



Journal of
BIBLICAL THEOLOGY
& WORLDVIEW

Volume 1, Number 1

BJU Seminary
Fall 2020

Eric Newton, *editor*
Layton Talbert, *review editor*
jbtw@bju.edu

BJU Seminary
1700 Wade Hampton Blvd.
Greenville, SC 29614

Journal of Biblical Theology & Worldview

published by
BJU Seminary

Steve Pettit, president
Neal Cushman, dean

By God's grace BJU Seminary has a decades-long legacy of equipping Christian servants to study and live and minister the Bible. The *Journal of Biblical Theology & Worldview* aims to share that ministry by displaying and applying truth through writing that is faithful to Scripture, consistent with our theological heritage, alert to current scholarship, and directed toward contemporary application.

The *Journal of Biblical Theology & Worldview* (JBTW) is peer-reviewed, published semiannually, and distributed electronically. For information about journal articles or access, contact jbtw@bju.edu.

© 2020 by BJU Seminary

All rights reserved. Materials in this publication may not be reproduced without prior permission, except for classroom use by teachers and students.



Table of Contents

Vol. 1, No. 1

Treasure New and Old: An Introduction to the <i>Journal of Biblical Theology & Worldview</i>	1
<i>Eric Newton</i>	
Old Testament Foundations for Justice in Society.....	9
<i>Ken Casillas</i>	
Should the Minister Get a Job? A Case Study on Normativity in 1 and 2 Thessalonians.....	29
<i>Neal Cushman</i>	
“The Prayer of Faith Will Save the Sick”: Revisiting a Complex Passage in Light of Biblical Context—James 5:13–18.....	44
<i>Brian Hand</i>	
Jesus, the Sadducees, and the Resurrection: A Case Study of Systematic Theology in the Bible —The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly.....	69
<i>Layton Talbert</i>	
Book Reviews.....	91
<i>How the Nations Rage: Rethinking Faith and Politics in a Divided Age</i> by Jonathan Leeman..... 91	
Reviewed by <i>Brian Collins</i>	
<i>Moral Choices: An Introduction to Ethics</i> by Scott B. Rae..... 94	
Reviewed by <i>Brian Hand</i>	
<i>Love Thy Body: Answering Hard Questions about Life and Sexuality</i> by Nancy R. Pearcey..... 97	
Reviewed by <i>Eric Newton</i>	
<i>Discontinuity to Continuity: A Survey of Dispensational & Covenant Theologies</i>	
by Benjamin L. Merkle..... 101	
Reviewed by <i>Layton Talbert</i>	
<i>Models of Premillennialism</i> by Sung Wook Chung and David Mathewson106	
Reviewed by <i>Layton Talbert</i>	
<i>New Creation Eschatology and the Land: A Survey of Contemporary Perspectives</i>	
by Steven L. James 108	
Reviewed by <i>Layton Talbert</i>	

Abbreviations

BECNT	Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament
<i>BSac</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
BKC	The Bible Knowledge Commentary
<i>CNTUOT</i>	<i>Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament</i>
<i>DCH</i>	<i>The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew</i>
HALOT	<i>Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSup	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
KEC	Kregel Exegetical Commentary
NAC	New American Commentary
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
<i>NIDOTTE</i>	<i>New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis</i>
NSBT	New Studies in Biblical Theology
NT	New Testament
<i>NovT</i>	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
OT	Old Testament
PNTC	Pillar New Testament Commentary
<i>REBC</i>	<i>Expositor's Bible Commentary</i> , Revised
<i>TLOT</i>	<i>Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament</i>
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries
<i>TWOT</i>	<i>Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament</i>
ZECNT	Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament

Treasure New and Old: An Introduction to the *Journal of Biblical Theology & Worldview*

Eric Newton¹

At the end of a string of kingdom parables Jesus inquires if his disciples understand his teaching. The answer reported by the Evangelist is a simple affirmative, “Yes” (Mt 13:51). What exactly the disciples comprehended is uncertain, though the remainder of the Gospels indicates that their confidence outdistanced their knowledge. But Matthew does not record any parsing of their answer. Instead, our Lord states a necessary consequence (Διὰ τοῦτο): “Therefore every scribe who has become a disciple of the kingdom of heaven is like a head of a household, who brings out of his treasure things new and old” (Mt 13:52).² A scribe of the kingdom knows where the treasure is, has been profoundly changed by this truth himself, and delights to display it.

This parable instructs us that NT teachers possess the incalculable privilege and responsibility of presenting revealed truth. The essence of biblical teaching is not to figure everything out but to receive and draw out divine revelation. Such teaching is a great commission, as Jesus announces before ascending to his Father’s right hand (Mt 28:18–20). The scribe who has become a disciple proclaims the wonder of God’s verbal self-disclosure in its interconnected splendor and with whole-life application. His calling is not that of inventor but rather curator, treasuring and transferring “the good deposit entrusted” to him (2 Tm 1:14 ESV). Curating requires careful study, interpretation, and applications that are faithful to the text.

Implicit in Jesus’ words in Matthew 13:52 is the complementary relationship between the Testaments. The message of the kingdom is new, yet not-new as well (Mt 13:35). It is *old*, as in the Law and the Prophets. It is *new*, as in the Master’s opening of disciples’ “minds to understand the Scriptures” (Lk 24:45) and giving additional revelation “by [his] apostles” (2 Pt 3:2). At the macrolevel, unearthing the treasure entails demonstrating God’s progressive revelation and employing hermeneutics that show how to read all of Scripture as a Christian. Consequently, a Bible teacher knows that “accurately handling the word of truth” (2 Tm 2:15) necessitates learning how to think in scriptural categories, letting God’s Word dictate the terms of understanding.

What a kingdom scribe teaches reaches beyond intriguing information, both for himself and for those whom he serves as curator. This divine truth disciples giver and receiver alike. Its impact forms beliefs, the kind that shape aspirations and undergird uncertainties and work themselves out in

¹ Eric Newton serves as professor of theology at BJU Seminary and an elder of Mount Calvary Baptist Church in Greenville, South Carolina.

² Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture is taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. www.Lockman.org

everyday choices that glorify the Lord. God's kingdom and righteousness unmistakably matter most; they elicit the heart's deepest loyalty because they are where the treasure truly lies (Mt 6:21, 33).

What Is in a Name?

The *Journal of Biblical Theology & Worldview* aims to serve ministers and students of the Bible by displaying and applying Scripture's treasures through theological writing. To aid the church in commending and defending the faith in our late modern context, the journal's articles intend to exemplify rigorous study that is faithful to Scripture, consistent with our theological heritage, alert to current scholarship, and directed toward contemporary application. While authors will demonstrate a variety of methodological approaches, the ministry of the teacher described in Matthew 13:52 serves as our template. Scripture alone stands as the touchstone of theology and worldview. The ensuing paragraphs settle into the journal's title by exploring our understanding of biblical theology, its history at BJU Seminary, and its connection to biblical worldview.

Biblical Theology

Theologians employ the adjective *biblical* in different ways to qualify their study of God and his revelation. By practicing *biblical theology*, many intend to clarify that Scripture is the normative source and basis of their work, as opposed to theology anchored in human reasoning or experience. Historically, some groups have started with this necessary understanding of theology but then digressed into an extreme version known as *biblicism*, the presumption that theology can be truest to the Bible by setting aside the doctrinal deliberations of the church in previous centuries.³ Others use the designation *biblical theology* more specifically to refer to the theology presented in the biblical writings themselves.⁴ Those who believe that the Bible is God's inspired Word regard this theology as unified truth that the diverse books communicate, while others less persuaded of the orthodox doctrine of divine inspiration accept the possibility of conflicting viewpoints. In fact, the modern discipline of biblical theology originated with Johann P. Gabler, whose rationalist presuppositions chafed against Lutheran confessionalism. Consequently, Gabler did not circumscribe his descriptive, historical study of the biblical writers' teaching by the unity and divine authority of Scripture.⁵

In his 1981 *Biblical Viewpoint* article on biblical theology, Robert Bell notes that conservatives commonly distinguish biblical theology from systematic theology in terms of *method*. Whereas the latter arranges biblical truth in logical categories, the former works with the same content and "presents it in its historical order so that the student can view God's truths as they unfolded through the ages of

³ For example, devotional German Pietists, such as Jacob Spener (1635–1705), exemplified a conservative antipathy toward dogmatics. See C. H. H. Scobie, "History of Biblical Theology," *NDBT*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000), 13. Michael S. Horton describes *biblicism* as "the tendency to identify one's own interpretation of Scripture with Scripture itself." "Historical Theology," *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, et al. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 294.

⁴ James Hamilton Jr. defines biblical theology as "the interpretive perspective of the biblical authors." *What Is Biblical Theology? A Guide to the Bible's Story, Symbolism, and Patterns* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 15.

⁵ Robert D. Bell, *The Theological Messages of the Old Testament Books* (Greenville, SC: BJU Press, 2010), 3–4.

Biblical revelation.”⁶ In that same journal issue, Stewart Custer emphasizes this understanding of biblical theology, describing its method as “the progressive development of Scriptural truth.”⁷

The renowned father of conservative biblical theology, Geerhardus Vos, had advocated this method because it allows “Scripture to set its own agenda” and employs the categories provided by “the divine economy of revelation itself.”⁸ However, Vos had also argued that like systematic theology, biblical theology “transforms the Biblical material.”⁹ Drawing on the work of J. Barton Payne,¹⁰ Bell goes a significant step further in distinguishing the two disciplines by not only their *method* but also their *nature*. Whereas systematic theology asks, “What is true of God?”, biblical theology inquires, “What did God reveal?” This understanding of biblical theology permits various methods, including “trac[ing] the subject through Scripture in chronological order,” comparing Scripture references with one another, grouping verses on the same subject to aid interpretation, and “analyz[ing] and summariz[ing] these truths.”¹¹ Systematic theology takes the analysis and summary of biblical theology, adds in theological reflection on general revelation, and draws inferences in order to answer questions the Bible does not directly address. Systematic theology is vital. However, distinguishing between what the Bible teaches and what theologians have concluded about God is crucial to “ascrib[ing] supreme authority to the Bible.”¹²

Thus, governing theological principles, not methodological rigidity, define biblical theology. The canon’s forward progress and divinely authored unity legitimize the kind of biblical theology that traces themes through Scripture. Individual biblical books also communicate theological messages. Consequently, as D. A. Carson suggests, intertextual theology involves the complementary approaches of synthesizing major biblical themes as they develop organically and harmonizing the theology of canonical books, corpuses, and Testaments.¹³ In summary, Brian Collins states, “Biblical theology is the discipline which seeks to discern the theological emphases of the biblical writers themselves, giving

⁶ “Introduction: What Is Biblical Theology?” *Biblical Viewpoint* 15/2 (1981), 81. See also Bell, *Theological Messages*, 1–7.

⁷ “The Value of Biblical Theology,” *Biblical Viewpoint* 15/2 (1981), 86. Custer recommends studying the progressive development through Scripture of particular topics, as well as the study of the message of particular biblical books and tracing the unfolding meaning of words. *Ibid.*, 84–86.

⁸ In David C. Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary: The Majestic Testimony, 1869–1929* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1996), 208, 140.

⁹ *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (1948; reprint, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2000), 15. Vos famously remarks, “In Biblical Theology the principle is one of historical, in Systematic Theology it is one of logical construction. Biblical Theology draws a *line* of development. Systematic Theology draws a *circle*.” *Ibid.*, 16.

¹⁰ J. Barton Payne, *The Theology of the Older Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962).

¹¹ Bell, 81.

¹² *Ibid.*, 82. This understanding of biblical theology is noticeable in Stewart Custer’s editorial in the inaugural issue of the Seminary’s former journal: “The title, *Biblical Viewpoint*, is not meant to imply an arrogant or presumptuous attitude, but rather a determination to let the meaning of Scripture decide the theological position of the periodical instead of reading into Scripture a preconceived philosophical or theological interpretation. One presupposition which all contributors will confess is a fervent faith in the verbal inspiration and authority of the Bible.” *Biblical Viewpoint* 1/1 (1967), 5.

¹³ D. A. Carson, “Current Issues in Biblical Theology,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 5 (1995): 35–36.

careful attention to the particular theological emphases of specific books, the historical development of theological themes throughout the canon, and the relation of these to the salvation-historical storyline.”¹⁴

Although no theologian can hermeneutically seal off his study from the influence of his cultural milieu, those who practice biblical theology endeavor to allow Scripture to speak on its own terms.¹⁵ Biblical theology at its best links the exegesis of individual texts to systematic reflection and application of all truth about God and his world. The methodological progression of exegetical analysis to canonical synthesis to systematic conclusions does not negate the fact that these three disciplines are interdependent and mutually informing. For example, systematic inferences logically succeed but must also inform the other disciplines, lest biblical texts or themes be pitted against one another.

. . . At BJU Seminary

Even an appreciation of its method and nature does not fully explain why biblical theology found a permanent home at BJU Seminary.¹⁶ Three interrelated factors provide additional context for this longstanding emphasis: the seminary’s theological premise, nondenominational posture, and faculty lineage. First, while historic fundamentalism has gained notoriety for what it opposes, its first principle is affirmative. However imperfect its application may be from time to time, the premise is that God’s inspired Word constitutes our utmost allegiance.¹⁷ This theological commitment produces a necessary, negative corollary, as demonstrated in the psalmist’s confession, “I esteem right all Your precepts concerning everything, I hate every false way” (Ps 119:128). What the Bible teaches about itself and other central doctrines requires unalterable opposition to alternatives. At its core fundamentalism insists that there are certain beliefs necessary to the gospel and, therefore, that Christian fellowship should not be extended to those who deny these fundamentals. Christianity is a faith for which to “contend earnestly” (Jude 3). Furthermore, because there is one way to stay on the straight path and a myriad of avenues to diverge from it, a foundational commitment to Scripture requires ongoing vigilance to align ourselves to God’s words, generation after generation. Hence the

¹⁴ Brian C. Collins, “Scripture, Hermeneutics, and Theology: Evaluating Theological Interpretation of Scripture” (PhD diss., Bob Jones University, 2011), 205.

¹⁵ John Owen, the towering Puritan theologian who predated modern biblical theology by over a century, speaks decisively for the priority of not only what Scripture says but also how Scripture says it: “Truths have their power and efficacy upon our minds, not only from themselves, but from their posture in the Scripture. There are they placed in such aspects towards, in such conjunctions one with another, as that their influences on our minds do greatly depend thereon.” *The causes, waies & means of understanding the mind of God* (1678), 166; cf. *The Works of John Owen* (1850–53; reprint, Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1967), 4:189.

¹⁶ In 2001 the Graduate School of Religion became Bob Jones University Seminary and Graduate School of Religion. In 2018 the name was simplified to BJU Seminary.

¹⁷ George Marsden suggests, “The crucial issue [for fundamentalists] seems rather to have been perceived as that of the authority of God in Scripture in relation to the authority of modern science, particularly science in the form of higher criticism of Scripture itself.” George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 2006), 120.

question, “What does the Bible teach?” Ministry trends come and go. Theological emphases rise and fall. But what does God himself accentuate in the timeless self-revelation preserved in our Bibles?¹⁸

Second, since its inception BJU has maintained a nondenominational posture.¹⁹ Consequently, the unity has never been around denominational distinctives but rather around the core doctrines of the Christian faith. For understandable reasons, not many Methodist presidents (as was Bob Jones, Sr.) would hire a Presbyterian (as was Charles Brokenshire) to lead a Christian college’s graduate religion program and teach systematic theology.²⁰ Because of this intentional focus on non-negotiables, BJU Seminary has deemed liberty appropriate when discussing historically debated theological positions that are within the bounds of orthodoxy.

Third, as is so often the case, an institution and its emphases are shaped by its leaders. Early and longtime professors made a firm imprint on the theological character of the institution. Charles Brokenshire, a graduate of Princeton Seminary where Geerhardus Vos served as chair of biblical theology, brought a masterful grasp of languages to his roles as faculty member (1943–54) and first-ever dean of BJU’s graduate school of religion.²¹ Brokenshire supervised Marshall Neal’s 1947 dissertation, “An Examination of the NT Concept of the Kingdom of God,” in which the future dean of BJU’s school of religion (1965–78) traced the Bible’s doctrine of the kingdom from the OT through the intertestamental times to the Gospels. Alongside Neal, Timothy Lin influenced many early students, including Robert Reymond. Though later known for his systematic theology, Reymond wrote his dissertation on OT covenants, explaining, “The procedure, or approach, in the study was the progressive method of Biblical Theology.”²² Reymond taught in the BJU graduate school of religion from 1961–68, during which time he passed on to Eugene Merrill, among others, the emphasis of tracing progressive revelation.²³

The development of biblical theology at BJU Seminary continued with Stewart Custer (NT faculty member, 1960–2002) and Robert Bell (OT faculty member, 1968–2014). Custer edited

¹⁸ One pastoral precursor to the biblical-theological heritage of BJU Seminary is the Bible study common among conservatives in the early twentieth century and epitomized in the teaching of G. Campbell Morgan. Morgan’s method of studying books of the Bible, while not directly connected to the academic discipline of biblical theology, shares common ground with its nature and method. Morgan attempted to provide “a bird’s-eye view of the contents of the Divine Library” as he taught a different book of the Bible each week. Jill Morgan, *A Man of the Word: Life of G. Campbell Morgan* (1951; reprint, Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2010), 86. This approach to studying Scripture was diffused in the ministerial training at BJU through homiletics courses taught by Richard Rupp and then Mark Minnick and Stephen Hankins during the final decades of the twentieth century. Stephen J. Hankins, interview by author, September 11, 2020.

