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From the Editor's Desk

Dear Readers,

In theology, all issues, contentions, and conclusions are ultimately driven by *hermeneutics*. To resolve a particular theological dispute, Jesus once asked his interlocutor this question: “What is written in the Law? How do you read it?” (Luke 10:26). *How we read* the Bible is centrally important in the theological enterprise, for it is from Biblical interpretation that everything else flows.

In class, one of my students recently suggested that the issue around which Christian hermeneutics revolves is a question: *Does God really mean what He said?* I agreed with this student wholeheartedly, but quickly added that one could just as easily invert the question: *Has God really said what He means?* A positive answer to that question should drive us inexorably toward an exclusively literal-grammatical-historical hermeneutic, since all other interpretive approaches necessarily imply that God has not, in fact, said precisely what He meant.

The Theological Interpretation of Scripture (TIS) is a relative newcomer to the arena of Biblical interpretation. Its popularity can be seen in the explosion of monographs, commentaries, and reference works published from this perspective in the past few decades. In response to this movement's meteoric rise, the Council on Dispensational Hermeneutics devoted its 2023 meeting to critically assessing and interacting with TIS. Many of the articles in the present issue of *JMAT* were originally papers presented at that meeting. It is our hope and prayer that these articles will be helpful to you in sharpening your thinking about *how the Bible ought to be read*. What could be more important than that? It is, after all, only by reading the Bible that we can come to know and love our Creator, Savior, and King. “The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever” (Isa 40:8). *Sola Scriptura!*

David Gunn, Ph.D.
Lead Editor

A Better Hermeneutic?: A Comparison of TIS and LGH Approaches to Justification in Job

Jamie Bissmeyer

Key Words: Book of Job, Theological Interpretation, TIS, Hermeneutics, Christocentric Hermeneutic

Introduction

Theological Interpretation of Scripture (TIS)² is a somewhat new development in hermeneutics, and it is likely many pastors have never heard of it. However, it has grown in both its influence and its adherents, and today, TIS is behind some of the most debated topics in theological circles: the nature of inspiration, how to find meaning in the Scriptures, the New Testament use of the Old, the role of historical theology and tradition in exegesis, theology proper, and more. As such,

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² Hereafter referred to as TIS. Tim Meadowcroft notes that the terms TIS and "Theological Interpretation" (TI) are interchangeable. See Tim Meadowcroft, "Introduction: An Interpretive Conversation," in *Ears That Hear: Explorations in Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Joel B. Green and Tim Meadowcroft (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Phoenix P, 2013), 1n1. Craig Carter appears to use the terms *TIS*, *TI*, and *Classical Theological Interpretation* (CTI) interchangeably in Craig A. Carter, *Interpreting Scripture with the Great Tradition: Recovering the Genius of Premodern Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2018), 15, 248. Similarly, he appears to use the term *Trinitarian Classical Theism* not just as a definition but as a hermeneutical model with some similar characteristics to TIS. See Craig A. Carter, *Contemplating God with the Great Tradition: Recovering Trinitarian Classical Theism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2021), 41, 44–45, 51, 54, 82.

dispensationalists need to consider this approach to Scripture and its compatibility with biblical hermeneutics.

One article cannot examine all the relevant aspects of TIS, and dispensationalists need to test it through literal-grammatical-historical³ hermeneutics. So, this article will test TIS in one way, by examining its fruits—i.e., by what kind of conclusions its methodological and theological approaches result in. This article will examine the fruits of TIS by comparing TIS and LGH approaches to the book of Job and in particular, the concept of justification in the book. The objective is to show that, while TIS claims to have a more God-centered and spiritual hermeneutic that produces better theology, the straightforward LGH approach to Job both reflects the reality of the text of Scripture better and produces more profound theological conclusions—all the while remaining sensitive to its history of interpretation. Thus, dispensationalism should remain steadfast in its commitment to LGH hermeneutics and not be swayed by this new approach to Scripture.

A Brief Overview of TIS

TIS as a formal approach to Scripture⁴ began to develop and become popular in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries,⁵ with some of its main proponents now being Francis Watson, Stephen Fowl, Kevin Vanhoozer, and Daniel Treier.⁶ TIS adherents claim that LGH hermeneutics within Protestantism

³ Hereafter referred to as LGH.

⁴ Some dispensationalists have argued that all non-LGH approaches to Scripture are theological interpretation. This article uses TIS in a formal and technical sense, which later sections will define.

⁵ Vanhoozer noted in 2008 that TIS had become much more popular in recent years (Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “Introduction,” in *Theological Interpretation of the Old Testament: A Book-by-Book Survey*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Craig G. Bartholomew, and Daniel J. Treier [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008], 15).

⁶ Cf. Daniel J. Treier, “What Is Theological Interpretation?: An Ecclesiological Reduction,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 12, no. 2 (April 2010): 146; and Daniel J. Treier, *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Recovering a Christian Practice* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 11.

is the result of the influences of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment on the church,⁷ and that its objective is to “reverse the dominance of historical criticism” and “redefine the role of hermeneutics in theology.”⁸

What Is TIS?

TIS is difficult to formally define, which is partly intentional.⁹ It has common practices¹⁰ but its adherents claim no

⁷ Treier, *Introducing Theological Interpretation*, 12–13. He later implies that modern American evangelicalism is either (a) fundamentalist and not interested in academic engagement or (b) compromised by historical criticism (*ibid.*, 22–24). See also Stephen E. Fowl, “Theological Interpretation of Scripture and Its Future,” *Anglican Theological Review* 99, no. 4 (2017): 671–73; and Carter, *Interpreting Scripture with the Great Tradition*, 20–26.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 14. Tyra notes that TIS proponents unite around a positive view of Christian Platonism and a negative view of the grammatical aspects of the Renaissance and Reformation. See Steven W. Tyra, “‘Christ Has Come to Gather Together All the Creatures’: What a Sixteenth-Century Debate Teaches about the Theological Interpretation of Scripture,” *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 13, no. 1 (2019): 55. Fowl notes that the rise of TIS in the last twenty years is due to, in large part, a reaction to the failings of historical criticism and the fragmentation of biblical scholars. See Fowl, “Theological Interpretation of Scripture and Its Future,” 674.

⁹ Daniel Treier notes, “These conversational projects [TIS] need no creed other than the Nicene, certainly not one that imposes methodological or doctrinal uniformity to interest their participants as possible movements of God.” See Daniel J Treier, “What Is Theological Interpretation?: An Ecclesiological Reduction,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 12, no. 2 (April 2010): 159. He then concludes, “Some of the vagueness and variety associated with ‘theological interpretation of Scripture’ is inevitable and legitimate even necessary” (*ibid.*).

¹⁰ See Treier’s overview of practices common to TIS in *ibid.*, 149. John Poirier states that TIS proponents “all view the ‘true’ meaning of Scripture as derivative of its active role within the Church today. In other words, these approaches locate meaning in some (supposed) aspect of Scripture that transcends its (human) authors” (John C. Poirier, “‘Theological Interpretation’ and Its Contradistinctions,” *TynBul* 61, no. 1 [2010]: 106). And: “Viewed positively, ‘theological interpretation’ denotes

consensus on a definition¹¹ or methodology.¹² Even today, TIS proponents claim it can at best only be defined as a connection

a number of approaches for reading Scripture within the shadow of the Church” (ibid., 106).

¹¹ Meadowcroft noted in 2013 that no clear consensus had emerged on the characteristics of TIS and that there is no methodology for it—it is rather a “perspective or approach to Scripture.” See Meadowcroft, “Introduction: An Interpretive Conversation,” 1–2. Grant Taylor notes that the main writers on TIS still disagree on its fundamental characteristics. See Grant D Taylor, “The Continuation of ‘a New Exchange’: Theological Interpretation of Scripture in Retrospect and Prospect,” *Southeastern Theological Review* 4, no. 2 (2013): 129. In 2017, Eric Vanden Eykel surveyed the different definitions of TIS and concluded that the most that can be said is that matters of faith and doctrine do not impede exegesis. See Eric M. Vanden Eykel, “Beyond Historical Criticism?: Avery Dulles’s Model for the Theological Interpretation of Scripture,” *Heythrop Journal* 58, no. 2 (March 2017): 201.

¹² Kevin Vanhoozer states that TIS is “not an imposition of a theological system or confessional grid onto the biblical text” (Vanhoozer, “Introduction,” 16). He also claims that TIS does not impose a general hermeneutic onto the biblical text (ibid., 17). See also Brad East, “The Hermeneutics of Theological Interpretation: Holy Scripture, Biblical Scholarship and Historical Criticism,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 19, no. 1 (January 2017): 30. East concludes, “[TIS] lacks a common method. It is more a posture, a set of shared judgements about how to approach the Bible, prior to details of exegetical procedure” (ibid., 32). Taylor notes, “Theological interpretation of Scripture, therefore, is not a specific method for exegesis but rather a discussion and encouragement of a Christian practice of interpreting Scripture that can be characterized as ancient *and* modern” (Taylor, “Continuation of ‘a New Exchange,’” 129; italics original).

Nevertheless, TIS proponents are aware that one always brings a metaphysical system or worldview with them when interpreting Scripture. Craig Carter, for example, states that evangelicals have adopted Enlightenment metaphysics and opts for a Christian Platonic one. See Carter, *Interpreting Scripture with the Great Tradition*, 9–14. See also J. Todd Billings, *The Word of God for the People of God: An Entryway to the Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 9. Carter states in another work: “Like all the previous readers of the Bible, we read it from within the limitations of our own historical situation, using our best metaphysical presuppositions—that is, the ones we think

between exegesis and metaphysics,¹³ and other proponents champion its opacity.¹⁴ Still, a basic definition of TIS is given by Vanhoozer: “The theological interpretation of the Bible is characterized by a governing interest in God, the word and works of God, and by a governing intention to engage in what we might call ‘theological criticism.’”¹⁵ In addition, TIS is characterized by a dual-emphasis on the saving acts of the Triune God in history and viewing the church as, in some sense, having at least an equal authority as Scripture.¹⁶

However, Meadowcroft observes that simply calling TIS God-focused or just defining TIS as theological interpretation is not helpful, since any faith-based reading and theological method would affirm the same.¹⁷ One of the most robust definitions of

correspond as closely as possible to reality.” See Craig A. Carter, *Contemplating God with the Great Tradition: Recovering Trinitarian Classical Theism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2021), 91.

¹³ See Tyra, “‘Christ Has Come to Gather Together All the Creatures,’” 54; and the discussion in Elizabeth Mehlman and Russell Meek, “Sputtering at the Start Line?: Examining Trends in Theological Interpretation of Scripture through Three Theological Commentaries on Ecclesiastes,” *BBR* 31, no. 1 (2021): 19.

¹⁴ See Ephraim Radner, “‘I Contain Multitudes’: The Divine Basis for the Theological Interpretation of Scripture,” *Pro Ecclesia* 31, no. 2 (May 2022): 142–59.

¹⁵ Vanhoozer, “Introduction,” 21. Vanhoozer defines theological criticism as something that is God-focused and ensures the reader does not make an idol that is manufactured from interpretive communities (*ibid.*, 21–22).

¹⁶ E.g., Mark Alan Bowald, “The Character of Theological Interpretation of Scripture,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 12, no. 2 (April 2010): 167; and Brad East, “What Are the Standards of Excellence for Theological Interpretation of Scripture?,” *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 14, no. 2 (2020): 157.

¹⁷ Meadowcroft, “Introduction: An Interpretive Conversation,” 2–3. Poirier argues that TIS proponents illegitimately imply that anyone who does not buy into their definition of terms is not using a theological method. See Poirier, “‘Theological Interpretation’ and Its Contradistinctions,” 3. He later notes that TIS proponents often give generous, somewhat vague definitions of TIS that do not describe what TIS actually practices (*ibid.*, 109).

TIS comes from J. Todd Billings, but even his definition is not clearly distinct from something an LGH proponent could affirm.¹⁸ It seems as if TIS is designed to be somewhat subjective

Daniel Treier notes that pre-critical exegesis was not monolithic, but he believes it inevitably led towards an allegorical hermeneutic. He notes 6 convictions of patristic exegesis: (1) conviction of the present reality of God; (2) presumption of a unified narrative; (3) the Rule of Faith; (4) Scripture treated as diverse yet a unified whole; (5) Scriptural texts as having their own historical meaning yet meant for us; (6) the Scriptural text as mystery. See Treier, *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture*, 42. However, depending on the precise definition of the terms, evangelical and LGH proponents would be able to affirm all of these points without adopting an allegorical hermeneutic or TIS.

¹⁸ Billings: “The theological interpretation of Scripture is a multifaceted practice of a community of faith in reading the Bible as God’s instrument of self-revelation and saving fellowship.... It also involves patient attention to the biblical text, various forms of biblical criticism, and a critical engagement with the Christian tradition through history—in a variety of cultural contexts” (J. Todd Billings, *The Word of God for the People of God: An Entryway to the Theological Interpretation of Scripture* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010], xii). Billings later argues for interpreting Scripture in the context of the Triune God and the Spirit (*ibid.*, xiii), which any faithful evangelical would already affirm. East defines TIS in a similar way, such that LGH proponents, with qualification and proper definition of terms, could affirm. See East, “Hermeneutics of Theological Interpretation,” 31. He later gives theological presuppositions to TIS, the first two an LGH proponent could easily affirm (*ibid.*, 33–35).

Carter defines TIS as, “The method of interpretation is faith seeking understanding by means of philosophical meditation on special revelation, which corrects and supplements natural revelation” (Carter, *Interpreting Scripture with the Great Tradition*, 15). Carter’s statement could be affirmed by an LGH proponent except for the phrase “philosophical meditation,” which Carter does not clearly define. In a later work, Carter defines theological interpretation as “primarily a matter of two issues: determining the proper context in which the text should be read and understanding the nature of the text as revelation,” which again, a Christian LGH proponent could affirm. See Carter, *Contemplating God with the Great Tradition*, 85–86.

Treier asks questions that he believe TIS uniquely answers—but which any fair-minded LGH proponent could also affirm: “What would it take for the church to be a community welcoming creative, scholarly

while remaining within the theological and interpretative framework set for it by its understanding of the church's historic teaching on biblical doctrine.

The Interpretive Method of TIS

The unique characteristics of TIS can be better discerned by noting its influences and methodology—which it does indeed have, despite some TIS proponents bristling at the term *methodology*. TIS appears to be reliant on a neo-orthodox¹⁹ approach to Scripture. Murray Rae references Barth as a guiding influence in proper spiritual exegesis.²⁰ Other TIS adherents

engagement with the Bible and for the academy to foster or at least tolerate biblically informed theology along with faithful interpretation of biblical texts as Scripture? That is the question many are asking” (Treier, “What Is Theological Interpretation?,” 159). Fowl believes theological interpretation is best defined as a pre-modern use of theology in scriptural interpretation for the Christian life and argues that methodological considerations are not as important. See Stephen E. Fowl, “Theological Interpretation of Scripture and Its Future,” *Anglican Theological Review* 99, no. 4 (2017): 675–76.

¹⁹ To be sure, TIS proponents would claim that their hermeneutic was held by most of the church before the Enlightenment. However, later sections will show most TIS scholars trace the origins of their modern movement to Karl Barth and his popularization of neo-orthodoxy. A helpful definition of neo-orthodoxy is as follows: “A Protestant Christian reaction against 19th-cent. liberalism in theology. The reaction was not organized, and is particularly associated with K. Barth. Quintessentially, Neo-Orthodoxy rejected the liberal belief that it is possible to argue from experience to God, or, more extremely, that theology is disguised anthropology. For Neo-Orthodoxy, the word and revelation of God constitute a disjunctive act which cannot be subordinated to human judgement: this self-revelation is uniquely embodied in Jesus Christ, the Word of God made flesh.” See John Bowker, “Neo-Orthodoxy,” *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of World Religions* (Oxford University Press, 2003), <<https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780192800947.001.0001/acref-9780192800947-e-5154>>.

²⁰ Murray Rae, “Theological Interpretation and the Problem of Method,” in *Ears That Hear: Explorations in Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Joel B. Green and Tim Meadowcroft (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2013), 19. See also Carter, *Interpreting Scripture with the Great Tradition*, 40. There are times when Carter disagrees with

openly speak of Barth's seminal influence in providing the foundation of TIS²¹ and that "Barth serves as the 'motivation and model' for TIS."²²

TIS's neo-orthodox roots help explain why Vanhoozer can speak of "hearing" God's word in interpretation.²³ Similarly, Meadowcroft argues for hearing the voice of God through TIS and implies that TIS should lead to an "encountering" of God in Scripture that, in some way, impacts hermeneutics.²⁴ Rae speaks of God communicating "through" Scripture as the defining mark of TIS.²⁵

Given that TIS appears to be a modern version of neo-orthodoxy, its proponents also argue against "propositionalism"²⁶

Barth, though (e.g., Carter, *Contemplating God with the Great Tradition*, 65).

²¹ Treier notes Barth as being a forerunner to TIS and provides an extended, positive overview of Barth's life and theology, and his prime influence on TIS (Treier, *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture*, 11, 14–20). In another work he states that Barth is a "first starting point" of TIS (Treier, "What Is Theological Interpretation?" 149). Treier later attempts to minimize Barth's influence on modern proponents of TIS (ibid., 152). Grant Taylor states, "TIS represents what Karl Barth (1886–1968) believed was one of the primary goals of his *Church Dogmatics*: '... the initiation of a new exchange of views about the question of proper theology, the established knowledge of God, and the obedient service of God among men.'" See Taylor, "Continuation of 'a New Exchange,'" 117, citing Karl Barth, *Evangelical Theology: An Introduction*, trans. Grover Foley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963), xi–xii.

²² Taylor, "Continuation of 'a New Exchange,'" 122.

²³ Vanhoozer, "Introduction," 22.

²⁴ Meadowcroft, "Introduction: An Interpretive Conversation," 3, 3n9, 6. Similarly, Billings: "The word of God in Scripture is something that encounters us again and again; it surprises, confuses, and enlightens us because through Scripture we encounter the triune God Himself" (Billings, *Word of God for the People of God*, 8). Carter includes "philosophical meditation" upon special revelation as part of TIS. See Carter, *Interpreting Scripture with the Great Tradition*, 15.

²⁵ Rae, "Theological Interpretation and the Problem of Method," 12.

²⁶ This article uses the following functional definition for propositionalism: "Though a debated term, a proposition is a basic verbal unit of shareable information at the level of a word, phrase, or sentence.

as a way to read Scripture²⁷ and instead opt for more spiritual, experiential interpretive methods.²⁸ TIS does not totally deny that meaning exists within the Scriptures—nor that the grammar and context of a passage are unimportant²⁹—but adherents plainly

Propositionalism captures the overall ethos and range of activities whereby the biblically faithful expositor delivers verbal assertions of the truth to target audiences, with the conviction that transcendent truth is based on non-experiential, a priori knowledge. Propositional theology thus refers to an exegetically based methodology for organizing the biblical propositions into a theological system that is universal in its evangelistic and pedagogical application.” See Christopher Burnett, “Defining Biblical Missions Through ‘Missiological Propositional Assertion’” (Ph.D. diss., The Master’s Seminary, 2022), 36.

²⁷ Billings argues against translating Scripture “into propositional building blocks to fit into a blueprint” (Billings, *Word of God for the People of God*, xiv). He makes a similar argument regarding the interpretation of Scripture in *ibid.*, 5. And later: “To put it differently, Scripture passages are not wholly determinative on their own, fitting seamlessly as propositions into a preestablished system of theology” (*ibid.*, 8). Billings later admits, though, that one cannot leave their theological presuppositions or “maps” behind even if such maps do not tell us everything” (*ibid.*, 9). Similarly, Treier casts Carl Henry’s defense of propositionalism in a negative light. See Treier, “What Is Theological Interpretation?,” 152n31. However, D. A. Carson notes that TIS proponents swipe at the concept of propositions when no one disagrees that the Bible is more than just propositions. See D. A. Carson, “Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Yes, But...,” in *Theological Commentary: Evangelical Perspectives*, ed. R. Michael Allen (London: T&T Clark, 2011), 206.

²⁸ Meadowcroft: “From a methodological perspective, notable within the ‘rule of faith’ is the notion of ‘spiritual exegesis,’ which contributes to the presupposition with which this volume is working: that the Bible is read in order that the voice of God may be heard” (Meadowcroft, “Introduction: An Interpretive Conversation,” 6).

²⁹ Carter has a helpful overview of the process of interpretation of Scripture, most of which a Christian LGH proponent could agree with, until he comes to the section on the canonical context of a book and the New Testament’s use of the Old, where he departs into using TIS language. See Carter, *Contemplating God with the Great Tradition*, 91–102. Rae provides an example of TIS exegesis on the Parable of the Sower in Mark, and while at times he remarks upon the grammar and context of

state that meaning is indeterminate³⁰ and that one must go beyond the words of Scripture and into an encounter with God to achieve the true goal of God's word, spiritual exegesis.³¹ They often opt

the passage in helpful ways, at other times he admits that a point he is arguing "is undoubtedly an extrapolation beyond the text of Mark 4:17" (Rae, "Theological Interpretation and the Problem of Method," 21).

³⁰ Brad East argues for, in principle, an infinite number of readings within the framework of one's ecclesiology and faith. He notes that there are some things the Scripture does not mean, but he does not explain how to discover such things, besides anything that goes beyond tradition. He then concludes, "The task of reading Scripture is therefore at once urgent, in the face of the community's business, and joyful, unburdened by the need to excavate 'the right' meaning of the text and instead compelled in gladness and delight to descend ever deeper into the inexhaustible depths of God's word. Repurposing St. Augustine's remark about love, we might sum up the church's premodern hermeneutics as: Believe, and read as you please" (East, "What Are the Standards of Excellence for Theological Interpretation of Scripture?," 158). In a separate article, East similarly states: "[TIS] is, second, a hermeneutic that, for theological and not only hermeneutical reasons, understands that the 'meaning' of scriptural texts is not and cannot be limited, much less identical, to the texts' 'original' meaning or to the human authors' intent" (East, "Hermeneutics of Theological Interpretation," 38). East is aware that his view undermines authorial intent but argues that the Scriptures, being inspired by the Spirit, are a unique hermeneutical case (*ibid.*, 39). See also Bowald, "Character of Theological Interpretation of Scripture," 168. Fowl seems to approve of any theological interpretation and sees scripture as aiding humanity "in their progress toward their ultimate end in God." See Fowl, "Theological Interpretation of Scripture and Its Future," 677. See also again East, "Hermeneutics of Theological Interpretation," 36.

³¹ Rae speaks of a "spiritual meaning" of the text and defines it as follows: "A meaning that is not divorced from the literal and historical meaning, but that, instead, properly illuminates the literal sense and historical reference of the text" (*ibid.*, 19). Treier connects an objective reading of Scripture to historical criticism. See Treier, *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture*, 14. He later claims, "The evangelical embrace of modernity runs deeper, in the distinction between a text's 'meaning' as single and determinate and its 'significance' or 'application' as multiple and context-sensitive" (*ibid.*, 24). He then criticizes evangelicals for adopting observations made by E. D. Hirsch in his work, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven, CT: Yale U P, 1967) and

notes Hirsch's later change in views (Treier, *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture*, 24n34). Treier then claims that evangelicals who believe in single-meaning multiple-application are getting their presuppositions from the academy (ibid., 24). He does not explain how it is "plundering the Egyptians" when Origen and Augustine imbibe Greek philosophy (cf. ibid., 13), but an "embrace of modernity" when evangelicals affirm linguistic observations made by a secularist.

Similarly, Carter admits that the church fathers used reading techniques originally meant for Roman and Greek classics, but argues that they focused "on the question of what God means to say through the text." See Carter, *Interpreting Scripture with the Great Tradition*, 247. Carter also connects single-meaning hermeneutics to historical criticism and speaks of "ways" of reading Scripture as a spiritual discipline in which dogma and metaphysics impacts exegesis (ibid., 10, 13). He also casts the quest for authorial intent as largely a product of E. D. Hirsch (ibid., 278) and implies that the meaning of Scripture for the original audience and the meaning for the present Christian audience are different (Carter, *Contemplating God with the Great Tradition*, 103). Earlier, Carter summarizes his point: "Trinitarian classical theism is a restatement of the plain sense of the text, that is, of what the text explicitly says plus what can be deduced from its explicit meaning. And second ... trinitarian classical theism not only arises out of the text but also enables us to penetrate more deeply into the *res* of the text, that is, the subject matter of the text, which is God" (ibid., 86).

Vanhoozer makes the argument that spiritual exegesis is actually an extension of the literal meaning of the text, not a different meaning altogether. See Kevin J Vanhoozer, "'Ascending the Mountain, Singing the Rock: Biblical Interpretation Earthed, Typed, and Transfigured,'" *Modern Theology* 28, no. 4 (October 2012): 792. What Vanhoozer is arguing for appears to be similar to the *sensus plenior* hermeneutical model, which argues in part that the NT expands upon the original meaning of the OT (cf. Raymond E. Brown, *The "Sensus Plenior" of Sacred Scripture* [Baltimore, MD: St. Mary's U P, 1955], 92. Cited in Kit Barker, "Speech Act Theory, Dual Authorship, and Canonical Hermeneutics: Making Sense of *Sensus Plenior*," *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 3, no. 2 [2009]: 229). Vanhoozer's definition of the literal meaning of a text does not allow the term *literal* to have a unique meaning in hermeneutics. Allowing the term *literal* to have a unique definition focuses hermeneutics on a quest for authorial intent and single meaning, which are at odds with most TIS proponents. Carter argues that TIS produces a more faithful reading to the literal sense of the biblical text, although he states that without a

for a christological/Christocentric hermeneutic³² to accomplish such goals,³³ which itself often sees the literal meaning or authorial intent of an OT text as insufficient for Christian exegesis.³⁴

Given the vague definitions of TIS and its undermining of determinate meaning and authorial intent in Scripture, its adherents appear to lean towards an odd combination to guide their interpretation of Scripture—a combination of neo-

metaphysical framework to bring to the text, its literal meaning is obscure (Carter, *Contemplating God with the Great Tradition*, 86).

³² A Christocentric hermeneutic seeks to connect every biblical text's meaning directly to Christ in some way, usually by reading the NT backward into the OT. See the discussions in J. Anthony Dupree, "A Case for a Christocentric Hermeneutic of the Old Testament" (M.A. Thesis, David Lipscomb University, 1995), 5–6; Graeme Goldsworthy, *Christ-Centered Biblical Theology: Hermeneutical Foundations and Principles* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 150; Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ From the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 52; Alan G. Padgett, "The Canonical Sense of Scripture: Trinitarian or Christocentric?," *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 45, no. 1 (2006): 37; and David Murray, *Jesus On Every Page: 10 Simple Ways to Seek and Find Christ in the Old Testament* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2013), 15.

³³ Carter, quoting Vanhoozer, defines theological interpretation christologically: "It is not that a new meaning has been added, but rather that the original meaning has finally achieved its Christological *telos*... The typological meaning *is* the literal meaning of the discourse when viewed in canonical, which is to say redemptive-historical context." See Vanhoozer, "Ascending the Mountain, Singing the Rock," 792; cited in Carter, *Interpreting Scripture with the Great Tradition*, 248. See also Meadowcroft, "Introduction: An Interpretive Conversation," 5–6. East argues that "Christ remains the terminus—the heart, the *res*, the voice—of Scripture, in its totality and in all of its parts" (East, "What Are the Standards of Excellence for Theological Interpretation of Scripture?," 162). See also East, "Hermeneutics of Theological Interpretation," 41.

³⁴ Dupree, "Case for a Christocentric Hermeneutic of the Old Testament," 5; Padgett, "The Canonical Sense of Scripture," 37; Bruce K. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 85.

orthodoxy and postmodernism,³⁵ the latter term having an expanded meaning: that TIS relies on a broadly ecumenical³⁶

³⁵ East admits that TIS entails that meaning of a text is dependent on the context of its reception and that TIS is a form of reader response theory. The questions a Christian are allowed to ask are then restricted to what the interpretive tradition of the church community allows. See “Hermeneutics of Theological Interpretation,” 35. F. David Farnell defines postmodernism as follows: “It rejects modernism and its confidence in ‘knowing,’ and embraces a relativistic view that truth varies depending upon bias, culture, and personal experience. Simply put, postmodernism claims that individuals or groups discover truth through their own subjective perceptions.” See F. David Farnell, “Postmodernism and the Gospels: Dancing on the Edge of Disaster,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 31, no. 2 (2020): 305. For a discussion on the history of postmodernism and its impact on Christian scholarship, along with its denial of LGH hermeneutics and propositional revelation, see *ibid.*, 305–18; see also Craig Bartholomew, “Post/Late? Modernity as the Context for Christian Scholarship Today,” *Themelios* 22, no. 2 (January 1997): 25–39.

³⁶ Vanhoozer simply states that we must “learn from the whole Body of Christ” (Vanhoozer, “Introduction,” 26). Treier defines all of pre-Reformation exegesis as Catholic and uses Catholic and Roman Catholic interchangeably (Treier, *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture*, 13, 25n37). Carter denies that the magisterium of Roman Catholicism is heresy and says, “There is room for discussion about what the proper role of the bishop of Rome might be” (Carter, *Interpreting Scripture with the Great Tradition*, 254). Treier acknowledges the Catholic claim to the church being central to hermeneutics, but does not deny that claim, only ambiguously saying, “Yet Protestants such as myself must use different descriptions as well” (Treier, *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture*, 25). In another place, Treier lumps Catholics and Protestants together as fighting the same battle against historical criticism, and claims that Catholics are more open to TIS (*ibid.*, 20–21, 30–31). In an article on TIS, Treier seems to push for an ecumenical partnership with all of Christendom as they practice TIS: “Its [TIS] coherence rests not on easily identifiable points of uniformity but instead on an opportune form of scholarly ecumenism” (Treier, “What Is Theological Interpretation?,” 160). And later: “Whatever its inevitable blind spots, then, theological interpretation of Scripture has great potential to galvanize fresh energy among the church’s teachers for contemplating the Triune God of the Scriptures, thereby contributing with verve to the renewal of intellectual life—and lively ecumenical relationships!—in the

community-based hermeneutic rooted in traditionalism.³⁷ Treier concludes, after a section on the necessity of an ecclesial center of interpretation, that TIS is “a series of loosely ‘postmodern’ riffs on Barth-inspired themes.”³⁸ The postmodern flavor of TIS allows it to maintain a community-based hermeneutic that sees meaning as primarily located in the historic community of Christendom, not the Scriptures.

Inspiration and TIS

TIS also has implications for the classic Protestant doctrine of inspiration that seem to minimize the influence of the human author of Scripture in interpretation and give the divine author a separate role in giving meaning—and these implications need to

West and beyond” (ibid., 161). East seems to affirm a Roman Catholic view of Scripture when he states, “One cannot know what Scripture is without inquiring into what the church is, and vice versa. Nor can an adequate theology of Scripture be set forth without a reciprocally related, mutually determining theology of the church” (East, “What Are the Standards of Excellence for Theological Interpretation of Scripture?,” 152).

³⁷ A version of TIS which emphasizes tradition and Christian Platonism is the so-called “Great Tradition,” which emphasizes reading Scripture in line with how its adherents perceive certain theological doctrines have developed in church history. For definition and discussion see Carter, *Interpreting Scripture with the Great Tradition*, 37. Meadowcroft challenges the “Western Epistemology of doubt” by arguing both for a christological and “Rule of Faith” reading of Scripture. Meadowcroft defines “Rule of Faith” as “the guiding truths for which the early church fathers and the councils struggled over the first five to eight centuries of our era” (Meadowcroft, “Introduction: An Interpretive Conversation,” 6).

³⁸ Treier, “What Is Theological Interpretation?,” 152. Later Treier states that TIS is a “... mix of 'evangelical' and 'catholic' elements tamed by Barthian and postmodern whips” (ibid., 156). These statements are in addition to the Yale school of post-liberalism mentioned by Treier as being a key influence on TIS (ibid., 156–58). In yet another place Treier states, “We enact our forms of interpretative self-offering as members of an inescapable variety of communal traditions, which are Scripture-shaped lenses through which we again examine the texts” (ibid., 160).

be spelled out by the proponents of TIS.³⁹ For example, Vanhoozer states, “Theological assumptions about God’s involvement with the production of Scripture play an important role in how interpreters take or construe the text and in how they deal with thematic developments as well as apparent historical inconsistencies.”⁴⁰ What those assumptions are, and what role they take in interpretation, is not explained.⁴¹ Meadowcroft appears to imply that hearing the voice of God is in some way more authoritative than the Scriptures themselves.⁴² Treier appears to opt for a Barthian-like separation of the biblical text from the divine word,⁴³ and casts the biblical doctrine of inerrancy, as formulated in the Chicago Statement of 1978, as a

³⁹ Treier notes that differing views of the doctrine of Scripture are arguably the root cause of the debates between TIS and non-TIS proponents and opts for understanding Scripture through an ecclesial lens. See Treier, “What Is Theological Interpretation?,” 153–54. Taylor observes, “A diverse range of views on the nature of Scripture and its sufficiency for theology exists in TIS” (Taylor, “The Continuation of ‘a New Exchange,’” 131). Carter implies that John Calvin overemphasized human authorial intent and that seeking human authorial intent is for secularism. He concludes, “That does not mean his [E. D. Hirsch’s] concern for respecting authorial intention cannot be shared by Calvin or us, but it does mean that theological hermeneutics must give careful consideration to the question of who the author is whose intention must be respected” (Carter, *Interpreting Scripture with the Great Tradition*, 246). See a similar discussion in Carter, *ibid.*, 90–91.

⁴⁰ Vanhoozer, “Introduction,” 23.

⁴¹ Vanhoozer later states, “No one denomination, school of interpretation, or hermeneutical approach has a monopoly on reading the Bible for the word of God” (*ibid.*, 26). However, Vanhoozer’s statement carries assumptions about the nature of inspiration and doctrine that are also not explained. Why does no hermeneutical approach have a monopoly on reading the Bible? Are approaches, even contradictory ones, equally right, and if so, what does that imply about how God produced the Scriptures?

⁴² He states that TIS “takes into account the self-perception of Scripture that it conveys and signposts the living voice of God, and attempts to read and interpret in those terms” (Meadowcroft, “Introduction: An Interpretive Conversation,” 4).

⁴³ Treier, “What Is Theological Interpretation?,” 154.

negative reaction to Barth.⁴⁴ Taylor concludes that TIS proponents do not agree on whether the Scripture is sufficient within itself to do theology.⁴⁵ Since TIS minimizes the words and human authorship of Scripture as it relates to meaning, its proponents do not always engage directly with the text and exegesis of the Bible.⁴⁶

Conclusions on TIS

TIS proponents have not provided clear guidelines for what parts of secular/pagan worldviews to adopt, outside of a marked appreciation for the spiritualizing tendencies of Platonism. It is also not clear about how to relate to other branches of Christendom that teach a false gospel or have differing views regarding the nature of the church.⁴⁷ Most importantly, it is not clear that TIS accomplishes arguably its main stated goal: to retrieve biblical interpretation from historical criticism.⁴⁸ Along

⁴⁴ Ibid, 152n31.

⁴⁵ Taylor, "Continuation of 'a New Exchange,'" 133.

⁴⁶ Rae, "Theological Interpretation and the Problem of Method," 11–12. Carson notes that TIS often goes far beyond anything that the Scripture hints at (Carson, "Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Yes, But ...," 205).

⁴⁷ For example, Carter states that the early community of readers (the church) is what canonized Scripture, raising questions regarding the relationship of the church to Scripture. See Carter, *Contemplating God with the Great Tradition*, 87. Treier seems to plainly state that a professing Christian can practice TIS regardless of the denomination or group they are a part of: "All they need are enough others who are recognizably like-minded about sustaining a 'generous orthodoxy' in the post-Christian West which does not require giving up primary ecclesiastical identities, denominational or otherwise" (Treier, "What Is Theological Interpretation?," 159). He earlier states that TIS is indebted to Roman Catholic Scholarship (ibid., 150).

⁴⁸ Carter notes that an unresolved issue within TIS is its relationship to historical criticism (Carter, *Interpreting Scripture with the Great Tradition*, 41–42). Poirier argues, "The term 'theological interpretation' is problematic because it implies that historical criticism is not 'theological interpretation,' even when the latter is aimed at elucidating a clearly theological passage (e.g., in Paul), and when it is undertaken specifically for theological purposes (Poirier, "'Theological Interpretation' and Its Contradistinctions,"

these lines, TIS proponents need to answer to what extent historical elements factor into exegesis and theology. If the goal of TIS is having a spiritual encounter with God, it would appear to undermine the necessity for historical Scriptural events to be literal.⁴⁹

Another question regards how adherents of TIS view the relationship between Scripture and the church. Many TIS writers are ambiguous about the ability of Christians to interpret the

110). Taylor notes Barth's seminal influence on TIS (as noted above) and admits that Barth held to most of the historical-critical conclusions of his day (Taylor, "The Continuation of 'a New Exchange,'" 117). See also the example of TIS and historical-criticism in Cory Barnes, "Ancient Near Eastern Context and Theological Interpretation of Scripture: An Exploration in Daniel 7:1–14," *JETS* 65, no. 2 (June 2022): 307–17.

Eric Vanden Eykel positively references Catholic scholar Avery Dulles's use of TIS and historical criticism together. Dulles argues that historical criticism still has a place in biblical studies as a historical discipline that can aid theology but is not itself theological (Vanden Eykel, "Beyond Historical Criticism?," 196, 198). Vanden Eykel later notes that the historical-critical method can be used as a "neutral" tool alongside all the presuppositions of a TIS proponent (*ibid.*, 200). Dulles then argues that exegesis uses historical criticism, while the fuller meaning (*sensus plenior*) of the text can only be found through what is essentially TIS (*ibid.*, 202). Fowl states that historical criticism is not opposed to TIS and concludes, "Theological interpreters can and should make use of historical, literary, social scientific, and all other types of biblical interpretation as long as they understand that such work needs to be subsidiary to the task of keeping theological concerns primary" (Fowl, "Theological Interpretation of Scripture and Its Future," 678–79). In this way, interpreters "plunder the Egyptians" (*ibid.*, 679).

⁴⁹ Brad East seems to assume that the Scriptures are the product of a long history of editing, redactions, compositions, etc. as it formed into its current state, and then concludes, "... these innumerable distributed actions of the one people of God are, at one and the same time, the work of the Holy Spirit to confect the jots and titles of the prophets and apostles to be, for us, the word of the Lord" (East, "What Are the Standards of Excellence for Theological Interpretation of Scripture?," 152). To an extent, it appears as if TIS and historical criticism share the belief that the writers of Scripture were largely influenced by the culture around them and that one must look behind the propositions of Scripture to find the true meaning of the text.

Scriptures apart from the guiding traditions and teachings of the church.⁵⁰ Some are more straightforward in that they believe the church and its teachings have greater authority than the Scriptures.⁵¹

As seen above, many aspects of TIS need examining from a dispensational perspective. But once again, defining TIS as a God-centered and Christian hermeneutic that submits to Scripture and honors tradition is not helpful, since almost all faithful Christians who are non-TIS would make the same claims about their own hermeneutic.⁵² LGH proponents need to push

⁵⁰ Rae argues that Scripture must be read in the context of the community of the church as the primary locus of interpretation, but then backtracks some and argues that one should still allow the Spirit to blow where it wills. See Rae, “Theological Interpretation and the Problem of Method,” 20. East notes that one’s standard of excellence in TIS depends on one’s community of interpretation and that the fundamental presupposition one should have is the community of the church (East, “What Are the Standards of Excellence for Theological Interpretation of Scripture?,” 154). The question of the relationship between TIS and the church raises the related issue of TIS proponents’ interpretation of church history through a singular lens—that all pre-Reformation, pre-Enlightenment Christians practiced a form of TIS and were not concerned with the human authorship of the Scriptures or its literal meaning (cf. Poirier, “‘Theological Interpretation’ and Its Contradistinctions,” 111).

⁵¹ So East, who concludes, “The Protestant principle of *sola scriptura*, for example, is prone to mischaracterizing this priority, given the (rightful) primacy it accords Scripture via the (misleading) solitariness or self-sufficiency it invariably implies” (East, “What Are the Standards of Excellence for Theological Interpretation of Scripture?,” 156). He later argues, “High doctrines of Scripture, funded by overweening emphasis on Scripture’s authority, have a tendency to mask or occlude this fact [Scripture’s secondary status to the church]... the church, by Christ’s efficacious word, is both destined to become, and called to be, *teleios*” (ibid., 157). In another article, East appears to describe a Roman Catholic understanding of how the canon of Scripture developed. See East, “Hermeneutics of Theological Interpretation,” 36.

⁵² For example, Abner Chou argues for a hermeneutic of obedience in an article critiquing a christological hermeneutic. See Abner Chou, “A Hermeneutical Evaluation of the Christocentric Hermeneutic,” *Master’s Seminary Journal* 27, no. 2 (Fall 2016): 138. Fowl claims the dominance of historical criticism meant that one could not be both a biblical scholar

back against that narrative that TIS advocates portray about their own position and ask for more clarity from them⁵³—while affirming that LGH hermeneutics is actually more Christ-centered and still interacts with church history.⁵⁴

So, what is one way to test the differences between TIS and LGH? Vanhoozer concludes about TIS: “The strongest claim to be made for theological interpretation is that only such reading ultimately does justice to the subject matter of the text itself.”⁵⁵ Similarly, John Webster argues, “The most fruitful way of engaging in Theological Interpretation of Scripture is to do it.”⁵⁶ TIS claims to produce more faithful and richer theology by minimizing grammatical, historical, and literary contexts, and focusing on a Christian’s spiritual experience in reading the text.

and a theologian—but LGH proponents would argue one can indeed be both without resorting to theological interpretation. See Fowl, “Theological Interpretation of Scripture and Its Future,” 673.

⁵³ Carson concludes, “At this moment, however, I am inclined to think that what is most valuable in TIS (and much is), is not new; what is new in TIS varies from ambiguous to mistaken, depending on the theological location of the interpreter” (Carson, “Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Yes, But ...,” 207).

⁵⁴ Tyra notes about the Reformer Martin Bucer: “Far from divorcing history from theology, Bucer saw rigorous attention to languages and context as the way to the Bible’s center, Jesus Christ. He sharply ‘limited the use of allegory’ precisely because it diverted interpreters all too often from this christological path” (Tyra, “‘Christ Has Come to Gather Together All the Creatures,’” 56). See also *ibid.*, 57. Tyra then surveys major interpreters such as Origen, Augustine, and Aquinas on Romans 8:19–22 and concludes that they sorely misread the text and lowered creation to merely an instrument for humans (*ibid.*, 72–75).

⁵⁵ Vanhoozer, “Introduction,” 22. Other authors imply that the practical heart of TIS is the New Testament’s use of the Old, as they argue that the NT authors change or expand the original meaning of the OT passages and that such an interpretation is exegetically justified. See Billings, *Word of God for the People of God*, 19; and Carter, *Interpreting Scripture with the Great Tradition*, 4–5, 14.

⁵⁶ John Webster, *The Domain of the Word: Scripture and Theological Reason* (New York: T&T Clark, 2012), 30. Cited in Brad East, “What Are the Standards of Excellence for Theological Interpretation of Scripture?,” 150.

Even if there is much within TIS that needs to be further defined and explained, setting side-by-side the conclusion of TIS and LGH approaches to Job is one way to see the differences between the approaches. The fruits of TIS and LGH approaches to Job can be compared then, to reveal which hermeneutic or methodology is both more faithful to Scripture and produces richer, more Christ-centered theology.

TIS in Job

Regarding an explicitly TIS approach to Job, Wilson argues, “The intellectual or ideological setting of the book is more significant than its historical setting.”⁵⁷ Nevertheless, Wilson makes some helpful observations, noting that the book posits that retribution is not the only system of justice God uses and that Job connects to other passages in the OT⁵⁸ Wilson notes the contentious issues in the book of Job and asks if and how it points to Christ, which are all valid questions.⁵⁹ In relationship to the NT, Wilson, for the most part, argues that it either affirms or expands upon what Job says.⁶⁰

As demonstrated above, the parameters of TIS are broad and allow for virtually any interpretation that accords with pre-Enlightenment historical theology. If one were to assume the arguments of TIS, that the post-apostolic and patristic fathers practiced TIS, one could say that they generally viewed Job as a model of righteous, patient suffering⁶¹ and interpreted the book

⁵⁷ Lindsay Wilson, “Job,” in *Theological Interpretation of the Old Testament: A Book-by-Book Survey*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Craig G Bartholomew, and Daniel J. Treier (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 152.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 153.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 150.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 154–55.

⁶¹ These fathers include Clement of Rome (AD 35–99), Cyprian (AD 200–58), Chrysostom (AD 347–407), Ambrose (AD 337/339–397), and Pope Gregory (AD 540–604), whose *Moralia in Job* was the most used commentary on Job for the next 1000 years. See Tremper Longman III, *Job*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 41–42. See also Donald K. Berry, *An Introduction to Wisdom and Poetry of the Old Testament* (Nashville: B & H, 1995), 68–69. Jerome (AD 347–420) had a positive but more complex view of Job

allegorically.⁶² Passages in Job were used by the early church to develop a doctrine of original sin.⁶³

Some pre-Reformation theologians, however, interpreted Job literally.⁶⁴ In addition, Luther and Calvin interpreted Job literally and did not employ a christological hermeneutic often.⁶⁵ Calvin

because of his work with the MT (ibid., 42). See also Stephen Vicchio, *Job in the Ancient World, The Image of the Biblical Job: A History 1* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 152, 159); and Vicchio, *The Book of Job: A History of Interpretation and a Commentary* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2020), 4. However, Theodore of Mopsuestia thought Job was written late and was not an overall pious person (cf. Berry, *Introduction to Wisdom and Poetry of the Old Testament*, 70). Berry also argues that Augustine referred to Job to indicate the pervasiveness of sin even in the most righteous people (ibid.).

⁶² The term *allegory* is difficult to define precisely (cf. Jon Whitman, *Interpretation and Allegory: Antiquity to the Modern Period* [Boston: Brill, 2003], 5–6). A basic definition would be “an interpretive method that goes beyond the normal sense of the text.” See Leroy Andrew Huizenga, “The Old Testament in the New, Intertextuality and Allegory,” *JSNT* 38, no. 1 (September 2015): 18.

⁶³ See Kenneth B. Steinhauser, “Job in Patristic Commentaries and Theological Works,” in *A Companion to Job in the Middle Ages*, ed. Franklin T. Harkins and Aaron Canty, Brill’s Companions to the Christian Tradition 73 (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2017), 62–63. Job 14:1–3 in particular was often used by the early church to argue for a doctrine of original sin. See David J. A. Clines, *Job 1–20*, vol. 17, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1989), 326; and C. L. Seow, *Job 1–21: Interpretation and Commentary*, vol. 1, Illuminations (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 670.

