NSBT Special Issue in Honor of D. A. Carson

themelios

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EDITORIAL

D. A. Carson's Influence on Biblical Theology

— *Benjamin L. Gladd* —

Benjamin Gladd is Executive Director of The Carson Center at The Gospel Coalition.

This special edition of *Themelios* is dedicated to D. A. Carson for his work in the field of biblical theology. While several tributes have been written to honor Carson, we wanted to honor him for his critical role in shaping biblical theology within evangelicalism. We invited authors who contributed to the New Studies in Biblical Theology (NSBT) series to participate, and they heartily agreed. Carson has wisely edited this esteemed series for the last thirty years. The articles in this *Themelios* issue either develop a point of their existing NSBT volume or build upon it. We would like to thank Inter-Varsity Press UK and B&H Academic for cosponsoring this issue and for their vital role in distributing the NSBT series. The goal of this editorial is to appreciate D. A. Carson's understanding and vision of biblical theology and to offer a few suggestions for the future of the discipline.

1. What Is Biblical Theology?

Before we discuss Carson's influence on biblical theology, we must first take a moment to discuss what it is. That may sound easy enough, but it is not. As Carson himself states, "The history of 'biblical theology' is extraordinarily diverse. Everyone does that which is right in his or her own eyes, and calls it biblical theology."[1] There is no lack of resources that chart the history of this enterprise, so we need only to mention the high points. Scholars often point to Johan Philipp Gabler's 1787 address at the University of Altdorf as a watershed moment.[2] Gabler famously argued for the distinction between biblical and systematic theology. And while Gabler's approach has considerable issues, such as his commitment to the Enlightenment and rationalism, his approach is far reaching and, in a sense, continues even to this day.[3]

Geerhardus Vos's definition is still one of the best: "Biblical Theology, rightly defined, is nothing else than the *exhibition of the organic progress of supernatural revelation in its historic continuity and*

[1] D. A. Carson, "Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 102.

[2] John Sandys-Wunsch and Laurence Eldredge, "J. P. Gabler and the distinction between biblical and dogmatic theology: Translation, commentary and discussion of his originality," *SJT* 33 (1980): 133–58.

[3] See Matthew Barrett, *Canon, Covenant and Christology: Rethinking Jesus and the Scriptures of Israel*, NSBT 51 (London: Apollos, 2020), 17–18.

multiformity."[4] Biblical theology is, therefore, supremely biblical and traces the unfolding nature of God's plan of redemption across the two Testaments.

2. The State of Biblical Theology in North America

Since the 1990s, biblical theology has flourished in North America. While scholars in the United Kingdom, Germany, and Australia have made significant contributions to the field of biblical theology, scholars in North America have produced and continue to produce biblical-theological resources at an incredible rate. Why is this the case? What factors led to this surge?

There are many reasons, but two come to mind. The rise of evangelical colleges and seminaries in the 1980s and 1990s certainly played no small role. Evangelical higher education during this time was generally marked by a commitment to inerrancy and the integrity of Scripture. Providentially, at this time, literary criticism began to gain traction in the wider academy, and evangelicals became increasingly interested in reading texts as a whole. The various criticisms of the New Testament guild—such as source, redaction, form, and so on that dominated the landscape for over a hundred years—were beginning to wane. The time had come to read texts not in piecemeal, or as the product of long development, or the interests of purported communities, but as a whole.

With a commitment to inerrancy and an interest in reading holistically, evangelicals became increasingly impassioned to study how Scripture works—not simply how Scripture relates to the world around us but how it works internally. Evangelicals began to look afresh at how Scripture relates to itself and how the two Testaments relate to one another. At this time, authors and publishers came to recognize a growing hunger for biblical theology, a way of reading the Bible that remains attuned to the themes that run across both Testaments and to the storyline of Scripture.

Publishers released several seminal projects on biblical theology around this time. For example, Graeme Goldsworthy's three books, *Gospel and Kingdom*, *The Gospel in Revelation*, and *Gospel and Wisdom*, were widely read and later published as a trilogy.[5] Inter-Varsity Press UK approached D. A. Carson in the early 1990s to start a new series devoted to exploring the Bible's unfolding storyline—the New Studies in Biblical Theology series. Little did anyone know at the time that the series would publish its sixty-fifth volume some thirty years later. Other series took a similar approach, such as Zondervan's Studies in Old Testament Biblical Theology. By the early 2000s, the field of biblical theology was taking shape. For example, the *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, edited by T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner, left an indelible mark.

By the 2010s, biblical theology reached a new phase. The time had come for biblical theology to work its way into the soil of the local church. Crossway green lit the Short Studies in Biblical Theology series and InterVarsity Press (US) started the Essential Studies in Biblical Theology series. Scholars also started examining how individual books or corpora were biblical-theological in nature, as Zondervan began producing their Biblical Theology of the New Testament series, and B&H Academic started a full-blown commentary series, the Evangelical Biblical Theology Commentary (now Lexham).

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[4] Geerhardus Vos, "The Idea of Biblical Theology as a Science and a Theological Discipline," in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*, ed. Richard B. Gaffin Jr. (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1980), 15 (emphasis original).

[5] Graeme Goldsworthy, *The Goldsworthy Trilogy* (Carlisle, PA: Paternoster, 2000).

By the mid 2020s, interest in biblical theology shows few signs of abating. Students and pastors are excited about learning and preaching the storyline of the Bible. If evangelicals continue to dig deep into the Scriptures and unearth precious biblical-theological insights, then the next few decades should yield an abundance of publications.

3. D. A. Carson's Understanding of Biblical Theology

Now that we've canvassed a brief history of biblical theology in the last few decades, the goal of this section is to trace Carson's seminal thoughts on what biblical theology is and isn't. In his 1997 essay "New Testament Theology," Carson approvingly cites Vos's definition of biblical theology (see above) and then states, "The critical expressions [of biblical theology] are progress, process, and historical continuity and multiformity."[6]

One of the best places to learn about what he thinks about the nature of biblical theology is his fine essay "Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology" in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, which was published in 2000.[7] He defines biblical theology as follows: "Ideally, biblical theology, as its name implies, even as it works inductively from the diverse texts of the Bible, seeks to uncover and articulate the unity of *all* the biblical texts taken together, resorting primarily to the categories of those texts themselves." He then states in the next paragraph, "The discipline as a whole must strive toward the elucidation of the biblical documents along the axis of redemptive history."[8] Carson's definition of biblical theology is, therefore, principled yet broad.

The process begins with exegesis, moves into the realm of biblical theology (BT), and then traces throughout the history of the church (HT). After considering historical theology, the subject matter is then synthesized using the categories of systematic theology (ST). Finally, and often overlooked, the process ends with a pastoral concern (PT): how should these insights be applied to Christian living and worked out in the local church? But Carson argues that this movement from exegesis to BT through HT to ST and PT isn't linear. It contains a series of "feedback loops." These loops "go back and reshape how one does any exegesis or theology."[9] Nevertheless, these loops must be checked against Scripture. He avers, "The line of final control is the straight line from exegesis right through BT and HT to ST and PT. The final authority is the Bible and the Bible alone."[10]

4. D. A. Carson's Contribution to Biblical Theology

Having sketched Carson's understanding of biblical theology, we now turn to his general contribution to the field. It's difficult to summarize the significance of Carson's work as it relates to biblical theology,

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[6] Carson, "New Testament Theology" in *Dictionary of the Later New Testament and Its Developments*, ed. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 807; see also Andrew David Naselli, "D. A. Carson's Theological Method" in *The Gospel and the Modern World: A Theological Vision for the Church*, ed. Brian J. Tabb (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2023), 11–50.

[7] Carson, "Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology," 89–104.

[8] Carson, "Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology," 100 (emphasis original).

[9] D. A. Carson, "The Bible and Theology," in *NIV Biblical Theology Study Bible*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 2321–4. See also Naselli, "D. A. Carson's Theological Method," 32–33.

[10] Carson, "The Bible and Theology," 2323.

since his work has always had a steady eye on the field of biblical theology. Nevertheless, we will isolate two dimensions that have shaped his writings.

The first is Carson's robust view of Scripture. He unabashedly argues for an evangelical view of Scripture—the cornerstone of his entire career.[11] He notes that the doctrine of inerrancy, properly understood, wasn't a modern-day invention but a long-held tradition. Scripture is without error in whatever it affirms, properly taking into account the text's genre, linguistic expressions, and so on.

The second is a consequence of the first: the relationship between the Old and New Testaments. Because the Bible is authoritative, inerrant, and clear, we should take seriously how the apostles read and apply Israel's Scriptures. He argues that the apostles use the Old Testament in a number of different hermeneutical ways. One of Carson's chief insights in this regard lies in the apostles' use of the technical term "mystery." Having taught a doctoral course over the years on "mystery," Carson perceives that students of Scripture who are interested in studying the relationship between the Testaments must, at some point, reckon with the notion of mystery.

Why is mystery so important to the study of the New Testament's use of the Old Testament and biblical theology at large? The biblical conception of mystery finds its point of origin in the book of Daniel, where it refers to God's end-time revelation that was previously hidden but has now been revealed (see Dan 2:31–35, 36–45). This hidden-but-now-revealed framework is found in Second Temple Judaism and continues into the New Testament. The apostles often weave mystery into their discussions of exceedingly important topics such as the nature of the kingdom, the cross, the resurrection, the relationship between Jews and Gentiles, and the gospel itself. Herein lies Carson's contribution: "Paul thinks of the gospel he preaches as simultaneously something that has been predicted in times past, with those predictions now fulfilled, and something that has been hidden in times past, now revealed."[12]

Carson then applies this hidden-but-now-revealed schema to Paul's typology of the Passover lamb. Carson states, "Paul certainly does not insist that when the stipulations regarding the Passover lamb were first written down, both writer and readers understood that they were pointing to the ultimate 'lamb,' the Messiah himself. So it would be fair to say that such notions were still hidden—hidden in plain view, so to speak, because [they are] genuinely there in the text (once one perceives the trajectory of the typology), but not yet revealed."[13] Carson, in other words, argues that the ultimate meaning of the Passover lamb is genuinely "there" in the Old Testament. This meaning was hidden for a time and then revealed to the apostles with the coming of Christ.

Carson then delivers what I think is one of his most significant insights on Paul's (and the apostles') use of the Old Testament:

> And that, perhaps, is why a "mystery" *must* be *revealed*, but also why it *may* be revealed *through the prophetic writings*. In other words, Paul feels no tension between these two stances because, as he understands them, there isn't any. And this is why the gospel

[11] See especially D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge, eds., *Scripture and Truth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983); D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge, eds., *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986); D. A. Carson, "Approaching the Bible," in *New Bible Dictionary*, ed. D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer, and G. J. Wenham, 4th ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 1–19; D. A. Carson, ed., *The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016).

[12] D. A. Carson, "Mystery and Fulfillment," in *Justification and Variegated Nomism, Volume 2: The Paradoxes of Paul*, ed. D. A. Carson, Peter T. O'Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 425.

[13] Carson, "Mystery and Fulfillment," 427.

> itself, not to say some of its chief elements, can be simultaneously seen as something that has been (typologically) predicted and now fulfilled, and as something that has been hidden and has now been revealed. What starts off as almost intolerable paradox emerges as a coherent and interlocking web.[14]

Instead of minimizing one or the other, Carson holds continuity and discontinuity together. And this finely tuned approach has considerable hermeneutical pay off. There have been a few evangelical attempts in recent years that explore this line of thinking,[15] but much work remains.

5. The Future of Biblical Theology

Now that we've looked to the past and present, we are in a better position to look to the future. In his influential essay "Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology," Carson argues for the presence of "countless quotations from, allusions to, and echoes of the OT found in the NT." He then mentions the apostles' diverse use of Psalm 2:7 in Acts 13:32–33, Hebrews 1:5, and 5:5. Instead of arguing for the apostles' irresponsible hermeneutical use of Psalm 2:7 (à la Barnabas Lindars) or their special, charismatic insight (à la Richard Longenecker), Carson thinks it's wise to examine these three uses of Psalm 2:7 at a deeper level. The goal is to determine if these three texts contain "interlocking typologies having to do with David, the temple, the priesthood, and other subjects."[16]

In typical Carson fashion, he then gives one of the most succinct insights on the future of biblical theology: "They [evangelical approaches to Scripture] have an enormous bearing on how one should properly read the Bible. Moreover, *they are the very stuff of biblical theology that seeks to track the Bible's storyline and explore the significance of the canon.*"[17] His point is that inner-biblical connections are the foundation of responsible biblical theology.

Above we discussed the current state of biblical theology and the incredible number of biblical-theological resources. One legitimate critique of what's happening now in the vast field of biblical theology is an overemphasis on themes that stretch from Genesis to Revelation. Of course, the Bible invites us to trace these themes, and we should continue to tease out these dimensions, but inevitably the field will become crowded with these types of thematically driven projects. The time has come for us to lean into inner-biblical connections.[18]

With hundreds of books on biblical theology already published, how does the church go about producing more robust biblical-theological resources? Three ideas spring to mind: First, we need to discover more of these inner-biblical connections. Evangelical publishers are now producing more

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[14] Carson, "Mystery and Fulfillment," 427 (italics original).

[15] See e.g., G. K. Beale and Benjamin L. Gladd, *Hidden but Now Revealed: A Biblical Theology of Mystery* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 329–38. Kevin J. Vanhoozer has recently and generally advocated for this approach, though he doesn't use the framework of "mystery" (*Mere Christian Hermeneutics: Transfiguring What It Means to Read the Bible Theologically* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2024]).

[16] Carson, "Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology," 98.

[17] Carson, "Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology," 98 (emphasis mine).

[18] For projects that pursue this endeavor, see, for example, G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, eds., *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007); G. K. Beale, D. A. Carson, Benjamin L. Gladd, and Andrew David Naselli, eds., *Dictionary of the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2023); and G. K. Beale and Benjamin L. Gladd, eds., *Connecting Scripture New Testament* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2025).

advanced cross-referencing systems, and this is much needed. A word of caution, though: these references need to be verified, one by one. Exegesis is a science and an art, so linguistic parallels can only go so far. That said, a great deal of biblical theology has yet to be harvested using the category of allusions and echoes.

New Testament scholars have spent much time focused on Old Testament quotations and not enough time teasing out the significance of Old Testament allusions. There are, after all, about three hundred and fifty Old Testament quotations in the New Testament, and two thousand to four thousand Old Testament allusions in the New Testament. For example, if one were to open to a robust New Testament commentary that was sensitive to the apostle's use of the Old Testament, one would find lengthy discussions of Old Testament quotations but barely a comment on Old Testament allusions.

Second, evangelicals must explore the use of the Old Testament in the Old Testament. Evangelicals have sometimes been reluctant to work on the use of the Old in the Old, because they are forced to take a stand on issues of authorship and dating. But the time has come for evangelicals to jump in with both feet and study how Old Testament authors often weave antecedent revelation into their material. We should be encouraged by a recent spate of evangelical resources in this field,[19] but a great deal of work remains.

Third, the church must continue to wrestle with the nature of fulfillment. One thing that evangelicals and the wider academy generally agree upon is the pervasiveness of inaugurated eschatology in the New Testament. But, within this framework of the already/not-yet, much more work remains on precisely how the apostles relate mystery to particular themes. Some biblical theology today tends to flatten the relationship between the Old and New Testaments. Scholars often trace individual themes throughout the Old Testament, but when they arrive in the New Testament, they often overlook how that particular theme takes on generally unexpected dimensions. Rarely does a theme move across the canon without any modification or development in light of Christ's work.

6. Conclusion

D. A. Carson has taught us that to do biblical theology—to do it well—depends on a high view of Scripture. This is why evangelicals have been at the forefront of the field and why each succeeding generation must reaffirm the authority and inerrancy of Scripture. Carson has also laid a foundation for responsibly tracing connections between the Testaments. We must embrace a hermeneutical model of reading the New Testament that upholds continuity and discontinuity. To tilt the scale too much in one direction creates an imbalance that fails to do justice with the text. As evangelical scholars consider what projects they should write in the future, it would be wise to tease out the continuity and discontinuity of Scripture.

Carson demonstrated a keen ability to convene other scholars and work alongside them. This is one of the reasons that there are so many NSBT volumes and that he has edited a breathtaking number of projects. He was always on the lookout for new developments and insights that unearthed the truth of the Bible; he saw gaps in the literature and was intent on filling them. If evangelicals are to continue the

[19] E.g., Gary Edward Schnittjer, *Old Testament Use of Old Testament: A Book-by-Book Guide* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2021); Matthew E. Swale, *Scripture's Use of Scripture in the Old Testament: Three Instincts for Identifying Allusions* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2025).

legacy of Carson, they must do so as a team. We are, after all, "servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God" (1 Cor 4:1).

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The Temple in Biblical Theology

— *G. K. Beale* —

G. K. Beale is professor of New Testament at Reformed Theological Seminary in Dallas, Texas and the author of The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God *in the NSBT series.*

I first got to know Don Carson when we worked together as co-editors of the *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*. We had a good working relationship and the *Commentary* did better than either of us expected. He also made very helpful editorial comments on my book in the NSBT series, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, in which he also gave me more word count than typical for the series. A friend of mine recently said, "I am glad Don is on our side." I heartily agree with that, since Don has been a valiant and penetrating critic of liberal approaches to the Bible. Anything Don writes can be relied on! Don has been most concerned to minister to the church rather than to academic studies, though he has certainly been proficient in the latter. I thank God for his life!

From the beginning in Eden, God designed the temple for his glory, and he commissioned Adam and Eve, his representatives, to fill the earth with his presence (Gen 1:28). God extended this commission to the patriarchs and Israel, culminating in the temple's construction under King Solomon. Yet, God didn't intend for the physical temple to remain in one localized place but to fill the whole earth (1 Kgs 8:27; Isa 66:1). Ultimately, God dwelled among us in Christ, the true temple (John 2:21), and he dwells in those who believe in Christ (1 Cor 3:16; 2 Cor 6:16–17), fulfilling the prophecies of the end-time temple (e.g., 2 Sam 7:12–14; cf. 2 Cor 1:20). The book of Revelation describes the new heaven and earth as a tabernacle, the final dwelling place of God (Rev 21:1–3, 22). The original commission that God gave to Adam and Eve is finally fulfilled when God dwells intimately with redeemed humanity in the new heavens and earth.

1. Eden, Adam's Commission, and the Expanding Dwelling Place of God

In the garden of Eden, God made his dwelling as a temple. While "temple" or "sanctuary" were not used in Genesis 1–3, Ezekiel called Eden "the garden of God" and "the holy mountain of God," containing "sanctuaries" (Ezek 28:13–14, 16, 18), just as Israel's latter temple was described as containing sanctuaries (Lev 21:23; 1 Kgs 6:29; Amos 7:9). Unsurprisingly, God was "walking back and forth" in Eden (Gen 3:8) just as he did in the temple (Lev 26:12; Deut 23:14; 2 Sam 7:6–7; Ezek 28:14). Furthermore, a river flowed from Eden (Gen 2:10), just as a river flows from the eschatological temple (Ezek 47:1–12; Rev 22:1–2). Like Israel's later temple, the garden of Eden had a tripartite sacred structure with the waters of Eden at the core (the holy of holies); the garden (the holy place), adjacent to the water source; and the uninhabited outer area of the world (the outer court). The tree of life of Eden was also represented in Israel's temple by the lampstand outside the holy of holies in the holy place, with seven protruding branches, and the garden'stemple's entrance was on the east side just like the temple (Gen 3:24; cf. Exod 15:17; Ezek 40:2; 43:12).

Within Eden, Adam had a missional purpose not only to guard but also to expand the boundaries of Eden until it filled the earth (Gen 1:28). As a priest, Adam was to "work … and keep" Eden (2:15), just as the priests were to "serve" and "guard" the temple (identical words used in Hebrew in Num 3:7–8; 8:25–26; 18:5–6; 1 Chr 23:32; Ezek 44:14). Ezekiel even pictured Adam in priestly attire (Ezek 28:13), with jewels that corresponded to those listed for the high priest (Exod 28:17–21). God commissioned Adam to guard this sanctuary and fill the earth with his glory (Gen 1:28). Adam and his descendants were to extend the geographical boundaries of the garden until Eden covered over and filled the whole earth with the presence of God. Sadly, Adam failed in his protective and missional purpose by admitting an unclean serpent that defiled this temple. As a result, Adam lost his priestly role, and God cast him out of the garden.

2. Adam's Commission and the Patriarchs

Adam's commission to be a king-priest and expand the borders of the Garden-temple was passed down to Noah (Gen 9:1, 7), Abraham (12:2–3; 17:2, 6, 8; 22:18), Isaac (26:3, 4, 24), Jacob (28:3–4, 14; 35:11–12; 48:3, 15–16), and Israel (47:27; Deut 7:13). The following references show a taste of how the language of Genesis 1:28 is repeated :

> And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth." (Gen 1:28) And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. … Be fruitful and multiply, increase greatly on the earth and multiply in it." (Gen 9:1, 7) "I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring … ; and your seed offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies [= 'subdue and rule'], and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed." (Gen 22:17–18) God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and multiply you, that you may become a company of peoples. May he give the blessing of Abraham to you and to your offspring with you, that you may take possession of the land of your sojournings that God gave to Abraham! (Gen 28:3–4)

God passed down the universal scope of the Adamic commission to Abraham and his descendants, who must bless all the nations of the earth. Intriguingly, this Adamic commission was passed down to Abraham and his descendants in small sanctuaries. Just as Genesis 1:28 was to be carried out in a localized sanctuary (Eden) whose boundaries were to be enlarged, so the restatement of this commission happened in the context of building small sanctuaries. God appeared to the patriarchs (cf. Gen 12:8; 13:3–4), so that they would "pitch a tent" (LXX: "tabernacle") on a mountain and build "altars," probably for sacrifice. This place was often called "Bethel," meaning the "House of God." The combination of these elements occurs elsewhere in the Old Testament that describe Israel's tabernacle or temple. These small sanctuaries reflect how their progeny was to spread out from a divine sanctuary to subdue the earth. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob built holy shrines that dot Israel's future land of promise and anticipate the Solomonic temple where God would take up residence.

3. Tabernacle, Temple, and the Cosmos

Israel's tabernacle and temple were more than just places of worship; they represented a re-establishment of the Garden of Eden's sanctuary in a symbolic model of the cosmos. The tabernacle and temple were miniature representations of the larger, cosmic temple that would ultimately encompass heaven and earth. This symbolism began with the patriarchs, whose altars represented smaller sanctuaries, pointing toward a later, larger temple. Similarly, David's preparations for the temple display the same characteristics as the altars of the patriarchs. Like the altars, a theophany accompanies the origin of Israel's temple on a mountain (1 Chr 21:16; 2 Chr 3:1), leading to the building of an altar for burnt offerings (1 Chr 21:26). Eventually, the place is called the "house of the Lord God" (1 Chr 22:1).

Just as the boundaries of Eden were to be expanded until they filled the earth (Gen 1:28), so the structure of Israel's temple mirrored the structure of the cosmos. This structure, with its symbolic significance, pointed to how the dwelling place of God in the temple was to expand to fill the entire universe. Psalm 78:69 explicitly draws out the parallels between the temple and the cosmos, since God "built his sanctuary like the high heavens, [he built the sanctuary] like the earth, which He has founded forever" (see also Exod 25:8, 40). Indeed, the temple is a model of the entire heaven and earth. God didn't intend for this replica to contain his presence in one localized place; instead, God declares, "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me?" (Isa 66:1). Indeed, the temple was intended to be a small model of something much bigger; God and his universal presence could never be contained by any localized earthly structure.

The tripartite structure of Israel's temple confirms the expanding purpose of God's temple, a structure that mirrored the tripartite structure of the cosmos. The three sections of the temple—the Holy of Holies, the Holy Place, and the outer Courtyard—symbolized different realms of the cosmos:

- The Holy of Holies represented the invisible heavens, where God's presence was fully manifested and where cherubim, similar to those around God's throne in heaven, symbolized the guarding of God's divine presence.
- The Holy Place symbolized the visible heavens, reflected by the variegated colors of the numerous curtains resembling the visible sky ("blue and purple and scarlet yarns," Exod 26:31) with flying cherubim (winged-like creatures) woven into the curtains. The lamps on the seven lampstands in Solomon's temple symbolized the heavenly lights (sun, moon, stars) and the creative work of God in forming the starry cosmos.
- The Courtyard symbolized the visible earth and sea, associated with the natural world and life on earth, as indicated by the large bronze washbasin (referred to as the "sea") and the altar (linked to the earth, as they were built of uncut stones in the tabernacle).

This tripartite structure, with its symbolic significance, pointed to a larger cosmic purpose: the temple as a model of the eventual expansion of God's presence to fill the entire universe.

Interestingly Israel was repeatedly called the "garden of Eden" (cf. Gen 13:10; Isa 51:3; Joel 2:3; Ezek 36:35), partly perhaps because Israel was to expand the limits of the temple and of its own land to the ends of the earth in the way that Adam should have. This was Israel's ultimate task, as is apparent from a number of OT passages prophesying that God will finally cause the sacred precinct of Israel's temple to expand and first encompass Jerusalem (Isa 4:4–6; 54:2–3, 11–12; Jer 3:16–17; Zech 1:16–2:11), then the entire land of Israel (Ezek 37:25–28), and then the whole earth (Dan 2:34–35, 44–45; cf. Isa 54:2–3). Isaiah 27:6 even prophesied that in the latter days Israel will finally expand the garden sanctuary over

the entire world: God will cause "Jacob to take root, Israel shall blossom and put forth shoots, and fill the whole world with fruit."

Israel, though, failed to carry out this commission, and they did not spread the light of God's presence throughout the earth (Isa 42:6; 49:6). Though the temple was to reflect Israel's calling as a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exod 19:6), Israel wrongly saw the temple as a symbol of their exclusive relationship with God rather than a call to spread God's presence throughout the earth. As a result, Israel was exiled because they committed idolatry and failed in this mission. God cast into an exile of darkness and chaos that reflected chaos before creation (cf. Isa 45:18–19). So, God began to build a new temple that would expand to fill the earth as he originally intended. How would this occur?

4. Christ and the Temple in the New Creation

The New Testament presents Christ and his followers as the temple in the new creation, since Christ is the temple toward which all the previous temples anticipated (2 Sam 7:12–14; Zech.6:12–13). Christ fulfills the prophecies of the temple, and so does the church, as an extension of Christ's body. In Revelation, the vision of God's presence filling the earth is finally fulfilled as the new heaven and earth are presented as a cosmic temple.

4.1. Christ as the Fulfillment of the Temple

The Old Testament temples pointed toward Christ, the embodiment of God's presence on earth. Jesus takes over the function of the temple by offering forgiveness of sin during his earthly ministry and becoming the ultimate sacrifice in God's true invisible temple to which the sacrificial system pointed (Rom 3:25). His death and resurrection fulfill the redemptive purpose of the temple, as he becomes the "cornerstone" (Mark 12:10; Matt 21:42; Luke 20:17) and the true "tabernacle" (John 1:14). The death and resurrection of Christ's body from the dead should be understood as the destruction and rebuilding of the temple (John 2:19–22). The resurrection marks the beginning of a new creation. God's tabernacling presence begins with Christ until that presence fills the whole cosmos at the end of the age.

4.2. The Church as the Temple

At Pentecost, the tongues of fire depict God's tabernacling presence with the church as in the heavenly temple (Acts 2:3; cf. Isa 30:27–30). Paul pictures the church being built together as a dwelling of God and holy temple, with Christ Jesus as the cornerstone (Eph 2:20–22). Individual Christians (1 Cor 6:19) and the corporate church (1 Cor 3:16; 2 Cor 6:16; 1 Pet 2:5; Rev 3:12; 11:1–2) are called temples of the living God. Indeed, the church fulfills Old Testament prophecies for the temple (e.g., Lev 26:11–12 and Ezek 37:26–27 in 2 Cor 6:16), since all the promises of God have begun their fulfillment in Christ (2 Cor 1:20; 7:1). While the church begins to fulfill the eschatological anticipation of the universal expansion of the temple, there is still an expectation that God's glory will consummately fill the cosmos.

4.3. Revelation and the Cosmic Temple

In Revelation 21:1–3, John envisions the new heaven and earth as a cosmic temple where God's presence finally fills all of creation. The new Jerusalem and new creation represent God's tabernacle among his people. The new heaven and earth of Revelation 21:1 is interpreted and pictured as the "new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven" where "the dwelling place of God is with man," and "He

will dwell with them" (Rev 21:2–3). God's presence is not confined to Israel's temple or the church, but this presence now fills the entire heavens and earth. This fulfills the end-time goal of the temple in the garden of Eden, as the dwelling place of God now fills the earth. Now the entire heavens and earth are the temple and dwelling place of God. Therefore, there will be no small architectural temple like Israel's old temple, because the Lord and the Lamb will be its temple, radiating out their glorious temple presence and thus transforming the whole new creation into a big cosmic temple (Rev 21:22). In this way, the temple prophecies (e.g., Ezek 37, 40–48; Isa 54) are fulfilled and completed.

5. Conclusion

Christ's death and resurrection inaugurate the new creation, where his presence dwells in his people and ultimately fills the entire cosmos. The church, as the temple, represents the beginning fulfillment of the temple prophecies, marking the already-but-not-yet aspect of the new creation. The temple is now embodied in Christ and the church, and this presence of God is expanding through the church until, one day, it will completely fill the heavens and earth at the end of time.

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A Biblical Theology of Image and Idol

— Richard Lints —

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It is my honor to contribute an essay in this special edition of Themelios paying tribute to the much beloved Don Carson and for his consequential work in curating the renaissance of scholarship in Biblical Theology in our time. Don's insistence that attention be paid to the dominant themes that echo across the entirety of the biblical canon has proven to be an incredibly rich research project which has borne fruit in his edited series, New Studies in Biblical Theology. Don has not only proven to be one of the most respected exegetes in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries but also a first class scholar who has ranged so widely across all of the theological disciplines. It was Don's Cambridge dissertation, published as *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility*[1] that opened my eyes as a young seminary faculty member nearly forty years ago to the possibility that the disciplines of theology and biblical studies could be allies rather than enemies. He insisted that readers of Scripture pay attention to the sacred deposit of the tradition of Reformed theology as they work their way across the full breadth of the canon. Toward that end, my goal in what follows is to trace the theologically significant categories of image and idol from the opening chapters of Genesis through the paradigm episode of idolatry in Exodus 32 all the way to the New Testament witness to Jesus as the perfect Image.

1. Creation in the Image of God

The biblical account of idolatry is rooted in the image-making dynamic that runs across the breadth of the canon. At the heart of this pattern is a "reflective" relationship rooted in the nature of worship. The *imago dei* (image of God) in the opening chapter of the Bible (Gen 1:26–27) refers to the theological stamp placed upon the original man and woman God created, along with their generations of their offspring. Idolatry, by contrast, is the practice that turns this imaging relationship theologically upside down. Instead of reflecting God as "images" of their creator, humans craft an idol and "reflect" it instead. In both instances, human identity is rooted in what they reflect and worship. The surprising end to this story in the NT is that the perfect Image of God (Jesus) enters into human history in visible form and restores the image in God's people and breaks the power of the idols.

It is important to note that the language of the *imago dei* occurs only two other times in the book of Genesis (5:1 and 9:6), and from that point forward across the Old Testament the language of idolatry becomes prominent. Outside of Israel's primeval history (Gen 1–11), the language of *image* occurs almost exclusively as a pejorative term, *graven images* (e.g., Exod 20:4, 2 Kgs 11:18; 2 Chr 23:17; Num

[1] D. A. Carson, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility: Biblical Perspectives in Tension* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1981).

33:52; Amos 5:26; Ezek 7:20) and there are always negative overtones associated with the reflection of those graven images.

The Hebrew term for image (צֶלֶם) has the semantic range to include idols, having the substantive denotation of making visible what was not readily seen. Across the OT, when *"image"* is used negatively, it most often refers to Israel's dalliances with foreign gods. Surrounded by nations where idol-making and idol-worship was common, Israel was called to be utterly unique. There were to be no material images of an invisible deity among the Israelites. In neighbouring cultures, carved statues abounded as the visible representations of invisible deities in whom the hopes of the nations resided. By contrast, in Israel there were to be no carved images, because God had already made a concrete image both visible and tangible to all who would look—namely, humankind.

The narrative of the Exodus from Egypt is followed quickly by the precarious journey into the Sinai wilderness. Israel did not know from where food or water would come, nor how they would navigate through the desert. They were met with a surprising series of displays of YHWH's faithfulness to them. Geographical guidance was provided by a pillar of fire at night and a moving cloud by day. Water came from a rock. Bread descended from heaven. Quail mysteriously came from the skies. In spite of all of this, Israel could not quite accept that God would continue to provide for them.

2. Turning the Story Upside Down

The landmark OT text regarding idolatry, Exodus 32, records the golden calf incident. It is a paradigmatic text that echoes across the OT. Running from Exodus 32:1 to 33:6, the account of the golden calf is carefully crafted in the book of Exodus. It is framed by an initial ascent up the mountain, followed by descent, *then* concluding with another ascent and final descent. At the outset, Israel crafted a molten image of a cow likely modelled upon the agrarian idols of Egypt, where Israel had recently come. In the cloud on top of the Mount, YHWH told Moses that the Israelites were "*your* people whom *you* brought up out of the land of Egypt" (Exod 32:7, emphasis mine). Moses bristled at this and responded in verse 11, "Why are you angry at this people whom *you* have brought out of Egypt" (emphasis mine). The central question of this exchange was "to whom do the people belong?" This is the question of identity at the heart of the story of idol-making in Exodus 32. YHWH's covenantal ownership of Israel was threatened by Israel's attempt to grant ownership rights to the idols. And significantly, Israel's security was threatened in this change of ownership. Their purpose and significance became as fragile as the calf that could be made one day and smelted out of existence the next. From this point forward in Israel's history, acts of rebellion were characterized by appeal to the calf's attributes—a stiff neck, a hard heart, ears that cannot hear, and eyes that cannot see.

The canonical echo of the Sinai episode reinforces its enduring significance for Israel's future relationship to YHWH. In Moses's song recorded in Deuteronomy 32, there is a strong interplay between the idols made by the people and the people themselves. The idols are "no gods," and the people became, as a result of their idols, "no people." In Numbers 33, YHWH issued a warning regarding the gods/idols Israel would confront on the other side of the Jordan when they attempted to possess the promised land. The "rebellion in the desert" served as the reminder of Israel's fragile status. In 2 Kings 11:18 and the parallel account in 2 Chronicles 23:17, the images/idols of Baal were destroyed with the recognition that they were powerless competitors to YHWH, though they were powerful competitors for Israel's loyalties. Nehemiah's recounting of redemptive history at the rebuilding of the temple called

to mind both God's great act of deliverance from Egypt and Israel's "great sin of the molten calf" (Neh 9). The hymnody of Israel likewise connected the great act of God's redemption in the exodus and the contrasting act of Israel's infidelity:

> At Horeb they made a calf and worshiped an idol cast from metal. They exchanged their Glory for an image of a bull, which eats grass. They forgot the God who saved them, who had done great things in Egypt. (Ps 106:19–21)

Israel's prophets often referred to Israel's hard-heartedness, their stiff-necks, their having ears but not hearing and eyes but not seeing (e.g., 2 Chr 30:8; 36:13; Neh 9:16–17; Job 41:24; Isa 6:9; 32:3; 44:18; Jer 5:21; 7:26; 17:23; Ezek 3:7; 12:2; Ps 95:8; 115:5–6; Zech 7:11). Thus, the people were becoming as spiritually inanimate as the idols they worshipped. The idols looked like living persons but were not able to talk or to walk (Jer 10:5). Idols without life could not give what they did not have and therefore would never be life-giving.

The prophet Isaiah offered the clearest and richest denunciation of idolatry in the period of the monarchy. The second half of Isaiah opens with four spiralling poems, each in turn having to do with the confrontation between YHWH and the gods of the nations. In Isaiah 40, the idol maker was portrayed as god-like in his creative abilities. But unlike God, the idol maker grew faint, and his strength wore out. He became hungry and thirsty as all humans do. God not only does not grow weary or faint, but in the familiar refrain of Isaiah 40:31, "those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary; they will walk and not be faint." Isaiah's argument became satirical. Imagine the irony. The idol maker cut down trees to make his idols. He used some of the wood for cooking, some of it for heating, and the rest of it to make his idols/gods, as if the scraps of wood were worthy objects of worship. The satire unveiled the genuine irrationality of idolatry. The idol maker ventured to make his own idol as the means to create and control his own significance and safety. In Isaiah 44 the idols were said to be "empty/nothing" (44:9, תֹּהוּ) hearkening back to the formlessness and void (תֹהוּ וָבֹהוּ) of the earth in Genesis 1:2. The emptiness of the idol, however, belied the arrogance of the project. The idol maker supposed that they were creating a deity. The rhetorical question Isaiah appeared to be asking was, "who indeed is the person who could possibly make their own god?" In other words, what sense does it make to say that the god who made us is made by us?

3. Turning the Upside Down Story Right Side Up

In the NT the *imago dei* is most directly connected to Christ (2 Cor 4:4; Col 1:15). Jesus is the "exact representation" and that by which the invisible God has become visible (cf. Heb 1:5; John 1:18). Christ is the perfect image who suffers in our place and for our redemption (Eph 5:25–26). As a consequence, human identity was most clearly seen in Christ, the one in whom, through whom, and for whom humankind was made (1 Cor 8:6; Col 1:16). The apostles claim that the visibility of Christ as the image of God (εἰκὼν τοῦ θεοῦ) is precisely what inverts the corrupted order of idolatry. In Christ, the Creator entered into creation and was thereby recreating the cosmic order after his image.

The idols represented the inversion of the original theological order of representation and reflection. The idols depicted an exchange of the glory of God for the foolishness of this world (Rom 1:23). The practices of idolatry assumed that the gods were beings adequately represented by objects of gold or silver and that could be shaped and moulded by their worshippers (Acts 17:29). These practices pervaded the Graeco-Roman world and were difficult for newly converted Christians to repudiate in

their entirety. The religious customs associated with the temple cults were often considered normative for all citizens of the empire. Rejecting those customs entailed dissonance with imperial rule and inevitably put Christians at risk. The opposite danger was just as real as well. Showing any kind of loyalty to the idols would be viewed as unfaithfulness to Christ and thereby put one's place in the covenant at risk (1 Cor 10:14; 1 John 5:21).

In Jesus's interaction with the Pharisees, there is one prominent place where idolatry is implicitly mentioned. In Mark 12 (parr. Matt 22:15–22 and Luke 20:19–26), the Pharisees asked Jesus whether Jews should pay taxes to Caesar. The question implicitly asks whether the image (εἰκών) of Caesar on the coins used to pay taxes constituted idolatry. The coin requested by Jesus did in fact portray the emperor as the *Pontifex Maximus* (High Priest) of the Roman religion. In his response to the query of the Pharisees, Jesus understood the challenge of coins but resisted the assumptions behind the questions. Treating another human as God was wrong. But the question was what practices constituted treating another human as God. Did paying taxes to Caesar entail treating him as God? Jesus reasoned that the emperor could be recognized as important to the well-being of the empire without also attributing to him divine powers. In this sense Jesus was demythologizing the emerging emperor cult—Caesar was not God—while also granting the emperor his right to collect taxes for the well-being of the people. This became the pattern for Paul in dealing with food offered to idols. If the idols were treated as divine, then Christians should abstain from the food offered to them. But if the idols were treated as simply blocks of gold or silver, then eating food offered to them was permissible.

The "emperor cult" became more aggressive after Jesus's death, extremely so under Domitian (emperor from AD 81–96), demanding a test of loyalty from all Roman citizens because of the imperial claim to deity. This would have been quite different under Augustus and Tiberius, the emperors in Jesus's time, where there appeared to have been no such test. Relinquishing the coin to the tax collectors by Jesus amounted to no more than an affirmation that Caesar possessed some form of civil authority. Undoubtedly, had Jesus been confronted with a claim about the alleged deity of the emperor, he would have steadfastly denied it. Towards the end of the first century, Christians faced this precise situation. As the book of Revelation manifests, martyrdom was the cost of refusing the emperor's test of loyalty and denying his claim to deity.

It is somewhat surprising to find that greed is included as an idolatry-related vice in the NT. There appears to be no particular concrete relation of greed to the temple cults of the Graeco-Roman world, and yet Paul denounced greed as idolatrous in Colossians 3:5 and Ephesians 5:5. No other vices in the NT are listed in such straightforward connection to the larger theological umbrella of idolatry. Why greed? The initial clue might come from the reminder that idolatry is fundamentally defective worship. It is rooted in the desire to replace God as the proper object of worship with an alternative. There were any number of alternative objects of worship which the Scriptures confront. The yearning or longing for these alternative objects of worship could well be covered under the umbrella term of greed. If we remember the ten commandments in Exodus 20 or Deuteronomy 5, the first four commands centered on the proper worship of YHWH, while the final set of commandments warned against the desire for that which is not properly yours—effectively marking the distinction between the rightful longing for God and the unrighteous longing for alternative objects to satisfy the human heart. If greed is the longing for ultimate satisfaction elsewhere than God, it would render the human heart idolatrous. Money might well be one object commonly associated with greed (Matt 6:24; Luke 16:14), but longing for ultimate satisfaction could well come from other creaturely realities like power or sex or reputation.

A great and terrible theological exchange takes place in the practice of idolatry according to Paul's argument in Romans 1. The glory of God is exchanged for images of every sort of creature: men and birds and land animals and even reptiles. This description of the tragic exchange at the center of idolatry is a Pauline way of providing a big picture of human corruption. The apostle issues the familiar canonical claim that there is no comparison between the Creator and the creature, and yet humans have persuaded themselves into thinking that other created things will satisfy their deepest longings.

There are important contrasts throughout Paul's argument in Romans 1 illuminating the emotional power of idolatry. Hoping to hold down the truth, humans were held down by unrighteousness (1:18). That which can plainly be seen was exchanged for darkness (1:20–21). Though they knew God, they did not know God (1:21). Claiming to be wise, they became fools (1:22). The glory of God was exchanged for but a dim image. The shadow was embraced rather than the reality (1:23). Refusing to honour God, they dishonoured themselves (1:24). Truth was exchanged for a lie (1:25). In each of these, there was a turning upside down or inside out of the created order.

In 1 Corinthians 10, Paul pursues another familiar line of argument against idolatry. He turns his attention to Isaiah 44, where idols are neither alive nor do they represent gods who are alive. The non-living idols represent non-existent gods. Paul admonished the Corinthians to flee from idolatry because the gods represented did not actually exist. In this light they surely could not provide any grounds for hope in the face of adversity.

Following Paul's account of the theological exchange of image and idol, Luke records Stephen's speech in Acts 7, reminding the Jewish ruling court that Israel's long history of idolatry was embedded in Israel's habits. Stephen cites Amos 5 as evidence from Israel's own history of the pattern of idolatry. He infers from the Golden Calf episode that all future idolatry (that the prophets later condemned) had its origins in the wilderness. Even the worship of Moloch and Rephan by the northern kingdom of Israel, which Amos had cited, were linked to the pattern that began with Israel's worship of the Golden Calf in the Sinai wilderness.

Likewise in Acts 17, Paul confronts the common religious idolatry of the Graeco-Roman world at Athens, a city filled with idols, likely more pervasive than in other cities of comparable size in the Graeco-Roman world. Its long and distinguished history had in part been tied to the heritage of temples and statues dedicated to a variety of emperors and gods. The Athenian idols were considered a sign of its cultural significance. Paul's critique of idolatry in Athens hinges on whether it makes sense to suppose that the Creator of the world can be fashioned out of gold or silver. It was God who created humankind, not the reverse. God is not an image that can be formed from the imagination or creativity of human artists. Paul claims that it would be illogical to suppose that humans can find their safety and significance by creating a god who gave them meaning in the first place.

The *imago dei* attains a unique status in the person of Jesus Christ, both in his perfect humanity and also in his perfect obedience to the Father even to the point of death on the cross. It is not an abstract metaphysical claim, but primarily a confession about salvation. The claim that Jesus is the "image of the invisible God" (Col 1:15) is the means to establish that God is renewing/restoring/ redeeming his people into his image. As the perfect image of God, Jesus is "reconciling to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross" (Col 1:20). In Christ, God has become visible.

Image and Idolatry remain theologically important concepts for contemporary Christians. The enduring presence of the *imago dei* pushes us to recognize that the only genuine answer to our deepest longings for security and significance are to be found in the God who created us and brought redemption

to us in Christ. By contrast, idolatry provides the pungent reminder that we are all prone to find security and significance in places other than the God who created and redeems us. We no longer bring carved statues into worship, but powerful present realities such as money, sex, and power often subvert our deepest longings for God and thereby blunt the force of the *imago dei* in each of us as it beckons us to worship the Triune God. Often our deep anxieties related to jobs, families, reputations, or retirement are accompanied by attempts to suppress those anxieties with idols. It is when we turn good things into God-things by attempting to create safety and significance on our own terms that we enter into the land of idolatry. Surely we must recognize the idols of our own making are no match for the Living God of the universe.

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A Call for Biblical-Theological Reformation: Prayer and Biblical Theology

— *Gary Millar* —

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I've sent your manuscript to Don Carson." I confess those words were more than enough to strike fear into my heart when I first read them! David Kingdon, then Theological Books Editor at IVP, went on to tell me that a new series was about to be launched, to be called "New Studies in Biblical Theology." To be honest, I wasn't really listening, because I was still reeling at the thought of Don casting his rigorously piercing eyes over my ill-formed prose![1]

I hadn't met Don at this stage, but after reading his Pillar commentary on John (as well as *A Call to Spiritual Reformation, Showing the Spirit, The Sermon on the Mount* and *From Sabbath to Lord's Day,* alongside the volumes on Scripture and hermeneutics) I did associate him with peerless exegetical insight and relentless logic. I think it's fair to say that more than anyone else, Don has been my model in this: he is the epitome of careful, rigorous, humble, warm-hearted exegesis. But the more I read (and the more I heard Don speak), something else stood out—Don's relentless commitment to and championing of *biblical theology.*

This was not, of course, a solo project. In the 1990s there was a gathering tide of interest in biblical theology. People like Graeme Goldsworthy (in *Gospel and Kingdom*) and Ed Clowney were leading the way in recovering this discipline. But for me, it was Don Carson's quiet influence which ultimately had the greatest impact.

I think there were several reasons for this. The first was that Don is, first and foremost, a brilliant exegete. This was vital in persuading many of us of the importance of biblical theology *as a vital and a rigorous discipline,* rather than a vague if spiritual activity. The second is that Don understands the *hermeneutical* importance of biblical theology. His exegesis was not only immensely rich but also thoroughly gospel-shaped. It was this ability to bridge a careful reading of the text with a Christocentric application which made him a trusted teacher across the English-speaking world and beyond. In addition, Don captured the richness of biblical theology in a way which transcended the tyranny of a

[1] By the way, he was immensely kind about the book, which eventually saw the light as *Now Choose Life: Theology and Ethics in Deuteronomy,* NSBT 6 (Leicester: Apollos, 1998).

single metaphor. I think this is a particularly significant insight, which laid the foundation for the New Studies in Biblical Theology and much more besides.

Don would often say that the rich tapestry of biblical theology is made up of around twenty key themes which interweave from Genesis to Revelation. I pressed several times for the "canonical" list, but he was strangely evasive. Eventually, he sent me the course he had taught for many years at Trinity, in which he outlined "about 20 themes"! The uncertainty flows from how we distinguish overlapping concepts (e.g., sacrifice, atonement, holiness, cleanness, etc.), but Don's insight was that the precise taxonomy is less important than the recognition that no one theme or category can successfully "rule" the others. This vital insight provided a framework for people introduced to biblical theology by works like *Gospel and Kingdom* or *God's Big Picture* by Vaughn Roberts to press more deeply into the richness of the biblical witness.

In all this, the remarkable thing was that Don saw the kingdom significance of this new awakening of biblical theology. The impact of the gospel-centred movement (and The Gospel Coalition in particular) outside the US, and particularly in the UK, Ireland, and Australia was deeply dependent on its solid theological footing in the work and personal reputation of D. A. Carson. He was relentlessly willing to travel the world, modelling biblical-theological exegesis and preaching and encouraging like-minded people wherever he found them. For all this and more, I thank God for him.

1. A Biblical Theology of Prayer

I am also indebted to Don for his encouragement to undertake the daunting challenge of writing a biblical theology of prayer.[2] The idea for attempting this was born when I was asked to do a series of talks on prayer at a young adults' conference here in Brisbane. I went looking for a broad biblical-theological survey of the biblical material and couldn't find one.[3] There were, of course, all manner of helpful books on the *practice o*f prayer (e.g., Paul Miller's *A Praying Life*[4]), including many based on key New Testament prayers (most often the Lord's Prayer), but nothing that I could find attempting a Genesis-Revelation cumulative study which explores the nature and development of prayer in the Scriptures. This led me to go looking for the first prayer in the Bible.

Interestingly, this search opened up all kinds of rich avenues of inquiry. For a start, it instantly highlighted that enjoying a relationship with God and praying to God may be related, but they are not equivalent categories. Adam "walks with God" in the Garden of Eden (Gen 3:8), as Enoch would as an outlier after the Fall (Gen 5:24). Presumably he "talks with God as a man would with his friend," as Moses

[2] J. Gary Millar, *Calling on the Name of the Lord: A Biblical Theology of Prayer*, NSBT 38 (London: Apollos, 2016).

[3] The closest thing was Carson's own edited volume, *Teach Us to Pray: Prayer in the Bible and the World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990). However, despite some excellent chapters in the collection (e.g., Ed Clowney on "A Biblical Theology of Prayer" [pp. 136–73], the approach was not uniformly biblical-theological. Carson's own magisterial study of Paul's prayers (*A Call to Spiritual Reformation: Priorities from Paul and His Prayers* [Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1992]) does exactly the kind of thing I was looking for. However, it obviously only covers a fraction of the prayers of the Bible. There are one or two academic studies from various theological perspectives which attempt this (e.g., Patrick D. Miller, *They Cried to the Lord: The Form and Theology of Biblical Prayer* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994], but there had not been a reformed evangelical contribution from a biblical-theological perspective for at least a quarter of a century.

[4] Paul E. Miller, *A Praying Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2009).

did in the remarkable events at Sinai (Exod 33:11). This kind of relational immediacy (and intimacy) is what humanity is made for, is what is interrupted in Genesis 3, and is the goal of God's grand redemption project (so, e.g., Revelation 21:3; 22). This, perhaps surprisingly, has significant ramifications for how we understand what the rest of the Bible says about prayer. Not least, it means that *we must be careful not to collapse our relationship with God into the single category of prayer*. If the relationship between God and his creatures precedes prayer, and eventually transcends prayer, then no matter how important prayer is, it cannot be equated with this relationship.[5] But that does beg the crucial question: what is prayer?

2. So What Is Prayer?

This almost seems too obvious to ask, but it is a vital question. Too often, we simply assume that we know what prayer is, draw on the vague stock of common ideas which many religions share, or construct a simple definition without really rooting it in the language or thought-world of Scripture (e.g., prayer is "talking to God," which, while not exactly *wrong*, is painfully inadequate and without much textual warrant).[6] This is where thinking biblical-theologically really helps.

If prayer doesn't appear necessary in Genesis 2 or Revelation 21–22, then it seems reasonable to say that prayer is a gift which God gives us for use in our fallen world—in the period between Genesis 3 and the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is something which God invites us to do in the interim.

So what, then, is the *purpose* of prayer? It is tempting to answer instinctively that prayer is to allow human beings to continue to enjoy God's presence this side of the Fall—to allow us to taste what Adam, Enoch, and Moses experienced. The problem is, that simply isn't what the text says. In the Old Testament, prayer is simply "calling on the name of the Lord," which is where Genesis 4:26 comes in.

3. Why Enosh Matters

Initially, it was John Calvin who drew my attention to the theological significance of "calling on God's name." In his section on prayer in the Institutes, he writes: "*Just as faith is born from the gospel, so through it our hearts are trained to call upon God's name [Rom. 10:14–17].*"[7] For Calvin, prayer is something which is stirred up by God himself and is basically asking him in faith to do what he has promised. It is God's gospel initiative which makes prayer possible, and it is the gospel which defines both who we need to ask and what we need to ask for most. With those words percolating in my mind, I came to Genesis 4:25–26:

> And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and called his name Seth, for she said, "God has appointed for me another offspring instead of Abel, for Cain killed him." To Seth also a son was born, and he called his name Enosh. *At that time people began to call upon the name of the Lord.*

[5] So for example, the title of James Houston's book *Prayer: A Transforming Friendship* (Oxford: Lion, 1989), whilst having much to teach us, is slightly misleading. Prayer may be a means through which we *experience* this 'friendship', but it is not constitutive of the friendship. This kind of relational (or experiential) language is often used in church without much thought or theological justification.

[6] Bruce Waltke, *Finding the Will of God: A Pagan Notion?* (Gresham, OR: Vision House, 1995).

[7] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* 3.20, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, Library of Christian Classics (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox, 1960), 850–51.

In *Calling on the Name of the Lord,* I argue at some length that this is not only the first example of prayer in the Bible but sets the pattern for what is to follow. When the promised rescuer of Genesis 3:15 does not show up immediately (neither Seth nor Enosh do anything to suggest that they are the expected "serpent-crusher"), humanity starts to call on the name of Yahweh. Whilst this could simply mean that a couple of generations after Eden people start to feel a general need, I would argue in the context of Genesis that this prayer is much better understood as crying to God, asking him to act as he has said he would. The prominence of the "seed" in Genesis is so significant that it is hard to justify reading Genesis 4:26 in any other way.[8]

The rest of the book demonstrates that virtually every prayer in the Bible has at its core a cry to God to do what he has promised. Obviously, in the Old Testament these prayers revolve around his promise to Abraham and those who follow, whilst in the New Testament the focus of both the prayers we are urged to pray and those that are prayed by the writers for God's people (including us) are what has been achieved for us by the Lord Jesus Christ. But the basic structure is the same. *Biblical prayer is essentially "calling on the name of the Lord," asking him to come through on his promises.*

4. Something I Wish I Had Expressed More Clearly

This is not to say that this is the sum total of our relationship with God. There are a variety of ways in which we are called to relate to God and even a range of things that we are to *say* to God. We are, of course, urged to adore God, called to confess our sins and to give thanks to him, as well as ask (to use the classic formulation of adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication). My contention is that in biblical usage these are activities which are related to prayer (and, in some contexts, necessary steps to prayer), but that the language of "prayer" is not an umbrella term which can be broken down into a series of constituent parts—the "prayer" bit is essentially focused on calling on God to do his work and to keep his promises.

I would also argue that even in the New Testament, when God has announced a vigorous "yes" to all his promises in the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Cor 1:20), this is still the essential nature of prayer. Whilst it is gloriously true that we now pray as those who through the Spirit share (somehow) in the sonship of Christ, which enables us to cry "Abba, Father"(Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6), the focus of this privilege is *free access to ask* rather than experiential intimacy. This is confirmed by Jesus's words in the Sermon on the Mount:

> Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and the one who seeks finds, and to the one who knocks it will be opened. Or which one of you, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a serpent? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him! (Matt 7:7–11)

This takes us to the very heart of New Covenant prayer. Like in the Old Testament, prayer is basically asking God to fulfill his promises by faith—however, on this side of the death and resurrection of Jesus, we have much greater clarity on what God is doing and will do in our world. This is foreshadowed

[8] See the foundational articles: T. Desmond Alexander, "Genealogies, Seed and the Compositional Unity of Genesis," *TynBul* 44 (1993): 255–70; "Further Observations on the Term 'Seed' in Genesis," *TynBul* 48 (1997): 363–67.

powerfully in the Lord's Prayer. It is *not* an amalgam of adoration, confession, etc., nor is it an attempt to say everything about our relationship with God. Rather, it is a series of foundational, gospel-shaped requests for God to advance his redemptive work in our world.

Of course, there is so much to say about the relationship with God we have been drawn into through our union with Christ by faith. But we must remember that prayer (our freedom to ask our Father to do what he loves to do) *is just one aspect of this filial relationship.* Yes, we are invited to "cast our anxieties upon the Lord" (1 Pet 5:7), to "draw near to God" (Heb 7:25), and even to "draw near to his throne of grace with confidence" (Heb 4:16). These are some of the many rich privileges announced in the New Testament, but in the language of the Bible *they are not described as "prayer."*

5. Jeremiah and the Prohibition of Prayer (An Exception that Proves the Rule)

This very specific definition of prayer finds unexpected support in one of the most puzzling texts in the Bible concerning prayer, which I did not address in the NSBT volume. Three times in the book of Jeremiah, the prophet is told not to pray for the people of Judah.[9] That is an astonishing (and problematic) prohibition, especially if prayer is simply a matter of talking to God. But if prayer is asking God to come through on his covenant promises, the prohibition starts to make sense.

In Deuteronomy 27 and 28, God promised that his covenant people living in his land would experience either blessing or curse (culminating in exile). The command to stop praying is simply an announcement that the tipping point has been reached, and the curse of exile is about to be experienced by the people. There is no place for praying that God will keep his promise, when his "promise" of exile has already been set in motion. In the same way that the blessings and curses of the covenant cannot be mapped directly onto salvation and damnation in the New Testament, so the prohibition on prayer needs to be understood as placing a time-specific pause on requests which will not (and cannot) be met.

Interestingly, a similar perspective is found in 1 Peter 4:7, where the apostle offers this reminder:

> The end of all things is at hand; therefore be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers.

The logic of the first part of the verse seems quite straightforward: the Lord is about to return in triumph and judgment, so it makes sense to live in a focused and Christ-like way. What is puzzling is that the apostle adds "for the sake of your prayers." What will happen if we lose sight of the "end of all things"? If we become selfish and irresponsible, then our prayers too will lose focus. We will stop asking God to work in us and those around us as he has promised before it's too late. For the apostle Peter, to pray is to ask God to work in the gospel-shaped ways that he has committed to work.

6. The Implications

Allowing the Bible itself to define and explain what God invites us to do and why when he calls us to pray really matters. It is not theological nitpicking, nor does it undermine the need for us to pray; rather, it should bring a greater urgency and energy to the task.

Understanding that prayer, at its core, is asking God to do what he has promised in and through the gospel will do four things:

[9] See Jer 7:16; 11:14; 14:11. A similar New Testament example is found in 1 John 5:16.

1. *It will change our attitude to prayer*: recognizing that prayer is basically asking God to work (and not an arcane spiritual exercise, or even an exercise in relationship, where we are to "practice the presence of God") should free *all of us* to get on with the task at hand. We pray because God has told us to and because he has said he will answer when we do it!
2. *It will change what we pray for ourselves*: of course, we can ask God for anything, but the Bible clearly encourages us to focus on the things that God has already promised to do in us through the gospel. "Just as God's Word must reform our theology, our ethics and our practices, so also must it reform our praying."[10]
3. *It will change the way we pray for the church:* when we understand that prayer is focused on asking God to do his kingdom work in and through his people, it will reorient our prayers away from our immediate needs to the sweeping plans of God. Of course, we can still pray for "daily bread" (see discussion on what this means), but as Jesus taught us, those prayers will be embedded in cries for God to reveal his glory to the world through his church.
4. *It will change what we pray for other people:* if we are praying for God to do his work in us, then it will flow naturally into praying the same for other people. The best thing we can pray for those around us is that God would bring them to Christ, enable them to be faithful to Christ, and make them look like Christ. To do anything less is to sell them short.

7. Conclusion

Recovering (or discovering) a biblical theology of prayer is not an academic exercise—it should free us and motivate us to pray. God has given us the gift and task of crying out to him in this fallen world as part of his strategy to reconcile this world to himself. This is no small thing. As individuals and as the church, we need to devote ourselves to calling on his name.

[10] Carson, *A Call to Spiritual Reformation*, 17.

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Righteous by Promise: Reflections on Circumcision

— *Karl Deenick* —

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It is hard to think of anyone who has influenced my theological thinking as much as Don Carson. His clear reasoning, careful attention to the text, and understanding of the interconnections of themes across the canon have set an example to imitate for both me and many others. But what I have valued most is his ability to synthesize theological truths by carefully laying out all the data, being sensitive to the storyline of the Bible, and refusing to play one element off against another, resulting in a careful and precise articulation. His *Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God* is just one such example. It was the first of his books that I read, and his methodology set the direction for everything I have done since. I am sure I am not alone. I praise God for Don's ministry.

1. Introduction

Circumcision is undeniably central to the unfolding story of the Bible. Yet it also presents a curious puzzle.[1] In Romans 4:11, Paul remarks that Abraham's circumcision was a seal of his "righteousness by faith while uncircumcised" (Rom 4:11, my translation). But a survey of OT passages about circumcision seems to say very little, at first glance, about either righteousness or faith. Moreover, the metaphorical uses of circumcision in the OT, such as circumcision of the heart and ears (Lev 26:41; Deut 10:16; 30:6; Jer 4:4), are often understood in transformational terms, bound up with the fulfilment of the new covenant promise (Jer 31:31–34; Ezek 36:24–28).[2] In contrast, in the NT circumcision frequently occurs in the context of discussions about justification by faith (e.g., Rom 2–4; Gal 3–5; Phil 3:1–12). Historically, this has been understood within Protestantism as a judicial category—the declaration of righteousness.[3] Yet transformation and justification have traditionally been understood as quite distinct concepts, albeit related. More recently, other conceptions of justification have been proposed, such as Wright's proposal that justification refers to "covenant status."[4] But even still, that idea seems quite distinct from the ideas bound up with circumcision of the heart in the OT.

[1] Karl Deenick, *Righteous by Promise: A Biblical Theology of Circumcision*, NSBT 45 (London: Apollos, 2018), 2–14.

[2] E.g., John D. Meade, "Circumcision of the Heart in Leviticus and Deuteronomy: Divine Means for Resolving Curse and Bringing Blessing," *SBJT* 18.3 (2014): 59–85.

[3] E.g., C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, 2 vols., ICC (London: T&T Clark, 1975–1979), 1:236.

[4] N. T. Wright, *Justification: God's Plan and Paul's Vision* (London: SPCK, 2009), 128, 195.

The question, therefore, is how these apparently disparate ideas might fit together. In particular, what does circumcision communicate about both righteousness and faith?[5] There is insufficient space to do justice to such a complex theme. But what follows is an attempt to outline the key points.

2. Walk Before Me and Be Blameless

Circumcision is first introduced in Genesis 17. God commands Abraham,[6] saying,

> Walk before me and be blameless and I will give my covenant between me and you and I will multiply you greatly. (Gen 17:1–2, my translation)

It has frequently been debated what it means when Yahweh says he will "give" (נתן) Abraham his covenant.[7] After all, he has already confirmed a covenant with Abraham in Genesis 15. But a close look at the term "give" (נתן) reveals that what is at play is God delivering Abraham the *content* of what he had already promised in the covenant.[8]

There is, however, a condition to be fulfilled for the contents of the covenant to be given: Abraham must walk before Yahweh and be blameless. This is not merely a call to "integrity."[9] It is the quality of being morally upright in character.[10] Blamelessness is used, for example, to describe the perfection of Yahweh and his works (e.g., Deut 32:4; 2 Sam 22:26, 31; Job 37:16). Moreover, it is also connected with righteousness (e.g., Deut 32:4; Ps 15:2). Most significantly, blamelessness has already been paired with righteousness in the life of Noah (Gen 6:9). The implication is that the two ideas are roughly synonymous.[11] In other words, Abraham must walk perfectly, which is to say, righteously, in his relationship with Yahweh for all the promises to be fulfilled.

Several points help us to understand the nature of this demand. The first is the establishment of the covenant in Genesis 15. There Yahweh swore on oath that he would give Abraham the land he had promised (Gen 15:13–16). Moreover, the way that the covenant was established, with Yahweh alone passing between the pieces of the sacrifice, implies that the fulfilment of the covenant will depend only on Yahweh.[12] In other words, the condition of walking before Yahweh and being blameless will ultimately be met by Yahweh not Abraham.

Second, in Genesis 15, Abraham has already been reckoned as righteous/blameless solely on the basis of his faith (Gen 15:6). Although he is not morally upright and blameless in himself, Yahweh has reckoned him to be so. As noted, the covenant will ultimately be fulfilled by Yahweh, but Abraham will participate in the blessings on account of his faith through which he is reckoned to possess the very righteousness that fulfilment of the promise demands.[13]

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[5] Another frequently discussed issue is the relationship between circumcision and baptism. For a consideration of that topic, see Karl Deenick, *Washed by God: The Story of Baptism* (Ross-shire: Christian Focus, 2022).

[6] For the sake of simplicity, I will always refer to Abraham as such, even though before Genesis 17:5 his name was Abram.

[7] E.g., Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 263–66.

[8] E.g., Gen 12:7; 13:15; 15:7; 17:5, 6, 16, 20. See Deenick, *Righteous by Promise*, 17–19.

[9] E.g., Benjamin Kedar-Kopfstein, "תָּמַם," *TDOT* 15:707.

[10] Deenick, *Righteous by Promise*, 21–29.

[11] Deenick, *Righteous by Promise*, 29–32.

[12] Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis*, 2 vols., NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990–1995), 1:436–37.

[13] Deenick, *Righteous by Promise*, 30–32.

Third, a broader look at the language of blamelessness paints a picture of how the condition will be met. Fifty-one of the ninety-one references to תָּמִים in the OT occur in the context of the sacrificial system, referring to a "spotless" animal (e.g., Lev 1:3, 10).[14] At the heart of this sacrificial concept is the idea of substitution: a "spotless" animal is offered in the place of a person who is not "blameless" in order to make atonement for them (e.g., 1:4).[15] Although the sacrificial system is instigated later in history than the events of Genesis, it is clear that the practice of sacrifice existed in the time of Noah and Abraham (e.g., Gen 8:20; 22:2–8). Moreover, for the original readers of Genesis who would have been schooled in Levitical sacrificial practice, describing Abraham and Noah as blameless would have made perfect sense. They were reckoned as blameless before Yahweh through the provision of a blameless sacrificial substitute.[16]

3. The Promised Seed

The structure of Genesis 17 also demonstrates that the ultimate fulfilment of the condition of walking before Yahweh blamelessly awaited someone other than Abraham. Throughout Genesis 17, Yahweh says that he will establish (הקים) his covenant not only with Abraham but with his "seed" (זֶ֫רַע). Most immediately, this is Isaac (17:19, 21), but it also includes the generations after him (17:7). In contrast to Ishmael, who is also Abraham's son through Hagar, it will be through Isaac that the covenant promise will continue down the generations.[17]

This must also be understood within the context of Genesis itself.[18] Following the disobedience of Adam and Eve in the Garden, God tells the serpent that he will raise up a "seed" (זֶ֫רַע) who will crush the serpent's head (Gen 3:15).[19] While זֶ֫רַע can be understood as either a collective or singular noun, the singular pronoun suggests that an individual is in view.[20] Genesis, then, is framed as a search for this particular "seed." The תּוֹלֵדוֹת formulas ("these are the generations of") and genealogies that structure the book focus attention on a particular line of descent (e.g., 5:1–32; 11:10–26).[21] In addition, the content is also focussed on particular individuals, often to the exclusion of others: Adam, Seth, Noah, Abraham, Isaac not Ishmael, Jacob not Esau, and Joseph not his brothers.

It is in this context that the establishment of the sign of circumcision takes place. All this suggests that the Abrahamic covenant and the related sign of circumcision are a means by which God identifies Abraham as the individual through whom the promised "seed" will come.[22] This line of descent then comes to further expression later in the OT in the Davidic covenant. Numerous times the Davidic

[14] Deenick, *Righteous by Promise*, 26.

[15] The idea of substitution is particularly seen in the way the person lays their hands on the head of the animal (e.g., Lev 1:4).

[16] Deenick, *Righteous by Promise*, 26–29.

[17] Deenick, *Righteous by Promise*, 39–44.

[18] See Deenick, *Righteous by Promise*, 44–48.

[19] There are significant similarities between Genesis 3:15 and 17:7. See Deenick, *Righteous by Promise*, 46.

[20] C. John Collins, "A Syntactical Note (Genesis 3:15): Is the Woman's Seed Singular or Plural?" *TynBul* 48 (1997): 139–48.

[21] T. Desmond Alexander, "Genealogies, Seed and the Compositional Unity of Genesis," *TynBul* 44 (1993): 258–59; also Jason S. DeRouchie, "The Blessing-Commission, the Promised Offspring, and the Toledot Structure of Genesis," *JETS* 56 (2013): 219–47.

[22] This comports with the later description of the covenant as the covenant with "Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." The accent falls on the particular individuals and the line of descent.

covenant is expressed in terms that echo Genesis 17:1–2: if David's sons "walk before [Yahweh] in faithfulness with all their heart," then God will fulfill his promise to David to put a man on the throne (1 Kgs 2:2–4; cf. 1 Kgs 3:6; 8:23–25; 9:4–7). God's promise to Eve will be fulfilled through a descendant of Abraham, but more particularly through a descendant of David.[23]

Here, then, we begin to see why the sign is circumcision in particular. It is because the promise is bound up with a male descendant of Abraham and David. Hence the sign is attached to the part of the body responsible for procreation.[24]

4. Believing the Promise

Yet circumcision also begins to be applied metaphorically in the OT. For example, in Deuteronomy 10:16, Yahweh commands the people to "circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn." Leviticus 26, however, gives us a particularly helpful window into what is meant.[25] There God speaks to the people using similar language to that in Genesis 17. If the people "walk in my statutes and observe my commandments," then God will "give" (נתן) them rain and crops, he will multiply them and walk among them, they will be his people, and he will be their God (Lev 26:3–12). In other words, if they obey, God will give them what he promised Abraham.

However, if that does not happen, God will come against his people in increasing judgement, with the final step being exile from the land (Lev 26:14–39). Yet there remains hope despite all this,

> But if they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their fathers in their treachery that they committed against me … if then their uncircumcised heart is humbled and they make amends for their iniquity, then I will remember my covenant with Jacob, and I will remember my covenant with Isaac and my covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the land. (Lev 26:40–42)

The remedy to the judgement for their disobedience is to humble their uncircumcised hearts. The use of "humble" (כָּנַע) here in the place of "circumcise" (cf. Deut 10:16; 30:6) gives us a window into what it means to "circumcise" their hearts.[26] It means to humble themselves, "confess their iniquity," and return to Yahweh (cf. 1 Kgs 8:46–50). If the people humble themselves on account of their sin, then God will "remember" his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The judgement that is due to the people because of their sin is dealt with by the people turning from sin and appealing to God on the basis of his prior covenant with Abraham.[27]

While there is much more to say, we begin to see here a glimpse of what it means to have a "circumcised heart." It is not to have a heart that is completely obedient, nor is it a fulfillment of the new covenant promise of the law being written on the heart. It is rather to have a heart that is humble

[23] Deenick, *Righteous by Promise*, 34–39.

[24] Deenick, *Righteous by Promise*, 48–50.

[25] Deenick, *Righteous by Promise*, 53–60.

[26] "Since כנע, 'humbling, self-abasement' replaces מול as the action that solves the problem of the uncircumcised heart, it provides the exegetical key to our metonym." (David A. Bernat, *Sign of the Covenant: Circumcision in the Priestly Tradition*, AIL 3 [Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2009], 104–5).

[27] These same ideas are repeated in various ways in the other circumcision passages in the OT. See Deenick, *Righteous by Promise*, 60–96.

and repentant and that takes hold by faith of God's promise to Abraham (and Eve), to save a people for himself through a blameless seed.

5. The Promise Fulfilled

These diverse threads come together in the NT. For example, Matthew begins his Gospel with a genealogy that traces the line of promise, making clear that Jesus is the fulfilment of God's promise to Abraham and David. In Stephen's speech he castigates the religious leaders for their "uncircumcised hearts and ears" (Acts 7:51). They are "stiff-necked people." The reason is that they have refused to accept the "Righteous One." Their failure to humbly recognize Jesus as the promised Messiah is a rejection of all that circumcision pointed to.[28] In Romans 2, it is those with a "hard and impenitent heart" who do not repent, who are "storing up wrath" for the day of judgement (Rom 2:5). Whereas it is the humble and repentant, who "by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality," that will receive eternal life.[29] The latter are those whose hearts are truly "circumcised" (2:25–29).

Perhaps the clearest example, however, is in Philippians 3, where Paul counters the "mutilators of the flesh"—those who are insisting on circumcision. Paul says he and the Philippians are the true circumcision—those who "worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh" (3:3). Paul lists his previous "privileges" before he came to know Christ. Not only was he circumcised on the eighth day and from the tribe of Benjamin, he was also "blameless" (ἄμεμπτος) in "righteousness under the law" (3:6).[30]

Yet Paul now considers all that rubbish. What matters is knowing Christ and sharing in all that he has achieved in his life, death, and resurrection (Phil 3:7–11). The chiastic structure of Paul's desire is revealing. He wants to know Christ,

> not having my own righteousness from the law but the through faith in Christ from God righteousness on the basis of faith. (Phil 3:9, my translation)[31]

The fundamental problem with Paul's former "righteousness" is that it was self-generated ("my own") but also "from the law".[32] In contrast, the true "circumcision" are those who, in humble repentance and faith, look to God for righteousness as a gift in Christ. For those in the OT, that meant looking ahead in expectation to the coming of the Messiah. For those in Paul's day and since, it means receiving Christ as the promised "seed" who has now come.[33] In Christ, Paul has the promised righteousness.

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[28] Deenick, *Righteous by Promise*, 209–10.

[29] This is not a description of those who are self-righteous, as is clear most immediately from the contrast with those who are heard-hearted and unrepentant. For this and other reasons, see Deenick, *Righteous by Promise*, 143–79.

[30] The nature of Paul's blamelessness here is complex. As we have seen, the law provided for a kind of blamelessness through a blameless substitute. Nevertheless, as becomes clear, Paul's blamelessness was problematic here in that it was "my own" not "from God" and also "from the law" rather than "from Christ" to whom the law and sacrifices pointed (Rom 3:21–22). See Deenick, *Righteous by Promise*, 114–15.

[31] Deenick, *Righteous by Promise*, 124.

[32] Deenick, *Righteous by Promise*, 128–30.

[33] Veronica Koperski, "The Meaning of *Pistis Christou* in Philippians 3:9," *LS* 18 (1993): 211–13.

Moreover, just as for Abraham, that righteousness is not only a present status; it also includes the hope of perfection as a moral reality to be fulfilled at the last day (Phil 3:21).[34] Paul desires to be conformed to Jesus's death and attain to the resurrection of the dead, pressing on to take hold of "perfection" (3:10–12). Yet, that blamelessness/perfection is something that will not be fully realized until Christ presents him before the Father on the last day (Col 1:22; Eph 5:27).[35]

6. Conclusion

Circumcision was a sign of God's promise to redeem a people for himself who would walk before him and be blameless/righteous. Ultimately, the fulfilment of that came through a promised "seed," Jesus Christ, who would be sacrificed in their place. That promise was symbolized in circumcision—a sign pointing to a "seed." For those, like Abraham, who took this promise into their heart (i.e., circumcised their heart), humbly and repentantly trusting in that promise, they became recipients of that promise. They received the status of righteous/blameless even while they awaited the full realization of what had been promised—that one day they, too, would walk before God in righteousness and holiness.

[34] Deenick, *Righteous by Promise*, 124–28. As Ziesler notes, "although the forensic or acceptability aspect is present in the passage, and although the man who has righteousness from God is by this acceptable to God, the context shows a need for more than this. It suggests the new being in Christ, dying and rising with him, knowing the *power* of his resurrection. One wonders why all this is needed if the basic point is simply the imputation of righteousness" (J. A. Ziesler, *The Meaning of Righteousness in Paul: A Linguistic and Theological Enquiry*, SNTSMS 20 [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972], 150; emphasis his).

[35] Deenick, *Righteous by Promise*, 97–104.

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Abraham's Ominous Silence: Missed Opportunity or Settled Faith?

— *Stephen G. Dempster* —

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It is an honor to contribute this essay as a tribute to Don Carson. It was Don who believed in my idea for a book for NSBT based on a paper I gave at a conference. His helpful oversight sharpened my work. Since that time, I have appreciated this fellow Canadian's scholarship and mentorship from afar, and his constant desire to hear the text then *and* now.

In my book, *Dominion and Dynasty*, I described Abraham's harrowing journey to Mount Moriah as more like a trek up Mount Doom.[1] There, he was to slay his beloved child of promise as an ultimate test of his love for God. Only the audience knows that this was a test. From a literary point of view this is the climax of the Abraham narrative, as it clearly echoes his call at the beginning. But the stakes are higher. At the beginning he was told to leave (לֶךְ־לְךָ) his homeland presented with three descriptors, "your country, your people, and your father's household" (Gen 12:1), and go to an appointed place. This is his *past*. Now, in chapter 22 the same language is used to leave (לֶךְ־לְךָ) his *future* behind (these are the only times in the Hebrew Bible that לֶךְ־לְךָ occur), described four times as "your son, your only son, the one whom you love, Isaac," by going to a designated place and offering him up as a burnt offering (22:2). As far as the larger metanarrative of Scripture is concerned, this future is not only Abraham's but is destined to be the future of the world, for there can be no universal blessing without this child. It seems then as if this child of promise must experience the curse of death. "In him every saving thing that God has promised to do is invested and guaranteed … [the sacrifice] is the disappearance from Abraham's life of the whole promise."[2]

This is an extraordinarily horrific ordeal, and the text has been traditionally understood as being the ultimate test of love for God, coming near the end of the Abraham narrative. The promise that Abraham would have a child who would bless the world has now finally been fulfilled. After many delays, in which Abraham and Sarah tried to domesticate the promise (Gen 15:3; 16:1–3) and even laughed at the possibility of the birth of a child to them in their old age (17:17; 18:12), the impossible dream came true (21:1–2). And the child was aptly named Laughter, both a rebuke to their doubts and the gift of incredible life and blessing into a cursed world. And yet, "No sooner are the birth and early childhood of Isaac described than the scene shifts to the most severe crisis in the narrative. God requires Abraham to sacrifice his son as a burnt offering" (22:1–22).[3] The child whose name means Laughter will now bring

[1] Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion And Dynasty: A Biblical Theology Of The Hebrew Bible*, NSBT 15 (Nottingham: Apollos, 2003), 84.

[2] Gerhard Von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, NTL (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox, 1973), 244.

[3] Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 84.

unbearable grief. The impossible dream now becomes a lived nightmare.[4] And the text is a literary masterpiece of Hebrew narrative, "fraught with background."[5] Each word is carefully chosen, and extra words such as "son" and "father" are filled with meaning and pathos. The whole text shows the intimate and close relationship between father and son.[6] And as Stanley Walters has shown, its place in the Torah shows its connection to the sacrifices of Leviticus, in particular the Day of Atonement. Every Israelite thus becomes Isaac on the altar, delivered at the last minute by the Lord's substitute offering.[7]

But in recent times the text has been used in a number of ways, as an indication of the God of Old Testament violence, or of primitive practices, certainly not in line with Jewish and Christian traditional ways of reading the text. The text has been charged as a horrendous example of child abuse.[8] And even within various Christian circles, one Christian writer's comments are not that uncommon: "At the outset it must be made clear that we cannot really suppose that the God and Father of Jesus Christ ever made so inhuman a demand upon a father as that which is represented here."[9]

Often, when scholars make such statements, they do not provide much exegetical support for their views but are simply repulsed by the text. However, a recent book devoted to this very subject has appeared which argues that the text itself, when read correctly, criticizes Abraham instead of praising him. In other words, the traditional view that Abraham is praised for his act of supreme devotion in obedience to God is a misreading of the text. Abraham's silent obedience and so-called settled faith is a missed opportunity for growth in his relationship with God. His silence is tragic.[10] Abraham is following a different worldview, an ancient pagan one, rather than the emergent monotheism of his nascent faith, and this former worldview is the one that he should have decisively rejected. Earlier in the narrative, he was on the right track when he interceded for the sinful city of Sodom, but why did he not intercede for his own son? God was trying to help him accept Isaac, whom he had apparently esteemed less than Ishmael. The result was that after the near sacrifice, God's apparent praise of Abraham's obedience was extremely muted, and the act of near immolation resulted in a family breakup which led to generational dysfunction. Abraham never saw Isaac again.

Let me first say that I respect the author of this book. There is much in the book from which I profited, particularly his emphasis on prayer as lament giving voice to one's sufferings and complaints

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[4] Stanley D. Walters, "Wood, Sand and Stars: Structure and Theology in Genesis 22:1–19," *TJT* 3 (1987): 308.

