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2 Timothy 2:2

*And the things that you have heard from me
among many witnesses, commit these
to faithful men who will be able
to teach others also.*

The Times of the Gentiles

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INTRODUCTION

Jesus made this prediction in his Olivet Discourse:

But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then know that its desolation is near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those who are in the midst of her depart, and let not those who are in the country enter her. For these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled. But woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing babies in those days! For there will be great distress in the land and wrath upon this people. And they will fall by the edge of the sword, and be led away captive into all nations. And Jerusalem will be trampled by Gentiles until **the times of the Gentiles** are fulfilled” (Luke 21:20-24, NKJV).

What did Jesus mean when he referred to “the times of the Gentiles?”¹ When did the times of the Gentiles begin? When will the times of the Gentiles end? What events will happen during this period of time when Gentiles conquer Jerusalem?

The times of the Gentiles refers to the period of time that began with the destruction of Jerusalem and Solomon’s temple by Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians in 586 BC. The times of the Gentiles included the destruction of Jerusalem and the second temple by Titus and the Romans in AD. 70.² The times of the

¹ This paper was presented at the Pre-Trib Rapture Study Group Conference on December 5, 2016, in Irving, Texas, and has been revised for this journal.

² Preterists teach that Jesus’ prediction of Jerusalem’s destruction in the Olivet Discourse was fulfilled only in AD 70 when Titus and the

Gentiles also includes a future time during the last half of the tribulation period when Jerusalem will be surrounded and conquered by Gentile armies (Zech 12:3; 14:2; Matt 24:15-31; Rev 11:1-3). The times of the Gentiles will end with the second coming of Messiah Jesus who will defeat the Gentile armies led by the Antichrist at the battle of Armageddon and deliver the Jewish remnant in Jerusalem (Zech 14:3-9; Rev 19:11-21).

The times of the Gentiles started during the dispensation of law, includes the dispensation of grace and will end at the conclusion of the seven year tribulation period before the start of the dispensation of the kingdom. The times of the Gentiles includes all of the 70 weeks (490 years) of Daniel's prophecy (Dan 9:24-27). The times of the Gentiles includes the church age from Pentecost (Acts 2) until the Rapture which will happen before the tribulation period (1 Thess 4:13-17). The times of the Gentiles includes the future seven-year tribulation period (the 70th week of Daniel's prophecy) predicted in Daniel 9:27 and explained in the book of Revelation chapters 6-19.

During the times of the Gentiles the following are true: (1) no Jewish king sits on the throne of David ruling Israel, (2) four Gentile kingdoms (Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome) conquered Jerusalem and dominated Israel in the past, and (3) ten Gentile kings along with the future Antichrist (a Gentile king) will conquer Jerusalem and dominate Israel in the future seven-year tribulation period.

This article is divided into four main sections. The first section will examine the past Gentile kingdoms in the times of the

Romans came and destroyed the city and the second temple. Premillennial dispensationalists teach that Jesus' prediction of the destruction of Jerusalem was fulfilled in AD 70 when Titus and the Romans destroyed the temple and Jerusalem. Premillennial dispensationalists also see another final fulfilment in the last half of the future tribulation period. Jerusalem and a future temple will again be trampled by Gentile armies in the last half of the tribulation period (cf. Rev 11:1-3). In the verses following Jesus' prediction of the times of the Gentiles, Jesus reveals the distress of the nations and physical signs in the heavens that precede the literal second coming of Jesus (the Son of Man) to earth in glory (Luke 21:25-28).

Gentiles: Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. The second section will examine the times of the Gentiles in the future focusing on the Revived Roman Empire and the coming of the Antichrist. The third section will look at the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ to earth as the end of the times of the Gentiles. The final section will look at the reign of King Jesus on the Davidic throne in the future temple in Jerusalem.

THE GENTILE KINGDOMS IN THE TIMES OF THE GENTILES

In 603 BC King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had a dream of an image of a metallic man which had a head of gold, a chest and arms made of silver, a belly and thighs made of bronze, legs made of iron, and feet with ten toes made of part iron and part clay (Dan 2:31-33). The different metals and parts of the image represent different Gentile kingdoms that dominated Israel in the past during the times of the Gentiles: Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome.³

In the first year of the reign of Belshazzar, king of Babylon, Daniel had a dream of four beasts (Dan 7). Daniel wrote,

In the first year of Belshazzar king of Babylon, Daniel had a dream and visions of his head while on his bed. Then he wrote down the dream, telling the main facts. Daniel spoke saying I saw in my vision by night and behold the four winds of heaven were stirring up the Great Sea. And four great beasts came up from the sea, each different from the other (Dan 7:1-3).

³ Liberal critics who reject Daniel as the author of the book that bears his name believe that the four kingdoms are Babylon, Media, Persia, and Greece. They reject the early date of Daniel because they reject predictive prophecy. Jesus believed that Daniel wrote his book (Matt 24:15). Conservative evangelical scholars argue that Daniel wrote his book in the sixth century (Ryrie Study Bible has 537 BC). For arguments for a sixth century BC date of Daniel see J. Dwight Pentecost, "Daniel," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1985), 1324-25.

The four beasts represent four Gentile kingdoms that would dominate Israel. The Great Sea refers to the Mediterranean Sea (Num 34:6-7; Josh 1:4; 9:1). The four beasts of Daniel's vision in Daniel 7 refer to the different Gentile kingdoms that dominated Israel during the times of the Gentiles: Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome.⁴

H. A. Ironside points out the differences between Daniel 2 and Daniel 7:

Chapter seven covers practically the same ground as chapter two. It takes in the whole course of the Times of the Gentiles, beginning with Babylon and ending with the overthrow of all derived authority and the establishment of the kingdom of the Son of Man. ... In the second chapter, when a Gentile king had a vision of the course of world-empire, he saw the image of a man—a stately and noble figure—that filled him with such admiration that he set up a similar stature to be worshipped as a god. But in this opening chapter of the second division, Daniel, the man of God, has a vision of the same empires, and he sees them as four ravenous wild beasts, of so brutal a character, and so monstrous, that no actual creatures known to man could adequately set them forth.”⁵

Babylon: The First Gentile Kingdom

Babylon was the first Gentile kingdom to conquer Jerusalem and dominate Israel during the times of the Gentiles. The Babylonian empire dominated Israel from 605-539 BC.

⁴ The book of Daniel was written in two languages: 1:1-2:4a and chapters 8-12 are written in Hebrew and 2:4b-7:28 are written in Aramaic. Hebrew was the language of God's covenant people Israel, and Aramaic was the language of the Gentile world in Daniel's day. Daniel 2:4b-7:28 focuses on God's prophetic plan for the Gentile nations.

⁵ H. A. Ironside, *Lectures on Daniel the Prophet* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1911), 117-18.

The Head of Gold on the Image in Nebuchadnezzar's Dream in Daniel 2

Daniel told King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon that he was the head of gold in his dream of the metallic man:

This is the dream. Now we will tell the interpretation of it before the king. You, O King are a king of kings. For the God of heaven has given you a kingdom, power, strength and glory; and wherever the children of men dwell, or the beasts of the field and the birds of the heaven, He has given them into your hand, and has made you ruler over them all—you are this head of gold. (Dan 2:36-38)

The Lion in Daniel's Dream in Daniel 7

Daniel wrote about the first beast in his vision in Daniel 7: "The first was like a lion and had eagle's wings. I watched until its wings were plucked off and it was lifted up from the earth and made to stand on two feet like a man, and a man's heart was given to it" (Daniel 7:4).

Daniel wrote that the first beast was like a lion that had eagle's wings. These two symbols show that Babylon emphasize the strength and speed of the Babylonian army (cf. Jer 4:7; Ezek 17:3). Daniel watched until the lion's wings were plucked off, it was lifted up from the earth and made to stand on two feet like a man. Nebuchadnezzar boasted about his empire and God judged him (read Dan 4:28-33). The reference to his being made to stand on two feet like a man and being given a man's heart could be a reference to his return to his sanity and the restoration of his kingdom (Dan 4:34-37).

The Kings of Babylon

Nebuchadnezzar ruled Babylon from 605-562 BC. Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians invaded Judah in 605, 597 and 586 BC. In 605 BC Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians took Daniel and his three friends back to captivity in Babylon (2 Kgs 24:1-4; Dan 1:1-6). In 597 BC Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians invaded Judah. They took the treasures from the

temple and they took King Jehoiachin captive to Babylon (2 Kgs 24:8-16). Nebuchadnezzar made Mattaniah (Jehoiachin's uncle) the king of Judah and changed his name to Zedekiah (2 Kgs 24:17). The prophet Jeremiah predicted that the Babylonians would rule the world (Jer 27:6-11), that the Jews would go as captives to Babylon (Jer 27:19-22), and that Jerusalem would be destroyed by fire (Jer 34:21-22).

In 586 BC Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonian laid siege to Jerusalem when King Zedekiah refused to pay tribute to Babylon (2 Kgs 25:1; Jer 52:4; Ezek 24:1). The Babylonians captured Zedekiah and his sons who tried to escape from the city. Nebuchadnezzar killed Zedekiah's sons while he watched, made him blind and took Zedekiah as a captive back to Babylon (2 Kgs 25:5-7; Jer 39:4-8; 52:6-11). Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and burned Solomon's temple to the ground on the 10th of Ab (August 15, 586 BC).

The times of the Gentiles began with Nebuchadnezzar and Babylon's destruction of Jerusalem and Solomon's temple. King Zedekiah was the last king of Judah to sit on the throne of David. Jehoiachin was the last surviving king of the Davidic dynasty. He was released from prison in Babylon on the 27th of Adar (April 2) in 561 BC (2 Kgs 25:27-30).

After Nebuchadnezzar died, Babylon was ruled by Evil-Merodach (562-560 BC), Neriglissar (560-556 BC), Labashi-Marduk (556 BC), and Nabonidus (556-533 BC). Nabonidus spent several years in Arabia and left his son Belshazzar in charge in Babylon. This explains why Daniel was raised to the third position in the kingdom of Babylon (Dan 5:7, 16, 29).

Belshazzar was the co-regent of Babylon with his father Nabonidus from 553-539 BC. Belshazzar gave a great banquet and used the cups from the temple in Jerusalem to serve wine. On that night he saw God's handwriting on the wall,⁶ Belshazzar was

⁶ The Aramaic words that God wrote on the wall were *Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin* (Dan 5:25). *Mene* means Numbered. The days of Belshazzar's reign as king of Babylon were numbered. His time was up. *Tekel* means Weighed. Belshazzar was weighed on God's scale of justice and was found to be wanting because he used the holy cups from the

killed by the Medes and Persians who conquered Babylon (Dan 5:28-31).⁷

Medo-Persia: The Second Gentile Kingdom

Media is the name for northwest Iran. Persia is a description for ancient Iran. Cyrus of Persia brought Media under his control in 550 BC. The Medes and Persians together conquered Babylon (Dan 5:28). The Medo-Persian empire dominated Israel from 539-332 BC.

The Chest and Arms of Silver on the Image in Nebuchadnezzar's Dream in Daniel 2

Medo-Persia is described as the chest and arms of silver in Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the metallic man (Dan 2:32). Daniel told Nebuchadnezzar, "But after you shall arise another kingdom inferior to yours" (Dan 2:39). As silver is inferior to gold, so the kingdom of Medo-Persia was inferior to Babylon. Babylonian King Belshazzar saw the handwriting on the wall which predicted that his kingdom would be divided and given to the Medes and Persians (Dan 5:28). Daniel was thrown into the lions' den because of the law of the Medes and Persians signed by King Darius (Dan 6:8).

The Bear in Daniel's Dream in Daniel 7

Medo-Persia is described as a bear in Daniel's vision in Daniel 7: "And suddenly another beast, a second, like a bear. It was

temple in Jerusalem for his party in Babylon. *Upharsin* means Divided. The kingdom of Babylon would be divided between the Medes and the Persians that very night.

⁷ Herodotus explains how Cyrus and the Persians conquered the city of Babylon. They diverted the waters of the Euphrates River into a canal, and as a result the Persian army entered the city at night by wading through the water under the city walls (Herodotus, *Histories* 1.191).

raised up on one side and had three ribs in its mouth between its teeth. And they said thus to it: Arise, devour much flesh" (Dan 7:5). Persia was more prominent than Media and that is why the bear is raised up on one side. The three ribs between the bear's teeth refer to the countries conquered by Medo-Persia: Babylon to the west, Lydia to the north, and Egypt to the south.

The Ram in Daniel's Vision in Daniel 8

Medo-Persia is described as the Ram in Daniel's vision in Daniel 8:

Then I lifted my eyes and saw, and there, standing beside the river, was a ram which had two horns, and the two horns were high; but one was higher than the other, and the higher one came up last. I saw the ram pushing westward, northward, and southward, so that no animal could withstand him; nor was there any that could deliver from his hand, but he did according to his will and became great (Dan 8:3-4).

The two horns of the Ram refer to Media and Persia. Persia was greater than Media, and that is why one horn is described as higher than the other. Media was older than Persia and that is why the higher horn came up last. The Persians under King Cyrus extended their kingdom west, north, and south.

The Kings of Medo-Persia

Cyrus ruled Persia from 550-530 BC (Dan 1:21; 6:28; 10:1). In 539 BC Cyrus and the Persians conquered Babylon (Dan 5).⁸ In

⁸ Josephus writes, "Now after a little while, both himself and the city were taken by Cyrus, the king of Persia, who fought against him; for it was Baltasar, under whom Babylon was taken, when he had reigned seventeen years. And this is the end of the posterity of king Nebuchadnezzar, as history informs us; but when Babylon was taken by Darius and when he, with his kinsman Cyrus, had put an end to the dominion of the Babylonians, he was sixty two years old. He was the son of Astyages and had another name among the Greeks. Moreover, he took

538 BC Cyrus permitted the Jews to return to the land of Israel to rebuild the temple (Ezra 1:1-4; 6:3-5) in fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy (cf. Is 44:28; 45:1-13). Zerubbabel led 50,000 Jews back to Jerusalem (Ezra 1-4).

The last verse of the Hebrew Bible contains Cyrus' decree for the Jews to return to build the temple:

Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: All the kingdoms of the earth the LORD God of heaven has given me. And He has commanded me to build Him a house at Jerusalem which is in Judah. Who is among you of all His people? May the LORD his God be with him, and let him go up! (2 Chron 36:23).

In 537 BC the Jews set up the altar for the temple (Ezra 3:1-7). In 536 BC the Jews laid the foundation for the second temple (Ezra 3:8-13). Daniel was given a vision of the future of Israel during the Greek period and the future tribulation period (Dan 10-12). From 536-530 BC the Samaritans hindered the rebuilding of the temple (Ezra 4:1-5).

Cambyes ruled Persia from 530-522 BC. During his reign the work on the second temple stopped (Ezra 4:24). Smerdis ruled Persia for a short time in 522 BC.

From 521-486 BC Darius I Hystaspes ruled Persia. He created a strong central government with satraps to govern his provinces. He established a postal system with 111 stations from Susa to Ephesus. He gave permission for the temple in Jerusalem to be finished (Ezra 4-6). Haggai and Zechariah prophesied during his reign and challenged the Jews to complete the second temple (Ezra 5:1-2; Hag 1:1, 15; 2:10; Zech 1:1, 7; 7:1).

Daniel the prophet and carried him with him into Media and honored him very greatly and kept him with him" (*The Antiquities of the Jews*, 10.11.4). Josephus distinguished Darius from Cyrus. Evangelical scholars differ on the identity of Darius the Mede. He has been identified as (1) Cambyes, son of Cyrus; (2) Gubaru, a governor of Babylon appointed by Cyrus; (3) Ugbaru, general of Cyrus' army; and (4) Cyrus himself. I agree with Dr. John Whitcomb Jr. that Darius the Mede was Gubaru (cf. John Whitcomb Jr., *Darius the Mede* [Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1977], 66).

From 520-516 BC Zerubbabel led the Jews to resume the rebuilding of the temple under the encouragement of Haggai and Zechariah (Ezra 5:1-2; Hag 1:1, 15; 2:10; Zech 1:1, 7; 7:1)

Tattenai (a satrap of Syria) sent a letter to Darius protesting the rebuilding project but Darius told Tattenai to leave the Jews alone (Ezra 5:3-6:14).

The Jews finished rebuilding the second temple in 516 BC:

So the elders of the Jews built, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. And they built and finished it, according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the command of Cyrus, Darius and Artaxerxes king of Persia. Now the temple was finished on the third day of the month of Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of King Darius (Ezra 6:14-15).

In 490 BC Darius the Great and the Persian army invaded Greece but were defeated by the Greeks at the battle of Marathon.⁹

From 486-464 BC Ahasuerus (Xerxes I) ruled Persia. He deposed Vashti as his queen and made Esther his queen in her place (Esth 2:5-18). He defeated Greece and took Athens. His fleet was later defeated by the Greeks at the battle of Salamis. Ahasuerus helped deliver Esther, Mordecai, and the Jews from wicked Haman and his plot to destroy all the Jews. Haman hanged on the gallows he had prepared for Mordecai. The Jews first celebrated the Feast of Purim in March of 473 BC (Book of Esther).

From 464-423 BC Artaxerxes I ruled Persia. In 458 BC Ezra led the second return of Jews from Persia back to the land of Israel (Ezra 7-8). Ezra confessed the sins of the Jews who had intermarried with foreign wives and they divorced their foreign wives (Ezra 9-10). In 445 BC Artaxerxes I permitted Nehemiah, his cupbearer, to return to the land of Israel to rebuild the broken down walls of Jerusalem (Neh 1-2).

⁹ Herodotus, *The History*, Book 6.

In 444 BC Artaxerxes I gave a decree to the Jews to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. This is the beginning date for the fulfillment of the 70 weeks prophecy found in Daniel 9:24-27. Hoehner says that the date is March 5, 444 BC Artaxerxes I permitted Nehemiah his cupbearer to return to the land of Israel to rebuild the broken down walls of Jerusalem (Neh 1-2). Sanballat the Samaritan, Tobiah the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arab opposed the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem (Neh 2:19). On September 22, 444 BC Nehemiah and the Jews finished rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem in 52 days in spite of opposition (Nehemiah 6:15-16). On September 27, 444 BC, Ezra read the book of the law and explained it to the people and they celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles (Neh 8).

Darius II ruled Persia from 423-404 BC. Artaxerxes II ruled Persia from 404-359 BC. Artaxerxes III ruled Persia from 359-338 BC. Arses ruled Persia from 338-336 BC Darius III ruled Persia from 336-332 BC.

Greece: The Third Gentile Kingdom

Greece was the third Gentile world power to conquer Israel. Philip of Macedon united the Greek city states. Hellenism spread across the world as a result of Alexander the Great's conquest of Persia, and Greek became the language of the empire. The Greek empire dominated Israel from 332-63 BC. This period of time includes the relative period of independence of Israel led by the Maccabees and Hasmoneans from 167-63 BC.

The Brass Belly on the Image in Nebuchadnezzar's Dream in Daniel 2

Daniel revealed to Nebuchadnezzar that in his dream of the metallic man that its belly and thighs were made of bronze (Dan 2:32). Daniel interpreted the bronze belly and thighs as "a third kingdom of bronze, which shall rule over all the earth" (Dan 2:39).

The Winged Leopard in Daniel's Dream in Daniel 7

Daniel wrote about the third beast in his vision in Daniel 7: “After this I looked and there was another, like a leopard, which had on its back four wings of a bird. The beast also had four heads and dominion was given to it” (Dan 7:6). The leopard with wings would be an incredibly fast creature. Alexander the Great conquered the known world faster than any other Gentile ruler.

The Goat with the Large Horn in Daniel's Vision in Daniel 8

Daniel had a vision of the Goat (Greece) defeating the Ram (Medo-Persia) (Dan 8:1-14).¹⁰

And as I was considering, suddenly a male goat came from the west, across the surface of the whole earth, without touching the ground; and the goat had a notable horn between his eyes. Then he came to the ram that had two horns, which I had seen standing beside the river and ran at him with furious power. And I saw him confronting the ram; he was moved with rage against him, attacked the ram and broke his two horns. There was no power in the ram to withstand him, but he cast him down to the ground and trampled him; and there was no one that could deliver the ram from his hand. Therefore the male goat grew very great; but when he became strong, the large horn was broken (Dan 8:5-8a).

In this vision, the male Goat represents Greece and the large horn on the goat represents Alexander the Great. Through a series of battles Alexander the Great and the Greek army defeated Darius and the Persians. Daniel predicted that Alexander the Greek would be a mighty king who would rule with great dominion and do according to his will (Dan 11:3).

¹⁰ Daniel had this vision of the Ram and Goat in the third year of King Belshazzar of Babylon around 551 BC. The Goat with the large horn (Greece led by Alexander the Great) conquered the Ram with two horns (Medo-Persia).

Alexander the Great

Alexander the Great was born on July 21, 356 BC, the son of King Philip II and Olympias. His first tutor was Leonidas who taught Alexander math and military skills, including archery and horsemanship. Alexander was tutored by the great philosopher Aristotle in 343 BC. Alexander joined his father Philip's army in 340 BC and Philip was able to unite the Greek city states. In 336 BC Philip of Macedon was assassinated and Alexander became the king of Greece. Alexander the Great ruled Greece from 336-323 BC.

After crossing the Hellespont, Alexander led the Greeks to defeat the Persians at the Granicus river in 334 BC as he crossed over into Asia. In 333 BC. Alexander the Great and his Greek army defeated Darius III and the Persians at the battle of Issus. Alexander then marched his army south along the coast. Alexander went up to Jerusalem and met Jaddua the high priest.

Josephus tells that when Alexander the Great came to Jerusalem that Jaddua the high priest showed him the reference in the book of Daniel and Alexander spared the city as a result in 332 BC. Josephus wrote,

When Jaddua, the high priest, heard that Alexander was coming, he was terrified and ordered his people to join him in prayer and sacrifice to God. When he learned that Alexander was not far from the city (Jerusalem) he went out in procession with the priests and the people. Alexander saw the procession coming toward him. The priests were clothed in linen and the high priest in a robe of blue and gold. On his head was a miter with the golden plate on which God's name was inscribed. Approaching alone, Alexander prostrated himself before the Name and greeted the high priest. As the Jews welcomed Alexander with one voice, he replied, 'When I was in Macedonia, considering how I would become master of Asia, I saw this very person in my sleep, dressed as he is now. He urged me not to delay, but to cross over confidently and take dominion over the Persians.' Alexander was escorted into Jerusalem by the high priest and his attendants. He went up into the temple, where he sacrificed to God according to the high priest's directions. And when the book of Daniel was shown to him, which predicted that

one of the Greeks would destroy the empire of the Persians, he thought himself to be the one so intended. When he offered the Jews whatever they desired, the high priest asked that they might observe their own laws and be exempt from the tribute every seventh year. Alexander granted these requests; and when they entreated him that he would permit the Jews in Babylon and Media to enjoy their own laws also, he willingly promised to do what they desired.¹¹

Alexander and the Greeks conquered Egypt without a fight in 332 BC. Alexander founded the city of Alexandria, which later became the capital city of the Ptolemies. In 331 BC. Alexander founded the city of Alexandria in Egypt. Alexander led the Greek army to defeat Darius and the Persians at the battle of Gaugamela and then at the battle of Arbela. Alexander and the Greeks conquered Babylon on October 18, 331 BC. Alexander led his Greek army all the way to India and defeated King Porus in 326 BC.

Daniel wrote, “Therefore the male goat grew very great; but when he became strong, the large horn was broken, and in place of it four notable ones came up toward the four winds of heaven” (Dan 8:8). The large horn that was broken refers to the death of Alexander. Alexander the Great died as a result of a fever on June 10, 323 BC.

The Diadochi

The Diadochi (Greek for successors) ruled over the Greek empire from 323-301 BC. After the death of Alexander the Great there was a power struggle between Alexander’s four generals. The Greek empire was divided into four separate kingdoms each ruled by one general.

Daniel had two visions concerning the division of the Greek empire into four powers after the death of Alexander the Great: (1) The four heads on the winged leopard (Dan 7:6), and (2) the four horns that came up after the horn on the male goat was

¹¹ Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, 11.8.5

broken (Dan 8:8). In Daniel 7 Daniel wrote "After this I looked and there was another, like a leopard, which had on its back four wings of a bird. The beast also had four heads, and dominion was given to it" (Dan 7:6). The four heads refer to four Greek rulers who came after the death of Alexander the Great.

The four horns (Dan 8:8) that came up after the death of Alexander also refer to his four generals who became rulers as the Greek empire was divided: (1) Lysimachus ruled Thrace and Bithynia (western Asia Minor called the Hellespont); (2) Ptolemy I ruled Egypt; (3) Cassander ruled Macedonia (including Greece); and (4) Seleucus ruled Syria and Babylon (including Persia).

The Ptolemies: Greek Rulers of Egypt

The Ptolemies were fourteen Greek rulers who ruled Egypt from 323-30 BC. They were friendly to the Jews and allowed them to maintain their religious freedom. The Ptolemies fought the Seleucidae for control of the land of Israel (275, 245, 240, 219, 217, 202-198 BC.). The capital city of the Ptolemies was Alexandria in Egypt.

Ptolemy I Soter ruled Egypt from 323-285 BC. In 312 BC Ptolemy I captured Jerusalem after he defeated Antigonus' son Demetrius I at the battle of Gaza. Ptolemy II Philadelphus ruled Egypt from 285-246 B.C. During his rule the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew OT) was written by Jewish scribes in Alexandria.

The Seleucids: Greek Rulers of Syria

Antiochus III was the Greek ruler of Syria from 223-187 BC. He helped Hannibal after Hannibal was defeated by the Romans. In 203 BC Antiochus III and the Seleucid empire conquered Jerusalem after the battle of Panium (part of the Fifth Syrian War) in which Antiochus III the Great defeated the Ptolemies. In 190 BC Antiochus III was defeated by the Romans at the battle of Magnesia. Antiochus III lost 53,000 men while Rome lost only 400 men. His son Antiochus IV was taken to Rome as a hostage for twelve years.

Antiochus IV Epiphanes

In 175 BC Antiochus IV Epiphanes became king of the Seleucid Empire. He ruled from 175-164 BC. Daniel predicted the rise of Antiochus Epiphanes who is described as the little horn of Daniel 8 that grew out of one of the four horns that came up when the large horn was broken. Daniel wrote,

And out of one of them came a little horn which grew exceedingly great toward the south, toward the east, and toward the Glorious Land (Israel). And it grew up to the host of heaven; and it cast down some of the host and some of the stars to the ground and trampled them. He even exalted himself as high as the Prince of the host; and by him the daily sacrifices were taken away, and the place of his sanctuary was cast down. Because of transgression, an army was given over to the horn to oppose the daily sacrifices; and he cast truth to the ground. He did all this and prospered (Dan 8:9-14).

The little horn of Daniel 8 refers to Antiochus IV Epiphanes – the ruler of the Seleucid Empire (ancient Syria). He was the eighth king of the Seleucid dynasty. He came to power in 175 BC after murdering his brother. He is not to be confused with the little horn of Daniel 7 which refers to the future Antichrist (see below). Antiochus tried to expand his empire and went south to Egypt, east to Babylon and west to Israel (the glorious land). His pride was seen in his self exaltation and by his stopping the sacrifices at the second temple. He cast truth down to the ground when he had the Torah scrolls burned in Jerusalem. Antiochus Epiphanes desecrated the temple for 2300 days (Dan 8:13-14).

Daniel gave this prediction in Daniel 11 about Antiochus Epiphanes who is described as a ruler of the King of the North who would persecute Israel:

And in his place shall arise a vile person, to whom they will not give the honor of royalty; but he shall come in peaceably and seize the kingdom by intrigue. With the force of a flood they shall be swept away from before him and be broken, and also the prince of the covenant. And after the league is made with him he shall act deceitfully, for he shall come up and become strong with a small

number of people. He shall enter peaceably, even into the richest places of the province; and he shall do what his father have not done, nor his forefathers; he shall disperse among them the plunder, spoil and riches; and he shall devise his plans against the strongholds, but only for a time. He shall stir up his power and his courage against the king of the South with a great army. And the king of the South shall be stirred up to battle with a very great army; but he shall not stand, for they shall devise plans against him. Yes, those who eat of the portion of his delicacies shall destroy him; his army shall be swept away, and many shall fall down slain. Both these kings' hearts shall be bent on evil, and they shall speak lies at the same table; but it shall not prosper for the end will still be at the appointed time. While returning to his land with great riches, his heart shall be moved against the holy covenant; so he shall do damage and return to his own land. At the appointed time he shall return and go toward the south but it shall not be like the former or the latter. For ships from Cyprus shall come against him; therefore he shall be grieved and return in rage against the holy covenant and do damage. So he shall return and show regard for those who forsake the holy covenant. And forces shall be mustered by him and they shall defile the sanctuary fortress; then they shall take away the daily sacrifices and place there the abomination of desolation. Those who do wickedly against the covenant he shall corrupt with flattery; but the people who know their God shall be strong, and carry out great exploits. And those of the people who understand shall instruct many; yet for many days they shall fall by sword and flame, by captivity and plundering (Dan 11:21-34).

Antiochus IV took the name Epiphanes which means "the Illustrious One," but the Jews nicknamed him Epimanes which means "the Madman." Antiochus IV illegally seized the throne from Demetrius Soter, a son of Seleucus IV Philopator (Dan 11:21). He turned aside an invading army of Egyptians and deposed Onias III (the high priest of Israel here called a prince of the covenant (Dan 11:22). Antiochus made an alliance with Egypt after his victory and robbed the rich and gave the loot to his followers (Dan 11:23-24). He sought to bring peace to his realm

by redistributing wealth, taking from the rich and giving to his followers.

After consolidating his kingdom, Antiochus IV attacked Egypt (the King of the South) in 170 BC and defeated the Egyptians (Dan 11:25-27). Antiochus professed friendship with Egypt as the victor and vanquished sat at the table together. Antiochus IV plundered Jerusalem and killed thousands of Jews on his way home to Syria (Dan 11:28). Antiochus IV desecrated the temple in Jerusalem before returning to his own country (Syria).

In 168 BC Antiochus IV moved against Egypt (King of the South) again (Dan 11:29). This time the Romans who came in ships opposed him (Dan 11:30a). Roman General Gaius Popillius Laenas took a letter to Antiochus IV telling him not to fight Egypt. When Antiochus asked for time to consider, the general drew a circle in the sand around Antiochus and demanded that he give his answer before he stepped out of the circle. Antiochus submitted to Rome's demands because he knew that if he resisted he would be declaring war on Rome. This was a humiliating defeat for Antiochus.¹²

Antiochus IV took out his anger on Israel. He showed favor to those who forsook the holy covenant (Dan 11:30b). His armed forces desecrated the temple and stopped the daily sacrifices (Dan 11:31a). Antiochus sent his general Apollonius with 22,000 soldiers into Jerusalem. They attacked and looted Jerusalem on the Sabbath, set fire to parts of the city and slaughtered many Jews (2 Macc. 5:11-14). They took many women and children as slaves.

Antiochus set up an abomination of desolation (Dan 11:31b). On December 16, 167 BC, the Jews were forced to offer a pig on the altar in the temple in worship of Zeus.

Josephus wrote,

And when the king had built an idol altar upon God's altar, he slew pigs upon it and so offered a sacrifice neither according to the law, nor the Jewish religious worship in that country. He also compelled

¹² Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews* 12.5.3

them to forsake the worship they paid their own God and to adore those whom he took to be gods; and made them build temples and raise idol altars, in every city and village and offer pigs upon them every day.¹³

Antiochus tried to hellenize the Jews and outlaw Judaism and many Jews abandoned their faith as a result (Dan 11:32). He prohibited circumcision and Sabbath observance. He banned and burned Torah scrolls. He ordered sacrifices to be made to Zeus in the temple (1 Macc. 1:41-64; 2 Macc. 6). Antiochus IV Epiphanes ruled the Jews from 175-164 BC. He persecuted the Jews in Jerusalem until the city was liberated by the Maccabees.

A Time of Jewish Freedom from Gentile Rule

The Maccabees

The Jews revolted against Antiochus IV and the Seleucids. Daniel predicted the Maccabean revolt: “Now when they fall, they shall be aided with a little help; but many shall join with them by intrigue. And some of those of understanding shall fall, to refine them, purify them and make them white, until the time of the end; because it is still for the appointed time” (Dan 11:34-35).