⁶⁴ E.g., Ambrose (cf. Judith R. Baskin, “Job as Moral Exemplar in Ambrose,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 35, no. 3 [September 1981]: 223). For a medieval example of a non-typological approach to Job, see Aaron Canty, “Nicholas of Lyra’s Literal Commentary on Job,” in *A Companion to Job in the Middle Ages*, ed. Franklin T. Harkins and Aaron Canty, Brill’s Companions to the Christian Tradition 73 (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2017), 229. See also Lindsay Wilson’s discussion on Thomas Aquinas and Maimonides on Job in Lindsay Wilson, *Job, Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 11–12.

⁶⁵ Vicchio, *Job in the Medieval World, The Image of the Biblical Job: A History 2* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 182. See also Susan E. Schreiner, *Where Shall Wisdom Be Found?: Calvin’s Exegesis of Job from*

saw Job as a patient sufferer, whereas Luther thought that Job suffered because he would sin later on.⁶⁶

A Note on the Historical-Critical Method on Job

Despite all that has been said about TIS, before moving to the next sections of this article it is important to affirm that TIS proponents are not wrong to argue that historical criticism has, at its heart, a non-biblical view of Scripture that is more concerned with answering hypothetical questions behind the Scriptures than what the actual biblical text contains.⁶⁷ Moreover, the rise of historical criticism did indeed prevent further theological inquiry into the book of Job,⁶⁸ and many conclusions theologians provided often contradicted each other.⁶⁹

Medieval and Modern Perspectives (Chicago: University of Chicago P, 1994), 91.

⁶⁶ Wilson, *Job*, 2015, 12.

⁶⁷ This is not to say that a Christian cannot, rightly or wrongly, believe in some aspect of historical development of Scripture into its final, canonical form, all the while believing he can still gain rich, God-centered theology from it. In this article and evidently in most TIS usages, the terms *historical criticism* and the *historical-critical method* refer to a whole way of approaching the Scriptures that takes a skeptical view towards the claims of Scripture—especially the historical ones—and seeks to find answers “behind the text” for questions regarding date of composition, authorship and text transmission. See Eugene H. Merrill’s discussion in Eugene H. Merrill, “The Development of the Historical Critical Method,” in *The World and the Word: An Introduction to the Old Testament*, by Eugene H. Merrill, Mark F. Rooper, and Michael A. Grisanti (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2011), 158–79. For further discussion see Vicchio, *Job in the Modern World*, 153.

⁶⁸ For a list of German historical-critical scholars who have written on Job, see Vicchio, *Job in the Modern World*, The Image of the Biblical Job, 3:154–57. See *ibid.*, 159–63 for discussion on nineteenth century French and English historical-critical views on Job. See Markus Witte, *Hiobs viele Gesichter: Studien zur Komposition, Tradition und frühen Rezeption des Hiobbuches*, Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments 267 (Göttingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2018), 13–36, for a list of modern critical sources on the book of Job.

⁶⁹ Vicchio, *Job in the Modern World*, 155. Vicchio notes that one benefit of the rise of historical criticism was that conservatives were forced

The modern approaches to Job mostly fall into these two camps: conservative (i.e., non-critical),⁷⁰ and historical-critical.⁷¹ However, historical-critical Joban scholars are beginning to give up on the quest for what lies behind the text of Scripture and are beginning to exegete the text in its current form.⁷² Nevertheless,

to deal with issues like authorship, composition, and date in ways that they had not before (ibid., 153). The self-contradictions in historical-critical observations on Job is, ironically, similar to what TIS would logically lead to. As seen in the above discussions, within TIS the text can mean whatever a Christian wants it to mean, as long as it generally falls within the shadow of the church's historic teaching on Job. For historical-critical scholars, the text can mean almost anything, as long as such conclusions are not based upon a conservative doctrine of verbal-plenary inspiration and inerrancy (which doctrine TIS would similarly have issues with, given their explicit denials of authorial intent and the doctrine of inerrancy as found in the Chicago Statement).

⁷⁰ Conservative Joban scholars usually hold to similar opinions as past interpretations of Job: Its date of authorship is either early or not important, Job is a model of righteous suffering, and the book's theme is about trusting God in unexplained suffering. See, for example, Elmer A. Martens, *God's Design: A Focus on Old Testament Theology*, 3rd ed. (North Richland Hills, TX: D. and F. Scott Publishing, 1998), 209; Robert L. Alden, *Job*, vol. 11, *The New American Commentary* (B&H, 1993), 28; Paul R. House, *Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998), 424; and Christopher Ash, *Job: The Wisdom of the Cross*, *Preaching the Word* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 30.

⁷¹ For contemporary and extensive literature reviews of Job see Vicchio, *The Book of Job*, 1–45; and Sean P. Kealy, *The Wisdom Books of the Bible: Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, Ben Sira, Wisdom of Solomon: A Survey of the History of Their Interpretation* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen P, 2012), 77–144. See in addition, Lindsay Wilson, “Job as a Problematic Book,” in *Interpreting Old Testament Wisdom Literature*, ed. David G. Firth and Lindsay Wilson (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2017), 61.

⁷² See Christopher R. Seitz, “Job: Full-Structure, Movement, and Interpretation,” *Interpretation* 43, no. 1 (January 1989): 10; and David J. A. Clines, *Job 1–20*, vol. 17, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1989), lvii. Clines admits that the historical-critical method requires “intelligent speculation” in order to ascertain the historical date and authorship of Job (ibid.). Although Eduard Dhorme leaves open the possibility that Job was edited over time, he argues that Job is best

it is rare that these scholars produce rich theological commentaries on Job or approach the Joban text as Christians who believe the Scriptures are the inspired word of God.

LGH Hermeneutics, Justification, and Job

To be sure, many secular scholars hold to the concept of authorial intent, and single-meaning hermeneutics, and analyze the propositions of the biblical text. However, it is uncharitable and imprecise for TIS proponents to lump Christians, who seek to understand the historical and grammatical context of God's inspired word, in with academics who believe in historical criticism as a worldview. TIS has not interacted with Christians who believe LGH hermeneutics is how God has designed Scripture to be written, nor has it considered the possibility that LGH proponents could be "plundering the Egyptians" in their own way and seeking to be sensitive to the history of interpretation on Job.

So, what would a Christian use of LGH hermeneutics be able to bring out of the book of Job, and is it capable of producing rich, Christ-centered theology that is sensitive to the history of its interpretation? The next few sections will answer those questions by focusing on one theme within Job—justification—and briefly showing both its importance within the book and its connections to Christ, all in ways that are consistent with LGH hermeneutics.⁷³

approached as a literary unity: "We must retain as a basis for our investigation the fact that each part possesses an apparent unity, a unity which, apart from certain inevitable and very minimal adventitious elements, implies a single author" (Dhorme, *A Commentary on the Book of Job*, lxii). C. L. Seow approaches Job as a unified whole, even if he assumes that the book has been edited over time to be a caricature of the wisdom genre (Seow, *Job 1–21*, 108). Wilson argues that the exegetical difficulties in Job actually serve important literary and theological functions. He says, "My growing conviction from studying Job is that many of the supposed inconsistencies and contradictions can be resolved, and the book can be read as coherent whole" (Wilson, *Job*, 2015, 25–26).

⁷³ The topic of justification in Job deserves far more space than this article can allow. This author is currently finishing a dissertation on the topic. For an initial survey of the topic, see William Barrick's analysis of

First, a few historical and human factors should be noted which, taken together, give reason to look more closely at the text of Job regarding its contribution to a biblical doctrine of justification. For example, at least some early interpretations of Job were influenced by the LXX translation of the book. The LXX of Job is known for being one-sixth shorter than the Masoretic Text (MT) version, for having a freer translation philosophy, and for rounding off much of Job's harsher language towards God.⁷⁴ The result is that for those patristic fathers who did not know Hebrew, they had, in some parts, a considerably different Scriptural text to work with than the earlier, Hebraic version.

The human factor as well has influenced Job's interpretation. Many Christians are familiar with the first two and last few chapters of the book, since they relate an incredible story of faith in suffering (Job 1–2) and a memorable lesson that Job ought to trust God even when he does not have all the answers in his suffering (38–42). In fact, not a few people's views of Job are largely based on these chapters of the book, even if such views do not always adequately cover the thirty-five or so chapters in between them. Yet, if one looks deeper into the middle and

justification and righteousness in Job in William D. Barrick, "Righteousness in Job: Concepts of Vindication and Justification" (paper presented at ETS National Meeting, Atlanta, GA, November 2010).

⁷⁴ The Original Greek (OG) of Job is known for taking a free interpretive stance in how it translated Job (the term *OG* refers to the oldest Greek translations of the Hebrew OT. See Tim McLay, *The Use of the Septuagint in New Testament Research* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003], 7. Cited in Jeffrey E. Miller, "Imputation and Justification," in *Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John D. Barry et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2016). Vicchio concludes that the difference in length between the LXX of Job and the MT is for theological reasons (Vicchio, *Job in the Ancient World*, 105). The translators of the OG of Job tended to eliminate parallel passages and explain texts to make them more understandable, in addition to often toning down the negative language Job uses against God (*ibid.*). See also Longman III, *Job*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 28–29; and JiSeong J. Kwon, "Rewritten Theology in the Greek Book of Job," *Biblica* 100, no. 3 (2019): 339–52.

largest portion of the book, there are many difficult and profound sayings that relate to justification. For both historical and human reasons then, it is permissible and even necessary to re-examine the concept of justification in the book.

LGH Hermeneutics and Justification in Job

This article will briefly examine one verse—Job 9:2—and make some preliminary observations regarding justification in Job. The following sections will break the observations down according to LGH categories and then synthesize the conclusions. Future sections will then connect the conclusions to Christ and church history in responsible ways, to show that LGH hermeneutics produces a more Christ-centered theology from Job, while remaining sensitive to the interpretive tradition of the church about the book.

The Literal

The term literal does not, of course, denote a “woodenly literal” approach to Scripture that does not believe in the existence of metaphors or figurative language. Rather, the term “literal” most accurately refers to the “literary style” of an author, i.e., what an author intends to say and how he says it, using normal, human language.⁷⁵ We can first note the context of

⁷⁵ For the purposes of the argument of this article, it will be assumed that the Scriptures were God-breathed (cf. 2 Tim 3:16), such that what the inspired human authors said in their own, plain, human language, is exactly what God intended to say (cf. 2 Pet 1:20–21). The literal sense of a text is “its most straightforward meaning” (Chris Baldwick, “Literal,” in *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* [Oxford: Oxford U P, 2015], <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780198715443.001.0001/acref-9780198715443-e-660>).

The accommodated nature of divine revelation and the reality of progressive revelation make a literal interpretation of an OT text possible. On accommodated revelation, see Tremper Longman III and Raymond B. Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 18, 25; Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Biblical Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, vol. 15, *New Studies in Biblical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 16; and Abner Chou, *The Hermeneutics of the Biblical Writers: Learning to Interpret Scripture From the Prophets and Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2018), 14n10.

Job 9:2 then. Chapter nine comes in the first cycle of speeches in the dialogue portion of the book.⁷⁶ At this point, Job has already passed the trials of Job 1–2 and is speaking out of the anguish of prolonged (cf. Job 7:3), unanswered suffering.⁷⁷ His words in 9:2 are both a direct response to Bildad (9:1–2a; cf. 8:3) and a use of Eliphaz’s own words against him and his other friends (4:17).⁷⁸

To Job, a relationship with God where nothing mankind does ultimately matters and humans can be judged for their fallen natures at any time, is not one worth having (Job 7:17–19; 10:20–22; 14:1–6). But although Job comes close to total despair of being in a right relationship with God (9:1–32), he has the faith in God to hope for a legal system in which man and God would be brought together through a heavenly mediator (9:33–34; cf. 16:19–21; 19:25–26). Job 9:2 then, is not simply Job’s despair of being right with God—Job’s question is itself a desire for reconciliation to God and forgiveness of sins (cf. 7:21; 14:15–17; 19:26–27).

Chou concludes, “In sum, God created language and its operation is embedded in the way we communicate. This is why we can understand texts and even pursue authorial intent. As we read the text of Scripture, the Bible explains *why* we could always do this” (ibid.; italics original).

Regarding progressive revelation, Brad Klassen summarizes, “Simply stated, progressive revelation refers to the manner by which God revealed his propositional, redemptive knowledge. God did not reveal this knowledge instantaneously, but progressively—through a process covering 1,500 years and including dozens of authors. It was a process which began with foundational truths and progressed to more specific details. But the later, more specific revelation never contradicts the earlier, more general revelation” (Brad Klassen, “Premillennialism and Hermeneutics,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 29, no. 2 [Fall 2018]: 137).

⁷⁶ For an overview of the structure and cycles of Job, see Ash, *Job*, 25.

⁷⁷ Job does not ask “what” but “why” in his lament (Job 3:11–12, 16, 20, 23). His despair came not from the fact of his suffering (in light of which he still blessed God, cf. 1:20–22) but from the possible implications that the unanswered suffering posed towards God.

⁷⁸ Eliphaz had stated that no one can be justified before God because of their sinful nature (4:17–21), and thus Job should expect to be judged, even if he lives an overall blameless life.

The Grammatical

Grammatically, the phrase “in the right”⁷⁹ translates the verb קָדַשׁ (*śdq*). The verb, depending on the stem, either means, “to be just, in right, to make right, to declare righteous” and has forensic overtones—as in, a judge declares that the person on trial has met the standards of the law and is righteous.⁸⁰ קָדַשׁ has a place of prominence in the book of Job that no other OT book affords it,⁸¹ demonstrating that the concept of justification—as part of an overarching legal metaphor in the book⁸²—has a central place in

⁷⁹ Unless otherwise noted, all verse references are from *Legacy Standard Bible*. Three Sixteen Publishing, 2022.

⁸⁰ For a breakdown of the stems and occurrences of קָדַשׁ in Job see J. A. Ziesler, *The Meaning of Righteousness in Paul: A Linguistic and Theological Enquiry*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series 20 (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1972), 20–28. Ziesler notes that 14 out of the 22 occurrences of the qal of קָדַשׁ occur in Job and concludes that if one takes Job as a whole as forensic, then almost all occurrences of קָדַשׁ in Job are forensic (*ibid.*, 20).

⁸¹ The verb קָדַשׁ occurs 17 times in Job and 24 times in the rest of the OT put together (cf. “קָדַשׁ,” *HALOT*, 1003). See also J. A. Ziesler, who provides a breakdown of where the various forms of the verb occur (J. A. Ziesler, *Meaning of Righteousness in Paul*, 20–28). He further notes that 14 out of the 22 occurrences of the qal of קָדַשׁ occur in Job and concludes that if one takes Job as a whole as forensic, then almost all occurrences of קָדַשׁ in Job are forensic (*ibid.*, 20).

⁸² The evidence for the presence of legal metaphor and legal language within Job is overwhelming. Vicchio observes that Job has more legal language than any other book of a comparable size (Vicchio, *Book of Job*, 399–401). A select, not exhaustive, list of the works that discuss the legal metaphor in Job include John Beresford Frye, “Legal Language in the Book of Job” (Ph.D. diss., University of London, 1973); J. J. M. Roberts, “Job’s Summons to Yahweh: The Exploitation of a Legal Metaphor,” *Restoration Quarterly* 16 (1973): 159–65; Sylvia Huberman Scholnick, “Lawsuit Drama in the Book of Job” (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 1976); Michael Brennan Dick, “The Legal Metaphor in Job 31,” *CBQ* 41, no. 1 (1979): 37–50; Sylvia Huberman Scholnick, “The Meaning of Mišpat in the Book of Job,” *JBL* 101, no. 4 (December 1982): 521–29; Samuel Madavaraj, “Legal Metaphor in Job 31:35–37” (S.T.M., Dallas Theological Seminary, 1993); F. Rachel Magdalene, *On the Scales of Righteousness: Neo-Babylonian Trial Law and the Book of Job*, Brown

the argument of Job. Job is speaking of being justified before God's presence and despairing of such a possibility. The following is thus one possible translation of Job 9:2: "In truth, I know that this is so.⁸³ How then⁸⁴ can a man be in the right with God?"⁸⁵

Judaic Studies 348 (Providence, RI: Brown Judaic Studies, 2007); Yair Hoffman, "The Book of Job as a Trial: A Perspective from a Comparison to Some Relevant Ancient Near Eastern Texts," in *Das Buch Hiob Und Seine Interpretationen: Beiträge Zum Hiob-Symposium Auf Dem Monte Verità Vom 14.–19. August 2005*, ed. T. Krüger et al., Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments 88 (Zürich, Switzerland: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 2007), 21–31; Rachel F. Magdalene, "Through a Glass Lawyerly: Reading the Legal Metaphors of Job 1–31," in *Law and Narrative in the Bible and in Neighboring Ancient Cultures*, ed. Klaus-Peter Adam et al., Forschungen zum Alten Testament. 2. 54 (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 123–38; and Carol A. Newsom, "The Invention of the Divine Courtroom in the Book of Job," in *The Divine Courtroom in Comparative Perspective*, ed. Ari Mermelstein and Shalom E. Holtz, Biblical Interpretation Series 132 (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2014), 246–59.

⁸³ "That this is so" translates כִּי־כֵן, which is usually anaphoric (cf. Gen 50:3; Lev 8:35; 10:13; Judg 14:10).

⁸⁴ Most translations take the *vav* as adversative (but) but taking it as connective/resultative (then) fits just as well. Bildad's verbatim reference in 25:4 to Job's words here also employ the *vav* in a connective/resultative sense, which most English translations bring out. For translations and commentators that interpret the *vav* in Job 9:2a in a connective/resultative sense, see The Schlachter 2000; Geneva Bible; LXX; Vulgate; Norman C. Habel, *The Book of Job: A Commentary*, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster P, 1985), 178; John E. Hartley, *The Book of Job*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 166; Samuel Rolles Driver and George Buchanan Gray, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Job: Together with a New Translation*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1921), 83–84.

⁸⁵ Author's translation. Translating the *vav* in Job 9:2b as "how then" also helps explain why Job changes Eliphaz's syntax from מִן־לִּפְנֵי in Job 4:17 to מִן־עִם here (cf. similar constructions to מִן־עִם in 1 Sam 2:26 and 2 Sam 6:22). Job is saying that because no one can be justified before God, even winning a legal dispute with God is impossible (cf. רִיב עִמּוֹ in 9:3). The use of the preposition עִם with רִיב (*rib*; a technical term for a legal dispute) is common, since one party is disputing "with" another party. See

The Historical

The historical setting of the book of Job answers why Job asks the question of justification in the first place. While theologically minded evangelicals have disagreed on the historical date of the composition of Job, there is broad consensus across the spectrum of biblical studies that the book's literary setting is the patriarchal period,⁸⁶ outside of Israel.⁸⁷ Job's

James Limburg, "Root Rib and the Prophetic Lawsuit Speeches," *JBL* 88, no. 3 (September 1969): 296. For further discussion on the term *rib* denoting legal disputes in Israel, see B. Gemser, "The Rib- or Controversy-Pattern in Hebrew Mentality," in *Wisdom in Israel and in the Ancient Near East*, ed. M. Noth and D. Winton Thomas, 2nd ed., Supplements to Vetus Testamentum 3 (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 1969), 122.. Bovati notes that the *rib* was a well-known legal concept in the ANE and references Julian Harvey as giving a survey of other ANE cultures who use the *rib* as a legal institution. See Julien S. J. Harvey, *Le plaidoyer prophétique contre Israël après la rupture de l'alliance: étude d'une formule littéraire de l'Ancien Testament*, Studia 22 (Paris: Bruges, 1967), 119–43; as cited in Bovati, *Re-Establishing Justice*, 182n192.

⁸⁶ The patriarchal period is the period during which the biblical fathers (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) lived (ca. early second millennium BC). See Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, "Patriarchs, Period of the," *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 2:1620; John D. Barry et al., eds., "Patriarchs," *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2016); and R. K. Harrison, "Patriarchs," in *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville: Holman Bible, 2003), 1252.

⁸⁷ This article assumes that the events of Job occurred sometime in the patriarchal period, with the events being written down by an inspired author shortly thereafter. For evangelical/reformed scholars who argue for an early setting of Job, see John H. Walton and Kelly Lemon Vizcaino, *Job*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 24; Robert L. Alden, *Job*, New American Commentary 11 (Nashville: B&H, 1993), 27; Ash, *Job*, 443–44; and R. Laird Harris, "The Book of Job and Its Doctrine of God," *Presbyterion* 7, no. 1–2 (1981): 8–9. Even historical-critical scholars admit at least parts of the book go back to the patriarchal period and that it was made to look like was written during that period. For further discussions, see Clines, *Job 1–20*, 1989; Seow, *Job 1–21*, 44; Edward L. Greenstein, *Job: A New Translation* (New Haven, CT: Yale U P, 2019), xvii; Marvin H. Pope, *Job*, vol. 15, The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1973), xxxiv; and Jan Joosten, "Linguistic Clues

historical setting makes it one of the earliest books of the Bible—if not the earliest—and places the book outside of the historical context of other biblical covenants or revelation. Such a setting allows Job to speak with a purity regarding justification and the relationship between man and God that sets trajectories for how later biblical authors developed the doctrine.

Job's historical setting also explains why Job despairs of justification—he did not have access to the answers that the rest of Scripture gives regarding mankind's predicament before God and their need of true righteousness to stand before Him.⁸⁸ From a canonical perspective, God thus ordained Job's suffering to cause him to ask the questions about man and God's relationship that the rest of the Scriptures answer. Job and his friends all try to understand how God works in the world—but ultimately true wisdom must be revealed by God (Job 28).

Justification, Job, and Christ

A Christian approach to LGH hermeneutics assumes the unity and divine authorship of the Scriptures (2 Tim 3:16), as well as the progress of revelation.⁸⁹ Thus, textual and thematic connections can be made to Christ and the gospel in responsible ways. In fact, one could even argue that Job provides a theological framework for the biblical doctrine of justification, while the rest of the Scriptures, and especially the NT, fill in that framework.

Textually, Paul directly quotes the book of Job at least three times (Rom 11:35; 1 Cor 3:19; Phil 1:19). Each time, Paul is contextually commenting on some implication or truth of the gospel. There has been some work done in these areas,⁹⁰ but both

as the Date of the Book of Job: A Mediating Position," in *Interested Readers: Essays on the Hebrew Bible in Honor of David J. A. Clines*, ed. James K. Aitken, Jeremy M. S. Clines, and Christl M. Maier (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2013), 356.

⁸⁸ See for example, the contrast between David's language in Psalm 8 and Job's language in Job 7:17–21, or Job's questions in Job 9:2, 33–35, and Paul's answers in Romans 3:23–24; 8:1, 33–34; and 1 Timothy 2:5–6.

⁸⁹ For further discussion see footnote 75.

⁹⁰ For discussions on connections between Job and Romans, see J. Ross Wagner, *Heralds of the Good News: Isaiah and Paul "In Concert" in*

the Letter to the Romans, Supplements to Novum Testamentum 101 (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2002), 301; and J. Gerald Janzen, “He Makes Peace in His High Heaven: Job and Paul in Resonance,” in *Reading Job Intertextually*, ed. Katharine J Dell and William L. Kynes, Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies (London: T & T Clark, 2013), 248. The most complete work on Paul’s use of Job in Romans 11:35 is from Andrew David Naselli, *From Typology to Doxology: Paul’s Use of Isaiah and Job in Romans 11:34–35* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012). However, Naselli’s typological hermeneutic arguably limits him from fully exploring how Paul drew upon Job in Romans 11:35.

For discussions on 1 Corinthians 3:19 and Job, see David B. Capes, Rodney Reeves, and E. Randolph Richards, *Rediscovering Paul: An Introduction to His World, Letters, and Theology*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2017), 186n6; Colin Eckstein, “The Death of God and the ‘Foolishness of the Cross’ in 1 Corinthians 1:18–2:5,” *Modern Believing* 60, no. 4 (January 2019): 352; Wagner, *Heralds of the Good News*, 56; Victor Paul Furnish, “Theology in 1 Corinthians: Initial Soundings,” in *SBL 1989 Seminar Papers*, ed. David J. Lull, vol. 28 (Atlanta, GA: Scholars P, 1989), 354–55; Sang Meyng Lee, *The Cosmic Drama of Salvation: A Study of Paul’s Undisputed Writings From Anthropological and Cosmological Perspectives*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament. Reihe 2. 276 (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 39–46; David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 103; C. Clifton Black, “Christ Crucified in Paul and Mark: Reflections on an Intracanonical Conversation,” in *Theology and Ethics in Paul and His Interpreters: Essays in Honor of Victor Paul Furnish*, ed. Eugene H. Lovering Jr. and Jerry L. Sumney (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), 194.

For connections between Philippians 1:19 and Job, see Gordon D. Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 737–78; Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven, CT: Yale U P, 1989), 22; Janzen, “He Makes Peace in His High Heaven,” 249; Walter G. Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 77; Stephen E. Fowl, *Philippians*, The Two Horizons New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 44–45; Heinz Giesen, “Eschatology in Philippians,” in *Paul and His Theology*, ed. Stanley E. Porter, Pauline Studies 3 (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2006), 241; Stephen Voorwinde, “More of Paul’s Emotions in Philippians,” *The Reformed Theological Review* 77, no. 1 (April 2018): 53–54; and G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology*:

where Paul directly quotes Job and elsewhere, possible connections between Job and Paul need further study.⁹¹ There could be a rich textual well in Job that Paul drew upon to develop his understanding of justification.⁹² Such work could all be done consistently within LGH framework, without resorting to spiritualizing or typologizing Job to come up with connections to Christ that, even if accurate at times, are imprecise and do not honor the connections between Job and Christ that God intended Christians to make.

The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 282.

⁹¹ See for example the discussion on the background of righteousness language in Mark A. Seifrid, “Righteousness Language in the Hebrew Scriptures and Early Judaism,” in *Justification and Variegated Nomism: The Complexities of 2nd Temple Judaism*, ed. D. A. Carson, Peter T. O’Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid, vol. 1 (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 415–42; and James B. Prothro, “The Strange Case of Δικαίω in the Septuagint and Paul: The Oddity and Origins of Paul’s Talk of ‘Justification,’” *Zeitschrift für die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und Die Kunde der Älteren Kirche* 107, no. 1 (2016): 60–66. Paul expected his audience to know what δικαίω meant before he connected it to Abraham (*ibid.*, 62). At one point Prothro notes Job 9:2 and 20 as one of the places Paul might have drawn upon to develop his doctrine that no one will be justified before God by their works (cf. Rom 3:20; Gal 2:16; see *ibid.*, 67). Examining the relationship between δικαίω and קָדַשׁ in the book of Job, along with Seifrid’s and Prothro’s lines of argumentation, would be a fruitful avenue of further research.

⁹² Prothro draws upon Job 9:2 and 20 in another place to argue for the presence of a bilateral contention or *rib* (רִיב) in the book (cf. Job 9:3). He then argues that Paul used both a bilateral and a trilateral contention framework to expound his own doctrine of justification in Romans 3:21–5:11. See James B. Prothro, *Both Judge and Justifier: Biblical Legal Language and the Act of Justifying in Paul*, *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament* 2. 461 (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 74, 140, 205, 208–9. Job grounds its discussion of justification in what could be termed “bilateral” (רִיב) and “trilateral” (מִשְׁפָּט) legal frameworks (cf. Job 9:2, 32; 10:6; 40:6–8. Further study on Paul’s use of the contention framework could produce rich theology related to Paul’s use of the book of Job to develop his own doctrine of justification.

Theologically, the doctrine of justification and its function within soteriology is one of the richest areas of theological study. Assuming the above observations about justification in Job, even simply comparing Job's theology of justification with Paul's (such as Job with Romans 3 and 8), would yield rich results. But if further work is done, Job's complex understanding of justification can produce greater comparisons and areas of theological continuity with Paul and how Christ accomplishes redemption. Even if typological approaches accurately assess that Paul answers Job's hope, they cannot give precise, biblical answers.⁹³

Justification, Job, and Church History

TIS proponents claim to have an approach to Scripture that upholds historic, Christian teaching on Job. However, justification in Job, as understood through LGH hermeneutics, is not a novel concept—it is simply a more in-depth examination of the historic teaching on the theme of the book as trusting God in suffering. Job can trust in God in suffering not simply because God is wiser and greater than he, but because he trusts, in faith, that God will overcome the problem of sin in him and the world in the end (cf. Job 19:25–27).

⁹³ For typological approaches see again Naselli, *From Typology to Doxology*; and Mike Mason, *The Gospel According to Job* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1994).

Theologians as influential as John Calvin⁹⁴ and John Owen⁹⁵ have noted and implied that Job is the biblical foundation of the doctrine of justification by faith. Overall, Calvin saw in Job that due to an exalted description of God's righteousness and man's sinful nature, justification before God by works would be impossible.⁹⁶ There are also modern scholars from historical-

⁹⁴ In his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Calvin argues that the ultimate question in justification is not how righteous man can be but if his righteousness can match God's. Calvin also saw that Job clearly proves that man's righteousness is nothing before God, and thus the book lays a foundation for the biblical doctrine of justification by faith. Regarding Job 9:2–3 he says, "Here we are plainly told what the righteousness of God is, namely, a righteousness which no human works can satisfy, which charges us with a thousand sins, while not one sin can be excused" See John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, vol. III (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2011), 494. See also an earlier discussion in *ibid.*, 493.

⁹⁵ Owen believed that the person of Job exemplifies the book of James's doctrine of justification by works better than any other book, by showing when someone can plead for justification. See John Owen, *Justification by Faith* (Grand Rapids: Sovereign Grace, 1971), 15–16. However, indirectly, Owen appears to make the same argument as Calvin regarding the book of Job and justification. He argues that when God responded to Job, Job realized that he cannot plead anything from his life to obtain justification and must only trust in God's grace to be right before God: "Wherefore, in the deepest self-abasement and abhorrency, he [Job] betakes himself unto sovereign mercy" (*ibid.*, 16). Owen's observations show that even a person as upright and faithful as Job could not merit righteousness before God.

⁹⁶ Calvin references Job 4:17–20 and 15:14–15, both of which have a form of the "How can man be justified in God's sight?" question. He notes that "I confess, indeed, that in the book of Job reference is made to a righteousness of a more exalted description than the observance of the Law. It is of importance to attend to this distinction; for even could a man satisfy the Law, he could not stand the scrutiny of that righteousness which transcends all our thoughts. Hence, although Job was not conscious of offending, he is still dumb with astonishment, because he sees that God could not be appeased even by the sanctity of angels, were their works weight in that supreme balance" (*ibid.*, 493). See the additional discussions on Job 9:20 and 10:15, and man's depravity and inability to attain true righteousness in *ibid.*, 496, 512).

critical, evangelical, and reformed camps that note the presence of justification language in Job.⁹⁷

Charles Ryrie has given one of the most insightful observations on justification in Job, observing that Job 9:2 stated

Timothy Miller comments that Calvin believed in a “double-justice” of God whereby God could be just in punishing Job: God’s revealed justice, which Job was faithful in; and his hidden justice, which not even the angels could stand before. See Timothy E. Miller, “Reformed Theodicy: Calvin’s View of the Problem of Evil,” *Puritan Reformed Journal* 10, no. 1 (January 2018): 128. Miller sees Calvin as grounding his theodicy in marveling at the mystery of God’s providence yet submitting to revelation (*ibid.*, 129–30).

Susan Schreiner makes the interesting argument that Calvin believed the concept of immortality resolved the meaning of the book of Job—that Job’s friends did not have a concept of eschatological judgment and that Job believed God could judge in a time past this life, and that suffering is not always because of sin. See Susan E. Schreiner, *Where Shall Wisdom Be Found?: Calvin’s Exegesis of Job from Medieval and Modern Perspectives* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1994), 91. Job arguably speaks to the concept of eschatological resurrection in Job 14:13–17 and 19:25–27.

⁹⁷ From a broadly evangelical perspective, see Stephen G. Dempster, “‘He Believed the Lord’: The Pedigree of Justification in the Pentateuch,” in *The Doctrine on Which the Church Stands or Falls: Justification in Biblical, Theological, Historical, and Pastoral Perspective*, ed. Matthew Barrett (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 55. Robert Yarbrough argues that Job 15:14–16 is arguably one of the passages Paul looked to, to form his convictions regarding the universality of human sinfulness. See Robert W. Yarbrough, “Paul and Salvation History,” in *Justification and Variegated Nomism: The Paradoxes of Paul*, ed. D. A. Carson, Peter T. O’Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid, vol. 2 (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2001), 239, cf. 329n202.

Perhaps the most complete survey of righteousness and justification in the book of Job comes from a conference paper presented by William Barrick at the National ETS in 2010. See Barrick, “Righteousness in Job: Concepts of Vindication and Justification.” Barrick argues that Job makes a significant contribution to the topics of righteousness, justice, and justification (*ibid.*, 1). He then gives a chart that lists the occurrences of the verbal, noun, and substantival roots of קָדַשׁ in the book of Job. From there, Barrick proceeds to survey where the קָדַשׁ root occurs in the book of Job, where he, for the most part, summarizes what scholarship concludes on each occurrence (*ibid.*).

the problem of mankind's justification before God correctly.⁹⁸ On the reformed side, the defining question of Protestantism—noted by Matthew Barrett as, “How can a person be right with God?”⁹⁹—occurs in the Bible only in Job, where it is repeated three times.¹⁰⁰ And as argued above, the concept of a legal metaphor running through the book of Job, with justification-language as a forensic concept set within the metaphor, is observed even by historical-critical scholars.¹⁰¹

What this article has done, then, merely builds upon the foundation of the interpretation of Job set by the early church, Reformation-era theologians, and modern evangelical and reformed theologians, while “plundering the Egyptians” regarding the observations of historical-critical scholars on the

⁹⁸ See Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Basic Theology: A Popular Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth* (Chicago: Moody, 1999), 344. Ryrie then frames the problem of mankind's justification before God resulting in three options for God: “He must condemn them, compromise His own righteousness to receive them as they are, or change them into righteous people. If He can exercise the third option, then He can announce them righteous, which is justification” (ibid.). *Biblical Doctrines* has a similar statement: “In justification, God provides the answer to mankind's most basic theological religious question: How can sinners come to be in a right relationship with the holy God of the universe?” (John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, eds., *Biblical Doctrine: A Systematic Summary of Bible Truth* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017], 609).

⁹⁹ See Matthew Barrett, ed., *The Doctrine on Which the Church Stands or Falls: Justification in Biblical, Theological, Historical, and Pastoral Perspective* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019), 20. For contemporary reformed perspectives on justification in Job, see Michael Scott Horton, *Justification*, vol. 2, *New Studies in Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 63; and J. V. Fesko, *Justification: Understanding the Classic Reformed Doctrine* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008), 221. Thomas Schreiner approvingly cites Calvin's references to Job to argue that the book of Job teaches that mankind is inherently sinful and therefore cannot be justified by God (cf. Job 3:9; 4:18; 5:13; 9:5–6; and 25:5). See Thomas R. Schreiner, *Faith Alone: The Doctrine of Justification: What the Reformers Taught and Why It Still Matters*, 5 Solas Series (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 55. He discusses justification in Job further in ibid., 162–63.

¹⁰⁰ Job 4:17; 9:2; 25:4; cf. 15:14.

¹⁰¹ See footnote 81 for further discussion on the legal metaphor in Job.

legal language in Job. Ironically, it is the man-made traditions of historical criticism and TIS (even if they are sometimes correct in certain observations) that have held back the book of Job from edifying the church as much as it could.

Conclusion: LGH Hermeneutics and Faithfulness to God's Word

Regarding Job and justification, it is difficult to see if any theology of justification will ever come from a TIS approach to the book—because the church has historically not often found a theology of justification within Job, and TIS proponents tend to go beyond the words of Scripture to draw their ultimate conclusions. However, God intended for a rich theology of justification to be read within Job's pages, and a LGH approach to Job is not only more faithful to God's Word, it also draws the most profound theological conclusions by showing that a framework for the biblical doctrine of justification lies within the book.

While a TIS approach might make some correct observations of the Joban text, it is incapable of drawing the careful and precise conclusions that God intended for his church to make. Moreover, because it creates pathways to Christ that do not exist, TIS actually limits the glory that Christ receives when his word is properly interpreted.¹⁰² As Chou remarks, "A grammatical-historical approach ensures that we have studied a text with the right emphasis, which in turn appropriately sets up for its connection with other texts and Christ."¹⁰³ By the merits of its fruits, TIS cannot honor Christ and his word the way that LGH hermeneutics can, and thus, dispensationalists should reject TIS.

¹⁰² Chou, "Hermeneutical Evaluation of the Christocentric Hermeneutic," 113, 133–35.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 137.

An Examination of John Walton's Misuse of Ancient Near Eastern Mythology upon the Text of Genesis 1

Ian Bacon

Key Words: ANE, Creationism, Cosmology, Cosmogony, Genesis, Hermeneutics, Mythology

Introduction

John Walton is a prominent Old Testament scholar² who is highly respected and influential. Indeed, his knowledge of ancient Near Eastern (ANE) literature is impressive and demands respect. Thus, when he introduces the reader to the topic of mythology in his popular-level commentary on Genesis, it is intriguing. However, it is concerning when he articulates that his methodology is to utilize comparative studies to “give us the tools to make cultural adaptation. Familiarity with the literature of the ancient Near East helps us become informed about the ancient culture and worldview.”³ His rationale for appropriating mythology into Genesis is that “the mythological literature of the ancient Near East is relevant to all of Genesis because it provides

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² John Walton is professor at Wheaton College. He is the author of many books and journal articles relating to the ancient Near East and the OT. His books on Genesis include *Genesis: NIV Application Commentary* (2001); *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (2009); *Genesis 1 as Ancient Cosmology* (2011); *The Lost World of Adam and Eve: Genesis 2–3 and the Human Origins Debate* (2015); *The Lost World of the Flood: Mythology, Theology, and the Deluge Debate* (2018); *The Lost World of the Torah: Law as Covenant and Wisdom in Ancient Context* (2019).

³ John H. Walton, *Genesis: NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 25.

for an understanding of how people thought about deity in the ancient world."⁴ As it pertains to the Genesis account, Walton argues that Genesis 1 is not describing the act of creating, but rather demonstrates the functionality of the cosmos. His hermeneutical approach to Genesis 1 and the resulting theological interpretation is worthy of consideration and analysis.

From a dispensational perspective, Walton's methodology is incorrect in that it presupposes the theology of the ANE into the biblical account of creation, which is an incorrect procedure for a literal grammatical historical (LGH) hermeneutic. The first section of the article will examine Walton's view of ancient Near Eastern literature upon Scripture. The second section will analyze the effects of Walton's ANE theological assertions upon the biblical text through a brief critique of *The Lost World of Genesis One*. This section will counter Walton's view by arguing that Genesis 1 describes the action of God creating the material elements of creation, which forms a polemic against ANE thought. In the third section, the overarching problems of Walton's view of Genesis 1 will be discussed. The conclusion offers some areas of discussion where dispensational hermeneutics may seek to clarify its correction of Walton's exegetical process.

Walton's View of ANE Mythology

Walton's main assertion is that Genesis 1 adopts the ancient Near East mythology because this would have been the worldview through which the audience would have understood the biblical text. He writes,

The ancients also had a cosmic geography that was just as intrinsic to their thinking, just as foundational to their worldview, just as influential in every aspect of their lives, and just as true in their minds. And it differs from ours at every point. If we aspire to understand the culture and literature of the ancient world, whether

⁴ Ibid., 27.

Canaanite, Babylonian, Egyptian, or Israelite, it is therefore essential that we understand their cosmic geography.⁵

One notices in this quotation that according to Walton, the creation account is no more different than that of its cultural neighbors.⁶ Walton narrows in on the common theme of ANE literature, writing,

Beyond this physical description, it is important to realize that this cosmic geography was predominately metaphysical and only secondarily physical or material. The role and manifestation of the gods in the cosmic geography was primary.⁷

This assimilation of ANE mythology forms a common cosmic geography that will undergird his interpretation of Genesis 1.

Although noting commonalities among all ANE myth generally, Walton particularly attempts to connect Genesis 1 with that of Egyptian mythology. He writes, "Principle cosmogonic texts relate to three important cult centers and their gods: Hermopolis (Ptah), Heliopolis (Atum), and Hermopolis (Amun)."⁸ Indeed, there are similarities between Egyptian mythology and Genesis one. The following chart compares the Hermopolis and Memphis Egyptian mythology with Genesis 1:1–2:3.

⁵ John H. Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament: Introducing the Conceptual World of the Hebrew Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 132.

⁶ Walton argues, "The language of the Old Testament reflects a similar view, and no text in the Bible seeks to correct it" (*ibid.*, 133).

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ John H. Walton, "Creation," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity), 156.

Hermopolis/Memphis	Genesis 1:1–2:3
1. Pre-creation condition: lifeless chaotic watery deep	1. Pre-creation condition: lifeless chaotic watery deep
2. Breath/wind (Amun) moves on the waters	2. Breath/wind of Elohim moves on the waters
3. Thought and word of Ptah creates Atum (light)	3. Word of God creates light
4. Emergence of primordial hill “in midst of Nun”	4. Creation of firmament “in midst of the waters”
5. Procreation of sky (Shu) when Nun was raised over earth	5. Creation of sky when waters were raised above the firmament
6. Formation of heavenly ocean (Nut) by separation	6. Formation of heavenly ocean when waters were separated
7. Formation of dry ground (Geb) by separation	7. Formation of dry ground when waters were gathered
8. Sun created to rule the world as the image of Rê	8. Sun and moon created to rule day and night
9. Earth sprouts plants, fish, birds, reptiles, animals	9. Creation of plants . . . later fish, birds, reptiles, animals
10. Creation of gods’ statues, cult sites, food offerings	10. Creation of man as divine image, food to eat, dominion
11. Ptah completes activity and “rests” in satisfaction	11. God completes activity and “rests” (in satisfaction)

While these similarities exist, much more significant differences exist between Genesis 1 and Egyptian mythology. Johnson explains,

As impressive as are the thematic continuities, the ideological discontinuities are more significant. First, the Hebrew cosmogony rejects all notion of theogony. Second, the Israelite cosmology rejects any hint of pantheism. Third, the Yahwistic version of creation is clearly monotheistic. Fourth, the apex of creation in the Hebrew version is not the generation of the sun as the image/manifestation of the sun god, but the fashioning of humanity as the image of Yahweh. Fifth, the distinctive seven-day framework of Genesis 1 is an ideologically loaded paradigm shift away from the one-day pattern of recurrent creation brought about each morning with the sunrise symbolizing the daily rebirth of Rê-Amun, the sun god creator as embodiment of Atum, the primordial demiurge creator. Sixth, Yahweh is self-existent, unlike the self-generated Atum. The Egyptians conceived of the various elements of the material world as the embodiment, physical manifestation, or terrestrial incarnation of the individual gods. The sun was the terrestrial manifestation of the sun god Rê (later Rê-Amun). The sky was the incarnation of Nut, the ground the embodiment of Geb, the dry air between was the male deity Shu and moist humidity was the goddess Tefnut. The primordial sea was Nun, the original womb of Atum, the original creator-god. Atum was called the All or One because all that he created (immaterial gods and material world) was simply an extension of himself. The Egyptian creator was immanent in his creation. Creation in Egyptian cosmogony was not *ex nihilo*, but was a transformation of the immaterial deity into his material manifestation. The procreation of the gods was the means of the creation of the material world (e.g., the birth of Shu is the creation of the sky [dry air], and the birth of Geb is the creation of the ground). Even Atum was procreated; the primeval waters (Nun) were his father and mother (although some versions depict Atum generating himself in the womb of the primeval waters). Likewise the primeval waters, once the lifeless infinite

monad, transformed itself in the waters of life from which all living beings and things in the cosmos would ultimately spring.⁹

Hence, Johnson’s conclusion is sound when he writes, “Genesis 1 appears to be a polemic designed to refute ancient Near Eastern creation mythology in general and ancient Egyptian creation mythology in particular.”¹⁰ Even Walton will concede some ground here when he writes, “There are admittedly many points in the narrative [of the Genesis account] where such an anti-mythical, polemical perspective can be plausibly supported.”¹¹ Yet, he prefers to focus on the worldview of the ANE as he concludes, “In the process however, the numerous points of worldview should not be ignored.”¹²

The view that Genesis 1 is a polemic against Egyptian mythology is strengthened when Genesis 1 is understood canonically within the Pentateuch. This is clearly seen in the ten plagues that God sent upon Egypt that “were designed to discredit the forces of nature the Egyptians worshipped (Exodus 7:14–12:31).”¹³ The following chart links the elements of creation to each Egyptian god.

Plague	Egyptian Deity	Reference
1. Water to Blood	Osiris, Hapi, Khnum	Exod 7:14–25
2. Frogs	Heqt, frog deity	Exod 8:1–15
3. Mosquitoes	Seb	Exod 8:16–19
4. Flies	Kephra and Uatchit	Exod 8:20–32

⁹ Gordon H. Johnson, “Genesis 1 and Ancient Egyptian Creation Myths,” *BSac* 165, no. 658 (Apr–Jun 2008): 192.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 193.

¹¹ John H Walton, “Creation,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 161.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Ed Hindson and Gary Yates, *Old Testament: A Survey* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2012), 76.

5. Cattle	Typhon and Imhotep	Exod 9:1–7
6. Boils	Hathor and Apis	Exod 9:8–12
7. Hail	Seraphis and Isis	Exod 9:13–35
8. Locusts	Seth, protector of crops	Exod 10:1–20
9. Darkness	Ra, sun deity	Exod 10:21–29
10. Death of Firstborn	Ptah, god of life	Exod 12:29–30

To better understand this event in relation to the Pentateuch, Sailhamer writes,

There is no indication that the author assumes his readers are familiar with the theology of the Egyptian religion. It seems more likely that the author is portraying the events of the plagues to a primarily Israelite audience, or at least one who would understand the world in terms of the theology of the Pentateuch itself. Thus, this series of plagues need not intend any more than the general but all-important point that the God of the covenant, the Creator of the universe, is superior to the powers of the nations whether those powers be merely political and military powers or powers that rely on magic.¹⁴

Thus, in the plagues God demonstrates his power by showing that he alone materially creates each element represented in the miraculous event. How does one know that the material makeup of each creation element is in focus rather than functionality in Exodus? Because the Egyptian magicians tried to compete with Moses' God by attempting to materially produce what Yahweh did (Exod 7:11, 22; 8:7, 18, 19, 9:11). Then Exodus presents the idea that Israel's God has the power over material creation that Egypt's deities do not. This builds on or pulls forward the creation account in Genesis 1. Hence, the Scriptural account of God as the material Creator refutes the ANE belief

¹⁴ John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 253.

system. The creation account in Genesis 1 serves as a polemic by making a propositional truth claim about Yahweh.