[5] Erich Auerbach, "Odysseus' Scar," in *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature—New and Expanded Edition*, trans. Willard R. Trask, with Edward W. Said (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 1–13.

[6] "The narrator takes great pains to demonstrate Abraham's love for Isaac, thereby signifying the monstrosity of the test imposed upon one who has waited so long for the fulfillment of the divine promise." James Crenshaw, "Journey into Oblivion: A Structural Analysis of Gen. 22: 1–19," *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 58.2 (1975): 253.

[7] Walters, "Wood, Sand and Stars: Structure and Theology in Genesis 22:1–19."

[8] See e.g., Cindy Brandt, "Child Abuse in the Near Sacrifice of Isaac," https://cindywangbrandt.com/child-abuse-in-the-near-sacrifice-of-isaac/. See also Walter Moberly's comments about the current "torrent" of such comments: R. W. L. Moberly, *The Theology of the Book of Genesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 182.

[9] William Cosser, *Preaching the Old Testament* (London: Epworth, 1967), 44.

[10] J. Richard Middleton, *Abraham's Silence: The Binding of Isaac, the Suffering of Job, and How to Talk Back to God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021). Remarkably similar points were made in an earlier publication by Leonard Sweet, *Out of the Question—nto the Mystery Getting Lost in the Godlife Relationship* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook, 2004), 37–64.

to God. This was one of the ways that the author was able to reconnect with his own faith after an intense period of spiritual decline. I have to say that I have benefited immensely from his other writings and have appreciated his concern not only for exegetical detail but also for practical application. I have highly recommended his book on the image of God[11] in my classes, and the author kindly came at my invitation to deliver a paper on his insightful book treating biblical eschatology[12] at the Biblical Theology section of the Evangelical Theological Society.

At the same time, I need to express my serious misgivings about his interpretation of the Aqedah text.[13] He begins by noting the importance of lament in Scripture, as a way of expressing one's honest feelings toward God and not suppressing them, and then proceeds to discuss helpfully and pastorally some of these psalms as well as the book of Job, which he helpfully describes as "voices from the ragged edge" of Scripture. This is the context of his exploration of Genesis 22:

> My interest in the meaning of Genesis 22, the book of Job, and how they may both be read in light of the lament tradition is not simply antiquarian. Rather, this exegetical exploration has a definite theological—even a pastoral—aim. As a biblical scholar, I love the in-depth exploration of biblical texts. Yet my purpose in this book is ultimately to help people of faith recover the value of lament prayer as a way to process our pain (and the pain of the world) with the God of heaven and earth—for the healing both of ourselves and of the world.[14]

He then provides his three main reasons for questioning the traditional interpretation of Genesis 22. His first is personal:

> The first and most basic consideration [of questioning the traditional understanding of Gen 22] is that I simply do not believe the God I have come to know would ever want me to sacrifice the life of another as proof of faithfulness; nor do I believe that this God values blind, unquestioning compliance. So if I heard a voice—internal or even external—claiming to come from God, telling me to sacrifice my son, I would not automatically comply …
>
> And if (for the sake of argument), after probing and investigating, I somehow came to believe that this word genuinely came from God, I would vigorously object to the instruction and question why God would want such a thing. And I would certainly intercede for the life of my son.[15]

His second reason is that "there is significant biblical precedent not to acquiesce voicelessly in a situation that seems wrong or unjust. This precedent includes the lament prayers in the Psalter, the

[11] J. Richard Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The* Imago Dei *in Genesis 1* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005).

[12] J. Richard Middleton, *A New Heaven and a New Earth: Reclaiming Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013).

[13] Genesis 22:1–19 is known as the Aqedah text in Jewish tradition since the Hebrew word for the binding of Isaac is only used once in the Bible: עָקַד (Gen 22:9)

[14] Middleton, *Abraham's Silence*, 20.

[15] Middleton, *Abraham's Silence*, 81.

intercession of Moses after the golden calf episode, the prophetic tradition of intercession on behalf of Israel, and the vocal complaints of Job.”[16]

Finally, there is the fact of striking dissonance within the Abraham narrative itself, since a few chapters earlier Abraham had interceded quite strenuously for a foreign city, but “when it comes to his own son … Abraham is strangely silent…. The contrast with Genesis 18 is startling.”[17]

At the outset it is quite clear that Genesis 22 is a difficult text and many orthodox interpreters have realized this. Middleton has mined the Jewish tradition for interpreters who have had problems with the text. For example, the book of Jubilees presents a Satanic figure as provoking God to provide this test for Abraham (Jub 17:15–18). This coheres with the story of Job, where God allows the Satan to attack Job. But it is interesting that although Middleton does show how the NT provides examples of giving voice to lament and complaint to God, e.g., in Jesus's wrestling with God in the Garden of Gethsemane regarding his impending crucifixion, he conspicuously omits the two texts which explicitly mention the Abrahamic test and *praise* Abraham as an example of great faith and works for his obedience to the divine mandate (Jas 2:20–24; Heb 11:17–18; cf. Rom 8:32). It is clear that these texts directly contradict the thesis of Middleton and would suggest serious problems for that thesis if not for the doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture.[18]

Secondly, the fact that the text does not mention Abraham objecting to the command of God does not mean that he had no problems with it. A sensitive reader of the entire narrative knows the fulfillment of this promise was something for which Abraham had long waited. The clear implication is that this child was no ordinary child but the epitome of the blessing of God's dreams for all the families of the earth. Most commentators recognize that Genesis 22 is a mirror image of Genesis 12 and is a deliberate echo, and in the latter momentous text, Abram hears the divine command and walks away from his past with nary a word. But surely the beginning of his spiritual journey was also a momentous act of faith. The author, by highlighting mainly the actions of this knight of faith at the beginning and the ending of the narrative, is making a clear statement. And by adding only the single Hebrew word הִנֵּנִי (“Here am I”) in Abraham's response to God in the climactic text, the author is highlighting the growth in Abraham's faith. Surely he had problems with both commands because they represented the upending of his entire life. Nevertheless, in the words of 12:4, “he went” (וַיֵּלֶךְ), and in the words of 22:1, 11 where he said, “Here am I” (הִנֵּנִי), he shows his unswerving determination.

But why does Abraham not intercede for his own son as he does for Sodom? Why can't he raise one single voice of protest or intercession for his own son, while he speaks volumes for Sodom? Surely by this time he has learned something about the goodness of God, and that he can trust this God, despite appearances. He would have learned that in leaving Mesopotamia, in the Hagar fiasco, in the successful Sodom intercession…. His son, Isaac, was clearly a miraculous gift, an impossible, inconceivable dream as any budding centenarian and his octogenarian wife would realize. The Abraham narrative is clearly a

[16] Middleton, *Abraham's Silence*, 81–82.

[17] Middleton, *Abraham's Silence*, 81–82.

[18] See also the allusions to Genesis 22 in the baptism and transfiguration of Jesus in Mark 1:11 and 9:7 (“My beloved Son”). In a paper given at a conference, Middleton does raise the issue of Hebrews and its interpretation of Genesis 22 and argues that, since the scholarly consensus holds that there is little evidence of resurrection in the OT, the writer of Hebrews imported a later belief back into the text. He affirmed (erroneously) that Abraham believed that God would resurrect Isaac even if he was killed.. As far as I am aware, this is not mentioned in his book. See “Abraham's Ominous Silence in Genesis 22,” J. J. Thiessen Lecture Series, Canadian Mennonite University, 25 October 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yr0owqIk4vg.

long journey of faith, and there is something of a literary climax at the end. By being silent the tension is raised to the nth degree. The mystery for Abraham is, "How could God go back on the promise and cancel their great future of universal blessing?"[19] But the mystery is resolved with Isaac on the altar and his father now exiting his part in the salvation history of Scripture: His belief was not blind faith because he believed, because of all that had gone before, that his God could be trusted. And he was right. This explains not only his silence toward God but his faith-filled and prescient statements to his servants that he and Isaac would return after worshipping on the mountain (Gen 22:5), and his reassuring words to his son that God would provide for himself an animal for the sacrifice (22:8). Abraham's naming of the location of sacrifice as the place where God provides confirms his insight of faith (22:14). And future Israelites learn the same lesson whenever they also present their sacrifices.

The Achilles heel for Middleton's interpretation is, of course, the praise that is *heaped* on Abraham by the angel of Yahweh after Abraham passes with flying colors this test of faith. The promises to Abraham are for the first time affirmed with an explicit divine oath and emphasized by the double use of the infinitive absolute for the first time in the promises made to him. Secondly, these promises, which have always before been non-contingent, now take on the air of contingency, since twice the angel of Yahweh grounds the promise in Abraham's faithful obedience:

> I swear by myself, declares Yahweh, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.

But my point is simply this. Abraham is superlatively praised for his remarkable obedience to the divine word, and this is remembered years later in the narrative (Gen 26:5). Middleton tries to downplay this praise by suggesting that it is muted at best. Middleton believes that the Abraham narrative is best understood as a test of the patriarch's discernment of God's character rather than a test of his trust in the promises of God, come what may.

> Is the God of Abraham simply one of the pagan deities of Mesopotamia or Canaan who requires child sacrifice as a symbol of allegiance.... Or is he different, a God of mercy and love for his children, who was even willing to forgo judgment on Sodom for the sake of the righteous? That was something Abraham should have learned in chapter 18, so he could pass it on to his own children. But he didn't. The lesson was cut short—by Abraham himself.[20]

So in Genesis 22 Abraham becomes known as a fearer of God instead of a lover of Isaac, since the latter is omitted from the divine praise. This would be like a professor giving a C to a student for an essay instead of an A. The text, however, will not agree with such an assessment. Abraham gets an A+ !

As a result of his interpretation, Middleton reads the conclusion to the story and the resulting episodes as evidence of total family dysfunction. Isaac does not leave with Abraham, and they never meet again in the subsequent narrative. Isaac has only a "bit" part in that narrative, as Jacob and Joseph become major protagonists. This family dysfunction is carried down into the family as Joseph's brothers

[19] This is a paraphrase of a statement by Walters, "Wood, Sand and Stars: Structure and Theology in Genesis 22:1–19," 307.

[20] Middleton, *Abraham's Silence*, 33–34.

sell him into slavery because of internecine strife.[21] This is more eisegesis than exegesis. In fact Isaac hears his father's act of faith praised in Philistia (Gen 26:5), and his future wife hears the divine praise of Abraham reverberating in her ears as she leaves Mesopotamia to become a feminine Abraham (24:60).

Abraham's silence is far from tragic; it is in fact heroic, as it shows a settled faith in the goodness and promises of God, even though they seem as good as dead! What a contrast with the first couple in the Garden!

But it is a mistake to consider this episode without the larger narrative of Abraham, and also the larger narrative of Scripture, a fact made clear even in the text, because a later editor ties the story into the cult history of Israel: "Even to this day it is said, that on the mountain of the Lord it will be provided" (Gen 22:14). This connects the story with the temple site in Jerusalem.[22] Similarly as Stanley Walters has shown, careful readers of the Torah will see its reverberations in the sacrificial offerings in Leviticus and the Day of Atonement. Rather than being a tragic missed opportunity, Abraham's act in Genesis 22 becomes a model and a foundational act for Israelite faith. He trusted in God even in the face of utter and incomprehensible contradiction. And for the first time it says of Abraham's seed that it will possess the gate of its enemies. Perhaps this echoes the earlier "the one who curses you will be cursed" or, more relevantly, that the seed of the woman will defeat the seed of the serpent (3:15). Interestingly, one of the rare times the linguistic expression, "I will surely multiply" (הַרְבָּה אַרְבֶּה), occurs is in 3:16 when Yahweh multiplies Eve's suffering in childbearing. As Jon Levenson observes, this may suggest that "Abraham's unstinting conformity to the horrendous command of his God counteracts 'Man's First Disobedience,' the sin of eating the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden."[23]

It is therefore no accident that early Christian interpreters have seen in this story a prefiguration of Jesus of Nazareth walking up the mountain of Calvary, unlike Isaac, finally too weak to carry the wood anymore.[24] Unlike Isaac, he does not ask his father, "Look—the fire and the knife, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" For he knows only too well the identity of the lamb. It is his death that will conquer the gates of his enemy. Abraham thus got a glimpse into that coming sacrifice, in which God the Father of all would not spare his own son but deliver him up for us all (Rom 8:32). Perhaps it was at this point that Abraham saw Jesus's day and was glad (John 8:56).

[21] Middleton, *Abraham's Silence*, 117.

[22] The mountain of the LORD is Zion as found, e.g., in Isaiah 2:1–5, Psalm 2. Cf. Gen 22:3 and 2 Chr 5:1–3.

[23] Jon D. Levenson, *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son: The Transformation of Child Sacrifice in Judaism and Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 140.

[24] E.g., Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 4.5.4; John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Hebrews* 25.

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From Prisoner to Prince: The Typological Character of the Joseph Story

— Sam Emadi —

Sam Emadi serves as the senior pastor of Hunsinger Lane Baptist Church in Louisville, Kentucky, and is the author of From Prisoner to Prince: The Joseph Story in Biblical Theology *in the NSBT series.*

My first encounter with D. A. Carson occurred while in high school when my brother introduced me to *Exegetical Fallacies*. Since that time, I've read dozens of books and articles written by Dr. Carson, each with great profit. Like so many others, I have found Dr. Carson's work compelling, not just for its academic credibility but because he is unwaveringly clear. In addition, I've long admired the way Dr. Carson has wielded his prodigious intellectual gifts as an act of love for truth, love for Christ, and for the good of the church and its undershepherds, like myself, who lead them. It's no coincidence that one of my sons is named Carson.

On a personal note, I've had the privilege of meeting Dr. Carson on only one occasion. Just prior to the publication of *From Prisoner to Prince*, he was preaching at the Ocean City Bible Conference which I was attending. During our brief conversation between sessions, he was extraordinarily kind—both commending me for my work in *From Prisoner to Prince* and offering counsel on different ways I could encourage my wife during a particularly busy season of our life for our family. That brief moment was revelatory of his love for the saints and pastoral character.

It's a privilege to honor Dr. Carson with an article in this journal summarizing one part of my argument in *From Prisoner to Prince*.

1. A Word on From Prisoner to Prince and on Typology

From Prisoner to Prince explores the Joseph story's contribution to biblical theology, particularly focusing on whether it's appropriate to recognize Joseph as a type of the Messiah.[1] Since its publication, I have become even more firmly convinced that typology is neither a New Testament imposition on Old Testament texts nor a reading strategy or hermeneutical method. Typology is the product of author-oriented, grammatical-historical exegesis. To put it another way: We do not read typologically; rather, the biblical authors wrote typologically.[2] Old Testament authors signaled to their readers that

[1] Samuel Emadi, *From Prisoner to Prince: The Joseph Story in Biblical Theology,* NSBT 59 (London: Apollos, 2022).

[2] For a defense of typology as intended by Scripture's human authors and thus as "prospective," see my article with David Schrock, "Typology," in *Dictionary of the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale, et.

the persons, events, and institutions they described anticipate a messianic resolution. If something or someone in the Old Testament is typological, a careful, contextual, exegetical reading of the text will bear that out.

Thus, the burden of *From Prisoner to Prince* and the burden of this article is to establish Joseph as a type of the Messiah. My aim is not simply to appeal to NT texts that make that point plainly but to demonstrate from within the Genesis narrative itself that Moses intends readers to see Joseph as a typological figure foreshadowing Israel's messianic, eschatological salvation.[3]

2. Genesis and Messianic Expectation

From its earliest chapters, Genesis is eschatological. Genesis 1–2 is not simply a record of creation, it is also a declaration of God's purposes for the world. Baked within the creation narrative is an eschatology, one which anticipates image-bearing priest-kings taking dominion over the earth, covering the globe with more image bearers, and expanding the boundaries of Eden until all creation becomes God's garden sanctuary.

What becomes immediately clear in the wake of the fall is that the entrance of sin into the world does not alter where creation is headed, it simply reroutes the path to getting there. Read in the context of Genesis 1–2, the *protoevangelium's* promise that a coming "Seed of the Woman" will crush the head of the seed of the Serpent draws a direct parallel between the coming seed and the work that Adam failed to do: protect the garden, conquer the serpent, and bring creation to its divinely ordained goal. Thus Genesis establishes an eschatological orientation first by the creation account and then immediately after the fall in Genesis 3:15. Those eschatological expectations are then only further developed and bolstered by subsequent prophecies and promises in passages like Genesis 12:1–3 and Genesis 22:15–18. As a result, reading with the grain of Genesis requires that interpreters understand the Genesis narratives within the current of the book's eschatological hopes.

Regrettably interpreters have often jettisoned Genesis's eschatological orientation when it comes to understanding the role Joseph plays within the book. Given Joseph's distinctive and unique literary characteristics, many scholars have suggested that a meaningful theological relationship between Joseph and the first thirty-six chapters simply does not exist. For instance Donald Redford suggested:

> The theological outlook of the writer of Gen 37–50 is different from that of the Patriarchal narrator. He does not mention the Covenant or the Promise, ubiquitous in the earlier chapters of Genesis. He is not interested in supplying the reader with comment on matters theological, as the Patriarchal author was.[4]

Similar sentiments are found in Bill Arnold's commentary on Genesis:

> A final question about the Joseph narrative is its function in Genesis and the Pentateuch as a whole. The covenant and the ancestral promises of land and seed—so central throughout Gen 12–36—are absent entirely, nor do we encounter any further revelatory

al (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2023), 852–60.

[3] For evidence that NT authors understood the Joseph story as typologically pointing to the Messiah, see Emadi, *From Prisoner to Prince,* 121–46.

[4] Donald B. Redford, *A Study of the Biblical Story of Joseph,* VTSup 20 (Leiden: Brill, 1970), 247.

> theophanies. This theological uniqueness combines with the literary distinctiveness we have discussed to illustrate the role of the Joseph narrative in the Bible.[5]

My contention is that such statements ignore the many allusions, references, and thematic developments of early chapters of Genesis throughout the Joseph story. Attention to these points of contact not only demonstrate the literary unity of Genesis, they also unfurl the typological role Joseph plays in the book that cements him into Genesis's own eschatological outlook. For Moses, Joseph does not simply conclude the book of Genesis, his story resolves various themes, plot points, promises, and expectations established earlier in the book. In relation to Genesis 1–11, Joseph is a new Adam, a seed of the woman, who delivers God's people from the Primeval curses. In relation to Genesis 12–36 Joseph is an anticipatory fulfilment of the Abrahamic promises. Moses thus portrays the life of Joseph as a messianic figure; his life represents the "type" of work God will do when he brings eschatological salvation.

3. Joseph and Genesis 1–11

On several occasions Moses links Joseph's story with that of Adam's, portraying Joseph as a new Adam and succeeding where Adam failed. For instance, Genesis 39 contains a number of notable narrative reversals of the account of the fall. In Genesis 3, Adam ate forbidden fruit because he "listened to the voice of his wife" (Gen 3:17)—a repeated phrase in the account of Abraham's sin with Hagar (16:2). As a result Adam's innocence is shattered, moving him from a state of nakedness to clothing. Similar language and themes are found in Genesis 39, though inverted. Joseph rebuffs Potiphar's wife's sexual advances because "he would not listen to her" (39:10). Intriguingly, the narrative suggests Potiphar's wife's body is forbidden food. On account of Joseph's wise administration, Potiphar "had no concern about anything *but the food he ate*" (39:6). And yet, later on in the same story, Joseph testifies that Potiphar "put everything that he has in my charge … nor has he kept back anything from *me except you*" (39:9, emphasis mine). Joseph's refusal to sleep with Potiphar's wife and thereby indulge in forbidden food reverses the course of Genesis 3. Joseph maintains his righteousness and as a result moves from a state of clothing to nakedness.

Moses develops even more direct points of contact between Adam and Joseph in the book's final chapter. Adam rebelled against God by taking "good and evil" into his own hands (Gen 3:5). Joseph, on the other hand, refuses to define "good and evil" for himself, instead professing faith not just in God's authority over good and evil but in his ability to bring good out of evil (50:20). Unlike Adam, Joseph refuses to count equality with God a thing to be grasped. By bookending Genesis with two stories that orbit around the word-pair "good and evil," Moses thus presents Joseph as a New Adam who succeeds where the old Adam failed.

Similarly, Joseph does not just invert the story of the fall, he also reverses the tragedy of Cain and Abel. Allusions to Cain and Abel in the Joseph story abound. For instance, the words "brother" (אָח) and "blood" (דָּם) are prominent in both narratives, and in each account Moses uses "blood as evidence that death has taken place."[6] As with the Adamic parallels, Joseph reverses the negative elements of

[5] Bill T. Arnold, *Genesis*, NCBC (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 316.

[6] Brian Sigmon, "Between Eden and Egypt: Echoes of the Garden Narrative in the Story of Joseph and His Brothers" (PhD diss., Marquette University, 2013), 137. The word אָח occurs eight times in the Cain and Abel narrative and twenty-one times in Genesis 37. The word דָּם occurs only in the Cain and Abel and Joseph narratives

the Cain and Abel story. Genesis begins with one brother murdering another, but Joseph overcomes his own brothers' murderous intent by mercy. Genesis then takes us on a journey from fratricide to forgiveness with Joseph playing the role of the one who resolves humanity's primeval sin.[7] Given these associations casting Joseph as a successful Adam and as one who reverses the fraternal conflict that has been plaguing the covenant family since Cain and Abel, it is no wonder Jacob's prophecy about Joseph in Genesis 49:22–26 is brimming with imagery suggesting Joseph represents the blessing of the new creation.[8] Joseph is a figure anticipating the eschatological restoration of the Edenic state.

4. Joseph and the Abrahamic Covenant

Just as the Joseph story both resolves and reverses various negative elements of the Genesis 1–11 narrative, so also Joseph functions as an anticipatory fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant. By "anticipatory fulfillment," I mean that Moses describes Joseph's life as genuinely fulfilling the promises given to Abraham, while at the same time making clear that Joseph's fulfillment of those promises is incomplete and partial, thus anticipating a greater eschatological fulfillment in the future.

Importantly, each part of the Abrahamic promise—land, seed, blessing, and kingship—finds its roots in the creation narrative. As Jim Hamilton has demonstrated, each part of the Abrahamic promises in Genesis 12:1–3 is about God restoring what was lost in Eden.[9] Once again, Joseph is not simply fulfilling the promises to Abraham but reversing course on the plight of human sin and suffering introduced by the fall in the early chapters of Genesis. As a result, Joseph functions as a prophetic *type*, a picture forecasting a final, messianic fulfillment of the promise and restoration of Eden. In the rest of this article we will briefly consider Joseph's relationship to the Abrahamic promises of seed, blessing, and kingship respectively.[10]

4.1. Seed

In Genesis 1:28 God commissions Adam and Eve with the task of populating creation with other image-bearers. Yet, in Genesis 3 the only thing that multiplies is pain in childbirth[11]—a theme that reverberates throughout Genesis as barrenness plagues the women of the covenant (Gen 16:2; 25:21; 29:31). In the Abrahamic covenant, however, God takes the Adamic command—"be fruitful and multiply" (פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ)—and transposes it into a promise: "I will multiply you exceedingly.... I will make you exceedingly fruitful" (17:2, 6).

(Gen 4:11; 37:22, 26, 31–33; 42:22) as well as three other times in Genesis 9:4–6. For further points of contact between the Cain and Abel story and Joseph, see Emadi, *From Prisoner to Prince, 78–82.*

[7] The phrase "from fratricide to forgiveness" is from Matthew R. Schlimm, *From Fratricide to Forgiveness: The Language and Ethics of Anger in Genesis*, Siphrut 7 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011).

[8] G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 96–98.

[9] James M. Hamilton, "The Seed of the Woman and the Blessing of Abraham," *TynBul* 58 (2007): 253–73.

[10] Like others, I would summarize the Abrahamic promises as pertaining to land, seed, blessing, and kingship. Given the limitations of this article, we will not consider Joseph's relationship to the land promise. For an examination of Joseph's relationship to the Abrahamic land promise, see Emadi, *From Prisoner to Prince*, 83–88.

[11] I owe that observation and phraseology to Laurence A. Turner, *Announcements of Plot in Genesis*, JSOTSup 96 (London: JSOT Press, 1990), 23–24.

In the Joseph story the seed promise comes to fruition as he both preserves and proliferates the holy seed. Chapters 37–45 record how Joseph, by forgiveness, preserves the seed from the kind of internal strife and violence that has plagued the seed's existence since Cain and Abel. Joseph himself makes that point plainly during his self-revelation to his brothers in Genesis 45:5–8. In this passage, Joseph, by a threefold use of "sent," recognizes God's sovereign ordering of his suffering to preserve the seed. God sent Joseph to Egypt to "preserve life" and "to preserve for you a remnant … and to keep alive … many survivors." Each phrase is freighted with biblical-theological significance. "To preserve life" (v. 5 [לְמִֽחְיָה]) and to "keep alive" (v. 7 [וּלְהַחֲיוֹת]) correlate Joseph with Noah, the archetypal seed-preserver in Genesis.[12] Additionally in verse 7, Joseph states that God sent him to "preserve a remnant (שְׁאֵרִית)" and to "keep alive … survivors (פְּלֵיטָה)." Joseph's use of this word-pair may be the genesis of identical language found in the prophets (Isa 10:20; 37:32; cf. 2 Kgs 19:31; Joel 2:32). In both Genesis and the prophets, the "remnant" and "survivor" are a signal of future hope for the covenant seed.

Whereas Genesis 37–45 focus on the preservation of the holy seed, Genesis 46–47 focus on its proliferation. Genesis 46:1–7 records the first theophanic vision of the Joseph story and contains a reaffirmation of the seed promise to Jacob, indicating that God will multiply the seed in Egypt (46:3). Genesis 46:8–27 then records the proliferation of the covenant seed to seventy persons, a new humanity modeled after the seventy nations of Genesis 10.

The seed promise then comes into full view in Genesis 47:27: "Thus Israel settled in the land of Egypt, in the land of Goshen. And they gained possessions in it, and were fruitful and multiplied greatly." To this point in the Genesis narrative, the word-pair "be fruitful and multiply" has been used only as part of a command (to Adam and Noah) or as part of a promise (to Abrahm, Isaac, and Jacob). But in the story of Joseph, that language finally occurs in the indicative. Under the wise administration of Joseph the covenant seed fulfills the Adamic commission and experiences the firstfruits of the fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise.

4.2. Blessing

In Genesis 12:1–3 God promises to Abraham a complete restoration of the Edenic state. These promises contain a fivefold blessing to match the fivefold curse that has fallen over creation (Gen 3:14, 17; 4:11; 5:29; 9:25). Additionally, these promises to Abraham make clear that this restorative blessing is not just for Abraham's family but for all the nations through Abraham.

Once again, Joseph serves as an anticipatory fulfillment of the promise. Potiphar appoints Joseph "over his house" (עַל־בֵּיתוֹ), and as a result Yahweh blesses Potiphar and his house "for Joseph's sake" (39:4–5). Such language clearly has the Abrahamic promises in view. Even commentators who suggest the Joseph story rarely incorporates theology from the Abrahamic narratives admit that Genesis 39 is an "allusion to the ancestral promises."[13] Later, Joseph is placed over another house (עַל־בֵּיתוֹ)—Pharaoh's—and as a result he blesses "all the earth" by saving them from famine (41:56–57; cf. 12:3).

The theme of blessing is then climactically portrayed as Joseph brings his father Jacob to an audience with Pharaoh in Genesis 47:7–10. As Dempster notes, "there are not just two individuals meeting here, but two nations, one of them embryonic and the other the most powerful nation on

[12] As Wenham notes, "'to preserve' (life) is a key phrase in the flood story (6:19–20; cf. 7:3; 50:20), implying that Joseph is like Noah, an agent in the divine saving plan." Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, WBC 2 (Dallas: Word, 1994), 428.

[13] Arnold, *Genesis*, 331

earth."[14] Yet, shockingly, aged Jacob twice blesses the powerful Pharaoh. The message is clear: *through* Joseph's wisdom and forgiveness of his brothers, the blessing of Abraham is now advancing to all the families of the earth.

4.3. Kingship

The hope for a royal seed is a major feature of the Abrahamic promises. Indeed, Genesis's obsession with tracing the line of the seed, by both genealogies and narrative, is tied to the messianic hope of a coming priest-king inaugurated by the *protoevangelium*. The Joseph narrative once again brings these expectations into play, identifying Joseph as a royal seed of Abraham.

Moses introduces Joseph primarily with reference to his royal dreams. The brothers themselves understand the dreams as signifying royalty: "Are you indeed to reign over us [הֲמָלֹךְ תִּמְלֹךְ עָלֵינוּ] or are you indeed to rule over us [מָשׁוֹל תִּמְשֹׁל בָּנוּ]?" (Gen 37:8). Both מלך and משל connote royal status, particularly when used together (Judg 9:2, 6, 8; Jer 33:21, 26; 2 Chr 9:26, 9:30).

Other features of Joseph's introduction also identify him as a royal seed. His famous "robe of many colors" (כְּתֹנֶת פַּסִּים) is likely clothing approximating some kind of royal robe. The phrase כְּתֹנֶת פַּסִּים occurs only one other time in the OT with reference to the garments worn by the daughters of King David (2 Sam 13:18). Additionally, Moses identifies Joseph as a "son of old age" to Jacob (Gen 37:3). This phrase identifies Joseph with Isaac (21:2, 7), thus linking Joseph with the dynastic expectations of the Abrahamic promises. Given the prominence of Genesis's royal expectations, Joseph's introduction leaves readers asking, "Is this the one to come or should we expect another?"

The rest of the Joseph story, of course, records the fulfillment of Joseph's dreams and his rise to the royal court. Joseph is thus an anticipatory fulfillment of the royal seed promise given to Abraham. Moses makes plain the "anticipatory" or typological nature of Joseph's royal position in Genesis 49:8: "Judah, your brothers shall praise you; your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; your father's sons shall bow down before you." Speaking of the coming Messianic king, Jacob indicates that his brothers will come and "bow down" (חוה) before him. Readers have already encountered this language and imagery in the Joseph story. Three times in the dream sequence Joseph's brothers bow to him (37:7, 9, 10), which is then matched by a threefold bowing as the dreams are realized in history (42:4; 43:26, 28). By using language and imagery that is a prominent part of Joseph's rise to the royal court, Jacob (and Moses through Jacob) casts the coming Judahite Messiah in the mold of Joseph. He is the *type* of king God will provide from the line of Judah.

5. Conclusion

The evidence above points to the conclusion that Joseph is not simply the last item in a series of disconnected tales. Joseph is the *resolution* to Genesis. Moses intends readers to see Joseph functioning typologically: acting as a new Adam, resolving the fratricidal conflict of Cain and Abel, fulfilling the promises of the Abrahamic Covenant, and mediating the blessing of Abraham to the nations. Joseph does this in a way that is partial and incomplete, thus anticipating a greater eschatological work in the future. These narrative elements all point to the fact that, even within his own context, Joseph—the

[14] Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Biblical Theology of the Hebrew Bible,* NSBT 15 (Nottingham: Apollos, 2003), 89.

rejected, royal son—functions as an indirect prophecy pointing to the life of Jesus of Nazareth, the true and better Joseph.

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A Biblical Theology of Israel's Exodus out of Egypt

— *L. Michael Morales* —

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1. Prologue: Exile before Exodus

The Bible story opens with a marvelous prospect: God creates the world in order to live with his people.[1] As his image-bearers, people were to rule on his behalf over all the earth, cultivating the land's resources and establishing a society of justice and righteousness. As those made in his likeness, the meaning of their lives would be found in knowing and serving God, submitting to his commands, and enjoying fellowship and communion with their Creator in the paradise of Eden.

Almost immediately, however, Adam rebelled, transgressing the command of God. As a result, Adam and Eve are exiled from the presence of God in the garden of Eden. Driving them out eastward, the Lord God sets *cherubim* (angelic, composite creatures known in the ancient Near Eastern world as fierce sentinels) and a flaming sword at the entryway to the garden, guarding the way to the Tree of Life. In one sense, the rest of the biblical story takes place in exile, outside of the Edenic presence of God. Human history is a history of exile. Anthropology, what it means to be human, now includes this primal expulsion as a soul-shaping reality—we are born as exiles, living outside of blessed fellowship with God. Genesis 1–11, in particular, narrates the increasing eastward exile of humanity: Adam and Eve are exiled "east of the garden of Eden" (Gen 3:24), Cain is later exiled "further east of Eden" (4:16), Noah's generation is destroyed in the cosmic waters of the flood (Gen 6–9), and, finally, after humanity's rebellious attempt to build a ziggurat reaching into the heavens, God confuses their language and scatters them across the face of the earth (11:1–9). This judgment from the Tower of Babel renews the primal expulsion from God and forms a theology of nations: the nations are in exile from God, alienated from his face, and thus in a state of ever-growing darkness, a plight evident in cultures full of idolatry, sexual immorality, and violence.

For the sake of restoring the nations to a knowledge of God—to the blessings of fellowship with him—the Lord calls out Abram (later called "Abraham"), and much of the rest of the Bible story, from

[1] This essay summarizes L. Michael Morales, *Exodus Old and New: A Biblical Theology of Redemption*, ESBT (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020). I am pleased to contribute to this special issue of *Themelios* commemorating Don Carson, who has been a faithful evangelical leader in promoting biblical studies for the church, and was honored to publish a volume in Carson's NSBT series (*Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord? A Biblical Theology of the Book of Leviticus* [Nottingham: Apollos, 2015]).

Genesis 12 onward, narrates how the Lord God began to fulfill his plan of redemption through the nation of Israel, a plan which culminates in the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, and a new heavens and earth (Rev 21–22).

Overly simplified, the two major movements that recur in the Bible story are exile and exodus. Exile from God, which leads to death, and exodus to God, which leads to life. In Ezekiel 37, for example, Israel's death and resurrection symbolize the nation's exile and exodus (or "restoration"). Because the nations are in exile from God, lost under his curse, redemption or salvation comes in the form of an exodus, a return to God out of exile. Israel's exodus out of Egypt (Exod 1–15), therefore, becomes the paradigm for salvation in the Bible.

2. The Historical Exodus out of Egypt

2.1. The Exodus Prefigured in Abraham's Life

In calling Abram out of Ur, God's providence is exodus-shaped, in many ways foreshadowing Israel's later exodus out of Egypt. Indeed, God will say, "I am the Lord, who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans" (Gen 15:7), just as later he will tell Israel, "I am the Lord, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery" (Exod 20:2). Abram is called to depart his country and family, to journey forth to a land that God would show him (Gen 12:1–3). Due to a famine in the land, Abram and his wife Sarai (later called "Sarah") end up in Egypt. As with Israel's later experience the Lord plagues Pharaoh before Abram and Sarai are released, with much plunder (12:10–20). Eventually, while Abram is in the midst of a deep sleep, the Lord shows him a vision of Israel's exodus out of Egypt (15:7–21), and in the last recorded episode of his spiritual odyssey, Abraham experiences a Passover-like deliverance of his son, Isaac, for whom the Lord provides a substitutionary lamb (22:7–8, 13–14).

2.2. The Goal of the Exodus: Knowing the Lord

Under God's providential hand, Israel's stay in Egypt took a turn for the worse when a Pharaoh arose who did not know the blessings experienced by Egypt under Joseph's administration. Seeing the divine blessedness of the Israelites, their fruitfulness and ingenuity, as a threat, he subjected them to a bitter life of harsh slavery. In this way, Israel was made to face the reality of their exile in Egypt and to long for redemption through an exodus out of Egypt. More than this, Israel's exodus becomes a paradigm of redemption for the nations, as the nations languish in spiritual exile. The Lord would be known as the God of the exodus.

Exiled from God's presence, the nations had plunged into the darkness of a truth-suppressing ignorance of him. Even Israel, without any divine revelation of Scripture, did not know God—Moses asked the Lord, "What do I tell the Israelites when they ask me for your name?" (Exod 3:13). Redemption, then, a true exodus, must involve a restoration not only of God's presence but of the knowledge of God, and this—the revelation of the Lord's incomparability—is thus the main goal of the exodus. In Moses's first encounter with Pharaoh, after he declares the Lord's demand to let his people go, Pharaoh responds with: "Who is the Lord, that I should obey him? I do not know the Lord, so I will not let Israel go" (Exod 5:1–2). Pharaoh's words clearly set up the ensuing drama as a revelation of the Lord's name, his being and attributes. Through the exodus, the Lord will reveal himself as the Creator of the heavens and earth, and as the King above all gods.

Accordingly, the plagues, or "signs and wonders," against Egypt are introduced by purpose statements that include the language of knowing the Lord. The first nine plagues are organized into three cycles of three plagues, with each cycle introduced by one such purpose statement. For cycle one, plagues one to three, the Lord tells Pharaoh through Moses, "By this you will know that I myself am the Lord" (7:17); for cycle two, plagues four to six, he says, "in order for you to know that I myself am the Lord in the midst of the land" (8:22); and for cycle three, plagues seven to nine, he states, "with the purpose that you will know there is no one like me in all the earth" (9:14). God's signs and wonders are not only for the Egyptians, but for Israel to know the Lord, and to recount his mighty acts to their children's children (10:2). Similar purpose statements occur for the sea crossing miracle (14:4, 18) and are crowned, finally, with Israel's own acknowledgment of the Lord's incomparability, in the song they sing on the other side of the sea: "Who among the gods is like you, O Lord? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in praises, doing wonders?" (15:11). Ultimately, the exodus revelation of the Lord's glory and majesty is to reach the nations, as demonstrated by Jethro (18:10–12) and, later, even by Rahab, a harlot in Canaan (Josh 2:10–11).

2.3. Redeemed by the Blood of the Lamb

Israel's exodus out of Egypt was no mere political release—it was a redemption, a ransoming of Israel's life out of death. In the Bible Egypt is often symbolized as a spiritual *Sheol*, the watery place of the dead. One always descends into Egypt, a place known for its graves (see Exod 14:11), and Israel's exodus even includes the nation's emergence from the waters of death. Pharaoh is also likened to one of the ancient world's mythological sea monsters, Rahab, dwelling in the waters of Egypt (e.g., in Ezek 29:3). But more than anything else, it is the Passover event that *defines* Israel's exodus out of Egypt as a redemption. The Lord is not only the Creator of the heavens and earth and the King above all gods, he is the Redeemer of his people.

For the last plague, God visited Egypt in judgment, slaying every firstborn, among both humans and animals. For Israel, however, he revealed a way of salvation. Israelites were to slay an unblemished lamb, without breaking its bones, and smear its blood on the lintel and doorposts of their homes that would serve as a sign. The lamb's flesh, roasted in fire, was to be eaten, with staff in hand, in readiness to depart from Egypt. God granted the lamb as a substitute for the firstborn of each house, and eating its flesh identified each member of the house with the firstborn son. In this way, every household displayed the national drama of the Lord's redemption of Israel, his "firstborn son" (Exod 4:22–23), from the *Sheol* of Egypt. Through the sacrifice of the lamb and eating of its holy flesh, Israelites were being prepared to be "a royal priesthood and holy nation" (19:6). The Passover was a dramatic act that symbolized Israel's redemption from death to life.

The broader goal of the exodus includes Israel's entering into a fuller relationship with the Lord at Mount Sinai, receiving both the Decalogue and his dwelling, the tabernacle, that he might live among his people. As God's treasured possession and covenantal partner, Israel would be God's instrument to restore blessing among the nations.

3. The Prophesied Second Exodus

3.1. The Pattern of Sacred History

Israel's historical exodus out of Egypt (Exod 1–15), was only the opening stage of a threefold pattern of sacred history: (1) the redemption of Israel, (2) the consecration of Israel by covenant at Mount Sinai, and (3) the consummation of the inheritance in the land of Canaan.[2] This pattern finds its historical culmination with the building of the temple in Jerusalem under Solomon's reign (1 Kgs 8). Through Israel's covenantal failure, however, whereby various Davidic kings—especially Manasseh—led God's people into idolatry and apostasy, which included injustice, sexual immorality, and bloodshed, the nation would be exiled from the land. In spite of God's longsuffering love and patience, sending a host of prophets, his "servants," calling Israel to repentance generation after generation, Israel proved hard-hearted and stiff-necked and eventually suffered devastation and exile.

Yet the message of the prophets was not about judgment and exile alone; rather, God also promised that the pattern of sacred history would be renewed in a powerful, Spirit-wrought manner. In the last days, the age of the Messiah, there would be a new exodus of redemption out of exile, leading to a new covenant and consecration, and a new inheritance of the land that would prove lasting. The prophesied second exodus would be greater than the first, historical exodus out of Egypt in every way, including a complete atonement and definitive forgiveness of sins, and a much greater outpouring of the Holy Spirit, causing God's people to internalize his Torah and to live faithfully to his glory (see, e.g., Ezek 36; Jer 31; Joel 2). Indeed, this renewed Israel would fulfill her original vocation of being a light unto the Gentiles, spreading a saving knowledge of the Lord God among the nations. Integrating the message of the prophets, five elements of the prophesied new exodus stand out. In the second exodus (1) the Lord's name will be glorified; (2) a new David will accomplish the role of a new Moses; (3) an Elijah-like messenger will prepare the way of the Lord; (4) the Spirit of the Lord will be poured out upon all his people; and (5) the consummate return to the land will be a resurrection from the dead into a new heavens and earth.

3.2. Isaiah's New Exodus

Of all the prophetic books, Isaiah contains the most richly developed hope of a second exodus, especially in its central section, chapters 40–55.[3] Isaiah 40–48 largely focus on Israel's failure to be the Lord's servant among the nations, proving blind and deaf to his will. Within the next section, Isaiah 49–55, we encounter another servant, an obedient one who embodies the nation of Israel but who also accomplishes a mission *to* Israel. He will raise up the tribes of Jacob, restoring the remnant of Israel, and become a light for the nations—the Lord's salvation to the ends of the earth (Isa 49:1–6)!

Isaiah 53, the "suffering servant" song, is placed between the anticipation of Israel's salvation (Isa 49–52) and the divine invitation for people to participate in the Lord's salvation (Isa 54–55). The Messiah's

[2] This pattern is set forth in W. J. Phythian-Adams, "Shadow and Substance: The Meaning of Sacred History," *Int* 1 (1947): 419–35.

[3] See John I. Durham, "Isaiah 40–55: A New Creation, A New Exodus, A New Messiah," in *The Yahweh/Baal Confrontation and Other Studies in Biblical Literature and Archaeology*, ed. J. M. O'Brien and F. L. Horton Jr. (New York: Edwin Mellen, 1995): 47–56; Bernard W. Anderson, "Exodus Typology in Second Isaiah," in *Israel's Prophetic Heritage: Essays in Honor of James Muilenburg*, ed. Bernhard W. Anderson and Walter J. Harrelson (New York: Harper, 1962): 177–95.

suffering as an atonement for the sins of his people and the world, as described in Isaiah 52:13–53:12, forms the redemption of the new exodus. This exodus context positions the servant's suffering within the theology of Passover, the beloved Son's sacrifice. In the final section of Isaiah (chs. 56–66), the vindicated servant gathers about him a renewed people, of Israel and the nations, who form obedient servants of the servant—these will eventually inherit the land in a new heavens and earth (Isa 65–66).

4. The New Exodus of the Messiah

4.1. The Gospel of John and the New Exodus

In John's Gospel, Jesus is introduced by John the Baptizer in a twofold way that brings out the Messiah's two great aims of redemption and new creation: Jesus is God's Passover Lamb of the new exodus (1:29, 36), and he is the Son who will baptize God's people with the Spirit of the new creation (1:30–34). Jesus's role as the Lamb of God culminates with his crucifixion that occurs during the slaying of lambs for Passover. Only John's Gospel also includes a detail relevant for Jesus's fulfillment of Passover: his bones were not broken during the crucifixion, in line with Passover regulations for the slain lamb (John 19:31–37; see Exod 12:46; Ps 34:20). As his death forms the bloodshed of Passover, the Son's resurrection from the grave forms the new exodus. The fulness of salvation, therefore, goes beyond spiritual regeneration to the resurrection of the body. When the Son returns for the day of judgment, God's people will be raised up and ushered into a new heavens and earth.

As the one who baptizes with the Spirit, the resurrected, exalted Messiah unites his people to his own death and resurrection and will one day raise up their bodies from the grave to inherit a new creation, described as a new and more glorious Eden (Rev 21–22). Hints of this wondrous exodus into a new creation are found throughout John's Gospel. From the cross, Jesus cries out, "It is finished" (John 19:30), which alludes to the completion of the first creation (Gen 2:1), and then John tells us that after his death a "great Sabbath" followed (John 19:31). Spiritually and theologically, Jesus by his atonement has brought the old creation to its completion; his resurrection therefore occurs on both the "eighth day" and the "first day," that is, the first new creation day, after the completion of the seven days of the old creation (20:1, 19, 26). More than this, his resurrection occurs in a setting that recalls the garden of Eden, signifying humanity's return to paradise and restored fellowship with God. Mary, whom Jesus calls "woman," even mistakes him for a gardener in a scene that echoes Adam and the woman in Eden (20:11–15). Like John's Gospel, the book of Revelation closes with an Edenic garden, a Tree of Life, and waters of life—and with the God who says, "Behold, I make all things new!" (Rev 21:5–6; 22:1–5). Through the eternal Son who became flesh and dwelt among us (John 1:14), God's people will finally inherit a new creation, with the God of all glory dwelling in their midst (Rev 21:3).

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The Land Promise in Biblical Theology

— Oren R. Martin —

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This article is written with abounding admiration and gratitude for the life and ministry of D. A. Carson. It is no exaggeration to say that, under God, Don's deep love for the glorious gospel of our blessed God and for Christ's church have had an inestimable influence on countless students, pastors, and scholars, and in turn their churches. The Lord has unusually gifted him with a mind for biblical scholarship (who hasn't devoured his commentary on *The Gospel according to John*, or been chastened by *Exegetical Fallacies*, or benefited from his articles and reviews on the trustworthiness of Scripture?) and with a heart for churches like his father pastored. Further, his ability to write to both scholarly and churchly audiences is truly remarkable. Not only has he blessed both the academy and church at large, he has also been a personal encouragement to "young" scholars like me. I am deeply grateful for his acceptance of my NSBT volume (he initially rejected it!) and his kind encouragements along the way. So I thank God for the gift of Don Carson, for in helping me read Scripture more faithfully, I see Christ more wonderfully.

1. Introduction

The land promised to Abraham recaptures and advances what was lost in Eden, and will not be fulfilled until a new and better Eden is regained. At every point throughout the OT, then, the promised land anticipates an even greater land to come. Although the promise initially related to Israel's settlement in the land of Canaan, by divine design it also pointed to something more expansive, which is finally revealed in the NT. This article will therefore track the progression of the land promise through the biblical covenants until it reaches its fulfillment in the new creation in Christ.[1]

2. The Land in the Old Testament

God's calling of, promise to, and covenant with Abraham recovers the universal purpose of Adam in terms of both the blessing of offspring and land. In other words, the universal scope of Eden narrows to the land of Canaan, thus serving as a microcosm of God's intention for all humanity, which in time would expand with the propagation of Abraham's offspring. For example, when Genesis 22:17–18 and 26:3–4 are taken together, the immediate context of the Abrahamic covenant already points to a larger

[1] For a more comprehensive treatment of this argument, see Oren R. Martin, *Bound for the Promised Land: The Land Promise in God's Redemptive Plan*, NSBT 34 (Nottingham: Apollos, 2015). Permission has been granted to use and build upon portions of *Bound for the Promised Land* in this chapter.

expansion of the territorial promise (more on this point below). In Paul's words, the proliferation of Abraham's offspring would result in inheriting the world (cf. Rom 4:13). However, this conclusion is not reinterpreting or spiritualizing the OT promise, as some charge. Rather, it begins to establish the type or pattern that points both back to Eden and forward to the ultimate fulfillment of the promise that would, in time, encompass the entire world. Furthermore, in the Abrahamic covenant there are both national (Gen 12:2, "nation") and international (Gen 17:4–6, "nations") elements. For example, Genesis 15 is a covenant made between God and Abraham and his "seed," while the covenant in Genesis 17 creates a broadening of the category of "seed." Second, God changes Abram's name to Abraham, for God made him "the father of a multitude of nations" (17:5). An intended ambiguity exists, then, for Abraham's "seed" *both* encompasses a multitude of nations (Gen 17) *and* relates to an individual descendant (22:17b) who will mediate blessing to all the nations of the earth.

When these texts are put together, then, the ultimate inheritors of the promises are not restricted to a national entity but reach an international community. That is, God's programmatic agenda for humanity after Eden begins with the formation of a nation through Abraham and points forward to an international people, which the Prophets pick up and advance. It is difficult to see, then, how the initial promise could be exhausted by any political borders, whether Israelite or otherwise, for the multiplication of descendants naturally expands the territorial borders until the earth is filled.

Though there is progressive fulfillment under leaders such as Moses, Joshua, David, and Solomon, the Prophets bring back into focus the Abrahamic promises and advance the pattern of fulfillment in various ways and stages, including both a physical and spiritual return with national and international results. For example, Isaiah describes Israel's return from exile in both near and distant ways, in language resembling the exodus (e.g., 11:1–16; 35:1–10; 51:9–11; 52:11–12). For example, the first return from exile is a physical release and return to the land accomplished by God's servant Cyrus (42:18–43:21; 44:24–45:1; cf. Ezra 1:1–3). But though this return is a fulfillment in the multifaceted process of God's promised restoration, it in no way compares to the prophets' final vision. Indeed, a deeper captivity kept Israel from being fully restored. That is, though the people are taken out of idolatrous nations, idolatry needed to be taken out of the people. This restoration and return will be accomplished by God's servant-king who will bring back Israel so that God's salvation may reach the nations (49:1–53:12). Forgiveness will come through God's (individual) servant who will deliver his (corporate) servant Israel (42:1–9; 49:1–6), redeem his people (9:2–7), rule over his people (11:1–5), and atone for sin by suffering, dying, and taking the punishment that they deserve upon himself (42:1–9; 49:5–6; 50:4–9; 52:13–53:12).

Furthermore, the servant's substitutionary atonement will initiate a new covenant that will bring enjoyment of the blessings of both the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants for Israel *and* the nations (54:1–55:13; cf. 19:19–25). Such an international plan had been God's plan since Abraham had received the word of promise. Moreover, a Davidic king will bless and rule the nations because God has made him leader and commander of the peoples (55:4–5), which connects to the Servant king in Isaiah 53 whose offering of himself and whose resurrection enables him to bring to fulfillment the promises of God in the Davidic covenant, as well as serve as the basis for the New or Everlasting covenant. Astonishingly, not only is the remnant called the Lord's servants (Isa 65:13–25), so also are foreigners from the nations included as the servants of the Lord (56:6). Furthermore, in fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant, the Lord will give his *name* and *blessing* to his servants in the land (65:13–16; cf. Gen 12:3; 17:5; 22:18; 26:4).

The result of the Servant's saving work, then, creates *servants*, and all—Israel as well as foreigners—will go to Jerusalem as God's holy mountain in a pilgrimage of worship (Isa 2:2–4; 27:13; cf. Mic 4:1–5).[2]

But Isaiah proceeds to describe more splendidly the result of this new order. Isaiah 65:17–66:24 provides a succinct summary of the eschatological themes that occur throughout the entire book and reveals the hope of restoration to the city of Jerusalem and the land in otherworldly language that describes astounding realities (cf. 2:1–4; 4:2–6; 9:1–16; 11:1–10). When the various strands are drawn together, Isaiah's vision of final restoration involves a new heavens and new earth (65:17; 66:22), a new Jerusalem (65:18–19; cf. 4:2–6), and a holy mountain, Zion (65:25; cf. 2:1–4; 4:2–6). Moreover, in fulfillment of the promises to and covenant with Abraham, God will give them a new *name* and they will receive *blessing* in the *land* by the God of truth (Isa 65:15–16). By the end of Isaiah, then, this temple-mountain-city is coextensive with the new heavens and new earth, which resounds with astonishing realities cast in terms of God's kingdom coming to and filling the earth.

In similar order, in Jeremiah God promises to take back his people if they return, and "then nations shall bless themselves in him, and in him shall they glory" (4:1–2). This reference reveals that the promises to Abraham would be realized (cf. Gen 12:3) if Israel would repent and glorify God. Like Isaiah, the nations are in view in the restoration of Israel and Judah, and this cosmological and teleological goal is in fulfillment of the Abrahamic promises (Jer 12:14–17). Furthermore, Jeremiah proclaims that Israel will return from exile in terms of a new exodus (16:14–15).

Then, in Jeremiah 30–33, Jeremiah unfolds the great promises of salvation and offers hope beyond the exile that will come in the form of a new covenant and return to the land.[3] Of particular importance is 31:38–40, which concerns the rebuilding and expansion of Jerusalem. In addition to the restoration of Davidic leadership (30:8–11), priesthood (31:14), and people (31:31–34), the restoration of the city brings to completion the glorious reversal of Jeremiah's pronouncements of judgment. Though the city had been destroyed, the future age of redemption will see its restoration *and more*. Derek Kidner comments that "the promise [in 31:38–40] is 'earthed' not merely in this planet but in the familiar details of Israel's capital, naming rubbish dumps and all.... But the vision outruns that exercise, in scale and in significance."[4] Therefore, the new Jerusalem will be both different and expanded from the old, and the rebuilt city will become the center of God's presence among his people (3:14–18; cf. Isa 65:17; 66:12; Rev 21:3).

Jeremiah describes the restoration of both people and place in the future and pins these hopes on a Davidic leader, a righteous branch, who, interestingly, is a combination of both king and priest (33:14–18). This king-priest will secure a new covenant for his people as certain as God's covenant with day and night, make them dwell securely in the land, and multiply the offspring of David as numerous as the sands of the sea in fulfillment of his covenant with Abraham (33:14–26). Moreover, Jeremiah 31:35–40 hints that this new covenant would operate within the contours of a new creation.

In similar fashion Ezekiel, the last in the so-called Major Prophets, prophesies that the renewed people will be purified in heart and spirit, and they will be one flock under a new David (chs. 34–37). As a result, "the nations will know that I the Lord make Israel holy, when my sanctuary is among them

[2] For further reading, see Matthew S. Harmon, *The Servant of the Lord and His Servant People: Tracing a Biblical Theme through the Canon,* NSBT 54 (London: Apollos, 2020).

[3] Though Jeremiah is the only text in the OT that specifically mentions the new covenant, other expressions can be linked with the new covenant, e.g., the everlasting covenant, a new heart or a new spirit, the covenant of peace, and a future covenant that would come in "that day."

[4] Derek Kidner, *The Message of Jeremiah*, BST (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 111.

forever" (37:28). Whereas God had been a sanctuary to the exiles "for a little while" (11:16), his presence will be with them forever. He will make a new covenant (36:16–38), which will deal with their sin and finally fulfill his covenant so that he can say, "They will be my people, and I will be their God" (37:23, 27). In order for this restoration to come, however, God must create a holy people from nothing. And to be sure, he will accomplish his new creation. Indeed, Ezekiel uses the language of resurrection to illustrate the promise of Israel's return to a new life in her own land from the deathlike existence of exile. In other words, the restoration to the land is linked with the resurrection motif. The dead shall be brought to life so that they too may participate in the restoration. But Ezekiel's vision of restoration does not stop with Israel. Like similar passages throughout the writing Prophets, Ezekiel indicates that the restoration will have international significance (16:59–63).

Ezekiel continues with his program by envisioning a rebuilt temple with revitalized worship in chapters 40–48. That is, first a new humanity is (re)created (ch. 37) and then placed in a new Temple-Eden. The climactic vision in chapters 40–48 describes the fulfillment of the promises of chapters 1–39. In a significant passage, Ezekiel 37:25–28 pulls together various strands of the new place for God's people and prepares the way for even more glorious promises in chapters 40–48 (cf. 37:25–28 and 43:7–9). It is significant, then, that Ezekiel ends with a vision of a purified land with boundaries situated around a new temple complex. More specifically, Ezekiel 47:1–12 contains an abundance of Edenic imagery and describes a paradisiacal temple that extends to encompass the entire land. Significantly, Ezekiel uses similar language as Jeremiah regarding a measuring line extending the boundaries outward (Ezek 47:3; Jer 31:39; cf. Zech 2). Thus, the promise concerning the renewed Israel living in the land under a new David is fulfilled in the vision of a temple, recreating an Edenic context, the boundaries of which are coterminous with the land.

3. The Land in the New Testament

The NT reveals that what was promised in the OT is fulfilled through the person and work of Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham, the son of Adam, the son of God. Jesus—the obedient Israelite—inaugurates the kingdom through his death and resurrection and finally delivers his people from the exile of sin (Matt 2:15; Col 1:13–14). Matthew interprets the eschatological land promises through the lens of various typological and universalized texts in the OT (Matt 5:5; Ps 37). Christ is the true temple (John 1:14; 2:19–22), and his people are described as a new creation and a new temple (2 Cor 5:17; 6:16). This new people, the church of Jesus Christ made up of both Jew and Gentile, await their final home. In this way it can be said that Abraham would "inherit" the world (Rom 4:13) without contravening or spiritualizing OT promises. This new heaven and new earth is cast in terms of a paradisiacal garden-temple-city (Rev 21–22; cf. Isa 65–66; Ezek 40–48). In other words, the variegated realities of the OT land promises—the expansive city, temple, and land—reach their *telos* in the new creation won by Christ. In this sense, then, what believing Israel obtains is far greater than the land of Canaan, for they—along with the nations—will inherit the whole earth in fulfillment of God's gracious and irrevocable promises. It is important to note, however, that the church of Jesus Christ, composed of both Jew and Gentile, does not necessarily eliminate a future salvation for ethnic Israel (Rom 9–11).

However, this future salvation is obtained only through faith in Jesus Christ as a surprising display of God's faithfulness and grace.[5]

From a canonical perspective, then, Revelation presents this worldwide temple as the new heaven and new earth—the new Jerusalem—in light of the fulfillment of Christ, the true temple. For the NT writers this prophecy became a brilliant way of speaking of what God had now achieved in and through Jesus. Paradoxically, although Ezekiel's vision had focused so much upon the temple, it found its ultimate fulfillment in that city where there will beno distinct physical structure known as atemple, because the true temple is the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb (Rev 21:22).

4. Conclusion

The final picture in Revelation envisions God's person—Jesus Christ, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, and a slain yet standing Lamb—and a glorious return of God's people living in his place under his personal reign, thereby tying together the creation and placement of man in Eden, the redemption of Israel, and, finally, God's eschatological purposes to bring blessing to the world. Eden has not merely been regained and the promised land possessed, however, but radically transformed through the life, death, resurrection, and rule of the triumphant Lamb who wins a new creation for his people. Indeed, the kingdom of the world will become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever (11:15; cf. Pss 2, 8). God's people in Christ will once again dwell with him in the land—forever.

[5] For further reading, see G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God,* NSBT 17 (Nottingham: Apollos, 2004).

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Reflections on *Including the Stranger*

— David G. Firth —

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1. Context and Approach

As with many who write on some area of biblical theology, my motivation in writing *Including the Stranger: Foreigners in the Former Prophets*[1] emerged from important pastoral, missional, and ethical issues I was encountering, issues where I wanted to ground my response more clearly in the biblical witness. Of course, one cannot simply read a 'biblical theology of migration and ethnicity' straight out of the Bible, because these are categories that have a specific nuance in modern discourse that differs from that of the biblical world. How such matters are constructed today are not the same as they were in comparatively recent history, let alone in the Old Testament. In addition, one cannot separate this from the issue of how one is to understand God's involvement in Israel's arrival in the land and the violence associated with that, since the issue of ethnicity is an integral part of this discussion. Indeed, when people learn that I teach Old Testament, it is one of the most frequent issues that they raise.

For me, biblical theology is therefore not an abstract discussion of some aspect of the Bible. It is rather a point at which the message of the Bible and the practice of discipleship come together. It remains the case that, in doing the detailed exegesis that supports the work of biblical theology, it may be necessary to move into areas that may seem obscure to many. But provided we keep the goals of discipleship before us, biblical theology can and should be understood as a discipline that is intensely practical, a place where careful exegesis and the issues involved in following Jesus come together. I therefore reject the sort of approach championed by James Barr in which biblical theology is a descriptive task rather than a normative one.[2] Rather, an evangelical approach to biblical theology takes the Bible's normative status as its starting point because of the need for the Bible to shape all we believe, are, and do. However, in agreement with Barr, I do accept that we need to interrogate the Bible carefully, ensuring we allow its voice to be heard rather than projecting our own onto it, while also understanding how its content shapes and develops our theology.[3] This process recognises that the interrogation of the biblical material is not restricted to the *topoi* that have typically guided systematic

[1] David G. Firth, *Including the Stranger: Foreigners in the Former Prophets*, NSBT 50 (London: Apollos, 2019).

[2] James Barr, *The Idea of Biblical Theology: An Old Testament Approach* (London: SCM, 1999). To understand Barr's model in dialogue with others, see Edward W. Klink III and Darian R. Lockett, *Understanding Biblical Theology: A Comparison of Theory and Practice* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012). However, although I find their typology for biblical theologies helpful, I see aspects of each of their types 2–5 in my own work.

[3] This statement requires a good deal more hermeneutical scaffolding than can be provided here, but for a stimulating recent discussion, see Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Mere Christian Hermeneutics: Transfiguring what It Means to Read the Bible Theologically* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2024).

theology. Rather, careful examination of the biblical text shows that it too speaks to many issues that have perhaps only risen to prominence in recent years in which its contribution has been relatively unnoticed. We do not need to ignore key themes that receive prominent attention across the canon in a search for novelty, but neither do we assume that they are the sum total of biblical theology. Rather, for as long as discipleship faces new challenges, and as fresh questions arise, it is the task of the biblical theologian to examine the Bible to identify how specific texts or broader themes within it help shape our discipleship. Biblical theology is never less than descriptive, but that description of the biblical material finds its goal in shaping discipleship.

Although my reflections in *Including the Stranger* thus arise from my convictions about the interface between the Bible and questions of discipleship, I am not sure that I can trace the book's origin to the questions of ethnicity which are at its core and which remain so prominent in current discourse. I was undoubtedly aware of discussions about ethnicity and migration that shape my thinking, something that continues to shape my existence as a foreigner living in the United Kingdom. But as someone whose vocation lies in the study and teaching of the Old Testament for those entering Christian ministry, and as someone who still moonlights as a preacher on some weekends, I also spend a good deal of my time engaging with the Bible, and especially the Old Testament, simply because it is there and worthy of study in its own right. That is, I do not only read and study the Bible simply because there are questions that I am confronting for which I do not have ready answers. I read and study the Bible because doing so is something that continually nourishes my own discipleship, confronting me with insights into the nature of God and what it is to know and serve him. I read the Bible because, as Craig Bartholomew reminds us, it is a means by which we hear God's address.[4]

How, then, did my understanding of the nature of biblical theology and awareness of many contemporary issues concerned with ethnicity result in this book? Much of my professional work as a biblical interpreter has focused on the books of the Former Prophets, in the classroom, as a preacher, and also in my writing.[5] It was in studying these texts that I began noticing the prominent role played by so many foreigners, and that there were many who I had not previously realised were foreigners. As I did so, I realised that their presentation was contrary to what I had often heard, and that the scholarly literature did not seem to address this issue in a manner that I found helpful. Alongside this, I was regularly encountering popular claims that suggested that these books effectively demonised foreigners. Richard Dawkins might not, in my view, be an effective biblical interpreter, but his claims about God in the Old Testament being a vengeful xenophobe, such that Israel's entry into the land was morally indistinguishable from Hitler's invasion of Poland, seem to have found considerable traction in both popular culture and the church.[6] In truth, I do not know which came first—observations about the

[4] An accessible approach to his thinking can be found in Craig G. Bartholomew, *Listening to Scripture: An Introduction to Interpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2023), though it is worth strengthening some of the more expressly exegetical dimensions of his work with Stanley E. Porter, *Interpretation for Preaching and Teaching: An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2023). There are obviously far more detailed works on hermeneutics available, and these are both introductory works, but the shared strength of both is that they situate biblical interpretation in the life of discipleship.

[5] For example, David G. Firth, *1 & 2 Samuel*, AOTC 8 (Nottingham: Apollos, 2009), and, Firth, *Joshua*, EBTC (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Academic, 2021). I should point out that the *Joshua* volume was written before *Including the Stranger* but was delayed by a change of publisher.

[6] Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (London: Bantam, 2006), 280. For an insightful critique of Dawkins, but also why his reading methods have found traction in the church, see Brent A. Strawn, *The Old Testament Is Dying: A Diagnosis and Recommended Treatment* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 83–102.

positive portrayal of so many foreigners or the contemporary discussions about both ethnicity and the justice of Israel's arrival in the land. Perhaps it was just that these elements came together in a helpful way, helping me to see what I believed was an important insight in the Former Prophets—that these texts were not opposed to foreigners, only to foreign religion, and that Israel was called to be an ethnically inclusive and religiously exclusive people. Provided foreigners embraced Yahweh, they could be an important part of Israel. Conversely, the figure of Achan emerged as someone much more important than I had previously noted. He was someone with impeccable ethnic credentials and yet was excluded from Israel precisely because he placed his own interests before those of Yahweh. Ethnicity on its own was never enough. Indeed, anticipating themes that will become more prominent in the New Testament, it was always about a living faith in God.

2. Content and Structure

Given my concerns in the book, its structure seemed to me to be fairly self-evident—the introductory chapter sets out the main issues concerning ethnicity before devoting one chapter to each of the books of the Former Prophets. The opening chapter also situated me as a reader of these texts. It seems to me to be important that the discussion of a topic which has potential implications for me (and my family) needed to be signalled, while also indicating the role this has played in the book's development. I am not sure that declaring such situatedness is always necessary, but especially where the conclusions drawn from the biblical material have important implications for my own understanding and practice of aspects of Christian social ethics, it seems only right to note the possibility that some of my interests could come from that situatedness. On the other hand, I did not want to weigh down the opening chapter with an extensive discussion of theories of ethnicity. I could have expanded the chapter with a discussion of race and ethnicity as elements of social construction in which how we define the other is largely the result of social relations. This in turn would need to enter the discussion of whether race and ethnicity exist apart from those social relations. But I am not sure that the points made would have changed, because if people believe in such things (whether or not there is a reality behind them), then that understanding of race and ethnicity shapes their belief and actions. Moreover, and building on J. Daniel Hays,[7] it seems to me that the biblical material does not reflect on issues of race and ethnicity in those categories. While I accept that we always have some theory through which we read the Bible, it did not seem to me that a detailed treatment of these areas of theory would have enriched the work.

Each of the books of the Former Prophets receives a chapter on its own. This reflects my conviction that reading these books as 'Former Prophets', rather than the common scholarly convention of the Deuteronomistic History, is important. This is not the place to detail my criticisms of the Deuteronomistic History as a hermeneutical construct, but I simply note that it ignores the canonical divisions between each of the books, books that each have a clear beginning and end. This allows us to recognise that, although these books have a clear family resemblance, there are also distinctive emphases that each brings, a distinctiveness that is flattened out when read as part of a Deuteronomistic History. So, although not a primary goal of the work, I did have a subsidiary goal of showing the fruitfulness of reading in this mode, and in particular of noting that although there was a shared vision of including foreigners, each book within the Former Prophets also develops this with its own distinctives.

[7] J. Daniel Hays, *From Every People and Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race*, NSBT 14 (Nottingham, Apollos, 2003).

Having previously written at some length on both Joshua and Samuel, I was able to draw on a body of existing research, though especially in the case of the material on Samuel there were points where I found myself needing to nuance my earlier conclusions or even to realise that there were important points where I had simply not appreciated the extent to which matters of ethnicity played out.

To give only one example, my earlier treatment of David's friend Hushai the Archite had given no attention to the fact that his gentilic identified him as being a member of a clan that had remained in Israel after Israel's entry into the land (cf. Josh 16:2). Like many contemporary western readers, the ethnic marking of his name had not seemed significant—no more important than a surname is today in identifying which person is meant. But though gentilics do not have only one function, ethnic marking can be one. Until I began exploring the issue of ethnicity, I did not appreciate how often it appears.

By contrast, it was doing detailed work on Joshua that first made me aware of how important this theme is. After all, the first person we encounter in the land is Rahab, a Canaanite prostitute who turns out to have a clearer understanding of Israel's faith and purpose than the scouts who come to her house, and who demonstrates this in enabling their escape. That she is clearly contrasted with Achan, an Israelite of the Israelites who acts more like a Canaanite, is surely a vital part of the book's presentation. As with Hushai, until doing the additional research for this book I had not realised the extent to which the figure of Achan casts a shadow over the remaining books of the Former Prophets, all of which allude to his story in showing points where Israel fails to live out its calling.[8] That Caleb was of Edomite descent, and yet becomes the paradigm character for the land allocation chapters in Joshua, was also not something I had anticipated.

Although I had a reasonable body of work on both Judges and Kings, there was more fresh research involved here. In both books, there are people who I again had not realised were presented as foreigners. The case of Shamgar is perhaps an easy one to have missed since his own account takes only one verse (Judg 3:31), though he is also mentioned in the Song of Deborah (Judg 5:6). Of course once we recognise that Caleb was a foreigner, then Othniel (Judg 3:7–11) is too. Just as Caleb is a paradigm in Joshua, so also is Othniel in Judges. In Kings, it was Elijah who was the unexpected foreigner. The most indefatigable defender of authentic Yahwism was from a settler family, though his parents must clearly have been believers given his name's testimony to that faith.

I could, like the writer to the Hebrews, go on with yet more foreigners in the Former Prophets, but time would fail me (Heb 11:32). Through foreigners, we see more clearly what Israel can be, and how it fails. Through foreigners, we gain a framework for assessing faithfulness and seeing that Israel was always more than its ethnicity. Israel was true to its calling when it included those who came to faith in Yahweh. Foreigners were, in fact, a major source of enrichment to Israel's life. They could be a threat when they did not abandon their previous religion, but so could Israelites who did not remain faithful.

Why does this matter? It has, I think, important implications for how we read the New Testament and the church's discovery of God's work among the Gentiles. It also has important implications for how Christians engage with governments on issues of immigration today. I do not mean by this that all Christians will necessarily agree on government policies, even if they find my exegesis persuasive. But it should make clear that approaches to foreigners today that automatically demonise them simply because they are foreigners are unacceptable. As peoples move around the world today, we need to think through the biblical material more thoroughly than ever before.

[8] See David G. Firth, 'Achan Typology in the Former Prophets,' *JESOT* 7.2 (2021): 16–36.

For this to happen, there is more work to be done, both on the biblical material and contemporary ethical reflection. I was delighted to see that Daniel Timmer has built on my work in a recent study on the Latter Prophets,[9] but there is more to be done in this area. I would hope that similar works could be produced on the Pentateuch, while Psalms also provides rich resources for reflection on this area. As always, once we begin studying the Bible in depth, it opens up new areas for us, expanding our understanding of discipleship and enabling us to wrestle with fresh challenges for today.

[9] Daniel C. Timmer, *'Egypt My People … and Israel My Inheritance': The Non-Israelite Nations in the Latter Prophets*, NSBT 63 (London: Apollos, 2025).

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Ruth to Restoration: Tracing Temple and Kingship in Canonical Perspective

— Peter H. W. Lau & Gregory Goswell —

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We are grateful for the enduring contribution of Don Carson to our understanding of biblical theology. I (Peter) was influenced by his view of the unity of Scripture and its focus on Christ in my formative teenage years through his books and especially through his Revelation talks at a Katoomba convention. I remain thankful for our conversation in Malaysia about the NSBT Ruth volume, his acceptance of the proposal, and suggestions for its improvement. And it has been a privilege to work with him as Old Testament book review editor at *Themelios*. For my part (Greg), the incisive thinking of Don Carson and his extraordinary commitment to promoting biblical theology as witnessed by the NSBT series have served as a benchmark in my mind for how scholarship can serve the church. We honor his legacy and theological clarity.

1. Introduction: A Canonical Tension

In our NSBT volume on Ruth, we explored the book of Ruth as a theological narrative of divine kindness, providence, and emerging kingship. While the theme of kingship received sustained attention—particularly in relation to the Davidic genealogy at the book's conclusion—temple theology was only lightly touched upon.[1] Yet, within the broader Old Testament canon, kingship and temple are deeply intertwined, both functioning as institutional expressions of God's relational presence and sovereign rule.[2]

This essay seeks to develop that underexplored dimension by placing Ruth in canonical dialogue with two post-exilic works: Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah. These books offer contrasting configurations of kingship and temple: Ruth presents a king without a temple; Chronicles idealizes their union; Ezra-Nehemiah depicts a temple without a king. Read together, they reveal a theological tension—Israel sometimes has a king without a temple, or a temple without a king—yet God's sovereign presence remains active throughout. This tension, we argue, anticipates resolution in Christ, the Davidic king who is also the true temple, in whom divine and relational presence converge once and for all.

[1] Peter H. W. Lau and Gregory Goswell, *Unceasing Kindness: A Biblical Theology of Ruth* NSBT 41 (London: Apollos, 2016), 14–15.

[2] God is omnipresent, but at times he takes up residence to relate to his people; see J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays, *God's Relational Presence: The Cohesive Center of Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019).

2. Ruth: Providential Kingship without Temple

Set in the time of the judges (Ruth 1:1), the Ruth narrative describes a period before Israel had a king and before the temple was constructed. Yet the book affirms divine kingship through the quiet orchestration of providence and kindness (חֶסֶד), culminating in a genealogy that leads to David (4:18–22). As we noted in *Unceasing Kindness*, Ruth and Boaz embody a form of piety marked by initiative, risk-taking, and other-centeredness, qualities that prefigure David's own leadership and devotion. Their actions reflect a lived theology in which God's rule is experienced not through cultic structures but through faithful response to God's guidance. This is not merely a temporary accommodation but a theological ideal: God's kingship is manifest in relational fidelity and covenant obedience.

The kindness (חֶסֶד) shown by Ruth and Boaz reflects the חֶסֶד of God himself, especially as their actions align with the law's requirements, which reflect God's character. In this way, the law functions not only as ethical instruction but as a vehicle of divine presence. The characters' obedience becomes almost like a narrative embodiment of temple theology, where God's relational presence is mediated not through architecture but covenant faithfulness.

This theological vision is reinforced by the literary structure of the book. The narrative is bookended by explicit mentions of divine activity (1:6; 4:13), underscoring God's providential hand.[3] While God's direct intervention is mostly hidden, the turning point occurs in 2:20, when Naomi recognizes YHWH's kindness in providing a potential kinsman-redeemer. This recognition sets the stage for Naomi's initiative in 3:1–5.[4] The structure itself thus mirrors the theological claim: God's kingship is active even when unseen, and providence unfolds through faithful human response.

The canonical placement of Ruth—following Judges and preceding Samuel—invites a theological reading that sees the book as a bridge between Israel's chaotic tribal period and the emergence of Davidic kingship.[5] In a recent work, I (Peter) further explored Ruth's function as a literary and theological hinge, reinforcing its role in Primary History (Genesis–2 Kings) by tracing lexical and thematic links between Ruth and the opening chapters of 1 Samuel.[6] These include shared motifs of infertility, divine reversal, and covenant faithfulness, as well as repeated phrases such as "better to you than X sons" (Ruth 4:15; 1 Sam 1:8), which bind the narratives together at their seams.

Importantly, the Ruth narrative models divine rule in the absence of temple and monarchy. This absence is not coincidental. It suggests that God's people can live rightly before him without the institutional presence of the temple, provided they can walk in covenant faithfulness.[7] Yet this theological silence regarding the temple must be understood within the broader canonical context.

[3] Peter H. W. Lau, *The Book of Ruth*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2023), 3.

[4] Lau, *The Book of Ruth*, 5. The characters' speech about God and their prayers to him throughout the narrative ensure that audiences do not forget his sovereign role in proceedings.

[5] The placement of Ruth varies across canonical traditions. In Hebrew Bible manuscripts, Ruth is found in the Writings (Ketuvim). See the discussion in Lau and Goswell, *Unceasing Kindness*, chs. 4 and 5.

[6] Peter H. W. Lau, "The Book of Ruth and the Beginning of 1 Samuel: Reinforcing a Crucial Link in Primary History," in *Explorations in the Interpretation of Samuel,* ed. Rachelle Gilmour and Benjamin J. M. Johnson, SBR 26 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2025), 27–44.

[7] The characters in the Ruth narrative frequently offer prayers and invoke God's name, without a formal sacrificial system. These prayers function as expressions of covenantal devotion, revealing that God remained accessible. At the same time, we must not downplay the theological significance of the temple and its sacrificial system in the Old Testament. The temple was the God-instituted locus for atonement, worship, and covenant renewal. Later canonical texts, such as Chronicles, reaffirm its centrality for maintaining a right relationship with God.

While the physical structure is absent, the relational presence it symbolizes—God the King dwelling among his people—is not. The Ruth narrative is saturated with divine initiative, guidance, and blessing. What the temple would later represent in architectural and liturgical form is already present in narrative and relational form.

This symbolic dimension becomes more explicit in the Chronicler's account, where temple and kingship are fused as expressions of divine sovereignty. Ruth's theological restraint thus sets the stage for the fuller development of temple theology in the canonical books that follow.

3. Chronicles: Temple and Kingship as Divine Expression

The theological union of temple and kingship in Chronicles begins with the Davidic covenant (1 Chr 17:1–15). Here, God's wordplay on בַּיִת, "house," forges a foundational connection between David's dynasty and the temple. David wants to build a house for YHWH, but God responds by promising to build a house for David, a permanent dynasty (17:12, 14). This promise establishes the framework for the Chronicler's vision: the Davidic king and the temple are inseparably linked as expressions of God's sovereignty. The temple is not just a religious structure; it is the embodiment of God's rule and relational presence among his people.

This vision is further developed in David's final speeches and Solomon's commissioning (1 Chr 28–29). Solomon is "chosen" by God to "sit on the throne of the kingdom of YHWH over Israel" (28:5). In this verse, not only is human kingship by God's choice and hence delegated under God's rule, Solomon does not inherit just a national throne but the throne of YHWH himself. This idea is reiterated in 1 Chronicles 29:23, where Solomon "sat on the throne of YHWH in place of David his father." God's ultimate sovereignty is more striking when we compare it to the parallel account in Kings, which states, "So Solomon sat on the throne of David his father, and his kingdom was firmly established" (1 Kgs 2:12). The phrase "the throne of YHWH" in the Chronicler's account underscores that God is the true king, and the Davidic monarch is his viceregent. This idea had already been introduced in the covenantal promise: "I will set him over my house and my kingdom" (1 Chr 17:14). The Davidic king, then, is not the sovereign but the steward, ruling under God's authority, expressing God's reign, and mediating his presence to the people.

The temple itself becomes a visible symbol of God's kingship. In 1 Chronicles 29:1, David refers to the temple as the בִּירָה—a fortified palace prepared for YHWH. The Chronicler's use of בִּירָה, a loanword from Akkadian, *birtu*, meaning "fortified town" or "citadel," is theologically significant.[8] It portrays the temple not simply as a place of worship but as the fortified palace of the divine king, a stronghold of covenant stability and sovereign presence. David's repeated use of the term (29:1, 19) emphasizes the temple's royal stature. The use of בִּירָה aligns with Solomon's enthronement "on the throne of YHWH" (29:23), suggesting that the temple is the architectural counterpart to divine kingship. The temple is not just the place for cultic activities; it is the palace of the sovereign God who rules over Israel and all creation.

This theological vision is reinforced by the Chronicler's focus on liturgical details. David organizes the Levitical musicians (1 Chr 15:16–24; 25:1–8) and he institutes regular thanksgiving and praise before

[8] *HALOT* 1:123; *NIDOTTE* 1:643. The term appears elsewhere in Chronicles for royal fortresses built by Jehoshaphat and Jotham (2 Chr 17:12; 27:4), reinforcing its connotation of strength and sovereignty. Nehemiah also uses בִּירָה to describe the temple (Neh 2:8).

the ark of the covenant (16:4–36). The temple is not only a political center but a liturgical one, where the king leads the people in covenantal devotion. The ark of the covenant, placed in the temple, is described as God's "footstool" (28:2), and the cherubim above it are called "the plan for the golden chariot of the cherubim" (28:18), evoking the image of God enthroned and mobile, sovereign and present.[9] In this way, the temple functions both as the worship center and the representation of God's kingship. The people's participation in worship affirms that they serve the divine sovereign enthroned in his palace.

In the postexilic period, when there was no Davidic king on the throne, the Chronicler's emphasis on the temple offered theological reassurance. Even without a human king, the temple stood as a tangible symbol of God's enduring kingship. It affirmed that God still reigned and that his relational presence had not departed. The temple thus served both a liturgical and eschatological function: it was the place where worship continued and the sign that the divine king remained enthroned. The Chronicler's vision of temple and kingship not only interpreted Israel's past but sustained hope for the future.

