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From the Editor's Desk

Dear Reader,

As promised in our Spring issues it is my pleasure to present in this issue of the JMAT the remaining papers that were presented at the Council for Dispensational Hermeneutics (CDH) by traditional dispensationalists from across the country hosted by Calvary University, in Kansas City, MO. Since the topic of Social Justice is so important, I wanted you, our reader, to have access to the current dispensational thoughts on these matters. We are praying these articles will enrich your mind and soul and challenge your thinking.

The website for the Council for Dispensational Hermeneutics (CDH) can be found here: <https://dispensationalcouncil.org/>. It has a wealth of resources and news of upcoming conferences.

As we continue social distancing, wearing masks and navigating life and ministry in a pandemic, it is our prayer at the JMAT that we find our refuge in God and still seek to serve our Savior, and you, our reader. I look forward to hearing from you as you profit and enjoy this issue of the JMAT.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark McGinniss', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Mark McGinniss, Ph.D.
Lead Editor

Social Justice, Anti-Semitism, and Anti-Zionism in Historical and Biblical Perspective

Mike Stallard

Key Words: Social Justice, anti-Semitism, Zionism, Israel, Palestine.

Introduction

Recently, my ministry took me to the country of Poland where I had the opportunity to visit the Nazi concentration and death camp at Auschwitz-Birkenau for the first time. I asked the Polish guide if he knew who Tadeusz Borowski was, and he gladly shared information with me about this famous Polish poet and writer who had lived in the very buildings through which I was walking. My interest in Borowski (1922-1951) goes back to a Ph.D. seminar where I was required to read his collection of autobiographical short stories entitled *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen*.² Borowski, a Gentile, was arrested by the Nazis in Warsaw and spent 1943-1945 imprisoned at various places like Auschwitz and Dachau. His fiancé was placed in Birkenau. Due to his youthful, physical

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² The short stories comprising this work were written shortly after World War II. The collection of all of his writings was published in 1954, comprising five volumes. The collection in *This Way for the Gas* I assume is a subset of his collected works that was not published in Poland until 1959. It appeared in the United States in 1967. The copy I use is Tadeusz Borowski, *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen*, translated by Barbara Vedder (New York: Penguin Books, 1976). In the Introduction, Jan Kott (translated by Michael Kandel) describes the collection as “one of the cruelest of testimonies to what men did to men, and a pitiless verdict that anything can be done to a human being” (12).

strength as well as cunning, he was able to survive until the camps were liberated.

Borowski opened his short history *This Way for the Gas* with the words, “All of us walk around naked. The delousing is finally over, and our striped suits are back from the tanks of Cyclone B solution, an efficient killer of lice in clothing and of men in gas chambers.”³ The concentration camp was a bundle of contradictions. Things that were helpful—killing lice—were deadly also to humans. One of Borowski’s jobs at Auschwitz was to load and help sort through the belongings dumped on the ramp by the trains that brought mostly Jews. The Jews were told that they were going to take a shower and could come back to get their belongings. Instead, most of them—men, women, and children—were gassed and put in the ovens. The volume of belongings—clothes, shoes, hats, meat, sausages, bread, cheese, blankets, coats, briefcases, and drink—was enormous because there were hundreds or thousands on each transport that came in. Those who helped with the large piles of belongings were inmates at Auschwitz. They survived on food they were able to set aside for themselves from the ramp (from the food left behind by the Jews) and which the Nazi guards allowed them to keep. This encouraged them to work hard at their jobs. Borowski records a comment by one of the other helpers: “They can’t run out of people, or we’ll starve to death in this blasted camp. All of us live on what they bring.” Yet they all knew what was going on. In this context, Borowski records asking another one of the prisoners helping at the ramp, “Listen, Henri, are we good people?” While the motivations for suicide may be complicated, one must wonder to what extent Tadeusz was bothered by his conscience over these things. He had survived at the expense of so many who had not. In his small apartment in Warsaw in 1951 (when he was just 29 years old), he turned on the gas and killed himself. Apparently, there were victims of the Holocaust after it was over.⁴

³ Borowski, *This Way*, 29.

⁴ In fact, Nazi history is so overpowering, there are 26 memorial and education centers in just one northwest section of Germany alone, which is a sampling from the whole country. See Christine Hartung and Ulrike

The Holocaust event has colored theological discussions since that time. Some Jewish people as well as some Gentiles have abandoned belief in God because of what he allowed to take place. Maybe he is not really there; or if he is, he is either finite or possesses diminished love. Some Jewish thinkers attribute the Holocaust to Christianity either mistakenly believing the Nazis to be a movement within Christianity or noting the climate of anti-Semitism in so-called Christian Germany that allowed National Socialism to be promoted. Moreover, various versions of dual covenant theology have been proposed, some of them part of an ecumenical thrust to find a way to bring Jews and Christians together through theological statements.⁵ The problem of evil in Christian apologetics now has its ultimate historical hurdle to overcome. Consequently, in one of the strangest ironies in history, anti-Semitism is on the rise in the contemporary world, proving once again that sin never seems to allow us to learn from history. An additional irony is that the Jewish people, especially those who live in Israel, are the ones who are now accused of practicing social injustice and genocide in the world.

Schrader, eds., *Response to History*, translated by Joseph Swann (Wuppertal-Münster, Germany: National Socialist Presbyteries and Memorials, 2015). Out of the voluminous literature on the Holocaust as well as historical research of persecution of Jews in Eastern Europe prior to the Holocaust, two resources that I find useful are Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1985) and S. M. Dubnow, *History of the Jews in Russia and Poland: From the Earliest Times until the Present Day*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1916). Dubnow, a Jewish historian, was killed by the Nazis in 1941.

⁵ See Craig A. Blaising, "The Future of Israel as a Theological Question," *JETS* 44, vol. 3 (September 2001): 440-42; and Walter C. Kaiser, *Jewish Christianity: Why Believing Jews and Gentiles Parted Ways in the Early Church* (Silverton, OR: Lampien P, 2017), 47-48. Dual covenant theology is the view that Jewish people come to God through the law while Christians come to God through Jesus. There are liberal and conservative expressions of this position.

What the Holocaust Should Not Do

Before we address the upside-down way that social justice is addressed in the Middle East, a few issues need to be discussed to provide a frame to the current historical and theological situation. In particular, I want to organize the discussion around “What the Holocaust Should Not Do.” There are several ways in which the Holocaust, as important to history as it is, can cause us to maintain unbalanced and incomplete thinking. Each of these areas needs exploration. The brief introduction provided here should be enough to summarize where our thoughts need to go.

Nazi Killing of Jews More Than Concentration Camps

First, even within Holocaust studies there is often a singular focus on the labor and death camps created by the Nazis to destroy the Jewish people. Certainly these atrocious methods and places deserve a bulk of the attention. However, other avenues in which Jews were killed should not be overlooked. Perhaps the largest and most symbolic example is the massacre of Jewish people in mass at Babyn Yar in the area of Kiev, Ukraine. Naimark laments,

Regretfully, Western representatives of Holocaust memory often have only the vaguest understanding of the killing of Jews in the east, with the exception of the death camps, Auschwitz being most notable for the sheer power of its symbolism as a “site of memory.” The mass shootings of Jews in German-occupied Soviet territory attracted less interest than the horrifying images of the gas chambers and the crematoria. One could say the same of scholarly examinations in the West of Babyn Yar, which have been strikingly few and relatively recent.⁶

At Babyn Yar, the Germans executed Jewish people mostly by firing-squad beginning on September 29-30, 1941. Around

⁶ Norman M. Naimark, “Preface” in *Babyn Yar: History and Memory*, edited by Vladyslav Hrynevych and Paul Robert Magocsi (Kiev, Ukraine: Dukh I Litera, 2016), 9.

⁷ Vladyslav Hrynevych and Paul Robert Magocsi, eds., *Babyn Yar: History and Memory* (Dukh I Litera, 2016), 8.

34,000 were killed on those two days. By the end of the war, 100,000 (mostly Jews) had been killed and buried in mass graves at the ravine called Babyn Yar.⁷ Our memory of the Holocaust should not be limited to the death camps, although the numbers there are far greater.

Other Genocides in History

Second, the shadow of the Holocaust should not make any of us forget the other genocides of history. Even in recent times, political leaders “motivated by ideology and immediate gains, are ready to isolate and murder alleged enemies both within their own states and in conquered territories.”⁸ Most historically aware Christians know about Darfur, Rwanda, Congo, Bosnia, Saddam Hussein’s attacks on the Kurds and others, and the tragedy of ISIS persecution of others, especially Christians, in Iraq and Syria. Especially noteworthy for mention is the Turkish genocide of Armenians in the Ottoman Empire during and after World War I. Some estimate that the Turks systematically killed 1.5 million Armenians.⁹

One of the most hypocritical events in history was the presence of Soviets on the panel of judges at the Nuremburg trials following World War II. The Soviet Union under Joseph Stalin had been responsible for the intentional death of millions of people in the two decades leading up to the war. Perhaps the most heinous of the government’s actions was the premeditated starving of the people of Ukraine, especially in the rural areas of the region, in what has come to be called the “Red Famine” or the Holodomor in 1932-33, although the killing had begun earlier and continued later.¹⁰ Research shows that between 1931 and

⁸ Ibid., 7.

⁹ See Raymond Kévorkian, *The Armenian Genocide: A Complete History* (New York: I. B. Tauris., 2011), an exhaustive study of over one thousand pages.

¹⁰ For a definitive, well-documented tragic history of the Soviet regime’s attempt to destroy Ukraine for political and economic reasons, see Anne Applebaum, *Red Famine: Stalin’s War on Ukraine* (New York: Penguin Books, 2018). The term *Holodomor* comes from the Ukrainian words for “to kill by starvation,” or more specifically *holod* (hunger) and *mor* (extermination). See *ibid.*, xxiv.

1934 more than 3.9 million Ukrainians died of hunger due mostly to Soviet strategy.¹¹ Although some Jewish people were included in these numbers, the vast majority were from other ethnic backgrounds. This example provides one small portrait within the massive extermination of human beings by communists during the twentieth-century, a number cited as high as 100 million souls. As one commentator noted, “The Bolshevik plague that began in Russia was the greatest catastrophe in human history.”¹² While Jewish people ended up targets, a wide array of people groups were destroyed as well.¹³ A focus on the Holocaust should not make us lose sight of other twentieth-century acts of supreme evil.

Anti-Semitism in Christendom

The most unfortunate discovery, from a Christian point of view, from studying anti-Semitism over the centuries is the abundant presence of active hatred and anti-Semitism in Christendom. Although an evangelical might take heart in understanding that the largest portion of such developments came

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² David Satter, “100 Years of Communism—and 100 Million Dead,” *The Wall Street Journal*, Online Edition, November 6, 2017, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/100-years-of-communism-and-100-million-dead-1510011810>.

¹³ For an insider view of Stalin’s evil, see Roy A. Medvedev, *Let History Judge: The Origins and Consequences of Stalinism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973). Concerning the Jews, Medvedev notes, “After the war Stalin began to exclude all Jews from the Party and government *apparatus*, covering his actions with talk about counter-revolutionary activities of international Zionist organizations ...” (493). The history of Czarist Russia with its pogroms against Jewish people shows that anti-Semitism in that part of the world predates the rise of communism. Furthermore, after the breakup of the Soviet Union and the decline of communism, the anti-Semitic tendencies lingered off and on. For a detailed presentation of the relationships in one part of the former Soviet Union, see Paul Robert Magocsi and Yohanan Petrovsky-Shtern, *Jews and Ukrainians: A Millennium of Co-Existence*, 2nd rev. ed. (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 2018). See especially pages 2-3, 55, 83, 151, 188, 248, 276. Although the Jews receive persecution throughout history in Russia or countries near Russia, the history has not been kind to other ethnic groups as well.

through the machinations of the Roman Catholic Church, he will be disappointed when he comes to some of the Reformers and studies what they said about the Jewish people. Three examples are given here as representative of Christendom down through the years. First, the popular church leader John Chrysostom (c. 349-407), Archbishop of Constantinople, who was known as the “golden-mouthed” orator, said the following about the Jews:

The Jewish people were driven by their drunkenness and plumpness to the ultimate evil; they kicked about, they failed to accept the yoke of Christ, nor did they pull the plow of his teaching. Another prophet hinted at this when he said: ‘Israel is as obstinate as a stubborn heifer.’ . . . Although such beasts are unfit for work, they are fit for killing.”¹⁴

While his eight homilies against the Jews contain some valid theological reasoning and use of Scripture, statements such as these provided fodder for Christian attitudes that could never see God as still having a plan for the Jewish people. The harshness of these statements jolts thinking Christians today and certainly offends the Jewish people. In fact, the Nazis used Chrysostom’s teachings to attempt to win the Christians of Germany over to their anti-Semitic agenda:

These pronouncements became in later centuries a source of inspiration to anti-Semites and also to the Nazis who otherwise had not much patience with Christianity. St. John Chrysostom was frequently quoted and reprinted in the Third Reich as a witness for the prosecution; after the Holocaust, this became an embarrassment for the church and attempts were made to explain their words in the historical context. It was said that the general discourse at the time was aggressive, brutal, and extreme. At a time of struggle for survival and recognition, Christian forgiveness and salvation were not in demand. These anti-Jewish attacks continued and grew even

¹⁴ John Chrysostom, *Adversus Judaeos*, Homily I, 5-6.

sharper after Christianity had become a state religion in the Roman empire.¹⁵

Other church fathers besides Chrysostom could also be cited as examples of anti-Jewish bias that could feed open hostility, although Chrysostom seems the worst in the early church.

A second example of anti-Semitism spawned in Christendom can be found in the Spanish Inquisition initiated by King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella, famous for funding the explorations of Christopher Columbus in the late fifteenth century. In the same year that Columbus sailed the ocean blue (1492), Ferdinand and Isabella expelled the Jews from Spain. Although the Inquisition took on expanded scope over the next three centuries, its early purpose was primarily to deal with the problem of Jewish converts to Christianity. It was thought that some of the converts were just pretending allegiance to the church to prevent persecution or that they had actually apostatized and gone back to private practice of Judaism.¹⁶ Ben Zion Netanyahu refutes the usual interpretation that Spain's leaders were attempting to deal with this "religious" problem by removing the Jews from Spain. Instead, at the foundation of the opposition to Jewish converts to Christianity and their descendants, many of whom had been brought up in the church, was *race* and not *religion*:

Thus we see how, in the midst of a people whose Christian zeal could in no way be doubted, a theory based on racism appeared whose three major articles of faith were: the existence of a *conspiracy* to seize the government of Spain; the ongoing "contamination" of the "blood" of Spanish people; and the need to

¹⁵ Walter Laqueur, *The Changing Face of Antisemitism: From Ancient Times to the Present Day* (New York: Oxford UP, 2006), 48.

¹⁶ Ben Zion Netanyahu, *The Origins of the Inquisition in Fifteenth Century Spain* (New York: Random House, 1995), xiii-xiv. The Israeli historian Netanyahu is the father of Benjamin Netanyahu, the current prime minister of Israel as this paper is written, although an election is scheduled soon. The book is dedicated to Jonathan Netanyahu who was killed leading the rescue operation at Entebbe on July 4, 1976. The massive tome is almost 1400 pages.

do away with these frightful dangers through a genocidal solution of the converso problem.¹⁷

Evidence that race was the driving force and not religious persecution comes from the fact that any religious problem the Jews and/or converted Jews were causing at the time was minor.¹⁸ As a result of the racial fears, Jews were prohibited from intermarriage, forbidden from holding high offices, sometimes tortured, eventually expelled or even worse—even if their families had been Christians for a couple of generations. In short, everything was in place, perhaps for the first time in history, to join virulent anti-Semitism to a theory of race so as to protect the purity of a peoples' view of themselves.¹⁹ This is before Luther and more than four centuries before Hitler. All of this was done in the name of Christianity.

A third black mark of Christian anti-Semitism appears in one of evangelicalism's heroes—Martin Luther (1483-1546), the father of the Protestant Reformation. His book *On the Jews and Their Lies* written three years before his death (1543) is the most famous of his anti-Jewish polemical works that uses harsh, vulgar, and murderous language.²⁰ Luther at that stage in his life came to the conclusion that it was impossible to convert the Jews to the Christian faith.²¹ His analysis covers many passages with appropriate interpretation and correct rebuke of some of the views of the Jewish people of his day. He goes overboard, however, into hateful anti-Semitism on several occasions. He bemoans that the Jews have a “bloodthirsty, vengeful, murderous

¹⁷ Ibid., 990-91.

¹⁸ Ibid., 1113.

¹⁹ The inside jacket of my copy of Netanyahu's book summarizes, “This was the first time that extreme anti-Semitism was wedded to a theory of race—a union that would dramatically affect the course of modern history.”

²⁰ One of Luther's books written in the same year (1543) was *On the Holy Name and the Lineage of Christ*, another source of strongly worded anti-Jewish sentiment.

²¹ Martin Luther, *On the Jews and Their Lies*, translated by Martin H. Bertram (Online edition; AAARGH, 2009), 2.

yearning and hope.”²² At the Nuremberg trials, Nazi war criminal Julius Streicher was asked about prior anti-Semitic literature. He defended himself this way:

Anti-Semitic publications have existed in Germany for centuries. A book I had, written by Martin Luther, was, for instance, confiscated. Dr. Martin Luther would very probably sit in my place in the defendants’ dock today, if this book had been taken into consideration by the Prosecution. In the book *The Jews and Their Lies*, Dr. Martin Luther writes that the Jews are a serpent’s brood and one should burn down their synagogues and destroy them.²³

After the trial, Streicher was executed for his crimes against humanity. Luther, however, was also on trial that day. The Christian looking at this evidence today should not be judged for being perplexed. How can Luther be so right on biblical authority and justification by faith alone, but so wrong on his hatred for the Jews?

I used to say that if Luther had died five years earlier so his anti-Semitic books would not have been published late in his life, the relationship of Jews and Protestants would have been better since that time. I no longer voice this opinion. Last year, I was using Luther’s lectures on Isaiah 63:1-6, given as early as 1530, over a decade before his worst books. Isaiah is describing the picture of a victorious Messiah who comes from Edom after judging them in the end-time days. Luther, without warrant and using extreme allegorical interpretation, identifies Edom as an ungodly synagogue, that is, the Jews. Edom refers to “red Jews” who are “bloodthirsty and murderous.” He goes on to say that “every calamity of the Jews is for the sake of Christ.” Luther apparently rejoices that the second coming of Jesus will be the final destruction of the Jewish people, contrary to the overall

²² Ibid., 14.

²³ *Trial of the Major War Criminals before the International Military Tribunal: Nuremberg 14 November 1945 – 1 October 1946*, Vol. 12 (Nuremberg, 1947), 318. The transcripts in English translation can be found online at the Library of Congress website under Military Legal Resources: https://www.loc.gov/rr/frd/Military_Law/NT_major-war-criminals.html.

message of Isaiah.²⁴ Such vitriolic language forces the genuine Christian to ponder the strength of the sin nature when even the greatest of Christians can think this way.²⁵ It is clear that Christian anti-Semitism cannot hide in the shadows of the Holocaust.²⁶

Jewish Persecution of Christians

Another area for which there must be balanced thinking in light of the Holocaust involves Jewish persecution of Christians. It may seem odd to address this in such a context, but a brief review is warranted. The Jewish people certainly have a right to voice the true statement that persecution has gone mostly one way against them. The other side, although historically smaller in volume, is still grievous nonetheless. Virtually every Christian knows that the Jewish leaders of the first century took part in the murder of Jesus outside Jerusalem. Believers should not use this as it has been used in history to label the Jews as the Christ-killers and give them sole blame for the death of Jesus.²⁷ In the book of Acts, the first Christian martyr (Stephen) was killed by Jewish hands (Acts 7). Jewish persecution of the church at Jerusalem

²⁴ Martin Luther, *Lectures on Isaiah*, vol. 17, edited by Jaroslav Pelikan and Hilton C. Oswald (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1969).

²⁵ Bernard N. Howard, a Jewish Christian, gives three proposals for responding to the Lutheran legacy of anti-Semitism: “1. Luther’s antisemitism should be acknowledged without qualification; 2. Luther’s antisemitism should—as far as possible—be understood; 3. Luther’s antisemitism should harm his reputation.” See “Luther’s Jewish Problem,” October 19, 2017, The Gospel Coalition, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/luthers-jewish-problem/>.

²⁶ Other case studies of Christian anti-Semitism could have been chosen: The history of Czarist Russia with its pogroms against Jewish people shows that anti-Semitism in that part of the world predates the rise of communism. Furthermore, after the breakup of the Soviet Union and the decline of communism, the anti-Semitic tendencies lingered on.

²⁷ I gave a paper last year at the Pre-Trib Study Group entitled “Why the World Hates the Jews.” I propose that Christians should not look at Jewish people as the “Christ-killers” and should instead develop a full-orbed theology of the cross to help explain our views to Jewish people and others. This paper is scheduled to be published in a future edition of the *Journal of Dispensational Theology*.

was so great that it displaced most Christians who lived in the city (Acts 8:2). The rest of the book of Acts describes the Jewish efforts to silence the Apostle Paul, but he escapes death. But he stands trial before Roman leaders with the Jews as his accusers. This is similar to what is found in the Apocalypse. Near the end of the first century, Jewish communities were involved in slandering Christians before the pagan Roman authorities at Smyrna (Rev 2:9) and Philadelphia (Rev 3:9). The second century continued the hostility between the two groups leading to the further divide between Jews/Judaism and Christians/Christianity. The martyrdom of Polycarp in AD 155 or 156 is often cited as an instance where Jewish people helped in the indictment and execution of a Christian.²⁸ However, by the time Christianity emerges as the religion of the Roman Empire in the early fourth century, a robust replacement theology had developed that eliminated any discussion of the role of Israel and the Jewish people in God's sovereign plan of history going forward.²⁹ The divide was viewed as permanent except for those few Jewish persons who would come into the church on the church's terms. The Jewish communities were now unable to mount persecution of Christians.

Perhaps the biggest change in Jewish perception of Christianity is that the New Testament itself is now viewed as anti-Semitic:

²⁸ See *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, XIII. The account of the death of Polycarp is given in *The Encyclical Epistle of the Church at Smyrna: Concerning the Martyrdom of the Holy Polycarp*. This work is part of the Apostolic Fathers collection and is sometimes titled *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*. Scholars are divided over whether the account is a Christian exaggeration and spurious relative to its statements about the Jews; see David E. Aune, *Revelation 1-5*, WBC, vol. 52A (Dallas, TX: Word, 1997), 162.

²⁹ The history of the development of replacement forms of theology in which the church replaces Israel in God's plan has been well documented. Some sources to consider are Kaiser, *Jewish Christianity*, 21-36; Ronald E. Diprose, *Israel and the Church: The Origins and Effects of Replacement Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000); and Michael J. Vlach, *The Church as a Replacement of Israel: An Analysis of Supersessionism* (New York: Peter Lang, 2009).

Meanwhile some Jewish, Christian and post-Christian critics have identified the New Testament itself as the source of the problem, seeing the role ascribed to the Jews in the New Testament as part of a 'culture of contempt' leading directly from John's Gospel to the gas chambers.³⁰

Of special note would be passages like John 8:44, Revelation 2:9, and Revelation 3:9 where, according to many Jewish interpreters, Jesus describes all Jews as descended from Satan and treats them as a synagogue of Satan.³¹ Christian scholars have responded to these charges.³² However, the believer must understand, in light of all that has happened, how the New Testament would be read by Jewish people, sometimes in an anachronistic way.

One unfortunate fact of post-Holocaust times is that some Jewish people do persecute Messianic believers in Israel.³³ It is quite common for the boycotting of a Jewish businessman who rents or sells property to a church or group of Christians, especially if they are ethnically Jewish. Furthermore, attempted violence takes place on occasion:

³⁰ Duncan MacPherson, "Difficult Conversations about Judaism, Anti-Semitism and Palestine," *The Society for Biblical Studies Newsletter* 12, no. 2, June 2014, www.sbsedu.org/L3_e_newsletter30.6.14/DifficultConversation2.htm. Some respected liberal theologians in Christendom have asserted that John's Gospel sees the Jews as a symbol of evil. See Elaine Pagels, *The Origin of Satan* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), 104-105.

³¹ For example, see Gerald Sigal, "How Does the Book of Revelation Promote Hatred of Jews?," *Jews for Judaism*, accessed August 22, 2019, <https://jewsforjudaism.org/knowledge/articles/how-does-the-book-of-revelation-promote-hatred-of-jews/>.

³² James D. G. Dunn, "The Question of Anti-semitism in the New Testament Writings of the Period," in *Jews and Christians: The Parting of the Ways A.D. 70 to 135*, ed. James D. G. Dunn (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 177-211.

³³ Estimates vary but there may be roughly 20,000 evangelical Messianic believers in Israel today.

A concert for the so-called Messianic Jewish community in Jerusalem two weeks ago turned violent when more than three dozen Jewish and right-wing extremists attacked members of the audience. For seven hours, about 40 right-wing extremists, so-called hilltop youth from the West Bank and members of the self-styled anti-assimilation group Lehava cursed and screamed, sprayed pepper spray and tossed live frogs at members of the community.³⁴

We can only pray that such events will not escalate and people are not hurt. It would be a tragic testimony for some Jewish people to become persecutors after all that has been done to them. One good sign is that many Jewish leaders seem to be coming forward to defend Christians against persecution around the world.³⁵ According to a recent British government report, at the present time, Christians are the most persecuted religious group in the world, mostly due to Islamic oppression, although not exclusively so.³⁶ This may provide a way for Jews and Christians to understand each other. Christians are the most persecuted *religious* group while Jewish people have been the most oppressed *ethnic* group in history.

Upside-Down Social Justice in the Case of Israel

In light of the oppression and misrepresentation of the Jewish people down through the years, it is not surprising that the nation of Israel is today wrongfully considered a colonial and genocidal oppressor who is destroying the Palestinian people. This way of arguing against the Jews of Israel increased after the Six-Day War in 1967 and, in particular, took off in earnest after the 1982

³⁴ Nir Hasson, “‘Messianic Jews’ Say Police in Jerusalem Didn’t Protect Them From Right-wing Mob,” *Haaretz*, June 14, 2019; one of the singers and musicians at the concert is part of the Friends of Israel family and supported by the ministry.

³⁵ See Tom Wilson, “Jews and the Persecution of Christians,” *First Things*, February 13, 2014, <https://firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2014/02/jews-and-the-persecution-of-christians>.

³⁶ “Christian Persecution,” *Israel My Glory*, 77 (Sep/Oct 2019): 8.

First Lebanon War.³⁷ Although there have been difficulties from time to time, the military strength of the Israel Defense Forces simply prevents a frontal attack by Arab forces. While terrorist activity continues, the Arab leaders, especially in the Palestinian Authority, are expending much energy to convince the world that the Jews in Israel are a Western imposition into the Middle East and have no right to be there. After the invasion of Lebanon in 1982, the Arab mayor of Nablus, Bassam Shaka'a, was asked to describe the response of the people in the so-called occupied territories. His answer expresses the narrative perfectly:

No one was surprised by the criminal attack on Lebanon. It is a continuation of Israel's policy aimed at exterminating our people, physically and politically. It is a continuation of the battle started by Israel at the very beginning when it considered the land to be its land, and sought to build a "pure" Israel without the inhabitants.³⁸

Notice the reversals, the upside-down language mirroring the Holocaust. The Palestinians have been criminally attacked. The goal of Israel is the extermination of the Palestinian Arabs. This is taken to mean elimination by death and not just the end of any self-rule possibilities in the political realm. The real issue is the land which Israel wrongfully considers to belong to the Jewish people. So the Jews have usurped the land belonging to someone else. Israel wants a pure nation with no other ethnic groups like the Palestinian Arabs. The portrait of Nazi Germany is superimposed on the nation of Israel. The nation of Israel, on this view, consistently practices social injustice and does so, apparently, by its own existence as well as its actions. The Arab

³⁷ The word *Palestinian* applied to both Jews and Arabs living in the area in the first half of the twentieth century. Since then, especially gaining ground in the 1960s when the PLO was formed, the word was hijacked so that it refers to an ethnic group. As such it is a failed designation. The term was created for political reasons.

³⁸ Cited in the interview article by Ghassan Bishara, "All Palestinians are Living One Battle, Inside and Outside, *Palestinian Journal* 11 (Summer/Fall 1982): 94.

narrative is somewhat surreal and absolutely false. There are over one million people living in Israel who are not Jewish. Some of them, even Muslims, belong to the Israeli Knesset or parliament. Israel does not target Palestinian Arabs for killing like Hitler's storm troopers. Furthermore, it does not target children for indiscriminate killing.³⁹ The hypocritical nature of the narrative can be seen in the PLO's automatic payment of a stipend to anyone who murders a Jew in Israel.⁴⁰

Two ways in which the Arab narrative about Israel is being advanced in the world are practical political pressure and the promotion of a version of Christian theology that supports the political pressure. In this way, the so-called Palestinian cause seeks to foment Christian opposition to Israel.

Practical Political Pressure: BDS

Here I do not really want to talk about the use made of the United Nations to advance the Palestinian Arab cause, although it is always present. Instead, I want to rehearse briefly the campaign to boycott, divest from, and sanction Israel (known as the BDS movement). One of the leading websites is bdsmovement.net which alleges to promote freedom, justice, and equality. It encourages specific ways in which people can get involved to oppose Israeli apartheid (as the narrative is described). Several articles are posted to advance the narrative. Two of the prominent sources of the published online presentations are the Palestinian BDS National Committee (BNC) and the Palestinian Campaign for Academic and Cultural

³⁹ See Alan Dershowitz, *The Case for Israel* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley & Sons, 2003), 189-96. Dershowitz does a good job of handling the charges from an ethical point of view. Standard histories of modern Israel will also help at least to the point that they were written. For example, see Martin Gilbert, *Israel: A History* (New York: Doubleday, 1998). Gilbert does a good job of letting facts speak for themselves including allowing the critics of Israel, even among Israeli citizens, to be heard. I have not seen that kind of honesty and transparency on the other side.

⁴⁰ David Bedein, "Who Says That Crime Does Not Pay?" *Israel Behind the News*, August 22, 2019, https://israelbehindthenews.com/who-says-that-crime-does-not-pay/18944/?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=ibn-today.

Boycott of Israel (PACBI). To get a flavor of the articles, a snapshot on a recent day showed the following titles (partial listing):⁴¹

1. “Boycott AnyVision: Israel’s ‘Field-Tested’ Facial Recognition Surveillance Company”
2. “PACBI Welcomes Statement by More than 500 Filmmakers Against ‘Close-Up’ Initiative Normalizing Israeli Apartheid”
3. “The BDS Movement Calls to Boycott Three Anti-Palestinian German Clubs”
4. “Boycott Pop-Kultur Berlin Festival 2019”
5. “No Impunity for Ethnic Cleansing in Jerusalem – Boycott Israel Now”
6. “Democratic Socialists of America Commit to National BDS Organizing”
7. “Human Rights Organizations Based in Israel Voice Concern before Bundestag President over Motion Defining BDS as Antisemitism”

The entire range of boycotting, divesting from, and sanctioning Israel is meant not just to hurt Israel economically (which has not happened yet), but to put the narrative in front of people, especially in the West. Knowing that most people do not know the actual conditions on the ground in Israel and the Palestinian Authority, the presentations hope to produce anti-Israeli thinking while producing sympathy for the Palestinian Arabs. It does not matter if the presentations are true or false.

Besides boycotting the purchase of Israeli products, a most troubling practice of the BDS movement is to attempt to keep Israeli speakers from being heard at various events, especially on college campuses in the United States. Dershowitz points out several examples:

1. A letter (April 2002) signed by 125 academics was printed in the *Guardian* (Great Britain) calling for a moratorium on support for Israeli academics and universities;

⁴¹ Snapshot taken on September 13, 2019.

2. A signatory of the above mentioned letter fired two scholars from an academic journal just because they were Israelis;
3. A teacher at Oxford University rejected a Ph.D. applicant just because he had served in the Israel Defense Forces.⁴²

Such attitudes have also generated discrimination against Jewish students at some prestigious universities. At the 2015 November “Students of Color Conference” (SOCC) at the University of California, two Jewish students from UCLA witnessed the BDS narrative firsthand. In response to participation in the conference, one of those Jewish students, Arielle Mokhtarzadeh, made the following observations:

Over the course of what was probably no longer than an hour, my history was denied, the murder of my people was justified, and a movement whose sole purpose is the destruction of the Jewish homeland was glorified. Statements were made justifying the ruthless murder of innocent Israeli civilians, blatantly denying the Holocaust in which six million Jews were murdered. Why anyone in their right mind would accept these slanders as truths baffles me. But they did. These statements, and others, were met with endless snaps and cheers. I was taken aback.⁴³

The SOCC meeting taught the absurd idea that the intifadas were peaceful uprisings against Israel. The message was clear: Jewish students who did not get on board with the anti-Israel, anti-Semitic program were not welcome in the progressive movement against racism. There has developed a “dubious bond between the progressive movement and pro-Palestinian activists who often engage in the same racist and discriminatory discourse they claim to fight. As a result of this alliance, progressive Jewish students are often subjected to a double-standard not applied to their peers—an Israel litmus test to prove their loyalties to social

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Quoted in Anthony Berteaux, “In the Safe Spaces on Campus, No Jews Allowed,” *The Tower Magazine*, February 2016, www.thetower.org/article/in-the-safe-spaces-on-campus-no-jews-allowed/.

justice.”⁴⁴ In addition, a chapter of Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) at Northeastern University “was so persistent in their anti-Semitic harassment—from defacing the statue of a Jewish donor to disrupting Holocaust awareness events—that the university was forced to temporarily suspend the organization in 2014.”⁴⁵

It is no surprise, in light of such a political climate on many college campuses, that a study of Jews and anti-Semitism in the ethnic studies or Middle East studies departments are sometimes rejected since so-called Palestinian studies using the Arab narrative predominate and are considered sacrosanct.⁴⁶ Therefore, the campus is often not a pleasant place for a pro-Israel student, especially if they are Jewish. In fact, the emphasis on social justice in dealing with Israel has been turned upside-down on its head. This pursuit for social justice is actually leading in our day to a strengthened anti-Semitism. As one commentator noted, “Social justice ideologues are not interested in issues, resolution or fairness. They mean to win at any cost, even if it means, as in the case of anti-Semitism, promoting the us/them binary code which always and inevitably divides people and prevents them from considering their common humanity.”⁴⁷

Theological Pressure: Liberation Theology

Added to the political pressure of the various expressions of the BDS movement, more troubling for the evangelical believer may be the utilization of liberation theology to advance the Arab narrative in the Middle East. Liberation theology developed in the last half of the twentieth century as a theological way of thinking about the oppressed peoples of the world.⁴⁸ Various

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Channa Newman, “Pursuit of ‘Social Justice’ Gives Strength to Anti-Semitism,” *The Pittsburgh Jewish Chronicle*, December 2, 2018, <https://jewishchronicle.timesofisrael.com/pursuit-of-social-justice-gives-strength-to-anti-semitism/>.

⁴⁸ A couple of resources on liberation theology are Ronald Nash, ed., *Liberation Theology* (Milford, MI: Mott Media, 1984) and Deane William Ferm, *Third World Liberation Theologies: An Introductory Survey*

authors stressed different areas, various parts of the world, and specific people groups, although the original progress was in Latin America within Roman Catholicism. The generalized form sees salvation as political deliverance rather than individual rescue from sin. Specialized forms of liberation theology would be black theology and feminist or womanist theology. Two key passages often sloganized in liberation theology are Jesus' statement "the truth shall make you free" (John 8:22) and Moses' demand to Pharaoh "let my people go" (Exod 9:13 et al.).

Related to the question of social justice, Israel, and the Palestinian Arabs, one encounters several avenues of liberation theology that converge on the notion that Israel is an apartheid state that should be confronted through BDS and other means. These various elements combine to form what has been labeled Christian Palestinianism.⁴⁹ At the center of this movement is an Anglican priest named Naim Ateek who could legitimately be called the "father of Christian Palestinianism." He was eleven years old in 1948 and witnessed what he considered unfair treatment of his Christian Arab family, which lost their home as the Israelis moved in. His seminal work *Justice and Only Justice* serves as the foundation document for a Palestinian liberation theology.⁵⁰ The dissemination of his views has largely been accomplished through the organization named Sabeel which he founded in 1989. *Sabeel* is the Arabic word for *way*, *channel*, or *spring*. The stated intention is to promote the liberation of Palestinians by nonviolent methods. There are chapters of Sabeel in many countries including the United Kingdom and the United States.

Wilkinson succinctly describes Naim Ateek and his organization Sabeel in rather strong and broad terms:

(Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987). I have sometimes made the comment that liberation theology is Marxism with Bible verses sprinkled on it.

⁴⁹ Paul R. Wilkinson, *Israel Betrayed, Volume 2—The Rise of Christian Palestinianism* (San Antonio, TX: Ariel Ministries, 2018), 60. Wilkinson says he calls this movement Christian Palestinianism "because it represents the antithesis of biblical Christian Zionism."

⁵⁰ Naim Ateek, *Justice and Only Justice: A Palestinian Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989).

Sabeel's propagation of a Palestinianized version of Roman Catholic liberation theology, its blatant distortion and de-Zionization of God's Word, its monstrous conception of a Marcionite Jesus arrayed in Palestinian robes, its promotion of an interfaith agenda at complete variance with the gospel of Jesus Christ, and its seduction of Western evangelicals already ensnared by replacement theology, have made it a potent and destructive force within the church.⁵¹

To unpack this summary, we start by noticing the respect for the roots of liberation theology and the perception that support from the Catholic Church will be necessary for them to accomplish their agenda. The next two parts, de-Zionization of God's Word and the Marcionite Jesus, stem from the devaluing of the OT in Christian Palestinianism. Ateek notes that among Christian Palestinians a major change took place in how the OT was viewed:

Before the creation of the State [of Israel], the Old Testament was considered to be an essential part of the Christian Scripture, pointing and witnessing to Jesus. Since the creation of the State, some Jewish and Christian interpreters have read the Old Testament largely as a Zionist text to such an extent that it has become almost repugnant to Palestinian Christians. As a result, the Old Testament has generally fallen into disuse among both clergy and laity, and the Church has been unable to come to terms with its ambiguities, questions, and paradoxes—especially with its direct application to the twentieth-century events in Palestine.⁵²

Ateek further commented that “the emergence of the Zionist movement in the twentieth century is a retrogression of the Jewish community into the history of its very distant past, with its most elementary and primitive forms of the concept of God.”⁵³ Ateek sees the Jews as going back to a tribal god. One sees in

⁵¹ Wilkinson, *Israel Betrayed*, 69.

⁵² Ateek, *Justice*, 77.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 101.

these words echoes of replacement theology. The OT is downgraded, and the promises to Israel about the land and future of national Israel are thrown away.

Part of the equation for Ateek and Christian Palestinianism is the clear statement that they are seeking a special hermeneutic:

Palestinian Christians are looking for a hermeneutic that will help them to identify the authentic Word of *God* in the Bible and to discern the true meaning of those biblical texts that Jewish Zionists and Christian fundamentalists cite to substantiate their subjective claims and prejudices.⁵⁴

When reading this, one readily understands that liberation theology is not conservative in orientation. Ateek's teaching is that the plain, literal meaning derived from grammatical-historical interpretation will not work for the Christian Palestinians because it is not what they want to see in Scripture. So they are searching for an alternative. It is they who are subjective and not the Zionists and dispensational fundamentalists who are bringing their prejudices to the text. Do the Christian Palestinians believe they have no prejudices themselves? We must read Scripture as God gave it and follow its lead even if it takes us into territory we were not expecting and do not really like.