Improper Application of ANE Mythology upon the Text of Genesis 1

To better understand how Walton's misuse of ANE mythology affects his hermeneutic of the biblical text, it is useful to analyze his work on Genesis 1 through a critique of *The Lost World of Genesis One*. Walton's thesis is as follows: "People in the ancient world believed that something existed not by virtue of its material properties, but by virtue of it having a function in an ordered system."¹⁵ Walton presents his argument by presenting eighteen propositions.

Propositions 1–4: Positing the Thesis of Functionality

It is within the introductory propositions that Walton establishes how he views Genesis 1. He begins in proposition one by stating, "Genesis 1 is ancient cosmology. That is, it does not attempt to describe cosmology in modern terms or advance modern questions. The Israelites received no revelation to update or modify their 'scientific' understanding of the cosmos."¹⁶ He further explains,

There is no concept of a "natural" world in ancient Near Eastern thinking.... As a result, we should not expect anything in the Bible or in the rest of the ancient Near East to engage in the discussion of how God's level of creative activity relates to the natural world (i.e., what we call naturalistic process of the laws of nature).¹⁷

Walton asserts in proposition two that Genesis 1 is communicating our existence through functional ontology. He explains, "The actual creative act is to assign something its functioning role in the ordered system. That is what brings it into

¹⁵ John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 26. Walton further explains, "Here I do not refer to an ordered system in scientific terms, that is, in relation to society and culture" (ibid.).

¹⁶ Ibid., 16.

¹⁷ Ibid., 20.

existence. Of course, something must have physical properties before it can be given function, but the critical question is, what stage is defined as 'creation?'"¹⁸ In another work he calls this ontology "cosmic ontology,"¹⁹ explaining,

The philosophical concept of ontology can be applied to many ideas (such as, evil, belief, the cosmos), but here we are dealing specifically with cosmic ontology. Understanding ancient peoples' cosmic ontology must precede discussion of their understanding of cosmic origins because ontology determines what aspect of origins will be of interest and ultimate significance.²⁰

Thus, for Walton, Genesis is not concerned with describing material creation, but rather is describing how "the parts of the cosmos functioned."²¹

In an effort to textually argue for functionality Walton then embarks on a series of word studies to attempt to show that function rather than form is in view in Genesis 1. The first word Walton deals with is *bara* "create." Walton associates a

¹⁸ Ibid., 27.

¹⁹ John H. Walton, *Genesis 1 as Ancient Cosmology* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 23.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Walton, *Lost World*, 29. To make his point Walton uses some analogies to show that in our modern times we think of objects and entities according to their function rather than their material makeup. Examples he offers are a chair, computer tower, or a company. He argues that we are only concerned with the existence of these objects because of their functionality, and we are less concerned with how they are materially constructed. This philosophical argument actually can be used to support the opposite view that functionality is derived from material form. Take for instance a chair. It certainly can be asserted that usefulness and enjoyment can be found in the functionality of a good chair. Yet, if the material components of the chair are not of good quality and the chair breaks, then the chair has not given optimal usefulness. Hence, functionality is derived from material form. When one takes this philosophical principle into Scripture one finds that the optimal functionality of the creation is predicated on the Creator who material made, or formed, each element of creation. Thus, the Scriptural principle is both form and function are described to proclaim the power of the Creator.

functionality meaning on the basis “that grammatical objects of the verb are not easily identified in material terms, and even when they are it is questionable that the context is objectifying them. That is, no clear example exists that demands a material perspective for the verb.”²² Walton’s conclusion on *bara* faces considerable objections.

Walton’s conclusion must be refuted by an analysis of *bara* as used in Scripture itself. Steven Boyd observes, “In the Biblical Hebrew, the verb בָּרָא (create) always has God for its subject and never mentions the material from which He created. Its presence in a verse therefore underscores that *God* is *Creator*.”²³ Kenneth Mathews adds *bara* “is used in the Old Testament consistently in reference to a new activity.”²⁴ Thus, grammatically it is of utmost importance to understand the subject of this verb. Morris writes, “The use of the word ‘create’ here in Genesis 1:1 informs us that, at this point, then physical universe was spoken into existence by God. It has no existence prior to this primeval creative act of God.”²⁵

The problem with Walton’s emphasis on the object created is it takes the focus away from what is being proclaimed, namely, that God created *ex nihilo*. It can also be argued that the meaning בָּרָא in Genesis 1:1 is material creation is seen by its connection with the synonyms עָשָׂה “made” (1:7, 16, 25, 31; 2:3,4) and יָצַר “formed” (2:7, 8, 19) within Genesis 1–2. The syntactical connectedness of these terms²⁶ within Genesis 1–2

²² *Ibid.*, 41.

²³ Steven W. Boyd, “The Genre of Genesis 1:1–2:3: What Means This Text?,” in *Coming to Grips with Genesis: Biblical Authority and the Age of the Earth*, ed. Terry Mortenson and Thane H. Ury (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2008), 189.

²⁴ Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 128.

²⁵ Henry Morris, *The Genesis Record: A Scientific and Devotional Commentary on the Book of Beginnings* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1976), 40.

²⁶ As seen by their *wayyiqtol* forms.

demonstrates that what is being described is God materially creating, making, and forming the elements of creation.²⁷

The next word Walton focuses on is “beginning.” Walton believes “that the ‘beginning’ is a way of talking about a seven-day period rather than a point in time prior to the seven days.”²⁸ This is interesting because this does not match his concluding remarks on the origins debate later in the book, which is decidedly against a young earth creationist view of a seven-day period of creation.²⁹ Yet, Walton does touch on an interpretative question that arises, which is should this verse be translated an independent clause (“In the beginning..”) or subordinate clause (“When God began to create..”)?³⁰ This will have theological implications for the meaning of the text. “Does Gen. 1:1 teach an absolute beginning of creation as a direct act of God? Or does it affirm the existence of matter before the existence of matter before the creation of the heavens and the earth?”³¹

It seems best to understand this verse as an independent clause that begins the narrative with an absolute point in time. Sailhamer writes, “In opening the account of creation with the phrase ‘in the beginning,’ the author has marked Creation as a

²⁷ This argument is also important for refuting Walton's view of the historical Adam. He posits that Genesis 1–11 is not describing material creation but rather describing the functionality of creation as a “home,” (temple) for God. He believes that Adam is archetypal rather than the representative head. As it relates to Adam, God both “made” and “formed” Adam from dust in the narrative of Genesis 1–2. Romans 5 becomes important in refuting Walton because Christ came to save humans from their sin to undo what the first Adam did. If one denies the material makeup of Adam, then that person denies the curse of sin and the need for a Savior. Walton's view of Christ would also be erroneous because one important aspect of Christ is the hypostatic union whereby Christ is 100% God/man in his incarnation. This is important because Christ had to come materially as a man to conquer the curse of sin and bring eternal life.

²⁸ Walton, *Lost World*, 45.

²⁹ As one can see it is assumed that a literal-grammatical-historical hermeneutic lends itself to a young earth creationist view of Genesis 1.

³⁰ Victor Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 1–17*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 103.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 105.

starting point of a period of time. Hence here will be the beginning of the history which follows.”³² Davidson writes, “The phrase ‘evening and morning,’ appearing at the conclusion of the six days of creation, is used by the author to clearly define the nature of the days of creation as literal twenty-four-hour days.”³³ Hence, “beginning” indicates the point in time when God begins to materially create. This fact would undercut Walton’s functionality argument.

The third word study that Walton embarks on is *tohu* “unformed” and *bohu* “emptiness” in Genesis 1:2. He writes, “We propose that *tohu* and *bohu* together convey the idea of nonexistence (in their functional ontology), that is, the earth is described as not yet functioning in an ordered system. (Functional) creation has not yet taken place and therefore is only (functional) nonexistence.”³⁴

HALOT renders הָבֵהוּ as “empty.” “This word is used three times in the OT and is always used with *tohu*.”³⁵ Because of the scarcity of usage of *bohu* and its connectedness to *tohu*, Walton focuses on *tohu*. Mathews notes that the meaning of הָבֵהוּ is “unclear,” saying, “It refers to an unproductive, uninhabited land, or has the sense of futility or nonexistence.”³⁶ To precisely narrow down the precise meaning within Genesis 1 one must understand the context of this verse. Morris writes, “Initially there were no stars or planets, only the basic matter component of the space-matter-time continuum. The elements which were to be formed into the planet Earth were at first only elements, not formed but nevertheless comprising the basic matter—the ‘dust’ of the earth.”³⁷ This word pair (or merism) does not speak of nonexistence but rather describes the process of creation beginning with the basic elements of material creation.

³² Sailhamer, *Pentateuch as Narrative*, 83.

³³ Richard M. Davidson, “The Genesis Account of Origins,” in *The Genesis Account and Its Reverberations in the Old Testament*, ed. Gerald A. Klingbeil (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews U P, 2015), 78.

³⁴ Walton, *Lost World*, 49.

³⁵ Hamilton, *Book of Genesis*, 108.

³⁶ Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 130.

³⁷ Morris, *Genesis Record*, 50.

Propositions 5–6: The Functionality of the Days of Creation

In these propositions, Walton compares the ancient Near Eastern myths to the creation of days to indicate that in days one through three God is describing a “functional sense, not a material one.”³⁸ He continues,

In the account of days four through six we see a shift in focus. While a functional orientation is still obvious, God is not setting up functions as much as he is installing functionaries. In some cases, the functionaries will be involved in carrying out the functions (especially the role of the celestial bodies in marking the periods of time), but in most cases the functionaries simply carry out their own functions in the spheres delineated in the first three days (time, cosmic space, terrestrial space).³⁹

Yet, is it appropriate to combine these days only according to function? Once again, it must be said that there is no doubt that each element within God's creation is made for a purpose (function). Yet, Walton overlooks the beauty of the creative process God uses to make creation.

Propositions 7–12: Creation as a Cosmic Temple

Within this section of propositions, Walton builds on the ontological functionality of Genesis 1 by asserting that the goal of the text is to describe creation as a functioning cosmic temple. Walton arrives at this conclusion by noting how God “rested” on day seven. Walton claims that this is confusing to our modern understanding but turns to ancient Near Eastern thought to derive an answer. He writes,

The difference is in the piece of information that everyone knew in the ancient world and to which most modern readers are totally oblivious: Deity rests in a temple, and only in a temple. This is

³⁸ Walton, *Lost World*, 57. Here he specifically references the periods of light and darkness.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 65.

what temples are built for. We might even say that this is what a temple is—a place for divine rest. ... But in the ancient world rest is what results when a crisis has been resolved or when stability has been achieved, when things have settled down.⁴⁰

The problem with this view is that it presupposes conflict at some point in the creative process. Yet, there is nothing in the biblical account of creation in Genesis 1 that God needed to reestablish stability. Additionally, to compare ANE mythology to “rest” is not an equal comparison. Mathews writes, “In the Babylonian creation stories the gods are freed from their labors after the creation of humans. ... God’s sabbath however, is not aversion to labor but the celebrative cessation of a completed work, whereby he expresses his mastery over time by sanctifying it.”⁴¹ Thus, the concept of God resting is not an arbitrary piece of information that is out of place. Sailhamer writes, “The author’s intention is to point to the past as a picture of the future, then the emphasis on God’s rest forms an important part of the author’s understanding of what lies in the future.”⁴²

Walton continues to develop his point, “We are proposing as the premise of Genesis 1; that it should be understood as an account of functional origins of the cosmos as temple.”⁴³ Evidence of this is found in Isaiah 6:3 whereby “the seraphim chant, ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord almighty, the whole earth is full of his glory.’”⁴⁴ Yet, the creation of an archetypal temple does not take place in Genesis 1, but rather in the garden of Eden in Genesis 2:8–14. God created a special place on earth, the garden of Eden, for man to be in God’s presence. This localized divine space becomes the type for all future temples. Daniel Liroy writes, “The creation narrative points to Eden as the earliest-occurring sacred space. Because it is a prototype and archetype of future temples, Eden becomes a conceptual framework for

⁴⁰ Ibid., 74.

⁴¹ Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 179.

⁴² Sailhamer, *Pentateuch as Narrative*, 96.

⁴³ Walton, *Lost World*, 84.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

understanding and appreciating their purposes."⁴⁵ Lioy continues,

For instance, according to Genesis 2:8, the Creator planted an "orchard of various fruit trees" in Eden (Brown 1999:138). Deliberate representations of these were found in the "wood carvings" placed within the temple of Solomon and which gave it a "garden-like atmosphere" (Beale 2005:8; cf. Stager 2000:39, 41). The intent of the "temple design" was to "recreate the primordial landscape of creation" (Carroll 2005) and draw attention to its "luxurious, pristine, and life giving" character (Lundquist 2008:xiv).⁴⁶

Walton misconstrues the relationship of creation in Genesis 1 to ancient Near Eastern mythology of temple. Writing on Genesis 2:8–14 Mathews writes, "In ancient Near Eastern mythology is found a 'garden of God' motif that depicts the divine residence on earth.; it typically possesses abundant waters, fertile herbage, and beautiful stones."⁴⁷ Yet, the verbiage that Near Eastern mythology uses is not present, and the narrative of Genesis 2 decidedly shows God as Creator and does not live in the garden.⁴⁸ Regarding the command not to eat the fruit of the trees Hamilton writes, "Once again ancient Near Eastern literature provides distant parallels to the eating of plants or some edible substance and the subsequent bestowal of life."⁴⁹ Yet, "Here again the Bible present its material in a way that is quite different from that of its neighbors."⁵⁰ The problem is much of scholarship, like Walton, have accepted that these myths are the underlying structure of Genesis 1–3.

⁴⁵ Daniel T. Lioy, "The Garden as a Primordial Temple or Sacred Space for Humankind," *Conspectus* 10, no. 1 (September 2010): 25.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 201.

⁴⁸ Hamilton, *Book of Genesis*, 161.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 162.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 163.

Overarching Problems with Walton's View of Genesis 1

Problem 1: Improper Hermeneutic

From a dispensational perspective, Walton's interpretation of Genesis 1 is flawed because it is based on an improper hermeneutic. In the introduction to the book Walton establishes his hermeneutic by importing cultural thinking of the times into the biblical text. Walton calls his hermeneutic "cogitative environment criticism." He explains, "The goal of this discipline is to recover the cultural layers from the world behind the text that were inherently understood by the ancient audience, but have been lost to our modern world."⁵¹ Walton's rationale for this is that to understand the words within our translations we must turn to their cultural meaning. He writes "Language assumes a culture, operates in a culture, serves in a culture, and is designed to communicate within a culture, we must translate the culture as well as the language if we hope to understand the text fully."⁵²

Therefore, Walton does not begin with a literal hermeneutic, but rather allows foreign texts to decide meaning. Absent from Walton's interpretive process is authorial intent of the text, which must be the boundary for the text itself to

⁵¹ John Walton, *Behind the Scenes of the Old Testament: Cultural, Social, and Historical Contexts* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 333.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 9. Walton explains how this is done, "Rather than translating the culture, then, we need to try to enter the culture. ... How do we do this? We can begin to understand the culture by becoming familiar with its literature" (*ibid.*, 11–12). Thus, Walton's hermeneutic is to compare ancient Near East literature with that of Genesis 1 and import its meaning into the text. Walton writes, "It is expected that Israelites held many concepts and perspectives in common with the rest of the world. ... Rather we recognize the common conceptual worldview that existed in ancient times. We should therefore not speak of Israel being influenced by that world- they were part of that world" (*ibid.*, 13). For those concerned about comparing ANE mythology with Scripture, Walton writes, "For the Israelites, Genesis 1 offered explanations of their view of origins and operations, in the same way that mythologies served in the rest of the ancient world and science serves us today" (*ibid.*, 14).

determine meaning. Walton refutes a literal hermeneutic when he writes, "It is interesting that many people who discuss Genesis 1 express an interest in interpreting the chapter 'literally.' By this they generally mean that is to be taken exactly for what it says rather than understand Genesis 1 simply in metaphoric, allegorical or symbolic terms. ... Our interpretative commitment is to read the text at what I call 'face value.'"⁵³ Walton explains that "face value" is defining the lexical meaning of a word based on its cultural connotation. Hence, Walton stresses "the similarities between the ways the Israelites thought, and the ideas reflected in the ancient world, rather than the differences."⁵⁴

Yet, as one considers the lexical meaning of each word in Genesis 1, it becomes clear that what the author is communicating is something unique from the ancient Near Eastern world. Beall notes the broader problem with Walton's hermeneutic of adopting ANE mythology, "The view that Genesis 1–11 is mythological, based on the (untrue) legends from Mesopotamia and elsewhere, is not consistent with the divine authority and inspiration of Scripture."⁵⁵ The hermeneutical principle that must be applied to Genesis 1 is to begin with what Scripture is saying by determining its meaning. This is done exegetically by examining the lexical and syntactical work on each word of Genesis 1. In this way, the interpreter upholds the divine authority and inspiration of the text.

Walton also overlooks a key aspect of exegesis which is to observe the genre of Genesis 1. Steven Boyd has done outstanding work in this area and through careful analysis of the text decisively concludes Genesis 1 is "a literal historical account."⁵⁶ Boyd notes, "For Genesis 1:1–2:3, three characteristics stand out: it is a magisterial literary composition; it is a foundational literary treaties; and it is a literal historical account."⁵⁷ Boyd defines 'magisterial' as: "profound, majestic,

⁵³ Ibid., 39.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 104.

⁵⁵ Todd S. Beall, "Contemporary Hermeneutical Approaches to Genesis 1–11," in *Coming to Grips with Genesis*, 134.

⁵⁶ Boyd, "The Genre of Genesis 1:1–2:3," 174.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 164.

full of grandeur, foundational, fundamental, vast, sweeping towering, incompatible, unplumbable, and inexhaustible.”⁵⁸ Regarding this text being a theological treatise Boyd writes, “It the foundation of Christian theology: our God, our Savior, is both Creator and Redeemer. In addition, it presents a powerful polemic against the present polytheism of the Ancient Near East.”⁵⁹ Additionally, the structure of the text supports that this text is narrative by the presence of *wayyiqtol*s sequentially describing the process of God's creating.

Problem 2: Improper Understanding of the Material Nature of the Creation/Recreation Motif

Walton's view affects the theological issue of the creation/re-creation motif that runs through Scripture. In fact, Walton has written on this theological theme in the *Dictionary of the Old Testament* where he focused on the comparisons to ANE creation myth (focusing primarily on Egyptian mythology). In this work, he writes,

A number of documents from the ancient Near East contain extensive treatments of creation. It is questionable whether any of them can be labeled as creation accounts, since the ancient thinkers did not typically think of creation as an end in itself. ... Nowhere in the ancient Near East did people think of creation primarily in terms of *making* things. ... Matter is not a concern of the author of Genesis.⁶⁰

Yet, Walton's assessment of Genesis 1 does not align with how the rest of Scripture builds on God's forming creation in Genesis 1 to point to re-creation brought by the Messiah. Gallusz confirms this when he writes,

The Biblical story is structured around the movement from creation to new creation, and the process of redemption is seen as a means of leading to restoration of the old creation. ... The strong link

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 166.

⁶⁰ Walton, “Creation,” 156; 161–62.

between the two ends of the canon suggests that these passages frame the entire biblical narrative, and therefore serve as two poles with critical interpretative significance for all biblical material. Consequently, everything in the biblical canon is to be understood as having its roots in Genesis 1 to 3, and also moving towards the final goal in Revelation 21–22.⁶¹

Genesis 1:1 is an emphatic statement that God created the heavens and the earth. “As a praise of God’s grace, the theme of the remainder of the Creation account (1:2–2:25) is God’s gift of the land. God first prepared the land for men and women by dividing the waters and furnishing its resources (1:1–27). Then he gave the land and its resources as a blessing to be safeguarded by obedience (2:16–17).”⁶² This statement reflects that the function of the land comes by from the God who materially created the land. The blessing of the land when it will produce abundantly is seen in the Messianic blessings that will occur when Messiah comes again and brings the re-creation of Eden in the creation account.

It is because of this motif within Scripture that Walton’s spiritual/theological view of *tohu* is misguided. To demonstrate this one must analyze the chart that Walton produces on this lexical term.⁶³

Deut 32:10	parallel to the wilderness; described by “howling”
1 Sam 12:21	Descriptive of idols who can accomplish nothing
Job 6:18; 12:24	wasteland away from wadis where caravans perish for the lack of water
Job 12:24;	wandering in a trackless land
Job 26:7	what the north is stretched over

⁶¹ Laszlo Gallusz, “Radically New Beginning, Radically New End: Creation and Eschatology in the New Testament,” in *The Genesis Creation Account and Its Reverberations in the New Testament*, ed. Thomas R. Shepherd (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews U P, 2022), 158.

⁶² John H. Sailhamer, *Pentateuch as Narrative*, 84.

⁶³ Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One*, 47.

Psalm 107:40	wandering in a trackless waste
Is 24:10	a <i>tōhû</i> settlement is described as desolate
Is 29:21	with <i>tōhû</i> they turn aside righteousness (similar to Is 59:4)
Is 34:1	measuring line of <i>tōhû</i> and plumb stone of <i>bōhû</i>
Is 40:7	worthlessness of the nations; parallel to “nothingness” and the “end”(?)
Is 40:23	rulers of the world made as <i>tōhû</i> ; parallel to “nothingness”
Is 41:29	images are wind and <i>tōhû</i> ; parallel to “nothingness”
Is 44:9	all who make images are <i>tōhû</i> ; parallel to without profit
Is 45:18	God did not bring it into existence <i>tōhû</i> ; but in contrast formed it for habitation (intended function)
Is 45:19	Israelites not instructed to seek God in waste places; parallel to land of darkness
Is 49:4	expending one’s strength to no purpose (<i>tōhû</i>)
Is 59:4	describes relying on empty arguments or worthless words (i.e., dissembling); parallel to that which is false or worthless
Jer 4:23	description of <i>tōhû</i> and <i>bōhû</i> : light gone, mountains quaking, no people, no birds, fruitful lands waste, towns in ruins

Walton concludes,

Studying this list, one can see nothing in these contexts that would lead us to believe that *tohu* has anything to do with material form. The contexts in which they occur, and the word phrases used in parallel suggest rather that the word describes that which is nonfunctional, having no purpose and generally unproductive in human terms.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Ibid., 49.

The opposite can be argued in that these references determine that the functionality of the land can occur only when Messiah brings material recreation. For instance, the context of Deuteronomy 32:10 is a poetic seam that points to the eschatological restoration of Israel to the land by the Messiah. Thus, the unproductiveness in these verses is due to material deterioration of objects and beings and points to the need for restoration to function properly. Hence, the pattern of the usage of this word in Genesis 1 follows the same pattern of God's creating material elements to fulfill their functionality to provide abundantly in the land when Messiah rules in his millennial kingdom.

Revelation 21–22 also clearly points to the elements of creation for recreation as recognized for its material makeup in the eternal state. For instance, the new heavens and earth are described by gold and jewels and glass. What is in view is not their functionality as much as their material quality. Revelation 21:18 says, “The city was like pure gold, like clear glass.” Notice the clause “like clear glass” is present to provide additional information about the material quality of the gold. This “pictures ideal gold so pure that it is transparent. This surpasses any gold known in this present creation.”⁶⁵ Another example is in Revelation 22:2, which refers to the leaves of the tree of life. Thomas explains their importance:

The tree yields additional benefits through its leaves (‘the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations’). The nations benefit from the health-giving qualities of the leaves. ... ‘Healing’ then must connote a promoting of health of the nations such as will be an ongoing service in new creation. This agrees with the identification of the nations in 21:24.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Robert Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 469.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 485.

Clearly, the elements mentioned in Revelation 21–22 refer to the creation of all the elements that formed the garden of Eden. Thus, when Walton asserts that Genesis 1 does not refer to the making of creation, he misses how the rest of Scripture uses and refers to the creation account in Genesis 1–2.

Even the miracles of Jesus in the gospels, especially in the gospel of John, focus on Jesus' ability to materially change objects and beings of creation as proof of his deity. The focus of the narrative of Jesus turning water into wine (John 2:1–11) is first on the material change (meaning at the molecular level) from one substance (water) to wine (wine). The functionality aspect of the miracle only comes into focus after the material change has occurred. Even the head waiter's response to the taste of the wine focused on the quality of the newly created beverage. When Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead (John 11) the focus was on the materially new body of Lazarus (i.e., repairing whatever was the cause of his death). The function of Lazarus's body could only happen due to Jesus' miraculous healing of the material body. Indeed, Jesus' own resurrection proved God's power to bring new life.

***Problem 3: Improper Understanding of Israel's God
(Yahweh) as Creator and Its Impact
on the Origins Debate***

By theologically concluding that the creation account is a description of functionality rather than a declarative statement of God as Creator, the attribute of God as Creator is denied (or at best very limited). The theological ramifications of Walton's rendering of ANE mythology upon Genesis 1 extend into the debate of origins. Walton surveyed ANE literature and concluded, "In the ancient Near East 'to create' meant ordering—assigning roles and functions rather than giving substance to material objects that make up the universe."⁶⁷ Thus, the idea of *ex nihilo* is not to be found in ANE literature.

⁶⁷ Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought*, 151.

Walton attempts to avert the science/faith debate by in essence forming a philosophical allowance for both.⁶⁸ The justification for this allowance for Genesis 1 and naturalistic processes comes from a teleological argument. He writes,

I have proposed here that Genesis is not metaphysically neutral—it mandates an affirmation of teleology (purpose), even as it leaves open the descriptive mechanism for material origins. Affirming purpose in one's belief assures a proper role for God regardless of what descriptive mechanism one identifies for material origins. ... Genesis is a top-layer account—it is not interested in communicating the mechanisms (though it is important that they were decreed by the word of God).⁶⁹

What Walton does is leave the door open for evolutionary thought if God is not tangibly involved in the process. Walton attempts to arbitrate the Intelligent Design and Neo Darwinian positions by trying to decipher proper naturalistic mechanisms (in his estimation). Yet, he ultimately vaguely affirms the positions when he concludes, "God has designed all that there is and may have brought some of his designs into existence instantaneously, whereas others he may have chosen to bring into existence through long, complicated processes. Neither procedure would be any less an act of God."⁷⁰

Theistic evolutionist Dennis Lamoureux also places the debate on origins within a discussion on concordism when he writes,

Since the Bible includes both theological and scientific statements, it could be argued that here are two basic types of biblical concordism. 'Theological concordism' claims there is an indispensable correspondence between the theological truths in Scripture and spiritual reality. 'Scientific concordism' states that

⁶⁸ He uses the analogy of a layer cake to make the case that the top layer of the debate is whereby "the top layer represents the work of God," while the lower layer represents the whole realm of materialistic or naturalistic causation or processes (Walton, *Lost World*, 115).

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 117.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 131.

there is an alignment between the assertions about nature in the Bible and the physical world.⁷¹

Lamoureux's position is to view science as separate from Scripture. He writes, "Our challenge as modern readers of the Bible, then, is to identify this ancient vessel and to separate it from, and not conflate it with the life-changing Messages of Faith."⁷² What could give Lamoureux the ability to do separate the biblical text from the origins of life? Walton's improper hermeneutic which detaches the meaning of the text allows for old earth and evolutionists to detach science from Scripture.⁷³

Using a dispensational hermeneutic, a young earth creationist will argue that the whole purpose of Genesis 1 is to proclaim God as the sole Creator, and the biblical account would circumvent the naturalistic explanations that assert otherwise. Perhaps this is why Walton is so antagonistic toward creationism when he writes,

Creationism, particularly young earth creationism, differs from the view proposed in this book by insisting that the Bible does offer a descriptive mechanism for material origins in Genesis 1, and therefore, is both teleological and intrinsically opposed to the descriptive mechanism offered in biological evolution. We have suggested that this perspective does not represent an accurate contextual reading of Genesis.⁷⁴

So, Walton is fine with promoting a naturalistic explanation of creation based on mythology but refuses to accept a literal reading of Genesis 1.

⁷¹ Dennis O. Lamoureux, *I Love Jesus and I Accept Evolution* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2009), 16.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 18.

⁷³ Walton attempts to guard the reader from "concordism," which he defines as attempting "to read an ancient text into modern times." He explains, "Concordists interpretations attempt to read details of physics, biology, geology, and so on into the biblical texts" (Walton, *Lost World*, 105).

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 153.

Problem 4: Improper View on Inspiration and Inerrancy

The hermeneutical approach that Walton utilizes is a comparison of the Genesis creation account with ANE myth. He explains his rationale when he writes,

The biblical text is a cultural artifact (in addition to whatever theological significance and claims may be attached to it) emerging from an ancient context, we should not be surprised that there are frequent occasions on which the meaning of the text will not be immediately transparent to us. Ancient Near Eastern ideas, concepts, beliefs, or worldviews may then be necessary in order to discern the meaning of the text.⁷⁵

Peter Enns adopts a similar position to that of Walton when articulating his view of inerrancy and the nature of Scripture that Scripture can only be understood within its historical context.⁷⁶

Yet, this is disturbing when one considers its effects on the doctrine of the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture. While on the surface this hermeneutical approach of first comparing historical information might seem like it is honoring the historical background of the text, it amounts to elevating foreign historical texts to the same level as Scripture. Within the process of exegesis, a choice must be made as to what determines meaning. Using the comparative studies methodology Walton has chosen the meaning according to ANE literature. This denies Scripture's authorial intent under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

⁷⁵ Walton, *Ancient Near Eastern Thought*, 30.

⁷⁶ Geisler and Roach write of Enns, "Enns claims that the non-Christian worldview of their day influenced what the biblical authors wrote. ... He says myth is a proper way to describe Genesis, even though he claims it contains history. ... Enns also asserts that God transformed ancient myths to focus on Himself" (Norman L. Geisler and William C. Roach, *Defending Inerrancy: Affirming the Accuracy of Scripture for a New Generation* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011], 101).

Conclusion

This article has presented Walton's hermeneutic of using ANE literature as a primary text to be imposed upon the biblical text. Walton's assertion that Genesis 1 describes the functionality of creation rather than the act of God creating has been rejected. Rather, it has been argued that Genesis 1 is a description of God creating the material elements of creation. Ultimately, Walton's view represents an improper hermeneutic through an improper appropriation of ancient Near Eastern mythology upon the biblical text of Genesis 1. The argumentation offered in this article follows the LGH of dispensational hermeneutics, especially noting the process of examining the grammar of the text itself before seeking historical data.

Yet, this discussion of Walton's hermeneutic offers dispensationalists the opportunity to correct the procedure of dealing with historical material with a proper hermeneutic. When using historical literature in the exegetical process, it must be secondary to the biblical text. Additionally, one must not just *compare* non-canonical writings with Scripture but must also observe *contrasts*. This showcases the polemical nature of the biblical text by highlighting the contrast between Scripture's proclamation of God against that of the gods of the ANE world. In this way a proper analysis is being made to assess whether Scripture is affirming a historical cultural norm, or if it is contrasting and changing ANE thoughts.

The hermeneutic Walton establishes by imputing the content of non-canonical writings upon the meaning of a biblical text is a practice that extends beyond OT studies. It seems that this same practice takes place in NT studies with the usage of the Dead Sea Scroll (DSS) literature. Rather than simply use this material to inform of the historical background, some use it to improperly import new meaning into a text. An example of this problem is seen in how scholars deal with Ezekiel 40–48 and Revelation 21. Many covenant theologians transfer the promise of Ezekiel's vision of a future literal temple to the vision of the eternal state in Revelation 21 using DSS material. The justification for such a maneuver is the belief that the Qumran community's attempts at allegorizing serve as the underpinning

of the NT authors. Thus, what Walton attempts in Genesis presents a broader problem that must be dealt with within OT, NT, and theological studies.

Theological Interpretation of the Song of Songs: A Test Case

A. W. Morris

Abstract: The primary proponents of Theological Interpretation of Scripture (TIS) tend to define TIS more in terms of what it *is not* than what it *is*. Rather than sort through the “is” and “is not” of TIS in theory, this study will evaluate TIS in practice. Two scholars have recently done full-length TIS treatments of the Song of Songs, which makes an interesting case study for *theological* interpretation since the Song’s theology is less overt than that of most other books of the Bible. This study will interact with both TIS studies and make the case that plain interpretation is preferable to TIS.

Key Words: Theological Interpretation, Song of Songs, Literal Interpretation, TIS

Introduction

In my various interactions with Theological Interpretation of Scripture (TIS), I have found its most salient feature to be its elusiveness. The primary proponents of TIS seem conspicuously averse to producing a clear definition, and they tend to describe TIS more in terms of what it *is not* than what it *is*. Vanhoozer states in the introduction of his OT survey that theological interpretation of the Bible *is not*

- an imposition of a theological system or confessional grid onto the biblical text.
- an imposition of a general hermeneutic or theory of interpretation onto the biblical text.

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- a form of merely historical, literary, or sociological criticism preoccupied with (respectively) the world “behind,” “of,” or “in front of” the biblical text.²

Instead of succinctly defining what TIS *is*, Vanhoozer lists three premises held by all the contributors to his survey: theological interpretation of the Bible

- is not the exclusive property of biblical scholars but the joint responsibility of all the theological disciplines and of the whole people of God, a peculiar fruit of the communion of the saints.

- is characterized by a governing interest in God, the word and works of God, and by a governing intention to engage in what we might call “theological criticism.”

- names a broad ecclesial concern that embraces a number of academic approaches.³

Rather than attempt to sort through the “is” and the “is not” of TIS, this article will bypass the realm of the abstract and “cut to the chase.” What has TIS produced in the way of biblical scholarship? However its proponents choose to describe it, what kind of fruit does “theological interpretation” bear for the spiritual nourishment of the church?

The Song of Songs is a fitting subject for a “test case” for theological interpretation of Scripture because of the long-held perception that the plainly interpreted Song is lacking in theological content. How will a method that describes itself as “theological” handle a book whose theology is perhaps not as overt as that of Isaiah or Romans?

This article will look at two recent TIS works on the Song of Songs to see how they attempt to interpret the Song

² Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “Introduction: What is Theological Interpretation of the Bible?” in *Theological Interpretation of the Old Testament*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 16–17.

³ *Ibid.*, 20–23.

“theologically.”⁴ The first is a (somewhat) exegetical commentary; the second is more of a theological meditation. Both authors align with TIS—the first by association with the commentary series to which he is contributing, the second by explicit statement. Each work will be assessed based on how the author arrives at a “theology” or theological contribution of the Song, followed by a response from the perspective of plain interpretation.⁵ The conclusion will be a defense of plain interpretation against “theological interpretation,” with particular reference to the Song of Songs.

TIS Interpretations of the Song

Brazos Theological Commentary (Paul J. Griffiths, 2011)

According to series editor R. R. Reno, “The Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible advances upon the assumption that the Nicene tradition, in all its diversity and controversy, provides the proper basis for the interpretation of the Bible as Christian Scripture.”⁶

Reno further states, “The editors of the series impose no particular method of doctrinal interpretation. ... Still further, the editors do not hold the commentators to any particular hermeneutical theory that specifies how to define the plain sense of Scripture—or the role this plain sense should play in interpretation. Here the commentary series is tentative and exploratory.”⁷

⁴ Another current TIS commentary series is “Two Horizons,” but as of this writing no volume on the Song has been published.

⁵ Throughout this article I use the term “plain interpretation” to refer to the method of biblical exegesis practiced by dispensationalists (see Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* [Chicago: Moody, 2007], chapter 5). I prefer to avoid the term “literal interpretation” because of the pervasive misunderstanding of the different meanings of the term *literal*.

⁶ R. R. Reno, Series Preface to *Song of Songs*. Brazos Theological Commentary, by Paul J. Griffiths (Grand Rapids: Brazos P, 2011), xiv.

⁷ *Ibid.*, xv.

According to an archived personal website, Paul Griffiths converted to Catholicism from the Anglican church in 1996,⁸ and the perspective of his commentary is unambiguously Roman Catholic. He does not hold to a single author of the Song; he believes that the Song is a collection of Hebrew lyrics that began to be assembled sometime after the Babylonian exile and were eventually finalized in the form we have today.⁹ He also believes that a translated text is no less authoritative: “There is, textually speaking, no real thing: there are only versions, all of them confected, some involving translation from one natural language into another and some not. ... Hearing the Song in English is not second best to hearing it in Hebrew: both are confected versions, and each is fully the word of the Lord.”¹⁰

Griffiths identifies three voices in the Song: “I call them, to begin with, the lover (a man), the beloved (a woman), and the daughters (a group of women).”¹¹ His view of the referents of these voices is best quoted in full:

... it is the unanimous witness of Jewish and Christian commentators before the modern period (and to a considerable extent after it) that the unnamed characters of the Song are figures, which is to say that in addition to being themselves they point to and participate in and reveal, in part, others: the people of Israel, the church, the individual beloved by the Lord, Mary, she whom

⁸ “Paul Griffiths,” Internet Archive, WayBack Machine, <https://web.archive.org/web/20190527005754/https://pauljgriffiths.net/>.

⁹ Griffiths, *Song of Songs*, xxiii–xxiv. He uses the term “confecting” to describe the process by which the Song was composed: “to confect is to make something sweet and beautiful by judicious mixing of ingredients; it may also imply a co-making, an act of making in cooperation with other makers” (ibid., xxiii).

¹⁰ Ibid., xxxviii. Griffiths chose to exegete a Latin translation of the Song (the *Nova Vulgata Bibliorum Sacrorum Editio*) rather than any version of the Hebrew text. His reasons were both ecclesiastical and liturgical—a Latin text because of the primacy of the Vulgate in Roman Catholicism, and an updated version of the Vulgate because it has become the standard text in Catholic lectionaries and other liturgical materials (ibid., xlii).

¹¹ Ibid., xliii.

the Lord has most desired and with whom he has entered into the greatest intimacy. The romance and desire of the Song, on these views, are not only, and perhaps not at all, about two unnamed lovers; they are also, and perhaps principally, and perhaps even only, about the desire of the Lord for his Israel, for his church, for Mary, and for you and me.¹²

To summarize Griffiths's allegorization, the male protagonist (the "lover") ultimately points to the Lord (which could be either God the Father or Jesus the Son), and the female protagonist (the "beloved") ultimately points to Israel, the church, the individual believer, and Mary the mother of Jesus. However, he does not opt for allegory *only* as Origen did but insists on retaining the plain meaning along with the allegorical referents:

On this allegorical view, the human beloved and the eroticism of the text vanishes, is neutered and absorbed. Better, certainly more fully Christian, is to read in such a way as to preserve both the text's figures and what they figure.¹³

In other words, the Song is about "erotic" human love *and* the "spiritual" relationship between the Lord and the aforementioned "female" referents. Griffiths refers to this as "figural" reading, which appears to mean allegorizing or typologizing without abandoning the plain meaning: "One event or utterance figures another when, while remaining unalterably what it is, it announces or communicates something other than itself."¹⁴ He concludes his introduction with this rhetorical question:

¹² Ibid., xlvi.

¹³ Ibid., xlix.

¹⁴ Ibid., lxix. Daniel Treier discusses different views on "literal," "allegorical," "typological," and "figural" reading in *Introducing Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 42–54.

Why not read the text just as a series of lyrics about love and desire? Well, of course that is possible. But to do that would not be to read the Song as a scriptural book; neither would it be to take seriously the weight of the Song's readings by Jews and Christians over two thousand years.¹⁵

The commentary itself contains his "figural" interpretations of each verse, beginning the "erotic" relationship of the male and female lovers followed by the "spiritual" relationships between the Lord and Israel, the church, the individual believer, and Mary the mother of Jesus. His interpretation of Song 1:2 ("Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth ...") appears to throw the question of gender and "the habituated shape of your sexual desires" wide open:

You, whether you are male or female, are, then, identifying with the Song's beloved when you resonate with the Song's first-person voice. But the questions of sex and gender—yours as hearer and that of the Song's voices, male and female—are not of central importance here. You, whatever your sex and whatever the habituated shape of your sexual desires, will find as you hear the Song, whether for the first time or the fiftieth, that you resonate and identify differently at different times; and the text of the Song forces those shifts upon you. If you are female and habituated to love of and desire for males, this does not mean that you can resonate only with the Song's beloved's expressions of desire for her male lover and delight in his male body. Neither, *mutatis mutandis*, if you are a male habituated to desiring the female. The Song's layers of figuration require, if you attend to them closely, transpositions here: as you come to see the beloved as a figure for the Lord's Israel-church and yourself as a member of that body, then her desires come to figure yours, whatever your sex and gender and habits.¹⁶

¹⁵ Griffiths, *Song of Songs*, liv.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 8–9.

There is a manifest lack of clarity on gender identity and sexual morality in this interpretation,¹⁷ which is most likely the result of his consistent conflation of the “erotic” with the “spiritual.” Song 5:1 refers to the consummation of the couple’s marriage on their wedding night, and Griffiths perceptively notes that the text of Song 4:16–5:1 “draws a veil” around the actual act of sexual intercourse so as not to sound like either a biology textbook or a trashy romance novel.¹⁸ Then he gives this additional reason for the “veiling”:

... if sexual intercourse, specifically the extended present of orgasm, serves in the Song (inter alia) as a figure for your full embrace by the Lord, an embrace of greater intimacy than which there is none, then the occlusion of its particular sensations and motions coheres well with the difficulty of representing that divine embrace in language.¹⁹

It is not clear whether Griffiths thinks that an orgasmic “embrace by the Lord” refers to a believer’s initial experience of salvation or ongoing spiritual union (or perhaps both). He holds that the last colon of 5:1 (“Eat, friends, drink and imbibe, lovers!”) is spoken by the “daughters,” and he sees this as “figuring” the reality that other people are usually involved with the salvation of individual believers:

Further yet, your own lovemaking with the Lord is not only yours: you have been prepared for it by the people of the Lord, whether Jewish or Christian, anointed by that people as the Lord’s lover. When—and this is the Christian version—the oils of baptism and confirmation stream luxuriously from your head into your eyes, you are being embraced by Jesus: and the congregation acclaim your embrace, a communal acclamation figured by what the

¹⁷ Griffiths is on record affirming the inherent “good”-ness of homosexual acts “motivated by love” in a 2014 book review (Paul J. Griffiths, “Uterior Lives: A Review of *Darling*,” *First Things*, no. 252 [April 2014]: 58–59. <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2014/04/ulterior-lives>).

¹⁸ Griffiths, *Song of Songs*, 115.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*.

daughters say in 5:1 to the couple. And, lastly, when Mary received the Lord's embrace and as a result conceived the Lord in her womb, that too was marked and acclaimed by others: angels, shepherds, magi, and, eventually, the church. In their acclamations can be heard echoes of the daughters' delight.²⁰

I am not sure how the Catholic Church would feel about the idea that the conception of Jesus was an orgasmic experience for Mary; but this level of "figuration" is ever-present in Griffiths's work, alongside his Catholic understanding of soteriology.

To summarize Griffiths:

- There is no objectively identifiable "original text" of the Song; therefore, any faithful translation is "fully the word of God."
- There is no reason to think that the Song (or any text, Scriptural or otherwise) has only one meaning.
- Plain interpretation without additional "figural" reading does not treat the Song as Scripture, nor does it take seriously the weight of church history.
- "Figural" reading of the Song allows (and even encourages) male readers of the Song to "resonate" with the female lover and female readers of the Song to "resonate" with the male lover, regardless of one's biological gender and the "habituated shape" of one's sexual desires.

The "erotic" experience between two human lovers—more specifically, sexual intercourse and orgasm—is "figural" of the spiritual experience between God and individual believers, especially the experience of salvation from sin, when believers are "embraced" by God for the first time.

Response

I will limit this response to two specific points. The first point is Griffiths's claim that to interpret the Song plainly is *not*

²⁰ Ibid., 116.

to read it as a scriptural book. My answer to that is, “Says who?” When did sin-tainted humanity become the exegetical arbiters of God-breathed Scripture? If we believe in the general principle that God intended for his word to be understood, then plain interpretation is the *only* way to read the Song as a scriptural book. If the Holy Spirit chose to breathe love poetry, then our task as interpreters is not to exhale our own spiritual “carbon dioxide” into it by inventing reasons why it must be something else.

Griffiths also claims that plain interpretation “does not take seriously the weight of the Song’s readings over the last two thousand years.” Aside from the fact that there have been plain interpreters even as early as the Patristic era (Theodore of Mopsuestia), biblical exegesis is not determined by majority vote. The church has gotten a lot of things wrong down through the centuries—that’s why there was a Reformation. An error that gets repeated for 1,800 years is still an error. An error that is believed by several billion people is still an error. Historical theology does not consist of repeating the same error over and over again because of church history.

The relevant question is, *why* did Origen, Augustine, and others feel they needed to bypass the plain meaning of the Song? The most likely answer is their erroneous Greco-Roman dichotomy between “the flesh” and “the spirit.”²¹ Here is a representative statement from Origen’s commentary:

But if any man who lives only after the flesh should approach it, to such a one the reading of this Scripture will be the occasion of no small hazard and danger. For he, not knowing how to hear love’s language in purity and with chaste ears, will twist the whole manner of his hearing of it away from the inner spiritual man and on to the outward and carnal; and he will be turned away from the spirit to the flesh, and will foster carnal desires in himself, and it

²¹ Richard M. Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), 545–47. He cites several studies on the Greek philosophical worldview of the church fathers.

will seem to be the Divine Scriptures that are thus urging and egging him on to fleshly lust!²²

Origen does have a point that a professing Christian not walking in step with the Holy Spirit could read the Song and get the wrong ideas. But the solution to this problem is not to separate the material world from the immaterial, especially when Genesis 1–2 declares all of God’s creation, including the one-flesh union between husband and wife, “very good” (Gen 1:31). The solution is to understand, from God’s perspective, what sexual purity means before *and during* marriage.

The second point is Griffiths’s conflation of marital lovemaking with our spiritual lives as Christians. Although there are instances of OT prophets metaphorically describing false worship as adultery and prostitution (Jeremiah 2, Ezekiel 16, Hosea 1–3), there are several places in Scripture where biblical authors appeared to put marital lovemaking and true worship in different categories of experience:

Exodus 19: As the newly liberated people of Israel arrived at Mount Sinai to enter into covenant relationship with their God, Moses gave specific instructions on YHWH’s behalf for how the people should prepare themselves. These instructions were: do not touch Mount Sinai (Exod 19:12), wash their garments (Exod 19:14), and do not “draw near to a woman” (Exod 19:15) – a euphemism for sexual relations.

