evangelism might look like.

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Charles E. Van Engen, ed. *The State of Missiology Today: Global Innovations in Christian Witness*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic. x + 304 pp. £28.49/\$35.00.

Bearing an ambitious title, *The State of Missiology Today: Global Innovations in Christian Witness* presents a series of essays based on Fuller Seminary's 2015 Missiology Lectures, celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the School of Intercultural Studies (SIS). Most of the essays are edited versions of lectures presented at the anniversary event in Pasadena in October of 2015. Charles Van Engen, retired SIS professor who taught at Fuller for more than 25 years, edited the collection. SIS is the newer name of the original School of World Mission (SWM) founded by Donald McGavran in 1965.



Part 1 is titled “The Diffusion of Innovation: Looking Backward to Look Ahead” and features seven essays. The editor’s introduction and Gary McIntosh’s chapter on Donald McGavran both highlight the seminal work of McGavran in founding the SWM at Fuller. I found these two chapters among the best of the of the book’s fourteen essays.

McGavran was a true innovator. In several ways, he inspired his colleague, Ralph Winter, whose pioneering work on unreached people groups remains one of the outstanding missiological innovations of the 20th century. McGavran’s work in India gave birth to both the “homogenous unit principle” and church growth missiology. These insights plus an analysis of vertical segmentation among Indian castes paved the way for Ralph Winter’s conceptualization of “hidden” or “unreached” peoples. According to McIntosh, McGavran’s book, *The Bridges of God* (New York: Friendship, 1955), offers an insight still crucial for mission workers: “Christianity travels best over the natural bridges of family, tribe and kinship” (p. 36).

The third chapter of Part 1 describes indigenous church movements in mission praxis. Sarita Gallagher’s essay connects the church growth theory of McGavran and SWM colleague Alan Tippett with examples of missionary activities in Papua New Guinea. I found this chapter the most helpful of the entire corpus. Indigenous church movements continue to be outstanding bearers of the gospel in Africa, Southeast Asia and north India. Tippett’s six central characteristics of an indigenous church are well worth our attention (pp. 74–76). I also appreciated Pascal Bazzell’s creative contribution, “Who Is Our Cornelius? Learning from Fruitful Encounters at the Boundaries of Mission (pp. 107–24).

Part 2 contains seven more essays and is called, “The Implications of Innovation: Back to the Future (Looking Forward).” Several contributions travel the globe to cover developments from Europe, Africa, and Latin America. Other chapters explore interfaith issues, Roman Catholic contributions, and interactions with Islam. Whereas most of the essays in part one explicitly connect to Fuller Seminary or Donald McGavran, the chapters of Part Two seem to stand alone.

They are less compelling for failing to connect with the larger history of Fuller’s school of missiologists. Anne-Marie Kool’s chapter, “Revisiting Mission in, to and from Europe Through Contemporary Image Formation,” seems particularly incongruous to this reviewer. Most of her essay simply critiques the *Atlas of Global Christianity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), mostly in reference to Europe. The notable exception in Part 2 is Jayakumar Christian’s essay “Innovation at the Margins” (pp. 165–77). Christian lists what he deems Fuller’s contributions to innovation: McGavran on church growth, Ralph Winter and theological education by extension, Ralph Winter and unreached people groups, Luis Bush

and AD 2000, plus Bryant Myers and development missions. Christian goes on to refer to his own research about a missiology for the poor and marginalized. He argues for a missiology that highlights four themes: identity, anger, the Holy Spirit, and truth. He seeks to apply the church's understanding of the *imago Dei* to healing the oppressed (pp. 168–77).

Collections of essays by multiple authors often run the risk of being uneven in content. This volume on missiology is no exception but does contain many valuable contributions. The missiology reflected in this volume highlights Fuller Seminary's historical and current appreciation of church growth and church planting as mission themes. Students also should know the work of other Fuller faculty members that goes beyond the chapters in this book. For example, Bryant Myers reflects an expertise about holistic mission and development, and Evelyne Reischauer is an expert on dialogue and witness among Muslims.

The introduction and the conclusion are brief but memorable. Retired professor Charles Van Engen's introduction sets the work of McGavran and Fuller's SWM in historical context. Van Engen believes McGavran to be the most influential missiologist of the twentieth century after John R. Mott. He lists ten innovations associated with Fuller's SWM/SIS.

Fuller's current Dean of the SIS, Scott Sunquist, delivers the conclusion. He goes out on a limb to identify eight future trends in mission. I was intrigued where Van Engen's list of past innovations aligned with Sunquist's future trends. Spiritual issues (introduction) matched the Holy Spirit (conclusion). Indigeneity and contextualization (introduction) foreshadow insider movements (conclusion). Finally, social sciences employed in missiological analysis (introduction) give way to technology (conclusion).

Only historical hindsight will tell us for sure where and when innovations in missiology occur and stand the test of time. For example, students of the *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement* course developed by Ralph Winter know that Paul's apostolic band paved the way for missionaries working in teams. Benedict and others invented monastic orders and the Jesuits turned their order into a kind of missionary army. William Carey and Protestant missionary societies followed and gave way to modern mission agencies and today's non-government organizations. Ralph Winter, McGavran's colleague at Fuller, grasped the importance of this innovation and identified these missionary entities as "sodalities" serving alongside churches at large termed "modalities." *The State of Missiology Today* persuasively argues that the cumulative creativity of Fuller Seminary's SIS faculty has uniquely contributed both to conceiving and comprehending innovations in missiology.

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