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From the Editor's Desk

Dear Reader,

In the midst of challenging times, we are excited to center our focus on God and his word through these articles in our fall JMAT. We are praying they are a blessing to you.

In each article we have the author's email so you may reach out and create a dialogue with the author. This is a great way to deepen the discussion and sharpen one another.

I am happy to announce that our book review editor Mr. Daniel Wiley is now Dr. Wiley. Dr. Wiley successfully defended his dissertation entitled, *A Critical Evaluation of Progressive Parallelism* this August. Congratulations to Dr. Wiley!

At the JMAT we 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 stylized flourish at the end.

Mark McGinniss, Ph.D.
Lead Editor

A Narrative Analysis of Pre-Sinaitic Well Scenes

Donald C. McIntyre

Abstract: There is a definite narrative progression in the well scenes of the Pentateuch, showing a cataphoric function to identify a deliverer for the progeny of Abraham. This impacts the Abrahamic promise, as is witnessed by an examination of the literary context and a description of narrative methodology and a plot-line analysis of major well scenes in Genesis and Exodus (Gen 16, 21, 24, 29, and Exod 2). A comparison of these scenes show the progression leading to Moses as the deliverer par excellence of Abraham's elect-progeny and effector of the deliverance of Israel from Egypt in fulfilment of Genesis 15:13–14. Previous analyses of the patriarchal well scenes which concluded that "seed line" or "betrothal" considerations were the primary motivation for these scenes' inclusion in the canon are unable to account for the entirety of the data in a way that this thesis is better able to defend.

Key Words: Abraham, Moses, Well, Genesis, Exodus

Introduction

The imagery of a well has been examined in detail by numerous theologians, with some seeing well scenes as nothing more than betrothal settings and others who see them as markers of Israelite boundaries.² In spite of this, an analysis

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² See Danna Nolan Fewell and R Christopher Heard, "The Genesis of Identify in the Biblical World," in *The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Narrative*, Kindle ed., ed. Danna Nolan Fewell (New York: Oxford UP, 2016). Fewell and Heard note, "As a communally constitutive story, the dialogic narrative of Genesis is, in short, a matter of survival. As it struggles to establish and maintain internal group coherence, it also

of how these narratives fit together is lacking in biblical scholarship. The goal of this article is to analyze the narrative plot structure of the major well scenes in pre-Sinaitic literature (Genesis 1 through Exodus 2). This will establish a definite narrative progression in the well scenes of the Pentateuch, showing a cataphoric function to identify a deliverer for the progeny of Abraham. This present analysis will begin with an examination of the literary context and a description of narrative methodology before moving through a plot-line analysis of major well scenes in Genesis and Exodus (Gen 16; 21; 24; 29; and Exod 2) with a particular emphasis on characterization.³ After the plot structures of these well scenes have been analyzed, a comparison of these scenes will be offered showing the progression leading to Moses as the deliverer par excellence of Abraham's elect-progeny and effector of the deliverance of Israel from Egypt in fulfilment of Genesis 15:13–14. This author views the Pentateuch in its final canonical form as a completed and unified text.⁴

Literary Context

The Narrative Genre

The Hebrew Bible consists of two primary genres: narrative, and poetry. Narratives are distinguished from poetry as stories which relay events as a series of actions as seen in the Hebrew text through the *wayyiqtol* construction and other grammatical markers including the relative clause and the use of independent

defends against external forces that press to permeate communal boundaries and absorb group identity..." (110–111).

³ The scope of this article does not allow for an in-depth analysis of the multiple mini scenes of Genesis 26 with Isaac; however, they will be briefly detailed in the section on chapter 24, since the characterization of Isaac is amplified through the contents of chapter 26. These mini scenes are worthy of further analysis.

⁴ John H. Sailhamer, remarks, "Though we often think of the Pentateuch as a collection of five books, viz., Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy, it was originally intended to be read as a single book" (*The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary*, Kindle ed. [Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 1995], 2).

personal pronouns.⁵ Narrative and story will be used synonymously throughout this assessment, in line with major narrative critics.⁶ Describing narrative, the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative* notes,

The mental representation of story involves the construction of the mental image of a world populated with individuated agents (characters) and objects. (Spatial dimension.) This world must undergo not fully predictable changes of state that are caused by non-habitual physical events: either accidents ('happenings') or deliberate actions by intelligent agents. (Temporal dimension.) In addition to being linked to physical states by causal relations, the physical events must be associated with mental states and events (goals, plans, *emotions). This network of connections gives events coherence, motivation, *closure, and intelligibility and turns them into a plot.⁷

These stories therefore will have characters, settings (objects), and events which show movement that formulate the plot line of the story. How one delineates the plot line and assesses characters and settings is essential to understanding a story. For this purpose, a brief orientation to narrative methodology is in order.

Narrative Methodology

The narrative methodology used herein will be limited to identifying the plot line of Fokkelman's trajectory theory for heroes (see heading below: *Well Motif*). Each narrative example involves a quest of some sort initiated towards an intended goal in which the main character seeks to achieve a certain end. This

⁵ Robert Chisholm, *Exegesis to Exposition: A Practical Guide to Using Biblical Hebrew* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), Kindle loc. 1439–1447, 1707.

⁶ Jerome Walsh, *Old Testament Narrative: A Guide to Interpretation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), Kindle loc. 51.

⁷ David Herman, et al., eds., *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*, Kindle ed. (New York: Taylor and Francis, 2005), 347.

then marks the initiation of a new act within the defined plot.⁸ The plot then progresses through a series of scenes marked by movements via change of location or change of characters. These two elements of plot progression will help to identify that the well scenes have a distinct function that is inseparable from the larger hero-quest act.⁹ This process will expand the boundaries of the commonly examined well-scene narratives. The well scene, as a rising action and distinct scene within the overall hero-journey act, cannot be resolved without understanding why each hero character journeys to a well in the first place. The trajectory theory as method describes how the actions of the narrative are evaluated, but a narrative analysis cannot be limited to describing actions. Actions are completed by actors (characters) and the descriptions of these actors have direct implications on the message of the narrative. The narrative development and portrayal of these actors will be referred to as characterization.

Characterization

Characterization is achieved through a variety of means. Bruce Waltke notes that characterization in Genesis can be done through outer description (though admittedly rare), direct characterization from the narrator as an evaluation or an omniscient revelation of the character's thoughts, through the character's direct speech, action, the character's name or nicknames given, through plot devices such as scenic descriptions or symbols.¹⁰ These elements will be examined for clues as to a character's nature and development in each well scene. How maturely a character develops will determine that characters "type." Character types assist in identifying their

⁸ J. P. Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Narrative: An Introductory Guide*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999), Kindle loc. 1237.

⁹ Joe Linares, *Proclaiming God's Stories: How to Preach Old Testament Historical Narrative* (Greenville, SC: BJU P, 2009), 111.

¹⁰ Bruce K. Waltke with Cathi J. Fredericks, *Genesis*, Kindle ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2001), 40–41.

functions in the narrative. Characters can be flat/static, round/dynamic, or semi-developed.¹¹

Despite how a character is portrayed in terms of personality (characterization), these characters also can be described in terms of their narrative function. Narrative functions involve distinct roles for characters to play, and a character can shift roles throughout a larger narrative structure, as will be seen when Abraham becomes an agent in the first two well scenes. Common narrative functions include protagonist/hero.¹²

There is one other aspect of characterization that is pertinent to this study: the art of narrative gapping. Meir Sternberg describes the interpretation of a literary work as a process of answering questions about the story before lamenting: “a closer look at the text will reveal how few of the answers to these questions have been explicitly provided there: it is the reader himself who has supplied them, some temporarily, partially, or tentatively, and some wholly and finally.”¹³ These missing pieces of information are referred to as “gaps,” and the reader participates in “gap filling” through constructing the missing information.¹⁴ Gapping also applies to characterization, as Waltke points out in reference to Isaac:

¹¹ Walsh, *OT Narrative*, Kindle loc. 519–552.

¹² For definitions and descriptions of “protagonist” and “antagonist” see Leland Ryken, *How to Read the Bible as Literature* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1985), 42. Ryken uses the term “hero” interchangeably with “protagonist” on page 45 and describes foils on page 54. For a description of characters as agents, see the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*, page 9, under human agency, by which a literary agent has no purpose outside of their completion of an action within a story.

¹³ Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington, IN: IUP, 1985), 186.

¹⁴ Herman et al. define this term stating, “Texts do not supply all the information needed for their interpretation. Furthermore, the more widely agreed upon any specific information is, the more likely it is to go without saying. As a series of philosophers, literary theorists, and cognitive scientists have shown, a satisfying interpretation of a narrative sequence emerges from the interaction or joint work of a text and an audience. In the presence of a gappy text [*sic*] (and all texts are gappy [*sic*]), if there is no

A gap is an intentional omission, whereas a blank is an inconsequential omission. The gap of the expected book entitled *tôlêḏôt* of Abraham (i.e., Isaac's narrative) is glaring. . . . This obvious intention gap stands as an implicit judgement against the miracle child who in later years gives himself over to sensual pleasures at the expense of spiritual discernment.¹⁵

It is assumed herein that character gapping is intentional and contextually explained in other cases as Waltke has done with Isaac.

With a basic understanding of narrative methodology, one can begin to examine narrative portions of the scripture. However, the narratives under consideration are not isolated works but are part of a larger “meta-narrative” known as the Pentateuch. This fact requires an orientation to the unity and purpose of the Pentateuch by which the individual well scenes can be understood.

The Purpose of the Pentateuch

Waltke and Yu posit that the purpose of the Pentateuch was to serve as a foundational document for the fledgling nation of Israel. They write, “A nation typically is a common people (a primary theme of Genesis) with a constitution/law (the main theme of Exodus–Deuteronomy) and usually has a common land (a theme of the Pentateuch and Joshua).”¹⁶ The creation of a founding document would require the creation of common identity and the establishing of social-political boundaries.¹⁷ However, the nation of Israel did not arise from a vacuum; they

evidence to the contrary, audiences assume that a communication is intended” (*Routledge Encyclopedia*, 193).

¹⁵ Waltke, *Genesis*, 40–41.

¹⁶ Waltke and Charles Yu, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach*, Kindle ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 316.

¹⁷ Describing the formation of the nation of Israel at Mount Sinai, Kenneth Ngwa notes, “Events around the mountain slow down the linear narrative pace as they forge a new sense of religious identity and of social belonging and boundaries” (“The Story of Exodus and Its Literary Kinships,” in *Oxford Handbook of Biblical Narrative*, 132).

had neighbors whom they came in contact with frequently and to different ends. This creation of a common identity and the establishment of social political boundaries were to become increasingly clear with the beginning of the patriarchal narrative. From Genesis 12 on, there is a clear distinction between the God of Abraham and the Patriarchs and the gods of the nations who surrounded them. There is, indeed, considerable overlap between Canaanite and Egyptian religious literature, which has given rise to two main theories of explication. The first is assimilation, whereby some have accused the Jewish authors/redactors of borrowing from their neighbors in constructing their own state religion.¹⁸ Others have attempted to describe the similarities to neighboring religions via intentional polemic. In *Against the Gods: A Polemical Theology of the Old Testament*, Currid describes the polemical nature of the Hebrew Bible, focusing on the clear parallels between Egyptian and Canaanite religions with Pentateuchal material.¹⁹ Merrill in *Kingdom of Priests* also notes the polemical nature of the Pentateuch.²⁰ Though this contrast is debated by OT scholars, this paper will assume a polemical relationship as opposed to a plagiarizing relationship between the Pentateuch and the ANE religious texts. With this understanding, these two ideas of the Pentateuch serving as the founding documents of a nation, with a polemical emphasis that serves to establish boundaries, are the lenses through which the acts and scenes of the Pentateuch must be interpreted. It will be demonstrated throughout this present analysis that the participants of the well-scenes have a foundational role in the Abrahamic covenant, whether elect or not, and as such share a common foundation. The polemical nature of the Pentateuch has been largely ignored in discussion of the well scene narratives. Before one can address how wells relate to ANE religious polemics, there must first be a discussion on the physical settings

¹⁸ Lewis Bayles Paton, "Canaanite Influence on the Religion of Israel." *The American Journal of Theology* 18, no. 2 (1914): 205–224. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3154722>.

¹⁹ John D. Currid, *Against the Gods: A Polemical Theology of the Old Testament* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013).

²⁰ Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, 80–81.

on which these well scenes occurred, as well as the water and well imagery of the ANE. Only after these elements are examined can a well-motif for Pentateuchal literature be articulated.

The Settings

The first two well scenes of Hagar take place in the Negeb area of Israel. The “Negeb refers to the region around Beer-sheba and Arad. Beer-sheba receives about ten to twelve inches of rain annually, an amount considered marginal for agriculture but adequate for grazing flocks. . . . Water was a perennial problem for inhabitants of the Negeb, but scattered wells along the major wadis and, later, the use of cisterns permitted settlements.”²¹ The last well scene with Moses happens in Midian near Sinai, which may have been even less hospitable regarding water. The *Holman Bible Atlas* describes that area briefly saying, “The Sinai is a desert with little rain and harsh climatic extremes. Vegetation is scarce except for the occasional oasis that lends a splash of green to an otherwise barren landscape.”²² Nomadic shepherds like Abraham were always on the hunt for sufficient sources of water to provide for themselves and their flocks, searching for wells and cultivating cisterns to meet this fundamental need. For a pre-modern desert dwelling people, water was a matter of life and death, and this need was reflected in their religious beliefs and practices. Leland Ryken summarizes how this happened:

Rains in the Holy Land are seasonal, with light rains coming in fall and spring and the bulk of the precipitation falling in the months of December through February. Summers are extremely dry. Rain is commonly seen by biblical writers as evidence of special providence, with the return of rains after a prolonged dry spell associated with God’s new advent and the withholding of rains a sign of divine displeasure (1 Kgs 8:35; Amos 4:7).²³

²¹ Thomas V. Brisco, *Holman Bible Atlas* (Nashville: B&H, 1998), 20.

²² *Ibid.*, 66.

²³ Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, and Tremper Longman III, eds. *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000), 930.

Haran of Mesopotamia is the location of the other two well scenes in the narrative, and this area had access to water, though its water access was not consistent. Situated on the Euphrates River the area was accustomed to annual flooding.²⁴ The mention of the Gilgamesh Epic is intriguing because it shows that the ANE cultures of Mesopotamia had a working theology of water. The water imagery of the Mesopotamian peoples and their neighbors in Canaan filled religious texts for the Baal and Marduk narrative cycles.²⁵ Some of that literature would become fodder for Moses' later polemical writings in the Pentateuch.²⁶ However, there is one more setting that should be examined before discussing the way that water imagery is displayed in the biblical narrative, Egypt.

With the narratives being described as a hero-journey narrative, the setting in which the journey conflict arrives also shapes how water is viewed by the participants. Moses, the final well scene participant, arrived at a well one day because he was fleeing from Egypt. Egypt had no such water problems as Canaan and Mesopotamia since it was situated on the Nile River, supplied by numerous tributaries. As Brisco notes,

²⁴ Thomas V. Brisco, describes the Mesopotamian water situation saying, "Autumn and winter rains in combination with melting snows of the high northern mountains produced a large volume of water that had to be harnessed. This inundation was unpredictable, at times being inadequate and at other times, violent. The timing of the flood in Mesopotamia was not as helpful for agriculture as in Egypt. Consequently, the inhabitants of central and southern Mesopotamia maintained a sophisticated system of canals, dikes, and dams from earliest times to protect their cities and to distribute water to thirsty fields. Ancient flood stories like the Gilgamesh Epic abounded in Mesopotamia. They expressed the ancients' fascination with and fear of these floods" (*Holman Bible Atlas*, 5).

²⁵ See John C. Gibson for reference to Baal (*Canaanite Myths and Legends*, 2nd ed. [Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1978], 2–6) and John Goldingay for reference to Marduk (*Genesis*, Baker Commentary on the OT, Kindle ed. [Grand Rapids: Baker], 25).

²⁶ See Currid, *Against the Gods*, and Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*. Others include Jacob Bryant as cited in Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary*, Kindle ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox), 86.

The White Nile provides a steady source of water from the lakes of equatorial Africa that are fed by constant rains. Near Khartoum in the Sudan, two other rivers—the Blue Nile and the Atbara—join the White Nile. During the spring, melting snows and rains in the Ethiopian highlands swell the Blue Nile and the Atbara with water, their swift currents carrying soil and organic materials.²⁷

The Nile would sometimes flood disastrously, but the necessary rise of the Nile for its yearly flooding, to maintain life, was no less than six meters.²⁸

Like the Canaanite and Mesopotamian religions, Egypt also has a theology of water. The southern neighbors in Egypt were similarly infatuated with water in their religious rites with the Nile River playing a pivotal place in Egyptian culture. The land of Egypt was considered to be the gift of the river:

The Nile provided transportation and communication as the principal highway of the land. Natural currents carried traffic northward, while prevailing north winds permitted travel upriver (southward). The annual inundation of the Nile provided the river's chief benefit to the land. Each year, with uncanny regularity, the Nile flooded, replenishing the land with water and a thin layer of new soil.²⁹

In comparison, Egypt was privileged with a consistent water supply that allowed consistent agricultural industry and a ready trade route via the Nile and accompanying winds that their desert neighbors were unfamiliar with. Canaan was mostly desert, with a rainy season where water had to be collected and used throughout the long dry season, and the Arameans were constantly wondering which of the bipolar extremes of water they would get when the Euphrates flooded. Egypt was able to rely upon the Nile. The polytheist nation was sure to give the Nile a god of its own to offer thanks and supplication to for this gift. According to John Shoup, "The ancient Egyptians believed that

²⁷ Brisco, *Holman Bible Atlas*, 7.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

the Nile god, Hapi, lived in a cave under Elephantine Island at Aswan and that the Nile flood began from there. Hapi was depicted as a man with folds of fat and large breasts to indicate the fertility and prosperity the flood brought.”³⁰ With the pivotal role of water throughout the different ANE cultures and religions now understood, it would be negligent to deal with water imagery in any form without examining its theological implications and its polemical relationships to Israel’s neighbors, the question still remains, however, about the role of wells in biblical literature for these same cultures.

Water Imagery in the Bible

Ryken describes water imagery in the Bible succinctly: “Water figures in the Bible in three main ways—as a cosmic force that only God can control and govern, as a source of life, and as a cleansing agent.”³¹ However, it is not until later in the biblical text (particularly Exod 19:10 and later Lev 8:6) that water begins to function as a cleansing agent: therefore, its use in Genesis and Exodus surrounding the well scenes would be limited to a cosmic force controlled by God alone or a life-giving/preserving source.

The theology of water which saw it as an uncontrollable cosmic force limited only by God was not limited to Israelite religion. Water was part of the religions of the patriarchs’ neighbors both north and south, especially the Baal worship of the Canaanite religions.³² This conflict between Baal worship and

³⁰ John Shoup, *The Nile: An Encyclopedia of Geography, History, and Culture*, Kindle ed. (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2017), xi.

³¹ Ryken et al., *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, 929, where they predicate this description on the scarcity of water in the region and its universal necessity for sustaining life.

³² Ibid., 930. Citing the seasonal rain and the belief in the providence of God for that rain, Ryken et al. remark, “The Israelites arriving from the wilderness were nomadic herdspeople, while the resident Canaanites were experts in settled agriculture, an expertise couched in the practices of Baal-worship. In Canaanite myth Baal had vanquished the fractious power Sea-and-River and so became the dispenser of the tamed waters vital to agriculture. By the time of the exodus Baal was firmly established in Canaan as the god of the winter rains and storms and hence of the primary

YHWH during times of drought would persist throughout the Biblical narrative with polemical texts post-dating the Pentateuch into the monarchy period (1 Kgs 17:1–19:21).

Well Motif

The *Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory* states, “A motif usually builds around a nuclear action sequence which can take different forms and cover more than a single event.”³³ The nuclear action sequence which this paper proposes for the well motif differs from that of others in viewing the reason for the journey to the well (what will be called “journey conflict”) and extending until the resolution of the journey conflict. Those who have written on well scenes have typically limited their analyses to the physical location of the well.³⁴ However, each of the well scenes examined herein have a conflict that leads to the journey, a conflict upon arrival at a well, a resolution to the conflict at the well, and concludes with a resolution to the initial conflict that led the character for journey to the well in the first place. This pattern is evident in all the well scenes examined, forming the “nuclear action sequence” evident through multiple events and characters. As such, this motif can be established and evaluated together for structural similarities and dissimilarities.

rainfalls of the countryside. In biblical faith the Lord of Israel was resolutely honored as the God of storms and rains (Ps 29; Jer 10:13; Zech 10:1), but the magical practices of Baal worshipers were a persisting temptation to the Israelites as they came late to settled agriculture.”

³³ Herman et. al, *Routledge Encyclopedia*, 322.

³⁴ See Robert Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, rev. ed. (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 60–61; John Sailhammer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 243; Menakhem Perry, “Counter-Stories in the Bible: Rebekah and Her Bridegroom, Abraham's Servant,” *Prooftexts* 27, no. 2 (2007): 275–323, doi:10.2979/pft.2007.27.2.275; Jack M. Sasson, “The Servant's Tale: How Rebekah Found a Spouse,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 65, no. 4 (2006): 241–265, doi:10.1086/511101; Esther Fuchs, “Structure and Patriarchal Functions in the Biblical Betrothal Type-Scene: Some Preliminary Notes,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 3, no. 1 (1987): 7–13, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25002051>.

As Yariah Amit points out, it is the role of the exegete to determine such import for the well-scenes. Amit notes the difficulty of identifying structural models in biblical narrative when he says, “We have seen that in constructing the plots the biblical author uses various structural models. . . . The author does not spell out which structure has been chosen, and it is up to the readers to discover if the choice of one model over another contributes to the integrity of the whole work.”³⁵ Amit encourages the interpreter to ask questions, evaluating if the author preferred “‘showing’ over ‘telling,’ or vice versa, and why?”³⁶ With these ideas in mind, the question becomes why Moses would devote so much ink to well scenes, and their corresponding motifs and imagery. To answer these questions, one must first perform an adequate literary and structural analysis.

Alter and Sailhamer suggest that well scenes serve no purpose other than to relay betrothal accounts, or to further the seed-line narratives.³⁷ But they have sub-stratified the well scenes at the exclusion of the prototype well scene of Genesis 16. When Hagar’s account is analyzed in comparison with the other well scenes, an overarching structural outline becomes apparent.

That outline could be described as:

- (1) Journey Conflict—Conflict causes a character to journey. This conflict is typically related to a catastrophic threat to Abraham’s progeny, jeopardizing the Abrahamic promise.
- (2) Arrival Conflict—The character arrives at a well where there is a separate, though sometimes related, conflict. These conflicts are of a secondary sort, serving as a rising action to the larger narrative that actually started with the flight from the previous locative setting.

³⁵ Yairah Amit, *Reading Biblical Narratives: Literary Criticism and the Hebrew Bible*, trans. Yael Lotan (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2001), Kindle loc. 795.

³⁶ Ibid., Kindle loc. 801.

³⁷ See Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*, 60–61; Sailhamer, *Pentateuch as Narrative*, 243.

- (3) Arrival Resolution—The conflict at the well is resolved. This resolution often has marital implications.
- (4) Journey Resolution—The conflict that caused the character to journey to the well is resolved. This resolution always requires a return journey to the original location where the journey conflict began and resolves the major issue which caused the protagonist to flee.³⁸

Amid this narrative plot structure, one particular character present at the well-scene will demonstrate a significant characterization development. It is the hypothesis of this paper that this character development is the key to understanding why these well scenes are included in the biblical corpus by identifying the deliverer of Abram/Abraham's progeny from dire treatment. It is this characterization that leads to the major thesis of this argument. This deliverer is a hero for the Abrahamic progeny, and these scenes are to be viewed as hero narratives.

Much of the difficulty in interpreting the well scenes of the Pentateuch stem from the misidentification of their literary sub-genre, affecting how one interprets the plot and structure, and therefore the author's emphasis. Most of these scenes have been interpreted as comedies. A comedy involves "a U-shaped story that begins in prosperity, descends into tragedy, and rises again

³⁸ Alter notes, "Some of the most commonly repeated biblical type-scenes I have been able to identify are the following . . . the encounter with the future betrothed at a well. . . danger in the desert and the discovery of a well or other source of sustenance . . ." Alter further describes the type scene of the well betrothal as having need of "the future bridegroom or his surrogate, having journeyed to a foreign land. There he encounters a girl. . . Someone, either the man or the girl, then draws water from the well; afterward, the girls rush to bring home the news of the stranger's arrival . . . ; finally a betrothal is concluded between the stranger and the girl, in the majority of the instances, only after he has been invited to a meal" (*Art of Biblical Narrative*, 60–61). However, the locative setting of a well seems to superimpose the attending marriage as will be argued throughout this paper, since each marriage found in the betrothal type scenes is part of a larger narrative where there is danger in the desert, and a discovery at a well takes place that will assist in resolving the attending conflict that led to the journey.

to end happily,” as Ryken describes it. But he notes that, “The first phase of this pattern is often omitted, but the upward movement from misery to happiness is essential.”³⁹ In the well scenes under examination, there will be a split with the second Hagar scene, Jacob and Moses both enjoying the pre-conflict bliss in the pattern, while the first Hagar scene and Isaac will have the pre-conflict happiness omitted. Ryken notes that comedy is the dominant biblical form covering the meta-narrative of Scripture but extending to “numerous smaller U-shaped stories of the type.”⁴⁰ Had these forms in fact been comedies, then their “emphasis” as Amit calls it, would have been on a restoration to the state of happiness. In fact, it appears that this is how most interpreters have understood these texts. This has led to the common interpretation of a comedy with the happily ever after of a marriage leading to the blessed children of Abraham.⁴¹ However, the texts show that these well scenes have not unanimously resulted in a happy ending. Hagar is still a slave under a harsh master in the first scene. Though Hagar is liberated in the second well scene, she is a divorced, single mother left searching for a home. Jacob is still a fugitive exiled in Padan-Aram, as is Moses in Midian. In each of these cases the prospects of bliss seem unattainable without a comedic effect. There must be another sub-genre category which these narratives would better fit.

Though these stories do exhibit some affinity to the narrative comedy, there is a better correlation with the sub-genre of a heroic narrative. This should come as no surprise since hero narratives make up the largest portion of narrative literature as Ryken points out. Ryken describes these narratives: “Hero stories are built around the life and exploits of a protagonist. Such stories spring from one of the most universal impulses of literature—the desire to embody accepted norms of behavior or representative struggles in the story of a character whose

³⁹ Ryken, *How to Read the Bible as Literature*, 81.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 82.

⁴¹ See interpretations by Alter, *Art of Biblical Narrative*; and Sailhammer, *Pentateuch as Narrative*.

experience is typical of people in general.”⁴² Within the well scenes there is a focus on the struggle of a character in the midst of a conflict between proscribed social norms and their current societal context. As will be shown below, Hagar as a slave aspires to a higher station and creates conflict between her and Sarai. Isaac is without a wife or children and in a place of social jeopardy. Jacob has become a fugitive for usurping an honor which society had reserved for the oldest brother. Moses was a fugitive for murder. Each well scene is preceded by a conflict of social norms for a character who seeks a level of restoration or ascension to a more advantageous social norm.

Fokkelman describes the ideas of quest and hero as being essential to the plot. He says, “The trajectory in an independent story is often a search or ‘quest’ undertaken by the hero in order to solve or cancel the problem or deficit present at the outset. The hero is the subject of the quest, and he proceeds along the axis of his pursuit: he is on his way to the object of value that he wants to acquire or achieve.”⁴³ In this line of plot, the well scenes cannot be taken independently of their journey, since it is here where the hero seeks to resolve their conflict. Any other conflict found (such as those that occur upon the arrival at the well) would be rising actions to the ultimate denouement.

If these well scenes are accepted as hero stories, they require a hero, the main character seeking to resolve the conflict. Ryken describes heroes as follows:

The true hero expresses an accepted social and moral norm; his experience reenacts the important conflicts of the community which produces him; he is endowed with qualities that capture the popular imagination. It must also be remarked that the hero is able to act, and to act for good. Most important of all, the narrative of his experience suggests that life has both a significant pattern and an end.⁴⁴

⁴² Ryken, *How to Read the Bible as Literature*, 75.

⁴³ Fokkelman, *Reading Biblical Narrative*, Kindle loc. 1237.

⁴⁴ Ryken, *How to Read the Bible as Literature*, 76.

Ryken also proscribes literary means for identifying a hero: “The hero’s identity is revealed chiefly through six means: the hero’s (1) personal traits and abilities, (2) actions, (3) motivations, (4) responses to events or people, (5) relationships, and (6) roles.”⁴⁵ In each of these scenes the characterization of the protagonist in the narratives will be predominantly identified as a hero via their actions, relationships, and roles. Only with Moses will all six identifying marks become apparent. This paper will argue that the well scenes are part of a larger plot structure of the hero story sub-genre, and that the protagonists of these scenes come to function as a hero, and more specifically a deliverer, who secure the progeny of Abraham’s lineage in fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant. Through the character’s interactions from arrival at the well through the denouement of their journey conflict, they model social and moral norms which lead to their actions being finally evaluated through narration as positive examples of piety within the overarching metanarrative of the patriarchal accounts. Specifically, this study will show that the hero of the story proves to be significant in the biblical narrative as they ensure the safety of Abraham’s progeny, participating in God’s providence of the Abrahamic covenant as it pertains to numerous descendants who would become nations and kings, and will lead to the ultimate deliverer and protector of Israel in the deliverer par excellence: Moses.

Hagar: The Proto-Typical Well Scene

Hagar is the oft-forgotten matriarch of biblical literature. This is unsurprising since she is ultimately dismissed out of deference to Sarah. However, Hagar makes significant contributions to the metanarrative of Scripture. There was something that Hagar experienced that made her worthy of this special place in Mosaic literature, while such prominence was withheld from other matriarchs. Many allude to the fact that Genesis is a story of national origins, giving special attention to the identification of the boundaries of social and political

⁴⁵ Ibid.

significance for the nation of Israel.⁴⁶ Though some would see the Hagar narrative as an origin story for Israel's future enemies, this should not prejudice the reader from seeing her distinct role in the metanarrative as will be shown in the well scene of Genesis 16.⁴⁷

Journey Conflict

In Chapter 16 of Genesis, the emphasis shifts from Abram to Sarai, who is discouraged over her barrenness, which has brought her public shame.⁴⁸ Sarai approaches Abram and asks him to take her slave Hagar as a concubine that she might serve as a surrogate mother to Sarai.⁴⁹ Abram agrees, and Hagar conceives. However, immediately upon knowledge of conception, there is conflict between the two women. Fewell and Heard describe the conflict succinctly when they state,

Sarai attempts to change her own status by changing Hagar's, but when she perceives that she has lost respect as a result of Hagar's pregnancy and attitude, she eagerly tries to shore up the boundaries that Hagar appears to be transgressing. With Abram's consent,

⁴⁶ Fewell and Heard, *Oxford Handbook of Biblical Narrative*, 109–124.

⁴⁷ Matthews notes the ambiguous light that Hagar and Ishmael are portrayed in throughout the book of Genesis when he says, “The Genesis narratives (chaps. 16; 21) present an ambiguous view of Hagar-Ishmael: they are rivals to Sarai and Isaac, but they are also blessed by the Lord by virtue of their relationship to Abram (16:10; 21:13, 18). Ishmael as the firstborn and the first to be circumcised (17:23) and the honor of the double theophany to Hagar (16:7–12; 21:17–18) show their inclusion.” See *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, New American Commentary, vol. 1B (Nashville: B&H, 2005), 178–179.

⁴⁸ See Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 1 (Dallas: Word, 1987), 273.

⁴⁹ Genesis 16:2: Skinner concludes the same when he remarks on v. 2 that Sarai intends to “*be built up—or obtain children (v.i.)—from her. . . by adopting Hagar's son as her own.*” See John Skinner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*, International Critical Commentary (New York: Scribner, 1910), 286.

Sarai ‘afflicts’ Hagar, using corporal punishment to put her back in her original subservient place.⁵⁰

Here is a tale of two women. One who is rich and loved yet barren is pitted against another who is poor, enslaved, unloved, mistreated, and bearing the child of her master. Where Hagar was once nothing more than a slave, now she is the bearer of the patriarch’s sole heir and stands to move up in the social hierarchy. It could be inferred that this is the first time in Hagar’s life that she was afforded a place of any social status, and that she has much to gain from her new position within the clan in terms of social status and financial security.⁵¹ Hagar apparently understands this and comes to despise her master. Sarai, who sought to use her slave to remedy her barrenness and remove her reproach, is now more insulted by the ascension of her slave girl, who should be counted as her personal property. Sarai places Abram under a curse, to which Abram responds by granting Sarai power to mistreat her slave, the mother of his only child. In response to Sarai’s mistreatment, Hagar flees, beginning her journey to find relief, perceiving her status and that of the child to be in jeopardy. This has significant ramifications considering Genesis 12 and 15, where Abram is promised descendants numerous as the stars, and yet is without an heir to realize that promise.

Arrival Conflict

Hagar flees in desperation, pregnant and alone, and comes to a spring (עַיִן, Gen 16:7). Here the arrival conflict coincides with the departure conflict. This is seen by the conversation which the LORD has with Hagar in v. 8: “And He said, ‘Hagar, slave-girl of Sarai, where have you come from; and where are you going?’ Then she said, ‘Away from Sarai my mistress! I am fleeing!’”⁵² Hagar is attempting to flee from Sarai, who has been afflicting

⁵⁰ Fewell and Heard, *Oxford Handbook of Biblical Narrative*, 116.

⁵¹ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 2 (Dallas: Word, 1994), 8.

⁵² All translations are the author’s unless otherwise noted, taken from the BHS.

her. Sarai's actions of social degradation had been difficult on Hagar, who being pregnant would have surely been in no emotional or physical state to withstand such harsh treatment. Instead of bearing the reproach and difficulties of Sarai's wrath, Hagar has made up her mind to flee, causing a whole new issue for Abram and his family. If Hagar does succeed in fleeing, then all three of the main characters are in jeopardy: (1) Abram's sole heir, to this point, is endangered in the womb of his mother who is wandering the desert; (2) Sarai is still reproachfully barren in the eyes of her peers; and (3) Hagar, if successful, will be an unwed mother of an illegitimate child, but if unsuccessful, could die in the desert being in no condition to travel the rugged wilderness alone and with child. The situation of the entire family is dire and in need of intervention, but to the model reader, it appears that the Abrahamic promise is now jeopardized. If Hagar is not restored and her child does not survive, the promise of God is compromised. In chapter 16, the conflict that causes the journey is Hagar's mistreatment, and that is the same conflict which she describes to the angel of the LORD when he confronts her in v. 8.

Arrival Resolution

The conflict with the well finds its resolution with the command of the LORD coming to Hagar in vv. 10-13: "Return to your mistress . . . and you shall bear a son! And you shall call his name Ishmael." God promises to bless her and the child, so that he will increase her descendants beyond multitude because of her submission and the blessing that is already upon the boy's father. As such, the LORD himself ensures the protection of the Abrahamic progeny that Hagar carries, and effects the Abrahamic blessing in part as a blessing upon Hagar's obedience, though he seemingly disqualifies Ishmael from being the elect-progeny of Abram through pronouncing a different blessing. The fact that the angel of the LORD, acting as the primary agent, serves to deliver Hagar and Abram's gestational progeny should not be missed. Wenham notes that in this scene, "the angel of the LORD is dominant, and Hagar accepts his orders and his

promises, while Sarai does not appear at all.”⁵³ Sarai is conspicuously absent so that reader is left to assume, apart from God’s condescending direct speech concerning the boy’s future, that this progeny is part of God’s plan.

Journey Resolution

Verses fourteen and fifteen show the resolution to the journey:

So she called the name of the LORD which spoke to her ‘You are the God who sees’ because she said ‘Moreover, here, I have seen the one who sees after me.’ Because of this, the well is called ‘The well of the Living One who sees me’ Behold it is between Kadesh and Bered. And Hagar bore to Abram a son, and Abram called the name of his son which Hagar had born Ishmael.

Hagar’s experience is pivotal to the life of Israel, as it reveals something about the God whom the nation serves so that her name for this well and the title she gives to this God who met her is made to stand for untold generations. Fewell and Heard note Hagar’s contributions when they mention her title by feminist critics as “theologian.”⁵⁴ However, Fewell and Heard do not explicitly state how the spring (עֵין) became a well (בְּאֵר). It must be inferred, since naming begets ownership, that Abram fortified this spring to become a well as a result of the LORD’s revelation to Hagar. Genesis shows that Abraham named the wells which he dug, but here he has given that right to his concubine. It is in Hagar’s return and submission that she is granted the social status which she so desperately craves, and she is memorialized through the well. Hagar has returned home, though the return journey is

⁵³ Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 4.

⁵⁴ Fewell and Heard state, “Her rejoinder, a seeming mixture of awe and audacity, has earned her among feminist critics the label of ‘theologian’ (Trible 1984). She utters a garbled response about seeing and being seen by God; she gives YHWH a new name, El-Roi (‘El who sees’); and, like Abram’s erection of altars, her experience is inscribed on geographical space (Beer-lahai-roi, ‘the well of a living one who sees me’), grounding (as it were) her identity in promised space” (*Oxford Handbook of Biblical Narrative*, 116–117).

gapped, moving straight from Hagar's direct speech of v. 14 to Ishmael's birth and Abram's presence in vv. 15–16.

Characterization

The character development of two characters becomes obvious through the text's direct speech and narration. Hagar the slave-girl is foreign (Egyptian), emotional (seen crying at the well), and impulsive (running away in the desert without any form of protection or provision). She craves social status (despising her master) and is willing to achieve social status through capitalizing on her newfound role within the home as a surrogate mother. However, Sarai will not allow her slave to usurp her role in the home and subjugates her through harsh treatment. This compels the pregnant young woman to flee. On Hagar's run-away journey she meets the Angel of the LORD, who corrects her faulty plan, providing her with the only means of sure safety until her son would be old enough to provide for and protect her.⁵⁵

The characterization of the LORD is also worth noting, here for the first time since Eve's confrontation in the garden, the LORD speaks to a woman who is a foreigner outside of the line of Abraham. The LORD is conspicuously absent in the plans of Abram and Sarai in chapter 16, though he features prominently in chapter 15. The LORD's benevolence is shown clearly in the fact that he is willing to bless this offspring of Abram, even though Abram and Sarai hastily act out a plan which seems to be outside of the LORD's original intention of chapters 12–15. Furthermore, the LORD shows himself to be a wise and beneficent counselor in providing the only means of safeguarding Hagar and elevating her social status. However, this blessing is contingent upon her obedience to his words, evidenced through

⁵⁵ As has been seen in the footnote 50 above, Wenham notes that women had no job prospects outside of their duties in the home. However, by waiting for the removal of Hagar and Ishmael as rivals to Sarah and Isaac until Ishmael's adolescence, God has mercifully ensured that both Hagar and Ishmael may survive as he would be old enough to find employment and provide for his mother.

her submission to her human master.⁵⁶ Hagar's scene is important to the development not only of Israel's boundaries and identity conflicts with their neighbors, but here we see that the Hagar scene is also an important development in the characterization of the LORD's character in Scripture. Throughout this passage, the LORD will evidence his retributive justice on the generations of Sarai for her sin through Egyptian oppression as well as his manifold grace for his people whether native born of the elect, or foreigners living in obedient submission to his revealed plan.

Hagar: The Anti-Type Well Scene

Hagar's prominence in the Pentateuch is indisputable as she is the recipient of a second distinct theophany in Genesis 21. The above plot structure for well-scenes is maintained in Hagar's second well scene which runs from Genesis 21:8–21.

Journey Conflict

The journey conflict is found when Sarai sees Ishmael mocking Isaac at his weaning party. At this point she demands that her husband send the bondservant away (Gen 21:8–10). Sarah's speech betrays questionable motives of self-preservation and economic stability, which upsets Abraham.⁵⁷ Abraham acquiesces, only after the assurance of God's protection on the lad and sends his concubine and older son away with scant provisions (vv. 11–14). Hagar is now rejected, shamed, and divorced, and attempting to care for her adolescent son. Along the way, the boy is overcome from exhaustion, and Hagar is forced to lay him down in the shade, and to walk away that she might not see his plight to what she assumed was sure death (vv. 15–16a).

Arrival Conflict

The arrival conflict is very brief, since Hagar is not even aware that she has arrived at the well. When Hagar sat down, "she lifted up her voice and wept" (Gen 21:16). She fears that her

⁵⁶ Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 13.

