Volume 31, Number 1 Spring 2020

# The Master's Seminary Journal



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THE MASTER'S SEMINARY JOURNAL
published by
THE MASTER'S SEMINARY

Nathan A. Busenitz, Dean of Faculty



*The Master's Seminary Journal* (*MSJ*) is is published semiannually each spring and fall. Beginning with the May 2013 issue, *MSJ* is distributed electronically for free. Requests to *MSJ* and email address changes should be addressed to journal@tms.edu. Articles, general correspondence, and policy questions should be directed to Chris Burnett.

*The Master's Seminary Journal*
13248 Roscoe Blvd., Sun Valley, CA 91352

*The Master's Seminary Journal* is indexed in *Elenchus Bibliographicus Biblicus of Biblica; Christian Periodical Index;* and *Guide to Social Science & Religion in Periodical Literature.* Articles are abstracted in *New Testament Abstracts; Old Testament Abstracts;* and *Religious and Theological Abstracts*. This periodical is indexed in the *ATLA Religion Database*® and it is also included in the full-text *ATLASerials*® (*ATLAS*®) collection. Both are products of the American Theological Library Association, 300 S. Wacker Dr., Suite 2100, Chicago, IL 60606, E-mail: atla@atla.com, and www.atla.com.



ISSN #1066-3959

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# The Master's Seminary Journal

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# EDITORIAL

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***Introductory Note:*** *Due to the COVID-19 health crisis, the Spring 2020 semester brought unprecedented challenges. On-campus classes were quickly shifted to online formats. In-person gatherings, including graduation, were either postponed or canceled. Public health orders directed students to stay home, emptying the campus of all but essential personnel. For graduate schools across the country, the pandemic raised questions about both pedagogy and sustainability.*

*But the health crisis also brought unprecedented opportunities, especially for churches and seminaries. Suddenly, the entire world fixed its attention on the realities of mortality and eternity. The brevity of life and the certainty of death gripped hearts and minds in a concentrated way. While preventative measures and medical treatments can slow the physical effects of disease, only the gospel offers a permanent cure for sin and death.*

*The following article does not address the COVID-19 pandemic. Rather, it focuses on the need for pastoral training, for the purpose of gospel advancement. When we remember why theological education is necessary, and what it is designed to accomplish, it reinforces our resolve to carry out our mission. A global health crisis does not change the scope or nature of our God-given mandate. It simply reminds us of the urgent need to raise up gospel ministers who will faithfully proclaim the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ.*

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A biblical justification for seminary education can be made from a number of New Testament passages. Matthew 28:19 prioritizes the teaching of disciples; 2 Timothy 2:2 emphasizes leadership training; Titus 1:9 requires elders to be equipped to articulate and defend the faith. Other familiar passages could also be cited. But a somewhat obscure passage in Acts 19 provides a precedent for seminary education

in a particularly insightful way. These verses, which may initially seem insignificant, describe the apostle Paul starting a theological training school in the city of Ephesus.

The setting was Paul's third missionary journey (AD 52/53–56). After leaving Antioch and traveling through the churches of southern Galatia, the missionary-apostle made his way to Ephesus. There he encountered roughly a dozen disciples of John the Baptist and introduced them to the Lord Jesus, the one to whom John pointed (Acts 19:1–7). Picking up the narrative at that point, Luke writes:

> And he entered the synagogue and continued speaking out boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God. But when some were becoming hardened and disobedient, speaking evil of the Way before the people, he withdrew from them and took away the disciples, reasoning daily in the school of Tyrannus. This took place for two years, so that all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks. (Acts 19:8–10)[1]

As Luke explains in verses 9–10, Paul met with a group of believers in a school for two years, reasoning about theology from the Word of God. Therein lies a basic paradigm of seminary education.

From this short passage (Acts 19:8–10), three features of the first seminary might be derived: the imperative, the investment, and the impact of theological education. These features provide helpful parallels for both students and teachers engaged in seminary education today.

## The Imperative: A Courageous Commitment to the Gospel (vv. 8–9a)

Acts 19:8 describes the content of Paul's message—a message he no doubt continued to deliver even after he left the synagogue. An analysis of verse 8 demonstrates that Paul's message was continuous ("continued"), courageous ("boldly"), careful ("reasoning"), full of conviction ("persuading"), and Christ-centered ("about the kingdom of God"). In keeping with His God-given mandate to preach the gospel, Paul faithfully discharged the truth of salvation in the synagogue in Ephesus for a period of three months.

As inevitably happens to those faithful to biblical truth, Paul encountered hostility. His message proved controversial (v. 9), not because the apostle was pugnacious, but because biblical truth is always polarizing. Commenting on this verse, Barnhouse notes the parallel to modern ministry: "Notice the reaction Paul received to his preaching. It is always the same; some respond favorably, but the vast majority are hardened and disobedient in their outlook…. This is always the response any preacher of the Word receives. This is the response any Christian receives to his faithful witness to the truth of God."[2]

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[1] Unless otherwise specified, all Scripture quotations are from the *New American Standard Bible* (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995).

[2] Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Acts: An Expositional Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 176.

Paul's unwavering commitment to the truth, in the face of hostility, sets a bold precedent for those in ministry today (whether in a church or seminary). Far too many Christian institutions are quick to soften the message for the sake of popular appeal. But the God-given imperative of any pastor or seminary professor is to champion the truth, no matter how foolish or unwelcome it may seem to the surrounding society.

## The Investment: A Concerted Concentration on Training (vv. 9b–10a)

Unable to continue teaching in the synagogue, Paul withdrew and began meeting with the disciples in a nearby school (probably a lecture hall used by a local philosopher named Tyrannus). Harrison sheds more light on the time Paul spent in this lecture hall:

> An illuminating addition in the Western text [Codex Bezae] at this point states that Paul's daily activity in this place went on from the fifth to the tenth hour, i.e., from 11:00 A.M. to 4:00 P.M. This was siesta time for the inhabitants. It has been conjectured that Paul was able to rent the hall at a nominal figure because it was not used at this time of day.[3]

That Paul met daily for a period of two years shows the level of personal investment he made in training these believers. If the marginal note in the Western text is correct, Paul's theology classes met during the city's normal naptime. The apostle gladly sacrificed his personal rest to instruct the disciples, likely through a form of dialogue teaching.

Interestingly, if Paul met with the disciples for five hours a day, six days a week, his total time with them would have been approximately 3,000 hours over two years. It is also noteworthy that Paul supported himself financially during this time as a tentmaker. As Bruce explains, "We may picture Paul spending the early morning at his manual labor (cf. 20:34; 1 Cor. 4:12), and then devoting the next five hours to the still more exhausting business of Christian dialectic. His hearers must have been infected with his keenness and energy."[4]

One final observation comes from "Tyrannus," whom most commentators think was the lecturer from whom Paul rented (or was given use of) the lecture hall. Kistemaker notes the significance of his name, "We have no further knowledge of Tyrannus, whose name meant Tyrant. Probably this was a nickname given to him by his pupils."[5] Apparently, Tyrannus was a taskmaster of a professor. What a contrast Paul's gracious and loving approach to instruction and encouragement must have been.

Again, Paul sets a compelling example for contemporary seminary instructors to consider. The apostle made real sacrifices to train up the next generation of Christian leadership. Two millennia later, it remains a sacred privilege to do the same for the glory of Christ.

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[3] Everett F. Harrison, *Acts: The Expanding Church* (Chicago: Moody, 1975), 291.
[4] F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 408.
[5] Simon J. Kistemaker, *Acts*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 684.

**The Impact:**
**A Christ-Honoring Contribution to the World (v. 10b)**

Luke concludes this small section by commenting on the impact resulting from Paul's training school in Ephesus: "so that all who lived in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks." Paul focused his attention on training, and the results were explosive. In fact, one commentator notes that "this venue, with its daily discussions over the course of two years, enabled Paul to have the most extensive influence so far recorded in Acts."[6]

As a result of this training school, pastors were trained and churches were planted. Bruce notes that the area around Ephesus "became one of the chief centers of Christianity. Probably all seven of the churches of Asia addressed in the Apocalypse were founded during those years, and others too."[7] He continues, "The planting of the churches of the Lycus valley, at Colossae, Hierapolis, and Laodicea, must be dated in this period: these cities were evangelized not by Paul personally but by his fellow workers."[8] From this school in Ephesus the gospel rapidly advanced into the surrounding regions. As Kistemaker observes, "We assume that the students trained by Paul became pastors in developing congregations in western Asia Minor…. These disciples were instrumental in preaching Christ's gospel, that is the word of the Lord, to both the Jews and the Greeks."[9]

Paul's two-year training school, by God's grace, had a far-reaching impact for the advancement of the gospel and the cause of Christ. Lenski writes: "Paul used Ephesus as a radiating center. While he remained in this metropolis and political center he reached out as far as possible by means of his assistants; how many he employed we cannot estimate. Congregation after congregation was formed."[10] The opportunity for gospel influence expanded exponentially as more and more students were trained.

Again, Paul's example provides a compelling model to consider. If seminaries are faithful to their God given *imperative,* and fully committed to the *investment they are called to make in the lives of their students*, they can rejoice in watching God bless their work as He uses His Word to *impact* the world. For the faculty of The Master's Seminary, the principles found in Acts 19:8–10 reflect both institutional priorities and individual convictions. Like Paul, may we be found faithful to fulfill our God-given mandate, by His grace and for His glory.

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[6] David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 536.
[7] Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles,* 409.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Kistemaker, *Acts*, 685.
[10] R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1961), 790.

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# ONE LIVING SACRIFICE: A CORPORATE INTERPRETATION OF ROMANS 12:1

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*Romans 12:1 is not only a well-known verse among Christians; it is also a highly cherished text about personal sanctification. However, is an individual perspective the only component of sanctification in Romans 12:1? Is there a corporate element to sanctification that has been overlooked by much of evangelical scholarship? This article will examine the corporate dimension of Romans 12:1 in four parts. First, it will set the stage with a survey of the background of the book. Second, it will examine the context of the first eight chapters of the book to pave the way for the meaning of Romans 12:1. Third, it will explore the context of the three chapters leading up to Romans 12:1, chapters 9–11, in order to demonstrate how an international subject leads to corporate sanctification. Fourth, it will analyze the syntax and grammar of Romans 12:1 and its surrounding context, in order to provide a complete and thorough interpretation of the verse.*

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## Introduction

One of the most misunderstood and misused verses in the New Testament, and perhaps in all of Scripture, is Romans 12:1. That may surprise some people, but the modern interpretation of this verse is quite lacking. Biblical scholars often demand, "Let the text speak for itself!" But in a case like this, that is easier said than done. Why does this verse fail to undergo sufficient scrutiny compared to other misused passages throughout the Bible? First, there is often a failure to recognize how Romans 12:1 fits within the broader argument of the book. This verse is a critical part of the apostle Paul's admonition to Roman Christians and a direct reflection of what was missing in this early church. Second, there are present-day, pre-text influences that have already framed the possibilities of one's understanding of this verse, limiting his ability to carefully recognize its true relevance. These pre-text influences regarding Romans 12:1 can include captivating sermons, passionate testimonies, Christian

music, Christian books, dynamic Bible translations or paraphrases, various study Bibles, heart-warming devotionals, or respectable commentaries. All may have good intentions, but they may also communicate a deficient interpretation of the actual meaning and importance of Romans 12:1. Once the Christian culture treats a misreading of a verse as normative, it is hard to see the need for change.

Many churches, missionary organizations, and para-church ministries adopt this verse as the motto for yielding to God's calling on the Christian life. On the one hand, this sentiment is often expressed in the following way: "God has so worked in my heart that I desire to obey the admonition of Romans 12:1 and I now willingly lay my body down 'as a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is [my] spiritual service of worship.'" By their confession with this verse, they are dedicating the rest of their lives to full-time Christian service, whatever that may mean. On the other hand, this verse often serves as a warning, as humorously depicted by the old cliché, which is usually said in reference to individual Christians who give up their calling or ministry: "The problem with living sacrifices is that they keep crawling off the altar."

Such expressions of dedication to the Lord and His service are commendable when accompanied with a genuine love for Christ. The sincerity of people making such statements is not the issue addressed in this article; using Romans 12:1 is. When individual verses are removed from their context and used as a convenient prooftext, then Scripture is inevitably, and unintentionally, reduced to a book of magical incantations with stand-alone verses. Almost any false religion or cult can use isolated verses to justify a variety of desired behaviors. However, God's Word should never be quoted out of context or used to justify one's conduct when it distorts the contextual meaning of a passage. God does not like being taken out of context, just like most people do not. Regardless, there are many examples of Christians in the evangelical world who readily misunderstand and misapply Romans 12:1.

This article is carefully written to restore the right understanding of Romans 12:1 and its renewed relevance for the church today. To begin, this article will seek to explain the background behind this powerful epistle. Next, it will walk through the broader and immediate arguments of the book and how they lay the groundwork for the true meaning of Romans 12:1. The better these contexts are understood, the more profound this verse will become. Finally, this article will expound on the verse itself, Romans 12:1, both in how it has been misinterpreted and in how it should be understood and applied to Christians in the modern church. The authors of this article hope that a faithful understanding of the importance and use of Romans 12:1 will cultivate more love for Christ and His body, the church!

## The Background of Romans

To properly apprehend the meaning of Romans 12, the reader must appreciate the book's background. This will be discussed in two parts—the Audience and Occasion and the Purpose of Writing.

## Audience and Occasion

To capture the argument of the book, the historical background must not be underestimated. How did the church[1] originate and who were its congregants? Blackwelder remarked, "We have no direct evidence concerning the founding of the church at Rome."[2] One of the early church fathers, Irenaeus, claimed that both Peter and Paul had a part to play in the establishment of the Roman church. In his words, "[T]here is one, very great, and most ancient and known to all, the Church founded and established at Rome by two most glorious Apostles, Peter and Paul…."[3] However, there is no early historical or biblical evidence that either of these apostles began the church in Rome.[4] Nevertheless, it is evident that these two apostles played a role in the early development of the church, as Peter seemingly associates with these Christians later in his ministry (1 Pet 5:13),[5] and the letter to the Romans is testimony to Paul's apostolic influence, not to mention his Roman imprisonment (Acts 28; Phil 1:12–14). If this is what Irenaeus intended by his comment, then it adds greater support to the notion.

The lack of biblical support for Peter's involvement in the earliest days of the church, and the fact that Paul had yet to visit the Roman believers at the writing of the Romans letter[6] (Rom 1:13, 15; 15:22), suggest that the church began under different circumstances.[7] In Acts 2:10–11, the reader is introduced to a list of Jewish exiles sojourning to Jerusalem for the celebration of Pentecost. Among them was a unique group of sojourning Romans, both Jews and proselyte Gentiles.[8] As Fiensy put it, "There were Jews from Rome present when the church began on the day of

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[1] Or churches, as there may have been several congregations in the city. See Craig S. Kenner, *Romans*, NCCS (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2009), 12.

[2] Boyce W. Blackwelder, *Toward Understanding Romans: An Introduction and Exegetical Translation* (Anderson, IN: The Warner Press, 1962), 28.

[3] Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies*, trans. Dominic J. Unger, ed. John J. Dillon (New York: Newman, 1992), 3:206.

[4] Blackwelder, *Toward Understanding Romans*, 28.

[5] The identity of the "fellow elect one [feminine] in Babylon" (ἡ ἐν Βαβυλῶνι συνεκλεκτὴ) is debated, but many scholars, including Schreiner, capably argue that the identity is Rome (i.e. the church in Rome; cf. Isa 13–14; 46–47; Jer 50–51; Rev 17–18). See Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, vol. 37, NAC, ed. E. Ray Clendenen (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 250–51.

[6] Blackwelder, *Toward Understanding Romans*, 28n1.

[7] Moreover, Paul's ambition to not preach the gospel on another apostle's foundation (15:20) discourages the idea that Peter or any other apostle established the Roman church. In addition to this, Blackwelder added, "[I]t is significant that the tradition which it reflects has no thought of the primacy of Peter." Ibid. In other words, even if Peter helped establish the Roman church, early church history lacks any evidence that Peter began as Rome's first pope. For a list of other theories besides Peter or Paul as the church's founder, see Blackwelder, *Toward Understanding Romans*, 31–32.

[8] Gk. οἱ ἐπιδημοῦντες Ῥωμαῖοι (Acts 2:10). The participle accompanying the ethnic "Romans" term—translated "visiting" or "sojourning"—means "to stay in a place as a stranger or visitor" according to Walter Bauer, "ἐπιδημέω," *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick William Danker, trans. William Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 370 (hereafter, BDAG). Also, following the term is the phrase Ἰουδαῖοί τε καὶ προσήλυτοι ("both Jews and proselytes"). Given that this ascription is placed in the middle of a list of ethnic names, it is likely that it specifically defines what kind of Romans came to Pentecost—both Jews and non-Jews (i.e., Gentiles who became worshippers of the true God). In this way, it is more than likely that both Roman Jews and Gentiles were saved at Pentecost and together began the churches in Rome.

Pentecost (Acts 2:10)."[9] These Romans were gloriously saved at the hearing of Peter's convicting sermon, and "[s]ome of them … carried back to Rome an account of the wonders witnessed on that day."[10] With the gospel in their hearts and its message on their lips, these invigorated believers returned to their synagogues proclaiming the news of the Messiah's coming, suffering, and resurrection, thus establishing the church to which Paul pens his letter. Because these new Christians lacked apostolic oversight, the stage was set, then, for Paul's letter to them.

For these believers, Rome had been their home for quite a long time. They were exiles, whose ancestors were victims of the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities. Even secular history confirms this, "Jews were present in Rome well before 139 B.C." [11] Sadly, these exiles were often expelled from Rome, first in 139 B.C., and "[a]gain in A.D. 19 Jews were expelled from Rome (along with members of the cult of Isis) and yet again in A.D. 49. These expulsions were probably for several reasons but one of these … was surely anti-Semitism."[12] Of these expulsions, the third exile plays a role in Paul's Romans letter. According to the historian Suetonius, the Jews were expelled from Rome by Emperor Claudius because of one named Chrestus,[13] which may in fact be a varied Latin pronunciation of Christ. This comports with the New Testament narrative. In A.D. 49, Claudius banned the Jews from Rome, and as Acts 18:1–2 confirms, both Aquila and Priscilla were exiled with them. This Roman couple was likely active in the church in Rome before the expulsion (Rom 16:3), yet became Paul's ministering companions in Asia Minor in the days following.

It is not likely that Claudius expelled the Jews because of the content of the Christian message. Rather, as was often the case in the synagogues, riots began over the Christian message as orthodox and Christian Jews discussed Jesus as Messiah (e.g., Acts 13:45; 15:19–20; 17:5, 13; 18:12–13).[14] But in A.D. 54, Emperor Claudius died, and with him so did the edict of Jewish expulsion from Rome. Thus,

> [T]he [orthodox] Jews and the Jewish Christians were expelled from Rome—and therefore from the Roman church—several years before Paul wrote the letter to the Romans. By A.D. 57 a few Jews had begun to trickle back into the city—for example Aquila and Prisca—but the percentage of Jews in the church was still rather low.[15]

More than likely, a few years later, Paul is prepared to write his letter to the Romans in A.D. 57–58, immediately preceding his journey back to Jerusalem at the end of his third missionary journey (Acts 20:38).[16] Clearly, "by the time Paul wrote

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[9] David A. Fiensy, *New Testament Introduction*, CPNIV (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1994), 223. See also Blackwelder, *Toward Understanding Romans*, 28.

[10] Blackwelder, *Toward Understanding Romans*, 31.

[11] Fiensy, *New Testament Introduction*, 222.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid., 224.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1961), 397. In fact, Paul's trip to Jerusalem was partly the occasion for the writing of the letter itself (Rom 15:25–28).

his letter (A.D. 57) to Rome the membership had changed dramatically. Only eight years before in A.D. 49 all or most Jews were expelled from Rome."[17]

This is one reason among many why many scholars assert that the church in Rome was composed of both Jews and Gentiles.[18] But as the historical background suggests, the percentage was strongly in favor of Gentiles. Not all Jews had returned from the exile. Many remained scattered throughout Asia Minor and other parts of the Roman Empire. This validates internal evidence in the book, since Paul compares this Roman congregation to the rest of the Gentiles to which he had ministered (Rom 1:13).[19] The Romans were like the many Gentiles to whom Paul longed to preach his gospel (1:15), whether they be Greeks, barbarians, wise, or foolish[20] (1:14). Even more directly, in Romans 11:13 Paul delimits his focus to the Gentile portion of his audience, "But I am speaking to you who are Gentiles."[21]

While both internal and historical evidence suggest that there was a high percentage of Gentiles that composed the church at the time of Paul's writing, there were also Jews in the audience who had recently returned from expulsion, albeit a minority. Even the mention of Gentiles in 11:13 implies that Gentiles were not the only audience listening to the reading of Paul's letter. Such a qualification—"I am speaking to you who are Gentiles"—is unnecessary if the audience was exclusively comprised of Gentiles. Moreover, a few other clues in the book hint that a small minority of Jews existed in the Roman church. For instance, Paul asks in 4:1, "What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found?" By phrasing it with the first person plural, "*our* forefather according to the flesh,"[22] Paul is suggesting that some of his readers have solidarity with Abraham physically, "according to the flesh."[23] Evidently, Paul also exhorts his readership in 14:1–15:6 about dietary issues germane to the Jewish conscience (cf. 1 Cor 8, 10) and honoring one day over another (i.e. Sabbath; 14:1; 15:1, 7). Patently, "the majority of the Roman Christians were Gentile, and the minority Jewish."[24]

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[17] Fiensy, *New Testament Introduction*, 223–24.

[18] Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 395–96.

[19] Ibid., 395.

[20] Gk. Ἕλλησίν τε καὶ βαρβάροις, σοφοῖς τε καὶ ἀνοήτοις. Greeks and barbarians may have been polarized classes of people in the ancient Roman world. The more literate class of higher Greek culture took the term "Greek" for its name, while the lower class of non-Greek speaking individuals (or simply illiterate) would have comprised the barbarian class. See Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT, ed. Joel B. Green (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 61–62.

[21] Gk. Ὑμῖν δὲ λέγω τοῖς ἔθνεσιν. Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations will be taken from the New American Standard 1995 Update (NAU). This version will also be abbreviated throughout the article as NAU.

[22] Gk. τὸν προπάτορα ἡμῶν κατὰ σάρκα. Emphasis added.

[23] Gk. κατὰ σάρκα. This phrase may have one of two meanings—either Abraham is an ancestor of Paul and some of his readers, or, if Paul is speaking rhetorically on behalf of his readers, then Abraham is an ancestor of Paul, some of his readers, and Jewish antagonists to which the theoretical debate is directed. This writer (Jay Street) prefers the latter in this case, given that the phrase is found in a rhetorical question.

[24] A. H. McNeile, *St. Paul: His Life, Letters, and Christian Doctrine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1920), 190.

## Purpose of Writing

Romans is undoubtedly unique in the New Testament. There is no other book in Scripture that comes close to the length of Paul's gospel presentation in Romans. That is why many scholars have scratched their heads when trying to explain Paul's purpose to compose such a long, but brilliant, treatise on the gospel of salvation. Why does Paul do this in Romans and not in other epistles? In fact, this posture is strange because the Roman believers had relatively few problems when considering other New Testament audiences. Paul commends them in 15:14, "And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, *filled with all knowledge* and able also to admonish one another."[25] In other words, the Romans were fully knowledgeable about the gospel, living it out, and helping others to do the same. Why "remind [them] again" (15:15) of these things?

To answer this, Guthrie surmised that there were a few "intellectual problems" among the Roman audience that needed addressing."[26] While this is possible, the fact that Paul insists that they were "filled with all knowledge" (15:14) suggests that he did not consider gospel comprehension as a significant concern, but that they needed preparation for an "intellectual" attack (16:17–18). Because of Paul's emphasis on the Law and Jewish retorts throughout the book (3:1–8; 7:7, 13; 9:19, etc.), it is likely that Paul envisioned a Jewish assault on the horizon.[27] It is often overlooked that not only were Christian Jews slowly returning to their churches after the ban was lifted in A.D. 54, but non-Christian, orthodox Jews were returning to their synagogues as well. Archaeologists have verified that "[s]everal synagogues existed [in Rome] during the New Testament era."[28] Hence, the Jews were anxious to reclaim their territory in the empire's capital city.[29]

That is why Paul composed a manifesto of gospel truth to this mostly Gentile audience. McNeile remarked, "[T]he former [Gentile Christians] needed the guidance of a master mind … framing a comprehensive *apologia* for the principle of universal religion as set over against Jewish nationalism."[30] Many of these Gentile Christians may have been new converts since the Jewish charter-members were expelled from Rome. The church was likely unskilled with the Hebrew Old Testament and vulnerable for an intellectual assault. Paul anticipated that the orthodox Jews would have a field day arguing the Roman Gentile Christians out of their cherished

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[25] Emphasis added.

[26] Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction*, 399.

[27] As Guthrie wrote, "For this reason Paul deals with the fundamental Christian principle of 'righteousness' as contrasted with the Jewish approach, and then discusses the problem of Israel's failure and her relationship to the universal Christian Church." Ibid.

[28] Fiensy, *New Testament Introduction*, 222.

[29] It is even possible that orthodox Jews were more eager to return to their synagogues than Christian Jews to their churches since many Christian Jews were likely involved in the gospel ministries of Asia Minor and other parts of the Roman Empire.

[30] McNeile, *St. Paul*, 190. Though McNeile devalued the local Jewish confrontation in Rome, the lofty *apologia* of Romans and the local Jewish setting are not mutually exclusive. In fact, since Paul likely anticipates that the Roman Christians will experience opposition from returning orthodox Jews, he composes a comprehensive *apologia* so that they will be ready for any kind of attack. Because the confrontation had yet to precipitate, he did not have any specific theology to train the Romans for as he does in other epistles for churches he knows so well.

gospel beliefs. Paul was going to make sure that would never happen. He saw this opportunity to ensure that their faith was founded with apostolic authority and biblically defensible before the first witnesses of Pentecost passed off the scene. Thus, while Romans contains unparalleled theology, a lofty tone, and masterful rhetoric unlike any other New Testament letter,[31] it is evident that Paul penned Romans with the Roman situation in mind.[32]

## The Context of Romans 1–8[33]

Not only does an understanding of the background help clarify the meaning of Romans 12:1, but a survey of the book itself is important as well. This section will address chapters 1–8, whereas the following section will concentrate on chapters 9–11.

Romans begins with a personal touch like Paul's other epistles,[34] but in 1:16–17, Paul seamlessly transitions from directly speaking to his readership and escorts them into what seems at first like a masterful soliloquy on the state of mankind before God (1:18–32). Finding common ground with every human being, Paul insists that no one can claim ignorance of God[35] (1:21) because He has clearly revealed His attributes in creation (1:19–20). Instead, man's unwillingness to glorify God (1:21) inevitably results in idolatry,[36] perverting God's image (1:23), and bringing upon him the only requisite consequence—the perversion of their own image[37] as well (1:24–32).

But Romans is not a soliloquy as much as it is a diatribe[38] between Paul and an imaginary Jewish opponent from 1:18–11:12.[39] It is as though Paul is previewing for his Roman readers his gospel conversations with Jews in the local synagogues.[40] Paul begins with common ground that all Jews can agree upon (1:18–2:16), demonstrating that all nations are without excuse for their behavior (1:21; 2:1), and then not long into his discussion, Paul challenges the Jew's internal loyalty to the Law of Moses[41] (2:17–29). This sparks immediate backlash and questions—"Then what advantage has the Jew?" (3:1); "If some did not believe, their unbelief will not nullify the faithfulness of God, will it?" (3:3); "But if through my lie the truth of God abounded to

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[31] Fiensy, *New Testament Introduction*, 225.

[32] Ibid., 225–26.

[33] Much of the content in this section is due to the research and wording from prior work by contributor Jay Street. See John David Street III, "Looking with New Covenant Eyes at an Old Covenant Problem: Resolving the Romans 7 Riddle," ThM thesis, The Master's Seminary, 2018.

[34] Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 56.

[35] Ibid., 83.

[36] Ibid., 74.

[37] Keener, *Romans*, 34–35.

[38] Stanley Kent Stowers, *The Diatribe and Paul's Letter to the Romans*, SBL 57 (Chino, CA: Society of Biblical Literature, 1981), 122–23.

[39] Keener, *Romans*, 42. In 11:13–32, Paul speaks directly to his Gentile readers after all the Jewish questions have been answered.

[40] Keener notions the idea that Paul was encountering similar gospel arguments in the synagogues he visited. Keener, *Romans*, 51.

[41] Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 33 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 315.

His glory, why am I also still being judged as a sinner?" (3:7). These are Paul's rhetorical questions, spoken from the vantage of an antagonistic Jew.[42] The thirty or more questions[43] throughout Romans 3–11 act as the discourse markers that transition Paul's thoughts from one argument to another. Paul employs these questions as an excellent teaching strategy for his reader to capably defend the gospel in response to the Jewish skeptic.

Ultimately, Paul's goal is to unquestionably prove that every person, whether Jew or Gentile, is a sinner without excuse (2:1–3:20). In other words, Romans 1:18–3:20 is Paul's case that Jews and Gentiles are *equally* sinners and that God is *right* in the way that He judges them. He builds this case by closing every door of salvation for humanity except the door of faith in Jesus Christ (3:21–31). Therefore, after shutting every other door, beginning in 3:21 Paul reveals the only means of salvation left for humanity—the gospel. Here, he presents the case that God is *right* to save sinners by the gospel. In other words, salvation by faith in Christ does not compromise his inflexible justice; rather the righteous anger of God is still satisfied in Christ's sacrifice[44] (3:24–26). And since both Jews and Gentiles are *equally* condemned before God, this salvation is also *equally* available to both (1:16–17; 3:23–24). By the end of Romans 3, Paul has brilliantly presented the gospel and proved that the balances of justice are equitable.

This leaves many questions for the Jew, especially with respect to his Jewish heritage and the Law. In 4:1–25, Paul educates his readers on the Old Testament, showing them that Abraham is an excellent example of salvation through faith, not through works of the Law.[45] In fact, if Abraham's salvation came by works, not by faith, then a promise of salvation could never be made, because it would be conditioned on the performance of a fallible person (4:16).[46] A conditional promise is an oxymoron. That is why God established a unilateral covenant with Abraham and his descendants, something which Jewish and Gentile believers can appropriate for themselves[47] when they walk in the same kind of faith as Abraham (4:16, 23–25).

As many scholars properly recognize, Paul organizes his content in Romans 5–8 to mirror itself in a chiastic way, both grammatically[48] and thematically,[49]which is

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[42] Keener, *Romans*, 51.

[43] For a full listing of all the rhetorical questions in Romans, contributor Jay Street has compiled the following: 3:1 (2x), 3, 5, 7–9, 27 (2x), 29, 31; 4:1, 9–10; 6:1, 15; 7:7, 13; 8:31; 9:14, 19, 30, 32; 10:14–15 (?) (4x), 18–19; 11:1, 7, 11.

[44] Robert H. Mounce, *Romans*, NAC 27 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 118.

[45] Ibid., 121.

[46] As Fitzymer put it, "As the law and the promise cannot exist side by side, the law must yield." Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 385.

[47] Mounce, *Romans*, 131.

[48] Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 293–94. Käsemann claimed that chapter 5 has connections to what follows (i.e., chapters 6–8) and not as much with what comes before (i.e., chapters 3–4). In this, he perceived that "a thematic superstructure for this section" appears. See Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 159.

[49] Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 293.

a common tactic in Scripture.[50] With the center of the chiasm in 7:14–8:4,[51] it is no wonder that the heartbeat of this section reaches an emotional climax of defeat (7:23–24) before the light of the New Covenant (8:1–4) breaks through the gloom of inability and wretchedness under the Old Covenant.

In Romans 5, Paul applies Abraham's blessing of faith to his mostly Gentile audience. Solidarity with Christ gives Christians reason to boast in all circumstances, knowing that their hope is secure that they will one day dwell in God's presence (5:1–2),[52] and that trials only magnify that hope (5:3–5), because it produces an endurance that proves the authenticity of faith and security in Christ.[53] Moreover, trials amplify the Spirit's presence more than in any other circumstance, because in those moments He reminds His people of the extent of God's love for them, even when they were once His enemies (5:5–11). That kind of love can only be found in solidarity with Christ, which follows the same framework of man's solidarity with Adam, only with incalculable blessings and grace (5:12–21)!

Paul responds in Romans 6 to Jewish antagonism that presumes that the Christian gospel is a clever way to excuse sin (6:1, 15).[54] On the contrary, those who die with Christ also live with Christ (6:2–4). There is no such thing as a Christian who gets part of Christ; the Christian is not only in solidarity with Christ by name, but also in His righteous life (6:5–11). That is why it is imperative for Christians to live out who they already are in Christ, not letting sin dominate, but proving themselves as slaves of *righteousness* by living *righteously* (6:15).[55] Otherwise, if their lives do not coordinate with their profession, then they prove themselves to be slaves of sin, not slaves of Christ (6:15–23).

Therefore, fruit is a necessary and natural by-product of being in Christ (7:4), which can only come from Spirit-filled living (7:6).[56] This is in contrast to life under the Law before the inauguration of the New Covenant (7:1–3, 5). Being bound to the Law is what kept God's people unable to be all that God wants them to be (7:7–25).[57] Though the Law is not evil in its own right (7:8, 12, 13b), it yet had no ability to grant spiritual prowess to its adherents (7:14; 8:3).[58] Instead, believers under the Old Covenant[59] were left to their own will-power and flesh to overcome sin (7:15–21). But

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[50] Chiasms can be found in large or small sections of Scripture. A smaller example would include a few verses, such as Genesis 11:1–9. Middle-sized examples would consist of the miracles of Jesus in Mark 5:1–6:6, the second half of Isaiah in Isaiah 40–66, or Paul's discussion here in Romans 5–8. Finally, a larger example can be found in an entire book, such as Lamentations.

[51] Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 293.

[52] Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 220.

[53] Keener, *Romans*, 71.

[54] Contra Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 356. Moo considers the idea of the Jewish interlocutor, but abandons it for the more traditional idea that his audience was tempted to think that the gospel of grace promotes sin. On the contrary, rhetorical questions in Romans are by and large for the interlocutor, and as he does throughout Romans 3–11, Paul defends the gospel in 6:1 from the Jewish attack that supposes that the gospel opposes righteous living.

[55] Ibid., 366–67.

[56] Keener, *Romans*, 86.

[57] Ibid.

[58] Mounce, *Romans*, 175.

[59] For an argument for the Old Testament believer in Romans 7, see Walt Russell, "Insights from Postmodernism's Emphasis on Interpretative Communities in the Interpretation of Romans 7," *JETS* 37,

even the best inclinations for God and His Law (7:16, 22, 25b) were ultimately stifled by the power and presence of sin (7:23).[60]

But under the New Covenant, the story is different: there *is no* condemnation (8:1). In fact, Jews and Gentiles, united in the church, are equally granted the ability to walk in righteousness precisely the way God intends (8:4).[61] Therefore, the multi-ethnic church must establish habits of righteousness in Spirit-filled living (8:12–17) as they await the redemption of creation and their decaying bodies, which are still susceptible to temptation (8:18–25). In times of tribulation the Spirit raises believers' prayers to properly groan for the kingdom they have yet to see (8:24–27),[62] while these heavenly citizens hold fast to the promise that God has been turning evil for good from the beginning of time (8:28), with His masterpiece being the redemption of His people (8:29–30).[63] That is why Paul can confidently conclude that nothing can separate Jew or Gentile from the love of God (8:38–39). These gospel promises to both nation groups are unbreakable, and the Trinity is exhaustively involved at every turn (8:31–39). But now a big question remains—With the church secure in God's plan, has God reneged on His promises to national Israel, and, if not, then how do Gentiles factor into this plan? As explained in the next section, the answer has to do with God's international mission to be God over all.

*Jay Street*

## The Context of Romans 9–11

While Romans 1–8 lays the foundation for understanding Romans 12:1, Romans 9–11 begins to build the walls. These three chapters also continue to develop the presentation of the gospel, but frame it from an international perspective. If the gospel is by grace alone through faith in Christ, how can one reconcile the fact that most Jews have rejected the gospel when the Old Testament promises their salvation?[64] Moreover, why do the Gentiles seem to have a greater presence among God's people than the Jews, God's chosen people?[65] Paul answers these questions in chapters 9–11. This international scope is significant at this point in the book, especially since it is the section leading up to Romans 12:1. In Romans 9–11, Paul paves the way for Romans 12:1 by discussing the relationship Jews and Gentiles have with each other on a national and redemptive-historical scale. How God treats them in salvation from a global perspective impacts how they must treat each other in their conduct from an ecclesiastical perspective. For this reason, in chapters 9–11, Paul levels the playing field, so that both Jews and Gentiles will come to realize that neither one has any leverage over the other.[66]

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no. 4 (December 1994). Also see Jay Street, "Romans 7: An Old Covenant Struggle Seen through New Covenant Eyes," *MSJ* 30, no. 2 (Fall 2019): 277–302. Craig Keener also argues a similar view. See Keener, *Romans*, 89–95.

[60] Ibid., 94.

[61] Mounce, *Romans*, 177.

[62] Keener, *Romans*, 107.

[63] Ibid., 108.

[64] Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 548–49.

[65] Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, BECNT, ed. Moisés Silva (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998), 471.

[66] Ibid.

Throughout these three chapters, Paul offers three reasons that Jews and Gentiles must not only coexist peacefully in the church, but also rally together as one united campaign around the worship of Christ:[67] (1) All are saved for God's glory, (2) all are saved by grace through faith alone, and (3) all benefit from the other's salvation. Therefore, as Paul defends toward the end of chapter 11, there is no room for pride (11:20, 25); there is only room for unity. They must come together as one living sacrifice (12:1).

## All Are Saved for God's Glory

The first reason for unity is that all are saved for God's glory. This is the most fundamental reason of the three. Why does God save both Jews and Gentiles by grace through faith alone and why do each benefit from the other's salvation? It is because God is not just a God of the Jews only; He is a God of the Gentiles too. He is Lord over every nation and wants to be glorified in every corner of the earth. It is not enough that the Jews are saved by God and worship Him; the Gentiles must do this too, so that God's glory will fill the earth, not just Palestine. This becomes apparent at various points throughout Romans 9–11. In the opening verses of chapter 9, Paul laments the unredeemed state of his Jewish brethren and lists all the wonderful blessings which God has bestowed on them (9:1–5). Such blessings include the covenants, the temple service, and the promises. But the last blessing is the Messiah Himself, whom he describes in the following way: "[F]rom whom is the Christ according to the flesh, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen" (9:5). Jesus is not just the God of the Jews; He is also the God of the Gentiles. He is over all and wants to exhibit His authority and power over every nation, tribe, and tongue this world possesses (Rev 5:9; 14:6).[68]

This is the very reason, as Paul continues to explain when quoting Exodus 9:16, that God raised up and brought down Pharaoh during the exodus: "'FOR THIS VERY PURPOSE I RAISED YOU UP, TO DEMONSTRATE MY POWER IN YOU, AND THAT MY NAME MIGHT BE PROCLAIMED THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE EARTH'" (Rom 9:17). Just as God saved Israel in the exodus physically, He saves all His people spiritually with the intention of spreading the glory of His name throughout the world.[69] This is further elaborated in Romans 9:22–24, when Paul defines the purpose of salvation and damnation:

> What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? And He did so to make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory, even us, whom He also called, not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles.

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[67] Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 553.

[68] James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, vol. 38b, WBC, eds. David A. Hubbard, Glenn W. Barker, and Ralph P. Martin (Dallas: Word, 1988), 536.

[69] Mounce, *Romans*, 200.

It's not just the Jews through whom God is interested to share the riches of His glory; it's the Gentiles too. God will be glorified in all people-groups.[70] For this reason, Paul argues that salvation comes only through faith, not works, "For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him" (10:12). If salvation is based on works, one nation may have reason to boast in itself rather than God.[71] Instead, God has designed salvation in such a way that all the glory goes to Him.[72] It is His work alone; both Jews and Gentiles must simply believe.

In the same way, all glory belongs to God for causing both Jews and Gentiles to benefit from the other's salvation. Through each nation's disobedience, the other comes to Christ, so that God may demonstrate His saving work over all, "For God has shut up all in disobedience so that He may show mercy to all" (11:32). The disobedience of Israel in the latter days has compelled the Gentiles to repent; the disobedience and subsequent conversion of the Gentiles will one day make Israel jealous to the point of repentance. In the end, God takes all who were disobedient and shows them mercy. It is all about Him.

Therefore, Paul concludes Romans 9–11 with a fitting doxology, "For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen" (11:36). Salvation is entirely God's work. Therefore, the glory belongs entirely to God. Thomas Schreiner captures the climax of Romans 11:36: "The salvation of Jews and Gentiles is penultimate. What is ultimate is the glory of God."[73] It is God's choice to save those whom He wants, and it is the saved who only need to believe. It is God's will to draw the Gentiles through Israel's disobedience and to draw Israel through the Gentiles' salvation. Since it is all about God's glory, a Jew or a Gentile has no reason to boast in himself over and against the other. He recognizes that he has been shown mercy and that the praise belongs to God alone. Therefore, the glory of God is the ultimate incentive for ethnic unity in the church.

### All Are Saved by Grace through Faith Alone

The second reason for unity is that all are saved by grace through faith alone. This argument has already been an important theme throughout the epistle to the Romans. It submits proof of God's righteousness (3:24–26), it ensures the effectiveness

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[70] Keener, *Romans*, 120. Keener observes, "But as that text had declared that he would make known the power of his name 'throughout the earth,' Paul can infer that God cares about Gentiles as well as Jews (9:24)."

[71] Schreiner, *Romans*, 561; Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 387.

[72] Dunn, *Romans 9–16*, 618. Dunn rightly identifies the second person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ, as the Lord of all in this verse, "It is not simply that the extension of God's grace to all has ended Israel's special covenant privileges as privileges enjoyed by Jews alone. It is also that the God who committed himself to Israel in covenant can no longer be thought of as simply or primarily the God of Israel. It is also that God, who showed himself to be concerned for all humankind in raising Christ from the dead and exalting him to his right hand, cannot now be understood or recognized other than in terms of this Christ. In committing himself to act so decisively in and through Christ, he obliged men and women to recognize God-in-Christ and to address themselves to God-through-Christ. Thus it is now through this Christ that all will be saved, share in the final wholeness of God's fulfilled purpose for the world—and that 'all' includes Jew as well as Greek."

[73] Schreiner, *Romans*, 638.

of salvation (4:16), it reconciles man to God (5:1), and it motivates the pursuit of sanctification (6:8–12). But in Romans 9–11, the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith bears another important implication: it is a catalyst for humble unity in the church.

From the very beginning, God has always operated with humanity on the basis of grace alone. When God chose Jacob over Esau to be the progenitor of His people, He did so without consideration of either one's efforts or character (9:11).[74] In truth, once they grew up, each one exhibited significant flaws that would have disqualified them both.[75] But the nature of grace is that of unconditional election, not moral qualification. For this reason, Paul summarizes God's choice of Jacob over Esau by saying: "So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy" (9:16). The choice is God's alone, and therefore, the glory belongs to Him alone.

This is why the Word of God has not failed when it promised salvation to Israel. Many Jews may have rejected God and His Messiah over the course of their history, but that is simply because "they are not all Israel who are descended from Israel" (9:6). There is always a remnant of believers within Israel chosen by God, in order to demonstrate that it is God's grace alone that redeems His people, and nothing else (11:5–6).[76] Anyone who was not saved was not treated unfairly, because "they did not pursue [righteousness] by faith, but as though it were by works" (9:32). Moreover, God's Word has not failed, because all national Israel will one day be saved by God's redeeming grace (11:12). Even though Israel is God's chosen people, they all are saved by His grace, not on any merit of their own. They have nothing to boast in.

This comes into focus in chapter 10. The standard for salvation across the board is grace appropriated through faith alone, as defined in Romans 10:9–11:

> [I]f you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. For the Scripture says, "WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED."

This way of salvation is not just for the Gentiles; it is also for the Jews,[77] because as Paul says in verses 12–13: "For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him; for 'WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED'" (10:12–13). Jews have no reason to act condescendingly to the Gentiles; they are saved by grace through faith just like their Gentile brothers and sisters.[78] In the same way, Paul warns the Gentiles not to act condescendingly to the Jews in Romans 11:17–20:

> But if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive, were grafted in among them and became partaker with them of the rich root

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[74] Mounce, *Romans*, 198.

[75] Schreiner, *Romans*, 507.

[76] William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Paul's Epistle to the Romans*, vol. 2, New Testament Commentary, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1981), 318.

[77] Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 659.

[78] Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 387.

> of the olive tree, do not be arrogant toward the branches; but if you are arrogant, remember that it is not you who supports the root, but the root supports you. You will say then, "Branches were broken off so that I might be grafted in." Quite right, they were broken off for their unbelief, but you stand by your faith.

The basis of salvation has always been faith for either Jew or Gentile. Therefore, boasting is excluded. In addition, it is the root of a Jewish faith that supports both of them, not an original faith of the Gentiles themselves.[79] The Gentiles needed the Jews, just as much as the Jews now need the Gentiles. As a result, boasting is again excluded. Unity is essential in the New Testament church. No one stands head and shoulders above another because all are saved by grace through faith alone.

### All Benefit from the Other's Salvation

The third reason for unity is that all benefit from the other's salvation. This is an important truth, expressed primarily in chapter 11, that often gets overlooked in favor of the debate between whether national Israel will be saved one day or not. However, this point is critical to the full message of Romans and the development of the concluding chapters, 12–16. The salvation of the Gentiles hinges on Israel's rejection and the salvation of Israel hinges on the salvation of the Gentiles.[80] This becomes a practical reason to build unity in the church. Each relationship will be explored in succession.

First, Gentiles are saved through Israel's rejection. Paul introduces the Roman church to this concept in 10:20 when He quotes Isaiah 65:1, "And Isaiah is very bold and says, 'I WAS FOUND BY THOSE WHO DID NOT SEEK ME, I BECAME MANIFEST TO THOSE WHO DID NOT ASK FOR ME.'" The cause of Gentile conversion in Romans 10 and Isaiah 65 is Israel's rejection of God.[81] Because God's own people rebelled against Him (Isa 65:2), He turned to other people-groups. Paul himself identifies Israel's own rebellion as the catalyst for Gentile salvation in Romans 11:11, "[B]y their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles."[82] Israel's own rejection paved the way for Gentiles to come to saving faith in Christ. Paul intends for this truth to humble the Gentiles, "For I do not want you, brethren, to be uninformed of this mystery — so that you will not be wise in your own estimation — that a partial hardening has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in" (11:25). The Gentiles came to believe in Jesus on the basis of Israel's rejection. This was all a part of God's redemptive strategy, leaving no room for arrogance.[83]

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[79] Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 704.

[80] Mounce, *Romans*, 218.

[81] Many commentators interpret Isaiah 65:1 as God allowing Himself to be sought by Israel, not the Gentiles. However, good evidence exists for the identification of this people being the Gentiles, not Israel. For example, the word for "call" (קרא) at the end of the verse appears in the Pual stem, indicating a passive. Therefore, the last line of Isaiah 65:1 should be translated, "[T]o a nation that *was not called* by my name," as the English Standard Version has it.

[82] See also Romans 11:15.

[83] Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 715.

