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EDITORIAL: PROCLAIMING CHRIST TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH

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* * * * *

Proclaiming Christ and bringing salvation to the ends of the earth has always been the heart of God. In his Pentecost message, Peter pointed to God's plan of redemption from eternity past and declared that Christ had been "delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2:22–23). At the beginning of human history—when Adam and Eve fell—the suffering and triumph of Christ was the first prophecy God announced. God focused on Christ and proclaimed, "He [Christ] shall bruise you [the serpent] on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel" (Gen 3:15). As God subsequently made a covenant with Abraham and promised to bless specifically Israel, He also promised to save the Gentiles, saying that "in you [Abraham] *all the families of the earth* will be blessed" (Gen 12:3; cf. Gal 3:8; emphasis added). God designed His salvation of sinners to go out to all the nations.

Scripture indicates, in fact, that the glory of God is displayed in His deliverance not only of one nation but of many nations—of both Jews and Gentiles. In Isaiah 49:6, God says to the Messiah:

> It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to cause the preserved ones of Israel to return; I will also give You as a light of the nations so that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth. (cf. Isa 42:6)

While God chose Israel and called them "a holy people to Yahweh" (Deut 7:6), He also saved Gentiles such as Rahab (Josh 2; 6:17, 23–25), Ruth (Ruth 1:16), the Ninevites (Jonah 3), the Samaritan woman (John 4:7–45), the centurion at the cross (Matt 27:54; Mark 15:39), the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:25–40), and sinners from every nation, tribe, people, and tongue (Rev 7:9). Thus, the prophet Isaiah proclaims, "Yahweh has bared His holy arm in the sight of all the nations, that all the ends of the earth may see the salvation of our God" (Isa 52:10; cf. 24:16; 45:22; Pss 22:27; 48:10; 98:3; Mic 5:4).

Moreover, Isaiah exclaims an astounding prophecy that God would one day redeem even Israel's archenemies—Egypt and Assyria. In Isaiah 19:24–25, the prophet writes that these nations would ultimately worship Yahweh alongside Israel:

> In that day Israel will be the third *party* with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, whom Yahweh of hosts has blessed, saying, "Blessed is Egypt My people, and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel My inheritance."

Yahweh is a God of salvation of all the nations—whether Jew or Gentile—and He desires all peoples to worship Him. Psalm 117:1 calls everyone to praise Yahweh: "Praise Yahweh, all nations; laud Him, all peoples!"

The gospel, therefore, is global. When Christ charged His disciples to preach repentance after His resurrection, He sent them out to all the world. Jesus said:

> Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. (Luke 24:46–47; cf. Matt 28:18–20; Acts 1:8)

God intends for the gospel to reach the ends of the earth, so that every knee would bow at the name of Jesus and that every tongue would confess that Jesus is Lord (Phil 2:10–11).

The honor God promised His Son was global. In Psalm 2:8, God the Father declared to His Son, "Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth as Your possession." Then in Zechariah 9:10, God declared that "He [the Messiah] will speak peace to the nations; and His reign will be from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth" (cf. Ps 72:8). As the gospel reaches the ends of the earth, all peoples will turn to and worship Christ.

God's grand, global, and glorious work of redemption is aptly put on display in John's vision of a vast multitude worshiping God. In Revelation 7:9–10, John describes:

> After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and *all* tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, and palm branches *were* in their hands; and they cry out with a loud voice, saying, "Salvation *belongs* to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."

Such exaltation of God is the reason Scripture calls all believers to proclaim Christ to the ends of the earth.

The focus of the current issue of *The Master's Seminary Journal* is global missions and the biblical charge to take the gospel to the ends of the earth. In the first article, M. Scarborough delivers a biblical case for churches to send out missionaries into the world and for missionaries to establish churches on the mission field ("A Missions Imperative: Developing a Mature Church). Kyle C. Dunham then explores the role of the Abrahamic Covenant in world missions ("The Abrahamic Covenant as the Foundation for Missions"). Chris Burnett follows this with an exegetical study of the Great Commission ("The Missionary's Guide to the Great Commission: An

Exegetical Analysis"). Jason S. DeRouchie examines Paul's unwavering commitment to proclaim Christ ("'Him We Proclaim!' Paul's Motivation, Means, and Mandate for Missions in Colossians 1:24–29"). Cherif Arif describes Isaiah's influence on Paul's view of the future salvation of Israel ("Missions and the Isaianic Influence on Paul's Understanding of Israel's Salvation and Restoration in Romans 11:26–27"). Brian Kinzel and Oleg Korotkiy discuss the historical reality of the hatred of Israel and God's response to those who hate His chosen people ("The Biblical Perspective on the Hatred of Israel and Its Implications for Antisemitism: To Be the Enemy of Israel Is to Be the Enemy of God").

E. D. Burns provides the history of contextualizing the gospel in missions and exhorts believers to preach the Word faithfully ("'The Conflict Is Upon Us': Resisting Ecumenism and Hyper-Contextualization"). Dave Deuel brings out the reality of human weakness and God's power in missions, accentuating the believer's necessary dependence on God to achieve work on the mission field ("Disability, Weakness, and Prayer in Mission"). Finally, Scott N. Callaham emphasizes the importance of and need to provide theological education to missionaries going on the field and to those who become believers on the field ("A Biblical Proposal for Theological Education in Mission").

The ultimate intent of this collection of articles is for the believer to be encouraged to proclaim Christ throughout the world so that sinners from every nation, tribe, people, and tongue would turn to worship God.

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A MISSIONS IMPERATIVE: DEVELOPING A MATURE CHURCH

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* * * * *

Global missions has a unique place in the life of the Church and should not be deemphasized or confused with other Christian activities. Regrettably, even when the distinctness of the missionary calling is maintained, the importance of helping local churches develop to maturity is often overlooked. It is imperative that missionary candidates and their sending churches grasp the value of helping national churches become mature. However, not all who are called to overseas ministry will be suited to this unique and challenging role. Those who desire to minister to the local church and assist her in becoming healthier need to plan and prepare well. The missionary who can serve as a professor-pastor may be uniquely positioned to contribute to the development of mature churches.

* * * * *

Introduction

Since her inception nearly 2,000 years ago, the Church has been about missions. The true church cares about missions because God cares about missions. A church that overlooks, or de-emphasizes, the missions mandate of Matthew 28:19–20 is a church that has misunderstood God's priorities.[2] God has not called the Church to be a merry band of believers consumed with the ins and outs of their daily lives who enjoy getting together to worship once or twice a week. Rather, God has called His people to be focused on bringing the light of the gospel to a dark world. Thankfully,

[1] Dr. Scarborough serves at a seminary in a Muslim majority country in the 10/40 Window.

[2] Here I have introduced missions as a ministry of the local church. However, God's desire for His people to be a light to the ends of the earth predates the establishment of the church in the first century. The OT abounds with passages that demonstrate this desire. For example, see Isaiah 41:10–12. There is some scholarly discussion on whether OT Israel had an "active" role or a "passive" one in living out their role as witnesses. For further discussion see Grisanti's chapter, Michael A. Grisanti, "The Old Testament: God's Heart for the World," in *Biblical Missions: Principles, Priorities, and Practices*, ed. Mark Tatlock and Chris Burnett (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2025), forthcoming.

many churches today are seriously embracing their God given mandate to go to the ends of the earth.

The importance of missions is rarely questioned.[3] However, emphases in missions are often wrangled over and disagreed upon. Individual churches and missions agencies sometimes have priorities that are unclear and confusing. Unfortunately, this lack of clarity can result in missionaries being "busy in ministry" but frequently spending their energy on tasks that are misaligned with biblical priorities. One important aspect in missions that is often overlooked is the importance of building a mature church. World missions today would be stronger, more effective, and more closely aligned to biblical priorities if more missionaries intentionally gave themselves to helping local churches become mature.

The What and Why of Missions

Understanding priorities in missions becomes harder when the "what and why" of missions are misunderstood. Therefore, a proper understanding of missions is in order. "Missions" as a term can be misleading in today's modern world. Businesses and churches have mission statements that define their goals and purposes. Of course, such statements are not wrong; they can be valuable in helping a variety of institutions function better. However, world missions is distinct from a mission statement because missions is not the goal or purpose of the Church. Rather, missions is the Church's calling; glorifying God is her raison d'etre (Eph 1:12, 1 Pet 2:9). As John Piper aptly put it, "Missions exists because worship doesn't."[4] That is, missions exists because people from every tribe and tongue and people and nation do not yet know and worship the one true God. Until all hear, the Church seeks to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth. World missions is not the Church's goal. Rather, it is a *means* to achieving her goal of glorifying God.

It is crucial to remember that missions is a means to an end and not an end unto itself. It is equally important to define what missions is and what it is not. In some contemporary evangelical circles, the idea of Christian missions has become so diluted that it has lost its particular uniqueness and weight. Denny Spitters and Matthew Ellison deftly argue that a poorly defined concept of missions is impeding the Church's global missionary efforts.[5] They are pushing back against a trend in modern Christianity that labels many types of Christian activities as "missions." For example, Christopher Wright proclaims that "If everything is mission … everything

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[3] The importance of missions is rarely questioned in theory. However, it would be a fascinating study to compile data and develop objective criteria to see if/how churches are living up to their own stated commitments to missions.

[4] John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad! The Supremacy of God in Missions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), 11.

[5] "We contend that many churches do not do missions well because they don't think about missions well." Denny Spitters and Matthew Ellison, *When Everything Is Missions* (Bottomline Media, 2017), 19. "Biblical mission definitions can have a gigantic effect on how local churches will make disciples of the nations—or if 'the nations' emphasis of Jesus' command will even be acknowledged or embraced." Spitters and Ellison, *When Everything Is Missions*, 107.

is mission."[6] He goes on to state that although everything is not cross-cultural evangelistic missions, everything a Christian or church "does should be missional in its conscious participation in the mission of God in God's world."[7] Wright is correct in that everything a Christian says, thinks, or does should accord with God's will. However, when global missions is reduced to merely being another label for intentional Christian living, we have lost something important.

Missions cannot simply be used as a catchall phrase to define every activity of the local church. Spitters and Ellison make an excellent point:

> If every Christian is a missionary and reaching people with the same language and culture as our own is indeed missions, then crossing cultures to share the gospel would naturally be a low priority. In fact, if everything is missions, then the goal of the Great Commission might not be to make steady headway in reaching more nations, tribes, and tongues, but to win as many people to Jesus as possible. This may explain why the overwhelming majority of the Church's resources are spent at home and not on extending the gospel into new frontiers: If the Great Commission's goal is merely to win as many people to Christ as possible, then we should identify the places where the most spiritual new births are taking place and give it our all.[8]

If everything counts as missions then cross-cultural gospel centered missions loses its prominence as one of the Church's great callings.[9] But, to de-emphasize missions is to deny the importance of our Lord's words: "Go therefore and make disciples of *all the nations*" (Matt 28:19).[10] The mandate is to make disciples of all the nations;

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[6] Christopher Wright, *The Mission of God's People: A Biblical Theology of the Church's Mission* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2010), 26. Wright is responding to the oft quoted Stephen Neill who, in 1959, pronounced that, "If everything is mission, nothing is mission." Stephen Neill, *Creative Tension* (London: Edinburgh House, 1959), 81.

[7] Wright, *The Mission of God's People*, 26.

[8] Spitters and Ellison, *When Everything Is Missions*, 103. E. D. Burns would agree that not every Christian is a missionary although every Christian is called to evangelize. E. D. Burns, *The Missionary-Theologian: Sent into the World, Sanctified by the Word* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2020), 51–52.

[9] Some writers use the word "missional" to describe a variety of church activities that are distinct from world missions such as leadership development, worship, and preaching. Gelder and Zscheile credit the book *Missional Church* with bringing the term "missional" into common church parlance. Craig Van Gelder and Dwight J. Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 1. See Darrell L. Guder and George R. Hunsberger, eds., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998). While some, like Gelder and Zscheile, maintain "missional" is flexible enough to be used in a variety of contexts, others have criticized the word and believe it has become "vacuous and lost its definitional value." Gelder and Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective*, 1–3. While not a bad term in and of itself, I maintain that the frequent use of "missional" and its application in contexts unrelated to world missions has contributed to a weakening of the (Western) Church's understanding of, and commitment to, cross-cultural missions. Again, Neill is helpful. He wrote, "If everything that the Church does is to be classed as 'mission,' we shall have to find another term for the Church's particular responsibility for 'the heathen,' those who have never yet heard the name of Christ." Neill, *Creative Tension*, 81.

[10] "All the nations" is πάντα τὰ ἔθνη which, while it can be used to mean political entities with defined borders and government (e.g., Acts 13:19), can also be translated as "people" or "Gentiles."

faithful churches must send missionaries to the ends of the earth with a view to God's adoption of sons and daughters from every people on earth. The objective is not to identify where our deployment of financial and human capital might bring the most return on investment. Rather, the goal is to glorify God by fulfilling the Great Commission as He has given it to us.

The Church has a long history of seeing missions to the nations as distinct from daily Christian living. Paul the apostle embodied this understanding. He left the comforts of home, exposing himself to danger, "to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for His name's sake" (Rom 1:5).[11] Paul was not content to stay home and labor to bring the gospel message to his Jewish compatriots, but was burdened to bring the salvific message of Jesus Christ to peoples and cultures who had not yet heard the Good News. This is world missions. Gratefully, many generations have understood world missions and departed to foreign shores for the sake of His name.

The Biblical Emphasis of a Mature Church

Missions is not less than bringing the message of salvation in Christ alone to all peoples, but is it more? Put differently, can the church legitimately have other priorities in global missions beyond evangelism? More to the point: Is there clear biblical evidence that helping local churches grow to maturity is a legitimate priority of global missions? I answer in the affirmative.

Jesus' Charge

The Great Commission of Matthew 28:19–20 reads, "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." The imperative phrase "make disciples" takes pride of place as the main clause in these verses.[12] Thus, it supplies the foundational context upon which the other secondary clauses rest. Christians go to the ends of the earth so that they can make disciples. Christians baptize new converts as part of their public identification as followers of Jesus. Christians also teach each other what Jesus commanded as part of a life of increasing maturity and devotion to the Savior.

Despite the traditional translation of "all the nations" the textual idea is best expressed with "all peoples" or "all people groups." Unless otherwise specified, all Bible references are to the New American Standard Bible, Updated Version (NASB) (La Habra: Foundation Publications, 1995).

[11] In Romans 1:5 Paul is specifically speaking about his apostolic credentials and the grace he received in order to minister to the Gentiles. His commitment to preaching the gospel to them is evidenced in the missionary journeys he embarked upon as detailed in Acts. "Gentiles" translates ἔθνος, the same word as in Matthew 28:19.

[12] It has been oft discussed that "make disciples" is the only true verbal imperative in this sentence. The other three key verbs ("go," "baptizing," and "teaching") are participles. However, they do share the imperatival force of "make disciples." If one is inclined to be even more precise, "go" could be categorized as a participle of attendant circumstance, while "baptizing" and "teaching" as participles of means. Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 1996), 645.

Notice the depth of Jesus' concept of discipleship.[13] His concern was not merely that one become a convert or believer. Rather, His expressed desire was to make disciples. That discipleship is more than mere conversion becomes clear by the addition of two activities: baptizing and teaching. Baptism cannot be an entrance requirement for heaven. Jesus' own words to the unbaptized and newly regenerate thief on the cross next to his makes this clear: "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43). Baptism is not a condition of salvation, but it is a matter of obedience for all who would live as His obedient disciples.[14]

As important as baptism is, it is but one step of being on the path of discipleship. Jesus charged His followers to teach the next generation of disciples *all* that He had commanded. To fulfill the Great Commission, missionaries must evangelize but they must also be faithful to pass on the full spectrum of Jesus' teachings. Craig Blomberg gets it right:

> Teaching obedience to all of Jesus' commands forms the heart of disciple making. Evangelism must be holistic. If non-Christians are not hearing the gospel and not being challenged to make a decision for Christ, then the church has disobeyed one part of Jesus' commission. If new converts are not faithfully and lovingly nurtured in the whole counsel of God's revelation, then the church has disobeyed the other part.[15]

To not evangelize is to disobey, but to not carefully teach the whole counsel of God is also disobedience. The implications for mature churches on the mission field should be clear. If churches and missionaries do not see discipling to maturity as an important priority, then they have missed the basic thrust of Jesus' charge in Matthew 28.

Paul's Emphasis

Jesus' charge to teach future disciples all that He commanded is clear. The apostle Paul's emphasis on mature believers is equally clear.

In Colossians 1:28–29 he writes, "We proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, so that we may present every man complete in Christ. For this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me." Paul, the quintessential missionary, did not move on from Colossae once a small body of converts had been gathered. Instead, he continued to care for them from afar and was concerned about their spiritual wellbeing.[16] His goal

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[13] It is outside the scope of this study to develop a full definition of what constituted a "disciple." Most simply, a disciple is a "follower" or a "learner." See Mark Dever, *Discipling: How to Help Others Follow Jesus* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 11; and Oswald J. Sanders, *Spiritual Discipleship* (Chicago: Moody, 1994), 8. A disciple was more than just a pupil; he was not seeking to merely obtain a body of knowledge, but rather he sought to actively imitate his master.

[14] For more on this topic, see Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn Wright, eds., *Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2006). Especially helpful are chapters one and three.

[15] Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 432.

[16] Paul did not found the church at Colossae. Most likely Epaphras did while Paul was in Ephesus (Col 1:6–7; Acts 19).

for the Colossian believers, as with others, was that he would be able to present each one complete in Christ.

The word τέλειον is variously translated as "complete" (NASB), "perfect" (KJV, NIV), or "mature" (ESV, HCSB). Of the last two translation options, Moo argues that "'perfect' is too strong, 'mature' too weak. He continues, "'Mature,' on the other hand, is too relative, inviting us to think that we are *teleios* as long as we are doing a bit better than some other Christians we could name."[17] Ultimately, Moo agrees with Schweizer who has given the sense as the "complete and undivided way in which a person, with all one's positive and negative attributes, is oriented toward God or toward Christ."[18] In modern parlance, the NASB's "complete" veers too close to the meaning of "perfect." Although mature may be too weak of a word according to Moo, it fits our purposes well.[19] Paul desired to see the saints at Colossae mature in their faith. He was under no illusions that they would be perfect this side of heaven.[20] Although they would not be perfect, Paul expends himself for them that they would be mature in their faith.

The Expectation in Hebrews

Jesus charged His followers to disciple others to maturity. Paul labored to see believers realize this maturity. The writer of Hebrews seems to take it for granted that long-time Christians would be mature disciples. He writes, "For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God, and you have come to need milk and not solid food" (Heb 5:12). The verse should not be taken to understand that all believers have the gift of teaching or the responsibility to assume an official teacher role in a local assembly.[21] However, the verse does communicate the expectation that believers who have been in the faith for a significant period should understand the deeper things of the Christian faith and be able to instruct others in them.

The author of Hebrews viewed it as a significant problem that the recipients of his letter were still children in the faith when they should have already become mature.[22] These immature Christians were not able to teach others because they were too "dull of hearing" to understand the weightier doctrines of the faith. They could not pass on what they did not know. Although the author assumes that they should have been mature by this point in their Christian walk, he does recognize that such

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[17] Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 161.

[18] Eduard Schweizer, *The Letter to the Colossians: A Commentary*, trans. Andrew Chester (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1982), 112.

[19] Schweizer also dislikes the term "mature." Schweizer, *The Letter to the Colossians*, 111.

[20] Some argue that Paul is referring to an eschatological presentation of the saints to Christ in Colossians 1:28. If this view is true, a translation of "perfect" may be more accurate. However, Paul's use of τέλειος in Colossians 4:12 is discussing the contemporary state of the believers at Colossae. Further, Paul's use of τέλειος in Ephesians 4:13 also refers to the present state of believers as a result of the faithful work of individuals that God has gifted for the ministry. Even if Paul has the eschatological state in mind, his personal labor (Col 1:29) indicates his goal of maturity in the lives of those he taught.

[21] David L. Allen, *Hebrews*, NAC (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 335–36.

[22] Interestingly, William Lane contends that the addressed believers had regressed from their previous level of maturity to which they had attained. William L. Lane, *Hebrews 1–8*, WBC (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1991), 145. His view is a minority one.

maturity does not merely come with the passage of time, but involves effort and training. Indeed, "solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil" (Heb 5:14). Spiritual maturity is not a given, it takes sustained labor. Moreover, this labor should not only characterize church leaders, but the entire community of saints gathered into a local church.[23]

Mature Churches Can Be Developed in Any Culture

Our brief review of pertinent biblical texts has reminded us that Jesus and His apostles emphasize the importance of a mature flock. The Church's mandate of teaching and discipleship with the goal of spiritual maturity is too plain to miss. This maturity is not divorced from the idea of missions but is congruent with it. It is fair to say that the work, whether abroad or at home, is not complete when someone comes to faith in Christ; ongoing discipleship must follow.

Biblical discipleship and spiritual maturity are not the exclusive purview of any one church or culture. Jesus made this clear in Matthew 28 when He commanded His followers to make disciples of all nations. Disciples of every people group need to be baptized and taught. Jesus' command to teach all that He had commanded to all peoples makes clear that Christian doctrine, standards, and practices are transcultural. The measure of a mature believer or a mature church will be universal because the standards are biblical, not cultural. With that in mind, it is helpful to list out the characteristics of a mature church that a missionary can assist in developing.

Mark Dever's well-known *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church* is an excellent summary of the defining characteristics ("marks") of a mature church.[24] They are important enough to reproduce here in full. A healthy church will be marked by:

1. Expositional Preaching
2. Gospel Doctrine
3. A Biblical Understanding of Conversion and Evangelism
4. A Biblical Understanding of Church Membership
5. Biblical Church Discipline
6. A Biblical Concern for Discipleship and Growth
7. Biblical Church Leadership
8. A Biblical Understanding and Practice of Prayer
9. A Biblical Understanding and Practice of Missions[25]

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[23] Due to space constraints, I have focused my attention on the overall concept of maturity and not on the maturity of the local church per se. That the church as a whole should be mature is obvious for at least two reasons. First, if every Christian is called to maturity, then it naturally follows that the churches in which those believers gather should be mature. Second, the Scriptures elsewhere teach the idea of corporate maturity. See for example, Ephesians 4:11–16 where the apostle explains that the Lord has given various categories of leaders to the Church so that the saints might be equipped, and the body might be built up.

[24] Dever employs the term "healthy" whereas I often use the term "mature." Although the terms have some difference in meaning, in the context of this article they can be used almost interchangeably as they are getting at the same idea.

[25] Mark Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, 4th ed. (Wheaton: Crossway, 2021). It is worth noting that the list of nine marks was updated between the third and fourth editions. In the fourth edition,

Certainly, a local church may look slightly different in various contexts because of the influences of culture and language, but the essential marks of a healthy church are universal because they are biblical. On the field, a missionary should strive to help a local church grow to maturity according to biblical standards, not become Western in its orientation and practice.

The Missionary's Role in Developing Mature Churches

Developing mature churches should be a significant priority in world missions. Healthy churches are not only a goal in missions work, but they are also a means to greater and more effective missions. As such, missionaries, churches, and missions agencies would do well to re-focus on this too-often neglected emphasis: intentional development of mature local churches. Missionaries can contribute to the development of healthy churches on the mission field by carefully considering their purpose, plan, preparation, posture, place, and eventual passing of the baton.

Purpose

Unfortunately, missionaries frequently lack clarity and purpose in what they are being sent to do. "Building God's kingdom" is a great slogan, but one that translates poorly to actual ministry efforts. *Before* they ever get sent to the field, missionaries need to ask themselves this question: What exactly am I being sent to do? Of course, on the broadest level, the missionary wants to glorify God. But how exactly does he expect to do this? Does he purpose to preach the gospel among a particular people group? Does he intend to translate a portion of the Scriptures? Is his goal to train a new generation of church leadership?

In order to contribute to the development of healthy churches, missionaries need to be intentional. There are countless ways that missionaries can fill their time, so it is vital that they agree with their sending churches and agencies on why they are being sent to the field. If those sending out the missionary are most concerned about seeing large numbers of converts or baptisms, they will likely be disappointed if he spends a significant amount of time discipling others to maturity. Defining missionaries' purpose narrowly enables them to know how they should be investing their time and effort.

Jesus understood why He came: "It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick; I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (Mark 2:17). Jesus' goal was not to spend His time distracted by those who obstinately refused to admit their need for a savior.[26] Rather, Jesus had a purpose: to call sinners – those who acknowledged their need to be saved. Note that Jesus had

several marks have been combined, leaving room for the addition of the chapters on prayer and missions. I find the updated list of nine marks to be excellent. Although some may argue that even more marks could be added to this list, Dever has gone on record stating that these are not the "only marks of health that a church should have." Dever, *Nine Marks of a Healthy Church*, 12.

[26] I am not suggesting that Jesus deliberately ignored groups of people or that some did not need to respond to His invitation. Edwards puts it well: "The saying is a defense of Jesus' outreach to the disreputable, not a suggestion that there are some who are exempt from his call." James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 86.

great clarity: "I did not come to do this, but I came to do that." His purpose was so clear, that He could confidently assert what He came to do and what He did *not* come to do.[27]

Purpose informs priorities. Missionaries who lack clearly defined purposes will not be able to confidently say "yes" to ministry that aligns with their priorities and "no" to ministry that does not. No one missionary can do everything. Purpose is needed; sending churches, missionaries, and agencies must work together to achieve this clarity.

In the case of developing mature churches on the mission field, purpose is sorely needed. Missionaries are often pulled in many directions. If the missionary does not intentionally purpose to spend time to help the Church on the field mature, it is likely he will be distracted with other noble but less important goals. The apostles recognized the need to keep first things first. In Acts 6, they refused to be distracted and pulled away from their primary goal of ministering the Word. They did not undervalue other types of ministry. Quite the opposite: they instructed the Church to identify godly individuals who could be specifically dedicated to those areas of service. However, the pressing physical needs of the fledging church could not override the twelve's commitment to giving the saints what they needed for growth and maturity: the Word of God. Unless more missionaries intentionally purpose to play a significant role in developing mature churches, there will be a noticeably smaller number of healthy churches on the mission field.

Plan

Once a missionary has a clear purpose, the next step is developing an actionable plan. Unfortunately, the idea of planning is sometimes looked down upon because some believers wrongly maintain that planning does not leave room for the Spirit of God to work. An anti-planning mindset unintentionally sets itself against Scripture's teaching on the matter. [28]

The concept of appropriate planning can be found in both Testaments. The author of Proverbs wrote, "Prepare your work outside and make it ready for yourself in the field; Afterwards, then, build your house" (Prov 24:27). This short verse is not a missions verse per se; rather, it is an admonition about how to work well. The writer is reiterating to his readers that certain work priorities need to be attended to first in

[27] Of course, Jesus' purpose in coming to earth was to glorify His Father in heaven. As He considered His death on the cross, He considered His purpose and fervently prayed that the Father would be glorified (John 12:27–28). Later, as He prayed, He confessed that all that He had done was to glorify the Father: "I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do" (John 17:4). Jesus' chief objective of glorifying the Father was accomplished through specific, tangible purposes in ministry.

[28] I have personally witnessed how a lack of planning can create large challenges on the field. For example, I remember meeting with an enthusiastic missionary who was leading a team of numerous young families in a difficult country located in the 10/40 Window. The team's overall purpose was simple and clear: win people to Christ. Although their purpose was clear, how they intended to accomplish their goal was less so. When I inquired how he and his teammates planned to accomplish their goal, he replied with three steps: pray, live for Jesus, and share the gospel. Although, none of these steps is wrong (in fact, they are all biblical!), they did not represent an actionable plan. As foreigners in a difficult country, there had been no real thought into what was needed to accomplish their team's goal. Such lack of planning does not bode well for long-term kingdom impact.

order to achieve the desired outcome. Waltke notes that "the saying offers no validation for the pattern of work it admonishes because *common sense validates* the pattern."[29] Simply put, working well requires evaluating the task at hand and formulating a plan to carry it out.

In the context of faith and discipleship, Jesus also introduces the idea of planning. "For which one of you, when he wants to build a tower, does not first sit down and calculate the cost to see if he has enough to complete it" (Luke 14:28)? In this statement, Jesus is challenging those who might be His disciples to carefully consider the cost of being His disciple. Jesus does not defend such careful consideration. He takes it for granted that His listeners understood the need for careful planning.[30]

Paul frequently made plans for various ministries. Paul told the Roman church about his plans to visit them (Rom 1:13). He further shared with them about his plans to go to Spain (15:23–28). He also planned to go to Corinth after passing through Macedonia (1 Cor 16:5–7). In God's sovereignty, not all of Paul's plan came to fruition (cf. Acts 16:6), but that did not stop him from pursuing ministry by way of careful planning.

Missionaries whose goal is to help local churches become healthy and mature churches need a plan. There are many questions. Where will the missionary serve? In what local body of believers? Exactly how will he contribute to the church's spiritual development? Will he run a discipleship program? Does he intend to preach and teach? Does he need to learn a foreign language to effectively communicate?[31] In answering these questions, missionaries should not assume that their goals and labors will be immediately desired and embraced by nationals on the field. To imply that their church is weak and in need of outside help may be offensive to the local leadership. Early and clear communication with national church leadership is a crucial part of planning. Their trust and support are vital.

Having an actionable plan does not mean that the missionary is so rigid that he cannot be flexible to adapt to the needs of the people he is serving. Nor does an actionable plan imply that a missionary already knows everything about the church or country he is moving to. A plan is simply a clear and reasonable path that leads to the desired outcome.[32]

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[29] Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs, Chapters 15–31*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 293. Emphasis mine.

[30] This is so, because as Marshall has bluntly stated, "anybody who undertakes a task without being ready for the total cost involved will only make a fool of himself." I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, NIGTC (Exeter: Paternoster, 1978), 593. Obviously, counting the cost does not represent the sum total of careful planning, but it is certainly part of the equation.

[31] High-level planning naturally precedes working out the finer details. As high-level planning influences how a missionary prepares for the field, I have treated "planning" before "preparation" in this essay. However, I readily admit that many aspects of planning will be worked out during or after the missionary's preparation. In all cases, the wise missionary should plan in partnership with his sending agency and home church.

[32] As one who is living and raising his family overseas, I am aware that plans do not often turn out exactly as they are laid down. This is to be expected when serving in difficult places where the unexpected often occurs. However, the fact that plans often change does not mean that planning is wrong or unhelpful. God often changes man's carefully laid plans. However, God's providential intervention in our planning

Preparation

Once a missionary has an acceptable plan, there needs to be an honest assessment. Does the candidate have the necessary preparation to serve well in this role? Does he have the appropriate education, training, and gifting to carry out his plans? Individual gifting is the prerogative of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor 12:7); spiritual gifts cannot be created by individual human need or desire. However, a missionary's gifting should be identified and developed before he embarks on his missionary service.

Paul urged Timothy to not neglect his spiritual gift but to kindle it afresh in God's service (1 Tim 4:14, 2 Tim 1:6).[33] Peter teaches his readers that although each one possesses a spiritual gift, it is something that must be put into service. "As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God" (1 Pet 4:10). Commenting on this text, Peter Davids helpfully states that "spiritual gifts are not autonomous entities outside a person's control, but abilities that the Spirit gives and that a person must grow in and use, putting them into service."[34] No one is ready to help a church to grow to maturity who has not already identified his gifting and begun actively employing it in faithful, God-honoring service.

A knowledge and development of personal spiritual gifts is essential, but the missionary who intends to help develop mature churches will usually need specific training that prepares him for the task. Although they may not serve as the pastor in their local congregation, missionaries helping churches grow to maturity will be sought out as teachers, disciplers, and counselors. In order to serve the immature church well, therefore, the missionary will need rigorous theological training.[35] Even the learned Apostle Paul took significant time out to prepare for the ministry which God had called him to (Gal 1:15–18).[36] If the missionary aims to see a healthy mature church of local believers, he will need to have a robust theology so that he can fulfill Jesus' commandment of teaching new believers all that Jesus commanded.

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should not be a cause for undue stress. "The mind of man plans his way, but the Lord directs his steps" (Prov 16:9). Kidner reminds us that "God has not merely the last word but the soundest." Derek Kidner, *Proverbs: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1964), 112.

[33] Although some might understand Timothy's gift in 1 Timothy 4:14 as his "call to ministry," the best interpretation maintains that Paul was speaking of Timothy's spiritual gifts that enabled him to perform the ministry to which he had been called. So, Yarbrough: "Timothy's 'gift' (*charisma*) that he should not 'neglect' suggests a divine bestowal through the Holy Spirit of competencies essential to his ministry." Robert W. Yarbrough, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 250.

[34] Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 160.

[35] Tan and Brooks embrace the same philosophy: "Theological training is a necessity for missionaries themselves since they must share the gospel, disciple people, and equip local believers for healthy church formation." Sunny Tan and Will Brooks, "Theological Education as Integral Component of World Mission Strategy," in *World Mission: Theology, Strategy, and Current Issues* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2019), 179. The exact kind and level of theological training will vary according to ministry contexts and specific ministry goals. For a compelling argument on the importance of missionaries being theologically astute, see Burns, *The Missionary-Theologian*.

[36] I agree with Timothy George who has argued that although Paul almost certainly engaged in ministry during his time in Arabia, this likelihood "should not obscure the fact that even so brilliant and well-trained a thinker as Paul would also require a period of intensive preparation for the life work to which he had been called." Timothy George, *Galatians*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 125.

Beyond theological training, missionaries who purpose to help churches mature will also benefit from practical training. They will acquire part of this training as they exercise their spiritual gifts in serving the saints. However, the importance of personal mentoring from mature pastors and church leaders is vital as well. Jesus spent countless hours with the men to whom He first entrusted the Great Commission. Titus, Timothy, and John Mark all benefited from spending time with the Apostle Paul. The missionary who will serve in an immature church with underdeveloped leadership should learn all he can about practical aspects of pastoral ministry and church leadership before he is thrust into a situation where he might be depended upon to help lead the church to greater health.

Posture

Well-trained missionaries with a clear purpose and a well-defined plan to serve in local churches overseas are a great start. However, even well-prepared missionaries will be ineffective on the field if they come in with the wrong posture. In other words, missionaries need to possess the right attitude. Although many characteristics of a biblical attitude could be mentioned, two are most important: love and humility.

Too often missionaries have an unbalanced view of love in world missions. Many missionaries have a strong love for the lost and a desire to see them come to Christ.[37] However, those same missionaries sometimes have less evident love for the local churches that God has raised up in the locations in which they serve. This simply will not do. "Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her" (Eph 5:25b). Christ did not die *merely* so that people could escape eternal punishment in the life to come. He died so that redeemed sinners could also live for God's glory in their temporal lives on this earth.

With unfortunate frequency some missionaries choose not to join local churches, preferring smaller missionary gatherings or even online church. Although there may be a variety of reasons for such a decision, in many cases such an avoidance of the local national church manifests a mindset that is contrary to our Lord's attitude toward His bride.[38] Further, such an attitude makes it nearly impossible for a missionary to help a local church become healthier if he does not love it enough to be committed to it.[39] Missionaries whose purpose is to help develop mature churches on the field must possess a sacrificial love for the local church in their context.

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[37] As well they should! Missionaries who lack a love for the lost will be poor servants indeed.

[38] This does not mean that there are *never* legitimate reasons for eschewing a local indigenous assembly. Depending on the circumstances, it may be the wisest choice. Nonetheless, I am convinced that far too often the decision to eschew a national local church is the wrong decision.

[39] I recognize that some churches on the field are so unhealthy that missionaries may need to "supplement" their spiritual diet by additional sermons, Bible study, or fellowship. The challenge of being committed to a weak church may be especially acute for those with children. Mark Borisuk maintains that, "For many missionary families, where to go to church will be one of the most complex decisions they face." This is certainly true. However, Borisuk is correct when he adds that this "decision must be based on the individual family's *spiritual and ministry goals*." Emphasis mine. Mark Borisuk, "Shepherding the Family on the Mission Field," in *Biblical Missions: Principles, Priorities, and Practices*, ed. Mark Tatlock and Chris Burnett (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2025), forthcoming. If a missionary family has the goal of

The first vital characteristic the missionary will need is love. The second characteristic is humility. This spiritual trait is important for all believers (Eph 4:1–2, 1 Pet 5:5), but is an especially important quality because most missionaries leave for the field when they are younger and eager to put into practice all they have learned. If a young theologically trained missionary arrives on the field and unwisely communicates that he knows better than the pastor and local church leaders about how to nurture a church to maturity, it is not hard to imagine that he might not be well-received by the nationals. He may actually be more educated than the national pastor. Further, he may even know how to help the church become spiritually healthier. However, if he does not demonstrate humility, his sincere efforts are more likely to be met with hostility rather than be embraced.

First Peter 5:5–6 is vital to bear in mind: "You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time." Younger men might have a tendency to buck leadership or offer their opinions too quickly. This tendency is likely exacerbated when young men become convinced that they are "right" and their leadership is "wrong." Peter's admonition to younger men does not rule out the need for all to embrace humility, but there is a particular need for it among the young.[40] Schreiner is on point when he argues that the elders are those who occupy a position of authority in the church while the younger men are those who are "literally younger, perhaps because younger people would be more apt to act rebelliously."[41] Younger missionaries who want to effect positive change in a national church must be especially mindful to be humble if they want to see their goal of a mature congregation realized.

Persistence

The previously mentioned considerations are important and offer a greater likelihood that the missionary can genuinely contribute to the development of a local healthy church. However, even if all those facets are present, there is yet another piece of the puzzle that needs to be considered: persistence. Unfortunately, too many missionaries do not persist on the field long enough to make a significant impact on a church's health. Certainly, some kinds of missionary service do not require longevity on the field.[42] However, missionaries who are committed to helping a local church grow to maturity need to be prepared to invest many years of their life.

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strengthening the local church, they will need to be committed to a (likely) weak national local church while working extra hard to ensure that the family is spiritually shepherded and nourished.

[40] Some, like Karen Jobes, argue that the distinction is not between older men and younger men, but between those who hold the position of elder/leader and everyone else. See Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 307.

[41] Peter's use of πάντες shows he is distinguishing between the younger group and the rest of the church. Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 237.

[42] Project-based missions might naturally require shorter lengths of service. In general, reliable statistics on lengths of service for any kind of missions seem elusive and/or conflicting. A report produced over 20 years ago by the World Evangelical Alliance claimed that the average length of missionary service

While spiritual birth is wrought by God in a moment, spirit growth takes time. Believers are not perfect this side of heaven; God constantly matures them until they see Jesus (Phil 1:6). This idea is implicit in Paul's instruction regarding elder qualifications in 1 Timothy 3. An elder should not be a new convert (1 Tim 3:6). Yarbrough notes that "Paul knows that new believers are untested and unsuited for the responsibilities the overseer faces."[43] Men who are too quickly elevated to positions of spiritual authority are a danger, both to themselves and others, because they have not had the appropriate time to grow and demonstrate spiritual maturity.[44] Maturity takes time.[45]

If the Church must be cautious and remember that even their most promising spiritual leaders need time to grow, how much more patient must she be with the rest of the flock? Missionaries can be especially prone to impatience. After spending years preparing for service, they are eager to see results once they are on the ground. Often, they are giving reports to donors who want to see some kind of return on their investment. For these reasons, and a myriad of others, missionaries need to cultivate the long view and remember that spiritual growth takes time.[46] Practically, this means a missionary needs to be prepared to serve for many years before a mature church will exist. Too often, missionaries' lack of long-term commitment can undermine their goal of a mature local church. In summary, a missionary can help develop a mature church by staying put and faithfully serving in a local congregation for years.

Passing the Baton

If a missionary is fortunate enough to spend years in a church helping it develop to maturity, he will undoubtedly have assumed some level of leadership in the church. Although such a situation is natural, it brings with it its own set of challenges. Ultimately, missionaries should not be focused on developing Western churches, but on developing healthy churches in foreign cultures.[47] Most local

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is twelve years. Jim Van Meter, "US Report of Findings on Missionary Retention" (US ReMAP II, December 2003). However, recently Nations Outreach claimed nearly 50% of missionaries serve five or less years. Jeremy Koering, "2024 Christian Missionary Statistics," *Nations Outreach* (blog), March 1, 2024, https://nationsoutreach.org/stories/christian-missionary-statistics/. More trustworthy published statistics on missionary retention would be a boon to missions agencies and churches.

[43] Yarbrough, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 201.

[44] Paul gives two reasons that the elder should not be a new convert: so that he will 1) not become conceited nor 2) fall into condemnation. Philip Towner argues that "maturity should help leaders avoid" these two dangers. Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 257.

[45] Other scriptures also indicate that spiritual maturity takes time. For example, that older women are to train the younger (Titus 2:3–5) demonstrates that maturity is more typically found in those who have had more time to grow in their faith. Above, we briefly examined Hebrews 5:11–14 where the author also relates the idea of time to spiritual maturity.

[46] Many western missionaries were fortunate enough to grow up spiritually in a healthy church environment. This means that they have never experienced how long it can take for a local church as a whole to mature together.

[47] Refer to the section above entitled "Mature Churches Can Be Developed in Any Culture."

churches will be best served by leaders from their own culture and context.[48] So, while a missionary may have assumed many responsibilities in his local congregation as he labored to see it mature, it will not become a truly mature indigenous church until it can stand on its own.

Missionaries can play a critical role in developing mature churches, but they can also get in the way of their own goal if they are not willing to give up their roles to national believers when the time is right. The final stages of developing a mature national church occur when a missionary is no longer needed as an essential part of the church's leadership. In order for mature *independent* churches to be established on the field, the missionary needs to give "permission" to others to shoulder the responsibilities that he has previously held.[49] The church's spiritual growth that the missionary has worked so hard to foster can actually be hindered if he does not pass the baton when qualified nationals are ready to serve. Jesus set the example for us of preparing the next generation. He taught and prepared His disciples, knowing that He would not always be with them, at least in the way they anticipated. In contrast to many leaders who cling to power and avoid talking about any future "successor" for fear of losing influence in the present, Jesus was the one who initiated conversation about the "day after" (e.g., John 13 and following).

Paul also modeled the kind of servant leadership that intentionally raised up younger believers to mature that they might be ready to assume the privilege and responsibility of shepherding God's flock at the appropriate time. For years, Paul had been preparing Timothy to assume greater and greater responsibility in the ministry. Going even further, he commanded Timothy to follow the same model of raising up qualified leadership: "The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (2 Tim 2:2). Note that the idea of "entrusting" biblical teaching to others does not happen quickly or without effort. As Towner has pointed out, this entrusting "was not simply a matter of a tap on the shoulder; it would require Timothy to teach and to model the faith" as well.[50] This passing on of the baton is not something that should occur right before the missionaries are approaching retirement age or preparing to leave the field. Rather, this entrusting involves a long-term vision to identify and invest in faithful men who will continue in sound doctrine and practice.

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[48] There is not space here to develop this idea. However, it is a generally accepted missions principle and accords well with the biblical data. Benjamin Merkle notes that even though Paul founded churches, "He did not let the first converts become dependent upon him as a missionary." In fact, much of "Paul's work through his visits, his letters, and his co-workers was primarily focused on enabling the local believers to do the work of the ministry." Benjamin L. Merkle, "The Need for Theological Education in Missions: Lessons Learned from the Church's Greatest Missionary," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 9, 4 (2005): 58.

[49] By giving permission, I do not mean to imply that a local church belongs to the missionary and that he has the absolute right to decide what goes on. Every church belongs to the One who has bought it with His blood. However, the reality is that some missionaries on the field (and pastors, elders, Sunday school teachers, etc. at home) can feel very possessive about "their" ministry roles and become reluctant to bring along others to maturity who might one day replace them. To see healthy churches established, missionaries need to think less about their ministry and more about God's glory and plan.

[50] Towner, *Timothy and Titus*, 491.

The Professor-Pastor

The missionary will be more helpful in the development of healthy churches if he carefully assesses his ministry according to the six considerations above. We examined these six aspects of missions on the principle level. Now we will briefly examine how these considerations can apply more narrowly.

If a missionary has a passion to serve only one local church and help it grow to maturity, "it is a fine work he desires to do" (1 Tim 3:1). Essentially, he desires to fulfill the role of an elder. However, due to the large need on the mission field and the many opportunities for service, some missionaries may be called to help multiple churches simultaneously. How can this be done well?

One viable option is for some missionaries to serve as professor-pastors *on* the missions field. Clarity is needed here. A professor offers formal training in theology and ministry skills within an established structure.[51] To develop healthy churches by teaching pastors and leaders, the professor will certainly require prior theological training. Tan and Brooks are correct that "coming alongside local believers and training them to … [lead the church] requires a commitment to providing *rigorous* theological training."[52] Rigorous training is required because the task of training other church leaders is a large responsibility with far reaching impact.

A pastor serves in the local church by shepherding and discipling. Although missionaries may sometimes serve as pastors, it is often preferable for a national to be the pastor and the missionary to assist him in caring for the flock. Thus, the "pastor" aspect of the professor-pastor missionary is best understood as one who plays the role of an elder. While he engages in formal training that might benefit multiple churches, the missionary should be committed to one church in which he can serve, teach, disciple, and model the faith. His commitment to a local assembly serves at least two purposes: 1) The missionary can play a significant role in developing one healthy church, and 2) that church can then serve as a model for how good theology and ministry skills look in practice.

World missions would benefit from more professor-pastors because more healthy churches would result from their labors. How do the six general principles that we considered above look when applied to the missionary professor-pastor? The first three principles are pre-field considerations while the last three principles are applicable to life and ministry in the destination country.

Purpose, Plan, and Preparation

Before the missionary candidate arrives on the field, there is much to consider. It is unlikely that the prospective missionary will become a professor-pastor if he did not have such a goal before going to the field. Opportunities to teach in a reputable school or seminary are not plentiful. However, such positions provide the opportunity

[51] An established structure differs from personal discipleship or mentoring. In many cases such personal training will precede the introduction of formal training. Formal training, at minimum, involves a curriculum, standards of evaluation, and a specific timeline. Formal training is not inherently better than informal discipleship but does serve a somewhat different purpose. Each has a place in the life of the Church.

[52] Tan and Brooks, "Theological Education," 179. Emphasis mine.

to train multiple leaders who can help churches grow to maturity while a concurrent pastoral role (e.g., elder, discipler, etc.) provides for greater impact in one local congregation. If the missionary candidate desires to be a professor-pastor to assist churches in becoming healthy, he and his sending church will need to have this as a clear goal and understand its implications.

A missionary candidate's purpose, plan, and preparation go hand in hand. If one desires to teach and prepare others in theology and pastoral ministry, he will need to be adequately equipped himself. Missionaries cannot skimp on their own theological preparation because they need to be prepared to "tirelessly labor to ensure national believers receive the highest quality training in the word of God that is possible."[53] Nationals deserve the highest quality training possible because they are shepherding the church of God which He purchased with His blood (Acts 20:28). The Church, no matter in which country or culture it exists, deserves well-equipped pastors and elders. Healthy churches require capable leaders. Capable leaders require quality training. Quality training comes from those who are already appropriately theologically and ministerially qualified.

A professor-pastor needs specific places to serve. He needs an institution in which to instruct and train as well as a local assembly in which he can teach and disciple. In almost all cases, the candidate should have an agreement with both the seminary and a local church before he goes to the field. That a seminary needs to agree to a professor's employment is obvious; no one would presume to appear at an educational institution unannounced and demand a teaching post. However, something similar can happen on the mission field between a missionary and a church. Some missionaries simply turn up at a local church and expect to be welcomed with open arms into a leadership or teaching role. This behavior demonstrates an unwise, and perhaps even arrogant attitude on the missionary's part. Pre-field communication with an established local assembly is important. The elders and leaders of the church should understand and agree to the missionary's desires and goals before he comes to their church.[54]

One final aspect of field preparation for the professor-pastor missionary is making decisions about language acquisition. On both fronts, fluency in the local language enables one to be most effective in ministry. Although it is possible to use English in some contexts, it is preferable to teach and disciple in the local language as much as possible.[55] Scott Callaham states that "crossing the bridge of language and culture is rightly the duty of the missionary far more often than it is the burden" of the national in the host nation.[56] Because the missionary is communicating God's

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[53] Tan and Brooks, "Theological Education," 180.

[54] Remember that the missionary professor-pastor has a different role from the church planter. He is coming alongside a local church to join it and strengthen it. This cannot be done effectively if he finds himself in opposition to the local leaders (no matter how "right" the missionary may be in his doctrine and practice).

[55] Scott Callaham has offered a fresh and compelling argument about the need for language learning in world missions. He even advocates for the importance of missionaries knowing the biblical languages in addition to the local language of the community which they serve. See Scott N. Callaham, "Language and World Mission," in *World Mission: Theology, Strategy, and Current Issues* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2019), 207–38.

[56] Callaham, "Language and World Mission," 227. Callaham's statement comes in the immediate context of communicating the Word of God to unbelievers on the mission field. I believe his argument is also applicable to theological instruction in a foreign country.

Word, it is imperative that he do all he can to remove barriers to learning God's Word.[57] This applies equally in the academy as well as the church. Although it will take years and countless hours of hard work, professor-pastors need to plan to joyfully give themselves to this labor in their early years.

Posture, Place, and Passing the Baton

Once the missionary has relocated to his host country the real work begins. From the outset, his posture (attitude) will set the tone for his ministry of training and discipleship. His early years of language training afford him a wonderful opportunity to demonstrate his humility and love for the church. Before his language develops sufficiently, the professor-pastor missionary will be severely limited in his ability to communicate the Word. After years of preparation before departing for the field, this additional time of "limited" ministry might feel frustrating. Despite the temptation to discouragement, this time should be seen as a blessing because it will give the missionary the chance to get to know the people and develop his love for them on a personal level. It is one thing to love the church in general and another to love the sometimes-difficult individuals that gather together each week. It is especially important that the missionary work hard to demonstrate his submission to his church's leadership. Although the leadership may have areas in which they need to grow, the missionary's submission to imperfect leaders demonstrates his love for God, His Word, and His people. This period of relationship building and brotherly love will help lay a foundation upon which the missionary will be able to build for many years to come.[58]

At this juncture it may seem pedantic to repeat the importance of being committed to a local church, but its significance can hardly be overstated. On the professorial side the missionary may see a quicker response to his labors, but on the pastoral side, much more time is required. While understanding that longevity is important, the wise professor-pastor will bear in mind that a church will be healthiest when it is led by mature believers from the local community and culture. The missionary should seek wisdom from God, even from his earliest days of ministry, to identify those faithful men to whom he will one day pass the baton.

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[57] Although English is often used in many countries in higher education, the missionary should not default to English as his primary language of teaching and discipleship without good cause. Theological education is quite different from secular education. For example, learning computer programing in English is fundamentally different from learning theology and Bible. A computer programmer needs to do a job in a field that is English dominated. Although his work might be in English, the rest of his life need not be lived in that language. In other words, many non-native English speakers use English in their workplaces to earn a living. Theology is different because it is not a job. Petrus van Mastricht has well said that "theology is nothing less than the doctrine of living for God through Christ." Petrus van Mastricht, *Theoretical-Practical Theology: Prolegomena*, ed. Joel R. Beeke, trans. Todd M. Rester (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2018), 1:98. In essence, believers need theology because they need to know and live for God. Thus, most theological learning (whether formal or informal) is best accomplished in the language in which that person will live for God. So, in order to best meet the needs of the learner, the missionary professor should teach in the language of the people whenever possible. With that, it must be noted that some languages have so few theological resources that advanced education may necessarily need to be in English or another more common shared language.

[58] It might feel trite, but the old expression applies here: "People don't care how much you know until they know how much you care."

Conclusion

After centuries of missions work, the task is not yet complete. Until the Lord comes back and calls His people to glory, the work of world missions will continue. An important part of faithful missions work is the sending of missionaries who are committed to coming alongside local churches and helping them become more spiritually healthy. This ministry is not easy, but it is worth the price. Christ laid down his life for His Church. May God raise up more missionaries who are willing to follow their Savior and lay down their lives for His people. If this were to occur, the global Church would undoubtedly be more mature.

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THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT AS THE FOUNDATION FOR MISSIONS

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The strategic role played by the Abrahamic covenant as the expression of God's saving intention for the nations is commonly accepted. Questions remain, however, as to the nature of the Abrahamic covenant and as to how the Abrahamic covenant relates to the task of missions. This study assesses the covenant in its linear disclosure across Genesis by positing four covenant stages that range from promise to confirmation with a concluding emphasis on blessing. Alongside this, the author suggests the terminology for the covenant within dispensational interpretation should move beyond the conditional/unconditional framework to understand it as a regulated royal grant guaranteed by God. In that the covenant carries direct and indirect relationships with other biblical covenants, this understanding sets the stage for the Abrahamic covenant's role in later Scriptural revelation. As the foundation for God's unfolding plan of redemption through its particularity, agency, and intention, the covenant serves as an impetus for Christian missions and affirms a continued role for Israel within a dispensational missiology.

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Introduction

The significance of the Abrahamic covenant for Old Testament theology and for Christian missions is commonly recognized.[1] Yet interpreters continue to debate the

[1] Paul R. Williamson designates Genesis 12:1–3 as "one of the most important revelations in the whole of Scripture" (*Sealed with an Oath: Covenant in God's Unfolding Purpose*, NSBT [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007], 77). Both dispensational and covenantal interpreters recognize its significance (Cleon L. Rogers, Jr., "The Covenant with Abraham and Its Historical Setting," *BSac* 127 [Jul–Sept 1970]: 241–56; John Murray, *The Covenant of Grace: A Biblico-Theological Study* [reprint ed., Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1988], 4). Christopher J. H. Wright terms the Abrahamic covenant the "manifesto of mission" ("The Old Testament and Christian Mission," *Evangel* 14 [Sum 1996]: 39).

covenant's place in the unfolding revelation of the Old Testament as well as its relationship to the task of missions. Questions remain as to how best to understand its serial disclosure across Genesis,[2] whether it is to be understood as a conditional or unconditional covenant,[3] how it relates to previous and successive biblical covenants,[4] and how it connects to the divine plan of redemption and a continued role for the nation of Israel.[5] With respect to the latter, interpreters debate whether an Old Testament foundation for missions, assuming there is one at all,[6] lies properly in creation,[7] the Abrahamic covenant,[8] or the exodus/Sinai event.[9] These discussions form the contours of the following essay through four tenets.

I argue, first, that the development of the Abrahamic covenant follows a linear progression across Genesis that incorporates four distinctive covenant stages that range from promise to confirmation. This understanding follows the contours of the earlier Noahic covenant and supports the development of the land, seed, and blessing promises (Gen 12:1–3; 13:14–18), with special focus in the successive passages on

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[2] Questions here relate to whether the covenant is established in Genesis 12 (John J. Mitchell, "Abram's Understanding of the Lord's Covenant," *WTJ* 32 [Nov 1969]: 24–48) or Genesis 15 (Gary Gromacki, "The Fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant," *JMAT* 18 [Fall 2014]: 79; Jeffrey J. Niehaus, "God's Covenant with Abraham," *JETS* 56 [2013]: 260). Some interpreters find two separate covenants in Genesis 15 and 17 (Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath*, 84–91; T. Desmond Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land: An Introduction to the Pentateuch*, 3rd ed. [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012], 176–79; Thomas E. McComiskey, *The Covenants of Promise: A Theology of Old Testament Covenants* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985], 145–50).

[3] Historically dispensationalists have termed the Abrahamic covenant unconditional insofar as it is designated an "everlasting covenant" (Gen 17:7, 13, 19) (John F. Walvoord, "The Fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant," *BSac* 102 [Jan–Mar 1945]: 27–29; Gromacki, "Fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant," 112).

[4] Daniel Block sees two kinds of covenants—communal/missional and administrative—and he places the Abrahamic/Mosaic covenants into the former category, merging them into what he terms the "Israelite covenant" (*Covenant: The Framework of God's Grand Plan of Redemption* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2021], 4; cf. McComiskey, *Covenants of Promise*, 59–93). Dispensational interpreters, however, are wary of erasing distinctions between the Mosaic covenant and Abrahamic covenant, usually seeing the latter as unconditional and the former as conditional (Eugene H. Merrill, "The Covenant with Abraham: The Keystone of Biblical Architecture," *Journal of Dispensational Theology* 12 [Aug 2008]: 13–14).

[5] Interpreters have called Gen 12:3 "the most missiological passage in the Old Testament" and a revelation of God's "*universal* mission of redemption so that the whole universe is redeemed from the grip of sin" (Jonathan S. Nkhoma, "Mission in the Postmodern World: A Biblical Foundation," in *Mission in Malawi: Essays in Honour of Klaus Fiedler*, ed. Jonathan Nkhoma, Rhodian Munyenyembe, and Hany Longwe, 48–76 [Luwinga, Malawi: Mzuni Press, 2021], 59, 65, emphasis his). Meredith G. Kline, on the other hand, sees the Abrahamic covenant as a suzerainty-vassal treaty that has stipulations which may be broken, leading to Israel's forfeiture of the privilege of participating in redemption (*Treaty of the Great King: The Covenant Structure of Deuteronomy, Studies and Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963], 22–24).

[6] Heinrich Kasting begins his study of missions not with the Old Testament but with Second-Temple Judaism (*Die Anfänge der urchristlichen Mission* [Munich: Christian Kaiser, 1969], 11).

[7] Craig Ott, Stephen J. Strauss, and Timothy C. Tennent, *Encountering Theology of Mission: Biblical Foundations, Historical Developments, and Contemporary Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), 4–6; A. Scott Moreau, Gary R. Corwin, and Gary B. McGee, *Introducing World Missions: A Biblical, Historical, and Practical Survey*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2015), 30.

[8] Charles H. H. Scobie, "Israel and the Nations: An Essay in Biblical Theology," *TynBul* 43 (Nov 1992): 283–85; John H. Yoder, *Theology of Mission: A Believers Church Perspective*, ed. Gayle G. Koontz and Andy Alexis-Baker (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014), 49.

[9] William Manson, "The Biblical Doctrine of Mission," *International Review of Mission* 42 (Jul 1953): 257.

land (Gen 15), seed (Gen 17), and blessing (Gen 22). This covenant progression cautions against typological readings of the Abrahamic covenant that undermine the reality of its land provisions, while providing a more nuanced picture of its anticipated blessing for all nations.[10]

Second, I offer more precise terminology with respect to the covenant's nomenclature. While typically interpreters have utilized a "conditional" versus "unconditional" framework to assess the covenant, more comprehensive study of the available ancient Near Eastern sources indicates that the situation is more complex. My proposed understanding modifies the terminology in a more nuanced and historically consistent direction. I argue that the Abrahamic covenant is best identified as a unilateral, irrevocable, albeit regulated, royal grant covenant, a pattern that follows the contours of an analogous covenant from Alalakh.[11] This understanding brings the terminology up to date within dispensational circles, while also arguing for a future role for the nation of Israel within a dispensational missiology.

Third, I argue that the Abrahamic covenant carries both continuity and discontinuity features with other biblical covenants. The covenant refracts earlier creational promises and stands in a hierarchical relationship to the succeeding Old Testament covenants. Such a connection hints at both direct and indirect relationships so that the covenants fulfill different purposes for different dispensations. This is why the Abrahamic covenant serves as the foundation for Christian mission rather than, say, the new covenant and why Israel has a continuing place in the task of global missions.

Fourth, I contend that the Abrahamic covenant serves as the foundation or basis for God's unfolding plan of redemption in the rest of Scripture and therefore serves as an impetus for Christian missions. While missiologies often begin with creation, the Abrahamic covenant finds unique significance as the foundation for Christian missions through three factors: its particularity, its agency, and its intention.[12] God's purpose of bringing soteriological blessing to the nations (intention) finds specificity in Abraham and his descendants (particularity), who are the conduit through whom the blessing is conveyed (agency). The Abrahamic covenant's nature as unilateral and irrevocable means that Israel has a continued, unalterable place in God's redemptive plan. The nation will occupy a future mediatorial role vis-à-vis the nations, a role she failed to fulfill originally due to disobedience to the Mosaic Law (cf. Exod 19:5–6). The Abrahamic covenant guarantees that Israel will realize her land, seed, and blessing promises, while the blessings promised to the nations will come to fruition through the spread of the gospel and the future millennial kingdom.

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[10] For a typological reading of the Abrahamic covenant that undermines its land provisions, see Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018), 826–35. For a dispensational response, see Michael A. Grisanti, "A Critique of Gentry and Wellum's *Kingdom through Covenant*: An Old Testament Perspective," *MSJ* 26 (Spr 2015): 129–37; Mark A. Snoeberger, "*Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*: A Review Article," *DBSJ* 17 (2012): 99–103.

[11] Kenneth A. Kitchen and Paul J. Lawrence, *Treaty, Law and Covenant*, 3 vols. (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2012), 1:231–34.

[12] As Arthur F. Glasser notes, Abraham's call is "the beginning of salvation history" (*Announcing the Kingdom: The Story of God's Mission in the Bible* [revised ed., Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003], 56).

Having outlined the progression of my argument, I turn now to an examination of the biblical and historical contexts of the Abrahamic covenant.

The Nature of the Abrahamic Covenant and Its Old Testament Setting

Most biblical interpreters concur that the notion of covenant plays an integral role in the unfolding of Scripture.[13] The first mention of "covenant" (בְּרִית) (*bərît*) appears in Genesis 6:18 with reference to the future Noahic covenant. The word appears nearly 300 times in the Old Testament, with semantically-linked terms such as "oath" (אָלָה [*ʾālâ*]; שְׁבוּעָה [*šəbûʿâ*]) and "covenant love" (חֶסֶד [*ḥesed*]) occurring another 350 times. While various proposals have been offered for the etymology and meaning of *bərît* (בְּרִית), the most likely conclusion is that it relates to an Akkadian cognate *birītu*, meaning "link," "clasp," or "fetter," and hence "bond."[14] I define *covenant* as the formal codification of a mutually-binding, relational commitment between non-kin members so as to establish and structure the union for the good of the community and for protection against potential threats.[15] The covenant has a formal ceremony, including witnesses, human and divine. Witnesses are not passive but are expected to act in the case of covenant violation by effecting the pronounced sanctions, whether curses (divine) or punishments (human). The covenant often includes a physical token as a sign, an oath of confirmation, and a communal meal.[16] A covenant by its nature thus formalizes and governs a relationship, making former outsiders family members through the establishment of blood-kinship.

In the creation narrative, prior to the formal introduction of the covenant concept, Yahweh creates humanity in His own image and blesses them, charging them to "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth" (Gen 1:28).[17] Following the fall and flood, the promised blessing and dominion mandate are imperiled, resulting in the Noahic covenant (Gen 9:1–17), the first clear covenant in Scripture and in history, established between Yahweh and the created order, specifically all living creatures (Gen 9:10–16).[18] The Noahic covenant

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[13] Probably overstated, nonetheless, are claims that the idea of covenant is "fundamental to the Bible's story" (Alistair I. Wilson and Jamie A. Grant, "Introduction," in *The God of Covenant: Biblical, Theological and Contemporary Perspectives*, ed. Jamie A. Grant and Alistair I. Wilson [Leicester, UK: Apollos, 2005], 12) or "the backbone of the metanarrative of Scripture" (Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 31). A doxological kingdom focus is more integral to Scripture, as elements of royal and priestly themes find prominence in the creation narrative, while the concept of covenant is absent.

[14] *TDOT*, s.v. "בְּרִית," by Moshe Weinfeld, 2:253–55; Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath*, 36–37. On the Akkadian cognate, see *CAD*, s.v. "birītu," 2:251–55.

[15] Cf. Mark J. Boda, *The Heartbeat of Old Testament Theology: Three Creedal Expressions* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2017), 56–62; Paul Kalluveetil, *Declaration and Covenant* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1982), 51. Gordon P. Hugenberger similarly identifies covenant as "an elected, as opposed to natural, relationship of obligation established under divine sanction" (*Marriage as a Covenant: A Study of Biblical Law and Ethics Governing Marriage, Developed from the Perspective of Malachi* [Leiden: Brill, 1994], 171).

[16] *TDOT*, 2:256.

[17] Unless otherwise noted, all Scriptural citations are from the English Standard Version (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016).

[18] Many interpreters infer an alleged covenant with creation in Genesis 1–2, but the evidence is scant. Insofar as covenants govern chosen rather than natural relationships, and are established between non-kin

encompasses God's purposes for curtailing evil within the created order specifically by creating boundaries (i.e., human government) for the life and flourishing of its creatures. The Abrahamic covenant, the next biblical covenant, carries a slightly different focus. It particularizes God's redemptive and doxological purposes for the created order through the agency of an individual (Abraham) and ultimately his descendants (the nation of Israel). In this way we may speak of the Abrahamic covenant as refracting the original divine intention to bless humanity and by implication the whole created order, after the intended blessing had been threatened by the fall and flood, showing the dire consequences of sin and the resulting curse.

Questions remain, nonetheless, as to the timing and process by which the Abrahamic covenant is implemented across the narratives of Genesis. Some interpreters speak of the covenant as established already in Genesis 12:1–3.[19] Most, however, recognize its official cutting ceremony to take place in Genesis 15, where Abraham severs animals and Yahweh passes through the carcasses in the form of a smoking firepot and flaming torch.[20] Yet references to the covenant or to covenantal language continue in later chapters. The term *bərît* occurs thirteen times in Genesis 17, mostly in the *wəqatal* or future sense ("I will give my covenant" [v. 2]; "I will establish my covenant" [vv. 7, 21]). Allusions in the divine oath of Genesis 22 to "blessing" evoke Abraham's initial call in Genesis 12, forming a frame around his entire storyline and thereby raising the question of when precisely Yahweh officially implements the covenant. Some interpreters thus conclude that Yahweh enacts separate covenants with Abraham over the course of his life, such as one in Genesis 15 and one in chapter 17. These interpreters would see the former as establishing a unilateral, eternal, promissory, national covenant, and the latter a bilateral, temporal, regulative, international covenant.[21] Others have rightly contested, however, that such a schema is doubtful, in that Scripture refers always to a singular covenant with Abraham, later confirmed unilaterally with Isaac and Jacob (Exod 2:24; Lev 26:42; 2 Kgs 13:23; Ps 105:9–10; Acts 3:25).[22]

A preferable approach sees the singular Abrahamic covenant as unfolding in four stages:

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members in the presence of possible risks, there is no need for a covenant with creation prior to the fall and sin curse. Block refers to the Noahic covenant as the actual cosmic covenant, as it is identified as a covenant between Yahweh and the earth (Gen 9:13) and between Yahweh and every living creature (Gen 9:10, 12, 15–16) (*Covenant*, 13–41).