In 166 BC the Jewish priest Mattathias refused to offer the sacrifice to the Greek gods at Modin. He killed an apostate Jew who did and this led to the insurrection. He lit the spark for the Jewish fight for freedom. Judas Maccabeus (called “the Hammer”) led the Maccabees in their revolt against the Seleucid empire from 166-160 BC. Daniel revealed that the temple would be desecrated 2300 days from 171 BC to December 25, 165 B.C. (Dan 8:14).

In 164 BC the Maccabees led by Judas captured Jerusalem following the battle of Beth Zur and rededicated the temple.¹⁴ The lampstand in the temple had oil in it for one day but it lasted for eight days. The Jewish feast which commemorates this victory of

¹³ Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews* 12.5.4

¹⁴ Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews* 12.5.6

the Maccabees over the Seleucids is called Hanukkah or the Feast of Lights. Interestingly enough, Jesus taught in the temple during this festival of Hanukkah and declared that he is the light of the world (John 10:22).

The Hasmoneans

From 135-63 BC the Hasmoneans ruled Israel during this time of Jewish independence. The Hasmoneans were ruling priests in Israel. Two religious political parties emerged from them. The Hasidim represented the conservatives who resisted Hellenization in Israel and they became known as the Pharisees. The Hellenizers adopted Greek customs and this group became known as the Sadducees. Both of these groups vied for power in Israel.

The Hasmoneans were named after Mattathias's great grandfather (1 Macc. 14:25-49). For 80 years the Jews experienced independence and this time was viewed as the golden age of Jewish nationalism. After Rome ended this period in 63 BC the Jews would never live in Israel as a free self governing people again until the establishment of the nation of Israel in 1948.

Rome: The Fourth Gentile Kingdom

The Iron Legs on the Image in Nebuchadnezzar's Dream in Daniel 2

The image in Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Daniel 2 had iron legs. The iron legs on the image represent Rome (the fourth Gentile kingdom to conquer Israel). Daniel wrote, "And the fourth kingdom shall be as strong as iron, inasmuch as iron breaks in pieces and shatters everything; and like iron that crushes, that kingdom will break in pieces and crush all the others" (Dan 2:40).

Ten Horned Monster Beast in Daniel Vision in Daniel 7

The fourth beast in Daniel's vision recorded in Daniel 7 was a ten-horned monster beast. This ten-horned monster beast also

represents Rome. Daniel wrote, “After this I saw in the night visions and behold a fourth beast, dreadful and terrible, exceedingly strong. It had huge iron teeth; it was devouring, breaking in pieces, and trampling the residue with its feet. It was different from all the beasts that were before it, and it had ten horns” (Dan 7:7).

Roman Rulers

In 63 BC Pompey and the Romans conquered Jerusalem and Israel.¹⁵ Pompey laid siege to Jerusalem for three months and then Pompey entered the temple. His Roman soldiers even killed the priests as they were offering their sacrifices at the temple “preferring the duties about their worship to God before their own preservation.”¹⁶

In 49 B.C. Julius Caesar became Roman emperor. He made war against Pompey and defeated him in Egypt. Because Antipater helped Julius Caesar, Julius made Antipater a Roman citizen. Antipater then made his son Herod governor of Galilee. From 47-40 B.C. Herod (later called the Great) was governor of Galilee. He went to Rome and became a friend of Julius Caesar when the Parthians attacked and captured Jerusalem.

From 37-4 BC Herod the Great ruled Israel as King of the Jews. Herod was the son of Antipater and an Idumean (from Edom). He consolidated his power by killing members of his family including some of his sons and his wife Mariamne. Herod the Great was a great builder.¹⁷ He renovated the second temple in Jerusalem. Herod built palaces at Caesarea Maritima and Jericho and palace-fortresses at the Herodium and Masada. Herod rebuilt the capital city of Samaria and renamed it Sebaste (from the Greek equivalent of Augustus).

From 31 BC-AD 14 Octavian, later called Caesar Augustus, ruled Rome. He was the nephew of Julius Caesar. He defeated

¹⁵ Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews* 1.7.1-6.

¹⁶ Ibid. 1.7.5.

¹⁷ Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews* 1.21

Mark Antony at the battle of Actium in 31 BC Mark Antony committed suicide after his defeat. Caesar Augustus divided his territories into two types of provinces: senatorial and imperial. The senatorial provinces were ruled by proconsuls appointed by the Roman Senate for one-year terms. They ruled over the more loyal and peaceful provinces. The imperial provinces were ruled by legates appointed by the emperor himself and prefects called procurators. Quirinius was a legate of Syria from AD 76-9 and made a census (Luke 2:2).

Jesus was born in Bethlehem to the virgin Mary around 6-4 BC (cf. Luke 2:1-20). Herod the Great had some Jewish boy babies in Bethlehem killed in his attempt to kill the baby Jesus (Matt 2:1-18). After changing his will several times, Herod the Great died and his kingdom was divided among his three surviving sons: Archelaus ruled Judea, Antipas ruled Galilee and Perea and Philip ruled Iturea and the region of Trachonitis (cf. Luke 3:1). Herod the Great was buried at the Herodium.

From AD 14-37 Tiberius Caesar ruled Rome. Tiberius appointed Pontius Pilate to govern Judea in AD 26. Tiberius was the Roman emperor when Jesus ministered in Israel and was crucified (Luke 3:1; 20:22, 25; 23:2; John 19:12, 15). Roman procurator Pontius Pilate offended the Jews by putting ensigns of Caesar in Jerusalem. He also spent money from the temple treasury on building aqueducts. Pilate sentenced the Lord Jesus Christ to be crucified (Matt 27; Mark 15; Luke 23; John 19). Pilate condemned Jesus to die because he viewed him as a rival king to Caesar, and he was afraid that the Jews would condemn him to Caesar if he let Jesus go.

Gaius known as Caligula ruled Rome as emperor from AD 37-41. During his reign he sent Petronius to invade Judea and erect a statue of himself in the temple.¹⁸ But the Jews protested at Tiberias and were willing to die than permit the statue of Caligula to be put in the temple.¹⁹ Gaius died after he wrote a note to

¹⁸ Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews* 18.8.2

¹⁹ Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews* 18.8.3

Petronius in which he threatened Petronius with death if he did not carry out his duty. Josephus wrote that Petronius,

rejoiced at this coincidence as to the death of Gaius, and admired God's providence who without the least delay and immediately gave him a reward for the regard he had to the temple and the assistance he afforded the Jews for avoiding the dangers they were in. And by this means Petronius escaped the danger of death which he could not foresee.²⁰

Claudius ruled Rome as emperor from AD 41-54. An extensive famine happened during his reign (Acts 11:28). Around AD 49 or 50 Claudius expelled Jews from Rome. Aquila and Priscilla came to Corinth from Rome as a result (Acts 18:1-2).

Nero ruled Rome as emperor from AD 54-68. During his trial in Caesarea Paul appealed to go to Caesar (Roman emperor Nero) for a fair trial (Acts 25:8, 10-12, 21; 26:32; 27:24; 28:19).

From AD 64-68 Nero persecuted Jews and Christians throughout the Roman empire as he blamed them for the fire in Rome. During his reign both Peter and Paul were martyred in Rome. Tradition states that Peter was crucified upside down and Paul was beheaded.

Galba ruled Rome as emperor from AD 68-69. Otho ruled Rome as emperor in AD 69. Vitellius ruled Rome in AD 69. Vespasian ruled Rome as emperor from AD 69-79.

In AD 70 the Romans led by General Titus (the son of Vespasian) destroyed Jerusalem and the second temple on the 9th of Av (the same date as Solomon's temple was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians).

The Roman general Titus did not want to destroy the temple. He told the Jewish defenders of the city,

I appeal to my own army and the Jew that are now with me and even to you yourselves that I do not force you to defile this sanctuary; and if you will but change the place where you will fight, no Roman

²⁰ Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews* 18:8.9.

shall either come near your sanctuary, or offer any affront to it; no, I will endeavor to preserve your holy house, whether you will or not.²¹

But after Jerusalem was taken by the Romans, Titus gave the “order that they should now demolish the entire city and temple but for all the rest of the wall, it was so thoroughly laid even with the ground by those that dug it up to the foundation, that there was left nothing to make those that came after believe that it had ever been inhabited.”²²

The destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in AD 70 fulfilled Jesus’ prediction that he made to the disciples in his Olivet Discourse around AD 30: “Then Jesus went out and departed from the temple and his disciples came up to show him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said to them, ‘Do you not see all these things? Assuredly I say to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down’ (Matt 24:1-2).

Domitian was the third and last emperor of the Flavian dynasty. He ruled the Roman empire from AD 81-96. Both Suetonius and Cassius Dio allege that Domitian gave himself the title of *Dominus et Deus* (Lord and God).²³ Domitian persecuted Jews and Christians throughout the Roman empire, those who refused to offer him a sacrifice and proclaim him as Lord and God.

Eusebius wrote,

With terrible cruelty Domitian put to death without trial great numbers of men at Rome who were distinguished by family and career and without cause banished many other notables and confiscated their property. Finally he showed himself Nero’s successor in hostility to God. He was the second to organize a

²¹ Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews* 6.2.

²² Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews* 7.1.1

²³ Suetonius, *Domitian* 13.2 and Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 67.4.7

persecution against us, though his father Vespasian, had no such evil plans.²⁴

During Domitian's reign, the apostle John was banished to the island of Patmos around AD 95 "for the word of God and testimony of Jesus Christ" (Rev 1:9). There John wrote the book of Revelation.

THE TIMES OF THE GENTILES IN THE FUTURE

Revived Rome: The Fifth Gentile Kingdom

The Ten Toes on the Image in Nebuchadnezzar's Dream in Daniel 2

Daniel interpreted the ten toes of iron and clay on the image in Nebuchadnezzar's dream:

Whereas you saw the feet and toes, partly of potter's clay and partly of iron, the kingdom shall be divided; yet the strength of the iron shall be in it, must as you saw the iron mixed with ceramic clay. And as the toes of the feet were partly of iron and partly of clay, so the kingdom shall be partly strong and partly fragile. As you saw iron mixed with ceramic clay, they will mingle with the seed of men; but they will not adhere to one another just as iron does not mix with clay (Dan 2:41-43).

The ten toes of iron and clay refer to a future form of the Roman empire. The iron and clay show strength and vulnerability. The ten toes refer to ten kings who will rule over a revived Roman Empire. The European Union (EU) with its many nations in the west could be a forerunner of this future form of the Roman Empire.²⁵

²⁴ Eusebius, *Church History* 3:17.

²⁵ The European Union is an economic and political partnership involving twenty-eight European countries. It has its own currency (the euro) which is used by nineteen of the member countries. The current

***The Scarlet Beast with Seven Heads and Ten Horns in
Revelation 17***

John saw a scarlet beast full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns (Rev 17:3-12). The revived Roman Empire is described by John as a scarlet beast that carries the harlot (apostate world religion) during the first half of the tribulation period. The seven heads of the beast are described as seven mountains which could refer to the seven mountains that surround Rome. The ten horns refer to the ten kings of the revived Roman Empire who “have received no kingdom as yet, but they receive authority for one hour as kings with the beast [the Antichrist]” (Rev 17:12). The fourth beast of Daniel 7 which referred to Rome, also had ten horns. John said that the ten horns which you saw on the beast, these will hate the harlot, make her desolate and naked, eat her flesh and burn her with fire. For God has put it into their hearts to fulfill His purpose to be of one mind and to give their kingdom to the beast [the Antichrist] until the words of God are fulfilled: (Rev 17:16-17) The ten kings of the revived Roman Empire will destroy the apostate church and then give their allegiance to the Beast (the Antichrist).

The Antichrist: The Final Gentile Ruler

The Little Horn on the Fourth Beast in Daniel 7

Daniel saw a little horn rise among the ten horns of the fourth beast. Daniel wrote, “I was considering the horns, and there was another horn, a little one, coming up among them, before whom three of the first horns were plucked out by the roots. And there, in this horn were eyes like the eyes of a man and a mouth speaking pompous words” (Dan 7:8).

EU member countries in 2017 are Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxemburg, Malta, The Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, and Sweden. The term Brexit refers to the United Kingdom which voted to leave the EU in June of 2016.

Daniel wanted to know about the little horn in his vision “which had eyes and a mouth which spoke pompous words, whose appearance was greater than his fellows” (Dan 7:21). An angel revealed to Daniel the meaning of the ten horns and the little horn. The angel said,

The ten horns are ten kings who shall arise from this kingdom. And another shall rise after them; He shall be different from the first ones, and shall subdue three kings. He shall speak pompous words against the Most High, shall persecute the saints of the Most High, and shall intend to change times and law. Then the saints shall be given into his hand for a time and times and half a time (Dan 7:24-25).

The coming Antichrist is the little horn of Daniel 7. He will come on the scene after the ten kings of the revived Roman Empire are on the scene. He will defeat three kings in his rise to power. The ten kings will then give their authority to the Antichrist.

The Roman Prince Who Makes a Covenant with Israel for 7 Years

The Antichrist (the Roman Prince) will make a seven- year covenant with Israel. The tribulation will officially begin when the Antichrist signs a covenant with Israel for seven years. In his 70 weeks prophecy Daniel wrote, “Then he shall confirm a covenant with man for one week; But in the middle of the week He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering and on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate, even until the consummation which is determined, is poured out on the desolate” (Dan 9:27).

The referent for the pronoun “he” mentioned in Daniel 9:27 is the “prince who is to come” who is of the people who will destroy the city and the sanctuary (temple) (Dan 9:26). The Antichrist will be a Gentile. He will be the Roman prince. He will make a covenant with Israel for one week (seven years).

A possible result of the signing of this covenant is that Israel will be permitted to build a temple on the temple mount. Today

many Jews are preparing for the day when Israel will build a temple in Jerusalem.²⁶

The King who Invades Israel in Daniel 11

Antichrist and the armies of the West will invade Israel and put down the rebellion. Daniel predicted that the “king” (future Antichrist) will invade Israel and take control:

And he shall enter the countries, overwhelm them and pass through. He shall also enter the Glorious Land [a reference to Israel] and many countries shall be overthrown; but these shall escape from his hand: Edom, Moab, and the prominent people of Ammon. He shall stretch out his hand against the countries and the land of Egypt shall not escape. He shall have power over the treasures of gold and silver, and over all the precious things of Egypt; also the Libyans and Ethiopians shall follow at his heels. But news from the east and the north shall trouble him; therefore he shall go out with great fury to destroy and annihilate many. And he shall plant the tents of his palace between the seas and the glorious holy mountain; yet he shall come to his end, and no one will help him. (Dan 11:40b-45).

Antichrist and his army will enter the Beautiful Land (Israel) and take many countries (Dan 11:40b-41a). Antichrist will not totally defeat Edom, Moab, and Ammon (modern Jordan) (Dan 11:41b). Antichrist will defeat Egypt, Libya, and Ethiopia (Dan 11:42-43). Antichrist will gain control over the hidden treasures of gold and silver from Egypt (Dan 11:43). Antichrist will be disturbed by rumors from the east and north (Dan 11:44). Antichrist will set up his military headquarters between the Mediterranean Sea and Mt. Zion (Dan 11:45).

²⁶ Randall Price, *The Coming Last Days Temple* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1999).

The Abomination of Desolation

The Antichrist will stop the Jews from offering sacrifices in the temple in the middle of the tribulation period (Dan 9:27). Daniel wrote, "But in the middle of the week he shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering" (Dan 9:27b). Right now the Jews do not have a temple on the temple mount. But the Jews will rebuild the temple and start offering sacrifices. In the middle of the tribulation period the Antichrist will stop the Jews from offering sacrifices.

The Antichrist will go into the tribulation temple and declare himself to be god. The False Prophet will set up the image of the Antichrist in the tribulation temple (Dan 9:27; Matt 24:15-16; 2 Thess 2:3-4; Rev 13:14-15).

Daniel predicted this future abomination of desolation that "on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate, even until the consummation, which is determined, is poured out on the desolate" (Dan 9:27).

Jesus predicted the abomination of desolation in his Olivet Discourse (AD 30): "Therefore when you see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place whoever reads, let him understand, then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains" (Matt 24:15-16).

Paul wrote that the man of sin (the Antichrist) will oppose God and exalt himself above all that is called God. He will go into the temple of God and declare himself to be God:

Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God (2 Thess 2:3-4).

The apostle John predicted that the False Prophet (the beast from the earth) would make an image of the Antichrist (the beast out of the sea) and would animate the image to that it could speak and order those who refuse to worship it to be killed. John wrote of the False Prophet that "he deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs which he was granted to do in the sight of

the beast, telling those who dwell on the earth to make an image to the beast who was wounded by the sword and lived. He was granted power to give breath to the image of the beast, that the image of the beast would both speak and cause as many as would not worship the image of the beast to be killed.” (Rev 13:14-15)

The Gentile Domination of Jerusalem and Israel in the Last Half of the Tribulation period

The Gentile Domination of the Future Temple in Jerusalem

The apostle John wrote,

Then I was given a reed like a measuring rod. And the angel stood saying, “Rise and measure the temple of God, the altar, and those who worship there. But leave out the court which is outside the temple, and do not measure it, for it has been given to the Gentiles. And they will tread the holy city underfoot for forty-two months” (Rev 11:1-3).²⁷

John was given a reed by the angel to measure the tribulation temple, the altar (place of sacrifice), and the worshippers. John was told not to measure the court outside the temple. This is probably a reference to the court of the Gentiles in the future tribulation temple.²⁸ John wrote here that in the future the

²⁷ Since John wrote the book of Revelation around AD 95 from Patmos during the reign of Roman emperor Domitian, John could not have been writing about the temple in Jerusalem which was destroyed in AD 70 by Titus and the Romans. The temple that is measured in Revelation 11:1-3 refers to the tribulation temple which will be on the temple mount in Jerusalem by the middle of the future tribulation period. When will this future temple be built? It could be built (1) before the pre-tribulation rapture of the church, (2) between the rapture and the Antichrist’s signing of a covenant with Israel, or (3) it could be built as a result of the Antichrist (Roman prince) signing a covenant with Israel for seven years (Dan 9:27).

²⁸ In the second temple there were several courts. The court of the priests was reserved for the Jewish priests. The court of Israel was

Gentiles will trample the holy city (Jerusalem) underfoot for 42 months (the last half of the tribulation period).

The Persecution of Israel

The Dragon (Satan) will persecute Israel during the last half of the tribulation period (Rev12:13-17).

Now when the dragon saw that he had been cast to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male child. But the woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent. So the serpent spewed water out of his mouth like a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away by the flood. But the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed up the flood which the dragon had spewed out of his mouth. And the dragon was enraged with the woman and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.” (Rev 12:13-17)

The dragon refers to Satan and the woman refers to Israel. Satan will be cast out of heaven in the middle of the tribulation period and will be confined to the earth. He will persecute Israel (the woman) who gave birth to the male child (Jesus Christ). A righteous remnant of Israel will be protected by God during these

reserved for Jewish men. The court of women was reserved for Jewish women. These three courts were on the same level as the temple building. From this level a person would descend five steps to the outer court which was called the court of the Gentiles. Archaeologists have discovered an inscription from the second temple. It says, “No foreigners may enter within the barricade which surrounds the sanctuary and enclosure. Anyone who is caught doing so will have himself to blame for his ensuing death.” Gentiles were permitted to go into the court of the Gentiles, but they could not go beyond the barricade.

last three and a half years. Israel will be given the two wings of a great eagle (airplane?) which shall carry them to a place in the wilderness (Petra?). Satan will try to destroy these Jews, but God will protect them (earth opens its mouth to swallow up the flood). Satan will then make war on the rest of her offspring = Messianic Jews who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus.

The Antichrist's Reign of Terror

Daniel predicted that the little horn (the Antichrist) would “persecute the saints of the Most High” (Dan 7:25). The word “persecute” literally means to wear out. Daniel also predicted that the “saints will be given into his hand for a time and times and half a time” (Dan 7:25), which refers to the last three and a half years of the tribulation period.

John predicts that the beast out of the sea (the Antichrist) will make war with the saints (tribulation saints; not the church) and overcome them. Many believers will be martyred by the Antichrist for their refusal to take the mark of the beast and for their refusal to worship the beast:

It was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them. And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue and nation. All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world (Rev 13:7-8).

The Final Siege and Attack of Jerusalem

The Gentile nations will lay siege to Jerusalem at the end of the tribulation period. Zechariah revealed,

The burden of the word of the LORD against Israel. Thus says the LORD, who stretches out the heavens, lays the foundation of the earth and forms the spirit of man within him: “Behold, I will make Jerusalem a cup of drunkenness to all the surrounding peoples, when they lay siege against Judah and Jerusalem. And it shall happen in that day that I will make Jerusalem a very heavy stone for

all peoples: all who would heave it away will surely be cut in pieces, though all nations of the earth are gathered against it....” (Zech 12:1-3)

Zechariah predicted that the Gentiles would lay siege of Judah and Jerusalem in the future. All the nations of the earth will be gathered against it. Just as Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians besieged Jerusalem and destroyed Solomon’s temple in 586 BC and just as Titus and the Romans besieged Jerusalem and destroyed the second temple in AD 70, so the Gentile nations will lay siege to Jerusalem and the tribulation temple at the end of the coming tribulation period.

The Gentile nations will attack and capture Jerusalem. The prophet Zechariah made this prediction about the future attack of Jerusalem by Gentile armies:

Behold the day of the Lord is coming and your spoil will be divided in your midst. For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem. The city shall be taken, the houses rifled, and the women ravished. Half of the city shall go into captivity, but the remnant of the people shall not be cut off from the city (Zech 14:1-2).

Zechariah predicted the day of the Lord judgment. The nations will be gathered to battle against Jerusalem and the city will be taken. The Gentile armies will loot the homes of the residents of Jerusalem and will rape their women. Half of the population of the city will be taken into captivity. But a righteous remnant will not be killed and will survive.

THE SECOND COMING OF THE LORD JESUS CHRIST AND THE END OF THE TIMES OF THE GENTILES

When will the times of the Gentiles end? The times of the Gentiles will end with the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ to earth at the end of the future seven-year tribulation period.

The Destruction of the Image by the Stone Cut Without Hands

King Nebuchadnezzar dreamed that a stone cut without hands would crush the image of the metallic man at its feet. Daniel told King Nebuchadnezzar what would happen to the image:

Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were crushed together and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; the wind carried them away so that no trace of them was found. And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth. (Dan 2:35)

The stone cut without hands represents the Lord Jesus Christ who will crush the Gentile kingdoms at the feet (the final form of the Roman empire) at his second coming to earth. Jesus did not destroy the Roman empire at his first advent. He will destroy the final form of the Roman empire at his second advent.

The Coming of the Son of Man

Daniel predicted that the Son of Man would come with the clouds of heaven to earth to reign as king over the nations. Daniel wrote,

I was watching in the night visions, and behold, One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all peoples, nations and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed (Dan 7:13-14).

The Battle of Armageddon

King Jesus (the Jewish Messiah) will defeat with a word the Gentile armies led by the Antichrist at the battle of Armageddon. John wrote,

Now I saw heaven opened and behold a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True and in righteousness He judges and makes war... And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean followed Him on white horses. Now out of his mouth goes a sharp sword that with it He might strike the nations... (Rev 19:15a, 19-21)

John wrote,

And I saw the beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army. Then the beast was captured and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshipped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone. And the rest were killed with the sword which proceeded from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse. And all the birds were filled with their flesh (Rev 19:19-21).

The Lord's Destruction of the Nations at Jerusalem

The Lord will destroy all nations that come against Jerusalem. The prophet Zechariah predicted that the Lord would fight for Israel: "In that day the LORD will defend the inhabitants of Jerusalem; the one who is feeble among them in that day shall be like David, like the Angel of the LORD before them. It shall be in that day that I will seek to destroy all the nations that come against Jerusalem" (Zech 12:8-9).

Zechariah then predicted,

Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations as He fights in the day of battle. And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which faces Jerusalem on the east. And the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, from east to west, making a very large valley; Half of the mountain shall move toward the north and half of it toward the south. Then you shall flee through my mountain valley, for the mountain valley shall reach to Azal. (Zech 14:3-5a)

The Judgment of the Sheep and Goats

King Jesus will judge individual Gentile survivors of the tribulation period to determine who enters the kingdom (Matt 25:31-46). After the battle of Armageddon King Jesus will sit on the throne of His glory and judge the Gentile nations. Jesus gave this prediction in his Olivet Discourse: "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him and He will separate them one from another as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats" (Matt 25:31-32).

Believing Gentiles who physically survive the tribulation period (called sheep) will enter the millennial kingdom (Matt 25:33-40). The evidence that they are believers is their actions of caring for Jews in the tribulation period. Believing Gentiles will give food to starving Jews and drink to thirsty Jews. They will open their homes and provide shelter to Jews who are strangers. They will clothe Jews that are naked. They will visit Jews when they are sick and in prison.

Unbelieving Gentiles who physically survive the tribulation period (called goats) will not enter the kingdom but will be sentenced to hell called everlasting fire (Matt 25:41) and everlasting punishment (Matt 25:46).

THE REIGN OF KING JESUS ON THE DAVIDIC THRONE IN THE MILLENNIAL KINGDOM

The times of the Gentiles will be followed by a time of great blessing for the Jews as their Messiah King Jesus will sit on the Davidic throne in the millennial temple and rule the world from Jerusalem.

The Stone That Will Become a Great Mountain

Daniel explained to King Nebuchadnezzar that the stone which became a great mountain in his dream is a future kingdom that God will establish,

And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms and it shall stand forever. Inasmuch as you saw that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver and the gold-the great God has made known to the king what will come to pass after this. (Dan 2:44-45)

After the destruction of the Antichrist (the eleventh king of Dan 7:23-26), Daniel predicted that an everlasting kingdom would be set up for the Jewish people. "Then the kingdom and dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High. His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him" (Dan 7:27). The everlasting kingdom of Messiah Jesus will have two phases: (1) Jesus will reign as King from Jerusalem during the first 1000 years (Rev 20:4,6); (2) Jesus will reign forever as King in the city of New Jerusalem which will be on the new earth (Rev 22:3).

The Reign of King Jesus on the Davidic Throne in the Future Millennial Kingdom

Jesus promised that the overcomers would sit and rule with him in the future kingdom, "To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with me on my throne as I also overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne" (Rev 3:21).

Where is Jesus today? Jesus is currently seated on the throne of God the Father in the third heaven. God the Father raised Jesus from the dead and "seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places" (Eph 1:20). Jesus endured the cross, despising the shame and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God (Heb 12:2).

Amillennialists and progressive dispensationalists believe that this throne is the throne of David in heaven. But traditional dispensational premillennialists reject this view. The Father's throne in heaven is a distinct throne from the Davidic throne on

earth. Jesus is not sitting on the throne of David today. He is seated on the throne of God the Father in the third heaven.

Jesus is the descendant of David who will sit on the Davidic throne ruling Israel in the future millennial kingdom. His rule over Israel will be the fulfillment of the Davidic covenant (2 Sam 7:16).

King Jesus will sit on the Davidic throne in the millennial temple in Jerusalem. Ezekiel wrote, "Then I heard Him speaking to me from the temple, while a man stood beside me. And He said to me, 'Son of man, this is the place of *My throne* and the place of the soles of My feet, where I will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel forever' (Ezek 43:6-7). The prophet Jeremiah predicted, "At that time Jerusalem shall be called the throne of the LORD, and all the nations shall be gathered to it, to the name of the LORD, to Jerusalem. No more shall they follow the dictates of their evil hearts" (Jer 3:17).

The angel told Mary that God would give her son Jesus the throne of his father David and he would reign over Israel forever. "He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of his father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever and of His kingdom there will be no end" (Luke 1:32-33).

Zacharias predicted that God had raised up a horn of salvation from the house of David: "Blessed is the Lord God of Israel, For He has visited and redeemed His people and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David" (Luke 1:68-69).

Jesus will sit on the throne of his glory after his second coming and the apostles will sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. So Jesus said, "Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matt 19:28).

Jesus predicted in the Olivet Discourse that he will sit on the throne of his glory after his second coming to earth. Jesus told his disciples, "When the Son of Man comes in His glory and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory" (Matt 25:31).

John predicted that the woman (the nation Israel) would have a male child (Jesus) would rule the nations: "She bore a male child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. And he child was caught up to God and His throne" (Rev 12:5). Why does the Messiah have to rule with a rod of iron? There will be unsaved Gentiles who are born to the believing Gentile physical survivors of the tribulation period. Many of these Gentiles will rebel against the Lord Jesus at the end of the millennium when Satan is loosed from the abyss and leads the final rebellion (Rev 20:7-10).

The Worship of King Jesus by Gentiles in Jerusalem in the Future Millennial Kingdom

Gentiles will come to Jerusalem each year to worship King Jesus in the millennial kingdom. Those Gentiles who do not come up to worship King Jesus during the Feast of Tabernacles will be punished with no rain.

Zechariah predicted,

And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. And it shall be that whichever of the families of the earth do not come up to Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, on them there will be no rain. If the family of Egypt will not come up and enter in, they shall have no rain; they shall receive the plague with which the Lord strikes the nations who do not come up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. This shall be the punishment of Egypt and the punishment of all the nations that do not come up to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. (Zech 14:16-19)

The ones who are left of all the nations will be believing Gentiles who physically survive the tribulation period. After experiencing the judgment of the sheep and goats (Matt 25:31-46) and entering the kingdom as the sheep they will go up to Jerusalem every year to worship the King (Jesus) and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles. King Jesus will judge Gentile nations who refuse to go up to Jerusalem to worship with no rain. This plague

of no rain will have devastating economic implications for Gentiles living during the millennial kingdom. Zechariah singled out Egypt saying that if they did not come up to worship the King in Jerusalem that they will have no rain. This is the punishment for all the Gentile nations that refuse to keep the Feast of Tabernacles (a Jewish festival held in the fall).

CONCLUSION

The times of the Gentiles began with the destruction of Jerusalem and Solomon's temple in 586 BC by King Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians. In the past four Gentile kingdoms have conquered Jerusalem and dominated Israel during the times of the Gentiles: Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians conquered Jerusalem and destroyed Solomon's temple in 586 BC. Titus and the Romans conquered Jerusalem and destroyed the second temple in AD 70.

After the destruction of the second temple Jews have been dispersed around the world. Many returned to the land of Israel and Israel was reborn as a nation in 1948. The Israelis have had to fight for their survival as a nation. They defeated Arab nations in the Six Day War in 1967 and the Yom Kippur War in 1973. The times of the Gentiles includes the church age from Pentecost to the Rapture.

The times of the Gentiles includes the future seven year tribulation period and involves a final Gentile kingdom that will be ruled by the Antichrist. He will persecute Israel during the last half of the tribulation period. He will defile the temple as the abomination of desolation (idol image of Antichrist) is set up in the tribulation temple and the Antichrist will declare himself to be god and demand that the world worship him. The Antichrist will persecute and kill many Jews and Gentile believers during the last half of the tribulation period.

The times of the Gentiles will end with the second coming of Christ to the earth at the end of the tribulation period. King Jesus will defeat the Gentile armies at the battle of Armageddon and deliver the righteous remnant of Jews at Jerusalem. King Jesus

will then judge the Gentile nations in the sheep-goat judgment. The times of the Gentiles will be followed by the millennial kingdom when King Jesus will reign over Israel and the world as he sits on the Davidic throne in the temple in Jerusalem.

The Inerrancy and Authority of Scripture in Christian Apologetics

Lee Allen Anderson Jr.

