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EDITORIAL

During studies for the Master of Apologetics (nearly a decade ago), training was also completed in an Apologetics Evangelism Partnership, which was a unique (albeit much appreciated and needed) emphasis from a foremost mission board. At the time of earning the Master of Apologetics, there were not many Christian institutions offering this emphasis as a major. Happily, two other alma maters (one of which includes Tyndale Seminary!) now offer degrees in apologetics. Throughout the formal studies and certification training, it seemed that many Christians *were* familiar with the study of apologetics. *Lately*, in ministry throughout this year (esp.), the question has been asked frequently with regard to “What is apologetics”? In teaching at a church worship service recently, this was the primary question asked. Perhaps the emphasis upon biblical eschatology for the past few decades has resulted in a deficiency in another important matter, that is, the priority of being equipped to “make a defense” (1 Pet 3:15) to anyone who asks with regard to the believer’s hope. (Certainly, the banality of the “church growth” movement and the sterility of many “pastors/elders” in their shepherding is a primary factor.) Therefore, it is with delight that the current *JODT* is published because there is an emphasis upon apologetics in the articles.

The December 2010 “Editorial” noted some exceptional and unique aspects of the biblical record. Kenneth R. Cooper’s article not only expands upon these unique aspects, but also provides several significant characteristics that answer why one should “believe the Bible.” A frequent quotation among apologists is Pascal’s statement that fallen humanity strives in vain to satisfy the “infinite abyss” that “can be filled only with an infinite and immutable object; in other words by God himself” (*Pensées* 148/428). The article addressing postmillennialism and Marxism by David Q. Santos demonstrates the truthfulness of the assertion. Santos argued that the “innate awareness of God” impacts all life, and is evident in the attempt to recreate the “utopian world” of Genesis 2 (i.e. the longing for this “utopia” can only be satisfied by the second coming, “in other words by God himself”). An evidence for the reliability of Scripture is the validity of the text, which is established by the documents of the original manuscripts. Brian H. Wagner clarified the issues with regard to the New Testament documents, and how this affects the doctrine of inspiration. Some readers will certainly disagree with Wagner’s preference for the Byzantine family of manuscripts, as opposed to the Alexandrian (of which, this reader would be the first); nevertheless, his argument is coherent and worth understanding. Jacob Gaddala helps readers understand “the commendable and also contradicting features of the Judges’ vows. It is always pleasurable to witness a student demonstrate biblical astuteness, and such is the experience with Jeremiah Loubet’s article addressing “Genre Override in Genesis 1—2.” Loubet’s discernment with regard to the ramifications of Christians being inconsistent with regard to genre and interpretation of the creation account is certainly relevant. Several of the book reviews are also apologetic in nature. The publisher trusts you will appreciate the contents herein, and will be inspired to “make a defense.”

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WHY BELIEVE THE BIBLE?

Kenneth R. Cooper

When one speaks with regard to the Bible, what does he/she mean? The term Bible simply means “book” and is often used of any book considered to be an authority on a given subject. In other words, if a book tells one virtually all they need to know regarding a subject, it may be considered the “bible” on that subject (e.g. *The Hunter’s Bible*, *The Fisherman’s Bible*, or *The Mechanic’s Bible*). Why, then, is *The Holy Bible* considered a special book? What makes the Bible particularly distinct not only as a “religious” book but also as a guide for ethics, behavior, and life? Before explaining why Christians believe the Bible, it is necessary to answer a couple questions: (1) What is this nature of this book;? and, (2) What characteristics make it a unique book?

THE NATURE OF THE BIBLE

The Bible is the Word of God; it does not just contain the Word of God; nor does it merely witness to the Word of God as neoorthodox theologians have taught. According to neoorthodoxy, “The Word is Jesus Christ; the Bible is a witness to the Word. Some parts of the Bible are better words about the Word than other parts, but all of it is merely a witness to the Word, Christ.”¹ Ryrie further noted that according to Karl Barth (the essential head of the neoorthodox movement), “the Bible cannot be the Word of God but can only become so when it overpowers us and gains the mastery over us.”² In reality, regardless of the neoorthodox attempt to diminish it, the Bible *is* the Word of God. In spite of what one may think or how the Bible affects them when it is read, it is the Word of God. The Bible is the Word of God because God wrote it, whether or not one accepts this fact. For centuries, men have received the Bible as the written expression of God’s speaking His Word directly to humanity. Furthermore, men have recognized God’s personal self-disclosure to humanity in the Bible. Without the Bible, men could not know God or know anything in relation to God.

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¹ Charles C. Ryrie, *Neo-Orthodoxy* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1956) 46.

² Ibid. 46-47. Ryrie referred here to Barth’s *Church Dogmatics*.

One knows other people as they reveal themselves by what they say and by what they do, or do not say or do; it is much the same way with God. Although God is spirit and is infinitely far and beyond man's comprehension (cf. Job 11:7; 33:12-15; 37:5; Rom 11:33), He has revealed Himself to humanity in His Word. God has spoken and God has acted. As John R. W. Stott clearly stated, God "has taken the initiative in *revelation*, making known to mankind both His nature and His will. . . ."³ For example, the Bible says, ". . . that which is known about God is evident within them [that is, in men]; for *God made it evident to them*. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. . . ." (Rom 1:19-20, italics added).

"General revelation," which is what the previously cited verse is addressing, is the revelation of God in nature. However, of course, this is not enough. Men need to know more regarding God, with regard to who He is, with regard to what kind of person He is, that is, His character and personality. God was pleased to give humanity such knowledge in what theologians have called "special revelation," and that special revelation consists of the Word of God (the Bible). The knowledge is called special revelation because "it was made to a special people (Israel) through special messengers (prophets in the Old Testament and Apostles in the New)."⁴ In special revelation, God speaks to humanity through the people who wrote the Bible. Special revelation will be addressed in the next section, which provides reasons for believing the Bible.

REASONS FOR BELIEVING THE BIBLE

The primary question, of course, is why should one believe the Bible? Herein are four reasons to consider.

First, the Bible's Own Claims for Itself

The Bible claims to be the Word of God. Granted, in a court of law, men would not accept this testimony as sufficient by itself to prove anything. However, at the same time, in any court on earth, men would not deny any defendant the opportunity to testify in his own behalf. Although men

³ John R. W. Stott, *Basic Christianity*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971) 11.

⁴ *Ibid.* 13.

would expect him to provide some corroboration for his testimony, they would allow the defendant to testify to the truth of his own defense.

What then is the testimony of the Bible? The Bible testifies that it is in fact the Word of God, or the revelation, the self-disclosure of God; it makes frequent claims in both the Old Testament and the New Testament to be the Word of God. Some examples from the Old Testament and the New Testament are provided.

The Old Testament

- Gen 15:1 “After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision. . . .”
- Exod 20:1 “Then God spoke all these words, saying. . . .”
- 1 Sam 15:10 “Then the word of the LORD came to Samuel, saying. . . .”
- Isa 38:4 “Then the word of the LORD came to Isaiah, saying. . . .”
- Hag 1:1 “In the second year of Darius the king . . . the word of the LORD came by the prophet Haggai, saying. . . .”

The phrase “the word of the Lord” occurs more than 150 times in the Old Testament so that eventually one has the idea that the Word of the Lord came to these men. God had something to say and He said it clearly and directly.

The New Testament

- John 12:28 “Then a voice came out of heaven: ‘I have both glorified it, and will glorify it again.’”
- Acts 13:46 Paul and Barnabas spoke out boldly and said, “It was necessary that the word of God be spoken to you first. . . .”
- Eph 6:17 Take . . . the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God
- 1 Thess 2:13 “. . . when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God. . . .”

“. . . for you have been born again not of seed
which is perishable but imperishable,
1 Pet 1:23-25 that is, through the living and enduring
word of God. . . . And this is the word
which was preached to you.”

In the New Testament, Paul summarized the revelation as follows: “These things [the things given by God] we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual” (1 Cor 2:13). Not only were these things spoken by the prophets of the Old Testament and by the apostles in the New Testament, but they were also written in what is now the Bible. In 2 Timothy 3:16, Paul noted, “All Scripture is inspired by God,” and the word “Scripture” actually translates the Greek word for “writing” (γραφῆ, *graphē*), and thus refers to the things written in the original manuscripts. Although Paul referred to the Old Testament Scriptures in this verse, the testimony of the entire Bible clearly indicated that it applies to *all* Scripture, including the New Testament.

Indeed, in this verse in 2 Timothy, one finds the key testimony of the Bible to its truthfulness. The key word is “inspiration.” Christians usually understand this word as referring to something that influences a writer such that they produce a beautiful work of literature—a poem, a story, a play—or a beautiful piece of music, or a beautiful painting, etc. In secular literature, this influence goes by the name Muse. In the Bible, however, it goes by the name Holy Spirit. God Himself is the “Muse;” there is no other because no other qualifies. God is the “Muse” who does more than merely influence the biblical writers, as Paul clearly indicated to young Timothy. Paul stressed the nature of God's influence with the word θεόπνευστος (*theopneustos*), which means “God-breathed.” The Scriptures were the result of God breathing out the words to the writers. In a real sense, the Scriptures are the “breath of God” in written form.

In the Old Testament, there is a similar testimony because the source of Scripture is the “mouth of God” from which He breathed out His message. The Psalmist said, “By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, And *by the breath of His mouth* all their host” (Ps 33:6, italics added). The “breath of His mouth” is the Old Testament equivalent of “God breathed.” Erwin W. Lutzer summarized this well when he wrote, “Inspiration does not just mean that God approved of their writings, but

that men actually wrote His words. His ideas became their ideas, and they accurately recorded what He wanted us to know.”⁵

Second, the Unity of the Bible

The Bible is a unique book. When one systematizes many of the characteristics, they will discover how unique it is. Consider the following facts:

- 1) It consists of 66 books.
- 2) It was written over a period of approximately 1,600 years.
- 3) It was written in 3 languages: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek.
- 4) It was written by approximately 40 authors.
- 5) Its authors varied considerably in background and education:

Scholars	Moses, Saul of Tarsus (Paul)
Fishermen	Peter, James, John
Tax Collector	Levi (Matthew)
Priests	Jeremiah, Ezekiel
Itinerant Fig Picker	Amos
Shepherd	David, Moses
Statesman	Daniel
Courtier	Isaiah
Military Commanders	Joshua, David
Kings	David, Solomon
Sages	Job
Scribes	Ezra.

Nevertheless, all the authors had the same worldview: God’s; the same view of history: it is His story; and, the same view of God: He is the sovereign Creator and God. Moreover, they have developed a single theme from beginning to end, a theme that ties the Bible together into a unified whole despite the years and diversity of authorship. The neoorthodox may have had this one correct but only by the grace of God: Jesus Christ is the Word of God. John made that clear when he said, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1). Jesus Himself indicated that He is the theme that creates the unity of the Bible. According to Luke, when He walked with Cleopas and his fellow

⁵ Erwin W. Lutzer, *Seven Reasons Why You Can Trust the Bible* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1998) 38.

disciple on the road to Emmaus, “[B]eginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures” (Luke 24:27). The Bible is, therefore, God’s book giving God’s message to God’s people. Paul E. Little characterized Scripture as “God linking to humanity and humanity’s response. This thread is woven through every book from beginning to end.”⁶ God communicated His thoughts to man and man responded by giving glory to God (1 Cor 10:31; 1 Pet 4:11), and this is the unified message of the Bible.

Third, the Evidence of Archaeology

Christians do not believe the Bible because of archaeology, but archaeology offers evidence that strengthens faith in the Bible, perhaps because it does authenticate the biblical records. Therefore, as a matter of first importance, one must define what is archaeology. A simple definition describes archaeology as the branch of science interacting “with the material remains of human life in antiquity.”⁷ In other words, archaeologists study pottery, jewelry, broken shards of unidentified objects, and other physical items, in addition to clay tablets and other ancient documents that expound the ancient world. Based on these physical items, archaeologists attempt to understand both the biblical text and the world that formed its context.

How has archaeology authenticated the Bible? The Hittites. The Hittites are a primary example because they are mentioned often in the Bible; and, in biblical times, they were prominent all over the land of Canaan.

- | | |
|--------------------|--|
| Gen 23:10;
25:9 | Abraham encountered Hittites in Canaan |
| Exod 33:2;
34:4 | God promised Moses to drive the Hittites from the land of Canaan |
| Josh 9:1;
11:3 | Joshua encountered Hittites in Canaan |
| 1 Sam 26:6 | David had difficulties with the Hittites |

⁶ Paul E. Little, *Know Why You Believe*, 4th ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000) 76.

⁷ William Sanford LaSor, “Archaeology,” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 4 vols., ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979) 1:235.

- 1 Kgs 9:20; Hittites continued as a serious factor
 10:29 In Israel's political life
- Ezra 9:1 Ezra had problems with Hittites when
 returning from exile

Nevertheless, for centuries, only the Bible mentioned the Hittites. No other known ancient records referred to them. As a result, many questioned the historical accuracy of the Bible. In other ancient records, particularly Egyptian and Assyrian, the peoples of this group went by other names, such as Kheta and Hatti. As noted, however, there were Hittites all over Canaan. Is it possible they were not all the same group; it is not only possible, but also apparently actually the case. There were two groups of Hittites: "[T]hose who were indigenous to Canaan and those from outside Canaan."⁸ The term Hittite is used forty eight times in the Old Testament. Of these, according to Wood, forty-two references identify those indigenous to Canaan. The other six, therefore, identify those outside Canaan.

Those indigenous to Canaan were identified with names that are Semitic in nature, not Indo-European like those of Anatolia. McMahon identified this indigenous group as descendants of Heth who was a son of Canaan (Gen 10:15).⁹ By the time of Abraham, this group of Hittites lived all over the hill country of Judah and particularly in Hebron.

The six references to Hittites outside Canaan pertain, according to Wood, "to the Indo-European Anatolian-Syrian Hittites of the second-first millennia BC."¹⁰ The Hittites beyond Canaan were of unknown origin and established an empire that lasted approximately five hundred years, from the early seventeenth century to the early twelfth century BC. Essentially, the empire achieved its status in the New Kingdom period, which was approximately 1400 BC. The New Kingdom endured until 1177 BC when it began to vanish and finally disintegrated until only a series of Neo-Hittite

⁸ Bryant G. Wood, "Hittites and Hethites: A Proposed Solution to an Etymological Conundrum," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 54 (June 2011): 241. Wood listed approximately a half dozen sources that discuss these two groups, among them Oliver R. Gurney, *The Hittites* (New York: Penguin Books, 1990) and Harry A. Hoffner Jr., "Hittites," in *Peoples in the Old Testament World*, eds. Alfred J. Hoerth, Gerald L. Mattingly, and Edwin M. Yamauchi (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994) 152-53.

⁹ Gregory McMahon, "Hittites in the Old Testament," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 6 vols., ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992) 3:233.

¹⁰ Wood, "Hittites and Hethites," 244.

states remained; these lasted until the eighth century BC when the Assyrian empire absorbed them. The discovery of the Hittite empire by archaeologists contributed considerably to an understanding of biblical history and reinforced the understanding of biblical accuracy.

The discovery occurred in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when archaeologists uncovered a collection of clay tablets at El Amarna in Egypt, containing a new Indo-European language. The tablets were part of the diplomatic correspondence of two Pharaohs, Akhenaten (1367-51 BC) and Amenophis III (1405-1367 BC). The language of these tablets was considered that of the King of Hatti and was identified as "Hittite." Since the area of Asia Minor in which these "Hittites" lived was known as Anatolia, outside the biblical records these people were sometimes called Anatolians. However, they called themselves Nešites (or people of Neša, another name for Kaneš, a major city in Anatolia).¹¹ The name "Hittite" itself is "derived from the indigenous place name *ḫatti*, "used for the pre-Indo-European inhabitants of central Anatolia."¹² The modern designation, on the other hand, is based upon the Hebrew *ḥēt/ḥitti*. In the old Assyrian texts, *ḫatti* is used as the geographical term for (central) Anatolia. . . ."¹³ Houwink Ten Cate added that the Assyrian texts actually used *ḫatti* in a manner corresponding to the use of *ḥēt/ḥitti* in the later books of the Old Testament. Consequently, the Amarna tablets confirmed that the Bible's designation of these peoples as Hittites was legitimate.

Another example of archaeological evidence consists of the story of Belshazzar, the Babylonian king for whom Daniel interpreted the handwriting on the wall. Until approximately one hundred years ago, scholars questioned the existence of such a king because they found no mention of him outside the Bible's record. More than a dozen lists of Babylonian kings existed, but all named Nabonidus as the last king of Babylon. Early in the twentieth century, however, some cuneiform documents were found that contain the name of Belshazzar. The documents named him as the firstborn son of Nabonidus. They further indicated that Nabonidus made Belshazzar his co-regent. For example, one of them declared, "He entrusted a camp to his eldest, his first-born son; the troops of the land he sent with him. He freed his hand; *he entrusted the*

¹¹ Gregory McMahon, "The History of the Hittites," *Biblical Archaeologist* 52 (June—September 1989): 65.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Philo J. Houwink Ten Cate, "Hittite History," *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 3:219.

kingship to him."¹⁴ When Babylon fell to the Persians, Nabonidus was in Arabia and the Persians spared his life. Belshazzar, on the other hand, was in Babylon; and he died the same night of the invasion (Dan 5:30).¹⁵

A similar case concerns Sargon, the King of Assyria, mentioned in Isaiah 20:1 in connection with his capture of the Philistine town of Ashdod. Again, until the advent of modern archaeology, the name Sargon was an enigma, occurring nowhere outside the Bible and only in this one passage in the Bible. However, in 1843, archaeologists discovered Sargon's palace at Khorsabad. The French consular agent at Mogul, Paul Émile Botta "discovered the palace of Sargon II [at Khorsabad]. Sargon had made his capital successively at Ashur, Calah and Nineveh and then finally here at this place. He called the new capital after himself, Dur-Sharrukin or Sargonburg, but eventually the ruin was ascribed to a Sassanid hero, Chosroes, and called Khorsabad, 'town of Chosroes.'"¹⁶ With the recovery of the palace, archaeologists found royal annals and various other records of the reign of Sargon (722-05 BC), suddenly making him one of the best known of Assyrian kings. In one of the annals, so-called "Display Inscription," discovered at Khorsabad, Sargon addressed a connection with Samaria. In this inscription, he said, "I besieged and captured Samaria, carrying off 27,290 of the people who dwelt therein."¹⁷

The examples provided herein are just a couple illustrations of how archaeology provides evidence that reflects the authenticity of the biblical record. Christians should believe the Bible because it is the Word of God. The evidence of archaeology, however, indicates that the Bible provided an accurate historical record of the events it narrates.¹⁸ In addition, archaeology "gives local color, indicating that the background is authentic," and archaeology "provides additional facts" with regard to names and places recorded in the Bible, thus providing a better understanding of the context of the Bible itself.¹⁹

¹⁴ Quoted in Jack Finegan, *Light from the Ancient Past* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946) 189, italics added.