[19] Mitchell, "Abram's Understanding," 38.

[20] Gromacki, "Fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant," 79; Niehaus, "God's Covenant," 260.

[21] Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath*, 89–90; Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land*, 176–79; McComiskey, *Covenants of Promise*, 145–150.

[22] Niehaus, "God's Covenant," 249; Seth D. Postell, "The Abrahamic Covenant," in *A Handbook on the Jewish Roots of the Christian Faith*, ed. Craig A. Evans and David Mishkin, 13–16 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2019), 14. Postell interprets the ceremony of Gen 17 as being necessitated by Abraham's lapse of faith with regard to Hagar in Gen 16. If the Abrahamic covenant is indeed irrevocable and unilateral, however, one wonders at the need to renew the covenant per se. A preferable approach is to see the covenant intentionally revealed in stages that elaborate upon the threefold promise of land, seed, and blessing in Gen 12:1–3.

The Four Stages of the Abrahamic Covenant			
Promise	Ratification (Cutting)	Sign of Attestation (Circumcision)	Confirmation (Oath/Sacrifice)
Gen 12:1–3, 7; 13:14–17	Gen 15:1–21	Gen 17:1–22	Gen 22:11–19
Land, Seed, and Blessing	Land Focus	Seed Focus	Blessing Focus

The promise stage anticipates the enactment of the covenant but remains prior to it. The ratification stage involves the actual cutting of the covenant (Gen 15:18) and includes the ritual slaughter of animals (cf. Gen 8:20). The sign of the covenant, in this case circumcision, is the physical token that attests to the covenant, now ratified. The oath/sacrifice consummates the covenant with divine and human confirmation. Such a four-stage covenant enactment finds general support in the four stages underlying the Noahic covenant, which Yahweh promises (Gen 6:18), ratifies (Gen 8:20–9:11), attests by sign (Gen 9:12–16), and confirms by affirmation (Gen 9:17). This understanding finds credence too in the development of the land, seed, and blessing promises initially given to Abraham (Gen 12:1–3; 13:14–18). The later elaborations of the covenant bring particular focus upon land (Gen 15), seed (Gen 17), and blessing (Gen 22).

Promise: Land, Seed, and Blessing (Genesis 12:1–3, 7; 13:14–17)

In Genesis 12, Yahweh calls Abraham to leave his kith and kin, and to traverse to a land that He would show him.[23] Part and parcel of the call are God's concomitant promises to bless Abraham. Interpreters differ as to how many promises Yahweh conveys, usually ranging from five to as many as fourteen.[24] For our purposes, there are roughly seven: (1) Abraham would become a great nation, with numerous offspring (12:2; 13:16); (2) he would receive the land of Canaan (12:1, 7; 13:14–15, 17); (3) he would be greatly blessed, including material wealth, life, and relationship with God (12:2); (4) his name would be great (12:2); (5) he would be a conduit of blessing (12:2–3); (6) he would be a watershed figure, bringing blessing to those who bless him as well as curse to those who curse him (12:3); and (7) his blessing would extend to every family group or ethnicity (12:3). Interpreters suggest different ways of distilling the essence of the divine promises, preferring rubrics such as personal, national, and universal[25] or land, people, and blessing.[26] The traditional triad is land, seed, and blessing.[27]

[23] Although somewhat anachronistic in light of the name change from Abram to Abraham in Gen 17:5, I use the name Abraham throughout for consistency's sake.

[24] Gromacki enumerates five blessings ("Fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant," 79), while Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum lists fourteen promises, although incorporating other passages ("Israelology: Part 1 of 6," *Chafer Theological Seminary Journal* 5 [Apr 1999]: 32–33).

[25] Essex, "Abrahamic Covenant," 212.

[26] Merrill, "Covenant with Abraham," 12.

[27] Kaiser, *Old Testament Theology*, 86.

Integral to these promises is the notion of blessing. The nominal and verbal forms of "bless" (בְּרָכָה [*bərākâ*], "blessing"; ברך [*brk*], "to bless") occur five times in Genesis 12:1–3, mirroring the five occurrences of the verb "to curse" (ארר [*ʾrr*]) to this point in the narrative (Gen 3:14, 17; 4:11; 5:29; 9:25). The correspondence thus anticipates how the blessing of Abraham will begin to reverse the effects of the curse. Moreover, prior to Genesis 12 each theme occurs five times: "blessing" (Gen 1:22, 28; 2:3; 5:2; 9:1) and "curse" (Gen 3:14, 17; 4:11; 5:29; 9:25). But after Abraham's call, blessing occurs more often than curse by a ratio of nearly 25 to 1.[28] The global nature of God's intention to bless becomes concretized to a greater and greater degree. Blessing in the Old Testament sense encompasses a range of benefits: total well-being (*shalom*), wisdom, God's presence, divine protection and provision, fertility, wealth, and triumph over enemies.[29] The nature of the promises suggests that the covenant is best seen as anticipated in this context but not yet enacted or cut.

Ratification: Land (Genesis 15:1–21)

The covenant is enacted or cut in Genesis 15 with the formal covenant ceremony. While each of the promised elements of land, seed, and blessing are evident in the ceremony, there is a special focus on the promise of land. The chapter begins with Abraham expressing some doubt that he will, in fact, have numerous offspring as God had promised (Gen 15:2). In his doubt Abraham suggests that his servant Eliezer become his heir (15:3), mirroring the ancient practice, evident in Larsa and Nuzi, of adopting a male servant if the head of a household were childless.[30] God responds by denying that Eliezer will be his heir but rather that his own son will be (15:4). Yahweh takes him outside, asking him to number the stars if he can, as this will equate to the number of his offspring (15:5). Abraham, who descends from ancestors who served foreign gods beyond the River (Josh 24:14–15), hails from Ur of the Chaldeans, a city whose patron deity was the moon god, Nanna or Sîn.[31] Abraham is to look to the sky not to gaze at the moon but to count the stars. Yahweh essentially conveys to Abraham that he is not to look for help to the moon god of his ancestors, the god who in their theology regulated fertility and seasons, but to look to Yahweh's own power and provision, beyond his ability to calculate. In this crucial moment, not only for Abraham's story but for the trajectory of the entire Pentateuch, Abraham believes in Yahweh and is credited with righteousness (15:6). Abraham's faith and justification thus precedes the actual cutting of the covenant. As John Sailhamer notes, the syntax of Genesis 15:6 indicates that the verse is to be read as the background for the rest of the chapter and for the covenant ceremony.[32] The ensuing covenant, which will serve as the basis for God's future dealings with Abraham and his descendants, does not produce faith and righteousness but rather flows from these realities, a point the apostle Paul is keen to make in presenting Abraham first and foremost as the man of

[28] See Matt Champlin, "A Biblical Theology of Blessing in Genesis," *Themelios* 42 (2017): 64.

[29] Rogers, "Covenant with Abraham," 247.

[30] Martin J. Selman, "The Social Environment of the Patriarchs," *TynBul* 27 (1976): 125–27.

[31] Douglas R. Frayne and Johanna H. Stuckey, *A Handbook of Gods and Goddesses of the Ancient Near East* (University Park, PA: Eisenbrauns, 2021), 225.

[32] John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 151–52.

faith who believed in God in anticipation of the promised blessing that would extend to the nations (Gal 3:6–9).[33] Blessing for Abraham at the outset is primarily soteriological and prior to the implementation of the covenant, just as the blessing for the nations will be initially soteriological and prior to the full implementation of the new covenant.

Yahweh then turns Abraham's attention to the reality of the land promise, reminding him that He called him out of Ur of the Chaldeans so as to give him the land he was standing on for a possession (15:7). Abraham, in turn, questions how he will know for sure that he is to take possession of the land (15:8). The covenant cutting ceremony that follows is essentially God's answer to Abraham's question. The phrase "this land" (הָאָרֶץ הַזֹּאת, *hāʾāreṣ hazōʾt*) frames the ceremony, appearing at its inception (v. 7) and conclusion (v. 18). The term *land* appears three times overall in the passage (vv. 7, 13, 18), the most of any passage having to do with the Abrahamic covenant outside the initial promise to give Abraham the land (4x in Gen 13:14–17).

According to God's instruction, Abraham is to ritually slaughter five animals. These animals are each associated with later priestly sacrifices in the Torah (Lev 5:6–7, 15–18; 16:3–5; Num 7:3–8). The three large animals (heifer, female goat, and ram) he severs but not the birds, again anticipating priestly sacrifices in which the birds are not entirely torn asunder (Lev 5:8). In contrast to the slain birds, birds of prey descend on the carcasses as night falls, but Abraham drives them away. These would be unclean birds, such as ravens or vultures, which have no place in priestly sacrifices. It is difficult to know if more meaning than this is involved, although some interpreters take the animals to represent Abraham's posterity and the birds of prey to represent foreign nations that will harass and threaten them.[34] Abraham falls into a deep sleep and a great terror and darkness descends (v. 12). This same word for "deep sleep" (תַּרְדֵּמָה, *tardēmâ*) earlier describes the deep sleep into which God puts Adam to remove his bone (Gen 2:21), and elsewhere it describes dreams and visions (Job 4:13; 33:15; Isa 29:10). Abraham's slumber and terror sets the stage for the dire prophecy about the enslavement of his descendants, to be followed by their deliverance and possession of the land (vv. 13–16).

In a pivotal moment in the covenant cutting ceremony, Yahweh alone passes through the carcasses in the form of a smoking firepot and flaming torch (v. 17). This action indicates that the covenant is a royal grant, akin to similar ceremonial practices in the ancient Near East. An analogous ceremony occurs in Jeremiah 34, where the human covenant partners pass through the carcasses of slain animals, an act which appears to ritually symbolize the fate that awaits covenant violators (see Jer 34:18–20). Many take this divine act to indicate that the covenant is unconditional.[35] As suggested earlier, however, my preferred terminology would be that the divine act signals the covenant is unilateral and irrevocable ("an everlasting covenant," Gen 17:7, 13, 19)—it cannot be abrogated by human failure in view of the divine

[33] For a compelling case that Paul quotes both Gen 15:6 and 22:18 in Galatians 3, see Jared M. August, "Paul's View of Abraham's Faith: Gen 22:18 in Galatians 3," *BSac* 176 (Jan–Mar 2019): 51–61.

[34] Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2005), 172–73.

[35] Walvoord, "Fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant," 27–29; Gromacki, "Fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant," 112.

prerogative. God, who cannot lie or change, guarantees the successful outcome of the covenant promises. Following His procession through the carcasses, God makes one more promise to give Abraham's descendants the land, including the implied ouster of the ten nations that currently inhabit it, symbolic of the certainty that no adversaries can stand before the fulfillment of God's promises.

Sign of Attestation: Circumcision (Seed) (Genesis 17:1–22)

Yahweh appears to Abraham when he is ninety-nine years of age to reiterate His promises concerning the covenant. This appearance takes place thirteen years after the covenant cutting ceremony of Genesis 15. Here the focus is on the proliferation of Abraham's descendants, with the accompanying sign of the covenant, circumcision. Yahweh tells Abraham to walk before him and be blameless. Walking before someone carried the notions of representation and mediation. The agency of Abraham as the mediator of blessing is highlighted. As Walton demonstrates, when God commands someone to walk before Him in the Old Testament, this charge underscores how kings or priests were to conduct themselves as His emissaries or representatives (1 Sam 2:30; 1 Kgs 2:4; 8:23; 2 Kgs 20:3).[36] The imperatival form of the verbs "walk" and "be blameless" (17:1), indicate that these actions are to be viewed as regulatory for the covenant partner. This does not signal that the covenant is "conditional" or that this is a separate covenant from the one ratified in chapter 15. Rather, as a covenant beneficiary, Abraham must meet the expectations placed upon him by his divine covenant Lord as His representative and emissary. As evidenced later in Genesis, Abraham fulfills these covenant obligations (Gen 22:16–18; 26:5).

The covenant sign phase carries a special emphasis on the seed promise. This stage begins with Yahweh's stated intention to greatly multiply Abraham's descendants (v. 2). Yahweh identifies the covenant as "my covenant" (בְּרִיתִי, *bərîtî*), a phrase that shows the divine initiative in establishing the covenant. This phrase occurs nine times in the chapter, and only here with respect to the Abrahamic covenant (Gen 17:2, 4, 7, 9–10, 13–14, 19, 21). For the first time in the unfolding Abrahamic covenant the term "multiply" appears (רבה, *rbh*), a term which means in the Hiphil "to make many," "increase," or "multiply."[37] Also appearing here for the first time with respect to Abraham is the term "make fruitful" (פרה, *prh* in the Hiphil) (v. 6), which means "to make flourish" or "cause to increase" by causing one's offspring to grow in number and strength.[38] Beyond this, the term "exceedingly" (מְאֹד, *məʾōd*), repeated twice for emphasis, amplifies and guarantees the proliferation of descendants (6x in the chapter: vv. 2, 6, 20). Moreover, God promises Abraham that he will be the father of a multitude of nations, ensured by his name change from Abram ("exalted father") to Abraham ("father of a multitude") (vv. 4–5). The renaming signifies that Abraham has been honored by coming formally under the headship of a covenant Master and into His family. The covenant Lord has the

[36] John H. Walton, *Covenant: God's Purpose, God's Plan* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 72–73.
[37] *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, 7:396.
[38] Semantic Dictionary of Biblical Hebrew (United Bible Societies), s.v. "פרה," available online at https://marble.bible/dictionary, accessed October 12, 2024.

prerogative to assign a new name.[39] Abraham is already a covenant partner, as demonstrated by the earlier covenant-cutting ceremony (cf. Gen 15:9–21), but here he is formally recognized and appropriated by means of the covenant sign through the name change and physical token of circumcision (Gen 17:5, 11).

Also indicative of the seed focus in this stage is the repetition of the term "seed" (זֶרַע, *zeraʿ*), occurring seven times in the chapter (vv. 7 [2x], 8, 9, 10, 12, 19), the most of any chapter in Genesis. With respect to the seed, Yahweh emphasizes that Abraham's posterity will also be beneficiaries of an everlasting covenant (v. 7), that they will inherit the land (v. 8), that they must too keep the covenant through the sign of circumcision (vv. 9–10), that the rite of circumcision extends beyond natural seed to any male within the household (v. 12), and that the covenant will be confirmed through Abraham's own natural seed (i.e., his biological son) (v. 19). Within this chapter the covenant is marked as an "everlasting covenant" (בְּרִית עוֹלָם, *bərît ʿōlām*) for the first and only times in Genesis (vv. 7, 13, 19). Abraham and his descendants must perform the rite of circumcision with every male (v. 10), in the flesh of the foreskin (i.e., amputation of the prepuce) (v. 11), on the eighth day after birth (v. 12a), and with the inclusion of both domestic- and foreign-born males (vv. 12b–13).

As to the significance of the rite of circumcision, Meade argues that the Israelite practice relates conceptually to the Egyptian practice of circumcising kings and priests.[40] Although Egyptian circumcision differed in some details, certain parallels suggest similar perceptions may lie behind the rites. According to Meade, Egyptian circumcision "functioned as a specific, voluntary, and initiatory rite to identify and affiliate the subject with the deity and to signify devotion to the same deity."[41] Drawing parallels to Israelite circumcision, he contends for several implications: (1) circumcision signals that the nation of Israel is to be devoted to Yahweh as its God; (2) circumcision identifies the nation as Yahweh's firstborn son (Exod 4:22–23) consecrated for His service (Josh 5:2–9), and (3) circumcision marks the whole nation as a kingdom of priests and holy people (Exod 19:5–6), mediating God's blessing to the nations.[42] The sign of circumcision solidifies the seed promise through a physical token that is emblematic of the covenant between God and Abraham's posterity and that serves as a reminder to Yahweh and the people of Israel of their covenant status.

Confirmation: Oath/Sacrifice (Blessing) (Genesis 22:11–19)

The fourth and final stage of the Abrahamic covenant follows on the heels of God's charge to Abraham to offer his son, Isaac, on Mount Moriah (Gen 22:1–2).

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[39] Corollaries would include Pharaoh Neco's changing Eliakim to Jehoiakim (2 Kgs 23:34), Nebuchadnezzar changing Mattaniah to Zedekiah (2 Kgs 24:17), and Nebuchadnezzar changing Daniel, Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael to Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (Dan 1:7). The name change asserts authority, although also from the perspective of the name-changer confers status and prestige (Otto Eissfeldt, "Renaming in the Old Testament," in *Words and Meanings: Essays Presented to David Winton Thomas*, ed. Peter R. Ackroyd and Barnabas Lindars, 69–79 [Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1968], 73).

[40] John D. Meade, "The Meaning of Circumcision in Israel: A Proposal for a Transfer of Rite from Egypt to Israel," *SBJT* 20 (Spr 2016): 35–54.

[41] Meade, "Circumcision in Israel," 45.

[42] Meade, 47–48.

Having received the promised son, Yahweh tests Abraham to demonstrate the genuineness of his faith. This final stage of the covenant emphasizes the blessing component. Genesis 22:1–19 is a finely-crafted narrative structured in two major parts: Abraham's test (vv. 1–10) and Abraham's blessing (vv. 11–19). The parts exhibit a bifid structure: God's address to Abraham in verse 1 is mirrored by the angel's address to Abraham in verse 11. In the first part Abraham lifts up his eyes and sees the place from afar (v. 4); in the second part he lifts up his eyes and sees the ram in the thicket (v. 13). Verses 9 and 10 form the center of the narrative with the peak of the drama. The confirmation of the covenant occurs in the second part of the narrative, following Abraham's successful obedience to Yahweh's command.

The Angel of the LORD, most likely the preincarnate Christ, stops Abraham from following through with the act of slaying Isaac by calling out his name twice for emphasis (v. 11). The Angel discloses indirectly that the required act was a test. Typically, the phrase "now I know" (v. 12) occurs in the context of a joyful cry from someone who has experienced God's deliverance (Exod 18:11; Pss 20:6; 56:9). Here, however, it relates to God's joyful knowledge that Abraham fears God. The fear of the Lord in the OT is equated with saving faith (Prov 1:7; 3:5–7; 9:10), so the confirmation that Abraham fears God should be related to his earlier trust in Yahweh (Gen 15:6). Abraham then spies a ram caught in a thicket, and he offers the ram as a burnt offering (Gen 22:13). Such sacrifices were a common feature of covenant ceremonies in Israel and the ancient Near East (cf. Exod 24:5–8; Ps 50:5; Zech 9:11).[43]

The only other occasions in which a ram is offered for a burnt offering (outside the ram as the guilt offering in Lev 5) take place when the priests are ordained (Aaron and his sons in Lev 8–9) or on the Day of Atonement by the high priest (Lev 16). Both occasions are highly significant acts of atonement and hint further, as in the covenant-cutting ceremony of Genesis 15, that Abraham functions as a proto-priest in anticipating certain cultic regulations of the Mosaic Law. As part of his own burgeoning mediatory role as God's king-priest and covenant partner, Abraham renames the mountain to reflect Yahweh's provision (v. 14).

The Angel then calls a second time from heaven to communicate significant further revelation concerning the covenant (v. 15). Of the various texts which promise blessing to Abraham, only here are the blessings presented as the outcome of Abraham's obedience, as he "has done this word" and "heeded God's voice" (vv. 16, 18). As a result, God swears by Himself as the highest authority (v. 16). Oaths were typically taken by both covenant partners in the ratification ceremony to signify the binding validity of covenant obligations.[44] Here Yahweh alone through the person of the Angel takes the oath to signal His intention to make good its provisions. This is the first and only divine oath in the patriarchal accounts and therefore serves as a guarantee of the solemnity and irrevocability of the covenant. Moreover, God promises to surely bless Abraham (v. 17), the only time in Genesis that the idea of certainty is added. These blessings call to mind God's original promises to Abraham with an escalation in force. Earlier, Yahweh promises Abraham that his descendants will inherit land (Gen 12:7; 13:14–17), but here they will possess even the gates of

[43] *TDOT*, s.v. "בְּרִית," 2:262–63.
[44] *TDOT*, s.v. "בְּרִית," 2:256.

their enemies (22:17). Earlier Yahweh promises Abraham will have many descendants (12:2), but here He guarantees a multiplication of descendants (22:17) (compared for the first time to sand on the seashore). Earlier Yahweh promises blessing for the families/clans of the earth (12:3), but here whole nations come within the purview of blessing (22:18). The verb "bless" (ברך, *brk*) occurs three times in the final verses as a point of emphasis (vv. 17, 18). Yahweh ensures that the Abrahamic covenant provisions will certainly come to pass, with a heightening of the blessing promises to include an international focus upon foreign nations to come under its purview. Having surveyed its disclosure across Genesis, I turn now to discuss the nomenclature of the Abrahamic covenant.

The Nomenclature of the Abrahamic Covenant

Debate surrounds whether the Abrahamic covenant should be labelled as "unconditional" or "conditional," or whether these categories are overly restrictive. Dispensational interpreters have preferred to see the covenant as unconditional, while covenantalists have argued that it is conditional.[45] Some nuance this conclusion by positing that while Yahweh's promises in the covenant are unconditional, its fulfillment with respect to timing and participants hinges upon faith and obedience.[46] Other interpreters have called for moving beyond a binary framework of conditional or unconditional.[47] Rather, they argue, all biblical covenants between Yahweh and humans carry both divine guarantee and some level of human responsibility. A corollary with this debate turns upon how to classify the covenant in its ancient Near Eastern context. Dispensational interpreters usually distinguish the Abrahamic covenant from the Mosaic covenant by identifying the former as a royal grant (promissory) covenant and the latter as a suzerainty-vassal (obligatory) covenant, categories first proposed by Weinfeld.[48] More comprehensive study of the available ancient Near Eastern sources, however, indicates that other factors add to the complexity.[49] While the categories proposed by Weinfeld carry some legitimacy, at the same time no ancient covenants or treaties were truly "unconditional" in the sense of omitting all obligations upon one or both of the covenant partners. Further, the distinction between the royal grant and suzerainty-vassal covenants overlooks the reality that royal grant covenants usually presuppose a suzerainty-vassal relationship. Critics were thus right to point out that to bifurcate covenants into stringent categories of unconditional or conditional is anachronistic and incomplete.

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[45] On the dispensational side, see John Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom* (Findlay, OH: Dunham, 1959), 149–58; Rolland D. McCune, "The Church and the Abrahamic Covenant" (ThM thesis, Grace Theological Seminary, 1966), 38–41. For a defense of the amillennial position and the Abrahamic covenant as conditional, see Oswald T. Allis, *Prophecy and the Church* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1947), 32–36; Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 284–89.

[46] Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward an Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 92–94; Keith H. Essex, "The Abrahamic Covenant," *MSJ* 10 (Fall 1999): 209–10.

[47] Block, *Covenant*, 2–4; Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 316, 662–66.

[48] Moshe Weinfeld, "The Covenant of Grant in the Old Testament and the Ancient Near East," *JAOS* 90 (Apr–Jun 1970): 184–203.

[49] Nearly all extant ancient Near Eastern treaties, covenants, and law codes may be found in Kenneth A. Kitchen and Paul J. Lawrence, *Treaty, Law and Covenant*, 3 vols. (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2012).

My proposed understanding modifies the terminology in what I suggest is a more nuanced and historically consistent direction. One may refer to the *promises* that will be codified in the Abrahamic covenant as unconditional (Gen 12:1–3), inasmuch as God is the guarantor. Yet the covenant itself is best identified as a unilateral, irrevocable, albeit regulated, royal grant covenant. This means that the covenant has both expectations for the covenant parties and a divine guarantee that brooks no alteration or annulment. That the covenant is, in fact, unilateral, irrevocable, and divinely-guaranteed is evident in each stage of the covenant program: (1) God takes the initiative in calling Abraham during the promise phase (Gen 12:1–3); (2) God alone passes through the severed animals during the ratification phase, taking full responsibility for its fulfillment (Gen 15:17); (3) God refers to the covenant as "my covenant" nine times during the sign of attestation phase, demonstrating that the covenant originates from His prerogative (Gen 17:2–21); and (4) God alone takes the oath in the oath/sacrifice confirmation phase, again taking complete responsibility (Gen 22:16).

Yet the covenant also carries stipulations to govern Abraham's conduct. Yahweh commands Abraham to follow certain patterns of behavior, with fourteen imperatives over the course of the covenant stages.[50] Furthermore, Yahweh expects Abraham to "keep the covenant" by faithfully implementing the rite of circumcision for his household and all his descendants (Gen 17:9–13). Any male who fails to do so is a covenant violator and is to be cut off from his people (Gen 17:14). Moreover, the covenant confirmation comes after Abraham has demonstrated fidelity and obedience by heeding the voice of Yahweh (Gen 22:18). Yahweh highlights the significance of Abraham's faithful conduct in his later covenant affirmation with Isaac: "I will be with you and will bless you, for to you and to your offspring I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham your father. I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and will give to your offspring all these lands. And in your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, *because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws*" (emphasis added; Gen 26:3–5). These tensions highlight the difficulty of the unconditional versus conditional framework. To say the covenant is *conditional* minimizes the divine guarantee that the covenant will certainly come to fruition, a reality evident at each stage of the covenant implementation. However, to say that the covenant is *unconditional* minimizes the clear expectations given to Abraham specifying how he must act in the light of his covenant status. Rather, a more nuanced approach seeks to balance these tensions while assessing the covenant in its ancient Near Eastern context: God guarantees blessing, but Abraham and his descendants have a vital role as the faithful agents of blessing.

When silhouetting the Abrahamic covenant against its ancient Near Eastern background, a similar type of covenant discovered in Alalakh of ancient Syria

[50] These imperatives include "go" (Gen 12:1), "get up" (13:17), "walk" (13:17), "take" (15:9), "walk" (17:1), "be blameless" (17:1), "take" (22:2), "walk" (22:2), and "offer" (22:2). The rite of circumcision omits imperatives, but the sense is clearly imperatival from the context.

(modern-day Türkiye) sheds light on these features of the Abrahamic covenant. [51] The covenant partners in this other covenant are Abba-AN of Aleppo, the suzerain, and Yarim-Lim of Alalakh, the vassal. The date of the covenant (c. 18th–17th centuries) falls between Abraham and Moses, later than the historical date of the Abrahamic covenant (c. 2091–2046 BC) but earlier than the composition of Genesis (c. 1446–1406 BC).[52] The language of the covenant is Old Babylonian, and its provenance is ancient Alalakh in northern Syria. The covenant begins with a historical prologue listing various cities that Yarim-Lim once happily ruled. A rogue governor named Zitraddu, however, incited rebellion, leading the cities to revolt against Yarim-Lim and, by implication, his overlord, Abba-AN. The latter responded militarily by killing the insurrectionists and by razing certain rebel towns, particularly Irridi. In exchange for the destroyed cities, Abba-AN offers a royal grant to Yarim-Lim, consisting of other towns to be donated in the place of the destroyed Irridi.

To ensure the legitimacy and permanence of the grant, Abba-AN imposes upon himself a self-maledictory oath, together with the ritual slaughter of animals, elements that correspond to the ratification and confirmation of the Abrahamic covenant (Gen 15:17; 22:16).

> Abba-AN swore to Yarim-Lim the oath of the gods,
> And cut the neck of a lamb (saying):
> (May I be cursed) if I take back what I gave you.[53]

The covenant also carries stipulations for how Yarim-Lim must conduct himself in remaining loyal to Abba-AN as the lead king.

> If ever in the future Yarim-Lim sins against Abba-AN,
> Or if he gives away (any) word (that) Abba-AN confides to him,
> Giving it away to another king;
> If he (Yarim-Lim) lets go of the hem of Abba-AN's garment
> And takes hold of the hem of another king's garment,
> He shall forfeit his cities and territories.[54]

These regulations pertain not just to Yarim-Lim but also to his descendants, who must adhere to the covenant stipulations. They will keep the donated territory in perpetuity if they remain faithful to Abba-AN and his descendants. The pact concludes with a list of covenant witnesses, who attest that Yarim-Lim has sworn oaths pledging fealty to the covenant statutes.

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[51] Donald J. Wiseman, "Abban and Alalaḫ," *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 12 (1958): 124–29; Anne Draffkorn, "Was King Abba-AN of Yamḫad a Vizier for the King of Ḫattuša?" *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 13 (1959): 94–97; Dennis J. McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant: A Study in Form in the Ancient Oriental Documents and in the Old Testament* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1981), 307–8; Kitchen and Lawrence, *Treaty, Law and Covenant*, 1:231.

[52] For biblical chronology, I follow Andrew E. Steinmann, *From Abraham to Paul: A Biblical Chronology* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2011).

[53] Kitchen and Lawrence, *Treaty, Law and Covenant*, 1:233.

[54] Kitchen and Lawrence, 1:233.

Similarities to the language, provenance, and protocols of the Abrahamic covenant suggest a common cultural background. There are several implications. These correlations indicate that the land promise should be foregrounded as integral to the Abrahamic covenant, the very provision that contemporary covenantalists often deny.[55] Further, the self-maledictory oath should be seen as equivalent to Yahweh's solitary passing through the severed animal parts (Gen 15:17) and His unilateral oath (Gen 22:16). This is a divine guarantee for the land provision as well as the other promises. Yet the regulations of the covenant hint that Abraham too would be expected to "take hold of the hem of Yahweh's garment," meaning that he and his descendants would be faithful and devoted servants of the Great King. Understood in these ways, both covenants function analogously as royal grants with stipulations, guaranteed by the suzerain but ensured with regulations governing the conduct of the vassal-kings. We may, then, extrapolate that here too Yahweh is granting territory, progeny, and life/protection/blessing in perpetuity to Abraham and his descendants, but also that He expects Abraham and his posterity to conduct themselves faithfully to Yahweh as God and King.

The Abrahamic Covenant in Relation to Other Biblical Covenants

Given this paper's limitations of scope, I can only briefly address here the relationship between the Abrahamic covenant and other biblical covenants. As mentioned above, the Abrahamic covenant carries a direct and indirect relationship with other biblical covenants. The covenant refracts earlier creational promises and stands in a hierarchical relationship to the succeeding OT covenants. The Noahic covenant codifies the means by which Yahweh would preserve life on earth, while specifying norms of human conduct with regard to the sanctity of human life. The Noahic covenant bears an indirect relationship with the Abrahamic covenant, insofar as it anticipates the Abrahamic covenant in terms of expressing God's will for the flourishing of human life through the restraint of evil. The Abrahamic covenant particularizes principles of the Noahic covenant to focus the divine redemptive plan for humanity through the agency of an individual (Abraham) and his descendants (the nation of Israel). Following the Noahic covenant, the Abrahamic covenant stands, in turn, as the spring from which issue the other covenants of Scripture. Its land, seed, and blessing promises are later codified or particularized through the successive Mosaic, Priestly, Davidic, and new covenants in both direct and indirect ways.

Therefore, discontinuity features also distinguish the Abrahamic covenant from some other covenants. For example, the temporal and material limitations of the Mosaic covenant render it a bilateral and negatable covenant in a way that the Abrahamic covenant is not.[56] Thus, the prophets may speak of violating the Mosaic covenant so that it is broken (Jer 11:10; 31:32; Ezek 17:19; 44:7; Zech 11:10), language that is never used of the irrevocable Abrahamic covenant (cf. Lev 26:44; Judg 2:1; Jer 31:35–36; 33:20–21; Ezek 37:12–14). Moreover, the polarity between

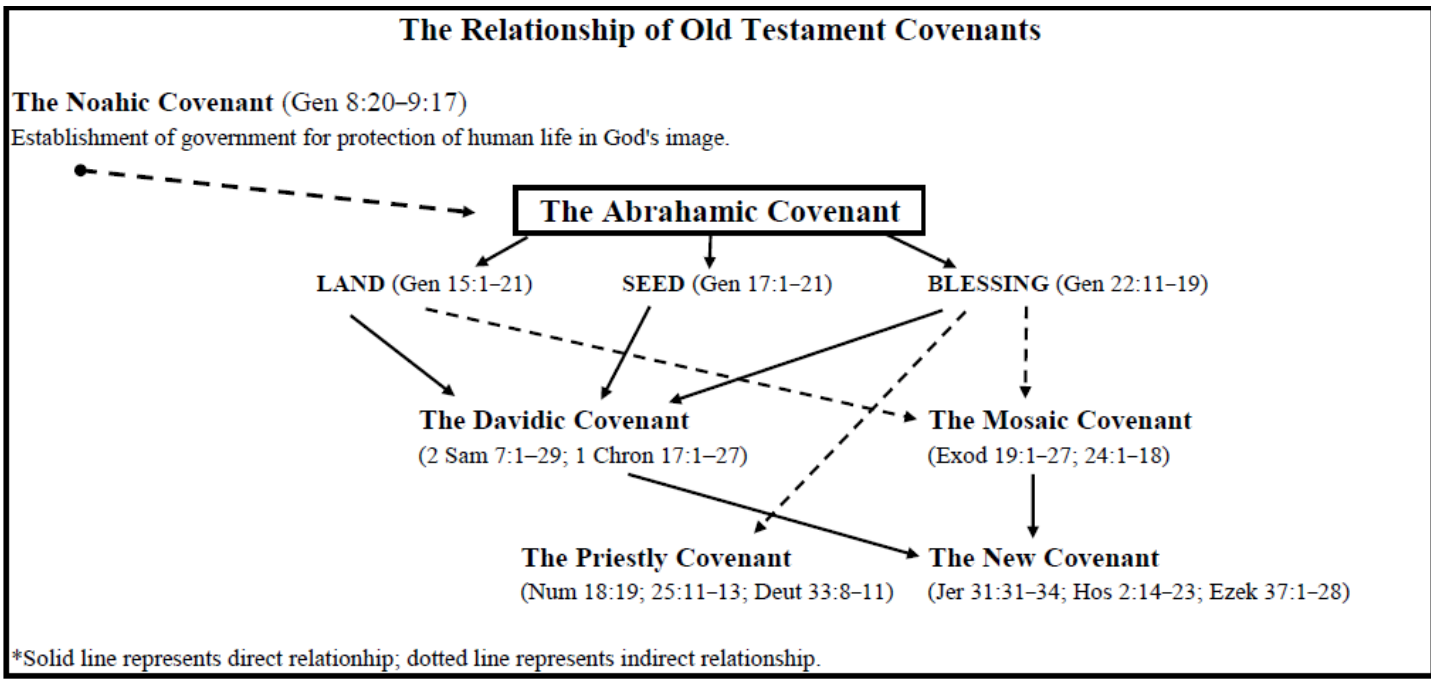
[55] For example, Gentry and Wellum argue at length for taking the land provision specifically as typological rather than normative (*Kingdom through Covenant*, 703–16).

[56] This is evident, for example, in the blood sprinkled upon the Israelites and in their oath to adhere to all the words of the covenant (Exod 24:1–8).

the Mosaic covenant and new covenant, as expressed in passages such as Jeremiah 31 ("a new covenant … *not like* the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt" [vv. 31–32] [ESV]) (cf. 2 Cor 3:5–18; Heb 7:11–8:13), means that the biblical writers view the new covenant as expressly superseding the Mosaic covenant, rather than all previous covenants.[57] Further, the new covenant, which includes land provisions as well as blessing (Hos 2:14–23; Ezek 37:1–28), has been cut but not yet enacted fully with Israel as originally promised. The Abrahamic covenant may thus carry an *indirect* relationship with some other biblical covenants. The relationship of the biblical covenants is visualized in the following chart:

[57] One of the principal weaknesses of progressive covenantalism in this connection is its conclusion that the new covenant consummates and thereby abrogates *all former covenants*, rather than seeing it as a corollary specifically to the Mosaic covenant alone (see Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 660–62; John D. Meade, "Circumcision of Flesh to Circumcision of Heart: The Typology of the Sign of the Abrahamic Covenant," in *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course between Dispensational and Covenantal Theologies*, ed. Stephen J. Wellum and Brent E. Parker, 127–58 [Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016]). Rather, while the new covenant is a corollary covenant to the Mosaic covenant, it is a *subsidiary covenant* with respect to the Abrahamic covenant. The new covenant, by means of the Spirit's work, brings to fruition the blessings promised to Abraham in a way that the Mosaic covenant could not.

The Relationship of Old Testament Covenants



The Abrahamic Covenant and God's Redemptive Plan

Having surveyed the nature and place of the Abrahamic covenant, I turn finally to address its place specifically as the foundation of Christian missions through its particularity, agency, and intention. The covenant holds a pivotal place in God's unfolding plan of redemption, as the wellspring of ensuing biblical redemptive history. A key goal of the Abrahamic covenant is to bring blessing to the nations, concretized through a vital relationship with the living God, so that God's kingdom might extend through all the earth.[58] Abraham and his descendants are the agents of this blessing of redemption for the nations. This comes particularly through the chosen Seed, the coming Messiah, who will reverse the curse so that the whole created order may be freed from sin and its consequences. Yet the coming Messiah will not exhaust or cancel the promises made to Israel. Israel occupies a mediatory role in God's soteriological plan, not only in the past but also, with regard to the future, in relation to God's coming eschatological reign over the restored cosmos. In that the covenant is irrevocable and divinely guaranteed, Israel's place in God's plan of redemption cannot be superseded or abrogated. The nation thus continues to occupy an integral role in a dispensational theology of missions.[59]

The approach to the Abrahamic covenant that I have advocated pushes back against some theological and especially missiological readings of Scripture that ground missions in creation or in the exodus/Sinai event. Such interpretations often minimize or even bracket out Israel from God's redemptive purposes. Thus, for example, Christopher J. H. Wright sees the mission of humanity as grounded in creation and therefore as encompassing a "holistic gospel" that focuses missions primarily in the care and keeping of creation: "Out of this understanding of our humanity … flows our ecological responsibility, our economic activity involving work, productivity, exchange and trade, and the whole cultural mandate."[60] While Abraham was chosen as an agent by God, his role was specifically (and merely) to be a conduit of blessing to the nations: "Israel came into existence as a people with a mission entrusted from God for the sake of the rest of the nations. All that Israel was, or was supposed to be—all that Yahweh their God did in them, for them, and through them—was ultimately linked to this wider purpose of God for the nations."[61]

Israel is thus downgraded in some sense to serve simply as "the midwife" for the Messiah so that the nations, rather than Israel, may become the conduit of blessing. The Abrahamic covenant thus concerns not ethnic Israel but "the church, the

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[58] Nkhoma, "Mission in the Postmodern World," 50. Glasser rightly argues that the kingdom of God is fundamental to the biblical concept of mission (*Announcing the Kingdom*, 20–28).

[59] On the latter, see Chris Burnett, "Toward a Dispensational Missiology: Eschatological Parameters for the Global Task," *MSJ* 31 (Spr 2020): 59–78.

[60] Christopher J. H. Wright, "Truth with a Mission: Reading All Scripture Missiologically," *SBJT* 15 (Sum 2011): 8. His basis for mission as extending from creation itself leads, however, to an essentially Marxist view of property rights: "Since the earth was given to all mankind, access to and use of its resources were meant to be shared and available to all. The creation narratives cannot be used to justify privatized, individual ownership, since it is to mankind as a whole that the earth is entrusted" (*An Eye for an Eye: The Place of Old Testament Ethics Today* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1983], 68). Such a conclusion stands in clear contrast to the OT's consistent concern for property rights as encoded, e.g., in the Ten Commandments (Exod 20:17; Deut 5:21).

[61] Wright, "Truth with a Mission," 9.

community of believing Jews and Gentiles who constitute the extended people of the Abrahamic covenant, to be the agent of God's blessing to the nations in the name and for the glory of Jesus Christ."[62] Such a turn impacts how God is working in the present age to restore the cosmos: "It is not so much … that God has a mission for His church in the world as that God has a church for His mission in the world. Mission is not just something we do (though it certainly includes that). Mission, from the point of view of our human endeavor, means the committed participation of God's people in the purposes of God for the redemption of the whole creation."[63]

In a similar way, to ground missions in the exodus/Sinai event is to adopt a supersessionist agenda for the task. Here Thomas Manson finds the basis for Christian missions: "The conception of the Church's universal mission is bound up, first and last, with the thought of the Church being 'the Israel of God.'"[64] In the exodus, Israel experienced a redemptive event that, in turn, "underlies the Gospel of Jesus and the inauguration of the new era of Christianity."[65] Jesus both completes and transcends Israel's Old Testament role so that He represents "fulfilled Judaism" as too does the church. This creates a dichotomy between "Israel after the flesh," who "hangs on to historic claim and privilege" and "Israel of the New Covenant" (i.e., the church), who has been set free to enjoy "the inward law of the Spirit."[66]

My proposed understanding of the Abrahamic covenant pushes back against such readings of the covenant and of Scripture as a whole.[67] Rather, the Abrahamic covenant concerns primarily the manner in which the Lord intends to convey land, seed, and blessing provisions to Israel (Abraham's descendants) and through them to bring blessing to the nations. Israel's own participation cannot be omitted from the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant; her mediatory role is integral to its implementation. The covenantalist perspective often tends to rule out Israel's continued mediatory role in view of the Messiah's coming. Yet Paul affirms that Christ's incarnation does not abrogate the former covenants: "Christ became a servant to the circumcised to show God's truthfulness, *in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs*" (emphasis added; Rom 15:8).

So then, with respect to the nations and thus to the church, the primary intention of the Abrahamic covenant is to bring blessing rather than to transmogrify original promises into spiritualized or typologically-eviscerated provisions (e.g., land) that have no consummation within human history. Instead, with respect to the nations, the promised Abrahamic blessing comes to fruition by means of the inauguration of the new covenant. Jesus Christ cuts the new covenant through His atoning death (Matt 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20), by which the church, encompassing all nations, participates in the promised soteriological blessings through the work of the Spirit (Rom 4:9–11; 1 Cor 11:25; 2 Cor 3:6; Gal 3:14; Heb 7:22; 8:6–13; 9:15; 10:15–18;

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[62] Wright, "Truth with a Mission," 10.
[63] Wright, 10.
[64] Manson, "Biblical Doctrine of Mission," 257.
[65] Manson, 259.
[66] Manson, 265.
[67] For a critique of Wright's missiological hermeneutic, see John A. Wind, "Not Always Right: Critiquing Christopher Wright's Paradigmatic Application of the Old Testament to the Socio-Economic Realm," *SBJT* 19 (Sum 2015): 81–100; Wind, "The Church's Mission Constrained by the Covenants: Engaging Christopher Wright's Conception of the Bible's Covenant Structure," *SBJT* 23 (Fall 2019): 61–73.

12:24; 13:30).[68] Gospel laborers who carry forth the good news to the nations do so as part of "a wild olive shoot" that has been "grafted … in the nourishing root of the olive tree" (Rom 11:17). They labor so that "in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles" by the power of God's Spirit through the proclamation of the gospel (Gal 3:14). As the emissaries of Christ, the promised Seed of Abraham, they go "in the fullness of the blessing of Christ" (Rom 15:29). Yet they also minister so that God might create a people for Himself from among the nations in anticipation of the coming kingdom (Acts 15:13–18) and so that the Jewish people might be provoked to jealousy and thereby believe in the Messiah (Rom 11:11–15).

The Abrahamic covenant's unilateral and irrevocable nature as an "everlasting covenant" means that Israel has a continued place in God's redemptive plan. She will occupy a future mediatorial role vis-à-vis the nations in the millennial kingdom. This role she failed to fulfill originally due to disobedience to the Mosaic Law (cf. Exod 19:5–6) but will fulfill under the aegis of the new covenant when consummated (Jer 31:31–34; Hos 2:14–23; Ezek 37:1–28). The Abrahamic covenant thus guarantees—because God Himself guarantees—that Israel will realize her land, seed, and blessing promises, and that the blessings promised to all nations will too certainly come to fruition. The global purview of missions does not begin, therefore, in Matthew 28 but in Genesis 12. The spread of the gospel extends God's intention to bring soteriological blessing to every ethnicity and nation on earth in preparation for His coming kingdom. The covenant may thus rightly be termed the foundation of God's mission, occupying a formative place in the storyline of Scripture. The importance of the Abrahamic covenant for realizing God's purposes for redemption can thus hardly be overstated.

[68] R. Bruce Compton, "Dispensationalism, the Church, and the New Covenant," *DBSJ* 8 (Fall 2003): 3–48.

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THE MISSIONARY'S GUIDE TO THE GREAT COMMISSION: AN EXEGETICAL ANALYSIS

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Few would dispute the foundational nature of the Great Commission to missions and missiology. This article seeks to provide a clear exegetical analysis of the Great Commission passages in the New Testament, focusing on Matthew 28:18–20 and supplementing it with the other texts. By considering these passages, Christ's mandate to His Church becomes clear: to make disciples in the image of Christ with the Word of God by the power of the Holy Spirit. This underlines the primacy of the Word of God, indispensable to the missionary's task as he fulfills the mission appointed for him by Christ.

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Introduction

Those who participate in evangelistic outreach and church work in foreign contexts generally consider their activities to be a part of fulfilling the Great Commission; otherwise they would not do them. However, examining how exactly their ministries fulfill the Great Commission requires discernment. This article aims to equip mission-minded pastors with a biblically grounded, theologically sound framework for understanding and executing the Great Commission.

The study begins with an exegetical analysis of the key passages in which the Lord Jesus Christ instructs His disciples about what activities they must carry out to participate in His work of building His church (Matt 16:18). These five passages, commonly referred to as the Great Commission passages, were given by Christ after

His resurrection: Matthew 28:18–20; Mark 16:15–20;[1] Luke 24:46–49; John 20:21–23; and Acts 1:8. This article will then synthesize the teachings of the five passages to give a composite understanding of Jesus' teaching on what the Great Commission is, so that believers who are eager to fulfill it around the world can do so faithfully and effectively.

The structure of the study will largely follow the order of phrases in the Matthean account, Matthew 28:18–20, which is perhaps the most recognized Great Commission passage:

> And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to keep all that I commanded you; and behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."[2]

In Matthew's Great Commission several major themes related to global missions coalesce, including the propagation of God's Kingdom, discipleship within the context of the local church, the authority of the Risen Christ, and His enabling presence among His disciples.[3]

The other four passages are as follows:

> Mark 16:15–20: [And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who have believed: in My name they will cast out demons, they will speak with new tongues; and they will pick up serpents, and if they drink any deadly *poison,* it will not hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover." So then, the Lord Jesus, after He had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. And they went out and preached everywhere, while the Lord worked with them, and confirmed the word by the signs that followed.]

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[1] The purpose here is not to assert the originality of Mark 16:9–20, though the discussion has an important place in textual and missiological scholarship. Against the inclusion of the longer ending of Mark 16:9–20, since it is "missing from the most reliable ancient manuscripts," along with counsel for pastoral application, see John MacArthur, *Mark 9–16*, MNTC (Chicago, IL: Moody, 2015), 408–18; and R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 685–88. In support of the canonicity of the longer ending of Mark 16:9–20 is the view that since most manuscripts have the long ending of Mark, it was most likely part of the original autograph. For the view, see Maurice A. Robinson and William G. Pierpont, *The Case for the Byzantine Priority* (Malta: Infinity, 2005), 13–46; Wilbur N. Pickering, *The Identity of the New Testament Text IV* (Bengaluru, Karnataka, India: WNP, 2014), 89–128.

[2] Unless otherwise stated, Scripture quotations come from the *Legacy Standard Bible* (LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 2021).

[3] So recognized in Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, NAC 22 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 429, and Donald Alfred Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, WBC 33B (Dallas, TX: Word, 1995), 881, but with caution in D. A. Carson, "Matthew," in *Matthew–Mark*, EBC 9, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 662, and R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 1109.

> Luke 24:46–49, including here v. 45: Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and He said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day, and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending the promise of My Father upon you, but you are to stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high."
>
> John 20:21–23: So Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you." And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained."
>
> Acts 1:8 (including here v. 7): But He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has set by His own authority; but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the end of the earth."

In analyzing Jesus' commands in the Great Commission passages, two fundamental observations emerge that put Scripture at the center of His mission to the nations. First, the risen Christ proclaims a global mandate for missions by His divine authority, supplying spiritual power to those who go and preach and teach the exclusive gospel of God as recorded in the Bible. Second, the risen Christ tasks those He sends with making disciples on the basis of the biblical content, by sending them to the nations to baptize believers and teach theology and practice.

The Risen Christ Ushers a Global Mandate on His Divine Authority

Matthew's Great Commission passage elucidates how the Lord Jesus Christ has authorized His disciples to make new disciples: by proclaiming the content of the Scriptures and demanding adherence to its teaching. Because Christ is King, His Word is the ultimate authority for belief and conduct everywhere.[4]

Scripture's Authority as the Foundation for the Great Commission

To understand how Christ's authority operates in the Great Commission, a few brief statements on the inspiration, inerrancy, and sufficiency of Scripture are necessary to establish its universal authority. First, the didactic nature of the Great

[4] The doctrine of the authority of Scripture is directly asserted by Jesus, in John 10:35 ("the Scripture cannot be broken"), and Paul, in 1 Thessalonians 4:1–2 (disciples receive Jesus' commands through the apostles). Additionally, the Reformed doctrine of the "witness of the Spirit" affirms the biblical evidence that when the Holy Spirit regenerates the soul, the reader of Scripture confidently recognizes the authority of the text and welcomes it as divine in origin (1 Thess 1:5; 2:13). See John Calvin, *Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2 vols., ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1960), 1.7.5.

Commission task stems from the doctrine of verbal, plenary inspiration.[5] God is the source of every revealed text of Scripture (πᾶσα γραφὴ, 2 Tim 3:16),[6] having "breathed out" eternal words (θεόπνευστος, 2 Tim 3:16).[7] Through the supernatural superintendence of the Holy Spirit (2 Pet 1:21), God taught His eternal words to the prophets and the apostles (1 Cor 2:13; cf. John 14:26; 15:26–27; 16:13).[8] By transmitting His teaching through the biblical writers, the Ultimate Author of the text continues to instruct those who read His words (1 Thess 2:13).

Second, for Scripture to command adherence, it must be perfectly truthful. God, who cannot deviate from the truth,[9] ensured that His written revelation expresses only what is wholly accurate to reality (2 Sam 7:28; Ps 119:160; John 17:17).[10]

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[5] For the doctrine of verbal, plenary inspiration, see Louis Berkhof, *Introductory Volume to Systematic Theology*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1932), 148–50; Archibald A. Hodge, and Benjamin B. Warfield, *Inspiration* (1881; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), 17–29; John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, eds., *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 77–81.

[6] The two words, πᾶσα γραφὴ, agree in gender and number, indicating the sense of "every" word of Scripture, from the word level to the sentence level. For support of γραφὴ as "Scripture," see references to OT propositions in Matthew 21:42; 22:29; 26:54, 56; Mark 12:10, 24; 14:49; Luke 4:21; John 5:39; 7:38; 10:34–35; 13:18; 17:12; and NT propositions in Luke 10:7 (cf. Deut 25:4); 2 Peter 3:15–16 (vis Paul's writings); 1 Corinthians 14:37. So concluded by Wayne A. Grudem, "Scripture's Self-Attestation," in *Scripture and Truth*, ed. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 39: "The Old Testament writings are regarded as God's words in written form."

[7] The Pauline hapax legomenon θεόπνευστος is a verbal noun with a passive sense that likely functions as a predicate adjective to specify the Divine origin of the biblical text. William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 449 (hereafter BDAG). See discussion of the term by Benjamin B. Warfield, "God-Inspired Scripture," in *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1948), 296: "The Scriptures owe their origin to an activity of God the Holy Ghost and are in the highest and truest sense His creation." There are many direct and indirect assertions of the divine origin of the written Word. Some of the direct assertions include Exod 17:14; 34:27; Deut 31:19, 24; Pss 140, 142; Isa 8:1; 30:8; Jer 36:1–3; 28; Hab 2:2; 1 Cor 7:10; 14:37; 11:23; 1 Thess 4:15; cf. 1 Cor 7:25, 40; Rev 1:19; 2:1, 8, 12, 18; 3:1, 7, 14; 14:13; 19:9; 21:5. Cf. 10:4. Some of the indirect assertions include Lev 1:1; Num 1:1; "thus says Yahweh" statements, e.g., Isa 1:2; 8:1; 42:5; Jer 1:11; Ezek 1:3; 33:1, 23; 34:1; Ezra 1:1; Neh 9:30; Zech 7:12; Mark 9:12; 14:21; Luke 18:31; John 7:38, 42; Rom 4:3; 9:17; 10:11; 11:2; Gal 4:30; 1 Tim 5:18.

[8] For assertions that the words of the biblical writers are exactly the Word of God, see the following passages: regarding Moses, Mark 7:9, 10, 13; Neh 8:1, 3, 14; 13:1; cf. 9:3; regarding the Psalms, see John 10:34–35; regarding Jeremiah, see Dan 9:1–2; regarding the prophets, see Zech 7:12; Matt 2:15; regarding David, see Acts 1:16; of Paul himself, see 1 Thess 2:13. While the delivery of special revelation is mysterious (see discussion in Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 3:9–19), the biblical writers recognized the objective, transcendent character of their words when writing Scripture. For discussion, see Grudem, "Scripture's Self-Attestation," 19–59; Kenneth Kantzer, "The Christ-Revelation as Act and Interpretation," in *Jesus of Nazareth: Savior and Lord*, ed. Carl F. H. Henry (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), 256, cited with comments in Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, *Volume III: God Who Speaks and Shows: Fifteen Theses, Part Two* (Waco, TX: Word, 1979), 463.

[9] On God's truthfulness, see Num 23:19; 1 Sam 15:29; John 14:6; 17:3; Rom 3:4; Titus 1:2; Heb 6:18; 1 John 5:20.

[10] See Roger R. Nicole, "Appendix 5: Charles Hodge's View of Inerrancy," in Archibald A. Hodge, and Benjamin B. Warfield, *Inspiration*, 93–95 (1881; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), 93–95; Paul D. Feinberg, "The Meaning of Inerrancy," 294, with discussion from 267–304; ICBI Chicago Statement on Inerrancy; MacArthur and Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 81, 107–113. Scripture asserts the absolute, truthful character of its morphemes and syntax and affirms that the data in the text is described accurately to the truth. Grudem, "Scripture's Self-Attestation," 51–52. Against the theory that the writers

Understanding what is expressed depends on how it is expressed, and so the very form of the words is essential for representing every matter faithfully.[11] In this way, God's Word provides the reader with access to the knowledge that is essential for living with an accurate understanding of the spiritual and physical reality around him.

Third, making disciples who live according to the Scriptures is not only possible but expected because God has sufficiently revealed the complete set of spiritual and material information about His nature, His will, man, and the created order.[12] God, through His Word, commands what people are and are not to believe objectively and how they are to conduct their lives.[13] Because of its inherent authority, the revealed Word of God is no "personal" or "dialectical revelation" that is subject to selective interpretation and application, but an objective theological corpus with life and death consequences.[14] Thus, the relevance of Scripture to an audience does not depend upon how its theological content might correspond to local beliefs and traditions, nor whether the truths proclaimed can be empirically tested. These foundational doctrines of biblical authority provide the framework for understanding that in the Great Commission Christ supplies His supreme authority to His witnesses, so that as they proclaim His exclusive gospel, sinners will come under His authority in obedience to the truth.

Christ Supplies His Supreme Authority to His Disciples

In Matthew 28:18 Jesus declares that His authority (ἐξουσία) is comprehensive and absolute—His sovereign control is adjectivally described as over "all" (πᾶσα) realms.[15] The risen Christ's authority over the Great Commission is delegated from

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of Scripture deliberately accommodated certain statements to the worldview and cultures of their readers, see Grudem, "Scripture's Self-Attestation," 53–57.

[11] Scripture is inerrant in every word of the original autographs, which includes the syntax of the words. Support comes from 1 Cor 2:13, in which Paul's use of συγκρίνοντες with πνευματικοῖς and πνευματικὰ implies that the Spirit's work included matching spiritual truths with their verbal arrangement. Also, in Gal 3:16, Paul's Christological "seed" (σπέρμα) argument hinges on the grammatical number expressed by God in the Abraham narratives, in which "seed" (זֶרַע) is expressed in the singular form (Gen 12:7; 13:15; 17:7; 22:18; 24:7).

[12] Primary support for the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture includes Deut 29:29; John 20:30–31; 2 Pet 1:3–4 (cf. Dan 8:26; 12:4; Rev 10:4); cf. Deut 4:2; 12:32; Rev 22:18–19. Biblical descriptions of Scripture's sufficiency are presented in Ps 119:105; 2 Tim 3:14–15; Titus 1:9; 2 Pet 1:19–20.

[13] Scripture's sufficiency is related to its inspiration in 2 Tim 3:16–17 and Ps 19:7–11, each passage listing the daily benefits of God's Word to the life of the faith-filled reader.

[14] Carl Henry used the holistic expression "propositional revelation" (Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 3:482) to answer the charge of subjectivity and relativity of meaning and application, that "the value of theological propositions lies only in their validity for life style or in their moral consequences." Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 3:456. For discussion of views against the term "propositional revelation," see Henry, *God, Revelation and Authority*, 3:455–81. For a recent proposal of Scripture as dialectical rather than propositional, see James Arcadi, "Analytic Theology as Declarative Theology," *TheoLogica* (2017): 37–52. Note that Arcadi's use of the term "declarative" does not mean "proclamational" but instead refers to "dialectical," "personal," and "subjective" interpretations of Scripture, which leads to a "culturally bound" theological method and expression that might not seek to represent the original meaning of the texts in question.

[15] "ἐξουσία," BDAG, 352–53; "πᾶς," BDAG, 782; Leon Morris, *The Gospel according to Matthew*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 745; John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NIGTC (Grand

His Father and is operative in the supreme sense because, as the eternal Son, He is of equal divine essence to the Father (John 1:1; 10:30; 12:41; 17:5, 10, 21–24).[16] Because Jesus is God, His authority is limitlessly transdimensional, being "in heaven and on earth" (ἐν οὐρανῷ καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς, Matt 28:18).[17]

Specific to His rulership over the earth, the Son holds authority as the Father's representative King, the messianic role which was anticipated in His genealogy. Matthew introduces the Messiah as being in the line of David and Abraham (Matt 1:1), through whom all the nations will be blessed (cf. Gen 12:1–3).[18] Messiah's mission, which is universal in scope according to the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen 12:3), is undergirded by His supreme authority as the ultimate Davidic King, who will rule the world forever (2 Sam 7:12, 16). Such comprehensive and absolute authority is inherent to the God-Man Jesus Christ. Christ alone governs the boundaries and outcomes of global missions.

Of further emphasis, the term "all" in verse Matthew 28:18 is couched in the immediate context of Jesus' post-resurrection appearance to His disciples in verses 16–17. The context reinforces the reality that because Jesus has resurrected to an eternally glorified life, His commanding role will continue into the future without end. It is with this unlimited authority that Christ mandates the mission of His followers (28:19),[19] granting them to wield His unassailable authority as they preach and teach His Word.[20] According to the subsequent Great Commission statement in Acts 1:8, because the Son's reign is universal, His followers now take up His preaching and teaching ministry with His power beyond Judea and Samaria. He sends them beyond the "lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt 10:5–6; cf. 15:24),[21] to the "ends of the earth," which is as far as His followers can go.

Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 1264, connects the context and use of the adjective to Matthew 11:27—Πάντα μοι παρεδόθη ὑπὸ τοῦ πατρός μου. All Greek text is from Nestle, Eberhard, and Institute for New Testament Textual Research, eds., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 28th rev. ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012).

[16] The passive construction ἐδόθη μοι distinguishes the delegation of authority (from the Father to the Son) without compromising the divine equality of the Persons of the Godhead—the Son's authority, though delegated from the Father, is the most supreme power, and exactly that which befits the Mediatorial King, who is both God and man. So recognized in Blomberg, *Matthew*, 431, and Carson, "Matthew," 665. Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, 886, connects the Risen Son's authority to His delegated authority pre-Cross, which was essential in testifying that the Son is equal to God (cf. Matt 9:6, 8; 11:27; John 3:35–36).

[17] The phrase occurs four times in Matthew, though in varied forms in relation to the article or the noun number (6:10; 16:19; 18:18; 28:18). Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1265.

[18] The Great Commission of Matthew 28 is a thematic *inclusio* to the opening verse of the genealogy, insofar as David's Messiah "makes possible the fulfillment of the universal intention that the good news is brought to the nations." In Craig Ott and Stephen J. Strauss, *Encountering Theology of Mission: Biblical Foundations, Historical Developments, and Contemporary Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), 36. Also see Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 2 vols. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 1:365.

[19] So noted in Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 1:371; Blomberg, *Matthew*, 431; David L. Turner, *Matthew*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 689.

[20] France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1083–84; Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, 889.

[21] France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1079. Global evangelism was always Christ's plan, but Israel was to receive news that Messiah had arrived first, as demonstrated in the parable of the wedding feast (Matt 22:1–10) and in the practices of the Apostle Paul, who, although being the "apostle to the Gentiles" (Rom 11:13; cf. Acts 26:16–18), typically began his proclamation ministry in Jewish synagogues (Acts 9:20; 13:5; 18:4).

Christ Empowers an Exclusive Mission

Having established Christ's supreme authority, the Great Commission demonstrates that preaching and teaching can only be accomplished by Christ's inexhaustible power. He promises to be present with His disciples so that they will persevere by His power in His exclusive mission. The following sections will show that Christ spiritually enables His disciples to proclaim God's wrath upon sinners and the reward of eternal life for those who become disciples of God's Son.

Christ Promises Power for Proclamation

Two affirmations of divine enablement arise from the final phrase of Matthew 28:20—"and behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." In the first phrase, "I am with you always" (καὶ ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ μεθ' ὑμῶν εἰμι πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας), Christ asserts the legitimacy and viability of biblical proclamation ministry in every generation. He promises to perpetually support His envoys as they proclaim the gospel and disciple believers in the truth of Scripture. In the sense of Christ's active presence, those who "labor at preaching the word and teaching" can be confident that their efforts are fully approved by Christ (1 Tim 5:17). His help is a continual reality for Great Commission disciplers.[22]

In the second phrase of Matthew 28:20, "even to the end of the age" (ἕως τῆς συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος), Christ promises to sustain proclamation activities in every generation by His Holy Spirit (Acts 6:10; 8:29, 39; 10:44; 11:15; 13:2, 4; 16:6). Through the work of the Spirit, Jesus maintains His ongoing presence as Immanuel—the God who is with His people (Isa 7:14; Matt 1:23).[23] By providing divine power for disciple-making,[24] Christ will continue to build His church (Matt 16:18) until His work is complete.[25] The Great Commission thus constitutes the continuous pattern for all disciples of Christ to preach and teach from the Scriptures and pass it down as a stewardship to their disciples (2 Tim 2:2). The strategies of the apostles and their disciples will never be obsolete as long as Christ's Great Commission is in force.

Christ Calls Missionaries to Proclaim Wrath and Reward

The power Christ promises for proclamation enables His missionaries to declare an uncompromising message that Christ alone is "the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but through [Him]" (John 14:6). Though there are many ways that preaching and teaching might be conducted, depending on the context,

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[22] Affirmed by Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 749; Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 1085, who recognizes the Spirit of Christ as the Agent of His ongoing presence (Acts 16:7; Rom 8:9; Gal 4:6; Phil 1:19; 1 Pet 1:11). Schnabel finds grammatical support in εἰμι πάσας τὰς ἡμέρας: "The formulation in the present tense … and the reference to, literally, "all days" … promise permanence." Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 1:367.

[23] So recognized by Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, 888; Turner, *Matthew*, 690; and Ben Witherington III, *Matthew*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2006), 534.

[24] For defining power as successful accomplishment of intergenerational discipleship, see Osborne, *Matthew*, 1107.

[25] See Turner, *Matthew*, 690; Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, 889; and Ott and Strauss, *Encountering Theology of Mission* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010), 37.

situation, and audience, the undeniable reality is that to proclaim the gospel is to pronounce divine wrath and reward. Preaching and teaching is conducted obediently to the Great Commission when it proclaims the solemn warning of Mark 16:16, that unbelief will incur God's judgment, in contrast to the blessing of a demonstrable saving belief: "He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned."[26]

In a similar vein, John 20:23 highlights the spiritual seriousness of sending the disciples to new territories: "If you forgive the sins of any, their sins have been forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they have been retained." The implication of these texts holds today: missionaries are sent by the Lord to deal powerfully with sin, either by communicating His forgiveness to those who repent or His condemnation to those who do not. By repentance and belief, the sinner will come to possess "life in His name" (John 20:31). On the other hand, unbelief signals the retention of sins (v. 23)—which, if left unconfessed by grace through faith, will lead to final condemnation (Rom 11:20; Heb 3:19).

Given the spiritual importance of gospel preaching, Paul identifies himself and all disciples in 2 Corinthians 5:20 as "ambassadors for Christ," who speak directly on behalf of God, such that it is "as God is pleading through [them]" (v. 20).[27] The appeal delivered in the proclamational act is that sinners must be reconciled to God (v. 19). Because the message of reconciliation is so central to the gospel that the disciples preach, Paul characterizes their activity as "the ministry of reconciliation" (v. 18). The activity of appealing to non-believers is that of begging (δέομαι, v. 20), which refers to pleading, asking, or requesting that the sinner be reconciled to God through faith in His gracious work of forgiving their trespasses (v. 19)[28] in order to avoid God's judgment on the world, from which no unreconciled sinner can escape.[29]

Before He made atonement for sin, Jesus Christ prayed that as His disciples testify of the gospel, many people would believe in Him on account of their witness (John 17:20) and be sanctified in the truth (vv. 19–20). Repentance and belief mark the apostolic *telos* of the first evangelistic sermon in Acts 2:37–40 to an inter-cultural audience, the Diaspora Jews. That the international audience repented, believed, and many were baptized (v. 41) testifies to the fact that the apostles understood the objective of their mission—to expose and deal with sin (cf. Luke 24:47; John 20:23) and baptize the new disciples (Matt 28:19; Mark 16:16).[30]

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[26] Ott and Strauss, who doubt the originality of the Markan passage, nevertheless appreciate the "note of urgency not present in the other Gospels," where "response to gospel preaching is a matter of eternal consequence." Ott and Strauss, *Encountering Theology of Mission*, 37. Calvin recognized that the condemnation clause is theologically warranted: "Rebels, when they reject the salvation offered to them, draw down upon themselves severer punishment, and not only are involved in the general destruction of mankind, but bear the guilt of their own ingratitude." John Calvin and William Pringle, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists Matthew, Mark, and Luke* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 388.