⁵⁷ Fewell and Heard, *Oxford Handbook of Biblical Narrative*, 117.

son will die, and as a result she will be without provision and protection.

Arrival Resolution

The arrival resolution begins when Hagar is again greeted by the angel of God. The texts depict the resolution, stating,

And God heard the voice of the boy, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, “What troubles you, Hagar? Fear not, for God has heard the voice of the boy where he is. Up! Lift up the boy, and hold him fast with your hand, for I will make him into a great nation.” Then God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water. And she went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink (Gen 21:17–19).

With a show of divine mercy and providence, God proves faithful to his initial promise to Hagar, and his two subsequent promises to Abraham concerning Ishmael, hearing the voice of the boy, a distinct play on the boy’s name and providing the boy with water which he was evidently in desperate need of. Hagar’s immediate conflict is resolved since her son is now restored to health.

Journey Resolution

This well scene has every element mentioned throughout the above structure except for one important point. The journey resolution never involves a return. This is the only well scene in which the permanent departure is the resolution. When God spoke to Hagar in Bathsheba, God announced that Ishmael would dwell before the face of all his brothers (16:12), and this was the fulfillment of the pronouncement. This moment of conflict was a defining identification of Abraham’s elect progeny and the removal of the rivalrous non-elect progeny and his mother. The resolution for this conflict was to start a new life, which the text shows happened in Paran of Mt. Seir. Verses 20–21 of that chapter read: “And so it happened that God was with the boy and he grew and dwelled in the desert and became a great archer. And he dwelled in the wilderness of Paran and his mother took a wife for him from the land of Egypt.” This shows God’s covenant

faithfulness to Ishmael, who was heir to a limited aspect of the Abrahamic covenant, as was affirmed twice also to Hagar, by hearing the boy, providing for his maturity, and successfully securing the future progeny to bring his word to pass. With this scene God is again the ultimate deliverer of the Abrahamic progeny through his merciful provision as people are submissive to God's revealed will.

The fact that this scene departs from the structure of the previous well scene would be cause for little concern if the return element was not present in all the following well scenes. However, since the return is evident in the other scenes, the absence of this element calls for attention. It would appear that Moses has rendered this scene as a framing narrative for chapters 16–21. The Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory notes, "Framed narratives occur in narrative situations when events are narrated by a character other than the primary narrator or when a character tells a tale that, although unrelated to the main story, contains a moral message for the listener in the text."⁵⁸ However, not all would agree with this brief definition. R. Malewitz of Oregon State describes framing narratives in this way: "As its name suggests, a frame story is a narrative that frames or surrounds another story or set of stories."⁵⁹ Though the narrator does not change in this narrative which is typically common, the characters shift, and someone who is viewed as a foil to Sara becomes a heroine. These narratives do bracket an important aspect of the larger narrative which seeks to identify Abraham's

⁵⁸ Herman et al., *Routledge Encyclopedia*, 186.

⁵⁹ Raymond Malewitz, *What is a Frame Story? Transcript*, The Oregon State Guide to English Literary Terms, <https://liberalarts.oregonstate.edu/wlf/what-frame-story>, accessed May 5, 2021. Malewitz notes further that a frame story "usually appears at the beginning and end of that larger story and provides important context and key information for how to read it. . . paying attention [to] the **frame** surrounding a story can help us to rethink the **content** of the story. . . every so often we read stories that build a frame narrative into the story itself. Instead of jumping right into the tale to be told, these narratives pause for a moment to reveal the person who tells the tale, the people who listen to the it, and the occasion for telling it" (emphasis original).

long promised son, and heir of the Abrahamic covenant, inviting the reader to pause and search out the occasion for this framed sequence of well-scenes. This search should include, according to Malewitz, asking: “Why is the story being told? What appeals does the story make to its implied audience of listeners? And how do the main story’s themes relate to the themes of the frame story?”⁶⁰ Moses as the author of the Pentateuch has included this story in his writings for the children of Israel who are in Kadesh Barnea and will be entering the Promised Land. Though it could be describing identity boundaries between Israel and the Ishmaelite tribes, the portrayal of Hagar as a heroine should ultimately lead to the rejection of boundary marking as the goal of these narratives. Instead, one can see God being faithful to Abraham to fulfill a secondary promise to Abraham that was graciously granted to him after a failed attempt to receive the promised son through his own devices. In the tradition of *kal wahomer*, if God will be faithful to his promises to the non-elect progeny of Abraham and to a foreign slave, how much more faithful will he be to the elect progeny of Abraham to the free and Terah-born wife?

Characterization

Hagar shows no real characterization development in this narrative. She has first and foremost sought to protect her and her son’s interest and proven responsive to the word of God at each instance. Her son is only described as becoming a skilled archer, which would be an ominous portent for the people of Israel as the non-elect line would eventually become one of their chief opponents, being nothing more than an agent to propagate the non-elect line of Abraham.

The character development of God differs throughout. As God encourages Abraham to heed his wife, which is the exact thing that led Abraham to the current predicament, some are led to question God’s care for this rejected slave and newly abandoned child. However, when one reads the text as a model reader, they instead see that God proves himself to be the only

⁶⁰ Ibid.

one capable of providing a better life for Hagar and Ishmael, as she is now emancipated with a future chieftain and accomplished warrior to provide for her.

Isaac: The Well Scene Par-Excellence

The second well scene in the pre-Sinaitic account is the well scene with Abram's servant and Rebekah in Genesis 24. This is the longest well-scene in Mosaic literature, and it is distinct in the fact that it is the one scene in which an Abrahamic descendent is not present at the well (even in the Hagar account, Ishmael is there in gestational form). This is of critical importance. The characterization of Isaac in this account will prove pivotal to understanding his role throughout the rest of the Pentateuch. The author has decided to gap Isaac when compared to the other patriarchs. However, the well-scene of Genesis 24 is yet still spectacular as it encases some of the longest conversational encounters in the entire Pentateuch between the servant of Abram and the other characters.

Journey Conflict

The journey conflict of Genesis 24 comes on the heels of Sarah's burial, and Abraham's shrewd business dealings with the cave at Machpelah from Ephron and his sons. This background is necessary to understand since it suggests two things: first, that the first generation of patriarchs, namely Sarah and Abraham, are approaching death, and second, that until the purchase of the cave, they have not yet inherited any land in Canaan as a permanent possession. The negotiation of Abraham in chapter 23 will serve as a point of comparison with the same types of negotiations that his servant will have in chapter 24 with God through prayer and then with Laban. However, the death of Sarah which precludes Abraham's negotiations seem to be the real point of conflict in chapter 24 since verse 67 ends speaking of Isaac's comfort through Rebekah, his new wife, after his mother's death. There would appear to be separate conflicts, one on the mind of Abraham and the other on the mind of Isaac. As Abraham grieves over his wife's death and is forced to reckon with his own mortality, he begins to question his legacy and realizes that his son has not yet been given in marriage, and this

precedes the legitimate birth of future heirs necessary to the Abrahamic promise of chapters 12 and 17. Isaac, on the other hand, is distraught over the loss of his mother and lacks female companionship in his current state of bachelorhood. Abraham seeks to resolve both of these issues by sending his trusted servant back to Aram to find a wife for Isaac from among his own house.

The command that Abraham gives to his servant, with the accompanying oath given in a sense of doom and urgency, shows that there is more on Abraham's mind than acquiring a wife, but finding a *worthy* wife. Again, the issue of boundaries seems to be a prominent feature as Abraham tells the servant about the Abrahamic promise and its contingent ramifications in vv. 6–8 of the chapter:

And Abraham said to him, “Keep this to me that you do not take my son back there. The God of Heaven, the LORD, from the house of my father which he took me and from the land, and from my kindred, spoke to me and who swore to me to say to your seed I will give this land, and he will send his angel before your face, and you will take a wife for my son from there.”

After making the necessary preparations, the servant departs.

Arrival Conflict

Verses 10 and 11 describe the arrival at the well: “And the servant took ten of the camels of his master's camels and he went with all kinds of goods from his master's hand, and he arose and went to Aram-Naharaim, to the city of Nahor. Then he made the camels kneel outside the city by the well of water, at evening time, according to the time women go out to draw water.” It is at this point that a new conflict arises as can be seen in the prayer and subsequent direct speech of the servant. The servant's main concern is whether or not his journey will be successful; will he be able to return to his master with the desired wife? The ESV renders verse 12 as follows: “And he said, ‘O LORD, God of my master Abraham, please grant me success today and show steadfast love to my master Abraham’” (Gen 24:12, ESV). This idea of being successful is echoed in the major English versions,

and it is qualified immediately by the servant through the LORD's continued covenant faithfulness (סֶדֶק) to Abraham, and it is repeated in praise in verses 26-27, 48-49, and 56. The servant requested the LORD to give him a sign which would speak of a woman's hospitality, qualifying her as marriage material for his master's son as a sign of his successful completion of his task. This negotiation with the LORD is qualified, rational, and motivated from a heart that seeks to see the LORD's faithfulness to the word which God has already revealed,⁶¹ and the elevation of the servant's master. Though the negotiation appears immediately successful, as the LORD answers the prayer before the servant finishes speaking with the arrival of Rebekah, but the marriage must first be arranged through the family.

Arrival Resolution

Upon arriving at Bethuel's house, the servant is greeted heartily by Rebekah's brother Laban:

The woman ran and told to her mother's house about these things. And Rebekah had a brother, whose name was Laban and Laban ran to the man, outside to the spring. And it happened as he saw the ring and the bracelets upon the hand of his sister and as he heard the words which Rebekah his sister said, "So the words of this man to me" and he went to the man and behold he was standing by the camels at the spring. And he said, "Come, oh Blessed of the LORD, for why do you stand outside? So, I have turned over the house and a place for the camels" (Gen 24:28-31).

There are a few narrative clues that Laban is less motivated from hospitality as he is by greed. The narrator remarks that "as he saw the ring and the bracelets . . . and he went to the man." This characterization has a cataphoric function to preclude the negotiations that will ensue from verses 34-58, where the servant recounts his prayer in detail and the marriage is arranged (vv.

⁶¹ See the Abrahamic promises throughout Genesis 12:1-7, 15:1-21, 17:1-21, and 22:16-18, which paired with Abraham's personal history of troubled foreign wives would have set the stage for the servant's understanding of God's faithfulness to his master and the stakes associated with his task.

34–51) and then stalled (vv. 54–56), before Rebekah gives the final consent which her family seemed ready to renege on (vv. 57–58). Though the servant is in no way able to haggle from a place of prominence, there must have been some manner of persuasion employed that has been gapped. The servant is in foreign territory and would seemingly be outnumbered by the cohort of Bethuel and Laban, and yet he is able to say confidently, “Send me to my master.” The fact that this young girl is given control over her own destiny is likewise unnatural. In most arranged marriages in the ANE culture, virgins were treated as property of their respective family and would go when they were sent and not when they assented. Perhaps this was a manipulative tactic in which the family assumed that the young girl would not be willing to venture with a stranger of her own, yet she does, in which case their hostile intention would have backfired, and the servant’s conflict resolved as he is successful against all odds.

Journey Resolution

With Rebekah’s assent, the family sends her away to her new family unit with a blessing fully in keeping with the Abrahamic promise of Genesis 12 and 17 when they say:

“Our sister may you increase
becoming thousands of ten-thousands,
and may your seed inherit the gate of his haters!”⁶²

Then the journey to Canaan begins, and the narrative continues,

And Rebekah arose and her young woman and mounted upon camels and they went after the man. So the servant took Rebekah and he left. Then Isaac returned to Beer Laha Roi, and was dwelling in the land of the Negev. Isaac went out to wander about in the

⁶² Though many would translate this as two bi-colons, the author has translated this as a tri-colon. This was done so that the blessing would be qualified so that Rebekah’s increase is given in terms of number, and then power attempting to give each verb its own colon, with the first line being progressively specified in the next two lines through numbers, and then the associated power that comes in numbers.

field as evening turned toward night. And he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold the camels were coming.

The fact that the author gives an extraneous detail of Isaac's previous location as Beer Laha Roi gives coherence among the overarching metanarrative of the well scenes so that the same God who looked on Hagar to preserve the un-elect seed of Abraham has now likewise looked upon Isaac to keep the same promise of making his seed, like that of his estranged brother, a great multitude. Just as Hagar is comforted by the LORD despite Sarai's affliction, so Isaac is comforted after Sarai's death through the LORD's provision (v. 67). While Abraham was concerned about the wrong heir in chapter 16 and needed divine intervention to his conflict, so too did Abraham need the divine intervention of God to resolve the conflict of chapter 24 as God provided a wife for the elect son from among his own house (vv. 4, 27, 48).

Characterization

The first characterization that must be noted is Isaac. Isaac is conspicuously absent in the major narrative of Genesis. His direct speech is limited to chapter 26, and even there he is a minor character with most of the direct speech coming from Abimelech and Phicol as well as Isaac's own servants. It should not be lost on the reader that in the major developments of Isaac's life, it is the role of others to effect God's will in Isaac's life. It is his father's servant who locates his wife at his father's request, it is the servants who dig and find the wells in chapter 26, and it is his wife who orchestrates the LORD's blessing on the correct son at the time of his impending death. In every other well scene, the person with the most to gain is present at the well with this lone exception. The author has intentionally shown Isaac to be a passive man in his own affairs, enslaved to his own emotional state, so that he is at home depressed when he should be looking for a wife. He will likewise be enslaved to his emotions and inner desires when it comes to child raising later. However, it is through Isaac's servants, working on his behalf, that the people of Israel begin to take the land through their cultivation of wells in chapter 26.

The second character developed is Rebekah. Rebekah appears out of nowhere and proves herself to be an industrious young woman, hospitable, and humble. She furthermore goes on to show herself submissive as she runs home to tell her family, the authority in her life, about her encounter. When the time comes for her to decide her fate, she submits herself to the arranged marriage which was struck the night before, even though her family has offered her an out to delay such submission. Rebekah is immediately obedient to whatever station of life she finds herself in and proves a worthy matriarch for the elect line of Abraham.

The third character is God. There is no direct speech here by God, and yet he is present. Here God answers the prayer of a servant immediately, in exact fashion to each of the petitions. God is also implicitly present watching over Isaac as he journeys from the place where God looks upon people to his new location to meet his new bride and receive comfort from God. Here God is portrayed as the God who watches over his people to give them success through prayer, as his agents work towards accomplishing his overarching purpose in the lives of the elect, and he comforts his people in their distress.

Perhaps the most noteworthy character is the one whom the author intentionally is least concerned with. It is common in narrative to leave minor characters nameless, describing them in terms of their position.⁶³ Though the servant would seem to be

⁶³ See Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 330. Sternberg states, "To remain nameless is to remain faceless, with hardly a life of one's own. Accordingly, a character's emergence from anonymity may correlate with a rise in importance." Thus, contrary to Waltke's assessment, the author intended the servant to remain unimportant to the overarching meta-narrative. Waltke notes, "By means of indirect characterization—actions and speech—the narrator develops a rich picture of the wise servant's gifts" (*Genesis*, 325). Before going on to assert that some commentators find him to be the main character in the account, however, Waltke identifies the servant as "anonymous;" and this "blanking" is intentional and emphatic, and therefore it is consequential. Waltke's definition of gapping, contrasted with "blanking" quoted above, showed that the delineation lay in the consequence of the missing information. The question that would automatically rise in the reader's

the protagonist in the story by counting his dialogue, observing his actions, and seeing the effect he has on the overall plot, the servant serves as nothing more than an agent who effects the will of God at the behest of Abraham for Isaac. What is noteworthy is the contrast between the servant and Isaac already at this start of Isaac's own narrative. This passivity which Isaac exhibits is in stark opposition to the activity of the servant of Abraham and later the activity of his own servants in chapter 26.

Jacob: The Romantic Well Scene

Jacob is a major character in biblical thought, earning a spot as the prototypical patriarch of Israel, eclipsed only by Abraham his predecessor and Moses his successor in terms of influence. The nation is known by his name, and not that of Abraham, whether as Israel or Jacob, throughout biblical literature.⁶⁴ Jacob's journey to the well begins as a fugitive from justice and ends with him in exile for two decades. Keeping the overarching narrative of well type scenes in mind, the well scene narrative cannot come to its conclusion until the conflict which drove the character to the well in the first place is resolved. This narrative will span from 27:41 (Esau's intention) to 33:20 (Jacob and Esau's treaty).

Journey Conflict

Jacob is a man who is ultimately concerned with worldly goods. He is a person who seeks to acquire wealth at all costs,

mind is how can this servant be unnamed? Other servants are named earlier in the Genesis account. The reason for this servant remaining unnamed is that he has been intentionally gapped because his role is strictly as an agent and serves as a cataphoric indictment against Isaac. All other men in the well-scenes will be present to find their own wife. For some reason, Abraham found Isaac unfit for the journey, perhaps to keep Isaac in the land which he has finally acquired some form of permanent possession through a recent purchase. However, the narrator seems to imply through his well-scene typology that Isaac should have been a more active agent.

⁶⁴ See Micah 3:1; Psalm 87:2; Numbers 23:7; and Obadiah 10 for examples of Israel's corporate identity as Jacob, and numerous passages referring to the children of the nation of Israel beginning in Exodus 1:12, etc.

even taking advantage of his own brother.⁶⁵ He began by refusing to feed his hungry brother until he conned him out of a birthright. Years later, while his father was sick, he obeyed his mother and through trickery and an impressive feat of self-camouflage was able to obtain the paternal blessing as well. Though Esau was able to despise his birthright freely (the wealth), he was not so willing to part with the blessing (the social honor inherent in God's divine blessing of dominion).⁶⁶ When the deception was found out, Esau planned to kill his brother (Gen 27:41). However, Rebekah, the originator of the plot, found out about Esau's plan and capitalized on her oldest son's patience by sending Jacob away to his greedy Uncle Laban to find a wife. This was a plan that seemed innocent enough to Isaac, who was unaware of Esau's plot, since he too had to go to Padan-Aram to find a wife (Gen 28:2).

As Jacob progresses towards Padan-Aram, he is met by God in a vision around a ladder on which the angels of God were ascending and descending. God spoke to him, reiterating the Abrahamic promise to the next generation. There are points of coherence between this account and the preceding journey and arrival conflict scenes, as the LORD grants assurance to the safety of Abraham's seed and reaffirms his intentions to multiply that seed in keeping with the Abrahamic promise. In light of Jacob's current flight as an exile from legitimate justice, this must be extremely comforting to the man who has now lost everything. Whereas Abraham's servant left with ten camels full

⁶⁵ In ANE culture, wealth was calculated through the accumulation of livestock and slaves. See Genesis 12:21 where Abraham is counted as rich because of his livestock as well as silver, and the same sentiment extended to slaves in Goldingay (*Genesis*, 224), describing Abram and Lot's accumulated wealth. Meanwhile, Esau as a hunter gatherer showed no such regard for wealth, instead choosing to live day-to-day as a hunter-gatherer (see Waltke, *Genesis*, 374–375).

⁶⁶ See Waltke, *Genesis*, where he says, "Blessing, the presence of God and his promises for abundance and dominion, is communicated through the spoken word" (384). Regarding Esau, Waltke comments, "He inherits no God-inspired dream, no vision of the transcendent. He reacts to the immediate, without reflection on future. He despises his right to take part in Abraham's promised destiny" (*ibid.*, 374–375).

of goods with which to barter for Isaac's future wife, Jacob will arrive with nothing but God's promise to provide. This causes Jacob to make a vow, contingent upon God's ability to fulfill his promise, where Jacob would acknowledge the LORD as his God, and build the house of God upon the memorial stone which he set up at Bethel and pay tithes (vv. 20–22). The arrival conflict then becomes a question of whether Jacob's life will be spared from Esau's wrath, allowing him safe return to his father's house as God has promised, granting him a secondary blessing by giving him offspring through his future wife.

Arrival Conflict

Sometime after the vision, Jacob arrives at the well in Padan-Aram where he encounters some stubborn shepherds who refuse to move the large rock covering the mouth of the well (29:2–8). Some have used this story to suggest that the stone was too large for the group to move, even leading to legends of Jacob being a giant in rabbinic literature.⁶⁷ Ryken notes, "A well was sometimes protected by a huge stone that only multiple shepherds could move, so that no one could steal a disproportionate share of the water (Gen 29:10)."⁶⁸ So perhaps the shepherds were not so much unindustrious as they were concerned with having credible witnesses who would ensure that they did not selfishly indulge in more than their rightful allotment of the precious resource. While Jacob is questioning the shepherds about his kinsfolk, Rachel arrives to draw water. Jacob is overcome with either a masculine urge to impress the girl, or social audacity that he refuses to wait any longer, so that he moves the stone himself, even though the time to move it has not yet come. The tension is only heightened with his welcome into her home. With the previous well scenes attesting to a marriage in some form, either the restoration of a marriage with Hagar or the arrangement of a marriage with Rebekah, there is yet a resolution for Jacob's secondary goal in going to Padan-Aram of retrieving a wife.

⁶⁷ Waltke, *Genesis*, 401.

⁶⁸ Ryken, *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, 940.

Arrival Resolution

Verses 15–20 of chapter 29 gloss quickly towards the resolution of Jacob’s marital status, showing that Jacob, after many days, was approached about his wages by his Uncle Laban. Jacob, without any earthly wealth, is able to arrange his own marriage without a dowry after he agrees to indentured servitude for a period of seven years, after which Laban will give Jacob his daughter Rachel. This seems promising; however, this would not happen without a second minor conflict arising due to the greed of Laban. The trickster Jacob is now tricked by Laban, and the women are switched under the guise of a drunken night so that Jacob has now married Leah, Rachel’s sister, and must fulfill a second term of indentured servitude for the woman he truly desires. After a tense argument with Laban and some bad-faith negotiations, Jacob receives Rachel after the celebration for Leah is completed but is forced to work an additional seven years. It is only after those second seven years, when Jacob receives the wife of the well scene that the arrival conflict is resolved.

Journey Resolution

Marriage, children, and wealth were not Jacob’s primary reason for arriving at the well that day. Jacob left Canaan under duress, fleeing from the wrath of Esau, having every intention of returning in safety. Jacob is in no position to leave Padan-Aram freely. He is an outsider living in a foreign land.⁶⁹ Instead of attempting to negotiate by faith like Abraham’s servant, Jacob leaves under cover as his father-in-law and his sons are shearing sheep. He is pursued, but the LORD protects Jacob, keeping with his earlier revelation. As soon as the Laban pursuit is negotiated,

⁶⁹ See Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 269. Wenham writes, “Laban is portrayed as a man governed by avarice. Again, the narrator does not spell out exactly the effect of Jacob’s wealth, leaving it to our imagination to fill in the details. The important thing is that ‘Jacob noticed’ it: הִנֵּה ‘that’ shows us the situation through Jacob’s eyes. He realized he was *persona non grata* with both his father-in-law and his brothers-in-law, and with no member of his own family nearby to support him, he senses his exposure and weakness.”

a servant arrives to show that Jacob's situation has worsened, as Esau approaches with four hundred men. Jacob has now learned what it is like to be robbed, mistreated, and manipulated, and seeks to buy his safety through a series of flattery and gifts. The gifts and flattery work and Esau's wrath is assuaged; he offers to protect Jacob and allows him to dwell with him. With Jacob's arrival in Canaan and treaty with Laban and Esau, the main conflict that gave rise to Jacob's departure is resolved, and he has entered the land of his father rich in money, livestock, slaves, and most importantly, children.

Characterization

Because of the great span of text that this section covers, there is a significant amount of characterization that takes place. To be fair, this well scene is part of a much larger act than those which come before it. Where Hagar's flight is preceded by the chapter immediate before, and Abraham's servant's conflict is described within the self-contained chapter of the well scene, Jacob's flight and arrival and return spans parts of seven chapters. Whereas the other analyses cover the well scenes with reference to the greater act, the characterization for this scene cannot be accomplished without considering the greater detail that accompanies such a larger section of narrative spanning all seven relevant chapters, since it is the conflict between Jacob and Esau that gives rise to Jacob's original flight. For this case, characterization will cover only those characters who appear at the well location. This act cannot end until Jacob returns to Canaan, just as Hagar returned to Abraham and Abraham's servant returned to Isaac.

The protagonist of the story is Jacob, although this is contrary to the reader's initial inclination. A person who is named יעקב and continues to show such deceptive and selfish behavior as Jacob did from conning his brother from a birth right, taking advantage of his father's disability and feeble state, and who is more concerned with his father's inheritance than maintaining good family relations, is not typically an endearing character. However, the narrator brings his readers to a place of sympathy with Jacob by showing that his election is from God, as seen in revelations to both Rebekah, Jacob, and later Laban. Jacob moves

from a place of prominence within the home, where he has been amassing livestock as a shepherd for his own future inheritance, to a place of destitution where he is forced to suffer as an indentured servant and is ultimately repaid for his own underhandedness. However, in time, Jacob is able to best Laban through his own craftiness, enriching himself. By the time the well scene closes, Jacob realizes that he can no longer rely on such manipulative behaviors to best the sheer force of Esau; and in case he thought that he could, the angel of the LORD meets him, cripples him, and gives him a new name. The new name signifies a new way of life for Jacob that will be marked by faith and prayer instead of self-reliance. Jacob ultimately restores to Esau a large sum of wealth, similar to that which he has stolen through manipulation, and he submits himself to Esau, referring to him as “Lord.” This exchange purchases Esau’s good favor through an extravagant exhibition of repentance.

Laban is a secondary antagonist and is a flat character. He is greedy, shrewd, and serves only as the means of providing Jacob his wealth, whether human or material. He is an unwilling participant in Jacob’s growth, only wanting what is best for himself, and does not realize his own downfall at Jacob’s hands until it is too late. Had it not been for divine intervention, it is likely he would have killed Jacob, leaving his daughters widowed and endowing himself with a rich workforce for his labors, retaining the wealth that he had been trying to amass from the labors of his son-in-law.

Rachel functions as an agent throughout the narrative and exhibits no significant growth in characterization. She quarrels with her sister over their husband as the loved wife who struggles to provide heirs. The biblical account shows Rachel negatively, stealing her father’s idols and acting deceptively like her husband, while chastising her husband for her lack of ability to conceive. She serves little purpose in the account other than to bring about the sons of Israel through themselves and their servants and serve as a foil to Leah (who is unexamined because of her absence from the well location).

The remaining character to be described is God. Throughout this narrative God speaks often and shows himself to Jacob in a violent and disabling theophany. God is not dissuaded from

fulfilling his original promise to Jacob despite his obvious character flaws, but instead seeks to correct those flaws over time and through various means of judgement. Furthermore, God keeps his word at every instance, protecting Jacob as he had promised from all harm and beginning to fulfill the promise of seed beyond number; at least thirteen children follow the company back to Canaan. God shows himself merciful, giving the women of the family children in proportion to their station in life. The unloved woman is blessed with more children than the woman who is loved, and the woman who is barren receives her answer to prayer. God shows himself the vengeful protector of his people as he threatens Laban, as well as the sanctifier of his people as he cripples Jacob so that he can no longer operate on his own strength and wisdom (as he did in Padan-Aram from the well to Laban). Though God threatens Laban to protect Jacob, he softens Esau's heart through gifts and the humility of Jacob's newfound identity.

Moses: The Heroic Well Scene

Only after a proper review of the antecedent well scenes can one properly appreciate the well scene of Moses. In the previous examples a consistent plot line emerged, where there is a conflict that gives rise to a flight, followed by a more minor conflict at a well, which typically results in a marriage (or restored marriage in the case of Hagar), and the conflict at the well is resolved before the conflict that caused the flight finds its proper resolution. Each of the above scenes, excepting Hagar's final departure, involved a return to the previous setting. Hagar's first departure led her back to Sarai, Abraham's servant returned to his master, and Jacob returned to the land of Canaan. In each case, Abraham's progeny was endangered which resulted in a journey to the well. When the individual journey conflicts reach their denouements, Abraham's progeny is more secure than it was before. There also is a consistent narrowing of the elect progeny, with the first well scene being Abram's only descendent at risk in Genesis 16, to Abraham's elect descendent at risk of perpetual bachelorhood in Genesis 24, and finally Isaac's elect descendent Jacob at risk in Genesis 27. With the entire line of Jacob revealed as elect in Genesis 49, the well scene of Moses

takes on special significance, since it is with Moses that the entire elect progeny of Abraham is endangered.

Journey Conflict

The second chapter of Exodus is a rapid-moving narrative that will account for the first 40 or so years of Moses' life. In Exodus 1, the people of Israel are under the oppression of Egypt serving as slaves because of the rise of a new pharaoh. The pharaoh assumed that this subjugation would reduce the number of Israelites so that they would not become a military threat. This plan did not work, so pharaoh attempted various other methods to exterminate the Hebrew children. Moses is delivered from one of these attempts through the heroic acts of his mother and the benevolent heart of the pharaoh's daughter. The boy continues to grow up in Pharaoh's house and all seems well for Moses, though the ominous fate of the Hebrews is gapped for the next 39 or so years. The next thing that the author recounts are the attempts of Moses to save a Hebrew slave from Egyptian mistreatment through murder:

And it happened in one of these days when Moses had grown that he went out to his brothers, and . . . and he saw an Egyptian man striking a Hebrew man of his brothers. So, he turned this way and that, and he saw that there was no one, and he struck the Egyptian, and hid him in mud. And he went out the next day, and behold, two Hebrew men were fighting. So, he said to the guilty one, "Why do you strike your neighbor?" Then he said, "Who set you to be a chief and a judge over us? Do you intend to kill me as you killed the Egyptian?" So, Moses was afraid; and he said, "Surely, this matter is known!" Then Pharaoh heard this matter, and he attempted to kill Moses, but Moses fled from the face of Pharaoh and he dwelled in the land of Midian and he sat down upon a well (Exod 2:11–15).

Moses sees the plight of his Hebrew brothers, and attempts to deliver one of them from mistreatment. However, he commits murder and finds himself now a law breaker and a fugitive of justice. Before Pharaoh can execute justice, Moses flees to Midian and arrives at a well. Moses' life is in danger for an attempt to deliver one slave from unjust oppression before his time.

Arrival Conflict

When Moses arrives at the well, the reader has already been taught by previous scenes to expect a second conflict. The conflict arrives in the form of some oppressive shepherds who chase off some local girls:

Now the priest of Midian had seven daughters, and they came and they drew water and filled the troughs to water the flocks of their father. But the shepherds came and drove them out, and Moses arose and saved them, and watered the flocks. Then they came to Ruel their father and he said, “How have you so quickly returned today?” And they said, “An Egyptian man tore us from the hand of the shepherds, and moreover drawing, he drew for us and watered the flock.” Then he said to his daughters, “So, where is he?” Why have you left this man? Summon him so he may eat bread!” So Moses decided to dwell with the man, and he gave Zipporah his daughter to Moses (Exod 2:16–21).

Moses is continually portrayed in the second chapter of Exodus as a deliverer of the oppressed. The Israelite slave and the helpless shepherdess are both objects of Moses’ pity, stirring him to defensive action to deliver them from affliction. The arrival at the well sees the daughters of the priests in jeopardy from evil shepherds. By the time exodus is closed, a nation of priests will likewise have been delivered from a wicked shepherd and watered by Moses’ hand.

Arrival Resolution

Moses, ever the deliverer, saves the girls from the shepherds and waters their flocks.⁷⁰ As has come to be expected, Moses’

⁷⁰ The imagery here should not be lost. In the ANE, a king was described as a Shepherd. Moses was fleeing from one figurative oppressive shepherd who was threatening elect Abrahamic progeny, and upon arrival finds literal shepherds oppressing non-elect Abrahamic progeny. Moses went from delivering one elect oppressed Abrahamic descendent, to seven non-elect oppressed Abrahamic descendants, and by the end of the narrative he will have delivered all of Abraham’s elect progeny from the most powerful shepherd on the face of the earth. As Goldingay notes concerning the metaphor of shepherding, “A king is his people’s shepherd;

efforts at the well lead to a marriage within the line of Terah, and more specifically within the line of Ishmael, to a Midianite priest's daughter. With this account the well scenes find an *inclusio*. Hagar is the female at the first well who finds the key to blessing through identity with and submission to the line of Abraham, and it is through this descendant of Abraham that the Kenites will be enfolded into the blessing of Abraham as this daughter of Hagar marries back into the elect family.

Journey Resolution

Moses' journey is preceded by a death threat, as pharaoh seeks to execute justice. This threat results in Moses' loss of status as an Egyptian of influence, being the adopted son of a daughter of pharaoh, to now being nothing more than a fugitive vagabond shepherd in the wilderness. Just as the journeys of each well scene were began with a threat to the protagonist, and by fiat the progeny of Abraham, and cannot end until the protagonist returns to his previous setting, neither can Moses' journey find its resolution until he returns to Egypt and the progeny of Abraham is safe. In Exodus 3, Moses receives a divine revelation via the burning bush and is commanded to return to Egypt so that he might deliver God's people. Again, the idea of "seeing" is important. In Exodus 3:7, God tells Moses, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people." The correlation with Hagar is clear: the God who sees the oppressed will comfort the oppressed, but only through a new act of subjugation as the people of Israel move from serving pharaoh to serving God (3:12). So too will Moses have to submit to God as his servant par excellence despite his initial hesitation (Exod 4).⁷¹ Moses eventually does return to

as Israel's king, YHWH is its shepherd (Gen 49:24; Ps 80:2 [80:1 [MT 2]]) and is even the individual's shepherd (Ps 23:1). Like kingship, shepherding suggests on one hand absolute authority and the power of life and death, and on the other an obligation to see that the subjects of this authority and power are looked after properly" (*Old Testament Theology: Israel's Faith*, Old Testament Theology Series, vol. 2 [Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2010], Kindle loc. 1122–1125).

⁷¹ Mathews notes the correlation between Hagar and Moses, without pressing it far enough, when he states, "Hagar and Moses share in a pattern of events: oppression (Exod 2:11–15a), flight in the desert where

Egypt, but entry to Egypt does not signal final resolution. Just as Jacob had to return in safety to the land of his father, Moses too must return to Egypt in safety regaining his lost honor. This will only come about through the deliverance of the Hebrew slaves which is detailed in the later narrative (Exod 11:3, 12:36). However, it is not until the successful deliverance of the people from the wicked shepherd and the progeny of Abraham is safe, emphatically described at the closing of the Red Sea, that this well scene is completed.

Characterization

This account spans 13 chapters marked by the Song of the Sea in celebration of the deliverance of God's people from their ultimate demise (Exod 15). It also brings part of the meta-narrative that is foretold in Genesis 15 to a close, completing the four-hundred-year sojourn of God's people in Egypt. During the 12 chapters of narrative, Moses moves from a person who sees deliverance of Abraham's progeny as a violent affair affected through personal acts of vengeance to a person wholly reliant upon God's deliverance. Moses is mostly silent through the first two chapters of Exodus; he is hesitant to speak on God's behalf by himself in Exodus 3 but becomes the primary mouthpiece for God in the discussions with pharaoh. However, there are certain ways in which the Moses well scene and the Exodus act parallel the prior well scene which will now be examined.

Comparative Analysis

A comparative analysis will yield a prospective theory of narrative progression in which certain aspects of Moses' journey are foreshadowed through the antecedent well scene narratives. These points of comparison include the progressive revelation of

theophany occurs (Exod 2:15b; 3:2), return and expulsion when miraculous deliverance occurs (Exod 10:11; 11:1; 15:22–27). The historical irony in Hagar's revenge is the Egyptian enslavement of Sarai's descendants (cp. 15:13; 16:6). Also, Hagar's son, who taunts Isaac, foreshadows the Egyptian purge of the Hebrew children (15:13; 21:10; Exod 1:16)." See K. A. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, New American Commentary, vol. 1B (Nashville: B&H, 2005), 179.

identifying the elect progeny of Abraham, the proper form of negotiation for God's deliverers, the role of the deliverer as husband, and the proper employment of physical prowess on the part of a deliverer. The term "deliverer" is employed here since in each of well scenes there is a viable threat of some sort to the progeny of Abraham, and the participant of the well scene delivers the progeny from an untimely demise.

Which Wife and Which Seed?

The first plot comparison begins with the Hagar and Sarai story. As was mentioned above, there is a clash between women that seeks to establish the matriarchal hierarchy within the clan.⁷² How this conflict is resolved will have ramifications for the progeny of Abraham, as the elect of the LORD is made known. Where Sarai is constantly affirmed as the mother of nations, Hagar is not promised such inclusion in the Abrahamic promise until she submits to the authority of her earthly master Sarai, the legal wife of Abraham.⁷³ Hagar is blessed because of her submission. Likewise, by the end of the well scenes, Hagar's future descendants are blessed through their submissive relationship to Abraham's elect progeny through their marriage into Moses' family and their willing inclusion into Israel (Num 10:29, Judg 1:16, 4:11). From beginning to end, the non-elect find safety and blessing from the LORD through their relationship with and their submission to Abraham's elect progeny.

How Does One Negotiate God's Promise?

The next point of comparison comes through the example of negotiation seen clearly in Abraham's servant and Moses.

⁷² "Sarai attempts to change her own status by changing Hagar's, but when she perceives that she has lost respect as a result of Hagar's pregnancy and attitude, she eagerly tries to shore up the boundaries that Hagar appears to be transgressing" (Fewell and Heard, *Oxford Handbook of Biblical Narrative*, 116).

⁷³ Skinner comments, "Hagar is not an ordinary household slave, but the peculiar property of Sarai" (*Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*, 285).

Abraham's servant had the blessing of watching Abraham intercede with God multiple times, sometimes successfully, and other unsuccessfully. This leads the Servant to learn the value of prayerful dependence upon God for a positive outcome, receiving success through faithful obedience. Isaac, in Genesis 26, and Jacob, in Genesis 29 and 30, did not learn these lessons, but relied upon their own human wisdom, and came up on the short end of negotiations multiple times. Moses had to learn negotiation, as he pled for God to be exempted from service, only to grow up into the ultimate power between the two most powerful entities in the cosmos known at the time, God and pharaoh. By the end of the Exodus event narrative, Moses has come to rely solely on God through prayer, resulting in success as he delivers God's people.

What Manner of Husband?

The third point of comparison likewise contrasts Moses with Jacob and Isaac. Isaac was portrayed as a physically, and eventually emotionally, absent husband who remains home while others accomplish his duties. Jacob does slightly better, portrayed as a present husband who leaves home to find a wife, but returns with four, rightfully doling out blessing, unlike his father who failed in this respect. Moses, however, shows to be the best husband of all as there is no sign that Moses ever had more than one wife at a time. He lovingly protected his wife, bringing her with him to Egypt until it became too dangerous for her to remain (Exod 4:24–26, 18:2). Moses' relationship with Jethro, his father-in-law, was healthier than Isaac's non-existent relationship with Bethuel, or Jacob's tumultuous and co-dependent relationship with Laban. Moses proves himself to be a faithful husband and a good son-in-law in ways that the biblical account hitherto had not mentioned.

What is the Proper Employment of Strength?

The next point of comparison between Moses and the previous narratives shows a progression in the deliverer's employment of strength. Jacob used his strength at the well to impress a girl whom the biblical narrative portrays as unworthy of matriarchy. Moses, however, employs strength twice, both

times to deliver the oppressed from the hands of unworthy shepherds. By the end of the narrative, Moses refuses to use his own strength and instead relies solely upon the LORD to free his people exhorting them by saying, “The LORD will fight for you, so you have only to be silent” (Exod 14:14). Moses proves to be the ultimate strong man before God, defeating a powerful ruler through faith and obedience.

The Better Servant

As the comparison continues, one can see another progression through servitude. The well scenes begin with a faithless servant endangering Abram’s progeny because of the harsh retribution taken on her for her social lapse in judgment, as Hagar attempts to usurp her master. The next scene progresses through a point of comparison when an unnamed servant is faithful to his master and the LORD, and thereby can successfully secure the elect progeny of Abraham by finding a wife for Isaac. Moses, however, is afforded the highest praise as a servant implicitly by being faithful to God to secure the entire nation at the greatest personal threat, so that by the end of the Pentateuch the LORD himself says of Moses, “Hear my words: If there is a prophet among you, I the LORD make myself known to him in a vision; I speak with him in a dream. Not so with my servant Moses. He is faithful in all my house” (Num 12:6–7). Moses is the servant par excellence.