¹⁵ Ibid. 190-91.

¹⁶ Ibid. 174-75.

¹⁷ Quoted in *ibid.* 175.

¹⁸ Clifford Wilson, "Does Archaeology Support the Bible?" [article online] (Answers in Genesis, 24 January 2008, accessed 7 August 2011) available from <http://www.answersingenesis.org/articles/nab/does-archaeology-support-the-bible>.

¹⁹ Ibid.

Finally, *the Evidence of Fulfilled Prophecy*

The Bible contains hundreds of prophecies, many which have not even yet been fulfilled. Conversely, it contains many that have been fulfilled; and these fulfilled prophecies sustain belief in the Bible. According to John F. Walvoord:

The revelation of prophecy in Scripture serves as an important evidence that the Scriptures are accurate in their interpretation of the future. Because approximately half of the prophecies of the Bible have already been fulfilled in a literal way, it gives a proper intellectual basis for assuming that the prophecy yet to be fulfilled will likewise have a literal fulfillment. At the same time it justifies the conclusion that the Bible is inspired of the Holy Spirit and that prophecy which goes far beyond any scheme of man is instead a revelation by God of that which is certain to come to pass.²⁰

The evidence of fulfilled prophecy is perhaps the best reason of all others for believing the Bible, because 100% of the predictions that have been fulfilled have been fulfilled accurately.

Many prophecies are noted as prophecies after the fact, but are nevertheless valid prophecies. For example, in Hosea 11:1, the prophet looked not to the future but to the exodus from Egypt when he said, "When Israel *was* a youth I loved him, And out of Egypt I called My son." However, the Holy Spirit led Matthew to see this statement as a prophecy concerning Jesus as the only-begotten Son of God. Quoting Hosea, Matthew declared, "So Joseph got up and took the Child and His mother while it was still night, and left for Egypt. He remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet: "OUT OF EGYPT I CALLED MY SON" (Matt 2:14-15).

However, the real evidence of fulfilled prophecy lies in those prophecies that more directly look to the future, that is, those prophecies that appear more explicitly prophetic. A couple of examples will clarify this.

"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Though you are little among the thousands of Judah, Yet out of you shall come forth to Me The One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth *are* from of old, From everlasting" (Mic 5:2).

²⁰ John F. Walvoord, *Every Prophecy of the Bible* (Colorado Springs: Chariot Victor, 1990, 1999) 10-11.

The Mican verse is clearly Messianic, that is, it predicts the coming of Israel's Messiah, but it also predicts the geographical location of His birth. Micah identified the place as Bethlehem Ephrathah because in the land of Canaan there were two Bethlehems, one in the north in the land of the tribe of Zebulun (Josh 19:15), "located 7 mi. (11km.) NW of Nazareth on the edge of the Oak Forest."²¹ The second Bethlehem lay in the south, which was Bethlehem Ephrathah according to Ruth 4:11b. The southern Bethlehem was "a town located on the edge of the desert of Judah, 5 mi. (8 km.) S of Jerusalem, 2500 ft. (760 m.) above sea level, situated on a rocky spur of the mountains of Judah just off the main road to Hebron and Egypt."²² The people blessed Ruth and Boaz with these words, "may you achieve wealth in Ephrathah and become famous in Bethlehem," indicating that the two names referred to the same place.

When the wise men came from the East to Jerusalem, they sought the one born king of the Jews. They had learned of this Messiah in their land and apparently had discerned when He would be born, and they wanted to see Him. When they inquired in Jerusalem concerning the place of His birth, the priests and scribes there responded, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for this is what has been written by the prophet. . . ." (Matt 2:5-6) (and here they quoted Mic 5:2). Not just in Bethlehem, but in the Bethlehem that was in Judah, Bethlehem Ephrathah. When they went to this Bethlehem, the wise men found Jesus there.

A second example comes from Isaiah 9. The prophet focused attention on the land of Naphtali and of Zebulun, land that later became known as Galilee. Both tribal lands were seriously distressed and covered with gloom. They suffered the judgment of God so that the land had a bad reputation for centuries to come. Indeed, by the time of Christ, one could still ask, as did Nathanael in John 1:46, "Can anything good thing come out of Nazareth [Galilee]?"

Yet referring to both Naphtali and Zebulun, the prophet Isaiah said,
The people who walk in darkness
Will see a great light;
Those who live in a dark land,
The light will shine on them. (Isa 9:2)

The Light of the world shined on the land of Naphtali and the land of Zebulun when Messiah came there to live and to be reared in the little

²¹ E. W. G. Masterman and K. G. Jung, "Bethlehem," in *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 1:473.

²² *Ibid.* 472.

town of Nazareth. Isaiah prophesied the “Light” and that prophecy was fulfilled when Joseph and Mary returned to their home in Nazareth. Can any good thing come from Nazareth? Yes. Yes. Yes. The Light of the world came from Nazareth in fulfillment of an eight hundred year old prophecy.

The prophecies of Micah and Isaiah represent many fulfilled prophecies that by their very fulfillment testify to the authenticity of the Bible as the Word of God; and, thereby provide yet another reason to believe it.²³

CONCLUSION

Here then are four testimonies that answer the question, why believe the Bible?

- 1) The Bible’s Own Claim for Itself;
- 2) The Unity of the Bible;
- 3) The Evidence of Archaeology; and,
- 4) The Evidence of Fulfilled Prophecy.

The first and the fourth are perhaps the most significant and the most valuable, but they all support the truth and the validity of the Bible as the Word of God. In the light of these evidences, therefore, why not believe the Bible?

²³ For a thorough discussion of fulfilled prophecy, see Walvoord, *Every Prophecy of the Bible*. The reader can also gain a comprehensive study of predictive prophecy in J. Barton Payne, *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy: The Complete Guide to Scriptural Predictions and Their Fulfillment* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973). For a list of prophecies concerning Christ and His life and ministry, in addition to references with regard to their fulfillment, see Charles C. Ryrie, *The Ryrie Study Bible* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1976, 1978) 1986-89.

POSTMILLENNIAL THOUGHT AND MARXISM: Theology of False Optimism

David Q. Santos

Calvin wrote with regard to man's innate awareness of God.¹ Other scholars recognize this same innate awareness of God that is found in all men. One such scholar, Carl F. H. Henry, expanded on this simple truth by writing, "The awareness of God rooted in conceptual knowledge carries over into the whole of life."² Consequently, in Henry's opinion, the awareness of God goes beyond simple knowledge. He explained that the awareness actually impacts life.

Henry added the importance of this knowledge of God: "The knowledge of God innately written on the nature of man is moral as well as rational."³ The statement means that the knowledge of God has an impact on one's moral behavior in addition to intellect. While man's sin nature dominates his life, there is a moral conscience motivated by an awareness of his Creator and that Creator's perfect moral nature. Obscured by the sin nature is a desire to know God and to live in His perfect original creation.

THE PERFECT CREATION

The Bible teaches that God provided a utopian world in the creation (Gen 2). The original world reflected the perfection of God and was the world in which God desired man to exist. God's perfect creation was without sin and without death. Unfortunately, the perfect creation was lost through one man's sin (Rom 5:12). The Bible also teaches that God will, in the future, restore the creation (Rom 8:21-23) and bring into existence a perfect society, a kingdom on earth (Rev 11:15). In that kingdom, Jesus Christ will rule and reign from His throne (Rev 3:21) with a rod of iron (Ps 2:9; Rev 19:15). Scripture does not reveal when the restoration will occur or when

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¹ Christopher Cone, *Life Beyond the Sun: An Introduction to Worldview & Philosophy Through the Lens of Ecclesiastes* (Fort Worth, TX: Tyndale Seminary Press, 2009) 417.

² Carl Ferdinand Howard Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 6 vols. (Wheaton: Crossway, 1999) 1:341.

³ Ibid.

the kingdom will be established; it only reveals that it will occur when the Father chooses, and that He alone knows when that will be (Matt 2:36; Mark 13:32).

Both prior to the time of Christ's ministry and since His ascension from earth to Heaven (Acts 1:9-11), men have tried to create this kingdom by their own power. By observation, one could suggest that along with man's innate awareness of God comes a desire for His utopian kingdom. Mankind has tried to replace God with things such as intellectual endeavors, passions, and even good deeds. In like manner, humanity has designed multiple governmental schemes to replace God's true plan for mankind. Within Christendom, this manner of thinking is commonly called Dominion Theology, which seeks to "reconstruct society to fit its template of Christian law and ethics."⁴ Dominion Theology is best understood in postmillennial eschatology; it is the view that by action the church can do enough good in the world and force the kingdom of God to begin.

The dominionist philosophy is certainly not found in Christian theology only. Many humanistic approaches to government and ethics have been made to "bring in the kingdom," a utopian nirvana without a god. The trouble with all of these systems of ethics and government is that they all fail to meet the problem of mankind and sin nature. The systems all perceive the world through the perspective of a man-centered reality. The systems affirm an evolutionary worldview and an anthropology that purports that men are inherently good. The systems rely upon the presupposition that both the world and mankind are getting better as a function of evolution. They could not agree with biblical anthropology, which points to unregenerate man as being a slave or dominated by his sin nature, as argued by the Apostle Paul (Rom 6:6, 16, 18, 20, 22).

The Greek philosopher Plato presented one such system. Plato's *Republic* presented a utopian society with a three-cast system that would be efficient and complete. The casts would include producers (craftsmen, farmers, artisans, etc), warriors, and guardians who were to be philosopher kings that made social and legal decisions. Plato's system did not place the burden of child rearing on individuals; it placed children into communal nurseries that would develop each child to its appropriate potential. The system took from individuals according to their ability to give. The premise—taking according to ability and giving according to need—is foundational to the modern system developed by Marxism.

⁴ Paul Martin Henebury, "The Eschatology of Covenant Theology," *Journal of Dispensational Theology* 10 (September 2006): 14.

THE MARXIST UTOPIA

Marxism sought to establish a utopia on earth without a god, presenting optimism and hope to the oppressed masses. Marxism is “the political and economic theories of Karl Marx (1818–83) and Friedrich Engels (1820–95), later developed to form the basis for the theory and practice of Communism.”⁵ Marxism is an “atheistic form of postmillennialism, as are other humanistic utopias.”⁶ The premise of Marxism is to remove all class distinctions with the presumed conclusion of a perfect society. *The Communist Manifesto* states that all existing society is the “history of class struggles.”⁷

Marxism contains the presupposition that only economics influence history. Harold J. Ockenga (in his article on Gustavus Adolphus, who was a Swedish ruler who militarily came to the aid of the reformers) indicated that the “Marxian maxim is that only the struggle for bread, or the philosophy of economic determinism controls history. Factors like religious faith, personal magnetism, military genius and statesmanship, to say nothing of romance, directly influence the events of history.”⁸ Marx (et al) regarded all struggles of history as only a struggle of existence. The struggle, in the Marxist view, is with two classes: the oppressed and the oppressors, or the bourgeoisie. Ockenga stated, “Marx made the struggle for a living the determining factor in political, legal and religious institutions. He believed that the self-interest of people led them to look primarily after their own welfare when left free, and that this economic self-interest expressing itself in relation to production and exchange was the stuff out of which history was made.”⁹ As found in other systems of government and ethics, self-interest causes the problems. Ockenga explained:

⁵ Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson, *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, 11th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

⁶ Norman Geisler, “A Premillennial View of Law and Government,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 142 (July–September 1985): 255.

⁷ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, “Manifesto of the Communist Party: Chapter 1,” (Marxists Internet Archive, accessed 23 December 2009) available from <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/ch01.htm>.

⁸ Harold J. Ockenga, “The Reformation and Gustavus Adolphus,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 104 (October 1947): 472.

⁹ Kenneth M. Monroe, “Biblical Philosophy of History,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 91 (July 1934): 321.

This interpretation of history supported the Marxian theory of “class struggle,” which prophesied struggles between different economic classes of society until all men became producers and then society would be emancipated, in his words, “from all exploitation, oppression, class-distinction and class struggle.”

The underlying causes of a community’s, a state’s or a nation’s development and decline may be sought in the field of their economic conditions. In the words of the Communist Manifesto, “The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle.”¹⁰

Therefore, for Marxism, the concluding answer to class struggle is to remove all classes. The removal is accomplished by three means. The means are: “(1) the abolition of private property, (2) the abolition of classes (including any and all family relations), and (3) the abolition of religion.”¹¹ Marxism maintained several elements found in Plato’s *Republic* such as the state raising and educating children, giving according to ability, and centralized government. Marxism was presented as a governmental system by which all could be better. Many considered it a system of hope. In this author’s view, Marx (and others) were not very good students of history. It can be demonstrated that Marxism emphasizes many of the characteristics that led other governments and societies to fall. For example, in 1788, Edward Gibbon wrote with regard to the five points that brought ancient Rome to its decline; several of which are highlighted in Marxism. He described Rome’s fall as coming from:

1. The undermining of the dignity and sanctity of the home, which is the basis for human society;
2. Higher and higher taxes; the spending of public money for free bread and circuses for the populace;
3. The mad craze for pleasure;
4. The building of great armaments when the real enemy was within the decay of individual responsibility;
5. The decay of religion; faith fading into mere form, losing touch with life, losing power to guide the people. . . .¹²

The parallel elements that caused the fall of Rome (and other societies) with Marxism should be exceedingly obvious. Destruction of family, removal of religion, and higher taxes provide an impetus (in addition to the

¹⁰ Ibid. 321.

¹¹ Cone, *Life Beyond the Sun*, 252.

¹² Roy Wallace, *Studies from Revelation* (Shreveport, LA: LinWel, 2002) 151-52.

removal of freedom that comes from ownership of property) that will doom any culture. Upon historical and political examination, the destructive reality of Marxism is evident. The utopia of a society in commune, or held by the state, has always morphed into a culture of tyranny with tyrants lording over the people; it exchanges individual opportunity for the hope of equality. Phillip Johnson described Marxism as “a liberation myth that has become a new justification for ordering people not to think for themselves.”¹³ The “liberation myth” attempts to establish a kingdom like the one that only God can provide, which abstemiously replaces God in their lives. If it is man that establishes the kingdom then those same men are only accountable to other men.

A government where the workers of the world could unite, giving what they have and taking according to their need, was never instituted. Instead, a new platform for dictators was designed with integral controls of the people, as their right to exist without the state was no longer intact. There was no right to property since ownership would lead to classes. Property ownership was deemed necessary for liberty. The philosopher John Locke argued property ownership is an essential component to ethics.

A much-overlooked impact of Marxism is how it affected Christian theology. Millard Erickson stated as follows: “Marxism as the world’s hope for a better future, has had great impact on various Christian theologians. They have felt challenged to set forth an alternative, superior basis for hope.”¹⁴ One must ask how this occurred. With such an anti-biblical worldview, how does Marxism infiltrate the church? The infiltration of the church occurred primarily through a misguided understanding of the church’s role in dealing with social problems and the single word “hope.” Marxism presents itself as a system of hope, and this theme seemed true to some in the Christian community.

Like all other beliefs, “Marxism [and liberation theology] needs to be subjected to the light of biblical authority.”¹⁵ In general, Christendom rejected the premises found in Marxism, and this rejection was primarily due to the anti-theistic worldview found in socialism. Following the Reformation, the world abounded with a revived theology that man did not need a human intercessor to intervene before God on his behalf. The same type of thinking was at least, in part, responsible for the revolutions of the

¹³ Phillip E. Johnson, “Separating Materialist Philosophy from Science,” *Bible and Spade* 10 (Spring 1997): 34.

¹⁴ Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998) 1158.

¹⁵ J. Ronald Blue, “Major Flaws in Liberation Theology,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 147 (January—March 1990): 102.

eighteenth century, including the American Revolution. Essentially, if man did not need a religious hierarchy to approach the Almighty God, then they certainly could exist without a monarchy. The thought inspired writers, such as Thomas Payne, to rebel against both monarchies and centralized government without representation. Louis Berkhof wrote, "Questions of social reform there always have been, but never in all the history of the world have they forced themselves on the attention of all classes of men, as they do today."¹⁶ He then cited the French Revolution and the philosophical and cultural changes across the world as one of the causes of this revolution. Berkhof cited two other changes in culture that influenced social unrest: the industrial revolution and the rise of socialism.

Marxian socialism maintained its desire for a utopian society with the promise of bringing an end to social injustice. Hillquit, a socialist proponent, explained how this utopian society would be established. He wrote, "The ethics of Socialism seeks not the ideal society through the ideal individual, but conversely the ideal individual through the ideal society."¹⁷ Berkhof took note of other types of Marxian slogans such as, "The emancipation of the workingmen can only be accomplished by the workingmen themselves," and, "Workingmen of all countries unite, you have nothing to lose but your chains, you have a world to gain!"¹⁸ Amidst the flattering promises of a better life, it is obvious why some would be enticed by this philosophy.

CHRISTIAN AND MARXIST RESPONSIBILITY

However, the church rejected socialism because it was seen as a return to placing personal authority and responsibility with the government. Christian dominated cultures were not willing to relinquish the rights and responsibilities they had fought to recover. It has not been until recent years that some Christian theologians began to consider the ethical problems of the world *and* allowing the possibility for Marxian socialism to be the solution. Theologians were considering social problems and the responsibilities of the church, with an emphasis upon determining the proper response to these problems. For some of these theologians, Marxian socialism seemed compatible with Christian ideals. Alan Hamilton made an interesting observation in his article addressing the social gospel. He observed that some Christians were embracing some of the tenants of

¹⁶ Louis Berkhof, *The Church and Social Problems* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1913) (Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 2009) 5.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* 65.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* 6.