¹⁹ In the opening decades of the twentieth century, an interdenominational network of influential Protestants united their efforts to preserve the Christian gospel and the institutions that had historically proclaimed it. These fundamentalist leaders represented an array of denominational affiliations, including Baptists, Congregationalists, Episcopalians, Methodists, and Presbyterians.

²⁰ See Mark Sidwell, “Charles Digory Brokenshire (1885–1954),” *Biblical Viewpoint* 25/1 (1991): 78.

²¹ See Sidwell, 72–74.

²² Robert L. Reymond, “An Investigation of the Covenants of the OT and Their Significance in the Theocratic Program of God” (PhD diss., Bob Jones University, 1962), 11.

²³ Reymond was one of two committee members for Merrill’s dissertation, which unfolded the revelation of a biblical prophet as developed through various OT periods. Eugene Haines Merrill, “An Investigation of the Person and Work of the OT Prophet of God” (PhD diss., Bob Jones University, 1963).

Biblical Viewpoint, which he envisioned as “a journal of simple Bible exposition for busy pastors.”²⁴ First published in April 1967, *Biblical Viewpoint* enjoyed a thirty-eight-year history that entailed more than 750 articles and hundreds of book reviews. Custer left his imprint on multiple generations of students through his meek spirituality, his courses in methods of Bible exposition, and his approach in theology courses of expositing all relevant verses in canonical order rather than grouping truths thematically.²⁵ Bell helped shape students’ theological outlook through courses like Advanced OT Theology and culminated decades of study and research with *The Theological Messages of the Old Testament Books*.²⁶ A steady stream of biblical-theological dissertations also flowed in the following decades, often supervised by Neal, Custer, or Bell.²⁷ While consistent in their outlook on the nature of the discipline, these theses also evidence development in methodology, such as the wedding of literary analysis to biblical theology.²⁸ And the legacy continues, as recent dissertations suggest.²⁹

. . . shaping a Biblical Worldview

Because biblical theology is not an end in itself, advancing this heritage follows a teleological path through systematic theology toward worldview. There is at least a two-fold connection between biblical theology and biblical worldview. First, while Christian literature, websites, and podcasts attest to abundant discussion about worldview, rightly aligning our desires and thought necessitates careful attention to what the Bible actually says. Never before have so many voices had the technological capabilities to speak so loudly to influence the core assumptions and values by which we navigate life. Confidence that the sixty-six canonical books are divinely inspired and therefore wholly profitable means that Scripture’s own themes and messages and cross references and storyline are the starting

²⁴ Hankins, interview by author, September 11, 2020. Hankins’ oral recounting of Custer’s ministry and impact provided helpful insight. Also, see Stephen J. Hankins, “Man of Grace—Man of God: A Spiritual Tribute to Stewart Custer,” *Biblical Viewpoint* 36/1 (2002): 1–5.

²⁵ The inaugural issue focused on Romans and included articles by Stewart Custer, Charles Woodbridge, Daniel Krusich, Marshall Neal, Robert Reymond, and Edward Panosian. Other contributors to early issues of the journal included Ernest Pickering, R. T. Ketcham, Henry Morris, Dwight Gustafson, Robert Picirilli, Monroe Parker, and Allen Ross.

²⁶ See footnote 4 above.

²⁷ One example is “The Theology of Hosea,” defended by Philip Brown in 1975. Though Wesleyan by upbringing and conviction, Brown primarily drew on biblical theology in his dissertation rather than systematic theology, with stated commitments to biblical inerrancy, progressive revelation, Christological fulfillment, and literary unity. Allan Philip Brown, “The Theology of Hosea” (PhD diss., Bob Jones University, 1975), 16–18.

²⁸ See Bryan Smith, “The Presentation of Judah in Genesis 37–50 and Its Implications for the Narrative’s Structural and Thematic Unity” (PhD diss., Bob Jones University, 2002), 19–21; and Philip A. Brown, II, “A Literary and Theological Analysis of the Book of Ezra” (PhD diss., Bob Jones University, 2002), 12–16.

²⁹ For very recent examples, Kristopher Kenneth Endean, “The Call to Leave Simplicity: A Biblical Theology of Culpable Spiritual Ignorance among the People of God” (PhD diss., Bob Jones University, 2020); and Andrew Minnick, “Bringing Many Sons to Glory: A Biblical-Theological Investigation of the Intersection of Sonship and Resurrection and Its Implications for Filial Christology, Including the Christological Significance of the Πρωτότοκος Title” (PhD diss., Bob Jones University, 2020).

point for our worldview.³⁰ Biblical theology helps orient our everyday lives to God's categories, rather than conforming God's revelation to our contemporary outlook.³¹

Second, regarding method, recent biblical theology has prioritized the Christian metanarrative, the big story of creation–fall–redemption–glory unfolded in the historical narratives, theocratic legislation, worshipful poetry, proverbial instruction, prophetic pronouncements, Gospel testimony, and apostolic letters that comprise the Bible. In other words, many current ways of doing biblical theology accentuate the continuity and progressive unfolding of the Bible's message. The Bible's theology coheres in its divine Author's storyline. Because Scripture exhibits an organic development in its narrative, a biblical theologian must be "commit[ted] to unpacking the texts of Scripture along the historical axis of the Bible's plot-line."³²

Significantly, Christian teaching of worldview also makes common use of this metanarrative framework for explaining the coherence and significance of the Christian faith.³³ What we love and how we think arise out of beliefs embedded in a narrative by which we make sense of life. These expressions of biblical worldview look in the same direction as a significant strand of biblical theology. Both express propositional truth within a redemptive-historical framework. Therefore, when systematic theology rightly seeks to answer contemporary questions, "the theological emphases of the biblical writers themselves . . . and the relation of these to the salvation-historical storyline"³⁴ constitute a crucial framework for worldview application. This is not to suggest a methodological straitjacket but rather to reaffirm the priority of divine revelation—both *what* is communicated and *how* it is communicated—over human systems and reflections, however sensible and insightful.

What Is in This Issue?

With this legacy in view, the inaugural issue consists of four essays dealing with biblical interpretation and ministerial application. In the first article, "Old Testament Foundations for Justice in Society," Ken Casillas takes up a much-discussed contemporary issue from the standpoint of OT revelation. While the phrase *social justice* carries significant ideological baggage and encompasses a

³⁰ The connection to worldview is evident in Brian Rosner's definition: "biblical theology may be defined as theological interpretation of Scripture in and for the church. It proceeds with historical and literary sensitivity and seeks to analyse and synthesize the Bible's teaching about God and his relations to the world on its own terms, maintaining sight of the Bible's overarching narrative and Christocentric focus." B. S. Rosner, "Biblical Theology," *NDBT*, 10.

³¹ BJU Seminary faculty exhibit this approach in a series of books entitled *Biblical Discernment for Difficult Issues*. For example, see Ken Casillas, *The Law and the Christian: God's Light Within God's Limits* (Greenville, SC: BJU Press, 2007); Brian Hand, *Upright Downtime: Making Wise Choices About Entertainment* (Greenville, SC: BJU Press, 2008); and Alan Patterson, *Handling Earthly Treasure: Biblical Certainties about Money* (Greenville, SC: BJU Press, 2011).

³² Carson, "Systematic Theology and Biblical Theology," *NDBT*, 95.

³³ Various approaches to structuring Christian apologetics and worldview along the lines of Scripture's unfolding story include D. A. Carson, *The God Who Is There: Finding Your Place in God's Story* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2010); Philip Graham Ryken, *Christian Worldview: A Student's Guide*, Reclaiming the Christian Intellectual Tradition (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013); Gregory Koukl, *The Story of Reality: How the World Began, How It Ends, and Everything Important that Happens in Between* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017); and Joshua D. Chatraw, *Telling a Better Story: How to Talk About God in a Skeptical Age* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020).

³⁴ Collins, 205.

diverse array of issues, the Scriptures clearly teach that God is very concerned about societal obligations, and not just among Abraham's descendants. Casillas's study traces this focus along the historical trajectory of the OT, giving particular attention to two key terms, *justice* and *righteousness*. In spite of the significant differences between Israel and the church, NT believers have much to learn from OT ethics.

The second essay accentuates the importance of grammatical-historical exegesis within the parameters of particular books of Scripture. In "Should the Minister Get a Job? A Case Study on Normativity in 1 and 2 Thessalonians," Neal Cushman demonstrates a context-sensitive hermeneutic that seeks to understand Paul's tentmaking in Thessalonica in light of his stated epistolary aims and concerns. This exegesis provides a way forward for moving from general commitments to the authority of Scripture to discerning whether Paul's practice constitutes a normative precedent for pastors today.

Next, Brian Hand tackles the interpretive conundrum of an oft-applied text in "'The Prayer of Faith Will Save the Sick': Revisiting a Complex Passage in Light of Biblical Context—James 5:13–18." What does James mean when he says, "the prayer of faith shall save the sick" (KJV)? Hand employs exegetical and biblical theology by exploring the meanings of key words, considering the wider context of James, comparing relevant NT passages, and developing an intertextual understanding of James's reference to Elijah. These analyses provide a multifaceted grid to examine evidence for the physical illness and spiritual weakness views and conclude with thoughtful application.

As stated above, systematic theology necessarily complements and builds on biblical theology. This issue's final article features a biblical narrative focused on systematic theology. In "Jesus, the Sadducees, and the Resurrection: A Case Study of Systematic Theology in the Bible—The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly," Layton Talbert demonstrates how exegetical and biblical theology supply important tools for systematic conclusions. Not only does the Sadducees' response to Jesus' teaching feature errant theology, but Jesus' critique provides an inspired example of sound method that draws necessary inferences from a central biblical-theological theme.

The issue concludes with six reviews of recent books on significant theological and worldview topics. May these contents display God's truth in a way that helps equip God's people for God's glory.

Old Testament Foundations for Justice in Society

Ken Casillas¹

In working to develop a theology of societal justice, one quickly recognizes the weightiness of the material on the subject in the OT. One immediately faces tensions as well. America is not Israel, and Scripture does not expect every detail of Israel's societal structure to be replicated in the nations of the world. Furthermore, the church is not Israel. The church—whether universal or local—is not a socio-political body, and its nature and mission differ significantly from those of Israel. Writers in the Reformed orbit make this point. DeYoung and Gilbert state, “We are concerned that in all our passion for renewing the city or tackling social problems, we run the risk of marginalizing the one thing that makes Christian mission Christian: namely, making disciples of Jesus Christ.”² This concern is especially a staple of dispensationalism. As McCune says, “The institutional church is not given a mandate to enter the political arena or to be the social watchdog of the world in any corporate sense. . . . The Great Commission says nothing about social or political factors; preaching and teaching are the church's purposes.”³

This is true but raises the question: what should the church preach and teach to Jesus's disciples? Jesus himself answered the question in the Great Commission: “Teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Mt 28:20).⁴ One of the things Jesus taught was the role of the OT as a divinely inspired source of ethical instruction (e.g., 5:17ff).⁵ This included identifying two commands as the greatest and as capturing the essence of the OT law: love for God and love for neighbor (22:35–40). Though these commands come from texts of the law Yahweh gave Israel as part of his covenant with that nation (Dt 6:5; Lv 19:18), they reflect patently universal ethical norms.⁶ In

¹ Ken Casillas serves as professor of Old Testament at BJU Seminary and senior pastor of Cleveland Park Bible Church in Spartanburg, South Carolina. He is the author of *The Law and the Christian: God's Light Within God's Limits* (Greenville, SC: BJU Press, 2008) and *Beyond Chapter and Verse: The Theology and Practice of Biblical Application* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2018).

² Kevin DeYoung and Greg Gilbert, *What Is the Mission of the Church? Making Sense of Social Justice, Shalom, and the Great Commission* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2011), 22.

³ Rolland McCune, *A Systematic Theology of the Biblical Christianity, Volume 3: The Doctrines of Salvation, the Church, and Last Things* (Allen Park, MI: Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010), 203.

⁴ Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

⁵ See Ken Casillas, *The Law and the Christian: God's Light within God's Limits*, Biblical Discernment for Difficult Issues (Greenville, SC: Bob Jones University Press, 2008); idem, *Beyond Chapter and Verse: The Theology and Practice of Biblical Application* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2018), 100–114.

⁶ Dispensationalist Alva J. McClain writes, “Our Lord Jesus Christ, speaking of man's obligation to his fellowmen, lays down the second great commandment, ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself’ (Matt. 22:39). This is the law—the law of God. And we dare not and cannot change it. But come on this side of Calvary and hear the voice of the same Lord as He speaks through John, ‘Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another’ (I John 4:11). *It is the same*

fact, one of Jesus's authorized spokesmen, the Apostle Paul, taught that the gospel enables NT believers to fulfill the OT law's ideal of love for neighbor (Rom 13:8–10; Gal 5:13–23).⁷ Thus, the writers of the NT draw on a wide variety of OT material in teaching God's people concerning ethics in this age.⁸ Indeed, Paul made this practice programmatic for NT preachers. He asserted that the OT Scripture is profitable for Christian sanctification and urged Timothy to preach that "word" to NT believers (2 Tm 3:14–4:2).⁹

In view of this imperative, the present study analyzes and synthesizes key data that demonstrate the foundational contribution of the OT toward a theology of justice in society. The first three-quarters of the Bible teaches values, desires, and goals of God concerning societal life in his world. The OT thereby nurtures in Jesus's disciple the right heart toward fellow human beings and informs his conduct through transhistorical ethical paradigms.¹⁰ As his worldview is increasingly molded by God's Word, the believer will grow in the wisdom needed to discern the specifics of societal life to pursue in his particular setting.

Toward these objectives, this article surveys the theme of societal justice along the storyline of the OT, centering on key Hebrew terminology related to this theme. The article focuses on exegesis and biblical theology but also incorporates suggestive reflection on contemporary relevance.¹¹ Material is drawn from five major periods that contain a bulk of the OT material on societal justice: Primeval, Patriarchal, Mosaic, United Monarchy, and Prophetic. Given space constraints over against the

duty, but now enshrined in the context of grace." McClain goes on to moderate the discontinuity in this statement: "But although dispensational distinctions are genuine and may be clearly observed, we are not to suppose that 'the context of grace' is completely absent from the earlier parts of Scripture." *Law and Grace: A Study of New Testament Concepts as They Relate to the Christian Life* (1954; reprint, Winona Lake, IN: BMH, 1967), 65–66 (emphasis added).

⁷ Dispensationalist Myron Houghton explains Romans 13:8–10 by making "a distinction between the law itself and the righteous standard of the law. . . . Spirit-controlled believers are free from the law of sin and death, but exhibit the righteous requirement of the law in their lives." *Law and Grace* (Schaumburg, IL: Regular Baptist, 2011), 119–20. Similarly, progressive covenantalist Thomas R. Schreiner writes: "The commands Paul cites from the Decalogue are required not because they are in the Mosaic law (since believers aren't under that law any longer) or because they are part of the Decalogue. They are required because they belong to the law of Christ, and the law of Christ includes the moral norms of the law." Furthermore, Paul's statement, "and if there is any other commandment" (v. 9), "demonstrates that love is compatible with other norms of the law, which are unstated due to space constraints." *Romans*, 2nd ed., BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2018), 674.

⁸ See Casillas, *Beyond Chapter and Verse*, 115–37; Brian S. Rosner, *Paul and the Law: Keeping the Commandments of God*, NSBT (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2013), 159–205.

⁹ "All of the Book—every part of it, no matter how small—will be found 'profitable' for the saved. We cannot dispense with any of it without loss to ourselves. In this connection, it needs to be emphasized without any compromise, that 'all scripture' includes the law of Moses. . . . We are not *under* the law; but because that law is inspired Scripture, it is full of valuable doctrine and useful lessons for us." McClain, 56.

¹⁰ On discerning the heart of God in Bible application, see Mark L. Strauss, *How to Read the Bible in Changing Times: Understanding and Applying God's Word Today* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 69–92. On transhistorical paradigms see Casillas, *Beyond Chapter and Verse*, 208–26; Christopher J. H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004), 314–25.