INTRODUCTION

Scripture's call to Christians to engage in the apologetic task is markedly obvious. For example, 1 Peter 3:15 instructs believers to always be "ready to make a defense (ἀπολογία) to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you." Similarly, Jude 3 exhorts Christians to "contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints." Here, the "faith" refers not to the subjective element of personal trust in the Lord God, but instead to that "body of truth that very early in the church's history took on a definite form," that is, the content of Christian faith—doctrinal truth (cf. Gal 1:23; 1 Tim 4:1).¹ Implicit in this verse, therefore, is the acknowledgment of the fact that a certain body of doctrinal truth exists, which in turn implies a source or origin for that doctrinal truth. For the Christian, the principle, authoritative source of doctrinal truth is the "God-breathed" holy Scriptures (2 Tim 3:16). The reliability of Scripture as a standard for Christian doctrine hinges on the fact that, as the inspired word of the true God who does not lie (Num 23:19; Titus 1:2; Heb 6:18), it is wholly true (Ps 119:160; John 17:17). To echo the words of the longstanding affirmation of the Evangelical Theological Society, "The Bible alone, and the Bible in its entirety, is the Word of God written and is therefore inerrant in the autographs."² This affirmation is not a peripheral issue to Christian theology; it is germane to the life of the church and, of logical consequence, the upholding of the Christian faith. As Albert Mohler succinctly argues, "Without a total commitment to

¹ Edwin A. Blum, "Jude," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gæbelein (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1981), 12:388.

² Evangelical Theological Society, "Doctrinal Basis," N.d., accessed January 23, 2017, www.etsjets.org/about.

the trustworthiness and truthfulness of the Bible, the church is left without its defining authority, lacking confidence in its ability to hear God's voice." Practically stated, "Preachers will lack confidence in the authority and truthfulness of the very Word they are commissioned to preach and teach." Likewise, "Individual Christians will be left without either the confidence to trust the Bible or the ability to understand the Bible as something less than totally true."³ At a most fundamental level, the inerrancy of Scripture is necessary to understanding the Bible's authority and message, and thus the theological content that comprises the Christian faith. It is unavoidable, therefore, that the inerrancy of Scripture is integral to the apologetic task: It is the commitment to inerrancy which informs the apologist of the certainty and trustworthiness of "the faith" that he seeks to defend.

It is thus supremely ironic (and highly unfortunate) that the doctrine of inerrancy itself has been, in recent literature, the doctrine that some apologists have been incredibly reluctant to defend. The departure from inerrancy as a doctrine necessary to the apologetic task is showcased conspicuously in James Taylor's recent work, *Introducing Apologetics: Cultivating Christian Commitment*, where he maintains, "Christian apologists are wise to avoid insisting that the Bible is absolutely inerrant (even if this is true) and to claim instead that it is true in all it teaches."⁴ In clarifying his view on biblical inerrancy and its relationship to the apologetic task, Taylor claims inerrancy "is difficult to defend," and speaking of Scripture, states,

³ R. Albert Mohler Jr., "When the Bible Speaks, God Speaks: The Classic Doctrine of Biblical Inerrancy," in *Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy*, ed. J. Merrick and Stephen M. Garrett (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 31. In surveying the history of the church's conflict over the doctrine of inerrancy, Mohler notes, "I do not believe that evangelicalism can survive without the explicit and complete assertion of biblical inerrancy" (31).

⁴ James E. Taylor, *Introducing Apologetics: Cultivating Christian Commitment* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 269.

God inspired human authors to write it. If God allowed these authors a certain amount of creativity (and it seems reasonable to think that he did) then they were not merely God's mouthpieces. In that case, even if God does not ever say anything false, it seems possible that those he inspired to write the Scriptures did, at least about relatively unimportant matters.⁵

Given Taylor's statement, one is left to assume that biblical inerrancy is irrelevant to Christian apologetics.

However, this perspective is extremely problematic, as it leaves the apologist to defend a body of doctrine that may or may not be true in all of its elements due to the fact that the inspired word on which it is based likewise may or may not be true in all of its elements.⁶ Ultimately, this outlook will render apologetics an obsolete and useless discipline, as it is logically impossible to defend as absolutely true a faith that depends on a revelation that is a mix of truth and error. In defending the faith, the apologist would be reduced to the role of a human arbiter in determining what parts of Scripture are necessarily true and what parts may contain error, effectually placing human judgment over the authority of God's revealed word.

In response to the perspective represented by Taylor's remarks, this article will argue that biblical inerrancy is absolutely essential to Christian apologetics, providing governance over the task of delineating the content of the faith to be defended and granting certainty to the apologist that what he defends is in fact the truth. This article will first examine a selection of sources that have advocated a departure from

⁵ Ibid., 276.

⁶ Another problem is present in Taylor's statement, though it is a quibble by comparison: In arguing that "God inspired human authors" to write his word, Taylor misrepresents the doctrine of inspiration. Second Timothy 3:16 indicates that inspiration, strictly speaking, is a property of the text, not the author. While the human agent writing Scripture was subject to superintending guidance of the Holy Spirit (2 Pet 1:21), it was not the author, technically, who was inspired. The *text itself* is, in its entirety, "God-breathed."

biblical inerrancy as traditionally defined, which provides the necessary undergirding for Taylor's assertion that "Christian apologists are wise to avoid insisting that the Bible is absolutely inerrant ... and to claim instead that it is true in all it teaches." It will then refute these compromised perspectives on biblical inerrancy, setting forth a succinct outline of the scriptural doctrine. The article will then move on to demonstrate the direct relevance of biblical inerrancy to the task of Christian apologetics, showing it to be indispensable to the defense of the faith and that, without it, the apologist risks utterly compromising the very essentials of Christianity. The article will then conclude with an appeal for Christian apologists to reaffirm an orthodox view of biblical inerrancy.

THE RECENT DEPARTURE FROM INERRANCY

Taylor's bold assertion that the Christian apologist should not insist upon the full inerrancy of Scripture tacitly rests on a foundation exhibited in recent challenges to biblical inerrancy that seek to redefine the doctrine to allow for the presence of error. For example, A. T. B. McGowan contends,

The basic error of the inerrantists is to insist that the inerrancy of the autographa is a direct implication of the biblical doctrine of inspiration (or divine spiration). In order to defend this implication, the inerrantists make an unwarranted assumption about God. The assumption is that, given the nature and character of God, the only kind of Scripture he could "breathe out" was Scripture that is textually inerrant.⁷

Fleshing out his point, McGowan continues, "One can see the logic of this progression from biblical proposition (Scripture is God-breathed) to implication (therefore Scripture must be inerrant) by means of a conviction about the nature and character of God (he is perfect and therefore does not lie or

⁷ A. T. B. McGowan, *The Divine Authenticity of Scripture: Retrieving an Evangelical Heritage* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2007), 113.

mislead).”⁸ Basic to McGowan’s objection to this line of reasoning is his claim that it, as an underlying assumption in the inerrantist’s perspective, “underestimates God and undermines the significance of the human authors of Scripture,” in that it “assumes God can only act in a way that conforms to our expectations, based on our human assessment of his character” and that God having chosen to write his word by means of human agency, “did not overrule their humanity.”⁹ McGowan does not expand further on this point or offer any notable textual defense for his position; however, it is easy to see how this perspective plays into Taylor’s reluctance to incorporate inerrancy into his apologetic.

Arguments for the “human dimension” of Scripture, along with the implication or even assumption of the possibility (or necessity) of error are advanced even more forcefully by Peter Enns in his work *Inspiration and Incarnation*. Enns states, “That the Bible, at every turn, shows how ‘connected’ it is to its own world is a necessary consequence of God incarnating himself.” He further argues, “It is essential to the very nature of revelation that the Bible is not unique to its environment. The human dimension of Scripture is essential to its being Scripture.”¹⁰ More to the point, the “human dimension” of Scripture requires that the text be permeated by errant ideas (of whatever sort—scientific, historical, or otherwise) held to by the human writers of Scripture that were not overridden by the superintending guidance of the Holy Spirit in the writing process. In a later essay,

⁸ Ibid., 114.

⁹ Ibid., 114, 118. For a thorough rebuttal of McGowan’s assertions, see G. K. Beale’s article, “Can the Bible Be Completely Inspired by God and Yet Still Contain Errors? A Response to Some Recent ‘Evangelical’ Proposals,” *WTS* 73, no. 1 (Fall 2011): 1–22. Beale argues that the concept of biblical inerrancy is explicitly biblical even though the word itself does not appear in the text.

¹⁰ Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 20.

Enns maintains, “I do not think inerrancy can be effectively nuanced to account for the Bible’s own behavior as a text produced in ancient cultures.” Also,

Despite its apparent interest in seeing God as so powerful that he can overrule ancient human error and ignorance, inerrancy portrays a weak view of God. It fails to be constrained by the Bible’s own witness of God’s pattern of working—that ... he reigns amidst human error and suffering, and he lovingly condescends to finite human culture.¹¹

Thus, according to Enns, the introduction of error as a result of the human element is unescapable and should not be ignored.

The implications of this argument for the apologetic enterprise cannot be overlooked. As Enns says, “For modern evangelicalism the tendency is to move toward a defensive or apologetic handling of the biblical evidence, to protect the Bible against the modernist charge that diversity is evidence of errors in the Bible and, consequently, that the Bible is not inspired by God.”¹² This approach, Enns suggests, well-intentioned though it may be, ultimately detracts from the defense of the faith:

This legacy accepts the worldview offered by modernity and defends the Bible by a rational standard that the Bible itself challenges rather than acknowledges. This contributes to the stress that Christians feel in trying to maintain an evangelical faith while at the same time trying to give honest answers to difficult questions.¹³

Clearly, Enns views any efforts to maintain the doctrine of inerrancy as counterproductive to the apologetic task.

¹¹ Enns, “Inerrancy, However Defined, Does Not Describe What the Bible Does,” in *Five Views on Biblical Inerrancy*, 91.

¹² Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation*, 108.

¹³ Ibid.; cf. 109.

The conceptual connections between Enns's work and Taylor's assertions are difficult to overlook. It would appear that Enns allows for more substantial deviations from inerrancy than does Taylor, who maintains that human mistakes caused error to enter into Scripture concerning "relatively unimportant matters." In either perspective, however, the implications for apologetics remain the same: Insistence upon inerrancy will presumably leave the apologist between a rock and a hard place—either being unable to defend what the Bible says, or being forced to modify what he means in saying that Scripture is a "true" revelation from God.¹⁴

¹⁴ An example of this kind of retreat from taking God's word as literally "true" and also from the defense of the reliability of the Bible's claims in apologetic discussion is brazenly evidenced in Matthew Flannagan's work presented in the recently-published *Come Let us Reason: New Essays in Christian Apologetics*, ed. Paul Copan and William Lane Craig (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2012), 225–249. This book aims to be a *tour de force* of Christian apologetics; however, in Flannagan's essay, it falls remarkably short. Looking at the question, "Did God command the genocide of the Canaanites?" from an apologetic perspective, Flannagan fails to address the real issue of how such a wide-scale destruction of human life reconciles with God's character. On the contrary, he completely undermines biblical authority by reinterpreting the plain meaning of Scripture—ostensibly in order to accommodate the long-held views of liberal critics who overstate the differences between Joshua and Judges. He says,

I contend that the widely held view that the book of Joshua teaches that God commanded the genocide of the Canaanites is questionable. Joshua is accepted as part of the canon. Read in this context, taking the account of total annihilation of the Canaanite populations as a literal description of what occurred *contradicts* what is affirmed to have literally occurred in Judges. Moreover, it *conflicts* with how the command is described elsewhere in Judges and Exodus. The writers would have known this and, not being mindless, could not have meant both accounts to be taken literally. This means that one must be nonliteral. *The literary conventions Joshua uses are highly stylized, figurative, and contain hyperbolic, hagiographic accounts of what occurred.* The conventions in Judges are less so. Consequently, the so-called genocide in Joshua and the command to 'utterly destroy' the Canaanites *should not be taken literally.* (244–45; emphasis added).

THE SCRIPTURAL DOCTRINE OF INERRANCY

The preceding charge by Enns against the defensibility of biblical inerrancy is wide of the mark to say the least! His audacious claim that the so-called “incarnational model” allows the Bible’s “historically conditioned behavior” to correct the orthodox view of inerrancy¹⁵ fails because it accounts only for Enns’s own interpretation of passages that, as he claims, demonstrate how the biblical literature “behaves.” And, if *Inspiration and Incarnation* is a fair indication, Enns’s own handling of Scripture shows that he is far more prone to try to seek out suspected contradictions than he is to try to present feasible ways of reconciling alleged discrepancies. As Bruce Waltke bluntly states, “Every text on which Enns’s model of inspiration depends is open to other viable interpretations.”¹⁶ Given the uncertainty of Enns’s exegesis (to say nothing of orthodoxy) it seems inappropriate to contest biblical inerrancy on the basis of Enns’s assertion that a proper doctrine of Scripture may be derived from an examination of the purported characteristics of the biblical text as opposed to the actual statements of the biblical text. James W. Scott expresses a similar

Refutation of Flannagan’s fallacious view on the historical details and theological thrust of the books of Joshua and Judges is beyond the scope of this paper. Still, the fact remains that regardless of how the terminology is construed, even though Flannagan does not denounce inerrancy *per se*, the core point of his conclusion invariably undermines the integrity of the biblical record.

¹⁵ Cf. Enns, “Inerrancy, However Defined,” 87.

¹⁶ Bruce K. Waltke, “Interaction with Peter Enns,” *WTJ* 71, no. 1 (Fall 2009): 117. In this article, Waltke systematically refutes Enns’s interpretation of numerous passages in the OT that allegedly contradict each other, as well as several passages in the NT that purportedly mishandle the OT verses that they quote from or allude to. Particularly insightful is Waltke’s handling of Proverbs 10:2; 24:16; and Ecclesiastes 3:15–17 with respect to the ultimate value of wisdom. Note also the harmonization he suggests between Hosea 11:1 and Matthew’s use of the verse in Matthew 2:15.

perspective: "It is illogical to suppose that the Bible's own doctrine of Scripture can be modified by any study of the data. Our understanding of what Scripture says about itself can be corrected only if meticulous exegesis of its relevant didactic statements yields a superior understanding of them."¹⁷ Stated another way, Scott charges that Enns ignores what Scripture actually says about itself with respect to the doctrines of inspiration and inerrancy, allowing for his interpretation of biblical "behavior" to trump the clear meaning of biblical statements. In contrast to the method proposed by Enns, Scott maintains that the only course to follow is to determine precisely what Scripture teaches about itself in relation to inspiration and inerrancy "and see what implications that doctrine has for our handling of Scripture."¹⁸

What then does Scripture teach concerning inerrancy? Several different lines of biblical teaching have direct bearing on the concept of inerrancy. First, the Scriptures teach that they are breathed out by God, that is, that they are inspired (2 Tim 3:16). This fact effectively indicates that Scripture is without error. As Millard Erickson argues, if the biblical text is inspired, certain implications must follow: "If God is omniscient, he must know all things. He cannot be ignorant of or in error on any matter. Further, if he is omnipotent, he is so able to affect the biblical author's writing that nothing erroneous enters into the final product."¹⁹ The quality of Scripture is therefore guaranteed by its

¹⁷ James W. Scott, "The Inspiration and Interpretation of God's Word, with Special Reference to Peter Enns, Part I: Inspiration and Its Implications," *WTJ* 71, no. 1 (Fall 2009): 132. As it was, this article critiquing Enns approached the length of a short book. Even so, a follow-up article by Scott was published in the next installment of the *Westminster Theological Journal* which, like the article written by Walke, featured point-by-point refutation of Enns' exegesis of passages containing alleged errors.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 137.

¹⁹ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998), 251.

unique divine origin. As Erickson correctly concludes, “Inerrancy is a corollary to the doctrine of full inspiration.”²⁰ Inerrancy cannot be dispensed with unless one is willing to seriously redefine the concept of inspiration, and any effort to redefine inspiration would in turn create major difficulties for Christian apologetics.

Second, connected to the preceding point, the character of God as the author of Scripture demands its inerrancy. Scripture repeatedly reminds its readers that God cannot lie (Num 23:19; 1 Sam 15:29; Titus 1:2; Heb 6:18) and so Scripture must convey truth in all that it says. If God had “accommodated” his message to various false ideas common in the days of its writers (even about “minor” or “unimportant” things) God’s truthfulness and trustworthiness would rightly be called into question. Furthermore, such an act of “accommodation” would lead to serious ethical ramifications for the Christian life. Believers are repeatedly told to imitate the character of God (e.g., Eph 5:1). Additionally, they are instructed to “put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness and truth” (Eph 4:24, NASB). Christians are also called to “lay aside falsehood” and “speak truth” (Eph 4:25). If, however, it be true that God allowed error to enter into Scripture in order to accommodate the mistaken ideas of his writers living in ancient times, one is left to assume, as Wayne Grudem puts it, “then God intentionally made incidental affirmations of falsehood in order to enhance communication.”²¹ Consequently, if God is right to do so, than why would it be wrong for believers to do the same thing? Grudem rightly concludes, “This would be tantamount to saying minor falsehood told for a good purpose (a ‘white lie’) is not wrong” and also, “Such a line of reasoning would, if we believed it, exert strong pressure on us to begin speaking untruthfully in situations where that might seem to help

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 97.

us communicate better, and so forth.”²² These ethical ramifications would be very destructive to the Christian faith, to say nothing of the apologetic task.

Third, Scripture teaches that it is, as God’s word, wholly true. For instance, the Psalms affirm that God’s word is “the word of truth” (Ps 119:43; cf. v. 160). Likewise, the Psalms state that God’s “law” and “commandments” are truth (Ps 119:142, 151). The Lord Jesus Christ also, in praying to the Father for his disciples, says, “Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth” (John 17:17). Additionally, in Romans 3:4, Paul appeals to Psalm 51:4, declaring, “Let God be found true, though every man be found a liar, as it is written, ‘That You may be justified in Your words, and prevail when You are judged’” (NASB). John Frame discusses the implication of this verse, saying, “If there is any disagreement between [God’s] words and our own ideas, his must prevail. And if we are so arrogant as to judge what he says, he must prevail in that judgment.”²³ The immediate relevancy to

²² Ibid., 97, 100.

²³ John M. Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2013), 598. In addition to these specific texts, the whole tenor of Scripture must be taken into account. As James Daane points out,

That the Scriptures regard themselves as a sure, unfailing, certain, and trustworthy word of God cannot be doubted. While specific proof texts are of limited number, the Scriptures in their entirety present themselves as the true, and therefore, reliable Word of God. It is true, and should be recognized, that the Scriptures, for reasons that derive from their very nature as the Word of God, do not indulge in an apologetic effort to demonstrate their reality and truth as God’s Word by reference to something other than themselves ... For this very reason, the Word of God in the Scriptures presents itself throughout as possessing these qualities without any special, introductory, self-conscious demonstration that it is what it asserts itself to be, namely, the Word of God. It merely speaks in terms of what it is: the Word of God ... The Scriptures present the Word of God as true just because it is what it is, the Word of God, quite independent of human acknowledgment (“Infallibility,” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, rev. ed., ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, et al. [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982], 2:821).

the claims of McGowan and Enns to “know better” than God what portions of his word are correct and what portions are errant is striking!

In any case, Scripture’s assertion to be “true” should be taken as direct confirmation of its inerrancy. As Frame writes, “Inerrancy simply means ‘truth’ in the propositional sense. I wish that we could be done with all the extrabiblical technical terms such as infallible and inerrant and simply say that the Bible is true. But in the context of historical and contemporary theological discussion, that alternative is not open to us.”²⁴ He later observes,

There are several ways in which truth is used in Scripture, and in John 14:6 it is a title for Christ himself. Theologians have taken license from these facts to ignore or deny the more common propositional use of the term, or its relevance to the doctrine of the word of God So although I still prefer the word truth, I will hold on to inerrancy as an alternative.²⁵

The point here is that even though the text does not use the term “inerrant” it does explicitly employ the term “truth” in the normal, propositional sense when speaking of itself. It is unwarranted, as some modern theologians have done, to drive a wedge between the concepts of “truth” and “inerrancy.” Accordingly, on the basis of the statements of Scripture surveyed here, Christians are right to affirm that the Bible is inerrant.

Fourth, Scripture clearly teaches its own authority, which necessarily demands biblical inerrancy. In Matthew 5:17–18, Jesus Christ asserts that he did not come to abolish the Law or the Prophets, but rather to fulfill them. He then promises, “Until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished” (v. 18, NASB).

²⁴ John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God: A Theology of Lordship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2010), 170–71.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 171.

As Paul Feinberg perceptively states, “The law’s authority rests on the fact that every minute detail will be fulfilled.”²⁶ Perhaps even more to the point, in John 10:35, Christ affirms that Scripture “cannot be broken,” which means Scripture “cannot be annulled or set aside or proved false.”²⁷ The link between this high claim of authority and the inerrancy of the text cannot be overlooked. As Feinberg notes, “While it is true that [both Matthew 5:17–18 and John 10:35] emphasize the Bible’s authority, this authority can only be justified by or grounded in inerrancy. Something that contains errors cannot be absolutely authoritative.”²⁸

Fifth, the way that Scripture uses previously-written Scripture undergirds the doctrine of inerrancy. In other words, a passage of Scripture may, in quoting from another passage, assume the complete accuracy of even the smallest details in that passage. For example, entire arguments are sometimes based on a single word (Ps 82:6 in John 10:34–35), the implied present tense of a verb (Exod 3:6 in Matt. 23:32), or the number of a noun, that is, whether it is in the singular or plural form (Gen 12:7 in Gal 3:16). Commenting on these fine details, Feinberg again states, “If the Bible’s inerrancy does not extend to every detail, these arguments lose their force. The use of any word may be a matter of whim and might even be in error.”²⁹ Thus, the

²⁶ Paul D. Feinberg, “Bible, Inerrancy and Infallibility of,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, 2nd ed., ed. Walter A. Elwell, Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 157.

²⁷ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 399.

²⁸ Feinberg, “Bible, Inerrancy and Infallibility of,” 157.

²⁹ Ibid. Feinberg notes, “It might be objected that the NT does not always cite OT texts with precision—that as a matter of fact precision is the exception rather than the rule.” Nonetheless, “A careful study of the way in which the OT is used in the NT . . . demonstrates that the NT writer quoted the OT not cavalierly but quite carefully.”

assumption of inerrancy is implicitly grounded in how Scripture handles Scripture. In spite of all the talk about how the text “behaves” over against what it says, it seems apparent that latter portions of the text treat earlier portions as absolutely and certainly true in all of their details.

These arguments, in concert, show that the doctrine of biblical inerrancy is scripturally valid, and that (as the fifth point especially highlights) it may not be denied even with respect to the minor details or the so-called “relatively unimportant matters” of the text.³⁰

What may be said, however, concerning the charge brought on by Enns, McGowan, and Taylor that, since Scripture is just as much a human product as it is a divine product, some error has entered the text, at least as it relates to purportedly “nonessential” or “unimportant” matters? First, it should be pointed out that there is a logical problem embedded in this assertion. As R. C. Sproul fittingly states, “If the classic statement is *errare est humanum*, to err is human, we reply that though it is true that a common characteristic of mankind is to err, it does not follow that men always err or that error is necessary for humanity.”³¹ If error is the necessary nature of man, it must be assumed that even Adam in his pre-fall state erred, and also that the glorified human inhabitants of heaven must err, lest they not be truly human.³² Vern Poythress argues similarly, about the

³⁰ It should be noted that there are other arguments in addition to these five. For instance, it might be noted that Deuteronomy 13:1–5 and 18:20–22 require a prophet’s predictions to invariably come to pass in order for his message to be considered authoritative. To use a modern term, the prophet’s message must be “infallible,” true and thus not subject to failure. The fact that Scripture demands such a high standard of its prophetic messengers arguably implies that Scripture itself is not subject to error, lest it fail to pass its own test for authority.

³¹ R. C. Sproul, *Scripture Alone: The Evangelical Doctrine* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2005), 145.

³² *Ibid.*, 145–46. This objection to biblical inerrancy has often been referred to as the *Barthian Challenge*, after Karl Barth, arguably the

human authors of Scripture, noting that “Since they were human beings, they had the possibility open to them of speaking the truth; they were under no innate constraint, belonging either to their humanity or to their fallenness, necessarily to lapse from the truth.”³³ The second half of Poythress’s argument, however, is what makes for an even more compelling case: “God wrote, using their abilities; and his superintendence of them as full persons, the involvement of the Holy Spirit both in them personally and in their writing, and God’s commitment to the truth assure us that what was possible for them became actual. They wrote the truth and did not fall into error.”³⁴ In short, the human element involved in the writing of Scripture does not override the fact that God, who does not lie (Num 23:19; Titus 1:2; Heb 6:18) supernaturally guided the human authors in the writing process, the Holy Spirit overseeing the selection of even the very words of Scripture (1 Cor 2:13; cf. 2 Pet 1:21). There is consequently no room for denial of the inerrancy of Scripture on the basis of human involvement in its authorship.³⁵ To

most prominent individual to advance it. For an expanded response to the challenge along the same lines as the response given by Sproul, see especially the arguments detailed by Norman L. Geisler and William C. Roach in *Defending Inerrancy: Affirming the Accuracy of Scripture for a New Generation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 273–75.

³³ Vern Sheridan Poythress, *Inerrancy and Worldview: Answering Modern Challenges to the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 248.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Analogy may be found in the person of Jesus Christ who, though fully human in His incarnation, was entirely without sin, and thus not subject to error. Charles Ryrie explains, “Just as in the incarnation, Christ took humanity but was not tainted in any way with sin, so the production of the Bible was not tainted with any errors” (*Basic Theology: A Popular Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth* [Chicago: Moody, 1986], 94). Ryrie then further draws out the analogy, saying,

In the humanity of Jesus Christ, there were some features that were not optional. He had to be a Jew. He could not have been a Gentile. He

summarize then, biblical inerrancy should be unwaveringly affirmed and, by implication, the Christian should be willing to take into account whatever significances that bears for apologetics.

THE APOLOGETIC RELEVANCE OF INERRANCY

The foregoing overview has shown that the doctrine of inerrancy is indeed an accurate reflection of what the Bible says about itself. However, the question remains whether the apologist should insist upon the doctrine of inerrancy in his defense of the faith. While it can certainly be granted, as Taylor says, that inerrancy can be difficult to defend, this reason alone is an insufficient one to dismiss as irrelevant to the apologetic task the doctrine of inerrancy.

Biblical inerrancy is tremendously important to Christian apologetics because it is the doctrine upon which all other doctrines stand (or fall). If the Bible is not inerrant, then it cannot be relied upon as a trustworthy and dependable record of doctrinal truth. There could, in the end, be no certainty therefore of anything that the Bible says. In practical terms, the Christian

had to be a man, not a woman. He had to be sinless, not sinful. But some features of sinless humanity might be termed optional. Jesus could have possessed perfect humanity within a variation of a few inches in height at maturity, though a dwarf or a giant would have been imperfect. He might have varied a little in weight at maturity and still have been perfect. Surely, within limits, the number of hairs on his scalp could have been a sinless option. However, the humanity He exhibited was, in fact, perfect humanity. (94–95)

This reality presents a similar picture to that which is seen in Scripture:

The writers of the Bible were not passive. They wrote as borne along by the Spirit, and in those writings some things could not have been said any other way. Paul insisted on the singular rather than the plural in Galatians 3:16. But conceivably there were some sinless options in Paul's emotional statement in Romans 9:1–3. Yet the Bible we have is in fact the perfect record of God's message to us. (95)

Indeed, human authorship does bear an impact on the wording of Scripture, but not such that its inerrancy is tampered with.

would be without any basis for knowing precisely what to believe or for knowing how God expects him to live. There would be no real meaning behind the biblical statements in Deuteronomy 8:3 and Matthew 4:4 that the man who fears the Lord is to “live . . . on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.” Erickson expands on this point, saying,

Our basis for holding to the truth of any theological proposition is that the Bible teaches it. If, however, we should conclude that certain propositions (historical or scientific) taught by the Bible are not true, the implications are far-reaching. We cannot continue to hold to other propositions simply on the grounds that the Bible teaches them.³⁶

It is not that the demonstration (or suspicion) of error in one aspect of the biblical text automatically makes the other aspects errant; however, the presence of error at any one point in the biblical text definitely makes all other aspects suspect—their accuracy and truth is uncertain. Thus, if the Bible is regarded as errant at any point, the remainder cannot be wholly trusted. Erickson notes that on all other aspects of the Bible’s teaching, “We either must profess agnosticism regarding them or find some other basis for holding them. Since the principle has been abrogated that whatever the Bible teaches is necessarily true, the mere fact that the Bible teaches these other propositions is an insufficient basis in itself for holding them.”³⁷ This being the case, the believer is left largely without any sort of doctrinal stability or certainty, because many of Scripture’s teachings (especially about salvific and moral matters) cannot be confirmed independently from other sources. As a result, the believer’s whole justification for his belief in Christianity is called into

³⁶ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 253.

³⁷ Ibid.

question, which would destroy any attempt at apologetic defense.³⁸

Biblical inerrancy is thus a foundational presupposition to orthodox Christian theology that must be held to unwaveringly by the apologist, at the risk of otherwise being stripped of his ability to defend the certainty of any other biblical doctrine. Even the core element of the text, the Gospel message, would be subject to irresolvable suspicion—for what kind of inerrant and trustworthy Gospel could possibly be present in an errant text? This is a point brought out well by Craig Parton in his overview of the apologetic contribution of John Warwick Montgomery. He says,

Montgomery saw immediately and early in his career that a gospel contained in a text with errors and contradictions was intellectually indefensible. If the texts which give us the gospel ... cannot be trusted in what they say on what the temple in Jerusalem looked like, how can it be trusted when it speaks of the heavenly Jerusalem?³⁹

³⁸ Erickson suggests a particularly helpful analogy on this point:

It is as if we were to hear a lecture on some rather esoteric subject on which we were quite ignorant. The speaker might make many statements that fall outside our experience. We have no way of assessing their truth. What he or she is saying sounds very profound, but it might simply be just so much high-flown gibberish. But suppose that for a few minutes the speaker develops one area with which we are well acquainted. Here we detect several erroneous statements. What will we then think about the other statements, whose veracity we cannot check? We will doubtlessly conclude that there may well be inaccuracies there as well. Credibility, once compromised, is not easily regained or preserved in other matters. (*Christian Theology*, 253–54)

³⁹ Craig Parton, “John Warwick Montgomery as Evangelical, Evidential, and Confessional Lutheran Apologist,” in *Tough-Minded Christianity: Honoring the Legacy of John Warwick Montgomery*, ed. William Dembski and Thomas Schirrmacher (Nashville: B & H Academic), 484.

This point is inescapable: If the Christian apologist abandons inerrancy, he fatally compromises his ability to defend all other aspects of Christian doctrine—the Gospel of Jesus Christ included.

What does this mean practically? It means that the apologist's argumentative strategy in the defense of the Christian faith must rest on the presupposition of biblical inerrancy whether or not the topic of inerrancy becomes a point requiring direct, detailed defense. Viewed broadly, different apologetic methods have advocated different perspective on how a defense of inerrancy fits into the larger apologetic case. Apologists of a presuppositional stripe tend to intertwine the defense of inerrancy into the very fabric of their opening gambit, arguing that unless Scripture is both inerrant and authoritative, the skeptic is without basis for either proving or disproving the Christian faith in the first place.⁴⁰ Apologists who lean more toward an evidentialist approach are more likely to present a case for the resurrection and deity of Jesus Christ and then go on to defend the inerrancy and authority of the Bible on the basis of Christ said about it.⁴¹ Other apologists have sought a mediating

⁴⁰ See especially on this point Cornelius Van Til, *The Defense of the Faith*, 4th ed., ed. K. Scott Oliphant (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2008), 169–70, 241; as well as Greg L. Bahnsen, “Inductivism, Inerrancy, and Presuppositionalism,” *JETS* 20, no. 4 (December 1977): 289–305. In this article, Bahnsen goes so far as to say, “At the heart of contemporary evangelical Bibliology and apologetics is the question of Scriptural inerrancy” (289). The present author is very reluctant to affirm that Bahnsen's apologetic methodology is entirely sound, as he does not allow for a robust view of how the Bible itself appeals to external evidence. But his claim is, in principle, still very telling and significant.