Marxism. The “veil of hope” and equality became appealing to some. Indeed, one of these authors wrote that the only difference between Marxists and Christian responsibility was that the Marxists *actually* made an attempt to apply their beliefs. Hamilton wrote,

A recent student of the relationship between the ideas of Marx and those of Christian thought points out: “Marx recognized that in form of statement the criteria of justice, equality, the brotherhood of man and the primacy of human values over such standards as that of efficiency in production sound like Christian ideals. But the difference, he maintained, between him and Christian advocates of the same principles was that he expected to put them into practice, whereas Christians were content to leave them in an uncontaminated, transcendental sphere.”¹⁹

Hamilton made a rather harsh accusation that also holds a serious error. To believe that Christians are not effective in matters of humanitarian needs around the world is to be unaware of what the church is and has been doing. More importantly, however, it is to believe that the gospel message itself is ineffective in the world. Indeed, this author’s view is that areas that have received mass conversions by preaching a pure gospel have been more effective at curing social problems than social movements. However, even with its anti-theistic worldview, some theologians have concluded, “they agree his [Marx’s] ethical ideas are close to (if not identical with) the ideals of Christian ethics and that Marxism cannot be considered apart from its theological implications.”²⁰ Hamilton recognized that some theologians are willing to accept some of the premises or “ethical principals” of socialism. Harold Hagar adopted a more biblical approach to this topic. He regarded the modern social gospel for what it really is, that is, false doctrine. He wrote:

Among the worst of the testings that can come to a child of God are those borne on the winds of false doctrine in the forms of pseudo-Christianity so rapidly sweeping across our nation today. On every hand there are numerous cults and isms with attractive programs, and enticing promises to lure the Christian away from his faith. Modernism also is making headway like an army of termites among our churches, and the appeal to disparage doctrinal discernment and

¹⁹ Alan H. Hamilton, “The Social Gospel Part 2,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 108 (January—March 1951): 92–93, as quoted by Elizabeth Paxton Lam, *The Place of Marx in Christian Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939) 148.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

denominational distinctions and be united in Christ is heard on every hand. But the worst enemy of all is Marxism, in the form of a modern social-gospel projected on religious grounds, so subtle in its propaganda that many people are unaware of its danger and progress.²¹

Hager recognized the many attacks on the church that are occurring today. The attacks are “weaving” false doctrine into the “tapestry” of Christendom, and normalizing anti-biblical worldviews. One should be reminded of the many warnings found in Scripture describing false teachers as “wolves” (Matt 7:15) who would secretly bring destructive heresies and would even deny the Lord that bought them (2 Pet 2:1). Nevertheless, Hager still believes that Marxism, as presented in the form of the modern social gospel, is the worst enemy of all. The modern hieratical movement has a connection to liberation theology, dominion theology, and theonomy (all of which have been influenced by postmillennialism). The central theme in each is to inaugurate the kingdom through social action.

POSTMILLENNIAL THOUGHT IN RELATION TO MARXISM

Postmillennialism is an eschatological view that Christ returns after the millennium; it presents itself as an optimistic view of the church and its role in establishing the kingdom of God. Postmillennial author Keith A Mathison wrote, “God has promised the church that the gates of hell will not prevail against her, that all the ends of the earth will turn to the Lord, and that all the families of the nations will worship before Him.”²² Mathison summarized:

Postmillennialism teaches that the “thousand years” of Revelation 20 occurs prior to the Second coming. Some postmillennialists teach that the millennial age is the entire period of time between Christ’s first and second advents, while others teach that it is the last one thousand years of the present age. According to Postmillennialism, in the present age the Holy Spirit will draw unprecedented multitudes to Christ through the faithful preaching of the gospel. Among the multitudes who will be converted are the ethnic Israelites who have thus far rejected the Messiah. At the end of the present age, Christ will

²¹ Harry Hager, “The Amazing Power of Unbelief in the World Today,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 110 (April 1953): 170.

²² Keith A. Mathison, *Postmillennialism: An Eschatology of Hope* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1999) xi.

return, there will be a general resurrection of the just and unjust, and the final judgment will take place.²³

The essence is that there will be a gradual movement of the church through the age that establishes the kingdom of God. Postmillennialists argue that the church will introduce the kingdom by the preaching of the gospel to the world in order that the Great Commission can be fulfilled. It is only after this manmade millennium is complete that Jesus Christ will return. During this millennium, Jesus will continue to reign from heaven while the world is “Christianized.” Even though it is as Mathison indicated with regard to the gates of hell not prevailing against the church, there may be significant opposition in the meantime. Louis Berkhof described this process as being like a “gradual fermentation wrought by the leaven” as opposed to a quick geologic event.²⁴

Thomas Ice wrote an article that examined neopostmillennialism, wherein he noted that there are two types of postmillennialism: (1) conservative (after the Puritan tradition and B. B. Warfield of Princeton); or, (2) after the liberal view which led to modern theonomy, dominion theology, liberation theology, and Reconstructionism. “Liberation theology is an ethical theology that grew out of social awareness and the desire to act.”²⁵ Reconstructionism “is the name given to the movement within Reformed Theology which seeks to reconstruct society to fit its template of Christian law and ethics. . . .”²⁶

“Reconstructionists believe that the ‘theonomic mandate’ demands an optimistic view of the subjugation of the *kosmos* by the Gospel prior to the Second Advent.”²⁷ They believe that while the church is waiting for Christ’s return, the command given to Adam to subdue the earth is still in effect (Gen 1:28). The optimism is that the church will overtake and dominate the world through its engagement. Therefore, they must rid the world of injustice and inequality, and force the world to accept living under biblical law with both its rewards and punishments. As one author stated, “It is impossible, we are told by . . . dominion-theology advocates, to have the law of God without accepting all of its sanctions and penalties as well. . .

²³ Ibid. 10.

²⁴ Berkhof, *Church and Social Problems*, 3.

²⁵ Thomas G. Sanders, “The Theology of Liberation: Christian Utopianism,” *Christianity and Crisis* 33 (17 September 1973): 168.

²⁶ Henebury, “Eschatology of Covenant Theology,” 14. Their great foundational text is Matthew 5:17–19 though they strive to translate *plerosai* as “confirm.”

²⁷ Ibid.

. As surely as law embodies the essential ideas of command and obligation, it must likewise embody the idea of sanction.”²⁸ The quote provided demonstrates the desire by adherents of liberation theology to impose biblical law with both its rewards and punishments to advance a social agenda. In making a similar case, Bahnsen wrote, “God’s law is binding in every detail until and unless the Lawgiver reveals otherwise . . . the civil magistrate today ought to apply the penal sanctions of the Old Testament law to criminals in our society.”²⁹ It might seem obvious to some that this error can only be made by those with a covenant theological persuasion, since Old Testament law is being applied to the church as though the church *is* Israel. Such a realization may help in understanding the origin, motivation, and hermeneutics of reconstructionists.

The beginning of the social gospel is related to the Baptist pastor Walter Rauschenbusch (1861-1918) and his work entitled, *Christianity and the Social Crisis in the 21st Century*.³⁰ Rauschenbusch was reared as a biblical literalist by his father, who was a German preacher but as an adult departed from that view. In his work, *Christianity and the Social Crisis in the 21st Century*, Rauschenbusch demonstrated his admiration for communism and his ignorance of social political systems. Rauschenbusch’s view of the gospel, the kingdom of God, and his view of humanistic world systems can be summarized in his own words.

But after all this has been said, it still remained a social hope. The kingdom of God is still a collective conception, involving the whole social life of man. It is not a matter of saving human atoms, but of saving the social organism. *It is not a matter of getting individuals to heaven, but of transforming the life on earth into the harmony of heaven* [emphasis added].³¹

Rauschenbusch believed that Jesus Himself was a prophet, who sought to accomplish social awareness, and through His faith, “transform the

²⁸ Walter C. Kaiser Jr., “God’s Promise Plan and His Gracious Law,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 33 (July—September 1990): 291.

²⁹ *Ibid.* 292.

³⁰ Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianity and the Social Crisis in the 21st Century* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2009) [eBook, Kindle version]. Walter Rauschenbusch (1861–1918) was the leading proponent of the Social Gospel Movement whose mission was to reform society to meet the social needs of the poor through the ministrations of the institutional church. “PBS recently called him ‘one of the most influential American religious leaders of the last 100 years’” (backcover).

³¹ *Ibid.* 53.

common hope.”³² He found biblical authority in his belief that Scripture was tainted by oral tradition³³ and that the kingdom is already here.³⁴ Rauschenbusch argued that communism is what freed the peasant from the feudal lord and that all social benefits like parks and water systems are functions of communistic thought. His premise was that the home, the state, and the church *are* communistic and should be embraced. His eventual conclusion was “that one of the greatest services which Christianity could render to humanity in the throes of the present transition would be to aid those social forces which are making for the increase of communism.”³⁵

Rauschenbusch desired to amalgamate the church with communism with the intention of ending social problems and establishing the kingdom of God in all of its fullness. Rauschenbusch failed to recognize the intrinsic problems of communism. The problems are all related to anthropology. In order for Rauschenbusch’s premise to be correct (i.e. man can inaugurate a utopia through hope and social reform) human beings would have to be innately good. Scripture, however, teaches just the opposite: the natural man is dominated by his sin nature and no matter what social system is employed, the fallen nature will eventually come to prevail. Therefore, the result will always be simply exchanging one oppressor—the bourgeois—for another, such as a central government.

Postmillennial dominion theology is a hope-centered theology that places its hope in social reform. Its popularity ebbs and flows with the state of the world and the church. For example, after World War II there were nearly no postmillenarians. Until that point, however, optimism abounded in many circles and had social impact. Ice indicated that some postmillenarians admit that the “optimism” of postmillennial theology aided the rise of both Nazism and Marxism and also noted that some postmillenarians have tried to separate themselves from the social gospel movement.

[O]ne cannot overlook the role that postmillennialism in general played in the rise and development of the “social gospel. . .” Chilton [postmillenarian] does admit to some postmillennial heresy. “Examples of the Postmillenarian heresy would be easy to name as well: the Munster Revolt of 1534, Nazism, and Marxism (whether ‘Christian’ or otherwise).” Nazism and Marxism are undesirable

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid. 52.

³⁴ Ibid. 51.

³⁵ Ibid. 320.

movements. Why then does Chilton not admit the relationship of postmillennialism to the “social gospel” movement?³⁶

It was man-centered optimism, even with the backdrop of Christian ethics, that allowed for the rise of Marxian Socialism. Some have used the phrase “Christian Utopianism” to try and describe the philosophy of dominion theology. Christian Utopianism held a strong influence in Latin America. “Its missionaries attended to the faith, culture, and experiences of the people, while drinking from the wells of theologians and the 16th century humanist-utopian thinkers.”³⁷ They drew upon humanistic thinking and amalgamated it with Christian ethics. The combination produced a theology that was more concerned about human struggle and its remedies than the biblical truth. Such a perspective is derived from the belief that the *world* must be won by the church for Christ to return. “Today’s liberation theologians have related their own work to this utopian school, which they call “theology from below,” a type of theological reflection that accounts for people’s faith, culture, struggles, and human rights.³⁸ Latin American liberation theology has used prophetic texts to “substantiate the ‘preferential option for the poor’ and their critique of unjust social and economic structures.”³⁹

Liberation Theology has challenged Christian churches and leaders to take up a “prophetic voice.” To be prophetic, in this view, means denouncing injustice in solidarity with the poor, raising their consciousness about their suffering and the possibility for change, and announcing the hope of an achievable, historical utopia that would bring a new sociopolitical, economic, and cultural order.⁴⁰

Once again, hope has been used as the enticement for a philosophy that promises the kingdom through domination. The focus is upon the injustices of the world for the purpose of gaining support, and the argument is that class warfare is the answer to the injustices of the world.

³⁶ Thomas Ice, “An Evaluation of Theonomic Neopostmillennialism,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 145 (July—September 1988): 290.

³⁷ Erwin Fahlbusch and Geoffrey William Bromiley, eds., *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, 5 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans /Leiden, the Netherlands: Brill, 1999, 2003) 3:188.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ M. Daniel Carol R., “Considering the Case for ‘Prophetic Ethics’, Surveying Options and Recognizing Obstacles,” *Ashland Theological Journal* 36 (2004): 3.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 3.

The presupposition is that the church must engage—not ministering to the needy—but rather in overthrowing the oppressors who Marx called the bourgeois.

Postmillennialism has presently found its niche among denominational groups that are inclined to themes of optimism and cultural engagement as a means for hastening the return of Christ, which is evident in the acceptance of postmillennial eschatology as presented by Reconstructionism within the charismatic movement.

The wedding between certain errant charismatic theologies and current neopostmillennialism may be similar to the deterioration of Puritan postmillennialism into the social gospel movement. If this is happening, then one may expect to see the spread of optimistic eschatology at the expense of historic orthodoxy. And again the tendency of postmillennialism to raise false hopes will have occurred.⁴¹

The potential is great for false hope to be elevated to a point where biblical authority is disregarded for a social theological tumult of reform and reconstruction with the intention being social reengineering. The tumult can be observed in the “positive confession” charismatic movement, which embraces social reform and modern ecumenical theology. Such hope and optimism places the total substance of the kingdom of God on their ability to change the world. “They seem to ignore the thought of any kind of divine intervention in the curative process. The divinity developed in liberation theology is the “divinity” to be found in all mankind.”⁴²

CONCLUSION

Ultimately, it is the innate awareness of God and the desire to exist in His perfect garden that motives men to make the attempt to establish a kingdom after their own image. Christians who maintain a biblical worldview anticipate their king’s return imminently, at any moment. Those that do not maintain this view still have the desire for the original creation. Even people in their natural state have an awareness of this perfect world. Whether it is Marxism or postmillennialism, the kingdom of God will not be accomplished by man’s will. Newell wrote, “The end of governmental things is at hand. Kings lost their majesty to democracy; aristocracy lost its dignity to socialism, finally to communism. This all comes, of course, to

⁴¹ Ice, “Theonomic Postmillennialism,” 290.

⁴² Blue, “Major Flaws in Liberation Theology,” 95.

tyranny under a dictator like Napoleon on the ruins of the French Revolution, Stalin succeeding Marxism.”⁴³ The promise of a perfect world government will be the mantra of the Antichrist who will rule the world for a time that God has sovereignly decreed.

There is a blessed hope in the future. The Apostle Peter taught that the church should be submissive to its authorities while waiting for Christ's return. However, the emphasis is still upon 1) waiting and watching for Christ's return to establish *His* kingdom, and 2) preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ as presented in the sure word of God. Peter did not teach that the church is to arise and become a political entity that holds the power to overthrow governments and exchange a less desirable ruler for another. In the culmination of the end times, there will not be theonomy but rather a theocracy when Christ returns. In the meantime, humanity embraces one system of government for another; they receive one leader who proposes hope to the next; humanity is drawn by optimism that their salvation will be found. They hope that they will gain enough momentum this time to establish a utopia in which everyone can exist in harmony. Those that know Jesus Christ patiently wait for His imminent return. All men know that they are responsible to something beyond themselves. Mankind longs to have the creation restored and the world to be ruled by the true king, Jesus Christ. However, the rebelliousness of the human heart rejects the moral and ethical standards of God. Therefore, they establish themselves as gods and develop man-centered governments. However, at the culmination of the present age, every tongue will confess and every knee will bow to Jesus Christ as Lord.

⁴³ Williams R. Newell, “The End of All Things is at Hand,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 109 (July—September 1952): 252.

NEW TESTAMENT CRITICISM: Helps and Hurts

Brian H. Wagner

Truly the best modern bible translation is “the one that is read.” Nevertheless, that still leaves the reality that there are relative strengths and weaknesses in each translation based upon the underlying rules of translation and textual criticism used for each translation. The only concern for this article is the rules of textual criticism for the New Testament portion of the Bible, as those rules relate to the strengths and weaknesses in modern translations of the New Testament text.

The article will follow a particular view of epistemology, scholarship, and philosophy of history. *First*, concerning epistemology, Jesus said, “If anyone wills to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or *whether* I speak on my own *authority*” (John 7:17, NKJV). The assumption of this article is that the reader desires to do God’s will and that the recognition of its truth statements, or errors, will be adequately affirmed if that assumption is correct. *Second*, concerning scholarship, or “scholarship” so called, the prophet Jeremiah said, “Thus says the LORD: ‘Cursed *is* the man who trusts in man, who makes flesh his strength, whose heart departs from the LORD” (Jer 17:5). Scholarship is only a servant to the reader, not an authority upon which to depend; it is only as helpful as it confirms divine revelation. In other words, human propositions based on results from the scientific method must not undermine the truthfulness or consistency of Scripture’s propositions. *Third*, concerning the philosophy of history, Solomon said,

That which has been *is* what will be, that which *is* done is what will be done, and *there is* nothing new under the sun. Is there anything of which it may be said, “See, this *is* new”? It has already been in ancient times before us. *There is* no remembrance of former *things*, nor will there be any remembrance of *things* that are to come by *those* who will come after (Eccl 1:9-11).

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There is a repetition of things in some aspect throughout the course of human history, and yet not remembered. It appears that Solomon taught that history is not evolutionary, but that similar lessons learned in the past are being learned again in the present. It thus seems to be a mistake for modern scholarship to think that it “knows better” than the scholarship of previous generations.

The thesis of this article is this: based upon one’s presuppositions, principles, and practices of New Testament textual criticism, the doctrine of inspiration, and its corollaries (inerrancy, preservation, and infallibility) are either affirmed or attacked. The results of such support or assault to the doctrine of inspiration either augments or diminishes, not only the exaltation of God, but also the edification of believers and the evangelism of the lost. God, “who cannot lie,” gave His inerrant Word so that it produces “living epistles” that will reflect as closely as possible the inerrant original (Tit 1:2; 2 Cor 3:2-3). Should one not presuppose that God also has to preserve that Word inerrantly, in some way, for each generation to make that outcome possible?

Modern, evangelical, and influential scholar of New Testament textual criticism, Daniel B. Wallace, equivocated on the matter and caused confusion. Wallace said, as recently as 2009, “A theological *a priori* should have [emphasis his] no place in textual criticism.”¹ However, in an article from 2007, he stated, “when one looks at the Nestle-Aland *Novum Testamentum Graece*, he or she is looking at the original text—either in the text or in the apparatus. The argument, then, that inerrancy is an unsupportable doctrine because the autographs are gone is moot: we *have* the original somewhere on the page of the Greek New Testament.”² How can Wallace make such a statement that reveals an unproven presupposition (i.e. that the original exists among the extant copies)? Wallace also said, “I am not convinced that the Bible speaks of its own preservation. That doctrine was first introduced in the Westminster Confession, but it is not something that can be found in scripture.”³ Does

¹ Daniel B. Wallace, “Challenges in New Testament Textual Criticism for the Twenty-first Century,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 52 (March 2009): 92

² Daniel B. Wallace, “Inerrancy and the Text of the New Testament: Assessing the Logic of the Agnostic View” [article online] (4Truth.net, accessed 28 June 2011) available from <http://www.4truth.net/workarea/DownloadAsset.aspx?id=8590117915>.

³ P. J. Williams, “Interview with Daniel Wallace” [interview online] (Evangelical Textual Criticism, 20 March 2006, accessed 28 June 2011) available

not Wallace obviously see that Jesus' teaching concerning the jots and tittles of the Old Testament text (Matt 5:18) and concerning His words, which are now found in the New Testament text (Matt 24:35), does demonstrate that the Bible is speaking of its own preservation?

WHAT ARE THE BEST PRESUPPOSITIONS FOR NEW TESTAMENT CRITICISM?

Since this article is dealing with a topic (viz. New Testament textual criticism), which is a discipline that relies heavily upon contemporary scholarship and the scientific method,⁴ it is important to first rate the possible presuppositions that have been connected to this discipline. Seven presuppositions have been chosen as the best to choose prior to developing a methodology for evaluating the manuscript evidence.

1. The 27 books, commonly designated the New Testament, are all apostolic, first century writings.
2. The original New Testament texts were written without error.
3. All the original words of these texts are preserved among the existing copies.
4. Genealogical and geographical use and distribution of the text of Scripture, even in translation, is the best evidence in determining the original text of Scripture.
5. The evangelical community better preserves the original text of Scripture.
6. Ancient Greek scholarship better recognizes the original text than does modern scholarship.
7. The essential message of the originals (i.e. of salvation and spiritual growth) is preserved infallibly in all translations.

from <http://evangelicaltextualcriticism.blogspot.com/2006/03/interview-with-dan-wallace.html>.