A Better Return

The final element to be examined is the theme of return. In each instance of a well scene there is an implied and later realized return to the original narrative setting. Hagar returned to Abram and Sarai in submission after the chastisement and promised blessing of God. Abraham’s servant returned successfully to Canaan with a wife for Isaac. Jacob returned to Canaan through a deceptive jailbreak, only to need God’s miraculous provision of protection through two different means. Moses experienced two different returns, one to Egypt as a frightened yet obedient servant who would be empowered through God’s continued presence in his life, and one to Midian, the place of the well and

the attendant Mount Sinai in bold and glorious triumph as the deliverer of God's people.

Conclusion

Through this brief analysis of pre-Sinaitic well scenes, a standard form has become evident. There is a threat to Abram/Abraham's progeny, establishing a defined conflict, which results in a journey away from home. The protagonist arrives at a well, which is a rising action, and leads to a definable yet secondary conflict. The secondary conflict at the well is resolved, and typically involves a marriage. Afterwards, there is a return to the original location where the journey conflict first arose, and the journey conflict finds its resolution through the deliverance of Abraham's progeny from their original threat.

If this plot line has been established, then the major conflict being described is not at the setting of the well, but at the setting which preceded the well, and the well only serves to identify the deliverer of Abraham's progeny from their immediate danger. In the first scene, the LORD himself is the deliverer of Abram's non-elect seed Ishmael through Hagar's submission to her master. In the second scene, the servant acting on behalf of Isaac shows a character flaw and effectively gaps Isaac, so that the unnamed servant delivers the progeny of Abraham through finding Isaac's wife. Jacob's deliverance is found in his securing of wives, and through them, securing his father-in-law's wealth to buy off his brother's benevolence, delivering his elect children from harm. Moses is identified as the deliverer of those who are oppressed by evil shepherds at the well in Exodus 2.

This deliverance with foreign women by which the non-elect become included through their relationship with Abraham's elect progeny forms an *inclusio* with the Hagar story. That *inclusio* invites the interpreter to see other comparisons between the well scenes, at which point there seems to be a narrative progression leading up to showing Moses as the ultimate deliverer of God's people through his personal character as a husband, his negotiation skills, his servanthood, his tempered use of personal strength, his ability to enfold the non-elect into the covenant blessing, and most importantly his universal deliverance of God's people.

The well scenes ultimately depict one larger polemical and theological motif. The God of Israel has revealed himself in history, to multiple individuals, to be the God who saves Abraham's progeny when they are in danger, just as wells provided life-giving sustainment to shepherds in the Negev. YHWH provides stability for Abraham's descendants from the erratic chaos of turbulent waters figuratively in Haran in a way that the Mesopotamian gods were unable to give to their worshippers figuratively or literally. The LORD also begins to reveal himself in Exodus 2 as the God who provides salvation and prosperity to Abraham's progeny in a way that will ultimately thwart the Nile gods by the conclusion of the Moses well-scene. This conclusion occurs when YHWY splits the Red Sea, giving Abraham's elect progeny deliverance from sure death at the hands of a superior military force. God fulfills his covenant promises to Abraham by being the well that his people can drink from amid a hostile, unforgiving environment as God systematically triumphs over the gods of Israel's neighbors.

David vs. Goliath or The LORD vs. Dagon?: How David's Exclusive Trust in the "Name" of the LORD Almighty Is a Defense Against Religious Pluralism

Ray G. Jones Jr.

Abstract: At a time when Christians face great resistance to the exclusive claim of the Christian Gospel by the pluralistic orthodoxy of Western culture, a fresh look at the Scriptures reveals that this is not a new experience for God's people. The Bible begins and ends with an unapologetic condemnation of rival deities and their competing truth claims. The "name" of the God of the Bible, first revealed as the LORD and later unveiled as the mystery of the Lord Jesus Christ, is uniquely sacred in contrast to the names of local gods worshipped by the culture surrounding the Israelites and Christians in the pages of Scripture. Those Old and New Testament figures who stand in the "name" of the LORD Almighty should encourage Christians today in their bold proclamation that "there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."

Key Words: Name, LORD, Pluralism, Exclusivism, Apologetics

It takes moral conviction, theological clarity, and courageous faith to defend the exclusive gospel of Jesus Christ when pluralism's counterclaim that all roads lead to God is the accepted norm of Western culture. Contrarians comprise a small percentage of the population. Most people prefer to swim with

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the current in order to get along and better yet, get ahead. As a result, many Christians have succumbed to societal peer pressure and have, in turn, reduced Jesus' robust declaration that he is "the way and the truth and the life" down to *a* path that *our* tribe uses to get to the Father.

However, this is not a new experience for God's people. Both the Israelites and early Christians lived in polytheistic cultures hostile to the exclusivity of their sacred texts. The experience of the patriarchs in Canaan followed by their descendants' bondage in Egypt and subsequent return to the promised land was one in which they were always surrounded by people who rejected their assertion that the LORD and the LORD alone is the one true God. Moreover, the first Christians met fierce resistance and violent persecution from their Jewish kinsmen, led by Saul, when they proclaimed that the crucified Jesus of Nazareth was more than a dead prophet—that he is the Lord Jesus Christ, a title putting him on equal footing with the LORD. As courageous followers of Christ, like Saul (renamed Paul after his conversion) who took the gospel across the Roman Empire, they continued to meet intense opposition from Gentiles who wholeheartedly embraced pluralism. Yet, over time many Greeks and Romans rejected polytheism and instead placed their faith in the exclusive gospel of Jesus Christ to save them.

Save? This sounds like life and death. For our pluralist friends, such language smacks of religious hyperbole. Yet, in perhaps the Bible's most famous story in 1 Samuel 17, we find this very language. When young, scrappy David approaches the mighty Goliath, he does not trust in his combat skills to win Israel a major upset victory against the heavily favored Philistine army. No, he trusts in the "*name*" of the LORD to save him and the Israelite army from death and national disgrace.

The story of David and Goliath is not in Scripture to inspire underdogs to find courage in the face of a great foe. This is not a battle of human champions. Rather, it is a supernatural battle of the gods.² David's and Goliath's dialogue in verses 43–47 confirms this. These two warriors are waging "a theological" war

² Edward E. Hindson, *The Philistines and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1971), 33.

in the *names* of their deities.³ David confronts Goliath, not just with a sling and five stones, but with the “*name*” of the LORD against Goliath’s curses in the *names* of the gods of the Philistines. As a result, this great OT narrative should be renamed The LORD vs. Dagon instead of David vs. Goliath. In looking more closely at this story and its place in the larger narrative of 1–2 Samuel, Christians find an unlikely defense for the exclusivity of the Christian Gospel.

I. The “*Name*” of God

What is in a *name*? When it comes to God, it is everything. Both the Jewish and Christian Scriptures devote much space not just to the *names* of God, but the “*name*” that becomes synonymous with one. The Hebrew word *shem*, translated “*name*” occurs over 800 times in the OT. “[I]t originally denotes an external mark to distinguish one person or thing from others,”⁴ but over time it came to refer to “gods, men and animals.”⁵ In the Ancient Near East⁶, including Israel, “there was awareness of the significance attached to a *name*, and of the power which resided in it.”⁷ Furthermore, one’s *name*, including a deity, speaks directly to one’s character.⁸ If one is to worship a god, there is a need to know its *name* in order to properly relate to them and in turn secure their favor and assistance.⁹

Much has been made of the Torah’s use of *names* for God, principally El, Elohim and *Yahweh*. Critical scholars see this as evidence for an evolutionary development of religion from

³ Abraham Kuruvilla, “David v. Goliath (1 Samuel 17): What Is the Author *Doing* with What He Is *Saying*?” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 58, no. 3 (2015): 494.

⁴ H. Bietenhard, “ὄνομα κτλ,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 252.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ The Ancient Near East will be referred to as ANE for the remainder of this paper.

⁷ Bietenhard, “ὄνομα κτλ,” 253.

⁸ Jeffrey Niehaus, “The Central Sanctuary: Where and When?” *Tyndale Bulletin* 43, no. 1 (1992): 23–24.

⁹ Bietenhard, “ὄνομα κτλ,” 255.

polytheism to monotheism. However, closer scrutiny reveals the opposite.¹⁰ Israel's struggle with idolatry indicates a devolutionary trajectory in their religious observance.¹¹ Yet, despite their idolatrous deviations, their unique worship demands "supernatural revelation" in order to know and understand the unique *names* of God.¹² The disclosure of these *names* as the progressive revelation of God unfolds in Scripture reveal significant changes in his dealings with humanity. As a result, these "are not names which man gives to God, but names given by God to Himself."¹³

It is true that El, a generic term for God, is found in Canaanite texts. Yet, this does not demand that the Israelites borrowed from their neighbors. Canaan's El is so different from the God of the Bible that neither culture would consider the other to be worshipping the same deity.¹⁴ The development of the Hebrew language from the Canaanite dialect shows God using their "religious terminology, such as *'ēl* and fill[ing] it with truth."¹⁵

As will be discussed, Goliath curses David by his gods, Elohim. In response, David approaches him boldly in the "*name*" of *Yahweh*. In Hebrew, Elohim is a plural noun, whereas *Yahweh* is singular. But, to conclude that Elohim implies polytheism and *Yahweh* monotheism is to misunderstand the Hebrew language. The use of Elohim is unique to the Israelites.¹⁶ "The form is plural in Hebrew to denote God's majesty."¹⁷ [W]hen speaking of pagan gods...however, it is always construed with a plural verb,

¹⁰ See Duane Garrett's critique of such approaches to the composition of the OT in *Rethinking Genesis* (Great Britain: Mentor, 2000) and Daniel Strange's excellent theology of religions, *Their Rock Is Not Like Our Rock* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014).

¹¹ Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1948), 63.

¹² *Ibid.*, 64.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Bruce K. Waltke with Charles Yu, *An Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 371.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 370.

¹⁶ Vos, *Biblical Theology*, 65.

¹⁷ Bruce K. Waltke with Cathi J. Fredericks, *Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 58.

whereas in a case of reference to the one true God it takes a singular verb.”¹⁸

Garrett sums up the complementary nature of these two *names*: “Elohim is what God is and Yahweh is who he is.”¹⁹ *Yahweh*’s revelation to Moses at the burning bush in Exodus 3 has provoked much discussion. Does this disclosure imply that Moses is ignorant of the existence of this *name*? Have he and the Israelites only known of Elohim up until now? Given their experience as slaves in Egypt for four centuries, Moses needs not only more insight into the nature of their relationship with God, he needs strong assurance from him if he is to take up the task God is calling him to. In response, God blesses Moses with revelation by giving him both the etymology and meaning of God’s *name*, which Waltke translates as “I am who I am for you.”²⁰ Clearly, God is disclosing something new to Moses. Although *Yahweh* is used in Genesis and as such indicates that the patriarchs did know him, they “did not fully experience the essential nature and power of [this] name.”²¹ The ensuing exodus will give his *name* “new significance because ... [t]he people will now see that *Yahweh* is present with them.”²²

In direct contrast to their neighbors, who possess a multiplicity of *names* for their gods, God reveals this one *name* to Israel in order that they might know him.²³ Fee notes, this “divine name ... functions as a central feature of Israel’s self-understanding ... [and] serve[s] as [their] primary identity symbol. The Israelites are ‘people of the name,’ that is, of their God, *Yahweh*.”²⁴ This insight is critical to understanding the use and development of the “*name*” of *Yahweh*, also known as the

¹⁸ Vos, *Biblical Theology*, 65.

¹⁹ Garrett, *Rethinking Genesis*, 16.

²⁰ Waltke, *Old Testament Theology*, 366.

²¹ John D. Currid, *Exodus*, vol. 1 (Auburn, MA: Evangelical P, 2000), 137.

²² Garrett, *Rethinking Genesis*, 17–18.

²³ For instance, there were 50 names for Marduk and multiple names for Egypt’s Re. See Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, vol. 1 (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 185.

²⁴ Gordon D. Fee, *Jesus the LORD according to Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 129.

LORD in the English Bible, over the course of the storyline of both the Jewish and Christian Scriptures. The “*name*” comes to stand for *Yahweh* himself.²⁵ This is not surprising since “the name of the deity was thought to be equivalent to that deity” in the ANE.²⁶ As Merrill puts it, “the divine name [serves] as an alter ego for God.”²⁷

The Decalogue’s third commandment clarifies and codifies this by sanctifying *Yahweh*’s name. To profane God’s sacred *name* is not only forbidden among the Israelites, but punishable by death (Exod 20:7; Lev 19:12; 24:10–16). The use of *Yahweh*’s *name* cannot be manipulated by humans in order to coerce him to do their bidding.²⁸ Unlike the Canaanites, Israel is not to make any magical associations with *Yahweh*. Yet, there is power in his *name*—even if *Yahweh* is not directly named.²⁹ In fact, the *shem* is used in lieu of *Yahweh*, as if to say his revealed *name* does not require utterance. As a result, the *shem* becomes an equivalent not just for *Yahweh*, but the cultic center where Israel gathers to worship him. The tabernacle and later the temple are the place where the “*name*” dwells (Exod 20:24; Deut 12:5; 2 Sam 7:13; 1 Kgs 8:16–20). “The *shem* is thus a transcendent entity at work in the world.”³⁰ Through the progress of revelation over the course of Israel’s history, their prophets use the *shem* “as an alternative term for *Yahweh*.”³¹ The *shem* is not simply a *name* for *Yahweh*; the *shem* is *Yahweh*!

II. The “*Name*” of the LORD in 1 & 2 Samuel

In order to properly understand David’s use of the “*name*” of the LORD in the face of Goliath’s religiously laden taunts in 1 Samuel 17, one must view it in light of the larger conflict between the Israelites and the Philistines that begins in Judges

²⁵ Bietenhard, “ὄνομα κτλ,” 257.

²⁶ Mark F. Rooker, *The Ten Commandments* (Nashville: B&H, 2010), 58.

²⁷ Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, New American Commentary, vol. 4 (Nashville: B&H, 1994), 149.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Bietenhard, “ὄνομα κτλ,” 255.

³⁰ Ibid., 258.

³¹ Rooker, *Ten Commandments*, 60.

and comes to dominate 1 and 2 Samuel. Although Israel faces other adversaries, the Philistines represent their biggest existential threat during the time of Samuel and Saul. David's defeat of Goliath as a young lad gives Israel a glimpse into the leadership skills he will employ to subjugate the Philistines during his reign many years in the future (2 Sam 8:1).

Historians do not know exactly when the Philistines arrive, but postulate they are part of the immigration of the "Sea People" that left the Aegean coast in the Mediterranean for the shores of Canaan.³² The Scriptures note that the Philistines are present in Canaan during the time of Abraham (Gen 21:34) and strong enough some 700 years later for the LORD to send the Israelites on a route that steers clear of them on their way to Canaan as they exit Egypt (Exod 13:17). Scholars see a linguistic link between the people of Philistia and the land now known as Palestine.³³ That the name Canaan drops out of use in favor of Palestine after 1200 BCE speaks to their growing presence and power in the region.³⁴ The Philistine's knowledge, skill, and monopoly in ironworking directly contributes to their military advantage over their neighbors, including Israel (1 Sam 13:19–22).³⁵

Politically, the Philistines should not be understood as a nation united under one king. Rather, they function as a confederacy of five independent city-states, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ekron, Gath, and Gaza, led by five individual rulers.³⁶ As seen in 1 & 2 Samuel, this pentapolis joins forces to confront and resolve internal and external threats (1 Sam 5:8; 6:16; 29:1–11).³⁷ However, their influence extends to other cities throughout the region. Until their subjugation by King David, the control of Palestinian cities goes back and forth between these two peoples as they vie for control over the Shephelah, the valley that serves

³² Hindson, *Philistines*, 14–17.

³³ *Ibid.*, 13.

³⁴ I'm indebted to my former seminary professor for this. See Gordon H. Lovik, "The Philistines," *Central Bible Quarterly* 12, no. 4 (Winter 1969): 5.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 8.

³⁶ Hindson, *Philistines*, 26, 47.

³⁷ Lovik, "The Philistines," 11.

as a buffer between the coast to the west and the mountains to the east.³⁸ The Philistines occupy the coast where the main trade route in the ANE lies and the Israelites live in and beyond the mountains to the east. As a result, possession of the Shephelah gives one access to and control of trade with the outside world. In the Philistine's hands, Israel is at their mercy.³⁹

However, the Philistine threat to Israel is also a cultural and religious one. In terms of both, the Philistines are syncretistic. Upon their arrival, they incorporate their own values from the Aegean region into the existing beliefs and customs of the Canaanites.⁴⁰ As a result, they abandon their language in favor of the Canaanite dialect, from which both the Hebrew and Aramaic languages develop.⁴¹ Thus, the Israelites and Philistines can communicate directly with one another, as evidenced by David and Goliath's epic dialogue on the battlefield. Consequently, it is not surprising that all three Philistine deities possess Semitic names: Dagon, Ashtoreth, and Baal-zebub.⁴² The religious practices associated with each of these gods is found in both Aegean and Canaanite culture. The Philistines arrive with their Aegean traditions and discovering similarities modify their nomenclature and practices to accommodate some Canaanite expressions of polytheistic worship.⁴³ Although there is overlap between the two cultures, Scripture recognizes a clear distinction between them (Judg 10:6). Since Dagon is chief in the Philistine pantheon and thus "the national god," this study will focus on this deity.⁴⁴ Moreover, this explains why the Bible references him more than any other Philistine god.

The Canaanite gods, El and Baal, and the Philistine Dagon are related to one another. According to Chisholm, "El was the

³⁸ Ibid., 10.

³⁹ Ray Vander Laan, "Shephelah," *That the World May Know*, 2021, <https://www.thatttheworldmayknow.com/shephelah>.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 8.

⁴¹ Lovik, "Philistines," 13.

⁴² Hindson, *Philistines*, 25.

⁴³ Ralph W. Klein, *1 Samuel*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 10 (Waco, TX: Word, 1983), 49.

⁴⁴ Itamar Singer, "Towards The Image of Dagon the God of the Philistines," *Syria* 69 (1992): 435.

high god who ruled over the divine assembly and imparted authority to the storm god Baal.”⁴⁵ Yet, Dagon is higher than Baal in the pecking order because he is Baal’s father.⁴⁶ Like other gods, Dagon’s influence is limited not just to a particular geographic territory, but to a specific function of nature within it.⁴⁷ Specifically, Dagon is worshipped as a “weather-fertility deity responsible for [the Philistine’s] crops.”⁴⁸

Every time the Israelites and Philistines meet on the battlefield an important question arises: Which god is stronger, Dagon or the LORD?⁴⁹ The accounts in Judges and 1 and 2 Samuel are polemical in nature. In fact, a case can be made that much of the Hebrew Scriptures function as a polemic against the religious beliefs of the ANE.⁵⁰ As a result, the historical narratives of Samson, Samuel, Jonathan and David demonstrate the LORD’s “superiority to the gods of the...Philistines, as well as His exclusive right to Israel’s loyalty and worship.”⁵¹ However, Saul’s ignominious defeat on Mount Gilboa to the Philistines calls this into question. Saul’s unwillingness to duel Goliath demonstrates he is not the one to fight or speak for the LORD. Only David, a man after God’s own heart, is up to the task (1 Sam 13:14).

⁴⁵ Robert B. Chisholm Jr., “Yahweh Versus the Canaanite Gods: Polemic in Judges and 1 Samuel 1-7,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 164, no. 654 (2007): 174.

⁴⁶ Currid, *Against the Gods* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013), 134.

⁴⁷ Israel’s later conflict with Aram in 1 Kings 20:23–28 illustrates how the surrounding culture thought the gods of various peoples were limited to a particular territory or part of nature.

⁴⁸ Chisholm, *A Commentary on Judges and Ruth* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2013), 428.

⁴⁹ J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel*, Volume IV: Vow and Desire (Assen, The Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 1993), 269.

⁵⁰ Currid makes a strong case for this polemic in *Against the Gods*. He says the purpose of polemical theology “is to demonstrate emphatically and graphically the distinctions between the worldview of the Hebrews and the beliefs and practices of the rest of the ancient Near East” (25).

⁵¹ Chisholm, “Yahweh Versus the Canaanite Gods,” 168.

The stories of Samson and the ark of the covenant in the temple of Dagon set the stage for David's confrontation with the Philistine champion, Goliath. In both cases, the Philistines bring home captured symbols to both celebrate their victory over Israel and gloat about the LORD's humiliating loss to Dagon. As Chisholm observes, "Samson's capture ... [foreshadows] the capture of the ark."⁵² In both cases, the LORD appears to have abandoned Israel, but in reality he utilizes guerrilla warfare to defeat the Philistines with a "trojan horse."⁵³ Samson's arrest at the hands of Delilah and the ark's seizure at Ebenezer deliver a mixed message to the Israelites and Philistines (Judg 16:18–30; 1 Sam 4:1–22). The Israelites are able to do the math, especially with the ark affair. Eli's comic death and the heartbreaking response of his daughter-in-law to the news of the ark of the covenant's capture make it clear that Israel knows they have not just lost the LORD's favor, but the future of their unique covenant with him stands on shaky ground. Why? They have been seduced into worshipping other gods. Samuel confronts them after the ark is returned: "Rid yourselves of the foreign gods and the Ashtoreths and commit yourselves to the LORD and serve him only, and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines" (1 Sam 7:3).⁵⁴ Yet, the uncircumcised Philistines are ignorant of all this. As a result, they make the wrong calculation and they and their precious Dagon pay dearly for it. In the case of Samson, the return of his hair and strength enables him to destroy the temple of Dagon in Gaza. If the Philistines thought their god had delivered Samson into their hands, then what does this catastrophe communicate about Dagon and the LORD? Judges leaves readers to ponder this question, whereas 1 and 2 Samuel provides a definitive answer.

If the exodus is to Israel what July 4, 1776, is to the United States, then the loss of the ark of the covenant is their September 11, 2001. Does Israel know the ark has been taken to the temple of Dagon in Ashdod? If that is where the Philistines put Samson,

⁵² Chisholm, *Commentary on Judges and Ruth*, 434.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ All quotations of the Bible are from the NIV (1984) unless stated otherwise.

then they probably know where the ark is headed. What a blow to their national psyche! As Israel grieves, the LORD quietly goes to war against their enemy. The festive Philistines gleefully place the ark at the foot of Dagon's totem in the temple in Ashdod (1 Sam 5:1–3). What is meant to serve as “a trophy” becomes a source of embarrassment for Dagon when they wake up the next morning to find him lying prostrate before the ark.⁵⁵ This story makes “a theological point with a polemical edge.”⁵⁶ The LORD is not subject to Dagon; Dagon is subject to the LORD—the one true God!⁵⁷ After standing Dagon back up, they find him on the floor again the next morning (1 Sam 5:4). But this second fall “is more severe.”⁵⁸ Dagon loses his head and hands, and with it shows he does not possess the ability to think, speak, or act.⁵⁹ After securing Dagon's obeisance, the LORD declares war by cutting off his head!⁶⁰ The ensuing events are comical and illustrate the hardness of the human heart and the power of the Satanic deception that makes faith in false gods a reality. The Philistines do not repent and forsake Dagon. Instead, they put Humpty Dumpty back together again and modify their liturgy in order to venerate the threshold upon which his lifeless limbs and head are found.⁶¹ This, along with their response to the deadly plague that terrorizes all of Philistia demonstrates “the resiliency of religion” (1 Sam 5:6–12).⁶² Clearly, the LORD is not a territorial deity like the gods of Palestine. The Philistines's unanimous decision to return the ark to Israel is a tacit admission that the LORD is superior to Dagon (1 Sam 6:1–18).

In the ensuing years, Israel asks for and is granted a king by the LORD in Saul who is supposed to go out before them and lead them in battle (1 Sam 8:20). Yet, when Goliath calls out to Israel's troops to send a *man* to fight him in a winner-take-all

⁵⁵ Fokkelman, *Vow and Desire*, 254.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 253.

⁵⁸ Klein, *1 Samuel*, 50.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Chisholm, “Yahweh Versus the Canaanite Gods,” 180.

⁶¹ Fokkelman, *Vow and Desire*, 254.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 255.

battle, no one volunteers, including Saul, because they are all too scared to face the Philistine champion. The narrator devotes considerable space to his description of Goliath (1 Sam 17:4–7).⁶³ He is a formidable warrior with a large stature, extensive military resources, and plenty of experience in war.⁶⁴ But, Saul possesses all of these as well and yet clearly feels overmatched.⁶⁵ The reasons behind the LORD's instructions for Saul's replacement are revealed in the Valley of Elah. When Samuel concludes that Jesse's strapping son, Eliab, is the one, God responds: "The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart" (1 Sam 16:7). As a result, Jesse's youngest son, David, is the one anointed as the next king of Israel.

The standoff between the Philistines and Israelites goes on for 40 days until David shows up with a care package from home for his older brothers and their commander. Upon hearing Goliath's challenge, the youth is incredulous, "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?" (1 Sam 17:26) David concludes what King Saul and his troops do not. This is not simply the trash talk of an undefeated prize fighter—it constitutes blasphemy! The targets of Goliath's insults are not limited to Saul and his troops. As David will note two more times in this account, Goliath has reproached "the *living* God" (vv. 36, 45). David is not unaware

⁶³ Is the writer of Samuel using typology to connect Goliath's scale-armor to the cursed serpent of Eden who is to die of a wound to the head? (See Kuruvilla, "David v. Goliath," 489). Or, is the writer utilizing more subtle connections to Eden and other key stories in Scripture where the character's garments are central to the story? (See Victor P. Hamilton, *Handbook on the Historical Books* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001], 257–258).

⁶⁴ Kuruvilla, "David v. Goliath," 499.

⁶⁵ See J. Daniel Hays, "Reconsidering the Height of Goliath," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48, no. 4 (December 2005): 701–714. According to Hays, Goliath's height should probably be measured at 6'9" rather than at 9'9." He is very tall, but he should not be understood to be the height of a superhero. If the average Israelite's height at this time is between 5'0"–5'6", then Saul is somewhere between 6'0" to 6'6." Goliath is surely taller than Saul, but he's not as overmatched as some surmise.

of Israel's past dealings with the Philistines and their god, Dagon. Unlike them, Israel does not worship an idol made of wood. The God they serve is not dead like Dagon, as the ark incident in 1 Samuel 5 proves.⁶⁶ Rather, Israel worships one who is living and "actively intervenes for his people."⁶⁷ Confident of this, David volunteers to fight "the uncircumcised Philistine." His use of this ethnic epithet succeeds in both demeaning Goliath and highlighting his exclusion and protection from the covenant relationship that he and Israel enjoy with the LORD.⁶⁸

King Saul fails to grasp this. If he did, he would have fought Goliath himself. This is precisely why the LORD has rejected him as king. He alone possesses the "the supreme responsibility" to represent Israel in this duel.⁶⁹ Yet, day after day he leads them off the battlefield.⁷⁰ Saul does not possess David's theological convictions and the courageous faith that is inspired by them. His spiritual ambiguity has spawned a theological crisis among his troops. Does the LORD possess the power to defeat such a formidable foe? If not, what does this say about Israel's God and their future as a people? Kuruvilla notes, "Goliath, it seems, was sure that Dagon ... was on his side; but Israel was not entirely certain that Yahweh was on theirs."⁷¹

Consequently, the dramatic confrontation between David and Goliath in vv. 40–51 represents the peak of the 58-verse narrative of 1 Samuel 17.⁷² When the Philistine champion sees David he despises and dismisses him. He demands that a man fight him, and instead Israel sends out a boy wielding a shepherd's staff.⁷³

⁶⁶ Klein, *1 Samuel*, 178.

⁶⁷ Chisholm, *1 & 2 Samuel* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), Kindle loc. 3330.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 136.

⁶⁹ Fokkelman, *Vow and Desire*, 146.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Kuruvilla, "David v. Goliath," 495.

⁷² Waltke, *Old Testament Theology*, 643.

⁷³ Hindson, *Philistines*, 158. My wife, Lori, observed that perhaps this scene is what inspired J. R. R. Tolkien's confrontation between Eowyn and the Lord of the Nazgul! He knows no man can defeat him, but because he doesn't expect to fight a woman, he lets his guard down and is ceremoniously defeated.

In response, Goliath taunts David and curses him by his gods. Yet, none are worthy of a *name*! The narrator deems their identity as insignificant in comparison to the God of Israel. The Philistine's curses turn this military encounter into a theological struggle. David's response reveals his "secret weapon." It is not the sling, but something much more powerful—the "*name*" of the LORD Almighty (v. 45).⁷⁴ Having rejected Saul's offer to use his armor and sword, David demonstrates where the source of "true strength" comes from: "faith in I AM."⁷⁵ David's decision shows that Saul and Goliath look to a false source for their power—physical might. Having been the first to reference the LORD in this narrative (v. 36), David now expounds on the nature and significance of the God of Israel by weaponizing his *name* as David approaches his blasphemous foe. Fokkelman calls the LORD Almighty or the LORD of Hosts, *Yahweh Sabaoth* in Hebrew, "the official name of God" and notes that it makes its first appearance in Scripture in 1 Samuel.⁷⁶ David's use of the *name* suggests it has "military connotations."⁷⁷ Waltke says the *name* is in fact "I AM's war title."⁷⁸ But, how David understands this is in direct contrast with how the Israelites misunderstood the LORD *Sabaoth* when they trot out his ark of the covenant like a magical talisman in order to "tempt God to decide the outcome" (1 Sam 4:4).⁷⁹ David's invocation of the *name* of the LORD *Sabaoth* is in the spirit of Hannah's use of it in her prayer for a son, the one who anoints David king many years later (1 Sam 1:11). They both possess "a living and personal relationship ...

⁷⁴ Klein, *1 Samuel*, 180.

⁷⁵ Waltke, *Old Testament Theology*, 637.

⁷⁶ Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel*, Volume II: *The Crossing Fates* (Assen, The Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 1986), 17.

⁷⁷ Klein, *1 Samuel*, 180; See Vos, *Biblical Theology*, 239–243 on the differing views on the meaning of "Jehovah of Hosts" in the OT. He argues that the "hosts" are angelic because of the name's tie to the Ark of the Covenant and the cherubim that adorn it. However, he concedes that when David uses the name in 1 Samuel 17:45 the "hosts" refer to the army of Israel in some sense.

⁷⁸ Waltke, *Old Testament Theology*, 373.

⁷⁹ Fokkelman, *Crossing Fates*, 203.

with God [who] has the power to write history.”⁸⁰ David and Hannah believe God is immanent and thus will act on their behalf in a tangible and dramatic way. As a result, the LORD *Sabaoth* blesses both of them, but humiliates the Israelites with the loss of the ark when they take his *name* in vain. The sacredness of the LORD and his *name* is what motivates David to fight Goliath. David’s initial response to the Philistine’s taunts is to accuse him of defying the Israelite army (1 Sam 17:26, 36). However, when he confronts Goliath face-to-face, David sees things more clearly—the Philistine is reproaching God himself (v. 45).⁸¹ To taunt the LORD’s anointed and his army is to taunt the LORD. For David, there is no distinction between the LORD and his *name*.⁸²

David’s speeches, in 1 Samuel 17 “provide the key” to understanding this story.⁸³ Each time David speaks his clarity and confidence increases. For David, Goliath stands in opposition to the army of Israel, but more importantly to the warrior God who fights for them. Furthermore, the Philistine and the army he represents are not pitiable followers of a false god, but arrogant blasphemers of the one true God. The Philistines are not content to live and let live. They are aggressors who have always resisted Israel’s presence in Canaan. Moreover, they have subjugated and humiliated them by refusing them access to weaponry. For Saul and his troops, this is an insurmountable obstacle to meeting the Philistine on the battlefield. Yet David is not deterred. His final speech and the only one directed to Goliath are the climax of this story (vv. 45–47). In fact, the Philistine’s defeat, though dramatic, is anticlimactic in comparison to David’s passionate defense and bold proclamation of the uniqueness of the God of Israel.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 36.

⁸¹ Kuruvilla, “David v. Goliath,” 502.

⁸² Bietenhard, “ὄνομα κτλ,” 280. David’s use of the *name* shows that this “is not just [an] utterance or invocation of the name of Yahweh but is ... a parallelism to Yahweh Himself.”

⁸³ Steven D. Mathewson, *The Art of Preaching Old Testament Narrative* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 65.

Having told Saul privately the LORD will deliver him from the Philistine (v. 37), he now goes public on the battlefield. The *name* of the LORD that he cites as his defense is “the main point” of all that David has to say to Goliath and all those gathered there, Philistine and Israelite alike.⁸⁴ Yes, David has made provisions for an offensive assault with his sling and five stones. But, as Fokkelman observes, “David is not so stupid as to give away his battle plan.”⁸⁵ Nonetheless, “the one Name” will serve as David’s ultimate weapon that will “withstand all the weapons of the Philistine.”⁸⁶ Goliath curses in the *name* of his anonymous gods, but David comes against him in the *name* of the LORD *Sabaoth*, the God of the army of Israel, that he dares to defy. The Philistine champion’s ensuing defeat will prove to those gathered there that Israel worships a unique God. Goliath will involuntarily fall prostrate to the one true God just as the false god Dagon collapsed in obeisance to the LORD in Dagon’s own temple. When David cuts off Goliath’s head, he actually decapitates Dagon ... *again*.⁸⁷ However, David’s true audience is global. David wants the whole world to know Israel trusts in the one God who alone can save. David’s speech sounds more like a preacher at a missions conference than he does a soldier in the theatre of war.⁸⁸ Yet David should be understood as a missionary who believes unapologetically that salvation comes exclusively through Israel’s God, the LORD.⁸⁹ David’s deliverance from

⁸⁴ Fokkelman, *Crossing Fates*, 174.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 180.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ Chisholm, *1 & 2 Samuel*, Kindle loc. 3280–3281.

⁸⁸ Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1990), 132.

⁸⁹ David exalts the “*name*” to a global audience in the next to last verse of his hymn of thanksgiving near the end of *1-2 Samuel*. He says, “I will praise you, O LORD, among the nations; I will sing praises to your *name* (2 Sam 22:50).” See Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel, Volume III: Throne and City* (Assen, The Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 1990), 353–355 to see how the narrator’s use of the “Rock” metaphor in both Hannah’s and David’s poems form an inclusio for the entire book.

Goliath and his god Dagon shows that the LORD and the LORD alone saves.

III. The “*Name*” of the Lord Jesus Christ

Jesus’ two questions to his disciples, “Who do the crowds say I am?” and “Who do you say I am?”, are identity questions (Luke 9:18–22). Both the crowds and disciples are fully immersed in Jewish culture and think in Jewish categories. As people immersed in the Jewish Scriptures, they know their God’s name: Yahweh or the LORD in English. In posing these queries, Jesus is polling his disciples and initiating a dialogue that invites a preliminary conclusion. The crowds believe Jesus is a prophet, but Peter concludes he is more—the Christ or the long awaited Messianic King. Yet, Jesus’ arrest and crucifixion shows that the Jewish religious establishment rejects Peter’s confession and concludes he is a blasphemer (Mark 14:61–65).⁹⁰ Why? No human can or should claim equality with God.⁹¹ Yet the early Christians, who are almost exclusively Jews, proclaim in the weeks following Jesus’ death, burial, and resurrection to their fellow Jews in their temple, where the Name of Yahweh dwells, that Jesus of Nazareth is both “Lord and Christ” (Acts 2:14–36). After hearing this, the Jewish audience asks, “What shall we do?” (v. 37). Peter responds by telling them they need to repent and be baptized “in the name of Jesus Christ” (v. 38). As the early church begins preaching the gospel, they too place great significance on the “name.” Yet, what is this name and who is it identified with? Early in Peter’s sermon, he quotes Joel 2:32: “Everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved” (v. 21). The OT prophet’s invitation is for people to call on Yahweh, but Peter applies this to the name of Jesus.

However, how can Jesus’ *name* be linked with *Yahweh*? When Saul of Tarsus hears the early church saying such things,

⁹⁰ The religious leaders’ reaction to Jesus’ answer gets to the heart of Jesus’ identity. His admission that he is indeed the Messiah would provoke a negative response. But it’s his reference to Daniel 7:13–14 that sends them into apoplectic fit. Here, Jesus hints that he is more than the Christ; he is divine—thus the charge of blasphemy.

⁹¹ Darrell Bock, *Jesus According to Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 596.

he is enraged and makes it his mission to arrest all who call on the Lord Jesus' "*name*" (Acts 9:14). Yet, the Lord Jesus apprehends Saul on the Damascus road and chooses him "to carry [his] *name*" before Jews and Gentiles (v. 15). As a result, Saul will suffer immensely for Jesus' "*name*" (v. 16). What can explain this dramatic reversal in Saul's thinking and theology? Saul sees someone and hears a message from the same one that Peter and the disciples already have. He comes to the same conclusion they do about Jesus of Nazareth: he is both Lord and Christ. As witnesses to the risen Jesus and ascended Lord seated at the right hand of the Father, both Peter and Saul/Paul, apply OT texts addressing *Yahweh* to Jesus. Their frequent use of the Septuagint (LXX), the Greek translation of the Hebrew OT, certainly makes their case easier.⁹² The LXX's choice to translate the Hebrew *Yahweh* (LORD) as *kyrios* (lord) "was of great importance for the early Christian Church, because the Church referred statements made by [Y]ahweh or statements about him to her Kyrios, Jesus Christ."⁹³

The fact that these unabashed monotheists call Jesus of Nazareth by the title *Lord* reserved only for *Yahweh* is highly significant to understanding the use of the "*name*" of God in the NT.⁹⁴ The Apostle Paul, the former Pharisee, applies such language to one of his people's most sacred texts, the Shema in Deuteronomy 6:4, so that it "embrace[s] both Father and Son" in 1 Corinthians 8:6.⁹⁵ For Paul, there is a "twofold reality of [his] high Christology—his view of Christ as the preexistent Son and the exalted one who is given the 'name' Lord—combined with his vigorously held monotheism."⁹⁶ If today's Christians, who are predominantly Gentile, fail to recognize this, they will not understand why Jews reject the claim that Jesus is the Christ and the only way to the Father. Judaism's and Christianity's views of

⁹² I. Howard Marshall, "Acts," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 542.

⁹³ von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 187.

⁹⁴ Fee, *Jesus the LORD according to Paul the Apostle*, 3.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 179.

Jesus are incompatible. Therefore, if *we* Christians want to convince Jews that they need to place their exclusive trust in the *name* of the Lord Jesus Christ, then *we* need to learn more about this *name*.

For starters, *Jesus* is our Lord's given and earthly *name* (Matt 1:21). It "expresses His humanity ... and also His divine mission."⁹⁷ Thus, he is known as Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph (John 1:45). Although the *name* Jesus does not communicate that he is divine, it does nonetheless send an important signal. Jesus, rendered Joshua in Greek, means "*Yahweh* is salvation."⁹⁸ However, what the angel says to Joseph next clarifies that this Jesus will be the one that *Yahweh* uses to *save* his people, Israel, from their sins.⁹⁹ Furthermore, Matthew's assigning of *Isaiah's Immanuel* to Jesus communicates that in him Israel will experience God's presence.¹⁰⁰ As a result, a debate rages about Jesus' identity throughout his ministry. His cryptic use of the title Son of Man and his insistence on secrecy from those who conclude he is Israel's *Christ* contribute to the confusion among the crowds (Mark 2:1–12; Matt 9:30; 16:20). Clearly, Jesus and Israel understand the mission of the Christ differently from one another. It is not until after his death, burial, and resurrection that the disciples come to understand and share with others how Jesus is the Christ and what it means for every Jew and Gentile (Luke 24:19–21, 44–48).

Space does not allow for an exhaustive study on how the early church comes to the conclusion from witnessing the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus of Nazareth that the *name* of the *Yahweh* applies to the Lord and Christ of the OT prophecies. However, two important NT passages that address the *name* will now receive consideration.

The Apostle Paul's majestic Christology is on full display in Philippians 2:5–11. As with all his epistles, pastoral matters are

⁹⁷ Bietenhard, "ὄνομα κτλ," 272.

⁹⁸ Craig L. Blomberg, "Matthew," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 3.