[27] For discussion of a missionary ambassador within the Hellenistic context, and the frame of mind that Paul and his fellow missionaries would have had with regard to speaking on behalf of the Lord, see Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 2:967–70.

[28] δέομαι, BDAG, 218.

[29] Discussed in Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 2:1389.

[30] Polhill considers Peter to have established in the sermon a kind of proclamational formula of "four essentials of the conversion experience (v. 38): repentance, baptism in the name of Jesus Christ,

Belief in the proclaimed gospel is central to the success of the Great Commission, but the unique message of the gospel is a hard message to hear (John 6:60–66). Christ provides His power in the moment of preaching, both for the missionary who proclaims the truth and also for the hearer to perceive it as true when it is preached (Rom 1:16–17; 1 Cor 1:18, 24; 2:1–5). In the case of certain Gentiles whom Paul and his companions approached, 1 Thessalonians 1:5 records that the missionaries' gospel came to the pagan audience not only in word, "but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full assurance." The language of "power" and "full assurance" denotes that the Spirit mediated both the gospel proclamation and its reception by the hearers. The Holy Spirit caused the missionaries to grow in the total conviction that as they were preaching they were pronouncing the very oracles of God. This confidence further emboldened them to continue proclaiming the gospel to their audience.[31]

From the audience's perspective, 1 Thessalonians 2:13 describes that those whom God called into His kingdom (v. 12) "accepted" the gospel when it was preached to them, so that they approved of the truths being proclaimed. Such genuine conversion resulted from regeneration. The sinners were previously spiritually blinded to the truth, but in the moment Christ was preached, they understood that the gospel was the other-worldly, divine power of God poured out for their salvation. The example of the Thessalonian preaching event is itself not prescriptive, but it is descriptive of Christ's Great Commission promise to send His witnesses to preach by His divine enablement. The Lord's powerful presence brings comfort and confidence to all of Christ's witnesses who engage in biblical proclamation to make disciples.

The Risen Christ Tasks His Witnesses to Make Disciples

The preceding analysis of Christ's authority and empowerment leads naturally to an examination of His assigned task. According to the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19, the risen Christ sends His witnesses to all nations to carry out cross-cultural biblical proclamation, with the goal being to "make disciples of all the nations." These three participles in Matthew 28:19–20 clarify how "making disciples" is to be done in order to fulfill the Great Commission: by going (πορευθέντες, v. 19), by baptizing (βαπτίζοντες, v. 19), and by teaching (διδάσκοντες, v. 20). Scholars have rightly understood that "the last participles [baptizing and teaching] are a pair that explain how or by what means the disciples will fulfill their commission," and that "the chief means of making disciples is

forgiveness of sins, and receipt of the Spirit. These four generally form a single complex throughout Luke-Acts. They are the normative ingredients of conversion." John B. Polhill, *Acts*, NAC 26 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 116.

[31] From the term πληροφορία ("full assurance"), as treated in "πληροφορία," BDAG, 827; Gerhard Delling, "πληροφορία," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, G. W. Bromiley, and G. Friedrich, 10 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 6:310–11; Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 1:371, §31.45. Hereafter *TDNT*.

teaching."[32] Each participle will be treated in turn to show how Christ commands missionaries to prioritize the preaching and teaching of His Word above all other activities and, in so doing, to make disciples.

Christ's Disciples Must "Make Disciples"

Grammatically, "make disciples" (μαθητεύσατε) is the finite verb of the verse and is stated in the imperative form. This form reveals that making disciples is Jesus' main command for His followers to obey.[33] The verb has the sense of being or becoming a pupil who adheres to the instruction of the teacher.[34] Μαθητεύω is causative, referring to instruction as the key to making disciples, where the teaching is focused on inculcating the ways of the risen Christ.[35]

A three-fold relationship structure emerges from this causative understanding of discipleship, with essential parties working together to transmit biblical truth. The first party is Christ as the original Teacher, who lays the foundational content from Scripture. The second is the discipler, who serves as an intermediate teacher to instruct others in the way of the Teacher using biblical content.[36] The third is the disciple, who learns and adopts the Teacher's ways as authoritatively binding throughout life.[37]

In this light, the distinction between making a convert and making a disciple is an important one: the conversion of the sinner is only the beginning of spiritual life, whereas being a disciple is a lifelong process of pursuing Christlikeness (Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 3:18; Col 3:10). Once the writings of Scripture make one "wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim 3:15), they become beneficial throughout life "for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be equipped, having been thoroughly equipped for every good work" (3:16–17).

To implement this biblical pattern of discipleship, the kind of teaching that the intermediate teacher, the discipler, is to pass from Christ to the new disciple begins with evangelism, but exceeds it in order to mature converts into disciples with the

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[32] Quoted from Daniel M. Doriani, *Matthew* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008), 2:532, who cites Daniel Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 642–45; followed by Witherington, *Matthew*, 534.

[33] Doriani, *Matthew*, 2:532; Ott and Strauss, *Encountering Theology of Mission*, 36.

[34] Μαθητεύω, BDAG, 609. Instances of disciples outside of the narrative context of the Great Commission include Joseph of Arimathea in Matthew 27:57 (ὃς καὶ αὐτὸς ἐμαθητεύθη τῷ Ἰησοῦ) and scribes referred to by Jesus in Matthew 13:52 (γραμματεὺς μαθητευθεὶς). See Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 746n31. Μαθητεύω is later used by Ignatius in *1 Romans* 5.1 (Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 230) and *1 Ephesians* 3.1 (Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 184).

[35] Μαθητεύω, BDAG, 609. Other instances of the causative sense include Acts 14:21 (μαθητεύσαντες ἱκανοὺς) and Ignatius, *1 Ephesians* 10.1 (Holmes, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 190).

[36] The role and motivations of the intermediate teacher are described well in Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 746.

[37] The role of the disciple is affirmed in Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 746; Carson, "Matthew," 666. The role of the "learner" is to continually learn (Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 746n31). In the context of Jesus' disciples in John 8:31, "learning" is not limited to a simple acknowledgment that the instructional content is true, but a dependent trust that the content is true and must be followed (cf. Matt 10:38; contra John 6:66).

biblical doctrine.[38] Christian maturity, which is the goal of discipleship "demands a total surrender of one's identity, security and being to the Lordship of Christ."[39] Maturing believers thus become the new intermediate teachers, discipling yet newer converts so that the church as a whole matures and ushers in the next generation of maturing disciples.[40]

Christ's Disciples Must "Go" to "All the Nations"

The command to make disciples emerges within a global context. Not only does Jesus consider the entire world the sphere of His mission, but He sends His disciples as message-bearers to "go" to "all the nations" (Matt 28:19). Understanding this mandate requires careful examination of the terms and concepts related to both the command to "go" to its target of "all the nations."

Christ's Disciples Must "Go"

Christ's use of the passive participle "go" (πορευθέντες) in Matthew 28:19 serves the primary command to make disciples (μαθητεύσατε).[41] The grammatical relationship between these terms establishes "going" as instrumental to disciple-making rather than as an independent command. The participle's relationship to the main verb reflects how all missionary activity serves the primary goal of making disciples.

John 20:21 enriches the understanding of the Matthean command to "go" through the concept of sending: "As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." The sending motif in John's Gospel[42] highlights Jesus' authority to dispatch a messenger for a specific purpose. In the Great Commission as recorded in John 20:23, Jesus' disciples are instructed to carry out the express work of forgiveness and judgment in new global contexts. It is unmistakable, then, that Christ sends His disciples into the world on a divine errand. However, the general meaning of "go" and Matthew's repeated connection of it to the main verb "make disciples" should caution the reader

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[38] France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1080, observes well the tendency of missionaries to misapply the teaching command in v. 19: "It is critical to note that the command is not to evangelize but to perform the broader and deeper task of 'discipling' the nations. Many denominations and mission groups misunderstand this and spend all their effort winning new converts rather than anchoring them in the Christian faith (in spite of the many studies that show that too few are truly converted in that initial decision)."

[39] Joe Kapolyo, "Matthew," in *Africa Bible Commentary: A One-Volume Commentary*, Tokunboh Adeyemo, gen ed. (Nairobi: WordAlive, 2006), 1170.

[40] Doriani, *Matthew,* 2:532.

[41] "Πορεύω," BDAG, 853; "μαθητεύω," BDAG, 609. Wallace considers how πορευθέντες "fits the structural pattern for the attendant circumstance participle" in Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 645. For other "Go and..." commands in Matthew's Gospel that demonstrate this grammatical pattern, see 2:8; 9:13; 11:4; 17:27; 28:7.

[42] See John 3:17 (cf. v. 16); 3:34 (cf. v. 31); 4:34; 8:42; 10:36; 11:42; 17:3, 8. For a detailed discussion of the sending motif in the Gospel of John, see Andreas J. Köstenberger, *The Missions of Jesus and the Disciples according to the Fourth Gospel: With Implications for the Fourth Gospel's Purpose and the Mission of the Contemporary Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 180–98.

from placing too great an emphasis on the "going," as if the combined imperative "go and make" requires transnational movement in every case.[43]

Nevertheless, according to Luke 24:47, Jesus commanded His disciples to testify of the gospel first in Jerusalem and move outward "to all the nations." This pattern demonstrates not merely geographical expansion but the strategic advancement of discipleship across cultural boundaries. The scope of this cross-cultural proclamation was evident from the church's beginning on the day of Pentecost, when "every nation under heaven" was assembled to hear Peter preach the gospel (Acts 2:5, 14–41). The Great Commission command to "go" is depicted likewise in Acts 1:8, in a general sense, as outward-going toward the farthest reaches of the inhabited Gentile world. The apostle Paul specifically defined those outward locations as places "where Christ was [not] already named," where pioneering work was still needed because the foundation of the gospel had not yet been built there (Rom 15:20–21).[44]

Since Luke authored both the Great Commission passages of Luke 24:46–49 and Acts 1:8, Jesus' depiction of the "ends of the earth" illuminates the meaning of "all the nations."[45] The book of Acts records how this worldwide mission unfolded historically. After witnessing in Jerusalem (Acts 1–7), the disciples moved outward into Judea and Samaria (chs. 8–9), and to the "ends of the earth" (chs. 10–28), experiencing a series of culture shifts as they moved from a heavily Jewish context (chs. 1–12) to a range of Gentile environments (chs. 13–28).[46] Early church history documents show how this outward-going pattern of missions continued. Eusebius of Caesarea recorded Mark as having ministered in Alexandria,[47] Peter in Rome,[48] Thomas in the wide Eastern expanse known as Parthia[49] and possibly into India,[50] Andrew in the Scythian territory north of and around the Black Sea,[51] and still others

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[43] France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 1080. Morris captures this well: "Where a participle is linked in this way with an imperative, it shares in the imperatival force (cf. 2:8, 13; 11:4; 17:27). Jesus was commanding his followers to go as well as to make disciples, though the emphasis falls on the making of disciples." Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 746n30.

[44] C. E. B. Cranfield, *Romans*, ICC (London: T&T Clark, 1979), 2:762; Robert H. Mounce, *Romans*, NAC 27 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 267. Global evangelism was always Christ's plan, but Israel was to receive news that Messiah had arrived first, as demonstrated in the parable of the wedding feast (Matt 22:1–10) and in Paul's practice of typically beginning his proclamation ministry in Jewish synagogues (Acts 9:20; 13:5; 18:4).

[45] Thomas S. Moore, "'To the End of the Earth': The Geographical and Ethnic Universalism of Acts 1:8 in Light of Isaianic Influence on Luke," *JETS* 40, no. 3 (1997): 396.

[46] The general geographical breakdown of Acts outlined here is reproduced from Ott and Strauss, *Encountering Theology of Mission*, 41.

[47] Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History, Books 1–5*, ed. Roy Joseph Deferrari, trans. Roy Joseph Deferrari, vol. 19, The Fathers of the Church (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1953), 5.16 (110–11).

[48] Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History*, 5.17 (111).

[49] Eusebius of Caesarea, 3.1 (137).

[50] Thomas' ministry in India is a later tradition, though not necessarily to be discredited. See editor's note in Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History*, 3.1 (137n2). The tradition is doubted in John Mark Terry, "The History of Missions in the Early Church," in John Mark Terry, Ebbie Smith, and Justice Anderson, eds. *Missiology: An Introduction to the Foundations, History, and Strategies of World Missions* (Nashville: B&H, 1998), 166–67.

[51] Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History*, 3.1 (137n3). Listed in Pratt, Sills, and Walters, *Introduction to Global Missions*, 100.

reaching the British Isles.[52] This historical pattern provides both precedent and instruction for cross-cultural discipleship in every age.

The "Nations" Are Foreign to the Missionary

The phrase "of all nations" in Matthew 28:19 is also basic to the Scripture-centered emphasis of the Great Commission. In its plainest sense, the term "nation" (ἔθνος) refers to geopolitical nation-states.[53] A sociological dimension of the term accompanies the geopolitical one to highlight that a nation is an ethnic group of people united by family heritage, culture, and traditions.[54] Together a nation's geopolitical and sociological dimensions accentuate the inherently foreign nature of missionary activity. Christ's disciples must "go" to the foreign environment, where the commonalities enjoyed within the local ethnic group (the nation) will be perceived in some way as foreign to those outside of the group (the missionary).

The corollary Great Commission passage of Luke 24:47 also expresses the command to go "to all the nations," which includes both Jews and non-Jews across the world.[55] In John 20:21–23, the geopolitical destination of "nations" or "world" is not explicit, yet the universal scope of the mandate is unmistakably both Jews and Gentiles. Christ's emissaries are authorized to take to nonbelievers everywhere His peace (εἰρήνη; cf. John 14:27), which is at the soteriological core of the gospel (Eph 2:14–18).[56] For the gospel of peace (Eph 6:15) to reach "the nations," a member of one nation must directly engage a member of another nation with the goal of disciple-making.[57]

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[52] That the apostles ministered on the British Isles is the subject of later growing tradition. See Eusebius of Caesarea, *Theophania*, 5.26; also his non-extant *Demonstratio Evangelica* 3.5 (as discussed in Arthur Cushman McGiffert, "Prolegomena: The Life and Writings of Eusebius of Caesarea," in *Eusebius: Church History, Life of Constantine the Great, and Oration in Praise of Constantine*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, vol. 1, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series [New York: Christian Literature Company, 1890], 35). Possibly implied by Tertullian, in "An Answer to the Jews," in *Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, trans. S. Thelwall, vol. 3. The Ante-Nicene Fathers (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 157–58.

Later writings record that Peter, Paul, and Joseph of Arimathea ministered in Britain, perhaps within five years of Christ's resurrection, though such specificity at a distance of centuries seems spurious. On placing Paul in the British Isles before his final return to Rome, see Dorotheous, *Synopsis de Apostol*, 9.23; also mentioned of Theodoret in Henry H. Howorth, *Christianity in Roman Britain*, Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, 1885, vol. 2 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1885), 120–21; also see; Gildas, *The Ruin of Britain*, 18; see also James Ussher, *The Whole Works of James Ussher*, 5:1. Ministry to Britain long before the third century is affirmed by Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, eds., "Introductory Note to Clement of Alexandria," in *Fathers of the Second Century: Hermas, Tatian, Athenagoras, Theophilus, and Clement of Alexandria (Entire)*, vol. 2, The Ante-Nicene Fathers (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 165.

[53] Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 1:361–65.

[54] "ἔθνος," BDAG, 276.

[55] For reasons to include, rather than exclude, the Jews in "all the nations" see Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 1:361–64. On the Gentile-Jewish distinctions of "nations," see Peter T. Lee and James Sung-Hwan Park, "Beyond People Group Thinking: A Critical Reevaluation of Unreached People Groups," *Missiology: An International Review* 46, no. 3 (2018): 215.

[56] Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 1:378–80.

[57] Turner, *Matthew*, 690.

From the sociological vantage point, the physical location of the hearer is not critical. Those who do not enter new time zones but instead go next door to proclaim the gospel to a neighbor who has come from a foreign location participate in the inherently foreign task of discipling the "nations." The goal of being sent as an ambassador of Christ to the nations need not change for one who goes less distance than another, as long as the goal remains to see the gospel extend out in concentric rings to and through the hearer from "the nations." With the objective of reaching the "nations" in mind, however near or far the believer travels, he must be faithful to go where he is sent. He must enter into the local culture of the foreign individual as the Lord leads, and he must preach and teach God's Word with the firm trust that the Lord will raise up new disciples among "the nations."

The "Nations" Are Individuals within a Population

According to the Great Commission passage of Mark 16:15, the gospel must be proclaimed far and wide: "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation." While this command encompasses "all creation" in "all the world," the target audience consists of individuals who are called to faith, as evidenced by the singular focus "He who has believed" (vv. 16–18). The focus of evangelism and disciple-making, therefore, is not on the sociocultural or political macrostructures of the nations themselves but on the conversion and growth of individual believers within a target population (Matt 10:18; Acts 11:18; 14:27; 15:3–7; 26:17; Rom 3:29; 9:24; 15:10; 16:4; Rev 7:9).[58]

In terms of Great Commission strategy, viewing the individual within the ethnic whole of a nation is further legitimized by the immediate context of the phrase "make disciples of all the nations" in Matthew 28:19. The command to "make disciples" limits the scope of discipleship to individual people, since discipleship requires evangelizing person by person and directly baptizing and teaching new local converts so that they continually adhere to the divine truths proclaimed by the discipler.[59]

Luke 24:47 provides another reason why individual transformation is Christ's objective, not societal or geopolitical structural transformation. The phrase "to all the nations" connects with the proclamation of "repentance for forgiveness of sins … in His name," revealing that the focus of Great Commission proclamation is spiritual and personal to the listener. The intention of missionary witness to the nations is thus the spiritual transformation of all hearers, Gentiles or Jews, "beginning from Jerusalem." All nonbelievers are inherently unfit for spiritual partnership until they enter into the family of God (3 John 5–8). Nonbelievers among the Jewish people are

[58] Affirmed by Robert Garrett, "The Gospels and Acts: Jesus the Missionary and His Missionary Followers," in *Missiology: An Introduction to the Foundations, History, and Strategies of World Missions*, ed. John Mark Terry, Ebbie Smith, and Justice Anderson (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1998), 72 and 72n4; *contra* Kenneth L. Gentry Jr., "Postmillennialism," in *Three Views on the Millennium and Beyond*, ed. Darrell L. Bock, Counterpoints: Bible & Theology (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 46–47.

[59] In Matthew 28:19, whereas τὰ ἔθνη ("the nations") is neuter, the object of baptizing and teaching, αὐτοὺς ("them"), is masculine and "refers to the implied direct object of the main verb," making disciples. See Charles L. Quarles, *Matthew*, Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2017), 352. In other words, it is not all nations that are being discipled as such but individuals from all nations. See also Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 1:536.

"far off" from God until they are saved by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 2:39), and nonbelievers from among the Gentiles are decidedly worldly and immoral (Matt 18:17). No matter the background, identity, or context of the sinner, they all need the same redemption by Christ, who alone establishes and strengthens the bond of unity in the family of God (Gal 3:28; Col 3:11).

Therefore, interethnic spiritual fellowship hinges on the proclamation of the gospel and the repentance of individual hearers, concentrically moving out from Jerusalem "to all the nations" where there are new individual hearers. Such a spiritual emphasis in the Great Commission reinforces that the reason to go to the nations, more than any other purpose, is to make individual disciples of Christ, who will bear His image in continually God-glorifying ways (2 Cor 3:18).

Christ's Disciples Must "Baptize"

The second participle in Matthew 28:19, "baptizing" (βαπτίζοντες), builds upon the discipleship mandate by characterizing the activity of the discipler with new believers. The command to baptize in the Matthean Great Commission highlights baptism as a unique feature of discipleship, since it is separated from the teaching content identified in verse 20 as "all that I have commanded you."[60] This distinction sets the stage for baptism's role as an outward, physical demonstration of the believer's inward commitment to Christ.

In the New Testament, baptism is consistently portrayed as a believing individual's full immersion into water. Jesus commanded water baptism within the context of John the Baptist's established practice in the Jordan River, as modeled in his preaching ministry (Matt 3:1–12; Mark 1:4–8; Luke 3:3; 7:29; John 3:23; cf. Acts 11:16; 13:24; 19:1–7), which Jesus Himself fulfilled (Matt 3:13–17). Following Christ's resurrection, the early church adopted full-immersion water baptism as a standard activity of new converts, who were adults or maturing adolescents capable of professing their faith (Acts 2:38, 41; 1 Cor 1:10–17; Rom 6:3; Gal 3:27; Col 2:12).[61]

Furthermore, the Markan Great Commission passage connects full-immersion water baptism to the believer's submission to the gospel (Mark 16:16), wherever he or she may be in the world (v. 15). Water baptism is not a means of salvation but rather a public testimony of saving grace already accomplished through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.[62] This distinction clarifies its role in the conversion story of the new believer. In terms of baptism's logical and chronological placement, "baptism is the initiatory step, to be taken at the beginnings of discipleship."[63] In this sense,

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[60] Jack Cottrell, *Baptism: A Biblical Study* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1989), 11, with discussion on 12, 15. On the distorted applications of the ordinance of full-immersion water baptism in insider movements, see John Massey and Scott N. Callaham, "Baptism as Integral Component of World Mission Strategy," in *World Mission: Theology, Strategy, and Current Issues*, ed. Scott N. Callaham and Will Brooks (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2019), 168–74.

[61] Matt Waymeyer, *A Biblical Critique of Infant Baptism* (The Woodlands, TX: Kress, 2008), 11–15; Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 1:358 (iv); G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (1962; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 359.

[62] Calvin and Pringle, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists*, 3:387–88.

[63] Kapolyo, "Matthew," 1170. Also emphasized in Waymeyer, *Biblical Critique of Infant Baptism*, 93; Massey and Callaham, "Baptism as Integral Component of World Mission Strategy," 152–53.

"baptizing" is the missionary's means of helping a new believer to symbolize his or her identification with Christ's community of disciples. As to missions strategy, then, the event of full-immersion water baptism shifts the missionary's tasks from evangelism to discipleship in the context of the local church.

The baptismal formula of Matthew 28:19 itself signifies disciple-making in seed form, as new believers must demonstrate at least a basic understanding that the God of the Bible is triune. Baptism "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (εἰς τὸ ὄνομα τοῦ πατρὸς καὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ καὶ τοῦ ἁγίου πνεύματος) references the essential unity of the divine Persons, to whom the disciple must fully commit.[64] Converts must agree that salvation history reached its apex in the gospel, revealing the Triune God to all peoples for their obedient worship.[65] No other god nor any other concept or identification of God is acceptable for one who is now identified with the death, burial, resurrection, and glorified life of the Son of God (Rom 6:3–11). Moreover, the expression "in the Name" indicates the spiritual relationship of the believer to the triune God as one of possession and authority. The convert has come under the ownership of the King and publicly declares so in word and act.

Baptizing by immersion in water into the Trinitarian name is a critical physical act for all true believers to perform. It serves to demonstrate the spiritual fellowship that the disciple has with the three Persons of God Himself.[66] For this reason, baptism should never be considered an empty, archaic formula, but a profound verbal declaration of the new disciple's new life of biblical faith. It represents the believer's identification with the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (Rom 6:3–7). This symbolic act epitomizes disciple-making, as it provides both the baptizer and the baptized with a profound opportunity to publicly assert the theological and relational truths that define a life fully submitted to the lordship of the Triune God.

Christ's Disciples Are "Witnesses" Who "Teach"

The third participle in Matthew's Great Commission account is "teaching" (διδάσκοντες) in Matthew 28:20, which Christ explains as "teaching them to keep all that I commanded you" (διδάσκοντες αὐτοὺς τηρεῖν πάντα ὅσα ἐνετειλάμην ὑμῖν). Jesus' commands in the Gospels now become the commands of His students, who must teach them to future students. The transference of authority from Christ to His disciples is expressed by the verb "command" (ἐντέλλω), which refers to giving orders or instructions of all kinds.[67] The object of the participle "teaching"

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[64] Morris, *Gospel according to Matthew*, 748; Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1269; France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 1117.

[65] Calvin well elucidated the significance of naming the Trinity in the baptismal command of verse 19: "This passage shows that the full and clear knowledge of God, which had been but darkly shadowed out under *the Law and the Prophets*, is at length fully discovered under the reign of Christ…. Thus we perceive that God cannot be truly known, unless our faith distinctly conceive of Three Persons in one essence; and that the fruit and efficacy of *baptism* proceed from God *the Father* adopting us through his *Son*, and, after having cleansed us from the pollutions of the flesh through *the Spirit*, creating us anew to righteousness." Calvin and Pringle, *Commentary on a Harmony of the Evangelists*, 387. Emphasis in original.

[66] Cottrell, *Baptism*, 16.

[67] "ἐντέλλω," BDAG, 339. The verb describes the cognate ἐντολή, which encompasses all forms of instructions and commands. "ἐντολή," BDAG, 340.

is the expression πάντα ὅσα, meaning "all that" or "everything." In context, this referent encompasses the content of Jesus' speech and righteous conduct in the Gospels—everything he taught on the foundation of the Old Testament and everything that can be observed about His obedient life.[68] The expression intensifies Jesus' command that they train new disciples to be obedient to "every last thing Jesus says" (cf. Matt 5:19).[69]

This teaching ministry is intimately connected to the role of witness. Luke, himself a Gentile, highlights Jesus' concern for a universal mission "to all nations" on the basis of the disciples' testimony of the gospel (Luke 24:47). In Luke 24:48, Jesus uses the term "witnesses" (μάρτυρες) as the earliest description of those who undertake the Great Commission challenge to assert biblical truth "to all the nations."[70] The disciples represent the connotations of the term—they are reliable eyewitnesses that declare and defend their experiences to others in order to establish truth. He calls His disciples to bear testimony of "these things" (τούτων), which is a demonstrative pronoun that covers the written predictions of the suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ (v. 46). These teachings link back to the Old Testament (v. 44) and reach forward to the proclamation of repentance and forgiveness of sins that will usher from Jerusalem through the disciples (v. 47).[71] The range of scriptural content that constitutes "these things" in Luke 24:48 corresponds to "all that" in Matthew 28:20, indicating that Jesus' authority lays behind the commands of the Old Testament also.

Jesus' use of "proclaim" (κηρύσσω) in Luke 24:47 helps disciples of all generations to uphold the act of teaching as public, vocal proclamation.[72] Great Commission proclamation activities encompass a broad range of instruction,[73] centrally focused on preaching and teaching the text of the Bible. Proclamation activities prioritize the ministries of Bible translation, biblical exposition, theological education, and a range of practical applications to matters of local church governance, public worship, ministry, and Christian conduct. Given the range of activities both possible and necessary, missionaries must be careful not to become distracted and neglect any theological concept or passage, since every word of Scripture constitutes "all that [Christ] commanded" (Matt 28:20) and is prescribed for use everywhere and among all recipients.

The content of this teaching is extensive. Some of the biblical themes that the earliest disciples were careful to teach include the following:

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[68] France, *Gospel of Matthew*, 1118–19. Nolland, *Gospel of Matthew*, 1270, recognizes that the use of τηρέω in the context of ἐντέλλω harkens back to Matthew 19:17, in which τήρησον τὰς ἐντολάς connects obedience (τηρέω, "keeping") to the Ten Commandments.

[69] Doriani, *Matthew*, 2:532; Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 1:368–70.

[70] Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission,* 1:368–69.

[71] Schnabel emphasizes that obedient disciples stem from obedient disciplers: "They do not preach themselves or their interpretation of Torah but rather God's revelatory acts in and through Jesus." Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission,* 1:382. Such external acts reveal "the 'internal significance' of Jesus the Messiah and his procurement of salvation for people." Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission,* 1:368–69.

[72] Κηρύσσω, BDAG, 543–44.

[73] For pushback against a narrow view of "preaching" as the Great Commission task of proclamation, see Witherington, *Matthew*, 534.

> Jesus' life and ministry (Acts 1:21–22), His death and resurrection, His vindication and His exaltation (Acts 1:22), the salvation "from this corrupt generation" (Acts 2:40), the word of the Lord (Acts 8:25), the necessity of conversion and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 20:21), the gospel of the grace of God (Acts 20:24), the message of Jesus (Acts 23:11), the kingdom of God (Acts 28:23).[74]

Such comprehensive proclamation demands an obedient response by the hearer—belief in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and the active surrender to His lordship (cf. Luke 24:44–47). The hope of the gospel is that once sinners hear the Word of Christ proclaimed, they have the opportunity to obey Him.[75] Paul connected obedience to Christ with the message of Christ. In Romans 10:8–17 and 15:18, he described his pioneering missionary goal as "the obedience of the Gentiles by word and deed" (15:18), a newfound confession of faith that ushers from the Holy Spirit as His disciples are sent out to preach "the word of faith" (10:8), which is the "word of Christ" (10:17).

Proclamation ministry begins with evangelism, as it is the preparatory stage of teaching Jesus' commands, in which He calls for the repentance and belief of all people (Matt 4:17; cf. 9:13; Mark 1:15; cf. 6:16; Luke 5:32; 13:3, 5; 24:47; John 3:16–18; cf. 14:6). Evangelistic contacts are instructed to be converted, and converts are instructed to mature within the context of a local church, based on all that Jesus has commanded in Scripture.[76] The teaching ministry with which the missionary is tasked progresses from the believer's initial faith through evangelism to full sanctification through more mature doctrinal instruction. As believers grow in their convictions, they continually conform to the image of Christ.

In order for this pattern of proclamation to instill a sanctified way of life, the teacher himself must adhere to the full range of the biblical content as his own way of life.[77] The teacher's words and the lifestyle must correspond manifestly, in line with Paul's goal for teaching doctrine: "love from a pure heart and a good conscience and an unhypocritical faith" (1 Tim 1:5). According to 1 Timothy 4:15–16, the missionary is to "take pains" to "be absorbed" in all teaching, paying "close attention" to [him]self and to [his] teaching." The purpose is that his own progress in the truth "will be evident to all" and thus serve as God's means for seeing others genuinely saved. In his missionary context of Ephesus, Timothy was commanded to "teach and preach" (δίδασκε καὶ παρακάλει, 1 Tim 6:2) in a way that would help the

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[74] Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission,* 1:370.

[75] "Teaching is not merely a transfer of knowledge but a transformation of life in obedience…. Making disciples involves calling people to acknowledge Jesus as Lord, submitting every aspect of their lives to his lordship." In Ott and Strauss, *Encountering Theology of Mission*, 36.

[76] Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, 887, considers the latter the task of Great Commission teaching: "The emphasis in the commission thus falls not on the initial proclamation of the gospel but more on the arduous task of nurturing into the experience of discipleship." Blomberg, *Matthew*, 431, recognizes that discipleship "proves a perennially incomplete, life-long task."

[77] Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, 888; Morris, *Gospel according to Matthew*, 749.

growing body of believers to embrace "doctrine conforming to godliness" and exert godly behavior (v. 3).[78]

Therefore, teaching is a discipling activity from Christ to His disciples first, and, through them, to the next disciples. Teaching as Christ's "witnesses" reflects the importance of imparting the full content of Jesus' teachings in His Word to new converts. The goal of the missionary's instruction is that the next generation of believers will be obedient to all that Jesus commands as the missionary is, and once more pass down the faith to others (Ps 145:4; 2 Tim 2:2).

Conclusion

Viewing the Great Commission across its five key passages helps all who desire to be faithful in their witness for Christ in the world to focus their efforts on proclamation ministry. What emerges most centrally from this analysis is how Scripture itself, authorized by Christ's supreme authority and empowered by His Spirit, plays an indispensable role in accomplishing the Great Commission. The transformative theology of Scripture is the Holy Spirit's instrument in the hands of His servants to make new disciples through preaching and teaching where Christ has not yet been named (Rom 15:20).

The ministry of the apostolic church exemplifies the biblical pattern of the Great Commission. Beginning in Jerusalem and extending further into the Gentile world, the earliest disciples demonstrated that faithful proclamation of the Word results in sinners being saved and local churches established for the ongoing work of maturing the disciples worldwide (cf. Acts 6:2, 4; 18:5; 20:20–21; 1 Cor 10:33; 1 Thess 1:5; 2:8–9, 16).[79] Contemporary missionaries stand in this same line of ministry, wielding the same authoritative Word in all global contexts.

Because Christ is powerful to save sinners everywhere, His disciples can undertake His mission with both humility and confident hope in His Word. They will do even "greater works" than the apostles, as the Holy Spirit sends them out to bring in a global harvest for the glory of the Son (John 14:12). Christ's prayer for the Father's providential guidance and protection of His disciples (John 17) continues to be answered as He spiritually empowers each new generation to fulfill the Great Commission. Every day, as believers mature in their faith and go out as Christ's witnesses to make new disciples in ever widening reaches of the world, they participate in God's purpose of filling the earth with the "grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet 3:18). All glory belongs to the risen Christ, who will continue to build His church through His messengers until the end of the church age.

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[78] The verb παρακαλέω in 1 Tim 6:2 refers to proclaiming a word of exhortation, comfort, or encouragement, which is essential for helping believers in their sanctification. See παρακαλέω, BDAG, 764–65; Otto Schmitz, "Παρακαλέω, Παράκλησις," *TDNT*, 5:773–79.

[79] For theological and historical discussion of preaching and teaching as "the central process of missionary work" for Paul and the apostles, see Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 2:977–78, with the quote on page 978.

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"HIM WE PROCLAIM!": PAUL'S MOTIVATION, MEANS, AND MANDATE FOR MISSIONS IN COLOSSIANS 1:24–29

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"Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me." (Col 1:24–29, ESV)

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Introduction[1]

"Worship is the fuel and goal of missions,"[2] which is about making worshiping disciples of Jesus Christ from all nations. Making mature disciples happens through

[1] This article began as three messages titled "Why Missions?", "How Missions?", and "Now Missions!" given at the FUSION Youth Weekend at Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Oct 22, 2022. I thank my doctoral research assistant Jonathan Zavodney for his significant help in accessing and assessing secondary literature for this published version.

[2] John Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad! The Supremacy of God in Missions*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 22; cf. Joe M. Allen III, "Missions at Midwestern: Why for the Church Means for the Nations," *MJT* 22.1 (2023): 96–113.

both reaching and teaching and stands as the principal task of the church (Matt 28:18–20; cf. Acts 1:8).[3] When disciple making crosses cultures, missions is operative. Few passages in Scripture capture so well the motivation, means, and mandate for missions as Colossians 1:24–29.

The church in Antioch originally sent Paul out as a missionary (Acts 13:1–3), yet they and the Spirit were only affirming how Jesus himself had earlier set him apart as "a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel" and to "suffer for the sake of my name" (9:15–16). The name Jesus, meaning "Yahweh saves," was infused with power and hope for global salvation. This name captured the content and motivating end of Paul's mission, as he carried out what the prophet Isaiah had earlier declared would be the messianic community's missionary cry: "Give thanks to the LORD, call upon his name, make known his deeds among the peoples, proclaim that his name is exalted" (Isa 12:4).

Jesus had appointed Paul "as a servant and witness" and set him apart to help Israelites and Gentiles alike "turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me" (Acts 26:16–18).[4] Thus, Paul sought "to bring about the obedience of faith among all the nations for the sake of [Jesus's] name" (Rom 1:5, author's translation).[5]

Paul had neither planted nor visited the church in Colossae (Col 1:7–8; 2:1), yet he had heard of their faith in Christ Jesus and the love for the saints (1:3–4). Writing toward the end of his ministry likely from a Roman prison (ca. AD 62), he urged the church to pray "that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison" (4:3). He asked them to "remember my chains" (4:18), and he clarified for them Christ's incomparable worth and its centrality to the Christian message and life.

In Colossians 1:24–29 Paul rejoices in his sufferings and through them fills up Christ's afflictions, for these trials provide a context to realize his calling to serve the church by making known with great toil the wealth of Christ's glory among the

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[3] See Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert, *What Is the Mission of the Church? Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom, and the Great Commission* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011); Jonathan Leeman, "Soteriological Mission: Focusing in on the Mission of Redemption," in *Four Views on the Church's Mission*, ed. Jason S. Sexton (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 17–62; Jonathan Leeman, *What Is the Church's Mission?* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022). For further reflections on the church's mission as testified to in Scripture, consider Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 2 vols. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004); Michael W. Goheen, *Introducing Christian Mission Today: Scripture, History, and Issues* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2014), 35–72; Scott N. Callaham and Will Brooks, eds., *World Mission: Theology, Strategy, and Current Issues* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2019), 1–101; Andreas J. Köstenberger, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission*, 2nd ed., vol. 53 of *NSBT* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2020). Missions within Christ's church does not capture all that is commonly associated with the *Missio Dei* ("Mission of God"), a concept that came to the fore in the 1930s; see David Jacobus Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, 20th Anniversary, American Society of Missiology 16 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2011), 389. For a more extensive treatment of the broader category, see Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006).

[4] On the relationship of spiritual warfare and missions, see Jason S. DeRouchie, "Greater Is He: A Primer on Spiritual Warfare for Kingdom Advance," *SBJT* 25.2 (2021): 21–55; cf. Craig Keener, "Paul and Spiritual Warfare," in *Paul's Missionary Methods: In His Time and Ours*, ed. Robert L. Plummer and John Mark Terry (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2012), 107–23.

[5] See Paul Barnett, *Paul: Missionary of Jesus*, After Jesus 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008).

Gentiles, thus fulfilling God's Word. Paul first declares his joy in sufferings (v. 24a–c) and then highlights how these distresses are, for the sake of the church, in some way completing Christ's own tribulations (1:24d–29). With respect to the latter, he clarifies the nature of his trials in relation to Christ (1:24d–g) and then notes their goal in serving the church (1:25a–29). He states the goal (1:25a), notes his divine calling as the foundation of the goal (1:24b–d), and then unpacks the means for reaching the goal (1:25e–29), which includes fulfilling God's Word (1:25e–26) by making known among the Gentiles the unparalleled riches of knowing Christ (1:27–29). Table 1 overviews the passage's flow-of-thought.

I. Paul's Joy in His Sufferings for the Sake of the Church (1:24a–c)
II. Paul's Filling up Christ's Afflictions for the Sake of the Church (1:24d–29)
  A. The Nature of His Sufferings (1:24d–g)
  B. The Goal of His Sufferings: To Serve the Church (1:25a–29)
    1. The Statement of the Goal (1:25a)
    2. The Foundation of the Goal: God's Calling (1:25b–d)
    3. The Means for Reaching the Goal: Fulfilling God's Word (1:25e–29)
      a. The Need to Fulfill God's Word (1:25e–26)
      b. The Way to Fulfill God's Word: Proclaiming the Wealth of the Mystery's Glory among the Gentiles (1:27–29)
        (1) The Content of Paul's Proclamation (1:27c–28)
        (2) The Manner of Paul's Proclamation (1:29)

Table 1. An Exegetical Outline of Colossians 1:24–29

The present study carefully considers the contribution Colossians 1:24–29 makes to our understanding of the missionary task. What drove Paul to proclaim Christ in the way he did? We will consider Colossians 1:24–29 from three perspectives: Why missions? How missions? Now missions!

Motivation: Why Missions?

By asking, "Why missions?" we seek to understand the motivating forces behind Paul's missionary calling. We will consider both the spark for his zeal and the purposes that drove him.

Foundation: God Initiates Missions (Col 1:25)

The apostle opens, "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known" (Col 1:24–25). God calls, God equips, and God sends Paul as a missionary. His whole ministry for the church's sake was "according to the stewardship *from God*" (1:25). God is the initiator of global missions.

"*God* so loved the world that he gave his Son" (John 3:16). "*By sending* his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh" (Rom 8:3). "You were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked…. But *God!*" (Eph 2:1–2, 4). Instead of wiping out all rebels, *God* initiated salvation, sending Jesus to save the world. *Jesus* set Saul apart as His "chosen instrument … to carry [his] name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel" (Acts 9:15; cf. Rom 11:13; 15:16). "*The Holy Spirit* said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off" (Acts 13:2–3). Paul was "called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God … concerning the Son" (Rom 1:1–3). Paul had a stewardship, for God had commissioned him as a missionary. As Schnabel summarizes, "Paul's call to missionary service emphasizes God's initiative, the encounter with Jesus, Jesus' authority over the life of Paul, the people to whom he is sent, and the content of the message that he will proclaim."[6] The Triune God is the initiator of world missions.[7]

Goal 1: Missions Seeks to Fulfill God's Word (Col 1:25–26)

Paul says, "[For the church] I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints" (Col 1:25–26). The phrase translated "to make the word of God fully known" (v. 25) clarifies the first goal of missions, and it likely means that Paul sought to fulfill or fill up God's Word.[8] Fulfilling God's Word directly relates to "the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to the saints" (v. 26).[9]

Jesus's coming sparked the fulfillment of a host of Old Testament promises.[10] Indeed, Schreiner considers the fulfillment of Old Testament Scripture as the basis for Paul's mission: "Paul was privileged to serve as the apostle to the Gentiles because he lived at the turning of the ages, the era in which God's saving promises

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[6] Eckhard J. Schnabel, "Paul the Missionary," in *Paul's Missionary Methods: In His Time and Ours*, ed. Robert L. Plummer and John Mark Terry (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2012), 32.

[7] Sumney notes: "Paul's sufferings do not benefit the church because Paul is superior, but because God has given him a task to perform…. Paul lives an extraordinary life that benefits the readers and even the whole church, but he holds this place only because God has commissioned him to fulfill this function." Jerry L. Sumney, *Colossians: A Commentary*, NTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 103. See also Wendel Sun, "Biblical Theology and World Mission," in *World Mission: Theology, Strategy, and Current Issues*, ed. Scott N. Callaham and Will Brooks (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2019), 67–101.

[8] The Greek reads πληρῶσαι τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ and is best rendered "to fulfill the word of God" (NKJV) or "to complete the word of God" (NETB). Harris is probably correct that the infinitive phrase is explanatory, defining the content of Paul's stewardship. Murray J. Harris, *Colossians and Philemon*, 2nd ed., Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament, ed. Murray J. Harris (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2010), 68.

[9] Cf. Bruce T. Clark, *Completing Christ's Afflictions: Christ, Paul, and the Reconciliation of All Things*, WUNT 2/383 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015).

[10] For a study of the Old Testament promise and New Testament realization of global missions, see Jason S. DeRouchie, "By the Waters of Babylon: Global Missions from Genesis to Revelation," *MJT* 20.2 (2021): 6–30; cf. Eckhard J. Schnabel, "Israel, the People of God, and the Nations," *JETS* 45 (2002): 35–57; Jason S. DeRouchie, "Question 28: What Is a Biblical Theology of Mission?," in *40 Questions about Biblical Theology*, by Jason S. DeRouchie, Oren R. Martin, and Andrew David Naselli, 40 Questions (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2020), 273–81; Andreas J. Köstenberger, "Mission," *DNTUOT*, 546–51.

were being realized. The gospel of Christ fulfills what was written in the Old Testament Scriptures, and believers inherit the promises made to Abraham."[11]

For example, in Genesis, God promises Abraham that he would become "father of a multitude of nations" (Gen 17:4), but it also says that this will only happen when the single male deliverer rises who will overcome the curse, defeat God's enemies, and bring blessing to the world. Yahweh declares to the patriarch, "I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" (22:17–18). As Paul would later observe, the offspring here is singular and refers to Christ, through whom God's blessing reaches the world (Gal 3:16, 29).[12] Similarly, the prophet Isaiah envisions Yahweh commissioning his individual royal Servant to save a remnant from both Israel and other nations: "It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to bring back the preserved of Israel; I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth" (Isa 49:6).[13]

Yahweh made these promises in the Old Testament, but ages and generations went by before they were realized. It took Jesus's coming and the missionary labors

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[11] Thomas R. Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God's Glory in Christ: A Pauline Theology*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2020), 67.

[12] While contemporary translations like the NIV, CSB, and NASB all render as a plural the pronoun associated with "seed," the ESV rightly captures that the form is singular in the Hebrew. Moses used plural pronouns when he intended to signal that the "offspring" was a people and not a person (e.g., Gen 17:7–8), and he used singular pronouns when focusing on an individual male descendent (e.g., 3:15; 22:17). For more on this, see C. John Collins, "A Syntactical Note (Genesis 3:15): Is the Woman's Seed Singular or Plural?," *TynBul* 48.1 (1997): 139–48; T. Desmond Alexander, "Further Observations on the Term 'Seed' in Genesis," *TynBul* 48.2 (1997): 363–67; Jonathan M. Cheek, "The Individual and Collective Offspring of the Woman: The Canonical Outworking of Genesis 3:15," *Them* 48.1 (2023): 29–46; cf. C. John Collins, "Galatians 3:16: What Kind of Exegete Was Paul?," *TynBul* 54.1 (2003): 75–86; Jason S. DeRouchie and Jason C. Meyer, "Christ or Family as the 'Seed' of Promise? An Evaluation of N. T. Wright on Galatians 3:16," *SBJT* 14.3 (2010): 36–48; Kevin Chen, *The Messianic Vision of the Pentateuch* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2019), 35–107; Jason S. DeRouchie, "Redemptive-Historical, Christocentric Approach," in *Five Views of Christ in the Old Testament*, ed. Andrew M. King and Brian J. Tabb (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2022), 197–99.

[13] Writing about Isaiah 49:3, 6, Beale rightly notes: "Here the Servant is called 'Israel' … (v. 3). And his latter-day mission is 'to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved ones of Israel' (v. 6). Now, the Servant cannot be the entire nation of Israel, since the sinful nation cannot restore itself, nor can the Servant be a faithful remnant of the nation, since the remnant is still sinful, and it would be redundant to say that the remnant's mission was to restore the remnant (with the 'preserved ones' refers to in v. 6). Some have identified the Servant with Isaiah the prophet, but there is no indication that he ever accomplished such a mission, especially as further elaborated on in Isa. 53, and especially since he was also still sinful (as was even the faithful remnant) and needed the healing mission explained there. Thus, the Servant in Isa. 49:3 is best understood to be an individual messianic Servant who would restore the remnant of Israel." G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 656–57; cf. G. P. Hugenberger, "The Servant of the Lord in the 'Servant Songs' of Isaiah: A Second Moses Figure," in *The Lord's Anointed: Interpretation of Old Testament Messianic Texts*, ed. Philip E. Satterthwaite, Richard S. Hess, and Gordon J. Wenham (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1995), 105–40; Walter C. Kaiser Jr., "The Identity and Mission of the 'Servant of the Lord,'" in *The Gospel According to Isaiah 53: Encountering the Suffering Servant in Jewish and Christian Theology*, ed. Darrell L. Bock and Mitch Glaser (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2012), 87–108; DeRouchie, "Redemptive-Historical, Christocentric Approach," 204–10.

of his church to fulfill them (cf. Rom 1:1–3; 16:25–26).[14] Sumney notes that the language of “fulfillment” concerns “Paul’s preaching everywhere among the Gentiles” and “probably also has an eschatological orientation…. Paul’s commission is part of the eschatological acts of God, and his proclamation to the Gentiles facilitates the advancement of God’s plan for the world.”[15] Through Paul’s ministry, Christ’s saving mission is extending to the ends of the earth (cf. Acts 13:46–47; 26:22–23), thus fulfilling longstanding Old Testament hopes.[16]

One of the goals of missions is to see God’s Word fulfilled, and when it is, God is exalted as faithful and trustworthy. Hence, Paul declares, “For I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me to bring the Gentiles to obedience—by word and deed, by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God—so that from Jerusalem and all the way around to Illyricum I have fulfilled the ministry of the gospel of Christ” (Rom 15:18–19). God is calling you to take part as a goer or sender in fulfilling promises he made thousands of years ago.[17] You can have a role in bringing the light of Christ into places that have been dark since the fall of mankind. God may be commissioning you to be Jesus’s feet and mouth to cross cultures for the sake of his name—to counter the bad news about wars and shootings, cancer and car accidents, relational tensions and immorality with the good news that peace with God is possible and eternal hope is real. Is God summoning you to this task?

Goal 2: Missions Seeks to Help People Value Christ as Their Greatest Treasure (Col 1:27)

“To [the saints] God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col 1:27). The Greek reads τὸ πλοῦτος τῆς δόξης τοῦ μυστηρίου τούτου “the wealth of the glory of this mystery,” with both “wealth” (πλοῦτος) and “mystery” (μυστήριον) being neuter nouns. What then follows is a neuter pronoun “which” (ὅ) that marks the phrase “Christ in you” as explicating either “wealth” or “mystery.”[18] Most scholars and contemporary translations (e.g., ESV, NIV) see “Christ in you” to be defining the “mystery,” and this is likely because “mystery” is the nearest neuter

[14] Thus, Beale suggests the idea to be “that of Paul ‘completing’ the prophesied task of announcing God’s end-time salvation, a task that was begun by Jesus as the predicted Isaianic servant.” G. K. Beale, *Colossians and Philemon*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019), 145. Similarly, Schweizer, commenting on verse 24, says that Paul “brings Christ’s work to fulfillment by his authentic proclamation of him as the redeemer of the community.” Eduard Schweizer, *The Letter to the Colossians: A Commentary*, trans. Andrew Chester (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1982), 105.

[15] Sumney, *Colossians*, 103.

[16] Cf. Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Acts*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 587–89.

[17] Marshall notes, “Thus the task of Israel, which she failed to carry out, has passed to Jesus and then to his people as the new Israel; it is the task of bringing the light of revelation and salvation to all the peoples of the world.” I. Howard Marshall, *Acts: An Introduction and Commentary*, TNTC 5 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1980), 245.

[18] So, too, Peter Müller, *Kolosserbrief*, Meyers Kritisch-Exegetischer Kommentar Über Das Neue Testament (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2022), 202 n. 51.

referent.[19] Nevertheless, the first noun in the chain is "wealth," suggesting that Paul is emphasizing not just the "mystery" or even the "mystery's glory" but "the *wealth* of the mystery's glory."[20] In 2:2 Paul notes that the "mystery" is Christ alone and hopes that those whom he serves will "reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." In Christ is great wealth or riches, and those treasures [πλοῦτος] become our riches only when we gain understanding and knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ. Thus, while the grammar of 1:27 most directly supports seeing "Christ in you" as the "mystery," the close context may suggest greater nuancing.[21]

The divine Son is "the radiance of the glory of God" (Heb 1:3), and we gain a "knowledge of God's glory in the face of Christ" (2 Cor 4:6). As Christ reflects, resembles, and represents the Father God before us, He is glorious, precious, and wondrous—the greatest treasure. Yet only when Christ is in us does He become our riches, and this wealth is related to our hope of glory. Paul spoke of this hope back in Colossians 1:4–5: "We have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, because of the hope laid up for you in heaven." We magnify Christ as our greatest treasure when Christ is in us and our hope rests in Him (cf. Matt 6:19–21; Rom 3:23; 2 Cor 4:6–7; Phil 1:21; 3:8).[22]

Christ's unmatched worth is highlighted in the way Paul clarifies that the mystery's glory is precious and valuable. Elsewhere the apostle uses the phrase "the wealth of the glory" to highlight the amazing treasure of God's revelation of Himself (Rom 9:23; Eph 3:16) and of the inheritance that awaits His saints (Eph 1:18). We worship what we value most, and we glorify God most when He satisfies us most. A key purpose of missions is to help people value or treasure Christ in them above all else. "Worship is the fuel and goal of missions."[23] Missions exists to see white hot

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[19] For more on the biblical use of "mystery," see Benjamin L. Gladd, *Revealing the Mysterion: The Use of Mystery in Daniel and Second Temple Judaism with Its Bearing on First Corinthians*, BZNW 160 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2008); G. K. Beale and Benjamin L. Gladd, *Hidden but Now Revealed: A Biblical Theology of Mystery* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2014); Beale, *Colossians and Philemon*, 145–51; Jason S. DeRouchie, "Question 21: What Role Does 'Mystery' Play in Biblical Theology?," in *40 Questions about Biblical Theology*, by Jason S. DeRouchie, Oren R. Martin, and Andrew David Naselli, 40 Questions (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2020), 205–14; Benjamin L. Gladd, "Mystery," *DNTUOT*, 551–55.

[20] Many scholars consider the noun construction τῆς δόξης an attribute genitive (thus, "the glorious riches of this mystery," e.g., NIV, NETB, CSB), a sense Harris captures in the translation, "the glorious riches that characterize this mystery." Harris, *Colossians and Philemon*, 71. For more on translation options, see Beale, *Colossians and Philemon*, 165–66. My interpretation of the wording is closer to his affirmation that "the point of verse 27 is that 'the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles' is 'Christ,' who is 'the hope of glory.'" Beale, *Colossians and Philemon*, 150.

[21] Moo recognizes some of the text's nuances, and both Moule and Harris sees the mystery as both Christ *and* his presence "in you." Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 156–58; H. C. G. Moule, *Studies in Colossians and Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1977), 101; Harris, *Colossians and Philemon*, 71.

[22] See John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist*, 3rd ed. (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2003). The riches that come with the hope of knowing Christ and embracing Christ are enough to help Christians endure through terrible suffering for Christ's sake (e.g., Rom 5:1–5; 8:18–21; Phil 3:8–11; Heb 11:24–26, 32–40; 1 Pet 1:3–9; cf. Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21).

[23] Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad!*, 22. Our English term "worship" comes from the Old English term "worth-ship." Worth is about wealth, and we worship or glorify what we value. In Psalm 22, which Jesus

worship explode across the earth. Christ is the mystery that God has now revealed, and His glory is magnified when He saves, fills, and satisfies lives. Thus, missionaries seek “the obedience of faith among all the nations *for the sake of [Jesus’s] name*” (Rom 1:5, author’s translation).

The highest goal of missions is to exalt Christ as glorious, and we value Christ most when we embrace Him as our greatest treasure. We receive help and hope and salvation, and He gets exalted as helper, hope-giver, and savior. Missionaries must treasure Christ and seek to help others treasure Christ above all else. Are you embracing Jesus as your greatest treasure today?

Goal 3: Missions Seeks to Present People Mature before God (Col 1:28)

Paul has stressed that “faith in Christ Jesus” and “love … for all the saints” and “the hope laid up … in heaven” are central to what is proclaimed in “the word of the truth, the gospel” (1:4–5). He has also celebrated that this Word has been “bearing fruit and increasing … since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth” (1:6). As such, Paul the missionary urges this church to “continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which is proclaimed in all creation under heaven” (1:23).

One of Paul’s key missionary goals was to shape complete Christians—not only reaching people through first-level evangelism but also teaching and training people until every church is mature. Thus, we read in 1:28, “[Christ] we proclaim, warning *everyone* and teaching *everyone* with *all* wisdom, that we may present *everyone* mature in Christ.” The universality of this statement points to each individual that Paul and his missionary team (1:1, 7–8) engage worldwide, seeking their maturity.[24]

What is maturity? Harris considers “a person mature in faith (cf. v. 23a) and in the knowledge of God’s will (cf. v. 9c)” to be “someone who has attained mature adulthood and is no longer misled by false doctrine (Eph. 4:13–14; cf. Heb. 5:14).”[25] Certainly this is true, but maturity is not limited to proper convictions; it also relates to one’s character. As Moo notes, “Similar to the Hebrew *tamim* (which is translated by *teleios* five times in the LXX), *teleios* connotes the quality of being so wholehearted in one’s devotion to the Lord that one can be said to be blameless in

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quotes at his death declaring, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Ps 22:1), Yahweh declares of the anointed king’s substitutionary sacrifice, “All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations shall *worship* before you” (22:27). That is, they will recognize and celebrate his worth.

[24] Moo notes the universality, cautions against taking it as referring to “every person in the universe,” and concludes, “The repetition of the phrase therefore emphasizes the full measure of gospel proclamation that Paul and his associates bring to every person they encounter. Each one is ‘admonished’ and ‘taught’ with the goal that each one might be presented fully mature in Christ.” Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 158. The universality continues as Paul speaks of “*all* the riches of full assurance of understanding” (2:2) and of “*all* the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (2:3). Moo further notes, “The goal of the proclamation here makes it more likely that both activities [admonishing and teaching] are directed to Christian converts.” Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 159.

[25] Harris, *Colossians and Philemon*, 73; cf. Michael F. Bird, *Colossians and Philemon: A New Covenant Commentary*, New Covenant Commentary Series (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2009), 68–69.

conduct (see esp. Matt. 5:48; 19:21; Eph. 4:13; Heb. 5:14; Jas. 1:4b)."[26] Signals of maturity within the book include the following:

- "Faith in Christ" and "love … for all the saints" (1:4);
- Being "filled with the knowledge of [Christ's] will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God" (1:9–10);
- Being "strengthened with all power, according to [God's] glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy, giving thanks to the Father" (1:11–12);
- Continuing "in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that [we] heard" (1:23);
- "Encouraged" hearts and "being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ" (2:2);
- Having "good order and the firmness of … faith in Christ" (2:5);
- Walking in Christ, "rooted and built up in him and established in the faith" (2:7);
- Not being taken "captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ" (2:8);
- Not "insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, and not holding fast to the Head" (2:18–19);
- Setting our "minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth" (3:2);
- Putting "to death … what is earthly" in us (3:5, 8–9);
- "Being renewed in knowledge after the image of [our] creator" (3:10);
- Putting on "compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and … forgiving each other" (3:12–13);
- Putting on "love" and letting "the peace of Christ rule in [our] hearts" (3:14–15);
- Letting "the word of Christ dwell in [us] richly" (3:16) and "doing everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (3:17);
- Wives submitting to their husbands, husbands loving their wives, children obeying their parents, fathers not provoking their children, bondservants obeying their masters and working "heartily … as for the Lord and not for men," and masters treating their "bondservants justly and fairly" (3:18–4:1);
- Continuing "steadfastly in prayer" (4:2);
- Walking "in wisdom toward outsiders" (4:5);
- Letting our "speech always be gracious" (4:6).

Maturity matters (cf. Heb 5:13–14), and it is a key goal in missions!

[26] Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 160.

Humans operate maturely when they function as God intended them from the beginning. As those made in God’s image (Gen 1:26–28), the mature are those who in their words, thoughts, and deeds revere God and reflect, resemble, and represent him rightly, displaying His worth, greatness, values, and kingship to the world. When we pray, “Hallowed be your name; your kingdom come” (Matt 6:9–10), we are asking that God’s name, His greatness would be shown holy and that His reign would be realized “on earth as it is in heaven.” To every believer, God has given “the light of the knowledge of God’s glory in the face of Christ” (2 Cor 4:6). We encounter God’s glory by gazing on Jesus, and as we behold “the glory of the Lord, [we] are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another” (3:18).

To the level at which we display Christ’s worth and live hating what He hates and loving what He loves, we are living as mature Christians. Our “faith in Christ Jesus” and “love … for all the saints” and “hope laid up … in heaven” are to be “bearing fruit and increasing” (Col 1:4–6). One goal of missions is to help people become mature, seeing themselves conformed into the likeness of Christ.[27] Are you a Christian whose new creational life is “being renewed in knowledge after the image its creator” (3:10)? God’s Word is fulfilled only when missions seeks the maturity of the saints (cf. Eph 4:11–13).[28]

Conclusion: Why Missions?

God calls for missions and sets the goals for missions. This passage sets out three goals for missions, but ultimately all three relate to one singular purpose. Indeed, for Paul to say missions seeks to present people mature means the same thing as helping people value Christ as their greatest treasure, and it is only when this happens that God’s Word, long promised is fulfilled. Hence, God has purposed that the church engage in missions to fulfill His Word by helping people value Christ as their greatest treasure, which is the mark of Christian maturity.

People can enjoy, cherish, treasure a living hope today when they see, celebrate, and savor Christ as glorious and valuable, more precious than things of earth. God is calling you today to be either a goer or a sender for this great cause—proclaiming light to those living in darkness, hope to the hopeless, and Christ as the only treasure that will last forever. “God desired to make known what is the wealth of this mystery’s glory among the nations, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col 1:27, author’s translation). Will you answer this call?

Means: How Missions?

God is passionate to see multitudes magnifying the majesty of His glory revealed in Christ, which is a treasure filled with power that God puts into the lives of fragile

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[27] Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Paul the Missionary: Realities, Strategies and Methods* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2008), 236–48. In Colossians, the context for maturity to flourish is the proclamation of Jesus as the fulfillment of Old Testament Scripture.

[28] See Juan Manuel Granados Rojas, “Is the Word of God Incomplete? An Exegetical and Rhetorical Study of Col 1,25,” *Bib* 94, no. 1 (2013): 63–79; Stephen I. Wright, “Discipleship as an Integral Component of World Mission Strategy,” in *World Mission: Theology, Strategy, and Current Issues*, ed. Scott N. Callaham and Will Brooks (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2019), 105–29.

missionaries—jars of clay (2 Cor 4:6–7). Now we must consider *how* churches who send and missionaries who go reach this goal of exalting Christ among the nations. What is the means for the missionary task? Paul gives two answers in Colossians 1:24–29.

We Engage in Missions by Suffering Joyfully to Illustrate Christ's Afflictions and Love for Those He Died to Save (Col 1:24)

"Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church" (Col 1:24). Suffering and sacrifice are not something we long for, but they are often necessary for growth and gain. Piper notes, "We measure the worth of a hidden treasure by what we will gladly sell to buy it. If we will sell all, then we measure the worth as supreme. If we will not, what we have is treasured more."[29] Jesus says, "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then *in his joy* he goes and sells *all that he has* and buys that field" (Matt 13:44). Piper adds, "The extent of his *sacrifice* and the depth of his *joy* display the worth he puts on the treasure of God. Loss and suffering, joyfully accepted for the kingdom of God, show the supremacy of God's worth more clearly in the world than all worship and prayer."[30]

In Colossians 1:24, Paul declares that he is rejoicing in his sufferings. Romans 5:3–5 is similar: "We rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us." What Colossians 1:24 adds is that Paul's suffering is not just benefiting him; it is *for the church*, implying that it is nurturing *their* endurance, character, and hope (cf. 2 Tim 2:10). And because of the benefit his suffering gives, he rejoices for their sake. So, what suffering is Paul enduring as a missionary, and how is this suffering benefiting the Colossians?

Most immediately, Paul's suffering refers primarily to imprisonment, likely in Rome.[31] Thus, he writes, "Pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which *I am bound*" (4:3). Or again, "Aristarchus *my fellow prisoner* greets you" (4:10). And finally, "I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. Remember *my chains*" (4:18).

Nevertheless, Paul's suffering was not limited to the Roman jail. From the earliest stages of his calling, Paul knew that he would suffer much. In Acts 9:16 God says of Saul regarding his upcoming missionary task to the Gentiles, "I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name." And suffer he did. Consider the apostle's words in 2 Corinthians 11:24–28:

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[29] Piper, *Let the Nations Be Glad!*, 93.

[30] Piper, 93.

[31] Markus Barth and Helmut Blanke, *Colossians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 295; Clark, *Completing Christ's Afflictions*, 58–59; Beale, *Colossians and Philemon*, 137.

> Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.

Paul’s suffering followed the words and example of Jesus, who says, “A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you” (John 15:20). Similarly, as Paul ministered to churches, he sought to strengthen “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” (Acts 14:22). The missionary task is always wrought with trial and pain, for God purposes His saints’ suffering to be a key means for proclaiming to the world “who Christ is, how he loves, and how much he is worth.”[32]

Consider the second half of Colossians 1:24: “In my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church.” What does Paul mean that he is “filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions”?[33] Was Christ’s saving work in some way ineffective? Paul stresses that this is *not* the case: “You, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him” (Col 1:21–22). Jesus’s death fully reconciles people to God and empowers our growth in holiness. And again, “You, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him” (2:13–15). Christ’s death has *fully* reconciled his church to God, and his resurrection has *fully* overcome all enemy opposition. So, what does Paul mean when he says, “I am filling up what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions” (1:24)?

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[32] John Piper, *Filling Up the Afflictions of Christ: The Cost of Bringing the Gospel to the Nations in the Lives of William Tyndale, Adoniram Judson, and John Paton*, The Swans Are Not Silent 5 (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 14. While unnecessarily downplaying the need for words, Barth and Blanke note, “It is in the suffering of his servants that God reveals his message which is entrusted to them, so that they themselves—and not their words—become the medium for this proclamation, and ‘finally so that God reveals himself as the proclaimer.” Barth and Blanke, *Colossians*, 291.

[33] For a helpful overview of the varied interpretations of this phrase, see John Henry Paul Reumann, “Colossians 1:24 (‘What Is Lacking in the Afflictions of Christ’): History of Exegesis and Ecumenical Advance,” *CurTM* 17, no. 6 (1990): 454–61; Joel White, “Paul Completes the Servant’s Sufferings (Colossians 1:24),” *Journal for the Study of Paul and His Letters* 6 (2016): 181–98; Beale, *Colossians and Philemon*, 136–43, 161–62; Holly Beers, “Filling up What Is Lacking in Christ’s Afflictions: Isaiah’s Servant and Servants in Second Temple Judaism and Colossians 1:24,” in *Who Created Christianity? Fresh Approaches to the Relationship between Paul and Jesus*, ed. Craig A. Evans and Aaron W. White (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2020), 432–45. For a more thorough treatment, see Clark, *Completing Christ’s Afflictions*.