⁴ New Testament criticism is the final development in the Historical-Critical Method. *First*, there is Form Criticism (i.e. Jesus spoke using parables, which were repeated orally into subsequent generations). *Second*, there is Source Criticism (i.e. the parables of Jesus were collected and recorded in written form). *Third*, there is Redaction Criticism (e.g. written collections of parables, teachings, stories, etc., were edited into a biography called Matthew). *Finally*, there is Textual Criticism (e.g. copies of Matthew were made for each new generation, but not perfectly; so the differences between the copies must be judged as to which best represents the original words of the Matthean autograph) (see http://www.participatorystudyseries.com/pss_full_pamphlet.php?sku=PSS022).

The order of these presuppositions reveals some progression of thought. If the New Testament books are all apostolic, then they bear a testimony of being an inspired divine revelation (2 Tim 3:16) and thus inerrant. They then also bear a true testimony of their own preservation (Matt 24:35) and of the commission for their worldwide propagation (Matt 28:20). Faithfulness to the task of preservation would presumably be better found among those who believe in the inspiration of the original text (2 Tim 2:2). Although historical challenges to the authenticity of the text would occur early (cf. 2 Thess 2:1), scholarship (among those with *koinē* Greek as their primary language and closer to the time of the origin of most variants now extant) would be better able to discern the original text from among the variants found in copies, than would modern scholarship, with their post-Renaissance understanding of *koinē* Greek.⁵

The final presupposition is arguably only an inductive result based on a thorough comparison of all extant copies and available modern translations. No two copies agree in every word they purport as being the original text, and no two translations agree on the meaning of every word chosen as representing the original. However, thorough evaluation of each copy or translation individually still provides the reasonable conclusion that salvation by faith and all sound doctrines are adequately found in each despite their variations.⁶ Nevertheless, one may just presume as true Paul's teaching concerning the sufficiency of Scripture (i.e. that even the copies, and perhaps translations [e.g. LXX] available to Timothy were sufficient for salvation and Christian maturity [2 Tim 3:15, 17]).

It is important to note that others have chosen other presuppositions in their approach to New Testament textual criticism, which are not followed in this article. They are as follows:

1. The New Testament writings were not inspired in the sense of being inerrantly written. (This contradicts the teaching of Jesus and Paul [John 10:35; 2 Tim 3:16; Tit 1:2].)

⁵ Admittedly, this presupposition, in some respects, underlies the very first. For the modern reader is dependent on early second and third century Greek scholarship and testimony for accepting the apostolicity of the New Testament text.

⁶ The point here will be developed later in this article, when dealing with the historical reliability of the New Testament text based upon the types and number of manuscript evidence available.

2. Some of the original words probably have been lost and should be recovered through scholarly emendation.⁷ (This contradicts the promises of Jesus [Matt 24:35; John 14:26].)
3. Manuscripts recovered in recent centuries, but older than manuscripts traditionally used for translation from AD 400 to AD 1700, are more likely to contain the original reading among the variants. (Why would God hide His portions of His Word for centuries of disuse?)
4. The more problematic or shorter readings extant in manuscripts are more likely the original. (Why would God intentionally make His truth grammatically difficult and confusing?)
5. The Majority reading based on the number of extant Greek manuscripts is better than a reading supported by a testimony of widespread use through multiple translations. (Why should the numerical weight of Greek manuscripts be viewed more significant than the historical witness of multilingual use and distribution?)

Prominent New Testament textual critics use such weak presuppositions to weaken the historical reliability and message of the New Testament text. Popular author, professor, and New Testament textual critic, Bart Ehrman used such presuppositions to boldly conclude: “The fact that we don’t have the words [of the original text] surely must show, I reasoned, that he did not preserve them for us. And if he didn’t perform that miracle, there seemed to be no reason to think that he performed the earlier miracle of inspiring those words.”⁸ As a consequence of these weak presuppositions, he also wrote, “There are clear reasons for thinking that, in fact, the Bible is not this kind of inerrant guide to our lives.”⁹ However, to make such statements, Ehrman had to assume that there are no quotations from history that are adequately preserved. Perhaps the reader should even conclude with suspicion that Ehrman’s own words are not adequately preserved! How can Ehrman avoid the overwhelming manuscript evidence of New Testament passages where

⁷ It is interesting that modern textual critics assume that their ancient second century counterparts made many of their “errors” because they produced emendations that were thought to better reflect the original.

⁸ Bart D. Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why* (New York: Harper, 2005) 11.

⁹ *Ibid.* 14

there are virtually no variants extant¹⁰ that historically preserve Jesus' own testimony concerning the inerrancy and preservation of Scripture? Neither Jesus or Paul taught that the Bible was a purely "human book from beginning to end."¹¹

WHAT CAN BE GLEANED FROM THE HISTORY OF NEW TESTAMENT TEXTUAL CRITICISM?

There seems still to be a consensus on the purpose of New Testament textual criticism. Bart Ehrman, representative of theological liberalism, said New Testament textual criticism is "a technical term for the science of restoring the 'original' words of a text from manuscripts that have altered them."¹² Bruce Metzger, representative of the intermediate position, wrote, "The textual critic seeks to ascertain from the divergent copies which form of the text should be regarded as most nearly conforming to the original."¹³ Alan Black, representative of the "evangelical right" said that New Testament textual criticism "is best seen in its purpose: to recover the original text of the New Testament from the available evidence."¹⁴ The purpose that Black delineated has always been the major intention of this discipline through the centuries.

In recent decades, however, the postmodern mindset has even begun to influence this scientific discipline. New Testament textual critics Eldon Epp and David Parker are two examples of such influence. Epp has said: "In less careful language, one might speak of an *autographic original*, a *canonical original*, or an *interpretative original*, but regardless of the terminology, there is a real sense in which every intentional, meaningful scribal alteration to a text – whether motivated by theological, historical, stylistic, or other factors – creates a new Textform, a new original."¹⁵ With regard to David Parker's view, Epp wrote:

¹⁰ This does not include variants caused by misspelling or changes in word order.

¹¹ Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus*, 11

¹² *Ibid.* 5

¹³ Bruce M. Metzger with Bart D. Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005) xv.

¹⁴ David Alan Black, *New Testament Textual Criticism: A Concise Guide* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994) 12.

¹⁵ Eldon J. Epp, "Issues in New Testament Criticism," in *Rethinking New Testament Textual Criticism*, ed. David Alan Black (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002) 75-76.

And if (*à la* Parker) the Gospels and other early Christian literature circulated as a free and “living text” in the early centuries, is there an original text, or specifically a “single original text,” to be recovered? Parker’s response, in part is, “The question is not whether we can recover it, but why we want to.” When he asks “whether the task of textual criticism is to recover the original text,” he replies, “It may be, but does not have to be,” and, as we have seen, he chooses rather to emphasize the insights we gain from multiple variants.¹⁶

However, this attitude of finding and preserving the original is not the norm of history. When Jesus promised, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away” (Matt 24:35), He had divinely determined that the original of His words would be preserved. One may even surmise that when Jesus said, “The word which I have spoken will judge him [unbelieving man] on the last day” (John 12:48). He meant that men’s lives would be judged according to Christ’s teaching in the books of Scripture (cf. Rev 20:12; Rom 2:16; Ps 119:89).¹⁷ Jesus also promised that the soon-to-come Holy Spirit would “bring to your [the apostles] remembrance all things that I said to you” (John 14:26).

The truth of this last promise makes the science of the Historical Critical Method unnecessary. Even though perhaps twenty years had elapsed from the time Jesus spoke to the people of Israel and Matthew recorded those words in his gospel, the divine guarantee was still in effect. Matthew would remember accurately by the Spirit of living God what Jesus had said. Jesus also hinted at the upcoming New Testament writings by His use of *martureo* (Gk. “to testify” or “to bear record”) when He said, “the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify [μαρτυρήσει] of Me. And you also will bear witness [μαρτυρεῖτε]” (John 15:26-27). The Greek word is associated with the written record of the Scripture in a number of places (see John 5:39; 19:35; 21:24; Acts 10:43; Rom 3:21).

The apostles knew that what they were writing was Scripture (cf. 1 Cor 14:37; 2 Pet 3:2; Rev 1:1-3; and, also Luke 1:3, if ἄνωθεν is taken to mean “from above”). The Apostle John, when writing the last book to be added to the New Testament corpus of revelation, gave future copyists strong warning to maintain the integrity of the text. He said, “If any adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God

¹⁶ Ibid. 75

¹⁷ Maybe the true “originals” of each book of the Scriptures are located in heaven, and what are normally called the autographs—produced by the prophets and apostles—are only inspired “copies.”

shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book” (Rev 22:18-19). One would rightly surmise from this that copyists who actually believed the import of this warning would be more careful in their copying than would copyists who saw the task as a secular employment.

In the first century, following the completion of the New Testament canon of Scripture, from AD 100 to AD 200, there is reliable testimony to such carefulness in copying. Polycarp, a faithful martyr from the first half of that century, one who personally knew the apostle John, recognized the New Testament written revelation as “sacred” writings. He said, “For I am convinced that you are all well trained in the sacred Scriptures, and that nothing is hidden from you; (something not granted to me). Only, as it is said in these Scriptures, ‘be ye angry, but do not sin,’ and, ‘do not let the sun set on your anger’” (12.1).¹⁸ Polycarp’s short epistle included other quotes and allusions, representing three fourths of all 27 New Testament books.

Irenaeus, in his work, *Against Heresies*, in the second half of the second century, and according to textual critic Wilbur Pickering, “quoted from every chapter of Matthew, 1 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians and Philippians, from all but one or two chapters of Luke, John, and Romans, 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, and Titus, from most chapters of Mark (including the last twelve verses), Acts, 2 Corinthians, and Revelation, and from every other book except Philemon and 3 John.”¹⁹ One can be assured that this Irenaeus, who was known to promote the careful copying of his own work,²⁰ would have maintained the same carefulness in copying and quoting from the Holy Scripture.

One final important testimony to the careful preservation of the New Testament text—one at the end of this first century of Christianity,

¹⁸ Polycarp, “Epistle to the Philippians,” in *The Apostolic Fathers*, 2nd ed., ed. Michael W. Holmes, trans. J. B. Lightfoot and J. R. Harmer (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989) 129.

¹⁹ Wilbur N. Pickering, *The Identity of the New Testament Text II* [book online] (The Revised Standard Version, accessed 25 July 2011) available from http://www.revisedstandard.net/text/WNP/id_5.html.

²⁰ Supposedly (according to the early church historian Eusebius), concerning one of his own works, Irenaeus said: “I adjure thee, who shalt transcribe this book, by our Lord Jesus Christ, and by His glorious appearing, when He comes to judge the living and the dead, that thou compare what thou hast transcribed, and be careful to set it right according to this copy from which thou hast transcribed; also, that thou in like manner copy down this adjuration, and insert it in the transcript” (v. 20) (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, as quoted by Metzger and Ehrman, *Text of the New Testament*, 33).

after the time of the apostles—is that of Tertullian. Tertullian, in dealing with the effects of an earlier heretic, known as Marcion, asked the hypothetical question still being asked by twenty-first century textual critics: “If, then, the apostles . . . composed the Gospel in a pure form, but false apostles interpolated their true record; and if our own copies have been made from these, where will that genuine text of the apostle’s writings be found which has not suffered adulteration?” (4.3).²¹ Tertullian knew of substantial evidence to answer that question, which is now unavailable to modern textual critics, but Tertullian’s testimony to it argues against the modern view of Epp and Parker (mentioned previously) that copies of the New Testament were “circulated as a free and ‘living text.’” Tertullian said to the heretics of his day:

Come now, you who would indulge a better curiosity, if you would apply it to the business of your salvation, run over the apostolic churches, in which the very thrones of the apostles are still pre-eminent in their places, in which their own authentic writings are read, uttering the voice and representing the face of each of them severally. Achaia is very near you, (in which) you find Corinth. Since you are not far from Macedonia, you have Philippi; (and there too) you have the Thessalonians. Since you are able to cross to Asia, you get Ephesus [Chap. XXXVI].²²

When Tertullian said “authentic writings” were being preserved at each location of their original destination, he means (at least) that careful copies of the autographs exist in those locations.

It is interesting that the most popular text that modern textual criticism has produced (i.e. *The Greek New Testament*, 4th revised edition, by the United Bible Society) relies greatly upon the scholarship and text tradition associated with Alexandria, Egypt. The Alexandrian tradition of the earlier centuries was in contrast to the text tradition that Tertullian indicated, which was associated with Asia Minor, where most of the autographs originally resided. Origen (ca. AD 225), a scholar and textual critic, came from the Alexandrian school. He admitted that concerning the text tradition in his area, “the differences among the manuscripts [of the Gospels] have become great, either through the negligence of some copyists or though the perverse audacity of others; they either neglect to check over what they have transcribed, or, in the process of checking, they

²¹ Tertullian, “Against Marcion” (Electronic Edition STEP Files, Quickverse 2007, v. 11.0.1).

²² Tertullian, “On Prescription against Heretics” (Electronic Edition STEP Files, Quickverse 2007, v. 11.0.1).

lengthen or shorten as they please.”²³ Would it not make sense that the Christian community from Asia Minor that was more evangelical, and more literal in its interpretation of Scripture, would also be more careful and consistent in its copying of the New Testament text than would the home of allegorical interpretation in Alexandria? Which text tradition would one think would be associated with a higher view of the inspiration of Scripture?

The two text traditions for the New Testament text continued and were even recognized by the scholar Jerome (ca. AD 400), who was a textual critic.

I pass over those manuscripts which are associated with the names of Lucian and Hesychius, and the authority of which is perversely maintained by a handful of disputatious persons. It is obvious that these writers could not amend anything in the Old Testament after the labours of the Seventy; and it was useless to correct the New, for versions of Scripture which already exist in the languages of many nations show that their additions are false. I therefore promise in this short Preface the four Gospels only, which are to be taken in the following order, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, as they have been revised by a comparison of the Greek manuscripts. Only early ones have been used.²⁴

Jerome recognized negative influences in two text traditions, one from Asia Minor (i.e. Lucian) and one from Alexandria (i.e. Hesychius). He attempted to return to the original by using “early ones” available to him and pointing to “versions” that agreed with these early texts. The testimony of Jerome demonstrates the importance of the Greek text-form that his Latin Vulgate translation reflects in addition to the confirmation of other early versions in other languages and the Greek text-form they reflect.

By the ninth century, the Greek text of the New Testament had become standardized, which the witness in the manuscript record demonstrates. The majority of manuscript evidence that is still extant is from that following period, which leads to the time of the invention of the printing press; it mainly reflects the Asia Minor text tradition. The scholar and textual critic, Erasmus (ca. 1500) popularized the New Testament text for theological study; his Greek text became one of the catalysts of the

²³ Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus*, 52, quoted from Origen, *Commentary on Matthew*, xiii.14.

²⁴ Jerome, “Preface to the Four Gospels,” as quoted by Kurt and Barbara Aland, *The Text of the New Testament*, trans. Erroll F. Rhodes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981).

Reformation. Since the number of Greek manuscripts available for study and editing was relatively small in Erasmus' day, comparison and agreeing with the standardized Vulgate was frequent. For two and half centuries from the time of Erasmus, his edited text was mass produced and altered very little so that it popularly became known as "the text which is now received by all,"²⁵ or *Textus Receptus*.

It was not that there existed no variants among the Greek manuscripts; that tended not to be as great an issue as other Reformation doctrines. However, with the onset of the age of skepticism and humanism (i.e. the so called, Enlightenment), liberal scholarship was making an issue of such variants and their bearing on the integrity and inspiration of the autographs. A scholar and textual critic, Johann Albrecht Bengel (ca. 1734) attempted a defense by establishing what he thought was a helpful rule for determining the original from among the variants. He said, "*Proclivi scriptioni praestat ardua*" or "the more difficult reading is preferable to the easier one."²⁶ Unfortunately, this rule has remained popular until today among New Testament textual critics; it presupposes that divine inspiration tended toward obscurantism in the originals, and, that copyists, with little sense of duty towards verbal preservation, made changes that would clarify the meaning to their liking. Such presuppositions, as previously noted, are theologically unsound and historically unsustainable.

With the increased archaeological research of the nineteenth century came an influx of more Greek manuscript evidence. The Alexandrian text tradition was "resurrected" for use, primarily since most surviving texts of antiquity were being rediscovered in the hot, dry, regions of North Africa and the Middle East. Some regarded this as an opportunity to overthrow the priority of the *Textus Receptus*. Karl Lachmann (ca. 1830) stated, "Down with the late text of the *Textus Receptus*, and back to the text of the early fourth century church."²⁷ Others regarded it as an opportunity to clarify the original text against the attacks of liberalism. Constantin von Tischendorf, jubilant at his recovery of the ancient fourth century Greek manuscript, now known as *Codex Sinaiticus*, said, "Providence has given to our age, in which attacks on Christianity are so common, the Sinaitic Bible, to be to us a full and clear light as to what is the word written by God, and to assist us in defending the truth by establishing its authentic form."²⁸

²⁵ Abraham and Bonaventure Elzevir, "Preface," in *Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed., as quoted by Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus*, 82.

²⁶ Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus*, 110.

²⁷ Karl Lachmann, as quoted by Aland, *Text of the New Testament*, 11.

²⁸ Constantin von Tischendorf, *When Were Our Gospels Written* (New York: American Tract Society, 1869) 42.

Although his motivation was commendable, Tischendorf was working on the assumption that “older” is better, and that assumption became another standard rule with textual critics in his century and in the centuries following.

Brooke Westcott and Fenton Hort (ca. 1881) followed Bengel’s and Tischendorf’s example and produced an edition of the Greek New Testament, which has usurped the popularity of the *Textus Receptus*, and has survived as the predominant foundation of the current popular United Bible Societies text. Westcott and Hort relied heavily on Tischendorf’s *Sinaiticus* (Σ) manuscript and the only other complete third century manuscript of the New Testament, called the *Codex Vaticanus* (B) because it was stored at the Vatican, in Rome. They said, concerning these manuscripts, “It is our belief (1) that the readings of ΣB should be accepted as the true readings until strong internal evidence is found to the contrary, and (2) that no readings of ΣB can safely be rejected absolutely, though it is sometimes right to place them only on an alternative footing, especially where they receive no support from Versions and Fathers.”²⁹

It is interesting to note that Westcott and Hort pointed to the geographical spread of the “support from Versions” as significant. However, their “earlier is better” among Greek manuscripts mentality has undermined the presupposition behind looking at the manuscript tradition among the versions in other languages (i.e. God wants His word not just copied, but translated and spread abroad). Such mentality also has not satisfactorily answered the question as to why God would hide some evidence from the originals for more than a dozen centuries.