⁴¹ See, Norman L. Geisler, *Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1976), 353–77, and Gary R. Habermas, “Jesus and the Inspiration of Scripture,” *Areopagus Journal* 2, no. 1 (January 2002): 11–16. Compare also the tact taken by John Feinberg set forth in *Can You Believe It's True? Christian Apologetics in a Modern and Postmodern Era* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013). In discussing the reliability of the Gospels, Feinberg writes,

approach, which centers both on the uniqueness of the Bible's claim to be inerrant (along with its internal consistency and assertions of prophetic fulfillment), as well as on multiples lines of evidence corroborating the Bible's claims.⁴² The point is that regardless of the exact methodology employed by the apologist, eventually the concept of biblical inerrancy enters into the apologetic task. Consequently, if the Christian abandons the

I should distinguish a theological defense of Scripture's reliability from an apologetic one. The theological doctrine most closely associated with this concept is inerrancy, and of course, inerrancy and inspiration go together. In theology classes on the doctrine of Scripture, as an evangelical, my concern is to set forth what Scripture teaches about its own inspiration and truthfulness. Questions about whether texts that speak of inspiration and inerrancy are themselves reliable are not the focus of the discussion. Rather, the theologian assumes that philosophers and apologists have made the case that Scripture is reliable and should be believed, regardless of the topic. So the task of the apologist is to make the case that the Bible is reliable in what it teaches about any topic. The usual starting point of such a defense is the historical claims the Bible makes. (p. 359)

Arguably, Feinberg's assessment does not seem to take full inventory of how interpretive perspectives may influence the nonbeliever's ability to agree with the interpretation of data presented by the apologist in order to back his claim of the Bible's reliability. That is another issue to be settled on another occasion. What is important to note, however, is that Feinberg's statement does not diminish the *need* to defend biblical inerrancy (it simply suggests a particular tactic of how to do so in the long run); nor does it detract from the fact that inerrancy must be assumed in order for the Christian apologist himself to have an accurate perspective on the content of the faith he seeks to defend.

⁴² See, for example, the approach outlined by Ronald B. Mayers in *Balanced Apologetics: Using Evidences and Presuppositions in Defense of the Faith* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1984), 70–73. For a practical outworking of this “both/and” type of defense at a layman's level, see Nathan Busenitz, *Reasons We Believe: 50 Lines of Evidence that Confirm the Christian Faith* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 71–152. Busenitz lists twenty overlapping lines of biblical and extrabiblical evidence in support of Scripture's authority.

defense of inerrancy (perhaps, as Taylor suggests, arguing that the Bible is only true in all that it teaches, but allowing for error in historical or scientific details), he fatally compromises his ability to defend all aspects of Christian doctrine—that is, the sum total of “the faith” (cf. Jude 3).

It is true that the defense of inerrancy does not necessarily need to be front and center in the Christian’s apologetic presentation, as there are many other aspects of the defense of the faith that require attention. However, if pressed on the subject of the Bible’s accuracy or authority, the apologist needs to be both willing and able to defend its full inerrancy. John Frame affirms that the Christian apologist must possess “a clearheaded understanding of where our loyalties lie and how those loyalties affect our epistemology” and also “a determination above all to present the full teaching of Scripture in our apologetic without compromise, in its full winsomeness and its full offensiveness.”⁴³ Both of these qualifications demand an unwavering adherence to inerrancy regardless of whether the apologist chooses to explicitly center his defense of the Christian faith on that doctrine. As for the particulars of the apologetic defense, “The important thing is not to talk about our presuppositions but to obey them in our thought, speech, and life.”⁴⁴ In this case, inerrancy must be a presupposition on the part of the believer that is affirmed uncompromisingly whether or not it arises as a

⁴³ John M. Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God: An Introduction* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1994), 88. While some might suspect that these qualifications are unique to presuppositional apologetics, they ought to be considered a requirement of all *orthodox Christian* apologetics. Although the Bible does allow for liberty in the argumentative style of the apologist (i.e., his apologetic method), never does Scripture suggest that the apologist ought not to present all of its claims as anything less than the full truth. This reality is what stands behind Frame’s statement that apologists must have “a clearheaded understanding of where our loyalties lie.”

⁴⁴ John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God: A Theology of Lordship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1987), 350.

topic of conversation in an apologetic exchange. This presupposition serves to inform the apologist's loyalties and, presumably, may in many cases help to direct him in the formulation of apologetic arguments. Frame is thus right to insist, "Our apologetic must always be an obedient apologetic—subject to God's revealed Word and thus governed by our own ultimate presuppositions. But whether we talk about presuppositions or not will depend on the situation."⁴⁵ If the inquirer is willing to accept the apologist's arguments without engaging the apologist on the topic of inerrancy, so be it; but if the believer is challenged on the topic of the Bible's accuracy or authority, he will surely have to defend the text's inerrancy.

The apologist may well be tempted to maintain only that the Bible is "a generally reliable historical text," leaving open the possibility that it might err in various ways. And, while there is certainly nothing wrong with seeking to show the Bible's historical reliability (using both its own claims and external evidence), the apologist does the Bible a disservice in shying away from his ultimate commitment to Scripture as much more than "a generally reliable historical text," but the inspired word of God, wholly inerrant and authoritative. Commitment to what the Bible actually says does not leave the apologist the option of avoiding altogether the issue of inerrancy. No, the case for inerrancy need not be the first line of the Christian's defense, but, in view of what the Bible asserts about itself, it is certainly illegitimate to dodge the objections of skeptics by saying, as Taylor does, that the Bible might, because of its human characteristics, err in some details. An infallibly true revelation of God cannot reside in an errant text.

THE NEEDED REAFFIRMATION OF INERRANCY

This article has argued, in direct contrast to the view expounded by Taylor, that biblical inerrancy is absolutely essential to Christian apologetics. It undergirds the apologist's understanding of the content of the faith to be defended and

⁴⁵ Ibid.

provides certainty to the apologist that what he defends is indeed the truth. This article has examined the perspectives of McGowan and Enns on inerrancy, perspectives that have advocated a departure from biblical inerrancy as traditionally defined, and which thereby provide the necessary support for Taylor's assertion that "Christian apologists are wise to avoid insisting that the Bible is absolutely inerrant ... and to claim instead that it is true in all it teaches."⁴⁶ This article has shown these views to be lacking, as they fail to take account of what the Bible claims for itself, and also of how Scripture uses Scripture. Passages of Scripture that quote from other passages invariably assume the complete accuracy of even the most minute details in those passages. In accordance with this understanding, biblical inerrancy is essentially relevant to the task of Christian apologetics. As stated previously, Scripture's inerrancy is necessary both to understanding and defending the Bible's authority and message. Moreover, it is a commitment to inerrancy that informs the apologist of the certainty and trustworthiness of the Christian faith that he seeks to defend. Accordingly, biblical inerrancy, while not necessarily comprising the central thrust of every apologetic argument, is nonetheless vital to the apologetic task. The biblical text does not permit for the abandonment of inerrancy, as Taylor suggests, simply in order to account for the human element in Scripture.

In view of this conclusion, it seems that an appeal is in order for Christian apologists to reaffirm with one voice the inerrancy of the Bible and to uncompromisingly stand upon it in their defense of the faith. Scripture's explicit claims to be "truth" (Ps 119:160; John 17:17) simply do not permit for the intrusion of error, regardless of how such error might be qualified as the fault of the human authors of the text rather than of God himself. Surely, there is no biblical charge that can be leveled against Christian apologists who both assume and assert the full inerrancy of the text. After all, it can do no harm for the believer to assert about Scripture what Scripture already asserts about itself, that it, as the word of God, is true.

⁴⁶ Taylor, *Introducing Apologetics*, 269

Wayne Grudem has passionately urged fellow believers to “consider the possibility that God may want us to quote his Word explicitly in private discussions and in public debates with nonbelievers.”⁴⁷ Doing so necessarily demands that the Christian has a high view of Scripture’s inerrancy and authority. When Christian apologists abandon the biblical claim to full inerrancy, and thus downplay the authority of Scripture in their defense of the faith, they are, as Grudem asserts, “often reduced to pragmatic arguments that are not decisive or to moral arguments that have no apparent transcendent moral authority behind them, and as a result the Church is anemic and has no influence in the world. But what should we expect when we leave our sword at home?”⁴⁸ On the contrary, Christian apologists must stand fast on the doctrine of inerrancy both implicitly in how they think of the authority of God’s word and, when appropriate, explicitly in how they argue for God’s word as wholly true. Only

⁴⁷ Wayne Grudem, “Do We Act as If We Really Believe That ‘The Bible Alone, and the Bible in Its Entirety, Is the Word of God Written?’” *JETS* 43, no. 1 (March 2000): 23. Grudem, speaking to Christians, continues,

Most of you have some influence in some spheres of non-Christian activity, whether you are a parent and there are ‘values’ curricula in your schools, whether you are a school board member, whether you are discussing something of ethical import with your neighbors, whether you are involved in ethics debates in the community, whether you are on radio talk shows in local secular stations, or whether you even have national influence in congressional committees or on ABC’s *Nightline* and other such venues. If we believe that ‘the Bible *alone* ... is the Word of God written,’ then shouldn’t we quote it in these contexts?

He further notes that there is “a common attitude that assumes that non-evangelicals and non-Christians don’t believe the Bible, so we don’t quote it. But I seriously doubt the wisdom of that approach. If ‘the Bible *alone* ... is the Word of God’ out of all the writings of the whole world, and if we hide it from unbelievers, where will they ever hear it?” (Ibid.). There is, therefore, a very practical apologetic (and evangelistic) tie-in to the affirmation of biblical inerrancy.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 24. “Sword” here is of course a metaphor for the word of God (Eph 6:17).

in affirming the full inerrancy of God's word can the Christian apologist have a firm basis for confidence in Scripture's authority, and so ultimately remain faithful to Jude's great apologetic directive, "contend earnestly for the faith" (Jude v 3).

“Is ‘Literal’ Literally the Best Term for Dispensationalists Moving Forward?”

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THE ISSUE WITH THE TERM “LITERAL” IN DISPENSATIONAL INTERPRETATION¹

In 1965 and later in 2007 Charles Ryrie affirmed, “Dispensationalists claim that their principle of hermeneutics is that of literal interpretation.”² This phraseology “literal interpretation” has been one of the benchmarks of dispensationalism ever since. However, defining the term *literal* in this context is not without its difficulties. The one significant issue with the term *literal* as a noun modifier for *interpretation* is that it is often further defined by other terms. Ryrie, himself, qualified “literal” by stating that it “might also be called *normal*,” or “might also be designated *plain*.” While one could understand qualifying a term once, Ryrie did it multiple times.³ I am not sure Ryrie intended this to become customary among scholars;

¹This article was originally presented at The Council of Dispensational Hermeneutics, September 14, 2016, Grace Theological Seminary, Winona Lake, Indiana and at the Faculty Forum, Baptist Bible Seminary, September 19, 2016, South Abington Twp., Pennsylvania.

² Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism Today* (Chicago, Moody Bible Institute, 1965), 86. *Dispensationalism: Revised and Expanded* (Chicago, Moody Publishers 2007), 91. In his *Basic Theology* when discussing interpretation Ryrie states, “God communicates in a normal, plain, or literal manner.” *Basic Theology* ([Colorado Springs, Victor Books, 1997]), 17.

³ For instance, see *Dispensationalism: Revised and Expanded*, pages 91 (three times), 92 (once), 97 (once).

however, it seems to have become somewhat of a necessity when dealing with the term *literal* in relationship to interpretation.

Writing on “the literal rule of interpretation” Elliott Johnson adds another qualifier: “To put it plainly, the literal, or normal, clear sense is to be chosen....”⁴ Later he adds another, “the ‘literal sense’ or ‘normal or simple sense’ has been demonstrated in practice to be probably accurate.”⁵ Robert Thomas adopts Terry’s traditional definition of literal interpretation and thus accepts other qualifiers: “Sometimes we speak of the literal sense, by which we mean the most simple, direct, and ordinary meaning of phrases and sentences.”⁶ A. Berkeley Mickelsen writes, “By literal meaning the writer refers to the usual or customary sense conveyed by words or expressions.”⁷ Kaiser and Silva compound the qualifiers, “... what we mean by the term literal,... means the simple, plain, direct or ordinary sense.”⁸ In the early pages of his Bible interpretation book, Roy Zuck seems happy with one qualifier: “... of course the so-called literal or normal approach....” Further in his book he qualifies it threefold when contrasting literal with figurative: “... presenting literal facts that might otherwise be stated in a normal, plain, ordinary way.”⁹ Herbert Bateman recalls memorizing Ryrie’s second point of the *sine qua*

⁴ Elliott E. Johnson, *Expository Hermeneutics: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Academie Books, 1990), 268.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 304.

⁶ Robert Thomas, *Evangelical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Kregel 2002), 233.

⁷ A. Berkeley Mickelsen, *Interpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), 179.

⁸ Walter C. Kaiser and Moises Silva, *An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search for Meaning* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 33.

⁹ Roy Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation: A Practical Guide to Discovering Biblical Truth* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1991), 63 and 147.

non of dispensationalism as "the distinction between Israel and the Church emerges from a hermeneutical system that is usually called literal interpretation, namely the employment of a normal or plain interpretation."¹⁰

While examples could be multiplied, the problem with the term *literal* as a noun modifier for interpretation seems clear and raises some concerns: (1) *literal* is a term that based on recent academic practice does not seem to be able to be defined by itself. Thus a term that cannot be defined on its own indicates its inadequacy; (2) if the term *literal* needs qualifiers, which ones should be employed and how many?¹¹ (3) even if a certain qualifier were to replace *literal* (such as *plain* or *normal*), I suspect that *literal* would not be dropped but just moved to a place of apposition to the "new" term;¹² (4) while "we" know what "we" mean by "literal interpretation," the need for one or more qualifiers suggest "our" readers may not; (5) literal interpretation may be confused with literal language and this creates issues in biblical poetry;¹³ and (6) even Ryrie recognized

¹⁰ Herbert Bateman, "Dispensationalism Yesterday and Today," in *Three Central Issues in Contemporary Dispensationalism: A Comparison of Traditional and Progressive Views*, ed. Herbert W. Bateman IV ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999), 35.

¹¹ If one were to combine the various qualifiers currently in play "literal interpretation" could be defined as the simple, plain, normal, ordinary, direct, basic, face value, and everyday language.

¹² Ryrie does this when speaking of his system of interpretation. He writes, "God communicates in a normal, plain, or literal manner" (*Basic Theology*, 17).

¹³ Both phrases are not the same. Anyone familiar with the Reformed parody of a "literal" interpretation of the *wasf* of Song of Songs 4 (see illustration on the next page) recognizes the misunderstanding the term causes. This is confusion at best or ridicule at worst.

that *literal* was not the best term for our method of interpretation: “Since the word ‘literal’ has connotations which are either misunderstood or subjectively understood, labels like ‘plain’ or ‘normal’ serve more acceptably.”¹⁴

These lingering observations support the legitimacy of the question: is *literal* literally the best term to describe traditional



The headline of this now common picture reads “The Song of Solomon illustrated (for our literalist friends.),” February 6, 2014, accessed July 26, 2016, <http://jimerwin.com/2014/02/06/song-of-solomon-illustrated-literally/>.

Another case in point is A. J. Jacobs’s, *The Year of Living Biblically: One Man’s Humble Quest to Follow the Bible as Literally as Possible* (Simon & Schuster, 2008). From his website he states, “*The Year of Living Biblically* is about my quest to live the ultimate biblical life. To follow every single rule in the Bible as literally as possible” (2017, accessed 23 January 2017, <http://ajjacobs.com/books/the-year-of-living-biblically/>).

One can guess the issues that arose with such a “literal” experiment. Jacob observes, “I found that fundamentalists may claim to take the Bible literally, but they actually just pick and choose certain rules to follow. By taking fundamentalism extreme, I found that literalism is not the best way to interpret the Bible” (ibid.) After his year living both testaments, he concludes that one cannot live the Bible literally—one has to pick and choose what commandments he or she obeys.

Another issue is that “literal language” may be used to demonstrate the difference between the phrase “figurative language,” which is a legitimate distinction.

¹⁴ Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 111. Unfortunately, “plain” or “normal” would seem to suffer the same misunderstanding as “literal” since neither has captured the fancy of scholars.

dispensationalists' method of interpretation? The short (and humble) answer is "no." While it is important to identify our method of interpretation, "literal interpretation" is literally not the best term.¹⁵ I suggest *contextual* replace *literal* as the modifier for interpretation. This is a more accurate term for dispensationalists' hermeneutic moving forward from this point.

Before proceeding to my reasons for adopting this term, the adjective: *contextual* needs definition. *Contextual* encompasses both the historical¹⁶ and literary contexts of the biblical work. By historical context we mean the chronological period in which the biblical author composed his work for his original audience. By literary context we mean the grammatical, syntactical, morphological, phonological and genre aspects of literary communication.¹⁷ Literary is the style by which the biblical writer

¹⁵ It should be noted that I am not jettisoning the noun *literal*. It is still a decent term as a noun as will hopefully be seen in the latter part of this paper. I am suggesting abandoning "literal" as a noun modifier before interpretation.

¹⁶ Since the OT is chronologically older than the NT, the ancient context allows one to maintain an OT priority (historically). This is vitally important.

¹⁷ Literary context is as small as a clause or a phrase in which a word is found and as large as the biblical canon itself. Context recognizes where each individual work of the Bible falls into the whole of the progress of revelation (historical context). It is certain that each book of the Bible is a literary part of its whole literary context. However, the immediate literary context in which a word is found determines meaning. Larger literary contexts such as similar genre, historical time period, placement in the canon, etc., will not contradict the immediate contextual meaning. Johnson is correct to note, "The determinative influence must go to the immediate textual context. That context fashions a textual usage which may be clarified and amplified by other supporting contexts" (Elliott E. Johnson, "Literal Interpretation: A Plea for Consensus," Pre-Trib Study Group Conference, 1992). <http://www.pre-trib.org/articles/view/literal-interpretation-plea-for-consensus> accessed November 16, 2016.

communicated in written words his intended meaning to his original audience within a certain historical context.

The main reason for this alternative term is that “contextual interpretation” best represents what we do in practice as we study the biblical text. While I am suggesting *contextual* as a replacement term, scholars have already recognized the priority of context in interpretation. Although Elliott Johnson does not use the term, contextual, he certainly recognizes the two main contextual elements: history and literary (although he employs the term *grammar* instead of literary but means the same as my term *literary*¹⁸). He writes, “Today, dispensationalists would agree that literal interpretation is a grammatical, historical interpretation.... Thus, *literal* interpretation entails those meanings which the author intended to communicate in the expressions of the text (grammar) in the original setting (historical).”¹⁹ Grant Osborne also recognizes the vast importance of “contextual interpretation”: “Two areas must be considered at the beginning of Bible study: the historical context and the logical context²⁰.... The historical and logical contexts provide the scaffolding upon which we can build the in-depth study of a passage. Without a strong scaffolding, the edifice of interpretation is bound to collapse.”²¹ While not using the term,

¹⁸ “Thus grammar that is necessary is that related to what an author has written—including lexicography, syntax, and literary genre” (Elliott Johnson, “A Traditional Dispensational Hermeneutic,” in *Three Central Issues in Contemporary Dispensationalism*, 65).

¹⁹ Elliott Johnson, *Ibid.*, 64. Johnson does use the term *context* when he observes, “... only the literal reading limits the interpretative process to the immediate context.... A literal reading always seeks clues that are either stated in or related to the textual expression in some grammatical and historical sense” (*Ibid.*, 32).

²⁰ By “logical context,” Osborne intends the language, genre and intention of the author. (*Hermeneutical Spiral* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1991], 21-22).

²¹ *Ibid.*, 19.

"contextual," Ryrie recognized its importance both historically and grammatically when he summarized his literal, normal or plain interpretation: "It is sometimes called the principle of grammatical-historical interpretation since the meaning of each word is determined by grammatical and historical considerations."²² Ryrie's "considerations" is my "contextual." It is not a stretch to suggest that grammatical-historical interpretation is essentially "contextual interpretation." Therefore, what I am suggesting is not a new interpretive practice, but a more nuanced terminology that communicates more clearly (and without the need for additional nouns in apposition to define it) what "we" actually do when we seek to understand the message of the Bible. *Contextual* interpretation is literally the better word moving forward.²³

A Test Case For "Contextual" Interpretation

The pitfall of employing the term "literal interpretation" is most obvious when it is at employed as a label to describe our interpretive process in biblical poetry, specifically Hebrew poetry. Although "we" understand what "we" mean when we talk about "literal interpretation" in poetry, "we" seem to be in need of constant qualifiers when moving to a genre that engages literary devices such as metaphor, simile, and the like more frequently. Zuck demonstrates the difficulty: "Perhaps it is better not to speak of 'figurative versus literal' interpretation, but of 'ordinary-literal' versus 'figurative-literal' interpretation. Therefore in this book *figurative* means figurative-literal, and *literal* means ordinary-literal."²⁴ Although "we" know what he

²² Ryrie, *Dispensationalism: Revised and Expanded*, 91.

²³ By adopting this term one of the benefits would be the elimination of the many and varied qualifiers that plague "literal interpretation." I, also, recognize that replacing the term, "literal interpretation" risks losing the richness of the term that established and anchors traditional dispensationalism. However, the risk seems worth it in light of the new term's increased clarity and accuracy.

means, his use of qualifiers showcases the problem and hardly clarifies labeling our poetic interpretative process.

When A Vineyard Is A Literal Vineyard And When A Literal Vineyard Is... Something Else

To test both terms, “literal interpretation” and “contextual interpretation” let’s take the words “vineyard” and “vineyards” as found in four verses of the Song of Songs (1:6; 2:15; 7:12; 8:11).

Before we look at each verse in its own immediate context, let’s explore the book’s context. If we accept literally the first verse of the Song, we are immediately aware of its historical and cultural context. The king of Israel, Solomon, wrote this musical piece circa ninth century BC. The literary context is also crystal clear. It is a song (שִׁיר). But more than just any song, it is Solomon’s best song (שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים). This pastoral song draws its imagery from the flora and fauna of Israel’s historical and geographical context. As such the informed reader expects to encounter a plethora of poetic literary devices that paint mental pictures from this ancient culture to communicate its literary message.

The Song is notoriously difficult to outline. I suggest that it flows from beginning to end through seven movements that each exhibits four themes (separation, desire, obstacle, and union) that repeat themselves in each movement.²⁵ Our first example (1:6) is part of the first movement (1:2-2:7) that expresses the “obstacle” theme.

The female lover speaks:

- (a) Do not stare at me because I am swarthy,
- (b) For the sun has burned me.

- (c) My mother's sons were angry with me;
- (d) They made me keeper of the vineyards (בְּכָרְמִים)

²⁴ Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation*, 147.

²⁵ Movement #1: 1:2-2:7; #2: 2:8-17; #3: 3:1-5; #4: 3:6-5:1; #5: 5:2-7:11; #6: 7:11-8:4; #7: 8:5-14.

(e) My own vineyard, which is mine, I have not kept (כֶּרְמִי)
(1:6)

The plural occasion of "vineyard" in line d is speaking of literal vineyards. In short the female beloved was made to work outside tending grape plants in the hot Middle Eastern sun. A contextual reading reveals that she was a common farmhand working in literal vineyards and had the sunburnt skin to prove it.²⁶ While it is certain the term here could be allegorized by some, reading the term in its immediate verse and the Song's context give no clues as to any reading other than recognizing "vineyards" as literal places where grapes were cultivated. The reason the female lover is "swarthy" or sunburnt is because she had to work outside in vineyards.

In line e the next occurrence of "vineyard" is singular. What are we to make of the use of this term here? Common "literal interpretation" wisdom declares: "When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense." It could make normal sense that her brothers kept her from working in her own vineyards because they wanted free sibling labor presumably for their own profit from their own vineyards. So line e is a simple statement of fact that makes literal sense. However, observing the literary context beginning in line a challenges such a reading and the "wisdom" of "literal interpretation." It is clear from the context that the term "vineyard" in line e is being used as a metaphor for the female lover's body. This is evidenced by the empathic use of the first person in this cola, כֶּרְמִי שְׁלִי לֹא נִטְרַחֲתִי ("my vineyard, which is mine, I have not kept"). This unusual construction provides a clue that a literal vineyard is not in view. This first person suffixed pronoun emphasis combined with the singular use of "vineyard" (in contrast to the previous line's plural use) indicates that the author utilizes a figurative use of the term. Also, line e in literary context is the explanation of the reason why she was sunburnt: it is because she was made to work

²⁶ Notice I am not rejecting the term "literal" as a noun. It functions quite nicely in this context and causes no confusion or misunderstanding.

outside in the hot sun (lines a-d) and thus was not able to care for her body, i.e., vineyard (line e).²⁷

Even though “we” know what we mean by the phrase “literal interpretation,” to suggest that this phrase is literally the best expression for the process we just followed is to invite Zuckian verbiage to label the distinct use of the same terminology in different ways.²⁸ It is much simpler and clearer to label the process “contextual interpretation” in which the literal and figurative use of the same term in different lines was the intent of the original author to communicate his single, intended meaning.²⁹

In the second example (2:15) we again come across two uses of the same word, “vineyards,” (כַּרְמִים). This verse occurs in the second movement expressing the obstacle theme (2:8-17).

The female lover speaks:

(a) Catch for us the foxes (שׁוֹעָלִים),

(b) The little foxes (שׁוֹעָלִים קְטַנִּים)

(c) The ones ruining the vineyards, (כַּרְמִים)

(d) While our vineyards (כַּרְמֵינוּ) are in blossom (2:15).

²⁷ Dan Estes concurs, “In this verse, ‘vineyard’ is used in two senses, first of the literal vineyard in which Shulammith was compelled to labour, and then as a literary figure for her physical body” (“The Song of Songs,” in *Ecclesiastes & The Song of Songs*, Apollos Old Testament Commentary [Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 2010], 308).

The same three-fold use of the first person suffix pronoun in relationship to a vineyard which is a metaphor for the female lover’s body is found in 8:12, כַּרְמִי שְׁלִי לִפְנֵי (“my vineyard, which is mine, before me”).

²⁸ i.e., “figurative-literal” vs. “ordinary-literal”

²⁹ While I imagine one could argue to maintain a “literal” reading of 1:6e that the female lover was overworked and thus not able to work on her own literal vineyard, contextually such a reading does not clarify or advance the three verses (5, 6, 7) of this stanza.

After a very steamy encounter in 2:3-6 the adjuration refrain (2:7) transitions the reader to this second movement (2:8-17). Here the reader overhears the female lover's quoting her beloved's desires (2:10-14). In short he wanted her, alone, in private and naked (2:14). While not squelching his desire, the female lover responded by pointing out that she wanted the numerous small foxes that were threatening havoc to their vineyards captured (2:15).

While it is possible to understand these lines as the female lover literally imploring her beloved to get his fox traps or his ninth century BC equivalent 12-gauge, such a literal reading grates against the literary context before (2:8-14) and after (2:16-17). While "a common sense" reading makes perfect literal sense: i.e., to be concerned about the agricultural damage that young Middle Eastern omnivorous mammals may cause to vineyards in flower, it does not fit contextually his expressed desire (10-14) or her request to enjoy his "prancing" on her peaks in the following verse (2:17)! An ordinary, normal, literal reading makes plain sense but simply does not make contextual sense.

Contextually, it is best to understand that "foxes" (2:15) are functioning as a metaphor for some type of unnamed problems that are creating some level of havoc in the couple's "vineyards." While the reader feels she wanted to grant his request (2:14), the unnumbered multitude of furry pests needed to be dealt with before they mature in size, causing greater destruction to their "vineyards."

Like the use of the first person singular suffixed pronoun in 1: 6, here the first person plural suffixed pronoun (כָּרְמֵינוּ) gives the reader an indication that these may not be ordinary or literal vineyards. Contextually "vineyards" should be understood as a metaphor for the various areas of a couple's relationship. It seems these relationship areas are in "bloom" (סִמְרָה) i.e., growing; however, there are unidentified "foxes" (i.e., obstacles) that are dangerous to these vineries bearing fruit. If these "small obstacles" were not dealt with while they were of manageable size, the couple's relationship (i.e., vineyards) would suffer harm.

For these two metaphors ("foxes" and "vineyards") to work, various aspects of literal "foxes" and literal "vineyards" need to

be understood. As Ryken observes, a “metaphor is a bifocal utterance that requires us to look at two levels of meaning or two spheres of experience.”³⁰ The first level is certainly the “literal” one. For the metaphor to communicate we need to be able to “see” literal ancient Middle East foxes (i.e., small ones) and vineyards in bloom. Ryken also recognizes, “At a literal, grammatical level, a metaphor always states an untruth.”³¹ This “untruth” leads to the second level, which is the figurative one. Hopefully, we understand that Solomon does not mean literal “foxes” or literal “blossoming vineyards.” He employs these literal images to paint a picture on the mental canvas of his reader as a point of comparison. Solomon takes the concrete, foxes in vineyards, to visually picture the abstract, obstacles in relationships. It is certainly easier for the original reader to visualize the destruction small foxes would do to a blooming vineyard, than envision the damage that certain obstacles cause in a marriage relationship.

Although “we” would all understand what “we” mean if “we” labeled this process “literal interpretation,” we appreciate that it is literally not the best term. “Contextual interpretation” that recognizes the historical and literary contexts of this verse seem to be a less problematic and a clearer representation of what we actually did with this verse.

Our next example is in the sixth movement and advances the theme of desire. Echoing his expression of desire to be alone with her in the literal rugged outdoors (2:14), here the female lover voices her longing to be alone in a more pastoral setting with a very erotic purpose.

The female lover speaks:

(a) Let us rise early *and go* to the vineyards (כִּרְמִים)

(b) Let us see whether the vine has budded

³⁰ Leland Ryken, *Literary Forms in the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 124.

³¹ Ibid.

- (c) *if* blossoms have opened,
- (d) *if* the pomegranates have bloomed.

(e) There I will give my love to you (7:13; Eng 7:12).

By this point in the Song we might be quick to label this use of "vineyards" (כִּרְמִיּוֹת) as a metaphor and hastily look for the comparison. Solomon has certainly primed us to be on the look out for metaphorical usages of the term. However, as we read the lines we are left to ponder, if this is a metaphor, we do not easily see the comparison implied or otherwise. While there certainly may be some suggestive metaphorical or euphemistic language with "vines budding," "blossoms opening" and "pomegranates blooming," "vineyards" of verse 13a are best read as literal vineyards, places where grapes are cultivated.

The adverb of location "there" (שָׁם) in line e also indicates that "vineyards" (7:13) are literal places where she wants to take her lover. The use of the verb of motion (שָׁכַחַת) also give evidence that "vineyards" are her desired destinations after their rising early (line a). This literal use of the term fits the literary context of 7:10-13 (Eng) very well. These are orchards where grapes are grown and the outdoor space where her erotic tryst will take place (line e). Lines b through d seem to be "excuses" to lure her beloved to this unique place to enjoy her lovemaking.

While one could label this "literal interpretation" (and "we" would all know what "we" mean), it does not capture our interpretative process. While we understand the term כִּרְמִיּוֹת, as a literal one, that determination came by our looking not simply at the word itself but at the context in which it is functioning. Any word by itself could be understood as literal. However, it is not until we look at the term in its context that its usage can be determined.³² Contextual interpretation seems to be a more

³² Take for instance the word *love*. Do I mean the emotion, or do I mean "any one of a set of transverse beams supporting the spits in a smokehouse for curing herring," (*OED*) or am I giving one side of the score of a tennis match? Only context will make my use of *love* clear.

accurate term for what we actually do when we interpret the biblical text.

Our last example is found in the last movement of the Song (8:5-14). These verses work to develop the obstacle theme for the last time (8:11-12).

The female lover speaks:

- (a) A vineyard (כֶּרֶם) belonged to Solomon at Baal-hamon;
- (b) He entrusted the vineyard (כֶּרֶם) to caretakers;
- (c) Each is to bring with its fruit a thousand *pieces* of silver (8:11)

- (a) My vineyard (כֶּרֶםִּי) which is mine (שְׁלִי) belongs to me (לִפְנֵי);
- (b) The thousand are for you, Solomon,
- (c) And two hundred are for those who take care of its fruit (8:12)

These verses are difficult to translate and interpret. However, determining the use of our term vineyard (כֶּרֶם) is straightforward. While it is possible that Solomon owned a single vineyard at unknown Baal-hamon, a literal reading of the term is unlikely. The key to understanding the first use of vineyard (כֶּרֶם) in 8:11a is in the place, Baal-hamon (בַּעַל הָמוֹן). This hapex geographic location is not to be taken as a literal place. Its unidentified location and its meaning, “possessor of abundance”³³ or “husband of a multitude”³⁴ points to a metaphorical use. Contextually, it seems the author is making a metaphorical reference to Solomon’s 1000 wives and concubines (1 Kgs 11:3). To state that Solomon was a “husband of an abundance” is not a literary hyperbole. Solomon’s “Baal-hamon

OED, *Oxford English Dictionary*, accessed January 23, 2017, <http://www.oed.com/search?searchType=dictionary&q=Love>.