Second, Israel will be saved through the Gentiles' salvation. Paul first hints at this in 10:19 when he quotes Deuteronomy 32:21, "First Moses says, 'I WILL MAKE YOU JEALOUS BY THAT WHICH IS NOT A NATION, BY A NATION WITHOUT UNDERSTANDING WILL I ANGER YOU.'" Both Romans 10 and Deuteronomy 32 describe how God will turn His attention to the Gentiles, *so that* He will make Israel jealous.[84] Paul later clarifies that Israel's jealousy will eventually lead to their own salvation (11:11–12, 14, 26–27).[85] The conversion of many Gentiles around the world is meant to stir up the affections of the Jews. *They* are the ones who are supposed to be reaping the benefits of an intimate relationship with God, not the Gentiles. As a result, Israel will one day return to God in repentance. Paul does not call Israel to humility, like he does the Gentiles. It is possible that he expects Israel is already in a humble state as they watch many Gentiles come to faith. Whatever the case, Paul seems to imply that Israel must still maintain a humble attitude along with the Gentiles (11:30–32). When Israel as a nation finally returns to the Lord, they will know it was because of the Gentiles they hated so much; they will no longer act arrogantly toward them.

The Gentiles are saved through Israel's rejection and Israel herself is saved through the Gentiles' salvation. Paul summarizes this well in Romans 11:30–32:

> For just as you once were disobedient to God, but now have been shown mercy because of their disobedience, so these also now have been disobedient, that because of the mercy shown to you they also may now be shown mercy. For God has shut up all in disobedience so that He may show mercy to all.

This "mystery" in particular highlights the enormous "depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God" (11:33; cf. 11:25). As Robert Mounce marvels, "Who but God could have conceived a plan that would turn disobedience into an occasion for mercy and in the process reach out universally to all who would believe?"[86] That God would cause the salvation of each ethnic group to hang on the other is an astonishing truth that provokes nothing but worship to an Almighty God. But even more than this, such a mutually dependent relationship should strip anyone of ethnic pride or attitudes of superiority. It would have been humbling for a Jew to learn that the Gentile he despised so much was the cause of his salvation, and vice versa. Paul removes any room for an excuse not to band together. The Jews and Gentiles not only must coexist in the church; they need each other, because the Jews and Gentiles needed each other to be saved.

For these three reasons the church must unite as one in their worship: They are all saved for God's glory, they are all saved by grace through faith alone, and they all benefit from the other's salvation. This should produce an attitude of humility where both Jews and Gentiles are not "conceited" (11:20) and not "wise in [their] own estimation" (11:25). But as Paul leaves the international scope of Romans 9–11 and ventures into the practical application of the letter in chapter 12, he carries over

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[84] Ibid., 668.
[85] Ibid., 687–88.
[86] Mounce, *Romans*, 227.

the charge to live out these same character traits. In Romans 12:3, Paul continues to warn the church, "For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly[87] of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith." In Romans 12:16, Paul repeats the same idea, "[D]o not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation" (12:16).[88] Unity was the goal of Romans 9–11 and continues to be the goal in chapter 12.[89] Romans 12:1 must be considered in this light. It is more than just a call for each Christian to sacrifice himself to God; it is an appeal to all Christians in the church, Jew and Gentile, to form one united sacrifice in their worship to God.

*James Street*

## Romans 12:1 Interpretation

Given the previous observations that the argument of Romans yields the unmistakable fact that the church was struggling with an ethnic division between Jewish and Gentile Christians, the apostle Paul turns to practical admonition for these polarized believers after establishing a strong doctrinal framework (Romans 9–11) for their corporate solidarity. This section of the article is divided into three important segments. First, there are contemporary hinderances to understanding the text of Romans 12:1. Second, the actual meaning of this verse must be examined, given the overall argument of the book and its actual verbiage. Third, there are practical implications of its meaning to the church and Christians today.

### Contemporary Exegetical Hindrances

Current Bible translations and paraphrases often represent a historical record of how exegetical ecclesiology and most Christians understand a passage of Scripture in question. While these versions might be an accurate reflection of what a text is saying, they can also expose a cultural bias of a translator, reflecting the most common and accepted interpretation of that passage. Where does this bias come from? Every human translator brings to the translation process multiple presuppositions, some valid and others of which are unproven. Therefore, using a reliable translation compiled by a team of translators, rather than one translator, can help overcome such bias. But even this is not always a fool-proof protection, since an entire team of translators can unwittingly conform to the broader Christian understanding of the passage

[87] Paul seems to allude back to 11:20 when he tells the Roman church "not to think more highly." The Greek word for "think more highly" is ὑπερφρονεῖν, whose root and meaning is reminiscent of the same Greek word in 11:20 (φρονέω), when Paul warned the Gentiles not to be conceited (μὴ ὑψηλὰ φρόνει).

[88] Paul makes an even clearer connection between 12:16 and the pair of verses in chapter 11 warning against pride, 11:20 and 11:25. He uses the same Greek phrase in 12:16, μὴ τὰ ὑψηλὰ φρονοῦντες, translated, "do not be haughty," as he did in 11:20 (μὴ ὑψηλὰ φρόνει), translated, "Do not be conceited." He also uses the same Greek word in 12:16, φρόνιμοι, translated, "wise," as he did in 11:25 (φρόνιμοι), also translated, "wise." The relationship between Jews and Gentiles continues into chapter 12 and beyond.

[89] Keener, *Romans*, 149. Keener notes, "Whatever else Paul's warning against conceit in 12:16 includes, it includes the corporate sense of superiority expressed by either Gentiles looking down on Jews (11:20) or the reverse, presumably as well as boasting in one's own gifts (12:3)."

in their translation. Then, when this biblical translation is broadly distributed to Christians around the world, the bias is reinforced and the interpretation goes unquestioned. This article demonstrates how this has happened with Romans 12:1 in some very popular English translations over the past century.

One of the most globally distributed contemporary English translations of the Bible is the New International Version (NIV).[90] The preface of this translation makes it clear that it was produced by a group of scholars who provided three intensive revisions:

> The translation of each book was assigned to a group of scholars. Next, one of the Intermediate Editorial Committees revised the initial translation, with constant reference to the Hebrew, Aramaic or Greek. Their work then went to one of the General Editorial Committees, which checked it in detail and made another thorough revision. This revision in turn was carefully reviewed by the Committee on Bible Translation, which made further changes and then released the final version for publication. In this way the entire Bible underwent three revisions, during each of which the translation was examined for its faithfulness to the original languages and for its English style.[91]

Yet, in spite of careful review, these translators were unable to divorce themselves from the common false assumptions of broader Christianity (pre-text influences) when it came to the popular misunderstanding of Romans 12:1. In their efforts to produce a "fluid" English translation they unwittingly succumbed to paraphrasing the verse rather than translating it: "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, *to offer your bodies as living sacrifices*, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship."[92]

Upon careful examination, this is not a translation based on the original text; rather, it is an interpretation of what the translators believe the text is saying. This English translation fits the commonly accepted understanding and use of this verse by most Christians and the translators unknowingly or deliberately adopted it. There is inherent in the modern American mind a rugged individualism that is apt to read the Bible with a prideful, self-centered hermeneutic.[93] This is evident when transla-

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[90] International Bible Society, *The Holy Bible: New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), Logos Bible Software. Hereafter NIV84.

[91] Ibid., preface, Logos Bible Software.

[92] NIV84. Emphasis added. Later revisions of the NIV corrected Romans 12:1 to reflect the original text rather than the popular misunderstanding of the verse.

[93] This dangerous hermeneutic personalizes every verse. It is first asking, "What does this verse mean to me?" before asking, "What does this verse mean?" What the verse meant to the original audience, in this case, the first-century Roman believer, must be answered before asking "What does it mean to me?" The closer an interpreter is to the original intent of the author and the original understanding of the audience, the closer they are to the true meaning of the text and its correct application.

tors act more like interpreters than exegetes, perpetuating an inadequate and short-sighted understanding of Romans 12:1, using the same hermeneutic with their "dynamic equivalency" approach to Bible translation.[94]

Another example of this gross misunderstanding of Romans 12:1 can be seen in the popular paraphrase-translation, *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language* (Eugene Peterson was the sole translator). Christians who read this version are mistakenly led into understanding this verse as a call to a highly individualized personal sacrifice: "So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take *your everyday, ordinary life*—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him."[95]

Here you can clearly identify the individualistic view of the translator. This interpretation appeals to the typical stand-alone Christian who places his confidence in his individual relationship with God and relies on his false sense of spiritual self-sufficiency. Reading Romans 12:1 with this understanding is a confirmation to him to continue his "Lone Ranger" style of Christian living. It is just he and God against the world. But understanding Romans 12:1 this way does violence to the entire argument and meaning of Paul's impassioned letter to the Romans. It treats the verse as if it were a single, independent admonition having nothing to do with the overall context of the apostle's appeal to solidarity and unity.

Another translation produced by the American Bible Society, *The Good News Version* (also known as *Today's English Version*, TEV),[96] uses the dynamic equivalence theory of translation. Its translation of Romans 12:1 is ambiguous, at best. It has been carefully crafted by the translators to be obscure in its meaning, giving the reader the power of interpretation, violating the stated purpose of dynamic equivalence theory—a theory which is intended to bring more clarity, not less: "So then, my brothers and sisters, because of God's great mercy to us *I appeal to you: offer yourselves as a living sacrifice to God*, dedicated to his service and pleasing to him. This is the true worship that you should offer."[97]

This translation could agree with the Paul's argument in Romans. However, its obfuscated wording makes its true meaning somewhat elusive. It all depends on whether the reader recognizes the "you" in the verse as singular or plural. If it is singular, then the meaning reverts to the individualized misunderstanding of this verse. If it is plural, then it could refer to Paul's original intention, as will be demonstrated below.

As mentioned earlier, poor translations are only one aspect of why so many Christians misuse and mischaracterize Romans 12:1. A person can actually have a

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[94] Dynamic equivalence Bible translation theory, as coined by Eugene Nida, states that the original sense of the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek text should be translated into a receptor language with readability in mind. This theorical approach was followed and endorsed by the NIV translators. Formal equivalence translates more word-for-word rather than sense-for-sense. The major fallacies and problems with dynamic equivalence theory is well documented in Leland Ryken, *The Word of God in English: Criteria for Excellence in Bible Translation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2002).

[95] Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2017). Emphasis added.

[96] American Bible Society, *Good News Bible: Today's English Version*, (Philadelphia: American Bible Society, 2006).

[97] Ibid. Emphasis added.

very good translation of the Bible, but still misread the wrong meaning into it because of other powerful influences at play.

## The Actual Meaning of Romans 12:1

As has already been established, Roman Christians were radically divided because of their arrogant assumptions concerning their ethnic standing before God. The Jewish Christians prided themselves in their historical lineage as God's chosen people, while viewing Gentile believers as novice newcomers to the faith. In contrast, the Gentile Christians considered themselves favored believers because they did not have to live under the restrictions of the Old Covenant. They were free to enjoy the great blessings of the New Covenant while arrogantly overlooking the importance of God's choice of the Jews in the history of redemption. Both took a condescending view of the other, causing multiple conflicts and confusion within the church. It stands to reason that the apostle Paul was driven to effectively address these factions with the rich theology of the book of Romans to heal the rift in an ethnically divided church.

Romans 12:1 is bracketed by Paul's admonition that his readers have no reason to assume a prideful attitude of division. "So that you will not be wise in your own estimation" (11:25) and each was "not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think" (12:3). The pivotal verse in this section is a summary of his lengthy argument of unification: "Therefore I urge you [plural], brethren [plural], by the mercies of God, to present your [plural] bodies [plural] *a living and holy sacrifice* [singular], acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship."[98] This verse is not a call to a personal surrender of oneself as a sacrifice to God. Rather, it is a *corporate* call to the entire church [plural] to present itself [singular] as a *unified* "living and holy sacrifice" to God. Then, Paul emphatically asserts in verse 4, "For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another" (12:4–5). Several verses later, he expresses a similar sentiment, "Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation" (12:16). Paul, a Jew and an apostle to the Gentiles, argues that both the Jewish and Gentile Christians needed one another if they were to understand God's intentions in redemption; and they must unite together to provide an acceptable sacrifice to God. Spiritual worship that is acceptable to God has as much to do with corporate oneness as it does with personal piety.

What this verse really says is a radical departure from the individualistic mindset of contemporary Christians. In it, Paul is teaching and emphasizing the centrality of the local body of Christ and how it worships and functions together as a singular ministry with multiple gifts. Proper sacrificial worship of the individual Christian is inescapably bound to the body of Christ as a whole and what benefits His church. Properly read and understood in its context, it is apparent that it was not the intention of the apostle Paul that Christians would ever use this verse to endorse or validate some individualistic, esoteric call to a singular, personal ministry. Rather, sacrificial worship is a corporate calling to oneness. Having the same mind is what is pleasing

[98] Emphasis added.

to God (12:16a). The church that is splintered into multiple factions and ministries by solitary persons stands in opposition to the body of Christ and its intended unity in Him.

## Practical Implications

Theology without practice is useless. Moreover, it is dangerous to have a proper understanding of a biblical text and not apply it. One could even argue that a Christian does not truly understand the real meaning of a text until that truth has changed his life. The *telos* of any text is how you should change and grow in conforming your life to the truth. So what are some practical implications as it relates to the actual meaning of Romans 12:1?

First, acceptable worship that is pleasing to God comes from a unified church. There is a direct correlation between the church coming together as one and the real type of worship that the Lord considers to be genuine. When the church is divided, then its worship is futile and counterproductive (cf. Matt 5:23–24). This is not acceptable before the Lord. In every other way the individual Christian may prepare his heart for worship, but if there is division between himself and other brothers in Christ, then his worship is not pleasing to God.

Second, the type of sacrifice God accepts involves all the other members of the body of Christ, since there are multiple members in one body (12:4–5). The most important and effective service is when the body of Christ functions and serves together as a corporate entity, not as a "one-man army." Each member supports and strengthens every other member in that Body. One of the main reasons the contemporary church is so ineffective is a failure to recognize the need for the church to move forward as a unified whole. While it is important for the individual Christian to use his life as a sacrifice for Christ, this verse is saying that the *most holy and acceptable* sacrifice to God comes from the collective oneness of its members. The local church must work and function together as one.

Third, in order to truly apply this verse to life there must be a mental resolve in the individual Christian to be "one-minded" with the other members of the body of Christ (12:1–2). This is easier said than done, because the prevalent culture is inherently individualistic in mind and motivation. Most education seeks to train people to be independent, leading many to succumb to the "tall poppy syndrome." But examples of corporate mentality can be seen in some types of military training, where soldiers are taught to look out for one another, to move forward as a unit and to place the welfare of their comrades above their own. An army of one is destined to fall on the battlefield. However, the army that moves together as one with Christ at the head will be a true living sacrifice that will accomplish much for God's glory.

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*MSJ* 31/1 (Spring 2020) 25–41

# IMPLICATION AND APPLICATION IN EXPOSITION, PART 3: FOUR HISTORICAL EXAMPLES OF APPLICATION—JOHN CALVIN, WILLIAM PERKINS, CHARLES SIMEON, D. MARTYN-LLOYD JONES

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*A significant concern for the expositor is navigating the relationship of interpretation and application. A part of the navigation is understanding the complement of the implications of a given text to the proper application. Teachers and expositors who want to make meaningful application of the passage or verse must bear in mind appropriate principles if they are to navigate from the ancient context to their contemporary audiences; if not, there will be misapplication on the one hand or not using the Scriptures to bear on the actions of listeners on the other.*

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While Part One[1] of this series of articles defined the keys terms and showed the use of those terms in preaching, Part Two[2] focused on the principles deemed essential for taking the message of the past and showing its relationship in applicational exposition. The task of building the figurative bridge from the ancient to the modern does require caution but it should not cause stagnation in the expositor's pulpit. The most important principle is stressing the need to always have an exegetical starting point when moving from the past to the present. Part Three notes the use of the principles to bridge the ancient gap and the categories of application employed by John Calvin, William Perkins, Charles Simeon, and D. Martyn-Lloyd Jones.

## The Reformers and "Sola Scriptura" for the Everyday Man

The Reformation's foundation was supported by their return to the Scriptures. With it came a "refocus of preaching, a rethinking of its purpose and a reevaluation"

[1] Carl A. Hargrove, "Implication and Application in Exposition: A Complementary Relationship, Part 1: Expositional Definitions and Applicational Categories," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 30 no. 1 (Spring 2019): 65–91.

[2] Carl A. Hargrove, "Implication and Application in Exposition, Part 2: Principles for Contemporary Application," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 30 no. 2 (Fall 2019): 321–47.

of its strategic place in the church's worship.[3] The Reformation was not simply a reformation of church doctrine and ecclesiology, but a reform of preaching as well. This reform would give birth to schools of preaching and develop greater standards of expository preaching.[4] Larsen characterizes the Reformation as the time in which "preaching comes of age" in the life of the church.[5] It is abundantly clear that expositional preaching was the norm during this stage in church life. It was also a time in which the Reformers sought to assure that the many truths of Scripture hidden behind the doors and lecterns of the Roman Catholic Church would be available for all to hear.

Among the *Solas* that distinguished the movement, *Sola Scriptura* was foundational because it was the source for properly understanding the others. The Reformers' commitment to the authority of Scripture was a core conviction for expositional preaching because to exposit was to bring listeners into the presence of God. Preaching allowed the voice of God to be heard, and exposition was the best means for this to occur. They were not expositing the declaration of the church or the voice of the pope, but of the Creator to whom all men must answer. With this declaration was the inherent power of the Divine voice instead of the frail, human, and often errant voice of Rome.

The sense of Scripture's authority made the Reformers very sober in their task of exposition. It created a great sense of obligation to help the people understand their newly discovered role as a kingdom of priests. In striving to meet this objective, Reformational preaching was both didactic and practical in nature. Preachers sought to understand the implications of the text through diligent exegesis and study that it might be applied to those hungering for truth. During the Reformation, many truths were disclosed which had been veiled for centuries throughout Europe. Sidney Greidanus captures the Reformed view of preaching as a redemptive meeting with God when he wrote, "The sermon is the Word of God! This is not a careless use of pregnant words, but it emphasizes once again that God enters the horizontal plane of history and uses men to accomplish his goal."[6]

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[3] Hughes Oliphant Old, *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church: The Age of the Reformation*, 7 vols., vol. 4 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 1; Kent R. Hughes, "The Anatomy of Exposition:Logos, Ethos, and Pathos," *SBJT* 3 (Summer 1999): 49.

[4] Old, *Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures*, 2–3.

[5] David L. Larsen, *The Compnay of the Preachers: A History of Biblical Preaching from the Old Testament to the Modern Era* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1998), 141–97. In chapter five of Larsen's work, he traces the significance of preachers of the Reformation. He is correct to include those who ignited the fuels of the Reformation: John Gerson (1363–1429) who spoke against the corruption in the church and called for biblical preaching. Richard Grosselete (1175–1253) who taught homiletics at Oxford, was known for his preaching, and influenced Wycliffe in his convictions on the authority of Scripture. John Wycliffe was the "morning star" of the Reformation and the "first preacher of a general revelation to be heard in all Europe." See George S. Innis, *Wycliffe: The Morning Star* (Cincinnati: Jennings and Graham, 1907), 15. Others included John Hus, Jerome of Prague, Millitz of Kremsier (the first Reformation preacher in Bohemia), and Erasmus (who influenced both Luther and Zwingli).

[6] Sidney Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura: Problems and Principles in Preaching Historical Texts* (Ontario, Canada: Wedge Publishing Foundation, 1970), 155.

## John Calvin

John Calvin continued the tradition of his Reformation predecessors, who practiced historical-grammatical interpretation and expositional preaching. Although Calvin was deeply theological, he shared an ability and passion for communicating in a manner that transcended class barriers. John Leith prescribes two elements of Calvin's doctrine of preaching.[7] First, although Calvin was a theologian and educator, he believed that effectiveness in instruction and reform was not the ultimate reason for preaching. Preaching has its foundation in the very will and purpose of God to speak to His church for its edification and His glory.

Second, preaching was "a sacrament of the saving presence of God."[8] This view of preaching was inextricably linked to the worship of the church—a worship created by God so that all who desired could participate. Therefore, Calvin strove to make this aspect of worship accessible to all men regardless of class. And in doing so, he consistently applied the texts to the lives of his listeners with the hope that they would live according to the high calling of the faith.

### *Statements and Examples of Calvin's Applicational View*

John Calvin considered preaching a sacrament, because in preaching, both the transcendence and immanence of the Lord meet. The loftiness of God is proclaimed in His transcendence, while the reality of God's immanence serves as a vehicle for communicating the means of grace, with "particular application in preaching."[9] In his study of Calvin's preaching, Lawson recognizes Calvin's intention to apply the Word to his congregation, stating, "As a preacher, Calvin's primary aim was to communicate to the common person in the pew. He was not seeking to impress his congregation with his own brilliance, but to impact them with the awe-inspiring majesty of God."[10]

T. H. L. Parker, in his classic survey of Calvin's preaching, makes several notes on his approach to applying the text in the lives of his congregation. Parker explains that the "pastoral impulsion" of Calvin was first bound to his "theological impulsion."[11] This meant that Calvin sought to communicate the theological convictions of his *Institutes* in the pulpit in order to shape the minds and hearts of his congregants to the theological vision gained from his exegesis. Calvin was driven as a preacher by the glory of God from a vertical standpoint. Horizontally, because of his pastoral obligation, he was driven by the potential edification of the body. Calvin communicated his personal conviction to help the body grow in grace, by articulating, "When I expound Holy Scripture, I must always make this my rule: That those who hear me may receive profit from the teaching I put forward and be edified unto salvation. If I

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[7] John H. Leith, "Calvin's Doctrine of the Proclamation of the Word and Its Significance for Today in Light of Recent Research," *Review and Expositor* 86, no. 1 (Winter 1989): 31.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid., 31–32.

[10] Steve Lawson, *The Expository Genius of John Calvin* (Lake Mary, FL: Reformation Trust, 2007), 85.

[11] T.H.L. Parker, *Calvin's Preaching* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1992), 8.

have not that affection, if I do not procure the edification of those who hear me, I am a sacrilege, profaning God's Word."[12]

Calvin believed the role of application in preaching was a means to assure that congregants understood their role as a new and spiritual priesthood. He gave careful consideration not only to the studying of the passage but to its application to the congregation. He would never come without "carefully pondering how [he] may apply the Holy Scripture to the edification of the people."[13] The statements of Calvin's application of Scripture communicate that his pastoral concern was never divorced from his theological convictions. He was a man who wanted his people to walk a life of godliness and believed that he was in part responsible for their growth (through application) in the preaching event.

*Calvin's Position on Explication and Application*

Calvin saw preaching as the explication of Scripture and its words as the foundation and substance for preaching. Calvin's humanist scholarship provided the unique skills for preaching, and he used his skills and interpretive abilities to disclose the "natural and true"[14] meaning for his congregation. Leith notes the relationship of explication and application in Calvin:

> Just as Calvin explicated Scripture word by word, so he applied the Scripture sentence by sentence to the life and experience of his congregation. Hence, his sermons always have a strong note of reality. They move directly from Scripture to the concrete, actual situation in Geneva. Calvin spoke vigorously concerning issues from the dress and cosmetic concerns of women to international issues, including war. Calvin's emphasis on preaching as the explication and application of Scripture gave to his sermons their particular form. He did not fashion his sermons according to a logical outline drawn from a particular theme. His sermons were homilies,

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[12] Ibid., 12, citing Calvin's *Corpus Reformatorum:* 54.287. The relationship of exhortational application is clearly communicated by Calvin in sermons on Timothy and Titus: "Therefore the two things that are here joined together (doctrine and exhortation) may in no wise be sundered… St. Paul shows that it is not enough to preach the law of God and the promises and what else is contained in Holy Scripture as though a man should teach in school. But we must improve, threaten, and exhort… Therefore, if teaching be not helped with exhortations it is cold and pierces not our hearts." In Jean Calvin, *Sermons on the Epistles to Timothy & Titus*, 16th–17th Century Facsimile Editions (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1983), 419, 947, 1199.

[13] Parker, *Calvin's Preaching*, 81, citing Calvin's *Corpus Reformatorum:* 26.473–474, Sermon XLIX on Deut 6:16. Calvin's preaching philosophy demonstrated a firm belief in exhortational application in the pulpit. In chapter 11 ("The Stimuli of Exhortations") of *Calvin's Preaching*, Parker notes various instances of Calvin's use of exhortation in his preaching. Several instances stand out: (1) Calvin interpreted 2 Tim 3:16–17 as *institutio formandae vitae* (instruction for the framing of life). (2) Calvin was convinced that Paul had the conviction, which was affirmed by personal experience with men, that "it is not enough to preach what is good and useful" but preachers must exhort and admonish obedience to the Word. (3) The application of 1 Tim 2:12 to the magistrates who would improperly assume authority that is not given by God. (4) Applying Paul's good fight to the general challenges of life and the particular challenges that would translate to any generation. (5) Using illustrations of current events (elections for city councils) to apply the text (1 Tim 5:7–12) and make it more concrete. Ibid., 114–17, 22–23.

[14] Leith, "Calvin's Doctrine of the Proclamation of the Word," 32.

> not lectures…. The sermons are powerful precisely because Calvin explicated and applied the Scriptures word by word, verse by verse within the framework of a vision of the Christian faith as a whole.[15]

In the arena of preaching, Calvin was masterful. He had a larger sense of the Christian community, which makes his sermons relevant today; and yet, he did not avoid the particular applications that were life changing for the people of Geneva. Calvin knew that there was no need to create a division between exegesis, explication, implication, and application in the preaching event. Each was vital in his goal to bring his listeners into the presence of God. Two examples of Calvin's commitment to Sola Scriptura for the everyday man are demonstrated in sermons from his series on Ephesians.

*Ephesians 4:1–5*

Calvin consistently uses exhortational and pastoral application in his twenty-first and twenty-second message on Ephesians. He is constant in identifying himself with the weaknesses of the flesh in his exhortations: "there is too much sloth and coldness in us…the infinite love that bears us, ought it not inflame us to run to him…that he may peaceably have the use of our whole life."[16] Calvin's sermons often show the use of reflective rhetoric to stimulate introspection and prepare them for direct application from the text:

> Furthermore, let us consider what he was aiming at in order that God may not complain about us as he does about the Israelites, by his prophet Isaiah, because of the ingratitude they had toward him….[but instead] we may blaze abroad his virtues and devote our whole life to magnifying him to the uttermost, (1 Pet. 2:19) according to this present text, where it is said that we must walk according to the vocation to which God has called us.[17]

Calvin called his congregation to demonstrate the virtues of their calling by "reaching out our hands, each one to his neighbor and brother"[18] so that God will be glorified in their midst. Calvin wanted the people of Geneva to have a view of the church beyond their streets and consider the affect their choices would have on others. They were exhorted to be "mirrors and examples, and encourage them so much the more to lead a godly life…that they may follow us.[19] Of course, Paul does not directly make such an exhortation, but it is an implication of the text and a reasonable if not necessary application of the passage.

Calvin's rhetoric demonstrated his knowledge of the human heart, and he was not averse to using phrases that revealed the ill intentions of men and served as rebukes to their selfish tendencies. When instructing the body to maintain the unity

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[15] Ibid., 34.
[16] John Calvin, *John Calvin's Sermons on Ephesians* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1973), 312.
[17] Ibid., 313.
[18] Ibid., 314.
[19] Ibid., 315.

Paul desired, Calvin said, "For we know that when any fire of strife is kindled, every man would have his enemies drowned in the bottom of hell."[20] This statement may alarm some, but it is another proof that Calvin was a theologian and shepherd who understood the corruption of the human a heart and his calling to preach for sanctification in the body. Calvin was not out of touch with the vices of those in the pews. He provides an excellent model for today's expositors—speak to the issues of the human heart with theological competency and in practical realities.

*Ephesians 5:22*

In the thirty-ninth sermon, Calvin exhorts, admonishes, and encourages husbands and wives in their call to love and submit. Many of Calvin's applications come by his use of words that speak to the difficult situations spouses face in marriage. He warns husbands against being "tyrannical, despising, and cruel."[21] In describing the flaws both husband and wife may offer as an excuse for not obeying the Scripture, he demonstrates his awareness of real-life situations—pastoral awareness and application. He is mindful that spouses may be, "stubborn, a wicked head, proud, drunkard, idle, irritable, quarrelsome, whoremongers, gluttons, and niggardly."[22]

When Calvin made these statements, they were not done so with a general audience in mind, but as a theological pastor, called to address the needs of his particular flock. Although these terms may be considered harsh to some, they were tempered with appeals to grace and promises of hope for the humble. His use of the interrogative, exclamatory, and strong final exhortations were effective tools that stimulated his congregants to consider their ways and apply the truth of Scripture.[23]

*Calvin's Need to Apply the Truth*

Hughes Oliphant Old comments that Calvin's use of application in preaching was a particular strength of his pulpit. This was in part due to the dearth of spiritual content the church had received for centuries. Calvin and the Reformers were sharing truths practically unknown to the church through the Middle Ages.[24] It is evident that one reason Calvin preached Deuteronomy and the Minor Prophets stemmed from a desire to demonstrate the link with the prophets who spoke against the ceremony and religious piety of Israel and the similar conditions in the Roman Catholic Church before and during the Reformation.

Calvin would look to Jesus and the apostles, whose true sense of piety stood in contrast to the religious establishment of their day. In doing so, Calvin was following in the steps of the One with true authority in the church, and his congregation needed to have this affirmed from various standpoints.[25] Calvin was committed to the appli-

[20] Ibid., 318.
[21] Ibid., 565.
[22] Ibid., 566.
[23] Ibid., 573–74, 576.
[24] Old, *Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures*, 130.
[25] Ibid., 130–31.

cation of Scripture through exhortations that were general and specific. His commitment was driven by a sober call to draw his congregation into a closer walk with the Lord—a walk of sanctification by faith.

## The Puritans and "Explication, Doctrine, and Uses"

"Explication" for the Puritans was a continuation of the Reformers' influence. The Reformers sought to make the truth of the Word available for the average man, and the Puritans had the same goal. Their goal was motivated by the desire for men to see the glory of God in preaching. They knew that if this were to take place, the Scriptures needed to be opened to the people and explicated.

"Doctrine" for the Puritans was the reason for diligent study. Explication gave the congregation full exposure to the doctrines discovered through exegesis. Although the Puritans sought doctrinal clarity, they also sought appropriation of the doctrine to life—uses.

"Uses" for the Puritans included the various ways in which the doctrinal implications of the passage were applied to the life of the congregation. In most cases, implication carried the idea of the truth or doctrine extracted from the text. Once the doctrine was discovered, they would provide means for implementing the discoveries in life.

The *Westminster Confession of Faith* captures the Puritan philosophy of preaching, especially embodied in *The Directory of Publick Worship*.[26] Preaching was viewed as "one of the greatest and most excellent works belonging to the ministry of the gospel"[27] because in it the minister was an unashamed instrument of God used for the salvation of souls.[28]

The Puritans' dependence on the illumination of the Spirit was of practical use in study, preaching, and the application of the Word.[29] They looked to the text for the implications that would allow them to develop and preach doctrine, which was tempered by a pastoral concern to avoid troubling a congregation's "minds with obscure terms of art."[30] The divines believed in preaching in a manner aimed at convincing the audience of their need to hear the sacred Word's message for every area of life. They used illustrations as a means to "convey the truth into the hearer's heart" and "promote edification" in the body of the local church.[31] Puritan preachers have been considered specialists in the application of Scripture.[32] This recognition is not simply based on their convictions expressed in the Confession, but the numerous examples of their philosophy demonstrated in a preaching method that had a profound effect on the church then and today.

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[26] "The Directory for the Publick Worship of God: Agreed Upon by the Assembly of Divines at Westminster," 1645, repr. (New York: Robert Lennox Kennedy, 1880).

[27] *Westminster Confession of Faith* (Glasgow: Free Presbyterian, 1646; reprint, 1990), 379.

[28] "Directory for the Publick Worship of God," 17.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Leland Ryken, *Worldly Saints: The Puritans as They Really Were* (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1986), 99–107. Derek W. H. Thomas, "Expository Preaching," in *Feed My Sheep: A Passionate Plea for Preaching*, ed. Don Kistler (Lake Mary, FL: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2008), 40–41.

The role of application in preaching was clearly communicated in the Confession, which states, "He is not to rest in general doctrine, although never so much cleared and confirmed, but to bring it home to special use, by application to his hearers."[33] Application for the Puritans was an integral part of exposition. This is particularly noteworthy considering how they treated the exposition of Scripture with care and sobriety. The Confession, in fact, contained seven distinct features of their concern and notable earnest approach for preaching.

It is abundantly clear in the Puritan philosophy of preaching that implications and applications were complements in the proper exposition of the Word. Like their Reformed predecessors, preaching was indeed experiential.[34] The experiential approach to preaching stressed the need for self-examination and diligence in personal sanctification. It was not a moralism because there was consistent instruction and exhortation to accommodate Christ's grace for transformation. Several Puritans of choice embodied the Puritan pulpit: William Perkins, John Owen, and Thomas Watson. Perkins will serve as an example of a preaching philosophy and ministry that demonstrates Applicational Exposition.

## William Perkins

William Perkins is considered the Father of Puritanism. His leadership in the church through moral example, scholastic aptitude, and pastoral skills allowed him to win the minds and hearts of many. Beeke notes that Perkins was influenced by the logic of Protestant rhetorician Petrus Ramus (AD 1515–1572), which "oriented him toward practical application rather than speculative theory" and matured his abilities as a preacher and theologian.[35] Perkins was noted for his plain yet doctrinal preaching and pious living. His influence was evident in England, as his works surpassed those of Calvin, Beza, and Bullinger combined.[36]

After his death, the influence of Perkins continued through the writing and teachings of William Ames, Richard Sibbes, John Cotton, and John Preston.[37] The plain preaching of Perkins asked questions such as, "What does Scripture teach? How does this apply to us today? What are we to do in response? How does Scripture teach us

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[33] *Westminster Confession of Faith*, 380.

[34] Joel R. Beeke, "Experiential Preaching," in *Feed My Sheep*, 53–70. Tanner G. Turley, *Heart to Heart: Octavius Winslow's Experimental Preaching*, 66–160. The key elements of Winslow's preaching included: the utter dependence on the Spirit for delivery and insight (which included application), the urgency of preaching, the relationship of doctrine and application, the centrality of Christ in exposition, and addressing the heart for holy living. Andrew Fuller was an advocate of the experimental preaching as well. In response to those who believed that one could not advocate doctrinal preaching and experimental preaching, Fuller offered these thoughts: "Christian experience (or what is generally understood by that term, the painful and pleasurable feelings of good men) will be found, if genuine, to arise from the influence of truth upon the mind … doctrinal preaching and experimental preaching are not so remote from each other … to extol the latter, at the expense of the former, is to act like him who wishes the fountain to be destroyed, because he prefers the stream." Andrew Fuller, *The Complete Works of the Rev. Andrew Fuller*, 3 vols. (1845; repr., 1988, Harrisburg, VA: Sprinkle), 1:170.

[35] Joel R. Beeke and Randall J. Pederson, *Meet the Puritans* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2006), 471.

[36] Ibid., 474.

[37] Ibid., 475.

to do it? These became the issues handled with seriousness and vigour in the pulpit."[38] His pulpit vigor was always expositional and applicatory in nature.

*Statements and Examples of Perkins' Applicational View*

William Perkins believed that until the "usefulness" of the Word was grasped then its purpose for change was incomplete in the listener's heart.[39] He spoke of "seven ways" application is made when preaching based on the different spiritual conditions of the congregation.[40] When preaching to the congregation, a minister should be aware of two forms of application. They are "mental and practical application."[41] Mental application is directed to the mind and involves either "doctrine of reproof (2 Tim 3:16, 17)…. Practical application has to do with life-style and behavior."[42] Practical application is the appropriation of the doctrinal truths taught from the text and motivation to respond by way of "encouragement and exhortation (Rom 15:4)."[43]

Perkins' example of application affirms the thesis of these articles—there is a complementary relationship between implications, application, and exposition. Application must first be directed to the mind of the listener for comprehension, then exhorted to change for appropriation. This is done in concert with the Spirit's help in illumining the mind of the preacher and the listener. The Spirit uses both to forge a union for change.

## Summary of Puritan Preaching

The Puritans exemplified precision in thought and practice, which is evidenced in the many contributions they made to the theological and spiritual maturity of the church—many of them are not addressed in this article.[44] The applicational preaching and theological writings of the Puritans have in part created the resurgence

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[38] William Perkins, *The Art of Prophesying*, rev. ed. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1996), ix–x.

[39] Ibid., xii.

[40] Ibid., 56–63. A synthesis of the categories are: Those who are unbelievers and are both ignorant and unteachable. These must first of all be prepared to receive the doctrine of the Word…. 2. Those who are teachable, but ignorant. We should instruct such people by means of a catechism (cf. Luke 1:4; Acts 18:25, 26)…. 3. There are those who have knowledge, but have never been humbled. Here we need to see the foundation of repentance stirred up in what Paul calls godly sorrow (1 Cor 7:8–10)…. 4. Those who have already been humbled. Here we must carefully consider whether the humbling that has already taken place is complete and sound or only just begun and still light or superficial…. 5. Those who already believe. We must teach them…. 6. Those who have fallen back. Some may have partly departed from the state of grace, either in faith or in lifestyle…. 7. Churches with both believers and unbelievers. This is the typical situation in our congregations. Any doctrine may be expounded to them, either from the law or from the gospel, so long as its biblical limitations and circumscriptions are observed (see John 7:37).

[41] Ibid., 64–65.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Ibid., 65.

[44] Charnock's classic, *The Existence and Attributes of God*, The works of Bunyan, the theological contributions of John Owen, the rich ministry and preaching of Thomas Watson, the blessing derived from *The Letters of Samuel Rutherford,* the pastoral insight of Richard Baxter, and the prowess captured in *The Marrow of Theology* by William Ames are further examples of the Puritan commitment to theology and practice.

of interest in Reformed theology and the Puritan mindset in many evangelical communities. Like the Reformers, they can never be accused of lacking in theological acumen or pastoral and practical wisdom. The Puritans consistently practiced exhortational and pastoral application in their pulpits because they were motivated by their theological persuasions. For men to know God, as they should, it meant that they must avail themselves of the full possibilities of faith through understanding and application. This was the heart of Puritan preaching—stimulating the mind with truth and motivating the wills to practice the truth of God's sufficient Word in varying ways.

## The Fruit of the Reformation and Puritanism on Applicational Exposition

The effect of the Reformation and Puritanism continues to reap benefits for the church. Its call to genuine ministry, personal holiness, and emphasis on the *Solas* had a profound influence on the ministers who followed in their steps. Charles Simeon (1759–1836) and D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899–1981) would affirm indebtedness to both movements.

### Charles Simeon

A great deal can be said concerning Charles Simeon's life, preaching, godly character, and influence on others. Simeon is often referenced for stating that exposition is the discovery of truths imbedded in the text and not an opportunity to foster one's personal beliefs or interpretations: "My endeavour is to bring out of Scripture what is there, and not to thrust in what I think might be there. I have a great jealousy on this head; never to speak more or less than I believe to be the mind of the Spirit in the passage I am expounding. I would run after nothing, and shun nothing."[45]

J. I. Packer believed that every sermon Simeon preached was expository because of his commitment to use the Scriptures to speak for the God who speaks to the hearts of men.[46] This commitment is consistent with the Reformational view of the preaching event as the engagement of the audience with the voice of God spoken through His preached Word.

#### *Statements and Examples of Simeon's Applicational View*

Simeon demonstrated a pastoral concern in his many years of service. He also saw that his role in the pulpit was simply to connect with his congregation, but to connect them to the One who would instruct, heal, and address their every need. Simeon stated, "For a minister to prate in a pulpit, and even to speak much good matter; but to preach is not easy—to carry his congregation on his shoulders as it were to heaven; to weep over them, pray for them, deliver the truth with a weeping, praying

[45] H. C. G. Moule, *Charles Simeon* (London: Methuen & Company, 1892), 97.

[46] J. I. Packer, "Expository Preaching: Charles Simeon and Ourselves," in *Preach the Word: Essays on Expository Preaching in Honor of R. Kent Hughes*, ed. Leland Ryken and Todd A. Wilson (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007), 141.

heart; and if a minister has grace to do so now and then, he ought to be very faithful."[47]

It is in this context that Simeon sought to make application of the text to his congregation. Packer states:

> Simeon's passion to raise standards of preaching among Anglican clergy was brought into focus when he ran across Essay on the Composition of a Sermon by the seventeenth-century French Protestant preacher Jean Claude, translated by Robert Robinson, Whitefield convert, nonconformist minister, and author of the hymn "Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing," who died in 1790. In 1796 Simeon republished the Essay, correcting and improving the translation, removing the rambling and anti-Anglican notes with which Robinson had adorned it, and appending one hundred "skeletons" of sermons on texts. From this grew his magnus opus, twenty-one volumes long, the full title of which in its final edition was as follows: Horae Homileticae or Discourses (Principally in the form of Skeletons) … forming a Commentary upon every Book of the Old and New Testament; to which is Annexed an Improved Edition of a Translation of Claude's Essay on the Composition of a Sermon. This huge effort reached its completion in 1833, when Simeon was seventy-four.[48]

The following is a synthesis of the key terms that frame Simeon's homiletical method:[49]

- By *Explication*, "which unfolds the text." Explain its import; vindicate its reasonableness, display its excellency.
- By *Observation*, "which draws out its substance in remarks, ranging all the illustrations under a few leading remarks."
- By *Propositions*, "which prove the truths in it from other Scriptures."
- By *Perpetual Application*, "which makes the statements or examples in the text press constantly upon actions and habits."
- *The Conclusion or Application*. Ought to be lively and animating, aiming to move Christian affections—as the love of God, hope, zeal, repentance, self-condemnation, etc.

There is little doubt that the principles, which acted as the foundation for Simeon's homiletical method, were sound. To an expositor they are familiar, having been reorganized and restated in modern volumes on homiletics. Simeon's preaching demonstrated expositional application.

Simeon's sermon notes from John 2:11 and Isaiah 53:1 indicate his theological understanding and application skills. He provides the biblical context for the passage, which operates as the setting for the clear and penetrating applications he makes.

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[47] Abner William Brown, *Recollections of the Conversation Parties of the Rev. Charles Simeon* (London: Hamilton, Adams, & Co., 1863), 105–6.

[48] Packer, "Expository Preaching," 144.

[49] As listed in Packer, "Expository Preaching," 153; also in Hugh Evan Hopkins, *Charles Simeon: Preacher Extraordinary*, Grover Liturgical Study, vol. 18 (Bramcote, UK: Grove Books, 1979).

*John 2:11*[50]

> Now then this is the effect that should be produced on our minds: We should receive him as the true Messiah. Let no doubt then ever rest on your minds in relation to this matter: but say with Peter, "We believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God." We should place full affiance in him under that character. The whole world should be to us as nothing in comparison of him; and we should "determine to know nothing," either as an object of confidence or as a ground of glorying, "but Jesus Christ and him crucified." We should surrender up ourselves entirely and unreservedly to his service—This is what the whole of his mediatorial work calls for at our hands; and this is no more than "a reasonable service" for every one of his redeemed to render to him.

*Isaiah 53:1*[51]

> But there is one subject in particular, that affords matter for the deepest regret to every benevolent mind; it is, the unconcern, which men in general manifest for their eternal interests….If the estimate which men form of themselves were true, we should rather have to ask, "Who hath *not* believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord *not* been revealed?" For all imagine themselves to be believers; and, because they have been baptized into the name of Christ, they conceive themselves to be possessed of real faith. But I must say with the Apostle, "Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves." To ascertain the point, I beg you to ask yourselves two questions, viz. *How you obtained your faith?* and, *How it operates?* Do not suppose that the faith of Christ is a bare assent to truths which you have been taught by your parents, or that it is that kind of conviction which is founded upon a consideration of evidence, such as you would feel respecting any common report which was substantiated to your satisfaction. True "faith is the gift of God." In my text, the believing of this report is identified with "a revelation of Jehovah's arm" to effect that faith: and true faith can result from nothing but the almighty power of God forming it in the soul. To those who think they believe—This do: Consecrate yourselves to God so wholly and entirely, that when the question is asked, "Who hath believed our report? and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed?" all who witness your life and conversation may point to *you*, and say, "That man carries his own evidence along with him: however I may doubt of others, I can entertain no doubt respecting him.' *This*, my dear brethren, is what God expects from you. He expects that you should "shine forth as lights in the world, and so hold forth the word of life, as to prove to all, that we have not laboured in vain, or run in vain."

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[50] Charles Simeon, *Horae Homileticae Vol. 13: Luke XVII to John XII* (London: Holdsworth and Ball, 1833), 232–34.

[51] Charles Simeon, *Horae Homileticae Vol. 8: Isaiah, XXVII–LXVI* (London: Holdsworth and Ball, 1832), 338–43.

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones

The great Welsh Protestant minister, preacher and medical doctor D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones was granted great influence in the Reformed wing of the British evangelical movement in the 20th century. For almost 30 years, he was the minister of Westminster Chapel in London. Lloyd-Jones retired from his ministry at Westminster Chapel in 1968, following a major operation. For the rest of his life, he concentrated on editing his sermons to be published, counseling other ministers, answering letters and attending conferences.[52] Lloyd-Jones was perhaps the best in communicating the intimacy of the preaching event. His portrayal will help any preacher remain focused and satisfied in his calling to commune with God and His people when he proclaims the truth of Scripture:

> Now let us hurry on to something much more important— the romance of preaching! There is nothing like it. It is the greatest work in the world, the most thrilling, the most exciting, the most rewarding, and the most wonderful. I know of nothing comparable to the feeling one has as one walks up the steps of one's pulpit with a fresh sermon on a Sunday morning or a Sunday evening, especially when you feel that you have a message from God and are longing to give it to the people.[53]

It is in this context of the intimate and sober preaching that Lloyd-Jones engaged in applicational preaching with his congregations. Lloyd-Jones was a strong advocate of application in preaching. This was in part due to the influence of Reformed and Puritan thinking on his pastoral philosophy.[54]

*Statements and Examples of Lloyd-Jones' Applicational View*

The volume that best expresses Lloyd-Jones' philosophy of preaching is *Preaching and Preachers*. The work is the result of Lloyd-Jones' lectures at Westminster Seminary in 1969. They are divided into sixteen chapters and start with "The Primacy of Preaching." In the first chapter, the overarching tone of his philosophy of preaching is established, as he communicates that proclamation is "the highest and the greatest and the most glorious calling to which anyone can ever be called" and the need for "true preaching in the church" to address the urgent need of the times.[55] Although Lloyd-Jones was applicational in his preaching, it is obvious from this statement and his legacy that he held preaching as preeminent in the church, and

[52] MLJ-Trust, "Meet D. Martin Lloyd-Jones." Accessed January 6, 2020, http://www.mljtrust.org/meet-mlj/.

[53] D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers*, 40th Anniversary ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 311.

[54] David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Puritans: Their Origins and Successors: Addresses Delivered at the Puritan and Westminster Conferences 1959–1978* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1987). In this volume, it is apparent that the Puritan mindset heavily influenced Lloyd-Jones. The messages in the volume were given at the Puritan Studies and Westminster Conferences between 1950 and 1978. Dr. Lloyd-Jones provides and overview of Reformed theology from the Reformation to the nineteenth century, while considering some of the major figures during that time.