An attempt at returning to the Asia Minor text tradition, also known as the Byzantine text tradition, has been made by the production of the edition known as *The Greek New Testament according to the Majority Text*, by Zane C. Hodges and Arthur L. Farstad. They said in their introduction (ca. 1982): “The witnesses to the Majority Text come from all over the ancient world. Their very number suggests that they represent a long and widespread chain of manuscript tradition.”³⁰ Even the *Textus Receptus* survives in print, and was used for the translation update called *The New King James Version*, which has been used for quotation for this article. A unique aspect of the New King James is that it includes in its footnotes all the major variations found between itself and the United Bible

²⁹ Brooke Foss Westcott and Fenton John Anthony Hort, *The Testament in the Original Greek*, as quoted by Metzger and Ehrman, *Text of the New Testament*, 179.

³⁰ Zane C. Hodges and Arthur L. Farstad, *The Greek New Testament according to the Majority Text* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982) xi.

Societies and Majority Text editions. They purposefully “make no evaluation of readings” (i.e. which is better). Nevertheless, this allows the reader to see how relatively serious, or how relatively non-important, the various choices between the various popular text traditions indeed are.

WHAT ARE THE CURRENT POPULAR METHODS FOR CHOOSING BETWEEN VARIANTS?

Admittedly there are a lot of variations to choose in a significant number of passages of the New Testament. Mostly this is because there is such a wealth of manuscript evidence. Apologist Josh McDowell summarized the existing evidence.

There are now more than 5,300 known Greek manuscripts of the New Testament. Add over 10,000 Latin Vulgate and at least 9,300 other early versions (MSS) and we have more than 24,000 manuscript copies of portions of the New Testament in existence today.

No other document of antiquity even begins to approach such numbers and attestation. In comparison, the *Iliad* by Homer is second with only 643 manuscripts that still survive. The first complete preserved text of Homer dates from the 13th century.³¹

One may contend that McDowell is unfairly including the multitude of Greek manuscript fragments that exist (see his table reproduced in Appendix A) and not conceding that there is three hundred years between the autographs of the New Testament and the first complete preserved text of the whole New Testament. However, it must be remembered that each of the New Testament books were individually written and usually transported separately to their intended audience.³² Furthermore, even if McDowell had revealed that information (see Appendix B which provides the number of manuscripts from the first 800 years), the quote he recorded from British scholar, F. F. Bruce, would still be true. In other words, “There is no body of ancient literature in the world which enjoys such a wealth of good textual attestation as the New Testament.”³³

³¹ Josh McDowell, “Evidence that Demands a Verdict, Part 1” [book online] (My Redeemer Bible Study Notes, accessed 2 August 2011) available from <http://www.angelfire.com/sc3/myredeemer/Evidencep7.html>.

³² There is good internal evidence to suggest that the prison epistles of Paul (viz. Eph, Phil, Col, and Philem) may have initially traveled together, in addition to the second and third epistles by John.

³³ F. F. Bruce, *The New Testament Documents*, as quoted by McDowell, “Evidence” [online].

With such a large number of manuscripts, one can imagine a corresponding large number of variations. However, even Bart Ehrman, who has used his anti-inerrancy presupposition to cause him to search for and choose variants that support his anti-inerrancy view³⁴ conceded, “Most of these differences [variants among the copies] are completely immaterial and insignificant. A good portion of them show us that scribes in antiquity could spell no better than most people can today (and they didn’t even have dictionaries, let alone spell check).”³⁵ However, there are choices, as evidenced by Ehrman, which do matter. One can confidently state, that, if all the verses with significant variation (i.e. beyond simple spelling and word order, were moved to one side, there would still remain within the remaining text of the New Testament the fullness of the gospel and sound doctrine necessary for salvation and spiritual growth). However, what if choices are made that present a contradiction within the teaching of the rest of Scripture or with historical fact? The doctrine of inerrancy, one can easily understand, is at stake in such circumstances, and truly it is, as is demonstrated in the examples of the next section.

First, it is important to summarize the current popular methods now being used in New Testament textual criticism. David Alan Black gave an excellent summary in his concise guide to New Testament textual criticism.³⁶ He discussed four main approaches. *First*, there is Radical Eclecticism, practiced by textual critics G. D. Kilpatrick and J. K. Elliot, who discount using any external evidence such as the age and distribution of the extant manuscript evidence. They rely primarily on finding which variant demonstrates the most internal consistency with the context, both grammatically and theologically. *Second*, there is Reasoned Eclecticism, practiced by Metzger, Aland, Holmes, Silva, and Ehrman. The second approach is perhaps the most popular methodology among modern textual critics; it appears to make internal evidence a priority (e.g. the shorter and harder reading is preferable among the variants), but they also take into account the Alexandrian text tradition as a priority (i.e. older is better).

³⁴ This is the evident purpose of his work, *Misquoting Jesus*, referenced in this article.

³⁵ Ehrman, *Misquoting Jesus*, 10-11, See Appendix C for a listing of the assumed unintentional and intentional changes made by copyists. It is correct to say “assumed” because when one chooses between the options on this list to discount a variant, they must first choose between presupposing a careless scribe, a well intentioned scribe with a low view of verbal inspiration, or a radical scribe with a theological agenda.

³⁶ David Alan Black, *New Testament Textual Criticism: A Concise Guide* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), adapted from information found on pages 36-40.

Some may feel they make external evidence a priority because of their tendency to weight heavily the readings of *Sinaiticus* (Σ) and *Vaticanus* (B), but these manuscripts were not just chosen because of their age, but because they retain shorter more difficult readings.

The *third* methodology Black discussed is Reasoned Conservatism, practiced by Sturz, Robinson, and Wisse. They make external evidence a priority over internal evidence. However, they follow the external evidence of the Asia Minor tradition (i.e. Byzantine), rather than the Alexandrian. The *fourth* approach is called Radical Conservatism which follows only the external evidence, meaning the majority witness among the extant Greek manuscripts. Choices where there is no clear majority witness may take the “older is better” evidence into account to help decide, but internal evidence plays little or no factor, since they would say evaluating that evidence is too subjective a task. There are a few other considerations used, than these, when weighing the value of the evidence found in each manuscript. See Appendix D for how the modern editions (the UBS and Majority Text) choose and disregard the various characteristics, both internal and external.

WHAT CAN BE LEARNED FROM SPECIFIC CHOICES MADE BETWEEN VARIANTS AS IT RELATES TO THE DOCTRINE OF INERRANCY?

The methodology represented in this article is Reasoned Conservatism. External evidence is important, especially of the Byzantine tradition, though the most agreement among all ancient versions would certainly surpass that tradition, especially if it stood alone against the witness of the majority of those versions. (See Appendix E for a sample worksheet where the major ancient versions are considered for external evidence.)

There are significant passages in the New Testament that textual critics have emphasized for various reasons, some because of their size (i.e. they were either added or deleted in the manuscript tradition). The two most familiar are the traditional ending verses of Mark 16:9ff and the traditional story of the woman caught in adultery from John 7:53ff. Some are significant because they increase or decrease an emphasis of a biblical doctrine. For example, the deity of Christ in John 1:18, prayer directed to Jesus in John 14:14, the triunity of the Godhead in 1 John 5:7-8 and believer’s baptism in Acts 8:37 are all doctrines taught elsewhere in the New Testament, but the emphasis of those doctrines is either increased or diminished based on which manuscript tradition is chosen as best reflecting the original in those passages.

What is more important is the fact that some variants exist which affects the doctrine of the total inerrancy of the originals. It is obvious that the current United Bible Societies revised 4th edition of the Greek New Testament has, in at least two instances, chosen, because of its reasoned eclectic approach, variants which indicate “mistakes” by the authors in the original. A reader can easily check to see if their modern translation in English is based upon these choices. The passages are Matthew 1:7, 10 and John 7:8.

Matthew 1:7, 10 are within the genealogical list of Matthew for Christ, and both verses concern names of the kings of Judah, which can easily be verified from the records found in the Old Testament books of 1—2 Kings and 2 Chronicles. The correct names of Asa (v. 7) and Amon (v. 10) in Matthew’s autograph have been changed in some early copies to Asaph and Amos respectively. Either that is true or Matthew himself made a blunder of historical fact, which impugns the notion that he was writing inerrantly under the supervision of the Holy Spirit. What is interesting with regard to the external evidence is that among the ancient versions it is fairly even, except that the Byzantine tradition is directly on the side of the inerrant choice. The United Bible Societies editors chose to think a later copyist felt led to correct Matthew instead of a later copyist perhaps having misheard the accent of the Alexandria scribe who was reading aloud the exemplar from which his copy was being made. One wonders if a New England scribe would read aloud “Asa,” how many would record “Asar” because of his accent?

The second passage is even more significant. The apostle John recorded Jesus words to His earthly brothers in John 7:8. He said to them, “You go up to this feast. I am not yet going up to this feast, for My time has not yet fully come.” The significant variation among the manuscript evidence concerns the word “yet.”³⁷ Again the versional evidence is divided, as in the examples in the previous examples of Matthew. Moreover, the Byzantine tradition demonstrates that the word “yet” is original, but so does codex *Vaticanus* (B) in addition to two papyri manuscripts, which are both a century older than *Vaticanus* (B). The example herein demonstrates how internal evidence is a priority when choosing between variants in the United Bible Societies text. The more difficult reading, which makes Jesus appear to be lying to His brothers, is to be preferred by them! Either John did not remember Jesus’ words correctly, which impugns inerrancy once again, or worse, Jesus did lie,

³⁷ Actually, the difference concerns the choice between words *oupō* and *ouch* (i.e. not yet and not).

which perhaps makes the whole doctrine of inerrancy, and even Christianity, doubtful.

CONCLUSION

Some of this may yet be only a discussion to be had in academic circles and with those training the next generation of pastors and teachers. It is significant that most accredited evangelical seminaries use the United Bible Societies text and promote the Reasoned Eclectic approach to New Testament textual criticism. However, the negative influence of this text and approach are also being seen in the translations that are becoming popular in America and the remainder of the English-speaking world. The Christian Booksellers Association gave its list for the top selling translations in the United States by unit numbers for 2009.³⁸ The top seven were:

1. New International Version (NIV)
2. King James Version (KJV)
3. New King James Version (NKJV)
4. New Living Translation (NLT)
5. English Standard Version (ESV)
6. Holman Christian Standard Version (HCSB)
7. The Message

When these seven are surveyed, all except the New Living Translation and the English Standard Version followed the Byzantine text tradition in the two passages previously examined. Furthermore, the New Living Translation followed the others in the Matthew passage, but not in the John passage. What is interesting is that all seven, except the King James Version and the New King James Version, are based primarily upon the new United Bible Societies and agree with it in most of their translation choices based on variants in the text tradition.

A more thorough survey of significant passages should be done. It is troubling that so many modern translations are being based on the United Bible Societies text, and that some are accepting uncritically the

³⁸ Taken from the following: Pastor Brett Maragni, "Best-Selling Bible Translations" [post online] (accessed 19 February 2010) available from <http://pastorbrett.wordpress.com/2010/02/19/best-selling-bibles>. The blog also states, "**This does not take into account sales by companies not affiliated with the CBA, which I assume would include sellers like Walmart, Target, Amazon, Barnes and Noble, and many others.*"

United Bible Societies text choice, even when the doctrine of inerrancy may be under attack by that choice. Perhaps more troubling is that major seminaries are accepting as “orthodox” the so-called scholarly findings of popular New Testament textual critics without recognizing the weak presuppositions upon which much of their methodology is based. Moreover and finally, perhaps the most troubling, is that conservative evangelical textual critics are beginning to question the inerrancy of the original text. For example, an evangelical professor and premiere New Testament textual critic said,

My own views on inerrancy and inspiration have changed over the years. I still embrace those doctrines, but I don't define them the way I used to. . . . I would say that if inerrancy is elevated to the status of a prime doctrine, that's when one gets on a slippery slope. . . . As for my definition of inerrancy, actually there is no inconsistency here. The broader evangelical community uses a variety of definitions of inerrancy. An individual might not agree with all of them, but might agree with one of those definitions. Let me propose a radical analogy: If I had said that I believe in God but I don't define him as I used to, would that mean that I no longer believe in him? Of course not. And my definition of inerrancy is still within the boundaries, though closer to the edges of how it is defined.³⁹

It is hoped that this contribution to the discussion of New Testament textual criticism will only help strengthen the testimony of the historical reliability of the New Testament text, will help clarify the best presuppositions and methodology of New Testament textual criticism, and will help defend the important sound doctrine of inerrancy taught by Christ (John 10:35; 17:17) and His apostles (2 Tim 3:16; Tit 1:2).

³⁹ Williams, “Interview” [online].

APPENDIX A

Greek Uncials	267
Minuscules	2,764
Lectionaries	2,143
Papyri	88
Recent finds	47
TOTAL	5,309 Extant Greek Manuscripts
Latin Vulgate	10,000+
Ethiopic	2,000+
Slavic	4,101
Armenian	2,587
Syriac Pashetta	350+
Bohairic	100
Arabic	75
Old Latin	50
Anglo Saxon	7
Gothic	6
Sogdian	3
Old Syriac	2
Persian	2
Frankish	1

APPENDIX B
The Reliability of the New Testament Text
In comparison with Other Ancient Literature

Compare the Numbers:

It is probably better not to say "5000 to 1" but "At least or 5 to 1," when comparing the New Testament manuscript evidence to that of other ancient texts.

Evidence from the first 8 Centuries:

- Full New Testament (3 uncials)
- All the New Testament except Revelation (2 uncials)
- Gospels, Acts, and Catholic Epistles (2 papyri, 1 uncial)
- Gospels (43 papyri, 184 uncials)
- Pauline Epistles (26 papyri, 58 uncials)
- Acts, Catholic and Pauline Epistles, and Revelation (1 uncial)
- Acts, Catholic and Pauline Epistles (8 uncials)
- Acts, Catholic Epistles (18 papyri, 29 uncials)
- Revelation (5 papyri, 7 uncials)

APPENDIX C
Reasons of the Types of Variants
that Exist in New Testament Manuscripts

Unintentional Changes

- Errors of sight (wrong word division, confusion of letters, haplography, dittography, and metathesis)
- Errors of hearing (confusion of vowels or diphthongs when the scribe listened to the exemplar text being read aloud to expedite making multiple copies)
- Errors of memory (account for interchange of synonyms, changes in word order, or substitution of material from a parallel passage)
- Errors of judgment (subsequent scribes may have misunderstood the marginal explanation of a previous scribe)

Intentional Changes

- Grammatical changes (supposed clarification needed in moods and tenses)
- Spelling changes (supposed inaccuracies in original)
- Historical corrections (supposed inaccuracies in original)
- Harmonistic changes (supposed additions from parallel passages)
- Conflations (supposed adding all variants together)
- Eliminations (supposed confusion in original)
- Doctrinal changes (supposed doctrinal error or uncertainty in original)

APPENDIX D
Choosing between Variants

Evaluating the Evidence – How Important is Each Characteristic?

Characteristics that are regarded as important by both the United Bible Societies and Majority Text:

- Antiquity of variant, or primitiveness;
- Variety of evidence, or catholicity; and,
- Internal consistency, or reasonableness.

Characteristics that are regarded as important, apparently, by the Majority Text only:

- Consent of witnesses, or number;
- Respectability of witnesses, or influence; and,
- Continuity, or unbroken tradition.

Characteristics that are regarded as important, apparently, by the United Bible Societies Text only:

- More difficult variant better than smooth;
- Shorter variant better than longer; and,
- Older manuscript better than more recent.

APPENDIX E

New Testament Textual Criticism Worksheet		
Passage		
Reading 1	Reading 2	Reading 3
Meaning	Meaning	Meaning
External Evidence Byz vg eth slav s ^p cop ^{bo}	External Evidence Byz vg eth slav s ^p cop ^{bo}	External Evidence Byz vg eth slav s ^p cop ^{bo}
Which Reading is Favored by the External Evidence and Why?		
Significant Internal Evidence		
Conclusion		

ANALYSIS OF VOWS IN THE BOOK OF JUDGES

Jacob Gaddala

Judges is a transitional book from the divinely appointed leaders, Moses and Joshua, to the beginning of monarchy under Saul. Much work remained to be accomplished, although Joshua had led the Israelites to tremendous and important victories in three major campaigns. The land had not been fully possessed, and groups of heathen tribes were still entrenched. At the conclusion of Joshua's life, large areas of land still remained to be conquered. The Book of Judges thus deals with the period following the initial conquest of Israel until the rise of Saul.

The spiritual malaise that began after the death of the generation that had witnessed the mighty saving acts of Yahweh is sketched in bold strokes. Without a clear memory of Yahweh's claims upon them, the Israelites quickly apostatized, turning to the gods of the Canaanites around them. The narrator's interests were several: the cyclical nature of historical events in Israel; the rapidity with which the spiritual deterioration began; the progressively deteriorating condition of the nation with each succeeding cycle; failure to retain a vital memory of Yahweh's salvific deeds; and, intermarriage with the Canaanites.

Vows form an integrative part of various subjects in the Book of Judges and have a predominant role in the lives of various characters in the Book of Judges. There are both positive in addition to negative features in the vows taken in the Book of Judges. The focus of this article is upon the commendable and also contradicting features of the vows taken in the Book of Judges in the proximity of the Old Testament and also extending to ancient near eastern context.

UNDERSTANDING THE VOWS

The Hebrew word *nadar* (נָדַר) translated "vow" is probably connected with the word *nazar* (נָזַר), which means "dedicate." The root connotes the act of verbally consecrating to the service of God (i.e. vowing to perform) (Gen 28:20), to make an offering (Lev 27) or to abstain from something (Ps 132:2). The vow, which is common to the Hebrew faith and other religions, is expressed in the Old Testament by two forms:

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- 1) A gift to God for a wish granted, a danger escaped, or a difficult undertaking accomplished (Vows of Devotion).
- 2) A promise to abstain, until some purpose is accomplished or for some definite time, from some enjoyment or pleasure. The abstinence may be conceived as a self applied stimulus, or it may be a voluntary sacrifice made to conciliate the deity's goodwill (Vows of Abstinence).

The first form is most common in the Old Testament. The later has a close parallel in Arabic custom and in the Koran.¹

God does not demand vows, and it is not sin to reject taking a vow (Deut 23:23). However, if vows are taken then they are binding (Deut 23:21, 23; Eccl 5:4). The payment of vows is mandatory not only in the Bible but also in the Ancient Near East. In the Ancient Near East, there were superstitious beliefs regarding the payment of vows. Tony Cartledge indicated that in the Ancient Near East what was vowed was considered to be the god's property, and thus failure to fulfill it led to punishment and disaster. One Akkadian example that he cited refers to a man who failed to pay his vow and caused the sickness of his entire family, and it was possible that the gods might send demons to afflict his household.²

Women frequently took ordinary vows also. The desire for offspring especially led women to take vows. The Old Testament offers two pertinent instances. The prayer of Hannah is well known (1 Sam 1:11), less well known is the case of the mother of Lemuel, who called her royal son "son of my vows" (Prov 31:2).