³³ BDB, 128.

³⁴ J. Cheryl Exum, *Song of Songs* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 260.

vineyard" contained a plethora of plants that represented the multitude of wives and concubines he enjoyed. This "vineyard" represented his harem that was placed in the care of others (eunuchs?).

While Solomon had an abundance of women in his vineyard, the female lover boasts of only one (8:12). The three-fold repetition of the first person suffix in line 12a, highlights that this "vineyard" is singular and unique. Just like our first example (1:6) this sole vineyard is a metaphor for the female lover's own body. Solomon may have his 1000 women, but her "vineyard" is her own. Solomon may have purchased his wives and concubines, but the female lover's "vineyard" cannot be bought. It is clearly hers alone without price (8:7), and she offers it to her lover (8:14).

While these two verses could be speaking of two separate and unique literal vineyards (Solomon's Baal-Hamon vineyard and the female lover's own literal vineyard), such an interpretation reads against the grain of the entire book, this last movement of the entire Song (8:5-14) and the literary context of its stanza (8:10-14). While we may quibble over the meaning of the metaphors employed by "vineyard," a contextual reading recognizes that figurative and not literal images are at play.

CONCLUSION

Moving forward, it seems more accurate for dispensationalists to dispense with *literal* (and its many qualifiers) as a modifier of our method of interpretation. Embracing the term "contextual interpretation" avoids the continued use of copious and varied qualifiers, avoids the confusion between *literal* as a noun and *literal* as a noun modifier as exhibited by Zuck and better represents the hermeneutic we practice. "Contextual" interpretation is literally the better word moving forward.

Jonah's Rescue: What Are the Implications for Today? (Jonah 1:17-2:10)

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PART ONE: INTRODUCTION

The book of Jonah is a straightforward narrative. The central piece of the story, however, could be the poetry of Jonah's prayer in chapter two. The nature of the book is unlike any of the other prophetic books found in the Old Testament (hereafter, OT). It is more of an account of Jonah's experiences rather than a collection of prophetic messages. But what is it about this book that evangelicals seek to critique and defend its historicity (historical analysis), offer different structural layouts (structural analysis), raise alternative interpretations (theological analysis), and propose various genre classifications (literary analysis)? Typically, what is at the center of the majority of these arguments is Jonah's psalm found in chapter 2; thus an examination of Jonah 1:17-2:10 is all the more important.

The purpose of this article is to examine Jonah's prayer. There are four sections to the article. Part one deals with the introductory issues: history, literary, theology, and genre. Part two discusses the identification of the prayer; that is, should it be classified as a lament psalm or declarative praise psalm? The psalm's identification is crucial. Due to its interpretive implications and therefore significant present-day application, part three analyzes the psalm's role within the context of the whole book. Is the psalm out of place? An exegetical and contextual analysis is also presented. Part four provides the significance of the psalm for today.

It is important to discuss these introductory issues, though not exhaustively, in order to provide a proper background for the study of Jonah 2. Different views and perspectives are presented; however, the writer of this paper offers a traditional, conservative position regarding the historical, structural, theological, and literary issues surrounding this psalm.

Historical Analysis

Traditionally, the book of Jonah has been understood as a historical account of episodes found in the life of a prophet. Some modern scholars, however, reject the historicity of the book and understand the book as legendary, allegorical, or parabolic.¹ Feinberg claims that modern scholars are in disbelief and have attacked this book probably more than any other in the Bible.² There is a tendency to view the book as fiction, but why is this?

Although there are several peripheral reasons, the book of Jonah is typically viewed as fiction for two reasons.³ The first is the exaggerated way in which the book is written, especially the use of the Hebrew adjective "great." It is used fourteen times in the book. It is used to describe several things (i.e., the size of the storm, the size of the fish, and the population of Nineveh), of which the size of the fish is the most commonly discussed reason. This is due to the housing of a prophet for three days and three nights. Can a fish really do this? The claim is Jonah's use of hyperbole is unrealistic and fanciful, thus supporting the book's classification as fiction. The second reason is the many

¹ For more thorough presentations against the book's historicity, see the following: Leslie Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 175-81; Terence E. Fretheim, *The Message of Jonah* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1977), 61-72.

² Charles L. Feinberg, *Minor Prophets* (Chicago: Moody, 1976), 133.

³ For a thorough discussion regarding the peripheral reasons, see T. Desmond Alexander, *Jonah: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC 23a (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988), 70-77; Douglas Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, WBC 31 (Dallas: Word, 1987), 438-42.

occurrences of the miraculous (i.e., the storm, the selection of Jonah by lot as guilty, preservation of Jonah in the fish, the gourd, the worm, etc.), of which the swallowing of Jonah by the fish and his preservation by it, being the most common occurrence discussed (1:17-2:10). The claim is that these events did not really happen. They are merely contrived events that develop some type of moral in view.

Despite modern scholarly consensus, many evangelicals support the historicity of the book.⁴ If for no other reason, divine inspiration and supernaturalism demand such a view. Feinberg states, "If we exclude the miraculous from our Bibles, how much of it do we have left? And more important, what kind of a God do we have left?"⁵

The book's historicity is defended on two fronts. First, Jonah's portrayal of things as larger than life, therefore classifying the book as fiction, is questionable at best.⁶ Alexander claims that the author actually plays down the miraculous and extraordinary nature of the events.⁷ Second, due to divine intervention, the

⁴ T. Desmond Alexander, "Jonah and Genre," *TynBul* 36 (1986): 35-59; C. Hassell Bullock, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophetic Books* (Chicago: Moody, 1986), 44-48; Robert B. Chisholm Jr. *Handbook on the Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 406-09; James Hardee Kennedy, *Studies in the Book of Jonah* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1956), 29-41; George M. Landes, "The Kerygma of the Book of Jonah," *Interpretation* 21 (1967): 3-31; Jonathan D. Magonet, *Form and Meaning: Studies in the Literary Techniques in the Book of Jonah* (Sheffield: Almond P, 1983), 39-54; Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 440-42.

⁵ Feinberg, *Minor Prophets*, 134.

⁶ John D. Hannah has done extensive research and discusses the possibility that the "great fish" was possibly a sperm whale or whale shark. Sperm whales are known to have swallowed large objects, including a 15-foot shark. See his discussion ("Jonah," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary Old Testament: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck [Wheaton: Victor, 1985], 1462-63).

⁷ Alexander, *Introduction and Commentary*, 73.

miraculous is all the more plausible.⁸ To suggest a doubt as to the book's historicity based on improbable events is really not adequate. One is rejecting the miraculous based only on a bias that assumes the supernatural is not possible. But what does one do with other miraculous events in the Bible? To suggest that those potentially are exempt, yet the events of Jonah are not, is again, to single out Jonah without due cause.⁹

This article therefore, supports the historicity of the book of Jonah. Jonah's message derives from actual historical events. It is important to understand that only recently have scholars considered the book of Jonah as fiction. This is significant due to the fact that the traditional understanding has long been in favor of Jonah's historicity. This speaks to modern scholars' potential critical presuppositions regarding the book's style and supernatural occurrences.

Structural Analysis

The structure of Jonah is typically seen as a book with parallel halves; chapters one and two approximately parallel chapters three and four. Although Jonah's approximate parallel structure is commonly recognized by most scholars, the structure is

⁸ John R. Kohlenberger III states, "The miraculous frequently plays a part in prophetic narrative (as in the Elijah and Elisha stories mentioned earlier), and serves in Jonah to highlight Yahweh's intense involvement with His creation: 1. the stilling of the storm . . . 2. the great fish saves Jonah from drowning . . . 3. the mass repentance of Nineveh . . . 4. the plant, the worm, and the wind" (*Jonah and Nahum*, Everyman's Bible Commentary [Chicago: Moody, 1984], 18).

⁹ Jesus assumed the book of Jonah as authentic. He spoke of Jonah's stay in the belly of the fish and contrasted the repentant Ninevites with the unbelieving people of his own day (Matt 12:39-42; Luke 11:29-32). See the discussion of the book of Jonah regarding its historicity in relationship to Jesus' use of chapter two of Jonah (Gleason Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, rev. and exp. ed. [Chicago: Moody, 1994], 348-49).

typically viewed in two different formats.¹⁰ The consensus, however, is that the halves illustrate the following parallel concepts: (1) a call from God and a response from Jonah, 1:1-3 and 3:1-3; (2) pagans consider and respond to Jonah's God, 1:4-16 and 3:4-10; (3) Jonah prays, 2:2-3 and 4:2-3; (4) Jonah reacts to God's gracious act, 2:5-11 and 4:5-10.

The unity of Jonah, however, has been questioned. The psalm in Jonah 1:17-2:10 is the only part of the book that is seriously considered by scholars as a late addition. In other words, chapter two does not seem to fit the structure of the book. There are two reasons for this. First, there is a sharp contrast between chapters two and four. Chapter two illustrates Jonah's thankfulness to God for delivering him, whereas chapter four illustrates Jonah's objection to God for delivering the Ninevites.¹¹ This demonstrates the incongruity of the book; thus scholars view chapter two as a later addition. Second, the psalm conveys a picture of Jonah that is out of character with the rest of the book. For example, the prophet is rebellious toward God and his calling (1:3); the prophet is unappreciative of God and his character (4:1-2); and the prophet is angry with God (4:3, 8). Therefore, to view Jonah as praising God for his deliverance (2:3-9) seems out of place.

Even though the evidence may suggest to excise or view chapter two as a later addition by some redactor, many find that

¹⁰ Some understand Jonah as having parallel halves. They are Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman III, eds., *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 394; Andrew E. Hill and John H. Walton, eds., *A Survey of the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 500. Yet there are others who view Jonah as having parallel halves that formulate into a chiasmus. They are Alexander, *Obadiah, Jonah, Micah*, 64-68; Magonet, *Form and Meaning*, 55; Kohlenberger III, *Jonah and Nahum*, 25; Chisholm Jr., *Handbook on the Prophets*, 409.

¹¹ Alexander states that some scholars suggest the book's structure would be restored if chapter two were excised. See *Obadiah, Jonah, Micah*, 65 n. 3, 4.

the above arguments are not convincing.¹² Chapter two is an integral part of the book for two reasons. First, the structure of the book is actually enhanced with chapter two. Kohlenberger places chapter two at the center of his chiasmic outline, thus claiming that Yahweh is both the center of the chiasm and book as a whole.¹³ The parallelism between the chapters cannot be denied. Magonet claims that the psalm in chapter two finds its counterpart in 4:1-3.¹⁴ Therefore, whether one claims that the structure is chiasmatically oriented or that the structure is a reversal of concepts, parallelism is evident. Chapter two is a necessary part of the book.

Second, chapter two complements the theology of the book quite nicely. The psalm sets the stage for discussing the compassion and grace of God, the theological theme of the book.

¹² For a comprehensive list of scholars who question the above arguments, see Duane L. Christensen, "The Song of Jonah: A Metrical Analysis," JBL 104, no. 2 (1985): 217, n. 3.

¹³ The chiasmic structure that Kohlenberger (*Jonah and Nahum*, 25) presents is as follows:

A. Yahweh's longsuffering toward Jonah, 1:1-2:10

B. Jonah's unexplained disobedience, 1:1-3

C. Yahweh saves the sailors, 1:4-16

D. Yahweh saves Jonah, 1:17-2:10

C' Yahweh saves Nineveh, 3:1-10

B' Jonah's disobedience explained and challenged, 4:1-11

A' Yahweh's longsuffering toward Nineveh, 3:1-4:11

See also Christensen's metrical analysis. He claims that the psalm's metrical structure (Hebrew meter focuses on patterns of word stress within given poetic lines) fits nicely with the parallels in chapter three ("Song of Jonah," 229-31).

¹⁴ Magonet, *Form and Meaning*, 55-63. George Cruz likewise claims that there is a reversal to the parallelism between chapters. He states, "The first set being that of the disobedience, obedience contrast between chapters one and three, and the second that praise/thanksgiving and the displeasure found in chapters two and four" ("Jonah Chapter 2: A Brief Pastoral Exegetical View," *Apuntes* 21, no. 3 [Fall 2001]: 94).

Jonah's change in character highlights this theme. Chisholm states, "The prayer actually contributes to the story's irony and the author's characterization of Jonah."¹⁵ Jonah is not a flat character, rather a complex one. Due to his spiritual ups and downs, he acts like a real person, thus providing readers with a number of opportunities to potentially see their character and conduct as similar to Jonah. The important point here is not just for readers to see that they relate to a biblical character, but to see how God will relate to them in the ebb and flow of life.

In sum, the structural analysis supports the inclusion of chapter two as original to Jonah. It is not a later addition nor should it be removed. Chapter two serves both structural and theological roles that find their way into the overall meaning of the book. There is no doubt that the book illustrates a symmetrical design where chapters one and two parallel chapters three and four. Jonah's character also serves to illustrate the compassion and grace of God while also demonstrating that he is just like one of his readers, a complex character undeserving of God's grace and at times disobedient against God and his calling.

Theological Analysis

Scholars present many theological ideas related to the book but none that require refutation *per se*; and it is not the purpose of this article to engage in such a discussion.¹⁶ This author

¹⁵ Chisholm, *Handbook on the Prophets*, 412. Hill and Walton agree. They write, "The prayer serves as an important function of showing the reader that Jonah fully recognized himself as an undeserving recipient of God's grace" (*Survey of the Old Testament*, 501). Steve Schrader also claims that the psalm's ironic thrust both within itself and in relation to the whole book is important and valuable in understanding the book as a whole (course notes for OTBL 731, Hebrew Exegesis and Reading, Baptist Bible Graduate School of Theology, Springfield, MO, fall 1999, 2).

¹⁶ A small representation of the different theological messages include the following: (1) Terence E. Fretheim, *Message of Jonah*, 18-19; he claims that Jonah is more of a problem between God and Jonah rather

suggests that Kohlenberger's chiastic structure lends itself to the correct theological message. The chiastic form of Jonah provides the reader with the thrust of the book; that is, it reveals God as the one who delights in performing acts of compassion on whom he wishes and when he deems appropriate.¹⁷ The narrative actually speaks of God as the main character, not Jonah nor the Ninevites.

Whether one wishes to place the emphasis on a particular chapter or character, the theological message is clear; the book of Jonah is about God. This analysis will become important later in the article, specifically in part four, where the significance of the book for today is addressed. It seems appropriate to conclude that this brief account of a prophet's life is really about a sovereign, compassionate God and his dealings with the prophet, sailors, and a pagan nation.

than to single out one of these characters as the main idea; (2) John Walton, *Jonah*, Bible Study Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 73; he claims that Jonah focuses on the changes brought about by classical prophecy; (3) Brevard S. Childs, "The Canonical Shape of the Book of Jonah," in *Biblical and Near Eastern Studies: Essays in Honor of William Sanford LaSor*, ed. Gary A. Tuttle (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 122-23; he presents two options (unfulfilled prophecy and salvation to the Gentiles), though he does not agree with them.

¹⁷ Robert Chisholm provides the proper attitude regarding the theological message. He states, "God exerted His sovereign power toward a particular goal—the reclamation of sinful men. Even though the Ninevites deserved to be punished for their sinful deeds, God in His grace decided to give them an opportunity to repent. In so doing He demonstrated the truth of Jonah's confession, recorded in Jonah 4:2: 'you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity;'" ("A Theology of the Minor Prophets," in *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*, ed. Roy B. Zuck [Chicago: Moody, 1991], 432). A brief listing of other scholars with a similar theological message include Ronald E. Clements, "The Purpose of the Book of Jonah," in *Congress Volume: Edinburgh 1974* (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 16-18; Gerhard F. Hasel, *Jonah: Messenger of the Eleventh Hour* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific P, 1976), 7-8; Kohlenberger, *Jonah and Nahum*, 23-25; Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 434-35.

Literary Analysis

The genre classification of Jonah is not an easy task. One can consider the numerous options proposed by many scholars and be left wondering which is correct. However the reader understands the genre of Jonah is of great importance for the interpretation of the text. Alexander provides a survey of the options in his article.¹⁸ They include history, allegory, Midrash, parable, legend, and satire, to name just a few.¹⁹

Didactic Historical Narrative

Without providing an exhaustive discussion regarding genre, this author agrees with scholars that the book of Jonah is a didactic historical narrative, which is the cataloguing of actual historical events that teach the readers by the means of a theological message.²⁰ It is important to keep the didactic and

¹⁸ See his article for a list of references (T. Desmond Alexander, "Jonah and Genre," 36-37).

¹⁹ Genre analysis is closely tied to the historicity issue; thus a full discussion concerning the different kinds of genre is not necessary here. The author of this article holds to the historicity of Jonah and therefore dismisses the other kinds of genre such as fiction, parable, allegory, etc. See Branson L. Woodard and his discussion as to the book of Jonah and its classification as satire and tragedy ("Jonah," in *A Complete Literary Guide to the Bible*, ed. Leland Ryken and Tremper Longman III [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993], 348-57; and Michael Orth, who views Jonah as a satire and parody, ("Genre in Jonah: The Effects of Parody in the Book of Jonah," in *The Bible in the Light of Cuneiform Literature: Scripture in Context III*, Ancient Near Eastern Texts and Studies, vol. 8, ed. William W. Hallo, Bruce William Jones, and Gerald L. Mattingly [Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1990], 257-78). See also R. K. Harrison and his discussion regarding the different genre possibilities (*Introduction to the Old Testament* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969], 905-14).

²⁰ For further discussion see Alexander, "Jonah and Genre," 53-59; Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 435-37. Fretheim goes so far to say that Jonah was never intended to be read as history. He writes, "The pervasiveness of

historical characteristics in balance. One should be aware of both Jonah's didactic nature, the fact that the book teaches and challenges the reader concerning God's sovereign compassion, and historical nature; the events of Jonah are placed within a historical setting.²¹

Now that a genre perspective of the book as a whole has been espoused, an examination of chapter two is important. An overall understanding as to the two possible genre classifications for chapter two (lament or praise) is the goal here. However, part two of this paper further analyzes Jonah's prayer as a declarative praise psalm and indicates why this is significant.

the didactic element in the book suggests a similar conclusion (i.e. a non-historical intention on the author's part). Virtually every phrase in the book is intended to teach. The kerygmatic and theological possibilities in every verse far exceed that which is to be found in other historical narratives in the Old Testament (e.g., 2 Kings). The abrupt ending, which makes an appeal to the reader rather than informing us about Jonah, betrays this central concern of the author" (*Message of Jonah*, 66). Stuart writes, "All biblical narratives are didactic to some degree; but in the case of the book of Jonah, the narrator has carefully shaped the story by sensitivity, summarization, and even minor chronological rearrangement for an obviously didactic purpose" (*Hosea-Jonah*, 435).

²¹ Millar Burrows states, "Jonah ben Ammitai was a real prophet, who predicted the territorial expansion of Israel under Jeroboam II as recorded in II Kings 14:25. Gath-hepher, from which he came, was a real town (Josh. 19:13); Joppa and Nineveh were real cities; and Tarshish, wherever it may have been, was a real place or area. If some of the events recounted in the book are not such as one might expect to find in a sober historical chronicle, that is true also of much that is included in the historical books of the Old Testament" ("The Literary Category of the Book of Jonah," in *Translating and Understanding the Old Testament: Essays in Honor of Herbert Gordon May*, ed. Harry Thomas Frank and William L. Reed [Nashville: Abingdon, 1970], 81).

Lament

A lament differs from a declarative praise psalm; in fact, they are opposites. Lament is a reaction to an event with disappointment and grief. It is typically a poetic form of speech found in the Psalms (cf. Pss 69, 77). The structure of a lament psalm follows a distinctive pattern. The five elements that occur in a typical lament psalm are address (introductory cry for help), lament (describing his lamentable state), confession of trust (frequently contrasted to the lament by the *ṯ*, *waw* adversative), petition (for God to be favorable and intervene), and either a vow of praise (offers a vow if God will answer) or praise to God (offers confidence that God will answer his prayer).²² The unique twist that accompanies lament psalms is their expressions of trust or praise in God.²³ The lament psalm is primarily toward God.

²² Steve Schrader, course notes for OTEB 622, Old Testament Introduction, Baptist Bible Graduate School of Theology, Springfield, MO, spring 2004, 224-25). See also Allen P. Ross, "Psalms," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1985), 785. See also Tremper Longman III, "Lament," in *Cracking Old Testament Codes: A Guide to Interpreting the Literary Genres of the Old Testament*, ed. D. Brent Sandy and Ronald L. Giese Jr. (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1995), 199-200. As David Leiter notes, these elements do not always follow this general pattern ("The Rhetoric of Praise in the Lament Psalm," *Brethren Life and Thought* 40 [Winter, 1995]: 48, n. 3).

Other notable sources include: Roy B. Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation: A Practical Guide to Discovering Biblical Truth* (Colorado Springs, CO: Victor, 1991), 130-31; Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 212; and Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1991), 182-83.

²³ This is the point of the article by Leiter ("Rhetoric of Praise in the Lament Psalm," 44-48).

Praise

A praise psalm is primarily a narrating of the attributes of God (descriptive praise) or the acts of God (declarative praise). The descriptive praise psalm “focuses on the attributes of God—who he is and what he is like.”²⁴ The typical descriptive praise psalm possesses three main parts. They are introduction (a call to praise), main section (the cause for praise), and recapitulation (the conclusion to praise).²⁵ Psalm 33 is a good example.²⁶

The declarative praise psalm focuses on thanksgiving for what God has done. The “psalmist was praising God by publicly declaring his mighty deeds. The emphasis was on the acts of God.”²⁷ The declarative praise psalm also typically possesses three main parts. They are introduction (the worshiper announces his intention to give thanks to God), main section (the psalmist speaks of his distress, his cry for help, and his deliverance), and conclusion (the worshiper speaks to the Lord’s gracious act of deliverance).²⁸

This author claims that Jonah 1:17-2:10 is an example of a declarative praise psalm. The structure of Jonah 2 seems to follow the declarative praise psalm structure, especially given Jonah’s situation of distress and deliverance. More analysis as to the reasons for this claim takes place in part two of this article.

²⁴ Kenneth L. Barker, “Praise,” in *Cracking Old Testament Codes: A Guide to Interpreting the Literary Genres of the Old Testament*, ed. D. Brent Sandy and Ronald L. Giese Jr. (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1995), 219. See also Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation*, 130-31. Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible*, 212; and Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, 182-83.

²⁵ Typically the descriptive praise psalm focuses on God as creator and as active in history, usually in regards to Israel.

²⁶ Barker, “Praise,” 221.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 222.

²⁸ See Ross, “Psalms,” 785.

Summary

To this point, the introduction has addressed four issues. The analysis of these introductory issues—historical, structural, theological, and literary—asserts traditional, conservative conclusions. These conclusions are important for two reasons. These two reasons pose far-reaching hermeneutical implications. They are the inspiration of Scripture and authorial intention. First, the historical, structural, and genre issues are important because of their connection with inspiration and the supernatural. The inspiration of Scripture does not include *just* the words but also the *structure* of the words and *events* involved in the narrative. To discard the book of Jonah as fiction or to claim that chapter two is a later addition to the book suggests “then the decision is based on an *a priori* conclusion contrary to the biblical position.”²⁹ How one understands the historicity and literary structure or genre of the text, ultimately determines how he will interpret the text.

Second, the theological issue is also important due to its impact on the author’s intention. The author’s intention is all-important. It speaks to the main intent of the book and provides the reader with a challenge to action. The author’s intention is discovered through the grammatical, historical, and literal method.³⁰ To interpret the author’s message subjectively or even

²⁹ William Sanford La Sor, David Allan Hubbard and Frederick William Bush, eds. *Old Testament Survey: The Message, Form, and Background of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 353.

³⁰ There are two principles that help to discover the author’s intended meaning. They are: essential meaning and exegesis. “Essential meaning refers to the fundamental interpretation of *the whole book as a whole as to its genre*. It is concerned with the interpretation of the book as a whole. It focuses on the discovery and development of the *theme of the book*. . . . Exegesis is the interpretation of a *passage within a book*. The purpose of exegesis is to ‘bring out’ the meaning of the text. It necessarily follows and comes from the essential meaning” (William Arp, course notes for NT1, Seminar in New Testament Hermeneutics and Exegetical Method, Baptist Bible Seminary, Clarks Summit, PA, summer 2002, 16).

haphazardly places one at the risk of handling God's word with an improper exegetical methodology, thus providing an improper interpretation. This becomes all the more evident upon one's decision as to the book's historicity and structure, especially if the exegete claims the book is fiction or that it is not structurally coherent.

PART TWO: THE IDENTIFICATION OF THE PSALM OF JONAH

Part two of this article delineates two proposals regarding the identification of Jonah's psalm. Given the prophet's situation in the belly of a fish, one would expect a lament psalm. However, others propose that due to God's character and the prophet's situation, one might also expect a thankful prophet for his deliverance. Which proposal makes best contextual sense? The article proposes Jonah's psalm found in 1:17-2:10 as a declarative praise psalm, not a lament psalm. Arguments for the identification of the psalm as lament and declarative praise are presented. This discussion then leads into part three, an analysis of the psalm and how it complements the theological context of the book as a whole.

Lament Psalm

For those reading the book of Jonah it is not hard to see that Jonah is in a difficult situation. Sauter asks the right question. He writes, "Buried alive, should Jonah have prayed like this? Is this prayer fitting for a stiff-necked prophet who wanted to flee from God?"³¹ One would expect a lament psalm for three reasons. First, Jonah's character provides the reader with a sketch outlining both his beliefs and behavior. Jonah understood whom he served, the God of the sea and the dry land (1:9). But this belief did not necessarily translate into obedience. Jonah progressively went

³¹ Gerhard Sauter, "Jonah 2: A Prayer Out of the Deep," in *A God So Near: Essays on Old Testament Theology in Honor of Patrick D. Miller*, ed. Brent A. Strawn and Nancy R. Bowen (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 148.

away from God and his call (1:3-6).³² Jonah continues his disobedient attitude against God with a displeased disposition (4:1-2), to the point that he wished to die (4:3-4, 8-9). With this sketch of Jonah's character, a lament psalm seems appropriate. Therefore, given this brief explanation, how could Jonah express thanksgiving to God? It seems out of place for Jonah. Alexander explains,

Jonah's character as revealed in the psalm is at odds with the author's portrayal of him elsewhere in the book. For example, the picture of Jonah gratefully praising God is hardly in keeping with the prose section, which portrays him as rebellious, sullen and unappreciative. Similarly, whereas in 1:12 he apparently greets the prospect of dying with little apprehension, his words in 2:2 reveal tremendous anxiety in the face of imminent death.³³

Second, Jonah's situation seems to favor the classification of a lament psalm. Some scholars understand the role of the great fish in Jonah (1:17f.) in this way. Typically they see Jonah as the prophet who prays for deliverance *from* the fish rather than one who praises Yahweh for the deliverance *by* the fish. Alexander comments, "Given his [Jonah] incarceration within the belly of the great fish, Jonah, it is suggested, is hardly likely to have expressed gratitude to God."³⁴ Because that lament psalms have an element of trust or praise in God, it seems that Jonah's plea for

³² Walter C. Kaiser Jr. states, "The prophet Jonah was well aware of the fact that disobedience to God's commands often results in divine punishment" (*I Will Lift My Eyes unto the Hills: Learning from the Great Prayers of the Old Testament* [Wooster, OH: Weaver Book, 2015], 89).

³³ Alexander, *Obadiah, Jonah, Micah*, 64.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 64. This is the view of Bernhard W. Anderson. He states, "The psalm is obviously out of place in its present context. In the belly of a fish a cry for help (that is, lament) would be appropriate, but not a thanksgiving for deliverance already experienced!" (*Out of the Depths: The Psalms Speak for Us Today* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974], 84).

deliverance is indeed this element of trust that God will deliver his prophet from his distress/cry for help.

Third, the psalm's structure seems to favor the identification as a lament psalm. It is apparent that Jonah typifies one who would find himself lamenting over his situation. Jonah's introductory cry to God occurs in 2:1-2. He is crying out to God due to his situation of distress ("prayed . . . out of the fish's belly," "out of the belly of *sheol* cried I,"). Jonah's lament is offered in 2:3-6. It is here that Jonah finds himself in a helpless situation ("you had cast me into the sea; thus the ocean currents surrounded me," "the waters compassed me unto my throat; the seaweeds were wrapped about my head"), thus motivating him to prayer. The third structural clue is what appears to be Jonah's confession of trust in Yahweh (2:4, 7). Last, Jonah vows to praise God ("But I with the voice of thanksgiving, will sacrifice to you," [2:9]). His lament therefore, turns to praise, a typical conclusion of lament psalms.³⁵

To conclude, some, because of Jonah's character, situation, and the structure of the psalm, accept the identification of Jonah's psalm as lament. Jonah 1:17-2:10 seems to fit the category of a lament psalm; Jonah expresses sorrow that eventually leads to joy. His sorrow is over the fact that he is in the "belly of sheol" and aside from Yahweh's saving compassion, he is as good as dead.

But is Jonah lamenting over his *present condition* in the "belly of the fish"? Or is he praising Yahweh for his deliverance from the ocean currents and seaweed that surrounded him? In other words, is the great fish his judgment or deliverance? This is the subject under analysis next.

Declarative Praise Psalm

Given Jonah's seemingly distressful situation, one would expect a lament psalm. However, the author of this article follows the lead of several scholars and identifies Jonah 1:17-2:10 as a

³⁵ There is no petition that God intervene on his behalf and rescue him; therefore a discussion of this element is not warranted.

declarative praise psalm.³⁶ This psalm can also be classified as a song of thanksgiving. There are two reasons for this conclusion.

First, the structure of Jonah's psalm lends itself to a declarative praise psalm. Although the classification of the elements of the structure varies among scholars, the typical structure of a declarative praise psalm is present.³⁷ For the consistency of this article, Barker's structure, based on three elements, points to the identification of Jonah's psalm as a declarative praise psalm. Jonah begins with an introductory statement of praise regarding his answered prayer by God ("I called out to the Lord, you heard my voice," 2:2). As typical with a declarative praise psalm, Jonah announces his intention to praise God for his deliverance.³⁸ Jonah continues with a recollection of his moment of distress and cry for help (2:3-6a). Jonah gives thanks for the deliverance already experienced ("Yet you brought up my life from the pit, O Lord, my God," 2:6b). Last, Jonah includes his promise to present a thank-offering and acknowledges God's gracious act of deliverance ("But I, with a voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you," "salvation belongs to the Lord," 2:9). The elements for a typical declarative praise

³⁶ A list of these scholars, though not exhaustive, includes Alexander, *Obadiah, Jonah, Micah*, 66-69; Barker, "Praise," 228-30; Chisholm, *Handbook on the Prophets*, 412; Kaiser, *I Will Lift my Eyes unto the Hills*, 87-98; Kohlenberger, *Jonah and Nahum*, 214-19; Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 439.

³⁷ Barker proposes three sections: introduction, main section, and conclusion ("Praise," 229); Allen and Fretheim propose four sections: introduction (including a statement of praise or prayer), recollection of personal crisis, divine deliverance, and vow of praise (*The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah*, 215; and *The Message of Jonah*, 94-95 respectively); Kohlenberger follows Westermann's six structural elements (*Jonah and Nahum*, 45-47). See also Claus Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981), 102-16.

³⁸ Kohlenberger writes, "Most Psalms of Declarative Praise begin with a proclamation of praise, such as 'I will praise Yahweh.' . . . Jonah's psalm begins with the summary of what he is praising God about" (*Jonah and Nahum*, 47).

psalm (introductory prayer/praise to God, recollection of time of distress, and God's deliverance) are all present, thereby providing a favorable identification as a declarative praise psalm.³⁹

Second, Jonah's psalm, as a declarative praise psalm, complements the context of the book. Jonah's prayer is not one "of petition for deliverance, but of thanksgiving for deliverance already experienced."⁴⁰ This is a major oversight of those who identify Jonah's psalm as lament, for they see Jonah responding to his situation, the belly of the fish, as one of judgment instead of deliverance. He is not asking God to rescue him *from* the fish. Rather he is thanking God for rescuing him from drowning in the Mediterranean Sea.⁴¹ This rescue happened when he was swallowed *by* the fish, which ultimately provided his deliverance.⁴²

³⁹ Fretheim states, "The psalm of Jonah is thus quite typical. It was the type of psalm which the readers of the book would have sung on regular occasions. They, too, would have expressed their thankfulness to God upon deliverance from some distress. They can thus identify with Jonah here" (*Message of Jonah*, 95).