The next part of Wilkinson's summary notes that Sabeel is an interfaith organization that really has nothing to do with the gospel of eternal life. The official full name of Sabeel is the Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center. As an ecumenical organization, it attempts to bring together various groups who share one thing: a dislike for Israel's alleged mistreatment and oppression of the Palestinians. Consequently, support comes mostly from the mainline denominations in the United States and various church groups around the world who are not committed to the literal interpretation of the Bible. Sabeel in this sense would represent a segment of the liberal spectrum in Christendom.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 79.

One must ask what the endgame really is for Christian Palestinianism. What would victory for their cause look like? Is it a nation called Palestine that will be run by the Islamic radicals with Jews living inside of it? That does not match the rhetoric of the PLO and the Palestinian Authority. Is the endgame the destruction of the Jews so that only Palestinian Arabs remain? This fits the rhetoric of the PLO but is hardly consistent with Christian teaching. It would be doing to the Jews what they are complaining that the Jews have done to them. Is the endgame a two-state solution? The leadership of the Arabs has consistently rejected a two-state solution the many times it has been offered beginning in 1947. It appears that what is really going on is a Christian expression of Palestinian Arab nationalism. Christ and the Bible are not at the center.

The final point in Wilkinson's summary is that Sabeel has been seducing Western evangelicals who hold to replacement theology to the detriment of the church. Evidence of this comes largely from the founding of Christ at the Checkpoint (CATC) in 2010, a conference sponsored every other year by Bethlehem Bible College located in the area under control by the Palestinian Authority. Noticeably, there is cross-over between Sabeel and CATC. Among those claiming evangelical credentials, Stephen Sizer, noted Anglican antagonist of Israel, Gary Burge, and Ateek have been involved at CATC as well as Sabeel. Gary Demar, Hank Hanegraaf, and Colin Chapman, among others, have led the charge to advance the same Arab narrative among evangelical Christians.⁵⁵ According to Wilkinson, CATC has superseded the more liberal Sabeel due to its evangelicalism. The CATC website affirms, "We feel compelled to address the injustices that have taken place in the ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestine, particularly the Palestinian lands under occupation."⁵⁶ One wonders why CATC singles out Israel when

⁵⁵ For a good summary of this issue, see Thomas Ice, *The Case for Zionism: Why Christians Should Support Israel* (Green Forest, AR: New Leaf P, 2017), 39-40.

⁵⁶ *Christ at the Checkpoint*, accessed September 13, 2019, <https://christatthecheckpoint.bethbc.edu/about-christ-at-the-checkpoint/>.

so much of the violence in the area is initiated by the Islamic terrorists. Further explanation of what they believe fleshes out the possible reason—their replacement theology.

We do not condemn the Jewish people and we reject any forms of anti-Semitism. In fact, many of our supporters are Israeli Jews who believe that the present Israeli treatment of the Palestinians does not reflect the deeper moral values of Judaism itself. We simply wish to find a life in the entire Holy Land that is free of discrimination and injustice, where each person can live without prejudice toward their race or religion. This also means we reject theologies that lead to discrimination or privileges based on ethnicity. Worldviews that promote divine national entitlement or exceptionalism do not promote the values of the Kingdom of God because they place nationalism above Jesus.⁵⁷

Notice the swipe at Zionism and the implied idea that dispensationalists place nationalism in the case of Israel as more important than Jesus. Again, I applaud the notable idea of living without prejudice in political matters, but what is the endgame? If they succeed what will it look like? Both the Jews and the Muslims would have to come to an understanding simultaneously about such things. It will take the second coming of Jesus to make this a reality, but then the land will clearly belong to Israel with no disputes.

Conclusion

The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, of which I am a part, began as a ministry of social justice to defend the Jewish people. After Kristallnacht on November 9-10, 1938, a pogrom against the Jews by the Nazis, a group of Christian leaders and businessmen met to help with a response to the injustice that was being carried out under the swastika. Among them were Lewis Sperry Chafer, the President of Dallas Theological Seminary, and H. A. Ironside, pastor of Moody Memorial Church in Chicago, both strong dispensationalists. They decided to form The Friends of Israel Refugee Relief Committee to help Jewish people who

⁵⁷ Ibid.

were fleeing from Nazi tyranny and oppression. They were not wrong to do so. Social justice of these kinds have a place in Christian thinking and action.

To close, I want to give some practical recommendations for action, social and spiritual, to respond to perhaps the greatest social justice issue of our time—anti-Semitism.

1. Consider the common sense things. Buy Israeli products, books written by Israeli authors, and Jewish magazines and resources. Write letters to the editor when you see anti-Semitism near you. Verbally stand against those who speak evil of the Jews using the old stereotypes.
2. Read and observe widely in various sources so that you are not hypnotized by the charisma of one author or speaker. Part of your studies need to be in Jewish history.
3. Attend a church, if possible, that is pro-Israel and accepts what the Bible says about Israel—past, present, and future. The church should not be afraid of dispensationalism.
4. Study your Bible following a literal understanding and fully embrace dispensationalism; this will lead you to believe that Israel has a right to the land and God has a future for His chosen people. This understanding should increase your love for the Jewish people.
5. Befriend Jewish people where you live. Centuries of persecution and forced conversions make many Jewish people believe that the very act of evangelism is anti-Semitic. They must learn that there are Christians who love them in the name of Jesus. But do not be afraid to share the gospel.

6. Pray for the peace of Jerusalem and your Jewish friends.
7. Make a trip to Israel with a pro-Israel group. Although you cannot see all the facts on the ground through a tour, it will increase your awareness nonetheless.
8. Do not accept all actions of the present Israeli government as right just because it is Israel. Analysis must be done. They must be held to account. However, the interpretation of the facts on the ground should not be done based upon the reporting of *Al Jazeera*.
9. Remember that Jesus is Jewish. How can we not love the Jewish people? The Apostle Paul said, "From the standpoint of the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but from the standpoint of God's choice they are beloved for the sake of the fathers" (Rom 11:28).

The Biblical Case Against Counter-Social Justice: YHWH's Demand for Justice and Righteousness

Steven W. Boyd

Abstract: A question is being prominently raised today by evangelical Christians: “What responsibility does the local church have to the disadvantaged and oppressed?” The biblical evidence that YHWH demands justice and righteousness from his people is *irrefragable*. He metes swift, severe judgment to the nefarious recreants to his mandate. And that he holds even his choicest servants accountable to execute the same, strictly judging either directly or through circumstances any breech, is *indisputable*. And that he even included it as a perpetual expectation in the covenants, the unconditional Abrahamic covenant, the conditional Mosaic covenant, and the mixed Davidic covenant, is *undeniable*. We have our answer.

Key Words: Justice, Righteousness, Abrahamic Covenant, Mosaic Covenant, Davidic Covenant

Introduction

There is a movement afoot that contends that Christians have no obligation with respect to social justice: our responsibility is only to promulgate the gospel and edify the saints. Let sinners feed other sinners and make amends for egregious wrongs committed in the past on certain people groups. But is this what the Bible teaches? The proponents of this position maintain that it is. I argue, however, that this is not only *not* what the Bible teaches but in fact is *diametrically opposed* to the character of God; his expectations for his people in the

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Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic covenants; and an explicitly stated goal of the Messianic mission.

The Argument—the Evidence

Information

We need to start by defining our terms. “Justice” is only one of the ways that מִשְׁפָּט can be rendered. In law contexts it refers to casuistic law as opposed to the apodictic laws of the Decalogue. In fact, in Psalm 119 it is used over and over again as one of eight terms within the semantic field of the Word of God. Some others are תּוֹרָה, “instruction,” חֶק (from חָקַק, “engrave”), “statute,” and מִצְוָה, “commandment.”² In addition, it refers to fair and honest adjudication in disputes. The usage in Genesis 40:12–13 is a bit different, the meaning of which we can determine *ad sensum*. Joseph told the chief of the cupbearers (lit. the one who gives drink) that pharaoh would restore him to his former position and “You will place the cup of pharaoh in his hand as was the former *custom* when you were his cupbearer.”

The root of מִשְׁפָּט is שָׁפַט, “judge,” but because that word invokes a certain context and the root applies to a much wider context than that, it is better to understand it as “make decisions.” As support for this understanding, consider the deliverers YHWH raised up to deal with the predacious neighbors of Israel. They are the שֹׁפְטִים. Their primary responsibility was military. After this, they became political leaders because of their military successes.³ And finally because they were political leaders, they also assumed the concomitant responsibility of being adjudicators (as happened with Moses; see Exod 18:13–26). Moreover, the standard for making decisions is the other term in view, from the root צָדַק.

What of this other term צְדָקָה, “righteousness,” and its congeners? When we think of a righteous person we might imagine an individual who is a paragon of virtue, one with

² All translations are by the author.

³ As happened with a number of our presidents, Washington, Jackson, Taylor, Grant, and Eisenhower, to name a few.

impeccable character. What then would we think of a woman who disguised herself in order to seduce her father-in-law who had refused to give her his third son and became pregnant by him? The patriarch Judah said of her, “She is more righteous than I.” Righteous? Would we use that word in this case? Obviously, we need to realign our thinking of this concept so that it is in line with that of the Bible.

We must ask, therefore, what did Tamar do that evoked such a pronouncement from Judah? She manipulated him into providing a son who would be credited to her deceased husband, Er. That is, she was so convinced that there must be a levirate marriage to give an heir to Er that she went through these elaborate machinations, lowering herself by pretending to be a prostitute and engaging in incest, risking what was almost done to her by Judah’s order to ensure that it would happen.

It did not make any difference that YHWH had executed Er for some unspecified evil deed.⁴ It is not unlikely that she was not privy to the information we have as readers. Even if she did know, it did not make any difference to her. He must have his heir.

Onan, refusing to give his brother an heir, knowing the child would not be his, and whether at Tamar’s behest so that she would have a child or for his purposes, flagitiously used her over and over again with no intent to do what he was supposed to do, in fact performing coitus interruptus to ensure that this would not happen. And so YHWH put him to death as well. No heir.

Judah’s third son came of age, but his father refused to do the right thing and give him to his daughter-in-law, fearing that his third son would meet the same end as his two brothers, thinking that the problem was her, not his sons. No heir and an intractable father-in-law.

She was driven to desperation to do the right thing. Although not yet codified,⁵ the law of levirate marriage must have been in place and in a supreme place at that. It is clear from where it is codified that a refusal to provide an heir was such a disgraceful

⁴ It is not particularly helpful to speculate on what Er did to incur the divine wrath. Nevertheless, there is no shortage of suggestions!

⁵ The law of levirate marriage is given in Deuteronomy 25:5–10.

thing that the one who so demurred was to be spat upon by the widow. To do the right thing according to a standard, codified or not, then appears to be the kernel of the meaning of biblical righteousness.

Before wrapping up this section, we should say a word about the verb. It appears to be a denominative; that is, the noun “righteousness” is a primitive noun and the verb is derived from it.⁶ The verb occurs in several stems, but our interest is in how it is used in the *Hiphil* stem. This stem is most often a causative, but here, along with the *Hiphil* of רשע (in the ground stem “ungodly” or “neglectful of God”), is declarative or delocutive in a forensic context: declare to be right (i.e., innocent) or say the word *righteous*, which in such a context would be saying “acquitted.”⁷ This sense of the *Hiphil* is quite evident in Proverbs 17:15: “One who declares innocent the guilty or one who declares guilty the innocent—the two of them are an abomination to YHWH.”⁸

Putting these two brief discussions of “justice” and “righteousness” together, we arrive at the idea that “doing justice and righteousness” is making the right decisions by doing the right thing according to a standard. What standard? YHWH’s standard, which flows out of his character and manifests itself in mandates and expectations to which he holds the nation.

Characterization

Before we look at explicit statements about YHWH’s attributes of justice and righteousness, we need to look at a

⁶ In the Semitic languages the vast majority of nouns come from verbal roots. Each Semitic language, however, has a small number of primitive nouns which are not derived from verbal roots, which are often common to many, if not all, of the languages.

⁷ Because Jerome misunderstood this use of the *Hiphil*, he translated it *justificare*, “to make righteous,” a mistranslation which informs the Roman Catholic understanding of justification.

⁸ YHWH’s standard creates a “problem” for him, which pertains to our salvation: how can he justify guilty ones? Paul is referring to this in Romans 3:23–26, particularly in the phrase “that he might be *just* and the *justifier* of the one whose faith is from Jesus” (emphasis added).

couple of early narratives in Genesis 2 and 4, to see these attributes in action, so to speak. First of all, justice and righteousness is embodied in YHWH's pronouncement: "It is not good for man to be alone. I will make him a helper corresponding to him." Let us look at this more closely. "Not good" is לֹא, "not" + טוֹב, 'good' (an adjective). The negative here is a denial of the descriptive category "good." Why did he say this? Because it would be the worst possible thing for Adam to disobey YHWH and in being alone he was vulnerable to do just that. So YHWH created the woman not just to address Adam's aloneness but to help him not sin against God. This is one of the reasons the serpent attacked Adam through the woman. In terms of justice and righteousness, YHWH made the right decision to create the woman for the reason to keep Adam from disobeying his Creator. And in contrast how bad was Adam's decision to disobey YHWH and how unjust to treat him who gave Adam existence and life in such a way!

The second example is not as pleasant—in fact—we must look at a dastardly deed, the contemplation of it and execution of it, and YHWH's interactions to that arch-perpetrator, the murderer of his brother, whom even YHWH could not convince to do the right thing, Cain. Our concern here is not on why "he was very angry" or why "his face fell," but rather on YHWH doing the right thing by trying to reason with Cain, enjoining him to do the good thing and then warning him of what a precarious position he would be in if he did not do the good thing and that he was in danger of doing something terrible. Unfortunately, Cain was bent on fratricide.

Now we turn to examine YHWH's reaction after the dark deed was done. One can almost hear his pain. What have you done? The voice of your brother's violently spilled blood is crying out for help to me from the ground. Oh how foul the deed! Oh how unjust! Oh how clear YHWH's outrage at this (and all others since) injustice done by man to man! Cursed be Cain, the first man cursed by YHWH.

Now we will look at explicit statements about these attributes. For the most part, we will look at those passages where both words are attested. There are fifty of them, but space will

not permit us to examine all of them. But on occasion we will look at a passage having only one of them. In fact, the first passage we will look at is such a one.

Abraham was convinced that YHWH was just: “Shall not the judge [שֹׁפֵט] of all the earth act justly [מִשְׁפָּט]?” Thus, he was emboldened to bargain with him about Sodom, about sparing the city were a certain number of righteous (צַדִּיק) found there.

According to Psalm 33:5, “YHWH loves righteousness and justice. We may ask towards whom? Apparently to all mankind, for the verse continues with “the earth is full of the grace [חֶסֶד] of YHWH.”

In Psalm 36:6–8 (5–7 in English), David extols the grace, faithfulness (אֱמֶן), righteousness, and justice of YHWH. “Grace” occurs first and again last in these verses, thus bracketing the other terms.

Psalm 99 speaks of the three-fold holiness of YHWH (קָדוֹשׁ הוּא): holy in his greatness, holy in his governance, and holy in his grace. As the psalmist speaks to YHWH, he refers to YHWH’s justice and righteousness as the strength of his rule.

Psalm 89:15 is an amazing verse in which David proclaims that the fundamental nature of YHWH’s rule is justice and righteousness: “Righteousness and justice is the foundation of your throne; grace and truth precede your presence (literally ‘face’).” Four attributes of YHWH are extolled in this verse: righteousness, justice, grace, and truth.⁹

In Psalm 103:6 David tells us in a general way towards whom YHWH’s justice and righteousness is directed: YHWH is the one who does righteousness and justice to the oppressed. Beginning with a hymnic participle, this statement is couched as an epithet—amongst a string of such—of YHWH. In addition, *righteousness* and *justice* are both plurals, referring to YHWH’s abundant acts of righteousness and justice.

In Lady Wisdom’s final address in Proverbs 1:8–9:18, in that she is the embodiment of divine wisdom, she states the

⁹ The last two are also the last two in YHWH’s declaration of his five-fold name (like the Egyptian *rn wr*, “great name,” for a pharaoh) to Moses (Exod 34:6).

following: “In the way of righteousness I walk all around (*Piel* indicating continual action); among the little paths of justice.”

Isaiah 5:16 is a remarkable verse speaking to the character of YHWH: “YHWH of the armies is exalted in justice; the Holy God becomes holy through righteousness.”

Messiah’s responsibility to his realm to come is characterized as follows in Isaiah 9:6: “to nourish it with justice and righteousness from now and for perpetuity. The zeal of YHWH of the armies will do this.”

“YHWH is exalted [שָׁבַח]. He dwells on high. He has filled Zion with justice and righteousness” (Isa 33:5).

YHWH’s words are just: “I speak justly—great to give victory” (63:1).

According to Jeremiah 4:2, YHWH swears by truth (אֱמֶת, אֱמֶת), justice, and righteousness and from 9:23 that a boaster should boast that he knows the character of YHWH who says, “I am YHWH who does grace, justice, and righteousness in the land [maybe ‘earth’]. In these I delight [חִפִּי].”

Expectation

The Abrahamic Covenant

Because YHWH, among all his other attributes, is characterized by justice and righteousness, he expects it from his people. We will look at perhaps what might seem to be a surprising place to find expectations—an unconditional covenant, the Abrahamic covenant. YHWH’s promises to Abram were clearly unconditional: “I will make you into a great nation”; “I will bless you”; “I will make your name great”; “I will bless those who bless you and the one who belittles you I will curse”; “all the families of the ground will be blessed through you.” And the covenant ratification ceremony recounted in Genesis 15 is obviously unconditional: Abram was asleep during the ratification and only YHWH as a burning torch and smoking furnace passed between the pieces of the animals, thus obligating only himself to keep the covenant. But I left out a clause from the Abrahamic covenant which speaks of expectation: “Be a blessing.” The form is an imperative, a 2nd person volitive; whereas all of the other forms are either cohortatives (I will ...)

or *qatal* (formerly called ‘perfect’) 3rd common plural (will be blessed). This is not a suggestion but a command.

The second appearance of this expectation is in 17:1b: “Walk before me and be blameless.” Again two imperatives (both of which are used to describe the character of Noah in 6:9—but in reverse order). These imperatives seem to be an expansion on the earlier “be a blessing.” Of course, another expectation in the unconditional covenant is that Abraham circumcise all newborn male children, and although this one is not in our immediate purview, were a male child not to be circumcised he would be cut off (כרת) from his people because he had broken YHWH’s covenant (17:14).

The third iteration of this expectation is much more specific. The occasion—YHWH and two angels came to Abraham and Sarah to proclaim to them that by that time the next year, old Sarah would bear Isaac, the son of the covenant. As the party was leaving and looking down on Sodom, YHWH paused to talk to Abraham, saying, “Shall I cover from Abraham what I am about to do?” Then he repeated two unconditional aspect of the covenant: “Abraham will certainly become a great nation and all the nations of the earth will be blessed through him.” After this reassurance, YHWH spoke of Abraham’s obligation to his descendants yet to be born so that they would meet YHWH’s expectations of them: “I entered into relationship with Abraham **in order that** *he would command* his sons and [even more] his extended household, **so that** *they would keep YHWH’s way*, [specifically] *to do righteousness and justice in order that* YHWH might bring upon Abraham that which He had spoken” (emphasis added). The last part of YHWH’s statement made the meeting of the expectation of doing justice and righteousness into a condition for receiving covenant blessing. That is, certain aspects of the unconditional covenant had become conditional.

The only information we have to go by to explain this change—and that is what it seems to be—is the account of Abraham’s actions in the preceding chapters of Genesis, in that YHWH is not capricious and does not renege on his promises. The onus therefore must fall on Abraham. But before we explore this intriguing development further, we will look at more

evidence that this expectation persisted throughout the history of Israel.

Note the following:

YHWH's demand for equitable adjudication

“Do not do evil in judgment: do not lift the face of the poor [give them special treatment] and do not magnify the face of the great [ditto]; righteously [fronted for emphasis] you will judge your neighbor” (Lev 19:15). It is noteworthy that these prohibitions are the strongest possible in Hebrew—like those of the Decalogue.

The judges and officers must judge the people with right judgment (Deut 16:18). And Deuteronomy 25:1 insists that in disputes the judges will determine innocence and guilt and declare innocent the innocent and declare guilty the guilty. According to Proverbs 17:15, an inversion of this is an abomination to YHWH.

General

Isaiah 28:7 concerns the evaluation of behavior. Lines are used for measuring the length of something, in this case behavior, and the line is justice. And weights on a scale are used to determine the weight of something, again of behavior, and the weight is righteousness.

Isaiah 33:14–16 is very similar to Psalm 15 in that it asks: who can dwell with YHWH? who is characterized as a consuming fire in the Isaiah passage. In the psalm the three-fold answer from YHWH, because David asked the question of Him, is: “the one who walks in integrity, does righteousness [צִדִּיק], and speaks truth in his heart” (Ps 15:2), after which specifics are given, which include not slandering, not lending money for interest, and not taking a bribe to pervert justice. The Isaiah passage answers the question: “one who walks in righteousness, speaks equitably [shows no prejudice or partiality], rejects the gain of extortion, shakes his palms from taking a bribe, closes his ears from hearing [plans] of bloodshed, and shuts his eyes so as not to see evil.”

Micah 6:8 is one of the great ethical teachings of the Old Testament—what does YHWH require of a man: “doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly with your God.”

Amos 5:24: “Let justice roll like water and righteousness like a permanent wadi [not bone dry as usual].”

According to Ezekiel 18:5, a righteous man is to do acts of justice and righteousness.

The identity of the disadvantaged who are often victims of injustice and unrighteousness

Isaiah 58:6–7 identifies the disadvantaged as having ungodly bonds, fettered with ropes of a yoke, oppressed, and wearing a yoke. These appear to be figurative designations. But maybe not. Then the prophet gets specific: break your bread with the hungry, you should bring the homeless afflicted into your house, cover the naked, do not hide yourself (neglect or ignore) your flesh (family, close and distant).

Jeremiah 5:28 names orphans and destitute among those often deprived of justice. Jeremiah 22:3 specifies who these oppressed are in the Divine mandate: “Do justice and righteousness; deliver the one who has been robbed from the power of oppression; the stranger, the orphan, and the widow do not oppress [יִנְהֵ].” Following this are the promises of blessings upon those who follow this mandate.

Of and to rulers

1. They must manifest the righteousness of YHWH and His justice with Israel (Deut 33:21).
2. Standard for how a king should rule (Ps 72:1–2).
3. “Remove violence and devastation. Instead do justice and righteousness” (Ezek 45:9).
4. Stern warning against those who turned justice into wormwood and threw righteousness down on the ground (Amos 5:7).
5. Another warning to those who turn justice into poison and righteousness into wormwood (6:12).

The benefit

1. “Happy are the guardians of justice who do righteousness at all times” (Ps 106:3).

2. “Better is a little with righteousness than much production without justice” (Prov 16:8).
3. “Doing justice and righteousness is more choice to YHWH than sacrifice” (Prov 21:3).
4. Doing justice and righteousness can preserve life and reverse the judgment of YHWH (Ezek 18:21, 27; 33:14, 16, 19).

Pronouncement of failure

In one of the most famous word plays in Isaiah, YHWH said, “I expected justice [מִשְׁפָּט], instead oppression [מִשְׁפָּח]. These words sound very similar in Hebrew, but their meanings are radically different, justice versus oppression. In the second exclamation by YHWH the words again differ by only one consonantal sound, but that little difference makes a major difference in signification: “I expected righteousness [צִדְקָה] and instead a cry for help [צַעֲקָה]” (Isa 5:7b), with the implication that the oppression provoked the cry for help.

Now we turn to explore the factors that resulted in the unconditional becoming in some parts conditional.

Presentation

The Patriarchal narratives

The clues to explain the change are found in Genesis, particularly, in the selection of the material and how it is presented. Abraham lived 175 years, 100 of them in and about the land of Canaan. We obviously do not have an exhaustive account of his life in Canaan in the dozen or so pericopes in Genesis. Moses was very selective, and it behooves us to ascertain to some extent what guided this selection.

A natural starting point is the Abrahamic covenant recorded in Genesis 12:1–3. We want to see if there is an intersection between the promises made there and the pericopes. What are some characteristics of these stories? First, Abraham mostly encounters kings and rulers. Second, for the most part he triumphs in these encounters. Third, he gets richer and richer. Fourth, although mostly he manifested faith, on occasion he

faltered, serious consequences followed, and YHWH intervened to protect him and his. Fifth, he lied about Sarah twice, putting her into jeopardy and potentially jeopardizing YHWH's plan. Sixth, during negotiations to acquire a burial place for Sarah, he was called a "great prince among us" (23:6).

From this short list we start to get an inkling of what Moses was about: he was demonstrating that YHWH was fulfilling in the life of Abraham some of those things he had promised him. He had begun making him into a great nation. He was blessing him by enhancing his status and enriching him through his various encounters. He was making his name great: he bested pharaohs and kings, he was becoming famous, and moreover, he was being transformed into a great man of faith. YHWH was protecting him from those who presented danger to him and blessing those who blessed him.

But something else is evident: Moses is showing us when Abraham was a blessing to others and when he was not. He was not a blessing to Sarah when he lied about her to pharaoh's men. This endangered Sarah and because of the subsequent judgment upon pharaoh and the Egyptians, Abraham was not a blessing to him and them. Yet again when he lied about her to Abimelech, he was neither a blessing to her nor to him and the women of his kingdom.

And of course the expectation in question and concomitant aspects of the presentation to demonstrate whether or not such and such an individual was meeting it is found throughout Scripture, not just with Abraham, but as YHWH said, with all his descendants from Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and his brothers, the Egyptian sojourn and exodus, the wilderness years, the conquest, and all the judges and kings until the exile and repatriation. But particularly as Abraham violated the expectation, YHWH modified it a bit. More violation led to more modification until the prospect of enjoying some of the promises and otherwise forfeiting them had to be made the motivation for compliance, which is what we see in Genesis 18:19 and continues on to what I believe is an extension of this expectation, the Decalogue.

The Conditional Mosaic Covenant

The Decalogue is divided into two parts. Seen from the perspective of justice and righteousness, the first part concerns justice and righteousness toward YHWH of which he was most worthy because he delivered them from the land of Egypt from the house of slaves (Exod 20:1). This justice and righteousness was to be manifested in fealty toward YHWH and to no one else. Fidelity to another god was perfidy and covenant breaking.¹⁰ The fourth commandment, although memorializing YHWH's work of creation (Exod 20:8–11) and his redemption of the nation (Deut 5:12–15), is also an instantiation of justice and righteousness to the disadvantaged. The rest of the commandments are clearly either injunctions to do justice and righteousness to each other or the strongest prohibitions not to engage in blatant violations of justice and righteousness toward one another.

After extensive particularization of justice and righteousness towards YHWH and man, the expectation in the two directions is once again summarized in its two parts in Deuteronomy 6:4–5 and Leviticus 19:18, respectively. Furthermore, according to Deuteronomy 27:19, once the nation was in the land, one of the curses was to be “Cursed is whoever perverts justice for a stranger, orphan, or widow.” And the people were to respond “Amen!” According to Joshua 8:33–35, since all the blessings and curses were read at Shechem between Ebal and Gerazim after Israel had secured the strategic middle of the hill country, those concerning the expectation were read and affirmed at that time.

The last mention of justice and righteousness is in Moses' blessing upon Gad, found amongst his other blessings upon all the tribes: “. . . the righteousness of YHWH he has done and his judgments with Israel” (Deut 33:21b). We don't know what righteousness and justice refers to. But that is actually immaterial. Here at the end of Moses' ministry he singles out one of the tribes as doing justice and righteousness, probably in the context of adjudication.

¹⁰ It is clear that the Decalogue follows a Hittite suzerain vassal treaty exemplar, in which fidelity to the suzerain is the primary responsibility of the vassal. An extant example is the treaty between the Hittite king Tudhaliash IV (the suzerain) and Shaushga Muwa (his vassal).

Unconditional and Conditional Aspects of the Davidic Covenant

The following seem to be unconditional aspects of the Davidic covenant (2 Sam 7; 1 Chr 17; Ps 89; 132):

1. "I will make a place for my people Israel."
2. "I will plant him."
3. "He will no longer be disturbed."
4. "Evil ones will no longer oppress him [Chronicles has "wear him out"] as at the first."
5. "I will give you rest from [Chronicles has "subdue"] all your enemies" [to David].
6. "YHWH hereby declares to you that YHWH will build a *house* [dynasty] for you."
7. "I will raise up your seed after you, who will come from your loins, and I will establish his kingdom."
8. "I will establish the throne of his kingdom for perpetuity."
9. "I myself will become a father to him; and he will become a son to me."
10. "My grace will not turn aside from him."
11. "Your *house* and your kingdom will endure in perpetuity before you" [Chronicles has "I will cause him to stand in my house and in my kingdom in perpetuity"].
12. "Your throne will be established in perpetuity."

However, this statement in the Davidic Covenant sounds conditional: "Whenever he acts perversely, I will chastise him with the rod of men and with the blows of human beings" (2 Sam 7:14). And this statement appears to be both conditional and unconditional: "I will not cause the foot of Israel to wander from the ground which I gave to their fathers only if they observe to do according to all I commanded them—with respect to the instruction [Chronicles adds "statutes" and "ordinances"] which My servant Moses commanded them [Chronicle has "by the hand of Moses"]" (2 Kgs 21:8; 2 Chr 33:8).

Ethan the Ezrahite, the author of Psalm 89, wrestles with this duality. He repeats many of the unconditional aspects of the

covenant in this psalm (21–30; 34–38 [20–29; 33–37 in English text]) using poetic imagery. He adds that it really was a newly inaugurated covenant with David: “newly inaugurated” because he uses the term “cut” (כרת) a covenant (v. 4 [v. 3 in English text]) and “covenant” (ברית) in verses 4, 29, 35, and 40. The psalmist, however, also refers to the conditional aspects of the covenant in verses 31–33 (30–32 in English text). In the last part of the psalm, his struggling with the reality that the nation was undergoing chastisement, even as he was writing, is quite apparent (39–47; 50–52): after saying that YHWH had promised to David that his throne would endure like the sun and the moon (36–37), he says,

But you yourself have spurned, rejected, and acted enraged toward your anointed. You repudiated the covenant with your servant ... his throne you have thrown down to the ground.... Where is your grace which you swore to David in your faithfulness? (38-39a, 44b, 49).

Psalm 132 has this twofold aspect as well: both in verse 10; unconditional in verse 11; and conditional in verse 12.

Realization

Although surely the mandate to do justice and righteousness was given to all of Abraham’s descendants, those who held the reins of power would have been the most likely to oppress the disadvantaged and in fact did, and thus Scripture’s focus is on the leaders: the patriarchs themselves, patriarchal leaders like Moses and Joshua, and also judges, but particularly kings.

Unfortunately, the latter with a few exceptions left a shabby record in this regard. It was said of only two kings that they manifested justice and righteousness: David and Josiah. Of David it was said—“So David reigned over all Israel. This self-same David was doing justice and righteousness to all his people” (2 Sam 8:15; 1 Chr 18:14). Readers hear of Josiah’s meeting of the expectation indirectly in Jeremiah’s excoriation of Jehoiakim:

Are you reigning because you compete in cedar? Your father—did he not eat and drink and do justice and righteousness, so then it was good for him? He vindicated the cause of the afflicted and destitute. Is this not really knowing me. Oracle of YHWH. (Jer 22:15-16)

Now, who was the father of that wretch Jehoiakim? Why none other than Josiah. The possibility exists, however, that since אָבִיךָ, “your father,” may mean “your ancestor,” Jeremiah may have been referring to David.

Sadly, even these two kings did not persevere in doing justice and righteousness. David descended into the nadir of injustice and unrighteousness when he committed adultery with Bathsheba while her husband was off fighting his battles, recalling him to try to cover up his sin, then plotting his murder, and most callously writing off his death as “the sword consumes this one and that one” (1 Sam 11:25).

YHWH’s outrage and condemnation of David’s egregious violation of the expectation screams from the pages of Scripture. Only his mercy saved David. But David paid dearly through problems with four sons for David’s nefarious deeds.

Josiah, on the other hand, did not escape his lapse. Unbidden by YHWH, in his foolish pride to try to stop Pharaoh Neco II’s march to support Assyria against Babylon, he died in battle. Apparently not thinking of what his sons might do to the poor and needy were he to perish, that there might be a return to the oppression of his father and grandfather, he went ahead, and as a result catapulted Judah into a precipitous decline which culminated in the slaughter of countless people, the destruction of the city and the temple, and cruel exile.

Anticipation

The reader of the Book of Kings has a sense of anticipation about Solomon’s reign after he, now king, asked for wisdom to govern the people. Certainly he recognized that the bloody succession, costing the lives of Joab, Shimei, and Adonijah and the banishment of Abiathar, was not the way to begin his reign. In addition, the demonstration of his wisdom given to him by YHWH strengthens this impression the reader has.

But it is not the reader's anticipation which matters here so much as it is that of the Queen of Sheba, who, when hearing of his fame, "came to test him with riddles" (1 Kgs 10:1). She arrived with a huge entourage, but after extensively quizzing him, was so overwhelmed by him and his court that she lavished praise on them all and especially upon YHWH, who "when loving Israel in perpetuity placed you [Solomon] as king to do *justice and righteousness*" (vs. 9b; emphasis added).

Unfortunately Solomon did not do justice and righteousness toward YHWH or his people: he flagrantly violated every aspect of the law of the king (Deut 17:14–20); apostatized after foreign gods; and his policies and excesses resulted in his son Rehoboam's day, the split of the united kingdom built by David.

Degeneration

Almost without exception the story of the kings of Israel and Judah is one of covenant perfidy and continual violations of the expectation. We have space to only treat the most foul (and some could argue if these are they, but YHWH's reactions seems to confirm them). We will observe each time the severe retribution from YHWH that came upon these violators. We begin with the shocking advice of Rehoboam's young friends, which contemned justice and righteousness.

Shocking words at Rehoboam's succession (1 Kgs 12:1–19)

The historical context was the succession of Rehoboam and whether or not the northern tribes, whose representative was Jeroboam, would support Solomon's son. Solomon's policies to support his bloated court had so antagonized the northern tribes that Rehoboam went to them at Shechem to hear and address their grievances in order to win them over. They said to him, "Your father made our yoke harsh. So now you lighten your father's harsh labor and his heavy yoke which he placed upon us so that we may serve you" (1 Kgs 12:4).

Rehoboam, instead of immediately agreeing to this reasonable request and thereby securing their loyalty, asked for three days. During those days he consulted his father's

counselors and the young noblemen he had grown up with. The former encouraged him to serve his people and give them a good answer and then they would serve him throughout his reign. The latter advised him to return an unbelievably harsh, vulgar, and extremely unwise answer, no doubt so that their privileged lifestyle supported by the burdensome taxation would continue indefinitely: “My little finger [probably obscene] is thicker than the loins of my father. So now my father loaded a heavy yoke upon you. I will add upon your yoke. My father chastised you with whips. I will chastise you with scorpions” (vv.10–11).

Rehoboam returned the latter’s answer to the northern tribes and not surprisingly they broke away from Judah. Then amazingly, Rehoboam sent Adoram, the leader of the *corvée*, to them (to force them back to working for him? or to collect taxes from them?). In any case, this foolish and futile act cost the latter’s life and Rehoboam had to beat a hasty retreat back to Jerusalem in his royal chariot, now king of only a stub of his father David’s kingdom.

Good king Asa’s reaction to prophetic rebuke (2 Chr 16:7–12)

Asa was one of the good kings of Judah—the account in Kings makes that plain, saying nothing against him other than that he did not remove the high places Solomon had set up and indeed stating that he had an upright reign, like that of David and going on to describe his reforms. It also includes without comment the account of Asa using funds from the temple and the palace to bribe the Arameans to break covenant with Baasha and attack his northern cities so as to lift the latter’s blockade of Jerusalem.

And the account in Chronicles for the most part echoes this positive assessment, even greatly expanding on his reforms. But Chronicles also looks at the aftermath of Asa’s dealing with the Arameans. YHWH was not pleased that Asa had resorted to such a stratagem and not relied on YHWH’s power as Asa had before. YHWH sent the prophet Hanani to rebuke him, telling him that by depending on Aram instead of YHWH, the army of Aram had escaped from his hands. Asa was so provoked to anger by the prophet’s words that he incarcerated him and furthermore

inexplicably lashed out at the people, mistreating (רצי) them, even though they had done nothing wrong, a terrible violation of the expectation, as if he were some kind of wounded animal.

YHWH would have none of this and inflicted him with a foot disease. But instead of seeking YHWH for help, he opted again for the human solution, the doctors. So, he was afflicted until his death.

The vile circumstances of Ahab stealing Naboth's vineyard (1 Kings 20)

Ahab coveted Naboth's vineyard. Naboth, following the Mosaic law, would not sell him the land which belonged to his family. Ahab returned to Jezebel, sullen and sulking. That black widow wove a plan to steal the land. Naboth was lured into a public assembly at a fast supposedly proclaimed by the king by being promised that he would be seated in the most honored place at the head of the people. On that occasion he was falsely accused by two supposed witnesses that they had heard him curse God and the king. Hearing this, the people took Naboth outside the city and stoned him to death. YHWH sent Elijah to confront Ahab with words most severe as he was in the process of securing his ill-gotten gain in egregious violation of the expectation.

YHWH's reaction to this vile deed is clear: the dogs' licking Ahab's blood and the dogs' eating the dead body of Jezebel.

Jehoram of Judah's murder of his brothers (2 Chr 21:4–20)

The fourth dynasty of Israel—unlike the preceding three of aggression—was a period of alliance between the kingdoms of Judah and Israel, an alliance secured by marriage of Jehoshaphat's eldest son to Ahab's daughter. To secure his throne, even though Jehoshaphat had promised it to him since he was the oldest, Jehoram killed all he thought could threaten his position, all his brothers and some of the princes of Israel as well. Although a descendant of David, he acted like a descendant of Ahab: building even more high places in the hills and forcing Jerusalem into whoredom (most likely of a spiritual kind?).

In response to this covenant violation YHWH brought predation from Edom and the Philistines upon Judah.

Nevertheless, though his people had broken covenant with him, he would not break covenant with them because of his promises to David of a perpetual dynasty. Then a letter came to the king from Elijah, excoriating him for leading his people into idolatry and murdering his brothers and pronouncing judgment upon the people and a ghastly ending upon the king, some terrible disease which would cause protrusion of his bowels. And so it came about. While the king was in the throes of the disease, the Edomites and Philistines invaded and took much spoil and all but the youngest of his sons, Jehoahaz (aka, Ahaziah). Jehoram died in most acute pain. And adding to that painful death was the ignominy of neither being given the usual royal burial rights nor being lamented.

Athaliah's extermination of all her grandsons and her atrocious reign (2 Kings 11)

Jehu's divinely ordered usurpation of the Omride dynasty and the establishment of the fifth dynasty of Israel involved many executions of royals of both royal houses, not just of Israel.¹¹ And so with the death of Jehoram of Judah by the hand of YHWH and the death of Ahaziah of Judah by the hand of Jehu, only the sons of the latter, her grandsons, stood in the way of Athaliah's ambition to seize the throne and perhaps place Judah under the hegemony of Phoenicia (after all she was the granddaughter of Ethbaal the Sidonian king).

Upon hearing of her son's death, she immediately destroyed all the royal seed except the infant Joash, whom his aunt had been able to snatch from her clutches and hide until he was old enough to reign.