In Mesopotamia, barrenness is a common reason for taking a vow. The inference for this is derived from the diagnostic handbook called "summa asipu ana bit marsi illiku," in which several symptoms of infant diseases is attributed to the fact that unpaid vows had seized the baby.³ Therefore, the Vows of Devotion are voluntary and the persons who take them are obligated to fulfill them, where as the Vows of Abstinence can be from God and there are some regulations to be fulfilled.

¹ Samuel McCauley Jackson, *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1912) 228.

² Tony Cartledge, "Vows in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* (1992): 88-89.

³ Karel Van der Toorn, "Female Prostitution in Payment of Vows in Ancient Israel," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 108 (Summer 1989): 196.

ANALYSIS OF VOWS IN THE BOOK OF JUDGES

Caleb's Vow

The Book of Judges begins with a father making a vow to give his daughter to the man who conquers the land. Caleb vowed to give his daughter, Acsah, to the man who conquered Debir. Caleb's younger brother, Othniel, conquered Debir and married Acsah (Judg 1:13). Othniel later became the first judge of Israel, and serves as the perfect illustration of a responsible father who wanted to give the best to his daughter and also a man who fulfills his vow.

Though nothing specifically designates Acsah's land as a part of her dowry, this land is referenced in connection with her marriage to Othniel and was a gift from her father. By the nature of Acsah's requests, it seems very likely that a married woman kept ownership of the dowry and possibly the use of it.⁴

Though dowry practice is not sanctioned in the Pentateuch, the custom pervaded the Levant in addition to regions to the east. Particularly significant are those regions which were in close proximity to ancient Israel and which therefore would tend to support the suggestion that ancient Israel participated in this custom also. Dowry was practiced at Ras Shamra, Babylon, Assyria, ancient Sumer, and Egypt at least as early as Thutmose III.⁵

The Israelite wife was not permitted to inherit her husband's property, and because biblical law made no provision for widows, a lucrative dowry provides for the common necessities of a widowed wife. It was not unusual in Babylon for the bride to receive a lavish dowry from her father, which served as a parental blessing and a mark of respectability.⁶ Caleb, therefore, is seen not only as a man who kept his vow but also a responsible father who cared for his daughter and respected her future.

⁴ Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961) 39.

⁵ Ivan Vasholz, "You Shall Not Covet Your Neighbor's Wife," *Westminster Theological Journal* 49 (Fall 1987): 400.

⁶ Michael D. Matlock, "Obeying the First Part of the Tenth Commandment: Applications from the Levirate Marriage Law," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 3 (2007): 304.

The Divine Vow

The text of Judges 2:3 reads, "So now I say, I will not drive them out before you; but they shall become adversaries to you, and their god shall be a snare to you" (NRSV). The verse is part of the speech, spoken by the messenger of the Lord, in which Israel, after having been brought into the Promised Land, was criticized for having made a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and for not having broken their altars. God vowed not to expel the remaining nations because Israel had broken the covenant.

The Angel of Yahweh is previously referenced in Genesis 16:7-14 and Genesis 22:11-18, both are cases of crisis important in preserving children of Abraham. He then appeared in Exodus 3:2 as a flame of fire in a burning bush, with a view to delivery of Israel from Egypt and to Balaam the seer in Numbers 22:22-35, again with a view to the delivery of Israel.⁷

Consequently, His appearance always had deliverance in mind. In the present passage, the Angel of the Lord moved from Gilgal to Bochim to pronounce judgment upon Israelites for their disobedience. The tabernacle was originally located at Gilgal (Josh 4:19-20); it was here that the men of Israel were circumcised and removed the reproach of Egypt (Josh 5:2-9). It was also at Gilgal that the Lord appeared to Joshua and assured him of victory as he began his campaign to conquer Canaan (Josh 5:13-15). Gilgal was the place of blessing and victory. Presently, the angel moved from Gilgal to Bochem to pronounce judgment.

The Angel of the Lord confirmed that He would never break the covenant that had been made with Israel, which was a reference to that sacred covenant that He swore by Himself because there was no greater to swear by (Gen 22:16). Given the customary parallel between the form of human and divine oath formulae, the deity is serving as the guarantor of his own oath. The Lord seems to give his promissory oath to man and to name Himself as the guarantor of the oath.⁸ However, then He reminded the Israelites that their part in that covenant was not to make any covenants or treaties with the inhabitants of Canaan, and to destroy the altars of Baal and Asherah, and of all gods in Canaan. The Israelites had failed in their part.

Man's response to God is seen in the building of an altar and offering sacrifices. The altar was erected to serve as a symbol of the

⁷ Peter Pett, *The Book of Judges: A Commentary* [online] (accessed 10 November 2006) available from <http://www.angelfire.com/ok/bibleteaching/judges.html>.

⁸ Hugh White, "The Divine Oath in Genesis," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 92 (June 1973): 165-79.

presence of the deity who was to guarantee the oath. It is not surprising to find various acts of altar erection following the divine promises to patriarchs. Jacob (in Gen 23:18, 22 and 35:14) erected a pillar after his encounter with God at Bethel as a witness to the verbal event that had transpired there. Since it was God in this case who had sworn, the pillar marked the place of a special epiphany of God.⁹ The divine vow was made due to the disobedience on the part of Israelites in breaking the covenant (this was in the context of judgment). Although the Lord fulfilled His vow in not removing the enemies, conversely, He raised judges in the times of oppression to deliver the Israelites. Therefore, God's sovereignty was displayed in this vow.

Jephthah's Vow

In the development of the period of Judges, two major emphases are observable: the increasing intensity of Israel's sin and depravity in the emphasized in the detailed enumeration of their idolatry; and, the Lord's severe chastisement of His people through two major oppressors, the Philistines and the Ammonites.¹⁰ It is noteworthy that seven categories of false deities are mentioned in Judges 10:6, while in verses 11-12, the narrator listed seven foreign nations from whom the Lord delivered Israel. Keil and Delitzsch commented, "The correspondence between the number seven in these two cases and the significant use of the number are unmistakable. Israel had balanced the number of divine deliverances by a similar number of idols which it served, so that the measure of the nation's iniquity was filled up in the same proportion as the measure of the delivering grace of God."¹¹

It is because of their apostasy that the Lord sold the Israelites into the hands of Philistines and the Ammonites, who subjugated them for eighteen years. Ultimately the Ammonites carried their warfare against Israel westward, crossing the Jordan and penetrating into the central and southern region to punish the tribes of Judah, Benjamin, and Ephraim. In Israel's preparation for the battle with the Ammonites, they offered the leadership of the eastern tribes to the one who could launch the attack against their enemies. At this time, Jephthah the son of a prostitute was summoned to the leadership in Israel.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Paul P. Enns, *Judges* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982) 86.

¹¹ C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, 10 vols. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1866-91; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996) 2:271.

The Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah to empower him in his battle with the Ammonites. Gathering his men from Tob, Jephthah traveled southwest passing through Manasseh to Mizpah. As Jephthah was preparing to fight the Ammonites, he decided to make a serious vow at great expense in order to invoke the Lord's blessing and to ensure the victory in the battle.

In Judges 11:30-31, Jephthah made a vow to God saying, "Then it shall be, that whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, shall surely be the LORD's, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering." The Lord enabled Jephthah to defeat the Ammonites, but it was his daughter who came first to meet him and he had to sacrifice his daughter to fulfill his vow. Ironically, the Ammonites had the custom of sacrificing the children and Jephthah made a vow when he went to war with the Ammonites.¹²

Scripture also records the case of a Moabite king who sacrificed his son in a desperate attempt to appease Chemosh, and effect a deliverance from Israel, Judah, and Edom (2 Kgs 3:27). However, with the exception of this instance, there is little evidence of any widespread evidence of this evil custom in Israel until the later period of the monarchy, notably in the reigns of Ahaz (2 Kgs 16:3) and Manasseh (2 Kgs 21:6).

Vows were not made to induce God to do something that He was not willing to do. They were made to bind the worshiper to the performance of some acknowledged duty. For example, Jacob's promise to worship God at Bethel was solemnized by oath. Jacob made his vow on the basis of what God had guaranteed to do. Therefore, he was trusting God's word and binding himself to reciprocate with his own dedication.¹³

Jephthah, on the contrary, was a victim of a Canaanite style environment; he was a son of a harlot, rejected by his own family, and forced to live the life of a brigand. Ultimately, however, Jephthah became a victim of his own word. His rash vow is reminiscent of the kind of bargains that Canaanites made with their gods to ensure their favor.¹⁴

After Judges 11:29, where the spirit of Lord came upon Jephthah, one perhaps expects him immediately to go and vanquish his foes like Othniel (Judg 3:10), Samson (14:19), and Saul (1 Sam 11:6). Instead he made a vow. The idea will probably be that Jephthah wanted to make

¹² Michael Smith, "The Failure of the Family in Judges, Part 1: Jephthah," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 162 (July—September 2005): 280-98.

¹³ Allen Ross, "Jacob's Vision: The Founding of Bethel," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 142 (July 1985): 233.

¹⁴ S. R. Wolff, "Child Sacrifices at Carthage: Religious Rite or Population Control?" *Biblical Archeology Review* 18 (1984): 31-51.

doubly sure of victory.¹⁵ It seems He had insufficient trust in God's Spirit. Jephthah desired to bind God rather than embrace the gift of the Spirit. The meaning of his words is doubt, not faith.

Nazarite Vow of Samson

The word "Nazarite" comes from the Hebrew word *nazir* (נָזִיר) which in turn derives from the verbal root *nazar* (נָזַר) which basically means "to separate." Other denominative forms of the word take the derived sense of "consecration" or "crown," sometimes referring to a Nazarite hair or the headpiece of a king or a high priest, which served as the sign of his consecration. In Genesis 49:26 and Deuteronomy 33:16, the word *nazir* is used of Joseph to indicate the contrast between him and his brothers.¹⁶

The pertinent text of Numbers 6 specifies that members of both sexes are free to take the Nazarite vow. In a context that usually speaks only with regard to men, there are details that are indeed remarkable. The vow of the Nazarite was voluntarily made by those who desired "to separate themselves unto the LORD" (v. 2), both men and women for a determined season (v. 8). During the time of his separation, the Nazarite was bound by three absolute restrictions. *First*, he could "eat nothing that is made of the vine tree, from the kernels even to the husk" (v. 4). *Second*, "there shall not razor come upon his head: until the days be fulfilled" (v. 5). *Third*, during the days of separation, "he shall come at no dead body" (v. 6).

At the end of his separation, specific sacrifices must be made at which time "the hair of his separation is shaven" (v.19). At that time, the restrictions of the vow are removed. The vow was offered voluntarily. Evidently, the Nazarite himself determined the length of the vow. Therefore, he decided how much he was willing to sacrifice. However, after the vow was made, its requirements were very strict.

Samson was different in that his vow was involuntary and for life. The only proscription specifically assigned to Samson is for his hair not to be cut. His mother was prohibited from drinking wine or eating unclean foods, but though some have argued that this should be understood as applying to Samson also.¹⁷ Blenkinsopp suggested that the Samson narrative is structured around the theme of how Samson successively

¹⁵ Bernard P. Robinson, "The Story of Jephthah and his Daughter: Then and Now," *Biblica* 85 (2004): 331-48.

¹⁶ Tony W. Cartledge, "Were Nazarite Vows Unconditional?" *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 51 (July 1989): 410.

¹⁷ G. B. Grey, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Numbers* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1903) 59.

broke various parts of his vow but the argument would be that Samson himself never made the vow. There cannot be an assumption made that Samson abstained from wine or strong drink when he took part in his wedding feast “as young men used to do” (Judg 14:10).¹⁸

An interesting observation is that the supernatural strength with which Samson was blessed was undiminished by these actions, but departed when his hair was shorn (Judg 16:19-20). Samuel who is also a Nazarite showed no compunction against touching the dead when he hacked King Agag to pieces (1 Sam 15:33).

The Rechabites had a perpetual commandment similar to a Nazarite vow in that they did not drink wine. However, their commitment also differed from the Nazarite vow. The Rechabites were not to own property. Likewise, nothing is mentioned regarding them cutting their hair or avoiding corpses. Their practices are viewed as loyalty to the command of their forefather rather than as a vow made individually.¹⁹

Samson embodies everything that is wrong with Israel. As a Nazarite, he frittered his calling and divinely given talent, using it essentially for personal selfish ends. Everything about him seems to be wrong: he married a Philistine in deliberate defiance of his parents; he was dismissive toward the enemy from whom he was to bring deliverance; and, he had affairs with a Philistine harlot and with Delilah. Even his final appeal for divine aid appears to arise from purely personal concerns. Popular opinion to the contrary, the statement that he accomplished more in his death than in his life is hardly complimentary.

CONCLUSION

The article herein has demonstrated the commendable features in addition to the failures of the persons taking vows in the Book of Judges, in the context of the Old Testament in its entirety. Even though a person is not obligated to take a vow, if taken, he has the obligation to fulfill it to be right in the sight of God. Vows cannot be taken to induce God to do something in favor but can be as an act of worship in response to what God is going to do or has done.

¹⁸ Joseph Blenkinsopp, “Structure and style in Judges 13-16,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 82 (1963): 65-76.

¹⁹ Clifford Rapp, “Confession: Old Testament Insights,” *Chafer Theological Seminary Journal* 5 (September 1999): 57.

GENRE OVERRIDE IN GENESIS 1—2

Jeremiah Loubet

Perhaps no passage in Scripture elicits so varied a response in the Christian community today as the creation account of the first two chapters of Genesis. The attitudes range from indifference to fierce intent, while hermeneutics range from allegory or myth, to literal grammatical-historical. To hear most discussions, one would assume many of the positions to be relatively modern, but their histories are more profound than at first evident. Among modern evangelicals, whose hermeneutic is primarily (generally) literal, most of the bewildering theories have not been influential. The constant pressure from the world and the more liberal side of the church has, however, eroded the literalism of many with a predictable result. A growing trend today is the use of genre labels as an excuse to take certain passages less than literally. The most commonly targeted areas are prophecy, the gospels, and portions of Genesis 1—11. The purpose of this article is to evaluate the apparent motive, method, and ramifications of this practice as regards the Genesis creation account.

MOTIVE

A brief look at history helps illuminate the present. The tendency of the church to interpret Scripture in a less than literal manner can be dated, at least, to Origen. In his work, *De Principiis* 4.1.6, he argued that the existence of days before the sun and moon was impossible and so could only be taken figuratively.¹ Origen was certainly influenced by his time, that is, profoundly influenced by Greek philosophy, and by Philo, who prior to him regarded the Jewish Scripture similarly. Olsen wrote, “One of Origen’s purposes in allegorical interpretation was to relieve the unbearable pressure put on Christians by skeptics like the pagan writer Celsus, who ridiculed many Old Testament stories as absurd and improper to God.”²

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¹ Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, eds., *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, 10 vols., rev. ed., trans. Frederick Crombie (Buffalo: Christian Literature, 1885), vol. 4 [online] (New Advent, accessed 5 October 2011) available from <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0412.htm>.

² Roger E. Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition and Reform* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999) 25.

Unfortunately he began a precedent in the church that lingers even today in its far-reaching effects.

Another of the church fathers who left a troubling influence in this area is Augustine. While Augustine (*City of God* 12.10) defended Scripture from criticism by those who declared the earth and humanity to “have always been,”³ and asserted a biblical age for the earth, his evaluation of the days in Genesis 1 was problematic and influential enough for John Calvin to address more than a millennium later. Calvin expressed the claim as “Moses distributes the work which God perfected at once [instantly] into six days, for the mere purpose of conveying instruction,” based on Ecclesiasticus 18:1, which Calvin declared “unskillfully cited.”⁴ Incidentally, Augustine’s theory seems to be the first evidence of a dismissal of the literal by genre, that is, non-literal pedagogy.

The scientific discoveries of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries brought new impetus for change. In 1796, Georges Cuvier demonstrated that extinction was a reality,⁵ forcing many theologians to re-evaluate their (non-biblical) position that elements of God’s perfect creation could not cease to exist. Ironically, rather than abandon the false position, many reacted by inserting time and a former creation between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2, a position now known as the Gap Theory. Developments in geology also challenged the age of the earth. In the 1780s, James Hutton began writing papers presenting a uniformitarian perspective on geology, and what has come to be known as “deep time.” In 1830-33, Charles Lyell published *Principles of Geology*, effectively popularizing Hutton’s work and expanding on it.⁶ Some theologians (and believing geologists) began to adopt another familiar departure from the plain sense of Scripture, that is, the Day-Age Theory.

By the time Charles Darwin published his most famous work (*The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of*

³ Philip Schaff, ed., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, trans. Marcus Dods (Buffalo: Christian Literature, 1887), vol. 2. [online] (New Advent, 5 October 2011) available from <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1201.htm>.

⁴ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, trans. John King (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, n.d.) [online] (Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 13 July 2005, accessed 4 October 2011) available from <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom01.vii.i.html>.

⁵ Ben Waggoner, “Georges Cuvier (1769-1832)” [article online] (University of California Museum of Paleontology, accessed 6 October 2011) available from <http://www.ucmp.berkeley.edu/history/cuvier.html>.

⁶ Edward J. Tarbuck and Frederick K. Lutgens, *Earth: An Introduction to Physical Geology*, 6th ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1998) 5-6

Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life) in 1859, the habit of distorting interpretation to include old ages of the earth had already been long established. Very quickly liberal theologians began to adopt forms of theistic evolution, though evangelicals predictably did not. By the 1880s, Milton Terry indicated

the great battle-field on which theologians and scientists have been most in conflict is the Mosaic narrative of creation. This narrative is supposed to describe the origin of all things, including matter, life, and mind; and the modern theories of evolution, and assertions of Man's immense antiquity, have seemed to command such an array of evidences that it has become very common to study Genesis with constant deference to these theories and assertions, and even to study biology and evolution with equal deference to the Book of Genesis. The highest aim of some writers would seem to be the construction of an exegesis of Genesis that may at once harmonize with the statements of the sacred writer and the hypothesis of leading scientists.⁷

Terry described two forms of Day-Age Theory before addressing that which most concerns this article: "Another class of interpreters . . . have attempted to escape all responsibility for a literal interpretation by resolving the Mosaic narrative into a poem, 'The Inspired Psalm of Creation.'"⁸

The last hundred years have seen many changes, but little to the various proposed theories. What has changed is an evangelical change from resisting any form of non-literal interpretation of the creation account, to adopting genre designations that eliminate the conflict between literal interpretations of the passage and allow concordance with current scientific theory. Many feel the pressure of a world that has changed and a mass of theory presented as fact. To live in the world today (and this is nothing new either) as a Bible believing Christian who accepts the plain sense of Scripture is to be ridiculed by the secular world and, unfortunately, by many Christians who have so accepted the tenets of uniformitarianism and evolutionism, that they are embarrassed by those who do not conform. The problem is, and has always been, that the Word of God is being conformed to man's wisdom, and not purely exegeted based on its own merit and structure. The motive in Origen's day is the motive

⁷ Milton S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Treatise On the Interpretation of the Old and New Testaments*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974) 544.