⁴⁰ Barker, "Praise," 229. Magonet states, "Jonah sees his prayer as appropriate, dutiful thanksgiving one – he acknowledges that God has saved him, and describes with due humility his loss of self-centeredness" (*Form and Meaning*, 52).

⁴¹ Kaiser states, "Praise is a natural response to every one of God's acts of deliverance for each of us. Jonah's prayer, then, is a prayer of thanksgiving for God's rescue of him from drowning; it is not a prayer asking for escape from the fish!" (*I Will Lift My Eyes unto the Hills*, 96).

⁴² Allen states, "Yahweh mounts a special rescue operation: *an enormous fish* plays the astounding part of a submarine to pick up Jonah from the murky seaweed at the bottom of the ocean and transport him safely to the mainland. The fish stands for the amazing grace of Yahweh, which came down to where he was and lifted him to new life. The Lord of the sea is Lord also of its creatures, and his providential control extends over both" (*Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah*, 213).

Jonah's near death experience (2:3-6) speaks to the drowning in the sea, not the belly of the fish.⁴³ To conclude, most scholars, due to the psalm's structure and context, accept the identification of Jonah's psalm as a declarative praise psalm. All elements of a typical declarative praise psalm are evident, unlike the elements for the lament psalm where the petition to God is missing. There is no need for Jonah to petition God because he has already experienced salvation. It seems evident that Jonah's psalm follows the typical pattern and provides the reader with a "psalm of thanksgiving sung in praise of God for rescuing the psalmist from a perilous situation," that is, in Jonah's case, drowning in the sea.⁴⁴

Jonah's psalm also speaks to a context quite different from what readers often expect. Jonah's situation is not perilous because he is in the great fish, but it is a praiseworthy situation because God has already answered his cry for help in the sea.⁴⁵ Stuart summarizes, "Once Jonah is inside the belly of the fish he has been delivered from drowning. A lament psalm would be appropriate only while he was still sinking in the Mediterranean. He *has* already experienced deliverance, and a thanksgiving psalm is the only sort appropriate to his situation."⁴⁶ This is the fundamental difference between the lament and declarative praise psalm classifications. The lament psalm is appropriate for those who are in distress, whereas the declarative praise psalm

⁴³ Barker claims that "the synonymous parallelism of terms for the stormy sea (deep, seas, currents, waves, breakers, engulfing waters, and seaweed)" speak to drowning in the sea ("Praise," 229).

⁴⁴ Peter F. Lockwood, "Jonah's Psalm: Fathoming Its Depths," *Lutheran Theological Journal* 34, no. 3 (2000): 109.

⁴⁵ Chisholm states, "Despite his earlier decision to choose assisted suicide over repentance, he was quite happy to be alive. Having come face-to-face with the horror of death, he greatly appreciated God's merciful deliverance" (*Handbook on the Prophets*, 412).

⁴⁶ Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 439.

refers to those who have already experienced deliverance. Jonah is praising Yahweh for his deliverance.

Summary

The identification of Jonah's psalm elucidates two fundamental problems concerning the interpretation of the psalm. The problems relate to how one views (1) the character of Jonah (his thankful attitude in relationship to his rebellious attitude in the rest of the book) and (2) the situation of Jonah (one of deliverance or judgment). The literary structure and the genre classification of chapter two is where one finds the apex to this twofold problem.

First, an analysis of Jonah's character has led some to see a contradiction with respect to attitude. Chapter two illustrates Jonah's seemingly thankful attitude, whereas the rest of the book portrays Jonah's rebellious attitude. Chapter two therefore is structurally and theologically incongruent with the rest of the book. To resolve this contradiction, some scholars conclude that 1:17-2:10 is not original and should be excised. This decision potentially affects how one views the historicity of the book of Jonah. As a result, some may conclude by asking, can the rest of the book be trusted? And are other portions of the book fanciful and unrealistic? If other portions can be viewed in like manner as that of chapter two, a later redaction to the text or as unrealistic, this can support the claim that the book's historicity is in jeopardy. This claim in turn affects the perception of literary structure of the book.

The structure of the book is often viewed as a parallel structure. For example, chapters one and two relate to chapters three and four. If some view chapter two as unrealistic, the structure of the book then becomes incongruent, and then chapter two is indeed out of place.

A proper structural analysis of Jonah however, shows that 1:17-2:10 fits into the overall development of the structure of the book.⁴⁷ Jonah's character in his psalm does not contradict other

⁴⁷ Kohlenberger's chiastic structure illustrates this.

parts of the book; rather it complements them. Jonah's thankful disposition is due to the received deliverance, thus illustrating God's compassion and sovereign control. This is the theological message of the book.

The second problem is how one views the situation of Jonah. If one sees the situation of Jonah in chapter two as one of judgment rather than deliverance, then he will naturally identify Jonah's psalm as lament. This is what the reader would expect. This can be a logical conclusion due to one's improper understanding of the book's theological message, which ultimately or directly, affects the genre classification of the psalm and book as a whole. If one sees this psalm as best communicated through a lament, then potentially the exegete's view of the overall theological message of the book is skewed.

A proper theological analysis of Jonah however, shows that 1:17-2:10 fits into the overall theological message of the book. Jonah's situation does not contradict the message; rather it contributes to and complements the overall big idea. The big idea, or theological message, of Jonah is that God delights in performing acts of compassion on whom he wishes and when he wishes. Jonah's response in chapter two validates the theological message because he is a recipient of God's compassion, thus the irony found in chapter four, not incongruity. It is now necessary to integrate the conclusions concerning the book of Jonah, his character and its structure. This will further validate the psalm's role within the context of the book as a whole.

PART THREE: THE ANALYSIS OF THE PSALM OF JONAH

Upon concluding that the psalm in Jonah is a declarative praise psalm, what happens when it is placed into the book as a whole? Does it fit the context? Part three of this article demonstrates that Jonah's psalm is an integral part of the book. A contextual and exegetical analysis validates the psalm's identification and provides the reader with an understanding of the psalm's meaning.

Contextual Analysis

The declarative psalm of praise fits within the context of the theological message of the book. Although the poem breaks the movement of the plot of the narrative, the poem is deliberately chosen and compositionally original as part of the storyline.⁴⁸ Two reasons support this conclusion. First, 1:17-2:10 is an integral part of the theological message of the book. Divine deliverance, or God's gracious compassion, is the central theological theme of the book. It is undoubtedly clear that Jonah receives deliverance, and as stated previously, it is his deliverance from the raging sea, not the great fish. Jonah's psalm directly contributes to the reinforcement of the theological theme of the book. Allen concludes,

The deliverance of Jonah is a prime factor in the story as a whole, not only for its own sake but for its implications in the later part of the narrative. It is a theme the author means to stamp upon the minds and memories of the listening circle, and it is for this reason that a wonderful device is employed, the use of a giant fish by which to effect not only Jonah's rescue but also his conscious preservation inside it.⁴⁹

The theological theme, God performing acts of compassion upon whom he wishes, when he wishes, is illustrated through three different objects. They are the sailors (1:10-16), the prophet (1:17-2:10; 4:6), and the city of Nineveh (3:4-10). The sailors were spared from the raging of the sea; thus they feared

⁴⁸ Athalya Brenner, "Jonah's Poem Out of and Within Its Context," in *Among the Prophets: Language, Image and Structure in the Prophetic Writings*, ed. Philip R. Davies and David J. A. Clines, JSOTSup Series (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1993), 186-89. D. W. B. Robinson states the poem has "a real appropriateness in its context, and we need not doubt that its essential content belongs to the occasion to which it is ascribed"

["Jonah," in *The New Bible Commentary*, ed. F. Davidson, A. M. Stibbs, and E. F. Kevan [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953], 717].

⁴⁹ Allen, *Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah*, 213.

Yahweh exceedingly and vowed vows.⁵⁰ Yahweh was in control of the sea. Jonah, too, was spared from drowning and distress, thus producing a voice of praise and joy. Salvation is only of the Lord. Nineveh was safe from Jonah's message of judgment. God relented concerning the calamity, which he had threatened to do to them, and he did not do it. Therefore, through these three objects, God's sovereign and compassionate activity is evident throughout the book.

Second, 1:17-2:10 enhances the structure of the whole book. Without the identification of chapter two as a declarative praise psalm, the reader will miss the author's intention. The book of Jonah is comprised of parallel halves, though they communicate opposing panels of thought. For example, Jonah's disobedience (1:3) is countered by his act of obedience (3:3). Jonah plans to disobey God because of what God is requiring of him, that is, to take the message of impending judgment upon a city undeserving of God's compassion. Yet, due to Jonah's deliverance in chapter two, he takes the message of repentance to the city of Nineveh in chapter three. The disobedience in chapter one and the obedience in chapter three thus illustrate the opposing panels of thought that give the book cohesion.

The second half of the book is like that of the first. It too communicates opposing panels of thought. Jonah's deliverance, resulting in his thankful disposition (2:4, 7, 9-10), is countered by an angry disposition (4:1, 8), resulting from God's act of gracious compassion and deliverance from judgment upon Nineveh. This creates quite the irony. Jonah is thankful for his deliverance from being cast into the sea (1:15, 2:4-7a); thus he vows with a voice of thanksgiving and claims that salvation is only of the Lord. Jonah's thankful disposition in chapter two and Jonah's angry

⁵⁰ Schrader comments, "The Lord who made the sea and sent the storm has heard their prayer and has saved them. . . . The sailors have made a life-changing discovery because they have come into contact with the living God. They make such offerings as they can, then and there, but plan to do more, formulating their intentions into vows to be carried out later" (course notes for OTBL 731, 14).

disposition in chapter four also illustrate opposing panels of thought producing cohesion.

Through illustrating opposing panels of thought, the reader can see the inextricable link that all the chapters have with one another, especially the role of 1:17-2:10.⁵¹ The result of Jonah's disobedience (chap one) is ultimately what prepares him for his deliverance and thankful disposition (chap two). The result of God's compassion (chap three) is the prophet's angry disposition (chap four). Therefore, the reader is able to see clearly the cohesion of the parallel halves of the book (see figure one below). If one expects and thus concludes 1:17-2:10 is a lament psalm, he has unnecessarily pulled apart the structure of the book. The author intends to communicate in *opposing* panels of thought; a back-and-forth illustration between the prophet's disposition and God's attention to every situation of distress. This therefore communicates the theological theme of the book (4:2c).



	<i>Opposing Panels of Thought</i>		<i>Opposing Panels of Thought</i>
First half of book (chapters 1 & 2)	God's Compassion & Jonah's <i>Disobedience</i> (chapter 1)	Results in 	God's Compassion & Jonah's <i>Thankful Disposition</i> (chapter 2)
Second half of book (chapters 3 & 4)	God's Compassion & Jonah's <i>Obedience</i> (chapter 3)	Results in 	God's Compassion & Jonah's <i>Angry Disposition</i> (chapter 4)

Figure 1. Structure of thought for Jonah.

⁵¹ Stuart *Hosea-Jonah*, states that chapter two contributes to the theological thrust of the book. It is pivotal to the theological theme of Jonah. "Through the psalm the wayward Jonah confesses Yahweh's undeserved rescue. . . . The psalm provides the focal statement of Yahweh's concern for individuals in need of favor" (Hosea-Jonah, 473).

Summary

Based on the whole context of the book, the reader must view 1:17-2:10 as a declarative praise psalm for three reasons. First, it illustrates the theological theme of the book. Yahweh delivers his prophet from his desperate situation, thus communicating to the reader that Yahweh acts compassionately to whom he wishes. This is why Jonah is thankful and not lamenting over his situation, for salvation is only of the Lord.

Second, it also enhances and complements the structure of the book. Though one might expect a lament psalm, the book's structure as two parallel halves with opposing panels of thought does not allow for this classification. The lament classification would thus disrupt the book's congruity. Jonah's declarative psalm fits the context.

Third, the structure of the psalm reflects a declarative praise psalm. The elements of the declarative praise psalm are analyzed both grammatically and syntactically below. This demonstrates cohesion between the psalm and the rest of the book of Jonah.

Exegetical Analysis

The identification of 1:17-2:10 as a declarative praise psalm is further validated by an analysis of the psalm's grammatical and syntactical elements.⁵² 1:17-2:10 will be analyzed according to the poem's structure presented earlier in the article. Each of the elements of Jonah's poem and its relationship is presented so the reader understands the meaning and significance.

⁵² Jonah 1:17 and 2:10 in the English text are not part of the declarative praise psalm. However, throughout the paper, 1:17-2:10 is referenced for contextual reasons. These two verses provide introductory and concluding thoughts as part of the narrative construction, while Jonah 2:2-9 actually comprise the declarative praise psalm.

Jonah 1:17 provides the reader with whom Jonah directs his prayer ("Yahweh, his God") and with the location from where Jonah prayed ("out of the belly of the fish"). Jonah 2:10 resumes the narrative part of the story and at Yahweh's command, the fish vomits Jonah onto dry land.

Introductory Prayer/Praise to God (2:2)

The first element of the psalm of praise is the summary of Jonah's prayer to Yahweh. He announces his intention to give thanks to God. The first element is constructed into two couplets that communicate Jonah's appeal to be delivered from a distressful situation and his subsequent deliverance.⁵³ This verse describes the obvious intervention of Yahweh and his gracious compassion upon Jonah in two ways.

The first way the reader sees the gracious compassion of Yahweh on Jonah's behalf is found in his situation and deliverance. Jonah states that his situation of distress ("out of my distress") in 2:2a is parallel to the ("belly of sheol") in 2:2b. This latter phrase demonstrates the seriousness and life-threatening situation of Jonah. It also "indicates that Jonah expected to die. *Sheol* was the abode of the dead, a great cave beneath the earth, even more final than the grave unless the Lord intervened in power."⁵⁴ Only Yahweh could save his prophet. Jonah's situation of distress led to his deliverance. As a matter of fact, Yahweh answered and heard Jonah's cry for help. The verse thus indicates rescue. Stuart explains,

⁵³ The two couplets demonstrate an overall synonymous parallelism. For example, (a) "I called out to the Lord, out of my distress"; (b) "and he answered me"; (a') "out of the belly of Sheol I cried"; (b') "and you heard my voice." Kaiser states, "This marks an altered feeling toward God, for just a few days ago Jonah was fleeing from God" (*I Will Lift My Eyes*, 91).

⁵⁴ Joyce Baldwin, "Jonah," in *The Minor Prophets*, ed. Thomas Edward McComiskey, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 569. Fretheim states, "Most distressing of all, however, is that it was considered a place largely cut off from God (see Psalm 88:5, 10-12, 115:17; Isaiah 38:18), beyond his presence, though not beyond his power" (*Message of Jonah*, 101). Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner state this word as wasteland, void, underworld (*The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament Volume 4: The New Koehler Baumgartner in English* [Leiden: Brill, 1999], 2, 1369).

'Responded to me' and 'heard my voice' are both idioms for more than just auditory sensation; they connote the gracious accession of God to the suppliant's situation, not simply receipt of his or her words. Employing literary clichés typical of thanksgiving psalms, Jonah's psalm actually concentrates not on what he said but on the fact that, from the trouble he was in, God mercifully delivered him.⁵⁵

The second way the reader sees the gracious compassion of Yahweh on Jonah's behalf is found in Jonah's verb usage. Jonah's use of the definite past ("I cried out") denotes an action completed and finished in the historical past, fixed by the narrative.⁵⁶ Jonah thus states that God *had already answered* him. This is indicated by the verb, the preterite + *waw* consecutive ("and he answered me").⁵⁷

In sum, it is clear that Jonah praised God for delivering him from his situation of distress. This introductory praise of Jonah provides the reader with a connection to both the past and the future. The past is explained through Jonah's verb usage, therefore communicating that he *was delivered* from drowning in the sea rather than *asking for present deliverance* from the fish. The reader can see through the use of the verbs that Jonah's situation of distress was a past event, therefore making further claims for the identification of the psalm as praise instead of lament.

The future is explained through Jonah's situation. Due to his past deliverance from the sea, Jonah experienced the compassion of Yahweh. This is the theological theme of the book, which is later illustrated with the city of Nineveh (chapter three). Therefore, Jonah's statement of introductory praise provides cohesion between the psalm's structure (Jonah's past deliverance) and theology of the book of Jonah (Nineveh's future deliverance). It also indicates that chapter two is not to be excised

⁵⁵ Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 476.

⁵⁶ Schrader, course notes for OTBL 731, 17.

⁵⁷ See Allen P. Ross, *Introducing Biblical Hebrew* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 18.2, 136-37.

but rather, serve as an integral part of the book complementing its structure.

Recollection of the Time of Distress (2:3-6a)

The second element of the declarative praise psalm is Jonah's description of his past distress. It is a looking back in the time of need. The praise psalm (2:2-9) is constructed around a metaphor depicting his life-threatening situation (2:3-6a). Due to the imagery, it is clear that Jonah was saved from drowning.⁵⁸ This element further describes Jonah's situation; therefore like the first element (introductory prayer to God), it also reflects Yahweh's gracious compassion. It does so in two ways.

The first way in which Jonah's distressful situation illustrates Yahweh's gracious compassion is seen through his use of drowning imagery. Jonah describes his situation with such magnitude that it enhances one's understanding regarding God and his saving power. Upon being cast into the sea, Jonah states the severity of his situation with two phrases: ("and the flood surrounded me") and ("all your waves and your billows passed over me," 2:3).⁵⁹ Stuart states that this verse continues "the theme of the brush with death begun in verse two. It was a mortal danger that Yahweh had caused (*you* threw me')." ⁶⁰

In verse five Jonah relives the process of drowning. Three verbs communicate that Jonah was hopelessly entangled. Jonah was "*engulfed* by waters up to his throat," "*surrounded* by the

⁵⁸ Barker states, "The synonymous parallelism of terms for the stormy sea (deep, seas, currents, waves, breakers, engulfing waters, and seaweed) all depict drowning in the sea, not in the fish's stomach" ("Praise," 229). OT psalms provide the imagery of drowning in the sea.

⁵⁹ "The currents surrounded me," is a description typical of other psalms (Pss 69:1-2, 14-15; 88:6-7, 17). "All your breakers and your waves passed over me," is an identical statement found in Psalm 42:7. See also Kaiser, *I Will Lift My Eyes*, 92-93.

⁶⁰ Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 476.

deep,” and “seaweeds were *wound around* him.”⁶¹ He was a prisoner of the sea. So much so that Alexander states that “try as he may, Jonah cannot free himself from his watery prison. Death by drowning seems inevitable.”⁶² This leads to Jonah’s final descent.

The first couplet in verse six concludes Jonah’s description of his situation. Here he reaches the extremity, the bottoms of the mountains. The two expressions (“to the foundations of the mountains”) and (“the bars of the underworld”) in this first couplet metaphorically illustrate the finality of death.⁶³

Alexander claims that Jonah viewed the underworld “as having a gate which was locked secure by bolts and bars: there could be no escaping from it. Once in Sheol, Jonah would be imprisoned there forever.”⁶⁴

The second way in which Jonah’s distressful situation illustrates Yahweh’s gracious compassion is through his recognition of coming into Yahweh’s presence again (v. 4). This is the turning point of the psalm. He was driven away from the sight

⁶¹ These three verbs—suffixed form of the verb, prefixed form of the verb, and suffixed form of the verb—provide the reader as to how the second verb ought to be translated. Ross notes, “In fact, this prefixed form of the verb occurs in poetic passages even without the conjunction (the *yipqod* pattern), and yet context indicates that it must be translated as a past-tense verb” (*Introducing Biblical Hebrew*, 18.2, 137). Koehler and Baumgartner see שָׁוַה as throat here (*The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*, vol. 2, 1. 712).

⁶² Alexander, *Obadiah, Jonah, Micah*, 115.

⁶³ Stuart states that these are expressions from ancient Near Eastern and OT imagery that relate to death. “The distance from the land of the living represented by arrival at the bases of the mountains and the fact that the Underworld’s bars prevented one from returning back to life” (*Hosea-Jonah*, 477). Schrader claims that ‘the land’ “only here refers to the underworld, beyond the grave. He reckoned that he had entered Sheol, the land of the dead, envisaged as a fortress from which there is no escape” (course notes for OTBL 731, 21).

⁶⁴ Alexander, *Obadiah, Jonah, Micah*, 116.

of Yahweh and "This denotes the present state of the subject affected by a past act," a present perfect verb, 'I have been driven away.'⁶⁵ Although Jonah was, literally "from in front of your [Yahweh's] eyes," driven from Yahweh, the force of the particle ("nevertheless") introduces a 'yes, but' clause.⁶⁶ In other words, although Jonah is driven from in front of Yahweh's eyes, he will still have the privilege of praising and worshipping him again in Yahweh's heavenly abode.

In sum, the second element (recollection of time of distress) of the declarative praise psalm presents similar conclusions to the first element (introductory prayer to God). The two ways in which Yahweh's gracious compassion is illustrated are through Jonah's use of drowning imagery (a near death experience) and his recognition that he will again be in the presence of Yahweh. Yahweh has saved Jonah from the land of the dead. The magnitude of Jonah's situation not only illustrates Yahweh's compassion toward him but it also reminds the reader that, like Jonah, he too is *not* far removed from Yahweh's care.

Concluding Statement of Thanksgiving (2:6b-9)

The third and final element of the declarative praise psalm is Jonah's statement of thanksgiving. This is where he speaks to Yahweh's gracious act of deliverance and then what he plans to do as a result of this deliverance. The third element therefore speaks to Yahweh's gracious compassion. Yahweh's compassion is seen in Jonah's report of deliverance (2:6b-7), his personal testimony (2:8), and his thanksgiving (2:9).

Jonah's situation is reflected by the term "grave."⁶⁷ This place of death is where Jonah found life and unexpected deliverance. Jonah is not merely spared from a serious risk; rather he was

⁶⁵ Schrader, OTBL 731, 19. It is interesting that this verb also is used in Gn 3:24 denoting Adam being driven out of the Garden of Eden.

⁶⁶ Baldwin, *Minor Prophets*, 570.

⁶⁷ See Koehler and Baumgartner, 1. pit, trap; 2. pit grave (*Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*, 4: 1473).

actually snatched up from a watery grave.⁶⁸ Jonah recognized Yahweh's work in saving him. This is evident in his direct address to Yahweh ("O Yahweh, my God").

Jonah continues his report of deliverance in the next verse as well. The reality of Yahweh's grace is evident in verse seven. Jonah's life was "fainting away." This idiomatic word construction denotes the 'process of growing feeble.'⁶⁹ As a result, Jonah emphatically remembers Yahweh ("I remembered the Lord").⁷⁰ The word order here puts the emphasis on the one who alone can save Jonah. His prayer came into the heavenly presence of Yahweh, in which the Jerusalem temple was an earthly representation ("your holy temple").

Jonah's personal testimony is captured through a contrast between ("worthless vanities") and ("their covenant-faithful God").⁷¹ Jonah is indicating or attributing his behavior to that of those who forsake their covenant-faithful God. This is the reason for this verse. Jonah is convicted of his folly in forsaking such a

⁶⁸ Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 477. Although some scholars and versions translate נִקְּחָ in the psalms as 'pit, hole, or abyss' (Psalm 16:10; 49:10 [9]; 103:4), it is better to use the modern English equivalent 'grave'. (See Robert Chisholm Jr, *From Exegesis to Exposition* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998], 33-34).

⁶⁹ Baldwin states, "Its force is to give pathos to the expression of an emotion, by emphasizing the person who is its subject, and who, as it were, feels it acting *upon* him" (571).

⁷⁰ Schrader states, "The verb implies more than mere recollection; it is an unspoken plea for help, and implies faith in the Lord's power and willingness to save" (OTBL 731, 22). Kohlenberger III states, "In Jonah, 'remembering' Yahweh means calling upon His name as the God who is there, mighty to save" (*Jonah and Nahum*, 53).

⁷¹ It is probably best to understand, *hesed*, as 'their own covenant faithful God.' This is due to the reference in the first part of the verse to false gods, so one would expect a reference to the true God in the latter part of the verse (cf. Ps 144:2 where God is referred to as, my *hesed* a metonymy for God himself).

God and states that anyone "who broke the covenant's first commandment by having other gods had 'abandoned' his or her loyalty to Yahweh."⁷² Barker adds that in reference to Jonah's later statement, "salvation comes from the Lord," this personal testimony presents a polemical twist and states that salvation does not come from "worthless idols."⁷³ Therefore, Jonah is warning those who seek help in "worthless vanities" are foolish.⁷⁴

Jonah moves to his final remarks in verse nine. After experiencing a near death experience, Jonah vows thanksgiving to Yahweh. In emphatic contrast to his previous discussion regarding those who worship worthless vanities, ("but I") Jonah expresses his attitude of thanksgiving in two ways. First he offers praise to Yahweh ("with the voice of thanksgiving"). He is responding to Yahweh's covenant-faithfulness, thus making his response identical to that of the sailors in 1:16. This was typical of worshipers in ancient Israel to recite praise portions of thanksgiving psalms. But his expression of thankfulness did not stop there.

Second, Jonah pledged to offer sacrifices to Yahweh ("will sacrifice to you, what I have vowed, I will pay").⁷⁵ Jonah intends

⁷² Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 478. Feinberg states, "He knew now the condition of the heathen, because in seeking to flee from the Lord, he had also forsaken the only source of mercy" (*Minor Prophets*, 141).

⁷³ Barker, "Praise," 229. Declarative praise psalms sometimes include instructions. Lessons are drawn from the experience and taught to the congregation. Jonah warned about the danger of idolatry in Jonah 2:8. For other instructions in declarative praise psalms see Ps 30:4-5, Ps 32:8-11, and Ps 34:11-14.

⁷⁴ Kaiser notes, "Yahweh offers his free, loving, gracious act of salvation, while the idols, who are dead as doornails, offer nothing at all; how could they, being inert and without any vitality!" (*I Will Lift My Eyes*, 96).

⁷⁵ Thanksgiving offerings were given in gratitude for deliverance from sickness (Ps 116:2-4, 17-18), trouble (Ps 107:22), or death (Ps 56:12) or for a blessing received.

to fulfill his side of the bargain, and to continue to do it in the future, not just in the present. This multiplies the magnitude of the total thanksgiving, which can be said to parallel the magnitude of Yahweh's gracious compassion.⁷⁶

Jonah's final expression of praise is delivered when he states that salvation comes only from Yahweh. Salvation here is of Jonah's physical life, "but when applied to the work of God it implies the far-reaching purpose of God to save in the fullest sense."⁷⁷ Jonah is praising Yahweh as Savior and as sole Savior. He intentionally labels Yahweh this way, yet ironically this very same fact will later fill Jonah with anger in chapter four.⁷⁸

In sum, the third and last element of the declarative praise psalm reflects once again Yahweh's gracious compassion. Jonah expresses this attribute of Yahweh through his report of deliverance, testimony, and thanksgiving. It is clear that through Jonah's thankful disposition and vow of thanksgiving that Yahweh's gracious compassion is accentuated.⁷⁹

Summary

The exegetical analysis validates that 1:17-2:10 is a declarative praise psalm. The analysis demonstrates cohesion both in theological and structural ways. Each element of Jonah's psalm reflects God's gracious compassion toward him, even

⁷⁶ Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 478.

⁷⁷ Schrader, OTBL 731, 24. See Pss 62:2[1]; 69:30[29].

⁷⁸ Fretheim states, "This stands in sharp contrast to his reaction to the deliverance of Nineveh. God's deliverance extended to Jonah in spite of his *lack* of repentance would be denied by Jonah to those who have in fact repented. . . . As such, his confession, 'deliverance belongs to the Lord!' stands in brilliant incongruity to the limitation which Jonah places on that very deliverance when it comes to the Ninevites. For Jonah, in the final analysis, God should *not* be able to extend his deliverance to whomever he pleases" (*Message of Jonah*, 103.)

⁷⁹ See Allen, *Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah, and Micah*, 217-18.

though he is a disobedient prophet. Stuart states that chapter two is “full of rescue and thanksgiving, miracle and praise, it allows Jonah to see that God’s determination to do good can mercifully benefit even those who deserve punishment.”⁸⁰ This compassion is not foreign to the book, for God’s compassion is the theological theme of the book. The psalm serves to prepare the reader for circumstances that occur later in the book (i.e., the repentance of the city of Nineveh and the prophet’s angry disposition).

Jonah’s psalm also reflects the structure of a declarative praise psalm. Jonah announces his intention to give thanks to God, he speaks of his time of distress and deliverance, and he also speaks to God’s gracious act of deliverance. Therefore, he vows to give thanks while expressing that salvation is only of Yahweh. Jonah’s psalm mirrors the typical structure of a declarative praise psalm.

PART FOUR: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PSALM OF JONAH

The story of Jonah being swallowed by a whale has captured the attention of generations of Christians. Although this story is fascinating and truly gripping, an analysis of Jonah’s psalm makes it evident that there is more to the book than just a prophet swallowed by a whale. There is more to the story. As one returns to the question in the title of the paper, “what are the implications for today,” he will see that God’s role in this story is far more significant than has typically been communicated.

Jonah’s psalm provides three implications for Christians today. First, God is covenant-faithful, compassionate, and sovereign. Christians today are not always obedient, even when God makes his intentions clear in his Word. Similar to Jonah, people run from God (cf. 1:1-4). For whatever reason, it seems that the Christian’s agenda, plan, roadmap to success, and/or revenge toward someone always looks better than what God sovereignly provides. At this point, often in a distressful and hopeless situation, Christians realize that what they brought upon themselves is a break in fellowship with God, not the “bed

⁸⁰ Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, 480.

of roses” so often aspired to. This is exactly where Jonah found himself. Surely disobeying and running from God (cf. 1:1-4) is better than offering a pagan culture (chap three) the chance to experience the compassion of God. He had the opportunity to get revenge against those who created havoc on him and his people. The real perplexity is that all the while he was trying to run from God, the ultimate conclusion is that he found himself banished from God’s presence (cf. 2:4). Yet, God in his gracious compassion, goodness, and covenant-faithfulness continues to respond to the believer’s sinful behavior. God’s character is such that he will keep his covenant with his people. “His grace is always open, even to those who seem unlikely to be recipients of that grace because of their outright disobedience.”⁸¹ Jonah clearly recognized that salvation belongs to God, and God alone. His compassion and grace is clearly seen in Jonah’s rescue. This leads to a second implication. Prayer.

Second, God listens to prayer. Christians today are to pray. Jonah was concerned with his absence from God, so much so that he prayed from the depths of the sea and from the belly of the great fish. Though he thought he had fled from God, yet his disobedience only gave rise to his voice through prayer. But Jonah did not just pray, “God, please be with me in my time of distress.” No, Jonah used the Scriptures to speak to Yahweh. “Jonah’s prayer was filled with words from the Psalms, which he no doubt had stored away in his heart for such a time as this.”⁸² This is a challenge for Christians today, the memorization of Scripture. How often is Scripture memorized? Maybe a better question would be *do* believers take the time to memorize Scripture? Jonah has clearly demonstrated that comfort is found in talking to God using God’s words.

There are no limits regarding the places from which to pray, and neither are there any limits to the times when one can pray. The point here is to pray, and to do so using the language of God’s word. The Psalms were written for one to express joys and

⁸¹ Kaiser, *I Will Lift My Eyes*, 97.

⁸² Ibid.

sorrows, successes and failures, and hopes and regrets. They are used to speak to God in words that he inspired others to speak to him in the past. Through prayers, believers affirm and express God's attributes; they demonstrate their dependence upon God.

Third, God saves people. It goes without saying that Christians today experience difficult and unpleasant situations throughout their lives. Some go through a considerable amount of despair, while others, not so much. The sailors (chap one), Jonah (chaps two and four), and Nineveh (chap three) are no exception. The events preceding Jonah's psalm of praise involve pagan sailors and a tempestuous sea. The sailors, due to this renegade prophet, experienced a raging sea that was threatening to drown the entire crew. Desperate measures were necessary. Both cargo, and eventually Jonah, were thrown overboard. But what resulted from this desperate situation? Both the sailors and Jonah offered prayers, the God of heaven and earth calmed the sea, and the sailors, though pagan as they were, offered sacrifices and made vows; they exceedingly feared God (cf. 1:16). Moments of crisis often turn people to Yahweh. By calming the sea, God saved the sailors; certainly a moment they will never forget.