The crown prince hid in the temple for six years, the span of his grandmother's reign, being under the care and protection of Jehoiada the high priest, the husband of Joash's aunt. Jehoiada skillfully conceived of a plan to safely and secretly bring Joash out in public and install him as the legitimate king. Taking those he knew to be trusted officials into his confidence, he showed them the son of the king and then gave them their orders, which

¹¹ Jehu's execution of members of Judah's royal family went far beyond the divine prescription.

they followed to the letter, encircling the young lad so that he could be anointed and installed.

Athaliah heard all the commotion and when she saw the king she tore her garments and cried, “Conspiracy! Conspiracy!” Jehoiada ordered her to be removed from the temple precincts and executed. His orders were carried out in the precincts of the palace.

Then Jehoiada established a covenant between YHWH, the king, and the people. The people extirpated Baal worship and all its trappings with which Athaliah had afflicted the nation, and they killed the priest of Baal in front of his god’s altars. The officials brought the king to the royal palace and he sat on the throne of the kings. The people of the land were happy again and the city was quiet. Athaliah they put to death with the sword in the palace.¹²

Joash’s murder of the son of his protector and mentor

This strikes me as a singularly nasty example. Not only was it a violation of the expectation, but it was also a gross violation of **דָּקָדָק** for **דָּקָדָק**.

In the example immediately above we saw the role Jehoiada played in protecting Joash, removing the threat of Athaliah and securing him on his throne and mentoring him (2 Kgs 12:3). He even secured two wives for Joash (24:3). Even though Joash is reported as doing what was right in the eyes of YHWH in both Kings and Chronicles, their evaluations are qualified: in Kings “in which Jehoiada the priest instructed him”; in Chronicles “all the days of Jehoiada the priest.” These caveats lead us to conclude that things might have changed after Jehoiada’s death. And indeed they did. Jehoiada died at the age of 130 and was honored by being buried in the tombs of the kings “because he done good with Israel, with God, and with his house” (24:16).

After this—no longer restrained by Jehoiada’s presence—the princes of Judah did obeisance [prostrated themselves] to Joash.

¹² This is the last word about Athaliah. Because she was a usurper of the Davidic dynasty, her reign is not described by the formula for the kings of Judah (or of Israel, for that matter), which normally includes a reference to where additional information about a particular king can be found.

So he listened to them. What did they say? We only know the results: they abandoned the house of YHWH, their fathers' God, and returned to base idolatry. "And wrath came upon Judah and Jerusalem because of this guilt of theirs" (2 Chr 24:18b).

YHWH sent prophets to them to urge them to repentance but they paid them no heed. Among those sent was Zechariah, a son of Jehoiada with a stern message: "Thus says God, 'Why are you transgressing the commandment of YHWH, you will not be prosper; because you have abandoned YHWH, he will abandon you'" (v.20). Their reaction was to conspire against him and stone him to death by order from the king in the courtyard of the temple, where Jehoiada had forbid even Athaliah to be killed!

The callousness of Joash's deed is highlighted by the chronicler and even more his most blatant violation of the just and righteous principle of $\text{לְעֵלֶיךָ יְיָ} \text{לְעֵלֶיךָ}$ for לְעֵלֶיךָ : "Joash did not remember the grace which Jehoiada his father had shown to him" (v.22). Zechariah cried out for requital from YHWH as he died. And so the reprisals began: Attacks by the Arameans—inglorious defeats at the hand of a much smaller force, because they had abandoned YHWH the God of their fathers, as Zechariah had said—predations resulting in the loss of many of the leaders and the taking of much spoil—Joash seriously wounded—killed in his own bed by conspirators because of the violently spilled blood of Jehoiada's sons [not just Zechariah]. And then—in contrast to Jehoida—*not* buried in the royal tombs.

Amaziah's bizarre idolatry and threats (2 Chr 25:14–16)

Amaziah dealt with those who had conspired against his father Joash, but he did not execute their sons because he wanted to follow the Mosaic law that—in the spirit of the expectation—fathers should not die because of their sons nor sons for their fathers, but rather each should die for his [own] sin.

He is given a positive evaluation but—like his father—with a caveat in both Kings and Chronicles: "only not as his father [ancestor] David; he did as his father Joash did" and "only not with his whole heart," respectively. Perhaps a manifestation of these qualifications is his quite perplexing, even irrational, behavior after YHWH had given him victory over the Edomites:

he brought back their idols to Jerusalem, set them up as his gods, prostrated himself before them, and offered incense to them.

YHWH immediately dispatched a prophet to confront the king and point out to him how irrational it was to worship gods who could not deliver their people from his hand. Amaziah did not allow him to continue, saying, “Who made you the king’s advisor? Stop right now lest they smite you” (v.16). The prophet stopped but not before pronouncing the king’s doom.

Divine blow after divine blow followed: a humiliating defeat by Israel—captured by Israel—brought back to Jerusalem in shame—600 feet of Jerusalem’s city wall broken down—the treasuries of the temple and the palace pillaged. In light of these disasters, no wonder a conspiracy rose up against him. He tried to escape by fleeing to Lachish. But they sent men to pursue him, and they executed him there. His body was returned to Jerusalem on horses and he was buried with his fathers (presumably in the royal tombs, but this is not explicitly stated).

The flagrant violations listed in Isaiah 5:8–30

Following the pronouncement of judgment on the nation for violation of the expectation, Isaiah specifies some of the most egregious: the stealing of houses and lands, self-indulgence while others suffer, mocking YHWH’s judgments, those who call evil good and good evil, and those who would pervert justice for a bribe. And upon these all violations of the expectation horrific judgments were pronounced.

Manasseh’s perfidy and provocation of YHWH (2 Kgs 21; 2 Chr 33)

That Manasseh engaged in heinous practices is quite bewildering especially when seen in the light of the fact that his father Hezekiah was one of the nation’s great reformers. This, however, is not the only instance. Jehoram of Judah followed Jehoshaphat, Ahaz followed a string of basically good kings; and Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, and Zedekiah were the sons of Josiah. Moreover, the converse also occurred: Asa after Rehoboam and Abijah, Hezekiah after Ahaz, and Josiah after Manasseh and Amon. But of no king of either Judah or Israel are the things said which were said of Manasseh, where his actions are described as

“the abominations of the nations which YHWH dispossessed before the sons of Israel” (2 Kgs 21:2); undoing all the reforms of his father Hezekiah (v.3a); reverting the nation to Baal worship, even erecting altars to Baal—as Ahab had done—in the temple (vv.3b–4, 7); adding to this setting up altars for sun worship and astral worship in the two temple courtyards; causing his son to pass through the fire and practicing every form of divination, sorcery, necromancy, etc. expressly forbidden according to Deuteronomy 18:9–12; leading the nation astray to the point that they did more evil than the nations which YHWH had destroyed before the sons of Israel, than the Amorites who preceded them, causing Judah to sin by his idolatries (vv.9, 11); provoking YHWH more than any since the Exodus (v.15); and shedding innocent blood to the extent that Jerusalem was filled [with it] from end to end (v.16; 24:4). And thus this judgment was pronounced upon the nation: “I will stretch over Jerusalem the line of Samaria, the weight of Ahab. I will wipe away Jerusalem as one wipes a dish—he wipes it and turns it over” (v.13).

Later the sins of Manasseh, particularly, for the blood of the innocent which he had shed, filling Jerusalem with innocent blood, so that YHWH was not willing to forgive, are cited as the cause for YHWH removing Judah from His presence (2 Kgs 24:3–4). Moreover, the chronicler tells that Manasseh was so bad that YHWH allowed the Assyrians to take him captive in chains to Babylon, where he repented, and when YHWH returned him to his throne, he tried to reverse all the wrong he had done, but it was too late for Judah (2 Chr 33:11–17). Furthermore, the final formulary reference to other sources of information on a king is unique in Manasseh’s case, in that it refers to his sins. In addition, he was not buried in the royal tombs but in a garden of his house. Amon, his son, named after the chief Egyptian sun god, reigned in his place and was so bad that after only two years his servants conspired against him and executed him.

The flagrant violations intoned by Jeremiah (Jer 7:5, 9–10)

Jeremiah had to contend against a people whose priests, prophets, princes, and sages thought and acted accordingly that

the Abrahamic covenant, the Davidic covenant, and YHWH's choice of and presence in Jerusalem made the city inviolable. The people thought that they could act any way they wanted, sin with impunity.

They seem to have forgotten about the expectation and the Mosaic covenant, and the conditional aspects of the Davidic covenant. Jeremiah disabused them of this idea in his famous temple speech in which the expectation figures prominently, speaking for YHWH:

Indeed if you strive to make your ways and actions good; if you strive to do justice each one to another, the stranger, the orphan, and the widow you do not oppress, innocent blood you do not shed in this place, and after other gods you do not walk to your own harm, then I will cause you to dwell in this place in the land which I gave to your fathers for perpetuity. (Jer 7:5)

And again, he expresses YHWH's incredulity about their misconceptions in his rhetorical question: "Stealing, murdering, committing adultery, swearing falsely, offering incense to Baal, walking after other gods who you do not know, you enter and stand before Me in this house which is called by My Name and say we are delivered—in order to do all these abominations? Has this house which is called by My Name become a bandits' cave in your eyes?" (9–10). He then points them to the ruins of Shiloh, the place where YHWH's name formerly dwelt, which he allowed to be destroyed because of the infidelity of Israel at that time. And YHWH communicates that he will do the same thing to the temple and throw Judah from his presence as he did Israel.

The atrocious treatment Jeremiah received

To put it mildly, Jeremiah's message was not well received, and he unjustly suffered much at the hands of his people and their leaders: beaten and put into stocks (20); seized after the temple speech and declared to be worthy of death (26); unjustly beaten and incarcerated in a prison compound, having been unjustly accused of defecting to the Babylonians (32:3; 33:1; 37:11–16); having to hide from the king and so not being able to go to the temple (36:5); thrown into a cistern (38:1–13); shanghaied to

Egypt (43:1–7); and then, according to tradition, stoned to death there. All those who participated in these outrages were severely judged.

Jehoiakim cutting up and burning the scroll (Jeremiah 36)

The last example we will look at—albeit, there are many more—is a particularly blatant act of contumely on the part of Jehoiakim.

YHWH ordered Jeremiah to write down all the pronouncements he had made up to that point, giving Judah yet another opportunity to repent. If the people read about all the calamity which he was about to do them because of their sins, each man might turn from his evil way and then he could forgive them of their perversions and sins. So Jeremiah dictated all his prophecies to his servant Baruch, which he wrote down on a scroll.

Then Jeremiah sent Baruch to read the scroll to the people on a fast day when the people from outside the city would assemble at the temple because Jeremiah had to remain in hiding. Jeremiah reiterated to Baruch, “Perhaps their pleading will fall before YHWH and each man will repent from his evil way, because the anger and wrath of YHWH is great, which YHWH has spoken to this people” (36:7). So Baruch took the scroll to the temple and read it to the people who were there while he was standing near to one of the gates.

An official heard the recitation and reported it to others. Baruch was brought before them and told to read the scroll again. After he did, they decided that king Jehoiakim must be informed about this. They also told Baruch that he and Jeremiah must go into hiding.

Jehoiakim was informed about the scroll and ordered it to be read to him. After each portion was read to him and the officials attending him, Jehoiakim cut up that portion and threw it into the fire. The king and his courtiers showed no reaction as the scroll was read and then burned. This happened until all the scroll had been burned up. Some officials begged the king not to burn the scroll but to no avail.

YHWH then ordered Jeremiah to write another scroll and add to it the crime Jehoiakim had committed and the punishment he would receive: no descendant of his would sit on the throne of David and he himself would not be buried after his death. YHWH will not be mocked nor his purposes thwarted. Jehoiakim would pay for his deeds!

This brings us to what is arguably the sternest and most striking condemnation of injustice and unrighteousness, Isaiah's stunning Song of the Vineyard.

Execration

Justice and righteousness is writ large in Isaiah: 12 times they are in tandem; “justice” (מִשְׁפָּט) occurs 42 times; “righteousness” (צִדְקָה) occurs 67 times; “righteousness” (צִדְקָה) occurs 36 times. But nowhere in this book of superlatives is there anything like the Song of the Vineyard.¹³ Isaiah's listeners did not suspect that this song which he sang would be a condemnation of the nation. Nor did they suspect that they would judge themselves condemned.

The song unfolds in five movements, pulling the listeners into participating in the action. First, Isaiah asked to sing to his beloved. Second, it was a song of his beloved's vineyard. Third, Isaiah sang as his beloved. Fourth, Isaiah revealed the identity of his friend. And fifth, Isaiah revealed the identity of the vineyard. Six key words should be kept in mind as we study this song: the crowd, concealment, conferees, conclusion, condign punishment, and condemnation.

As Isaiah sang of his beloved's vineyard, he refers to the provisions to achieve great expectations: the place of the vineyard—the best place (Isa 5:1b), the preparation of the vineyard—the best ground preparation and removal of stones (5:2a), the planting of the vineyard—the choicest vine (5:2b), the

¹³ Isaiah is referred to as “the prince of the prophets,” “the Messianic prophet,” and “the perfect artist with words.” He uses more names for YHWH than any other book and has the largest vocabulary of any book—although Job has more *hapax legomena*. The Servant Songs, the portrait of Christ in the OT, is found here, in particular the matchless fourth Song, 52:13–53:12, in which it is as if Isaiah were at the foot of the cross.

protection of the vineyard—wall and a watchtower (5:2c), the production of the vineyard—he carved a catchment basin in the rock to receive the juice (5:2d). Then he sang about the purpose for the vineyard—to bring forth good grapes. Finally he sang about what the vineyard ending up producing stink fruits!

Then Isaiah switched to singing as his beloved. He convened the crowd as a jury and polled them—what should I do (5:3)? Then he questioned the jury. What more could I have done (5:4a)? He knew that they were thinking that he could not have done anything more. The vineyard was at fault. Then he asked them why it happened that the vineyard produced stink fruits? He knew that they didn't have an answer. Then he sang like a judge about his decision: please let me inform you what I am about to do to my vineyard: remove its hedge so that it is for grazing, break down its wall so that it is a trampled place (5:5), I will make it a wasteland, it will not be pruned, it will not be hoed, and thorn bush and thistle shall come up (5:6a).

All of these things a human vintner could do, and no doubt the crowd agreed with everything Isaiah was saying. The vineyard was no good and had to be abandoned. But then Isaiah sang one more thing as his beloved: one more thing that he would do to the vineyard: “I will command the clouds to not rain upon it rain” (5:6b). At this point the crowd knew that they had been had. No human vintner could command the clouds! Isaiah's beloved was YHWH! And they probably suspected that they had condemned themselves. To remove all doubt and to confirm their suspicions, Isaiah continued his song, revealing the identity of the vineyard: “Indeed the vineyard of YHWH of the armies is the house of Israel and the men of Judah His pleasant planting” (5:7a).

And finally he sang as his beloved about expectations versus realizations: “I expected justice [good grapes]—instead oppression [stink fruits]; I expected righteousness [good grapes] — instead a cry for help [stink fruits]” (5:7b). Using in this indictment the same roots which occur in Genesis 18 reinforces YHWH's indictment of the nation in chapter 1 of Isaiah that the nation is like Sodom and Gomorrah and His addressing them as such.

After a horrendous eighteen-month siege, Jerusalem fell. The city was destroyed. The temple razed. The king—his sons were executed in front of him before he was blinded and dragged in chains to Babylon, where he died. The people were taken into exile. The vineyard was laid waste.

Restoration

After punishing the nation with exile for a host of sins, idolatry being paramount among them, but also according to the Song of the Vineyard, violation of the expectation being a direct cause, YHWH orchestrated the rise and domination of an empire whose policy was to repatriate those their predecessors (the Babylonians) had deported from their native lands. The Persians pursued this policy in order to curry favor with the national deities of the peoples they returned. YHWH promised a restoration which manifested justice and righteousness.

“The judged land will be restored and be a place where justice will tabernacle [שכן]...and righteousness will dwell [ישב]...” (32:12–20, esp. 16–17).

“Thus says YHWH, ‘Keep justice and do righteousness, because My salvation is about to come and My righteousness to be revealed’” (56:1).

The punishment that would come upon those who exiled his people would be a just vengeance. We behold the portrait of YHWH as Divine warrior: “He clothed Himself with righteousness like armor and a helmet of salvation on His head. He clothed Himself with garments of vengeance...” (59:17).

In an extraordinary personification, Jerusalem and Judah speak judgment to come followed by restoration:

I even I will watch for YHWH. I will wait for the God of my salvation. My God will hear me. Do not be happy over me, my enemy, that I have fallen. I will rise again. That I am sitting in darkness. YHWH is my light. The wrath of YHWH I must bear, because I have sinned against him, until he pleads my case and does justice for me. He will bring me out into the light and I will see His righteousness. (Mic 7:7–9)

Finalization

And finally we see that justice and righteousness characterize Messiah and his reign:

1. Isaiah 9:6—Both terms occur in a description of the characteristics of the eternal Messianic throne and kingdom.
2. 11:4–5—The Messiah “will judge the poor righteously and decide for the afflicted equitably.”
3. 16:5—“The throne [of the Messiah] will be established graciously. He will sit upon it in truth in the tent of David judging and inquiring of justice and zealous for righteousness.”
4. 32:1—“Indeed, A king shall reign righteously. And as for princes, they will govern justly.”
5. 42:1, 3, 4, 6—In this first of the Servant Songs, the Messiah is characterized with respect to justice and righteousness and the role truth plays: “justice [fronted, thus emphasized] to the nations He will bring forth,” “Through truth He will bring forth justice,” “...until He places on the earth justice,” and “I YHWH called you in justice.”
6. 53:8, 11—He had to be denied justice in order that we could be justified.
7. Jer 23:5—“Indeed, the days are coming—oracle of YHWH—that I will raise up for David a righteous branch. And a king will reign and He will be successful and He will perform justice and righteousness in the earth/land.”
8. 33:15–16—Verse 15 is very much like 23:5:

In those days and at that time I will cause to grow for David a righteous branch. And He shall do justice and righteousness in the earth/land.” But verse 16 adds: “In those days Judah shall be saved and Jerusalem shall tabernacle securely. And this is what it shall be named ‘YHWH is our righteousness.’”

Conclusion

Certainly there are many more verses dealing with justice and righteousness. Suffice it to say that the evidence is overwhelming that YHWH expected justice and righteousness from his people because it originates in him and belongs to him and he wants his people to be like him. But this has a sobering side: this was not an option for Israel; it was a demand. Consequently, violations were not tolerated and retribution could be justly severe, even for his choicest human servants. Moses was denied entry into the promised land for failing to uphold the holiness of YHWH, and it did not matter that he was so provoked by the unbelief and grumbling of the people. David lost four sons and his reign went into a “tailspin” because of his egregious violation of this expectation. But what of us? Are we free to ignore an expectation flowing out of the very character of YHWH and that which will characterize the rule of the Messiah? Would we want to?

The Rapture: Cosmic Segregation or Antidote for Oppression? A Critical Response to the “Racial Ideology of Rapture”

Cory M. Marsh

Abstract: This article offers a much-needed critical response to a 2016 essay published in *Perspectives in Religious Studies*. In this essay, author Nathaniel P. Grimes suggested that the doctrine of the rapture was an idea used to promote “cosmic segregation,” a heavenly avenue of escape for white supremacists from blacks and other ethnic groups which society had marginalized. Framed against contemporary notions of social justice, the article will first expose Grimes’s flawed methodology used to validate positions condemning the rapture as a racist doctrine before building a positive case for the rapture as a biblical antidote for oppression against minorities in the current economy.

Key Words: Rapture, cosmic segregation, white supremacy, social justice, suppression

Introduction

In keeping with trending social issues, a recently published article in *Perspectives in Religious Studies* by Nathaniel P. Grimes made a bold, if not sensational, claim: the

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dispensational understanding of the church's rapture is a racially coded theology legitimizing evangelical mistreatment of minorities in America since the wake of the Civil War.² Perceiving the rapture to be a doctrine invented by Darby and exploited by Scofield, Moody, and other Caucasian leaders of the American Bible Conference Movement, Grimes posited the pretribulational rapture was an idea used to promote a "cosmic segregation," a heavenly avenue of escape for white supremacists from blacks and other ethnic groups that society had marginalized.

The current article will offer a critical response to Grimes's thesis by first exposing a flawed research methodology he used to validate positions condemning the rapture as a racist doctrine. Additionally, against the backdrop of contemporary hotbed notions of social justice, the essay will positively build a case for the pretribulational rapture as a biblical antidote for oppression against minorities in the current economy. The thesis will be supported by two main drives: (1) The church is a spiritual, non-political institution comprised of the most marginalized people-groups in human history forming a collective body whom Christ will spare from impending devastation and doom upon the earth; and (2) The imminent appearing of Christ as taught in the pretribulational rapture demands an urgency in applying biblical social justice themes out of love for all ethnicities in obedience to Christ.

New Wine in Old Wineskins

It is nothing new to hear that the doctrine of the rapture is under attack. Critiques range from those leveled by conservative Reformed scholars to liberal critics condemning the doctrine as heretical, cultic, or even the handmaiden to the prosperity gospel.³ Lately, the doctrine concerning the pretribulational

² Nathaniel P. Grimes, "The Racial Ideology of Rapture," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 43, no. 3 (Fall 2016): 211–21.

³ Professor of NT at the Lutheran School of Divinity in Chicago, Barbara R. Rossing, surfaces in Grime's essay and perhaps represents the worst of mischaracterizations and *ad hominem* rhetoric describing the rapture as "a destructive racket" (1); "an invention" (19); "a false gospel of

rapture of the church is getting hit from a newer angle causing a stir in the church: social justice. Taking it one step further, recent advocates of social justice now claim dispensationalist teaching regarding the church's rapture promotes a racist, cosmic segregation. According to one such critic, Nathaniel P. Grimes, "Rapture portrays God's answer to the destructions of the sins wrought in the nineteenth century by war, greed, and white supremacy as a move to create a state of cosmic segregation."⁴ On the surface, there is not much to critique in Grime's statement. That a collective group of believers on this earth will indeed be "segregated" from the earth's wickedness—which certainly includes fleshly supremacist notions—is a staple belief within pretribulationism. However, as Grimes's essay plays out, the "segregation" he has in mind is the picture one usually draws in connection to racism characterized by 19th century slavery and 20th century Jim Crow policies. For Grimes, rapture theology viz., pretribulationism, was born in the wake of crises provoked by the American Civil War and has chiefly served to "legitimize" evangelical abandonment of society's most marginalized.⁵

Flawed Research Methodology

Though space limits a full critical analysis, there is much to critique in Grimes's research. For instance, in his article "The Racial Ideology of Rapture,"⁶ Grimes provides minimal direct quotation from those whose rapture teachings he believes justified racism such as Scofield, Moody, and Darby, choosing rather to depend on secondary sources that have clear anti-dispensational or anti-evangelical axes to grind.⁷ One such

prosperity combined with promise of escape from any consequences," used in connection with Jimmy Baker (4); even going so far as to say: "The Rapture vision invites a selfish non-concern for the world. It turns salvation into a personal 401(k) plan that saves only yourself" (18). See Barbara R. Rossing, *The Rapture Exposed: The Message of Hope in the Book of Revelation* (New York: Basic Books, 2005).

⁴ Grimes, "Racial Ideology," 219.

⁵ Ibid., 211.

⁶ Ibid., 211–21.

⁷ E.g., Michael Phillips, *White Metropolis: Race, Ethnicity, and Religion in Dallas 1841–2001* (Austin: U of Texas P, 2010); Barbara R.

example is an essay written by Michael Cartwright, an essay that Grimes intersperses throughout his article.⁸ In Cartwright's essay, itself largely dependent on questionable research,⁹ Cartwright draws loose connections between premillennial-dispensationalism and the racism surrounding the Reconstruction period. Describing dispensational hermeneutics in terms of platonic rationalism with prejudiced undertones, Cartwright goes so far to claim, "A dispensationalist hermeneutic may serve to conceal racist patterns of thought."¹⁰

Of the few times Grimes does quote from a dispensational thinker relevant to the time period, like C. I. Scofield, Grimes does so out of context, leveling charges of racism without any actual firsthand support. Simply referring to the prophetic declaration in Genesis 9 in the *Scofield Reference Bible* that "from Ham will descend an inferior and servile posterity" and using it to suggest that Scofield promoted a sense of security for "white identity" since the "white elites of Dallas" would be able to escape "the negroes" by way of rapture defies responsible

Rossing, *Rapture Exposed*; Douglas Frank, *Less than Conquerors: How Evangelicals Entered the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986); and Timothy P. Weber, *Living in the Shadows of the Second Coming: American Premillennialism 1875–1982* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983). Of the four, Weber's is perhaps the fairest in his analysis, especially his first edition published in 1979 (an historical survey stopping at 1925), which grew out of his doctoral dissertation at the University of Chicago. Nevertheless, the use of these and other secondary and tertiary sources in Grimes's article showcases a biased research methodology, with very few primary or firsthand sources represented.

⁸ Michael G. Cartwright, "Wrestling with Scripture," in *The Gospel Black and White: Theological Resources for Racial Reconciliation*, ed. Dennis L. Okholm (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), 71–114.

⁹ Examples include his dependence on overtly biased sources that have merely handed down repeated mischaracterizations of dispensational thought (such as Douglas Frank), and inaccurate, yet easily verifiable historical details (such as his inaccurately associating of C. I. Scofield with Dallas Theological Seminary [Grimes, "Racial Ideology," 94]).

¹⁰ Cartwright, "Wrestling," 174–175, n 48.

research in a stunning display of illegitimate jumps.¹¹ Indeed, not a hint of racism is present in any of the few direct quotations Grimes supplies by either Scofield¹² or D. L. Moody.¹³ Moreover, his treatments of J. N. Darby, though as prominent it is for his study, lacks any direct quotation from Darby himself, being entirely dependent on anti-Darbyite or anti-dispensational sources.¹⁴ It is Grimes's dependence on secondary and tertiary resources that unfairly mischaracterize premillennial-dispensationalism as racist theology—nothing from actual premillennial-dispensationalists or pretribulationists themselves. In light of such research methods, one is reminded of historian Jim Owen who wrote in *The Hidden History of the Historic Fundamentalists*: “More is required from the critic than ... to build one's reputation as a scholar by painting unflattering graffiti on their tombs.”¹⁵

A final yet major flaw should be noted concerning Darby and Grimes's thesis, that is, because the doctrine of the rapture was birthed in the wake of the American Civil War with ties to slavery, therefore the rapture contains racist ideology. Though Grimes suggests that Darby, a citizen of the UK, “pioneered” rapture doctrine,¹⁶ he neglects disclosing that there was no recent slavery or civil war in Europe out of which to posit a supposed racist rapture. The Slave Trade Act of 1807 and The Slavery Abolition Act (1833/34) were both passed by Parliament,

¹¹ See Grimes, “Racial Ideology,” 215. Moreover, in another instance, Grimes admits the curse of Ham in Genesis 9 known to yield inaccurate racist interpretations by some was an outdated argument “no longer in vogue” (213) at the time of Scofield but uses the same text to justify blaming Scofield and rapture theology as producing racism (215). In any case, Scofield does not use Genesis 9 in any way whatsoever to refer to blacks and/or minorities or the rapture.

¹² Ibid., 215, 218.

¹³ Ibid., 217, 218, 219.

¹⁴ Ibid., 214.

¹⁵ Jim Owen, *The Hidden History of the Historic Fundamentalists 1933–1948: Reconsidering the Historic Fundamentalists' Response to the Upheavals, Hardships, and Horrors of the 1930s and 1940s* (Lanham, MD: University P, 2004), 14–15.

¹⁶ Grimes, “Racial Ideology,” 214.

criminalizing the institution of slavery in Europe long before the American Civil War ensued (1861–65). This suggests there was no justified racist social milieu occurring in England and Ireland that would propel Darby or any other European dispensationalist to “invent” a rapture doctrine to escape blacks and other minorities.¹⁷ Yet, Grimes frames his entire argument around the American Civil War and American white supremacy as birthing the doctrine of the rapture while simultaneously positing that Darby invented the rapture in England. It seems Grimes cannot reconcile the contradiction, that Darby invented the rapture in the UK *and* that it originated in America in the context of American slavery and white supremacy.¹⁸ In actuality, “rapture theology” predates 19th century America and Europe by far. Scholars have long documented its origin as stemming from an early theology of imminence, even tracing it to within the first few centuries of the church.¹⁹

¹⁷ The term “justified” here is in the context of government-approved, institutionalized slavery which would then “justify” such racist notions. This author is *not* suggesting that racism is ever morally “justified,” nor is he so naïve as to believe that racism did not exist in Europe merely because of Parliament’s official prohibitory acts.

¹⁸ It should be noted that though Grimes is more focused on the ways rapture-belief developed in America rather than proving the origin of the doctrine itself, or that it is inherently racist, his essay nevertheless is pervasive with strong (illogical) inferences that inevitably lead one to summing the doctrine *is* racist—since those who taught it were supposedly racist. In any event, the tension present in Grimes’s article regarding Darby as the doctrine’s inventor and its inherent racism as carried over and birthed in America cannot be relieved.

¹⁹ See J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come: A Study in Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 193–205; cf., William Watson, “Medieval Dispensationalism (A.D. 430–990),” in *Discovering Dispensationalism: Tracing Dispensational Thought from the First to the Twenty-First Century* (El Cajon, CA: Southern California Seminary P, forthcoming). For an interesting historical survey of the mid-to-late 19th century disputes surrounding the idea of the Lord’s “imminent” return, see Richard R. Reiter, “A History of the Development of the Rapture Positions,” in *Three Views on the Rapture*, ed. Stanley Gundry (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 9–44.

Rapture Theology and Post-Civil War Black Ministers

Contrary to Grimes's description of rapture theology being racially coded and peddled by white supremacists of the 19th century, various Civil War era African American pastors and thinkers eagerly adopted rapture theology—and did much to promote it. A notable example is 54th Massachusetts Regiment veteran, the Reverend Eli George Biddle. A minister in the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, Biddle understood that the rapture of the church and subsequent premillennial return of Christ would ultimately put an end to all injustice in the world, even predicting that all racial prejudice and intolerance will cease in the church. At the imminent appearing of Christ, “all iniquity, injustice, unrighteousness, and impiety will be overthrown,” declared Biddle.²⁰ In light of Biddle's decidedly dispensational-pretribulational positions, it is surely strange that Grimes would suggest, “The racial ideology of Darby's dispensationalism had effectively served to exclude [black ministers].”²¹ In reality, Biddle and many of his black contemporaries viewed the rapture of Christ's body as the immediate and divine relief of injustice expected for those believers most oppressed.²²

Rapture and the Oppressed

Throughout his well-articulated, yet flawed, article, Grimes asserts the doctrine of the rapture served a 19th century politico-sociological purpose leaving devastating effects “from which neither America nor the church has recovered.”²³ In actuality, at

²⁰ Elder E. George Biddle, “The Restoration of all Things,” *Star of Zion* (February 1927): 1–5. See also Biddle's two-part series, “Pre-Millennialism: Or the Doctrine that the Second Coming of Christ Precedes the Millennium,” *Star of Zion* (August and September 1922). Cf. Mary Beth Swetnam Mathews, *Doctrine and Race: African American Evangelicals and Fundamentalism Between the Wars* (Tuscaloosa, AL: U of Alabama P, 2017), 82–83.

²¹ Grimes, “Racial Ideology,” 218.

²² Although it does appear that Biddle wavered back and forth on his premillennialism as time went on, he never flatly rejected it or his belief in the pretribulational rapture. See, e.g., Mathews, *Doctrine and Race*, 82–86.

²³ Grimes, “Racial Ideology,” 211.

the risk of being marginalized by Confederacy sympathizers who permeated local civic magistrates, many churches during the Civil War and post-war periods (even within the Southern Presbyterian tradition) held to dispensational doctrines like the rapture while simultaneously promoting themes of justice that sought to benefit oppressed minorities. This they accomplished by emphasizing an obedience to the NT, especially via evangelism-outreaches seeking to build Christ's church. Prominent dispensational leaders of the time included none other than John Nelson Darby who believed the present state of the church, as evidenced by its unbiblical emphasis of secular politics, was a "ruined" economy just like the others before it.²⁴

Influencing a swarm of American Christians, Darby frowned upon churches tied to denominations enveloped in political earthly affairs. He heavily praised independent assemblies that were bound together by nothing other than the public evangelization of the lost with a gospel message that resonated with society's poor and marginalized as well as the edification of believers, those who waited obediently for Christ to receive them to himself (John 14:3).²⁵ Indeed, it was their belief in the pretribulational rapture of the church that gave the most satisfactory hope to those Christians most marginalized by society, knowing that at any moment they can be "caught up"

²⁴ For more on Darby's position on the church's "ruin," see this author's chapter, "Luther Meets Darby: The Reformation Legacy of Ecclesiastical Independence," in *Forged From Reformation: How Dispensational Thought Advances the Reformed Legacy*, ed. Christopher Cone and James I. Fazio (El Cajon, CA: Southern California Seminary P, 2017), 109–44.

²⁵ These distinctive elements of Darby's ecclesiology is especially pronounced in two of his notable essays: "Considerations on the Nature and Unity of the Church of Christ," and "On the Formation of Churches," both in *The Collected Writings of J. N. Darby*, vol. 1, ed. William Kelley (Winschoten: Heijkoop, 1971). For good summaries of Darby, his influencers, and those he himself influenced, see Crawford Gribben and Mark Sweetnam, "J. N. Darby and the Irish Origins of Dispensationalism," *JETS* 52, vol. 3 (September 2009): 573–76; and, Bruce A. Baker, "The Early Life and Influence of John Nelson Darby" *JMAT* 21, no. 2 (Fall 2017): 110–26.

together to meet the Lord in the air (1 Thess 4:17) and be relieved of earthly pains like racism.²⁶

Spirituality (Not Passivity) Leading to Rapture

Churches that garnered praise by notable 19th century dispensational leaders in particular emphasized a renewed “spirituality in the church,” a position that refused to push secular politics and authority onto church members. This traditionally reformed doctrine which early dispensational thinkers adopted, maintained a distinction between church and state—the former’s purview being spiritual, the latter’s being secular.²⁷ Emphasizing a spiritual authority only so far as Scripture demands, its “Most ardent proponents,” Snoeberger explains, “were found in the pulpits of ‘border churches’—churches positioned along the geographical boundary between the Union and Confederacy, and easily the most vulnerable of all to violent schism.”²⁸ Indeed, pastors who advocated such a spirituality in the church during the Civil War, like Samuel McPheeters who led the Pine Street Presbyterian Church in St. Louis, were forced through un-Christian political means to resign their pastorates for refusing to stand with any civil legislature supporting states’ rights that

²⁶ Despite the fact that the Greek word ἀρπά[-ζω] / [-γμός] (“seize[-ure],” “snatch,” or “caught up”), which the Vulgate translated as *rapt*[-ura] / [-io] (“rapture”) occurs 14 times in the NT, some such as Barbara B. Rossing—from whom Grimes draws support in his article—definitively declares: “No specific passage in the Bible uses the word ‘Rapture’” (*Rapture Exposed*, 21). Rossing represents a slew of either uninformed or biased, non-exegetes who still hold on to the erroneous claim that the Bible nowhere uses the word contrary to the preponderance of actual biblical data (e.g., Matt 11:12; John 6:15; 1 Thess 4:17; 2 Cor 12:2; Jude 23; Rev 12:5, et al.). For a sound biblical defense of the pretribulation rapture position, see Richard L. Mayhue, “Why a Pretribulation Rapture?” *MSJ* 13, no. 2 (Fall 2002): 241–53.

²⁷ See Russell D. Moore and Robert E. Sagers, “The Kingdom of God and the Church: A Baptist Reassessment,” *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 12 (Spring 2008): 68–86, esp. 70.

²⁸ Mark A. Snoeberger, “A Tale of Two Kingdoms: The Struggle for the Spirituality of the Church and the Genius of the Dispensational System,” *Detroit Seminary Baptist Journal* 19 (2014): 57.

legalized slavery or for not swearing allegiance to federal government policies during church services.²⁹

Churches such as Pine Street Presbyterian and even Walnut Street Presbyterian Church led by pre-tribulationist James Hall Brookes who publicly defended McPheeters, promoted spirituality in the church by emphasizing personal holiness and evangelism while actively waiting for the imminent appearing of Christ. They did so by recognizing the economic distinction between the Christian church as entirely spiritual and the Jewish theocracy under which national Israel was formed in the OT.³⁰ As such, ecclesiology, not eschatology, was the governing doctrine that formed these early dispensationalists' belief in rapture and any cultural engagement they thought complemented such a belief. Because they viewed the church as purely spiritual and relieved of all legalistic politicism or theocratic notions that motivated national Israel, they were freed to engage the poor and underclass solely as spiritual ministry.³¹ Keeping civic debate at an arm's length, these churches advocated for the evangelism of all races and promoted holy living in the church as they sought

²⁹ Cf. *ibid.*, 61–63. A primary and sympathetic source account of the schisms endured by McPheeters due to his spirituality-in-the-church emphasis is Charles Hodge, “The Complaint of Rev. Dr. McPheeters,” *The Princeton Review* 3 (July 1864): 551–75. Hodge, like Brookes, adamantly defended the ousted McPheeters.

³⁰ Snoeberger, “Tale,” 57–58; cf. n17. For an in-depth analysis on Brookes and his positions see, Carl E. Sanders, “The Premillennial Faith of James Hall Brookes” (Ph.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1995).

³¹ Although the notion of a split between a spiritual church and secular world is an area that both Grimes and I certainly agree on, we have different starting points and consequently evaluations of that development. For Grimes, the notion of a split is precisely what he attempts to challenge by arguing against the idea of the church as purely spiritual and apolitical. He does this by presupposing *history* as the guide to ecclesiology and thus views the church as bearing a distinctly political role to play on the earth. Though I recognize the legitimacy of history as an important tool for one's ecclesiology, I nonetheless presuppose the authoritative NT as the only infallible guide for ecclesiology—regardless of how fallible men have developed such a doctrine throughout history.

to obey Christ's command to render to Caesar what was Caesar's and to God what was God's before Christ's return (Matt 22:21). Although the origin of the doctrine of the spirituality-of-the-church emphasized a distinction between secular political affairs and Christian spiritual affairs during the present economy, the distinction, in time, did yield an eschatological emphasis by dispensational proponents.³² Those who advocated such a distinction between secular legislature and spiritual living, as even John Nelson Darby did,³³ also taught that the church, a *spiritual* body comprised of believers from all backgrounds and ethnicities—even those most oppressed—would at any moment be raptured and forever relieved of fleshly social ills and earthly political agendas.³⁴ Such a doctrine ran congruent with Paul's description of the church in Galatians 3 that "there is neither slave nor free ... for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (v. 28). As such, the sin of racism has no place in the body of Christ or biblical rapture theology.

³² As Larry Pettegrew observed, it was never about "date setting," or an overemphasis on eschatology for the pretribulationist; rather, it was about holy living during the church age. Pettegrew quotes James Brookes who stated, "Many suppose that this [prophecy] is the only topic discussed, and some have circulated the report that we have fixed the day, or at least the year, of our Lord's return. But there is not a shadow of truth in either the surmise or the statement" (*Believers' Meeting at Clifton Springs*, 403, quoted in Larry Pettegrew, "The Rapture Debate at the Niagara Bible Conference," *BSac* 157, no. 627 [July 2000]: 349, n17).

³³ Snoeberger, "Tale," 60.