This did not necessarily mean that YHWH considered sexual relations among his married people to be unholy; the creation mandate to “be fruitful and multiply” (Gen 1:28) was still operative. But the fact that YHWH commanded his people to abstain from sexual relations in advance of the formation of their spiritual covenant is telling. If YHWH had wanted his people to *associate* marital lovemaking with spiritual communion, there could have been a command (or at least an encouragement) to have all the sex they wanted for two days before meeting with him to enter into their spiritual “marriage

²² Origen, *Origen: The Song of Songs, Commentary and Homilies*, ed. Johannes Quasten and Joseph C. Plumpe, trans. R. P. Lawson. Ancient Christian Writers, vol. 26 (Mahwah, NJ: Newman P, 1957), 22.

covenant.” Instead, YHWH commanded his people to spiritually separate themselves *to* him by separating themselves *from* sexual relations for a short time.

1 Corinthians 6–7: Paul quoted Gen 2:24 to illustrate the seriousness of sexual relations outside of marriage: “Or do you not know that he who cleaves to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For he says, ‘The two will become one flesh’” (1 Cor 6:16). Sexual relations outside of marriage are much deeper than the physical act; the two individuals are united in a way that God has reserved for husbands and wives.

By way of contrast, in 1 Corinthians 6:17 Paul wrote, “But the one who is joined to the Lord is one spirit [with him].” The contrast to sexual immorality is not “becoming one flesh with the Lord” but rather becoming one *spirit* with the Lord. Believers in Christ enjoy a kind of spiritual intimacy with our Lord Jesus through the indwelling Holy Spirit, but Paul made a specific point of *not* describing this intimacy as some kind of marital “sex life” with Jesus—not even in direct contrast to sexual immorality.

In chapter 7, Paul distinguished marital lovemaking and prayer. In response to ever-present temptations to immorality (from which at least some of them had been saved [1 Cor 6:9–11]), Paul commanded the married couples to have sexual relations on a regular basis in order to counteract these temptations (1 Cor 7:2–3). The only reason Paul allowed for marital abstinence was for a couple to devote themselves to a temporary season of prayer, followed by a resumption of sexual relations (1 Cor 7:5).

This did not mean that marital lovemaking was unholy or even unspiritual, but it does reveal a category distinction between the communion of a believer and God through prayer and the communion of a husband and wife through lovemaking. It is true that in the broadest sense our entire lives are an offering of worship to God (Rom 12:1), but we are not supposed to think of worship as somehow becoming “one flesh” with God.

Song of Songs: As many commentators have noted, the use of metaphor and imagery was necessary to allow the author of the Song to write about nakedness and sexual intercourse

without sounding vulgar or pornographic. But what *kind* of imagery was used, and what kind *could* have been used?

The imagery of the Song mostly points back to Eden—gardens, trees, flowing streams, fragrances, beautiful animals, choice fruits. Could the author have used a different kind of imagery, perhaps “cultic” imagery from language and ritual of Leviticus? In Song 7:11–13 the wife invites her husband to come away with her to the vineyards in the countryside, where she will give her lovemaking to him. Why not have the wife invite her husband to come away with her to the temple and be a “love-offering” to YHWH upon the altar? The author’s choice of Edenic but *not* Levitical imagery strongly suggests that no such association between lovemaking and worship was intended.

Conspicuous in His Absence: Studies in the Song of Songs and Esther (Chloe Tse Sun, 2021)

Sun states in her introduction, “I will adopt theological interpretation as the primary method of this book. By theological interpretation, I borrow the analogy of digging from Kevin Vanhoozer.”²³ I find this to be a fascinating (and deeply revealing) metaphor for biblical studies. It implies, among other things, that the meaning of the text is not visible “on the surface” – you have to dig pretty far in order to find it.

Sun’s work is more of a theological reflection than a straightforward exegetical commentary:

The goal for this book, then, is to examine, meditate, and reflect theologically on the Song of Songs and Esther in relation to the theology of absence and inquire how these two books function in Old Testament theology.²⁴

²³ Chloe Tse Sun, *Conspicuous in His Absence: Studies in the Song of Songs and Esther* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2021), 3. Vanhoozer compares TIS to the 1848 California gold rush, with “knowledge of God” being the desired “theological gold” (“Introduction: What is Theological Interpretation of the Bible,” 16).

²⁴ Sun, *Conspicuous in His Absence*, 2.

It does not appear from Sun's work that she sees the protagonists of the Song as allegorical in the same way as Griffiths. Her work does not contain much in the way of straightforward exegesis; she is primarily dealing with larger theological themes. The overall structure of her work is:

the first two chapters place divine absence in a larger context of Old Testament theology. The next four chapters address the issue of divine absence through four themes: time, temple, feast, and canon.²⁵

Chapter 1 examines a number of scholarly views on theological presence and absence, including the "dialectical view" that presence and absence are not mutually exclusive but that God can be present in absence and absent in presence.²⁶ Chapter 2 focuses on wisdom, which Sun defines as "the search for the order of things in God's created world."²⁷ She sees the Song and Esther as "countertexts" to the rest of the OT:

... these two scrolls complement and supplement what is lacking in Old Testament theology in regard to the transcendent and mysterious nature of God. Therefore, these two books contribute to a fuller picture of who God is and how human beings relate to this God. Rather than remaining in the periphery as two small, festive scrolls, these two books push the boundaries, moving to the center of Old Testament theology, contesting, challenging, or even protesting the loud voices of divine presence in human history.²⁸

Chapter 3 discusses the absence of God in relation to time. Sun perceptively notes that the Song does not follow a linear chronology, unlike Esther, which narrates a single chain of events. She sees a parallel between the apparent elusiveness of the male lover in the temporally "fluid" Song and the occasional elusiveness of the God who exists outside of time:

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 26–39.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 51.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 77.

The implication is that there are times and there will be times when we feel that God is absent because God does not subject himself to human beings' timeline, nor does he live inside the confinement of human time. In that sense, God's presence is elusive from humanity's experience.²⁹

Chapter 4 not only draws connections between the garden imagery of the Song and the garden of Eden but also leans heavily on the idea that the garden of Eden was to be understood as a kind of temple:

In the ancient Near East and the Hebrew Bible, temple symbolizes divine presence. Although God appears to be invisible in the Song, the presence of the garden-temple imagery indirectly suggests his presence.³⁰

Chapter 5 discusses the place of the Song and Esther within the five "scrolls" that make up the "Megilloth" (Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther). Each of these "scrolls" is read during a particular feast, with Passover being the initial feast at which the Song is recited. Sun argues that the association of the Song with Passover dates back at least as far as the allegorical treatments of the Song in the Midrash Rabbah and the Aramaic Targum.³¹ On the connection between the absence of God in the Song and the celebration of Passover, Sun states, "The absence of God's name does not prevent the celebration of God's deliverance in the past, nor does it prevent us from entreating him for his mercy in the present."³²

²⁹ Ibid., 135.

³⁰ Ibid., 139.

³¹ Ibid., 187. The Song Rabbah is believed to have been composed between the 6th and 8th centuries CE, and Targum Song between the 7th and 9th centuries CE (Penelope Robin Junkermann, "The Relationship Between Targum Song of Songs and Midrash Rabbah Song of Songs" [PhD diss., University of Manchester, 2010], 46, 83).

³² Sun, *Conspicuous in His Absence*, 211.

Chapter 6 discusses the Song's place within the OT canon. Sun sees the Song as both "resonant" and "dissonant" with the rest of the canon:

Song of Songs and Esther serve both as echoes and as counterechoes in relation to the rest of the Hebrew Scripture. As echoes, the motifs of both books resonate with other biblical texts; as counterechoes, they challenge, critique, and evaluate the normative motifs manifested in the rest of the canon.³³

Sun holds to "canonical interpretation,"³⁴ which treats the canon of Scripture as a single entity in which intertextual "resonances" can go in either direction. For example, she sees Song 5:10–16 as both resonant and dissonant with the statue dreamt by Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 2, and she also sees the sexual perspectives of the Song, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes as resonant with Genesis 2.³⁵

To summarize Sun:

- The Song and Esther are "countertexts" that contribute a "theology of absence" to OT theology.
- In the Song (and also in the spiritual lives of believers) God can be present in absence and absent in presence.
- The Song is both resonant and dissonant with the rest of the OT canon.

The "practical applications" of the Song are not primarily about the marriage relationship but rather the spiritual response of believers who feel the "absence of God" in their lived experiences.

³³ *Ibid.*, 228.

³⁴ She further states (in agreement with Brevard Childs): "Since the focus of the canonical approach centers on its final form and the meaning of the canonical books for the faith community, the dating of the books and the order of the books become relatively insignificant" (*ibid.*, 229).

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 263–64.

Response

Perhaps the best way to respond is to look at the foundational premises of Sun's theological argument:

1. God is not mentioned in the Song of Songs; therefore, God is absent.

Does the mere fact that God is not mentioned in the Song mean that God is *absent* in the Song? I would submit that God is more accurately described as “backgrounded.” Aside from the divine attribute of omnipresence, which is attested in the OT (Ps 139:7–10; Jer 23:23–24), the Song gives three subtle hints of the “backgrounded” presence of God.

The first is Song 5:1c, the only words spoken from “outside” the Song. The identity of the speaker of this colon is not directly revealed, but the perspective is most definitely God's. The imperatives to the literary husband and wife in Song 5:1c align seamlessly with the creation mandate to all husbands and wives in Genesis 2:24. Whether the speaker of Song 5:1c is YHWH himself or the poet speaking from the perspective of YHWH, Song 5:1c is a statement of divine approval and blessing of the one-flesh union between husband and wife.

The second is the term הַתְּהִיבֵהוּ (“most vehement flame/flame of YHWH”) in Song 8:6. Whether this term is an intensive form (cp. הַתְּהַיבֵהוּ in Jer 2:31) or a short form of the Divine Name (cp. הַתְּהַיבֵהוּ in the “hallel” psalms), the comparison of monogamous love and jealousy with the “other-worldly” powers of death and Sheol suggest some sort of reference to the transcendent.

The third is the woman's charge to the daughters of Jerusalem “by the gazelles or by the does of the field” (Song 2:7, 3:5). There is no apparent reason why an Israelite would swear by female animals. Israelites were commanded to swear by the name of YHWH (Deut 6:13) and forbidden from swearing by the names of false gods (Jer 12:16, Amos 8:4). The most likely explanation is that these are circumlocutions of two names of

God, which would subtly point to the “backgrounded” presence of God without explicitly “sacralizing” the subject matter:³⁶

צבאות “gazelles”	→	יהוה צבאות “YHWH of Hosts”
אֵיזֶת הַשָּׂדֶה “does of the field”	→	אֵל שֶׁדַי “God Almighty”

2. The absence of God in the Song makes it a “countertext” to the rest of the OT that contributes to a fuller understanding of the nature and works of God.

Does the mere fact that God is not mentioned in the Song make it a “countertext?” That would depend on *why* God is not mentioned in the Song. If the Song is building upon the theological foundation of God’s good creation before sin entered into human experience, then it cannot be “counter” to anything other than the sin that followed the fall. It is certainly not “counter” to the nature of God or his work.³⁷ The Song is as orthodox as orthodox can be, even if God’s presence is in the background.

Why, then, is God “backgrounded?” The most likely explanation is simply that God does not intend for his people to conflate marital sex with true worship. Sun argues (similarly to Griffiths): “Just as the boundary between human sexuality and divine-human relationship in Proverbs 1–9 is fuzzy, so too is it in the Song of Songs.”³⁸ I would submit that this boundary is *not* fuzzy at any point in Scripture.

Even Jesus made the specific point that human marriage—and the God-ordained sexual relations that go with it—will not follow believers into the resurrection (Matt 22:30, Mark 12:25, Luke 20:34–36). Our highest and most glorious relational

³⁶ Gordis (*The Song of Songs and Lamentations* [New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1974], 28) and Davidson (*Flame of Yahweh*, 622–23) make the same connection.

³⁷ Davidson similarly sees the harmony between the Song and God’s creation in Genesis (*Flame of Yahweh*, 621–22).

³⁸ Sun, *Conspicuous in His Absence*, 257.

intimacy in our eternal resurrected bodies will *not* be sexual in nature. If nothing else, this tells us that not all intimacy is of the same kind or category. It is entirely consistent with the rest of Scripture for God to “background” his presence in a book primarily concerned with an intimacy that belongs only to this life.

3. The primary theological contribution of the Song concerns the absence of God from the lived experiences of believers.

There may be some level of “resonance” between the perceived absence of God in the lament psalms and the absence of the male lover from the presence of the female lover in the Song. But for most of the Song, the lovers are either together or anticipating being together. There are only two passages (3:1–5, 5:2–8) in the Song’s eight chapters in which the lovers are separated from each other unwillingly with no indication of when they will be together again. Are those two passages the primary focus of the Song’s theological contribution?

I would submit that the primary theological focus of the Song is the unashamed one-flesh union of which Genesis 2 speaks. The Song is pre-fall creation theology. Whatever post-fall obstacles might occasionally hinder this union, the Song “fleshes out” (for lack of a better term) the emotional and physical experience that God intends for every husband and wife.

Conclusion: In Defense of Plain Interpretation Rather Than “Theological Interpretation.”

Despite what Griffiths would have us believe, there have been a number of plain interpretations of the Song in the history of the church. Here are four from the last forty years:

Tyndale Old Testament Commentary (G. Lloyd Carr, 1984). Carr describes his interpretive approach to the Song as

... *natural* or *literal* interpretation. This approach interprets the Song as what it appears naturally to be—a series of poems which speak clearly and explicitly of the feelings, desires, concerns, hopes and fears of two young lovers—without any need to allegorize

or typologize or dramatize to escape the clear erotic elements present in the text.³⁹

He preferred the term “natural” to “literal” because of potential confusion about the term “literal” applied to poetry that is rich in metaphor and figurative language. At the end of his introduction he summarizes the purpose of the Song:

The Song is a celebration of the nature of humanity – male and female created in God’s image for mutual support and enjoyment. There is nothing here of the aggressive male and the reluctant or victimized female. They are one in their desires because their desires are God-given. It is only a community which is uncomfortable with such a concept that excommunicates those who understand the Song in its natural sense, or those who, having understood it correctly, refuse to allow ‘such a book’ to be part of God’s revealed word.⁴⁰

Contributions of Selected Rhetorical Devices to a Biblical Theology of the Song of Songs (Mark McGinniss, 2011). McGinniss’s work, as the title suggests, has to do with certain rhetorical devices that contribute to the theology of the Song. His approach to the Song is worth quoting in full:

Solomon wrote a song celebrating passion and desire between a man and a woman within the confines of marriage. This poem is not a narrative that traces a historical couple through the ups and downs of their love relationship. It is an artistic creation that places the two main literary characters into a lush and near perfect environment. In this garden setting the characters reveal themselves through their conversation. This sometimes erotically charged dialogue paints on the reader’s imagination the pleasure of fulfilled desire. For this couple, longing is only satisfied in the presence of the other. When absent from each other, they yearn for

³⁹ G. Lloyd Carr, *Song of Solomon: An Introduction and Commentary*. Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1984), 36 (emphasis original).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 58.

one another and their desire drives them over every obstacle to be one. The movement of the book from her first voiced longing to her final wish is achieved by this progression of absence to presence. For this couple presence produces shalom; absence is always to be struggled against. No good comes from absence except a desire to be present with the other.⁴¹

He adds,

While there is no appeal to the Law, no divine commands, no mention of priests or the temple, the astute audience understands that the Song calls for a reproduction of its message in the life of each married couple that is wise enough to hear the theological notes of this ancient love song.⁴²

Evangelical Exegetical Commentary (A. Boyd Luter, 2013). Luter holds that Solomon is the male protagonist of the Song and an unnamed country girl called the “Shulammitte” is the female protagonist.⁴³ He maintains that this romantic episode with “Shulammitte” occurred during Solomon’s co-regency with David, around the time his son and successor Rehoboam was born to Solomon’s Ammonite wife Naamah (1 Kgs 14:21)⁴⁴—by which point Solomon’s harem already totaled sixty wives and eighty concubines (Song 6:8).

I’m not sure how it would be possible for Solomon to write a song claiming to celebrate his own monogamous marriage to the “Shulammitte” when, by Luter’s own admission, Solomon

⁴¹ Mark McGinniss, *Contributions of Selected Rhetorical Devices to a Biblical Theology of the Song of Songs* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 224.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ A pastor named Tommy Nelson also holds this position. He preached a sermon series in 1991 that eventually became *The Book of Romance: What Solomon Says About Love, Sex, and Intimacy* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998). Nelson did not deal with Solomon’s polygamy any more believably than Luter did.

⁴⁴ A. Boyd Luter, *Song of Songs*, *Evangelical Exegetical Commentary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2013), unpaginated digital Logos edition, section entitled “Setting.”

practiced polygamy both before and after. By this reasoning, the theological message of the Song would be that it does not matter how many women a man has “on the side” as long as he has one “true love.”

Although his “historical” interpretation appears impossible to reconcile with the known facts of Solomon’s life, Luter says this about the purpose of the Song:

... the presence in the Song of a number of reasonably clear echoes of the earliest chapters of Genesis infers that, even in employing a well-known ANE literary genre, “the finest of the songs that belong to Solomon” was intentionally crafted to portray God’s perspective on the romantic and sexual love between a man and woman.⁴⁵

Whether the protagonists are historical or literary, Luter agrees that the purpose and message of the Song ultimately have to do with God’s plan for marriage and sex. I would only add that God’s perspective is that one man and one woman should cling to each other (Gen 2:24) and *resist* the temptation to have sexual relations with anyone else. God’s perspective would have been for Solomon *not* to have a harem, not for Solomon to delusionally imagine himself to be monogamous while simultaneously loving foreign women to the tune of 700 wives and 300 concubines (1 Kgs 11:1–3).

“Inner-Biblical Portraiture: The Use of Genesis 1–3 in the Song of Songs” (A.W. Morris, 2022). The substance of the argument of my dissertation is that the theological foundation of the Song of Songs is in the early chapters of Genesis, as Luter and Carr⁴⁶ both suggested indirectly. The theological message of the Song is not merely that marriage and sex are good; it is that God’s creation is good. The Song is about what God created, not what humanity figured out. Therefore, the Song is theological *by definition*.

⁴⁵ Ibid., section entitled “Purpose.”

⁴⁶ Carr similarly states, “In one sense, the Song is an extended commentary on the creation story—an expansion of the first recorded love-song in history” (*Song of Solomon*, 37).

Here are some major points where these plain interpretations of the Song agree:

- The Song is what it appears to be, which is love poetry about a married couple set within the larger biblical context of sexual morality.
- The Song was written either by Solomon himself or one of Solomon's contemporaries.
- The antecedent theology of the Song comes primarily from the early chapters of Genesis, in which God set forth heterosexual monogamy before the fall as his plan for marriage and sexual relations.
- Although the Song points back to pre-fall Eden, the protagonists' marriage is set against the backdrop of the post-fall world. This includes the possibility of emotional and physical separation as well as the temptation to sexual immorality.
- The Song's practical applications center around the emotional and physical relationship between husband and wife, and also the relational purity of the unmarried—in other words, plain application of plain interpretation.

I would submit the following reasons why plain interpretation is to be preferred rather than TIS:

1. *I still do not know what TIS is in practice.* Two books might be a small sample size, but I am no closer to understanding TIS from reading these two authors than I was after reading Vanhoozer's (non)-definitions. Sun interprets the Song as primarily about the perceived "absence of God" in the lives of believers. Griffiths interprets the Song as simultaneously about an "erotic" relationship between two lovers and also the "spiritual" relationships between the Lord and Israel, the Church, the individual believer, and Mary the mother of Jesus. Sun sees God as "absent" in the Song; Griffiths states, "The Lord is not explicitly mentioned at all in the Song, but if the Song is read as a scriptural rather than a closed book, then he is everywhere in

it.”⁴⁷ Both of these authors are supposedly using the same method, but the results are not even close.

Now, to be fair, plain interpreters of the Song do not agree on everything. Luter holds that Solomon and one of his wives (rather than literary characters) are the male and female protagonists. None of us agree on the Song’s macro-structure (or lack thereof). But we all agree on the aforementioned “majors,” and it is possible to objectively glean from these works a fairly clear idea of what plain interpretation entails.

2. *TIS appears to be too much of a democracy of opinions.* Griffiths rhetorically asked, “Why should the Song or any scriptural text (or indeed any text at all) have just one meaning even when considered *ad litteram*?”⁴⁸ Aside from the meaninglessness of the question (I could just as easily ask why any text should have more than one meaning), the impression I’m getting is that TIS values inclusiveness over correctness. TIS places a high value on interpreting the Bible “in community,” which has a certain degree of wisdom to it. If a biblical exegete thinks he has discovered an interpretation that the entire church has completely missed for the last two thousand years, then that interpretation is probably suspect. But TIS does not appear to have any specific and objective criteria for evaluating the interpretations of any particular theological community.

For example, one of the most difficult verses in the Song is 5:7, which takes place during the woman’s second “dream sequence.” In Song 5:2–8 the woman dreams that she is sleeping alone, her husband knocks on the door of the room where she is sleeping (5:2), she doesn’t open the door immediately (5:3), by the time she does open the door her husband is no longer there (5:6), and she goes out looking for him on city streets in the middle of the night (5:6), where she is struck and wounded by the night watchmen (5:7), after which she still has not located her husband (5:8).

What are we to make of this incident, especially the public assault and humiliation in 5:7? Some plain interpreters see the watchmen’s actions as divinely orchestrated discipline

⁴⁷ Griffiths, *Song of Songs*, 10.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, xliii.

against the woman for being self-centered and unresponsive to her husband.⁴⁹ But does the text give any statement to that effect? No, it does not. As Carr points out concerning the watchmen, “No reason for their reaction is given in the text,”⁵⁰ nor do we find any moral commentary in Song 5:2–8, suggesting that the woman committed a punishable sin by hesitating to open the door to her husband instead of opening it immediately.

The most that can be said from a plain interpretation of this text is that everything about Song 5:2–8 is *wrong*. The husband and wife should not be separated from each other, especially at night. If he comes knocking, she should not refuse to open the door to him. If she does not initially open the door to him, he should not depart before she eventually does. If she leaves her home in search of him, she should not be assaulted by anyone. And if she looks for him, she should eventually find him. There is no way to interpret any of this as somehow *right*.

The reason the “divine discipline” interpretation of Song 5:7 is most likely incorrect is that the text does not support it. The interpreter is free to speculate about why the night watchmen struck the woman, but speculation is not exegesis. And if the interpreter’s speculation lands on God being a wife-beater, then perhaps the interpreter should speculate elsewhere. But unlike plain interpretation, TIS would not be in a position to evaluate the “divine discipline” reading as incorrect as long as the interpreter can demonstrate that it is sufficiently “theological.”

How do the two TIS authors interpret this verse? Griffiths sees 5:7 as “love wounds” that supposedly parallel the male lover’s “wounds” in 4:9. This is based on a doubtful Latin translation of בְּכַתְּנִי □ (“you have excited my heart” [Song 4:9]) as *Vulnerasti cor meum* (“you have wounded my heart”).⁵¹ He connects them to other “love wounds” in Scripture:

⁴⁹ Nelson, *Book of Romance*, 118–19; McGinniss, *Contributions of Selected Rhetorical Devices*, 218.

⁵⁰ Carr, *Song of Solomon*, 149.

⁵¹ Griffiths, *Song of Songs*, 124. He does point out that the terms used for the beating and crucifixion of Christ are different than those used in the Song (124n175), but he does not mention that the Hebrew terms used in Song 5:7 are completely different than those used in Song 4:9.

Love's separation wounds are everywhere in scripture and tradition: in Israel's exile, in Peter's tears, in Mary's grief for her dead son. The separation wound in which all these participate, around which they circle, is the wound of Christ crucified, a wound given verbal form in the cry of desolation on the cross (Matt. 27:46). The Song's love wounds, heard in the light of knowledge of that wound, are given their deepest possible resonance: hearing them in that way and interpreting through them your own separation wounds. ... The city's "guards" have beaten and wounded the beloved in her separation. They will beat and wound you too.⁵²

He then connects the idea of "love wounds" with the literary protagonists of *Aeneid*, *Jude the Obscure*, and *King Lear*, and concludes,

All these participate in and figure Mary's separation from her son and her grief at his death on the cross. Love's separation wounds are incised deeply into all our bodies, and the Song's thematization of them permits them, rightly heard, to appear in their livid and bloody glory.⁵³

Sun sees a "resonance" between Song 5:7 and Ezekiel 16, a prophetic judgment against the nation of Israel in exile. Israel's idolatrous worship of false gods was compared to both adultery and prostitution (Ezek 16:30–32), and YHWH's punishment was metaphorically described as stripping Israel's clothing and stoning her to death (Ezek 16:37–40). Although the wife in the Song was not acting as a prostitute, Sun holds that she may have been mistaken for one based on a Middle Assyrian law quoted by Keel.⁵⁴

⁵² Ibid., 124–25.

⁵³ Ibid., 125.

⁵⁴ Sun, *Conspicuous in His Absence*, 255 (quoting from Othmar Keel, *A Continental Commentary: The Song of Songs*, trans. Frederick J. Gaiser [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994], 195). The Assyrian law in question reads, "A harlot must not veil herself; her head must be uncovered; he who has seen a harlot veiled must arrest her, produce witnesses, (and) bring her to

She also sees a “dissonance” between these texts: “At the same time, these images in the Song also counter Ezekiel 16 by presenting a portrait of an ideal love of a woman who suffers for the sake of her beloved.”⁵⁵ Her “theological” interpretation of Song 5:7 is that it is both resonant and dissonant with Ezekiel 16 based on a speculative case of mistaken identity because of an Assyrian law that was probably not followed in Israel and did not match the circumstances described in Song 5:2–8.

Plain interpretation can be tested and, if necessary, corrected. Wayne Grudem famously changed his position on divorce and remarriage because he realized that he had missed something in the text of 1 Corinthians 7:15.⁵⁶ TIS does not appear to have any specific and objective criteria for adjudicating between divergent interpretations.

3. *Plain interpretation is most conducive to exegetical humility.* The most problematic assumption behind TIS (and just about every hermeneutic other than plain interpretation) is that humans get to choose how to interpret God’s word. Plain interpretation begins with the assumption that God has his own opinion about how humans should interpret his word. Peter made the specific point that the Spirit-led authors of Scripture were not trafficking in human opinions (2 Pet 1:20–21), and there is no reason to think that the meaning of God-breathed Scripture would ever be left to human opinion, whether of an individual or a community. Humans don’t get to choose how to interpret the Song or any other book in the Bible. God has already chosen for them.

the palace tribunal; they shall not take her jewelry away, (but) the one who arrested her may take her clothing; they shall flog her fifty (times) with staves (and) pour pitch on her head” (James Bennett Pritchard, ed., *The Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*. 3rd ed. with Supplement [Princeton: Princeton U P, 1969], 183). Even if the people of Israel considered this case law to be legally binding (and there is no indication from the OT that they did), it does not match the specific case described in Song 5:2–8.

⁵⁵ Sun, *Conspicuous in His Absence*, 256.

⁵⁶ Wayne Grudem, “Grounds for Divorce: Why I Now Believe There Are More Than Two,” *Eikon 2*, no. 1 (Spring 2020): 71–79.

Plain interpretation is like railroad tracks. Once a train derails, there is no way to control where it will go. No matter how much TIS proponents (or anyone who is not a plain interpreter) might appeal to the inward assurance of the Holy Spirit or the weight of church history, the bottom line is that anyone who is not a plain interpreter is free to do whatever is right in his own eyes.⁵⁷ Once the exegetical train is off the rails, there is no way to control where it will end up.

This is not to say that plain interpreters always get it right. We are as sin-tainted as everybody else, but plain interpretation is at least aiming at the correct target. If we sometimes miss, we can humble ourselves, repent, and seek further clarification of the plain meaning of God's word.

4. *Plain interpretation is most conducive to exegetical contentment.* The underlying assumption behind every allegorical or typological interpretation of the Song is "There *must* be more to it than *that*." TIS in particular appears to be characterized by an insatiable craving for "more." Rather than being content with what God has plainly given to us in his word, TIS would turn biblical exegesis into an endless mining expedition for the "nuggets" supposedly buried beneath the "surface" of the text.

The problem is that this search for "nuggets" inevitably results in a craving for more and deeper "nuggets." Qoheleth's comment that "the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing" (Ecc 1:8) is still true. Where does it end? How much mining will it take to satisfy our craving? This is not to say that any of us should ever think that we have "fully mastered" the word of God. Paul prayed that the Philippians' love would grow in knowledge and depth of insight (Phil 1:9). But this growth consists of more fully understanding (and, more importantly, applying) the plain meaning of the text—not in endlessly searching for other meanings.

⁵⁷ Ryrie makes the same point in his discussion of hermeneutics (*Dispensationalism*, chapter 5).

Dispensational Distinctions in Redeemed Humanity as a Correspondence to God's Tri-Unity?

Adrian E. Isaacs

Abstract: The consistent threefold distinction between the nations, Israel, and the church observed by traditional dispensationalists represents a correspondence to God's triune being. Dispensationalists have been criticized for affirming a consistent distinction within the people of God (specifically, the Israel-church distinction). Many dispensationalists have effectively responded to this criticism on exegetical and hermeneutical grounds. This article engages this point of debate by suggesting a theological rationale for the wider threefold distinction, the aforementioned correspondence to the Trinity. If it can be demonstrated that corporate, redeemed humanity bears the marks of being triadic, then a plausible theological rationale for the consistent threefold distinction between the nations, Israel, and the church observed by traditional dispensationalists becomes evident: God, through history, is shaping corporate humanity in a manner that will ultimately reflect his own triune being.

Key Words: Dispensations, People of God, Triunity, Eschatology

The Dispensational Threefold Distinction in Corporate Humanity

Much attention in dispensational studies has been placed on the relationship between Israel and the church. Both supporters of dispensationalism, and its critics, have recognized the central importance of this relationship to dispensational theology. Specifically, traditional dispensational theology has maintained that there exists in the purposes of God

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a consistent distinction between Israel and the church which precludes one group from ever assuming the purposes and identity of the other. The church is not a “new Israel,” and Israel was not the church in the OT. Each group represents a distinct divine purpose, and these purposes are not to be confused with each other. Indeed, so important is this distinction between Israel and the church to traditional dispensationalism that Charles Ryrie identified it as the first element of his *sine quo non*.²

Israel is an elect nation with a distinct calling and particular covenants intended to be fulfilled by that nation. This means that a distinction must also be observed between Israel and the rest of the nations—the Gentiles. If Israel enjoys a position before God not enjoyed by any other nation, then a real distinction must exist between the Jewish nation and the vast array of Gentile nations to which Israel stands in contrast. As Chafer observed, the Gentiles stand in contradistinction to the nation of Israel right to the very end.³ And since the church of Jesus Christ is not a nation of the earth, but a body of called-out individuals *from* every nation, a real distinction must also exist between the church and the nations. For the premillennialist, this should be particularly evident when considering the millennium. In the millennial age, many from the nations will be saved, yet not to a position in the church, which would have been completed, raptured, and glorified before the tribulation period, and judged and married to Christ before the millennium.⁴ Thus the redeemed from among the nations in the millennium must represent a work of God distinct from his work in the church. This calls to mind Chafer’s recognition of “Two Gentile purposes”—a calling out of Gentiles in the present dispensation to form the church, and the wider salvation of Gentiles in the

² Charles Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody, 2007), 46–48.

³ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1976), 6.

⁴ Adrian E. Isaacs, “Eschatological Humanity as Triune: Considering a Foundational Dispensational Distinction in Light of the Doctrine of the Trinity,” *Interdisciplinary Journal on Biblical Authority* 1, no. 2 (Fall 2020): 181–82.

millennium.⁵ All of this implies a broader threefold distinction involving three distinct groupings in corporate humanity: the Gentile nations, the one elect nation Israel, and the body of Christ—the *ecclesia*, a group of individuals called out from every nation.⁶

A brief survey of seminal dispensational writers, as well as traditional dispensational voices of today, reveal a recognition of distinctions within God’s people and a threefold distinction in corporate humanity between the nations, Israel, and the church. John Nelson Darby spoke of three spheres where Christ’s glory is displayed—the Jews, Gentiles, and the church.⁷ Darby’s approach here is a fascinating one, as he not only identified a threefold distinction, but even went on to offer a doxological

⁵ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *The Kingdom in History and Prophecy* (1915; repr., First Rate Publishers, 2016), XIV.

⁶ Though the threefold distinction between the nations, Israel, and the church is the focus of this article, it is recognized that a strict threefold makeup to corporate humanity is not always the emphasis in Scripture. First Corinthians 10:32 would certainly be a place where a threefold distinction is evident. Yet Scripture also draws distinctions even within the Gentile peoples; hence the multiplicity of ethnicities and nationalities exist. In Isaiah 19:25, God refers to Egypt as his people, and Assyria as his handiwork—both alongside the Jewish nation, which he regards as his inheritance. In Acts 17, we see the principle of *unity-in-diversity* in the human race, but not in a strict threefold sense. Paul tells the Athenians that God made all nations from one man and that their boundaries and times were determined by God. Here, there is unity in that all nations proceeded from one man, yet there is also diversity in the multiplicity of nations. The unity of the human race is of course also seen in Romans 5 where Paul contrasts *sin through Adam* and *righteousness through Christ*. There are also distinct tribes within the one nation of Israel, and various callings and giftings within the one body of Christ. So, while the traditional dispensational approach has observed a consistent distinction in corporate humanity between the nations, Israel, and the church, it is recognized that this threefold arrangement is not the only manner in which the Bible presents unity and diversity in humanity.

⁷ John Nelson Darby, “Elements of Prophecy in Connection with the Church, the Jews, and the Gentiles,” in *The Collected Writings of J. N. Darby*, vol. 11, ed. William Kelly (Winschoten, Netherlands: H. L. Heijkoop, 1971), 45.

rationale for the distinction. There was a threefold glorification of Christ—the three spheres where Christ’s glory is displayed. The church was not of this world but was a heavenly people—united to the ascended Christ—who displayed the sovereign, redeeming grace of God.⁸ The church was set in heavenly places in Christ “that in the ages to come God might shew the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness to us in Christ Jesus.”⁹

Israel and the nations for Darby represented “different degrees” of Christ’s earthly government.¹⁰ Through Israel, God’s immediate government in the earth is established, while the Gentiles are brought to recognize God’s sovereignty and power through His dealings with Israel.¹¹ When Jerusalem is established in peace in the kingdom age, the nations will own the Lord in Zion.¹² Darby also highlighted the role of the Gentiles as rulers in the earth in light of Israel’s failure to properly represent their God.¹³

C. I. Scofield, in his work *Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth*, began his treatise on biblical distinctions with a chapter entitled “The Jew, The Gentile, and the Church of God.” At Niagara in 1888, Scofield spoke of this threefold distinction as “the inspired division of the human family” and that “you will find that each has a distinct place in the counsels and purposes of God.”¹⁴ He went on to point out that “these distinctions run through all Scripture.” According to Arno Gaebelein, it was from James Hall Brookes that Scofield learned of prophetic particulars concerning the nations, Israel, and the church.¹⁵

⁸ Ibid., 46–47.

⁹ Ibid., 47; referencing Ephesians 2:7 (KJV).

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid., 52.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ C. I. Scofield, “Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth,” in *Conference Hill Studies: Report on the Believers’ Meeting for Bible Study: Held at Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario, July 18–25, 1888*, ed. S. Robinson (Charleston, SC: Nabu P, 2011): 109–16.

¹⁵ Arno C. Gaebelein, *The History of the Scofield Reference Bible* (New York: Our Hope Publications, 1943), 22.

Scofield's student, Lewis Sperry Chafer, gave us a thorough treatment of the threefold distinction between the nations, Israel, and the church in his writings, particularly his *Systematic Theology*. Chafer recognized a threefold distinction in humanity that he understood was consistent. That is, each group—the nations, Israel, and the church—continues what it is from the origin of each respective group to the eschaton.¹⁶ Chafer also emphasized that each group's distinct *identity* is never lost or confused. Except for the gathering of individual Jews and Gentiles to form the church in the present dispensation, these three groups never lose their unique identities, nor are they ever merged into something other than what they are.¹⁷

Regarding the calling of both Jews and Gentiles in the present dispensation to form the church, Chafer perceptively regarded this group as a *third* corporate grouping alongside the previous two. Commenting on Ephesians 2, Chafer wrote,

In the midst of these distinctions between Jew and Gentile which were set up by God, owned by God, and accentuated by human prejudice and hatred, a new divine purpose was introduced; made possible on the ground of the death and resurrection of Christ and the advent of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost. That divine purpose is no less than the forming of a new body ... drawn from both Jews and Gentiles....¹⁸

The church, as Chafer recognized, is composed of individuals drawn out from the previous two groups—Israel and the nations—to constitute a third division in corporate humanity.

Later dispensationalists have also affirmed real distinctions within God's people, including the threefold distinction. Chafer's successor at Dallas Theological Seminary, John Walvoord, produced three works that have been combined into one volume entitled *The Nations, Israel and the Church in Prophecy*. As the title suggests, this volume relates biblical

¹⁶ Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, 37–40.

¹⁷ Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 4, 311.

¹⁸ Lewis Sperry Chafer, *The Ephesian Letter: Doctrinally Considered* (1935; repr., Resurrected Books, 2015), 109.

prophecy to each of the three groups, highlighting that which pertains to the Gentiles, that which pertains to the Jews, and that which pertains to Christians. According to Walvoord, it was erroneous to assume that eternity would mean the loss of national identity.¹⁹ Thus, he argued that in the new creation to come, Gentiles will be Gentiles, and Israelites will be Israelites.²⁰ The New Jerusalem will feature the children of Israel, the Gentiles, and the church, represented by the twelve apostles. This plurality within corporate humanity represented for Walvoord a *unity in diversity* with respect to God's program—²¹unity in one common salvation, but distinction in character and dispensational background.²²

In his work *Things to Come*, J. Dwight Pentecost related the doctrine of the tribulation uniquely to each of the three groups with sections entitled “The Relation of the Church to the Tribulation,” “Israel in the Tribulation,” and “The Gentiles in the Tribulation,” demonstrating a recognition of this key distinction. Charles Ryrie noted that while God's purposes for the church and Israel are given the most attention in the Bible, other groups, including the nations, have purposes as well.²³ Concerning the nations, Ryrie noted that God's plan for this group continues into the heavenly Jerusalem and that these nations are distinct from the church.²⁴ Paul Benware highlighted that the *one new man* of Ephesians 2 is distinct from both the Gentiles and Israel and is entirely new relative to the prior two groups.²⁵ Meanwhile, Dr. Mark Hitchcock has stated that biblical prophecy discloses God's plan for the Gentile nations, the Jewish people, and the church.²⁶

¹⁹ John F. Walvoord, “The Nations in Prophecy,” in *The Nations, Israel and the Church in Prophecy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), 169.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 170.

²¹ John F. Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom: A Basic Text in Premillennial Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1959), 326.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 47.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Paul Benware, *Understanding End Times Prophecy: A Comprehensive Approach* (Chicago: Moody, 2006), 117.

²⁶ Mark Hitchcock, *The End: A Complete Overview of Bible Prophecy and the End of Days* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2012), 10.

Robert Thomas understood Revelation 21:12–14, which of course speaks of the names of the twelve tribes of Israel in the New Jerusalem, as well as the twelve names of the apostles, to indicate that Israel will have a distinct role from the church in the New Jerusalem and in eternity.²⁷ And finally, in the recent work *Discovering Dispensationalism*, editors Cory Marsh and James Fazio point out that for dispensationalists, there has never been only one people of God, but rather multiple peoples of God.²⁸ The authors naturally recognize a clear, consistent distinction between Israel and the church, neither of which can assume the identity of the other,²⁹ and also recognize the ongoing identities of Gentile nations, even in the eschaton.³⁰

We can summarize then by saying that real, consistent distinctions within the people of God, including the threefold distinction between the nations, Israel, and the church, is generally well attested in the writings of traditional dispensationalists. The threefold distinction recognizes that while corporate humanity is shaped into a threefold plurality in history, the distinction is maintained eternally. That is to say, the dispensational and historical arranging of humanity into this threefold plurality of Gentile, Jew, and Christian is reflected in a redeemed, eschatological humanity that maintains this threefold distinction. As Walvoord stressed, the identities are not lost in the New Jerusalem. That being said, the idea that there could be real, consistent identity distinctions in the people of God, particularly in the eschaton, has been criticized by non-dispensationalists.

²⁷ Robert L. Thomas, “The Traditional Dispensational View,” in *Perspectives on Israel and the Church: 4 Views*, ed. Chad O. Brand (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2015), 135.

²⁸ Cory M. Marsh & James L. Fazio, eds., *Discovering Dispensationalism: Tracing the Development of Dispensational Thought from the First to the Twenty-First Century* (El Cajon, CA: SCS P, 2023), 368.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 366

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 368.

Criticism of Dispensational Distinctions in the People of God

Generally, the criticism of dispensational distinctions in the people of God has centered on the Israel-church relationship, though the wider threefold distinction has been recognized. For example, commenting on Scofield's *Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth*, Michael Williams stated that the threefold distinction between the Jews, Gentiles, and the church is the most important division in Scripture in dispensational theology.³¹ The 1943 report of the PCUS Ad Interim Committee regarding the compatibility of dispensationalism to the Westminster Confession recognized the dispensational distinction in the human race between the Jews, Gentiles, and the church, but objected to this, particularly the idea that there could be two different eternal destinies for Israel and the church.³² They countered the dispensational view by arguing for the human race as a *unit*, the entirety of which is fallen and must exercise saving faith, with one eternal destiny set before them—heaven.³³ So for the Ad Interim Committee, the concern was to see the human race as a unit, rather than a plurality of groups. Emphasizing the covenant of grace of covenant theology, the Committee's concern here was largely soteriological, not dispensational.³⁴ Committed to the unifying nature of this covenant of grace, the Committee regarded dispensational distinctions within the people of God as erroneous.³⁵

³¹ Michael Williams, *This World is Not My Home: The Origins and Development of Dispensationalism* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2003), 26.

³² "Copy of the Original Report of the 1943 PCUS Ad Interim Committee on Changes in the Confession of Faith and Catechisms as to Whether the Type of Bible Interpretation Known as 'Dispensationalism' is in Harmony with the Confession of Faith," in R. Todd Mangum, *The Dispensational-Covenantal Rift: The Fissuring of American Evangelical Theology from 1936 to 1944* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2007), 235.

³³ *Ibid.*, 236.

³⁴ Isaacs, "Eschatological Humanity as Triune," 188.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

Vern Poythress, in his critique of dispensationalism, argued quite clearly that there can be only one people of God because there is only one Christ. Again, soteriology appears to have been the driving force behind this concern.³⁶ He argued that since there is one humanity united under the headship of Adam, a humanity that is universally affected by Adam's sin, so there is one new redeemed humanity under Christ's headship.³⁷ Again, these arguments by Poythress are made directly in opposition to the dispensational position of a plurality in the people of God. John Gerstner, in his work *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth: A Critique of Dispensationalism*, raised a similar soteriological objection, questioning how two distinct peoples of God, Israel and the church, could possess the same salvation.³⁸

The title of Keith Mathison's work, *Dispensationalism: Rightly Dividing the People of God?* speaks directly to the non-dispensationalist's concern, namely, that dispensationalism divides the people of God. Mathison is quite clear, stating that people of God from all ages are one body, the church,³⁹ which in supersessionist fashion he regards as the "true Israel."⁴⁰ He argues that the foundational dispensational doctrine of a distinction in the people of God, namely, Israel and the church, is unbiblical, and that Christians must reject it, affirming instead the oneness of the people of God, the church, the "true Israel."⁴¹

More recently, covenant theologians Chad Brand and Tom Pratt Jr. have argued that the dispensational distinction

³⁶ Vern S. Poythress, *Understanding Dispensationalists* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 43.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 42.

³⁸ John Gerstner, *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth: A Critique of Dispensationalism* (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2000), 235, quoted in Adrian E. Isaacs, "The Nations, Israel, and the Church in the Eschatology of Lewis Sperry Chafer" (Th.D. thesis, University of Toronto, 2023), 97.

³⁹ Keith Mathison, *Dispensationalism: Rightly Dividing the People of God?* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 1995). 38

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 38.

between Israel and the church is artificial.⁴² A major part of their argument is that, since God is *one*, there must only be *one* people of God, a people taken from all the nations.⁴³ This appeal to “oneness” as a basis for the oneness of God’s people is similar to the move Gerstner made, except that while Gerstner appealed to the one salvation, Brand and Pratt appeal to the one God. For Brand and Pratt, the *oneness* of God is the very basis for a single people of God throughout the Bible.⁴⁴ The authors, in making this argument, include a footnote where they indicate that their emphasis on the oneness of God is based on Israel’s *Shema* and that they do not intend to discuss the nature of the Trinity, which they understand to be distinctiveness-in-unity.⁴⁵

As covenant theologians, Brand and Pratt Jr. obviously wrote from a perspective that understands both Israel and the church to represent differing aspects of the unfolding of redemption under one covenant of grace. While rejecting supersessionist or “replacement” language when speaking of Israel and the church and affirming an eschatological salvation for Israel,⁴⁶ the authors nonetheless reject the view that Israel will have a distinct role from that of the church in the eschaton, a point argued by Robert Thomas.⁴⁷ The *one new man* language and teaching of Paul eliminates such an eternal distinction and suggests but *one* people of God.⁴⁸ Thus, the *one new man* is not a third group alongside Israel and the nations as Benware argued, but rather is redeemed humanity *in toto*, the church, from the cross and Pentecost⁴⁹ through to the eschaton.

⁴² Chad O. Brand & Tom Pratt Jr., “The Progressive Covenantal View,” in Brand, ed., *Perspectives*, 236–37.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 237.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 237n13.

⁴⁶ Chad O. Brand, ed. *Perspectives*, 15. The precise position that Brand and Pratt represent is known as *progressive covenantalism* (see the aforementioned work edited by Chad O. Brand, *Perspectives on Israel and the Church: 4 Views*).

⁴⁷ Brand & Pratt Jr., “Response by Chad O. Brand and Tom Pratt Jr.” in Brand, ed., *Perspectives*, 153.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Brand, ed., *Perspectives*, 15.