4. Ezra-Nehemiah: Temple Rebuilt, Kingship Absent

In Ezra-Nehemiah, the people of God return to Jerusalem with the mandate to rebuild the destroyed house of God (Ezra 1:2–4), and that goal is achieved by the end of Ezra 6. The leading role played by Zerubbabel in this project is plain (3:8; 4:2; 5:2), and on that basis, it is intriguing that the narrative is silent about Zerubbabel's Davidic lineage. It is a matter of debate how much significance the reader is meant to see in his patronym ("the son of Shealtiel"), and the same applies to the use of the same patronym in the prophecy of Haggai (Hag 1:1, 12, 14; 2:2, 23).[10] Shealtiel was the son of Jeconiah (= Jehoiachin), the deposed and exiled Judahite king (cf. 1 Chr 3:17–19). This patronym is also used in Ezra 3:2, 8; 5:2 and Nehemiah 12:1, but it cannot be assumed without argument that this is designed to alert the reader to his Davidic linkage, for Zerubbabel is never in so many words identified as a Davidide in the narrative. The narrator of Ezra-Nehemiah does not stress the royal lineage of Zerubbabel; in fact, it would be more accurate to say that the Davidic pedigree of Zerubbabel is ignored and concealed from the reader.

In Chronicles, the reigns of David and Solomon are seen as a unity centered on the construction of the temple.[11] In Ezra-Nehemiah, the figure of David is recalled a number of times in his role as organizer of cultic worship (Ezra 3:10; 8:20; Neh 11:23; 12:24, 36, 45, 46), and his son Solomon once joins him in the same role (Neh 12:45). However, none of these references connect the Davidic house with the erection of the temple. The name behind the non-specific description of the original builder of the temple ("a great king of Israel") in Ezra 5:11 is, obviously enough, Solomon, but the point is that he is not mentioned by name in this verse, and so the Solomon connection is effectively downplayed. It is probably the case that the Jewish representatives only mention that the temple was originally a royal building project in an effort to attract the support of the Persian monarch for its rebuilding.

Near the end of the book, the story of Solomon is cited as a sobering example of a great man led astray by foreign wives (Neh 13:26). Solomon was "beloved by his God," with this expression recalling

[9] The ark as "footstool" reflects the ancient Near Eastern concept of the footstool as part of the throne apparatus. See *NIDOTTE* 1:989. The cherubim imagery evokes the mobile throne of God seen in Ezekiel's vision (Ezek 1:4–28; 10:3–22) and Psalm 18:10, where God "rode on a cherubim and flew."

[10] Cf. Gregory Goswell, "The Fate and Future of Zerubbabel in the Prophecy of Haggai," *Bib* 91 (2010): 77–90.

[11] Roddy L. Braun, "Solomonic Apologetic in Chronicles," *JBL* 92 (1973): 503–16.

the name Jedidiah (= "Loved by the Lord") given to Solomon at his birth (2 Sam 12:24–25). The point made is that "foreign women made *even* him to sin," namely, despite his wisdom and the special divine favors bestowed upon him (cf. 1 Kgs 11:1–8). Here, the figure of Solomon is used as an object lesson of immoral behavior for the people generally, not as a messianic cipher. The only person in Ezra-Nehemiah identified as a Davidide is Hattush, who plays no special role (Ezra 8:2). When all this is taken into account, it is plain that the silence in Ezra-Nehemiah concerning the Davidic origins of Zerubbabel must be intentional.

In line with this orientation, there are multiple instances of architectural use of the name David (Neh 12:37 [x2]; cf. 3:16) and references to his liturgical role (12:45, 46) and to his role as prophet (= "the man of God"; 12:24, 36). Nehemiah 12 mentions David by name six times, but nothing implies an expectation of a future Davidide who will put everything right. Certain prominent architectural features of the city memorialize David as a great figure of the past who had close connections with Jerusalem, part of which is called "the city of David" (3:15), but they do not imply that there is an important future for his descendants. An underlying "kingdom of God" theology is the reason for the book's failure to provide a hope centered on the house of David.[12] Despite present disappointments and failures by the people (esp. Neh 13), the implied hope is that a change for the better will come through the intervention of God the King. On that basis, Ezra-Nehemiah can be read as looking forward to the coming of Jesus and to the dawning of God's kingdom through the work of him who is God in human flesh.

5. Theological Reflection: Canonical Tension and Resolution

The practice of biblical theology does not require all books to say exactly the same thing, but it does assume the compatibility of the theology of the different Bible books, with individual canonical books complementing each other in different ways. Set in the early period of Israel's occupation of the land, the book of Ruth demonstrates that the fact and exercise of God's Kingship do not depend on what will later become institutions in Israel, namely Davidic kingship and the temple. God's rule of his people will later find expression in both the house of David and the house of God, but despite their honor and importance, they are not indispensable, for they are only vehicles for something higher and more fundamental. At the other end of the Old Testament period, in the face of the loss of Davidic rule and the destruction of the temple, the book of Daniel reasserts the truth of God's supreme kingship, which can do without either prop if needed. Mediating positions are provided by Chronicles and Ezra-Nehemiah. The Chronicler forges what appears to be an inseparable link between temple and Davidic kingship; however, at the end of the book, kings disappear, but it is announced that the temple will be rebuilt (2 Chr 36:22–23). Ezra-Nehemiah highlights the rebuilt temple, but no Davidic king is connected to its rebuilding. Both these books come from the post-exilic period in which the temple functions as the definitive symbol of God's Kingship over Israel and the world.

In Jesus Christ, the King who is God himself dwells among his people in human form. God's sovereign relational presence, the ultimate reality to which both temple and kingship pointed, is perfectly embodied in him. Jesus does not merely fulfill these typologies; he *is* the reality they symbolized. As the incarnate Son, he is both the divine King and the dwelling place of God among his people.

[12] For a detailed argument along these lines, see Gregory Goswell, "The Absence of a Davidic Hope in Ezra-Nehemiah," *TrinJ* 33 (2012): 19–31.

As the Son of David, Jesus sits on the throne of YHWH himself (Matt 1:1; Luke 1:32–33). He is not a viceregent but God the King in human form, exercising divine sovereignty (Matt 28:18; Eph 1:20–22). His perfect obedience to the Law and his self-giving actions express God's rule and reflect the חֶסֶד of God that Ruth and Boaz prefigured, now made flesh (John 1:14, 17). In his words and deeds, the kingdom of God breaks into history (Mark 1:15; Luke 17:21).

Jesus is also the true temple, the place where God's glory dwells fully among humanity (John 1:14; 2:19–21). He is the ultimate meeting place between God and humanity, the reality foreshadowed by the Chronicler's vision of the temple as the place where God's presence was enthroned, and by Ezra-Nehemiah's rebuilt sanctuary. Through his atoning death, fellowship with God is restored (Heb 10:19–22). In Christ, believers indwelt by the Spirit become God's temple (1 Cor 3:16–17; Eph 2:21–22), embodying his presence and awaiting the day when they will reign with him (Rev 5:10; 22:5).

6. Conclusion

This study has traced a canonical pattern that resists simplification. Ruth, Chronicles, and Ezra-Nehemiah each present distinct configurations of temple and kingship, yet none achieves completeness. Ruth depicts divine kingship without temple or monarchy, and Ezra-Nehemiah presents a temple without a king. Chronicles insists that they are inseparable, yet this configuration is incomplete in his time. This incompleteness is not a deficiency to be explained away but a canonical feature that points us to Christ. When we pay careful attention to what each book affirms and what it lacks, the tensions become theologically productive. Together, these books reveal that Israel never possessed the full reality that these institutions symbolized. They point beyond themselves to something, or someone, greater.

Recognizing these incomplete configurations illuminates the fullness of what Christ accomplishes. In him, God's sovereign presence converges fully and permanently: Jesus is not merely a Davidic king or a temple where God dwells but God the King himself dwelling among his people. What Israel experienced only in fragmented forms finds its complete expression in the incarnate Son.

This approach has methodological implications for biblical theology. Canonical diversity is not an obstacle to a christological reading but its necessary foundation. Only by reading each text on its own terms, attending to both its affirmations and its silences, can we grasp the full scope of what Christ accomplishes. Biblical theology requires patient attention to the particularity of each witness before moving to synthesis, for it is in the gaps and tensions of the Old Testament that the shape of God's sovereign purposes becomes clear.

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God's Unfaithful Wife: A Biblical Theology of Spiritual Adultery

— Ray Ortlund —

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I gladly acknowledge my debt of personal gratitude to Don Carson for his kindnesses to me through the years. One great kindness was his inviting me to contribute to the New Studies in Biblical Theology series. I remember how it happened. Don was giving me a ride home from O'Hare Airport in Chicago, back in the '90s when we were both teaching at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. We had been away at the meetings of the Evangelical Theological Society, as I recall. Driving north on the freeway toward our homes in Libertyville, Don explained his exciting new idea—the NSBT series. He asked whether I might be interested in contributing, and if so, what my theme might be. I thought for too-brief a moment and blurted out, "Whoredom!" Don hit the steering wheel with his hand and said, "Yes!" And the next thing you know, here we are!

My volume was initially titled *Whoredom: God's Unfaithful Wife in Biblical Theology*. The publishers later suggested a more subdued title: *God's Unfaithful Wife: A Biblical Theology of Spiritual Adultery*. But however we word it, the teaching of the Scriptures on this theme is unavoidably blunt, even disturbing. Here is the point: "If Yahweh is the husband of his people, then their lapses from faithfulness to him may properly be regarded as the moral equivalent to whoredom."[1]

Don sums up the vision of my NSBT volume when noting that it aims

> to examine afresh what it means to confess that Yahweh is the Bridegroom of his covenant people Israel, and that Christ is the Bridegroom of the church. Not only does the development of this theme link large swathes of the canon together, but it simultaneously discloses the profoundly personal nature of God's covenanted love, exposes the odium of spiritual adultery ('whoredom'), and, conversely, enriches our view of marriage.[2]

In our historical moment, manhood, womanhood, sexuality, and marriage are perceived as fluid categories, open to rearrangement according to our personal identities and cultural narratives. But the biblical vision of God as *the husband* of his people, and his covenant with us as a *marital* bond, suggests that ultimate reality is not only love but even *romantic* love—the Bible moves our present-day questions over into a different framework, to put it mildly.

[1] Raymond C. Ortlund, Jr., *God's Unfaithful Wife: A Biblical Theology of Spiritual Adultery*, NSBT 2 (Nottingham: Apollos, 1996), 8.

[2] Preface to Ortlund, *God's Unfaithful Wife*, 7.

As Don implies in his remarks above, this biblical theme is not just one doctrine among others, weighty though that would truly be. But this biblical theme of marriage maps onto the macro-structure of the Bible in its totality. It begins in Genesis and runs through the Law and the Prophets. It continues in Jesus and the apostles. It concludes in the Apocalypse of John. From cover to cover, the covenant of marriage provides a wrap-around category for God's profound commitment to his people. Therefore, to depart from the biblical view of marriage is not only to lose that one doctrine; it is to forsake the whole structure of the biblical witness. In such a departure, we stand to lose not only the message of the whole Bible but also the key to understanding ourselves—our manhood, womanhood, sexuality, and marriage. And are we not suffering that very meltdown in our world today?

With an awareness of how much is at stake, then, we will survey what the Bible teaches in this area of consequential beliefs and glorious realities.

1. The Law

From the beginning, the Bible teaches that human sexuality is not reducible to gender politics and cultural constructs; it is a glorious creation of God for his kingdom purpose in this world. God created man "in his image," that is, as a representation of God's royal claims upon this world (Gen 1:26–28). This image of God is shared equally by male and female, Genesis 1:27 declares.

Genesis 2 then "selects" and "double-clicks," so to speak, on this male-and-female image-of-God reality affirmed in Genesis 1. Now the Bible shows that *marriage* was God's first strategy for bringing his dominion into the world through mankind (Gen 2:18–25). And how is this unique human relationship to be properly understood? The Bible says,

> Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. (Gen 2:24)

Moses interrupts his narrative of the Garden of Eden with the Lord God bringing Adam and Eve together in marriage. He pauses, turns to us post-fall people for whom the Garden of Eden is even less than a distant memory, and he explains to us the present relevance of what God gave in the remote past. Marriage did not come down to us as a human invention, subject to our historic traditions and personal preferences. Marriage came down from God above. And he defined it as a "one flesh" union, that is, one man marries one woman, for one mortal lifetime, exclusively sharing everything together. No other relationship, not even the parental, compares to such a profound bond.

> This is the vision of human marriage which provides the coherent network of meanings necessary for an understanding of the covenanted nation's relationship with Yahweh, as the story unfolds in the rest of Scripture.[3]

Strikingly then, as the Old Testament drama continues, the Bible uses marriage-related categories to frame Israel's betrayals of their covenant Lord. Their sins against him are presented not as petty legalistic missteps but as shocking acts of adultery, even whoredom.

For example, in Exodus 34:11–16, God renews his covenant with his wayward people after their golden calf orgy. To quote Bruce Waltke, "His people … commit adultery with a fertility deity on their

[3] Ortlund, *God's Unfaithful Wife*, 23.

wedding night with [the Lord]."[4] To emphasize the urgency of covenant faithfulness in their future, the Lord even names himself "Jealous." But how could it be otherwise? Their relationship entails boundaries of an intimate, emotional, marital nature. No wonder, then, that Israel's flirtations with Canaanite nature religion are characterized as "whoredom" (v. 16).

2. The Prophets

Hosea captures the *Zeitgeist* of his historical moment in the northern kingdom of Israel by naming it "a spirit of whoredom" (Hos 4:12; 5:4). In chapter 1 of his prophecy he tells the backstory to his bold claim:

> The Lord said to Hosea, "Go, take to yourself a wife of whoredom and have children of whoredom, for the land commits great whoredom by forsaking the Lord." (Hos 1:2)

Hosea must serve as a living parable of the reality God's people do not see and presumably do not *want* to see: their departures from the Lord are turning his holy land into their degraded brothel. The reality is too extreme for God to ignore. But his ultimately redemptive purpose through Hosea "is one of the most remarkable depictions of divine grace in the Old Testament."[5] And, taking the rest of chapters 1–3 into account, the message is clear:

> The life of whoredom [God's unfaithful wife] has chosen must be purged from her national soul; but through all the agony required for the cleansing to be thorough, nothing will be able to separate her from the love of Yahweh.[6]

Passing by Isaiah, Micah, and Jeremiah, we will note briefly the vision of Ezekiel on our way to the New Testament. Chapter 16 of Ezekiel famously portrays the promiscuities of God's people as "abominations" (v. 1). Accordingly, "there is much in this chapter which is repulsive to our taste."[7] The distasteful truth is that God's people have taken his blessings, with which he had beautified and dignified them, and have twisted their use into the exact opposite of God's purpose. They have reduced his kingdom to their own Las Vegas playground of sinful indulgence, setting up local franchises of their lewdness, and normalizing such abominations nationwide. The prostitute nation has sunk so low as not to accept payment from her customers, for indeed she pays them!

The literal reality Ezekiel confronted was Judah's religious compromises and diplomatic entanglements with foreign powers. They professed faith in Yahweh; but they functioned in denial of his all-sufficient care, buying good will and protection from the very nations they should have resisted. For their unbelief in him, the Lord threatens to subject them to these nations they have cozied up to. He will intervene decisively: "I will make you stop playing the whore, and you shall also give payment no more" (Ezek 16:41). But they must know the egregious extremity of their evil. Judah has sunk even lower than Israel to the north and Sodom to the south (vv. 46–51). Judah, therefore, cannot excuse herself with

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[4] Bruce K. Waltke with Charles Wu, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 363.

[5] Thomas Edward McComiskey, ed., *The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 1:17.

[6] Ortlund, *God's Unfaithful Wife*, 75.

[7] G. A. Cooke, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Ezekiel*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1936), 160.

smug superiority. Nor can she fault her covenant Lord for withdrawing his blessing from his corrupt people. He knows they will only turn the blessing into yet more wickedness.

Ezekiel chapter 23 returns to this troubling vision of God's unfaithful wife flirting with worldly powers for the sake of worldly gain. The prophet's argument is so vivid, in some of its details, as to be downright embarrassing. Truly, God is quite prepared to expose the odium of human evil. And Ezekiel's point in this chapter? Judah is incorrigible in her manic drivenness. "She will *never* be faithful to her husband."[8]

No wonder, then, that the last two words of the Old Testament are "utter destruction" (Mal 4:6). If this marriage can ever be renewed, nothing less than a new covenant is needed.

3. The New Testament

In Matthew 19:3–6, Jesus affirms Genesis 2:24 as still normative today in our fallen world. After all, the passage concerns divorce. And to him, it is obvious that male and female remain worthy fixities of human existence as created by God (v. 4). What's more, Jesus takes it for granted that the Creator who made mankind in this duality was also the voice who defined marriage as the "one flesh" union (vv. 4–5). Finally, he asserts that the new social reality created on a wedding day is not merely a human arrangement but is "what … *God* has joined together" (v. 6). Every lawful marriage is a miracle worthy to be preserved.

In 1 Corinthians 6:15–17, the apostle Paul quotes Genesis 2:24. His theology of the human body in this passage is startling. Our bodies are *members of Christ* (v. 15). Our covenant with him must not be thought of as a mere abstraction. We are involved with *Christ*, and Christ with *us*—even at a *visceral* level. The covenant is that deeply personal. It is, therefore, unthinkable to degrade our Christ-indwelt body parts in an extra-marital sexual fling, a "one body" hook-up. Such would be a cheap imitation of the "one flesh" union of marriage, where sex does belong (v. 16). But even more, it would violate our "one spirit" union with Christ (v. 17). Sexual sin is not trivial but profound, for our union with Christ is not trivial but profound. And our union with him includes our very bodies—the humblest part of us.

In Ephesians 5:31–32, Paul again quotes Genesis 2:24, with another astonishing claim. In verse 30, he asserts that we are members of Christ's body. Then in verse 31, seamlessly, he joins Genesis 2:24 to that thought. In its original context, the logical particle "Therefore" at the beginning of Genesis 2:24 connects the "one flesh" union of marriage with the prior fact that God had created Eve out of Adam's literal flesh. But in the new context of Paul's argument, the logical particle "Therefore" connects the "one flesh" union of marriage with the ultimate reality that "we are members of [Christ's] body" (v. 30). This line of reasoning is stunning. Why do we men and women fall in love and get married? Paul would say, To embody visibly on earth the transcendent reality of Christ and his Bride. No wonder the apostle then exclaims, "This mystery is profound" (v. 32). A Christian husband and wife are caught up in glories far beyond their own marital happiness. "Through it all, the mystery of the gospel is unveiled."[9]

Significantly, nowhere in the New Testament do we find Jesus or the apostles casting any doubt on the original meaning of marriage in Genesis 2:24. Their arguments show its continuing validity. They are not waffling or apologizing. Quite the opposite. They even lift the ancient vision of marriage into an eternal and ultimate redemptive hope for us today.

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[8] Ortlund, *God's Unfaithful Wife*, 125.

[9] Ortlund, *God's Unfaithful Wife*, 158.

4. The Apocalypse

The apostle John brings the biblical drama full-circle, with better-than-before resolution. He unveils before our eyes the final and eternal destination of the redeemed in Christ. The whole biblical story has been moving toward this climactic "happy ending." John helps us picture it as a wedding feast (Rev 14:6–9). He also portrays the community of Jesus as a bride in her lovely wedding gown (21:2). He shows us to ourselves, with the eyes of faith and hope and love, as "the Bride, the wife of the Lamb" (21:9). And his pastoral purpose in offering these powerfully moving images is to stir our hearts to live now with this heart-cry: "The Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come'" (22:17). Our prayers, aligned with the Holy Spirit, keep us eagerly open to the risen Christ every day—sitting on the edge of our seats, as it were—all the way until his second coming.

> The suffering church militant of this present evil age is to cultivate one great impulse throbbing in her soul, viz., an aching longing for the Bridegroom to come to her, to take her in his arms, with nothing within herself to wrest her away, and to be held there forever.[10]

5. Conclusion

When we stand back and consider the Bible in its totality, taking in its typological symmetry, this astonishing claim stands forth: Not only does God in Christ love sinners, but God in Christ loves sinners with the romantic heart of a devoted, faithful, adoring husband. Human marriage is good, but it is not the experience we most long for. Human marriage serves as a metaphor for the experience we most long for. Sexuality bespeaks ultimacy. Intimacy presages glory. Falling in love portrays our coming to Christ and going to heaven. The biblical gospel speaks with this earthy, and yet heavenly, emotional power.

> The gospel tells the story of God's pursuing, faithful, wounded, angry, overruling, transforming, triumphant *love*. And it calls us to answer him with a love which cleanses our lives of all spiritual whoredom.[11]

I thank my friend Don Carson for the privilege of re-telling this glorious gospel story in the New Studies in Biblical Theology series.

[10] Ortlund, *God's Unfaithful Wife*, 168.
[11] Ortlund, *God's Unfaithful Wife*, 173.

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Shepherds, Here to Stay

— *Timothy S. Laniak* —

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I'm profoundly grateful for Don Carson's half-century of scholarship and his leadership with the NSBT particularly. This approach to building theology from the ground up is more common for biblical scholars than systematic theologians, and while Don is among the former, he has shown his savvy in navigating both worlds.

Like many who have contributed to the series, I benefited from Don's wisdom in the editorial process. My biggest hurdle was having him say that my manuscript—already pruned to a minimum viable product!—needed shaving by another ten percent. One paragraph on page thirty-five with seventeen long bibliographical notes had to be protected from the editorial cleaver. (I'll explain why below.) The result was a publishable volume just a few words shy of 100,000 words—and one picture on the front. I compensated for that imbalance with a sequel[1] featuring a lot fewer words and a lot more pictures.

Shepherds After My Own Heart (SAMOH) addresses increasing interest among exegetes, biblical theologians, and Chrisitan leaders of all types in the intersection of biblical leadership paradigms and contemporary contexts. In a gathering of theologians in Jerusalem, another scholar questioned me on Scripture's ongoing relevance: "Doesn't the Bible reflect antiquated, hierarchical proclivities in 'high power distance,' patriarchal cultures?" Questions in less academic settings also express concerns about reinforcing caricatures of "dumb" sheep and heavy-handed leadership. My research points to the irresistible relevance of the biblical shepherding model, which ably corrects these misunderstandings.

For many, of course, servant leadership is the clearest and simplest articulation of biblical leadership. But the Scriptures are much richer, introducing leadership through various metaphors and maxims, and in both normative and narrative genres. Shepherd leadership is the most prominent, comprehensive model in the Bible, running throughout its many layers. It explains the many ways to be either good or bad shepherds. And it's simultaneously about God's leadership and ours in the context of his global mission.

1. Genesis of the Research

The curiosity behind *Shepherds after My Own Heart*[2] began twenty-five years ago at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, where I was a biblical theologian for our Lily-funded think tank for

[1] Tim Laniak, *The Good Shepherd: Forty Biblical insights on Leading and Being Led* (Grand Rapids: Our Daily Bread Publishing, 2024).

[2] Timothy S. Laniak, *Shepherds after My Own Heart: Pastoral Traditions and Leadership in the Bible*, NSBT 20 (Leicester: Apollos, 2006).

seminary presidents.[3] Shepherd leadership was the overarching rubric, with Jeremiah 3:15 as our key verse: "I will give you shepherds after my own heart who will lead you with knowledge and understanding." Seminary leaders repeatedly said they were getting most leadership insights from secular sources and that biblically based books were simply following secular models. There was shared hunger for something deeper and more biblical.

In preparation for an upcoming sabbatical, I spent two years pouring through Bible passages and secondary literature touching on literal and figurative herding. I also explored the power of metaphor, which was being recognized across disciplines as fundamental to human thought and language. The paragraph I wouldn't surrender in word-count reduction surveyed functionally equivalent terms to metaphors: paradigms, schemas, frames, prisms, images, symbols, epistemes, implicit theories, representations, cognitive maps, mental models, cultural models, cultural systems, and world hypotheses. This awareness paved the way for appreciating the sensory, rational, and imaginative trigger power of culturally rich figurative language.

As Research Professor at the Albright Institute for Archaeological Research in Jerusalem (2003–2004), I began ethnoarchaeological investigations among Bedouin tribes while using the resource reservoirs of the École Biblique and Hebrew University. I was astounded that something so central to the Bible—especially for "pastoral" identity(!)—lacked a comprehensive resource for the academy or the church. This void kept my intention alive to produce a resource edifying for pastors and any Christian leaders seeking to follow and lead biblically.

2. Shepherds after My Own Heart

2.1. OT Precedents and Anticipation

SAMOH begins with surveys of metaphor theory and pastoral realities and roles common throughout the ancient Levant. I then examine metaphorical shepherd epithets for rulers in ancient texts. Shepherd was by far the most common term for leaders, especially rulers preferring to be known as "faithful shepherd" on behalf of their gods. Royal ideology routinely extolled shepherd kings for their ample provision and wise laws (internally) and courageous protection (externally).

When the Bible adopts this terminology, it is applied to both God and Israel's leaders, beginning with Moses and David. Themes from neighboring societies are similar, though YHWH is the more prominent Shepherd of Israel; his delegates are subordinate. These prototypical figures feature prominently, with explicit echoes in their successors.

Moses represents God's shepherd leadership in the Exodus, at Sinai, and across deserts to the promised land. Specific herding terminology becomes clear as God leads—sometimes gently (נהל), by driving (נהג) or guiding (נחה), occasionally through visible presence (cloud and fire), and, in perpetuity, by the Torah. Primary shepherding roles of provision, protection, and guidance consistently shape the leadership of the God purposefully present among them. And the prophetic-priestly-shepherd Moses programmatically mediates this divine shepherding.

Like Moses, archetypal king David comes from a literal shepherding background. Both were called from their herds to lead God's flock (Ps 77:20; 78:70–72). The historical books' cautious posture toward human monarchy avoids calling David *the* shepherd of Israel (as expected in the ancient Near East).

[3] Center for the Development of Evangelical Leaders (CDEL).

He is called *to* shepherd (verb) God's flock and, like Saul, to be a נָגִיד—a term subtly emphasizing a delegated role to the divine Shepherd. David's lapses into royal pretense—typical for ancient rulers—were met with prophetic rebuke and a shepherd's remorse (2 Sam 12:1–12; 24:17).

The structure and content of the psalter reinforce the view that monarchy in Israel was always subordinate to divine rule. "YHWH reigns" is the overarching theme. The subordinate theme—only present after centuries in the promised land—was a *delegated* Davidic ruler leading as an *extension* of God's rule. The most fundamental principle of shepherd leadership can be summarized in Psalm 23:1: "The Lord is my shepherd." Israel's king was first a sheep. There would be centuries of exile when kings in this chosen line—along with prophets, priests, and elders—were not faithful as under-shepherds.

Several prophets build a vision of the future featuring a second exodus with a Mosaic figure and a uniquely qualified Davidic ruler. Isaiah is a rich resource, highlighting Israel's predicted return from exile under the leadership of the divine Shepherd they once knew in the wilderness. Pastoral imagery includes terms for God's presence, provision, protection, and guidance (Isa 40:1–11). In the new creation Isaiah describes, YHWH will gather to Israel "still others" (Isa 56:8), making up the global flock of God Jesus will later call "other sheep" (John 10:16).

Jeremiah and Ezekiel likewise contribute visions of a second exodus, including searing critique of false shepherds who misled God's flock. In fact, most shepherd leadership references in *both* Testaments are prophetic pronouncements of judgment on "misleaders" (a.k.a. wolves). Ezekiel 34 provides the most sustained analogue of Israel's mismanaged mission by under-shepherds. YHWH *personally*—emphasized repeatedly with the emphatic first-person pronoun—rescues his brutalized and scattered flock and then places them in the care of נָשִׂיא David once again. Both prophets, like Isaiah, locate promises of the flock's return, rescue, and restoration in the context of a renewed Spirit-empowered covenant.

Zechariah continues prophetic critique of worthless misleaders (or "no shepherds"), including prophets, priests, kings, and all those abusing power ("goats" in 10:3; cf. Ezek 34:17). Echoes of the first exodus abound; YHWH will rescue his flock again. Zechariah's contribution is remarkable in its specificity regarding both a suffering and militant shepherd. The prophet describes a future when a divine shepherd will be pierced (12:10) and his sheep scattered (13:7). But he will lead them again, as we shall soon see.

2.2. NT Fulfillment and Reset

Each Gospel picks up Old Testament themes about the divine shepherd—his rescue and gathering of a scattered flock, sacrificial care, calling of representative under-shepherds, and critique of Israel's false shepherds. Each connects pastoral elements to second exodus motifs of desert, feeding (bread and water), Holy Spirit, and new covenant.

Likely the first Gospel, Mark portrays Jesus as the serving and suffering shepherd, hyperlinked throughout to Old Testament passages about YHWH and the coming messiah. In feeding miracles in chapters 6–8 that take place in desert or deserted places (ἔρημος), Mark mentions bread eighteen times—both being themes of the desert sojourn. He tracks closely with Zechariah's predictions of a royal shepherd who is "struck" and his sheep "scattered" (Mark 14:27). Jesus uses a herding term (προέρχομαι) in his promise to "go before" his disciples into Galilee after his resurrection (Mark 14:28).

With almost 300 Old Testament allusions, Matthew builds his portrait of Christ as new Moses and Son of David with sustained hyperlinks to these prototypical figures and to the Isaianic suffering

servant. More than other Synoptics, he deploys shepherd language for Jesus's identity, ministry, and death. He is the compassionate shepherd for those in need—the last, least, and little ones—and for shepherd-less sheep who are "troubled" and "downcast." Matthew alone states it is not the shepherd's will that any should be lost (Matt 18:14).

Jesus sends the Twelve out "like sheep among wolves" (Matt 10:16; cf. 7:15) to spread a kingdom always threatened by malevolent forces. In Matthew's unique parable in chapter 25, the messianic royal-shepherd separates sheep and goats in final judgment. This recognition that a shepherd is known for both mercy and judgment echoes Ezekiel 34.

Shepherd imagery is easily at home in Luke where Jesus is presented as a seeking and saving shepherd (19:10). Luke features the shepherds in Bethlehem early, reinforcing rustic and royal ties to shepherd king David. The parable of the lost sheep in Luke 15 is tied to parables of lost coins and lost son(s)—each emphasizing lostness (ἀπόλλυμι). These mashals highlight the priority in Jesus' ministry on gathering (συνάγω) those who are scattered (σκορπίζω), especially the poor, lost, and outsiders.

Luke alone records Jesus authorizing seventy/seventy-two disciples to go "like lambs among wolves" (10:3; cf 12:32), again announcing God's kingdom's arrival and pronouncing judgment on those resisting it. Paul's speech in Luke's sequel reinforces the disciples' identity as both followers and leaders: "Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood" (Acts 20:28). He continues by warning of wolves who will certainly arise among them.

John's unique portrait leverages an "I am" statement in the Good Shepherd parable of John 10. This shepherd—whose sheep come to the one who knows them by name—protects them from wolves even at the cost of his life. Again, we recognize the shepherd-like combination of intimate care for the flock, on one hand, and courageous protection from predators on the other. John the Baptizer introduces Jesus as the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). Centuries of Passover celebration anticipated this climax to Christ's ministry at the cross, when the Shepherd of the Exodus becomes the Passover lamb. With a vision to gather "the scattered children of God" (11:52), Jesus calls Peter three times to shepherd his flock and feed his sheep (21:15–19).

Two remaining New Testament books focus on shepherd leadership. First Peter, like other general epistles, was written to those living as sojourners and exiles (2:11) in "the scattering" (διασπορά; 1:1). Among their heroes is Abraham whose transient life as sojourning shepherd was marked by faith (Heb 11:8–19; Jas 2:21–23). First Peter ends with an appeal as fellow elder to shepherd God's flock with care, without profit motive, and with respect for the Chief Shepherd to whom they will give account (5:1–4).

The climax of our pastoral theology comes from Revelation where the lion ruler is also the slain lamb, and both are combined in the shepherd whose presence involves provision, protection, and guidance.

> They are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat down on them, nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes. (Rev 7:15–17)

3. Insights and Implications

Before this book was published in 2006, I began speaking on spiritual shepherding at conferences and consultations. I shared stories and pictures from interviews among Bedouin shepherds to infuse modern urban-dweller imaginations. The interest exceeded what one would expect from cultural novelty. It aroused an existential sense of alignment with a deep, historic calling for all of us in ministry leadership. Students in MDiv and DMin programs began using SAMOH as a text for pastoral identity and work. Some ministries changed the language and imagery of their mission.

As a result of this broad interest, I created a forty-day illustrated journey using categories of provision, protection, and guidance. Originally *While Shepherds Watch Their Flocks*, it is republished as *The Good Shepherd*. ShepherdLeader.com was launched with leader forums to discuss topics in both books. The topic resonated for a variety of Christian leaders. Clearly, the contextual and exegetical work of biblical theology was paying dividends personally and professionally for many, as it had for me. This was true outside the US as well. Not surprisingly, leaders in Africa resonated with a more culturally relevant and comprehensively biblical model than best-practice and principle handbooks from the West.

To round off this summary are a few more insights now tested by research, practice, and feedback. The metaphor of shepherd is a micro-narrative tied directly to the biblical meta-narrative. It is a zipped file that, when opened, connects to whole-Bible traditions like creation/new creation, covenant/new covenant, and especially exodus/second exodus. In the biblical epic, God is *the* Shepherd, but he persists in calling and recalling human leaders, like Moses and David, to shepherd his flock. This reflects the "divine preference for human agency." It is one of the most compelling features of human identity, beginning at ground zero in creation.

One specific aspect of this larger storyline is how the wilderness serves as a paradigm for our journey to the promised land. As the perpetual celebration of Booths and Revelation 7's vision reminds us, the wilderness itself is a unique place for God's presence, provision, protection, and guidance. While the garden of Eden and Jerusalem's temple anticipated heaven, so too did the desert journey. The wilderness is, figuratively, the context for our following and our leading.

While these lofty intertextual connections provide biblical gravity to our understanding, several other actionable insights readily emerge. One is that *shepherding holds together both compassionate service and the courageous and appropriate use of authority*. More than "switching hats," this insight is rooted deeply in God's character; he is both merciful and just, gracious and holy. He leads with both staff and rod. And we, his sheep, need both. As a shepherd, Paul was both: "What do you prefer? Shall I come to you with a rod of discipline, or shall I come in love and with a gentle spirit?" (1 Cor 4:21). This mix is clearly missing in the servant leadership model.

There is something to be said about switching hats, however. Literal shepherds model *constant adaptation to a diverse and evolving role set*. In societies that value specialization, generalists are more necessary, though often valued less. Pastors manage boards, funerals, weddings, fundraising, educational programs, hospital visits, conflicts, and regular preaching—several of these functions often on the same day, and often without recognition. Many of us are spiritual shepherds in other settings without a simple, singular role. Being a parent is an obvious example. We need to embrace needs both constant and episodic, challenges from unexpected places, and overall changes in the landscape and composition of our flocks. After a seminary graduation one student told me she had spent twenty-five years in youth ministry, then successfully engaged a demanding MDiv, and only recently discovered the

flock God was now calling her to: two aging parents with dementia who needed her to be their shepherd through the valley of the shadow of death. She understood her shepherd's calling.

While there are many ways to express shepherd leadership, the Scriptures also invite us to consider multiple metaphors to complement the central ones like shepherd, servant, steward, and son. Paul was a mid-wife, father, mother, farmer, soldier, builder, athlete, vessel, and elder. These all reinforce a "responsibility for" (flock, family, resources) and "a responsibility to" (the divine owner). Various images of God also reinforce his fundamental posture among his people: gardener, architect, potter, king, warrior, and father. The mixing of metaphors only increases Scripture's variegated vision of leadership—both divine and human.

We can follow Paul's example with contextual metaphors that resonate today, as long as alignment with biblical metaphor meanings is retained. Terms like wounded healer, coach, and mentor translate nuances resident in Scripture's many metaphors. However, the statement by pastors of large churches, "I am not a shepherd; I am a leader (or rancher)," misunderstands how useful the shepherd metaphor is, regardless of context and size.

I had wondered going into this research if we should seek a contemporary "dynamic equivalent" for modern urbanites. However, the metaphor's tenacity across genres, authors, and time periods convinced me the shepherd model was worth representing in its own vernacular. It deserves a cross-cultural trip into a world that was integral to our spiritual forebears' landscape. I have watched leaders come alive as spiritual shepherds in diverse denominational cultures and ministries including counseling, recovery, disciple-making, church-planting, and peace-making. I have no doubt now that shepherds are here to stay.

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The Servant of the Lord and His Servant People

— *Matthew S. Harmon* —

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We are currently living in the golden age of biblical theology. Never before has the church had more resources to help it understand the biblical storyline and the themes that unite that story. On a human level, few have been more responsible for this renaissance of biblical theology than Don Carson. So it is with profound gratitude to God that I acknowledge my own debt to Don for instilling in me a love for the God of the Word and the Word of God.

When most people hear the title "servant of the Lord," they tend to think of the suffering servant in Isaiah or the fulfillment of that passage in Jesus Christ. But a closer look at the biblical storyline reveals a number of individuals identified as servants of the Lord.[1] The terms servant and slave have a range of use in Scripture. Often the respective Hebrew and Greek words refer to people who are in a subservient position to another person, whether by their own choice or against their will. Yet there is also a specialized use of "slave/servant" language in which that term is an honorary title given to a person whom God raises up to advance his creational and redemptive purposes in this world. Indeed, a closer look at the biblical storyline reveals a series of individual servants of the Lord who carry out royal, priestly, and prophetic roles. God uses these individual servants to create a servant people. This pattern is repeated throughout the Old Testament, climaxes in Jesus Christ, and is extended to the church in the New Testament.

1. Adam

Although he is never explicitly referred to as a servant of Yahweh, Adam was the first servant of the Lord. As a creature made in God's image, Adam was invested with royal, priestly, and prophetic roles. God commissions Adam to rule over and subdue the earth as an expression of his own sovereign rule over creation (Gen 1:26–28). He places Adam in the garden (which is presented as God's earthly sanctuary) to "serve" (עבד) and "keep" (שמר) it, language that is used elsewhere to describe priestly duties within the tabernacle (Num 3:7–8; 8:26; 18:7). Adam even exercises a prophetic role in that he

[1] This essay summarizes Matthew S. Harmon, *The Servant of the Lord and His Servant People: Tracing a Biblical Theme through the Canon*, NSBT 54 (London: Apollos, 2020). See also Harmon, *Rebels and Exiles: A Biblical Theology of Sin and Restoration*, ESBT (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2020); Harmon, *Galatians*, Evangelical Biblical Theological Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2021); and Gary E. Schnittjer and Matthew S. Harmon, *How to Study the Bible's Use of the Bible: Seven Hermeneutical Choices for the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2024).

receives God's word (Gen 2:16–17) and then communicates that word to his wife. As Yahweh's servant, Adam was called to produce a servant people by being fruitful, multiplying, and filling the earth with obedient divine image bearers. But Adam fails in his role as a servant, rebelling against God by seeking to determine right and wrong for himself (Gen 3:1–7). As a result, sin and death are unleashed into creation. Yet God promises to raise up a new servant, a serpent-crusher who obeys where humanity failed and takes upon himself the punishment humanity deserves for its disobedience (Gen 3:15). That promised serpent-crushing serpent will come through the line of Abraham (Gen 12:1–3; 22:1–9). But by the end of Genesis, however, that servant is nowhere to be found, as Abraham's descendants live in Egypt as sojourners (Gen 50:22–26).

2. Moses

Nearly four hundred years later, that new servant appears: Moses. Although Abraham's descendants had increased greatly, they languished in slavery to the Egyptians (Exod 1:1–2:24). So God raises up Moses to deliver his people (Exod 3:1–4:31), exercising royal, priestly, and prophetic roles. Following the miraculous signs Yahweh performs through Moses, culminating in the crossing of the Red Sea, Israel believes in both Yahweh and his servant, Moses (Exod 14:31). As a royal figure Moses leads the people to freedom under Yahweh's authority, enabling them to fulfill God's purpose. He frequently intercedes for the people, mediating God's presence as a priestly figure. By receiving God's words and communicating them to God's people, Moses is the prophet par excellence. Even more significantly, in his role as the servant of the Lord, Moses transcends the ordinary roles of prophet or priest. His relationship with Yahweh is direct—he speaks with God face to face and has God's Spirit resting upon him uniquely (Num 12:1–9). Through Moses God establishes his covenant with Israel, setting them apart as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation to live out a modified form of God's original commission to Adam (Exod 19:1–6). In other words, God creates a servant people through Moses, his servant.

3. Joshua

The book of Joshua opens with the death of Moses, the servant of Yahweh, and the commissioning of the next servant: Joshua (Josh 1:1–9). He lives out his identity as the servant of Yahweh by defeating the enemies of God's people and giving them rest in the promised land. During Moses's life God had prepared Israel for this transition by putting his Spirit on Joshua (Num 27:18–23; Deut 1:38; 3:28; 31:3, 14–23; 34:9). Yahweh authenticates Joshua's status as his servant by enabling him to perform Moses-like actions, including parting the Jordan River (Josh 3:3:1–4:24), appearing to Joshua (5:13–15), answering prayer for victory in battle (8:18–26), and writing down God's words (24:25–28). But Joshua does more than simply imitate Moses the servant. As the servant of Yahweh, Joshua performs Adam-like actions. Through his conquest of the land, Joshua exercises dominion over a new Eden—the promised land (11:23). As a priestly figure, Joshua the servant mediates God's presence to the nations around and intercedes on behalf of the people (7:6–9). By receiving and writing down the words of God, Joshua the servant exercises a prophetic role. Although Joshua does not rise to the level of Moses within the biblical storyline, he dies a faithful servant of Yahweh who plays his part well in redemptive history (24:29–30). He leaves behind a servant people committed to being faithful to Yahweh, even though Joshua knows that Israel will not live up to that commitment (24:1–28). But unlike when Moses dies,

there is no clearly defined successor for Joshua, no clearly identified individual to fill the role of servant. Instead, Israel must endure hundreds of years of suffering through the sporadic and increasingly failed leadership of the judges. Only when God installs a king after his own heart will an individual emerge who fulfils the role of the servant of Yahweh.

4. David

That king is David. As the next servant of the Lord, he takes up the mantle of previous servants, including Joshua, Moses, and even Adam. David serves the Lord by establishing a kingdom that anticipates the full realization of God's original creational purposes and the eschatological hopes of his people. As king over Israel, he exercises authority not only over Israel but some of the surrounding nations as well (2 Sam 7:1). In a limited sense, he exercises the kind of authority and dominion that God commissioned Adam to exercise. Despite not formally being a priest, he engages in priestly actions. Foremost among these is making preparations for the building of the temple (1 Chr 22:1–29:22) and leading the people in worship (2 Sam 6:1–19). In this way he parallels Adam, who was placed in Eden, God's garden sanctuary, and commissioned to cultivate its expansion. God inspires David to write numerous psalms that are the very words of God himself, marking him off as a prophet as well. But David's significance as the servant of the Lord goes beyond what he himself does. God makes a covenant with David (2 Sam 7:1–29), promising to raise up one of his descendants to rule over an eternal kingdom, exercising the dominion over creation that Adam failed to exercise. Through this future Son of David, the ultimate servant, God will one day realize his creational and redemptive purposes to produce a true servant people who will have God's law inscribed directly on their hearts and will be empowered by his Spirit to faithfully obey his commands (Isa 11:1–10; Ezek 34:11–31; 36:22–38).

Although David's son Solomon experiences some initial success, his eventual demise makes it clear that the wait for the serpent-crushing servant of the Lord continues. Following the death of Solomon and the split of the nation into the Northern and Southern Kingdoms, God's people begin a centuries-long descent into increasing depths of idolatry and covenant rebellion. In the midst of that descent, God raises up the prophet Isaiah to foretell the future arrival of a new servant of the Lord.

5. The Isaianic Servant

Through the work of individual servants of the Lord, Yahweh had commissioned Israel to be a servant people through whom the nations would see the glory of the Lord on display (Isa 42:1–9).[2] But instead of opening the blind eyes and deaf ears of the nations, Israel itself became blind and deaf because of their rebellion against God (42:18–25). So Yahweh promises to raise up a new individual servant who would restore rebellious Israel and be a light of salvation to the nations by obeying where Israel had failed (49:1–12; 50:4–9). He will restore Israel and be a light of salvation to the nations (49:1–12). This individual servant will obey where Israel failed, trusting in the Lord for vindication in the midst

[2] Some scholars see the servant of Isaiah 42:1–9 as an individual messianic figure; see, e.g., John W. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40–66*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), 108; Robert Chisholm, "The Christological Fulfillment of Isaiah's Servant Songs," *BSac* 163 (2006): 393–401; Brian J. Tabb, "Sharing the Servant's Mission: Isaiah 49:6 in Luke-Acts," *JETS* 65 (2022): 510–12. But the larger context of Isa 40–48, in which all other references to the servant appear to be to Israel, seems to favor Isaiah 42:1–9 as referring to Israel.

of suffering (50:4–9). Through his vicarious suffering for the sins of the people, Yahweh will accomplish the redemption of his people (52:13–53:12). Through the new covenant the servant inaugurates, he will create a servant people who reflect God's glory to the ends of the earth (54:1–17). Through this promised servant, God will fulfill his original purpose for creation and his covenant promises to Abraham and David (54:1–3; 55:3). As a prophet, this servant will announce the word of the Lord to the ends of the earth. As a priest, this servant will offer his own life as a sacrifice for the sins of his people (Jew and Gentile alike). As a king, the servant will rule over his people and establish a kingdom that transforms creation itself (52:13–53:12; 65:17–25). This Isaianic servant creates a servant people who share in his victory over death and his inheritance (Isa 54:17). Thus, this individual Isaianic servant seems to be a culmination of previous servants, embodying elements of the previous servants and anticipating their fulfillment in a singular individual who transcends all who come before him.

6. Jesus

God's people would have to wait seven centuries before this promised servant finally appears on the stage of redemptive history. The NT presents Jesus's identity and work as fulfilling the role of the Isaianic servant of the Lord, both in its totality and with respect to specific elements of his life, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension (e.g., Matt 8:17; 12:15–21; Mark 10:45; Luke 2:29–32; 4:16–21; 9:51; 22:37; John 12:37–38). Yet Jesus's identity as the servant of the Lord extends beyond the repeated citations, allusions, echoes, and thematic parallels to the Isaianic servant.

The NT writers also use servant language in connection with identifying Jesus as the fulfillment of each of the servant figures who came before him. Thus, Jesus is the servant who obeys where Adam the servant fails, crushing the serpent and exercising the dominion Adam was commissioned to exercise (Matt 26:36–46; Luke 4:1–13; Rom 5:12–21). He is the servant who is the prophet greater than Moses, authoritatively leading his people in a new exodus from their bondage to sin (Luke 9:28–36; Acts 18–26). Jesus is the servant who gives his people a greater rest than Joshua, bringing them into the eschatological rest of the new creation (Heb 4:8–10). He is the servant who is David's greater son, defeating sin, death, and the devil through his death and resurrection and ascending to the right hand of the Father to rule over an eternal kingdom (Luke 1:68–69; Acts 15:13–18). Jesus is the servant who obeys where Israel fails (Matt 4:1–11), not only bringing restoration to a remnant of Israel but becoming a light of salvation to the nations. He is indeed the servant of servants, bringing to fulfillment all that God begins to do through his previous servants.

7. The Apostles

Like every servant before him, Jesus the servant creates a servant people. But in an unexpected wrinkle, he does so through the agency of key leaders within the early church that are described as servants of Christ, servants of God, or servants of the Lord. Preeminent among these servant leaders is the apostle Paul. He presents his life and ministry as the fulfillment of the servant of the Lord described in Isaiah 49, a conviction that is central to his self-understanding (Acts 13:47–48; Gal 1:15–17).[3] By dwelling in Paul, Christ the suffering servant fulfills the mission of the servant to be a light of salvation to

[3] On this theme in Acts, see Holly Beers, *The Followers of Jesus as the Servant : Luke's Model from Isaiah for the Disciples in Luke-Acts*, LNTS 535 (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2016); Tabb, "Sharing the Servant's Mission,"

the Gentiles (Gal 2:19–21). Servant terminology is also applied to several of Paul's ministry co-workers, but with the exception of Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:24–26, none of those descriptions borrow language from OT servant passages. The exception to this general observation is that, in both Acts 13:46–47 and 2 Corinthians 5:11–6:2, Paul uses the plural "we" to describe his ministry in language borrowed from Isaiah 49, suggesting that he views his ministry co-workers as participating in the servant's mission. Peter, James, Jude, and John also open their respective writings by referring to themselves as servants of Christ, suggesting that they, too, see themselves in the long line of individual servants God uses to advance his creational and redemptive purposes, but giving no clear indication that such is the case.

8. The Church

Working through these servant leaders, Jesus the risen servant of the Lord creates a servant people: the church. The NT demonstrates the servant identity of God's people in three primary ways: (1) directly calling them servants (Mark 10:43–45); (2) using servant language to describe them (Gal 5:13); and (3) showing them carrying out the mission of the servant (Phil 2:15). The risen Jesus dwells in his people by his Spirit to complete the elements of the servant's mission that remain. Only Jesus vicariously suffers for the sins of his people. Only Jesus is the perfect image of God who fulfills Adam's servant commission as a prophet, priest, and king. Only Jesus is the prophet greater than Moses, the conqueror greater than Joshua, and the king greater than David. Yet he now works in and through his servant people, the church, to bring to full realization every aspect that remains of the servant's mission.

The church's role as a servant people takes two distinct forms in the NT. The first and most frequent is an Isaianic shape. As God's people suffer and endure it without violent response, they follow in the footsteps of Jesus the servant (Rom 8:33–34; 1 Pet 2:18–25), even as they await their final vindication from the Lord (Rev 6:9–11). As God's people proclaim the good news of what Jesus the servant has accomplished through his death and resurrection, they are the means by which God restores Israel and shines the light of salvation to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8; Phil 2:15). Even the nature of their common life together is guided by the principle of using the freedom Christ purchases for us as a means to serve one another self-sacrificially in love (Gal 5:13). The second form of God's people as the servant is Adamic in nature. When at last God consummates all his promises in a new Eden, humanity perfectly reflects the image of God (Rev 22:1–5). As God's servants, redeemed humanity exercises the dominion over creation that God commissions Adam to exercise. They worship him as priests in his glorious presence. By virtue of their union with Christ the servant, God's people at last fully realize their destiny as image-bearing servants.

Embracing our identity as a servant people frees us from the slavery of constantly trying to determine our own identity and instead enables us to live in the joy that comes from knowing and being known by God. Our corporate life should be marked by bearing one another's burdens, because Jesus has already borne our greatest burdens for us. Through the church, Jesus Christ, the servant of the Lord, continues his mission of being a light of salvation to the nations. Empowered by his Spirit, we exercise servant shaped stewardship, mediate his presence to those around us, and proclaim his Word to a dying world. Those called to leadership within the church should advance God's purposes by self-sacrificially using all available resources rather than employing political maneuvering and personal charisma to achieve a

509–22. In Galatians, see Matthew S. Harmon, *She Must and Shall Go Free: Paul's Isaianic Gospel in Galatians*, BZNW 168 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010), 78–86, 103–15.

personal agenda. The result will be a beautiful and compelling picture of Jesus the servant, who loved us and gave himself for us (Gal 2:20).

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The One Like the Son of Man Is the Highest One: The Two Most Highs in Daniel 7:15–28

— *James M. Hamilton Jr.* —

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Is there a consistent and pervasive messianic hope in the Old Testament?[1] Or is it the case that at a certain point that hope mutated and was transferred away from the expectation of a single figure, with the result that it was expressed in a variety of ways? Does the evidence indicate that, rather than being focused on a future king from David's line, the messianic hope was "democratized," such that the hope turned to the people of Israel instead of a future king?

This is the way that many seem to read the references to "the saints of the Most High" receiving the kingdom in Daniel 7:18, 22, 25, and 27. Lucas, for instance, writes, "vv. 22 and 27 indicate a correspondence of some sort between the figure of v. 13 and 'the (people of) the holy ones of the Most High.'"[2]

Almost entirely unnoticed, subtle details in the text communicate staggering realities in Daniel 7. One major difficulty is that the text is in Aramaic. Other difficulties include the apocalyptic genre of the text and the plethora of information it communicates. Even those who work through the text in the original language could easily read over the elusive but massively significant features of the text to which this article draws attention.[3]

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[1] I am thankful for this occasion to honor Don Carson. Though it was not my privilege to study with him in person, his writings and presentations influenced me, most particularly through his commitment to the study and exposition of the original language texts of the Bible in the service of biblical theology for God's people in the church. In Don's honor here, I want to revisit something I exposited in my contribution to the New Studies in Biblical Theology, of which I have only become more convinced, and on which my thinking has grown more clear as the years have passed. See James M. Hamilton Jr., *With the Clouds of Heaven: The Book of Daniel in Biblical Theology*, NSBT 32 (Nottingham: Apollos, 2014).

[2] Ernest C. Lucas, *Daniel*, AOTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 185. See also 200–201.

[3] I did not notice what I here point out in my own initial readings of Daniel 7 in Aramaic, but in writing *With the Clouds of Heaven*, my attention was drawn to these details by Peter J. Gentry, "The Son of Man in Daniel 7: Individual or Corporate?" in *Acorns to Oaks: The Primacy and Practice of Biblical Theology*, ed. Michael A. G. Haykin (Toronto: Joshua, 2003), 59–75, who also pointed me to Chrys Caragounis, *The Son of Man: Vision and Interpretation*, WUNT (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1986).

I have tremendous respect and appreciation for G. K. Beale, but his discussion of Daniel 7 illustrates the general lack of awareness of the textual distinctions to which I want to draw attention in this brief essay in Carson's honor. Beale rightly sees that Daniel's vision in the first half of Daniel 7 is interpreted in the second half, but because he has overlooked crucial details in the text, he concludes that "the Son of Man is not mentioned in the … interpretive section." He thus wrongly concludes, "it is very likely that the interpretive section of the vision identifies the 'Son of Man' figure with end-time Israel, 'the saints of the Most High' (vv. 18, 22, 27)," and he must appeal to "corporate solidarity and representation" to maintain that "the Son of Man is both an individual and also a representative for a community."[4]

On the contrary, the figure described as "one like a son of man" in 7:13 *is* repeatedly referenced in Daniel 7:15–28. To demonstrate this, we begin with observations on the two different terms for "Most High" that appear in Daniel 7:25, and from there we will work through the interpretation of the vision in the second half of Daniel 7.

1. The Two Terms for Most High in Daniel 7:25

The only English translation that distinguishes between the two terms for "Most High" in the Aramaic original is the NASB, which reads as follows in Daniel 7:25: "He will speak out against the Most High and wear down the saints of the Highest One … "[5] The first Aramaic term, עִלָּיָא, is rendered by the phrase "Most High." This term appears ten times in the Aramaic section of Daniel (2:4–7:28), always designating the God of Israel as the "Most High."[6] The only instance of עִלָּיָא in chapter 7 is at v. 25. The second Aramaic term for "Most High" is rendered by the phrase "Highest One" in the NASB, though most English translations (CSB, ESV, JPS, NET, NIV, NKJV) also translate it "Most High." In distinction from the normal Aramaic term, however, the NASB's "Highest One" translates עֶלְיוֹנִין. This term occurs only four times in the Old Testament, all in Daniel 7, at 7:18, 22, 25, and 27. Each instance of this term occurs in the expression קַדִּישֵׁי עֶלְיוֹנִין, "saints of the Most High," and, as noted, the NASB renders this "saints of the Highest One," distinguishing between "Most High" for עִלָּיָא and "Highest One" for עֶלְיוֹנִין. This second term, which the NASB renders "Highest One," appears to be an Aramaicized form of the Hebrew term for "most high," עֶלְיוֹן.[7]

We thus have two terms that mean "Most High," one from the Aramaic language (עִלָּיָא), one from the Hebrew (עֶלְיוֹנִין). The Hebrew term has been Aramaicized through the addition of the masculine plural Aramaic suffix and seems to be used in synonymous distinction from the already employed Aramaic term.

The use of this Aramaicized Hebrew term עֶלְיוֹנִין in the expression קַדִּישֵׁי עֶלְיוֹנִין, "saints of the Most High," indicates that Daniel does not intend to associate the saints with the figure he designates as "Most High" by the Aramaic term עִלָּיָא but with one who is also "Most High" but distinguished from

[4] G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), 394–95, with n. 24.

[5] I am citing the NASB 1995. The 2020 edition also preserves this distinction.

[6] This term appears in Daniel 3:26, 32 [ET 4:2]; 4:14 [ET 4:17]; 4:21 [ET 4:24], 22 [ET 25], 29 [ET 32], 31 [ET 34]; 5:18, 21; and 7:25. The abbreviation ET designates English Translation. The English and Hebrew verse numbering differs at the end of Daniel 3 and beginning of Daniel 4. English translations begin chapter 4 where the Hebrew enumerates 3:31, so that 4:1 in the Hebrew text is 4:4 in the English. A ketiv/qere reading occurs each time this term appears. The *ketiv* in the text reads עִלָּיָא, while the *qere* in the margin is עִלָּאָה.

[7] *HALOT* 1948.

him. Thus a second, seemingly equivalent, way to designate someone as “Most High” has been brought into Aramaic from the cognate Hebrew language. Why would Daniel make this move? Who is being designated by this second way of referring to someone as “Most High”?

Given the parallels between Daniel 7:14 and 7:27, the answer to this question seems clear. Consider these texts side by side (corresponding terms bolded in English translation):

Daniel 7:14	Daniel 7:27
וְלֵהּ יְהִיב שָׁלְטָן וִיקָר וּמַלְכוּ וְכֹל עַמְמַיָּא אֻמַיָּא וְלִשָּׁנַיָּא לֵהּ יִפְלְחוּן שָׁלְטָנֵהּ שָׁלְטָן עָלַם דִּי־לָא יֶעְדֵּה וּמַלְכוּתֵהּ דִּי־לָא תִתְחַבַּל ESV: “And 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** one that shall not be destroyed.”	וּמַלְכוּתָה וְשָׁלְטָנָא וּרְבוּתָא דִּי מַלְכְוָת תְּחוֹת כָּל־שְׁמַיָּא יְהִיבַת לְעַם קַדִּישֵׁי עֶלְיוֹנִין מַלְכוּתֵהּ מַלְכוּת עָלַם וְכֹל שָׁלְטָנַיָּא לֵהּ יִפְלְחוּן וְיִשְׁתַּמְּעוּן ESV: “And the **kingdom** and the **dominion** and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High; his **kingdom** shall be an **everlasting** kingdom, and all **dominions shall serve** and obey **him**.”

Both texts assert that the nations will “serve him,” and the third masculine singular pronoun “him” in 7:14 points back to the “one like a son of man” in 7:13. The third masculine singular pronoun in 7:27, on the other hand, points back to the “Most High/Highest One,” designated as עֶלְיוֹנִין in distinction from the Ancient of Days in 7:9. This first figure to take his seat in 7:9, the Ancient of Days, appears to be the one designated as “Most High” with the Aramaic term עִלָּיָא in 7:25 and elsewhere in the Aramaic sections of Daniel.

To summarize this section: there are two terms for “Most High” in Daniel 7:25, עִלָּיָא and עֶלְיוֹנִין. The first of these, עִלָּיָא, appears ten times in the Aramaic sections of Daniel to designate Israel’s God. The second, עֶלְיוֹנִין, seems to have been brought into Aramaic from Hebrew to designate a second figure as “Most High” in addition to the one already known as “Most High.” Whereas Daniel refers to God as “Most High” with the normal Aramaic term, he refers to the “one like a son of man” (7:13) as “Most High” with the Aramaicized Hebrew term עֶלְיוֹנִין in the four instances of the expression “saints of the Most High” at 7:18, 22, 25, and 27.

2. The Flow of Thought in Context

Note that in Daniel 7:9, “thrones were placed.”[8] Writing in the 500s BC, Daniel would have had access to Psalm 110, which David composed around 1000 BC. The key point from Psalm 110:1 is that the already seated Yahweh invites David’s Lord to sit at his right hand and thereby be enthroned with him. The Ancient of Days takes his seat in 7:9, and Daniel seems to interpret the vision he receives in light of God’s promises to establish the throne of the seed of David forever (2 Sam 7:12–14) and the Psalm 110:1 invitation for David’s Lord to sit at Yahweh’s right hand. The “one like a son of man” in Daniel 7:13, then, is to be understood as the future king from David’s line, as attested from the fact that he receives

[8] Unless otherwise noted, I will use the ESV for English translations.

an everlasting kingdom in 7:14. The only kingdom in the Old Testament that will be established forever is the one over which the seed of David will reign (2 Sam 7:12–14).

Having seen the vision in 7:1–14, Daniel approaches one of the "thousand thousands" and "ten thousand times ten thousand" (7:10) who "stood there" (7:16) in attendance on the Ancient of Days in the heavenly court. Significantly, Daniel presents this heavenly being, this angelic interpreter, as the one who introduces the phrase "saints of the Most High" to him in 7:18. Alarmed by what he had seen (7:16), Daniel sought "the interpretation of the things" (7:16) from a member of the heavenly court, and that heavenly being spoke the words of 7:18. In the angel's words in 7:17–18, he offers a two-verse interpretation of the vision Daniel saw in 7:1–14. The four beasts symbolize four kings (7:17), and after them the "saints of the Highest One/Most High" will receive an everlasting kingdom (7:18).

Thus Daniel indicates that it was not his idea to describe "the one like a son of man" as "Most High" in parallel with and distinction from the "Ancient of Days" by bringing the Hebrew term for "Most High" into Aramaic so as to distinguish this figure from the one being referred to as "Most High" with the ordinary Aramaic expression. As Daniel tells the story, the angel made this move, revealing to Daniel that the "one like a son of man" was to be identified with and yet distinguished from the "Most High."

The "saints" or "holy ones" are the people of the kingdom (some argue they are angels, but "saints" stands in apposition to "people" in the original Aramaic, so I take them to be people), and the "one like a son of man" or "Highest One/Most High" is the king of the kingdom inherited by the saints. There is no kingdom without a king, and these "saints" are not identified simply with God. To identify the saints with God, Daniel could present the angel referring to the "saints of the Most High" using the normal Aramaic term, עִלָּיָא, rather than importing the Hebrew term into Aramaic for a second way of referring to the the Most High/Highest One with the term עֶלְיוֹנִין. This "Highest One" is the king of the kingdom the saints receive, as described in 7:13–14. He is the "one like a son of man": the king of the kingdom received by the saints is the seed of David, David's Lord.

Daniel communicates his desire to know more about the fourth beast in 7:19–20, before adding new information about the arrival of the Ancient of Days and the kingdom of the son of man in 7:21–22. Whereas the little horn from the fourth kingdom was "speaking great things" in 7:9 (so also 7:20), Daniel elaborates on this that he "made war on the saints and prevailed over them" in 7:21. This leaves 7:22 to provide Daniel's summary of 7:9–14 before the angel offers his explanation of the same in 7:23–27. The table that follows aligns the text of 7:9–14 with Daniel's summary of these events in 7:22.

Daniel 7:9–14	Daniel 7:22
As I looked, thrones were placed, and the Ancient of Days took his seat; his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames; its wheels were burning fire. A stream of fire issued and came out from before him; a thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him; the court sat in judgment, and the books were opened. I looked then because of the sound of the great words that the horn was speaking. And as I looked, the beast was killed, and its body destroyed and given over to be burned with fire. As for the rest of the beasts, their dominion was taken away, but their lives were prolonged for a season and a time. I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And 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 one that shall not be destroyed.	until the Ancient of Days came, and judgment was given for the saints of the Most High, and the time came when the saints possessed the kingdom.

The arrival of the Ancient of Days for judgment, originally described in 7:9–10, is compressed into the first two phrases of 7:22. The judgment rendered for “the saints of the Most High” in 7:22 is the judgment that puts an end to the little horn’s war on the saints, and these saints are the people of the “Highest One/Most High” (so designated with the Aramaicized Hebrew term עֶלְיוֹנִין). As in 7:9–14, so in 7:22. The Ancient of Days judges the little horn from the fourth kingdom, vindicating the saints, granting the kingdom to the “one like a son of man.” In 7:22 this “one like a son of man” is referred to as the “Highest One/Most High” (עֶלְיוֹנִין).

Just as Daniel summarized and added to the vision of the fourth beast (7:7–14) in 7:19–22, so the angel summarizes and adds to it again in 7:23–27. Here again the little horn from the fourth kingdom speaks against the “Most High,” God, and here Daniel presents the angel using the normal Aramaic term עִלָּיָא to refer to God as the Most High (7:25a; cf. 7:8, 20). In addition to speaking against God, the little horn persecutes “the saints of the Highest One/Most High” (7:25b; cf. 7:21). Again, the Aramaicized Hebrew term עֶלְיוֹנִין designates the figure with whom the saints are associated, the one like a son of man. The final clauses of 7:25 indicate that the little horn from the fourth kingdom will speak against God and persecute God’s people for three and one half years (cf. 9:27; 8:14; 12:7, 11–12).

As in Daniel 7:9–14, so in 7:26–27. The little horn’s terror is brought to an end by the judgment of God: the court sits (7:26; 7:9–10), the books are opened (7:10), and the verdict goes against the

little horn. In 7:11 "the beast was killed," and in 7:26b he is "to be consumed and destroyed to the end." Dominion was taken from the beasts in 7:12, and it was taken from the little horn in 7:26a. The everlasting kingdom received by the "one like a son of man" in 7:14 is given to the Highest One/Most High, the king over the people of the kingdom, the saints, in 7:27.

3. Conclusion

In this short piece I hope to have made accessible to a wider audience a profoundly significant textual reality in Daniel 7. In this passage, there are two figures, the Ancient of Days and the "one like a son of man," who share an important set of commonalities: first, both are to be enthroned (7:9); second, though the "one like a son of man" is to be presented before the Ancient of Days, he is already present in the heavenly court, indicating that rather than coming into being, he is preexistent; third, this "one like a son of man" travels on the clouds of heaven, and elsewhere in the Old Testament only Yahweh travels on the clouds (Exod 19:9; 34:5; Num 11:25); and fourth, both the Ancient of Days and the "one like a son of man" are referred to as "Most High." Even as there are commonalities between these two figures, there are also important ways in which they are distinguished: different but equivalent terms are used to designate each as "Most High." The Ancient of Days is called "Most High" with the ordinary Aramaic term, עִלָּיָא. The angelic interpreter, by contrast, introduces an Aramaicized form of the Hebrew for "Most High," עֶלְיוֹנִין, and uses it to designate the "one like a son of man" as "Highest One/Most High." In addition, there is no suggestion that we are not dealing with two persons, the Ancient of Days and the "one like a son of man," but one. There are obviously two figures, and this explains why "thrones were placed" (7:9).

The revelation about the Most High in Daniel 7 neither confounds the persons nor divides the substance.[9] There is one person who is Ancient of Days, and there is another person who is the "one like a son of man." But the "Most High-ness" of the Ancient of Days and of the "one like the son of man," though distinguished, is equivalent. The Ancient of Days is not the "one like a son of man," and both are Most High. We might be so bold as to say there are not two Most Highs but one Most High. Two persons who share one substance, and more will be directly revealed in the New Testament.

Daniel was alarmed by what he saw (Dan 7:15, 28). It is intriguing to ponder just how "Nicene" or "Athanasian" his understanding of what he saw would have been. But this I conclude with confidence: the "one like a son of man" is the Highest One.

[9] The language of this paragraph is indebted to the Athanasian Creed. For the English language version I use, see James M. Hamilton Jr., "The Chiastic Structure of the Athanasian Creed," *JETS* 66 (2023): 279–300.

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Friends, Non-Israelites, and the Surprising Grace of God: A Grateful Retrospective on New Studies in Biblical Theology at 30

— Daniel C. Timmer —

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It is a joy and an honor to contribute to this special volume of *Themelios* dedicated to celebrating the thirtieth anniversary of New Studies in Biblical Theology. From the very beginning of my theological journey, this series attracted both my eye (at that point in time, with its platinum-hued exterior and crisp artwork on the front cover) as well as my heart and mind. I don't recall which volume I first picked up and read, but eventually I picked up almost all of them! Along with the *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, the NSBT series had a profound influence on my theological development.[1] The same is true of Don Carson, under whom I had the privilege of studying while at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in the early 2000s and who later helped edit my volume on Jonah published in 2011.[2] Each of these opportunities to interact with Don was memorable.

A first snapshot, this one of Don in the classroom, is set in a doctoral seminar at Trinity focused on the relation between biblical and systematic theology. In each class session, Don would ably and effortlessly discuss various aspects of this complex methodological question and their implications. Midway through the class, the students would be given 5 or 10 minutes to form small groups, each of which would develop an impromptu analysis along the lines of biblical and systematic theology to a topic that Don would announce. I can still hear his soft Canadian accent as he called us to analyze the subject of wrath (in his pronunciation, "wroth").

About a decade later, I again had the chance to learn from Don, in this case in his role as (then sole) series editor of NSBT. His feedback on my manuscript for the volume on Jonah began with some brief encouragements and then turned to my use of the term "regeneration" to describe the internal

[1] T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner, eds., *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000).

[2] Daniel C. Timmer, *"A Compassionate and Gracious God": Mission, Salvation, and Spirituality in Jonah*, NSBT 26 (Leicester: Apollos, 2011).

change of the sailors in Jonah 1. What strikes me as much now as it did then is the soft tone and gentle argumentation by which he invited me to describe that change more carefully. He began by expressing his agreement with my point in general: "I have no doubt that people cannot truly change … without the work of God taking place within them." He then shifted, in very mild language ("Yet one cannot help but observe that … "), to an invitation to think through the issue more deeply: "Are there *no* differences between the experiences of believers in the old covenant and the experiences of the new covenant [?]" A few lines later, he again indicated that we were thinking along similar lines before pursuing his encouragement to refine my position in the gentlest of terms: "I eschew the bifurcations of the more rigid forms of dispensationalism as much as you do. But I wonder sometimes if … "[3] Don's patient pedagogy of this fledgling biblical theologian went on for 324 (kind) words, concluding on a decidedly understated note with, "Do you want to give this one a bit more thought?" The melding of Don's prodigious learning with such patience and gentleness is a stellar example of the integration of Christian character, scholarship, and mentoring, and was enormously valuable to me—and doubtless to all those who interacted with him.

My main task in this article is to summarize some key features of my second contribution to the series, *Egypt My People … and Israel My Inheritance*.[4] My initial interest in the prophets was related to the biblical-theological poles of unity and diversity, specifically Jonah as the "odd man out" in the Minor Prophets due to its unique record of an Israelite prophet being sent to a non-Israelite nation in an historical rather than eschatological setting. The redemptive-historical question was multifaceted: what was Israel's posture toward the nations to be? What kinds of engagement with non-Israelites are attested during the united and divided kingdoms in particular? Why is so little that might be called "mission" evident in the OT's historical record?

In short order, my interest in Jonah led me to the book of Nahum, often thought to be radically at odds with Jonah.[5] I eventually became involved in the Book of the Twelve section of the Society of Biblical Literature, where my continued interest in unity and diversity led me to take up the theme of non-Israelites across the Minor Prophets in a volume focused on the synchronic-diachronic tension in academic biblical studies.[6] The specialized nature of the volume meant that it would likely be read by a few dozen people at most, but I could not think of a suitable way to translate my work into a more accessible and useful form until David Firth's *Including the Stranger* appeared in NSBT a few years later.[7] Chiding myself for my thick-headedness, I promptly proposed a volume on non-Israelites across the Latter Prophets, and Don Carson again offered support and encouragement as the project took shape.

Egypt My People reflects my continued interest in the OT prophetic corpus in general, and particularly in the various ways that non-Israelites figure there. With the exception of Hosea, which includes no oracles of any kind concerning foreign nations, and perhaps Obadiah (unless "to rule Mount Esau" in

[3] Don Carson, personal communication, July 8, 2009.

[4] Daniel C. Timmer, *'Egypt My People … and Israel My Inheritance': The Non-Israelite Nations in the Latter Prophets*, NSBT 63 (London: Apollos, 2025).

[5] See, for example, Aaron Schart, "The Jonah-Narrative within the Book of the Twelve," in *Perspectives on the Formation of the Book of the Twelve: Methodological Foundations – Redactional Processes – Historical Insights*, ed. R. Albertz, J. Nogalski, and J. Wöhrle, BZAW 433 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2012), 109–28, especially 116–18.

[6] Daniel C. Timmer, *The Non-Israelite Nations in the Book of the Twelve: Thematic Coherence and the Diachronic-Synchronic Relationship in the Minor Prophets*, BINS 135 (Leiden: Brill, 2015).

[7] David G. Firth, *Including the Stranger: Foreigners in the Former Prophets*, NSBT 50 (London: Apollos, 2019).

Obadiah 21 refers to Edomite survivors), every book of the prophetic corpus connects both judgment *and* salvation with non-Israelites. Part of the volume's *raison d'être* is to make sense of this diversity with respect to the fates of non-Israelites, which—apart from Jonah—are set in broadly eschatological settings. Essentially, this involves recognizing the different ways that the biblical texts characterize or describe non-Israelites who are condemned and those who are the subjects of oracles of salvation. Not surprisingly, the latter group is routinely described as undergoing profound spiritual transformation and/or coming to enjoy an element of deliverance that is akin to descriptions of the renewed Israelite remnant. Notable examples include the adoption of restored Sodom (alongside Samaria) by restored Judah as its daughters in parallel with the provision of atonement (Ezek 16:53–63) and the permanent inheritance of a portion of the restored land of Canaan by non-Israelite sojourners (47:21–23).

Alongside its exploration of unity in diversity, the volume also explores how *oracles concerning the nations function in our present redemptive-historical epoch* (when was the last time you heard a sermon based on an oracle against the nations?). The ways that the prophets characterize the nations was crucially important in helping me develop this biblical-theological and hermeneutical path. It took a bit of time for me to find this path, and even more to explore it; eventually, I decided to write an article to ensure that my thinking was sufficiently clear and convincing before continuing.[8] Along the way, I came to realize that an important element in making biblical-theological sense of the prophets' pronouncements concerning the nations is the supra-ethnic nature of the oracles themselves. That is to say, the oracles do not condemn Assyrians for being "Assyrian" ethnically or for simply being members of the nation of Assyria. Rather, the condemnations of a state or nation for various sins described in moral, religious, and ultimately theological terms primarily have in view a subgroup *within that nation* that acted in those ways rather than its entire population.

There are numerous examples of this selectivity within a particular nation or group in the prophetic books: the pride of the Assyrian monarch and the destruction of his army (rather than of all of Assyria) in Isaiah 10; the condemnation of Edom's political and military actors for pride and violence and the contrasting preservation of Edomite women and children whom Yahweh will preserve and care for (Jer 49:7–22); and Nahum's persistent focus on Assyria's king, military personnel, and diplomats, all of whom God commits to bringing down, in contrast to the population of Nineveh, which survives the fall of the city and of the empire (Nah 2:10). The frequency of this distinction within a single foreign nation led me to conclude that OT oracles against the nations do "*not usually present those groups as simple political entities with homogeneous populations that are equally implicated in the sins for which the prophets condemn them*."[9]

In the same way, oracles of salvation for the nations are characteristically addressed to *a portion* of the non-Israelite state or group in question. (The same is true of oracles to Israelite audiences, as the use of terms in the semantic fields of "remnant" or "remainder" makes clear.) Almost as a rule, the empirical extent of each group is difficult to determine with precision. This is the case, for example, with "Egypt"

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[8] Daniel C. Timmer, "Constructed Identities and Dueling Ideologies: Reading Ancient Israelite Foreign Oracles as Ideological Critique," *BibInt* 32 (2024): 445–66. In doing so I built on the insights of H. C. P. Kim, "The Oracles against the Nations," in *The Oxford Handbook on Isaiah*, ed. L.-S. Tiemeyer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 59–78; Moshe Weinfeld, "The Protest against Imperialism in Ancient Israelite Prophecy," in *The Origins and Diversity of Axial Age Civilizations*, ed. S. N. Eisenstadt (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986), 169–82; and others.

[9] Timmer, *Egypt My People*, 7. Throughout this article, many of my comments are based on the corresponding discussion in the volume.

in Isaiah 19. Although the nation's leaders and idols are at the center of Isaiah's critique, different images of its deliverance include an undetermined fraction of the population ("five cities," Isa 19:18) as well as—so it would seem—the entire country after its judgment, as suggested by the merism of an altar in the middle of the country and a pillar to YHWH at its border (Isa 19:19). Similar ambiguity as to the extent of the non-Israelite "remnant" continues throughout the prophetic corpus, as does the authors' consistent emphasis on the spiritual, moral, and behavioral features that constitute this group's new identity. Thus Joel announces salvation for all those "who call on the name of YHWH" (Joel 2:32), Amos foretells the integration of "the remnant of Edom and all the nations over whom my name is called" (Amos 9:12), and Micah foretells that nations that had previously opposed Israel/Judah will submit to YHWH and fear him when they witness his astounding deliverance of his people in a second exodus (Mic 7:14–17).

In light of the prophets' repeated announcements of salvation *and* judgment concerning non-Israelite "nations," the reader often has no choice but to recognize the "nation" in question as a *bipartite whole*. Since one part *of the same political entity* is the subject of an oracles of salvation and the other the subject of an oracle of judgment, ethnic or national identifying features are simply irrelevant. In other words, those who are condemned are condemned for what they do (that is, in moral and theological terms), not for what they are (that is, in ethnic terms). In the same vein, salvation is announced to non-Israelites regardless of their ethnicity—and despite their being without the covenantal and other advantages Israelites enjoyed (Rom 9:4–5). As a result, an oracle that nominally focuses on a non-Israelite nation is in fact relevant to *anyone, anywhere*, regardless of ethnicity or nationality, that matches the description of those to whom the prophet announces future judgment or salvation.

On this basis, *Egypt My People* takes a final hermeneutical step in light of the *ideological* focus of many of the oracles against the nations. Following its varied and widespread use in the social sciences and politics more generally, ideology has become a useful concept in biblical studies for circumscribing the "network of ideas" that leaders of states—and especially of empires—developed and promulgated to serve political and religious ends.[10] In the oracles against the nations, ideology helpfully circumscribes a fairly consistent list of sins that are alleged against royal and military figures in particular as those who represent the portion of the nation that a prophet condemns.[11] While the term "ideology" draws attention to the intentional and often distorted nature of the realities described by such texts, from another angle ideological texts are simply calculated expressions of ideas and beliefs that make up worldviews. But whereas a worldview is a particular way of knowing and thinking about what exists, what human beings are, and how we should live in light of the nature and telos of what exists, an

[10] See, for example, Shawn Z. Aster, *Reflections of Empire in Isaiah 1–39: Responses to Assyrian Ideology*, ANEM 19 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2017).

[11] See, for example, Tamás A. Bács and Horst Beinlich, eds., *Constructing Authority: 8th Symposium on Egyptian Royal Ideology*, Königtum, Staat und Gesellschaft 4.5 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2017); Juan C. M. García, "Egypt, Old to New Kingdom (2686–1069 BCE)," in *The Oxford World History of Empire*, ed. Peter F. Bang, C. A. Bayly, and Walter Scheidel, 2 vols.(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 2:13–42; Mario Liverani, *Assyria: The Imperial Mission*, trans. A. Trameri and J. Valk (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2017); and David S. Vanderhooft, "Babylonian Strategies of Imperial Control in the West," in *Judah and the Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period*, ed. Oded Lipschits and Joseph Blenkinsopp (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 235–62.

ideology additionally “serves to recommend, justify or endorse collective action aimed at preserving or changing political practices or institutions.”[12]

My attempt to show that attending to the prophets’ critique of ideology is a theologically and homiletically helpful approach begins with a survey of the royal and imperial ideologies of ancient Egypt, Neo-Assyria, Babylon, and Persia that notes their distinctive traits as well as the fundamental elements they have in common. The latter category includes the belief that the empire or state was established and is now maintained by the will of the gods, the contrastingly disordered and dangerous nature of states and empires outside its borders, and the moral goodness of the empire’s actions undertaken with the goal of extending its control (and thus justice and order on its own terms) as far as possible beyond its present borders.