³⁴ It is worth reinforcing that Darby's conviction over the rapture of the church grew out of, not only his literal interpretation of the NT, but also his view of the spirituality-of-the church. Indeed, it was the church's spiritual character as distinct from the worldly affairs on earth that yielded so neatly to a pretribulational rapture. As such, he was able to say in his *Collected Writings*, vol. 11, "Prophecy does not relate to heaven. The Christian's hope is not a prophetic subject at all" (156). Thus, *ecclesiology* was the primary doctrine supporting Darby's pretribulational rapture, not his eschatology. Cf., John Walvoord, *The Rapture Question* (Findlay, OH: Dunham, 1957), 16, who, representing most modern pretribulationists, takes a stance similar to Darby's.

Remarkably, this runs overtly counter to Grimes's thesis that "rapture theology" is historically racist since it was developed in the wake of the Civil War by those who, at one time or another, allegedly supported Confederate abuses of blacks and sympathized with legalized slavery and/or white supremacy. Rather, it was what is today referred to as the pretribulational rapture that provided the ultimate positive antidote to oppression and gained its profound following in America *precisely because* of the issues surrounding slavery and the Civil War. Though Grimes claims his article does not "judg[e] the motivations of individual premillennialists" but rather aims to trace "the disastrous sociological effects" that the doctrine of the rapture has had on America,³⁵ his essay is replete with one-sided anti-dispensational biases, yielding only conclusions that do in fact judge the intentions of godly leaders from a previous century. A few notable examples will suffice.

One is Grimes's affirming quotation from Michael Phillips's *White Metropolis*, where Phillips draws an absurd comparison between dispensationalism, whiteness, racism, and Manicheanism. Attempting to connect to Phillip's false-comparison, Grimes goes so far as to suggest that the racism he believes is embedded in the rapture is the result of the dispensationalist's plain reading of Scripture.³⁶ Another instance is found in Grimes's concluding analysis: "Premillennialism in America was both shaped by white supremacy and in turn served to shape history in ways that disproportionately afflicted black people and others identified as non-white—those on the underside of society."³⁷ How one is to distinguish between the doctrine of premillennialism and those who promoted it is anyone's guess. Grimes does not offer an answer, only the

³⁵ Grimes, "Racial Ideology," 211, 220. In various places, Grimes seems to confuse the distinction between premillennialism and pretribulationism, often equating the two. It deserves clarifying here that while the latter always includes the former, the converse is not necessarily true. Historic-premillennialists, for example, are traditionally *posttribulational* while dispensational-premillennialists are traditionally *pretribulational*.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 215–16.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 219.

implication that they are synonymous. In any case, there is little merit to Grime's contention that fundamentalists' or dispensationalists' lack of efforts in social action or reform was because of a supposed pessimism demanded by their premillennial eschatology. Rather, as Snoeberger has well outlined using the father of American Dispensationalism James Brookes as an example, it was these pastors' conviction over the spirituality-of-the-church, not premillennial eschatology, that informed their resistance to large scale political social reform.³⁸

This means the pretribulational rapture of the church was at most a logical corollary or implication from these leaders' spirituality-of-the-church position and *not* their supposed pessimistic end-times views demanding cultural passivity. Held by reformed and dispensational thinkers alike, the spirituality-of-the-church underscores two distinct realms birthed in the wake of Christ's first coming that operate within their own divinely-appointed jurisdictions viz., the church and the state.³⁹ Teasing this distinction out yields logically to a pretribulational rapture for the former's main mission is spiritual, not political (e.g., the Great Commission). The state, on the other hand, will once again return to a theocracy after the church is removed, first to one that is distorted and evil (2 Thess 2:3–8), followed by one that is characterized by peace, righteousness, and justice in fulfillment of prophecy (Luke 1:32–33; Matt 19:28; 2 Tim 2:12; Rev 20:2 – 6; cf. Isa 2:2–5; 11:6–11; 19:24–25).

Rapture Demands Social Justice

One's theology of rapture, if indeed biblical, does not in any way "legitimize" evangelical's abandonment or mistreatment of minorities, as Grimes suggests.⁴⁰ In fact, by its distinct virtue of

³⁸ Snoeberger, "Tale," 63–64.

³⁹ Todd Magnum, *The Dispensational-Covenantal Rift: The Fissuring of American Evangelical Theology from 1936–1944* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2007), 8–10; 103–106, provides as strong a case as any demonstrating the affinity shared between old Princetonian Reformed thinkers and dispensational thinkers concerning the spirituality-of-the-church.

⁴⁰ Grimes, "Racial Ideology," 211.

imminence leading to an urgent proclamation of the gospel before Christ's appearing, the pretribulational rapture is the very catalyst that stimulates both evangelism as well as correcting societal ills. This is because, as Peter warned, "the end of all things is near" (1 Pet 4:7).⁴¹ In other words, it is *because* the end time is approaching, a time realized at either Christ's rapture of his church or his return with the church, that Christians are to show love and hospitality to those around them as good stewards of God's grace (vv. 8–10).⁴² This urgency demanded by dispensational-premillennialism runs contrary to both amillennial and postmillennial theologies that posit either a gnomic or virtually indefinite period of time before the return of Christ.

Whereas non-pretribulational options allow for passive engagement with culture—the thought being a sort of "time is on our side" notion—the doctrine of the pretribulational rapture rebukes such passivity knowing time is approaching its end. For those who hold to a pretribulational rapture, time is certainly counting down with each second representing a moment to win souls for the gospel—even if only giving a cold drink to a thirsty beggar in the name of Christ. Those who truly understand the doctrine of the rapture of the church do not sit idly by in the face of social evils, accepting them as the inevitable signs of the times—for example, the legalized genocide of countless numbers of minority races called abortion.

Former Fuller Seminary president Richard Mouw, who is not a dispensationalist, understands the positive social implications

⁴¹ The (consummative) perfect active indicative ἤγγικεν ("is near" or "is at hand") highlights its temporal function and stative aspect. Peter's usage suggests the current state of affairs is the result of Christ's first advent, and it is a state of affairs approaching its final destination which is the return of Christ. Cf. BDAG, 2165.2, BibleWorks.

⁴² Though it lies outside the scope of this paper, an argument can be made for a distinctly dispensational reading of Peter's admonition by underscoring his placing of οἰκονόμοι (literally, "dispensation-ers") with χάριτος θεοῦ ("grace of God"). Without pressing in too hard, Peter may be hinting at Christian responsibility in what is commonly referred to as the current "dispensation of grace."

of the doctrine of the pretribulational rapture perhaps better than many who claim to be dispensational. In answering his own stated question as to why those who hold to a pretribulational rapture actively protest societal evils when those very evils seem to run congruent with biblical prophecies, Mouw defends such rapture advocates with integrity:

Because they believe that obedience to the gospel requires us to speak out against evil, even if we have no realistic hope for success in stemming the tide, prior to God's final victory in history. If Jesus is to return during their lifetimes, they want to be found faithfully opposing all that dishonors his name, even if the things they oppose are prophesied in the Bible as signs that the end is in sight.⁴³

Indeed, Mouw captures well the inevitable tension the Bible presents with commands to love one another, including our enemies, and do good for everyone (Gal 6:10), even going so far as to step in and fight on behalf of the oppressed (Prov 24:11–12). Believers are to do these good things *as well as* expect the final days to “come with difficulty” (2 Tim 3:1) marked by evil people who will “go from bad to worse” (v. 13). This is, as George Marsden termed, a “paradoxical tension” that Christians must hold in balance; but good must still be done while there is opportunity.⁴⁴ Those who hold to a pretribulational rapture, most notably dispensationalists, therefore, cannot be thought of as clinging to a “racially coded theology” that justifies racism, as

⁴³ Richard J. Mouw, *The Smell of Sawdust: What Evangelicals Can Learn from their Fundamentalist Heritage* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 100.

⁴⁴ It is this very tension—which dispensationalist/pre-tribulationists hold in balance—that exposes a major weakness in Joel Carpenter's fascinating study, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (New York: Oxford UP, 1997). Throughout the book, Carpenter presents the early dispensationalist desire for revival as inconsistent with their descriptive eschatology, but he does so by misunderstanding their true motive for revival. Dispensational-pretribulationists have always understood that wrath is indeed coming, a horrific future event that in turn motivates their desire for societal repentance and salvation, much like Jonah toward Nineveh.

Grimes posited. Nor, can they be charged with neglecting social action that honors the Christ of Scripture as scholars such as Bahnsen, Gentry, and North have repeatedly charged.⁴⁵

Again, Mouw, a critic of dispensational theology, recognizes such mischaracterizations that dispensational-pretribulationists have endured unfairly. With honest transparency, he confesses, “The dispensationalist perspective was supposed to undercut Christian social concerns—but long before I ever heard of Mother Teresa,” says Mouw, “I saw dispensationalists lovingly embrace the homeless in inner-city rescue missions.”⁴⁶ Likewise, another notable critic of pretribulational-dispensationalism, Calvin University professor Joel Carpenter, expressed sentiments similar to those of Mouw: “As eager interpreters of ‘the signs of the times,’ they were among the first Americans to see—and denounce—the Nazi’s persecution of Jews.”⁴⁷ Carpenter would go on to describe the urgency fundamentalist-dispensationalists displayed toward those in society whom they reached as an outworking of their belief in the rapture, even admitting that it

⁴⁵ The charge of societal neglect is overwhelmingly so in Greg L. Bahnsen and Kenneth L. Gentry Jr., *House Divided: The Break Up of Dispensational Theology* (Tyler, TX: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), esp. 13–138; moreover, Gary North’s monthly newsletter, “Dispensationalism in Transition: Challenging Dispensationalism Code of Silence,” published by the Institute for Christian Economics, available at <https://www.scribd.com/document/141399309/Dispensationalism-in-Transition>, is a poorly argued denunciation of dispensationalism that also inaccurately represents the social implications of the pretribulation rapture.

⁴⁶ Mouw, *Smell of Sawdust*, 101.

⁴⁷ Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*, 244. Contra the outlandish claims by Kenneth L. Gentry Jr. in, “Anti-Semitism and Dispensationalism,” *Modern Preterism*, 2011, https://www.preteristarchive.com/2011_gentry_anti-semitism-and-dispensationalism/. Remarkably, Gentry attempts to make an argument that dispensationalism is more guilty of anti-Semitism than Reformed-supersessionism by claiming the former “frequently citing academic works” from ultra-critical or liberal authors who are themselves inconsistent with their claims, and that they [dispensationalists] celebrate the return of Jews to the modern state of Israel while anticipating their “wholesale slaughter.” The incredibly overt strawman arguments and irresponsible mischaracterizations against dispensational theology by all three scholars (Gentry, North, and Bahnsen) is nothing short of stunning.

was they, in contrast to liberal optimists that had “the more realistic outlook” on society.⁴⁸ Indeed, dispensational-pretribulationists motivated by nothing other than an urgent call to love, care for, and evangelize the most oppressed in the world—before the opportunity is lost at the church’s imminent disappearing—is the indelible legacy of rapture theology.

Rapture as Oppression’s Divine Antidote

The doctrine of the rapture insists on believers actively making disciples for Christ who in turn influence culture by their very lives while there is still time—“In order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen” (1 Pet 4:11). Contrary to Grimes’s premise of the rapture being a racial “cosmic segregation,” it is actually a divine antidote to wicked, racial oppression. Referred to by Paul as “the blessed hope,” the rapture of the church demands a vibrant Christian life as believers live and minister to others in this present age being “zealous for good works” (Titus 2:11–14).⁴⁹ Gerald Priest notes, “While it is scripturally true that Christians are to occupy until the Lord’s return, this injunction does not mean we squat and wait no more than we swat at everything that does not suit us. We are to reach out into the world evangelistically without becoming tainted by the world, which is not an easy task. ... Befriending the lost in this world need not translate into befriending worldliness.”⁵⁰

One must not forget that pretribulationists (or fundamentalist-dispensationalists) did in fact fight what they considered to be the social evils of their day, most prominent

⁴⁸ Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*, 244–45; cf. 108–109; See Mouw, *Smell of Sawdust*, 102; and Timothy P. Weber, “Premillennialism and the Branches of Evangelicalism,” in *The Variety of American Evangelicalism*, ed. Donald W. Dayton and Robert K Johnston (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1991), 14–15, for a similar conclusion.

⁴⁹ The substantive present participle προσδεχόμενοι in Titus 2:13 suggests a *proactive* waiting or expecting, one characterized by the good works and personal holiness in the world as stated in the pericope.

⁵⁰ Gerald L Priest, “Early Fundamentalism’s Legacy: What is It and Will it Endure Through the 21st Century?” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 9 (2004): 342.

among them being public school policy and prohibition.⁵¹ Though these may reflect “evils” of a generation now past, it was nonetheless their literal interpretation born out of conviction for Scripture’s authority that propelled them to actively engage the culture. Rather than allowing the belief in a pretribulational rapture to keep them from social action, they took to the fight their firm belief in the authority of Scripture. Indeed, at a recent ETS conference, Madison Trammel lists doctrinal loci such as the Bible, sin, salvation, the church, and eschatology as “most directly relevant to cultural engagement” for classic dispensationalists like Ironside, Gaebelein, Scofield and Chafer.⁵²

Moreover and undeniably, it was the zealous urgency caused by the belief in a pretribulational rapture that fueled modern foreign missions and global evangelism—movements often spearheaded by fundamental-dispensationalists, as documented by multiple scholars.⁵³ “Driven by a literal dispensational interpretation of the Bible,” contends Priest, “local church pastors and institute workers challenged young Christians to aggressively win their cities and neighborhoods to the Savior before it was ‘too late.’”⁵⁴ Priest would later suggest, “Following the example of campaign evangelists Moody and Sunday, many

⁵¹ Though the literature is vast regarding early 20th century dispensational/fundamentalist cultural engagement, a good primer is George M. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991). Although Marsden displays customary ignorance toward dispensational teaching, e.g., inaccurately stating that each dispensation represents a “different plan of salvation” (40), he is nonetheless recognized an authoritative voice in the history of early fundamentalism.

⁵² Madison Trammel, “Dispensational Theology and Fundamentalist Social Action: A Match Made in Heaven or Strange Bedfellows?” (paper presented at the Evangelical Theological Society Far-West conference, Riverside, CA, March 29, 2019).

⁵³ See, for example, Joel A. Carpenter, *Revive Us Again*, 28–31; 242–49; Gerald L. Priest, “Fundamentalism’s Legacy,” 335–37; and Larry D. Pettegrew, “*Rapture Debate*, 331–47, as well as his five-part series “The Niagara Bible Conference and American Fundamentalism,” published in *Central Baptist Quarterly* (1976–78).

⁵⁴ Priest, “Fundamentalism’s Legacy,” 335.

ventured out from the churches as itinerant evangelists exposing *personal* and *national* sin and calling for revival in a spiritually destitute land” (emphasis added).⁵⁵ A time was rapidly approaching, taught pretribulationists, when Christians would no longer have a witness in the world by loving those who society had always deemed unlovable.

Indeed, the love of God in Christ compels the church to love the poor, marginalized, and downcast of society in order for God to be glorified—and the urgency to do so is demanded in the doctrine of the rapture of the church. As such, Christ receiving his bride to himself as prophesied in the NT (cf. John 14:3; 1 Thess 4:17) before the most devastating period in human history occurs—that is, the doctrine of the pretribulational rapture—provides the greatest hope for believers of all ethnicities and backgrounds in the current economy as they have the hopeful opportunity to be spared from God’s wrath to be poured out on all the unregenerate (1 Thess 5:9).

Conclusion

The church is made up of the most marginalized people groups in human history. From its inception hated tribes from around the globe fill its ranks. Its homecoming or “rapture” does not promote a “cosmic segregation” as suggested by Grimes. Rather, it serves as a powerful antidote to oppression against minorities demanded by the imminent appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ receiving the church to himself before the great day of wrath on the earth epitomizes the special type of love a husband has only for his bride—a bride as diverse as the countless ethnicities and economic backgrounds that comprise her beauty. It is out of love for their fellow man—no matter the persuasion or ethnicity—and his need to escape impending doom which undergirds the pretribulationist’s zeal for the lost.

The sensational claim by Nathaniel P. Grimes that the dispensational understanding of the church’s rapture is a racially coded theology legitimizing evangelical mistreatment of minorities in America since the wake of the Civil War has been demonstrated to be severely flawed. Contrary to the belief that

⁵⁵ Ibid., 336.

the rapture is a modern doctrine invented by Darby and exploited by other white dispensational leaders in the late 19th century as a “cosmic segregation,” or privileged avenue of escape for white supremacists from blacks and other ethnic groups, this paper defended the pretribulational rapture as a biblical antidote for oppression against minorities in the current economy. As argued, the church is a spiritual (not political) institution comprised of the most marginalized people-groups in human history, indeed a collective body of countless ethnicities and nationalities whom Christ will spare from impending doom upon the earth.

A Brief Historic Examination of Christian Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism among Black Americans and Their Skepticism of Dispensationalism

Luther Smith

Abstract: This journal article briefly examines the historical trend of theology within black fundamental and evangelical Christian churches to evaluate its extensive distrust of dispensational thought. It observes the origin of black American Baptist history, how its roots are connected to Covenant Theology, and its commitment to the Baptist Confession (specifically, The Baptist Confession of 1689). This article also investigates the roots of the black Wesleyan Christian churches and their commitment to the Wesleyan doctrine, which is also underscored in their historic confessions. Lastly, this article notes the significant cultural movement during this time (i.e., slavery), and how these two specific denominations cemented the Covenant Theological system within the black fundamental and evangelical Christian churches in America, which has led to mistrust of the dispensational system.

Key Words: Black Americans, fundamentalism, dispensationalism, Covenant Theology, Southern Baptists, Methodists, slavery

Dispensationalism historically has made a significant impact on American fundamental evangelical Christianity. This was largely due, in part, to the influence of Cyrus Ingerson Scofield

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and the *Scofield Reference Bible*, published in 1909.² Although the *Scofield Reference Bible* was not used in American seminaries, the Bible was predominantly used in Bible institutes and local churches in the early 1900s. These Bible institutes and local churches by and large promoted dispensational thought in American Christianity. After World War I, due to the global conflict unlike the world at that time had seen before, the theological system of dispensationalism assisted in explaining the international conflict from a biblical perspective.² In effect, this explanation brought dispensational thought to the mainstream in American evangelicalism. During this time in history, dispensationalism was welcomed mostly by white American evangelical Christians. However when it came to black American fundamentalist Christians, it was met with skepticism, specifically among black American Southern Baptists and Wesleyans. They were convinced that the interpretative method found within dispensational thought was foreign to the historic Christian faith.

This study will examine the possible explanation of the origins of the distrust among black American fundamental evangelical Christians towards dispensational thought. To do so, it will briefly observe the history of black Southern Baptists and Methodists (i.e., Wesleyans). In addition, this article will present a brief investigation of the positive influence of these two denominations in their work against slavery and how their work against slavery may have impacted the black American interpretive method of the Scriptures. Furthermore, the timing of John Nelson Darby's travels in America and the black American fundamentalist Christian's response to Darby's instruction will also be observed throughout this discourse.

The "Genesis" of Slavery in America

Although slavery has been present throughout human history, slavery was introduced in America soon after the European colonists arrived. Native Americans were used as servants at the start of slavery in the New World; however, shortly after, Africans also began to be imported to the colonies. The first group of Africans were brought into the colony of Jamestown, Virginia, in 1619. These Africans were captives who were removed from a previous slave ship, the *San Juan Bautista*, which was carrying these Africans to be imprisoned for

² Renald Showers, "The Life and Legacy of C. I. Scofield," *Israel My Glory*, September/October 2016, <https://israelmyglory.org/article/the-life-and-legacy-of-c-i-scofield/>.

crimes in the country of Mexico.³ John Rolfe, concerning the first Africans brought to America, wrote the following:

About the latter end of August, a Dutch man of Warr of the burden of a 160 tunnes arrived at Point-Comfort, the Comandors name Capt Jope, his Pilott for the West Indies one Mr Marmaduke an Englishman. They mett with the Treasurer in the West Indyes, and determined to hold consort shipp hetherward, but in their passage lost one the other. He brought not anything but 20. and odd Negroes, which the Governor and Cape Marchant bought for victuals (whereof he was in greate need as he pretended) at the best and easiest rates they could.⁴

After they reached Virginia, these African slaves became part of colonial life,⁵ and it appeared slavery was more of a custom that was adopted rather than a law in the New World. They were not known as slaves at the start of this practice, but as indentured servants.⁶ Indentured servitude was practiced in both the North and the South. It was even possible at this time that one who was a slave, after a time,

³ "African Americans at Jamestown," National Parks Service, February 26, 2015, <https://www.nps.gov/jame/learn/historyculture/african-americans-at-jamestown.htm>.

⁴ "Transcription from Original," "20 and Odd Negroes": an Excerpt from a Letter from John Rolfe to Sir Edwin Sandys (1619/1620), https://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/_20_and_odd_Negroes_an_excerpt_from_a_letter_from_John_Rolfe_to_Sir_Edwin_Sandys_1619_1620.

⁵ Martha McCartney, "Virginia's First Africans," modified October 9, 2019, https://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/virginia_s_first_africans.

⁶ "Slavery," *New Standard Encyclopedia*, vol. 15 (Chicago: Ferguson, 2002), 466-67. It should be noted those who were in the care of owners at the start of this practice were not called "slaves" but "indentured servants." It was common practice that indentured servants were contracted (or covenanted) to work for a certain amount of years and were given room and board in exchange for their service. It was more than likely this practice of indentured servitude was taken from the OT (i.e., Exod 21:1-2; Lev 25:45-46). It was not until later on in colonial history (perhaps 1640 with the punishment involving John Punch, who was sentenced to a life of servitude to his owner, that slavery became lifelong. This sentencing, in effect, opened the door for the idea of lifelong slavery).

could gain freedom and his own land.^{7,8} In fact, in the mid-1600s Rhode Island passed a law stating that for a slave to be in the service of a person for more than ten years was prohibited. Contrary to popular belief, a small number of whites from the South owned indentured servants, and most of them owned about two on average.⁹ Furthermore, Indians and blacks who were free from their indentured servitude also owned slaves. In addition to some of the servants working on plantations (mostly for tobacco), others also worked as craftsmen, had domestic jobs, and obtained factory positions.

Slavery and Colonial Law

Over time the custom of slavery became law, with mixed ordinances on the treatment of slaves, within the colonies of the New World. Massachusetts became the first colony to observe slavery legally, with Maryland, New York, and New Jersey following suit many years later. However, Massachusetts also required that every black and Indian slave receive militia training. Virginia also passed a law that made it legal for freed blacks to own indentured servants. Furthermore in 1663, a court of Virginia ruled that after children were born, they were to retain the status of the mother (i.e., Hereditary Virginia Slavery Law). If the mother was a slave, that child borne to her would also be a slave. Yet, if the mother was a free woman, the child would also retain the status of freedom.

In the mid-1660s there seemed to be a shift in how the colonies began to view slaves, specifically black slaves. In 1664, the colony of Maryland was the first state to take action against interracial marriages. Furthermore, Maryland not only created a law that made all black slaves indentured servants for life (New York, New Jersey, North and South Carolina, and Virginia followed suit by passing laws concerning slaves of their own), but in Maryland a slave was considered a criminal if he left the care of the owner.

⁷ McCartney, "Virginia's First Africans."

⁸ This situation may be observed in the case of Virginia where an African black man named Antonio, who later went by the name "Anthony Johnson." Anthony Johnson was an indentured servant to a black man named John Castor. In the mid-1600s, Anthony Johnson had owned 250 acres of land and had his own indentured servants to till it (cited by facinghistory.org). It would appear at the genesis of indentured servitude, the ability of the person was more important than the color of the person, and that indentured servitude was a part of the cultural practice in the early colonies.

⁹ "Slavery," *New Standard Encyclopedia*, 15:466-67.

The laws soon affected the religious life for the black slaves in the colonies. In previous times when a slave became a Christian and was baptized in the church, his or her status was considered changed from slave to free man or woman. However in 1667, Virginia ruled that Christian baptism did not change one's status as being a servant (New York announced a similar law in the 1670s). Shortly after Bacon's Rebellion (1676) Virginia passed a law that all blacks and slaves were prohibited from owning guns and gathering in large numbers and allowed for the severe punishment of slaves who either attempted to flee or physically attacked Christians. Moreover, Virginia created a law that slaves who were imported were now indentured servants for life.

The shift in perception, and the degradation of slaves, was now expanded to include the general black population. During the early to mid-1600s, interracial marriages were an occurrence. However, similar to Maryland, at the end of the 1600s, Virginia passed a law that prohibited interracial marriages between whites and blacks, and whites and Indians. North and South Carolina also installed what had become known as the "Slave Codes." Some of laws outlined included that a large number of slaves traveling, without a white person overseeing them while they were traveling, was illegal. If these slaves were caught, they could be punished as outlined below:

And whereas, it may be attended with ill consequences to permit a great number of slaves to travel together in the high roads without some white person in company with them; Be it therefore enacted by the authority aforesaid, That no men slaves exceeding seven in number, shall hereafter be permitted to travel together in any high road in this Province, without some white person with them; and it shall and may be lawful for any person or persons, who shall see any men slaves exceeding seven in number, without some white person with them as aforesaid, traveling or assembled together in any high road, to apprehend all and every such slaves, and shall and may whip them, not exceeding twenty lashes on the bare back.¹⁰

Additionally, these codes also stated that no slave, or Negro, was able to own personal possessions or property and included sanctions

¹⁰ David J. McCord, ed., *The Statutes at Large of South Carolina*, vol. 7: *Containing the Acts Relating to Charleston, Courts, Slaves, and Rivers* (Columbia, SC: A.S. Johnston, 1840), XLIII.

against slave owners who promoted the personal growth of their slaves. One such code stated the following:

And whereas, the having of slaves taught to write, or suffering them to be employed in writing, may be attended with great inconveniences; Be it therefore enacted by the authority aforesaid, That all and every person and persons whatsoever, who shall hereinafter teach or cause any slave or slaves to be taught, to write, or shall use or employ any slave as a scribe in any manner of writing whatsoever, hereafter taught to write, every such person and persons, shall, for every such offense, forfeit the sum of one hundred pounds current money.¹¹

In 1705, the colony of Virginia also outlined their own codes for slaves. Among these codes included such laws that if a slave was killed, the owner was to be paid the value of what that slave was worth. These laws and many others that were outlined in other states such as New York highlighted and cemented into the social conscience that slaves should be viewed as property of the owner, even though it was not explicitly stated in the codes that slaves were property. Despite the efforts of the colonies to pass laws that would treat those who were indentured servants humanely (e.g., military captains in the South had to train one slave for every white male and the prohibition of the murder of blacks, Indians, and slaves from other blacks, Indians, and slaves), there were still laws that were exercised discouraging the promotion of blacks within the culture (e.g., free blacks, Indians, and even interracial slaves could never own property).

Prior to the mid-1700s there were several uprisings that occurred due to the slave codes that were being passed throughout the colonies and the harsh treatment of these slaves that occurred from the hands of their owners. Florida, who would return slaves who had escaped from the Carolinas from their owners seeking refuge, now forbade the selling back or returning of these slaves to their owners. Later during that time, Florida would give freedom and land to slaves who came to their colony. Furthermore, the colonies themselves were beginning to become disenchanted with British monarchy, setting the stage for what would lead to the colonies petitioning and ultimately going to war with the British for their independence. After the American Revolution, the new country, free from the rule of the British, still continued to have

¹¹ Ibid., XLV.

contentions about the slavery issue from state to state. While Rhode Island prohibited that slaves be removed from their own state, Pennsylvania began the process of freeing people from slavery, while New York and Massachusetts gave slaves the right to vote. However, the development of the cotton gin by Eli Whitney in 1794 brought back a demand for slave labor in the Southern states. By the turn of the eighteenth century, the slave trade was outlawed in the United States, but smuggling slaves still continued well into the mid- to late-1800s. The issue of slavery was addressed on a national level when Abraham Lincoln declared the Emancipation Proclamation in which he began his announcement with the following words:

That on the first day of January, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three, all persons held as slaves within any State or designated part of a State, the people whereof shall then be in rebellion against the United States, shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free; and the Executive Government of the United States, including the military and naval authority thereof, will recognize and maintain the freedom of such persons, and will do no act or acts to repress such persons, or any of them, in any efforts they may make for their actual freedom.¹²

At the end of the Civil War the American government ended slavery with the passage of the 13th Amendment that was added to the United States Constitution. Slavery has a complex and interwoven history with the colonies, most of whom were deeply religious, attempting to decide the best course of action in regard to the increasing population of indentured servants in the New World. These actions, despite their being well intentioned, were used by others to denigrate and harm blacks and other minorities during this period in history. It is within this social context that how one would interpret Scripture played a significant role in not only the promotion of slavery, but also in the abolishment of slavery.

Slavery, Christianity, and the First Great Awakening

As indentured servitude (and later slavery) was the custom of the colonies, this subject was also being discussed within Christianity, with

¹² "Transcript of the Proclamation," National Archives and Records Administration, accessed July 11, 2019, <https://www.archives.gov/exhibits/featured-documents/emancipation-proclamation/transcript.html>.

opposing positions of thought developing. One such issue was with water baptism. It was the custom in the colonies that no person who was baptized could be a servant to another Christian; however, when a slave became a Christian, this placed the owner in the position to release the slave due to his new identity in Christ.¹³ This led to hesitation for sharing the gospel with those who were slaves to sin and being free in Christ. In effect, the amount of evangelism among blacks was due in large part to the black population within the colonies. As Wheeler comments,

The intensity of the debate over evangelization of Blacks varied directly in proportion to the number of slaves or Blacks in the population, while the evangelization itself varied inversely. In the North, where Blacks were found in small numbers, their evangelization took place with some regularity through the efforts of ministers and missionaries. In the South, where there were large numbers of Blacks, evangelization was sporadic.¹⁴

Massachusetts, the first colony to legalize servitude for life (i.e., slavery), in this same law made a case for the humanity of slaves using the law of Moses and the theocracy of Israel, as noted below:

There shall never be any bond slavery, villeinage, or captivity amongst us unless it be lawful captives taken in just wars, and such strangers as willingly sell themselves or are sold to us. And these shall have all the liberties and Christian usages which the law of God established in Israel concerning such persons cloth morally require. This exempts none from servitude who shall be judged thereto by authority.¹⁵

In the early seventeenth century there was a concerted effort to evangelize the African slaves. Such groups included Roman Catholics, Anglicans, and even the Quakers.¹⁶ Even the Church of Jesus Christ of

¹³ Edward L. Wheeler, . "Beyond One Man: A General Survey of Black Baptist Church History," *RevExp* 70, no. 3 (1973): 309-19.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 310.

¹⁵ "Massachusetts Body of Liberties, 1641," Constitution Society: Everything Needed to Decide Constitutional Issues, accessed August 14, 2019, <http://www.constitution.org/bcp/mabodlib.htm>.

¹⁶ Wheeler, "Beyond One Man," 309-19.

Latter-Day Saints (i.e., Mormons) attempted to evangelize African slaves. Over time the Roman Catholics and Anglicans were not successful in expanding their influence into converting Africans to their religion. This could have partly been due to the liturgical pattern of worship within these particular denominations. Despite the efforts of Mormons to make progress with African slaves, they also met little success. This was more than likely due to their doctrinal discrimination of blacks not being accepted into the priesthood. The Quakers, in their evangelistic attempts, fared well due to their intentions of desiring to educate African slaves. However, it was the First Great Awakening (1730-1755) that had a significant impact on black slaves. The roots of this revival began with the Dutch Reformed churches in New Jersey in the early 1700s and spread throughout the commonwealth.¹⁷ The revival then expanded to the middle colonies, many of whom were Calvinistic in their theology. Soon after, the First Great Awakening spread the fervor of revivalism from Northern and Middle colonies to the Baptist and Methodist congregations in the South,¹⁸ and with this movement also brought the involvement to speak against the atrocities of slave owners to their slaves. The prominent preacher George Whitefield, in a letter to the early colonists, addressed the inhumane treatment of slaves by their slave-owners:

Your Dogs are caress'd and fondled at your Tables --- But your Slaves, who are frequently stiled Dogs or Beasts, have not an equal Privilege. They are scarce permitted to pick up the Crumbs which fall from their Masters Tables: Nay, some, as I have been informed by an Eye-Witness, have been, upon the most trifling Provocation, cut with Knives, and had Forks thrown into their Flesh --- Not to mention what Numbers have been given up to the inhuman Usage of cruel Task-Masters, who by their unrelenting Scourges have ploughed upon their Backs, and made long Furrows, and at length brought them even to Death itself.¹⁹

¹⁷ Earle E. Cairns, *Christianity through the Centuries: A History of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 401.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ "A Letter from the Rev. Mr. George Whitefield, to the Inhabitants of Maryland, Virginia, North and South-Carolina," [Encyclopediavirginia.org](https://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/media_player?mets_filename=evm0003029mets.xml), https://www.encyclopediavirginia.org/media_player?mets_filename=evm0003029mets.xml.

In addition, the preaching of the First Great Awakening was unparalleled during this time in history. This revival focused heavily on man's sinfulness and the necessity of salvation from eternal damnation. This mode of preaching led those who heard the messages to have such reactions like crying and wailing.²⁰ This type of freedom to express oneself in the service may have been more welcomed by the slaves at the time due to their cultural practice in their origin country of Africa. As one author noted, "The evangelical emotionalism that allowed freedom of expression and characterized the Methodists and Baptists of this period no doubt bore a resemblance to the religious expressions of West Africa, and to tribal religious practices."²¹ At this time in history, man's sinfulness brought to light by the preaching of God's word lead to more discussions in the concerning the treatment of mankind, particularly slaves. This phenomenon brought together many denominations, specifically the Presbyterians, Methodists, and Baptists. Due to the social activity that was found within all of these religious institutions, with the word of God at the helm, black slaves were beginning to be accepted among these organizations, specifically among the Baptists, although they still had very little influence within these congregations. As Torbet commented,

The churches of the state generally included Negroes in their membership and imposed upon their slave-holding members a strict code to regulate the religious care and treatment of the slaves. A similar policy was followed in other Southern states including North Carolina and Maryland. It appears that the Negro members were provided with a certain space in the meeting-house for worship, but were not permitted to vote in business sessions, although they might be heard in cases related to their own race.²²

The First Great Awakening brought the advent of the first churches in early America, with the majority of black Americans at this period of time joining white Baptist and Methodist churches. However, not all congregations agreed with this change, as there were some congregations that offered second services, segregated church entrances and pews, and in some cases, mass numbers of white congregants exiting the church meetings altogether, leaving black

²⁰ Robert G. Torbet, *A History of the Baptists* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson, 1950), 240.

²¹ Wheeler, "Beyond One Man," 311.

²² Torbet, *History of the Baptists*, 240.

congregants to start their own church services.²³ Yet this period of revival and mass conversion still proved productive, especially in Southern states where slavery was more prominent.²⁴

The Second Great Awakening (1790-1840) further solidified the evangelism among black slaves. This period of history was brought by early camp meetings, tent events, and heavy ecstatic emotionalism, which resonated with many blacks, slave and free. This further cemented the doctrinal and denominational influence between these two groups. Additionally the Second Great Awakening further progressed the thought of early Americans in their denominations concerning this issue of slavery. One such writer stated the following:

By 1800, black Methodist churches began to be established, fostered by black members responding to revivals and camp meetings, mainly in Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina. Methodist circuit riders and the autonomy of local white Baptist preachers in the rural South contributed to the rapid dissemination of and response to the gospel. For blacks displaying a fervor and giftedness for exhorting others, they were allowed to preach to other blacks and sometimes unconverted whites.²⁵

As in the First Great Awakening John Wesley and his predecessor George Whitefield²⁶ continued to speak out against the atrocities of

²³ Diane J. Chandler, "African American Spirituality: Through Another Lens." *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 10, no. 2 (November 2017): 159-81.

²⁴ This is noted by Edward Wheeler who cited Owen D. Pelt and Ralph L. Smith in their book *The Story of the National Baptist*. The First Great Awakening continued to be promoted with the Baptists and the Methodists in the Southern states. As a result, it was this particular revival that solidified religion in the South.

²⁵ Chandler, "African American Spirituality," 166.

²⁶ There are some who are convinced that George Whitefield was not against slavery, but against the barbaric and inhumane conduct of slave masters toward their slaves, as an author noted, "By the mid-1740s, however, Whitefield became connected with slave master who had converted under his ministry. And though he never publicly retracted his criticisms of the institution, he complied with his wealthy friends offers to give him slaves and a South Carolina plantation. More importantly, Whitefield became convinced that he needed slaves to work at a Georgia plantation to fund the operations of his Bethesda orphanage, outside of

slavery. Another such leader of the Second Great Awakening was Charles Finney, who in his discourse connecting slavery to selfishness wrote,

No human constitution or enactment can, by any possibility be law, that recognizes the right of one human being to enslave another, in a since that implies selfishness on the part of the slaveholder. Selfishness is wrong per se. It is therefore always and unalterably wrong. No enactment, human or divine, can legalize selfishness and make it right, under any conceivable circumstances. Slavery, or any other evil, to be a crime, must imply selfishness. It must imply a violation of the command, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." It implies a breach of this, it is wrong invariably, and necessary, and no legislation, or anything else, can make it right.²⁷

In the colonies of the New World the Bible was a central part of life, and even within this culture the debate of slavery was beginning to take shape. This was due in part to the customs and laws that were in the colonies about how slaves who came to Christ were to be treated. This issue continued to be placed before the colonies' conscience with the advent of the First Great Awakening, exposing man's sin and the need for a Savior, with the Second Great Awakening continuing this tradition. This preaching, in effect, led to the humanitarian efforts against slavery, and at the forefront of this battle were the two denominations that would have a significant impact on black slaves: the Baptists and Wesleyans.

Slavery, Christianity, and the Civil War

The influence of the Scriptures continued to have an impact on the cultural perspective of slavery. Black and white pastors would preach to their congregants about the decency and dignity of human beings by defending that mankind is created in the image of God. As a

Savannah, which was the great charitable project of his career" (Thomas S. Kidd, "George Whitefield's Troubled Relationship to Race and Slavery," January 6, 2015, *Christian Century* Blog, <https://www.christiancentury.org/blogs/archive/2015-01/george-whitefield-s-troubled-relationship-race-and-slavery>). This underscores that slavery, as a practice, was more about the societal custom among the early colonists in America at the time, than it was about superiority over another ethnicity.

²⁷ Charles Finney, *Finney's Systematic Theology: The Complete & Newly Expanded 1878 Edition* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1994), 29.

result of this message, many churches in the North took stances against the practice of slavery, and many denominations took sides on this subject.²⁸ Additionally, denominations would train blacks with compelling qualities that led to, in effect, greater influence among black slaves. As one author noted,

The denomination that allowed Blacks to preach had an advantage in attracting Blacks. African slaves with exceptional speaking ability or exceptional leadership qualities found it easier to become exhorters or ministers among the Baptist than in other denominations, which usually required more formal training...Early in Black Baptist history, then, the role of the preacher took on special significance. He became the strong charismatic leader among an oppressed people, a center of power among the powerless²⁹

In the case of the Methodists concerning the antislavery movement, the Wesleyan Methodist Church was established in 1843 with the purpose of promoting members who did not own slaves. This was in opposition to the Methodist Episcopal Church, which promoted slavery and defended slave-owners in their congregations.³⁰

Hostile tensions grew between the North and the South, as the culture began to shift from the rural areas to industrialized places in the North. As a result many of the Methodist denominations began grow rapidly. Within the conflict of the Civil War there were many advocates of the abolitionist movement who were associated with the Methodist denomination, as Chandler observed when writing the following: "Harriet Tubman, an A.M.E. [i.e., African Methodist Episcopal] Zion member, helped slaves escape to free states in the North and transition to cities. The estimated 90,000 African Americans who initially escaped to the North were the first fruits of a massive migration to come."³¹

²⁸ It should be recognized that there were many missionary movements by black Americans that had developed due to the attitude change of slavery in the North. There were black churches established in the South, except most of them were overseen by white Southerners.