[55] Ibid., 17.

matintained strong objections to the call to change with the times of the culture and seek other means to hear and communicate truth.[56]

His applicational method was grounded in his conviction that preachers proclaim God's Word theologically and be Spirit-led, yet structured.[57] Lloyd-Jones saw the relationship of the pulpit and the pew as one of intimacy, influence, and awareness—His exhoratation for preachers to understand that it is "axiomatic that the pew is never to dictate to, or control, the pulpit" is balanced with a pastoral challenge that the preacher must "equally....assess the condition of those in the pew and to bear that in mind in the preparation and delivery of the message" if he is to fulfill his role and capture the character of the message for their congregation.[58] This view is another indication of his commitment to the dignity and authority of the pulpit, while still speaking with pastoral application to the congregation.

In his discussion on the shape of the sermon, Lloyd-Jones developed the thought of the original intention of Scripture and contemporary application: "Having discovered the main message and thrust of your text you must proceed to state this in its actual context and application. For instance, it might be in its application to the particular church to whom the Apostle was writing. You must show its original context and application."[59]

Although he was a strong advocate of systematic exposition, he exhorted preachers to be sensitive to the needs of their flock and be ready to alter preaching schedules if some tragedy occurs in their midst. This sensitivy is an example of the pastoral application that shows the relevance of the Scriptures to address the needs of the pew in various life situations. He stated with a sense of rebuke who may rely too much on their routine: "Though you may have planned out the greatest series of sermons the world has ever known, break into it if there is an earthquake! If you cannot be shaken out of a mechanical routine by an earthquake you are beyond hope!"[60]

Lloyd-Jones understood that there can be a biblical/pastoral "contextualization" of the text. He was very practical in his statements on the role of preaching and contextaulization.[61] Lloyd-Jones warns against being bound to "achaic phrases" or practices instead of "principles and things that are permenant" in the gospel ministry.[62]

*Psalm 27:4 as an Example of Lloyd-Jones' Applicational Exposition*[63]

Gleaning from the personal experience of the subject:

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[56] Ibid., 56.
[57] Ibid., 75–90.
[58] Ibid., 156.
[59] Ibid., 218.
[60] Ibid., 207.
[61] Ibid., 145–47.
[62] Ibid., 147.
[63] All quotations correspond to D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones' audio recording of *Psalm 27*, provided by the Martyn Lloyd-Jones Trust, accessed online March 26, 2020, https://www.mljtrust.org/sermons-online/psalms-27-1-14/seek-my-face/. They are transcribed in D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, "Seeking the Face of God: Nine Reflections on the Psalms," ed. Elizabeth Catherwood and Ann Desmond (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005).

> Now, as in most of the psalms, the psalmist here is giving us his experience, because he is anxious to praise God. He is also anxious to help others. That is the whole purpose of sharing a personal experience-not to call attention to oneself but to call attention to the Lord who is the giver of all and who alone is worthy to be praised. As we look at the experience of this man, we can learn many lessons from him. He is teaching us here how to face the battle of life and of living. That is the great value of the book of Psalms. They are always so practical because they are experimental or experiential. They have this additional value: Each psalmist is not a man writing theoretically about life. It is generally someone who, having passed through some experience that tried and tested him, has again discovered the way of success and of triumph. So he wants to celebrate that and to pass on the information to others. And another great value, of course, of the psalms is that they are always so honest. The psalmist does not pretend he is better than he is. He opens his heart; he exposes himself to us.[64]

The relevance for daily life:

> The value of all this to us is obvious because, after all, each of us is involved in struggle in our daily lives. Nothing is so wrong, and indeed dishonest, as to pretend that the moment you become a Christian all your problems are left behind and you will never have any difficulties from then on. That is just not true. The Christian is not promised an easy time in this world; indeed, the reverse is much nearer the truth. We are told in many places in the New Testament that as Christians we can expect unusual trials precisely because we are followers of the Lord.[65]

The use of the interrogative:

> How are you getting on in this battle? Are you triumphant, are you assured? That is what we are meant to be as God's people. How are you facing the stresses and the trials, the troubles and the tribulations of life? Well, in this psalm we turn to the right way of facing these problems because here the psalmist tells us, out of his own experience, the only way whereby we can indeed truly do so in a world like this.[66]
>
> So you must start with a grand strategy of life, and that is stated to perfection in this psalm. Here it is: We must always start in heaven, with God. Then having done that, we come to earth and face the problems of life and of living as we find them in the light of what we have already seen in heaven with God. That, then, is the great principle, and we all get into trouble because we forget this essential strategy. Never start with your problems. Never! Never start with earth; never start with men. Always start in heaven; always start with God. That is really the one great message of

[64] Lloyd-Jones, "Seeking the Face of God," 153–54.
[65] Ibid., 154.
[66] Ibid., 155–56.

this psalm, but the psalmist puts it, of course, in different ways.[67]

Exhortational application:

> So having established the strategy in our minds, let us follow the psalmist as he works this out for us. Pay attention to him, and ask God to give you understanding through His Spirit, so that you may grasp this most precious truth that can revolutionize your whole life and your outlook upon it. Do you feel defeated, frightened, fearful of life? My dear friend, here is the very thing you need. Take heed for all you are worth, for all your life, and this man will show you how to be more than a conqueror. We start, therefore, with the psalmist's confidence: The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? the LORD is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? When the wicked, even mine enemies and my foes, came upon me to eat up my flesh, they stumbled and fell.[68]
>
> So I ask the question again: Do you face life like this? Are you "more than conqueror"? If not, are you asking, "How can I get this confidence? How can I attain to the position of the psalmist? How can I not only get it but maintain it and continue with it?" But he has anticipated you and wrote his psalm in order to help you. And here are his answers. The first great thing is: Believe in the Lord. "I had fainted, unless I had believed" (Ps 27:13). This is always the beginning. You cannot have anything without belief. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews says, "He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (11:6).[69]

These examples of Lloyd-Jones' application of the text were the norm for his preaching career. What was preached in the genre of poetry was also true in other genres as well.[70]

## Summary and Conclusion

Applicational exposition is not new to evangelical pulpits. It is not a trend introduced with the New Homiletic or post-modern hermeneutics. It has enjoyed a rich history in the life of the church. The examples cited demonstrate several important features of application common to evangelical expositors. The Reformers, in their commitment to the preeminence of Scripture, were men who exposited the Scriptures with a very focused intention to share the once hidden truths of revelation with their audiences in a way that combined doctrinal preaching with practical applications for

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[67] Ibid., 156.

[68] On vv. 1–2; Ibid., 157.

[69] Ibid., 167.

[70] D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Christ-Centered Preaching of Martyn Lloyd-Jones: Classic Sermons for the Church Today* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014). This volume includes messages from Matthew, Deuteronomy, Ephesians, Joshua, Romans, 1 Corinthians, Genesis, Psalms, Acts, and John. Of course, one may visit The Martyn Lloyd-Jones Trust at mljtrust.org and note the consistent expositional approach of Lloyd-Jones as he spoke with authority, clarity, urgency, and relevance for his day.

life. John Calvin was a man who best demonstrated this relationship of theology and practice. His theological perceptiveness was a divinely used tool that set the stage for exhortations, admonitions, and instructions to his congregation. In the same manner in which Calvin would not separate the sacred call of life manifested in the secular arena, so preaching that speaks of the majesty of God should not be separated from preaching that is directed to application in one's spiritual journey.

During the age of the Puritans, preaching maintained its loftiness and its practicality. The Puritan philosophy of preaching included uses in the sermon to direct listeners to live for the glory of God and the benefit of the Christian and secular community. The father of Puritanism, William Perkins, was pronounced in his applicational preaching method, which had its starting point in the mental applications of doctrine that properly motivate believers to greater faith and godliness.

The preaching philosophy of Charles Simeon maintains its influence in modern preaching, and his pastoral applications are a model for any pastor committed to a full-orbed ministry. The influence of Puritanism was evident in the life and preaching of Lloyd-Jones as he stood against the shifting culture of his day. His commitment to sound doctrinal preaching stood in contradiction to the shallow pulpits trending in his day; yet, his commitment did not exclude life lessons, contemporary language, and applications for congregations. Lloyd-Jones' example is one worth repeating. With similar preaching trends occurring today, expositors should follow Lloyd-Jones' example, namely, to focus on theological preaching, but include imperatival, exhortational, and pastoral application in their life-giving messages.

Overall, these examples demonstrate how doctrinal preaching need not be divorced from application in preaching. The relationship of application to genuine exposition is one of complement because it completes the cycle of the doctrine's goal: life change for the glory of God and the benefit of the hearer (Rom 15:4, 7; 1 Cor 10:31; Col 1:28; 1 Tim 1:5). Even the examples of the most general applications of the text evidence that implications are the source of the applications. From the Reformers to modern expositors, implications are a necessary complement to authentic application of the text to the lives of the listeners.


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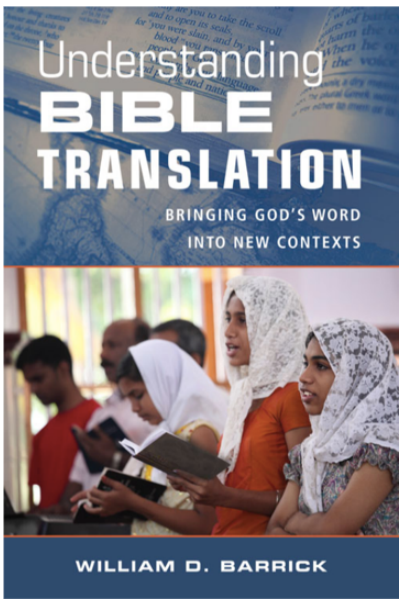


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ISBN: 9780825420252

*MSJ* 31/1 (Spring 2020) 43–57

# MARTYN LLOYD-JONES ON "UNITY"

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*This is Part One of a two-part article that surveys several of the Doctor's messages on unity in order to gain a clear idea of his views on "unity." In Part One the Doctor's messages from his regular pulpit ministry in the early 1960s as well as an extended article from 1962*—The Basis of Christian Unity—*will be analyzed to establish ML-J's view on unity prior to his watershed message in October of 1966. In Part Two particular attention will be paid to the message delivered at the meeting of the National Assembly of Evangelicals in October 1966—a message that by all accounts marked a watershed moment in twentieth-century British evangelicalism. Other of ML-J's messages on unity after 1966 are also examined. This survey and examination will demonstrate that ML-J's message on unity in 1966 was consistent with his views on unity before and after 1966. The article concludes with suggestions for why the Doctor's teaching on unity has value and application for twenty-first-century evangelicalism.*

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## Introduction

The meeting of the National Assembly of Evangelicals in October 1966 was a watershed moment in British evangelicalism.[1] In hindsight it was also a key event in the division of evangelicalism.[2] It is not without irony that the subject of the message

[1] See Carl. R. Truman, "J. I. Packer: An English Nonconformist Perspective," in *J. I. Packer and the Evangelical Future: The Impact of His Life and Thought*, ed. by Timothy George (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 120.

[2] See Iain H. Murray, *Evangelicalism Divided: A Record of Crucial Change in the Years 1950 to 2000* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2000), 44. Murray notes, "The Lloyd-Jones address of 18 October 1966 has repeatedly been described as 'dividing evangelicals', but" he points out, "the division was already there." See also, Iain H. Murray, *The Unresolved Controversy: Unity with Non-evangelicals* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2001), 1, 2.

of Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (hereafter ML-J)[3] on that occasion was "unity."[4] In many ways, the subject, indeed, the doctrine of "unity" was a major theme of ML-J.[5]

The events and aftereffects of that 1966 message by Lloyd-Jones are still being referenced by some, and as then, there are divergent opinions regarding ML-J's message.[6] Historians and critics then and now have questioned his intentions and motives,

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[3] With the highest respect this article will follow others by abbreviating "Martyn Lloyd-Jones" to ML-J.

[4] The message is recorded in D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, "Evangelical Unity: An Appeal," in *Knowing the Times: Addresses Delivered on Various Occasions* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1989), 246–57. This message will be considered in detail in Part Two of this article, in a forthcoming issue of *The Master's Seminary Journal*.

[5] "The late Doctor D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones was as concerned for the unity of churches which were committed to the Christian gospel as he was for the maintenance of the gospel itself." Hywel Rees Jones, "The Doctor and the British Evangelical Council," in *Unity in Truth: Addresses given by Dr D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones at meetings under the auspices of the British Evangelical Council*, ed. by Hywel R. Jones (Darlington, Co. Durham, England: Evangelical Press, 1991), 7. Iain Murray explains why the matter of unity was so important to ML-J. In the 1950s and 1960s the ecumenical movement, "by aiming to bring denominations together," was seeking a unity which was "spiritual and church based." In Iain H. Murray, *D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith, 1939–1981* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1990), 425. As ML-J understood it (see the following analysis), such a "unity" was not true unity, and unity on such terms would actually lead to a weakening of unity between evangelicals. As will be seen in the analysis to follow, ML-J was concerned to promote true unity between evangelicals on evangelical principles. Furthermore, "how the need for true unity was to be met was much more important to Dr. Lloyd-Jones than mere opposition to the ecumenical movement." Ibid., 427.

[6] As just one example, see Alastair Roberts, "One Reason Why John Stott's Stand Against Martyn Lloyd-Jones Mattered," *Alastair's Adversaria*, October 21, 2016, accessed February 14, 2020, https://alastairadversaria.com/2016/10/21/one-reason-why-john-stotts-stand-against-martyn-lloyd-jones-mattered/. In his blog post—defending John Stott and critical of ML-J—Roberts does give ML-J credit for identifying the "the many compromises, yet considerable ambition, of the ecumenical movements of his day." But Roberts argues that "Lloyd-Jones' overwhelming concern for doctrinal purity may well have meant that he wasn't sufficiently able to perceive the importance of other dimensions of the Church's life: its institutions, traditions, polity, and its many bonds to the identity of communities and the nation more generally." Roberts continues, "The quest for a pure church can result from a failure adequately to reckon with the existence of the church as *simul justus et peccator*, and with the functioning of the church as a flawed human polity among other human polities." The misapplication of *simul justus et peccator* aside, it seems Roberts has missed ML-J's (biblically grounded) point that the church was never meant to be identified by "community" or "nation" or as a "human polity." The church is to be the Body of Christ! (See ML-J's analysis of Ephesians 4 below.) It is not ML-J's ecclesiology that is flawed but Roberts' and that of the now largely defunct ecumenical movement. The rest of the post lauds the influence that "Anglican institutions" have had on evangelicalism in Britain especially in producing "Protestant scholars." Thus he asserts, "Pure ecclesiologies (sic) can be a deep threat to the development of a rigorous evangelical theological tradition." The flaw in Roberts' argument (which he virtually seems to admit in this comment: "Fifty years on, it seems fair to say that the evangelicals who remained within the Church of England have not escaped untouched by the wider doctrinal and ethical failures of their communion") is that, while it is *arguable* that evangelicalism has benefited from the educational influence of Anglican educational intuitions (the work of N. T. Wright being a case in point that the benefit or influence is anything but "unmixed"), it is *clear* that the Anglican Church has deviated from a biblical ecclesiology (not to mention a biblical morality) and those evangelicals who remain are "not untouched by the wider doctrinal and ethical failures of their communion." Furthermore, Roberts' post fails to address what is the most serious deviance from evangelical principles and doctrines—namely the gospel itself (not to mention biblical fidelity)—that negates the supposed benefit for evangelicalism in the area of scholarship. In short, following Stott's "stay in" policy, evangelicalism as a whole is more fragmented and thus weaker and less influential in the areas outside of scholarship (such as public morality)—not to mention how the lack of true evangelical unity has contributed in significant ways to the diminished emphasis (in the church!) on the preaching of the gospel in favor of social welfare movements and political campaigns.

even as they have debated about what exactly it was that he was calling for. But, since his stated topic was "unity," it would appear that the best way to judge those opinions would be to seek to understand what ML-J believed about unity. If he was seeking to promote unity, his listeners, of every generation, should attempt to know what he meant by "unity."

Since "unity" was a major theme of ML-J's life work, however, to fully address the question of ML-J's understanding of unity would be a subject worthy of a master's thesis, if not a doctoral dissertation. Therefore, in this article the objective is to discover some clear principles to provide a clearer view of ML-J's beliefs on unity. The procedure will be to consider (to summarize, to analyze, to appraise, and to appreciate) several of the messages on unity by "the Doctor"—from before, after, and including his 1966 message to the National Assembly—to discern the broad outlines and key precepts of the biblical doctrines that formed his understanding of unity. In the end the objective is not so much to engage ML-J's critics but to seek to discover and clarify his views. It is hoped, however, that an understanding of his views about unity will reveal at least a partial answer as to why he addressed the 1966 Assembly as he did. Furthermore, the need for of a biblically grounded doctrine of unity—true unity among biblically minded evangelicals—is still a very pressing need in the twenty-first century, and ML-J's insights are still very much pertinent.

As will be seen in the article, ML-J believed that true unity must be in truth, among genuine (gospel converted, gospel-focused) Christians, not in movements or social programs. It is highly doubtful that those advocating a program of social justice, or ethnic reconciliation, or similar endeavors—either by cooperating with unbelievers or mixing those endeavors with the gospel of salvation by faith alone in Christ alone—would have ML-J as an ally.

## Sermons on Ephesians 4:1–6[7] from the Early 1960s

Along with his remarkable series on Romans[8] the Doctor's series on Ephesians[9] has proven to be among his most lasting and impactful achievements. In the fourth volume on Ephesians (of a series of eight volumes in the *Banner of Truth Trust* publication) the text under consideration is Ephesians 4:1–16 and the overarching subject is "Christian Unity."[10]

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[7] Cited from D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Christian Unity: An Exposition of Ephesians 4:1–16* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1980).

[8] The series on Romans was preached at Westminster Chapel on Friday night messages—an astounding total of 366 sermons—from 1955 to 1968. See https://banneroftruth.org/us/store/sermons-and-expositions/romans-14-volume-set-by-martyn-lloyd-jones/, accessed April 3, 2020.

[9] The series on Ephesians was preached on Sunday mornings from the Westminster Chapel pulpit from 1954 to 1962.

[10] Lloyd-Jones, *Christian Unity: An Exposition of Ephesians 4:1–16*. Hereafter this volume will be cited in the body of this article as CU, followed by the Scripture reference in Ephesians followed by the page number; e.g. (CU, 4:1–3, 11).

## Chapter 3: "Keeping the Unity of the Spirit" (4:2–3)[11]

After two introductory and transitional chapters,[12] the topic of "Unity" comes to the fore in the third chapter.[13] ML-J notes, that in describing the "worthy walk" of believers (4:1), "The first particular matter which the apostle mentions is that we are 'to endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.'"[14] Paul makes this the first particular because (recalling what Paul has written in Ephesians chapters 1–3) it is "the central object of salvation, in a sense, to re-unite, to bring together again, to restore the unity that obtained before sin and the Fall produced this terrible havoc."[15] [Salvation itself is concerned with the theme of unity.][16]

ML-J notes that the matter of "unity" has, in effect, already been addressed by the apostle in Ephesians 3 in Paul's doctrine of "the mystery of Christ" (3:4), which doctrine/mystery is the fact that in Christ "the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel" (3:6).[17] This unity is "the peculiar mark of the Christian calling"[18] and "this matter of unity is the first thing"[19] to consider in the chapters of application based on the doctrine Paul taught in chapters 1–3. In fact, it is matter of "utmost importance" to keep in mind that "Whatever be the unity of which the Apostle speaks, it is a unity that results directly from all that he has been saying in the first three chapters of the Epistle … In other words, you cannot have Christian unity unless it is based upon the great doctrines outlined in chapters 1 to 3."[20] [Christian unity is grounded in knowing and affirming true doctrine.][21]

This vital truth must be understood, says ML-J, because of the "modern trends in the Christian church." ML-J had in mind the "the endless talk about unity, union and re-union" in, what he called "the age of ecumenicity."[22] This talk of unity was

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[11] Lloyd-Jones, *Christian Unity,* 34–46.

[12] Ibid., 11–33.

[13] Ibid., 34.

[14] Ibid., 34–35.

[15] Ibid., 35.

[16] In this article the comments in brackets [ ] are either the author's analysis of ML-J's comments or are key summaries in ML-J's own words, that are in effect the building-blocks in answering the question, "What was ML-J's concept of 'unity?'"

[17] See Ibid., 47ff, where ML-J discusses the doctrine of the Body of Christ and the matter of unity.

[18] Ibid., 35.

[19] Ibid., 36.

[20] Ibid., 37.

[21] This same point is made in Chapter 6: "Revival": "The tragedy is that men are trying to produce unity by telling us that it does not matter very much what we believe, that so long as we come together and work together and do not argue about doctrine, we shall all be one. But the unity of the Spirit comes through understanding, not through discounting understanding and saying that the knowledge of doctrine does not matter. The great characteristic of revival is that men understand the doctrine and the truth in a way they have never done before." (CU, 4:2–3, 79) [There can be no true revival without unity in doctrine.] "Christian unity is the result of a common faith in the gospel of Jesus Christ." In Murray, *D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones*, 429.

[22] Lloyd-Jones, *Christian Unity*, 36.

"merely appealing for some general spirit of friendship, brotherliness, or camaraderie" and an appeal that involved "some common aim [for or] against something which is a common enemy."[23] In view of such talk ML-J advises:

> So if anyone comes to you and says, 'It does not matter much what you believe if we call ourselves Christian, or believe in God in any sense, come, let us all work together', you should say in reply, 'But my dear sir, what about chapters 1–3 of the Epistle to the Ephesians? I know of no unity except with that which is the outcome of, and the offspring of, all the great doctrines which the apostle lays down in those chapters.'[24]

[Whatever this unity may be, we are compelled to say it must be theological, it must be doctrinal, it must be based upon and understanding of the truth.]

Next, in the analysis of Ephesians 4:3, ML-J observes that "the word 'Spirit' has a capital 'S'" and so "refers to The Holy Spirit."[25] The modern talk of "unity" ignores this and so is "entirely unscriptural. It is entirely human … it is not the unity that is produced by the Spirit Himself." Rather, "The unity about which the Apostle is concerned here is produced and created by the Holy Spirit Himself."[26] "He alone can produce this unity," "It is His work." "It is not a mechanical unity." It is not a "coalition or amalgamation … but the unity of the Spirit starts within and works outwardly."[27] To have this unity of the Spirit there must be a "right understanding of the doctrine of the Spirit," in fact, "Nor can this unity ever be felt or experienced or put into practice unless the Holy Spirit is in us and has done His gracious work within us."[28] In short, if there is no agreement "about regeneration and re-birth" by the Spirit, "If the Holy Spirit is not in us we cannot experience this unity; it can only be experienced by those in whom He dwells and whom He has enlightened."[29] "We cannot be true Christians unless the Spirit resides in us."[30] [There cannot be true unity between a Christian—a Spirit-indwelt believer—and those who are not regenerated and enlightened by the Spirit.] Furthermore, this unity is "spiritual, unseen and internal" and this means "this internal principle [of unity] comes first, and then outward manifestation."[31] [So unity is not the result of working together but an internal principle that leads to mutual, Spirit-directed, endeavors.]

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[23] Ibid., 36. This is a prescient observation in view of appeals in 1994 for evangelicals to align with Roman Catholics as with Evangelicals and Catholics Together (ECT); see "Evangelicals & Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium," *First Things*, https://www.firstthings.com/article/1994/05/evangelicals-catholics-together-the-christian-mission-in-the-third-millennium, accessed April 3, 2020. For a critique of ECT see, "Irreconcilable Differences: Catholics, Evangelicals, and the New Quest for Unity, Parts 1–3," *Grace To You*, accessed April 3, 2020, https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/GTY54/irreconcilable-differences-catholics-evangelicals-and-the-new-quest-for-unity-parts-13.

[24] Lloyd-Jones, *Christian Unity*, 37.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Ibid., 37–38.

[27] Ibid., 38.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Ibid., 38–39.

[30] Ibid., 41.

[31] Ibid., 38–39.

In fact, this unity cannot be man-made, or manufactured; indeed, it already exists and must be maintained ["keep the unity of the Spirit"]. "The Apostle does not ask us to make a unity or to create a unity. It exists because we are Christians, he says, and we are to guard it." "The unity is there, and what we have to do is to guard it, to keep it, to preserve it."[32] Christians do this by "lowliness," "humility," "meekness," "longsuffering," "forbearing," all that "in love."[33]

## Chapter 4: "The Body of Christ"[34]

Here ML-J draws out the nature of true unity in reference to the apostle's use of the metaphor of the church—"the mystical, unseen and spiritual Church"[35]—as The Body of Christ. Glancing at 1 Corinthians 12, ML-J observes that "The first thing that emerges is the organic character of the unity that is in the church."[36] [Once again, this unity not mechanical, nor man-made; it is not synthetic or manufactured but organic—"The Church is a new creation."[37] "The second element which the Apostle emphasizes is the diversity in the unity… what we see in the church is unity, not uniformity."[38] That is, as body has many parts, so the Body of Christ is made of many members and "Each part of the body has its own function, but it plays a part in the whole."[39] [The unity of the Body of Christ—what it is and how it functions—must define and control the type of unity Christians are endeavoring to experience.]

## Chapter 8: "One Lord"[40]

In this sermon/chapter ML-J observes that "The Apostle is still concerned to emphasize the unity of the Church. The doctrine of the Person of the Son is put before us in order to maintain 'the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace'. The Apostle introduces this doctrine with but two words, 'one Lord'."[41] ML-J then asserts: "The Lord Jesus Christ in and of Himself leads to unity and always produces unity; so one of the best ways in which we can understand this biblical doctrine of the unity of the church, and preserve it, is to keep our eyes steadfastly on the doctrine of the Person of the Son of God."[42] [Once more, unity is not based on the depreciation of doctrine, but on a robust doctrine of Christ.] That includes: the doctrine of His incarnation,[43]

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[32] Ibid., 40–41.
[33] Ibid., 41–44.
[34] Ibid. 47–57.
[35] Ibid., 52.
[36] Ibid., 53.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid., 54.
[39] Ibid., 56.
[40] Ibid., 94–106.
[41] Ibid., 95.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid., 96.

the doctrine of His two natures,[44] the doctrine of the uniqueness of His work—there is only one Savior,[45] and the doctrine that there is only one gospel.[46]

This yields a surprising consequence: this is that, "there is an aspect of intolerance in the Christian faith"[47] (cf. Acts 4:12; 1 Cor 8:5–6). And yet "At one and the same time Christianity is intolerant and unifying. It must be intolerant…." and preach the only the true gospel (ML-J cites Gal 1:8). ML-J explains:

> We preach Christ alone and we must never say that God can be known without Him. We must be utterly intolerant at this point. And because all true Christians are intolerant at this point, and are all in Him, they are united, welded into one. Intolerance, and absolute unity! Is not this the New Testament gospel? We must preserve both. We must say at one and the same time, that there cannot be such a thing as a World Congress of Faiths, and also that all true Christians are one in Christ Jesus. In it precisely because we are all one in Christ that you cannot have a World Congress of Faiths. Such an idea is a farce; indeed, it is a denial of Christ."[48]

[There can be no true unity apart from the exclusive faith in Christ. The experience of this unity is found in our relationship to and in Christ.][49] ML-J goes on to state, "We are all joined to Him, the same Person; and He is in us all, and is our 'all in all'."[50] That is, each of us has the same Master[51] [and our unity is found in our mutual love and devotion to Him and in our common justifying faith in Him].[52]

This overview does not by any means exhaust the Doctor's insights on Christian unity that could be gleaned from his messages on Ephesians 4. But the insights that have been gained will prove crucial in analyzing his views overall.

## Occasional Messages on Unity from the Early 1960s

In addition to the messages on unity from the series in Ephesians, ML-J addressed the issue of unity in a number of his occasional addresses which he delivered in various venues over the years. Three such addresses will be analyzed. The first to be considered for this article is titled "The Basis of Christian Unity;"[53] and the ad-

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[44] Ibid., 98.
[45] Ibid., 100, 102.
[46] Ibid., 102.
[47] Ibid., 100.
[48] Ibid., 102–3.
[49] As stated in Ibid., 103.
[50] Ibid., 105.
[51] Ibid., 104–5.
[52] In the very next chapter, Chapter 9: "One Faith," ML-J argues the "one faith" that unifies the church is "justifying faith"—that faith which is found in the gospel. See Ibid., 109.
[53] The first address is found in Lloyd-Jones, *Knowing the Times*, 118–63; also published separately as D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Basis of Christian Unity* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2003).

dress was originally two addresses delivered "to the Westminster Ministers' Fellowship" in June 1962.[54] Significantly, this 1962 message would (1) reflect the full insight of ML-J's views on unity gleaned from his studies in Ephesians and (2) it was delivered four years before he took up the topic in the message to the National Assembly of Evangelicals in 1966.[55] This is noteworthy because it reveals (as will be seen) that the substance of ML-J's views on unity and conviction with which he held them, were firmly in place well before the 1966 address.

Another key message to be considered is in the volume *Unity in Truth*,[56] which is a compilation of several of ML-J's addresses to the British Evangelical Council. The address is titled "What is the Church?"[57] This particular address—and all the addresses in this volume were delivered after 1966—was given "on 13 November 1968 at Toxteth Tabernacle where the BEC was holding its second major conference."[58] The final address to be considered is also reproduced in *Unity in Truth*, titled "Wrong divisions and true unity"[59] This address was delivered at Bethesda Chapel, Sunderland in 1970.[60] The analysis of these later addresses will show that ML-J remained consistent in his views on unity.

## "The Basis of Christian Unity"

ML-J begins this address by noting the ongoing attention the matter of "church unity" was receiving in "the various branches and divisions of the Christian church" particularly among the Roman Catholic Church, and the "so-called 'Orthodox' churches, Greek and Russian." In these churches the idea of unity informed an effort whereby "all other sections of the church should return to her that is 'the one and only true church of Christ.'"[61] However, there were others who advocated a rather more expansive understanding of unity amounting to a more "visible unity and a coming together of all who call themselves Christian in any sense whatsoever." For these, "unity means that all sections of the Christian church, anybody, everybody claiming the name of Christian, should meet together, have fellowship together and work together, presenting a common front to the enemies of Christianity."[62]

ML-J noted that still others, among them certain evangelical circles, regarded "unity in terms of coming together to form a kind of 'forum', where various views of the Christian faith are discussed … hoping that as a result they may eventually arrive at some common agreement."[63]

Against the backdrop of these sorts of views, ML-J's address is divided into several "Parts." Parts I and II each take up an examination of John 17 and Ephesians 4

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[54] For the purposes of this article, since it is printed as one chapter, this will be considered one address.

[55] That 1966 address, "Evangelical Unity: An Appeal" (in Lloyd-Jones, *Knowing the Times*, 246–57), will also be analyzed in Part Two for insights into ML-J's views on unity.

[56] Lloyd-Jones, *Unity in Truth: Addresses given by Dr D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones*.

[57] Ibid., 45–65.

[58] Introductory note by the editor to Lloyd-Jones, "What is the Church?," 45.

[59] D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, "Wrong divisions and true unity," in *Unity in Truth*, 102–22.

[60] Introductory note by the editor to Lloyd-Jones, in Ibid., 102.

[61] Lloyd-Jones, *The Basis of Christian Unity*, 118.

[62] Ibid., 119.

[63] Ibid.

respectively. The focus is specifically two texts—John 17:21 and Ephesians 4:13. ML-J explains the choice of his texts: "These are the verses that are so frequently quoted today and used as slogans" by those advocating for unity. ML-J is exceptionally clear in his analysis: "I propose to examine [these two texts] in the light of certain questions. First: What is the nature or character of true unity? Secondly: What is the place of doctrine and belief in this matter of unity? Thirdly: How does this unity come into being?"[64]

ML-J argues that these questions are important because, "The majority view holds that the way to produce unity is not to discuss and consider doctrine, but rather to work together and pray together. The slogans that are 'doctrine divides', but as we 'work together' and 'pray together' we shall arrive at unity."[65] ML-J notes that those who argue for unity in this way are often doing so in the name of more effective evangelism—"we are told, it is urgently essential that we should come together in order that we may evangelize."[66]

## Part I: John 17

ML-J notes that this text ("'That they may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me'"[67]—which is "so frequently used as a slogan") is from Jesus' prayer in John 17. To provide a context for this text ML-J has a brief summary of John 17. He sees seven sections to this prayer: the Lord's prayer is (1) for Himself (vv. 1–5); (2) for His people generally (vv. 6–10); (3) "that they may be kept as one"[68] (vv. 11–12); (4) "that they may be kept as one from the subtle attacks of the evil one"[69] (vv. 13–16); (5) "for their sanctification;"[70] (6) more on the nature of unity (vv. 20–23); (7) "that they may be where He is" to behold his glory[71] (vv. 24–26). From this analysis ML-J offers a number of "Principles of Unity."[72]

First, ML-J observers that this prayer is "restricted in reference," that is, it is "for particular people," the "people of who He said right at the beginning that they have been given to Him by God,"[73] they are "certain people who belong to God,"[74] and they are "people who have been separated from the world." "There is no universalism in this chapter"[75] (cf. John 17:9). Furthermore, these people have "received" (v. 8) and "believed" (v. 20) His word. In sum, ML-J notes that "the characteristics of these people" "emphasize the element of separation and distinction."[76] And thus, "the people who are the subjects of the unity of which our Lord is speaking are not those who

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[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Ibid., 120.
[67] This text as quoted from Ibid.
[68] Ibid., 121.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Ibid., 122.
[75] Ibid.
[76] Ibid.

happen to have been brought up in a certain country, or who happen to belong to a given race or nation or *to a particular visible church*."[77] In short, the unity of which he is speaking is for those who have received and believed his word, "what we would now call the gospel message."[78] [The unity for which Jesus prayed is exclusively for those who have believed the gospel.]

The second principle "concerns the origin of the unity."[79] The point ML-J wants to make here is that this unity—the unity of those who have received and believed his word—"is already there, already in existence."[80] [This is not a unity manufactured by his disciples and is not something "at which we should aim."[81]]

The third principle of this unity has to do with its nature or character. From verses 20–23 ML-J notes it is a unity "comparable to the unity that exists between the Father and the Son" and "comparable to the unity between the Son and the people for whom He is praying."[82] It is not "some organizational unity."[83] It is a "unity of essence," "of being,"[84] and hence, it is a unity of those who have been "born again," and "'made partakers of the divine nature' [1 Pet. 1:4]."[85] ML-J assumes his hearers/readers know that this new birth and new nature are accomplished by the "Holy Spirit of God, who creates within believers the truth of this new nature."[86] The simple but stark point ML-J is making here is that the unity Jesus prays for is only for those who have been born again—it is "not like a number of people deciding to form a coalition or society in order that certain purposes should be carried out."[87] In a summary note ML-J points out that the case of Judas (cf. John 17:12) shows that one may "give the appearance of belonging" but without the new birth "there is no real unity."[88] [This unity is only for those who have been born again and given a new nature by the Holy Spirit.]

In sum, "Any 'unity' which lacks these characteristics is not the unity of which our Lord speaks in John 17."[89] [Therefore, to use this text to appeal for any other basis of unity (as did those advocating an ecumenism not based on this evangelical principle of the new birth) is not a legitimate use of this text.]

## Part II: Ephesians 4

In the rest of this address ML-J provides a general analysis of Ephesians 4 and the subject of unity. He begins with brief anecdote of an encounter with a "well known evangelical preacher"[90] who at one time had held that "you must have agreement about truth" and "about doctrine" in order to have fellowship with others but

[77] Ibid., 123; emphasis added.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Ibid., 124.
[83] Ibid.
[84] Ibid., 124, 125.
[85] Ibid., 125.
[86] Ibid.
[87] Ibid.
[88] Ibid., 126.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Ibid.

who had come to hold, after reading Ephesians 4 that it starts with fellowship (v. 3) and "it's only later" that there may be "the unity of the faith" (v. 13). Thus this "well known evangelical preacher" was "proposing to have fellowship with people who disagreed with him theologically" because "he believed it was through such fellowship that he could arrive at ultimate doctrinal agreement."[91] It was the view of this "evangelical preacher" that unity could be achieved by "working together, evangelizing together, praying together and having fellowship together" even with those who were theologically liberal "that we shall ultimately arrive at the unity of the faith."[92] In the rest of this address ML-J asks the simple "crucial question": Does Ephesians 4 teach this view of unity?

Once again, ML-J considers the entire context of the chapter: "A general analysis of the section reveals the following: in verses 1 to 3 Paul makes a general appeal for unity; in verses 4 to 6 he describes the nature of the unity; in verses 7 to 12 he describes the variety in unity and the means which God has taken to preserve it; finally in verses 13 to 16 he describes the unity perfected, or its ultimate realization and flowering."[93]

With his typically keen eye for the significance of exegetical details, ML-J observes, "The key to the whole exposition of chapter 4 is the word 'therefore' in verse 1." The reason for this is that this word "points us back to the first three chapters of this great epistle."[94] In short, ML-J argues that the exhortation on unity is in the light of the previous three chapters of doctrine. Paul does not "start with unity and then proceed to doctrine; he takes up unity because he has already laid down his doctrine."[95] Thus, the view of the "well known evangelical preacher" is proven false—"his entire exposition is vitiated at the outset."[96]

In a focused overview of Ephesians chapters 1 to 3 ML-J shows who the people are to whom the exhortation to unity comes. The unity Paul has in view is for those who are "in Him" (cf. 1:4)—"There is no unity, there can be no unity, apart from the person of the Lord Jesus Christ, apart from His work and especially the redemption which is 'through His blood'."[97] This unity is for those who are "in Him" by election and predestination (cf. 1:4–6).[98] It is a unity for those who "have realized that by nature they were dead in trespasses and sins" (cf. 2:1), have "been quickened together in Christ"[99] (cf. 2:5 "made alive"[100] and "who have been 'regenerated,' who are God's workmanship"[101] (cf. 2:10). It is a unity of all those "who have been 'raised together' with Him, and they have been 'made to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus'" (vv. 4–7).[102] ML-J notes the Ephesians had been "brought into this unity, which is in the church, entirely by the action of the Lord Jesus Christ, and

[91] Ibid., 127.
[92] Ibid.
[93] Ibid.
[94] Ibid.
[95] Ibid., 128.
[96] Ibid.
[97] Ibid., 129.
[98] Ibid., 129–30.
[99] Ibid., 130–31.
[100] Citing from *New American Standard Bible* (La Habra, CA: Lockman Foundation, 1995).
[101] Ibid., 131.
[102] Ibid., 130–31.

particularly by the shedding of His blood on the cross" (cf. 2:13): "These, and these alone, are the subjects of the unity of which he speaks in chapter 4."[103] It is a unity in which the distinctions of Jew and Gentile are no longer applicable: "All these differences are gone … they are united in their common trust in Jesus Christ"[104] (cf. 2:14 and 3:6). It is a unity in the Spirit: "it is produced by the Holy Spirit and by Him alone."[105] [True unity is to be found only with those who are "in Him," that is, those who are chosen (elect) in Christ, redeemed by the blood of Christ, and united by faith in Christ.]

The next major section of *The Basis of Christian Unity* is largely a summary of the Doctor's exposition of Ephesians 4:1–16, which ML-J then summarizes. The unity of which the apostle is speaking here is (1) "an existing spiritual unity which then expresses itself externally;"[106] (2) essential to this unity is the "fundamental spiritual experience of regeneration or rebirth produced by the Holy Spirit. Unity is never considered except in terms of this 'new nature' and 'new life';"[107] (3) this 'new nature' and 'new life' is always expressed in "a belief in certain fundamental truths … the 'teaching' or 'doctrine' of which the apostle speaks in Ephesians;"[108] (4) those truths are:

> That man is lost and helpless and hopeless because of sin and the fall. That the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the Son of God, saves us by His perfect life of obedience to the law and by His death, which is the result of His bearing our guilt and the punishment … That salvation becomes ours by faith alone; it is apart from any works or merit in ourselves, and solely as the result of God calling us effectually by the Holy Spirit. That is the faith, without which there is no unity."[109]

That said, ML-J recognizes there may be other points of the truth that those who are new in the faith may not yet understand and other particulars about which there may be different views (e.g. "Calvinistic or Arminian").[110] Nevertheless, in the teaching of the New Testament "there is an absolute foundation, an irreducible minimum, without which the term 'Christian' is meaningless."[111] There are doctrines (see above) that must be believed and apart from those doctrines "there is no such thing as fellowship, no basis of unity at all."[112] Two cannot even pray together if one thinks there is a casual access to God and another believes "there is only one way of entry into the 'holiest of all,' and that is 'by the blood of Jesus'."[113] Two cannot evangelize together if they do not agree on who Christ is or what the meaning of "salvation"

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[103] Ibid., 131.
[104] Ibid., 133.
[105] Ibid., 133.
[106] Ibid., 148.
[107] Ibid.
[108] Ibid.
[109] Ibid.
[110] Ibid., 149.
[111] Ibid.
[112] Ibid.
[113] Ibid.

is.[114] "There is no real fellowship and unity in a group of people where some believe in the wrath of God against sin … and others not only do not believe in the wrath of God at all, but say it is almost blasphemous to teach such a thing…."[115] ML-J asserts in sum:

> How ridiculous it is to suggest that there can be fellowship and unity between those who believe that they are saved and have access into God's presence solely because in His great love He made His only Son 'to be sin for us' (2 Cor 5:21) and spared Him not 'but delivered him up for us all' (Rom. 8:32), and those who believe that the death of Christ was a great tragedy … and that ultimately we save ourselves by our obedience, good works, and our practice of religion.[116]

This concluded ML-J's exposition of John 17 and Ephesians 4.

## Part III: New Testament Corroboration

In this next section ML-J reviews, First, several passages in the New Testament that reveal the causes of disunity. These causes are (1) factions (cf. 1 Cor 1:10–16) that take the focus of the church of Christ; (2) false teachings such as (a) worldly philosophy (cf. 1 Cor 1:17); (b) anti-Christ teachings (cf. 1 John); (c) teaching works righteousness (cf. Galatians and Hebrews); (3) "anything that exalts self and not Christ," such as those who "were glorying in their spiritual gifts."[117] [In short, ML-J is arguing that when there is deviation from the truth about, and centrality of Christ, unity is not possible.]

Second, ML-J demonstrates that the New Testament teaches that, far from discounting doctrine for the sake of unity (since some claim "doctrine divides") "there is no unity apart from truth and doctrine, and it is its departure from this that causes division and breaks unity."[118] Furthermore, "the New Testament emphasizes that doctrine can be defined." That is, it can be set forth in propositions and has been in the "creeds and confessions of the faith."[119] This is in contrast to the modern "doctrinal indifferentism" of such bodies as the World Council of Churches.[120] Throughout the New Testament "there is an insistence upon true doctrine in contradistinction to false doctrine" and this proves that true "doctrine can be defined and stated in terms and propositions."[121] [True doctrine can be clearly defined and clearly stated and thus serves as the basis for true unity.]

To reiterate this point ML-J has a third section to this Part wherein he surveys a number of passages in the New Testament where false teaching was condemned.

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[114] Ibid., 150.
[115] Ibid.
[116] Ibid.
[117] Ibid., 151–52.
[118] Ibid., 152–53.
[119] Ibid., 153.
[120] Ibid., 153–54.
[121] Ibid., 155.

Here ML-J is exposing the error of suggesting that Christians "must never be negative" and "we must never be critical of other views" but we must always exhibit "a kind of niceness and politeness" in the face of other views.[122]

ML-J contradicts this error by citing several instances in the New Testament where false teachers are forthrightly exposed. For instance, false teachers are called "wolves in sheep's clothing" (Matt 7:15–27), "false Christs" (Matt 24:24–26), "grievous wolves" (Acts 20:28–31), "false apostles" (2 Cor 11:13–15) and "enemies of the cross" (Phil 3:18–19),[123] and false teaching is called "philosophy and vain deceit" (Col 2:8), "profane and vain babblings," (1 Tim 6:20), "words which 'will eat as doth a canker [cancer]'," (2 Tim 2:17) and "wells without water" (2 Pet 2:17).[124]

In sum, ML-J shows that the modern notion of unity that "dislikes any polemical element at all in preaching and teaching the truth" is not the teaching of the New Testament.[125] There is a place for "speaking the truth in love" but such speaking includes clear exposé of false teaching "in order that the 'children' of the faith may be protected from their nefarious influence."[126] [True unity is not possible with doctrinal error, but that error must be forthrightly exposed and at times called out in severe terms. True doctrine, indeed, does divide from false doctrine.]

## Part IV: Conclusions

In the final section of *The Basis of Christian Unity* Martyn Lloyd-Jones offers several summary statements about unity. The key points follow.

"Unity must never be isolated or regarded as something in and of itself."[127] That is to say that unity must never be considered as an end in itself apart from doctrine and truth.

The "question of unity must never be put first," that is, doctrine comes first, and unity of fellowship comes out of unity in doctrine (cf. Acts 2:42).[128]

"We must never start with the visible church or with an institution, but rather with the truth which alone creates unity."[129] ML-J illustrates this point by noting Paul's break with institutional Judaism and Luther's break with the Roman Catholic Church;[130] and he concludes with a very clear assertion: "The invisible church is more important than the visible Church [note the capital C], and loyalty to the former may involve either expulsion or separation from the latter, and the formation of a new visible church."[131]

"The starting point in considering the question of unity must always be regeneration and belief in the truth. Nothing else produces unity and … it is impossible apart from this."[132]

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[122] Ibid.
[123] Ibid., 155–56.
[124] Ibid., 157.
[125] Ibid.
[126] Ibid.
[127] Ibid., 159.
[128] Ibid.
[129] Ibid.
[130] Ibid., 160.
[131] Ibid.
[132] Ibid.

"An appearance or a façade of unity based on anything else [than regeneration and belief in the truth] and at the expense of these two criteria, or which ignores them, is clearly a fraud and a lie."[133]

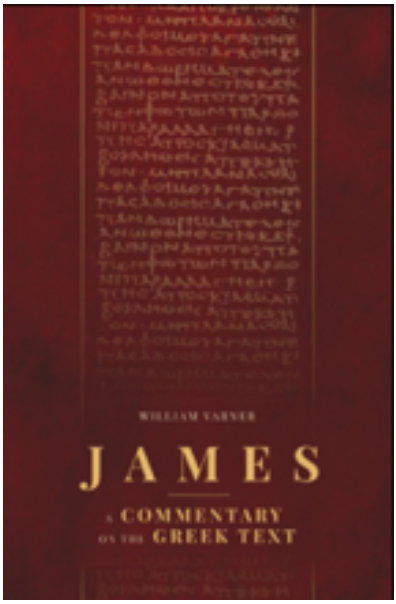
"Truth and untruth cannot be reconciled…. Error is always to be exposed and denounced for truth's sake."[134]

The church is not a "forum in which fundamental matters" or essential truths can be debated with non-brethren for the purpose of "witness-bearing." The church is to "preach to such and evangelize them."[135]

"Unity must obviously never be thought of primarily in numerical terms, but always in terms of life," and so the "greatest need of the hour" is "renewal and revival."[136]

It will be noted that the themes of this summary section were the very themes Martyn Lloyd-Jones highlighted in his 1966 message before the National Assembly of Evangelicals, which will be analyzed in Part Two.

[133] Ibid.
[134] Ibid., 161.
[135] Ibid., 161.
[136] Ibid., 162–63.