¹¹ In the fall of 2019 I taught a doctoral course on OT hermeneutics and exegetical method, and I assigned the students to write their major papers on aspects of the OT's teaching regarding societal justice. While the present article reflects my own work, students Jonathon Davis, Nate Labadorf, Kristian Römer, and Sam Stephens helped to advance my thinking on the subject, and I thank them for their input.

breadth of the information available, the discussion must be highly selective but will sufficiently illustrate the ongoing role of the OT for understanding what pleases God in societal life.¹²

Societal Justice in the Primeval Period

Though the opening chapters of Genesis do not dwell on societal justice, they lay the theological foundation for this theme. That foundation is the *imago Dei*. Scholars debate various details of the image.¹³ Did God create humanity *in* his image or *as* his image? Is the image a set of qualities/abilities, or is it humanity's function of exercising dominion over the earth, or some combination of both? Regardless of how such questions are answered, the *imago* remains basic to the Bible's teaching on humanity and human society. That the image of God transcends secondary distinctions or differing roles among people is implied by the facts that both male and female are made in this image and both together are called **אדם** (Gn 1:26–27; 5:1–2). The same follows from the transmission of the image from father to child (5:1–3). Justice would surely ensue from thoroughgoing respect for all human beings as equal image-bearers. As Grudem says, the *imago* “means that people of

¹² Resources for more detailed study abound. Book-length introductions include Bruce B. Birch, *What Does the Lord Require? The Old Testament Call to Social Witness* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985); Michael Barram, *Missional Economics: Biblical Justice and Christian Formation*, The Gospel and Our Culture Series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018); Mark T. Coppenger, *A Christian View of Justice* (Nashville: Broadman, 1983); Timothy Keller, *Generous Justice: How God's Grace Makes Us Just* (New York: Penguin, 2010); Bruce V. Malchow, *Social Justice in the Hebrew Bible: What Is Old and What Is New*, Religious Orders (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical/Michael Glazier, 1996); H. G. M. Williamson, *He Has Shown You What Is Good: Old Testament Justice Then and Now*, The Trinity Lectures, Singapore, 2011 (Cambridge, UK: Lutterworth, 2012). In-depth works include Léon Epsztein, *Social Justice in the Ancient Near East and the People of the Bible*, trans. John Bowden (London: SCM, 1986); Norman K. Gottwald, *Social Justice and the Hebrew Bible*, The Center and Library for the Bible and Social Justice Series, 3 vols. (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2016, 2018); Richard H. Hiers, *Justice and Compassion in Biblical Law* (New York: Continuum, 2009); Walter J. Houston, *Contending for Justice: Ideologies and Theologies of Social Justice in the Old Testament*, Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 428 (London: T & T Clark, 2006); idem, *Justice for the Poor? Social Justice in the Old Testament in Concept and Practice* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2020); J. David Pleins, *The Social Visions of the Hebrew Bible: A Theological Introduction* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001); Henning Graf Reventlow and Yair Hoffman, eds., *Justice and Righteousness: Biblical Themes and Their Influence*, JSOTSupp 137 (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic, 1992); Moshe Weinfeld, *Social Justice in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995); Cynthia Long Westfall and Bryan R. Dyer, eds., *The Bible and Social Justice: Old Testament and New Testament Foundations for the Church's Urgent Call*, McMaster New Testament Studies (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2015); and Wright.

Such works approach their subject from a variety of theological perspectives. In reading discerningly, one should consider five key questions: (1) What is the author's view of the inspiration and authority of Scripture? (2) What is his understanding of the gospel? (3) What is his understanding of the relationship between Israel and the nations of the world? (4) What is his understanding of the relationship between Israel and the church? (5) To what degree has he been influenced by extrabiblical—or unbiblical—ideologies regarding social issues?

¹³ For an introduction to the issues, see Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 160–75. For detailed discussion, see G. C. Berkouwer, *Studies in Dogmatics: Man: The Image of God*, trans. Dirk W. Jellema (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962); Gerald Bray, “The Significance of God's Image in Man,” *TynBul* 42/2 (1991): 195–225; Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986); Beth Felker Jones and Jeffrey W. Barbeau, eds., *The Image of God in an Image-Driven Age: Explorations in Theological Anthropology*, Wheaton Theology Conference Series (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2016); G. A. Jónsson, *The Image of God: Genesis 1:26–28 in a Century of Old Testament Research*, Coniectanea Biblica OT Series, trans. L. Svendsen (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1988); Richard Lints, *Identity and Idolatry: The Image of God and Its Inversion*, NSBT (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2015).

every race deserve equal dignity and rights. It means that elderly people, those seriously ill, the mentally retarded, and children yet unborn, deserve full protection and honor as human beings.”¹⁴

What becomes of such justice when the image of God is not respected? Grudem answers: “If we ever deny our unique status in creation as God’s only image-bearers, we will soon begin to depreciate the value of human life, will tend to see humans as merely a higher form of animal, and will begin to treat others as such. We will also lose much of our sense of meaning in life.”¹⁵ This is exactly what happened when sin entered the human race. Following Adam and Eve’s expulsion from Eden, the first narrative records Cain’s murder of his brother Abel (Gn 4:1ff). Two chapters later one reads that “the earth was filled with violence” (6:11, 13). The judgment of the flood did not solve the problem. Afterward God stipulated capital punishment as the penalty for murder precisely because of the value of the *imago Dei* (Gn 9:6).

Societal Justice in the Patriarchal Period

Thankfully, the biblical storyline concentrates on God’s work to restore his image and his kingdom on earth. Material within and beyond Genesis relates to initial developments in this regard.

The Calling of Abraham

In Genesis 12 God sketches his plan for overturning sin and the curse and restoring his kingdom on earth: he would bless all families of the earth through Abram (v. 3). Many other passages indicate that this blessing centers on Christ and his redemptive work, but Genesis includes in the blessing a dimension that is easily missed. On his way to judge Sodom and Gomorrah, “The LORD said, ‘Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice, so that the LORD may bring to Abraham what he has promised him’” (18:17–19). Yahweh’s intent is not only for “righteousness and justice” to characterize Abraham’s descendants but also to contribute to his plan for the nations. As Mathews puts it, the calling of Abraham to bless the world “included the intermediary step of creating a righteous people whose conduct would be a beacon for the nations.”¹⁶ This early revelation establishes the broad universal context within which to understand all the instruction and legislation on societal justice that the OT goes on to give Abraham’s progeny.¹⁷

Foundational here is defining the expression *righteousness and justice*. The first term translates צִדְקָה (159x in the OT). Detailed analysis of this noun requires comparison and contrast with its twin

¹⁴ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 450.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2005), 223.

¹⁷ For a study of the creational context of Israel’s laws, see James K. Bruckner, *Implied Law in the Abraham Narrative: A Literary and Theological Analysis*, JSOTSupp 335 (London: Sheffield, 2001).

צֶדֶק (119x) as well as examination of their corresponding verb צָדַק (41x) and adjective צָדִיק (205x). Essential definition is facilitated by the fact that these words share the idea of “conformity to a standard.”¹⁸ This is implied by the typical English gloss for צָדִיק and צָדַק: *righteousness* or, more simply, *rightness*. For someone or something to be “right” requires some standard against which he or it is being evaluated. Genesis 18:19 is only the second time Scripture uses צָדִיק (the first being 15:6), and the verse does not state what standard God has in mind for Abraham and his descendants. It is clearly a standard of conduct, however: something Abraham’s descendants are to do (עֲשֵׂה) as part of keeping (שָׁמַר) the way (דֶּרֶךְ) of Yahweh.

The standard becomes clearer from the term accompanying צָדִיק: “justice,” מִשְׁפָּט, appears in Genesis 18:19 for the first of 424 times in the OT. Though this noun conveys many nuances in the OT,¹⁹ Genesis 18 itself provides help for defining the term in relation to the subject of the present article. As Abraham begins to intercede on behalf of Lot, he pleads, “Will you indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city. Will you then sweep away the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous who are in it? Far be it from you to do such a thing, to put the righteous to death with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from you! Shall not the Judge [Qal participle of שָׁפַט] of all the earth do what is just [מִשְׁפָּט]?” (18:23–25). Abraham’s closing question connects מִשְׁפָּט with the verb from which it derives, שָׁפַט, to judge (204x). Here מִשְׁפָּט represents the ideal of treating people in a way that corresponds with their conduct. More specifically, מִשְׁפָּט must guide someone who is meting out legal penalties, leading him to punish the guilty and spare the innocent. This is what English speakers typically have in mind with the term *justice*, and it includes ideals more technically known as “procedural” and “retributive” justice. Based on the belief that all human beings are equal in the eyes of the law, procedural justice guarantees due legal process for all. Retributive justice requires that offending parties receive punishment according to their offenses.²⁰ It is reasonable to conclude that these two concepts are significant components of מִשְׁפָּט in Yahweh’s statement in verse 19.

Interestingly, Genesis 18 also illustrates the injustice that is the opposite of מִשְׁפָּט. The reason Yahweh punishes Sodom and Gomorrah is because of the “outcry” against these cities (זַעֲקָה, v. 20; צַעֲקָה, v. 21; 19:13). The root of צַעֲקָה occurs for the first time in Genesis 4:10, in God’s response to Cain after he killed Abel: “What have you done? The voice of your brother’s blood is crying [Qal participle of צָעַק] to me from the ground.” This is the first of several passages showing that these

¹⁸ This view enjoys broad consensus among scholars. For detailed defense, see David J. Reimer, “צָדִיק,” *NIDOTTE*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 3:744–69; compare “צָדִיק (*šādēq*) be just, righteous,” *TWOT*, ed. R. Laird Harris (Chicago: Moody, 1980), 2:752–55. For a differing approach, see K. Koch, “צָדִיק *šdq* to be communally faithful beneficial,” *TLOT*, ed. Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann, trans. Mark E. Biddle (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997), 2:1046–1062. As evident in the discussion below, Koch’s communal emphasis is in view in a number of צָדִיק usages but can be subsumed under the broader “conformity to a standard” rubric.

¹⁹ For surveys, compare Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, “מִשְׁפָּט,” *HALOT*, rev. Walter Baumgartner and Johann Jakob Stamm, trans. M. E. J. Richardson, study ed. (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 1:651–51; “מִשְׁפָּט,” *DCH*, ed. David J. A. Clines (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic, 2001), 5:556–64. For more detailed study, see G. Liedke, “שָׁפַט *špṭ* to judge,” *TLOT*, 3:1392–99.

²⁰ For definitions of justice-related terms, see the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, available at <https://plato.stanford.edu/index.html>.

terms for “outcry” denote “the cry of the oppressed because of harsh treatment.”²¹ In addition to homosexuality, Genesis points to the sin of injustice in Sodom and Gomorrah. Note the violent way in which the men of Sodom attempted to pursue the angels who visited Lot (19:1–10).

The Example of Job

Though the Book of Job was likely composed in the Solomonic period, Job himself seems to have lived around or before Abraham’s time, southeast or northeast of Canaan.²² No evidence connects Job to the line of Abraham or the Abrahamic Covenant. Nevertheless, the book that bears his name repeatedly presents him as living an exemplary life flowing from the fear of God (e.g., Job 1:1, 8, 22; 2:3, 10). Job’s just treatment of others is a major element of his example.

As Job’s friends strain to identify the sins that allegedly brought about his calamities, they increasingly turn to his actions toward disadvantaged people. In chapter 22 Eliphaz makes these accusations (vv. 6–9):

For you have exacted pledges of your brothers for nothing
and stripped the naked of their clothing.
You have given no water to the weary to drink,
and you have withheld bread from the hungry.
The man with power possessed the land,
and the favored man lived in it.
You have sent widows away empty,
and the arms of the fatherless were crushed.

Eliphaz connects this disgraceful conduct with a dismissive attitude toward God himself (vv. 12–20). Talbert comments,

For Eliphaz to link the severity of Job’s punishment to these kinds of crimes reveals how seriously such social responsibilities were regarded and how profoundly interconnected man’s religion was perceived to be with his treatment of others. . . . We tend to emphasize spiritual sins such as idolatry, or moral sins such as adultery, and minimize the seriousness of social and humanitarian sins such as oppression and neglect. This fails to give adequate weight to other issues with which God has historically been concerned.²³

Chapters 29–31 record Job’s climactic self-defense over against the outrageous charges of his friends. In 29:14 he makes the general statement, “I put on righteousness [צִדִּיק], and it clothed me; my justice [מִשְׁפָּט] was like a robe and a turban.” The verses that flank this statement illustrate the kinds of behaviors that in Job’s mind qualify as צִדִּיק and מִשְׁפָּט.

²¹ Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 18–50*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 20.

²² On the identity of Job and the composition of the Book of Job, compare Francis I. Andersen, *Job: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC (Nottingham, England: InterVarsity, 1976), 64–66, 81–84; Gleason L. Archer Jr., *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody, 2007), 429–34; John E. Hartley, *The Book of Job*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 15–20, 65–67; Eugene H. Merrill, Mark F. Rooker, and Michael A. Grisanti, *The World and the Word: An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Nashville: B&H, 2011), 500–502; Layton Talbert, *Beyond Suffering: Discovering the Message of Job* (Greenville, SC: BJU Press, 2007), 6–8.

²³ Ibid., 329n7.

When the ear heard, it called me blessed,
 and when the eye saw, it approved,
 because I delivered the poor who cried for help,
 and the fatherless who had none to help him.
 The blessing of him who was about to perish came upon me,
 and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy.
 I put on righteousness, and it clothed me;
 my justice was like a robe and a turban.
 I was eyes to the blind
 and feet to the lame.
 I was a father to the needy,
 and I searched out the cause of him whom I did not know.
 I broke the fangs of the unrighteous
 and made him drop his prey from his teeth. (vv. 11–17)

This passage does not focus on unjust actions that Job avoided. Instead, **צֶדֶק** and **מִשְׁפָּט** describe his positive actions of providing material aid to the poor and legal defense to the oppressed.²⁴

Job expounds on such actions at greater length in chapter 31, and these are summarized with the term **צִדִּיק** (32:1). At least for the modern reader, part of this passage introduces tension since it takes for granted a kind of slavery.

If I have rejected the cause of my manservant or my maidservant,
 when they brought a complaint against me,
 what then shall I do when God rises up?
 When he makes inquiry, what shall I answer him?
 Did not he who made me in the womb make him?
 And did not one fashion us in the womb? (31:13–15)

Detailing the OT's approach to slavery is beyond the scope of this article.²⁵ One must, however, bear in mind considerable differences between slavery in the time of Job and slavery in modern times. To begin with, in any given passage the Hebrew terminology for “slave” may or may not denote the level of ownership or control implied by the English word *slave*. This becomes apparent even in comparing English translations. For instance, while the NASB of Job 31:13 speaks of “male or female slaves,” the ESV uses the softer glosses *manservant* (**עֶבֶד**) and *maidservant* (**אִמָּה**).²⁶ Additionally, in the Ancient

²⁴ On the broader significance of **מִשְׁפָּט** for the message of the Book of Job, see Sylvia Huberman Scholnick, “The Meaning of *Mišpaṭ* in the Book of Job,” *JBL* 101/4 (1982): 521–29.

²⁵ For surveys of the OT's handling of slavery, see Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Toward Old Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 1991), 98–100, 288–90; Wright, 333–37. For detailed analyses, see Gregory C. Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, *JSOTSup* 141 (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic 1993); Isaac Mendelsohn, *Slavery in the Ancient Near East: A Comparative Study of Slavery in Babylonia, Assyria, Syria, and Palestine from the Middle of the Third Millennium to the End of the First Millennium* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1949); Thomas Schirrmacher, ed., *The Humanisation of Slavery in the Old Testament*, World of Theology Series 8 (2015; reprint, Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2018). For a popular-level discussion specifically in response to contemporary attacks on the biblical worldview, see Paul Copan, *Is God a Moral Monster? Making Sense of the Old Testament God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 124–149.

²⁶ The following definition reflects the fluidity of OT terminology for servanthood/slavery: “‘*ebed* ‘servant’ is governed within the word field of social order by the antonym → ‘*ādōn* “lord” in its meaning as a term of relation and, consequently, may not be limited—at least not in the first instance—to a precisely defined designation of status (‘slave,’

Near East (ANE) people generally became servants/slaves not because they were kidnapped but because they were prisoners of war or needed to pay debts or otherwise avoid financial ruin in what could be an extremely unstable and dangerous society.²⁷

Slaves did occupy a low social status and were often despised, however. Within this setting, what stands out about Job is not that he owned slaves but that he was so committed to treating them justly (v. 13). This commitment grew out of his sense of accountability to God (v. 14) and his recognition that both master and slave are equally created by God (v. 15). “His faith led him to a liberated attitude toward those who were usually considered as having little worth. In this regard he was way ahead of his time.”²⁸ In fact, Wright calls Job 31:15 “the highest point of the Old Testament’s ethical critique of slavery.”²⁹

For the present purposes the main lesson is that Job understood his actions toward others to be inherently good and required apart from any legislation given to Abraham’s descendants. This understanding could have derived from non-inscripturated special revelation, “natural theology,” common sense, a sensitive conscience, and/or upbringing informed by these. In fact, scholars have extensively chronicled statements similar to Job’s from various pagan ANE cultures.³⁰ Whatever the case, Job’s testimony has a timeless character that makes it especially relevant for the believer striving to live in a God-pleasing way in the world today.