Sometimes Christians, like the sailors, go through difficult situations where it seems all is at loss. Desperate times call for desperate measures. But know that when trials and distress come from the hand of God, they come, as they did in the sailors' and Jonah's case; that is, for the purpose of surrendering one's will and placing one's dependence upon God alone.

What can be said about Jonah in chapter two? His recollection of his distressful situation placed him in a near death experience. Jonah was as good as dead (2:2-6). However, God had other plans for the prophet (cf. chap three). He brought Jonah from the pit into his presence, such that the prophet could exclaim, "Salvation belongs to the Lord!" (2:9). Yahweh ordained Jonah's rescue; the great fish spewed out Jonah at the command of the Lord.

The events following Jonah's psalm of praise involve a pagan city (Nineveh) that turned from its evil ways and repented and an angry prophet. God, through his sovereign plan, saved both of them (3:10; 4:6), and does so because he is a compassionate, merciful God (4:2) who always acts within his character.

The salvation experienced by the characters in this story is not indicative of what God will do all the time in all circumstances. God is sovereign and compassionate on whom he wishes when he deems appropriate. The Christian's responsibility is to trust, fear, submit, and depend upon God in all circumstances.

Culture and the Church's Discipleship Strategy

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INTRODUCTION

A trip to the local Christian bookstore will reveal the popularity of church growth material and discipleship resources. Pastors and church leaders are interested in learning new approaches to ministry and are quick to buy the next best-selling, tried and proven, effective method to guarantee ministry success. With all that is available to help the church leader in his ministry and with so many programs offered to build Christian growth, families should be well-off in their pursuit of spiritual maturity. So how does the landscape look as believers have made their attempt to proclaim the truth of the gospel? Unfortunately, not so good.

Jim Putman states, "American Christians are not on a mission. They look far more like the world than they should. They live the same way and chase the same things. Their marriages and families look the same. They are biblically illiterate and care little about sharing their faith with others. Churches are producing people who do not and cannot share the gospel."¹ Barna went to people in the congregations of pastors who have a biblical worldview and asked basic worldview questions about salvation, Jesus, and heaven and hell. Fewer than one in seven had a biblical worldview even though the pastor believed and taught biblical

¹ Jim Putman, *Church Is a Team Sport: A Championship Strategy for Doing Ministry Together* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 74.

truth.² In Josh McDowell's book, *The Last Christian Generation*, he declares that "85 percent of kids who come from Christian homes do not have a biblical worldview. Most of them are leaving the faith between ages eighteen and twenty-four."³ Putman and Harrington claim, "Fewer than one out of five who claim to be born-again Christians have a worldview of even a few fundamental biblical beliefs."⁴ Most Christians will die without ever sharing their faith with someone and "sixty to eighty percent of young people will leave the church in their twenties."⁵ Many will return at a later point in their life or after having experienced a crisis.

While the situation of the Christian population is disheartening enough, the church appears to be in its own struggle of survival. Church goers appear to be breathing as they gather for worship services and run their programs, but oftentimes they are merely surviving rather than living life abundantly.⁶

According to the Barna Research Group, there are about 360,000 churches in America. Current numbers tell that only 15 percent of these churches are growing, and only 2 to 5 percent of

² "Only Half of Protestant Pastors Have a Biblical World View," *The Barna Update*, January 12, 2004, accessed February 1, 2017, <http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdateID=156>.

³ Josh McDowell, *The Last Christian Generation* (Holiday, FL: Green Key, 2006), 14.

⁴ Jim Putman and Bobby Harrington, *Discipleshift: Five Steps That Help Your Church to Make Disciples Who Make Disciples, Exponential Series* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 21.

⁵ David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011) and David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons, *UnChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity and Why it Matters* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007).

⁶ Brad House, *Community: Taking Your Small Group Off Life Support* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 20.

the churches are experiencing new conversion growth. Those that are growing are doing so by transfer growth. This means that a small percentage of the bigger churches are getting bigger and the smaller churches are shrinking or disappearing altogether.⁷

Putman writes that "50 percent of all evangelical churches in America did not have a single convert last year (according to 2008 data)."⁸ And as many as 80 to 85 percent of American churches are in a season of decline or on the verge of dying completely.⁹

What is further daunting, is that many of these churches in decline are not aware of their struggle and actually believe that they are doing just fine. For many churches in America, their efforts at evangelizing and discipling converts is a chapter reserved in their history that has now closed. Discipleship is not happening in these churches and unless they sound the alarm, their apathy will lead to their demise.

PART 1: DEFINING THE MISSION

It is interesting that most churches have at some point involved themselves in a strong outreach component. Every church at one time had a passion in proclaiming the gospel outside the walls of the church and in growing believers. This most generally occurred during the early stages of the church when it became planted. However, as the church began to grow, these outward-focused churches began to shift toward internal matters such as facilities, programs, and expenses of the ministry.

Over time churches seem to acquire committees, meetings, programs, and traditions, none of which may be wrong in themselves, but which cumulatively move the church from mission to maintenance mode. Time and energy are spent making the institutions function. The energy of many churches is thus

⁷ Putman, *Church Is a Team Sport*, 71.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Aubrey Malphurs, *Strategic Disciple Making: A Practical Tool for Successful Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 23.

absorbed in maintaining the legacy of a program of activities and church buildings.¹⁰

Churches must ask the original questions that were asked from the beginning and that have become lost during the busyness of church life. These questions relate to the church's purpose, mission, vision, and strategy to minister to the community. What does God want us to do? How are we going to minister? These questions are necessary to keep the church from straying into areas that will cause diversion from its most important task—following the mission. The church can do a lot of ministry, but that does not mean it is following its Great Commission mandate.

Re-Envision the Great Commission

The Bible gives the church her mission which is found in Matthew 28:19-20: "... Go and make disciples." The mission is the overall goal of what the ministry should be accomplishing. According to Jesus in this passage, the mission is about being intentional at making disciples and in instructing them to follow Christ. The Great Commission has both an evangelistic and spiritual growth aspect. The bottom line is that the church should be making disciples; it should witness new birth (conversion) and spiritual growth (discipleship) in the people under its ministry. A church that does not reach lost people is not following the mission of the Master. The Great Commission is not just the mission of the early church; it is the mission mandate given to every local church today. The changing times and difficulty of doing ministry in a pagan society are not a valid excuse for failing to make disciples. Putman observes, "Some believers get sidetracked into believing if we just change the laws, America will be godly again. But you cannot mandate morality. Christians could change the world by committing themselves to the mission Jesus gave us."¹¹ The church must realize that God is still in the

¹⁰ Tim Chester and Steve Timmis, *Total Church: A Radical Reshaping Around Gospel and Community* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 86.

¹¹ Putman, *Church Is a Team Sport*, 72.

business of redeeming lives and when this does not seem to be happening, the church should do some self-evaluation.

Most churches believe that their mission is the Great Commission and they might even have it well worded on paper, but the reality of the ministry dictates something else other than reaching the lost and growing saints. For example, a church may declare that it a Great Commission church, but upon further examination it becomes evident that the main mission is to have a great music program. This focus is illustrated by the amount of time invested into the music ministry and the emphasis it receives from pastoral leadership.

Another church may have a strong Bible teaching ministry because it values the Scriptures highly. Thus its sole mission, whether held at a conscious or, more likely, an unconscious level, is to communicate the Scriptures. Though this is a worthy endeavor, it is not the church's Great Commission mission.¹²

The Mission and Culture

For many churches that are declining, a significant part of the problem is a struggle to adjust to the changing culture. Malphurs observes "If our churches are going to reach the people of this culture, then they need to understand culture."¹³ Many churches feel that any attempt at understanding culture is a compromise of the Christian faith. It is important to understand culture because most of the issues that turn people away from the gospel have to deal with our particular (cultural) approach rather than the message of the gospel itself. House writes, "We get so entrenched in Christian culture that we don't realize that what feels normal to us may be very intimidating for someone else."¹⁴

¹² Malphurs, *Strategic Disciple Making*, 14.

¹³ Aubrey Malphurs, *The Dynamics of Church Leadership, Ministry Dynamics for a New Century* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 108.

¹⁴ House, *Community*, 140.

“When the culture, not the message, unnecessarily or unintentionally turns people off to the gospel and Christianity because it is out of touch, then it is bad.”¹⁵ What is ironic is that even those churches that try to avoid adapting to culture have failed to realize that they have already bought into a particular culture. It is not so much an issue of whether culture affects a church but rather which culture is influencing the church.

Culture Has a Mark on Us All

Malphurs emphasizes, “Culture profoundly shapes and influences all of our life and beliefs, and most of us aren’t aware of it. We use culture to order our life, interpret our experiences, and evaluate behavior.”¹⁶ The neighborhood we grew up in, the institution where we graduated, and even the churches where we were raised all have a particular perspective and influence upon our lives. Culture involves ethnic, geographic, racial, social, and religious values and practices that are shared by people of a particular place and time. Culture was an inherent part of the life of Adam and Eve before the fall. Malphurs goes on “We shouldn’t be too surprised the younger generations fail to embrace the cultural aspects of their parents’ and grandparents’ Christianity.”¹⁷ Each person is a product of his own unique culture in which he has lived.

Culture and the Christian Response

Christians have not always agreed on how to engage culture. Some Christians respond by isolation; they have nothing to do with culture. Others run to an opposite extreme and attempt to accommodate themselves to it. A third response and one that is more in line with Scripture is to minister within a particular cultural context. “Isolationists tend to view culture as something

¹⁵ Malphurs, *The Dynamics of Church Leadership*, 137.

¹⁶ Ibid., 122.

¹⁷ Ibid., 124.

'out there'- an evil force beyond us that we can separate from. However, while culture is 'out there' it's also 'in here.'"¹⁸ The point made previously is that culture is a part of everyone's life; no one really can isolate themselves from culture. Some of these isolationists have mistaken the New Testament word *world* for culture. That usage of the word describes culture when it's under the control of Satan, his forces, or men who pursue evil, not good.¹⁹ There are many aspects of culture that are not inherently evil. We can accept parts of culture that are not in direct opposition to the Bible.

If the Bible does not explicitly or implicitly prohibit a particular behavior, value or experience, and it can be accepted without opposing our consciences, then believers are free to accept it. This simply means they can participate in it without modification and enjoy it to the glory of God. There are some aspects of culture that are naturally opposed to the gospel. Slavery and abortion are obvious examples. Some aspects of culture may be inherently innocuous, but they have been perverted by sin. These things were made good by God but have been used for idolatry or abuse. Sexuality would be a good example.²⁰

Aubrey Malphurs provides an effective criteria for determining whether a church should use a particular practice. He categorizes every practice of the church as either a function, form, or freedom.²¹ Functions are timeless, unchanging, nonnegotiable precepts based upon Scripture. These are mandates and examples include baptism, Lord's Supper, teaching, prayer, etc. Forms are temporal, changing, negotiable practices the church decides based upon culture. These are not mandates and examples include worship style, forms of evangelism (door-to-door etc.) and whether to use wine or grape

¹⁸ Ibid., 131.

¹⁹ Ibid., 130.

²⁰ House, *Community*, 131.

²¹ Malphurs, *Dynamics of Church Leadership*, 98-114.

juice for the Lord's Supper. Freedom are practices with permission to change forms so long as practices do not contradict biblical teaching. Examples include foot washing and women with head coverings.

Given that forms change and that churches have the freedom to change forms that have no instruction from the Bible, churches should also be aware of forms that could become a cultural barrier. House writes,

Barriers of practice are the practical obstacles of time, space, and accessibility that hinder the gospel. Cultural barriers include language and behaviors that alienate people before they can hear the gospel. Barriers of perception are the images, stereotypes, or experiences that people have had with the church that affect their perception of Jesus and the church.²²

These practices may not be wrong biblically speaking, but since they are forms that are considered barriers, it would be wise for the church to change these practices.

Culture and Contextualization

A proper Christian view of dealing discerningly with culture is what missiologists define as contextualization. Every missionary understands that in order to connect to the people of his mission, he must learn the context of his ministry. The missionary learns the customs and culture of the people and ministers within that context instead of imposing his American culture on the indigenous people. He understands that he can adapt his ministry to the culture of the ministry community so long as it does not dishonor Scripture nor dilutes the gospel message. Contextualization views culture as simply a vehicle that "God, man, or Satan can use for their own purposes, whether good or evil."²³ Jesus is our greatest example of contextualization;

²² House, *Community*, 129.

²³ Malphurs, *Dynamics of Church Leadership*, 133.

He took upon Himself the culture of humankind. He was born into a Jewish family and learned the trade of a carpenter.

The Mission and Change

The Great Commission never changes, but we are aware that culture is changing and we must be willing to change as well. Bruce McNichol writes in *Christianity Today* that churches over fifteen years old produce an average of only three converts to Christ per year for every one hundred church members. Churches three years to fifteen years old produce an average of five converts to Christ per year for every one hundred church members. But churches under three years of age produce an average of ten converts to Christ per year for every one hundred church members.²⁴ These statistics tell us that older churches have the greatest struggle with growth. And the reason? Older churches have become established and have a tendency to continue doing what worked for them in the past. Churches have grown passive to change and in some cases may be afraid to deal with it. Every pastor knows that churches hate change. Not just churches, but individuals who make up the church. Humans like the comfort of consistency and they do not like to place themselves under evaluation. If any church is to have a future, it must recognize that it must change and this goes for all churches; the small and large, the traditional and contemporary. Methods must change if we are to be effective at reaching new generations. As Malphurs notes, "To get better at what we do as well as grow spiritually, we must always be improving the way we do things."²⁵ Pastors must lead their churches into times of constant change, and they must go at it slowly and very strategically. There will be those along the way who refuse to change and instead remain content with the status quo. As long as the leadership team is together the church will advance the mission even when

²⁴ Bruce McNichol, quoted in "Churches Die with Dignity," *Christianity Today*, January 14, 1991, 69.

²⁵ Malphurs, *Strategic Disciple Making*, 112.

some members may leave because of change. Leaders understand why change is necessary and decide on what change is essential in the life of the church. Change without a specific purpose that benefits the ministry causes more confusion than growth. House comments,

Effecting change will take commitment, hard work, and patience. Changing the culture of the community in your church will require a consistent plan that starts with repentance on the part of the church and dependence on the Holy Spirit to impart change in our hearts.²⁶

How do church leaders go about reversing the declining condition of the church and establish a church culture where the gospel not only thrives, but people are transformed into mature disciples? Zig Ziglar's famous quote is fitting here: "If you aim at nothing, you will hit it every time."²⁷ Mission and vision statements look impressive on paper, but never come to fruition without an effective plan. The church must know its mission, but it needs a well prepared strategy to accomplish the mission.

PART 2: DEVELOPING A DISCIPLESHIP STRATEGY

The main thrust of the Great Commission is the development of mature, multiplying disciples. Salvation is just the beginning of the Christian life, and what Jesus envisioned was not just a crowd, but followers who knew the cost of their devotion. When Jesus invited his disciples to follow him, it was a call to leave a life of comfort and join a cause that was much bigger than themselves. In 2 Corinthians 3:17-18, Paul declares that it is the Holy Spirit who does the transformative work in the life of believers. Human programs and even discipleship strategy is not what changes lives—only God can work in hearts. Yet, we must not diminish the

²⁶ House, *Community*, 192.

²⁷ Quoted from Tom Ziglar, "If You Aim at Nothing...", October 7, 2016, accessed January 30, 2017, <https://www.ziglar.com/articles/if-you-aim-at-nothing-2/>.

fact that church leaders have a shepherding responsibility to which they will be held accountable. Remember, the strategy is how a church will accomplish the mission. Spiritual growth happens only when believers are introduced to growing environments where change can occur.

Discipleship Strategy as a Process

"Babies are not just born into families and then left there. In functioning families, they are nurtured and prepared for adulthood. For all the talk of peer pressure and the influence of the media, the primary influence on a child is the family."²⁸ The stages of our natural life are a vivid illustration of the growth process in the Christian life. When believers experience conversion, they are not automatically perfected from their sinfulness. Although 2 Corinthians 5:17 declares that believers in Christ are a new creation, it does not assume that they will no longer struggle with previous sin or act in immature ways. We expect certain behavior from children and we expect certain behavior from adults. We simply accept that people are at different stages of life and we teach them according to what is most needed during the stage that they are currently in. The problem in the church is that many leaders do not think through issues of maturity when they expect certain things from their members. Furthermore, individuals often move through the life of the church without any formal training to guide the believer in his or her spiritual growth.

Far too often churches that share the gospel with someone, pray with that person, and perhaps even baptize that person, only to give him or her a Bible and tell him or her to come back to church next week. Few people survive past these initial steps, spiritually, and if they do, they often stay in an immature state for their entire lives, never experiencing all that Jesus has for them.²⁹

²⁸ Chester and Timmis, *Total Church*, 113.

²⁹ Putman and Harrington, *Discipleshift*, 91.

Every organization must have some type of structure and plans in place in order to operate and achieve the mission. In the church, this process is often referred to as the assimilation process. The purpose of the assimilation process is to develop a flow of how Christians should be moving in their spiritual life and how they will function in the church during each stage of their growth. A good assimilation process considers where people are in their spiritual life and moves them forward toward maturity. It begins with first-time visitors and continues onward to the highly committed leader. The process should be built to accommodate the whole church; from the children's ministries to adult ministries, everything is contributing to the process of building mature disciples.

The discipleship process is important because it provides reason for the existence of all ministries of the church. This means that ministries that are not an essential part of the discipleship process should normally be discontinued.

Discipleship Strategy as a System not a Program

Computer technology has advanced over the years. There are a variety of computers to choose from on the market today. Besides color options and special user features, computers come with many options that are designed for a particular use. Regardless of whether a computer is considered basic or high-end, computers all have one important thing in common: computers are designed with software systems to run programs.

In the same manner, churches have been notorious for creating a plethora of programs but often fail to install an effective system to manage all of the programs. For the church, discipleship is the system that runs its programs. Malphurs writes,

It is not to be one of several programs of the church, it is the program of the church. It is not a ministry in which a few dedicated disciple makers work with a limited number of people who want to

mature in their faith. It is a ministry of the church that seeks to make disciples of all its people.³⁰

Programs that operate without a clear purpose and direction to grow believers are ineffective. The church is guilty of doing a whole lot of “things,” but few seem to really direct life change. The discipleship strategy is the playbook so to speak for the church. As a playbook, it provides a specific plan that has been created to win the game. Putman uses the playbook analogy: “Many of God’s coaches have no playbook to give the potential players that may come to their teams. They let people do what they want or, just as bad, they let them do nothing, just sit and watch the coach perform.”³¹

The job of the coach is to inform incoming players about the playbook that has been developed by the team of leaders. Some players may come along and believe that they know a better way to play the game, and the coach must be clear that if players want to be on the team; then they must learn to play by the same playbook that all other players have committed to in order to win the game. Putman and Harrington write, “If you’re a church leader and your church has a playbook, then right up front it helps answer a well-meaning person like this who wants the church to go another direction. It helps articulate to that person the specifics of what you do as a church and why you do it.”³² As churches age and become more established in their ways, it becomes more difficult to align some of its beloved programs around a common goal. People see needs and want to do things to meet those needs, but if a church is not careful, it will allow any and every kind of ministry. No one enjoys shutting down a good idea that is designed to benefit someone. But if the church accepts a smorgasbord approach to its ministries, it will inevitably be

³⁰ Malphurs, *Strategic Disciple Making*, 67.

³¹ Putman, *Church Is a Team Sport*, 168.

³² Putman and Harrington, *Discipleshift*, 224.

going in many directions: “Having too many options weakens the impact of the things that are most important.”³³

Discipleship Strategy that is Measurable

Truth be told, churches simply do not like to be evaluated. Often the thinking is that something of a spiritual nature cannot be measured. Because there is nothing really in place to measure a program’s effectiveness, churches simply continue to let programs run their course until they finally die out or there’s no further interest. When pastors are questioned about their discipleship program there is often a detachment between what they believe they are accomplishing and the actual growth numbers from the ministry.

Only 43 percent of the pastors surveyed said their church regularly evaluates discipleship progress among their congregation, but they do believe progress is being made. Over 90 percent of pastors agree their congregation is making significant progress in spiritual development, but less than half are satisfied with the state of discipleship and spiritual formation in their church. This would indicate that pastors are probably looking for improvement but have rarely had anything measureable to determine what or how much progress is truly being made.³⁴

Creating systems that allow ministries to be measured can be beneficial to the ministry. Numbers alone are not the best way to measure the effectiveness of a program. Are disciples being made? In what ways are the program contributing to the overall mission of the church? In what ways are people growing in their relationships with one another? These questions and others demonstrate how systems can be used to measure the effectiveness of a ministry. The last thing a church would want is

³³ Andy Stanley and Bill Willits, *Creating Community: 5 Keys to Building a Small Group Culture* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 2004), 55.

³⁴ Ed Stetzer and Eric Geiger, *Transformational Groups: Creating a New Scorecard for Groups* (Nashville: B & H Publishing, 2014), 71.

for a program that is not working to continue to drain the effort and time of limited volunteers.

Discipleship Assimilation Model

The church's discipling strategy should identify different stages of growth in the Christian life and then seek to provide ministry for each stage. Everything the church does should fit into a particular stage of the discipleship process. Without a clear discipleship strategy, the church will assume that people can find their own way through life, eventually landing at each required stage of growth. Having a visual illustration of the discipleship process helps growing believers to visualize their current place in the process and also provides direction for them as they continue to grow into further stages of their spiritual development. The assimilation model will look different for each ministry context but should include essential functions of any New Testament church such as biblical teaching, genuine relationships, serving, and ministry training. The assimilation model provides a system to accomplish the required functions of the church by using strategic forms to grow disciples. The model that the church develops for its own assimilation process should be simple so that anyone can understand, yet very specific on how the disciple will be progressing in spiritual maturity.

The following is a proposed assimilation model that any church can use because it illustrates how every person can be assimilated into the discipleship process and on the path toward Christian growth.

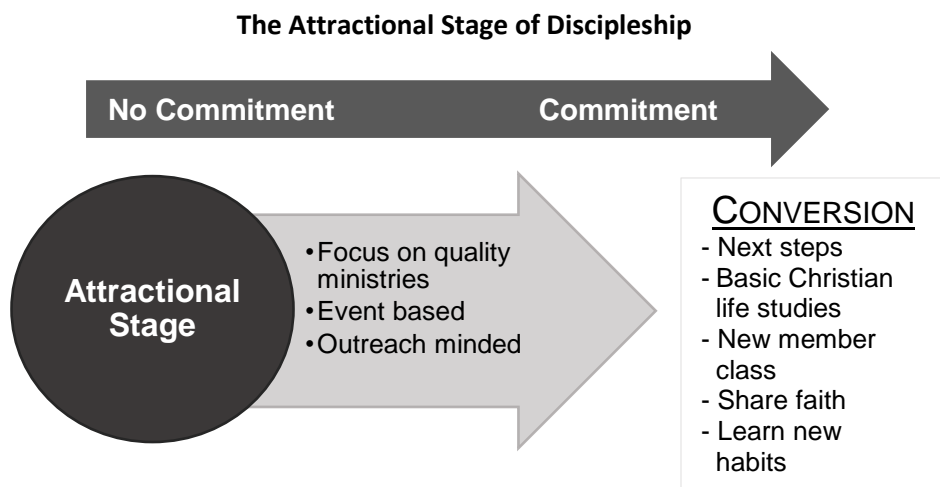


FIG. 1. The Attractional Stage of Discipleship

The attractional phase is usually the entry point into the churches discipleship assimilation strategy. This phase, which involves minimal commitment, is focused on attracting potential disciples. Most visitors fit into this category; they are either unsaved or are Christians who have had little growth in their faith. The most common event that serves to attract curious seekers who have not made a commitment to Christ is the weekend service. Sometimes the concept of being attractional receives criticism from those who believe only Christians are present at a weekend church service. As Putman observes, "In our American culture, the first place a person might come if they are looking for a church is to a service Even non-Christians will attend a service if they are investigating the claims of the Bible."³⁵ As our American culture becomes increasingly postmodern and fewer people attend church, the body of Christ will need to adapt a missional approach that involves engaging the community outside of event-based services.

³⁵ Putman, *Church Is a Team Sport*, 111.

Intentional Outreach

The intent here is not to argue the merits of whether our services should be geared toward believers or reaching unbelievers, but at the very least we should agree that both believers and unbelievers will be present during our church services every weekend. Since unbelievers will be present, their decision to connect further with the church will be based upon their experience at an event like the weekend service or a special outreach event. Our outreach efforts must take into account the current culture and attempt to create interest by those who have remained distant to Christianity. Putman comments,

For instance, we might say we want to reach the world, but we do things that keep us from being in contact with the world we want to reach. We plan an outreach, but it is really designed to attract people who already think like us (other believers). We don't know how to relate to lost folks, so we pray and expect that God will bring them to us.³⁶

The church must return to the Great Commission and focus on reaching those outside the walls of the church.

Unbelievers are not naturally attracted to the gospel, so what brings them to us is not the truthfulness of our teaching or the spiritual dynamic of the service. Most often, unbelievers are looking for belonging; they are looking for a place of identity and place that gives hope. We admit that those who are in the attractional stage will often have a consumer approach to the church—they are looking for what the church has to offer. Immature Christians and unbelievers base their church experience solely on the quality of the music, the friendliness of the staff, the opportunities for their children, and whether the service and teaching is comprehensible and welcoming. Churches must do all they can (without compromise) to leave an impression on those who visit our services so that they may have future opportunities to speak gospel truth and eventually see them move on to greater maturity. Christians will often overlook

³⁶ Ibid., 109.

the shortcomings of a church; however, unbelievers typically won't be back if their experience does not measure up to their expectation. The church building and services should be "places where neither the church nor the unchurched would be embarrassed to bring their friends. Remember the church grows by word of mouth. No one will bring people to something that will embarrass them."³⁷

Inadequate Expectations

A primary misconception about those churches who consistently reach unbelievers during the service is that they are compromising the gospel for the sake of outreach. We have already established earlier that churches can have different ministry forms and are free to do so as long as those forms do not conflict with biblical teaching. The most important thing is for the church to follow the prescribed functions of the church set forth in the NT and to choose practices that do not contradict clear biblical instruction. Putman explains, "We do not need to dumb down our preaching to target the unchurched. We can and have to teach biblical truth. However, we must make allowances for the unchurched or they will not desire to hear more."³⁸ Many religious people will be uncomfortable with aspects of the church service and outreach events that are designed to attract. But these people must understand that the attractional phase is not designed to be a stage of significant growth but rather a starting point to move people on to more depth. As with a child that has a lot of growing yet to do, churches cannot expect unbelievers to value the most important things. Some churches offer weekend services specifically designed for the seeker or unsaved person and then offer a service specifically geared for believers. Most churches do not have the luxury of multiple services so the leadership must plan their weekend services strategically in ways that minister to believers but also welcomes those who

³⁷ Ibid., 112.

³⁸ Ibid., 115.

have not yet decided to follow Christ. Many churches begin with an outward drive to reach their community but over time they begin to shift their attention to internal matters, attempting to please those who gather only to neglect those who have not yet become believers.

Inspiration to Continue

Essentially, “the corporate worship service is like a pep rally, in many ways. It informs, motivates, and recruits players to join the team or to get out there and get the job done!”³⁹ It recruits observers to become followers of Christ and followers to become growing leaders of Christ's church. The goal of the attractional stage is to get the individual into the next step because he will not move forward in his spiritual growth just by attending the general session. He needs the accountability of others in his life and the training that cannot be accomplished by just attending a Sunday worship service. Yes, we reach people where they are but that does not mean that we let them remain there. Too many churches have a strategy that ends with attracting more people, and this becomes their main objective in their assimilation strategy. “The challenge is to move people to the next ministry event- to get them out of the stands and onto the discipleship playing field so they attend not only worship service but small group or Sunday school or both as well.”⁴⁰ The discipleship assimilation strategy of the church makes it essential and possible by providing a clear pathway to the next stage of discipleship.

For the person who is not a Christian, the next step is to receive Christ as Savior; for that person the most pressing and immediate need is salvation. During the attractional phase, the unsaved will have many opportunities to hear the gospel and will be encouraged to make Christ their Lord. When people accept Christ as Savior, they should be introduced to the Christian faith

³⁹ Ibid., 120.

⁴⁰ Malphurs, *Strategic Disciple Making*, 93.

through basic classes on doctrine and be encouraged to join a new believer's small group, a next steps group, or other network to assist during the infant stages of spiritual birth. It is important that new believers be integrated into the discipleship process as soon as possible as time is critical. The longer the new Christian sits without taking the initial steps following salvation, the greater the likelihood of the believer becoming stagnant in the growth process. A new members' class should be a requirement for anyone who wants to join the church or be involved as a primary teacher and decision maker in the church. The new members' class will provide an orientation on the church's beliefs, values, vision, ministry philosophy, and strategy (the playbook). Those who are not yet ready to join the church may participate in certain ministries but should understand that membership is a requirement for certain ministry roles that involve key areas of responsibility and leadership.

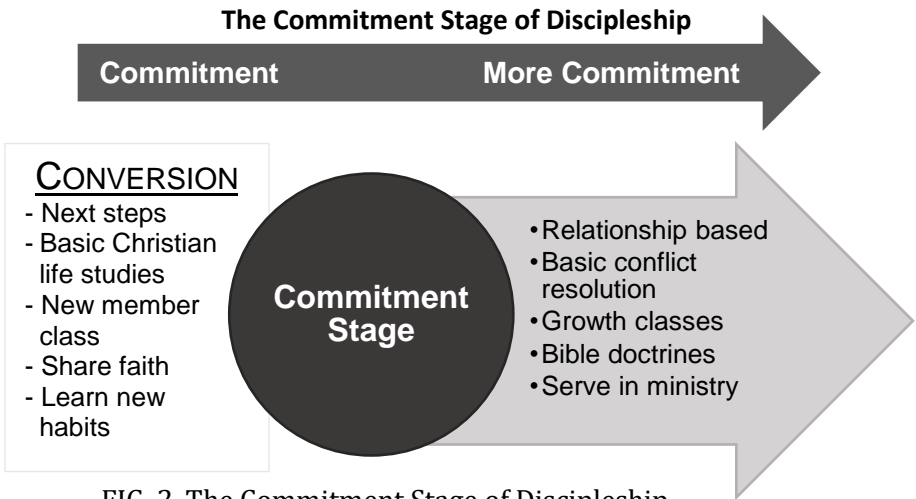


FIG. 2. The Commitment Stage of Discipleship

Conversion marks the beginning of a life of commitment to the gospel. It may be reasonable to include conversion within the commitment stage; however, it seems more fitting to view salvation as the event that makes commitment in the Christian

life possible. It is the catalyst that allows change to take place. In a society that often lacks commitment, it is important for disciples to know that following Christ does not come without a cost. Eternal life is a free gift; however, in Luke 14:25-33, Jesus made it clear to the crowd that following him would demand commitment of all areas of their life. New believers must understand that God has not called them to be idle but to move forward with commitment in the Christian life.

Commitment to Community

A lot of attention has been devoted to small groups in recent years and there is a good explanation for this— our culture craves meaningful relationships. George Gallup has said, “Americans are among the loneliest people in the world.”⁴¹ Andy Stanley and Bill Willits concur: “In the midst of busy lives, overcommitted schedules, and congested cities, we feel alone.”⁴² Americans are too busy to engage in relationships. Busy schedules and the intensity of work has caused many to come home and retreat from relationships. Very few Americans have contact with their neighbors today, unlike past generations. Gone are the days when Americans would sit on their front porch and interact with the life of their community. While most Americans live fast-paced lives, many indicate they wish they had more meaningful relationships. The Starbucks Corporation has learned that the success of its organization is not just from the taste of coffee. As Stanley and Willits observe, “Starbucks sees itself in the business of doing more than selling a premium cup of coffee. Starbucks believes part of its corporate purpose is to create environments that connect people so meaningfully that it changes the quality of their lives.”⁴³ Because of Starbucks’ commitment to community, their products are selling.