The chapters of the book that are dedicated to individual prophetic books (chapters 3–17) pursue most of these lines of analysis simultaneously: unity and diversity in the prophets’ presentations of the future judgment and salvation of non-Israelites, the hermeneutical significance of the prophets’ focus on the ideologies of the nations (part of which) they condemn, and some of the ways that the New Testament traces the fulfillment of these texts in Jesus Christ, the Christian church, and its mission in the world. The fulfillment of Amos 9:11–12 in the book of Acts is a classic example, so much so that David Peterson proposes that the second half of the book of Acts is “a commentary on Amos 9:11–12 (LXX).”[13]

The final chapter of *Egypt My People* explains how one moves from appreciating the prophets’ critiques of the ideologies of various ancient Near Eastern nations to critiquing contemporary ideologies of various kinds on the *same theological grounds.* It then applies that method to a variety of contemporary issues. As such, it proposes a method for developing cultural apologetics or biblical critical theory that draws on the biblical prophets in particular.[14] Taking a hint from Augustine’s *City of God*,[15] I first consider the larger context of modern and postmodern thought in the West as the larger setting for contemporary ideologies. I then describe and synthesize some exemplary Christian critiques of and responses to contemporary ideologies that advocate certain beliefs and actions with respect to the human being (including moral autonomy, gender fluidity, the role of artificial intelligence, and transhumanism), the material world (including consumerist, commercial materialism and the phenomenon of advertising), and, of course, political paradigms, against the backdrop of the increasingly clear failure of political liberalism due to the destructive effects of secular thought.

Building on constructive Christian proposals with respect to these contested domains within especially western cultures—and with an eye to the homiletical and meditative use of the prophets—the volume concludes by drawing attention to the fundamentally *individual* manifestation of sinful ideology as multifaceted idolatry. “If *idolatry* can be described as the expression of disordered desires and loves or a ‘way of relating’ to them, *ideology* formulates a way of seeing [and acting in] the world

[12] Michael Freeden, “Ideology,” in *Concise Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 2000), 381.

[13] David G. Peterson, “Luke’s Theological Enterprise,” in *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts*, ed. I. Howard Marshall and David G. Peterson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 531.

[14] Christopher Watkin offers valuable insights on prophets in his *Biblical Critical Theory: How the Bible’s Unfolding Story Makes Sense of Modern Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2022).

[15] Mehmet Ciftci, “Saint Augustine and the Theological Critique of Ideology,” *New Blackfriars* 99 (2018): 20–29.

that corresponds to those disordered loves."[16] Over against the prophets' condemnation of individual and collective sin, their message of God's coming salvation points to the gospel as God's appointed means of restoring *proper* beliefs and actions in fallen human beings and reconciling them to himself. His kingdom, which the Spirit's re-creative work establishes, is the only realm in which human beings can truly flourish, even while living in a world that is scarred by sin and opposed to truth. My closing encouragements to laypersons, theologians, and preachers alike "to explore, share, and apply the rich theology of these texts to themselves and their world" sketch some lines along which all readers can better hear, respond to, and live in light of the neglected but strikingly rich and relevant treatment of non-Israelites in the prophetic books of the OT. May it be so!

[16] Timmer, *Egypt My People*, 252; citing Watkin, *Biblical Critical Theory*, 311, with a nod to David Naugle's excellent work on disordered loves that draws upon Augustine: *Reordered Love, Reordered Lives: Learning the Deep Meaning of Happiness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008).

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Key Questions Concerning the Book of Ecclesiastes: An Explanation of the Negative Views of Qohelet

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I have two fond memories of meeting Dr. Carson. We both taught the same week at the Reformed Theological Seminary (RTS) Orlando campus in 2006 and had dinner together. He did not know me, but he was so kind and personable. Then he came to RTS Charlotte several times to teach week-long intensive courses during the summer. Since I was the Academic Dean, I arranged dinner at a restaurant with several faculty members. I sat across from him and our discussion turned to the need for a volume on Wisdom Literature in the NSBT series. At the end of the dinner, he asked me to submit a proposal, which was accepted and became the book, *Finding Favour in the Sight of God: A Theology of Wisdom Literature* (2018). I am thankful for the opportunity to publish in that series and for Dr. Carson's encouragement. I have also been thankful for his commitment to the Scriptures as the inspired word of God. Our students always appreciated his courses, especially the course on the book of Hebrews.

Finding Favour in the Sight of God covers the books of Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes. This brief article will focus on why Ecclesiastes struggles with the meaning of life and expresses such negative views. Key questions will be asked, and the answers will explain why the author is struggling with the meaning of life. I offer a few comments here to set the stage for the questions which follow.[1] There are two types of writing in the book: a first-person discourse in 1:12–12:7 and a third-person frame, composed of 1:1–11 and 12:8–14, produced by a wise man. The first-person discourse has been called an autobiography (an account of the life of an individual, or a part of his life, written by the individual in the first person).[2] Another term that could be used is "memoir," which is "a written record of a usually famous person's own life and experience."[3] The prologue introduces the author of the memoir (1:1), gives the motto (1:2), asks a key question (1:3) that will be answered, and gives a poem from the author that previews what is coming (1:4–11). In the epilogue (12:8–14), a wise man presents the memoir to

[1] For more detailed discussions of the major questions in the book of Ecclesiastes, see my commentary, *Ecclesiastes: A Mentor Commentary* (Ross-shire, UK: Christian Focus, 2017), or the section on Ecclesiastes in *Finding Favour in the Sight of God: A Theology of Wisdom Literature*, NSBT 46 (London: Apollos, 2018).

[2] Tremper Longman III, *Fictional Akkadian Autobiography* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1991), 40. Longman argues that the autobiography in Ecclesiastes is fictional because it was written by someone who presents himself as Solomon.

[3] *Cambridge Dictionary*, s.v. "memoir," https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/memoir.

his son to warn him of certain intellectual pursuits and to point to the answer of the problems with which the author was wrestling. The author of the memoir identifies himself by the Hebrew "Qohelet" (1:12), usually translated "the Preacher" or "the Teacher." The term "Qohelet" will be used for him in this article. Who Qohelet was and when he wrote are major questions that have a wide variety of answers which will be touched upon at the end of this article.

1. What Method Does Qohelet Use in His Search for the Meaning of Life?

The key question of the book concerning whether there is any profit to labor is asked at the beginning in 1:3, but it also occurs in 3:9. Qohelet uses the related Hebrew verb עָמַל and noun עָמָל for labor or "toil," as represented in the translation of 1:3, "all his labor at which he labors."[4] This word emphasizes the difficult nature of labor, which is the emphasis of Qohelet (thirteen of sixteen uses of this word occur in Ecclesiastes). The word has a broader meaning than we expect when we think of labor, so that Thompson can say, "Eccl. 1:3 describes the entire human enterprise as a laborious task."[5]

The method by which Qohelet investigates the meaning of human activity in life is through observation. Qohelet uses "I saw"[6] eighteen times in the first-person discourse (1:12–12:7). His use of this phrase is not uniform throughout but is employed in several different aspects of his argument. First, it introduces an observation which he sets forth to explore the meaning of certain events in life (2:13; 3:10, 16; 7:15; 9:11). Second, it asserts an important observation within the development of the argument he is making (2:24; 4:1–3, 4, 7; 6:1; 10:5; 10:7). Finally, a few times Qohelet uses "I saw" to set forth a conclusion he wants to make from his investigation of a topic (1:14), including the introduction of some "calls to enjoyment" (3:22; 5:18). Observation is a key part of Qohelet's methodology in his search for meaning in life. There is debate concerning the best way to characterize his epistemology. Fox calls it "essentially empirical," and Bartholomew describes it as "autonomous." Both argue that his epistemology is different from what is found in the book of Proverbs.[7] Qohelet looks to his own experience as the source of his knowledge and the means of its validation.[8] He proceeds by seeking experience, observing it, judging it, and then reporting his perceptions. He also uses experience in arguing for his propositions. This is a different approach than in the book of Proverbs, where the goal in examining creation is not to discover truths but to understand truths better to teach them in an effective way. There is very little attempt in Proverbs at argumentation from individual experience. If one asked a traditional sage, "How do you know this?" he would answer, "Because I learned it." Qohelet would reply, "Because I saw it."[9]

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[4] All translations are mine unless otherwise indicated.

[5] David Thompson, "עמל," in *NIDOTTE* 3:435. He gives the evidence for the broader meaning.

[6] This is the Qal perfect 1cs form (רָאִיתִי) of the common verb "to see" (רָאָה).

[7] Michael V. Fox, "Qohelet's Epistemology," *HUCA* 58 (1987): 141–42, 145–47, and Craig G. Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes,* BCOTWP (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 58 n. 232. Contra J. L. Crenshaw, "Qoheleth's Understanding of Intellectual Inquiry," in *Qohelet in the Context of Wisdom*, ed. A. Schoors, BETL 136 (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1998), 205–24.

[8] In an article on "The Epistemology of the Book of Proverbs," Fox comments about Qohelet in a footnote, "His claim to have derived conclusions from his independent observations—and these alone—is the most radical proposition in the book" (*JBL* 126 [2007]: 669–84).

[9] Fox, "Qohelet's Epistemology," 152, 154.

2. What Is the Goal of Qohelet's Search for Meaning?

Several times Qohelet states his goal. He is going to use wisdom to search out all that is done under heaven. But wisdom is also going to be the object of his search. He wants to know wisdom (1:16). This is more than an intellectual examination of wisdom because the verb יָדַע can mean to know by experience.[10] He wants to experience how wisdom works in life and the consequences that come from wisdom. The surprise is that he does not privilege wisdom in his search but will also be seriously devoted ("applied my heart") to know madness and folly. In other words, he seeks to investigate by experience how madness and folly affect life and the consequences that come from it. He states this same goal in 7:25 where he refers to his search in more graphic terms. He repeats that he wants to know and seek wisdom, and he does not back off from his search to know "the wickedness of folly and the foolishness that is madness." It is a remarkable statement that he wants to experience the wickedness that comes with folly and the foolishness that is madness to see where each will lead. What he adds here about his search is that he is seeking to know "the sum of things." The word חֶשְׁבּוֹן can mean "calculation" or "to give an accounting."[11] Qohelet is seeking an explanation of how the world works. How does everything fit together? He is very negative about whether an answer can be found to this question. After stating, "All this I have tested by wisdom," he concludes, "I said, 'I will be very wise,' but it was far from me" (see also 8:1, 17).

Several implications can be drawn from these remarks by Qohelet. First, his problem is with wisdom, because wisdom does not live up to his expectations. Wisdom may give you a relative advantage over foolishness (2:13–14), but in the end it does not really matter, because what happens to the fool is no different than what happens to the wise—"how will the wise die? Like the fool!" (2:16). This explains his question, "So why then have I become very wise?" (2:15). He is not starting on a "secular" basis to show what life is like without God. He is wrestling with the fact that wisdom itself does not ultimately deliver on its promises.

The second implication is that Qohelet's search does not privilege wisdom as the right way to go. There are clearly two ways in Psalm 1, the way of the righteous and the way of the wicked, and they end up in two different places (vv. 5–6). There are clearly two ways laid out in Proverbs 1–9, with the youth exhorted to pursue the way of wisdom to avoid at all costs the dangers of living a life of foolishness. Qohelet desires to pursue both wisdom and foolishness. The problems of life dominate his thinking, which leads him to question the benefit of wisdom. This affects his advice. Since he does not privilege wisdom, he does not give strong exhortations to pursue wisdom.[12]

3. How Does God Relate to Qohelet's Search for Meaning?

God appears several times in the first-person discourse (1:12–12:8). The name for God is always the generic name Elohim. The covenant name of God is Lord, which became prominent in the Exodus event, where God demonstrated that he was faithful to his covenant promises and would fight for his people. Lord occurs all throughout Proverbs, but it never occurs in Ecclesiastes. That is not necessarily negative except when it becomes clear that God is a problem for Qohelet and that he never brings God in to solve the issues with which he is wrestling.

[10] Graham Ogden and Lynell Zogbo, *A Handbook on Ecclesiastes* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1997), 47.

[11] Different ways this word has been translated include "the scheme of things" (ESV), "the reason of things" (NASB, NKJV), "answer" (Murphy), and "solutions" (Fox).

[12] See the comments on 7:15–18 and 11:9 in Belcher, *Ecclesiastes*, 263–71 and 376–79.

This becomes clear in chapter 3. The poem on time that begins the chapter is a statement of the traditional view of wisdom that there is a time for every activity and part of wisdom is knowing the times so that one can act appropriately at the right time. The poem is followed by the question that opened the book, "What profit does the worker have from his toil?" Does the poem on time change his answer in 2:11 that there is no profit to labor? Qohelet begins with an observation of what he has seen in relationship to God (3:10). He has seen the task that God has given to human beings to keep them busy (1:13 called this "a grievous task"). God has also made everything appropriate in its time (3:11). God understands the times because he has created them. He knows how everything fits together in its proper time. He has also placed "eternity" (עוֹלָם) in the heart of humans. This word includes the desire to move beyond the fragmentary knowledge of our human situation to know the character and purpose of the events in the world. It also includes the future either in this life or life beyond this life, but the problem is that Qohelet does not believe we can be sure of the future either in this life or beyond (7:14; 8:7). The end of 3:11 is where we begin to see the problem Qohelet has with God: "except that people cannot discover the work that God does from beginning to end." The limitation of human knowledge in understanding God's activity in the world, including how he will act in the future, is the problem. This makes it difficult for people to make proper decisions at the appropriate times. The desire to understand how the world works in conjunction with the inability to understand God's purposes leads to frustration (see the enigmatic statement about God's work in 7:13). Thus, this hinders the ability to act at the right time to ensure a profit.

The second part of chapter 3 is important because it reinforces the idea that God is distant, which explains why he is not brought in to solve the problem. It begins with another observation related to how wickedness wins the day even in places where you would expect justice to rule (3:16). Qohelet follows that observation with a theological reflection ("I said in my heart") in 3:17 that God will judge the righteous and the wicked because there is a time for every work. This could be the answer, but he offers another reflection which focuses on the relationship between humans and animals (3:18). He argues that there is no difference between humans and animals. They have the same breath and are made of the same substance, so that at death they go to the same place (3:19–20). We do not even know if the spirit of humans goes upward and the spirit of the animals goes down into the earth (3:21). The problem is that Qohelet allows this anthropological statement to stand without bringing in the theological reflection of 3:17 to provide an answer. A similar thing happens in 9:1 where the righteous and the wise are in the hand of God, which should bring comfort and security, but being in the hand of God does not make any difference in what happens to the righteous and the wise (9:2). Qohelet has lost confidence in God, so he does not appeal to God as an answer to the struggles in his search.[13]

4. Why Are the Calls to Enjoyment Not the Answer to His Search?

The end of chapter 3 has a "call to enjoyment," which some interpret as the answer of faith to the problems with which Qohelet is wrestling. Although the calls to enjoyment are a gift from God (2:24), they are not the answer. The reason for this conclusion goes back to 2:10–11 where Qohelet answers whether there is any profit (יִתְרוֹן) to labor. After considering all the works which his hands had accomplished in 2:1–9, he concludes that there is no profit under the sun (2:11). There is no lasting

[13] Thus, the fear of God in the first-person discourse is a cautious attitude toward God because you are not sure how he will act (Tremper Longman III, "The 'Fear of God' in the Book of Ecclesiastes," *BBR* 25 [2015]: 13–21).

benefit to human labor. This is different than what Proverbs 14:23a states, "In all labor there is profit" (מוֹתָר).[14] Even though Qohelet concludes that there is no profit to labor, there is something from labor that should be enjoyed which is called 2:10) חֵלֶק). This word expresses having a share of something,[15] and a good translation is "portion" or "lot." It is used with many of the calls to enjoyment (3:22; 5:18–19; 9:9), which express that there is nothing better than to eat, drink, and find some pleasure in labor. The calls to enjoyment are not the answer of faith. They are not on the level of profit but are all one can expect in a world that is full of unfulfilled expectations.

The final question to think about is how can we explain such negative views presented in Scripture? Some argue that the somber mood of the book is because the book was written in a time when things were not going well for Israel, usually thought to be later in Israel's history after the exile. But maybe the somber mood of the book is not due to the time when it was written but to the struggles of the author. Fox and Bartholomew argue that Qohelet is living when Israelite wisdom is in decline, so he seeks to explore meaning with the tools of Greek epistemology. But Barton argues that the book is thoroughly Semitic in its point of view and is completely free of Greek influence.[16] Scholars date the book late mainly because the language of Ecclesiastes reflects Late Biblical Hebrew and does not fit the language of pre-exilic Standard Biblical Hebrew. But what if the book is not an official document of the monarchy but is a private memoir written in one of the many dialects that existed in Palestine in pre-exilic Israel?[17] The only son of David who reigned over Israel in Jerusalem (1:1; 1:12) was Solomon. What if Solomon wrote 1:12–12:7 during the period of his life when his foreign wives turned his heart away from the Lord (1 Kings 11)? What if a wise man presented this to his son (12:12) as a warning against speculative wisdom and as an explanation of how the wisest man of all the earth (1 Kings 3:11–13) could struggle so much with the meaning of life?

There is a parallel in Psalm 73:1–16 where the author almost slipped off the right path because of the prosperity of the wicked. The warning is that we should not get so caught up in trying to explain what we experience that we question God's wisdom and forget the simple necessity to fear God and to keep his commandments (12:14).

Ecclesiastes is a fascinating book and there are many views of it. I have tried to give exegetical reasons why there are so many negative statements in the first-person discourse and how they fit with the more positive statements of the calls to enjoyment. The author mentions God several times in the book, but he does not use God to solve the problems with which he is wrestling. He also does not privilege the way of wisdom (as Proverbs does) but also wants to experience madness and folly to see where that leads him. He explores the futility of life through an empirical method based on his observations of the world. Such an approach to life would make sense if Solomon was the author (1:2, 12) who wrote 1:12–12:8 during the time of his life when his foreign wives turned his heart away from the Lord (1 Kings 11). I think everyone can agree that parts of the book accurately describe what it would be like to live in a fallen world apart from God. The futility of life, captured by the key word הֶבֶל, is translated by the Greek word ματαιότης, which is used by Paul in Romans 8:20 to state, "the creation was subjected to futility." One day creation will be set free from its bondage to corruption. The good news is that we will also be set free from the futility of sin and its destructive power through Christ (Rom. 8:22–24).

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[14] The Hebrew words יִתְרוֹן and מוֹתָר are both derivatives of the verb יָתַר.

[15] *HALOT* 1:323.

[16] George Aaron Barton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Ecclesiastes*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1908), 32–43.

[17] Ian Young, *Diversity in Pre-Exilic Hebrew*, FAT 5 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1993).

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The God Who Became Human[1]

— *Graham A. Cole* —

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Christianity brought two startlingly new ideas into the ancient world: the one God is Trinity, and God the Son became incarnate. Regarding the latter, Augustine provides evidence of the newness of incarnation when he wrote his famous *Confessions*. In it, he recounts how the philosophers said the word was with God and was God but not that the word became flesh.[2] However, he did read it in John's Gospel 1:14.

This essay will explore the idea of incarnation in terms of both Old and New Testament witness. This will take us into the realm of the Old Testament's rendering of God and Israel's expectation of a divinely provided agent of deliverance for God's people. The question, however, is whether Israel expected that deliverance would come by way of an incarnation.

1. The "Embodied" God: The Old Testament Witness

God in the Old Testament is portrayed as though incarnate in numerous places. Even Jewish scholars have noted this. Rabbinical scholar Jacob Neusner wrote:

> On the basis of a large number of stories along these lines [with their anthropomorphic descriptions of God], we might well contemplate composing the story of God on earth—a kind of gospel of God incarnate, walking among human beings, talking with them, teaching them, acting among them, just as for the evangelists of the church received and venerated their writings, Jesus Christ, God incarnate, walked on earth, taught, and provided the example for humanity of the union between humanity and deity.[3]

As a rabbi, he does not embrace the Christian view, but he sees why New Testament writers saw in Jesus the incarnation of deity.

[1] It is a privilege to contribute to a text honoring D. A. Carson. What a gift to the church he is: eminent scholar, fruitful evangelist, astute apologist, insightful reader of culture, and skilled strategist regarding mission. I count him as a friend. I also appreciate his invitation to contribute a volume on the incarnation to his NSBT series, *The God Who Became Human: A Biblical Theology of Incarnation* (NSBT 30 Nottingham: Apollos, 2013). I draw on that work here albeit in a highly selective way. Many of the claims in this essay are much more robustly buttressed in that volume.

[2] Augustine, *Confessions* 7.9.13–14.

[3] Jacob Neusner, *The Incarnation of God: The Character of Divinity in Formative Judaism* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1992), 17–18.

Old Testament scholar Edmond Jacob recognized the importance of the relation between these stories and the incarnation when he wrote:

> The God of the Old Testament is a God who seeks to manifest his presence in order to be recognized as the sovereign Lord; that is why the fear of God is at the basis of all piety and all wisdom. But God also and especially seeks to manifest his presence in order to save man. A line not always straight, but nonetheless continuous, leads from the anthropomorphisms of the earliest pages of the Bible, to the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ.[4]

It is illuminating that Jacob highlights the manifestation of the divine presence. Theologians typically understand God as transcendent and immanent. But another category is needed: concomitance. The Bible presents the God who is with us, not simply above us or within us.

In the stories which Neusner refers to there are three forms of expression to consider: anthropomorphisms, anthropopathisms, and anthropopraxisms— all evidenced in the text of the Old Testament. Anthropomorphisms describe God as having human-like physical characteristics. Examples abound. God is described as having eyes (e.g., Gen 6:8), ears (e.g., 2 Sam 22:7), nostrils (e.g., Ps 18:15), arms (e.g., Deut 33:27), fingers (e.g., Ps 8:3), and feet (e.g., Isa 60:13). These examples come from every part of the Old Testament: the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. Anthropopathisms ascribe human-like emotions to God. Again, examples abound. God rejoices (e.g., Jer 32:41), grieves (e.g., Gen 6:6–7), and is angered (e.g., Num 11:10). As for human roles, God is a king (e.g., Ps 95:3), a warrior (e.g., 15:3), a shepherd (e.g., 23:1), a potter (e.g., Jer 18:6), a gardener (e.g., Gen. 2:8), a father (e.g., Exod 32:8), and a mother (e.g., Isa 66:13). All these roles are well known in the ancient world.

The Old Testament thus provided descriptors and stories without which the incarnation would have been largely, if not wholly, inconceivable. Theologian T. F. Torrance comments: "They [Old Testament foreshadowings of incarnation] constitute the essential furniture of our knowledge of God even in and through Christ. If the Word of God became incarnate apart from all that, it could not have been grasped—Jesus himself would have remained a bewildering enigma."[5]

It would be a mistake to think that the Old Testament writers had a crass materialistic understanding of God because of the use of anthropomorphic, anthropopathic, and anthropopraxist descriptors. Isaiah, for example, clearly distinguished between the material and the spiritual when he says of God: "But the Egyptians are mere mortals and not God; their horses are flesh and not spirit" (Isa 31:3). The parallelism is to be noted. Again, the prohibition on image making in the Torah (e.g., Exod 20:4) and the prophetic critique of idolatry point in the same direction (e.g., Isa 46:1–7 and Jer 10:1–10).

2. The Incarnate God: The New Testament Witness

The New Testament clearly asserts that Jesus is God incarnate. The prologue of John provides the classic text: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). But turning to Paul we find that the incarnation was a secret now made known. The key text is 1 Timothy 3:16:

[4] Edmond Jacob, *The Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. A. W. Heathcote and P. J. Allcock (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1958), 32.

[5] T. F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, new ed. (Colorado Springs: Helmer & Howard, 1992), 18.

> Beyond all question, the mystery from which true godliness springs is great: He appeared in the flesh, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory.

So, what does Paul mean by "mystery" or "secret"? According to Gladd, "mystery constitutes an eschatological revelation that was previously hidden but now has been revealed."[6]

Given that the incarnation was a secret but now revealed, what is to be made of the varied expectations of the Old Testament? Those varied OT expectations include: a prophet like Moses (e.g., Deut 18:15–22), a Davidic king (e.g., Ezek 34:20–24), the Son of Man (e.g., Dan 7:13–14), the suffering servant (e.g., Isa 52:13–53:12), and God coming to Zion (e.g., Zech 8:3). But in these expectations, nowhere do we find an incarnation of deity portrayed.[7] What we do find in the New Testament is that these expectations are realized in Jesus who is truly God yet truly human (John 1:14, Phil 2:5–11, and Heb 2:14–16).

3. The Manifold Purpose of the Incarnation

In the medieval period, Anselm famously raised the question of the rationale of the incarnation in *Cur Deus Homo* ("Why Did God Become Human?"). His own answer was an appeal to reason rather than to special revelation, but happily, the New Testament writers witness to the rationale of the incarnation without such a limitation.[8]

3.1. Revelation

The Prologue of John's Gospel presents one of the rationales for the incarnation: revelation. It reaches its climax with this claim: "No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known" (John 1:18). The revelatory mission of Jesus is made plain in the Garden of Gethsemane when he prays to his Father: "I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began. I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world" (17:4–5).[9]

3.2. Redemption

Redemption is another reason for the incarnation, as the Apostle Paul makes plain in Galatians 4:4–5: "But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law,

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[6] Benjamin L. Gladd, "Mystery," in *Dictionary of the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale et al. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2023), 552 (further discussed in 551–55).

[7] Figures like the angel of the Lord may be a Christophany (i.e., an appearance of God the Son in human form) but a Christophany is not an incarnation. See my book, *The God Who Became Human*, 116–20.

[8] Anselm wrote intentionally without recourse to revelation and as though he knew nothing of the incarnation. He argued from his analysis of the human situation that only a human could satisfy an offended God and that none were good enough. Hence, God provided the Godman to do what humanity could not do for itself: honor God. See the discussion in Justo L. González, *A History of Christian Thought: From Augustine to the Eve of the Reformation*, vol. 2 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1987), 158–67.

[9] This is one of two places in the prayer where there is a window into the inner life of the Trinity before creation. The other is John 17:24: "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world."

to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship." The "set time" (τὸ πλήρωμα τοῦ χρόνου) was the opportune time which not only could be understood as the *Pax Romana* in place—Roman roads everywhere which enabled the spread of ideas and Greek as the lingua franca—but also included the conceptual framework (as discussed in the foregoing) now available for an incarnation to be understood.

3.3. Victory

The *protoevangelium* ("first gospel") of Genesis 3:15 is programmatic. The biblical universe is a dramatic one: good is at war with evil. Evil will not triumph. In the wisdom of God, the offspring of Eve will fatally wound the serpent, even though he himself should suffer in securing victory:

> And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.

The defeat of the serpent sounds a *Christus Victor* note. Dying in our place is integral to that victory and nestles within the *Christus Victor* framework.[10]

The Book of Hebrews connects the victory to the incarnation: "Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death" (Heb 2:14–15). The fear of death lies in the fear of judgement. That fear is nullified through the cross of Christ. First John also affirms *Christus Victor*: "The one who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work" (1 John 3:8). A sound biblical theology recognizes the programmatic importance of the *protoevangelium* for the unfolding plotline of Scripture.

4. The Significance of the Incarnation

The Word became flesh is an affirmation of the created order. Jesus was not merely human in appearance as ancient docetists claimed. He was truly human. The risen Christ does not cease to be incarnate but bears the scars of his historical experience, as his conversation with Thomas shows (John 20:26–29). Indeed, the world to come is not a purely non-material replacement of this one but its transfiguration (Rom 8:18–25). The Bible does not present a dualism in which spirit is good and matter is evil.

Human value is also affirmed by the incarnation. The Word did not become a monkey or a dolphin but a human. Roman Catholic philosopher Jacques Maritain rightly argued, "the sanctity of human life ultimately rests on the fact that Christ became incarnate as a human creature, not some other sort of creature."[11] This is entirely fitting given the biblical testimony that humans are in the image of God and Jesus was and is quintessentially that image (cf. Gen 1:27 and Col 1:15). In fact, Jesus held a hierarchal view of the value of different creatures. He declared that humans were of more value than sheep or

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[10] I argue so in my *God the Peacemaker: How Atonement brings Shalom*, NSBT 25 (Nottingham: Apollos, 2009), 233–39. I am further indebted to D. A. Carson for the invitation to contribute the above-mentioned volume on the atonement to his NSTB series.

[11] Quoted by Stephen Post. "Sanctity of Human Life", *Dictionary of Scripture and Ethics*, ed. Joel B. Green (Grand Rapid: Baker Academic, 2011), 702.

sparrows (cf. Matt 6:25 and 12:9–14). It is important to note in passing that this is a comparative judgment and not a dismissal of the value of other creatures.

The depth of divine love is also revealed by the incarnation. In John's account the sending of the Son was the expression of divine love as John 3:16 shows: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son [identified in John 1:1–18], that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." John's first letter explicates the rationale of that sending and its implications:" This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins" (1 John 4:9–10). And the implication is then drawn out by John: "Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (4:11).

5. Conclusions

My wife is a dress designer and writer of fashion textbooks. She says that to sew a garment properly you need to listen to the fabric talk. Leather must be sewn with special leather needles, otherwise the needles will break. Biblical theology listens to the fabric of Scripture talk with particular attention given to its unfolding plotline. In this chapter we endeavored to listen to the fabric talk both in the Old and New Testament.

The Old Testament testimony rendered an "embodied" God. Anthropomorphisms portrayed a God in human form. Anthropopathisms presented God with a human-like emotional life. Anthropopraxisms portrayed God in roles analogous to human ones. In so doing, when the incarnation took place in time and space, there were concepts available for understanding the miracle that had happened whilst preserving its mystery and its saving purpose.

The New Testament delineated the rationale of the Word made flesh: a saving purpose with its revelatory, redemptive, and *Christus Victor* dimensions and how the varied figures of Old Testament expectation—a prophet like Moses, a Davidic king, the servant of the Lord, the Son of Man, God coming to his temple—coalesced in Jesus. Importantly, according to the Apostle Paul, the incarnation was a mystery, a secret now revealed that Jesus appeared in the flesh. Incarnation per se is generally not in the Old Testament witness.

Nineteenth century philosopher Søren Kierkegaard realized how stupendous the incarnation was. He wrote to startle because he was frustrated with the Lutheran clergy of his day and their complacency. (At least, that was his perception.) He wrote:

> If the contemporary generation had left nothing behind them but these words: "We have believed that in such and such a year the God appeared among us in the humble figure of a servant, that he lived and taught in our community, and finally died," it would be more than enough.[12]

Enough perhaps for Kierkegaard but thankfully not enough for our New Testament writers with their many-sided witness to the significance of the "mystery of godliness that he [Jesus] was manifested in the flesh" (1 Tim 3:16).

[12] Søren Kierkegaard, "The Disciple at Second Hand," in *Philosophical Fragments*, ch. 5, *Religion Online*, https://tinyurl.com/49eshnys.

The significance of the incarnation lies in its revelatory and saving purposes as set out in the literature of the New Testament: the revelation of the Father in relation to the Son, redemption, and victory over evil exemplified in the devil. Theologically reflected on, that significance shows itself in affirming the goodness of the created order, the value of human life, and above all the depths of the divine love.

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A Better Priest and the Problem of Abiathar: Literary and Biblical-Theological Reflections on Mark 2:23–28

— ***Matthew Emadi*** —

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I began my NSBT volume, *The Royal Priest: Psalm 110 in Biblical Theology*, with a quote from a sermon Don Carson preached, called "Getting Excited about Melchizedek."[1] The title of the sermon alone testifies to Dr. Carson's love for the Bible and for biblical theology. I wonder how many Christians can say they have ever been excited about Melchizedek? For some, pronouncing his name correctly is scary enough, let alone understanding his role in redemptive history. Dr. Carson was excited about Melchizedek because he loves the gospel and the glory of Christ's new covenant priesthood. He preached on Melchizedek—something many would be unwilling to do at a national conference—because he wanted Christians to understand the unity of Scripture. Dr. Carson has spent his life teaching us how to do biblical theology, and I am forever grateful for his guidance.

The purpose of this short article is to honor Don Carson's legacy by presenting a literary and biblical-theological interpretation of Mark's problematic phrase ἐπὶ Ἀβιαθὰρ ἀρχιερέως (often translated "in the time of Abiathar the high priest") in Mark 2:26:[2]

> And he said to them, "Have you never read what David did, when he was in need and was hungry, he and those who were with him: how he entered the house of God, *in the time of Abiathar the high priest*, and ate the bread of the Presence, which it is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and also gave it to those who were with him?" (Mark 2:25–26, ESV, emphasis mine)

The problem, of course, is that Abiathar's father Ahimelech, not Abiathar, was the high priest when David entered the house of God (1 Sam 21:1; cf. 1 Sam 22:20). What are we to make of this? I first grappled with Mark 2:26 while writing on Jesus's priesthood in Mark's Gospel for a chapter in my NSBT volume. I quickly discovered that the numerous scholarly studies on Mark 2:26 seemed to have exhausted all possible interpretative and textual solutions.[3] It is appropriate, therefore, to ask if a text

[1] D. A. Carson, "Getting Excited about Melchizedek (Psalm 110)," in *The Scriptures Testify about Me: Jesus and The Gospel in The Old Testament*, ed. D. A. Carson (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013).

[2] Matthew and Luke do not mention Abiathar in their accounts of the same episode (Matt 12:1–8; Luke 6:1–5).

[3] For a succinct summary of the different explanations scholars have given for the reference to Abiathar in Mark 2:26, see William B. Bowes, "Revisiting 'the Time of Abiathar the High Priest': Interpretation, Methodology and Ways Forward for Understanding Mark 2:26," *Themelios* 47.2 (2022): 263–69.

that has almost as many interpretations as interpreters deserves yet another investigation? I believe so, but I am not of the opinion that we still lack a satisfying explanation. The work done by Perrin and Bowes persuasively demonstrates that Mark included the phrase ἐπὶ Ἀβιαθὰρ ἀρχιερέως to evoke a particular Old Testament storyline that supports his messianic portrait of Jesus as the true priest and Son of David.[4] As Bowes suggests, Mark's reference to Abiathar is not a sloppy failure to get the facts of history straight but part of a "deftly crafted, coherent, and connected" narrative meant to teach the reader about Jesus's identity and the demise of his religious opponents.[5] Jesus, like David who ate the bread of the presence, is a priestly king, and his disciples, like David's men, are a priestly people in service of the true king. Jesus's opponents, however, are like Abiathar the high priest who started well but ended up as the only priest in the Old Testament ever deposed of his office. To resist Jesus, then, is to find oneself on the wrong side of redemptive history.

My aim is to complement the work of Perrin and Bowes by offering some fresh literary and biblical-theological lines of argumentation that help explain why Mark chose to include the phrase ἐπὶ Ἀβιαθὰρ ἀρχιερέως in his description of the grainfield controversy. To this end, I will first examine the literary context of Mark 2:1–3:6, paying particular attention to Mark's emphasis on meals with Jesus in Mark 2:13–28, to demonstrate that the reference to Abiathar contributes to a larger narrative portrait of Jesus as the messianic priest. Second, I will show how the phrase ἐπὶ Ἀβιαθὰρ ἀρχιερέως guides the reader toward a correct interpretation of David's actions at Nob. In other words, David's priestly meal in 1 Samuel 21:1–6 is part of 1–2 Samuel's narrative portrayal of David as a prophetic type of the priestly messiah who would fulfill God's promise concerning a faithful priest described in 1 Samuel 2:35. The phrase ἐπὶ Ἀβιαθὰρ ἀρχιερέως is not merely a warning for the religious leadership resisting Jesus—they, like Abiathar, will be rejected by God—but an indication that Jesus is the greater Son of David and the ultimate fulfillment of God's promise to raise up a faithful priest (1 Sam 2:35). Due to space constraints, my analysis will be brief and suggestive. My hope is that the interpretation here will stimulate further reflection on this important text.

1. Mark 2:1–3:6: Chiastic Structure, Covenant Meals, and a Priestly Messiah

Joanna Dewey has demonstrated that the conflict narratives of Mark 2:1–3:6 form a chiastic structure with the prediction of Jesus's death in Mark 2:20 at the center of the chiasm.[6] My description of the chiastic literary structure is as follows:

A Mark 2:1–12: Miraculous healing and the forgiveness of sins
  B Mark 2:13–17: A meal with sinners at the house of Levi
    C Mark 2:18–22: The new wine of the kingdom
  B′ Mark 2:23–28: A meal of grain with the priest-king of Israel
A′ Mark 3:1–6: Miraculous healing on the Sabbath

[4] Nicholas Perrin, "The Temple, A Davidic Messiah, and a Case of Mistaken Priestly Identity (Mark 2:26)," in *From Creation to New Creation: Biblical Theology and Exegesis: Essays in Honor of G. K. Beale*, ed. Daniel M. Gurtner and Benjamin L. Gladd (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2013); Nicholas Perrin, *Jesus the Priest* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 190–207; Bowes, "Revisiting 'the Time of Abiathar the High Priest.'"

[5] Bowes, "Revisiting 'the Time of Abiathar the High Priest,'" 277.

[6] Joanna Dewey, "Literary Structure of the Controversy Stories in Mark 2:1–3:6," *JBL* 92 (1973): 394–401.

The literary structure exposes the common themes in each of the pericopes. The three central pericopes (B, C, B′) involve meals and are mutually interpretive. In Mark 2:13–17, Jesus eats with sinners at the house of Levi. In Mark 2:18–22, Jesus defends feasting instead of fasting with an illustration about a bridegroom and new wine. In Mark 2:23–28, Jesus's disciples eat heads of grain on the Sabbath. A brief examination of Mark 2:13–17 and 2:18–22 will help to decipher how Jesus's mention of Abiathar supports Mark's Christological argument in this section of his Gospel (2:1–3:6).

1.1. Mark 2:13–17: A Meal with Sinners at the House of Levi

Jesus's meal at Levi's house (Mark 2:13–17) is parallel to the grainfield controversy in Mark 2:23–28. On the heels of cleansing the leper and forgiving the paralytic—both priestly actions—Jesus calls Levi to be his disciple (2:13–14). Levi, who was likely given the name Matthew after his conversion,[7] may have been a Levite, a descendant of the priestly tribe of Israel.[8] The meal that follows Levi's conversion is a feast at Levi's house for sinners and tax collectors (2:15–17). Gladd notes that Jesus's meals with sinners in the Gospels should be understood against the backdrop of the Old Testament sacrificial system. Through their sacrifices, God's people experienced expiation (purification offerings), consecration (burnt offerings), and fellowship with God in a communion meal (peace offerings).[9] In Gladd's words, "The goal of the various sacrifices and offerings is dwelling with God *in a covenant meal*."[10] This movement from cleansing to consecration to communion is the same movement we find in the Gospels.[11] In Mark's Gospel, Jesus casts out unclean spirits (1:21–28), cleanses and forgives the unclean and sinful (1:40–2:12), and eats covenant meals with those in need of salvation (2:13–17, 23–28).

It is certainly not a coincidence that Jesus's meal with sinners at the house of a man named Levi is parallel in the literary structure to the disciples' meal in the grainfield—a meal Jesus likens to David's men eating priestly bread. The tribe of Levi was Israel's priestly tribe, but only through the better ministry of a Davidic priestly messiah did Levi the tax collector become a true Levite. In the context of controversy with Israel's religious leaders, Mark wants the reader to understand who truly enjoys fellowship with God. Peace with God belongs to those who break bread with Jesus. The tax collectors and sinners at his table are consecrated to God, the true Israel, God's covenant people, and a kingdom of priests (cf. Exod 19:6; 1 Pet 2:9).

1.2. Mark 2:18–22: The New Wine of the Kingdom

Situated between the parallel passages of the meal at Levi's house (Mark 2:13–17) and the meal in the grainfield (2:23–28) is a narrative about the new wine of God's eschatological kingdom. Once again, the controversy pertains to matters of eating and drinking. The disciples of Jesus feast, but the disciples of John and the Pharisees fast. Jesus's disciples should feast because the bridegroom is with them (2:19). They do not belong to the old religious structures of the scribes and Pharisees—represented by old garments and old wine skins—but to the new age characterized by the fulfillment of God's promises and the inauguration of God's dynamic reign through the life and ministry of Christ.

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[7] Contra Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017), 111.

[8] This Levi, however, did not serve God as a priest but instead served the state as a tax-collector. His occupation is a bit ironic given that Levitical priests were to receive their financial support from the tithes of their kin.

[9] Benjamin L. Gladd, *Handbook on the Gospels* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021), 124.

[10] Gladd, *Handbook on the Gospels*, 124.

[11] Gladd, *Handbook on the Gospels*, 124.

Mark's carefully crafted narrative is rich in theological significance. Jesus's discussion of the new wine of his kingdom (2:22) flows right into a description of the disciples eating grain (2:23). The wine and the grain anticipate the elements of another significant meal in Mark's Gospel: the wine and bread of the Lord's Supper. By referencing David's decision to give (δίδωμι) the priestly bread to his men, Mark not only justifies the actions of Jesus's disciples in the grainfield, but he also proleptically anticipates the establishment of the Lord's Supper, where Jesus gives (δίδωμι) the bread and the wine to his disciples during the celebration of the Passover (14:22–25). The first Passover set Israel apart as a royal priesthood;[12] the Lord's Supper marks out the followers of Jesus as God's eschatological kingdom of priests. The old must give way to the new.

As we will see below, David's men became "temporary priests" by eating the bread reserved for priests. In a similar yet greater way, the meal of grain in Mark 2:23–26 points to the priestly identity of Jesus and his disciples. The idea that an established priesthood must come to an end to make way for a new order of priesthood is exactly what 1 Samuel 21:1–8 reveals in describing David's actions at Nob. Eli's house would come to an end to make way for a new priest-king like David. Turning now to the Old Testament context of 1 Samuel 21, I will argue that David's priestly meal is part of a narrative portrait in 1 Samuel that presents David as a type of the faithful priest described in 1 Samuel 2:35. By appealing to David's actions in the time of Abiathar, Jesus demonstrated a proper understanding of 1 Samuel 21 and revealed the typological significance of his disciple's meal in the Galilean grainfield.

2. David as the Faithful Priest of 1 Samuel 2:35

By including the phrase ἐπὶ Ἀβιαθὰρ ἀρχιερέως, Mark invites the reader to interpret 1 Samuel 21 within the broader context of 1–2 Samuel and Solomon's ascension to David's throne (1 Kgs 1–2). First Kings 2:27 explicitly identifies Abiathar's deposition as the fulfillment of God's promise to cut off the strength of Eli's house (cf. 1 Sam 2:27–35). Yet, the connection between Abiathar and God's judgment on Eli's house is even more significant. God promised to cut off not only Eli's strength but also the strength of his father's house, a clear reference to Aaron (1 Sam 2:27–28, 31). The transfer of the priesthood from Abiathar to Zadok fulfills God's word of judgment on Eli's house, but Zadok was a descendent of Aaron, Eli's forefather (1 Kgs 2:35). Thus, Zadok is not the final fulfillment of God's oracle of judgment. The final fulfillment of God's promise to raise up a faithful priest would come through someone who was not from the tribe of Levi. Although 1–2 Samuel is primarily concerned with the rise of the monarchy in Israel, the promise of a faithful priest at the beginning of the narrative is not a "banal distraction" from the storyline of David's rise to kingship.[13] Instead, the promise of a faithful priest informs David's priest-like actions at various points in the narratives of 1–2 Samuel—wearing the ephod, making offerings, blessing the people, and building an altar—including his partaking of the bread reserved for priests in 1 Samuel 21 (1 Sam 21:1–6; 2 Sam 6:12–14, 17–19; 24:18–25). The books of Samuel present David as a priest-king. He typifies the kind of priestly messiah that will fulfill God's promise of 1 Samuel 2:35.

[12] L. Michael Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord?: A Biblical Theology of the Book of Leviticus*, NSBT 37 (Nottingham: Apollos, 2016), 81–82.

[13] Karl Deenick, "Priest and King or Priest-King in 1 Samuel 2:35," *WTJ* 73 (2011): 331.

3. David and His Men as an Alternative to Eli's House

Ahimelech's offer to David and his men to eat the holy bread may suggest that David came to the tabernacle on the Sabbath, the day the priests replaced the bread of the presence (Lev 24:8–9). Ahimelech offered David the bread upon the condition that David's men had kept themselves from women (1 Sam 21:4). The condition evokes a pivotal moment in Israel's history when Israel was consecrated to God as a royal priesthood at Mount Sinai (Exod 19:1–25). To meet with God at his mountain sanctuary required that the men of Israel remain clean by not going "near a woman" (Exod 19:5; cf. Lev 15:8). They were to be holy, as they were consecrated to the Lord. David reassured Ahimelech that his men met the requirement: "The vessels of the young men are holy even when it is an ordinary journey. How much more today will their vessels be holy?" (1 Sam 21:5, ESV). Leithart suggests that the use of "holy," instead of "clean," indicates that David's men had been consecrated as "temporary priests" for their participation in a holy war.[14] The holiness of these "temporary priests" is a powerful contrast to the immoral priests Hophni and Phineas. David's men refrained from women, gaining access to the bread reserved for priests, whereas Hophni and Phineas "lay with the women who were serving at the entrance of the tent of meeting," disqualifying themselves from the priesthood (1 Sam 2:22).

The contrast between David and his men and Eli's sons is even more profound. According to 1 Samuel 2:36, when Eli's descendants are completely deposed of the priesthood, those remaining in his house will come to the newly appointed faithful priest to ask for a piece of silver or a loaf of "bread," saying, "Please put me in one of the priest's places, that I may eat a morsel of bread." Eli's descendants will desire to do what David and his men do in 1 Samuel 21:1–6, namely, occupy the place of the priests to enjoy a morsel of bread. Eli's house will no longer enjoy the privileges of the priesthood, privileges that 1 Samuel 21:1–8 associates with David. Leithart also observes that the repetition of the word "hand" in 1 Samuel 21:1–8 (vv. 3, 4, 8) recalls God's instructions to Moses to ordain priests by filling their hands (Exod 29:19–25; Lev 8:25–28).[15] David was not ordained a priest, but in 1 Samuel 21 his hands are filled. A priest-king like David will take ownership of the priesthood when God cuts off the strength of Eli's house.

It is also important to note that David's interaction with Ahimelech at Nob is part of an exodus motif. David was on the run from Saul, just as Israel fled Pharaoh during the first exodus. God fed Israel with bread from heaven, just as the priest fed David and his men with bread from the tabernacle, a microcosm of heaven itself.[16] Israel came to Sinai, God's dwelling place, where they were to refrain from women and be consecrated as a royal priesthood. David and his men came to the tabernacle, God's dwelling place, where they partook of bread because they had refrained from women and were holy, consecrated to Yahweh. David's exodus, like the first exodus and Jesus's new exodus, forms the "foundation of a new nation" made up of priestly "disciples."[17]

4. Concluding Reflections

Returning to the grainfield controversy in Mark 2:23–28, we can appreciate Mark's masterful understanding of the Old Testament and how the reference to the events of 1 Samuel 21:1–6 "in the time

[14] Peter J. Leithart, *A Son to Me: An Exposition of 1 & 2 Samuel* (Moscow, ID: Canon, 2003), 116–17.

[15] Leithart, *A Son to Me*, 116.

[16] Leithart, *A Son to Me*, 117.

[17] Leithart, *A Son to Me*, 117.

of Abiathar" support Mark's Christological aims. Mark's description of the disciples plucking heads of grain on the Sabbath as they made their "way" alludes to Isaiah 40:3 and recalls Mark's use of the same verse at the beginning of the Gospel (Mark 1: 1–3). The new exodus Mark announced at the beginning of the narrative continues to play out in Jesus's ministry in the Galilean grainfield. The disciples are part of this new exodus. Jesus, like David, is their priest-king, and they, like David's men and Israel at Sinai, are a priestly people. David's men ate bread from the "house of God," but Jesus's disciples eat grain from a field, implying that all of creation is Christ's temple.

When the Pharisees accuse Jesus's disciples of breaking the Sabbath, Jesus justifies their actions with a correct reading of 1 Samuel 21. The genius of Jesus's appeal to David's priestly meal at Nob and situating it "in the time of Abiathar" is that the two together—1 Samuel 21 and Abiathar—require us to understand David's actions at Nob and, indeed, the logic of Jesus's argument in light of God's promise to judge Eli's house and raise up a faithful priest (1 Sam 2:27–35). As we have already observed, Abiathar's removal is presented as the fulfillment of God's word of judgment on Eli's house (1 Sam 2:31; 1 Kgs 2:27). By mentioning Abiathar, Jesus tethers David's actions at Nob to God's promise to raise up a faithful priest who will not be from the house of Eli or the house of Eli's father Aaron (1 Sam 2:27–28, 31). David is a partial fulfillment of the promised priest of 1 Samuel 2:35 but not the ultimate fulfillment. That honor belongs to Jesus. He is a priest-king who does not trace his lineage through Aaron but through Judah. He is a priest-king of a superior order than the Levitical priesthood. He is, as David says in Psalm 110:4, "a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek." And his priesthood is worth getting excited about.

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Reflections on the Risen and Exalted Christ

— Peter C. Orr —

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I first heard Don Carson speak in 1993 at Cornerstone Church, Nottingham. Don preached a sermon on John's Gospel that opened up Scripture for me in a new way as he showed the deep connections between the testaments. The next year I heard him at the UK's Word Alive conference where I attended a set of seminars that Don ran on biblical theology. This was the first time I had heard of biblical theology, and I was gripped by Don's presentations. I still have the notes from 30 years ago, and the familiar topics of Melchizedek, Psalm 110, and the use of the law are there. Don's insights are unsurprisingly helpful, e.g., on the topic of which commands of Scripture retain applicability, at one point he states: "There is a sense in which every statement in scripture is both absolute and relative." He goes on to explain that all of God's truth is culturally laden because *we* are culturally laden. However, it was the question time that I found most helpful. Don started each session with 20 minutes of questions that had remained from the previous day. His ability to answer even the most obscure question inspired me to deepen my own understanding of the Scriptures. In his writing and his speaking Don has remained a significant example and influence on my Christian life and work as a lecturer. I give thanks to God for him.

1. Exalted above the Heavens

This article is a summary of my NSBT volume,[1] which considers Jesus in his exalted state. Generally speaking, as Christians we have tended to focus our attention on what Jesus *did* (his life, death, and resurrection) and what he *will* do (return and reign). And while there has been something of a revival in the study of Jesus's ascension,[2] there is a tendency to consider Christ's exalted state simply in relation to the *events* of his ascension or his *parousia*. Studies which consider Jesus in his exalted *state* are relatively rare. However, the Christ that Christians trust in, relate to, and love is the Christ who not only lived, died, rose, and will come again but who is presently at God's right hand. Christian faith, as well as Christian theological reflection, must take into consideration this significant aspect of Christ's

[1] Peter C. Orr, *Exalted above the Heavens: The Risen and Ascended Christ*, NSBT 47 (London: Apollos, 2018).

[2] E.g., Douglas Farrow, *Ascension Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2011); Patrick Schreiner, *The Ascension of Christ: Recovering a Neglected Doctrine* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2020).

identity.[3] This book examines the exalted Christ through the lens of his identity (chs. 2–4), his location (chs. 5–8) and his activity (chs. 9–10).

2. The Identity of the Exalted Christ

The issue of the identity of the exalted Christ concerns the continuity between Jesus as he walked the earth and as he sits at God's right hand. I imagine that most readers of this journal do not need to be convinced that the NT affirms a basic continuity in identity between the earthly Jesus and the risen and exalted Christ.

However, it is important to note that the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus does not leave his identity entirely unchanged. At the narrative level this can be seen in the fact that there is need for revelation following his resurrection. Even his closest followers could not immediately and naturally recognize him. For Luke, only when their eyes are "opened" (24:31) and Jesus is "made known to them" (24:35) can the disciples grasp who he is. For John, Jesus does not only appear to the disciples but is "manifested" or "revealed" to them (21:14).[4] Their way of relating to him has changed following the resurrection. His identity has changed, not in the sense that he is a different individual but that he cannot be apprehended and perceived simply with the naked eye. I argue that Jesus's identity undergoes development in a number of ways. We see this when we consider his name, his resurrection, and his relationship to the Spirit.

There are a number of texts in which Jesus is said to receive a new name following his resurrection and ascension. In Philippians 2:9, following his exaltation Jesus receives "the name that is above every name." Here his identity as the divine Lord "expands," not in the sense of taking on something wholly new but by being more widely and clearly known. In Ephesians 1:21, his exalted name reflects the move he makes from death to being seated at God's right hand. Hebrews 1:4 speaks of Jesus inheriting a "more excellent name"—that of the Davidic Son. This is the name by which Jesus is identified and recognized following his resurrection from the dead. Finally, in Revelation 3:12 we saw that Jesus's new name points to his identification with both his exalted status with God and his identification with his people (3:12).

How do we understand verses in the NT where, following his resurrection, Jesus is described as being *made* "Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36) and "Son of God" (Acts 13:33; Romans 1:4)? In both cases, I attempt to show that Jesus did not become someone entirely new (i.e., as if prior to the resurrection he was not Lord, Christ, or Son). However, nor is the resurrection a *mere* demonstration of what was true of Christ already. The resurrection actually does change Jesus by bringing him into the *full* expression of his identity as son, Lord, and Christ. In Luke there is a parallel with Jesus's identity as Saviour which he had before the cross but which he fulfilled or realized by his death on the cross.[5] Similarly, for Paul in Romans 8, believers are "sons" of God already, but we will only enter into the fulness of our sonship

[3] At this point I need to acknowledge some specific feedback that I received from Don when I sent him the draft. He pointed out that my book was actually more of a *systematic* theology rather than a *biblical* theology. He was, of course, correct. He is, of course, a gracious man and allowed the book to be published. In the series preface, he noted the "rather unusual approach to biblical theology" that I took. I am grateful that he allowed this "unusual book" (as he also called it) to be published!

[4] All Scripture quotations are from the ESV unless otherwise noted.

[5] This is the argument of Kavin Rowe, "Acts 2.36 and the Continuity of Lukan Christology," *NTS* 53 (2007): 37–56.

following the redemption of our bodies (Rom 8:23). Likewise, for Jesus his resurrection brings about the *full* experience and expression of his identity as Lord, Christ, and Son of God.

Regarding the identity of the exalted Christ in relationship to the Spirit, in Romans 8:9–10 Paul switches between the Spirit dwelling in believers to Christ dwelling in them. This suggests to some that, at least at the level of experience, Christ and the Spirit cannot be distinguished.[6] In 1 Corinthians 15:45 Paul describes Christ as a "life-giving" Spirit, suggesting that the risen Christ has become "a" if not "the" Spirit.[7] Perhaps even more starkly, in 2 Corinthians 3:17 Paul states that "the Lord is the Spirit," suggesting, again at the very least at the level of experience, that Christ and the Spirit are indistinguishable. However, what we show is that Christ is not "embodied" in the believer *as* the Spirit but is present in a personal sense by the presence of the Spirit himself in the believer. The relationship between Christ and Spirit is such that if the Spirit is present to the believer, then Christ is. The depth of the relationship between Christ and the Spirit (inherent in the very phrase, "Spirit of Christ," with its parallels to "Spirit of God") means that the "density" of mediation that the Spirit provides is such that if the Spirit is "in" a person, in a real sense Christ is too. However this presence of Christ by the Spirit must be understood in the context of the *absence* of Christ. These two aspects of the Christian's experience are held together most clearly in Romans 8, a chapter which helps us to see both the personal dimension of the Spirit's mediation and the Spirit acting as a "substitute" for the absent Christ. The absence of Christ is too often overlooked when scholars examine the relationship between Christ and the Spirit. By ensuring that we do not neglect the heavenly location of Christ (Rom 8:34), the nature of his "embodiment" by the Spirit comes into clearer focus. It is neither a material embodiment nor an experiential identification without remainder. To have the Spirit is to have Christ because the Spirit is the Spirit of Christ, not because the Spirit *is* Christ, nor even because the Spirit is *experienced a*s Christ.

3. The Location of the Exalted Christ

Where is Jesus now? The obvious answer is that Jesus is in heaven, as affirmed by a number of NT texts: he is at God's right hand (e.g., Rom 8:34; Col 3:1; Heb 1:3; 1 Pet 3:22). Luke (24:50–53) and Acts (1:9–11) both describe Jesus's ascent into heaven. Paul, in fact, describes Christ as having "ascended far above all the heavens" (Eph 4:10). In his sermon in Acts 3, Peter tells the crowd that Jesus is the one "whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring" (3:21). So, the NT is crystal clear, Jesus is in heaven.

However, there are also a number of NT texts which affirm that Jesus, in some sense, remains with us. The fundamental and frequent Pauline description of the believer as being "in Christ" (Rom 12:5; 1 Cor 1:2; 2 Cor 1:21; etc.) does not admittedly have to indicate a sense of location, but the description of Christ as dwelling in the believer (e.g., Gal 2:20; Rom 8:10) locates Christ with the believer. Further, we have Jesus's solemn promise to his disciples at the end of Matthew's Gospel: "Behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (28:20). So, the NT is also crystal clear, Jesus dwells in and with believers.

We can think of this seeming tension in terms of his presence (e.g., Matt 28:20) and his absence (e.g., Acts 3:21). In the book, I argue that this absence is a function of his on-going humanity and possession of a discrete, localizable body. Because he remains localizable, he is *bodily absent.* As such, his presence

[6] E.g., James D. G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making: A New Testament Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Atonement*, 2nd ed. (London: SCM, 1989), 146–47.

[7] E.g., Hendrikus Berkhof, *The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1977), 25.

is always a *mediated* presence. Because of his relationship with the Holy Spirit, Christ *is* present to believers in a real way. But it is never an unqualified presence—that remains for the future. Very simply, we can conceive of his location as: *absent in body, present in the Spirit* (cf. 1 Cor 5:3; Col 2:5).

In terms of the presence of Christ, I examine one of the most important sections in the NT to deal with Christ's on-going presence: 2 Corinthians 2–4. Here we see that Christ's presence is both mediated and *epiphanic*, i.e., Christ is *made* present. In this epiphanic mode of his presence Christ does not act as the subject of his presence but is made present through the person of Paul and through the Spirit-carried preaching of his gospel. He is the object rather than subject of his presence. Believers encounter him in a mediated but powerful way. The power of this encounter is revealed in the effects of this presence as believers come to know Christ (2:14), are "known and read" by all (3:2), are transformed from glory to glory (3:18), experience God's re-creating light (4:6), and have the Spirit-formed life of Jesus work even in their mortal bodies (4:11).

Considering Christ's epiphanic presence and his absence together helps us conceptualize both more clearly. Though Christ is absent his influence is not removed from the world. His epiphanic presence has powerful epistemological, transformative, and eschatological (death or life) effects in the world. The believer can encounter and experience the risen Lord in the most profoundly transforming way. However, although this mode of Christ's presence is significant, it does not override his absence.

The different entities involved in the mediation of Christ's presence point to the complexity involved in this mode of his presence. Paul does not randomly switch between himself, the Spirit, and the gospel. Rather we see that the gospel and the apostle (and by analogy the Corinthian church) provide the external canvas upon which Christ is displayed. As the gospel is heard, Christ's glory and "face" are seen (3:18; 4:4–6). As the apostle is heard preaching and seen suffering, the aroma of Christ is smelt (2:14–17) and the "life of Jesus" encountered (4:7–12). This latter encounter, though, brings the role of the Spirit into focus. It is the Spirit who provides the "depth" to this mode of Christ's presence. Believers do not simply encounter Christ as a cinema-goer observes a screen or a reader engages a text. Rather, the Spirit, who shares Christ's divine status as "Lord," enables the epiphanic presence of Christ to penetrate to the very depth of the recipient's being (3:18; 4:10–11; cf. 4:2).

4. The Work of the Exalted Christ

In the final section of the book, I consider the ongoing activity of Christ on earth (ch. 9) and in heaven (ch. 10). His activity on earth is further divided into the progress of the gospel (e.g., Col 1:29), the perseverance of Christians (e.g., Rom 14:14), the discipline of Christians (e.g., 1 Cor 11:32), and his speech (e.g., 2 Cor 13:3). His activity in heaven has two aspects: his acting as God from heaven and his intercession (Rom 8:34; Heb 7:25). The latter in particular is an aspect of his ongoing ministry that is frequently overlooked by Christians but is an aspect of Christ's ministry that is very significant for our assurance and our final salvation. When we sin, we can remember that Jesus is sitting down, that his work is finished, that he is appearing in heaven on our behalf—that full atonement has been made. When we struggle to persevere and are tempted to give up, we can remember that someone is always praying for us, and not just anyone, but the risen and exalted Lord Jesus. Jesus is the one who is continually interceding that we will be saved to the uttermost (Heb 7:25).

5. Conclusion

This book concludes with some reflection on the pastoral significance of the exalted Christ. I seek to show how Christian hope, Christian life, Christian faith, and Christian theology are all inextricably bound up with the exalted Christ. To highlight one aspect of that conclusion, I reflect on how considering Jesus's eternal humanity helps undergird our conviction regarding the uniqueness of humanity, in the face of some (e.g., Peter Singer) who argue that humanity is not distinct or unique, a position that frequently undergirds, for example, arguments in favour of abortion or euthanasia, which question the inherent value of human life. Christians tend to turn to the doctrine of creation to understand the place of humanity, focussing on humans as the image of God. While this is right and helpful, it needs to be complemented with the fact of Jesus's eternal humanity. That the exalted Christ is a glorified human being shows us what humanity is meant to be and what redeemed humanity one day will be. Human beings are unique in God's eyes, and we know that because the Son of God became a human being and remains a human being forever.

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The Acts of the Risen Lord Jesus

— *Alan J. Thompson* —

Alan Thompson is the head of New Testament at Sydney Missionary & Bible College (of the Australian University of Theology) in Sydney, Australia, and the author of The Acts of the Risen Lord Jesus: Luke's Account of God's Unfolding Plan *in the NSBT series.*

Before getting to the summary of my NSBT book on Acts, I would like to express my gratitude to Don Carson. Like countless people across the world I am grateful to God for the ways in which he has used Dr Carson. Dr Carson was one of the main reasons my wife and I travelled from New Zealand to TEDS in Chicago. I was delighted, therefore, when a few years into my studies he called to ask me to be his graduate assistant. In addition to the usual quiz marking and research tasks of a graduate assistant, what stands out most from those two years is the time we spent together in (many!) drives to and from his home and O'Hare airport. Although there is more to say, his most enduring legacy in my own life and ministry has been his explanation and promotion of biblical theology. The pervasiveness of his influence upon me can easily be seen in the number of Carson entries in the bibliography of my recent little introductory guide to biblical theology. So, thank you, Don, and praise the Lord for the gifts, life, ministry, and Christ-centered faithfulness he displayed through you, by his grace.

Turning now to *The Acts of the Risen Lord Jesus*, the brief introduction orients readers to the book's approach to the book of Acts. While Acts is often mined for answers to contemporary debates, this book seeks to offer a framework for approaching Acts, so that readers can integrate and interpret the themes *Luke* emphasizes within Luke's overarching focus. The opening verses of Luke's Gospel highlight Luke's emphasis on the accomplishment of God's purposes in order to provide assurance for believers. When Acts is read in this light, it seems that this assurance is needed because of the suffering and persecution that believers face. Given that the events Luke will describe were "fulfilled" and that the genre of Acts reflects "biblical history" with Luke's imitation of LXX style and inclusion of Old Testament allusions, it is evident that Luke wants readers to grasp that he is writing a continuation of the story of Israel in his "biblical narrative." Readers of Luke's work should look first and foremost to what God is doing and how God is accomplishing his purposes even now through the reign of the risen Lord Jesus. Thus Acts ought to be read in this "biblical-theological" framework that places Acts in the setting of salvation history—that is, the move from the Old Testament to the continuing reign of Christ in his inaugurated kingdom.

1. Living "Between the Times": The Kingdom of God

The book of Acts is about "the continued outworking of God's saving purposes specifically in the inaugurated kingdom of God through the reign of the Lord Jesus."[1] In Luke's Gospel, Jesus declared that the kingdom had arrived in his ministry. This kingdom must be received and entered through childlike

[1] Alan J. Thompson, *The Acts of the Risen Lord Jesus: Luke's Account of God's Unfolding Plan,* NSBT 27 (Nottingham: Apollos, 2011), 29.

trust in him (e.g., Luke 10:9; 11:20; 17:21; 18:17). Yet, at the end of Luke's Gospel, after his wrath-bearing death and death-defeating resurrection, Jesus ascended to heaven. What does the kingdom look like now? How do people enter the kingdom now? Luke alerts readers to his aim to answer questions such as these with two significant references to the kingdom at the beginning and another two at the end of his book—thus, framing the book (Acts 1:3, 6–8; 28:23, 31).

These references are not incidental and show that Luke's account of how the gospel spread from Jerusalem to the nations must be understood within the "framework" of the kingdom. The opening verse of Acts provides a hint about what this inaugurated saving rule of God looks like now that Jesus has ascended. Luke will now focus on what Jesus continues to do and teach. This hint is confirmed before we leave chapter 1, as Jesus answers the believers' prayer to show who he had chosen to replace Judas. In Acts 2, Jesus is responsible for the events of Pentecost—he pours out the Spirit from his ascended position and rule at the Father's right hand (2:33) and he adds believers every day to the number of those being saved (2:47; cf. 5:32). Although Luke does not make Jesus's continued involvement explicit in every event, he regularly reminds readers that Jesus is the one who enables the word to spread—Jesus is the one who saves and works through his people so that the gospel goes to the people of Israel and to the Gentiles (cf., e.g., 9:4–6, 15–16; 11:21; 16:14; 18:9–11; 23:11; 26:23).

These framing references to the kingdom help readers understand the suffering and persecution of believers in Acts. This is most clearly seen in the one sentence summary of Paul and Barnabas's message of encouragement to suffering believers: "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God" (14:22). This verse places the issue of suffering within the framework of the kingdom. In this inaugurated phase of God's saving rule, the word spreads, and churches are established in the midst of the opposition and suffering that is part of living in this fallen world. The kingdom in fullness is yet to come and yet to be entered.

2. The Hope of Israel: The Resurrection and the Arrival of the Last Days

The framework of the continuing reign of the Lord Jesus in this inaugurated saving rule (kingdom) of God is also the reason why the resurrection of Jesus features so prominently in the book of Acts. Once again, the expectations of the Old Testament in passages such as Ezekiel 37, Isaiah 27, and Daniel 12 point to an eschatological hope of blessing for Israel. This is why Luke 24 focuses so much on Jesus's resurrection. On the one hand, the Scriptures pointed to this, and the disciples should have seen that. On the other hand, Jesus and his resurrection were required for that resurrection hope to be understood.

This is why the resurrection is the climax and focus of the sermons in Acts (e.g., 2:24–32; 13:30–37). Even Paul's sermon in Acts 17 is framed by references to the resurrection of Jesus (17:18–19, 31–32). The resurrection, at the culmination of these evangelistic speeches, is emphasized as a real historic event (see the refrain "we are witnesses," "he was seen," e.g., 2:32; 10:39, 41; 13:31; cf. 1:22) and the outworking of God's saving purposes (see the refrain "God raised him from the dead," e.g., 2:24; 10:40; 13:30). Indeed, since Jesus's resurrection from the dead is an event tied to and in anticipation of the final resurrection of the dead (cf. 4:2; 23:6; 24:15, 21; and esp. 26:23, "the first to rise from the dead"), Jesus's resurrection is the embodiment of "the hope of Israel." This emphasis on Jesus's resurrection and "the hope of Israel" is the key feature of Paul's defenses in Acts 22–28 (e.g., 24:14–15; 28:20). This resurrection "hope" for the blessing of the last days means that the risen Lord Jesus offers the blessings of the last days to those who trust in him—that is, the blessings of the Holy Spirit, salvation, repentance, and forgiveness of sins

on the basis of his death (cf. 5:30–32). The rest of the chapter locates this emphasis on the resurrection alongside Luke's teaching on the atoning significance of the death of Jesus in Luke and Acts, and the way the gospel is preached in Acts. In summary, the resurrection of Jesus is emphasized in Acts because it is the evidence of the inauguration of the age to come, it is inextricably tied to our final resurrection, it is the embodiment of the "hope of Israel," and so the blessings of the age to come are offered to all who come to Jesus in repentance and faith on the basis of his death and resurrection.

3. Israel and the Gentiles: The Kingdom and God's Promises of Restoration

If Acts describes the current expression of the administration of God's saving rule through Jesus's continued reign from the right hand of the Father, what has become of God's promised blessings to the people of Israel—the people who received those promises in Isaiah and the prophets? This is exactly the issue behind the apostles' question in 1:6 that sets up the program for the rest of the book of Acts.

Although Jesus's answer (1:7–8) to the apostles' question is often seen as a rebuke to a wrong-headed question and therefore a redirection away from an interest in Israel to a different topic, the context (e.g., the link between "kingdom" and "Spirit," 1:4) as well as the following words of Jesus indicate that he answers rather than rebukes their question. Jesus's answer (a) includes Israel (i.e., Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria) and (b) alludes to the very Scriptures that promise blessing through the Servant to Israel and the Gentiles (Isa 32:15; 43:12; 44:3–5; 49:5–6; cf. Acts 3:26; 13:47). Thus, although they should not concern themselves with matters of timing (note, e.g., how the gospel spread to Samaria, Acts 8:1–4), the apostles can rest assured that, yes, in answer to their question, God's saving rule is right on track as promised in the Scriptures. This understanding of Jesus's promise to Israel in 1:8 is confirmed in Acts 2—the Spirit comes as promised, and "all Israel" is addressed (2:5, 14, 22, 36; note that Paul never ceases reaching out to the people of Israel, cf. 13:46; 14:1; 18:8, 19; 19:8–10; 28:30). The "last days" are here, and Jesus the Messiah has risen from the dead, ascended to the right hand of the Father where he reigns and has poured out the Spirit as evidence of his rule.

The spread of the gospel to Samaria in Acts 8 must also be understood within this framework of the outworking of God's promises. In light of the history of Samaria as the rebellious northern kingdom (1 Kgs 12; 2 Kgs 17; esp. 17:33), it is no surprise that, in the New Testament, Samaritans were viewed as outsiders to the people of Israel (Luke 18:18; cf. Matt 10:5–6; John 4:7–10; 8:48). Nevertheless, the hope of Ezekiel 37 was that Israel would be united again under the coming Davidic king. Acts has pointed to this hope in Jesus's promise for all Israel (Acts 1:8), in Jesus's exaltation to the throne of David (2:33–34), and in Peter's message to "all the house of Israel" (2:36 ESV; cf. Ezek 37:16). This hope comes to fruition in Acts 8 when Samaria as a whole "accepted the word of God" (8:14 NIV; i.e., "the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ," cf. 8:9–11). The remainder of Acts 8 continues this inclusion of outsiders from Israel's temple—specifically, a eunuch. Why does Luke repeatedly call this Ethiopian "the eunuch" (8:27, 34, 36, 38, 39)? Since Peter begins from where the eunuch was reading (Isaiah 53), he likely took him just a little further along the scroll to Isaiah 56 (esp. 56:3, 5), to the promise of restoration through the Servant for outsiders like foreigners and eunuchs (cf. Deut 23:1–7).

The quotation from Amos in Acts 15:13–18 also reflects the sequence articulated by Jesus (1:8) and alluded to by Peter (3:26), that God promised to restore the Davidic kingdom first, before bringing blessing to the nations. The restoration of David's tent is probably a combination of both Davidic rule and the restoration of the eschatological people of God under that rule. Thus, the inclusion of Gentiles

is again seen to be the outworking of the prophetic hope and evidence of the saving rule of God being worked out at this stage in salvation history in the reign of the risen Lord Jesus (cf. also Isa 49 in Acts 13:47).

4. The Promise of the Father: The Gift of the Holy Spirit

The framework that Luke provides of the inaugurated saving rule of God, through the risen and reigning Lord Jesus, also helps to understand the role of the Spirit in Acts. The scriptural promise of the Spirit must be kept in mind (e.g., Isa 32:15; 44:3; Ezek 37; Joel 2). This is why the Spirit is referred to as "the promise" (cf. Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4; 2:33, 39). As we noted above, the link between the nature of the inaugurated kingdom and the Spirit was made in the opening verses of Acts (1:1–3, 4–5, esp. 6–8; cf. the allusion to Isa 32:15). This is made more explicit, of course, in Peter's explanation of the events of Pentecost as that which is promised in Joel. The Spirit, therefore, comes in fulfilment of God's promise for "the last days" (Acts 2:17) and is part of Luke's evidence for the presence and nature of the inaugurated kingdom.

In this inaugurated kingdom, therefore, the promised Holy Spirit is bestowed by the risen and reigning Lord Jesus. The Lord Jesus accomplishes the restoration of Israel (1:6), and he accomplishes this restoration through the Spirit (Luke 24:49). Jesus is the one who sent the Spirit (Acts 2:33), and this is evidence of his reign as Lord and Davidic king. The result of this is that his people are empowered to bear witness (1:8), to "prophesy" (2:17–18). Now that Jesus has lived, died, risen, and reigns, every believer in him is even greater than John the Baptist, the greatest of the prophets (Luke 7:26–28; cf. Num 11:29). All believers in Jesus have the "promised" Spirit and can point to the crucified and risen Lord Jesus as the fulfilment of God's saving promises.

Luke also emphasizes that there is one people of God under the one Lord Jesus. In Luke's account of Cornelius's conversion, numerous direct links to Acts 2 highlight the unity of Jew and Gentile. They have the same gift, the same Holy Spirit, having heard Peter's message that everyone who believes in Jesus receives forgiveness of sins (Acts 10:43–47; 11:15–17; 15:8–9). When read in light of Acts 2, the similar wording of 8:14 to 11:1 ("Samaria/Gentiles received the word of God") points to an emphasis on "corporate" reception of the Spirit (Jews-Samaritans-Gentiles), the outworking of salvation history, and the unity of all those who repent and trust in Christ (the "disciples" in Acts 19 were disciples of John the Baptist who needed to be told about Jesus). Thus, the inaugurated kingdom framework that Luke provides also helps to understand his emphasis on the Spirit.

5. The End of an Era: The Temple System and Its Leaders

The place of the temple and temple leadership should also be understood within this framework of the reign of the risen Lord Jesus. Acts 3 is deliberately linked to Acts 2 which has just emphasized that the last days are here, that Jesus is the promised Davidic king, indeed David's Lord, who has ascended to reign forever on the throne at the right hand of the Father (2:31–32). Acts 3 continues from the summary at the end of Acts 2 by zeroing in on one of the signs of the apostles in the temple in these "last days" (2:17; 3:24). By repeatedly referring to the temple in the opening verses of Acts 3, Luke signals that he is about to draw attention to the place of the temple. This is then the focus of attention in the literary frame of Acts 3–5 that culminates in 6–7 (a similar focus on the temple and leadership

of Israel concludes the book in Acts 21–28). The healing of the lame man in the name of Jesus in Acts 3 overcomes the inadequacy of the temple system that excluded him. Peter's sermon then points instead to the all sufficiency of Jesus, the one who is the promised Servant, the prophet like Moses, the Davidic king, and the seed of Abraham through whom blessing comes to Israel and the nations.

This initially subtle contrast between the temple and Jesus comes to a climax in Acts 3–7 with Stephen's speech and dying prayers. Stephen's speech does not criticize the temple per se. Instead, Stephen highlights the history of Israel as one of rebellion against God's messengers and idolatry—culminating in their rejection of Jesus and idolizing of the temple. In his final words Stephen's prayers for the reception of his spirit into God's presence and the forgiveness of sin for those opposed to him reflect the prayers and character of the Lord Jesus. More than that, they point to Jesus as the ultimate fulfilment of the temple. Stephen's prayers point to two key functions of the temple—access to God's presence and the means of forgiveness through the sacrificial system. Thus, Stephen is not against Moses or the temple. He proclaims the one that Moses pointed to, and he proclaims the ultimate fulfilment of the temple system.

6. The End of an Era: The Law Is No Longer the Direct Authority for God's People

Since the last days are here and Jesus is the one who now reigns as Lord (he poured out the Spirit, guides his people, enables the spread of the good news about him), what authority does the law now have for God's people—the people who have received forgiveness and the promised Holy Spirit from him? Jesus himself said that "the Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John. Since that time, the good news of the kingdom of God is being preached" (Luke 16:16). As with the place of the temple, this issue also frames the book of Acts, as both Stephen and Paul were charged with being against the law of Moses (Acts 6:11, 13–14; 21:21, 28; cf. 18:13). In both cases, Luke points out that it is not believers such as Stephen and Paul who are against the law, it is the Jewish leadership who oppose them. In proclaiming Jesus, Stephen and Paul proclaim the one Moses wrote about and pointed to (e.g., 23:6; 24:15, 21; 26:6–8, 23; 28:20).

Nevertheless, Jesus himself points to where the direct authority for his people may now be found. Acts 1 emphasizes the specific appointment of the apostles by Jesus, including the replacement for Judas, as the authorized representatives of Jesus who bear witness to his resurrection and teaching. This is the backdrop for the surprising statement in 2:42 (cf. 2:37) that the early church devoted themselves to "the apostles' teaching" (Moses is the focus for the Jewish opposition elsewhere in Acts, cf. 6:14; 15:21; 21:21, 28). The leadership and teaching of the apostles in contrast to the temple leadership continues through Acts 3–6. This does not mean that the law is rejected. The apostolic distribution of help to believers in need alludes to Deuteronomy 15:4 (cf. Acts 4:43), and the wise apostolic leadership in ensuring care for the widows alludes to the scriptural concern for widows (Deut 24:19; 26:12–15; cf. Luke 20:47).

Although debated, the apostolic "decree" of Acts 15:20 also points to the apostolic leadership of God's people. Circumcision is rejected as necessary for salvation since both Jew and Gentile are saved by faith in Jesus (15:11). James concludes that only four restrictions should be made to Gentiles who are "turning to God" (15:19). The explanatory letter from the apostles and elders explained that it "seemed good to the Holy Spirit" and to them "not to burden" these believers with "anything beyond" these four requirements (15:29). This combination of just four items may be best understood as that which is associated with Gentile pagan idolatry. Thus, on the one hand, all that is needed is "faith" in the Lord

Jesus, and circumcision is not required—Gentiles do not need to become Jewish proselytes. On the other hand, Gentiles cannot remain pagan idolaters either. They must also "repent" when they "turn to God" (15:19; cf. 26:17–20; 1 Thess 1:9). Of course, this too is in keeping with the law. Yet, this is not meant as an isolated selection of four laws of Moses to keep. Rather, this reflects the idolatrous past of the Gentiles. Thus, the role of the law in Acts is also best understood in the context of this new salvation-historical situation brought about by the inaugurated kingdom of God, as Jesus himself said (Luke 16:16). The Lord Jesus and his apostles are now the direct authority for God's people, and they point to how the law and the prophets may now also continue to be understood in light of Jesus, the one they pointed to.

7. Concluding Summary

In summary, Acts shows that the kingdom of God, inaugurated during Jesus's earthly ministry in his death and resurrection, continues to be administered through Jesus as he reigns from the right hand of the Father. His ascension does not mean the departure of the kingdom. In this "interim" period before he returns, while there continues to be suffering and persecution, he continues to administer God's saving rule in fulfilment of the Father's promises and purposes. He enables the spread of the word through his people. His death-defeating resurrection is the supreme evidence of this inaugurated kingdom, bringing into this age the blessings of the age to come for God's people—forgiveness of sins and the promised Holy Spirit. In keeping with the promises in the prophets, Israel is restored, Judea and Samaria are united under the reign of the Davidic king, and Gentiles are included—all by faith in Jesus. Likewise, the Spirit is evidence of the arrival of the last days and the reign of the Lord Jesus from the throne of David. All who turn to the Lord Jesus in repentance and faith receive the Spirit and are empowered to bear witness and proclaim the good news about him. There is one people of God—Jew and Gentile—for there is one Holy Spirit for all who come to the one Lord Jesus. This means, therefore, that there are implications for the old era. The temple is fulfilled and transcended by the all sufficiency of this crucified, risen, and reigning Savior through whom we have access to God's presence and forgiveness of sins. The temple leadership must bow to the Lord Jesus, and now he and his authorized apostles are the direct authority for God's people. Everything, including the law and the prophets, must now be understood in relation to the Lord Jesus and his teaching as expressed in the teaching of his apostles.

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Ethiopians, Deliverance of the Gentiles, and Judgment on Jerusalem: Allusions in Acts 8 to Jeremiah's Ebedmelech Narrative

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What an honor it is to be invited to participate in this special issue honoring D. A. Carson! Throughout my career Don Carson has been a model for what a Christian scholar should be, and I am appreciative beyond words for his contribution to the study and exposition of God's word. Anecdotally, during the same week when I drafted this article, I was using his Pillar commentary on John as I prepared to teach an adult Sunday School class.