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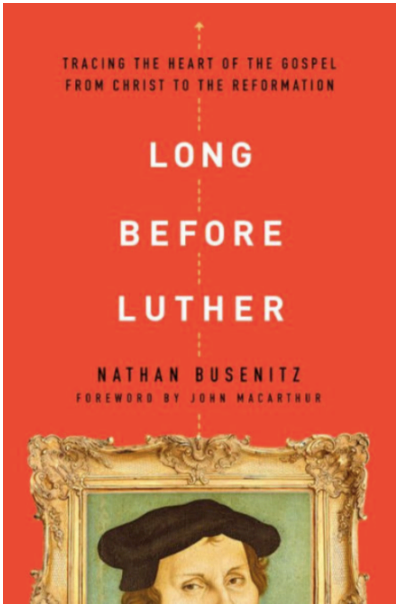


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*MSJ* 31/1 (Spring 2020) 59–78

# TOWARD A DISPENSATIONAL MISSIOLOGY: ESCHATOLOGICAL PARAMETERS FOR THE GLOBAL TASK

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*The vast majority of publications which influence overseas mission practitioners today either diminish the centrality of Scripture in engaging cultures, or approach Scripture with ill-defined interpretive parameters and unchallenged theological presuppositions. Conservative missionaries who apply a literal, historical-grammatical hermeneutic to their ministry of the Word must address such puzzling problems in order to raise up grassroots disciples with a conservative understanding of biblical doctrine. The article will evaluate the teachings of key New Testament passages, with the goal of understanding how Israel, the church, and future events necessarily factor into the ethos and practice of missions today. On the basis of these teachings, the article aims to highlight the importance of adopting and implementing a "dispensational missiology" in the work of global evangelism and discipleship, demonstrating the need for the conservative, biblical teaching of ecclesiology and eschatology in the global church. This article was originally published in the* Journal of Ministry & Theology of Baptist Bible Seminary *23 no. 1 (Spring 2019): 141–73.*

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## Introduction

Charles Taber, important trainer of Bible translators and avid mission theorist, faithfully advanced anthropological and linguistic strategies on the use of Scripture in the global church. Yet a few troublingly dismissive phrases seem to summarize his experiences of years of contextualizing the Bible in West Africa: "We had found out in the field… that the national church was capable of being guided by the Holy Spirit using the Scriptures. We also found it no longer possible to trust the dispensational hermeneutic that I had learned from childhood."[1] Taber seems to suggest that the more he was exposed to a West African method of interacting with Scripture, the more he grew to distrust the literal, historical, grammatical interpretive method.

[1] Charles R. Taber, *International Bulletin Of Missionary Research*, vol. 29, No. 2 (April 2005): 89.

Anti-colonial rhetoric that decries white, late-modern-era theology and its bibliological commitments is not uncommon in contemporary evangelical literature.[2] Some mission theorists who influence overseas practitioners today present unchallenged presuppositions on the role of Scripture, and in so doing seem to radically diminish the centrality of Scripture in engaging cultures.[3] But trivializing the advancements of the dispensational hermeneutic in forming global theology is a poorly wagered argument.

For example, it hardly seems plausible that such an influential linguist and missionary as Taber would come to disregard a hermeneutic known for its faithful search for the original meaning of Scripture, especially when compared to the theological landscape of Africa, known for promoting a culture-first reading.[4] Equally strange is Taber's suggestion that any local church, in West Africa or elsewhere, can ensure a Spirit-led interpretation of the Bible without a commitment to both rigorously understand the authorial intent of a passage and to find the appropriate local application in keeping with a consistently literal reading of Scripture.

What additional benefits might Charles Taber have offered if he had upheld the dispensational hermeneutic in all areas of the missionary task? How would promoting

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[2] Postmodern scholars criticize the evangelical propositionalism and apparent cultural ignorance of some modern era missionaries as a deleterious, top-down theological elitism which arose during the Enlightenment. See Reformed theologian Douglas Wilson's claim that propositionalism is an evangelical "pathology" (In Douglas Wilson, "A Couple Doctrinal Pathologies," *Blog & Mablog: Theology that Bites Back* [October 19, 2008], accessed August 21, 2018, https://dougwils.com/s16-theology/a-couple-doctrinal-pathologies.html). The largely postmodern claim that classical propositionalists followed Enlightenment philosophies are not uncommon in contextualization theory arising from Westerners and non-Westerners alike. See Alister McGrath, *A Passion for Truth: The Intellectual Coherence of Evangelicalism* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 163–79, with discussion through p. 200; Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism—Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 13–14; John R. Franke, "Reforming Theology: Toward A Postmodern Reformed Dogmatics," *Westminster Theological Journal* 65, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 1–26; F. LeRon Shults, *The Postfoundationalist Task of Theology: Wolfhart Pannenberg and the New Theological Rationality*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999. Also see strong discussion by Nigerian Victor I. Ezigbo, *Re-Imagining African Christologies: Conversing with the Interpretations and Appropriations of Jesus Christ in African Christianity* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2010), 1, 8–13, esp. 10–12.

[3] Missional authors Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, for example, urge for socio-cultural accommodation practices above propositionally driven ones. They promote various insider movement strategies that seem neither to deliver the content of the gospel in a culturally relevant way nor match conservative parameters for evangelistic engagement. By highlighting what appear to be unnecessary pragmatic concerns, they risk advocating for activities which obscure the biblical mandate to preach the truths of Scripture at all times (2 Tim 4:1–2) with utmost priority (1 Cor 9:16). See Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *Shaping of Things to Come: Innovation and Mission for the 21st Century Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 109, 117–21.

[4] Nigerian theologian David Tuesday Adamo summarizes the many interpretive directions under the central tenet of cultural priority: "African biblical hermeneutics is vital to the wellbeing of African society. African biblical hermeneutics is a methodological resource that makes African social cultural contexts the subject of interpretation." He further defines the way in which the Afrocentric hermeneutic is to be deemed biblical: "This is a methodology that reappraises ancient biblical tradition and African world-views, cultures and life experiences, with the purpose of correcting the effect of the cultural, ideological conditioning to which Africa and Africans have been subjected in the business of biblical interpretation. It is the rereading of the Christian scripture from a premeditatedly Africentric [sic] perspective…. The analysis of the biblical text is done from the perspective of an African world-view and culture." In David Tuesday Adamo, "What is African Biblical Hermeneutics?" *Black Theology: An International Journal* 13, no. 1 (April 2015): 70.

a consistently literal approach to the text in the global church bring theological clarity to evangelism and discipleship? Could the application of the dispensational hermeneutic in national churches steer the tide of unbiblical culture-based theology?[5]

This article presents a decidedly dispensational direction for global instruction in order to highlight some of the advantages to the theological training of the global church that result from the dispensational hermeneutic.[6] A "dispensational missiology" is constructed via two biblical doctrines: the expectation of the imminent return of Jesus Christ and a future for national Israel. The dispensational trajectory for missions ensures that essential principles of evangelism and sanctification are not overlooked when raising up indigenous disciples—living and serving with a heightened awareness of the future, in keeping with the pastoral teaching of the apostles.

For discussion are key New Testament texts that help the missionary and the national church to keep a clear focus on the biblical mission ethic and the vital parameters for evangelism. The passages are Matthew 24–25, 1 Corinthians 15, Titus 2, 1 Thessalonians 1 and 4–5, 2 Thessalonians 1–2, and 2 Peter 3. These passages reveal how Israel, the church, and future events should factor into the attitude and practice of missions today both for missionaries and for their local Timothies.

## Dispensational Distinctions and Their Missiological Import

Constructing a dispensational missiology hinges upon one's commitment not only to the literal, historical, grammatical hermeneutic, but also to the doctrine of perspicuity, namely that Scripture communicates God's message to its audience with

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[5] The late David Hesselgrave, influential missiologist and co-founder of the Evangelical Missiological Society (EMS), was an exemplary voice of conservative reason. He spoke over a decade ago against the generic "evangelical ecumenism" of EMS members which has led to the propagation of sub-biblical theories across the world. From Hesselgrave's vantage point, the varying and conflicting theological positions of the members have overhauled the once sure conservative bibliology which members pledged to uphold at the time of joining the Society. The fact that Hesselgrave would plead with so-called conservative evangelicals for the integrity, intent and priority of Scripture evidences how prolific sub-biblical contextualization strategies have become across the globe. EMS requires adherence to the ICBI Chicago Statement on Inerrancy at the time of entrance but does not define a policy to ensure the application of inerrancy to the practical theology espoused by its members (accessed August 21, 2018, https://library.dts.edu/Pages/TL/Special/ICBI_1.pdf). See David J. Hesselgrave, "The Power of Words," published in *Global Missiology* (January 2006), accessed February 16, 2016, www.globalmissiology.net; also see Richard V. Pierard, "Evangelicalism," in *New Twentieth Century Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, ed. J. D. Douglas (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 311–13.

[6] Given the limitations of the article and the audience's familiarity with dispensationalism, the paper will focus on the theological implications of the literal, historical, grammatical hermeneutic rather than reconstruct its exegetical process. A concise definition of the dispensational hermeneutic is however an essential starting point. Robert Thomas adapted Milton Terry's definition of the "grammatico-historical method" of exegesis as applied to the Bible: "A study of inspired Scripture designed to discover under the guidance of the Holy Spirit the meaning of a text dictated by the principles of grammar and the facts of history." See Robert Thomas, *Introduction to Exegesis* (Los Angeles: Robert L. Thomas, 1987), 24.

Nathan Holsteen adds a succinct yet summative definition to include a "(more) consistent literalism," as he calls it: "A literal hermeneutic is an approach to Scripture that finds the meaning of the text in the plain or normal sense of the text in its context." For the term and quotation, see Nathan D. Holsteen, "The Hermeneutic of Dispensationalism," in *Dispensationalism and the History of Redemption: A Developing and Diverse Tradition*, ed. D. Jeffrey Bingham, Glenn R. Kreider (Chicago: Moody, 2015), 112–13.

verbal clarity.[7] Because of the clarity of Scripture, it is possible to read Scripture with a consistent literalism[8] with the aim of conserving the authorial intent of a given prophecy in order to understand it in light of redemptive history.

One helpful way to work toward the missiological import of dispensationalism is to syllogistically represent the theological axioms that derive from the hermeneutical distinctives. At least seven dispensational axioms can be traced, as is done here with some preliminary comments.[9]

1. God clearly reveals His will through the Scriptures, the written "oracles of God."

   The inspired, written form of the "oracles of God" (Acts 7:38; Rom 3:2; Heb 5:12; cf. 2 Tim 3:16) is the direct revelation of God. The prophets were fully aware of the message they proclaimed[10] and their role in proclaiming it.[11]

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[7] Brad Klassen ably defends the doctrine of perspicuity, and offers a useful definition: "Simply stated, to affirm the clarity or perspicuity of verbal revelation means to affirm that when God speaks, he does so in such a way that his words will be clear and intelligible to his intended audience…. God communicates his intent effectively, employing the most appropriate forms and structures of human language to make the knowledge he desires to reveal comprehensible to mankind. He never misses the mark." See Bradley D. Klassen, "A Light Shining in a Dark Place: The Clarity of Verbal Revelation According to Moses and the Prophets" (PhD Dissertation, The Master's Seminary, 2016), 1.

[8] Holsteen, "The Hermeneutic of Dispensationalism," 112. In his chapter, Holsteen carefully parses through various uses of the dispensational claim to literalism. He helpfully notes how, in the early years of progressive dispensationalism, Blaising might have exaggerated the emphases between dispensationalists, as literalism "is still a common feature in all forms of dispensationalism" (120–21n27). For essential discussion on what constitutes literal vs. non-literal hermeneutics with regard to the apostolic treatments of types, see John S. Feinberg, "Systems of Discontinuity," *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship Between the Old and New Testaments*, ed. John S. Feinberg (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1988), 74–75. For a lengthy yet unsatisfactory discussion which fails to recognize or respond to the key hermeneutical debate raised by Feinberg, see Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 109–126, esp. 113, 117–18.

[9] The syllogism presupposes that the dispensational hermeneutic supports its findings even though the exegetical steps involved in the hermeneutical process are not detailed here. Given the practical theological interests of this article, only some treatments and sources will be used in supporting the syllogism.

[10] It is important to distinguish between "objective" and "subjective" clarity, along the lines of Luther's "external" and "internal" *claritas*. Klassen raises the distinction and defines the objective clarity, stating, "A fundamental distinction exists between two perspectives on the clarity of verbal revelation: the nature of verbal revelation as it is defined by God and intended for man, and the manner in which man receives it. Strictly speaking, the clarity of verbal revelation as a quality of God's Word refers to the former, not the latter…. To acknowledge that verbal revelation is objectively clear is not to contend that it must *appear as clear* to its readers" (Klassen, "A Light Shining in a Dark Place," 2n4, emphasis in original). Klassen defines the "subjective" clarity similarly to Luther's "internal" *obscuritas*: "A responsible, comprehensive definition of the doctrine of clarity must certainly include reference to the obfuscating effect of sin, the necessity of spiritual regeneration, the Holy Spirit's ministry of illumination in believers, and the role of the community of God's people in the interpretive process" (Klassen, "A Light Shining in a Dark Place," 2n3). For discussion of Luther's dual *claritas* in relation to his dual *obscuritas*, see Bernhard Lohse, *Martin Luther's Theology: Its Historical and Systematic Development* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1999), 164–65.

[11] Klassen details the prophet's self-recognition as "God's human mouth," acting as "covenant prosecutors" in full recognition of their task and message. Klassen, "A Light Shining in a Dark Place," 281–91.

2. The eschatological details taught God's faithfulness and demanded faithful response.

   For example, Genesis 15:6 is an early indicator that faith in God is the belief in God's faithfulness to accomplish His future plan—the righteous person is the one who trusts that God will fulfill at a time yet to be revealed what He has promised by oath.[12] Predictive prophecy is useful for understanding God's eschatological trajectory and for living presently in God's will.[13] Both the present-day ethical dimension and the predictive eschatological dimension worked in tandem to deliver a timely message to the original hearers.[14]

3. Jesus and the apostles literally connected their prophecies to OT eschatology.

   The dispensational hermeneutic expects prophetic harmony between the Testaments because all of Scripture is one storyline.[15] There is "a united rationale amongst the biblical authors" as to the hermeneutic to employ and the eschatological content to maintain across Testaments.[16] Contemporary readers are to

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[12] Well stated in Ibid., 297.

[13] To the contrary, Brent Sandy finds little support that the Old Testament prophets could predict the distant future with enough detail to bring the kind of gravitas to their original hearers that present-day readers assume. He argues that the literary style employed by the prophets makes predictive prophecy "inherently ambiguous and in some ways less precise." See D. Brent Sandy, *Plowshares & Pruning Hooks: Rethinking the Language of Biblical Prophecy and Apocalyptic* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2002), 158. In Klassen's terms, Sandy understands Old Testament prophecy to be more "kaleidoscopic" than "telescopic," and his observations appear to strike against the conservative understanding of perspicuity. See Klassen, "A Light Shining in a Dark Place," 295n47, 303.

[14] This concept is explained by Mike Stallard, who helpfully pushes back against Sandy's conclusion that the metaphorical and at times emotional language of the prophets is shrouded in a layer of obfuscation and mystery which might sacrifice eschatological detail. Mike Stallard, "The Certainty of Prophetic Language," Pre-Trib Research Center, accessed May 21, 2020, https://www.pre-trib.org/articles/dr-mike-stallard/message/the-certainty-of-prophetic-language/read. Klassen also responds to Sandy, writing, "By stressing so ardently the limited value of distant-future, non-Messianic prophecy, [Sandy and others] have diluted the value which distant-future, Messianic prophecies had for their original audiences…. It is much more capable of effecting moral transformation in the present than they acknowledge." In Klassen, "A Light Shining in a Dark Place," 299.

[15] Dispensationalist Michael Vlach adds hermeneutical precision on Scripture's trajectory: "The Bible's storyline as revealed in the Old Testament is the same storyline that is fulfilled in the New Testament over the course of Jesus' two comings. The New Testament does not reinterpret or transcend the Bible's storyline." Michael J. Vlach, *Dispensationalism: Essential Beliefs and Common Myths* (Los Angeles: Theological Studies Press, 2016), 57–58.

[16] Abner Chou makes a strong case for the interconnectedness and intertextuality of Old Testament and New Testament Prophets. As one example of eschatological alignment, Jesus, the ultimate prophet (Heb 1:1–2), sources his teaching on the timing of the abomination of desolation (Matt 24:15–16) in Daniel's chronology in Dan 9:27. Other Old Testament prophecies interwoven in Jesus' Olivet Discourse include Isa 27:13; Dan 7:9–13; 12:1; Zech 9:14. See Abner Chou, *The Hermeneutics of the Biblical Writers: Learning to Interpret Scripture from the Prophets and Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2018), 159. In another example, Peter explicitly links the predictions of his letter to those of the OT prophets, Jesus, and his apostles (2 Pet 3:2). Throughout 2 Pet 3:1–18, Peter bases his description of the eschatological Day of the Lord and the new heavens and earth on allusions and quotations from Isa 13:6; 65:17; and Mal 4:5. What's more, in 3:10, Peter echoes the "thief in the night" image from Jesus (Matt 24:43) as well as Paul (1 Thess 5:2). See Abner Chou, *The Hermeneutics of the Biblical Writers*, 188.

follow this rationale.[17]

4. Consistent literalism preserves the reader from distorting the trajectory of the prophecy.

   Non-literal results do not flow from literal hermeneutical methods; the obfuscating of the eschatological details ultimately changes the nature of the original message.[18] When a passage is allowed to speak for itself at its particular point in the progress of revelation, then the prophecy is seen for what it really is: a promise that must be completely fulfilled.[19]

5. The promises to Israel must be fulfilled in distinction from the church.

   Concerning the aspect of future salvation, for example, OT prophecy concerning both Jew and Gentile must "be taken on its own terms rather than reinterpreted in the light of the NT."[20] There are many unique features with regard to future Israel that point to the coming reality that Israel will serve as the vehicle for the global, physical, and spiritual blessing of all peoples of the earth.[21]

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[17] Considering each prophecy in its specific context in the canon requires what Chou has coined "prophetic, apostolic, and Christian hermeneutics." The prophets wrote with a view to the future, and the NT writers understood their task of exegeting and expounding OT teaching for the NT context. Chou remarks, "Literal-grammatical-historical hermeneutics is not a modern formulation but how the biblical writers read the Scriptures. The Christian hermeneutic follows the prophets and apostles, and is thereby a hermeneutic of obedience." See Chou, *The Hermeneutics of the Biblical Writers*, 22–23, with quote on 23.

[18] Any system which contends for a New Testament reinterpretation of prior prophecy, rather than expansion thereof, does not employ a literal hermeneutic even though it may propose to do so. Progressive Covenantalists Gentry and Wellum see dispensationalists and nondispensationalists as employing the same hermeneutic (in Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 113), even though nondispensational systems tend to expect the redefinition of OT predictive prophecy in the NT. Blaising and Bock rightly ask of the nondispensational claim to a "literal" hermeneutic: "If language says one thing in terms of intention but really means something else, then is this not still a type of allegory?" See Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 393. On the basis of such observations, Bock surmises that nondispensational eschatology is ultimately unhelpful in the quest to understand the work of the church today: "Confusion about the identity of the kingdom, its subjects, and its nature leads to confusion about the church's mission and mandate." Darrell L. Bock, in Blaising and Bock, *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church*, 66.

[19] So Beecher: "From the time when [a promise] was first given it was doubtless thought of as something by which future ages would be able to test God's ability to reveal coming events…. In this aspect of it, it would stir their imaginations, and set them to looking forward." in Willis Judson Beecher, *The Prophets and the Promise* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell & Company, 1905), 212–13.

[20] In Feinberg, "Systems of Discontinuity," 75. A consistently literal reading of the "new man" of Ephesians 2:11–16 cannot deny the diversity of Israel within the Christian unity of Jew and Greek. Carl Hoch notes the discontinuity inherent to the concept of "newness," while conserving continuity in God's plan of salvation to save Gentiles and establish the church. See Carl B. Hoch, "The New Man of Ephesians 2," in Blaising and Bock, *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church*, 98–126. Neither can a literal hermeneutic deny the perpetuity of Israel's blessing in the physical land simply because salvation has now extended to the nations and folded Gentiles into the blessing promised to the "seed" of Abraham (Gen 12:1–3; Rom 4:11–12). See Paul Feinberg's logic on the concept of multiple fulfillment in Paul D. Feinberg, "Hermeneutics of Discontinuity," in *Continuity and Discontinuity*, 109–28, esp. 127.

[21] Scripture itself expects that the nation of Israel will one day receive physical land as an inheritance by God (Gen 12:1–3), and that one day "all Israel" will live to the glory of Messiah (Rom 11:26). Jesus

6. The missionary activity of the apostles was motivated by prophecy.

   The NT prophets understood that the events which culminate in national Israel's salvation would follow the return of Messiah. NT missionary activity was directed to both Jew and Gentile in keeping with the direction of prophecy.[22]

7. Predictive prophecy ought to motivate and guide missionary activity in the church today.

   The reliability in God's character hinges upon the expectation of absolute and total fulfillment for both Jew and Gentile.[23] Missionaries must operate in the hope of a future restoration of environment, society, economy, and politics in the millennial reign of Christ.[24]

## Select New Testament Eschatological Highlights

Dispensationalism wagers that Scripture is clear about how Israel, the church, and future events should factor into everyday ecclesiology. But dispensationalism

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Christ will one day rule all the nations from the land of Israel in an intermediate state for 1,000 years (Rev 20:1–6) before the Eternal State begins (1 Cor 15:24–28).

[22] Transcending OT prophecy would cause the NT writers to diminish Israel's distinct future so that they would have given singular eschatological significance to the church. The meaning and significance of Old Testament passages in their original contexts at their stage of revelation would have become distorted, and the apostolic teaching and mission would have been inappropriately weighted in a largely non-Jewish trajectory.

It is instructive to highlight the importance the apostles gave to seeing Israel saved in accordance with prophecy. In a quick scan of Acts 17–18, Paul employed a distinct Jew-first missionary strategy (cf. Rom 1:16). He made it a matter of course to enter a city and begin witnessing about the Christ in the synagogue on the Sabbath. In the Thessalonian synagogue Paul and his missionary companions engaged in discussion about Jesus Christ on three consecutive Sabbaths (17:1–2). In Berea they immediately did the same (17:10). Beyond Macedonia, in Athens, before arriving in the Areopagus, he witnessed to Jews and Greek God-fearers in the synagogue, but also to a general pagan audience in the marketplace, which was the center of social life and local commerce (cf. 16:19; 17:5). In Corinth, after finding the Jews Aquila and Priscilla, his main interactions were in the synagogue on the Sabbath (18:4), though doubtless he used his leather-working trade as an opportunity to testify of Christ to all peoples in the interim (18:3, 5). Paul's missionary efforts in Corinth appear to have been specific to the teaching of the Word of God in the synagogue, though increasing Jewish hostility shifted Paul's focus toward the Greek proselytes (18:4– 11).

[23] Since God made unbreakable, unconditional promises, He must sustain them along the timeline of salvation history, "for the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable" (Rom 11:29; unless otherwise specified, all verse selections are taken from *New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update*. La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995). The believer believes that God spoke of the future truthfully in the past, and expects that what was specifically declared will be completely fulfilled in the future.

[24] Because Jesus provided a sneak preview of His future reign in His first coming, the missionary is free to serve Him today with the understanding that only under His physical rule in the future will true justice and peace be accomplished in the nations. However, understanding Israel's future role or part in the grand narrative of salvation history is both varied and vague in missiology. Evangelical missiologists commonly describe the grand narrative of Scripture in biblically appropriate terms, namely that God is faithful to save sinners according to the Abrahamic Covenant. Yet, there appears to be no consensus view on the degree to which Israel actually mediates the Abrahamic Covenant. For equivocation on the role of future Israel, see Andreas J. Köstenberger and Peter T. O'Brien, ed. *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission* (Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press, 2001), 262–63.

goes further, to direct the attitude and practice of missions. Missiological implications can be derived from several New Testament passages, including Matthew 24–25; 1 Corinthians 15; Titus 2; 1 Thessalonians 1, 4, and 5; 2 Thessalonians 1–2; and 2 Peter 3. The passages teach national believers to expect the imminent return of Christ and to conduct themselves in godly ways, just as the original audience was commanded, in the interim.

## Matthew 24–25

In this longest record of the Olivet Discourse (cf. Mark 13:1–37; Luke 21:5–36), Jesus did not reveal a clear timeframe for the "end of the age" (cf. Matt 24:3) Rather, he decried speculative efforts to determine the timing of His immediate return, showing them through parables the impossibility of discovering such information.[25]

By focusing on Tribulation events awaiting a future generation (Matt 24:34), Jesus taught on imminency[26] to urge the present-age believers to remain faithful regardless of what may appear to be end-time events. The fruit of expectancy, that patient anticipation of the Lord's imminent return, is an all-encompassing tension in the life of the Christian.[27] To this end, believers were to be alert at all times, watching for His return (Mark 13:33–37), and ministering boldly until He comes (cf. Rev 3:2; 1 Cor 16:13; 1 Thess 5:6; 1 Pet 5:8). In 24:45–51 Jesus called his disciples to holy living and the priority of servanthood.[28] In 25:1–13, He demanded urgent expectation for His return in all godliness,[29] and in 25:14–30 He taught on the importance of

[25] Cf. 24:36, 42, 44, 50; 25:13; Mark 13:32. The signs Jesus did provide pointed to His appearance at the end of the coming "day of the Lord" but the timeframe of the beginning of His eschatological return remained shrouded in mystery. So John F. Hart, "Jesus and the Rapture: Matthew 24," in *Evidence for the Rapture*, ed. John F. Hart (Chicago: Moody, 2015), 52. So John MacArthur Jr., *Parables: The Mysteries of God's Kingdom Revealed Through the Stories Jesus Told* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2015), 125–26; also Craig Blaising, "A Case for the Pretribulation Rapture," in *Three Views on the Rapture: Pretribulation, Prewrath, or Posttribulation*, Alan Hultberg, gen. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 50–51.

[26] Thomas uses the term to describe the sudden return of Jesus Christ without warning or sign (see Robert L. Thomas, "The Rapture and the Biblical Teaching of Imminency," in *Evidence for the Rapture*, 23–24, 31.

[27] So it was in the life of the apostle Paul, who hoped to remain in the flesh until the appearance of Christ (cf. Rom 13:11; 1 Cor 10:11; Phil 4:5) yet eventually recognized his physical end might precede Christ's return (2 Tim 4:6–8). See brief treatment on Paul's expectancy in Thomas, *Evidence for the Rapture*, 31.

[28] In the parable of the two servants in 24:45–51, the timing of the return of the Master is unknown and surprising. Both the faithful and the wicked servant believe in the imminent return of their Master, but the wicked servant compounds a lack of constraint with moral degradation in his absence. While the wicked servant does not doubt that his Master will one day return, he does not view the return as impending, and thus disregards the prerogatives of his stewardship to his own peril. He is an example of the one who is not ready for the Son of Man to return (24:44). The parable of the two servants points to the accountability required of every servant of Christ: where the knowledge of the Lord's return does not foster an eager expectation which results in a work ethic commensurate to the truth, sin may abound and a fearful judgment will result (cf. Mark 8:38).

[29] In the following parable of the ten bridesmaids (25:1–13), Jesus addresses His imminent return from the human standpoint of a delayed arrival. An excessive interval of time before Christ returns might be as surprising to a hopeful believer as an unsuspecting return would be to an unfaithful servant, as is the case in the previous parable. Expectations may need to be extended and care must be given so that hope does not wane while waiting for the Bridegroom. As throughout the Olivet Discourse, the question is not

responsible labor for the kingdom.[30]

In light of the prophetic content and exhortations, the missionary must reinforce the expectancy of Christ's sudden return with local disciples: serve the Master with all diligence and haste until the parousia. The national believer, just like every believer, must be characterized by moral living, eager preparedness to be with Him in glory, and faithfulness in ministry. As Jesus taught, failure to appreciate the imminence of Christ's return opens the door to folly and peril.

## 1 Corinthians 15

Paul delineates the doctrine of bodily resurrection and rapture in order to offer a transcendent hope which will buttress the church in the face of false teaching.[31] In the increasingly secularizing 21st-century world, Paul's message resonates strongly, especially to those who suffer opposition to the gospel: living faithfully before a faithless world is in part shaped by a biblical view of the future, for "if we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied" (v. 19).

The illogical claim that believers would not be raised from the dead (v. 12) is countered by the reality that Jesus Christ was raised as the "first fruit" of all who die in the faith (vv. 13–23, esp. 20, 23). Were there no resurrected Christ, there would be no redemption in Christ, nor would there be resurrection or rapture in Him. And if, in the end, death held authority over the believer rather than Christ, then there would be no motivation to serve Him during times of suffering (vv. 30–32).[32]

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whether Christ will return, for Christ's return is presumed to occur imminently. The question is whether the believer will live with a sense of urgency which spurs faithful conduct and witness since His return could be at any time (cf. Rom 13:11; 1 Cor 7:29; 1 Pet 4:7). Long or short in human years, the time of the *parousia* will come unexpectedly like a thief (cf. 1 Thess 5:2; 2 Pet 3:10; Rev 3:3; Matt 24:40–44 [Luke 12:39]). Failure to be ready for Him is a foolishness tantamount to the wickedness of the immoral servant of the previous parable, for the negative result is permanent.

[30] The parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14–30 underscores the work ethic demanded of the believer until the return of Christ. To be given of the Master's resources is to be given an opportunity to invest it wisely in order for it to produce dividends (v. 27). Not putting the Master's resource to use is considered a wicked action by a lazy and worthless person (vv. 26, 30). Such wastefulness in the absence of the Master leads to ruin when He returns at an unexpected time. Jesus again highlights through this parable the folly of being unprepared for His imminent return. The Lord, however, is pleased by the diligent work of His faithful servants, and so He shares His joy with those who deliver a return on their stewardship to the degree of faithfulness commensurate with the resources given to them (vv. 15, 21, 23, 29). The apostle Paul later emphasized the importance of understanding and meeting one's responsibility before Christ: "Let a man regard us in this manner, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. In this case, moreover, it is required of stewards that one be found trustworthy" (1 Cor 4:1–2).

[31] First Corinthians 15 describes the rapture as a fact for all believers (vv. 51–52). No time reference is supplied, but the fact that believers will receive glorified bodies in that instant (cf. Phil 3:20–21) distinguishes this event from the final event of His coming (cf. Rev 19:14). So Paul N. Benware, *Understanding End Times Prophecy: A Comprehensive Approach* (Chicago: Moody, 2006), 213. Mayhue succinctly analyzes the major contrasts between the rapture event and the second coming of Christ to earth on linguistic and contextual grounds. See Richard Mayhue, "Why a Pretribulation Rapture?," in *Christ's Prophetic Plans: A Futuristic Premillennial Primer*, ed. John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue (Chicago: Moody, 2012), 93–94.

[32] The passage bookends the eschaton by instructing that after Christ has subjected all powers and authorities, including death, then His millennial reign will conclude and the Eternal State will commence (vv. 24–26). If neither Christ nor His followers resurrected, no one would be caught up in the clouds nor

If the missionary teaches the national believers to expect the rapture and the bodily resurrection with the imminent return of Christ, then he will have been faithful to the work and will stand confidently before Christ in the day of glorification and reward (Phil 2:16; cf. 1:6; 1 Cor 3:10–15; 4:5; 2 Cor 5:9–10). Eschatologically informed believers will live above the evils of this world and will be more ready to proclaim the gospel to their people. The stronger their convictions about the truth the more confident their ministry to their people—eschatological hope is a key motivator being a light in this crooked and perverse generation (Phil 2:15).

Conversely, the missionary who denies the global church the rich exhortations that arise from eschatology is guilty of theological ignorance both for himself and for those he serves. Considering eschatology to be a minor topic to be sidelined, or even an advanced topic kept at bay from young believers, leaves the believer exposed to worldliness and uninspired to set his focus on heaven (vv. 33–34).[33] What's more, beyond implicitly hindering one from living heaven-bound, the national church will not be sufficiently motivated to defend the truth of God that Paul affirms. Quelling the kinds of eschatological heresies which plague the church, as was the case in Corinth, becomes all the more difficult to the theologically dull and undiscerning.

## Titus 2

Paul's message to his missionary delegate Titus in the overseas context of Crete outlines the godly behavior required of both the missionary and the indigenous believer, and does so on exegetical grounds.[34] The missionary must authoritatively proclaim how saving grace powerfully intervened in the world at Jesus Christ's first coming (v. 11) and now provides spiritual redemption and purification to all who will believe in Him today (v. 12). But the proclamation of the gospel (cf. v. 15) is not complete unless it points to the final redemption promised at Christ's future physical appearance. The hope that Christ will soon be revealed in His unfading glory provides the motivation for boldness in proclaiming the gospel now (v. 15; cf. 2 Cor 3:10–12).

Additionally, it is that longing for the realization of the future hope, that expectancy, which fuels the church to live in righteousness presently (cf. Titus 2:12). The renunciation of sin, the practice of righteousness, and eager service today are zealously lived out under the looming shadow of Christ's appearing (v. 14).

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have a glorified body incapable of corruption. Death could not be defeated and the thought of an eternal reign in an eternal kingdom in the presence of the eternal Son would be ludicrous.

[33] Matthew Henry preaches it well: "If there will be a resurrection and a future life, we should live and act as those who believe it, and should not give into such senseless and sottish notions as will debauch our morals, and render us loose and sensual in our lives." In Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 2275.

[34] Paul instructs Titus to proclaim that salvation will advance from the spiritual to the material realm at a future time in which Jesus Christ appears in His glory. Only at His second advent will spiritual redemption be brought to fulfillment, and so the believer's hope is also his eschatological tension in which he is spiritually redeemed, yet with further redemption coming at an unknown future time. While little here is delineated about the nature of Christ's coming revelation, it will be physical, as connoted by ἐπιφαίνω. See Titus 3:4, and the use of ἐπιφαίνω in the physically fulfilled prophecy of Luke 1:79. Burkhard Gärtner, "Επιφάνεια," in *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Colin Brown, gen. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 319–20.

Therefore, keeping a focus on the "blessed hope" strengthens the missionary's resolve to instruct nationals on the importance of godly conduct now. The expectancy of Christ's imminent physical return is the context whereby the faithful missionary must rebuke believers who are not living "self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age" (v. 12).

## 1 Thessalonians 1, 4, 5

Eschatological teaching permeates the first letter to the Thessalonian church (cf. 1:10; 2:12; 2:19; 3:13). According to 1 Thessalonians 1:9–10, all believers are commanded to uphold the doctrines of the rapture,[35] bodily resurrection, and the physical return of Christ. Paul's recap of the Thessalonian conversions provides a clear example of how evangelization and a precise eschatology pair together in a missionary context. The passage indicates that a successful gospel witness must lead to a successful discipleship in which eschatology is incorporated into the early theological instruction of new converts from an unchurched setting.

Missionaries ought to find Paul's model of evangelization and eschatological instruction among the Thessalonian believers useful. In the narrative the new converts received the gospel with full assurance (1:5) and renounced their idolatry, demonstrating sincere repentance by serving the true and living God (1:9). They continued to live out their Christian hope by eagerly awaiting the return of the resurrected Christ who saved them.[36] The missionary who girds the national believer with eschatology actually bolster's the believer's Christology—the believer now lives a life of

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[35] A specifically pre-tribulational orientation creates a particularly urgent zeal for church planting. The only time in which the church may participate in reaching the lost is collocated within the "day of salvation" (cf. 2 Cor 6:2; cf. Rev 1:3; 6:1–8). The language of 1 Thess 4:16–17 indicates that the rapture of the church will be pretribulational. The trumpet will sound with authority and urgency (v. 16). If it were otherwise, the Thessalonians would have raised pointed questions and fears about life in the tribulation. Tribulation would have been imminent rather than the coming of the Lord. The believers are to be both informed (v. 13) and comforted (v. 18) by the reality of an imminent rapture for themselves, and the resurrection of their dead in Christ. The encouragement tied to this rapture teaching parallels the teaching in John 14:1–3 in which believers are promised a presence with Christ when He comes again to snatch His people on earth (John 14:3; 1 Thess 4:17). So Benware, *Understanding End Times Prophecy*, 211; Mayhue, "Why a Pretribulation Rapture?" 91–92.

Dispensationalist Paul Benware highlights how futuristic premillennialism raises at least three important results of the rapture which are gloriously hopeful for believers alive today. First, Christ's promise to retrieve His own will be fulfilled. His commitment to unbroken fellowship with His saints will be faithfully and finally realized. Second, the believer's salvation will be complete insofar as the rapture will release us from the bondage of sin by transforming the believer's flesh from mortal to immortal. This grand mystery (1 Cor 15:51) will be a final act of saving grace to those already saved by grace through faith in Christ. Third, the rapture will unite the dead in Christ and the living church so that the invisible Body of Christ will be brought to fruition. The thought of complete unity in Christ in the air is an excellent comfort to all affected by the grief of death (1 Thess 4:18). Benware, *Understanding End Times Prophecy*, 214.

[36] The Christian's future hope is grounded in the eschatological image of Christ. Jesus' physical return from heaven (cf. Acts 1:11) corroborates the biblical witness that, once slain, Jesus was resurrected to life and is active today in the presence of the Father as Melchizedekian High Priest (Heb 7:16, 23–28; cf. 2:10–15). When Christ returns at an unspecified time in the future, He will come as the loving Deliverer to save true Christians before He pours out His wrath as the Judge of the unrepentant.

expectancy, permeated by service to the Savior who will return.[37]

Yet, emotional and intellectual challenges arise as a disciple grows in the knowledge of doctrine and love for God and others. The Thessalonian believers, who had been instructed on the return of Christ by Paul (2 Thess 2:5), raised troubling questions about those in the church who died or would die before the rapture (1 Thess 4:13). Apparently they needed follow-up from Paul, despite Timothy's efforts to root them in doctrine (cf. 3:2), in order to resolve tensions about the timing of the resurrection of the saints and their uncertainty about whether those they mourned would participate in the glorious return of Christ.[38] To this deeply emotional question Paul instructs on the future bodily resurrection.[39] The doctrine was Paul's remedy for grief, especially in the face of the hopelessness common to nonbelievers in the local culture (4:13). For the believer, death must not generate hopeless sorrow but rather an abiding hope because of the teaching on life after physical death. Death is an inherently eschatological topic, for death as sleep (cf. John 11:11) implies the promise of an awakening (1 Thess 4:16).

There are world events today that look horrifically "tribulational" from the vantage point of history. Persecuted global Christians might tend, like the Thessalonian believers, to wonder if their fiery trials constitute *parousia* events. To address such concerns about end-time events, Paul opens 1 Thessalonians 5 on the new topic of the Day of the Lord.[40] Instruction about the terrifying, wrathful event is meant as an encouragement to keep doing the important reciprocal work of edifying the saints—those experiencing a fearful anxiety about the future should encourage one another (5:11). The sincere faith of believers can only be strengthened when recognizing that the terrifying, cataclysmic events are not for their destruction but for the wicked (v.

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The term meaning "to await" or "expect" in 1 Thess 1:10 ἀναμένω is *hapax legomenon* to the NT. If there is a question as to whether this waiting intends the quality of Christian hope often applied to γρηγορέω (cf. Matt 24:42; 25:13; 26:41; Mark 13:35, 37; 14:38; Acts 20:31; 1 Cor 16:13; 1 Thess 5:6; 1 Pet 5:8; Rev 3:2f; 16:15), the LXX may assist. In Jer 16:13, LXX translates קָוָה ("to await" or "to hope") with ἀναμένω to capture the emotional search for illumination in a time of dark judgment. See "קָוָה," in Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, M. E. J. Richardson, and Johann Jakob Stamm, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: Brill, 1994–2000), 1082; "'Αναμένω," in F. W. Danker, W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, eds. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. 3rd ed. Based on Walter Bauer's *Griechisch-deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments und der frühchristlichen Literatur*, 6th ed, eds. K. Aland and B. Aland, with V. Reichmann (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2000), 68.

[37] So R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus and to Philemon* (Columbus, OH: Lutheran Book Concern, 1937), 234–35. Lange suggests that they needed more time to work through the ramifications of the doctrine, in Lange, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, trans. and ed. Philip Schaff (New York: Charles Scribner & Co., 1869), 74–75.

[38] So Lenski, *Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus, Philemon*, 323. For helpful discussion of the timing and participation view in light of problematic proposals, see Kevin D. Zuber, "Paul and the Rapture: 1 Thessalonians 4–5," in *Evidence for the Rapture*, 151–55.

[39] The dead in Christ will be raised at the second coming of the Lord, and that day will come as a surprise (cf. 5:2). The teaching parallels the resurrection teaching in 1 Corinthians 15. The Thessalonian believers understood that Jesus was to come back, just as the apostles were instructed by Jesus (John 14:1–3). Through a report by Timothy, Paul learned that they questioned whether the dead brethren would also participate in the coming blessings and glories of Christ.

[40] Περὶ δὲ ("Now as to," or "Now concerning") uses an accusative of reference to mark a shift in topic to what follows. See Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 379. For discussion on the use of the construction in 5:1, see Zuber, "Paul and the Rapture," 161.

3). The thought that the dead in Christ will be resurrected when the living believers will be snatched away, all before the Day of the Lord, is designed to be a great comfort to the church.

The prophetic content ought to not only replace angst but lead to clearheaded thought and action in the work of the ministry (5:6–8). Christ is even now sanctifying all who are identified with Him now with faith, hope, and love, and His sanctifying work will be made complete at the rapture or bodily resurrection of the dead in Christ. Furthermore, the fact that Christ's return will bring swift and severe punishment on unbelievers serves to motivate the church to evangelize the lost while time permits—the coming wrath necessitates urgent Christian witness.

The question is not whether Christ will fulfill His promise to rapture the church and raise dead church-age believers, but whether believers will pursue the completion of their sanctification with integrity and marked growth in holiness during their earthly years. Such an eschatologically aware believer will become a mature believer who is emotionally grounded and positioned well to counsel and lead others to live sanctified lives in the hope of the soon coming Christ. Blamelessness of spirit, soul, and body are not just ultimate goals but real desires that should tangibly mark every Christian. For a missionary to in some way neglect teaching this eschatological content to persecuted global Christians is, on a very real and practical level, unconscionable.

## 2 Thessalonians 1:1–2:12

The severity of the affliction suffered by the church caused the Thessalonians once again to fear they were living in the vengeful Day of the Lord (1:4). Though they were maturing in faith and love since Paul's first letter (1:3), they apparently waned in eschatological hope due to their pressing difficulties. In Paul's second letter he addresses the believers' debilitating concern that they had somehow missed the gathering of the saints at rapture (2:1–2). Yet, as bad as the suffering may have been, there was still little correlation with the ultimate Day of the Lord because specific events would need to take place before Christ would come to rule (2:3–4).[41] Ultimate relief from suffering and persecution must wait for an unknown future time when Christ in his wrath metes out all due vengeance against the wicked (1:6–10; 2:8, 12).

Having a right view of the end to the wicked is necessary so that the suffering Christian might understand both the full extent of God's justice and the present call to personal righteousness. A correct eschatological framework is essential for reinforcing the believer's steadfast pursuit of a worthy walk full of deeds commensurate with true faith, all done to the glory of the Lord (1:11–12; cf. Phil 1:9–11). Once again, it is the missionary's task to adopt these doctrines, live in the light of them, and ensure that they are taught and applied to the very difficult circumstances in which the global church suffers.

It would be a mistake, however, to see theological instruction as a stale lecture devoid of pathos and relevance. Paul's letter indicates that the Thessalonian disciples

[41] Similarities between the persecution of the first century and that of the eschaton were felt insofar as the lawlessness of the wicked world system and false religions was already very much at work to torment believers and corrupt society (2:7; cf. 1 John 2:18; 3:4; 4:3).

believed the doctrine of the rapture. What they needed now was pastoral care so that they could live godly lives in light of the prophecies. Paul, in his wisdom, actually addressed their concerns with a more detailed doctrine of eschatology. The missionary would do well to utilize doctrine to instill a Christian hope, and to do so pastorally, especially as the global church faces increasing persecution.

## 2 Peter 3:1–18

Peter reminds his readers to be attentive to the eschatological teaching that they receive because the predictive prophecy he proclaims comes from the Old Testament prophets, and also from Jesus and the other apostles (vv. 1–2). No Christian should disparage the doctrine of the return of Christ with some feigned "pan-millennialism," which is no better than the position of the false teachers.[42] In fact, Peter does not record the prophecy lesson simply to fill out his readers' eschatology. Rather, he does so to help the maturing believers grow stronger in discernment and fight more astutely against the false teachers who preyed on them with twisted theology (v. 16).

Peter's eschatology, as a weapon for the fight, covers the following aspects. First, Christ's return is imminent (v. 10), and will come when His patience, which should be considered a gracious opportunity for salvation (v. 15; cf. 2 Cor 6:2; Acts 2:40), runs out (cf. 2 Pet 3:9; Phil 4:5; James 5:8–9; Rev 3:11; 22:7, 12, 20). The timing of the return of Christ is sovereignly determined based on when Christ completes His saving work in this epoch. Second, the events of the parousia will ultimately usher in drastic cosmic changes, and such knowledge is motive for believers in the interim to remain unmovable in their faith and exhibit the fruit of holiness and godliness in all their affairs (2 Pet 3:11–12).

The missionary is tasked with proclaiming the predictions that come from the OT and NT prophets. Knowing the future is designed to impact the present. Precisely because the Lord has promised that the new heavens and a new earth will be inhabited in righteousness (v. 13), the believer must now practice righteousness (v. 14). Despite the fiery trials now being faced (cf. 1 Pet 4:12), and no matter the global upheaval to come (2 Pet 3:10, 12), true believers must live in peace (3:14). Peace now, in view of the coming cosmic chaos, is true stability of heart and mind (vv. 16–17). The missionary must stave off the perversion that comes from biblical ignorance (v. 16). Peter sees eternal fruit in the proper understanding of eschatology: believing and applying the truths of the *parousia* lead to growth "in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" and ultimately the ascription of more glory to Him "both now and to the day of eternity" (v. 18). Such is the hope for believers in all cultures of all generations, until the Lord has accomplished the fulness of His salvation.

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[42] "Pan-millennialism" is the humorous position that "everything will 'pan out' in the end." But denying the prophetic content is tantamount to following the example of the false teachers which have begun to rise up in the church who knowingly mock the return of Christ as a lie (3:3–5; cf. 2:1–3). Rather, the believer is commanded to wait for Jesus' second coming with patience (3:8). After all, it is the patience of the Lord to await the fullness of salvation (v. 15), no matter how long that may seem from the human perspective (vv. 8–9).

Summary

There are many purposes for teaching eschatology in the foreign context from a distinctly dispensational perspective. The dispensational eschatology is not some vague, esoteric, or sideline enterprise that the missionary can take or leave when making indigenous disciples.

Understanding the prophetic hermeneutic is significant for the Christian's convictions today in at least three ways. First, the believer has a sure future upon which to fix his or her thoughts so that during the fiercest of earthly trials he or she may hold an unwavering hope in the ultimate rescue of Christ. Second, biblical clarity on the fate of those who are not caught up in the air demands a level of urgency in evangelism and ethical conduct among unbelievers so that they might be won to Christ and saved from His targeted wrath. Third, the delay in returning has thus far given believers more opportunity to follow Christ in His virtues, namely by cultivating patience and steadfast faith, and a richer sanctification during this time of sojourn.