What he means is that the suffering of Christ's saints illustrates both Christ's worth to the sufferer and Christ's afflictions and love for those He died to save. Suffering is not only the result of the missionary task; it is part of the means for fulfilling it by extending and presenting Christ's worth and tribulations.[34] We potentially find a helpful parallel in Philippians 2:30. The Philippian church had raised support for Paul, and they chose one named Epaphroditus to deliver the missionary gift. In route, however, "he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me." In Greek, the phrase "*complete what was lacking* in your service to me" in Philippians 2:30 is almost identical with "*filling up what is lacking* in Christ's afflictions" in Colossians 1:24.[35] In what way was Epaphroditus completing what was lack in the Philippians' service to Paul. He had to deliver their gift in person (cf. 1 Cor 16:17).[36] So, what does Paul mean when he says he is "filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions"?

He means this: The Lord Jesus prepared a love offering for His bride, the church, by suffering and dying for sinners. The offering lacks nothing in its effectiveness to save, but Jesus has chosen to use His saints (people like Paul and perhaps you) to make a personal presentation of Christ's afflictions and love to the world.[37] In this way, missionaries' suffering demonstrates two things: (1) Christ's worth, that He is more valuable than their physical safety and security, and (2) Christ's love, that He loves the nations enough to sacrifice the safety and security of His body for the sake of His sheep among the nations. In 2 Corinthians 4:8–12, the missionary Paul says:

> We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be

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[34] Commenting on 1 Corinthians, Hafemann speaks of Paul's "apostolic suffering as the revelatory vehicle through which the knowledge of God as made manifest in the cross of Christ and in the power of the Spirit is being disclosed." Scott Hafemann, "The Role of Suffering in the Mission of Paul," in *The Mission of the Early Church to Jews and Gentiles*, ed. Jostein Ådna and Hans Kvalbein, WUNT 127 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019), 174.

[35] ἀναπληρώση … ὑστέρημα "he may fill up … what is lacking" (Phil 3:20); ἀνταναπληρῶ τὰ ὑστερήματα "I am filling up what is lacking" (Col 1:24). Clark dismisses the representative interpretation, arguing that "the apostle's afflictions (and his alone [as opposed to those of the church] in some way bring completion to the former afflictions of the now exalted Christ." Clark, *Completing Christ's Afflictions*, 37–44, quote from 43–44. In contrast, I see all the church's sufferings as representative and by this means completing Christ's afflictions.

[36] Hafemann notes, "Paul does not say that he *adds* to the number of sufferings needed but that he actually 'fills up' or 'completes' what is *lacking* in Christ's sufferings, namely its missionary transport. The issue in Col 1:24 is not the quality or quantity of Christ's suffering but its portrayal to those for whom it is intended." Hafemann, "The Role of Suffering in the Mission of Paul," 180–81 n. 35. Lang comes to a similar conclusion after examining the use of the phrase in conjunction with πλούτος in Col 1:27: "'To complete what is lacking' is thus to disburse christological wealth to those for whom it has been credited but not yet personally transferred, and this transfer necessarily entails Paul's own Christ-like sufferings." T. J. Lang, "Disbursing the Account of God: Fiscal Terminology and the Economy of God in Colossians 1,24–25," *ZNW* 107, no. 1 (2016): 119.

[37] As Schreiner notes, "Paul's ministry was the means by which the message of Christ was extended to the gentiles." Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God's Glory in Christ*, 351. Most likely, the phrase "filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions" does not exclusively apply the apostles, for the use of a similar phrase in Philippians 2:30 and 1 Corinthians 16:17 suggests that any Christian who suffers while remaining faithful to Christ "fills up what is lacking in Christ's affliction."

> manifested in our bodies. For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. So death is at work in us, but life in you.

Suffering is an essential part of Christian mission. Furthermore, it is a primary means of confirming that we are “heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ,” for those who “suffer with him” will in turn “also be glorified with him” (Rom 8:17; cf. Phil 3:10).

On December 5, 2013, terrorists murdered Ronnie Smith, a Christian missionary from Texas, who was serving as a schoolteacher in a north African city. Ronnie and his wife and child had moved there a year and a half earlier to spread a passion for God’s supremacy in all things for the joy of those people through Jesus Christ. On that Thursday Ronnie went on his morning jog and was gunned down because of his commitment to Jesus.[38] That was December 5, 2013. On February 1, 2014, less than two months after Ronnie’s martyrdom, I found myself at his church in Texas, training nearly 300 leaders in an all-day workshop. In the middle of the room were probably over 100 men and women who had recently committed themselves to go to the hardest places on the planet with the good news that through Christ’s life, death, and resurrection the reigning God eternally saves and satisfies sinners who believe. Whereas the terrorists thought that killing Ronnie would put an end to gospel witness, God was using his death and his family’s suffering to multiply that witness in the world by 100-fold. Writing around AD 160–225 during a time when Rome was massively persecuting Christians, the church father Tertullian said, “The oftener we are mown down by you [Romans], the more in number we [Christians] grow; the blood of Christians is seed.”[39]

It may seem counter-intuitive, but for centuries God has motivated new missionaries to go by hearing the stories of believers who surrendered and suffered because they counted Jesus a greater treasure than worldly pleasure (cf. Heb 11:26). “Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life” (John 12:24–25; cf. Mark 8:35; 2 Cor 4:14–18). In His body Christ suffered before enjoying His resurrection (Heb 12:2), and the church as His body must endure suffering before our resurrection (cf. Rev 6:9–11). “You will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and some of you they will put to death. You will be hated by all for my name’s sake. But not a hair of your head will perish. By your endurance you will gain your lives” (Luke 21:16–19). God’s plan for saving His world includes raising up people who are ready to walk Calvary’s road for the sake of Christ’s name and for the joy of all peoples. “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me” (Luke 9:23).

Recall Colossians 1:27: “God desired to make known what is the wealth of this mystery’s glory among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory”

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[38] https://wng.org/sift/a-life-laid-down-1617251403; https://www.cbsnews.com/news/american-teacher-slain-in-benghazi-was-the-heart-of-the-school-student-says/.

[39] Tertullian, *The Apology*, translated by Rev. S. Thelwell in *Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 3, Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian. I. Apologetic; II. Anti-Marcion; III. Ethical*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004, originally 1885), 55.

(author's translation). *When missionaries joyfully suffer for Christ's sake, they illustrate Christ's afflictions and love for those He died to save.*[40] Consider Schreiner's reflections on the role of suffering in Paul's mission:

> Paul's suffering was vital to his mission as the apostle to the Gentiles. We should not conceive of Paul as engaging in mission and experiencing the unfortunate consequence of suffering in the process, as if his difficulties were unrelated to his mission. On the contrary, the pain Paul endured was the means by which the message of the gospel was extended to the nations. Suffering was not a side effect of the Pauline mission; rather it was at the very center of his apostolic evangelism. His pains validated and legitimated his message, demonstrating the truth of the gospel. This is not to say that sufferings in and of themselves ratify the truth of the Pauline gospel. Rather, Paul's sufferings provide evidence of the truth of his gospel. Indeed, his sufferings are a corollary of the sufferings of Jesus. Obviously Paul's anguish was not atoning, nor did he bear the sins of God's people in a substitutionary death as Jesus did. His suffering was, however, central to his apostolic calling.[41]

Through His saints' suffering, God displays for the world the marks of Christ (Gal 6:17) and the love of Christ to save sinners. Terrorists are willing to die to kill others; Christians are willing to die to save others. May we be such people.

We Engage in Missions by Toiling with God's Power to Proclaim Christ through Warning and Teaching (Col 1:28–29)

"Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me" (Col 1:28–29). Suffering is a necessary but not sufficient means to see souls saved. As Paul questions elsewhere, "How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent?" (Rom 10:14–15).

People get converted and move toward maturity only by hearing and responding to God's Word of truth. Through His Word God grants rebirth in Christ, moving people from death to life. "You have been born again … through the living and abiding word of God" (1 Pet 1:23). Through His Word God helps saints conquer sin and become more holy. Hence, Jesus prays, "Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth" (John 17:17). Through His Word God moves saints to endure unto glory. As Paul says, "I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified" (Acts 20:32).

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[40] Gupta highlights the pleasure that comes not from suffering for its own sake but for suffering for Christ's sake: "Paul is *pleased* to suffer not because it feels good or looks good or earns him favor or credit in the world but because he can actively engage in the primary form of covenantal growth mapped out by Jesus himself." Nijay K. Gupta, *Colossians*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2013), 80.

[41] Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God's Glory in Christ*, 83.

As a missionary, Paul toiled to see healthy churches grow, which necessitated keeping Christ central (“him we proclaim”) and doing so by “warning” and “teaching” (Col 1:28). Because God takes sin seriously, we should as well. Therefore, the apostle regularly cautions his listeners regarding the impending danger that will fall on all who fail to persevere in heeding God’s Word. He writes, “And you … he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, … if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard” (1:21–23). The proof of one’s reconciliation is endurance in the faith. Where compromise persists, divine fury will follow. Thus, Paul asserts, “Put to death … what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these the wrath of God is coming” (3:5–6). And later he urges bondservants, “Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality” (3:23–25; cf. Rom 11:22).

Along with warning, teaching is imperative. Through hearing “the word of truth, the gospel,” the Colossians had grown in their “faith in Christ Jesus,” their “love … for all the saints,” and their “hope laid up … in heaven” (Col 1:4–5). Paul then adds: “You heard [the gospel] and understood the grace of God in truth, just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant” (1:6–7). In his letter, Paul clarifies how God had delivered the Colossian Christians from “the domain of darkness” and placed them into Christ’s kingdom (1:13–14). He exults in Christ’s preeminence (1:15–20) and instructs those who have “received Christ Jesus the Lord” to, in turn, “walk in him, rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught” (2:6). His letter is merely enforcing and codifying what the believers had earlier heard regarding the person and work of Christ and the implications of being a Christian. “If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God” (3:1).

Both warning and teaching are necessary for the church to grow. Thus, Paul urges, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom” (3:16). Yet the work of proclaiming Christ must not be done in one’s own strength.

Indeed, God’s “power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor 12:9). In Colossians 1:29, Paul piles up words related to power: “For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me” (cf. 1:11). Central to the missionary task is trusting in a big God to do what we cannot accomplish on our own. God’s grace does not make the toilsome task unnecessary; it makes it possible (Phil 2:12–13). As sinful humans, we cannot save human souls by means of our own strength. But with God, “all things are possible” (Matt 19:26). Thus, Paul worked with the strength God supplied to accomplish his ministry, and so must we (cf. 1 Pet 4:11). Ministry of the Word is a toilsome task, especially when fruit is not immediately visible.[42] Yet we

[42] Schweizer comments, “All the trouble and activity that the apostle allows his ministry to involve him in, and also the source of all this, lies completely in the power of Christ. This is not transcendent in the sense that it takes effect in another world; it does indeed come to the apostle from beyond, from the transcendent, but it takes effect in the concrete situation of his life and work on earth.” Schweizer, *The Letter to the Colossians*, 112.

learn from Paul, who said that, in relation to the other apostles, "I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me" (1 Cor 15:10). Christ-honoring ministers and missionaries are those who toil to proclaim Christ while trusting in the all-sufficient God to work for His glory and the joy of those He came to save.[43]

Conclusion: How Missions?

According to Paul in Colossians 1:24–29, we engage in missions (1) by suffering joyfully to illustrate Christ's afflictions and love to those he died to save and (2) by proclaiming Christ through warning and teaching with God's power. At the heart of the Great Commission is a call to bear witness to Jesus with the help of the Spirit. We proclaim Jesus through our suffering, but this is not sufficient to save souls. We must also proclaim Jesus through our words—sharing the good news that the reigning God eternally saves and satisfies sinners who believe through Christ's life, death, and resurrection. "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal 2:20).

Will you take up this call to suffer and to share. Christ's kingdom expands through such sacrifice and boldness. Is God calling you to surrender to this task? If so, find some others who can pray with you about this possibility.

Mandate: Now Missions!

Jesus says to His disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest" (Matt 9:36–37). Paul believes he is part of the fulfillment of seeing this prayer answered. Furthermore, several factors suggest that he speaks of his own motivation and means for missions in places like Colossians 1:24–29 to see the same passions awakened in every Christian within every local congregation.

Note, for example, that Paul is with Timothy when writing Colossians (Col 1:1–2), and at the least these two stand behind the apostle's use of the first-person *plural* in statements like, "Him *we* proclaim" (1:28). The mission is, therefore, not limited to the apostles, for others are involved. Similarly, in Acts 13 Paul points to Isaiah 49:6 to clarify to the Jews in Antioch of Pisidia why he and Barnabas are turning to the Gentiles in their mission: "For so the Lord has commanded us, saying, 'I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.'" In its original context, this text highlights the global mission of God's individual messianic servant Jesus. Yet now all those in Christ—whether apostles like Paul or partners like Barnabas—carry out Christ's mission of seeing

[43] Sumney captures well this idea: "This verse's most important point is that God empowers Paul's work for the Colossians, and for the whole church. Paul's successes and his apostleship are not of his own doing. While he does labor strenuously, he remains completely dependent upon the power of God. His sufferings are part of this strenuous work, and he is able to endure tribulation for the sake of the church only because the working of God enables him.… The power of God enables the ministry of the apostles in the same way that it enables all Christian obedience and life." Sumney, *Colossians*, 111.

those from the nations become mature disciples. Coming back to Colossians, note the following parallels:

- "Him we proclaim, *warning* [νουθετοῦντες] everyone and *teaching* [διδάσκοντες) everyone *with all wisdom* [ἐν πάσῃ σοφίᾳ)" (Col 1:28).
- "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly [πλουσίως; cf. 1:27) *with all wisdom* (ἐν πάσῃ σοφίᾳ), *teaching* [διδάσκοντες) and *warning* [νουθετοῦντες) one another" (3:16, author's translation).

The similar terminology in both Colossians 1:28 and 3:16 highlights that Paul extends his missionary goals to every Christian within every local congregation. Mature disciples become disciple-makers because they are concerned to see Christ worshiped on a global scale. And just as Paul suffered for the sake of Christ's name (Col 1:24), so all believers must suffer in our earthly calling to make disciples of all nations (2 Tim 2:3, 9; 3:12).[44]

Even as I write this study, I am praying for God to awaken hearts and to shape world Christians who are willing to take great "risk" for the sake of Christ's name. What is God doing in you? Is he calling you to be a goer or a sender? Those are your obedient options. This study has considered the motivation and means for missions. But knowing *Why Missions* and *How Missions* is not enough. We must also recognize the mandate for missions today—*Now Missions!* I, therefore, end this extended meditation by reflecting on implications and applications of the main points set forth thus far. What does missions now look like in view of Colossians 1:24–29?

If Missions Is God's Initiative (Col 1:25), Then Ask Him How He Wants You to Be Involved

Paul's ministry was a stewardship from God (Col 1:25). Christ calls His church to "make disciples of all nations" (Matt 28:18), and He promises that from generation to generation "I will build my church" (Matt 16:18). Paul was an "apostle to the Gentiles" (Acts 9:15; Rom 11:13), but it wasn't just apostles that God called to go. For example, in Acts 13:2–3 the Holy Spirit also called Barnabas to join Paul in the missionary task. Then other figures periodically joined them, like John Mark (13:5; cf. 15:37), Silas (15:40), Timothy (16:1–3), and Luke (16:10).[45]

Scripture portrays different kinds of missionaries.

1. *Paul-like missionaries.* In Corinthians Paul expresses his hope to "preach the gospel in lands beyond you, without boasting of work already done in another's area of influence" (2 Cor 10:16). Similarly, in Romans 15:20 he says, "I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else's foundation." Still, as we have already seen in Colossians 1:28, Paul did not just plant a church and run to the next location; his goal was to shape mature churches. This is why

[44] Cf. Mark 8:34; 10:30; John 15:20; 16:33; Acts 14:22; Rom 8:17; 1 Thess 1:5; 3:3; 1 Pet 4:12–13.

[45] Consider also the thirty-five personal references listed at the end of Romans 16, some of which refer to more than one person and all of whom Paul considers his fellow workers in Christ.

he stayed in Ephesus three years (Acts 20:31), declaring the kingdom and proclaiming the whole counsel of God (20:25, 28).

2. *Apollos-type missionaries.* Some missionaries minister after a church is already planted, as was the case in Corinth (Acts 18:1–17 with 19:1). Hence, Paul said to the Corinthians, "I planted the seeds, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow" (1 Cor 3:5–6).
3. *Timothy-like missionaries.* These missionaries engage in long-term shepherding in a foreign context (1 Tim 1:3). Timothy left his home in Lystra (Acts 16:1), traveled with Paul for a time doing missionary work in various places (16:3–5), and then settled away from home, with Paul's encouragement, in Ephesus to shepherd the young church (1 Tim 1:3) after its founding with its own outreach (Acts 19:10) and elders (20:17).

Furthermore, God calls others to help shape local churches that are mobilizing centers that send others "in a manner worthy of God" and "support" them. Thus, John writes, "You will do well to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God. For they have gone out for the sake of the name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. Therefore, we ought to support people like these, that we may be fellow workers for the truth" (3 John 6b–8). Such support includes helping missionaries through advocacy and financial provision (Rom 15:24; 1 Cor 9:11; Gal 6:6; Titus 3:13) and contributing financially to the needs of those they are serving (Rom 15:25–27; 2 Cor 8:1–5; 9:2, 6–15). Through such means churches and missionaries become partners in the gospel (Phil 1:5) and "fellow workers for the truth" (3 John 8).

Knowing that the missionary task is a "stewardship from God" (Col 1:25), missions now means that you should be prayerfully assessing whether God is calling you to go "out for the sake of the name" (3 John 7) or to send and support.[46] This may take time to assess, and it is wise to obtain the affirmation of godly counselors and to gain all necessary training so you can be faithful in your task. Regardless, God is calling you either to go or send; anything less is disobedient. He desires that you become a world Christian who wants to see Christ proclaimed and disciples shaped among "every tribe and language and people and nation" (Rev 5:9).

If the Means of Missions Is Suffering (Col 1:24–25) and Sharing (1:28–29), and If the Motivation for Missions Is to See Others Treasure Christ (1:25–28), Then Fight Entitlement, Train, Share, and Commit to Treasure Christ, Come What May

The Apostle Peter says, "Do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed" (1 Pet 4:12–13).

[46] Johnson notes, "One of the things we see clearly in Scripture is that a concern for missions is for all Christians, because it is a concern for every local church, together." Andy Johnson, *Missions: How the Local Church Goes Global*, 9Marks (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 20.

After the Communists took over Romania, Christian minister Richard Wurmbrand was imprisoned and endured 14 years of torture for the sake of Christ’s name (1948–1964). He wrote, urging believers to get spiritually ready to suffer:

> What shall we do about these tortures? Will we be able to bear them? If I do not bear them I put in prison another fifty or sixty men whom I know, because that is what the Communists wish from me, to betray those around me. And here comes the great need for the role of preparation for suffering which must start now. *It is too difficult* to prepare yourself for it when the Communists have put you in prison….
>
> In prison you lose everything. You are undressed and given a prisoner’s suit. No more nice furniture, nice carpets, or nice curtains. You do not have a wife any more and you do not have your children. You do not have your library and you never see a flower. Nothing of what makes life pleasant remains. Nobody resists who has not renounced the pleasures of life beforehand.[47]

From Paul’s own prison cell, he writes to the Philippians, “It is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Phil 1:20–21). What does Paul mean when he expresses his hope that he will honor Christ in his body by life, for to him, to live is Christ? I think he answers a little later when he says, “But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ” (3:7–8). Paul’s quest was not to acquire goods or health or status or fame. He is in a prison rejoicing because the loss of all else is allowing him to gain Christ in his life. But what does Paul mean when he expresses his hope that Christ will be honored in his body by death, for to die is gain? This he answers in 1:23: “My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better.” We honor Christ in death when we die believing that to be with Him is far better than this life.

Karen Watson was a missionary in her thirties from California, who gave her life for Christ in the Middle East when caught in a line of gunfire on March 15, 2004. Before her death she wrote a letter that depicts a beautiful treasuring of Jesus above her earthly life. Here is part of her note.[48]

> Dear Pastor Phil & Pastor Roger,
>
> You should only be opening this letter in the event of death.
>
> When God calls there are no regrets. I tried to share my heart with you as much as possible, my heart for the nations. I wasn’t called to a place. I

[47] Richard Wurmbrand, “Preparing the Underground Church,” *Epiphany Journal* 5, no. 4 (1985): 46–48.

[48] Erich Bridges and Jerry Rankin, *Lives Given, Not Taken: 21st Century Southern Baptist Martyrs* (Richmond, VA: International Mission Board, 2005), 191–92.

> was called to Him. To obey was my objective, to suffer was expected, His glory my reward, His glory my reward….

The Missionary Heart:

> Care more than some think is wise
> Risk more than some think is safe
> Dream more than some think is practical
> Expect more than some think is possible

I was called not to comfort or success but to obedience….

> There is no Joy outside of knowing Jesus and serving Him. I love you two and my church family.

In His Care,
Salaam, Karen

Jesus says, "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple." He then adds, "Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and *count the cost*, whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish'" (Luke 14:26–30).

Missions now in such a context means:

1. *You will begin to count the cost of what it could mean to follow Jesus.* Your parents, children, siblings, or friends may think crossing a culture for Jesus's sake is radical or strange. Yet this may be part of the cross that Christ calls you to bear for the sake of His name. Paul says, "I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord" (Phil 3:8).
2. *You will train to warn and teach with care.* Paul told Timothy, "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth" (2 Tim 2:15). Missionaries must know God's Word and understand how Christ relates to everything. Paul told the Corinthians, "I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor 2:2). For this missionary, all he did and taught was connected to the cross. As Carson says of Paul, "He cannot talk about Christian joy, or Christian ethics, or Christian fellowship, or the Christian doctrine of God, or anything else, without finally tying it to the cross. Paul is gospel-centered; he is cross centered."[49] So, too, must be every missionary.

[49] Schreiner, *Paul, Apostle of God's Glory in Christ*, 83.

3. *Teaching cross-culturally also means that you must know your people*—their language, their culture, their worldview. And you must embrace it with joy, for “where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matt 6:21).
4. *You will eagerly and boldly proclaim the gospel to those around you*—both to Christians and non-Christians, resolving that you are “not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes” (Rom 1:16). Paul has three tenses when he speaks about salvation. “By grace you *have been saved* through faith” (Eph 2:8). “The word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who *are being saved* it is the power of God” (1 Cor 1:18). “Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more *shall we be saved* by him from the wrath of God” (Rom 5:9). The gospel has justified us (past salvation), freeing us from sin’s penalty. The gospel is sanctifying us (present salvation), freeing us from sin’s power. And the gospel will glorify us (future salvation), freeing us from sin’s presence and protecting us from God’s wrath eternally. Be bold to proclaim the gospel, remembering that “Christ in you” is your “hope” (Col 1:27) and that God made you a mere “jar of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God” and not you (2 Cor 4:7).

If Missionaries Must Toil with God’s Strength (Col 1:29), Then Depend on God and Pray for Missionaries to Endure and Succeed with God’s Help

Paul struggled with all Christ’s energy that He powerfully worked in him (Col 1:29). The Apostle also pled for the Colossian church to “pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison” (4:3). Globally minded Christians must recognize that the task of world evangelization will only be accomplished by Christ working through His people. Christ alone builds the church (Matt 16:18), and God alone causes its growth (1 Cor 3:6–7). Thus, we “work out [our] own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in [us], both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Phil 2:12–13). “Whatever [we] do, in word or deed,” we seek to “do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Col 3:17). God is worthy of the world’s worship. So “whoever speaks, [do so] as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, [do so] as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 4:11).

Conclusion

In Colossians 1:24–29 Paul rejoices in his sufferings and through them fills up Christ’s afflictions, for these trials provide a context to realize his calling to serve the church by making known with great toil the wealth of Christ’s glory among the Gentiles, thus fulfilling God’s Word. In this study we have considered how this text captures Paul’s motivation, means, and mandate for global missions. As for motivation, God has purposed that the church engage in missions to fulfill His Word by helping people value Christ as their greatest treasure, which is the mark of Christian maturity. As for means, we engage in missions by suffering joyfully to

illustrate Christ's afflictions and love to those He died to save and by proclaiming Christ through warning and teaching with God's power. As for mandate, every Christian must be a goer or a sender, seeking "to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of [Christ's] name among all the nations" (Rom 1:5). Mature churches seek to make worshiping disciples of Jesus Christ from all nations through both reaching and teaching. "Him we proclaim … that we may present everyone mature in Christ" (Col 1:28). Will you take part in missions for the sake of Jesus's name?

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THE ISAIANIC INFLUENCE ON PAUL'S UNDERSTANDING OF ISRAEL'S SALVATION AND RESTORATION IN ROMANS 11:26–27

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* * * * *

This article explores the influence of Isaiah upon Paul's theology of Israel's future salvation and restoration. As Paul describes Israel's rejection of the gospel, he details that this is a partial hardening, an observation he makes in light of Isaiah 24–27 and 59–60. These texts which recount the glorious future for Israel are woven together in Paul's writing as he envisions a future hope because of God's gracious choice. God will not abandon the people He has chosen but will redeem them and bring them to Himself. This glorious future stirs Paul to preach the gospel and devote himself to prayer, the essential tasks of the biblical missionary.

* * * * *

Introduction

This article examines the embedded hope within Paul's statement "all Israel will be saved" in Romans 11:26, which he supports with two passages from Isaiah: Isaiah 59:20–21 and 27:9. In these Isaianic texts, the prophet envisions a future in which God's triumph over sin and evil is fully consummated, bringing redemption to its ultimate fulfillment. Central to these passages is the restoration of Israel in the Promised Land. While recent scholarship has increasingly accepted the concept of Israel's future conversion to Christ, many hesitate to affirm Israel's physical restoration to the land, arguing that such an implication is inconsistent with the overarching narrative of Scripture. This article challenges that perspective, arguing that Paul, in Romans 9–11, develops and expands Isaiah's vision of restoration, demonstrating through his citations from Isaiah 59 and 27 that Israel's restoration occupies a central and indispensable role in God's redemptive plan. To accomplish this goal, this article will demonstrate first that Romans 9–11 centers on Israel's role in the gospel and God's plan of salvation. Second, it will explore Paul's understanding of Israel in relation to the biblical storyline and Romans 9–11. And third, it will show how Paul's understanding was shaped by the eschatological hope

of Isaiah. Fourth, this eschatological hope is anchored in the two texts that Paul references (Isa 27; 59). For both Paul and Isaiah, Israel's salvation is inseparably tied to her restoration. When Israel is restored, shalom—peace, wholeness, and flourishing—will not only return to Israel but also extend to the entire cosmos, fulfilling God's ultimate redemptive purposes for His people and all creation. By aligning with the Isaianic hope and the Jewish expectations articulated in the Old Testament prophets, Paul affirms the faithfulness of God's Word, declaring that it has not failed (Rom 9:6a). After demonstrating the future restoration and salvation of Israel, this article will conclude with reflecting on several implications for missions and missiology.

Paul, the Gospel, and Romans 9–11

Paul's extensive use of OT Scripture is evident throughout his writings. His letter to the Romans contains the highest concentration of OT references[1] in his writings. These references are clustered in three major passages (Rom 4:1–25; 9:1–11:36; and 15:1–12), each intricately tied to the gospel message. The predominant theme of these passages is God's redemptive plan to form a unified, diverse people encompassing all ethnicities—Jews and Gentiles—demonstrating the inclusivity and universal scope of the gospel.[2] In the gospel, diversity and unity coexist harmoniously.

The Gospel and Israel

Rather than attempting to eliminate or diminish diversity, Paul identified sin—not ethnicity—as humanity's fundamental problem (Rom 3:1–31).[3] God executes His eternal plan of salvation through the gospel, which Paul discusses in Romans 9–

[1] By "references," I describe both direct quotation or allusion. For definitions of these terms, see G. K. Beale, *Handbook of the New Testament Use of the Old Testament: Exegesis and Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 29–40. For an in-depth analysis of Paul's direct citations and allusions from the OT, see Ellis, *Paul's Use of the Old Testament*, 150–187. Also, for a thorough presentation of Paul's citations, see D. Moody Smith, "The Pauline Literature," in *It Is Written: Scripture Citing Scripture: Essays in Honour of Barnabas Lindsars*, eds. D. A. Carson and H. G. M. Williamson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 268–72.

[2] Christopher D. Stanley, *Arguing With Scripture: The Rhetoric of Quotations in the Letters of Paul* (New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 143.

[3] William S. Campbell argues that portraying the God of Israel, who sent His Messiah to save the world, as opposed to ethnic diversity is both theologically untenable and inconsistent even with a modern understanding of a diverse world. Acknowledging humanity's diversity has always been integral to theological thought and is essential for addressing historical and cultural differences justly. Paul should not be viewed as harboring a negative or ambivalent attitude toward Jews and Judaism, as is sometimes suggested. Rather, Paul's mission as the apostle to the Gentiles (*ethnē*) aligns with God's broader redemptive purpose, affirming the distinct identities of both Jews and Gentiles in Christ. Paul's vision for unity did not seek to erase diversity but embraced it as a vital component of God's plan for reconciliation through Christ (William S. Campbell, *The Nations in the Divine Economy: Paul's Covenantal Hermeneutics and Participation in Christ* [Maryland: Fortress Academic, 2018], 129–52). Contra August H. Konkel's position, which asserts that for Paul, the concept of "Israel" is a single reality shaped by God's mercy and election, transcending ethnic boundaries, which means it took a new definition including not only Jews but Gentiles as well ("What is the Future of Israel in Romans 9–11," in *The Letter to the Romans: Exegesis and Application*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Francis G. H. Pang [Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2018], 116–18).

11. As Brian J. Abasciano observes, Romans 9–11 "completes the exposition" of the epistle's central theme introduced in Romans 1:16–17, that the gospel is God's power to save Jews and Gentiles.[4] In these chapters, Paul highlights the divine order (*taxis*) within God's ontological economy of mutual blessing,[5] underscoring the gospel's proclamation "to the Jew first" (Rom 1:16c).[6] By highlighting this divine order, Paul addresses confusion regarding Israel's role in God's redemptive plan (Rom 11:13–14, 25), and responds to questions about God's faithfulness to His promises to the nation (Rom 9:6; 11:2).[7] As salvation is "from the Jews" (John 4:22c), Paul seeks to highlight the Jewish roots of the gospel, making its relationship to Israel a central theological necessity within God's redemptive plan. Consequently, as C. E. B. Cranfield argues, the Jewish emphasis in Romans 1:16c necessitates a thorough examination of how Israel fits within that plan.[8]

Such an examination is essential for interpreting the identity and role of Israel in the OT and addressing the theological tension between God's covenant faithfulness and her current state of unbelief. It also reconciles the Christian hope expressed in Romans 8:28–39 with Israel's present hardening.[9] Paul needed to clarify the cause of Israel's enmity toward the gospel and demonstrate how this enmity would ultimately be resolved when "all Israel will be saved" (Rom 11:26).[10] To address these issues,

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[4] Brian J. Abasciano, *Paul's Use of the Old Testament in Romans 9:1–9: An Intertextual and Theological Exegesis*, edited by Mark Goodacre (New York: T&T Clark, 2005), 31.

[5] Soulen writes, "Viewed in light of distinction between Israel and the nations … biblical ontology takes the form of an economy of mutual blessing, in which God summons the households of creation to receive God's blessing in the company of another," *The God of Israel and Christian Theology*, 121.

[6] Joseph A. Fitzmyer correctly perceives, "The priority of the Jew is acknowledged not only because the gospel was first preached to the Jews, but because God promised his gospel through the prophets of old in the sacred Scripture of the Jews (1:2), thus destining it for his chosen people, and through them for all others" (*Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Yale Bible [New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008], 257).

[7] William S. Campbell provides a balanced perspective on the audience addressed in Romans 9–11. While Paul's primary concern in these chapters is Israel—whom he refers to as his "kinsmen according to the flesh" (Romans 9:3)—he simultaneously makes a critical distinction between Israel as a nation and the Gentiles. Throughout these chapters, Paul's focus shifts to addressing the arrogance of the Gentiles (11:13–14, warning them against boasting over Israel's apparent rejection. Thus, while Israel remains central to Paul's theological argument, he directs much of his admonition toward the Gentiles, urging humility and an understanding of their place in God's unfolding redemptive plan (*Unity and Diversity in Christ: Interpreting Paul in Context* [Cambridge: James Clarkes & Co, 2017], 157–68).

[8] C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, International Critical Commentary (New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 2:445.

[9] Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 2:46–47. Cranfield argues that there can be no satisfactory interpretation of the OT without addressing the phenomenon of Israel. The Epistle to the Romans, being deeply concerned with interpreting the OT, would be incomplete if it did not tackle the question of Israel's role in salvation history. Also, the relationship between God's faithfulness and Israel's unbelief (Romans 3:1ff) necessitates a thorough discussion. Paul must address Israel's place in God's plan because it is intrinsically linked to the question of God's trustworthiness and covenant faithfulness. Furthermore, the discussion in Romans 8:28–39 on the certainty of Christian hope and God's purpose naturally leads to addressing Israel's apparent exclusion from this purpose. If God's plan for Israel has been frustrated, it undermines the basis of Christian hope and questions the reliability of God's promises.

[10] For Paul, it is crucial to affirm God's faithfulness as an intrinsic dimension of His righteousness and to underscore that Israel's protological election in the OT will be validated by their eschatological priority at the Parousia and the consummation of God's triumph. In this way, the elective priority of Israel, as established

Paul incorporates nearly half of his OT references in the letter in chapters 9–11,[11] aiming to affirm the harmony between God's Word in Scripture, Israel's future, and his gospel message.

Romans 9–11 Defines Israel's Role

If Romans 9–11 "provides a paradigm of redemptive history with regard to this age and the unfolding of God's redemptive purpose for Israel and for the world,"[12] then attempting to redefine Israel's identity and role in a manner inconsistent with OT Scripture—as it would have been understood by its original audience—risks introducing theological inconsistency. In addition, if Romans 9–11 does not support the consistency of God's Word regarding Israel with the gospel message, it would imply that God's Word has failed (Rom 9:6a). This, in turn, would suggest either that God is unfaithful to His covenant promises to Israel (Rom 3:2–3; 9:4–6; 11:1–2a; 11:29) or lacks the power to fulfill them (Rom 11:23).[13] Furthermore, as Hays observes, "If Paul's reading of Scripture in these chapters is flimsy, then there is little hope for his proclamation to stand."[14] Such flimsiness would not only call into question Paul's understanding of Scripture but also undermine his credibility as an apostolic interpreter of God's Word, ultimately casting doubt on the trustworthiness of his gospel among his audience, both Jews and Gentiles.

In summary, Romans 9–11 is fundamentally concerned with the *Israelfrage*—the theological question of Israel's role and future in God's redemptive plan—by addressing her past, present, and future in relation to the gospel and covenantal promises. Contrary to Herman Ridderbos' assertion that Paul teaches "the church … has taken the place of Israel, and national Israel is nothing other than the empty shell from which the pearl has been removed,"[15] Paul in these chapters carefully engages Scripture to demonstrate otherwise. It is untenable to claim that Paul would redefine Israel's identity in a context where he consistently distinguishes Jews and Gentiles and argues against the church supplanting Israel.[16] Paul's argument is firmly rooted in the overarching biblical storyline, emphasizing that God's redemptive plan includes the ultimate restoration of national Israel. The birth, promises, purposes, and the existence of Israel are central aspects of the biblical storyline.

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in Romans 1:16; 9:4–5; 11:2a; and 11:28 is ultimately confirmed in Romans 11:26. See, J. C. Baker, "The Faithfulness of God and the Priority of Israel," *Harvard Theological Review* 79 (1986): 14.

[11] According to the UBS 5th edition, 60 verses in Romans contain direct quotations from the OT, with four conflations, bringing the total number of distinct quotations to 64. In addition, the UBS 5th edition documents 88 allusions and parallels within the letter. Notably, 32 of these quotations and allusions occur in Romans 9–11, demonstrating that nearly half of the OT references in Romans are concentrated in this section. This underscores the theological importance of Romans 9–11 in Paul's argument regarding Israel's place in God's redemptive plan.

[12] Fred G. Zaspel and James M. Hamilton Jr., "A Typological Future-Mass-Conversion View," in *Three Views on Israel and the Church: Perspectives on Romans 9–11*, ed. Jared Compton and Andrew David Naselli (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2018), 99.

[13] Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 64.

[14] Hays, 64.

[15] Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, trans. John Richard De Witt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 354–355.

[16] Mark D. Nanos, *The Mystery of Romans: The Jewish Context of Paul's Letter* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1996), 275–76.

Central to this storyline is the Christ-event, which serves as the pivotal moment dividing the old and new epochs.[17] For Paul, the Christ-event is the central moment in salvation history signaling the fulfillment of OT promises and inaugurating a new era of salvation. In Romans, Paul outlines the trajectory of redemptive history[18] by addressing the four major components that encapsulate the biblical storyline: creation, fall, salvation, and restoration.[19] For Paul, salvation history is central to understanding God's work in creating, sustaining, calling humanity to repentance and faith, and redeeming, while also pointing toward the consummation of all things.[20]

Abraham and Salvific Provisions to Israel

Within this grand narrative, Israel's role remains pivotal. As John Goldingay notes, the OT "tells us who God is and who we are through the ongoing story of God's relationship with Israel."[21] In other words, the entire OT centers on Israel, the God of Israel, and their relationship with the world. Implied, as Soulen aptly observes, is that "apart from Israel, Gentile would not exist."[22] For Paul, God's relationship with Israel provides the framework for understanding His redemptive purposes in history for the nation, the nations, and the cosmos. This relationship is mediated through God's covenantal provisions with Israel.

H. J. Kraus writes, "By way of Abraham and Israel God enters into the world of the nations."[23] In His divine providence, God often chooses to mediate His blessings to people through others. Within the grand narrative of Scripture, the covenant made with Abraham reveals God's promise to bless the nations *through* Israel (Gen 12:1–

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[17] Mark J. Keown, *Discovering the New Testament: An Introduction to its Background, Theology, and Themes: The Pauline Letter*, Volume 2 (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2021), 401.

[18] Abner Chou demonstrates how Paul's citation and interpretation of Scripture is deeply rooted in redemptive history. He shows how Paul integrates the OT storyline into his Christological understanding of God's plan, showing that the church, though a mystery previously unrevealed, continues the same redemptive trajectory seen throughout the OT, Gospels, and Acts. Paul's writings reflect this big-picture perspective, showing that his ministry, theological discussions, and actions are part of God's unfolding plan, especially in relation to the inclusion of Gentiles and the eventual salvation of Israel (*The Hermeneutics of the Biblical Writers: Learning to Interpret Scripture from the Prophets and the Apostles* [Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2018], 167–77).

[19] In Romans 1:20, for instance, Paul highlights that God, as the Creator, reveals His eternal power and divine nature through the created world. The fall is addressed in Romans 1:21–23 and 5:12, where humanity's disobedience leads to sin and death. Salvation, found in Christ's sacrifice, is discussed in Romans 3:23–24, 5:8, 6:23, and includes the salvation of Israel in Romans 11:26. The theme of restoration is captured in Romans 8:18–21, 29–30, where creation and humanity await final redemption and renewal. See also, Michael J. Vlach, *He Will Reign Forever: A Biblical Theology of the Kingdom of God* (Silverton, OR: Lampion, 2017), 22–23; Michael J. Svigel, *The Fathers on the Future: A 2nd Century Eschatology for the 21st Century Church* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2024), 15–27.

[20] Robert W. Yarbrough, "Salvation History (Heilsgeschichte) and Paul: Comments on a Disputed but Essential Category," in *Studies in the Pauline Epistles: Essays in Honor of Douglas J. Moo*, ed. Matthew S. Harmon and Jay E. Smith (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 188.

[21] John Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology: Israel's Gospel*, vol. 1 (Westmont, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 30.

[22] Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology*, 130.

[23] H. J. Kraus, *The People of God in the Old Testament* (New York: Association, 1958), 27.

3; 18:8; 22:18), specifically by providing salvation through Christ (Rom 1:2–3).[24] These blessings, however, are not confined to spiritual provisions but also extend to physical provisions. As Christopher J. H. Wright puts it, "All that God did in, for, and through *Israel* … had its ultimate goal the blessing of all nations of *humanity* and the final redemption of all *creation*."[25] As the OT storyline unfolds, the Abrahamic covenant emerges as foundational to "the story of God's action through a chosen people to restore harmony to creation by their being a blessing to all the earth's people (Gen 12:3)."[26]

The salvific provisions of the Abrahamic covenant, in this way, are "holistic; that is, they cover the whole of human life and experience: physical, material, social, personal (including mental and emotional), political and cultural, and religious."[27] This renders the core of salvation fundamentally *restorative*, transcending the forgiveness of sins and the avoidance of judgment. It involves the repair and reversal of the effects of the fall, restoring both humanity and all creation to God's original purpose (Gen 1–2; Rom 8:19–22).[28] From a biblical perspective, salvation and restoration are intimately interconnected at every level.

God's Faithfulness to Salvific Provisions for Israel

If the storyline of the OT reveals that God's consummative work is to restore the fullness of life to Israel, the nations, and all creation,[29] central to this plan is God's covenantal faithfulness to Israel. As Soulen writes, "God's historical fidelity toward Israel is the 'narrow gate' that opens on the new creation."[30] Israel's protology, thus, is intrinsically linked to her eschatology, the eschatology of the nations and the cosmos. Brent E. Parker, however, by pointing to the various titles, designations, and imagery that describe Israel and her vocation, concludes that the term "Israel" can extend beyond a purely nationalistic, ethnic sense.[31] While vocation provides a fuller understanding of Israel's role, it does not eliminate, alter, or replace its core nationalistic, ethnic identity; rather, it just explains it. If biblical Israel were to cease

[24] Gen 12:1–3; 18:18; 22:18; Isa 49:6–26; Luke 1:67–79; 2:25–29; Rom 4:13, 18; 16:20; Gal 3:6–9, 16, 29.

[25] Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 395 (emphasis in the original).

[26] Howard A. Snyder, *Salvation Means Creation Healed: The Ecology of Sin and Grace* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2011), 124.

[27] Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 131.

[28] J. Richard Middleton, *A New Heaven and a New Earth: Reclaiming Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014), 79. Also, Howard A. Snyder, *Salvation Means Creation Healed*, 65–164.

[29] Israel: Isa 27:6; 49:6; 60:1–3; Jer 31:33–34; Ezek 37, the nations: Isa 2:2–4; 19:23–35; Zech 8:22–23, and all of creation: Isa 11:6–9; 65:7. See Robert L. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism: The Interface Between Dispensational & Non-Dispensational Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 236.

[30] Soulen, writes, "The movement from creation (Gen 1–11) to covenant (Gen12:1ff.) at the beginning of time is balanced at the end of time by a movement from covenant to creation. God's eschatological *shalom* encompasses not only Israel and the nations and all who have died, but animals, mountains, streams, and indeed a new heaven and a new earth (Isa 11; 65:17ff; 66:22)." Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology*, 133. (emphasis in original).

[31] Brent E. Parker, "The Israel-Christ-Church Relationship," in *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course Between Dispensational and Covenantal Theologies*, eds. Stephen J. Wellum and Brent E. Parker (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2016), 54.

to exist, or her national identity were not preserved, the biblical vision of consummation would be disrupted, as this vision culminates with nations from all over the world gathering alongside Israel to worship Yahweh in Jerusalem.[32] Israel's elective purposes, therefore, extend to the consummation, affirming her indispensable role in God's redemptive plan (Isa 19:23–25).

Israel's election is unchanging coming "with no 'expiration date.'"[33] God's choice of Israel is rooted in His sovereign love and will, revealing deep mysteries of His character and purposes (Deut 7:6–8). At its core, the unfolding narrative of salvation history reveals that "God has chosen Israel in order to bring *shalom* to the whole creation,"[34] and this shalom is realized through a restored Israel. To view the church, formed of both Jews and Gentiles, as the "new restored Israel"[35] in Christ risks blurring the prophetic vision of the eschaton—a vision where Israel's unique role as God's covenant people remains distinct. Peter R. Ackroyd rightly emphasizes that the "new Israel" emerges from the transformative experience of restoration, much like the "old Israel" was shaped and defined by the events of the exodus.[36] Collapsing the distinction between Israel and the nations risks undermining God's covenant faithfulness to Israel, which is essential to the blessings of the nations within salvation history.

This salvation history narrative shapes the writings of Paul.[37] The apostle carefully builds upon the divine revelation given to the prophets, integrating the new revelation he received into the framework of the old.[38] In Paul's theological framework, each stage of revelation builds upon and points forward to the next, without annulling, reinterpreting, or redefining the previous stage.[39] Unconditional

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[32] J. Gordon McConville, *Isaiah*, eds. Mark J. Boda and J. Gordon McConville, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2023), 246–247.

[33] R. Kendall Soulen, *Irrevocable: The Name of God and the Unity of the Christian Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2022), 93.

[34] Snyder, *Salvation Means Creation Healed*, 127.

[35] Parker, "The Israel-Christ-Church Relationship," 63–67.

[36] Peter R. Ackroyd, *Exile and Restoration: A Study of Hebrew Thought of the Sixth Century B.C.* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1968), 131.

[37] One of the key differences between how NT writers, such as Paul, read the OT compared to their non-Christian Jewish contemporaries is the adoption of a salvation-historical framework. Paul specifically emphasizes reading the pivotal moments in OT history in their chronological sequence, especially in light of the Christ-event, drawing interpretive insights from that order. This approach reflects Paul's reliance on the unfolding nature of redemptive history, as seen elsewhere in, for instance, Romans 4, where the sequence of events holds theological significance. See, G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, "Introduction," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), xxvi.

[38] Chou elaborates on three key elements to demonstrate that the apostolic hermeneutic is in continuity with the OT prophetic tradition. First, the introductory formulas used by NT authors reflect a deliberate connection to the language and authority of OT prophets. Second, their self-descriptions as spokesmen of God emphasize their role within the same divine commission, aligning themselves with the prophetic office. Finally, their intertextual practices, where they frequently engage and interpret OT texts, reveal a deep alignment with the prophetic tradition rather than charting an independent or divergent course. This continuity underscores the coherence of Scripture and the unity of divine revelation (*The Hermeneutics of the Biblical Writers*, 125–54).

[39] Contra George Eldon Ladd whose position on Israel and the church revolves around the idea of continuity between OT Israel and the NT church. Ladd argues that Paul sees the church as the *true Israel of God*, continuous with OT Israel, and that the church has inherited the promises given to Israel through Christ, the Messiah. In this view, the church represents the people of God, and the redemptive work of Jesus

OT prophecies and promises, if unfulfilled even in the NT era, must still be fulfilled to their original recipients, as the progression of revelation cannot negate such promises.[40] This progressive unfolding of God's redemptive plan regards Scripture as a continuous, interconnected narrative from creation to consummation, in which Israel remains Israel—an ethnic nation—and her covenantal promises remain intact.[41] If Israel, as Soulen argues, plays a role in the eschaton by serving as "the instrument by means of which God heals the fundamental conflict between God and creation,"[42] then redefining Israel to mean something other than the ethnic nation of the OT would create a disjointed storyline.

As a devout and learned Jew, Paul diligently sought to demonstrate that the Christian message aligned with the testimony of Scripture, especially concerning the nature and actions of Israel's God, including the promise of His *mercy* toward Israel in the last days.[43] Like the OT prophets, Paul understood God's salvific and restorative mercy as inseparable from His covenant faithfulness to Israel. Therefore, Paul employs Israel's Scripture in Romans 9–11 to address Israel's role, status quo, and destiny according to the overarching biblical narrative. Paul's assurance is rooted in the fact that Israel, "from the standpoint of God's choice … are beloved for the sake of the fathers" (Rom 11:28b).

As Cranfield explains, "The ground of Paul's certainty that the Jews are still beloved of God, though under His wrath because of their unbelief and opposition to the gospel, is the faithfulness of God, that faithfulness, steadfastness, reliability, without which God would not be the righteous God He is."[44] This faithfulness serves as the driving force behind Paul's entire argument in Romans 9–11. Accordingly, Paul's aim is to affirm that "the word of God has not failed" (Rom 9:6a), encapsulating his endeavor to demonstrate from Scripture God's enduring mercy and covenantal commitment to Israel.

God reveals his mercy through salvific acts. Bruce Corley highlights that Paul's extensive use of the theme of divine mercy in Romans 9–11 parallels the Hebrew term חֶסֶד (*hesed*), emphasizing God's steadfast love and covenant loyalty. Despite Israel's covenant-breaking, which brought judgment, God's *hesed* ensures the

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fulfills the promises made to Israel. Ladd points out that Paul's use of the OT is not about a direct one-to-one fulfillment of prophecy but rather integrating the new redemptive events into the broader stream of OT redemptive history (*A Theology of the New Testament*, ed. Donald A. Hagner, Revised ed. [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993], 432–34). In contrast, John S. Feinberg's approach, rooted in progressive revelation, maintains a more distinct separation between Israel and the church. Feinberg argues that unconditional OT promises made to Israel, especially those unfulfilled in the NT, must still be fulfilled to Israel specifically. While he acknowledges that some prophecies may apply to the church, the original promises to Israel cannot be canceled or subsumed into the church's identity ("Systems of Discontinuity," in *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship between the Old and New Testaments: Essays in Honor of S. Lewis Johnson, Jr.*, edited by John S. Feinberg (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1988), 76.

[40] Feinberg, "Systems of Discontinuity," 76.

[41] See, Michael J. Vlach, *Has the Church Replaced Israel? A Theological Evaluation* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2010), 92–101.

[42] Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology*, 115.

[43] Stanley, *Arguing With Scripture*, 1.

[44] Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 2:582.

restoration of Israel (11:25–26).[45] The OT consistently underscores God's mercy toward Israel in the past providing a strong theological basis for expecting the same mercy in the future.[46] For Paul, the theme of mercy assumes an eschatological dimension when applied to Israel.[47] Paul's hope, thus, is rooted in God's character and unwavering covenantal faithfulness to Israel.

In summary, for Paul history is fundamentally salvation history, with his exegesis firmly grounded in the biblical storyline and Israel's central role to the unfolding of God's redemptive plan. In Romans 9–11, where Israel's role and future have become points of confusion, Paul meticulously employs a wide range of scriptural references to reaffirm Israel's standing as a nation. His convictions rest on "his stubborn insistence on God's enduring faithfulness to his covenant people Israel."[48] Paul's objective is to reconcile Israel's current unbelief with God's unwavering promises, demonstrating from Scripture that Israel remains integral to God's redemptive purposes and the ultimate consummation of history—a biblical hope he thoroughly substantiates through the prophecies of Isaiah.

Paul, the Prophecy of Isaiah, and Restoration Eschatology

Paul demonstrates a profound theological affinity for the prophecy of Isaiah,[49] as evidenced by his frequent references to this prophet throughout his writings.[50] Isaiah stands out as "the most substantively important scriptural source for Paul,"[51] significantly shaping his theology concerning Israel and the nations in the eschaton. As Hays explains, "Isaiah offers the clearest expression in the Old Testament of a universalistic, eschatological vision in which the restoration of Israel in Zion is accompanied by an ingathering of Gentiles to worship the Lord."[52]

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[45] Bruce Corley, "Jews, the Future, and God (Romans 9–11)," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 19 (1976): 46. For a thorough study on the concept of "mercy" in Romans, see Ligita Ryliškytė, "God's Mercy: The Key Thematic Undercurrent of Paul's Letter to the Romans," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 81 (2019): 85–105.

[46] E.g., Exod 34:6–7; Deut 4:31; Ps 103:8–10; Isa 54:7–8; Hos 2:23; Ezek 36:22–24; and Mic 7:18–19.

[47] Ultimately, whether for Jews or Gentiles, all are saved by God's mercy, but Israel's experience of mercy is especially rooted in God's covenant promises, making clear that their future salvation and restoration are, in the end, entirely acts of mercy (Rom 9:22–24; 11:30-32). Also, His mercy toward Israel is a reaffirmation of His covenant with them, showing that His faithfulness will eventually lead to their restoration (Romans 11:26–27). See Baker, "The Faithfulness of God and the Priority of Israel in Paul's Letter to the Romans," 14.

[48] J. Ross Wagner, *Heralds of the Good News: Isaiah and Paul in Concert un the Letter to the Romans* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 5.

[49] John F. A. Sawyer, *Isaiah Through the* Centuries, Wiley Blackwell Bible Commentaries, eds. John F. A. Sawyer, Christopher Rowland, Judith Kovacs, and David M. Gunn (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell, 2018), 3.

[50] Romans contains the highest concentration of quotations from and allusions to Isaiah. Out of the 21 references to Isaiah in Romans, 15 are found in chapters 9–11 alone. See Ellis, *Paul's Use of the Old Testament*, 150–51. For an overview of Paul's use of Isaiah, see Steven P. Sullivan, *The Isaianic New Exodus in Romans 9–11: A Biblical and Theological Study of Paul's Use of Isaiah in Romans* (Silverton, OR: Lampion, 2007), 106–22. Furthermore, Isaiah himself is explicitly named as a speaker four times in Romans 9–11 and one time in Romans 15 Romans 9:27–28; 9:29; 10:16; 10:20–21; 15:12.

[51] Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 162.

[52] Hays, 162.

Several observations can be drawn from Hays' comment. First, Isaiah's vision of the eschatological kingdom maintains clear distinctions between national identities and does not depict a "new Israel" that incorporates both believing Jews and Gentiles in Christ.[53] If one essential aspect of defining a nation is an "identifiable ethnic core,"[54] Isaiah preserves this identification when Israel is restored in the eschaton. Second, another defining feature of a nation is its "historic homeland."[55] When God dwells in Zion, the city is *not* "changed and transformed" into "the whole new creation,"[56] but remains distinct as the historic and beloved city of God.[57] The term "Zion" has consistently retained this topographical denotation throughout various eras of biblical history.[58] In Isaiah, from a macrocosmic perspective, the entire cosmos constitutes the realm of God's kingdom; however, from a more focused vantage point, Zion serves as its microcosm and capital, the designated place where God will dwell as King.[59] Isaiah preserves the distinct identities of people and place in the eschaton without redefining or transforming them.

This view of the eschaton makes Isaiah a foundational source for Paul's articulation, particularly in Romans, where he engages with his eschatological vision to expound on God's redemptive plan for Israel and the nations. Isaiah shaped Paul's framework of restoration eschatology.

Restoration Eschatology and the New Exodus

Restoration eschatology is a post-exilic belief that addresses Israel's hope of salvation and restoration. As Michael F. Bird elucidates, it is "the belief that God would intervene and establish a better dispensation for Israel in light of circumstances that did not reflect the grand promises of peace and prosperity pledged in Israel's sacred traditions."[60] The core tenets of restoration eschatology include: "the re-establishment of the twelve tribes, the advent of a messianic figure (or figures) to defeat Israel's enemies and reign in righteousness, a new or purified temple, the establishment of pure worship and righteous people, the return of Yahweh to Zion, abundant prosperity, a renewed covenant and the subjugation or admission of the Gentiles."[61] These eschatological hopes, grounded in Isaiah and the prophets, were so pervasive across Jewish sects that they represented a collective and widely shared

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[53] Contra the conclusions of Andrew T. Abernethy, *The Book of Isaiah and God's Kingdom: A Thematic—Theological Approach*, ed. D. A. Carson, vol. 40, New Studies in Biblical Theology (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2016), 197.

[54] Kim, *The Multinational Kingdom in Isaiah*, 9–16.

[55] Kim, 9–16.

[56] Contra the conclusions of Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant: A Biblical Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 468.

[57] Ps 87:23; 132:13–14; Isa 2:3; 62:1–2; Joel 3:16–17; Zech 8:3.

[58] Jon D. Levenson, "Zion Traditions," *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1098–99.

[59] Abernethy, *The Book of Isaiah and God's Kingdom*, 198.

[60] Michael F. Bird, *Jesus and the Origins of the Gentile Mission* (New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 26. Also, Wagner, *Heralds of the Good News*, 29–33.

[61] Wagner, *Heralds of the Good News*, 27. For further elaboration on these themes and their interpretive background, see Pablo T. Gadenz, *Called from the Jews and from the Gentiles: Pauline Ecclesiology in Romans 9–11* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 41–56.

vision for Israel's future restoration.[62] At its heart, restoration eschatology encapsulates Israel's hope of a *new exodus*.

For Israel, the original exodus event serves as the foundational, identity-defining moment in her history.[63] In this pivotal event, God's covenantal faithfulness, His power to deliver, guide, protect, judge, and restore is vividly displayed.[64] Yet, as Israel falls into idolatry, she faces the consequences of disobedience—subjugation by foreign powers and exile from the promised land.[65] To regain God's favor, Israel must repent and return to Yahweh (Deut 28–30).[66] Israel's collective repentance sets in motion the fulfillment of God's redemptive plan, ushering in times of refreshing, the coming of the Messiah, and the full realization of the blessings promised in the Abrahamic covenant.[67] OT prophets framed Israel's ultimate return from exile as a new exodus, heralding a new and lasting era of divine redemption.[68] This era "will be parallel to Israel's earliest history, a new exodus resulting in a new Israel and a new covenant."[69]

Like the first exodus, the new exodus is not only about deliverance from whatever impedes Israel's relationship with God, but also about her flourishing and well-being in the land.[70] It promises the full restoration of *shalom*—wholeness, peace, and prosperity—in covenantal communion with God.[71] In this way, the new exodus ushers in the Messianic age, marking the end of Israel's exile and bringing unprecedented fertility and abundance to the land.[72] It foretells a period of secure habitation, agricultural fruitfulness, abundant prosperity, and Messianic *shalom*. In essence, the new exodus encapsulates Israel's restoration in its fullest and most comprehensive sense, along with its profound implications for the cosmos.

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[62] E. P. Sanders provides extensive extrabiblical literature that supports the concept of Jewish restoration eschatology. He categorizes his citations into three sections: non-biblical literature from the pre-Roman period that continued to be read and used, Palestinian literature of the Roman era, and Diaspora Jewish literature. See, E. P. Sanders, *Judaism: Practice and Belief: 63 BCE–66 CE* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2016), 473–86.

[63] Rikk E. Watts, "Exodus Imagery," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Prophet*, edited by Mark J. Boda and Gordon J. McConville (Downers Grove, IL; InterVarsity, 2012), 205.

[64] Numerous poetic and prophetic texts reflect on the Exodus, using it as a paradigm for God's redemptive actions and covenantal faithfulness. Examples include passages such as Ps 78:12–53; 105:23–45; 106:6–12; Isa 11:15–16; Jer 7:22; 34:13; Ezek 20:5, 36; Hos 2:15; 11:1; Amos 3:1; as well as Mic 6:4; 7:14–15.

[65] The following passages form a consistent theme in Deuteronomy, where idolatry leads to exile and scattering, serving as both a warning and a consequence for Israel's disobedience: Deut 4:25–27; 28:36, 63–64; 29:24–28.

[66] Cf., Isa 59–60; Jer 24:6–7; 29:12–14; Ezek 36:24–28; and Hos 14:1–4.

[67] Charles H. Talbert, *Reading Acts: A Literary and Theological Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, Rev. ed., Reading the New Testament Series (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2005), 39–41.

[68] Nicholas G. Piotrowski, "The Exodus," in *Dictionary of the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, eds. G. K. Beale, D. A. Carson, Benjamin L. Gladd, and Andrew David Naselli (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2023), 237.

[69] Bill T. Arnold, "Old Testament Eschatology and the Rise of Apocalypticism," in *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology*, ed. Jerry L. Walls (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 28.

[70] Middleton, *A New Heaven and New Earth*, 86. Also, Piotrowski, "The Exodus," 237.

[71] Soulen, *The God of Israel and Christian Theology*, 130–31. E.g., Isa 2:4; 11:1–9; 35:1–10; 54:10; Ezek 34:25–31; 37:26; Zech 9:9–10; Mic 4:1–8; Joel 3:18.

[72] Antonine DeGuglielmo, "Fertility of the Land in the Messianic Prophecies," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, no. 3 (1957): 307.

Israel's return from the Babylonian exile did not bring about the idealized restoration she had longed for. Post-exilic prophets such as Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi reaffirmed this reality, pointing to Israel's glorious restoration as a future hope yet to be realized.[73] Consequently, Israel came to perceive herself as living in a state of ongoing exile, a condition that defined her status quo. This enduring state shifted her expectations of deliverance and restoration from the present to the eschatological age to come.[74] N. T. Wright explains, "The present age is still part of the 'age of wrath'; until the Gentiles are put in their place and Israel, and the Temple, fully restored, the exile is not really over, and the blessings promised by the prophets are still to take place."[75] Peter R. Ackroyd describes the new age as one "of cosmic significance"; it "involves not simply the final establishment of God's promises to Israel, but a complete renewal of the life of the world."[76] This comprehensive transformation will be brought about through the new exodus.

The new exodus stands as the solution to Israel's exilic condition, providing the pathway to her permanent restoration with profound implications for the nations and the entire cosmos.[77] Isaiah weaves restoration promises so thoroughly into his prophecy, leading several scholars to propose the new exodus as the prophet's dominant theme.[78] In Isaiah's prophecy, Yahweh is depicted as a Redeemer (kinsman) who restores Israel—His "family"—and assumes responsibility for purchasing her back.[79] Yahweh will also return as a *divine warrior* to subdue primordial chaos, asserting His universal kingship from Zion, safeguarding Israel from all natural or historical threats to its security and welfare by ushering in a new era (Isa 24–27; 59–60).[80]

Isaiah's portrayal of Yahweh's victorious actions culminates in the final restoration of Israel,[81] where the promises of the new covenant are fully realized.[82] This realization is "a reversal of the words of doom on the basis of the bond with his people which God is willing to maintain."[83] In this new era, a Davidic king will reign,[84] and

[73] C. Marvin Pate et al., *The Story of Israel: A Biblical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 99–103.

[74] N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God: Christian Origins and the Question of God* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1992), 301.

[75] Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 270.

[76] Ackroyd, *Exile and Restoration*, 251.

[77] Piotrowski, "The Exodus," 238.

[78] Faith Elizabeth Lund, "'Out of Egypt': The Exodus Motif in the New Testament," (PhD Dissertation: Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, 2018), 51. Also, Sullivan, *The Isaianic New Exodus in Romans*, 28–33.

[79] Prevallet, "The Use of the New Exodus in Interpreting History," 143.

[80] Theodore Hiebert, "Divine Warrior," in *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 878.

[81] Scott C. Ryan, "Cosmic Conflict and the Divine Warrior in Paul's Letter to the Romans," (PhD Dissertation: Baylor University Press, 2017), 115–157.

[82] Jeremiah 31:31–34 outlines the promises of the New Covenant for Israel, including an internal transformation where God's law is written on their hearts, a restored personal relationship, a universal knowledge of God, and the full forgiveness of sins. (C.f. Isa 55:3; 59:20–21; and Jer 32:40)

[83] Ackroyd, *Exile and Restoration*, 61.

[84] Isa 9:6–7, 11:1–5, Jer 23:5–6, 33:14–17.

Zion, refashioned in all its glory, becomes the center of the universe,[85] reflecting the fulfillment of God's redemptive purposes for Israel, the nations, and all creation.

In summary, Isaiah profoundly shaped Israel's eschatological hope, portraying Yahweh as the coming King and divine warrior who will save and restore Israel to the land, reign from Zion, and ultimately set all things right. This restoration, however, is contingent upon Israel's repentance. Once restored, Israel's renewal will bring unprecedented blessings for the entire world. Isaiah 59 and 27 vividly capture these eschatological events. Paul, drawing on these prophetic texts, integrates Isaiah 59:20–21 and 27:9 into Romans 11:26, emphasizing the promise of Israel's salvation and its global impact (Rom 11:12, 15). In the Jewish worldview of Paul's time, salvation was understood as the fulfillment of past divine promises culminating in future restoration.[86] There is no compelling evidence to suggest that Paul deviated from this perspective regarding Israel that Isaiah emphasized.

Paul, Isaiah 59 and 27, and Israel's Restoration in Romans 11:26

Like the prophet Isaiah, Paul, in Romans 11:26–27, uses Scripture to build upon and reinforce the continuity of the biblical storyline rather than fragment it.[87] In revealing the μυστήριον (mystery) about Israel in Romans 11:25,[88] Paul ensures that "the storyline continues in a straightforward way,"[89] not contradicting but building upon previous revelation. This continuity reflects Paul's Jewish interpretive assumptions, which affirmed the internal consistency of Scripture, the significance of every inspired word, the absence of secondary meanings, and the necessity of interpreting each passage within its context.[90] These interpretive assumptions challenge the view that "the OT authors intended to communicate typologically,"[91] a perspective that, as Mark W. Karlberg argues, "rules out any additional literal fulfillment of the land promise in a future restoration of national Israel subsequent to

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[85] Isa 2:2–4, 60:1–3, 19–22, 65:17–19. See also, Elaine Marie Prevallet, "The Use of the New Exodus in Interpreting History," *Concordia Theological Monthly*, no. 37 (1966): 140–41.

[86] Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 300.

[87] Isaiah skillfully engages previous sacred texts, particularly the Torah and Psalms, weaving them into his prophetic message with a unique lyrical style that enhances their relevance for his audience. He integrates Israel's foundational stories—creation, exodus, and covenant—into a vision of restoration. This layered use of tradition creates a dynamic narrative that aligns Isaiah's message with the overarching biblical storyline of God's redemptive plan. See Gary Edward Schnittjer, *Old Testament Use of Old Testament: A Book-by-Book Guide* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2021), 215–219.

[88] The mystery consists of three key components: first, a partial hardening has occurred to Israel; second, this hardening will persist until God's work with the Gentiles is complete; and third, in this manner, all Israel will be saved. See, Michael J. Vlach, "A Non-Typological Future-Mass-Conversion View," in *Three Views on Israel and the Church: Perspectives on Romans 9–11*, ed. Jared Compton and Andrew David Naselli (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2018), 63.

[89] Vlach, "A Non-Typological Future-Mass-Conversion View," 63.