²⁹ Wheeler, "Beyond One Man," 311-12.

³⁰ Earle E. Cairns, *Christianity through the Centuries: A History of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 458.

³¹ Chandler, "African American Spirituality," 166.

The Baptists were also involved in inner conflicts within their denomination regarding slavery. Most Baptists went along with the culture of slavery. As Torbet noted,

The majority of the Baptists were cautious about the issue for three reasons: (1) their preference for unity whenever possible; (2) their hesitancy to violate the principle of non-interference in of the church in civil affairs; (3) the presence of slave holding members in their churches.³²

However, there were Baptist congregations and organizations developed for the movement of anti-slavery. Among them were the Hancock Association (1836), the Washington Association (1836), and the Freewill Baptist Anti-Slavery Society (1843), who were all involved in promoting abolition in the Union. Much like the Methodists who had divided over slavery, there were schisms within the Baptist denominations. For example, the Southern Baptist Convention was formed as a response to the Baptists in the Northern states and their response to anti-slavery.

At the conclusion of the Civil War, those denominations that sought to assist former black slaves and those who escaped from the South to the North in search of freedom saw large numbers of black Americans among their congregations. This was also partly due to the contribution of Baptists and Methodists who assisted to meet the basic needs of former slaves by providing them housing, work, and food.³³ Slavery, which had developed from indentured servitude, was now placed at the fore of the early Union. The Baptist and Wesleyan churches continued to remain at the center of this social debate, even dividing and creating sub-denominations over this very issue. However, even after the Civil War, the two major denominations, despite the various schisms that occurred due to their social work, continued to have a religious impact among former black slaves in both the North and the South.

³² Torbet, *History of the Baptists*, 300.

³³ Chandler, "African American Spirituality," 167.

The Interpretive Perspective of the Baptists and the Methodists

The Scripture during the time of the colonies and early America was extremely influential in common life.³⁴ As a result of the significant impact of the Scriptures, how the colonies and the early United States viewed the Bible had influenced the black slaves' explanation of the Scriptures. Historically, most Baptist congregations in the early colonies and the Union showed doctrinal fidelity to Covenant Theology, specifically outlined in various confessions. As one author explained, "The same use [of the confessions] of Scriptures became prevalent among American Baptists, for in 1742 the Philadelphia association adopted as its Declaration of Faith another Calvinistic Confession which had been drawn up by London Baptists in 1689."³⁵ In chapter 7 of the London Baptist Confession of Faith is a statement concerning the Covenant of Redemption, Covenant of Works, and the Covenant of Grace.³⁶ To the Baptists, these covenants became the means by which they were convinced Scripture was to be understood.³⁷ As Baptists in the colonies during the First and Second Great Awakening, they had received many black slaves in their congregations, and as the slaves heard the sermons in their churches, they were exposed to this particular theological system.

Furthermore, this system also added to the overall cultural context of their function in society, as the black slaves directly related to the historical narrative of the slaves that were held in captivity in Egypt,³⁸

³⁴ This theological influence was observed in colonial law. For instance, in the Law of Massachusetts it is written that those who worship another god other than the Lord, a person was engaged in witchcraft, or blasphemed the Holy Spirit were offenses that were punishable by death. This is taken from the OT instruction given to Moses by the Lord to the nation of Israel (cf., Deut 13:1-5; 18:15-22).

³⁵ Torbet, *History of the Baptists*, 475.

³⁶ "1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith," *The Reformed Reader*, accessed August 14, 2019, <http://www.reformedreader.org/ccf/1689lbc/english/Chapter07.htm>.

³⁷ Torbet, *History of the Baptists*, 476.

³⁸ Due to the Africans' and slaves' perspective in relating their struggles of slavery to the nation of Israel, it would not be too far to believe that they considered the black preacher of their time to be like a Moses figure, who was called by God to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt into the promised land and give them the truth about God directly.

as well as the ministry of Jesus Christ to the downtrodden and the slave. As Chandler commented,

Portions of Scripture, including the Gospels and the Exodus motif in the Old Testament where the Israelites awaited freedom from Egyptian bondage, deeply resonated with converted slaves. Additionally, the realization that Jesus came into the world to exalt the humble and that God was no respecter of persons contributed to the deepening faith through commonality, community, safety, and identity that would eventually lead to black congregations.³⁹

The Methodists adopted the *Articles of Religion* in 1794, which were taken from the thirty-nine articles that originated from the Church of England. Contained in the *Articles of Religion* were twenty-four statements that articulated the doctrine of the Methodist religion. In contrast to the London Baptist Confession of 1689, the *Articles of Religion* did not contain the explicit descriptions of Covenant Theology, nor did they include the distinction between Israel and the church, and there was no statement concerning eschatology.⁴⁰

This interpretive influence is seen in many of the black preachers and Negro spirituals of this time in history. For example in the song titled "Bound for Canaan Land" contains the following words:

Where're you bound?

³⁹ Chandler, "African American Spirituality," 164.

⁴⁰ Even though John Wesley did not pen an official doctrine in the *Articles of Religion*, it is interesting to note his explanation of the view of Israel in regard to eschatology. In his interpretation of Revelation 12 concerning the image of the woman clothed with the sun, with the moon at her feet and the crown of 12 stars on her head, he wrote, "A woman - The emblem of the church of Christ, as she is originally of Israel, though built and enlarged on all sides by the addition of heathen converts; and as she will hereafter appear, when all her 'natural branches' are again 'grafted in.' She is at present on earth; and yet, with regard to her union with Christ, may be said to be in heaven. ..." Concerning Revelation chapter 12 he commented, "The whole of this chapter answers the state of the church from the ninth century to this time." Even though this doctrinal subject is absent from this particular document, it would appear he conflated the program of Israel with the church. See John Wesley. "Bible Commentaries: Wesley's Explanatory Notes, Revelation 12," accessed August 14, 2019, <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/wen/revelation-12.html>.

Bound for Canaan land
O, you must not lie
You must not steal
You must not take God's name in vain
I'm bound for Canaan land

Your horse is white, your garment is bright
You look like a man of war
Raise up your head with courage bold
For your race is almost run

How you know?
Jesus told me.

Although you see me going so
I'm bound for Canaan land
I have trials here below
I'm bound for Canaan land.⁴¹

Similarly the words to the song "Dry Bones" (aka "Dem Bones") spoke of Ezekiel and how the word of the Lord through Ezekiel made the dry bones in the valley come alive (Ezek 37:1-8). This song was used by black slaves to discuss the power of the word of God in the life of the church, rather than the future work of God to restore the nation of Israel (Ezek 37:11-14). This type of belief was also found in the black preachers of this time. One such preacher, John Jasper, in a sermon titled "De Sun Do Move," used the story of Joshua and the sun standing still to discuss the doubt a saint has about the Lord's word.⁴²

Additionally, this sermon by John Jasper did not distinguish between the works of Lord for Israel while they were in the promised land, spiritualizing this particular verse for the church. Most preachers in the country at this period in history, especially black preachers, were more concerned about the saving of souls from eternal damnation rather than the complete deliverance of the nation of Israel or the system of

⁴¹ "Bound for Canaan Land," *Negrospiruals.com*, accessed August 14, 2019, http://www.negrospiruals.com/songs/bound_for_canaan_land.htm.

⁴² John Jasper, "De Sun Do Move." Baptist History Homepage, accessed August 14, 2019, <http://baptisthistoryhomepage.com/jasper.sun.do.move.html>.

dispensationalism. Concerning early twentieth-century preacher, Dr. R. B. Roberts, one author noted,

For Roberts, the verses⁴³ in question were not so much a guidebook to future events (or even an explanation of past human events) but instead were a part of a comprehensive plan for salvation contained in scripture and plainly understood by those who read it. Reading with guidance was still a part of his mission, as likening the six steps to Solomon's throne to the stages of the life of Christ was not an obvious connection.... The exercise served as a means for the believer to understand the actions of required of him or her in order to gain eternal life and avoid eternal punishment.⁴⁴

The Bible was the centerpiece of colonial and early American life, and due to the extensive evangelistic work of the Baptists and the Wesleyans and their promotion of human decency and antislavery, this gave these two denominations great gains among black and free slaves in the North and the South. Due to the increase of blacks within these congregations, they had heard and believed the theological system of Covenant Theology, or an equivalent of the system that was found in their confession and creeds and were taught within their local churches.

Consequently, those who were black preachers had learned from their churches this particular doctrine, which was mainly soteriological in its scope. In addition, due to the early preaching to slaves, blacks identified with national Israel and connected the messages of freedom and grace in their songs and their preaching, connecting commonalities between their slavery and the OT nation. Additionally, the use of certain passages of Scripture, especially those of an eschatological nature, were used for evangelism. All of these factors possibly paved

⁴³ The "verses" the author notes in this paragraph is 2 Chronicles 9:17 in which Dr. R. B. Roberts outlays what he refers to as the "six steps" of the "throne of Solomon" foretelling of the ministry of Christ in his first advent, specifically his incarnation, baptism, temptation, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. Furthermore he connected this verse with the verses in Revelation 5:1-8 to show that Jesus is the faithful witness who redeemed all nations from their sin. The interpretive method used by R. B. Roberts and others further underscored the soteriological grid that was placed on the Scriptures for the purpose of evangelism and Christian piety.

⁴⁴ Mary Beth Swetnam Mathews, *Doctrine and Race: African American Evangelicals and Fundamentalism between the Wars* (Tuscaloosa, AL: U Alabama P, 2017), 78.

the way for the uncertainty and cynic attitude among black slaves and early black Americans to adopt dispensational thought.

Dispensationalism and the Suspicion of Black Americans

In the late nineteenth century there were a few theologians and Bible scholars who endorsed dispensational thought.⁴⁵ However the system was being instructed and taught more on a local church level rather than in academic institutions. It was not taught in higher education until John Nelson Darby came to America to promote dispensational thought among many denominations. During his time in the United States, he found an audience among the Brethren and some Presbyterian churches. However it was difficult for Darby to penetrate any other denominations due to their established traditions and theological beliefs. As Darby commented,

They are going on happily enough in the east, some added, but no great progress in numbers; in the west a good many Presbyterians, several ministers among them, teach the Lord's coming, the presence of the Holy Ghost, that all sects are wrong, but as yet few move from their place.⁴⁶

Darby was encouraged to observe Bible teachers instructing their congregations in proper doctrine concerning the second coming, and the indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. Yet many congregations were dismissive of adopting dispensational thought as the way to read and explain Scripture. Black Baptist and Methodist churches agreed with their white counterparts in respect to the fundamental teachings of Scripture (i.e., the inerrancy of Scripture, the virgin birth of Christ, the substitutionary atonement of Christ, the physical resurrection of Christ, and his second coming).⁴⁷ Yet when it

⁴⁵ Such dispensational Bible scholars included Arno Clemens Gaebelein (1861-1945), James Hall Brooks (1830-1897), and Henry Ironside (1878-1951).

⁴⁶ Quoted in Larry V. Crutchfield, *The Origins of Dispensationalism: The Darby Factor* (Lanham, MD: UP of America, 1992), 14.

⁴⁷ There are many that would include the supernatural works of Jesus as a fundamental. However this was ancillary point that supported all of the other fundamentals. Furthermore, due to the soteriological and hyper-ecclesiastical focus of people's interpretation at this particular time, the

came to dispensationalism, most Black churches, due to their hermeneutical perspective of the end times, and their position of an ethnic Israel observed the system as problematic. As Mathews noted,

While African American Protestants lined up with white fundamentalists on many common tenets, they did not voice dispensationalist notions with nearly the same frequency. In fact, these Baptist and Methodist writers, with a few notable exceptions, tended to read eschatological texts of apocalyptic passages and a reluctance to embrace John Nelson Darby's complex and often innovative system of reading for clues about the end of time.⁴⁸

Early black American Baptists and Methodists who maintained fidelity to their theological system (i.e., Covenant Theology) believed that Darby's way of reading Scripture, from their point of view, was inconsistent from the traditional way that Scripture had always been explained. Mathews comments,

... for African-American Baptists and Methodists between the wars, there was a single theological objection to dispensationalism—it was, in their opinion, a newfangled and contrived way of reading the Bible.... For them, a recent (within the last 50 years) method of interpreting Scripture that required alternative meanings beyond the traditional literal and allegorical was a wrong-headed practice.⁴⁹

This traditional and allegorical interpretive method could be observed within the writings of Eli George Biddle. He was an African American AME Zion preacher and writer for the *Star of Zion* who appeared to be intrigued by Darby's writings. However, upon further examination of later articles that Eli George Biddle wrote, he further distanced himself from the system and instead opted to come up with his own peculiar explanation concerning the nature of God in end time

miracles of Jesus were not highlighted, but more of how these miraculous works fit into the overall redemptive work of Christ for mankind.

⁴⁸ Mathews, *Doctrine and Race*, 76.

⁴⁹ Thomas Kidd, "African-American Christians and Fundamentalism," The Gospel Coalition, April 13, 2018, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/evangelical-history/african-american-christians-and-fundamentalism/>.

events.⁵⁰ This method of explaining the Scriptures was common among Baptist and Wesleyan traditions concerning the worship and preaching in black churches, which often allowed for more expressive story in their worship services. As Edward Wheeler observed, “The evangelical emotionalism that allowed freedom of expression and characterized the Methodist and Baptist of this period no doubt bore a resemblance to the religious expression of West Africa and tribal religious practices.”⁵¹ Due to the specific hermeneutic of dispensational thought, this would not allow the allegorical method of interpreting the Scriptures to be employed, which also could have contributed to the skeptical attitude of black Americans toward dispensationalism.

Dispensationalism, in terms of being involved in the social movement of slavery in early America, was largely absent, leaving Reformed believers in Baptist and Methodist denominations to evangelize slaves, Africans, and early black Americans. Consequently, for slaves and black Americans who had lived in a community that had endorsed and reinforced this view, had been trained in Covenant Theology by confessions and creeds, and had been instructed due to the First and Second Great Awakening, the single focus of the Scriptures was primarily evangelistic. It is no wonder that they observed the dispensational interpretation of the Scriptures as obtuse.⁵²

⁵⁰ Biddle affirmed that the word of God was without error writing the following: “Both the written and the Living Word are imperishable ... absolutely reliable ... pure and chaste ... eternal” (quoted in Mathews, *Doctrine and Race*, 83). However, he also took interpretive license when he wrote that “with no racial prejudice, no intolerance, or unkindness, all peoples, with regard to race, color or creed, will live harmoniously together as children of God, brothers and sisters of one Father and mother” (ibid.). In fact in several other articles he penned, he stated that God was a mother.

⁵¹ Wheeler, “Beyond One Man,” 311.

⁵² It must be noted that in eschatological doctrine John Nelson Darby (and later on C. I. Scofield) promoted the future deliverance and the fulfillment of promises given to national Israel by God himself (e.g., land, seed, blessing, king, and kingdom), and to attribute the blessings of ethnic Israel with the church was a violation of Scriptures. One author comments, “Darby [believed] that to confuse the hopes of Israel and those of the church are extremely detrimental. If the spiritual condition and hopes of Israel are the same as the churches, they are disappointed in them for they have no fulfillment. If, on the other hand, their hopes are the churches hope, then our hopes have been lowered to temporal and Jewish earthly ones” (Crutchfield, *Origins*, 180). However, this author is convinced one of the main reasons

Conclusion

The skepticism of dispensationalism among black Americans can be traced back to the evangelization of the slaves in the colonies and early America. Baptists and Wesleyans intentionally sought to preach the gospel and promote humanitarian acts to this specific population, which led to a significant impact of black slaves joining the ranks of these two denominations. As a result, due to the Calvinistic influences and their perspective concerning the covenant of grace, the free and non-free blacks in the Baptist and Wesleyan congregations were instructed and trained in the early creeds and confessions that promoted Reformed thought among Baptists and Wesleyans. Additionally, this theological ideology was reinforced by the colonial laws and ordinances in the states in which they lived. Lastly, the Christological, soteriological, hyper-ecclesiastical hermeneutic, and evangelization foci were also solidified in the minds of free and black slaves and early black Americans in these congregations.

Subsequently, when John Nelson Darby appeared, the suspicion among blacks was high because dispensationalism was foreign to the system they had all been instructed in and taught previously within the culture. Simply put, the system of dispensationalism in terms of societal efforts and biblical impact was very late among the colonial and early American landscape. By the time dispensationalism gained influence within fundamental evangelicalism, the culture had already been through the American Revolution (1775-1783) and the Civil War (1861-1865), where both Baptist and Wesleyan denominations with Reformed backgrounds were heavily involved.

This lesson in history is a reminder for dispensational thinkers and scholars to be on the front lines of societal issues within our world. Dispensational thinkers and scholars must discuss injustices within the culture and societies from the consistent literal grammatical historical (CLGH) perspective, and to be personally involved and invested in the lives of human beings and fellow brothers and sisters from all cultural and ethnic backgrounds for their well-being (Gal 6:9). Additionally, our conduct should be grounded in the “one anothers” found within the New Testament.⁵³ These are the *oughts* that our Lord and Master has

black Americans found this risible was at the time there was no national Israel in Jerusalem.

⁵³ For example, the “one another” instructions found in the epistles of the apostles are the conduct by which the church would address the needs of the members of the body of Christ. All of these instructions of the Christians’ conduct are based on the reality that one has been born again (John 3:4-18)

given to the church so that believers may truly operate by their new identity in Christ and in their desire to love God and serve one another. Furthermore, dispensational thinkers must be invested in training those from other cultures in how to explain the Scriptures in light of the *sine qua nons*, and how this particular method of explanation is adequate to address all contentions found in the society. Then the black American Christian, or Christians of any culture in the future, may want to subscribe to and promote such a theological system.

Soli Deo Gloria!

and has been unified with all ethnicities that are assured that Christ has died for them and rose for their justification (cf. Eph 2:11-22).

Hearing and Proclaiming Her Voice: The Not-So-Secret Longing of Female Sexual Desire in the Song

Mark McGinniss

Abstract: Evangelicalism as a whole (in which dispensationalism is a part) does not have a stellar history as it relates to its treatment of women or their issues. One area that has been woefully neglected in the church is the area of female sexuality. The church has generally been monotone in her voice to her female members along the lines of “no, no, no,” “sex is dirty, dirty, dirty,” or “sex is simply for your husband.” This voice is unfortunate and even unbiblical since there is an entire book in the Bible that bears directly on female sexuality. The voice of the Song of Songs is neither mute nor monotone on this critical subject. However, this poem is rarely heard (or taught accurately). This song needs to be embraced and celebrated for its divine teaching to married and single women on their own sexual desire.

Key Words: Sex, sexuality, Song of Songs, women, desire

Wrong Voices and Deafening Silence

Evangelicalism as a whole (of which dispensationalism is a part) cannot boast a stellar history as it relates to its

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treatment of women or their issues.³ One area that has been woefully mishandled in the church at large is the area of female sexuality. The church's voice has generally been either silent or monotone to her female members along the lines of "no, no, no," "sex is dirty, dirty, dirty," or "sex is simply for your husband."⁴ Although some have attempted to correct these incomplete or unbiblical "voices," they are competing with countless opinions that at times (unfortunately) are noisier and more compelling.

Linda Dillow and Lorraine Pintus record these well-intentioned (but woefully wrong) voices of moms to their daughters:

"Only 'those kinds' of girls enjoy sex."

"Sex is a man's thing. You just have to endure it."

"Wait until you've have been married twenty years, it gets old."

³ The denial or suppression of female sexuality is not a church only issue. Western culture may have a more checkered history than the church in this regard. Baumeister and Twenge observe, "The suppression of female sexuality can be regarded as one of the most remarkable psychological interventions in Western cultural history. According to Sherfey's (1966) respected statement of this view, the sex drive of the human female is naturally and innately stronger than that of the male, and it once posed a powerfully destabilizing threat to the possibility of social order. For civilized society to develop, it was allegedly necessary or at least helpful for female sexuality to be stifled. Countless women have grown up and lived their lives with far less sexual pleasure than they would have enjoyed in the absence of this large-scale suppression. Socializing influences such as parents, schools, peer groups, and legal forces have cooperated to alienate women from their own sexual desires and transform their (supposedly and relatively) sexually voracious appetites into a subdued remnant" ("Cultural Suppression of Female Sexuality," *Review of General Psychology* 6, no. 2 (2002): 166, <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/26cf/592c500860d43ceab39d21816654e53e9c6c.pdf>).

⁴ This essay is dealing with female sexuality from a Western perspective. It is not interacting with the international church in areas where female sexuality is actually physically attacked as in the practice of female circumcision.

Interestingly, while the male gender may have heard the same voices, they do not generally suffer in the same way expressing their sexuality within marriage.

“After two years of marriage, the excitement vanishes. You’ll see.”

“Give him his sex so you can have his children.”⁵

A female believer wrote to Kevin Leman: “I grew up in a really conservative, religious home. I was never told in so many words, but the message came across loud and clear: *Sex is dirty. And you’re dirty if you ever think about it.*”⁶ Gary and Barbara Rosberg share Jasmine’s struggle: “My mom and grandmother pounded into my head that sex was dirty. How do I take all that training from the women in my life and still become the sexy woman I know my husband wants? As soon as I get in the mood, those messages bounce around in my head and I get turned off before I get started.”⁷

Dannah Gresh and Juli Slattery write of one Christian who shared, “Growing up, I was one of those ‘good Christian girls’ who took the message of purity seriously. I had trained my mind and my heart to say no to sexual things through my teens and early twenties. When I got married, the wedding ring on my finger didn’t suddenly erase all the ‘no’ messages.”⁸ Another female believer wonders, “How can I get rid of old tapes in my head from my childhood about how defiled sex is? They make me feel inhibited every time I have sex. I feel like a prostitute.”⁹

Judy, too, grew up in a religiously conservative home. Before she was to be married at twenty-one, her mom pulled her aside for the sex talk (for the first time). Kim Eckert continues Judy’s story, “Her mom described sex as something a wife did for her husband to keep him satisfied. Never did the mom mention the

⁵ Linda Dillow and Lorraine Pintus, *Intimate Issues: Conversations Woman to Woman* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook P, 1999), 5.

⁶ Kevin Leman, *Turn Up the Heat: A Couple’s Guide to Sexual Intimacy* (Grand Rapids: Revell), 22.

⁷ Gary Rosberg and Barbara Rosberg, *The 5 Sex Needs of Men and Women* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2006), 99-100.

⁸ Dannah Gresh and Juli Slattery, *Pulling Back the Shades: Erotica, Intimacy, and the Longings of a Woman’s Heart* (Chicago: Moody, 2014), 103-4.

⁹ Archibald D. Hart, Catherine Hart Weber, and Debra L. Taylor, *Secrets of Eve* (Nashville: Word, 1998), 11.

possibility that there could be sexual pleasure for the wife.”¹⁰ Unfortunately Judy is not a lone case as Eckert reports, “I have counseled many women who have experienced a deep sense of disappointment and guilt about their inability to enjoy sex as a gift in marriage. Even though they know that sex within marriage is not a sin; it still feels like a sin.”¹¹ One Christian wife responded to a study of the sexual attitudes of Christian women and shared, “More than anything else I want to abandon myself to my husband when we make love. He is kind and gentle, and very patient with me. But something inside me tells me I am doing bad things ... after two years of marriage I still feel like I am sinning.”¹²

Juli Slattery tells the story of Holly. In a group of moms discussing how to

infuse excitement into the marriage after childbirth, ... one of the women suggested going to the underwear store and mixing in some ‘sexy undies’ with the standard ‘granny panties.’ Holly was embarrassed and disgusted that her Christian friends would suggest wearing lacy underwear and thongs. Although she couldn’t voice a logical or biblical reason why she was offended, she simply couldn’t accept that God would be okay with this.¹³

Dillow and Pintus share the story of one woman who confided,

It’s as if I live in a two-story house. The top floor is my spirituality and the bottom floor my sexuality. In between the two floors is a brick barrier separating my spiritual self from my sexual self. Because I want to be godly, I can’t allow myself to be too earthly—and sex is definitely earthly. I allow myself to experience

¹⁰ Kim Gaines Eckert, *Things Your Mother Never Told You: A Women’s Guide to Sexuality* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2014), 85.

¹¹ Ibid., 13.

¹² Hart, Weber, and Taylor, *Secrets of Eve*, 12.

¹³ Juli Slattery, *No More Headaches: Enjoying Sex & Intimacy in Marriage* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2009), 50.

pleasure—but only so much. If I get really carried away, it would be ‘too fleshly.’¹⁴

My wife, Joy and I counseled one young wife and her sexually frustrated husband (with two kids) who truly believed that God never meant women to enjoy sex. As “Jean” sat on the couch across from us, she vehemently challenged us to show her that he did!

Just a few years ago we were asked to conduct a single pre-marital session on “sex” for a young Christian pastor and his soon-to-be bride. The reason for only one session was because her pastor was too uncomfortable and embarrassed to share with them openly, honestly, and biblically about physical intimacy within marriage.

While the reasons, motivations, and historical influences can be debated concerning such individual stories, the reality is that many of our sisters in the Lord have not heard God’s *full* voice concerning female sexuality. What is surprising is that with the sexual revolution of the 1960s and the plethora of sexual information (both good and awful) a few mouse clicks away in 2020, one wonders why Christian women are struggling so in this area. One reason is that these women (generally) have been taught that the Bible should be followed in all areas of life. And many endeavor to obey the biblical text. However, in the area of sexuality, outside the “Thou shalt not” passages and 1 Corinthians 7:3-5, the church has been monotone in her prohibitions. One sister observes,

The church is behind the times in many respects. Certainly, it has not helped to educate its adherents to a healthy and biblically acceptable form of sexuality. The church needs to counter hundreds of years of ‘shame-based’ theology connected with sexuality. I want my daughters to have a healthier view of sexuality than I grew up with.¹⁵

¹⁴ Dillow and Pintus, *Intimate Issues*, 15.

¹⁵ Hart, Weber, and Taylor, *Secrets of Eve*, 9.

Although not true of every church or family, this sister recognizes that while the church has nailed the negatives, it has in many cases avoided the teaching of the positives. Ellison and Brown submit,

If the Christian response to sex has long been fear and suspicion, and if the prevailing watchwords are control and restraint, then contemporary Christians must look long and hard to find theological affirmation of erotic pleasure and even longer and harder to find theological interest in *women's* sexual pleasure.¹⁶

For women, the church's silence is deafening; and other voices are all too eager to fill this void. As Carolyn Mahaney observes, "If you watch TV, go to the movies, or read magazines today, you can get the impression that the only people having sex (or good 'sex') are the ones who aren't married. If married sex is even portrayed in popular media, it seems bland or routine. Our culture demeans marital sex and instead celebrates immoral sex."¹⁷ Following the siren song of culture creates its own set of poor consequences for the women of the church.

However, above this cacophony from culture rises a clarion voice from Scripture—an entire book about sexuality from the female perspective. It is my contention that the church needs to hear this voice and "sing" without embarrassment, shame, or blush the Song of Songs.¹⁸ I also assert that this mostly ignored but divinely inspired poem from God's own lips needs to be the foremost voice women hear on the beauty and wonder of their sexuality.

Speaking for women, Mahaney rightly observes,

¹⁶ Marvin M. Ellison and Kelly Brown Douglas, eds., "Introduction to Part 4," in *Sexuality and the Sacred: Sources for Theological Reflection*, 2nd ed. (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2010), 241.

¹⁷ Carolyn Mahaney, "Sex, Romance, and the Glory of God: What Every Christian Wife Needs to Know" in *Sex and Supremacy of Christ*, ed. John Piper and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), 202.

¹⁸ Or allegory or spiritualizing.

It is important that we acquire a biblical perspective of sex. God intends for us to experience tremendous joy and satisfaction in our sexual relationship with our husbands. And what greater proof do we need than the fact that God included the Song of Solomon in Holy Scripture—an entire book of the Bible devoted to love, romance, and sexuality in marriage. ... This little book portrays a physical relationship between husband and wife that is filled with uninhibited passion and exhilarating delight. This is God's heart and aim for our sexual experience.¹⁹

Hearing the Song in its Proper Key

To hear the divinely inspired Song rightly, women (and others who want to teach it) must recognize how it teaches. Unlike the NT epistles or OT Law, there are no commands or imperatives for the reader to follow. Instead, as wisdom literature it instructs by holding up at the same time both a model and a mirror. As a model the Song implicitly instructs readers that this is the type of wise, intimate relationship God desires them to enjoy. The model does not share the “normal” quantity of sexual experiences, various sexual positions, or best sexual techniques for a happy Christian marriage.²⁰ Instead it models in broad-brush strokes the God-desired quality of marriage intimacy. It silently asks this question of its readers, “Don’t you want this type of intimacy in your marriage?” As a mirror, the Song implicitly requests readers to evaluate whether or not their marriage reflects the desire of this couple in their own relationship. It silently asks the question of its readers, “Do I have this quality of desire and physical intimacy between my spouse and me in our marriage?” Estes rightly notes, “Instead of merely reporting the experience of the characters, the book, as poetry, endeavors to re-create their experience in the reader.”²¹ As such the Song does not command

¹⁹ Mahaney, “Sex, Romance,” 202.

²⁰ The Song is not as some have claimed a Hebrew or even Christian Kamasutra. Patrick Hunt writes, “The *Song of Songs* is more appropriate to bedside table than coffee table.... It could even be called the Hebrew *Kamasutra*” (*Poetry in the Song of Songs: A Literary Analysis* [New York: Peter Lang, 2008], iv).

²¹ Daniel J. Estes, *Handbook on the Wisdom Books and Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 401.

obedience; it inspires every wise couple to desire and maintain a relationship that mirrors and models these lovers.

Solomon wrote his best song (Song of Sol 1:1) celebrating passion and desire between a heterosexual man and woman within the confines of God-ordained marriage. This poem does not narrate the ups and downs of the courtship-marriage-post honeymoon stages of an historical couple. It is an artistic creation that places the two main literary characters into a lush and nearly perfect environment. In this garden setting the two lovers reveal themselves through their conversation. This sometimes erotically charged dialogue paints on the reader's imagination the pleasure of fulfilled desire and the palpable ache of absence. For this couple, longing is satisfied only in the presence of the other. When absent from each other, they yearn for one another, and their desire drives them over every obstacle to be one. The movement of the book from her first voiced longing for his kisses to her final wish for his return is achieved by this cyclical progression of absence to presence.²² For this couple presence produces shalom; absence is always to be struggled against. No good comes from absence except a desire to be present with the other.²³

²² Appendix 1 is my outline of the flow of the Song.

²³ What the Song is not: (1) The Song is not about God's love for Israel or Christ's love for the church. This allegorical interpretation was a common view held by the church fathers because of their uncomfortableness with the subject matter and their philosophical foundations. They spiritualized or allegorized the Song. For example, the female lover's breast actually represented a deeper or more spiritual meaning. Since women have two breasts, some commentators said that one breast was the NT and the other was the OT in which the church received her nourishment. Jewish scholars would equate the two breasts with Moses and Aaron who "nourished" the nation of Israel. (2) The Song is not a narrative that traces the love between Solomon and the country lass named the Shulammitte. One cannot outline the Song based on their courtship, marriage, and happily-ever-after. The text simply will not sustain such a reading. For examples see the obvious sexual references in 1:2; 1:4; 2:3-6; 2:14; 3:4, which are before the supposed wedding in the later part of chapter 3. (3) Some have surmised that it is a narrative of two male lovers, one being Solomon and the other a rustic shepherd, who vie for the affection of the pretty Shulammitte whose heart

The Song of Songs is an ancient love song about a couple who revel in their strong physical desire for each other. Through the use of intimate dialogue this couple shares their desire to be joined when separated and passionately enjoy each other when they are together. For this couple sex/physical oneness is a natural consequence of desire and defeating obstacles to be together. While the garden motif reminds the reader of the Garden of Eden, this garden is post-fall and has a number of obstacles the couple must overcome to be one. Through the use of highly charged sexual imagery clothed in Hebrew poetry, this fictitious couple invites every couple who is wise to enjoy their own celebration of love within the confines of their marriage.

The Song moves and has its being through the interaction of four main characters or more specifically four voices: the female lover (who speaks the majority of time—approximately 65%), the male beloved, and a chorus of women known as the daughters of Jerusalem.²⁴ This female chorus functions to let the reader know the inward thoughts of the female lover when the male lover is absent from her. They also act as the near audience for the reader as the female lover shares her exhortation with the daughters, which applies to them.²⁵ The fourth voice speaks but one full poetic line and it is the narrator's voice who speaks for God (5:1). No other voices are heard in the Song.

really belongs to the lowly shepherd and not the fabulously wealthy king. Again, the text will not support such a reading.

²⁴ Interestingly, and not seen in our English translations, the second person pronouns that are used of the "daughters of Jerusalem" are masculine plural in the BHS. This is not a textual issue but a rhetorical device of Solomon to allow both men and women readers to be represented by the "daughters" in the Song and subject to the exhortations of the female lover. See Song of Solomon 2:7; 3:5; 8:4.

²⁵ Solomon, although the author of the Song, has no voice in his composition. Solomon is directly spoken to only once (8:12). In this instance he acts as the foil for the couple who enjoy only each other while the king has his hordes ("vineyards") of women (Baal-hamon, i.e., "master of many," 8:11). Solomon wrote better than he lived. He knew that one mutually exclusive love is better than a harem full of lovely and willing ladies who were bought with wealth (8:7c, d).

God's Voice on Female Sexuality

One woman muses, "What is right? What is wrong? Can I both be godly and sensuous? I wish I knew how I should think about sex and how You, God, think about sex."²⁶

Although OT theologian Paul House gets some points right on the Song, he is certainly not helpful when he concludes, "Song of Solomon is artistically and thematically lovely but not particularly theologically enriching."²⁷ His observation misses badly the opportunity to answer from God's own perspective what God thinks about sex and how divine wisdom should inform women how they should think and act concerning all things sexual. This poem is filled with divinely inspired theology that voices distinctly the proper and good expression of female sexuality.

While we cannot bare all the theology concerning female sexuality based on our present time constraints, allow me to uncover five divine realities that demonstrate that the Song is the foremost voice women need to hear concerning their own sexuality, that the Song is the foremost voice that the church needs to proclaim (on Sunday mornings) concerning female sexuality for all her members, and that the Song as God's voice provides divine permission for her married female members to celebrate fully his gift of female sexuality in their own marriages.

#1. Women Have Divine Permission To Celebrate Physical Intimacy Within Marriage²⁸

In the unique opening lines of the Song, the female lover pines:²⁹

²⁶ Dillow and Pintus, *Intimate Issues*, 3.

²⁷ Paul House, *Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998), 469.

²⁸ Although there is no need to state the obvious boundary markers to these truths to the present audience, to avoid any misunderstandings or applications, all of these theological truths are required by God to be enjoyed within the confines of a heterosexual marriage.

²⁹ No other book of the Bible begins with a female point of view or voice.

May he kiss me with the kisses of his mouth!
 For your love is better than wine (1:2).³⁰

Not satisfied she hungers a chapter later:

Sustain me with raisin cakes,
 Refresh me with apples,
 Because I am lovesick.
Let his left hand be under my head
 And his right hand embrace me (2:5-6).

These few poetic lines provide clear evidence of our female protagonist's yearning for multiple kisses, erotic caresses, and prolonged lovemaking. Her craving for intimacies is palpable and undeniable. Only the most talented allegorists could cover up what these divine texts so clearly expose—the woman wants sex! While these sample texts are theologically informative, what should not be missed are the subsequent lines. In the following verses 1:3 and 2:7 her erotic desires are not met with divine lightning bolts! There is no divine prohibition, divine sarcasm, or divine censure for this woman's cravings for physical intimacy in any part of the Song. Only a caution is proffered in the adjuration refrains.³¹ This thrice-repeated warning challenges the unmarried daughters of Jerusalem not to awaken such "love" (i.e., desires) until the proper time (i.e., marriage). However, for the woman of the Song, there is no similar restraint. She need not abandon or even curtail her fleshly longings since she is already married.³²

While these verses certainly show God's approval of female sexual desire, it is in 5:1 where his divine affirmation is unmistakable. The section that ends with 5:1 actually began in 3:6 with their separation. Once the couple is together (4:1), the

³⁰ All translations are from the NASB unless otherwise noted.

³¹ Cf. 2:7; 3:5; 8:4.

³² The Song begins *in medias res*. The couple is already married. Although a minority of scholars sees the couple as unmarried (and it is true there is no mention of their marriage in the poem), not being married would contradict the Torah which would have excluded its inclusion in the canon.

male lover begins an elaborate *wasf* that recounts her exquisite physical beauty (4:1-7).³³ His praise of her body transitions to an invitation for his female lover to overcome unknown and possible dangerous obstacles that separate them (4:8-9). Male desire continues in the next verses and becomes more bodily specific but stays clothed in flora metaphors (4:11-15). His invitation and yearning is answered with her own enticement:

Female lover

Awake, O north *wind*,
And come, *wind of* the south;
Make my garden breathe out *fragrance*,
Let its spices be wafted abroad.
May my beloved come into his garden
And eat its choice fruits! (4:16)

While dressed in spicy Hebrew images, it is clear that her offer is for lovemaking. The man enthusiastically accepts her invitation with the same metaphorical language that morphs her garden into his garden:

Male lover

I have come into my garden, my sister, *my* bride;
I have gathered my myrrh along with my balsam.
I have eaten my honeycomb and my honey;
I have drunk my wine and my milk. (5:1a-d)

Longman remarks, “He enters the garden and enjoys all of its delights. ... The double objects of each of the final three cola indicate the totality of his experience. ... He has possessed her completely, a fitting image of sexual intercourse.”³⁴ However, in the midst of such “intimate feasting,” an unidentified voice addresses the couple:

³³ *Wasf* is an Arabic term for a physical description.

³⁴ Tremper Longman, III, *Song of Songs* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 159.

Eat, friends;
 Drink and imbibe deeply, O lovers (5:1e,f).

While there is discussion among scholars as to the identity of the unknown voice, a legitimate contender is the narrator. Although Amit is writing on Hebrew narrative, she summarizes well the position of the narrator and her words are applicable to this poem: “Both God and the narrator must be trustworthy and hence are the benchmark of trustworthiness for all other personae. Whatever accords with the narrator’s statements of God’s must be beyond doubt.”³⁵ In this case the narrator’s imperatives to continue the “feasting” of each other is actually the voice of God.³⁶ Dillow observes, “The poet seems to say this is the voice of God Himself. Only the Lord could pronounce such an affirmation. He, of course, was the most intimate observer of all.”³⁷ Since the anonymous voice is God’s, the poet is using this short imperative rhetorically to cast his divine favor over the most intimate of human activities between a man and a woman. The point should not be missed that the commands are to both lovers: female and male. The woman is to be “drunk” with their lovemaking just as much as the man. Exum is certainly correct as she observes, “‘Eat,’ ‘drink,’ and ‘be drunk,’ plural forms addressed to both lovers, leave no doubt that eating and drinking in the garden is mutual sexual indulgence and satisfaction.”³⁸

³⁵ Yairah Amit, *Reading Biblical Narratives: Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 95.