It has been sufficiently established that the missionary must treat the whole of Scripture's teaching on the end-times events with clarity and precision, for the good of the local disciples. The dispensational framework for eschatology is both true to the text and relevant to daily life, and so a global theology built upon the dispensational framework will benefit the mission of the local church. As the select New Testament passages demonstrate, the concept of a surprise rapture event and *parousia*, when interpreted with a consistent literalism, helps contend for the faith, provides the impetus to live a holy life, and calls the believer to serve the coming King with urgency. On the other hand, an eschatology that is not built from a consistent interpretation of prophecy may lead to weaker faith. When key exhortations designed for these presently dark days is hidden from the church, the battle for biblical living becomes unnecessarily difficult.

## Missiology in View of the Millennium

Belief in the premillennial, physical return of Jesus Christ generates a natural desire to understand what the Bible has to say about the location and nature of His return. Where He goes and what He does in the future is of great importance to every dispensationalist. Because the millennium is not yet realized, global evangelism and theological training today must be done with the expectation of Christ's imminent return and closure of the church age. Such expectancy requires expediency—doing faithful ministry with hope and urgency to bring God glory now. From the missiological standpoint, then, it is vital to know how Scripture portrays the future for church age believers and the nation of Israel in the eschaton. Dispensationalism permits as clear a picture of the millennial reign of Christ as possible from Scripture. Consistent literalism avoids assigning some arbitrary significance to Israel.[43] Rather,

[43] Rather, the glory of Christ will be seen in physical Jerusalem when He comes to reign, and later the eternal presence of God will reside in the New Jerusalem of the Eternal State. It is problematic to downgrade the reality of the physical city of Jerusalem to a local concept that applies to any sort of missionary activity, as missional Ed Stetzer has done: "We Christians will each want to do all we can to fulfill

the dispensational hermeneutic ties Israel's future to the Messianic hope which all Jewish people hold to some degree even today.[44]

In the briefest of snapshots, the following statements summarize select biblical evidence for a millennial kingdom. Jesus Christ will sit on David's throne (Matt 19:28; 25:31), according to the Davidic Covenant (2 Sam 7:13, 16; Ps 89:3–4, 35–37), in the physical city of Jerusalem (cf. Zech 8:20–23) for a one-thousand year reign of peace and justice (Rev 20:4–7; Zech 14:9; cf. 1 Cor 15:24–28). By that time, "all Israel" will be saved (Rom 11:25–29) so that the promise of the Abrahamic Covenant will be fulfilled in the land (Gen 12:1–3). In the millennium the land covenant of Deuteronomy 29–30 will finally be realized and the borders of Israel will be restored to the fullest extent for the Jewish people when they convert to serve Messiah as their rightful King. Only when the salvation of the Gentiles is complete (Rom 11:25; cf. Luke 21:24) and the judicial act of spiritually blinding Israel is reversed will the millennial kingdom be established and the biblical covenants be fulfilled.[45]

The coming reality of the millennium affects the missionary's ethic today. Because the millennium will one day come, missionaries need to discern the types of activities worth engaging in the nations. If missionary activity today is to be done in light of Jesus Christ's millennial reign, then at least a few key considerations come into play.

1. The missionary must engage in individual evangelism and making faithful disciples.

   All missionaries are initially tasked with bringing individuals from all nations and worldviews to the saving knowledge of the King of kings, that they might worship Him as the only God. There is no room for a fatalism that would impede evangelism: even though many sinners will one day die for their active

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our own mission—from our own Jerusalem." A poor exegesis of the Jerusalem Council (p. 590) and statements of Jerusalem's transitory influence in NT witness (see esp. 585–86) flatten Stetzer's argument to a mishmash of unguarded concepts, such as his Pentecost reference: "Let us wait in one accord for the coming of the Spirit" in order to advance the mission of God outside of provincial legalism (593). While Stetzer's ethical exhortation to pursue mission is not missed, using Jerusalem as an allegorical motif disconnects the historical geopolitical capital from its future in God's plan and purpose for the city. See Ed Stetzer, "The Trouble with our Jerusalems," in *Discovering the Mission of God: Best Missional Practices for the 21st Century*, ed. Mike Barnett (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 585–99.

Indian theologian Eliya Mohol runs in a similar direction as Stetzer in defining the missional trajectory of many different forms of Zionism. After he treats the biblical concept of Zion as the physical location of Jerusalem and hub of eschatological missionary activity, he traces the transcendent principles of love and unity which bind syncretistic forms of Zionism in India, South Korea, and South Africa. Mohol's objective is not to point out error in light of Scripture, but to urge Christian Zionists to remove Jerusalem from the center of eschatological import and rather hold to the purely ethical goals of the syncretized groups: "The monotheistic groups that want to lay exclusive claims on the physical Jerusalem can learn lessons from these universal communities in emphasizing the ideals of Zion and not hankering after land in Jerusalem." In Eliya Mohol, "Zion," in *Dictionary of Mission Theology: Evangelical Foundations*, ed. John Corrie (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 450.

[44] Eliya Mohol recognizes a modicum of Zionist expectation in all participants of Jewish celebrations when they pray "May the Redeemer come to Zion," or they greet one another, "Next year in Jerusalem!" In Mohol, "Zion," 449–50.

[45] So Benware, *Understanding End Times Prophecy*, 216.

rebellion against God (John 8:24; Rom 6:23; cf. 1 John 3:4; Isa 59:2), the missionary should be motivated by God's patience in the current dispensation (2 Pet 3:9) to labor in any way useful for the salvation of even a few (1 Cor 9:19–23).

A further antidote to fatalism today is to consider the need for evangelism in the millennium, even when there are no false religions or idols competing with the Lordship of Christ. Understanding that there will be a final rebellion of the apostate children of believers in the millennium (Rev 20:8–9) is a reminder that even at a time of unparalleled peace there should be the desire to mercifully and fearfully rescue as many sinners as possible from their impending destruction (Jude 22–23).

Conversion, however, is itself not the goal but the gateway to a God-glorifying life. Today's believer must be discipled into a mature person who will serve the King now, throughout the millennium, and into eternity (cf. Rev 5:10). Making biblical disciples requires great toil in the indigenous church because it involves the transformation of the believer's cultural orientation (cf. Titus 1:12–13).

Biblical discipleship also strikes against the common evangelistic practice of open-air campaigns, which are common to the Third World. Such campaigns tend to focus on mass conversion without a discipleship strategy at the local church level.[46]

The Body of Christ has but one King, Jesus Christ, who reigns spiritually now, and will physically reign from David's throne in the millennium. Therefore, the missionary must labor to ensure that formerly false worshippers who proclaim Christ now submit to his lordship and put an end to dual authority—a syncretized faith in Christ that is marked by old, unbiblical ways of thinking and acting (cf. Titus 1:13–2:1).[47]

2. The missionary must invest in training pastors for the ministry of the local church.

True disciples are maturing Christians, and spiritual growth happens, by God's design, through the godly leadership of Christ's under-shepherds in the local church (1 Pet 5:1–5). Paul and his missionary delegates considered the raising up of elders for the church worth their greatest efforts (Titus 1:5; 1 Tim 1:3, 5–7, 18–19).

Elders are themselves to be mature men, qualified to give spiritual oversight to souls in their care (Heb 13:7, 17; cf. Titus 1:6–9; 1 Tim 3:1–7). The elder best suited to teach eschatology in the church is the one who accurately handles God's Word and puts it into practice in his own life. Both the prophetic content and the application need to come from a man who believes it and lives it, otherwise his disciples will see right through his flimsy convictions and find more excuses for

[46] Thanks go to South African theology student Warrick Jubber whose personal experiences with tent campaigns corroborate my own observations in South Africa, Uganda, Kenya, border towns of Mexico, the Dominican Republic, and southern regions of Italy.

[47] So Eckhard Schnabel, *Paul the Missionary: Realities, Strategies, and Methods* (Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press, 2008), 28–29.

not living according to his exhortations. Of course, raising up elders of this caliber first requires that the missionary himself be such a man shaped by theological clarity and personal conviction (cf. Paul and Barnabas in Acts 14:21–23).

Local church leadership must make great pains to be the kinds of examples their people should imitate. Living for Christ, and if necessary, dying for him as martyrs, is the biblical antidote to any local church member who self-identifies as a victim of the corrupt, persecuting world. The indigenous pastor must teach radical sacrifice to his people, no matter how oppressed or materially challenged they may be (cf. 2 Cor 8:1–5). The eschatological passages on reward provide the kind of daily motivation to live and serve the King with an unwavering heart despite earthly circumstances (Dan 12:3; Matt 5:10–12; 16:27; 25:20–23; 1 Cor 3:8, 11–15; Phil 3:14; 2 Tim 4:8; 1 Pet 5:3; Rev 22:12).

Furthermore, certainty of the millennial kingdom in which Christ is physically present enables radical sacrifice because of the confidence it engenders for a future of peace and plenty. And beyond the blessing and prosperity of the millennium, believers are promised the ultimate comfort of a sin-free world—in the new heaven and new earth He will wipe away every tear (Rev 21:4; cf. 1 Cor 15:24–28).

3. The missionary must not prioritize activities that compete with or compromise the mission of the church.

Basic Christian duty must at least include upholding human dignity, maintaining a godly reputation in practical dealings with government, and responsibly preserving the environment as a stewardship. Thus, from one perspective, social, political, and environmental activities can be good ways to testify to the upright moral and societal conduct befitting a disciple of Christ. Dispensational missionaries, however, must discern ways in which even good activities can exceed the biblical mandate and betray the missiology that derives from their hermeneutic.

Faithfulness in missionary service can be measured by the correlation between prophecy and practice. Assigning environmental priority over church planting, for example, would show no correlation between prophecy and practice. The earth itself groans for renewal, but the renewal will only come in the millennium (Rom 8:18–22). No man can fully realize the reverse of the curse on the earth in this age; only the God-Man can fulfill bring renewal in the future (cf. Isa 35:1–2; 65:21–22, 25; Joel 3:18).

Dispensational missiology also decries the problems of viewing social justice and political restoration as the work of the church. Walking in the light of God might be the present reality of some individuals from many nations, but in the millennium the nations, no longer under the deception of Satan (Rev 20:3), will flock to the city of Jerusalem to apply Christ's justice in their governments (Isa 2:2–5; cf. 60:3). Christ will teach God's law to them from His seat in Jerusalem as the head of all world governments (2:3), and He will judge the political and legal cases they bring to Him (2:4). His justice will seem right to the nations, such that they apply His law and become peaceful nations (2:4). Yet, today, the nations are not submitted to the lordship of Christ but are submitted to the deceiver who rules over the whole world (2 Cor 4:4; Eph 2:2; cf. Rev 12:9).

It is important, therefore, for the missionary to ask whether his involvement in a particular environmental, social, or political cause competes for time and resources with evangelistic and discipleship strategies that are in line with the dispensational eschatology.[48] If so, the activity risks shifting the missionary's focus from urgent gospel proclamation to a pragmatic "Christianization" effort. In such a case the missionary will have ignored the eschatological reality with a misplaced zeal, and must work to realign his "holistic mission" efforts with the true work of the church.[49] If the aid the missionary provides does not fit squarely into the church planting motif, then his activities do not fit squarely with Scripture.[50] He must change course quickly, because the Lord could return at any time, and he will have to give an account of his stewardship.

## Conclusion

Promoting a dispensational eschatology as the basis for a faithful missiology is not only reasonable but right. A consistently literal approach to interpreting prophecy provides a strong theological framework with a clear eschatological trajectory from which to develop missiological teaching and practice. It could be said that a "dispensational missiology" today is the continuation of the missionary strategy employed by the apostles. Several New Testament passages highlight the attitude and priorities befitting the missionary, and set a standard from which to evaluate field activities. In this way, dispensationalism provides not only interpretive clarity concerning the text, but direction for today's practices. The living Word jumps off the page and onto the

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[48] Joel James and Brian Biedebach, long-term missionaries to Southern Africa report on "holistic missions" from the front lines with the following assessment: "Social action projects are like black holes—they have a habit of sucking in all the ecclesiastical resources within reach of their gravitational pull. While the theory states that the gospel, preaching, and the church are the main things, in regard to budgets, planning, staff, and effort, what's actually first is all too clear." In Joel James and Brian Biedebach, "Regaining Our Focus: A Response to the Social Action Trend in Evangelical Missions, *The Master's Seminary Journal*, 25 no. 1 (Spring 2014): 36.

James and Biedebach also comment that the increasing connection between social justice and gospel ministry in the church has led to confusion by those involved in promoting and supporting the mission of the church: "Pastors and missions committees barely seem aware of the distinction between missionaries who focus on social action and missionaries who focus on Bible translation, theological training, church planting, and gospel proclamation." In Ibid., 33.

[49] As a basic guideline, any specifically non-evangelistic, non-disciple-making activity that can be better conducted by a local government ought to be done through the local government, or by a non-governmental office (NGO) tasked with executing the program. From a more spiritual perspective, the dispensational missionary must be sure that the activities of establishing Third World hospitals, irrigation projects, and cleaning polluted environments, for example, serve legitimate kingdom purposes in this dispensation.

[50] Meeting temporal, physical needs should be primarily an act of spiritual compassion with the goal of leading people to Jesus, the Bread of Life, who met the needs of the hungry and the sick (Matt 14:15–21; 15:30–38) not only for the temporary good of the people but to proclaim the gospel (John 6:26–27, 35–38). James and Biedebach conclude for their African context: "Long after the AIDS orphans have grown up, the wells have been blocked with sand, and the medical clinics have closed due to a lack of Western funding, the people of Africa will need churches to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. But if the Western church continues to send missionaries focused on social action, who will plant and pastor those churches? The church in Africa and around the world can flourish, but it takes the right kind of national leaders, and from the West, it takes the right kind of missionaries doing what only Christians can do." In Ibid., 50.

field!

Hopefully this preliminary attempt to formulate a "dispensational missiology" will lead to other treatments that look both behind and ahead, to the history and the future of missiology. It would be helpful to discuss the historic missionary service by dispensationalists over the last century and a half. How did the early faith missions and early Christian Zionists apply the dispensational hermeneutic to the work of the church across the globe? Was their ethos and practice compatible with this "dispensational missiology"? Likewise, it would be useful to analyze the history of non-dispensational missionary efforts to see areas of missiological contrast. Did employing a different interpretive method for prophecy lead to different goals, strategies, and results on the field? Have revisions to non-dispensational theological systems over time changed the tenets and practices of mission?

As to the direction of mission theory and practice, further work needs to be done to challenge today's prevalent contextualization practices in light of the eschatological teaching of Scripture. One example is immediately within reach: dispensational missiology confronts "felt need" evangelism strategies and calls for their revision. In reaction to the cultural and spiritual felt needs of a society or people group, it is common practice to substitute the clear proclamation of the gospel for roundtable dialogue and a variety of alternatives to direct, propositional evangelism, which may include socially-oriented programs which do little more than provide secular aid under the Christian banner of "mercy."[51] Such missions efforts are tragically misplaced in view of Christ's return, because when He comes He will judge every person who remains in his sin (Rom 2:6–8), and will judge the missionary as to his gospel priority (2 Cor 5:10; 2 Tim 2:5; cf. Rom 14:10–12). Truly loving sinners means placing sociocultural felt needs in subjection to "ultimate needs, those seen from God's perspective."[52] The missionary must labor to make unashamed workmen of all disciples, no matter how difficult the task. The Lord is coming quickly (Rev 22:20), and one day, when all the nations worship the one true God in spirit and in truth, the missionary will see "the triumph of hope realized."[53]

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[51] For example, individual evangelism stands in stark contrast to the tenets of liberation theology, particularly in Latin America, where the ultimate eschatological goal is the complete man in a complete society, a people group with limitless potential to rise above their current oppression through the restructuring of socio-economic and political structures. For discussion of the eschatology of liberation theology, see Emilio A. Nūnez and William D. Taylor, *Crisis in Latin America: An Evangelical Perspective* (Chicago: Moody, 1989), 273–75.

[52] In Tim Matheny, *Reaching the Arabs—A Felt Need Approach* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 1981), 153.

[53] George W. Peters, *A Biblical Theology of Missions* (Chicago: Moody, 1984), 326.

*MSJ* 31/1 (Spring 2020) 79–105

# THE SONS OF GOD AND "STRANGE FLESH" IN GENESIS 6:1–4

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*The "sons of God" text in Genesis 6:1–4 often receives nothing more than a brief comment from the pulpit or commentary. Coming right before the great deluge and God's covenant with Noah, the passage seems to be a minor glimpse into antediluvian history. There have been several major views proffered over the past two millennia, and the view that the "sons of God" were demonic angels who cohabitated with human women is one. In 1981, William VanGemeren proposed a re-examination of the "ungodly angel view" as the identity of the "sons of God" in Genesis 6:1–4. This article intends to answer this call for further exegetical scrutiny by examining the text through the lens of a biblical-theological and exegetical methodology. By viewing the text using this methodology, and the understanding of a specific center, or constant theme throughout the corpus of Scripture—which is the idea of God's grace given in the midst of judgment—then the answers to difficult questions such as the reason for the Flood, identity of the sons of God, and the purpose of the Nephilim become much more clear and harmonize with the immediate context of Genesis 1–11.*

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## Introduction

After two millennia of intense study of the Scriptures, controversies still abound over select passages that generate intense debate among evangelicals. One of these perplexing and unresolved passages is Genesis 6:1–4 and the identity of the "sons of God" and the "Nephilim," and the motivations for the global deluge that follows.

> Now it came about, when men began to multiply on the face of the land, and daughters were born to them, that the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves, whomever they chose. Then the LORD said, "My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, because he also is flesh; nevertheless his days shall be one hundred and twenty years." The Nephilim were on the earth in those days, and also

> afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men, and they bore children to them. Those were the mighty men who were of old, men of renown.[1]

Without question, even heralding from the pre-Christian era, this passage remains one of the most abstruse in Scripture.[2] Difficulties abound due to the brevity of the pericope, as well as to the literary, lexical, and theological problems, which have been treated in numerous articles, commentaries, and monographs.

Essentially, one's view of the passage revolves around the interpretation of the nature of the "sons of God" and "daughters of men," the relationship between the two, and the nature of their actions.[3] In general, the views can be broadly put into three categories: the "sons of God" are (a) ungodly angels, demons, or evil spirits, who cohabitated with human women, (b) men from the godly line of Seth who married women from the ungodly line of Cain, or (c) despotic rulers who forcefully took women to be wives in their harems.

A second question arising from these views deals with the identity of the Nephilim described in Genesis 6:4. Either they are exclusively a product of the unions between the "sons of God" and daughters of men, or they are people [men] who happened to be coexisting at the time these "sons of God" came into the daughters of men.[4] A third possibility is that they could have been "mighty warriors" who were influenced by the "despotic rulers" and were responsible for the increase in violence stated in Genesis 6:11.

From a historical standpoint, the "ungodly angel" view is the oldest, with the Septuagint (LXX) having some extant manuscript variant readings οἱ ἄγγελοι τοῦ θεοῦ "the angels of God" for the Hebrew בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים ("sons of God").[5] In addition, the books of 1 Enoch (possibly second-century BC) and Jubilees (first-century BC) present an interpretation of angelic cohabitation with women in Genesis 6. This view is also referenced in many passages of the Pseudepigrapha, and was accepted by Philo,

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[1] Unless otherwise specified, all Scripture quotations are taken from the *New American Standard Bible* (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995).

[2] A sampling of comments can be found with Umberto Cassuto, "The Episode of the Sons of God and the Daughters of Man," in *Biblical & Oriental Studies I* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1973), 17, who calls this text "one of the obscurest sections of the Torah," and Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis = Be–reshit: The Traditional Hebrew Text with New JPS Translation.* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 45, who says, "The account given in these few verses is surely the strangest of all the Genesis narratives." Robert Davidson, *Genesis 1–11*, The Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge: University Press, 1973), 69, goes further by describing this passage as "one of the strangest passages in the whole Old Testament." Ephraim Speiser, *Genesis: Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1964), 45, even adds the implications to the confusion by stating that "this isolated fragment makes it not only atypical of the Bible as a whole but also puzzling and controversial in the extreme."

[3] Henry Morris, *The Genesis Record: A Scientific and Devotional Commentary on the Book of the Beginnings* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976), 165; Kenneth Mathews*, Genesis 1–11:26*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 323.

[4] Some commentators have taken the position that they were both. They hold that the Nephilim were not really special, other than they were equated with the "mighty warriors" described at the end of v. 4. Thus, Nephilim were around when the improper marriages took place, and even more Nephilim were created through these marriages.

[5] Cassuto, *The Episode of the Sons of God*, 17. It should also be noted that in v.4, the LXX also uses γίγαντες "giants" without a variant for the Hebrew הַנְּפִלִים "Nephilim," and הַגִּבֹּרִים "mighty men" indicating that these Nephilim were the offspring of the marriages between the "sons of God" and daughters of men.

Josephus, and many church Fathers.[6] The "ungodly angel" view is currently the position most accepted by most modern commentators.[7]

The earliest work that suggests the "Sethite" interpretation for the "sons of God" was Julius Africanus (AD 160–240), and its popularity arose because it avoided the suggestion of carnal intercourse with angels.[8] This view remained dormant until Augustine (AD 354–430) discussed the passage in his work *City of God*, and was *the* predominant Christian interpretation from the Reformation up until the nineteenth century,[9] but has few advocates today.[10]

The "despotic ruler" interpretation entered Jewish exegesis about the middle of the second century AD, and was also driven by the conviction that angels could not indulge in sexual intercourse with women.[11] It remained mostly in orthodox rabbinical Judaism[12] and was not readily accepted by Christianity, who had turned more to the "Sethite" view.[13] Specifically, this view saw the בְּנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים as "judges" or "princes," but did not gain in popularity due to lexical difficulties. A variant of this view was developed by Meredith Kline,[14] who suggested that the "sons of God" were sacral kings that regarded themselves as divine. The term "sons of God," or "sons of the gods" were actually appropriated to the antediluvian kings.[15] Since the publication of Kline's analysis, the view of "despotic rulers" has generated increasing interest by commentators and scholars.[16]

## A Call to Re-examination

In 1981, William VanGemeren[17] issued a clarion call for evangelicals to re-think their naturalistic assumptions and tendency towards demythologization. His concern

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[6] In his article, Robert Newman, "The Ancient Exegesis of Gen 6:2, 4," *Grace Theological Journal* 5/1 (1984): 13–36, presents a thorough analysis of the ancient sources that attest to the "ungodly angel" view of Genesis 6:1–4.

[7] Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, vol. 1, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 139.

[8] Ibid., 140.

[9] John H. Walton, *Genesis*, vol. 1, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 291. This is the position of Calvin, Luther, and Keil. Also, William H. Green, "The Sons of God and the Daughters of Men," *The Presbyterian Reformed Review* V (1894): 654–60, and Donat Poulet, "The Moral Causes of the Flood," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* IV (1942): 293–303 supported the "Sethite" position, but in recent years, the "Divine ruler" view (view 3) has gained some support, and Poulet (*Moral Causes*, 655) even conceded that the "ungodly angel" view has been popularized by a number of modern scholars.

[10] Wenham, *Genesis*, 140.

[11] Ibid., 139.

[12] Carl Friedrich Keil, *The First Book of Moses (Genesis)*, trans. James Martin, Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2001), 81.

[13] Walton, *Genesis*, 291.

[14] Meredith Kline, "Divine Kingship and Genesis 6:1–4," *Westminster Theological Journal* 24 no. 2 (May 1962): 187–204.

[15] Ibid., 192.

[16] See Leroy Binney, "An Exegetical Study of Genesis 6:1–4," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 13/1 (1970): 43–52; Walton, *Genesis*, 293–98; and David Livingston, "Who Were the Sons of God in Genesis 6?," *Bible and Spade* 22/2 (2009): 34–40. Also, Willem VanGemeren, "The Sons of God in Genesis 6:1–4: (An Example of Evangelical Demythologization?)," *Westminster Theological Journal* 43 no. 2 (Spring 1981): 343. VanGemeren complements the scholarship of Kline while reserving judgment on actually accepting the view as satisfactory.

[17] VanGemeren, *Demythologization*, 343–47.

is that evangelicals have preferred an inconsistent "rational" explanation purely because of exegetical difficulties with the text. It is not just that theology has possibly overridden the place of exegesis in the interpretation process, but quite possibly a philosophical theology is now beginning to predominate.

Specifically, VanGemeren proposed a re-examination of the "ungodly angel view" of the identity of the sons of God in Genesis 6:1–4 in order to provide a satisfactory alternative to the "non-angelic" interpretations.[18] The purpose of this article is to answer this clarion call and to re-examine the "ungodly angel" view of this text with a biblical-theological and exegetical methodology.[19] Essentially all views of this brief text are fraught with difficulties and nagging questions which continue to humble the expositor.[20] The brevity of the text and the limited information provided by its laconic wording makes the evidence ambiguous, defying clear-cut identifications and solutions.[21] Because of this, every view requires some sort of theological input to fill in the gaps where exegesis falls short.

While exegetical arguments abound, there are three specific unanswered questions[22] that provide criticisms for the "ungodly angel" view. The first question is actually a problem for all exegetes, but the second and third are particular to the "ungodly angel" view.

1. What is God's reason for bringing global judgment in the Flood?
2. Why did the judgment fall on mankind if it was the "sons of God" who sinned?
3. How is it theologically possible for angels to cohabitate with human women?

This article will seek to provide solid answers to these pertinent questions. The flow of the article will be straightforward. First, it is necessary to establish a baseline and conduct a brief discussion about the exegetical arguments supporting the "ungodly angel" view. What follows will be an explanation of the methodology used in the re-examination process. We propose a biblical-theological and exegetical methodology, which will utilize the idea of a theme, or center which runs through the Old Testament. This idea is not new or unique, and this study will follow the works of Walter Kaiser as well as James Hamilton. With the methodology defined, the exegetical observations previously discussed will be analyzed using a biblical-theological approach. Conclusions will then be drawn about the motivation for God's judgment on all mankind in the face of the sins of the "sons of God."

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[18] VanGemeren's (Ibid.) concern and call for a re-examination of the "angelic" view follows Kline's observation "…what has contributed most to the continuing dominance of the mythical (or at least angelic) interpretation of the passage has been the absence of a satisfactory alternative." (Kline, "Divine Kingship," 188–89).

[19] This study begins with the understanding that the "ungodly angel" view is the correct view for the "sons of God" in Genesis 6:1–4. As defined above, the purpose is to provide exegetical answers and support for the historic criticisms of the view.

[20] Mathews, *Genesis*, 322.

[21] Victor Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 1–17*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 265.

[22] This is not to say that answers have not been provided. Various commentators have provided viable solutions to these problematic questions, and VanGemeren (*Demythologization*, 320–48) lists his answers in his call for a re-examination of the "ungodly angel" view. This article will seek to examine these answers in the light of a biblical-theological and exegetical methodology, rather than just a historical, contextual, grammatical, and lexical approach.

## Exegetical Observations

The arguments surrounding the identity of the "sons of God" have been adequately and cogently articulated by commentators and theologians in each camp, so there is no need to re-argue the points of prior scholarship. Rather, we will briefly summarize the uncontested arguments in favor of the "ungodly angel" view, and clarify the contested points which will be "re-examined."

### Uncontested Exegetical Observations

The uncontested strong points of the "ungodly angel" view are listed first.

1. The "ungodly angel" view is the oldest view dating from the pre-Christian era, and was the obvious viewpoint of the apostles Peter and Jude, who both quoted (or at least referenced) from the book of 1 Enoch (2 Pet 2:4; Jude 6).[23]

2. It is significant that the LXX renders the phrase οἱ υἱοὶ τοῦ θεοῦ ("sons of God") as οἱ ἄγγελοι τοῦ θεοῦ ("angels of God").[24] The LXX also refers to the הַנְּפִלִים "Nephilim" as οἱ γίγαντες "giants." The LXX was the dominant version of the Scriptures used during the ministry of Jesus and the apostolic age.

3. Genesis 6:1–4 is connected with the context which precedes (the lines of Cain and Seth in Gen 4–5) and what follows (the Flood narrative in Gen 6:5–8:22).

4. The identity of the "sons of God" as angels is the most obvious and natural view from the initial reading of the text.[25]

In summary, the fact that the "ungodly angel" view is the most ancient is uncontested. In addition, the LXX and the apostolic allusions to the book of 1 Enoch in 2 Peter and Jude indicate this was the view of pre-Christian Orthodox Judaism, as well as the early church for the first two centuries.

With the exception of some historical critics, essentially all commentators and scholars accept the literary connections of Genesis 6:1–4 with the preceding narrative (chaps. 4–5) regarding the proliferation of mankind and the following narrative (6:5–8:22) describing the Flood. In particular, most see verses 1–4 as having some sort of causal connection with verses 5–8.

It certainly bears some level of introspection and weight to consider that this was apparently the sole view of the Jewish community before the second century, as well as the view of the apostles. While outspoken on Noah and the Flood as a historical event, Jesus is noticeably silent on the identity of the "sons of God" and the Nephilim.

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[23] See Introduction.

[24] Poulet (*Moral Causes*, 295) holds the "Sethite" view for the "sons of God," and concedes that the best manuscripts of the LXX contain the reading "angels of God."

[25] Franz Delitzsch, *New Commentary on Genesis*, vol. 1, trans. Sophia Taylor (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1888), 222; Keil, *Pentateuch*, 81; Poulet, *Moral Causes*, 295; John Murray, *Principles of Conduct* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 244; Kline, *Divine Kingship*, 192–93.

## Contested Exegetical Observations

Apart from the history of interpretation and literary connections, the exegesis of the passage begins to diverge, dependent on the exegete's presuppositions. First, the point must again be reiterated that on a first read of the passage, the "ungodly angel" view is the most obvious.[26] The implication is that the "Sethite" view and the "despotic ruler" view came about because of a presupposition that the "ungodly angel" view is theologically untenable, and not because of grammatical or contextual requirements.

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| Calvin[27] | That ancient figment, concerning the intercourse of angels with women, is abundantly refuted by its own absurdity; and it is surprising that learned men should formerly have been fascinated by ravings so gross and prodigious. |
| Keil[28] | These passages show that the expression "sons of God" cannot be elucidated by philological means, but must be interpreted by theology alone. |
| Green[29] | This purely mythological conceit was foisted upon the passage in certain apocryphal books like the Book of Enoch; also by Philo and Josephus, who were misled by the analogy of ancient heathen fables. |
| Poulet[30] | Strange as this theory seems today, it was not without ostensible support.[31] |

Because of a theological conclusion (that the "ungodly angel" view is theologically impossible), the basic text of 6:1–4 must be interpreted within the boundaries of that conclusion. This is what would require the exegete to look at the "ostensible support" for the "ungodly angel" view in a completely different manner.

A theological conclusion would also dismiss the lexical strength of the usage of the phrase "sons of God" to refer to ungodly angels. It would create the unnatural scenario where lexical terms such as הָאָדָם would be used differently in the same passage with no contextual support. Finally, despite strong grammatical support, it would be a natural requirement to disassociate the Nephilim with the union of "sons of God" and "daughters of men." The exegetical points favoring the "ungodly angel"

[26] Point 4 above—note that this conclusion was derived by many who do not support the "ungodly angel" view.

[27] John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Book of Genesis, Part I: From Adam to Noah, Genesis I–VI, 8*. trans. John King (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 238.

[28] Keil, *Genesis*, 810.

[29] Green, *Sons of God*, 655.

[30] Poulet, *Moral Causes*, 295.

[31] VanGemeren (*Demythologization*, 320) notes that Poulet's arguments against the "ungodly angel" theory are theological rather than exegetical.

view listed below are hotly contested by those who reject the "ungodly angel" view. But the criticisms leveled are not exegetical but theological—and that based on the critic's theology, as noted by VanGemeren.[32]

In addition, the New Testament references to 1 Enoch are easily dismissed by critics as well. Feinberg[33] rejects the idea of 1 Peter 3:19 referring to angels because he summarily dismisses the view that the "sons of God" are angels in Genesis 6:1–4. In most cases, New Testament commentators who reject the notion that these passages (1 Peter 3:18–19; 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6) refer to Genesis 6:1–4, do so because they conclude that it is theologically impossible that angels had sexual relations with human women. Again, it is not the exegesis of the text that drives the conclusions, but rather a theological conclusion that drives the text. The contested points of the "ungodly angel" view are listed below:

1. The strict use of the phrase בְּנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים is isolated to refer only to angels in the Old Testament (Job 1:6; 2:1; 38:7; Daniel 3:25, cf. Psalm 29:1; 89:7). Even though there are allusions to Israel being "God's son" in Scripture, this does not diminish the strength of synchronic analysis, albeit with a narrow lexical base.[34] In addition, as stated above, the original Israelite would have understood the passage to refer to "ungodly angels."[35]

2. The usage of the word הָאָדָם ("mankind") is used in a general sense in Genesis 6:1, and thus must also be regarded as generic in meaning in v. 2.[36] The "ungodly angel" view requires that הָאָדָם has a general referent in all three of its uses in the passage. In fact, when the author intends a specific usage for the plural "men" (found in v. 4) he uses a different word אֲנָשִׁי.

3. The בְּנוֹת הָאָדָם ("daughters of men") which the בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים saw and took for wives (6:2) are the same daughters וּבָנוֹת יֻלְּדוּ לָהֶם born to "generic mankind" described in verse 1. Thus, the daughters/wives are generic women that could be born from any human person on the earth at that time. In the same way that הָאָדָם "mankind" is generic, so the בְּנוֹת הָאָדָם "daughters of men" and the wives of the בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים "sons of God" are also generic.

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[32] VanGemeren, *Demythologization*, 320.

[33] John Feinberg, "1 Peter 3:18–20, Ancient Mythology, and the Intermediate State," *Westminster Theological Journal* 48 no. 2 (Fall 1986), 322–23.

[34] Walton, *Genesis* 292. It should be noted that Walton does not agree with the "ungodly angel" view, but rather holds to the "despotic ruler" view when he makes this observation. He concludes that the narrow lexical base for the phrase "sons of God" (only found in a few verses, and that in the "linguistically isolated book of Job") is a weakness, which follows the arguments of Keil (*Genesis*, 81), but he does make a strong case for the methodological use of the phrase as a definite strength. In addition, Mathews (*Genesis*, 326), sees this observation as a solid strength of the "ungodly angel" view even though he holds the "Sethite" view.

[35] Cassuto, *The Episode of the Sons of God*, 19.

[36] Kline, *Divine Kingship* 189. Note that Kline is a proponent of the "despotic ruler" view, yet acknowledges this lexical understanding. One of the major criticisms of the "Sethite" interpretation is the lexical inconsistency of the usage of הָאָדָם by having a generic meaning of "mankind" in v.1 and specific to the "Cainite line" of men in v. 2.

4. The phrase בְּנֵי־הָאֱלֹהִים "sons of God" is contrasted with the phrase בְּנוֹת הָאָדָם "daughters of men." The contrast is not between the two usages of הָאָדָם in vv. 1–2 (man as a large group in v.1 and man in a more limited sense in v. 2), but is between the "sons of God" and the "daughters of men."[37]

5. The Nephilim (οἱ γίγαντες "giants" in the LXX) are the offspring of the union between the "sons of God" and "daughters of men" which is evident from the phrase in Genesis 6:4, אֲשֶׁר יָבֹאוּ בְּנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים אֶל־בְּנוֹת הָאָדָם וְיָלְדוּ לָהֶם ("when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men and they bore to them"). The pronoun הֵמָּה refers back to the offspring of the "sons of God" and "daughters of men" earlier in the verse, הַנְּפִלִים ("the Nephilim").[38] This wording is describing the origin of the Nephilim-Gibborim.[39] If the Nephilim are disconnected with verses 1–2, then other than providing a temporal referent to the existence of the Nephilim, verse 4 becomes an isolated fragment with no connection to the preceding antediluvian context of chapters 4–5, or to the upcoming deluge in 6:5–8:22.[40]

6. The pronouncement of divine displeasure (v. 3) comes between the cohabitation scene (v. 2) and the reference to the Nephilim—the children produced by the "sons of God" and "daughters of men." The placement of the verse is what is crucial, in that the union of the two groups is offensive to Yahweh, and also that the Nephilim are mentioned right after the judgment of a reduced life span to 120 years and not living forever. The Nephilim are identified as "men" in verse 4, and therefore equivalent to "flesh" in verse 3, which means they will indeed suffer the judgment just pronounced.[41]

The re-examination of the "ungodly angel" view is not just a matter of re-arguing the exegetical arguments. This is pointless, as critics mostly argue from a theological perspective. Instead, the re-examination needs to take place at the theological level. Specifically, the answers derived for each of the three questions given in the introduction are the true source of the theological conflict.

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[37] VanGemeren, *Demythologization* 335. This argument is so strong against the "Sethite" view that most today who hold to this view have modified their argument to hold that the "daughters of men" could be generic, and that the "godly" Sethite men (referred to as "sons of God") married both Sethite women and/or Cainite women.

[38] Wenham, *Genesis*, 143; contra Binney (*Exegetical Study*, 51) who says the הֵמָּה in v. 4 could refer back to הַנְּפִלִים "the Nephilim," the children of the union of the "sons of God" and "daughters of men," (the object of וְיָלְדוּ "they bore"), or the immediately preceding pronoun הֵם (from לָהֶם in v. 3). Binney takes the unnecessary and more improbable view that the focus is on the "sons of God" (why not the "daughters of men"?) and are the focus of the temporal clause in v. 4 rather than the offspring.

[39] Kline, *Divine Kingship*, 190.

[40] VanGemeren, *Demythologization*, 336.

[41] Throughout his commentary on this passage, Hamilton (*Genesis*, 266) essentially takes no stand, but effectively presents the difficulties of each view. He makes the same observation, but holds to the view that the Nephilim are not the "bastard offspring" of the illicit union in v. 2 (contra point 6), which would indicate that God has no position on the Nephilim, good or bad. His translation reflects this in that he views the Nephilim as separate and distinct from הַגִּבֹּרִים "the Gibborim."

This is demonstrated in the comments given by various commentators. Older scholars point to the fact that the judgment of the Flood was only directed to mankind.[42] Keil asks:

> Why then should judgment fall upon the tempted alone? The judgments of God in the world are not executed with such partiality as this. And the supposition that nothing is said about the punishment of the angels, because the narrative has to do with the history of man, and the spiritual world is intentionally veiled as much as possible, does not meet the difficulty. If the sons of God were angels, the narrative is concerned not only with men, but with angels also; and it is not the custom of the Scriptures merely to relate the judgments which fall upon the tempted, and say nothing at all about the tempters.[43]

Contemporary commentator James Hamilton surmises, "The major contextual argument against this ["sons of God" are angels] identification is that it has mankind being punished for the sins of angels."[44] In answer to why the "ungodly angel" view of 6:1–4 is weak, Walton provides three reasons:

> (1) Cohabitation between angels and humans has no immediately obvious connection with the purposes of Genesis; (2) an angelic intrusion is considered out of place in the sequence of episodes recounting the advance of human sin; and (3) the mythological tone is at odds with life in the real world as we know it, though in the end our interest is in the world as the Israelites knew it.[45]

Both modern commentators acknowledge that the main difficulty lies in the exact tie to the motive of God in bringing the Flood, and the introduction of angels or the purpose of angelic cohabitation into the narrative.

So, it is clear that a major obstacle for the "ungodly angel" interpretation is its lack of an answer to VanGemeren's question, "What is the wrong involved in the marriage of 'the Sons of God' to the daughters of man?"[46] In reality, this is the starting point for most scholars, and their answer is the fuel that propels their exegesis. Sailhamer astutely makes this observation by quoting John Calvin: "For, in order to make a transition to the history of the deluge, he prefaces it by declaring the whole world to have been so corrupt, that scarcely anything was left to God, out of the widely spread defection."[47]

Finally, on the third question, answers given by the "ungodly angel" camp are summarily rejected due to its supposed theological impossibility. Indeed, this is what

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[42] Murray, *Principles of Conduct*, 245–46.
[43] Keil, *Genesis*, 86.
[44] Hamilton, *Genesis*, 262–63.
[45] Walton, *Genesis*, 292.
[46] VanGemeren, *Demythologization*, 342.
[47] John Sailhamer, "Genesis" in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gabelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 2:75.

drove the introduction of both the "Sethite" view and the "despotic ruler" view.[48] Rejectors point to the fact that there is no credible motive for angel interference in human reproduction (other than sinful lust, which makes no sense for asexual beings). In addition, they all refer to Jesus' remarks in Matthew 22:30 about angels not marrying or being given in marriage as being the final word on the subject.

Nevertheless, by providing strong and credible solutions to these three questions, the "ungodly angel" view provides a viable and sustainable alternative to the "rational" explanations of 6:1–4 and answers VanGemeren's concern. This alternative will be accomplished through the use of a biblical-theological and exegetical methodology.

## Methodology

Although the Old Testament does not necessarily provide a coherent and comprehensive plan of God,[49] a biblical theologian must still be committed to interpreting the Bible as a coherent whole because it is the Word of an inherently coherent God.[50] One of the approaches of this commitment to coherence is the pursuit of a theme or center of the Old Testament. Gerhard Hasel notes that during the twentieth century this commitment was demonstrated by an "unprecedented impetus" given to the pursuit of a logical theme or center of the Old Testament.[51]

The vigorous pursuit described by Hasel was certainly not a pursuit that led to a unified decision. In his article on issues in Old Testament theology, Hasel notes that Walther Eichrodt's revolutionary approach to an Old Testament center, which evolved to the biblical concept of "covenant," was shared by many, but was not without opposition by those who denied that the Old Testament actually even contained a center.[52]

Within this frame of reference, James Barr discussed a "plurality" of centers, which opened up different ways to organize the Old Testament. Both Hasel[53] and James Hamilton[54] list no small number of scholars who advocated their own different biblical center of the Old Testament. In reviewing a summary of proposed centers, Hasel writes:

> It is highly significant that virtually all proposals for a center have God or an aspect of God and/or his activity for the world and humankind as a com-

[48] Wenham, *Genesis* 139–40.

[49] Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 117.

[50] Paul House, "Biblical Theology and the Wholeness of Scripture" in *Biblical Theology: Retrospect and Prospect*, ed. Scott Hafemann (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 270.

[51] Gerhard Hasel, "Major Issues in Old Testament Theology," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 31 (1985): 37.

[52] Ibid., 37–38.

[53] Ibid.

[54] James Hamilton, "The Glory of God in Salvation Through Judgment: The Centre of Biblical Theology?" *Tyndale Bulletin* 57 no. 1 (2006): 65–67.

> mon denominator. This points inadvertently to the fact that the Old Testament is *Theocentric*, as the New Testament is *Christocentric*. In short, God/Yahweh is the dynamic, unifying center of the Old Testament.[55]

This article will focus on a synthesis of the thematic approaches to the Old Testament by two contemporary scholars: Walter Kaiser and James Hamilton.

## The Thematic Approach of Walter Kaiser

In his 1978 monograph on Old Testament theology, Walter Kaiser developed an inductively derived theme found in the Old Testament.[56] Kaiser focused on using an exegetical methodology that derives the theme of the Old Testament from the text itself.[57] According to Kaiser, this textual derivation must occur inductively. It must be shown that it is not only the starting point of the canon, but must also attest to its veracity through the continuous testimony revealed throughout the corpus of Old Testament texts. Antithetical to the genetic and reconstructionist version of *Heilsgeschichte* employed by Von Rad, Kaiser presupposes the canonical text in its extant manuscripts as factual and authoritative, without any historical reconstruction.

Consistent with Brevard Childs' canonical approach to the Old Testament, Kaiser has a keen awareness of the need for unity between the Old and New Testaments, but is equally concerned that New Testament revelation not be read back into the Old resulting in spiritualizing, moralizing, or allegorizing the text. In Kaiser's theology, he makes the case for a biblical center of the Old Testament which is also attested by the writers of the New Testament, resulting in a coveted biblical unity. According to Kaiser, this center is God's record of "promise," or a "promise-plan" that is repeated throughout Scripture; he was the first to use the idea of "promise" as an organizing principle.[58] Kaiser develops his own promise plan of God this way:

> The promise-plan is God's word of declaration, beginning with Eve and continuing on through history, especially in the patriarchs and the Davidic line, that God would continually be in his person and do in his deeds and works (in and through Israel, and later the church) his redemptive plan as his means of keeping that promised word alive for Israel, and thereby for all who subsequently believed. All in that promised seed were called to act as a light for all the nations so that all the families of the earth might come to faith and to new life in the Messiah.[59]

By acknowledging various theological perspectives and traditions (Covenant [Reformed] and Dispensational), Kaiser carefully defines his methodology to avoid confusion. To help portray the pervasiveness of this unifying center, and specifically

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[55] Gerhard Hasel, *Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate*. 4th edition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 168.

[56] Walter Kaiser, *Toward an Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978).

[57] Ibid., 33.

[58] Hasel, *Old Testament Theology*, 53.

[59] Walter Kaiser, *The Promise Plan of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 19.

its unity with the New Testament, Kaiser gives ten distinctive characteristics.[60] For brevity, only three are listed.

1. The doctrine of the Promised Messiah is found throughout all the Scriptures and not just in isolated or selected passages.

2. The Old Testament Messianic teaching was regarded as the development of a single promise (Gr. *Epangelia*), repeated and unfolded through the centuries with numerous specifications and in multiple forms but always with the same essential core.

3. The culmination of all the specifications (i.e., the individual predicted doctrines that support the one unifying promise-plan) are wrapped up in the one promise doctrine, or promise-plan, which focuses on Jesus Christ.

Analogous to Eugene Merrill,[61] Kaiser sees the earliest expression of this promise in the creation account in Genesis 1 where God gives a blessing to the fish and fowl (v. 22) and then to mankind (v. 26).[62] He equates the idea of "blessing" (first through the Hebrew verb ברך where God "blesses" the fish and fowl in v. 22) to the "promise" and asserts that the unifying promise is revealed in a multiplicity of lexemes.[63] Unlike Merrill, however, he rejects the idea of "dominion-having" as the central content of the promise (covenant), and does not include the idea of the commands to rule and subdue that are found in 1:26–28. For Kaiser, "blessing" is like the starter's pistol that initiates the unfolding of the ultimate plan of God, and he sees verse 28 as prophetically foreshadowing the divine blessing through the mediation of Abraham.

The biblical text begins with the spoken Word of God (v. 3). Building on that, the first chapter of Genesis contains a repeated emphasis of the spoken word of a personal God, moving from the speaking of creation to the speaking of blessing. God blessed the creatures of the sea and air (v. 22), followed by his special blessing to mankind that carried one additional amplification; they were to be God's personal image bearers. The result of this blessing is rule and domination of creation by man. Man (Adam and subsequently his wife, Eve) was God's appointed steward over His creation, and was to act as vice-regent over all inanimate and animate matter.

Before the culmination of the creative process, God also pronounced a blessing on the Sabbath, ending with the statement that everything was "very good." The first word of promise, however, is rightly found in Genesis 3:15: "And I will put enmity

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[60] Ibid., 19–25.

[61] Eugene Merrill, *Everlasting Dominion: A Theology of the Old Testament* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman), 22–27.

[62] Kaiser, *Towards an Old Testament Theology*, 33.