[90] Contrary to the common perception of Paul's exegesis as somewhat arbitrary, David Instone-Brewer's extensive study of first-century Jewish scribal practices offers substantial, albeit indirect, evidence supporting Paul's contextual engagement with the OT. By examining over a hundred exegeses preserved in rabbinic literature likely originating before 70 CE, Brewer's research suggests that any assumption of Paul's indifference to the contextual subtleties of his scriptural citations may, in fact, overlook his role as a precise and deliberate first-century Jewish exegete. See, David Instone Brewer, *Techniques and Assumptions in Jewish Exegesis before 70 CE* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1992), 163–71.

[91] Zaspel and Hamilton Jr., "A Typological Future-Mass-Conversion View," 75.

or alongside the messianic fulfillment."[92] However, as Michael Vlach suggests, if "Scripture lays out a storyline whereby Israel, Israel's land, nations, temples, physical blessings, and other tangible matters are important," then "types in the Bible do not overturn the significance of these."[93] Based on his interpretive assumptions, Paul would align with, rather than go against, the flow of the biblical storyline.

Paul cites the OT to clarify how the biblical storyline unfolds. Given Paul's familiarity with Isaiah, it is reasonable to argue that his conflation of Isaiah 59:20–21 and 27:9 in Romans 11:26–27 was both deliberate and essential to explaining and supporting the overarching biblical storyline. These two Isaianic texts share key themes—as described below— that align with Paul's theological argument, suggesting that his combination of them was an *ad hoc* synthesis aimed at affirming Israel's future salvation.[94] Beneath Paul's citations lies a rich historical and theological context, one saturated with the hope of restoration eschatology.

Context of Isaiah 59 and 27

Isaiah 24–27 and 59–60 also share significant theological, intertextual, and thematic parallels concerning Israel, the nations, and the cosmos, with Israel as the central focus.[95] In both sections, Isaiah preserves Israel's national identity without transforming it into a "new Israel" that includes Gentiles. Isaiah envisions a future kingdom where Israel and the nations coexist in harmony, worshiping Yahweh in Zion. These passages present a unified storyline in which Yahweh, depicted as the divine warrior, delivers Israel from sin and exile, regathers the scattered people, and reigns victoriously from Zion.[96]

In their context, Isaiah 59 and 27 are fundamentally eschatological. Shum observes that Isaiah 59:20–21 and 27:9 "resemble each other considerably in that each envisions Israel's eschatological *revival* and *re-acceptance* by Yahweh, characterized by the removal of the nation's lawlessness and ungodliness."[97] They predict a complete, national transformation and renewal of Israel, intricately tied to the inauguration of the new exodus. However, as noted above, the new exodus necessitates Israel's collective acknowledgment of the sins that have estranged her from God, followed by a genuine return to Him in repentance. Only then, as outlined in Deuteronomy 30:1–10, does God intervene redemptively.[98] Isaiah 59 prophetically encapsulates this process, presenting a structure with three distinct parts: the indictment of Israel's sin (vv. 1–8), Israel's confession (vv. 9–15a), and God's intervention though a Redeemer (vv. 15b–21).[99] At the heart of this chapter is the

[92] Mark W. Karlberg, "The Significance of Israel in Biblical Typology," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 31, no. 3 (1988): 259–60.

[93] Michael J. Vlach, *Dispensational Hermeneutics* (Las Vegas, NV: Theological Studies Press, 2023), 92.

[94] Shum, *Paul's Use of Isaiah*, 239.

[95] For a detailed exegesis and synthesis of these chapters, see Cherif Arif, "The Eschatological Influence of Isaiah 59:20–21 and 27:9 on Paul in Romans 11:26–27 Supporting the Future Salvation and Restoration of National/Ethnic Israel" (PhD. Dissertation: The Master's Seminary, 2023), 220–318.

[96] Sullivan, *The Isaianic New Exodus in Romans 9–11*, 361.

[97] Shum, *Paul's Use of Isaiah in the Letter to the Romans*, 240. (Emphasis mine)

[98] Sullivan, *The Isaianic New Exodus in Romans 9–11*, 370.

[99] Shalom M. Paul, *Isaiah 40–66: Translation and Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 497.

role of the Redeemer, Israel's Messiah, [100] who will intervene decisively in history to reclaim, redeem, and restore the nation.

Isaiah 27 describes similar themes, focusing on God's dealings with Israel's exilic condition and its ultimate resolution in the eschaton. Within its eschatological context,[101] Isaiah 27:9 highlights two key truths: Israel's exile will come to an end, and her sins will be atoned for. Moo observes how Isaiah 27, like Isaiah 59:20–60:7, predicts Yahweh's deliverance of "Jacob"—Israel—from exile and sin, restoring the scattered people to their own city, Zion.[102] Israel's exile is intended as a disciplinary measure within the framework of her covenant relationship with Yahweh.[103] Through this exilic condition, God orchestrates the atonement of Israel's sin. Gary V. Smith clarifies, "This does not mean that suffering brings atonement of sin, but that the process of suffering brings a person to the place where sins are recognized and confessed so that God can forgive them."[104] Thus, national recognition of sin and repentance become indispensable steps in Israel's lasting transformation and thus restoration.

Israel's transformation, as Paul declares, involves submission to God's righteousness in Christ (Rom 10:3–4). Isaiah 59:12–15 depicts Israel confessing her unrighteousness, caused by her iniquities and spiritual blindness, which prompts God's intervention to bring salvation. His intervention is certain (59:16). Israel's estrangement from God will come to an end, and all will be set right through her full restoration (60–62). Paul House explains that, "If the people's renewal depended on themselves, their leaders, and their allies all would be lost. Since Yahweh has determined to set things right, however, hope abides. He will redeem…. He will send the Messiah as His covenant. He will renew His people."[105] Paul reflects this radical change in Romans 11:12, envisioning Israel's πλήρωμα (fullness),[106] a condition that signifies the reversal of her ἥττημα (failure).

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[100] Isaiah 59 presents a unified vision of the Messiah, the Servant, and the new Davidic King as central to the fulfillment of God's eschatological covenant (59:20–21). The covenant, entirely initiated by God, is embodied in the Servant, who acts as a "covenant to the nations" (Isa 42:6; 49:8) and brings restoration to Israel and the Gentiles. Anointed by the Spirit, the Davidic Messiah fulfills this role, proclaiming God's truth with divine authority and establishing a kingdom of righteousness and peace. The Servant's faithful ministry produces a transformed "offspring," comprising repentant followers from Israel and the nations, justified by his sacrificial work (Isa 53:10–11). This eschatological renewal culminates in the complete restoration of creation, fulfilling the promises of the Davidic covenant and showcasing God's sovereignty, grace, and ultimate plan for redemption. See Smith, *Isaiah 40–66*, 605–6.

[101] The structural marker בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא (on that day) appears four times in Isaiah 27:1, 2, 12, and 13, while הַבָּאִים (in the days to come) appears once in 27:6. These markers, common in prophetic literature, point to a distant future event. They also serve to make Isaiah 27 a cohesive unit, with verse 6 functioning as its thematic center.

[102] Moo, *The Letter to the Romans*, 743.

[103] Lev 26:33–34; Deut 28:64–65; Jer 30:11; Ezek 20:37–38.

[104] Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah 1–39*, The New American Commentary, ed. E. Ray Clendenen (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2007), 463.

[105] Paul R. House, *Isaiah: A Mentor Commentary* (Ross-shire: Mentor, 2018), 2:606–7.

[106] The New Jerusalem Bible and the NET Bible translate the word πλήρωμα (pleroma) as "restoration" to capture the theological significance of Israel's reversal from failure to fullness.

At the heart of the biblical storyline, Israel's πλήρωμα represents "nothing less than a restoration of Israel as a people to faith, privilege, and blessing,"[107] Accordingly, the atonement of Israel's sin in Isaiah 27:9 marks her transition from alienation to renewed communion with God, transforming her condition from exile to restoration (27:12–13).[108] In sum, Isaiah 27, particularly in the vineyard song (27:2–6),[109] portrays a reversal of Israel's status—from a state of ailment to one of permanent healing and flourishing. This transformation, with evident cosmic consequences,[110] is brought about through Yahweh's intervention and sovereign initiative.[111] Isaiah 27:12–13 "conclude both chapter 27 and the larger corpus, chapters 24–27, on a note of promise and restoration of the people of Israel on Mount Zion."[112] Hoping in God's promises necessitates the assurance that these promises cannot fail. Paul held firmly to this hope.

Israel's Eschatological Hope and Paul's Missiology

The realization of Israel's eschatological hope, as presented in Isaiah 59 and 27, aligns closely with Paul's mission as an apostle to the Gentiles. In Romans 11:13–14, Paul emphasizes his ministry as a means to provoke Israel to jealousy (Rom 11:11), drawing on Deuteronomy 32:21 (also cited in Romans 10:19), a passage that profoundly shapes his view of God's plan of salvation.[113] Moses' song in Deuteronomy 32 influenced Paul not only in its motif of jealousy but also in its themes of Israel's election, fall, and ultimate salvation, alongside the inclusion of the Gentiles.[114] For Paul, the present salvation of some Israelites serves as a foretaste of Israel's ultimate restoration, when, as envisioned in Deuteronomy 32:43 (also cited in Romans 15:10), both Israel and the nations will together praise God in Zion—a vision further elaborated in Isaiah 60–62. This led James M. Scott to perceive that, "the restoration (salvation) of Israel is the driving force of Paul's whole endeavor,

[107] John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the Old and New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), 2:79. The New Jerusalem Bible (NJB) and the New English Translation (NET) both convey the nuance of πλήρωμα by translating it as "restoration," effectively capturing its theological significance.

[108] J. Gordon McConville, *Isaiah*, ed. Mark J. Boda and J. Gordon McConville, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2023), 312.

[109] Isaiah 27:2–6 presents a hopeful song symbolizing God's care for His vineyard, representing Israel, in contrast to an earlier depiction of destruction (5:5–6). The song is a celebration of God's future goodness to Israel. In this passage, also, God promises unwavering protection, nurturing, and fruitfulness for the vineyard, eliminating threats like thorns and briers, which symbolize opposition to His work. See Smith, *Isaiah 40–66*, 458–61.

[110] The restoration of Israel involves the reconciliation of the nations to God (Isa 25:6–7), the defeat of death (25:8), the destruction of Leviathan (27:1), and the flourishing of Israel, which will be acknowledged by the entire world (27:6, 12–13).

[111] Shum, *Paul's Use of Isaiah*, 241.

[112] Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah: A Commentary*, The Old Testament Library, ed. William P. Brown, Carol A. Newsom, and Brent A. Strawn, 1st ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 194.

[113] Richard H. Bell, *Provoked by Jealousy: The Origin and Purpose of the Jealousy Motif in Romans 9–11* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1994), 285.

[114] Bell, *Provoked by Jealousy*, 285.

and the nations participate in that restoration."[115] Like many of his contemporaries,[116] Paul articulates his expectation through a fervent hope and prayer for Israel's ultimate salvation (Rom 10:1).

Paul's hope for Israel's salvation is rooted in the assurance that God's call to the nation is irrevocable (Rom 11:26, 29). The adjective ἀμεταμέλητος (irrevocable), describing Israel's calling, denotes "something one does not take back."[117] When God calls, the determination to save is irreversible. His calling is rooted in His eternal decree, yet His salvation occurs in time as He effectually calls those whom He has chosen. In Romans 9–11, the future tense of σῴζω (to save) portrays Israel's salvation as still in the future.[118] Scott contends that σῴζω inherently echoes "OT expectations of Israel's restoration."[119] Notably, the Septuagint (LXX) of Isaiah, Paul's primary source of citations in Romans 9–11, also employs σῴζω in the future tense within contexts anticipating Israel's restoration.[120] Accordingly, Israel's soteriology transcends the present age, envisioning her future salvation as "the eschatological denouement that will do full justice to God's righteousness and the plight of his chosen people."[121] This ultimate denouement finds its expression in the fulfillment of Israel's OT restoration promises.[122] Israel's salvation is incomplete without her restoration.

Furthermore, as Isaac W. Oliver argues, Paul's closest companion, Luke, articulated Israel's salvation in comprehensive restorative terms—encompassing freedom from exile and all forms of oppression, whether spiritual, physical, political, social, or economic.[123] Luke, recognized as an Isaianic scholar, demonstrates a deep awareness of Isaiah's context and broader theological message, as reflected in his frequent quotations and allusions to the book.[124] Luke's view of Israel in the eschaton encompasses the fulfillment of restoration promises. It is unlikely that Paul held a contrary or even slightly differing view. For both, Luke and Paul, "the divine promises of restoration recorded in the Jewish Scripture would in the end be fulfilled to Israel in the manner that concerned Israel."[125] Paul and Luke's shared perspective highlights God's unwavering integrity in fulfilling the promises He made to Israel through His covenants (Rom 9:4–6), emphasizing the consistency of His redemptive plan.

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[115] James M. Scott, "And then All Israel will be Saved (Rom 11:26)," in *Restoration: Old Testament, Jewish, and Christian Perspectives*, ed. James M. Scott (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 521.

[116] Stefan C. Reif, "Some Notions of Restoration in Early Rabbinic Prayers," in *Restoration: Old Testament, Jewish, and Christian Perspectives*, ed. James M. Scott (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 281–304.

[117] William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 53.

[118] The verb σῴζω is used five times in Romans: 9:27; 10:9; 10:13; 11:14; and 11:26.

[119] Scott, "And then All Israel will be Saved (Rom 11:26)," 522.

[120] Arif, "The Eschatological Influence of Isaiah 59:20–21 and 27:9 on Paul in Romans 11:26–27," 389–97.

[121] Robert W. Yarbrough, "The Theology of Romans in Future Tense," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology*, no. 11 (2007): 54.

[122] For more evidence supporting the future restoration of Israel in Romans 11, see Arif, "The Eschatological Influence of Isaiah 59:20–21 and 27:9 on Paul in Romans 11:26–27," 406–30.

[123] Isaac W. Oliver, *Luke's Jewish Eschatology: The National Restoration of Israel in Luke–Acts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 140.

[124] David Seccombe, "Luke and Isaiah" *The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts?: Essays on the Use of the Old Testament in the New*, ed. G. K. Beale (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1994), 248–56.

[125] Oliver, *Luke's Jewish Eschatology*, 146.

Accordingly, despite Israel's hardening, Paul remains confident in Israel's future salvation, standing on the assurance that God has not forsaken His people whom He foreknew (Rom 11:1). Paul's confidence is rooted in the conviction that "divine foreknowledge and reversal of election would be a contradiction in terms."[126] It is implausible that God's election could fail or fall short of achieving its purposes. Accordingly, Paul views Israel's hardening as both partial and temporary.[127] While the majority of Israel has rejected the gospel, a small λεῖμμα (remnant) remains, chosen and preserved by grace (Rom 11:5), serving as a testament to God's faithfulness and the warrant of His redemptive plan.

For Paul, the preservation of the remnant extends beyond the present, anticipating a future in which the remnant transforms into a nation, fully devoted to worshiping Yahweh, as envisioned in Isaiah 59 and 27. In this way, the remnant functions as the firstfruits, guaranteeing the promise of a full harvest. While the existence of the remnant reflects a present judgment, this judgment is not final but destined to be reversed. The remnant, therefore, is a temporary phenomenon that points to a future reality when God's redemptive work for Israel is completed, serving as a testimony to His sovereignty and mercy.[128] As Gottlob Schrenk observes, the remnant plays a critical role in God's plan of salvation, contributing to "the re-adoption, the salvation of all Israel."[129] Thus, Israel's hardening is not permanent; it endures only "until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in" (Rom 11:25). At that appointed time, Paul declares "all Israel will be saved" (11:26), signaling the end of Israel's hardening and the full realization of God's enduring covenant promises of restoring the nation, as promised in Isaiah 59 and 27.

Conclusion

Isaiah 59–60 vividly portray the realization of a radical, national transformation of Israel with far-reaching international and cosmic implications. Isaiah 59:20 aligns this transformation with Yahweh's coming to judge, redeem, and reign as King from Zion. As the centerpiece of Isaiah 56–66, Isaiah 60 emphasizes two key dynamics of Yahweh's kingship: first, Zion is established as the dwelling place of Yahweh's radiant glory, where His majesty is magnificently displayed; second, the unmatched splendor of Yahweh's glory draws all nations to Zion, where they offer praise and tribute, acknowledging Him as the supreme and universal King.[130]

This vision reflects a multinational paradigm of the messianic kingdom, maintaining national and territorial distinctions between Israel and the nations.[131] In this way, Isaiah 59–60 suggest an inaugurated new exodus, culminating in "the

[126] Michael A. Grisanti, "The Progress of God's Program for Jews and Gentiles as Pictured in Romans Eleven" (ThM Thesis: Central Baptist Theological Seminary, 1986), 39.

[127] Fitzmyer, *Romans*, 621.

[128] Lester V. Meyer, "Remnant," in *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 671.

[129] Gottlob Schrenk, "Λεῖμμα," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 203.

[130] Abernethy, *The Book of Isaiah and God's Kingdom*, 106.

[131] Kim, *The Multinational Kingdom in Isaiah*, 88–92.

enthronement of Yahweh in a restored Jerusalem-Zion."[132] This hope is echoed in Isaiah 24–27,[133] where Yahweh's enthronement through a righteous Davidic king brings restoration on personal, national, and global scales.[134]

Paul's conflation of Isaiah 59:20–21 and 27:9 highlights his focus on Israel's restoration and God's unwavering faithfulness to redeem His people.[135] This is not a reliance on isolated proof texts but a reflection of Isaiah's comprehensive vision of restoration, a theme reinforced by other prophetic writings. Paul further demonstrates that Israel's future πλήρωμα (fullness) will bring extraordinary blessings to the world, aligning with Isaiah 27:6, which envisions the thriving of the nation, and its fruit will fill the whole world.[136]

For such a radical societal and cosmic transformation to occur, God must "restore Israel to the promised land, rebuild cities, and make Israel's new status a witness to the nations."[137] In other words, Israel's restoration is the initial step of cosmic consummation (Rom 11:15). As part of this cosmic consummation, the OT anticipates Gentiles ultimately streaming to Jerusalem to worship Yahweh following Israel's restoration and establishment in the land.[138] In this way, Paul harmoniously explains the biblical redemptive narrative, aligning with Isaiah, the OT prophets, and the themes of restoration eschatology.

In summary, as Wagner puts it, "In both Isaiah 24–27 and Isaiah 59–60, God's victory is complete. Israel is finally reconciled to her God, nevermore to stray, and never again to suffer judgment of foreign oppression and exile."[139] By highlighting Israel's future redemption twice in Romans 11:26–27 (Isa 59:20 and 27:9), Paul emphasizes the complete removal of Israel's sin and its implications.[140] These chapters encapsulate a vision of redemption through Jewish eyes, encompassing deliverance from all forms of evil—"evil of body and soul, evil in creation and civilization."[141] For Israel, therefore, salvation is both future and holistically restorative.

In Romans 9–11, Paul constructs a compelling biblical case for Israel's salvation, meticulously exegeting and quoting OT texts, particularly from Isaiah. Paul's exegetical method exemplifies the essence of exegesis: understanding a passage's context to discern its role within the immediate biblical text and the overarching

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[132] Rikki E. Watts, "Consolation or Confrontation? Isaiah 40–55 and the Delay of the New Exodus," *Tyndale Bulletin*, no. 41 (May 1990): 34.

[133] God comes to reign in Zion (24:23; 25:6–10; 27:12–13), cleanses His people from sin (26: 16–19; 27:9–11), delivers them from oppression, and gathers the scattered back to Zion (27: 12–13). As in Isaiah 60, Gentile nations are depicted as either participating in Israel's worship and blessings (24: 14–16a; 25:6–10a) or opposing the Lord and facing His wrath (24:1–13,17–22; 25:10b–12; 26:11, 21). See, Wagner, *Heralds of the Good News*, 295.

[134] Donald E. Gowan, *Eschatology in the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (New York: T&T Clark, 2000), 2–3.

[135] Scott, "And then All Israel will be Saved (Rom 11:26)," 490.

[136] Childs, *Isaiah*, 194.

[137] Gowan, *Eschatology in the Old Testament*, 2.

[138] See, Robert Saucy, "Does the Apostle Paul Reverse the Prophetic Tradition of the Salvation of Israel and the Nations?," in *Building on the Foundations of Evangelical Theology: Essays in Honor of John S. Feinberg*, ed. Gregg R. Allison and Stephen J. Wellum (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 66–91.

[139] Wagner, *Heralds of the Good News*, 295.

[140] Shum, *Paul's Use of Isaiah*, 240.

[141] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ: Christology in Messianic Dimensions*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1993), 29.

biblical storyline. In essence, Paul's use of these Isaianic passages in Romans 11:26–27 builds on his indebtedness "to the larger story Isaiah tells about God's passionate commitment to restore Israel to himself."[142]

Like Isaiah, Paul longed for the day when "all Israel will be saved," viewing it as the culmination of God's redemptive plan through the Deliverer. For Paul, "Israel's 'Deliverer' is the Christ of the Parousia, the messiah who will come in the glory of God and whose name is Jesus."[143] Paul's hope for Israel's restoration is an extension of a hope anchored in a divine promise—one firmly rooted in the unchanging character of God, His prophetic promises, and the redemptive work of Jesus Christ, Israel's promised Messiah, Redeemer, and King.

So how does Paul's hope for Israel's restoration influence one's missiology? First, Paul's view of Israel's future motivated his proclamation of the gospel. Paul's preaching to the Gentiles throughout his life was magnified by the need for the Jewish people to accept their Messiah in faith. His ministry provoked the nation to jealousy before God (Rom 11:11). The coming salvation and restoration of the nation fueled his evangelistic efforts. And in similar fashion, the proclamation of the gospel to the ends of the earth, to Gentile nations, is the appointed divinely means to stir up His chosen people to saving faith.

Second, the future restoration of Israel supported Paul's prayer for the unbelieving Jews (Rom 10:1). Because God had not forsaken His people, Paul's prayer was aligned with God's will. The purpose of God to save Israel and the nations through the work of missions and the preaching of the gospel fuels intercessory prayer for redemption of the lost. These two themes, evangelistic proclamation and prayer for the lost are supported by Paul's belief in the future restoration and salvation of the nation Israel.

[142] Wagner, *Heralds of the Good News*, 280.
[143] Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, 35.

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THE BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE HATRED OF ISRAEL AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR ANTISEMITISM: TO BE THE ENEMY OF ISRAEL IS TO BE THE ENEMY OF GOD

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Hatred of Israel and modern-day antisemitism is anything but a new phenomenon. Though its presence has ebbed and flowed throughout history, it is as old as the nation of Israel. Understanding the biblical testimony about this malevolent hatred is essential. This analysis explores the biblical perspective on the hatred of Israel, asking and answering the fundamental question: Why has the nation of Israel been subject to such hatred throughout history? The Old and the New Testaments present both the historical and the spiritual roots of this hatred against God's chosen people.

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Introduction

Many have noticed in the past decade a distinct increase in attacks against the Jewish people and against various Jewish institutions. The common term used to describe this racial hatred of anything related to the Jewish people is "antisemitism" (originating from German).[1] A recent and significant attack against the people of Israel took place on October 7, 2023 by Hamas terrorists who attacked the Israeli communities near the Gaza strip. Hamas' hideous and blood-thirsty assault had a polarizing effect on global opinions of Israel and the Jewish people. Many expressed deep sadness and grief over the cruel rampage of destruction, murder, rape, and kidnapping that Hamas perpetrated against their Israeli neighbors. Shockingly, this massive terrorist onslaught also prompted a world-wide increase in antisemitism.

[1] Wilhelm Marr, *The Victory of Judaism over Germanism*, trans. Gerhard Rohringer, 8th edition (Bern: Costenoble, 1879), http://archive.org/details/marr-wilhelm-the-victory-of-judaism-over-germanism_202012.

This tragic event, the ensuing war, and the innumerable reactions to it have been constantly in the headlines, reminding the world of the animosity the Jewish people have suffered throughout history and which they continue to endure in the present.

This horrific incident is only an example of the hatred Israel has endured all throughout her history. In light of this event and other such attacks on Israel and the Jewish people, the intent of this article is to look to Scripture and provide a biblical perspective on why such hatred of Israel and the Jewish people exists. This article seeks to answer the question: *Why has the nation of Israel been subject to such vicious hatred throughout history?* Approaching this study from a biblical-theological perspective, the material is organized chronologically.[2] The Old Testament portion of this article provides a selective overview of the animosity that the people of Israel endured in ancient history, whereas the New Testament portion focuses on key explanations for this worldwide phenomenon and the animosity Israel will face in the future, according to Revelation 12, 16, and 20.[3] Ultimately, this article shows that according to the Scriptures, the hatred of Israel, and therefore modern-day antisemitism, is an act of opposing God's people and God Himself.

Definition

Hatred of Israel and antisemitism has a long history, making it difficult to explain comprehensively.[4] One definition specifically of "antisemitism" that Robert S. Wistrich proposes is: "All forms of hostility toward Jews and Judaism throughout history."[5] The term "antisemitism" in the German language is credited to Wilhelm Marr, a man who himself has been charged with expressions of hatred against the Jewish people in his writings.[6] Beyond identifying antisemitism in the general populace, researchers have argued that the organized church has also been often

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[2] See John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, eds., *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 35. It must be acknowledged that the designation "Biblical Theology" is perceived by some as inherently antisemitic. See, e.g., Jon D. Levenson, "Why Jews Are Not Interested in Biblical Theology," in *Judaic Perspectives on Ancient Israel*, ed. Jacob Neusner et al. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 295, where he states, "To the Christian biblical theology is concerned with christological issues in a way that excludes the Jews and finds no parallel in Judaism." This study, however, does have parallels in Jewish interpretation of the Scripture and focuses on, rather than exclude, the Jewish people.

[3] Brian Kinzel is responsible for the Old Testament section, and Oleg Korotkiy for the New Testament section.

[4] For a standard definition, see the statement on "What Is Antisemitism?" *International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance*, accessed May 22, 2024, https://holocaustremembrance.com/resources/working-definition-antisemitism; for helpful treatments of the subject see Linda Maizels, *What Is Antisemitism?* (New York: Routledge, 2022), http://dx.doi.org/10.4324/9781003021827-2; Deborah E. Lipstadt, *Antisemitism: Here and Now* (New York: Schocken, 2019); David L. Bernstein, *Woke Antisemitism: How a Progressive Ideology Harms Jews* (New York: Wicked Son, 2022); Steven K. Baum et al., eds., *Antisemitism in North America: New World, Old Hate* (New York: Brill, 2016), https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1163/j.ctv2gjwsz3.

[5] Robert S. Wistrich, *Antisemitism: The Longest Hatred* (New York: Pantheon, 1991), xvi. See also a talk by Josh Sofaer, "Why Are Jews Hated?" in which Sofaer defines the term as "hatred against Jews because they are Jews" (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u6ogEw_XL9o; 2023).

[6] Maizels, *What Is Antisemitism?* 3, wherein she explains that Marr believed that hatred of the Jews "was both rational and necessary."

guilty of antisemitism in its history.[7] Debra Lipstadt, a world-renowned expert on this topic, has even attempted to link antisemitism to the New Testament.[8] Michael Brown—who rejects the view that the New Testament is antisemitic—states that many think, albeit incorrectly, that "there was a straight line from the New Testament to the Holocaust."[9] While this inaccurate perception that Christianity and the New Testament are antisemitic may exist, church leaders must endeavor to demonstrate that, as Dan Sered and Simon Stout explain, antisemitism is a spiritual problem that sincere followers of Jesus must eradicate.[10] Not only must the followers of Christ reject this sentiment from their hearts and lives; they must also desire and pray that the gospel would reach the Jewish people globally. As Paul wrote in Romans 1:16: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek."

In view of such deep-rooted history of animosity toward the people of Israel, this article will attempt to show that both the Old Testament and the New Testament condemn any hatred of Israel and modern-day antisemitism as deplorable and diabolical. Though, to be sure, the term "antisemitism" describes anti-Jewish sentiment in modern history, examination of Scripture reveals that hatred of Israel and the people of Israel originated in ancient history with the devil as its source. Scripture demonstrates that such antagonistic treatment of the people of Israel is not merely superficial but in fact spiritual. On the one hand, it stems from God's archenemy—the devil. On the other, it seeks to destroy God's people because God promised to bring the Messiah through the nation of Israel in order to defeat the devil.

As noted above, then, this article will advance the view that hatred of the people of Israel—in history, in the present, and in the future—is driven by the agenda of the devil who opposes God's plan to bring the Messiah through the people of Israel in order to save sinners from their sin, reverse the curse, and make all things new.

The Biblical Perspective on the Hatred of Israel in the Old Testament

Roots of Spiritual Conflict

The reality and depth of hatred toward God's chosen people Israel is clearly illustrated in OT history. In the Torah (or the Pentateuch), two important passages explain that the roots of this hatred are spiritual: Genesis 3:15 and 12:1–3.

In Genesis 3:15, the Bible first describes the broadest meaning of enmity: it refers to the spiritual conflict between the serpent and the seed of the woman as "enmity" (אֵיבָה). It was the serpent who tempted Eve to mistrust God and disobey Him. As a consequence for the serpent's sin, Genesis 3:15 predicts an ongoing conflict between the seed of the woman and the serpent (later revealed in Rev 12:9–

[7] For evangelical studies of this point see Michael L. Brown, *Our Hands Are Stained with Blood: The Tragic Story of the Church and the Jewish People*, revised ed. (Harrisburg, NC: Destiny Image, 2019); Thomas Fretwell, *Why the Jewish People?: Understanding Replacement Theology & Antisemitism* (London: Ezra Foundation, 2021).

[8] Lipstadt, *Antisemitism*, 17–18.

[9] Brown, *Our Hands Are Stained with Blood*, 14.

[10] Dan Sered and Simon Stout, "The Spiritual Problem of Antisemitism," *Lausanne Movement* (blog), May 11, 2020, https://lausanne.org/global-analysis/the-spiritual-problem-of-antisemitism.

10 to be Satan). While this verse does not refer directly to the people of Israel, one point to draw out from this verse is that Scripture identifies the ultimate source of all conflict to be spiritual and to flow from the chief enemy of God.[11]

Genesis 12:1–3 then gives a more specific indication that the sons of Israel should expect opposition. God's promise to Abram in this passage stands as a turning point in biblical history.[12] It is impossible to overstate the importance of this promised comprehensive favor to Abram (land, nation, name, and blessing).[13] This promise (later ratified as a covenant in Gen 15) divides all people into two camps. On the one side, God promises His blessing to all those who in turn bless Abram. On the other side, God promises to curse (ארר) those who despise (קלל) Abram.[14] That is, from this point in history, God promises "all the families of the earth" to expect either His blessing or His displeasure in response to their treatment of the nation emanating from Abram. As Victor P. Hamilton notes, "God states that his relationship to others will be determined by the relationship of these others to Abram. Abram can expect to encounter both those who will bless him and those who will curse him."[15]

Regarding the subject of this study, the passage suggests that from that point forward, Abram should expect to encounter "the one who curses you" (12:3). The near context gives an example of this principle when Pharaoh took Sarah (12:10–20). God later warned Abram that his descendants would be enslaved and oppressed 400 years (Gen 15:13). In his own life, the patriarchs saw this opposition when Ishmael mocked Isaac (Gen 21:9), when the Philistines seized Abraham's wells near Beersheba (Gen 21:22–26), and when Isaac also suffered because of the Philistines' envy (Gen 26:12–33).

Taken together, Genesis 3:15 and 12:3 foreshadow the suffering that ancient Israel would experience at the hands of their enemies. It is significant that the word

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[11] Gerard Van Groningen, "The Fall," *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 241. He writes, "This enmity would be expressed in an abiding antithesis between Satan's dominion and the cosmic kingdom of God." See also Eugene H. Merrill, *Everlasting Dominion: A Theology of the Old Testament* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 199–226.

[12] See, e.g., E. A. Speiser, *Genesis*, AB (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), liii, where he divides the book into two sections (chap 1–11 and chap 12–50). He writes on p. 87 that 12:1–3 "signal the beginning of the integral history of a particular group." For this same division see Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 369; Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1967), 123–24; Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, WBC (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1987), lii.

[13] Walter C. Kaiser, *The Promise-Plan of God: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 52; Paul R. House, *Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998), 52; Kenneth A Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, NAC (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2005), 113, where he explains that "bless" in Genesis "describes primarily two benefits: progeny and material wealth." Cf. Michael Brown, בָּרַךְ, *NIDOTTE*, 1:758, where he writes, "*nothing was more important than securing the blessing of God in one's life or nation*" (emphasis original).

[14] Though the two words for "curse" in 12:3 are typically translated the same in English because they are synonymous terms, the verb קלל is a malediction that calls down a curse (e.g., Goliath to David, 1 Sam 17:43) while ארר describes the resultant state and a divine pronouncement of a curse (e.g., God to Satan, Gen 3:15). Wenham writes that ארר "refers to a judicial curse pronounced on evildoers" (Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, WBC [Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1987], 276. See also Leonard J. Coppes, קָלַל, *TWOT,* 2:800; C. A. Keller, קלל, *TLOT*, 3:1144; C. A. Keller, ארר, *TLOT*, 1:181.

[15] Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17*, 373.

"enemy" (אֹיֵב) comes from the same root as the "enmity" (אֵיבָה) of Genesis 3:15. The history of ancient Israel shows that the term "enemy" often describes the "national enemies of Israel,"[16] those who violently opposed God's people.

Exodus 1—The First Holocaust

Exodus 1 gives the first description of state-sponsored persecution of ancient Israel.[17] Vague accusations against Israel culminated in wholesale enslavement and infanticide. The reason behind this awful history is described in 1:7—Israel's remarkable fruitfulness. This verse uses verbs characteristic of the creation account in Genesis 1 to describe the divine "creation" of the nation of Israel (שרץ, מלא, רבה פרה,). Only one verb in 1:7 is not from the creation account, עצם, "to be mighty"; this addition to the list brings to the foreground the fact that Israel "grew immensely powerful."[18] This one brief verse describes how the blessing promised to Abraham to become a "great nation" came to pass by God's providential work.

The story becomes ominous when we read in the next verse that the new king "did not know Joseph" (1:8). Here, the verb "to know" (ידע) does not mean that the new king had no information about Joseph (e.g., how he saved Egypt by a combination of divine revelation and astute management). Just as "to know" can have the positive sense of care, confidence, and even intimacy, so also "to not know" in this context has the negative sense of neglect, distrust, and estrangement. Hamilton writes, "The new Pharaoh refuses to acknowledge the worth of Joseph's contribution to Egypt's well-being. He repudiates the legitimacy of Joseph's time in office, refuses to acknowledge him and to extend any further courtesy to Joseph and his kin."[19] There undoubtably were political realities behind Pharaoh's decision to disenfranchise the Israelites, possibly the memory of the Hyksos domination of Egypt.[20] The account regards those details, like the name of the Pharaoh, as extraneous.

Pharaoh's speech to his nation plays on their natural fears with what must be the oldest antisemitic trope: this people cannot be trusted.[21] His speech in 1:9–10 includes accusations that have been leveled against the Jewish people through the ages: they will dominate our culture (1:9), they are not trustworthy (1:10), they will side with our enemies (1:10), they are "rootless" and will leave us at an inopportune time (1:10). He begins with the very dubious assertion: "the people of the sons of

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[16] Tyler F. Williams, "אֵיב," *NIDOTTE*, 1:366; he counts 129 out of 284 occurrences describing Israel's enemies.

[17] For a similar opinion see Steven Leonard Jacobs, "Religion, Theology and American Antisemitism," in *Antisemitism in North America: New World, Old Hate*, ed. Steven Leonard Jacobs et al. (Brill, 2016), 60–63, http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1163/j.ctv2gjwsz3.9.

[18] Robin Wakely, "עָצַם," *NIDOTTE*, 3:484.

[19] Victor P. Hamilton, *Exodus: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 7.

[20] For this opinion see Iain Provan, V. Philips Long, and Tremper Longman III, *A Biblical History of Israel,* 2nd edition (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2015), 184; Garrett, *A Commentary on Exodus*, 98. However, for a contrary opinion see Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *A History of Israel: From the Bronze Age through the Jewish Wars* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1998), 82. For the history of the Hyksos in Egypt, see Donald B. Redford, *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 98–124.

[21] Maizels, *What Is Antisemitism?*, 38, calls this "a classic antisemitic allegation: the dual loyalty charge." However, she questions the historicity of the account.

Israel are more and mightier than we" (1:8). Did the population and might of the sons of Israel actually exceed that of native Egyptians? Douglas K. Stuart writes that this statement is "surely an exaggeration intended to frighten rather than to present the facts accurately."[22] It is noteworthy that the new king interpreted God's providential blessing on the sons of Israel as a threat to his people and to his rule. For the first time in the Scriptures, the Israelites are called a "people" (עַם), a great population bound by common ancestry. It is ironic that this recognition comes from one who hates and fears them.

The Egyptians' actions against Israel fall into two measures of persecution. First, the Egyptians imposed servitude on the Israelites (1:11–14). Oppressive control, loss of freedom, miserable affliction, and forced labor are all the result of Pharaoh's fear. Yet these measures cannot thwart the plan of God to multiply Abraham's seed—"the more they afflicted them the more they multiplied" (1:12). Second, they attempted to weaken or destroy Israel by murder, namely male infanticide (1:15–22). Pharaoh's inability to halt Israel's amazing propagation leads him to this sinister stage of oppression. Apparently, the logic behind this step is that with the males dead, the female Israelites could be taken as wives for the Egyptians' slaves, a stratagem illustrated in the Old Testament.[23] The courageous stand of the midwives (1:15–21) initially thwarted the king's plan. Consequently, Pharaoh commanded all the Egyptian people in 1:22 to participate in this genocide, bringing guilt on his entire nation.

In summation, this account in Exodus 1, the first mention of state-sponsored and concerted oppression of Israel in the Scripture, paints an awful picture of Israel's existence in Egypt. The nation of Israel faced grinding slavery compounded by the horror that parents would experience each day fearing for their infant sons' lives. Israelite parents were forced to live in dread, knowing that at any time an Egyptian might take their baby boys and kill them. The text is silent on how widespread this chilling edict in 1:22 was actually obeyed. It seems that the edict remained in effect until the exodus from Egypt. The next account implies that enough Egyptians complied with the orders to commit the murder of Israelite boys so that Moses' mother feared for her son's life (2:2–3). It is encouraging to remember that the Exodus account particularly emphasizes "Yahweh's ability to deliver his people, defeat all their enemies, men or gods, and control the kings of the earth for his own glory and his people's benefit," so that "the Exodus event became the salvation event par excellence in the OT."[24] Merrill explains that since "Egypt would no longer bless the people of the Lord [they] therefore would forfeit the blessings that otherwise could be expected."[25] The terrible persecution against Israel continued, but Israel continued to multiply. Rather than experience blessings (e.g., as under Joseph), the Egyptians experienced God's curse in the ten plagues. In the end Pharaoh and his army were decisively defeated in one instant when they drowned in the sea (Exod 14).

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[22] Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2006), 64. So also Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 1:273 and William H. C. Propp, *Exodus 1–18*, AB (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974), 131, where he writes, "Pharaoh's paranoia is ludicrous, yet sinister."

[23] Propp, *Exodus 1–18*, 141, citing *BibAnt* 9:1 and references to this practice (Deut 20:14; 21:10–14; Judg 5:30; 21:11–14; 1 Kgs 11:15).

[24] Eugene Carpenter, "Exodus: Theology," *NIDOTTE*, 4:611.

[25] Merrill, *Everlasting Dominion*, 254.

Amalek and Implacable Hatred of Israel

The Scripture presents Amalek as the archetypical enemy of Israel. There are few details about the Amalekites in the Bible.[26] Researchers have not found information about Amalek outside the Bible, as is true of other details in Scripture as well.[27] The Amalekites apparently were semi-nomadic, dwelling in the Negev (Num 13:29). They are described often as raiding Israel. The book of Judges records how the Amalekites repeatedly inflicted grief on Israel as marauding plunderers allied with the twelve tribes' enemies (with Eglon king of Moab [3:12–13]; with Midian [6:3, 33; 7:12]; with the Maonites [10:12]). In a positive resumé of king Saul's warfare, the account reads, "And he did valiantly and struck the Amalekites and delivered Israel out of the hands of those who plundered them" (1 Sam 14:48). The Amalekites attacked Ziklag when David and his men were away (1 Sam 30). By kidnapping the women and children, the Amalekites again showed a propensity to attack the defenseless. Duane A. Garrett aptly calls them "desert pirates."[28]

As Debra K. Reid explains, "The Amalekites are consistently presented as an enemy of Israel and therefore of Yahweh himself."[29] For ages Jewish writers recognized the role of the Amalekites as the perpetual adversary.[30] Joel S. Kaminsky notes that historically Jewish writers explained Amalek's hatred of Israel as demonic, meaning that "the theological idea that massive historical evils perpetrated by individuals and groups who harbor an irrational hatred of Jews and Judaism are part of a larger cosmic pattern."[31] This pattern is explained clearly in three places: 1) Exodus 17:8–16; 2) the account of Haman in the book of Esther; and 3) Psalm 83.

The Unexpected Pogrom (Exodus 17:8–16)

Exodus 17:8–16 describes the first encounter Israel had with Amalek, which provides the earliest paradigm for understanding this people. In this passage, the

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[26] Brian Britt et al., "Amalek, Amalekites," *EBR*, accessed August 20, 2024, https://doi.org/10.1515/EBR.amalekamalekites; Samuel Abramsky, David S. Sperling, and Elimelech Epstein Halevy, "Amalek, Amalekites," *EncJud*, 2nd edition, 1:28–31; Gerald L. Mattingly, "Amalek," *ABD*, 1:169–71. Though Mattingly calls them "a relatively obscure people," he acknowledges that they are presented as one of the traditional enemies of Israel.

[27] One possible identification for Amalek outside the Bible is explained by Bob Becking, "Amalek," *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, 2nd ed. (Leiden/Boston: Brill/Eerdmans, 1999), 26. He notes that some think "Amalek" is the name of a Canaanite mountain deity mentioned in the Egyptian source called the Egyptian Leiden Magical Papyrus dating to 1292–1069 BC. Becking acknowledges that this identification is disputed.

[28] Duane A. Garrett, *A Commentary on Exodus*, Kregel Exegetical Library (Grand Rapid: Kregel Academic, 2014), 435–36.

[29] Debra K. Reid, "Amalek," *NIDOTTE*, 4:371. Robinson essentially agrees, writing that "Amalek has chiefly a symbolic function, standing for any group or nation who by attacking Israel resists the divine will," see Bernard P. Robinson, "Israel and Amalek: The Context of Exodus 17:8-16," *JSOT* 10, no. 32 (June 1985): 18. By this he needlessly casts doubt on the historical details of the account.

[30] Steven Leonard Jacobs, "Rethinking Amalek in This 21st Century," *Religions* 8, no. 196 (2017), https://doi.org/10.3390/rel8090196.

[31] Joel S. Kaminsky, *Yet I Loved Jacob: Reclaiming the Biblical Concept of Election* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2007), 115–16, also cited by Jacobs, "Rethinking Amalek," 5.

Amalekites appear unexpectedly and attack Israel at Rephidim. The context explains that the Israelites suffered from a lack of water, causing a nation-wide crisis (17:1–7). Apparently, the Amalekites journeyed far from their normal territory in the Negev in order to attack Israel. Deuteronomy 25:18 adds that the Amalekites attacked "all the stragglers at your rear when you were faint and weary." The cruelty of a surprise attack on vulnerable non-combatants adds to Amalek's guilt.

Joshua, introduced for the first time, is given one day (i.e., "tomorrow"; 17:8) to assemble an army for defense. Given the Israelites' lack of preparations, it is not surprising that victory over the Amalekites was uncertain during the battle. Many questions have been posed about the meaning in 17:11–12 of Moses holding the "staff of God."[32] What is clear is that only when the staff was raised did Israel prevail. This must indicate that help from God came as Moses held up the staff, which throughout the previous chapters represented the power of God. Joshua was victorious over the Amalekites, but not completely because the text states that Joshua "weakened" Amalek, allowing them to survive to fight another day against Israel.[33] Amalek is presented as the powerful enemy that nearly defeated Israel.

After Joshua's victory, the text explains Amalek's opposition to God and Israel in several ways. First, God commands Moses to record by written and oral means God's intention to "utterly blot out the memory of Amalek" (17:14). It is notable that this is the first time writing is mentioned in the Bible, and that it is in reaction to the expression of hatred of God's people Israel. This act of anti-Israel animosity was so significant that God required Israel to guard the memory of the event by means of a written document.[34] Second, Moses erects an altar (17:15). Although the passage does not give a reason for the altar, contextually the best explanation is that Israel sought to commemorate the victory over and the vow against Amalek.[35] Third, the final verse in the pericope predicts perpetual war with Amalek. Exodus 17:16 states that the "war" (מִלְחָמָה) is between Amalek and Yahweh perpetually (מִדֹּר דֹּר, "from generation to generation").[36] The conclusion underscores again God's promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:3—that to be the enemy of Israel is to be the enemy of God Himself.

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[32] For a recent treatment, see Tomer Greenberg, "The Battle with Amalek (Exod. 17.8-16): When God Trusts in Man," *JSOT* 47, no. 3 (March 2023): 304–21, https://doi.org/10.1177/03090892221149048.

[33] Brevard S. Childs, *Exodus*, OTL (Richmond, VA: Westminster John Knox, 1974), 311. Greenburg also interprets חלשׁ in this way, writing that the verb, "indicates a close victory rather than a knockout" ("The Battle with Amalek [Exod. 17.8–16], " 317). However, some lexicons explain the verb in 13:13 as "defeated" and not "weakened." *HALOT* and *DCH* differentiate between I-חלשׁ "to weaken" and II-חלשׁ "to defeat."

[34] Millard notes that Exodus 17:14 shows that writing was normal in ancient Israel, and that written documents had more authority than oral tradition (Alan R. Millard, "Authors, Books, and Readers in the Ancient World," in *The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Studies*, ed. Judith M. Lieu and J. W. Rogerson [Oxford University Press, 2008], 543–63, https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199237777.003.0031); see also Alan R. Millard, "Literacy: Ancient Israel," *ABD* 4:337. Although she misrepresents Millard's view, Susan Niditch nonetheless agrees that "the Bible offers ample evidence of an Israelite literate mentality" (Susan Niditch, *Oral World and Written Word: Ancient Israelite Literature*, Library of Ancient Israel [Louisville, KY: Westminister John Knox, 1996], 94).

[35] Garrett, *Commentary on Exodus*, 436–37.

[36] The first phrase of 17:16 is (וַיֹּאמֶר כִּי־יָד עַל־כֵּס יָהּ) a notorious crux with multiple interpretations and emendations. The LSB renders it, "Because He has sworn with a hand upon the throne of Yah." Durham instead explains the phrase as referring to Amalek's enmity to God: "The Amalekites have raised a hand against Yahweh's sovereignty, symbolized repeatedly in the OT by reference to his כסא/כסה 'throne'" (John I. Durham, *Exodus*, WBC [Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1987], 237). For a helpful discussion of this point, see Greenberg, "The Battle with Amalek," 316.

Haman and the Resurgence of Amalek (Esther 3)

Despite the commands and attempts to eradicate Amalek, this people group reappears several times in Israel's history. The Scriptures show that this enemy persistently continues to fight. As noted, they plagued the tribes during the Judges. Saul was commanded to continue a holy war and to "utterly destroy" (חרם) Amalek (1 Sam 15:3, וְהַחֲרַמְתֶּם, "and devote to destruction").[37] Saul almost completely obeyed when he "devoted to destruction all the people" (1 Sam 15:8, וְאֶת־כָּל־הָעָם הֶחֱרִים). Since Saul failed to finish this holy war, Samuel himself killed King Agag (1 Sam 15:33). At this point in the biblical narrative the reader might think that Amalek then ceased to exist as a people. Yet they reappear soon after in the raid against Ziklag (1 Sam 30). The Chronicler later explains that not only did David war against them (1 Chron 18:11), but that again during Hezekiah's reign centuries after David, men of Simeon "defeated the remnant of the Amalekites who had escaped" (1 Chron 4:43).

The resurgence of Amalek was anticipated in Exodus 17:16 where it is stated that in "every generation" God Himself would wage war against them. This tension between perpetual warfare while attempting to erase Amalek's memory is reflect by the ironic call to "not forget" to "blot out the memory of Amalek" (Deut 25:19). As Diane Lipton notes, "A common thread is the call for total destruction alongside acknowledgement of persistent survival."[38] Tomer Greenberg concurs: "Amalek has some extraordinary ability to oppose God, an ability that is not easily subdued—not only now but always."[39] The account of Haman in the book of Esther is a dramatic example of this motif as well.

Haman appears in Esther 3:1. His promotion by the Persian king is surprising, since 2:21–23 records how Mordecai saved the king from an assassination plot. Expositors typically have explained that "the author must have intended the designation of Haman as 'the Agagite' [הָאֲגָגִי] to indicate descent from Saul's opponent Agag, king of Amalek."[40] There can be no doubt that Mordecai refused to honor Haman because of his association with the perpetual enemy of God (cf. Esth 3:4). If Mordecai was guilty of violating a royal command, he alone should have been punished. But Haman's true genocidal intentions are revealed in Esther 3:6 where we read, "Haman sought to destroy all the Jews." The ensuing story is how the threat of genocide hangs over the Jewish people in every part of the Persian empire.[41]

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[37] For a discussion of the intertextual allusions to Amalek in 1 Samuel 15, see Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading*, Indiana Literary Biblical Series (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University, 1985), 482–514.

[38] Diane Lipton, in Brian Britt et al., "Amalek, Amalekites," *EBR*, see section (I), "In the Bible."

[39] Greenberg, "The Battle with Amalek (Exod. 17.8-16)," 313.

[40] Bezalel Porten et al., "Haman," *EncJud*, 2nd ed., 8:293. So also: Kathryn Schifferdecker (in Jo Carruthers et al., "Haman," *EBR*, https://doi.org/10.1515/ebr.haman); Mervin Breneman, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, NAC (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1993), 326; Reid, *Esther*, 89; Frederic William Bush, *Ruth, Esther*, WBC (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1996), 379, 384. See especially Carey A. Moore, *Esther,* AYB (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1974), 35, where he summarizes this point: "This is the view of Josephus (who rendered it *amalekiten*), the Talmud, and the Targums, as well as of most commentators, who rightly view Haman as a descendant of the Amalekites." Despite this, some commentators express skepticism about the connection between אֲגַג and הָאֲגָגִי, e.g., K&D, 4:213, where they write that this "can by no means be proved. The name Agag is not sufficient for the purpose."

[41] For contemporary historical examples of genocide see Breneman, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, 326, who cites Robert Gordis, "Religion, Wisdom and History in the Book of Esther—A New Solution to an Ancient Crux," *JBL* 100 (1981): 383.

The eventual complete reversal of Haman's plan and the salvation of the Jewish people point out that while God is not actually mentioned in the book, He is nonetheless present to save His people. A dual-sided theme in the book is (1) the threat to God's people along with (2) His providential salvation. Haman illustrates that danger to the Jewish people can appear unexpectedly and suddenly. In the book, Haman is called the "attacker" of the Jews (צֹרֵר, 3:10; 8:1; 9:10, 24) and the "enemy" (אוֹיֵב, 7:6), using the word that reminds the reader of the enmity in Genesis 3:15. Mervin Breneman calls this theme "the danger of antisemitism" and then applies it to his own faith: "Esther says to the Christian that anti-Jewish hostility is intolerable to God."[42] The positive side of this dual theme is that even though God may not be mentioned in the book, He is even so clearly acting. Indisputably, it was the hand of God that elevated Esther "for such a time as this" (4:14).

Prayer for Protection against Genocide—Amalek in Psalm 83

The previous passages describe concrete episodes of historical animosity toward Israel. Psalm 83, in contrast, summarizes typical threats of animosity toward Israel. As Willem VanGemeren explains, this psalm presents "a *national lament* in which the psalmist prays the Lord's intervention against many enemies."[43] This provides a helpful conclusion to the first part of this study since Psalm 83 gives a reflective answer to the question of why Israel was so hated and so threatened. This is an imprecatory psalm directed against ten groups of enemies (tribes, nations, and cities) while remembering the defeat of another seven individuals. Amalek is mentioned, but obviously the expansive lists show that this prayer aims at a broader application. This psalm repeats the observation of Exodus 17:15—the enemy of Israel is the enemy of God Himself.

Who are these enemies? The ten groups mentioned (83:6–8) represent most of Israel's enemies who at one time or another threatened the security of God's people. In this setting, Amalek is just one of many. The Bible does not record a specific episode when all of them banded together against Israel. As Tremper Longman expresses, "Rather than indicating a specific historical moment, these are the traditional enemies of Israel, and thus the psalm could have been used in any similar conflict."[44] The list almost certainly reflects the Egyptian idiom of "nine bows" that represents all the enemies of the state, with Assyria as the great world power leading the coalition; hence, John W. Hilber explains, the psalmist includes "a stereotypical list of enemies."[45] In other words, the two lists, both the ten active

[42] Breneman, *Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther*, 297.

[43] Willem VanGemeren, "Psalms," *EBC*, rev. ed., 5:627. He reflects the majority opinion among commentators that the psalm does not reflect a specific national threat to Israel.

[44] Tremper Longman III, *Psalms: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC (Nottingham, England: InterVarsity, 2014), 308.

[45] John W. Hilber, "Psalms," *ZIBBCOT*, 5:89, citing Eric Uphill, "The 'Nine Bows," *Jaarbericht van het Vooraziatisch-egyptish Genootschap Ex Orient Lux* 19 (1965–1966): 396–98. The phrase appears in Egyptian canonical and monumental texts where James K. Hoffmeier calls it "a popular expression for the enemies of Egypt" ("The Gebel Barkal Stela of Thutmose III," *COS* 2.2B:15; see also James K. Hoffmeier, "The [Israel] Stela of Merneptah," *COS* 2.6:41, where the idiom is used also).

enemies and the seven vanquished foes (83:9–12), summarize all those opposed to Israel, past, present, and future.

What is the goal of this coalition aligned against Israel? Their program is presented in a telling chiasm.[46]

83:3 (A)	Enemies of God	"For behold, Your enemies …"
		"Those who hate You …"
83:4 (B)	Enemies of Israel	"… against Your people …"
		"… against Your treasured ones
83:5 (B')	Enemies of Israel	"… let us wipe them out as a nation …"
		"… the name of Israel …"
83:6 (A')	Enemies of God	"For they have conspired …"
		"Against You …"

As the structure points out, the enemies of Israel are the enemies of God Himself. The psalm further develops the recurring theme that to oppose Abraham's descendants is to invoke God's curse; those who hate God are the same ones that attack the chosen people. In this case, the epitome of their desire is to "wipe them out as a nation/that the name of Israel be remembered no more" (83:4). This verse speaks plainly of the enemy's desire to carry out genocide against God's people Israel. Since the Scriptures (as well as modern history) record numerous incidents where genocide was actually attempted against Israel, this statement cannot be considered as poetic overstatement. Calvin recognizes that the psalmist "enumerates the many nations which had conspired together for the express purpose of *exterminating the people of Israel*."[47] W. Schottroff explains that the idiom of "the cessation of memory" is "*equivalent to total annihilation*, [and] is expected for evildoers and enemies … or conferred upon them in curse and judgment sayings."[48]

Summary

This section has surveyed a selection of passages from the OT that show that the hatred of Israel, and even attempted genocide, was a reality in ancient Israel. Exodus 1 shows that animosity toward the people of Israel emanated from Pharaoh's distortions and misplaced fear. The long history of Amalek's attacks shows that such hatred can appear unexpectedly and without explanation. Haman continued Amalek's hatred by attempting to annihilate Israel, using slanderous tropes and bribery. Psalm 83 provides a reflective and prayerful description of the hatred of Israel in the era of ancient Israel, describing how numerous enemies wanted to destroy the nation. The psalm ties such attacks to enmity with God Himself—to hate God is to hate the nation of Israel. This psalm ties together two themes. First, the psalm reminds that the ultimate source of such enmity is the serpent himself (Gen

[46] Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51–100*, WBC (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1990), 345, citing B. Costacurta, "L'aggressione contro Dio: Studio del Salmo 83," *Biblica* 64 (1983) 518–41. The two כי phrases serve as an inclusio.

[47] John Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries*, trans. John King, Accordance electronic ed. (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1847), paragraph 15200 (emphasis added).

[48] W. Schottroff, "זכר," *TLOT*, 1:385 (emphasis added).

3:15). Second, and most obvious, the psalm hearkens back to Genesis 12:1–3 where God vowed to punish with a curse any who dared to oppose Abraham's descendants.

The Biblical Perspective on the Hatred of Israel in the New Testament

Despite the belief that hatred of the people of Israel in ancient history or antisemitism in modern history is merely a human phenomenon, Scripture shows that behind this ideology are demonic origins.[49] This portion of the article uses intertextual and literary analysis[50] to examine the hatred of the people of Israel in three texts: Revelation 12:1–17, 16:12–16, and 20:4–10.[51] To study these texts we answer five main questions.

(1) What is the *structure* of the texts and how does this structure help discern their meaning?[52]
(2) What is the placement of the texts within their units and how does this placement help discern their meaning? That is, what is the *context* of each passage?
(3) How does the *literary analysis* of the content of the texts help discern their meaning?
(4) How do the *allusions* in the texts help discern their meaning and how do they contribute to their overall message?
(5) What is the *theological message* of these texts?

Revelation 12:1–17

Revelation 12 is the cornerstone text exposing the demonic powers behind the hatred of the people of Israel. John the Apostle describes seeing two heavenly signs that, frame by frame, in a metaphorical but clear form, revealed the truth behind this ideology. Following literary analysis, we define the boundaries of chapter 12 by two phrases, the first of which refers to a heavenly sign: "A great sign appeared in

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[49] Here we use the New American Standard Bible (NASB) and *Novum Testamentum Graece*, Nestle-Aland, 28th ed.

[50] Craig Koester, "Book of Revelation," *NIDB*, 4:787, says that there are different approaches to text analysis, for example, "readers approach," where "interpretation is affected by what kind of material they think they are reading." But this article uses the text-centered approach that pursues authorial intent and which involves three dimensions: first, understanding the Bible as a text; second, reading the Bible as a text; and third, exegeting the Bible as a text. See Yee-Cheung Wong, *A Text-Centered Approach to Old Testament Exegesis and Theology and Its Application to the Book of Isaiah* (Hong Kong: Alliance Bible Seminary, 2001). Although this article does not allow for a more in-depth literary analysis of the text, which would be based on its three important characteristics such as compositional cohesion, compositional strategy, and compositional coherence, proposed by Robert De Beaugrande and U. Dressler Wolfgang in *Introduction to Text Linguistics,* Longman Linguistics Library (New York: Longman, 1981) and in working with text genres, this research nevertheless traces the development of animosity toward Israel in the book of Revelation.

[51] Despite the fact that in the Gospels (Matt 24, Mark 13, Luke 21, etc.) and Epistles (2 Thess 2:1–12; 1 John 2:18, 22; 4:1–6, etc.) there are texts that point to the role of the devil and the Antichrist in their work against Israel and the Messianic line, the clearest texts revealing the essence of anti-Israel activity are arguably found in the book of Revelation.

[52] For further discussion, see Adela Yarbro Collins, "Book of Revelation," *ABD* 5:696.

heaven" (12:1), while the second refers to an earthly vision: "And I saw a beast coming up out of the sea" (13:1), between which John placed 12:1–17.

(1) Structure

Although many commentators define the structure of chapter 12 thematically, we focus on its literary markers to show how John built the framework of the passage.[53] In this chapter, John employs two phrases. The first phrase is "A great sign appeared in heaven" (v. 1). The second phrase is "Then another sign appeared in heaven" (v. 3).

(1) The first sign: the woman (12:1–2)
(2) The second sign: the dragon (12:3–17)

This structure implies a specific composition of the text. It is constructed in such a way that the reader can see two interconnected elements of one picture—the opposition between Israel and the devil—which demonstrates the essence of the hatred of God's people.

(2) Context

The place of chapter 12 in the book of Revelation plays an important role in providing understanding for the hatred of the people of Israel.[54] Inasmuch as chapter 12 precedes chapters 16 and 20, the content of chapter 12 establishes the nature of the first wave of animosity toward God's people described in chapter 16 ("And I saw" v. 13) and the nature of the second wave of animosity described in chapter 20 ("Then I saw" v. 4).

(3) Literary Analysis

It is important to note at the very beginning of chapter 12 that the two signs (12:1, 3) that John saw were heavenly phenomena. This chapter not only depicts "heavenly warfare"[55] but also "embodies a surrealistic word-picture which describes the spiritual struggle standing behind historical events."[56] Following this idea, when working with the analysis of the text of chapter 12, we will note two plots associated with the description of the hatred of God's people, the first of which relates to the object of persecution, and the second to the initiator of this persecution.

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[53] See Tyler D. Mayfield, *Literary Structure and Setting in Ezekiel*, Forschungen Zum Alten Testament 2/43 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010). Although there are various literary markers (formulas, phrases, words) in the book of Revelation, the key words in its first chapter are: "saw" (v. 2), "see" (v. 11), "see," "saw" (v. 12), "saw" (v. 17), "have seen" (v. 19), "saw" (v. 20), and they indicate that the book is built on a multitude of visual pictures of the future, which largely determines its structure.

[54] "Then I saw" (13:1), "I saw" (13:3), "Then I saw" (13:11), "Then I looked" (14:1), "And I saw" (14:6), "Then I looked" (14:14).

[55] George Eldon Ladd, *The Revelation of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 166.

[56] Ladd, *The Revelation of John*, 167.

The First Scene: The Object of Persecution

In the two signs of Revelation 12 that relate to the dragon's war with God, three objects are clearly visible that were subject to persecution by the dragon: (1) the woman, (2) the child, and (3) the faithful remnant.

In both the first and second heavenly signs, John saw a woman. The word "woman" (γυνὴ) is used in the text eight times (12:1, 4, 6, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17). In addition to this word, John mentions 17 pronouns when referring to this woman.[57] Thus, in chapter 12, John uses 25 direct references related to the woman who was persecuted by the dragon. Although there are different opinions about who this woman is,[58] a strong argument can be made that the woman represents Israel (first woman).[59] The terminology John uses in 12:1 to describe this woman, and the context of the chapter, both deal with Israel. The description in 12:1 is: "a woman clothed with the sun and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars." Later, chapters 17–18 deal with Babylon (the second woman), and chapters 19–22 deal with the Church, the bride of the Lamb (the third woman).

The second sign in chapter 12 that John saw was a male child, whom he describes in various Greek terms.[60] George E. Ladd is sure that this child is the Messiah when he writes that the dragon wants "to destroy both the woman and the Messiah."[61] John Walvoord shares this same idea saying that the phrase "the man-child" refers "to Christ."[62] Evidence that this child is the Messiah is provided by several factors associated with his description in chapter 12. First, this child will "rule all nations with a rod of iron" (12:5). Second, he has a specific relationship with God (12:5). Third, he is associated with the throne of God (12:5). Fourth, the use of terminology in this chapter is associated with the person of the Messiah: "Christ" (12:10), "the Lamb" (12:11), "Jesus" (12:17).

Besides the woman and her child, chapter 12 also points to another target of persecution. John saw people "who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus" (12:17), against whom the dragon declared war (in Greek, "went away to make a war" ἀπῆλθεν ποιῆσαι πόλεμον). In this text, the phrase "who … hold to the testimony of Jesus" refers to those who belong to Christ. Walvoord writes

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[57] (1) "her" (five times), (2) "she" (five times), (3) "who" (two times), (4) "her" (seven times).

[58] Many commentators believe that this woman represents the Church. Ladd, *The Revelation of John*, 166, writes that "the woman represents the ideal people of God – the church." Michael Wilcock, *The Message of Revelation,* The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, England: InterVarsity, 1975), 119, also shares this idea when he says that this woman "is in fact the church." James L. Resseguie, *The Revelation of John: A Narrative Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 171, writes: "The woman is an image of the church, persecuted by the dragon." Robert Mounce, *The Book of Revelation,* NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1997), 236, says: "It is out of faithful Israel that Messiah will come. It should cause no trouble that within the same chapter the woman comes to signify the church (v. 17)."

[59] John Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago: Moody, 1998), 187, is confident that "the woman" represents "Israel." For evidence that the woman in Revelation 12 is Israel, see Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ,* 187–88; G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Revelation,* NCBC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 197–98; Alan Johnson, "Revelation," *EBC*, rev. ed. 13:693–96.

[60] In the NASB in 12:2 there is a word "child" but in Greek there is another word (τεκεῖν "to bear children," "birth"), in verse 4 "child" ("child" τὸ τέκνον), in verse 5 "child" ("son," "man" υἱόν, ἄρσεν, also "child" τὸ τέκνον), in verse 13 "child" ("male," "man" τὸν ἄρσενα).

[61] Ladd, *The Revelation of John*, 166.

[62] Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 187.

that these are "Israel, the remnant of the seed of the woman,"[63] about whom the context of chapter 12 speaks.

The Second Scene: The Initiator of the Persecution

The second sign (12:3–17) that John saw not only demonstrates the dragon's war with God, but also consists of several phases, each of which points to specific actions of the dragon. (1) The dragon wants to devour the child (12:4). (2) The dragon pursues the woman (12:6, 13, 14). (3) The dragon "poured water like a river out of his mouth after the woman, so that he might cause her to be swept away by the flood" (12:15, 16). (4) The dragon is "enraged at the woman" (12:17). (5) The dragon "went off to make war with the rest of her children, who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus" (12:17). In order to better describe the personality of this evil spirit, John uses various epithets. He uses the word "dragon" (δράκων) in its different variations eight times.[64] Thus John shows that the initiator of the targeted attack on Israel is not a man, but an evil spirit[65] – the enemy of God (12:5, 6, 10, 17).[66]

(4) Allusions

In chapter 12 John does not make any clear allusions to other passages in Revelation. In 12:5 there is an indirect allusion to Revelation 2:27. Although both passages use similar phrases: "who is going to rule all the nations with a rod of iron" (12:5) and "he shall rule them with a rod of iron" (2:27), the difference is that 12:5 is talking about the authority of Christ, while 2:27 is talking about the authority of Christ's followers (see 2:26).