Societal Justice in the Mosaic Period

Given what Yahweh says in Genesis 18:19, the Mosaic law emphasizes the need for justice in Israelite society. The Torah explicitly labels a variety of laws with justice-related terminology. For example, the required accuracy of selling/trading measurements is described in terms of both צֶדֶק (Lv 19:36; Dt 25:13–16) and מִשְׁפָּט (Lv 19:35). Viewing justice from the standpoint of the person receiving it, מִשְׁפָּט can refer to “rights,” what rightfully belongs to a person. A priestly law makes this point: “And this shall be the priests’ due [מִשְׁפָּט] from the people, from those offering a sacrifice, whether an ox or a sheep: they shall give to the priest the shoulder and the two cheeks and the stomach” (Dt 18:3). Likewise, Deuteronomy 21:17 uses מִשְׁפָּט for the right of the firstborn to a double portion of his father’s inheritance.

e.g., Exod 21:2, 32) or a descriptive functional designation (‘worker’; cf. Job 7:2 ‘*ebed* who longs for the shadows’ par. ‘day laborer, who hopes for wages’). . . . As a term of relation, ‘*ebed*’ is given content (‘bondsmen, subordinate, subject, vassal, mercenary, official, minister’) by the context in which one is the subordinate of one’s lord (or lady). . . . In the social sphere, ‘*ebed*’ commonly designates the slave in the OT. It is not, however, a technical term in the sense of Eng. ‘slave,’ which necessarily involves a negative preconception. One may never forget either that the same word can describe the officer and the minister of the king or the nuance of the term in the self-designation ‘your servant.’” Claus Westermann, “עֶבֶד ‘*ebed* servant,” *TLOT*, 2:821–22.

²⁷ See especially Chirichigno, Mendelsohn, and Schirmacher.

²⁸ Hartley, 415.

²⁹ *Old Testament Ethics*, 337.

³⁰ See especially Epsztein and Weinfeld. While helpful, such studies can minimize the uniqueness of biblical revelation. For an older but thoroughly orthodox presentation, see Richard D. Patterson, “The Widow, the Orphan, and the Poor in the Old Testament and the Extra-Biblical Literature,” *BSac* 130/519 (1973): 223–34.

Many Mosaic laws focus on the role of officials who render rulings in “court” cases. They must “justify [Hiphil of צדק: declare righteous] the righteous [צדיק] and condemn the wicked” (Dt 25:1, NASB). They must decide all cases with impartiality (משפט in Ex 23:6; Lv 19:15; Dt 1:17; 27:19; צדק in Lv 19:15). Deuteronomy 16:18–20 is especially notable for how it interchanges the vocabulary:

You shall appoint judges [Qal participle of שפט] and officers in all your towns that the LORD your God is giving you, according to your tribes, and they shall judge [Qal of שפט] the people with righteous judgment [משפט-צדק, judgment of righteousness]. You shall not pervert justice [משפט]. You shall not show partiality, and you shall not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and subverts the cause of the righteous [צדיק]. Justice [צדק], and only justice [צדק], you shall follow, that you may live and inherit the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

Likewise, legal penalties must be applied equally to all classes of people. The *lex talionis* includes this provision: “You shall have the same rule [משפט] for the sojourner³¹ and for the native, for I am the LORD your God” (Lv 24:22; cf. Ex 21:31).

Contemporary readers of the OT would recognize the above laws as reflections of justice. Other passages in the Torah, however, blur the line between modern categories of justice and benevolence. Deuteronomy 10:17 proclaims, “For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe.” The last statement corresponds to the laws against impartiality in juridical affairs, but verse 18 begins with a more active form of משפט: “He executes justice [משפט] for the fatherless and the widow.” This refers to defending and delivering vulnerable people who are being treated unfairly or oppressed.³² The rest of verse 18 is even more active: “And [he] loves [Qal participle of אהב] the sojourner, giving him food and clothing.” On this basis, verse 19 urges, “Love [Qal imperatival perfect of אהב] the

³¹ Mosaic laws regarding the sojourner or alien (גר) are of special significance for contemporary debates concerning justice in the realm of immigration. For a survey of the data, see Georges Chawkat Moucarry, “The Alien According to the Torah,” *Themelios* 14/1 (1988): 17–20. For detailed study, see David G. Firth, *Including the Stranger: Foreigners in the Former Prophets*, NSBT (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2019); J. Daniel Hays, *From Every People and Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race*, NSBT (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2003); Christiana van Houten, *The Alien in Israelite Law: A Study of the Changing Legal Status of Strangers in Ancient Israel*, JSOTSupp 107 (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic, 1991). When it comes to application, balancing the various strands of biblical teaching is admittedly difficult. James K. Hoffmeier analyzes the various OT “foreigner” terms and provides helpful biblical and extrabiblical data concerning the existence of state borders in the ANE. Yet his argument that the OT גר is equivalent to today’s “legal” alien seems strained. See *The Immigration Crisis: Immigrants, Aliens, and the Bible* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2009). On the other hand, M. Daniel Carroll R. uses the OT גר laws as a key part of a case for immigration reform. Carroll’s approach to Romans 13:1–7 is questionable, however, allowing for the violation of immigration law if that law is deemed unjust. See *Christians at the Border: Immigration, the Church, and the Bible*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2013); *The Bible and Borders: Hearing God’s Word on Immigration* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2020). Ultimately, Christians should evaluate their country’s immigration laws and use their influence to promote legislation that is most in keeping with biblical ideals and patterns. Toward this end, two additional works merit consideration: Robert W. Heimbürger, *God and the Illegal Alien: United States Immigration Law and a Theology of Politics*, Cambridge Studies in Law and Christianity (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Tisha M. Rajendra, *Migrants and Citizens: Justice and Responsibility in the Ethics of Immigration* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017).

³² See Robert G. Bratcher and Howard A. Hatton, *A Handbook on Deuteronomy*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 2000), 205.

sojourner, therefore, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt.” The juxtaposition of justice and love is striking.

Similarly, in legislating on lending practices Deuteronomy 24 says, “And if he is a poor man, you shall not sleep in his pledge. You shall restore to him the pledge as the sun sets, that he may sleep in his cloak and bless you. And it shall be righteousness [צִדְקָה] for you before the LORD your God” (vv. 12–13). The NET Bible translates צִדְקָה here as “a just deed.” The point is simply that compassionate treatment of the poor man is “the right thing to do.”³³ The passage goes on to speak of מִשְׁפָּט and compassion in the same breath: “You shall not pervert the justice [מִשְׁפָּט] due to the sojourner or to the fatherless, or take a widow’s garment in pledge, but you shall remember that you were a slave in Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you from there; therefore I command you to do this” (vv. 17–18).

Four key points emerge from studying the Mosaic laws on societal justice. First, one should not distinguish sharply between מִשְׁפָּט and צִדְקָה terms. Some scholars hold that the dominant idea of the root שפט is the restoration of שְׁלוֹם to relationships following a disruption.³⁴ Similarly, Keller comments: “These two words [מִשְׁפָּט and צִדְקָה] roughly correspond to what some have called ‘primary’ and ‘rectifying justice.’ Rectifying justice is *mishpat*. It means punishing wrongdoers and caring for the victims of unjust treatment. Primary justice, or *tzadeqah* [*sic*], is behavior that, if it was prevalent in the world, would render rectifying justice unnecessary, because everyone would be living in right relationship to everyone else.”³⁵ Keller’s qualified statement *roughly correspond* is important in making such a distinction. As seen in several verses cited above (e.g., Lv 19:15), the צִדְקָה word family can refer to rectifying justice. Conversely, the use of מִשְׁפָּט for the priest’s food allotment (Dt 18:3) sounds like primary rather than rectifying justice. Especially significant are the cases in which מִשְׁפָּט and צִדְקָה words work together to communicate a single idea. Weinfeld analyzes the hendiadys מִשְׁפָּט וְצִדְקָה and similar expressions in the Hebrew Bible and other ANE literature. He argues that such expressions convey the ancient ideal of “social justice.” This ideal relates to all levels of society: those in official positions such as judges and kings but also common people in their everyday interactions. It includes making fair judicial decisions and enacting just laws. It also includes releasing or rescuing people from oppressive circumstances as well as contributing materially in order to help deliver fellow human beings from destitution.³⁶ Similar to Weinfeld, the present study has shown the variety of societal expectations associated with מִשְׁפָּט/צִדְקָה, and more is to come.

Second, the connection between some acts of benevolence and מִשְׁפָּט/צִדְקָה suggests that other Mosaic acts of benevolence may be characterized with these terms even when the terms are not used in the legislation. One thinks of the requirement that the Israelites leave harvest gleanings for the poor to gather (Lv 19:9–10; 23:22; Dt 24:19–22). Other examples include the distribution to the needy

³³ See *ibid.*, 402.

³⁴ See Liedke, 3:1393; *HALOT*, 2:1623.

³⁵ *Generous Justice*, 7–8, citing Wright, 257. Rather than using the better-known categories *retributive justice* and *distributive justice*, Keller borrows the labels *rectifying justice* and *primary justice* from Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Justice: Rights and Wrongs* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), ix–x.

³⁶ See *Social Justice in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East*, especially 7–44.

from the third-year tithe (Dt 26:12–15) and the economic relief of the Sabbatical Year (Ex 23:10–11; Lv 25:1–7; Dt 15:1–18) and the Year of Jubilee (Lv 25:8–34). These mechanisms do not imply that wealth is evil, nor do they advocate redistribution of wealth as promoted by modern socialistic schemes. As humane “safety nets,” however, they give members of the covenant community their “due” in that they provide ways for them to avoid utter humiliation or devastation.³⁷

Third, as seen in Deuteronomy 10:17–19 and other texts, Mosaic societal justice is not driven simply or fundamentally by concern for other humans. Instead the overriding motive is to reflect God’s character and honor him. As Wright notes, “For Israel . . . justice was no abstract concept or philosophical definition. Justice was essentially theological. It was rooted in the character of the LORD, their God; it flowed from his actions in history; it was demanded by his covenant relationship with Israel; it would ultimately be established on the earth by his sovereign power. . . . Justice on earth flows from justice in heaven.”³⁸ Consequently, people cannot understand or pursue justice adequately unless they come to know God.

Fourth, Israel’s societal justice was not for the sake of this one nation only. Toward the beginning of Deuteronomy Moses declares:

See, I have taught you statutes and rules [משפטים=legal pronouncements, ordinances], as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should do them in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. Keep them and do them, for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, “Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.” For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is to us, whenever we call upon him? And what great nation is there, that has statutes and rules [משפטים] so righteous [צדיקים] as all this law that I set before you today?

Moses anticipates that if Israel’s society were ordered according to God’s laws, the nations of the world would be impressed and drawn to Israel and her God. The implication is that the wisdom and righteousness of Israel’s laws—including laws regarding justice—should inform the laws made in other nations. Merrill puts it this way: “Even the pagan nations—by whom wisdom was prized and highly sought after—would see in Israel’s covenant provisions a wisdom of a higher order, one to be eagerly emulated. This, of course, was part of the attraction of Israel by which they were to become a means of blessing the whole earth.”³⁹ Thus, Deuteronomy 4:5–8 reinforces what Yahweh said in Genesis 18:19 concerning his purpose for Abraham’s descendants. It also encourages readers to identify in Israel’s laws universal patterns of societal justice that transcend the particulars of the theocracy and that provide guidance for dealing with contemporary issues. Wright suggests helpful questions to ask in this process:

³⁷ See E. Calvin Beisner, *Prosperity and Poverty: The Compassionate Use of Resources in a World of Scarcity* (1988; reprint, Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1988); Craig L. Blomberg, *Neither Poverty nor Riches: A Biblical Theology of Possessions*, NSBT (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1999); David L. Baker, *Tight Fists or Open Hands?: Wealth and Poverty in Old Testament Law* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009); Wright, 146–81.

³⁸ *Old Testament Ethics*, 254.

³⁹ Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 116–117.

- What kind of situation was this law trying to promote, or prevent?
- What interests was this law aiming to protect?
- Who would have benefited from this law and why?
- Whose power was this law trying to restrict and how did it do so?
- What rights and responsibilities were embodied in this law?
- What kind of behaviour did this law encourage or discourage?
- What vision of society motivated this law?
- What moral principles, values or priorities did this law embody or instantiate?
- What motivation did this law appeal to?
- What sanction or penalty (if any) was attached to this law, and what does that show regarding its relative seriousness or moral priority?⁴⁰

Societal Justice in the United Monarchy Period

Given the Pentateuch's emphasis on societal justice, one would expect the theme to be a significant concern in subsequent books. Joshua and Judges necessarily focus on the conquest and retention of the Promised Land, however. By definition the role of the judge (שֹׁפֵט) involved the determination and enforcement of מִשְׁפָּט (e.g., 4:4–5). Nevertheless, the text of Judges does not provide specific examples in this regard. What one does encounter are gross violations of Mosaic principles of justice (e.g., 19:22–30), even by those in leadership (e.g., 9:1–6).

The reader of Judges anticipates that societal justice will receive attention once the monarchy is established (cf. 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25). Though Judge Samuel ministered with integrity (1 Sm 12:3–4), his sons “took bribes and perverted justice [מִשְׁפָּט]” (8:3). King Saul's persecution of David reflects another kind of perversion of justice (e.g., 18:9ff). By contrast, 2 Samuel 8:15 summarizes the early years of David's reign over all Israel in terms of doing “justice and equity [מִשְׁפָּט וְצֶדֶקָה] to all his people” (cf. 1 Chr 18:14). It is noteworthy that the narrative continues quickly with the stories of David's kindness/loyalty [חֶסֶד] to Mephibosheth (9:1) and his rebuffed effort to show חֶסֶד to Hanun the Ammonite (10:2). The linking of these stories suggests overlap between חֶסֶד and מִשְׁפָּט וְצֶדֶקָה.⁴¹ Later, Absalom steals the Israelites' hearts by alleging that the older David is failing to render מִשְׁפָּט (15:1–6).

Upon commencing his reign Solomon prays: “Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern [שֹׁפֵט; ‘judge,’ NASB] your people, that I may discern between good and evil, for who is able to govern [שֹׁפֵט] this your great people?” (1 Kgs 3:9). Verse 11 rephrases this request as “understanding to discern what is right [מִשְׁפָּט; ‘justice,’ NASB].” The granting of the request becomes evident to Israel in the king's handling of two prostitutes who both claim to be mothers of a

⁴⁰ *Old Testament Ethics*, 323.

⁴¹ This connection is drawn from Richard G. Smith, *The Fate of Justice and Righteousness during David's Reign: Rereading the Court History and Its Ethics according to 2 Samuel 18:15b–20:26*, Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies 508 (New York: T&T Clark, 2009), 65–106, who builds on the work of Weinfeld. Smith's overall thesis is questionable, however: that the author of Samuel presents David as having failed at justice/righteousness from the beginning.

baby: “And all Israel heard of the judgment [מִשְׁפָּט] that the king had rendered, and they stood in awe of the king, because they perceived that the wisdom of God was in him to do justice [מִשְׁפָּט]” (v. 28), “to make judicial decisions” (NET).

This theme climaxes in 1 Kings 10 with the visit of the Queen of Sheba. After Solomon stuns her with his wisdom and the glories of his kingdom, the queen is breathless. Her exclamation culminates with this statement: “Blessed be the LORD your God, who has delighted in you and set you on the throne of Israel! Because the LORD loved Israel forever, he has made you king, that you may execute justice and righteousness [מִשְׁפָּט וצִדְקָה]” (v. 9). Some see here an ironic rebuke of Solomon, contending that the king was neglecting the concerns of his people while growing the luxuries of his court.⁴² Without minimizing Solomon’s sins, others argue that in verses 23–25 the narrator presents Solomon’s wealth, wisdom, and worldwide fame in a positive light, as a fulfillment of God’s promise to make Solomon great (3:12–13).⁴³ Furthermore, 2 Chronicles 9:8 repeats the Queen of Sheba’s statement about מִשְׁפָּט וצִדְקָה, yet the Chronicler does not deal with Solomon’s apostasy. Whether one sees 1 Kings 10:9 as a commendation or a rebuke of Solomon, it still testifies to Israel’s potential for drawing the nations to Yahweh, in fulfillment of Genesis 18:19 and Deuteronomy 4:5–8. It also implies the broad applicability of the ideals that were to govern Israelite society.

Solomon’s wisdom overflowed in the production of the Wisdom Literature, and this literature contains substantial emphasis on societal justice. Some evidence from Job has already been noted above. Ecclesiastes decries oppression and extortion as realities that can make earthly life a crushing burden (3:16; 4:1–4; 5:8). Proverbs conveys instruction on what makes for a just society and just behavior in society. In fact, the book’s stated purposes include “instruction in wise dealing [Hiphil infinitive absolute of שָׁכַל], in righteousness [צִדְקָה], justice [מִשְׁפָּט], and equity [מִישָׁרִים]” (1:3; cf. 2:9). As adverbial accusatives of manner, the closing trio specifies what “wise dealing” looks like.⁴⁴ This construction precludes a sharp distinction between what is merely wise and what is just. Like the Torah, Proverbs roots an understanding of justice in a right relationship with Yahweh (28:5; cf. 1:7; 9:10). It also repeats the law’s insistence on righteous measurements (16:11) and its prohibition of partiality in judicial decisions (18:5; 22:22–23). Further, Proverbs anticipates the prophets in prioritizing justice over worship ritual (21:3). Justice should characterize all of God’s people (e.g., 12:5; 29:7), but Proverbs applies it especially to kings (e.g., 8:15–16; 29:4, 14). As in earlier OT books, one encounters a connection between justice terms and terms associated with benevolence: compare the similar statements in 16:12 (צִדְקָה), 29:4 (מִשְׁפָּט), and 20:28 (חֶסֶד and אֱמֶת).