³⁶ While it is outside the scope of this paper to pursue, a legitimate question is the absence of the voice of God. “Why not let God speak for himself in the Song of Sol, instead of ‘hiding’ his voice behind the unnamed narrator?” It may be that since Israel’s neighbors were so heavily engaged in various fertility cults that Solomon may have felt the need to keep a respectable distance between God and the act of sex. As Phipps writes, “In Hebrew culture sex had been demythologized; it was considered a proper sphere for man but not for deity.” See William E. Phipps, “The Plight of the Song of Songs,” *JAAR* 42, no 1 (March 1974): 83.

³⁷ Joseph C. Dillow, *Solomon on Sex* (Nashville: Nelson, 1977), 86.

³⁸ J. Cheryl Exum, *Song of Songs: A Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2005), 183.

Arguably this is the clearest divine voice in all of Scripture proclaiming God's approval, nay his encouragement, for both married females and males to celebrate to the fullest sexual intimacy within marriage. This is the voice sisters in the Lord need to hear (and believe). But if the Song is not rightly proclaimed, how will they hear God's wisdom and how will those unbiblical messages bouncing around their gray matter be countered without God's voice?

#2. Women Have Divine Permission To Initiate Sexual Experiences Within Marriage

One area where married women struggle is in the area of initiation of sexual experiences with their husbands. Writing on the top five sexual needs of men and women, the Rosbergs comment, "Of all the sex needs, initiation seems to be the most difficult for many wives to practice."³⁹ While the reasons for lack of initiation certainly vary among women, it is not an issue for the female lover in the Song.

I am my beloved's,
 And his desire is for me.
 Come, my beloved, let us go out into the country,
 Let us spend the night in the villages.
 Let us rise early *and go* to the vineyards;
 Let us see whether the vine has budded
And its blossoms have opened,
And whether the pomegranates have bloomed.
 There I will give you my love. (7:10-12)

Although her invitation is attired in Hebrew metaphor and figurative language, it does not take a degree in Hebrew to undress her meaning. She is initiating a sexual romp! While the "budding," "opening" and "blooming" may be sexual innuendoes (or flimsy excuses for lovemaking in the vineyard), it is clear that she is enticing him through sensually charged agricultural imagery for a time of lovemaking, and if to be understood literally, outside! Diane Bergant explains, "The word for love is

³⁹ Rosberg and Rosberg, *5 Sex Needs*, 136.

plural in form and, as has been the case with its other appearances (1:2, 4:10), is better translated ‘lovemaking.’⁴⁰ Hess writes, “The picture is also a metaphor of her body and its fecundity for love. In this verse the drama and journey again lead to the same destination, the place of lovemaking.”⁴¹ Longman concurs: The last line “clarifies her intention to explore the vineyard. She will give her love to him; the vineyard again is a place of lovemaking.”⁴²

The metaphors are not so dense that the reader cannot see that the female is the one expressing sexual desire, planning and initiating the amorous tryst. To understand the theology here one needs to remember how the Song of Solomon teaches. As a model it asks the question: “Don’t you want this type of intimacy in your marriage?” And as a mirror it asks, “Do I have this quality of desire and physical intimacy between my spouse and me in our marriage?” In other words it encourages women to ask themselves, “Do I understand that God allows me as a woman to initiate a sensual scenario with my husband?” While many of our married sisters do not live in such an agricultural setting to follow the Shulammite’s example line by line (and in some places lovemaking outdoors is illegal—if caught), the verses affirm that women do have God-given approval to be the architect in lovemaking. The modern wise female lover has the divinely approved model to follow in the Shulammite.

#3. Women Have Divine Permission To Celebrate Sexual Creativity Within Marriage

Another area where many women feel prohibition is expressing sexual creativity within marriage. Here is a sampling of real questions I have received from women:

“Is role-playing wrong? Does the Bible say anything about it?”

⁴⁰ Dianne Bergant, *The Song of Songs* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical P, 2001), 91.

⁴¹ Richard S. Hess, *Song of Songs* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005) 226.

⁴² Longman, *Song of Songs*, 201.

“I don’t want anyone to faint so I wanted to text this question. Oral sex, is it wrong, biblical?”

“How can you decide to try new positions?”

“Is it permissible to use toys/devices?”

“A pastor bought his wife some lingerie and wants her to dress like a prostitute in the bedroom. Is this ok in God’s eyes? And dance like a stripper for him? What do you think?”

These queries reveal the fact that Christian women wrestle with knowing what is sexually right or wrong in the bedroom ... or any other room in the house. And even if some may be erotically adventurous inside or outside the bedroom, there is the morning after. One woman muses, “I blushed when I remember what we had done last night. What would my mother think—what would my pastor think—what did I think?”⁴³ This is an example of one looking for the divine voice in this vital area.

The female lover in the Song has no such reservations or doubts. Finishing the section, she began above, not only is there a promise of female initiation of lovemaking, but on her proverbial suggestive menu is a promise of something “old and new” in verse 13.

Female lover

Come, my beloved, let us go out into the country,
 Let us spend the night in the villages.
 Let us rise early *and go* to the vineyards;
 Let us see whether the vine has budded
And its blossoms have opened,
And whether the pomegranates have bloomed.
 There I will give you my love.

The mandrakes have given forth fragrance;
 And over our doors are all choice *fruits*,
 Both new and old,
 Which I have saved up for you, my beloved (7:11-13).

⁴³ Dillow and Pintus, *Intimate Issues*, 210.

Verse 13 (14 Hebrew) is somewhat puzzling. What are these “choice *fruits*” that are both “new and old” which the female lover has “saved” for her male lover? In keeping with the double entendre of the previous verses of “budding,” “opening” and “blooming,” it is safe to assume that there is a sexual connotation associated with this verse. If one consults HALOT and translates כָּל-מִנְדִּים as “all delicacies” instead of “choice *fruits*” and recognize that the female lover is the one who has “stored up” “both new and old” “delicacies” for her beloved, it does not take much ingenuity to see her creative use of language as a euphemism for both fresh and “old” favorite sexual activities for them to both to enjoy.⁴⁴ Cheryl Exum suggests, “The fruits the woman offers are choice fruits of her garden (4:13, 16). ‘New as well as old’ includes the whole spectrum of delights, known to lovers who appreciate how new familiar can be.”⁴⁵ Dianne Bergant sees “new and old” as a merism and writes, “The merism includes the poles and whatever is between them. The woman has already promised to make love (7:13). Here she declares that she has laid up the pleasures of lovemaking for her beloved (*dodi*).”⁴⁶ Hess comments, “The expression ‘new and old’ used of fruit may function as a metaphor for experiences of carnal love that the two have shared. The female promises new delicacies as well as those already favored by her lover.”⁴⁷

We are uncertain as to the male lover’s response to her creative and not-so-subtle carnal declaration. But sanctified imagination would guess he said yes. However, it is not his response that is important, but her voice, her longing, her desire, her erotic inventiveness that is centered and celebrated in these verses. Her longing meets no divine condemnation, no reprimand, no rebuke. Although the Shulammite’s voice is undoubtedly both the model and mirror for females to hear, how will they hear if the church is not proclaiming this theology? Female sexual creativity is to be celebrated within marriage and this truth proclaimed in church.

⁴⁴ HALOT, 543

⁴⁵ Exum, *Song of Songs*, 242.

⁴⁶ Bergant, *Song of Songs*, 92.

⁴⁷ Hess, *Song of Songs*, 227.

#4. Women Have Divine Permission To Celebrate Female Sexual Passion Within Marriage

Leman shares a letter he received from a female Sunday school teacher: “Here’s my secret: I really, really love sex. And I’m a woman. (If the other Sunday school teachers could hear me now, I’d be the talk of the church for a year.)”⁴⁸ This observation begs the question. What are the reasons that a woman who says she loves sex with her husband becomes church news for a year? Isn’t this supposed to be the norm? One of the reasons it would be “news” is because women have heard multiple voices announce throughout history (their own personal history and their gender’s) that they should not like sex; sex is not for them, or sex is only for procreation. And if they ever discover that they (heaven forbid) actually enjoy sex, they certainly shouldn’t acknowledge it! To be a proper Christian woman (they have been told) they must squelch their female sexual passion.

While many have heard these erroneous voices, it was not the voice that governs the female lover of the Song.

Listen to a sampling of her voice:

May he kiss me with the kisses of his mouth!
For your love is better than wine, (1:2)

Like an apple tree among the trees of the forest,
So is my beloved among the young men.
In his shade I took great delight and sat down,
And his fruit was sweet to my taste.
He has brought me to *his* banquet hall,
And his banner over me is love.
Sustain me with raisin cakes,
Refresh me with apples,
Because I am lovesick.
Let his left hand be under my head
And his right hand embrace me. (2:3-6)

My beloved extended his hand through the opening,

⁴⁸ Leman, *Turn Up the Heat*, 232.

And my feelings (*inward parts*)⁴⁹ were aroused for him. (5:4)

His mouth is *full of* sweetness.

And he is wholly desirable.

This is my beloved and this is my friend,

O daughters of Jerusalem. (5:16).

I would lead you *and* bring you

Into the house of my mother, who used to instruct me;

I would give you spiced wine to drink from the juice of my pomegranates.

Let his left hand be under my head

And his right hand embrace me, (8:2-3)

Unless one follows Origen or Bernard of Clairvaux, the female voice is unequivocal as it concerns female sexual passion and pleasure. While biology itself teaches that females are designed for sexual pleasure,⁵⁰ here unembarrassed theology needs neither comment nor commentary to demonstrate God's approval of female sexual passion within marriage. The biblical text is clear; the divine voice is clear; her voice is clear. The only voice missing is the church's voice. The voice of the Song provides a strong theological anchor that allows a woman to have her sexual celebration approved by God and not simply by feelings or the headlines of *Redbook* or *Cosmopolitan*.

#5. Women Have Divine Permission To Celebrate Nakedness Within Marriage

Lauren F. Winner observes, "We Christians get embarrassed about our bodies. We are not always sure that God likes them very much. We are not sure whether bodies are good or bad."⁵¹ It is interesting that God designed physical intimacy to be embodied in well, bodies! Without real, corporeal bodies, there

⁴⁹ HALOT's second definition for מַעַד, "that part of the body through which people come into existence," 609.

⁵⁰ The only function of the female clitoris is to provide sexual pleasure.

⁵¹ Lauren F. Winner, *Real Sex: The Naked Truth about Chastity* (Grand Rapids: Brazos P, 2005), 33.

is no sexual intimacy to be received or given and certainly none to be celebrated.

The first book of the Bible displays for readers that God is not ashamed of bodies, even nude ones. This makes perfect theological sense since God created man and woman bodily (Gen 2:7; 2:21-22) and both without a stitch of clothing (Gen 2:25). While clothing has become a theological necessity after the fall for mankind, in the Song nakedness is unashamedly evident and celebrated between the husband and wife.

The fifth movement of the Song is by far the most erotic stanza of biblical poetry in the canon. The reason for its erotic nature is the detailed *wasf* of the female lover (7:1-9a). What makes this *wasf* so different than the one of chapter 4 is that here the female lover is nude and possibly dancing. That she is completely uncovered is clearly visible by the body parts that he describes in metaphorical detail:

“curves of your hips...” (7:1)

“your navel is like a round goblet...” (7:2)

“your belly is a heap of wheat...” (7:2)

“your two breasts are like two fawns...” (7:3)

“Your stature is like a palm tree,

And your breasts are *like its* clusters. (7:7)

I said, ‘I will climb the palm tree,

I will take hold of its fruit stalks.

Oh, may your breasts be like clusters of the vine ... (7:8).

These physical feminine qualities can only be described in such literary vividness if she is naked. Otherwise these various “parts” would be hidden beneath her garments. While this *wasf* has been the “whipping boy” for feminist scholars against the “male gaze,” they do not represent the Shulammite’s opinion of his visual contemplation of her body. In response to his thoroughly approving gaze she declares,

I am my beloved’s,

And his desire is for me (7:10).

Bergant views his gaze and her response to his gaze as “mutual love, not an unequal relationship. It is interesting to note that whenever this formula is appears, it is found in the mouth of the woman. She is clearly desirous of mutual possession.”⁵² Exum writes, “Whereas Genesis connects the woman’s desire to her domination by the man, the Song says desire is mutual.”⁵³ It is clear from her four-word response,

אָנִי לְדֹדִי
וְעָלִי תְּשׁוּקָתָךְ:

that the female lover does not shy away from her lover’s gaze. Although some may argue that the female lover’s lack of garments is strictly for his enjoyment, it is readily heard in her response that she is not ashamed of her bare physique but embraces and luxuriates in her bodily sensuality with her lover.

While there is ongoing cultural and scholarly discussion concerning how sexually stimulated the modern female gender is by sight, clearly the female lover likes what she sees when she turns her feminine gaze on her nude lover (5:10-16). In this lone female *wasf* in the Song it is clearly evident by the male body parts described that he is naked under her visual scrutiny. While his head, locks, eyes, cheeks, lips, and hands would be noticeable if he were clothed, it is her description of his “abdomen” and legs which give physical evidence of his full-frontal nudity.

Female lover

His abdomen is carved ivory

Inlaid with sapphires.

His legs are pillars of alabaster

Set on pedestals of pure gold. (5:14-15)

If he were clothed, neither of these male body parts would be visible to her naked eye. Bergant observes,

⁵² Bergant, *Song of Songs*, 90.

⁵³ Exum, *Song of Songs*, 241.

Moving further down his body, the woman marvels at the man's belly. The Hebrew word used [מַעֲדָה] usually denotes inner organs, bowels, even womb. The woman would not extol the man's belly unless it was naked, clearly a provocative thought. Although the precious gems probably refer to overlaid decoration, there might also be veiled allusion to the man's genitals. The generous use of double entendre throughout the poem leaves this reference open to such interpretation.⁵⁴

Uncovering these metaphors, Longman proposes,

When one thinks of ivory, one thinks of a tusk of ivory, an object that could easily have erotic connotations. The decoration with lapis, a precious stone blue in color, simply would highlight the object's preciousness. In such an erotic poem, the line at the least is suggestive of, if not explicitly referring to, the man's member.⁵⁵

Exum concurs, "There is something sexually suggestive in all these images of hardness—not simply that one or more of these images might be a veiled reference to the man's penis."⁵⁶

While her lover's nudity is clothed under these salacious Hebrew metaphors, her lavish appreciation for his entire body cannot be missed. At the end of her *wasf* she asserts of her naked lover:

His mouth is *full of* sweetness.
And he is wholly desirable.
This is my beloved and this is my friend,
O daughters of Jerusalem. (5:16).

As it was in the Garden before the fall, this pair is naked and not ashamed to celebrate it with each other. This female is the model and mirror for all wise women to evaluate their practice and attitude concerning nakedness. The Song (i.e., God) declares

⁵⁴ Bergant, *Song of Songs*, 72.

⁵⁵ Longman, *Song of Songs*, 173.

⁵⁶ Exum, *Song of Songs*, 207.

that bodies are good and that naked bodies are to be enjoyed within marriage.

Conclusion

To Judy, Holly, Jean, Jasmine, and Other “Good Girls”

There is an orchestra of voices that the women whose stories introduced this paper can listen to as it concerns their sexuality. However, the Song of Songs has shown that God has not left his daughters without a clarion voice for them to follow in all things sexual. God desires that his daughters understand and follow his voice alone as it concerns their sexuality. Although it is certainly not easy to switch off contrary voices, a wise wife will follow the divine voice above all others (Prov 1:5). Women who follow this divine voice inside and outside the bedroom have divine permission to acknowledge and celebrate their sexuality within the confines of their individual heterosexual marriages.⁵⁷

To Those Who Teach the Song

While much more can be affirmed from the theology of the Song concerning female sexuality, enough theology has been laid bare to allow the women of the church to hear the true and only voice that should guide their sexuality—God’s. As dispensationalists who understand God’s word correctly, it is our responsibility to proclaim God’s voice distinctly without stammer, stutter, or blush concerning female sexuality. At least half of the congregation is waiting to see if the church has anything more to say about female sexual pleasure than the negatives.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ In this paper I am not arguing for eliminating the “no” voice to premarital sex or sexual immorality. I am arguing for a balanced biblical voice to be heard.

⁵⁸ However, hearing this theology in the male voice has its own issues. As one female 30-something shared, “Without even reading your paper, my first reaction is ugh ... another man telling me how to view my sexuality.” Although such sentiments do not absolve us of our teaching responsibilities, it should sensitize us to how we communicate such theology (cf. Titus 2:3-4).

Appendix 1
How the Song Moves⁵⁹

Thematic Elements	Separation	Desire	Obstacle	Union	Transition
First Movement 1:2-2:7	1:2	1:2-4	1:5-6	1:7-2:3a	2:3b-7
Second Movement 2:8-17	2:8-9	2:10-14	2:15	2:15	2:16-17
Third Movement 3:1-5	3:1	3:2-3	3:1-3	3:4	3:5
Fourth Movement 3:6-5:1	3:6-11	4:1-7	4:8	4:9-5:1d	5:1e-f
Fifth Movement 5:2-7:10	5:2-6:1	5:4-16	5:3-6	6:2-7:9	7:10
Sixth Movement 7:11-8:4	8:3	7:12-13	8:1	7:11-8:2	8:4
Seventh Movement 8:5-14	8:13-14	8:6-7	8:8-12	8:6-7	

⁵⁹ Notice how the Song of Solomon begins with the theme of separation (1:2) and ends with separation (8:13-14). This cyclical pattern demonstrates that this truly is a song that God desires “not to end” in a marriage relationship.

Book Reviews

— *Old Testament* —

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Reading Genesis Well: Navigating History, Poetry, Science, and Truth in Genesis 1–11. By C. John Collins. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018. 336 pp. Softcover \$36.99.

The author of *Reading Genesis Well* is C. John Collins, Professor of Old Testament at Covenant Theological Seminary, St. Louis, Missouri. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Liverpool. He has published four other books to date, all of which are relevant to the complex subject matter this book seeks to tackle. Those titles are *The God of Miracles* (2000), *Science and Faith* (2003), *Genesis 1–4: A Linguistic, Literary, and Theological Commentary* (2006), and *Did Adam and Eve Really Exist?* (2011). He has also published numerous articles and book reviews in many different journals.

The hermeneutical challenges that confront the interpreter of Genesis 1–11 are neither minimal nor insignificant. It is no surprise, then, that the author invests the first six chapters (157 pages—essentially half the book) methodically laying down his proposal for the best way to read Genesis 1–11 so that the reader comes away with how the original audience (mainly ancient Israelites farmers) would have understood it. Thus, he assesses various critical tools that are popular among Bible scholars today. Specifically, he examines linguistic analysis, rhetorical analysis, literary criticism, and genre criticism. While acknowledging that these disciplines all make a significant contribution to biblical scholarship, he nonetheless concludes that each falls short in one way or another. He is especially critical of those who are committed to a literal interpretation. Now, while that immediately sounds an alarm, once he explains and illustrates what he means, it is not so alarming (yet we’ll issue a caution later). As one might discern from the titles of his other books (noted above), this is not to suggest that he discounts the historicity of the people and events in Genesis 1–11, nor the

possibility of the supernatural within the same. In fact, he repeatedly affirms this throughout the book.

Collins's main concern is to show that many interpreters, in their zeal to be faithful to each word of the text, fail to see the socio-linguistic and rhetorical impact that would have been understood by the original audience. He reminds his readers that communication consists of more than the simple word-level meanings (*locution*). Other factors (e.g., tone of voice, situational context, social conventions, etc.) allow the speaker to deliver an intended meaning that often transcends the words themselves (*illocution*) due to the "shared world" of the author/text and audience/message. Since all true communication involves listeners or receivers, then their response helps reveal their understanding (*perlocution*) of what the speaker conveyed. Perhaps one could say that Collins's first six chapters could serve as a primer in communication theory since he covers the following basics: *speech act theory, the function of metaphor* (chapter 3); *good-faith communication, world picture and worldview, sense, reference, and rhetoric* (chapter 4); *cohesion and coherence, audience criticism* (chapter 5); *use of anachronism as an audience aid, and literary style* (chapter 6).

One of the unique aspects of this book—one that had great personal appeal to me—was his use of C. S. Lewis as a model for his own "rhetorical-theological" approach. Recognizing Lewis as a literary scholar, he aims to avail himself of the "raft-load of linguistic and literary ideas" (25) he put forth (though not in any systematized way). Not to mention that Lewis was eminently qualified to do so, being trained in philosophy, classics, and English literature, as well as teaching the same at Oxford and Cambridge. Collins's ample citations and applications of Lewis are truly refreshing.

It is not until chapter 7 that Collins presents his "critical intuitive" approach (as he calls it). After carefully

laying the methodological foundation in the foregoing chapters, he proceeds to systematically work through the various sections of Genesis 1–11 (creation account, Gen 1–2; the fall and its consequences, Gen 3–4; from Adam to Noah, Gen 5; the great flood, Gen 6–9; the Table of Nations, Gen 10; the Tower of Babel, Gen 11a; and from Shem to Abram, Gen 11b). Collins provides the reader with many keen insights in virtually each of the above sections. Two of my favorites were (1) his insight on the Nephilim reference in Numbers 13:33; and (2) the stark contrast between the Lamech of Genesis 4 and the Lamech of Genesis 5. But there were many others. Now, that is not to say that he will always please the reader. There were a number of specifics that I took issue with (e.g., inflated numbers on the life spans in the genealogical lists; whether Adam really said, “Bone of my bones, etc.” in 2:23; his being non-committal about the universality of the flood; etc.).

The remainder of the book interacts with how other readers from ancient times have interpreted Genesis 1–11 (chapter 8); how to apply the rhetorical-theological approach to some of the more entrenched interpretations of familiar expressions, such as *whether the sun rises*, or *accounting for rain* in the pre-flood days, or *a three-decker universe*, etc. (chapter 9); how the reader of Genesis 1–11 should understand God’s action during the creation week: as a first or second cause? (chapter 10); and how Genesis 1–11 serves the redemptive history for both Israel and the world (chapter 11).

While there is much about this book that I found beneficial, I nevertheless come away with a serious caution. It appears to me that the subjectivity inherent in Collins’s method goes unchecked in certain places. This is most notably evident in chapter 10 (although in chapter 9 he expressly tips his hat toward the Big Bang theory). Supposedly an ancient Israelite farmer would have understood the reference to “waters above” and “windows of heaven” (in Genesis 1 and 7,

respectively) as a reference to rain clouds. Also, since the word for “kind” in Genesis 1 is not a scientific term, it does not indicate in any way as to whether a “kind” can eventually turn into a different kind or not (which, thus, allows for naturalistic evolution, or what he would call “biological dissent with modification”). According to Collins, the text is making no such point and contains no such implicature. And as for the record of Adam’s formation in Genesis 2 (as well as the creation of the plants, animals, birds—indeed, everything created during the creation week), the text says nothing about the process involved. Thus, God potentially could have used secondary causation (e.g., theistic evolution) to accomplish the task.

Overall, I see *Reading Genesis Well* as a helpful resource for the scholar to sharpen his hermeneutical tools and come away with many useful insights for teaching and ministry. But, as with so many of the books on my shelf, one must use it with discretion and care.

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Including the Stranger: Foreigners in the Former Prophets. New Studies in Biblical Theology. By David G. Firth. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2019. 218 pp. Softcover \$23.40.

Including the Stranger: Foreigners in the Former Prophets is another valuable addition to New Studies in Biblical Theology series. Although data concerning foreigners, God’s attitude toward them, and their relationships

with the people of God in the OT could be drawn from nearly all of the books of the Scriptures, David Firth chose to narrow his focus to the Former Prophets. While it is true that within the histories of this portion of the OT the greater emphasis is on the reporting of history, rather than commenting on it, Firth wants the reader to understand that the interpreter who concentrates on the genre, language, and things commended in the text will better understand the status, place, and purpose of the foreigners in and around Israel. He emphasizes that the foreigners found in these books are both numerous and neglected as far as systematic study is concerned.

In his extensive and intensive analysis of Joshua, Judges, the books of Samuel, and the books of Kings, Firth identifies the foreigners not by that designation, but by gentilics, social and physical location, or comments about the individuals that identify them as being foreigners.

Of course, Firth recognizes that much of the contemporary literature concerning these books is centered on ethical issues, for example, the foreigners as enemies of the Lord and his people (e.g., the Canaanites), and how God deals with them in warfare. He quotes some well-known paragraphs from Richard Dawkins to illustrate not only the atheist's perspective on the God of the OT, but also, with a less vituperative statement, a ghoulish summary of Joshua's destructive acts. Firth explains that many of the conquest narratives of the period are hyperbolic in language, emphasizing total victory, but not conflicting with the continuing existence of peoples and cities that had been devoted to destruction after decisive battles. In fact, it is because the Canaanites and others continued to live near and in Israel that there are so many foreigners to be explored in this study.

Firth is a careful exegete, providing a broad commentary on each of the books, and a detailed commentary of the foreigners found strewn throughout the books. At some

points the detail becomes a bit overwhelming because of his concern to provide background, context, relationships, contrasts, and comparisons for the foreigners studied; but it is worthwhile to track with him, for those non-Jews whose existence in the history of Israel and Judah taught valuable lessons.

Though not an exhaustive list, the following are many of God's valuable lessons pointed out throughout this book. First, God desired to accomplish his will through selected foreigners; and these were often presented quite positively. Second, Yahweh did more than tolerate foreigners in the land, but desired that they would come to him and join the family, enjoying his blessings. Third, the Israelites were not to become (like) the idolatrous Canaanites (in heart, mind, and behavior). Fourth, Yahweh would use the nations to punish Israel. Fifth, Yahweh intended the defeat of foreign armies to cause them to know that he alone is God. Sixth, God is not a God who discriminates, and his purposes have always included all peoples. Seventh, the people of God are to be a community defined by faith, not by ethnicity. The book concludes with a chapter applying lessons learned in the rest of the study to the lives of Christians today.

This book would be an ideal textbook for a course in the Former Prophets. Pastors and teachers of the Word would benefit greatly by reading this masterful unfolding of this part of the Scriptures and by meeting a host of foreigners used by the Lord to instruct Israel, and us.

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The Old Testament in Seven Sentences: A Small Introduction to a Vast Topic. By Christopher J. H. Wright. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019. 184 pp. Softcover \$ 18.00.

Christopher J. H. Wright's *The Old Testament in Seven Sentences* delivers new students of Scripture an insightful overview of the Old Testament's major storyline and its themes. Imitating the OT's own structure as a "grand narrative" (6), Wright organizes his overview with a similar narrative approach using "seven sentences" (each developed as a separate chapter) to identify the plot points in his retelling of the OT story. The seven sentences—taken from across the Law, Prophets, and Writings—successfully pinpoint the major elements of the OT's plot: the creation of the world (Gen 1:1), the selection of Abraham (Gen 12:3), the redemption of Israel from bondage (Exod 20:2), the establishment of a covenant with King David (1 Sam 13:14), the preaching of the prophets (Mic 6:8), the anticipation of the gospel (Isa 52:7), and finally, the encouragement and instruction from the Psalms and wisdom books (Ps 23:1). This volume does not attempt to introduce readers to the content of every book in the OT. Instead, Wright introduces new readers of Scripture to what he identifies as the crucial plot points of the overarching narrative of the OT's grand story.

Although Wright's organization around the OT's narrative provides readers with an excellent snapshot of the OT's big picture, his discussion of the Psalms and wisdom books is awkwardly placed and ultimately detracts from his storyline approach. In Wright's retelling of the OT story, his chapter six (entitled "Gospel") ends with the OT's concluding scene of Israel waiting in anticipation for God to act once more on their behalf. But instead of ending the book there—where the OT storyline itself ends—Wright doubles back to the Psalms and wisdom literature in the book's seventh and

final chapter. Not only does the return to Psalms and wisdom undermine the effectiveness of the ending of Wright's retelling, but it also gives the appearance that these books do not fit naturally within the OT narrative framework but are a sort of addendum to its otherwise complete storyline. In a book that is attempting to demonstrate the relatedness of the OT's contents within the framework of its metanarrative, the choice to place the wisdom books at the end fails to demonstrate to the reader their connectedness to that metanarrative. In short, a whole genre of OT Scripture—the wisdom corpus—appears as a disconnected, perhaps even expendable, portion of the OT. A simple solution might have been to introduce the wisdom writings alongside Wright's discussion of Solomon, wisdom literature's chief contributor. In so doing, the wisdom would be integrated into Wright's paradigmatic narrative approach, and the natural concluding scene of the OT—Israel waiting expectantly for God to act—returns to its rightful place as the story's final plot point.

Though Wright's handling of wisdom needs adjustment, his overall narrative approach proves exceptionally successful at providing new readers of Scripture a foundational framework for digging deeper in their study of the OT. While book-by-book introductions benefit readers by explaining the contents of Scripture's individual parts, Wright's narrative approach benefits readers by providing the necessary broader context for understanding the ultimate significance of that content. As Wright correctly observes, "Without the first three acts [of the drama of Scripture], Jesus becomes just another human savior of some kind. The story would lose its essential beginning (creation), its profound problem (sin), and the governing theme of God's promise of blessing to all nations. . . . The whole story [of the drama of Scripture] only makes sense *as* a whole story" (7, emphasis original). It is this "whole story" approach, condensed to a manageable seven sentences, that Wright's introduction

provides readers in order to equip them to contextualize their study of the diverse individual books that make up the OT.

Wright's introduction provides more than just a firm grasp of the OT's overarching storyline, however; readers are also directed toward a more sophisticated reading of that storyline through Wright's scholarly yet accessible explanations along the way. By including insightful observations of the OT's cultural context (60), helpful guidelines for understanding various genres of OT books (129–32; 142–46), succinct introductions to important questions of interpretation (27), useful overviews of major OT themes (84), and enlightening discussions of difficult passages (82, 128), the reader is treated to far more than just a simple retelling of the OT narrative. By including brief overviews of such topics amid his retelling of the “grand narrative,” Wright's volume strikes an excellent balance between breadth and brevity. In so doing, Wright plays the vital role of bringing the fruit of his years of scholarship back to the church for their edification and personal growth.

The Old Testament in Seven Sentences ultimately accomplishes its goal of providing new readers of the OT with a helpful starting point in their study by offering a satisfying introduction to the OT's major contents and themes. Though the primary audience may be new students of Scripture seeking to get the “lay of the land,” knowledgeable readers of the OT also stand to gain from Wright's work as he demonstrates an exemplary model—his seven sentences—for effectively condensing and communicating the big ideas of the Old Testament.

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Jesus, Skepticism, and the Problem of History. Edited by Darrell L. Bock and J. Ed Komoszewski. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2019. 384 pp. Softcover \$34.99.

This intriguing collection of research essays focuses on “beating them at their own game.” The book is largely a response to another group of essays titled *Jesus, Criteria, and the Demise of Authenticity* (2012), edited by Chris Keith and Anthony Le Donne. This work argues that the various criteria used in NT studies that are part of the quest for the historical Jesus are flawed, sometimes fatally, due to anti-Christian assumptions flowing from form criticism and a number of other weaknesses that hinder the use of the criteria by the Church for its understanding of Jesus. *Jesus, Skepticism & the Problem of History* generally rejects this negative approach to such criteria. Instead, it argues that proper use of the criteria can be a useful apologetic tool to show that properly using the various rules invented by the skeptics will beat the skeptics at their own game. While skeptics use their criteria to enhance the idea that the Christ of faith (or the Christ of the Church) is not the real Jesus of history, Bock and his fellow essayists demonstrate that the criteria actually prove that we know more about the historical Jesus than the skeptics admit. Furthermore, there is nothing we know about the historical Jesus that contradicts the Christ of faith or orthodox Christology.

In light of the fact that the Bock and Komoszewski work responds to the Keith collection, the reader would be better served if he read the latter work first. It is also preferable to read the earlier and easier book by Darrell L. Bock titled *Who Is Jesus? Linking the Historical Jesus with the Christ of Faith* (2012) in preparation for reading *Jesus, Skepticism, and the Problem of History* unless one is already aware of how the criteria work. In this way, the reader can see precisely how the various criteria (e.g., multiple attestation of sources and forms, dissimilarity, embarrassment, rejection and

execution, coherence) are used in the process of historically authenticating New Testament information about Jesus.

Jesus, Skepticism, and the Problem of History is comprised of four parts. The first section gives three introductory essays on “The Value of New Testament Historical Studies.” Part two yields seven articles on “The Gospels and the Historical Jesus.” The work here demonstrates where most of the debate lives since the Gospels give most of what we know about the life of Christ. The third segment of the book provides two essays that deal with “The Book of Acts and Christian Origins.” The final part of the book gives three responses to the book. Interestingly, one of the responders is Scot McKnight, a contributor to the Keith and Donne book that is being answered.

The opening article by Bowman and Komoszewski (“The Historical Jesus and the Biblical Church: Why the Quest Matters”) introduces and surveys the various developments in the historical quest for Jesus. The historicity of Jesus matters because the earthly Jesus is the church’s Jesus, the canonical Jesus is the only Jesus we have, and the historical Jesus *is* the real Jesus. Therefore, the “church’s only interest is in following and believing in the historical Jesus—the real Jesus, the real man from Nazareth” since “there is no other Jesus” (42). In essence, the Christian faith is rooted in history. Thus, the church has an interest in studying the criteria which help us to authenticate biblical stories about the Savior.

Next, Craig Blomberg and Darlene Seal give an overview of the study of the historical Jesus in recent evangelical scholarship, a helpful summary for those who are not familiar with current NT studies in this area. In the following essay, Michael Metts responds to the charge from Chris Keith that the criteria for the historical quest are indebted on the whole to the failed enterprise of form criticism. He does so by noting the differences between earlier

questers who operated in the domain of form criticism compared to more recent attempts to engage the historical investigation. Consequently, the use of various criteria cannot be jettisoned with a kind of guilt-by-association argument by invoking the faults of form criticism.

Three of the articles from the second part of the book will be highlighted here. First, in his researched essay “Textual Criticism and the Criterion of Embarrassment,” Daniel Wallace reviews specific examples of how copyists might have altered Gospel texts because they were uncomfortable with various readings. Those who emphasize Matthean priority or external evidence might struggle with some of the discussion, but the issue overall deserves consideration. Second, Darrell Bock presents a detailed analysis of the use of criteria to investigate the charge of blasphemy as Jesus appears before the Sanhedrin. Third, in an extremely interesting article, Craig Evans and Greg Monette combine discussions about the criteria of multiple attestation, embarrassment, and verisimilitude with the burial of Jesus as well as bringing in some interaction with archaeology. For example, using various insights the burial of Jesus by Joseph of Arimathea proves to be reasonably grounded in history.

In evaluating the overall collection of essays in *Jesus, Skepticism, and the Problem of History*, one is immediately struck by the level of scholarship and writing. While an excellent work on both accounts, the level of the writing makes the book one written by scholars for scholars. While the well-read pastor or layman can follow the book, it takes some prior familiarity with the subject to be able to glean the full measure of what it offers. Nonetheless, the apologetic value of opposing skeptics such as those in the Jesus Seminar makes the book a significant work for the church. Consequently, more pastors should make themselves aware of this important debate.

Other positive remarks can be made about the book. First, the book presents a balanced approach to its critique of the anti-criteria slant. For example, in Bock's article on Jesus before the Sanhedrin, the following sensible statement is emblematic of the book's attitude: "My position is that a criteria-like approach is not the be-all and end-all for Jesus studies, but that it is an important and useful component in such a study" (207). Second, the level of discussion coupled with the variety of areas covered prevents any criticism of being overly theoretical or given to generalities. One sees close up how NT studies work. It is a practitioner's treatise, albeit a scholarly one. Third, the work provides an apologetic approach that is useful in defending the faith in a way that drives people to the details of the text of Scripture, always a good trait to have.

In the public square, the average person may be aware of the fascinations produced by works like Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* or Bart Ehrman's *Jesus Before the Gospels*. However, behind the scenes is the vigorous research and responsible presentations of evangelical NT scholars who are engaged in important historical studies that beat the skeptics at their own game. In this vein, *Jesus, Skepticism, and the Problem of History* is a challenging but worthwhile read.

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The New Testament in Its World: An Introduction to the History, Literature, and Theology of the First Christians. By N. T. Wright and Michael F. Bird. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2019. 992 pp. Hardcover \$59.99.

Upon learning of N. T. Wright and Michael F. Bird's *The New Testament in Its World*, I first questioned, "Why another New Testament introduction?" There are already almost countless introductions to the NT, such as those written by Carson and Moo, Burge and Green, Gundry, and Thielman. And all these have been produced by a single publishing house, Zondervan, in just the last handful of years! What makes *New Testament in Its World* stand out from the crowd?

First, some background. This book begins with Bird's description of how, in 2010, he suggested someone should condense Wright's massive corpus into a single volume. The goal was to provide "something of an N. T. Wright 'reader' or 'sampler,' written up in the genre of an introduction to the New Testament" (26). Nine years later, Wright and Bird released *The New Testament in Its World*.

This book is divided into nine parts. Part I, "Reading the New Testament," summarizes how the NT should be read as history, literature, and theology. Part II, "The World of Jesus and the Early Church," provides an overview of the Jewish and Greco-Roman culture. Part III, "Jesus and the Victory of God," considers Jesus' identity as well as his crucifixion. Part IV, "The Resurrection of the Son of God," examines the purpose of the resurrection. Part V, "Paul and the Faithfulness of God," begins the actual survey of NT books, beginning with Galatians. Part VI, "The Gospel and the Story of God," surveys the four Gospels. Part VII, "The Early Christians and the Mission of God," surveys the general epistles and Revelation. Part VIII, "The Making of the New

Testament,” overviews topics such as textual criticism and canonization. Part IX, “Living the Story of the New Testament,” provides a summary and conclusion to the book. Those familiar with Wright’s other works in his Christian Origins and the Question of God series will notice that many of the section titles reflect and summarize Wright’s books by the same names.

At nearly a thousand pages, its size alone sets this book apart from other introductions. This allows Wright and Bird the chance to cover a considerable amount of territory. To review a book this long, I will focus on three strengths and three weaknesses. First, the strengths:

- (1) *The breadth of content.* I thoroughly enjoyed Wright and Bird’s focus on the historical setting of the NT. Wright is at his best when summarizing vast swaths of history. For those unfamiliar with this time period, Part II provides an invaluable summary—succinct yet robust—of the Jewish exceptions and the Greco-Roman culture.
- (2) *Survey of N. T. Wright.* Whatever one may think of Wright and his conclusions, it is quite astounding to consider the sheer number of books that he has produced. For those unfamiliar with his writings, *The New Testament in Its World* provides an excellent “CliffsNotes” version.
- (3) *The book itself.* I was surprised at the physical quality of this volume. It is a beautifully bound cloth text and contained high-resolution photographs throughout. Quite simply, it was enjoyable to read. Apart from aesthetics, it is clear that significant planning went into designing this volume. From detailed maps, diagrams, and summaries of chapters, to practical question and answer sections, this text is built for the classroom.