It was twenty-five years ago that I joyfully read the email from D. A. Carson that my proposal for *From Every People and Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race* (FEPN) had been accepted for the prestigious NSBT series. I was much younger back then, not yet established as a writer, and my book proposal on race had already been turned down by several publishers, so you can imagine my excitement when Carson accepted it. Over the years, this book has made a positive impact on the church, especially in race relations, and I am eternally grateful to Don Carson for accepting it.

1. Introduction—The Two Ethiopian Officials

In FEPN one important aspect of my study was to explore the theological significance of the many Black Africans that appear in the Bible. Two of the most significant characters I studied were the Ethiopian[1] official/eunuch[2] named Ebedmelech (Jer 38–39) and the Ethiopian official/eunuch converted by Philip (Acts 8). The fact that there are two Ethiopian officials playing important roles

[1] In the Hebrew OT this region is called Cush. It was on the Nile River to the south of Egypt in what is now Sudan. The Greeks, however, referred to everything south of Egypt as "Ethiopia," so in the Greek Septuagint (LXX) text of Jeremiah and likewise in Acts these two characters, who are from the same exact area, are both called Ethiopians.

[2] Both in Hebrew (Jer 38:7) and in Greek (Acts 8:27) the term used of these men can connote a eunuch or, more likely in these contexts, an official.

in the salvation story, one in the OT and one in the NT, is rather amazing, and can hardly have been coincidental.

While in FEPN I was only able to mention this connection briefly, over the last fifteen years or so I have been able to explore the intertextual relationship between these two stories in more detail. From a broad perspective, I explored the intertextual use of LXX Jeremiah in Luke-Acts in general.[3] Then, more specifically, I studied the intertextual-allusion[4] relationship between these two Ethiopian official/eunuch stories.[5]

In these studies, I was seeking to answer several fundamental and related questions: (1) Of all the conversion stories that Luke could have used, why did he choose the Ethiopian eunuch story? (2) Are there clear allusions in Acts 8 back to the Jeremiah narrative about Ebedmelech the Ethiopian (Jer 38–39). And, if so, (3) What do they add to our theological understanding of Acts? In this short article paying tribute to D. A. Carson, I would like to synthesize and summarize five main observations from my study, followed by an overall conclusion, thus updating my initial observations in FEPN.

2. Luke-Acts, Jeremiah, and Ethiopian Officials

2.1. When exploring intertextuality the distinctives of Jeremiah are important to note.

It is important not to lump Jeremiah in with all the other literary prophets of the Hebrew Bible into one amorphous mass ("*The Prophets*") but to recognize his particular characteristics, even within the prophetic corpus. There are several distinctives of Jeremiah that are relevant to our study. First of all, and perhaps most noticeable, is the large amount of narrative biographical material in the book of Jeremiah, in contrast to the other literary prophets. Second, the city of Jerusalem plays an essential role in the book of Jeremiah, especially the prediction and the fulfillment of the destruction of Jerusalem. Third, Jeremiah is characterized as the proto-typical persecuted prophet. He is frequently in conflict with the ruling authorities in Jerusalem during his tumultuous ministry, being threatened, convicted, beaten, and imprisoned.

Also unique within the prophetic corpus is Jeremiah's story of Ebedmelech the Ethiopian. While the other prophets, like Isaiah, prophesy of the future inclusion of the Gentiles, Jeremiah actually tells the story of one (38:7–39:18; LXX 45:7–46:18).[6] At the climactic moment in the book of Jeremiah, as the Babylonians are closing in, and as all of Jerusalem's leaders reject God's message and turn

[3] J. Daniel Hays, "The Persecuted Prophet and Judgment on Jerusalem: The Use of LXX Jeremiah in the Gospel of Luke," *BBR* 25 (2015): 453–73.

[4] I am using the term "allusion" to refer loosely to the same phenomenon that Richard Hays labels as "allusive echo," *metalepsis*, or "intertextual echo." As Hays explains, "Allusive echo functions to suggest to the reader that text B should be understood in light of a broad interplay with text A, encompassing aspects of A beyond those explicitly echoed." Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 20.

[5] J. Daniel Hays, "Central Paradigms for the Gentile Inclusion: An Intertextual Comparison of Jeremiah's Ebedmelech and Luke's Ethiopian Eunuch," *Sapientia Logos* 3.1 (2010): 1–24; and more recently, "Judgment, Deliverance, and Ethiopians: Allusions to Jeremiah's Ebedmelech Narrative in Acts 8" (paper presented at the SBL international meeting, Uppsala, Sweden, June 2025). Much of the material presented in this *Themelios* article is drawn from these works.

[6] In the latter half of Jeremiah the order and numbering of the chapters in the Greek Septuagint (LXX) differ from that of our English Bibles, which follow the Hebrew Masoretic Text.

against Jeremiah his prophet, Ebedmelech the Ethiopian boldly defends and rescues Jeremiah. Then as judgment comes and all of these Judean leaders are executed or exiled, Ebedmelech the Ethiopian, in stark contrast, is delivered. Indeed, several scholars have noted that Ebedmelech the Ethiopian serves as a "symbol" or "representative" of the remnant of faith, or especially of Gentiles who are saved by faith.[7] He is a real-life character in the narrative who also provides a symbolic picture of the prophetic Gentile inclusion.

2.2. Jeremiah was popular and quite well-known in the latter half of the first century AD.

One of the questions that frequently arises when claiming to see allusions and intertextuality is whether or not the original audience would have recognized it. In this regard, it is helpful to note that Jeremiah was extremely popular and well-known in the late first century,[8] much more so than today. This is evident from the extraordinarily large number of popular written works circulating that were associated with Jeremiah and/or his scribe Baruch (beyond the book of Jeremiah). This includes Lamentations; 1, 2, and 3 Baruch; The Epistle of Jeremiah; Paralipomena Jeremiah (4 Baruch); and *The Lives of the Prophets*. Likewise, several fragments discovered at Qumran reference Jeremiah and/or events in the book of Jeremiah (*4QApocryphon of Jeremiah C*, *4QPseudo-Ezkiel* [4Q483–90]; 4Q384; 4Q385; 4Q389).

In addition, the first-century Jewish historian Josephus held Jeremiah in extraordinarily high regard, mentioning him specifically over 44 times. Josephus especially highlights Jeremiah's prediction of Jerusalem's destruction and the prophet's extensive persecution (trials, imprisonment, beating, etc.). Josephus also specifically recounts the story of Jeremiah's rescue by "The Ethiopian" (*Ant.* 10.122).

2.3. Luke-Acts references and alludes to the OT (especially the Greek LXX) extensively.

Without question the books of Luke and Acts use the LXX Old Testament frequently. Sanders states, "Luke is the most explicit of the evangelists in insisting that to understand what God was doing in Christ one had to know Scripture."[9] Yet often Luke makes connections to the OT by indirect allusion rather than direct citation. Bock writes: "The Old Testament is not cited with explanation points like Matthew, but woven into the fabric of the account. This implicit literary style of Old Testament citation may be responsible for much of the 'subtlety' since Luke indulges by choice in little explicit editorial comment."[10] Thus Luke expects his readers to see his allusions back to the OT without explicitly identifying those allusive connections.

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[7] Walter Brueggemann, *To Build, To Plant: Jeremiah 26–52*, ITC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991); Christopher R. Seitz, "The Prophet Moses and the Canonical Shape of Jeremiah," *ZAW* 101 (1983): 17–18; Tom Parker, "Ebed-Melech as Exemplar," in *Uprooting and Planting: Essays on Jeremiah for Leslie Allen*, ed. John Goldingay, LHBOTS 459 (New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 253–59.

[8] Joachim Jeremias remarks that Jeremiah was "one of the favorite prophets of the people" ("Ιερεμιας," *TDNT* 3:219).

[9] James A. Sanders, "Isaiah in Luke," in *Luke and Scripture: The Function of Sacred Tradition in Luke-Acts*, ed. C. A. Evans and James A. Sanders, reprint ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2001), 18.

[10] Darrell L. Bock, *Proclamation from Prophecy and Pattern: Lucan Old Testament Christology*, JSNTSup 12 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987), 269.

2.4. Jeremiah echoes throughout Acts 2–8 in particular.

Within the Book of Acts, it is in chapters 2–8 that the influence of Jeremiah is the most pronounced, for this is the portion of the narrative that deals most directly with the opposition to and persecution of God's spokespersons (his prophets) in Jerusalem. Indeed, there is quite a high concentration of the word "prophet" in Acts 2–8 (2:16, 30; 3:18, 21, 22, 24; 7:37, 42, 48, 52; 8:28, 30, 34). Just as Jesus was characterized as a prophet and persecuted as a prophet in Luke, now his new spokespersons, especially Peter and Stephen (and Paul, later in the story), are characterized as prophets and persecuted as prophets in Acts.[11]

As noted above, the book of Jeremiah—and no other prophetic book—is likewise characterized by frequent persecutions of the prophet, including schemes and efforts to silence him, along with accusations, confrontations, trials, and attempts to have him executed. Acts 2–8 is interlaced with these exact same themes.

Not only thematically but also structurally there are several strong conceptual parallels between Acts 2–8 and Jeremiah 37–39 (LXX Jeremiah 44–46). Within Acts 2–8 there are two major confrontations between God's new spokesmen (implied to be prophets) and the authorities: Peter's proclamation (Acts 2) followed by his trial (Acts 3); and Stephen's proclamation (Acts 6) followed by his trial and execution (Acts 7). This is highly reminiscent of events in Jeremiah's life, especially his two confrontations and arrests presented in Jeremiah 37–39.

In both accounts (Jeremiah 37–39 and Acts 2–8) God's spokesmen (prophets) point out Israel's sin of disobedience, especially accusing the ruling authorities in Jerusalem. In both accounts numerous officials and officers that represent these ruling authorities in Jerusalem are mentioned. Also, in both accounts one of the central motifs is that these authorities are trying to *silence* God's prophets and their message. This opposition escalates into a pattern of repeated and intensifying persecution against God's prophets. This results in the prophet being cast into prison, both in Acts 2–8 and in Jeremiah 37–39.

While many of the allusions are general and thematic, there are also quite a few specific intertextual connections between Acts 2:1–8:3 and Jeremiah. For example, in Acts 2:14 Peter addresses the crowd as "Men of Judea and dwellers of Jerusalem." In Greek this phrase occurs nowhere else in the LXX except in Jeremiah, where it occurs exactly like this 8 times (Jer 4:3, 4; 11:2; 18:11; 19:3; and 39:32).

Likewise, in Acts 7:51–52, as Stephen draws his speech to a climactic conclusion and as his own death draws near, he makes several probable allusions to Jeremiah by the terminology he chooses. For example, Stephen indicts his accusers by proclaiming, "You stiff-necked people! Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised." While the term, "stiff-necked," is used several times in Exodus to refer to Israel's defiant disobedience (33:3, 5; 34:9), in Jeremiah 7:25–26, the "stiff-necked" terminology occurs in this exact same context as Stephen's: the repeated rejection of the prophet. Note also that in Jeremiah 7:25–26 the prophet Jeremiah is doing exactly the same thing that Stephen is doing in Acts 7:51–52—he is summarizing and characterizing the history of Israel as a constant defiance and rejection of the prophets.

[11] Luke Timothy Johnson, *Prophetic Jesus, Prophetic Church: The Challenge of Luke–Acts to Contemporary Christians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 32; David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 13.

Relatedly, the references to being "uncircumcised of heart and ears" would also appear to be an allusion to the book of Jeremiah. Only in Jeremiah are there references to *both* the uncircumcised of heart (Jer 9:28) and uncircumcised of ears (Jer 6:10).[12]

Stephen's accusation in Acts 7:52, "Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute?" echoes Jesus's statements in Luke 11:47–50 and 13:33–35. Many scholars assume that Stephen is referring to the execution of Isaiah described in *Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah* 5.1–16. Yet, as in Luke 11:47–50, here the evidence for seeing Jeremiah in this context is stronger. As noted above, in the book of Jeremiah his persecution is a dominant theme, and in numerous extra-canonical texts of Second Temple Judaism Jeremiah is presented as the paradigm of the persecuted prophet, not Isaiah or any other prophet.

Furthermore, in *The Lives of the Prophets*, while the execution of several prophets is recounted—Isaiah, Ezekiel, Micah, Amos—it is Jeremiah who is "stoned by his people" (*Liv. Pro.* 2.1), a tradition likewise echoed in 4 Baruch 9:21–32. That is, of all the prophets, the tradition of being stoned to death is associated only with Jeremiah. Thus in the story of Acts 7, it is highly ironic that Stephen himself is stoned by the people and the leaders of Jerusalem just a few verses after this allusion to Jeremiah (Acts 7:58).

2.5. The story of the Ethiopian's conversion in Acts 8:26–40 makes several intertextual allusions to the Ethiopian in Jeremiah 38–39.

In the context of confrontations with leaders, tense trials, indictments of judgment, and imprisonments of God's new prophets, the appearance of an Ethiopian official/eunuch would seem to be a rather strong allusion or intentional parallel to the Ethiopian official/eunuch in Jeremiah 38:7–39:18. Ebedmelech the Ethiopian plays a critical role in Jeremiah (he saves the prophet and then is saved himself from the destruction of Jerusalem). Furthermore, his appearance as a central character alongside Jeremiah and Baruch in the book of 4 Baruch indicates that there continued to be a very strong tradition associating him with Jeremiah and the parallel destructions of Jerusalem in 587 BC and AD 70.

Both of these men are referred to as Ethiopians (and officials or eunuchs), and they are from the same place—a kingdom on the Nile River, just south of Egypt. In addition, both men are also connected to the royal court. The Ethiopian eunuch is "an important official" in the court of Candace, Queen of the Ethiopians (Acts 8:27). Ebedmelech is similarly an official in the "house of the king" (Jer 38:7).[13]

Likewise, both of these stories are related to Jerusalem. In Jeremiah 38, Jeremiah the prophet warns the people to flee Jerusalem, and in Jeremiah 39, Jerusalem comes under siege and is destroyed. In Acts, judgment on Jerusalem hangs in the air as Peter and Stephen echo the impending judgment voiced by Jesus in Luke 21, who also, following Jeremiah, had warned the people to flee Jerusalem (Luke 21:21). In Acts 2–8 the persecution and hostility by the leaders in Jerusalem against God's prophets escalates, culminating in the death of Stephen.

In Jeremiah 38–39 everyone in Jerusalem has turned against Jeremiah. All of the leadership in Israel have conspired against him and openly turned hostile against him, persecuting him and trying to kill him. They have all rejected the word of God and his messenger, and they have tried repeatedly

[12] Bill T. Arnold, "Luke's Characterizing Use of the Old Testament in the Book of Acts," in *History, Literature, and Society in the Book of Acts*, ed. Ben Witherington III (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 318.

[13] The social/historical implications of Ebedmelech's name along with the contextual meaning of the Hebrew term *sārîs* combine to provide strong evidence that Ebedmelech was an official, probably a soldier or officer of some type.

to silence him. At this very time, when all of Jerusalem has rejected the prophet and his message from God, Ebedmelech the Ethiopian suddenly appears, responds positively, and believes, thus finding salvation and deliverance (Jer 39:17–18) even as Jerusalem falls and the leaders who opposed Jeremiah are executed (Jer 39:1–7).

The situation in Acts 2–8 is very similar. The Jewish leaders in Jerusalem have rejected the message from God as well as his messengers (who are compared to the prophets). These leaders try to silence the messengers, and as in Jeremiah 38–39, in Acts 2–7 God's messengers are imprisoned. This fails to silence them, however, and the Judean authorities in Jerusalem then kill one of the messengers and scatter the rest. At this very point in time, when the leaders in Jerusalem have openly turned hostile against the gospel and those who proclaim it, seeking to silence its message, an Ethiopian official suddenly appears, reading from Isaiah 53, an OT prophecy that proclaims the very heart of the gospel. This Gentile, in contrast to the Jews in Jerusalem and especially the leaders, believes the message from God and finds deliverance, just as Ebedmelech did. For both of them the message was not silenced.

3. Conclusion

As Luke told the story of how the gospel spread out from Jerusalem, no doubt there were hundreds of conversion stories to choose from. Under God's inspiration, the Ethiopian official's conversion by Philip was likely selected for several reasons. First of all, in the programmatic Acts 1:8 Jesus told his disciples that they would be his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and to the end of the earth. Acts 2–7 recounts the explosion of the gospel in Jerusalem. Acts 8:1–8 notes the spread from Jerusalem throughout Judea and Samaria. The Ethiopian in Acts 8:26–40 certainly qualifies as representing the next step, taking the gospel to the ends of the earth.

The intertextual connection to Jeremiah 38–39 also adds several nuances to the unfolding story in Acts. First of all, in Jeremiah, the story of Ebedmelech the Ethiopian is a paradigmatic, "real life" version of the prophetically-proclaimed inclusion of the Gentiles into the people of God. By alluding to that story in Acts 8, Luke is using his Ethiopian conversion story as a dramatic opening picture of that same prophetic Gentile inclusion, a biblical theme that will continue throughout the book of Acts, even taking center stage as the story unfolds.

Thus both Ebedmelech in Jeremiah and the Ethiopian in Acts 8 serve as paralleling models or paradigms of the Gentile inclusion. The fact that they are both Black Africans is not insignificant, for God is apparently using these two Black people of faith to symbolize and represent the inclusion of "every people and nation" into the people of God.

Second, the allusion to Jeremiah 38–39 recalls the rejection of God's word and the persecution of his prophet by the leaders in Jerusalem that led to the horrific destruction of the city by the Babylonians. The similarities between that situation in Jeremiah and the situation described in Acts 2:1–8:3 are remarkably close, and drawing attention to these parallel situations is likely one of Luke's intentions. While these two Gentile Ethiopians believed the word of God, the leaders of Jerusalem rejected it and persecuted God's prophets, bringing an indictment of judgment upon them and their city, Jerusalem.

Thus in connecting to Jeremiah's story of Ebedmelech the Ethiopian, Luke is also underscoring the consequences for the rejection of God's message and the murder of Jesus Christ his son and prophet in Jerusalem. The Romans will destroy Jerusalem, just as the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem back in the

day of Jeremiah. In contrast, the gospel of Jesus Christ will not be silenced but will be spread among the nations, even to the ends of the earth.

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Reading the Bible with the Apostles

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D. A. Carson's scholarship has influenced us from our undergraduate days, where we encountered books like *How Long, O Lord?* written by a rigorous academic and yet a committed believer. His work has shown us what it looks like for faith to seek understanding in the modern era. And for one of us, Don served as a skillful (and demanding!) *Doktorvater,* a role he has played for dozens of evangelical scholars over the course of his career. In the field of biblical theology, Carson's work has been a major part of the discipline's renaissance among evangelicals in our generation. He has helped define the discipline. And he has shown how biblical theology can be useful to the church through volume after helpful volume of the New Studies in Biblical Theology series. It was a privilege for us to contribute to this series, and this article sums up some of the conclusions of our study, *Biblical Theology according to the Apostles*.[1]

How did the apostles read the Bible? There are many ways to answer this question, but our study attempted to get at the answer by examining the "summaries of Israel's story" (SIS) in the NT.[2] There are seven places in the NT where we see a substantial summary of the storyline of the OT: the opening genealogy in Matthew 1:1–17; the parable of the tenants (Matt 21:33–46//Mark 12:1–12//Luke 20:9–19); Stephen's speech in Acts 7; Paul's sermon at Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:16–41); Paul's argument in Galatians 3–4; his reflections on Israel in Romans 9–11; and the well-known "hall of faith" in Hebrews 11. These SIS give a window into how the apostles did biblical theology before it was a technical discipline. In other words, they give us a window into how the apostles read the Bible. As such, these summaries offer us insight into how *we* may read the Bible more faithfully.

Our book studies these seven SIS descriptively with an eye toward prescription. How does the biblical theology of the apostles offer us guidance in our reading of the Bible today? Here are some of our findings:

[1] Chris Bruno, Jared Compton, and Kevin McFadden, *Biblical Theology according to the Apostles: How the Earliest Christians Told the Story of Israel,* NSBT 52 (London: Apollos, 2020).

[2] We borrow the category SIS from J. B. Hood and M. Y. Emerson, "Summaries of Israel's Story: Reviewing a Compositional Category," *Currents in Biblical Research* 11 (2013): 328–48.

1. There is variation in how the NT authors tell the story. Just as the prophets tell Israel's story both positively (Psalm 105) and negatively (Psalm 106), so the apostles tell the story with different emphases depending on their different purposes. For example, in Hebrews 11, each of the biblical characters (and there are many) are described in a positive way. This accords with the author's purpose to encourage his audience to persevere in faith and to show that such perseverance is possible. In contrast, Romans 9–11 reminds readers that the story of the Bible has always been a story of God's mercy to disobedient characters. This different telling accords with Paul's purpose to uphold the faithfulness of God to his word and his people even when considering the puzzling fact that the majority of Israel has not believed in the gospel of Christ.

The variety of summaries in the NT teaches us that there is not one way to do biblical theology. The summaries have elements of unity, of course, like the centrality of Christ as the climax of the biblical story. But within this unity, we must allow for various approaches to biblical theology depending on the purposes of the author (or preacher) and the needs of the moment.

2. One point of unity in the SIS is something we call a "covenant substructure." How did the NT authors decide which of the many people and events of the OT to highlight in their summaries? Often, the SIS highlight the major covenants between God and his people. Matthew's genealogy, for example, presents Jesus as the fulfillment of the covenantal promises God made to Abraham and especially to David. Stephen's speech focuses on the eras of Abraham, Moses, and David. Why? Among other reasons, he is following the major covenants God made with his people. Paul's argument in Galatians 3–4 is about the promise of the Abrahamic covenant, its fulfillment in Christ, and its relationship to the later law covenant. And in Romans 9–11, the apostle labors to show how God has not abandoned his covenant people.

This focus on the covenants in the SIS should affirm and shape our own approaches to the OT that focus on the covenants. It should also lead us to consider the importance of "covenant" as a critical category in biblical theology. It is often observed that explicit statements about the covenants are rare in the NT. But even where the covenant is not mentioned explicitly, the SIS teach us that it should be assumed as a major part of the structure of biblical theology.

3. A major conflict in the SIS is sin. Matthew's genealogy alludes to David's adultery by speaking of "Uriah's wife" (Matt 1:6).[3] Further, its focus on the exile reminds readers of the idolatry of Israel and the downfall of the Davidic dynasty. Jesus's parable of the tenants recounts Israel's rejection of the prophets, foreshadowing the rejection and murder of God's Son. Stephen's speech in Acts 7 similarly highlights Israel's rejection of the deliverers whom God had sent to them, like Moses. And Paul explains the role of the law in this conflict. The law did not bring about the blessing of Abraham but the curse of exile, the very curse from which Christ has redeemed those who believe. The law was never intended to justify sinners but rather to point sinners to the cross of Christ. God's plan was always to grant mercy to the disobedient in Christ (Gal 3:22; Rom 11:32; cf. Acts 13:39).

Thus, we biblical interpreters are not wrong to highlight sin in our own tellings of the biblical story. Sin, the cross, and forgiveness are central elements in the Bible's story. The exile, such an important era in OT history, is not only a story of the oppression of God's people by foreign enemies but of the deeper conflict between God and sinners, which has been resolved in the cross of Christ. We must also be cautious about replacing the cross with the law in our tellings of the story. The law was never meant to justify but rather to lead sinners to God's mercy in Christ.

[3] Scripture citations are from the New International Version (2011).

4. Another conflict is the unfulfilled promises of the OT, and specifically the land promise. In Hebrews 11, we learn that God's people have always been waiting for the eschatological fulfillment of the land promised to Abraham. OT believers were waiting for a heavenly homeland to come, just as we are. Paul's argument in Galatians speaks similarly of our true mother as the "Jerusalem that is above" (Gal 4:26), a promised home we have not yet reached. And in Romans 9–11, Paul has hope that God will yet fulfill his promises of mercy to his people Israel, for "God's gifts and his call are irrevocable" (Rom 11:29). In the promise of the land in particular we begin to see the typology of the NT authors. Things in the OT foreshadow the eschatological fulfillment to come.

This means we should not look for the ultimate fulfillment of God's promises in this world. The OT saints were looking to the world to come, and so are we. This is not to say there is no fulfillment in the NT. Rather, it is to say that suffering comes before glory.

5. A major prophetic type in the SIS, in fact, is the suffering of Christ. In the parable of the tenants, Israel's rejection of the prophets foreshadows the murder of God's Son. And in Stephen's speech, Israel's rejection of Joseph and Moses similarly anticipates the crucifixion: "Was there ever a prophet your ancestors did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him" (Acts 7:52). Thus, the climax of the Bible's story is not only Christ's rule but also Christ crucified. He fulfills biblical typology not only in his person but also in his work.

Following the apostles, then, we should search the Scriptures for those things that point us to Christ and his suffering. Warranted typology should be a part of faithful biblical theology.

6. A closely related type in the SIS is the suffering of God's people. In Stephen's speech, the rejection of Joseph and Moses not only foreshadows the crucifixion of Jesus but also the stoning of Stephen. In Paul's sermon at Pisidian Antioch, Hosea's warning about unbelief anticipates the synagogue leaders' rejection of the apostles' message. In Galatians, Paul appeals to Ishmael's mistreatment of Isaac as foreshadowing the Galatians' own mistreatment at the hands of those who were misleading them. In Romans 9–11, Israel's rejection of the apostolic message is anticipated throughout the Scriptures, as is Paul's hope for Israel's future: just as there was a remnant at the dark time of Elijah, "So too, at the present time there is a remnant chosen by grace" (Rom 11:6). And in Hebrews 11, believers of old persevered in the faith through difficult circumstances just like those experienced by believers today.

Thus, we should look not only for types of the crucified Christ in Scripture but also for types of the suffering people of God. After all, "everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope" (Rom 15:4).

7. All this is to say that the biblical theology of the apostles is profoundly gospel centred, as Carson might put it. The story of the old covenant finds its fulfillment in the gospel of the new covenant. It finds its climax in the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is a story that continues in the church, the people of the gospel, who have found God's mercy in Christ. It is a story that offers the hope of good news to the disobedient. And it is a story that gives encouragement to believers to finish the race and obtain the gospel promise.

There are various ways of telling the story of the Bible, but they must all be the same story of the gospel. We are grateful that this gospel story has been perhaps *the* primary emphasis in Carson's variegated ministry as well as a focus of the *New Studies in Biblical Theology*.

We see from the SIS in the NT that the apostles read the Bible in a gospel-centered way. Their reading was built on God's covenants that point forward to their fulfillment in the new-covenant gospel

of Jesus Christ and his people. Christ has died for the sins of his people and fulfilled all God's promises, resolving the conflicts in Israel's story. And that story foreshadows the era of fulfillment by prefiguring the suffering and vindication of Christ and his followers.

We learn to read the Bible by reading the Bible, and then by reading it in the *way* that the Bible reads the Bible. What we have attempted to do in our book is to outline a kind of biblical-theological "rule" for interpretation—not one that competes with the ancient and revered rule of faith but rather one that supplements it for the modern era. And this work goes on as we continue to read and study the Bible together.[4] D. A. Carson has given us an exemplary model of biblical scholarship in service to the church. May the Lord give us all strength to follow in his footsteps.

[4] As an outgrowth of our NSBT volume, we are beginning a new series of books with Apollos called "Reading the Bible with the Apostles" (RBA).

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The Puzzle of Paul and the Law: A Hermeneutical Solution

— *Brian S. Rosner* —

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While the influence of Don Carson extends across many areas, I am especially grateful for his example and encouragement on the topics of the use of the Old Testament in the New Testament and biblical theology. I met and got to know Don at Tyndale House in Cambridge as a young doctoral student at the university in the late 1980s. I am not alone in owing him a debt of gratitude for his support. Don was the editor of three major projects involving numerous scholars, to which I contributed: the ground-breaking NSBT and Pillar commentary series and the *Commentary on the Use of the Old Testament in the New Testament.* I also had the privilege of co-editing with Don (and two others) the *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology.* Indeed, Don has played a major role in the flourishing of both disciplines in biblical scholarship in the last forty years.

My *Paul and the Law: Keeping the Commandments of God* tackled the thorny and sometimes controversial question of Paul's relationship to the Law of Moses.[1] Three theological positions have a strong interest in Paul's view of the law. Each tends to focus on an emphasis in Paul's letters that is clearly present but plays down other aspects of the subject. Broadly speaking, *Lutheranism* holds that Paul believed that Christ abolished the law and that the Law is the counterpoint to the gospel. The primary role of the Law is to lead us to despair of any hope of obedience leading to God's acceptance and to drive us to seek God's mercy in Christ. For the most part the Law is not seen as playing a big role in the Christian life (although Luther himself made effective use of the law in his catechisms). Second, the *Reformed* view agrees that salvation is by grace and not by obeying the law, but once saved we are under the moral law and must obey it in order to please God. Third, the so-called *New Perspective* on Paul, which is really a new perspective on Paul in relation to Judaism, thinks that the problem of the Law for Paul is not that salvation is by grace and not by works, but that Paul's opposition to the law was simply that it was used by Jews to exclude Gentiles from the people of God; Jewish ethnocentrism is the reason Paul opposed the Law. There is something to learn from each of these perspectives. In my view, the challenge is holding onto their valid insights in a manner that does justice to the full range of evidence and, with important qualifications, does not deny the validity of other perspectives.

How Christians are meant to read the Law of Moses is something of a puzzle. The apostle Paul addresses this question, but his letters present both negative critique and positive approval of the Law. Paul describes the Law as "holy, just and good" (Rom 7:12), a very positive gift of God (9:4), and quotes it when regulating the conduct of believers in Christ (e.g., Deut 25:4 in 1 Cor 9:9). On the other hand,

[1] Brian S. Rosner, *Paul and the Law: Keeping the Commandments of God*, NSBT 31 (Nottingham: Apollos, 2013).

he speaks of the Law as an enslaving power, increasing trespass, and used by sin to bring about death (Gal 4:1–10; Rom 5:20; 7:5).

Discussing Paul and the Law is a bit like being watched while you carve a chicken:[2] it's fairly easy to start well, but you quickly have to make some tricky decisions (about which everyone has an opinion), and it's very easy to end up in a sticky mess with lots of bits left over that no one knows what to do with. Studies of Paul and the law distinguish themselves by whether they face these unmistakable tensions in his letters and how they explain them. The best biblical theology not only has texts to explain its position but also does not have texts that it needs to explain away rather than embrace and incorporate.

1. A Hermeneutical Solution

In *Paul and the Law* I argue that Paul's letters are marked by negative and positive statements about the Law, the question to ask is not "which bits" of the Law is he referring to in each case, but the hermeneutical question of "in what sense" or "as what" are we to read the Law? Asking in which capacity or with what force the Law meets the Christian resolves the tension between the negative and positive material. Christians, according to Paul, do not read the Law of Moses as "Law-covenant," since we are "not under the Law" (Rom 6:14; Gal 5:18). Instead, we read the Law "as prophecy" of the gospel and "as wisdom" for Christian living.[3]

That we are not to read the Law as a binding legal code is implied in that, unlike Jews in Romans 2, Paul never says that believers in Christ do the Law (v. 25), observe the righteous requirements of the Law (v. 26), transgress the Law (vv. 23, 25 and 27), and possess the (Law as a) written code (v. 27). Instead, Paul insists, Christians fulfil the Law (e.g., Rom 13:8–10; Gal 5:13).[4]

Reading the Law as prophecy is signaled in Romans 3:21, where Paul asserts that the disclosure of the righteousness of God in the gospel is attested by "the Law and the prophets;" Romans 16:25–26, where Paul notes the role of "the prophetic writings" in "declaring the gospel beforehand;" and Galatians 3:8, where we are told that the gospel was "announced beforehand to Abraham." D. A. Carson wrote that Paul does not uphold the Law for Christians "as *lex*, as ongoing legal demand," but rather its continuity is sustained in that it points to and anticipates the "new 'righteousness from God' that has come in Christ Jesus."[5]

Reading the Law as wisdom is supported by 1 Corinthians 10:11, where Paul describes the Law as "instruction," νουθεσία, and in Romans 15:4, where he says that the Law is a source of moral "teaching," διδασκαλία. Both νουθεσία and διδασκαλία are terms that have clear wisdom associations. Paul uses the cognate verbs, νουθετέω and διδάσκω, in contexts that indicate that the functions of instructing/admonishing and teaching are undertaken in conjunction with wisdom: "We proclaim him by *instructing* and *teaching* all people *with all wisdom* so that we may present every person mature in

[2] This analogy was suggested to me by Andrew Errington.

[3] Parts of this article are adapted from my article on the Desiring God website and used by permission: Brian S. Rosner, "Written for Our Instruction: Reading the Law as Wisdom," 24 June 2025, https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/written-for-our-instruction.

[4] See Brian S. Rosner, "Paul and the Law: What He Did Not Say," *JSNT* 32 (2010): 405–19.

[5] D. A. Carson, "Atonement in Romans 3:21–26," in *The Glory of the Atonement: Biblical, Historical and Practical Perspectives: Essays in Honor of Roger Nicole*, eds. Charles E. Hill and Frank A. James III (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 139. In terms of this book's construal, Carson points to law as legal code and prophecy respectively.

Christ" (Col 1:28); "*teach* and *admonish* one another *in all wisdom*" (Col 3:16). Further, in 2 Timothy 3:16–17, where the practical usefulness of Scripture, including the Law, is explained is particularly enlightening: "All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (2 Tim 3:16–17, NRSV). Three of the four terms in these verses that explicate the usefulness of Scripture, namely, "reproof" (ἐλεγμός), "correction" (ἐπανόρθωσις), and "training" (παιδεία) are wisdom terms.

2. Reception of the Hermeneutical Solution

Most reviews of *Paul and the Law* have been quite positive, and a few major scholars have indicated agreement with my position. For example, in his Pauline theology Douglas J. Moo writes: "Brian Rosner has highlighted the many ways in which Paul assumes the teaching of the law in his own teaching and comes to a conclusion that I find quite compelling. While not imposing the law as an authoritative norm, Paul reappropriates the law as 'wisdom,' integrating its essential core into his own teaching."[6] And Thomas R. Schreiner describes my book as "a helpful study on Paul's understanding of the Law," concurring that "describing Paul's view of the law solely in terms of abolition is unsatisfying, however, since we also find the motif of fulfillment in his writings."[7]

Some pushbacks have arisen in Reformed circles, fearing that reading the Law as wisdom rather than as legal requirement diminishes its moral authority and usefulness. In the rest of this article, I seek to clarify what I mean by reading the Law as wisdom and show that it can be illustrated not only in Paul's letters but also in the teaching of Jesus and in Lutheran and Reformed catechisms, taking the laws against stealing and murder as examples. As we will see, reading the Law as wisdom is in fact a higher moral bar than reading it as a legal code to be obeyed and not transgressed.

3. The Law as Wisdom

The seed of the notion of the Law as wisdom is planted in Moses's description of the purpose of the Law in Deuteronomy 4:6: "You must observe them [the laws] diligently, for this will show *your wisdom and discernment* to the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, 'Surely this great nation is *a wise and discerning people*!'" Psalms and Proverbs contain texts that similarly take the Law to be a font of wisdom: "The Law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the decrees of the Lord are sure, *making wise the simple*" (Ps 19:7); "Your commandment *makes me wiser* than my enemies, for it is always with me" (119:98); "Those who keep the Law are *wise children*" (Prov 28:7a).

The morality of the Mosaic laws is based on the creation's moral order, the same basis of wisdom taught elsewhere in the Old Testament. As Christopher Wright puts it, in the Law of Moses obedience is not only to the God of covenant purpose and redemptive action but also to the God of created order.[8] Genesis 1 presents creation as a place of order, system, and structure, "which provides an objective basis

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[6] Douglas J. Moo, *A Theology of Paul and his Letters: The Gift of the New Realm in Christ*, BTNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2021), 622.

[7] Thomas R. Schreiner, *Paul, an Apostle of God's Glory in Christ*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020), 356.

[8] See Christopher J. H. Wright, "Old Testament Ethics," in *New Dictionary of Pastoral Theology and Christian Ethics*, ed. David J. Atkinson, David F. Field, Arthur F. Holmes, and Oliver O'Donovan (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1995), 48–56.

for the exercise of moral freedom and sets limits to moral relativism.... There is a basic shape to the world which we did not invent, and therefore a corresponding shape to the moral response required of us.... Morality, in biblical terms, is preconditioned by the given shape of creation."[9] According to Oliver O'Donovan, the Law is a wise articulation of the created order.[10]

Paul reads the Law as wisdom for living, in the sense that he internalizes the Law, makes reflective and expansive applications, and takes careful notice of its basis in the order of creation and the character of God. Taking two examples, this can be seen in the way in which Paul makes use of the laws against stealing and murder.

4. The Commandment against Stealing

Paul mentions the subject of stealing three times in his letters. In Romans 2:17–24 he alludes to the Decalogue commandment not to steal and uses the language of legal obligation. Significantly, the context is his challenge to his Jewish opponents as to whether they transgress the commandments. According to Paul, for Jews the Law remains a legal code that must be obeyed and not transgressed.

In Romans 13:8–10 Paul cites the commandment not to steal in a discussion for Christians of how love fulfills the Law. In this passage, it is not that Christians must "keep" the laws listed. Rather, Paul makes the point that not being under the Law does not lead to license; the obligation to love brings the Law to completion. Paul's point is that loving your neighbor is the goal of keeping the Law. But keeping the laws (even those of the Decalogue, such as Laws against adultery, murder, stealing, and coveting) does not mean that you will love your neighbor. But if you love your neighbor, you will do more than just keep the Law, fulfilling what Paul takes to be their real intent.

The third text is Ephesians 4:28, where Paul addresses Christians and instructs them not to steal: "Thieves must give up stealing; rather let them labor and work honestly with their own hands, so as to have something to share with the needy" (NRSV). Paul reflects on the responsibility to work, established in Genesis 2:15, in order to be able to share with the needy. His reflective application of the law against stealing in Ephesians 4:28 is instruction for living that exemplifies the re-appropriation of the Law as wisdom.

The Heidelberg Catechism makes similar moves in reading the commandment not to steal in Questions 111 and 112. Not content to read the Law as only forbidding "outright theft and robbery," the catechism explains that "in God's sight theft also includes all evil tricks and schemes to get our neighbor's goods for ourselves ... such as inaccurate measurements of weight, size, or volume; fraudulent merchandising; counterfeit money; [and] excessive interest. ... God forbids all greed." Further, the catechism teaches that the commandment not to steal, echoing Ephesians 4:28, obliges me to "work faithfully so that I may help the needy in their hardship."[11]

Similarly, Luther's Small Catechism makes an expansive application of the commandment not to steal: "What does this mean? We should fear and love God so that we do not take our neighbor's money

[9] Wright, "Old Testament Ethics," 49.

[10] Oliver O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order: An Outline for Evangelical Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 189–90.

[11] The Heidelberg Catechism (1563), Questions 110–11, cited in Jonathan Gibson, *Be Thou My Vision: A Liturgy for Daily Worship* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 269–70.

or possessions, or get them in any dishonest way, but help him to improve and protect his possessions and income."[12]

5. The Commandment against Murder

How does Paul read the commandment against murder (Exod 20:13; Deut 5:17)? The influence of the murder commandment in Romans offers another example of how Paul reads the Law as wisdom.

Romans refers to the commandment not to murder on two occasions, employing the lexeme φόν- "murder," which is used in the LXX murder commandment. The first is in Romans 1 in a vice list (1:29–31), which includes links to the Decalogue commandments against covetousness and rebellion against parents. The passage demonstrates that Paul continues to use the Law as the means of condemning the conduct of those outside of Christ.

A full appreciation of the influence of the murder commandment in Paul's moral teaching requires some attention to contemporary Jewish use of the commandment, along with the use of the commandment in the OT.[13] In brief, murder was widely regarded as the quintessential anti-social sin, the opposite of love. Other laws overlapped with murder, and the notion of murder was exploited in its capacity as a metaphor for social injustice, including anger and malicious speech.

With this in mind, Paul's extensive use of other expressions for murder-related activity in Romans is significant. In Romans 3:13–15 he quotes Scripture on murderous speech ("the venom of vipers is under their lips") and murderous deeds ("feet swift to shed blood"). In Romans 7:11 Paul personifies sin and depicts it as a killer in his discussion of sin and the Law. Romans 8:35–36 refers to being killed and persecuted for God's sake. In Romans 11:3 Elijah is quoted as pleading to God against Israel: "Lord, they have killed your prophets … and are seeking my life." In Romans 12:14, 17–21 Paul refers to those who persecute God's people. And in Romans 14:13, 15, 20, 21 Paul warns the strong about destroying those who are weak in faith. The influence of the murder commandment is profound, in spite of Paul nowhere saying or implying that believers are under the Law.

Jesus's exposition of the commandment not to murder in Matthew 5 is noteworthy for its internalized application. He judges hatred to be tantamount to murder, a surface expression of something deeper: "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment" (5:21–22a). And he warns that God does not accept the worship of those who are angry: "if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift" (5:23–24).

The Heidelberg Catechism similarly undertakes expansive applications of the murder commandment, focusing on the heart motivations: "I am not to belittle, hate, insult, or kill my neighbor—not by my thoughts, my words, my look or gesture, and certainly not by actual deeds." It teaches that "by forbidding murder God teaches us that he hates the root of murder: envy, hatred, anger, vengefulness. In God's sight all such are disguised forms of murder." For the catechism, not to murder is the opposite of love: "By condemning envy, hatred, and anger God wants us to love our neighbor as ourselves, to be patient,

[12] Luther's Small Catechism (1529), https://catechism.cph.org/en/10-commandments.html.

[13] William Andrew Williamson, "The Influence of You Shall Not Murder on Paul's Ethics in Romans and 1 Corinthians" (PhD diss., University of Western Sydney/Moore Theological College, 2007), 112–203.

peace-loving, gentle, merciful, and friendly toward them, to protect them from harm as much as we can, and to do good even to our enemies."[14]

Similarly, Luther's Small Catechism expands the application of the murder commandment beyond the taking of a life: "You shall not murder. *What does this mean?* We should fear and love God so that we do not hurt or harm our neighbor in his body, but help and support him in every physical need."[15]

6. Written for Our Instruction

Believers in Christ are not under the Law as a legal code. But the Law of Moses is still valid as God's inspired Word. Reading it makes us wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus and equips us for every good work (2 Tim 3:15–16). The Law trains us for righteous living when we read the Law as wisdom. Such a reading strategy is exemplified by Jesus Christ and the apostle Paul and reflected in Lutheran and Reformed catechisms. We do well to read the Law as wisdom for our own moral correction and formation. To quote Paul, the Law of Moses was written "for us" (1 Cor 9:10) and "for our [moral] instruction [διδασκαλία]" (Rom 15:4; cf. 1 Cor 10:11).

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[14] The Heidelberg Catechism (1563), Questions 105–7, cited in Gibson, *Be Thou My Vision*, 268–69.
[15] Luther's Small Catechism (1529), https://catechism.cph.org/en/10-commandments.html.

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The Faith of Christ and the Message of Justification for Today

— *Mark A. Seifrid* —

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It is a delight to contribute to this volume in honor of Don Carson, whose life and work has been given to the study of the Scriptures in service to the life of the church, service which necessarily entails the task of engaging in biblical theology.

The doing of biblical theology necessarily entails biblical criticism. Lest the readers of this essay fall into shock, let me make clear that in making this statement I do not have in mind the rationalism that governed the interpretation of the Scriptures at the birth of so-called "biblical theology." Nor do I have in mind the usual understanding of "historical criticism," with which we are all familiar. I have in mind instead the criticism of us, our thought, labor, and life that we encounter in what the Scripture says and reveals about us as fallen creatures, on its way to telling us of God as the justifier and savior of the fallen human being. It is in this form of biblical criticism that biblical theology must necessarily engage.[1] We are not thereby absolved of labor, a labor that includes—and this is of critical importance—the reading of the texts of Scripture in their historical contexts, insofar as these may be discerned. Historical awareness of the text brings its own dangers, of course. The modern history of interpretation is full of examples of naïve overconfidence in "historical method" as a means of determining the meaning of texts. All too often a supposed "background" of a text is allowed to overrun what that text itself is saying. Despite this danger, the historical dimension of our task is indispensable. As valuable as the "theological interpretation of Scripture" and the study of the history of interpretation might be, they provide us only with what the church has said and taught about the Scriptures. They may well lead us back to the Scriptures. But in being led back to the text we are confronted with a word that has the power to confront us and call us again to the obedience of faith in our time and place. The very otherness of the text allows it to open our ears to the truth about ourselves and the world. Without this form of historical awareness, we are liable to read ourselves into the text in all the wrong ways. The work of biblical theology is to serve the church in answering the question, "What does this word of Scripture mean for us here and now?" It is worth remembering that the writings of the New Testament—themselves examples of biblical theology—are occasional pieces, written for the needs of churches at a particular moment in their life. All biblical theology is likewise written for its moment—the moment of the writer and the readers, for the questions and challenges that they face. Precisely in addressing the theological questions of its time and place each work of biblical theology may bear abiding significance.

[1] On the power of the Scripture to interpret itself and its readers, see Oswald Bayer, *Martin Luther's Theology: A Contemporary Interpretation*, trans. Thomas H. Trapp (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 68–92.

In view of these reflections, I would like to return to two questions concerning the meaning of Paul's insistence that "we have believed in Christ Jesus so that we might be justified by the faith of Christ and not by works of the Law" (Gal 2:16). The first of these questions is that of the meaning of πίστις Χριστοῦ. The second is that of what it means to be justified by faith.[2]

It was the dissertation of the late Richard Hays, first published in 1983, that caught the imagination of interpreters in its challenge to the modern reading of "the faith of Christ."[3] This genitive expression in its various forms had been nearly universally understood in the sense of an "objective genitive," speaking of our faith *in* Christ. Appealing to the "narrative sub-structure of Galatians," Hays argued that the expression, which appears twice in Galatians 2:16 and once again in another form in Galatians 2:20 ("the faith of the Son of God"), signifies not our faith in Christ, but Christ's own "faith," that is to say, Christ's faithfulness toward God in his earthly life and mission.[4] It is this faithfulness of Christ, not our own faithfulness, that saves us, according to Hays. True enough. I am not interested here in problematic aspects of Hays's reading of Paul. I want instead to offer reflections on the meaning of "the faith of Christ" that interpreters generally have overlooked in the discussion that followed Hays's work. The rendering of πίστις Χριστοῦ as an objective or subjective genitive, which assumes that πίστις bears a verbal sense, has dominated the discussion, even where nuances or creative new categories of the genitive have been offered. Since "faith" remains a noun, however, it is necessary to consider the possibility that in the expression πίστις Χριστοῦ the genitive might be understood in a nominal sense, i.e., as genitive of source or possession. In this instance, the two converge for three distinct reasons. First, according to Paul, the promises of God have been given to Christ and have come to fulfillment in him.[5] Life and blessing properly belong to him alone. Second, Christ, according to Paul, gave himself for us in self-giving love in order to redeem us from sin and death. It was, furthermore, God, the Father, who sent him into the world for this purpose.[6] For this reason, one may speak of Christ, the crucified and risen Lord, as communicative in his very being and existence. In him—in him alone—God fulfills all his promises and gives himself to us in all his goodness and with all his gifts. Third, Christ comes to us with his gifts solely through the apostolic proclamation of the fulfillment of God's promises and purposes in him. We are bound to Christ by faith in this proclaimed word. The communication between God and the human being in Christ takes place through "hearing and believing." When Paul speaks of "the faith of Christ" he is announcing the form of the relationship of communion between God and the human being that takes place in Christ, who is at once the abiding source of faith ("faith is *from* Christ" and its abiding object ("faith *in* Christ"). The human being does not remain a constant in this communication. The old person is crucified. A new person has been created in Jesus Christ and mediated to each one by the word of the Gospel and the faith that springs from it.[7] It is for this reason, one may suggest,

[2] For further discussion of these two questions, see Mark A. Seifrid, *Christ, Our Righteousness: Paul's Theology of Justification*, NSBT 9 (Leicester: Apollos, 2000), esp. ch. 5.

[3] Richard B. Hays, *The Faith of Jesus Christ: The Narrative Substructure of Galatians 3:1–4:11*. The Biblical Resource Series, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

[4] "Faithfulness" clearly belongs to the semantic range of "πίστις" (e.g., LXX Ps 32:4 [33:4 ET]; Hos 2:22; Rom 3:3—Gal 5:22 is another question)

[5] 2 Cor 1:20; Gal 3:16.

[6] Rom 3:21–36; 5:8; 8:1–4, 32; Gal 1:1, 4; 4:4–7.

[7] Oswald Bayer has explored the ethics that emerge from this understanding of faith in relation to contemporary philosophical and theological currents. See Oswald Bayer, *Freedom in Response, Lutheran Ethics: Sources and Controversies*, trans. Jeffrey F. Cayzer (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 2007).

that often with Paul "faith" may be understood as signifying simultaneously the act of believing and the content that is believed.[8]

Interpreters generally have overlooked the fact that for the Greek fathers the expression "the faith of Christ" did not need to be translated, even if they found it useful or necessary to interpret it. Similarly, the Latin translation, *fides Christi*, (as well as the Old Church Slavonic, I am told) could retain the form—and thus the semantic openness—of the Greek.[9] The English, too, can retain the rendering "the faith of Christ" (and related forms) and, in fact, did so in a number of early translations.[10] As far as I can see, it was not until Luther's influential *Septembertestament*, that the interpretive renderings of πίστις Χριστοῦ as an objective genitive first appeared in biblical translations.[11] Admittedly, interpretive renderings such as ἡ εἰς Χριστὸν πίστις already appear in the Greek fathers. Often, however, one finds the genitive constructions such as we find with Paul—and these not always in citation of the apostle. The rendering of the expression as an objective genitive therefore cannot be said to constitute the "traditional" reading.

For background to the expression in the first century, we may turn briefly to Acts. The single Lukan reference to "Christ-faith" in Acts 3:16, together with its conjoined interpretation, provides a clear example of this usage and a clue to its significance as well. It appears in the context of Peter's proclamation following the healing in the Temple:

> And by the faith of this name (Jesus Christ of Nazareth)—this one whom you see and know, his name has made strong—and the faith that is through (Christ) has given wholeness to this one before all of you.

As is clear from the language of the verse, "the faith of this name" is nothing other than "the faith that comes through (Christ)." Here we encounter a major theme of Acts: The proclamation of the name of Jesus, believing in, and calling upon his name constitutes the fulfillment of God's purpose and promise. The faith that "is of the name" of Jesus and is "given through him" is at once faith in Jesus and obedience to God, who raised him from the dead. We must remind ourselves that in the Scriptures and in early Judaism the language of "faith" is reserved for God alone. There is only one faith, that of the speaking God, who promises and fulfills. One might turn from God to serve idols and to place one's *trust* in them. But just as there is only one true God, there is only one faith. We therefore must not overlook the significance of the language of Acts 3:16. It announces the one true faith in the wake of God's work in Jesus.[12] To believe in Jesus is to obey God. To call upon the name of Jesus is to call upon the name of the Lord.[13] The language of faith is reserved in Acts for Jesus as its source and object.[14]

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[8] Rom 1:12, 17; 10:6–8, 16–17; 1 Cor 2:5; 2 Cor 13:5; Gal 1:23; 2:20; 3:23–29.

[9] The patristic Greek interpretations of the expression, which deserve further exploration, vary, including ἡ εἰς Χριστὸν πίστις as well as ἡ κατὰ Χριστὸν πίστις. Both the objective genitive and the authorial genitive are included, as is the case often with the usage of the simple form.

[10] John Wycliffe (1382) has in all instances of the expression "faith of Christ." William Tyndale (1526) likewise translates with "faith of Jesus Christ" in Gal 2:16, 20; 3:22; and Rom 3:22. In Rom 3:26; Phil 3:9; and Eph 3:12, Tyndale has "faith in Christ." The KJV (1611) still retains "faith of Christ" in Galatians (Gal 2:16, 20; 3:22). Only in Rom 3:26 and Eph 3:12 does one find "faith in Christ."

[11] Luther (1522; *Septembertestament*): "(durch den Glawben) an Jesu Christ" (Gal 2:16 [2x]), significantly varying, then, "(ich lebe nun) dem Glawben des sons Gottis" (Gal 2:20), and finally, "durch den Glawben an Jesum Christum" (Gal 3:22).

[12] Acts 20:21; 24:24; 26:18.

[13] Acts 20:21; 24:24; 26:18.

[14] The Gentiles who believe the proclamation of Jesus "turn to God" (Acts 15:19; 26:20; 1 Thess 1:9–10).

We may safely presuppose that the significance accorded to the name of Jesus in earliest Christianity informs Paul's references to "the faith of Christ." For Paul, too, there is only one faith: "one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and father of all" (Eph 4:5–6). It furthermore should come to us as no surprise that Paul's references to "the faith of Christ" are concentrated within his arguments on justification. That is true of the passages we shall consider here: his report of the confrontation of Cephas in Antioch (Gal 2:11–21) together with his discussion of the promise to Abraham (Gal 3:6–14) and then his announcement of the revelation of God's righteousness in Romans 3:21–26.[15]

We begin with Paul's account of the dramatic confrontation of Cephas in Antioch. It is precisely here that Richard Hays's reading of "the faith of Christ" in the following chapters of Galatians fails to persuade. While it is true that Paul presents God as acting in Christ, sending him forth to redeem us (Gal 4:4–5) and raising him from the dead (1:1); and while it is true that Christ, in giving himself up, acts in accord with the will of God, the Father (1:4; 4:5); Paul presents salvation in Galatians—and especially in 2:11–21—not as an act of Jesus's faithfulness toward God, but as Jesus's act of self-giving love toward us. The two references to "the faith of (Jesus) Christ" in Galatians 2:16 would seem to serve the same aim as does the declaration of Acts 3:16, defending and explaining what faith is and does in the light of Jesus Christ. Cephas has not been "walking" uprightly with respect to the truth of the Gospel. Paul delivers a corrective. As Galatians 1:23 makes clear, the faith Paul came to proclaim—to the surprise of the Judean churches—was radically new, even if it arose from a promise from of old (Gal 3:6; Gen 15:6).

There are good reasons for understanding the usage of πίστις in Galatians 2:16 in a nominal sense. First of all, the antecedent usage is clearly nominal: proclamation necessarily has content (Gal 1:23). Admittedly, the associated verbal references to believing in Christ fill out that content (Gal 2:16). One thus has to recognize one form of redundancy or another in interpreting Galatians 2:16, whether one opts for "believing in Christ" or "the faith that comes from Christ." To my thinking, an emphasis on Christ as the substance or content of faith is inherently more likely than a statement about believing in Jesus that is already present in verbal form. Paul is pointing to faith as a new reality and sets it in opposition to its alternative, justification by "the works of the Law." He then goes on to describe—in the first person—the life of faith in a way that transcends his own acting and existence:

> I have been crucified with Christ. I live, yet no longer I, but Christ who lives in me. The life that I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself up for me. (Gal 2:20)

Here we must speak of "the faith of the Son of God" as the faith that is given by the Son of God. Paul has been taken up into Christ's cross and resurrection. He has become a new person. Although his earthly existence continues, he has been given a radically new life that he lives "by the faith of the Son of God." Paul further describes the knowledge of the Son of God that this faith includes: "He loved me and gave himself up for me." This confession is doctrinal, to be sure. But it is more than doctrinal. It speaks of a living relationship that has its basis in the act of love and self-giving of the Son of God prior to Paul's faith. Paul has undergone an exchange of existence and identity in an act of communication that was initiated by Christ's self-giving love and resulted in the faith of the apostle. Paul the sinner and Christ the Savior remain distinct and yet in the dynamic exchange that takes place in faith: they are one. He lives by the faith that comes from the Son of God.

[15] See also Phil 3:2–11.

This reading is strengthened by Galatians 3:23–26, where Paul speaks of faith as adventitious: "faith" came to the world only with the coming of Christ. The apostle hardly could have forgotten the faith of Abraham, to whom he has just appealed. Yet the promise to Abraham was a promise to Abraham. It worked Abraham's faith but not yet the faith of those who were to receive Abraham's blessing (3:6–9). It is Christ, Paul declares, who is the "seed" to whom the promise of blessing was given (3:16). Abraham's blessing thus comes to those who believe through the "faith of Jesus Christ," namely, the faith that comes from Christ (3:22). Not only the superfluity of a repeated reference to the act of believing but also the adventitious nature of this faith point away from reading "the faith of Christ" in the sense of an objective genitive.

We may now turn to Romans 3:21–26, where Paul repeats his announcement of the revelation of God's righteousness. He immediately characterizes this righteousness as coming through "the faith of Jesus Christ" (Rom 3:21–22).[16] Once again the "faith of Jesus Christ" appears as an adventitious faith. Through it the righteousness of God comes to the human being. Should we understand Paul as referring to "faith in Christ"? Here, it is God, not Christ, who savingly acts. Paul correspondingly does not speak of "believing in Christ" (πιστεύειν) in this context. He speaks simply of "believing" (3:22).[17] Faith is implicitly directed to the God who has revealed his righteousness. Christ appears here, arguably, as the channel through whom this faith comes (3:22). Through faith he is God's "mercy seat" (3:25).[18] As we have noted, for Paul, along with the rest of earliest Christianity, faith in God and faith in Christ were inseparable. Here the emphasis lies on faith in God, as Paul's concluding theological statement (3:27–31) makes clear.[19] It is best, then, to understand "the faith of Jesus Christ" (3:22) and "the faith of Jesus" (3:26) as speaking of Jesus as the means by which faith is given. The righteousness of God "through the faith of Jesus Christ" fulfills the witness of the Law and the prophets (3:21).

Now we may speak of the significance of Paul's language about "the faith of Christ for life," both in its historical context and in its relevance for the present. Often—all too often—Romans 3:21–26 is read, taught, or preached apart from its rhetorical conclusion in 3:27–31. The point that Paul wants to make with his preceding announcement, and indeed with the entire sweep of the argument beginning at Romans 1:16, then goes missing. The boast in Jewish advantage is excluded by "the law of faith" according to which "a human being" is justified here and now by faith, apart from "works of the Law"—the outward and visible deeds that signal commitment to the Law of Israel's God. Paul has prepared for this assertion already. Having announced "the righteousness of God given through the 'faith of Jesus Christ,'" he asserts that it is "for all who believe, for there is no distinction"—no distinction between Jew and Gentile. All have sinned. Adam's transgression has been repeated in each one. Justification comes as a gift by God's grace alone (3:22–23). In 3:29–31, Paul points to Israel's fundamental confession as a rejection of any Jewish boast of advantage: "Hear, Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one" (Deut 6:4). If God is one, argues Paul, God is the God not only of Jews but also of Gentiles. He is thus the one who justifies both Jew and Gentile through faith. Paul is not announcing an abstract monotheism but

[16] It is obvious that Paul speaks of a saving righteousness: the demonstration of God's righteousness here and now in the world makes God the "justifier of the one, who is of the faith of Jesus" (Rom 3:26).

[17] The phrases in Rom 3:25 are to be taken as independent of one another: God put forward Christ Jesus as mercy seat, by faith (and) in (or by) his blood.

[18] On the interpretation of ἱλαστήριον in Rom 3:25, see Mark A. Seifrid, "Romans," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, 2nd ed., ed. G. K. Beale, D. A. Carson, and Benjamin L. Gladd (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, forthcoming).

[19] See also the following discussion of Abraham's faith in God, in which we now share (Rom 4:1–12, 13–25).

the self-revelation of the living God. The oneness of God is manifest in that his righteousness is given through the faith that comes through Christ for all human beings. This affirmation is directed to Jewish believers within the circle of largely Gentile house churches in Rome, who were all too ready to disdain and judge their Gentile brothers and sisters.

It is obvious that the same dynamic was at work in Antioch, where Cephas failed to uphold the Gospel (Gal 2:14). Paul must remind him that despite their common Jewish identity, as those who are "of the works of the Law," they have believed in Jesus Christ. They have done so in order to be "justified by the faith that is of Christ" and not by "works of the Law." In so believing they find themselves to be "sinners"—no different from the Gentiles. To not eat with the Gentiles was to reject the grace of God in the love of Christ, an act that Paul, as he announces, refuses to do (Gal 2:21).

The "new perspective on Paul" thus got it half-right and totally wrong. Its representatives were right when they pointed to the ethnic dimension of Paul's message. They were totally wrong in failing to see that Paul's insistence upon the full acceptance of the Gentiles was essential to "the faith that comes through Jesus Christ." The acceptance of Gentile believers as brothers and sisters in Christ was a test for the earliest church—not a test of their openness to diversity but a test of the faith that had come to them in and through Christ. It was a test as to whether they regarded the present Jerusalem as their home or lived in hope of the Jerusalem above, the mother of all the children of promise. The same test of faith remains for the church today.

It would do us well to listen to Paul. His message bears fundamental significance for the life of a church that is becoming more ethnically diverse. In both Antioch and Rome, the Gentiles had become the majority. This dramatic change brought challenges that required a response grounded in Christ. Paul provides it: faith itself, the faith of Christ, calls for the acceptance of all other believers in Christ, no matter what their background or heritage. One may cite Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who in his own time and place echoes the apostle:

> Only through Jesus Christ do I have and shall I have fellowship with the other. The more authentic and deeper our fellowship becomes, the more all else between us shall recede, the more clearly and purely shall Jesus Christ and his work alone become living and active between us. We have one another only through Christ. But through Christ we really *have* one another entirely and for all eternity.[20]

[20] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Gemeinsames Leben*, DBW 5 (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1987), 22. Translation by the author.

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Seated on the Throne: The Centrality and Supremacy of God in Revelation

— *Brian J. Tabb* —

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It is a joy to contribute to this issue of *Themelios* commemorating the remarkable legacy of my mentor and friend, Don Carson, the longtime editor of the NSBT series and of this journal until 2018.[1] In November 2022 Don delivered a memorable presidential address on Isaiah 6 to the Evangelical Theological Society, and he concluded by leading the hundreds of gathered academics in singing the classic hymn, "Holy, Holy, Holy."[2] In many ways this address epitomizes Don's commitments to rigorous exegesis and faithful biblical theology not as ends in themselves but for the sake of heart-felt, reverential worship of the living God. The book of Revelation entreats readers to "worship God," and this essay reflects on the awesome and multifaceted portrait of the one true God in the final installment of holy Scripture.[3]

God is utterly supreme and central in the Apocalypse. He is the beginning and end of all reality, "the Alpha and the Omega" (Rev 1:8). Angelic worshippers in his heavenly throne room never cease declaring that God Almighty is thrice holy (4:8). He is unrivaled and preeminent, ruling the universe that he created as the sovereign King and Judge (4:11). God "lives for ever and ever" (4:9). God simply *is*, as he declared to Moses, "I am who I am" (Exod 3:14). Only God is absolute and self-determining. Everything else is contingent, created by God and sustained by the divine will.

And yet there are opponents who dare to challenge the divine sovereign and defy their maker. John writes that the beast "*was given* [ἐδόθη] a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it *was allowed* [ἐδόθη] to exercise authority for forty-two months" (Rev 13:5). The ancient nemesis, the diabolical dragon, authorizes the beast's rule and invests it with his own authority (13:2). However, the beast's mouth and authority are derivative, given by God for a brief three-and-a-half years (cf. Dan 7:25). Similarly, the false prophet "is allowed" (ἐδόθη) to work deceptive signs (Rev 13:14). For a while the Almighty permits the nations to fawn after falsehood. Believers must not be deceived. The Almighty is still seated on his glorious throne, and all rival sovereigns must bow the knee or face his wrath (6:15–17).

The Apocalypse offers the consummate biblical depiction of God as Creator, Sovereign Lord, and Judge. The one true God has begun to establish his kingdom and execute his end-time purposes to save

[1] For a collection of Carson's *Themelios* writings, see *The Gospel and the Modern World: A Theological Vision for the Church*, ed. Brian J. Tabb (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2023).

[2] See D. A. Carson, "Tris-Hagion: Foundation for Worldwide Mission," *JETS* 66 (2023): 1–10.

[3] This essay adapts material from Brian J. Tabb, *All Things New: Revelation as Canonical Capstone*, NSBT 48 (London: Apollos, 2019), 29–45.

his people and judge evil through the Messiah Jesus, and he will surely fulfill his promises and make all things new (21:5). This essay focuses on Revelation's remarkable presentation of God as (1) the one who is, who was, and who is coming; (2) the Alpha and the Omega; (3) the Lord Almighty; (4) the one seated on the throne; and (5) the Creator.

1. The One Who Is, Who Was, and Who Is Coming

Ian Paul asserts that Revelation has "the most developed Trinitarian theology of any New Testament book."[4] Indeed, the salutation in Revelation 1:4–5 is one of the most profound trinitarian declarations in the Scriptures:

> Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth.

"Grace and peace" reflects the standard early Christian adaptation of the traditional Hellenistic "greetings" and the Jewish "peace," which Paul repeatedly extends "from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (e.g., Rom 1:7). However, Revelation elaborates significantly on the trinitarian source of this grace and peace. These verses prepare readers for the absolute centrality of God in the symbolic universe of the Apocalypse.

"From him who is and who was and who is to come" is one of many grammatical irregularities ("solecisms") in the Apocalypse, since the preposition ἀπό consistently takes a genitive object but John uses the nominative case. Since John "correctly" uses the genitive twice in 1:4b–5 (ἀπὸ τῶν ἑπτὰ πνευμάτων … ἀπὸ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ), the peculiar grammar in verse 4a likely signals a deliberate allusion to Exodus 3:14 LXX.[5]

In Exodus 3, Moses encounters the God of his fathers at the burning bush. This God has heard Israel's cries and so commissions Moses to lead his people out of Egypt. He then reveals to Moses his name: "I am who I am. … Say this to the people of Israel, 'I am has sent me to you.' … Say this to the people of Israel, 'Yahweh, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you'" (vv. 14–15).[6] Here God reveals his name (Yahweh) and its significance for enslaved Israel. The Greek translators render the first divine title Ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ὤν ("I am The One Who Is," NETS) and also render the personal name Yahweh as Κύριος, which denotes his "legal authority."[7]

Revelation's distinctive divine title, ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος (1:4), recalls Yahweh's foundational self-disclosure at the burning bush, and it also has notable extrabiblical parallels. For example, Seneca the Younger writes, "Life is divided into three periods—that which has been, that which is, that which will be" (*On the Happy Life* 10.2).[8] According to Pausanias, the prophetesses at the oracle at Dodona

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[4] Ian Paul, *Revelation*, TNTC 20 (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 2018), 4.

[5] Sean M. McDonough, *YHWH at Patmos: Rev. 1:4 in Its Hellenistic and Early Jewish Setting*, WUNT 2.107 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 199–202; G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 188; Martin Karrer, *Johannesoffenbarung (Offb 1,1–5,14)*, EKKNT 24.1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017), 214–15.

[6] This translation modifies the ESV by substituting "Yahweh" for "The Lord."

[7] "κύριος," *NIDNTTE* 2:773. Variations of Ὁ Ὢν κύριε also appear in LXX Jer 1:6; 4:10; 14:13; and 39:17 [mt 32:17], according to the Göttingen edition.

[8] Cf. Seneca, *Epistle* 58.7–8, 16–17. See the discussion in McDonough, *YHWH at Patmos*, 34–41.

sang, "Zeus *was* [ἦν], Zeus *is* [ἐστίν], Zeus *shall be* [ἔσσεται]. O mighty Zeus!" (*Description of Greece* 10.12.10). This formula combines the common tripart division of time with the notion of deity as being par excellence. Thus, the title in Revelation 1:4 suggests awareness of and engagement with contemporary Greco-Roman theological claims.[9] Only the God of Israel whose definitive revelation comes in and through Jesus Christ (Rev 1:1) may rightly claim to be "the one who is and who was and who is coming."

The threefold expression, "him who is and who was and who is to come" (Rev 1:4), recalls Exodus 3:14 and also presents "a sophisticated 'unpacking' of the name which reveals its universal significance."[10] The Apocalypse employs three different versions of this divine title:

> ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος (1:4, 8) ὁ ἦν καὶ ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἐρχόμενος (4:8) ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν (11:17; 16:5)

The variations in order are noteworthy. The formula in 4:8 moves from past ("who was") to present ("who is") to future ("who is to come"), which anticipates the emphasis in verse 11 on God's worthiness as the creator and sustainer of all things. However, elsewhere John begins with the present tense ὁ ὢν, which stresses above all that God is *now* present with his people. Further, ὁ ὢν contrasts the genuine deity with lifeless idols "which cannot see or hear or walk" (9:20) and with the beast who "was, *and is not*" (17:8).

The third title, ὁ ἐρχόμενος, is the most surprising adaptation of the divine name. It expresses not simply "God's future existence, but his coming to the world to consummate his kingdom."[11] Significantly, the thematic summary statement in 1:7–8 refers to Jesus "*coming* [ἔρχεται] with the clouds" (cf. Dan 7:13) and then to the Almighty "who is and who was and *who is to come* [ὁ ἐρχόμενος]." Isaiah 40:10 asserts that Yahweh "comes [LXX, ἔρχεται] with might … ; behold, his reward is with him, and his recompense before him."[12] In Revelation 22:12 the Lord Jesus declares, "*I am coming soon* [ἔρχομαι ταχύ], bringing *my* recompense with me, to repay everyone for what he has done." Thus, the Apocalypse applies OT expectation of God's "coming" to Christ's parousia.[13] Said another way, Jesus will bring to pass the eschatological coming of Yahweh.

The abbreviated designation in 11:17 and 16:5, ὁ ὢν καὶ ὁ ἦν, suggests that Yahweh's long anticipated "coming" is realized in the trumpet and bowl judgments. Schreiner writes, "There is no need to speak of God coming since the end has come: the kingdom has arrived, the king has come."[14] The Almighty has "begun to reign" (11:17), as the eternal kingdom of "his Christ" is established and the nations cease to rage (11:15, 18; cf. Ps 2:1–2). The Holy One avenges the blood of his saints and prophets (Rev 16:5–7; cf. Isa 49:26). The declaration that the Almighty's judgments are "true and just" comes from "the altar," where the cries of the slain are heard and the prayers of the saints are offered as incense (Rev 6:9; 8:3). Thus, the Apocalypse presents this establishment of God's reign as his faithful and just response to the

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[9] Cf. Martin Karrer, "God in the Book of Revelation," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Book of Revelation*, ed. Craig R. Koester (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 212.

[10] McDonough, *YHWH at Patmos*, 204.

[11] McDonough, *YHWH at Patmos*, 214.

[12] Cf. Pss 96:13; 98:9; Isa 66:15; Zech 14:5, 9.

[13] Edward Adams, "The 'Coming of God' Tradition and Its Influence on New Testament Parousia Texts," in *Biblical Traditions in Transmission: Essays in Honour of Michael A. Knibb*, ed. Judith Lieu, Charlotte Hempel, and Michael A. Knibb, JSJSup 111 (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 19.

[14] Thomas R. Schreiner, *Revelation*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2023), 413.

petitions of his persecuted people.[15] Bauckham writes, "This is the biblical God who chooses, as his own future, his coming to his creation, and whose creation will find its own future in him (cf. 21:3)."[16]

2. The Alpha and the Omega

The one seated on the throne twice announces, "I am the Alpha and the Omega" (Rev 1:8; 21:6). This use of the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet is equivalent in meaning to "the first and the last" and "the beginning and the end" (21:6; 22:13). Yahweh similarly declares in Isaiah 48:12, "I am he; I am the first, and I am the last" (cf. 41:4; 44:6). He alone is Israel's Creator, Redeemer, King, and Rock, in contrast to the lifeless idols utterly incapable of saving their devotees (44:6–20).

"The Alpha and the Omega" is "a rhetorical merism" that expresses totality.[17] The God who controls the beginning and the end is by implication supreme over all things. He is before all rival sovereigns—including the dragon and the beast—and will outlast them. He alone is the divine Creator who rules over his created realm and will bring it to its appointed *telos*, when he announces "it is done" and makes all things new (21:5–6).

The risen Christ employs variations of this divine title in the book's opening and closing chapters:

> I am the first and the last. (1:17) I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end. (22:13)

Jesus thus profoundly and unmistakably identifies himself with the sovereign and eternal Creator God. "As the ruler of history Jesus is fully divine, sharing God's identity."[18] The ancient hymn aptly expresses this profound truth:

> Of the Father's love begotten, ere the worlds began to be, he is Alpha and Omega, he the source, the ending he, of the things that are, that have been, and that future years shall see, evermore and evermore.[19]

3. The Lord God Almighty

The Apocalypse refers to God as "Almighty" nine times, seven times using the full phrase "the Lord God, the Almighty" (κύριος ὁ θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ).[20] This title appears frequently in the LXX prophetic books, usually translating the Hebrew יְהוִה אֱלֹהֵי הַצְּבָאוֹת (The Lord GOD of hosts).[21] παντοκράτωρ

[15] Brian J. Tabb, "Prayer in Apocalyptic Perspective," in *For It Stands in Scripture: Essays in Honor of W. Edward Glenny*, ed. Ardel B. Caneday (Saint Paul: University of Northwestern, 2019), 191–208.

[16] Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, NTT (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 30.

[17] John Paul Heil, *Book of Revelation: Worship for Life in the Spirit of Prophecy* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2014), 25.

[18] Schreiner, *Revelation*, 761.

[19] Aurelius Prudentius Clemens; cited in Craig R. Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 38A (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 36.

[20] Rev 4:8; 11:17; 15:3; 16:7; 19:6; 21:22; cf. 1:8; 19:15.

[21] Hos 12:6 [12:5 ET]; Amos 3:13; 4:13; 5:8, 14–16, 27; 9:5–6; Nah 3:5; Zech 10:3. See W. Edward Glenny, *Finding Meaning in the Text: Translation Technique and Theology in the Septuagint of Amos*, VTSup 126 (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 186–89.

conveys the omnipotence and universal sovereignty of God over his creation, underscoring "his actual control over all things."[22] The Almighty is "King of the nations" (Rev 15:3), who reigns in power (11:17; 19:6) and executes "true and just" judgments (16:7).

If God is παντοκράτωρ, then *ipso facto* the beast is not. John sees "a beast rising out of the sea" (Rev 13:1; cf. Dan 7:3–8). This beast is invested with the Dragon's own power and authority (Rev 13:2), and the whole earth marvels, "Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?" (13:4). This blasphemous praise of the beast apes the biblical acclaim, "Who is like you, O Yahweh, among the gods?" (Exod 15:11).[23] For a time, this beast exerts its diabolical authority against God's holy people (Rev 13:7; cf. Dan 7:21) and seduces earth's kings to assemble for battle "on the great day of God the Almighty" (Rev 16:14). In the end, the beast is hurled into the lake of fire (19:20), and those earth dwellers who oppose God Almighty and the Lamb will experience terror on "the great day of their wrath" (6:15–17). In contrast, the redeemed will triumphantly celebrate the Almighty's reign and gaze on his beauty in the new creation (19:6; 22:4).

4. The One Seated on the Throne

The Apocalypse's signature designation for God is "the one seated on the throne." The vision establishes that God's throne is "the centre of the universe"; all creation "finds its significance in orientation toward the throne" and its almighty occupant.[24] The throne is the dominant feature of John's heavenly vision in chapter 4. The seven Spirits and the sea of glass are *before* the throne (4:5–6), as is the golden altar (8:3). The four living creatures are *in the midst of* the throne and *around* it (4:6). A rainbow and twenty-four elders on their thrones are *around* the throne (4:3–4). Flashes of lightning, rumblings and peals of thunder issue *from* the throne (4:5). This imagery recalls Yahweh's awesome presence at Sinai, which prompts the people to tremble (Exod 19:16; 20:18). Such lightning, rumblings, and thunder recurs in Revelation after the seventh seal (8:5), the seventh trumpet (11:19), and the seventh bowl (16:18). According to 4:5, these judgments proceed from the Almighty's throne, which assures readers that the sovereign God will judge evil and vindicate his suffering people.[25]

Revelation 4 recalls the OT depictions of God on his heavenly throne surrounded by his heavenly attendants, particularly Ezekiel 1.[26] John sees "a door standing open in heaven" (Rev 4:1), similar to the open heavens in Ezekiel 1:1. John and Ezekiel each describe a rainbow (Rev 4:3; Ezek 1:28), flashes of lightning and fiery torches (Rev 4:5; Ezek 1:13; 1:27), and a crystal expanse (Rev 4:6; Ezek 1:22), which cumulatively stress the transcendent glory of God (Rev 4:11; Ezek 1:28). And Ezekiel 1 is clearly the primary Scriptural source for Revelation's description of the "four living creatures." Each creature has four faces (Ezek 1:6), four wings (1:6, 11), and eyes all around (1:18). The prophet later identifies these living creatures as "cherubim" (10:15), which are frequently associated with the presence of God throughout the OT and later Jewish writings. Revelation 4 fuses together Ezekiel's vision of the four

[22] Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 30.

[23] Richard Bauckham, *The Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 305.

[24] Laszlo Gallusz, *The Throne Motif in the Book of Revelation*, LNTS 487 (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2014), 331.

[25] Beale, *Revelation*, 326.

[26] Cf. 1 Kgs 22:19; Isa 6:1–4; Ezek 10:1; Dan 7:9.

living creatures with the seraphim in Isaiah, who have *six wings* (Isa 6:2) and call out, “Holy, holy, holy” (Isa 6:3; cf. 1 Enoch 39:12).

Additionally, G. K. Beale argues that John’s throne room vision follows the order and structure of Daniel 7.[27] Revelation 4 depicts the glorious Ancient of Days on his throne attended by angelic servants (cf. Dan 7:9–10). Revelation 5 continues to follow Daniel’s basic script of Daniel 7 with the opening of the heavenly scroll(s) (Rev 5:1–5; Dan 7:10) and a divine figure who approaches God’s throne and receives dominion over “all peoples, nations, and languages” (Rev 5:6–7, 9; Dan 7:13). Remarkably, Jesus the slain and conquering Lamb receives the same exclusive praise and accolades due to the one seated on the throne (Rev 5:11–13; 7:10) and then sits down on the very same throne (3:21; cf. 22:1, 3). Beale observes, “It is the picture of Christ in 3:21 presently sitting on His Father’s throne which leads into the vision of chaps. 4–5.”[28]

Revelation also presents rival thrones, of Satan and the beast (2:13; 13:2; 16:10). In fact, “The way the beast shares the throne of Satan is a demonic imitation of the way the Lamb shares the throne and authority of God.”[29] The Apocalypse thus presents a fundamental cosmic struggle over who is the true sovereign to which allegiance is due: God or the beast.

Revelation 20:11–12 portrays the dead standing before the great white throne to be judged according to their deeds. Unbelieving humanity will face the wrath of the one seated on the throne and the Lamb (6:16). Conversely, suffering faithful believers long for God to execute his righteous judgment (6:10) and offer them shelter, comfort, and an enduring place before the throne (7:15–17; 22:3–5).

In the culminating vision of the new creation, “God’s presence decisively shifts from heaven to earth.”[30] All rivals will be forever displaced, and the throne of God and the Lamb—the central reference point of heaven—will be the defining feature of the new creation, giving light and life to his people (22:3–5).

5. The Creator

Biblical writers consistently stress that the God of Israel created all things, which demonstrates his consummate power and lordship over the world and everything in it, including human beings. Creation theology “virtually dominates the Bible … and is a key theme throughout the Apocalypse.”[31]

The seminal throne-room vision in Revelation 4 emphasizes God as supreme Creator in multiple ways. The four living creatures bear the likenesses of the strongest wild and domestic animals (lion and ox), the swiftest bird (eagle), and the most dignified creature—man made in God’s image (4:7; cf. Ezek 1:10). “The four creatures show that in the proper order of things, all creation glorifies the Creator.”[32] Third, the twenty-four elders lay their golden crowns before the throne and extol the Almighty who

[27] G. K. Beale, *The Use of Daniel in Jewish Apocalyptic Literature and in the Revelation of St. John*, reprint ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010), 181–82.

[28] Beale, *Use of Daniel*, 180.

[29] Koester, *Revelation*, 570.

[30] J. Richard Middleton, *A New Heaven and a New Earth: Reclaiming Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 169.

[31] Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 241.

[32] Koester, *Revelation*, 369. This well-ordered heavenly worship scene serves as “a model for the orientation of the congregations in the seven churches,” according to David A. deSilva, *Seeing Things John’s Way: The Rhetoric of the Book of Revelation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 98.