Though Proverbs 31 may not go back to the Solomonic period, it is noted at this point for the sake of convenience. Here King Lemuel’s mother gives him some arresting counsel. She warns kings against intoxicating beverages, “lest they drink and forget what has been decreed and pervert the rights [דִּין] of all the afflicted” (v. 5). Conversely, rulers should use their power positively: “Open your mouth

⁴² See Iain W. Provan, *1 and 2 Kings*, NIBC (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), 87; Wright, 273–74.

⁴³ See Dale Ralph Davis, *1 Kings: The Wisdom and the Folly*, FBC (Ross-shire, Great Britain, 2002), 103–104, citing Ronald S. Wallace, *Readings in 1 Kings* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 69.

⁴⁴ NET translator’s note; cf. GKC §118q.

for the mute, for the rights [דִּין] of all who are destitute. Open your mouth, judge [שפט] righteously [צדק], defend the rights [דִּין] of the poor and needy” (vv. 8–9; cf. 24:11–12). Waltke explains why such action is necessary: “The poor may be defenseless against them [the rich and powerful] because they are too ignorant to counteract the obstructionist tactics of the legally savvy, too inarticulate to state their case convincingly, too poor to produce proper evidence, and/or too lowly to command respect. Furthermore, the rich and powerful can bribe witnesses to accuse them falsely.”⁴⁵ Jewish legend holds that “Lemuel” is another name for Solomon, but it is just as possible that Lemuel is a Gentile ruler. Waltke thinks “he is probably a proselyte to Israel’s faith.”⁴⁶ If so, the inspired inclusion of his mother’s teaching in Proverbs demonstrates strong continuity between God’s ethic for Israel and his expectations for justice in the nations generally.

In any case, Solomon ultimately failed in his kingly duties, and his failure feeds the OT’s expectation for a king whose character and reign would be marked by perfect justice. Various kingship psalms point in this direction, and Psalm 72 is especially relevant. The superscription indicates that the psalm was written לְשִׁלְמֹה: either *by* or *for* Solomon. The passage is a prayer for the success of an Israelite king, as an outworking of the Abrahamic Covenant (v. 17). Some of its expressions echo Solomon’s reign, particularly the references to Sheba (vv. 10, 15). Yet Solomon fell far short of satisfying the longings of this passage. Furthermore, some of those longings are inapplicable to a merely human king (e.g., v. 5). Thus, Psalm 72 anticipates the ultimate Davidic King.⁴⁷

This text describes several features of the Messianic kingdom, but societal justice stands out most prominently.

Give the king your justice [משפט], O God,
 and your righteousness [צדקה] to the royal son!
 May he judge [דין] your people with righteousness [צדק],
 and your poor with justice [משפט]!
 Let the mountains bear prosperity for the people,
 and the hills, in righteousness [צדקה]!
 May he defend the cause of [שפט] the poor of the people,
 give deliverance to the children of the needy,
 and crush the oppressor! . . .
 For he delivers the needy when he calls,
 the poor and him who has no helper.
 He has pity on the weak and the needy,
 and saves the lives of the needy.
 From oppression and violence he redeems their life,
 and precious is their blood in his sight. (vv. 1–4, 12–14)

This prayer reflects two facts that have been surfacing throughout the OT. First, the שפט terms and the צדק terms overlap considerably, and together they summarize the ideal of societal justice. Second,

⁴⁵ Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs Chapters 15–31*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 509.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 503; cf. Peter A. Steveson, *A Commentary on Proverbs* (Greenville, SC: BJU Press, 2001), 435.

⁴⁷ This view is standard among conservative commentators. See Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1–72: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1973), 273; Allen P. Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms, Volume 2* (42–89), KEC (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2013), 545–46.

this justice is multifaceted. It is not limited to accurate judicial pronouncements. It includes caring deeply for the oppressed and working aggressively to deliver them from injustice. Such is the society that believers love because such is the God who loves them and whom they love (cf. Ps 146:7–9).

Societal Justice in the Prophetic Period

After Solomon's demise and the division of his kingdom, Yahweh eventually raises up a host of prophets to proclaim his Word to his people. The need for societal justice is one of their main burdens. The extensive prophetic material on the subject can be adequately summarized under three themes.

The Prophetic Rebuke of Israel

The negative element predominates, denouncing Israel for injustice and urging repentance. Amos is the *locus classicus* in this regard.⁴⁸ Addressing the Northern Kingdom in the eighth century B.C., he famously calls for מִשְׁפָּט to “roll down like waters” and צְדָקָה “like an ever-flowing stream” (5:24). This demand comes because the people have done the unthinkable: “turned justice into poison / and the fruit of righteousness into wormwood” (6:12). Amos specifies what this means, detailing multiple violations of Mosaic legislation on justice. In chapter 5 he rebukes the nobility for excessively taxing the poor for personal gain as well as for accepting bribes in order to deny legal claims of the needy in court (vv. 11–15). Chapter 8 explains trampling on the needy (v. 4) in terms of false balances that produce illegitimate profits (v. 5), the purchasing of slaves, and the sale of chaff with wheat (v. 6). In describing such oppression, Amos uses graphic imagery such as the depiction of Samaria's wealthy women as cows (4:1).

Focusing on the Southern Kingdom around the same time, Micah's language is even more offensive. He depicts the leaders' oppression of the people in terms of cannibalism (3:1–3). It is no wonder that he dismisses their worship offerings, extravagant as they may be, and presses on them more fundamental concerns: doing מִשְׁפָּט, loving חֶסֶד, and walking humbly with God (6:8). Here Micah is not rejecting the worship practices required by the Mosaic law. Rather, societal injustice reflects a breakdown in the nation's relationship with God, and therefore worship ritual is meaningless and insulting. The “spiritual” and the societal are inseparable.⁴⁹

Micah's contemporary Isaiah makes the same point. His opening salvo urges, “Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; / remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; / cease to do

⁴⁸ Amos's “basic theme was that Yahweh, Israel's great God, who had been so good to them in past generations, was going to send a devastating and final judgment upon them because of the sins which they had committed, sins involving social injustice and religious apostasy.” Stan Bushey, “The Theology of Amos,” *Biblical Viewpoint* 14 (1980): 62. Compare Robert D. Bell, *The Theological Messages of the Old Testament Books* (Greenville, SC: BJU Press, 2010), 393–403; David A. Hubbard, *Joel and Amos: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC (Nottingham, England: InterVarsity, 1989), 111–19.

⁴⁹ For a similar explanation, see Hemchand Gossai, *Justice, Righteousness and the Social Critique of the Eighth-Century Prophets*, American University Studies, Series VII Theology Religion, vol. 141 (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), 265–71.

evil, / learn to do good; / seek justice [מִשְׁפָּט], / correct oppression; bring justice [שֹׁפֵט] to the fatherless, / plead the widow's cause" (1:16–17). Isaiah's Song of the Vineyard exclaims that Yahweh "looked for justice [מִשְׁפָּט], but behold, bloodshed; / for righteousness [צְדִיקָה], but behold, an outcry [צַעֲקָה]!" (5:7). The next verse denounces the greedy acquisition of land in violation of the Year of Jubilee laws. According to 10:1–2, Judah's leaders not only oppressed the needy but also crafted laws that facilitated oppression. Isaiah 58:6–7 links justice with both fasting and compassion. "Is not this the fast that I choose: / to loose the bonds of wickedness, / to undo the straps of the yoke, / to let the oppressed go free, / and to break every yoke? / Is it not to share your bread with the hungry / and bring the homeless poor into your house; / when you see the naked, to cover him, / and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?" (cf. vv. 9–10).

As God's people move into exile, the prophets spotlight societal injustice as a main reason for judgment. Jeremiah grieves that Judah's legal system is perverted against the vulnerable (e.g., 5:28; 7:5–6; 21:12; 22:3). So does Ezekiel (e.g., 7:23–27; 22:29; 45:9), upholding just treatment of fellow men as an obligation of Israel's relationship to Yahweh (chapters 18 and 33). True knowledge of Yahweh includes knowing what he delights to do: חֶסֶד, מִשְׁפָּט, and צְדִיקָה (Jer 9:24). The inevitable effect becomes clear in one of the OT's most incisive statements about societal justice. Jeremiah 22 teaches that what a king does with his influence reflects his spiritual condition. Rebuking Jehoiakim by describing Josiah, Yahweh says, "Do you think you are a king / because you compete in cedar? / Did not your father eat and drink / and do justice and righteousness [מִשְׁפָּט וְצְדִיקָה]? / Then it was well with him. / He judged [דִּין] the cause of the poor and needy; / then it was well. / *Is not this to know me?*" (vv. 15–16, emphasis added). Sadly, however, injustice plagued Israel even in the post-exilic period (see Neh 5:1–19). Thus, to the very end the OT continues calling Yahweh's people to מִשְׁפָּט. Zechariah echoes his predecessors in telling them to protect and provide for the needy instead of worrying about details regarding fasting (7:9–10; 8:16–17).

The Prophetic Rebuke of Non-Israelite Nations

The Hebrew prophets also address the sins of non-Israelite nations. Anticipating the final destruction of the world, Isaiah declares: "The earth lies defiled under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed the laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant" (24:5). This statement refers to the moral requirements incumbent upon human beings as creations of God, requirements known at least through conscience (cf. Rom 2:12–16). But "the everlasting covenant" may refer specifically to the Noachian Covenant and its associated prohibition of murder (Gen 9:1–17).⁵⁰ In any case, Israel's prophets assume that Gentiles are bound to certain divine expectations for societal life. For example, in response to Jonah's preaching the king of Nineveh tells everyone in the city to turn

⁵⁰ Compare J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1993), 199; John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1–39* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 446; Peter A. Steveson, *A Commentary on Isaiah* (Greenville, SC: BJU Press, 2003), 196–97; Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah: The English Text, with Introduction, Exposition, and Notes, Volume II: Chapters 19 to 39* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 155–58.

specifically from “the violence that is in his hands” (Jon 3:8).⁵¹ Daniel ends his prediction of Nebuchadnezzar’s beastly punishment this way: “Therefore, O king, let my counsel be acceptable to you: break off your sins by practicing righteousness [Aram. צִדְקָה], and your iniquities by showing mercy [Aram. חֲנּוּן] to the oppressed, that there may perhaps be a lengthening of your prosperity” (4:27). Wood provides a reasonable explanation of the background: “Nebuchadnezzar was a noted builder. Often kings showed little consideration to those who did the work on building projects, with hundreds dying of extreme heat and difficult conditions. Nebuchadnezzar was probably guilty of this lack of concern. In his pride, he may also have taken little notice of injustices meted out by judges and other officials as well as by the rich in his kingdom. Daniel’s counsel was that all this should be corrected.”⁵² Whatever the details, Nebuchadnezzar has violated fixed requirements for the treatment of fellow human beings. So had Sodom of old: “Behold, this was the guilt of your [Jerusalem’s] sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy” (Ez 16:49). God expected the Sodomites to use their abundant resources to help people in need.

Through multiple prophetic oracles, Yahweh holds the nations of the ANE accountable for violating his will regarding societal justice. The severe judgments announced in the oracles against the nations indicate the gravity of these standards. Compiling the data from Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Habakkuk, Obadiah, and Nahum, one finds nine non-Israelite entities targeted: Babylon, Philistia, Moab, Damascus/Syria, Egypt, Edom, Tyre, Ammon, and Nineveh/Assyria.⁵³ Whether the oracles were delivered to the nations or were spoken only to Israel/Judah by way of promising deliverance and vindication, they send a forceful message that God will not tolerate injustice in the world forever.⁵⁴

Especially potent are Amos’s oracles regarding Israel’s neighbors (1:3–2:3). The prophet uses these oracles and the one against Judah (2:4–5) as a rhetorical technique to constrain the Northern Kingdom to see the rightness of Yahweh’s judgment against it (2:6ff). Nevertheless, each of Amos’s

⁵¹ “Violence [חֲמָסָה], the arbitrary infringements of human rights, is a term that occurs in the OT prophets especially in connection with cities: urban conglomeration encourages scrambling above others, like caterpillars in a jar [Jer 6:7; Ez 7:23; Am 3:10; Mi 6:12]. Although the tale [!] deals with moral misbehavior in an Assyrian city, the listeners would recall that Assyria’s aggressive violence toward other nations was condemned by the prophets as a national characteristic [e.g., Na 3:1], and so by association it has special point.” Leslie C. Allen, *The Books of Joel, Obadiah, Jonah and Micah*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 225.

⁵² Leon J. Wood, *A Commentary on Daniel* (1973; reprint, Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1998), 117–18.

⁵³ See the chart in John H. Walton and Andrew E. Hill, *Old Testament Today: A Journey from Original Meaning to Contemporary Significance* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 258.

⁵⁴ Walton and Hill provide a helpful analogy (263): “The Old Testament theology concerning the way God treats nations can be illustrated if we use the example of an old-fashioned balance scale with trays connected to either end of a rocker beam balanced on its center point. If we envision such a scale for God’s handling of sin in the temporal-material frame, we will have a cogent picture of Israel’s general theology. One tray represents evil, the other side, good. As a nation did that which was right, weights would be placed on the ‘good’ tray. As a nation did that which was sinful or wrong, weights would be placed on the ‘evil’ tray. One additional feature of this system is that under the evil tray is a button that sounds an alarm. The idea is that when evil sufficiently outweighs good, the alarm sounds and God prepares to carry out judgment.” Walton and Hill clarify that the oracles against the nations present God’s way of determining the earthly destiny of nations not his way of determining the eternal destiny of individuals.

brief oracles against the nations stands as a message in its own right. He first addresses entirely foreign nations: Damascus/Syria (1:3–5), Philistia (1:6–8), and Tyre (1:9–10). Then he narrows down to peoples related to Israel because they descended from Abraham and Isaac (Edom, 1:11–12) or Abraham’s father Terah (Ammon, 1:13–15; Moab, 2:1–3).

Amos’s oracles against the nations center on three categories of sins. Though he does not decry them with **שפט/צדק** terminology, these sins obviously violate God’s expectations for justice in society. The nature of these sins is clear even though scholars debate the specific historical events Amos describes. In general, the nations are guilty of *cruelty* toward their enemies. Damascus, for example, “threshed Gilead [the region of the Transjordanian Israelite tribes] with threshing sledges of iron” (1:3). The language here refers to a threshing board with sharp objects underneath.⁵⁵ Even if Amos is speaking metaphorically, he is describing abusiveness in the extreme. As a further example, the Philistines “carried into exile a whole people to deliver them up to Edom” (1:6). This refers to an invasion of some village or community in order to sell its inhabitants as slaves. “Removal by kidnapping for the sole purpose of resale is contrary to even the lowest sense of morality.”⁵⁶

Next, the nations’ cruelty is particularly reprehensible when it involves *violation of expected brotherliness*. The Tyrians also “delivered up a whole people to Edom,” but additionally they “did not remember the covenant of brotherhood” (1:9). That is, they breached a previously made treaty.⁵⁷ Next comes the sin of Edom: “He pursued his brother with the sword and cast off all pity, and his anger tore perpetually, and he kept his wrath forever” (1:11). These statements could be describing treaty-breaking like Tyre’s, but the expression *his brother* more likely indicates the Edomites’ egotistical disregard for their physical kinship with Judah (cf. the Book of Obadiah).⁵⁸

The nations’ sins reach their nadir in the last two of Amos’s oracles, which focus on *utter disrespect for human life and dignity*. The Ammonites “ripped open pregnant women in Gilead, that they might enlarge their border” (1:13). They valued land more than life. Moab “burned to lime the bones of the king of Edom” (2:1). The Moabites so wanted to degrade Edom that they evidently desecrated the tomb of one of its kings, exhumed his remains, and thoroughly incinerated them. Amos considers this entirely unacceptable even though he had earlier denounced Edom for its own abuses.

Amos censures the nations in other ways. He introduces each of his oracles with the expression *for three transgressions . . . and for four* (1:3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 2:1; cf. 2:4, 6). This formula does not necessarily mean that a specific number of sins will be enumerated. Scholars have suggested various ways for understanding the numbers here,⁵⁹ but ultimately the point is that the sin has exceeded the limit of divine toleration. The expression emphasizes that God has been exceedingly patient and is entirely justified in his punishment of the nations. Also significant is the term translated *transgressions*,

⁵⁵ See Jeff Niehaus, “Amos,” in *The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary*, ed. Thomas Edward McComiskey (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 1:341.

⁵⁶ Gary V. Smith, *Amos*, Mentor Commentaries (Fearn, Ross-shire, Great Britain: Mentor, 1998), 81.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 85–86.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 87–89.

⁵⁹ For instance, “three—no, four,” implying compounded sins, or “three plus four,” equaling seven, a number symbolizing completeness. Compare Niehaus, 340, with Smith, 69–70.

פָּשַׁע. The root has to do with “a breach of relationships.”⁶⁰ It describes breaches in various kinds of relationships such as the relationship between family members (Gn 50:17), between fellow citizens (Ex 22:9), between people and their rulers (1 Kgs 12:19), and between Israel and Yahweh (Is 1:2). As seen in the last two examples, depending on the kind of relationship פָּשַׁע can refer to rebellion or revolt. Amos’s use of פָּשַׁע for the nations’ sins implies a relationship between the nations and God as their sovereign or between the nations and fellow human beings.