No dispensationalist would contradict biblical monotheism. Likewise, no dispensationalist would deny that there is *one* salvation. But to argue, on the basis of these two things as some non-dispensationalists have done, that there must be only *one* people of God seems to neglect the biblical principle of unity-in-diversity, something that exists within the very being of God himself.⁵⁰

The Threefold Distinction as a Correspondence to God's Tri-Unity

The Triune God

It is well established and recognized that the distinctions observed in the people of God by dispensationalists are rooted in a particular hermeneutical approach, namely consistent literalism, or historical-grammatical interpretation. This hermeneutical approach was, of course, Ryrie's second element in the *sine qua non* of dispensationalism. Ryrie's argument was that the first element of the *sine quo non*, the distinction between Israel and the church, was born out of a consistent use of the historical-grammatical method.⁵¹ As this principle is widely recognized among dispensationalists, I will not say anything more with respect to the hermeneutical factors underpinning dispensational distinctions within corporate humanity. The primary concern of this article pertains to a possible theological rationale for the threefold distinction between the nations, Israel, and the church; specifically, the threefold arrangement between these three groups serves a correspondence or close resemblance to God's tri-unity.

In introducing the doctrine of the Trinity into this discussion, we are not so much concerned with the more particular aspects of theological debate regarding the Trinity, such as differences between Western and Eastern approaches (except for a passing reference to the filioque), or contemporary discussions regarding the classical model of the Trinity and the

⁵⁰ Which Brand and Pratt Jr. do recognize.

⁵¹ Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 47, 48.

relational model.⁵² Our concern is generally more basic, simply the reality of a threefold unity-in-distinction in the Godhead, which all orthodox Christians would affirm. In suggesting this correspondence between corporate humanity and God's triunity, I hope to provide a reasonable response to those who claim that God's *oneness*, and the *one* salvation in Christ precludes there being multiple peoples of God.

Traditional Trinitarian doctrine affirms that God is *one*, but that three hypostases, or "Persons" constitute the one God. The divine essence, or *ousia*, is not something akin to a fourth reality alongside the Father, the Son, and the Spirit.⁵³ Nor is it divided into parts among the three.⁵⁴ Rather, God is entirely present in each of the three divine persons so that the Father, Son, and Spirit all mutually share the one divine essence.⁵⁵ This means that each of the three divine persons are essential to deity. God exists *precisely as* the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. There is but one God, a statement in complete conformity to Jewish and OT monotheism (Isaiah 46:9). Yet this one God exists *as* a plurality of persons. The Father is God (John 6:27, 1 Pet 1:3), the Son is God (John 1:1, John 20:28), and the Spirit is God (Acts 5:3–4, 1 Cor 2:10–11). Real distinction is present within the one eternal, immutable God.

Trinitarian doctrine recognizes the real distinctions within the Godhead to be distinctions of relations. That is, the distinction in God lies in the fact that there are relations of persons within God's being: The Father is not the Son, and Son is not the Father, and the Son and the Father are not the Spirit. So far as the divine essence is concerned, all three possess everything pertaining to deity. But with respect to the eternal relations within the Godhead, each divine person retains the identity that is theirs from eternity. These relations between the Father, the Son, and the Spirit represent their only distinguishing

⁵² See Jason S. Sexton, ed. *The Doctrine of the Trinity: Two Views* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014).

⁵³ Philip W. Butin, *The Trinity* (Louisville: Geneva P, 2001), 32.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

aspect.⁵⁶ Whatever we can say about God the Father, we can say about God the Son, except that he is the Father.⁵⁷

The classical doctrine of the Trinity has of course used the words *begotten* and *procession* to understand the relations between divine Persons.⁵⁸ The Father is the unbegotten one, while the Son is eternally begotten of the Father. The Spirit meanwhile proceeds from the Father and the Son.⁵⁹ The persons of the Trinity do not stand isolated or unbounded from each other. That would be tritheism. Rather, an indivisible unity exists among the three persons that is constituted by these unique relations: the Begetter, the Begotten, and the One who proceeds from both. The relations between the divine persons accounts both for what differentiates and unites the Trinitarian reality.⁶⁰ This is a unity-in-distinction, and a distinction-in-unity; and the communion that exists between the three divine persons—their *koinonia*—is a blissful communion of love.⁶¹

Pulling all of this together, classic Trinitarian doctrine affirms that there is one God that exists in three distinct but co-equal persons, the Father the Son, and the Holy Spirit. All three are God, yet each possesses a distinct identity so as not to be any of the others. The three are not separate deities that stand apart from each other, but are bound together in an indivisible unity where the Father begets the Son, and the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. We can summarize this by considering a well-known illustration of the Trinity, known as the Shield of the Trinity.

⁵⁶ Gerald O'Collins, *The Tripersonal God: Understanding and Interpreting the Trinity* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist P, 1999), 178.

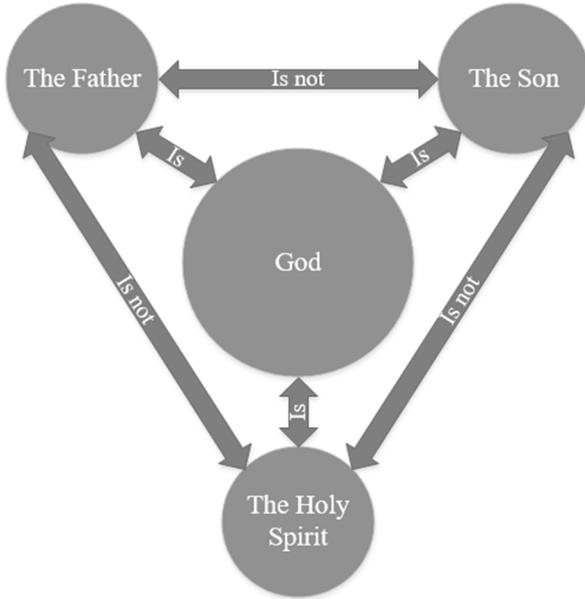
⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Isaacs, "Eschatological Humanity as Triune," 194.

⁵⁹ It is recognized that Eastern Christians would object to the "filioque" clause: "and the Son."

⁶⁰ O'Collins, *Tripersonal God*, 178.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 179.



The Nations, Israel, and the Church

What does all of this have to do with dispensational theology? When the traditional dispensational understanding of the relationship between the nations, Israel, and the church is observed in light of the unity-in-diversity of the Trinity, a remarkable correspondence seems to appear. First, there is the simple fact of a shared humanity despite consistent identity distinctions. There is only one human nature, not multiple. Gentiles, Jews, and Christians all share precisely the same anthropological makeup, the human nature inherited from Adam and Eve. This one humanity subsists in the three groups equally. None is less human than another. In this model, the one human nature corresponds to the one divine nature, while the three distinct identity groups correspond to the three persons of the Trinity. While obviously not making any connection to the Father, the Son, or the Spirit, the Apostle Paul seems to have affirmed the threefold nature of corporate humanity when he told the Corinthians not to “cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews,

Greeks or the church of God” (1 Cor 10:32). One natural humanity subsisting in three groups implies a triadic humanity.

There is also the manner in which the threefold distinction has been historically worked out through the dispensations. The distinction between the nations, Israel, and the church is elective and dispensational rather than physiological. That is to say, Israel and the church do not simply appear as independently created groups, entirely separate from the Gentiles with a separate nature, but rather, share a bond of unity and an identical human nature with the Gentiles and with each other. The period from Adam to Abraham consisted of one group of people on the earth, the Gentiles.⁶² When God chose to establish a covenant nation through which he would redeem the world, he did not create a new humanity in the sense of a new physiological reality but rather called out from the nations one man, Abram (Gen 12:1–3). Through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, God established a second division in the human race, Israel.

The human race, having fallen into sin was in need of saving. Abraham is called out from the nations by God, and the elect nation of Israel is established. Through Israel came Jesus Christ, the Savior of humanity. Thus, Israel, a nation elect out of all the nations, becomes the very channel of blessing and salvation for the nations. Though there is real distinction (i.e., the distinction between Gentile and Jew), there is also real unity as it pertains to corporate humanity. True humanity consists of Jew and Gentile.

And of course, it is through the work of the Jewish Messiah that a third group, the church, is established. Again, the church is not an isolated entity, entirely separate from the prior two groups. Rather, through the cross, and the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost, the church is constituted by individuals drawn from both the nations and Israel. Paul wrote in Ephesians 2:14–16,

For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations.

⁶² Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, 40.

His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.

The church consists of individuals from both Israel and the nations. It represents a bond of unity between Jews and Gentiles. It is through the Jewish Messiah, giving life to the world, that this third group exists. Yet, the existence of the church does not eradicate or nullify the continued existence of both Israel and the nations. All three exist together. Thus, what God has done through history is fashion corporate humanity into a threefold plurality that appears to bear some resemblance to his own triune reality.

Finally, there is the arrangement in the millennium and the new creation. Dispensationalists understand Scripture to teach a glorious era on this earth that will be characterized by righteousness and the just rule of Jesus Christ on this earth. During this glorious millennium, the nations will be saved (Mal 1:11; Isa 11:10), not as a part of the church, but as their own distinct group. This was the second of Chafer's "two Gentile purposes." We also know that Israel will experience a national, eschatological salvation. In addition to the various OT passages that speak of Israel's redemption, Paul speaks of Israel's coming redemption in Romans 11. Since Israel and the church are distinct from one another, this eschatological Jewish salvation does not bring them into the church. Rather, they are saved *as Israel*, in fulfillment of God's covenant promises to that nation. And with respect to the New Jerusalem, we are told that the nations will walk in the light of the eternal city and will bring their glory into it. We also see in the New Jerusalem the names of the twelve tribes of Israel, and the twelve apostles of the Lamb (Rev 21:12–14), which may be indicative of an enduring, eschatological distinction between Israel and the church.

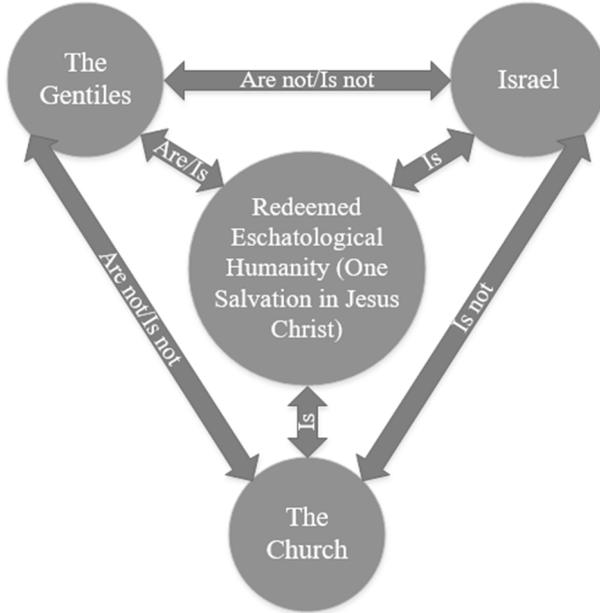
As demonstrated earlier in this article, traditional dispensationalists have understood the unity-in-diversity that exists in corporate humanity to be maintained even in the eschaton. National identities will not be lost. Making a connection between the diversity-in-unity in God and the diversity-in-unity in redeemed humanity is not at all

unprecedented among dispensationalists. Cory Marsh and James Fazio note that the diversity that exists among the persons of the Trinity will in fact continue to reflect the diversity among human beings who are made in God's image, and who will be united under his lordship.⁶³ They go on to note that distinctions among the different peoples of God remain even in the new creation (Rev 21:12, 14).

The correspondence being suggested here specifically concerns the nations as a corporate group, Israel, and the church reflecting the triune reality of God. What God has done in history, shape corporate humanity into a threefold reality, will be maintained eternally, and will forever bear a similarity to the threefold diversity-in-unity in the Godhead. Within eschatological redeemed humanity, there is *one* salvation. All are saved in the exact same way, whether they be part of the Gentile corporate group, Israel, or the church. All are saved by grace through faith, with Jesus Christ accomplishing the redemption common to all. Yet this eschatological redeemed humanity exists as three distinct groups: the nations, Israel, and the church. Each retains its distinct identity. The church is not Israel, and Israel is not the church, and neither of these are the Gentiles. Yet all three are one in Christ, who is in fact their common center. On this point, Darby's view, which we looked at earlier, is compelling: the threefold distinction serves as a threefold glorification of Christ, whereby each group uniquely provides an opportunity for Christ to be glorified in a particular way. In summary, we can illustrate this threefold arrangement in redeemed corporate humanity, and its apparent correspondence to the Trinity, in the following way:⁶⁴

⁶³ Marsh and Fazio, *Discovering Dispensationalism*, 368.

⁶⁴ This illustration first appeared in Adrian E. Isaacs, "Eschatological Humanity as Triune: Considering a Foundational Dispensational Distinction in Light of the Doctrine of the Trinity," *Interdisciplinary Journal on Biblical Authority* 1, no. 2 (Fall 2020): 198. Used by permission.



Concluding Thoughts

The goal of this article has been to suggest that the consistent threefold distinction between the nations, Israel, and the church that traditional dispensationalists understand to be revealed in Scripture, reflects God’s triune distinction-in-unity. There is one God in three eternally distinct persons, and there is one redeemed eschatological humanity in three distinct groups. As the three persons of the trinity exist in a loving, eternal union, so the three groups will exist together in the eschaton, forever enjoying each other. Israel with the nations, the nations with the church, and the church with Israel. Seen in this light, the three groups together constitute the one redeemed humanity, with the essence of their unity being their common life in Jesus Christ. Here, there is no place for triumphalism; no place for antisemitism, or replacement theology. To truly bear a likeness to the triune God in this manner, each of the three groups is necessary and must stand in their own distinct identity. If one is removed, the correspondence breaks down.

If this apparent correspondence between redeemed corporate humanity and the Trinity is what God specifically intended, then far from dividing the people of God, it would seem that dispensationalism is the one theological approach that truly captures this remarkable similarity between redeemed corporate humanity and the Trinity. The consistent, historical-grammatical interpretive method employed by traditional dispensationalists brings this consistent threefold distinction to light. The dispensational reading of corporate humanity through biblical history arrives at the eschaton with a corporate redeemed humanity that is three-in-one, forever displaying a likeness to the one God who is three-in-one. It seems to me then, that to argue that *one* God and *one* salvation necessitates *one* people of God misses the mark. God is a plurality of persons and, thus, we should not be surprised if the one humanity made in God's image is characterized by a plurality of people groups.

It is recognized that our progressive dispensational friends may find this suggested correspondence difficult to accept, not because it is characterized by real distinction in humanity, but because of the everlasting threefold nature of it. In their book *Progressive Dispensationalism*, Blaising and Bock were careful to point out that in their view, the church is not a separate group in contrast to Jews and Gentiles, but rather, represents redeemed humanity as it exists in the current dispensation prior to Christ's return.⁶⁵ In another work, Blaising again stresses that in his view, the church is not a distinct people separate from Israel and the Gentiles.⁶⁶ Rather, the church is a spiritual communion of persons of different *ethnes* and nations united in Christ.⁶⁷ While the progressive position still affirms a diversity-in-unity among the redeemed, I would argue that the traditional position offers a far richer theological picture in that the diversity-in-unity is specifically threefold, beautifully

⁶⁵ Craig A. Blaising & Darrell L. Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 49–50.

⁶⁶ Craig Blaising, "A Theology of Israel and the Church," in *Israel, the Church, and the Middle East: A Biblical Response to the Current Conflict*, ed. Darrell L. Bock and Mitch Glaser (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2018), 89.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 90.

reflecting the threefold diversity-in-unity of the Godhead and doing so eternally. This is not simply an arbitrary theological preference, but the natural outcome of a consistent, historical-grammatical interpretation of the biblical text.

Finally, it is recognized that this suggested correspondence is not without its challenges and question marks. Perhaps chief among these is the fact that it is largely theologically reasoned. If indeed the correspondence is specifically what God has intended, it is not explicitly mentioned in Scripture. However, it is arrived at by observing what Scripture as a whole *does say* about the nations, Israel, and the church and the nature of their relationships to each other. Another issue, which may be more of a question than an outright difficulty, is how each of the three groups experiences and relates uniquely to God in the eternal state. If the threefold distinction is maintained, and each group shares in the same salvation, which must involve union to Christ the Savior, where might an experiential difference lie—if there is one? And finally, how far should the correspondence be pressed? The inner life of God is obviously a deeply mysterious matter, and so any attempt to draw a correspondence between humanity and God's triune reality must recognize that there are limits as to how far the correspondence can be taken.

That said, traditional dispensational theology has recognized a threefold consistent distinction in corporate humanity between the nations, Israel, and the church. It is entirely reasonable then to suggest that a theological rationale would lie behind this arrangement. Said another way, what might the divine motive be in shaping corporate humanity in a threefold manner? Dispensational theology affirms that the glory of God is the underlying purpose of God in creation.⁶⁸ I suggest then that the threefold arrangement between the nations, Israel, and the church was intended by God to be to his own glory for all eternity by reflecting the wondrous reality of the diversity-in-unity of the triune God.

⁶⁸ Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 48.

Are the Old Testament Dietary Laws Morally Binding?

Mark J. Larson

Key Words: Dietary Laws, Kosher, Mosaic Law, Ceremonial
Cleanness, Ethics

Introduction

The Book of Acts indicates that controversy surrounded the issue of the Old Testament dietary laws in the period of the apostolic church. The Jewish church in Jerusalem objected that Peter had gone into the household of the Gentile Cornelius. They contended with him, bringing this objection: “You went in to uncircumcised men and *ate with them*” (Acts 11:3; emphasis added). Later, the Jerusalem Council met in response to the position of the Judaizers who maintained with reference to the Gentile converts to Christianity: “It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses” (Acts 15:5). Keeping the law of Moses entailed the duty of avoiding the unclean foods of the Mosaic ceremonial law. Who would have thought that “the problem of unclean foods” would be “at the heart of the first great controversy in the early church”? But that was the case. The twofold question faced by the early church was this: “Did Gentile believers have to be circumcised and keep the law of Moses about food?”²

Even today, the commitment of Orthodox Judaism to eat only kosher foods causes some Christians to wonder about their ethical responsibility when it comes to the matter of eating. In

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² Gordon J. Wenham, “The Theology of Unclean Food,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 53 (1981): 6.

addition, there are scholarly essays by Seventh Day Adventist scholars such as Jiri Moskala who present sophisticated arguments maintaining that the dietary laws given to Israel in the time of Moses are still valid today.³ Evangelical believers can be perplexed about this issue. Are the OT dietary laws morally binding for Christians at the present time as so many contend? We shall address this question by considering the following issues: the place of the dietary laws within the Mosaic legislation; the logic and symbolism of the food regulations; the temporary standing of the kosher mandates, and the changes brought by Jesus Christ.

Part of the Ceremonial Law

The Mosaic dietary laws are found in Leviticus 11:1–47 and Deuteronomy 14:3–21.⁴ The Levitical material, the lengthier of the two passages, indicates that its intention is “to distinguish between the unclean and the clean, and between the animal that may be eaten and the animal that may not be eaten” (Lev 11:47). Leviticus indicates that the classification of clean and unclean runs “parallel” to the category of holy and unholy.⁵ This indeed is one of the foundational concepts of Old Testament theology. All of reality is divided into two categories. There is the realm of the unconsecrated, and there is the sphere of the consecrated. The first category is the realm of the secular; it is the realm of the common and ordinary. Every object or person which is a part of the secular sphere stands apart from God—it has not been devoted to him. The second category is the sphere of the sacred;

³ Jiri Moskala, “The Validity of the Levitical Food Laws of Clean and Unclean Animals: A Case Study of Biblical Hermeneutics,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 22, no. 2 (2011): 3–31.

⁴ R. K. Harrison, “Heal,” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 644, draws attention to the uniqueness of the biblical material regarding clean and unclean animals. There are no other lists like this in any of the literature of the ancient Near East.

⁵ Michael G. McKelvey, “Leviticus,” in *A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the Old Testament: The Gospel Promise*, ed. Miles V. Van Pelt (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 94.

it is the sphere of that which is holy. Every object or person which is a part of the sacred realm belongs to God—it has been devoted to him.⁶

The importance of this issue of whether or not something was clean or unclean is underscored by the central burden of the book stated in Leviticus 19:2, in which the LORD gives this directive to Moses: “Speak to all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say to them: ‘You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy.’” The same emphasis regarding the holy and the profane, the clean and the unclean, is seen in the divine directive given to Aaron concerning the proper conduct of priests in the tabernacle (Lev 10:8–10): “Do not drink wine or intoxicating drink, you, nor your sons with you, when you go into the tabernacle of meeting, lest you die.” What was the point of this mandate? “It shall be a statute forever throughout your generations, that you may distinguish between holy and unholy, and between unclean and clean.” The priests needed to set the example in Israel. They were called upon to avoid conduct that was unholy and unclean.

In addition to the unclean and clean distinction, Leviticus further classifies the animals according to the sphere in which they live.⁷ The passage envisions four domains in which the animals live. Some animals live on the land (Lev 11:1–8), while others exist in the water (Lev 11:9–12). There are birds that fly in the air (Lev 11:13–19), and there are insects that move about on the land and in the air (Lev 11:20–23).

It is important to recognize that this dietary legislation was not part of the Ten Commandments, which “comprise the legal, moral, and spiritual foundation” of the life of the nation of Israel.⁸ Bruce Waltke contends that the moral law of God

⁶ Herman Bavinck, *The Doctrine of God*, trans. William Hendriksen (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth, 1977), 211, provides an excellent discussion at this point.

⁷ John E. Hartley, *Leviticus*, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1992), 153.

⁸ Eugene H. Merrill, *Everlasting Dominion: A Theology of the Old Testament* (Nashville: B & H Publishing, 2006), 330.

revealed in the Ten Commandments is eternal.”⁹ Paul does appear to reflect this position in Romans 7:12: “The law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good.” Indeed, the purpose of the incarnation of the Son of God and the intention of his substitutionary death is “that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit” (Rom 8:4). Paul goes on to explain in Romans 13:8–10 that the righteous requirement of the law is love and cites the sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth, and tenth commandments from the Decalogue. He insists that the prohibitions contained within it are still binding. These commandments and “any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (Rom 13:9).

Clear thinking regarding the Mosaic legislation is related to the recognition that the Exodus material distinguishes between the moral foundation imbedded in the Ten Commandments (Exod 20:1–17), the judicial law intended for implementation in the Holy Land (Exod 20:18–23:19), and the cultic legislation presented in the remainder of the Book of Exodus (Exod 25:1–40:38).¹⁰

Lewis Sperry Chafer affirmed that the “Law of Moses is recorded in three parts.” He stated that the commandments “embrace the moral government of Israel (Ex. 20:1–17). The judgments “embrace the social requirements (Ex. 25:1–3:18), and the ordinances “regulate the worship (Ex. 25:1–31:18).” Chafer was saying nothing new at this point. The three-fold division of the Mosaic law has long been recognized, not only by Calvin and the Reformed tradition, but also in Aquinas and the medieval doctors.¹¹ Chafer, though, expressed himself differently than what had been generally maintained in classical thinking on

⁹ Bruce K. Waltke, “Theonomy in Relation to Dispensational and Covenant Theologies,” in *Theonomy: A Reformed Critique*, ed. William S. Barker and W. Robert Godfrey (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 70.

¹⁰ Waltke, “Theonomy in Relation to Dispensational and Covenant Theologies,” 70–73.

¹¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Treatise on Law*, trans. Alfred J. Freddoso (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine’s Press, 2009).

this subject. “The entire system,” he wrote, “including the commandments as a rule of life, ceased with the death of Christ.” In fairness to Chafer, though, we should not conclude that he espoused an Antinomian position. He did say that the law of Christ is “that which now governs the Christian (1 Cor 9:20–21; Gal 6:2).” He stated, “Observe the term ‘my commandments’ which was used by Christ only in the upper room (John 14:15, etc.).” This is the place from which the Christian gets his “life-direction.”¹²

By way of response to the position of Chafer, we grant the importance of Paul’s directive in Galatians 6:2 that we are to “bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” This does not mean, however, that the moral principles imbedded in the Decalogue and scattered throughout the Mosaic legislation have lost their force. Paul had already called upon the believers in Galatia to adhere to a fundamental ethical duty: “Through love serve one another” (Gal 5:13). He based his directive upon Leviticus 19:18 and made this assertion: “For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (Gal 5:14). It is not so much that Christ replaces Moses by giving entirely new moral principles by which we ought to live. Christ in fact strengthens and deepens our moral obligations so clearly revealed in the Mosaic law (Matt 5:21–30). Herman Ridderbos notes in his exposition of Galatians 6:2 that “the claim of the law which was once given” and the responsibility to bear one another’s burdens in love “continues in effect,” but “this accrues to the believer from Christ.”¹³

There is no indication in the New Testament that the moral law disclosed in the Old Testament is anything less than eternal. It is likewise interesting that Baptists in the early eighteenth century referred to both of these biblical texts mentioned above—Romans 7:12 and 8:4—in chapter 12 of the New Hampshire Baptist Confession (1833) in a discussion on the harmony of the law and gospel: “We believe that the Law of God

¹² Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1976), 225–26.

¹³ Herman N. Ridderbos, *The Epistle of Paul to the Churches of Galatia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), 213.

is the eternal and unchangeable rule of this moral government; that it is holy, just, and good; and that the inability which the Scriptures ascribe to fallen men to fulfill its precepts arises entirely from their love of sin; to deliver them from which, and to restore them through a Mediator to unfeigned obedience to the holy Law, is one great end of the Gospel, and the means of grace connected with the establishment of the visible Church.”¹⁴

The dietary laws, however, were something distinct from the Decalogue, which forms “the core of biblical ethics.”¹⁵ It was part of the vast corpus of Mosaic ceremonial law, which concerned sacred places (the tabernacle), sacred actions (the sacrifices, purification rites, and eating clean foods), and sacred times (involving particular days, months, seasons, and years).¹⁶

Even in the period of the old covenant, the ceremonial law did not apply to all people on the face of the earth. It concerned the rituals of the Israelites who had entered into the Mosaic covenant (Exod 24:8). Vern Poythress writes, “All the things described in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14 are unclean *for Israel*.” He then draws attention to Deuteronomy 14:21: “You shall not eat anything which dies of itself. You may give it to the alien who is in your town, so that he may eat it, or you may sell it to a foreigner, for you are a holy people to the LORD your God.” Poythress notes, “What is prohibited to Israel is not prohibited to others.”¹⁷

¹⁴ Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 746.

¹⁵ William Dyrness, *Themes in Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1979), 177.

¹⁶ Walter C. Kaiser, *Toward an Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 114, advocates the classical position regarding the law of Moses: “This single law had three aspects or parts: the moral law, the civil law, and the ceremonial law.” He affirms that there are three strands that belong to the ceremonial law: “an elaborate sacrificial system,” “the tabernacle,” and “the theology of uncleanness and purification.”

¹⁷ Vern Poythress, *The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses* (Brentwood, TN: Wolgemuth and Hyatt, 1991), 84.

The Logic and Symbolism of the Unclean

It may well appear at first glance that the Mosaic distinctions between the unclean and the clean animals are purely arbitrary. A closer inspection of the biblical text, however, indicates that there is a rationale to the method of classification given by the LORD.¹⁸ The animals that are placed into the category of unclean demonstrate one of three characteristics.¹⁹ In the first place, unclean animals are abnormal or defective in the sense that they deviate from the paradigm or norm. This, for example, would rule out the eating of lobster, which as a water animal deviates from the paradigm of having fins and scales. Secondly, an animal may be unclean because it is related to the ground that was cursed by God after the fall of man into sin. This would explain the prohibition against eating things like the lizard that creeps along the ground. Finally, an unclean animal would be associated in some sense with death. This would explain the forbidding by God of the eating of anything that dies of itself, as well as the eating of birds that feed on dead animals.

Some think that the divine prohibition against the eating of the unclean animals was purely a matter of hygiene and that the forbidden animals were carriers of disease.²⁰ The problem with this view is that the NT allows the eating of what the Mosaic law had forbidden.²¹ Does God now expose his NT church to

¹⁸ Nathan MacDonald, *What Did the Ancient Israelites Eat? Diet in Biblical Times* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 33, manifests a higher critical approach to the biblical text when he maintains that the dietary laws in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14 come from after the exile and reflect an exercise in priestly categorization. Conversely, Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 5, properly notes a “striking feature of the Levitical laws” that is “so obvious that it can be overlooked.” “At the beginning of every chapter, and often several times within a chapter, it says, ‘The Lord spoke to Moses.’”

¹⁹ Poythress provides a nice discussion at this point (*The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses*, 80–85).

²⁰ An example of this approach is seen in D. I. Macht, “An Experimental Pharmacological Appreciation of Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 27 (1953): 444–50.

²¹ Richard C. Gamble, *The Whole Counsel of God*, vol. 1, *God’s Mighty Acts in the Old Testament* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing,

meat which carries disease and is therefore harmful to them? The great difficulty in the health interpretation is the simple fact that the New Testament removes all distinctions between edible and inedible animals. It has been well stated that “it is inconceivable that God would do away with rules he had given to promote good health.”²²

Rather than being a matter of hygiene, the fundamental significance of the distinction between the clean and the unclean relates to the matter of symbolism. In the larger sense, we must remember that the ceremonial law was symbolic.²³ “The ceremonial ordinances are everywhere translucent with a spiritual meaning.”²⁴ A biblical symbol portrays a fact or principle of a spiritual nature in a visible form.²⁵

What spiritual principles did the dietary laws intend to convey to OT Israel? This is by no means a new question in biblical interpretation. It is interesting that the seventeenth-century Baptist theologian John Bunyan anticipated contemporary interpretation regarding the spiritual significance of the Mosaic dietary regulations. Bunyan wrote, “I was also made about this time to see something concerning the beasts that Moses counted clean and unclean. I thought those beasts were types of men; the *clean* types of them that were the people of God: but the *unclean* types of such as were the children of the wicked one.”²⁶

2009), 447, remarks that “most modern commentators think that the purity laws transcended the issue of personal health and hygiene.” He observes in footnote 66: “the fact that Jesus declared all foods clean indicates that more than hygiene was involved.”

²² Hartley, *Leviticus*, 142.

²³ Gustav Oehler, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Minneapolis: Klock & Klock, 1978), 188, put it this way: “The *whole ritual ordinances* to which the Israelite is subject, from his circumcision onward, have a symbolic character.”

²⁴ Oehler, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 451.

²⁵ Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), 144.

²⁶ John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (London: Penguin Books, 1987), 21.

More recently, Walter Kaiser set forth this view: “Cleanness meant the worshiper was *qualified* to meet Yahweh; ‘unclean’ signified that he lacked the necessary qualifications to come before the Lord.”²⁷ An additional lesson that was intended by God was surely to impress upon Israel the duty of ethical holiness. We should remember that the central theme of Leviticus is the fact that God is holy and he demands the holiness of his people.²⁸ Likewise, immediately following the long list of dietary stipulations in Leviticus 11:1–44, the section concludes with the LORD making this statement: “You shall therefore be holy, for I am holy” (Lev 11:45b).

One of the interesting things about Leviticus 18:1–20:27, a section in which the LORD warns Israel to avoid ethical impurity (Lev 18:2–3; 20:23), is the teaching that sin brings defilement. We see this, for example, in Leviticus 18:24–25: “Do not defile yourself by any of these things: for by all these the nations which I am casting out before you have been defiled, therefore I have visited its punishment upon it, so that the land has spewed out its inhabitants.” The spiritual lesson in the dietary stipulations is that the LORD wanted his people to avoid the unholy and the unclean so that they would not defile themselves.

In a larger sense, we must remember that holiness was the intention of the LORD for Israel in offering to them the bilateral, conditional Mosaic covenant. Exodus 19:5–6 states, “Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to me above all people; for all the earth is mine. And you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.” Eugene Merrill reflects upon the designation *holy nation* and the purpose that God had: “For the first time Israel would be called no longer just a people (*‘am*) but a nation (*gôy*), that is, a discrete and ethnically identifiable political entity that would take its place among all the other nations of the world.” He further states, “It would be

²⁷ Kaiser, *Toward an Old Testament Theology*, 116.

²⁸ Michael G. McKelvey, “Leviticus,” in *A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the Old Testament*, ed. Miles V. Van Pelt (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 94. Cf., John J. Davis, *Moses and the Gods of Egypt* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1971), 197.

especially marked by its status as a people set apart by God to be his uniquely and one exhibiting, by its laws and conduct, a model of morality and righteousness to which all nations should aspire.”²⁹ Indeed, by living as a holy nation, they would be a kingdom of priests teaching the nations the way of salvation.

What was the point of the dietary laws? The LORD wanted his people to be pure from defilement, a clean and holy people. The constant concern to stay away from the ceremonially unclean—the abnormal (symbolizing sin which is a deviation from the norm of God’s moral law); the things associated with God’s curse (which comes upon sin); and the things of death (which is the penalty of sin)—would constantly remind the people of their moral duty to be set apart from ethical uncleanness that brings God’s curse and death.³⁰ The dietary laws reminded Israel that she had been chosen to be holy in the midst of a world that was morally unclean.³¹

Part of the Mosaic Covenant Alone

The Scripture indicates that the dietary laws belong exclusively to the period in the redemptive history of the Mosaic covenant. From creation until the Noahic flood, God’s intention was for mankind not to eat meat. On day six of the creation week, the directive comes from God to the first man and the first woman: “Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the surface of all the earth, and every tree which has fruit yielding seed; it shall be food for you” (Gen 1:29). After the flood, permission is given to eat animals, without the restrictions which come later at Sinai: “Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. I have given you all things, even as the green herbs” (Gen 9:3). It was only when the Mosaic covenant was

²⁹ Eugene H. Merrill, *Everlasting Dominion: A Theology of the Old Testament* (Nashville: B & H Publishing, 2006), 271. Cf., Kaiser, *Toward an Old Testament Theology*, 116.

³⁰ Oehler, observes that the ceremonial law in terms of its symbolism was something that was “mirroring the inner process of sanctification” (*Theology of the Old Testament*, 188).

³¹ Wenham, “The Theology of Unclean Food,” 14.

established at Mount Sinai that unclean animals were stipulated and declared inedible.

The point that we need to remember is that the Mosaic covenant in which the dietary laws appear—unlike the Abrahamic covenant, the Davidic covenant, and the new covenant—was not an everlasting covenant. “Predictions begin to arise in the latter prophets that the Mosaic covenant will be replaced by another covenant.”³² There is the prediction of Jeremiah that a new covenant will replace the covenant made at Sinai. The prophet makes this announcement: “Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD” (Jer 31:31–32). As we enter the New Testament, Hebrews 8:13 reflects upon the Jeremiah passage and states, “In that he says, ‘A new covenant,’ he has made the first obsolete. Now what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.”

Scripture insists that we have moved past the Mosaic dispensation. This means that there are implications for the dietary laws of that period. Significant New Testament passages indicate that the dietary laws of the Mosaic era are no longer in effect and were therefore temporary in their duration. Paul can say in Romans 14:14 with emphasis and a deep sense of certainty: “I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself.” He then states himself positively in Romans 14:20b, “All things indeed are clean.”³³ He likewise asserts in 1 Timothy 4:1–3 that those who depart from the faith are characterized, among other things, by commanding others “to abstain from foods which God created to be received with

³² Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 150.

³³ The point of these statements, as noted by Thomas R. Schreiner, is to emphasize that “food laws also are no longer binding” (*Paul, Apostle of God’s Glory in Christ: A Pauline Theology* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001], 322).

thanksgiving.” He further adds in the same passage, “For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer” (1 Tim 4:4–5).

Jesus Brings Change

The question that arises from such a NT position is this: Why are the dietary laws no longer in effect? There is, in the first place, a recognition in the NT that that which had been unclean is now clean. When Peter objected to the Lord’s directive that he should eat “unclean” meat (Acts 10:14), the Lord responded, “What God has cleansed you must not call common” (Acts 10:15).³⁴ This vision unveiled to Peter no doubt had a “decisive influence” on the thinking of the early church. “The purity laws had fulfilled their function and were abolished.”³⁵

The message given to Peter is similar to the statement that follows Jesus’ question in Mark 7:18b–19a: “Do you not understand that whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him, because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and is eliminated?” Mark then adds this editorial comment:³⁶ “Thus he declared all foods clean” (Mark 7:19b). This is a remarkable example of the authority of Christ. In a real

³⁴ I. Howard Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 185–86, summarizes the passage: “The effect of the vision was thus to announce to Peter that the distinction made in the Old Testament between foods that were ‘clean’, and therefore fit for human consumption, and those that were unclean, was now cancelled, so that in the future Jewish Christians could eat any food without fear of defilement.” F. F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), 218, interprets the passage in the same way: “The abolition of Jewish ceremonial barriers was pressed home in the vision with special reference to food-laws.”

³⁵ William L. Lane, *The Gospel according to Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 256.

³⁶ Darrell L. Bock, *The Gospel of Mark* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2005), 459, affirms concerning Mark 7:19b: “Mark treats this as a narrative aside, indicating that this was his own remark about what Jesus said.”

sense, Jesus “reverses divine law (Leviticus 11).”³⁷ One could say that we have gone backward to the time following the Noahic flood before the law was given at Mount Sinai: “Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you” (Gen 9:3).

The dietary laws are no longer binding, in the second place, because the NT brings an abrogation of the Mosaic ceremonial law. As we observed earlier, Waltke argues that “the moral law, summarized in the Ten Commandments, is eternal, but the ceremonial and judicial laws, though of eternal value for their typology and of eternal force to the extent that they express the moral law in relative situations, are abrogated.” He further affirms that “the ceremonial and judicial laws” which “comprise most of the law” are “cancelled.”³⁸

Waltke’s position has had a prestigious pedigree within the Reformed theological tradition. Calvin, for example, distinguished between the moral, ceremonial, and judicial laws. He accepted what he called “that common division of the whole law of God published by Moses into moral, ceremonial, and judicial laws.”³⁹ He further declared that the “ceremonial laws could be abrogated while piety remained safe and unharmed” and likewise stated that “when these judicial laws were taken away, the perpetual duties and precepts of love could still remain.”⁴⁰

Calvin’s position has long been recognized on a confessional level within the Protestant community. One example among many that could be cited is chapter 19 on the law of God in the 1689 London Confession. We find this declaration:

Besides this law, commonly called moral, God was pleased to give to the people of Israel ceremonial laws, containing several typical

³⁷ Knox Chamblin, “The Law of Moses and the Law of Christ,” in *Continuity and Discontinuity: Perspectives on the Relationship between Old and New Testaments*, ed. John S. Feinberg (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1988), 195, points out that Jesus “reverses divine law (Leviticus 11).” Poythress, *The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses*, 86.

³⁸ Waltke, “Theonomy in Relation to Dispensational and Covenant Theologies,” 69.

³⁹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battle (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), 1502.

⁴⁰ Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1503.

ordinances, partly of worship, prefiguring Christ, his graces, actions, sufferings, and benefits, and partly holding forth divers instructions of moral duties, all which ceremonial laws being appointed only to the time of reformation, are, by Jesus Christ the true Messiah and only law-giver, who was furnished with power from the Father for that end abrogated and taken away.

With respect to the Mosaic civil legislation, the 1689 Confession affirms, “To them also he gave sundry judicial laws, which expired together with the state of that people, not obliging any now by virtue of that institution; their general equity only being of modern use.” Finally, chapter 19 addresses the question regarding the enduring nature of the moral principles imbedded in the Ten Commandments: “The moral law doth forever bind all, as well justified persons as others, to the obedience thereof.” It adds this qualification: “Neither doth Christ in the Gospel any way dissolve, but much strengthen this obligation.”⁴¹

The first-century Judaizers had no conception regarding the possibility that the Mosaic ceremonial law was no longer in effect. They caused a controversy in the church in Antioch insisting upon the necessity of circumcision and obedience to the ceremonial law (Acts 15:1, 5). The Jerusalem Council though “set aside circumcision and the ‘law of Moses.’”⁴² The Judaizers’ influence was also felt in Colossae, and therefore Paul combats their teaching in Colossians 2. While they insisted that Gentile believers must be circumcised, Paul contends that NT believers do not need OT physical circumcision because we have the spiritual circumcision given by Christ: “In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ” (Col 2:11). Paul here reminds the Colossians that they had experienced a radical, spiritual surgery in the removal of the

⁴¹ *The Baptist Confession of Faith of 1689* (Sterling, VA: GAM Printers), 35–36.

⁴² Waltke, “Theonomy in Relation to Dispensational and Covenant Theologies,” 63.

physical body as it stood under the dominion of fallen human nature.⁴³

The Judaizers also wanted the Colossians to keep the duties of the Mosaic ceremonial law. They thought that they ought to be concerned about the sacred times “regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths” (Col 2:16). The special days connected with Judaism needed to be observed. Furthermore, they wanted to impose sacred actions upon them in terms of food and drink. This brings forth Paul’s admonition: “No one is to act as your judge in regard to food or drink” (Col 2:16). Paul is saying that we cannot be called to account for failing to follow the kosher dietary regulations of Moses.

It is against the teaching of the Judaizers that Paul affirms that the ceremonial law has been permanently abolished: “Having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And he has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross” (Col 2:14).

This text declares that God did three things with the ceremonial law—identified as “the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us.” First, God “wiped out the handwriting of requirements.”⁴⁴ This necessarily means that the rules and regulations of the ceremonial law have been wiped away. They have been erased. God has “wiped out” not only the handwriting of requirements as they were “against us” in terms of their condemnation, but he has also wiped out “the handwriting of requirements” in terms of their obligatory nature.⁴⁵ Second, the ceremonial law has been carried away:

⁴³ Heinrich Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistles to the Philippians and Colossians* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1983), 297.

⁴⁴ William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Colossians and Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1964), 121, makes the point that “God annulled the law.” The result is that the believer “has been discharged from the law viewed as a code of rules and regulations.”

⁴⁵ Commenting upon Colossians 2:14, John Calvin affirmed, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Colossians*, trans. John Pringle, vol. 21, *Calvin’s Commentaries*, 188: “If Christ has fully redeemed us from condemnation, he must have also effaced the remembrance of the obligation.”

“And he has taken it out of the way.” God himself has removed the handwriting of requirements stipulated in the Mosaic ceremonial law. Third, Paul asserts that the ceremonial law was fastened with nails to the cross of Christ: “Having nailed it to the cross.” As a result of these realities, Paul concludes, “Therefore let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ” (Col 2:16–17).

Enduring Instructional Value

Are the OT dietary laws morally binding? The word of God answers in the negative. Nevertheless, the Mosaic dietary legislation as part of the inspired Scripture is “profitable for doctrine” and “for instruction in righteousness” (2 Tim 3:16). Such laws still have their symbolic value. Their spiritual and moral instruction is particularly necessary when we consider the character of the era in which we live. Our time is fundamentally flawed and degenerate. “This present evil age” has not yet gone away (Gal 1:4). We still must “be saved from this perverse generation” (Acts 2:40). Furthermore, the mandate to run after holiness, a life of total consecration to God, remains in place: “Pursue peace with all people, and holiness without which no one will see the Lord” (Heb 12:14). The duty of the believer “to keep oneself unspotted from the world” has not changed (James 1:27).

What relevance does a passage like Leviticus 11 have for a Christian living in the twenty-first century? “The general principle of separation from what is unclean is still valid.”⁴⁶ The moral directives given by Paul to the church in Corinth are the will of God for our time: “Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean” (2 Cor 6:17). “Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Cor 7:1). At the same time, we ought to be encouraged as we remember that a promise is given to all who respond in obedience to the divine will: “I will be a Father to you, and you shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty” (2 Cor 6:18).

⁴⁶ Poythress, *The Shadow of Christ in the Law of Moses*, 85.

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Treasuring the Psalms: How to Read the Songs that Shape the Soul of the Church. By Ian J. Vaillancourt. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2023. 240 pp. Paperback, \$28.00.

Ian Vaillancourt teaches at Heritage Theological Seminary in Ontario and is the author of the monograph, *The Multifaceted Savior of Psalms 110 and 118: A Canonical Exegesis* and the trade book, *The Dawning of Redemption: The Story of the Pentateuch and the Hope of the Gospel*. The volume under review, *Treasuring the Psalms*, is similar in scope to the latter book mentioned: an introduction to the Psalms in just over 200 pages. Though it is under the IVP Academic imprint and includes both footnotes and Hebrew text, Vaillancourt identifies his audience as “college or seminary students, pastors, and church study groups” (10). For the last setting, he includes discussion questions at the end of each chapter. Vaillancourt includes Hebrew words in Hebrew script for those who know Hebrew, but he advises those who do not to simply skip over these words, noting, “A knowledge of Hebrew is *not* required in order to understand this book” (x). He has also written some six more advanced appendices, which are available for free download at IVPress.com/Treasuring-the-Psalms.

Part One, Chapters 1–5, focuses on reading the psalms canonically. Part Two, Chapters 6–9, focuses on reading the psalms christologically. The third part of the book, Chapters 10–12, looks at the personal and corporate use of lament, thanksgiving, and praise psalms.

In Part One, Vaillancourt argues that not only were the individual psalms written by men moved by the Spirit of God for the purpose of individual and corporate worship, but the composition and order of the Psalter was also done under inspiration. Vaillancourt also seeks to recover the acceptance and use of the superscriptions. While not dismissing the challenges represented by differences between the titles in the Masoretic text and LXX, he argues that throughout church history the superscriptions have rightly been regarded as an integral part of the psalms. In the course of this discussion, he helpfully summarizes the information found in the superscriptions regarding authorship, historical setting, and musical instruction.

Vaillancourt closes out the first part of the book with three chapters that survey the canonical structure of Psalms. Psalms 1 and

2 are understood as a gateway to the whole Psalter, which is divided into five books. Vaillancourt argues that the concentration of Davidic superscripts and lament psalms in Books 1 and 2 reveals that these books are meant to be read in light of David's historic reign and the struggles and suffering that exist as a result of sin. He takes the psalms in Book 3 to reflect on the loss of the Davidic kingship. This does not mean that they were all written with that topic in mind, but that they were collected as reflecting that topic or the mood associated with it. He summarizes Book 4 of the Psalter this way: "YHWH reigns, even when David does not; even when there is no earthly king on the throne of Israel, our covenant God reigns over all" (68). Book 5 begins with Psalm 107, which he holds to have been written upon the return from exile and in light of the reversal of the covenant curses of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. A cluster of Davidic psalms point to the restoration of the Davidic monarchy. The songs of ascent in this context look to the restoration of temple worship. This book is also replete with psalms of praise. The final chapter of Part One examines the strategic placement of royal psalms.

In Part Two, Vaillancourt looks at different ways the psalms point to Christ. He utilizes Psalm 90 as an example of how to interpret psalms in a redemptive-historical framework. He observes that this psalm was originally written by Moses as Israel was looking forward to leaving the wilderness and to entering the Promised Land. Within the Psalms, Psalm 90 heads a book of the Psalms that reflects on Israel in exile. In that context it serves to remind the people of their desire to return to the Promised Land. Vaillancourt equates Jesus' death on the cross with a wilderness experience that was undergone to bring Israel into the eternal promised land of the New Creation. Thus, Christians can sing Psalm 90 in anticipation of the New Creation.