"created all things" (Rev 4:10–11). The songs of the living creators and the elders make clear that all things owe their existence to the thrice holy Creator God, who alone is worthy to receive glory, honor, and power. This scene of heavenly praise contrasts sharply with the Roman emperors of the late first century, who were acclaimed as worthy benefactors and saviors of Rome and even addressed as "lord" and "god."[33]

The sovereign God who brought the world into existence is also responsible for its future.[34] God announced in Isaiah 65:17, "For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth," and John sees the fulfillment of this prophecy in Revelation 21:1: "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more." The sea symbolizes the forces of evil, chaos, and hostility towards God and his people, and these forces have no part of the new creation. The sea's removal may also relate to the prophetic hope of the new exodus for God's people.[35] The God who made the heaven, the earth, and the sea and everything in them (14:7) announces that he is *making all things new* (ἰδοὺ καινὰ ποιῶ πάντα, 21:5). This alludes to Isaiah 43:19 LXX, which depicts the hope of a new-exodus deliverance in terms of new creation: "*Look, I am doing new things* [ἰδοὺ ποιῶ καινά] that will now spring forth, and you will know them, and I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the dry land" (NETS). While Revelation does not spell out how the new heaven and earth appear and the former things pass away, the syntax of 21:5 suggests that God does not simply make *new things* to replace the old but makes all things *to be new.*

6. Conclusion

Revelation draws repeatedly on God's self-disclosure throughout the Scriptures and emphatically presents the centrality and supremacy of the true God who alone is worthy of worship.

First, Revelation 4 presents God as the supreme sovereign who created all things and rules over his creation. The four living creatures and twenty-four elders model the intended vocation of all creatures: unceasing worship of the all-powerful, holy God who lives for ever and ever. Revelation 5 moves beyond the Old Testament and Jewish theology of chapter 4 to articulate a profound Jewish *Christian* theological vision of Jesus the Lamb, who is worthy to open the sealed scroll and is worshipped together with one God.[36]

Second, the Maker of heaven and earth is also the God of the exodus. He is the "I am" (Exod 3:14), who sends plagues on Egypt, dries up the sea, and rescues his people. Revelation presents the fulfilment of the prophetic hope of a new exodus, as God redeems his people from bondage and makes them a kingdom and priests through Jesus, the slain and conquering Lamb (Rev 5:9–10; cf. Exod 19:4–6). In response, God's redeemed people "sing the song of Moses … and the song of the Lamb" (Rev 15:3; cf. Exod 15:1), bringing together the two great saving events in redemptive history: the exodus from Egypt and the cross of Christ.

[33] For examples, see Koester, *Revelation*, 365–66.

[34] "God as Creator becomes the basis of eschatological hope," writes J. Scott Duvall, *A Theology of Revelation*, BTNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2025), 276.

[35] David Mathewson, *A New Heaven and a New Earth: The Meaning and Function of the Old Testament in Revelation 21.1–22.5*, JSNTSup 238 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2003), 243–58. Cf. Isa 51:9–11.

[36] Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation*, 32, 60. Cf. Brandon D. Smith, *The Trinity in the Book of Revelation: Seeing Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in John's Apocalypse*, Studies in Christian Doctrine and Scripture (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2022), 112–13.

Third, the everlasting God is “the Alpha and the Omega,” responsible for the first creation and the new creation, the beginning and end of all things. Revelation 21:1 announces the glorious redemption and transformation of the cosmos, where the present order will give way to “the new heavens and the new earth” prophesied in Isaiah 65:17 and 66:22. The prophets wrote that God would dwell among his people for ever in the temple (Ezek 37:27; 43:4), and the Apocalypse shows this hope fulfilled and exceeded as God Almighty and the Lamb will *be* the temple of the New Jerusalem, illumining the new creation with their glorious, enduring presence (Rev 21:22–23).

This God is the very center of all reality. The Almighty has defeated all rivals in heaven (12:7–8), where angelic beings worship and serve him day and night (4:6–11) and his slain martyrs enjoy rest in his presence as they await the denouement of his dominion (6:10–11). What is true in heaven now will be true on earth as well. God will reassert himself as “King of the nations” and will execute judgments on the beast and all rival sovereigns who usurp his praise and oppress his people (15:3; 16:5–7). Therefore, readers must heed the angel’s repeated exhortation to John: “Worship God” (19:10; 22:9).

Revelation’s consummate vision of God should profoundly shape the worldview and lifestyle of its readers. First, the Apocalypse *clarifies* for readers that the Creator God—not Caesar—has ultimate authority and thus deserves ultimate allegiance. Second, John’s prophecy *challenges* readers to resist and repent of spiritual complacency, worldly compromise, and false teaching, while holding fast to the sure promises of God. Third, Revelation *comforts* afflicted believers with assurances that the supreme Judge will establish true justice and secure a glorious future for all who conquer “by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony” (12:11; cf. 6:9–11).

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Sanctification Revisited

— *David G. Peterson* —

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It was my privilege to contribute the first volume in the New Studies in Biblical Theology series, edited by Don Carson.[1] I first met Don in Sydney, when he came to give a series of lectures at Moore College in 1985. Subsequently, he invited me to participate in two conferences at Tyndale House Cambridge, organised on behalf of the World Evangelical Alliance Theological Commission. His enthusiasm for the discipline of biblical theology and his intention to promote publications in this field encouraged me to send him my work on sanctification. His comments and suggestions in preparation for publication were incisive and most helpful, as anyone who knows Don might expect!

1. The Challenge of Biblical Theology

My undergraduate development was much influenced by the passion of my teachers Donald Robinson and Graeme Goldsworthy for biblical theology. My postgraduate research on Hebrews was then supervised by Professor F. F. Bruce, who was well known for interpreting the New Testament in the light of the Old.[2] In my undergraduate years, I was personally and theologically troubled by the inadequacy of popular approaches to the topic of holiness and sanctification. When I began studying Hebrews in depth, I was struck by the way the author spoke so definitively about the accomplishment of our sanctification 'through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all' (10:10 ESV; compare 13:12). I had previously understood that sanctification is a process of moral and spiritual transformation following justification by faith, but I soon discovered that New Testament writers were mostly using the terminology in a different way.

A biblical-theological approach to the interpretation of a text requires that it be carefully examined in its immediate context, related to the use of similar terms and concepts in other biblical contexts, and ultimately understood in terms of the progressive revelation of God's purpose for humanity from creation to new creation.[3] So, the text in Hebrews 10:10 caused me to reflect on why and how the author first applies Psalm 40:6–8 (39:7–9 LXX) to the sacrifice of Christ (Heb 10:5–9) and then argues that this inaugurated a new-covenant relationship with his people (10:11–18; cf. 10:29). Jesus sanctifies the new people of God by dying for them and bringing them to faith in himself as brothers and sisters (2:11–13). God's ultimate purpose is to bring them to glory with his Son (2:20). These biblical arguments

[1] *Possessed by God: A New Testament Theology of Sanctification and Holiness*, NSBT 1 (Leicester: Apollos, 1995). This book was based on a series of public lectures I gave at Moore College in August 1994.

[2] My dissertation was published as *Hebrews and Perfection: An Examination of the Concept of Perfection in the Epistle to the Hebrews*, SNTSMS 47 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

[3] See B. S. Rosner, 'Biblical Theology,' in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2000), 3–11.

led me to examine in some detail how the language of sanctification was used in the Old Testament and applied in the New Testament to Christ and the gospel.

I discovered that Jesus had spoken in this way about his high-priestly ministry and its consequences when he described himself as the one 'whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world' (John 10:36; cf. Exodus 29). The Greek verb used here and elsewhere (ἁγιάζω) can also be rendered 'sanctify', 'set apart', or 'make holy'. Jesus goes on to talk about his salvific work and its consequences in terms of consecrating himself in death to do the Father's will, so that his disciples may be 'sanctified (or 'consecrated') in truth' (John 17:19). In line with this perspective, the apostle Paul addresses the church of God in Corinth as 'those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours' (1 Cor 1:2). Paul goes on to claim that God has made his Son to be 'our wisdom and our righteousness and sanctification and redemption' (1:30)[4] and then describes them as those who were washed, sanctified, and justified 'in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God' (6:11).

Neither of these last two texts implies a sequence of divine activity. They describe different aspects of the saving work of Jesus and the regenerative work of the Spirit, which enable faith in Christ through the gospel of grace (cf. Acts 20:32; 26:18; 2 Thes 2:13–14; 1 Pet 1:2). They do not focus on a process of individual transformation following conversion or imply that sanctification follows justification. They address our status and position before God collectively as 'the saints' (ἅγιοι, 'holy ones'), who are called to *be* holy (1 Cor 1:2; 1 Thes 4:1–8; Heb 12:12–17; 1 Pet 1:13–16, 22). Sanctification by faith was a new idea for me, but it stimulated new patterns of understanding. Sanctification in terms of being set apart to belong to God and his people is a gift of his grace, together with the other blessings promised in the gospel. God takes ownership of us as his Spirit enables us to trust in his Son. Faith in Christ is what essentially differentiates us from others and is manifested in works that demonstrate God's holy will and character.[5]

Put differently, the assurance that we are relationally God's holy people, because of his gracious initiative and provision for us in Christ, is the motivation and empowerment for holy living. Complete sanctification of body, soul, and spirit will be accomplished by God 'at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ' (1 Thess 5:23–24; cf. Eph 5:25–27; 2 Thess 2:14). This outcome is elsewhere referred to as glorification (Rom 8: 17, 29–30; cf. 1 Cor 15:42–44; 2 Cor 3:18; Phil 3:20–21). The same expectation of ultimate transformation into the likeness of Christ causes the apostle John to speak about living pure lives in the present (1 John 3:2–3).

New Testament teaching about sanctification is a development of Old Testament teaching about God's saving intentions for Israel as his 'treasured possession among all peoples' (Exod 19:4–6). They were set apart from the nations and established in the land he promised them, to belong to God and be his holy people (Lev 19:2). As a holy nation, they were to demonstrate what it meant to live under the direct rule of God, with his sanctifying presence in their midst (Exod 29: 43–46; Deut 7–15). As 'a kingdom of priests', they were to serve the Lord exclusively and thus be a people through whom his character and will might be displayed to the nations (Deut 16–26). In this way, God's original promise to

[4] The noun ἁγιασμός ('sanctification') in 1 Cor 1:30 can also be translated 'holiness'. I discuss the way this term should be understood in different NT contexts in *Possessed by God*, 139–42.

[5] Don J. Payne, in *Already Sanctified: A Theology of the Christian Life in Light of God's Completed Work* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020), 13–38, reviews various positions that have been taken on the relationship between faith and sanctification since the Reformation. See also his conclusions about sanctification in the OT (pp. 41–56).

bring blessing to 'all peoples on earth' would be enacted (Gen 12:3).[6] These covenantal and corporate perspectives are reflected in New Testament teaching about the way Jesus has sanctified a people for himself to fulfil God's eschatological saving plan for the nations.

2. Sanctification Expressed

As my thinking developed, I was pleased to discover a series of articles on sanctification by John Murray[7] and started to explore the history and significance of different approaches to this topic. Systematic theology is another way of ordering and relating the teaching of Scripture, but when its exponents move in different directions and come to different conclusions, the discipline of biblical theology must surely be foundational in evaluating those differences. Murray's articles were a significant contribution to that debate and to my thinking.[8]

Murray observes that in the New Testament the most characteristic terms for sanctification are used, 'not of a process, but of a once-for-all definitive act.'[9] He begins to substantiate this claim theologically by reflecting on Romans 6:1–7:6 and discerning the need for 'a once-for-all definitive and irreversible breach with the realm in which sin reigns in and unto death.'[10] He focuses on the theme of dying and rising with Christ, which brings together his historic achievement, our incorporation into the benefits through baptism into Christ, and the subsequent moral imperative. Murray argues that 'the saving action of each person of the Godhead at the inception of the process of salvation insures the decisive character of the change thereby effected.'[11] Most significantly, the apostle 'constantly interweaves the most explicit references to the death and resurrection of Christ as once-for-all historic events with the teaching respecting actual, experiential death to sin on the part of the believer.'[12] Stimulated by Murray's argument, but wishing to explore the context more fully, I decided to devote chapter five of my book to an exposition of Romans 6–8. I concluded that 'holiness' or 'sanctification' in Romans 6:19, 22 (ἁγιασμός) is presented as the God-given alternative to the *condition* of uncleanness and lawlessness from which we were rescued by God in Christ. 'The ethical demand of sanctification arises out of the saving activity by which God consecrates us to himself as a distinct and dedicated people.'[13]

Elsewhere, Paul prayed that God might establish the hearts of the Thessalonians 'blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints' (1 Thess 3:13). He also exhorted them to express their sanctification in the present by abstaining from sexual immorality and learning to control their own bodies 'in holiness and honour' (4:3–4). To the Corinthians he said,

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[6] Marny Köstenberger, in *Sanctification as Set Apart and Growing in Christ*, SSBT (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2023), 13–25, more broadly relates the Bible's teaching about the sanctification of Israel to God's intended restoration of humanity as the image of God.

[7] John Murray, *Collected Writings*, 4 vols. (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1977), 2:277–317.

[8] See the brief summaries of different views provided in Stanley N. Gundry, ed., *Five Views on Sanctification*, Counterpoints (Grand Rapids: Academie, 1987) and Donald L. Alexander, ed., *Christian Spirituality: Five Views*, Spectrum (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1988).

[9] Murray, *Collected Writings*, 2:277. With reference to 1 Cor 1:2; 5:11, Murray argues that Paul 'co-ordinated their sanctification with effectual calling, with their identity as saints, with regeneration, and with justification.'

[10] Murray, *Collected Writings*, 2:279, noting also the parallel arguments in 1 Pet 2:24; 4:1, 2, and 1 John.

[11] Murray, *Collected Writings*, 2:285.

[12] Murray, *Collected Writings*, 2:291. Murray argues that 'it is necessary to stress both aspects, the past historical and the experiential in their distinctness, on the one hand, and in their inter-dependence, on the other.'

[13] Peterson, *Possessed by God*, 103.

'Let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God' (2 Cor 7:1). These passages suggest the need to work out the implications of our holy status and calling in every aspect of our lives. Commenting on 1 Corinthians 6:11, John Calvin put it this way:

> that having been once *justified*, they must not draw down upon themselves a new condemnation—that having been *sanctified*, they must not pollute themselves anew—that, having been *washed*, they must not disgrace themselves with new defilements, but, on the contrary, aim at purity, persevere in true holiness, and abominate their former pollutions.[14]

Hebrews 12:3–11 considers the way God disciplines the ones he loves in the struggles of life, 'that we may share his holiness.' An immediate benefit is 'the peaceful fruit of righteousness,' but the author also goes on to say, 'Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord' (12:14). Once again, the emphasis here is on the need to realize and express our holy status and calling, until by God's grace we stand before him transformed. I examine these and other passages in chapter four of my book and conclude that the focus is not on self-improvement or a linear progress in holiness. The ongoing battle with sin and the flesh necessitates decisive action, as we draw on all the resources provided by God to enable us to 'run with endurance the race set before us' (Heb 12:1–3; cf. Phil 3:12–21).

3. Progressive Sanctification

Sanctification is commonly understood in evangelical circles as a process of moral renewal and transformation after conversion. For example, Bruce Milne acknowledges that the terminology refers to being 'set apart' or 'consecrated' to be God's own possession, but he argues that it has a second meaning in Scripture, 'which now prevails in theological usage: the attainment of intrinsic holiness of character.'[15] Milne goes on to say:

> Scripture's lack of a single term to refer to the growth in holiness of God's people, and its use of a term rooted in the once-for-all status we receive in faith-union with Christ, underline the impossibility of separating the crisis of renewal from subsequent moral transformation. In theological terms, justification (a once-for-all act affording the Christian righteous standing before God) cannot be separated from sanctification (the life-long process of moral transformation into more of Christ's image).[16]

Unfortunately, this argument does not give adequate weight to the co-ordinate use of justification, sanctification, and redemption terminology in Pauline texts about salvation, conversion, and calling (1 Cor 1:30; 6:11). Furthermore, it fails to show how the emphasis on definitive or positional sanctification in the New Testament functions to encourage holy living and relates to gospel eschatology.[17] Put

[14] John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, trans. John Pringle, reprint ed., Calvin's Commentaries (Bellingham, WA: Logos, 2010), 211.

[15] Bruce Milne, *Know the Truth: A Handbook of Christian Belief*, 3rd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 263–64.

[16] Milne, *Know the Truth*, 264.

[17] Compare the argument of Payne, *Already Sanctified*, 129–34.

differently, it fails to explain how the progress of sanctification should emerge from understanding and experiencing the blessing of positional sanctification.

Murray proposes a progressive view of sanctification with both negative and positive dimensions: 'both mortification and sanctification.'[18] However, the emphasis in Romans 6 is on a continuing pattern of response to Christ in the gospel, rather than a step-by-step appropriation of holiness. 2 Corinthians 3:18 most clearly defines the goal of sanctification, though this is obviously a divine work and not a promise of measurable daily progress. Transformation into the image of Christ is our God-given hope, and the basic consideration for believers is that 'we must recognize increasingly the implications of union and communion with Christ, and of communication from him.'[19] Although sanctification is only one aspect of the process, for Murray it is foundational: 'it must, in the nature of the case, be patterned after the image, conformity to which is the final end.'[20] Murray rightly contends that it would be 'a deflection from biblical patterns of language and conception to think of sanctification exclusively in terms of a progressive work.'[21]

4. Conclusion

Biblical teaching about sanctification first emerges in contexts concerning the salvation of Israel and God's commissioning of his people to reflect his holiness in every aspect of their lives. Israel is blessed with the giving of God's law to facilitate this and enable them to be a source of blessing to 'all the families of the earth' (Gen 12:3; cf. Exod 19:56; Deut 7:6–11). The fulfilment of this pattern of salvation and blessing for people from every nation is achieved by the Lord Jesus Christ in his death, resurrection-ascension, and pouring out of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit enables faith in God's Son and appropriation of all the benefits offered in the gospel: cleansing from sin, justification, sanctification, and redemption (1 Cor 1:30; 6:11; Eph 5:25–27; 2 Thess 2:13–14; Heb 2:11; 9:11–14; 10:10, 29; 13:12; 1 Pet 1:2). The challenge of this new status in Christ is to manifest God's holy will and character in everyday life and relationships by the Spirit's enabling (1 Cor 1:2; 2 Cor 7:1; 1 Thess 4:1–8; Heb 12:14; 1 Pet 2:13–21). Transformation, renewal, and growth to maturity in Christ arise from God's sanctifying initiative and advance his plan to restore humanity in his image. Glorification in Christ, when we finally stand before him, is the ultimate aim of this divine engagement with us (Rom 8:17, 29–30; 2 Cor 3:18; Col 3:1–4; 1 John 3:2–3).[22] Just as justification, sanctification, and redemption are different ways of explaining how the saving work of the Lord Jesus impacts our lives in the first place, transformation, renewal, and growth to maturity are co-ordinate ways of describing the continuation and completion of God's saving work. If sanctification is simply identified with moral and spiritual development after conversion, the

[18] Murray, *Collected Writings*, 2:295; cf. Rom 6:11–14; 8:13; Col 3:1–15. It is odd that Murray uses the word 'sanctification' a second time with reference only to the positive side of the process. Other terms such as 'vivification' and 'aspiration' could be substituted.

[19] Murray, *Collected Writings*, 2:304. The law of God is 'the transcript of God's perfection' (p. 307), but the supreme revelation of what God is and of his will for us is the Lord Jesus Christ himself (p. 308).

[20] Murray, *Collected Writings*, 2:310. Payne puts it more strongly: 'Sanctification forms the basis and framework for obedient conformity to the image of Christ' (p. 69). Furthermore, 'Sanctification presents us with everything we need to pursue and live out the implications of holiness—including our responsibility to do so' (p. 70).

[21] Murray, *Collected Writings*, 2:278.

[22] I explore this in the sixth chapter of *Possessed by God* and also in David G. Peterson, *Transformed by God: New Covenant Life and Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012).

salvific foundation of this process is obscured.[23] Each of the terms that the Bible uses in this connection should be appreciated for the contribution it makes to our understanding of God's total plan.

[23] Payne, in *Already Sanctified*, 9, rightly concludes that 'transformation depends on sanctification but should not be confused with it.'

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Toward a New Testament Theology of Mission

— Andreas J. Köstenberger —

Andreas Köstenberger is co-founder of Biblical Foundations™ and theologian in residence and director of the equipping center at Fellowship Raleigh in Raleigh, North Carolina. He is the author of Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Missions *and co-author of* Father, Son and Spirit: The Trinity in John's Gospel *in the NSBT series.*

I have many fond memories of my time at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School studying under D. A. Carson in the early 1990s. I cannot do justice here to the many ways in which I have learned from you, Don, how to be a godly scholar, clear writer, and minister of the gospel. Thank you for your life lived for the gospel and the church and for your investment in the life of this fledgling Austrian scholar. I would not be who I am today without you!

I wrote my doctoral dissertation on the mission theme in John's Gospel under Don Carson's tutelage. A revised version was published later by Eerdmans.[1] In subsequent years, I continued to write on the mission theme. The following survey is largely based on the New Testament portion of my book, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth*.[2]

Before I delve into a survey of a New Testament theology of mission, let me say a few words about biblical theology in general. Biblical theology is as old as the Bible, as we find that many of the biblical writers in both Testaments refer to earlier texts and motifs in Scripture or provide the foundation for later texts. Looking backward, the psalmists frequently refer to God's mighty acts in Israel's history such as the exodus. Looking forward, Isaiah envisions a new exodus at the coming of the Messiah, and Jeremiah prophesies the establishment of a new covenant. So, we see that the biblical writers already practiced biblical theology, understood as the study of the interconnectedness of biblical texts. This involves well-known phenomena such as prophecy, typology, messianic fulfillment, and others.

Nevertheless, not everyone agrees what biblical theology is and how it should be conducted. For my part, I define biblical theology simply as *the theology of the Bible itself*, that is, *the theology of the biblical writers*. Through careful listening to Scripture, we determine what it is that the biblical writers believed and what they attempted to communicate about God, the Lord Jesus, the Holy Spirit, the church and its mission, and so forth.

Essentially, therefore, my method in biblical theology is *inductive*, drawing out from Scripture what the biblical writers have put there. I do not start out with a theological system of my own (though presuppositionless exegesis is admittedly impossible) that I then seek to prove deductively by way of

[1] Andreas J. Köstenberger, *The Missions of Jesus and the Disciples according to the Fourth Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

[2] Andreas J. Köstenberger with T. Desmond Alexander, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Missions*, NSBT 53 (London: Apollos, 2021).

proof-texting—that would be systematic theology—but I construct a biblical theology from the ground level up from the biblical texts themselves.[3] So, then, what does the New Testament say about mission?

1. A New Testament Theology of Mission

I. Howard Marshall has rightly characterized the New Testament writings as "the documents of a mission."[4] According to Marshall, "New Testament theology is essentially missionary theology."[5] As Marshall observes, "A recognition of this missionary character of the documents will help us to see them in true perspective and to interpret them in the light of their intention."[6] Due to space constraints, I will limit myself here to a discussion of Matthew, Luke-Acts, Paul, and John, which encapsulate the major contours of the New Testament's mission theology.

1.1. Matthew

Matthew's Gospel, while showing Jesus's mission as focused on Israel, ends with the Great Commission, the risen Christ's command to his followers to disciple the nations. In so doing, Matthew grounds the missions of Jesus and his disciples explicitly in Old Testament precursors. According to Matthew, Jesus the Messiah fulfilled Israel's destiny as the representative Son of God, with the result that God's blessings to the nations, promised to Abraham (Gen 12:3), come to fruition through Jesus in the mission of his followers.

Like the other evangelists, Matthew portrays Jesus's mission as proceeding along salvation-historical lines: first to the Jews, then to the Gentiles. While, prior to the resurrection, Jesus's followers are instructed to limit their mission to Israel (10:5–6; 15:24), the Great Commission extends their summons to all the nations. Occasionally in Matthew, Jesus does minister to Gentiles, but never at his own initiative (cf., e.g., 8:5–13; 15:24–27). Toward the end of his Gospel, Matthew refers to the future proclamation of the "gospel of the kingdom" as a witness to all the nations (24:14; cf. 26:13; Mark 13:10).

Matthew's account, like the other Gospels, focuses on Jesus's mission, which includes the preparation of his followers for ministry. Yet while Matthew refers to the fact that "some doubted" when seeing the risen Christ (28:17), he doesn't end on a note of doubt; rather, he shows Jesus on a Galilean mountain, surveying the territory like a conquering general, assuring his followers of his unlimited authority in heaven and on earth and commanding them to spread the victorious, glorious news of the gospel to all the nations. Matthew thus ends on a note of triumph and joyous expectation: the community of Jesus, with its risen Lord at its side (28:20: "I am with you always"), is sent on a worldwide mission.

1.2. Luke-Acts

Luke, like Matthew and Mark, tells the story of Jesus and his salvation; the book of Acts then traces the movement of that salvation to the Gentiles. In comparison with Matthew and Mark, Luke portrays

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[3] For a fuller treatment of the definition of and method in biblical theology, see Andreas J. Köstenberger and Gregory Goswell, *Biblical Theology: A Thematic, Canonical, and Ethical Approach* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2023), ch. 1.

[4] I. Howard Marshall, *New Testament Theology: Many Witnesses, One Gospel* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 34.

[5] Marshall, *New Testament Theology*, 34.

[6] Marshall, *New Testament Theology*, 35.

Jesus's mission in more overtly universal terms, that is, as ultimately directed also toward the Gentiles. But like his Synoptic counterparts, Luke maintains the historical fact that Jesus didn't actively reach out to Gentiles during his earthly ministry. Unlike the other Synoptic writers, however, Luke composes a second volume, and there makes clear that the boundaries still in place between Jews and Gentiles prior to Jesus's crucifixion and resurrection are removed after the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost.

Luke's second volume presents what "Jesus continued to do and teach" (Acts 1:1) by his Spirit through the early church led by the apostles. This establishes the subtle but vital point that Jesus, even after his ascension, has not disappeared from the scene; rather, from his exalted position at the Father's right hand, he continues to direct and oversee the divine mission. Luke's account traces the progress of gospel proclamation from Jerusalem—the center from which the word of the Lord goes forth—to Judea and Samaria, and even "to the ends of the earth" (1:8). In a major paradigm shift from a centripetal movement (men and women coming to Israel) to a centrifugal one (God's people going out to others), Jesus's followers are to serve as witnesses to Israel and subsequently Paul as a witness to the Gentiles.

Events with major significance for the mission recorded in the book of Acts include Pentecost and the universal outpouring of the Spirit (ch. 2), Stephen's martyrdom (ch. 7), Paul's conversion and commission (9:1–31; repeated in chs. 22 and 26), the gospel's spread to Cornelius and the Gentiles (10:1–11:18), Paul's first missionary journey (13:1–14:28), the Jerusalem Council (15:1–35), and Paul's second and third missionary journeys and testimony before Roman rulers (15:36–20:38).

The Jerusalem Council has been dubbed the most important chapter in all of Acts since it describes a decisive breakthrough in Luke's story. The threat to the expansion of the gospel to the Gentiles is turned aside so that the Christian mission now extends to Western Asia and Europe. Nothing can hinder the irresistible progress of the gospel, and God's people, through his Spirit, overcome all obstacles. Paul and Barnabas continue the mission of the Servant, for they are now the "light for the Gentiles" (13:47, quoting Isa 49:6, a passage applied to Jesus in Luke 2:32). And while proclamation still begins with the Jews (3:26; 13:46; 18:5; 28:25–28), no distinction is now made between them and Gentiles concerning salvation and reception into God's people: faith in Jesus is all that is required (e.g. 16:31). The conclusion of Luke's second volume describes an open-ended mission to Jews and Gentiles (28:17–31). This reminds readers of an unfinished task and the urgency of being identified with the ongoing advance of the gospel of salvation in the Lord Jesus Christ. Truly, we now live in Acts chapter 29.

1.3. Paul

In the early church's mission to the Gentiles, Paul was the indisputable leader. From the time of his conversion and calling on the road to Damascus, the proclamation of the gospel became the consuming passion of Paul's whole life (Acts 9). His encounter with the risen Christ led to a paradigm shift in his thinking: rather than viewing Jesus as accursed and God-forsaken, he came to understand that Jesus was at the heart of God's saving purposes as Israel's Messiah, Son of God, and Lord of all. As the Crucified and Exalted One, Jesus bore the curse "for us" and thus fulfilled the law's God-intended purpose. It had always been God's plan that "the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Jesus Christ" (Gal 3:13–14).

The apostle understood his missionary activity to Gentiles within the context of an Old Testament expectation in which the nations would in the last days partake of God's blessings to Israel. Paul knew that he was entrusted with God's "mystery," the end-time revelation that now Jews and Gentiles alike were gathered into one body, the church (Rom 16:25–26; Eph 2:1–3:13; Col 1:25–27). Yet while Paul

was called and commissioned to be the apostle to the Gentiles (Rom 11:13; cf. 1:5), he ardently prayed for the salvation of his own people Israel. Although there was a temporary and partial hardening that led to the extension of the blessings of salvation to the Gentiles, God intends to bring his saving grace to ethnic Israel as well (Rom 9–11, esp. 11:33–36).

The first primary task included within the scope of Paul's missionary commission was evangelism. Paul's ambition was to go where the gospel had not yet been proclaimed and to proclaim the gospel there as a herald of good news (Rom 15:20–21; cf. Isa 52:15; 66:18–20). His strategy focused on preaching and evangelizing Jews as well as Gentile worshipers and God-fearers in local synagogues. As the apostle proclaimed the gospel, God converted both men and women. But Paul also founded churches as part of his missionary task. Paul's aim was to establish Christian congregations in strategic and mostly urban centers from where the gospel could spread further to the surrounding regions. Conversion to Christ meant incorporation into him and thus membership within a Christian community. Through his practice of residential missions and his nurture of churches by teaching and admonition, Paul sought to bring men and women to full maturity in Christ (Col 1:28–29).

Paul's writings wrestle with Jewish unbelief, the relationship between Jews and Gentiles in the church, the nature of the gospel in relation to the law, and the implications of Christ's death and resurrection for the life of the believer. The mission motif is not equally prominent in all of Paul's letters. In certain instances, Paul had to focus primarily on internal struggles or believers' lack of maturity (e.g. Galatians, 1–2 Corinthians). In other instances, Paul involved his recipients more directly in mission work, such as in the case of the Philippians, whom he calls "partners" in ministry (Phil 1:5, 27; 2:16; 4:10–19). In relation to the spiritual warfare in which all Christians are engaged, he urged his readers to stand firm against the onslaughts of the evil one and his forces, which involves resisting temptation (Eph 4:27) and announcing the gospel of peace in the power of the Spirit (Eph 6:10–20, esp. vv. 15, 17). In his letters to Timothy and Titus, finally, Paul emphasized that God is the Savior of all (1 Tim 2:3–4; 4:10; Titus 2:10–11; 3:4). He also provided the post-apostolic church with instructions regarding the organization of the church and qualifications for church leaders.

1.4. John

Of all the Gospels, John provides the most conscious theological reflection regarding the relationship between the missions of Jesus and the disciples. John's trinitarian mission theology is Christ-centered, focusing on Jesus, who, as the sent Son, fulfills his redemptive mission in complete dependence on his sender, God the Father (e.g. 4:34). While the first half of John's Gospel depicts Jesus's rejection by Israel (1:11), the second half narrates Jesus's preparation of his new messianic community that will continue his mission following the crucifixion and resurrection (chs. 13–17). In anticipation of his exaltation to the Father, Jesus promises to answer prayer offered in his name (14:13–14) and promises to send "another helper," the Holy Spirit (14:16). He calls on his followers to glorify him by "going" and bearing fruit (15:16) as they testify to him in the power of the Spirit (15:26–27) as a loving, unified community (13:34–35; 15:12, 17; 17:20–26).

In the commissioning narrative, the crucified and risen Lord turns sender. He breathes the Holy Spirit on the disciples and charges them to proclaim forgiveness of sins in his name (20:21–23). In keeping with the wording of Jesus's commission, "As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you" (20:21), his own relationship with the Father serves as the paradigm for the disciples' relationship with Jesus in pursuit of their mission. The Gospel's declared purpose is that the readers might believe in Jesus

(20:30–31). Jesus's followers are to serve as his representatives, proclaiming him as the one through whom those who believe can receive forgiveness and eternal life. John also offers a profound reflection on the way in which Jesus's followers remain associated with him after his exaltation. Through the Spirit, they are vitally connected with Jesus in an organic relationship that enables them to bear fruit (ch. 15) and to serve as Spirit-filled witnesses (15:26–27).

2. Conclusion

In this era between the "already" and the "not yet," we are a body of pilgrims and resident aliens. We suffer and are persecuted for the sake of Christ's name, but amid this we are to follow his example, demonstrating patience and a gentle spirit and showing that, ultimately, we do not belong to the world. If the gospel is to be proclaimed persuasively and with God's saving power, it must be preserved pure. And we should adorn that gospel with our godly lifestyle and proper, God-honoring relationships.

Continuing the mission of Jesus in our world today also involves the nurture and pastoral care of men and women by feeding them with the word of God so that those who have come into a saving, living relationship with Christ will be brought to maturity in him and will be able to stand before their Lord on the final day. As we await our Lord's certain and soon return, let us aspire to live godly lives and engage in mission to a lost world that has no other hope apart from Jesus. He is "the way, and the truth, and the life," and no one can come to the Father except through him (John 14:6).

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— OLD TESTAMENT —

James M. Hamilton Jr. and Matthew Damico. *Reading the Psalms as Scripture*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2024. 142 pp. £16.99/$19.99.

I am writing this review in Peru, a land of incredible variety. It stretches from the coastal region touching the Pacific and its plentiful sea life, through the desert region with its barrenness, into the mountainous areas terminating in high altitude with the snow-covered Andes, and finally breaching the Amazon jungle and all the exotic features of that climate. Yet Peru is one land. So too the Psalms is a book of incredible variety—genres, authors, moods, length, vocabulary, and so on. But it is one book. Hamilton and Damico demonstrate both the variety and unity of the Psalms admirably in *Reading the Psalms as Scripture*.

James M. Hamilton Jr. is the professor of biblical theology at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and senior pastor of Kenwood Baptist Church, Louisville. He has published widely on the Psalms as well as many other aspects of biblical studies and biblical theology. Matthew Damico is the pastor of worship and operations at Kenwood Baptist Church, Louisville, and the director of Kenwood music. He is a graduate of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, and this is his first book. An interview with Lexham Press implies that the material is largely Hamilton's, with Damico being the catalyst for writing up the material as a book and presumably pulling material together—perhaps he was more intimately involved in creating content for chapter 9, 'Singing the Psalms as Christians'. Together, they have produced a profitable volume for the church.

The book possesses a brief introduction orientating readers to the Psalter and a summary conclusion proffering seven theses for reading the Psalms, which distils the argument of the book into four pages. Between these book ends are nine stand-alone chapters entitled 'Reading the Psalms as a Book', 'Reading the Psalms with their Superscriptions', 'Reading the Psalms as Individual Compositions', 'Reading the Psalms in the Psalter', 'Reading the Psalms in Light of Earlier Scripture', 'Reading the Psalms and Messianic Typology', 'Reading the Psalms as Interpreted by Later Old Testament Authors', 'Reading the Psalms as Interpreted by New Testament Authors', and 'Singing the Psalms as Christians'. The chapter titles clearly and effectively map the content of the book. While the chapters are stand alone, they do interact and build upon one another. I should also note here that the chapter on reading the Psalms as individual compositions and its engagement with Hebrew poetry remedies a weakness I highlighted in my *Themelios* review of Hamilton's Psalms commentary (*Themelios* 47 (2022): 588–89, https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/themelios/review/psalms-hamilton-ebtc/).

There are at least three reasons this book will benefit its readers. First, the authors persistently resist the temptation to engage the secondary literature on the Psalter. Rather, they rigorously and relentlessly return to the text of Scripture—encouraging their readers to open their Bible alongside reading the book. The authors are not, however, ignorant of the secondary literature. Second, therefore, this book

is probably the first presentation of the academic work on the canonical shape of the Psalter conducted over the past forty years available in a popular-level, accessible volume. Others have come close, such as O Palmer Robertson's *The Flow of the Psalms: Discovering Their Structure and Theology* (Philipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2015) or perhaps my own 'Reading the Psalter as a Book' (*Themelios* 49 [2024]: 607–17). Its accessibility means the church will now benefit from the academy—Hamilton and Damico serving as trustworthy guides. Third, the final chapter on singing the Psalms is a great argument for the recovery of singing psalms in our churches today. While worship wars is not a field into which I wish to stray in this review, no faithful Christian could be disappointed by singing more Scripture. Hamilton and Damico assert, "God intends his people to sing, and to sing psalms. In most evangelical circles, we are more likely to find that churches ignore the psalms…. We have bankrupted our own tradition and are needlessly cutting ourselves off from manifold benefits" (pp. 118–19).

One potential disadvantage of this work is its brevity and accessibility. For those who are not convinced of the approach—such as the canonical shape of the Psalter; or a messianic, typological reading of the psalms; or the particular cross-references highlighted with earlier and later Old Testament portions and the New Testament—there is not enough discussion or presentation of evidence to convince. If one desires this engagement, one needs to follow the sparse footnotes or look to Hamilton's commentary and articles on the Psalms. Of course, such discussions are not Hamilton and Damico's purpose in the book, which may make this an unfair criticism. But when introducing new concepts to a popular audience, some consideration for these things must be taken into account, given that new proposals are often met with some scepticism. Sceptics are unlikely to be convinced by this volume alone.

Notwithstanding this potential weakness, I plan to use this volume in two ways. First, I think it would prove a helpful book to read in a church book group or home group/small group context. While four or five reflective questions at the end of each chapter would greatly enhance its usefulness in this setting, it remains a provocative conversation starter that points readers to the biblical text. Second, I intend to use this volume (or parts of it) as seminar reading for an introductory undergraduate class on the Psalms. Its accessible level will ensure all students grasp what has been taught, and those who have been diligent in engaging the lecture material appropriately will be provoked by the content to wrestle with the Psalter on these matters.

I have mixed emotions concerning this volume. On the one hand, I am delighted that material which overlaps with my doctoral work is now available in a more popular form. On the other hand, I am disappointed because this is the book I wanted to write on the Psalms—but alas, it has been written! *Reading the Psalms as Scripture* is a gem of a book that brings the best of recent scholarship on the Psalms into a short accessible format for every Christian.

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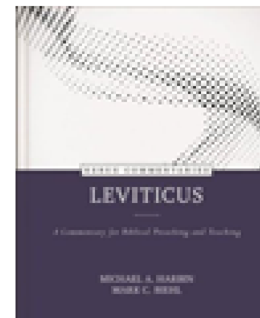
Michael A. Harbin and Mark C. Biehl. *Leviticus: A Commentary for Biblical Preaching and Teaching*. Kerux. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2024. 458 pp. £28.15/$39.99.



The Kerux Commentary series seeks to be true to name by assisting the *proclamation* of Scripture. Accordingly, each volume pairs a biblical specialist with a homiletician to provide interpretative insights that are fully integrated with practical suggestions for preachers. In this volume, Michael A. Harbin (Professor Emeritus of Biblical Studies, Taylor University) and Mark C. Biehl (Associate Pastor, Upland Community Church) apply that formula to Leviticus. The result is a valuable guide for anyone wishing to teach this crucial book to a contemporary audience.

The commentary opens with expected discussion of authorship, structure, and historical setting. However, the authors' treatment of select theological themes satisfyingly pushes beyond what is typical. Consideration of holiness, for instance, not only explores etymology and potential glosses but contemplates ontology, Trinitarian characterisation, and social ethics (pp. 50–55). Less run-of-the-mill topics are also tackled, including what the biblical language of נֶפֶשׁ (life, soul, body?) might signify (pp. 62–68).

In the commentary proper, Harbin and Biehl divide the twenty-seven chapters of Leviticus into sixteen preaching units (summarised on pp. 13–26). Treatment of each follows a consistent pattern. Following a one-page overview, the authors outline the literary structure and key themes of the passage. This is followed by a verse-by-verse, or section-by-section, "Exposition" that probes the interpretative issues in conversation with a range of secondary literature. Exegetical insights are then marshalled to distill the unit's "Theological Focus." Unlike many commentaries, an additional section explicitly considers "Preaching and Teaching Strategies." This includes a synthesis of the exegetical and theological issues and a statement of the emergent preaching idea. Further homiletical guidance is provided by listing "Contemporary Connections" alongside suggestions for "Creativity in Presentation." Each chapter concludes with study questions to inspire small group discussion. Despite having two authors, the writing style remains seamless throughout, allowing detailed textual work to blend organically into consideration of "big idea," core themes, and possible application(s), without jarring disconnects.

Throughout, significant discussion of Hebrew lexemes and phrases is appraised in standalone paragraphs rather than embedding this discussion in the main text. This draws attention to crucial interpretative issues while also allowing any who wish to avoid such detail the opportunity to read unencumbered. Still, I appreciated the underlying expectation that preachers will be working closely with, or at least consulting, the Hebrew text. The authors certainly make a strong case for doing so. Furthermore, copious sidebars and excurses illuminate pertinent contextual and theological matters. These sometimes run to several pages (e.g., "The Israelite Calendar and the Seven-Day Week," pp. 316–18). Seven appendices contemplate tangential matters like "Slaves and Emancipation in Israel" (pp. 431–34) and "Land Measurement and Crop Value" (pp. 441–43). All these features are a real boon. Even having spent many years working on Leviticus, I discovered new things from reading this commentary.

In line with the series's brief, the volume aims to resource preachers. Hence, I consider possible limitations in relation to that target audience and purpose. The first is easily anticipated: as with any book that proffers contemporary points of connection, not every application will suit every context.

Still, Harbin and Biehl supply a valuable starting point, and model, for preachers and teachers to work from as they discern implications in their own settings.

A more substantial issue relates to the selection of preaching units. The authors do not provide their rationale for dividing Leviticus into sixteen sections. Yet, this would have been useful for readers—not only as an example of how to do this kind of work well but also to aid those who may have to preach Leviticus in six weeks, or in twenty. What might such a series look like? While occasionally noting that a section could be further subdivided (e.g., p. 293), no alternatives are provided.

The demarcation of preaching units also leads to a degree of imbalance. While Leviticus 25 receives two chapters' worth of treatment (pp. 359–84), the extensive block of material in Leviticus 11–15 is given only one (pp. 194–219). Even within this, the 149 verses of Leviticus 13–15 (17% of the book) receive less than seven pages of commentary (pp. 209–16). Certainly, as the authors recognise, these chapters "probably constitute the most difficult section of Leviticus" (p. 195). Yet the very issues they suppose a Christian audience might baulk at, that Leviticus 11–15 is "very technical … long, and … detailed," or even that the "section seems arbitrarily thrown into the book" and is made irrelevant by New Testament teaching (p. 195), surely provide warrant to address such (sometimes wilful) ignorance and to confront assumptions that can be as deeply held as they are mistaken. The danger of not challenging this kind of status quo is that it is thereby reaffirmed.

Harbin and Biehl have written a commendable guide for aspiring preachers and teachers of Leviticus. May it enable many congregations to discover surprising delight in this centrepiece of Torah.

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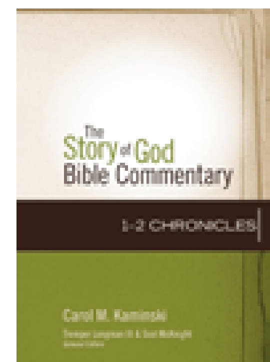
Carol M. Kaminski. *1 & 2 Chronicles*. Story of God Bible Commentary. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2023. xx + 627 pp. £45.00/$59.99.



Chronicles is an oft-neglected book in the church, so a new commentary that shows its theological and pastoral relevance is a welcome contribution. Carol Kaminski, Professor of Old Testament at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, has published two monographs on Genesis as well as an eight-week Bible study on 1–2 Chronicles. Her volume appears in the Story of God Commentary series, which uses the NIV (2011) and is aimed primarily for clergy and laypeople. Like other volumes in the series, the commentary seeks not only to explain the text in its original setting but also to identify historical, typological, and theological trajectories that "land in Christ in the New Testament" (p. xvii).

The commentary begins with a concise seventeen-page introduction, covering standard matters. Issues of authorship and date are followed by discussions of canonicity and title, genre, literary structure, and historical setting (pp. 4–13). Kaminski also includes a brief section on preaching from Chronicles, where she suggests that a topical approach is best, highlighting themes such as prayer, worship, or leadership principles (p. 8). Churches that preach through a book systematically would have appreciated guidance on chapter clusters. The introduction concludes with theological themes: a vision for a unified people of God, a vision for a worshipping people of God, a vision for a

prayerful people of God, and a vision for a witnessing people of God (pp. 13–17). The last theme is particularly noteworthy—a brief discussion of the passages related to God's mission beyond Israel, a theme often neglected in readings of Chronicles.

Following the design of the series, the commentary proper examines each chapter in three stages. "Listen to the Story" presents the whole chapter under consideration along with a list of relevant earlier Old Testament texts. This section functions as a canonical orientation rather than a close analysis of the type and degree of innerbiblical connections. For that type of discussion, consult Gary E. Schnittjer, *Old Testament Use of Old Testament: A Book-by-Book Guide* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2021). "Explain the Story" discusses the passage section by section, typically in two or three pages, with footnotes used sparingly. "Live the Story" applies the passage to contemporary Christian audiences. The volume concludes with Scripture, subject, and author indices.

Several features make this commentary a valuable resource for its intended audiences. Kaminski consistently prioritizes the Chronicler's presentation rather than reading Chronicles as a supplement to Samuel–Kings. This approach allows Chronicles' distinct emphases, such as the centrality of the temple, worship, and God's promise to David, to emerge. The commentary also reads from the perspective of the whole storyline of the Bible, where the Old Testament is integral to the unfolding biblical narrative, continuing through to its New Testament fulfillment.

Kaminski's integration of ancient Near Eastern historical and cultural background is another strength. References to material remains, inscriptions, and comparative data are used judiciously to illuminate the text. For example, Kaminski notes that the archaeological evidence of horse stables at Megiddo dates to the ninth century BC, which is later than Solomon's time, but still points to the "kind of infrastructure required for Solomon's many horses and chariots" (2 Chr 8:6; p. 348).

The applications are generally thoughtful and pastorally orientated. Kaminski regularly grounds contemporary reflection in the New Testament rather than moving directly from Old Testament text to modern Christian practice. This approach reflects the series's commitments and will be appreciated by readers concerned with canonical coherence.

Only a couple of observations may be offered by way of critique. First, given the theological significance of the Chronicler's change of phrasing in 1 Chronicles 17:14, where God says that David's son will be "set over *my* house and *my* kingdom," further discussion of its implications would have been welcome (pp. 180–81). The Chronicler's presentation of the inseparable link between temple and kingship raises important interpretive, theological, and perhaps even messianic questions.

Second, some *Themelios* readers may desire a more explicit christological trajectory in certain applications. In the discussion of Josiah (2 Chr 34), Kaminski suggests that the king's example reminds readers that "God uses people of all ages—including youth—for his kingdom purposes," supported by 1 Timothy 4:12 and 2 Timothy 3:14–15 (p. 551). Another possible biblical-theological trajectory is to situate Josiah's reforms within the Chronicler's tension between outward covenant renewal and the persistence of judgment. Huldah's prophecy reveals that even exemplary reform cannot avert disaster on Jerusalem and its people (2 Chr 34:25–26), highlighting the need for a more decisive and enduring renewal. From a canonical perspective, Josiah's youthful zeal for the temple and the book of the law may thus anticipate Christ, whose perfect obedience and covenant mediation accomplish what royal reforms could not (cf. Luke 2:40–52; Heb 10:5–14).

These observations are relatively minor and do not substantially detract from the commentary. Kaminski has produced a readable and theologically engaged commentary that meets the series's stated

aims. The commentary is a valuable addition to the expanding stable of Chronicles commentaries from a pancanonical perspective. *Themelios* clergy and laypeople can add this commentary to consult, alongside recent commentaries with a biblical-theological bent, such as John W. Olley's "1–2 Chronicles" (in *ESV Expository Commentary*, ed. Iain Duguid, James M. Hamilton Jr., and Jay Sklar [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019], 3:899–1294) and Graeme Goldsworthy's *1 and 2 Chronicles* (Sydney South: Aquila, 2021).

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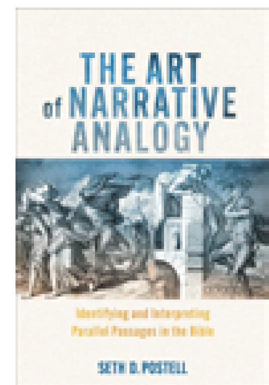
Seth D. Postell. *The Art of Narrative Analogy: Identifying and Interpreting Parallel Passages in the Bible*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2025. xx + 209 pages. £20.59/$24.99.



Who are the only two people in the Bible to be called a "discerning man"? (Joseph and David; see Gen 41:33 and 1 Sam 16:18). What are the only two events in the Bible that refer to stinking fish? (The first exodus and the second; see Exod 7:18 and Isa 50:2). Though such questions may be seen as useful only for Bible trivia, Seth Postell argues that these kinds of literary connections give the interpreter insight into the meaning of texts. Postell serves as professor at Israel College of the Bible, a Hebrew-speaking Messianic Bible college in Netanya, Israel. He writes *The Art of Narrative Analogy* to provide a method for the interpreter to discover his or her own connections within narrative texts of the Old and New Testaments. He argues that biblical authors intentionally create meaning by alluding to and patterning their narratives after previous ones in the Scriptures. This technique exists within books (e.g., Peter and Paul in Acts), across books (e.g., Genesis and Esther), and across testaments (e.g., Moses and Jesus).

In chapter 1, Postell explains narrative analogy. He defines it as "a story written with the specific intent of paralleling an earlier biblical narrative" and notes that "the meaning of the narrative analogy is based upon the specific point of comparison" (p. 5). Postell emphasizes the authorial intent of these comparisons over bare intertextuality (p. 11). One question Postell does not address is how often the authors use narrative analogies. Based on his book and his prolific examples, one would think these are everywhere. But if this is such an important hermeneutic, why do we know so little of it?

In chapter 2, Postell explores the distinction between narrative analogy and typology, distancing his work from the latter method. Here one finds an important concern with his approach. Postell disapproves of typology, seeing it as overly christological, as "spiritualizing" the text, and as non-literal exegesis (p. 163). He opts instead for "predictive analogy" or a prophetic use of analogy (p. 163). He later says, "the goal of this book is to promote a responsible reading of the Bible that seeks the authorial intent" (p. 181). Many readers will share a fundamental hermeneutical disagreement with the author. Frankly, Postell did not need to bring up this controversy. One can use narrative analogies as an aspect of typology. For example, if Joseph is a type of Mordecai, this does not preclude (but rather strengthens) the view that both Joseph and Mordecai can be types of Christ. Postell's anti-typological take distracts, if not frustrates, the reader seeking connections in the text that develop across redemptive-canonical history.

Chapters 3–8 explain Postell's method of identifying and interpreting narrative analogies. Postell emphasizes uniquely shared terminology (e.g., stinking fish) and often a parallel sequence of events. He explores different ways that analogies create meaning. Sometimes, figures are similar (Peter and Paul in Acts). At other times, figures demonstrate divergence (Joseph resists temptation while King David fails). Interestingly, other characters reveal a "dynamic analogy." Postell explains, "In a dynamic analogy, a single figure in the source story is paralleled by two or more figures in the target story; or multiple figures in the source story parallel a single figure in the target story" (p. 11). For example, Postell masterfully examines the book of Esther, where Mordecai is like Joseph but then Haman is treated like Joseph. Then, in chapter 8, Postell explores extended analogies, where entire books compare narratives or characters (such as the entire book of Joshua modeling the exodus/Moses).

The final chapter explains "predictive analogies," which are analogies not using narrative but poetic interpretations of narrative, or prophetic and apocalyptic literature (p. 164). This chapter seems out of place in a book about *narrative* analogies. Nevertheless, the chapter explores interesting parallels between Moses and the Servant and Isaiah's use of the exodus theme. The work here shows many similarities to typology, or the OT use of the OT in general.

One other small alteration could have improved this work. Postell loves *Star Wars* and fills the book with illustrations from the movie series. Those less familiar with the series will find these illustrations unhelpful, if not bewildering (because of the extent to which Postell goes into detail). The illustration works as an opening introduction to the concept of narrative analogies, but it should have been sequestered to the beginning of the book and not served as a recurring thread.

The Art of Narrative Analogy stands out for its unique contribution. More technical works such as those of Adele Berlin, Robert Alter, and John Sailhamer have their use. This work can help the typical student or pastor to begin to look for connections in narratives. If nothing else, many who may have already noticed the similarities in different texts (like those of Moses and Joshua) will now have greater confidence to explore further connections and discern meaning in the text. What seems like mere Bible trivia can prove profoundly relevant, as Postell shows us.

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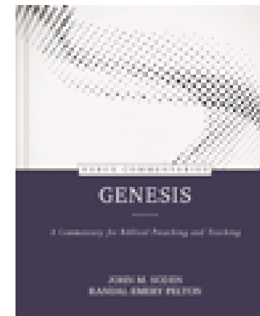
John M. Soden and Randal Emery Pelton. *Genesis: A Commentary for Biblical Preaching and Teaching*. Kerux. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2025. 752 pp. £36.69/$54.99.



Though written millennia ago in a different language to a different people, the book of Genesis stands as Scripture's historical, literary, and theological ground floor—effectively establishing God's promise for blessing and salvation in a world marred and broken by Adam's sin. *Genesis: A Commentary for Biblical Preaching and Teaching*, part of the Kerux Commentaries series, is written by both an expert in biblical exegesis (John M. Soden) and an experienced homiletician (Randal Emery Pelton). Based on the "Big Idea" approach, Kerux guides the reader through a well-tested sequence: exegetical analysis, theological focus, preaching and teaching strategies.

While there are nearly fifty "preaching passages" within this commentary, it is divided into four main sections: (1) Primeval Narratives (Gen 1:1—11:9); (2) Abraham Narratives (Gen 11:10—25:11); (3) Jacob Narratives (Gen 25:19—37:1), including the History of Ishmael (Gen 25:12–18); and (4) The Fourth-Generation Narratives (Gen 37:2—50:26).

The "Introduction" (pp. 53–77) is informative and engaging. Historically speaking, while affirming Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch (cf. pp. 81, 99–100) Soden and Pelton also accept the "Late Date" for the Exodus and the implications of "Setting" and "Context" for Genesis (see pp. 54–55). Literarily, they show astute sensitivity to the various ways that the Hebrew scribes communicated their rhetorical (world-view formative) message, such as attending to discourse markers, repetition, dialogue, and narrator evaluations (p. 57). Theologically, "God's Sovereignty and Goodness," "Faith," "Worship," "Blessing," "Sin," "Rest," "Humanity as God's Image(s)," "Cursing," and "Good versus Evil" are all noted among a few other key themes.

Lexically, each of the different Hebrew stems (e.g., Qal, Piel, Hiphil, and Hithpael) are treated independently. Users will also appreciate the generous references to many of the standard sources, such as BDB, *TLOT*, *TDOT*, *TWOT*, *NIDOTTE*, and *HALOT*. Regrettably, while Louw and Nida was (relatively speaking) well-leveraged for Greek, among other tools, I could not find Lust or Muraoka, specifically, for Septuagint references. At the risk of being too trenchant, the term "literal" (see pp. 166, 181, 197, 227, 238, 368, etc.) remains problematic and is, perhaps, best avoided altogether (see Stanley E. Porter's *James Barr Assessed: Evaluating His Legacy over the Last Sixty Years* [Leiden: Brill, 2021] and Douglas J. Moo's *We Still Don't Get It: Evangelicals and Bible Translation Fifty Years after James Barr* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014]) among other scholars).

Syntactically, GKC, Joüon, Lambdin, Waltke and O' Connor (WOC), in particular, were each judiciously applied (*sans* any LXX grammars, like Muraoka, for instance). One example should suffice. Concerning Genesis 15:6a, Soden and Pelton insightfully assert (pp. 296–97):

> The Hebrew text … indicates this is not sequential. Rather than the normal narrative sequences of the *waw* on a preterit, indicating continuing sequence, verse 6 begins with a *waw* on a perfect, indicating disjunction or background information (WOC, §32.3e., 541), which they translate, "Now he trusted YHWH and he counted *it to him* as righteousness" (as a parenthetical idea, WOC, §16.4f, 305). The construction presents a summary statement of Abram's faith … a typical or frequentative use of how Abram has

> responded … or, more specifically, a "habitual-iterative past" that should be translated "he *kept believing* Yahweh".... *GKC* calls it "a longer or constant continuance in a past state" (§112 ss).

Typographically, the volume is exceptionally well done. Although I could not find many direct references to how the MT accents might affect exegesis (cf. p. 109), the Hebrew pointing is clear. The ample white space, extra shading, sidebars, and numerous headings/subheadings are extremely helpful. It was also easy to appreciate the different references to culture at large, such as Caravaggio's painting, "Sacrifice of Isaac," or Pink's "What About Us." There are also quite a few maps, tables, graphs, and charts alongside other graphics, such as a picture of the Shabak stone (p. 84), a representation of the "three-tiered universe" (p. 128), Ziggurat Dūr Untash (p. 229), a well at the gate to ancient Beersheba (p. 382), Autumn Mandrakes (p. 504), and some cylinder seals (p. 610). Anyone familiar with *In the Beginning … We Misunderstood: Interpreting Genesis 1 in Its Original Context* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2012) by Johnny V. Miller and John M. Soden, which I used as a textbook for "Primeval History," will not be disappointed!

Because Kerux is intentionally designed to guide preaching/teaching, the value of its discussion questions (provided at the end of each chapter) is best shown by an extended example (p. 216):

> Noah's Line: Exposing Heart Issues (Genesis 9:18–29): (1) Do we expect perfection of the righteous? How should we view someone who sins? (2) How do we respond to God when we recognize sin in our lives or roots of flesh in our own hearts? (3) Considering Shem and Japheth going to extreme lengths to protect their father and avoid any impropriety, how should believers today view their responsibilities to avoid evil in either act or appearance? (4) Define carefully what it means to be cursed or blessed? (5) What does it mean in practical ways to call Jesus your God and Savior? If I identify with him, what expectation does that require of me for my actions and for my heart response to him? (6) How does my honoring of authority in my life bring honor to Christ? What authority structures do I need to honor, and what will that look like?

My main quibbles are series related rather than volume specific. The complete lack of indices (Scripture, Author, Subject) hampers the overall utility of the book as a reference tool. Also, a translation of Genesis would have allayed some of my concerns about the use of the term "literal." Irrespective of these, this book does an excellent job of integrating key components of character, relationships, and life skills with Bible knowledge (a truly integrated model). Its primary audience will likely be pastors, preachers, and Christian ministry leaders, including those leading Bible study groups. Students from Christian universities, seminaries, and Bible colleges will also benefit immensely. Highly recommended!

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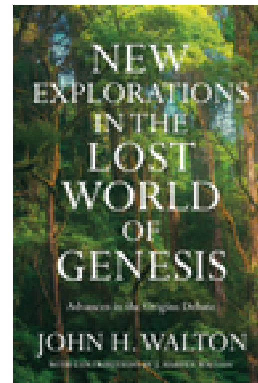
John H. Walton, with J. Harvey Walton. *New Explorations in the Lost World of Genesis: Advances in the Origins Debate*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2025. 244 pp. £18.99/$25.00.



John Walton, long a leading evangelical voice on Genesis, first published the popular *Lost World of Genesis One* in 2001. Over the past sixteen years, he has published seven more volumes in the series, including this latest one. This book supplements previous arguments, with only occasional revisions (p. 8). It also includes contributions from J. Harvey Walton, whose research inspired many of the revisions. As with previous volumes, readers will find this volume clear, readable, provocative, and engaging.

After an introductory chapter on the background of this book, chapter 2 discusses Walton's methodology. This longest chapter shows how his methodology shapes his conclusions. Scripture, he argues, has divine authority through human agency, with inerrancy applying only to biblical affirmations and not necessarily references. For instance, a character's reference may not be theologically or historically accurate. However, he extends this idea "beyond … traditional confines" (p. 22). Are shared ANE concepts, such as cherubim and seraphim, the serpent in Genesis 3, or the divine council in 1 Kings 22 reference or affirmation? He gives no answer but shows how far one might extend this dichotomy. He suggests that concepts shared with the broader ANE are "most likely a reference," while those that depart from standard ANE thought are "most likely affirmation" (p. 25). Thus, "the Bible is true in all that it affirms … but that does not mean that [references] stand as something that the Bible affirms in its authority" (p. 27). Distinguishing between the two is, for Walton, crucial for determining what counts as authoritative and inerrant.

Chapters 3–4 supplement Walton's previous work on Genesis 1. Walton previously highlighted Genesis 1 as a treatise on *function* instead of material origins. Walton now prefers the term *order* instead of function. If Genesis 1 moves from chaos to order, then those made in God's image are order-bringers (p. 91). The goodness of creation refers to its orderliness (pp. 93–94). Divine rest refers to achievement of order (p. 130). Even the broader movement from creation to new creation is now conceptualized as an expansion of divine order.

Chapters 5–6 supplement Walton's previous work on Genesis 2. Walton no longer argues that the garden of Eden was like a tabernacle. Instead, he now views both the garden of Eden and the tabernacle within a framework of royal gardens (p. 140). This shifts the archetypal role of Adam and Eve from priests in a tabernacle to royal wardens maintaining order in a garden. More notably, Walton now conceives of the garden as located in the divine realm where Adam and Eve could not find order (p. 142). They learn that "dwelling in the divine realm [is] unnatural" (p. 143).

Chapters 7–8 supplement Walton's earlier work on Genesis 3 and contain the book's most controversial claims. Walton explains J. Harvey Walton's research on Genesis 2 and 3 and calls it both "mind-blowing" and "perhaps disturbing" to traditional theology (p. 183). He contends that Adam and Eve's pursuit of "godlikeness … was not wrong" but "inadequate to achieve their desired outcome" of order (p. 182). Genesis 3, he insists, is not "about how sin came into the world … [or] about how the choices of two individuals have negatively affected all the rest of us" (p. 184). Questions about the origin of sin are, for Walton, anachronistic (p. 184). This leads to a rejection of doctrines of original sin:

“Adam and Eve are not to be blamed for our sin and its resulting condition—we each individually and universally carry that load” (p. 194). Nor is their exile punishment (pp. 198–200), but Adam and Eve are sent “out to enter the world to which they belong, to a new phase of life” (p. 198). Such proposals are stimulating yet “perhaps disturbing,” and evangelicals who hold to historic doctrines of the fall will remain cautious about adopting Walton’s conclusions.

Chapters 9–10 give a brief discussion of the relationship between Genesis and science and a summary conclusion. Chapter 9 summarizes previous arguments from Walton’s other books with only minimal new explorations. Walton makes clear that the Bible does not consider modern questions of science, such as material mechanisms. Chapter 10 restates and summarizes areas of new research and significant revision. He suggests that the “basic thrust of [his] position remains largely unaltered” (p. 241). The order spectrum continues to underlie much of his research and provides insightful avenues for further research (p. 241).

This book offers several surprising supplements and revisions. Throughout, Walton consistently holds that interpreters should track “with the author as those invested with authority from God” (p. 241) and this book continues his lifelong project of understanding ANE thought and how it shapes Genesis. For these questions, interpreters will value Walton’s in-depth research and consistent methodology.

But can biblical authority be reduced to human intention within a particular historical context? Many would disagree with Walton and hold that historical and cultural studies serve the meaning of the text but do not finally determine it. The Holy Spirit did not inspire Genesis apart from his redemptive plan to fulfill all things in Christ. For this reason, many will remain dissatisfied with a methodology that downplays the text’s divine *telos* and how later Scripture shapes our understanding of earlier revelation.

Pastors and students who are interested in Genesis will want to read this volume alongside Walton’s earlier works. Walton remains a clear and engaging conversation partner. But they will want to consider Walton’s methodology alongside other recent works, such as C. John Collin’s *Reading Genesis Well: Navigating History, Poetry, Science, and Truth in Genesis 1–11* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2018), or Kevin Vanhoozer’s *Mere Christian Hermeneutics: Transfiguring What It Means to Read the Bible Theologically* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2024).

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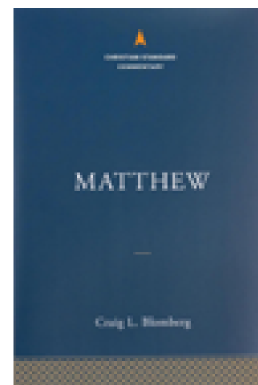
— NEW TESTAMENT —

Craig L. Blomberg. *Matthew*. Christian Standard Commentary. Nashville: Holman Reference, 2025. xxvi + 726 pp. £39.99/$39.99.



This volume is a revision of Blomberg's 1992 commentary on Matthew in the New American Commentary (NAC) series. It is also part of a new series, the Christian Standard Commentary (CSC). Blomberg discusses this connection in his author's preface (pp. xv–xx), noting that the vision behind the CSC series was to revise and update the NAC using the Christian Standard Bible (CSB) as the base text (the NAC used the NIV). A revision was only possible for some of the volumes, however, since a number of original authors had retired, passed away, or were otherwise unable to take on a revision. So the CSC is a combination of new volumes and revised ones. Oddly, the series introduction (pp. xi–xiv), presumably written by the general editors, says nothing about the connection between the NAC and the CSC, nor the use of the CSB as its base text.

Some commentary revisions are small upgrades, correcting minor mistakes and updating bibliography. Blomberg's is on a much grander scale. He notes that because his NAC commentary stayed within its contracted word count, he was able to expand this one considerably (NAC: 460 pp.; CSC: 752 pp.). The thoroughness of revision is evident in the select bibliography (pp. 689–92). Of the approximately one hundred books listed there, about ninety percent were written after the first edition of the commentary.

Blomberg's style is clear and accessible, designed especially for students and pastors but with sufficient scholarly depth for academic research. It is a good "go to first" commentary, setting out well the central thrust and key interpretational issues in each passage. Blomberg deals fairly with opposing views and often reaches mediating solutions.

It is of course impossible in a short review to comprehensively survey each passage. Instead, I will summarize Blomberg's conclusions on various introductory issues and then on a few of Matthew's controversial passages.

Concerning Matthew's structure, Blomberg sees legitimacy in both of the two most widely cited outlines. The first is structured around the five main teaching sections (chs. 5–7; 10; 13; 18; 23–25), which all end with a similar formula ("after saying these things…") and alternate with sections of narrative. The second, proposed by Jack Kingsbury, is structured around the formula, "From that time on Jesus began to…," which appears at 4:17 and 16:21, dividing Jesus's ministry into three phases (1:1–4:16; 4:17–16:20; 16:21–28:20). Blomberg integrates both of these into his outline, as some other commentators have, but uniquely reverses the order of discourse and narrative from 16:21 onward.

On Matthew's theology, Blomberg surveys five main themes: Christology, fulfillment of Scripture, discipleship and the church, Israel and the Gentiles, and eschatology. He is skeptical of Kingsbury's conclusion that "Son of God" is Matthew's dominant title for Jesus. While it is certainly an important one, appearing in key passages and containing both messianic and divine connotations, one should not diminish the importance of other titles and themes that contribute significantly to Matthew's fulfillment motif (e.g., Christ, Son of David, Son of Man, Wisdom, Lord).

Concerning Matthew's purpose and audience and more specifically the scholarly debate whether Matthew's community has decisively broken with Judaism, Blomberg agrees with those who see the relationship with the Jewish community as already severed, but he views this break as recent enough that the two are still in vigorous polemical debate (pp. 34–35). This kind of conflict was occurring throughout the Roman empire, which makes the exact location of Matthew's community uncertain. What little evidence there is from the early church suggests Judea or Palestine, but more popular among contemporary scholars is Antioch in Syria. This conclusion is driven by Antioch's large Jewish population, thriving Christian church, and proximity to Palestine.

On Matthew's sources, Blomberg affirms the likelihood of the two-source hypothesis, that Mark's Gospel was written first and that both Matthew and Luke used Mark as well as a common source or sources ("Q"). On the date of Matthew, Blomberg agrees with D. A. Carson that the paucity of evidence would allow nearly any date between AD 40 and 100, "but perhaps a slight preponderance of weight favors a date in the 60s" (p. 50).

On authorship, Blomberg acknowledges that, strictly speaking, all four Gospels are anonymous. It is church tradition that identifies the author as Matthew (Levi) the tax collector. But nothing in the date, purpose, or content of the Gospel precludes this identification. Blomberg rejects the argument that Matthew could not have been the writer since an apostle would never have used the work of a non-apostle (i.e., Mark). The early tradition associating Mark's Gospel with Peter would have been sufficient to give it the stamp of apostolic authority. While apostolic authorship is not necessary to ensure the inspiration and authority of the gospel, "Matthew remains the most plausible choice for author" (p. 53).

With reference to historicity and genre, Blomberg takes a similarly measured approach. He concludes that while "none of the gospels is a history or biography of Jesus according to modern standards of precision and reporting … nevertheless, Matthew, like the other three gospels … measures up quite well when compared with ancient Jewish and Greco-Roman histories and biographies" (pp. 54–55).

On various fulfillment quotations, where Matthew has been accused of taking the Old Testament text out of context (e.g., Isa 7:14 at 1:22–23; Hos 11:1 at 2:15; Jer 31:15 at 2:17–18), Blomberg appeals to various kinds of double fulfillment, either partial and proleptic fulfillment in the Old Testament followed by final or complete fulfillment in the New Testament (p. 75), or to various kinds of typology or analogical fulfillment (pp. 85–86; pp. 87–88).

Matthew's preference for "kingdom of heaven" over "kingdom of God" reflects pious Jewish use of circumlocution to avoid uttering the divine name. In terms of their meaning, the two expressions are largely interchangeable. The distinction is not, as in older dispensational scholarship, an indication of a postponed kingdom (pp. 96–97).

On Matthew's most famous teaching section, the Sermon on the Mount (chs. 5–7), Blomberg surveys eight major interpretations, finding the most satisfying one in an "inaugurated" or "already/not yet" eschatology, where the sermon's ethic remains the ideal for all Christians, but which will never be fully satisfied until the consummation of the kingdom at Christ's return (pp. 131–32).

Finally, the strange episode in 27:51–53, where "many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised … and appeared to many," is most likely not a legendary accretion or apocalyptic symbolism but "a genuine event, just like the resurrection Jesus himself," with rich theological significance concerning the bodily resurrection of the dead (pp. 665–67).

Those who know Blomberg's work from other writings will recognize the same clarity, balance, and insight found there. While at times (though surprisingly rarely) I disagreed with Blomberg's individual

conclusions, his thoughtful, humble, and measured scholarship is on display throughout. This volume will no doubt assume its rightful place as one of the most respected and useful commentaries on Matthew's Gospel.

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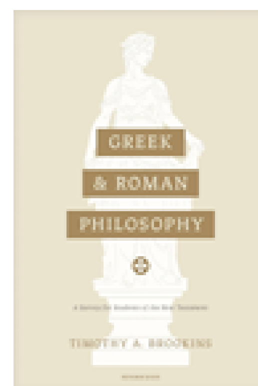
Timothy A. Brookins. *Greek and Roman Philosophy: A Survey for Students of the New Testament*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2025. 232 pp. £29.99/$29.95.



Tertullian famously asked, "What hath Athens to do with Jerusalem?" Because much of the New Testament (NT) was originally addressed to churches in the gentile world, NT interpreters might answer, "Much in every way." Every student of the NT must determine how to relate the NT writings to the philosophical traditions that were influential for the audiences they addressed. Timothy Brookins—professor of Early Christianity at the University of St. Thomas and author of *Corinthian Wisdom, Stoic Philosophy, and the Ancient Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014) and *Rediscovering the Wisdom of the Corinthians: Paul, Stoicism, and Spiritual Hierarchy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2024)—has written a primer to help his readers address this perennial issue.

Brookins writes *Greek and Roman Philosophy* to offer "a survey of the Greek philosophical tradition from its inception in the Classical period until the final stages of its evolution beginning in the first part of Late Antiquity" (p. 1). He plots his course with an angle toward how Greek philosophical traditions impacted the thought world of the NT.

Brookins chronologically surveys the ancient philosophical landscape (p. 5). He overviews the Greek philosophical tradition in chapters 1–2 before segmenting his book into four parts. Part 1 (chs. 3–6) surveys classical philosophy, covering the pre-Socratics, Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, and the Cynics (early sixth to late fourth century BCE). Part 2 (chs. 7–10) reviews Hellenistic philosophers, including the Stoics, Epicureans, and the Skeptics. Part 3 (chs. 11–15) examines the post-Hellenistic period, which treats Roman variants of different schools, the revival of Platonism, and the development of popular philosophy. Part 4 (chs. 16–17) examines how NT authors and early Christians received and utilized Greek and Roman philosophy.

As Brookins narrates the unfolding story of philosophy in Athens, Socrates emerges as the root of most schools. Socrates emphasized ethics over physics, bringing philosophy "down to earth from the heavens" (p. 24; citing Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* 5.4.10). Far from being a highbrow discipline, Socrates saw philosophy as a way to order one's life to achieve happiness and live the good life (pp. 29, 42, 48, 79). Different schools achieved this end differently. Platonists looked beyond the physical world and its faults to the realm of the forms to understand the virtues (p. 42). Aristotelians saw virtue as a means toward the end of happiness (p. 48). Stoics reasoned with philosophy to live according to nature (p. 68). Epicureans reasoned with philosophy to achieve the most pleasure and least pain through the virtues (p. 89). Rather than portraying these ancient philosophers as disassociated scholars

or caricatured figures isolated in ivory towers, Brookins presents them as practical guides—life coaches devoted to the pursuit of happiness.

Though Brookins rightly demonstrates how these philosophies treasure ethics more than physics, he does still discuss their physical—and metaphysical—differences. Platonists drew a sharp distinction between the physical world and its imperfect projections with the immaterial realm and its forms (p. 39). Like the Platonists, the Aristotelians distinguished between the material and the immaterial; however, they understood the immaterial as immanent within the material rather than a transcendent reality standing apart from it (p. 46). Stoics and Epicureans did not differentiate between the non-physical and physical realms. In fact, the Stoics saw spirit (*pneuma*) as a physical reality (p. 78). Brookins notes how these different understandings of the physical world impacted understandings of ethics. Though Brookins does not overtly say it, one must account for the difference between how the philosophers conceived of the universe and how NT authors conceived of the same before appropriating ethical parallels between Greco-Roman philosophies and the NT.

Brookins demonstrates a thorough understanding of the schools of ancient philosophy, granting the reader helpful context for how the philosophies developed over centuries. He strikes a balance of competency and lucidity, introducing the new student without overwhelming them. Brookins supplies primary and secondary source literature for each philosophical school for students who desire to study further.

Although Brookins describes each tradition with care, he rightly does not grant each tradition the same influence in the Greco-Roman world. Through numerical charts, Brookins assists students by demonstrating which philosophical schools had sway at different moments of history (pp. 120, 147). Brookins especially notes how Stoicism stood in contested eminence at the time the NT was penned (p. 120).

The only complaint one might offer with this volume is that, although Brookins subtitled his volume *A Survey for Students of the New Testament*, the chapter he devotes to Greek and Roman Philosophy in the NT is two pages long. Readers do not finish this book with a methodology or heuristic to aid their interpretation of the NT with their newfound knowledge of the philosophical traditions. A test case of how one of the philosophies affects the interpretation of a NT text would have helped readers apply the material. Even so, the first appendix provides a helpful bibliography of recent scholarly interaction with NT texts and philosophers, so the student can pursue the subject beyond the book.

Overall, Brookins has contributed an accessible and engaging volume that introduces his readers to a pivotal aspect of background study of the NT. *Greek and Roman Philosophy* would serve equally well as a textbook for a NT Backgrounds course or for the interested layperson. His concise but accurate descriptions ensure that his volume should have a lasting impact for the foreseeable future.

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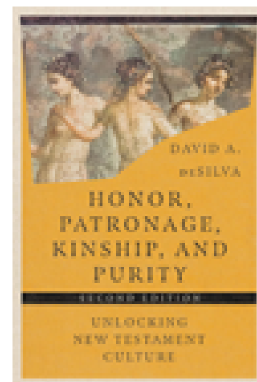
David A. deSilva. *Honor, Patronage, Kinship, and Purity: Unlocking New Testament Culture*. 2nd ed. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2022. xviii + 388 pp. £31.99/$42.99.



David A. deSilva, Trustees' Distinguished Professor of New Testament and Greek at Ashland Theological Seminary, is a leading voice in cultural and anthropological approaches to Scripture. Among his more than twenty-five books, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship, and Purity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000) has been his most influential and widely used work, shaping both scholarly and pastoral engagement with the cultural world of the New Testament. The appearance of this substantially revised second edition—twenty-two years after the first—invites fresh attention to a book that has already formed readers across several languages, including Armenian and Korean.

DeSilva describes this volume as his "signature book" (p. ix), and for good reason. Alongside Bruce J. Malina's *The New Testament World* (3rd ed. [Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001]), it has served as a foundational introduction to cultural-anthropological interpretation. What distinguishes deSilva is his ability to pair cultural description with sustained exegetical application, allowing readers not only to learn the cultural model but to see it work within the biblical text.

The book's structure remains unchanged in the second edition: four cultural constructs—honor (chs. 1–2), patronage (chs. 3–4), kinship (chs. 5–6), and purity (chs. 7–8)—are each introduced through Greco-Roman and Jewish sources and then applied to New Testament passages. This paired approach continues to be one of the book's chief strengths, as it trains readers to integrate background study with actual interpretation. deSilva also preserves the original purpose of the book: "to equip readers to become better readers of Scripture so that they may become better shapers of disciples and faith communities" (pp. 8–9). The pedagogical intention that shaped the first edition continues to guide this one.

What justifies calling this a "completely revised edition," as deSilva himself does (p. x)? The revision is not cosmetic nor limited to the addition of a closing chapter. Rather, the entire work has been read through twice and reshaped "to reflect precisely the book [he] would have written had [he] first attempted it in 2021 rather than 1999" (p. x). The result is not a new structure but a thoroughly refreshed content. DeSilva reports a twenty percent increase in total volume; however, the significance of the revision lies not in quantity but in the integration of two decades of scholarship and of his own deepened engagement with ancient sources.

The revisions take two major forms. First, the book incorporates more recent developments in New Testament studies. DeSilva interacts with works such as John M. G. Barclay's *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015) and Te-Li Lau's *Defending Shame* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2020), integrating insights that were not available at the time of the first edition. Second, he enriches his treatment of ancient sources. For example, in the discussion of honor and shame, he strengthens the argument that honor is not merely externally bestowed but internally validated. To this end, he supplements the earlier use of Epictetus with additional references to Seneca, drawing on Stoic notions of self-approval (p. 34 n. 41). These enhancements demonstrate a more comprehensive and nuanced command of the cultural dynamics under discussion.

Is this revised edition worth reading for those familiar with the first? Absolutely. Readers of the original edition will notice a more mature voice, deeper engagement with ancient evidence, and updated scholarly conversation. In many respects, this is the book deSilva would have written had he possessed today's resources and perspectives. Given the frequency with which the first edition is cited, instructors who have used the book in the classroom will welcome the refreshed material and updated bibliographic resources (pp. 357–64), which have been carefully curated and expanded.

For new readers, the book remains one of the clearest and most engaging introductions to cultural approaches to the New Testament. DeSilva's balanced use of ancient sources, sociological insights, and exegetical illustrations makes this volume an especially accessible starting point. His explanations are lucid and pastorally sensitive, enabling students, pastors, and lay readers to see how cultural dynamics illuminate the biblical text. This revised edition continues to serve as an invaluable bridge between historical-cultural study and the interpretive practice of Christian communities.

If there is a limitation, it is one inherent to cultural-anthropological models more broadly: the risk of over-systematizing cultural constructs that were often fluid, contested, or varied across regions and social strata. While deSilva is careful and generally avoids this pitfall, readers should remain aware that cultural models, though illuminating, cannot account for every textual nuance. Yet even here, the book functions well, offering not an inflexible template but a set of tools to be used judiciously.

In sum, this thoroughly revised edition retains its place as deSilva's signature contribution and offers a richer, more comprehensive gateway into the cultural world of the New Testament. By integrating two decades of scholarship and deepening its engagement with ancient materials, this edition will serve both first-time readers and long-time users exceptionally well.

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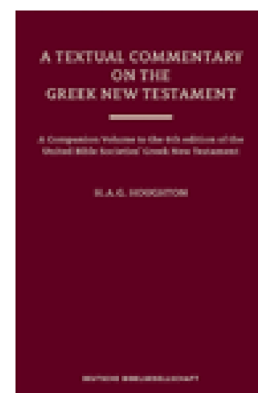
H. A. G. Houghton. *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament: A Companion to the Sixth Edition of the United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament*. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2025. xvi + 590 pp. £89.99/$89.95.