⁸ *Ibid.* 546-47

today. The individuals and circumstances may have changed, but the basic issues remain the same.

METHOD

One of the first things to seize the attention of a reader of commentary, Bible survey/introduction, or theological Internet blogs (especially liberal) is the bewildering variety of assigned genres and interpretations of Genesis 1—2. Some characterizations appear more consistently than others, but the arguments for using them are more consistent than the descriptions themselves. While recognizing what kind of literature this passage presents is undeniably important to interpretation, the variety presented should alert any serious student of the Word.

Paul Zimmerman wrote, “Unless we decide the kind of literature we are dealing with, we cannot perform good exegesis. If it is historical prose, that is one thing. If it is poetry or myth or saga or symphony, that is quite another.”⁹ Utey labeled Genesis 1:1-3 as “Historical Drama,”¹⁰ but in another work noted that chapters 1—2 may be poetry.¹¹ Logos’ literary genre coding listed Genesis 1—2 variously as “Saga (primeval),” “Prose, Myth,” and “Poetry” for 1:27 and 2:23.¹²

As noted earlier, Terry challenged the use of “The Inspired Psalm of Creation,”¹³ a designation used by Drane of 1:1—2:4 (“hymn in praise of creation”¹⁴). Daniel Harlow considered this context “divinely inspired story,”¹⁵ not to be taken literally. The examples provided are by no means exhaustive, and with all the categories and sub categories one soon thinks of Polonius’ listing of acting genres in Hamlet: “tragedy, comedy, history,

⁹ Paul A. Zimmerman, ed., *Creation, Evolution, and God’s Word* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1972) 102.

¹⁰ R. J. D. Utey, *How It All Began: Genesis 1-11* (Study Guide Commentary Series) (Marshall, TX: Bible Lessons International, 2001) 3.

¹¹ R. J. D. Utey, *Old Testament Survey: Genesis – Malachi* (Marshall, TX: Bible Lessons International, 2000) 13.

¹² Logos Bible Software 4, Tooman Literary Genre Coding of the Old Testament, Genesis 1-2.

¹³ Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 547

¹⁴ John Drane, *Introducing the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Lion Publishing, 2000) 264.

¹⁵ Erin Roach, “Mohler: Bible not Subject to Modern Science,” *Baptist Press* (27 September 2011 [article online] (Baptist Press, 5 October 2011) available from <http://www.bpnews.net/BPnews.asp?ID=36204>.

pastoral, pastoral-comical, historical-pastoral, tragical-historical, tragical-comical-historical-pastoral.”¹⁶

The fact that definitions of these labels remain inconsistent adds to the confusion. One of the most commonly held genre labels is that of myth, a particularly nebulous and problematic designation. After noting, “most people think of a myth as something that is untrue,”¹⁷ Drane noted the varieties within definitions of myth among literary scholars.

A myth can be simply a story about gods and goddesses and their doings, described as if they were human beings. . . . Myth can also be a technical term for what takes place during a religious rite. In Babylon, for instance, the annual New Year Festival was the most important religious event of the year. Here the Babylonian story of creation would be recited, while the king acted out the story as it was told. The recitation was a ‘myth’, to accompany the ritual. Yet others use the term ‘myth’ to describe a story which expresses a truth about human life that cannot adequately be described in terms of science or history. . . . This is the type of ‘myth’ scholars usually have in mind when they use this term in relation to the Genesis creation narratives.¹⁸

He also noted that this diversity of possible meanings “has become a very slippery term . . . unlikely to be of much help to us here.”¹⁹ In practice, this label could be used without eliminating literality, but very seldom is. One could argue that this term is not only unhelpful, but also misleading, and most often used in a way that enforces a non-literal understanding.

Is there textual reason to present the creation account as myth? Hamilton argued against one of the most often cited evidences and stated, “it has been suggested that the reference to ‘the deep’ (1:2; Hebrew *tehom*) is a veiled reference to Tiamat of Babylonian fame. Even if that is the case one would be hard pressed to see any obvious mythic allusions in the use of *tehom* by the author of Genesis 1:2.”²⁰ His reason is that there is no adversarial relationship to the “deep,” and further because “strong linguistic arguments militate against the equation of Tiamat and *tehom*.”²¹ Kaiser agreed, saying that any such “equation violated the rules of morphology and equivalency in cognate languages.” He further added,

¹⁶ William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* (Leipzig: Tauchnitz, 1843) 42.

¹⁷ Drane, *New Testament*, 260

¹⁸ *Ibid.* 260–61.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 261–262.

²⁰ Victor P. Hamilton, *Handbook on the Pentateuch: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982) 25.

²¹ *Ibid.*

“nothing has been found in the biblical narrative of creation to tie it to the mythical ancient Near Eastern cosmogonies.”²²

Second most common seems to be the designation of “poem.” The implications of this designation become obvious in most instances of its use. Bates wrote, in his introduction to Genesis, “Twenty-eight centuries ago an unknown Hebrew priest wrote a poem about the Creation of the world. He knows nothing about environmental science, and less than nothing about astrophysics; his insight was only poetic. Yet most of science and physics for the last two hundred years has been devoted to trying to explain his poem.”²³ In other words, this combination of documentary hypothesis and denial of inerrancy presents Genesis 1 as having no real effect upon the detailed reality of the origin of the universe and life.

Is there any reason, however, to deem the creation account poetry? Kaiser presented a grammatical argument against, stating:

The Hebrew form of the verb is exactly the same as is routinely used for Hebrew narratives. Furthermore, Hebrew poetry seldom if ever uses the Hebrew indicator for the direct object, whereas Genesis 1 and 2 do. There are additional grammatical and syntactical forms in Genesis 1 and 2 that can only be found in prose literary genre, not in poetry. Thus these accounts may not be listed under poetry.²⁴

Steven Boyd also analyzed the verb forms of uncontested parallel poetic, and literal accounts throughout the Old Testament Scripture, making statistical analysis for comparison. Applying his results to Genesis 1:1—2:3 he found that this passage is “narrative with a probability of 0.9999. This value, virtually one, shows an extraordinary level of confidence.”²⁵ The same types of problems appear with any of the other designations that lend themselves to a non-literal interpretation. Furthermore, nearly every author who espouses one of these genre designations argues (often strenuously) against the designations and conclusions of others who assign a different genre.

²² Walter C. Kaiser Jr., Peter H. Davids, F. F. Bruce, and Manfred Brauch, *Hard Sayings of the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996) 89.

²³ Ernest Sutherland Bates and Lodowick Allison, eds., *The Bible, Designed to Be Read as Living Literature: the Old and the New Testaments in the King James Version* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993) 3.

²⁴ Kaiser et al., *Hard Sayings*, 89.

²⁵ Don DeYoung, *Thousands, Not Billions: Challenging an Icon of Evolution: Questioning the Age of the Earth* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2005) 167-68.

Perhaps the reason for this great lack of agreement lies in the fact that “no consensus exists as to a precise definition of genre”²⁶ and this results in great liberality to assert opinion. Daniel Chandler, describing the concept of genre as a whole, wrote, “The classification . . . of genres is not a neutral and ‘objective’ procedure. There are no undisputed ‘maps’ of the system of genres within any medium (though literature may perhaps lay some claim to a loose consensus). Further, there is often considerable theoretical disagreement about the definition of specific genres.”²⁷ Chandler’s description leaves the field all too easily malleable to the whim of the interpreter.

Once again the question arises: Why then would anyone deviate from what appears to be obvious? The question is especially relevant if what Terry stated is true, “every thorough Hebrew scholar knows that in all the Old Testament there is not to be found a more simple, straightforward prose narrative than this first chapter of Genesis.”²⁸ The only obvious answer seems to be Terry’s. They “have attempted to escape all responsibility for a literal interpretation,”²⁹ or in Cone’s words, “genre hermeneutics provides a means whereby the literal grammatical historical approach can be abandoned.”³⁰

RAMIFICATIONS

What results from this abandoning or diminishing of any literal interpretation of the creation account? How will one’s interpretations of the Word as a whole change? What is the logical progression? These considerations should, at least, make anyone think about the reasoning and motive for their position.

The use of a non-literal interpretation, especially as an escape or apologetic tactic will lead to the same consequences as in the time of Philo and Origen, that is, departing from the clear teaching of Scripture into subjectivity. Secondly, compromise that allows evolutionary teaching contrary to Scripture is fatal to theology. Even Thomas Huxley, an avowed

²⁶ Robert L. Thomas, *Evangelical Hermeneutics: the New Versus the Old* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2003) 324.

²⁷ Daniel Chandler, “An Introduction to Genre Theory” [article online] (Aberystwyth University, accessed 7 October 2011) available from <http://www.aber.ac.uk/media/Documents/intgenre/intgenre1.html>.

²⁸ Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics*, 548.

²⁹ *Ibid.* 546

³⁰ Christopher Cone, *Prolegomena: Introductory Notes on Bible Study and Theological Method* (Ft. Worth, TX: Tyndale Seminary Press, 2007) 141.

enemy of the faith, could not help to note the importance of understanding Scripture literally.

I am fairly at a loss to comprehend how any one, for a moment, can doubt that Christian theology must stand or fall with the historical trustworthiness of the Jewish Scriptures. The very conception of the Messiah, or Christ, is inextricably interwoven with Jewish history; the identification of Jesus of Nazareth with that Messiah rests upon the interpretation of passages of the Hebrew Scriptures which have no evidential value unless they possess the historical character assigned to them.³¹

He proceeded to indicate that evolutionary theory undermines the accounts of creation and the flood, calling into question the entirety of Scripture. Ken Ham identified some of the theological ramifications of this.

The book of Genesis teaches that death is the result of Adam's sin. . . . But if we compromise on the history of Genesis by adding millions of years, we must believe that death and disease were part of the world before Adam sinned. [...] The God of an old earth is one who uses death as a part of creating. Death therefore can't be the penalty for sin and can't be described as the last enemy. . . . There's no doubt - the god of an old earth destroys the gospel.³²

Cone stated, "What the genre hermeneutic begins in Genesis is not complete until the entire authority of Scripture is undermined, placing the interpreter above the revelation, and thus placing the creature above the Creator."³³ Discerning the evidence, especially textual, is important to understanding Scripture, and consequently to systematizing theology. One must ask, "How do they know what they know?;" and, "Why do they accept what they accept?" Aldous Huxley, for all his great many faults, made some valid points. In *Ends and Means*, he said, "Most ignorance is vincible ignorance [from Latin *vincibilis*, from *vincere* "to conquer"]. We don't know because we don't want to know. It is our will that decides how and upon

³¹ Thomas Henry Huxley, *The Lights of the Church and the Light of Science* (New York: D. Appleton & Company, n.d.) [online] (Project Gutenberg, 3 December 2008, accessed 6 October 2011) available from <http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/2/6/3/2632/2632.txt>.

³² Ken Ham, ed., *The New Answers Book: Over 25 Questions on Creation/Evolution and the Bible* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2006) 36-37.

³³ Cone, *Prolegomena*, 145.

what subjects we shall use our intelligence.”³⁴ Huxley’s statement applies to one’s acceptance of any position, theological or otherwise. Christians are responsible for how and what they understand in the Word. One cannot blindly accept anything taught by fallen men. Christians must be Bereans, that is, looking to the Word as their source and corrective guide to truth, in all diligence, as approved workman.

If pressures from the secular world are allowed to dictate interpretation, then mankind has become the measure of all things. The very subjectivity (and hence variety) of assigned genres in Genesis 1–2 demonstrates the fact that motive determines designation, not content. If content were dictating designation, then the possibilities would be far more limited.

In this complicated issue of genre and interpretation there is always more than is apparent initially. Too many positions are accepted blindly, looking to only a fraction of the evidence. The evangelical community needs to awaken to the very real consequences of compromise. J. A. Mattill, writing in *Free Inquiry* nearly thirty years ago said: “the creationists have also shown irrefutably that those liberal and neo-orthodox Christians who regard the creation stories as myths or allegories are undermining the rest of Scripture, for if there was no Adam, there was no fall; and if there was no fall there was no hell; and if there was no hell, there was no need of Jesus as Second Adam and Incarnate Savior, crucified and risen. As a result, the whole biblical system of salvation collapses.”³⁵ The world recognizes the inconsistency, why is that Christians cannot also?

³⁴ Aldous Huxley, *Ends and Means: An Enquiry Into the Nature of Ideals and Into the Methods Employed for Their Realization* (Reader's Union) (Edinburgh: T. and A. Constable LTD., 1938) 270.

³⁵ A. J. Mattill Jr., "Three Cheers For the Creationists," *Free Inquiry* 2 (Spring 1982): 17, as quoted by Henry Madison Morris, *That Their Words May Be Used Against Them* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 1997) 381-82.

BOOK REVIEWS

The Judgment Seat of Christ by Samuel L. Hoyt. Milwaukee: Grace Gospel Press, 2011. 226 pp., paper, \$15.00.

Dr. Hoyt has provided an excellent, comprehensive understanding of the judgment seat of Christ. He stated that the purpose of this study is “to carefully establish the limits of this judgment in regard to its nature and results” (p. 179). The thesis is “that the judgment seat of Christ is a most solemn evaluation at which there will be no judicial punishment for the believer’s sins, whether confessed or unconfessed, but rather commendation according to the faithfulness of the Christian’s life” (p. 15).

Hoyt rejected the prominent view of only one general judgment (pp. 17-22) espousing the understanding of most premillennialists that there are five major eschatological judgments (pp. 22-23). The judgment seat of Christ is specific to the church age believer and occurs between the rapture and the second coming of Christ (pp. 47-54). In describing the judgment seat of Christ, the author provided individual chapters on the setting, nature, purpose, standards (or criteria) of judgment, and extent. Chapters ten and eleven are dedicated to the rewards received by Christians at the judgment and Hoyt addressed the difficult issues concerning the meaning of loss and shame that will be experienced by some at this event (ch. 9). In each of these discussions, Hoyt did an excellent work of biblical exegesis.

The favorite chapter is the third, which deals with the etymological and cultural background of the “*bēma*” seat. Herein, Hoyt provided important information concerning the use of the Greek word “*bēma*” during New Testament times, and its distinction from *kritērion*, which can also be translated “judgment seat.” Hoyt clearly demonstrated that while the words can be used interchangeably to a degree, “*bēma* generally denotes a place of prominence, while *kritērion* specifically refers to a place of prosecution” (p. 45). Therefore, *bema* was used most often for the reward seat at athletic events while *kritērion* was used exclusively for the court of justice. Historically, Hoyt provided the background of the four great Pan-Hellenic games (Olympic, Pythian, Isthmian, and Nemean), paralleling these contests with Paul’s writing concerning the Christian athlete and his rewards. The research here is a most interesting and helpful section, which provides much clarification on the New Testament metaphors and teachings. In particular, at the judgment (*bēma*) seat of the Grecian games the contestants did not face judicial punishment but

received rewards according to their success in the events. Similarly, the Christian will not be condemned or punished at Christ's *bēma*, but will gain rewards, or suffer loss of the same, depending upon how they have "run the race."

The Judgment Seat of Christ is a thorough and valuable study of the subject. Whether used as a textbook or for personal study, it is greatly recommend. However, there is one caveat: *The Judgment Seat of Christ* is a rewrite of Dr. Hoyt's doctoral dissertation submitted in 1977. As such, Hoyt offered no documentation and listed no bibliographical works past 1976. While this does not deter from the biblical material, which of course has not changed since the mid-1970s, this reviewer would have liked to observe Hoyt engage some of the modern scholars on the subject. Perhaps an appendix or two could be added to any future reprint addressing what theologians from N. T. Wright to Randy Alcorn are writing with regard to the kingdom of God and heaven. Although he might be among the few, this reviewer would find such a discussion beneficial. As it is, *The Judgment Seat of Christ* should find a place in the libraries of serious students of Scripture.

Gary E. Gilley, senior pastor, Southern View Chapel

Evangelical Hermeneutics and the New Testament Use of the Old Testament by Rynold D. Dean. Iron River, WI: Veritypath Publications, 2010. 251pp., paper, \$24.99.

Old Testament scholar Walter Kaiser stated, "The relationship between the OT and the NT stands as one of the foremost, if not the leading, problems in biblical research of this century" (p. 1). Rynold Dean addressed this difficult issue by first lamenting that there has been a recent shift within evangelicalism from the past understanding of biblical interpretation as controlled by context, meaning, and inspiration (pp. 7, 12-13, 19). The author rejected postmodern hermeneutics that has infiltrated much of modern scholarship—both secular and biblical—and stated his position that the intention of the authors (of Scripture) is what is found in the written text and each text has one definite meaning (pp. 43, 46, 50, 52).

With these presuppositions in mind, *Evangelical Hermeneutics* explains and analyzes six major views within conservative evangelicalism concerning the New Testament writers' use of the Old Testament.

1. Contemporary Judaism/Second Temple Hermeneutics (represented by Richard Longenecker and Peter Ennis).

The position here teaches that, at times, New Testament writers used special New Testament hermeneutics in order to arrive at the latent meaning of Old Testament texts. The claim is that New Testament authors used the same exegetical procedures as do contemporary Judaism in order to find the true meaning of the Old Testament text (p. 72). Some within this school of thought believe contemporary Christians can use this same exegesis today (p. 73). Dean rejects this view (pp. 76-85).

2. Divine Intent – Human Words (represented by J. I. Packer, E. Elliot Johnson, and Vern Poythress).

Prophetic passages rely upon the human author's words but the Old Testament writers did not always fully intend or comprehend the prophetic reference that they were making. Dean believes this approach violates the fundamental concepts of context, meaning, and inspiration (pp. 94-97).

3. Full Human Intent (represented by Walter Kaiser)

Kaiser explained, "To interpret we must in every case reproduce the sense the scriptural writer intended for his own words" (p. 108); therefore the Old Testament and New Testament meaning is always the same.

While Dean appreciates facets of this approach he critiqued, "I would contend, however, that imposing this type of restriction bears the marks of confusing the NT writer's use of the OT passage with his GH (grammatical/historical) interpretation" (pp. 115-20).

4. Biblical Intertextuality (represented by Abner Chou)

The New Testament authors do not modify or change the original intent or the OT texts in any fashion, according to Chou (p. 133). Dean agrees to a certain extent but said, "There is no exegetical evidence to support the position that the original OT writer foresaw or in any way conceived – to say nothing of

'intended' – the actual application that the NT writer makes of the OT passage" (p. 135).

5. Inspired Subjectivity (represented by John Walton).

Walton contended, "At certain times Jesus and the apostolic/prophetic witness of the NT, based on the authority of NT inspiration, engage Old Testament texts in order to express new revelation that, hitherto, was unknown to God's people" (p. 141). Walton's understanding is similar to Dean's position but Walton's view is difficult to understand and negatively impacts grammatical-historical hermeneutics (pp. 160-67).