Whichever relationship is in view, Amos assumes that God has international expectations for justice. These requirements cannot be tied strictly to the fact that the nations had oppressed God’s covenant people, since the sins identified were committed against both Israelites and non-Israelites. To borrow Hammershaimb’s words, Amos is describing “breaches of a universally valid moral law.”⁶¹ The oracles’ assumed requirements are largely negative in nature (e.g., cruelty is disallowed). As with Isaiah 24:5, some commentators connect these to the humanity-wide prohibition of murder in Genesis 9:6.⁶² But Amos also assumes at least one positive expectation: nations ought to be honest and abide by treaties they make (1:9).

Whether negative or positive, Amos’s requirements transcend cultural and covenantal variations and convey divine standards for justice in society throughout the world. This represents a complement to the important distinction between Israel and the church. One must not entirely equate the collection of documents known as “the Old Testament” with the arrangement Yahweh made with Israel known as “the Old Covenant.” The Old Testament is broader than the Old Covenant, and it contains authoritative instruction for humanity at large—including instruction on societal justice.

The Prophetic Anticipation of God’s Kingdom on Earth

In contrast to Israelite and Gentile injustice, the Prophetic Books join with passages such as Psalm 72 in anticipating complete justice in the world through God’s ultimate Anointed King. Hosea points in this direction in an early prediction of the New Covenant (2:19–20). But Isaiah in particular feeds the hope for a just society. Chapter 9’s beloved promise says that the climactic Davidic kingdom will be established and upheld “with justice [מִשְׁפָּט] and with righteousness [צְדִיקָה]” forever (v. 7; cf. 16:5). Those who patiently wait for this are declared blessed (30:18). Isaiah 42 announces not only that the Servant the Lord will bring מִשְׁפָּט to the nations but also that—unlike so many past rulers—he will deal tenderly with the weak (vv. 1–4). In the future kingdom Yahweh’s מִשְׁפָּט will function as a light to guide the nations (51:4–5). Based on all the foregoing, one may conclude that God receives a measure of glory when the same light guides the nations today even partially. Furthermore, if believers yearn for societal justice in the future Messianic age, does it not stand to reason that they will

⁶⁰ G. Herbert Livingston, “פָּשַׁע (*pāsha*) ‘rebel, transgress, revolt,’” *TWOT*, 2:741. R. Knierim argues for פָּשַׁע as fundamentally a legal term meaning “crime.” This definition would only strengthen the point being made above. See “פָּשַׁע *peša* ‘crime,’” *TLOT*, 2:1033–37.

⁶¹ Erling Hammershaimb, *The Book of Amos: A Commentary*, trans. John Sturdy (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1970), 22. More broadly on this point, see John Barton, *Amos’s Oracles against the Nations: A Study of Amos 1.3–2.5*, The Society for Old Testament Study Monograph Series 6 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1980).

⁶² See, for example, Niehaus, 340.

pursue such justice to whatever degree possible in this age? As Abernethy writes, “Since God ‘love[s] justice’ (61:8) and even enters the fray because he is so appalled by the injustice in this world (59:15), it is fitting for his servants to advocate for the vulnerable, set captives free and provide for those in need. The people should be like their king, for they are beneficiaries of God’s own justice and righteousness.”⁶³

Conclusion

The present study has traced the theme of societal justice throughout the OT, particularly as reflected in the key terms **מִשְׁפָּט** and **צִדְקָה**. It has shown that Yahweh expected Israel not to oppress others and to uphold fairness in the courts. More actively, the Israelites were to rescue those in their midst who were suffering oppression. More actively still, the justice of the theocracy was linked with humanitarianism, making material provision for the destitute in the covenant community. Finally, God’s will for Israel’s society reflected patterns expected of nations the world over. The OT reveals elements that God loves and hates in human society at large.

On the other hand, this article has not proposed specific laws or policies that modern nations should adopt. Nor has it called the institutional church to participate in societal or political enterprises. Resolving such matters requires more than the OT. Major NT factors to consider include the mission of the church as well as the Christian’s relationship to the state.

What the OT does, however, is to provide substantial teaching for developing an ethic and vision for societal life. This revelation constitutes a core element of the biblical benchmark for assessing contemporary notions of “social justice.”⁶⁴ Perhaps just as importantly, it will help the believer not to minimize his responsibilities in overreaction to unbiblical perspectives on the subject. The OT material ought to shape the conscience, affections, and objectives of the Christian. It directs him as to the kind of person he should become, the kind of behavior that should characterize his life, the kinds of relationships he should cultivate, and the kinds of socio-political strategies and tactics he should use his influence to promote—all by the enabling grace of the gospel. Ultimately, the OT displays the character of the God who has created and redeemed the believer. Worshiping this God and reflecting him in the world becomes the goal of the disciple of Jesus Christ.

⁶³ Andrew T. Abernethy, *The Book of Isaiah and God’s Kingdom: A Thematic-Theological Approach*, NSBT (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2016), 190–91.

⁶⁴ The present study has opted for the expression *societal justice* due to the problematic associations of “social justice.” For an entry point to the discussion, including bibliography, see <https://shenviapologetics.com/intro-to-critical-theory/>. Helpful works from a Christian perspective include Scott Allen, *Why Social Justice Is Not Biblical Justice: An Urgent Appeal to Fellow Christians in a Time of Social Crisis* (Grand Rapids: Credo House, 2020); Mike Moses, “Privilege, Oppression, and the Gospel: A Biblical Response to Intersectionality,” *Presbyterion* 45, vol. 1 (2019): 128–52; Thaddeus J. Williams, *Confronting Injustice without Compromising: 12 Questions Christians Should Ask about Social Justice* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2020). See also Helen Pluckrose and James Lindsay, *Cynical Theories: How Activist Scholarship Made Everything about Race, Gender, and Identity—and Why This Harms Everybody* (Durham, NC: Pitchstone, 2020); Noah Rothman, *Unjust: Social Justice and the Unmaking of America* (Washington, DC: Regnery Gateway, 2019).

Should the Minister Get a Job? A Case Study on Normativity in 1 and 2 Thessalonians

Neal Cushman¹

It is a well-known feature that Paul worked outside of direct ministry for the purpose of supporting himself, evidently making tents for a living (Acts 18:3). From his example, some have inferred recently that this approach is the superior means of accomplishing gospel ministry.² A segment of the American house-church movement seeks to simplify the task of church planting in this way, entirely eliminating the expenses of buildings and paid clergy.³ However, the arena where bivocational ministry is advocated the most is in missions. Since the church seems to be facing a financial crisis, as demonstrated in deputation experiences that extend between three and five years, perhaps the church may look to its members who are willing to vocationally support themselves on the mission field. In response to this financial dilemma, missions practitioners suggest “tentmaking” as a viable alternative to traditional methods of raising support.⁴ In this way, the tentmaker works a part time or full time job on the target field, seeking to build relationships on the job, with the hope of gospel witness. Furthermore, in whatever time is left, the tentmaker works in the direct ministry of preaching, prayer, visitation, counseling, etc.

¹ Neal Cushman is professor of New Testament and dean of BJU Seminary. He has served as a missionary pastor in Canada as well as an undergraduate Bible and seminary professor for over twenty-five years.

² Older pastoral ministry manuals suggest secular work as a solution to financial woes connected to being underpaid in the ministry. Mark Lee presents such a scenario in *The Minister and His Ministry*: “If a minister and his wife feel that one or the other must supplement their income with extra work, let them discuss the matter with the officers of the church and so avoid misunderstanding. If the case is well presented [sic] the officers may detect the need which was missed before and propose a more equitable salary for their pastor.” *The Minister and His Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1960), 122. More recently, authors on pastoral practice have encouraged pastors to consider “bivocational” ministry in certain instances, arguing that Paul was bivocational. The two instances which Doris Borchert cites where this is especially effective is in new church plants and in church situations where one attempts to rejuvenate a church that has “plateaued.” David P. Gushee and Walter C. Jackson, eds., *Preparing for Christian Ministry: An Evangelical Approach* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1996), 148–49. See also Dennis W. Bickers, *The Tentmaking Pastor: The Joy of Bivocational Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000) and C. Neal Johnson, *Business as Mission: A Comprehensive Guide to Theory and Practice* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2009) for advocacy of “business as mission.”

³ One of the tenets of the house church movement is the idea that the traditional church wastes large amounts of money on its buildings, programs, and even on its ministers. A tentmaking mentality, on the other hand, streamlines the ministry effectiveness of the church, enabling it to pour its funds directly into evangelism and discipleship. For a rejoinder to this idea, see “Financing Apostolic Ministry,” at <https://church-planting.net/FreeDownloads/Operations/Ministry%20Financing.pdf>, accessed August 1, 2020.

⁴ The term “tentmaker” generally designates a vocational minister who engages in secular work alongside of traditional ministry functions. The phrase “Business as Mission” is an approach to life and work that sees business as ministry when it is carried out with the Great Commission in mind. “Business as Mission” advocates argue that all of life is mission for the believer.

Hermeneutical Considerations

Although other motivations exist for a missions strategy that includes tentmaking,⁵ the most obvious question at this juncture is whether or not the Bible supports the idea of tentmaking as the *preferable ministry model*. Paul did it; should we?

Questions of Normativity

The term “normativity” in biblical studies is generally prescriptive. If a passage of Scripture instructs the original reader to do or think something, the activity or belief is considered “normative” if subsequent readers of this passage are required to do or think likewise. For instance, Paul instructs the Thessalonian church to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thes 5:17). The command is easily understood and applied without question by all generations of believers. However, nine verses later Paul instructs the same church to “greet all the brothers with a holy kiss” (1 Thes 5:26). In contrast to the previous command, few believers practice this type of greeting in churches today. Each text contains an imperative verb, yet only the former command is considered “normative” for all believers in the church age. Most interpreters would argue that the “holy kiss” practice is grounded in first century Greco-Roman culture and is therefore not required for believers in churches today.

Paul’s Example

In some respects, Paul’s practice may not provide a helpful model for today’s minister. For example, Paul typically sought to start churches in cities with synagogues, preaching Christ first to the Jews. Many cities of the twenty-first century do not have a synagogue, so following Paul’s pattern in this respect would mean avoiding these cities, or at least postponing evangelism there. Paul’s pattern also raises the question of whether to prioritize the Jewish population in a city with a synagogue before sharing the gospel with that city’s gentiles.

In another instance Paul made a vow to the Lord and shaved his head in demonstration of his adherence to the law (Acts 21:23–24), believing that this would assure a Jewish audience that he had not abandoned his Jewish heritage. Surely this is not a necessary aspect of church ministry today. On the other hand, Paul sometimes eschewed Jewish norms; contrary to typical Hebrew practice, he decided not to get married (1 Corinthians 7).⁶ In one case he followed Jewish norms; in the other he rejected them. It is important to note that Paul had a particular reason to avoid marriage due to the

⁵ The viability of utilizing tentmaking to reach “creative access” countries is not the subject of this paper. The importance of such access is underlined by the fact that, as of the beginning of the twenty-first century, eighty-three percent of the world’s unbelievers live in such countries. See Tetsuano Yamomori, *God’s New Envoys: A Bold Strategy for Penetrating Closed Countries* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 1987). Paul was able to travel freely throughout the Roman empire without passport or visa. Today’s world, however, is not so easily accessed. To live in these countries in the twenty-first century, one must often have a secular job. Thus, today’s tentmaking missionary has entirely different motivations than Paul’s. See also Patrick Lai, *Tentmaking: The Life and Work of Business as Missions* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2012), for a defense of tentmaking for the purpose of gaining access into visa restricted nations.

⁶ For a classic examination of Paul’s methods of ministry, see Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods: St. Paul’s or Ours?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962).

nature of his ministry, along with the difficult circumstances he faced. Regarding application to the members of the Corinthian church, for some he encouraged a celibate life; others he exhorted to marry. In each instance, Paul had compelling reasons to do and to say what he did, so it is valid to question the normativity of these practices today, particularly if one's circumstances do not closely resemble Paul's. If we made Paul's example normative, ministry methods today would look quite different.

Following Paul's missionary strategy narrowly would require ministering only in those places where Christ is not known (Rom 15:17–24). If every minister of the gospel did this, no one would oversee the ministries that have already been started. Rather, Paul often sent members of his missionary team to establish and maintain churches that had been planted at an earlier date. We may therefore conclude that Paul's exhortation to his churches to imitate him does not extend to every detail of his life.⁷

Even more perplexing are the commands of Paul, as they seem to wield more authority than mere example. Thus, should today's church members "greet one another with a holy kiss" (1 Thes 5:26; 1 Cor 16:20)? Are women never to speak in church (1 Cor 14:33–36)? Since Paul describes women speaking in church in an approving manner in an earlier pericope (1 Cor 11:2–16), it is likely that the injunction in chapter 14 requires some qualification.⁸

All of this amounts to somewhat of a dilemma for the student of the word of God. Adhering to Hirsch's classic distinction between "meaning" and "significance" means admitting to a single interpretation of a passage, with many applications.⁹ However, are there any limits to those applications? Since it is patently clear from both Thessalonian epistles that Paul vocationally supported himself for the purpose of helping the church grow in Christ, should not all clergy be ready and willing to do the same?¹⁰ Even more, should they not follow Paul's example and actually get a job in addition

⁷ Paul encourages others to follow his example or even to imitate his life in at least six texts of the New Testament: 1 Cor 4:15–17; 11:1; Phil 3:17; 4:9; 2 Thes 3:7–9; 2 Tm 3:10–11.

⁸ Thomas Schreiner argues that Paul was addressing a particular problem in Corinth with its women: the women of the church were causing a disorder, so they were to remain silent. Thomas R. Schreiner, *Interpreting the Pauline Epistles*, Guides to New Testament Exegesis (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990), 153. Schreiner rightly observes that since Paul permits women to speak in church in 1 Corinthians 11, his instructions in chapter 14 must be occasional in nature; they should not be construed as providing an absolute rule for the church.

⁹ It is important to understand Hirsch's use of the terms "meaning," "understanding," "interpretation," and "significance." "[Meaning] embraces not only any content of mind represented by written speech but also the affects and values that are necessarily correlative to such a content." E. D. Hirsch, *The Aims of Interpretation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 8. "Interpretation" joins two successive activities—first, the "understanding of meaning," and second, the "explication of meaning" (which includes meaning and significance). Ibid., 19. In other places Hirsch seems to use the terms in a different sense. *Validity in Interpretation* describes "understanding" as "that which is prior and different from interpretation," similar to Martin Heidegger's "pre-understanding." *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale, 1967), 135. In this text Hirsch names "understanding" as a "construction of meaning," or a combination of meaning and significance. "Interpretation," on the other hand, is an "explanation of meaning." Ibid., 136.

¹⁰ Bloecher opines that although Paul argued that preachers of the Word were entitled to financial support, he would not accept it, rejecting this right so that he could reach "the maximum number of people for Christ." "Getting Perspective," in *Working Your Way to the Nations: A Guide to Effective Tentmaking*, ed. Jonathan Lewis, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1996), 18. This unqualified statement appears to imply that if you really care about reaching the maximum people for the gospel, you should emulate Paul. You should get a job.

to their ministerial duties? This question becomes more poignant when one observes Paul specifically exhorting believers in Thessalonica to work based on his own example:

For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you. It was not because we do not have that right, but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate (2 Thes 3:7–9).¹¹

Paul appears to argue that his practice of working with his hands was beneficial for the Thessalonian church; therefore, the Thessalonian believers should imitate Paul in this respect. Moreover, perhaps today's clergy should set a similar example.

Solving the Significance Dilemma

Schreiner solves the significance problem by analyzing every possible application of Scripture in four steps: 1) “formulating a principle from the passage; 2) consulting all the Pauline teaching on the issue; 3) constructing his teaching into a unified whole; and 4) determining whether Paul's advice is solely explicable from the specific situation he addressed or whether it stems from God's intention in creation.”¹² The first challenge for employing Schreiner's method is the difficulty of coming up with an appropriate principle to accurately reflect the meaning of the text. For instance, what principle might be appropriate for Paul's instruction that women should wear veils (1 Cor 11:2–16)? Since it would seem that wearing veils was a cultural feature of Paul's day, should one draw from this passage the principle that a woman's head must be covered in some way, presumably by a hat or scarf? Or should the principle be to show submission to the husband in a culturally acceptable manner? One principle is physical in nature, while the other is somewhat abstract.

A second difficulty with Schreiner's grid is the order of the steps that he advocates in his theological method. By moving from an examination of the target passage (step 1) to Paul's relevant teaching in all of his writings (steps 2 and 3), the theologian may inadvertently draw conclusions which obscure his understanding of the particular circumstances of the target letter's recipients. Perhaps it would be better to place step 4 in front of steps 2 and 3.¹³

Thus, it is advisable for the exegete to thoroughly seek the meaning of the passage before formulating a universal principle. Likewise, he should postpone an examination of other texts in order for the target passage to be understood on its own merits. If one must resort to 1 Corinthians in order to understand and properly apply 1 Thessalonians, what does that say about the original reader of 1 Thessalonians who did not have access to Paul's later writings? Is he left without a valid application?

¹¹ Unless otherwise noted, Scriptures quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

¹² Schreiner, *Interpreting the Pauline Epistles*, 159.

¹³ Schreiner's order does allow for the fourth step as a check against unwarranted conclusions that occur during the first three steps.