H. A. G. Houghton, Professor of New Testament Textual Scholarship at University of Birmingham, UK, has provided a long-awaited replacement for Bruce Metzger's textual commentary bearing the same name (with the obvious exception of a difference in subtitle, reflecting a difference in critical editions of the Greek NT). For unfamiliar readers, the second edition of Metzger's textual commentary was published in 1994—thirty-one years prior to the publication of Houghton's textual commentary.

Unlike Metzger's earlier commentary on the UBS4/NA27, Houghton's commentary reflects shifts in NT textual critical methodology with the emergence of the "Coherence-Based Genealogical Method" (p. 21). This method, to date, has been applied to the Catholic Epistles (e.g., James, Jude) in UBS5/NA28 and to Mark, Acts, and Revelation in UBS6/NA29. Houghton's commentary engages with these

recent revisions and thus the most recent text-critical scholarship, reflected in the publication of UBS6/NA29 in late 2025 as well as the extensive and ongoing *Editio Critica Maior* (ECM) project.

The author builds on Metzger's work and cross-checks his own commentary with Metzger's, as well as the simplified version of Metzger's commentary, edited by Roger L. Omanson (*A Textual Guide to the Greek New Testament* [Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2006]). Beyond these resources, Houghton takes pains to interact with two recent scholarly editions of the Greek NT, namely, *The SBL Greek New Testament* (SBLGNT; ed. Michael Holmes [Atlanta: SBL Press, 2010]) and *The Greek New Testament: Tyndale House Edition* (THGNT; eds. Dirk Jongkind and Peter Williams [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017]) as well as various articles in the field of NT textual criticism. This commentary follows the earlier ranking system (A, B, C, D) used by Metzger and the UBS4 committee, reflecting, in descending order, degrees of certainty regarding the textual reconstruction. Also, the author adds the symbol , denoting decisions that have been left open.

One aspect of this commentary that is clearly distinct from Metzger's is that Houghton's work does not reflect the decisions of a committee. Given this, "rather than" defending "the committee's text," his commentary "seeks to present a rationale for each decision while indicating which of the alternative readings are worthy of serious consideration" (p. 35).

A few examples of Houghton's commentary will be discussed to give the reader a sense of how this commentary compares with Metzger's earlier work. Commenting on Mark 1:1, while Metzger only offers a rationale as to why the phrase "son of God" is included, not discussing the Byzantine reading which has a definite article before God (thus, του θεου), Houghton gives a C ranking for the Byz. reading and provides a much more ample discussion, covering the various readings, the potential reasons why this reading could be the original, and how the ECM of Mark 1:1 compares with SBLGNT and THGNT. Houghton and Metzger both give a C rating for Mark 1:4, but in different directions, with Houghton (again, with Byz.) arguing for the omission of "the" (ὁ) before βαπτίζων, resulting in "John baptizing," and Metzger, in contrast, favoring the title "John the Baptist/Baptizer" given its parallel with Mark 6:25 and 8:28 and its occurrence in Matthew and Luke. However, as in Mark 1:1, Houghton's discussion is noticeably more thorough.

Perhaps most noticeable is the vast difference between Houghton and Metzger in their respective discussions of Revelation. Houghton's appears throughout, e.g., 1:5 (λύσαντι ἡμᾶς / λουσαντι [Byz.]); 2:13; 5:11 (φωνὴν / ως φωνὴν); and 21:3, strongly suggesting the need for continued text-critical work on Revelation, since readings once undisputed are now seen as undecided alongside other strong readings. In addition, there are numerous times when Houghton is commenting on a given reconstruction of the text that is not noted by Metzger and vice versa. Metzger's commentary in fact includes many smaller textual discussions that are simply absent in Houghton's work (e.g., 2:16, 20, 22; 5:6; 10:6, 10; 11:2, 12, 17, 18, 19; 12:10; 13:7, 17; 14:1, 6, 8, 13, 20; 16:1, 4, 16; 18:12, 17, 22; 19:5, 6, 7, 11, 13), and, on occasion, Houghton includes what was omitted in Metzger (e.g., 1:4; 20:5). Metzger's attention to smaller textual readings omitted by Houghton means that Metzger is not dispensable yet, at least for the most thorough students.

Also, there are many times when Houghton's reading, reflecting the ECM, departs from Metzger's reading (e.g., Rev 4:11; 5:9; 6:17) as well as readings whose certainty is demoted (e.g., 5:10, from {A} to {C}; 15:3 and 6, from {B} to {C}) and promoted (6:3–4, from {B} to {A}; 13:6, from {B} to {A}) by Houghton. These differences between the author and Metzger, rather than rendering the former's work obsolete, actually establish Metzger's commentary's further usefulness as it allows the serious student

of NT textual criticism to compare the discussions between these two works in the many areas where they differ. In summary, for the aforementioned reasons, Houghton's work adds to our understanding of recent progress in the field of NT textual criticism in a way that not only illuminates previous debates but also furthers our understanding of current scholarship. As such, this commentary is essential for anyone working in NT textual criticism.

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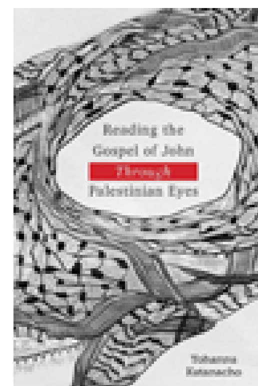
Yohanna Katanacho. *Reading the Gospel of John Through Palestinian Eyes*. Carlisle, PA: Langham, 2020. xii + 137 pp. £9.99/$17.99.



Yohanna Katanacho is a Palestinian Israeli evangelical who lives and works in Nazareth, Israel. He belongs to the large Palestinian Arab minority in Israel and the small Palestinian Christian community within it. And yet, he has an outsized voice within the Palestinian church. He is on a short list of leading Arab-Christian scholars in Israel/Palestine whose members are writing not only for their community but also for the West. And this explains his unique and singular importance.

Each of us writes history or theology from a perspective. This might be shaped by innumerable factors such as ethnic background, nationality, gender, socio-economic location, historical setting, or national/cultural context. Unwittingly we assume that our own context is the norm and we read others "far from us" too rarely.

Reading Katanacho is thus a helpful—no, a necessary—exercise because we gain insight from a perspective that sharpens our own and diversifies it richly. He is writing as an Arab, a Palestinian, an Israeli, and a Christian who resides in Galilee. He has witnessed the religious rivalries (Judaism, Islam, and Christianity) that reside just beneath the surface of his country. He has also witnessed his country's dangerous political conflicts. He lives as a member of a distressed minority, such that (despite the fact that his own Arab/Palestinian community makes up nearly 50% of the total population of Israel and the occupied territories), he is still told that this country does not belong to him *because of his ethnicity*. And he has seen violence and discrimination. The nearby West Bank has frequent conflicts between Jewish settlers and Arab villagers, leaving over two hundred Palestinians dead in 2025. And then there is Gaza in the south, where for over two years about 70,000 of Katanacho's fellow Palestinians (27% of them children) have died violently, in the wake of the terrible events of October 7, 2023.

This is the context that shapes Yohanna Katanacho's world and writing. When he talks about peace or hope, he is doing it from within a setting that has known little of it. Peace is not a casual term to him; it is an on-the-ground dream and lost reality.

His current volume on the Gospel of John is not a commentary in the usual sense. There are points where he is writing verse-by-verse explanations of the text. And here he excels marvelously, giving, for example, detailed cultural insights into the wedding of Cana. However, this is not the book's plan. We find here a series of integrative essays about important themes all shaped by Johannine thinking. He

writes about "holy space" (ch. 3), "holy time" (ch. 4), "holy history" (ch. 5), "the holy nation" (ch. 6), and the chapter I flew to immediately: "holy land" (ch. 7). Each of his sixteen chapters picks up a theme and then recreates the theological worldview of John by building the deep structures that are presupposed by the gospel.

The careful reader will at once spot the difference between this book and the usual western commentary. Katanacho's own context slips through. When he writes chapter 12 ("the persecuted people") you know that this is not a casual subject for him. However, he does not simply write from the tragedy of Palestinian life but rather universalizes these themes so that a believer in Nigeria, Egypt, Nepal, or Europe will read his words and immediately learn how John's teachings are relevant to life.

Yohanna Katanacho is a scholar (PhD, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School), a pastor (Christian and Missionary Alliance Church) and a teacher at Nazareth Evangelical College. And each of these vocational callings runs through his writing. He is not simply offering esoteric interpretations for the academy but is writing to bless and enrich the people of God, in Nazareth and around the world. Nathanael once asked, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (Jn 1:46). He was speculating about Jesus, of course, and when he met his Lord, the wonder of Jesus became clear. Another modern answer is yes, good things are coming from Nazareth: Yohanna Katanacho writes from this same city and his offer of this book is a wonder, a gift, to the church.

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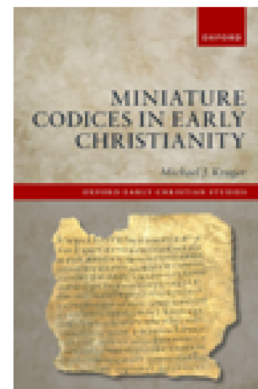
Michael J. Kruger. *Miniature Codices in Early Christianity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2025. 218 pp. £84.00/$110.00.



In our digital age, the shift from text to hypertext has introduced new opportunities and complexities to the task of reading. What it means to "read a book" might mean many different things. One of the reasons that this paradigm shift feels so destabilizing is because of the unrivaled dominance of the codex "book form" that has been at the center of how people organize and access information for thousands of years.

An interesting feature about the earliest churches is that they were early adopters of this then innovative publication technology (outpacing the broader Greco-Roman world by several hundred years). In *Miniature Codices in Early Christianity*, Michael Kruger examines an easily overlooked datapoint in this story of the codex format. As part of the material turn in the study of the ancient world, scholars have noted the meaningful significance of not only the content of biblical manuscripts but also their physical or paratextual features. Kruger's focus is on "miniature codices" and what they might tell us about the people and communities that read and produced them.

While these tiny religious texts have been analyzed in various ways, Kruger's monograph is the first full-length treatment of this kind of codex. In demonstrating the rationale for his study, Kruger notes that further work needs to be done on defining the category of a miniature codex, cataloguing the relevant evidence that must be included, and exploring the implications this evidence might have for

our understanding of the early Christian community (pp. 1–28). Kruger structures his work in order to address each of these three areas of needed research.

Kruger begins by defining the category of a "miniature codex" with precision, by accounting for both form and content. Drawing on previous studies but also modifying them, he establishes a size criterion (less than 12 cm in width), surveys the extant evidence, and situates these very small codex manuscripts within the broader landscape of ancient book production. His focus is on miniature codices that are produced in the "early" era of the church (which he ranges from the second to eighth centuries), that originate or function within the Christian community, and that are written in Greek on either papyrus or parchment. This foundational work allows the study to distinguish miniature codices from other small-format texts and to clarify their relative frequency among Christian manuscripts compared with non-Christian literary remains.

The argument develops by examining competing explanations for the function and origin of miniature codices. Kruger evaluates proposals that attribute these manuscripts to practical concerns such as portability, personal reading, or economic efficiency, as well as interpretations that emphasize "magical," symbolic, or performative uses. One of Kruger's chief contributions to this area of scholarship is his careful delineation of the similarities and differences between miniature codices and religious amulets. Older studies conflated these two categories, but Kruger maintains that many miniature codices did not function like amulets (which were usually understood by users to provide some sort of benefit or protection if they were worn).

For Kruger, several features distinguish a mini-codex from an amulet or mystical token: they are composed with continuous text, they are in the codex format, and they bear the marks of professional or competent scribal production (see pp. 36–46, pp. 102–5). These features lead to an important and interesting conclusion, namely, that these tiny texts were designed to actually be read by their users. Though they could certainly have been used as an amulet by a given person (e.g., a book with excerpts from New Testament texts about healing worn by someone who is sick), these carefully crafted booklets were intended to function as readable texts (e.g., the personal copy of a Gospel for personal study and devotion). Mostly, these texts were probably meant for private use, but Kruger also observes the liturgical-ritual function of some examples that contained elements of an ecclesial service. While the size of the codex prevented easy public reading, "they could have been used by ministers as a handy guide to their liturgical duties" (p. 67). In this scenario, "the minister might have held the little booklet in one hand while reading the communion text, offering a communion prayer, and even leading a final hymn" (p. 67).

Beyond this interpretive issue, a major component of this volume is Kruger's comprehensive catalogue of manuscripts that fit the criteria he establishes for the category of a miniature codex (see pp. 106–69). Here Kruger provides a unique numbering system for sixty-two manuscripts. Kruger acknowledges that further research will likely uncover more manuscripts in the future, but this catalogue exceeds previous formal studies. Each entry describes the basic content of the manuscript, the reconstructed size of the artifact, the generally accepted date range, a bibliography of the most relevant published studies on a given fragment, and a fresh description of the manuscript that includes aspects like scribal patterns and any notable paleographical features.

The study concludes by integrating the material findings into a broader account of early Christian textual practices, arguing that miniature codices constitute a meaningful subset of Christian manuscripts that illuminate how texts were produced, circulated, and used within early Christian communities.

Statements are often made by scholars and pastors that downplay the relevance of physical copies of the Scriptures in the ancient world. However, Kruger's study at the very least forces a more nuanced vision of how biblical texts functioned for individuals in these eras. As Kruger observes, "the mere *existence* of such tiny books is a reminder that (some) Christians—perhaps more than we thought—expressed their textual culture, and particularly their commitment to the Christian scriptures, in private/personal ways" (p. 177). This means that "like never before, *individual Christians could be united to, and connected with, their books*" (p. 177, emphasis original). Indeed, "it is hard to think of something more bookish than always carrying around a book" (pp. 177–78). These kinds of observations have the potential to reshape several commonly stated assumptions about the reading culture of the earliest churches.

In the end, this technical volume about little books yields sizable insight into the social and reading culture of Early Christianity. A literal page-turner about ancient little page-turners.

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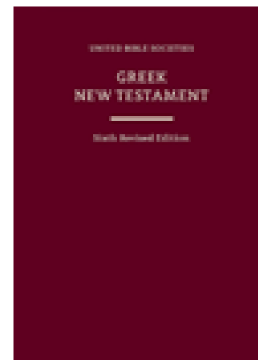
United Bible Societies. *The Greek New Testament, 6th Revised Edition*. Edited by Hugh Houghton, et al. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2025. £99.99/$89.95.



First published in 1966, the UBS *Greek New Testament* hits its 60th birthday this year. It has long been the preferred hand edition for its intended audience of translators, students, and pastors. The arrival of this new, sixth edition is a major publishing event, especially as it is accompanied by a completely new textual commentary (reviewed separately). So much has changed with this edition that it can fairly be called the most significant update to the UBS edition in fifty years (when the third edition was first linked with the Nestle-Aland). By way of review, we can highlight the salient changes under the following headings: editors, format, text, and apparatus.

The largest change is not to the edition itself but to the team that is responsible for it. From the beginning, a distinguishing feature of the UBS Greek New Testament has been that its text is the product of a committee rather than an individual. The committee was originally designed to be widely representative of North American and European scholarship and is still aimed at reflecting "a consensus view of the current state of scholarship" (p. 4*)*. Confessionally, its members eventually encompassed all three historic branches of Christianity (though the project has always been spearheaded and funded by Protestant Bible societies). That committee has changed somewhat over the years, with members added and removed, but by the time the UBS5 was published in 2014, all five of the listed editors had either passed away or were retired. This left some of us wondering about the committee's future. However, the Preface to this edition explains that a new one was already formed in 2011. It consists of Hugh Houghton, Christos Karakolis, David Parker, Holger Strutwolf, David Trobisch, and Klaus Wachtel (Stephen Pisano was a member but passed away in 2019). To the best of my knowledge, this represents members from Protestant (Anglican and Lutheran), Eastern Orthodox, and Roman Catholic churches. The new committee was tasked with revising the edition, including which variation units to include and which witnesses to cite, but they did not, as explained below, make any new textual decisions. They did, however, reevaluate and reassign the popular letter grades (A to

D), despite admitting they have misgivings about the whole system (p. 13). The result is somewhat awkward in that the reader is given this committee's level of certainty about someone else's textual decisions. Overall, the revisions led to 269 A-ratings, 447 B-ratings, 235 C-ratings, just 17 D-ratings, and 48 diamond readings (explained below).

Moving to formatting, the most obvious change is that the entire edition has been re-typeset using Minion font. The result is very pleasant and, along with other changes mentioned below, makes the whole page more inviting to this reviewer's eye. The physical size is comparable to the previous edition. This is achieved, despite slightly thicker pages (reducing bleed-through) and a thicker cover, because the number of pages is reduced from 990 to just under 700. Much of that is due to a reduced apparatus (see below), but the preface, introduction, and appendices are also shorter. The paragraphing and section headings are largely unchanged, but poetic formatting now follows the Nestle-Aland for the first time (see, e.g., Col 1:15–20; Titus 3:4–7; Heb 1:3–4). Sadly, the four beautifully detailed color maps of the ancient world have been replaced by two smaller, more basic black-and-white versions. Old Testament quotations are now marked with italics instead of bold type with some updates to what is marked as such (e.g., Mark 13:24–25 is now treated as a quotation). Much more substantial is the change to the cross-referencing system itself, which has moved from the bottom of the page to the outer margins and now only marks Old Testament quotations (which are still indexed). Gone completely is any reference to non-biblical citations (e.g., 1 Enoch 1:9 in Jude 14–15), biblical allusions (e.g., Ps 2:7 in Matt 3:17), and literary parallels (Epimenides in Titus 1:12). The resulting index of Old Testament quotations is a mere six pages. But the most significant format change—if it can be called that—is also the one I expect to cause the most angst among the intended audience: the order of books now reflects Greek manuscript tradition with the Catholic Letters following Acts and Hebrews sandwiched between 2 Thessalonians and 1 Timothy. Though it may seem novel, the same order can be found in nineteenth-century editions like Westcott and Hort and even in the late twentieth-century edition of Robinson and Pierpont.

Of course, in any new edition the big question is always: where has the text changed? Like its predecessor, the UBS6 has adopted the editorial decisions of the much larger *Editio Critica Maior* (ECM) where available. In the UBS5, that meant only the Catholic Letters, but here it expands to include Mark, Acts, and Revelation. Everywhere else, the text remains as before and thus reflects the text of the UBS3 from 1975. In all, 165 changes were introduced in the newly updated books, and these are listed conveniently in an appendix (33 in Mark, 52 in Acts, 80 in Revelation). None of these, it must be kept in mind, is the decision of the UBS committee itself, but of the different ECM editorial teams (though a few UBS members are also ECM editors). If any generalizations can be made about the changes, they would be that Byzantine readings are slightly more represented and the text of Revelation has fewer solecisms. If I had to pick a candidate for "most surprising decision," it would be the rejection of the sentence, "and the rest of the dead did not come alive until the thousand years was complete," in Revelation 20:5. Could this decision, if right (and I think it is wrong), affect millennial views? Amillennialists may hope. Brackets are another change. The use of double brackets has been expanded so that there are now no "missing verses" (e.g., Acts 8:37) while the use of single brackets has been reduced. Following the ECM, the latter are abandoned in favor of the diamond symbol. This represents places where the ECM editors left a decision open and so print the text as a split line (one reading on top of the other). Here, there are no split lines, and so the default is to print the top-line text which usually matches the previous edition's text. In all, just under thirteen percent of the ECM's diamond-marked variations are included in this edition: 14 of 66 in Mark; 14 of 156 in Acts; 6 of 43 in the Catholic Letters; 13 of 106 in Revelation

(unfortunately, no full list is given as was in UBS5). This shows just how few split lines in the ECM are deemed significant for translation or exegesis.

While textual changes always get the most attention in a new edition, I would venture that the changes to the apparatus are more significant here. Overall, the apparatus has been streamlined and reduced. Some of this is due to the complete removal of the discourse segmentation apparatus and the reduction of the cross-referencing system explained above. For this reviewer, the removal of the former is a gain with no real loss: its value was far outweighed by how cumbersome it was to use. Another reduction is that references to modern Bible translations, added in the fifth edition, are gone again. Further reduction comes from the remaining textual apparatus in terms of both the number of variants and the evidence listed. In the first case, although 138 variation units are new, there are fewer overall. The number is down from 1,418 to 1,017. Likewise with the textual evidence. After being increased in UBS4, patristic evidence is now vastly reduced: only Greek authors, and only up to the fifth century, are included (with Tertullian the lone Latin exception). The resulting list of patristic sources has gone from 169 entries to just 28. Versional evidence is slimmer, too, with Armenian, Georgian, and Slavonic cut. Yet another reduction, and an important one, comes in regard to Latin. Old Latin manuscripts are no longer cited individually (the siglum "vl" for *vetus latina* replaces "it") and the same is true of different print editions of the Vulgate. Oddly, the Old Syriac does not get the same treatment but is still distinguished by three of its four known manuscripts (Curetonian, Sinaitic, and the Sinai New Find; Vat. iber. 4 is not cited). The changes to the citation of Greek manuscripts are mostly cosmetic but do affect each category. Lectionaries are now cited only as a group and only when they differ from the Byzantine text. Fewer minuscules are cited in Paul and in books edited for the ECM. The citation of majuscules also follows the ECM in using Gregory-Aland numbers (e.g., 03) for alphabetic designations (e.g., B), though both are still given in the introduction. Though some readers may balk, this is good news for my students who always forget that D (05) in Mark is not D (06) in Romans. As for the papyri, they are now cited up to P141. The fourteen added since UBS5 date from the second to the seventh century and attest to eleven New Testament books. One new addition is the citation of the Textus Receptus when it differs from the Byzantine text. As a result of all the reductions, it is rare to find a page where the apparatus takes up more than a quarter of the page—a real contrast with previous editions.

These constitute the most important changes. I have kept my evaluations of them to a minimum since they mostly speak for themselves. After several months of use, I have found the new edition much more inviting than any of its predecessors. The editors succeeded admirably in their goal of making the edition "more focused and user-friendly" (p. 8). As a result, I expect this edition to increase the UBS's already loyal fan base, especially among those new to the Greek New Testament. If I have an overriding concern, it is that the apparatus surrenders too much in the process so that those of us accustomed to leaning on the UBS for its extra detail will now have to go elsewhere, perhaps all the way to the ECM. But all editions have their limits, and this one is no different. It makes for an excellent hand edition, one that is well conceived and well executed, and promises to carry on the UBS legacy for many years to come—perhaps another sixty.

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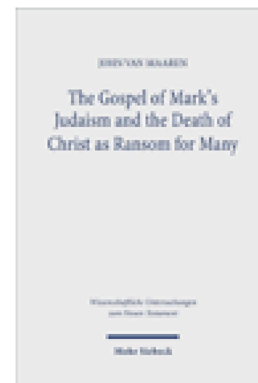
John van Maaren. *The Gospel of Mark's Judaism and the Death of Christ as a Ransom for Many*. WUNT 534. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2025. £124.00/$168.00.



Many monographs proclaim their ambition to shift a paradigm; few do. In my opinion, this volume stands a better chance than most. This monograph is the second to develop from the author's doctoral dissertation at McMaster University; the first was published as *The Boundaries of Jewishness in the Southern Levant: 200 BCE–132 CE* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2022). The present work applies a nuanced, textured set of conceptualities for discerning and situating the "Jewishness" of an ancient religious text such as the Gospel of Mark, which it employs to undermine the reigning scholarly paradigm, which the author calls "Gentile Mark."

By "Gentile Mark," Van Maaren means not the ethnicity of the author but a reconstruction of the text's perspective and its social setting (p. 14). The most significant pillar of Gentile Mark is "that the writer is understood to narrate a development during Jesus's Galilean ministry in which Jesus's behavioral expectations and target audience move from a limited focus on the Jewish people and their ancestral law to a more encompassing ethic and a universal embrace of all those who will 'repent and believe in the good news' (1:15)" (p. 14). Van Maaren argues that one crucial reason for the dominance of this view is that "scholars have been reading the Gospel of Mark through a particular Pauline lens" (p. 19). After an introduction (ch. 1) and a history of Gentile Mark in scholarship from the late nineteenth century to the present (ch. 2), Van Maaren argues that, in Mark, Jesus does not reject the Mosaic law either in whole or in part but instead assumes its practical authority (ch. 3); that instead of narrating a progressively widening mission to the nations, Mark's narrative "assumes throughout an Israel-centric mission with little or no hints of the inclusion of the nations (p. 133; ch. 4); that Mark's eschatology does not annul, delay, or reinterpret expectations of Israel's national restoration but instead straightforwardly affirms them (ch. 5); and that the author of Mark understands Jesus's death to "ransom scattered Israel from among the nations" (p. 217; ch. 6). In Van Maaren's view, purported indicators of a mission of Jesus to foreigners rely on inconsistent narrative signals and create contradictions. Those contradictions disappear when the relevant textual details are understood as "part of a regathering of scattered Israel from among the nations" (p. 218). Finally, a brief conclusion recaps the argument (ch. 7).

Before I engage with the substance of Van Maaren's provocative and significant arguments, one minor housekeeping matter needs addressing. The book is marked by thorough research, clear writing, and careful argumentation throughout, but it is marred by a distracting number of minor errors. I mention the following, not to blame the author (let the one who is without typos throw the first stone) but in the hope that the publisher might consider a modest revision of its editorial processes: "writers" missing an apostrophe (p. 34); "criteria" where "criterion" was needed (p. 56); "alter" for "altar" (p. 75 n. 93); οἶκόν misspelled (p. 112); εἰς with an acute accent instead of a smooth breathing mark (p. 119); a reference to 13:1 where 13:10 was intended (p. 129); "to acknowledgement" where "to acknowledge" was intended (p. 147); "the emphasize" instead of "the emphasis" (p. 165 n. 134); "the indicative case" for "the indicative mood" (p. 168); "Ps. 110:2" for "Ps. 110:1" (p. 173); misspelling the name of Rikki Watts as "Ricki" (p. 175); "necessarily step" instead of "necessary step" (p. 181); Mark 15:6 for 16:6 (p. 216); "it's" for "its" (p. 223); "receive" for "received" (p. 224); "extent texts" for "extant texts" (p. 230); and "disciple's" for "disciples" (p. 231).

To do full justice to Van Maaren's work would require a far more substantial review essay than space permits here, so I will limit myself to commenting on what I regard as the work's two strongest theses and its two weakest positions. First, the two strongest theses. While I would not endorse every detail of Van Maaren's proposal regarding Jesus's stance toward the law in Mark, I do think he has convincingly refuted the common position that Jesus rejects the authority of (at least large portions of) the Mosaic law. Van Maaren's study of the handwashing incident in Mark 7:1–23 is particularly illuminating (pp. 69–79), although I wish it would have gone into even more detail the way the author's 2017 article on the subject does (see John van Maaren, "Does Mark's Jesus Abrogate Torah? Jesus' Purity Logion and Its Illustration in Mark 7:15–23," *JJMJS* 4 [2017]: 21–41).

Second, regarding the dominant perception that Jesus's ministry progresses from an Israel-only focus to increasingly embrace Gentiles, I am convinced that van Maaren's criticisms are decisive. For instance, he points out that, in the encounter with the Syrophoenician woman, Jesus is seeking solitude, not embarking on a deliberate, Gentile-focused mission (7:24). "If the writer means to depict it as the beginning of a foreign mission, it begins contrary to the intentions of the story's hero" (p. 98). Further, Jesus's initial refusal of the woman's request, supported by his explanation that he was sent first to the children, i.e., Israel, implies that Jesus had not yet ministered to Gentiles. This calls into question the widespread view that, in 5:1–20, Jesus had already initiated a Decapolis-wide mission of proclamation to Gentiles (p. 98). Insofar as Jesus's stance toward the law and his purportedly shifting target audience are perhaps the most load-bearing pillars of "Gentile Mark," in my view van Maaren succeeds in his overall aim.

In my view, the two weakest points of van Maaren's argument are his treatment of the significance and beneficiaries of Jesus's death and his failure to deal adequately with the evidence Mark presents that Jesus intends his disciples to engage in future proclamation to geographically widespread Gentiles. Regarding Jesus's death, one key problem in van Maaren's treatment is ambiguity regarding the intended recipients of its saving effects. He writes, "In the context of Mark's new exodus motif, the identity of the 'many,' as the primary beneficiaries of Jesus's death, is best understood as the many descendants of Jacob scattered among the nations whom the Hebrew prophets foresee being gathered to the ancestral homeland" (p. 205). It is not clear to me how much work van Maaren intends the adjective "primary" to do here and in what the primacy consists. Does van Maaren understand Mark to state or imply that others beyond scattered Israelites are intended beneficiaries of Jesus's death? Who else benefits and how do we know? Those are crucial questions that van Maaren's "primary" raises, yet, as far as I can tell, he nowhere answers.

Second, van Maaren underplays evidence in Mark for a future Gentile mission. Regarding 7:27, "let the children be fed first," van Maaren sees "first" as merely "leaving open a possible later additional mission depicted as feeding dogs" (p. 118). "Possible" is too weak: "first" necessarily implies "second" or "next," and the woman's rhetorical triumph over Jesus's pedagogical deferral confirms that Gentile dogs will, so to speak, have their day. Van Maaren's attempt to limit the force of the metaphor to a statement about the priority of children over pets fails to account for how subsequent action interacts with the saying. Further, regarding the promise to bear witness before governors and kings, in the context of the good news being preached to all nations (εἰς πάντα τὰ ἔθνη; 13:9–10), van Maaren argues that the target of such proclamation is scattered Israelites among all nations, not the Gentiles who constitute those nations (pp. 125–33). But this seems to me to run aground on at least the rock of "governors and kings." Who are these governors and kings, and what realms do they govern? If they are Gentile rulers ruling

Gentile realms, then the disciples’ promised proclamation to them would seem to constitute irrefutable evidence of Jesus’s intent that his followers will proclaim good news to non-Jews in non-Jewish lands.

This is a substantial, challenging, original monograph. There is much more I could have both commended and raised questions about. It deserves to be carefully reckoned with by all scholars and serious students of the Gospels.

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— HISTORY & HISTORICAL THEOLOGY —

Jeffrey W. Barbeau. *The Last Romantic: C. S. Lewis, English Literature, and Modern Theology*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2025. 166 pp. £17.99/$22.00.

Few authors have displayed the breadth of Christian imagination like C. S. Lewis. From his creative world-building, like Narnia and Perelandra, to his compelling argumentation in *Mere Christianity,* to the moving imagery of *The Great Divorce*, Lewis has captured his readers’ attention and pointed them further up and further in. Scholarship on the life and writings of Lewis has blossomed in recent years, and Jeffrey Barbeau’s *The Last Romantic: C. S. Lewis, English Literature, and Modern Theology* contributes to our understanding of Lewis. Barbeau has published works on British Romanticism, Methodism, and English Romantic-era religion. He brings his areas of expertise to bear in this work that explores the impact of British Romanticism on C. S. Lewis. *The Last Romantic* is the eighth volume in IVP’s Hansen Lectureship Series that publishes books based on lectures at the Marion E. Wade Center at Wheaton College.

This book features three chapters drawn from the lectures: “C. S. Lewis and the ‘Romantic Heresy,’” “C. S. Lewis and the Anxiety of Memory,” and “C. S. Lewis and the Sacramental Imagination.” Each chapter features a response from a Wheaton faculty member, including Sarah Borden, Matthew Lundin, and Keith L. Johnson. Barbeau interacts with his respondents in the conclusion. This book also features never-before-published poetry by C. S. Lewis, discovered in the marginalia of Lewis’s personal library held in the Wade Center.

Barbeau opens chapter 1 with an intriguing discussion of a debate between Wheaton faculty members in the 1960s published in the Wheaton *Faculty Bulletin* concerning aesthetics, Romanticism, and C. S. Lewis. Readers may read Barbeau’s account for the details, but the crux of the debate was concern about “the Romantic trend in religion” represented by C. S. Lewis (p. 23). Barbeau then launches his analysis of the impact of British Romanticism on Lewis’s personal appeals in *Mere Christianity* and *The Abolition of Man*. He identifies William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge as the two Romantic writers with the most impact on Lewis.

Intellectual influence is a tricky thing to prove. Authors can cite and interact with the work of thinkers, but how can one prove that one thinker truly influenced another? Barbeau does not argue

from citations and allusions alone. Rather, he demonstrates C. S. Lewis's engagement with Romantic writers and the development of his thought through analysis of marginalia in books from Lewis's personal library. Of special interest is Barbeau's discussion of Romantic themes in *The Abolition of Man,* paired with an analysis of Lewis's marginalia in his copy of Alec King and Martin Ketley's *The Control of Language*—the book Lewis called "the Green Book" in his denunciations in *The Abolition of Man*.

In his second chapter, Barbeau compares Lewis's autobiographical works with Romantic-era spiritual autobiographies. He contrasts Lewis's *Surprised by Joy* and *A Grief Observed* with an unpublished diary of a young woman from the mid-nineteenth century, as well as the published autobiographical work of John Wesley. The connection between Lewis's autobiographical works and John Wesley's *Journal* would seem arbitrary if not for more of Lewis's marginalia. Barbeau shows that Lewis's marginalia prove that he read Wesley's *Journal* shortly after his wife's death and during the time he wrote *A Grief Observed* (p. 78). Barbeau's analysis of the constructed nature of *A Grief Observed* in the vein of Wesley's selectively edited *Journal* is compelling. Barbeau argues well that Lewis's autobiographical works should be read as intentional, edited publications like Wesley's rather than as diaries. This chapter also features a noteworthy addition to debates in scholarship on Lewis. Biographers of Lewis debate the veracity of Lewis's timeline of his conversion. Barbeau introduces new evidence by means of tracing Lewis's correspondence with Owen Barfield and Bede Griffiths, discussing the writings of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. He pairs this correspondence with Lewis's concurrent marginalia that support Lewis's account of events in 1929.

Barbeau's final chapter considers "the legacy of the Romantic 'symbol' as the key to understanding Lewis's effort to negotiate personal experience" (p. 112). He examines the tendency towards nature worship in British Romanticism and Lewis's rejection of it in *The Four Loves*. He traces Lewis's engagement in *The Great Divorce* with the human propensity to replace love for the Creator with love for part of the creation. He demonstrates Lewis's engagement with William Blake and Coleridge in *The Great Divorce*. He then focuses his analysis on a lesser-known essay of Lewis's, "Transposition." Barbeau argues that Lewis's use of symbol approaches something richer than the term "symbol" conveys. He calls it Lewis's "sacramental imagination." He concludes, "For Lewis, as with Coleridge, narrative participates in the real sacramentally" (p. 139). He closes with a commendation of Lewis's common emphasis on the personal, not as a turn to groundless subjectivity but to demonstrate "that human imagination may point to higher realities than we recognize by sensory knowledge alone" (p. 144).

Jeffrey Barbeau has expanded our knowledge about the life and work of C. S. Lewis. His writing is engaging, and his subject is interesting. His careful analysis of Lewis's marginalia suggests many further lines of research for Lewis researchers. His careful engagement with Lewis's writings leaves the reader wanting to return to Lewis's works to feel the weight of glory and to journey further up and further in by means of Christian imagination.

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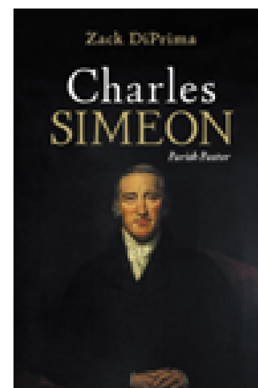
Zack DiPrima. *Charles Simeon: Parish Pastor*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2025. 218 pp. £23.00/$30.00.



Like many renowned pastors of history, Charles Simeon is best known today for his preaching. A prominent evangelical organization devoted to training pastors for preaching even bears his name, the Charles Simeon Trust, whose workshops regularly quote Simeon's preaching adage: "My endeavor is to bring out of Scripture what is there, and not to thrust in what I think might be there" (*Horae Homileticae* [London: Holdsworth and Ball, 1832], 1:xxi). But who was the pastor behind this towering preacher, and how did he understand and practice ministry within his particular tradition? This overlooked and fascinating subject is the concern of Zack DiPrima's *Charles Simeon: Parish Pastor*.

This study has great historical and practical value. Aside from his pulpit prowess, Simeon as a pastor has been left largely untouched. Simeon's spirituality has been examined, his "originality" and commitment to the Scriptures above theological systems is discussed, and his story of faithful ministry in the early opposition he encountered at Cambridge is fairly well known. But in addition to looking at him as a preacher, DiPrima examines Simeon through several distinct lenses: Simeon as a ministerial mentor, devoted Anglican, pious exemplar, and pastor of a parish. These features flesh out Simeon as a historical figure and, for the interested pastor, are full of potential insights for ministry.

DiPrima begins by setting the course for the study, which he says is focused on Simeon's "pastoral theology": his theologically informed perspective on the pastorate and the distinct approaches to ministry he embraced. Chapter 1, "Ministerial Mentor," sets Simeon in the context of a few key figures that influenced him, demonstrates the way Simeon intentionally leveraged his position to train and place future ministers, and makes a powerful argument for Simeon's global influence through mentorship. The next chapter describes Simeon as a devoted evangelical Anglican, which in his day made him a maverick—a maverick, DiPrima argues, whose Anglican commitment enabled him to be the key shaper of Anglican evangelicalism.

Chapter 4 delves into Simeon's personal piety, and here readers will especially be served by DiPrima's retrieval of Simeon's godly example. Notable in this chapter is Simeon's repeated insistence on a pastor's tender affections for and gentleness toward his people. Next, DiPrima describes Simeon's parish pastoral practice, highlighting Simeon's use of societies to effectively care for a large congregation where personal visits to every member were nigh impossible. Here, one sees Simeon's commitment to core convictions about ministry with a penchant for originality. Finally, "preaching paragon" examines the most well-known feature of Simeon's ministry. DiPrima argues that Simeon's preaching, and especially his impartation of convictions to future preachers, was the capstone of Simeon's influence and legacy. Indeed, as DiPrima shows, even Spurgeon, J. I. Packer, and John Stott were influenced by his preaching philosophy and prowess.

Parish Pastor occupies the niche genre of "published dissertation I think you'd enjoy." Though the work is academic and centers on demonstrating Simeon's historical influence through his pastoral ministry, it is also accessible and engaging. First of all, its subject is one of the most interesting and singular early evangelical pastors. Simeon was nothing if not his own man, and the distinct ways he practiced ministry highlighted by DiPrima are thought-provoking. Moreover, the writing is engaging. Most of DiPrima's careful historical analysis situates Simeon in the fascinating context of early Anglican

evangelicalism, where he is surrounded by remarkable and sometimes eccentric figures. Occasionally, DiPrima's situating of Simeon bears the thoroughness of a dissertation, but by and large it is warranted, illuminating, and interesting.

Diprima's angle for the study—pastoral theology—also bears comment and commendation. Pastoral theology in history is a neglected but growing field; it occupies a middle space between biography and historical theology. Methodologically, pastoral theology draws from a figure's stated views (in this case, Simeon's sermons and reflections) about the nature and practice of ministry, but it also discerns a philosophy of ministry through accounts of how one practiced ministry (e.g., Simeon's dinner parties for ministers and use of societies to care for his parish). DiPrima's study navigates this balance well and adds to it historical testimony about Simeon's influence on subsequent generations of leaders. There are, of course, limits to a study of this nature. The massive amount of material in Simeon's *Horae Homiletica* may bear further insights into Simeon's ministry. But *Parish Pastor* will be a starting place for future Simeon scholars interested in this topic.

Perhaps most helpful about this angle is how it shows that Simeon was not just a great preacher or holy man, but a wise and entrepreneurial pastor. Most fascinating was how *Parish Pastor* highlights the interplay between Simeon's committed churchmanship and his quietly innovative ministry practices outside of corporate worship. As DiPrima points out, Simeon combined a love of Anglicanism and commitment to its liturgy with a variety of innovative ministry practices, such as dinner parties for aspiring pastors and societies organized to account for every parishioner. This was a unique combination among early evangelicals. But as DiPrima argues, this is precisely what made Simeon so decisively influential for future ministers. To quote Spurgeon, Simeon had an "all-round" ministry that was more than just preaching. It also involved training the next generation, embracing and wisely navigating one's tradition, and personally caring for the sheep for whom Christ died.

However, as *Parish Pastor* concludes, Simeon's chief influence was indeed through his preaching. Again, this study fleshes out Simeon's preaching beyond what is well known—such as his commitment to the power of preaching, authorial intent as governing interpretation, and reticence about systematic theology dominating interpretation of biblical texts. But DiPrima also covers new ground, especially in Simeon's homiletic practice: his "skeleton" outlines, oral rehearsal, extemporaneous method of delivery, and insistence on the various stylistic qualities of good preaching. In these convictions and practices, Simeon was both a model and mentor to future generations of evangelical preachers.

If you want a careful historical study of one of early evangelicalism's most interesting and influential figures, I heartily recommend *Parish Pastor*. For leaders looking for wisdom in ministry, its picture of a rooted but entrepreneurial pastor provides much material for reflection and application.

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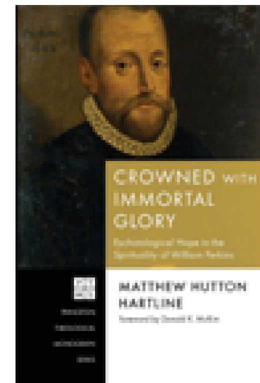
Matthew Hutton Hartline. *Crowned with Immortal Glory: Eschatological Hope in the Spirituality of William Perkins*. Princeton Theological Monograph Series. Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2024. 159 pp. £22.00/$28.00.



Within England, Europe, and New England, William Perkins (1558–1602) was one of the most influential English Protestants during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century. Known today in certain circles as "the father of English Puritanism," some readers may be surprised to learn that by the mid-1800s Perkins's works had faded from prominence in England and America. While the study of Perkins has experienced a renaissance in the past few decades, scholars have largely neglected his eschatology and have instead focused on topics like preaching, predestination, and covenant theology. This lacuna is not because death, heaven, and eschatological themes played a small role in his corpus. Instead, as Matthew Hartline convincingly shows in *Crowned with Immortal Glory*, these topics appeared over and over again in the books, sermons, and spirituality of William Perkins.

The book is a publication of Hartline's 2022 doctoral dissertation entitled "Crowned with Immortal Glory: Eschatological Hope in the Spirituality of William Perkins," completed at Southern Seminary under the supervision of J. Stephen Yuille. Hartline currently serves as a pastor at First Baptist Church in Cobden, Illinois. *Crowned with Immortal Glory* has three overarching ends: (1) to define Perkins's eschatological hope; (2) to demonstrate how this hope flows from vital theological loci like creation, covenants, soteriology, and the incarnation; (3) and to delineate how this eschatological hope shapes Perkins's view of Christian spirituality and ministry (p. 6). Through this flow, the author is "chiefly concerned" to recover Perkins's view of biblical spirituality (p. 8).

Broadly speaking, the book unfolds chronologically in five steps: (1) overview of Perkins's eschatology: this includes exploring Perkins's views on traditional topics like the millennium and beatific vision; (2) elucidation of Perkins's *ordo salutis*: this exposition connects eschatology with soteriology, covenant theology, and union with Christ; (3) discussion of Perkins's doctrine of glorification; (4) unpacking Perkins's teaching about the resurrection; and (5) connecting Perkins's eschatological thought with his teaching on Christian piety and ministry.

Hartline's book has many strengths. I want to highlight three. First, Hartline's monograph is one of the closest readings of Perkins's corpus I have encountered in more than a decade of reading scholarship on Perkins. This fact is especially noteworthy given the relatively brief 150-page length of *Crowned with Immortal Glory*. On almost every page, Hartline quotes or references around a half-dozen pericopes in Perkins's vast corpus of more than two million words. Further, unlike a decent tranche of scholarship on Perkins, Hartline's work draws from all over Perkins's corpus and not just from a few select tracts within Perkins's roughly few dozen publications. As a result, Hartline immerses readers in Perkins's thoughts.

Second, while scholars have paid peripheral attention to Perkins's eschatology, they have not focused at length on it. As such, Hartline's work aptly fills an important gap in the study of Perkins. Third, Hartline's book manages to connect a relatively understudied theme—namely, eschatology—to heavily studied themes—namely, soteriology and covenants—in such a way that Hartline sheds fresh light on the latter. This is no small matter given the volume of scholarly writing on Perkins's soteriology and covenantal theology.

As this book is a published doctoral dissertation, I should mention two observations before concluding this review. First, the book largely avoids engaging in broader scholarly debates about Perkins, his contemporaries, or the broader Puritan movement. One notable exception is Hartline's discussion of Perkins and the covenant of works (pp. 35–36). Nonetheless, the introductory summary of research is less than one full page (pp. 5–6). Many chapters have at most five secondary sources. The author's thesis and his exposition of Perkins's thinking largely appears in a vacuum. While Hartline is often exploring mostly unchartered territory in scholarship on Perkins, the book's general lack of engagement with secondary sources is noteworthy for a doctoral dissertation. Second, apart from five brief pages of biography about Perkins in the introductory chapter, the book almost entirely neglects Perkins's historical context (pp. 1–5). The author avoids elucidating relevant context about life in 1590s Cambridge, such as the terrors of plagues, infant mortality, death during childbirth, and fears of Roman Catholic invasions. These factors loomed in the background—and sometimes in the foreground—of Perkins's discussion of eschatological matters.

In conclusion, if you are a historian looking to understand Perkins's thought within its original context or a scholar looking for an argument set in the context of broader academic debates, then you will likely come away from Hartline's book wishing for more. However, for theologians looking for a detailed exposition of Perkins's eschatological thought, Hartline's book is a precise and well-researched monograph. Likewise, for pastors, interested laity, and those seeking to grow spiritually from Perkins's thinking about eternal matters, Hartline's book serves as an accurate, detailed, and invaluable guide.

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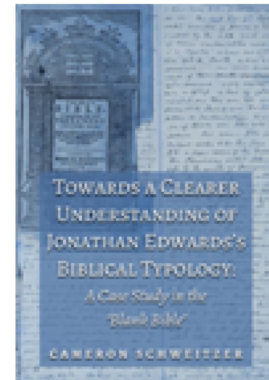
Cameron Schweitzer. *Towards a Clearer Understanding of Jonathan Edwards's Biblical Typology: A Case Study in the "Blank Bible"*. Treatises on Jonathan Edwards. Monee, IL: JESociety Press, 2025. 362 pp. £28.72/$34.95.



The fifth in the Jonathan Edwards Society's Treatises on Jonathan Edwards series, Cameron Schweitzer's work focuses on Edwards's typology as found in his "Blank Bible." Other works in this series include works by S. Mark Hamilton, Adam G. Cavalier, John S. Banks, and David Luke. The "Blank Bible" was a Bible Edwards had marked with insights he had gleaned from Scripture in blank spaces built into this particular printing of the Bible. For this work, Schweitzer limited his scope to the examples of types found and expounded upon by Edwards in the "Blank Bible" with cross-references to Edwards's "Notes on Scripture" as seen in the *Works of Jonathan Edwards* Yale series (Vols. 15 and 24, edited by Stephen J. Stein in 1998 and 2006, respectively). Cameron Schweitzer serves at Gateway Seminary as the director of the San Francisco campus and associate professor of historical theology. He graduated with his PhD from Gateway in 2022. He has written previous chapters for the *Jonathan Edwards Miscellanies Companion* (vols. 2 and 3) and contributed an article on Edwards's exegetical typology in *Themelios* 50.3 (2025).

Schweitzer's purpose is to challenge the two strands (implied or explicitly stated) in scholarship of Edwards's typology. First is the "conservative" approach that limits typology only to Christ specifically,

or the New Testament generally. Second are those in the "Miller-Lowance line" named after Perry Miller and Mason Lowance (also advocated by Ava Chamberlain and Thomas Davies). Schweitzer rebuts the Miller-Lowance stance with Douglas Sweeney, Stephen Nichols, and Robert Brown, while also challenging the "wholly" christological view of Edwards's typology (in contrast to Glenn Kreider, Miller, and Nichols). In his thorough categorization and evaluation of Edwards's typology in the "Blank Bible," Schweitzer shows evidence of Edwards's use of types and antitypes found in the Old Testament and in the New Testament, and of Old Testament types that "culminate in eschatological realities" (p. 190). All this shows that Edwards's typology is not strictly "conservative" or christological.

Schweitzer thoroughly categorizes the multitude of ways Edwards examined and postulated on types found in his "Blank Bible." While Schweitzer begins the categories of types with those which would fit in the Miller-Lowance conservative and/or Christological categories, he moves on to show nine other various overarching types found in Edwards's "Blank Bible." These include christological, soteriological (the cross), soteriological (ascension, exaltation, etc.), ecclesiological, "intra" Old Testamental, New Testamental, eschatological, natural, spiritualistic, and other various types categorized under "miscellaneous." Along with these chapters, Schweitzer also provides helpful categorical tables in canonical order.

Schweitzer's work also provides a great example of Edwards's hermeneutics as seen through his notes. What should be of interest to Edwards scholars is the vast array of avenues one can explore by examining a type (or a thread of types), as Schweitzer does in Edwards's "Blank Bible," and how to subsequently analyze this typology in the formulation of these types in Edwards's sermons and theological writings. Having written on Edwards's sermons, this reviewer saw several examples ("Christ the 'Rock of Defense,'" p. 45; "The Shepherd of God's Flock," p. 48; "The Nile and Christ's Divinity," p. 202) where, from his research, he could connect with Edwards's hermeneutics, homiletics, and theology in further research. Because of these exciting potentialities, Schweitzer has offered Edwards studies an invaluable resource and springboard for further Edwardsian study.

An example given by Schweitzer emphasizes his point of showing an intra-Old Testament type with Jacob's "troublesome life," including his flight from his family and later "banishment from Canaan," as typified through his "halted thigh" in wrestling with the Angel of the Lord (pp. 125–26). This is shown as an example by Schweitzer of how Edwards's types did not conservatively only point to Christ and the New Testament but typified examples with one another in the Old Testament, or even in a biblical character's life. These kinds of insights can be a springboard for further research into Edwards and his use of types. For example, Schweitzer's insight prompted this reviewer to examine Edwards's sermon on this text, the sermon "Blessed Struggle" found in *Sermons and Discourses 1734–1738* (*Works of Jonathan Edwards* 19), where Edwards preached on Jacob's wrestling with the Angel of the Lord and identified it as a type of the steadfastness one needs to have in prayer through trials. Here, Edwards sees the physical wrestling as a type of "persevering prayer" and the wounded thigh as a "trial of his constancy." The above comparison illustrates the benefit of Schweitzer's research in showing Edwards is not wholly "conservative" or christological. Schweitzer's catalog of examples will advance further study of Edwards's use (or changing) of types later in his sermons or theological writings.

For his own work, Schweitzer has successfully redefined how Edwards's typology should be reflective of his commitments to biblical typology, advancing towards a "God-ordained teleological and/or eschatological fulfillment" (p. 266). Schweitzer shows the ways in which Edwards biblically moved

beyond "conservative" or christological typology by tethering biblical types to the reality of redemptive history.

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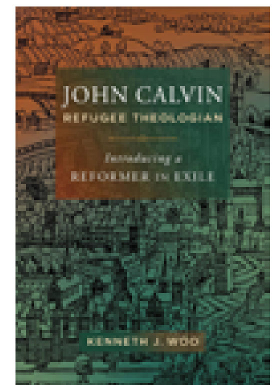
Kenneth J. Woo. *John Calvin, Refugee Theologian: Introducing a Reformer in Exile*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2025. 232 pp. £19.99/$24.99.



If one follows the field of Calvin studies today, one notes the emergence of a generation of scholars rooted either in Southeast Asia or Latin America who are publishing material at a high standard. This is observable, for instance, in the recent *John Calvin in Context* (ed. R. Ward Holder [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020]) and *Oxford Handbook of Calvin and Calvinism* (ed. Bruce Gordon and Carl E. Trueman [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021]). John Calvin (1509–1564), a Reformer in an age of tyrannical kings and emperors, is proving to have a high degree of relevance to global cultural and political situations. What is observable beyond Europe and North America is also observable *within* European and North American contexts. The volume under review is the third on Calvin studies to have recently passed through the reviewer's hands, representing the efforts of Asian American or Latino American scholars. The future of Calvin studies is therefore bright. It has gone global.

Kenneth Woo, a graduate of Westminster Seminary, Philadelphia, and Duke Divinity School, now a church historian at Pittsburgh Seminary, has a firm grasp of his subject and a deep sympathy with the Genevan Reformer and his teaching. A third-generation American of Chinese descent, he has found a resonance between this French native of Noyon—uprooted to Switzerland for his own safety—and his own family's story of coming to America in a time of peril. With this affinity acknowledged, Woo has gone on to survey the career and writings of Calvin with eyes alert to the many allusions the Reformer made to his experience of being a refugee and knowing the pain of exile.

He is not the first to raise this issue. In the book's introduction, he kindly acknowledges (pp. xix and xxiii) that two historians—the late Heiko Oberman (d. 2001), as well as Nicholas Terpstra—have gone before him in highlighting the significance of mass migration of religious refugees in the sixteenth century. But it is Woo who has taken on the demanding task of tracing the thread of Calvin's experience of exile in his theological writing, his biblical commentaries, his correspondence, his preaching, and his polemical writing.

But what *kind* of a book emerges from this tracing of the 'exile thread' in Calvin's life and ministry? Not a biography. I think it is safe to say that Woo takes for granted that his reader, having read a standard biography, already has a good grounding in the main contours and controversies of Calvin's career. Nor is the book a theological biography: that would require a much larger volume than this. I find the subtitle very apt: *Introducing a Reformer in Exile.* Woo wants his reader to take a closer look at the Calvin we *think* we already know. It is as though the frames of a familiar film are now to be viewed in slow-motion. And in those slower-moving frames, we are able to see scars, to sense injury, and to take

note of indignation, all of which are traceable to his at-first temporary (1535) and then-permanent flight from France in 1536. From this, there was to be no return. With that experience scarcely processed, Calvin, with colleague Guillaume Farel, experienced exile again when, after only two years, they were banished: Calvin left Geneva for Strasburg. Woo guides us to see the traces of these upheavals in what Calvin preaches, argues, and writes. The point is not to bring us to shed a tear for Calvin but to see him as more than one-dimensional. This is a man with a past, a man with a memory. Every reader of this book will go away more empathetic. Every reader of Calvin will read with greater attentiveness.

It needs to be said that tracing the refugee theme in Calvin's career makes for a more engaging story in some portions of this book than in others. Chapters 1 (his personal history) and 2 (his diverse audiences) proved gripping. Chapter 3 (which traced the refugee theme through the successive expanded editions of the *Institutes*) was especially informative. Chapters 7–8 (which dealt with his polemical writings and criticisms of the secret believers he tagged as 'Nicodemites') made for engaging reading.

But let us return to Woo's starting point. There, he acknowledged that he had been alerted to the issue of refugees in the Reformation era by writers who went before him. The reader who is generally aware of Reformation history will perhaps recall that a good number of Calvin's contemporary Reformers had life experiences that closely corresponded to his. John Knox (d.1572) had already been banished from Scotland, endured French imprisonment, then needed to flee Edwardian England, and received the cold shoulder in Frankfurt *before* settling in Calvin's Geneva. Italian Protestants Peter Martyr Vermigli (d.1562) and Girolamo Zanchi (d.1590) were similarly exiles from their homeland (Vermigli eventually needing to flee from Oxford in 1553, just as he had fled Italy). Bucer of Strasburg, who befriended Calvin in 1538, himself needed to flee that city and died in Cambridge, England, in 1551. Polish Reformer Jan á Lasko (d.1560) was already a refugee when at Emden in the Holy Roman Empire. He arrived in London in 1548, but by 1553 it was no longer a safe place for him. In this wider context, Calvin, a fellow refugee, had relatively greater stability than many of his contemporaries.

If we do not keep this wider context in mind, Woo's book can have the unwitting effect of further strengthening a predisposition we already carry with us: a fixation on Calvin to the neglect of his contemporaries. It is the superabundance of Calvin's republished writings since the Victorian period (in comparison with the writings of his contemporaries) that makes a study like *John Calvin, Refugee Theologian* possible. The sober truth is that the observations made by Woo about the Reformer of Geneva might well be replicated by the examination of the accessible literary remains of many of his contemporaries. But theirs are the under-told stories.

Kenneth Woo has opened a pathway in an exemplary way. There are numerous fellow-Reformers whose experiences of exile still call for investigation.

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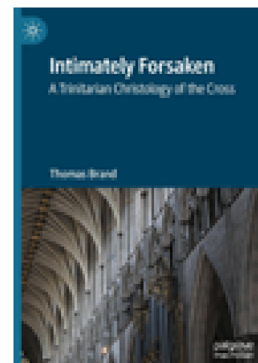
— SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY —

Thomas Brand. *Intimately Forsaken: A Trinitarian Christology of the Cross*. Cham, Switzerland: Macmillan, 2024. x + 216 pp. £119.99/$159.99.



The lament of Jesus from the cross, as documented in Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34 ("My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"), represents one of the most theologically challenging statements within the biblical text. In the aftermath of the two World Wars, pastoral and theological impulses to render God more immediately relatable produced doctrinally distorted interpretations of this cry, some positing an ontological rupture within the Triune God. In *Intimately Forsaken*, a revised version of his doctoral thesis, Thomas Brand offers an orthodox alternative by developing, as the subtitle indicates, a Trinitarian Christology of the cross. Employing the architectural metaphor of a cathedral, Brand contends that the theological weight of Christ's cry must rest upon four pillars: sound exegesis, orthodox Christology, classical theism, and a robust doctrine of the Trinity (p. 3). In doing so, Brand leads the reader to the foot of a triniform cross while guarding against the projection of its cruciform shadow into the inner life of God.

As the first pillar, Brand offers an exegetically grounded definition of "forsakenness" within the crucifixion narratives. Following Cyril of Alexandria's reading of Psalm 22:1, Brand interprets Christ's forsakenness as covenantal and representative: as the second Adam, Christ bears the covenant curse for those united to him by faith (pp. 15–16). Analyzing the exegetical triangle of Mark 15:34, Acts 2:31, and Psalm 16:10, Brand construes "forsakenness" as Christ being "left undefended" to God's judgment against sin (pp. 19–21) rather than a rupture within the Trinity or a perichoretic cessation.

The second pillar examines the orthodox doctrine of the hypostatic union and its direct corollary, the *communicatio idiomatum.* Brand expounds Cyril's asymmetric Christological predication (pp. 28–39) and traces its development through John of Damascus (pp. 58–65) to Thomas Aquinas (pp. 65–67), showing how this tradition is sustained against heterodox readings. He contends that this patristic consensus, as inherited by the Reformed tradition, predicates the properties of both natures of the Son while rejecting the Lutheran *communicatio naturarum*, or the cross-predication of attributes (p. 67). Brand offers a particularly incisive critique of Martin Luther, contending that Luther "departed from the bounds of Chalcedon" (p. 42) by ascribing divine predicates to Christ's human nature and vice versa (pp. 42–51). Although Brand acknowledges patristic caution concerning the *communicatio idiomatum* and the cry of dereliction, he argues that his governing maxim, though novel, remains orthodox (p. 62). This reviewer notes that this novelty is methodological rather than dogmatic.

In the third pillar, Brand defends the metaphysics of classical theism by affirming divine simplicity, immutability, and impassibility. He critiques what he terms "inferential theology," exemplified by Jürgen Moltmann and Bruce McCormack, which reconstructs God's nature from the economic event of the cross (p. 76) and reflects Hegel's "history of God" (p. 85). Against this, Brand argues via Aquinas that God's existence as *actus purus* precludes suffering in the divine nature while providing the metaphysical conditions for the incarnation (p. 99).

The fourth and final pillar turns to Trinitarian distinctions. Drawing on Aquinas (pp. 110–18) and Turretin (pp. 120–21), Brand defines the divine persons as subsistent relations, distinct from the divine

essence only by a modal distinction (p. 133). This framework, he asserts, safeguards divine simplicity against the fragmentations implicit in Social Trinitarianism (pp. 137–46).

Having established these pillars, Brand articulates his constructive proposal. Paralleling Cyril's paradox that Christ "suffered impassibly," he introduces the phrase "intimately forsaken" (p. 152). He argues that the Son was truly left undefended by the Father in his human nature while remaining, in his divine nature, in unbroken perichoretic communion sustained by the Spirit (p. 160–62). Upholding the principle *opera Trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa*, Brand asserts that the Father and Spirit participate fully in the undivided work of the cross without sharing in the Son's suffering, where the Holy Spirit serves as the bond of love between the Father and the Son even in the darkness of Golgotha (pp. 171–74).

The chapter culminates in a defense of penal substitutionary atonement that avoids Moltmann's "God against God" rupture (pp. 180–81). Acknowledging the lack of a conciliar definition of redemption comparable to Nicaea or Chalcedon, Brand appeals to the church fathers (pp. 174–75) to show a substantive and consistent soteriological agreement within the tradition (p. 175). Penal substitution thus emerges as the undivided work of the Trinity: the Son, sustained by the Spirit, voluntarily bears the penalty of sin in his humanity while remaining intimately united to the Father in his divinity (p. 184).

This reviewer concludes that Brand's architectural vision does not merely aspire to coherence—it holds. Brand persuasively demonstrates that one need not posit a passible divine nature to affirm the full gravity of the cross. It is precisely the impassible God who, by assuming a passible human nature, truly suffers for humanity's redemption. *Intimately Forsaken* is demanding and technically rigorous, synthesizing historical theology, analytic theology, and Reformed catholic dogmatics. Proponents of Social Trinitarianism and Lutheran Christology will find their assumptions sharply challenged, as will critics of penal substitutionary atonement. In this way, Brand confronts neo-orthodox reconstructions of God and Eastern Orthodox objections to penal substitution—ironically on patristic ground, a foundation the latter claim as home turf. The result is a formidable contribution to the ongoing retrieval of classical theism, alongside the works of James Dolezal, Steven Duby, and others. If Brand's aim is to counter passibilist influence beyond the academy, however, a more accessible and affordable articulation of his proposal is needed for the benefit of both pulpit and pew.

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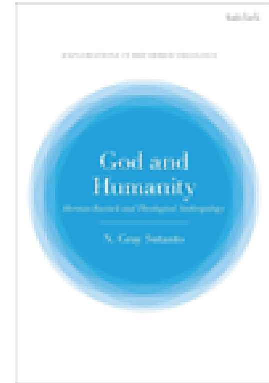
N. Gray Sutanto. *God and Humanity: Herman Bavinck and Theological Anthropology***. T&T Clark Explorations in Reformed Theology. London: Bloomsbury, 2024. viii + 220 pp. £28.99/$39.95.



Although scholarly discourse has acknowledged Herman Bavinck's significant contributions and relevance to contemporary discussions, a comprehensive resource on his theological anthropology has been absent until the publication of Sutanto's *God and Humanity: Herman Bavinck and Theological Anthropology*. In this book, Sutanto seeks to give a wide-ranging, yet not exhaustive, account of Bavinck's theological anthropology, situating him within the context of his contemporaries and modern issues.

In chapter 1, Sutanto aims to illustrate the scope and relevance of Bavinck's theological anthropology, positing that Bavinck delineates a holistic, religious, embodied, and corporate account of humanity that is rooted and finds its ultimate purpose in the triune God.

In chapter 2, Sutanto works through Bavinck's view of personality and the unconscious, tracing the latter's view on the body-soul relationship. Chapter 3 examines Bavinck's thoughts on the religious character of humanity through the trajectories of affect and cognition. Sutanto puts Bavinck in conversation with Aristotle's psychology (p. 18) and contends that Bavinck saw the unconscious as the "heart" of the person (p. 23). Humans are not brains on a stick that are shaped by reason; rather, they are actively responding to God's revelation, which penetrates and models the whole person. Sutanto continues Bavinck's argument by placing him in conversation with affect theory, which argues that "the body is already formed in particular ways that precede and inform cognition" (p. 43). Bavinck maintains humans are religious by nature, and Sutanto explains that "religious expressions may arise out of basic affects precisely because our bodies have been formed by an unconsciously religious psyche and an environment of revelation" (p. 52). Humans, then, holistically respond to God's revelation.

In chapters 4–5, Sutanto investigates the impact of sin on humanity by continuing his dialogue between Bavinck and affect theory (p. 75). He argues that sin has malformed the human heart, which leads humanity to suppress God's general revelation (p. 74). The fallen human heart resists dependence on God and instead constructs an idol in God's place, such that true conformity to God's revelation requires the illumination of the Holy Spirit (pp. 90–91). Sin, then, distorts God's revelation at the affective, heart level. Sutanto's fifth chapter broadens the purview of human sin, shifting the focus from the individual to the corporate. This is justified by humanity's creation in the image of the triune God (p. 104) and their organic unity, which finds its origin in Adam (p. 105). Sin is described as egocentricity, which loosens the unity of humanity and atomizes it (pp. 112–13). The corporate, generational nature of sin requires the Holy Spirit to bring about renewal and unity (p. 119).

In chapters 6–7, Sutanto describes the goodness of human cultural diversity, its corruption by sin, and its subsequent redemption and consummation. The author places Bavinck in conversation with his contemporary, Abraham Kuyper, arguing that Bavinck has a more nuanced and biblical vision of race. Sutanto further contextualizes Bavinck's work within the framework of German nationalism, contending that Bavinck foresaw its emergence and distinguished humanity (p. 130), which represents another instance of egocentrism (p. 133). According to Sutanto, Bavinck saw human history as pluriform rather than as a singular line of development (p. 142), which is what led Bavinck to the conclusion

that God's kingdom cannot be reduced to a single culture (p. 123). The conversation proceeds on how human diversity impacts religion: Bavinck argues that every religion arises out of a response to God's creational revelation (p. 148), so there is no nation or people who have exclusive access to the creational knowledge of God (p. 147). Sutanto posits that while humanity's fallen nature influences its reactions, divine redemption is provided and will culminate in God's overarching plan.

Within chapter 8, Sutanto contrasts Bavinck's ideas with those of Mark Cortez, arguing that consummation is a natural consequence of Reformed theology, predicated on God's benevolent covenantal relationship with humankind. Although Adam failed to attain consummation (p. 174), Christ fulfills what Adam failed to do (p. 179) and stands as God's intended mediator for humanity (p. 183). In chapter 9, Sutanto constructs Bavinck's view of the beatific vision, which is informed by his Christology and understanding of the nature-grace relationship (p. 185). He contends Bavinck understood sin as primarily ethical and not metaphysical; therefore, when humans are renewed by the Holy Spirit, they can once again display righteousness and have their relationship with God restored (p. 187). Christ, who is both God and man, allows humans to fellowship with God religiously and ethically through covenant (pp. 192, 199). In its final section, Sutanto offers a beneficial overview of each chapter's content.

Sutanto's *God and Humanity* is truly a noteworthy contribution. The book elucidates Bavinck's theological anthropology, engages him with his contemporaries, and offers insights into how his work can enrich modern discourse. Sutanto walks the reader through Bavinck's holistic, embodied anthropology, while also spurring the reader to emulate Bavinck, which proves to be a great strength of this book. However, there is still work to be done. For example, it would have been a welcome addition to see Sutanto setting Bavinck into conversation with postcolonial anthropology. A follow-up study examining Bavinck's theological anthropology within the context of the AI era would also be of significant interest. To summarize, *God and Humanity* is a commendable and vital addition to the church's resources. I anticipate this book will serve as an important secondary source for Bavinck's theological anthropology, yielding significant constructive theology.

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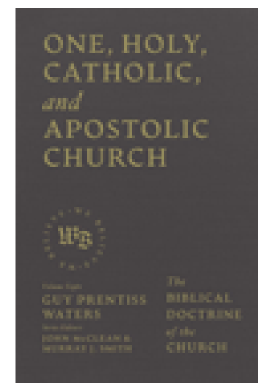
Guy Prentiss Waters. *One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church: The Biblical Doctrine of the Church*. We Believe. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Academic, 2025. xxxv + 310 pp. £30.99/$36.99.



Guy Prentiss Waters is the James M. Baird, Jr. Professor of New Testament at Reformed Theological Seminary. Though a New Testament scholar, Waters has written several books and articles venturing into ecclesiology, such as *Well-Ordered, Living Well: A Field Guide to Presbyterian Church Government* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2022). In contributing to the We Believe series with his *One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church*, Waters continues to give attention to the doctrine of the church.

The series seeks to build upon and "constructively develop" (p. xxviii) primary doctrines of the Christian faith in conversation with Scripture and doctrinal theology. Waters's contribution reflects well the goals of this series. The book

is divided into three main parts. The first part (chs. 1–7) gives attention to Scripture, specifically, the biblical-theological and canonical teaching of Scripture on ecclesiology. The second part, comprising chapters 8–13, focuses on the doctrine of the church—including discussions on the church's attributes, marks, government, life, and mission. The third part consists of one chapter (ch. 14) which discusses the relationship between the church and the state. To conclude, Waters provides seven theses to summarize his findings on the doctrine of the church.

There are several strengths that characterize this work. Beyond the fact that Waters's discussion is clearly written and sound in the main, he provides in the first section a penetrating exposition of relevant biblical texts to support his understanding of the doctrine of the church. Interestingly, Waters makes a compelling case for the use of confessions in his discussion on the marks of the church. He defines confessions as documents "developing" the ecumenical creeds "and responding to errors," as "human documents" serving as "summaries, in uninspired language, of the truths of inspired Scripture" (p. 154). Given this definition, the author offers numerous reasons for using the confessions: (1) there are examples in Scripture of summaries of doctrine (e.g., 1 Cor 15:3–4); (2) confessions help the church's mission by enabling her to "communicate the gospel precisely … and consistently" (p. 156); and (3) confessions fosters unity within the church and between different church bodies.

Though Sunday as a day of worship is assumed by most Christians in the world, Waters provides some helpful reasons it ought to be so, such as, e.g., Jesus rising from the grave on the first day and John the apostle speaking of "the Lord's Day" in Revelation 1:10. Though non-Sabbatarians may not appreciate his argument here, the New Testament seems to point toward the first day of the week as having significance for corporate worship. In his discussion of the government of the church, Waters makes a sound argument for elders "jointly" administering church discipline, clarifying that apostles doing so individually was due to "their extraordinary office" (p. 178) and thus not prescriptive for the church today. Regarding the mission of the church, Waters rightly emphasizes preaching as primary over against deeds. Though deeds are important, they cannot supplant but must supplement and confirm the preaching of the gospel. In the final chapter, Waters makes a compelling case for a "two-kingdoms" approach to the question of the church/state relationship, writing that each signifies "distinct spheres of authority" (p. 246). Finally, Waters soundly navigates the complex question of the role of the Spirit in both the Old and New Testaments, arguing rightly that the Spirit "had been active … redemptively under the old covenant," and, as such, the new covenant represents "a deepening and expansion" (p. 78) of the Spirit's work under the old covenant.

Despite its many strengths, some weaknesses also need to be mentioned. The author asserts, rather than argues, that "church" in Matthew 16:18 and 18:17 refers to elders, not the entire congregation (p. 218). Furthermore, the author does not clearly connect these passages (Matt 16:19 with 18:19) and seemingly omits explicit commentary on the relationship between Matthew 16, 18, and 28. In conjunction with this, Waters asserts at a separate juncture that the church is endowed by Christ with the prerogative to enact church discipline, yet he stipulates that its exercise is confined to a plurality of elders, "*not by the congregation*" (p. 218, emphasis mine). Here, he is making a distinction between the power held by the church and the authority wielded by elders only. However, he fails to demonstrate this on exegetical grounds. Similarly, Waters implies that the Presbyterian form of church government is the one that is biblically faithful. However, his engagement with other approaches, specifically Congregationalism, the distinct Reformed model of church government, is regrettably brief and therefore lacking in depth. Finally, it would have been beneficial, given ongoing discussions within Presbyterian denominations, to

address the question of female ordination and service as deacons. Notwithstanding these limitations, its lucidity, conciseness, and focus on the fundamental aspects of church doctrine render this work one of the premier contemporary treatments of ecclesiology overall, and of Reformed Presbyterian ecclesiology specifically.

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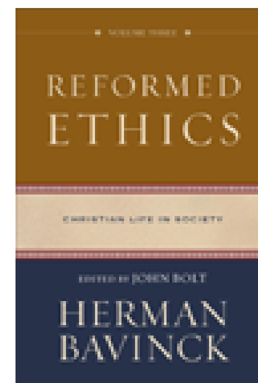
— ETHICS & PASTORALIA —

Herman Bavinck. *Christian Life in Society.* Vol. 3 of *Reformed Ethics*. Edited by John Bolt. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2025. 440 pp. £45.99/$57.99.



The wait for the final volume of Herman Bavinck's *Reformed Ethics* is over. The contents of this third volume, which focuses on Christian life in society, was largely unavailable in any language, until this edition hit the shelves. As a result, a treasure trove of Dutch Reformed moral reasoning is now widely available.

As John Bolt notes in his preface, the final volume of *Reformed Ethics* is incomplete because Bavinck never finished the manuscript. The editors considered fleshing out the remainder of Bavinck's outline from his other essays, but instead they elected to publish that content in a separate volume: *Reformed Social Ethics: Perspectives on Society, Culture, State, Church, and the Kingdom of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2025). Consequently, the third volume of Bavinck's *Reformed Ethics* is limited to a translation of a single (but lengthy) chapter on the family, and two appendices, which include his lecture notes on philosophical ethics and the manuscript of a public lecture on contemporary morality.

As such, it is a volume that is primarily useful for scholars seeking to understand aspects of Bavinck's thinking, rather than a polished approach to ethics. While *Reformed Dogmatics* is a magnificent gateway into Reformed orthodoxy, *Reformed Ethics* is a look at the unfinished moral reasoning of an excellent theologian. There are raw edges in his rhetoric and nuances left unexplored.

Nevertheless, the content presented in this volume is worth exploring. The extent of Bavinck's bibliographic work is always startling, as he seems to have read widely and deeply. He consistently digs into ancient philosophical texts as well as volumes from a range of competing religious perspectives, including Buddhist sources. The relative comprehensiveness of Bavinck's research is impressive, especially given the challenge that accessing resources must have presented in the age before the internet. That said, at points what we have in his drafted chapter on the family feels more like bibliographic notes than a completed essay. There are sections that are somewhat tedious, such as his detailed exploration of the different degrees of cousin marriage that have been approved or disallowed by various theologians throughout church history.

Yet the most provoking aspect of this third volume of *Reformed Ethics* isn't who can marry whom—a question that had fewer variables in Bavinck's day when agreement on gendered complementarity in

marriage was assumed; rather, it concerns his views of women and marriage. Most of the content of the first two volumes has a fairly timeless quality which generally follows a theological outline. Bavinck's thinking on marriage and the family in this volume reflects many of the cultural prejudices of his day.

For example, Bavinck argues that "except for [a few] special reasons, everyone is duty bound to marry" (p. 23). That is a statement that will quickly cause a row on social media today, but it was the accepted wisdom in the early nineteenth century. His polemic has more to do with resistance toward Roman Catholicism than our contemporary debates about the vocation of singleness. It also captures a cultural moment when, due to the limited legal standing of women, marriage was a main source of female protection and financial stability.

More provocatively, Bavinck's descriptions of women fall along stereotypical lines that have potential to serve as rage-bait in contemporary online discourse and may threaten Bavinck's broader legacy with some readers. For example, he generalizes, "A man analyzes and gets to the bottom of phenomena, a woman dislikes analysis and apprehends (as by intuition) the whole in its immediate value and beauty" (p. 24). And, as he continues to highlight the psychological differences between men and women, "For the man, one word of loyalty is enough; the woman demands a host of small confirmation and trifles" (p. 25). It is no wonder the editors issue a word of caution about the contents in their preface. But as they also acknowledge, this is far from Bavinck's final version of the text, so there is no way to know what might have changed in subsequent drafts.

Still, there is no question that Bavinck's social ethics were shaped by the contours of his culture. Yet the points of discontinuity between Bavinck's cultural context and ours can lead us to question our own cultural assumptions. Reading historical sources well requires attentiveness to the prevalent assumptions of both present and past cultures. Bavinck may have overgeneralized the categorical differences between men and women, but these passages strike us primarily because of our culture's emphasis on the lack of distinction between the sexes. Part of the value in reading old books is having our unidentified prejudices highlighted so we can reconsider them. *Reformed Ethics* provides ample opportunity for that reconsideration.

Furthermore, there is value in the appendices to this short volume. Bavinck's essay on philosophical ethics reflects his willingness to leave no stone unturned. Readers get a time capsule look at early evaluations of positivism, utilitarianism, and Darwinism that show the continuity of Christian concerns about these schools of thought. His lecture on contemporary morality offers a window into his apologetic approach, which begins with the belief that "even in the most glaring [moral] aberration still lurks an element of truth that sustains it and makes it appealing" (p. 359). This cultural apologetic listens for the resonance with truth and then highlights the deeper fulfillment that is found in Christianity.

Unlike *Reformed Dogmatics*, which was prepared for publication during his lifetime, Bavinck never completed the systematic exposition of his moral reasoning. This means that all three volumes of *Reformed Ethics* should be read with awareness of their incompleteness. Nevertheless, there is much gold to be mined as Bavinck applies his Reformed ethics to a rapidly evolving world.

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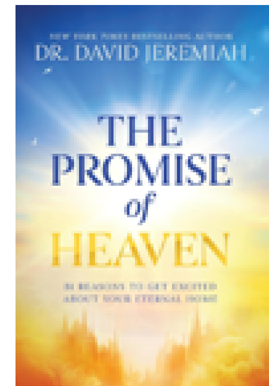
David Jeremiah. *The Promise of Heaven: 31 Reasons to Get Excited About Your Eternal Home*. Nashville: Nelson, 2025. 240 pp. £14.99/$19.99.



Few Christian doctrines are as universally cherished and yet as casually misunderstood as that of heaven. For many believers, heaven functions more as emotional reassurance than an actual theological conviction. It is referenced in moments of grief, gestured toward in worship song lyrics, and often left undefined beyond vague imagery of peace and reunion. In *The Promise of Heaven*, David Jeremiah seeks to reclaim heaven as a biblically grounded certainty rather than a sentimental abstraction. His stated aim is pastoral clarity and renewed hope, and, in many respects, he succeeds.

Jeremiah's central thesis is both simple and necessary: heaven is real, physical, promised, prepared, and central to Christian hope. Drawing from the teachings of Jesus, the writings of Paul, and the visions of Revelation, he insists that eternity is not an afterthought to Christian faith but its destination. Heaven, in Jeremiah's telling, is not escapism but the ultimate fulfillment of the Christian faith. It is the culmination of God's redemptive purposes and the believer's true home.

One of the book's strongest features is its structure. The material is arranged into well-organized sections that move logically from foundational questions to pastoral applications. This allows readers to engage the book selectively without losing coherence. A casual reader may explore topics that pique personal interest, while a more serious student can trace the full argument from beginning to end. This modular design makes the book especially suitable for small groups, devotional reading, or pastoral recommendation.

Even more prominent than its structure is the book's pastoral heart. Jeremiah writes not as a detached theologian but as a shepherd. His tone is consistently reassuring, compassionate, and accessible. He is keenly aware of the fears, losses, and uncertainties that shape how real people think about death and the life to come. Heaven is presented as a promise meant to steady believers through suffering and orient their lives toward hope.

Jeremiah is particularly effective in articulating why heaven matters now. He frames Christian existence in terms of a pilgrim identity, helpfully stating: "We aren't citizens of earth traveling to heaven; we are citizens of heaven traveling through earth" (p. 34). This life on earth, as presented in his framework, is not our permanent home but the place of our temporary assignment. Believers live as ambassadors in this world representing their true and more perfect homeland. This metaphor is both pastorally rich and theologically responsible. It reinforces the reality of the New Testament tension between the already-and-not-yet of the kingdom of God, without collapsing eternity into the present moment.

At his best, Jeremiah demonstrates admirable restraint when addressing questions Scripture leaves unresolved, such as the precise nature of our resurrection bodies. He occasionally models theological humility as he qualifies his own speculative claims, acknowledges the limits of biblical revelation, and refuses to stake dogmatic certainty in areas where Scripture is silent. These moments reflect a commendable awareness of mystery and a desire to avoid presenting tentative hypotheses as dogmatic certainties.