⁹⁹ Vos, *Biblical Theology*, 308.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

his primary concern. Readers learn his theology as he applies it to the issues facing the churches and individuals, to whom he writes.¹⁰¹ “With the imitation of Christ as Paul’s goal, he tells Christ’s story.”¹⁰² For Paul, Jesus’ life does not begin on earth when he is born to Joseph and Mary. His identity should not be limited to that of a mere mortal. Yet, humans can learn from Jesus’ example. Thus, Paul begins “with his prior existence,” in which Jesus, being “in very nature God,” debases himself by taking on human flesh.¹⁰³ As a result, Jesus shows himself to be Israel’s Lord and Christ after rising from the dead. Therefore, the Father, whom Paul always refers to as God, exalts Jesus by placing him at his right hand and bestows upon him “the name that is above every name” (v. 9).¹⁰⁴

The question remains: What *name* does the Father give to him? Is it *Jesus*, *Christ*, *Lord* or a combination of two or all three of them, or others not listed here?¹⁰⁵ According to Fee, there are only two options: Jesus or Lord.¹⁰⁶ O’Brien, asserts that the *name* here should not be identified with “a proper name.”¹⁰⁷ Therefore, the *name* the Father bestows here is not *Jesus* despite its mention in verse 11. Rather, God gives Jesus “his own name, [*kurios*] (“Lord”), in its most sublime sense ... that is, “Yahweh.”¹⁰⁸ The Apostle Paul’s words here reflect Isaiah 45:18–25, “one of the most powerful OT affirmations of the uniqueness of [the] God

¹⁰¹ Fee, *Jesus the LORD according to Paul the Apostle*, 64.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 36.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 130.

¹⁰⁵ Peter T. O’Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 237.

¹⁰⁶ Gordon D. Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 221.

¹⁰⁷ O’Brien, *Epistle to the Philippians*, 237.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 238; Fee goes into extensive detail about this in *Jesus the LORD according to Paul the Apostle*. He writes, “The risen Christ is not Yahweh himself.... Rather, the preexistent *Son of God* returns by way of his resurrection to receive the honor of having bestowed on him the *substitute name* for God [*Adonai*], which for Paul then becomes a title for Christ as “Lord” [*Kyrios*]—and this “name” is now used by Paul exclusively for Christ and never for God the Father” (*Paul’s Letter*, 130).

of Israel in the context of his redeeming work.”¹⁰⁹ In doing so, he ties the universal submission of humanity to *Yahweh* in Isaiah to Jesus (Isa 45:23; Phil 2:10). *Yahweh*’s message, recorded by Isaiah, is one of exclusivity: “there is no God apart from me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none but me. Turn to me and be saved, all you ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other” (vv. 21–22). This message sounds very similar to David when he confronts Goliath after listening to his curses uttered in the *name* of his Philistine gods. The fact that Paul ties this passage to Jesus signals that he is now the one to whom such exclusive language applies.

However, this is not unique to Paul. Peter speaks similarly in the earliest days of the church. In fact, Peter and the authorities of the temple, where the *Name* dwells, have an extended dialogue about the “*name*” in Acts 4.¹¹⁰ They ask Peter and John, “by what power or *name*” do you heal? (v. 7). In other words, the leadership demands the identity of the authority empowering their message and actions. As the stewards of *Yahweh*’s temple and law, they know they have not granted them the authorization to speak in his *name*.¹¹¹ If it is not *Yahweh*, then who exactly stands behind this irrefutable miraculous activity? Is this some form of magic or sorcery?¹¹² No, Peter answers that they healed or more precisely saved, *sesotai*, this man crippled from birth “by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth” (v. 10). Like Paul and David, Peter links saving, in this case deliverance from physical infirmity, to the *name* of God. But now the Savior is identified as Jesus. Having already connected the substitute name for God,

¹⁰⁹ Moisés Silva, “Philippians,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 837.

¹¹⁰ “The theme of the name of Jesus is frequent in Acts (3:6, 16; 4:10, 12, 17–18, 30; 5:28, 40–41; 8:12; 9:16, 21, 27, 28; 15:26; 16:18; 19:13, 17; 21:13; 22:16; 26:9)” (Bock, *Acts* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007], 190). Interestingly, “the name,” *onoma*, is used synonymously for *Jesus* in Acts 5:41 like “the name,” *shem*, is used synonymously for *Yahweh* in the OT.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 190.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

Adonai, to Jesus when preaching in the temple courts, Peter “makes clear that the name one is to call on belongs to Jesus.”¹¹³

This represents an existential crisis for the religious authorities. If Jesus, whom they crucified, is in fact the Lord raised from the dead, will they now call on his *name*? Can they continue to call on *Yahweh* while still rejecting *Jesus*? Peter gives them no such wiggle room. He boldly proclaims to them: “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). Peter’s message is an exclusive one. The road that leads to *Yahweh* now goes through *Jesus—the hope and fulfillment of the Jewish Scriptures*.

IV. Conclusion

Peter’s message, like David’s to Goliath, is a hard sell and his audience reads from the same Scriptures.¹¹⁴ Ironically, the Jewish leaders are more like Goliath than the David they revere. They too reject the *name* that Peter and David trust in to save them. Although Peter is referencing different texts in his sermon in Acts 2, he’s quoting the same author in David to make the case that Jesus is both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:25–28, 34–35).¹¹⁵ Does Peter believe all roads lead to God? He stands in front of his Jewish brethren and tells them in rejecting Jesus they are headed on a path that will not lead them to their beloved *Yahweh*. Later, Paul takes this same message to the Gentiles who wholeheartedly embrace polytheism. The Bible is clear that there is only One road to God. The *name* that one trusts in makes all the difference in determining whether one arrives at the right destination. If one is asking God to save them, one must call him by the right *name*.

¹¹³ Ibid., 118.

¹¹⁴ I am making a Christotelic connection to David. I’m indebted to my theological and homiletical mentor and uncle, Dr. Doug Finkbeiner of Lancaster Bible College, for pointing me in this direction. See Randal E. Pelton, *Preaching with Accuracy* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2014) for an overview of Christotelic preaching.

¹¹⁵ The Christ as the Jewish Messiah is David’s descendent and heir (2 Sam 7:11–16; Matt 1:1).

May *we* 21st century Western Christians share young David's theological convictions. May they inspire the courageous faith *we* need today to defend God's *name* against the assaults of our pluralist friends and foes. May *we*, like Peter, boldly proclaim the exclusive gospel of Jesus Christ to all those who desperately need saving. May *we*, like Paul, embrace this gospel's inclusivity by offering Jesus' message of reconciliation to everyone. There may only be one road to God, but every human being is invited to take it.

The Rise and Fall of The Biblical Theology Movement

John Wivell

Abstract: The Biblical Theology Movement was a Post-World War Two Neo-orthodox trend by nonconservative Biblical Scholars that attempted to solve the problems inherent in classic Liberalism. In its late 19th and early 20th Century form, theological liberalism was inextricably wedded to a historical criticism that focused unduly on the process of the development of Scripture and avoided the theological significance of the Biblical message. It assumed an antisupernaturalism that made hearing a genuine Word from God impossible, and therefore left liberal preachers with no message that could heal a hurting world. Scholars turned to Barthianism to obtain the spiritual power present in orthodox theology, but without what they saw as the anti-intellectualism of fundamentalism. Genuine intentions to hear God's supernatural voice failed because they refused to adopt the worldview that made the language of traditional orthodoxy authentic.

Key Words: Biblical Theology, Fundamentalism, Liberalism, Neo-orthodoxy, Special Revelation, Biblical Languages

In Hollywood, once the story is completed it ends. The bad guys lose, and the good guys live happily ever after. But in real life, the story is still in process, moving forward to the eternal state. God has guaranteed the ultimate triumph of his sovereign will. But until it does, sometimes the bad guys win. Such is the story of the Fundamentalist/Modernist controversy, as told by conservatives. The Liberals won, the Fundamentalists

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lost, and by the 1940s, virtually all of them had been driven out of the mainline denominations. In the aftermath, the Fundamentalists rebuilt and slowly acquired power. They changed into the modern evangelical movement. But what happened to the Liberals? They too changed. The winds of Barthianism swept into the US in the 1930s, along with the evident failure of classic Liberalism to account for the World Wars and the Great Depression. People were desperate to hear a word from God to heal their broken and shattered world. Conservatives were providing this word; Liberalism could not. A return to orthodoxy was unthinkable, but something had to be done. The solution was an attempt to provide a word from God while maintaining the historical critical assumptions of Liberalism. Childs labeled this attempt the Biblical Theology Movement.²

I. What was the Biblical Theology Movement?

Ask an average Christian to define biblical theology and one is quite likely to get some variation of “theology that is biblical.” In this sense all theology rightly done is biblical theology. Whether one seeks to write a systematic theology, trace a theme through Scripture, or analyze the specific teachings of a book or author, all of them must be fundamentally biblical to be of any value to the church. However, as helpful as it may be to assert that our theology must be derived from the only written source of special revelation, this definition is no help in distinguishing the various disciplines of biblical study.³

A more specific definition makes it possible to distinguish from systematic theology on the one hand and exegesis on the other. In this sense biblical theology is that branch of theological study that traces distinctive themes in various sections of the Bible, focusing on how a particular theme is progressively

² Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970), 13–30.

³ For this definition and the two following, see Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 9–12.

revealed in Scripture.⁴ Examples of thematic studies can be found from the earliest days of the church; however biblical theology as a modern theological discipline is usually credited to J. P. Gabler in his 1787 inaugural address *de justo discrimine theologiae bibilicae et dogmaticae* (On the Proper Distinction between Biblical and Dogmatic Theology). Gabler argued that a distinction between a purely historical biblical theology and dogmatic study would prevent theological discord by separating the timeless, simple teachings of Scripture from the complex, subtle conclusions from a theologian. This discipline was to create a firm foundation for dogmatics from timelessly valid concepts. Gabler conceived of this as a purely descriptive discipline with no attempt to apply the Bible to contemporary life.⁵ As scholars took up the challenge, two things became clear during the 18th and 19th centuries. First, a division between Old and New Testament theology was immediate and inevitable. Second, the attempt to create a purely objective discipline in accordance with Enlightenment principles was not possible. In the creation of their theologies, biblical theologians could not avoid importing their philosophical and theological convictions.⁶ Modern theologians are divided on whether biblical theology should be descriptive or normative. Stendahl distinguishes what a text meant from what it means today. He argues that the biblical theologian's job is to make plain what the author meant; what it means today is the job of the systematic theologian and the

⁴ For a good overview of the history and method of biblical theology from an evangelical perspective see Grant R. Osborne, "Biblical Theology," in *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, ed. Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 339–346.

⁵ For a translation and commentary on the Latin original see John Sandys-Wunsch and Laurence Eldredge, "J P Gabler and the Distinction between Biblical and Dogmatic Theology: Translation, Commentary, and Discussion of His Originality," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 33, no. 2 (1980): 133–158.

⁶ For a history of biblical theology that includes efforts before Gabler as well as a survey of 18th and 19th century biblical theologians, see Henning Graf Reventlow, "Theology (Biblical), History of," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 6:483–505.

preacher. He is so confident in the method that he asserts that the believer and agnostic alike can perform this descriptive task.⁷ For the normative approach, Lemke argues that even when pure description is the goal, normative dimensions creep in by how the biblical data is selected and interpreted. The intention of the text itself is against complete neutrality, since it presupposes the reality of God who seeks a personal response from his creatures. Theology is more than just the study of religious ideas; it must be concerned with truth for today. It is the Bible's ability to speak meaningfully to the present age that explains its preservation by generation after generation.⁸

A third and even more specific definition of biblical theology is found in Brevard Childs's *Biblical Theology in Crisis*. Childs describes an approach to biblical studies in America from the close of World War II to about 1965. This approach he calls the Biblical Theology Movement. Although it was heavily influenced by European scholars, it had a peculiarly American character and its concept of the theological task was different compared to those who came before and after.⁹ It also heavily borrowed from Neo-orthodox theologians such as Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, and Richard Niebuhr.¹⁰ It is the specific approach that Childs calls the "Biblical Theology Movement" that concerns us.

II. Is "Biblical Theology Movement" a Misnomer?

But was there such a thing as the Biblical Theology Movement? James Smart argues that the term is a misnomer. According to him, a movement suggests an organization and conferences, with scholars working in close cooperation and theological agreement. There was no formal organization and

⁷ Krister Stendahl, "Biblical Theology, Contemporary," in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. George Arthur Buttrick (New York: Abingdon P, 1962), 1:418–432.

⁸ Werner E. Lemke, "Theology (Old Testament)," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 6:454–455.

⁹ Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis*, 13.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 16–17, 56.

scholars came from widely differing theological perspectives. He argues that Barth, Brunner, Niebuhr, and Paul Tillich were far too different to be lumped together as “neo-orthodox.”¹¹ The American movement was part of a broader scene. Similar struggles took place in Britain and the Continent.¹² Lemke objects that biblical theology was not in a state of crisis or dissolution, but rather it entered a period of transition and reassessment. Scholars and laity alike had been too glib about their theological conceptions, then woke up one day to discover a serious gap between their abstractions and their religious experience.¹³

But these objections are more about definitions than substance. It is true that the Biblical Theology Movement had no organization and had great theological diversity. However, the term “movement” will not go away. Smart himself uses the term to describe theological fads rather than carefully organized coalitions of scholars.¹⁴ He admits that “all...who became interested in biblical theology were thrown into a measure of alliance by their confrontation with a common enemy.”¹⁵ And “that developments in biblical theology in America have had a different context and a somewhat different character from those in Britain and Europe.”¹⁶ Childs well replies that “Smart has offered no new evidence for his position.” He admits that the relationship between American and European scholars during this period were not well explored in his book.¹⁷ No great theological agreement is implied by the term “neo-orthodox,” but one must have some label for the group, if for no other reason than as a practical shorthand. Finally, Lemke misunderstands the intent of Child’s label “crisis.” There is no evidence in the book that he believes that biblical theology was in a state of

¹¹ James D. Smart, *The Past, Present, and Future of Biblical Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1979), 23–26.

¹² *Ibid.*, 74–84.

¹³ Lemke, “Theology (Old Testament),” 453.

¹⁴ Smart, *Past, Present, and Future of Biblical Theology*, 9.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 28.

¹⁷ Childs, “The Past, Present, and Future of Biblical Theology,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 100, no. 2 (June 1981): 252–253.

dissolution. A “crisis” is “a time of intense difficulty or danger,” not “the formal ending of an assembly.”¹⁸ Childs, far from suggesting that theologians of the seventies were no longer interested in biblical theology, says that present-day leading biblical scholars still identified with the long-range goals of the movement. He argues that few of them wish to return to the minutiae of historicocritical scholarship.¹⁹ James Barr similarly suggests that there was indeed a crisis in biblical theology, but this crisis was precipitated by a loss of prestige, not a loss of interest in biblical theology. The problem was that the movement had arrayed itself against history but was not careful to consider opposition from theology.²⁰

Therefore, there is merit in identifying the mid-20th century Neo-orthodox trend as the “Biblical Theology Movement.” It makes little difference if one calls it a “movement,” a “trend,” a “stage,” or some other term. But since there is no other established label than the one suggested by Childs, it is wise to stick with that one. Yet one must recognize that this is a technical term for a specific theological period; it does not refer to all possible examples of biblical theology.

III. How did the Biblical Theology Movement Begin?

After the close of World War II, a series of books and articles flooded forth that made a clear break with the prevailing theological trends.²¹ In particular, the history of religions school (*religionsgeschichtliche Schule*) was criticized for devolving into historical and literary minutia. Smart shows that this phenomenon had been the prevailing trend from 1875 to the 1930s.²² A focus on purely historical description was supposed to avoid eisegesis of one’s theology back into the Scriptures.

¹⁸ OED, “crisis” and “dissolution.”

¹⁹ Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis*, 91–92.

²⁰ James Barr, “The Theological Case against Biblical Theology,” in *Canon, Theology, and Old Testament Interpretation: Essays in Honor of Brevard S. Childs*, ed. Gene M. Tucker, David L. Petersen, and Robert R. Wilson (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 4–5.

²¹ For a bibliography of the period, see Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis*, 14–17.

²² Smart, *Past, Present, and Future of Biblical Theology*, 54.

However, this was achieved by striving to be untheological and totally objective. Yet total objectivity on matters of personal convictions is impossible. Smart says, "A man, if he is a thinking creature, can no more escape from allegiance to some theology... than he can escape his own skin."²³ His solution to this problem is to let the Bible speak for itself the way we do for another human mind. Second, Smart puts the blame for a purely descriptive OT theology on a renewed interest in history. This had the beneficial effect, he claims, of making plain the historical development of Israel's literature. However, in the effort to explain everything by historical means, it was forgotten that the living God cannot be explained by historical description. Indeed, so infatuated was the history of religions school with evolutionary development and progress, that the Scriptures were forced into a Procrustean bed to make them fit their ideas of spiritual and religious development. Third, the rise of Liberal theology led people to substitute "religion" for "theology." Schleiermacher had defined the heart of Christianity as religious experience rather than doctrine in an effort to reach the intelligent despisers of religion. As this developed any religious experience was acceptable. Thus, by a strange inversion, the pursuit of religious experience over ideas led to the bare description of history instead of theological conviction.²⁴

A. The Emotional Precedent: The Problem of Anti-theological Liberalism

But perhaps better than just cataloging the changing focus from historical to theological is the testimony of those connected with the movement. The Biblical Theology Movement arose when Liberal scholars discovered that a purely historical description of religion gave them nothing of value to speak to the contemporary world. Smart movingly describes his own confusion when he discovered that his superior education did not sufficiently equip him to preach in an ordinary church.

²³ Smart, "The Death and Rebirth of Old Testament Theology," *The Journal of Religion* 23, no. 1 (January 1943): 5.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 6–9.

My own experience may well have been typical. Completing a doctorate in the Semitics department of the University of Toronto in 1931, I was advised by the professor under whom I had done most of my work to spend the next ten years bringing myself abreast of these ‘assured results.’ [Smart emphasized that] the body of these assured results was so impressive that any serious questioning of them seemed irresponsible ... One of them was the nonexistence of an Old Testament theology.

This anti-theological bias of biblical scholarship...was eventually to produce a reaction. After nine years of study under some of the most competent Old Testament scholars in North America, I became a village pastor with the task of preaching and teaching the Christian gospel upon the basis of the Old Testament as well as the New. The question of how the sacred literature of Hebrews and Jews becomes Christian Scripture had never been discussed in my hearing either in three years in seminary or in my years in graduate school!... I could no longer evade the basic theological question. In what way were these Scriptures a unique revelation of God? How was their essential content to be translated into meaningful language for my people?... I found both Testaments coming open in a new way to speak to our need.

What was difficult to understand was why anyone involved academically in biblical research should object to this discovery of fresh relevance for the biblical text! The only possible explanation was that a professionally untheological biblical science was affronted by a process that brought to light in Scripture a theological content that at some essential points contradicted the former ‘assured results.’²⁵

Otto Piper had a similar experience. Unlike Smart, there was no sudden crisis and change, but rather a gradual development in his thinking. Born in Germany, he spent his younger years in Europe. He was most unimpressed by the antireligious literature then current, as it reminded him of the Youth Movement he had abandoned. His studies at “the most outstanding theological

²⁵ Smart, *Past, Present, and Future of Biblical Theology*, 46–48.

schools of pure liberal tradition” gave him extensive reading in the historical critical school. But he was disturbed by the difference between his rigorously objective training and the subjectivism he perceived “in almost every interpretive work of twentieth century critical theology.”²⁶ While studying in Paris, he encountered Huguenot students at the seminary who impressed him by their zeal for the gospel. They treated the Bible as the book of the church, not as just another literary masterpiece. His need for a valid religion was only heightened by his participation as a soldier in World War I and by Germany’s subsequent defeat. When he began teaching at the University of Göttingen, he struggled to develop a unified message of the Bible in contrast to the methods he was familiar with, a method that saw fundamental differences in the teachings of various biblical writers. World War II forced him into exile and eventually led him to the US to teach at Princeton. Contact with Bible-loving adherents of a Keswick theology created a desire in him to factor the work of the Holy Spirit into his theological task.²⁷

B. The Historical Precedent: The Fundamentalist/Modernist Controversy

Although one can trace the shift from descriptive to normative biblical theology on both sides of the Atlantic, the scene in America was different. What made it different was the legacy of the controversy between Liberals and Fundamentalists between the 1910s and 30s.²⁸ It is at this point that it is important to define our terms. Both “Liberalism” and “Fundamentalism” have been used loosely by the opposite sides to insult a view that one disagreed with that was more conservative or more progressive than one’s own view. When used this way the terms become devoid of real meaning. It is the Fundamentalism after the controversy began but prior to its existence as a separatist movement that concerns us here. Curtis Lee Laws coined the term in 1920: “We suggest that those who will still cling to the great

²⁶ Otto Alfred Piper, “What the Bible Means to Me 1: Discovering the Bible,” *The Christian Century* 63, no. 9 (February 27, 1946): 266.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis*, 19.

fundamentals and who mean to do battle royal for the fundamentals shall be called ‘Fundamentalists.’”²⁹ By the fundamentals he refers to those points that have traditionally marked historic orthodox Christianity.³⁰ There were many responses to Liberalism of the day that sought to distill the essentials of Christianity. The 1910 General assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the USA listed five fundamentals that are justly famous.³¹ They are the inerrancy of Scripture, the virgin birth, the substitutionary atonement, the bodily resurrection of Jesus, and the reality of Jesus’ miracles. The committee added that other articles of faith were equally necessary.³²

The kind of Liberalism under discussion is the religious variety that existed in the 19th and early 20th centuries. This theological aberration began as rationalistic naturalism began to triumph amid the intellectual elite. Darwin’s *Origin of the Species*, while not the only source of this philosophy, certainly had a tremendous influence. In its 19th century form, evolution had a devastating effect on the biblical claims to authority and inerrancy. Philosophical modernism was intent on fully understanding the world without recourse to the supernatural. It

²⁹ Curtis Lee Laws, “Convention Side Lights,” *Watchman Examiner* 8, no. 27 (July 1, 1920): 834.

³⁰ This is not the place for a history of Fundamentalism. For several excellent full-length studies, as well as extensive bibliographies, see Jeffrey Paul Straub, *The Making of a Battle Royal: The Rise of Liberalism in Northern Baptist Life, 1870-1920*, Monographs in Baptist history 8 (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2018); Kevin T. Bauder and Robert G. Delnay, *One in Hope and Doctrine: Origins of Baptist Fundamentalism 1870-1950* (Schaumburg, IL: Regular Baptist Books, 2014); David Beale, *In Pursuit of Purity: American Fundamentalism since 1850* (Greenville, SC: Unusual Publications, 1986).

³¹ The Biblical Theology Movement was led primarily by Presbyterian scholars, though it was certainly not confined to them. Since no effort is being made to be complete about the prehistory of the Biblical Theology Movement, Presbyterian documents have been used as examples because they are most relevant to the present discussion.

³² General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the USA, “The Doctrinal Deliverance of 1910,” *PCA Historical Center*, accessed October 30, 2018, <http://www.pcahistory.org/documents/deliverance.html>.

was believed that the observer could penetrate the mysteries of the universe by sufficiently objective scientific methods. Julius Wellhausen's JEDP theory was intended to demonstrate that Judaism developed by the natural product of evolution from fetishism to polytheism and eventually to monotheism.³³ As advocates for source and form critical methods multiplied, the omniscience of higher critical methods was so impressive in many circles that "the assured results of higher criticism" were thought to be impregnable.

Simultaneous with the rise of rationalistic naturalism was the pressure to modify Christianity according to the spirit of the age. We have already alluded to Schleiermacher and his replacement of doctrine with experience. This made it possible to avoid the increasingly troubling historical questions altogether. Since the miraculous and supernatural were increasingly maligned, these elements must be reinterpreted on naturalistic principles. Yet Liberals, or Modernists, as they were alternately known, for the most part continued to use traditional orthodox language, but with radically different meaning. Jesus is God, but by this they meant that the life of God that appears in all men is especially clear in him. They believe in God, but he may denote only the supreme object of men's desires.³⁴ They talk of the resurrection, but they make this to mean the permanence of his influence or a spiritual existence beyond the grave.³⁵ The few who spoke more forthrightly were quickly expelled from their denominations.³⁶ One feature that most were clear on was the inherent goodness of man. Evil did not exist in man's heart, but only in his environment. Thus, by education and societal reform the world's goodness would overcome its evil without any outside sources

³³ For a short summary of Wellhausen, see Norman L. Geisler, "Wellhausen, Julius," in *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 770–771. See also Douglas A. Knight, ed., "Julius Wellhausen and His Prolegomena to the History of Israel," *Semeia* 25 (1982): 1–155.

³⁴ J. Gresham Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism* (New York: Macmillan, 1923), 110.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 108.

³⁶ For example, Charles Briggs was suspended from Presbyterian ministry in 1893. See Beale, *In Pursuit of Purity*, 143–145.

needed. Of course, they did not see themselves as the destroyers of the Christian faith. They were trying to save Christianity by making it relevant to the modern world. They believed that they did hold to the essentials of Christianity, but only denied the theories Fundamentalists used to explain them.³⁷ Yet as Machen cogently argues, by paring away all objectionable or unbelievable elements to the Christian faith, the resulting religion not only was not Christianity, but it also belonged in a different class of religion altogether.³⁸

What made the Fundamentalist/Modernist controversy a deciding factor in the character of what followed it in America was the bitterness of the debate. There are several good ways of illustrating this. The process by which Liberalism gained control of Baptist and Presbyterian denominations, and the heavy cost incurred when the inevitable split took place might be outlined. Space would not permit anything approaching a fair survey. A better approach is to provide an example of the debate in action. No better example can be furnished than the controversy between Harry Emerson Fosdick and Clarence Macartney. On May 21, 1922, just two years after the term "Fundamentalist" was coined, Fosdick preached his famous sermon "Shall the Fundamentalists Win?" from the First Presbyterian Church in New York. The sermon is a passionate appeal for tolerance, yet his portrait of Fundamentalists paints them as narrowminded obscurantists who would rather quarrel over who "should tithe mint and anise and cumin...when the world is perishing for the lack of the weightier matters of the law, justice, and mercy, and faith."³⁹ He connects Fundamentalists with the intolerance of the Sanhedrin in Acts 5:38.⁴⁰ Finally, they are "giving us one of the worst exhibitions

³⁷ W. Robert Godfrey, "Faithful Vigilance," *Tabletalk* (March 2006): 17.

³⁸ Machen, *Christianity and Liberalism*, 6–7.

³⁹ Harry Emerson Fosdick, "Shall the Fundamentalists Win?," in *Sermons in American History: Selected Issues in the American Pulpit, 1630-1967*, ed. DeWitte Talmadge Holland, Hubert Vance Taylor, and Jess Yoder (Nashville: Abingdon, 1971), 347.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 339.

of bitter intolerance that the churches of this country have ever seen.”⁴¹

Fosdick is unusually candid. He makes no mistake about rationalistic naturalism. Evolution, historical reconstructions, and comparative religious studies are considered “new knowledge” that is absolutely without the possibility of contradiction. Thus, just as it was necessary to integrate the Copernican revolution into a Christian worldview, it is equally necessary to integrate this new knowledge into the old faith.⁴²

He labels Fundamentalistic concerns as mere opinion:

If a man is a genuine liberal, his primary protest is not against holding these opinions, although he may well protest their being considered the fundamentals of Christianity...The question is, has anybody a right to deny the Christian name to those who differ with him on such points and to shut against them the doors of the Christian fellowship?⁴³

He is quite clear on what these opinions are. The substitutionary atonement is a “special theory” that “placates an alienated deity and makes possible welcome for the returning sinner.” The virgin birth is a “vexed and mooted question” and “a biological miracle that our modern minds cannot use.” The doctrine of inspiration implies that the Scriptures were “inerrantly dictated by God to men.” This theory of inspiration is “static and mechanical” and a “positive peril to the spiritual life.” The second coming does not mean a literal coming on the clouds of heaven. Rather, it means the slow gradual evolution of mankind from primitive to sophisticated and will eventually result in God’s will and principles being worked out in human life and institutions.⁴⁴

Clarence Macartney responded less than two months later with his sermon “Shall Unbelief Win?” His tone is quite irenic. He is quick to praise Fosdick’s frankness, eloquence, and

⁴¹ Ibid., 346.

⁴² Ibid., 339–340.

⁴³ Ibid., 341.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 340–345.

tolerance.⁴⁵ Rather than condemn the sermon, he recommends that it be read by fence-sitters so they can see that Fundamentalism and Liberalism cannot and should not be reconciled. As he considers Fosdick to be unorthodox, he expresses his hope that Fosdick will return to the evangelical faith. Yet he is also quite clear about the danger of Fosdick's theology. The virgin birth is not a linchpin doctrine because of its own merits, rather, it is a practical test as to whether someone believes in the divinity of Jesus. Denying it sets a precedence for using the same method to "repudiate any other part of the Gospel story." He suggests that it is disingenuous to earn one's living from a Presbyterian church whose creed confesses the virgin birth while simultaneously denying it.⁴⁶ On the inspiration of Scripture, Macartney gives a bit too much away by suggesting that some parts of Scripture are more inspired than others. Nevertheless, he questions whether men such as Fosdick believe the Bible has any special authority at all.⁴⁷ As for the second coming, he notes that Christ is more than a principle of righteousness, but a real person who will truly come.⁴⁸ On the atonement, he expresses wonder that Fosdick is only interested in demolishing the traditional theory and has no interest in how the atonement works. To place the virgin birth, the inspiration of the Bible, the second coming, and the atonement in the category of trifles is almost unpardonable flippancy.⁴⁹

In a subsequent letter, Fosdick complained that he was not treated fairly at all, and the position Macartney described was a preposterous caricature of his position. He claims to believe in the deity of Jesus, regardless of the question of the virgin birth. He holds that the Bible does have a special authority, but it is not the authority of a dictionary which carries inerrant answers to questions. Rather, it is like the authority of his mother, who was

⁴⁵ Clarence Edward Macartney, "Shall Unbelief Win?," in *Sermons in American History: Selected Issues in the American Pulpit, 1630-1967*, 349-351.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 355-356.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 356-358.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 359-360.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 362.

certainly not inerrant but who had a formative influence on his life. He believes in the vicarious sacrifice of Jesus, but not “a governmental theory of substitutionary punishment which was outlawed from every decent penal system on earth long ago.”⁵⁰

Macartney responds that the doctrinal issues he mentioned are indeed important. The virgin birth is found in Scripture and is the teaching of the church where Fosdick pastors. The substitutionary atonement is the only one taught in the Scriptures. He asserts that he did not miss Fosdick’s plea for tolerance, and he himself is sympathetic towards it. But he says, “I will not stop my mouth when I see or hear a proclamation of the word which is a violation of the New Testament.” He states that “the Christ whom you preach is not the Christ whom I preach and in whom I put my trust for this life and for that which is to come.”⁵¹

Because Fosdick was so honest with his beliefs, he came to the attention of the General Assembly. Up to this point, Fosdick had been ordained as a Baptist even though he was currently associate pastor at First Presbyterian. But now the Assembly attempted to force him to sign a doctrinal statement by requesting that he be ordained as a Presbyterian minister. Rather than subscribe to any confession of faith, he resigned in 1925. But he immediately found a new position at the Riverside Church.⁵²

Fosdick had predicted: “I do not believe for one moment that the Fundamentalists are going to succeed.”⁵³ Alas, he was quite correct. In both Baptist and Presbyterian denominations, Fundamentalists were gradually forced out and had to create their own associations, mission boards, and training institutions. Many pastors had to abandon their retirement accounts and some churches lost their buildings. By the 1940s even the most patient Fundamentalists had left. The Liberals had scored an almost total

⁵⁰ Harry Emerson Fosdick and Clarence Edward Macartney, “The Fosdick-Macartney Correspondence,” *The Interior* 53 (December 21, 1922): 1642.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 1642, 1650.

⁵² Riverside was known as Park Avenue Baptist Church when Fosdick took the position. It was renamed the Riverside Church when John Rockefeller built a new building for him. See Beale, *In Pursuit of Purity*, 155, 187–188.

⁵³ Fosdick, “Shall the Fundamentalists Win?,” 348.

victory. Yet it was a hollow victory. The Liberals too were battered and weary from the fighting. Because they valued experience and emotion over doctrine, even their most educated proponents had difficulty understanding what the fuss was all about. They still hoped for some way of bringing the two groups back together, though they remained immovably committed to higher critical methods. Furthermore, massive changes in society because of two World Wars and the Great Depression meant that the old Liberalism now seemed irrelevant. A change in theological focus was inevitable, though this change did not result in a return to conservative ideology.

B. The Theological Precedent: The Rise of Neo-Orthodoxy

The change was to come as Neo-orthodoxy began to filter into America through Germany. Biblical studies changed as theologians began to break with the Liberal tradition and interest in theology grew. While all the major Neo-orthodox theologians had an impact, that of Emil Brunner was especially significant,⁵⁴ raising the difficult problem of describing and defining Neo-orthodoxy. Mention has already been made of Smart's objection that there were too many differences to label them all "neo-orthodox." Douglas Hall asserts that the term has always been highly ambiguous.⁵⁵ Furthermore, none of the men associated with the term liked the label. As a student of Paul Tillich and Reinhold Niebuhr, Hall had thought them so different that they seemed to have nothing in common. But as he writes fifty years later with the advantage of hindsight, they do seem to have enough in common to be grouped together as a movement. The differences between the individual theologians should not be minimized. For example, one of the best known is the sharp controversy between Karl Barth and Emil Brunner over the existence of natural theology. Brunner called for a careful definition and investigation of the place of natural theology. Barth replied in uncharacteristic brevity with a thunderous *Nein!*

⁵⁴ Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis*, 16–17.

⁵⁵ Douglas John Hall, *Remembered Voices: Reclaiming the Legacy of "Neo-Orthodoxy"* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 5–8.

He stated, “A real rejection of natural theology does not differ from its acceptance merely in the way in which No differs from Yes...Really to reject natural theology means to refuse to admit it as a separate problem.”⁵⁶ This difference, like many, has to do with substance, doctrinal content, and method. It is not merely a disagreement about words or about the nuances of the theological system.

Yet the differences, as great as they are, are not important for our purposes nearly as much as the similarities. There are enough shared characteristics to group together, though it will be necessary to write with some generalities. The first characteristic is a renewed understanding of sin. Two World Wars had destroyed most people’s faith in the goodness of man and the inevitability of progress.⁵⁷ Neo-orthodox theologians thought of sin as exchanging theocentric thinking with self-centeredness. This was less an exegetical deduction than the incorporation of Kierkegaard’s concept of anxiety.⁵⁸ Anxiety is the unfocused fear that comes from the knowledge of the freedom to choose. When Adam and Eve chose to eat of the fruit, they became conscious of their sin through their choice. The actual existence of Adam and Eve made little material difference to the story.⁵⁹

A second characteristic is the acceptance of historical critical methods of interpreting the Bible.⁶⁰ Neo-orthodoxy did not abandon the methodology developed by the history of religions school and continued to be refined. Brunner and Niebuhr characterize Genesis 3 as myth.⁶¹ The Gospel of John was a novel

⁵⁶ Emil Brunner and Karl Barth, *Natural Theology: Comprising “Nature and Grace” by Emil Brunner and the Reply “No!” By Karl Barth*, trans. Peter Fraenkel (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2002), 75.

⁵⁷ For a collection of testimonies about the collapse of Liberal optimism, see William Allen Silva, “The Expression of Neo-Orthodoxy in American Protestantism, 1939-1960” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Yale University, 1988), 38–49.

⁵⁸ Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Neo-Orthodoxy: An Evangelical Evaluation of Barthianism* (Chicago: Moody, 1956), 38–39.

⁵⁹ Søren Kierkegaard, *Concept of Dread*, trans. Walter Lowrie, 3rd ed. (Princeton, 1957), 42–45.

⁶⁰ Silva, “Expression of Neo-Orthodoxy,” 14.

⁶¹ Ryrie, *Neo-Orthodoxy*.

written by a trembling old man, and the pastoral epistles were not written by Paul.⁶² It was possible to adopt this view without also adopting classic Liberalism's reductionistic naturalism because the historical facticity of the Scriptures made little difference. Whether or not the tomb is actually empty, the doctrine of the resurrection shows that the opposition between man and God is overcome. The story of Adam and Eve, though myth, is the story of all of us: a true account of the presence of sin in man.⁶³

A third characteristic is a new view of revelation. Where Liberalism explained everything by naturalistic processes from an implicit faith in science to uncover the truth, Neo-orthodoxy in contrast preached that God had revealed himself in Christ. God's supernatural breaking into history was celebrated and emphasized instead of being explained away as imagination. Walter Horton shows how deeply he was influenced by Neo-orthodoxy when he writes: "my own center of confidence and hope has passed from science to revelation, from human discovery to divine guidance ... I look for concrete light and guidance ... to the biblical revelation of God."⁶⁴ Neo-orthodox theologians differed in how much credence should be given to natural revelation, but they saw the primary source of revelation as being Christ.⁶⁵

A fourth characteristic is a new view of the Bible, a different one from both Liberalism and Fundamentalism. For Liberals, the tools of higher criticism were there to sort out what really happened and what did not. Once they had reconstructed the actual events or original doctrines, they could reformulate Christian doctrine to more accurately fit the truth. For Fundamentalists, the Bible is the inerrant Word of God. It carries the inherent authority of God himself. Our understanding of it

⁶² Ibid., 35, 45.

⁶³ Ibid., 41, 30.

⁶⁴ Walter Marshall Horton, "Between Liberalism and the New Orthodoxy," *The Christian Century* 56 (May 17, 1939): 639. Horton disagreed with "Barthianism," but the influence of Neo-orthodoxy is quite plain, and his own pilgrimage is an excellent statement of the shift from science to revelation.

⁶⁵ Ryrie, *Neo-Orthodoxy*, 34–35.

can be mistaken, but it cannot. Real understanding is both possible and obligatory, as is the necessity of application to contemporary life. Neo-orthodox theologians criticized both perspectives. The tools of higher criticism were useful for getting beyond the bare facts, for what really happened was not that important. Since they believed that the Bible is not inerrant, to confess inerrancy was to make an unacceptable sacrifice of the intellect. It is a matter of consistency that an errant word is therefore a human production. As stated above, the primary revelation of God is in Jesus Christ. That is the divine Word. The Scriptures are a human word about the Word of God, and as such it is a witness to the Word of God. The Bible becomes the Word of God when God uses it to overpower us. When people encounter Christ in the Scriptures by faith, the Bible becomes the Word of God for them. Therefore, the authority of the Bible is an instrumental authority, not an inherent authority. When God uses the Bible to reveal Christ, it is that encounter that is authoritative.

The final characteristic that we will discuss here is a strong christological focus. Whereas Liberalism had an anthropological focus, Neo-orthodoxy made Christ the center of their theology.⁶⁶ Yet the life of Jesus of Nazareth held little importance. Many of the stories were not authentic, and the little information that did exist showed Jesus to be little different than other religious founders. It was in the cross that the significance of Christ was to be found. In the cross God revealed that the things of this world are vain and doomed. In the cross God revealed the sign of the election of all life.⁶⁷

This survey of Neo-orthodoxy has necessarily omitted many details. No mention has been made of their unique views of eschatology; of the transcendence of God; of their interest in the reformers; of their ecumenical stance. Little time was spent on Niebuhr's social consciousness, Barth's sovereignty of God, Brunner's view of human nature. Tillich's philosophical intricacies need not detain us. It will not be necessary provide a critical response, as this has been done ably elsewhere. Suffice

⁶⁶ Hall, *Remembered Voices*, 128.

⁶⁷ Ryrie, *Neo-Orthodoxy*, 35–36.

to say that these five characteristics are those that most concern the Biblical Theology Movement.

IV. The Characteristics of the Biblical Theology Movement

If a movement is to be described, it is necessary that there be enough common characteristics that the adherents can be reasonably grouped together. This does not mean that there may not be significant differences between them. In the case of the Biblical Theology Movement, despite many identifiable distinctions, enough things in common remain that the movement may be profitably described as a whole. The following characteristics sketch these common elements.