As for weaknesses:

- (1) *Wright's Theology*. If you already know Wright's views, you will not be surprised by what you read. This book is classic Wright. Wright holds to one (of many) views of the New Perspective on Paul. This undergirds all that he writes about the doctrine of justification. For example, in the discussion about Jesus' resurrection, Wright focuses on Jesus' "victory" and makes no mention of substitutionary atonement (e.g., 256–61). He claims that the focus of the early church seems "markedly different from the atonement theology of the later church" (257). Furthermore, Wright does not take the standard evangelical view of the OT's messianic nature. Rather, he concludes, "Jewish messianism grew out of earnest reflection on Israel's sacred traditions in the light of the social and political context of the Jewish people" (226). Therefore, OT passages often viewed as messianic in their original context should not be understood as such. Examples include Daniel 7, which Wright asserts should not be viewed as "'messianic' in its original setting" (223), as well as Isaiah 53, which he claims should be viewed as non-messianic (62–63). Ultimately, Wright and Bird argue that the OT should be read "retrospectively, moving backwards from messianic event to scriptural text" (64). Yet I find it difficult to see how re-reading the OT in light of Jesus would have persuaded first-century Jews that the OT actually points to Jesus. There are various other related issues, such as Wright and Bird's insistence that 2 Peter is pseudepigraphical (763–65) and that the resurrections described in Matthew 27:51–53 should not be taken as literal (324–25).
- (2) *Order of Chapters*. The chapter order is quite perplexing. Rather than proceed canonically, Wright and Bird begin with Paul's letters (specifically Galatians) prior to surveying the Gospels. I would have found it easier to follow if they had gone in canonical order.

- (3) *Overly dismissive*. Although I often appreciate the style and tone of Wright and Bird, I found them unnecessarily dismissive—even caustic—of some views they do not accept. For example, when writing about the idea of a rapture in 1 Thessalonians 4, they write, “Let me put it this way: if one day you look out of your window and see people rising up into the air, the natural thing to do is to say to yourself, ‘Well, I’ll be d***ed!’” (425).

In summary, *The New Testament in Its World* is a unique volume unlike any other. Although one may not agree with Wright’s and Bird’s conclusions on every topic, this book provides a valuable summary of Wright’s works and contributions to the field of NT studies. I cannot think of a better way for someone to simultaneously gain familiarity with the world of the New Testament as well as with Wright’s corpus than by reading this volume.

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God’s Relational Presence: The Cohesive Center of Biblical Theology. By J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019. 416 pp. Softcover \$34.99.

When it comes to biblical theology, there are nearly as many proposed themes as there are theologians who write about them. Some assert that the central focus of the Bible is the kingdom of God. Others argue that the primary theme is promise and fulfillment. Still others claim concepts such as covenant, redemption, creation, or God’s glory is the central focus. In *God’s Relational Presence: The Cohesive Center of*

Biblical Theology, J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays offer a fresh approach to this issue by proposing that the central theme of all Scripture is the presence of God.

True to its title, *God's Relational Presence* makes the claim that the theme of the Bible is God's dwelling with his people. Duvall and Hays summarize, "Our basic thesis: the Triune God desires a personal relationship with his people and so makes his presence known to establish and cultivate that relationship. In other words, this relational presence of God lies at the heart of the Bible's overall message, at the heart of biblical theology" (325). The authors qualify what they mean by "cohesive center" by providing a helpful analogy. They do not claim the "cohesive center" is like the center of a wheel where "everything must connect directly to the hub of the wheel" (4). Rather, this "cohesive center" is pictured as the center of a spiderweb where "all the central themes and subthemes in biblical theology ... depend on the center for structural integrity and cohesion, even while the specific manner of interconnection ... can be complex" (5). Their point is that although there are many prominent themes throughout Scripture, they all depend one way or another on the concept of God's relational presence.

Besides the introduction and conclusion, *God's Relational Presence* is divided into six sections: (1) The Relational Presence of God in the Pentateuch; (2) The Relational Presence of God in the Historical Books, Psalms, and Wisdom Books; (3) The Relational Presence of God in the Prophets; (4) The Relational Presence of God in Matthew, Mark, and Luke-Acts; (5) The Relational Presence of God in Paul's Letters and in Hebrews and the General Letters; (6) The Relational Presence of God in John's Gospel, Epistles, and Apocalypse. In so doing, Duvall (who is a NT professor) and Hays (who is an OT professor) provide a robust consideration of both Testaments. Each biblical book is discussed, though some do receive more discussion than others (e.g., the Song of

Songs, where Duvall and Hays simply conclude, “the topic is one that does not directly involve the presence of God” [110]).

One strength of this book is the simplicity of its thesis. In the field of biblical studies, often centered on precise details and careful observations, there is a certain beauty to Duvall and Hays’s approach that is surprisingly refreshing. As they note, “Our starting observation is that Genesis is the plot-forming beginning and Revelation is the consummating end” (4). Rather than focus on the minutia, these authors paint with a broad brush that provides clarity and insight. This comes from years of experience explaining the overarching story of the Bible to students: “We both regularly encountered the need to explain the entire Bible and the flow of the biblical story to our students. Meeting this challenge has been our passion for the last twenty-five years” (9).

It was surprising to notice that in *God’s Relational Presence*, Duvall and Hays arrive at a different conclusion than they had in their previous biblical theology book, *The Story of Israel: A Biblical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004), cowritten by C. Marvin Pate, E. Randolph Richards, W. Dennis Tucker Jr., and Preben Vang. In that book, they asserted that the story of Israel is the center of biblical theology: “We believe that the story of Israel—the story of God’s creation, humanity’s sin and resulting exile, and God’s mission to restore his people—represents a prominent theological theme of Scripture” (*Story of Israel*, 278). This is compared to their assertion in *God’s Relational Presence*: “From beginning to end, and in virtually every chapter in between, the relational presence of God unifies and advances the biblical story” (327). Although these themes are not contradictory, it is clear that Duvall and Hays have adjusted and refined their understanding of how the Bible fits together over the past years.

Throughout this book, there were numerous “aha!” moments. Each chapter was filled with exegetical insights that

bolstered one's confidence that the relational presence of God is in fact the cohesive center of the Bible. Although some may still disagree that this is *the* central theme of all Scripture, based on Duvall and Hays's work, it is certainly at least one of the central themes of the Bible. Overall, I highly recommend this book. There are few resources that summarize the overarching message of Scripture as clearly and succinctly as *God's Relational Presence*.

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Lexham Geographic Commentary on Acts through Revelation. Edited by Barry J. Beitzel. Bellingham, WA: Lexham P, 2019. 792 pp. Hardcover \$39.99.

Barry J. Beitzel, the general editor of *Lexham Geographic Commentary on Acts through Revelation*, presents an impressive set of credentials to serve as the general editor for this volume that consists of no fewer than 53 essays by an equally impressive team of nineteen contributors. It is the second of a two-volume set (with the first volume, published in 2016, dedicated to a geographic commentary on the Gospels).

I must admit that I was pleasantly surprised as I worked my way through this 792-page tome. I expected something more along the lines of a Bible atlas commentary, Bible encyclopedia, Bible backgrounds commentary, or even a Bible customs and manners book. But this was something much more. We often don't consider that spatial considerations necessarily influence a given region's culture. But this volume shows not only that they do, but that to ignore or bypass such considerations is to deprive ourselves of

critical insight into that culture's sociological and theological fabric, which, of course, is vital to accurate interpretation. This volume masterfully demonstrates how to do achieve this critical insight.

The layout of the book is as follows. There are two pages of endorsements from men who are generally well-known in the world of NT scholarship: Darrell Bock, Scot McKnight, Douglas Moo, David Pao, Klyne Snodgrass, David DeSilva, Grant Osborne, and Philip Comfort. Then follows the normal front-matter (Title page, verso, Table of Contents, Abbreviations), plus a very helpful "Series Preface" (7 pages) by Beitzel who argues convincingly that spatial considerations are a non-optional part of the hermeneutical process. After the "Series Preface" is a brief "Volume Preface" (2 pages), after which follow the 53 essays that form the heart of the book. There is an ample amount of back-matter (67 pages) consisting of six different sections: a first with 18 pages of maps, images, and charts; a second with 5 pages of brief biographical notations for each of the nineteen contributors; a third with a 12-page subject index; a fourth with a 16-page Scripture index; a fifth with a 15-page Image Attribution index; and a sixth and final one-page acknowledgement of Project Staff.

As for the heart of the commentary—the 53 essays—there is a standardized approach to which each author conforms. First, each essay begins with a title and the primary Scriptural reference(s) the chapter will focus on with regard to spatial (and its concomitant socio-theological) considerations. Second, there is a framed inset of "Key Points" on the opening page which quickly orients the reader as to what to anticipate as he moves through the content. Third, the authors provide an introduction which affords them an opportunity to convey to the reader their own nuanced approach as to how their geographic study has made an impact on their interpretation of the biblical material. Since this approach is what I consider to

be a significant contribution of this commentary, I will provide two examples below to illustrate the point.

In the very first essay, Mark L. Strauss provides a chapter entitled “Typological Geography and the Progress of the Gospel in Acts.” The key Scriptural references listed under the title are “Acts 1:8, 27:1–28:16; 28:30–31.” Then comes a brief two-paragraph introduction wherein he explains the nuanced approach he takes. He writes,

This article, however, is not about the geography of Acts per se.... It is about Luke’s geographical theology. For Luke, the journeys in Luke and Acts have not only historical significance, but also symbolic and theological significance. This article examines how Luke uses geography typologically to symbolize the paradox of the cross and ethnic progress of the gospel from Jews to all people everywhere (1–2).

Similarly, consider Cyndi Parker’s essay entitled “The Threefold Expansion of the Early Church: Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria” (Chapter 3). The Scriptural focus is Acts 1:6–8. After observing that Galilee is omitted, she offers this comment in her introduction to the essay:

The instruction to take the gospel message out of Jerusalem is often explained as a geographical reference moving in concentric circles from the smallest location to the next larger location. While this explanation is true, the instruction has a more complex and nuanced meaning beyond geography. Given that Jesus is talking to his Galilean disciples, one would expect a purely geographical list to include Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and *Galilee*—especially since Jesus spent most of his public ministry in Galilee. But Galilee is omitted in favor of “the ends of the earth.”

A preferable explanation to the place names acknowledges that the places mentioned in Acts 1:8 are a cultural product derived from a combination of memory, religion, sociological, and political associations. Their nuanced meaning deserves careful attention. (42–43)

After the introduction is the commentary proper, peppered with footnotes throughout and followed by a bibliography. As for the footnotes, the bulk of these serve as documentation of the author's source material. Some, however, are explanatory footnotes, which I often found to be enlightening. As for the bibliography at the end of each essay, the number of sources referenced are somewhere in the range of 10–50, depending on the length and complexity of the essay at hand. Beyond that, every essay is amply illustrated with color images of epigraphy, ancient and modern cartography, color drawings, photos of archaeological finds, etc. In fact, I mentioned above the 15-page Image Attribution index, which by my estimation provides attributions to more than 300 images. The reader should also note that the digital edition of this book in Logos Bible Software differs in terms of the number of images per essay and in terms of the additional media that is accessible through hyperlinks (e.g., videos, interactive infographics, expandable maps, etc.)—sometimes by even double the amount in the print edition.

I highly recommend *Lexham Geographic Commentary on Acts through Revelation*. While it is probably a bit technical for the average layman, it should become a “go to” for every pastor, preacher, and professor. Ideally, this would be a required textbook, along with its companion one on the Gospels, for any graduate-level New Testament Introduction course. Unfortunately, the size of even one volume would prevent the assigned reading of the whole of it. But either a judicious selection of certain parts (e.g., Johannine, or Pauline

sections), or perhaps parceling out all of it to the whole class with assigned presentations on their respective portions would creatively accomplish the learning objective.

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James: Verse by Verse. (Osborne New Testament Commentaries). By Grant R. Osborne. Bellingham, WA: Lexham P, 2019. 204 pp. Softcover \$19.99.

Grant R. Osborne's commentary on James, based on the NIV for his English text, is part of the Osborne New Testament Commentaries, an eleven-volume series. In the introduction of this commentary, Osborne shares his goal for the series: "I would like [these commentaries] to be interesting and exciting adventures into the New Testament texts. My hope is that readers will discover the riches of God that lie behind every passage in his divine word. I hope every reader will fall in love with God's word as I have and begin a similar lifelong fascination with these eternal truths" (xi). Osborne, a theologian and NT scholar, taught New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School for thirty-nine years. He died in 2018 at the age of 76, but his writings are theologically rich and sprinkled with practical application.

The subtitle, *Verse by Verse*, is very apt as Osborne leaves no verse untouched. This commentary is a good blend or balance of scholarly exposition and practical application. It is academic but written so that a layman who desires to better understand the book of James can easily understand the meaning. Osborne includes helpful and insightful Greek word studies, such as on *peirasmōs* (trial; 24); *makrothymēo* (patient

waiting; 150); and *astheneo* (weakness; 163). Furthermore, he develops word pictures based on the etymologies for even clearer understanding, such as “perseverance” and “mature,” which are metaphors relating to agriculture and medicine respectively.

Osborne makes a careful distinction between Paul and James’s perspectives on faith and works, which he contends are not in conflict with one another, but actually complement each other (83-84). His interpretation of James’s reference to Rahab as an example of faith is well done, offering an excellent summary of her as an example of faith-based works (91-92).

His interpretation of a “harvest of righteousness” in James 3:17 is worth noting as he believes James uses the word *righteousness* ethically to refer not to right standing before God, but to the righteous behavior that flows out of it (118). Osborne comments that translating the quotation in James 4:5, “the spirit he caused to live in us tends toward envy,” is “immensely difficult” as the Greek can be translated three viable and preferred ways, which he gives on page 124. He does state that he believes the second interpretation (i.e., God jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us) as rendered in NIV 2011, NASB, NRSV, and the ESV, makes more sense and is the best one. In addition, Osborne makes a good distinction between judging and admonishing in James 4:11-12 (130) and provides excellent commentary on the wealthy’s disregard for God due to their self-centeredness, which leads to forgetting God and ultimately to their sinning. Finally, I appreciated his commentary on James 5:14-15a regarding prayer and anointing with oil (164-65). His conclusion about the use of oil for anointing along with prayer is worth quoting: “We must conclude that anointing is not required for healing, but it is commendable practice (especially for serious illnesses) for its symbolic value and

because it enables us to focus our prayers more thoroughly” (165).

I do take exception with his interpretation of “perfect” in James 3:2b. Osborne writes, “‘Perfect’ here goes beyond 1:4, where it refers to the ‘mature and complete’ Christian to point to sinless perfection. His point is that if you can completely control your tongue, you can control the whole body and every part of yourself, and thus attain to perfection in this life. The attainment of this perfection will come in our heavenly life to come, but we strive for it in the here and now” (97). I found this confusing double-talk and wondered, “Which is it?” But, he does seem to back track in his summary section where in referring to the Greek word, *telios*, which can mean perfect and mature. He writes, “While we will never attain to sinless perfection, we can reach spiritual maturity, and to do so we must avoid ‘stumbling’ in our use of speech among God’s people” (103). It’s one of those, “No, you’re wrong. Oh wait, yes, I agree,” parts of the book.

A strength of this commentary is Osborne’s summaries at the end of each chapter. I would call it his “CliffsNotes” for those who want the bottom line of what James wrote without reading the book of James or Osborne’s entire commentary, neither of which I recommend. Other notable features include a helpful Glossary (177-79), an extensive Subject and Author Index (183-93), and a scholarly Scripture and Other Ancient Literature Index (194-204).

I recommend this commentary on James and would gladly secure other volumes in this New Testament series by Osborne. If I were giving it a grade, it would be an A.

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Acts: Verse by Verse (Osborne New Testament Commentaries). By Grant R. Osborne. Bellingham, WA: Lexham P, 2019. 576 pp. Softcover \$22.99.

The late Grant Osborne taught New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School for thirty-nine years. His commentaries are based on his extensive class notes and are intended for pastors, Bible study groups, and Christians who desire a deeper understanding of the Scriptures. In addition to the useful introduction, he adds a glossary of theological terms for those who might not be familiar with the literature. The author's conservative evangelical perspective results in meaningful interaction with the theological intent of the passages. He does not shy away from drawing out the implications of his exegesis for life and ministry. A wide variety of information is given to assist the reader in comprehending the meaning and significance of the passage. No knowledge of Greek is assumed, so all terms are transliterated, and their meaning explained. There is geographical information, such as the insight that Antioch was 250 miles from Jerusalem (272) or that Derbe is 90 miles from Lystra (264). The commentary is based on the NIV, but Osborne does not shy away from discussing the best way to translate a phrase. For example, in Acts 13:40, the NIV has "I am going to do something in your days, that you would never believe," but Osborne prefers a more literal "I am working a work in your days, a work that you would never believe" (248). When Paul and Barnabas failed to understand the language at Lystra, this resulted in the people almost sacrificing to them. Osborne concludes from this that it is essential for missionaries to be prepared to speak to the people they minister to (260).

Inaugurated eschatology forms his framework for understanding Acts, which he concisely defines as "the view

that the kingdom is already here yet not in a final sense” (24). Along with that, he considers the church to be the new Israel, so it is questionable for him that Pentecost can be considered the birth of the church at all. In other words, he sees direct continuity between Israel and the church as the one people of God. On tongues, he aims for a middle ground between cessationists and non-cessationists, which he describes as “seek not, forbid not” (43). When he discusses whether Simon Magus was truly saved or not, he recognizes the difficulty of the issue; however, his remarks are inconsistent at this point, leaving the reader wondering what he really thinks. On the one hand, he wonders whether there ever was any true faith in Simon (162). On the other hand, he considers the magician to be “a carnal Christian rather than an unbeliever” (163). In harmonizing the events of the Jerusalem council with the chronology in Galatians, he chooses the common view that Galatians took place prior to the council and that the visit in Galatians 2:1-10 is the famine visit of Acts 11:27-30 (270).

Therefore, the commentary appropriately balances scholarship and academics for its intended audience. Application, historical background, exegetical detail, and theological implications are all dealt with at appropriate points. The pastor or serious Bible student will find much helpful information, whether or not he agrees with Osborne at every point. It is an excellent addition to Osborne’s New Testament Commentaries.

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Two Commissions: Two Missionary Mandates in Matthew's Gospel. By James I. Fazio. El Cajon, CA: Southern California Seminary P, 2015. 112 pp. Softcover \$14.00.

In discourse surrounding the historical divide between covenantal and dispensational theologians, each tradition has, at times, been guilty of putting the systematic cart before the exegetical horse. When this inversion occurs, legitimate continuities and discontinuities that may be exegetically derived are lost in systematic expression. To over-emphasize similarities or differences for the sake of systematic harmony is to render God's polychromatic revelation in monochrome. Yet, as James I. Fazio maintains in *Two Commissions: Two Missionary Mandates in Matthew's Gospel*, rightly dividing the whole counsel of God requires attentiveness when the work of careful exegesis yields the fruit of discontinuity.

Fazio is Dean of Bible and Theology at Southern California Seminary in El Cajon, California, where he also serves as a Professor of Biblical Studies. His *Two Commissions* is an interesting work that gives exegetical attentiveness to critical, yet often overlooked distinctions between Jesus' commissions in Matthew 10:5–15 and 28:18–20. The work is a concise, direct, and clearly organized presentation of Fazio's thesis that the Gospel of Matthew contains "two discernible missionary mandates where Christ sent His disciples to two different people groups with two evidently distinct messages" (10).

Chapter One begins the work with a short introduction that presents the two commissions. Fazio also calls readers to careful Bible study, summarizes the issue of continuity and discontinuity, and outlines the book. Chapter Two presents the first or "Germinal Commission" (11) from Matthew 10, and Chapter Three presents the more familiar "Great Commission" from Matthew 28. Each commission is considered from the angles of context, content, complement, and consequence.

An additional consideration is also given from the angle of the intended audience. This pattern allows Fazio to carefully compare and contrast the commissions, which he helpfully summarizes in table form at the end of each chapter (e.g., 61). It is in these two chapters that the main argument of the work is set forth. Fazio posits distinction in the ministries, messages, and outcomes of the two commissions recorded in Matthew. Leaning primarily upon the Gospel of Luke, Acts, and the Pauline witness, Chapter Four presents analogous support for the conclusions drawn from Chapters Two and Three. Attention is given to Luke's presentation of the two commissions (Luke 9:1–6; 24:44–48) and his unique record of Jesus's sending of the seventy (Luke 10:1–16) as well as to a sketch of "Paul's gospel" (74–79). Here he argues that a distinction in ministry, message, and outcomes is observable in the Gospel of Luke and the post-ascension preaching of the apostles. The theological implications of the preceding exegetical summary are presented in Chapter Five. Fazio summarizes his understanding of the "continuous" (covenantal) and "discontinuous" (dispensational) views while demonstrating how his understanding of the two commissions differs from each tradition as presented. The covenantal view, according to Fazio's understanding, emphasizes continuity at the expense of observing revealed changes in God's economy (84–90). On the other hand, the dispensational view challenged by Fazio has driven a wedge of artificial discontinuity between the Great Commission and the post-ascension preaching of the apostles (90–94). Both views suffer from oversimplifying a nuanced issue and can be corrected by observing the distinctions highlighted in Chapters Two and Three. The work ends with a summary conclusion (Chapter Six) and an Appendix that presents a refreshing conversation between Fazio and Dr. Mark Strauss, formerly of Bethel Seminary in San Diego, California. The critical engagement by Strauss allows Fazio to respond to questions that may arise

for other readers. The inclusion of this dialogue strengthens the presentation of Fazio's thesis and the overall clarity of the work.

Two Commissions is thought-provoking. Fazio accomplishes his intention to "raise important questions" rather than to "draw conclusions" (4), especially as it relates to distinctions within the Gospel of Matthew. The primary strength of the volume lies in this approach. Moreover, Fazio's treatment of Matthew 10 and Matthew 18 within the framework of his clear structure allows distinction *within the biblical texts* to be highlighted for the reader to consider. Texts that are a challenge for any simplistic view of Jesus's earthly ministry (e.g., Matt 15:21–28) are allowed to sing with full voice. This is not to suggest that the work is completely neutral. Fazio submits upfront that the distinctions he identifies are best reconciled within a dispensational framework (12) and, as such, a dispensational predisposition cannot be denied. Yet, he labors to avoid the common cart-horse inversion mentioned earlier.

While the strength of the work resides primarily in the insightful study of Matthew's Gospel, weaknesses emerge in the presentation of analogous support and the summary of theological implications. After so carefully refusing to allow preliminary synthesis to determine exegetical conclusions in Matthew, it seems Fazio allows some of the distinctions identified between Matthew's two commissions to be over-applied in his reading of other texts. For example, it is claimed that authority over sickness and demons and escape from the coming judgment do not "characterize the ministry of the apostles after [Jesus] ascended to His Father in heaven" (68). Yet, the gospel ministry of the apostles was importantly confirmed with signs and wonders (e.g., Acts 3:1–16; 2 Cor 12:12; Heb 2:4) and included the reality of coming judgment as an impetus for repentance (e.g., Acts 17:30–31). Similar concerns arise in the volume's suggestion of distinctions in the

apostolic preaching of the kingdom (71), Christ's appellations (72), and Peter and Paul's gospel (77–78). Surely it can be acknowledged that the post-ascension preaching—indeed, the Great Commission preaching of the apostles—included an emphasis on the kingdom (e.g., Acts 28:23, 30 cf. Luke 10:9; 1 Thess 2:12). Further, the Lord's identity as Messiah-King does not seem to recede to the background of the apostolic message of salvation (e.g., Rom 1:1–4; 1 Cor 15:24–28; Col 1:13; Heb 2:5–8). As for Paul, it seems that his concern was Peter's failure to “walk straight” in practice with regard to the truth of the gospel (Gal 2:14) that Peter himself knew (2:15) rather than a hangover from the “Germinal Commission” in his understanding of the gospel. Concerning such theological implications, the book's synthesis may be truncated. This is understandable for a shorter work, but what is included left this reviewer with a desire for a more complete analysis and engagement with a broader range of scholarship, especially on the dispensational side. To his credit, Fazio is quick to acknowledge that many questions are left unanswered and conclusions are left unsynthesized. Perhaps the intent for the work to primarily present observations of distinction from his exegesis, which is a noted strength, works against the notion to include a robust synthesis of theological implications. An inclusion of this sort would certainly change the focus of the book.

Ultimately, *Two Commissions* models the notion that the details of every text are important and encourages each side of the covenantal-dispensational divide to account for every exegetical detail in their systematic expression. Simply put, Fazio's work is a helpful study that succeeds in its aim to highlight distinctions in Jesus's two commissions in Matthew 10 and Matthew 28. Students of Scripture will be well-served by supplementing their exegetical resources on the Gospel of Matthew with *Two Commissions*.

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Do Christians, Muslims, and Jews Worship the Same God? Four Views (Counterpoints, Bible and Theology). Ronnie P. Campbell Jr. and Christopher Gnanakan, general editors. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2019. 240 pp. Softcover \$16.09.

Most teachers have been asked the question: Is the Allah of Islam the same as the Christian God? Or, Is the God of the Muslims and of the Jews the Father of Jesus Christ? As the title indicates, this study asks another, similar question: “Do Christians, Muslims, and Jews worship the same God?” Pastors and teachers in America, especially those who have had little to do with evangelizing Jews or Muslims, will often confidently respond, of course they do not! The beliefs of each of these religions are different and God is described quite differently, so they cannot all be the same God. Or, they may go as far as to say that as followers of Jesus, we worship the same God as the Jews; we just know more about him. But most of us will struggle to believe that though all three religions look back to Abraham and call themselves “people of the Book,” we all worship the same God.

The answer to this question is not as easy as it seems. First, one must ask what “worship” means and philosophically what does “the same” mean? Then there is the knotty problem of determining what exactly is meant by God? How is he defined and described? In addition, there is the reality that all three traditions have many subgroups, and the question could be raised: do all of the conceptions of God of the people in the various subgroups match up? In other words, do we all believe in the same God, but not exactly agree on who he is, even within the subgroups of our own major faiths? When we

approach a Jewish or Muslim believer, do we acknowledge that we are worshipping the same God, or are we obligated to convince the person in our evangelism that they need to convert to a God who is wholly different than theirs?

In assembling this book, the Counterpoints editors have done an excellent job of selecting the writers, who present their own views, ask and answer some of the above questions, and critique the thoughts of each other well. The general editors open the discussion with a brief introduction containing both an overview of the positions defended by the contributors and a summary of the non-negotiables of “evangelical” faith.

William. Andrew Schwartz and John B. Cobb Jr. follow with their position: “All Worship the Same God” (a religious pluralist view). They present arguments for a view that more than one path can lead to the God of Abraham. They begin by asserting that there is no one Christianity any more than there is one Judaism, or one Islam. They also claim that the ambiguity of the words *same*, *worship*, and *God*, adds to the difficulty of answering the question in the title of the book. Yet they are willing to rise to the challenge, and they use process theology to demonstrate the value of seeing worship of the ultimate reality—Being Itself/the Supreme Being—as the worship that is normative for Christians, Jews, and Muslims. To them, the benefits of this view are many, including world peace, generosity, greater humility, promotion of dialogue, etc.

Francis Beckwith presents another view of “All Worshipping the same God,” taking the perspective that since there is only one true God, all are ultimately referring to the same God. Using the story of three hypothetical individuals who move from atheism toward theism, each of them choosing one of the three Abrahamic religions, Beckwith argues that since there came a time when all three came to believe in God, they all entered their new faiths with belief in the same God. The

God they had come to believe in and to worship is the one true God to whom they had been introduced: “*the absolute, uncaused, perfect, rational, unchanging, self-subsistent, eternal creator and sustainer of all that which receives its being from another*” (46). Beckwith uses Scripture and history to further develop his argument that Christians, Muslims, and Jews worship the same God, despite their theological disagreements.

Gerald McDermott presents the view that Christians and Jews worship the same God, but the Muslims do not because of their profound disagreement about the nature and character of God. Christians and Jews worship the same God because the NT writers do not suggest that the God worshipped by the Jews and self-revealed in the OT was to be replaced with a new God. McDermott further explains that some of the characteristics of God treasured by Christian believers were already accepted by the Jews. McDermott clearly emphasizes that there is only one God, the Triune God of Christian orthodoxy, and that the god of the Qur’an is different in kind. This is not to question the good character of Muslims, only to emphasize the fundamental differences between the Allah they worship and the true living God.

The “None worship the Same God” view is championed by Jerry Walls. Much of his argument is based on Tomas Bogardus and Mallorie Urban’s “How to Tell Whether Christians and Muslims Worship the Same God,” in *Faith and Philosophy* 34:2 (2017). The critical terms that come from their argument are “reference shift” and “source of information in the dossier.” Bogardus, Urban, and Walls use Saint Nick as an example of reference shift. Since Santa Claus is often used as another name for Saint Nicolas, the question must be asked: “What characteristics of Saint Nicolas does Santa Claus possess?” Though their names might be used interchangeably in contemporary conversation, the world-hopping Santa in a flying reindeer sleigh has nothing in

common with the ancient Saint Nicolas, so the dossier of the one is completely unlike the dossier of the other. Similarly, if such a reference shift has taken place in Islam, Muslims who worship Allah do not worship the same God worshipped by Christians according to their core beliefs about him. In addition, Walls emphasizes that the NT revelation has changed everything, because through it we understand the Messiah, Jesus Christ, his death and resurrection, the Holy Spirit, and other fundamental truths that undergird our worship.

Following each of these presentations, the writers of the other essays comment on the positions taken by the current presenter, often reviewing or contrasting points they had made with the present writer's essay. In addition, the presenter is allowed to respond to the others who have commented on his paper.

The final pair of essays, presented by authors who have been ministering to Muslims, approach this question with an eye toward the apologetic and evangelistic value or lack of value this question has in approaching Muslims. Their practical insights add value to the discussion by demonstrating how arguments like this are either helpful or destructive in their evangelistic endeavors. One could only wish that a third voice, that of one who has labored for years in Jewish evangelism, would have been added to the others.

Rather than run through all the counterarguments and responses given, the present reviewer prefers to describe two foundational issues that run like threads through the whole book. First, one can mention the question of whether it is proper to use biblical, doctrinal, or dogmatic arguments to answer this question. For Schwartz and Cobb, the answer is no. They object to the use of doctrinal differences because in their view the sameness of the God of the Christian, the Muslim, and the Jew is not to be found in such doctrinal discussions. McDermott and Walls would argue that a proper Christian presentation of the issue at question can only be

given through a thoroughgoing use of a biblically-based doctrinal presentation of who God is and why this Trinitarian God is worshipped on the basis of NT revelation.

The other frequently recurring question is whether the authors have either overemphasized the differences between the God worshipped by a Christian, the Allah of the Muslim, and the Jehovah God of the OT, or underestimated those differences. This proves to be an interesting discussion, because it leads to a consideration of the “mistaken beliefs” that believers in one faith have that the other worshippers of God do not hold to, and the difference it makes.

This book is a kaleidoscope of fundamental problems, issues, and debatable points. As such, it will serve well as a textbook for upper level college, graduate, and seminary students (especially those with training in logic) in a course such as comparative religions, or theism. It should be required reading for students of missions who intend to work with Muslims and Jews.

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A Guide to Theological Reflection: A Fresh Approach for Practical Ministry Courses and Theological Field Education.

By Jim L. Wilson and Earl Waggoner. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2020. 185 pp. Softcover \$18.99.

As the subtitle of this work indicates and the back cover affirms, *A Guide to Theological Reflection* is written to serve a very specific purpose, though additional applications are possible. The book is divided into two sections. The first (15-54) focuses upon the process of theological reflection. Here the authors make clear the importance of theological reflection: to provide a bridge from the classroom to the

ministry field (16). As they put it: “Faithful ministry occurs when we close the gap between what we believe and how we actually live and minister” (21). To do this requires a “pause” in ministry activity in order to “learn from the past and prepare for the future” (23). During this pause, theological reflection moves through three stages: (1) *identifying* how beliefs, thoughts, and feelings influence actions; (2) *aligning* them with God’s truth; and (3) *exploring* possibilities for future endeavors (23-54). Rightly done, such reflection serves to transform the minister into becoming the kind of person God desires (26). In all of this process, the primacy of Scripture is upheld, though additional sources of truth from other fields of learning can provide helpful insights as they are submitted to scriptural authority (34).

The second section (57-172) discusses the “tools” by which effective theological reflection is enabled. Here the authors discuss the importance of what they term the “360-degree ministry support system.” Feedback from peers and ministry recipients as well as focused mentoring are the key aspects of this tool for facilitating reflection (62-76). Additional tools include journaling (77-115); case studies, defined as “summaries of multiple ministry episodes conducted over an extended period of time that allow patterns of attitudes, reactivity, and ministry responses to emerge” (118); verbatim reports, defined as “detailed summaries of isolated ministry events” (121); and “growth covenants,” which are intentional statements of more rigorous action plans designed to close the gap between “operational and confessed theology, theory or emotional health” (139). Through all of this discussion many illustrative and practical examples of these tools are provided.

All in all, the book accomplishes its stated purpose. At times, the discussion seems needlessly repetitive. Yet, a student or ministry intern who is brand new to this process may not feel this way. Also, it is not clear to this reviewer

what is “fresh” about the approach presented, since many of the principles and tools are quite familiar. Finally, the authors assume that the ministry intern is already competent in deriving theological truths and principles from scripture, since there is no discussion of how to do this. Nevertheless, this “guide” would be a useful tool for educational institutions which require ministry practicums and internships, as well as churches and other parachurch ministries that are seeking to develop a more robust approach to personal discipleship, ministry training, and staff development.

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Every Believer Confident: Apologetics for the Ordinary Christian. By Mark J. Farnham. Sisters, OR: Deep River Books, 2019. 206 pp. Softcover \$15.99.

When it comes to the topic of apologetics, there seems to be no lack of resources available both to the scholarly community as well as to the average Christian. In the latter regard, Lee Strobel’s very popular “The Case for” series is just one noteworthy example. Yet, many Christians still feel intimidated by a culture that is increasingly contrary to and even hostile towards biblical truth and the gospel. Mark Farnham’s *Every Believer Confident* provides a ready solution to that reality (full disclosure: Mark is a colleague of this reviewer at Lancaster Bible College).

In this concise and eminently readable volume, Farnham puts into book form principles and guidelines he has been sharing primarily with church audiences over the last several years through weekend seminars and other venues. Many of the illustrations he uses are from personal experience,

but they are also of the kind that virtually any Christian can relate to them. His conviction is that the “average Christian can learn to defend the Christian faith, share the gospel, shake the unbelief of non-Christians, present the Christian worldview, and lead people, to saving faith in Jesus Christ” (20).

With Farnham’s Ph.D. in apologetics from Westminster Theological Seminary, it is not surprising that Farnham champions a presuppositional approach to apologetics, which he says, “begins with biblical truth and seeks to get at the heart of the unbeliever’s rejection of the gospel” (30-31). Yet, he is respectful of other approaches and even recommends some of them in his Bibliography of Suggested Resources. Farnham advocates a basic two-step approach: First, seek to demonstrate the incongruity of other worldviews, and then provide in a winsome manner the compelling truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He rightly views apologetics as “a distinct but inseparable part of evangelism” (24). Indeed, he briefly traces the Bible’s “defense of the truth” from the garden of Eden through the OT (39-42). His principal NT text for “the biblical warrant for apologetics” is 1 Peter 3:15-16. For Farnham, the primary means by which the believer “prepares a defense” [Gk. *apologia*] of his faith is by knowing that faith thoroughly (44). Indeed, such preparation “requires an investment of time, effort and sometimes money. It also takes careful thought, reading, studying and conversations to become an experienced apologist” (45). Sadly, there seem to be few Christians who actually share their faith on a regular basis, let alone aspire to such preparation. But Farnham certainly makes a compelling case that becoming more effective in apologetics and evangelism is within the reach of most Christians, if they are willing.

There is much I appreciate about this work. First, as already noted, Farnham rightly wed apologetics to the overall

task of evangelism. The Christian's goal should not be merely to successfully defend the truth but also to seek to lead people to Christ (99ff.). Second, Farnham rightly stresses the fact that apologetics is more a *spiritual* endeavor than a *philosophical* one and as such needs to be undergirded with prayer and undertaken in the power of the Holy Spirit (57-59). Third, he makes very clear throughout the book that becoming more effective as an apologist and evangelist is not so much a matter of becoming a "subject matter expert" as it is learning to ask the right questions that serve to expose the weaknesses and even the irrationality of non-Christian worldviews (80-92). To this end he provides a very helpful chapter on "strategies for effective apologetics encounters" (125-35), a primer on common logical fallacies (137-50), and a practical illustration of principles and guidelines with a very realistic "case study" (151-61). He concludes with an overview of important doctrinal truths (Scripture, God, Man and Sin) relevant to the task of apologetics (163-189).

One area of the book that could use additional support and clarification is the discussion of the terms of the gospel (117-23). He begins by citing Jesus' words in Mark 1:15 ("repent and believe in the gospel") as encapsulating the proper response to the gospel. As a dispensationalist, I would prefer Paul's words in Acts 20:21 ("repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ") to make this point. But, surprisingly, there are no other citations of Scripture to support his many theological statements in this section. Although I would readily agree with most of what he says, he could have done a better job supporting specific assertions with Scripture, especially since he criticizes other approaches at the beginning of the chapter. A relatively minor quibble is his overwhelming preference for the pronoun "she" in referring to a believer, presumably in the name of gender equality. In the evident absence of such equality in this book, I would prefer the use of neutral terms such as "one" or "they."

In summary, if you can't have Mark to your church to do his apologetics seminar, the next best thing would be to walk your church, your Sunday school class, or your mentee through the steps outlined in his book. Hopefully, as more believers accept Peter's challenge to "always [be] prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is within you," this book will become a go-to resource to help them obey that command.

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Cultural Apologetics: Renewing the Christian Voice, Conscience, and Imagination in a Disenchanted World. By Paul M. Gould. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019. 240 pp. Softcover \$11.99.

What does a "cultural apologist" do? He or she "seeks to help others see Christianity as *both* plausible and desirable" (91). In order to accomplish this purpose, Gould proposes "the reestablishment of the Christian imagination, mind, and conscience" (33). Cultural apologists fulfill their mission on a cultural scale "by creating and cultivating beauty, goodness, and truth in the spaces we inhabit, the lives we live, and the things we make" (212). On an interpersonal level, they accomplish their mission "by listening, prodding, discussing, providing evidence, inviting, and serving the tangible needs of the seeker" (213).

As a backdrop, Gould traces the relationship between perception and desire. In short, there is a "connection between what we love and our perception" (38). As a corollary, evidence for the existence of God is "widely available" yet "easily resistible" (38). "God does not force himself upon us. He desires genuine love, and thus the evidence for his

existence can, and often is, missed by those who think there is nothing outside themselves more important than themselves” (39). Rather than merely repeating the common storyline of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration, Gould prefers the basic narrative of home, away from home, home again. Beginning with an enchanted world created by God, humans have moved into a disenchanted world emptied by the suppression of truth. The missional endeavor is to re-enchant the world through an awakening of desires and a “return to reality” (44). A naturalistic reductionism has emptied the world of transcendence and sacredness. We are cosmic orphans who no longer perceive “a world infused with the supernatural” (56). Yet in losing the world, we lose ourselves as well (60).

Chapter 3 addresses re-enchantment. “The first step to re-enchantment is to reawaken within ourselves and others the deeper desires of the heart for truth, goodness, and beauty, which in turn will arouse the heart’s deepest desire—a desire and love for God” (69). How can the church respond to such deadened desire? It should appeal to the imagination, reason, and conscience. An approach from the imagination leads to the divine artist, an approach from reason leads to the divine mind, and an approach from objective morality leads to divine goodness (93). Corresponding to the triad of beauty, truth, and goodness, we find “Christ as the Beauty of all beautiful things, the Truth to which all truths point, and the Good of all good things” (94).