However, this restraint is not consistently applied throughout the book, particularly in Jeremiah's handling of apocalyptic literature. His interpretive approach to Revelation and related passages often lacks a clear or consistent hermeneutical rationale. At times, he treats imagery as literal without sufficient justification, while elsewhere interpreting similar imagery symbolically, again, without explaining why. This selective literalism creates an interpretive tension and risks confusing readers who lack the tools to distinguish genre, symbolism, and theological intent.

This issue is compounded by the book's firm grounding in premillennial dispensationalism. Within the premillennial dispensational framework, Jeremiah's conclusions are coherent and consistent. Readers who share these eschatological convictions will likely find the book affirming and familiar. However, for readers shaped by other historically orthodox Christian views of the end times, including amillennial or postmillennial perspectives, the book will raise significant questions. Jeremiah does not meaningfully acknowledge alternative interpretive traditions, nor does he clarify when his conclusions reflect system-specific assumptions rather than broadly agreed-upon Christian doctrine.

That said, readers with settled eschatological convictions outside of Jeremiah's framework can still find meaningful material here. The pastoral insights, biblical encouragements, and emphasis on hope transcend the differing eschatological perspectives. While some interpretive claims may need to be received critically, the book offers "nuggets" that can be affirmed and fruitfully applied by all.

A related weakness involves Jeremiah's use of terminology. To his credit, he does explicitly distinguish between "Heaven," "the New Heaven and the New Earth," and "the New Jerusalem." However, in practice, these distinctions are not consistently maintained. In an apparent effort toward cognitive simplification for readers, Jeremiah often uses "heaven" as a catch-all term. However, this flattens important biblical nuances and can lead to misattribution where promises or descriptions associated with the final renewed creation are loosely applied to the intermediate state or vice versa. While this may aid readability for a general audience, it also risks blurring theological categories that Scripture carefully differentiates, thus further perpetuating pop culture misconceptions about the eternal Christian state. This mitigates the effectiveness of the book.

Despite these weaknesses, *The Promise of Heaven* remains a useful supplementary pastoral resource. Jeremiah's confidence in Scripture is evident throughout. He does not rely on near-death experiences, personal visions, or speculative accounts of the afterlife to validate the doctrine of our eternal life with God in Christ. Instead, he consistently anchors his claims in the resurrection of Jesus and the trustworthiness of God's promises. In his telling, heaven is certain because Christ is risen!

In a cultural moment marked by anxiety, instability, and a looming fear of death, Jeremiah's emphasis on eternal hope is both timely and needed. He reminds readers that heaven is not merely an ethereal future but a real and present anchor of Christian expectation. Living with eternity in view reshapes priorities, loosens materialism, and infuses suffering with meaning.

The Promise of Heaven is not without its limitations and frustrations, particularly for readers attentive to the subtleties of genre and symbolism and who are seeking theological precision. Yet its pastoral clarity, comforting tone, and biblical confidence make it a meaningful contribution to popular Christian literature. For readers seeking encouragement, reassurance, and a renewed vision of eternal hope, Jeremiah offers a steady and compassionate guide to an orthodox view of heaven.

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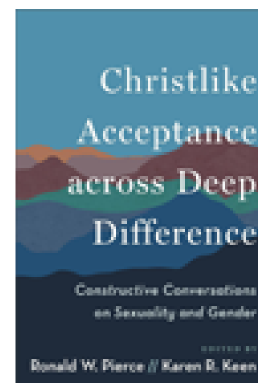
Karen R. Keen and Ronald W. Pierce, eds. *Christlike Acceptance across Deep Difference: Constructive Conversations on Sexuality and Gender*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2025. 269 pp. £22.99/$28.99.



Are same-sex sexual relationships and transgender identities matters about which Christians can agree to disagree? The editors of *Christlike Acceptance across Deep Difference*, Karen Keen and Ronald Pierce, believe so. In fact, despite deep differences between them, most of the contributors to this volume agree with its two central claims: (1) that same-sex sexual relationships and gender transitioning are "disputable matters"; and (2) that Christians who disagree about such matters must accept one other as faithful members of Christ's body.

The book is divided into three parts: the first ("Biblical Wisdom beyond the Debate") attempts to ground the larger argument on several key biblical passages; the second ("Successfully Navigating Divides") offers wisdom for negotiating disagreements with fellow Christians; and the third ("Ministry with LGBTQ People, Families, and Friends") provides practical guidance for personal and pastoral ministry.

As the conclusion that Christian disagreement about LGBTQ relationships and identities is not fellowship dividing (claim 2) is built upon the premise that these issues are "secondary" and "disputable" (claim 1), I will confine this review to a brief summary of the key arguments that buttress this first claim from the chapters in part 1 of the book. This will then be followed by two points of critique.

The central passage of Scripture used by author and editor Ronald Pierce is Romans 14:1–15:13. Just as Paul advised the Romans to accept each other despite their differences over days and diet, Pierce argues that Christians can "accept other followers of Jesus whose understanding of Scripture regarding sexuality and gender differs from ours without passing judgment on them" (p. 4). He acknowledges that the church, historically, has not affirmed LGBTQ relationships and identities, but he also believes that the "moral absolutes" and "universal beliefs" of the church have changed. For instance, since the church once supported slavery (and now does not) and strongly prohibited divorce and usury (but now allows it), it is not ludicrous that the "Western church is slowly but steadily acknowledging the growing number of queer and affirming people who love Christ and the Bible" and "who desire to lead lives of obedience to their Lord" (p. 12). Hence, we should welcome them with Christlike acceptance as faithful brothers and sisters.

Pierce also posits some ambiguity in Paul's words to the Corinthians about those who practice homosexuality not inheriting the kingdom of God. He argues that the command is not as straightforward as it might appear, for the Greek nouns μαλακοὶ and ἀρσενοκοῖται (1 Cor 6:9) can be interpreted in many ways. Paul could be referring to exploitative and abusive sexual acts or excessive lust, and it is up for debate whether Paul was "even aware of loving, same-sex relationships between people of equal class and/or status" (p. 13).

For Pierce, accepting a person is not the same as affirming their behavior. Indeed, for him, "Acceptance sits at the center of the welcoming-accepting-affirming spectrum" (p. 14). And so, just as a natural family can accept a member living in their home without affirming all of their views and behaviors, the spiritual family can accept LGBTQ Christians without affirming or agreeing with all of their views and behaviors. Pierce writes, "We are spiritual siblings not because we agree but because we share a saving relationship with the same Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer" (p. 15). He also argues that accepting LGBTQ people into the church is not the same as condoning sexual immorality. Once more,

Pierce asserts that Christians in good faith cannot correlate faithful LGBTQ Christians with idolatrous people, as Paul describes in Romans 1. Indeed, since there is "an ongoing debate" about interpretation of Romans 1, Pierce suggests that non-affirming traditionalists (among whom he numbers himself) could be wrong and thus should refrain from passing judgment (p. 15).

Pierce concludes his chapter by positing two ways non-affirming Christians can practice acceptance toward affirming Christians. First, they can simultaneously love, befriend, and work alongside their "spiritual siblings," while maintaining their contrary convictions—albeit non-judgmentally. That is, Pierce argues that Christians can be explicitly accepting while remaining non-affirming (p. 16). Second, non-affirming Christians can practice acceptance in Christian organizations by taking cues from the Church of England and the Catholic Church to "bless but not affirm" same-sex unions. Churches should also consider whether agreement with their views on gender and sexuality might be "less important for someone on the maintenance staff than for someone who leads a Bible study" (p. 17).

In her chapter, "Genesis, Discernment, and God's Will," Karen Keen argues that we should look beyond the debate over sexuality and gender and focus on how the story of our origins can provide insight into discerning God's will in ethics. Because all human beings are made in God's image, Keen believes that each person has been endowed with agency to practice discernment and make wise choices. For Keen, stories in the Old Testament highlight the need to discern God's will in complex situations (e.g., Adam and Eve's temptation in Gen 3; Moses's dilemma in Exod 18:13–36).

Discernment is especially needed when laws seem to conflict or are overridden by a greater good. For example, David and his men, and later Jesus and his disciples, ate consecrated bread which only the Levitical priests were permitted to eat (Lev 24:5–9). But according to Keen, both David and Jesus used their God-given discernment to break the law because it "was the right thing to do because people were hungry, and the whole point of the law is to serve the common good of human beings" (p. 27). In fact, Keen argues that listening to differing opinions is necessary for discerning the truth: "The pursuit of truth requires being open to evidence, including opposing perspectives and insights we have yet to sincerely wrestle with" (p. 30).

For Keen, practicing discernment in our disagreements over sexual ethics yields three applications. First, we should seek oneness rather than uniformity, for we are all one in Christ but not necessarily in our beliefs. If the early church disagreed about food sacrificed to idols and yet remained unified, Keen posits that we can disagree over our discernment of God's will in sexual ethics and still be one in Christ (p. 31). Second, we should imitate God's generosity toward one another. Instead of labeling those with whom we disagree as being in error, we should be generous toward them and recognize that our understanding of the Scriptures could also be flawed. Even if we disagree with Christians on sexual ethics, God's generosity is the model for us. For "if the Master of the Universe is willing to share a throne with you, a sinner, are you not willing to work together with someone across the table?" (p. 33). Third, we must always listen to the other side (Prov 18:17). Again, we cannot practice discernment if we are not willing to consider opposing views, for what need is there for discernment if there are no other options to weigh? Thus, to discern the truth, we should take the opinions of outsiders seriously, otherwise "we may miss what God is doing" (p. 34).

In the last three chapters of Part 1, David Bennett, J. R. Daniel Kirk, and Wesley Hill offer different perspectives on a range of New Testament texts that address questions of sexual ethics. First, Bennett argues for a balance between radical holiness and radical inclusion. He uses the acceptance of eunuchs in Isaiah 56 and Matthew 19 to suggest that these texts serve as a "paradigm from which we might

adjudicate and approach the question of sexual orientation and gender dysphoria in the church today." In his view, "we can still have solidarity with those whom we disagree, even if we may wrestle with how, if at all, fellowship is possible" (p. 46).

Next, Kirk proclaims that "The Good News of Romans 1" is that Gentile inclusion through the Spirit, not physical descent, removes the stipulations of procreation, circumcision, and adherence to the law for Gentile believers. How so? Since "contrary to nature," they have been grafted into the olive tree of the people of God (Rom 11:24), their sexual acts that are "contrary to nature" (Rom 1:26) are also acceptable. Kirk is explicit on this point, writing that "when gentiles are brought in, they are not made to conform to the standards that had previously existed for demarcating the people of God" (p. 63). Romans 1, then, does not condemn LGBTQ relationships and identities because it does not point back to the old creation of Genesis 1 but rather to the new creation of Galatians 3:28, where there is neither male nor female, but all are one through faith in Christ Jesus.

Lastly, Hill argues that the biggest roadblock to Christians accepting those with whom they disagree about LGBTQ matters is the apparent condemnation of LGBTQ relationships and identities in 1 Corinthians 6:9–11. For Hill, however, "there are too many ambiguities and complexities in the Pauline text for it to be pressed and wielded in the way traditionalists have done, often to the spiritual harm of gay Christians" (p. 67). The ambiguities Hill mentions surround the Greek terms μαλακοὶ and ἀρσενοκοῖται. Because of these ambiguities, Hill says Christians should look instead to Romans 1 as a passage that is clearer in condemning same-sex sexual behavior. However, since this passage "does not directly speak into the life of the church," there is room for nuance and negotiation in how to address this topic among Spirit-filled Christians (p. 70). Hill thus concludes that while same-sex sexual acts are sinful, there is "no neat, clean, straight line to be drawn from Paul's text to our current pastoral and cultural dilemmas." So, to use 1 Corinthians 6:9–11 to threaten "affirming gay Christians" with judgment is to misuse the text. "Our job, rather, is to mention such threats only on the way to proclaiming their nullity" (p. 78).

The main aim of *Christlike Acceptance across Deep Difference* is honorable. It is a genuine attempt to bridge the gap between Christians who disagree about LGBTQ relationships and identities and to promote greater unity within the church. Moreover, many of the authors pose good questions that demand a cogent biblical and theological response. Some chapters, such as Tim Muehlhoff's "Speaking Truth in Love" (ch. 7), offer helpful advice for engaging in conversations with people with whom we might disagree about any number of matters. Nevertheless, despite the authors' intentions, their arguments frequently sacrifice the truth of Scripture for a pseudo-unity. As the following two points demonstrate, the primary problem is that they fail to plausibly defend the claim that LGBTQ relationships and identities are in fact "disputable matters"—i.e., tolerable differences.

First, it is hermeneutically invalid to compare disputes about LGBTQ relationships and identities with the continuing applicability of Old Testament food laws. Yet in almost every chapter, the authors cite the early Christians' disputes over eating certain foods and observing religious days as an example of how we can disagree over LGBTQ issues and still be one in Christ. However, as Jesus makes clear (Mark 7:14–23), what goes into your body and what you do with your body are on completely different planes, morally speaking. The food laws and holy days given in the Old Testament were for a specific period to promote the principle that Israel was to be separate from the other nations. When Jesus came, he declared all foods clean (Mark 7:18–19). God's people were no longer to be set apart by food but by being filled with God's Spirit and living holy lives. Nowhere in the New Testament is it taught that eating

animals formerly regarded as unclean is sinful. This is why Paul can regard it as a matter of conscience and encourage stronger believers to be willing to sacrifice their freedom for the sake of weaker believers.

In contrast, consistent biblical condemnation of sexual immorality (including homosexual acts and desires) is not confined to the Old Testament (e.g., Matt 5:19–20; Mark 7:21–23; Rom 13:13–14; 1 Cor 5–6; 10; Gal 5:19–21; 1 Thess 4:1–8; Eph 5:3–4; Col 3:5–6). Hence, sexual ethics cannot be treated as matters of conscience or placed in the same category as ceremonial laws fulfilled by the coming of Jesus. Rather, all forms of sexual immorality should be met with repudiation, resistance, and repentance.

Second, it is not possible to live Spirit-filled lives of obedience and to indulge in the desires of the flesh. Yet many of the authors of this volume argue that Christian people in loving same-sex sexual relationships should be seen as faithful brothers and sisters in Christ. One clarification that both Pierce and Hill offer is that they are speaking of those who "desire to lead lives of obedience to their Lord *as they best understand* the Scripture's teaching on sexuality and gender" (p. 12). The implication here, however, is that Scripture is not clear about how its teaching on sexuality and gender applies in daily life. And so, if a person sins in ignorance (due to a misunderstanding of biblical sexual ethics), God will excuse them. Doubtless, greater knowledge brings greater responsibility. Nevertheless, the Scriptures teach that sins committed in ignorance will still be punished, albeit to a lesser degree than intentional sins (Lev 5:17–19; Luke 12:47–48). We do people no favors, then, if we leave them in ignorance or fail to warn them that "those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God" (Gal 5:21).

Furthermore, the Scriptures leave no room for ambivalence. It is clear what a Spirit-filled life looks like—bearing the fruit of the Spirit and crucifying the desires of the flesh. One of the deeds of the flesh is sexual immorality, which would include the pursuit of LGBTQ relationships and identities (as opposed to unbidden sexual temptation or unwanted gender confusion). In short, a person cannot be walking in the Spirit if they are actively practicing or promoting sin (1 John 3:8–10).

Christian unity need not be damaged by differences over *adiaphora*. However, LGBTQ relationships and identities do not belong to this category. Therefore, they can neither be affirmed as good nor accepted as "disputable." While we must never fail to love another, we should never lie to one another. This, then, is not a matter about which the church can afford to compromise if it wishes to remain faithful to Jesus.

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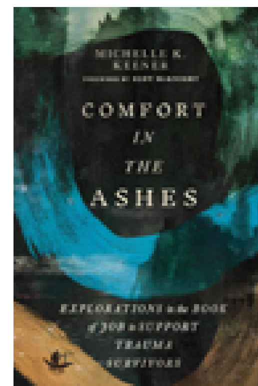
Michelle K. Keener. *Comfort in the Ashes: Explorations in the Book of Job to Support Trauma Survivors*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2025. 201 pp. £20.99/$26.00.



Practical theology self-consciously arises from lived experience and then asks questions of the Bible or a particular theological tradition. Often, the foray into the Bible or theology is disappointing in its simplicity. Michelle Keener is to be commended for offering the world of practical theology a work that is simple but not simplistic. *Comfort in the Ashes: Explorations in the Book of Job to Support Trauma Survivors* is an accessible work of practical theology that provides an informed account of trauma in a fruitful conversation with an equally informed account of the book of Job.

The book of Job has been subjected to all kinds of readings that assume a particular diagnosis of Job's bodily condition, psychological state, or social experience. It is methodologically fraught to assume that the portrayal of a character in an ancient text can ever validate such diagnoses. Keener seems aware of this and is rightly modest in her claims. Her work is offered as a set of "explorations," not decisive conclusions. The connections she proposes between the experience of trauma and the character of Job are presented tentatively, with a sense that they are like analogies or correlations, not facts. That is, the man Job is *like* a trauma survivor, and the book of Job has literary features that *resonate* with how a trauma survivor may engage with language.

This approach has real pastoral value. One can imagine recommending Keener's book to a person processing trauma who perhaps feels disconnected from Scripture and the things of God. Keener offers trauma survivors empathic descriptions of what trauma might feel like and invites them into the book of Job in a way that is appealing and hopeful. Readers whose worlds have been ruptured will find a valuable companion in the man Job, thanks to Keener's insightful portrayal of him.

Keener's interaction with the book of Job is thorough but does not attempt to provide a comprehensive reading of the book. Indeed, her observations of the text are often general in nature. Keener self-consciously skips over many of the book's details. Her engagement with the text walks a delicate line between interpretative complexity and pastoral clarity. I appreciated the reporting of debates about whether the divine speeches have a bullying or nurturing function; the wide-ranging discussions of the symbolism and rhetorical use of behemoth and leviathan; and the surveying of possible translations and readings of Job's final words. To advance her proposals, however, Keener does have to make interpretive choices. Her preferences serve her pastoral reading, but she does not always defend them. The thoughtful reader might want fuller evidence. (Pleasingly, Keener has also published a more comprehensive and technically exacting work, *A Trauma Theory Reading of the Book of Job* [London: T&T Clark, 2025].)

One of Keener's most intriguing claims is that trauma healing involves meaning making, not the finding of *the* meaning of an experience or one's reactions to it. She proposes that the author or Job portrays a man who has sufficiently engaged in meaning making to return to his roles and relationships with God, society, friends, and family in the book's epilogues. Job does not actually voice the meaning he found. His brief and ambiguous words in Job 42:1–6 leave us to keep exploring what the book was about and what the divine speeches achieved. This is a helpful and important contribution to Joban

scholarship, providing a good reason not to try to resolve the puzzling realities of the Hebrew text. As a practical theologian, Keener helps us see that the purposeful elusiveness of the book of Job can inform similarly open-ended pastoral conversations.

On a few occasions, I wished that Keener had entertained another reading of the book of Job. For example, the proposal that Job's friends were wise in their ministry of presence and silence is not the only possibility. David Clines has postulated that their silence is indicative of a cutting-off of association from Job who is now dead to them. It is noteworthy that even before Bildad and Zophar speak, Job feels forsaken and disappointed with them (Job 6:14–30). Later in the work, Keener is attentive to the gracious engagement of Yahweh with Job and makes connections to the imminence and grace of the incarnation in Christ. This is valuable but needs to be held in tension with the grand sense of divine otherness present in the Yahweh speeches. In a similar vein, Keener rightly identifies the reclaiming of creational order in the Yahweh speeches but without comment on the violence that is at work in Yahweh's ordered world. This seems a significant omission for a work on trauma.

My strongest reservation came in Keener's argument that the doubling of Job's property conveyed a sense of Yahweh making himself accountable for Job's suffering. Understandably, she connected this with the shattering admission by Yahweh that he has acted harmfully toward Job for no reason (Job 2:3). Many readers have found these words traumatizing. It would have been good to explore ways of incorporating these ideas into a healing, meaning-making process. I will need to explore whether Keener's larger work provides further resolution.

To conclude her book, Keener moves beyond Job, providing a most readable account of ways pastors and churches might engage with people experiencing trauma. She consistently sounds a warning that the pastoral care of people processing trauma may not be an appealing calling to individuals and churches who are looking for efficient strategies to achieve measurable success. This is an uncomfortable, honest, and compelling criticism and adds to the book's significant contribution to contemporary pastoral theology.

Comfort in the Ashes is a clearly written, empathic, warm-hearted invitation to turn to the book of Job in the process of understanding and healing trauma. This is wise, if complex, pastoral advice.

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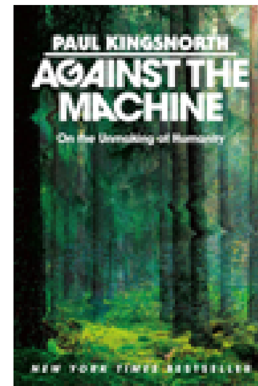
Paul Kingsnorth. *Against the Machine: On the Unmaking of Humanity*. New York: Thesis, 2025. 368 pp. £25.00/$32.00.



There are times in Trent Dalton's award-winning *Boy Swallows Universe* (London: 4th Estate, 2018) where the gritty, 1980s setting of Brisbane's hardscrabble back-blocks jars with the magical realism Dalton weaves throughout his coming-of-age story. The novel's central character, Eli, ekes out life between dreamy spell and dreary suburbia. The same gear crunch is not as apparent in Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (London: Penguin, 2014), set as it is in the steamy Columbian hinterlands. That was, after all, a liminal, exotic space, always threatened by modern encroachment, yet always promising magic.

There is a certain grinding of metal on metal in Paul Kingsnorth's latest work, *Against the Machine: On the Unmaking of Humanity*, though I have yet to decide whether it is more Marquez or Dalton. Not that Kingsnorth tabs the spot where reality ends and magic begins. Why would he? The former Wiccan/New Age Green activist, now Romanian Orthodox believer, has existed within the enchanted frame for some time. All he has done is switch allegiances. But perhaps that's the point of the book. Kingsnorth did not come from materialism to mysticism. He was already there when he was converted.

Aside from being a public testament to his mystical experience of Christ that led to his conversion, which he unpacks in this work, Kingsnorth picks up—eventually—the "technique" themes of the French philosopher-theologian, Jacques Ellul. Ellul was convinced that the modern world had been subsumed by a dominant technological imaginary that flattens out creativity, deadens spirituality and independent thinking, and kills off our freedoms as a byproduct. The problem is that we are blind to this loss of freedom and groupthink. Why? Because the technology mechanistically creates the chains that bind us and blind us, and we empower it to do so because it offers us freedom. It is a veritable Mobius strip of slavery!

This is familiar territory. So even as I sit reading, chirping constantly under my breath, "Ellul, Ellul, Ellul," his apparition takes some 115 pages to manifest. But then it does. Ellul's *Technological Society* is Kingsnorth's "Machine," but with some extra add-ons just for us.

And who is the "us"? First quarter twenty-first century hyper-moderns who, whether reluctantly or ineluctably, have come around to an acknowledgement of transcendence in the six enervating decades since the 1964 English translation of Ellul's work. Kingsnorth, a late convert and prolific secular writer, knows his audience.

So if you have read Ellul, or Neil Postman for that matter, you now have the language to name, and the cultural spectacles to see, the creeping soft totalitarianism that promises to smooth out the bumps and provide the personal satisfactions we so desperately crave—all at a price of course. Instant wealth and influence is yours if you can hit the right algorithm. You can gain academic footholds and better job prospects by outsourcing the hard work to AI. You can maintain bodily autonomy and reach your full identity through unfettered access to reproductive rights, physical augmentations, and genetic testing of embryos. And Kingsnorth is refreshingly honest. As a Christian, he assumes Chesterton's "I am, yours truly" when the question is asked "What is wrong with the world?" We are all simultaneously

victims and perpetrators. I enjoyed the tussle he has within his own head, as he beavers away at his peculiar way of doing non-Machine sanctification.

Kingsnorth unpacks his own journey towards a far simpler lifestyle in rural Ireland, cutting peat for the fire, doing without TV or motor car (for a time), and living in a thatched cottage. Sounds idyllic. Sounds like the kind of life I want, at least now that I am living large atop Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

Yes, that's also a gear crunch moment for me, and a recurring theme in so many modernity-porn books. Cutting peat is cute. Refusing auto-transport is noble. As such, texts that offer this are great sells for those stuck in a traffic jam on a particularly wet Wednesday morning. Yet not so much for those for whom peat is the only source of fuel and who walk hours for water every day.

Kingsnorth eschews the modern medical world also, to a degree. At the very least he circles it warily, empowered and emboldened as it is by the Machine. Yet I could not help thinking that when he cancelled a recent book tour due to illness, mandrake root was not his Plan A for recovery. However, Kingsnorth's target is neither Left nor Right, Luddite or Tech-bro. He sees with gimlet-eyed clarity that the progressive movement he so endorsed in the past has paid for, and party to, the very Machine that gave rise to the capitalist system he once so heartily and heatedly fought against.

A bit like the Epstein files, too late do we realize that the social, economic, and political differences between Noam Chomsky and Prince Andrew are mere chimeras, vanishing in the chemtrails of a Lear jet winging its way to a pleasure island of sex and debauchery. For every capitalist Mar-a-Lago in Florida, there is a Socialist dacha by the Black Sea. The Machine is not fussy. It will capture and captivate all. It will give us the desires of our hearts and bring leanness to our conservative and progressive souls alike.

Kingsnorth has his own unredacted Epstein files. The usual suspects are named and found guilty, notably the Western deviation from the mystical realm as the second millennium gathered pace. He traces the rise of this malaise across the planet, locating it in historical spaces and places, with the Reformation taking a particular, and all too assumptive, beating. Indeed, the brevity with which he announces that seismic shift in European history as a significant falling domino with devastating effect jarred me. Yet it aligns with his theology. Like his more hard-headed contemporary, Rod Dreher (*Living With Wonder: Finding Mystery and Meaning in a Secular Age* [London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2024]), Kingsnorth challenges the functional immanence of Western Protestantism.

As converts to Eastern Orthodoxy, both men assume that icons are thin spaces, liminal portals that access the divine, rather than idolatrous pictures that reduce and refute it. And so what is true of good must also be true of evil. This makes the Machine begin to sound like it has a mind of its own. At what point did we move from realism to magic? That is the allure of this book. Yet also what makes it slightly hard to pin down. Is there something behind the Machine? A ghost? A demon? Does it matter? To think it does shows how completely subservient to the Machine we are.

The further you delve into Kingsnorth's book, the more suburban Brisbane becomes Columbian jungle. Or the fur coats become Narnia. In true magical-realist style, Kingsnorth keeps crunching the gears. Is the Machine a form of sentience so malevolent that it would seduce us into thinking that the hope (or terror) we have begun to place in AI to totalize our human existence is itself merely a mere bit-player in a grander, darker narrative? Perhaps AI is merely the bait. So allured are we that we don't see the shadow of the fisherman standing on the banks. Hence the more deeply I pondered this book the more disquieted I became! Shadows became ghouls.

But maybe that is the point. Kingsnorth offers no strong solutions; he is more interested in alerting us to the danger. And that gives him a hall pass when it comes to application, or at least it makes us

want to give him a hall pass. So there are no six steps to a deeper, more robust Christian experience in which we make do with less stuff and get off the internet on Sundays. No study guide at the end. Mystical he began, and mystical he remains. And while the gospel is presented as *personally* liberating for Kingsnorth, a portal to true transcendence and meaning, *Against the Machine* does not particularly carve out suggestions as to how we can practically live differently in community.

That makes the book slightly unsatisfying—although I suspect Kingsnorth would be satisfied that Reformed, linear types such as myself, find it so. You are supposed to feel something visceral rather than simply arrive at chartered conclusions. Kingsnorth aims to hit you in "the feels," and he finds his target. But perhaps that is his role from here on in. Perhaps he is in step with Ezekiel's initial vision of God in his exilic text. Kingsnorth presents an "appearance of the likeness of the horror" of the Machine rather than the Machine itself, the unmediated presentation of which would likely destroy us.

And so, in the end that's about enough. This gut-response highlights the importance of Kingsnorth's book. If it simply raises our awareness of the quiet dis-ease within us that we struggle to articulate, providing it with a handle, then so be it. "The Machine" is not the only label that could have been attached, but it encapsulates enough of our angst to work. It resonates with our existential, societal, and theological heartbeat. And it draws out of us the exclamation: "Aha, I recognize that!"

Or to put it in a way that Kingsnorth might approve, for every theo-political book pointing out how to solve the world's problems, we need a dusty prophet lying on his side for 390 days, hiding his beard hair in his cloak, and eating his bread cooked on, if not animal dung, then at the very least baking his sour dough on a peat fire cut from an ancient Irish bog.

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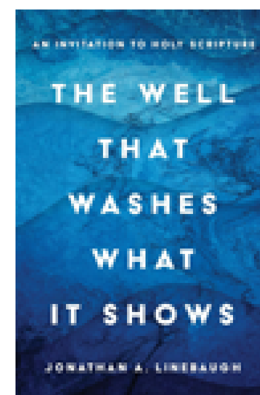
Jonathan A. Linebaugh. *The Well That Washes What It Shows: An Invitation to Holy Scripture*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2025. viii + 206 pp. £18.52/$24.99.



While books abound on both the content and interpretation of Scripture, Jonathan Linebaugh's *The Well That Washes What It Shows* is offering something different. The subtitle reveals its distinctive contribution: *An Invitation to Holy Scripture*. For all the books I have read on content and hermeneutics, precious few adopt the posture of invitation.

The opening chapter introduces the nature of Scripture. It is God's personal address, possessing "living and creative power" (p. 1). Through it we encounter "the Father speaking in the power of the Holy Spirit to communicate and give the Son" (p. 8). The title of the book, drawn from a George Herbert poem, identifies the double work of Scripture as both *showing* our great need and then *washing* us clean. This two-beat rhythm persists through the entire book: Scripture diagnoses us and delivers us. Hence, the Bible is doing something to us, insofar as "to read the Bible … is to undergo the action of God, whose word creates and resurrects" (p. 11).

The main two subsections of the book are structured like a standard biblical survey, with each testament subdivided into three parts. For the Old Testament these are the Law, the Prophets, and the

Writings. For the New Testament, they are the Gospels, Paul's Letters, and then the remaining texts from Hebrews to Revelation.

In his chapter on the Law, Linebaugh speaks in terms of both promise and problem. On the one hand, the Torah is suffused with God's grace, constantly offering life and forgiveness. On the other hand, the Torah wrestles with the reality of human rebellion; whether it is Adam in Eden or Israel redeemed from Egypt, people are "still the same" (p. 28). Thus, the fundamental question the Torah poses is whether disobedience and death will have the last word.

Chapter 2 surveys the Prophets, from Joshua through to Malachi. The opening sections rehearse basic data about the nature of prophecy (i.e., it is not simply foretelling), before providing a potted survey of Israel's history and the prophets who spoke in various periods. This chapter develops what has already been asserted: the prophets speak words of both judgement and grace, diagnosis and deliverance. The most poignant moment in this section is Linebaugh's reflections on Ezekiel's "valley of dry bones" and the question his vision raises: Is God's love able to raise disobedient humanity from the dead?

Chapter 3 engages the Writings, with a specific focus on the wisdom literature and the Psalms. The wisdom literature supplies us with diverse perspectives on both the goodness and the futility of life, which ultimately points hearers to put their hope in their Creator. The Psalms are portrayed as songs of both honesty and hope; they not only allow for the pouring out of one's heart in pain and confusion, but also, in the words of Luther, offer "promises of Christ's death and resurrection" (p. 62).

Chapter 4 sees the start of a new subsection, a tripartite approach to the New Testament. Linebaugh's tome here sings with delight. The coming of Jesus is God's "merciful surprise" (p. 67), and the Gospels are framed as texts that enable us to encounter this Jesus who "sets free, forgives, and gives life to those who are in bondage to sin and death" (p. 74). Crucially, the Gospels are understood as "preaching in the form of writing" (p. 72), because in each of them "Jesus is the gift given in the gospel" (p. 75).

Chapter 5 presents a compact survey of Paul's letters, which is later supplemented by a chapter specifically on Romans. Paul's pastoral writings speak words of grace and hope in Christ to address all human needs—not just the guilt of transgression, but our slavery to sin and our bondage to death. At this point Linebaugh adopts a new motif that he will carry to the end of his book: the "grace of God that is the crucified and risen Christ 'for our sins' cuts the chains that bind our being loved to our biography" (p. 105).

Chapter 6 seeks to survey Hebrews *to* Revelation but, for reasons of space, largely achieves this by discussing *only* Hebrews *and* Revelation. Nevertheless, each work is competently summarized and folded into the recurring themes Linebaugh has already established. Thus, the sermon to the Hebrews both warns and assures, simultaneously presenting Christ and exposing the "instability and hollowness" of all other hopes (p. 124). Revelation is shown not to be a riddle but an unveiling of the reality that in Christ God has acted, is acting, and will act to redeem his people from the forces of chaos and death.

Chapter 7 represents a third subsection of the book: a case study of Romans. For Linebaugh, Romans is the classic example of his overriding thesis that Scripture is a "living and active word that both reveals and redeems" (p. 125). Some of this chapter reads like a conventional New Testament introduction, including discussions of date and structure. At other times, the tone turns decidedly homiletic, reveling in the love of God, expressed in the cross, and poured into our hearts by the Spirit.

Chapter 8 draws the themes of the book together under the heading "Comfortable Words." This captures well the way Linebaugh wants to frame the invitation of Scripture. The Bible is a summons to

find life, not by avoiding our troubles, fears, and failures, but through finding that God speaks a word of resurrection hope at "the site of human need" (p. 167).

Linebaugh's work admirably fulfils its stated goal. The language of "invitation" is precisely what this book achieves. There is a lyrical quality to the writing and an overriding tone of gladness at the goodness of God revealed in the gospel. In focusing our hearts and minds on what God is doing through Scripture, we are exhorted to see the Bible as an experience of searing vulnerability which ends not in despair but in sharing the joy of the God who justifies the ungodly and raises the dead. There is much here that will renew the weary disciple and guide the newborn novice.

At the same time, the book does evince a characteristic weakness. At times, seemingly adopting a Lutheran rather than a Reformed framework, the Old Testament tends to be treated as a foil to the New. The chapters on the Gospels and Romans are twice the size as that on the Torah. It is understandable in a work so brief that Linebaugh wants to assure the reader that the end goal is always to rest in the good news of Jesus. Nevertheless, giving more space to the New than to the Old too easily communicates that the point of Scripture is to flick forward to the end. I am certain this is not Linebaugh's intention, but at the very least, the book could have offered one example of what it means to linger longer in the gracious words of the Old Testament.

This criticism aside, Linebaugh's book would work well in a variety of settings, from the college classroom through to the church small group. Indeed, the text is eminently suitable to give to a ministry team or college faculty. For we all need reminding that Scripture is "alive and active" (Heb 4:12 NIV), a well that truly washes what it shows.

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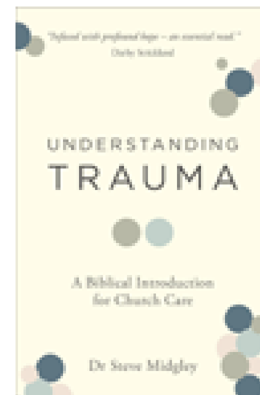
Steve Midgley. *Understanding Trauma: A Biblical Handbook for Church Care*. London: Good Book, 2025. 203 pp. £9.99/$16.99.



Steve Midgley's *Understanding Trauma* is one of two significant books on biblically based Christian counseling approaches to trauma released in 2025 (the other, Darby Strickland's *When It's Trauma*, is reviewed later in this issue of *Themelios*). From my perspective as someone who has worked with victims of trauma over decades in a range of roles—medical practitioner, minister and elder, and professional Christian counselor—and who is now working on a DPhil on healing responses to trauma in the Psalms, the two books make numerous helpful contributions to understanding and practice and complement each other well.

Understanding Trauma is *a local-church* manual on pastoral care for both pastors and the church family of those who have been harmed by traumatic experiences. Midgley writes as a minister of the Word who is also medically and psychologically trained. He addresses what whole churches need to know about caring for one another, even when the problem is trauma. He has over four decades of experience to draw upon—initially as a Cambridge-educated medical doctor, then from his training in psychiatry, and finally as senior pastor for many years of

a healthy reformed evangelical church. Here, where Midgley still serves as an assistant minister, the pastors, like the biblical-era shepherds from which they derive their name, care for the struggling individual sheep in their flock as well as manage overall flock health, and the whole church strives to practice every-member ministry in which the word of Christ dwells richly.

The book is divided into three main sections of approximately equal length.

Section 1, "Seeing Trauma in Scripture and Life," has chapters titled "Trauma in the Bible"; "What *Is* Trauma?"; "Encountering Trauma"; "Trauma and Church"; and "Jesus and Trauma." This section provides a good summary of the biblical background of an area that is very well described in Scripture, without the word for physical wounds (trauma) that we now use. Midgley presents eight local-church case studies of traumatized people that give a good sense of what is going on for them as individuals and how that may appear to others.

Section 2, "Contemporary Thinking and Biblical Perspectives," covers how trauma is understood today; trauma and memory; trauma and the body; and trauma and relationships. This section helpfully summarizes current thinking about trauma, explaining and welcoming key insights and theories, while appropriately cautioning that there is much more to learn and that some theories will inevitably change. Midgley aptly describes how theories can be helpful but sometimes misapplied. The chapter on the impact of trauma on relationships, including in the local church, and the help that God has designed the local church community to bring provides a practical theological underpinning for the final section.

Section 3, "Responding with Compassion in the Local Church," includes welcoming thoughtfully; conversations about trauma; trauma and lament; trauma and beauty; trauma and the hope of Jesus Christ; and churches that care well. Here we see how to help with detailed concrete examples. The processes of listening, understanding, conversing, and connecting with people and the Lord are well explained. Scripture is used well throughout to inform and guide all of this. Given the ministry realities in many churches and the complexity of many people's struggles and circumstances, I share Midgley's concern about churches going beyond their gifts, training, experience, and capacity. My hope is that as pastors and congregations are rediscovering biblical pastoral care and counseling, and getting themselves better equipped for it (including people with suitable gifts becoming well-trained and experienced in counseling for trauma), more local churches will be able to do what is needed in the area of talking and relationships (but perhaps not in medicine/psychiatry).

While Midgley expresses some caution about churches attempting to do everything that can be done for trauma, he is insistent on demonstrating, with concrete examples, just how much significant, transformative, life-changing care can take place in a reasonably healthy church. He has a vision for, and experience of, a church that can offer so much more than merely *supportive* "tea and sympathy"—as a psychiatrist once called what he imagined I, as a counseling pastor at the time, would provide to one of his complex PTSD patients. Of course, that psychiatrist's assessment was partly based on longstanding gaps in pastoral care at many levels in most churches—which is why Midgley needs to write the books he does.

What Midgley effectively shows us is that the apostle Paul's urging in 1 Thessalonians 5:14 for the whole church to encourage the fainthearted and help the weak—written, like the rest of the Bible, in the context of pervasive trauma (though without modern DSM-5 categories, or use of the word "trauma")—does not cease to apply to us today just because we have recently rediscovered that a person's disorderliness, weakness, and faintheartedness may be caused, at least in part, by highly distressing

situations. Nor does understanding that their ongoing trauma syndrome is embodied as well as spiritual make the help and encouragement provided by the church less important.

Midgley is appreciative of much of the modern research into the effects of trauma and what can help heal it, as well as the expertise that comes from training and experience. Yet he is unfazed by the tendency to see mental health professionals as having the sole jurisdiction and practice of trauma care. He shows what truly patient and encouraging church-based care looks like when a struggle is long drawn out, as it often is when a traumatic experience has harmed someone.

I can add, personally, from many years of involvement in the mental health system and my local church family, that I think Midgley is right to give such a prominent place to the church. A reasonably healthy church—where sound theology *and* Christian living is prayerfully lived out so that the love and word of Christ abounds in community—can help the traumatized in ways that nothing else can, while still helping in many ways that are roughly analogous to the best of care offered outside the church (modern medication management excepted).

I read the pre-publication version of Midgley's book with a critical eye, to see if I could offer a whole-hearted endorsement. I could. Having no critique to make within the intended scope of the book, I will instead pick up on an aspect of the implementation of Midgley's vision for our churches. If churches that use church health "metrics" want to implement what he has outlined, it will be strategic to include care of the traumatized (and others who are "weak" or "fainthearted") in the metrics. Otherwise, our attention may be diverted away from what Midgley and the apostle Paul urge. I doubt we can reliably measure the amount of work done in the area or assess its effects with a single number or percentage, but perhaps there could be a hybrid qualitative-quantitative measure. How many traumatized or struggling people do we know who are receiving good, relational, Word-based, and practical care from pastors/shepherds and others in their church? How many are finding blessing? How many seem stuck or are even going backwards? What trends can we discern as we help and encourage as a church? What constructive leadership discussions, pastoral strategies, and public and private ministry of the Word do the metrics stimulate?

Understanding Trauma is a great book that meets many present needs. If followed, it will go a long way towards filling gaps in current pastoral care practices.

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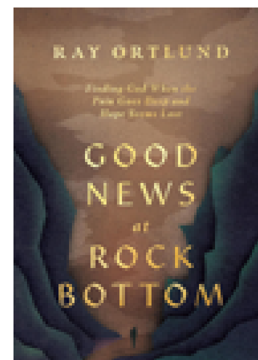
Ray Ortlund. *Good News at Rock Bottom: Finding God When the Pain Goes Deep and Hope Seems Lost.* Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2025. 160 pp. £10.99/$16.99.



Betrayed. Trapped. Lonely. Dying. How does the gospel help—*really* help—at the lowest points in life? In *Good News at Rock Bottom*, Ray Ortlund comes alongside readers as a fellow traveler who knows what it is to experience pain and disappointment. As he does so, he lifts up Jesus, the one we can trust to meet our most desperate needs. Ortlund sits down beside the reader and points out that it is only from low places that true hope can be found. He is also alert to the fact that "our painful experiences raise huge questions about God. Like, 'Where was he when I needed him most?' And the Bible doesn't always answer our questions. What it offers is a new way to hope and to worship—right where we are" (p. 8).

The book springs from a teaching series, and the author's heart as a pastor of real people with real struggles is evident in both his content and manner. His tone is gentle, speaking as to those who are in the pit: perhaps wary because they have been burned by the sin of others, unable to face the possibility of another disappointment, or feeling crushed by the weight of their own guilt or shame.

The structure of the book is built around an extended meditation on Isaiah 57:15:

> For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: "I dwell in the high and holy place, and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite."

Each chapter contains reflection on an aspect of this verse, followed by application of that truth to the various ways we may find ourselves at rock bottom. The aim is not to provide an apologetic argument, however; logic is rarely what hurting hearts need to hear. Rather, Ortlund aims to offer rest and hope in the loving presence of God, who dwells with the contrite and lowly.

It is a challenge for any author to address some of the biggest and darkest experiences of the human condition. Sin and suffering come with great complexity, and those who speak need to grasp this in order to avoid trite answers or misguided comforts. Ortlund shows he is equal to this task, weaving together acknowledgement of how such experiences feel with theological truths that help readers look to the Lord. He validates the pain of betrayal by exploring the covenantal faithfulness that ought to lie at the heart of relationships. He tackles how our own sin can leave us feeling trapped, "defeated and despairing" (p. 57). But from there he moves to show us how "God invites us back, fallen all the way to rock bottom, just by being true to himself, not lowering his standards at all. He really is that merciful" (p. 60).

He then recognizes the way that loneliness amplifies the pain of both sin and suffering. Yet he counters the temptation to withdraw from others during such times by simultaneously holding out the all-sufficiency of Jesus and the goodness of our imperfect church communities, which are founded on God's grace. Finally, in the face of death—so rarely talked about directly in Western cultures—Ortlund provides wise guidance for how to persevere to life's end, reflecting on the difference it makes to know that Christ is *with* us always and that he will carry us in our weakness.

The use of numerous passages of Scripture throughout, along with apt words from church history and testimonies of God's work in his people, help to make God's promises concrete and relatable. The

overall effect is that readers are nudged toward trust in God and godliness in life by words of compassion and, in the truest sense of the term, encouragement.

Good News at Rock Bottom is the kind of book that is easy to pick up even if your emotional bandwidth is, well, at "rock bottom." Ortlund knows the human heart and is almost deceptively astute in bringing not just the facts but the *hope* of the gospel to bear upon its darkest places. There are thoughtful questions for reflection or discussion at the end of each chapter, which add to the book's usefulness as a companion to personal devotions or for reading with a friend or small group.

The conversational style and use of colloquial language may take readers less familiar with the author's manner a little while to settle into. And those looking for a dense and detailed theological tome may find themselves slightly disappointed. But what this book offers is something more like a letter from a beloved and wise uncle or favorite teacher, who knows how to comfort and challenge you in the same breath.

As rock bottom is a place that many of us can find ourselves, and some of us more than once, Ortlund's book meets a very real need and deserves to be widely read.

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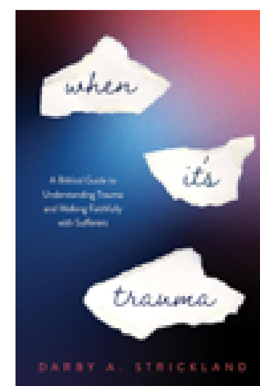
Darby A. Strickland. *When It's Trauma: A Biblical Guide to Understanding Trauma and Walking Faithfully with Sufferers*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2025. 308 pp. £22.99/$22.99.



Darby Strickland's *When It's Trauma* is one of two 2025 book releases on trauma from a Christian counseling perspective that make tremendous contributions to biblical understanding and practice. (Steve Midgley's complementary work, *Understanding Trauma: A Biblical Introduction for Church Care*, is reviewed earlier in this issue of *Themelios*).

Darby Strickland is a faculty member at the Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation in Philadelphia and teaches counseling at Westminster Theological Seminary. She writes with many years of experience working in a Christian counseling center with trauma, domestic abuse, and relationships as her areas of specialization.

When It's Trauma is written for anyone who wants to come alongside someone who has been *traumatized*, which she defines as being "severely impacted by a devastating event that was (1) sudden and unpredictable, (2) life-threatening, or (3) a profound violation of trust" (p. 16). This book will indeed be helpful for a pastor, elder, small-group leader, friend, family member, or professional counselor. It has the clear feel of someone who has had extensive experience of walking compassionately and skillfully with many suffering people over excruciatingly long periods.

Strickland provides this summary of her book (p. 11):

> *Part 1: Foundations of Care*. We begin not with strategies but with presence. With listening. With seeing.... We explore how we can be wise companions to people who are walking through deep suffering—and how Jesus himself draws near to the broken-hearted.

> *Part 2: Wounds of Trauma*. We delve into specific wounds caused by trauma. Each chapter … follows a similar structure by defining and describing one of those wounds, showing how Scripture portrays it, overviewing its impacts on a sufferer, and then explaining how a helper can provide support. Some suggestions will be most practical for formal counselling relationships, while others may be useful in any context. Each chapter also includes discovery questions you can ask a sufferer to learn more about their experience.
>
> *Part 3: Hope of Restoration.* We end by exploring the slow, sacred journey of restoration after trauma, drawing from the books of Ezra and Nehemiah to cast a hopeful vision of how sufferers can rebuild amid the rubble. Healing from trauma is rarely linear—it weaves grief with worship and progress with resistance—and so it requires the steady presence of Christ and his people.

A helpful, annotated "further reading" list is provided after the appendices, and additional resources to help church leaders work through the book's contents are available for download.

The book left me, an experienced counselor, satisfied and newly encouraged to push on more hopefully with my longer-term traumatized counselees. There is also much here for the inexperienced and those who want to be more effective in their helping. Its message is humble, clear, and hopeful: the Lord is our Deliverer and Counselor—not Strickland, not me, not you, and not the counseling relationship or counseling method, as important as these are, and as loving and skillful as Strickland is.

Furthermore, even recommended self-soothing techniques that might be seen as purely medical or physiological are rightly attributed to God's grace, wisdom, and kindness, in a way that helps restore confidence in our loving and sovereign Lord. My own observation over decades is that hoping in the Lord and looking to him in all things is at the core of the most helpful approaches to trauma. Strickland models this in the fine details of extended counseling relationships, while exhibiting the interventions that the wider counseling world has also found to be beneficial. Nevertheless, her approach is deeply rooted in Scripture—it is the lens used to interpret everything, and her words sensitively and wisely express the word of Christ.

Strickland's "ministry of presence" is a wise, biblical, and necessary corrective in a culture where pastoral care can be rushed and efficiency is highly valued. It is an appropriately paced ministry of the Word that starts by saying little. It should help many to slow down and really listen before speaking gently and slowly, while continuing to listen carefully and prayerfully.

A short appendix on "Empathy Versus Enmeshment" (pp. 291–96) will be helpful for those who may get too caught up in the lives and experiences of others—especially when caring in local church contexts that do not have the usual boundaries of a professional counseling center.

I have just two small criticisms of this truly excellent book. The first is that a Scripture index would help as readers dip back into the book again and again. The second is that there could be more on singing as a healing response to trauma, trouble, and distress, as we see in many of the Psalms, in other parts of Scripture, and in the world around us.

Having said that, singing out loud while alone was not a mainstream psychotherapeutic intervention when this book was being written. So, it is pleasing that Strickland not only mentions it (p. 16) but later notes that "many of my counselees have learned to call on the Lord by singing a song that encapsulates

a comforting reality" (p. 222). She also has a wonderful section on Psalm 42 about how the Lord helps people find their voice despite the challenges of embodied distress (pp. 92–99).

However, I would want to give more emphasis here to the psalm itself (and songs like it) being for singing as well as speaking, noting that Psalm 42:8b is usually taken as referring to songs of the Lord that *he gives* his people to *sing to him* at night, with v. 8c ("a prayer to the God of my life") clarifying just who is singing. (Further support for this reading can be found in Psalm 77 and Job 35:9–10, where God "gives us songs in the night," and Psalm 137:4, where traumatized people struggle to "sing *the Lord's song* in a strange land.")

Taken this way, the ancient psalm-singer foreshadows Strickland's contemporary observation that many of her counselees have learned to sing to the Lord in their trauma. And in the context of night-time distress, singing a God-given prayer-song at night would then become a significant, even exemplary, way to self-soothe both body and soul. For through singing/speaking to ourselves and the Lord and hearing him in return through the inspired words of the psalm, we simultaneously receive the physiological benefits of breathing exercise, the comfort of musical sound and vibration, a resetting of rumination, and much more besides.

To be clear, what Strickland helpfully recommends about actively imagining God singing over us in his redeeming love and compassion remains valid, as we should still pursue blessing through meditating upon the beautiful and comforting image in Zephaniah 3:17, where our God sings over us and "quiets (us) by his love" (p. 127).

As I expected, I find myself in close agreement with what Strickland says about counseling "when it's trauma." The unexpected thing is that I also find myself wanting to be like her in my own work—imitating her as she imitates Christ. And that may be the highest praise I can offer. It is delightful and inspiring to see the heart, character, and wisdom of the Lord in the ministry of another in such a challenging area.

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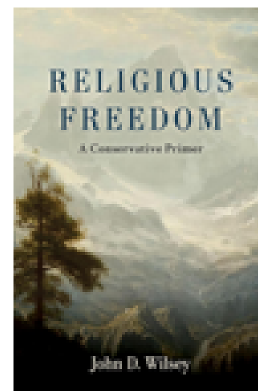
John D. Wilsey. *Religious Freedom: A Conservative Primer*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2025. 280 pp. £22.99/$28.99.



In his recent work, *Religious Freedom: A Conservative Primer*, historian John Wilsey contributes to the current debates over political theology. He defends a particular vision of conservatism, which he calls *aspirational conservatism*. This approach embodies conservatism as something prepolitical, "a temperament … a way of life before it ever represents a political stratagem" (p. 33). Opposing Christian postliberalism in particular, he seeks to introduce readers to what Alexis de Tocqueville saw as the heart of the American experiment: the union of "two spirits" into one, the spirit of liberty and the spirit of religion.

In this endeavor Wilsey is largely successful, and many will benefit from his story-filled introduction to historic conservative thought. Beyond that, however,

those looking for assistance in more pressing and contemporary skirmishes regarding the scope and meaning of "religious freedom" may be disappointed.

Chapter 1 provides clarifications that are key to defining political conservatism. Wilsey distinguishes true conservatism from some of the false images that form in peoples' minds when they hear the term—e.g., "racism, religious fanaticism, classism, narrow-mindedness, and blind traditionalism." Wilsey is clear: "if conservatism means any of these things, then it should be rejected out of hand" (p. 29). He shines the light of history upon the subject to distinguish between particular manifestations on the one hand and the substantive essentials on the other. Relying on Matthew Continetti's "twelve postwar categories for the Right" witnessed in American history, Wilsey points out the great disparities between differing expressions of conservatism and calls the reader to instead focus on what constitutes "the permanent beneath the flux." Generally, this looks like the pursuit of Order before Liberty (p. 42). More specifically, it is the commitment to conserving "the harmony between the spirit of liberty and the spirit of religion" (p. 32).

Chapter 2 continues to lay groundwork, addressing what Wilsey considers "the conservative imagination." Conservatism must be about more than politics; it must be about "the pursuit of a life of the mind, a well-formed imagination, a philosophical framework to understand reality" (p. 63).

The goals of the book take on greater clarity in chapter 3. Wilsey distinguishes between Nationalism and Patriotism, which he calls, respectively, "Closed American exceptionalism" (disordered) and "Open American exceptionalism" (rightly ordered). He critiques both sides of the political divide: those of the left who would denigrate the American identity altogether and those of the right who would do the same by questioning the national ideal of blending religion and liberty. This is where he begins to build a case against postliberal thought—an effort he continues throughout the book.

In chapter 4 Wilsey presents the central argument of the book: that "too much order results in tyranny, and too much liberty results in anarchy" (p. 118). He emphasizes that both represent two-front battles, as versions of each arise on both the Left and the Right. He labors to fairly articulate and critique the argument of Stephen Wolfe and his *Case for Christian Nationalism* (pp. 126–31). Wilsey points out what others have missed: that Wolfe's argument is concerned neither with the role of the church, nor with the matter of American nationality *per se*, but instead seeks "to cast a vision for the purpose of the state in general" (p. 105). Wilsey concludes that Wolfe's magisterial Christian nationalism fits within the broad schema of postliberalism (pp. 141–43).

Chapter 5 retreats from the more nuanced debates within Christian thought and appeals instead to history to advocate for conservatism broadly. By means of numerous examples, Wilsey demonstrates that to reject aspirational conservatism is to embrace "vain utopianism" (p. 155). True conservatism does not eschew change: "Change is inevitable, and 'stability is not immobility'" (p. 163). "The study of history," Wilsey concludes, "helps us to put away childish things.… Childishness ignores complexity and will not abide paradox" (p. 167).

In the final chapter, Wilsey writes of the need to embrace a civic religion. Here he speaks positively of the effects of non-Christian religion to a degree that some will find surprising. He employs the likes of C. S. Lewis's apologetic and Anselm's Ontological Argument, each of which reason to *a* God but not necessarily the God of Scripture. Wilsey describes "religious consciousness … basic to the human condition" as that which "separates libertinism from liberty" (p. 195), and he describes conservatives as prizing religion and religious institutions "no matter their personal beliefs" (p. 175). He follows these broad statements with an acknowledgement that, for its part, America clearly had a Christian founding

(p. 181), while also taking pains to emphasize that this is not the same thing as being founded with a Christian identity. He thus distinguishes religious freedom and Christian identity as two competing answers to the question of how America was founded (John Wilsey, "*America as the City Upon a Hill*" [PhD diss., Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2009], 239).

Wilsey faithfully seeks to confront and correct *big-government, postliberal* Christian Nationalists. Unfortunately, he leaves entirely unaddressed what could be called *presuppositional, limited-government* Christian Nationalists. This silence is unfortunate, since this is precisely where much of the religious liberty debate is happening today. It is a space occupied by self-identifying Christian Nationalists such as Doug Wilson, to be sure. But other serious Christian thinkers, who do not identify with that label, stand in close proximity, engaged in good-faith efforts to clarify where the differences are. This is what Kevin DeYoung meant recently when he said, "I am not a Christian Nationalist, but I almost could be" (Kevin DeYoung, "6 Questions for Christian Nationalists," *Clearly Reformed*, 1 December, 2025, https://clearlyreformed.org/6-questions-for-christian-nationalists/). And it is the ground that 9Marks president Jonathan Leeman occupies as he exposes the fatal flaws behind equating freedom of religion with a vague freedom of conscience. Indeed, calling it a "view from nowhere," he even wonders whether such a grounding for religious freedom is "itself the greater enemy of religious freedom" (*Political Church: The Local Assembly as Embassy of Christ's Rule* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2016], 87).

For American evangelicals, the question at heart is this: Are the foundational truths of the Declaration of Independence really *self-evident*, or are they instead *particular results* of a Christian worldview? This is a significant question in debates about religious freedom today, particularly within the Baptist world that Wilsey inhabits and for whom his is a representative voice. However, it is worth noting that recent writings and interviews by key Baptist figures like Albert Mohler, Stephen Wellum, and others reflect the same concerns as Leeman's noted above (David Schrock, "Interview with Albert Mohler on Christian Nationalism," *SBJT* 28.2 [2024]: 148–67). But those battles are not acknowledged at all in Wilsey's book, and so no light is shed to help those in the fray. This is disappointing in a 2025 work that would speak to the subject of religious freedom.

Religious Liberty: A Conservative Primer fulfils the aim of the second half of its title. Wilsey paints a picture of conservatism that reveals both its beauty and its complexity. And his commendation of rightly ordered patriotism is greatly needed today. But those who come to this book hoping to be better equipped for some current religious liberty debates may be disappointed.

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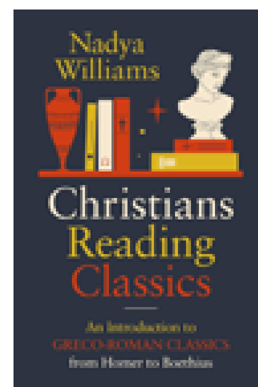
— MISSION & CULTURE —

Nadya Williams. *Christians Reading Classics: An Introduction to Greco-Roman Classics from Homer to Boethius*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2025. 299 pp. £20.00/$32.99.



Jesus once chided the religious leaders of his day for their faulty reading practices, since, despite diligently searching the Scriptures, they failed to see how those texts bore witness to him (John 5:40). Such a Christ-seeking reading habit—one that listens for witness to him in the books being read—is similar to what Williams advocates in her book *Christians Reading Classics*. Of course, hers is the harder task of helping Christian readers find witness about Christ in *pagan* books rather than in the inspired corpus of the canonical Jewish Scriptures.

Williams intends the book to be "a survey of Greco-Roman classics" (p. 273), and she accomplishes the daunting task of addressing upwards of thirty-seven ancient authors in just 270 pages. Along with her rich analyses of the most well-known authors, Williams does an outstanding job of bringing lesser-known figures into the conversation, especially women (for instance, the Christian imitator of Vergil's poetry, Faltonia Betitia Proba). After a helpful and visually appealing timeline of authors, followed by a ten-page introduction, the book has five parts. Part 1 focuses on the "Longing for Eternity," analyzing Homer and Greek historians. Part 2 focuses on the "Formation of Virtuous Citizens," engaging Aeschylus, Greek playwrights, and philosophers. Part 3 focuses on rhetoric, tackling speechwriters, Greek manuals, and Roman poets. Part 4 focuses on "Heroes and Role Models," covering Roman poets and biographers. Part 5 focuses on "Virtues and Vices," merging Roman philosophers with Christian theologians. She then concludes the book with a discussion of the virtue of re-reading.

Williams navigates the difficulty of such broad inclusion by providing a twofold organizational approach: both chronologically linear (for the most part) and thematically grouped. She is wise to adopt a chronological approach because it helps her ensure her readers are "oriented in time," thereby seeing "the influence of ideas over time" (p. xvii). Her second strategy, organizing the chapters into thematic units, is a little less helpful. While she is perceptive about these themes, and while many of the texts/authors surveyed do touch on them at various points, they become a little constraining. I wonder if Williams might have done better simply to list off in the introduction the main themes that would arise at various points throughout the chapters, and then allow each text to tap into whichever theme—or theme*s*—that might fit it. Then again, since Williams is seeking to reach an audience with little to no background in reading these ancient classical texts, perhaps the thematically grouped approach is appropriate, ensuring that readers don't get overwhelmed by the sheer number of authors.

The biggest asset of Williams's book is the way that she situates her discussion of these ancient texts in conversation with the Christian tradition. Her approach uses the Christian framework to guide readers in discerning what's valuable in these ancient texts without being put off by the non-Christian aspects therein. She claims that the "virtues, as presented in the pagan texts, do not reflect the complete picture that is only fully visible to those equipped with gospel eyes" (p. xv). One instance where Williams brings Christian aspects into conversation with these pagan texts is her intriguing suggestion that Mary's Magnificat offers a "*response to* the pagan women of Greek tragedy and comedy" (p. 99). While she does not develop this idea, Williams is here prompting Christian readers to set out and hunt down

these possible connections (or others like it that the readers discover on their own) in order to draw out the benefit that comes from thinking about how the biblical stories might handle things differently from—albeit in conversation with—their pagan interlocutors.

Overall, I think that Williams has done an excellent service to the Christian reading community, particularly for educators who desire to help (young) Christian readers foray into the world of classical literature. She has offered discerning and exciting treatments of countless classical texts. Furthermore, she has provided a thematic overview to hold together those many works, all while reminding readers to reflect on their own Christian tradition as they read.

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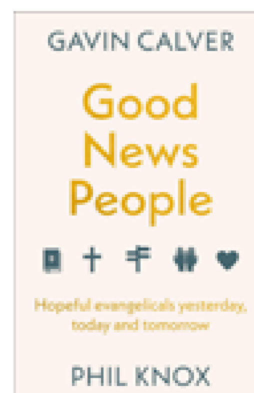
Gavin Calver and Phil Knox. *Good News People: Hopeful Evangelicals Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*. London: Inter-Varsity Press, 2025. xiv + 203 pp. £12.99/$15.99.



The title, *Good News People*, is an apt one for this book. On the one hand, Calver and Knox associate the name with the organization with which they work, the Evangelical Alliance. For the authors, to speak of "evangelicals" and "good news people" is to say the same thing (p. 3). On the other hand, the title is appropriate because Calver and Knox offer the reader good news about God's work in the UK. With story after story throughout the book, the reader who cares about the growth of the kingdom of God is encouraged by the good news that the supposed demise of evangelicalism in the post-Christian UK is not the whole story. According to the authors, there is, in fact, good news to celebrate: God is at work.

The authors organize the book into two parts. In part 1, the authors define "evangelical" as they mean it, appealing to the word's roots and the movement they reflect. Calver and Knox use appropriate care in these efforts. Contemporary readers know all too well that the term "evangelical" has been utilized, perhaps even co-opted, to refer to a particular set of voters and political activists in the United States. The authors themselves note this unfortunate reality (pp. 11–14). Not to confuse that usage with theirs, they briefly explain their understanding of the term and the movement through Bebbington's quadrilateral: bibliocentric, cruciocentric, conversionist, and activist. Their careful distinction advances their purpose. They advocate for a heavenly kingdom, not an earthly one.

In the second and most extensive part of the book (two-thirds of its content), Calver and Knox offer a series of five challenges, or "postures," as the writers call them, to UK evangelicals. The writers challenge the readers to embody seemingly paradoxical traits: to "be brave and kind" (ch. 4), to "be culturally relevant without selling out" (ch. 5), to "be hopeful and realistic" (ch. 6), to "go for decisions and make disciples" (ch. 7), and to "be united and diverse" (ch. 8). The authors argue that, by virtue of their evangelical identity and convictions, evangelicals should exemplify these paradoxical traits. For each posture, the writers illustrate how evangelicals in the UK express it effectively and appropriately. The cumulative weight of the stories communicates an encouraging picture of strength and growth

among UK evangelicals. Though reflecting their UK context, the authors do not limit their charge to the UK only but commend these postures to evangelicals everywhere.

At the end of each chapter, the authors provide reflective questions for the reader to make personal application of the chapter's content and invite readers to find resources for corporate use at www.goodnewspeople.church. Each chapter concludes with a few annotated "recommended reading" selections to help readers explore the chapter's contents further.

Overall, the book fulfills its purpose in providing challenge and hope to evangelicals. It offers good news to good news people. The book could legitimately be characterized as an explanation and promotion of the Evangelical Alliance. One cannot fault the authors for introducing the organization they work for and clearly esteem. While the authors promote evangelicalism above all, they do not shy away from championing the Evangelical Alliance as a model for faithful imitation.

My sole criticism concerns the concluding chapter, where the authors take a tough stance. The conclusion opens with a brief story about a friend who told the authors he had departed from evangelicalism. The authors lament this person's departure from evangelicalism toward what they label "experi-angelicalism" (p. 190). The authors choose here to exhibit cleverness (bordering on cheekiness) that they discouraged in chapter 4. The conclusion also overgeneralizes and advances a caricature of embattled evangelicals who alone have the courage and conviction to uphold Christianity in a harsh world. The authors are gracious gentlemen who care deeply about people and the truth; that much is clear from the rest of the book. The conclusion, though, presents a clumsy digression from that stance.

The book does not break any new ground in terms of theological ideas or practices. Most of what the authors offer on faith and practice follows well-worn trails. This does not constitute a weakness. In fact, their method aligns with the book's purpose: to reinvigorate and encourage evangelicals by revisiting their roots and reclaiming their mandate rather than pioneering a new way forward. As mentioned above, the authors recommend a concise number of works for further study at the end of each chapter. Consequently, readers should recognize the book's limitations. If one desires to be encouraged and challenged by the relevance and progress of evangelicalism, this is a fitting book. If one wants an in-depth examination of evangelicalism or of current societal research, this is not the book. After all, the book covers a broad swath of material, including "yesterday, today, and tomorrow" in less than two-hundred pages.

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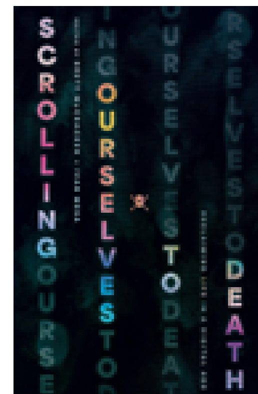
Brett McCracken and Ivan Mesa, eds. *Scrolling Ourselves to Death: Reclaiming Life in a Digital Age*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2025. 248 pp. £12.99/$18.98.



As a homage and contemporary appropriation of Neil Postman's key work, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, on technology's effects on the life of the mind in 1985, *Scrolling Ourselves to Death* is a contemporary read with fourteen engaging essays. These diverse essays divide into three parts: key insights from Postman's work, practical challenges for contemporary communication, and the answer the church can offer to the milieu. The book provides insights into how Christians can effectively share the good news of Christ, even while the culture has its figurative and literal heads down in their phones. This volume proves to be a timely and welcome guide forward for the church and those looking to tread a different path.

Brett McCracken introduces the series of essays with a dismal situation: "Heads down. Phones out. Fingers scrolling. This is the humanoid posture of our age…. From the rising of the sun to its going down, we scroll our way through the day. We scroll our way through life. And we are scrolling ourselves to death." (pp. 1–2). From distracted-driving car accidents to the increasing prevalence of loneliness and depression linked to smartphone use, this book will serve as a sobering and remedial aid if you seek to evaluate your own practices and help others enjoy silence, solitude, meditation, and obedience to Christ. Much of our problem is that we are so distracted by digital entertainment that we are unable to enjoy the physicality of the immediate world. McCracken keenly shows a simple way forward out of the morass: "Once we recognize this fact—that television is fundamentally oriented around commandeering your attention so it can be monetized—we can begin to resist its pull" (p. 9).

Each essay in this helpful volume is a reminder that technology is not neutral but has a *telos* it seeks to move us toward, with sometimes suspect foundations that can be antithetical to biblical teachings. Patrick Miller's fine essay warns us of the ever-so-subtle movement from amusement to addiction, as app developers and engineers have worked together with psychologists to understand human behavior and mastermind devices that keep you enraptured and coming back for more. The move toward addiction has been rather sudden as a society, shortening attention, short-circuiting the beauty of deep thinking, and fostering impatience in consideration of others' opinions. He warns, "Your phone is a digital syringe. It's a gateway to lifelong, brain-altering, relationship-destroying addiction" (p. 21).

Joe Carter follows up by tracing the history of various technologies and how they have influenced our plausibility structures and theological methodology. Jen Pollock Michel issues a fateful warning of the siren calls of social media, justifying our intimate lives so much so that we commoditize our relationships and prostitute ourselves, where "self is a commodity" and "reality is entertainment" (p. 48). Hans Madueme insightfully outlines our current cultural moment of conspiracy theory and relativity. Samuel James aptly argues that "media is powerful because it directs our attention" (p. 78). In other words, instead of being active observers and agents in the world, media creates habits of passive engagement with the world. Additionally, the nature of 60-second and 5-minute videos touting health claims, anecdotal evidence, and personal (non-professional) remedies does not lend itself to the research necessary to verify that the snake oil remedies actually work.

The essays then shift to the practical implications for today's communicators of the gospel. Collin Hansen surmises that, if unchecked and unmonitored, social media will become the primary tool for spiritual formation rather than the local church. In fact, the local church has become another option or commodity to be judged and tentatively accepted. Even then, the offerings of the church are valuable insofar as they "amuse and please" us (p. 97). Thaddeus Williams's essay offers a way forward to cut through the incoherence of today's discourse by providing clarity, sharp lines, and integration of mind, body, and soul. Nathan Finn offers a harrowing warning about the dangers of adopting trendy, pragmatic approaches to spiritual formation by forgetting our history as believers. We must repent of our spiritual amnesia that assumes "we know more than everyone who came before us because of our constant access to nearly limitless content" (p. 135). Finn then offers a path forward through practical steps and the appropriation of the old paths of wisdom, which will prove a boon for the storm-tossed soul.

The third part of the book offers a promising way forward for the church. Shane Morris encourages us not to be Luddites but to "use media creatively but cautiously" (p. 147). Further, McCracken's essay urges us not to be mere consumers of content but doers as well. He says, "We are overstimulated but underactivated" (pp. 163–64). As much of the book proposes, the antidote to the present sickness is to be intentionally engaged in the immediate world around us. Or as Jay Kim's essay suggests, we must reaffirm and "cling to embodiment" (p. 191). The church must embrace the fact that "meaningful connection is always inconvenient and demands high commitment" (p. 193). Finally, Andrew Spencer admonishes us to heed Aldous Huxley's warning in *Brave New World*, not by becoming "technologically backward to correct course" but to "become aware of how technology shapes culture" and the church (p. 216).

Ivan Mesa ends the book with a medicine that is bitter at first but ultimately sweet to the soul. The church must reclaim its historical identity to offer a clear north star to the swirling ideologies and dizzying pixels. So many in our day have adopted technology without understanding its ramifications for our souls. From shorter attention spans to discontentment with life in general, it will be the brave who do something about it. It begins in their own consumption and in helping move people toward an integrated life. A helpful resource for churches, each essay also provides excellent discussion questions for local congregations to warn, rebuke, and guide those who desire to heed the warning signs.

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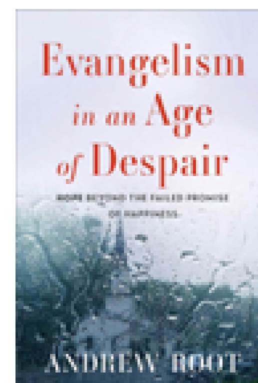
Andrew Root. *Evangelism in an Age of Despair: Hope beyond the Failed Promise of Happiness*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2025. 289 pp. £22.99/$29.99.



Andrew Root, professor of theology at Luther Seminary, offers a penetrating examination of evangelism amid the pressures and contradictions of modern life. In *Evangelism in an Age of Despair,* he argues that the church's challenge is not simply the loss of belief but the progressive thinning of the soul shaped by cultural forces that promise happiness while producing exhaustion. Root extends themes developed across his earlier work, particularly the emotional fragility of the modern self, and places them in direct conversation with Christian witness. His book is not a manual of techniques; it is a theological retrieval grounded in the conviction that God himself moves toward human sorrow and that evangelism must be reordered around this pattern of divine descent.

Root's opening diagnosis is one of the book's strongest contributions. He characterizes late modern culture as an age of "happy misery," where curated optimism masks deep interior depletion. Drawing on the long influence of Montaigne and the Western pursuit of self-curated happiness, Root argues that modern identity is relentlessly managed yet rarely healed (pp. 18–22). Evangelism shaped by therapeutic uplift, he warns, merely baptizes the cultural project rather than confronting its emptiness. In its place, Root draws attention to the apocalyptic presence of Christ, who "is found in sorrow" (p. 130). From this conviction emerges his central theological claim: evangelism is the church's participation in God's descent into human suffering.

At the center of this proposal is Root's retrieval of a "theology of consolation," shaped by Luther's *theologia crucis* and informed by figures such as Gregory of Nyssa, Jean Gerson, Johann von Staupitz, and Blaise Pascal. These witnesses refuse the triumphalist instincts of the modern self. They draw attention instead to the places where weakness uncovers the movements of divine grace. Root distinguishes sharply between the modern self—curated, anxious, and fragile—and the soul—which is awakened through God's gracious initiative. Evangelism, in this frame, is not the refinement of technique or persuasion. It is cruciform participation in God's restorative presence, where life is brought forth from death.

The argument unfolds patiently. Root contends that the cultural shift from soul-formation to self-curation has left contemporary people profoundly alone. When churches adapt uncritically to these conditions, Christian witness is reduced to the marketable, the therapeutic, or the accommodating. Root applies steady theological pressure against these trends, calling Christian communities to cultivate spaces marked by patience and shared vulnerability. Such spaces, he suggests, make room for God's consoling agency to be encountered rather than engineered.

Root writes with an eye towards those who carry unspoken exhaustion beneath outward competence, especially in contexts marked by pressure and performance. His reflections on the necessity of presence demonstrate a deep engagement with the emotional landscape of modern life. He recognizes that genuine evangelistic presence requires stamina and the willingness to accompany others without resorting to techniques that avoid the depth of their sorrow.

Root's treatment of proclamation is enlightening. He does not sideline verbal witness; he reframes it within his theology of consolation. In Root's vision, speech rises out of God's own descent into human sorrow. Confession becomes the moment that the soul awakes to God's nearness. As he puts it, "Soul comes through confession and surrender … the event of evangelism always calls for a confession" (p.

181). Proclamation, then, is never a tool to engineer outcomes. It is the kind of word that can only be spoken from within shared suffering. This shift reveals the heart of Root's theological project: witness is truthful speech born from solidarity with the broken, not a strategy layered on top of it.

Not every reader, however, will find the book easy to navigate. Root engages with philosophical and historical sources in depth, which may stretch those less familiar with these conversations. His prose is reflective and occasionally dense, demanding careful and unhurried attention. He also threads a fictional storyline through the chapters. Some will appreciate how it illustrates the themes; others may find it interrupts the argument's rhythm and slows its momentum. These stylistic choices undeniably shape the reading experience but do not obscure the project's theological force.

Root's doctrinal anthropology, though insightful, also invites further exploration. His distinction between self and soul provides a helpful lens for naming the pressures deforming modern identity, and his treatment of the "three malaises" (p. 62) exposes the fragility of the contemporary self with notable precision. Yet, the more contested dimensions of spiritual formation in a secular age, especially the role of eschatological hope and the future-oriented nature of Christian identity, remain less pronounced than his focus on divine descent and consolation. This creates a slight imbalance in a work otherwise attentive to the complexity of modern spiritual need.

Evangelism in an Age of Despair is a timely and serious work. Root directs the reader back to the cruciform center of the faith, where consolation, not happiness, becomes the ground of Christian witness. His theological vision is pastoral without slipping into sentimentality, and his account of evangelism challenges the church to imagine witness not as persuasion but as participation in the suffering love of Christ. For pastors, ministry leaders, and Christians navigating a culture marked by distraction, exhaustion, and unresolved longing, Root offers a compelling call to recover an evangelism rooted in presence and sustained by the God who meets his people in their sorrow.

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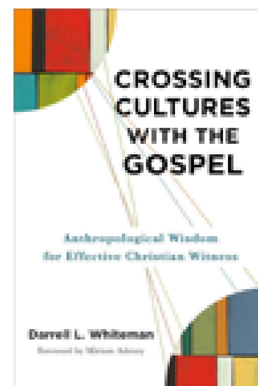
Darrell L. Whiteman. *Crossing Cultures with the Gospel: Anthropological Wisdom for Effective Christian Witness*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2024. xvi + 255 pp. £21.99/$27.99.



Darrell L. Whiteman, former missionary and professor, writes *Crossing Cultures with the Gospel: Anthropological Wisdom for Effective Christian Witness.* Divided into five parts, each with fourteen chapters, averaging about fifteen pages each, this work is an introductory-level textbook for cross-cultural communication classes. Influenced by renowned Christian anthropologists Charles Kraft, Alan Tippett, and Paul Hiebert, Whiteman desires to pass along his nearly half-century of ministry experience to others. The main point Whiteman wants to convey is that the truth of the gospel must be spread in a contextually appropriate manner (p. xv).

One of the most critical observations Whiteman makes is that evangelism and discipleship are most effective when they happen in a relationship. While simple and obvious, this reflection is more complex than realized. For cross-cultural workers, being in a relationship with those outside of their culture occurs when they understand that different culture.

When this happens, the interpretation of thoughts, actions, and experiences is filtered with less restraint through the lens of the Bible over preconceived notions and prejudices (pp. 14–16).

Nevertheless, understanding another's culture is taxing. Culture is not innate (one is not born with a specific culture); instead, it is learned, shared, and acquired by being a member of society (pp. 19–30). Two of the more important obstacles to learning culture are ethnocentrism and culture shock. Ethnocentrism, believing that one culture is superior to another, hinders the spread of the gospel and blinds one to the beauties of other societies. Ethnocentrism is more than just nationalism. Ethnocentrism is the negative and incorrect thoughts, actions, and attitudes—known or unknown—toward another culture. The most obvious example Whiteman uses of ethnocentrism is the apostle Peter, a Jew, who had to undergo a "second conversion" before he could share Christ with Cornelius, a Gentile, in Acts 10 (pp. 1–2).

Among other matters, ethnocentrism is conveyed implicitly through "paramessages," or unconscious nonverbal forms of communication (p. 107). Cross-cultural workers' thoughts and actions surface in paramessages and can contradict what they say. Being certain that God is impartial and that believers from other societies are co-heirs in the kingdom of God is central to missionary work. If cross-cultural workers do not believe this, cultural biases can emerge. Whiteman writes, "Unless we believe at the deepest level of our being that we are equal with others as children of God and that we are equal as sinners who have been redeemed by God's grace, then we are going to send paramessages that say, 'You are inferior to me. I am better than you'" (p. 109). This type of ethnocentrism is often personified when a missionary experiences culture shock. Missionaries carry "culture baggage" (p. 201), such as actions, attitudes, values, and beliefs that differ from the host culture. Fear, anxiety, fatigue, isolation, and frustration result. Manifestations of culture shock can be mild to severe and are common for anyone from any culture entering a new one (p. 131).

One of the cures for culture shock and ethnocentrism that Whiteman mentions is learning the local language. He recommends that a missionary study the host language full-time for the first two years of living in a culture (p. 114). While two years is inadequate, it should be the beginning of a lifetime of language and culture learning. Another cure for culture shock is dying to self (p. 64). This sounds cliché, but dying to self is essential for any missionary. While the analogy between dying to self and the incarnation of Christ is overblown, the missionary being vulnerable and willing to learn and serve the host culture is key.

Whiteman's work is helpful for those preparing to serve overseas as cross-cultural workers. He writes in a readable and lucid manner. Chapters are short, giving the reader manageable, easy-to-digest content. There are few footnotes to obscure the reading. Because the topics he addresses are challenging to understand, he helps readers appreciate them by beginning each chapter with stories that illustrate the concepts. He also provides bullet points, graphs, and charts of some of the more abstract or demanding themes. The summaries at the end of each chapter are especially helpful. However, in simplifying ideas, Whiteman makes the cross-cultural communication of the gospel seem formulaic, which can give missionaries in training a false sense of security and confidence. Perhaps this is warranted as the work is an introductory-level textbook, but the lack of nuance leaves the reader wanting more in-depth analysis.

Whiteman's work provides a suitable foundation for those interested in understanding the basic themes of cross-cultural communication of the gospel. Subtleties can be learned and experienced later in the mission field and in other, more specific courses. More importantly, Whiteman assures the reader

that with hard work, humility, and patience, the truth of the gospel can be spread to all societies in a contextually appropriate manner.

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