"Promise-fulfillment" recognizes when Jesus fulfills, for instance, the promises of the Davidic covenant found in some of the psalms. "Contrast" is the third way the Psalms point to Christ. In Psalm 51, for instance, sinful David contrasts with his sinless greater Son. Typology is a third way to read the psalms christologically. Vaillancourt understands typology to refer to a series of patterns in God's way of working in the world (types) that find their fulfillment in an antitype.

Throughout the book, Vaillancourt utilizes various psalms in case studies to exemplify his point. Chapters 8 and 9 are extended case studies. Chapter 8 looks at Matthew's quotations and allusions to Psalm 118 as an example of the NT's use of the Psalms. In Chapter 9, Vaillancourt illustrates all that he has been saying to this point with a case study of Psalm 3.

The third part of the book looks at persona and corporate uses of lament, thanksgiving, and praise psalms. In this section, he uses Psalms 42, 118, 117, and 15 as examples.

All in all, Vaillancourt has succeeded at mediating serious scholarship on the Psalms to students and church Bible study groups. Vaillancourt is also forthrightly conservative, which is appreciated. There are a few stumbles, however. For instance, Vaillancourt sees the Exodus as a type that is ultimately fulfilled in the cross without adequately acknowledging that an ultimate exodus in which Israel returns to the land is directly prophesied in connection with the second advent. Some will also be wary of allowing the canonical location of the psalms to shape their meaning. Finally, in an appendix to Chapter 10, Vaillancourt includes a lengthy quotation from Bruce Waltke's *Old Testament Theology* in which Waltke claims, falsely, or at least too broadly, that dispensationalists hold imprecatory prayers to be evidence of an ethically inferior OT. Perhaps Waltke has encountered dispensationalists who hold that view, but I have not encountered such critics myself. These stumbles aside, this is an attractively designed book whose content will help its readers to treasure the Psalms indeed.

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Dictionary of the New Testament Use of the Old Testament. G. K. Beale, D. A. Carson, Benjamin L. Gladd, and Andrew David Naselli, eds. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2023. 992 pp. Hardcover, \$46.90.

Since 2007, G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson's *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* has been an indispensable resource for understanding individual NT texts in their OT contexts, use in Jewish sources and textual background along with the hermeneutical and theological implications. The field was further helped by the companion handbook on their exegetical method (2012) and more recently, *The Old Testament Use of the Old Testament* by Gary Edward Schnittjer (2021). Each of these stood out for the fact that they uniquely filled an unmet exegetical need.

The release of the *Dictionary of the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (DNTUOT) does so yet again, so much so that it eludes any close comparisons. Is it a general theological survey like Elwell's *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (2017)? It addresses a wide range of topics from biblical-theological themes (54 articles) like the Divine Warrior or the serpent and antichrist. It touches on textual history (25 articles)—the Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Philo, the Mishnah and Targums, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and the Septuagint. And it even addresses five topics from systematic theology and theological method. Still, with only 158 articles, the DNTUOT is more narrowly focused on the topic of intertextuality than broader dictionaries.

Is it, then, a biblical theology survey like the *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (Alexander, Rosner, Carson, Goldsworthy, 2000)? It does offer individual entries on each book (55 articles) that effectively work as biblical theologies. And yet each is specifically through the lens of intertextual links. For instance, the article on Genesis (6 pages, Stephen Dempster) begins with structure, major themes, and the significance of Genesis 3:15. It then traces links to Genesis in the Synoptics, John, Acts and Paul, Hebrews, and the Catholic letters, and Revelation. Some articles (for example, "Ecclesiastes") actually give more attention to inter-OT quotations. But the effect is an enriched understanding of the biblical books and

their place within the rest of the canon—a kind of biblical theological survey of each book.

Perhaps a better comparison is to one of the IVP Dictionaries such as the *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, since both are delimited to a narrower field-specific concern. But in the case of the DNTUOT, the topic is so broad, encompassing the entire canon, that it is useful for any student of the text—OT or NT exegetes, biblical theologians, and pastors. The content is robust, but original languages are transliterated and technical language appears only where necessary, so that a very wide audience can use the dictionary with profit.

Because of its scope, there is something for every reader to disagree with and much more to learn. Richard Belcher is disinclined toward Solomonic authorship of Ecclesiastes, adopting Longman's frame hypothesis. Max Rogland makes a stimulating argument that Esther has a much greater impact on the NT than has been acknowledged. Jonathan Worthington's extensive, detailed discussion of Philo (20 pages) finds parallels to Paul that seem a stretch, but rightly concludes in the end that the differences are far greater. In a few cases, the need to write an article on intertextuality may encroach on and distort the interpretive process. If we struggle to find actual textual parallels in the book of Judges (Miles V. Van Pelt), might we be tempted to stretch the search further than we ought? Are Samson and Jephthah's daughter really types of Christ?

A final criticism is of the title—an obvious and helpful link to the existing commentary and handbook. And though "Dictionary of Biblical Intertextuality" might describe the content better, the word "intertextuality" does still carry a raft of problematic notions. Still, readers should not let the title cause them to underestimate the scope of the DNTUOT, which extends to all types of biblical intertextuality and the entire exegetical endeavor.

It is rare to discover a new resource that immediately forces its way onto the front shelf with the books that must be constantly in reach. But together with the *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, the *Dictionary* is an indispensable resource that

pastors, students, and scholars from across the biblical disciplines will turn to constantly.

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Eve Isn't Evil: Feminist Readings of the Bible to Upend Our Assumptions. By Julie Faith Parker. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2023. 224 pp. Paperback, \$22.99.

Julie Faith Parker employs a feminist hermeneutic and challenges evangelical readers to read the Bible anew. She communicates engagingly, writing with the knowledge of a scholar but the heart of a pastor. She incorporates real-life stories into her writing, seeking to inculcate justice and equity into her readers. The substance of the book consists of eight chapters (2–9), in which she argues that the OT upholds women as equals.

Parker's feminist hermeneutic allows her to examine the biblical text from a different lens and "retell Bible stories in new ways" (12). Parker believes gender is a cultural construct, so she uses masculine and feminine pronouns for God and calls God the "Mother of Creation." She retells the story of Adam and Eve with a very optimistic view of Eve. For example, only Adam is kicked out of the Garden of Eden because God doesn't trust Adam not to eat from the tree of life. Eve, however, was deemed trustworthy and "remained in Eden with God—the mother of all living with the Mother of Creation" (20). In Parker's retelling of the story, Eve "realized the need to share her life-giving power with the rest of the world, so she generously left the garden and joined Adam to have children" (20). Parker claims that "there is no one 'right' way to interpret the Bible" (22) and encourages her readers to employ a feminist hermeneutic.

Interpreters who adopt a reader-centered hermeneutic will find Parker's *Eve Isn't Evil* insightful and intellectually stimulating, but those who reject this hermeneutic will be disappointed. Some of Parker's interpretations border on absurdity. From Joseph being on the autism spectrum (36), Rahab studying Torah between clients (47–

48), to Martha supplanting Mary in John 11 (139), some of her interpretations, while creative, seem unlikely. Her analyses, however, are based upon the Hebrew text, and in Chapter 10, she provides educated answers to her interpretive decisions.

Most disturbing, *Eve Isn't Evil* is written to evangelicals by an evangelical press, but it boldly disparages evangelical hermeneutics, theology, and practice. Parker encourages readers to consult spiritual beings other than the Lord God. She begins the book with a story about a time she met with a medium. Parker then faults herself for failing to follow the medium's advice immediately (2). She attests to a growing adoration of Saint Anthony, who has aided her in finding lost objects. After losing an object, Parker calls on Saint Anthony and asks for help. She then thinks about where the object is located and receives "a vision of where to find it and voilà—a few minutes later, what was lost is found" (46). She then exhorts the reader, "Try it sometime" (46).

Parker's feminist hermeneutic guides her to see virtue in the medium at Endor, whom Saul consulted after the Lord refused to answer him (1 Sam 28:3–25). Even more surprising is that Parker draws a correspondence between the medium at Endor and Jesus: "Like Jesus, another biblical prophet, the medium of Endor combines otherworldly abilities with deep human compassion as she trusts her own spiritual gifts" (63). The point of comparison concerns the slaughtering of a fatted calf, which the medium of Endor did for Saul, and the father did for the prodigal son in Luke 15.

Evangelicals can rightly conclude that Eve isn't evil, but Julie Faith Parker's *Eve Isn't Evil* is not evangelical. Her syncretistic "Christianity" bears greater resemblance to Isaiah's theological opponents who spoke, "Seek the mediums and the spiritists, the ones who whisper and mutter" (Isa 8:19). Evangelicals should respond as Isaiah did, "Should not a people seek their God? Should they seek the dead on behalf of the living? To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light to them" (Isa 8:19b–20). The lack of light in *Eve Isn't Evil* can be found

in its first sentence, “The genesis of this book was a meeting with a medium” (1).

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How to Read & Understand the Psalms. By Bruce K. Waltke and Fred G. Zaspel. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2023. 608 pp. Hardcover, \$49.99.

Waltke and Zaspel present a helpful volume that is neither a commentary nor a biblical theology, but a work preliminary to both. Describing their approach, they wrote, “We want to enter the preunderstandings, the mind of the psalmists, as it were, and gain the proper lenses for reading the psalms so that we can interpret more faithfully, understand more precisely, develop our theology more firmly, and expound more fully” (8). To enable the reader to complete these tasks, the authors offer fifteen chapters and three appendices containing valuable tools that equip the reader with the bare essentials to interpret the Psalms. These tools include a chapter on hermeneutics (chap. 2), another that orients the reader to the basics of Hebrew poetry (chap. 6), and others on the various psalm forms, such as praise and petition-lament (chaps. 8–9). Other vital areas of interest to the study of Psalms, such as authorship, date, the superscripts and postscripts, and the final arrangement of the Psalter are also dealt with. The volume is more than a vague introduction, as the authors demonstrate the effectiveness of the various tools and details discussed by including brief expositions of more than sixty different psalms.

The book interacts with critical scholarship in a comprehensive and fair manner, while including a defense for traditional viewpoints, such as Davidic authorship and the antiquity of the Psalms (chap. 3). Preceding the chapters on praise and petition-lament is Chapter 7, “Form Criticism and Psalm Forms.” While critiquing the anti-supernatural modernism that undergirds the form critical approach, the authors give a foundation for identifying the various forms that are found in the psalms. The book gives a primer to scholarly topics

related to the psalms, and it is written in a way that benefits the scholar, while remaining accessible for the non-academic reader.

The expositions of more than sixty psalms peppered throughout the volume highlight the value of the methodology presented by the authors. The exposition of each psalm includes an examination of the respective psalm's background. While brief in many instances, there are certain psalms that receive a more detailed treatment. For example, the background to Psalm 2 includes the psalm's historical setting, its setting in the Psalter, and its canonical setting (109–10). Many expositions also include an evaluation of the form and structure, and its significance to the proper understanding of the psalm. Following these preliminary steps, the authors offer a detailed exposition of the passage. At times these expositions include contemporary illustrations (297), while at other times there are invitations for personal reflection (302) or personal application (427). Each one is succinct, usually spanning between five to ten pages, but despite this brevity, they include useful information and insight for either an academic or a church ministry setting.

Chapter 3, "Hermeneutics," gives some basic principles that are necessary to interpret Psalms. The authors implore the reader to utilize both a firm hermeneutic and a thoughtful reflection of the author's setting and context when interpreting a psalm (24–27). Along with these principles, the authors call the reader to demonstrate a sympathetic understanding, placing oneself under the tutelage of the biblical author. A central hermeneutical principle presented by the authors is summarized: "We remain aware of the Psalms' orientation to the Davidic king and, in turn, their anticipation of Christ" (31). Throughout the book, the authors interpret the psalms in a way that acknowledges the original meaning of the author, while also completing their analysis with a canonical, Christocentric interpretation (429). In taking this approach, they fail to maintain a divide between the original audience and the contemporary audience. Their Christocentric hermeneutic creates tension with the principle of single meaning of the text, which places the locus of meaning in the relationship between the text's original audience and author apart from any input from later readers. The encouragement for the reader to embrace a right-to-left canonical reading of the Psalms is the main drawback of this volume, and this feature requires an informed approach and discernment on the part of the reader about proper

hermeneutical principles, including an acknowledgment of the single meaning of a text.

From superscripts to postscripts, and everything in between, this volume serves as a useful handbook for navigating one of the most beloved books of the Bible. Deriding a shallow approach to Psalms, the authors state the purpose of studying the book of Psalms: "... we must seek in our reading of the Psalter to go beyond the emotional pick-me-up and uncover its message in its fullness for the metanarrative of the Bible and for our own spiritual lives" (7). The authors give a primer on invaluable details and tools that are needed to fulfill this goal in studying the Psalms. The authors did not have the space to deal with every psalm, but every psalm that is dealt with includes a detailed and helpful analysis. This book excels at calling the reader to a committed study of the Psalms that is both academically challenging and spiritually reflective. This volume would be a welcome addition to the library of any interested student of the Psalms.

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Leviticus: The Lord's Holy People Living Out His Holy Character (Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament). By Jay Sklar. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2023. 835 pp. Hardback, \$69.99.

Jay Sklar is professor of Old Testament at Covenant Theological Seminary, and this is his second commentary on Leviticus. The introduction to this commentary, as he acknowledges, is a revision of the introduction to his Tyndale Commentary on Leviticus. In this work, he adds sections on literary features of the text and his approach to discourse analysis. Sklar holds that "Moses is the author of at least a substantial part of the book" (5). The qualification allows for later editorial activity, though he seems to lean toward this being early and

minimal. Footnote 1 suggests that Joshua may have edited these speeches into their final form.

The commentary proper is divided into 37 chapters that each have the same structure. They begin with a two- or three-sentence summary of the “Main Idea of the Passage.” This is followed by a section labeled “Literary Context,” which describes and visualizes how the passage fits in its broader context. Each section also includes the Hebrew text and English translation in a clausal display. The “Structure and Literary Form” section provides the overall structure of the section of text under consideration along with observations about the section’s literary form. Under “Explanation of the Text,” detailed comments are made verse-by-verse. As a rule, the ZECOT series does not include an “Explanation of the Text” in every chapter for longer books of the Bible. Rather, these are “generally limited to twelve to fifteen literary units deemed most critical for hearing the message of the book” (xv). However, Sklar was permitted to include “Explanation of the Text” sections for every unit. Even so, he had more material than could be included within the scope of the commentary, so he produced a companion volume, *Additional Notes on Leviticus in the Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament* (Saint Louis, MO: Gleanings P, 2023). These books cross-reference each other. Finally, each chapter closes with a section on “Canonical and Theological Significance.” Sklar does not skimp on this section, often devoting four to six pages to it. This is the section where Sklar applies Leviticus to the Christian.

Occasional “In Depth” boxes treat certain topics with more detail than the commentary structure normally would allow. For instance, at Leviticus 18:22 Sklar includes an “In Depth” feature titled “Do the Prohibitions against Homosexual Sex in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 Apply Today?” He provides two arguments commonly used to answer the question in the negative along with responses to those arguments. He then argues that the prohibitions, which he has established refer to “consensual homosexual sex” (491), do apply today because they are rooted in the creation order. Confirmation of this conclusion is found in Jesus’ teaching on marriage. In a footnote, he includes within sexual practice both actions and “lustful thoughts.”

A sampling of Sklar’s treatment of two specific texts will further illumine the value of this commentary. He identifies Leviticus 16 as a hinge point in the book and includes many helpful charts in this

commentary. A chart helpfully outlines the three parts to the atonement performed on that day. Sklar, in keeping with the discourse analysis emphasis of this commentary, argues that *weqatal* forms mark the sequence of action in the chapter while other forms indicate when the text is offering “background information” or alternative viewpoints. He also addresses the meaning of *‘āzā’ēl* and the function of the *‘āzā’ēl* goat. Sklar rejects the proposal that *‘āzā’ēl* was the name of a demon. He is unable to decide between the proposal that *‘āzā’ēl* refers to the wilderness terrain into which the goat was released or the proposal that *‘āzā’ēl* refers to the departure of the goat. He includes this helpful note for pastors: “So whichever translation of *‘āzā’ēl* is correct [of the two acceptable options], it certainly did function as a scapegoat in both senses of the term noted above: that which not only departed the camp but also bore the blame for others’ wrongs.... In light of this, preachers and teachers may find using the term ‘scapegoat’ to be the most helpful approach when explaining the passage” (430). In the section on “Canonical and Theological Significance,” Sklar connects the ritual surrounding the *‘āzā’ēl* goat to Isaiah 53 and the substitutionary atonement of the Servant. He further relates the Day of Atonement more broadly to Hebrews’s presentation of Jesus’s high priestly work.

Leviticus 25:44–46 is another challenging text since, in the past, it was used to justify the enslavement of Africans in perpetuity, and, at present, it is used to critique the Bible as a book that justified slavery. Sklar tackles these issues at length. First, he questions the wisdom of translating עֶבֶד as *slave*. He notes that “many moderns think of a ‘slave’ as ‘a person who is the legal property of another or other and is bound to absolute obedience, human chattel’ (*Concise Oxford Dictionary*)” (697). Sklar observes, “But this type of slavery is forbidden to Israelites,” and he notes the various rights that an עֶבֶד had—including the right to flee from a master (Deut 23:15–16) (697). Foreign servants had the same rights as Israelite servants save a guaranteed release in the seventh year or at a Jubilee. The Mosaic law designed servitude with protections and rights that made the situation desirable enough that some might voluntarily choose to maintain that economic relationship permanently. Sklar also reads Leviticus 25 in the larger context of the Mosaic law: “Note that the LORD has already forbidden the Israelites from acquiring as servants anyone who had

been kidnapped (Exod 21:16). (This fact alone should have prevented any attempt to use the Bible to justify the slave trade in America.)” (701). Finally, Sklar explores how the larger economic system outlined in this chapter was designed to “foster economic equity and opportunity,” “encourage strong families,” and in general benefit those in need as well as those with means (705–6).

Sklar is a careful interpreter of Leviticus who has written a commentary that should serve well pastors and other careful students of Scripture.

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Reading the Psalms Theologically. Eds. David M. Howard and Andrew J. Schmutzer. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Academic, 2023. 355 pp. Softcover, \$26.99.

This book is an anthology of eighteen essays by nineteen authors (there are two contributors to the first essay). Like many works of an anthological nature, the various essays are of uneven quality, but all are worthwhile. It will not be accessible for the average layperson, but pastors and theological students will find the work engaging and thought-provoking. It includes a thorough bibliography (24 pp.), an index of subjects and authors (10 pp.), and an index of Scripture and other ancient literature (19 pp.).

The book begins with an introductory essay that thoroughly surveys the current state of Psalms studies. Currently, the debate rages over whether an inspired editor intentionally organized all 150 psalms, grouped into collections of five books to tell a coherent story, and if so, what is that metanarrative? Among those who agree that there is a larger story being conveyed, there are two basic approaches. One view is that the hope of a Messianic Davidic king is dashed when the king and covenant fails (Psa 1–89). As a consequence, the hope of a singular messianic figure is replaced with a democratizing focus upon a corporate representation of God’s kingdom on earth through his people as they absorb wisdom from the application of Torah (Psa 90–150). That is, wisdom replaces royalty as the means through

which God mediates his kingdom on earth. The other perspective, represented by the authors of this work, is just the opposite: that notwithstanding all appearances to the contrary, the covenant remains in force and the heir to David's throne will yet come to reign on earth.

The remaining essays are grouped into four categories. The first deals with "canonical readings" of the psalms (i.e., editorial criticism, or a focus upon the macrostructure) and includes five essays. Pride of place among these goes to Peter C. W. Ho's masterful organization and synthesis of data from all 150 psalms, through which he illustrates the narrative flow and demonstrates that the covenant remains in force. The reader will appreciate his use of multiple charts and graphs to summarize the data and illustrate the use of chiasmus on the macrostructural level. This essay is complemented by David Gunderson's treatment of the psalms at the "seams" (i.e., the beginning and ending of the five books), which he argues work as pillars that support the overarching narrative of the fall and rise of David's dynasty. Also in this section is an essay by James M. Hamilton Jr. in which he argues that—based upon his knowledge of the Torah—David understands his role in the divine economy and *intentionally* portrays himself as a type of the Messiah. Seth D. Postell's essay emphasizes the divine nature of the Messiah in the psalms and notes how it lays the groundwork for Daniel's presentation of the Son of Man figure. Finally, Jill Firth develops the "servant" concept in the psalms, distinguishing between the Davidic/Messianic servant (singular) and the servants (plural) of the Lord.

The remaining three categories of essays shift the emphasis from a macrostructural reading to a more restricted focus upon individual psalms or theological concepts. The second category of essays deals with the theme of lament and suffering, and here there are five essays. C. Hassell Bullock suggests that the Hebrew word *nasa'* ("to forgive") carries overtones of vicarious atonement. May Young's article focuses upon the book of Lamentations (rather than Psalms) and its movement from despair to hope accompanied by a move from the singular "I" to a corporate "we." Rolf A. Jacobson's essay observes that the lamenters do not accept the notion that their suffering is always due to some sin on their part or to an absent God. Rather, despite the irrational appearance of things, they maintain

hope and confidence in a God who will yet deliver and vindicate. Philip S. Johnston surveys the data on *sheol* in the psalms. Daniel J. Estes portrays Psalm 32 as praise rather than penitential in nature.

The third category of essays is “The Nations and the Gods” and contains three essays. Ryan J. Cook focuses upon the various portrayals of the nations throughout the Psalter as a whole, while Jamie A. Grant highlights the theme of their inclusion in Psalm 87. Andrew J. Schmutzer exegetes Psalm 82 and argues that the “gods” of the psalm represent a divine council, not merely human judges.

The final category of essays develops the themes of God’s presence and sovereignty, and it includes four essays. J. Clinton McCann Jr. emphasizes a concern for ecology in the “enthronement psalms.” Jerome Skinner highlights the role of the physical sanctuary in representing God’s presence. J. Nathan Clayton observes the paradox of God’s distance and proximity conveyed through the Levitical psalms. Finally, David C. Mitchell interprets Psalm 110 as meaning that Melchizedek was actually a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ, and not merely a historical type.

I highly commend the book and all its essays as worthwhile reading. Notwithstanding its merits, I could identify potential areas of weakness for some readers. First, some of the essays may be less insightful. For example, Johnston provides a thorough analysis of *sheol* in his essay, but any pastor who has already done a thorough word study on *sheol* in seminary is not likely to find a depth of new material here (nor does Johnston seem to break new ground in this essay versus his earlier publications on the topic). Second, at times the attempt to be pastoral and address contemporary concerns through the theology of the psalms seems a little forced. For example, in McCann’s essay on ecology some readers may wonder whether his expressed concern for such things as mankind overpopulating the planet and over-fishing the seas (249) represent applications of the text befitting authorial intent, or whether they merely represent the imposition of modern concerns upon the text. Has the author jumped too quickly from text to application without laying a convincing exegetical foundation? Finally, some essays do a better job of examining the theology of the psalms in light of the broader Biblical revelation. For instance, Hamilton’s proposal that David *knows* that he is a type of the Messiah builds upon prior data in the Torah. Likewise, Postell’s portrayal of the divine Messiah in the psalms is

tied intriguingly to the theology of Daniel. On the other hand, Mitchell's argument that Melchizedek *is* Christ is limited to the data of Psalm 110. To be sure, this essay provides a thorough exegesis of the text and its history of interpretation that I found very helpful and fascinating. But what was disappointing was how quickly he dismissed the statement in Hebrews 7:3 that Melchizedek was "made like unto the Son of God." With a simple "wave of the hand," he dismisses that statement suggesting that only Christ can be like the Son of God (295). At this point, I was hoping to see how he would exegete and integrate the NT data with the psalm, but instead he simply wrote it off as irrelevant.

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The Book of Ruth (The New International Commentary on the Old Testament). By Peter H. W. Lau. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2023. 342 pp. Hardback, \$48.00.

Peter Lau, who teaches Old Testament at Seminari Theoloji Malaysia, has written the replacement volume to Robert Hubbard's 1988 commentary on Ruth in the New International Commentary on the Old Testament Series. Lau had already co-authored with Gregory Goswell a theology of Ruth in the New Studies in Biblical Theology series.

Lau identifies Ruth as a "historical narrative" or as a historically accurate short story written by an unidentified author and tentatively dated after the rise of the Davidic kings but prior to the exile. Ruth is the main character of the book, but Naomi is the central character. Lau proposes several different structures to the book: a structure of acts and scenes with the four acts corresponding to the four chapters of the book, a chiasmic structure (in which the sections of the chiasm

do not align with the scenes of the act/scene structure), and a U-shaped plot structure that tracks Naomi's rise, fall, and restoration.

Lau argues that the "primary purpose" of Ruth "was to present God's providence and kindness in preserving the family that produced King David" (28). A "secondary purpose" of the book would be to encourage God's people in kindness toward others: "God's unceasing providence and kindness encourage his people to follow a lifestyle of kindness" (29).

In his discussion of canonicity, Lau focuses on Ruth's varied placement in the canon since its canonicity itself is not debated. Instead of arguing for a normative canonical location, Lau looks at the varied placement of Ruth within the canon to see what insights can be gleaned from each.

Lau is sensitive to connections between Ruth and other parts of Scripture. He documents connections between Ruth and the Genesis narratives concerning Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Judah as well as connections between Ruth and the book of Samuel (24–27). He concludes the introduction with a section on "Ruth and the New Testament," in which he examines Ruth's place in Matthew's genealogy, how Ruth contributes to the New Testament's teaching about "mission" to the nations, and how Ruth contributes to an understanding of Christ's redemptive work.

Lau documents both "theological messages" and "themes" in the book of Ruth. Of the former he develops, "Names of God," "God's Providence," "Human Action," "The Cycle of Divine-Human Kindness," and "God's Blessing." With regard to the latter, he looks at the application of the Mosaic law in Ruth and the role of ethnicity. He concludes that the book encourages an application of the law according to its basic "principles" rather than "strict adherence to the specifics of the laws," noting that Ruth was praised for her marriage to Boaz despite the prohibition of Deuteronomy 7:3–4. Her abandonment of other gods and adherence to Yahweh made this permissible. Ruth assimilated to Israel, but she also remains identified as a Moabite.

The commentary proper is structured according to the four acts. Lau begins each act with a delineation of the scenes that comprise the act. With each scene he notes the "characters," "location," and "action" of the scene. Lau also summarizes each act and discusses how it links to the preceding acts. The commentary on each act is

structured according to scene. For each scene, Lau provides a translation, notes on the translation, comments on the scene's structure, and verse-by-verse commentary. The notes deal with textual, grammatical, and translational issues.

A survey of some of the difficult passages in Ruth will provide a sense of Lau's approach. In his comments on the opening scene, he weighs the interpretive options evenly but indicates a preference for the view that famine could be read as a covenant curse, the departure from the land without divine authorization faithlessness, the deaths could be judgments, and the marriage to foreign wives who proved barren a realization of the curses of the Mosaic covenant.

Lau does not characterize Orpah's return, nor Naomi's mention of her god, negatively. In fact, he notes that Chinese culture might misconstrue Ruth's covenant with Naomi as normative and use it to place undue pressure on daughters-in-law. With that concern in mind, he defends Orpah's return as a legitimate option.

Lau defends the Masoretic Text of Ruth 2:7. He interprets Ruth's request to "glean and gather" to go beyond the requirements of the Mosaic law regarding gleaning. Thus, the servant over the harvesters had her enter a hut and wait for Boaz—all morning. The coherence of the servant's speech breaks down toward the end because he recognized that, in Boaz's estimation, he had made the wrong decision.

Naomi's plan for Ruth and Boaz contains a number of words and phrases that could have sexual connotations. Lau interprets these in a non-sexual way, though he acknowledges that they do raise the question for the reader of what Ruth, the Moabitess, will do. While he acknowledges that Naomi's plan was "risky and dangerous," he thinks that Naomi was acting for Ruth's benefit and perhaps even acting in faith. He argues that this kind of secret invitation for Boaz to marry Ruth was necessary in an honor/shame society since a public invitation could cause Boaz to "lose face" (195).

Ruth 4:4 seems to link redemption of land with levirate marriage in a way that the Mosaic law did not. Lau, contrary to some interpreters, thinks the allusions to levirate marriage are so numerous that it must be in view. While the law does not link the two, Boaz did so. It was legitimate for Boaz to link levirate marriage to the land redemption because "in a collectivist society, roles are not clearly

defined. A kinsman-redeemer's role would include whatever is required to help a needy family member, to mend the breach in the kinship structure" (249).

Lau's commentary on Ruth is a worthy replacement to Robert Hubbard's excellent volume. He handles difficult passages well, his sensitivity to Ruth's relation to the rest of Scripture is helpful, and there is value in his ability to synthesize different emphases. For instance, he doesn't make a false choice between the importance of Ruth *or* Naomi or between the book's purpose with respect to God *or* its applicatory purpose for its readers. However, his multiple proposed structures for the book do not hold up equally well. The act-and-scene structure is superior to his proposed chiasm. Lau also leans into the perspective he has as a scholar from southeast Asia. This perspective seems to have illuminated the difficulties of Ruth 4:4, but it led him astray with regard to Orpah's return to her god(s). Overall, this book will serve pastors, seminarians, and scholars well.

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1 Peter, 2nd ed. (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament). By Karen H. Jobes. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2022. 374 pp. Hardcover, \$33.99.

This volume is a revised edition of Karen Jobes's 1 Peter commentary in the Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament series. The commentary's first edition (2005) was one of the best commentaries on 1 Peter but was ready for a revision. The overall structure of the commentary, consisting of three sections, remains unchanged. The first section is a 61-page introduction. The second section is the commentary section, which is 260 pages long. The last section is a 14-page excursus.

Three notable features of the original volume are retained. Jobes proposes that the recipients were converted elsewhere besides Asia Minor (most likely Rome), arguing that the converts were living in Asia Minor because Claudius used the periodic expulsion of undesirables to colonize different areas of the Empire. The second

unique feature from the original volume is her in-depth analysis of LXX usage in 1 Peter. She specifically compares the uses in 1 Peter against their original LXX context. The last notable remaining feature of the original volume is an excursus that analyzes the Greek syntax of 1 Peter for evidence of bi-lingual interference. She concludes that there is definite evidence of a Semitic influence in the Greek vocabulary and style of 1 Peter.

There are five notable additions to the second edition. First, Jobes provides a refreshed translation based on the NA28 Greek text. The author's translation is used in the commentary unless otherwise noted. Second, the author adds additional text-critical information for some OT quotations. Third, she standardizes references to the Greek OT. The Pentateuch is referred to as the LXX, and the remainder of the books are referred to as the OG (Old Greek). The entire Greek

OT is referred to as LXX/OG. Fourth, bibliographic information was revised and supplemented. Lastly, a section on the use of the OT in 1 Peter was added to the introduction.

There are four positive aspects of this commentary. The first is that this commentary is accessible to many different types of readers, as only a basic level of Greek is required to interact with it. The second positive aspect is that the commentary emphasizes surfacing the argument of 1 Peter rather than focusing on critical issues. The third positive aspect is the in-depth analysis of OT quotations. The last positive aspect is the excursus provided on the quality of the Greek language employed in writing the letter.

The last two positive aspects are beneficial for different reasons. The in-depth analysis of OT quotations directly affects exegesis. This is a problematic area in NT exegesis, and Jobes does an excellent job navigating the issues. The excursus is very helpful in refuting arguments against Petrine authorship. It provides strong evidence against the prevalent idea that the Greek of 1 Peter was too good for a first-century fisherman to write.

There is one negative aspect that this reviewer sees in this commentary. There does not seem to be enough extra content to justify a new revision. I would heartily recommend a person who does not have the original 1 Peter commentary buy the more recent edition. Still, I am unsure how valuable this second edition will be for someone who owns the first edition. The only exception to this

disclaimer would be scholars who specialize in the Petrine correspondence and who will want to get whatever new material this second edition does offer.

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A Bird's-Eye View of Luke and Acts: Context, Story, and Themes.
By Michael F. Bird. Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2023. 344 pp.
Paperback, \$36.00.

Michael F. Bird serves as the deputy Principal and lecturer in New Testament at Ridley College in Melbourne, Australia. He is a veteran professor and a prolific author. (In the interest of full disclosure, Bird also served on my Ph.D. dissertation committee).

In this engaging new volume from IVP, Bird brings a wealth of accumulated knowledge and experience, gleaned from years of studying and teaching Luke-Acts. He understands that the Lukan corpus, representing over 25% of the NT, is essential to biblical interpretation. In fact, he argues (like others before him) that “Luke-Acts is the New Testament in a nutshell” (2). Bird authored this book to serve as an introduction to Luke-Acts. It is designed for pastors, researchers, and students.

There are three primary strengths of *A Bird's-Eye View of Luke and Acts*: scholarship, accessibility, and humor. First, the volume contains the fruit of rigorous NT scholarship. Bird does not pen a shallow treatise. He dives into the deep waters that challenge interpreters of Luke-Acts. He discusses questions of genre (was Luke a biography, an apologetic treatise, or some form of historiography?), eschatology (did Luke nuance eschatology differently from Paul, perhaps due to a “delayed Parousia”?), and feminism (was Luke pro-women or anti-women?). While readers might not always agree with Bird's explanations, they will always find his exegetical-theological explorations stimulating and robust. The footnotes alone are a valuable source of information for students and scholars who wish to pursue further research in Luke-Acts.

The second strength of the book is its accessibility. Although it is written by a scholar and is brimming with scholarship, the book somehow manages to remain accessible to the general reader. Bird has a knack for writing that comes through in his thoughtfully constructed prose and poetic phrases. He writes with an eye toward relevance: how does Luke-Acts impact modern Christians and shape their mission? He distills the fruits of scholarly labor so that beginning students and busy pastors can benefit from the work of others.

The final strength of *A Bird's-Eye View of Luke and Acts* is its use of humor. We are not accustomed to humor in academic writing, but readers of Bird will know that it is one of his trademarks. In this book, he employs humor skillfully but responsibly. For instance, in a discussion of material possessions in the Lukan corpus, Bird avers, "Luke's picture of Jesus is not that of a Robin Hood who takes from the rich and gives to the poor, nor that of a Marxist revolutionary mobilizing the urban proletariat to revolt against their evil capitalist overlords" (192). Bird sprinkles humor throughout discussions of empire, salvation, and numerous other topics. These lighthearted comments make the book feel fresh and relevant, without trivializing the subject of Luke-Acts.

The primary challenges of the book will be determined by the reader's theological presuppositions. Complementarians, for example, will no doubt disagree with some of Bird's conclusions in his chapter on feminism (although, even for complementarians, there is much there with which to agree). Bird's discussion of eschatology and the linked question of the church's relationship to the Jewish people (and Israel) will no doubt satisfy some, but not all readers. That is to be expected in a book of this nature, that introduces students to a broad range of crucial and controversial topics.

Overall, *A Bird's-Eye View of Luke and Acts* is an excellent contribution to the scholarly conversation about Luke's two-volume work. It is useful as an introduction for students and as an overview

for pastors who are preaching on the Lukan corpus. When I preach through Acts in 2024, I will keep Bird's book close at hand.

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A Jewish Paul: The Messiah's Herald to the Gentiles. By Matthew Thiessen. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2023. 187 pp. Paperback, \$24.99.

Matthew Thiessen, whose Ph.D. was awarded at Duke University, is an associate professor of religious studies at McMaster University. His book continues an argument from his previous publications, that the Apostle Paul was a practicing Jew whose calling was to bring the Gentiles to faith in Jesus Christ, the Messiah. The author has a strong desire to discourage anti-Jewish thinking and supersessionism in the church. He insists that Paul would have been astounded to find his writings interpreted to encourage anti-Judaism in the church and that his letters should be understood to teach that there was a concept of works salvation in Judaism.

In the introduction, Thiessen explains that even those who have studied the letters of Paul all their lives struggle to understand him, to gain an accurate picture of him, and to agree on the substance of his thought. The author intends to help the reader better understand the letters we have from Paul and how Paul related to the Judaism of his day.

Thiessen also carefully distinguishes his perspective on Paul from adherents of the "new perspective" on Paul (a view that characterizes the Jews as ethnocentric), and the "apocalyptic school" (which stresses the discontinuity of Paul's message from Judaism). In his perspective, Paul's only "ethnic" concern was the division in the thinking of the ancient Jews between those who are Jews and those who are non-Jews. Thiessen also states that Paul's position on God's deliverance and its provision as an unmerited gift of God is like that of his fellow Jews. Rather than see Paul, as presented in his letters and the writings of Luke, as "against" Judaism, he has come to see Paul as one who is within the Jewish and Mediterranean world.

To help readers avoid making the Paul of the Bible in our own image, Thiessen consistently refuses to use several traditionally translated terms throughout his twelve chapters. These terms include *Christian* (preferring those loyal to Jesus, the Messiah), *church* (since that term engenders visions of something different than the meaning of *ekklesia* in Paul's world), *Christ* (which should be understood as Messiah, or the Anointed One), and *apostle* (since the modern English reader will not appreciate the significance of the word as used in Paul's day). While it is interesting to encounter the Greek words instead of usual English equivalents, it would seem to be a truism that contemporary readers routinely err in the accuracy of understanding New and Old Testament words and phrases.

In addition to the words just mentioned, Thiessen is careful to use the transliteration of the Greek word for "spirit," *pneuma*, whenever he discusses the meanings of God as Spirit, the spirit of Christ, and the work of the Holy Spirit. He is convinced that the ancient Greeks did not conceive of *pneuma* as something immaterial, but rather as "the most perfect form of matter" (107). This and other concepts Thiessen believes to be drawn from the philosophy and science of the ancient Greeks, including the Stoics.

In Thiessen's view, Paul, as the one sent to the Gentiles, wrote his epistles primarily to the Gentiles. For example, his concern about circumcision was not to condemn the practice of circumcision in Judaism, but to warn Gentile believers in the Messiah not to consider circumcision a necessary condition for being a Jesus follower. There does not appear to be a widespread concern on the part of the Jewish people to proselytize non-Jews, and the evidence is limited which might indicate that some Jewish people would have thought it necessary to become Jews to be saved. God would, in the future, in his own way, deliver the Gentiles.

The author emphasizes that Paul did not experience a conversion from one religion (Judaism) to another (Christianity). Rather, as a Jew, and now believing in both the resurrection and the apocalyptic return of the Messiah, he urged Gentiles to become followers of the Messiah. He also faults his fellow-Jews in Romans 9–11, not because of their works-righteousness, but because they do not believe that Jesus is the Messiah.

Paul did not write a theology or an autobiography. He did not quote Jesus as a source, and he emphasized little of the life and death of Jesus. It is Paul's emphasis on the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus, in keeping with promises made to Abraham and his seed, that has made possible the incorporation of the Gentiles into "God's eschatological deliverance" (160).

The above summary is, of course, not adequate to represent the sum of thought-provoking proposals made in *A Jewish Paul*. Yet, this reviewer completed his reading of Thiessen's book with several concerns, including the following.

First, while I agree with Thiessen that we should use the shape of the canon, it is apparent that Thiessen agrees with the modern critical view that many of the letters traditionally believed to be Pauline letters are not letters from the hand of Paul.

Second, while all students of Paul agree that his worldview would have included aspects of rabbinical teachings, the Scriptures themselves, the philosophies he would have studied, and the common concepts of the world in which he lived; and that the shape of his worldview, language, heritage, etc., would have contributed to how his corpus of letters would have been written; there seems to be no place in Thiessen's presentation for the work of the Holy Spirit or inspiration.

Third, while the significance of *ekklesia* should be understood within the context of its regular use, and while the danger of reading a later concept of "a church" or "the church" into Paul's letters should be remembered, it appears that the author has facilitated another potential error. While attempting to keep Paul within his Jewish context, and to prevent the supersession of Israel by the church, the author has deemphasized the church in God's program to the point that the Lord's desires concerning the unique collective relationships of being Messianic Jewish and Gentile followers of Jesus as one body are also deemphasized.

Fourth, while Paul would have known Stoic science, Jewish mythology, and other beliefs of his day, can absolute claims be made that the power of various of his fundamental concepts, such as the materiality of *pneuma* and resurrection, would have been derived from those sources?

Fifth, it is difficult to agree with Thiessen that Paul found nothing wrong with Judaism, and that the blindness of the Jews had no punitive aspect to it.

Finally, while I fully agree with Thiessen that anti-Judaism and supersessionism must be corrected and condemned in theology and biblical studies, one can hold to the truth that God has a plan for the Jews in the present and the future without adopting some of the problematic aspects of the “Paul within Judaism” view.

While not recommended to the general reader, this book would be of value to scholars in NT studies who desire to understand the fundamental arguments of the perspective of Paul within Judaism the author presents, with the unique nuances of Thiessen’s position.

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Beyond the Greek New Testament: Advanced Readings for Students of Biblical Studies. By Max Botner. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2023. 400 pp. Softcover, \$36.99.

The production of Greek readers designed to help students learn to read the NT in its original language has become a cottage industry. The challenge for professors and interested students has moved from *finding* a suitable reader to *choosing* a suitable reader. Max Botner’s *Beyond the Greek New Testament*, as the title indicates, is a reader with a different purpose. This Greek reader fills the unique space of helping students read ancient Greek more broadly, outside of the NT. Botner provides an entryway for those wishing to read that “vast and diverse corpora of ancient Greek literature” often inaccessible to students studying NT Greek (1).

Selections come from the Septuagint, Apostolic Fathers, and Josephus—as you might expect—but the bulk of the readings come from sources less familiar to religion and biblical studies students. Categories include OT Pseudepigrapha, Philo, Historians and Biographers (e.g., Herodotus, Plutarch, and Lucian), Philosophers and Rhetoricians (e.g., Plato and Aristotle), and Poets and Playwrights (e.g., Homer and Sophocles). Readings vary in length,

giving professors the option to combine several shorter readings for a single assignment. Some readings, such as *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* 7.156 by Diogenes Laertius, are short and take up less than two pages, while others, such as the *Letter of Aristeas* 128–143, 170–171, are much longer. Note that this reader does not include English translations, but instead directs readers to both recommended translations and, for free online editions of many texts, the *Perseus Digital Library* (www.perseus.tufts.edu).

In the book's introduction, Botner states that his goal is to help readers with challenging and unfamiliar grammatical features, including participles, the articular infinitive, infinitives in indirect discourse, the optative mood, subordinate-clause structures, and particles. He provides such helps throughout the book with explanatory notes. Botner also assists the reader by providing short introductions for each section and for each book or author. In addition to providing information about historical background, the introductions for the different readings include references for supplemental Scripture that relate to the readings. For example, two selections by Thucydides in which he explains his authorial purpose and historical method warrant comparison with the introduction to Luke's Gospel (Lk 1:1–4).

Beyond the Greek New Testament is a tremendous resource for many reasons. One, it contains a wealth of diverse selections—90 in all—covering a variety of genres and time periods. Two, the vocabulary glosses and grammatical explanations in the footnotes make challenging selections accessible. Three, it broadens the reader's awareness of ancient Greek texts. And fourth, it helps readers improve their ability to read Greek. One potential difficulty for professors using this book is choosing which readings to skip, since a single semester is not long enough to work through all of them. One other potential difficulty is that of locating the recommended English translations for these texts. Many are easy to locate or are in the public domain, but some, particularly OT pseudepigraphal works, may be harder for some to obtain.

Someone who has completed several semesters of Greek could use and benefit from this book. I recommend seminary professors seriously consider using this book for an advanced reading course. Ph.D. students seeking to increase their capacity to read Greek literature would also benefit immensely by working through this

resource. Not only will working your way through this reader help you read beyond the NT, but, most importantly, it will also help you read the NT better.

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Introducing Koine Greek: A Grammar & Workbook. By Jared M. August. Bennington, VT: Northeastern Baptist P, 2022. 284 pp. Hardback, \$34.99.

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Why another introductory Greek grammar? The bulk of the grammars available today were written toward the end of their authors' teaching lives and are packed full of the fruits of their years of labor—mammoth works, with each lesson being essentially a transcribed, highly insightful lecture. The blessing of this fruit, however, is often lost on the poor first year student overwhelmed by the cumbersome and often confusing task of sifting out the things he “really needs to know.” Although a successful Greek class requires more than the excitement students bring to the first day of class, the inevitable deflation into overwhelmed discouragement in week three often cancels out all other factors. So, often the single biggest catalyst to student success is keeping alive their confidence that they can succeed. The minimalist approach of *IKG* makes success and confidence accessible, especially to the undergraduate student, and so fills the need for an introductory grammar that gives the beginning student a chance to love Greek.

August's first minimalist tactic is to leave seminary-level material for other textbooks. The first-year Greek student is confronted with only what he needs to know right now. Rather than

a collection of long transcribed lectures, *IKG* is more of a reference book where the needed pieces of information—charts, rules, etc.—are easily retrieved, not buried under pages of accompanying explanations and examples.

Second, each chapter tells the student in so many words exactly what he must memorize. And a “review of concepts” list of questions at the end of each chapter focuses the student again on the essential information.

Third, the essential material included is itself slimmed down by consolidating multiple concepts into one. For example, August teaches connecting vowels as simply part of the verb endings. As another example, all three genders of nouns (first and second declension) are combined into a single, simple chart (37). Further, August takes the approach of teaching building blocks of the language—such as verb endings—together with the formulas for generalizing from those particular blocks many instances of expression. This approach minimalizes rote memorization, and perhaps it is also a helpful corrective to today’s craze over supposed “immersive” Koine Greek learning. Yet, August does give an immersive experience that is authentic, i.e., in the NT: all practice examples are from the NT, and each chapter assigns translation of an actual NT passage. This get-right-into-the-NT approach to the built-in workbook has the further benefit of giving a taste of success and instant reward for the student’s labors. Between these carrots and the frustration-free packaging of the material, the Greek student has no excuse not to love Greek.

Beyond August’s minimalist approach, a quick glance at the table of contents reveals his intentional macro-sequencing of material. After present active indicative verbs, the other parts of speech are taught. This approach allows the student to get his bearings in a framework of Greek grammar and syntax before filling out the rest of the complicated Greek verb system in the last half of the book. Microsequencing is also thoughtful. For example, rather than teaching the three genders of nouns in three successive chapters, chapter five teaches the nominative and accusative form of all three genders, and chapter six teaches the genitive, dative, and vocative form of all three. This approach emphasizes the grammatical significance of cases over the morphology of genders as the basic principle of the student’s mental organization scheme for nouns.