(5) Theology

Revelation 12 depicts the satanic hatred of God's people through the two signs in the sky that John saw. These two signs paint a picture of the dragon's war with God, which is expressed in an attack on Israel, Israel's Messiah, and Israel's faithful remnant.

Revelation 16:12–16

If in Revelation 12:1–17 John saw a visual aid as to where disdain for the people of Israel originates and how it works, then in 16:12–16 John points to how this

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[63] Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 187.

[64] 12:3, 4, 7 (twice), 9, 13, 16, 17. Additionally, chapter 12 uses 5 other descriptions for the enemy of God: (1) the phrase "the serpent of old" (ὁ ὄφις ὁ ἀρχαῖος, 12:9), (2) "the devil" (Διάβολος, twice, 12:9, 12), (3) "Satan" (ὁ Σατανᾶς, once, 12: 9), (4) "accuser" (ὁ κατήγωρ, once, 12:10), and (5) "serpent" (ὄφις, three times, 12:9, 14, 15).

[65] Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, 187, writes directly that "the dragon" represents "Satan." So also Ladd, *The Revelation of John*, 166.

[66] Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 234, writes that antisemitism represents "the age-long conflict between God and Satan which accounts for the persecution the church is to experience." In the context of this chapter, there is another picture that represents the war of the dragon and his angels with Michael, "one of the chief princes" of Israel (Dan 10:13), and his angels (Rev 12:7–10), which indirectly refers to the war of the dragon with God.

mechanism will manifest itself in earthly conditions at the end of the Great Tribulation. I define the boundaries of 16:12–16 by two literary formulas, the first of which is "the sixth angel poured out his bowl" (16:12), and the second, "the seventh angel poured out his bowl" (16:17), between which John placed this text.

(1) Structure

John marked the structure of 16:12–16 by several short phrases, which he begins with the conjunction "and" (καί), following the literary formula: "The sixth angel poured out his bowl" (16:12a).

(1) "and its water was dried up" (16:12)
(2) "And I saw" (16:13)
(3) "And they gathered them together" (16:16)

This structure indicates three stages in the development of targeted attacks on Israel at the end of the Great Tribulation, the main part of which John begins with the phrase: "And I saw" (16:13)

(1) The creation of conditions for war (16:12).
(2) The appearance and activity of demonic spirits (16:13–15).
(3) The attack on Israel (16:16).

(2) Context

Revelation 15 begins with the phrase, "Then I saw another sign in heaven" (15:1), followed by the phrase, "seven angels who had seven plagues, which are the last, because in them the wrath of God is finished" (15:1; see also 15:6, 7). Chapter 17 begins with the announcement of the judgment of Babylon, which will be brought by one of the seven angels having the seven bowls (17:1), using the phrase "I will show you" (17:1), as well as "and I saw" (17:3). Situated between these chapters, chapter 16 begins with the command of the seven angels to "pour out on the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God" (16:1), followed by seven literary formulas that define the structure of the chapter.

(1) "the first *angel* went and poured out his bowl" (16:2)
(2) "the second *angel* went and poured out his bowl" (16:3)
(3) "the third *angel* went and poured out his bowl" (16:4)
(4) "the fourth *angel* went and poured out his bowl" (16:8)
(5) "the fifth *angel* went and poured out his bowl" (16:10)
(6) "the sixth *angel* went and poured out his bowl" (16:12)
(7) "the seventh *angel* went and poured out his bowl" (16:17)[67]

[67] Johnson, "Revelation," 593, divides this chapter into seven parts, each of which begins with an angel pouring out a bowl of wrath. In the same way F. F. Bruce, 1986, "Revelation," *IBC*, 1596, divides this chapter into seven parts.

The structure of chapter 16 not only reveals a unified theme but also identifies the place of 16:12–16 to be between the fifth (16:10) and seventh (16:17) formulas, which is the penultimate literary location in the series of God's judgments.[68] The placement of this text makes it clear that the outbreak of animosity toward God and Israel at the end of the Great Tribulation will occur after the beast's kingdom "became darkened" (16:10–11), and its final stage will begin after "the seventh angel pours out his bowl upon the air" (16:17).

(3) Literary Analysis

An analysis of the text of 16:12–16 points to four factors that reflect the demonic anti-God and anti-Israel activity during the Great Tribulation.

The First Factor: The Demonic Nature of the Animosity toward Israel and God

Revelation 16:13 demonstrates the demonic nature of the animosity toward Israel and God, where John uses several key phrases. The first: "out of the mouth of the dragon." The second: "out of the mouth of the beast." The third: "out of the mouth of the false prophet." The fourth: "three unclean spirits." Thus, these words clearly indicate the demonic nature of this phenomenon: "dragon" (τοῦ δράκοντος), "beast" (τοῦ θηρίου), "false prophet" (τοῦ ψευδοπροφήτου),[69] and "three unclean spirits" (πνεύματα τρία ἀκάθαρτα).

The Second Factor: The Demonic Source of the Animosity toward Israel and God

The phrase "out of the mouth" (ἐκ τοῦ στόματος), which John repeats three times in 16:13, plays an important role in identifying the source of this animosity. One of the meanings of the preposition ἐκ (out of, from, with) refers to a movement from within to the outside, clearly demonstrating the trajectory of evil that originates from within the unclean trinity (the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet).

The Third Factor: The Role of Demons in the Animosity toward Israel and God

John saw three spirits "unclean, like frogs" (16:13) (ὡς βάτραχοι) coming out of the mouth of the unclean trinity,[70] which "are considered unclean animals by the Jews (Lev 11:10, 41)."[71] In addition, the apostle uses another phrase to describe these

[68] (1) Judgment of the wicked men (v. 2); (2) Judgment of the inhabitants of the sea (v. 3); (3) Judgment of the murderers of the saints (vv. 4–7); (4) Judgment of the wicked (vv. 8–9); (5) Judgment of the throne of the beast (vv. 10–11); (6) Judgment of the wicked trinity and their coalition (vv. 12–16); (7) Judgment of the cities, islands, and wicked men (vv. 17–21).

[69] G. B. Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation of St. John the Divine* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 206, says that this text (16:13) contains the first mention "of the false prophet, but it is not hard to identify him with the monster from the land which made all men worship the first monster (xiii. 11–18). It is a title which recalls Jesus's prophecy of the coming of false messiahs and false prophets (Mark xiii. 22), and it is strongly suggesting that the first monster is to be regarded as the false messiah or Antichrist."

[70] Caird, *A Commentary on the Revelation*, 206, says that "In all the Old Testament prophecies about an enemy from beyond, who is to gather for a last decisive battle, there is no mention of frogs."

[71] Johnson, "Revelation," 734.

unclean spirits: "spirits of demons" (πνεύματα δαιμονίων) (16:14). Beasley-Murray writes that these spirits are "the malignant forces of the spiritual world."[72] They are "demonic powers," "the three evil spirits," and "the unholy trinity."[73] Verse 14 indicates the role of these spirits in gathering the enemies to oppose God and Israel. First, they will perform signs ("miraculous signs").[74] Second, they will go out "to the kings of the entire world" (see also 16:16). Third, they will gather these kings together. Fourth, on God's appointed day, they will lead these kings to war against Israel (see also 16:16).

The Fourth Factor: The Goal of the Coalition of Animosity toward Israel and God

In 16:16 John uses the phrase "and he gathered them together" and also the word "Armageddon" (Ἁρμαγεδών).[75] John MacArthur clarifies the connection of 16:16 with the land of Israel when he writes: "Since there is no specific mountain by that name, and Har can refer to the hill country, it is probably a reference to the hill country surrounding the Plain of Megiddo, some sixty miles north of Jerusalem."[76] Thus, in this text, John the apostle points to the purpose of the anti-Israel and anti-God coalition at the end of the Great Tribulation: war (16:14) against Israel (16:16).

(4) Allusions

At the outset, we will point out two rules we use when working with allusions in this article.[77] First, despite the fact that the book of Revelation contains many references to the Old and New Testaments,[78] most of which "come not in explicit quotations but in allusions and conceptual borrowings,"[79] we will refer only to the texts of the book of Revelation. Second, despite the fact that the references we will deal with are not direct quotations or even paraphrases, they are united by common vocabulary and similar context, which is an important condition for the legitimacy of the references.

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[72] Beasley-Murray, *Revelation*, 224.

[73] Bruce, 1986, "Revelation," 1620.

[74] Mark Wilson, "Revelation," *ZIBBC*, 4:341. We want to add that in 16:15 John uses the following two phrases: "blessed is he who watches" and "he who keeps his garments," which refer to the saints who will not be deceived by demonic spirits and therefore not join the ranks of the wicked coalition.

[75] See discussion on Armageddon by Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 301–302; and Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 268–71.

[76] John MacArthur, *Because the Time is Near* (Chicago: Moody, 2007), 255–56.

[77] Jeffery Leonard, "Identifying Inner-Biblical Allusions: Psalm 78 as a Test Case," *JBL* 127, no. 2 (2008): 245, writes that when evidence of the dependence of one text on another emerges, it is necessary to define a standard by which the reliability of the evidence can be assessed. He further speaks of two types of intertextual links: (1) clear links and (2) lesser clear links, while emphasizing that each type of these links implies the use of different standards for assessing the strength of that evidence.

[78] D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 477, write that some scholars think that John used certain New Testament sources ("Matthew, Luke, 1 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Colossians and Ephesians) to write the book of Revelation."

[79] Carson and Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 477.

Upon a close examination of Revelation, one can find a number of allusions from 16:12–16 to Revelation 13,[80] 14,[81] 17, and 19.[82] These allusions further expound the foundation of the hatred of the people of Israel by pointing out that such sentiment is the foundation of Satan's war against God, expressed in an attack not only on Israel, but also on Christ and the late-tribulation saints. However, 16:12–16, above all, has a close connection with chapter 12. In 16:13, the first person listed in the unclean trinity is the dragon (δράκων), the key figure who will lead the military campaign against Israel at the end of the tribulation. In Revelation 12, the key figure who leads the attack on Israel, its Messiah, and the faithful remnant is the same dragon (δράκων) (12:3, 4, 7 [twice], 9, 12, 13, 16, 17). Furthermore, in chapter 16 (key verses being 13, 14, 16) and chapter 12 (key verses being 4, 6, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17) the same context is evident: the dragon's war against Israel and God.

(5) Theology

Built upon this analysis, it can be concluded that the global surge in animosity toward Israel and God that will occur at the end of the Great Tribulation will be a

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[80] In Revelation 13, John uses the same words as in 16:12–16. The first word is "beast," which sometimes appears in phrases such as "the first beast," "the other beast," and "the image of the beast" (13:1, 2, 3, 4 [three times], 11, 12 [two times], 14 [two times], 15 [three times], 17, 18). In addition, the pronouns "him," "he," "his" refer to the beast (verses 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8), regarding which R. C. Sproul, *The Last Days According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 182 writes: "Nowhere in Scripture do we get such a graphic picture of a wicked eschatological figure as the Apocalypse provides of 'the beast.'" Koester, "The Book of Revelation," 176 connects the beast that came out of the sea with the Antichrist, the opponent "of God and Christ" (Rev 13:1–10). He [Koester, "The Book of Revelation," 175] writes that the beast appeared on the world arena "in the end times." Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 299, writes that the beast that came out of the earth (13:11–17) represents "The false prophet (appearing by that name for the first time)." Besides the word "beast," in chapter 13 we find the word "dragon" (vv. 2, 4, 11), as well as "war" (πόλεμος) (vv. 4, 7), which John places in the context of the war of the first beast (Antichrist) with the saints (v. 7). See Sproul, *The Last Days According to Jesus*, 182–86. Sproul, *The Last Days According to Jesus*, 178 writes that the Antichrist has more than one meaning. It depends on its prefix: "The prefix normally means 'against' and suggests someone who is in opposition to something. In this sense *antichrist* refers to someone who stands in opposition to Christ and who is his very antithesis"; and he adds that, "In Greek the prefix *anti-* can also be translated 'in place of.' Theologians call this the imitation motif. So we might view the Antichrist as a false Christ, or as one who seeks to usurp the rightful place of Christ"; and he then adds that, however, "It is possible, if not probable, that the concept of antichrist contains both elements." Mounce, *The Book of Revelation,* 299 writes that "The dragon is without doubt the seven-headed dragon of chapter 12 (specifically identified as Satan in 12:9)."

[81] In Revelation 14:9–12 (as in chapter 13), the word "beast" is found (vv. 9, 11), which John uses in the context of the judgment (vv. 9–11) of those who worship the beast (v. 11), which God will perform "in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb" (v. 10).

[82] There are several key words that connect 16:12–16 with chapter 17, such as "beast" (verses 3, 7, 8 [two times], 11, 12, 13, 16, 17), "kings" (verses 2, 10, 12 [two times]), "kingdom" (verses 12, 17), "reigns" (v. 18), and "war" (v. 14). Not only do these references share the vocabulary with 16:12–16, but they are also in the context of the war of the beast and his coalition (17:12–14), no longer with Israel as in 16:12–16, but with the saints (v. 6) and the Lamb who "will overcome them" (v. 14). Furthermore, 16:12–16 has an important connection with 19:17–21, where John uses the same vocabulary as in 16:12–16: "kings" (19:18, 19), "beast" (vv. 19, 20 [twice]), "armies" (v. 19), and "false prophet" (v. 20). All of these words are placed in the context of the beast and the false prophet's war, not with ethnic Israel in the valley of Armageddon (16:16), but, as in chapter 17, with Christ and His saints, whereby the beast and the false prophet will be "thrown alive into the lake of fire" (19:20) and their coalition will be destroyed by Christ (19:21).

planned action, which will include preparation, the identification of the leaders of this coalition, the creation of the coalition itself, and the setting of the coalition's goals. This analysis also indicates that opposition to the people of Israel and God (including modern-day antisemitism) is not a human initiative. It is a spiritual phenomenon of demonic origin, which has impetus given by the dragon together with the beast and the false prophet, using unclean spirits who will gather the kings of the earth with the purpose of destroying not only Israel, but also attacking the Messiah of Israel and the faithful remnant of the Great Tribulation period.

Revelation 20:4–10

Revelation 20:4–10 refers to the ultimate global attack on Israel and the Messiah at the end of the Millennium (see vv. 7–10). In chapter 12, John saw a picture of the structure of this attack, and in chapter 20 he gives a description of the operation of this mechanism in the final part of human history. If we follow the literary approach to defining the boundaries of 20:4–10, we observe that this text is located between two identical phrases that define its boundaries: "Then I saw" (καί εἶδον, 20:4, 11).

(1) Structure

Unlike commentators who approach the construction of the text structure thematically, we, as in the previous sections of this article (12:1–17; 16:12–16), draw attention to the literary markers of 20:4–10. In this text, after the phrase "Then I saw" (20:4a), the phrase "a thousand years" (χίλια ἔτη) is repeated four times in 20:4, 20:5, 20:6, and 20:7. The first three parts of this structure relate to the entire period of the 1000-year kingdom, during which one category of people (the saints) will reign (20:4, 6), and at the end of which the other (the wicked) will be judged (20:5). And the fourth part of the structure is connected with the culmination of this kingdom: the final attack against Israel and the Messiah, expressing yet another concerted attack on God's people Israel (20:7–10).

(2) Context

Chapter 19 ends with the defeat of the beast and the false prophet (19:20) and the final destruction of this demonic coalition (19:21), the story of which begins with the phrase "Then I saw" (19:11). Chapter 21 opens a new period of history – a new heaven and a new earth – which also begins with the phrase "Then I saw" (21:1). Thus, chapter 20 is located between the final phase of the Great Tribulation and the beginning of eternity. Various commentators divide chapter 20 thematically.[83] But,

[83] For example, Craig S. Keener, *Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 813–15, divides the chapter into three parts: (1) The Thousand-Year Kingdom (20:1–6); (2) The Folly of Gog and Magog (20:7–10); (3) The final Judgment (20:11–15). Johnson, "Revelation," 593, divides it into three parts: (1) The Binding of Satan and the Millennium (20:1–6); (2) The Release and End of Satan (20:7–10); (3) The Great White Throne of Judgment (20:11–15). Bruce, 1986, "Revelation," 1597, divides it into the same parts as Johnson, but titles its sections differently: (1) The Binding of Satan and the Reign of the Martyrs (20:1–6); (2) Gog and Magog (20:7–10); (3) The Last Assize (20:11–15).

upon closer analysis, one can notice that the structure of chapter 20 is determined not so much by the subject matter as by one literary formula, "Then I saw," which is repeated four times.[84] Thus, the place of 20:4–10 points to the action of the dragon (Satan) between his first imprisonment for one thousand years and his second, eternal imprisonment.[85]

(3) Literary Analysis

In the section dealing with the structure of 20:4–10, we showed that this text begins with the formula "Then I saw" (20:4), followed by four sections, each of which is defined by the phrase "a thousand years." The first section (20:4) deals with the saints who did not worship the beast, the second (20:5) with the wicked dead, and the third (20:6) with the state and condition of the saints.[86] The fourth section (20:7–10) has a number of key words and phrases to clarify the essence of Satan's attack on Israel. It begins with the phrase: "When the thousand years are completed" (20:7). Here John indicates the actions of Satan after he is released from prison, using such phrases and words as: "Satan will be released" (λυθήσεται ὁ Σατανᾶς) (20:7), "will come out to deceive [πλανῆσαι] the nations" (20:8),[87] "to gather them together for the war" (20:8), "they came up" (20:9), "surrounded" (20:9).

James L. Resseguie says that in 20:7, "The passive voice ('will be released') is a passive of divine activity – a pardon granted by God."[88] Despite his release, which was initiated by God, Satan, together with his coalition, will surround Jerusalem (20:9), which in this verse is described in the form of "the two-step progression – 'the camp of the saints' and 'the beloved city.'"[89] Here, "the actual strategy and method of Satan's deception is not revealed, but it will succeed in duping the unregenerate people of the world into revolting against the Lord Jesus Christ."[90] Thus, the fourth section clearly demonstrates that Satan will be at the head of the

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[84] (1) "Then I saw" (v. 1); (2) "Then I saw" (v. 4); (3) "Then I saw" (v. 11); (4) "And I saw" (v. 12).

[85] From this structure it is clear that the text of 20:4–10 is located between its first section and the third section. The first section deals with the dragon's imprisonment in the abyss for a thousand years (vv. 1–3). The second section with the development of events after the end of his thousand-year Kingdom (vv. 4–10). The third section with God the Judge sitting on a white throne (v. 11). The fourth section with the final judgment of the wicked (vv. 12–15).

[86] The first section (20:4), which is defined by the phrase "reigned with Christ a thousand years," contains several key phrases and words: "the souls of those who had been beheaded," "who had not worshiped the beast," "had not received the mark," "came to life," and "reigned." Thus, in this part of the verse, John points out the characteristics and functions of the saints who defeated the beast and were resurrected before or at the beginning of the thousand-year Kingdom. See more information on the reign of the saints in MacArthur, *Because the Time is Near*, 298–300. The second section (v. 5), which John the Apostle introduces with the phrase "until the thousand years were completed," contains the key phrase "the rest of the dead did not come to life," which points to a class of people who will not come to life until after the thousand years have been completed. The third section (v. 6), which John introduces with the phrase "will reign with him for a thousand years," contains three key phrases: "blessed and holy," "they will be priests of God and of Christ," and "they will reign." In this section, John deepens the idea of 20:4, pointing to the blessed state and condition of the resurrected saints during the millennial kingdom.

[87] Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, 372, says that "Both Satan and the false prophet are portrayed in Revelation as deceivers (12:9; 20:3; 13:14; 19:20)."

[88] Resseguie, *The Revelation of John*, 248.

[89] Resseguie, 248.

[90] MacArthur, *Because the Time is Near*, 301.

coalition at the end of the thousand-year kingdom, which will move its armies against Jerusalem. And the phrases and words: "fire came down," "devoured them" (20:9), "the devil," "who deceived," "was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone," "the beast," "the false prophet," "they will be tormented" (20:10) describe God's response to those who oppose Israel and the Messiah, which will be expressed in the judgment of this anti-Israel and anti-God coalition (20:9) and the devil (20:10).

(4) Allusions

Revelation 20:4–10 and 16:12–16 have a clear intertextual connection. These texts are linked by a phrase with identical vocabulary: "to gather them together for the war" (20:7) and "to gather them together for the war" (16:14). In both chapters, 16 and 20, this battle is led by Satan (the dragon). The context in both texts is the same – animosity toward Israel and God – which will take a tangible form when Satan goes to war "against God's people."[91] Revelation 20:4–10 also has an intertextual connection with 12:1–17, which speaks of the dragon's attack on the woman, child, and faithful remnant. Both texts share common vocabulary that is associated with the initiator who wages war against Israel and God.[92] All these texts (12:1–17; 16:12–16; 20:4–10) have one context in common: the persecution of Israel, which, according to 12:1–17, includes an attack on Israel's Messiah and the faithful remnant of Israel.

(5) Theology

The results of the study of Revelation 20:4–10 indicate that the formation of a new anti-Israel coalition will be led by Satan at the end of the thousand-year kingdom. Although the first coalition was destroyed by God, and the beast and the false prophet were thrown into the lake of fire (19:20; 20:10), after a thousand years Satan will again gather an army consisting of deceived nations, "which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog" (20:8).[93] This campaign, just like the first (16:12–16), will be directed toward war with God, in which the dragon will lead his armies against Israel (20:7–8), Israel's Messiah, and the faithful remnant of Israel (12:1–17).

Summary

Carson and Moo correctly state that the book of Revelation "makes significant contributions to a number of areas of New Testament theology,"[94] such as the

[91] Keener, *Bible Background Commentary*, 814

[92] In chapter 20, John uses the words "Satan" (v. 7), "devil" (v. 10), who is also called "dragon" (v. 2), "serpent" (v. 2). In chapter 12, John also uses the same words: "dragon" (vv. 3, 4, 7 [twice], 9, 12, 13, 16, 17), "devil" (verses 9, 12), "Satan" (v. 9), "serpent" (vv. 9, 14, 15).

[93] Johnson, "Revelation," 772, says that "In Ezekiel 38–39, Gog refers to the prince of a host of pagan invaders from the North, especially the Scythian hordes from the distant land of Magog. In Revelation, however, the names are symbolic of the final enemies of Christ duped by Satan into attacking the community of the saints."

[94] Carson and Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 483.

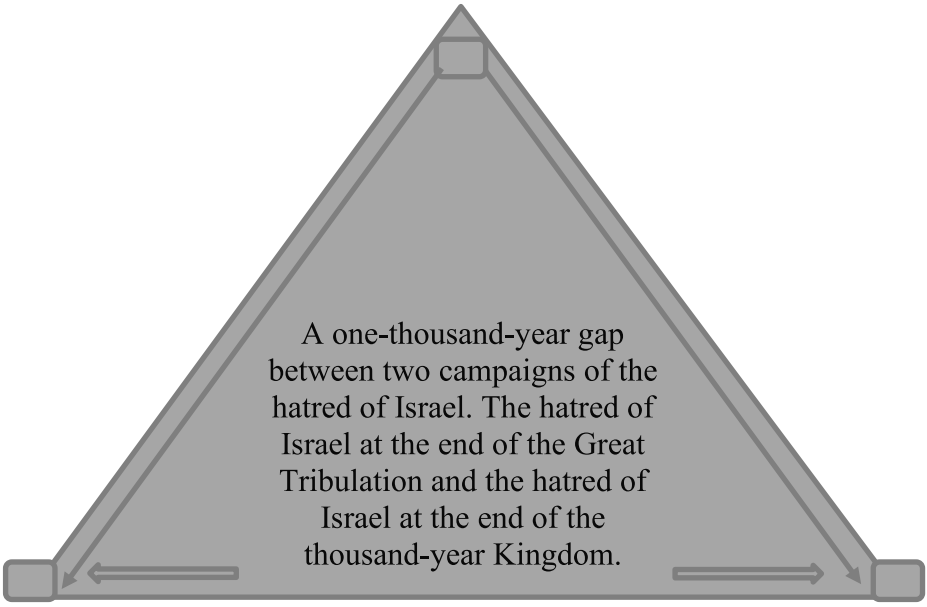
sovereignty of God, Christology, "the end of the history," and "the reality of God's judgment."[95] In addition, analysis of the three texts above (12:1–17; 16:12–16; 20:4–10) demonstrates that the book of Revelation sheds light on and contributes to the biblical perspective on the hatred of Israel. Based on the intertextual analysis, literary analysis of these texts and literary analysis of their context, we suggest three elements that explain the hatred of Israel from a biblical perspective: (1) the model concerning the hatred of Israel, (2) the schema concerning the hatred of Israel, and (3) the characteristics concerning the hatred of Israel.

The Model Concerning the Hatred of Israel

As a result of the analysis, we have identified a model concerning the hatred of Israel that is a triangle marked by three texts (12:1–17; 16:12–16; 20:4–10) that are united not only by common vocabulary but also by a common context: the dragon's war with Israel and God. The first text (12:1–17) refers to two signs in heaven. Here, the mechanism expressing the hatred of Israel is demonstrated in metaphorical form, where the dragon's war with God is expressed in an attack on Israel, the Messiah of Israel, and the faithful remnant of Israel. The second text (16:12–16) refers to the dragon's war with God at the end of the Great Tribulation, when the dragon will lead his armies against Israel. And intertextual analysis makes it clear that this war includes an attack on the Messiah of Israel and the faithful remnant of Israel. The third text (20:4–10) is concerned with the dragon's war with God at the end of the thousand-year kingdom, when the dragon will again lead his armies against Israel, but, as in 16:12–16, intertextual analysis makes it clear that the dragon's war includes an attack on Israel's Messiah and the faithful remnant of Israel.

[95] Carson and Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 483–84.

1. The Sign in Heaven (Rev 12:1–17)
Israel
Israel's Messiah
Israel's Faithful Remnant



2. The Great Tribulation (Rev 16:12–16)
Israel
Israel's Messiah
Israel's Faithful Remnant

3. The Thousand-Year Kingdom (Rev 20:4–10)
Israel
Israel's Messiah
Israel's Faithful Remnant

The Schema Concerning the Hatred of Israel

We built the schema of the biblical perspective concerning the hatred of Israel on six key words, the equivalent of which we discovered in these three texts. The first word is *dragon*. The second is *God*. The third is *war*. The fourth is *Israel*. The fifth is *Messiah*. The sixth is *remnant*.[96]

First: The dragon is at war with God.

Second: The dragon's war with God is expressed in an attack on three objects: Israel, the Messiah of Israel, and the faithful remnant of Israel.

[96] In 12:1–17; 16:12–16; 20:4–10 and their literary contexts, John uses different epithets of six words, the meaning of which I have indicated by one word that conveys the idea of their equivalents.

The Characteristics Concerning the Hatred of Israel

In addition to the model and schema concerning the hatred of Israel, a literary analysis of the three texts in the book of Revelation (12:1–17; 16:12–16; 20:4–10) points to several characteristics concerning the hatred of Israel. First, hatred of Israel is not based on human ambitions or convictions. It is the work of demonic forces (Satan, the Antichrist, the false prophet, and demonic spirits). Second, the creation of a coalition that hates Israel implies a specific goal: to war against Israel, the Messiah of Israel, and the faithful remnant of Israel. Third, hatred of Israel is not bound by time, space, or human status, but will continue until the end of human history (the time of the Great Tribulation or the thousand-year kingdom), it will extend to the farthest territorial boundaries ("the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog," 20:8), and it will include the highest status of human authorities ("the kings of the whole world," 16:14 or "nations," 20:8). Fourth, hatred of Israel is a system of thought that includes animosity toward the nation of Israel, the Messiah of Israel, and the faithful remnant of Israel ("great wrath," 12:12; "enraged," 12:17). Fifth, hatred of Israel is irrational, since the influence of demonic forces on the human mind (20:8) deprives a person of the ability to think soberly and righteously (cf. Rom 1:18–32).

Conclusion

The Biblical story about enemies of God hating Israel "is the old story of Satanic hatred to God, and man's frailty told out again…"[97] Today, like previous generations of Christians, we see that "Satan rages about the earth, persecuting the people of God (12:7–12)."[98] We know that Satan's attacks will never cease. Satan and his followers will continually invent new methods by which they will seek to destroy Israel, wage war against Israel's Messiah, and attack the faithful remnant of Israel. Despite this, God will judge the devil and destroy the demonic system behind all forms of hatred toward God's chosen people, including modern-day antisemitism.[99] The dragon's battering machines will fail, and the sharp spears of his coalition will break. The time will come when the people of God, covered by the shadow of the Almighty Lord, will stand on the ashes of the fallen idol of the hatred of Israel.

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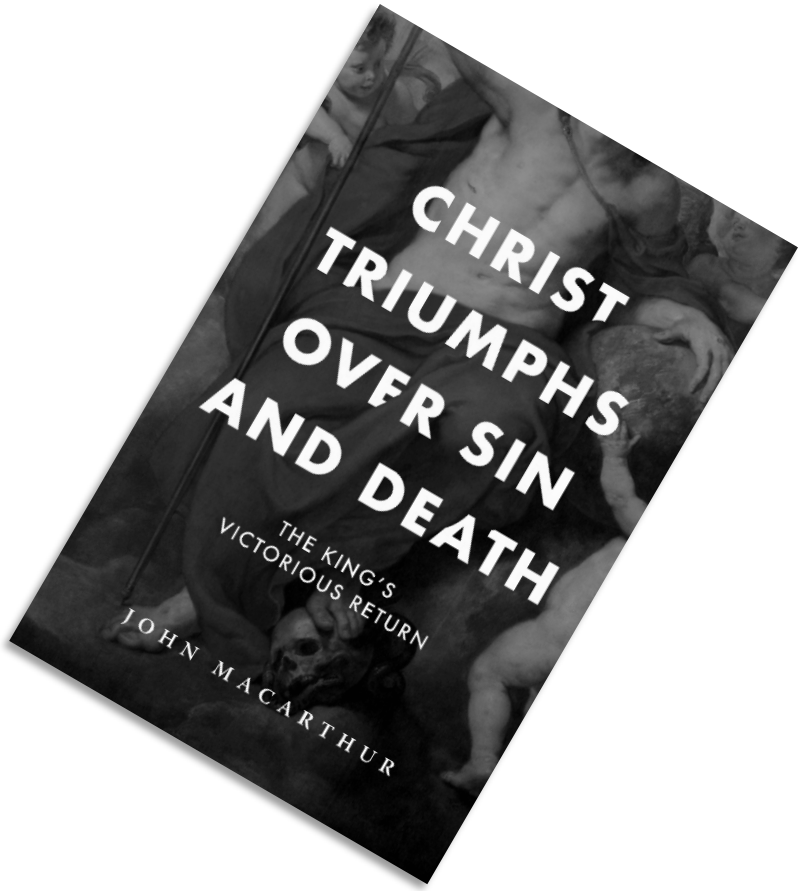
[97] Harry Ironside, *Lectures on the Book of Revelation* (New York: Loizeaux Brothers, 1950), 343.

[98] Koester, "Book of Revelation," 176. Craig Koester, "Book of Revelation," *NIDB,* 4:793, says that "The people of God include biblical Israel and the followers of Jesus." G. R. Beasley-Murray, *The Book of Revelation,* NCB (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 293, writes that the Church of Jesus Christ "is distinguished by its rejection of allegiance to the beast."

[99] Although Ladd, *The Revelation of John*, 270, says that in Revelation 20 "as in the battle of Armageddon, the emphasis in the divine victory is not on the defeat of the hosts of men who have fought against the Messiah and his people, but upon the destruction of the powers which have stood behind them," Revelation 20:9 clearly indicates that the fire of God that came down from heaven also destroyed the people who were part of the anti-Israel coalition.

THE KING'S VICTORIOUS RETURN



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"THE CONFLICT IS UPON US": RESISTING ECUMENISM AND HYPER-CONTEXTUALIZATION

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* * * * *

Recent cultural trends have increased pressure on missionaries to contextualize the gospel in an ecumenical fashion that minimizes sound theology and does injustice to the Word of God. This article examines the origins of these trends and their impact upon missions theology today. Rather than giving way to societal pressures, missionaries are called to prioritize the work of evangelistic proclamation in a manner faithful to Scripture. Missionaries should live out the exhortation given by the Apostle Paul in their preaching of the truth: "Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love" (1 Cor 16:14).

* * * * *

Introduction[1]

On the pendulum of contextualization, how far is too far? What is acceptable? Tolerable? Unacceptable? May Muslim-background believers secretly worship Jesus in a mosque? May Buddhist-background believers still leave votive offerings in neighborhood spirit houses to appease the spirits yet secretly pray to God for protection? May a tribe in Papua New Guinea still use drums in Christian worship when drums are designed to repel evil spirits? What about New Age-background believers still employing mindfulness and yoga to achieve oneness with God's celestial energy?

Many seasoned missionaries debate degrees of contextualization. And the answers are not simple. Typically, they depend on multiple factors in a specific

[1] Content in this article has been adapted and revised from E. D. Burns, *Ancient Gospel, Brave New World: Jesus Still Saves Sinners in Cultures of Shame, Fear, Bondage, and Weakness* (Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 2021), 103–35.

situation. No general rule applies to all people groups, in all languages, in all countries, at all times. Basic contextualization is a natural and normal practice of human communication. Those who are fluent in more than one language can seamlessly contextualize their meaning without much premeditated effort. Learning the local language is the key for understanding inherently the cultural paradigms and how to explain the gospel to the target people. To try to do it in English or through an interpreter will have its unavoidable pitfalls and deficiencies. As difficult as it might be, learning their heart language is the key.

God's Word transcends culture. But that does not rescind the responsibilities of communicating its timeless truths in diverse languages and human contexts. God's Word can and must be translated into other languages. And unlike man-made religions' sacred writings, we can understand the Bible's inspired meaning when it is translated into other languages.

God's Word is unique in that God speaks by the Scriptures to diverse cultural paradigms. The Word communicates its transcendent doctrines through various translations. And without abandoning all unholy remnants of the image of God in those paradigms, Scripture reorients their priorities to conform to the lordship of Christ over all things.

Once the gospel takes root in local societies and cultures, inevitably it rebukes, redefines, and renovates cultural value systems. It brings them under the scrutiny, control, and meaning of God's truth in Christ. Of those cultural value systems and orientations that the Bible and doctrine do not create and prescribe, they are neither neutral nor innocent. They might faintly reflect God's law and created order, but sin has spoiled them. They are on a collision course with the impenetrable standard of God's Word and His ways, works, and world.

Therefore, contextualizing the gospel indiscriminately to ungodly ways of thinking about the world and reality will be fundamentally flawed. All forms of thinking, belief systems, and value systems (and the individuals who espouse them) must yield to Christ's kingship. Missionaries must heed God's commands over against the world's perspectives and opinions. Movements of ecumenical partnership and interfaith dialogues have weakened among many the doctrinal boldness necessary for Great Commission service. The spirit of amicable ecumenism has led to multi-perspectival methodologies of hyper-contextualization. Ecumenism is the ground in which hyper-contextualization flourishes.

Ecumenism influences us to think that it seems humble and charitable to affirm the standpoint of a target culture's "lived experience"; however, the fact is that no melanin level, biological sex, socioeconomic bracket, or nationality render anyone more or less competent and authoritative to adjudicate God's culturally transcendent law and gospel. As the Bible says, "From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come" (2 Cor 5:16–17). God spoke the world into existence, and God speaks through His Word. Out of nothing He spoke all things into being, and through His Word He speaks new creation life into our dead souls. He wrote the Book; He makes the rules.

Instead of addressing all the historical errors of ecumenism and the missiological degrees of contextualization, this article broadly surveys the

history and consequences of some ideas, and explains why we must define and defend our doctrine. Clarity is the enemy of error. Error can abound in some cultures for generations where the missionaries communicate doctrinal ambiguity and ambivalence. This article will take into account many of the common emphases and effects of ecumenism, hyper-contextualization, standpoint theory, and multi-perspectivism.

Ecumenism's Effect on Softening Doctrine's Hard Edges

In the history of the modern era's Great Commission service, many Christian leaders have ceded evangelical theological ground to ecumenical dialogue.[2] Others have convinced themselves, in the name of unity, love, and "we-can-do-more-together-than-apart" slogans, that the promises of God in redeeming the world are conditioned upon their activism, pragmatism, or pietism. This shift from bearing witness to Christ and His coming kingdom to "living the gospel" and "building Christ's kingdom"[3] is a blend of confused ecclesiology, soteriology, and eschatology. But the insidious part of this is not in an abdication of theology, per se, but rather in the assimilation of familiar evangelical vocabulary (e.g., sin, faith, redemption, heaven, kingdom, etc.) with the priorities of humanistic utopianism. A highbrow ecumenism that unites around social causes and shallow relationships props up "influential" activism as the world's messiah. Christ, then, becomes the victim-martyr mascot, cheering on His revolutionaries of justice. And the movement's mantras of "incarnational living" through being a "faithful presence" with "winsome dialogue" are palpably exhausting. They guilt-trip God's people into believing the vacuous proviso that if the world's Christians unite around love for Jesus not doctrine, deeds not creeds, and by "living the gospel," we can then "redeem the culture" and finish the "revolution of love and justice" that Jesus started. And best of all, no pressure, "the world is watching."

Doctrinal Compromise for Kingdom Culture-Making

Twentieth-century Christianity found its progressive voice in the pen of the American activistic theologian, Walter Rauschenbusch (1861–1918). Though he came from a long legacy of theological liberalism, Rauschenbusch pioneered an American variety of Christianized activism, socialism, pietism, mysticism, volunteerism, and pragmatism. The 21st-century's social liberals, though claiming to

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[2] Ecumenism and ecumenical dialogue are typically inter-religious (or inter-faith) and cross-denominational alliances based upon a high value of perceived community around an activistic cause and a lowest-common denominator of doctrinal clarity. These alliances can either be formal (e.g., signed agreements between diverse parties) or informal (e.g., ministry-based relationships for common causes). Often there is a general agreement to the "basics" of the Christian faith, such as The Apostle's Creed. And anything more specific than that can be considered peripheral, distracting to Christ's mission, and even divisive and harmful to church unity.

[3] These are common terms that have been popularized through liberal Christian jargon and are usually related to what is typically called "incarnational" ministry. For resources that bring careful correction to this language, see Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert, *What Is the Mission of the Church?: Making Sense of Social Justice Shalom and the Great Commission* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2011); Greg Gilbert and D. A. Carson, *What Is the Gospel?* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010).

be secularists and even utopians, are the progressive offspring of Rauschenbusch's religious ideals.[4] And those religious ideals were mainlined in Protestant liberalism, which theologian J. Gresham Machen (1881–1937) boldly condemned as "contrary to the doctrines of the Christian religion" and as being "another religion."[5] The siren song for Christians is that we can successfully ensure human flourishing if we play by the rules of the liberation movement *du jour*. Of course, human flourishing is never defined nor is it ever measured. But we are shushed into never questioning motives, since everyone means well and has a good heart, and we are chided to never challenge methods, since all truth is God's truth.

Rauschenbusch famously merged an assurance of prophetic holiness with a collective feeling of belonging to a social cause: "The social gospel … fuses the Christian spirit and social consciousness." And he went on to propose that "experiences act as a kind of guide by which we test what seems to have truth and reality." He claimed that this collective process enacts "a democratic change in theology on the basis of religious experience…. An experience of religion through the medium of solidaristic social feeling is an experience of unusually high ethical quality, akin to that of the prophets of the Bible."[6] Rauschenbusch shunned a gospel where any Christian "appears before the judgment seat of Christ with $50,000,000 and its human corollaries to his credit, and then pleads a free pardon through faith in the atoning sacrifice."[7] For Rauschenbusch, just as "sin is a social force," so "salvation, too, is a social force. It is exerted by groups that are charged with divine will and love … a social organism ruled by justice, cleanness, and love. A full salvation demands a Christian social order."[8] The guilt of sin emerged from unjust social privilege, and the corresponding atonement came from following the way of Christ in mourning over the victims of their social privilege, fighting legislative battles to crush systemic injustice, and organizing social activism in any and every sphere of society. Assurance of salvation in this system grew out of a combination of feeling solidarity with other social activists around building the kingdom of God, which "is the energy of God realizing itself in human life … that is valuable in so far as [*sic*] it grows out of action for the Kingdom and impels action."[9] Rauschenbusch trumpeted the kingdom as "the revolutionary force of Christianity."[10]

Evangelical leaders in the 20th century, especially in the English-speaking world, slowly grew weary of being tarred and feathered by the institutional elites as either narrow-minded fundamentalists or so heavenly minded that they were no earthly good. Their resolve to endure the shaming slowly began to crack. The hairline fracture started when evangelicals discovered through ecumenical dialogue that liberals were surprisingly nice people. Cordial interaction in the university and denominations gave way to friendly relationships whose point of connection

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[4] See Joseph Bottum, *An Anxious Age: The Post-Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of America* (New York: Image Books, 2014).

[5] J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 16, 18.

[6] Walter Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel* (New York: Macmillan Publishers, 2008), 20–21.

[7] Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, 19.

[8] Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianizing the Social Order* (Boston: The Pilgrim Press, 1912), 116.

[9] Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel*, 141.

[10] Rauschenbusch, 135.

revolved around the rewarding camaraderie of "working together in unity for a kingdom cause." Liberal Christians proved to be quite likable. In fact, they were genuinely amicable and pleasant people with compassionate hearts for the urban poor. As a result, through a desire to protect harmony and work together, the hard edges of doctrine were smoothed down. Christianity was no longer a religion of truth grounded in God's unilateral promises; rather, it became more of an altruistic cause for community organizing built upon social solidarity that believed in creating something beautiful together for flourishing as God's children.

The identifiable infusion of Rauschenbusch's kingdom theology into the evangelical psyche came in 1910 at the World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh. The ecumenical priorities of this conference's organizers downplayed the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture, the exclusivity of Christ, and maintained a highbrow tolerance to progressive Christianity and the blending of Christianity with other beliefs. The ecumenical discussions continued for decades as philanthropic alliances developed in the name of pursuing holistic and broader world evangelism. This latitudinarian approach to world evangelism lost its grip on the biblical gospel altogether. Evangelism morphed into declaring the value and worth of each person and helping them make sense of their deepest questions and needs in life. The church's mission became focused on the felt needs of society, showing people how to be part of God's mission to recreate culture, renew all things, and ultimately produce God's *shalom* throughout the world. This would happen once Christians learned to walk in the way of Christ so attractively that the world would join in God's mission of restoration. In this system, since everyone has been effectively reconciled to God already, the mission is to partner with God in inviting humanity to repair society's systemic brokenness and to flourish in their God-given inheritance. The mission was to restructure society around God's grandest dreams for humanity: justice, love, peace, and equity.[11]

Ecumenism Based on Causes and Friendships

Rauschenbusch's social transformationalist ideologues live on. Contemporary laptop-warriors and "artivists" organize and infiltrate Christian consciousness throughout seminaries, conferences, publishers, and most pervasively through social media. As thrilling as it might feel to be part of a movement-mindset, Christians must unite around truth, not causes. That dopamine rush from being part of the in-crowd of radical activists is an intoxicating drug that blinds the mind to reason, truth, and common sense. It is slavery to social liberationism through the means of awakening humanity to its divine spark, its sacred potential to flourish as the kingdom of God. Machen contended,

> The grace of God is rejected by modern liberalism. And the result is slavery—the slavery of the law, the wretched bondage by which man undertakes the impossible task of establishing his own righteousness as a ground of acceptance

[11] For a discerning treatment of the development of the ecumenical world mission movement (i.e., the World Council of Churches) after 1910, see Arthur P. Johnston, *The Battle for Evangelism* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1978).

> with God. It may seem strange at first sight that "liberalism," of which the very name means freedom, should in reality be wretched slavery. But the phenomenon is not really so strange. Emancipation from the blessed will of God always involves bondage to some worse taskmaster.[12]

We must be careful not to use Christianity as a social organizing agenda. Christianity is fundamentally a doctrinal religion, not a cause to follow. The English philosopher, C. S. Lewis (1898–1963) warned in his book, *The Screwtape Letters*, that mission drift happens through slowly conflating the doctrines of Christianity for the blessings of Christianity's influence:

> On the other hand we do want, and want very much, to make men treat Christianity as a means; preferably, of course, as a means to their own advancement, but, failing that, as a means to anything—even to social justice. The thing to do is to get a man at first to value social justice as a thing which the Enemy demands, and then work him on to the stage at which he values Christianity because it may produce social justice. For the Enemy will not be used as a convenience. Men or nations who think they can revive the Faith in order to make a good society might just as well think they can use the stairs of Heaven as a short cut to the nearest chemist's shop…. "Believe this, not because it is true, but for some other reason." That's the game.[13]

In addition to viewing Christianity as a means for improving the temporal living conditions and overall human experience in society, an equally tenuous approach to Christianity exists—the temptation to view Christianity as so contextually flexible that it could include anyone who professes to love or follow Jesus. And the more erudite, cultured, and politically progressive the better. Instead of Christian fellowship grounded in the ancient gospel as the global church has historically confessed, cause-oriented solidarity and niceness are ends in themselves. The Welsh preacher of the 20th century, D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899–1981) labeled this blind commitment to affinity a "false ecumenical tendency." Evangelicals were letting their guard down and partnering with self-professed Christians who had no clear biblical doctrine other than sentimental platitudes and religious "niceness." He cautioned:

> It is the danger of being so broad, so wide, and so loose that in the end we have no definitions at all. As I see things today, this is perhaps the greater danger because we are living in what is called an ecumenical age. People have reacted, and rightly, against the divisions in the past, these wrong and sinful divisions. But the danger is that you react so violently that you swing right to the other extreme and say that nothing matters except that we have a Christian spirit.... Certainly we must all believe in unity. Our Lord has established that once and for ever in His great high priestly prayer (John 17). It is everywhere in the New Testament. Our great endeavor should be to be one, yet this must not lead to a

[12] Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*, 121.
[13] C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2017), 126–27.

> looseness in our thinking. We must not become subject to a false, vague, nebulous, ecumenical type of thinking.... I've met people who said... the Church of Scotland people and others whom we did not know and with whom we had nothing to do in the past, we've discovered they're very nice people, and we've had a very happy time working with them. This was very subtle, because they found that they were nice people—whether they had thought before that these people had horns and long tails I do not know—but the point was that they had been impressed by their niceness, by their friendliness, and by their brotherliness. This had the effect of making these people take the next step and say, Well, I wonder whether these doctrines we've been emphasizing are so important after all. Isn't the great thing about us that we are Christians, that we've got this loving spirit, and that we're prepared to work together?[14]

Excessive Contextualization[15]

This ecumenical tendency to defer noble motives to everyone, hope for the best, and admit that we have secret doubts about our faith often jettisons historical doctrine. And when that happens, where there are not objective and confessional moorings, all manner of hyper-contextualization presents itself as valid, innovative, and intriguing.

Often, from a non-native perspective (that of the missionary), the ability to discern intuitively when contextualization goes too far is quite complex. It is as complicated as learning a language fluently. Discerning excesses of contextualization is especially challenging if the missionary's primary operating standpoint is the target culture's perceived value system. Rather, the missionary's fundamental starting point should be rooted in theology, though not to the exclusion or denigration of the target culture. It is a matter of priority and focus. And to be honest, some missionaries falter by rarely acknowledging their own implicit existential approach to Scripture. This is usually evident in seasons of culture shock when the missionary seems to nitpick every disagreeable thing about the target culture. Yet others fail by arguing for understanding the Word through the target culture's standpoint and intersectional identities. It takes discernment and finesse to navigate between both ditches. Candidly admitting that we all have hidden perspectives is different than insisting on a standpoint filter that uniquely comprehends God and His gospel.

The missionary is truly tricultural—operating in the Bible's doctrinal value system, his own fallen native culture, and the fallen target culture. But to avoid inundating the target culture with his native culture and to prevent syncretism by blending biblical doctrine with the target culture, the missionary must be dominated by the Bible. His categories, priorities, and emphases must be doctrinally sound. He must hold the focused precision of a surgeon and the sober-minded calm of a sniper. This will help him know how to make the Bible's teaching understandable to the target people without deviation.

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[14] D. M. Lloyd-Jones, *What Is an Evangelical?* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth, 2002), 18–19.

[15] The rest of this article borrows some abbreviated and reorganized content from the author's work: E. D. Burns, *Ancient Gospel, Brave New World: Jesus Still Saves Sinners in Cultures of Shame, Fear, Bondage, and Weakness* (Cape Coral, FL: Founders, 2021), 103–35.

An Analogy

Consider this scenario: A Nigerian missionary, Chibundu, relocates to suburban Atlanta. Chibundu is sharing the gospel to middle-class youth in an after-school outreach. Querying their epistemological standpoint and their Generation Z value system, he discovers that they interpret truth and understand meaning through the prism of material pleasure, sexual expression, and self-esteem. Their impression of Christianity is that it is trite and boring. So, starting from their standpoint, Chibundu concludes that the good news for these young suburbanites is that Jesus can fulfill their material and sexual desires. He can help them accept themselves the way God made them, and he can show them how to have abundance (code for "fun") in life.[16] And assuming they have had minimal exposure to the basics of the gospel, Chibundu shares short "devos" to tell the story of the Bible. Using the Gen Z version of John 1:1—an actual and an irreverent publication—he quotes, "Since Day Uno there was Cap G. Big J was chillin' with Cap G. And Big J was Cap G."[17] And then he goes on to cite another distorted and blasphemous rendering of Ephesians 2:4–5, saying, "Cap G bein' the real one, took us zombies and high key gave the real game."[18] Guess what? This kind of contextual "gospel" connects to the youth in a way that he perceives is inoffensive, culturally relevant, and enthusiastically embraced. He writes to his supporters in Africa and says, "I found a culturally relevant way to contextualize the gospel for the Gen Z people group."

Now, this illustration is obviously ridiculous and insipid. Intuitively, when the roles are reversed and traditional missionary-sending nations receive Majority World missionaries who employ the West's hyper-contextualization techniques, we then realize this standpoint approach is untenable. Anyone with a basic grasp of Scripture knows that the gospel is so much more than meeting felt needs of someone's standpoint. However, this culturally maximizing style of contextualization is not too dissimilar to what Western missionaries do when they prioritize interpreting Scripture mainly from the standpoint of the target cultural value system.

This type of prioritizing-culture-first approach is a gateway for future Christian cults and proves more difficult to penetrate with the true gospel. It might seem culturally relevant, expedient, and effective to the missionary. But it can produce devastating results of syncretism, sects, and utter confusion. One of the best ways to create a resistant unreached people group is to inoculate them with enough "Jesus" so that they presume they are "followers of Jesus." They fail to know, assent, and trust in the Christ of the Bible as the Spirit has revealed Him throughout the ages. When missionaries fail to define terms biblically and doctrinally and instead ask questions of cultural priority, counterfeit gospels proliferate.

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[16] While hypothetical, this illustration reflects reality, as is evidenced by the work of a pro-same-sex author arguing that Scripture affirms same-sex relationships. See Matthew Vines, *God and the Gay Christian: The Biblical Case in Support of Same-Sex Relationships* (New York: Convergent Books, 2014). For a biblical perspective on sexuality, see John D. Street, *Passions of the Heart: Biblical Counsel for Stubborn Sexual Sins* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2019).

[17] See Sunday Cool, *The Word According to Gen Z: A 30-Day Devo Challenge* (Nashville: LifeWay, 2020), 8, 36. See also "Gen Z Bible Translation (part 2)," Sunday Cool Tees, September 25, 2019, YouTube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_QOLQ758uLo.

[18] Cool, *The Word According to Gen Z*, 8, 36.

Risk of Contextualization: Intersectional Gnosticism

As illustrated above, some missionary practitioners and missiologists have overemphasized interpreting Scripture through the contextual standpoint of the target culture. Interpretive errors have slipped in unnoticed through discussions of "the [fill-in-the-modifier] gospel": the African gospel, the Western gospel, the shame/honor gospel, the Chinese gospel, the Global South gospel, the Indian gospel, and so on. To be clear, this assessment does not mean that Scripture should never specially apply and minister to people of diverse ethnolinguistic backgrounds, generations, and cultures. One ethnolinguistic group might respond with contemplative reverence to gospel truths, while another group might receive the gospel with celebration and dancing. Where a Scandinavian church might recite the Apostles' Creed with solemnity, a Ghanaian church might sing it with tambourines and exuberance. Biblical promises of God's justice impact a marginalized people enduring ruthless genocide differently than an upper-class student in a Western university. The former prioritizes verses of judgment and imprecation, while the latter emphasizes ideas of social responsibility and fairness. Both emphasize God's impartiality and justice, but their unique perspectives steer their applications of it.

To be fair and candid, the challenge with big-hearted missionaries is that they often use common terminology they hear in soundbites and on social media. I have embarrassingly made this mistake in using some secular-originated terminology, only later to find out that its technical meaning was antibiblical and far from what I was intending. I initially assume this is also the case when I hear missionaries undiscerningly parrot faddish jargon. It is not uncommon to hear a missiologist talk about the "intersections" of theology and culture or the like. Usually, that is just a trendy way of saying "the ways theology addresses commonly held ideas and the ways major cultural value systems influence the theological questions we ask." But the fact is, words have meaning, and ideas have consequences.

We must define terms, say what we mean, and mean what we say. The more missionaries and missiologists undiscerningly borrow verbiage from social sciences, the more the world's insidious hidden meanings have purchase power over our thinking. The evangelical fascination with "plundering the Egyptians" and discovering God's common-grace truth in the secular social sciences too easily leads to mission drift. And that leads to gospel drift. This is all done, with genuine intentions, to be sure, in the name of "ecumenical dialogue," "cultural sensitivity," and "relevant contextualization."

Standpoint Theory and Intersectional Gnosticism

In attempting to liberate biblical interpretation from the perceived colonization of Western interpretation, some missiologists employ a reader-centric hermeneutic (which, ironically, is thoroughly Western). It asks what the text fundamentally means to readers according to their cultural value system and orientation. Yet, frankly, this actually tends to exceed postmodernism. A "post-proposition" approach or a "post-truth" approach are more accurate descriptions. Inadvertently, the missionary dons a theological paternalism and becomes, as it were, a new priest who decides what ideas and doctrines the disadvantaged culture can understand. This approach effortlessly

slips into *standpoint epistemology* (or *standpoint theory*), illustrated by the anecdote about the Nigerian missionary.[19] This approach argues that knowledge emerges from a social and experiential position. Though few evangelical theologians and missiologists push contextual theology this far, it is an inevitable trajectory.[20]

Standpoint theory has roots in critical theory (academic jargon for *cultural Marxism*), Marxist theory, and the Hegelian dialectic.[21] It is an epistemological tool for understanding and interpreting truth from the standpoint of a marginalized minority's "lived experience," in conflict with an oppressive majority. And white Euro-American heterosexual male biblical interpretation has overshadowed historical theology and missiology. So some seek to interpret the Bible from a diverse standpoint because, they contend, marginalized minorities understand truth, not just differently but even more accurately. Truth is contextually situated, and every intersection of a marginalized component (e.g., non-white, non-male, non-sexually binary, Majority World) adds a uniquely authoritative epistemological tool for approximating truth. This secret spiritual knowledge based on a marginalized status is a form of what I call, "intersectional gnosticism."[22] Essentially, this says that an unmediated, intuitive spiritual knowledge exists based on one's oppressed, marginalized, or minority experience that separates the "haves" from the "have nots." Though not the same, it has a similar spirit to the Galatian heresy, which suggested that particular ethnicities must receive the Jews' teachings and submit to their laws because they had special knowledge based on their standpoint. Even with the most genuine intentions, this is still a false gospel because it abandons the freeness of grace (Gal 1:6–11). Again, without ambiguity, it is a false gospel.

Intersectional gnosticism, when applied to Scriptural interpretation, suggests that Jesus was an oppressed minority and came to liberate poor people. Therefore, hermeneutical and doctrinal priorities of privileged Christians from oppressor classes—affluent white Euro-American biological males—are fundamentally deficient in their biblical and theological conclusions.[23] To be fair, some would not make such a generalized claim, but they would acknowledge that much doctrinal systematization comes from the pens of imperfect white Euro-American males who have had their own cultural and generational blind spots (which, of course, we all have).

Nevertheless, increasingly loud voices contend that such doctrines from privileged white males are inherently oppressive, enforcing a colonialist and white-supremacist rule upon the poor and marginalized Christians of the Majority World. And the more intersections of supposed minority status exist in an individual, the

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[19] This anecdote about the suburban youth group in Atlanta is admittedly imperfect because true standpoint theory focuses primarily on the oppressed. It merely illustrates the faulty principles of standpoint-oriented contextualization.

[20] For an original source promoting standpoint theory, specifically indigenous standpoint theory, see Martin Nakata, *Disciplining the Savages: Savaging the Disciplines* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies, 2007).

[21] For a brief analysis of the effects of the Hegelian dialectic, see Burns, *Ancient Gospel, Brave New World*, 159–60.

[22] In 1989, "intersectionality" was initially a method to blend postmodern theory with political activism to analyze and change society. It became synonymous with cultural Marxism. See Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review* 43, no. 6 (July 1991): 1241–99.

[23] For examples, see James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2010), 53, 66–67.

more that person claims an authoritative interpretation of Scripture. This tendency generally exhibits a form of ethnic epistemology that claims only those who share one's ethnicity can know truth for that particular ethnic group. Essentially, this abrogates anyone else's truth claims that are of a diverse or majority group.[24]

Background: Christianized Deconstructionism, Post-Colonialism, and Missions

This culturally situated standpoint approach to knowing contextual "truth" is a consequence of the post-1960s' "long march through the institutions."[25] The French postmodern philosopher Jacques Derrida (1930–2004) strongly opposed transcendent truth. Derrida despised what he called the Christian tradition's "totalitarian forms of knowledge … a tyrannical desire to produce final Truths … for what is universal and certain."[26] So, to gut transcendence from the Christian tradition's consciousness, Derrida created a new way of finding contextual truth called "deconstruction." Each cultural standpoint and social/experiential position could determine its own truth based on its own inherent constructs: "Deconstruction reveals that a given Truth is not transcendent, that it is dependent upon other small-t truths, and that it is culturally constrained."[27] Critical race theorists Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic admit that critical race theory bears a similarity to socially constructed truth when they state, "For the critical race theorist, objective truth, like merit, does not exist, at least in social science and politics. In these realms, truth is a social construct created to suit the purposes of the dominant group."[28]

In terms of destabilizing these dominant narratives of objectivity, because of unfulfilled "utopian dreams of a socialist revolution," critical theorists argue that the twenty-first century "social-democratic struggle" has focused on "concepts of hegemony" wherein "dominant groups manipulate symbols and images to construct 'common sense' and thereby maintain their power."[29] They boast that "critical analysis of hegemony aims to expose and deconstruct … 'common sense.'"[30] According to cultural Marxism's critical theory, feelings and experiences are

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[24] For a penetrating essay on "ethnic gnosticism," see Voddie Baucham, "Ethnic Gnosticism," in *By What Standard? God's World … God's Rules*, ed. Jared Longshore (Cape Coral, FL: Founders, 2020), 105–16.

[25] Herbert Marcuse, *Counterrevolution and Revolt* (Boston: Beacon, 1972), 55. Herbert Marcuse (1898–1979) was a German-American philosopher of the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory. In his famously influential essay among Leftists and woke activists, Marcuse argued that the Right must be destroyed through whatever means necessary in order to liberate the Left. Marcuse, "Repressive Tolerance," in *Political Elites in a Democracy*, ed. Peter Bachrach (New York: Routledge, 2017), 158.

[26] Quoted in Riki Wilchins, *Queer Theory, Gender Theory: An Instant Primer* (Bronx, NY: Riverdale Avenue Books, 2014), 48.

[27] Quoted in Wilchins, *Queer Theory, Gender Theory: An Instant Primer*, 50.

[28] Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (New York: NYU Press, 2012), 104.

[29] Jacob P. K. Gross, "Education and Hegemony: The Influence of Antonio Gramsci," in Bradley A. U. Levinson, ed., *Beyond Critique: Exploring Critical Social Theories and Education,* 1st ed. (New York: Routledge, 2011), 65.

[30] Gross, "Education and Hegemony," 65.

supreme over objective truths and principles.[31] Similarly, critical theorists Robin DiAngelo and Özlem Sensoy employ a critical pedagogy to awaken (and be woke) to what is called a "critical consciousness."[32] They argue that claims of objective, transcendent truth are socially unjust: "A key element of social injustice involves the claim that particular knowledge is objective, neutral, and universal."[33] They explain that "critical theory calls into question the idea that objectivity is desirable or even *possible*."[34] DiAngelo and Sensoy go on to make clear that "knowledge is socially constructed…. We mean that knowledge is reflective of the values and interests of those who produce it. This term captures the understanding that all content and all means of knowing are connected to a social context."[35] So, they show how "positionality" becomes "a key tool in analyzing knowledge construction. Positionality asserts that knowledge depends upon a complex web of cultural values, beliefs, experiences, and social positions."[36]

The Left has increasingly viewed deconstructing the meaning of language and recreating meaning (using the same or newly reimagined words with bizarre uses that don't connect to "common sense") as a tool for subverting transcendent meaning, obscuring objectivity, and demoralizing and manipulating people. Language is mainly useful to catalyze operational change for social outcomes—a linguistic alchemy. It does not reflect a timeless universal order. Language speaks into being new potentialities of self-creation.

For a famous example of the consequence of language deception, let's take the Jewish lesbian philosopher Judith Butler. Butler famously sabotaged the meaning of the created order of maleness and femaleness by castigating the Judeo-Christian roots of structured language and ideas as oppressive "regimes of power."[37] Using language like *man* and *woman* supposedly oppresses people into submission to the dominant patriarchal Christian worldview. Hence, to liberate people from their mental, emotional, and social slavery to objective language power structures, all terms must be questioned, subverted, and reimagined. Butler contends that there is no "universal basis for feminism, one which must be found in an identity assumed to exist cross-culturally."[38] In other words, there is no objective transcultural and transgenerational

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[31] "We must free ourselves from … this ideology [of objective truths]. We must learn to trust our own senses, feelings, and experiences, and to give them authority, even (or especially) in the face of dominant accounts of social reality that claim universality." Charles R. Lawrence III, "The Word and the River: Pedagogy as Scholarship as Struggle," in *Critical Race Theory*, ed. Kimberlé Crenshaw, Neil Gotanda, Gary Peller, and Kendall Thomas (New York: The New Press, 1995), 338.

[32] According to Frankfurt School philosopher and sociologist Max Horkheimer (1895–1973), critical theory seeks to liberate "men and all their potentialities" from the dominant traditions and enslaving ideas of oppressive ideologies. "Its goal is man's emancipation from slavery." Max Horkheimer, *Critical Theory: Selected Essays*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (New York: The Continuum, 2002), 245–46. Critical consciousness is where people become aware (or woke) of their positionality in the world and the world's power structures that shape its dominant version of reality.

[33] Robin DiAngelo and Özlem Sensoy, *Is Everyone Really Equal? An Introduction to Key Concepts in Social Justice Education*, Multicultural Education Series, ed. James A. Banks, 2nd ed. (New York: Teachers College Press, 2017), 29.

[34] DiAngelo and Sensoy, *Is Everyone Really Equal?*, 29 (emphasis original).

[35] DiAngelo and Sensoy, 29.

[36] DiAngelo and Sensoy, 29.

[37] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 1st ed. (New York: Routledge, 2006), xxxii, 5, 9.

[38] Butler, xxxii, 5, 9.

meaning to the most fundamental binaries of creation—maleness and femaleness. Rather, this self-proclaimed gender that is "independent of [biological] sex … becomes a free-floating artifice."[39] She argues that words create new meaning. And by repeating new words and new meanings, just as God spoke all things into being, this subverts oppressive language regimes. We can then install our own regimes of reimagined language. English philosopher Roger Scruton (1944–2020) pungently remarked that "the nonsense machine began to crank out its impenetrable sentences, of which nothing could be understood" and "it looked as though Nothing had at last found its voice."[40]

The Emergence of Post-Colonialism

This notion of deconstruction noticeably entered the Christian consciousness first through professor of religion John Caputo in 1987 in his book on deconstruction in hermeneutics. Caputo continued to push his ideas into Christian discourse through *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida* and *What Would Jesus Deconstruct?*, with a foreword from Brian McLaren, a foundational influencer in the emergent church movement of the 1990s and early 2000s. McLaren and Caputo both labored to deconstruct Christianity, McLaren famously in his *The Secret Message of Jesus*.[41] Their deconstruction approach questioned truth and blurred meaning. Caputo also served as the doctoral supervisor for the popular Christian philosopher James K. A. Smith, who mainstreamed many postmodern ideas into Christian thought. Smith contends that the philosophies of French postmodernists like Derrida and Foucault share similar claims with Christianity's central doctrines. He warns Christians against claiming objective truth and shows how to embrace the best of postmodern deconstructionism:

> To assert that our interpretation is not an interpretation but objectively true often translates into the worst kinds of imperial and colonial agendas…. But our confidence rests not on objectivity but rather on the convictional power of the Holy Spirit (which isn't exactly objective)…. Deconstruction's recognition that everything is interpretation opens a space of questioning—a space to call into question the received and dominant interpretations that often claim not to be interpretations at all. As such, deconstruction is interested in interpretations that have been marginalized and sidelined, activating voices that have been silenced. This is the constructive, yea prophetic, aspect of Derrida's deconstruction: a concern for justice by being concerned about dominant, status quo interpretations that silence those who see differently. Thus, from its inception, deconstruction

[39] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xxxii, 5, 9.

[40] Roger Scruton, *Fools, Frauds and Firebrands: Thinkers of the New Left* (London: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2019), 16.

[41] John D. Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics: Repetition, Deconstruction, and the Hermeneutic Project* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987); idem, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1997); idem, *What Would Jesus Deconstruct?: The Good News of Postmodernism for the Church*, The Church and Postmodern Culture (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007); Brian D. McLaren, *The Secret Message of Jesus: Uncovering the Truth that Could Change Everything* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007).