A. The Restoration of a Biblical Emphasis on Theology

There was a sense that the earlier generation of scholars had so focused on the evolutionary development of religious ideas that the central theological message of the Bible had been lost. In the inaugural editorial of *Theology Today*, the editors establish their purpose for the magazine as being “to contribute to the restoration of theology in the world of today as the supreme science, of which both religion and culture stand in need for their renewal.” Another purpose was “to study the central realities of Christian faith and life, and to set forth their meaning in clear and appropriate language.” They lament the lack of conviction in those who are neither Fundamentalists nor Liberals, and that modern society has replaced theology as “the queen of the sciences” with religious fads. All problems are ultimately theological difficulties, so a revived concern for Christ himself as the truth is the key to purifying mankind’s literary production.⁶⁸

The theological message of the Bible was a non-propositional sense of mystery behind the literal words. Smart claims that in the history of biblical interpretation the church repeatedly lost

⁶⁸ John Alexander Mackay, “Our Aims, and the Present Number,” *Theology Today* 1, no. 1 (April 1944): 4–7.

the meaning of the Scriptures even while cherishing it and studying it intensely. Then the key to understanding is found again and the Bible transforms the church again. The rabbis built a system on the law of God but forgot the prophetic vision of God himself. In the Middle Ages the Bible was studied with care, but the allegorical interpretation robbed it of the freedom to criticize the established order. The heirs of the Reformation buried the Scripture under an overemphasis on its divinity. Nineteenth century scholarship so emphasized the human character of the Scriptures that it ceased to be a word from God. This mysterious quality that requires constant rediscovery points to its hidden center. The Scriptures alone among religious literature embodies the revelation of God to man. Since God can be known only in a partial and broken manner, the Scriptures themselves cannot be reduced to the historical record of Israelite, Jewish, and Christian religions.⁶⁹

For Wright, a theological understanding of the Bible has “little abstract or propositional theology within it.”⁷⁰ It is not a systematically or historically arranged system of ideas, but “an interpretation of history, a confessional recital of historical events as the acts of God ... Consequently, not even the nature of God can be portrayed abstractly. He can only be described in relation to the historical process.”⁷¹ Christ cannot be completely comprehended by an analysis of his life, teachings, or experience as one might with other great religious leaders. Since he was one sent by God, one can only understand him in the light of preceding history.⁷²

The new emphasis on theological understanding was accompanied by a critical attitude toward the previous generation of scholarship. Rowley remarks that with the rise of rationalistic criticism, “to many biblical study became a matter of merely scientific investigation.” Furthermore, the application of

⁶⁹ Smart, *The Interpretation of Scripture* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), 13–19.

⁷⁰ George Ernest Wright, *God Who Acts: Biblical Theology as Recital*, *Studies in Biblical Theology* 8 (London: SCM, 1969), 55–56.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 57–58.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 60–61.

Darwinian evolutionary principles to the realm of religion “threatened the position of Jesus in the faith of the Church.”⁷³ Jesus became “a mere moment in the religious evolution of man.” Such scholarship “heralded as final truth” conclusions “which have been the product of subjective and a priori reasoning.” These scholars would decide the issue in advance, then “admit only that evidence which is consonant with the prejudged verdict.” A knowledge of the historical context and original language are not adequate in themselves. The authors of the editorial of *Interpretation* write: “We have not entered the temple of Holy Scripture, therefore, when the critical process has done its work. We have merely stood at the door and looked in.”⁷⁴

Wright complains that

discussions of biblical religion had largely become histories of the development of ideas ... The concentration on the minutiae of sources and documents seemed to destroy the unity of the Bible ... Biblical criticism, accommodating itself so largely to the presuppositions of the liberal idealism of the last century, *has* destroyed a great deal of the Bible’s authority. Scripture is no longer determinative as the source of Christian theology.⁷⁵

Yet despite this criticism, the historical critical methods were still deemed valid. Nineteenth century criticism made it possible to expound the Scriptures with more clarity, while freeing them from the dead weight of dogmatic exegesis.⁷⁶ The new change in biblical criticism seeks to conserve all that is of worth, but desires to transcend them. Second Isaiah is accepted, as is the minimal involvement of Moses in the Pentateuch. But it seeks to go beyond the human element to understand the abiding

⁷³ H. H. Rowley, *The Relevance of the Bible* (New York: Macmillan, 1944), 13–14.

⁷⁴ Editorial, “Criticism, and Beyond,” *Interpretation* 1, no. 2 (April 1947): 223–224.

⁷⁵ Wright, “The Christian Interpreter as Biblical Critic: The Relevance of Valid Criticism,” *Interpretation* 1, no. 2 (April 1947): 140.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

significance of the Bible for the present generation.⁷⁷ According to Wright, "Because of the very nature of Scripture, therefore, we [not] only have the freedom and the right to use literary and historical criticism; we are impelled to employ it." This includes the process of transmission and the occasion of its composition.⁷⁸

But their criticism of old Liberal theology should not be thought as a return to traditional orthodoxy. Conservatives are lambasted as those "who have an emotional obsession against all higher criticism."⁷⁹ Indeed, the conservative position is still given the misleading label "bibliolatry" because "intellectual integrity and the Bible itself demand that the rights of biblical criticism be safeguarded, and authenticated facts regarding the history and literary composition of the biblical records be joyfully accepted."⁸⁰ Wright is even stronger when he writes that

a relatively static authoritarianism, of the Roman Catholic, Fundamentalist, or any other type, so confuses the authority of the Church and its creeds with the authority of the biblical faith that the tension which God places between himself and our human understanding is removed. Certainly, the removal of this tension is the first step in opening the doors of the Church to idolatry.⁸¹

B. The Unity of the Bible in spite of the Historical Critical Method

A second characteristic of the Biblical Theology Movement was an emphasis on the unity of the Bible. This emphasis produced several works dealing with both Testaments.⁸² They were critical of the previous generation's fragmentation of the

⁷⁷ Rowley, "The Relevance of Biblical Interpretation," *Interpretation* 1, no. 1 (January 1947): 15.

⁷⁸ Wright, "Christian Interpreter as Biblical Critic," 148.

⁷⁹ Editorial, "Criticism, and Beyond," 220.

⁸⁰ Mackay, "Our Aims, and the Present Number," 7.

⁸¹ Wright, *God Who Acts*, 109.

⁸² Rowley, *Relevance of the Bible*; Paul S. Minear, *Eyes of Faith: A Study in the Biblical Point of View* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1946); Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time: The Primitive Christian Conception of Time and History* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1950).

Bible into a bewildering multitude of sources on the basis of minute and subjective criteria to the exclusion of all other matters.⁸³ Therefore they sought some fundamental unity that could absorb a diversity of sources and theological perspectives without abandoning historical critical methods. Some solutions were rejected from the outset. An allegorical interpretation “is to abandon a historical sense and to open the door to undisciplined fancy; and on such principles any text may be made to mean anything we please.”⁸⁴ It disrespects the Bible and attaches divine authority to what we read into the text rather than the text itself.⁸⁵ Allegory was even charged with anti-Semitic motivations.⁸⁶ There was disagreement on the validity of typology. Florovsky distinguishes typology from allegory—the latter is a method of exegesis; the former, an interpretation of events. Typology implies history and looks for the inner correspondence of the events themselves. Paul’s allegory of Sarah and Hagar is typology under a different name.⁸⁷ On the other hand, Smart is as eager to dismiss typology as he is allegory. Some “patterns of correspondence” are the repeated partial fulfillment of God’s promises that are later again fulfilled partially, not typology. Whenever a prophet drew his imagery of new deliverances or judgments from older ones, a similarity is inevitable. Because the New Testament arose out of the thought-forms of the Old, the language of the New is colored by the Old. This too is not typology. When the historical meaning of a text is made clear by later history, this is a historical/theological interpretation, not a typological one. The New Testament can be regarded as a final reinterpretation of older traditions, which is equally not

⁸³ Wright, “Christian Interpreter as Biblical Critic,” 139–140.

⁸⁴ Rowley, *The Unity of the Bible* (London: Morrison and Gibb Limited, 1953), 18.

⁸⁵ Rowley, “Relevance of Biblical Interpretation,” 5.

⁸⁶ Filson is discussing allegory prior to the end of World War II, when anti-Semitism was unfortunately not as unacceptable as it is today. Even so, this is still a devastating criticism. See Floyd Vivian Filson, “Unity of Old and New Testaments,” *Interpretation* 5, no. 2 (April 1951): 140–141.

⁸⁷ Georges Florovsky, “Revelation and Interpretation,” in *Biblical Authority for Today*, ed. Alan Richardson and Wolfgang Schweitzer (London: SCM, 1951), 175.

typology. Thus, Smart wishes to discard the term “typology” altogether.⁸⁸

The most common positive description of the unity of the Scriptures was “unity in diversity.”⁸⁹ This diversity is not merely differences in time, authorship, and literary form. It extends to differences in spiritual value and in the message itself.⁹⁰ This emphasis allowed them to keep the historical critical methods of the previous generation.⁹¹ Yet the positive model for this unity varied significantly. For Rowley, the unity of Scripture was due to the one God revealing himself to men in history. The men to whom God revealed himself had varying degrees of spiritual capacity to receive the revelation. The Bible was the human, fallible record of this revelation. Because of their limited capacity, they may have incorporated false ideas about God or about ethical standards, to say nothing of historical or scientific data.⁹²

James Muilenburg has three categories of biblical unity. First, the purpose of God unifies the Bible from beginning to end. At the beginning God makes his will known and at the end he brings his will to completion. Second, the Bible is unified by God’s covenant relation with his people. This is how Israel understood the meaning of her existence; it is the proper framework for understanding the law; it is the matrix in which the future is anticipated by a waiting community; it is in the covenant relationship that Israel confesses her sovereign Lord and Christians recognize the Messiah. Third, there is a continuity of divine revelation. Throughout history there have been a succession of theophanies.⁹³ Robert Dentan’s article focuses mainly on the unity of the Old Testament, though he ties it to the New Testament in the conclusion. He matches the three broadest genres of the Old Testament—history, prophecy, and wisdom

⁸⁸ Smart, *Interpretation of Scripture*, 102–120.

⁸⁹ Rowley, *Unity of the Bible*, 1–29.

⁹⁰ Rowley, *Unity of the Bible*, 4, 6; James Muilenburg, “The Interpretation of the Bible,” in *Biblical Authority for Today*, 198–199.

⁹¹ Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis*, 38.

⁹² Rowley, *Unity of the Bible*, 7–16.

⁹³ Muilenburg, “Interpretation of the Bible,” 200–208.

literature—with three historical periods—prehistory to the mid-8th century BC, mid-8th century to roughly the exile, and from the exile to about the Christian era. In the first period Israel celebrates her covenant relationship. In the second, the prophets bemoan the immaturity and failed potential of this once great nation. In the third, the wisdom literature seeks to develop standards for individuals within the community. For the Christian, there is a higher unity that connects the Old and New Testament. The Old Testament has a sense of incompleteness that for the Christian is resolved in the New Testament. The church is the new and spiritual Israel.⁹⁴

C. The Revelation of God in History instead of in the Bible

The heart of the Biblical Theology Movement was a fairly Barthian conception of the way God revealed Himself in history. Revelation was the event of God's self-disclosure to the prophets and apostles. Propositions were secondary to the experiential encounter with God. This idea of revelation was critical to their goal of carving out a middle ground between Fundamentalism and classic Liberalism. The enscripturation of the divine disclosure was a purely human process as the prophets struggled to understand and communicate the awesome reality that they had experienced. Therefore, the Scriptures could contain errors because the prophets were not carried along by the Spirit as they wrote. Yet neither was the Scripture an entirely naturalistic human search for the divine. The prophets did not create their ideas out of whole cloth, but rather they had a genuinely supernatural experience of God. This conception also avoided the fragmentation associated with the search for sources and redactions. The one history of God's revelation unites the different sources and editors and connects the ancient past with our modern present.⁹⁵

Yet though there was widespread agreement that God had revealed himself in history, the explanation of the details varied.

⁹⁴ Robert Claude Dentan, "The Unity of the Old Testament," *Interpretation* 5, no. 2 (April 1951): 153–173.

⁹⁵ Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis*, 39–41.

For H. H. Rowley, the Bible is grounded in historical events, but the authority of the Bible is only found when one incorporates the significance of these concrete facts into the sense.⁹⁶ Since he believes that the Bible includes “false presuppositions” and “limited outlooks,” this sorting process is a prerequisite to properly understanding what the Bible reveals about God. The concept of development in revelation is acceptable as long as God is not eliminated from the story.⁹⁷

For Wright, God has revealed himself primarily in the objective events of Israel’s history. From this primary assumption it was inferred that God had chosen his people, which inference was then used to further interpret Israel’s history. This special relationship with God was described as a covenant. In the New Testament the primary event to be explained was the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The NT writers recognized that Jesus was the climax of God’s redemptive purpose, so explained the Christ-event using typology. So also, the church was understood typologically as a parallel to the congregation of Israel. Modern interpreters should not invent additional types because of the danger of falling into allegory.⁹⁸

As a transplanted European Scholar, Otto Piper borrowed heavily from the *heilsgeschichtliche Schule*. He believes that within “the historical life of mankind there is a special process of ‘holy history’ going on and converging toward us.” History is “a continuous process in time with a purpose, a goal, and an intrinsic dynamic that transcends the activities of the individual agents.” Thus, what makes the “holy history” different from regular history is the intrinsic dynamic produced by the “presence of the ever coming God.”⁹⁹

H. Richard Niebuhr distinguishes “outer history” from “inner history.” Outer history is “the succession of events which an uninterested spectator can see from the outside.” Inner history is

⁹⁶ Rowley, “Relevance of Biblical Interpretation,” 8.

⁹⁷ Rowley, *Unity of the Bible*, 15–16.

⁹⁸ Wright, *God Who Acts: Biblical Theology as Recital*, 50–56, 59–66.

⁹⁹ Otto Alfred Piper, “What the Bible Means to Me 4: The Bible as ‘Holy History,’” *The Christian Century* 63, no. 12 (March 20, 1946): 362–363.

“our own history,” the same events as viewed by the participants in the story. Outer history considers the effects of the event most important; inner history values its worth to us. Outer history views time quantitatively, as a series of events. Inner history views time as duration, as a stream of consciousness from our remembered past to the anticipated future. It is to think of history as a poet instead of a scientist.¹⁰⁰

C. The Unique Hebrew Mentality of the Bible

Scholars of the Biblical Theology Movement recognized from the beginning that the Bible had a unique perspective. To force the text into a framework of evolutionary progress was to impose alien categories on the Bible. If the Bible was to be understood at all, it must be understood in its own categories.¹⁰¹ It possessed a uniquely historical perspective in contrast to the surrounding polytheistic neighbors. Quickly the difference became associated with Hebrew versus Greek mindset. Greek thinking was abstract, propositional, and theoretical. Hebraistic thinking was historical, concrete, and practical.¹⁰² The variation in this thinking was thought to be demonstrated in the linguistic peculiarities of the languages themselves, as Brunner remarks: “The decisive word-form in the language of the Bible is not the substantive, as in Greek, but the verb, the word of action. The thought of the Bible is not substantival, neuter and abstract, but verbal, historical, and personal.”¹⁰³ Numerous studies fleshed out the claim that a difference in thinking stemmed from a difference in languages. It should be added, however, that the New Testament was thought to share the same perspective as the Old, despite being written in Greek.¹⁰⁴ The explanation for this was that Semitic thought-forms underlay both Testaments. Aubrey Johnson sought to demonstrated from the shift between singular

¹⁰⁰ H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation*, (New York: Macmillan Co., 1941), 59–72.

¹⁰¹ Muilenburg, “Interpretation of the Bible,” 199–200.

¹⁰² Wright, *God Who Acts: Biblical Theology as Recital*, 33–46; Piper, “What the Bible Means to Me 4,” 362.

¹⁰³ Emil Brunner, *Truth as Encounter*, (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964), 47.

¹⁰⁴ Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis*, 45.

and plural when describing a group, or the identity between a person and his emissary, that in the Israelite perspective the community can be conceived as a singular identity, and in turn the community was bound up in the individual.¹⁰⁵ Thorleif Boman makes a system out of doing word studies to establish a difference between Greek and Hebrew thinking. The Greek experienced the world by composed reflection; the Hebrew by ceaseless movement, emotion, and life. Visual space was the thought-form of the Greek; for the Hebrew it was time. For the Hebrew the word was the reality; for the Greek it was the thing.¹⁰⁶ These assertions are established by detailed lexical studies. For example, he observes that הָיָה can mean either "be" or "become" and from this he draws the conclusion that "the person is an active being who is perpetually engaged in becoming and yet remains identical with himself."¹⁰⁷ This work was lauded by George Knight as "seminal in its importance," and "a book not to borrow, but to buy, mark, and inwardly digest."¹⁰⁸

D. The Use of the Surrounding Culture in Unique Ways

Perhaps the least distinctive characteristic of the Biblical Theology Movement is how the Bible used the cultural and religious elements in unique ways. Adherents of this position included classic Liberals, Roman Catholics, and even Jews. The claim was that the Bible did borrow heavily from its

¹⁰⁵ Aubrey R. Johnson, *The One and the Many in the Israelite Conception of God*, 2nd ed. (Cardiff: University of Wales P, 1961).

¹⁰⁶ Thorleif Boman, *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek*, The Norton Library (New York: W. W. Norton, 1975), 204–207.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 38–49.

¹⁰⁸ George Angus Fulton Knight, "Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek," *Theology Today* 18, no. 2 (July 1961): 254–255. Dentan and Muilenburg register some disagreement, but do not disagree with the main thesis of the book. See Robert C. (Robert Claude) Dentan, "Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek," *Interpretation* 16, no. 2 (April 1962): 205–207; Muilenburg, "Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 17, no. 1 (November 1961): 79–81; Frederick L. Moriarty, "Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 23, no. 3 (July 1961): 367–370.

environment, yet it combined those elements in unique ways. Both Old and New Testament scholars made this claim. "It is possible to detect the reflection of Egyptian and Mesopotamian beliefs in many episodes of the Old Testament, but the overwhelming impression left by that document is one, not of deviation, but of originality."¹⁰⁹ "Therefore we can grasp the distinctive character of the New Testament message concerning God only by a clear discernment of the originality of its teachings about Jesus Christ."¹¹⁰ Wright is a good representation of what these distinctive elements were. Unlike polytheists, God could not be characterized by any single aspect of nature. God's activity was not mythological, but the direct cause of events in nature and history. God stood alone, with no other being even near his level. No images were appropriate to portray God. To be religious one must also be moral.¹¹¹

V. Evaluation and Aftermath

The Biblical Theology Movement gained doctrinal hegemony for roughly the twenty years following World War II. Its end as a major trend came about as the proposed middle-ground between Fundamentalism and Liberalism proved to be impossible to establish. Some of the characteristics dissolved due to inherent illogicality. Those that were essentially sound lacked a proper foundation for their claims, so were subsequently eclipsed as the theological world of former Liberalism moved on to other concerns.

A. *The Revelation of God in History instead of in the Bible*

The revelation of God in history was inherently problematic from the start, something that became obvious once adherents of the Biblical Theology Movement tried to define the precise

¹⁰⁹ H. Frankfort et al., *The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1965), 367.

¹¹⁰ Floyd Vivian Filson, *The New Testament against Its Environment: The Gospel of Christ, the Risen Lord*, Studies in Biblical Theology 3 (London: SCM, 1963), 9.

¹¹¹ Wright, "How Did Early Israel Differ from Her Neighbors?" *The Biblical Archaeologist* 6, no. 1 (February 1943): 1–20.

nature of history. Perhaps the most critical blow to this point was Barr's inaugural address at Princeton Seminary. He points out that Christianity is a historical religion, so history is crucial to its credibility. Yet as a rubric to understand all of Scripture apart from inspiration, the revelation of God in history fails to properly account for everything. First, there are large sections of the Old Testament that cannot be made to fit the concept of revelation through history. An example of this is the wisdom literature. Second, even in texts that do fit, the revelation of God through history is logically impossible. The exodus required God's direct communication to Moses, or it would not have happened at all; yet on this understanding the burning bush would have to be an interpretation of the event by fallible Israel. Third, since the Biblical Theology Movement did not accept the historicity of the entirety of Scripture, they were forced to so broadly define what is "history" that the term loses all meaning. If Noah's flood is legend, while the exile is sober history, how is it possible to lump both together and call it the revelation of God through history?¹¹² Inerrancy would solve this problem immediately by assuming it is all accurately historical. But the adherents of the Biblical Theology Movement had not left themselves that option.

Less influential, but more devastating was the criticism of Langdon Gilkey. He correctly observes that the source of the difficulty was the attempt to bridge two worlds, that of Liberalism on the one hand and orthodoxy on the other. Orthodoxy understood God's acts and speech literally and univocally. He spoke with an audible voice and performed wondrous miracles. Whatever the text claims God did or said, that is what he really did. But Liberalism takes as its starting point a closed universe of cause and effect. Since the supernatural is impossible on this understanding, God's actions or speech were transmitted immanently through the natural order and was accessible to all men. Neo-orthodox and biblical theologians repudiated the reduction of God's activity to general influence and his speech to subjective human insight. Yet they did not repudiate the foundational assertion of a closed universe.

¹¹² Barr, "Revelation Through History in the Old Testament and in Modern Theology," *Interpretation* 17, no. 2 (April 1, 1963): 193–205.

Therefore, the speech or actions of God are understood analogically. "God acts, but not as men act; God speaks, but not with an audible voice."¹¹³ Yet the concrete events that these actions or speeches are supposed to represent did not happen in the way it was recorded. "It makes us wonder, despite ourselves, what, in fact, do we moderns think God *did* in the centuries preceding the incarnation."¹¹⁴ Yet strangely the question of what God *really* did is given very little attention except to deny miracles. The exodus was interpreted as a natural but unlikely event that Israel took to be the supernatural hand of God; and from that experience created an entire religion. Gilkey is unusually candid about the drawbacks of trying to hear the voice of God in a closed universe. Yet instead of drawing the conclusion that orthodoxy is correct, he calls for a careful ontology that will put meaning into orthodox language even in a closed universe. He is not able to describe what possible philosophical alchemy could meet these requirements, but he is nevertheless optimistic that it must be possible.¹¹⁵

B. The Unity of the Bible in spite of the Historical Critical Method

Establishing a fundamental unity to the Scriptures was also doomed to failure, because the search for unity conflicted with the underlying naturalistic assumptions of the historical critical method. The only way forward was to reassert the historical critical method and the fragmentation that went along with it. The other alternative, to suspect the historical critical foundation, was never seriously considered. As European and American non-conservative scholars began to make claims for theological disunity, Neo-orthodox and Liberal scholars began to abandon an attempt to find theological unity. Von Rad, ironically enough, was concerned to establish the unity of the Bible. He proposed a revised form of typological exegesis. He argued that there was

¹¹³ Langdon Gilkey, "Cosmology, Ontology, and the Travail of Biblical Language," *Concordia Theological Monthly* 33, no. 3 (March 1962): 149.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 146.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 143–154.

no unifying center to the Old Testament, for amid the various sources one could detect repeated theological reinterpretations of the biblical stories. For example, in the account of the giving of manna, the earlier source saw only the provision of physical food for Israel (Exod 16:1–5; 13b–16a). But the later source saw in this something typical of what repeatedly happens to God's people (Exod 16:6–13a, 16b–26). Yet it was in this reinterpretation that he found unity.¹¹⁶ However, his proposal was not well received by NT scholars. Conzelmann objected to his ambiguity of theological intention and historical survey.¹¹⁷ Thus von Rad succeeded in steering non-conservative scholars away from the unity of the Bible.

For the New Testament also, non-conservative scholars began to lose interest in establishing the unity of the Bible. Conzelmann's dissertation made the claim that Luke had a unique theological perspective that can be determined by comparison with Mark. He claimed that as the years lengthened it became clear that Jesus was not returning soon, so Luke sought to establish a theological system that could reconcile a heavenly Jesus and an earthly church for the long-term. He had a unique conception of the church's mission as part of the plan of God from the beginning.¹¹⁸ Ernst Käsemann claimed that the New Testament exhibited frequent irreconcilable theological contradictions. Therefore "the New Testament canon does not, as such constitute the foundation of the unity of the Church. On the contrary, as such ... it provides the basis for the multiplicity of the confessions."¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ Gerhard von Rad, "Typologische Auslegung Des Alten Testaments," *Evangelische Theologie* 12, no. 1–2 (July 1952): 17–33; "Typological Interpretation of the Old Testament," trans. John Bright, *Interpretation* 15, no. 2 (April 1961): 174–192.

¹¹⁷ Hans Conzelmann, "Fragen an Gerhard von Rad," *Evangelische Theologie* 24, no. 3 (March 1964): 113–125.

¹¹⁸ Conzelmann, *The Theology of St. Luke*, trans. Geoffrey Buswell (New York: Harper and Row, 1960).

¹¹⁹ Ernst Käsemann, "The Canon of the New Testament and the Unity of the Church," in *Essays on New Testament Themes*, Studies in Biblical Theology 41 (London: SCM, 1971), 100, 103.

C. The Unique Hebrew Mentality of the Bible

While not the only one to object, Barr's *The Semantics of Biblical Language* almost singlehandedly demolished the concept of a Hebrew mentality.¹²⁰ He argued that the Hebrew versus Greek idea stemmed from a false view of language supported by a selective and biased use of the evidence. The basic unit of biblical meaning, he points out, is not the word but the sentence. Words come from an established pool of vocabulary to be reused at will; sentences are unique and so can carry unique meaning. Theological statements are capable of translation into other languages and therefore do not require the unique morphological, lexical, and grammatical structures of the Hebrew language in order to be understood. There is no necessary correlation between the number and variety of words for a thing and the depth of thought on that thing by its speakers. The Bible was translated because of its status as a sacred book. Accordingly, the community that translated it will be familiar with it, and they will be culturally distinct from the wider society that speaks the same language. The Biblical Theology Movement was reluctant to accept this because it threatened to fragment the Scriptures and destroy the synthetic method they were using. They also refused to accept this because they wanted to find a higher unity in the Scriptures behind the text rather than at the literary level. Boman is especially attacked for his illogical and unsystematic application of conflicting lexical, grammatical, and morphological data to establish his claims. Even Kittel's mighty TWNT is not exempt from Barr's withering criticism.¹²¹

D. The Use of the Surrounding Culture in Unique Ways

The proper foundation for maintaining the distinctiveness of the Bible to the cultures around it is an unconditional faith-commitment to it as the inerrant revelation of God. It is simple to demonstrate that prophets and apostles wrote from a particular

¹²⁰ For other criticisms of the distinctive Hebrew mentality, see Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis*, 70–71.

¹²¹ Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (London: Oxford U P, 1961).

historical situatedness. If they were trapped by their limited human perspective, and unable to hear a word from God and transmit it without error, then an attempt to show a contrast will fail. For it will inevitably be shown that they did not write in a vacuum. To the degree they wrote their own interpretations of God's revelation rather than being borne along by the Spirit, to that degree they must have adopted the ideas around them. As mere men where else could they have acquired their ideas? But if it is true that human situatedness does not preclude the overshadowing power of God to speak his word, then even though they were but men, they could write just as they claimed to write—the very word of God. The power of God can so carry them that though they still wrote with their own personalities intact and with their own cultural backgrounds, they nevertheless could write exactly what God desired them to say. God is not limited by human situatedness: he uses it to clearly communicate to people at a specific time and place.

Accordingly, as non-conservative scholars tried to establish a contrast of the Bible without inspiration, they invariably found the project impossible. In the New Testament there was never the clear break with the history of religions school as with the Old Testament. Bultmann and Dodd maintained a sense of historical connectedness in their own differing theological perspectives.¹²² Erwin Goodenough's massive *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period* claimed that hellenistic Christianity was not distinct from the Judaism it borrowed from. Judaism of the period was not monolithic; there was a popular, hellenized Judaism in addition to the Rabbinic Judaism.¹²³ In the excitement that followed the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, scholars began to see parallels between the Qumran community and the New Testament.¹²⁴ Frank Cross argued that the worship of Yahweh grew out of the worship of old Northwest Semitic deities.¹²⁵

¹²² Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis*, 73.

¹²³ Erwin Ramsdell Goodenough, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period*, 12 vols., Bollingen series 37 (New York: Pantheon Books, 1953).

¹²⁴ Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis*, 74.

¹²⁵ Frank Moore Cross, "Yahweh and the God of the Patriarchs," *Harvard Theological Review* 55, no. 4 (October 1962): 225–259.

Instead of arguing that Israel took cultural elements and distinctively repurposed them in unique ways, Cross argued that Israel incorporated the mythology of the past and through the process of historical development the old Semitic gods were transformed into Yahweh as we know him today.¹²⁶

E. The Restoration of a Biblical Emphasis on Theology

The attempt of biblical theologians to recover the theological dimension rested on Neo-orthodox theology. Yet that system is inherently illogical, for it attempts to hear a genuine word from God while espousing a worldview where God is unable to speak and act in the way that men speak and act.¹²⁷ Furthermore, the wide variety of theological positions were only united by their opposition to Liberalism. As classic Liberalism ceased to be a problem, the apparent theological unity broke up.¹²⁸ Finally, the rise of postmodernism brought an entirely different set of concerns and a new direction for potential threats. Then called “the new hermeneutic,” this movement claimed that both the interpreter and the writer are trapped within their own cultural context and are unable to break out of it to discover objective truth.¹²⁹ Whether scholars adopted the new hermeneutic or attacked it, the Biblical Theology Movement was not equipped to answer it and therefore became outdated.

Conclusion

The Biblical Theology Movement did produce some salutary effects. Its emphasis on orthodox expression made it easier for conservatives to make the claims they did. But it is not enough to have orthodox language. Without a proper foundation, the attempt to reproduce the affective dimension of orthodoxy and its spiritual power was doomed to failure. Scholars in this

¹²⁶ Frank Moore Cross and David Noel Freedman, “The Song of Miriam,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 14, no. 4 (October 1955): 237–250.

¹²⁷ Ryrie, *Neo-Orthodoxy*, 58–62.

¹²⁸ Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis*, 78.

¹²⁹ Donald A. Carson, “Hermeneutics: A Brief Assessment of Some Recent Trends,” *Themelios* 5, no. 2 (January 1980): 14–16.

movement wanted to move away from the unbridled humanism of classic Liberalism. But their allegiance to historical critical methodology shackled them to a worldview that does not make it possible to hear an unambiguous word from God or to affirm the miracles essential to the very foundation of the Christian worldview. They were adamant that a return to Fundamentalism was not possible or desirable. Therefore, when cracks began to emerge in the theological edifice they had built, the only way forward was a return to some of the naturalistic and ahistorical claims they had sought to circumvent. The leading lights of the movement did not abandon their position in the 1960s, but they acquired few new disciples. Some scholars sought to further the idea with some modification. The most notable example of this is Brevard Childs. His canonical approach sought to use the canon of Scripture as the unifying theological center. He too had few disciples despite being a world-renown OT scholar. The despised Fundamentalists, that non-conservatives were so sure were boxing themselves into anti-intellectual irrelevancy, thrived and grew into the formidable evangelical movement we know today. The heirs of classic Liberalism, despite their constant attempts to innovate the message of the gospel itself, have been gradually fading into irrelevancy, even though they still retain the keys of academic power.

There is Hope: Church Revitalization

Kevin M. Brosius

Abstract: Current statistics indicate that many churches are in a period of decline and no longer impacting their community. Current statistics reveal that 85% of all North American churches are in a state of decline and many of those eventually close. While the process of turning a church around is often slow and challenging, there is hope for every church in need of revitalization. A church can move from “survival move” to a renewed place of thriving by implementing a strategic development team, investing in young leaders, renovating worship, implementing change slowly, and preparing to handle difficult people. Church leaders should also plan strategies when churches refuse to adapt to changes.

Key Words: Revitalization, Growth, Change, Decline, Mission

Introduction

As Peter stood face to face with the Savior of the world acknowledging that he is the Christ, the Son of God (Matt 16:18), our Lord revealed his plan for the ages: he would build his church and nothing including the very efforts of hell would thwart its advancement. That universal promise more than two-thousand years ago still stands as God continues to offer hope to a lost world through the primary instrument of his church. And while God is blessing his church and remains committed to using her for a special work, the church easily grows passive toward the mission she has been entrusted. In America, churches can be found throughout metropolitan and suburban areas and yet

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the eternal impact of its presence seems to be waning. According to Kevin Ezel, there is a triple crisis in North America today:

First, our population continues to grow and become more diverse, yet we are not starting enough new churches to keep pace with that growth. Second, we are losing a shockingly high number of churches every year that simply close their doors and disappear. Third, even more of our existing churches have stopped being outwardly focused and are no longer lights for the gospel in their communities.²

Consider the following statistics that indicate the church is losing its ground as a mission outpost within society:

- Only 15% of churches in the United States are growing and just 2.2% of those are growing by conversion.³
- 10,000 churches in America disappeared in a five-year period.⁴
- The number of people in America who do not attend church has doubled in the past 15 years.⁵
- Roughly three-fourths of established churches in North America either are declining or are on a long-term plateau.⁶

² Kevin Ezel, forward to *Can These Bones Live?: A Practical Guide to Church Revitalization* by Bill Henard, xiii–xiv (Nashville: B&H, 2015), xiii.

³ Andy McAdams, “The Condition of the Church in America,” *Poikilos*, December 19, 2005, <https://wmson.wordpress.com/2005/12/19/the-condition-of-the-church-in-america/>.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Thom S. Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church: 12 Ways to Keep Yours Alive* (Nashville: B&H, 2014), 20.

- The Southern Baptist Convention, one of the largest denominations in America, loses more than nine hundred churches every year.⁷

Most churches that are in a decline are not even aware of the deadly erosion that has taken place in their congregation. Others fail to accept that there is a problem and that important changes are necessary to experience the vitality the church once enjoyed. One of the first questions pastors and leaders must ask is, “If the church closed its doors today, would anyone but its own members notice? Would the city be saddened because such a great community-transformation partner—a missionary of impact—as gone?”⁸

Why should we be interested in church revitalization? Because we want to be more effective at making disciples and fulfilling the Great Commission. Church revitalization is not just about having more people and building larger buildings; church revitalization is about returning the church to her purpose of making committed followers of Christ and being effective at pointing people to Jesus.

The following pages provide a diagnosis of church health in order to understand why many churches experience decline. It follows with a modest proposal to help in restoring dying churches to greater health and kingdom impact.

PART 1

THE DIAGNOSIS: DYING OR GROWING?

Doctor visits may seem mundane and hideous, but the reality is that people who desire to remain healthy understand that prevention goes along way. For individuals, health exams tell us how we currently are doing and what we need to do better in order to live healthier lives. The same goes for the church as an

⁷ Mark Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory: Revitalizing Dying Churches* (Nashville: B&H, 2016), 3.

⁸ Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson, *Comeback Churches: How 300 Churches Turned Around and Yours Can Too* (Nashville: B&H, 2007), 5.

organization. Before we can expect to see any growth, we must do an honest health assessment of the church.

Symptoms of Dying Churches

Research and evaluation on church health indicate that all churches that have closed and those who enter a period of decline experience similar symptoms that tend to plague the church and ultimately lead to her demise. While not intended to be an exhaustive list, the autopsy of deceased churches and the symptoms experienced in sick churches all share similar traits. These churches became focused on themselves instead of the Great Commission, operated from a faulty leadership structure, lacked vision for the future, and experienced a slow almost unnoticed decline.

Inward Focus

It is ironic that declining churches who have turned their focus inward at one point in time began as a church plant with an outward focus. New churches are very effective at evangelism because they are born out of a passion to reach the community with the gospel. The new church has little resources; it lacks attractive and comfortable buildings. The church plant has limited personnel resources and cannot pour its energy into running big programs. Perhaps there is some truth to the saying that “There is more in less.” As the church becomes well established with its permanent buildings and programs in place, it begins to shift toward maintenance mode further sliding into an inward focus. As a result, members fail to recognize aging facilities and needed building improvements as long as they are comfortable. Henard comments, “What the world sees is that church members care less about God’s house than they do about their own houses.”⁹

⁹ Henard, *Can These Bones Live?*, 79.

Dwell on the Past

Inwardly focused churches tend to hold on to the past. There is a certain bit of stability that we all desire because this provides a sense of security. Declining churches spend more time reminiscing on the past rather than dreaming about the future. There can be a variety of reasons why the inwardly focused church clings to the past. For some churches, the past brings them back to the “good old days.” Older church members may remember when the building was full of people and ministry programs were effective. And so, for them, the methods of the past are sufficient for today. For other churches, new equates to compromise. These churches live by the lyrics to the hymn *Old Time Religion*—if it’s good enough for mama, it’s good enough for me!” Inward churches tend to elevate a particular methodology to the same level as scripture. In other words, while doctrine is unchangeable, any change in methodology is seen almost tantamount to changing the truth of Scripture. As Rainer observes, “Yes, we respect the past. At times we revere the past. But we can’t live in the past.”¹⁰

Preference Driven

Another symptom of dying churches that have become inward focused is holding on to preferences and a certain way of doing church. Preferences come in a variety of forms including worship styles and programs even though these may no longer impact the lives of others. Some believers refuse growth because they prefer smaller churches over larger churches. It seems selfish to want the church to perform according to our preferences at the cost of advancing the kingdom of God. In actuality, the preference driven church is more concerned about protecting the way they do church rather than reaching the community for Christ. Thom Rainer’s evaluation of deceased churches revealed that dying churches often cling to their preferences and refuse to let go even to the point of preferring death over change: “So what did the deceased churches cling to? What did they refuse to let go of facing certain death? Worship styles were certainly on the list. As were fixed orders of worship

¹⁰ Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church*, 21.

services. And times of worship services.”¹¹ Fighting over preferences of music, teaching styles, or the correct way to do ministry is a form of idolatry. When we value preferences over our love for Jesus and his mission, we are revealing certain idols that serve our desires for church. Many churches declare that they want to reach their community for Christ, but they expect the community to look exactly like them and hold to their preferences and traditions.

Not Reaching the Community

If there is one characteristic that summarizes all dying churches, it is their inability to connect with the community. The only way for churches to reach new people (both saved and unsaved) and recover from a pattern of decline, is for churches to gain an active presence in their communities. As the church grows inward, it becomes more consumed with ministry programs and events designed for Christians. As a result, the church spends all its energy and resources on programs tailored to its members, never reaching beyond the walls of the church. When churches experience a financial decline, the first ministries that are usually cut from the budget are those that are not essential for the members. Outreach and missions are usually the first ministries to be cut when these are the most important for adding new members. Many churches in decline have attempted to offer ministry that is assumed to be wanted by the community. However, in reality, what is offered is the same approach that the church has always offered (preference again?). Until the declining church makes a diligent effort to understand what will reach the community, it will continue down a similar path of decline it has already taken. Rainer observes,

With most of these churches, somewhere in their histories they have become satisfied with the status quo. They resist change and often seek to minister only to those inside the church. They have some or many programs. They may even have large budgets. But they are not making a significant impact on their communities, nor

¹¹ Ibid., 22.

do they see significant numbers of changed lives in their congregations.¹²

The church must prove to the community that it has something valuable to offer and that the community is better off having the church in its neighborhood. It must prove that it has a relevant message to be heard.

Entitlement

Churches that have an inward focus often develop a consumeristic approach to ministry. Members expect the church to meet their needs and when the church fails to provide care, these members usually become discontent and may even threaten to leave the church. Because there is a lack of outward focus, the dying church has a difficult time showing compassion toward others and putting the mission of the church before one's own personal ministry desires and preferences. Older members of the church may feel that their voice should be valued above others because they have invested more time and money into the life of the church over the years. Servant leadership willingly places the needs and desires of others before oneself. Only as members submit to one another and recognize that the primary role of the church is not about meeting their needs, will it return glory to God and advance his kingdom.

Avoid Change and Growth

"No one would ever argue that doing the same things the same old, anemic ways would ever produce different results, although most of the time that is what we see. Yet, many are unable or are afraid to face change."¹³ And while congregations grow accustomed to a certain way of doing things and cringe at the mention of change, every person recognizes that change is a part of life. All people recognize that change is an element of life. We move, change neighborhoods and schools, and accept a new position of employment. People know that "what got them

¹² Rainer, *Breakout Churches: Discover How to Make the Leap* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 23.

¹³ Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 19.

their job five years ago is not sufficient to get them their next promotion. If they hope to get ahead, they must take classes to update skills, attend seminars to network with clients, or sign up for training to raise their level of expertise.”¹⁴ The same holds true for the sports realm and “it is equally valid that what brought a church to its current level of ministry fruitfulness will not get it to the next level of growth and vitality.”¹⁵ If churches wish to reach new people, they must start new ministries. Programs and ministries become less effective over time. Yet studies reveal that leading a church through change is one of the hardest things for pastors to accomplish.