As a closing positive feature, *IKG* reflects refreshed views of current issues in Greek pedagogy and exegesis. Chapter 8 explains the middle voice (and so-called middle deponency) that is both adequate and appropriate to the first-year student. “Stanley Porter’s verbal aspect theory is generally followed,” though August has helpfully elected to use “more intuitive names” for the three aspects—“incomplete, complete, and state-of-being” (ii).

The benefits of a minimalist Greek grammar are of course a trade-off for the loss of some things. For example, the attempt to reduce the number of charts to the bare minimum could be the reason that August sometimes opts for more abstract-learner-oriented, paragraph-style inductive explanation rather than the outline- or chart-style organization methods preferred by visual learners. For example, the initial introductions to the components of verb parsing (and the same with those of noun parsing) are first explained over several paragraphs before being distilled into a chart. So, these parallel concepts perhaps aren’t as firmly fixed from the beginning as parallel in the visual learner’s mind.

A related potential loss is actually that of simplicity: the reductionistic nature of minimalism—reducing the number of rules or principles by combining them—can sometimes lead to an increased number of exceptions to the simplified rules. For example, teaching connecting vowels as part of verb endings could perhaps make the later concepts of contract vowels or the morphology of the perfect active more difficult to master. Further, the streamlined, formula-based approach to memorization of data can sometimes prove more difficult for the visual learner: it requires him to keep straight and recall all the abstract mental processes that he must perform on the minimal visual data he was required to memorize. The visual-learner student may find it is easier to absorb and use a sheet charting all the particular forms of the Greek verb system and by observation to generalize his own set of rules/patterns.

Most of the losses, however, are simply roles to be filled by a classroom professor skilled both in Greek and language pedagogy. Including only necessary explanation in the textbook simply means it falls to the professor to supply the rest of the picture. For example, in the chapter on verbs, terms like “irregular [verb]” (22) and terse statements like “the Greek verb does not grammaticize time; that is

left to contextual markers” (19) assume familiarity with lingo or linguistic concepts that the college undergraduate probably needs to get from his professor. Thus, this textbook would be least helpful for someone trying to teach himself Greek at home and only somewhat better for the classroom with an inexperienced professor or one who takes the guide-on-the-side approach to teaching. But when it comes to student success and confidence in language learning, a simple reference-style textbook supporting robust sage-on-the-stage pedagogy in the classroom is far superior to a textbook trying to replace it with transcribed lectures. This new approach in *IKG* is in my opinion a major step forward in undergraduate Greek pedagogy.

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Romans: A Concise Guide to the Greatest Letter Ever Written. By Andrew David Naselli. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022. 231 pp. Hardcover, \$29.99.

Andrew David Naselli (Ph.D., Bob Jones University; Ph.D., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School) is a professor of systematic theology and New Testament at Bethlehem College and Seminary in Minneapolis. In his commentary, *Romans*, Naselli captures Paul’s complex argument in less than 200 pages. His goal is to get to what Paul intends to communicate “by his words in this God-breathed letter” (17). Unlike most commentaries that were written for scholars or pastors, Naselli’s *Romans* is designed for any individual or group Bible study. Yet unlike most accessible commentaries, Naselli’s *Romans* is not merely devotional. It deals with the text and is full of exegetical meat. That is not to say that *Romans* cannot be read devotionally, since Naselli’s aim for his readers is to “better understand Romans with the result that [they] increasingly know and worship God” (17). *Romans* is a helpful and needed commentary for non-specialists. Here is why.

This commentary only makes sense with an open Bible. This is intentional. In fact, Naselli even encourages opening several other

versions, or following his phrase diagram (by Logos). Naselli captures the main message of Romans: *The gospel reveals how God is righteously righteousing [sic.] (i.e., justifying) unrighteous individuals—both Jews and Gentiles—at this stage in the history of salvation* (23). The macro structure of Romans demonstrates the universal need for God’s righteousness (1:18—3:20), the means of obtaining it (3:21—4:25), its benefits (5:1—8:39), its vindication (9:1—11:36), and how to live in light of it (12:1—15:13).

While Naselli captures this macro-structure, he also works out the minute details, down to clauses and phrases. For example, in 3:27–31, Naselli highlights three inferences from the truth that the righteous God righteously justifies the unrighteous (3:21–26): (1) humans cannot brag because God justifies them by faith alone (3:27–28); (2) God justifies both Jews and Gentiles by faith (3:29–30); and (3) God’s people fulfill the law by this faith; they do not nullify it (3:31). By zooming in and out from macro-structure to micro-structure, Naselli makes visible for readers how the small pieces (clauses and phrases) fit together into the logical flow of the entire letter.

In a short commentary, Naselli has concisely and satisfactorily answered difficult and debatable passages in Romans. Let me list a few.

What does “the righteousness of God” refer to (1:17; 3:5, 21, 22, 25, 26; 10:3)? Naselli summarizes the main views: (1) what God *is* (God’s attribute of being righteous); (2) what God *gives* (God’s gift of righteous status); and (3) what God *does* (God’s activity of saving sinful people or God’s covenant faithfulness). Naselli combines these options: when sinful people experience God’s attribute of being righteous, God either (a) saves them by righteously giving them a righteous status or (b) condemns them. Against the idea of covenant faithfulness, Naselli argues that the essence of “the righteousness of God” both highlights “what God *is* when he justifies you” and “what God *gives* you when he justifies you” (3:26).

Who is the “I” in Romans 7? Scholars argue that the “I” refers to either (1) Paul as a Christian; (2) a pre-Christian experience (Adam, Israel, or Paul), or (3) anyone trying to please God by self-effort.

Naselli argues that the “I” refers to a believer in Christ struggling with indwelling sin. But, following Moo, he asserts that the main point is not on “I’s” identity; rather, that the law—though good and holy—turned into an instrument of sin because of man’s sinful bent and inability to deliver himself from sin’s power (91–93).

What does it mean to “heap burning coals on his head” (12:20)? The first possible meaning refers to *God judging your enemy*. Burning coals are associated with judgment (cf. 2 Sam 22:9; Ezek 24:11). By repaying with kindness, it is further evidence for God to judge your enemies. The second option means *your enemy feels ashamed so he repents*. The quotation from Proverbs 25:21–22 may refer to an Egyptian ritual of repentance by carrying a bowl of burning coals on his head. Naselli selects the first view (minority position) because of its consistency with the OT, its fit within the literary context of 12:19, and its parallel to God’s kindness and righteous judgment in 2:4–5 (164–65).

Throughout the commentary, Naselli adequately and succinctly represents other views while also arguing for his own. Whether one agrees with him or not, the other views are made available for further study. This commentary is a helpful discipleship tool in at least three ways. First, Naselli writes in such a way that makes difficult concepts accessible. As already demonstrated above, *Romans* can help a small group Bible study unpack both Paul’s flow of thought and the concepts in difficult passages.

Second, Naselli also utilizes illustrations and personal anecdotes that make a biblical concept accessible. For example, he explains how God was righteous in passing over former sins in the OT even prior to sin’s payment on the cross through animal sacrifices (3:25). He illustrates the legitimacy of this process by likening it to buying an item on credit. The animal sacrifices were payment on credit, and Jesus’ death on the cross was the credit bill payment (56–57).

Finally, *Romans* can further help small group Bible studies through the study guide provided at the end. The questions challenge one’s own thinking about the passages in Romans, such as “How would you summarize the main idea of 5:1–11 in one sentence?” Other questions are practical: “Why is 8:1 such good news for you?”

Naselli's *Romans* is a commentary one can enjoyably read from cover to cover. It helps the reader understand Paul's letter and truly results in worship. I hope there will be more commentaries written this way on other books of the Bible.

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The Apostle and the Empire: Paul's Implicit and Explicit Criticism of Rome. By Christoph Heilig. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2022. 170 pp. Hardcover, \$29.99.

The author of this book, Christoph Heilig, is an up-and-coming scholar who is a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Basel. He received his doctorate from the University of Zurich under the supervision of Jörg Frey. This book is a follow-up to the 2015 monograph *Hidden Criticism? Methodology and Plausibility of the Search for a Counter-Imperial Subtext in Paul*. The book was prompted by an article, "Hidden Transcripts? The Supposedly Self-Censoring Paul and Rome as Surveillance State in Modern Pauline Scholarship" by Laura Robinson, in *New Testament Studies* 67, no. 1 (2021): 55–72.

The book consists of five chapters. Chapter 1 consists of an exposition and critique of Robinson's article. Chapter 2 gives the author's theoretical framework to evaluate whether specific passages contain hidden critiques of the Roman Empire. Chapters 3–4 apply his framework to 2 Corinthians 2:14 and the idea that the reference to a "triumph" is a coded critique of Rome. Heilig spends quite a bit of time evaluating the passage in light of Claudius's triumph in celebration of the conquest of Britain in AD 44. He thinks the general idea of a Roman triumph is in view. The author concludes that the passage is actually a critique of the Corinthians, that it was not hidden, and that it was not directly aimed at Rome. The final chapter is a discussion of potential research opportunities in this area. Areas for further research include exegetical blind spots, a misguided focus on coded messages in Paul, research into post-colonial considerations in Romans 13:1–7, relating cognitive linguistics and exegetical

methodology, the use of digital humanities, and improvements to commentaries.

The book has several positive qualities, the first of which is the author's brief overview of the issue. This reviewer had only a passing familiarity with the issue of coded/hidden Roman critiques by Paul, so this book was an excellent introduction to the issues involved and was very helpful. The second positive quality is that the author did an excellent, respectful critique of Robinson's article. He was fair and balanced with his assessment despite ultimately concluding against her argument. The third positive quality was the quality of the exegesis of 2 Corinthians 2:14. Chapters 3–4 offer an excellent example of the use of background cultural/historical material to help with exegesis.

Despite these positive qualities, the book has three drawbacks. The first drawback is that it lacks unity. The first few chapters deal with the Robinson article, but she is dropped during Chapters 3 and 4. The author only comes back to her in the conclusion. Chapters 3–4 are unified, but Chapter 5 moves off to a mixed set of suggestions for further research. It seemed as though this book was a set of three different journal articles that were assembled in this book, with only a small amount of connection between them. The second drawback is that centering the initial chapters around a single journal article seems to be a weak justification for the book. The last drawback is that the final chapter seems to be simply an assortment of interpretive issues. Several of them (such as the remarks on commentaries) did not seem to relate to the overall book. This was jarring to this reviewer, especially since it was the last content chapter and weakened the argument of the book.

I would only recommend buying this book if someone is interested in “hidden criticisms.” Further, this book should only be purchased after acquiring other foundational sources, such as by Barclay, N. T. Wright, and even the journal article mentioned in the book.

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The Letter to the Hebrews (Pillar New Testament Commentary).

By Sigurd Grindheim. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2023. Hardcover, \$64.99.

Sigurd Grindheim is a professor at Western Norway University of Applied Sciences. His previous books are *Introducing Biblical Theology* and *Living in the Kingdom of God: A Biblical Theology for the Life of the Church*.

The discussion of authorship leads Grindheim to speculate, and he acknowledges that it is nothing more, that Apollos was the author of Hebrews. He proposes that the book could have been written at any time between AD 60–100, and he leans toward a later date. Grindheim holds that a church in Italy, likely in Rome, received the letter. The church that received the letter could have been comprised of both Jews and Gentiles. The letter was written to encourage believers under pressure of persecution not to apostatize; however, the author was not necessarily concerned about a reversion to Judaism.

In the section on the book's theology, Grindheim penned an essay that summarizes the book theologically. He proposes that bringing humans close to God is the central idea of the book. Foundational to this is the divine and human nature of the Son who serves as high priest through the new covenant to deliver and cleanse his people and to bring them into the heavenly Jerusalem. Grindheim proposes that the eschatology of Hebrews is one of the most "realized" of the New Testament. However, the eschatological realities discussed are not all manifest, which is why persevering in faith is so important.

Grindheim interprets the quotation of Psalm 2 in Hebrews 1:5 as referring to the eternal begetting of the Son. He justifies reading "today" as a reference to eternity based on a parallel to Philo. Grindheim grants that this reading of Psalm 2 is at variance with the psalm in its original context, its reception history in the Second Temple period, its usage in Acts 13:33, and even with Hebrews 5:5. Grindheim rejects readings that would cohere with these other texts on the grounds that interpreting the verse as referring to the enthronement of the messianic Son in the resurrection/ascension event "is of no relevance to the author's argument in this context: to show Christ's superiority over the angels" (113). But this argument

hangs on his previous misidentification of the “name” in verse 4 as *Lord* rather than as *Son*, and also on his failure to understand the role of the Messianic Davidic Son to lead humanity in a rule over all creation, including the angels (cf. 1 Cor 6:3). A better line of interpretation recognizes that the title *Son* in these opening verses is used to refer to the Son as *both* eternally divine *and* as the Davidic Messiah. Part of Grindheim’s difficulty is that he seems to think Chapter 1 focuses on Jesus’ deity whereas Chapter 2 focuses on his humanity. In reality, these are not so neatly divided.

Grindheim does better in Chapter 2. In a lengthy excursus, he distinguishes the coming new creation, “the world to come,” from the heavens that exist at present. He rightly understands that *’elōhîm* in Psalm 8:5 could legitimately be translated as “heavenly beings, angels” (159) and thus refuses to drive a wedge between Psalm 8 and Hebrews’s use of it. He also rightly understands that the referent to the man/son of man to whom all things are to be subjected are “human beings in general” *and* “Jesus as their ultimate representative” (160). This rightly recognizes the psalm’s allusion to Genesis 1 and sees it as a prediction of the reversal of Adam’s fall.

In his discussion of the warning passages, Grindheim rejects the interpretation that claims the people addressed “were never genuine believers” (317). Nor does he accept the claim that the only genuine faith is persevering faith. He also rejects the claim that Hebrews 6:4–6 is about “failure to reach maturity as a Christian” (318) rather than about apostasy. He accepts as possible Schreiner’s proposal that the warnings are a means of ensuring the salvation of those who received them and thus do not presuppose that anyone will truly fall away from the faith. However, he clarifies that he sees this reading as being “supplied on the basis of a systematic, Calvinistic framework” rather than arising from exegesis of the text. He also notes that “Christians who are not from within the Calvinist tradition,” referencing Luther in a footnote, see these passages as indicating that those who truly had faith in Christ can apostatize. He offers no critique of this last view.

Grindheim rejects a platonic reading of the distinction between the earthly and heavenly tabernacles, arguing that, despite superficial similarities, Plato and the author of Hebrews operate with different worldviews. Because of the language of movement and space, he rejects metaphorical approaches that understand the heavenly

tabernacle as Christ's body or as the church. He understands the "greater and more complete tent" (9:11) as "the place of God's presence," but he claims that "the space is metaphorical space ... because God's presence must not be understood as a geographic location" (431). He rejects the view that Jesus did not become a priest or begin to minister as a priest until he entered heaven.

Grindheim holds that the old covenant (the Mosaic covenant) accomplished its purpose and is now obsolete. He holds that "the imperfection of the old covenant consists in its inefficiency. It was incapable of taking away sin" (400). He does not think that that the problem was that people could break the old covenant, since he thinks the warning passages indicate that people could break the new covenant as well.

In his comments on Hebrews 9:16–17, he rejects the idea that the author is using *diathēkē* to refer to both a covenant and a will/testament. He argues instead that the author of Hebrews was speaking about the inauguration of the new covenant and is alluding to the sacrifice involved in the ratification process. He offers this interpretive paraphrase, "For where there is a covenant, it is necessary that the death of the one making it be represented (by sacrifice, in order to demonstrate the curse under which they are placing themselves if they break the covenant)" (450).

Grindheim interprets the heavenly home/city that Abraham was said to look to (11:16) as "community with God and with his people" (574). Though he doesn't argue that this text sets aside the land promises to Israel, this interpretation points in that direction.

Grindheim's commentary is a serious mid-level work on Hebrews. While some of his interpretations are less than compelling, his arguments for the priestly work of Christ prior to the ascension and his interpretation of Hebrews 9:16–17 merit serious consideration. Grindheim would not be my first choice among the Hebrews commentaries available—I would purchase Schriener,

Guthrie, Cockerill, and Lane first—but he would be, nonetheless, a worthy addition to a commentary library.

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Biblical Theology: A Canonical, Thematic, and Ethical Approach.
Andreas J. Kostenberger and Gregory Goswell. Wheaton, IL:
Crossway, 2023. Hardcover, \$48.32.

At 760 large pages of text, *Biblical Theology* by Andreas Köstenberger and Gregory Goswell adds to the recent burgeoning of valuable resources in biblical theology. It is particularly helpful as a survey of individual books, such as preparation for a sermon series or getting oriented to the larger context before exegeting a specific passage.

The method and structure are well summarized by the subtitle—“a canonical, thematic, and ethical approach” since the authors survey each book of Scripture through these three lenses.

This method is set out initially along with a helpful overview of biblical theology methods in the first chapter (65 pages). Subsequently, it analyzes the structure of the Old Testament (38 pages) and then proceeds book by book through the Law, Prophets, and Writings. The New Testament proceeds similarly but with a helpful examination of how the OT and NT relate and intertextuality (40 pages). Along the way, each of these sections examines not only the individual books with thematic, ethical, and canonical lenses but also each of the major sections (law, prophets, writings, gospels, Pauline epistles and general epistles) and each of the testaments.

But the central and most beneficial contribution of *Biblical Theology* is in the individual treatments of each book (typically 4–8 pages) under the same three headings of the subtitle: (1) Taking each book in turn, the authors begin with a brief orientation to the background and structure and then expound on major themes of that book including how these themes relate to one another. (2) Next, they explain what that book contributes to biblical ethics. This part of the discussion stays solidly within the parameters of biblical theology,

not attempting to analyze contemporary culture or fuse the horizons to make specific applications. (3) Finally, the authors analyze the book's place in the storyline of Scripture. Misleadingly, this section is not as concerned with the diachronic setting in salvation history or promise-fulfillment. More often OT discussions surround the paratextual issues of how exegesis might be influenced through different arrangements in the Hebrew or Greek canonical orders (note Goswell's *Text and Paratext*, 2022). This section is more helpful with the NT books where it more comprehensively surveys the links to all of Scripture.

The final chapter is long enough to stand as a section of its own (80 pages). This is one of the most helpful sections of the book, surveying key themes in each testament such as kingship, covenant, the Spirit, or kingship (total of 21), and ethics such as wise living, trusting in God, faith, or mission (total of 17). The authors believe that they ought to use a multiplex approach in which no single theme does all the work. Of these they choose the love of God as one of the central themes among a group of themes (761). The book concludes with a summary of the OT and NT storylines and reflections on the future of biblical theology.

Biblical Theology assumes conservative dates and theology throughout. Dispensational interpreters will be disappointed by the view that Daniel 9:24–27 reinterprets Jeremiah's prophecy, redirecting its fulfillment towards the rebuilt temple after the return from exile (99). Similarly, Revelation "requires a special kind of hermeneutic, as we are dealing here with visionary material" (676).

Besides adding fresh presentations and insights to existing book theology approaches, several other distinguishing features make *Biblical Theology* profitable. The concern to maintain both the unity and diversity of the biblical books through the lens of theme, canon, and ethics captures concerns that are easily missed in other works (688). In particular, the ethics discussion with each book and section arises from the authors' commendable concern that biblical theology has neglected the "so what" question.

But one of the most marked unique features also borders on an eccentric fixation—the *leit motif* of paratextual analysis. After these questions have already appeared with each section and book of the OT, should this occupy nearly 50% of the already short, closing

summary of the OT? One wishes that in place of the recurring discussions of the various orders of the Hebrew canon, we could have received more discussion, for instance, of the theological themes in chapter 13.

This, in turn, points to an additional weakness of the book—at times the seams between the two authors' contributions stand out. Generally, the NT sections are the more helpful, though if the dominating paratextual discussions in the OT could be dampened some, the entire book might be more consistently beneficial to general readers or exegetes.

Biblical Theology offers excellent exegetical insights for each book of Scripture and can serve well as a companion volume to the older New Dictionary of Biblical Theology (Alexander, Rosner, Carson, Goldsworthy, 2000) or a more complete supplement to *The King in His Beauty* (Schreiner, 2013). It is an outstanding resource to add to any pastoral or student library.

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Calvin on the Death of Christ: A Word for the World. By Paul A. Hartog. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2021. 200 pp. Paperback, \$28.00.

In evangelical soteriology, the question of the extent of the atonement—i.e., *did Christ die for the sins of all humanity, or only for the sins of the elect?*—is undoubtedly one of the most contentious. (This has been the case for quite some time: during the synod of Dort in 1619, the debate over this question became so heated that Franciscus Gomarus twice challenged Matthias Martinius to a duel!) As the debate has continued to rage on, advocates of “limited atonement” and “unlimited atonement” have sometimes sought to enlist John Calvin as a co-belligerent. But this maneuver isn’t the easiest one to execute, since Calvin’s writings never directly addressed this question (unsurprising, since the question didn’t become a major concern for Reformed thinkers until a generation

after Calvin), and his statements that did indirectly bear on the subject admit of multiple possible interpretations.

So, where exactly would Calvin have come down on this question? Paul Hartog's book *Calvin on the Death of Christ* furnishes a nuanced and eminently supportable answer. Arguing that it would be both anachronistic and reductionistic to pigeonhole Calvin as a proponent of either the "limited" or "unlimited" viewpoints, Hartog convincingly demonstrates that Calvin "combined the language of Christ's death as in some sense a universal *provision* along with his firm emphasis upon particularist 'unconditional election'" (5).

The book unfolds over five chapters. Chapter 1 sketches out the three general approaches to how Calvin's thinking on this issue is typically assessed in scholarly circles. Chapter 2 (which Hartog regards as "the heart of this volume" [6]) is a lengthy and richly-documented exploration of Calvin's thinking on the nature and effects of Christ's death. Here, Hartog identifies and fleshes out 12 major points that emerge from Calvin's writings on this subject. Chapter 3 addresses three particular statements in Calvin's writings that are frequently used to support the idea that he held to an embryonic form of the "limited atonement" view. Here, Hartog carefully exegetes the writings in question, and shows how they have sometimes been misinterpreted and misapplied to serve polemical ends. Chapter 4 examines the diversity of Reformed thought on the extent of the atonement in the early modern period, and helpfully locates Calvin's thinking in that variegated theological landscape. Chapter 5, the book's epilogue and conclusion, not only summarizes and reiterates the study's major findings, but also engages in a little constructive theologizing: here, Hartog urges consideration of a "complex-intentioned approach" (as opposed to a *single-intentioned* or *multiple-intentioned* viewpoint) to the systematic treatment of Christ's atoning death in relation to God's salvific plan.

This book is a masterful work of historical-theological analysis. It is well-researched, well-reasoned, and well-written. The methodology Hartog employs is a wonderful example of how historical theology should always be done: rather than foisting alien theological concepts or anachronistic systems upon his subject, Hartog simply allows Calvin to speak for himself. Where there are tensions or ambiguities in Calvin's writings, Hartog does offer

possible explanations, but he does so humbly and tentatively, without forcing the square peg of Calvin's writings into any pre-punched round holes. At every point, Hartog's analysis is supported by an abundance of primary source quotations, with extensive contextual discussion where necessary. (This is true to one degree or another all throughout the book, but it is particularly prevalent in chapter 2, where primary source quotation and analysis is most critical.) Hartog also displays an impressive command of the secondary literature on this subject, which he consistently discusses in a commendably irenic tone.

In addition to Hartog's central thesis about how Calvin viewed (or *would have viewed*) the extent of the atonement, here are several other particularly helpful points that emerge from this work:

- Many of the ways theologians have typically discussed the extent of the atonement (e.g., the terms "limited atonement" and "unlimited atonement," or the entire quinquarticular "TULIP" framework) are so reductionistic that they are arguably more obfuscatory than they are helpful.
- There is a need for much greater sensitivity to the process of theological development throughout history in discussions such as this.
- The tension that many have detected in Calvin's writings on the death of Christ is largely due to the fact that he was more exegetical and pastoral, rather than speculative and philosophical, in his theological method. That isn't necessarily a bad thing.
- In chapter 3, Hartog's proposed explanation for why Calvin defined "all people" in 1 Timothy 2:4 as all *classes of people* (rather than as *all individuals*)—even though he understood this passage to refer to the *preaching of the gospel*, not its *efficacious application*—is especially compelling and helpful.

In his conclusion, Hartog writes, "Despite any shortcoming, I hope this work inches the conversation forward with more historical light than polemical heat" (162). In my opinion, he has accomplished

that goal in spades. I am pleased to recommend this book enthusiastically to all students of historical and systematic theology.

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God's Monsters: Vengeful Spirits, Deadly Angels, Hybrid Creatures, and Divine Hitmen of the Bible. By Esther J. Hamori. Minneapolis, MN: Broadleaf Books, 2023. 296 pp. Hardcover, \$28.99.

Superhuman beings have long fascinated people, and Esther Hamori's entry into the biblical subject seeks to expose the dark side of these creatures, and of God himself, in a book that Bart Ehrman calls "a godesend" (cover). It is through this vantage point that readers will have to sift to find a few moments of edification due to the darkness of both the material and the author's viewpoint. Hamori alerts the reader to this point of view in her introductory chapter: "Monsters of the Bible can indeed demonstrate something about the nature of the biblical God. But be prepared: God's nature isn't always so benevolent. In fact, this God may be the monster of monsters" (7).

The material is divided into three major sections: first, the heavenly entourage of God with chapters on Seraphim, Cherubim, The Adversary, The Destroyer and Other Angels, Demons in God's Ranks, and Manipulative and Mind-Altering Spirits; second, earthly monsters including the Sea Monster, Shades, Ghosts, and Other Living Dead; and then finally God, to whom the author refers as "the God-monster" (261). The book is based upon material from a class that Hamori has long taught at Union Seminary in NY called "Monster Heaven," and with copious sarcasm and numerous references to popular horror movies, she desires her reader to see that "the Bible has been domesticated, muzzling its monsters" (10).

One of the strengths of the book is the way it de-sanitizes popular misconceptions of angelic beings. Her chapter on the cherubim addresses their infantilization: "Cherubim are imagined now as happy, fat angel-babies. To the writers of the Bible, this image would

be unrecognizable” (41). Her accounting of the story of Job pulls no punches, reminding the reader that “there’s no softening the loss of ten children” (90) and enabling her audience to feel the bleakness of the innocent sufferer’s dilemma: “He’s subjected to his friends’ unremitting affirmations of the divine message that God doesn’t cause the innocent to suffer (but he did!) and so Job must have brought this on himself (but he didn’t!)” (191) (parentheses in original).

Unfortunately, the book suffers from several weaknesses. First is the myopic way the work seeks to compartmentalize these monsters and horrors, isolating them from the greater narrative. Yes, the Bible is full of many awful events and individuals, but the bigger picture of Scripture helps make sense of it. Hamori presents Bible accounts in a way that prevents the reader from seeing this bigger picture. For instance, in her examination of the cherubim and her recounting of the garden of Eden narrative, she states, “When God realizes things haven’t unfolded as he expected, he curses everyone in his path...He’s like Walter White in *Breaking Bad* putting down everyone who sees through his innocent facade.... In a disturbingly typical abuser move, God shows just enough care to keep the people convinced of his love, making them clothing and even dressing them himself. This tender act is almost enough to make you forget that he just lied to them about their lives being in danger.... He even alters the story: he misquotes himself to Adam.... God has just gaslighted the first humans” (45–46). By breezing over the significance of the clothing God made for Adam and Eve (an innocent, bloody, substitutionary sacrifice to cover their shame) and making reference neither to the protoevangelium nor the statements of Adam and Eve, the redemptive narrative is muzzled, even mutilated. Another example is Isaiah 6, wherein she recounts the story of the seraphim but never so much as alludes to what Isaiah or the heavenly beings say about what just happened with the live coal being put to the prophet’s mouth. Of course, soteriology is not the focus of her study, but nonetheless, this practice of cherry-picking monstrosities throughout the book amounts merely to a catalog of the sensational, as one awful act is listed after another. If Hamori’s emphasis is upon how the Bible is meant to be read, one wonders how it ever came to be cherished by so many, including her own ancestors.

A second weakness which some readers may not find helpful is the tone with which God is addressed. Certainly, both testaments are filled with the honest, unfiltered struggles of God's people as they grapple with the problem of why God allows suffering and the mystery of evil, but Hamori's work is supersaturated with sarcasm directed at the Almighty, which perhaps will be of little devotional, theological, or homiletic value to many. She is wont to use phrases such as "God's anger management issues aside" (18), "the Godfather sends his heavies to do his dirty work" (21), "God intentionally harming his people" (24), "in this analogy God's the wife beater" (26), "God lied and the snake told the truth" (45), "ongoing teamwork between God and Satan" (100), and "in the final verses of the New Testament, it is written that no one who practices falsehood will enter the new Jerusalem (Revelation 21:27; 22:15). This could pose a problem for the Almighty" (200), among many others.

A third, though minor, weakness the book has is that it requires the reader to be familiar with scores of horror movie references and television shows. Undoubtedly Hollywood has been drawing inspiration from the Bible for over a century (presumably without paying royalties to the author), but each chapter contains so many references that the reader will have to brush up on his TV binging if he hopes to understand each illustration.

The book features flashes of higher criticism, open theism, and a bit of politics. There are also some interpretive oddities, such as when dealing with the topic of the adversary, Hamori omits any reference whatsoever to Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28, without an endnote as to why these traditionally significant passages are left out of the discussion. And regarding the seraphim, she argues strongly but not convincingly that the fiery serpents of Numbers 21 are the exact same beings seen in Isaiah 6, though the Hebrew terms are not exactly the same.

One final significant point to bring up is that in her introduction, Hamori briefly reflects on the effect the tragic death of her brother had on her. "His death, and my sense of a world spinning out, off its axis, without order, propelled me into a long period of religious exploration, turning over a variety of ideas before finding my way back home to Judaism, the tradition I grew up in" (9). The reader could be left with the impression that the author's world continues to be disordered and off center. She concludes "the Bible isn't a solution

to the struggles of life, but a reflection of them” (271). If there is nothing more to God’s monsters than this, the reader will be left longing for a sequel wherein God is not a monster only, but also a Father.

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The Baptism Debate: Understanding and Evaluating Reformed Infant Baptism. By Peter Goeman. Raleigh, NC: Sojourner P, 2023. 244 pp. Paperback, \$13.99.

Peter Goeman (Ph.D.) serves as associate professor of Old Testament and biblical languages at Shepherds Theological Seminary (Cary, NC) and Shepherd’s Church. The reviewer is a dispensationalist, partly classic and partly progressive, and belongs to the IFCA International, which continues to hold to a dispensational hermeneutic in its membership. Having said that, I have a deep appreciation for other brother-pastors who hold other hermeneutical views.

Most of us connected to the institution and tradition of *JMAT* come from a dispensational and primarily credobaptist perspective. While entirely outside the scope of this review, the writer will admit to falling in line with several of the views of John Bunyan as it relates to the practice of immersion with allowing believers freedom of conscience as it relates to the Lord’s Table. The reviewer also agrees with many observations of John Piper. Having said that, the fact remains that believer’s immersion and the Reformed practice of pedobaptism cannot both be equally biblical. This critique acknowledges from the start that believer’s baptism by those who have responded to Christ in faith is the assumption of the NT text.

Goeman tees up the topic at hand not only by what’s inside the cover but by putting it front and center on the book’s cover: *The Baptism Debate*. Throughout the book, the reader will not miss the author’s clear intent. Goeman notes, “I believe Infant baptism is unbiblical and harmful to the church.” On the same page Goeman continues, “Unashamedly, I write to persuade them (and you) that infant baptism is unbiblical” (3).

As is the case with dispensationalism, faith is seen as a requirement not only for salvation (which precedes the act and decision of baptism), but faith is also a prerequisite for baptism itself. Peter starts off the discussion by quoting Louis Berkhof who admits that the Bible points to faith as a prerequisite for baptism as revealed in Mark 16:16, Acts 10:44–48, 16:14, etc. Berkhof's quotation highlights that Scripture only captures the act of baptism for adults because that baptism is a different kind of baptism than one experienced by children. R. C. Sproul is quoted as pushing back against the Baptist who calls "foul" with the observation that if personal faith had to be required for baptism, it should have also been required for circumcision. For Sproul, faith was not required for circumcision, therefore it is out of bounds to suggest that the NT believer must have personal faith before baptism. Goeman does a great service to both those who hold to credobaptism as well as those holding to pedobaptism by noting five different sub-views within pedobaptism. Goeman notes that for Calvin, "Adult baptism symbolizes present faith, repentance, and union with Christ; while 'infants are baptized into future repentance and faith'" (38).

In Chapters 2–3, the reader is presented with an understanding of covenant theology and its view of the single covenant of grace and then that covenant's mandate for pedobaptism. Goeman and many dispensationalists will hold that Moses was the mediator of the old covenant. The reviewer understands that indeed Moses served as a mediator of the old covenant. What is perhaps less clear is how the role of Moses as mediator served as a type or a shadow of Christ and, that being the case, in some sense shares the role of mediation for the OT saint under the Mosaic law. Clearly, Hebrews 9:15 makes the point that Jesus Christ is a mediator of a new covenant in ways in which he was not in the old covenant. The reviewer disagrees with the writer when he suggests that covenant theology's view that Jesus was the mediator of all covenants is a weak argument.

The author continues in Chapter 4 with a look at pedobaptism and its dependence on a single people of God which removes distinction between Israel and the church. This is followed up by a chapter dealing with the question of replacing an OT ritual (circumcision) with a NT ordinance (baptism). Chapter 5 may be one of the most

helpful chapters of the book, as the writer does an admirable job of detailing the details of circumcision and how they do or do not comport with a biblical theology of baptism. Connected with this discussion (covered in chap. 6) is a close look at the argument of household baptisms as an apologetic for infant baptism. Goeman answers the implication of “household salvation” passages with the exegetical analysis of the Scriptures which mention individuals. Peter notes that instead of a pattern of family unity in faith, one finds just the opposite in passages such as Matthew 10. Goeman finishes the last two chapters by looking at the patterns of baptism and noting the difference between NT baptism for the church and the baptism of John the Baptist.

If there is a well-worn theme that one will get in reading this book, it is the unmistakable connection between the practice of infant baptism (pedobaptism) and the various commitments of covenant theology. That essence of covenant theology foundationally is the existence of the one covenant of grace, which is connected to the one people of God through the ages, and the sign of that one covenant for the one people has been the one practice of OT circumcision and NT pedobaptism. In the minds of our covenant friends, baptism and circumcision is the same ordinance. Peter argues effectively in his book that the OT practice of circumcision is distinct and different from the NT practice of baptism. The only negative might be a few stylistic details which the reviewer minimizes because he knows the nature of writing a book like this.

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The Rise and Fall of Dispensationalism. By Daniel G. Hummel. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2023. 400 pp. Hardcover, \$27.89.

The author of this book, Daniel Hummel, directs The Lumen Center of Madison and has previously authored *Covenant Brothers: Evangelicals, Jews, and the U.S.-Israeli Relations* (University of

Pennsylvania, 2019), in addition to contributing writing and research to a variety of outlets. He earned his Ph.D. from University of Wisconsin-Madison, where he currently serves as an Honorary Research Fellow.

To this reviewer, a traditional dispensationalist, Hummel's book on the history of dispensationalism was both a fun read and a frustrating journey. I find books on the development of various movements within modern Christianity highly interesting. Hummel does not disappoint on this score. The flow progresses along nicely, producing an effective and stimulating narrative of the intended historical analysis. While agreeing with much of the scrutiny, there is room for discussion and disagreement about the historical storyline. Before evaluating questionable assessment, however, there are several positive features to mention.

First, overall, the historian Hummel accurately represents much about the movement that came to be named "dispensationalism." Starting with Darby and the Plymouth Brethren (19ff), he grasps this movement's cultural impact at several points along the historical timeline, its overall influence on evangelical theology generally, and that it encompasses more than eschatology (xvii, 9). In demonstrating these points, Hummel fills in the gaps with helpful details about figures such as Dwight Moody, J. Frank Norris, William Bell Riley, C. I. Scofield, Lewis Sperry Chafer, and others, bringing the reader up to speed on some of the connections among the historical players in developments of the intertwined movements of fundamentalism and dispensationalism. Especially pertinent here is the formulation of an academic, scholastic form of dispensationalism, largely through Dallas Seminary and its founder Lewis Sperry Chafer, who influenced later dispensationalists like Charles Feinberg, John Walvoord, Charles Ryrie, and J. Dwight Pentecost (198–203). This scholastic formulation leads naturally to a second positive feature of Hummel's work. He correctly surmises the significance of Charles Ryrie's definitional work (252–53): "Ryrie's erudition, affability, and wide engagement with critics ... ensured that *Dispensationalism Today* would sell well and be a seminary staple for decades" (253). Hummel also fairly represents the opponents of dispensationalism, including former dispensationalists such as Philip Mauro (142ff), Arthur Pink (193–94), and G. Campbell Morgan (194). A final

positive remark involves the author's acknowledgment that modern dispensationalism is not just the spread of Darby's theological content (6–7). Hummel understands North American evangelicals absorbed Darby's eschatology before they adopted other features of his teaching. In this context, dispensationalism must be observed as a trans-denominational movement.

Despite these good points, which are representative of much of Hummel's work, some problems in the historical analysis need to be explored. Beginning with his recognition of Ryrie's work, he unfortunately states the common but erroneous view that Ryrie's emphasis on literal interpretation was a new synthesis (253). What he, and many others, have missed is the major focus on literalism going back into the early-to-mid 1800s among the growing movement. Emile Guers, pastor of a church in Geneva, who spent time with Darby, serves as a prime example, voicing some general principles of interpretation in *The Future of Israel* (1856). The first two principles were literal interpretation and a distinction between Israel and the church, just as Ryrie outlined over one hundred years later. Historians cannot focus on distinctions in historical development without also recognizing the elements of continuity.

A second problematic area is the labeling of dispensationalism as a *new premillennialism* throughout the work (69–73). While there is some truth to this categorization in light of shifts during the last two hundred years, traditional dispensationalists may look at this as another attempt to portray dispensationalism as some recent innovation in church history. The pretribulation rapture, part of the so-called new premillennialism, is thought to have been invented in the early 1800s by John Nelson Darby or others. The truth of the matter, however, is that we now have twenty or more citations of the pretrib rapture before Darby, some going back to the early church. This larger narrative needs to inform Hummel's investigation.

A third difficulty with Hummel's work is that on several occasions he flirts with pejorative language. Perhaps the most significant example is the painting of dispensationalism as a theology for white Protestants (5) that services "white racial essentialism" (125–27). To be sure, racial tensions should not be ignored in the analysis of American religious history, which Hummel would rightly conclude is a prominent blemish on American Christendom. However, his analysis seems to place dispensationalism in the center

of this blight, which seems somewhat odd because dispensationalism never dominated the southern United States, where racial problems were aggravated. No one should question that all sorts of American evangelical Christians in the early part of the 1900s struggled with biblical attitudes about race. Nonetheless, one particular over-the-top statement, which borders on a guilt-by-association argument, is the assertion that “separatists almost uniformly supported socially conservative candidates and the Ku Klux Klan” (187). Hummel characterizes these separatists (those on the fringes of dispensationalism like J. Frank Norris, John R. Rice, and Bob Jones) in this way without citing any reference. Such an indictment invoking the heinous KKK, if true, deserves much stronger documentation.

Finally, Hummel overstates the notion that dispensationalism has an aging leadership (307) and that, in 2004, dispensationalism was a movement with no young scholars (322). Similarly, he expresses ideas that traditional dispensationalism has been destroyed and has collapsed (318–19). It is quite fair to say that the movement has diminished in academic circles and even in the churches. But there is a cadre of younger dispensational scholars populating the faculties of many schools, many of whom this reviewer has trained. The heralding of the death of dispensationalism is premature. During the Middle Eastern wars of the 2000s, books were being written on the decline and death of dispensationalism while claiming at the same time that dispensationalists were powerful enough to control the foreign policy of the President of the United States. In these days, trends move back and forth easily. It is best to have a chastened historical study.

While the negative analysis given here should be taken seriously (and more could be given), the value of Hummel’s work remains. Dispensationalists especially should read it. They need to know what others are thinking about them even if the evaluation is a bit skewed. Hummel’s writing is an enjoyable read for those who love religious history. May the reader take advantage of this opportunity.

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Unlimited Atonement: Amyraldism and Reformed Theology. Eds. Michael F. Bird and Scott D. Harrower. Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2023. 240 pp. Paperback, \$25.99.

Michael Bird and Scott Harrower, the co-editors of this collected volume, are colleagues on the faculty of Ridley College in Melbourne, Australia. This originating milieu is fitting for the topic, as Ridley College is affiliated with Australian Anglican and Reformed circles, which historically have been a greenhouse for moderate Calvinism. The eighth chapter of the volume (composed by Rory Shiner) focuses upon the “hypothetical universalism” of D. Broughton Knox, the former principal of Moore Theological College in Sydney (a “sister” institution to Ridley College). And the twelfth chapter is written by Michael Jensen, a son of Peter Jensen who succeeded Knox as principal at Moore. “The rejection of limited atonement is, it turns out, a common feature on the Australian Reformed landscape” (154).

Some of the book’s contributors distinguish between Amyraldism, “hypothetical universalism,” and so-called “four point” Calvinism (25, 141), while others use these terms rather synonymously (155, 157). Page 147 elucidates the unique nature of Amyraut’s moderate Calvinism, with its peculiar combination of (1) the order of divine decrees, (2) a twofold will of God, and (3) a threefold covenant. “Over the centuries, numerous theologians have expressed views similar to that of Amyraut’s hypothetical universalist atonement without necessarily including the distinctive elements of his own theology” (151). Page 145 shares Richard Muller’s helpful taxonomy of historic views of the extent of the atonement among the Reformed. The core of moderate Calvinism(s) is the combination of particular, unconditional election with the intended, real (and not merely abstract, notional) sufficiency of Christ’s atonement for the whole human race (144).

The volume particularly focuses on the historic legacy of moderate Calvinism within the English (Anglican) and French (Huguenot) Reformed traditions. The first chapter (by Oliver Crisp) traces the history of Anglican “hypothetical universalism.” Chapter 10 (by James Arcadi) contends that the Anglican Thirty-Nine Articles combined a universal atonement with particular, unconditional election. In Arcadi’s reading, the Articles maintain that Christ died

for “*all* sins of *all* humans” (188). As the Church of England Catechism affirms, “Christ redeemed me, and all mankind” (159). Arcadi describes the unlimited sufficiency of Jesus’ atonement as a “dispositional property” (194) and applies the doctrine to the test case of infants within Anglican theology (196–98). Chapter 2 (by Michael Bird), Chapter 7 (by Jeff Fisher), and a significant portion of Chapter 3 (by Christopher Woznicki) focus upon the distinctive theology of Moïse Amyraut, which he promulgated while serving as professor of theology at the Saumur Academy in France.

The contributors to the volume argue that iterations of moderate Calvinism are neither “aberrant” nor “inferior” forms of Reformed theology but hold a rightful place within the “variegated and broad stream” of Reformed thought (26): “... Amyraldianism and related views emerged from within the Reformed tradition and lie within the bounds of Reformed orthodoxy” (131; cf. 152). And hypothetical universalism “has persisted as a minority report into the present” (35). Recent scholarship has underscored, beyond any doubt, that the Canons of Dort were purposely framed to allow the inclusion of particularist versions of hypothetical universalism (139–41, 207). In sum, Reformed unity does not necessarily entail uniformity (107).

The volume’s discussions are characterized by irenic tenor and analytic precision. Nevertheless, the authors differ in the details and in their own theological penchants. Oliver Crisp prefers the heritage of Anglican hypothetical universalism (as reflected in James Ussher and James Davenant) over the Amyraldian version of moderate Calvinism (32). Yet Christopher Woznicki favors the Amyraldian solution to “double payment” argumentation over the response found in Ussherian hypothetical universalism (62, 69–70). Joshua Farris and Mark Hamilton (chap. 6) even prefer the Anselmian satisfaction theory of William Ames (satisfying a debt of honor owed to God) over the penal substitution of Edward Polhill’s hypothetical universalism (satisfying a debt of punishment). This inclination stands in direct contrast to the influential work of D. Broughton Knox (the Australian theologian mentioned earlier), who sought to strengthen support for moderate Calvinism while forming a “trenchant defense of penal substitution” (156, 162, 166–67).

Fruitful forays include theological examinations of the interplay between “unlimited atonement” and the nature of forgiveness (chap.

5) and the relationship between “unlimited atonement” and social ethics (chap. 12). This discussion could have been enriched by investigating how a multi-intentioned understanding of the atonement (as espoused by John Hammett, Gary Shultz, and Bruce Ware) may include the purpose of cosmic restoration, potentially informing wider ethical perspectives regarding the created realm (Rom 8:18–23). Jensen focuses entirely upon the “common good” within *social* ethics, even while mentioning the “cosmic act of reconciliation” and “cosmic redemption in the blood of Christ” (227–28). In Jensen’s anthropocentric convergence, the cosmic is essentially collapsed into the social: “the cosmic scope of [Christ’s] work on the cross surely invites us to consider the implications of the atonement for social ethics” (228).

The centripetal force of the volume’s thematic approach is a mixed blessing. The focus upon French Amyraldism and British hypothetical universalism does make room for a chapter on moderate Calvinism within Anglophone Baptist history. The highlight of David Allen’s analysis is the demonstration of Andrew Fuller’s “shift” from limited atonement to unlimited atonement. Fuller’s even-handed, open-minded approach is reflected in his acknowledgement that his debate with Dan Taylor (a General Baptist) spurred him to rethink his own position (210–15). Even so, when this chapter moves forward into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the discussion essentially narrows to an investigation of Southern Baptists (215–17). Other Baptist movements that preserved the tenor of the 1833 New Hampshire Confession of Faith and channeled the moderate approach of Augustus Hopkins Strong are largely neglected. The likes of Bruce Demarest (associated with the Conservative Baptist movement), Millard Erickson (with roots in the Baptist General Conference), and Norman Douty and Robert Lightner (with connections to the Regular Baptist movement) are mentioned only in passing if at all (cf. 151, n96).

While these secondary Baptist branches are understandable casualties of the editorial pruning process, the Reformed focus is truncated as well. Because the parameters of the cutting board are “Scottish, English, and French expressions” (108), other Continental forms of moderate Calvinism from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are left aside. As a corollary, the Lutheran background of atonement debates is barely touched upon, although James Arcadi

mentions that Article II of the Anglican Thirty-Nine Articles parallels the wording of the Augsburg Confession (187). One might also consider how sentiments found in Luther's *Sermon on John 1:29* could inform the interpretation of Article XV. Moreover, Jeff Fisher notes that Amyraut engaged in dialogue with Lutherans (154). In fact, contemporary scholarship has demonstrated that Amyraut's thought was not so much a *via media* between Arminianism and Calvinism (*pace* 202–203) as an attempted rapprochement with Lutheranism.