[63] Kaiser refers to the works of Foster R. McCurley, Jr., "The Christian and the Old Testament Promise," *Lutheran Quarterly* 22 (1970): 401–10 and Gene Tucker, "Covenant Forms and Contract Forms," *Vetus Testamentum* 15 (1965): 487–503 whose lexicographical work demonstrate the variety of expression used for the idea of "promise." McCurley identifies the Hebrew רבר "to speak" as referring to "promise" in over thirty instances, and Tucker shows how the words "pledge" and "oath" also share the antecedent "promise."

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."

Even though the immediate context for 3:15 is judgment, the blessing continues through the population growth and innovation in chapter 4. The blessing of productivity (although somewhat less than the original blessings given in chap. 1) was interrupted by the cataclysmic castigation of wrath because of a parallel growth of evil that had overwhelmed the planet (6:5). Against the backdrop of the near extinction of God's creation, God facilitated the perpetuation of His promise by working through Noah and his family. This second word of blessing (being fruitful and multiplying) was repeated to Noah and his family, and was also given to all living creatures on the earth (8:17; 9:1, 7) as well as a promise to all nature (8:22).

The catastrophic event of the Flood also precipitated the first use of the word of covenant,[64] by which God promised to forever refrain from judgment through a flood. This is the first act of self-restraint, and is made through a promise covenant. What is interesting to note is that this act of grace (self-restraint) was given without any change in the original problem—that man was continually wicked and that the thoughts of his heart were evil continually. When Noah and his family left the ark and sacrificed to God, it was still clear that the thoughts of all mankind (here Noah, his wife, his three sons, and their wives) were evil by nature "from their youth."

What is evident from this observation is the idea that God will not judge again what He has already judged. God did not curse the ground through the Flood, but rather He exterminated all life "that has the breath of life," excluding fish. The pleasing aroma that God smelled was in the midst of sin and rebellion. The question remains, "What is it that was pleasing to God when the original problem of 6:5 remained unchanged?" Kaiser proceeds to show how the Scriptures answer that question with a continual reference to the promise—God's grace given in the midst of His judgment.

Kaiser includes the idea of judgment along with promise:

> The theological factors found in each crisis, which perpetrated the judgment of God, were the thoughts, imaginations, and plans of an evil heart (Gen 3:5–6; 6:5; 8:21; 9:22; 11:4). But God's salvific word was equal to every default of earth's mortals. *Alongside the sin-judgment themes came a new word about a "seed" (Gen 3:15), a race among whom God would personally take up his residence and "dwell" (Gen 9:27), and the blessing of what Paul would later call the "good news" of the gospel (Gal 3:8) offered to every nation on the face of the earth (Gen 12:3)*.[65]

Against the backdrop of sin and judgment, the promise-plan of God (synonymous with blessing) singularly occupies the place of center. In the same way that tin and lead meld together when heated to a specific temperature to form solder, the picture of sin-judgment and grace-salvation are also commingled into the single,

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[64] See Gen 6:18; 9:9, 11–13, 15–17.

[65] Kaiser, *Promise Plan* 47, italics added.

distinct idea of "promise." This understanding of "promise" leads to further examination of the thematic approach of James Hamilton.

## The Thematic Approach of James Hamilton

Since Kaiser published *The Promise Plan of God* in 2008, a new work in the area of biblical theology was published that advanced Kaiser's argument for a theological center. In 2010, James Hamilton produced a biblical theology, titled *God's Glory in Salvation Through Judgment*.[66] Before he published his work, Hamilton presented his thesis in seed form for discussion to the Biblical Theology Study Group of the Tyndale Fellowship in 2004. The results of this discussion were later published in 2006 in the Tyndale Bulletin, titled *The Glory of God in Salvation Through Judgment: The Centre of Biblical Theology?*

Hamilton's assertion that the center of biblical theology is the glory of God in salvation through judgment is motivated by a need for transformation in the church that results in beholding the glory of God in the face of Christ (2 Cor 3:18–4:6) and that this glory is both a judging glory and a saving glory.[67] A strong point of this work is Hamilton's detailed discussion about the existence of a center in biblical theology.

Contrary to his critics, Hamilton believes that the issue is not whether a theological center of the Bible can hold, but that those who do not really "listen carefully" to the Bible will not see the glory of God, and thus will miss its unity.[68] The idea of the judgment, justice, mercy, and grace of God are spread throughout the corpus of the biblical text, yet can be seen as a clear interlinking theme that connects and displays the glory of God. Not only does God intend to reveal His glory through these actions, He actually magnifies His glory by having them intertwined. What makes this an increasingly spectacular picture is not just that God is both justice and mercy, but that it is His own justice and judgment that actually highlights His mercy and grace, and illuminates it in a way that is unparalleled.[69]

Given the tumultuous debate around the viability of a unique center of biblical theology, and the trend even among the "centrists" to hold to a multiplex of themes, Hamilton boldly states his assertion of the existence of a prominent center.[70] He states his disagreement with those who hold the improbability, if not impossibility, of the existence of a biblical center, while still acceding that his proposal is not expected to gain any form of universal support. His motivation is not so much academic, but rather stems from a powerful source, which is pursuing the glory of God. "The theological presupposition that the Bible is the revelation of a coherent and harmonious God keeps us probing for the best triage of themes, and at the center will be the center of biblical theology." Quoting Joseph Plevnik, he writes, "As audacious

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[66] James Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation Through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010).

[67] Ibid., 41–42.

[68] Ibid., 40.

[69] Robin Routledge, *Old Testament Theology: A Thematic Approach* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 313.

[70] Hamilton, "The Centre of Biblical Theology?" 61.

as it no doubt sounds, here we are 'concerned not with what is *a* centre, but what is *the* centre'."[71]

God's glory in salvation through judgment is not a penultimate purpose of God, but rather is *the* ultimate purpose which stands unsurpassed. It is the glory of God manifested in judgment and grace that is the ultimate reason that God creates, judges, and redeems.[72] Like the peeling away of an onion layer after layer, so the text of Scripture peels away the enigma of the identity of the seed at each level of glory until all is revealed in the final glory of Jesus Christ, the promised seed (2 Cor 3:18).

The Bible is mostly in the narrative genre, and this is true especially in the Old Testament. The basic hermeneutical cycle of interpreting a narrative is to find the various scenes. Every narrative has setting, conflict, crisis, and ultimately a resolution. From its opening pages, Scripture provides the setting of God's goodness (the creation account in Gen 1–2), followed by a conflict (Eve's conversation with the serpent in 3:1–5). This is followed by a crisis of epic proportions in Genesis 3:6ff (the Fall). The rest of Scripture, on to the end of Revelation 22, is the resolution.

Kaiser's theme of promise (given in judgment to remove people from judgment) and Hamilton's theme of God's glory in salvation through judgment are essentially synonymous. They represent God's plan to redeem humanity from its self-inflicted crisis, while glorifying the Trinity. All this is done through the implementation of a promise, which was given in Genesis 3:15. The implementation of this promise (the theme) is then worked out from Genesis 3:16 onward, and ultimately reveals God's plan: the fulfilment of His promise in the person (seed) of Jesus Christ, the Redeemer of mankind.

It is through this lens of biblical theology that the exegetical analysis is undertaken, because it is the overriding context that must fix the boundaries of any consistent interpretation.

## Analysis

One of the nagging questions swirling around all the views of Genesis 6:1–4 is how it relates to 6:5–8 and the global deluge. The non-angelic views (i.e., the lines of Cain and Seth, and the royal rulers) seek to answer this question by providing polygamy,[73] promiscuity,[74] oppression,[75] spiritual exogamy,[76] and violence and arrogance from the Nephilim[77] as the primary causes of the Flood. Virtually all exegetes and commentators espouse at least a partial reasoning (if not primary) to the increase

[71] Joseph Plevnik, "The Centre of Pauline Theology," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 51 (1989): 461–78.

[72] Hamilton, *A Biblical Theology*, 562.

[73] Poulet, *Moral Causes*, 301; Kline, *Divine Kingship*, 196; Binney, *Exegetical Study*, 49.

[74] Walton, *Genesis*, 291.

[75] David Clines, "The Significance of the 'Sons of God' Episode (Genesis 6:1–4) in the Context of the 'Primeval History,'" *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 13 (1979): 34.

[76] Green, *Sons of God*, 656–57; Murray, *Principles of Conduct*, 247; Calvin, *Genesis*, 238.

[77] Calvin, *Genesis*, 245; Poulet, *Moral Causes*, 301–3; Keil, *Genesis*, 86–87; Speiser, *Genesis*, 46; Binney *Exegetical Study* 52. Binney takes the Nephilim as being identified with the "sons of God" in v. 2., but holds that violence and arrogance were characteristic of the polygamous "sons of the gods."

in the evil of mankind, and violence stated in 6:11.[78] In every case, the conclusion is that a new stage of evil has been reached, and that God's boundaries have been breached in yet another realm.[79]

What is common among the non-angelic views of 6:1–4 is that they agree that the boundaries that have been breached are some form of sin by the "sons of God." As stated above, the issue involves some form of transgression involving marriage between the "sons of God" and "daughters of men," and violence and arrogance from the Nephilim. This is not only natural, but is the only option for those who hold that the term "sons of God" must refer to humans due to theological restrictions. The problem with the current views of the inaugural sin which crossed the line of God's patience is that they all find themselves with a huge exegetical problem. The specific problem is found in two verses:

> Genesis 6:5—Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.
>
> Genesis 8:21—And the LORD smelled the soothing aroma; and the LORD said to Himself, "I will never again curse the ground on account of man, for the intent of man's heart is evil from his youth; and I will never again destroy every living thing, as I have done."

Genesis 6:5 is clear. What Yahweh "saw" before declaring the global Flood was that the wickedness of man was extensive "great on the earth" and intensive "only evil continuously."[80] This is most certainly a precursor to a righteous divine decree of judgment. But, the dilemma is introduced in the last section of the Flood narrative (Gen 8:21). When Noah sacrificed to Yahweh after disembarking from the ark, Yahweh made a declaration (i.e. a "promise") that He would never again flood the earth, "curse the ground" on account of man. While this is not so troubling, the causal statement (causal כִּי) that follows is problematic "for the intent of man's heart is evil from his youth."

What makes this so difficult is that both passages describe man's total depravity. Both use the Hebrew noun יֵצֶר "form, fashion" translated "intent" or "intention." This puts the emphasis not on any specific action, but on the totally evil and wicked thoughts, ideas, and formulations that *precede* every action. The issue is that if man is beset with exactly the same problem in 8:21 (after the Flood) as he is in 6:5 (before the Flood), how can any specific sin be God's motive for bringing the global deluge? If the sin of polygamy, rebellion to a specific marriage covenant, or even violent

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[78] Ron Hendel, "Of Demigods and the Deluge: Towards an Interpretation of Genesis 6:1–4," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 106 no. 1 (1987): 23; Calvin, *Genesis*, 237; Keil, *Genesis*, 88; Morris, *The Genesis Record*, 173.

[79] Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 83.

[80] Ibid., 85.

behavior were to be the cause of the Flood, then God flooded the world with no remedying effect. The propensity to commit those very same sins remained in full force directly after the Flood.

While this is a perplexing question to the exegete, there is an even more momentous problem. Genesis 8:21 states that "God smelled the soothing aroma." The word for "soothing" comes from the Hebrew root נוח "rest" which is the foundation for the name of Noah, who brought "comfort" for mankind (5:29). Not only was the Flood ineffectual (if it was intended to stop arrogance and violent behavior), at its culmination God was actually "restful." Somehow, God was delighted, or at least content with the results of His judgment, even though mankind never improved from his problem stated in 6:5.

Either God failed in His attempt to curtail and even stop a society bent on godless self-destruction, or He has a particular level of patience that acts like a trip-switch for trampling out the vintage and letting the grapes of wrath flow. The first option fails directly as it stands in opposition to the very character of God. The second is difficult to understand as every sin described by the "Sethite" view or the "despotic ruler" view has been repeated thousands of times over and throughout the existence of the human race. Polygamy and marrying outside the covenant (like the marriage of the Moabitess Ruth with Boaz) were replete throughout Israel's history. Likewise, violence by many "despotic" rulers was not only horrific, in many places it was ordained by God.

Connecting the global judgment of the Flood to a specific repeatable human behavior creates more exegetical problems than it solves. The answer must be found where the judgment is seen as consistent throughout Scripture when God's character is confronted with man's sinful behavior.

This article proposes that the answer can come through a biblical-theological approach that views Old Testament Scripture through the lens of the theme of a promise that is given in the midst of judgment. It is understood that both the promise and the judgment bring glory to God. Following Kaiser and Hamilton, the promise given by God that brings 6:1–4 into focus is the promise given to the serpent in 3:15.

It is noted that in the text of the first promise that God does not speak to either Adam or his wife, but rather to the serpent. This is a definite pronouncement of judgment on Satan, with a declaration of promise in the "seed" of the woman who will come to crush the "seed" of Satan. There was no judgment without hope spelled out for the first couple in this verse. This was reserved for the serpent, and given to him [Satan] alone.

The commentators and scholars who rely heavily on the context of chapters 4–5 to provide a "rational" explanation for the identity of the "sons of God" fail to go back to the necessary context—the context of the promise. In fact, it is quite possible that in 4:1 Eve thought that Cain was the promised seed.[81] When this necessary fact

[81] The Hebrew text provides קָנִיתִי אִישׁ אֶת־יְהוָה ("I have acquired a man, Yahweh"). Commentators differ on the use of the Hebrew אֵת. If one takes it as the direct object marker, then Eve would be making some claim of giving birth to a redeemer. If it is taken to be the preposition "with," then this is more of an exclamation of the first childbirth "with *the help of* Yahweh." See Walton, *Genesis*, 261–262; Mathews, *Genesis*, 265n254.

is brought into the fore, it becomes quite clear why an angelic host is presented in the text.[82]

The clarity comes in that if the "sons of God" are fallen angels or demons, there is a very clear motive for their taking the "daughters of men" as wives (or at the very least, sexual partners). The future of Satan's kingdom rises or falls on the eventual arrival of a "seed" from the first woman. If all offspring of that woman were to be contaminated, Satan might not only be able to divert, but to successfully eliminate the judgment given by God. Because all of Scripture is silent on how this contamination would take place, we can speculate only as to the actual mechanics. For the sake of argument, four are offered:

1. Ungodly angels enticed human women into intercourse to create an "immortal" human race. Immortality is in view because of God's specific statement in v. 3 when God said His spirit will not strive with man *forever*, and that man's days will now be limited to 120 years.[83] This would certainly upset God's plan for redemption and would be a way to circumvent God's preventing the first couple from eating of the tree of life and living forever.

2. The offspring of ungodly angels and human women could have created a non-human race that somehow altered the characteristics of the soul of each offspring. If the offspring were not of "Adam," then they would not be redeemed.

3. By corrupting the human race through unnatural intercourse, the ungodly angels would have made all human lineage corrupt, thus eliminating God's ability to create a union between a holy God and sinful (yet totally human) man.

4. The point is that the promised seed (3:15) was going be the God-man. This seed would be the combination of the supernatural and the natural, and make everyone a demigod. Counterfeit "god-men" or demigods would have corrupted the entire redemptive process.

Question #1

A problem with most scholars (of all views) is that their answer to the specific offense involved is with the idea of lust by the "sons of God." For those who reject the "ungodly angel" view, this is the only option. But even those who hold the "ungodly angel" view still do not see the true motive here. Morris suggests that both men and women were possessed by the demonic "sons of God," and that the women even

[82] Mathews (*Genesis*, 326) makes this point as a weakness of the "ungodly angel" view in that up to chapter 6 there has been contextually no introduction of an angelic host or heavenly court.

[83] It is admitted that this could either be the shortening of life spans to 120 years, or a period of grace until the Flood for 120 years. The text is ambiguous, and commentators are essentially split. But, the point of the verse is clear—all human life is about to die "because they are flesh."

resorted to using artificial cosmetics and allurements to maximize the attraction process.[84] Cassuto rightly asserts that the text provides no indication of a sinful sexual act like rape, adultery, or any act against the Lord's will.[85] In fact, Genesis 6:3 contains only a message of judgment without any rebuke or reproof. The act of marriage itself is not described as sinful in the text.

If the act of marriage (or cohabitation) is not sinful, then what exactly is the sin? The sin would be the crossing of boundaries, and having intercourse between two beings who are not of the same essence. Specifically, the grievance is the procreation of angels/demons with human women, which created a "counterfeit" offspring. The term "counterfeit" is fitting here, because with the context of 3:15 in mind, and the theme of "promise" through the seed (ultimately the God-man Jesus Christ), the angelic procreation was intended to corrupt the seed line and thus makes God's judgment null and void. This effectively answers VanGemeren's question about the need for an explanation of the offense of the marriage.[86] Just crossing boundaries is not enough. It is the crossing of boundaries with a desire to threaten the promised seed that invokes a merciless act by God.

Most commentators describe the Hebrew phrase כִּי טֹבֹת "that they were good," which demonstrates that the motive for the unnatural union was beauty and attraction. VanGemeren recognizes that the women's beauty is a significant exegetical observation but notes that Calvin goes too far in saying that their beauty caused the "sons of God" to lust carnally.[87] There is nothing in the text about lust, rape, or fornication. All that can be said is that the attractiveness of the human daughters made them appealing to the "sons of God."

Since the idea of carnality is not required, there is another potential view. The "sons of God" saw that the daughters of men were attractive, yes, but also that they were good for breeding. They would be excellent candidates for initiating Satan's plan for corrupting and ultimately defeating God's plan for redemption. This would make sense, as the issue of crossing physical boundaries (spiritual realm to the earthly realm) was the actual offense.

Understanding the motive of the "sons of God" (ungodly angels) to disrupt the plan of God's "seed" (His Son Jesus Christ), unveils the understanding of the judgment which resulted in God smelling a "soothing" aroma while man is left in an unchanged, sinful state. God flooded the earth to destroy all the offspring—except for the pure line which carried the seed. If we understand this as the motive for the Flood, then a clearer picture of Genesis 5 comes into view. Each of the men listed in chapter 5 came from a prior human offspring, originating from Adam. None of the men listed in the chapter could have come from a "son of God." Noah was from a pure line—the line of the seed. In this way, God was pleased at the abatement of the Flood and the termination of all "corrupt" life on the earth. His seed was preserved, as was His plan. The revealing of the "seed" in His Son Jesus Christ is one step closer, and Satan's best plan is decimated.

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[84] Morris, *The Genesis Record*, 169.

[85] Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis, Part I: From Adam to Noah, Genesis I–VI*: *8*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1972), 294; Cassuto, *The Episode of the Sons of God*, 25.

[86] VanGemeren, *Demythologization*, 346–47.

[87] Ibid., 332.

That this fits with the rest of Scripture can also be seen in various places. Of these, three are offered: (1) In Genesis 4, after the first two children were born, Cain was overtaken by sin so that he would destroy his brother, the potential seed; (2) Pharaoh ordered the killing of all Hebrew male children (Exod 1:15–22); and (3) Herod created a dragnet of sorts and ordered the killing of all Jewish babies under the age of two in order to kill the Messiah (Matt 2:16–18, 20). Satan has always been about the business of trying to destroy the coming seed by trying to either corrupt or destroy the pure line from which it originates. Genesis 6:1–4 is the first attempt at corrupting the offspring rather than killing the offspring.

## Question #2

With the motive of the global deluge settled, the next question is, "Why did the judgment fall on people when the true sin was committed by the angels?" The answer is straightforward. While it is true that the Cainite line demonstrated various acts of sinfulness (though certainly no more than what transpires today), the motive of God was to protect His promised seed. The intercourse described in Genesis 6:2 created a race of people who were threatening God's plan of redemption. Either the offspring were corrupted to the point of being unredeemable, or counterfeit "god-men" would arise and thwart the ability of the true God-man to fulfill His purpose and redeem mankind.[88] Naturally, these are the Nephilim described in 6:4.

The Nephilim-Gibborim (described as "giants" in the LXX) are also a problem for those who reject the "ungodly angel" view. Unfortunately, because of a lack of perspective in utilizing a thematic understanding of the Old Testament, many scholars describe the offspring of the "sons of God" and "daughters of men" to be a superhuman race,[89] superhuman monsters,[90] or monsters or demigods.[91] Without an understanding of the theme of "promise" in the coming seed, the description of the Nephilim seems to serve no purpose. The only plausible explanation is a physical one, in that the descriptions relate to deformity, unnatural strength, or increased propensity for wickedness. The conflict between the Nephilim-Gibborim and God is not physical, but spiritual. The action performed by God on such a cataclysmic act is singularly focused: the protection of His promise, the coming seed in His Son, Jesus Christ.

One last strength to be explained for the usage of this methodology is that in 3:15 God stated that there would be a literal crushing of a literal seed. Through the Nephilim (who are literally the offspring of Satan), God literally fulfills his promise. When all the Nephilim die in the Flood, Noah (who carries the seed) lives in an ark. But what is most amazing is how this scenario repeats itself later in Scripture. In 6:4, the text indicates that there were Nephilim וְגַם אַחֲרֵי־כֵן ("also afterwards"). The adverb

[88] The exact nature of the corruption is undefined. When dealing with the actual "physics" of the spiritual world, unless God reveals the mechanics in Scripture, it is best not to speculate. Because the passage should be viewed in light of the promised seed, it is clear that the "sons of God" were corrupting mankind in some way.

[89] Green, *Sons of God*, 65.

[90] Murray, *Principles of Conduct*, 246.

[91] Keil, *Genesis*, 87.

כֵּן is used mostly of manner "so, thus",[92] and gives force to the idea that the Nephilim were also "after those days," and that they were also in like manner.

This statement has confounded many scholars. If the Nephilim existed after the Flood, as indicated in Numbers 13:33, then this presents many problems. If they survived the Flood, then God's word of promise to Noah about the extinction of all life is meaningless. If the purpose of the Flood was to wipe out the Nephilim (as suggested above), then the Flood was not efficacious, and God had no reason to "smell the soothing aroma" after Noah's sacrifice.

Various solutions have been offered, most of which see that the Nephilim are normal human beings and the name is more descriptive of their behavior. Sailhamer curiously sees the Nephilim as referring to the specific antediluvians coming from the line of Seth listed in Genesis 5.[93] Rabbinic scholars avoided the implication that the Nephilim survived the Flood by supposing that the Hebrew וְגַם אַחֲרֵי־כֵן refers to the time of grace (120 years) before the Flood.[94] Still others see the possibility that Numbers 13:33 is either a superficial gloss motivated by a late interpretation of Genesis 6:4 as "giants," or that the text is merely stating an exaggeration by the spies, using a reference to 6:4 to bolster their claims of incredulity.[95]

It is only "ungodly angel" scholars who see that the Flood is specific to the Nephilim-Gibborim, or at least to the products of the unnatural intercourse. The purpose of the Flood is either to crush the attempt to introduce man into the realms of the divine,[96] or it is to eradicate a corrupted human race—either of which is evident by the specific delineation of the line leading from Seth to Noah, which was preserved.

How the Nephilim existed after the Flood is not given (in the same way that Cain's method of finding a wife is not given). One possibility is that the offspring of the "sons of God" and "daughters of men" also included women as well as men. While each of the men listed in Chapter 5 is pure (no one coming with a "son of God" as father), the text is silent as to the wives. It is a possibility that at least one of the wives of the sons of Noah was an offspring of an unholy marriage. If it was the wife of Ham, this explains why Noah's curse in Genesis 9:25–27 was against Canaan, and not Ham. Since the Canaanites settled into the land of Canaan (Gen 10), it is logical that this is where the Nephilim would come into view. Nephilim that were seen after the Flood could possibly (with some level of DNA reduction) have come through the genes of the women.

While it is not opportune to be dogmatic about how the presence of the Nephilim (וְגַם אַחֲרֵי־כֵן) existed "afterwards—after the Flood," a possible solution is given by Ronald Hendel, a scholar who holds that 6:1–4 is mythological and not historical. Hendel equates the Rephaim (Deut 2:11) with the Anakim and Nephilim of Numbers

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[92] Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, eds., *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1979), 485. See the usage here in Joel 2:28, where the reference indicates that God's spirit will be poured out on "all flesh" after the manner of Israel's national repentance and national restoration. This is not to say that the temporal aspect is absent, as this is clearly a temporal phrase, but rather that in addition to the temporal aspect there is an aspect of manner involved as well.

[93] Sailhamer, *Genesis*, 79.

[94] Wenham, *Genesis*, 143.

[95] Mathews, *Genesis*, 337–38.

[96] VanGemeren, *Demythologization*, 347. See Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11: A Commentary*, trans. John Scullion (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 499.

13:33.[97] While the initial Nephilim were wiped out in the Flood, all three show up again in Israel's history. What is historically recorded is that the Rephaim and Anakim are wiped out by Joshua (Josh 11:21–22), Moses (Josh 1:4–6; 13:12), and Caleb (Josh 15:14; Judg 1:20). Eventually, the final stragglers were totally cleaned out by David and his men (2 Sam 21:18–22; 1 Chron 20:4–8).

What makes this observation particularly interesting is that this totally fits when viewed through the biblical-theological grid of the theme of "promise" in the coming seed. The word "Nephilim" translates the Hebrew root נפל "fall," and thus translates to "the fallen ones." Even though the etymology of הַנְּפִלִים "Nephilim" is obscure,[98] Wenham sees a possible allusion to Genesis 6:4 in Ezekiel 32:20–28 through the use of same term גִּבּוֹרִים ("warriors"), the same term used in Genesis 6:1–4. Hendel makes the pointed observation, "The function of the Nephilim-Rephaim in all of these traditions is constant—they exist in order to be wiped out: by the Flood, by Moses, by David, and others. Their sole purpose on this earth is to die."[99]

Satan created a deviant offspring from daughters of the human race in order to corrupt and stop God's plan for final judgment on the demonic kingdom. God was prophetically waiting for him: Satan's literal seed, the "Nephilim" that he created, were people who were destined to fall, not to succeed; each one of them was crushed by God through His promised seed. Noah prevailed over the Nephilim, who drowned in the Flood, by resting in his ark above the waters. Israel was prepared in Egypt so that they would go to Canaan and destroy the Nephilim. As more of the giants arrived on the scene, they were destroyed again by David, the precursor to the coming seed and king, Jesus Christ. God's declaration, "His seed will crush your seed," literally happened as each of the Nephilim was crushed by someone carrying the promised seed. Therefore, Scripture attests that Satan's creation of the Nephilim was allowed by God so that Satan would formulate and implement a plan that would fulfill the prophesy spoken against him.

The answer to the second question then, emerges. Since the Flood was not so much a judgment on man's sin, but was an extermination of a threat to the promised seed, who is Jesus Christ, it is only natural that all humankind would be destroyed, except for the family that carried the pure seed. The central issue is not judgment, because all the people of the "godly" line of Seth died in the deluge (including Methuselah, the father of Enoch, and Lamech, Noah's father who prophesied about future grace). The central issue is God preserving His seed, and preserving His promise.

## Question #3

The last question is no doubt the most difficult to answer, and is probably the single biggest obstacle why the "ungodly angel" view was not sustained after the third century AD—Jesus' statements about the nature of angels. But it must be remembered that Jesus was answering a question about the nature of people during the

[97] Hendel, *Of Demigods and the Deluge*, 20–23.
[98] Wenham, *Genesis*, 143.
[99] Hendel, *Of Demigods and the Deluge*, 21.

final resurrection, and that His reference to angels was merely a comparative illustration. While many commentators reference Matthew 22:30, all related passages of the Synoptic Gospels must be examined and compared before rendering a judgment.

> Matthew 22:30—For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.
>
> Mark 12:25—For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.
>
> Luke 20:35–36—but those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage; for neither can they die anymore, for they are like angels, and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection.

What is interesting to note is the words recorded by Luke. The additional "for neither can they die anymore, for they are like angels" helps add clarity to the understanding. Correct hermeneutics compels us to harmonize the various accounts into one, as Jesus most probably did not have three separate yet identical questions from the Sadducees at three different times. We take Luke's account to be the full account of Jesus' words.

In this case, verse 36 begins with a causal γὰρ that indicates the true reason why people in the resurrection are like angels: they do not die and the point of comparison is immortality.[100] Hendriksen follows when he says that the reason why people in the resurrection do not marry or are given in marriage: "Reason: they do not die; therefore marriage with a view to the perpetuation of the race will not be necessary."[101] The issue is one of immortality, not procreation, which is the point that Jesus is making.

The idea of marriage is that two become "one flesh." Because the natures of humans and the Nephilim are different, a biblical marriage is an impossibility. Jesus' teaching speaks nothing of procreation, and the interpreter must be careful not to go beyond the text in areas where God is intentionally concise. It actually makes sense for God to leave the subject cloaked, as it relates to a proliferation of a counterfeit seed and a false gospel. God will not provide Satan with a celestial microphone to proffer more confusion. Cassuto proposes that Genesis 6:4 is more of an etiological explanation for the first readers of the Pentateuch on the origin of the Nephilim.[102] This would make sense, as it shows that they not only are human and can be defeated and die like men (because they are men, cf. Gen 6:3), but that God stands opposed to the Nephilim and has destroyed them before. Thus, Israel is to go into the land of Canaan with a victorious spirit.

With a clearer understanding of Jesus' words in the New Testament, then the obstacles preventing us from seeing a connection with related passages (specifically,

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[100] I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 741.

[101] William Hendriksen, *Luke*, NTC (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 906.

[102] Cassuto, *The Episode of the Sons of God*, 23–24.

1 Pet 3:18–20; 2 Pet 2:4; and Jude 6) are removed. The passages in Peter are more generic, but the passage in Jude has more specific detail.

> 1 Peter 3:18–20—For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison, who once were disobedient, when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah, during the construction of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through the water.
>
> 2 Peter 2:4—For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment;
>
> Jude 6–7—And angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode, He has kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day. Just as Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities around them, since they in the same way as these indulged in gross immorality and went after strange flesh, are exhibited as an example, in undergoing the punishment of eternal fire.

Peter speaks of generic "spirits" in 1 Peter 3:19, and their disobedience is also unspecified. The text reveals the time as "when the patience of God kept waiting in the days of Noah." The content of the passage thus provides possible circumstantial support for Genesis 6:1–4. Peter's second possible reference to the antediluvian account speaks directly of "angels" and an angelic transgression "when they sinned." While the sin is not specific, it should be noted that they are sent to ταρταρώσας ("Tartarus"), which is a term used in Greek mythology to refer to a subterranean place lower than Hades where divine judgment was meted out.[103]

The angels were given divine judgment at that time "when they sinned," and they were actually bound in darkness, a judgment that Peter indicates is not final. Only the angels who sinned at a particular time are in Tartarus waiting for final judgment. The scenario happens to agree with the reference in Jude which speaks of a specific set of angels who "abandoned their proper abode," and are also bound and waiting eternal judgment. The "ungodly angel" view of Genesis 6:1–4, provides the only satisfactory explanation as to why some of the evil angels are bound and others are not.[104]

Of the three passages, Jude provides the most detail. Even though he is quoting from the book of 1 Enoch, the inspiration of the Holy Spirit makes the quotation God's Word. Scripture therefore affirms that there were angels who sinned, and there

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[103] Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 4th ed., rev. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), 813.

[104] Charles R. Smith, "The New Testament Doctrine of Demons," *Grace Journal* 10 no. 2 (Spring 1969): 30.

were angels who did not keep their own domain (i.e., heaven, the celestial sphere), and there were angels who abandoned their proper abode (again, referencing heaven). This sin led to being bound in darkness waiting for final judgment—but only with some angels.

Unlike Peter, Jude provides a glimpse into the transgression, comparing the sin of the angels with the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah and their judgment. Jude's explanation begins with the comparative ὡς "just as, in the same way as," which serves to make the comparison. Those who reject the "ungodly angel" view of Genesis 6:1–4 take the antecedent to the indefinite pronoun τούτοις ("these") in Jude 7 as referring back to Sodom and Gomorrah, but since τούτοις is masculine, it cannot refer back to αἱ περὶ αὐτὰς πόλεις ("the cities around them") because the noun "cities" is feminine. The most natural antecedent for τούτοις is the angels in verse 6.[105]

The implication of Jude's words is that both the angels who sinned and the people of Sodom and Gomorrah shared the same manner of sin—they were involved in gross immorality and also pursued "strange flesh." Almost all scholars would take the pursuit of strange flesh to mean homosexuality in the case of Sodom and Gomorrah, but it was obviously not the same with the angels in Genesis 6:1–4. If this is true, then exactly what is the comparison?

Those who disagree with a connection between Jude 6–7 and Genesis 6:1–4 do so because of an initial rejection of the "ungodly angel" view. Because they hold to a biblical marriage taking place in Genesis 6:1–4 (rather than just procreation), they say that ἐκπορνεύσασαι "to engage in illicit sex" does not apply, because marriage is in view rather than "titanic lust."[106] But if the marriage is not a biblical marriage, and the sexual union has crossed God's defined boundaries, then the idea of "illicit sex" would definitely apply. Newman sees that in addition to 1 Enoch, the apostolic writers Peter and Jude might also have been referencing explicit revelation from the Old Testament in Isaiah 24:21–22.[107]

> Isaiah 24:21–22——So it will happen in that day, That the LORD will punish the host of heaven, on high, And the kings of the earth, on earth. And they will be gathered together like prisoners in the dungeon, and will be confined in prison; and after many days they will be punished.

There is obviously a strong connection between the gross immorality and crossing of boundaries in the account of Sodom and Gomorrah and the "sons of God" in Genesis 6:1–4. When looking at the passage through the biblical-theological lens of the theme of "promise" in the seed of the Savior, the meaning of Jude becomes clear, as Sodom and Gomorrah also experienced total extinction. If the sin was homosexuality, then why wasn't the flame of the tribe of Benjamin totally extinguished in Judges 19–21? Why aren't homosexuals throughout the ages totally destroyed, or at least visibly judged?

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[105] David Edmond Hiebert, *Second Peter and Jude: An Expositional Commentary* (Greenville: Unusual Publications, 1989), 236–37.

[106] Keil, *Genesis* 83–85, 85n1; Walton, *Genesis*, 297.

[107] Newman, *Ancient Exegesis*, 33.

The answer lies in the actual transgression—sexual sin that crossed the boundary from natural to supernatural. The difference between the men of Sodom and Gomorrah and those of the tribe of Benjamin in the book of Judges is that the men of Genesis 19 were trying to have intercourse with angels. This is the "strange flesh" of Jude 6–7 and is the "strange flesh" of Genesis 6:1–4. Anytime there is even the slightest hint of affecting God's plan for the seed, swift and immediate judgment ensues.

The apostolic writers Peter and Jude both were aware of the "ungodly angel" view of Genesis 6:1–4 and obviously held to it. The non-inspired book of 1 Enoch was available, as it was quoted and referenced in at least two epistles. As men who were "moved by the Holy Spirit" and spoke their convictions, they, more than anyone else during their time, understood the wonder and majesty of God's plan to provide a Savior and He did so through a simple seed that came through a frail Jewish woman during their time. They understood that God would let nothing stand in the way of ushering in and displaying His seed to a broken world.

With the third and final question answered, there remains only one additional observational footnote. The Nephilim are noted as being אַנְשֵׁי הַשֵּׁם ("men of the name"). While usually translated "men of renown," the New Living Translation provides "the heroes and famous warriors of ancient times."[108] This interpretive translation gives the sense that the Nephilim were just men who performed heroic and memorable deeds, but the Hebrew is quite specific in "men of the name." The idea is repeated in Genesis 11, when the people of Babel, led by Nimrod (described as a גִּבֹּר in Gen 10:8) try to make a name for themselves. The result is not as catastrophic as the Flood, but almost. God created a confusion in the world that has lasted up until the present day.

In chapter 11, it seems as if there is no hope for the earth and its inhabitants. Judgment continues until something happens in chapter 12. What happens is grace––grace that is manifested in God choosing a man for Himself to carry the seed. With Abram, God said, "I will make your name great" (12:2). When the seed, or the name of the seed, is threatened, God acts with swift judgment. It is only God who will name the seed, and it is only God who will make His name great. The Nephilim were more than just "men of renown." They were in some sense demigods, who were ascribing the name of "deliverer" to themselves, an attempt which only ended in certain and complete destruction.

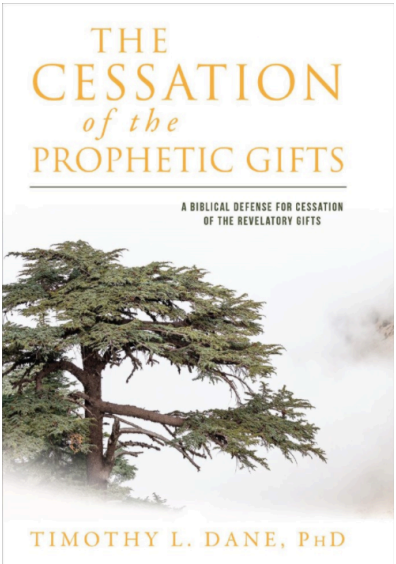
## Conclusion

Genesis 6:1–4 is a passage that terrifies most preachers and causes many scholars and theologians to be brief in their comments. Because of the brevity of the text, the identity of the "sons of God" and the Nephilim leave even the most serious scholar humbled and left to discussing options yet offering no position. Over the years, many have met the challenge of this text and landed on one position or another while following strong convictions. As to taking a position, they are to be commended.

[108] *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 1996).

This article set out to demonstrate the advantage of using a biblical-theological approach to interpretation. In a way, the choice of text, one which requires the exegete to climb the Mt. Everest of exegetical difficulty, proves the benefit of the method, because it leads to clarity with conviction. Difficult passages like Genesis 6:1–4 can be understood in a way that harmonizes with the rest of Scripture when one understands the theme of "promise" in the seed of Jesus Christ, who will crush the seed of Satan, and will glorify God in both judgment and salvation. The promise of 3:15, in the near context of Genesis 6:1–4, is a motive for ungodly angels to attempt to wreak demonic mischief upon God's plan. The short pericope under evaluation thus offers insight into how God is always in control of redemption. In fact, He uses Satan's own plan to fulfill the prophecy that He Himself gave to Satan in 3:15––the Nephilim (Satan's seeds) were crushed by Noah, Israel, and David (the pure seed of the woman).

The "ungodly angel" view is the only interpretation that provides clear and compelling answers to the three questions that have plagued every commentator who deals with this passage. The motive for the Flood was to destroy Satan's offspring and rid the world of "impure" seeds. The reason that mankind was judged and not angels was that the purpose of the Flood was to purify and not to judge. Judgment on the angels certainly did happen, as noted in 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6, but the focus of the Flood was on the counterfeit or corrupted offspring. Angels did procreate with humans, and their pursuit of "strange flesh" resulted in instant judgment without mercy. With these questions answered according to the biblical-theological method, VanGemeren's call to exegetical arms appears to have been answered. The "ungodly angel" view stands resolute on solid ground.

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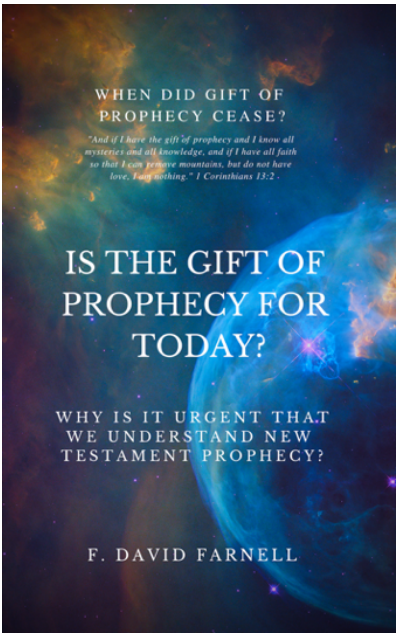


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*MSJ* 31/1 (Spring 2020) 107–23

# THE REALITY OF THE KINGDOM AND THE MINISTRY OF THE CHURCH IN ACTS

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*The role of the kingdom in relation to social work has emerged as a central concern among evangelicals. Within a growing consensus that there is a present form of the kingdom, many are calling churches to reconsider their role in relationship to society in light of the kingdom's presence. Much of the discussion focuses on Christ's teaching about the kingdom and his ministry of word and deed as recorded in the Gospels. Due to the focus on Jesus' earthly life and ministry, it may be easy to overlook how the early church viewed and carried out their responsibility in relationship to the kingdom. In order to ascertain the role of the kingdom in relation to social work for the church, one must consider the account of Acts. This article will survey the passages in Acts that pertain to the early church's understanding of the kingdom. In conjunction with that, the portions of Acts that deal with activities often associated with social work will be evaluated followed by a discussion of related theological issues. This study will seek to demonstrate that the account of the church in Acts provides no evidence for the idea that the kingdom serves as a basis for the church to express the rule of Christ in society at large.*

* * * * *

## Introduction

The relationship of the church to the kingdom remains an area in which theologians differ. However, the role of the kingdom in relation to social work has emerged as a central concern among evangelicals. Within a growing consensus that there is a present form of the kingdom, many are calling churches to reconsider their role in relationship to society in light of the kingdom's presence.[1] Much of the discussion focuses on Christ's teaching about the kingdom and his ministry of word and deed as recorded in the Gospels. Many have concluded that Jesus taught a present form of

[1] E.g., "If the Kingdom is concerned with the ultimate transformation of creation, society, and culture, then these things are certainly worthy of the concern of the regenerate church in the present epoch of redemption history." Russell D. Moore, *The Kingdom of Christ: The New Evangelical Perspective* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 123.

the kingdom and demonstrated its presence through deeds of mercy in healing the poor and welcoming the outcasts; therefore, the church is called to demonstrate the rule of Jesus in their individual lives and in society at large with both words and deeds. They are called to extend Jesus' kingdom to every aspect of the world.

Due to the focus on Jesus' earthly life and ministry, it may be easy to overlook how the early church viewed and carried out their responsibility in relationship to the kingdom. In order to ascertain the role of the kingdom in relation to social work for the church, one must consider the account of Acts. This article will endeavor to survey the passages in Acts that pertain to the early church's understanding of the kingdom. In conjunction with that, the portions of Acts that deal with activities often associated with social work will be evaluated followed by a discussion of related theological issues. This study will seek to determine whether or not the account of the church in Acts provides evidence for the idea that the kingdom serves as a basis for the church to express the rule of Christ in society at large.

## Clarifying the Issue

It is vital to understand the particular question being addressed in this article in order to properly grasp the conclusion. Thus, it may be helpful to clarify the issue under consideration. The purpose here is not necessarily to determine whether the kingdom is present, future, or both. Though it may be important at times to touch upon that question in an explanation of a passage, a determinative answer will not be pursued.[2] Rather, this study is focusing on the kingdom's relationship to societal involvement by the church.

Nor is the study simply looking at the proposal that the lordship of Christ serves as a motivation for doing good to others. The question being considered is not whether the reality of the kingdom of God frees believers from living as though this world were the ultimate reality. Undoubtedly the promises of the kingdom help shape the outlook of believers today, as Thomas Schreiner notes:

> The hope of the gospel promises that righteousness will conquer and evil will be defeated. Therefore, everything that believers face in the world must be assessed in light of the future, for the future world of righteousness represents ultimate reality. Evil's reign will be short-lived. Hence, believers can face the world without falling prey to cynicism, despair, or misrepresentation. They encounter the world knowing its destiny and with the certainty that a new creation will dawn.[3]

Rather, the question focuses on whether or not the church is called to seek justice and well-being in society at large because of the kingdom. Many today state that the present form of the kingdom helps the church to understand that its mission includes the confrontation of every form of evil in society. As Karl Allen Kuhn summarizes

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[2] A study of Acts could never settle the question, for a definitive answer would require analysis of both Old Testament and New Testament passages.

[3] Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 756.

his understanding of Luke's teaching on the kingdom: "The world misshaped by Satan and the elite is to be undone by the advent of the Kingdom in Jesus and its advance in the mission of the early church."[4]

Craig Blaising, in his explanation of progressive dispensationalism, argues that "the social ministry of the church … flows from … the fact that the church is a manifestation of the future kingdom."[5] He states that the church's "connection with the coming kingdom gives the church a basis for an evangelistic participation in the political and social affairs of this world," adding that as "the church becomes the workshop in which kingdom righteousness is pursued in the name of Christ, then social ministry externally becomes a call to Christ."[6]

George Ladd, while promoting a premillennial understanding of the kingdom with a current inaugurated form, argues for the church's involvement in opposing every form of evil in society in light of the kingdom:

> Thus the mission of the Church is not only that of employing the keys of the Kingdom to open to both Jew and Gentile the door into the eternal life which is the gift of God's Kingdom; it is also the instrument of God's dynamic rule in the world to oppose evil and the powers of Satan in every form of their manifestation. When God's people lose sight of this fact, we betray our character as the Church. We are the focus of a conflict between the Kingdom of God and satanic evil. This is essentially a conflict in the spiritual realm. But these spiritual forces of satanic evil and of God's Kingdom manifest themselves in the areas of human conduct and relationships. Therefore we must press the battle against the powers of darkness wherever we find them until the day dawns and the light of the knowledge of God shall fill the earth.[7]

Tim Keller, an amillennialist, states that the church is not merely to demonstrate to the world what the kingdom is like as a countercultural people but is to extend the kingdom into the world.

> The church is to be an agent of the kingdom. It is not only to model the healing of God's rule but it is to spread it. "You are … a royal priesthood, a holy nation … that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Peter 2:9). Christians go into the world as witnesses of the kingdom (Acts 1:6–8). To spread the kingdom of God is more than simply winning people to Christ. It is also working for the healing of persons, families, relationships, and nations; it is doing deeds of mercy and seeking justice. It is ordering lives and relationships and institutions and communities according to God's authority to bring in the

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[4] Karl Allen Kuhn, *The Kingdom according to Luke and Acts: A Social, Literary, and Theological Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 253.

[5] Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Wheaton, IL: BridgePoint, 1993), 286.

[6] Ibid., 289–90.

[7] George Eldon Ladd, *The Gospel of the Kingdom: Scriptural Studies in the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 121–22

blessedness of the kingdom.[8]

Gary North, a postmillennial reconstructionist, argues that only a postmillennial understanding of the kingdom provides a proper motivation for believers to involve themselves in society: "When Christians do not view their present social involvement as possessing a fundamental continuity with the emergence (i.e., development or extension) of the kingdom of God in history, they have little incentive to develop a specifically Christian social theory."[9]

Thus, the question under consideration is whether any of these understandings find support in the account in Acts. Does the early church evidence motivation to extend the kingdom into society through social involvement?

## Survey of Acts

In order to address this question, two kinds of passages must be studied.[10] Passages that appear to address the kingdom will be evaluated to determine if they make any connection to societal involvement. Then, passages in Acts that appear to address societal involvement will be presented to see what kind of involvement is entailed and if they present a connection to the kingdom.

### Kingdom Passages in Acts

The passages under consideration will include those that explicitly mention the kingdom as well as some which seem to emphasize ideas related to the kingdom. Alan Thompson has argued that the mention of the kingdom at the beginning and the ending of Acts shows that the book as a whole needs to be understood through the framing of the kingdom even when it is not explicitly mentioned.[11] However, the fact that Luke only explicitly mentions the kingdom eight times in Acts as opposed to forty-four times in the Gospel of Luke should lead us to temper that assertion.[12]

### Explicit Mention of the Kingdom

There are eight uses of the term kingdom in the book of Acts: Acts 1:3, 6–8; 8:12; 14:21–22; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 30–31.[13]

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[8] Timothy J. Keller, *Ministries of Mercy: The Call of the Jericho Road*, 2nd ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1997), 54.

[9] Gary North, *Millennialism and Social Theory* (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1990), 95.

[10] Space does not permit any of the passages to be studied in depth, so many points of exegetical detail must be left unaddressed. However, a general sense of the passage will be attempted with more detail given in matters related to the question at hand.