⁴¹ George Gallup Jr., *The Peoples Religion* (New York: MacMillan, 1989)

⁴² Stanley and Willits, *Creating Community*, 22.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 20.

The amount of time someone has invested in church attendance is not an indicator of their spiritual maturity. The real indicator is whether the disciple is growing in relationship with other believers and non-believers. Ed Stetzer and Eric Geiger write,

In many contexts we've interpreted growth through the lens of a classroom model, based on knowledge and completing a course of study. For transformation, the culture in our churches must shift from mere classroom to community, a community that learns and processes God's Word together and encourages one another to live what they have learned.⁴⁴

Stetzer and Geiger explain, "So many churches are trying to get larger. They put a lot of time, energy, and money into their pursuit of getting bigger. The church needs to make getting small a priority."⁴⁵ Churches are experiencing the effectiveness of small groups simply because smaller group settings provide a solution to the lack of meaningful relationships in our day to day busyness.

In the following pages that develop the concept of community, the terms *community groups*, and *small groups* will be used interchangeably and synonymously. While small groups are not the only ministry in the church, it has become the primary means of effective discipleship in twenty-first century culture because it provides a solution to the growing lack of community in American society.

Biblical Basis for Community

The NT refers to more than thirty "one another's" and if that isn't reason enough to see the Scriptural emphasis on

⁴⁴ Stetzer and Geiger, *Transformational Groups*, 81.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 33.

relationships, here are five biblical reasons why our small group ministry is essential:⁴⁶

1. Since the start of the church, Christians have gathered in small and large groups for discipleship, edification, worship, evangelism and ministry (Acts 2:46-47).
2. The Godhead exists in perfect community (trinity) and he created us to live in community with one another (Gen 2:18).
3. Believers need one another when life becomes tough (Eccl 4:9-12).
4. Jesus' presence is stronger when two or three are gathered in his name (Matt 18:20).
5. Fellowship with God's people is part of God's plan for discipleship (Acts 2:41-42).

Even though Jesus preached to large crowds of people, He spent the majority of his time in small group discipleship. He did not just teach; he focused on doing life with his disciples. Putman and Harrington point out, "Paul did not simply lead a Sunday school class once a week or preach a sermon to a large crowd and end there. He focused on doing life with people he discipled."⁴⁷

Benefits of Community Life

Stetzer and Geiger write,

In worship gatherings grounded in Jesus, God supernaturally uses the preaching of his Word and the worship to transform hearts and affections. And in groups grounded in Jesus, God supernaturally uses the community to mature His people. Both are important to God. Both must be important to your church.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Nelson Searcy and Kerrick Thomas, *Activate: An Entirely New Approach to Small Groups* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014), 156.

⁴⁷ Putman and Harrington, *Discipleshift*, 34.

⁴⁸ Stetzer and Geiger, *Transformational Groups*, 65.

People who are involved in a community group of the church generally are more committed to improving their relationships with Christ and with others in the church.

Group environment allows people to express their faith and the experiences of their walk with Christ. Studies indicate that when people contribute, they tend to feel more appreciated and involved rather than just listening to a speaker. And when it comes to sharing their faith with those outside the church building, "Those who are in groups share their faith more and at a higher rate than those not involved in a group."⁴⁹

As people become connected in small groups, a natural bond forms that leads to people caring for one another. When people walk through life together, they become more involved in each other's life. Group members take on shepherding roles, thereby taking the load off of full-time care-takers and lowering the unrealistic expectation of pastors having to care for everyone.

Small groups provide another means by which unchurched people may connect with the church. Some people are more comfortable connecting initially in a small group environment instead of an intimidating crowd of people. The community group can be a means to connect new people to the church.

Designing Your Community Groups

Defining the purpose of a small group is the first step in the planning process. Often times the discussion centers around how to get more people involved in community groups rather than emphasizing the purpose and value of community groups. One of the biggest mistakes leaders make when it comes to small group planning is to move forward without sufficient planning. If people do not understand why they should be in a small group, it will be difficult to fill the groups. All small groups should have the following characteristics: Bible centered, intentional focus to help Christians grow in maturity, and providing a safe place where there is honest talk about their walk with Christ.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 123.

Agenda of the Small Group

What actually takes place during the small group meeting? Can small group be a weekly social event where Christians gather to discuss the game and spiritualize it by tacking on a little prayer for the coming week or is there a particular format small groups should follow? Every small group must understand why it exists; if it does not it will attempt to have various purposes but no real central purpose. For example, some people might think the role of small groups is to care for people. A group with this thinking would center all its attention on service without considering how it is growing spiritually. The group could be mistaken to have a primary goal of being missional in which case everything would center on outreach. Putman and Harrington advise, "The key is that the small group's purpose be defined as encouraging discipleship—not primarily fellowship or counseling or even outreach (although these may be vital components of the process)."⁵⁰ When the small group understands its primary function, it will then be able to adequately set its agenda. The group should not attempt to be everything and those that try to will accomplish very little.

Community groups should focus on spiritual growth and "Godtalk" should be a natural part of every gathering. Each group should have a leader and if possible, a coordinator. The leader facilitates the meeting and discussion around a Biblical study or topic. The group study should be something approved by the church leadership and a syllabus should be created to include information about the meeting times, places, and material covered in the group. The coordinator is in charge of taking care of administrative items such as attendance trends, communication, and general care of its members. Church staff should oversee the progress of groups to ensure that they function smoothly and function as coaches to leaders. Group life should be something that exists even when members are apart because the goal are shooting for is an identity, not an event.

⁵⁰ Putman and Harrington, *Discipleshift*, 186.

Expectations of the Small Group

Some groups are expected to reach new people and bring them into the life of the group or church. While no one usually complains about new people having an interest in spiritual matters, the primary focus of the group should not be outreach but the spiritual growth of Christians. People get comfortable with those in their group and when new members join in at random times, it often disrupts the connection already established by those who have bonded. An environment that is constantly changing does not lend itself to authentic community. Leaders must carefully evaluate what they are expecting of their groups. The church must ensure that the church calendar allows for maximum participation in the small group ministry. If small groups are considered an option among many other programs, it will not receive the value it should have in the discipleship strategy. People have limited time in our society and they will only attend a few church functions per week. Pastors often advertise programs as if they all are equally important, but the message that this sends is that nothing is more significant. Nelson Searcy and Kerrick Thomas note,

There is no way you can ask attender Joe Average to be at the weekend service, be at the mid-week service, go to the men's prayer breakfast on Friday morning and be in a small group. It's unrealistic. He only has so much time. When you create a culture that gives your attenders multiple options for how they want to engage in ministry, you do them a disservice.⁵¹

Accountability of the Small Group

Small groups provide the best platform for accountability in the Christian life. Christians all need accountability if they are to grow in their spiritual lives. "The purpose of accountability in community is to lead others to repentance in everyday life through biblical correction with grace, knowing that every sin is

⁵¹ Searcy and Thomas, *Activate*, 41.

unbelief in the gospel.”⁵² We all have certain blind spots in our life that need to be addressed by those who look closely at our lives and tell us what they are seeing. Groups should be a comfortable, non-judgmental environment where people are free to talk about their struggles and learn how to grow spiritually.

Promotion of the Small Group

If we believe that small groups are the most effective means of discipleship growth, then we want to encourage as many as possible to become involved in a small group. The best recruitment tool for small groups is the emphasis that it receives from leadership. Pastors and elders lead in setting the value on what is the most important ministries of the church. Not only should pastors regularly promote the small group ministry from the pulpit, but they also should highlight stories of changed lives because of small group involvement and be willing to join a small group. Ongoing sign-ups for recruitment does not benefit the small group system. A more effective approach is to run a promotional campaign for a certain period of time.⁵³ Constantly putting the small group ministry before people will create a culture that values small group discipleship. No other ministries should be highlighted when focus is to be given to the small group campaign. Make it evident that small groups are important to the life of the church.

⁵² Stetzer and Geiger, *Transformational Groups*, 11.

⁵³ Searcy and Thomas explain the importance of running the promotional campaign for recruitment before the start of groups and not having ongoing sign-ups. The value of promotional months with designated periods for sign-up is that it raises group participation by having everyone begin together, decreases burnout of members and leaders, and puts regular focus and creativity on something that is important in the life of the church (*Activate*, 35-37).

Life Span of the Small Group

Once groups are regularly meeting, how long should small groups last? Running small groups indefinitely is an unwise practice for two reasons. First, in American culture people will not sign up for something that has no end in sight. Whether it is a college course, workshop, or seminar, everything comes to a completion. Small groups without a defined ending point will become less appealing because people do not want their schedules to be forever restricted. Some people fear that if they have an unpleasant experience with their small group, they are trapped without an exit plan. Second, those who newly join a small group do not want to join a group that is already well established. It makes sense for prospective small group participants to join new groups that are just starting off. Most churches will not have the manpower to regularly add new groups. The practice of running small group programs for a set duration allows for a reset period in which all groups can restart and add new members. This also allows an exit plan for those who wish to try a different small group or break off to form additional small groups.

Some churches have made it a practice to split a small group once it reaches a certain maximum number of participants; however, no one wants to divide something that they have grown comfortable with. A better approach to reproducing small groups would be to begin every small group with a potential leader in training that could then lead a group during the next rotation. The coordinator of a particular small group could be a good candidate to begin an apprenticeship under the group leader and eventually break off to lead his own small group the next time.

Putman and Harrington write, "Once a Christian has become relationally connected with other disciples and is learning how to obey Christ, he or she will begin to experience spiritual growth. This will lead to a growing interest in serving others, using the gifts, skills, wisdom, and abilities that God has given to bless others."⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Putman and Harrington, *Discipleshift*, 160.

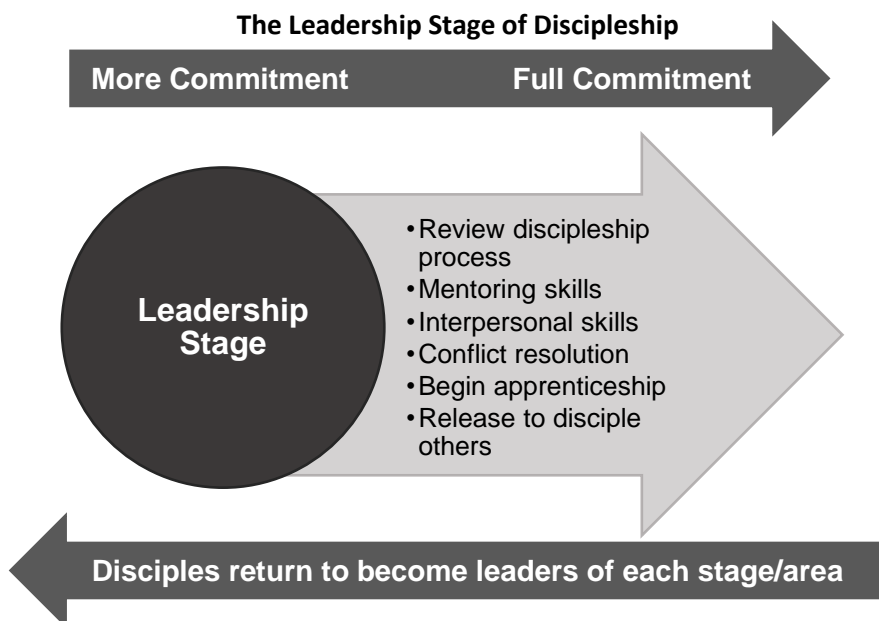


FIG. 3. The Leadership Stage of Discipleship

The final stage of the discipleship model is the leadership stage. Most people would look at this final stage and think that they could never become leaders. Part of the reason why normal disciples cannot imagine themselves as future leaders is because they have misunderstood leadership to be people who are good preachers, teachers, administrators, or professionals. When normal Christians see leadership as vocational, they begin to feel that they have little to offer.

When people think of Bible studies, they often think of a teacher teaching and everyone else passively listening. This is a problem for several reasons. First, many people do not have the gift of teaching, and a person who cannot teach can make a group really boring. Second, it is difficult to recruit leaders because many will feel that they are unqualified, that they do not have the theological training or biblical knowledge to lead.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Putman and Harrington, *Discipleshift*, 191.

Pastors and church leaders must help disciples come to realize that God wants them to be leaders and this does not mean that they will become pastors, teachers, or evangelists. "Not all of us are eloquent or engaging. Not everyone can think on their feet. Some people are simply not good at speaking to strangers and forming new friendships Most gospel ministry involves ordinary people doing ordinary things with gospel intentionality."⁵⁶ Second Timothy 2:2 should be the church's model for leadership training. Paul had discipled Timothy, and now he tells Timothy to go and disciple other men. But it doesn't stop there—the point of Timothy's discipling others is that the disciplined can become disciplers. If we view the Great Commission as a mandate that involves producing disciples, then it would naturally lead to the training of others to become leaders. How many pastors can look out into their congregation and see a group of capable Christians whom they can entrust the ministry of disciple making? Often times the church is dysfunctional because it has not given direction to training its leadership. Pastors and elders must view their role as a coach, helping others succeed in the ministry. They must train leaders at every level in order to succeed. Teams are looking to coaches to help them toward victory. The discipleship assimilation model is the plan to prepare disciples to become future leaders of the church. Every stage of the model has been instrumental to bring the disciple into greater commitment where he will be mature and able to lead others into maturity.

Some pastors and disciples have unfortunately viewed leadership roles as something to be reserved for a select few. Churches have generally hired from outside the church believing that no internal candidates exist. In the NT, church leaders were often appointed from within the congregation. The issue that churches face today is not a lack of qualified individuals who could become future leaders, but rather the absence of a training process that could equip the disciples God has already given the church to become leaders. Training is an important aspect of everyday life, yet the church has not developed a reputation of

⁵⁶ Chester and Timmis, *Total Church*, 62-63.

effective leadership training. Equipping the saints involves training and too many disciples are short-circuited when they are introduced to leadership without proper guidance.

Leaders are Developed

The ministries of the church are only as effective as the training system of those ministries. Leaders must be developed; they need initial training, ongoing training, and direction as they lead their particular ministries. Churches do a disservice to people when they place them in leadership without equipping them for the roles in which they will serve. Leadership development is more than training of a particular skill like teaching; it involves some of the other important skills such as handling conflict and relating to different personality traits within the ministry. Classes should focus on interpersonal skills, understanding the biblical instruction for conflict resolution, mentoring skills, and how to be an effective leader. Michael Gerber, the author of one of the most popular business books, tells a story about a woman who was incredible at making apple pies so she opened her own business: "But the business was failing, and she was on the verge of collapse. What she really loved to do was make apple pies, and people loved them. But she had no managerial or entrepreneurial skills so her business was doomed to fail."⁵⁷

Those who desire to be leaders must demonstrate a teachable spirit. There is no place in the ministry for experts who think they know it all. Humility is a major character trait required of all leaders. Furthermore, the individual must clearly understand the core values, mission, and vision of the church and accept responsibility to serve under the church's established strategy for disciple making. They come ready to advance the kingdom of God under the direction of pastors and elders, the spiritual advisors of the ministry.

⁵⁷ Cited in Stetzer and Geiger, *Transformational Groups*, 133.

Jesus did not look for leaders who came to the job already skilled for the work. He developed leaders who were normal ordinary men (the disciples) who needed a little shaping.

Audrey Malphurs advises, "Your church does not exist to provide jobs for people, but to provide Christ-honoring ministry through people with the right divine wiring in the right positions."⁵⁸

Leaders Need Apprenticeships

One part of effective training that many programs lack is an apprenticeship process. Classroom training is needed but often times it proves inadequate to prepare someone for a new task. Stanley and Willits note,

The assumption is that the more information leaders are exposed to, the better prepared they will be to lead. But, like the conference notebook gathering dust on the shelf, it is not the acquisition of information that properly prepares a leader to lead; rather, it is the application of the right information.⁵⁹

Furthermore, House writes,

Think of it like playing golf. I can study all the techniques and tricks that can be crammed into a magazine, and I can tell someone everything I've learned. But it doesn't make me a better golfer if I never swing a club.⁶⁰

Apprenticeships allow instructors to not only teach information but to observe the student in action allowing for on-the-job training. Once the student is comfortable performing the task on his own the instructor can then release the student for ministry leadership. It is appropriate to specify the duration of

⁵⁸ Malphurs, *Strategic Disciple Making*, 120.

⁵⁹ Stanley and Willits, *Creating Community*, 153.

⁶⁰ House, *Community*, 55.

the ministry responsibility that pastors expect from their leaders. New leaders can always renew their commitment if they desire to continue, but they should never be expected to serve indefinitely as this leads to ministry burnout and poor stewardship.

Leaders Reproduce Themselves

Second Timothy 2:2 becomes the standard for measuring the effectiveness of a discipleship strategy. Paul tells Timothy to make disciples who will reproduce themselves. The best indication that someone is a mature disciple of Christ is that he makes it his life's mission to equip others to be trainers. We train others for ministry not so that we may fulfill vacancies in our ministry, but because there is a biblical mandate to be trainers. The Christian life is about passing on the faith to faithful men. There really are only two choices when it comes to the way we do ministry: we could become ministry hoarders and not allow others the opportunity to lead or we can entrust the ministry to those who have demonstrated commitment to the gospel message and are willing to take on responsibility. Scott Thomas and Tom Wood clarify, "Faithful leaders will make disciples, but great leaders focus on making other leaders."⁶¹

CONCLUSION

The church needs a new paradigm for making disciples in the twenty-first century. Pastors should view themselves more as system developers or as coaches instead of acting as care providers. So many church leaders have set their sights on the peripheral matters such as attendance numbers and program numbers instead of pursuing the more important matters such as real growth in discipleship. Being large is not an indicator of success but whether people are coming to Christ and being shaped into Christ's image. Ministry goals should focus on the quality of membership rather than the quantity of members. The

⁶¹ Scott Thomas and Tom Wood, *Gospel Coach: Shepherding Leaders to Glorify God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 28.

beautiful thing is that as a church focuses on the quality of their discipleship strategy, the church will naturally grow because more people are committing to the ministry. Things that are living naturally grow. Members will learn how to better love God, one another, and their neighbors. The unsaved will encounter a supernatural experience when they witness transformation taking place in community life.

Christ is at the head of the organization because the Father has given him all the authority to direct the affairs of his church. The elders or pastors work in the churches not only as leaders but capable, gifted administrators, conducting the affairs of the church. The people are the workers whom Christ has gifted. They, in turn, use their gifts to equip other workers to carry out the ministry of the church.⁶²

Stanley and Willits ask, "People will never come to experience the benefits of your ministry unless they can easily connect to it. Have you created a maze or steps to connection? If you have provided steps, are they easy, obvious, and strategic?"⁶³ People who attend churches are either consumers or they are owners in the ministry. We want to move people toward greater commitment.

The challenges that the church encounters today are unique, unlike those at any other time in history. Churches all across America are experiencing a decline in attendance and ministry passion, and many churches are dwindling to the point of closure. Churches must come to awareness regarding the changes in culture and rethink their strategy for effective disciple making. The church must experience a renewed interest in the Great Commission and develop a process that assimilates every person into the life of the church. They should understand that disciples move through stages of maturity in the Christian life as they learn to develop into mature leaders of the church.

As Stetzer and Geiger comment, "The health, long-term mission, and viability of the church are not going to be

⁶² Malphurs, *The Dynamics of Church Leadership*, 88.

⁶³ Stanley and Willits, *Creating Community*, 175.

determined by those who gather on Sunday morning. The future of the church will be determined by the depth of its disciples.”⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Stetzer and Geiger, *Transformational Groups*, 18.

Gaining by Losing: Why the Future Belongs to Churches that Send. J. D. Greear. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015. 256 pages. \$19.99.

If you are a pastor or church leader, this book will challenge you to change the scorecard for how you measure success in ministry. J. D. Greear, senior pastor of Summit Church in Raleigh-Durham, NC, argues convincingly that the true metric is not our seating capacity but our sending capacity. Greear calls churches, no matter their size, to return to the New Testament emphasis on making disciples and unselfishly sending them out to reproduce more disciples and new churches—rather than gathering them, counting them, and keeping them. To see global gospel advance and churches multiplied, Greear contends, churches must be willing to generously give away their resources—their leaders, people, money, time, and giftedness.

For local churches in North America to faithfully fulfill their Great Commission calling to reach our continent and the global nations for Christ, we need thousands of new churches--and the God-prepared leaders to start them. In *Gaining By Losing*, Pastor Greear uses the inspiring testimony of his own church to demonstrate how committed churches send out trained teams of their best people to parent daughter churches, thereby sharing in the passion, presence, and purpose of Christ, the Great Commissioner. He argues on clear biblical grounds that healthy churches are sending and planting churches—and that healthy Christians are going Christians. Every church and every Christian is born to reproduce.

The author is no arm-chair theoretician; nor is he a careless exegete. Greear has a Ph.D. in systematic theology from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary where he is also a faculty member. His doctoral dissertation focused on the correlations between early church presentations of the gospel and Islamic theology. Greear has also authored three other published books. Under his visionary leadership, Summit Church has been transformed from a plateaued 40-year-old traditional Baptist church of 350 people to become a dynamic, growing multi-site church. Summit has impacted not only its own city but over the last twelve years released and sent out over 650 of its

own people—many of them recent college graduates whom they have mentored to join church planting teams. Amazingly, Summit has now planted twenty five domestic churches and ninety international churches (116).

The book is split into two parts. Part one explains why churches should send and discusses some of the sending challenges. Greear shows that (1) all Christians are under gospel obligation (Rom 1:14); (2) the God of the Bible is a sending God who sent his best into the world to rescue the lost (forty-four times in the NT Jesus is referred to as “sent”); and (3) all believers, as followers of Christ, are thus called to be “sent ones,” to be on mission with Jesus (John 20:31). Rather than viewing an elite special class of “super-saints” as “missionaries,” sending churches are convinced that “all of God’s people are commanded to go” and thus “all of God’s people are sent” (34). Greear sums up his position on the importance of mission with a quotation from Charles Spurgeon: “Every Christian is either a missionary or an imposter.” He also points to Christopher Wright (in line with other evangelical missiologists of our day), that *the church was formed by God and exists for his mission*. Greear adds, “Without the [Great Commission] mission, a church is not a church; it’s just a group of disobedient Christians hanging out” (38). Then, having laid this solid theological foundation, Greear, in the rest of this first section, tells the story of how their church came to these core motivating convictions, journeying, often painfully, toward becoming a city-focused, gospel-driven, and Great Commission-shaped sending church.

Part two, the bulk of the book, lays out and describes *ten keys*, or “*plumb lines*” which have shaped Summit’s church ministries. Using Scripture, anecdotes, and insightful illustrations, Greear demonstrates how any congregation can develop a sending culture and strategy. This reviewer believes these tried-and-proven principles, if properly understood and contextually implemented, could revolutionize the way churches do mission(s), enabling churches to see the Great Commission accomplished in this generation.

Devoting an entire chapter to each principle, Greear shows how to build a missions ethos that pervades the entire church and

suggests many practical ways churches can implement each principle. This reviewer will seek only to briefly summarize these ten Great Commission plumb lines. First, to develop a sending culture, moving people from selfishness to generosity, leaders must teach their people that the church's mission is *rooted in, sustained and motivated by a deep and passionate understanding of the gospel* (57-67). Second, they must teach the Great Commission as not merely a calling for some but an enduring mandate for all; this assumption that "*everyone is called*," challenges "ordinary believers" to use their "secular" vocations to strategically advance the mission of God and enables church leaders to empower and mobilize many for local and global missions (69-81). Third, sending churches must balance being *both attractional* ("Come and see") *and missional* ("Go and tell"); they must seek to grow *both deep* (in the gospel) *and wide* (in the mission), becoming churches that are *both faithful and fruitful* (83-99). Fourth, aiming to *transform an audience into an effective army* of sent-ones, the church must become "not [just] a group of people gathered around a leader, but a leadership [development and empowerment] factory" (101-17). Fifth, the sending church is one that "makes visible the invisible Christ" in their community by not only proclaiming but *powerfully demonstrating the gospel* through changed lives and intentional (not random) acts of kindness and community service (119-31).

Greear's sixth plumb line is the core conviction that "disciple-making is the central component of the Great Commission" and "ought to be the standard by which we should judge *every* ministry in the church." Thus, the metric for any ministry's success is whether it is producing reproducing disciples and raising up its own leaders from within the assembly (133-48). Seventh, is the conviction that "every [staff] pastor is our missions pastor" and thus every ministry of the church "should be leading people into God's global mission" (149-59). His eighth: churches pursuing a sending culture are moving toward becoming multicultural, seeing *racial reconciliation as a fruit of the gospel* and teaching their people to "live multicultural lives, not just host multicultural events" (161-77). Ninth, sending churches challenge would-be disciples to be risk-takers;

corporately they are willing *to take great risks* as they sacrificially, and by faith, invest their best people and resources in gospel ventures and church planting (179-89). Finally, leaders of sending churches are constantly seeking to birth and cultivate missionary vision among their people; in so doing they build corporate momentum for needed change in order to reach more people far from God (191-200).

Gaining By Losing concludes with two very practical appendices which, in my opinion, are worth the price of the book. The first shares steps for setting up an *effective international missions strategy* for the local church, suggesting eleven helpful building blocks. Among other things, this appendix argues that short-term mission trips are not a waste of time and shows how they can be beneficial when teams go to assist, catalyze, and empower nationals, allowing them to set the agenda (200-19). The second appendix shows how to develop a “*domestic*” *church planting strategy*. It describes *why* church planting is “paramount in the mission” of God and should “occupy a large portion of our sending portfolio.” To recruit planting teams, Greear believes that church leaders should take the initiative to “call out” qualified harvesters rather than merely “call for” volunteers. He also argues that multiplying churches will develop a leadership pipeline in order to cultivate church planters and teams from the harvest rather than to import them from other ministries (221-38). This reviewer believes every North American pastor would profit greatly by reading and applying these two very practical appendices.

In the closing section of this review, I’d like to highlight what I see as the main strengths and weaknesses of this book.

Strengths

There are at least four strengths to this book. First, it is clearly *gospel-centered*. A point of the book is that the gospel is central in the Christian life and in church planting/missions. Greear argues, “The gospel is not just the diving board; it is the pool” (57). With Tim Keller, he believes that the gospel is not just the A-B-Cs of Christianity; it is the A through Z. God’s people are best motivated

toward a spirit of generosity and sacrifice not by guilt or greed (two commonly used tools of some preachers) but by grace (60-61). "Believing the gospel," Greear writes, "leads to becoming like the gospel. Those who go the farthest and give the most are most aware of how far Jesus went and how much he gave up to reach them" (66). Throughout the book, Greear shows many practical implications springing from passion for the gospel.

Second, the book sets forth a *sound ecclesiology*. Greear comes from an independent Baptist background and is convinced that the local church is plan A in God's Great Commission purposes. He challenges pastors and churches to take the lead in global and local missions, not being overly dependent on denominational structures or parachurch groups. He calls for churches to keep the main thing the main thing (making disciples) and so set up discipling and leadership training strategies (pipelines, pathways). He rightly advocates church-based mentoring residencies to fully prepare key harvest leaders and church planters—not relying too heavily on the academic institutions.

Third, this treatise reflects a *balanced missional perspective*. Greear states over and over that churches must be evangelizing and making disciples at home and abroad. Believers must never forget that both Christians and churches need to be outward focused to survive, grow and send. Greear's premise that everyone is called to be a missionary in their own setting would challenge lots of pew sitters to become more active in the Great Commission. His reminder that our ecclesiology should be a good mix of "missional" and "attractional" is vital to keep churches healthy and capable of reproduction. I appreciated Greear's emphasis on how the church is a place for believers to gather and be equipped for the mission of Monday-Saturday. He points out that of the forty miracles recorded in Acts, thirty-nine happen outside the church walls. His conclusion: the main place God wants to manifest his power is in the community (94-95).

Fourth, *Gaining By Losing* is *eminently practical*. Books about being missional are prevalent today but, in this reviewer's opinion, are often quite theoretical and idealistic. They frequently rely on undefined terms and lofty concepts without

digging into “how.” I appreciate Pastor Greear’s contribution because he deals not only with the biblical/theological foundation but also shares suggested ways to implement and contextualize his recommendations. Greear’s use of real stories and ministry experiences at Summit Church helps readers get a real-life picture of how one might put these ideas into practice in an actual church setting. Another really practical component of this book, as already noted, are the appendices, which share detailed steps for developing international missions and domestic church planting strategies.

Weaknesses

Faulty Exegesis: There were a few places where I felt Scripture may have been misinterpreted or misapplied. One of Greear’s foundational verses for the book is John 12:24; in the introduction, he writes about a “principle of the harvest,” how the seed that dies is ultimately a picture of what must churches do—die to her own selfish ambition. Contextually, however, this verse seems to speak about the seed of Christ and the fruit (the salvation of souls) of his substitutionary death (cf. John 12:23). Though I don’t necessarily disagree with the principle Greear is advocating, I’m not sure this is the best text to base it on. I also did not see the connection of churches being attractational from Exodus 19:5–6 and 1 Peter 2:9–11; 3:15 (86, 87). These texts seem to be more about going out than about our drawing in seekers. There are few other debatable passages but these are the exception and not the norm in this book; overall I felt Greear handled Scripture well.

Calling Confusion: My second critique of this book is the at times confusing discussions on the subject of Christian calling. Greear’s fourth chapter focuses on the “myth of calling” and argues that every Christian “has at least two major callings”—the call to use their “secular” vocation “for the glory of God and the [gospel] blessing of others” and the call to make disciples in obedience to the Great Commission. Thus he challenges his people and readers, “*Whatever you’re good at [vocationally], do it well for the glory of God, and do it somewhere strategic for the*

mission of God" (75, emphasis his). While I am in agreement with this last statement and understand his intent to motivate lay ("ordinary") believers to "live sent" and use their God-given skills to advance the gospel globally, my concern is that Greear may be undermining the still-needed role of the vocational frontier missionary whom God has called to take the gospel to unreached people and places. Greear does a good job of establishing from both Scripture and church history that the Christian faith spread rapidly in the first century primarily through the witness of "normal" Christians—not because of those in "full-time" vocational ministry such as the apostles. He believes, and I tend to agree, that "the question is no longer *if* we are called to leverage our lives for the Great Commission, only where and how" (78). While there is a sense in which all believers are "called" to be on mission with Christ because of the clear command of the Great Commission, that reality in no way nullifies the specific calling (desire, enabling, gifting) a sovereign God still gives to some to cross barriers of culture, ethnicity, and language with the Good News and to plant new churches where Christ is not known and named (Rom 15:20). While there are NT examples of people in missions who did not have dramatic, specific callings (as Greear rightly points out)—such as Phillip, Timothy, Priscilla and Aquila—Scripture is clear that the Lord of harvest does call out some from the life of a missional church to be full time sent ones (Acts 13:1-2). My concern is that Greear's focus on helping "regular believers" in the local church "recover the understanding that they are called to the mission and shaped by God for a specific role in that mission" (78) may minimize the vital role of the frontier missionary church planter and the unintentionally undermine the historic classical understanding of missionary calling. The truth is, finishing the Great Commission task in our lifetime will require the full involvement of *both* God-called vocational missionaries *and* obedient marketplace ("tent-making") lay people who are bi-vocational.

Strong Statements: A final small critique I have of this book is that at times, in his zeal to build his case, Greear seems to overstate his arguments and unintentionally puts his readers on a guilt trip. I realize Greear states he is seeking to avoid the guilt-

trip aspect of Great Commission ministry, but I still at times sensed it. For example, he writes, "...You can't really call yourself a follower of Jesus if you don't see yourself as sent" [a missionary] (p. 34). And "When is the last time your sacrifices for the mission made someone question your sanity?" (p. 59). Or "Failure to risk our lives to the fullest potential for the kingdom of God is as wicked as the most egregious violations of the laws of God" (p. 181). By the end of the book it felt like Greear was saying that all churches/Christians who do not do mission in an all-out, pedal-to-the-metal, risky way are grossly sinning.

Bottom Line: Despite these few concerns, I heartily recommend this book to those who want a better understanding of why and how churches should be sending-focused. This treatise is a gospel-centered, compassionate, and bold call to lead churches to fulfill the Great Commission faithfully. It is encouraging, equipping, and motivating. Be ready to be challenged to pursue a sending mindset in your life and church.

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