Many pastors feel as though they are cornered and unable to lead the church toward any real significant growth because of the challenges that come with leading change. Pastors are stuck because they do not want to create waves, or they are not sure how to lead change in the congregation. Many churches have operated under a specific methodology for many years and see no need to consider change. These same churches have grown suspicious of any changes in the ministry as a church growth gimmick. Christian Schwarz observes, “To them it seems to present simplistic rules and principles ‘that don’t work in the real world, anyway.’ From their point of view, mere people are trying in their own strength to do what only God can do. Whether or not this impression is right, it is the image the church growth movement has in the eyes of many believers...”¹⁶ Churches that are leery of change often point out the many bad examples of churches that compromise biblical truth. The assumption is that if the church goes down a road of change, it may go farther than it should. And while biblical faithfulness is always a concern when changes occur, churches cannot afford to resist change as the world around them changes. Rainer points out, “Most churches in America fit one of two categories:

¹⁴ Gary McIntosh, *Taking Your Church to the Next Level: What God You Here Won’t Get You There* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 15–16.

¹⁵ Ibid., 16.

¹⁶ Christian A. Schwarz, *Natural Church Development: A Guide to Eight Essential Qualities of Healthy Churches* (Carol Stream, IL: ChurchSmart Resources, 1996), 6.

Traditionalist/Resistor or Innovator/Embracer. The former model represents churches that avoid nearly all changes, and the latter describes churches that continually chase the latest fad.”¹⁷ Wise churches learn to steer clear from extremes when it comes to pursuing a process of change. Furthermore, research in church growth indicates that it requires an average of seven years to implement any significant change in the church.¹⁸

Congregation Lacks Diversity

Another mark of a dying church is the congregation is made up of one ethnicity or one generation. While location certainly has an effect on congregation demographics, dying churches that have turned their focus inward often make little effort to reach people who are different from them. Older, established churches typically have a large percentage of older believers while younger churches tend to have a higher ratio of young people.

The difference between an older and younger church is related to two aspects of life: controllability and flexibility.... Older churches typically have numerous policies and guidelines that create controls that keep the church stable. Younger churches have lower controllability, fewer rules and regulations that allow younger churches to try new ministries, stop investing in programs that don't work, and move in new directions.¹⁹

The church model of the New Testament is one that is composed of both younger and older believers. The church needs the energy and innovation of the youth as well as the wisdom and guidance of previous generations. Dying churches struggle to provide a ministry that is multi-generational and multi-ethnic.

Frequent Conflict

A final symptom of the dying church that has become inward focused, is frequent conflict. Because the dying church struggles

¹⁷ Rainer, *Breakout Churches*, 164.

¹⁸ McIntosh, *There's Hope for Your Church: First Steps to Restoring Health and Growth* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 69.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 70.

to understand the value of diversity, one area of conflict is between those who are different and who do not agree on church ministry. The younger generation often blames the older generation for the church's lack of growth, and the older generation blames the younger generation for attempting to hijack the church and take it toward an unwanted direction. Conflict exists because there is no unifying direction for the church. When leaders attempt to lead the church through change in a much-needed direction, there will always be conflict. Because there is a sense of loss experienced during the change process, some people will naturally buck against the process even if properly prepared by leadership. And there will always be a group of people who desire to take the church back to its "good ol' days." Individuals and groups who attempt to create disunity should not be tolerated. The church must make it clear that it will not ignore divisive attempts to undermine the church or the leaders who have been called to lead the congregation.

Ineffective Leadership Structure

Dying churches tend to have complex leadership structures which often prevent the church from moving forward. Most of the challenges in decision making have been created by God's servants with good intentions. For example, at its infancy, the church generally relies upon the pastor to do most of the work of the ministry. As the church becomes established, the desire is to involve more people so various committees and teams take on many leadership roles. Larger churches shift back to a centralized model of decision making by pastoral leaders. Growing churches recognize that the church will have to adjust its leadership structure at different stages of growth.

Confusion on Roles

In many older, declining churches, the assumption is that the pastor is the hired hand to do ministry. These members expect the pastor to be a part of every ministry in the church and to personally minister and care for every member. According to Henard, "They like having the pastor be available for hospital visitation, home ministry, and counseling. These issues create a

huge dilemma for the church. To grow, it must change its structures, but a change in structure means that the delivery method of ministry changes.”²⁰ Understanding the pastor do be the primary “doer” of ministry is both theologically inaccurate,²¹ as well as unrealistic. “This fact alone demonstrates why many small churches cannot get over certain attendance barriers. One person can only meet the needs of so many people, then the ministry begins to fail.”²² The church must come to understand that the pastor functions more in the role as a coach rather than a performer of ministry and that ministry tasks are to be shared by the congregation. Churches that wish to grow should invest their time in raising up ministry teams. Many seminaries train pastors to function as scholar-chaplains instead of scholar-leaders. For churches to grow, pastors will have to lead others to take on responsibility that he cannot accomplish alone. The other extreme as far as leadership structure is concerned, is when boards and committees take on a role that should be accomplished by a single leader. Stetzer notes, “We’re amazed at how many churches will put their best leaders on boards to decide things that one person should be empowered to do.”²³

It has already been mentioned that effective pastoral leadership is about equipping others for the work of the ministry. However, there is no other leadership position that can replace the God-ordained office of the pastor. Pastors and elders have been ordained by God to oversee all the affairs of the church (1 Tim 3), and they are the only ones in scripture that are held accountable (Heb 13:17) for the decisions of the church. By the very nature of their role and level of responsibility, pastors and elders should be a part of decision making and leading the future of the church rather than functioning primarily in an advisory role.

²⁰ Henard, *Can These Bones Live?*, 179–180.

²¹ Ephesians 4:11–12 defines the role of pastors as primarily equippers.

²² Henard, *Can These Bones Live?*, 178.

²³ Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 216.

Misplaced Leaders

An interesting finding by the research of Aubrey Malphurs and Gordon Penfold revealed that many of the pastors who were able to revitalize a dying church had a similar personality and giftedness.²⁴ What this might reveal is that God has gifted pastors for a particular ministry context. For example, some pastors may be better wired to start churches while other pastors would be best suited to provide stability operations in already established ministries. If it is true that certain giftedness and leadership styles have a bearing on the type of ministry pastors will be most effective at leading, then it must also be true that not every pastor will be effective at leading churches through revitalization. McIntosh notes, “As a church ages and changes size, it demands new approaches to leadership, change, programming, training, and presents a host of new challenges that must be faced.”²⁵ It requires a different leadership style at each juncture of church growth. “Unfortunately most leaders are not able to freely bounce back and forth between differing styles of leadership, which requires a succession of pastors coming and going at each transition point.”²⁶ According to Malphurs and Penfold’s estimation, 75 to 90 percent of pastors are non-re-envisioning pastors.²⁷

Plateaued Leaders

In many declining churches, pastors have exhausted their efforts at church growth. Their initial vision has waned as they have struggled to keep forward momentum.

If the church’s leaders are not experiencing a vibrant and passionate ministry, this will always trickle down to affect the congregation. The pastor “loses his dream. It may be that he had a dream for the first ten years of service. Those dreams have been fulfilled or dashed, and he has not developed a new dream.

²⁴ Aubrey Malphurs and Gordon Penfold, *Re:Vision: The Key to Transforming Your Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014), 126–131.

²⁵ McIntosh, *Taking Your Church to the Next Level*, 11.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 100.

²⁷ Malphurs and Penfold, *Re:Vision*, 126.

Therefore, the church falls into stagnation because the pastor has plateaued himself.”²⁸

High Pastoral Turn-Over

Declining churches often experience a high turnover rate of pastoral leadership. When churches struggle to hold onto pastors, this is a sure sign that problems are in play in the church. Rainer’s evaluation of churches that closed their doors revealed, “For the majority of the churches, pastors came and went at a pace of every two to three years, especially in the two decades leading to the deaths of the churches.”²⁹ A pastor would come to the church, attempt to lead the church forward, which naturally resulted in change. The people would become upset over the changes and create a difficult time for the new pastor. Eventually the pastor would give up and resign, and the cycle would start all over with the next pastor.

Lack of Vision

Declining churches often lack direction for the future of the church. Perhaps the church had an original vision in the past but as everything around the church began to change, the church failed to adapt the vision to more effective ways of reaching culture. It is important at this juncture to understand that the church’s mission never changes. The mission is what Christ has called the church to do: a timeless responsibility to reach people for the gospel and lead people to Christlikeness. However, vision involves a God-inspired vision of where a church believes it is headed to fulfill the mission. The congregation and the staff must align themselves to the church’s vision. If people are moving in multiple directions, it typically results in a church split.

No Clear Purpose

One of the first questions the church must ask in defining its vision is to determine its purpose. Why does the church exist, and what does it seek to provide for the community? The purpose is

²⁸ Henard, *Can These Bones Live?*, 54.

²⁹ Rainer, *Autopsy of a Deceased Church*, 55.

much broader than the church's mission and vision, but it is the starting point. Without understanding the purpose of the church, it will not be able to arrive at a clear God-inspired vision. The purpose of the church involves its overall intent to glorify God (Rom 15:6; 1 Cor 6:20), whereas the vision paints a clear picture of the future of the church and what it can and must be.

No Clear Discipleship Strategy

The discipleship strategy or assimilation plan provides the means by the church attempts to accomplish its vision. The discipleship strategy explains the process by which the church will lead people to become more Christ-like. It is specific and can identify where every person is currently in their relationship to Christ and what the next step is in the discipleship process. Clifton comments, "In reality, dying churches don't primarily have an attendance problem, a giving problem, or a baptism problem. They have a discipleship problem."³⁰

Slow Decline

In most cases, except for instances of a church split, dying churches experience a slow and almost unrecognizable decline. Rainer describes this process: "Slow erosion in a church takes place over a period of years, and until the leaders and members are willing to admit that a problem exists, no remedial effort is taken. Thus further erosion and even death of the church are likely."³¹ The tendency for declining churches is to cut programs that do not directly benefit the members of the church. Outreach and evangelism programs are often the first to be cut when these are actually the main source of potential growth and vitality the church needs.

Church decline comes in a variety of ways including a drop in attendance as few new members are added and older members begin to die, dwindling finances because of low attendance, and then a cut to ministry programs due to lack of personnel available to help keep the ministry running. Declining churches truly enter a downward spiral that becomes difficult to correct.

³⁰ Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory*, 7.

³¹ Rainer, *Breakout Churches*, 79.

Characteristics of Growing Churches

There is certainly no enjoyment in studying dying churches. The good news is that God is still using his church today and it will grow as it returns to his mission. Research gathered on growing churches reveal a common set of characteristics present in churches that grow.

Outward Focus

While dying churches tend to have an inward focus, growing churches tend to place value on being outwardly focused. This is not to suggest that these growing churches care less about discipleship (although some do); however, they have a noticeable passion to reach the unreached people in their communities. Their focus is often evident by their participation in community efforts. “When churches lovingly serve the communities around them, the unchurched very often are motivated to come to Christ.”³² Outward focused churches recognize that there will be a percentage of unbelievers present at the worship service, and so they find ways to connect with these unbelievers without compromising the quality of worship for believers.

Dwell on the Future

Instead of living in the past, growing churches live for the future. These churches are not committed to their past methods, but rather are open to change if it will help them to minister more effectively. “The church should continually be sensitive to the possibility that what it is doing today may not be what God would have it do tomorrow.... The community’s needs will probably change over time.... Therefore the church must be sensitive to God’s new directions and paths.”³³ Wise churches will recognize the need to regularly evaluate their methods rather than jump to the newest fads and church growth tactics. Growing churches recognize that what is considered new today may eventually become outdated and become the new “tradition.” Only by

³² Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 64.

³³ Rainer, *Breakout Churches*, 126.

having a watchful eye toward the future can the church make carefully planned and effective transitions.

Know Their Cultural Context

Those churches who are making the greatest Kingdom impact are those who spend time studying and understanding the culture that they are trying to reach. Malphurs and Penfold write,

The external environment that the Bible sometimes refers to as the world bears down on churches and can pose a threat to their very existence. Thus it is critical to the church that it learn how to cope with that constantly changing external environment. The culture that works hard at reading and adapting to these changes is more likely to survive them. If it can't or does not know how to change, it will not survive. But the church that reads and adjusts to the culture will not only survive but thrive spiritually.³⁴

Some well-meaning Christians have a misunderstanding of culture. They associate societal customs and practices with worldliness, and this has led to unfair criticism of a certain style of ministry. The misunderstanding comes in thinking that culture is inherently evil, yet culture has been around long before the fall of mankind (Gen 3:14–19). In fact, even before sin entered the world, God said that everything he had made was good and this includes culture. The very act of Jesus becoming incarnate and taking on flesh indicates that he clothed himself with culture. Jesus lived in a Jewish community, followed Jewish customs, and even dressed like those in his Jewish neighborhood. “We see that the Godhead related to and operated in a cultural context (Acts 4:24) and evidence indicates that culture will be an intrinsic part of our future in heaven (Rev. 7:9-10).”³⁵ Every one of us has been influenced by the culture in which we have been born (for good or bad), and we cannot separate ourselves from culture. We use culture to interpret our experience, order our lives, and assess appropriate behavior.

³⁴ Malphurs and Penfold, *Re:Vision*, 169.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 171.

Culture, whether a past one or a present one, has an impact on every church including its traditions. How we worship has been influenced by culture. For example, the traditional church has been modeled after a European church model with a set order of worship and buildings that include stained glass and steeples. For people influenced by this culture, only buildings that look like a church are acceptable for worship. The challenge is that even in America, churches must learn the culture where they minister. Culture extends beyond just speaking the same language. As Stetzer and Dodson observe,

Just as we'd need to learn the language, culture, context, and accepted avenues through which we could communicate the gospel overseas, we need to adapt our church to the changing culture in which God has placed us. Even though we may know the same language, we may not be speaking in ways that people can hear, understand, and believe. We never change or compromise the gospel (1 Cor. 4:6), but we communicate it clearly and with a sense of urgency to our changing culture.³⁶

Growing churches try to understand the culture of their ministry context not in order to be cool but to better connect the message of the gospel. Many churches lose their influence in their community because they have failed to recognize and adapt to a new culture.

Accept Change

Effective churches have come to expect change and have prepared themselves for change. These churches approach change not with resistance but with caution. They are careful not to change everything at once, and the things they do change always aligns with their vision. If the church fails to change, many will move on to a church that offers relevant ministry. It is easy to become defensive toward those who leave the church over consumeristic tendencies and a lack of commitment to the church. However, the reality is that we live in an American

³⁶ Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 56.

society that values quality in every aspect of our daily life. People do not hesitate to change their favorite restaurant or department store over a bad experience or poor product. Henard provides this analogy: “The analogy I use is the health club. If I am a member of a health club and a new one moves in across the street, and its equipment is better, the hours are more convenient, and the dues are the same, I am going to change my membership.”³⁷ Pastors must lead their people toward a biblical commitment to the church, yet if the church fails to offer a ministry of excellence in all that it does, people will be drawn to a better option.

Develop Effective Leaders

Growing churches multiply by multiplying their leaders. As the church grows, pastoral work becomes more demanding for full-time staff. The church will not grow if it does not learn to turn over ministry tasks to trained individuals within the church. In fact, according to Stetzer and Dodson’s research, those churches that experienced a major comeback in growth had pastors who changed their perspective on ministry from doing most of the ministry themselves to training others to do much of the pastoral work.³⁸ In addition to restructuring their ministry tasks, 62 percent of pastors who had experienced a turn-around in their churches indicated that they reached outside themselves to find the answers to revitalization.³⁹ Some of these pastors relied upon mentors or coaches, and others invested themselves in reading and research to reach the next level of growth. The bottom line is that these pastors recognized they could not take the church to the next level with their current level of understanding. Effective leaders are lifelong learners especially in a fast-changing society. Growing churches have developed an effective leadership training program so they can multiply workers and reach more people.

³⁷ Henard, *Can These Bones Live?*, 152.

³⁸ Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 42.

³⁹ Malphurs and Penfold, *Re:Vision*, 194.

Passionate About Vision and Goals

Growing churches know where they are going and never take their eyes off the vision. The vision is the motivator—it paints a clear picture of what the church will look like when it arrives or accomplishes its mission. While mission and vision are similar, the vision creates passion to accomplish the mission. Churches often have a number of mission statements, goals, or biblical purposes on paper, but this does not necessarily indicate that the church has adopted a vision. Vision is more than a statement on paper; it is an overwhelming conviction within to make disciples of Christ. If the average member of the church cannot recite the vision of the church without the pastor's input, it is likely the vision has not been received even though it may be published in church documents. Every area of the church's ministry is influenced by the vision.

Grow by Being Small

As churches get bigger over time, the close family feel becomes lost in the increasing structure and size of meetings. Growing churches understand that growth generally happens when people are in close relationship with one another. The worship service is not designed to offer discipleship even though the Bible is taught. The biblical model of discipleship is one that incorporates others into our lives for edification and growth. While corporate worship is a function of the church, pastors of growing churches understand the value of small groups. Rainer comments, "Breakout churches understand that church members must get connected with a small group for them to grow in spiritual health and to remain connected with the church. Members who are involved in worship services alone tend to drift toward inactivity."⁴⁰ Because there is such a great emphasis on small groups, many churches are now hiring small group pastors to ensure that the small group ministry reaches the goals of the church. It is becoming rare today to see a large, growing church without some form of small group ministry.

⁴⁰ Rainer, *Breakout Churches*, 106.

PART 2

UNDERSTANDING AND PURSUING GROWTH

Churches go through various stages of life as they age and develop into more sustainable ministries. Pastors should become aware of the unique needs at each stage of the church's development to prepare the church for potential challenges and to help it remain healthy during the growing process.

The Church Life Cycle and Growth

Every living organism goes through a particular life cycle which includes birth, maturity, and eventual death. Churches and organizations also face a similar situation. "One major difference exists between the human life cycle and that of an organization. In the human life cycle, decline is inevitable.... In the organizational life cycle, decline is not inevitable—only probable."⁴¹ Pastors often find themselves stuck in the ministry, unable to move beyond the current stage of growth. Understanding the church life cycle helps pastors in the following ways: (1) if they are on the growth side of the life cycle, they will be aware of the pitfalls and challenges ahead of them; (2) if they are on the decline side of the life cycle, they will understand what got the church there in the first place and then the uphill battle they must resolve in order to lead the church back to growth. A number of stages have been presented for the church life cycle; however, most agree that the following stages below are included in the life cycle.

⁴¹ McIntosh, *Taking Your Church to the Next Level*, 25.

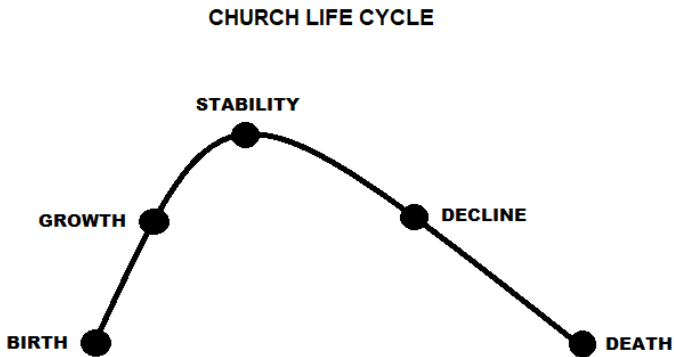


FIG. 1. The Church Life Cycle⁴²

Stage 1: Birth

The birth stage of the church life cycle is a very exciting time in the life of the church. This first stage is usually a life transforming experience for the founding pastor and the launch team. A lot of work goes into discerning the first vision of the church as well as the structure plans to make it happen. The significance of this stage is that the church begins with a clean slate without any prior traditions dictating how the church should minister. The values, goals, and purpose of the church are clearly defined. Because of the clarity of purpose, there is generally intentional outreach and effectiveness at generating interest in the community and attracting new members. The challenges in this stage mostly consist of proper planning, limited space and resources, and thinking toward the next stage of greater growth and impact.

Stage 2: Growth

The second stage of the church life cycle is usually characterized by increased membership, activity, and funding. The church's mission and vision are further shaped as it begins

⁴² For more information about the Church life cycle, see McIntosh, *Taking Your Church to the Next Level*, 30.

to lay permanent roots in the community. Building programs and renovation are a reality and the church refines its programs and ministries to meet the needs of the congregation. New ideas are welcomed, and creativity is needed to reach families who are becoming a part of the church. Increased ministry demands additional staff members, and the church becomes more formalized as an established organization.

Stage 3: Stability

By this stage, the church has acquired a permanent facility. Energy that was once devoted to outreach begins to shift toward maintaining the current ministry. Traditions and practices become more established and routine. Growth has leveled off at this stage; however, decline is not a real concern because there are enough people still coming to replace those who leave or die. Finances are adequate to operate the church's ministry and provide for staffing needs. Facilities are adequate for the number of people who are attending the church. Members are generally satisfied with the way things are going without any need to make changes. The stability stage is a very dangerous phase of the church life cycle. Because the church appears to be operating smoothly even with periodic high points, the church fails to identify ways in which it is growing sluggish and monotonous which becomes clearly obvious to newcomers.

Stage 4: Decline

If the church does not become aware of the potential pitfalls and challenges of stage 3, it will inevitably experience stage 4. The church begins to struggle with a decreasing membership which results in budget shrinks, deferred building maintenance, staff cuts, and few professions of faith and baptism. Because this stage is often a long and slow decline, the problems may go unnoticed for a period. As an institution grows, it moves through phases toward increased institutionalization characterized by increasing bureaucracy, eventually becoming less effective and

collapsing under its own weight.⁴³ Denial becomes a coping mechanism for those long-time church members who have seen better days in the life of the church. Leaders blame the community for a lack of commitment to the church and conclude that people are no longer interested in spiritual growth. Divisions often erupt over what has led to the decline with many members holding on to past days of success. The warning signs can only go ignored for so long before the church must come to grasp that it is operating in survival mode.

Stage 5: Death

Unfortunately, churches that were once influential and thriving in their communities do die. This can be a very difficult process for long-time members who have witnessed the past days of the church. While death ends the life cycle of the church, it does not have to be a totally negative experience. First, death is a natural process that is characteristic of every living thing. We can appreciate the accomplishments and the ways in which God used the church to further the kingdom by reaching people for Christ and providing discipleship during its lifetime. Second, when a church prepares to die, it can make some important decisions regarding leaving an inheritance that can serve as a lasting legacy. "Like other organisms, churches tend to grow fastest in the earliest stages, reproduce frequently during their maturing years and hopefully assist as wise, generous, and loving grandparents during their final years."⁴⁴

Natural Church Growth

Many pastors and churches are uncomfortable talking about church growth. To these believers, church growth means focusing on the externals using a business-like approach to church ministry. Yet, growth is a natural process for any healthy living organism. We do not make ourselves grow, that is an automatic process no matter how much we eat or how many

⁴³ David O. Moberg, *The Church as a Social Institution: The Sociology of American Religion* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1962), 118.

⁴⁴ Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory*, xvi.

supplements we take. “In applying this idea to the life of a congregation, it indicates that certain developments appear to happen ‘all by themselves’ or ‘automatically.’ Christians, however, know—even though it cannot be proven empirically—that the fruit that develops seemingly all by itself is, in reality, a work of God.”⁴⁵ Natural church growth development is not so much focused on creating growth, but on healthy environments that will foster natural growth. Natural church growth focuses on quality, recognizing that higher quality directly results in higher quantity. Farmers cannot make their crops grow; however, they can address issues that contribute to growth such as soil quality and proper husbandry. Natural church growth development recognizes that church growth is a by-product of a healthy environment, whereas decline is the by-product of an unhealthy environment.

If quality is so essential to the health of the church, then how do we measure a church’s quality index in order to assess the health of the congregation? “Since fruit—according to both biology and the Bible—is visible, we are able to check on the quality of an organism (or church) by examining its fruit. Natural church development has two levels of questions about fruit. One level is quality: How high is the quality index? The other level is quantity: Is the church growing or multiplying?”⁴⁶ Church health and not numbers, should be the measuring tool by which churches can gauge the spiritual life of the congregation. Increased worship attendance is not the end goal, but increased worship attendance is a natural by-product of quality improvement. Church quality control must become a routine function to determine the health of the church. Some church leaders may have a difficult time admitting that the church needs to be evaluated. Yet, church evaluation happens all the time. Consider the couple who in conversation on the way home discuss the service or the issues in the children’s department. The reality is that church evaluation happens every Sunday whether we accept it or not. If you want to know how your ministry is doing, check the vital signs.

⁴⁵ Schwarz, *Natural Church Development*, 12.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 76.

Revitalizing Dying Churches

The statistics tell us that there are more declining churches today than growing churches. How can pastors lead their churches back to fruitfulness and growth experienced in the early stages of the church's life cycle?

Understand the Challenges in Church Revitalization

Even though pastors love their congregations and want to see them flourish, they must discern whether they are the ones to actually lead their church toward revitalization. Not every pastor is wired to lead a church through the revitalization process. Some pastors are best equipped to be a church planter and others to lead growing ministries. They must discover if they are gifted to be a revitalization pastor and then they must decide if they can handle the unique challenges that come with turning a church around. Clifton observes, "Pastors risk their reputations, their livelihoods, and their emotional health when they get involved in struggling churches."⁴⁷ Revitalization pastors are putting themselves into conflict as any attempt at change will necessarily create resistance among the congregation. Church revitalization certainly isn't for the faint of heart, and it will exact a toll on both the pastor and his family.

Develop a Renewed Vision for the Church

While the church most likely had a vision at some point in its early history, a renewed vision will be needed to move the church forward. McIntosh tells where vision begins: "Rarely does God give vision to a committee, a board, or a team of people. These groups are important, but they typically serve to help a leader shape and form a vision rather than discover it. So if you are a pastor, vision begins with you."⁴⁸ "Committees, deacons, trustees, and Bible study teachers all play an important role in a church. But none of these are called to exercise oversight for the Chief Shepherd as those who will give an account (Heb. 13:17).

⁴⁷ Clifton, *Reclaiming Glory*, 12.

⁴⁸ McIntosh, *There's Hope for Your Church*, 76.

Only pastors are given that charge.”⁴⁹ The vision must include an outward focus and desire to get back to reaching the community. The pastor will lead the way in creating a new culture in the life of the church.

Implement a Strategic Development Team

Malphurs and Penfold give advice for establishing a development team: “Once you have determined your new culture, you will need to implement it. You accomplish this by recruiting a strategic development team, consisting of no more than nine key leaders in the church. Next, use this team to discover your core values and develop your mission and vision statements along with a strategy to implement them in the church.”⁵⁰ The role of this team is to evaluate the church in light of its vision and mission and to determine the church’s weakness. The team will report to the congregation on the results of its investigation and propose ways the church can move forward in growth. The team will assess everything in the life of the church that could be posing as a stumbling block to growth including facility deficiencies and ministries that may need to be overhauled or discontinued. An alternative would be to hire an outside consultant who would be able to give the church an analysis of its problems.

Deal with Difficult People

Once the church has embraced its new vision, mission, and purpose, difficult people will begin to appear who oppose the new direction of the church. Revitalization requires leaders to make difficult decisions. Leaders must not tolerate divisiveness and difficult people. They must make it known that such behavior will be dealt with accordingly. Pastors tend to avoid conflict, hoping the problem will go away; however, rarely does a problem get resolved until it is addressed. “Accept any and all resignations immediately whenever someone threatens to leave.

⁴⁹ Brian Croft and Harry L. Reeder, *Biblical Church Revitalization: Solutions for Dying and Divided Churches* (Fearn, Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 2016), 65.

⁵⁰ Malphurs and Penfold, *Re:Vision*, 181.

Thank them for their service but accept the resignation.”⁵¹ The goal is to move forward with those who come on board with the church’s new vision.

Restore Passionate Worship

In almost all declining churches, worship has become mundane and no longer passionate. Growing churches have enthusiastic worship services where people leave having experienced a freshness from God. Passionate worship does not have to be contemporary in style, but it must be creative and draw people into the very presence of God. “Almost all comeback churches identified their mood of worship as celebrative and orderly (96% and 95%, respectively) with a significant emphasis on being informal and contemporary (81% and 69%, respectively).”⁵² When worship is inspiring it will draw people to the services.

Invest in Young Leaders

Many churches overlook the potential in training young leaders. Churches tend not to involve young adults because of their immaturity and lack of knowledge. However, young leaders will be able to help the church read the culture better and understand vital areas the church can use to have a more effective presence in the community. If churches do not provide opportunities for young leaders, younger individuals will eventually leave and find a new ministry where they are given the opportunity to lead.

Implement Change Slowly

Before pastors can lead their churches in the revitalization process, they must prepare their people for change. They must help their people with the reality that unless something changes in the life of the church, the church will continue toward a path of decline and eventual death. Revitalization pastors recognize that the established church is deep in traditions and customs, and

⁵¹ McIntosh, *There's Hope for Your Church*, 112.

⁵² Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 78.

they know that change will take time. Pastors must remove the hazards that effectively stand in the way of making it difficult to proceed and they cannot do it alone. A theology of change consists of understanding function, forms, and freedom. Function is what the church does such as worship, evangelism, and fellowship and addresses the purpose of the church. Function never changes. Forms, however, must change to stay relevant to current culture. Forms include the church's worship style (traditional, contemporary, etc.) as well as outreach and discipleship methods. Freedom refers to the flexibility in how the church decides to accomplish the functions.⁵³ Many people are uncomfortable with change because of the fear of pragmatism. Leaders will need to provide assurance to the congregation that all changes will fall within certain biblical parameters. Pastors must rely on other leaders in the church to support and implement the process. Even as leaders make changes in the church, they cannot completely remove the past. The right approach involves holding on to the old church while simultaneously building a new one. It may take a minimum of seven to ten years to revitalize a dying church.⁵⁴

Decide to Stay as Long as Possible

Because it takes time to make any significant progress in church revitalization, the pastor must determine to commit to staying with the church as long as possible. It is unfair to assume that he should never leave because the church may enter a new stage of life that requires a new leader with different capabilities who can take it to the next level. However, pastors should realize that short tenures often stunt church growth especially if the church is already in the process of change. Of those breakout churches studied by Thom Rainer, the staff had an average tenure of 12.5 years.⁵⁵

⁵³ Malphurs and Penfold, *Re:Vision*, 208.

⁵⁴ Henard, *Can These Bones Live?*, 89.

⁵⁵ Rainer, *Breakout Churches*, 98.

When the Church Refuses to Revitalize

Perhaps what is most discouraging is not that churches die, but rather that churches choose to die rather than revitalize. It is easier for churches to close their doors than to admit a problem exists and deal with the challenges that have led to decline. These churches would rather close their door than deal with change.⁵⁶ God can only revitalize a church as the congregation becomes willing to make difficult decisions regarding the future and seek his glory and direction above all. If the church cannot come to a place of agreement on revitalization, a few options are possible.

Replant

In a replant, the church closes for a time with the intent to restart at a later date. The difference is that the replant is essentially a new church. Everything about the original established church is put aside as the church operates from a clean slate. The replant involves a change in leadership, includes building renovation or relocation to have an effective presence in the community, and a new vision for the church. One of the greatest challenges to this option is that the original church must reach an agreement to disband and re-assemble under a new method and direction. Replant church candidates are often churches that have declined to the point of desperation as closing the church becomes a reality. The church decides to make a last-ditch effort to save what it has or face imminent death.⁵⁷

Death with Dignity

The final option for the church that refuses to revitalize is to die with dignity. The church agrees to totally disband as a church and give away its building and remaining assets. “This thought should not be threatening at all, if the given church or group has produced four ‘children,’ sixteen ‘grandchildren,’ and fifty-four ‘great-grandchildren! In God’s creation, the ‘genetic

⁵⁶ McIntosh, *Taking Your Church to the Next Level*, 79.

⁵⁷ For additional information and resources on replanting a church two helpful organizations are North American Mission Board (www.namb.net/church-replanting) and Acts 29 Network (www.acts29.com/what-is-replanting/).

information' remains and reproduces itself, though individual organisms may die."⁵⁸ The church can give its building to a new church plant in the area, or it can donate it to an existing church that could use the facility.⁵⁹

Either option is a very painful choice for the dying church, but it is choosing to invest in ways that benefit the Kingdom by sacrificially giving so that another church may live.

CONCLUSION

Missiologist and church health researchers Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson believe that "most of the churches in North America need a new approach, a new philosophy, and a new passion. Yet, most will not make the change. Most of those that try will not succeed. Why? Because too many pastors will see the need for change but will be unable to convince their churches to make the changes that are necessary."⁶⁰ Satan would have nothing more than to see that the Christian church become less effective for the Kingdom and enter a phase of slumber in the Christian life.

Church revitalization is not about building larger buildings that can hold more people. Church revitalization is about making an impact that reaches beyond former days of ministry. Revitalization is a very challenging task, but it is not an impossible one. "Churches can experience renewal at any point in their life cycle. However, the older a church becomes and the later in the life cycle renewal is attempted, the more difficult it is to see true resurgence of growth and vitality."⁶¹

Churches must come to understand why they have reached a point of decline and then be willing to take the necessary steps toward greater health and Kingdom impact. God is faithful to his church, and as the church returns to a vision of disciple-making and pushing back the darkness in the community, it can then

⁵⁸ Schwarz, *Natural Church Development*, 69.

⁵⁹ For further information on closing the church and donating its resources, see Stephen Gray and Franklin Dumond, *Legacy Churches* (St. Charles, IL: Churchsmart Resources, 2009).

⁶⁰ Stetzer and Dodson, *Comeback Churches*, 29.

⁶¹ McIntosh, *Taking Your Church to the Next Level*, 33.

expect to experience growth unlike anything in former days. “And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved” (Acts 2:47).

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Advances in the Study of Biblical Hebrew and Aramaic: New Insights for Reading the Old Testament. By Benjamin J. Noonan. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2020. 336 pp. Softcover \$26.77.

Benjamin Noonan is an emerging scholar in the field of OT Hebrew studies. He teaches Hebrew and Old Testament courses at Columbia International University (SC), having received his training from Wheaton College (B.S., M.A.) and Hebrew Union College (M.Phil., Ph.D.). At Hebrew Union, he studied under the able guidance of leading Semiticist Stephen A. Kaufman of the Comparative Philology mold who is a leading contributor to the Comprehensive Aramaic Lexicon Project. Noonan has also worked closely with Hélène Dallaire, Professor of Old Testament and Semitic Languages at Denver Seminary, who penned the foreword for this book. Noonan is a member of the Evangelical Theological Society (he serves on the Pentateuch Program Unit Steering Committee), Institute for Biblical Research, Society of Biblical Literature, and National Association of Hebrew Professors. He has previously published two other works via Eisenbrauns, a scholarly branch of Pennsylvania State University Press that specializes in Ancient Near East studies, biblical studies, and archaeology, Assyriology, linguistics, and related fields. This resume more than qualifies Noonan to write his latest work, titled *Advances in the Study of Biblical Hebrew and Aramaic: New Insights for Reading the Old Testament*. Though also academic in nature, *Advances* marks Noonan's first foray into mainstream publication and provides a much-needed survey of current, noteworthy developments, questions, and trends in biblical Hebrew and Aramaic scholarship. Endorsements by reputable scholars like Robert Chisholm, Jr., Peter Gentry, and Miles Van Pelt authenticate its value, and it serves as the complementary volume to *Advances in the Study of Greek* by Constantine Campbell with a foreword by D. A. Carson (2015).

In the front matter, Noonan's concise introduction explains the purpose and rationale for the book, including his desired outcomes. He then presents 10 informative chapters that average 21 pages in length and address the following topics:

- Linguistics and linguistic theories
- History of biblical Hebrew and Aramaic studies
- Lexicology and lexicography (the study of word meaning and the formation of dictionaries)
- Verbal stems
- Tense, aspect, and mood
- Discourse analysis
- Word order
- Register, dialect, style-shifting, and code-switching
- Dating biblical Hebrew and Aramaic texts
- Teaching and learning Hebrew and Aramaic

Though he gives each subject thoughtful treatment, Noonan reserves his most extensive discussion for discourse analysis, followed by verbal stems second, then tense, aspect, and mood third. Giving increased attention to discourse analysis seems appropriate since it has emerged as a relatively new yet promising dimension of biblical interpretation.

The reader will appreciate Noonan's clear format and style. He arranges the chapters in a logical manner and numbers chapter sections and subsections as far as five levels deep, making it easy to trace your progress or return to information that interests you. Each chapter opens with a concise, three-paragraph introduction followed by a methodical explanation of key concepts, impactful developments, and noteworthy contributors. At appropriate junctures in each chapter, Noonan pauses to offer what may be the book's most valuable benefit, an evaluation of the advances he has traced. These evaluations culminate with a concluding section for each chapter entitled "The Ways Forward." The sections and subsections move from observation and analysis to synthesis and recommendation by highlighting especially crucial advancements, pressing questions, and promising avenues of further study to explore. The book ends with a brief conclusion.

Noonan's end matter features an impressive bibliography of approximately 900 sources. This vast inventory includes what seems to be everything from major, standby works and relevant articles by reputable influencers to pertinent dissertations by otherwise obscure scholars from around the world. This bibliography, in conjunction

with meticulous footnotes throughout the book, provides the reader with a massive intersection of pooled knowledge that will be invaluable for anyone doing serious research in the field of biblical Hebrew and Aramaic. The end matter also includes a one-page Scripture Index, a detailed subject index (with secondary levels), and a four-page author index.

Biblical Hebrew and Aramaic studies present an imposing and somewhat abstract spectrum of information that exceeds what any one person can comprehend in a cohesive way. Noonan's *Advances* has made a significant advance of its own towards tackling this daunting task of analyzing and synthesizing the current state of the many branches within this field in a way that feels both manageable and understandable. If Noonan had produced a complicated and erudite book, readers would certainly acquiesce due to the challenging nature of his subject. Surprisingly, though, he has not. He has presented a wide range of complex and even subjective knowledge, opinions, and research in an accessible, engaging, reasonable, and orderly way.

It seems unreasonable for me to critique Noonan at all since his accomplishments and expertise in the Hebrew Old Testament eclipse mine enormously (to say the least). What's more, my knowledge of biblical Hebrew and Aramaic has expanded significantly by reading this book, and I will likely read it again, whether in whole in or part. That said, I will offer the following measured critiques in the spirit of a complete review.

First, though a book like this requires the use of technical jargon, Noonan provides helpful definitions and explanations for specialized words along the way. Even so, a second edition would benefit from adding a concentrated glossary of terms in the end matter.

Regarding a second edition, footnote 56 in chapter 10 needs amended since it leads to a defunct WordPress site. To access the ASI Hebrew Bible by Audio Scriptures International (which he recommends), visit <https://listen.talkingbibles.org/language/heb/> or <https://www.mechon-mamre.org/p/pt/ptmp3prq.htm> instead.

Second, for whatever reason, Noonan omits the nine-part Eisenbrauns series, *History, Archaeology, and Culture of the Levant*, which would seem to offer relevant insights for advances in biblical

Hebrew lexicology. This is a minor critique for sure since he demonstrates an unquestionably voluminous perspective.

Third, several times on pages 228–232 Noonan refers to “the P source” in his discussion of dating the Hebrew texts. In doing so, he recognizes the traditional scholarly consensus and approach of dividing the Old Testament by “source” rather than by book alone. He does not promote the JEDP theory himself because he accepts the Bible’s self-claims regarding authorship/editing and believes the assumptions of source criticism may not always apply and may also not accurately reflect ancient Near Eastern practices of authorship and writing. For the record, Noonan prefers an approach akin to that of Richard S. Hess, who in his *Israelite Religions: An Archaeological and Biblical Survey* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007) evaluates classical source criticism, notes its shortcomings, and concludes: “The abiding value of the Documentary Hypothesis is the manner in which various types of Pentateuchal literature have been identified” (59). In Noonan’s own words, “Even if the assumptions of classical source criticism are wrong, the Documentary Hypothesis reminds us that the Pentateuch contains a variety of (although not necessarily contradictory) emphases and concerns because it encompasses a variety of different genres and deals with a variety of topics” (personal correspondence). Thanks to Dr. Noonan for providing this clarification by email and for granting me permission to include it in this review.

These critiques aside, *Advances* stakes its claim as an indispensable resource for anyone studying biblical Hebrew or Aramaic at the graduate or postgraduate level and should be essential reading for any doctoral program focused on OT exegesis, interpretation, and exposition. It will heighten students’ awareness of key concepts and issues and enable them to coordinate their research with recent advances and pertinent resources. *Advances* is also an indispensable resource for anyone teaching in this field since it brings the reader up to date with current progress and research beyond what former training provided. Even the most advanced scholar will enhance their perspective from Noonan’s encyclopedic collation of data. With this book, Noonan not only brings the reader up to date on the state of biblical Hebrew and Aramaic scholarship, but he impacts the reader in a similar way to D. A. Carson’s acclaimed *Exegetical*

Fallacies. He alerts us to how little we know and therefore encourages us to read and interpret the Old Testament with more prayerful humility and dutiful study. For that reason alone, this book deserves a resounding, heartfelt recommendation.