This is not to diminish the importance of a coherent theology that is derived by considering the teaching of the entire canon of Scripture. Rather, it is to postpone this step in one's theological method so that the individual writing can be adequately heard. Thus, one may find that Paul's reason for working with his hands in Thessalonica is unique. Once this is discovered, it is entirely appropriate to investigate why he worked with his hands in other cities.

Third, Schreiner's baseline for his cultural analysis (step 4) appears to be limited to those things that are grounded in creation. He states in his final step that one can ascertain if an activity is normative by "determining whether Paul's advice is solely explicable from the specific situation he addressed or whether it stems from God's intention in creation."¹⁴ Therefore, human practices may be divided into two categories; those practices that stem "from God's intention in creation," and those practices that are situational, or culturally bound. Although this strategy may work well regarding the question of male headship (1 Cor 11), it does not provide a good rubric for appropriate foods for people to eat (Gn 1:28–30).¹⁵ Moreover, the guidelines for acceptable foods changed several times in the various dispensations that God established.¹⁶ Thus, we acknowledge that God may have different expectations for people of different eras and cultures.

Contrary to Schreiner, J. Robertson McQuilkin argues that the biblical "form" should not be dismissed so easily in seeking an appropriate application.¹⁷ He is concerned that so many teachings of Jesus and the apostles could be regarded as "historic-specific" that they would not be regarded as being normative for today's reader.¹⁸ He suggests, "Scripture itself may limit the audience in the immediate context through a specific statement of the author or through an obvious requirement of the historical setting."¹⁹ Therefore, according to McQuilkin, unless the Scriptures indicate that a form is only for a select audience, then it can be considered normative for today.²⁰ Thus, the challenge for the interpreter of Scripture is to discover if sufficient evidence exists in the text to limit the application of the "form" to the original audience.

¹⁴ *Interpreting the Pauline Epistles*, 159.

¹⁵ For a thorough discussion on the question of whether or not women should wear headcoverings while engaged in church worship, see David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic), 505–32. Garland discusses the merits of the various interpretations of this passage and concludes that the traditional view is best: head coverings for women who worship in church are necessary due to the cultural contexts where they exist. To not do so will bring shame and dishonor upon the church of God (see especially pp. 505–11).

¹⁶ See Gen 9:3–5; Lev 11:1–47; and Acts 10:9–43.

¹⁷ *Understanding and Applying the Bible*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 1992), 281.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 282.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ "Problems of Normativeness in Scriptures: Cultural Versus Permanent," in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy and the Bible*, ed. E. D. Radmacher and R. D. Preus (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 219–22. Robert Thomas agrees with this approach, as it best represents a high view of inspiration. Thomas, however, presents an eclectic grid for determining normativity: 1) Does the context limit the recipient or application? 2) Does subsequent revelation limit the recipient or the application? 3) Is this specific teaching in conflict with other biblical teaching? 4) Is the reason for a norm given in Scriptures, and is that reason treated as normative? 5) Is the specific teaching normative as well as the principle? 6) Does the Bible treat the historic context as normative? 7) Does the Bible treat the cultural context as limited? Robert L. Thomas, *Evangelical Hermeneutics: The New Versus the Old* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002), 390.

For McQuilkin, cultural “forms” in Scripture are somewhat more complicated:

Most of us might agree that washing another’s feet at mealtime, leaving ladies’ hair uncut, and other such commands are culturally specific and therefore do not apply universally. Specifically, they do not apply to us! However, we have discovered that the same principle can apply to virtually any teaching of Scripture. But to set aside any Scripture simply on the basis that it is cultural and therefore valid for only one specific cultural setting, is to establish a principle that can be used to set aside any or even all biblical teaching.²¹

McQuilkin’s overarching concern is that Scripture not be robbed of its authority due to a cultural interpretation.²² Would it not be possible to argue that Christ’s teaching on divorce or Paul’s warning against homosexuality could be divested of authority by saying that they were addressing specific cultural problems?

One can appreciate McQuilkin’s approach to applying the Scriptures. He allows for cultural adjustments in applying texts, but he assumes that practices that are described in Scripture are authoritative, unless the Bible clearly indicates otherwise. However, McQuilkin makes a category mistake when approaching the question of “work” in the Thessalonian epistles. Instead of categorizing Paul’s work practice as a “historic-specific” matter, McQuilkin labels it as a cultural feature of Thessalonian life.

Paul used a cultural argument to support his injunction to work with one’s hands (1 Thes 1:11). Scripture may not give a reason for a teaching, but if it does, the reason becomes part of the teaching. Here, the reason given is not some eternal moral principle, but a cultural argument: “so that you may behave *properly* (emphasis his) toward outsiders and not be in any need” (4:12). In other words, the enduring principle is given that Christians should earn their livelihood as a testimony to non-Christians. It reflects the cultural pattern (“properly”) that, for Christians in Thessalonica, would mean manual labor. Since the argument is based on culture, if that cultural situation is not present, only the principle (not the command) should be made normative. In this case, the cultural factor is not imposed externally but is part of Paul’s argument. Paul does not make the cultural context of the command a universal norm, and we are not obliged to duplicate the cultural context of the command to work.²³

McQuilkin’s assertion that Paul is addressing a cultural feature in Thessalonica is based on the clause, “so that you may behave *properly* towards outsiders and not be in any need”; he suggests that the term “properly” indicates observance of appropriate cultural norms in a particular context.²⁴ On this basis Thessalonian believers were commanded to do *manual labor* because this practice was appropriate to the culture of this city. However, for the contemporary believer the universal principle is to earn a livelihood through work.

Although the adverb “properly” (εὐσχημόνως) could refer to appropriate cultural behavior, it is not likely that it indicates that here. The clause cited above is part of a sentence that extends from 4:10b to 4:12, and is structured as follows:

²¹ McQuilkin, *Understanding and Applying the Bible*, 290–91.

²² J. Robertson McQuilkin, “Limits of Cultural Interpretation” *JETS* 23 (1980), 113–20.

²³ McQuilkin, *Understanding and Applying the Bible*, 291.

²⁴ Ibid.

But we exhort you, brothers
 that you abound more and more,
 and that you aspire to live quietly,
 and that you practice your own business,
 and that you work with your own hands,
 just as we commanded you
 that you might walk properly towards outsiders,
 and that you might not have need of anything.

Paul's exhortation contains four infinitive clauses that are grammatically parallel to each other and act as the object of Paul's exhortation. The first of these clauses expands on the idea that was introduced in the previous sentence (4:9–10a), that of "loving one another." Paul instructs the Thessalonian church to abound more and more in their love for one another. Specifically, this would be accomplished by living a quiet life, avoiding being a busybody, and engaging in labor for the purposes of supporting oneself. All of these elements comprise what it means to live "properly" before unbelievers.

Thus, it is odd that McQuilkin would isolate the idea of "working with one's hands" as the only culture-specific practice described in the exhortation.²⁵ Rather, it is reasonable to conclude that Paul was addressing a work issue that had arisen in the church at Thessalonica, and that he endeavored to take several measures at correcting the problem. Therefore, McQuilkin could have achieved a better conclusion by treating this situation as a "historic-specific" practice.

It appears best to assume that Paul's exhortations, commands, and even his example are normative for today, unless the text provides some limitations to the application of the text.²⁶ Yet several issues remain. Does proper interpretation lead to appropriate application? If this is indeed the case, then one must pursue the meaning of the text, assuming that it will contain indicators that limit the application of its teaching to the modern audience. This study seeks first to prove that point.

Second, is it possible to discover if an activity is normative for the modern reader simply by examining data contained in the letter itself? Must one resort to arguments from other portions of the Bible to arrive at an answer?²⁷ This paper will seek to discover if Paul teaches, through his example and

²⁵ See footnote 33.

²⁶ For other helpful perspectives on normativity, see G. W. Knight III., "A Response to Problems of Normativeness in Scriptures: Cultural Versus Permanent," in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy and the Bible*, ed. E. D. Radmacher and R. D. Preus (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 241–53; and Alan F. Johnson, "A Response to Problems of Normativeness in Scriptures: Cultural Versus Permanent," in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy and the Bible*, ed. E. D. Radmacher and R. D. Preus (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 257–82.

²⁷ I ascribe to a theological method that utilizes first exegesis and then biblical theology. I recognize the value of chronologically tracing a theme through Scriptures but argue that biblical theology first examines what a biblical author says about a theme and, at times, even confines that study to a particular audience. Since Paul's tentmaking practice occurs in both Thessalonica and Corinth, this approach is especially important, for Paul may have engaged in secular work in these cities for different reasons. Following this step, one may expand to other books of the Bible to gain a wider perspective and to observe progressive revelation on a theme. Systematic theology may then be employed, utilizing historical theology and other sources that are helpful to interpretation and application. I owe much of my thinking on this to Michael Stallard, who introduced a form of this methodology to me in his Advanced Theological Method class, Baptist Bible Seminary, Clark Summit, PA. Harold Hoehner supports this approach: "Specific passages must be examined in light of the theological framework of the specific work of the writer of Scriptures. This is biblical theology. This step attempts to prevent the

instructions, that it is better for the minister of the gospel to support himself through “secular” work by examining the Thessalonian epistles alone. This is not to disparage a wider approach to biblical theology that examines a theme in the entire canon chronologically; rather, it reserves it as the “next step.” I advocate that one should begin by approaching a writing as the original reader only could, as a self-contained communication.²⁸ Therefore, both 1 and 2 Thessalonians will be utilized because they were written to the same people, with little intervening time between their composition.²⁹ In addition, Paul develops the “work” theme progressively through each epistle, culminating his argument in the final chapter of 2 Thessalonians.

Therefore, this paper will demonstrate that the significance of a text is restricted by the meaning. It will be seen that Paul’s decision not to be remunerated by the Thessalonian church was based on his narrow set of circumstances at this church. Thus, his decision to do “secular” work is not to be considered as normative for clergy today.

The “Work” Theme in Thessalonians

Although Paul speaks of “work” often in his letters, he does so nowhere more frequently than in the Thessalonian epistles.³⁰ One wonders if he does not set the tone for his first letter in his initial words of commendation: “remembering before our God and Father your *work* of faith and *labor* of love and *steadfastness* of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thes 1:3, emphasis added). The work terminology (work, labor, and steadfastness³¹) used here is descriptive of how much effort the Thessalonians have put into their growth in Christ. Although Paul does not address the issue of “working for a living” here, he seems to plant seed thoughts to the effect that the believers at Thessalonica were willing to work. This thought is furthered in the second epistle in Paul’s

theologian from taking passages out of context or bending passages of Scriptures to fit a personal theology.” Roy B. Zuck, ed., *A Biblical Theology of the New Testament* (Chicago: Moody, 1994), 9.

²⁸ One could also propose that the Thessalonian reader had access to antecedent Scriptures, but we cannot assume that he had actually read or heard these documents.

²⁹ The case for 2 Thessalonians being the first communication to the church is not a compelling one. That 1 Thessalonians speaks of persecution in the past, while 2 Thessalonians speaks of it in the present is not enough to convince this author (cf. 1 Thes 1:6 and 2:14 with 2 Thes 1:4). Rather, the pastoral tone of 1 Thessalonians seems much more in keeping with how Paul would have communicated with new believers. Second, the eschatological concerns of the first letter are simpler than that of the second one. Nonetheless, one cannot be dogmatic on this point. It appears that the second letter was written shortly after the first, allowing time for Timothy to return to Paul in Corinth to give a second report of the Thessalonian condition. Therefore, it is likely that the entire span of Paul’s span of communication with the church there took place within five or six months, placing the date of 1 Thessalonians at about AD 50.

³⁰ “Work” terminology—*ἐργάζομαι*, *ἔργον*, *κόπος*, *ὑπομονή*, *μόχθος*, *κοπιᾶω*—occurs in Pauline literature as follows: Romans, .93%; 1 Corinthians, .46%; Philippians, .96%; 1 Thessalonians, 3.37%; 2 Thessalonians, 6.38%; 1 Timothy, .89%; 2 Timothy, 1.2% (*Bible Works* 7.0.012g, copyright, 2006). Therefore, less than 1 percent of all the words in Romans are “work” terms, but in 1 and 2 Thessalonians, “work” language comprises over three percent of the words in the first epistle and over six percent in the second.

³¹ Although “steadfastness” (*ὑπομονή*) might not strictly be considered “work” terminology, it remains part of Paul’s overall conception of work. Paul links “work,” “labor,” and “endurance” together in the Christian life because the latter term denotes a constancy that is so often missing in some (see 1 Thes 1:3). Likewise, it must be true of those who provide for their families’ physical needs.

thanksgiving section where he praises the Thessalonians for their progress in faith and love (1:3), but prays that God might count them worthy of their calling, and that they might progress further in the *work* of faith that had already developed in their lives (1:11).

In fourteen instances in the Thessalonian letters “work” terminology denotes some sort of job that one might have, whether it be labor for the gospel’s sake, or whether it be for secular employment.³² For instance, Paul admonishes the Thessalonians to hold those who labor in the gospel in highest regard “because of their work” (1 Thes 5:12–13). In addition, he describes his own ministry among the Thessalonians as “work” (1 Thes 3:5). It is therefore reasonable to say that, as part of his strategy for writing both epistles, Paul emphasizes the importance of work, both in one’s walk with Christ and in one’s responsibility to provide for the physical needs of his family. Yet this final issue provoked the most concern in both Thessalonian letters, as can be demonstrated.

“Working with Your Hands”³³

Paul’s admonition to do physical work came during his first visit to Thessalonica at the founding of the church: “But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more, and to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, *as we instructed you*, so that you may live properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.”³⁴ Paul is compelled here to reemphasize what he had already taught, presumably during his initial visit to Thessalonica. Paul cites this original exhortation in the second letter, further demonstrating the point that his teaching on this matter can be tracked to his earliest times with the Thessalonians (2 Thes 3:10). Evidently, either Paul noticed tendencies towards laziness within the Thessalonian church, or this teaching was part of his normal discipleship training. In either case, Paul felt the need to reemphasize this point in his first letter to them.

Furthermore, the apostle felt the need to be more explicit about this topic in his closing exhortations in the first letter: “And we urge you, brothers, *admonish the idle*, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all.”³⁵ Following Paul’s instructions to church members to show special respect to those Christian workers who “labor” (κοπιᾶω) among them for their work’s (ἔργον) sake (5:12–13), Paul admonishes believers to warn the “idle” (ἄτακτος).³⁶ He

³² 1 Thes 2:9; 3:5; 4:11; 5:12, 13, 14; 2 Thes 3:8, 10, 11, 12.

³³ It is interesting that Paul speaks of work in this manner. “Working with your hands” probably describes nearly every job of the first century. If one were to follow this admonition explicitly, one would have to rule out many of the jobs of the twenty-first century.

³⁴ 1 Thes 4:10b–12, emphasis mine.

³⁵ 1 Thes 5:14, emphasis mine.

³⁶ The adverb form (ἀτάκτως) occurs in 2 Thes 3:6 and 3:11. Both the adjective (ἄτακτος, 5:14) and the adverb (ἀτάκτως, 3:6, 11) may be rendered as “disorderly,” “insubordinate,” “idle,” or “indolent.” Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick W. Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), *s.vv.* ἄτακτος, ἀτάκτως. Although I have translated these as “idle” above, these terms may have the sense of “disorderly” or “insubordinate”; however, this possibility does not adversely affect my argument. The critical element is that believers described here have not subjected themselves to the teaching of the apostles and are therefore

“urges” (παρακαλέω) these believers not to neglect these issues in the church.³⁷ From this it seems all too evident that Paul is addressing particular believers who have dishonored God by their laziness. It is reasonable to assume that Timothy and Silas brought word back to Paul of this condition, among other things, prior to his writing the first letter.³⁸ Thus, their report became part of the occasion for the epistle’s concerns. It can be concluded then, that at the writing of 1 Thessalonians, there were those in the church of Thessalonica who did not work to support themselves.

The second epistle raises the same issues, though with more urgency. Evidently, Paul’s admonition to the church about how to respond to those who persisted in their laziness was ineffective. The church had failed to warn these slothful saints sufficiently so that the problem had evidently grown worse. Now Paul was compelled to command the church to withdraw from every believer who lived this way (3:6–14).³⁹ The strength of the apostle’s command cannot be overstated here. He commands them “in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ,” employing the full confessional name of Christ (3:6). Paul regards the situation as perilous. Not only does the idle believer put a financial strain upon the rest of the congregation; he also spends his time in pursuits that damage the work of Christ (3:11). The only recourse is to separate from the disobedient brother in order to make him ashamed. Nonetheless, Paul qualifies, “Do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother” (3:15). The brother’s salvation is not in question, but his Christian testimony is.

Clearly, two problems existed in relation to a work ethic at the Thessalonian church. First, there were believers who did not support themselves sufficiently in the workplace. Second, the church was far too lenient in their treatment of these disobedient brothers. Paul warned them on at least two occasions prior to the writing of the second epistle, and they did not act. Now he constrains them to comply by apostolic command.

Paul’s Personal Work Ethic

Paul’s work habits, although not entirely unique to Thessalonica, were rather strict: Paul refused to receive any remuneration for his ministry from believers at Thessalonica.⁴⁰ As has already

insubordinate. A careful application of 2 Thessalonians 3:6–15 to Christian ministry would warrant the same process of separation for any type of unrepentant disobedience among believers.