Including an index would have greatly assisted the volume's usability as a tool for reference and research. Nevertheless, the volume succeeds in its intention of broadening the reader's understanding of the historic pedigree of moderate Calvinism. In recent years, the trickle of such historical investigation has become a torrent of revisionary force. "This effectively blows the lid off all attempts to suggest that Amyraut was somehow the deviant, drunk uncle who showed up at the family picnic and compromised the 'true' Reformed doctrine of limited atonement" (207). Neglected members of the Reformed clan are being welcomed once again to the extended family reunion. The expansion of the guest list is to be applauded as a change in disposition grounded in sound historical scholarship.

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Called to Preach: Fulfilling the High Calling of Expository Preaching. By Steven J. Lawson. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2022. 208 pp. Softcover, \$18.99.

Called to Preach by Steven J. Lawson is an excellent book on preaching written by one of America's premiere preachers. Lawson is the founder and president of OnePassion Ministries, which is a ministry designed to equip preachers to become faithful expositors. Lawson also serves as a teaching fellow with Ligonier Ministries, as well as a professor of preaching and Dean of the Doctor of Ministry program at The Master's Seminary. He is the executive editor of *Expositor* magazine. Lawson holds a B.B.A. from Texas Tech

University, a Th.M. from Dallas Theological Seminary, and a D.Min. from Reformed Theological Seminary.

Lawson clearly states the purpose of this book in the introduction. He writes, “In the following pages, I will set before you what the Bible says about this lofty responsibility of expository preaching” (8). The author admits that the book does not offer brand-new ways to preach. Instead, he dives into Scripture, as well as examples of faithful expositors from church history to show what expositors are called to do, exposit the word of God (8).

Called to Preach is arranged into nine chapters that walk the reader through the process of preaching. Three chapters deal with the various aspects of being called to preach. Lawson identifies several characteristics found in men who are genuinely called to preach. Those who are called to preach will exhibit, among other things, a burning passion to preach, the ability to teach, growth in godliness, spiritual influence on others, and confirmation by others as to their calling (11–19). The next four chapters explore the multidimensional aspects of sermon preparation. The information contained in these chapters is extremely practical and will benefit the young and inexperienced pastors, while also reminding older, experienced pastors about the basics of expository sermon preparation. The last two chapters address the importance of preachers living holy lives and continuing to work on their craft.

Lawson opens the first chapter by observing, “Preachers are not made—they are born. No seminary can make an expositor. No Bible college can create a preacher. No church can manufacture a man gifted in the pulpit. Only God can call a preacher” (10). Lawson emphasizes this viewpoint strongly, urging churches to get back to identifying and heeding the ministry of men who are called and anointed by God to preach.

Chapters 4–7 walk the reader through the process of preparing and preaching a sermon. Lawson states, “The process of preparing a biblical sermon includes both studying the Scripture passage and preparing the message that explains and applies it” (40). The benefit of this section is that it encourages the preacher to be diligent in study and preparation, as well as to be mindful of how to deliver a sermon so that the congregation will receive and respond to it. The author lists and briefly defines several legitimate forms of expository preaching, ranging from sequential to topical exposition. This

information can help a preacher avoid the inadvertent habit of preaching the same style of sermon every week (45–47). Lastly, Lawson reminds preachers that the preacher must not merely give information but must preach so that lives will be transformed. For this transformation to occur, the information in the sermon must be accurately preached biblically, theologically, and historically, as under the unction of the Holy Spirit. Lawson writes, “The empowering of the Holy Spirit is absolutely essential in preaching” (93).

One of the highlights of the book is found in Chapter 2 when Lawson exegetes the signature text of biblical preaching, 2 Timothy 4:1–5 (22). In doing so, he shows that preachers are commissioned to preach the word of God and are not free to preach whatever they wish in any manner they wish (23). He observes that preachers are commissioned to preach the message God has given in his word, in a similar fashion as a herald would “preach” or publicly announce an imperial decree issued by the Roman emperor (24). Just as the herald was not free to “preach” any message he wished in the manner he wished, so the called and commissioned preacher of God’s word is not free to preach any message he wishes in the manner he wishes (24). He must preach the word of God in the way it was given (2 Tim 4:2).

The main weakness of this book is that it is not a detailed manual on how to prepare expository sermons, which some may mistakenly expect. However, the strengths of the book far outweigh the downside. The strengths of the book are that it reminds preachers of the sacred task they are called to perform while challenging them to rely on the Holy Spirit as they perform the task.

This book is highly recommended for seminary students and pastors. *Called to Preach* should be read by seminary students who are preparing for pulpit ministry, as well as by pastors who are already engaged in regular pulpit ministry. It offers a clear reminder of the sacred task to which the preacher is called, which is to preach the word of God and to live what he preaches. *Called to Preach* is a

valuable resource because it has the potential to equip and encourage seminary students and pastors in their calling.

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I Have a Psychiatric Diagnosis: What Does the Bible Say? By Edward T. Welch. Greensboro, NC: New Growth P, 2022. 96 pp. Paperback, \$12.99.

Ed Welch is well-known in the biblical counseling world. He is the author of numerous books, some of the most popular being *When People Are Big and God Is Small* (256 pp.); *Addictions: A Banquet in the Grave* (321 pp.); *Depression: Looking Up from the Stubborn Darkness* (274 pp.). The present book under review is by design more limited in scope—only 96 pages—than the titles previously mentioned. *I Have a Psychiatric Diagnosis: What Does the Bible Say?* is published by New Growth Press as a part of their “Ask the Christian Counselor” series. This series takes a bit of a deeper dive than their mini-book series (e.g., *Help! I Can't Forgive*, or *Help! I Want to Change*), yet keeping it accessible to the layperson. Each of the books in the series (nine thus far) are compact in size (5x8 in.) and aim to touch on the big counseling questions of our day.

Welch serves at CCEF (Christian Counseling and Educational Foundation). He has two noteworthy credentials as an author on this topic. He first attained a Master of Divinity (M.Div.) from Biblical Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. Next he attained a Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in Counseling (neuropsychology) from the University of Utah. I point out these two degrees because the first chapter of the book is titled, “Bridging the Divide.” The “divide” he is talking about is the one between “psychological problems” and “God’s words” (3). He tries to help the reader understand some of the technical jargon that has emerged from the secular field of psychology and how they interface (or not) with the terms of Scripture. Mainly, however, the chapter outlines his plan for the book. And it is very simple: (1) listen to God and get help from his people, and (2) listen and learn from those who have experience (12). He will

follow this plan in the remaining chapters of the book as he addresses “Anxiety and Panic Disorders” (chap 2); “Trauma” (chap. 3); “Depression” (chap. 4); and “Narcissism” (chap. 5).

In his chapter on anxiety and panic attacks, Welch primarily points the reader to find solace in the presence of Jesus. Among several suggestions and biblical observations, two rise to the top. The first is that the biblical command to not be anxious “is not so much a command as it is a promise of his presence” (28). He likens it to comforting a weeping child by compassionately urging them not to cry. The point, he says, is that it is more of a reassuring word that there is now a reason for hope because we are there with them. The second is about the mysterious onset of panic attacks. They seem to be unpredictable and inexplicable. When people ask what causes them, Welch suggests that sometimes the best answer is, “I don’t know.” But then he offers some rather profound insight when he says, “This [answer] will *not* limit your ability to help or be helped.... Trusting and coming close to Jesus helps more deeply than knowledge and insight” (31).

In the chapter on trauma (Ch. 3), Welch offers helpful background on the term’s origin in the field of medicine, with primary application to soldiers suffering the traumas of war. The term has since, of course, extended far beyond the experiences of war to any violent near-death experience. Much of the chapter contrasts the psychological approach to both the body and the mind and relevant passages of Scripture that address both aspects of the whole person. While there are some helpful thoughts and insights in the chapter, Welch unfortunately commends two books without any caveats to alert the reader of potential concerns. The first book is *Trauma and Recovery* written by an avowed feminist. The second book is Bessel van der Kolk’s *The Body Keeps the Score*. This second recommendation is particularly disconcerting to this reviewer since it is quite a controversial book within the biblical counseling sphere.

The chapter on depression (chap. 4), although brief, offers good reminders to find our hope in Christ. After characterizing depression as a “lead-cased room” where “nothing good is allowed in,” Welch first reminds the downcast person that the Creator who made the ears will himself hear when anyone chooses to talk. Then Welch writes, “Say *something*. Say *something*” (57). He goes on:

- “The gospel is about Jesus, who did what you cannot do” (58).
- “The gospel is about Jesus, who is praying for you” (59).
- “The gospel unites you to Jesus, and you can pray his prayers” (60).

The final chapter, on narcissism (chap. 5), in some ways stands in stark contrast to the foregoing chapters. By that I mean that much of Welch’s suggestions are intended to counsel the biblical counselor’s mind and mindset more so than the counselee’s mind and mindset. Let me explain. After discussing the diagnostic label as deriving from Greek mythology and then surveying its characteristic features from the *Diagnostic and Statistics Manual*, 5th edition (*DSM-5*), he proceeds to show that the heart of the challenge for a biblical counselor is that the one diagnosed as a narcissist presents himself to the biblical counselor as having no problem. Or, if there is a problem, it is everyone else. Considering that, here are some suggestions he offers to the counselor:

- *Say no to your anger.* [That would be the biblical counselor’s anger.]
- *See the other person as a child.* [That would be to see the narcissist as a child.]
- *Do not use “narcissist” and other labels.* [The counselor should use biblical categories.]
- *Practice your own empathy skills.* [That would be the counselor’s empathy skills.]

Overall, I believe there is much helpful material in this compact little book. Welch (from my experience) always presents with a very irenic style. Although he has addressed some challenging counseling issues, in the main there is little here that is objectionable and much that is helpful. Aside from his seeming endorsement of two questionable and/or controversial books, the material here would serve well as a primer for biblical counselors seeking to help those

struggling with anxiety/panic attacks, trauma, depression, and narcissism.

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Interpretation for Preaching and Teaching: An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics. By Stanley E. Porter. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2023. 183 pp. Paperback, \$21.98.

Interpretation for Preaching and Teaching by Stanley Porter offers a unique approach to the discipline of Bible interpretation. Porter provides a manual for pastors and Bible teachers as they stand before God's people declaring God's Word. Porter's goal is to offer a guide that is both practical and attainable rather than scholarly or technical and which has the average pastor in mind as he writes (vi). His interpretive principles are mixed with practical guidance and specific exercises designed to help preachers grow in their interpretation of Scripture. Porter, President, Professor of New Testament, and Roy A. Hope Chair of Christian Worldview at McMaster Divinity College, brings a wealth of theological knowledge and experience to this topic. Porter has also written many other books on various topics and is most noted for his work on the verbal aspect of NT Greek.

Porter deals with five aspects of hermeneutics in this book. He works from small to large in scope, starting from the language of the text and moving toward the preaching of the text. His topics include authority, language, levels of the text, biblical theology, systematic theology, and preaching the text. Throughout these chapters, he uses the book of Philemon as a case study and demonstrates the disciplines he teaches by showing how they work out in the book of Philemon.

The author begins by talking about hermeneutics in general. Here he defines his terms, noting that hermeneutics is the treatment of the principles of understanding and models of interpretation relating to a text of Scripture (3). Porter defines his terms in this work and is very clear about what he does and does not mean when it comes to

hermeneutics. Moving forward, Porter discusses how the authority of Scripture relates to hermeneutics. He writes that biblical authority is in direct connection to Bible interpretation and that these two are related to one's own beliefs and assumptions (27). In Chapter 3, Porter talks about linguistics and language and gives helpful information regarding the original languages of the Bible (45–48). He provides two chapters on the level of the text itself, addressing items such as meaning, context, goals for interpretation, and genre. Porter continues with a chapter on biblical theology, another on systematic theology, and another on homiletics. Though some of Porter's discussions are technical, he pairs the tools given in each chapter with practical examples. He demonstrates the skills he teaches by showing how they work out in the book of Philemon, giving the reader practical examples of each hermeneutical principle taught in the book. Porter treats this book as a workbook of sorts, giving readers practical next steps and exercises for practicing what he teaches.

This book provides an interesting perspective on the full spectrum of hermeneutics. Porter chooses a drastically different way of handling the topic of hermeneutics, one in which he addresses the discipline without using many of the usual terms and standard talking points one would expect to find in an introduction to hermeneutics. For instance, Porter cautions when attempting to find "authorial intent," and even questions whether interpreters can find the intention of the original author, noting that the biblical authors are "always in some way obscured by the persona they put forward in the text" (65). While the caution he gives has value, perhaps he ought not to dismiss this pursuit so quickly. Porter also has little to say about traditional types of genres, and he does not spend much time addressing how to interpret individual genres as one might expect from an introductory look at Bible interpretation. Porter notes that due to time and distance, a descriptive approach that treats genres as "patterning of literature rather than regulative norms" should be preferred (81–82). Again, Porter's observations are worthwhile, but interpreters can still find value in considering some of the standard genres that are often delineated in hermeneutics.

Another area of distinction can be found in Porter's discussion of systematic theology. Porter presents his "systematic theology as translation" approach, noting that this method moves systematic theology beyond interpretation and uses the discipline as a tool for

translation (127). Porter's desire for application to contemporary culture is a necessary goal for Bible interpretation, but the lack of emphasis on a dogmatic approach to systematic theology seems short-sighted. Certainly, interpreters ought to apply systematic theology to modern contexts, but traditional and orthodox doctrines do exist, and these doctrines ought to be upheld by one's paradigm for systematic theology. In this sense, Porter seemed to embrace a process of doing systematic theology that jumps right from the heart of a text to the heart of the contemporary audience with little time for historical theology or the formulation of doctrine. However, interpreters must have a formulated doctrine to contextualize if they are to make systematic theology applicable to modern individuals. Perhaps rather than jumping directly from the original audience to the contemporary one, Porter should add a step in between which emphasizes the formulation of doctrinal principles based on the text.

Due to how Porter handles the topic of Bible interpretation, readers may find this work different than expected and even difficult to grasp. Though written as an introduction, this work can be technical and challenging for an entry-level reader. This can be even more of a struggle when considering how this book addresses hermeneutics without some of the more standard terminology that one might find in other books on the topic. Therefore, this book would be most accessible to a reader who already has a foundation in hermeneutics and seeks to broaden one's understanding and challenge one's interpretive approach to the text of Scripture.

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Is Hell Real? By Dane Ortlund. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022. 48 pp. Paperback, \$4.99.

In this short but powerful book, Dane Ortlund lays out the biblical case for the reality of a literal hell. Immediately he admits that this truth offends unbelievers. He also says that even some who profess to be Christians don't want to talk about it or admit its reality. However, this disconnect does not lessen the certainty of a literal hell as clearly spelled out in the Bible. Ortlund says that he wrote this

book so that all would see the horrifying reality of hell. Thankfully, he goes deeper and speaks to the need for all to turn their affections towards Jesus and the hope that he offers that enables man to escape eternity in hell and instead have life with Jesus in heaven.

The author begins by stating that hell is needed. Though this may sound strange at first, he states that the reality of hell lets man know that God is a just God. If God did not punish man for sin, then God would not truly be just. Hell also allows humans to keep justice in God's hands and not seek vengeance on their own. If there were no hell, then humans would indeed seek retribution for every wrong done to them. However, if hell is real and coming, then man can know that God sees all the evil done and will indeed take care of it if the guilty party does not repent.

Ortlund also shows in the Bible that hell is awful. The common misperception is that hell is where the spirit goes. However, Matthew 5 and 10 clearly show that the entire body and spirit are in hell. The author also shares that hell is not a state of mind but a painful reality. Unrepentant man will be punished for his sins and will feel physically the weight of that punishment. Hell is also a punishment that will be eternally meted out and is deserved because man has committed his own sins. His nature is sinful, so therefore what man does in his actions is sinful and therefore deserves hell.

This small book's author also considers what most humanity believes: they are not as bad as the worst of sinners. Therefore, they really don't deserve hell. When man compares himself to others, there comes a type of self-justification. Of course, there are others who have committed worse, perhaps even public sins. And when man compares himself among horizontal relationships, he feels as though he truly deserves heaven. Ortlund reminds readers about the parable of the self-righteous tax collector who doesn't see his sinfulness in light of God's standard but in light of the seemingly worse tax collector instead (Luke 18). The tax collector, however, sees his own sinfulness in light of God's perfect standard and calls for God's mercy. Each man must not look to his horizontal relationships for justification, Ortlund observes. Rather, he must look upward towards God, see his standard of perfection, and ask for forgiveness and trust in the perfect record and work of Jesus, man's only hope for salvation.

Ortlund finishes his book by asking man to consider the closeness of hell. No man is guaranteed another day or even another minute.

Since hell is deserved, man must take notice of this reality. Ortlund doesn't finish the book with that bleak certainty. He offers the hope of the gospel. He reminds readers that every sin is punishable. The key distinction, then, is whether a man will pay the penalty himself in hell or trust that Jesus bore that punishment in his place.

Ortlund graciously and biblically answers the question posed in the book's title. Though many who read this book may consider this book to be unloving or judgmental, Ortlund demonstrates how the Bible underscores the reality of hell. He answers many objections to the reality of hell and gives sound, logical responses to difficult questions. However, he doesn't allow his logic to be the final authority. He points to Scripture and its sufficiency to make the case.

I'm thankful that the author doesn't simply make the case for hell. He weaves in and ends with the hope of Jesus and the gospel. I would gladly recommend this book to anyone. It would serve believers well to review what the Bible says about this important topic and can motivate them to tell others of the reality of hell, paired closely with the hope of the gospel.

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Legal Issues in Biblical Counseling: Direction and Help for Churches and Counselors. T. Dale Johnson Jr. and Edward Charles Wilde, eds. Greensboro, NC: New Growth P, 2022. 272 pp. Paperback, \$34.99.

The two editors of *Legal Issues in Biblical Counseling* (hereafter *LIBC*) are well qualified to preside over a book of this nature. T. Dale Johnson, Jr. currently serves as the Executive Director of the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors (ACBC) and holds a Ph.D. in biblical counseling. He has authored two other books: *The Professionalization of Pastoral Care* (2020) and *The Church as a Culture of Care* (2021). Edward Charles Wilde is an attorney and an ACBC certified biblical counselor and holds an MABC from the Master's University, where he serves as an adjunct professor. He is

published in several law journals and serves as the content editor of the *Journal of Biblical Soul Care*. He is also a contributing author to the book *Men Counseling Men* (2013).

LIBC is a collection of twelve essays aimed to educate and prepare churches and Christian organizations regarding the legal implications and potential exposure biblical counselors and ministries may have in our current culture. The book is highly pragmatic as evidenced by the “To Do” checklist at the end of every chapter. The seven contributing authors are comprised of four attorneys, one victim’s advocate, one pastor, and one ministry executive.

The book divides into two nearly equal parts, with six essays devoted to each part. Part 1 is titled “Protecting a Counseling Ministry in a Church.” Part 2 is titled “Protecting Myself and My Counselees.” The back matter includes a short bio of each of the contributors, a glossary of legal information, and an Appendix that includes two sample forms: Consent to Biblical Counseling Discipleship and Personal Data Inventory.

Part 1 unfolds logically from the first to the sixth chapter. In Chapter 1, Dale Johnson sketches out the biblical boundaries for both the church and the state and correctly observes that at different points in history, both entities have ventured beyond their God-given domains. On the one hand, the government at times has placed undue restrictions upon the religious freedom of the church. At other times, the church has shared the state’s sword to coerce religious activity. This book aims to keep the boundaries of both domains clearly in view.

In Chapter 2, Edward Wilde provides a helpful chapter on what the interests of the state are. He reminds the reader that “the goal of any government is some kind of order” serving the interest of some public good rather than being driven by an inherent “antipathy toward Christianity” (29). He proceeds to show that ordered societies (i.e., “polite societies”) establish two spheres of engagement: *private space* and *public space*. Religious practice finds much greater freedom with less governmental interference in the former sphere. The government is much more likely to intervene when religious expression takes place in the public sphere. “Therapy” and “clinical practice” exist in the public sphere. To the state, biblical counseling looks much like secular therapy. Therefore, Wilde presents a solid case and an even more compelling plea to biblical counselors: “[W]e

must be clear that we are engaged in the religious practice of discipleship rather than the secular practice of therapy" (46).

The remaining chapters of Part 1 take the prior two chapters and tease out the practical implications for churches and Christian ministries. They do an admirable job of showing what steps to take to reduce the potential of state interference. Chapter 3 (also by Wilde, "Why Would the State Seek to Regulate Biblical Counseling?") makes the case that each ministry must be sure to explicitly identify the private space of religious practice in any and all governing documents. Chapter 4 urges the reader to proactively develop a relationship with a local lawyer (Todd Sorrell, "The Church and a Local Lawyer"). The title of Chapter 5 (again by Wilde) is "Business Formation and Insurance of Your Counseling Ministry," which clearly identifies the focus of the chapter. Finally, Chapter 6 addresses pragmatic issues pertaining to two highly relevant and prevalent issues: (1) mandatory reporting and (2) the termination of an employee.

Part 2 shifts the focus from the corporate to the individual. Tim Pasma begins this section by giving a pastor's perspective on legal issues. He urges his readers to realize that seeking legal protection is not a failure of faith nor an insult to God (141). Instead, he argues, that by engaging the legal system (with wisdom), it will help prevent legal challenges. Although these are solid reminders, what I appreciated most was his final perspective. He argues that pastors and those engaged in biblical counseling who seek to follow biblical principles will in most cases exceed those stipulations of our legal system (142).

Chapters 8 and 9 are mainly for those who have never been entangled personally in a lawsuit. Repeatedly, the authors convey that it is an all-consuming and highly intimidating process. Therefore, these two chapters equip the reader to be as prepared as possible by knowing what to expect (Chapter 8, "The Anatomy of a Lawsuit," by Ed Wilde and Deborah Dewart) and how best to avoid one (Chapter 9, "How to Avoid a Lawsuit," by Todd Sorrell).

Chapters 10 and 12 ("Religious Liberty and the Judicial System" and "Gender, Sexuality, and Religious Liberty," respectively, both by Deborah Dewart) provide helpful legal defense resources as well as pragmatic suggestions for tightening up the governing documents of

the church or ministry. In short, Dewart urges that explicit doctrinal position statements on key contemporary issues—especially a statement on sexuality and a definition of marriage—should be included in the Bylaws, Statement of Faith, and Policies and Procedures documents. In addition, she urges each ministry to implement a *Biblical Dispute Resolution Policy* that counselees must read and sign whereby they commit to resolving any disputes through biblical mediation or arbitration.

Chapter 11 (“What Your Counselee Faces in the Legal System,” by Ed Wilde and Tanya Braun) deserves special comment. As for the chapter topic, it provides good information that will make the biblical counselor gain a better appreciation for the extra burden a counselee carries who is embroiled in a legal dispute. For some reason, however, the authors chose to include a segment on forgiveness that this reviewer did not find helpful. The authors first mention it in conjunction with a specific scenario. Then they give a separate excursus entitled “A Note on Forgiveness and Justice.” Much of what they say in this excursus is good, yet their statement on forgiveness either lacks clarity or else doctrinal precision.

Despite the one area of critique in the previous paragraph, my overall assessment of *Legal Issues in Biblical Counseling* is overwhelmingly positive. Every pastor and Christian ministry should read it sooner rather than later. More than that, they should act upon the pertinent areas of exposure to which the book will undoubtedly make plain to them.

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Listening to Scripture: An Introduction to Interpreting the Bible.
By Craig G. Bartholomew. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2023.
208 pp. Paperback, \$20.59.

Listening to Scripture offers those beginning their journey in biblical studies a helpful entry point into the world of hermeneutics. Bartholomew admirably accomplishes what any good introduction to

a vast topic should accomplish: he manages to introduce the reader to many of the more important conversations in biblical hermeneutics without overwhelming the reader with a dizzying array of secondary topics that could easily undermine the goal of a proper “introduction.”

One of the most valuable aspects of Bartholomew’s book is his concern to introduce biblical hermeneutics not only as an academic endeavor, but also as a spiritual one. This emphasis on a balanced approach to Bible interpretation—one where both mind *and* heart are engaged—is the subject of the opening chapter and continues to be an emphasis throughout the book. In the conclusion of a later chapter entitled “A Liturgical Hermeneutic,” Bartholomew laments the far-too-common trend in hermeneutical works to keep “academic interpretation” and “personal appropriation” separate from one another. Serious Bible study cannot include only the academic at the expense of what should be “the end or telos of our reading”—to know God more fully through rigorous engagement with the biblical text (160). To accomplish this end, Bible interpretation must go beyond merely academic investigation. Reading Bartholomew’s repeated reminders along these lines was refreshing and will doubtless be a tremendous help for new students of the Bible to keep “the telos” in view, avoiding the pitfall of allowing academic discussions to displace the true goal of Bible interpretation.

Having encouraged readers to engage both mind and heart when studying the Bible, the first major section of *Listening to Scripture* continues with a chapter devoted to discussing Scripture’s unity. Crediting the influences of authors such as Lesslie Newbigin and N. T. Wright, Bartholomew plots out Scripture’s story into six “acts,” demonstrating the grand, cohesive metanarrative that binds together the Old and New Testaments. From here, a final introductory chapter explores the topic of Scripture and biblical authority, where Bartholomew encourages those studying the biblical text to see it for what it truly is, “a fully trustworthy witness to God’s self-revelation” (53).

The second major section—and really the heart of the book—begins in chapter four, “A Triadic Approach.” The chapter begins with a wonderful summation of the major movements in the world of biblical scholarship that have led up to the present time. While not the main point of the chapter, this summation is a *truly beneficial*

orientation to the academic study of the Bible. Joining a scholarly conversation that started so long ago can be intimidating to biblical hermeneutics newcomers. Bartholomew's brief summary of the historical developments leading up to the modern conversation is invaluable in a book promising a proper "introduction" to hermeneutics.

After summarizing the movements that have led to the current conversation (modernity, historical criticism, literary criticism, postmodernism, and a turn toward theological interpretation), Bartholomew lays out his own "triadic" approach to biblical hermeneutics that plots the course for the next few chapters. "Rather than seeing historical, literary, and theological approaches to the Bible as separate endeavors [as they had been historically separated in various "movements" in the world of biblical scholarship], we need an integrated hermeneutic that includes all three" (65).

Bartholomew devotes the next three chapters to a detailed discussion of each of these elements of his hermeneutical triad. Chapter five discusses the value of studying the literary aspects of the biblical books. Or, as one of his subsection titles nicely puts it, there is value in "Reading [the biblical] Books *as* Books" (75, emphasis original). As might be expected, the chapter explores topics such as composition and genre and how a sensitivity to the literary qualities of Scripture aids proper interpretation. Chapter six gives the second element of the triad: the importance of understanding biblical narrative and its relationship to history. Citing such examples as Jesus' resurrection (historical event) and forgiveness (theology), or the relationship between Israel's exodus from Egypt (historical event) and God's expectation for Israel's obedience (theology), Bartholomew demonstrates that the truthfulness of the Bible's theology depends upon the historicity of its narrated events. In developing one's hermeneutical approach to Scripture, the question of the relationship between its narration and the facts of history must be settled—so, a worthwhile introductory topic indeed.

While the literary and historical/narrative dimensions of the triadic approach are important, Bartholomew makes clear that these dimensions ultimately support the third and most important element of the triad, the so-called "*kerygmatic*" dimension of the biblical text. Bartholomew uses the term *kerygmatic* to refer to the Bible's "message"—that is, the overall point that God is making in a given

text (116). While the literary dimension considers the literary shape of the text and the historical/narrative dimension considers the relationship between the text and history, the *kerygmatic* dimension considers the *message* the text is communicating. To understand the *kerygma* or “message” of the text, Bartholomew proposes three hermeneutical lenses through which to examine the text. Helpfully, he expresses these lenses in the form of questions the interpreter brings to the text. The “liturgical” hermeneutical lens (a name Bartholomew admits may be lacking) asks, “How is God offering himself to me/us through this text?” (Chapter 9) The “ethical” hermeneutical lens asks, “How is God instructing me/us about how to live?” (Chapter 10) And the “missional” hermeneutical lens asks, “How is God equipping me/us for being sent into his world?” (Chapter 11) (148). By asking these (sometimes overlapping, as Bartholomew points out) questions, the *kerygma*—the message of the text—is discovered.

While there is much to commend in *Listening to Scripture*, Bartholomew occasionally articulates positions some (including myself) will find disagreeable. For example, viewing Genesis 1–2 as an anonymous work (122), or, when discussing his missional hermeneutical lens, seemingly questioning the primacy of evangelism in the church’s mission (184). To be fair to the volume, however, those elements with which I found myself in disagreement were, in the end, tangential to Bartholomew’s overarching hermeneutical program he is setting out to present. In an introductory book on hermeneutics, especially one that is so full of illustrations like *Listening to Scripture*, it would be impossible to please every reader at every point. In the end, the occasionally disagreeable statement does not undermine the value of this text for the judicious reader looking for an entry point into the vast world of biblical hermeneutics.

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The Christian Counselor's Medical Desk Reference, 2nd edition. Charles Hodges, Jr., ed. Greensboro, NC: New Growth P, 2023. 448 pp. Paperback, \$39.99.

Charles Hodges, Jr. is well qualified to serve as editor for the second edition of *The Christian Counselor's Medical Desk Reference* (hereafter referred to as *CCMDR*). He is an effective, seasoned practitioner in both medicine and biblical counseling. Academically, he earned his M.D. from Indiana School of Medicine at Indiana University. He holds two master's degrees, an M.A. in Counseling and an M.A. in Religion from Liberty University. As a practitioner, he is board-certified in family medicine and is a Fellow of the American Academy of Family Physicians. He is also the Executive Director for Vision of Hope, a residential treatment facility for women (an extension of the ministry of Faith Church in Lafayette, IN). Additionally, he serves as a Fellow of the Association of Certified Biblical Counselors (ACBC).

The *CCMDR* is an update of the original volume, edited by Robert D. Smith, M.D., published twenty years earlier (2004). Smith was a mentor to Charles Hodges, Jr. In fact, Hodges testifies in his two-page dedication that Smith was the man “who more than any other changed my thinking about counseling” (vii).

As the name would suggest, *CCMDR* is a sizeable tome designed to serve primarily as a reference tool for the biblical counselor. At 448 pages, it is about fifty pages slimmer than the first edition, yet, from what this reviewer can tell—not being trained in medicine—it is comprehensive in scope. Aside from the Introduction by Hodges, there are 22 essays by 14 different authors. From the list of contributors and their biographies, I discern that all fourteen are biblical counselors and all but one are formally trained in the field of medicine. There are nine MDs (all males), two RNs (both females), one DO (a female), and one PharmD (a male). The fields of practice include family practice, anesthesiology, primary care internal medicine, pulmonary care, critical care, sleep medicine, orthopedic surgery, rheumatology, OB/gyn, emergency medicine, and pharmacology. The combined years of medical experience of this group of contributors (as best as I could calculate with the information available) is approximately 420 years.

The layout of the book is simple. The front matter is limited to ten pages (two pages of endorsements, four pages of title, recto and verso, a two-page dedication, and a two-page table of contents). The back matter is even slimmer at only three pages, listing the contributor's biographies. Aside from a five-page introduction, the heart of the book is 426 pages, twenty-two essays on the interface between medical knowledge and practice and biblical counseling.

As for the organization of the essays, it is not explicit (e.g., Part 1, Part 2, etc.). But from what I can discern, the first four chapters set the conceptual framework for how the practice of medicine and biblical counseling overlap. Here are the titles of those four chapters:

- Chapter 1: What is Medical about Mental Illness? (Charles Hodges, Jr.)
- Chapter 2: The Scriptures Are Sufficient (Charles Hodges, Jr.)
- Chapter 3: Counseling People with a Medical Illness (Daniel Gannon)
- Chapter 4: When Should a Biblical Counselor Consult a Doctor? (Martha Peace)

The next four chapters appear to address specific behaviors that are undesirable and chronic, which are also a primary category in the *Diagnostic and Statistics Manual*, 5th edition (*DSM-5*). These four chapters are

- Chapter 5: Depression: Medical Background and Biblical Hope (Charles Hodges, Jr.)
- Chapter 6: Life-Altering Anxiety: Medical Background (Gordon "Chip" Phillips)
- Chapter 7: ADHD: Essential Medical Background and Biblical Counseling Guidelines (Pamela Gannon)
- Chapter 8: Autism Spectrum: Disorder (ASD): Essential Background Knowledge and Helpful Biblical Principles (Pamela Gannon)

The next three chapters address the topic of medicine and its effects on the brain. There is an overview by Craig Svensson

(Pharm.D.), a chapter by Martha Peace providing a biblical counselor's perspective on psychotropic drugs, and a chapter on alternative medications by Daniel Gannon.

Chapters 12, 13, and 14 are all written by Charles Hodges, Jr. who addresses some of the most difficult issues counselors face, namely, obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), schizophrenia, and bipolar disorder (respectively).

The editor seems to have organized Chapters 15–18 around the challenge of dealing with the pain associated with some type of loss, some of which is specific to seemingly unshakeable pangs of one or more past experiences. Chapters 15 and 17 address post-traumatic stress (Mark Buono) and postpartum depression (Dan Wickert and Jocelyn Wallace), respectively. Chapter 18 discusses suicidality (Daniel Dionne). Now chapter 16 (Dan Wickert and Erin Ramirez) is on the topic of premenstrual syndrome (PMS) and does not seem to fit my imposed organizational category of loss. I presume it is placed logically adjacent to a chapter on childbirth and postpartum depression.

Chapters 19–22 only seem loosely tied together. Chapter 19 is by Daniel Dionne and discusses the medical, legal, and spiritual issues associated with marijuana and CBD use. In chapter 20, Matthew Rehrer provides a helpful chapter on dementia from both the perspective of the sufferer and the caregiver. Next, Lee Edmonds provides good medical and biblical advice for people suffering from sleep disorders. Finally, Jim Halla offers medical and biblical wisdom about rheumatology and the painful symptoms associated with such maladies.

My overall assessment of this book of essays is overwhelmingly positive. Since I am not trained medically, however, I cannot speak to the accuracy of the medical science and perspectives of each chapter. But as a biblical counselor—which is the primary target audience—I believe it is an essential tool that should be on the shelf of anyone who is involved in biblical counseling in any ongoing way. As a reference tool, it provides insight into the medical side of a given presenting issue, and the insights and perspectives come from experts in the medical field with compelling credentials in both medicine and biblical counseling. Moreover, the book is also rife with practical counseling principles and tips that biblical counselors can use to offer

true encouragement and help to those suffering under the burden of some kind of persistent affliction.

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The Seminary as a Textual Community: Exploring John Sailhamer's Vision for Theological Education. Ched Spellman and Jason K. Lee, eds. Dallas, TX: Fontes P, 2021. 218 pp. Paperback, \$18.95.

This book began life when John Sailhamer briefly considered becoming the Provost of Dallas Seminary in 1993 and wrote an essay outlining his vision of what a seminary should be. And then for nearly three decades, the essay sat on a long-term storage stack, unread and unnoticed. Two of his former students edited this essay, “The Nature, Purpose, and Tasks of a Theological Seminary,” along with several other manuscripts, bringing his helpful insights to the attention of many.

John Sailhamer’s vision is of the seminary as a text-focused community. Because the seminary serves the church, “the nature of Christianity necessarily defines the nature and purpose of a Christian seminary” (5). As the paramount religion of the book, Christianity can only ever be healthy when it is text-centered, and so also the Christian seminary (6).

When implemented in the curriculum, this means that every department of the seminary—both practical and theoretical—has the same fundamental task of enabling believers to read Scripture well and apply it to life (11). Sailhamer’s rich vision guides seminaries as they navigate an unknowable future and prepare students for challenges we cannot anticipate. Seminaries may make minor adjustments to methods and emphases, but the central task centered on the reading Scripture must remain stable (14). It also reorients the seminary’s relationship to the academy. The secular university model insists on repudiating, *a priori*, the study of Scripture as God’s words that reveal realities that cannot be seen (19). A better vision is that

“the church [and hence the seminary] is to the Bible what a living informant is to an unknown language. The church is the living key to the Bible’s meaning” (20). A seminary prepares students to carry out this role well, with academic rigor. As the duties of an OT king (Deut 17:18), prophet (Jer 36:2), and high priest (Ezra 7:10–11) were textual and scholastic, so an effective seminary is a community of faithful readers who have dedicated themselves diligently. In short, seminaries must produce believing scholars (25).

Sailhamer uses the metaphor of navigating a ship in which steering a straight course requires both reading the instruments (exegesis) and knowing the ship’s relative position (application and praxis, [28]). And so, reading the text is insufficient if it is only static; good reading must extend to shaping human lives within the textual community. The seminary should intentionally guide the student to ask, “What does [the text] mean to me and my family *now while I am in seminary?*” (30). The goal of courses must be to develop “the skills of working with the biblical text in context, specifically, the student’s own context of the seminary community” (33).

The remainder of the paper explores the individual domains of the seminary and the specific skills taught in it, dividing between Tier 1 tasks within the domain of the seminary (exegesis, doctrine, Christian life), Tier 2 in the church (homiletics, Christian education, pastoral ministry), and Tier 3 in the world (missions/evangelism, theology, and ethics). Sailhamer also proposes degree pathways and frameworks that were specifically oriented toward Dallas Seminary and are less relevant today.

This is only the first and most important essay of the book; several others follow. Chad Spellman and Jason Lee reflect on Sailhamer’s vision with a helpful summary and extension into similar thoughts from John Webster, Kevin Vanhoozer, Graeme Goldworthy, and John Piper. Sailhamer returns with reflections on Schneider’s Hebrew grammar (chap. 5), archaeology and the accuracy of the Old Testament (chap. 6), the loss of an interpretive grid in modern life and concomitant loss of confessional readings that simply accept biblical history as it stands (chap. 7), a brief history of hermeneutical approaches (chap. 8) and selected book reviews (chap. 9), an interview with Collin Hansen on interpreting the Pentateuch (chap. 10), and a complete bibliography of Sailhamer’s writings (chap. 11).

Because the documents were noticed and published posthumously, the sections of the book are rather disjointed, connected, if anything, only by the general theme of hermeneutics. Most readers will find the major insights they seek in Chapter 1. Even here, there are shortcomings. Sailhamer's vision is of the seminary as a community in itself, distinct from the church and in need of its own maintenance. This vision may have seemed achievable at Dallas Seminary in 1993; it seems quaintly nostalgic given the flexible and remote options by which seminaries survive today. But if our students can remain physically proximate to their homes, families, and churches, is this a weakness? Does the seminary really need to preserve itself as an alternate community?

And yet, the core concept of Sailhamer's vision is a concept so vibrant and evocative that it merits multiple readings and comes to mind as a grid for all aspects of theological education. This book will not stand out as exceptionally helpful for exegetes, theologians, or pastors. But for that narrow group of theological educators who have the delightful opportunity of shaping a curriculum or a learning community, the key concepts of Sailhamer's essay are profoundly helpful.

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Virtuous Persuasion: A Theology of Christian Missions (Studies in Historical and Systematic Theology). By Michael Niebauer. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Academic, 2022. 287 pp. Paperback, \$29.99.

Michael Niebauer is the director of Heritage Mission, which is engaged in training leaders to start worship services in care facilities with the view of developing robust congregations. The Mission is an arm of the Anglican Diocese of Christ Our Hope. Niebauer is an ecclesial fellow in the Center for Pastoral Theologians and a contributor to online Christian journals. He is also the host of the podcast "This We Believe." His Ph.D. is from Duquesne University.

Virtuous Persuasion is one of the most intelligent books written on missions in a long time. In the space of seven chapters, Niebauer challenges some of the major paradigms in twentieth-century missions and presents a cogent picture of missions as a virtuous practice. He is a master teacher, presenting in each section an explanation of what he intends to do, an explication of the subject, and a summary of what was done. The language of *Virtuous Persuasion* reflects Niebauer's Anglican confession, but also his commitment to the Scriptures, evangelism, and discipleship.

In Part I, Niebauer lays out "the critical task," in which he describes and debates with three models of missions and the three problems they cause missionaries and missions.

First, he explores the model of "the *Missio Dei*." Major characters in the critique are Barth, Schleiermacher, and Balthasar. In this view, missionaries are extensions of God's work of reaching the world. Because God is the active agent, the missionary can lose both distinctiveness (since every believer can be described as a missionary in one form or another) and focus (since it moves away from clear distinction between sender and sent).

Next, he tackles "mission as growth," in which the major characters are Donald McGavran and Alan Hirsch. While the missionary is now a distinct actor, there is an emphasis on the tools of the social sciences to determine who in target populations are most likely to be receptive to the gospel. Thus, the missionary with tools in hand now becomes the actor and manipulator (of both the people and the Bible as a strategic source) yet robbed of joy and spiritual power in presenting the gospel.

The third model is that of "Mission as Dialogue." The focus is on the writings of Knitter, Cobb, and Dupuis. Here the author highlights two unacceptable emphases of this model: the rejection of conversion because it is seen as manipulation and the self-conversion involved in trying to understand and find agreement with the views of the other participant in dialogue.

Part II, the "constructive task" includes chapters on "mission as virtuous practice," "proclamation," and "gathering."

Here, Niebauer sets forth his conception of Christian mission: "*Christian mission is best construed as specific activities (proclamation and gathering) that develop virtue in its practitioners, moving them toward their ultimate goal of partaking in the glory of*

God" (109–10). Though this is an attempt to deal with the problems of the three approaches to missions mentioned above, the primary thrust of these chapters is to present a viable, biblical, and virtuous approach to the persuasion of proclamation, acts of translation, and humble discipleship. His explanations of both proclamation and gathering reflect experience and sensitivity, with special care for handing over authority and delight in communion. The virtuous practice of the missionary committed to the highest ethical principles enables the missionary to proclaim, gather, and leave good results in the hands of others who have the same regard for moral excellence and good results blessed by God of His glory.

In the final chapters, Niebauer deals with the craft of mission (tragedy, tradition, and telos), and three biblical passages (Ps 96, Luke 10:17–20, and Acts 7:51–60), illustrating his concept of mission as virtuous practice.

The much-needed thesis of this book reminded the reviewer of a statement on the final page of Sidney H. Rooy's published dissertation, *The Theology of Missions in the Puritan Tradition*: "Those who bear Christ's name must bear His character" (398).

The reviewer would recommend that before reading this book, readers familiarize themselves with Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*. Along with Thomas Aquinas, MacIntyre is a major source of inspiration and information in the book.

The only constructive criticism this reviewer would give is that the author has assumed a great deal of contemporary readers, especially those who—as missionaries—would read this book, regarding an understanding of the ancient conversation concerning virtue. The views of the Greek philosophers, Augustine, and especially, Thomas Aquinas, concerning virtue and virtuous practices are certainly valuable. But, sadly, too many contemporary servants of Christ have not been sufficiently exposed to these conversations to appreciate that value. Perhaps an explanation of the rationale for interacting with these philosophers and church fathers and with MacIntyre would be helpful for such readers.

This book is highly recommended for missionaries, administrators, and academics who desire to equip their students to

serve the Lord and those to whom they minister the word of truth with virtuous, fruitful lives.

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World Religions: A Guide to the Essentials, 3rd ed. By Thomas A. Robinson and Hillary P. Rodrigues. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2022. 349 pp. Paperback, \$40.00.

The authors of this excellent textbook are Thomas A. Robinson, emeritus professor of religious studies at the University of Lethbridge, and Hillary P. Rodrigues, professor of religious studies at the same university. Both hold Ph.D. degrees from McMaster University.

The subtitle of the book is “A Guide to the Essentials,” and that phrase admirably describes the nature of the book. The book serves as a guide, helping readers make their way through the mass of information available concerning any of the major “religions” covered; and it describes each religion in enough detail to allow the reader to know what should be known about them. It provides what the authors have described as “a broad view” of the religious systems covered.

Robinson and Rodrigues begin the book with a helpful chapter describing difficulties involved in defining a religion, utilizing correct terminology, and developing a proper methodology. Regarding methodology, the authors explore such things as the “insider’s” or “outsider’s” view, sociological and anthropological categories, the ideal and the real, points of view of subgroups, space and time, and other crucial approaches. Another point carefully clarified by the authors is the fact that leaders and practitioners have often chronicled the stories of the religions, so the practical beliefs of the “common believer” are often not represented.

The next chapter, on “Ancient Religions,” is valuable as a brief overview of the concerns in that area of research. The reader is first introduced to the intentional unbiased approach of the authors. Though the authors do not opt for a “history of religions” approach, and they are careful to emphasize that categories for classifying

religions should be used with care, it is unlikely that every generalization made here about the early days of religious beliefs will be acceptable to believers reading the book. For example, passages referring to other “gods” in the OT or the adoption of idolatrous worship by Israelites do not necessarily imply the actual existence of those gods apart from the beliefs of the nations (23).

The summaries of the various religions have another encouraging feature. The authors have studiously avoided presenting any of the religions discussed from the deposit of European thinking and conclusions about the religions developed centuries ago. In fact, their sensitivity to the cultures is laudable.

It must be said that the position of objectivity taken by Robinson and Rodrigues is one of the strengths of their handling of each of the religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Chinese and Japanese religions). They provide quick facts, introduce groups and terminology, and give excerpts from “holy books” in grey boxes throughout. They also survey the history, sources of information, beliefs, practices, officials, and perspectives on various social issues. In fairness, one must say that the varied positions of different people and groups within the religion are well represented. That means, for example, that “orthodox” and “reformed,” ultra-reactionary and liberal perspectives will be presented together, along with the objections or clarifications of fringe groups of any religion described.

In that this textbook is a third edition, it is respected, valued, and well-used. The careful descriptions given, and the thoroughness of presentation of the material, make this an exceptionally useful and authoritative introductory textbook about religions.

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Ph.D. Dissertations in Progress at Baptist Bible Seminary

— *New Testament* —

Tiago Albuquerque – *The Relevance Theoretic Approach to *iva* + the Subjunctive in the Gospel of Mark*

Todd Bolton – *Putting the Intent Back in Authorial Intention: Understanding Authorial Intention in the Equipping Terms of 2 Timothy 3:16-17 and Its Connection to Practical Application in Preaching in 2 Timothy 4:1-2*

Joel Thomas – *Getting it Right: A Quest for Clarity in Biblical Theology*

John Wivell – *Acts 2:36 As a Summary of an Exegetical and Empirical Apologetic Discourse*

— *Systematic Theology* —

Michael Dellaperute – *Born This Way: A Christian Apologetic to the Intersex Objection and Approach to the Intersex Person*