> has been, at root, ethical—concerned for the paradigmatic marginalized described by the Old Testament as "the widow, the orphan, and the stranger."[42]

Eventually, under the charge of McLaren, the emergent church's focus shifted away from deconstructing meaning to an ideology of confronting "power." This ideology is called *post-colonial theory*, concocted by the French philosopher Michel Foucault (1926–1984).[43] This shift meant that the colleagues and followers of McLaren attacked traditional Christian truth because it is essentially a disguised power play to control people. They view the history of Western Christianity as littered with crusades and colonialism.[44] And McLaren indicates that deconstructionism led him to post-colonial theory because, as he questioned the meaning of language and biblical truth, McLaren questioned the "colonial bias" and an "imperial" and "dominating mindset inherent to Christian faith."[45] He saw that "Metanarratives weren't simply big stories—they were the stories that fueled colonialism."[46] He suggests that to save the authentic Christian faith from its history of oppressive theological constructs, we need to reimagine the faith with new "diverse adjectives, … modifiers like emergent Christianity, big tent Christianity, missional Christianity, not to mention feminist, eco-, Latin American, black."[47] And in deconstructionist fashion, he prefers to make thinly veiled attacks on truth claims through evasive and open-ended questions over against clear propositional statements. For example, he posits,

> Unmodified theology is accepted as Christian theology, or orthodox theology, or important, normal, basic, real, historic theology. But what if we tried to subvert this deception? What if we started calling standard, unmodified theology chauvinist theology, or white theology, or consumerist or colonial or Greco-Roman theology? … Could it be that the faith that has been rejected in Europe is not the essential and original Christian faith, but rather the colonial Christian faith—the chauvinistic, Greco-Roman, consumerist, white-man's Christian faith?[48]

But to ensure that he clearly communicates his newfound deconstructive focus, McLaren argues, in a rare blunt claim, "Standard, normative, historic, so-called orthodox Christian theology has been a theology of empire, a theology of

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[42] James K. A. Smith, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism?: Taking Derrida, Lyotard, and Foucalt to Church*, The Church and Postmodern Culture (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 51. Smith, in his interesting and creative style, goes on to outline what he practically suggests for a "deconstructive church" and a "storytelling church"; Smith, *Who's Afraid of Postmodernism?* 57–58, 76–80.

[43] For an introduction to the basics of Foucault's ideology, see Michel Foucault, *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon, 1984).

[44] For one of the first "evangelical" attempts at mainstreaming post-colonialism, see Kay Higuera Smith, Jayachitra Lalitha, and L. Daniel Hawk, ed., *Evangelical Postcolonial Conversations: Awakenings in Theology and Praxis* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014); see also Randy S. Woodley, Bo C. Sanders, and Grace Ji-Sun Kim, *Decolonizing Evangelicalism: An 11:59 p.m. Conversation*, New Covenant Commentary Series (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2020).

[45] Brian D. McLaren, "Post-Colonial Theology," *Sojourners*, September 15, 2010, https://sojo.net/articles/post-colonial-theology.

[46] McLaren, "Post-Colonial Theology."

[47] McLaren, "Post-Colonial Theology."

[48] McLaren, "Post-Colonial Theology."

colonialism, a theology that powerful people used as a tool to achieve and defend land theft, exploitation, domination, superiority, and privilege."[49] In similar fashion, Minneapolis-based activist and spiritual director Mark Van Steenwyk moved from deconstructing truth to decolonizing Christianity. Referring to America, he argues,

> Let us take the ax to the root. Our nation's Christian roots aren't incidental to our imperialism; they are central…. This Christian supremacy has been the justification for the deepest of our national sins. If we want to confound and disrupt the narratives of oppression, we need to raise our angry voices in the pews as well as the streets. I don't mean that figuratively…. I literally mean we should disrupt our churches.[50]

Therefore, according to deconstructionists, the way to discover the hidden meaning of Christianity is to deconstruct language, question meaning, reimagine truth statements, and reinterpret meaning through non-powerful standpoints. This is done to the degree that authentic Christianity is "liberated" from its historic intellectual colonization of Greco-Roman, Western European, individualistic, guilt-oriented, salvation-oriented constructs. These new standpoint approaches take on new modifiers, each one claiming its own truth claims and metanarratives against the oppressive backdrop of classic Christian gospel doctrines. Adopting and retaining the ancient faith and historic doctrines would entail succumbing to a theological colonization of the marginalized mind. And standing with the faith passed down through the ages, without modifying it, would mean joining the oppressors and the corrupt system that the true message of Jesus seeks to deconstruct.

Many missionary practitioners are completely naive to the activistic intensity behind this growing post-colonial movement. These standpoint and post-colonial theories are serious threats to historic Christian doctrine and missions. They are not merely diverse perspectives we can ignore. Their purveyors are passionate activists intent on breaking down classic Christian doctrine and its influences to recreate a Christianity of their own imagination. The positionality of the oppressor's knowledge (historical Christian doctrine and transcendent truths), they would contend, must suffer conflict with the socially constructed knowledge of the oppressed (non-Western perspectives and value systems) in order to create new knowledge (historically marginalized perspectives that are morally superior).[51]

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[49] McLaren, "Post-Colonial Theology," *Sojourners*, September 15, 2010, https://sojo.net/articles/post-colonial-theology.

[50] Mark Van Steenwyk, "Take the Politics of Disruption to Church," *Sojourners*, February 21, 2017, https://sojo.net/articles/take-politics-disruption-church.

[51] This is an example of the Hegelian Dialectic, which posits that social systems and society change by standard majority positions undergoing attack from opposing minority positions in order to blend the two and create a new position: Thesis + Antithesis = Synthesis (New Thesis).

Foreground: Leftist Liberalism in Missions

Christian philosopher and theologian J. P. Moreland indicates that Christian discourse is up against the confluence of two aggressively opposing worldviews: naturalism and postmodernism. And so, to maintain respect from the academy, Christian discourse slips into parroting politically correct language, taking on a form of theological revisionism. He explains,

> It seems that more and more theologians and biblical scholars are revising the biblical text or Christian doctrine at just a time when it becomes politically correct to do so. These revisions usually abandon what the church has taught and believed for many centuries in favor of a new view that virtually no one has held in church history but which is extremely popular among secular intellectuals and elites. [52]

Ethicist and theologian Gary Dorrien helpfully shows how this echoes old-fashioned liberal theology's "creative intellectual response" to the liberal pursuit of "a progressive Christian 'third way' between the authority-based orthodoxies of traditional Christianity and the spiritless materialism of modern atheism or deism."[53] Dorrien explains:

> The idea of liberal theology is nearly three centuries old. In essence, it is the idea that Christian theology can be genuinely Christian without being based upon external authority. Since the eighteenth century, liberal Christian thinkers have argued that religion should be modern and progressive and that the meaning of Christianity should be interpreted from the standpoint of modern knowledge and experience.[54]

The liberal rush to deconstruct external authority and reinterpret Scripture from dynamic experiential standpoints is emphatically modern. It is not pre-Hellenic, pre-Western, and pre-colonialist as some opine:

> Before the modern period, all Christian theologies were constructed within a house of authority. All premodern Christian theologies made claims to authority-based orthodoxy. Even the mystical and mythopoetic theologies produced by premodern Christianity took for granted the view of scripture as an infallible revelation and the view of theology as an explication of propositional revelation.[55]

Now, we must ask, other than historically understanding how deconstruction and post-colonial theory made inroads into Christian hermeneutics and missions, why

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[52] J. P. Moreland, "How Christian Philosophers Can Serve Systematic Theologians and Biblical Scholars," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 63, no. 2 (2020): 304–305. Moreland gives examples of such revisionism, one being the "acceptance of Neo-Marxist views of social justice, white privilege, and diversity." Moreland, "How Philosophers Can Serve," 305.

[53] Gary Dorrien, *The Making of American Liberal Theology: Imagining Progressive Religion, 1805–1900* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001), xiii–xiv, xv.

[54] Dorrien, *American Liberal Theology*, xiii–xiv, xv.

[55] Dorrien, xiii–xiv, xv.

does this really matter? This push toward decolonizing theology, with all its humane emergent-esque packaging, will prove to be an unmitigated threat to the future of missions. Christian missionaries who propagate a salvation-oriented gospel over against a social transformative gospel no longer seem merely intolerant and arrogant. Those were the days of relativism. Salvation-preaching missionaries are now unsafe, hateful, and racist.

Anti-White and Anti-Missionary Activists

Increasingly, more vocal influencers use fearmongering terms like *racist*, *white supremacist*, and *colonialist* to deride gospel-preaching missionaries and even endanger their visa platforms, financial support, reputation, and overall security. And the combination of social media, cancel culture, and mob mentality could potentially ruin a missionary's life and endanger his family within twenty-four hours. We cannot win over anti-missionary activists with our winsome attitude and groveling anti-white penance.

In discussing the use of common terms like *white* and *privilege*, missionaries must be careful to explain what they mean and do not mean. The world has its own definitions. For instance, associate professor of systematic theology and African studies at Yale University, Willie James Jennings, argues thus about whiteness and Christianity: "Whiteness as a way of being in the world has been parasitically joined to a Christianity that is also a way of being in the world."[56] He goes on to claim that the "fusion of whiteness and Christianity" has led to racism, sexism, patriarchy, planetary exploitation, and nationalism.[57] And then he defines what he means and doesn't mean by *whiteness*: "To speak of whiteness is not to speak of particular people but of people caught up in a deformed building project aimed at bringing the world to its full maturity…. Whiteness is a horrific answer to this question [of maturity] formed exactly at the site of Christian missions."[58]

Feminist and activist Andrea Smith further illustrates in *Can "White" People Be Saved?* how anti-conversionist the scholars are who conflate whiteness with missions. Without careful qualification, Smith comprehensively condemns the history of missionary work among Native Americans in the United States because it "has been simultaneously the history of Indigenous genocide. This is true because the goal of missionization of Indigenous people was not their salvation."[59]

Because the history of missions is condemned alongside colonization and white supremacy, even among those missionaries whose skin's melanin and passport country do not fit the narrative (Majority World missionaries), they could still likely be charged with white supremacy. How is that possible? Because *whiteness*, *white supremacy*, and *white privilege* are social constructs that suggest "oppression," "oppressor," and "cultural imperialism." And Christianity is downstream of an

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[56] Willie James Jennings, "Can White People Be Saved? Reflections on the Relationship of Missions and Whiteness," in Love L. Sechrest, Johnny Ramírez-Johnson, and Amos Yong, ed., *Can "White" People Be Saved?: Triangulating Race, Theology, and Mission*, Missiological Engagements (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018), 27–28, 43.

[57] Jennings, "Can White People Be Saved?," 27–28, 43.

[58] Jennings, 27–28, 43.

[59] Andrea Smith, "Decolonizing Salvation," in Sechrest, et al, *Can "White" People Be Saved?*, 44.

oppressive Euro-centric white colonialist culture. Therefore, "Christian privilege" is not indicative of gospel blessings to be generously shared but, rather, such privilege is a tyrannical cultural hegemony to be subverted and destroyed. I have seen cases where non-white ministers and evangelists suffer derision for spreading the oppressive colonialist systems of whiteness. They are accused of inflicting psychological and theological oppression.

To illustrate these concerns, Eliza Griswold, in a 2020 article from *The New Yorker*, demonstrates how some church leaders have impugned all things "white" in Christian tradition and history. Highlighting Christian leader and organizer, Michelle Higgins, Griswold quotes her relaying comments that she made in December 2015 at the famous Urbana Student Missions Conference: "Mission work was really an exercise in exporting racism, and that evangelicalism was a moral protection for white supremacy."[60] Griswold goes on to quote from Lisa Sharon Harper, the founder of Freedom Road, a progressive evangelical group: "For the next five hundred years [of Christianity], the principle effort will be decolonization."[61]

These examples from Christian activists are indicative of the gospel drift and mission drift that has been part of the evangelical missions community for multiple decades. For example, in his book *How to Be an Antiracist*, professor of race and discriminatory policy Ibram X. Kendi describes when his parents attended InterVarsity's Urbana'70 where evangelist Tom Skinner (1942–1994), was preaching. They recall Skinner describing Jesus as a "radical revolutionary" through "a new reading of the gospel."[62] He declared, "Any gospel that does not … speak to the issue of enslavement, injustice, [and] inequality … is not the gospel."[63] Kendi goes on to remark, "They were saved into Black liberation theology and joined the churchless church of the Black Power movement…. They stopped thinking about saving Black people and started thinking about liberating Black people."[64]

Let that last statement sink in. Is that not tragic? Analogically speaking, in what ethical universe would a physician mainly seek to liberate HIV-infected Africans from the social effects of European colonization when all the while he has unlimited access to a free cure for the HIV virus but doesn't want to use it because he received it from European medical scientists? That would be medical malpractice of the highest order and a crime against humanity. Why do we tolerate less for those who claim to be physicians of the soul?

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[60] Kevin Porter, "Michelle Higgins Challenges Evangelical Church on #BlackLivesMatter at Urbana 15," *The Christian Post*, December 31, 2015, https://www.christianpost.com/news/black-lives-matter-ubana-15-michelle-higgins-challenges-evangelical-church.html.

[61] Eliza Griswold, "How Black Lives Matter is Changing the Church," *The New Yorker*, August 30, 2020, https://www.newyorker.com/news/on-religion/how-black-lives-matter-is-changing-the-church.

[62] Ibram X. Kendi, *How to Be an Antiracist* (New York: Random House), 15–16.

[63] Kendi, How to Be an Antiracist, 15–16.

[64] Kendi, 15–16. Consider James Cone's (1938–2018)—the father of black liberation theology—explication of salvation according to Black liberation theology and his influence on influencers like Tom Skinner and Ibram Kendi: Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation*, 135–36.

Caring Especially for Eternal Suffering

Indeed, Christians should have compassion for all suffering but *especially* everlasting suffering. It is not a matter of either/or. However, it is also not a matter of both/and, since they are not of equal magnitude. The differences between temporally *immediate* needs and eternally *important* needs are incalculable. Certainly, we should care enough to help distressed people, but we must care most for those speeding blindly into eternal torment. Evangelical outreach that fails to prioritize the eternal over the temporal will lose the *evangel* altogether. Consider this simple and poignant observation by pastor and theologian S. Lewis Johnson (1915–2004):

> Since the great truth of justification by faith alone is at the heart of Paul's letter to the Roman church, the epistle may come as something of a surprise to modern ecclesiastics. We might have expected the apostle to address believers at Rome, a city crammed with social problems, with a social manifesto or, at the least, a recitation of the primary truths of Christianity in their application to the social problems of the imperial city. Rome was a city of slaves, but Paul did not preach against slavery. It was a city of lust and vice, but he did not aim his mightiest guns at these evils. It was a city of gross economic injustice, but he did not thrust the sword of the Spirit into the vitals of that plague…. Paul did not think that social reform in Rome was "an evangelical imperative." The proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ solved the crucial and urgent need for the society as a whole and for people in particular. It is still the imperative of the Christian church, and the Christian church will advance only to the extent that its gospel advances.[65]

Conclusion

The history of modern missions records many big-hearted missionaries who lose their resolve to keep contending for biblical truth and grow weary in waiting for the future promises of God. The seeming innocence of ecumenical friendships threatens to shipwreck their faith. They find that hyper-contextualized models of communicating the least-common denominator of the Christian faith is preferable to the perceived imperialistic bigotry of proclaiming the historic faith.

As Christians increasingly push back against the threat of cultural Marxism embedded in critical theory language, the verbiage will likely rebrand, but the ideas will remain the same. It is a moneymaker and a power grab for too many billionaire-activists, globalist-technocrats, and cultural elites to just cast aside. This is a long-term battle for language, meaning, and ideas—and lest we forget, these ideas have eternal consequences. Eternal hell and heaven are on the line. We must view it as a

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[65] S. Lewis Johnson, *Discovering Romans: Spiritual Revival for the Soul*, ed. Mike Abendroth (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2014), 25. In quoting "an evangelical imperative," Johnson was referencing Claude Thompson, "Social Reform: An Evangelical Imperative," *Christianity Today* (March 26, 1971), 8–12. In his footnote, Johnson argued, "Now no one, not even the most obtuse Bible-beating, Bible-Belt fundamentalist, will take the position that the teaching of Scripture does not involve the Christian ultimately in social vision and action. But the real issue is one of degree. The primary thrust of the Scriptures is toward the evangelical issue, not the social questions…. Such evangelism will produce social action and change."

modern ideological religion that has declared war with classic Christianity. Dutch theologian Herman Bavinck (1854–1921) lays out the inevitability of a long truth war with the spirit of the modern age:

> If we understand Christianity's warrant and maintain a desire to preserve her essence, then we can do nothing else but take a resolute position against the systems of the day and the worldviews of its own invention and fashioning. There can be no question of mediation. There can be no thought of reconciliation. The times are too grave to flirt with the spirit of the age. The deep, sharp contrast standing between the Christian faith and the modern person must provide us with the insights that picking portions of each is not possible and that deciding between alternatives is a duty. However lovely peace would be, the conflict is upon us.[66]

Truly, the conflict is upon us. There is no third way. Cultural Marxism is not a neutral construct that Christians can nicely tolerate and eventually redeem. This is not a matter of chewing the ecumenical meat and spitting out the bones; in this case, the meat is poisoned. Consider what the godfather of cultural Marxism, Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937), contended: "Socialism is precisely the religion that must overwhelm Christianity…. In the new order, Socialism will triumph by first capturing the culture via infiltration of schools, universities, churches, and the media by transforming the consciousness of society."[67]

As Christians rush to "plunder the Egyptians" and seek out those points of commonality in culture, a naïve ecumenism permeates the evangelical mind. When we hear Christians encourage things like interpreting Scripture from the "standpoint" of another culture, "deconstructing" and "decolonizing" theology to make room for diverse voices, promoting "social justice," or repenting of "white supremacy," we must query what they are suggesting. This is merely political activistic language disguised as a theological movement to influence Christian institutions. They might know enough about cultural Marxism's critical theory to know it is bad, but they are nonetheless parroting its language. They have probably merely observed other influential Christians use trending terminology, but they do not take the time to read and examine the original sources. When novel worldly terminology infiltrates Christian discourse, if it does not have a historical precedent with a common definition, Christians must seek definitions. We should ask, "What do you mean? How do you know that's true? What does the Bible say?"

The activist-impulse of evangelicalism often uncritically adopts the culture's language in order to be a "brave prophetic voice" and to "be a blessing" to the culture, insisting that "social transformation" is "an evangelical imperative." But if we would mainly use biblical terms and precise historic doctrines, we would not need to borrow worldly concepts, since words have meaning and ideas have consequences. And bad

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[66] Herman Bavinck, *Christian Worldview*, trans. N. Gray Sutanto, James Eglinton, and Cory C. Brock (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 27.

[67] Quoted by Roger Kiska, "Antonio Gramsci's Long March through History," *Religion & Liberty*, Acton Institute, 29 No. 3 (December 12, 2019), https://www.acton.org/religion-liberty/volume-29-number-3/antonio-gramscis-long-march-through-history.

theological ideas have eternal victims. If we start borrowing worldly terms, we will inevitably start thinking worldly thoughts, even if that was not the original intention. Moreover, we must beware of the serpent-like tendency of some to use biblical terminology with newly innovated meanings—a contextually dynamic "living constitutionalism," as it were. Using worldly constructs to solve societal problems without a heavenly gospel of personal salvation in Jesus Christ is the story of human history. It is Babel's legacy. Bad ideas have bad consequences. And if history has taught us anything, some bad ideas come with body bags.

To be sure, any twenty-first-century missionary, regardless of their nationality and complexion, who is courageous enough to proclaim the ancient gospel of salvation in Christ through faith and repentance will find themselves marginalized. They will be a hated and vilified minority. This is exactly the way the post-colonialist ideological system works. Conversionist Christianity is deemed imperialistic. And it thus requires deconstruction, subversion, and eventual destruction of the salvation-oriented missionary *ethos*. This is no surprise when it comes from the world, but it will be heartbreaking when it comes from friends and those who call themselves "brothers." Get ready. Know the truth. Rest in Christ. Paul's exhortation is apropos: "Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. Let all that you do be done in love" (1 Cor 16:14).

"Peace if possible; truth at all costs."
Martin Luther

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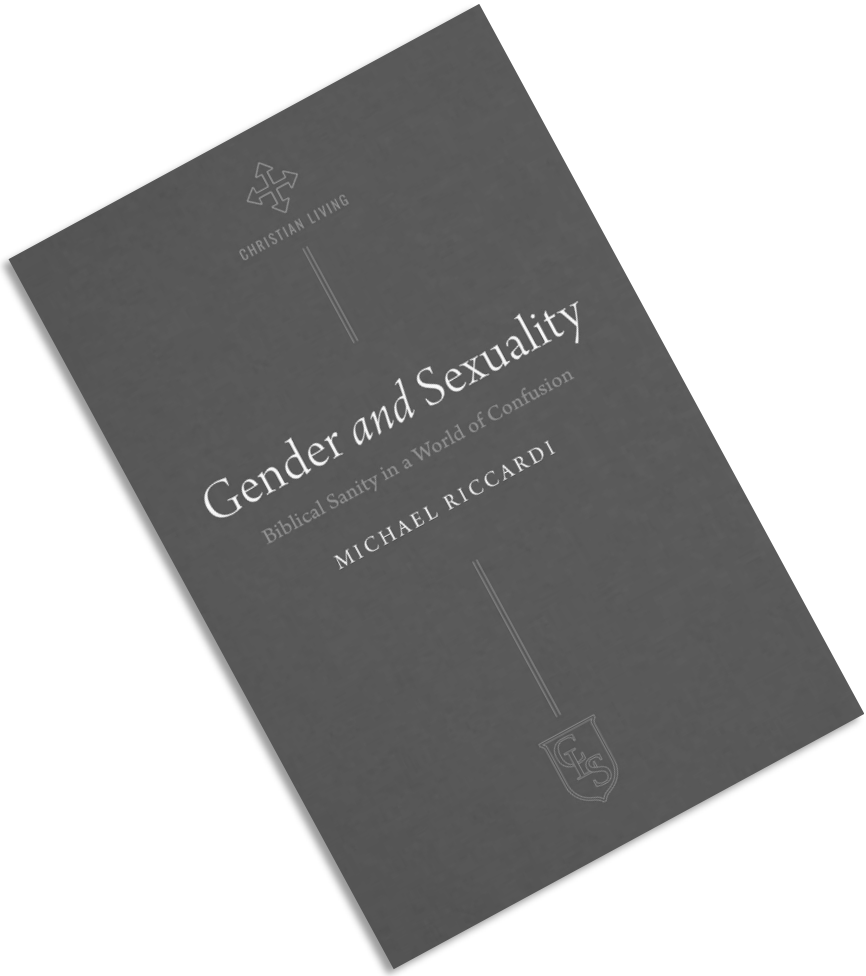

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DISABILITY, WEAKNESS, AND PRAYER IN MISSION

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Why would God give missionaries weakness? Should disability be viewed as limiting involvement in missions? These questions arise in the fallen world that we inhabit. However, a biblical missiology recognizes the inherent value of weakness to the pursuit of missions according to the plan of God. Weakness humbles the proud and self-dependent missionaries, forcing them to rely upon God alone. It is a means of success, not failure; for when Christians are weak, then they are strong. This article examines the role of disability and weakness in the God-exalting work of missions.

* * * * *

Introduction[1]

Weakness does not neatly equate with disability, but they do often coexist. Furthermore, disability often, although not always, results in an experience of weakness. Weakness is central to the redemptive plan of our all-powerful God. It is the means of *success*, not failure; for when Christians are weak, then they are strong. Strength through weakness might seem paradoxical, but in fact it reveals the glory of God and crushes human pretension. God, who resists the proud and gives grace to the humble, confounds earthly powers and refutes worldly wisdom through the weakness of His chosen vessels. It was through weakness that the forces of evil were defeated and judged; and it is through weakness that the mission of God is advanced today.

As King over all creation, God is carrying out His mission plan for this world through His messengers. To make them successful agents, He commissions and empowers them, but often He must first reduce their strength to infuse them with His power. This is biblical weakness. Many of God's messengers experience weakness, sometimes because of disability, including Paul, Moses, Gideon, and David. To a

[1] Some content in this article has been taken from *Disability in Mission: The Church's Hidden Treasure* by David C. Deuel and Nathan G. John. Copyright © 2019. Used by permission of Hendrickson Publishers, represented by Tyndale House Publishers. All rights reserved.

group of beaten-down and weak captives, Isaiah the prophet said, "He gives power to the weary, and to him who lacks vigor He increases might. Though youths grow weary and tired, and choice young men stumble badly, yet those who hope in Yahweh will gain new power; they will mount up with wings like eagles; they will run and not get tired; they will walk and not become weary" (Isa 40:29–31). This common thread of weakness among God's servants assures us that God will meet our inadequacy with His strength, in whatever task He calls us to accomplish. Moses, Isaiah, and Paul were all called by God to deliver His words and perform His works, but Paul perhaps gives us the fullest picture of weakness in the life of God's servants.

The common pattern of God working in weakness is epitomized in Jesus, who was sent to earth in weakness and died on the cross in weakness. He humbled himself, taking on the form of a servant to complete the greatest mission of all time: to bring salvation to a lost and dying world. God uses weak messengers. It is therefore not surprising that weakness is a common experience in God's mission. Biblical history leaves us a record of responses to disability, both good and disappointing.

Disability and Weakness in Biblical Times

Misunderstandings about weakness has often led to people with disabilities being stigmatized. In Israel's early days, religious leaders misunderstood God's law, believing that the same law that required God's people to provide for and protect persons with disabilities also prohibited priests with disabling conditions from serving. This error was rooted in the misunderstanding that priests with disabilities who were restricted from offering sacrifices should not serve as priests at all.[2] In short, it assumed that people with disabilities should not undertake leadership roles. This prejudicial mindset often isolated and alienated them by stigmatizing them. This was carried to an even greater extreme later in Israel's history when people with disabling conditions sometimes were not allowed to be present in the synagogue when the Torah was read,[3] or to enter the Qumran community of ancient Israel near the Dead Sea.[4] However, these were isolated incidents, for historically Judaism has set the bar on caring for people who are vulnerable.[5] The church has its own patterns of neglect which exacerbates the weakness of the vulnerable.

Acts of exclusion of the seemingly weak find no place in Jesus' teaching and practice. Jesus' care for people with disabilities shocked the religious establishment and continued to do so into the period of the early church. Instead of being kept out, some with disabling conditions directly approached Jesus or were brought to Him on stretchers. In one case, a man was lowered through a hole cut in a roof (Mark 2:1–12). These acts mark the dawning of a new day for the inclusion of people with disabilities in the church. Jesus breaks down barriers of isolation and invites people with disabilities to come to Him. He provides them with dignity and sees their true value as treasures created in the image of God for His purposes and glory (cf. John 9:3). So why now do

[2] James D. G. Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996), 39–40.

[3] Lynn Holden, *Forms of Deformity* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1991), 214.

[4] See the discussion of 1QSa 2.5–6 in Dunn, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 39–40.

[5] See Gregg E. Gardner, *The Origins of Organized Charity in Rabbinic Judaism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 180–92.

some churches and mission boards reject "weak" people with disabling conditions from serving as pastors, missionaries, and in other forms of leadership?

Biblical Weakness

Weakness is a loss of strength or ability that affects everyone, and it changes through our lives. Disability terminology changes over time, but with each new term one characteristic remains: namely, that some ability is lacking. This negative framing of disability is a reason why the church struggles to understand it and appreciate it. Seeing weakness and strength through a biblical lens brings a different perspective.

The Bible teaches that to be human is to be weak (Gen 1; Ps 19; Rom 1) for we are frail, transitory, and mortal beings (Rom 5:6; 6:19; 8:26). From Genesis to Revelation, Scripture recognizes the weakness of humankind or the "flesh."[6] As David Alan Black writes in *Paul, Apostle of Weakness*, "Weakness is not simply the occasional experience of sickness or powerlessness, but a fundamental mark of the individual's worldly existence."[7] As Solomon explains in Ecclesiastes, while we may experience temporary strength, to pursue strength is ultimately a chasing after the wind (e.g., Eccl 1:14, 17; 2:11, 17). We all eventually become weak. The apostle Paul taught, in a nutshell, that our "whole being is dependent upon God and that men and women as creatures of God (like Adam and Eve) are susceptible to the limitations of all creation."[8]

Owning our weakness can lead to biblical strength, which is rooted in dependence. Because God created the universe, He depends on nothing, but God designed humanity, indeed all creation, to depend on Him (Col 1:16–17). In the Fall, mankind sought independence and power, and, sadly, became weaker as sin weakened the creation (Gen 3:19). Ironically people's unquenchable thirst for independence and power resulted in weakness that would ultimately crush them. In contrast, as is evident from the Bible, when we depend on God, we allow Him to enable us with His strength (2 Cor 12:9–11). True biblical strength is a consequence of a right and dependent relationship with God. God's plan of redemption is to bring human beings back into perfect dependence upon, and union with, Him. Therefore, paradoxically, it is in our weakness (human) that we are strongest (most dependent on God). Similarly, when we are disabled, we are perhaps more likely to be dependent on God; to be God-abled.

Ultimately, God in His grace overcame our human weakness, caused by separation from Him, by sending His Son in weakness as a babe, to die as an adult in weakness on a cross, at the hands of human power (Phil 2:5–11). In Christ, the paradigms of power and weakness were turned upside down. Through this weakness of the cross, God restores our relationship with Himself, allowing us to depend on

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[6] Regarding the Old Testament term "flesh" (*basar*), see Hans Walter Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974), 30–31. For a treatment of the Greek term "flesh" (*sarx*) see David Alan Black, *Paul, Apostle of Weakness* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2012), 146.

[7] Black, *Paul, Apostle of Weakness*, 154.

[8] Black, 151.

Christ dwelling in us, and giving us true biblical strength. The cross nullifies the root cause of weakness by restoring us to relationship with God in astounding ways.

Weakness as God's Theatre

Our weakness shows us our need for God—the Creator and Sustainer of the universe—to enable us. One of Moses's weaknesses seems to have related to His slow speech and heavy tongue, likely representing a speech difficulty or possibly a speech disability (Exod 4:10–12). Yet He was God's weak vessel to display God's might. In our small-minded ways, we might question why it is important to God to use weakness. Our weakness is God's theatre for displaying His strength before a watching world. Even the angels are watching God's theatre of weakness. This explains why God chooses to work through weakness. But why do we need weakness?

First, God uses disability and any resultant weakness as part of our growth. To comprehend this, we must look at weakness from two points of view: our own weakness, and weakness in others. We will understand weakness in others by first understanding it in our own experience. From our self-study, we will learn to share empathy with those who are weak. Then we will be ready to help them from our position of weakness (2 Cor 1:3–5).

Second, weakness in others is our opportunity to serve them and to help them grow. Crucially, the Apostle Paul says, "we must help the weak" (Acts 20:35) because Jesus meets the needs of the weak through faithful fellow-believers (Heb 4:14–16). Helping others in sincerity before a watching world is a critical part of God's plan for weakness. In this way the weakness of those with disability is in fact a part of their ministry to the world. Their weakness is an opportunity for others to serve God through serving them. This is how those people are bearing witness to Christ.

How does weakness help us and others grow? God uses weakness to create a healthy vulnerability, which then allows spiritual growth. Like the Apostle Paul, the prophet Jeremiah came to realize that he suffered at the hands of his enemies because he followed the Lord's leading. Today, we might say with hesitation that it was the Lord who caused Jeremiah's sufferings. But we would be only partially correct, because God does allow us to experience weakness for His sake and ours. God uses our suffering to grow us in our sanctification, all the while displaying His glory by empowering us through our weakness. Jeremiah similarly came to accept God's plan for his (Jeremiah's) weakness through those who devised schemes against him.[9] In short, our weakness is a battle that God will win as His power and purpose are displayed though our vulnerability.

Paul Experiences God's Use of Weakness

Throughout Paul's ministry, God chose to work powerfully through Paul's weakness; this weakness was a celebration of God's triumph through disability and

[9] See Jeremiah 15. For a helpful description of the context, see Susan Niditch, *The Responsive Self: Personal Religion in Biblical Literature of the Neo-Babylonian and Persian Periods* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), 64.

hardship.[10] The triumph of weakness can be won against various forms of resistance, opposition, or inability. These are God's battlefields, where He claims the victory. For the apostle, weakness often came through people who challenged him. But he also experienced weakness in the form of personal suffering, a thorn in the flesh (2 Cor 12:7–10). Opposition from without and fear from within weakened Paul. He was afflicted on every side with conflicts and other forms of opposition, and with fears and weakness within (e.g., 11:23–33).

Paul's weakness from the outside came from those who opposed him and his ministry. Some opponents had entered the Corinthian church while he was away, and they sought to undermine his ministry. Their chief criticism was that Paul was weak, particularly when he was present! He didn't look like an apostle or teach like one. Paul was just not impressive, using their measure of strength. Interestingly, before Paul met Jesus on the road to Damascus he was known as Saul, a strong man who used his power to persecute those of "the Way" (Acts 9:2). But Paul was changed. These opponents were using popular ideas of what a leader should be from Corinthian culture, setting them up as biblical standards. In the face of this opposition, Paul articulated his views about weakness in 2 Corinthians 10–13. Pastors, missionaries, and other ministry leaders will relate to the apostle's challenge. Paul wrote to the Corinthians to defend himself against their criticism. The approach that he took in the letter is a beautiful picture of accepting criticism and then turning it on its head with biblical teaching. Rather than denying weakness, Paul argued that he was most certainly weak, and that weakness is ideal for an apostle, indeed for anyone in Christ's church. The weaker, the better!

Weakness from the inside was Paul's thorn in his flesh. The thorn was likely some sort of infirmity as suggested by the idea of an object causing pain, and of "flesh" in its most literal sense, that is, body.[11] This was the most common meaning of the term "weakness" in Paul's world. The imagery is probably more precisely a stake in Paul's flesh, large and very painful! That the stake was some form of physical obstruction to Paul's ministry seems clear. It may also have formed one of the points of accusation. The fact that he sought the Lord in prayer three times to remove the thorn, but was not cured, may remind us of our own suffering (2 Cor 12:8). Those of us who have a disability, or some other form of suffering, find comfort in the fact that even the Apostle Paul, who healed others in his ministry, could not heal himself. Nor would God heal him, although He could have.

Paul described his weakness as a messenger of Satan, but God sovereignly used the messenger for his own purposes, just as He did with Job. Paul did not state the relationship between the messenger and the thorn. In fact, the apostle carefully used the passive construction, "there was given to me," to avoid identifying a sender (2 Cor 12:7). But who gave it? We can surmise that Paul did not identify a sender

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[10] Moisés Silva, ed. *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, s.v. '*asthenia*' (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 4:316.

[11] For discussion of various views on the meaning of the "thorn," see John F. MacArthur, *2 Corinthians*, MNTC (Chicago: Moody, 2003), 400–401; David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 518–22; Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 567–71; Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids; Eerdmans, 2005), 851–59.

because it is not easy to explain responsibility when it comes to describing God's and Satan's roles in physical infirmities. This was true with Job too.

Whether the thorn was from God or Satan, clearly God intended to use it. Paul saw God's purposes in his weakness, particularly when he made statements like "for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses" (12:10). Weakness is God's design, not bad luck or random chance. Paul gave three reasons for his thorn, all of which may apply to us as children of weakness in this world. It served: (1) to cut off his flow of pride for receiving the revelations; (2) to position him in need, so that he could receive Christ's help; and (3) to help him see the power of Christ working in him that he might otherwise miss.

These three things were not in Satan's best interest. Paul's spiritual weakness, that is, his propensity toward pride in receiving the revelations that gave him apostolic standing, was tempered by his physical weakness. This leads us to conclude that our weakness causes us to depend upon God and not on ourselves. We cannot appreciate God's strength and His glorious purposes unless we first experience our own weakness. What can we draw from this?

When the church lays hands on someone, commissioning them to perform its work, this special blessing affirms and celebrates a call and giftedness in that person. Sadly, people with disabling conditions have usually been last in line to experience such affirmation and celebration. Sometimes, they are excluded from being in line, either by local church leadership or by mission agencies. Imagine what it would mean for a young girl or boy in a wheelchair, or someone who is hearing or sight-impaired, to realize that they too can take part in the church's mission if they are called and gifted.

What the casual reader might miss is that Paul described his conflict as all-out spiritual war.[12] The opposition to him had moved beyond persecution to a full-scale attack. He was "harassed at every turn—conflicts on the outside, fears within" (2 Cor 7:5). What is crucial is that the apostle treated the internal and external opposition as one. Paul's opponents—Satan being the chief—had power that they used against him and the mission that he was trying to conduct. But God's matchless power overrode the opposition in both the attacks and Paul's physical diminishment.

The Sphere of Christ

It is in the "seeming weakness of the world" that the foolishness of the world is confounded by God's wisdom. People are not called because of their wisdom, their talents, or their status and stature. God calls out of His strength and provision (1 Cor 1:26). God explained His ways to Paul in these clear words, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor 12:9). The imperfect strength of this world cannot compare with what God offered Paul. And beyond human comprehension, weakness perfects God's strength.[13] No wonder Paul could say with conviction, "for when I am weak, then I am strong" (12:10). Yes, it is as

[12] Lisa M. Bowens, *An Apostle in Battle: Paul and Spiritual Warfare in 2 Corinthians 12:1–10* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017), 190–94. Bowens argues that Satan attacks Paul by sending a thorn and that the ongoing conflict with false apostles should be viewed collectively as a cosmic battle over which God triumphs.

[13] Black, *Paul, Apostle of Weakness*, 161.

easy as that. Let us remind ourselves that Paul's transparent look at himself and his own weakness was done in the context of his mission to the Corinthian church, which was probably the church that brought him his greatest challenge. Weakness of all sorts is most prevalent where the battle for new converts and new local churches is fiercest. For those of us who love the Lord's mission, this comes as welcome encouragement.

It is beautiful to think of Paul's weakness operating in the sphere of Christ (2 Cor 10:13–15). To understand this, we must picture the distinction between heaven and earth. Having prepared the way for us through His death on the cross, Jesus waits for us in the heavenly places. In our earthly realm, characterized by worldliness, believers are subject to all forms of weakness. We feel pain, experience disability, suffer spiritual confusion and meet all the darkness of the world's chaos. But as believers in Christ, we already have access to the heavenly places, the sphere of Christ, and this world's darkness begins to lift. The stench dissipates. In Christ, Paul ascends to the heavenly places (Eph 1:3, 20). And the apostle invites those of us who are weak to join him. The sphere of Christ offers unlimited power, comfort, and peace.

What Characterizes Paul's Weakness?

Paul describes weakness more precisely and thoroughly in 2 Corinthians 10–13 than anywhere else in Scripture. Although he does not intend to present his Corinthian readers with a complete theology of weakness, he offers us enough detail to understand it, and what it accomplishes for him and his opponents.

- *What is weakness like in Paul?* Paul shows that although weakness is humble and gentle (2 Cor 10:1), it can be bold (10:1–5), confident (10:7), and can have authority (10:8). It manifests itself consistently whether he is physically present or writing from a distance. Weakness is unimpressive (10:10) but is not inferior (10:15).
- *What does weakness do for Paul?* Weakness does not allow Paul to compare himself with others (10:12); does not boast in accomplishments (10:13–15); elevates others (11:7–9); does not judge by appearance (10:7); brings glory to God (11:30); and gains strength from the cross of Christ (12:9).
- *What does weakness do to Paul's opposition?* Powerfully, it demolishes strongholds, arguments, and pretension (10:4), and shames the strong and the proud (1 Cor 1:25–27).

David Black summarizes:

> If being weak means acting like a father instead of like a ruler, speaking with simple instead of proud words, preaching the gospel free of charge instead of demanding apostolic wages, humbling oneself instead of boasting in oneself, leading the churches by example instead of forcing one's will upon them, then Paul is happier to admit, "I *am* weak."[14]

[14] Black, *Paul, Apostle of Weakness*, 90.

Weakness transforms Paul. No wonder he uses the analogy of the human body to teach the value of weakness in the church (1 Cor 12:22–23):

> Even the least attractive and most inconspicuous members of the church are important and should be treated with respect. The weaker members not only have a proper place in the church, but are in fact "much rather necessary," for all the members of the body are interdependent and interrelated. Therefore, because they are indispensable, Paul says they only "seem to be" (*dokounta … hyparchein*) weaker and unnecessary.[15]

In short, "God not only places the necessary weaker members in the body but also gives more honor to them" (1 Cor 12:24).[16]

Paul's Exposé of Weakness

People with disabilities can bring a dependency that the church lacks and desperately needs. Too often our churches condone, or even adopt, the dominant societal narrative, with independence or autonomy as our goal. Yet, our earthly journey is a classroom to learn dependency upon the Lord. Paul wrote this exposé to give us a clearer picture of how dependency worked out in his own life, and therefore, how it might work out in ours. His conclusion? Our weakness displays our vulnerable humanity and thus our need to rely upon God. This allows God to work in and through us to achieve His mission.[17]

Ultimately, then, weakness transforms lives. What does it mean for us to be weak? It means that we must become weary and wait for God's strength. It means that we must suffer before He can heal us. It means that we must fail so that our Lord can succeed for us. It means that we must lose so that He can win. It means that we must die weak so that He can give us new and perfect life. How we need weakness!

Prayer-Dependency: God's Remedy for Mission Weakness

The Spirit's Prayer Solution

God allows no weakness except He provides appropriate power. What provision has He made for our weakness, in particular our inability to succeed in His mission? What must we do so that God uses us, not *despite* our weaknesses but *because* of them?

In Romans 8, the context in which Paul defines hope for the suffering and groaning creation,[18] he transitions to the next section with the words, "in the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness" (v. 26). Paul then probes the complexities of our weakness when we don't know how to overcome it. Crucially, this passage, like 2 Corinthians 12, focuses on weakness in God's mission. The two passages go hand

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[15] Black, *Paul, Apostle of Weakness*, 81.

[16] John K. Chow, *Patronage and Power: A Study of Social Networks in Corinth* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic, 1992), 178.

[17] Ralph P. Martin, *2 Corinthians* (Waco, TX: Word, 1986), 382.

[18] John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 310.

in glove. If weakness is the problem, prayer is the solution. But what should we pray for in weakness?

Our Weakness and God's Will

We must understand our weakness-dependency upon God. But what provision has God made to overcome our weakness and yet help us remain fully dependent upon Him? Paul boldly proclaims, "My power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor 12:9). The apostle needed mission power to validate his apostolic authority, include others into apostolic ministry, connect his work with others as fellow workers, in short, all mission activity.[19] But he also needed God's help to remain dependent on God in weakness. The key was following God's will. For Paul, "by means of this disability God's will was made manifest to his servant."[20] Praying in God's will was the challenge before Paul.

Paul says, "The Spirit also helps our weakness" (Rom 8:26). But how? God so desires our dependency that He gave us an antidote. Prayer engages us in God's will. Thomas Schreiner explains: "The weakness of believers in prayer, therefore, is that they do not have an adequate grasp of what God's will is when they pray. Because of our finiteness and fallibility, we cannot perceive fully what God would desire."[21] The author adds, "Believers are weak in that they do not know what to pray for, since the totality of God's will is hidden from them."[22] The Apostle Paul is concerned with the believer's inability to pray; not *how* to pray but *what* to pray.[23]

God's Will and Our Prayer

Weakness is the crucible for prayer-dependency. God so desires our dependency rooted in our weakness that He gave us an antidote—prayer. Prayer is an essential part of His missional strategy, and the point of prayer is to reinforce Paul's presentation of the gospel.[24] How does it work? It starts with groaning along with the rest of creation (Rom 8:18–22). Groaning is a prelude to hope. It is less about asking for something and more about depending on the Lord.[25]

Although believers cannot specify their requests to God clearly since they do not know His will, the Holy Spirit translates these groanings and conforms them to God's will.[26] The prayer of believers is not always answered affirmatively since they do not always know what God's will is.[27] But because the Spirit "fathoms the divine plans to the bottom"[28] and intercedes in accord with God's will, God always answers our

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[19] Thomas A. Vollmer, *"The Spirit Helps Our Weakness": Rom 8:26a in Light of Paul's Missiological Purpose for Writing the Letter to the Romans* (Biblical Tools and Studies 36; Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 2018), 80.

[20] Black, *Paul, Apostle of Weakness*, 111.

[21] Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1978), 443.

[22] Schreiner, *Romans*, 443.

[23] Vollmer, *"The Spirit Helps Our Weakness*," 145.

[24] Vollmer, 132.

[25] James D. G. Dunn, *Romans* 1–8 (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1988), 477.

[26] Schreiner, *Romans*, 446.

[27] Schreiner, 446.

[28] F. Godet, *Romans* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1895), 103.

prayers.[29] Every prayer is one hundred percent heard and answered. With the Spirit's fail-safe prayer connection, the believer on mission can know for certain that prayer is consistent with the will of God.[30] By fulfilling God's will, mission is accomplished.

If you listen carefully to Paul, the only impressive thing about him is his weakness.[31] But Paul is confident in God's power to prevail over Paul's weakness. Schreiner says, "Believers should take tremendous encouragement that the will of God is being fulfilled in their lives despite their weakness and inability to know what to pray for. God's will is not being frustrated because of the weakness of believers. It is being fulfilled because the Spirit is interceding for us and invariably receiving affirmative answers to His pleas."[32] This might seem too good to be true. Not with God.

The Spirit's Role in Our Prayer

Simply put, "Weakness becomes something that keeps the believer from doing what God desires. The Spirit is the necessary agent to help the believer get beyond the impasse of the weakness and to live in accord with God's design."[33] Thomas Vollmer explains: "Paul includes himself in those struggling and fulfilling the mission of God, and one draws the conclusion that Paul has established the Spirit as missiological agent, in order to help the Christ follower succeed in expanding God's mission to the world."[34]

Not surprising, Paul's discussion of prayer-weakness appears in the context with the verse we go to in times of hardship and suffering: "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Rom 8:28). Schreiner explains, "No wonder all things are working out for our good—the Spirit is effectively praying for us so that the will of God will be accomplished in our lives."[35] To illustrate Paul's statement, an *ordo salutis* follows. God resolves our weaknesses as sure as He accomplishes our salvation.

If Jesus conducted His mission in weakness, how much more should we?[36] Richard Bauckham responds, "The power of God evident in Paul's ministry, not least in the transforming effect of the Gospel he preached, could be seen to be no merely human achievement of Paul's but divine power which found its opportunity in Paul's weakness."[37] Black adds: "In the midst of his inadequacy and apparent disabilities is at work the grace of God that enables him to be a more than conqueror (Rom 8:37)."[38] He continues, "Only when Christians confess their prayer-*astheneia* can that weakness be overcome by the Holy Spirit and prayer become not merely a possibility but a reality. Thus in Pauline thought prayer takes on a special significance to the

[29] Schreiner, *Romans*, 446.

[30] P. T. O'Brien, "Romans 8:26, 27: A Revolutionary Approach to Prayer?" *Reformed Theological Review* 46 (1987): 71-72.

[31] Richard Bauckham, "Weakness—Paul's and Ours" *Themelios* 7, no. 3 (1982): 4.

[32] Schreiner, *Romans*, 446–47.

[33] Vollmer, *"The Spirit Helps Our Weakness*," 261.

[34] Vollmer, 261.

[35] Schreiner, *Romans*, 447.

[36] The apostle's weak mission is in continuity with Jesus' mission. See Peter T. O'Brien, "Mission, Witness, and the Coming of the Spirit," *BBR* 9 (1999): 208–209.

[37] Bauckham, "Weakness," 4.

[38] Black, *Paul, Apostle of Weakness*, 111.

degree that it is affected by the Spirit, who intercedes with wordless groans for those unable to pray."[39]

Prayer and Power in God's Weakness Theatre

Returning to the conviction that weakness is God's theatre for mission power, "This activity of the Spirit on behalf of Christians in their prayer life suggests that for Paul prayer is the ultimate showplace of the power of God revealed in human weakness, since it takes place at the most fundamental level of the believer's relationship with God."[40] Prayer is not only our personal lifeline to God but also our fundamental access to God's mission power. No prayer; no accomplished mission.

How does weakness-dependency impact our thinking about God's power in our lives accomplishing His will for mission? Black explains:

> Paul teaches that God's way of exhibiting power is altogether different from our way. We try to overcome our weakness; God is satisfied to *use* weakness for his own special purposes. Too many become disheartened over their infirmities, thinking that only if they were stronger in themselves they could accomplish more for God. But this point of view, despite its popularity, is altogether a fallacy.[41]

This draws us to the inevitable conclusion regarding our weakness-dependency and God's sufficiency: "God's means of working, rightly understood, is not by making us stronger, but by making us weaker and weaker until the divine power alone is clearly manifested in our lives."[42] This astounding statement means that every person, regardless of how weak, may participate in God's global mission. No one is excluded.

Conclusion

By His will, God chose Moses, Isaiah, and Paul in weakness and disability, then sent them on their missions. Was this mission sabotage? By no means. God used their weakness to disable pride, dismantle opposition, and display his power to a watching world in God's theatre of weakness.

If the church's mission needs weakness, the church needs to allow people with disabilities to express their call and giftedness for the glory of Christ along with the rest of us in our weaknesses. We all will demonstrate the value of, as well as the need for, weakness. This leads to the inevitable conclusion that "there are many people in ministry too strong to be useful. There are no people in ministry too weak to be useful."[43]

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[39] Black, *Paul, Apostle of Weakness*, 127.
[40] Black, 127.
[41] Black, 161–62.
[42] Black, 161–62.
[43] Spoken by Dr. John MacArthur at Together for the Gospel conference, Twitter post by Richard Gregory, April 12, 2018, https://twitter.com/RichardPGregory/status/984504149978042369.

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A BIBLICAL PROPOSAL FOR THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION IN MISSION

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Theological education is essentially absent from most missiological discussion, despite standing at the center of the Great Commission. In response, founded upon trust in the full authority and sufficiency of all of Scripture, this article presents a biblical proposal for theological education in mission. This call to action lays out a biblical vision for the theological education of missionaries and those whom they serve on the mission field. May the church return to its mission and teach all the nations to keep all the commands of Jesus, to the end of the age.

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Mission: Obeying the Great Commission

Even a cursory glance at missiological literature reveals that missiologists do not agree upon a great many aspects of their field, including its very nature and definition.[1] In response, this article proceeds from a central premise and its corollary. The central premise is that authoritative and sufficient Scripture teaches that the church's mission is to obey Christ's Great Commission.[2] The corollary is that a sure sign of mission activity according to the Great Commission is that mission takes place in harmony with all other biblical teaching as well.

[1] Mission is neither inherently undefinable (David J. Bosch) nor "everything" (C. J. H. Wright). See David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, American Society of Missiology Series 16 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), 9; Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God's People: A Biblical Theology of the Church's Mission* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 26.

[2] Wright argues against the idea that Great Commission passages, or any other "list of texts," provides proper biblical grounding for the church's mission. See Christopher J. H. Wright, "Mission as a Matrix for Hermeneutics and Biblical Theology," in *Out of Egypt: Biblical Theology and Biblical Interpretation*, Scripture and Hermeneutics 5, edited by Craig Bartholomew et al. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 102–43 (esp. 109–13).

Accordingly, the first section below briefly surveys the Great Commission to determine how the church—and specifically, missionaries—should obey it.[3] The following section then steps back to consider how missionaries should train toward their task, a sacred calling assigned in the Great Commission and elaborated upon in the rest of Scripture. Then the final section steps ahead to the mission field and considers how missionaries should train leaders for the new churches they plant.

The Great Commission

Great Commission texts include Luke 24:45–49, John 20:21–23, and Acts 1:8, but the Great Commission's most classic expression is Matthew 28:18–20.[4] The single command within Matthew's Great Commission passage is "make disciples," with three key actions ("go," "baptize," and "teach") expressed by participles. "Go" is mandatory; the disciples must "go" for disciple making to take place among "all the nations."[5] Then "baptize" and "teach" are also necessary actions, for they explain how one makes disciples of Jesus. Baptizing new followers of Jesus is a one-time act at the beginning of their discipleship.[6] Then "teaching them to keep all that I commanded you" is a continual activity as Jesus promises to be present with His church "even to the end of the age."[7]

Training of Missionaries

Teaching Jesus's disciples among "all the nations" certainly entails the church evangelizing and teaching those closest at hand: people who are culturally similar and geographically nearby, and thus easiest to reach. Yet "all the nations" also includes "all" who are far away. Going to "all the nations" demands that the church send out missionaries to cross boundaries of nation-states, cultures, ethnicities, and languages. Their destination can be any place where people have not bowed the knee to Christ, including places of greatest need such as pioneer mission fields where the Gospel has not yet reached anyone. Of such people Paul asks, "How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? And how will they preach unless they are sent?" (Rom 10:14b–15a). Before cross-cultural

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[3] For further development of the ideas summarized in this introduction, see Scott N. Callaham, "Make Disciples: What the Great Commission Means and What We Must Do," forthcoming in *Biblical Missions: Principles, Priorities, and Practices,* edited by Mark Tatlock and Chris Burnett (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2025).

[4] Mark 16:15–18 appears in the traditional "longer ending" of Mark. No material follows Mark 16:8 in the earliest manuscripts of the Gospel of Mark. See Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994), 102–7. Ramm uses the spurious endings of Mark to illustrate the principle that "No doctrine should be constructed from an uncertain textual reading." See Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation: A Textbook of Hermeneutics*, 3rd rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1970), 183.

[5] See discussion of the function of the three participles and refutation of the popular translation "as you go" in Cleon Rogers, "The Great Commission," *BibSac* 130 (1973): 258–62 (esp. 261–62).

[6] For the role of baptism within Great Commission obedience see John Massey and Scott N. Callaham, "Baptism as Integral Component of World Mission Strategy," in *World Mission: Theology, Strategy, and Current Issues,* edited by Scott N. Callaham and Will Brooks (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2019), 149–75.

[7] This article cites Scripture from the Legacy Standard Bible.

international missionaries depart for the mission field, the church should evaluate their qualifications and train them for their crucial task.

Qualifications for Missionaries

At the very outset of discussion of qualifications for missionary service it is essential to emphasize a fundamental attribute to which churches and missionary sending agencies devote all too little attention: that a missionary candidate must be a Christian. Discerning whether a missionary candidate is truly regenerate is urgent, and not because hordes of adherents of world religions or cult groups are attempting to infiltrate Christian missionary organizations. Instead, it is necessary to ensure that a missionary candidate is saved due to the deceitful human heart (see Jer 17:9) that beats in time with the universal, innate religiosity of human beings.[8] Unregenerate religious people may profess faith in Christ, get baptized, join churches, admire scriptural teaching, reform their behavior to align with Christian social and ethical principles, and even graduate from Christian seminaries and become ministers. They "fit in" as "cultural Christians." They experience God's common grace afforded to all humanity, and they even desire to go on the mission field. Yet in the case of these unregenerate religious people, the Holy Spirit has not brought them to the end of themselves and granted them new life in Christ. In a word, they do not believe the Gospel. Rather, alongside Scripture they pay "attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons" (1 Tim 4:1). Scripture's judgment upon them in 1 John 2:18–19 stings; as false teachers, they are "antichrists," and at the most elemental level they are "not of us." For the sake of the world church and the urgency of the call of the Great Commission, churches, seminaries, and missionary sending agencies must screen those who aspire to serve on the mission field for true faith and allegiance to Christ.[9]

Regarding born-again missionary candidates, people whose lives are impossible to explain apart from the Gospel, introductory textbooks and guides to mission typically cover qualifications as an element of missionary preparation. Categories of qualifications may address the physical, academic, vocational, and spiritual spheres of life. Regarding spiritual qualifications, one author sets out as components of a missionary candidate's spirituality "a genuine conversion experience," "knowledge of the Scriptures," "assurance of divine guidance," "a strong devotional life," "self-

[8] Calvin wrote that "the mind of man is … a perpetual manufactory of idols." See John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3 vols., trans. John Allen (Philadelphia: Philip H. Nicklin and Hezekiah Howe, 1816), 1:115. In editions with differing pagination, see Book 1, Chapter 11, Section 8.

[9] John Wesley volunteered for missionary service before his conversion. Wesley's diary records his anguish on 1 February 1738, "that I who went to America to convert others, was never myself converted to God." His footnote for this statement reveals doubts even about his self-admission of lostness: "I am not sure of this." Yet in the same lengthy entry he later wrote, "I want that faith which none can have without knowing that he hath it (though many imagine that they have it, who have it not)." See John Wesley, *The Journal of John Wesley: As Abridged by Nehemiah Curnock* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1963), 36–37. For a secular perspective on the phenomenon of unbelief in ministry, see Daniel C. Dennett and Linda LaScola, "Preachers Who are Not Believers," *Evolutionary Psychology* 8 (2010): 122–50.

discipline," "a heart of love," and "some success in Christian service."[10] These spiritual attributes are indeed desirable on the mission field, though in the end they are evaluated subjectively and are likely to manifest in varying degrees from missionary to missionary. Usually not mentioned in mission textbooks are objective biblical qualifications for missionaries.

Asserting objective biblical qualifications for missionaries may raise eyebrows among mission agencies accustomed to assessing missionary candidates according to their own organizational standards. When drawing up such standards, mission agencies should keep in mind Jesus's directive in the Great Commission: make disciples. Jesus commands disciples to make disciples, who in turn will make disciples in an ongoing chain of disciple making until His return. In the Great Commission Jesus assigns disciple making to His redeemed people, with the result that Jesus's new disciples must gather into local churches with the rest of the redeemed. In some cases, biblically faithful local churches in some mission fields stand ready to receive new converts as members and to continue discipling them. Yet in some other areas biblically faithful churches are inaccessible or non-existent. In such situations, missionaries must plant new churches.

These newly planted churches need leaders. According to contemporary mission philosophies that prize rapid reproduction of churches through "people movements," missionaries should draw "new believers into leadership roles through participative Bible studies."[11] The missionary never teaches, but instead mentors these emergent new church leaders.[12] A surprising number of mission agencies endorse these behind-the-scenes, catalytic, non-Bible-teaching strategies, despite their lack of precedent in Scripture. "People movement" philosophies invest leadership in freshly converted people with a natural bent toward leading, trusting that they supply what a foreign missionary inherently lacks: the in-group identity that allegedly fosters the rapid propagation of Christianity within that discrete people group.[13]

In stark contrast, Scripture assigns church leadership to elders, each of whom can hold "fast the faithful word *which is in accordance with the teaching*, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to reprove those who contradict" (emphasis added; Titus 1:9). Obviously, a new convert who has received no teaching himself would not be able to satisfy this requirement. Furthermore, Scripture

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[10] J. Herbert Kane, *Life and Work on the Mission Field* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 23–35, esp. 32–35. Note that Kane does not mention a specific missionary calling as a prerequisite for missionary service. For reflection upon missionary calling see Zane Pratt, M. David Sills, and Jeff K. Walters, *Introduction to Global Missions* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2014), 1–15.

[11] Contemporary "people movement" philosophies include CPM (Church Planting Movements), DMM (Disciple Making Movements), and IM (Insider Movements). Regarding the importance of rapid reproduction, see V. David Garrison, *Church Planting Movements* (Richmond, VA: International Mission Board, 1999), 36. See the definition of a Church Planting Movement on p. 8: "a rapid and multiplicative increase of indigenous churches planting churches within a given people group or population segment." For a description of question-based, non-directive, participative Bible studies, see V. David Garrison, *Church Planting Movements: How God is Redeeming a Lost World* (Bangalore: WIGTake Resources, 2004), 315–17.

[12] Watson and Watson directly deny that missionaries should "preach or teach." See David L. Watson and Paul D. Watson, *Contagious Disciple Making: Leading Others on a Journey of Discovery* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2014), 127.

[13] Acts 8:9–24 relates the story of an in-group natural leader among the Samaritans named Simon, who apparently came to faith in Christ and received baptism, but was in fact a false convert.

explicitly prohibits new converts from becoming elders lest they "become conceited and fall into the condemnation of the devil" (1 Tim 3:6).

According to the teaching of authoritative and sufficient Scripture in the Great Commission, missionaries baptize and teach new disciples. Then as the Holy Spirit draws new disciples to come to faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, the missionary gathers them into churches, leads these churches, and trains biblically qualified leaders—elders—for these churches. In order to plant and lead churches, as well as to train elders with integrity, missionaries should themselves meet the qualifications of elders found in 1 Timothy 3:2–7, Titus 1:6–9, and 1 Peter 5:2–4.

An immediate objection to elder qualification for missionaries arises; missionaries need mission-field based support for their church planting work, often from those who do not meet the qualifications of elders. These support workers could be attorneys, information technology professionals, medical personnel, aviators, Bible translators, accountants, schoolteachers, and so forth. They may be men who lack the training or spiritual gifting to teach the Word of God, or they may be women.[14] Yet these support workers can be vital in sustaining the work of missionary church planters, because they free these missionaries from urgent secondary concerns so that the work of the Word of God may continue unimpeded.[15] Therefore, these workers should not view their contributions as somehow unimportant, unspiritual, or non-theological. In fact, as many of these support workers as have the potential and biblical qualification to serve as elders, they should train toward serving in that capacity as God allows. A key tool for equipping missionaries to plant and lead churches as elders is theological education.

Theological Education for Missionaries

Just as the field of missiology faces an identity crisis when untethered from Scripture, the enterprise of theological education also lacks coherence apart from a biblically driven agenda. To illustrate with one recent example of incoherence due to lack of anchoring in the Bible, a past leader of the Asia Theological Association relates his "disillusionment with theological education in general" resulting from encounters with the administrators of two seminaries. These leaders opposed his suggestion to cancel class in order to have students join "right-thinking citizens" who were engaging in protest actions on the streets of their city.[16] This seminary-accrediting-agency head judged that "serious incarnational engagement in the life of a nation" would be more

[14] "Husband of one wife" is one of the qualifications of an elder (1 Tim 3:2). 1 Tim 2:12 also informs the role of women on the mission field, for in this text the apostle Paul prohibits women from teaching men. Regarding women teaching women, often women on a missionary team can be in closer contact with host nation women for evangelism and discipleship than would be appropriate for men. For a historical survey of women missionaries, see Ruth A. Tucker and Walter L. Liefeld, *Daughters of the Church: Women and Ministry from New Testament Times to the Present* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 291–327.

[15] Freeing ministers of the Word from urgent secondary tasks prompted the early church to appoint the first deacons (or perhaps proto-deacons) in Acts 6:1–6.

[16] Paul Cornelius, "Rescuing the Mind from Academics: A South Asian Perspective on *Missio Dei* and the *Telos* of Theological Education," in *Equipping for Global Mission: Theological and Missiological Proposals and Case Studies*, Evangelical Missiological Society Monograph Series 32, edited by Linda P. Saunders, Gregory Mathias, and Edward L. Smither (Littleton, CO: William Carey, 2024), 19.

helpful in formation for "ministry and mission" than the seminary curriculum.[17] Then as for training needs for missionaries in particular, a "people movements" advocate asserts that the "principle of group conversion ought to be the fundamental principle of missionary work everywhere" and finds it inexcusable that missionaries should receive theological education that does not impart "special knowledge of anthropology, sociology, and non-Christian religions."[18]

An implicit assumption of both the above-mentioned seminary accreditor and the "people movements" missiologist is that the Holy Spirit-inspired Word of God is not of supreme value or authority in theological education. Instead, they advocate familiarity with culture as paramount. Now, keeping abreast of current events within one's environment (such as mass street protests) certainly fosters situational awareness, and familiarity with principles of "anthropology, sociology, and non-Christian religions" can aid in living cross-culturally and contextualizing the message of Scripture without compromising the truth (see Acts 17:16–34). That said, faithfulness to the Bible's transcultural message must remain the passion of the missionary such that Scripture exercises control over contextualization of the missionary's message.[19] Since communicating the message of authoritative and sufficient Scripture is central to the Great Commission, theological education for missionaries should produce cross-cultural disciple making expositors.

1. Theological Education for Cross-cultural Missionaries

The first of the three main characteristics of the "cross-cultural disciple-making expositor" is the capacity to work cross-culturally. At first glance, it may seem that some aspects of cross-cultural missionary field work are outside the scope of theological education. For example, a missionary may need business acumen to operate a "platform" company, official certification as an engineer or a language teacher to acquire a visa, or an accredited graduate degree in a secular field in order to live and work in a certain mission field. On the one hand, in God's sovereignty, it is quite possible that the best path toward earning these credentials runs through receiving training from a non-Christian institution.

On the other hand, missionaries should rethink "secular" aspects of pre-mission field training in light of the hard cultural turn against Christianity throughout much of the world in recent years. In this present "negative world," public educational institutions indoctrinate students into anti-Christian, state-imposed moral systems with (anti-)religious fervor.[20] The ways that schools in more conservative communities versus those in more progressive communities treat orthodoxies such as critical social justice, advocacy of unfettered access to government subsidized abortion, and the latest dictates of liberal politicians and the LGBTQ+ movement are remarkably similar and differ only in their degree of advocacy.

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[17] Paul Cornelius, "Rescuing the Mind from Academics: A South Asian Perspective on *Missio Dei* and the *Telos* of Theological Education," 19.

[18] A. L. Warnshuis, "Group Conversion," in *Church Growth and Group Conversion,* J. W. Pickett et al., 5th ed. (South Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1973), 19.

[19] E. D. Burns, *Ancient Gospel, Brave New World* (Cape Coral, FL: Founders, 2021), 25.

[20] Renn popularizes the concept of the "negative world" in Aaron M. Renn, *Life in the Negative World: Confronting Challenges in an Anti-Christian Culture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2024).

One might raise the objection that engagement with hardline anti-Christian worldviews on a university campus develops competence in cross-cultural witness and thus would be an experience to seek out rather than to avoid. Yet in military terms, this course of action is like sending recruits from boot camp into hand-to-hand combat against the enemy's special forces. The predictable result is not training, but slaughter. Instead, in the "negative world" more than ever before, Christians should consider bringing their "secular" education into contact with the realm of theological education. Accordingly, future mission field workers should ideally acquire skills for cross-cultural living from institutions such as a Christian university.