The “way of imagination” focuses on beauty exemplified through music and the arts. Adapting C. S. Lewis’s well-known sentiments on pain, Gould declares, “Beauty is a divine megaphone to rouse a disenchanted world” (104). Gould also taps into C. S. Lewis’s understanding of *Sehnsucht* (without using the exact term)—a desire for the transcendent. Beauty can be reflected in “the attractiveness of the Christian life” (105), but also in aesthetic works of

creativity (whether the topics are religious or not). Regarding literature, “all good stories point us to Jesus even if they do so indirectly” (113). Gould claims, “The Holy Spirit woos us through the beauty and imaginative stories depicted in these works of art” (73). In a theological hermeneutic, however, one could speak of common grace in such artistic contexts rather than a pneumatological immediacy.

Readers will most likely be surprised to learn that Isaac Watts (the famous hymnist) also composed a textbook on logic and reason: *The Right Use of Reason in the Inquiry after Truth with a Variety of Rules to Ground against Error* (1724). This specific example helps Gould move from the role of imagination (and beauty) to the role of reason (and logic). Although Gould’s cultural apologetics approach is broader than traditional models, he does not perceive it to contradict apologetic approaches that utilize logic and argumentation. Nevertheless, the goal of effective persuasion is not merely to win an argument but to be a faithful witness (142).

Gould’s third component of cultural apologetics is an approach through conscience (the moral approach through goodness). The quest for goodness finds expression in the longing for wholeness, justice, and significance (148). In response, one might argue that the longing for significance relates as much to the desire for transcendent meaning as it does to goodness. Regarding the facet of wholeness, Gould rightly notes that the biblical concept of *shalom* is more than the absence of conflict—it is a flourishing wholeness, a holistic well-being. Christians are called to be “agents of shalom” (152). Christianity should “make *this* world more inviting, more delightful, more flourishing” (163). Christian ideals include commitments to human dignity, personal liberty, and individual equality (163).

The facet of justice has become a complex prism in today’s culture. The longing for justice inevitably confronts alternative views of justice. Gould counsels, “We must attend

to how Christianity is perceived by the culture-shaping institutions, or Christianity will continue to be viewed as implausible and undesirable” (167). Yet the structural and ideational structures of contemporary culture differ from traditional Christianity regarding human nature, personal identity, and human flourishing—to borrow from the title of a celebrated work by Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice?* One senses that Gould’s response to the critique of God as a “moral monster” was somewhat of a punt, as he sent readers to the works of Paul Copan and David Lamb without his own developed response (192). He himself admits that his response merely “outlines the general direction” and that “much more can and needs to be said” (192). Gould’s discussion of the cultural barrier of Christian sexual ethics calls for imaginative responses that remain faithful to biblical ethics.

One could add to Gould’s analysis of culture through an additional lens of conscience and moral goodness. Humans share a longing for forgiveness, to have their mistakes, failures, and offenses expunged from their account. Our current culture has its own sense of justice, but often seems to lack a meaningful mechanism of reconciliation. Sentencing of guilt within a “cancel culture” has left many questioning how a sense of justice can be appeased and what counts as sincere and sufficient penance. While humans may live by differing perspectives of justice, this cultural phenomena still reflects an innate orientation stemming from the very nature of moral beings.

The final chapter discusses “home,” being reconciled to God through Christ. The Christian life is a Christocentric paradox. As Lewis declared, “Look for yourself, and you will find in the long run only hatred, loneliness, despair, rage, ruin, and decay. But look for Christ and you will find Him, and with Him everything else thrown in” (205). Our stories become enveloped in the good news of God’s proclamation: “God’s overwhelming love and mercy to us on the cross is the

sudden joyous return that provides the means for human beings to live forever as intended” (209). Therefore, the ultimate question is “What do you make of Jesus Christ?” (219).

Gould insists that a cultural apologist addresses both local and global concerns (211). At times, Gould’s critique of the malaise of contemporary life came through a subcultural focus that will resonate with many of his readers—those left unsatisfied by the accoutrements of a materialistic bourgeois existence, including streaming television, upscale restaurants, and endless sporting events (182). However, many Americans do not live a life characterized by commuting through a “manicured suburb carting kids to soccer” (82). Gould does attach a three-page appendix applying his model to non-Western cultures (217-19). But even Western, American culture is not monolithic. Nevertheless, beauty, truth, and goodness remain as significant signposts along the disparate journeys.

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Faithful Theology: An Introduction (Short Studies in Systematic Theology). By Graham A. Cole. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2020. 118 pp. Softcover \$14.99.

Graham Cole, Dean and Professor of Biblical and Systematic Theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, contributes the first work in the Short Studies in Systematic Theology series titled *Faithful Theology: An Introduction*. For Cole, “faithful theology is a human project that arises from wise reflection on the self-revelation of God” (14). However, to do theology faithfully, one must know how to formulate theology from Scripture. Cole argues, “It is one thing to have

an evangelical's high view of Scripture. It is quite another to know how to derive teaching (doctrine or theology) from Scripture" (15). This distinction is critical because, as Cole explains, theology not only answers the question, "What ought we to believe?" but also "What ought we to value?" and "How ought we to live?" (15-16). Therefore, a correct theological method is essential for faithful theology and, in turn, a faithful Christian walk.

In response to this challenge, Cole presents a theological method with five components. First, Cole establishes Scripture as the epistemological base of sound theology and key hermeneutical rules for interpreting this foundation (chapter 1). Second, Cole explains the value of church tradition as a servant of biblical interpretation (chapter 2). Third, Cole reveals the impact of the fall upon theological reflection, with the major consequence being the nature of one's context as an influencer of one's interpretive decisions (chapter 3). Four, Cole explains how wisdom contributes to theological formulation, including how the theologian correctly uses reason, how one "ranks" doctrine, how one appeals to biblical theology, and what questions one asks and criteria one uses to handle difficult theological questions (chapter 4). Five, Cole concludes by establishing the importance of the ultimate goal of theological reflection, which is the worship of the Triune God (chapter 5).

Although *Faithful Theology* is a short book, Cole successfully presents the foundational elements of a solid theological method. Perhaps the greatest strength of *Faithful Theology* is chapter four, "The Work of Wisdom." This is where the "rubber hits the road," so to speak, and one begins to learn how to "do" theology and integrate the points established in the previous three chapters (i.e., how to read Scripture, glean knowledge from tradition, and humbly evaluate the challenges presented by one's context). I especially appreciated Cole's discussion of "Dogmatic Rank"

(76-78). Ranking doctrine is an important part of doing theology and one demanded by Scripture itself (compare Gal 1:8-9 and 1 John 4:2-3 with Rom 14:5). Cole's distinguishing of level 1 and level 2 convictions, with the first being essential to the faith and the second being those that establish denominational differences, is very helpful. While level 2 convictions are important and should be used to establish denominational lines, they should not keep believers from fellowship outside of an ecclesiastical setting. This point will be especially valuable as the culture becomes more secular and Christians come together and work through various theological issues. I also found Cole's discussion of the relationship between biblical and systematic theology (81-82) helpful. While proof-texting can have its place in theology (81), biblical theology as a step prior to systematic theology "safeguards us from citing texts out of context" in an attempt to bring the text into the present (82). This point is especially important for younger theologians who have been raised in a particular Christian tradition and may have been instructed to read texts in a certain way without considering the context of the passage in the Bible's redemptive storyline.

Nevertheless, and likely due to its size and scope, *Faithful Theology* could be enhanced in some areas. For example, in explaining the importance of sound hermeneutical principles, Cole argues that "plain Scripture is to interpret obscure Scripture" (27). While the principle is true enough, it requires nuancing. No Christian would deny that 1 Corinthians 15:29 is an obscure passage (cf. 29). However, believers do not agree on the clarity of all Scripture. For example, dispensational and historic premillennialists argue that Revelation 20:4-6 clearly teaches a future 1,000-year reign of Christ upon the earth. In contrast, amillennialists and postmillennialists insist that Revelation 20:4-6 is not clear and should be interpreted in light of other Scripture. Who is correct? Because of the nature of these sort of contested

passages, further clarification regarding the “Scripture interprets Scripture” principle would be helpful.

Another example is Cole’s explanation of the value of tradition. There is no denying that tradition is a valuable resource for theological reflection today (note especially Cole’s discussion of the importance of the historical discussion of the Trinity, 48-50). However, Cole’s defense of “positive tradition” relies heavily upon key biblical texts regarding Apostolic tradition (e.g., 1 Cor 15:3-7; cf. also 11:2; 2 Thess 2:15; 3:6) (43-44). While it is true that these passages defend “positive tradition,” Protestants and evangelicals would argue that apostolic tradition is categorically different than that of post-apostolic tradition, since the former is solidified as part of inspired Scripture. This is not to argue that Cole teaches a magisterial view of post-apostolic tradition, since Cole establishes Scripture as the final authority for faith and practice (cf. 24) and that tradition in church history is a “mix of healthy and unhealthy, even toxic” (44). However, since Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox apologists frequently appeal to these same biblical passages in defense of their view of tradition as a magisterial authority, it would be helpful to clarify the value of apostolic tradition as part of inspired Scripture and the positive contributions of post-apostolic tradition which, although valuable, is not inspired and thus has a limited value in comparison to apostolic tradition. Without clarification, this line can become blurred very easily.

These concerns aside, *Faithful Theology* is a solid introductory text to theological method. While *Faithful Theology* can contribute to the academic study of theological method, the text is primarily “addressed to pastors, theological students, college students, and interested layfolk” (17). These individuals will definitely find Cole’s work helpful and informative.

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Coronavirus and Christ. By John Piper. Wheaton, IL:
 Crossway, 2020. 106 pp. Softcover \$8.99.

This book was written at the end March 2020. Piper wrote, “For all I know, I will not live to see this book published. I have at least one relative infected with the coronavirus. I am seventy-four years old, and my lungs are compromised with a blood clot and seasonal bronchitis. But these factors do not ultimately decide. God decides. Is that good news? Yes” (43). Although Piper did live to see his book published, this statement strikes the balance between the fragility of human life and the sovereignty of Almighty God, which is a positive tension we live with every day, with or without the coronavirus.

In the introduction Piper writes in the context of the coronavirus, “...this is a time when the fragile form of this world is felt. The seeming solid foundations are shaking. The question we should be asking is, ‘Do we have a Rock under our feet? A Rock that cannot be shaken—ever?’” (8). Thus, this book is not limited to how a Christian should view the coronavirus only, but anything that disrupts and damages life. The principles articulated are cross-pandemic and applicable to whatever threatens to weaken our view of God and attack the safety and security of our lives. Regarding the Rock of certainty versus the sand of probabilities, Piper asserts, “This is a firm Rock under my feet. It is not fragile. It is not sand. That is why I am writing” (14). Piper further states, “The coronavirus demands hard reality, not easy imaginings. God and his word are the reality we need—the Rock under our feet” (58). Thus, Piper sets the table for what he is about to

serve, a 6-course meal (chapters 6-11) that answers the question, “What is God doing through the coronavirus?” (60)

In setting the table or providing the context for answering the question, “What is God doing through the coronavirus?” Piper describes “the Rock” as “hope now” or present hope which is a solid foundation, “not a mirage” (36). It is solid because “God’s word is granite” (21), and it is righteous because it is holy and good. He calls the coronavirus a “bitter providence” (22, 37), which is not a disparagement, but a description. We are “sorrowful, yet always rejoicing” (2 Cor 6:10), the secret of which is “knowing that the same sovereignty that could stop the coronavirus, yet doesn’t, is the very sovereignty that sustains the soul in it” (23). In referring to God’s sovereignty, Piper states it “means that he can do, and in fact does do, all that he decisively wills to do....When he decides for a thing to happen, it happens everything happens because God wills it to happen” (39). Piper contends, therefore, that the coronavirus was sent by God (42). This is hard to read and hear, and should not be said apart from the context in which Piper states it. Furthermore, Piper adds that though it is a bitter season: “God ordained it ... governs it ... will end it” (42). One last statement about God’s sovereignty worth quoting is, “... If we try to rescue God from his sovereignty over suffering, we sacrifice his sovereignty to turn all things for good” (45).

The six answers to the question, “What is God doing through the coronavirus?” are given in chapters 6-11.

- (1) God is giving the world ... a physical picture of the moral horror and spiritual ugliness of God-belittling sin (61).
- (2) Some people will be infected ... as a specific judgment from God because of their sinful attitudes and actions (69).
- (3) The coronavirus is a God-given wake-up call to be ready for the second-coming of Christ (73).
- (4) The coronavirus is God’s thunderclap call for all of us to repent and realign our lives with the infinite worth of Christ (77).

- (5) The coronavirus is God's call to his people to overcome self-pity and fear, and with courageous joy, to do the good works of love that glorify God (87).
- (6) God is loosening the roots of settled Christians ... to make them free for something new and radical and to send them with the gospel of Christ to the unreached peoples of the world (95).

Although Piper's six answers relate specifically to the coronavirus, they apply to "all other calamities" (61). Thus, while Piper's book is coronavirus specific, it is "all other calamities" general. He contends that whether the coronavirus or some other calamity, what may be meant for evil, God means for good, right from the start.

I recommend this book as it addresses a current crisis that will continue to have worldwide effects and affect Christians and the church. In less than 100 pages, Piper effectively addresses a current crisis common to the world and worldwide church, but gives biblical answers that have application far beyond the coronavirus. It could be subtitled, *Calamities and Christ*, or *Crises and Christ*. I plan to keep it handy as I minister to and counsel others to know how to be "sorrowful, yet always rejoicing."

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The Heart of the Preacher: Preparing Your Soul to Proclaim the Word. By Rick Read. Bellingham, WA: Lexham P, 2019. 160 pp. Hardcover \$13.99.

Pastoral ministry is rewarding in a myriad of ways. Many give testimony of the immense satisfaction that is experienced as the gospel of Christ is shared and as people are discipled in the faith. It truly cannot be measured. However,

many will also readily share that it is not easy work and there are often many unforeseen challenges and pitfalls. *The Heart of the Preacher: Preparing Your Soul to Proclaim the Word* does not provide all of the answers to the dilemmas and struggles that a pastor will face, but it does address a core issue that each pastor should give diligent attention to in order to successfully carry out this calling. Even though pastoral ministry involves a deep work in the heart of others, it also requires careful attention to the pastor's heart.

At the time of this writing, the world is wrestling with the ramifications of a pandemic that is out of control. It was known that a pandemic could occur and a number of generations before us have experienced this feeling of helplessness and anxiety. But for the most part, the generations that are now living have not had to grapple with a pandemic of the type and magnitude that we are now experiencing. There is an urgency and a race to discover a vaccine that will address the issues of COVID-19 and prevent the continued spread of this dreaded virus.

In this brief book, *The Heart of the Preacher: Preparing Your Soul to Proclaim the Word*, Rick Reed addresses a problem of greater magnitude than a pandemic and one that there is no vaccine or cure and never will be this side of eternity. This problem, a pandemic of a spiritual nature, has not only affected everyone in the world, but spiritual leaders as well. Those who are called to pastoral ministry can obtain a magnificent education, possess great gifting, and be acutely aware that God has called them to this profoundly important and rewarding work, but still become "shipwrecked" before the mission is completed. Attention must always be given to the heart of the preacher. In Part I of the book, Reed focuses on 15 issues that test the preacher's heart and how God can use these issues to refine the heart. As the author addresses each of these problem areas, he devotes just a few pages to each area of concern. But in doing so, Reed arrests the

attention of the reader to how troublesome each issue is and whets the appetite of the reader to seek further exploration, diagnosis, and remedy, if needed. These heart issues are unlikely to merely “show up” rapidly, but rather can be quite insidious. Therefore, the pastor may be engulfed in a spiritual struggle and be unaware of how the root cause of that struggle gained its foothold. As this book is not comprehensive in addressing any one particular heart issue, it does motivate the reader to take a further and more careful look in order to determine a strategy to address it.

In Part II of the book, the author challenges the pastor to take practical steps to strengthen the heart. Reed stresses that being reactive as indicated in Part I is not enough. By being proactive through the ten admonitions that Reed sets forth in the second part of the book, a pastor is much more likely to build a resistance to the many manifestations of spiritual heart disease that are commonly experienced. Part II also does not provide a comprehensive study of the ten issues that are addressed, but similar to Part I, the reader will be challenged to pursue further study and application in order prepare fully for the testing that will surely be encountered.

This book is very beneficial for busy pastors. A brief pause taken to read the short but thought-provoking chapters may make a lifetime difference in the effectiveness of the one’s ministry. And doing so will not only bring glory to God but also will benefit his proclaimer of truth.

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Engaging the World with Abraham Kuyper. By Michael Wagenman. Bellingham, WA: Lexham P, 2019. 143 pp. Softcover \$8.99.

Michael R. Wagenman is Reformed Chaplain and faculty at Western University in London, Ontario, Canada. He earned his Ph.D. at the University of Bristol (UK). His dissertation focused on the theology and philosophy of power within the 19th and 20th century Reformed and Roman Catholic ecclesiology. His present writing is a first of two-part research on Abraham Kuyper. *The Power of the Church: The Sacramental Ecclesiology of Abraham Kuyper* (2020) is the second volume and should be released in 2020.

Engaging contributes to the Lived Series produced by Lexham Press. According to the series preface, its editor's primary goal is to present the significant impact that great men had on the contemporary Christian way of thinking.

Engaging opens with a timeline of Abraham Kuyper's life, followed by eight exciting chapters. Wagenman presents a brief introduction to Kuyper's trajectory from being a pastor of a small church to becoming prime minister of the Netherlands. Abraham Kuyper was a man with many gifts. His footprint is virtually everywhere. Kuyper was pastor, journalist, theologian, politician, church reformer, and cultural critic. According to Wagenman, Kuyper lived motivated by one crucial concern: how the church relates to modern society. Kuyper was convinced that the church has "a God-given role to play in the civic marketplace of cultural institutions" (6). Furthermore, "this role cannot be carried out faithfully if the church retreats into the private sphere and adopts a defensive posture against the world or accepts the sacred-secular dualism and engages in a restricted ministry of only saving souls for heaven" (6). In other words, Kuyper strived to see the lordship of Jesus across a range of cultural endeavors. The rest of the book demonstrates Kuyper's main concern about

the six different areas of cultural engagement: identity, public discourse, education, church, society, and politics. Each chapter tracks Kuyper's foundational conviction that "Jesus Christ is Lord of all things" (8).

Wagenman shows the nuts and bolts of Kuyper's mindset on these matters and then points out some implications for today. On the subject of identity, for example, Kuyper identifies himself as a "confessional Christian," in opposition to "cultural" and "modernist." The first group, cultural Christians, describes those who "sacrificed the hard work of faithful Christian action to avoid contamination from the messiness of the world" (14). The second group, modernist Christians, views cultural, political, and scientific advances without a default suspicion. They moved the center of authority from God and Scripture to "individual human judgment revealed through the authority of science, politics, and cultural trends" (16). However, confessional Christians embrace the idea that faith, Scripture, and Christ should influence all human spheres "because [they] concern the whole of our human race" (19).

Kuyper should be applauded for his attempt to subdue every aspect of human affairs under Christ's lordship. However, one might ask if the Bible supports this vigorous optimism about society. Kuyper appears to ignore that the human problem is not a result of a social dilemma, but its cause. Thus, to solve those dilemmas will not solve the human heart's problem, which is the cause of injustice and evil in the present world. According to Wagenman, Kuyper did not believe "that the world would have to wait for a long-distant consummation of the kingdom of God. No, Kuyper believed that this project of extending compassion to the poor and reconciliation between rich and poor was a task that Jesus gave to the church for the present time" (85). One might ask if Jesus even charges his church with such a task. If he did, does he add the hope that this would be the way to produce the

kingdom of God? In this way, should Christians live with such optimistic expectations about humankind and society?

A downside of Wagenman's book is, although he presents Kuyper's mindset very well, he does not explain the origin of Kuyper's thought, that is, the building process of Kuyper's ideas and conclusion. Speaking clearly, this reviewer expected to see more interaction with the Bible and why and how Kuyper arrived at his radical conclusions. However, only 13 Bible references appear in the Scripture Index (143), many of them with few or no interactions. This reviewer is not asking for a different book. Nevertheless, two or three most essential verses that explained Kuyper's aspirations would not be too much.

All in all, *Engaging the World with Abraham Kuyper* is a useful tool to introduce Kuyper's thought to new readers. Wagenman is clear in his writing and efficient in presenting the essential ideas. Also, he is honest with the reader regarding the Kuyper personality. Furthermore, Wagenman closes each section with insightful corollaries of Kuyper's thoughts for today.

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A Legacy of Preaching: The Life, Theology, and Method of History's Great Preachers, 2 Vol. Edited by Benjamin K. Forrest, Kevin L. King, Bill Curtis, and Dwayne Milioni. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2018. 800 pp. Hardcover \$79.99.

A Legacy of Preaching: The Life, Theology, and Method of History's Great Preachers is a two-volume collection of biographies of the most significant preachers since Christ. The editors aim "to present a historical,

theological, and methodological introduction to the history of preaching” (27). The goal, however, is not simply to describe the history of preaching, but also, based upon the biographical material, “to consider how to best move forward in our own pulpits and in the training of future preachers” (27). The theological and methodological emphasis within the biographies also serves to form future preachers who have a similar concern. The editors write, “Our hope is that this approach will yield fruit for present and future preachers as they formulate their own understanding of how to be a theologian from the pulpit” (28). The editors aim for the work to be of encouragement and help for the pastor, “heroes to imitate” for the student, and a helpful study aid for the teacher (29).

Sixty preachers are covered, each by a scholar with expertise on that preacher. Even with such a wide array of authors, the work has consistency and cohesion, with each author addressing the historical background, “theological aspects of the preacher’s approach to preaching” (28), the preacher’s methodology, his contribution to preaching in general, and also including a sermon excerpt. Each biography is written using footnotes and includes a bibliography. Each volume contains its own Scripture index and subject index. Volume one, *Apostles to the Revivalists*, begins with the apostle Paul and concludes with George Whitefield. Volume two, *Enlightenment to the Present Day*, begins with Charles Simeon and concludes with J. I. Packer.

A Legacy of Preaching is an overwhelmingly positive work for many reasons. First, the goal of the book to inspire us “to consider how to best move forward in our own pulpits and in the training of future preachers” (27) is accomplished through the masterful collection of scholars writing on some of history’s greatest preachers. Second, the editors manage an ambitious task well. Surveying sixty preachers is no small task, but the editors have accomplished it in a way that is

detailed enough to be helpful but not so large as to be inaccessible for the average pastor, student, or teacher. After two volumes, the reader has enough of the big picture of preaching since Christ to understand some of the distinguishing characteristics of preaching. Simultaneously, the reader also has sufficient information to learn from individual preachers in a meaningful way. Third, although not a primary purpose, the editors successfully utilize introductory sections to explain the historical contexts of the preachers. The preachers of the middle ages, for example, are preceded by an excerpt that notes the unifying characteristics of those who preached in the middle ages (157-58). These explanations help the reader better understand how the preachers were products of their times. Fourth, the editors chose from a variety of theological positions. Wesley and Edwards are chosen, along with Finney, Barth, and Packer. The variety of preachers helps readers to learn from those whom they may not have been inclined to learn from, thereby aiding readers in ways that may be new to them.

A Legacy of Preaching does not have many negative attributes. One potential area of improvement would be regarding the bibliographies at the end of each biography. Because of the substantial number of preachers surveyed, the biographies are relatively small. Inevitably, as one reads the book, some preachers will stand out to the reader over others, and the reader may be inspired to read more about a particular preacher. However, most of the bibliographies have over fifteen entries. The reader who desires to learn more about a preacher will find it difficult to know which works to begin reading from these lists. The editors could have encouraged the authors to include an annotated bibliography or suggestions for further reading that highlighted a couple of works that would be most helpful for the curious reader.

Overall, *A Legacy of Preaching* is a fantastic work that preachers, students, and teachers would do well to read as they seek to grow in their understanding of the marvelous responsibility to proclaim the word of God.

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A Pastoral Rule for Today: Reviving an Ancient Practice. By John P. Burgess, Jerry Andrews, and Joseph D. Small. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019. 194 pp. Softcover \$14.30. Kindle \$11.99.

If you're a pastor, then what's your "pastoral rule"? If you don't have one, then what would it be if you did? Do you need one? These are the questions you'll be asking when you read *A Pastoral Rule for Today*. As the authors point out, pastors face a difficult calling. Pulled in many directions and juggling multiplied demands, their overwhelming task can generate confusion, consternation, and even burnout. To prevent such unfortunate results, this book encourages pastors to codify a set pattern of disciplines and practices to "help sustain pastoral ministry and contribute to the formation of faithful and vibrant Christian communities" (181).

A Pastoral Rule follows a straightforward approach. The introduction explains why pastors need a guiding rule and the conclusion explains how to formulate one. Then eight chapters of approximately 20 pages are the meat that's sandwiched in between. The first seven chapters shine the spotlight on successive personalities from church history, showing how a key principle or value guided each of their lives and ministries. The eighth chapter lays out a pastoral rule

that the Presbyterian Church (USA) commends to its ordained clergy today, albeit unofficially.

The authors of this book follow a “team” approach. Jerry Andrews (Ph.D., University of Chicago and pastor of First Presbyterian Church, San Diego, CA) wrote about Augustine and Gregory the Great. Joseph Small, the former director of the Presbyterian Church (USA) Office of Theology and Worship, wrote about Benedict and Calvin. And John Burgess (Ph.D., University of Chicago and Professor of Systematic Theology at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary) wrote about Wesley, Newman, and Bonhoeffer. In doing so, each contributes from areas of personal expertise and study, offering historical insights with contemporary relevance for pastors today.

This book focuses on what the authors call a “rule,” which refers to “a disciplined way of life that keeps us grounded in the principal calling of a pastor” (5). To demonstrate what this entails, they examine the lives of seven historical figures and their respective “rules.” In many respects, these “rules” resemble the modern concept of “core values.”

To identify these rules, each author relies on the published writings of each historical figure, though they also cite other sources such as biographers (especially for Wesley and Newman). By analyzing and surveying each figure’s lifestyle, teachings, sermons, and writings, they arrive at deductive conclusions. In this way, the authors identify the following associated rules:

- Augustine: Theological Friendship
- Benedict: Monastic Obedience
- Gregory the Great: Holiness and Service
- John Calvin: Ministerial Accountability
- John Wesley: Careful Speech
- John Henry Newman: Pastoral Study

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Physical Presence

As the authors explore these “rules,” they also demonstrate how the rules affected each figure’s mindset and lifestyle by shaping his priorities and influencing his choices in meaningful, clarifying ways. Those who enjoy church history will enjoy this perceptive, focused approach, which may have been missed in the big picture presented by prior church history classes or literature.

Throughout the book, readers will appreciate the various thought-provoking bits of wisdom that appear along the way. “Friends love each other most truly when they see more closely God in each other” (24). “The pastoral call is not so much about balance as it is about pursuing both the active ministry and the contemplative life” (72). “Today, in far too many congregations, pastors act as CEOs of an organization ...” (87). Then there’s my favorite tidbit, which is advice from John Wesley himself: “Always ... conclude the service in about an hour [and] never scream ...” (119). Any pastor will find something in this book that will challenge his thinking in a valuable way.

On a practical note, Chapters 1-7 end with a list of 4-5 discussion questions, followed by 5-6 suggestions for further reading. Though the final chapter doesn’t follow the same format, it intersperses multiple diagnostic questions throughout instead. These features make this book a useful resource for personal reflection and group discussion, especially among pastors.

Despite these positive aspects, the reader may be disappointed by several downsides. Most notably, the authors support their claims with scant biblical evidence, relying almost solely on the wisdom offered by select historical figures. An index in the appendix reveals forty-two Scripture references, equivalent to one reference per every 4.5 pages. More importantly, most of these references are no more than a

cursory mention that rarely contributes to the material in any authoritative or substantive way. For an entry on pastoral theology, this feels like a serious flaw.

Another potential weakness is the book's ecumenical paradigm. Though most evangelical readers will appreciate the inclusion of Augustine as an exemplary figure, many will question whether Benedict of Nursia (the "father of monasticism"), Gregory the Great (a Roman Catholic pope), John Henry Newman (a 19th-century Roman Catholic priest and cardinal), or maybe even Dietrich Bonhoeffer (a 20th-century Lutheran pastor and theologian) qualify as appropriate examples for evangelical pastoral ethics. This ecumenical approach may weaken the integrity of the book's central message. To be sure, a mature, discerning reader who is rooted in God's word should be able to glean wisdom from any of these men. As Augustine himself famously said, "All truth is God's truth." Yet for a book that is geared for pastors, far better exemplars exist, such as Theodore Frelinghuysen, Charles Spurgeon, and Martyn Lloyd-Jones, to name a few.

Finally, the central message of the book is weakened by an inconsistent application of what pastoral rule entails. Though the authors offer a definition (mentioned previously), they flesh out this definition in contrasting ways. For the first seven chapters, they present the rule as a single, defining principle or value, such as "theological friendship" for Augustine and "ministerial accountability" for Calvin. But when they propose a contemporary pastoral rule in Chapter 8, they describe it as "brief" with "three key components: personal disciplines, conduct in ministry, and structures of mutual accountability" (165). Then they unveil a "rule" that's fifteen pages long and looks more like a meticulous compilation of all seven preceding rules and more. Such a rule is hardly brief! In the conclusion that follows, they offer examples of other contemporary rules that are shorter, one featuring eight separate points and another featuring four.

Though these rules are more concise than what they showcase in Chapter 8, they are still more expansive than what the first seven chapters imply.

A Pastoral Rule for Today provides a reasonable service for pastors who wish to cultivate a more orderly, principled life. The book offers a fresh historical and pastoral take on what we normally discuss as mission, core values, and so on, which terms have a decidedly more contemporary sound and corporate feel. Nevertheless, the book suffers from token interaction with Scripture, an ecumenical bent, and some genuine confusion regarding how “brief” (or un-brief) a pastoral rule should be. With these things in mind, it’s fair to say that pastors will benefit from reading this book, as they might from any fair pastoral roundtable discussion, just not as much as they might hope.

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Preaching as Reminding: Stirring Memory in an Age of Forgetfulness. By Jeffrey D. Arthurs. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017. 167 pp. Softcover \$17.22. Kindle \$9.99.

Though there is no shortage of books about preaching, this entry explores a function of preaching we easily forget. As the late influential and oft-repeated Haddon Robinson (and former colleague of Arthurs’s) prescribes in *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Sermons*, preachers should explain, prove, and apply the Scriptures. Yet as Jeffrey Arthurs observes, they should embrace a fourth aim as well—to remind. According to him, “the Lord God has commissioned and equipped ministers to serve as the Lord’s remembrancers” (8).

This book divides neatly into two halves. The first three chapters give sound and compelling rationale for viewing preaching as a ministry of remembrance, and then the final four chapters offer advice for doing this ministry well. This fourfold advice explains how to stir memory through style (effective language), story, delivery (nonverbal factors), and ceremony and symbol. This handy volume moves thoughtfully and efficiently from one section to the next, making it suitable for busy pastors and engrossed academics alike.

Preaching as Reminding demonstrates that remembering (and forgetting) is not an obscure, tangential topic, but is a major theme that permeates Scripture and should permeate the aim and approach of our preaching as well. Arthurs's survey and analysis of biblical data on this subject are worth the price of the book and merits serious reflection, if for no other reason than we seem to have forgotten to think much about it. Arthurs has done the church a great service by giving this reminder. Altogether, he provides more than a biblical foundation, but a well-researched perspective as well, writing in an accessible, thoughtful, and engaging style, not with dry, academic, or technical verbosity.

To begin, Arthurs points out that "in the Bible, 'remembering' is more than mental recall. It involves emotion and volition as well as cognition," as when the thief on the cross "asked the Lord to remember him" (Luke 23:42) (13). Arthurs highlights the meanings of the oft-used biblical terms for remembering, *zakar* (Hebrew) and *mimnēskō* (Greek) to verify that "memory is a whole-person activity" (15-18).

Against this semantic backdrop, Arthurs lays out a methodical survey that spans both the Old and New Testaments, showing how God remembers (and forgets). Then he shows how Scripture reveals the human propensity to forget God and his truth, a weakness that affirms the need for

reminding. Arthurs argues convincingly that “preaching as reminding is built on theology proper—the character and actions of God” (24).

Consequently, Arthurs touts the preacher’s responsibility to “help the children of God remember what they should remember [about God] and forget what they should forget” (45). To illustrate how preachers should help God’s children this way, he commends and explores the examples of “Moses in Deuteronomy, the [OT] prophets, and the apostles in the Epistles,” which is a helpful and motivating sequence of insightful observations (49).

In the second half of this book, Arthurs offers advice for effective pulpit speech techniques. He presents these techniques as aids (he calls them “tools” in each chapter title) that will equip preachers to be effective “remembrancers.” For each chapter, he opens with a section called “How It Works,” in which he explains how and why the technique promotes improved “remembering.” He follows this explanation with a section called “How to Work It,” which describes how to apply the technique in various ways. The advice in these chapters is valuable; it draws from a variety of sources, including frequent biblical examples, and corresponds with Arthurs’ personal gifting and expertise.

Some readers may criticize Arthurs’ inclusion of data from neuroscience and rhetorical theory since preaching is a spiritual exercise (cf. 1 Cor 1:21, et al.). Arthur draws from such sources midway through the first half (29-39) and intermittently throughout the second. Readers may also question his citation of various secular sources like Henry David Thoreau, a transcendental philosopher (88).

Arthurs acknowledges and allays this concern. For instance, when he says, “Neuroscience affirms the inseparability of thinking and feeling,” he follows with another paragraph saying, “Perhaps my emphasis on emotion and heart has raised some red flags in your mind. Let’s

conclude this chapter by giving voice to some concerns that you may have” (58-59). What follows is a series of thoughtful, biblical evidence for the validity of his claims, making clear his firm commitment to the authority of Scripture (58-64).

Arthurs exhibits this carefulness throughout the book, and a thoughtful reader will recognize and appreciate that he cites nonbiblical sources and data in a complementary fashion, either to illustrate or corroborate his points, while relying squarely on Scripture as the basis for his case.

As another point of critique, Arthurs repeatedly attributes to the Holy Spirit a contemporary ministry of aiding spiritual memory, cf. John 14:26 and 1 Coromthians 2:11-13 (9, 17, 64). Though some readers will agree with Arthurs on this point, others will relegate this “remembrance” ministry of the Spirit to the first-century apostles alone. This is a minor observation since Arthur’s case for the importance of “reminding” remains firm without this detail.

Arthurs speaks to a full range of evangelical denominations and traditions, which some may find uncomfortable and others may find unsatisfying. He gives a nod to the “Protestant zeal to guard against the excesses of sacramentalism” on one hand [high church] while also acknowledging some concern about “our roots in frontier revivalism, with its emphasis on human experience and decision” [low church] (134-35). Altogether, his broad target audience does not weaken his message, though it does limit what he can say regarding the significance of baptism as a ritual of remembrance, which is an admittedly minor detail in the book (142).

For anyone who hesitates to read yet another book about preaching, rest assured that this one adds fresh content to the conversation. Though it draws from neuroscience and rhetorical theory, it does so in a helpful way. Most importantly, it provides a thorough and thoughtful biblical analysis of a crucial yet overlooked function of preaching.

Preaching as Reminding deserves to be read by experienced pastors who may be surprised by how it enriches and expands their view of a practice which they may feel they have mastered. It should also be assigned as required reading that supplements standby texts like Robinson's *Biblical Preaching*, especially at the masters level of seminary training, preparing preachers to enter the pulpit determined, skilled, and unashamed to remind the church of what it already knows.

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Dissertation Defenses at Baptist Bible Seminary

— *Old Testament* —

Michael Cha — *The Positive End-Time Fate of the Nations in the Book of the Twelve*

Abstract: This dissertation seeks to develop a biblical theology of the positive eschatological fate of the non-Israelite nations in the Minor Prophets from a dispensational premillennial perspective. This biblical theology will examine the Minor Prophets' usages of the terms "peoples" in passages describing the positive end-time fate of "nations" and "the nations." The relevant passages for this study include Amos 9:12; Micah 4:1-4; Zephaniah 3:8-10; Zechariah 2:15; 8:13, 22-23; 9:7, 10; 14:9, 16-19; and Malachi 1:11.

Ismael Dora – *The First Rock Song: Contributions of Divine Metaphors to the Theology of the Song of Moses (Deut. 32:1-43)*

Abstract: The topic of metaphor has stimulated production of scholarly works since the 1970's when several philosophers began to formulate various theories regarding this difficult subject. IN the field of biblical studies, some scholars and exegetes have investigated metaphors in the Hebrew Bible, but much remains to be done since the majority of these works only focus on the poetic books, especially the book of Psalms.

This dissertation examines three divine metaphors in the Song of Moses: God is a rock, God is a father, and God is an avenging warrior. This study's approach looks at the literal meaning of the vehicle to see how it was used in ancient Israel and/or in the ancient Near Eastern neighboring nations. This paves the way for the literary and theological examination of the metaphor, which is conducted in three steps: a) identification and interpretation of the metaphor; b) function of the metaphor; and c) theological observations regarding the use of the metaphor.

This project utilizes a linguistic approach to figurative language, meaning that the metaphors in the Song of Moses are studied and examined through the biblical text. This method helps the exegete to understand the metaphorical statements and the rhetorical effects they

produced. It also helps to understand the intention of the original author of the Song as he communicated this message to his audience.

— *New Testament* —

Pavel Togobitsky — *Two-Voice Framework and -(θ)H- Forms in New Testament Greek*

Abstract: This dissertation examines the usages of the voice-forms with the -(θ)η- affix in the aorist and future tenses in the text of the Greek New Testament. The recent paradigm shift in the voice studies from the three-voice framework (active, middle, passive) to the two-voice framework (active, mediopassive) raises a question about the relevancy of the middle interpretation of the -(θ)η- forms, which, in the old paradigm, were considered as passive or deponent only. The dissertation (1) describes the place of the -(θ)η- forms in the middle domain, (2) suggests the classification of their meanings using the structural, functional, and cognitive approaches, (3) tests all the cases of the verbs with the -(θ)η- affix in the New Testament in light of this classification. As a result, the applicability and usefulness of the two-voice framework have been demonstrated.

— *Systematic Theology* —

Jay Hollinshead — *The Σάρξ / Πνεῦμα Antithesis in the New Testament Pauline Letters of Galatians, Philippians, and Romans*

Abstract: This dissertation critically evaluates Russell’s seminal work regarding the Pauline meaning of the classic σάρξ/πνεῦμα antithesis in Galatians 5-6 and tests Russell’s threefold methodology (lexicography, socio-anthropology, and rhetorical criticism). In this study Russell’s threefold methodology is modified with updated augmentations in each area of research to assess more accurately his determinations. From these enhancements in methodology this study seeks to justify or not, or further refine, any understanding of the σάρξ/πνεῦμα antithesis Russell proposed by testing it with the modifications in Philippians 3 and Romans 7-8 with the intent to formulate a NT Biblical Theology of Paul’s σάρξ/πνεῦμα meaning. The study concludes that the σάρξ/πνεῦμα antithesis principally or chiefly refers to a redemptive-historical realm, sphere or era rather than the common ontological “dual-nature” meaning for a σάρξ/πνεῦμα antithesis. It also concludes that σάρξ semantically retains an

anthropological element in each passage, though it relates to ethics only indirectly and subsequently in Galatians and Romans. It is determined that Paul's principal rubric for this antithesis is soteriology, and sanctification is a subsidiary extenuation or application. The findings lay a more precise Biblical Theology groundwork on which a more rigorous Systematic Theology significance and application may be constructed. This should provide some aid in being more precise when extrapolating any implications for sanctification under Paul's principal rubric of soteriology, based on how specifically he uses σάρξ in antithesis to πνεῦμα in Galatians, Philippians and Romans.



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