[11] Alan J. Thompson, *The Acts of the Risen Lord Jesus: Luke's Account of God's Unfolding Plan*, New Studies in Biblical Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 44.

[12] Michael J. Vlach, *He Will Reign Forever: A Biblical Theology of the Kingdom of God* (Silverton, OR: Lampion, 2017), 401.

[13] Darrell L. Bock, *Acts,* BEC (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 328

*Acts 1:3*—He presented himself alive to them after His suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.[14]

At the beginning of Luke's second book, he mentions Jesus' pre-ascension ministry with His disciples. During that forty-day period, Jesus proved the reality of His resurrection and taught His disciples about the kingdom of God. The necessity for this teaching comes from the disciples' failure to understand how Jesus' death could relate to the Messianic hope.[15] The parallel passages in Luke 24:25–27 and 44–49 confirm the idea that Jesus was showing His apostles how the Old Testament Scriptures taught that Jesus' suffering was a necessary part of God's saving plan.[16] The resurrection meant that His suffering did not destroy the promise of the kingdom. The details of the kingdom are not given here, so it is difficult to determine whether Jesus' teaching about the kingdom related to society at large in any way. Since the verse does seem to act as a heading of sorts for the remainder of the book, what the kingdom entails will be clarified as the story progresses.

*Acts 1:6–8*—So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by His own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

The wording at the beginning of verse 6 indicates that this is the final conversation Jesus had with His apostles before His ascension.[17] Thus, the apostles had received instruction concerning the kingdom for the last forty days. However, the precise timing of the kingdom had not been declared, so they asked Jesus, "Will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" There are several assumptions found within that question: (1) this is a restoration of a kingdom which once existed; (2) this restoration was still future; (3) the kingdom would be restored to national Israel; and (4) the lacking piece of information was the timing of the restoration.[18] Jesus replied that the apostles are not to know the timing of this restoration. It is significant to note that Jesus does not correct the disciples' understanding of the kingdom, especially since Jesus regularly rebuked or corrected those who asked Him questions.[19]

Rather than concerning themselves with the timing of the restoration of the kingdom, the disciples must focus on the task they have been given in the meantime.[20] They are to be Jesus' witnesses. Some have seen a subtle shift of emphasis in Jesus' reply. Rather than rejecting the idea of a restoration, they claim Jesus "depoliticized"

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[14] All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the *English Standard Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001).

[15] Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH, 1974), 390.

[16] David Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*. PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 105.

[17] F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 35.

[18] McClain, *Greatness of the Kingdom*, 393–94.

[19] John A. McLean, "Did Jesus Correct the Disciples' View of the Kingdom?" *Bib Sac* 151 (April–June 1994): 218–19.

[20] Bock, *Acts,* p. 62.

it.[21] As F. F. Bruce states, "their present question appears to have been the last flicker of their former burning expectation of an imminent theocracy with themselves as its chief executives. From now on they devoted themselves to the proclamation and service of God's spiritual kingdom."[22] However, as John McLean has pointed out:

> The difficulty with this proposal is that Jesus did not redefine the kingdom by mandating the proclamation of the gospel. The proclamation of the gospel was a central focus of Peter's sermons and his anticipation was that "the times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord … whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time" (Acts 3:19, 21). Peter's language reflected his continued expectation of the coming of the kingdom (cf. Acts 1:11; Matt 17:11).[23]

As Michael Vlach has argued, "It is highly probable after forty days of instruction from the risen Jesus that the apostles had a proper grasp on the nature of the kingdom of God."[24] Thus Jesus was not altering the apostles' assumptions of the kingdom but was instructing them with their mission "during the unrevealed time of the Interregnum.[25]" While waiting for the guaranteed return of Christ (cf. 1:11), the mission of Christ's followers is to bear witness to Jesus to the ends of the earth.[26]

*Acts 8:12*—But when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.

In Acts 8, Philip moves out of Jerusalem in connection with the growing persecution and begins preaching Christ in Samaria and performing signs, such as casting out demons and healing the lame. While discussing Simon the magician's profession of faith in 8:9–13, Luke mentions that the Samaritans "believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ" and were baptized as a result of that faith.

Here is the first explicit mention of the kingdom of God in relation to the ministry of the disciples. Again, Luke does not provide specific content for what Philip is saying as he preaches the kingdom of God. However, his message is described in various ways in this passage: it is the "word" (v. 4), "Christ" (v. 5), the "kingdom of God" (v. 12), and "the name of Christ" (v. 12).[27] It seems that these descriptions are at least related if not identical in providing the content of Philip's message.[28] Thus, the preaching of the kingdom is closely tied in with preaching the Word and Christ. Here, the activities of the disciples in relation to the kingdom include preaching, performing signs, and baptizing believers.

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[21] John B. Polhill, *Acts*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 84.
[22] Bruce, *Book of Acts,* 36.
[23] McLean, "Did Jesus Correct the Disciples' View of the Kingdom?" 218.
[24] Vlach, *He Will Reign Forever*, 403.
[25] McClain, *Greatness of the Kingdom*, 395.
[26] Bock, *Acts*, 66.
[27] The disciples' preaching of "the gospel" in v. 25 might also be related.
[28] Polhill, *Acts*, 216

*Acts 14:21–22*—When they had preached the gospel to that city and had made many disciples, they returned to Lystra and to Iconium and to Antioch, strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.

Towards the end of Paul and Barnabas's first missionary journey, they returned to some of the cities where they had previously started churches. They did three things there: (1) strengthened souls of the disciples, (2) encouraged them to continue in the faith, and (3) told them that "through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God." Here, nearly all commentators agree that the kingdom refers to a future reality.[29] Paul and Barnabas are not laying out the requirements for entrance to the kingdom but affirming that the divine plan includes suffering. However, "the gospel provides a certainty about entering the kingdom of God."[30] Thus, believers are enabled to persevere in their faith, even in the midst of suffering and persecution, because of the reality of the future kingdom. Believers are called to stay true in the midst of tribulation, since "it is those who suffer for and with Christ now who will share His glory."[31]

*Acts 19:8*—And he entered the synagogue and for three months spoke boldly, reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God.

In Acts 19, Paul was ministering in Ephesus. As was his custom when entering a new city, he began by teaching in the synagogue. His teaching in the synagogue of Ephesus was longer than most places, lasting for three months. Luke states that Paul's teaching there included "reasoning and persuading them about the kingdom of God" (v. 8). Luke uses similar language regarding Paul's interaction with Jews in other locations where he describes Paul proving that Jesus is the Christ (e.g., 9:22; 18:5). It seems that Luke uses "the kingdom of God" here as a different way to describe Paul's argument that Jesus is the promised Messiah of the Old Testament.[32] Paul's ministry in connection to the kingdom here consists primarily of reasoning and persuading that Jesus fulfills Old Testament promises concerning the Messiah.[33]

*Acts 20:25*—And now, behold, I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again.

In Acts 20, Paul has gathered the elders of Ephesus to address them on his journey back to Jerusalem. In verse 25, he refers to his ministry among them as going about "proclaiming the kingdom." At other times in this address, he refers to his ministry as "testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ" (v. 21); testifying "to the gospel of the grace of God" (v. 24); and "declaring to you the whole counsel of God." All of these may refer to the

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[29] E.g., Bock states: "Unlike other texts in Acts, where 'kingdom' refers to God's entire program, here the term refers to the moment of final vindication that one enters after death." Bock, *Acts*, 482.

[30] Peterson, *Acts of the Apostles*, 414.

[31] Bruce, *Book of Acts*, 280.

[32] Bock, *Acts*, 600.

[33] There might also be a connection with the miracles Paul performed in 19:11.

same general message, but it is especially difficult to distinguish between "the gospel of the grace of God" and "the kingdom."[34] Paul's proclamation of the kingdom here appears to have not only been a message to unbelievers but also a continuing message to believers.

*Acts 28:23*—When they had appointed a day for him, they came to him at his lodging in greater numbers. From morning till evening he expounded to them, testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets.

After Paul finally arrives in Rome, he meets the Jews there. He spends an entire day "testifying to the kingdom of God and trying to convince them about Jesus both from the Law of Moses and from the Prophets." The kingdom of God and Jesus are linked together in Paul's preaching and persuading ministry, giving further support for the connection suggested in Acts 19:8. As well, the emphasis is placed on the Old Testament's teaching concerning Jesus and the kingdom. Paul sought to persuade these Jews that Jesus was the promised Messiah who would ultimately restore the kingdom to Israel.[35] Some of the Jews were convinced and believed, while others disbelieved. Thus, Paul's argument about the kingdom is closely related to his preaching of the gospel.

*Acts 28:30–31*—He lived there two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance.

Luke concludes his book with Paul living in Rome for two years and "proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance." Paul continued to preach the same message he had declared to the Jews in verse 23.[36] Luke begins and ends the book with the idea of the kingdom, making it a literary *inclusio* that highlights its significance for the book of Acts.[37] The task that Christ gave to His apostles in 1:8 is being fulfilled as His disciples witness about Him and the kingdom throughout the world.

In the passages of Acts that explicitly mention the kingdom, the disciples are witnessing, preaching, baptizing believers, performing miracles, encouraging perseverance in believers, and persuading unbelievers.[38]

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[34] Bruce, *Book of Acts*, 391n58.

[35] Homer Austin Kent, *Jerusalem to Rome: Studies in the Book of Acts* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1972), 195.

[36] Polhill, *Acts*, 546.

[37] Bock, *Acts*, 754. Though not, as argued above, meaning that everything in Acts must be viewed in relation to the kingdom.

[38] Acts 17:7, where the mob at Thessalonica accuses Paul and Silas of saying that Jesus is another king beside Caesar, is not included in the above section for two reasons. First, it is difficult to determine if the accusation was legitimate—if Paul and Silas really were saying that Jesus was a king. Second, there are no related ideas or activities that are not listed in the other passages.

Passages Related to the Kingdom

Though they do not explicitly mention the kingdom, four other passages in Acts are often connected to the idea of the kingdom and help provide some detail to what the disciples said when they preached the gospel of the kingdom: Peter's sermon at Pentecost in Acts 2:14–41; Peter's sermon in the temple in Acts 3:12–26; Paul's sermon in Antioch Pisidia in Acts 13:16–41; and James's argument at the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15:13–21. The context and basic point of the passages will be considered with a focus on the call to action given.

*Acts 2:14–41*

In Acts 2, Christ's promise of Acts 1:8 is fulfilled as the Holy Spirit comes on the disciples and they begin to speak in tongues. As the Jews from every nation gathered around to see the spectacle, Peter addresses them and provides an explanation for what they were seeing. Peter's argument is intended to prove that Jesus is the promised Christ and the sovereign Lord.[39] He quotes from Joel 2:28–32, Ps 16:8–11, and Ps 110:1 to demonstrate that the promises of the Old Testament are being fulfilled through Jesus. The speech, as a whole, shows that the gospel is "the good news that God's promise has come in Jesus, who died for sin and sits at God's side, distributing the benefits of salvation rooted in forgiveness and the provision of the Spirit."[40]

When asked how to respond to this message, Peter urges the Jews to "repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (2:38). The appropriate activity in light of the message that Jesus is the promised Messiah and the sovereign Lord is repentance and baptism.[41] The benefits that result from that response are forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Spirit.

*Acts 3:12–26*

Sometime after Peter's speech at Pentecost, he and John heal a lame man at the temple. As the people at the temple gathered around Peter in wonder, he takes the opportunity to preach to the crowd. In the first portion of his speech (vv. 12–18), Peter explains why the healing took place. In the second portion (vv. 19–26), he seeks a response to these facts—repentance and a turning to the offer of forgiveness.[42] If they respond in this way, four benefits will follow: (1) their sins will be blotted out; (2) they will experience "times of refreshing" from the Lord; (3) God will send Jesus; and (4) the time of the restoration of all things will come.[43] If they repent and turn,

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[39] Kent, *Studies in Acts*, 32–33.

[40] Bock, *Acts*, 108.

[41] Repentance affirms a belief in the message by turning to its truth, and baptism is the means by which believers publicly associate themselves with God's redeemed people.

[42] Ibid., 165.

[43] Whether or not this was an official offer/reoffer of the kingdom will not be discussed here. For a defense of the view that it is an official reoffer, see McClain, *Greatness of the Kingdom*, 403–6. For an argument that Peter was not offering the kingdom but was merely "preaching a message of repentance

they will begin the process that will guarantee their ultimate experience of all these blessings.[44]

*Acts 13:16–41*

Early in Paul's first missionary journey, he and Barnabas arrive in Antioch in Pisidia. While in the synagogue on the Sabbath, they are invited to speak. Luke then gives Paul's first recorded sermon. He presents a historical review of Israel's history up until David (vv. 17–22) followed by an argument that Jesus is the promised Messiah who fulfills the Old Testament prophecies (vv. 23–37).[45] He concludes with an offer of forgiveness and a warning against unbelief (vv. 38–41). The result of their accepting this message will be forgiveness of sins and freedom from everything which the Law of Moses could not free them.

In all three sermons, the hearers are urged to accept the message. This acceptance includes things like repentance, baptism, and turning. The benefits of accepting the message include forgiveness of sins, the gift of the Spirit, participation in God's plans for Jesus' return, and greater freedom than that found in the Mosaic Covenant.

*Acts 15:13–21*

During the Jerusalem Council, James appeals to the message of the prophets to show that God intended Gentiles to benefit from His work of salvation through Jesus Christ. He references an Old Testament kingdom passage, a partial fulfillment of Acts 9:11–12, to understand the nature of Gentile salvation.[46] James seems to not only reference Amos but the general message of the prophets.[47] His focus is on the inclusion of the Gentiles as God's people without becoming Jews.[48] They could remain as Gentiles as they seek the Lord.[49] Thus, the church decides not to require Gentile believers to follow the Mosaic Law. The focus here is on the nature of salvation for the Gentiles and the only social ramification would be for Jews to embrace Gentile believers as part of God's people.

## Social Involvement Passages in Acts

There are several passages in Acts that record believers either doing or encouraging acts often tied to social involvement. These passages will be briefly considered to determine the specific nature of the act and any ties to the kingdom.

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that reflected his understanding of eschatology," which did not yet include a full understanding of the timing of the kingdom, the nature of the church, and the inclusion of the Gentiles, see McLean, "Did Jesus Correct the Disciples' View of the Kingdom?" 225–26.

[44] Bock. *Acts*, 175–78.

[45] McClain, *Greatness of the Kingdom*, 416.

[46] Vlach, *He Will Reign Forever*, 423–24.

[47] Bock, *Acts*, 503.

[48] Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Acts*, ECNT, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 640.

[49] Richard N. Longenecker, *Acts*, EBC, vol. 10, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 947.

*Acts 2:42–47*

After Peter's sermon at Pentecost, Luke describes the early fellowship of the believers. They gave themselves to doctrine, fellowship, the Lord's Table, and prayer. They marveled at the signs done through the apostles and were praising God. They also shared with each other, selling their possessions and distributing the proceeds as needs arose.[50] Some argue that the reason they acted this way was their expectation that Christ would soon return. They placed little value on their existing possessions because they knew there would be a divine restoration when the kingdom came.[51] However, the reason given in the text is social—the needs of the community.[52]

Those benefitting from this social work are believers. Since this description comes on the heels of Peter's message at Pentecost, their activity may be related to the message of the kingdom in Acts. They responded to this message by giving themselves to the life of the newly formed church and providing for the needs of fellow believers.

*Acts 4:32–37*

Luke gives another short description of the nature of believers' interaction with each other in the church in this passage. They were united in heart and soul, and the apostles continued to testify of Jesus. Luke gives a description similar to 2:42–47 regarding the possessions of this young church. They willingly shared with each other, selling their lands and houses to distribute to those in need. Apparently, the apostles oversaw the distribution at this stage. Though some have tried to argue that this is an experiment in community ownership, the evidence clearly points to a voluntary practice. As Longenecker notes, "Though these early Christians had *personal* possessions, they did not consider them to be *private* possessions…to be held exclusively for their own use and enjoyment."[53] Polhill lists five relevant facts in this regard.[54] (1) Rather than describing a transfer of ownership or a forced surrendering of property, the iterative imperfect verbs communicate a selling of goods as needs arose. (2) Barnabas' example in 4:36–37 would be unimpressive if it was obligatory. (3) Peter tells Ananias in 5:4 that he could do what he wanted with his land and was under no obligation to give the money to the church after selling his land. (4) The care of widows in 6:1–6 is presented as a charity fund for the needy, not as a common fund from which each person is apportioned. (5) In Acts 12:12ff, Mary still had a maid and owned her own home where fellow believers would gather.

The acts of sharing and charity here are done on behalf of fellow believers. There does not appear to be any direct link to the kingdom in this passage.

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[50] Polhill, *Acts*, 120.

[51] McClain, *Greatness of the Kingdom*, 402.

[52] Bock, *Acts*, 153. This reason does not necessarily preclude the expectation of Christ's soon return. That expectation may have made them more inclined to sell their possessions to help those in need.

[53] Longenecker, *Acts*, 782.

*Acts 6:1–6*

An issue arises in the church in Acts 6. Some of the Hellenistic widows were being neglected in the distribution of the church, perhaps caused by the growing number of disciples.[55] The apostles, who had been overseeing the distribution, had likely enlisted Aramaic-speaking Jews to help in the distribution. It is probable that these helpers had been overlooking, not necessarily intentionally neglecting, the Greek-speaking widows.[56] Though the problem surfaced along ethnic lines, the community realized that these normal lines of demarcation should not exist in the church.[57] The apostles determined that this matter was not important enough for them to abandon their preaching and prayer ministry. Thus, they instructed the believers to choose men to oversee the distribution to the widows. These men, most likely the first deacons of the church, ensured that all the widows were cared for in the distribution of the church.[58]

Again, believers are the beneficiaries of this charity work. There is no explicit link to the kingdom in this passage.

*Acts 9:36–42*

In this passage Luke records the miraculous resurrection of Dorcas. She is described as someone "full of good works and acts of charity." At least part of her charity entailed providing garments for widows, who wore these garments as they displayed them to Peter.[59] "Her charity to the widows would qualify her as a genuine precursor of those women who helped widows so that the church would not be burdened (1 Tim 5:16)."[60]

Though it is not explicitly stated, it seems reasonable to assume that the widows were part of the group of disciples mentioned in the passage. There is no explicit link with her charity work and the kingdom.

*Acts 10:2*

Luke introduces the account of Cornelius's salvation by describing him. He is a God-fearer, who shows his devotion to God by giving alms and praying.[61] These are two of the three central works of Jewish piety.[62] Most likely, as a God-fearer, his giving of alms would have been to poor Israelites,[63] though it is not explicitly limited to them and may have included Gentiles in the city.[64] There is no connection to the kingdom given.

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[55] Schnabel, *Acts*, 329.

[56] Polhill, *Acts*, 179.

[57] Bock, *Acts*, 258.

[58] It might be that the funds for this distribution came from the properties that were sold and brought to the church.

[59] Bruce, *Book of Acts,* 199.

[60] Polhill, *Acts*, 247.

[61] Bock, *Acts*, 385–86.

[62] Polhill, *Acts*, 252.

[63] Bruce, *Book of Acts,* 203.

[64] Schnabel, *Acts*, 485.

*Acts 11:27–30*

Agabus, one of the prophets from Jerusalem, prophesies in Antioch that a great famine would be coming on the world. The believers in Antioch decide that they will send some help to the believers in Judea. This relief was to be done "everyone according to his ability" (v. 29). After gathering these funds, they send them to Jerusalem with Barnabas and Saul. The church in Antioch, predominantly Gentile, showed its care and concern for the needs of believers in Judea, predominantly Jewish, by providing funds to help in disaster relief.[65]

This gift demonstrated a concern for fellow believers from different ethnicities and from different local churches. There is no mention of the kingdom.

*Acts 20:33–35*

As Paul meets with the Ephesian elders, he reminds them of his example in regard to finances. Paul never coveted anyone else's possessions but rather labored with his own hands to provide for himself and his team. In this way, he provided an example to the Ephesian elders, who are also called to work to provide for themselves and to provide for others—the weak.[66] Paul's use of "must" shows that it is a moral imperative to help the weak.[67] Paul reminds the elders that they are not to live for material goods but are to use them to provide for those in need.

Paul does not clarify whether the weak here refers to believers or would include weak unbelievers as well. The only mention of the kingdom was earlier in Paul's speech as he described the elders as people among whom he had preached the kingdom.

*Acts 24:17*

As Paul gives his defense before Felix, he describes his return to Jerusalem as coming to "bring alms to my nation and to present offerings." This reference "is the one clear remark in Acts confirming the fact that Paul had brought a collection for the church in Jerusalem (Gal 2:10; Rom 15:26; 2 Cor 8–9). For Paul, this offering was appropriate as a reflection of the church's unity and the contribution Jerusalem had made to the Gentiles' faith."[68]

From the other passages, it is clear that Paul's offering was for believers in Jerusalem. There is no connection made with the kingdom.

## Survey Conclusions

After surveying passages related to the kingdom and passages discussing social work, it is possible to draw some tentative conclusions. The kingdom of God is a significant part of the book of Acts, since it opens and closes with teaching about the

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[65] Bock, *Acts*, 418.
[66] Bruce, *Book of Acts,* 395.
[67] Bock, *Acts*, 632.
[68] Ibid., 693.

kingdom. This, however, does not mean that everything found in Acts is related to the kingdom. It simply shows that the kingdom was an important part of the early church's teaching.

The kingdom is typically mentioned in reference to verbal ministry. It is preached, argued for, and taught. It is connected to the message of the gospel in Acts, which focuses on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus as well as His coming judgment.[69]

The relationship of the kingdom to those outside the church is exclusively one of invitation to embrace the message of the kingdom by repentance. Unbelievers are called to recognize that Jesus is the promised Messiah and to submit themselves to Him as Lord. If they refuse, they will be judged and condemned by Him.

The primary means of proclaiming this kingdom was arguing from Old Testament passages that discussed the promised Messiah and connecting those to the person and work of Jesus. The apostles proved that Jesus was the fulfillment of these promises and was now offering forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Spirit. Christ's followers will participate in God's total plan of restoration and redemption when he returns.

The teaching of the kingdom in relationship to believers is connected to persevering in the midst of trials and being on guard against false teachers. The teaching of the kingdom for the church did not include the hope of a utopia on earth in this present age. Rather, it assured difficulty for the believer.

The social ministry of the early church recorded in Acts was almost exclusively focused on fellow believers. There are no explicit ties between the kingdom and mercy ministry in Acts. At most, one might argue that the realities of the kingdom in Acts lead believers to care for fellow believers in need by sharing one's resources with others, to organize that care by designating particular individuals to ensure that this care is distributed fairly, to remove natural distinctions—like ethnic division—between believers, to seek to minister to needy churches in other areas during times of crisis, and to work to provide for oneself and the weak.

There are no examples of ministries that are intended to transform the structures of society at large. The believers in Acts do not unite to oppose all injustice, or to implement kingdom ethics on societal institutions, or to shape government by Old Testament laws. If they did participate in these activities, Luke did not consider it necessary to record them or make a connection to the message of the kingdom.

## Other Theological Issues

In order to establish a more solid conclusion about the presence of the kingdom and the ministry of the church in relation to society, two other key theological issues must be touched upon.[70] The nature and purpose of the miracles in Acts will be presented followed by the believers' relationship to government in Acts.

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[69] Bruce, *Book of Acts*, 32–33.

[70] None of the issues can be presented in depth, but some key points regarding the kingdom and social involvement will be addressed.

Miracles in Acts

Miracles occur throughout the book of Acts. Specific miracles are mentioned, such as the healing of the lame man in the temple (Acts 3:1–10), the resurrection of Dorcas (9:36–43), the healing of the cripple in Lystra (14:8–18), and the exorcism of the slave girl in Philippi (16:16–18). There are also several summary statements of miracles: regarding all of the apostles (2:43; 5:12); regarding Peter's work (5:15–16); regarding Stephen (6:8); regarding Philip (8:6); regarding Paul and Barnabas (14:3; 15:12); and regarding Paul alone (19:11–12; 28:9).[71] These miracles seem to be done mostly in public, with many witnesses. They also are often tied to the preaching of the gospel, with those seeing the miracles being amazed by them and unable to deny their validity.[72]

The purpose of these miracles may be tied to the kingdom. They are similar to the ones Jesus did during His earthly ministry in announcing the kingdom. However, they seem to wane as the New Testament progresses. One possible explanation is that these miracles were given as part of the offer of the kingdom, but the rejection of the kingdom by the Jewish nation led to a decline in these miracles and an almost complete absence by A. D. 70 when Jerusalem was destroyed. Alva J. McClain concludes:

> The great miracles of Acts, then, are powers which really belong to the Millennial Kingdom. This suggests that their occasional and partial enjoyment by the generation living during the time of Acts, as also in the period of the Gospels, was intended to authenticate an offer of the Kingdom to Israel, a genuine offer although conditioned on the repentance of the nation. And it explains why, following the crises of Jewish rejection reached in Acts 28 and the destruction of Jerusalem, the age of great public miracles came to an end.[73]

However, it is also possible that these miracles were not tied to an offer of the kingdom but were tied to an entrance of the kingdom into the present age.[74] These signs were intended to demonstrate the authenticity of the messengers and the message during a time of transition in salvation history. Eventually, the transitional period would end, so there would be no more expectation of miraculous signs as normative in the Christian life.[75]

In either explanation, these miracles are considered extraordinary and temporal. Thus, they provide no support for contemporary societal involvement by the church. In contrast, Nicholas Perrin argues that practices of healing, exorcism, and proclamation by Jesus in the Gospel of Luke are the primary signs of the entrance of the kingdom, the church in Acts is seen to continue these three activities as witness to the inbreaking of the kingdom, and thus the church should continue to emphasize them

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[71] McClain, *Greatness of the Kingdom*, 407.
[72] Ibid., 407–8.
[73] Ibid., 412.
[74] Peterson, *Acts of the Apostles*, 83–86.
[75] Ibid., 86–87.

today. "Today's church would do well to consider each of Jesus's present signs [healing, exorcism, proclamation], in their broadest sense, as strategic priorities for its own vocation;"[76] and "I believe that all churches everywhere are called to carry out ministries of exorcism and spiritual warfare, healing, and proclamation (though this threefold reality can have a lot of different looks)."[77]

But Perrin is forced to expand and reinterpret these activities to include healing that is not only physical but emotional, social, and spiritual and exorcism that is primarily carried out through prayer and fasting.[78] It is illegitimate to argue that these miraculous signs of power in Luke and Acts find their parallel today in ordinary acts of service. To argue for a church to care for the sick by funding health clinics on the basis of the apostles' healing of the sick denigrates the nature and purpose of those healings.

It may also be helpful to point out the primacy of the spoken word even in relationship to the signs and wonders in Acts. These signs and wonders are not the ultimate means of the spread of Christianity in the world—preaching and teaching are. David Peterson helpfully concludes, "Luke leaves us with the lasting impression that the work of God is advanced in the world essentially by proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ…. Evangelism without accompanying signs and wonders is in no sense incomplete. The gospel alone is fully sufficient to lead us to faith in Christ and the salvation he has won for us."[79]

## Believers and Government in Acts

Since the argument for societal involvement in light of the presence of the kingdom often includes a call for the kingdom and its justice to be expanded to human governments, it is important to consider the early church's interaction with the government.

In Acts, governmental authorities are at times presented in a positive light. Some, like Sergius Paulus, respond favorably to the preaching of the gospel (Acts 13:5–12). Some, like Gallio, are able to discern when unjust charges are being laid against the believers and dismiss the charges (18:12–17). However, civil authorities are also often portrayed in a negative light. The Jewish leaders wrongly punish the disciples without any judicial basis (5:17–42). Herod kills James and places Peter in prison unjustly (12:1–24). Several civil authorities admit Paul's innocence while still holding him in prison (23:29; 24:10–27; 25:22–27; 26:31). But even in these injustices, it is clear that God remains sovereign over these governments.[80] In Acts 4:24–28, the disciples recognize the wickedness of human government was used by God to carry out His plan.

Even though the government is often portrayed as wicked or unjust, believers are never portrayed as revolting against government. Though they must obey God's directives when they conflict with man's (Acts 5:29), they are otherwise to submit to

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[76] Nicholas Perrin, *The Kingdom of God: A Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019), 166–67.

[77] Ibid., 241.

[78] Ibid., 167.

[79] Peterson, *Acts of the Apostles*., 86–87.

[80] Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 787.

the established government. Schreiner concurs: "In … Luke-Acts … the profound evil and even demonic character of the state is unmasked…Nevertheless, believers are not encouraged to adopt a revolutionary mind-set, as if they could usher in the kingdom of God through political change. They are to pay taxes and ordinarily subordinated themselves to authority."[81]

## Conclusion

The account of the church in Acts provides no evidence for the idea that the reality of the kingdom is a motivation for seeking justice or promoting well-being in society at large. A survey of Acts reveals that the kingdom is primarily associated with the proclamation of the gospel and calls for a response of repentance from unbelievers. The accounts of social ministry in Acts are done almost exclusively among believers, either within a particular assembly or between assemblies, without any explicit connection to the kingdom. The miracles in Acts are not a model of social engagement but were temporary signs of the kingdom. The relationship between believers and the government in Acts provides evidence against a call for believers to spread the kingdom to governments by social engagement, since believers continue to obey God even under unjust governments.

This conclusion does not mean there is no connection between the kingdom and social engagement in the Gospels or the Epistles, though it is at least significant that the account of the early church does not make this connection. Nor does this conclusion necessarily mean that churches, or individual Christians, should not be engaged in societal transformation.[82] But it should at least caution against viewing that type of work as kingdom work or part of the church's mission.

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[81] Ibid., 793–94.

[82] For more fully developed thoughts on how believers and the church should relate to societal transformation, see Benjamin G. Edwards, "Being Jesus, *Missio Dei*, and Kingdom Work: An Analysis, Critique, and Proposal for Modern Approaches to Holistic Ministry," *DBSJ* 19 (2014).

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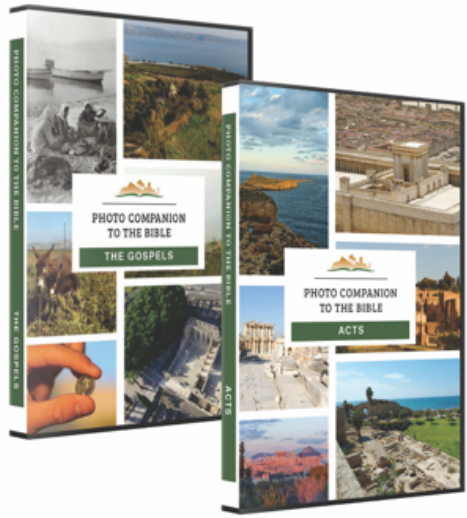


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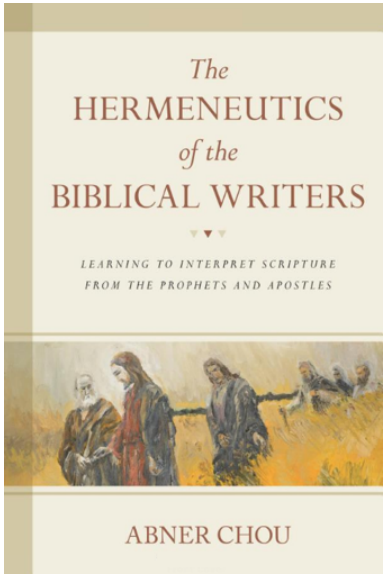


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H. H. Hardy II. *Exegetical Gems from Biblical Hebrew: A Refreshing Guide to Grammar and Interpretation.* Grand Rapids: Baker, 2019. 202 pp., $19.99 Paper.

Reviewed by Iosif J. Zhakevich, Associate Professor of Old Testament, The Master's Seminary.

H. H. "Chip" Hardy II—a graduate of the University of Chicago in Northwest Semitic Philology (PhD, 2014; MA, 2008) and of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Biblical & Theological Studies (MDiv, 2005)—serves as Associate Professor of Old Testament and Semitic Languages at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary (2014–present). In accordance with his rigorous training, Hardy II delivers in *Exegetical Gems from Biblical Hebrew* a robust discussion of some of the major elements of Hebrew grammar that advances the student in the knowledge of the Hebrew language. While this work unapologetically wields technical discussion of Hebrew grammar, the work also excels in bringing the reader to the exegetical implications of Hebrew grammar and toward the practical interpretation of the biblical text.

The work consists of thirty chapters, each chapter presenting a particular element of Hebrew grammar with analysis of the respective grammatical element within a specific passage in the Hebrew Bible. The following is a sampling of a number of chapters that illustrate the topics covered in the work: Chapter 1—Hebrew Language and Literature (Ezekiel 9:4); Chapter 2—Textual Criticism (Genesis 22:13); Chapter 4—Construct Phrases (Genesis 29:17b); Chapter 9—Verb Conjugations 1: *qatal* = *wayyiqtol* (Exodus 16:34–35); Chapter 16—Verb Conjugations 8: Infinitives Absolute (Jeremiah 7:9–10); Chapter 25—Verbless Clauses (Deuteronomy 6:4); Chapter 30—Pragmatics: הִנֵּה (Genesis 1:31).

In each of these chapters, Hardy adheres to a specific structure that governs his explanation of the principle in question. First, he provides a brief *introduction* that sets up the respective principle and exclaims its importance. Second, he offers a general *overview* of the grammatical principle that explains the technicalities of its grammatical function. Third, he includes a section entitled *interpretation*, in which he applies the grammatical principle to a specific passage that contains this principle. Finally, he offers a section designated as *further reading* with relevant resources for additional research.

Overall, this work is a useful instrument for explaining some of the fundamental elements of grammar and for helping the student apply the discussed elements of

grammar for interpretation. One example that illustrates the value of this work can be drawn from Chapter 7 that discusses pronouns and that considers the grammar of pronouns specifically within 2 Kings 8:1b. First, as Hardy introduces the discussion on pronouns, he points to 2 Kings 8:1b and observes that when the Shunammite woman deserts her household due to a famine, the text refers to her and to her household with feminine pronouns; and Hardy suggests that there is exegetical value in this. Second, he explains the usage of pronouns as subjects and as objects; the appearance of pronouns as suffixes on prepositions, nouns, and verbs; the various functions of pronouns for emphasis, topicalization, casus pendens, shift in focus, and other various functions.

After this discussion of grammar, Hardy focuses on the Shunammite woman in 2 Kings 8:1b and explains that the feminine singular pronouns/suffixes suggest that the narrative is describing the misfortune not merely of a poor woman within her household, but, more specifically and more tragically, the misfortune of a widow. While the grammatical trigger for this interpretation is the feminine pronouns in the text, Hardy builds his case by relying upon the entire context of the passage and upon a comparative reading of this passage vis-à-vis the story of Ruth and Naomi. On account of this study, he concludes: "It would appear that the Shunammite woman is widowed and the family's property was in jeopardy. She has to rely upon God's intervention to provide for her and her family's well-being" (47). In other words, the biblical text uses feminine pronouns not merely because the subject of the story is a woman, but, rather, because the subject of the story is a widowed woman who finds herself helpless in a time of difficulty. In addition to this example, the more excellent of Hardy's discussions are his chapters on the voice and valency of verbs (ch. 19), prepositions (ch. 22), and the constructions והיה and ויהי (ch. 28).

Despite the overall value of this work, certain vulnerabilities within Hardy's discussions do emerge. First, and this is the major point of criticism, a small number of Hardy's discussions are less successful in explaining the exegetical value of the grammatical principle. For example, the discussion on definiteness in chapter 5 suffers this shortcoming. While Hardy lays out a helpful explanation of the function of definiteness in Hebrew, the actual case study on Proverbs 31:1—i.e., the definiteness or indefiniteness of the word מַשָּׂא—struggles to illustrate well the exegetical significance of the definiteness or the indefiniteness of a word in the text. The difficulty here is that Hardy does not choose an obviously definite or indefinite noun to demonstrate the implications of that definiteness or indefiniteness. Rather, he chooses a case that is ambiguous, and then, on account of literary context, argues for the noun's indefinite nature, and in the end, he presents the potential implications, all the while acknowledging that "the interpretation of this passage remains inconclusive" (33). Thus, though the reader walks away seeing the difficulty in the passage concerning מַשָּׂא, this case study displays weakness in its attempt to illustrate the exegetical significance of definiteness vs. indefiniteness in Hebrew.

In other instances, but to a lesser degree of consequence, the reader also walks away from Hardy's discussion on the infinitive construct verbs in chapter 15 wondering: What is the distinctive function of the infinitive construct verb? Why does the text use specifically the infinitive construct as opposed to a finite verb? Is it to focus on the action of the verb to the exclusion of the person, gender, and number?

Is there another reason for the specific use of the infinitive construct? The same query applies to Hardy's discussion of the infinitive absolute verbs in chapter 16.

Second, while the sections that Hardy provides for *further reading* of various subjects are generally helpful, at times they are less satisfying. In chapter 2, the list of resources for *further reading* excludes the standard authority on textual criticism, namely, Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism.* In chapter 4, on the discussion of construct phrases, the section would have benefitted from a general resource that provides a list of categories of genitive constructions (e.g., Frederick C. Putnam, *Hebrew Bible Insert*; Bill T. Arnold and John H. Choi, *A Guide to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*; Ronald J. Williams, *Williams' Hebrew Syntax,* 3rd ed., revised and expanded by John C. Beckman; etc.). In chapter 9, on the discussion of the *qatal* and the *wayyiqtol* verbs, the *further reading* section wants sources to the likes of John Cook, *Time and the Biblical Hebrew Verb: The Expression of Tense, Aspect, and Mood in Biblical Hebrew* and perhaps Jan Joosten, *The Verbal System of Biblical Hebrew: A New Synthesis Elaborated on the Basis of the Classical Prose*. These two resources are not mentioned until chapter 17 (see 110), though in a discussion on stative and fientive verbs.

In contrast to these critical comments on sources in *further reading*, Hardy does succeed elsewhere in listing the key helpful resources at the appropriate place, such as his mention of Francis I. Andersen, *The Hebrew Verbless Clause in the Pentateuch* in a discussion on the verbless clause in chapter 25, or his inclusion of Robert D. Holmstedt, *The Relative Clause in Biblical Hebrew*. Since the portions on *further reading* are presented as an important part of the work, they are therefore given to scrutiny as well (xiv).

In the end, I will be gladly recommending this resource to every one of my students at the end of the first year of Beginning Hebrew Grammar and in my Hebrew Exegesis courses. Hardy makes grammar clear and exciting. He explains how the study of some of the intimidating and some of the seemingly boring parts of grammar such as pronouns, prepositions, particles, and other such principles of grammar yield edifying and rewarding results. Hardy is certainly justified in suggesting that this resource can benefit college and seminary students, former Hebrew students, and Hebrew instructors (pp. xiv–xv); and, I would add, this resource can both refresh and also deepen the reader's knowledge of Hebrew.

Timothy L. Dane. *The Cessation of the Prophetic Gifts*. https://frbible.org/dr-tim-dane/, 2016. 545 pp., $35.00 Hardcover.

Reviewed by Kevin D. Zuber, Professor of Theology, The Master's Seminary

In this book, Dr. Timothy L. Dane (MDiv, ThM, The Master's Seminary) takes up the contentious issue of cessation versus continuation of the spiritual gifts. This work is Dr. Dane's doctoral dissertation (PhD, Baptist Bible Seminary, Clarks Summit, Pennsylvania). While the literature on this issue is vast, Dr. Dane's contribution is neither superfluous nor superficial. Indeed, in this work he demonstrates a thorough familiarity with a large percentage of the extensive literature. And he has made a creditable contribution to the overall debate.

Dane has accomplished this by focusing on a specific issue, even a specific passage, 1 Corinthians 13:8–13, and indeed, most specifically on the expression τὸ τέλειον in verse 10. After an introductory chapter (Chapter 1) which provides the reader with an overview of the *Importance*, *Need*, *Limitations*, and *Method* of his study, Dane's approach to dealing with this passage begins with setting forth what he calls the "Historical Interpretations of 1 Corinthians 13:8–13" (Chapter 2), that is, a "historical survey of how various interpreters have handled 1 Corinthians 13:8–13 and the meaning of τὸ τέλειον" (31). The four views surveyed include: (1) the content knowledge view—that in this passage "Paul is merely referring to two states of knowledge, one that is present and incomplete" versus "another state that will be complete when a person enters into the presence of God." (32); (2) the completed canon view—that τὸ τέλειον is the completed canon of the New Testament (as over the "in part" / ἐκ μέρους of v. 9); (3) the eschatology view—which, in Dane's analysis, is actually a cluster of views, wherein "τὸ τέλειον refers in some way to a 'perfect' state of affairs" that will arrive with the return of Christ, or the end of the age, or the eternal state; and (4) the mature-body view (the one Dane opts and argues for in this dissertation), which suggests that with τὸ τέλειον (which Dane argues in Chapter 3 should be understood in the nuance of "mature") Paul is "referring to a certain kind and level of maturity which Paul anticipated would eventually come to the body of Christ" (102). In the analysis of these views in Chapter 2, Dane exhibits a thorough understanding of the views and displays a thorough familiarity with the works of those who argue for the views, and he demonstrates that he knows the strengths and weaknesses of those views. In Chapter 3 he offers the reader a careful and thorough exegetical analysis of the passage, at each point along the way again interacting with various interpreters and bringing the exegesis to bear on his analysis of the four views.

The articulation and argumentation of Dane's mature-body view relies heavily on the work of his mentors from The Master's Seminary, Robert L. Thomas and F. David Farnell. But Dane develops the view so that his work is not a mere reprise of the work of Thomas and Farnell. In specific, Dane argues for a "particular kind of maturity" that has to do with "the nature of the church itself," a maturity that "had both doctrinal [and] practical sides to it" (266). The doctrinal side of that maturity concerned the reality that in the Body of Christ a spiritual union of Jews and Gentiles, with "equal spiritual status," was created (266). The practical side of that maturity concerned the unity and love that this spiritual union was to bring about, which Dane argues was gained "during the apostolic age and produced a cessation of the revelatory gifts" (295).

In Chapter 4 Dane engages in a thorough exegetical analysis of Ephesians 4:11–16 in which he demonstrates that Paul's use of τὸ τέλειον is essentially the same as his use in 1 Corinthians 13:10 and thus supports the version of the mature-body view that Dane proposes. Chapter 5 offers an overview of four key theological considerations of cessationism, and Dane shows how the analyses and exegesis of his previous chapters supports cessationism according to these four key theological considerations.

The book jacket blurb by the aforementioned F. David Farnell begins with the words "Highly Recommended!" This reviewer concurs enthusiastically.

John A. Beck. *The Basic Bible Atlas: A Fascinating Guide to the Land of the Bible*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2020. 176 pp., $16.99 Paper.

Reviewed by Michael A. Grisanti, Professor of Old Testament, The Master's Seminary.

John Beck has published another interesting and valuable work in the area of Bible geography. Beck (PhD, Trinity International University) has taught courses in Hebrew and Old Testament for more than twenty-five years, many of those years teaching field studies in Israel, Jordan, and Egypt. Beck spends most of his year writing and is a permanent adjunct faculty member at Jerusalem University College in Israel. His books include *Along the Road*, *The Baker Illustrated Guide to Everyday Life in Bible Times*, *Discovery House Bible Atlas*, and *The Holy Land for Christian Travelers*, among others. He describes himself as a Bible geographer with a passion to make the Bible's geography meaningful.

Part 1 of the volume (Introduction to Geography) entails two brief introductory chapters. The second chapter provides a customary atlas introduction (Introduction to the Biblical World), providing clear explanation of key concepts (e.g., Israel as a land bridge, a small land, a geographically diverse land, a thirsty land, and the Lord's chosen land, on pp. 26–36) and helpful images and maps. The first introductory chapter explains the "why" of this particular atlas, pointing to the largest section—Part 2 (Putting the Story in Its Place). Beck present this atlas as a "starter" atlas, focusing on the basics and big picture.

In Part 2, Beck moves through the story of salvation from Genesis through Revelation, seeking to make geography meaningful in clear connection with the metanarrative of Scripture. He is convinced that the Bible is "the story of God meeting real people in a real time and place. And we will not fully understand this story unless we understand the place from which it has come" (20).

He divides this treatment of the intersection of Bible geography of Scripture and the story line of Scripture into eight story sections: Creation, Fall, and Rescue Plan stories, Exodus, Wilderness, and Transjordan Stories, Conquest, Division, and Crisis Stories, United Kingdom Stories, Divided Kingdom Stories, Exile and Return Stories, Jesus Stories, and Church Stories. The volume ends with a fairly brief section of endnotes as well as indices for Scripture and place names.

For the sake of space, only one example will be provided of Beck's helpful connection of geography and topography (and related realities) to the flow of the biblical text. As he does in some of his other published works, Beck wants the biblical reader to understand a few of the key lessons offered by Israel's wandering through the wilderness areas. This was not simply a "by chance" experience, how one gets from point A to point B, but a divinely orchestrated opportunity for His people to grow in their understanding of Him and His expectations. The prophet Jeremiah describes this graphic reality: "The wilderness … through a land of deserts and ravines … through a land of drought and darkness … a land no one traveled through and where no one lived" (Jer 2:6). Beck points out that this was a region with little water and food, but an abundance of wild creatures.

This reality might cause one to ask, "Why did the Lord bring Israel to this harsh and threatening ecosystem and then keep them there for such a long time?" He points

to Deuteronomy 8:2 and offers three lessons/objectives God had in mind for His people by means of this wilderness experience. First, He humbled them—bringing His people face-to-face with their limitations. Only humble rather than arrogant people will be able to honor this awesome God. Second, He tested them—He put them in situations where they had no option but to look up and trust Him! Third, He taught them—they had been in Egypt, with a vastly different worldview, for centuries—many gods willing to share their subjects with each other. In total contrast to that worldview, Yahweh presents Himself as the one true God, a jealous God who did not accept anyone's worship of rivals. I could write much more about this section or several others, but wanted to give the readers of this review a taste of Beck's observations.

In addition to the many helpful interpretive observations Beck offers that are tied to the geography and topography (and other related disciplines) of the biblical lands in which God interacted with His chosen people, the book has an abundance of superb maps and illustrations (62 of them) that shed light on various aspects of those lands that deserve consideration.

One of the nice things about Beck's volume is that he holds to many positions we value: a high view of God, he happily embraces inspiration and inerrancy, he holds to an early date of the Exodus, and he regards to narrative accounts as credible history. Although I love his fuller *Discovery Bible Atlas* (and require it for my Bible Geography course), the much smaller volume packs a powerful punch. It represents a less daunting read (shorter length), but packs a lot of great observations in a relatively small volume.

I heartily recommend this volume for anyone wanting a better grasp of another area of biblical context—the geography and topography of Israel (and some of the nearby lands). Beck writes with clarity and passion. He carefully weaves the biblical narrative into the geographical realities that the Bible presents. These insights from the physical setting of Scripture will greatly impact the biblical understanding of those who read this helpful volume.

Rick Brannan. *Greek Apocryphal Gospels, Fragments and Agrapha: A New Translation*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2017. 193 pp., $14.99 Paper.

Reviewed by Kelly T. Osborne, Emeritus Professor of New Testament.