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Understanding Old Testament Theology: Mapping the Terrain of Recent Approaches. By Brittany Kim and Charlie Trimm. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020. 192 pp. Softcover \$19.99.

Brittany Kim (professor at North Park Theological Seminary) and Charlie Trimm (associate professor of biblical and theological studies at Talbot School of Theology, Biola University) begin their *Understanding Old Testament Theology* by describing the consistent neglect and frustration most Christians feel when approaching the Old Testament, leaving them unable to understand “how God is speaking to them through the Old Testament” (1). In response, the authors “seek to address this problem by offering a guide through the maze of publications in the field” (4). They do this by describing seven different approaches to Old Testament theology that is subdivided into the book’s three major sections. The first section (chapters one and two) seeks to describe those methods which focus on the historical aspect of the Old Testament, while the second (chapters three and four) describes two approaches which focus on tracing one or more themes through the corpus. The final section is titled “Context” and describes Canonical, Jewish, and Postmodern approaches. Each chapter is described by common features that Old Testament theologians share when employing that particular approach, as well as a section on points of tension among those within that particular method. A test case evaluating an Old Testament Theologian’s interpretation of Exodus concludes each chapter.

The first method discussed is that which seeks to deal with the Old Testament grounded in “Biblical (Hi)story” which “focuses on the progressive historical development of Israel and its faith according to the biblical presentation” (13). This method is different than the view of the chapter which follows it, that of the Historical Critical Method, but the title of the chapter seems out of place when compared to the rather straightforward and more properly academic titles of other views. By placing the “Hi” of history in parentheses, it seems to distract from the actual content of the chapter. Perhaps a better title would be that of “Narrative historiography” since the authors believe that most of the views they summarize seek to deal with both the historical aspect of the Old Testament as well as its narrative presentation. The second chapter describes the historical critical method well and notes the widespread influence of this method on Old Testament studies. The authors remain more than charitable to the historical critical methods, though they note that it has caused some, particularly Von Rad and Schmid, to doubt the historicity of the Biblical accounts (44, 46). The third chapter, discussing the multiplex theme propagated by Hasel questions how one should delineate the themes to be traced in OT theology (62) and well as what interpretive methods should be employed (67). The central theme approach of chapter four lists some common central themes, for which there is no consensus, and notes the difficulty of handling non-narrative literature. For the canonical approach, the author’s draw attention to questions regarding which canon should be analyzed and bring to focus the emphasis on the history of interpretation (103). The chapter on Jewish Old Testament theology brings into question “whether it even exists” (119). Some Jewish theologians believe that this field is a purely Christian endeavor, and even if there is a place for Jewish theologians in the discussion, there is still the matter of the exact role of post-biblical Jewish material (119, 121). Postmodern Old Testament Theology focuses on the role of the interpreter, their communities, and subjective experiences, and particularly power dynamics. The main question around postmodern theologies is to what extent the Bible should be deconstructed (138), and how to handle the divergent interpretive methods and conclusions.

Throughout the work the authors are extremely cordial towards all the methods employed. They seek to offend no one, and simply bring questions which warrant answers for each method. No one method was singled out for scathing rebuke, and none was offered as a particularly worthy method to employ in the future. The authors end their work with a review of each method in summarized form and a discussion on works which seek to perform OT theology on smaller levels and larger levels (151–152). Finally, the author’s “suggest that you should first determine which approach most deeply resonates with you and then select one of the paths found in this book that leads to that peak” (157). Though this approach is safe for the authors, it would seem to minimize the inherent difficulties within certain approaches. For example, if post-modern theologies are employed and studied, would one then be removing the locus of meaning outside of the author and his original audience? If one espoused the historical critical method, would they be endangering their own faith as they come to doubt the historical reliability of the scriptural account? While Kim and Trimm’s work serves as a good introduction to multiple approaches, their concluding exhortation would seem dangerous and could have devastating effects if everyone simply does Old Testament Theology as is right in their own eyes instead of critically evaluating the methodological foundations that undergird such approaches with an eye towards their logical end point.

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Raised on the Third Day: Defending the Historicity of the Resurrection of Jesus. Ed. W. David Beck and Michael R. Licona. Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2020. 392 pp. Softcover \$26.99.

This festschrift consisting of eighteen essays compiled by David Beck and Michael Lincona bears tribute to the extensive research and prolific writing of Dr. Gary R. Habermas on the resurrection of

Christ. Habermas is considered by many to be the foremost scholar and authority on the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Of the eighteen contributors to this festschrift, statements such as the following bear testimony to the scholarship of Habermas:

Robert B. Stewart: "I am not aware of anyone who has studied the historicity of the resurrection of Jesus longer and more deeply than Gary Habermas has." (1)

J P. Moreland: "But by far the greatest thing that happened to me during my sojourn at Liberty was meeting, befriending, and laboring alongside Gary Habermas ... the top expert on Jesus' resurrection." (15)

David Baggett: "If I were to picture the array of apologetic resources as a star-studded baseball team, the case for the resurrection would likely reside at the center of the diamond as the prize pitcher. Nobody can take the mound and make that pitch better than Gary Habermas." (105)

Furthermore, in the introduction Lincona and Beck state, "This volume was a labor of love to honor our colleague and friend Gary Habermas. His accomplishments in apologetics, especially his work on the resurrection of Jesus, puts him at the very top of his field" (ix). Thus, this collection of essays honoring Habermas is, in the words of Habermas himself, "the absolutely outstanding lineup of scholars.... Further, the volume's topics largely revolve around the research areas that I have pursued most over the years.... The scholars' competencies are off the charts, and the chosen topics likewise. I have nothing but admiration for the exceptional job done by editors Beck and Lincona" (xiii–xiv).

I found some essays more interesting and edifying than others, specifically those of Stewart, Bock, and Lincona. Admittedly, many were above my paygrade and difficult for me to process or even appreciate, such as Moreland's discussion on near death experiences (NDE) and substance dualism (SD), and Beck's on the logical structure of moral arguments. Those who are more given to philosophical thought and content would no doubt benefit from a

study of these topics, but I found them ponderous at best. However, I was intrigued by the two essays of focusing on the Shroud of Turin by Foreman (37–60) and Schwortz (201–224). Overall, I found Bock’s essay on women witnesses at the empty tomb, Lincona’s on the primacy of Paul’s discussions on Jesus’ resurrection, and Turek’s evaluation of Habermas to be the most beneficial. This is not to minimize the value of the other fifteen essays, but from a pastoral perspective these three were the most helpful to me.

Bock writes, “It is often said that women could not be witnesses in the Jewish ancient world. This point is applied to the resurrection empty tomb accounts and the kerygmatic event tied to them” (257). Bock’s premise is that since women were the lone witnesses to the initial awareness of an empty tomb and alone heard the angelic announcement of Jesus’ resurrection, then this bears weighty evidence to the historicity of the resurrection versus being a fabrication. Bock writes, “A fabricated story about the empty tomb would have a very different character, given the cultural hurdles already existing in the claim of resurrection. The women are in the story because they were at the event” (260–61). Amen!

Lincona’s essay offers four reasons for viewing the apostle Paul as our best ancient source for answering the most important questions related to Jesus’ resurrection. They are as follows:

- Paul’s letters are early.
- Paul had been an enemy of the early Christians.
- Paul provides a link to the preaching of the Jerusalem apostles.
- Paul’s teachings on Jesus’ resurrection are consistent with the resurrection narratives.

Turek shares five tools that help historians mine nuggets of truth out of what might be considered largely unreliable texts:

- Multiple independent sources
- Enemy attestation
- Embarrassing testimony
- Eyewitness testimony
- Early testimony

Frank Turek concludes his essay with words that summarize the essence of Habermas's life and work, and this festschrift: "Gary Habermas's life work on the resurrection makes belief in that comforting hope a lot more certain. What work could be important than that? Thank you, Gary!" (338). Amen and amen!

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John: Volume 2A (Zondervan Illustrated Bible Background Commentary). By Craig S. Keener. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019. 272 pp. Hardcover \$29.99.

If you happen to pick up a Bible Background commentary, the odds are you will see the name Craig S. Keener somewhere in it either as the author or a primary contributor. His first such commentary was the *IVP Bible Background New Testament* which was published in 2014 and has sold more than a half million copies. He was also a primary contributor to the well-received *Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible* published in 2016. One can see, then, that Keener is a well-suited author for the volume on John's Gospel in the *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Background Commentary* series.

It was truly a delight to read through this volume, not only because of my personal interest in the Gospel of John, but also because of the high quality of photographic images, the durable glossy pages, and its informative content. Keener writes concisely, yet the reader is satisfied with his comprehensiveness of the background information he presents.

As for the layout and organization of the material, there are 16 pages of front matter (Table of Contents; Introduction by Clint Arnold, General Editor of the series; List of Sidebars; List of Charts; Index of Photos and Maps; and Abbreviations) and 39 pages of back matter (Annotated Bibliography, End Notes, Sidebar and Chart Notes, and Credits for Photos and Maps). This leaves 217 pages of commentary proper. After a brief five pages of standard introductory

matters (standard for any New Testament book, e.g., author, date, setting, etc.), Keener jumps right into the background material of the biblical text. He covers the whole book section by section, first by a major division and then by a series of subdivisions within that. Perhaps it will give a clearer picture by showing the reader how Keener provides the background material to John chapter 2, which he covers in about seven-and-a-half pages of material with just two major divisions and their respective subdivisions. Here is his outline below:

Jesus' Wine Sign (2:1–11)

The third day (2:1)
 Cana (2:1)
 Invited to the wedding (2:2)
 Jesus' mother (2:2)
 Nor more wine (2:3)
 Woman (2:4)
 Why do you involve me? (2:4)
 My hour (2:4)
 Servants (2:5)
 Do whatever he tells you (2:5)
 Stone water jars (2:6)
 Master of the banquet (2:8)
 The servants ... knew (2:9)
 The choice wine (2:10)
 Revealed his glory (2:11)

The Raising of a New Temple (2:12–25)

Capernaum (2:12)
 Went up to Jerusalem (2:13)
 Exchanging money (2:14)
 Whip (2:15)
 Sheep and cattle (2:15)
 A market (2:16)
 Zeal for your house (2:17)
 Prove your authority (2:18)
 Destroy this temple (2:19)
 Raise it again (2:19)
 In three days (2:19)
 Forty-six years (2:20)
 After...recalled (2:22)
 Not entrust himself (2:24)
 Knew what was in each person (2:25)

A glance at the headings above reveals that Keener has dealt with virtually every aspect of the chapter—certainly everything that significantly affects the proper understanding of the background. The length of each subdivision varies, ranging from a brief paragraph (ca. 25 words) to longer paragraphs (ca. 200 words). Even though this is a snapshot of just one chapter in John's Gospel, I would venture to say it is representative throughout. To be sure, there are longer paragraphs elsewhere, but not significantly so. Topics that require more detailed treatment or elaboration, Keener tends to place in a sidebar chart. [Note: There are a total of 64 sidebar charts covering such things as Samaritans, Holy Sites, Temple Guards, The Pool of

Siloam, Begging in Antiquity, Sheep Pens and Gates, The Sanhedrin, Footwashing, The Vine, Pruning, Historicity of Jesus' Trial, Pilate, and many others.]

Interspersed throughout the commentary are high resolution images, which one would expect in an *illustrated* book. Again, limiting it to just the commentary on John 2, Keener provides for the first major division (Jesus' Wine Sign) a photo image of what stone water jars from the first century would have looked like. In the second subdivision, he provides a color map of Galilee, Samaria, and Judea (which is the geographic area under consideration in the text), as well as an aerial view of the remains of a Capernaum synagogue. In addition, he provides a two-page spread of color photos, images, and drawings of the following: A Warning Inscription (photo), A Model of the Jerusalem Temple (photo of temple proper and the courts), Herod's Temple Mount (color drawing), Tyrian shekels (image), Jerusalem Temple cutaway (drawing), the Holy Place (drawing of top and side view), and the Ark of the Covenant (drawing). But then he ends the section with a "Reflections" inset (described below).

There are a total of twenty-one "Reflections" (one in every chapter). Essentially, these are practical applications and exhortations designed to encourage readers to put this information to practical use in their Christian life. Perhaps an example will give the reader a taste of what these are like. Here is the brief reflection by Keener from John 9:

Afraid of being ostracized from their community, some were afraid to speak the truth about Jesus. Yet we know that eternity hangs on him. How can we counter the influence of peer pressure and other pressures to be silent about Jesus? Granted that we must share him lovingly and gently, but are we willing to suffer ostracism when people respond with hostility? (97)

This commentary is a great resource for any Bible student. I do, however, want to mention one criticism. There is no complete bibliography of sources cited. This was personally inconvenient to me since there was a particular reference I wanted to access, but when

I referenced the end note, I discovered that it was the shortened citation of the source. The full bibliographic detail is provided only at its first citation. Every time after, a shortened form is used (i.e., last name, abbreviated title, page number). Since I could not cross-reference it with a master bibliography, I had to comb through all the previous end notes searching for the very first citation of the source. It was a cumbersome and time-consuming task, but I did, at last, find it. My recommendation for the editors is to correct this in a future edition.

In sum, this volume is a worthy addition to the library of all Bible students who desire to increase their understanding of the Fourth Gospel. As with any background commentary, its benefit will extend beyond the book under consideration, making it profitable for NT studies in general, since many other NT books share much of the same background. By the same token, much of the material is unique to John, making this volume highly profitable for the study of the John's Gospel in particular. With all these considerations, I heartily endorse this volume.

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Analyzing and Translating New Testament Discourse. By David J. Clark. Dallas: Fontes P, 2019. 279 pp. Softcover \$29.99.

David J. Clark (Ph.D., London School of Oriental and African Studies) is an experienced Translation Consultant for the UBS. Although retiring in 2002, Clark has continued to work in Russia on various translation projects on a voluntary basis. His book *Analyzing and Translating New Testament Discourse* is a compendium of individual articles written over his 25-year career tied together by the common “conviction that a clear understanding of an ancient Biblical text is dependent on a grasp of its structure” (xv). The book spans a total of fourteen chapters, covering an array of NT books, with a

sampling of each of the major divisions represented in the work. For the sake of brevity, this critique will deal with three main areas that describe the breadth of Clark's work: chapters dealing with lexical choice based on discourse features, the book's flagship chapter on Matthew's discourse structure, and a third section on those chapters dealing with vocative displacement.

Most of the application for discourse analysis was to locate pericope and paragraph boundaries, as well as other discourse blocks helpful for structure. The third chapter, introduced as "Discourse Structure in Matthew's Gospel," written with Jan de Waard, addresses these issues. Here Clark and de Waard show a variety of discourse methods to analyze plot structure through discourse functions. Particular attention is paid to establishing narrative and discourse blocks in blocks of three, which seems to be a Matthean predisposition. The attention paid to the verbal forms of the beatitudes is extremely helpful showing a chiasmic structure in verses 6–7 (26), the use of a diamond diagram (29), and a footnoted diagram showing how the beatitudes move from beatitudes to principles expected of the hearers (34). The multiple graphs throughout this chapter alone are worth the price of the book for the Matthean scholar, and for replication by all NT exegetes. By focusing on the narrative and discourse blocks and their thematic cohesion, Clark posits three acts in Matthew. While not a new proposal, the argument that Clark submits to get there is uniquely creative (17–19). In the second appendix for the chapter, Clark shows how participial clauses can be seen to point both ways. Clark offers the helpful analysis that the nominative use is typically pointing forward (bringing a known agent into the forefront for future action), while the participle in genitive absolute construction backgrounds a character. It would be beneficial for the reader to remember the adage that "rules were made to be broken" and that the generalizations that readers were taught in basic syntax will not always apply in every instance of writing. This individuality of the author's employment of syntactical structure demands the exegete to put in the requisite study, such as Clark displayed, for each biblical author within their own corpus and even within individual letters.

The book also includes helpful insights on word selection when issues arise from word selection in their discourse functions. The first

chapter, “Our Father in Heaven,” deals with the difficulty of translating the distinctively Matthean title of “Father in Heaven/Heavenly Father” in cultures who do not have a term for “heaven” and would be forced to supplement with the term “sky.” Clark posits that the term “heaven” is often used in place of the term God in Matthew when parallel passages are considered in the gospel, and that a translation of “our Father in the sky” would mislead the reader “with another false message that God is distant” (2) that they should supply “God our Father” (6). The second chapter, entitled “After Three Days,” lays out Clark’s assessment that in cultures who have no emotional attachment to the “after three days” translation of those verses with *μετά* as the preposition should translate as “on the third day” (11) to maintain the Sunday distinction without the chronological difficulties that have proven to be a constant derision of the hyper-literalist who lacks the nuance of Jewish time concepts.

Though the work was written for translators, the attentive exegete can gain helpful methods through reading Clark’s work. Particularly helpful for those interpreting and preaching from the Greek text is Clark’s ability to show how different biblical authors use discourse functions differently. This can be seen when Clark draws attention to the displacement of the vocative. The fourth chapter “Vocative Displacement in the Gospels: Lexico-Syntactic and Sociolinguistic Influences,” where Clark makes the argument that lexico-syntactic displacement of vocatives has fewer implications for the translator than socio-linguistic displacement (125). Lexico syntactic displacement seems to be linked with one-word adverbial phrases, other one-word phrases like fossilized imperatives, interjections, and occasionally the occurrence of a personal pronoun. The sociolinguistic influence deals with displacing the vocative due to a power differential between the speaker and the hearer, by age, social position, politeness, etc. (116–19). The sixth chapter “Vocative Displacement in Acts and Revelation” allows Clark to come to firmer conclusions on the displacement of the vocative, which normally appears sentence initial. He finds that “in some restricted situations . . . the vocative is automatically displaced. . . . Displacement in other settings, however, does indicate an increased social distance between participants in the dialogue” (147). The author does note that the use of the vocative in epistolary literature is a needed study in the future.

One suggestion for improvement is better formatting. The chapters of the book were uneven and assembled in a seemingly indiscriminate way. If the chapters were laid out in canonical order, or topically, for example, so that the chapters on vocative displacement were successive, and similarly those on the gospels, then this would have helped the reader build upon the previous content in a systematic manner. Dealing with topics in canonical order would have lent the work a logical flow for the exegete and the translator so that it could be more friendly as a reference work.

This book was written by an experienced, fair minded, and judicious translator for other translators. As such, the example of various methods, employed across a broad range of texts will make for a ready reference to the task of translating. This book will be rather difficult for the reader who is unable to work in the Greek text unaided, as would be expected with its emphasis on translation. However, for those who have built the facility in Greek studies, or those willing to translate and parse as they go, this book will prove an invaluable introduction to various discourse analysis methods. *Analyzing and Translating New Testament Discourse* is a necessity for those translators interested in learning how discourse analysis can aid in their task; and it is a useful tool for the exegete displaying the profitability of discourse analysis.

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Paul and the Hope of Glory: An Exegetical and Theological Study. By Constantine R. Campbell. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2020. 503 pp. Softcover \$34.99.

Constantine R. Campbell (Ph.D., Macquarie University) was professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Seminary and is now Senior Vice-President of Global Content and Bible Teaching at Our Daily Bread. He lives in Canberra, Australia.

Among Campbell's several publications is a uniquely useful book entitled *Paul and Union with Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study*. The purpose of the study was to examine exhaustively the writings of Paul concerning phrases, metaphors, and implications of the union of believers with Christ. It contained a section on introductory matters that included the views of many NT scholars and theologians concerning the subject of the book; an exegetical section, in which each of the passages in Paul's writings were presented in Greek and in English translation followed by a commentary; a section of theological analysis; and a conclusion.

Paul and the Hope of Glory examines Paul's eschatology in a similar format. His introductory chapter includes a description of his methodology and the recent (1930–2013) history of discussion of the subject of Pauline eschatology. Part 2 is his presentation of texts (Greek and English) and his commentary on the pertinent elements of eschatology in the context of the quoted verses. The exegetical study is divided into the following topics: two ages and two realms; the parousia; the last day; judgment; resurrection; eternal life; inheritance; new creation; Israel; glory; and hope. These topics and others reappear in the theological discussion in the next part; for example, "Christ and His Parousia," "The Resurrection of Christ and Believers," etc. The theological section (Part 3) includes the following headings: "Christocentric Eschatology; Apocalyptic Eschatology; The Age to Come; This Present Age; and Conclusions." The book includes a bibliography, and Scripture, subject, and author indexes.

While reading the "Recent History of Pauline Eschatology" section, one could easily conclude that the various themes and views of Schweitzer through N. T. Wright in the debate concerning Pauline apocalypticism and eschatology discussed by Campbell will form the substrata of his presentation from that point forward. The question of whether in the exegetical treatment Paul's writings would sit in judgment over with the theological positions described, providing verification, vindication, or correction, or simply be another voice in the debate, was not answered in the Introduction.

Campbell answered that question in the Exegetical Study, in that he refreshingly set the debate aside and concentrated on a sympathetic discussion of the various texts subsumed in the topics mentioned

above. A primary critical question he asks is whether Paul can be said to have written on a particular eschatological subject, merely alluded to it, or did not mention it. One interesting example of this question at work is the relationship of the general resurrection of the dead, and judgment. Though in Jewish thought there is the belief in a general resurrection, Campbell states that whether Paul believed in one or not, he did not mention it in his epistles. Since he assumes that there will be but one judgment (of believers and unbelievers together), Campbell asserts that Paul leaves the question of whether the resurrection will occur before or after judgment unclear.

Campbell concludes that Paul's eschatology is similar to the Jewish apocalypticism in his day, including—as it does—mystery language, the coming of the Son of Man, two-age eschatology, etc. Yet the righteousness of God and a salvation-historical shape to apocalypticism is in Paul, but not in Jewish apocalyptic thinking. Paul's eschatology is "irreducibly" Christocentric, shaped by the death, resurrection and ascension of Christ, which impact the present and future of humans and the universe. Believing that "union with Christ would be the *webbing* that connects all of Paul's key theological commitments," Campbell agrees with Schweitzer that "eschatology provides the frame of the web" (453).

Campbell's explanation of the two ages/two realms thinking of Paul is well done, reminding the reader of Augustine's *City of God*. Two opposing ages, the present evil age and the age to come, and two realms, the realm of sin and evil and the realm of righteousness, are compared and contrasted throughout Paul's writings. Believers in the present live hopefully, knowing that because Christ Jesus was resurrected, we will be resurrected, too, and will enter into glory.

Campbell discusses some interesting and thought-provoking subjects in his theological section, carefully referencing the topics and exegetical passages explored earlier. Though this reviewer was impressed with the exegetical work preceding them, he struggled with some of Campbell's theological conclusions.

These include the question of whether Paul's position on hell, annihilationism, and universalism is revealed in his writings. Ultimately, Campbell dismisses the claim that a universalist position could be derived from Paul's writing but suggests that Paul's writings could be used to support annihilationism. Also, Campbell

thinks it possible that praying for the dead was not a problem to Paul, especially because the living and the dead in Christ are all connected. Aside from the exegetical foundation of that position, the influence of that position among people who regularly talk to ancestors or spirits deserves some thought. Taking the view that Paul emphasizes the difference between those who are Israel and those who are not in Romans 9–11, Campbell concludes that Paul's position concerning Israel is that the remnant who receive Christ as their Savior will be the Israel that will be saved, not national or ethnic Israel.

An area of some confusion is Paul's view of the interim body of the saint. Campbell mentions three views of the relationship of the post-death saint to resurrection: immediate arrival in the presence of the Lord in an interim body; soul sleep (in which the soul will not experience an interim between death and the resurrection), and a folding of time that will allow all believers at death to go immediately to the resurrection of the saints. Quoting only Philippians 1:23–24 and 2 Corinthians 5:1–10 as relating to the issue (but both ambiguous in his view), Campbell seems, reluctantly, to lean toward the disembodied intermediate state. The reluctance stems from the priority of the scriptural and Jewish emphasis on the "holistic view" of the body.

Campbell's take on the following debatable issues is interesting. On the question of renewal or recreation of the world and the universe, Campbell opts for a restoration and renewal. Based upon this, he encourages a view of ecology that both rejects trashing the world because it will be destroyed anyway, and that our intervention is necessary to bring about the renewal of the earth. Campbell believes that our hope for the future should prompt our respect for the earth. Similarly, he emphasizes that care for the body as the vessel to be transformed for everlasting life should discourage the unthinking use of cremation.

It should be apparent from this review that this lengthy and carefully crafted book is both scholarly and practical, and that it is worth the effort of the exegete and theologian to follow Campbell through his exploration of passages and themes of Paul's eschatology. No one will agree with everything he has written, but very few will personally take on the task he took upon himself. With that in mind,

the reviewer would encourage New Testament and theology teachers, and graduate students in New Testament to read this book.

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2 Corinthians (The Story of God Bible Commentary). By Judith A. Diehl. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2020. 416 pp. Hardcover \$27.99.

Judith Diehl (Ph.D., University of Edinburgh) taught New Testament and Hermeneutics at Denver Seminary. Her volume on 2 Corinthians is a commendable addition to the accessible *Story of God* commentary series.

Diehl's central thesis is that Paul wrote 2 Corinthians to defend his apostolic identity and ministry. According to Diehl, this letter was penned amid a time of deep emotional distress and conflict between Paul and his adversaries within the Corinthian church. As the likely fourth letter (second canonical letter) written by Paul to Corinth, this missive reveals the depths of Paul's inner psyche as a missionary-pastor.

Like other volumes in the *Story of God* commentary series, *2 Corinthians* was readable and relatable. Written by an author with both pastoral and academic experience, the commentary fairly crackles with relevant application. From story to poetry, from anecdote to exegesis, this work is not overly technical, and instead reads as a treatise on how to suffer and serve as a pastor. Whether she is mixing in illustrations from her own ministry, sharing poetry from Eugene Peterson, or citing the latest blogs from pastoral experts, Diehl crafts a work that is deeply in touch with the profound joy and agony of pastoral ministry.

In keeping with the series formatting, *2 Corinthians* discussed each section of the biblical text under the headings "Hear the Story," "Explain the Story," and "Live the Story." The latter section, focused upon application, might have been the strongest point of this

commentary. Diehl wrote as one who was in touch with the fears and foibles of pastors. She also demonstrated a unique interest in connecting the text to issues of racial reconciliation and justice. Like other volumes in this series, Diehl's work includes a section called "Listening to the Text in the Story." This sidebar, included near the beginning of each section of the text, provided the OT allusions and echoes that could be heard within 2 Corinthians. This feature is remarkably useful to interpreters, both pastors and scholars alike.

The chief weakness of the book was its lack of extended exegetical discussion. The reader might sometimes prefer additional information on a challenging interpretive question. Yet, Diehl (perhaps in keeping with the goals of the commentary series) maintains a brisk pace and refuses to get bogged down by troublesome textual details. *2 Corinthians* also seems to rely heavily upon the work of a few authors (N. T. Wright, Eugene Peterson, and Linda Belville are repeatedly referenced). Although these authors have much to offer the church, perhaps more breadth would have strengthened this commentary.

Overall, this volume by Judith Diehl is a significant contribution to the Story of God commentary series. Although *2 Corinthians* could benefit from further exegetical discussion and increased engagement with relevant literature, it still accomplished its purposes. It was a readable commentary that will be relevant and insightful, especially for pastors. Indeed, the volume is almost evocative, as it traces the depths of Paul's joy and agony as he ministers to a recalcitrant congregation. For pastors who write their resignations every Monday, this volume will come as a breath of fresh air.

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The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution. By Carl R. Trueman. Wheaton: Crossway, 2020. 425 pp. Hardcover \$34.99.

As the title suggests, this is a profound work of analysis that requires focused thought and reflection to properly absorb its arguments. However, Trueman's work is somewhat unique in its singular focus upon a certain aspect of modern culture. As Professor of Biblical and Religious studies at Grove City College, Trueman provides primarily a history (which he dates from the Enlightenment era) of how society has evolved to its present conception of the nature of human selfhood. In fact, he argues that the modern sexual revolution, whose culmination he identifies with the normalization of transgenderism, is more a byproduct than a cause of that evolution. Specifically, Trueman documents how inner psychology—"feelings" or "intuitions"—has come to be decisive for a person's sense of who the person is and the purpose of that person's life (23). What's more, as he subsequently observes, "If the inner psychological life of the individual is sovereign, then identity becomes as potentially unlimited as the human imagination" (50). Finally, such identities, whatever they may be, *must be* recognized by society as legitimate (63).

The book is divided into four main parts. In Part 1, he utilizes the writings of several philosophers to provide the broader categories and concepts for framing the issue at hand. In Part 2, he delves into the origins of the psychologizing of the self with special attention given to Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778), who not only argued (as many do today) that society or culture is the true source of a person's problems but that a person is "at his best—he is most truly himself as he should be—when he acts in accordance with his nature," as he freely chooses to conceive that nature (123). He also analyzes the influence of Karl Marx (1818–1883), Frederick Nietzsche (1844–1900), and Charles Darwin (1809–1882), who "in their different ways provided conceptual justification for rejecting the notion of human nature and thus paved the way for the plausibility of the idea that human beings are plastic creatures with no fixed identity founded on an intrinsic and ineradicable essence" (166).

In Part 3, he discusses “the sexualizing of psychology and the politicizing of sex.” The central figure for the first part is Sigmund Freud. Indeed, he identifies Freud as the person most responsible for making plausible “the idea that humans, from infancy onward, are at core sexual beings” and that “our sexual desires ... are ultimately decisive for who we are” (28). For Freud “true happiness *is* sexual satisfaction” (205). The politicization of sex he ascribes first to lesser-known figures such as Wilhelm Reich (1897–1957), who drew upon the thought of both Freud and Marx to devalue the institution of the family (235). He also discusses the role that feminism has had in challenging the basic biological binary and the perceived differences they present. For example, Simone de Beauvoir (1908–1986) argued that “biology is to be transcended by the use of technology; who or what woman really *is* is not her chromosomes or her physiology; rather, it is something that she becomes either as an act of free choice or because society coerces her into conformity with its expectations” (259). The similarity of this perspective (penned in 1949) to modern transgender ideology is striking.

Finally, in Part 4 he explores various facets of contemporary society to demonstrate how thoroughly the intellectual developments discussed in Parts 2 and 3 have so radically transformed Western culture. In this regard, he discusses the influence of Hugh Hefner (1926–2017) in mainstreaming pornography as well as the history of and tensions within the LGBTQ+ movement (e.g., feminism vs. transgenderism). In fact, recent judicial victories, such as the constitutionality of gay marriage, derive largely from the expressive individualism that began to take root centuries before (311).

There is much more that could be mentioned: for example, the “cultural amnesia” referenced in the subtitle reflects society’s continuing choice to “forget” the moral (Christian) underpinnings upon which Western society was founded. Trueman also discusses how an emphasis upon a woman’s psychological well-being has become the primary criterion to decide whether an unborn child should live (323). Equally illustrative of Trueman’s thesis is the response of the gay community to the AIDS crisis, namely, “any inhibiting of sexual freedom—even that designed to prevent the transmission of a deadly disease—is considered unacceptable because of its perceived obnoxious moralizing or potential for

promoting such. That sentiment is entirely consonant with a therapeutic culture of expressive individualism, in which it is the present moment and the individuals' ability to perform their own selves in whatever way they choose in that moment that are the only significant ethical concerns" (348). Finally, Trueman ominously warns that "no culture or society that has had to justify itself by itself has ever maintained itself for any length of time" (381). Also, "as fewer and fewer people care about their own religious commitments, so they will care less and less about religious freedom as an important commitment for society as a whole" (400).

Without a doubt, Trueman makes his point in quite convincing fashion. The book is weighty without being overwhelming. An index of subjects and personalities is fairly detailed and helpful. My main criticism would be that four hundred pages of analysis are not well served by a mere five pages of "suggestions" (402–407) as to how the church should respond to this monumental change. Trueman rightly emphasizes the need for "long and hard" reflection, and, certainly, a better understanding of how people in the secular world think serves the church well in the task of the Great Commission. Such understanding should also serve pastors well as to what the typical congregant, who is unconsciously imbibing the modern perspective of the self, needs to hear from the pulpit.

Trueman also rightly calls the church to community ("human beings still need to belong, to be recognized, and to have community") and to recovery of "both natural law and a high view of the physical body" (405). These are important emphases, but one wonders whether they are too little too late. Certainly, secular society has largely left the Christian worldview in the trash heap of discarded perspectives. However, as Trueman reminds us, "The task of the Christian is not to whine about the moment in which he or she lives but to understand its problems and respond appropriately to them" (30).

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Theological Retrieval for Evangelicals: Why We Need Our Past to Have a Future. By Gavin Ortlund. Wheaton: Crossway, 2019. 218 pp. Softcover \$21.99.

Gavin Ortlund (Ph.D., Fuller Theological Seminary) serves as the senior pastor of First Baptist Church in Ojai, California. His pedigree in the evangelical movement stems from his grandfather Raymond C. Ortlund, Sr. (host of The Haven of Rest radio program) and father Raymond C. Ortlund, Jr. (president of Renewal Ministries and a council member of The Gospel Coalition). Interestingly, Gavin's parents (to whom he dedicated this book) announced last month that they had joined the Anglican Church of North America. His father declared, "My soul needs the depth of Anglican tradition."

Theological Retrieval for Evangelicals encourages a constructive *ressourcement*, especially of the patristic and medieval sources (14). Ortlund has written "with pastors, theology students, and interested lay Christians especially in mind" (14). He claims that the average evangelical rarely engages in historical theology, and the rare exceptions tend to focus upon Protestant heroes like Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Jonathan Edwards (12). This general critique bears the ring of truth, although one could add that even in the exceptional instances, evangelicals often produce and consume popular-level histories rather than scholarly tomes. Which is why, as Phillip Cary and others have insisted, American evangelicals tend to turn Luther into one of their own, stripped of his sacramentalism.

In Part I, Ortlund acknowledges the dangers of an unmitigated reclamation, which has led famous individuals to leave evangelicalism for the folds of Rome or Orthodoxy. The first chapter reviews past discussions, including the Mercersburg vs. Princeton debates. Ortlund maintains that B. B. Warfield oversimplified the theology of Augustine. In broad strokes, Warfield portrayed the Reformation as the victory of Augustine's doctrine of grace over his doctrine of the church. By contrast, Ortlund appeals to Reformation and post-Reformation models of responsible renewal nurtured by rooted continuity, including the works of Francis Turretin and John Jewel. Of course, if one were to place the likes of Jean Dail   into the mix (*Du vrai emploi des P  res*), the early modern Protestant approaches become more complex.

The second chapter addresses the “evangelical ache for history” (46). The “sense of rootlessness” and the “desire for historical depth” have been impulses toward Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism (49), as manifested in the cases of Hank Hanegraff and Francis Beckwith (one could now add the example of Mark Galli, the former editor of *Christianity Today*). Ortlund’s response is “to further the intuition that *evangelical* and *ancient* are far from antonyms, just as *catholicity* and *Catholicism* are far from synonyms” (52). Besides the historical impulses, one also wonders about the influence of literary and apologetic icons from Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and the *via media* of Anglicanism (such as Tolkien and Lewis, both of whom Ortlund frequently references).

According to Chapter Three, patristic and medieval theology can bulk up areas where evangelical teaching is manifestly weak. Ortlund highlights current debates concerning divine simplicity, and he laments the lack of interest in angelology. Moderns may mock medieval disputations concerning “how many angels can dance on the head of a pin,” but the medieval era was “perhaps the richest period of reflection on angelology in the history of the church” (69). One wonders if the modern focus upon empiricism and a redemptive-centeredness (rather than a more broadly doxological approach) may facilitate the relative neglect of angelology. Ortlund further contends that patristic and medieval theology can also reframe contemporary discussions by “providing a premodern perspective” (72). The heart of the chapter summarizes “the perils of retrieval,” including distortion, artificiality, repristination, and minimalism (73–76). After calling for the exploration of neglected ecclesiastical figures, Ortlund wisely cautions against a facile mapping of the first millennium and a half of historical theology that overlooks the nuances of contour.

Part II moves from abstract inclination to concrete application. “I have always felt that the best shorthand way to commend theological retrieval is simply to do it. The process explains the procedure” (87). Chapter Four examines ramifications of the Creator/creature distinction. Specific topics include the Reformed *extra Calvinisticum* and Thomas Torrance’s emphasis upon the ascension. While both examples make for fascinating reading, they remain somewhat unexpected entries, in view of the volume’s stated focus upon patristic and medieval theology.

The following chapter wades into the doctrine of divine simplicity. Ortlund suggests that “divine simplicity (or better, some combination of divine simplicity and perichoresis) may provide a more solid grounding for a monotheistic Trinity than perichoresis alone” (137). Drawing from the wells of classical theology could also inform other flashpoints in the doctrine of God, such as debates concerning divine impassibility, the eternal generation of the Son, and eternal functional subordinationism within the Trinity (cf. 54).

The sixth chapter deftly argues that one may combine recapitulation and satisfaction in an understanding of Christ’s substitutionary work. Ortlund maintains that the evangelical treatment of the atonement has been polarized by a reductive focus upon penal substitution alone or upon an unwarranted turn away from substitutionary atonement. Ortlund investigates the views of Irenaeus, Athanasius, and Anselm, and concludes that they all (to varying degrees) supported facets of both recapitulation and satisfaction. Even so, one may ask *how* Christ’s “obedient act” (as the Second Adam) was able to overturn the initial transgression of Adam (Rom. 5:12-19)—could not penal substitution be *foundational* to the outworking of recapitulation? While the chapter highlights the restoration of humanity, one could add the restoration of the entire cosmos (Rom 8:20-22). Moreover, a fuller engagement with *Christus Victor* views in patristic and medieval theology would have been helpful (cf. Col 2:15; Heb 2:14–15).

The final chapter examines Gregory the Great, “a man of action, a great practical genius” (186). Ortlund mines Gregory’s *Book of Pastoral Rule* for its balanced approach and pithy aphorisms. “The overall emphasis, however, is that pastoral exhortation must function with great sensitivity and balance, recognizing the different needs among the people in the congregation and not allowing the kind of exhortation needed for one particular vice to drown out the kind of exhortation needed for another” (199). The volume helpfully concludes with a general index and a Scripture index.

This reviewer empathizes with Ortlund’s general call for theological retrieval, but remains guarded in concurrence, partially because of the need for nuance and the variabilities of historical development. Often the early church fathers did not speak with a united voice, highlighting the necessity of an objective framework for

historical retrieval, by which to forestall a “buffet” approach. Gregory the Great relayed treasures of practical wisdom. Yet he also developed sacramental, penitential, and purgatorial doctrines that were wielded against Protestants during the so-called “Counter Reformation” (cf. 202). Calvin praised John Chrysostom’s homiletical exegesis but criticized his views on divine-human cooperation. An unbounded appropriation could, as Ortlund himself acknowledges, compromise evangelical identity. Those from free church traditions may sense the need for even more caution than the heirs of the magisterial reformers. Nevertheless, a responsible theological retrieval is one antidote (among others) to an evangelicalism constantly chasing its own fashionable tail. *Ressourcement* may be complex, but it remains inescapable for the sake of a robust evangelical identity. “Whether” to retrieve is a closed case; “how” and “to what extent” remain open questions.

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Understanding Spiritual Gifts: A Comprehensive Guide. By Sam Storms. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020. 364 pp. Softcover \$17.99.

How well do you understand what Scripture teaches about spiritual gifts—their nature, significance, and practice? Though Sam Storms (Lead Pastor for Preaching and Vision at Bridgeway Church in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma) acknowledges that spiritual gifts have become a somewhat faddish and even divisive topic in recent decades, he hopes to bring increased balance and clarity to the subject for the benefit of the church in his newly published work *Understanding Spiritual Gifts: A Comprehensive Guide*. He concludes, “I do hope that it will contribute in some small measure to easing the tension over spiritual gifts that so often tends to put continuationists and cessationists at each other’s throats” (316).