6. Inspired *Sensus Plenior* Application (ISPA) (represented by Robert Thomas).

Thomas wrote, "At certain times Jesus and the apostolic/prophetic witnesses of the NT, based on the authority of NT inspiration, engage Old Testament texts – employing the words of that text – in order to express new revelation that hitherto was unknown to God's people" (p. 159, cf. p. 172).

Dean is most comfortable with ISPA but believes the terminology needs improvement. By definition "inspired" is used because all Scripture is inspired by God; "*sensus plenior*" means the New Testament gives additional or a fuller sense than the passage had in its Old Testament setting. Moreover, "application" is used because it does not eradicate the literal meaning of the Old Testament passage but simply applies the Old Testament wording to a new setting (p. 152). Thomas' view differs from Walton's in that the New Testament citation is in no sense a fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecy (pp. 152-54).

As already stated, Dean is not pleased with the ISPA title, especially seeing the word application as a poor choice (pp. 173-81). He modified Thomas somewhat by saying, "All NT uses of the OT, in some fashion, reflect a correlation between GH understanding of the OT text and the NT circumstances" (pp. 208-09). *Evangelical Hermeneutics* was intellectually stimulating, easy to read considering the subject matter, and presented a

fervent argument for a modified ISPA position; it is well worth a read by serious students of Scripture.

Gary E. Gilley, senior pastor, Southern View Chapel

Galatians: Exposition, Commentary, Application by Laurence M. Vance. Pensacola, FL: Vance Publications, 2010. 168 pp., paper, \$9.95.

Laurence M. Vance is an author and publisher who has produced more than a dozen books on topics as broad-ranged as Calvinism, the King James Bible, Greek nouns and prepositions, economics, and politics. In this latest work on Galatians, Vance attempted to produce a work that is one of a kind. In his own words,

How does one justify adding another volume to the raging historical stream of commentaries on Galatians? In reply it might tritely be said that this commentary is unique. *Galatians: Exposition, Commentary, Application* is uniquely conservative, evangelical, traditional, and, most of all, uniquely biblical [p. vii].

The commentary only exposit Galatians 1—2 but it makes some good points on these chapters. For instance, in discussing why circumcision was such a significant issue for the early church, the author explained that circumcision was permanent (p. 75). The Gentile who acquiesced to the Jewish pressure to be circumcised changed his body permanently and, quite possibly, did the same thing to his soul. Paul, therefore, encouraged the Gentiles to avoid this ritual entirely, if it was done with legalistic intentions.

While explaining the nature of Christ's death and the importance it has for the believer, Vance explained that Christ did not die because He broke the law but because sinners did (p. 126). Jesus was crucified to pay the price for sin and, therefore, one must be crucified with Christ and one must live in Christ (Gal 2:20). He is the sin-bearer and, if one would be forgiven and live a life that pleases God, one must do it through the life, death, and resurrection of the Son of God.

However, Vance's commentary has some inconsistencies also. For instance, in the preface, the author stated that his book is "uniquely conservative, evangelical, traditional, and most of all, uniquely biblical" (p. vii). Nevertheless, in the same preface, he stated:

Although traditional interpretations will not quickly be abandoned, this commentary will not be bound by tradition. As a consequence, some interpretations might be considered novel [p. ix].

It seems contradictory to state that the book is traditional and, conversely, that the book is not bound by tradition. Novelty and tradition do not go together. A book has to possess one or the other.

A second inconsistency in *Galatians* is the author's use and subsequent criticism of the New International Version of the Bible. In the introduction, he stated that the New International Version translation is employed "because of its widespread popularity" (p. xiii). However, within the pages of this work, Vance criticized this popular translation no less than 14 times (66, 76, 81, 83, 85, 89, 103, 107, 108, 118, 119, 121, 126, and 128)! One would think that if the New International Version were that bad, the author would choose another as his point of reference despite the popularity of the New International Version.

A third inconsistency in this commentary concerns some of the applications the author made. For example, in discussing how Paul and Barnabas were given the "right hand of fellowship" from the other apostles (Gal 2:9), Vance applied the passage as follows:

God obviously discriminates between hands. But that is not all. The Bible is full of distinctions: Israel vs. the nations (Joel 3:2), men vs. women (Lev. 27:3-4), adults vs. children (Lev. 27:3-6), righteous vs. wicked (Deut. 25:1) [p. 86].

It seems like a forced application to say that Paul's point in Galatians 2:9 was to demonstrate how God discriminates between hands. The more obvious application would be that Paul and Barnabas met the approval of the other apostles and that approval was shown in their being given the right hand of Christian fellowship.

In conclusion, *Galatians: Exposition, Commentary, Application* has some helpful insights into Paul's epistle and can be of use to Bible students. However, it has some inconsistencies that make an exhaustive study of the book difficult.

Jeremy Cagle, *intern*, Southern View Chapel

Good News for Anxious Christians, 10 Practical Things You Don't Have to Do by Phillip Cary. Grand Rapids: BrazosPress, 2010. 197pp., paper, \$14.99.

Cary, a philosophy professor at Eastern University, challenged what he called “the new evangelical theology,” which is “a set of supposedly practical ideas about transforming your life that gets in the way of believing the gospel” (p. x). The techniques that he addressed “all have the characteristic that they turn you away from external things like the word of God, Christ in the flesh, and the life of the church, in order to seek God in your heart, your life, your experience. Underneath a lot of talk about being personal with God, it’s a spirituality that actually leaves you alone with yourself” (p. xi).

With this premise in mind, Cary attacked ten “sacred cows” of the new evangelicalism. As a college professor, he constantly regarded these faulty ways of Christian living and thinking in his students. Young people have been reared in an evangelical environment that has perpetuated these myths for the entirety of their lives, and they are unaware that the matters Cary discussed are recent distortions of the truth and not part of historical Christianity. Cary wrote primarily for these students and his writing style reflects that; it is colloquial, repetitive, and relatively simple. Such a writing style might be irritating to older or more astute readers, but the content of the book is excellent.

Crucial propositions of the new evangelicalism include:

- God is speaking in your heart
- Your intuitions are the voice of the Holy Spirit
- Finding God’s individual will for your life
- You must examine your motivations
- Heart and head are different
- You have to be transformed all the time
- You always have to experience joy
- Sermons must be practical
- Experience is foundational to the Christian life

As can be seen, each of these challenges to evangelical thought would elicit much discussion. However, Cary addressed each topic well with clearly intended reasoning and biblical understanding. Cary’s work is helpful and would be a great study for a high school or college Bible study.

Gary E. Gilley, senior pastor, Southern View Chapel

Couples Who Pray: The Most Intimate Act between a Man and a Woman by Squire Rushnell and Louise DuArt. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007. 200 pp., paper, \$15.99.

As part of Thomas Nelson's BookSneeze book review program, this reviewer is allowed to choose books for the publisher to send him for reading and then review on his blog. *Couples Who Pray* seemed to be good for a married man to read with his wife, and as a resource to offer to other couples. Unfortunately, such expectations were wrong. To be honest, this reviewer was fairly disappointed with *Couples Who Pray*. It was not at all what had been expected. Indeed, there were several places where much more was desired.

- 1) *A significant disappointment was with the claim on the top of the cover: *Includes the 40 Day Prayer Challenge.** Unfortunately, the "40 Day Prayer Challenge" is little more than, "We challenge you to pray for 5 minutes a day for 40 days." *Did not need a book for that!*
- 2) *The whole premise of the book seems to be, "If you pray for just 5 minutes a day with your spouse, everything will just be better."* There is no question that prayer is important or that it can solve marriage and home problems, but it does not just occur magically. Of course, the authors do not claim that exactly, but the stories they recount of their famous connections seem to make that case.
- 3) *One other issue has to do with the plethora of stories.* It is not that this reviewer minds hearing stories from other people, especially people whom he admires or respects for one reason or another. *Couples Who Pray* is replete with stories (Denzel and Pauletta Washington, Scott and Tracie Hamilton, and Gavin and Patti MacLeod to name a few). However, when too many of them are placed together—one right after the other—it quickly becomes a bad late-night commercial: "These pills/steps/prayer times worked for us, and they can work for you, too!"

Couples Who Pray was not much of a book about prayer as much as a self-help book that happened to feature prayer; it is for this reason that the book is not recommended very well.

Daniel Goepfrich, *teaching pastor*, Oak Tree Community Church

Evil and the Justice of God by N. T. Wright. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006. 176 pp., cloth, \$28.00.

In this volume, Wright attempted to address three themes: the problem of evil in our contemporary culture in the light of Jewish and Christian traditions; a Christian perspective on the problem of evil, especially as it impacts the global empire, criminal justice and punishment, and war; and, the corporate as well as the individual response, especially in relationship to forgiveness (cf. p. 18). Wright stated the central point of his book as: “The ultimate answer to this aspect at least of the problem of evil—is not only that in the new world God himself will be beyond the reach of the moral blackmail of unresolved evil, but that we shall be as well” (p. 143). Wright took to task those in our culture who naively hope that human progress will ultimately abolish evil, or at least greatly diminish human wickedness. He felt the need to challenge those invested in a belief in this type of progress (pp. 16, 22-23, 135ff).

Evil and the Justice of God offers a good overview of how different worldviews understand evil (pp. 34-41), in addition to helpful insights into the Gospels’ accounts of how God deals with evil (cf. p. 93). However, Wright is a fervent believer in *Christus Victor* (the theory that the atonement was primarily a victory over the forces of evil) and this skews his understanding of how Christians are to address evil in our world today. In essence, he believes that because Christ has now come to His kingdom (p. 85) there is no need to wait for the second coming for believers can implement Christ’s victory over evil now (pp. 102, 128, 139). He wrote, “The call of the gospel is for the church to *implement* the victory of God in the world *through suffering love*” (emphasis in original) (p. 98). Wright offered five general ways to implement Christ’s victory: prayer, holiness, politics and empire, penal codes, and international disputes (pp. 118-25). Specifically, he called for forgiveness of the debt of poor countries (p. 147), transformation of criminal justice (p. 149), and new ways of handling international disputes (pp. 124-125). Leading the way toward these initiatives are individuals, such as Desmond Tutu (pp. 103, 134-35), Miroslav Volf, professor at Yale Divinity School (pp. 132-33), and L. Gregory Jones, dean of Duke Divinity School (pp. 133-34). As can be readily seen, these three men, while perhaps insightful, are hardly leaders in an understanding of biblical Christianity.

Wright apparently rejected a personal devil, regarding Satan primarily as an evil force (pp. 71-72, 81, 108-12). Nevertheless, this volume offers help in understanding Wright’s view of evil—and much of it is beneficial, but the book disappoints because it never really wrestles with

the issues nor does it articulate specifically, to any satisfying degree, what the church or individual believers are expected to do with evil in our world. More importantly Wright's understanding of *Christus Victor* emphasizes the results of the atonement as Christ's victory over political, cosmic, and evil forces, which, as a consequence, defines the Christian's mission as a confrontation with these same forces (pp. 81-83, 102, 109).

Gary E. Gilley, *senior pastor*, Southern View Chapel

Interpreting the Historical Books: An Exegetical Handbook by Robert B. Chisholm Jr. Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2006. 231 pp., paper, \$14.59.

Chisholm's volume is one of six in the "Handbooks for Old Testament Exegesis" series edited by David M. Howard Jr. The only others in the series presently available are on the Pentateuch and Psalms. The others, *Wisdom Literature*, *Prophets* and *Apocalyptic Literature*, await publication. The books are primarily intended to serve as textbooks for graduate level exegetical courses that assume a basic knowledge of the Hebrew language. However, any well-versed serious student of Scripture would benefit from these works. The book under review, written by the chair of the Old Testament department at Dallas Theological Seminary, is helpful on a number of levels. It serves as an excellent primer and introduction to the Old Testament books beginning with Joshua and concluding with Esther.

Chisholm opened with a long chapter explaining what narrative literature is including basic elements of a story, structural features, dialogue, the role of the narrator and plot, and concluded this chapter with some interpretive principles. Throughout, the author illustrated his points through use of biblical stories found mostly in the historical books. Illustration is followed by a quick examination of all twelve of the historical books found in Scripture, focusing mainly on the primary themes and purposes of the books. Special attention is also given to the establishment of Israel's monarchy and the life of David (pp. 104-12).

Chapter three provides the foundation for interpretation of the narrative texts and includes numerous recommendations of resources for understanding the text. Chapter four begins the interpreting process by dealing with the question, "What did the text mean to its implied readers in its literary historical-cultural context?" The author handled this question by providing a case study on the story of David and Goliath.

Chapter five moves into the proclamation of the narrative texts by addressing the question, “What does the text mean to contemporary readers who are part of the community of faith?” Proclamation is accomplished through a three-fold process: moving back into the world of the text and attempting to answer the question, “What did this text mean in its ancient Israelite context?” Secondly, discovering what theological principles emerge from a thematic analysis of the text. Then, finally moving back into the modern world, “we take the theologically nuanced thematic emphases of the text and develop homiletical trajectories from these theological vantage points” (p. 189). The final chapter handles the application of the text primarily by offering two examples: Elisha and the she-bears (pp. 199-211) and Ruth (pp. 211-25). The volume concludes with a glossary of specialized terms used throughout the book.

As a textbook on the Old Testament historical books, or as a teaching guide for interpreting narrative biblical literature, or as a resource for introduction to these books of Scripture, this reviewer would recommend *Interpreting the Historical Books* as a valuable guide for the serious pastor or Bible teacher.

Gary E. Gilley, senior pastor, Southern View Chapel

Israel and the Church by Ronald E. Diprose. Waynesboro, GA: Authentic Media, 2004. 281 pp., paper, \$16.99.

Diprose is academic dean at the Evangelical Italian Bible Institute in Rome, not a place one might expect a strong scholarly work supporting a premillennial view of Israel. Nevertheless, the subtitle of the book summarizes well the contents: “The Origin and Effects of Replacement Theology.”

Diprose actually addressed two concerns: replacement theology—the idea that the church has replaced Israel as the people of God—and what he called “the new majority view.” The majority of the book dealt with replacement theology while “the new majority” is regulated to an appendix. Diprose admitted that replacement theology has been the dominant view within the church since post-apostolic times until the middle of the 19th century (p. 30). However, he does not believe that this theology emerges from Scripture. Chapter two is devoted to a careful analysis of the pertinent Scriptures on the subject, and based especially on Romans 9—11, the author concluded that the New Testament does not teach replacement theology (cf. p. 67).

Diprose's opinion is that replacement theology was developed in the post-apostolic era (pp. 69-98) and was made possible through the combination of an increasing hatred of the Jews and Origen's allegorical method of interpretation. By 692, a council at Trullo decreed "Let no-one in the priestly order nor any layman eat the unleavened bread of the Jews, nor have any familiar intercourse with them, nor summon them in illness, nor receive medicine from them, nor bathe with them, but if anyone shall take in hand to do so, if he is a cleric, let him be deposed, but if a layman, let him be cut off" (p. 94).

The impact of replacement theology upon ecclesiology is the subject of chapter four. Once the church was identified as Israel, it followed that a Levitical model of the ecclesiastical order would be adopted, and thus the church's leadership model increasingly adopted Old Testament characteristics (pp. 106, 133-36). Such practice also had implications for the meaning of baptism and the Eucharist, which very early became means of salvation (pp. 111, 128).

Replacement theology also changed the eschatology of the church. Prior to Augustine, the church was mostly premillennial, but Augustine brought together the church and the kingdom in such a way as to make them virtually identical (p. 159). Augustine spiritualized Israel's blessings and promises in such a manner that it led to discrimination against Israel (pp. 164-67).

Israel and the Church concludes with a discussion of "the new majority view," which teaches that Israel has its own separate covenant and is thus exonerated of the need to believe in Jesus for salvation (pp. 171, 175-92). *Israel and the Church* is a well-reasoned, carefully researched polemic for a premillennial understanding of Scripture, and is enthusiastically recommended.

Gary E. Gilley, senior pastor, Southern View Chapel

The Life You've Always Wanted, Spiritual Disciplines for Ordinary People by John Ortberg. Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2002. 269 pp., cloth, \$18.99.

Ortberg, a teaching pastor at Willow Creek Community Church, published *The Life You've Always Wanted* in 1997 and expanded it in 2002. The book provides a good example of the style and content of the teaching at Willow Creek and its many clones. Concerning style, Ortberg is entertaining, interesting, and enjoyable. He freely used numerous stories and

illustrations that presented his understanding of the Christian life as inviting.

As for content much of what Ortberg offered is helpful, practical, and biblical. The book, however, is heavily inundated with the teachings, and teachers, of mysticism and Roman Catholic traditions and rituals. The authors for which he was dependent and quoted are a virtual “Who’s Who” of mystics both past and present:

Richard Foster (pp. 9, 81, 100, 112, 113, 143)
 Dallas Willard (pp. 10, 27, 35, 43, 52, 66, 92, 106)
 St. John of the Cross (pp. 36, 157)
 Thomas Kelly (pp. 76, 140, 150)
 Thomas Merton (pp. 85, 95, 96)
 Henri Nouwen (PP. 86, 99, 158, 161, 180)
 Julian of Norwich (p. 91)
 George Fox (p. 142)
 Ignatius of Loyola (p. 142)
 The Desert Fathers (pp. 171, 180)
 Francois Fenelon (p. 173)
 Madame Guyon (p. 186).

Moreover, there are assorted liberals and Roman Catholic leaders that he quoted positively including:

James Dunn (p. 31)
 G. K. Chesterton (p. 61)
 Mother Teresa (pp. 66-68)
 Carl Jung (p. 77)
 Tony Campolo (p. 104)
 Pope John XXIII (pp. 124, 207)
 Søren Kierkegaard (pp. 11, 175, 218).

Furthermore, as expected, since this book addresses “spiritual disciplines for ordinary people,” there is much borrowed from Roman Catholic tradition, especially from the mystical segment (pp. 44, 54, 98, 102, 131, 201).

Ortberg is interested in Christians being transformed into Christlikeness, which is highly commendable. However, he regarded the means of this transformation as the mystical practices that finds their origins not in Scripture but in the rituals and techniques developed mostly in early Roman Catholicism. Moreover, accepting and obeying supposed extrabiblical instructions from God are absolutely essential for spiritual

transformation (p. 143). According to the author, it is essential that the believer learn to discern the extrabiblical voice of God (pp. 140-54).

What good can be gleaned from *The Life You've Always Wanted* is destroyed by the false teachings and emphases that are predominant throughout. Ortberg did not direct his readers to Scripture but to Roman Catholic mysticism. Nevertheless, Joseph Stowell, former president of Moody Bible Institute and now president of Cornerstone University, could endorse the book on the backcover with these words: "John, in his winsome 'let's sit down and talk about this' style, has crafted a powerful convicting book on the process of spiritual transformation." Such an endorsement is an amazing indictment on the condition of evangelicalism today.

Gary E. Gilley, *senior pastor*, Southern View Chapel