For too long it would seem most conservative, Bible-believing Christians have perhaps avoided the study, or simply been unaware of, even the existence of extra-canonical writings which are referred to as NT apocrypha. Of course, the study of the canonical writings of the NT must always remain primary for all such Christians, because they contain "everything pertaining to life and godliness" (2 Pet 1:4). Nevertheless, other writings of the early church, such as those of the so-called Apostolic Fathers (e.g. the Didache, 1 Clement, the epistles of Ignatius, etc.), not to mention some of those in the volume under review, have not been given their just due in terms of study, recent publications notwithstanding (cf. Bart Ehrman's 2-volume *Apostolic Fathers* [Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press, 2003], and Michael Holmes' *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations* [3rd ed.;

Baker, 2007]). For this reason, Rick Brannan has done noble service to Bible-believing Christians by providing something of an introduction to some of the key apocryphal writings relating to the NT with a new translation of several Greek apocryphal gospels, ten major fragments of other writings, as well as two dozen agrapha (pronounced AH-grah-fah), that is, sayings not found in the canonical Gospels but attributed to the Lord Jesus Himself both in the NT (Luke and Paul), and in early patristic literature, both Clement epistles, Barnabas and Justin Martyr's *Dialog with Trypho*.

Rick Brannan is a programmer, editor and translator at the tech company, Faithlife Corporation (formerly Logos Bible Software), in Bellingham, WA, having helped, along with others, to produce the Lexham English Septuagint. He recently published a *Lexical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles: First Timothy* (2016) and *Second Timothy: Notes on Grammar, Syntax, and Structure* (2016), both under the Appian Way imprint, as well as his own translation of the Apostolic Fathers also under the Lexham imprint (2018). All of these works, including the subject of this review, *Greek Apocryphal Gospels, Fragments and Agrapha*, are also available electronically for the Logos Bible software program.

With a brief introduction (1–6), Brannan gives an overview of the writings he translates and discusses in the book. He notes that "the apocryphal gospels say less about Jesus in the context of the first century and more about the problems and issues people in later centuries had in understanding Jesus, and how they tried to solve those problems" (2). This point is key to evaluating properly all of the writings Brannon deals with, and should not be forgotten when a reader immerses him/herself in the details of individual gospels or fragments. He notes, regarding the apocryphal materials found here, that "[i]n many situations, authors are dealing with problematic areas—questions that canonical material simply does not address" (6), and offers the salutary reminder that

> In general, this means focusing not on how the material might change our understanding of the Jesus of the New Testament, but instead on how the author/compiler of this material understood Jesus by considering how he is portrayed. It involves placing these insights not back into the world of the New Testament, but leaving them in the world of the author [of the apocryphal material] (5–6).

Following the Introduction, the author discusses twenty Agrapha. He defines the word from the Greek adjective meaning "unwritten," as applying "[i]n its original usage, …[to] 'unwritten' sayings of Jesus, sayings that did not occur in the four canonical Gospels" (7), but then adds, "[s]ome use the term to refer strictly to extracanonical sayings considered to be authentic; others use it to refer to any sayings attributed to Jesus *with no burden of authenticity*" (7; italics added). It is this last definition which Brannan adopts (7) and thus does not focus on the issue of whether a particular saying attributed to Jesus should be considered genuine or not. This is what the phrase "with no burden of authenticity" seems to mean.

Although one can understand that the purpose of the book is not to take on the issue of what is authentically inspired Scripture, the reader who believes the Bible to be inerrant can be forgiven for thinking this choice of definition tends to minimize

the distinction between canonical and non-canonical writings. This is unfortunate, since one of the major benefits of this book is, as this reviewer sees it, to make these non-canonical materials more accessible to the Christian reading public. It is also puzzling as to why he treats Acts 20:35 ("It is better to give than to receive"), but not Acts 1:4–5 and 6–8. Perhaps the author considers Acts to be sort of a continuation of the third Gospel, but then why include Acts 20:35? The criterion for selection is given on page 10, where Brannan states that he will only discuss passages that are "without direct roots in the canonical gospels" (10). On that basis, one surely could argue the Acts 1 passage should be included, because only part of it is to be found in Luke 24:49, as Brannan maintains. Other NT passages discussed by Brannan (1 Cor 7:10–11, 9:14, 11:23–25, 2 Cor 12:8–9, 1 Thess 4:15–17) may fit his criterion, but they still seem rather out of place in a book which is 90% devoted to apocryphal material.

Following the Agrapha, Brannan takes up the *Protevangelium of James* (*Prot. Jas.*) which narrates events from the life of Mary, the mother of Jesus, and Mary's parents (35–55). As with other apocryphal writings, this one interweaves what Bible-believing Christians regard as fictional material into or between passages from the text of the canonical Gospels. For example, in *Prot. Jas*. 10, Mary is chosen by lot to weave a veil for the temple (non-canonical), but this is followed by the incident recorded in Luke's Gospel of the angel Gabriel announcing to her beforehand the conception and birth of Jesus (*Prot. Jas*. 11.2 = Luke 1:30–38). This is followed by an account of Mary's visit to her kinswoman Elizabeth, with extra (non-canonical) details worked into what is in the main a borrowing of the Lucan account (*Prot. Jas*. 12.1–2, on 46–47).

To a greater or lesser degree this pattern of interweaving is followed in the different apocryphal materials, whether in the lengthy sections of so-called "gospels" (35–133), or in the shorter fragments of various provenance that constitute the remainder of the book (134–75). These longer "gospels" include the *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* (56–66), the *Gospel of Peter* (67–80), the Greek portions of the *Gospel of Thomas* (81–91), the *Gospel of Nicodemus and the Acts of Pilate* (92–126, part of which is *The Descent of Christ into Hades*), the *Gospel of Mary* (Magdalene) (127–33), while the remainder of the book deals with ten different sets of fragments which cannot be convincingly identified as coming from a particular work that is recognized today to have been actually known in the ancient church (134–75). A comprehensive bibliography, subdivided according to categories of genre (apocryphal gospels, agrapha, infancy gospels, passion gospels, post-resurrection gospels, and fragments) rounds out the book (176–93).

All of the longer works and the ten shorter fragments date from the second, third, fourth centuries or possibly even later (e.g. *Infancy Gospel of Thomas* and some of the fragments), which ought immediately to suggest either the derivative nature of the writings, i.e. adapting wording and subject matter from the text of the NT writings themselves, or their fictional character (perhaps even wishful thinking, in some cases). Nevertheless, some sought to pass several these off as genuine first-century apostolic writings (*Prot. Jas.* and *Gospel of Thomas*).

Brannan is to be commended for the succinct nature of his discussions. Each single agraphon is first introduced, then he notes the existence, if any, of parallels, biblical or extra-biblical. He then offers the translation of the LEB—the Lexham English Bible, presumably (for there is a rather glaring absence anywhere in the book

of a list of abbreviations used) for the canonical passages, while he provides his own translation of the agrapha found in patristic works (cf. 20–22). It would improve matters to give the translation first and then discuss its content, rather like a commentary, before noting the parallels, but that is a relatively minor point. A bibliography specific to the agrapha genre rounds out the whole section (32–34).

The longer "gospel" material (e.g., *Prot. Jas.*) follows more or less the same pattern, with an introduction, a description of the work's content, an indication of the relationship of to the NT in particular passages being listed clearly, a section on the work's distinctives, and then the translation. A short bibliography completes each section of the "gospels" material (55, 66, 79–80, 91, 126, 133). Like the section on the agrapha, only one bibliography concludes the section discussing the ten fragments (172–75), rather than one for each individual fragment. This is arguably the most useful feature of the book for anyone who is seeking to discover more than the basics which the translations themselves provide.

Without going into detail in evaluating such apocryphal material as this book contains, there is continuing importance, in this reviewer's opinion, for Christians who believe in the inerrancy of the canonical writings of the NT to know the huge difference in quality that exists between what is rightly recognized as inspired Scripture, the 27 books of the NT, and the writings which purport to supplement the record of the NT canon. And it is important for at least some of those Christians, who wish to support and defend "the faith once for all delivered to the saints" (Jude 3, NKJV), to be aware of the nature of these false materials that have been propagated with a view to mixing error with truth (cf. the parable of the wheat and the tares, Matt 13:36–43). After all, such was a danger in apostolic times (cf. 2 Thess 2:2 with 3:17), it persisted in the centuries following the apostles, and the danger shows no signs of diminishing.

A couple of minor errors must be noted, one on page 144 where "recto (lines 2–5)" should read "verso (lines 2–5)", and another on page 172 where "*nomina sacra*" is plural, but the singular form *nomen sacrum* is required.

As stated at the beginning of this review, Rick Brannan has done the Christian reading public a genuine service by making available some of the most important apocryphal writings relating to the NT in an up-to-date, non-technical edition which provides access to the text translated in a user-friendly format.

*The Lexham English Septuagint*: *A New Translation*. 2nd ed. Rick Brannan and Ken M. Penner, eds. Lexham Press, 2019. xix + 1482 pp., $39.99 Hardcover.

Reviewed by William Varner, Professor of Bible and Greek, The Master's University.

Unlike the many English Bible translations of the Hebrew Bible available today, readers desirous of studying the Septuagint (LXX) or Old Greek (OG) translation of the Jewish scriptures have settled for either the Brenton translation, the more recent *New English Translation of the Septuagint* (NETS), or the translation in the *Orthodox Study Bible*, which largely reflects the *New King James Version*. The *Lexham English Septuagint* (LES), however, is a completely new translation. Rick Brannan, a scholar

for Faithlife Corporation, and Ken M. Penner, Professor at Francis Xavier University, were the chief translators/editors of this hardback second edition of the *Lexham English LXX*, which up to now has been available as a digital resource in the Logos Bible program. While Brannan and Penner carried the load of this major translation/revision, a number of additional "contributing editors" and "production editors" helped (iv, vii).

A new translation of the LXX into English has been needed since Brenton's translation reflects the English of the nineteenth century while the NETS version exhibits a rather wooden style and a commitment to using transliterated names and places which often appear strange to the reader. The following are a few distinctive features of the LES.

1. Transliterated names in the footnotes of the 1st edition of the LES have been removed. The LES now uses the familiar names in most English versions (xvi).

2. The LES is a translation of the Greek, without an eye to the Hebrew. If the LXX translation was "formal" the LES seeks to be "formal." If the LXX was "idiomatic" or "functional" the LES is "idiomatic" (xiii). The LES is trying to understand the LXX as a "Greek" document (xvii).

3. Unlike some recent editions of the LXX which follow an "eclectic" method of choosing readings, the LES follows a "diplomatic" method by rendering Swete's edition which was largely the text of Vaticanus (xi). Since the Greek texts of Daniel and Tobit are so different in the main manuscripts of Codices Vaticanus, Alexandrinus, and Sinaiticus two translations of these books are included.

Instead of simply describing what the volume does, readers can get a sense of the LES approach to translation by actually seeing the results of the translators' labors. I offer the following example of how the LES renders Genesis 4:1–8a (4), accompanied by personal observations about the way in which the translators rendered into English that Greek verse.

[1] And Adam knew Eve, his wife, and she conceived and brought forth Cain and said, "I have acquired a man through God."
[1] Ἀδὰμ δὲ ἔγνω Εὔαν τὴν γυναῖκα αὐτοῦ, καὶ συνέλαβεν καὶ ἔτεκεν τὸν Κάιν. καὶ εἶπεν Ἐκτησάμην ἄνθρωπον διὰ τοῦ θεοῦ.
Comments: The translation of ἔγνω as "knew" maintains the euphemism of both the LXX and the Hebrew. The translation of διὰ τοῦ θεοῦ as "through God" is also literal.

[2] And she proceeded to bring forth his brother, Abel. Abel became a herdsman of sheep, and Cain was working the earth.
[2] καὶ προσέθηκεν τεκεῖν τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ τὸν Ἄβελ. Καὶ ἐγένετο Ἄβελ ποιμὴν προβάτων· Κάιν δὲ ἦν ἐργαζόμενος τὴν γῆν.
Comments: Translation of προσέθηκεν (aorist of προστίθημι) as "proceeded" is a good alternative to the literal "he added" idiom of both the Hebrew and its LXX translation.

[3] Now this happened after a number of days: Cain brought some of the fruit of the earth as an offering for the Lord,
[3] καὶ ἐγένετο μεθ' ἡμέρας ἤνεγκεν Κάιν ἀπὸ τῶν καρπῶν τῆς γῆς θυσίαν τῷ κυρίῳ·
Comments: This is a fairly straightforward rendering of 4:3. The translation divides the sentence by inserting a colon, which indicates what it was that "came to pass."

[4] and Abel himself also brought some of the firstborn of his sheep and some of their hard fat parts. God looked upon Abel and upon his gifts,
[4] καὶ Ἄβελ ἤνεγκεν καὶ αὐτὸς ἀπὸ τῶν πρωτοτόκων τῶν προβάτων αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν στεάτων αὐτῶν. καὶ ἔπιδεν ὁ θεὸς ἐπὶ Ἄβελ καὶ ἐπὶ τοῖς δώροις αὐτοῦ·
Comments: The translation of στεάτων as "hard fat parts" is, in my opinion, strange. What does it mean? Muraoka's *Lexicon of the Septuagint* defines the word as "*fat attached to animal meat*, 'suet'." The second sentence avoids the parataxis of the repeated καὶ before "God."

[5] ἐπὶ δὲ Κάιν καὶ ἐπὶ ταῖς θυσίαις αὐτοῦ οὐ προσέσχεν. καὶ ἐλύπησεν τὸν Κάιν λίαν καὶ συνέπεσεν τῷ προσώπῳ
[5] but he did not pay attention to Cain and upon his offerings. He grieved Cain very much, and he fell in face.
Comments: The translation again avoids the parataxis of the repeated καὶ beginning the second sentence. "Fell in face" is, in my opinion, an overly literal translation of συνέπεσεν τῷ προσώπῳ. It is not an English expression.

[6] The Lord God said to Cain, "Why have you become deeply grieved, and why has your face fallen?"
[6] καὶ εἶπεν Κύριος ὁ θεὸς τῷ Κάιν Ἵνα τί περίλυπος ἐγένου, καὶ ἵνα τί συνέπεσεν τὸ πρόσωπόν σου;
Comments: Here the Greek turns back to the literal "your face fell."

[7] "Have you not sinned if you offer rightly but do not divide rightly? Calm down! His recourse will be to you, and you will rule him."
[7] οὐκ ἐὰν ὀρθῶς προσενέγκῃς, ὀρθῶς δὲ μὴ διέλῃς, ἥμαρτες; ἡσύχασον· πρὸς σὲ ἡ ἀποστροφὴ αὐτοῦ, καὶ σὺ ἄρξεις αὐτοῦ.
Comments: I wonder why it is not preferable to just keep the conditional sentence: "If you offer rightly but not divide rightly, you have sinned." Why change it to a question? Furthermore, who is the "him" in the last statement? Is it the "his" of "recourse"?

[8] And Cain said to Abel, his brother, "Let's walk through the field."
[8] καὶ εἶπεν Κάιν πρὸς Ἄβελ τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ Διέλθωμεν εἰς τὸ πεδίον
Comments: The translation includes the words Διέλθωμεν εἰς τὸ πεδίον, which Hebrew equivalent is not in the Masoretic Text. I am not sure that "through the field" conveys accurately the εἰς τὸ πεδίον. A better rendering of these words addressed to Abel is: "Let us cross over into the field."

An important feature of this volume is the inclusion of the dozen or so "apocryphal" books, which were preserved in ancient copies of the LXX. Another bonus is

the addition of some pseudepigraphal works like the *Psalms of Solomon* (1396–1425), *Enoch* (1413–25) and the *Odes* (1426–41). The volume also includes translations of *Third and Fourth Maccabees* (1364–95), which are not always included in the so-called Apocrypha. Readers may be unaware that some of the translations of *Daniel* and *Tobit* survive in two different versions in Codex Vaticanus and Codex Sinaiticus. The alternative Greek versions found in Sinaiticus are also included for the books of *Tobit* (1442–56), *Daniel* (1457–77), and the additions to *Daniel* (1478–82). This translation was also able to benefit from the recent *Lexicon of the Septuagint* by T. Muraoka (2009).

Whether one likes it or not, NT scholars know that the LXX/OG versions served as the source for many of the "OT" quotations in the New Testament. In my opinion, a study of any OT passage should include what the Greek says as well as the Hebrew or Aramaic. Furthermore, the "Bible" of the early church Fathers until Jerome consisted of the LXX/OG books. Scholars and pastors simply need to be more aware of the LXX. A helpful feature of this volume is that it contains a readable version of those Apocryphal Books, as well as some Pseudepigrapha for a ready reference.

I am very positive about the philosophy and methodology of the LES. It provides an accurate and readable alternative to the dated Brenton version while avoiding some of the "quirkiness" of the *New English Translation*. My advice is to purchase it!

Sidney Greidanus. *From Chaos to Cosmos: Creation to the New Creation*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018, 244 pp., $15.99 Paper.

Reviewed by Paul Twiss, Instructor of Bible Exposition, The Master's Seminary.

Sidney Greidanus is a well-known author who writes from a wealth of pastoral and academic experience. He has written several volumes to serve teachers of the Bible including *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*; and *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*. His most recent book, *From Chaos to Cosmos: Creation to New Creation*, forms part of a series from Crossway entitled *Short Studies in Biblical Theology*. With relatively sparse footnotes the book is intended to offer an accessible introduction to the theme of chaos and creation, traced across the metanarrative of Scripture.

Greidanus begins with a brief study of the chaos-cosmos theme as found in the Ancient Near East (17–26). He notes several parallels between the biblical record and that of the Babylonian creation epic *Enuma Elish*, as well as ancient Canaanite literature. Although these proposed similarities may be new to many of Greidanus' readers, he presents them in a cogent manner that lays a foundation for the rest of his study. From there a study of these themes as found in Genesis, Exodus and Joshua is given (27–54). Greidanus succinctly rehearses the transition from chaos to cosmos seen in the first creative act, and argues that Genesis 3 constitutes a descent into a new *evil* chaotic order. Subsequent milestones—such as the Flood, the tower of Babel, the promises to Abraham, the exodus and Jordan crossing—are then interpreted in light of these themes, in each case God is working through the reality of chaos to restore His cosmos.

Greidanus' discussion of the wisdom literature, Psalms, and prophets is his longest chapter, wherein he casts a wide net to argue for the chaos and creation themes (55–120). Greidanus contends for biblical theological inferences by way of wisdom in Proverbs, Leviathan and Rahab in Job, the sea in Psalms, and restoration in the Prophets, among a glut of other concepts. His fundamental premise remains the same: that the metanarrative testifies to a work of God whereby He is working out a renewed cosmos from the present reality of chaos.

The penultimate chapter considers these themes in the New Testament (121–73). Greidanus argues that Jesus' ministry was one that taught a chaos/cosmos dichotomy, and that his coming represents a redemptive-historical movement towards the latter. This movement is then further explained in the Epistles as believers are identified as new creations, called to battle the powers of darkness, and called to wait for the new heavens and new earth.

Greidanus concludes his book with a practical chapter on how to preach and teach the chaos-cosmos theme to a church congregation (175–99). He provides example sermons that work through the Scriptures, highlighting pertinent texts. As an alternative approach Greidanus also suggests a seven-part Christocentric series that demonstrates various ways in which the Scriptures move from Old Testament text to fulfillment in the Savior. A smattering of short examples is helpfully provided.

*From Chaos to Cosmos* is written in a clear, lucid manner such that in a general sense the stated aim of the series is met in this volume, namely: "to connect the resurgence of biblical theology at the academic level with everyday believers" (13). Moreover, a number of features make Greidanus' work worthy of commendation. First, the attention given to ANE backgrounds is particularly helpful. Often overlooked in popular level writing, cognizance of the cultural milieu in which the Hebrew Bible was written is essential if biblical theology is to be done well. Greidanus introduces the reader to the field of comparative studies in an unintimidating way, drawing insightful conclusions while being careful to affirm the inspiration and authority of Scripture.

Second, the study questions offered at the close of each chapter are beneficial. In an effort to demonstrate the relevance of metanarrative studies for everyday ministry, Greidanus' carefully considered prompts help the reader not only to consolidate, but to apply. Indeed, this feature, coupled with the accessible presentation of material, make *From Chaos to Cosmos* a worthy book for small group studies. The benefits are clear: ministry leaders can introduce church members to a biblical theological approach, using the study questions as an instrument for inductive learning.

Third, Greidanus' final chapter on preaching the chaos-cosmos theme is particularly helpful. Undoubtedly the *Short Studies in Biblical Theology* series will appeal to pastors who desire to teach with a more holistic approach to the Scriptures. The last section of the book offers insights to this end, with respect to both methodology and practice. Especially helpful is Greidanus' proposal for how one can move from Old Testament to New—seven means the Scriptures employ to forge degrees of continuity across redemptive-history. Although Greidanus labels these as 'Christocentric' approaches, more generally he is simply identifying various dynamics employed by the authors of Scripture to uphold narrative continuity.

With these points of merit noted there are several concerns that come from reading *From Chaos to Cosmos*. First, as is a symptomatic problem for any thematic approach to analyzing the drama of Scripture, a number of the book's claims demand further justification. By way of example, Greidanus treats all too briefly Israel's crossing of the Jordan river. Drawing attention to the narrator's appellation for God—"the Lord of all the earth" (Josh 3:11)—Greidanus barely develops an argument for interpreting the episode with reference to the chaos-cosmos theme. Since the inferred relationship is not immediately evident, a logical explanation is imperative. If Greidanus had demonstrated a correspondence between the Jordan crossing and the exodus narrative he would have not only defended his inclusion of Joshua 3 in the chapter, but he would have also introduced his readers to an often overlooked facet of biblical theology: that texts often find their way into a metanarrative indirectly, by virtue of their relationship to another passage. Sadly, Greidanus consistently fails to explicate his methodology and reasoning, preferring instead to simply quote large portions of Scripture. In so doing he does not serve the layperson well.

Second, and closely related, as *From Chaos to Cosmos* strives for usability within the church, a concern arises that it will infer too simplistic an approach to biblical theology. After Greidanus' helpful treatment of Gen 1–2, he frequently espouses a metanarrative based on the invocation of one or two *Leitwort* for each passage. Without wishing to belittle the value of intertextual studies, one of the weaknesses inherent to the recent resurgence of biblical theology is the misappropriation of lexical parallels. Aligning texts based upon a perceived verbal or syntactical correspondence is a valuable final step in the analytical process; it is by no means the only step. Much work must be done at the thematic-conceptual level before the validity and/or significance of an intertextual relationship can be seen. Greidanus rarely exemplifies such an approach. As such he models an overly simplistic hermeneutic—one that does a disservice to the nuances of Scripture's meta-narrative.

In sum, *From Chaos to Cosmos* is an introduction to one theme that permeates the Bible. It is clearly written and could help the layperson by introducing him to a holistic reading of the Scriptures. Greidanus' work could be strengthened with a more dogmatically articulated methodology. To be sure, the task of writing at the popular level while also explicating interpretive decisions is not easy. But such is surely the challenge for anyone who attempts to communicate the drama of redemptive history beyond the realms of academia.

Robert A. Mullins and Mark Vitalis Hoffman. *Atlas of the Biblical World*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2019. 160 pp., $24.00 Paper.

Reviewed by Michael A. Grisanti, Professor of Old Testament, The Master's Seminary.

Another recently published Bible atlas (relatively short) is *Atlas of the Biblical World*, written by Robert A. Mullins and Mark Vitalis Hoffman. Mullins is Professor of Biblical Studies at Azusa Pacific University. He is codirector of the archaeological excavations at Abel Beth Maacah. Hoffman is Associate Professor of Biblical Studies

at United Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg. He travels to Israel regularly.

On the one hand, this volume has many of the features you would expect an atlas to have: sixty-nine maps (one per chapter), five timelines, and nineteen photographs, and one artistic reconstruction (Solomon's Temple). The maps are clear and helpful, using various colors well. On the other hand, these authors chose to pursue breadth over depth. There are sixty-nine chapters that cover the varied segments of the Old and New Testaments. However, each chapter generally involves one page of text and one map, with the timelines and photos interspersed throughout the volume. Mullins provided the content for the first forty-five chapters (through the Persian period) and Hoffman handles the intertestamental period and the NT (twenty-four chapters). Both authors write with clarity and provide relevant references to biblical and extra-biblical literature where it is especially important. This volume offers its readers a quick overview of the people, places, and events of both Testaments.

Unfortunately, at numerous junctures, the authors demonstrate a less conservative understanding of the "history" described in Scripture. A few examples will suffice to make the point. At the end of their treatment of the patriarchs (72), Mullins states that there is no direct proof for the ancestors/patriarchs or any events associated with them. Along with other factors, this has given rise to significant questions about the historicity of the Patriarchs. In a few chapters that relate to the exodus from Egypt and conquest of Canaan (34–42), Mullins says that various groups from the Canaan area coalesced with outside groups to form the basis of later premonarchic Israel. The conquest of Canaan, presented in Joshua as a somewhat short campaign (ca. 7 years), really involved a much longer and complicated emergence of "Israel" that was telescoped into a single military event. Although Mullins embraces the historicity of David and Solomon as rulers, the extent of their kingdoms were inflated for theological reasons (62–66).

Although Mullins and Hoffman are biblical scholars and make helpful observations about the potential intersection of geography and archaeology and the Bible along the way, their questions about the historicity of numerous events and people mentioned in the Bible because there is no clear archaeological evidence diminishes the value of this atlas. Their commendable effort to provide concise summaries in a relatively short volume leaves out so much that its usability is limited as well.

Carl F. H. Henry, ed., *Basics of the Faith: An Evangelical Introduction to Christian Doctrine*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2019. 440 pp., $29.99 Hardcover.

Reviewed by Kevin D. Zuber, Professor of Theology, The Master's Seminary.

This volume is a collection of articles, on key theological topics, from an array of authors that were first published in the pages of *Christianity Today* (*CT*) between the years 1961 and 1962 (and subsequently published in a volume titled *Basic Christian Doctrines* [Baker Book House, 1975]). The present volume lists Carl F. H. Henry as the editor, which was his role at *CT* in the early 1960s (and his role in the production of the aforementioned *Basic Christian Doctrines*). The list of contributors is a virtual "Who's Who" of midcentury American neo-evangelicals. A few of these

names are still somewhat recognizable to the current generation of theological students (e.g., Philip E. Hughes, Anthony Hoekema, G. C. Berkouwer, Cornelius Van Til, Leon Morris, John Murray, James I. Packer). Other names are still recognizable to the professors of the current generation of theological students (e.g., George E. Ladd, Fred H. Klooster, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, Bernard Ramm, John H. Gerstner, Oswald T. Allis, F. F. Bruce, John F. Walvoord, Merrill C. Tenney, Frank E. Gaebelein, J. A. Motyer). All the names were highly regarded scholars in their day.

The list of topics—theological essays all—bears out the appropriateness of the title: *Basics*. The reader will find brief but commendable essays on "The Inspiration of the Bible" (Klooster), "The Holy Trinity" (J. Kenneth Grider), "Angels" (Ramm), "The Atonement" (Morris), "The Work of the Spirit" (Walvoord), "Justification by Faith" (H. D. McDonald), "Sanctification," (Murray), "The Nature of the Church," (Packer), "The Second Coming: Millennial Views" (William M. Arnett), "The Final State: Heaven and Hell," (Motyer). Other topics, arguably, may not be considered quite as basic but reflect the issues important to particular traditions within neo-evangelicalism, such as "Predestination" (William Childs Robinson) and "The Covenant of Works" (O. T. Allis), or the wider concerns of evangelicals generally, such as "The Saving Acts of God," (Ladd), "Creation," (Harold B. Kuhn), and "The Government of the Church," (Edward J. Carnell).

The reader will find this volume to be valuable in several ways. Surprisingly, and at times strikingly, the reader will find that in some of the articles the scholarship is still pertinent. That is, the treatment of the topic remains germane to the evangelical discussion of that topic in the twenty-first century. At other times, the treatment reflects the discussion of the era (mostly the many references to Barth and neo-orthodoxy). However, there is value in reading these latter essays as well, for the "theologically dated" material reveals the main concerns of the neo-evangelical movement in the 1960s and beyond. In many of these essays one can discern the desire of the neo-evangelicals to demonstrate their capacity to engage in serious scholarship even over basic doctrinal matters, and to bring that scholarship to bear in dialogue with theologies beyond evangelicalism.

It is of interest to note that, while some of the essays reflect a particular theological tradition, when viewed as a whole the volume reflects a broad representation of the various theological backgrounds (for instance, dispensational and covenantal) within evangelicalism. This reflects a broad but "basic" unity within evangelicalism in the mid-twentieth century that, arguably, does not seem to be the case within evangelicalism in the early twenty-first century. There may be a number of reasons for the difference then and now, but this volume suggests a striking one: in that era evangelicalism saw itself as identified and defined by theology. One can reasonably argue that a theologically informed self-identity among self-professed evangelicals today, while perhaps not totally absent, is certainly not the most prominent way evangelicals self-identify today. Even when the evangelicals of that bygone era differed over particular matters of theology, yet for each of them it was theology—and even agreement on the "basics" of theology—that defined the movement. This is not the place to engage in an analysis of the various histories of evangelicalism over the last sixty-plus years—histories that have been seeking, or groping, for a definition of evangelicalism—but these essays are a reminder that at one point in time evangelicals were

defined by theology, not by association with secular ideologies, politics, or the latest cultural fads.

Iain M. Duguid, James M. Hamilton, Jay Sklar, eds., *ESV Expository Commentary: 1 Samuel–2 Chronicles*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019. 1344 pp., $49.99 Hardcover.

Reviewed by William Varner, Professor of Bible and Greek, The Master's University.

The first impression left by this commentary is its huge size! I thought that I was picking up one of the six volumes of Matthew Henry's classic series on the entire Bible. I soon recognized that this work is even longer than Matthew Henry's corresponding volume.

The series published by Crossway is edited by a triad of recognized scholars, headed by Iain Duguid of Westminster Seminary, plus James Hamilton of Southern Baptist Seminary and Jay Sklar of Covenant Seminary. The *ESV Expository Commentary* is projected to be a 12-volume series, and to my knowledge this is the fifth volume to appear.

The editors describe the series as having the following characteristics: (1) "exegetically sound"; (2) "robustly biblical-theological"; (3) "globally aware"; (4) "broadly reformed"; (5) "doctrinally conversant"; (6) "pastorally useful"; (7) "application-minded"; and (8) "efficient in expression" (9–10). While I am not that familiar with the other published volumes, my initial judgement is that the commentators make a good effort to fulfill these goals.

The included OT books are covered by the following scholars: 1–2 Samuel, John L. Mackay, Edinburgh Seminary (deceased); 1–2 Kings, J. Gary Millar, Queensland Theological College (Australia); and 1–2 Chronicles, John W. Olley, Vose Seminary (Australia). One is struck by the international character of this specific team, although the above editors teach in American institutions.

The commentators appear to follow a rather consistent approach to their books. First, there is an introduction to each pair of books: Samuel (16 pages); Kings (20 pages); and Chronicles (22 pages). Keep in mind that these are large pages as well. The critical positions expounded are generally "conservative," although American readers may have to get used to a broader definition of "conservative"/"evangelical" than that to which they may be accustomed. An example of this is in Olley's handling of the discrepancies between the numbers in Kings and Chronicles as credited to either "scribal errors," rounding off," or "literary hyperbole" (921). Olley does not offer a preference at this point and apparently views the issue as affected by all three options.

Following this overall introduction, each section of the biblical books is then addressed in a rather consistent approach. I will take the familiar account of David and Goliath in 1 Samuel 17 as an example of this treatment. First comes a "Section Overview" (17:1–58, one page), followed by a "Section Outline" (13 lines); a "Comment" section (8 pages); and a "Response" (one page). It is the last section that is often missing in academic commentaries and this effort is an attempt to fulfill the

goals mentioned above of the commentary being "pastorally useful" and "application-minded."

Does this volume fulfill its stated goals? I believe it does, with consideration given for a possibly uneven application of the methods due to its being a multi-authored volume. The treatment, for example, of the Septuagintal differences with the Masoretic Text in 1 Samuel 17 was succinct but adequate for those desiring an "expository" rather than an "academic" commentary. Mackay prefers the interpretation that the stone knocked Goliath unconscious and David then finished him off with the giant's sword (191–92). He also has an interesting "biblical-theological" observation at this point. "Like his god Dagon before him, the Philistine champion is face down on the ground and headless, as in 5:1–5" (192).

As an appropriate follow up to this comment, in the "Response" section MacKay helpfully refers to the Christian battle described in 2 Corinthians 10: 3 and Ephesians 6:12, and to David's awareness of the divine reality expressed in such passages as Jeremiah 9:23–24 and 1 John 4:4 (193). He also argues that David is a foreshadowing of the Messiah without engaging in excessive allegory (193–94). In all this he avoids that vapid "application" often heard that believers are "to learn how to kill the Goliaths in your life," as well as seeing the humanistic lessons on "the overcoming of the underdog against great odds."

Millar's comments on 1–2 Kings contain an excellent section on the books' "Theology" (501–8), a subject often ignored in most commentaries. Not surprisingly, he believes that "the theology of 1–2 Kings has long been recognized as being shaped by and also expressing the theology of Deuteronomy" (501). Olley expounds the theology of Chronicles (906–15) as tied heavily to the sacrificial "cultus" and creatively and wisely expounds its Messianic thrust (916–17). The final two verses affirm themes that previously run throughout the book but also ends with an open call for "you" to "go up" (1291–92).

Apart from taking up a lot of shelf space (!), I like the approach of this commentary. Does it merit the retail cost of $49.99? Well, if not there is always Matthew Henry!

John D. Laing, Kirk R. MacGregor, and Greg Welty, eds. *Calvinism and Middle Knowledge: A Conversation*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2019. 276 pp., $36.00 Paper.

Reviewed by Scott Christensen, Associate Pastor, Kerrville Bible Church, Kerrville, Texas, TMS Alumnus (MDiv, 2001).

The problem of reconciling God's sovereignty with human freedom and respon-sibility is one of the most daunting tasks of theology. This task is exasperated when the problem of evil is introduced as Christians are compelled to refute the charge that God is the author of evil. Historically, this has been a debate largely fought between Calvinists and Arminians. But in recent years new players have entered the fray, in-cluding open theists and Molinists. Open theism has been rightly rejected as unor-thodox. But Molinism, which dates back to the teaching of the Jesuit priest Luis de Molina (AD 1535–1600), has gained newfound popularity in orthodox (evangelical) circles as a resourceful way to answer these critical questions. Most Arminians and

Calvinists have rejected Molinism, but recently some Calvinists have found sympathy with several Molinist distinctives, which has generated some lively debate.

Several aspects of this debate are canvassed in *Calvinism and Middle Knowledge: A Conversation,* edited by John D. Laing, Kirk R. MacGregor, and Greg Welty. Laing is Professor of Systematic Theology and Philosophy at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas and Havard School for Theolog-ical Studies in Houston, Texas. MacGregor is Assistant Professor and Chair of the Department of Philosophy and Religion at McPherson College in McPherson, Kan-sas. Welty is Professor of Philosophy at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina. This multi-author volume contains fourteen chap-ters, many of which reproduce dialogues and essays delivered during the 2012–2014 Molinism / Middle Knowledge Consultation of the Evangelical Theological Society. Some of the essays have been published elsewhere.

The discussion is intended to be more accessible to pastors and Bible students. However, it engages the issues via philosophical theology and thus the essays do not contain much in the way of biblical exegesis or reflections gleaned from systematic theology. While the essays do not use some of the more arcane language of analytic philosophy, they do require some intellectual diligence for the person who is not already conversant with the issues. The essays (chapters) are fairly evenly divided between proponents of classical Calvinism (i.e., Greg Welty, Paul Helm, and Guillaume Bignon), Molinism (i.e., John D. Laing, Kirk R. MacGregor, Kenneth D. Keathley, and William Lane Craig), and what has been termed Middle-Knowledge Calvinism (i.e., Terrance L. Tiessen and Bruce A. Ware).

To understand the discussion, it is important to note that classical theism delineates two categories for divine knowledge. First, *natural knowledge* refers to all nec-essarily factual truths and possibilities known to God immediately and intuitively (e.g., two plus two equals four; bachelors are unmarried men). This is knowledge of all that *is* or *could* be. Secondly, *free knowledge* refers to what God freely decrees (wills) to happen in history. This is knowledge of all that *will* certainly be. Molinism adds a third distinctive brand of knowledge called *middle knowledge.* This refers to God's pre-volitional foreknowledge of *counterfactuals of creaturely freedom* which is what people *would* freely choose under any possible scenario. Because such knowledge originates within the freedom of the creature it is said to be independent of God's other kinds of knowledge. God "assembled" this middle knowledge of all the possibilities in order to actualize the circumstances that would result in the par-ticular choices that match the world He desires to create.

It is also important to understand that Molinism (together with Arminianism and open theism) defines creaturely freedom in line with *libertarian free will* (hereafter, LFW) in which man's choices are defined as: (1) indeterministic (i.e., free from being determined by God) and (2) able to be exercised with alternative possibilities. One is free to equally choose 'A' or 'not-A' in the same exact circumstances. Libertarians believe these two features ground moral responsibility. In contrast, most Calvinists embrace *compatibilism*—a kind of freedom that is compatible with divine determin-ism. Compatibilistic freedom indicates that free agents always choose in accordance with their strongest desires and motives as they are influenced by factors internal and external to themselves. God is the primary but remote cause of their choices while

they are the secondary but immediate cause of their choices. Compatibilistic freedom grounds moral responsibility in the intentions of the choosing agent.

Turning to the book, the introductory chapter by the editors lays out many of the historical and theological issues surrounding the rise of Molinism. The book is then divided into four sections. The first section ("Molinism, Evolution, and ID") consists of three chapters. The first two chapters seek to explore new ground by employing middle knowledge to Intelligent Design and theistic evolution. In chapters 1 and 2, John Laing and Kirk MacGregor (respectively) suggest God uses middle knowledge of how all possible random mutations *would* proceed in the development of new species, and somehow utilizes that knowledge to generate the complex creatures He wants even though they risk developing flaws. In chapter 3, Greg Welty questions whether middle knowledge can have legitimate value or meaning when shifted from the choices of sentient beings to impersonal material processes. He says, "Why would *facts about physical mutations* be facts over which God has no control?" (38). If God determines the laws that guide biological processes and how they operate it logically follows He would know precisely the outcome of those laws without having to depend on random or chance occurrences.

Part 2 of the book is entitled "Calvinist Concerns with Molinism" and contains three chapters. In chapter 4, Greg Welty shows that Molinism bears the same burden as Calvinism when it comes to exonerating God from moral culpability for evil. Molinism seeks to distance God from moral culpability by saying He foreknows all the counterfactuals of the libertarianly free choices of His creatures, but He does not determine their actual choices and therefore bears no responsibility for them. Welty uses the memorable Bullet Bill illustration to make his point. Imagine God is analogous to a person deliberately shooting an ordinary gun with ordinary bullets that kill a person. Then imagine the Molinist God is analogous to a shooter who shoots a different kind of gun so that when He repeatedly pulls the trigger out come a series of Bullet Bills (which are analogous to human beings). Each Bullet Bill has LFW and therefore is able to decide whether to kill or not to kill the respective victim. The shooter (think God) has middle knowledge of the counterfactual decisions of each Bullet Bill and chooses to actualize the one that freely decides to kill the victim. Thus, even though the shooter did not directly cause the victim to die, nonetheless, Welty says we intuitively assign moral culpability to the shooter because He chose to actualize which Bullet Bill would use his freedom to kill the victim. Thus, this is not significantly different than the shooter who uses an ordinary gun. Both are equally culpable for killing the victim.

Kenneth Keathley responds to Welty in chapter 5. He rejects the Bullet Bill illustration and says moral culpability is rooted in the choosing agent's intentions, not in his knowledge. Thus, Bullet Bill is morally responsible because he has evil intentions. The shooter with counterfactual knowledge is not culpable because he has good intentions. However, Welty responds in chapter 6 that Keathley employs a typical Calvinist (compatibilist) argument here not a Molinist argument. Furthermore, Welty points out that Molinist providence accomplishes God's will by "actualizing circumstances" (82) that ensure the outcome. Thus, God is not passively viewing the future, but actively ensuring it will unfold as He planned it.

Part 3 is entitled, "Calvinist Appropriation of Middle Knowledge" and contains four chapters. Chapter 7 is entitled, "Does Calvinism Have Room for Middle

Knowledge? A Conversation." Paul Helm answers no and Terrance Tiessen answers "no, but…". Much of the discussion revolves around the words *would* and *could* in connection to God's knowledge of our choosing. Molinism claims that *could* falls in God's natural knowledge and *would* falls in His middle knowledge. Helm disputes this claim. He says if there is something someone *would* do then it is also true that they *could* do it. What a person *would* do is a subset of what he *could* do. Thus, both are part of God's natural knowledge effectively rendering middle knowledge unnecessary. Tiessen concedes Helm's point and so has abandoned his former effort to use middle knowledge as a Calvinist.

In chapter 8, Bruce Ware seeks to make a slightly different case for Middle-Knowledge Calvinism. He argues middle knowledge is a subset of natural knowledge. Ware also supposes that middle knowledge works only with compatibilist freedom. In chapter 9, John Laing thinks it is wrong headed to use middle knowledge to describe Calvinistic compatibilism since middle knowledge has always been distinctly associated with LFW. In either case, Laing does not see any significant difference between Ware's modified Calvinism and traditional Calvinism. He thinks both positions cannot escape what is called the "grounding objection" that is usually leveled against Molinism—namely, that it is not possible that foreknowledge of counterfactuals of freedom can be truly known to God. Furthermore, he thinks both positions collapse into fatalism because God's nature compels Him to ordain necessary outcomes.

In chapter 10, Terrance Tiessen responds to Laing's critique of Ware and his own position. He sees no problem with the grounding objection because he now agrees with Helm that God's "hypothetical-knowledge" (not middle knowledge) of compatibilistically free counterfactuals is grounded in His natural knowledge. Thus, God's knowledge is not dependent on a potential person's nature or what he may or may not do in the future. Tiessen also seeks to correct misconceptions Laing has about compatibilistically free creatures as if their choices were somehow intrinsically necessitated due to their strange ontology (nature). People will always choose according to antecedent internal and external factors and cannot act against those factors, but that has nothing to do with their intrinsic nature per se, but with the antecedent factors. Thus, if alternative factors came into play, then alternative choices and outcomes would result.

Part 4 is entitled, "Molinism and Calvinism: The Ongoing Conversation," and contains four chapters. In chapter 11, John Laing seeks to delineate and clarify the distinctive features of each of the respective views of divine knowledge. In chapter 12, Terrance Tiessen adds to the discussion of Ware's Middle-Knowledge Calvinism. He points out (in apparent agreement with Laing) that if Ware sees God's free knowledge as a subset of His natural knowledge then that would undermine God's freedom, rendering His free knowledge (decretive will) necessary and thus hard to distinguish from fatalism.

In chapter 13, Guillaume Bignon seeks to clarify how Calvinism makes use of the idea of divine permission and asymmetry in regard to God's control of evil. God's providential relationship to good and evil is not symmetrical but asymmetrical. He stands behind good more directly, and behind evil more indirectly. Nonetheless, Calvinism does not endorse a general/ disengaged form of divine permission as in the

case of the indeterminism of libertarianism, rather a specific/engaged form of permission. God specifically, willingly permits His creatures to choose evil He has ordained by not preventing it and by ensuring the circumstances in which evil choices come about. In this regard, Calvinism and Molinism find some agreement.

Chapter 14 is a transcript of a debate between Calvinist Paul Helm and Molinist William Lane Craig on the program "Unbelievable?" hosted by Justin Brierley. The debate is a good, but all too brief, introduction to some of the basic differences between the Calvinist and Molinist views of divine providence, foreknowledge, and human freedom. Finally, the editors close the book by introducing topics and issues that need further exploration.

This book is useful for understanding some of the ancillary issues surrounding the debate between Calvinism and Molinism. While Calvinism faces difficulties defending claims that God is the author of sin, it retains more abundant and robust resources for addressing the problem than Molinism does. Paul Helm and Greg Welty provided the most incisive and persuasive critiques of middle knowledge and Molinism in general. Terrance Tiessen makes some valuable contributions after affirming that classical Calvinism is not improved by appealing to Molinist distinctives. It is commendable that he is willing to openly acknowledge where he went wrong and to faithfully pursue the evidence for the truth even if he must discard his previous thinking. On that note, Bruce Ware's embrace of middle knowledge as a Calvinist is simply baffling.

The chapters (1 and 2) by Laing and MacGregor seeking to utilize middle knowledge to support theistic evolution are wholly unconvincing for two reasons. First, as Welty pointed out, given the nature of the terms laid out by Molinism, using middle knowledge to ascertain impersonal material processes is incoherent. Secondly, and more importantly, the general theory of evolution has insurmountable scientific, biblical, and theological problems in the first place, rendering it indefensible for any Christian. Elsewhere in the volume, Laing has shown that he does not grasp some of the basic arguments for Calvinistic providence and compatibilistic freedom, equating these distinctives with a logical necessity and fatalism. The fact that God uses secondary causation in accomplishing His providential purposes should immediately rule out equating divine determinism to fatalism. The doctrine of concurrence has a long pedigree in Calvinistic theology, of which Laing seems unaware.

One of the shortcomings of the book is its failure to lay out some of the more basic arguments for and against Molinism, which could have been done in the introductory essay. Molinism faces several critical problems that unfortunately have not been adequately addressed in the volume, especially with regard to its embrace of LFW. LFW stands against the Bible's testimony to God's all-encompassing decree and meticulous providence over all that transpires (Isa 45:5–7; 46:8–11; Eph 1:11). It also denies the full weight of human depravity (John 8:34; Rom 3:9–18; 8:6–7; Eph 4:17–19) and the efficacious nature of divine grace, which allows for no human boasting (1 Cor 1:26–31). While free will theists understand that God's saving grace is necessary for sinners to be saved, in the end, LFW renders His grace insufficient for salvation, making it ultimately dependent on the autonomous choices of sinners. Thirdly, Molinism has not given an adequate answer to the grounding objection. It gives no account of how God could know the indeterminate choices of creatures who

are regarded as always free to act in ways that cannot be foreknown without sacrificing their freedom. Molinism generally resorts to mystery on this point.

If LFW is true, then God simply cannot know the future choices of His creatures. Open theism has clearly understood this problem, and, by rejecting the doctrine of divine omniscience, is left floating alone in the galaxy of free will theism. The open theist argument is itself a "valid" argument (i.e., if its premises are true, then the conclusion follows), but it is not "sound." Briefly stated, the argument goes like this: (1) God grants His creatures libertarian free will (LFW); (2) the future choices of libertarianly free creatures cannot be known; (3) therefore, God cannot know the future choices He grants to His creatures. Arminians and Molinists must face the fact that if LFW is true, then premise (2) of open theism must also be true for them, and in turn the conclusion (3) must hold true for them as well. Yet, the problem emerges: one is faced with trying to salvage either divine omniscience or LFW—both cannot be embraced. This would be like attempting to serve two masters and experiencing devotion to one while despising the other. Since Scripture is clear that God does know our future choices, then premise (1) must be false. So, while the LFW argument proposed by open theists (and by implication all free will theists) is *valid*, it is not *sound* and so must be rejected. One cannot—indeed, must not—despise the doctrine of divine omniscience, otherwise the one true God as He has revealed Himself to man is eviscerated. Therefore, the consistently biblical and theological reader is compelled to reject LFW and all brands of free will theism that support it, including Molinism.