A Christian university can provide a host of options for optimal equipping, such as an excellent faculty within a needed "secular" field of study. A well-resourced Global Studies program in a Christian university could also offer training in cultural anthropology and language acquisition, or even teach one of the world's widely spoken strategic languages.[21] Furthermore, Global Studies faculty who are veteran missionaries can provide encouragement through mentoring and lead international mission trips to help future missionaries gain experience applying learned skills in an actively missional context before arrival on the mission field.

2. Theological Education for Disciple-Making Missionaries

Perhaps following graduation from a Christian university, a concentrated period of explicitly theological training can build upon the Christian worldview foundation set by earlier equipping. The first of the two major purposes of this formal theological education is to train disciple-makers. According to the Great Commission, the definition of disciple making among all nations is to baptize and teach all that Jesus commands.

"All that Jesus commands" must include "first order" Gospel doctrines that define Christian orthodoxy.[22] Scripture itself speaks of "first importance" teachings, which center upon Christ: His death, burial, resurrection, and post-resurrection appearances (1 Cor 15:3–8). Furthermore, teaching a "different gospel" than the Gospel Paul proclaimed results in blanket condemnation (Gal 1:6–9). The clear implication is that disciple-making missionaries must teach new believers the Gospel message in full alignment with Scripture, with no admixture of error.

Furthermore, disciple-making missionaries must baptize. While the English word "baptism" is malleable enough to communicate a wide array of literal and metaphorical meanings, the semantic range of the word in Biblical Greek is narrow. In the Bible, baptism means "immersion."[23] Therefore, baptism for new disciples requires immersion of the body in water. The burial drama acted out in immersion (Rom 6:4) stands behind the metaphorical imagery of baptism in Scripture, such as

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[21] An example of a textbook that bridges the fields of anthropology and mission is Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985). An example of a language textbook that trains students for specifically Christian use of language is Wang Shuguang, *Chinese through Scripture* (Aurora, IL: Kharis, 2022).

[22] Albert Mohler popularized the concept of a three-tiered "theological triage" on his blog. See https://albertmohler.com/2005/07/12/a-call-for-theological-triage-and-christian-maturity/. Accessed October 19, 2024.

[23] See BDAG, s.v. βαπτίζω.

the Messiah baptizing with the Holy Spirit and with fire (Matt 3:11, Luke 3:16).[24] All this is to say that baptism is extremely important—important enough to be a component of the very mission of the church, and also for Jesus to tie baptism to the Trinity (a "first order" Gospel doctrine) in Matthew 28:19.

Baptism is an act that preaches the Gospel, but it is not the Gospel itself. Put another way, baptism is not a "first order" doctrine in that it does not *save* a sinner but rather *displays* the salvation of a sinner. Therefore, theological education that leads to disciple making, as well as the churches that result from disciple making, must commit to "second order" doctrinal stances such as baptism as well. It follows that theological education and mission must be confessional. Trans-denominational parachurch organizations may have their place, but that place is outside of theological education and work on the mission field.

As discussed to this point, theological education for disciple-making missionaries must include first order and second order doctrines. Yet "all that Jesus commands" encompasses still more. Jesus's teaching, and direct teaching about Jesus as the culmination of God's salvation plan for all peoples, fill the entire New Testament. In addition, Jesus teaches that "all the Scriptures" contain "things concerning himself" (Luke 24:27). Furthermore, 2 Timothy 3:16–17 directly addresses the significance of "all Scripture" as "God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be equipped, having been thoroughly equipped for every good work." Should any doubts remain about the relationship between Jesus and even the least-cited and least-read texts in the Bible, in the Great Commission Jesus reminded His followers who He is, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth" (Matt 28:18). Jesus is God, therefore the Holy Spirit-inspired Word of God is Jesus's word. The entirety of Scripture is the proper focus of theological education for disciple-making missionaries.[25]

Theological education for disciple-making missionaries should of course include subjects that are Scripture-driven but not Scripture themselves, such as the missionary work of the church. Yet before proceeding to discuss these extrabiblical elements of theological education, it is helpful to restate that the Bible is authoritative and sufficient for all of life, and that includes mission. Missiology is not an independent discipline that opens access to previously unknown insights into God's plans for the world, and mission must never displace Scripture at the center of theological education for missionaries.[26]

One can visualize the generative effect of Scripture upon mission with the image of a droplet falling into an undisturbed body of water. The droplet is Scripture itself. The first ripple produced by the impact of the droplet is the fruit of interpretation of

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[24] Objections to biblical baptism that call upon extrabiblical or pragmatic considerations (as well as systematic theologies of baptism built upon these considerations) undermine the authority and sufficiency of Scripture for the doctrine of baptism.

[25] Waltke and Yu write, "Every sentence of the Bible is fraught with theology, worthy of reflection." See Bruce K. Waltke and Charles Yu, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 21.

[26] See the mission-centric proposal in Jeffrey P. Greenman, "Mission as the Integrating Center of Theological Education," in *The Bible in World Christian Perspective: Studies in Honor of Carl Edwin Armerding*, ed. David W. Baker and W. Ward Gasque (Vancouver: Regent College Press, 2009), 193–210.

biblical passages. The second ripple is the Old and New Testament theology that arises from biblical interpretation. The third ripple is biblical theology, which traces the voice of the Holy Spirit throughout the Old and New Testaments that together form the canon of inspired Scripture. The fourth ripple is systematic theology, which organizes theological concepts into doctrines. Subsequent ripples outward are the realm of applied theology, where such fields as church history, philosophy of religion, Christian ethics, preaching, and mission reside.

Mission thus stands as a subsidiary field of applied theology, an exciting subfield where disciples of Jesus obey Him and put theology in action. These disciple-making missionaries need as firm a grasp as possible upon the Heavenly Father-ordained, Christ-exalting, Holy Spirit-driven theology-in-action that they are obeying in the Great Commission. Theological education for disciple-making missionaries must therefore extensively train in Scripture (the droplet) and its effects (the ripples), all the way to mission. Then as disciple-making missionaries obey the Great Commission, they will revel in "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col 2:3) in Christ and pass these treasures on to the next generation of Jesus's disciples whom the Holy Spirit will draw near on the mission field.

3. Theological Education for Expositor Missionaries

Preaching is a Great Commission act according to Luke 24:47, which reads that "repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in [Christ's] name to all the nations." The verb of proclamation here is κηρύσσω, which in Luke and Acts has to do with Gospel proclamation (Luke 4:43–44, 8:1; Acts 8:4–5), teaching (Acts 28:31), and synagogue preaching (Luke 4:44, Acts 9:20, cf. Acts 15:21).[27] Beyond the act of preaching the Gospel that the Holy Spirit uses to draw people to faith in Christ, missionaries have the responsibility to preach in the churches they plant, for they are the founding elders of those churches. Therefore, these cross-cultural disciple-making missionaries must be expositors, and their theological education should prepare them to preach, "accurately handling the word of truth" (2 Tim 2:15).

Now before this essay advances a single sentence further, one should acknowledge that even the suggestions that a missionary should be a preacher, and furthermore that as a preacher he should rightly wield the tools of the preaching trade, are essentially absent from modern textbooks on mission.[28] Yet there is an aching need for biblically and doctrinally faithful proclamation of the Word of God in churches on the mission field. There appears to be an unfortunate disconnect between the command of Christ in the Great Commission and the many strategies that missionaries craft for their work on the field. To receive inspiration from missionaries

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[27] Christopher A. Beetham, ed., *Concise New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, s.v. "κηρύσσω" (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2021), 456–59 (esp. 458–59); Gerhard Friedrich, "κηρύσσω," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964–76), 3:697–718 (713). Note that Mark 16:15 also uses κηρύσσω.

[28] A welcome step in the right direction is brief mention of the need for missionaries to use "proper biblical exegesis" as they interpret the Bible within its "linguistic, cultural, and historical setting" in *Missions,* Gailyn Van Rheenen, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 286.

who embrace their call to preach the message of the Bible, it is unfortunately often necessary to turn to biographical works on long-dead missionaries.[29]

Contemplating missionary preaching naturally calls to mind the dynamic of language; a missionary preaches in vain if he does not speak the language of the people on the mission field. Using a human or even a machine translator often carries a risk of mistranslation or some critical "loss in translation."[30] Furthermore, praying for the apostolic gift of tongues to preach in unlearned languages is both futile and a potential disqualifier from ministry due to serious misunderstanding of biblical teaching on the gifts of the Holy Spirit.[31] Indeed, the need for missionaries to preach in the language of the people they serve is obvious and pressing. Cross-cultural international missionaries must arduously cross a "language bridge" to the people's cultural setting rather than expect the people to cross that bridge to the missionaries. That said, there is another culture-spanning language bridge that modern-day missionaries seldom cross, and refusal to cross it speaks volumes about one's attitude toward preaching the Bible. This is the bridge of the biblical languages: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek.

Unfortunately, preparing sermons from the inspired biblical text in the original languages is not as widespread as preferred.[32] This reality, in part, seems to suggest that knowledge of the biblical languages may be suited to academic commentary writers, but not necessarily to preachers. It is as if the unavoidable losses in translation that are present in all modern Bibles are not worth the awareness of the missionary expositor. Yet neither the translated Bible in the missionary's native language ("language A") nor the translated Bible in the language of the people he serves ("language B") are capable of being perfect transmitters of meaning from the ancient manuscripts to the modern reader. They are translations, after all. Furthermore, one could easily posit a scenario on the mission field in which "language A" and "language B" Bible translations disagree on the meaning of a particular passage. Either both, one, or neither is in error, depending on issues of translation that an expositor cannot understand without recourse to the original language text.

The prospect of greater faithfulness to that original language text, and teaching its meaning accurately on the mission field, should provide key motivation for

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[29] See for example E. D. Burns, *A Supreme Desire to Please Him: The Spirituality of Adoniram Judson*, Monographs in Baptist History 4 (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2016), 84–86.

[30] For helpful guidance for preaching with the help of a human translator when circumstances demand it, see Pat Gustin, "How Not to Get Lost in Translation," *Journal of Applied Christian Leadership* 4 (2010): 126–30. The present state of technology does not support machine translation for preaching. For a study demonstrating the inadequacy of machine translation when lives are at stake, see Breena R. Taira et al., "A Pragmatic Assessment of Google Translate for Emergency Department Instructions," *Journal of General Internal Medicine* (2021): n.p.

[31] Regarding the refusal of some missionaries to study Chinese in the expectation that the Holy Spirit would miraculously impart the language, James Hudson Taylor commented, "How many and subtle are the devices of Satan to keep the Chinese ignorant of the gospel." See Alvyn Austin, *China's Millions: The China Inland Mission and Late Qing Society, 1832–1905*, Studies in the History of Christian Missions (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 222. See also a survey of false claims of speaking unlearned languages in Gary B. McGee, "Shortcut to Language Preparation? Radical Evangelicals, Missions, and the Gift of Tongues," *IBMR* 25 (2001): 118–23.

[32] For a popular-level meditation on the importance of biblical languages in ministry see John Piper, *Brothers, We are Not Professionals: A Plea to Pastors for Radical Ministry* (Nashville: B&H, 2013), 98–105.

biblical language study.[33] The flame of that motivation must burn bright enough in missionaries' hearts to prioritize maintaining command of the biblical languages after formal study is complete.[34] Otherwise, the rigors of ministry—and modern language learning!—on the mission field will rob the missionary of hard-fought gains in familiarity with the inspired Word.

The missionary has a sacred duty, a duty that calls for wrestling in prayer, to employ his hard-fought gains in the vocabulary, grammar, and syntax of the biblical languages rightly to cross the culture-spanning language bridge to the ancient world of the Bible. The process that enables interpreting the biblical text as much as possible according to the intent of its human and divine author is "grammatical-historical interpretation." As for the "historical" element of "grammatical-historical interpretation," it certainly helps to cultivate knowledge of "biblical backgrounds": the thought worlds of the ancient Near East for Old Testament interpretation and that of Greco-Roman culture for New Testament interpretation. The significance of biblical backgrounds now granted, it is important to note that most sources of information about these ancient worlds are extrabiblical and therefore not inspired. In contrast, the most significant element of background for any biblical text is the canon of inspired Scripture. For example, the most important component of New Testament background is inspired: the Old Testament.[35] Furthermore, the Bible advocates the concept of the full sufficiency of Scripture in 2 Peter 1:3: "His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the full knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence." Trust in the authority and sufficiency of Scripture demands that the senior partner of "grammatical-historical interpretation" must be "grammatical," which fixes primary attention upon the biblical text itself.

The utterly non-creative, workmanlike discipline of drawing out meaning from biblical passages may not appeal to the postmodern imagination. Yet the crying need of the mission field is not impressionistic appropriation and exploitation of Scripture, with results that "fit" pet doctrines of the missionary or prevailing socio-cultural settings. In fact, the message of Scripture should not comfortably conform to any cultural status quo. Instead, "The word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Heb 4:12). The divine Word exposes sin and calls for repentance, and just as the

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[33] For a recent defense of the pressing need for biblical language knowledge among preachers, see Irvin A. Busenitz, "Lifting the Veil: Original Languages and the Pastor-Theologian," *TMSJ* 34 (2023): 79–90.

[34] Helpful resources for maintaining biblical language knowledge include Accordance and Logos Bible software, reader's editions of the Old and New Testaments, the five volumes of the *Two Minutes a Day* book series by Jonathan G. Kline, and devotionals such as Jacob N. Cerone and Matthew C. Fisher, *Daily Scripture: 365 Readings in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021). If a means of connecting to the Internet is available on the mission field, missionaries can also access the Daily Dose of Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek websites and subscribe to the associated video streaming channels, which feature new 1–3-minute videos each weekday that walk through Scripture passages in the biblical languages.

[35] The dynamic of "scriptural exegesis of Scripture" in which the New Testament interprets the Old carries on patterns of interpretation present within the Old Testament itself. Later Old Testament passages draw upon earlier ones in a harmonious crescendo of special revelation. See Gary Edward Schnittjer, *Old Testament Use of the Old Testament: A Book-by-Book Guide* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2021), xvii and *passim*.

missionary could be God's chosen instrument to deliver this message, so could the missionary be one of the greatest obstacles to its clear communication, if not properly trained in Scripture. Theological education for missionaries should teach grammatical-historical interpretation to help the missionary extract himself as much as possible from the message God sends him to preach.

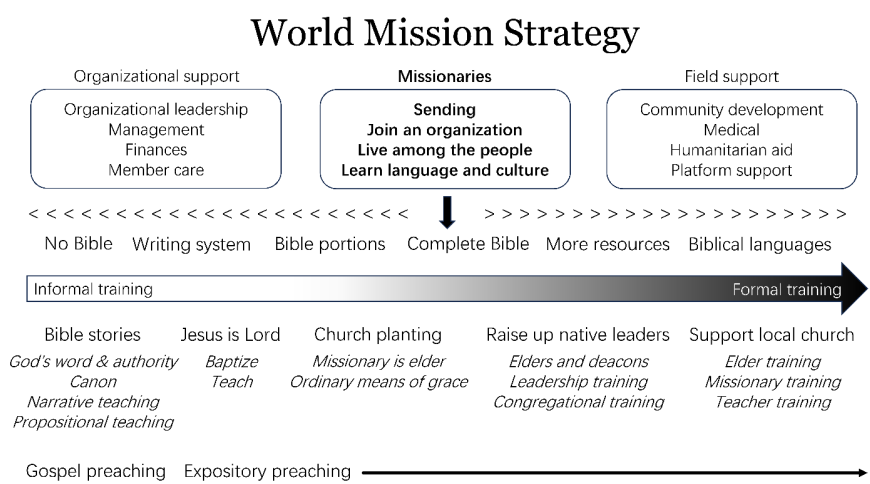
Having determined the meaning of the biblical text through self-denying, non-creative means, the missionary should creatively marshal every element of his theological education and his walk with God through life to present the Bible's message to the people he serves on the mission field. He faces a daunting task: communicating biblical truth in a language of which he is likely a much poorer speaker than his listeners, and within a rhetorical package that his audience must understand despite holding few if any socio-cultural touchpoints in common with the missionary. The Holy Spirit often imparts grace in this difficult process: the grace of heightened focus and effectiveness in using the language of the people in preaching God's Word, and also hyper-awareness of weaknesses in doing the same. Awareness of one's weaknesses in preaching prevents the missionary from any claim to mastery of the art of preaching in the language of the people, and assures everyone that any positive spiritual result that comes from mission field preaching is completely due to the action of the Holy Spirit (see 2 Cor 12:9). The Spirit calls specific people to preach specific messages from Scripture to specific audiences in specific circumstances, and it is a humbling and joyful experience for the missionary to be so called.[36]

Mission Field Training of Disciples

Teaching "to keep all that I commanded you" is a responsibility of churches throughout the lifetime of disciples, thus theological education stands at the center of missionary obedience to the Great Commission on the mission field. Yet theological education for new disciples on the mission field will necessarily take a different form than the theological education that equipped the cross-cultural disciple making expositor missionary sent to them. Furthermore, the theological training needs of an infant church on the mission field will differ from the needs of a mature, missionary sending church that it will one day become. Established churches on the mission field will stand somewhere on a spectrum of maturity between these two extremes, and their theological training needs will likewise differ. The following discussion addresses how missionaries should provide theological education on the mission field in obedience to the Great Commission. Reference to the figure "World Mission Strategy" below may assist in tracking with this discussion.[37]

[36] Expositor missionaries, like all expositors, should deliver the message God has birthed and grown in his heart through careful study of the Bible. Pragmatic shortcuts like plagiarizing the sermons of others make one a "peddler" of God's Word (2 Cor 2:17). See David Schrock, *Brothers, We Are Not Plagiarists: A Pastoral Plea to Forsake the Peddling of God's Word* (Cape Coral, FL: Founders, 2022).

[37] The author developed this diagram for the World Mission course held at China Reformed Theological Seminary in Taipei, Taiwan from May 27–31, 2024.



Cross-cultural disciple-making expositor missionaries are the group in the center top of the diagram. These missionaries receive support from missionary organizations they join, as well as from those who keep these organizations running (top left). Missionaries also benefit from the work of field support personnel (top right). Yet throughout this article, the term "missionary" has meant cross-cultural disciple-making expositors who carry out the Great Commission on the mission field.

The solid black down arrow signifies the point at which the missionary enters the culture of the people he serves.[38] The arrow can appear anywhere (signified by the chevrons) along a spectrum of engagement characterized by the material on the bottom half of the diagram. The first line in this bottom half has to do with the mission field church's engagement with the Bible, ranging from none at all (meaning that there is no Bible in the people's language) to the advanced point when mission field church leaders receive training in the biblical languages. The horizontal gradient arrow depicts the level of formality of theological education that will accompany various developmental stages of the missionary's work, which appears in the next line of text. These developmental stages track the work of the missionary from telling Bible stories, through planting and leading churches, to performing a mostly supportive role for the host culture church. The text in italics further fleshes out what takes place in each developmental stage. Finally, the bottom line characterizes the missionary's preaching through the development of the host culture church. For the sake of addressing all church development stages, the following sections place the missionary's entry point at the far left of the diagram, in pre-literate oral culture with no Scripture in its language.

[38] This "entry" is the beginning of the missionary living among the people he serves and learning their language and culture. The whole life dedication of cross-cultural disciple making expositor missionaries stands in stark contrast to that of a "nonresidential missionary" championed in V. David Garrison, *The Nonresidential Missionary* (Monrovia, CA: MARC, 1990), 13–14. This executive consultant-like networking role is neither missionary nor missionary support in the terms of this article.

Informal Theological Education: Storying

Every cross-cultural disciple-making expositor missionary must be a theological educator, including the missionaries who provide informal training to pre-literate oral cultures. They should tell Bible stories that communicate the nature and authority of God and His Word, span the canon, and unfold the grand metanarrative of Scripture from the Bible's own standpoint.[39] Naturally, Bible stories as "stories" will take a narrative form. Narrative is a powerful means of communication in any culture, and narrative carries particular potency in oral cultures.[40] Yet the Bible also contains propositional truth embedded within narrative, such as God's moral law summarized in the Ten Commandments. After narrating the engraving of the Ten Commandments by the finger of God in Exodus 31:18 and before an account of the dramatic shattering of the tablets at the foot of Mount Sinai in Exodus 32:19, missionaries should teach the Ten Commandments themselves.

Whenever a missionary tells Bible stories in pioneer church planting work, from time to time, in a culturally appropriate way, the missionary should take care to refer to the written text of the Bible as the source of the stories. The reasons for this reference include the fact that the stories themselves are extracts from Scripture and not Scripture themselves. A further reason for pointing to written Scripture is to stoke yearning for Scripture in the local language. The missionary takes the first steps toward realizing this dream of local language Scripture by creating a writing system. The writing system should use an alphabet rather than ideograms, and unless there is an overriding cultural reason to choose Arabic, Cyrillic, or an Indic script like Devangari, the writing system should employ the Latin alphabet, at least as a starting point. The choice of the Latin alphabet is aspirational, for it is a gateway to the world church's lingua franca: English. The missionary may dream toward the day when, in the sovereignty of God, the descendants of the people he is serving might travel to his own homeland to evangelize his descendants.

Missionary preaching from the beginning of cultural engagement should follow the apostolic evangelistic preaching pattern in Acts of urging repentance from sin, belief in Jesus as Savior and Lord, obeying Jesus, and baptism.[41] When the Spirit grants repentance and regeneration, people respond in faith and receive immersion into "the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit" (Matt 28:19). Discipleship has begun! Gospel proclamation through exposition of "the whole purpose of God" (Acts 20:27) should then be the norm for missionary preaching.

Somewhat Formal Theological Education: Scripture

As the Holy Spirit enables the harvest of new believers on the mission field, the missionary should establish a church to gather them in Christian community. Under

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[39] Jackson Wu, "Biblical Theology for Oral Cultures in World Mission," in *World Mission: Theology, Strategy, and Current Issues,* edited by Scott N. Callaham and Will Brooks (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2019), 269–89.

[40] Walter J. Ong and John Hartley, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, 30th Anniversary Edition (New York: Routledge, 2002), 136–52.

[41] Chad Vegas and Alex Kocman, *Missions by the Book: How Theology and Missions Walk Together* (Cape Coral, FL: Founders, 2021), 153–54.

the missionary's shepherding as elder, the church should develop its spirituality around God's gift to the church of the ordinary means of grace. The Word of God takes deep root in the hearts of people when they take it in regularly together, celebrate baptism and the Lord's Supper together, pray together, sing praise to the Lord together, and practice church discipline together. In the atmosphere of participation in these ordinary means of grace, translating the Word of God accurately into the local language takes on special urgency. As Scripture portions pass reviews of accuracy and proper use of the local language, they can become the focal point of more formalized theological education. Just as Scripture was the focal point for the theological education of the missionary, so it must be also on the mission field. Providing that the missionary's Bible storying laid a foundation of love for the Old Testament that informs the new church's reading of the New Testament, the missionary may decide to translate the New Testament first. The day that the new church can hold in their hands a New Testament in their own language, that they helped to translate, is truly a day to celebrate. Translating the New Testament must remain an intermediate goal, however, because the new church needs the remaining three-quarters of the Word of God in the Old Testament.

In concert with working on Bible translation, the missionary should raise up native leaders for the new church. Like the missionary himself, they must meet biblical qualifications: a process that takes time.[42] The missionary should grow the disciples in the church to the degree of maturity in the Word of God that there is an abundance of men who are elder qualified, such that choosing among them who should be elders and who should be deacons becomes difficult. With the help of new elders, the missionary should train leaders for Bible study groups and provide congregational training on Scripture driven evangelism. These kinds of training should seem familiar to the congregation, for they see others around them putting this training to use.

Returning to the selection of new elders, these elders must preach. The missionary has already been demonstrating expository preaching throughout the process of the growth of the church, so providing training on text-driven preaching is a logical next step. The missionary must provide as many exegetical resources as possible in the local language, always remembering that Scripture handled rightly (2 Tim 2:15) is the best resource for expository preaching. This training continues until the church and the missionary discern that native elders are ready to assume leadership of the church.

Formal Theological Education: Seminary

Truly treating Christians on the mission field as brothers and sisters in Christ entails utter rejection of paternalistic thinking. Put positively, missionaries should

[42] "People movements" mission philosophies radically contradict Scripture on this point. The popular training model T4T employed in the Church Planting Movements methodology wrenches apart the elder qualifications passages, asserting that the Titus 1 elder qualifications do not require screening out new converts from consideration as in 1 Timothy 3:6. This line of thinking claims that Titus 1 provides teaching on elder qualifications for new churches, and 1 Timothy 3 contains teaching on elder qualifications for more mature churches. See Steve Smith and Ying Kai, *T4T: A Discipleship ReRevolution* (Monument, CO: WIGTake Resources, 2011), 265–76.

invest in local believers in order to maximize the glorification of God in their lives. This process of glorifying God is truly a work not of finite human ability but of the infinite power of the Holy Spirit. After all, as Scripture teaches, it pleased God to transform a great enemy of Christ and the church (Saul of Tarsus) into an apostle to the Gentiles. Missionaries should pray incessantly for those whom they serve, mourning those who fall away and celebrating those whose potential to serve God and bring Him glory may well eclipse that of the missionary himself (see Phil 2:3).

All this is to say that the greatest need of an established church on the mission field is to add spiritual depth through formal theological education.[43] Formal theological education on the mission field should resemble the equipping that produced the cross-cultural disciple-making expositor missionaries who brought the Gospel to the field, planted churches, and passed on church leadership to local elders. This is because mature churches on the mission field must now raise up their own elders, missionaries, teachers, and other believers as Christianity sends down deep roots into the local cultural setting. These mature churches have grasped the baton passed from "so great a cloud of witnesses" (Heb 12:1) that came before them, and they must take full responsibility for obeying the Great Commission.

The chief characteristic of formal theological education on the mission field must be unshakable trust in the authority and sufficiency of Scripture. Furthermore, formal theological education on the mission field must also be confessional, with adherence to primary and secondary doctrines of the Christian faith firmly grounded upon Scripture. Bible saturated theological education will imbue grammatical-historical interpretation in students, such that they will spot the twisting of Scripture in evangelical feminism, critical social justice, the Charismatic movement, the New Apostolic Reformation, Word of Faith teachings, deliverance ministries, and the myriad forms of mysticism such as the Spiritual Formation movement.[44]

Missionaries should throw open the doors of knowledge of Scripture all the way to the pinnacle of theological education: training in the biblical languages. The purpose of this training is to shift church leaders' practice of grammatical-historical interpretation from their translated Bible to the inspired text in the original languages. The limited number of exegetical resources available in non-European languages mandates a "barefoot" model of biblical language training.[45] In this "barefoot" model, church leaders develop the ability to read and interpret the original language text with reference to their biblical language training materials and their translated Bible. The intimacy with the Word of God that comes from interpreting it through the biblical languages then drives the mission field church to further Great Commission obedience. Following the pattern of churches who brought the Gospel

[43] The phrase "all the nations" in Matthew 28:19 vividly pictures the breadth of Gospel advance, and "teaching them to keep all that I commanded you" describes the depth of Gospel advance in the Great Commission. This insight derives from a Chinese student whose name the author must withhold for security reasons.

[44] Jesus modeled dependence on God and His Word over against Satanic trampling upon the Word in Matthew 4:1–11, Mark 1:12–13, and Luke 4:1–13.

[45] An illustration of the paucity of exegetical resources in non-European languages is the case of Chinese. More than a century following the publication of the classic Chinese Union Version Bible translation, as of the writing of this article there is still no Biblical Hebrew lexicon available other than those based on Strong's Numbers, an inherently unreliable system for exegesis.

to them, the mission field church sends its best leaders to join the worldwide force of cross-cultural disciple-making expositor missionaries, joyfully being Jesus's witnesses "to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

Conclusion

Since the impartation of the Holy Spirit of God to all the people of God at Pentecost, the redeemed of all nations have shared God's own empowerment to carry out their mission, the Great Commission. As the church obeys the Great Commission, according to Jesus, the gates of Hades will not overpower it (Matt 16:18). This article has laid out a proposal for theological education in mission, inviting the church to commit wholeheartedly to teach all nations to keep all the commands of Jesus "even to the end of the age."

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REVIEWS

Svigel, Michael J. *The Fathers on the Future: A 2nd Century Eschatology for the 21st Century Church*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2024. 320 pp., $21.99 Paperback.

Reviewed by Daniel P. Jarms, DMin, Associate Dean of the Master's Seminary Spokane and Pastor at Faith Bible Church, Spokane, WA.

Michael J. Svigel is department chair and professor at Dallas Theological Seminary. He has written extensively on theology, church history, as well as Christian fiction. He specializes in patristics and has written about these topics at an academic and popular level. His aim is to present "A comprehensive (not exhaustive) treatment of Irenaean premillennial eschatology" (3). As he claims at the outset, he does even more by clarifying, strengthening, and even correcting some missteps of 2nd Century eschatology. True to his goal, Svigel's volume is a well-researched, examination, defense and interpretation of futurist premillennialism. It includes twenty-nine links to articles as "go deeper excurses" which are referred to in www.fathersonthefuture.com. These act as useful appendixes. If printed, this volume would stand well over 500 pages.

The opening chapter lays out Svigel's approach to Irenaean premillennialism. He uses an integrative theological method utilizing original languages of both the biblical texts and a grammatical-historical hermeneutic. He seeks to read "the whole of Scripture in light of its parts and its parts in light of the whole." He follows Irenaeus' emphasis on the Trinitarian creation-fall-redemption narrative centered on Christ and His first and second coming (5). These and other pre-commitments promise to give a thorough examination of Irenaeus' eschatology. Svigel writes,

> He believed in a seven-year tribulation period at the end of the age, climaxing in the return of Christ as king, the resurrection of the righteous as well as a remnant of mortal survivors of the anti-Christ's reign left to repopulate the earth, followed by a thousand-year intermediate kingdom, and concluding with the resurrection of the wicked and ushering in of the eternal new creation. (8)

Following Irenaeus' *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* Svigel explains the narrative structure of creation-fall-redemption. In Chapter 2 Svigel explains Irenaeus' teaching that God created man to transform the earth from "formless and empty" to "formed and filled" (17). Despite the fall into sin, this aim was never changed. The story of redemption begins, according to Irenaeus, with God's gracious

governance and an establishment of a theocratic rule through Abraham and the nation that would come from him (22–23). The Abrahamic covenant provides a framework for God's rule over His nation (24–25) and the Mosaic Covenant provides 'contextualized expression of moral, civil, and ceremonial obligations (25). The Davidic covenant promises a king who will rule over the whole world. This king will empower his followers as image bearers in a new humanity that "becomes the means of ultimately transforming the world from chaos to order, from emptiness to fullness, from wickedness to righteousness, from death to life" (26).

In Chapter 3 Svigel explains how this OT trajectory is developed in the NT. Christians of all eras have agreed that God's plans will be fulfilled in three ways. In Svigel's helpful nomenclature, each term begins with an "R": 1) The return of Christ as king and judge; 2) The resurrection of the dead when the righteous are raised to eternal life and the wicked to eternal condemnation; and 3) The restoration of all creation to sinless perfection. Today, Premillennialists, Amillennialists, and Postmillennialists disagree significantly on the details but are unified on the framework. For the student of historical theology, chapter 5 gives a generous sampling of the earliest church fathers' views on the future.

In terms of biblical theology, Svigel spends one third of the book (Chapters 6–13) walking through the OT and NT passages regarding the future. The categories found in covenantal or dispensational theology were not developed for another 1400 years. Irenaeus and his contemporaries cannot be neatly placed in them. Svigel interacts with the early church fathers as he details his own exegesis of the OT and NT writers. Significant time is given to an exegetical analysis of Revelation 20:1–6 (Chapters 11–13) and how it relates to the major modern views.

Svigel deals positively and peaceably with the major areas of modern debate on eschatology. The topic of the Kingdom of God is one of the first (Chapter 4). He highlights 11 distinct ways the phrase or idea of the kingdom of God is used in Scripture (42–43). It is multilayered with present and future realities, as well as spiritual and material ones. It will be fully present at Christ's second coming in which Christ will transform the world and establish paradise. A frequent point of differentiation of amillennial, postmillennial and premillennial viewpoints is the character of the kingdom. Chapter 14 presents a case for a positive earthly and spiritual millennium with Christ reigning on earth. He compares amillennial and postmillennial views today with Irenaeus' view.

Svigel follows Irenaeus and his contemporaries in a three-fold understanding of paradise planted, paradise removed into heaven, and paradise restored. This is an early articulation of a New Creation Model much of which is affirmed across millennial perspectives today.[1] There are significant sections devoted to the Day of the Lord from the OT and NT (Chapters 15–18). In these he uses Irenaeus and extensive biblical exegesis to argue for the Day of the Lord and the second coming being a process rather than momentary event (211). This is a key perspective for today that speaks to the distinction between amillennialists and pre-millennialists. Svigel shows how Irenaeus and other church fathers' exegesis would refute preterism (Chapter 17). Without saying pre-tribulational rapture, he argues for an impending

[1] Michael J. Vlach, *The New Creation Model: A Paradigm for Discovering God's Restoration Purposes from Creation to New Creation* (Cary, NC: Theological Studies, 2023).

pre-day-of-the-Lord rapture. Chapter 18 highlights the rapture views of the church fathers. Their views were often not clear or detailed. There appears to be no clear distinction between the church and Israel as in modern dispensationalism, but there is a strong anticipation of the conversion of Jews and a restoration of Israel in the land. Christ would rule from Jerusalem in the millennial kingdom. Both historic premillennialists and dispensational pre-millenialists claim Irenaeus as the earliest proponent of their views, but Irenaeus cannot be easily categorized by the modern viewpoints.

Svigel delivers on his objective. He ably argues an Irenaean Pre-millenialism. This is not a polemical work, but a rhetorical one in which he wants to persuade the reader to this view. In sum, all major eschatological views would benefit from holding up their views in the light of the early church fathers. Svigel may not say it outright, but his presentation would fall comfortably within progressive dispensationalism. It provides a useful and surprisingly contemporary expansion of Irenaeus ably using exegesis, church history and theology.

Schnittjer, Gary Edward, and Matthew S. Harmon. *How to Study the Bible's Use of the Bible: Seven Hermeneutical Choices for the Old and New Testaments*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2024. 304 pp., $23.99 Hardcover.

Reviewed by Caden Colson, ThM Student, The Master's Seminary.

Gary Edward Schnittjer (PhD, Dallas Theological Seminary) is a distinguished professor of Old Testament for the School of Divinity at Cairn University. He has been teaching Biblical Hebrew and Old Testament at Cairn since 1997. Dr. Schnittjer's books include *Torah Story: An Apprenticeship on the Pentateuch* (Zondervan, 2023), *Old Testament Narrative Books: The Israel Story* (B&H, 2023), and the substantial, 1,104-page reference work, *Old Testament Use of Old Testament: A Book-by-Book Guide* (Zondervan, 2021).

Matthew S. Harmon (PhD, Wheaton College) is a professor of New Testament Studies at Grace Theological Seminary, where he has taught since 2006. Dr. Harmon's books include, among several others, *The God Who Saves and Judges: A Theology of 2 Peter and Jude* (Crossway, 2023), *The Servant of the Lord and His Servant People: Tracing a Biblical Theme through the Canon* (IVP, 2020), and *Rebels and Exiles: A Biblical Theology of Sin and Restoration* (IVP, 2020).

With their combined Old Testament (OT) and New Testament (NT) savvy, as well as a common interest in biblical theology and Scripture's use of Scripture, Schnittjer and Harmon present *How to Study the Bible's Use of the Bible: Seven Hermeneutical Choices for the Old and New Testaments* (Zondervan, 2024). While designed to be used as a textbook in hermeneutics, this book is also a useful resource to pastors and teachers, and even the layman who is serious about studying the Bible in greater depth.

The NT's use of the OT is a critical topic in biblical interpretation, with about 350 direct quotations and between 400 and 4,100 allusions (depending on who is

counting).[2] In *How to Study the Bible's Use of the Bible*, Schnittjer and Harmon cover both how the NT uses the OT and how later OT passages use earlier ones. To guide Bible students in interpreting Scripture's use of Scripture, they structure the book around seven key hermeneutical choices (one chapter each). These are choices an interpreter must make when studying a given passage of Scripture and how it connects to a previous passage or passages.

Before an overview of each of these seven chapters, the reader may find it helpful to know a few general characteristics of the book, as well as the authors' stated presuppositions about hermeneutics and bibliology. A couple of helpful features are the inclusion of a case study or two and a list of study questions at the close of each chapter. The case studies clearly exemplify how to put each hermeneutical principle into practice, and the study questions help the reader gauge how well he understood the contents of the chapter. A characteristic to which some readers may need to acclimate is Schnittjer's and Harmon's tendency to use their own preferred terminology in place of more standardized terms in biblical studies. For example,

- They use "plain sense exegesis" to refer to a literal-grammatical-historical hermeneutic.
- They use "Mesopotamian exile" to indicate the Babylonian exile.
- They use "Israel's scriptures" to refer to the OT.
- They use the wording, "individual and collective" to refer to the concept of corporate solidarity or federal headship.
- They use "donor text" and "receptor text" to refer to an earlier passage and a later textual connection back to that passage.

Helpfully, they include a substantial glossary at the end of the book which defines their commonly used terms and phrases.

Moving to the convictions and content of the book, Schnittjer and Harmon are to be commended for their stance on hermeneutics and bibliology, especially as it relates to Scripture's use of Scripture. They argue in the introduction that modern interpreters ought to interpret the Bible the same way it interprets itself. They further believe that the Bible itself demonstrates the use of a consistent hermeneutic throughout. "[Jesus and the NT authors] interpret the Old Testament the way the Old Testament interprets itself—as it had been for more than a thousand years before the days of Jesus" (xx). Thus, they do not see the NT authors as transforming the meaning of the OT or reading more meaning into it than was originally intended (*sensus plenior*). Instead, with a sound view of progressive revelation and the unified storyline and message of the Bible, they see the OT writers and NT writers employing a consistent hermeneutic. Authors of later revealed Scripture read previously revealed Scripture according to its originally intended sense and purpose. As Schnittjer and Harmon emphasize, "The authors of the New Testament did not invent a new hermeneutic. They followed the well-worn interpretive path used by the prophets, psalmists, narrators, visionaries, and sages of Israel's scriptures" (xxiv). This well-worn interpretive path is simply the literal-grammatical-historical

[2] Michael J. Vlach, *The Old in the New: Understanding How the New Testament Authors Quoted the Old Testament* (Sun Valley, CA: The Master's Seminary Press, 2021), viii.

hermeneutic, or as Schnittjer and Harmon prefer to call it, a "plain sense hermeneutic" (xxii–xxiii). They hold that "when later biblical authors—of either testament—interpret scriptures according to the very ways these earlier scriptures interpret themselves, this is nothing other than plain sense exegesis" (xxvii).

Thus, because the NT writers are simply continuing the OT exegetical method, Schnittjer and Harmon believe one must study how the OT interprets itself to understand how the NT interprets the OT. This leads to the burden of this book:

> How can modern interpreters understand the New Testament's use of scripture without studying the scriptural exegesis within the Bible of Jesus and the apostles? The present study emphasizes the Old Testament's interpretation of itself as a resource to study the New Testament use of scripture (xxvii).

Schnittjer and Harmon demonstrate not only sound convictions regarding progressive revelation and a consistent hermeneutic but also a lucid explanation of this in the introduction. The robust Introduction well-prepares the reader to engage fruitfully with the seven hermeneutical choices around which the rest of the book is structured. In each chapter, Schnittjer and Harmon either argue for one choice over another, or sometimes encourage a responsible combination of both.

Chapter 1 presents the choice of seeing the OT and NT as either *sequestered* or *connected*. The burden of this chapter is essentially to convince the reader that neither testament should be read in isolation (sequestered). Schnittjer and Harmon claim the NT has too long been studied according to Second Temple rabbinical exegesis. Modern interpreters ought to extend their view further into the past to use OT exegesis, they argue. "Israel's scriptures should be approached on their own terms rather than overlaying them with categories of Second Temple sectarian and rabbinic exegesis" (5). The NT authors are not simply employing a hermeneutic popular in their day. Rather, they are continuing to employ the hermeneutic of the OT authors before them in a connected way. Thus, recognizing the intentional interconnected nature of the OT and NT is a crucial starting point to study the Bible's use of the Bible.

Chapter 2 presents the choice between "adjusting meaning and/or adjusting context versus advancement of revelation." Schnittjer and Harmon commendably take a firm stance in favor of advancement of revelation. One of the strongest features of this chapter is a substantial section in which Schnittjer and Harmon point out the deficiencies of the *sensus plenior* approach (38–43). This chapter well-equips interpreters to recognize that the NT authors are not changing the sense of OT passages but rather exegeting and continuing the trajectory set up in the OT.

Chapter 3 presents the choice of "detecting allusions as an art versus science." Schnittjer and Harmon advocate a responsible blend of both, and that the interpreter must not be too extreme on either side. This is a helpful chapter overall, but with the somewhat vague instruction to combine art and science, the student is left with no sure-fire way to confidently identify any given allusion. This chapter would be helped by emphasizing that one must seek to prove authorial intention to be sure of an allusion, and that this is possible with the careful study of each passage in its original context and the illumination of the Holy Spirit as its ultimate Author.

Chapter 4 discusses "horizontal versus vertical context." While the "vertical" and "horizontal" terminology can be confusing at first, this chapter's strength is that

it makes the reader aware of the very sophisticated interconnectedness of Scripture. Thus, interpreters are urged to work hard to understand the meticulous and intentional interplay not just within a book, but across all books of Scripture that came prior. This insightful chapter admirably serves those who desire to learn more about the strings of connections between an entire network of biblical passages.

Chapter 5 discusses "biblical versus extrabiblical relationships," arguing that the interpreter should give the greatest weight to connections within the canon of Scripture. However, interpreters should also pursue a "basic grasp of different kinds of extrabiblical literature" (110). Schnittjer and Harmon refer readers to some of the most important extrabiblical works to consider (110–15), providing an easy starting point for further study.

Chapter 6 focuses on the topic of biblical typology, examining the choice between "backward-looking versus forward-looking typological patterns." This is the difference between typological connections that are only recognizable in retrospect versus connections that one can identify as intentional foreshadowing. Schnittjer and Harmon rightly caution interpreters to limit proposed types to only those that can be seen as authorially intended, explaining,

> Biblical types are not rooted in the creativity of the interpreter; they are embedded by God himself within the text. While the degree to which the human author was aware that the person, event, institution, or pattern was pointing forward to someone or something greater can be debated, the larger redemptive-historical and canonical contexts indicate this in some fashion. (139)

Schnittjer and Harmon display good caution and solid, single-meaning exegesis in this chapter. Their helpful, final cautions are that "we must hold our proposed types with a measure of interpretive humility" and avoid the danger of "hunting for 'secret messages'" in the Bible … Instead, our focus must remain on the plain sense meaning of the text within its literary, historical, social, redemptive, and canonical contexts" (157).

Finally, Chapter 7 requires a heightened sense of discernment. Their discussion of "historical exegesis versus historical and prosopological exegesis" verges on inconsistency with a "plain sense" and single-meaning hermeneutic. Prosopological exegesis is defined in this chapter as "a biblical author *reading an earlier biblical speech in the light of a new character*" (160, emphasis original). This seems to mean that the later author takes the words a previous character spoke and applies them to a different character. For example, "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?" in Psalm 22 are taken as David's personal words, yet applied later to Christ. More concerning, Psalm 45's, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever" (v. 6) is taken as an exaggerative honorific address to a merely human king, only later applied to Christ by the author of Hebrews (1:8). Schnittjer and Harmon seem to depart in this one section from their conviction that earlier writers of Scripture intentionally looked forward to the advancement and fulfillment of their predictive writing, fearing that "[r]ejecting prosopological exegesis altogether results in a reading of scripture limited to the historical context of the donor text" and "confinement of the sense to the historical context of the donor text does not adequately handle the biblical evidence" (164). With such a view, they dismiss the possibility that the psalmists in

the above examples wrote prophetically with the Messiah in mind as the primary speaker or referent of the words they recorded.

In the closing section of the book, Schnittjer and Harmon succinctly summarize how students, pastors, and Bible teachers may responsibly interpret the Bible's use of the Bible. They give four simple steps, all informed by the principles elaborated throughout: "Identify allusion, study donor text, study receptor text, explain exegetical outcomes" (179). Helpfully, they close with a couple of case studies that pull together the principles from the previous chapters, showing interpreters how to employ them all in the exegesis of a given passage.

Overall, *The Bible's Use of the Bible: Seven Hermeneutical Choices for the Old and New Testaments* is a valuable and commendable resource for Bible students, pastors, teachers, and anyone else looking to go deeper in Bible study. Schnittjer and Harmon masterfully demonstrate the beauty and sophistication in the interconnectedness of the Bible. The book might slightly be improved by a greater emphasis on previous authors' intentional anticipation for future connections and the development of revelation (as opposed to the larger emphasis on later authors' recognition of connections). The reason the scriptural authors saw these connections was because the authors of earlier portions of Scripture intentionally set them up. Thus, later authors obeyed the intention of previous authors by ultimately making those connections. Additionally, the advocacy of prosopological exegesis (though limited and careful) is troubling because it takes a step afield of the authorial intention of a previous biblical author. However, students who employ appropriate discernment will derive great value from this book and the further resources Schnittjer and Harmon suggest within. It is an excellent treatment overall and recommended to anyone who desires to better understand the Bible's use of the Bible.

Bowman Jr., Robert W. and J. Ed Komoszewski. *The Incarnate Christ and His Critics*. Kregel Academic, 2024. 853 pp., $42.99 Hardcover.

Reviewed by William Varner, Professor at The Master's University.

Since I endorsed this book, I begin this review by citing the words of that endorsement. "How do you improve on a classic? Bowman and Komozewski's book *Putting Jesus in His Place* has achieved such a status since its publication in 2007. Yet the authors have actually improved on their own classic defense of Jesus' full deity in this new book by bringing it up to date (since critics always rework their arguments) and by sharpening and expanding their exegesis of key texts. You will never need another work on the deity of our Lord Jesus if you get this book!" (7).

It is actually inaccurate to call this book a second edition of an original volume because it truly is an entirely new work. The authors have structured their revised book around the same *HANDS* acronym in the earlier one. Part 1 is Crown Him with Many Crowns: Jesus' Divine *Honors* (81–166). Part 2 is Like Father Like Son: Jesus' Divine *Attributes* (167–324). Part 3 is The Name of Jesus: Jesus' Divine *Names* (325–528). Part 4 is Doing What only God Does: Jesus' Divine *Deeds* (529–666). Part 5 is The Lamb upon His Throne: Jesus' Divine *Seat* (667–764).

But this tome by the authors (henceforth called B&K) is far more than a clever acronym. It simply is a comprehensive study of biblical Christology in defense of Jesus' incarnation. Such a book is sorely needed because we live in a period when Jesus' divine identity is increasingly denied and misinterpreted and even deliberately distorted. This is true among many of the so-called cults who uniformly deny His deity, but there is also a resurgence of unitarians who even deny not only our Savior's deity but also His preexistence! Painful memories return of a former colleague who developed just such an idea and joined that cult! We can also add the Muslim views of Jesus as only a prophet and that of religious liberal academics who want to build a wall between the Jesus of history and the so-called Christ of faith.

B&K take their readers systematically through the numerous examples in the New Testament witness to Jesus as prophet, priest, and king, including His role as a true man, the Son of God and the eternal second person of the Trinity. If there is any drawback to this book, it is actually also its strength! I mean by that statement that the book is truly exhaustive (and sometimes exhausting) as it thoroughly explores the biblical texts that teach by both declaration and by inference that Jesus is the second member of the Trinity and fully Divine. No relevant text is ignored, as is evident in its 26 pages of Biblical texts cited in the Index (825–50). Many of us know by experience how cults can ignore the original languages and also distort them as they twist the languages to fit into their often absurd interpretations. Our authors skillfully expound the meaning of the original languages in their thorough discussions. For example, the infamous ideas of the Watchtower Society in their twisting of John 1:1 by calling the Logos "a god" are thoroughly refuted on pages 411–31. B&K's mentor, Daniel Wallace, recently retired from Dallas Theological Seminary and author of the classic, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, adds his enthusiastic endorsement on the back cover: "The Finest defense of our Savior's deity in the 21st century and perhaps in all of Christian history."

While the reader's patience will be demanded because of the extremely thorough discussions, this is a book that you will return to over and over as you encounter attacks on the deity of our Lord Jesus. You will not be disappointed to have this tool on your bookshelf even if you do not read it through entirely when you first purchase it. This reviewer's considered conclusion after pouring through *The Incarnate Christ and His Critics* is that this volume is simply the best volume you can ever study on the Deity of Christ.

I began this brief review with the quotation of my own endorsement inside the book. I now close this review with a quotation from the Australian scholar Michael Bird who contributed the Preface to the book. "It will be a reference resource for pastors, a primary text for apologists, a teaching tool for professors, and a refreshing read for anyone who wants to understand what it means to say to Jesus, "My Lord and my God!" (16).

Toombs, Rachel. *Reading the First Five Books: The Invitation of the Pentateuch's Stories*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2024. 175 pp., $17.49 Paperback.

Reviewed by Karl Walker, Associate Editor, The Master's Seminary.

Rachel Toombs completed her Ph.D. in theological studies at Baylor University with a focus in Hebrew narrative. The idea for her most recent publication, *Reading the First Five Books: The Invitation of the Pentateuch's Stories*, is the product of communal reading experiences during COVID in 2020. Combining her educational background at Regent College (M.A.) and Baylor University (Ph.D.), Toombs presents *Reading the First Five Books* as both an invitation and a work of instruction. She invites her readers to a particular way of reading the Pentateuch's stories, instructing them in the reading tools applicable to Hebrew narrative. Toombs puts forward "a hermeneutic that recognizes the active role of readers in meaning-making, because readers must first accept the invitation" (xiii). Driven by the certainty that "stories transform readers," Toombs hopes that readers will engage with the narratives of Scripture, encountering their brevity (ch. 2), pacing (ch. 3), characterization (ch. 4), complexity (ch. 5), and grotesque elements (ch. 6). These encounters will bring change to readers as they eat these stories (ch. 7) and remember who they are, who God is, and what He has done on their behalf.

Toombs begins by outlining her hermeneutical approach (ch. 1). She rejects spiritual/allegorical readings of the text, as well as approaches that pursue the author's intention in writing. Alternatively, Toombs desires readers to "wander around, as it were, and wonder about why the stories are told the way they are" (2). This phrase functions as the heartbeat of her reading approach and runs throughout the remainder of the book. To unpack what she means by "wonder and wander," Toombs critiques the evangelical formulation of biblical hermeneutics found in the Chicago statements on inerrancy and hermeneutics.[3] Though she believes this statement produces numerous problems to reading and interpretation, Toombs focuses on just two. First, "the Chicago statements place the biblical witness and scientific discovery in opposition to each other" (7). Second, the CSBI and CSBH place too much responsibility on "interpreters to get it 'right' in order to apply Scripture to their daily lives" (7).

In response, Toombs' hermeneutical approach draws on the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Wolfgang Iser, suggesting that reading is an event in which the situation of the reader has a role in "meaning-making." The reader's ability to make meaning of the text is largely influenced by one's historical context and experiences. Therefore, as Toombs concludes, "meaning resides not somewhere 'out there' but within us" (15). Yet, to avoid total subjectivity in interpretation, Toombs quickly moves to the stylistic elements of Hebrew narrative. Because the narrative has been composed artistically, Toombs argues that these aesthetic elements of the story transmit meaning to the reader (referencing the work of Robert Alter).[4] She argues the advantage of her approach is that it "muddies the waters of 'objective' interpretation without dissolving into a puddle of subjectivity and relativity" (8).

Turning to these artistic features, Toombs begins with the brevity of Hebrew narrative (ch. 2). Trademark of its style is the absence of background detail in most biblical stories, such that much remains unsaid. In Toombs' assessment, the sparse

[3] Hereafter, CSBI and CSBH. See "The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 21, no. 4 (Dec 1978): 289–296, and "The Chicago Statement on Biblical Hermeneutics," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 25, no. 4 (Dec 1982): 397–401.

[4] Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, rev. ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2011).

detail of Hebrew narrative propels the reader to creatively visualize how the silence of the text contributes to its meaning. This practice, described as "sanctified imagination," should push the reader further into the text (39). Toombs exemplifies her argument by appealing to Leviticus 10:1–7, the story of Nadab and Abihu offering strange fire. The ambiguous nature of this story points to the meaning of the story residing in its gaps. Toombs advocates a contextual interpretation that reads the ambiguity in light of the surrounding context of clarity through the abundance of commands specified to Moses.

Next, Toombs unpacks the importance of a narrative's pacing (ch. 3). The pacing, or rhythm of a narrative, creates certain expectations for the reader which, when disrupted, point to meaning in the text. A major component of a narrative's pacing is its usage of the *waw* conjunction. Though difficult to render in English, the *waw* disjunctive and *wayyiqtol* can either slow down or speed up the pacing, such that the reader should pay attention to their occurrences. Toombs' case study stems from Genesis 32:22–32, in which the usage of the *wayyiqtol* combines the pacing of the narrative with its brevity, prompting the reader to make sense of its unspoken details.

A third feature of Hebrew narrative is its characterization (ch. 4). Toombs overviews primary themes in characterization such as modes (indirect or direct), or types of characters (flat or round, type or agent, etc.). She notes the varied nature of these characters to demonstrate that the Bible includes highly sophisticated characters, rarely able to be pinned to a simple evaluation. Her case study is the characterization of God in the book of Exodus (Exod 3:1–6; 4:24–26; 19; 24). Without seeking to be irreverent, Toombs articulates how the narrative demonstrates the beauty of God's nature, such that "we find here a 'character' in God who can be known but not in the usual ways, who can be spoken of but only by pushing the boundaries of ordinary language, who can take center stage but not without turning that stage (in the spirit of Emily Dickinson) slant" (98). This moves Toombs to a treatment of the complexity in characterization often found in narrative (ch. 5). And she argues for this complexity through the drama between Isaac and Rebekah, and Esau and Jacob (Gen 27).

Finally, Toombs moves to the grotesque elements of Hebrew narrative (ch. 6). These elements include the sacrificial system of Leviticus, its various laws about sickness and bodily fluids, the rite of circumcision, and Jacob wrestling with God. Toombs places these examples into three categories: the grotesque in relation to an individual body, in relation to another body, and in relation to God. Her case study here appeals to Numbers 16, the account of Korah's rebellion against the authority of Moses and Aaron. Toombs suggests that the effect of the grotesque in narrative is to "draw readers more deeply into the possibility of God at work in the world" (134). God's awe-inspiring might and His interventions in the earthiest of events demonstrates both His transcendence above His creatures and His immanence among his people. In response, the reader is called to eat these stories (ch. 7), to read and remember. Toombs advocates this response by referencing Deuteronomy which recounts numerous stories for the people of Israel that remain central to their identity as God's chosen people.

Reflecting on *Reading the First Five Books* yields a complicated evaluation. First, of benefit to the reader is the attention given to the literary features of narrative

(brevity, pacing, characterization, etc.). Toombs' treatment of these sections generally follows in the path of that trod by previous literary critics such as Sternberg, Alter, Berlin, and others. With this literary emphasis, Toombs is discontent with a cursory reading of the text that overlooks its intricate details. Certainly, these features are evident throughout numerous Old Testament narratives. However, to focus on the aesthetic qualities of the text demands, by default, an author-centered approach in which meaning is transported away from the reader to the one who wrote the text and included these features. It was the author's intention to include and exclude certain details, and thus he would have his own motivation in mind. This appears to be at odds with the hybrid hermeneutic that Toombs advocates. For example, in Toombs' chapter on brevity, she rejects Sternberg's distinguishment between gaps and blanks because "readers are often not immediately in a position to determine what constitutes a productive narrative 'gap' versus a fruitless narrative 'silence'" (40). Note that in one sense Toombs' statement is correct because the narrator, not the reader, is the one to make this distinguishment. Yet in her case study she concludes that the answer is found by a close literary reading of Leviticus 10:1–7 within its broader context" (48). That is to say, the text itself contains the answer, not the reader. So she concludes that the "text is not a blank slate but gives us material to engage with, material that speaks to how this text should be read" (49). But this seems to contradict her earlier suggestion regarding the reader's role in ascribing meaning to a text. To pose this tension in a question: in Toombs' hermeneutic, where is the intersection between the author speaking to how the text should be read and the role of the reader in meaning-making?

Second, Toombs' work focuses on key elements of narrative but does not clearly articulate a methodology for their implementation. The reader may come away with the major tools of Hebrew narrative, and yet remain unsure of when to implement them. This may be due in part to Toombs' lack of treatment of the relationship of plot to the transformative effect of stories. Toombs' writing is driven by the conviction that stories transform readers. But Toombs does not clearly answer how a story generates that transformation. What role does the plot play in generating that transformation? As Toombs notes, Hebrew narrative plots are particularly selective (brevity, pacing). Yet their selectivity should be read in light of the plot structure and tension. Additionally, the characters of the plot are portrayed in respect of the plot. For example, Berlin notes that physical descriptions of characters, whether height, clothing, or appearance always bear relation to the broader plot.[5] Otherwise stated, direct characterization occurs in relationship to the plot, and by extension achieves the intended transformative effect upon the reader. However, to examine the tools of narrative such as characterization, brevity, or pacing without studying the role of plot in narrative strips the reader of interpretative guardrails for discerning intended artistic elements in the text.

Third, Toombs' rejection of the CSBI and CSBH will prove troubling to the inerrantist. Indeed, as Toombs notes, the Chicago statements affirm both the infallibility and inerrancy of Scripture. Furthermore, as Toombs also notes, these statements place a lofty weight upon interpreters to "get it right in order to apply

[5] Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*, Bible and Literature Series 9 (Sheffield, UK: The Almond Press, 1983), 34.

Scripture to their daily lives" (7). The Scripture is the Word of God, and nothing less. To speak for God when God has not spoken bears incredible consequences, evidenced in Scripture. And so, this lofty weight should remain upon the reader and student of Scripture. The solution for the reader is not to alleviate this burden in interpretation. Rather, one should pursue reading and interpretation in prayer, much study, and in the fellowship of the local church.

By virtue of these three points, any usage of *Reading the First Five Books* should be done in light of broader works on Hebrew narrative such as Sternberg's *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, Berlin's *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*, and Bar-Efrat's *Narrative Art in the Bible.* Furthermore, consideration of an evangelical appraisal of these techniques would prove helpful, when engaging with Toombs' treatment of these issues.[6] Consequently, this review does not recommend Toombs' work as an evangelical starting point in the study of the Pentateuch's stories.

MacArthur, John. *The War on Children*. Los Angeles, CA: John MacArthur Publishing Group, 2024. 223 pp., $15.96 Hardcover.

Reviewed by Marc Daniel Rivera, Independent Reviewer.

The War on Children tackles one of the most urgent and contentious issues of our day: the ideological and moral assault on the youngest members of society. Pastor and author John MacArthur argues that children, from the moment of conception, have become a primary target for secular agendas aimed at dismantling traditional, biblical values. Published by John MacArthur Publishing Group, this book serves as both a wake-up call and a guide for Christian parents, guardians, and anyone concerned with the moral welfare of future generations.

The book opens with a powerful preface detailing how today's culture has moved from protecting to actively endangering children. Through entertainment, education, media, and even government policies, secular forces are intent on reshaping societal norms. Rather than aiming to merely complain about this shift, MacArthur uses this book to offer practical, biblically grounded ways to protect and nurture children in a hostile environment. As he notes, the stakes are eternal, making this not just a social issue but a spiritual battleground.

Divided into two main sections, *The War on Children* first introduces readers to the historical and contemporary "Slaughter of the Innocents." MacArthur explores how children are devalued, beginning with attacks on life itself. From abortion to ideological manipulation, children's rights to spiritual and moral freedom are increasingly curtailed. Chapters like "Whose Children Are They, Anyway?" and "Children Are a Gift from the Lord" remind readers of the God-given stewardship and responsibility that parents have over their children, a responsibility MacArthur argues is being systematically undermined by government interference.

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[6] J. Daniel Hays, "An Evangelical Approach to Old Testament Narrative Criticism," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 166 (Jan – Mar 2009): 3–18.

The second section, "The Key Battlefronts," dives into specific challenges faced by families today. MacArthur discusses five major cultural "attacks"—on conception, life, family, women, and men—highlighting how each of these spheres has been manipulated to destabilize the nuclear family and sever traditional roles. For instance, in "The Attack on the Family," MacArthur critiques the erosion of parental authority, particularly in educational and governmental settings. The book also explores how redefined gender roles not only challenge the structure of family but directly oppose biblical teachings.

Throughout, MacArthur emphasizes the critical importance of raising children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. He offers biblical counsel and pastoral guidance, encouraging parents to take an active role in their children's spiritual formation. MacArthur's message is clear: raising children cannot be left to the state or even to nominally Christian institutions. Parents are called to be the primary influences, modeling and teaching biblical truth.

For readers familiar with MacArthur's previous works, this book is consistent with his call for clarity and courage in faith. However, *The War on Children* goes beyond typical social commentary, calling Christians to actively resist cultural currents and to uphold God's truth, especially for the sake of their children. MacArthur does not sugarcoat the challenges but insists that Christian parents are not without hope or resources.

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ABSTRACTS: THE MASTER'S SEMINARY PH.D. DISSERTATIONS (2024)

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HOW CAN A MAN BE RIGHT BEFORE GOD? THE BOOK OF JOB'S THEOLOGY OF JUSTIFICATION AND ITS APPLICATION FOR TODAY

Jamie Bissmeyer

"How can a person be right with God?" This is the question many have asked, and which is addressed in the biblical doctrine of justification by faith. That question gave birth to the Reformation and caused the Church to reconsider how God accomplished redemption in Christ. However, it is less known that this question is not specifically asked anywhere in the Bible—except in the book of Job, where the question is asked three times (Job 4:17; 9:2; 25:4).

Common interpretations on the book of Job including Job as the righteous sufferer, trusting God in suffering, and theodicy are not altogether wrong. However, Job has more to offer when one considers its contribution to justification. Most biblical scholars focus on the book of Job's ideas about suffering and wisdom, while the full weight of its theology on justification remains underappreciated.

This dissertation will thus examine justification in the book of Job, by arguing that the book primarily portrays justification before God as being: 1) a divine, forensic, and eschatological verdict; 2) and a verdict which implies that the one justified has obtained forgiveness of sins, reconciliation to God, and an imputed righteousness. The objective is to show how the book of Job understands the concept of justification, to show that it makes a foundational contribution to any biblical understanding of the doctrine—and that Job understands justification to be the fundamental doctrine upon which the relationship between mankind and God turns.

Chapter One will establish the presuppositions and methodology of this dissertation. There will follow a literature review of historic interpretations of the book of Job and a review of what scholars have said about righteousness and justification in it, to show that this dissertation is building upon prior historic observations on Job.

Chapter Two will then overview the legal metaphor in Job and argue that it helps to shape the key arguments of the book. The objective is to show that justification is

the center and climax of the legal metaphor in Job and is thus a central doctrine in the book.

Chapter Three will then focus on justification's biblical-theological development within the book of Job. The conclusion will be that the book of Job's teaching on justification includes reconciliation, forgiveness, resurrection, mediation, and redemption—as well as vindicating the righteousness of God over and against any other worldly system of justice.

A fourth and final chapter will take Job's teaching on justification and begin conversations between it and several influential perspectives (Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and the New Perspective on Paul) on justification. The conclusion will be that their teachings on justification are ultimately incommensurate with the book of Job's and that Job's understanding of justification supports the historic, Protestant formulation of it.

"HIS NAME IS YAHWEH": THE IMPORTANCE OF USING THE DIVINE NAME

Aaron Valdizan

Although God revealed his name by which Israel was to remember him forever (Exod 3:15), most translations have substituted the divine name with a title or euphemism, usually something equivalent to "Lord," from as early as the third century BC. This dissertation shows that God expected his name to be used, its disuse throughout Israel's history was due to a particular interpretation of Scripture, application of Tiberian Masoretic principles provides an accurate pronunciation of the name, and the significance of the New Testament use of κύριος for יהוה when applying Old Testament texts to Christ is diminished when the divine name is missing in Old Testament translations.

Chapter 1 addresses key passages in the Hebrew Bible that reveal God's intention for his people to use his personal name. A study of Exodus 3:14–15 shows the significance of the divine name and God's reasons for giving it. Representative passages that express God's desire for people to use his name then reveal four contexts for its use: (1) swearing by the name, (2) calling on the name, (3) blessing the name, (4) praising the name. This is followed by an analysis of commands not to use the divine name, giving special attention to the interpretation of the Third Commandment.

Chapter 2 surveys use of the divine name in the earliest translations of the Hebrew Bible and oldest extant Hebrew and Greek manuscripts. This discussion reveals that the majority of scribes and translators avoided using the divine name for several possible reasons. Nevertheless, avoidance of the divine name was not a universal scribal practice in ancient times.

Chapter 3 addresses the pronunciation of the divine name. A survey of the historical development of the Hebrew language shows that the Tiberian Masoretic tradition preserves a reliable pronunciation system with roots from much earlier. Abbreviations of the name in Scripture are addressed in order to establish some principles for determining pronunciation. Then popular conjectures for how to

pronounce the name are evaluated. Ultimately, the vocalization rules of the Tiberian Masoretic tradition show that "Yahweh" is an accurate historical pronunciation.

Chapter 4 discusses New Testament citations of Old Testament passages containing the divine name in the Hebrew text but translated with κύριος and applied to Jesus. Analysis of these texts reveals that the deliberate connection the New Testament writers made between Jesus and Yahweh through a nuanced use of κύριος becomes clear only when the divine name is kept in the text of the Old Testament. This study concludes that God has given us His name, Yahweh, and desires that His people use it even today.