This lengthy volume divides into six parts. Part I addresses “The Nature, Purpose, and Prayerful Pursuit of Spiritual Gifts.” In this

section, Storms explores biblical terminology, the number of spiritual gifts, and concludes that we should “pray and ask for” God to impart us with spiritual gifts (61). This conclusion reappears as a prominent emphasis throughout the book. Storms defines a spiritual gift as “a God-given ... Spirit-empowered capacity or ability to serve the body of Christ” (26). Part 2 addresses “The Debate over the Cessation or Continuation of Miraculous Gifts of the Spirit,” in which he surveys the biblical and theological case for both cessation and continuationism, respectively. He gives special attention to Jonathan Edwards’s conviction that the *charismata* have ceased and offers a guided survey of “evidence” for the practice of spiritual gifts throughout church history. Part 3 addresses “Revelatory Gifts of the Spirit.” These gifts include the “word of wisdom,” “word of knowledge,” prophecy, and “discerning of spirits.” In each case, Storms concludes that these gifts carry an inherent revelatory quality. Unlike canonical revelation, however, he suggests that these gifts are subjective and may occasionally convey inaccurate thoughts due to human shortcomings. Part 4 addresses “Speaking in Tongues.” It examines scriptural data on both tongues-speaking and the interpretation of tongues. Storms concludes that the gift of tongues is “*not* the ability speak in a known human language” but is “a heavenly language, a language that derives from the supernatural enablement of the Holy Spirit” (213–214). Part 5 addresses “Faith, Healing, and Miracles.” Storms presents the gift of faith as something more than a general faith that God *can* heal, as a heightened belief “that it is God’s will to heal someone *right now*” (254), while also recognizing that it is not always God’s will to heal. He also suggests that miracles not only still happen today but that “the spiritual gift of miracles is still operative in the church today” (261). Part 6 addresses “Other Gifts and Apostleship.” In this section, Storms finally considers the ministry and leadership gifts mentioned in passages like Romans 12:3–8 and Ephesians 4:11–16. He also gives special attention to apostleship and concludes (albeit hesitantly) that this is likely not a spiritual gift but rather a role that consists of specially delegated authority that continues to occur today (294).

I read this book hoping for a thorough treatment of the subject from a fair, balanced, and biblical perspective. The author’s

reputation as an experienced pastor, an accomplished theologian (having served as the President of the Evangelical Theological Society), a council member of the Gospel Coalition, and an all-around gracious person raised my hopes to this end. Yet sadly, I was largely disappointed, though the author's tone was generally gracious. To begin with, the title of the book is misleading since the book, though lengthy, is not comprehensive. Storms gives outsized attention to the miraculous and revelatory gifts while giving almost no attention to the less phenomenal (uncharismatic) ministry and service gifts. Such an imbalanced treatment belies the book's claim to be comprehensive. A more fitting title would be "*An Exhaustive Defense of the Continuation of Charismatic Gifts.*"

To Storms's credit, he regularly presents a cessationist perspective followed by a continuationist rebuttal. At first glance, this seems to be a fair and gracious approach, but he frequently responds to the continuationist perspective with surprisingly weak and dismissive argumentation that consists of dogmatic statements, personal experiences, gotcha questions, logical fallacies (such as straw men, etc.), and cross-referencing between unclear and unrelated Scripture passages. It would take one or more journal articles or a lengthy paper to respond adequately to Storms' argumentation. Two arguments stand out as particularly curious. In one instance, he leans firmly on an account in the pseudepigraphal book, the *Testament of Job*, to support the idea that tongues-speaking consists of angelic languages rather than human languages (212). In another instance, he interprets Ephesians 4:11 in an inconsistent, unusual manner. On one hand, he claims that this passage speaks about spiritual gifts (100), yet on the other hand he suggests that apostles are not a spiritual gift but rather an "ecclesiastical position" (292).

Though I had hoped to recommend otherwise, this book is neither a balanced nor comprehensive survey of what Scripture teaches about spiritual gifts. It does, however, offer an insightful look at how a charismatic, continuationist understands spiritual gifts, especially those gifts that are revelatory and miraculous. In this way, Storms has provided us with a valuable resource—and one that has further affirmed my cessationist perspective.

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Asian Christian Theology: Evangelical Perspectives. Ed. Timoteo D. Gener and Stephen T. Pardue. Carlisle, Cumbria, UK: Langham Global Library, 2019. Softcover \$20.99.

The growth of the church in Asia over the last century is one of the remarkable trends in global Christianity. Unfortunately, there are still few resources available to Asian evangelicals that reflect evangelical theological commitments and address issues facing Christians living in an Asian context. In response to this need, Timoteo D. Gener (Chancellor and Professor of Theology at Asian Theological Seminary) and Stephen T. Pardue (Associate Faculty for Theology at International Graduate School of Leadership and Asian Graduate School of Theology) have gathered sixteen contributors (Gener included) to produce *Asian Christian Theology: Evangelical Perspectives*. According to the editors, “In the context of an expanding and strengthening Asian church ... this book has a simple goal: to offer an approach to Christian theology that is biblically rooted, historically aware, contextually engaged, and broadly evangelical” (2). The book is organized into two parts. The first eight essays reassess traditional Christian doctrines (Scripture, the Trinity, Christology, etc.) from an Asian perspective, while the final eight essays address topics bearing on important issues facing Asian evangelicals (5). Per the back cover of the text, the target readers of *Asian Christian Theology* include students at Asian seminaries, those

outside of an Asian context seeking to learn more about theology from a global perspective, and people belonging to an Asian diaspora.

Overall, *Asian Christian Theology* accomplishes its intended task. Outside of Ken Gnanakan's article "Creation, New Creation, and Ecological Relationships" (a solid and timely article yet does not explain how it distinctively contributes to Asian theology in particular), the authors provide readers with a clear window into the meeting of theology and the concerns of those living in an Asian context. Nevertheless, even the reader outside of this context will benefit from *Asian Christian Theology*. Kar Yong Lim's "A Theology of Suffering and Mission for the Asian Church" serves as a good example. Lamenting that Western missiological studies have mostly ignored the inevitability of suffering in the missionary enterprise (185), Lim reminds readers of Paul's understanding of suffering, one which was the expected consequence of his missionary work but was also used by the Lord to reveal his power in Paul's life, to bring unbelievers to faith, and to reveal Paul's love for those who need the gospel (185–189). This reminder of the centrality of suffering in missions is important for all believers, and especially those in the West, as Western believers face an increasing post-Christian context (cf. 193) and the temptation of personal glory and success (cf. 184).

As with most compilations, the articles in *Asian Christian Theology* are mixed in their quality and impact value, and the reader should be aware that he or she might not agree with all the conclusions of the contributors even if the articles make sound theological points. Ivan Satyavrata's article "Jesus and Other Faiths" is a case in point. Satyavrata does a solid job critiquing pluralism, a significant issue in an Asian context. Challenging Indian pluralist S. J. Samartha and his arguments that Christianity's claim to exclusive truth disrupts harmony between religions and that all religions lead to the same "God" (typical play-book pluralism), Satyavrata reminds his readers of the real differences between various religions (226–228) and that pluralism itself is exclusivistic in its outlook, and thus self-contradictory (229). Western Christians would do well to heed Satyavrata's arguments as the temptation to accept "tolerance" in the West grows as the threat of pluralism increases in Western contexts. However, some readers may not approve of the "fulfillment

approach” Satyavrata adopts in addressing Christianity’s relationship to other religions. That other religions might contain elements of truth based upon Paul’s addresses to Gentiles in Acts 14 and 17, along with his creation theology in Romans 1–2 (231), is true, as even fallen humanity knows something about the true God. However, while the fulfillment approach may have pure motives in addressing how Asian peoples can accept Christianity without radically renovating their culture (cf. 236), it seems to leave itself open to inclusivism (cf. 239). More work will need to be done in this area.

Simon Chan’s “Towards an Asian Evangelical Ecclesiology” is another example. Chan rightly critiques common Western evangelical tendencies to center Christian practice on pragmatism and fulfilling individual felt needs rather than collectively rallying to accomplish evangelism and missions (145). While this critique is timely, Chan’s solutions are mixed in theological soundness. For instance, writing on the need to establish the importance of the ordinances in the church, Chan writes, “Most Asians understand better the ‘sacramentality’ of the rite of baptism than most evangelicals. This is why many Chinese families are quite willing to allow their children to attend church but not be baptized. For them, baptism is no mere ritual; it is the point of no return” (148). Fair enough. However, in the very next paragraph, Chan argues for infant baptism, noting that “Infant baptism understands that the church as the household of faith consists not just of individuals, but that whole families are incorporated into the household of faith” (148), though Chan offers no biblical or theological justification for this conclusion. Perhaps, just as Western church practice may be influenced by Western culture’s postmodernism (one that, ironically, cultivates a focus upon individuals and their felt needs) Chan’s own cultural background (with the importance of the family in Asian culture) may be influencing his theological conclusions (cf. 145–148). Furthermore, more needs to be said regarding ancestor veneration (cf. 149–152), as missiologists have raised serious concerns regarding its incorporation into Christian practice that are not addressed here.

One of the aims of global theological texts like *Asian Christian Theology* is to offer a theological perspective from underrepresented people groups to benefit the universal church.

Even with its flaws, *Asian Christian Theology* has accomplished this universal objective. Its considerations of suffering and pluralism make the text worth reading, even if one is not Asian or serving in an Asian context. *Asian Christian Theology* will greatly benefit the global church for years to come as she marches onward into an uncertain future.

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The Spirit of Holiness: Reflections on Biblical Spirituality. Ed. Terry Delaney and Roger D. Duke. Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2020. 232 pp. Softcover \$28.99; Digital (Logos Edition) \$19.99.

Delaney and Duke have gathered and edited a collection of eleven essays in honor of Donald S. Whitney, who has quite a wealth of ministry experience both as a pastor (15 years), and as Dean and Associate Dean at two different Southern Baptist Seminaries (10 years and 15 years, respectively). Whitney has authored multiple books on spiritual disciplines and has carried on an itinerant speaking and preaching ministry for many years. He is also the founder and president of The Center for Biblical Spirituality.

The eleven essays in *The Spirit of Holiness: Reflections on Biblical Spirituality* are carefully considered and arranged in a logical order. The word “reflections” in the subtitle plays on two nuances of the term. The first nuance signals a look back at past saints in church history with respect to their contribution to the doctrine of spirituality. Here the aim is to articulate how these great saints not only understood spirituality, but also how they practiced it and how today’s readers can imitate it. The second nuance of “reflections” is a look inward as to how believers today can interact with three particular doctrines (providence, sanctification, and perseverance) so as to bolster their spiritual growth in “the local church as the locus of spirituality” (xii).

The opening essay is by Joe Harrod, who takes the reader through a survey of Puritan devotional writings on the Trinity to see how

accessible the Puritans made the doctrine at the lay level. He concludes (among other things) that Puritan devotional material did not shy away from weighty doctrinal truths for the common readers to “chew on.”

The next two essays, reflect on the piety of Thomas Manton and Hercules Collins (by Stephen Yuille and Steve Weaver, respectively). Yuille explores the importance of meditation, which seems to be a lost art today. This is regrettable since it appears from Manton’s piety that meditation is the one spiritual discipline that can present to one’s mind the inestimable beauty of Christ, while at the same time prevent all kinds of vain thoughts. The essay by Weaver, on the other hand, explores the rich body of literature produced by persecuted Christians over nearly three decades by the established church. Such affliction lent itself to deep meditation on God’s sovereignty, providence, and the sufficiency of Christ. Weaver gives particular focus to the prolific pen of Hercules Collins during his time of incarceration. Refusing to submit to the “Act of Uniformity of 1662,” he was indicted and then put in jail in 1684. From then until his death in 1702, Collins churned out a dozen works out of “the furnace of affliction” which Weaver describes as “deep and vibrant spirituality that was like pure gold” (46).

Tom Nettles and Michael Haykin provide the next two essays, respectively, on Jonathan Edwards and Andrew Fuller. The title of Nettles’s essay is “The Sixth Sense of Jonathan Edwards.” Here, he aims to convey to the reader the adeptness of Edwards at casting spiritual truths in such a way that it moves one’s affections. He shows how Edwards sees ten layers of *sensibility*, through which God opens the eyes of his people so that they come to have “an experimental knowledge of the nature of holiness” (69). In a similar vein, Haykin’s article shows how Andrew Fuller used the medium of letter-writing in his day to refute an opponent who scoffed at the notion of the use of means in reaching the lost. He shows how Fuller affirms a compatibilism between God’s sovereignty in salvation and man’s access of the means of grace whereby “truth makes progress” in one’s heart (72).

The last essay in the first section of the book is an article by Brian Albert on Charles Spurgeon and his well-known bouts of depression. Very helpfully, he shines the spotlight on the role of Scripture during

these times of darkness. Accessing his *Treasury of David* (4:1475), he cites these words: “That which in the day has kept us from presuming has in the night kept us from perishing.” He observes that Spurgeon spent two decades on his *Treasury of David*, which was “the largest commentary on the Psalms ever assembled” (106). He notes that Spurgeon was never commissioned to that task but took it on primarily because he “wrote it as a man convicted and comforted by the word” (106).

The second part of this book begins with a transitional essay by Albert Mohler entitled “Rescued by Theology.” He begins the essay with a very moving testimony of how he lived at a time and in a spiritual milieu where he thought spirituality was all about the “higher life.” But he could never attain. He writes, “I began to hate myself for my inability to feel what I was supposed to feel, pray as I was supposed to pray, and direct my heart only to things from above” (110). He testifies that he found himself at a theological crisis. What brought him out of this crisis (gradually) were what he calls three “movements”: J. I. Packer and *Knowing God*; John Piper and *Desiring God*; and Donald Whitney and *Obedying God*. In my opinion—even though it is a tough call—this may just be the best essay of the collection.

The final four essays are the following: “The Spiritual Advantages of Faith in Divine Providence (by Joel R. Beeke); “Freedom of Inclination and Its Implications for the Christian’s Growth in Sanctification” (by Bruce A. Ware); “Pressing On” (by Steven J. Lawson); and “The Integrity of the Local Church” (Jim Elliff). Beeke centers his article around the Heidelberg Catechism’s Question 28 which affirms that God will provide for believers and how that helps believers face an uncertain future with freedom and boldness. Ware’s article deals with the thorny question of the freedom of the will, interacting significantly with Jonathan Edwards’s understanding that man’s volition always chooses according to “the ‘good’ that it most wants” (150). He then offers practical suggestions as to how Christians can promote the right kind of inclinations and desires in keeping with God’s character and will. Then, Lawson’s article underscores the importance of perseverance, using Philippians 3 as a basis from which to draw his thoughts. Finally, Jim Elliff closes out the collection of essays by underscoring the importance of the

local church as the “society” God has provided to promote spirituality among its members.

For a thin little book, it offers much for the reader. There is good historical information here on the Puritans and church history. There are solid doctrinal truths that are teased out. And there are practical suggestions that can help the reader in his own “biblical spirituality.”

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Preaching Hope in Darkness: Help for Pastors in Addressing Suicide from the Pulpit. By Scott M. Gibson and Karen Mason.
Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2020. 259 pp. Softcover \$23.99.

Suicide disrupts families, communities, and churches. Pastors can face the challenges of suicide and work to prevent suicide through their preaching and pastoral care. Preachers announce hope in the face of tragedy. The gospel provides the resources of true hope. Scott Gibson, professor of preaching at Baylor University and Truett Seminary, and Karen Mason, professor of counseling and psychology at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, invite readers into a conversation “between a preacher and a suicide preventionist” (1). Chapter one offers ten facts to help preachers understand suicide. The facts show the importance of dealing with suicide from the pulpit and provide clergy with skills to offer hope to congregants. The skills include developing a theology of suffering and a willingness to enlist the help of mental health professionals. Chapter two challenges unbiblical cultural assumptions: suicide can be “justified when life is painful” (26), philosophy supports suicide, and human dignity is tied to a person’s productivity. The authors offer seven ideas for prevention of suicide in chapter three: a connection to others, the dignity of each individual, a preaching emphasis on hope, moral reasons to live, developing self-control, understanding grief and suffering, and a willingness to reach out for help. The theme of chapter four is the priority of preaching in a pastor’s ministry. Chapter

five offers a guide for pastoral care after a suicide crisis with reminders to listen well in ministry to families and to refer to suicide preventionists when help is needed. Chapter six considers the funeral and ongoing care. The funeral sermon should aim at providing care for the family of the deceased with other attendees invited to listen. Chapter seven provides resources for teaching youth and young adults about suicide prevention. Case studies in each chapter offer practical application throughout the book. The appendixes offer sample sermons, liturgies, letters, and Bible study lessons.

Gibson and Mason provide a straightforward and concise guidebook for pastors in responding to suicide. The book offers clear and practical guidance. They instruct pastors to “avoid detailed descriptions of the suicide, ... romanticizing or idealizing the person who died, ...[or] oversimplifying the cause of suicide” (18). They suggest someone from church could “send a ‘caring letter’ that says something like the following: ‘I’m praying for you at this difficult time. I look forward to seeing you on Thursday’” (42). Preachers should avoid euphemisms about suicide and speak directly, “‘He died by suicide’ or ‘She killed herself,’” and can refer to family and friends as “‘survivors of suicide’...or ‘the suicide bereaved’” (65). The book is rooted in biblical wisdom and filled with Scripture references. Biblical themes and stories strengthen the book’s application. The greatest strength of the book is the direct message of hope. Gibson and Mason remind the overwhelmed pastor and offer the key pastoral strategy in facing tragedy, “The pervasive message of the Bible is that there is always hope” (46). Too many pastoral guides offer a new and improved ministry paradigm, but pastors do not need a restructured model of ministry to handle the challenges of suicide. Instead, in the face of suffering, pastors extend the gospel. Pastors offer the hope of the resurrection to their hurting congregations and communities. Compassionate pastors create room for lament. They offer a theology of suffering to strengthen and sustain listeners. An important aspect of the pastor’s ministry is pastoral involvement at times of crisis. The pastor’s ministry of presence and willingness to listen provides comfort. Gibson and Mason provide the reminder that preachers are not alone but have mental health professionals to whom they can refer the vulnerable. The pastor need not shoulder the burden alone nor be the fount of all wisdom. Presence with the hurting provides care.

Even admitting “I don’t know” when confronted with the question, “why would God allow this to happen?” can be a powerful reminder of trust in God’s faithfulness (85). Gibson and Mason share an encouraging theological framework to strengthen their practical instructions.

The book’s weaknesses do not negate its usefulness. When Gibson and Mason offer critique of cultural voices that advocate or allow for suicide, they offer examples from ancient Babylon to current Netflix dramas, but space limitations allow only a sketch of modern culture’s failures. Their references to the “‘death with dignity’ movements” pass quickly (29). The authors lament “that few churchgoers are hearing sermons about suicide prevention,” but this narrow focus on specific mentions of suicide seems to overlook the broader framework the book develops about a theology of suffering to respond to a variety of tragedies (37). Congregants are emboldened in the midst of tragedy not merely by a sermon that names suicide, but by every sermon that offers gospel hope. Yes, preachers would serve their congregations well to speak directly about suicide prevention, but every sermon that points to the resurrection fortifies listeners. The concise book serves the pastor in the midst of crisis and allows a helpful refresher even between a family visit and the funeral, but only 125 pages are devoted to the main text with the remainder filled by appendices and notes. The recommended resources, listed in both the body of the book and an appendix, can help supplement the book’s brevity (108, 165). The four funeral sermons all offer gospel hope, but they are uneven in following the authors’ advice. The sermons do not all include the encouragement for the hurting to reach out for help nor are they all text based. One of the example sermons quotes more Johnny Cash than Scripture (172).

Preaching Hope in Darkness is a refreshing and gentle encouragement to pastors as they serve survivors of suicide and work to prevent suicide. Gibson and Mason offer practical advice rooted in biblical wisdom. Although pastors need to be aware of the specific challenges brought to families, congregations, and communities by suicide, pastors already have the primary tools to shepherd those in need. Preachers have the rich hope of the resurrection, examples of biblical lament, and an understanding of sin and suffering to fortify

their congregations in the power of the gospel. Gibson and Mason serve the church well in providing a pastorally sensitive resource with the insights of suicide prevention. New and experienced preachers alike will be served by the text. When the tragic phone call comes, the pastor will be equipped to respond in a ministry of prayer and presence. Then, in preparation for the funeral and ongoing care, the pastor can return to the guidance of Gibson and Mason. Death does not have the victory. Jesus Christ is risen from the dead.

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Leading Small Groups That Thrive. Ryan T. Hartwig, Courtney W. Davis, and Jason A. Sniff. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020. 247 pp. Softcover \$22.99.

Various ministries and churches are looking for effective ways to communicate the gospel and disciple believers in Christ. There is a plethora of options to choose from, but one that has received significant attention and has benefited from careful analysis is the use of small groups. Although the Scriptures affirm the value of groups to accomplish God's purposes in the lives of his people, in recent decades the value of small groups to connect people together and achieve meaningful change has seen a significant resurgence. In addition to the public pulpit ministry of a local church, small groups must be considered as a powerful, dynamic means of communicating God's truth and helping people with life-changing application of his truth.

It is obvious that there are numerous resources available to assist a ministry in small group outreach, but *Leading Small Groups That Thrive* is a great tool that must be considered. This book helps to refine the process of moving your group ministry forward from where it is a mere conceptual idea to placing it on a trajectory for a successful outcome. A particularly refreshing aspect of this book is that it is more than a collection of ideas about small group work. It brings to the reader's attention the practical steps that should be considered for every phase of preparation and implementation. The

authors consistently point the reader to the research that they have gathered in support of these practical steps. For example, the second chapter of the book is devoted to identifying the makeup of a catalytic group leader. Perhaps many of us picture in our mind a composite of essential qualifications for a group leader, but these assumptions may not be accurate, and this chapter challenges some of these common assumptions and expectations. As a ministry endeavors to find qualified and successful leaders for their small group ministry, this chapter helps to provide an evaluative process that assists in identifying leaders who will assume these positions. Beyond that, the purpose that is emphasized in this book is the successful replication of group leaders so that the ministry's propagation of small groups is accomplished.

Another portion of the book that should be highlighted in this review is the ninth chapter that discusses burnout. People-helping will always be an emotionally and spiritually taxing endeavor, and nobody who leads a small group should be ignorant of the toll it can take over time. This chapter helps a leader to identify the concerns that need to be considered when a threshold is being crossed and how to put together a preventative plan to avert the disastrous consequences of burnout. Also included in this chapter on the leader's care of self in order to serve well is an emphasis on the intentional and meaningful assimilation of God's word, participation in prayer, and the worship experiences of the leader. Although a leader can conclude that these valuable admonitions are rudimentary, they are not. They must be revered as essential; ignoring these admonitions will likely put a leader's spiritual vitality and effectiveness in peril.

Finally, in this review, it should be mentioned that this book concludes with some very helpful appendices. They are worthwhile sources of information that will clarify insights from each chapter and encourage further exploration. *Leading Small Groups That Thrive* is an informative and helpful addition to enhance the mission of the local church.

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Another Gospel? A Lifelong Christian Seeks Truth in Response to Progressive Christianity. By Alisa Childers. Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale Momentum, 2020. 288 pp. Softcover \$17.00.

Paul's warning to beware against those who distort the gospel is the same warning that Alisa Childers addresses to the contemporary church in *Another Gospel: A Lifelong Christian Seeks Truth in Response to Progressive Christianity*. Childers is a writer, apologist, and blogger and therefore designs her text to walk the line between a personal narrative of encountering progressive Christian thought and a formal refutation of progressive arguments. *Another Gospel* surveys the rise and beliefs of the progressive movement, how historic Christianity counters the movement, the role of scriptural authority, and a refutation of the progressive theologies of hell and the atonement. The audience is twofold, including Christians who struggle with how to counter progressive Christianity's claims and those familiar with the recent inroads of the movement in Christian culture (12). Childers's aim is to reveal that "Christianity is not based on a mystical revelation or self-inspired philosophy" (10) but is instead based in scriptural truth that is preeminent over feelings-based pseudo-Christianity.

For a book that is conversational as well as apologetic, Childers is complete in her exposition. Referencing church history and contemporary progressive documents, she outlines the claims of

progressive Christianity and how Christian faith refutes its attacks. For example, she counters the underlying premise of the deconstruction movement that affirms “another Jesus—and another gospel” (76) by discussing objective truth as an issue of language. Naturally, she concludes that when an interpretation of Scripture drifts from a literal, grammatical, and cultural framework, it becomes simply a subjective interpretation rooted in critical theory. Because progressive Christianity defines familiar theological terms in ways that affirm personal attitudes, Childers affirms, “We cannot redefine what God calls sin and still presume to identify that ethic as Christian” (53). The most helpful defense is her exposition of scriptural authority in Chapters 7–9, where she reviews the principles of textual criticism, the basic defenses for the veracity of the word, and refutes the progressive claim that Scripture is a matter of cultural interpretation. Scripture is the final authority of the holy God in that “it has the authority to correct our thinking and behavior—and not the other way around” (169). Her emphasis on the authority of Scripture is not unique. Yet, she significantly demonstrates that interpretation is the crux not only of progressive Christianity as a whole but also of the insidious parts of progressive Christianity. It is the hidden parts of progressivism that well-meaning believers accept because they have not seen fit to recognize their thinking as subservient to the literal commands of God. Here, Childers is essentially clear: to accept the critical theory of interpreting Scripture as less than absolutely authoritative is to “choose to follow the whims of a godless culture” (176).

Childers’s text is successful in equipping readers to identify the different appearances of progressive Christianity so that they may understand and refute it in all its forms. At its most subtle, progressive Christianity appears in the church as smaller reinterpretations of Scriptural truth to affirm personal desires; at its most extreme, all the tenets of orthodox faith are destroyed. Though the claims of each version may differ, Childers understands that both types are dangerous. For example, she counters the progressive interpretation of the atonement that interprets God’s wrath as “based on the type of wrath that humans experience rather than the true wrath of God” (213). This distinction necessarily refutes the heresy of Christ appeasing God’s unjust wrath. Yet, Childers also correlates this idea

her earlier principle that interpreting the terms of Christianity is of utmost importance. To fail to understand terminology is to be unable to defend the faith. Therefore, the text's primary strength is in showing the nuanced ways in which progressive claims appear. Finally, this book meets the challenging task of defining the unities of the seemingly disparate progressive movement. The author's personal experiences as part of a progressive Christianity discussion group enable her to provide straightforward definitions of progressive tenets. Her experiences also demonstrate that progressive Christianity sounds harmless to those searching for hope but is ultimately a hopeless faith.

Yet, her experiences also weaken the text. Each chapter includes overly detailed illustrations that would have benefited by more succinct ties to the main defenses of each chapter. More analytical and less summative material would add to the richness of her conclusions about how historic faith rebuts the false teaching of progressive 'faith.' For example, the idea that a literal hell demonstrates the cultural hatred of "dogmatic claims about reality" has significant ramifications, but these were left unexplored (200). Further, the central idea implicitly raised throughout the text was also unaddressed: why are Christians not informed enough to counter the suspected problems in progressive Christianity? The text would have profited from an explicit discussion about how the church and parachurch may better equip believers to refute the claims of false teaching and support the validity of orthodox Christianity.

Childers's text would benefit both the new believer who may be unknowingly encountering progressive thought and the believer more familiar with the contemporary dangers of deconstructing the Christian faith. With its replete use of primary excerpts and contrasts between progressive and Christian beliefs, this book is an effective primer for why the historic Christian faith rests not only on the claims of Scripture but on the veracity of Scripture.

For the believer who is versed in hermeneutics and postmodern attacks on faith, another text is needed to provide a more detailed refutation of progressive Christianity. For all readers, *Another Gospel* is a necessary reminder to defend Scripture's legitimacy and reject the subtle facets of progressive subjective interpretation.

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Embracing Evolution: How Understanding Science Can Strengthen Your Christian Life. By Matthew Nelson Hill. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2020. 152 pp. Softcover \$20.00.

This work by Matthew Hill on integrating evolution with the Christian worldview provides an interesting attempt to merge two perspectives that actually contradict one another if biblical theology is the basis for Christian truth. Hill is an ordained elder in the Free Methodist Church and serves as associate Professor of Philosophy in the Department of Theology at Spring Arbor University. This book is not Hill's first foray into the field of evolutionary thinking and its impact on Christian living. Earlier he penned the book *Evolution and Holiness*, a work he mentions at times in *Embracing Evolution*. To understand the latter in greater context, it would be wise for the reader to review the former first. The fundamental assertion in the current work is that a Christian believer must seek to understand the truth of his evolutionary roots in order to develop his or her ongoing spiritual sanctification, a tenuous thesis on several counts as the evaluation below will show.

Embracing Evolution begins with an introductory chapter entitled "Opening a Dialogue." The audience that Hill is targeting for dialogue appears to consist of those professing believers who may struggle with their faith in light of accepted scientific evidence and the presumed reasonable proof for evolution. His work is an attempt to help such readers to navigate the Bible and science debates, accepting both evolution and faith in Christ. The main sections of the book are organized in three parts dedicated to 1) understanding the biblical lens needed to read Scripture faithfully, 2) understanding the

scientific lens by which we should appreciate evolutionary thinking relative to the reality of the world of nature, and 3) providing an integrated approach to evolution and the Christian faith.

While a young-earth creationist like this reviewer will struggle with the vast majority of the book, good points about the work can be acknowledged. First, the writing style is usually easy to follow especially given the fact that the topic is not an easy one for the average layperson in the church. Hill gives many illustrations, some of them personal, which clarify his argument. However, readers should be cautioned that illustrations do not give rational arguments that support, just information to bring clarity. Second, near the end of the book, he provides a two-page study guide with discussion questions for each chapter. These can be used for individual study or in a small group setting working through the teaching of Hill. Third, to his credit, Hill acknowledges the difficulty of harmonizing evolution with one of the most significant teachings of the Bible, namely, the issue of the origin of death. In evolution, death is a regular feature in the ongoing process of nature for millions of years. In the Bible, death is part of the curse brought into the universe because of Adam's sin in the Garden of Eden. Hill correctly understands that this difference provides a great hurdle for him to overcome.

Despite these positive elements of *Embracing Evolution*, the work deserves strong criticism on several fronts. First, Hill abandons the introductory focus on opening dialogue later in the book. In a somewhat pejorative section, Hill clearly shows he has no interest in dialogue with young-earth creationists like Ken Ham or ultra-Darwinists like Richard Dawkins (74–75). He portrays his position as a reasonable mediating position between these two extremes. Treatment of young earth creationists, Ken Ham in particular, is somewhat jaded. Hill appears to take an undeserved potshot (as do many evolutionists) at the lack of scientific credentials of Ham and his staff. Further, he shows no recognition and makes no mention of the scientist-led modern creationist movement spearheaded by the Institute for Creation Research and other scientific groups. This dismissive attitude toward young-earth creationists, who deal with scientific evidence and do far more than spout Bible verses from Genesis, produces an unwelcome “caricature tone” to the book.

A second problem is the potential that Hill's approach yields for downplaying the authority of Scripture. Following the Methodist tradition, he affirms the Wesleyan Quadrilateral—Scripture, tradition, reason, and personal experience with God—where the Bible is usually viewed as the primary source of authority. In this way, Hill does not intend to downplay Scripture. In several places, however, he casts doubt upon any straightforward understanding of the text in order to allow for evolutionary thought. One particular example goes to the heart of Hill's focus on the necessity of understanding our evolutionary roots in order to arrive at the needed sanctification in the Christian's life (102–104). This is a clear denial of the sufficiency of Scripture. This is particularly egregious in light of direct teaching of passages like 2 Peter 1:3: "His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence" (NASB). In the first century, the believers who first read that text did not have access to information from the teaching of modern evolutionary thought. If they had everything they needed to grow in the Lord in the first century, then today's Christians also have no need to add evolution to their worldview in order to change their behavior.

A third issue with the book is the lack of a definitive presentation of the concept of science. With seeming ease, Hill appeals to events of the distant past going back millions of years as if they have been verified empirically. This is a common but faulty presentation of origins by evolutionists. Origin science is of a different order than modern verification by means of experimentation. It is impossible to go back in time to the Big Bang and put it in a test tube to verify its actual occurrence. Hill seems to be unaware of this difference in the way he portrays his material. It will do no good to appeal to the present as the key to the past and investigate the supposed crumbs left by nature for us. The interpretation of such a trail is highly debated by scientists of all kinds. Hill also treats science much like a modernist and does not acknowledge the rise of postmodernism's critique of the arrogance and overly certain nature of modern scientific assertions. While postmodernism in general has many problems, so does modernism.

A fourth problem in the book is the way that Hill handles microevolution versus macroevolution and overall speciation issues.

Most young-earth creationists will acknowledge that at the level of microevolution (horizontal evolution) speciation occurs. That is, the development of new species happens in nature. What is rejected is vertical evolution that teaches that lower life forms evolve into higher life forms. But Hill goes beyond the wrongful assumption that evidence for microevolution proves macroevolution. In fact, there is no real distinction between the two according to Hill (52–57). He goes on to assume that change in populations within nature equals evolution. Surprisingly, one of his examples is the peppered moth, an example that has long been refuted but is still used in evolutionary arguments. The peppered moth existed before the Industrial Revolution but became dominant in England afterwards as the white moths were more easily picked off the darkened trees by the birds. In this example, there is no change whatsoever in the species. Both moths of different colors existed before and after the change in the overall population due to environmental events. The example simply has nothing to do with either microevolution or macroevolution.

A fifth problem with *Embracing Evolution* is the aforementioned conundrum of how death originated. In evolutionary doctrine, death has been part of the universe from the beginning. We walk around with dead fossils under our feet that, by evolutionary reckoning, died millions of years ago before there was an Adam and Eve to sin and bring the curse of death on the world. Hill acknowledges that his handling of this issue is not entirely satisfying (41). He even suggests that the problem may not be solvable. Nonetheless, his attempt to say something on the issue is to note that “in the Christian faith, the idea that death is necessary for life is nothing new” (41). Thus, death could be a good thing that God has placed in nature as part of the normal processing of the evolutionary timeline. One can only hold that this is true if the straightforward reading of Genesis 3 and other biblical texts is rejected outright. However, if one gives up evolution, the difficulty disappears. The origin of death will always be one of the problems that evolution will never be able to handle.

In the end, Hill assumes that the scientific evidence for evolution is assured. He also is embarrassed, as his quotation of Augustine shows (26–27), by Christians who read the Scripture in such a way that they do not consider evolutionary teaching. Thus, pastors must be cautious in using *Embracing Evolution* for study in the local

church. It has a place in the clash between those who reject evolution and those who affirm it. Those who want to involve themselves in the details of the dispute (perhaps seminary level) will benefit by a careful reading and analysis of Hill's claims. However, to integrate evolutionary teaching with the Bible, as Hill's work does, emasculates the biblical text at the exegetical level due to a presupposed belief in evolution. A better source for understanding the issues of science in the conflict would be agnostic Michael Denton's books *Evolution: A Theory in Crisis* and *Evolution: Still A Theory in Crisis*.

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— *Old Testament* —

Milton Morocho — *David, A Moabite? An Analysis of Deuteronomy 23:3-6 and the Book of Ruth, and the Theological Implications of David's Lineage*

Abstract: The Bible holds two truths that appear to contradict each other. Ruth 4:17 states that David is the third generation of Moabite descent. However, the law of Deuteronomy 23:3 prohibits the entry to the assembly of the Lord until the tenth generation of a descendant of a mixed marriage with a Moabite. These two biblical statements lead to the conclusion that David legally could not have entered the assembly of the Lord. The aim of this study is to harmonize these two realities. This study demonstrates that King David's heritage was not invalidated by his ancestral connection to Ruth, but not because God contravened the law. Rather, because he is sovereign over human affairs as well as the law, God allowed/permitted/ directed Ruth to become an Israelite.

In this dissertation there is an exegetical study of Deuteronomy 23:3–6 to determine the veracity of the law that excludes Moabite descendants. There is also a study of the important events in the book of Ruth to find an answer to the reaction of the people of Bethlehem to Ruth's marriage. Furthermore, there is a discussion of the theological implications of Ruth's acceptance into the assembly of the Lord, as well as an evaluation of the different views of Ruth's acceptance as an Israelite. This study concludes that King David's heritage was not invalidated by his Moabite ancestry because Ruth was accepted into the Jewish community. God sovereignly used the redemption and levirate laws to qualify Ruth as the wife of Boaz. As a result of this, the people of Bethlehem accepted her as their own and God blessed the couple by providing a son.

David E. Cooper – *The Macroplot of Genesis as Structurally Developed Through Episodic and Toledot Contributions: An Intersection of Discourse Analysis and Plot Analysis*

Abstract: Through the intersection of discourse analysis and plot analysis, a proposed macroplot for Genesis is developed from the formal structure of the narrative. The macrostructure of Genesis is determined to consist of eleven sections marked by transitional toledot headings. These headings are further stratified by their conjunctive or asyndetic form resulting in an outline for Genesis which includes five main sections and six sub-sections. From this structural starting point, a clause-by-clause discourse analysis ensues demarking these main sections and sub-sections according to their episodes. Each episode is then examined in order to reveal its specific contextual plot contribution. This analysis reveals that each main toledot traces a lineage of promise introduced in Genesis 3 throughout the incumbent narrative by repetition of the plot elements 1) threat to the promised line, 2) hope of God's means of resolution, 3) promise extended to the subject of the next main toledot, and 4) God's reassurance of promise. Through synthesis of each episode's plot contribution into the macroplot of Genesis, it is concluded that Genesis records the story of God's relationship with mankind to whom He delegates the blessing-commission. This commission consists of the responsibility of reflecting God's image through their relationships to each other, to the earth, and to the animal kingdom. Despite the disobedience of mankind to this commission, God extends a promise of completion through the progeny of mankind. This line of progeny is traced through the narrative including various threats and tensions. Rather than reject mankind's role as delegated representative, God responds to the threats and tensions with promise and reassurance. As the line of promise is narrowed through each main toledot section, the promise itself is expanded to include the promises of a multitude of descendants, a land, and the role of blessing to other nations. Each representative of the promised line experiences these blessings to some degree contributing to hope for fulfillment, yet their fulfillment is not reached within the

narrative. The narrative therefore ends with anticipation for the fulfillment of the promises of God to the line of promise.

— *New Testament* —

John Vo — *Paul's Ethics of Ethnic Reconciliation: Reading Ephesians 4-6 in Light of Ephesians 2:11-22*

Abstract: Ephesians 2:11–22 is regarded by most scholars as the theological center of Ephesians. The theme of ethnic reconciliation is clearly exhibited in the passage. The ethics of Ephesians in chapters 4–6 is grounded in the doctrinal section of chapters 1–3. Given the relationship between Ephesians 1–3 and 4–6, the ethics of Ephesians 4–6 would seem to find its theological grounding in Ephesians 2:11–22. Namely, the “one another” ethics in Ephesians 4–6 would be grounded in the theological context of ethnic reconciliation. The authorial intent application of the “one another” ethics is specific to the process of ethnic reconciliation that Christ has accomplished. In other words, the “one another” ethics throughout Ephesians 4–6 has in mind the exhortation to Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians to be united in Christ since they are now one social community, i.e., the church. Although Ephesians addresses multiple theological and practical issues, one of the primary occasions that caused Paul to write Ephesians is the ethnic conflict between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians. The theological center of Ephesians 2:11–22 and the practical ethics of ethnic reconciliation in Ephesians 4–6 ought to be viewed as Paul’s primary, if not main concern, for Ephesians.

— *Systematic Theology* —

Daniel Wiley — *A Critical Evaluation of Progressive Parallelism*

Abstract: Progressive parallelism is a structural approach to the book of Revelation which states that the Apocalypse is arranged as a series of vision cycles. Each of these cycles (covering 3–4 chapters) addresses roughly the same chronological period (generally the time between the first and second coming of

Christ) but each successive cycle extends further into the future and describes key eschatological events and themes in greater detail than addressed in previous cycles. Progressive parallelism serves as a valuable defense of amillennialism. If progressive parallelism proves exegetically sound, then one can argue that Revelation 20:1 begins a new cycle and describes events immediately following the first coming of Christ, thus demonstrating that the millennium is not a future kingdom on earth that consummates following the second coming of Christ, but rather describes the reign of the saints during the present age.

To prove legitimacy of progressive parallelism, proponents offer various evidences, including so-called consummative judgment and salvation at the end of each vision cycle, the parallels between the seals, trumpets, and bowls judgments, and the thematic relationships between Revelation 12 and 20, as well as chapters 19 and 20. These evidences, although appearing valid and coherent, suffer from poor exegesis of key texts, inconsistency in applying standards to prove recapitulation, and frequent appeals to an unfalsifiable “eschatological progression” to explain away exegetical difficulties. Therefore, progressive parallelism does not successfully defend amillennialism.



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