³⁷ In seven instances Paul uses παρακαλέω to challenge the church: 1 Thes 4:1, 10, 18; 5:11, 14; 2 Thes 2:17; 3:12. But in three places, he combines this “urging” with “brothers” (ἀδελφός), which further strengthens the command: 1 Thes 4:1, 10; 5:14.

³⁸ According to 1 Thessalonians 3:1, Silas and Timothy seem to come to Paul when he sent for them. Following this request, Paul instructs Timothy to visit the church at Thessalonica again (1 Thes 3:2) in order to establish the believers there. At this point, it is clear that Paul was unaware of their spiritual progress (3:5), and so sends Timothy to gain an accurate report. Timothy’s report of the Thessalonian condition, then, comes to Paul in Corinth (Acts 18:1–5). Thus, the occasion for the first epistle to the Thessalonians occurs at this point. Paul writes to them to thank the Lord for their progress in the faith and to instruct them in some areas where they lack.

³⁹ Apart from the section on the “Man of Lawlessness” in chapter 2, this is the longest sustained discourse in 2 Thessalonians.

⁴⁰ He did, however, receive funds twice from Philippi (Phil 4:16). In order to support his claim that Paul consistently refused any wages for his preaching ministry, Lenski argues that these were “love” gifts, and not payment for ministry: “These were gifts of love, which for that reason Paul could not refuse; they were not pay, wages, support, not a

been noted, the church had persistent problems in the area of a proper work ethic. Therefore, Paul's personal work ethic took on new significance, for his example in this respect needed to be above reproach.

Paul argues that his visit to Thessalonica was not a failure (2:1). Even though there was opposition, Paul rests on the fact that God had entrusted him with the gospel (2:4). So as not to taint the gospel, the mission team was vigilant not to minister out of impure motives: they did not seek man's praise, but God's alone (2:6). In addition, the team determined to place no burden on the fledgling church, especially as it pertained to finances (2:6b–9). Paul calls them all to witness these things that he is now claiming—the facts are undeniable (2:10–12).

Paul formulates two arguments that support the financial integrity of the missionary team that worked in Thessalonica. First, as apostles of Christ, they had every right to receive remuneration from their converts (2:6b). Given Paul's plural form for "apostle," he does not use this as a technical term, but rather as a designation for all those who were sent out to serve Christ in gospel ministry. Thus, it may be surmised from this text that ministers of the gospel have every right to be supported by their parishioners.

Second, because of their love for those at Thessalonica, the missionary team members were willing to share not just the gospel, but also their lives (2:8). Given the context, the sharing of their lives could only mean the team's willingness to work night and day⁴¹ in ministry and secular work, to the extent that their very lives were being expended. It is important to note that Paul presents many images of compassion, gentleness, and love in this discourse section. To this end the missionary team endured toil and hardship in order to place no burden upon the church (3:9).⁴² Therefore, it can be clearly seen that although there were those who were willing to place a burden upon the church due to their poor work ethic, Paul would have no such thing in his personal life: he would rather sacrifice sleep, working night and day, in order to present an example to the Thessalonians.

violation of Paul's principle ever to preach the gospel gratis." Richard C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus and to Philemon* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1937), 249. Lenski's explanation regarding Paul's unwillingness to receive support for his ministry is inadequate for the following reasons: 1) Paul argued in his correspondence with the Corinthian church that it was the right of a minister of the gospel to be remunerated for his ministry (1 Cor 9:6–12); 2) the Philippian contributions to Paul's ministry aimed at meeting his daily needs (Phil 4:15–18); 3) Paul did not likely distinguish which gifts were motivated by love and which were motivated by pure duty; and 4) Paul had other reasons why he would not receive support from the church at Corinth (cf. 2 Cor 2:17 with 2 Cor 11:5). As to why there was no mention of the gifts from Philippi in the Thessalonian epistles, Bruce explains that perhaps the money given was not sufficient to eliminate work; or, perhaps Paul does not mention in order not to embarrass the Thessalonians. F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 45 (Waco, TX: Word, 1982), 35. Paul, on the other hand, does not hesitate to directly confront the Corinthian church with its failures (2 Cor 11:8–9).

⁴¹ "Night and day" are in the normal Pauline order. See also 1 Thes 3:10; 2 Thes 3:8; 1 Tm 5:5; and 2 Tm 1:3. Their labors were clearly not sporadic. Ramsay suggests that they began work long before dawn in order to have sufficient time during the day to evangelize and disciple. Cited in D. Edmond Hiebert, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, rev. ed. (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1992), 103.

⁴² The missionary team was determined not to be burdensome to the Thessalonian church. However, does a "mirror reading" of the text allow us to assume that other teachers were demanding payment for their services, as philosophers of that era did? See Hiebert, *Thessalonians*, 104. The text does not warrant this supposition. Other motivations caused Paul to act in this fashion.

The link between Paul's personal work ethic and that of the Thessalonians is clearest in the second letter. Paul reiterates his Thessalonian work ethic in the extensive discourse on idleness in the church (2 Thes 3:6–14). In this section he argues that the missionary team taught these things in a thorough manner: "Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us" (3:6). Paul affirms that his teaching was directly contrary to the practice of certain Thessalonian believers.

Not only Paul's teaching, but Paul's practice was contrary to their way of life: "For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you" (3:7–8). The missionary team took extreme measures, even to the point of paying for every meal that was offered them, so as to present a consistent pattern of a diligent work ethic.⁴³ Paul summarizes his reasons for living this way in verse 9: "It was not because we do not have that right, but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate." Thus, once again Paul reiterates the point that he had every right to be remunerated for his ministry work, but he chose rather to be an example of hard work so as to give the Thessalonians no opportunity for misunderstanding.

Therefore, it may be seen that Paul's unwillingness to be remunerated for ministry work is directly linked to the serious problem of laziness among some of the Thessalonians. That the church did not adequately address the problem exacerbated the situation. So Paul, although he was certainly accustomed to "working with his hands" in other places, must adopt this as his only source of income so as to deal with the unusual situation at Thessalonica.

Is Paul's Work Practice at Thessalonica Normative?

There are at least three different ways to approach the significance of Paul's work practice at Thessalonica. The first approach sees in Paul an unqualified pattern for Christian life and ministry. This entails preaching to "the Jews first" and seeking ministry opportunities where Christ is not yet named. Since Paul worked with his hands to support himself, every other minister of the gospel should too.

The second approach does not insist that in every situation one should refuse remuneration for ministry. Rather, the "core principle" of these texts in Thessalonians might lead one to believe that more effective ministry might be accomplished if a pastor would not receive money from his congregation. Or perhaps more generally, if the minister got a job, he might be able to widen his circle of contacts, therefore increasing the breadth of his ministry. Although such ideas do not directly appear in the text of the Thessalonian letters, if one were to draw a "principle" out of the Pauline work texts, it might be that "a secular job could help one's ministry."

⁴³ Contrary to this more literal understanding, Hiebert maintains that to eat food is not simply to take a meal, but rather to receive a "living" from the Thessalonians. *Thessalonians*, 371.

The third view holds that Paul's example may be considered normative unless it is limited by the occasion. For instance, in Paul's defense of his ministry team's model (1 Thes 2:1–12), he lists the following:

- 2:3 their exhortation had no deceit
- 2:4 they sought to please God, and not men
- 2:5 they refused to use flattery
- 2:6 they did not minister out of greed
- 2:6 they did not seek men's glory
- 2:7 they treated their converts gently
- 2:8–9 they supported themselves through their own work

All of these features of the missionary team could be considered normative for those who serve in ministry, but the text evidences limiting factors that demonstrate that some of the activity is occasional. That the last feature is not to be considered normative is supported from the Thessalonian epistles by the following limitations. First, Paul asserts that the ministry team had every right to receive support from the church (1 Thes 2:6; 2 Thes 3:9). In each instance where Paul speaks of his choice not to receive support, he makes it clear that he has the right to be paid by the church. Second, Paul determined that his team would be an example to those who were lazy. Lethargy was such a persistent problem at Thessalonica that the apostle had to take drastic measures to ensure that his message was properly received. Third, Paul determined to avoid being a "burden" to the church there, perhaps because the church already carried the burden of those who would not work.⁴⁴

Taken together, these features clearly indicate that Paul's financial practice was unique at Thessalonica. Therefore, this third approach is the reasonable solution to the question of normativity in relation to Paul's work habits in Thessalonians. In this situation Paul employed measures that would not be normal practice in ministry.

Apostolic Precedent

The normal practice established by the apostles in Acts 6 is that pastors should devote themselves to the ministry of the word and to prayer. Shortly after its founding in Acts 2, the church encountered a problem that posed a dilemma for the apostles: Should they divert their attention away from the ministry of the word and prayer in order to meet physical needs that had arisen in the church (Acts 6:1–2)? Instead, the Holy Spirit guided them to establish a new office in the church that would address these growing physical needs (6:3–4). This resolution preserved the crucial functions of the pastor and established a pattern. Pastors are to guard against the possibility that other activities could encroach upon their primary calling: the ministry of the word and prayer.

The Pastoral Epistles further support this pattern by 1) delineating qualifications for the pastoral office that include teaching;⁴⁵ 2) instructing pastors to focus on the ministry of the word and

⁴⁴ Paul seems to imply this in his exhortation to the lazy members of the church that they should "eat their own bread" (2 Thes 3:12).

⁴⁵ Compare the qualifications of overseers (1 Tm 3:1–7) with the qualifications of deacons (1 Tm 3:8–13; Acts 6:3). Both offices require management skills, but only the overseer requires the ability to teach. One can assume that the

prayer (1 Tm 2:1–4; 4:6, 11–16; 5:17; 2 Tm 2:1–2; 4:1–5); 3) teaching church congregations to financially support their pastors (1 Tm 5:17–18); and 4) warning pastors against entanglement in secular pursuits (1 Tm 6:6–10; 2 Tm 2:4). Neither these nor other texts prohibit secular work; rather, the minister of God is to conduct his personal and ecclesial life with wisdom and faith. If he feels the need to work in a secular job, he should have a *compelling reason* why this action would not compromise the apostolic pattern.

Application

Paul had a compelling reason why he should support himself by making tents in Thessalonica. Though pastors should focus on the ministry of the word and prayer, they may have valid reasons for engaging in secular work. For instance, new church plants or revitalizations often require additional funding during the initial stages of ministry, so the pastor must often work outside of the church to cover the basic needs of his family. One would hope that this arrangement would not be necessary as the church grows so that the pastor can focus on his calling. However, one must acknowledge that a “full-time” pastoral position may not be typical or possible in some cultural contexts.⁴⁶

In some cultural contexts, the pastor may widen his opportunities for evangelism and discipleship by working in the industry of the region. However, one must be wary of becoming so consumed in the secular employment that the ministry of the word and prayer is neglected.

As noted earlier in this paper, eighty-three percent of the world’s population resides in nations that are inaccessible to missionaries apart from “creative” strategies to enter them. Missionaries who seek to secure a visa to these areas of the world must enter as medical professionals, English teachers, travel agents, computer programmers, exporters, linguists, baristas, or one of many other business positions. Of course, some jobs consume so much time and energy that the work of ministry is minimized, motivating many to seek positions that allow for the greatest possible investment in ministry. This author would argue that these needs in the world represent a *compelling reason* for “tentmaking” in these contexts.

Summary

The question of normativity regarding Paul’s refusal to receive funding from the Thessalonians may be answered within the Thessalonian epistles alone. It is true that one could examine Paul’s practice elsewhere and come to similar conclusions, but the question of the original reader’s understanding of the text would have gone unanswered. As it stands, the original reader would have understood that Paul was acting in unusual ways because of the problems that existed within the

first deacons of the church possessed such teaching skills (Stephen, Acts 7; and Philip, Acts 8), but the ability to teach was not required to serve in the office of deacon.

⁴⁶ I am aware of many situations in the world in which the national pastor works for a portion of the day, and then studies, evangelizes, and disciples the rest of the day. This appears to be necessary in situations in which church growth is very slow and where the persecution of the church is prevalent.

reader's church. There would have been no question in the mind of this reader that if circumstances were better, Paul would have received remuneration from his converts.

Conclusion

Paul's work practice at Thessalonica provides a good opportunity to examine the relationship between meaning and significance. In this instance, it can be clearly seen that the meaning of the text limits the manner in which the text may be applied today. Paul worked a "secular" job in Thessalonica so that his example would reinforce his exhortation to the Thessalonian believers that they should engage in gainful employment. As a result, the apostolic pattern for elders is reinforced: pastors are to give themselves to the word and to prayer as their highest priorities in ministry.

“The Prayer of Faith Will Save the Sick”: Revisiting a Complex Passage in Light of Biblical Context—James 5:13–18

Brian Hand¹

Biblical theology offers such spiritual reward that it deserves to be treated as more than merely one viable approach among many. The reader who understands the theological themes within a book, the progressive revelatory development throughout the books, and the mutually informing relationships among the books has a much greater prospect of grasping what Scripture is saying in its particular contexts. Biblical theology helps the reader recognize theological boundaries (inhibiting heterodoxy) so that it becomes harder to take a biblical author out of his scriptural context. It also supplies theological background to guide us through thorny passages in which we find “some things . . . that are hard to understand” (2 Pt 3:16).² Applying the method of biblical theology to James 5:13–18 provides insight into James’s likely meaning.

Protestant theologians have long recognized the intractability of James 5:13–18.³ Daniel Hayden observes, “The evident promise inherent in the phrase ‘the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick’ (5:15) is an ever-lurking embarrassment for many who have known failure in trying to apply this passage to the physically ill.”⁴ Keith Warrington says, “James clearly expects the prayer of faith to succeed. In the absence of such success, many contemporary suggestions have been offered.”⁵ And R. Kent Hughes concludes, “*Prima facie* James’ directions did not ‘work’ for Ponnammal [a woman with cancer who grew worse and died after following the procedure outlined

¹ Brian Hand serves as professor of New Testament at BJU Seminary and a deacon of Cornerstone Baptist Church of Greenville, South Carolina. He is the author of *The Worthy Champion: A Christology of the Book of Revelation Based on Elements of Its Literary Composition* (Greenville, SC: BJU Press, 2008), *Upright Downtime: Making Wise Choices about Entertainment* (Greenville, SC: BJU Press, 2008), and *The Climax of Biblical Prophecy: A Guide to Interpreting Biblical Prophecy* (Greenville, SC: BJU Press, 2012).

² Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the ESV® Bible (The Holy Bible, English Standard Version®), copyright © 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

³ Andrew M. Bowden summarizes seven different interpretations of James 5. From his list, the view that most closely aligns with that of this paper is #4 (spiritual sickness/spiritual healing). One of Bowden’s most helpful contributions is his documenting the commentators who hold the various positions (e.g., Kaiser, Moo, Ropes, Windisch, Davids, Martin, Shogren, Popkes, and McKnight hold a physical sickness/physical healing view). “An Overview of the Interpretive Approaches to James 5.13–18,” *Currents in Biblical Research* 13/1 (2014): 67–81.

⁴ Daniel R. Hayden, “Calling the Elders to Pray,” *BibSac* 138/551 (1981): 263.

⁵ Keith Warrington, “James 5:14–18: Healing Then and Now,” *International Review of Mission* 93, nos. 370–71 (2004): 357. Warrington’s article provides helpful arguments from biblical and extra-biblical lexical uses of the terms involved.

by James]. . . . Honesty demands that we admit that such is often the case when Christians attempt to follow this Scripture.”⁶

Having agreed on the complexity of this passage, theologians diverge in their interpretation of it. Roman Catholicism teaches *The Anointing of the Sick*—known prior to the 1970s as Extreme Unction.⁷ This doctrine describes a process in which (1) those who are at the point of death can call for (2) a priest who has been appointed by a bishop (3) to pray for them as a representative of the only true church of Christ on earth and (4) to anoint them sacramentally in a fashion that (5) actually saves them spiritually from serious sins that would serve as serious impediments to eternal life and that had not been previously confessed to a priest. The following portion of the text that treats Elijah is largely irrelevant to the interpretation of the anointing of the sick.

Protestant theologians reject these points of Catholic interpretation, but they also differ from one another. Their interpretations form three major views (with several permutations of each): (1) that James 5:13–18 pertained to sickness only in the apostolic age and is inapplicable in the present; (2) that James addresses physical sickness in every age; or (3) that James addresses spiritual weakness. All of the Protestant interpretations have the advantage that they introduce fewer extra-textual concepts than the Catholic interpretation does, and the Protestant commentators handle the connection of James 5:13–16 with vv. 17–18 more effectively.⁸ For instance, James does not limit ἀσθενεῖ (sickness, v. 14) to a sickness to the point of death; he does not refer to ἱερεῖς (priests) but πρεσβυτέρους (elders); he does not specify a limited class of leaders who had been appointed by a particular high-ranking church authority; he does not ask the elders to pray as representatives of the only true church; and he does not state or imply that the *saving* in view is eschatological. Thus all of the Protestant interpretations handle the text more accurately than the Roman Catholic view.

Of the three Protestant interpretations, the belief that James addresses the healing of physical sickness in every era has greatest numerical support among the commentators.⁹ Both supporters and critics of this position point out that the sick person often grows worse or even dies in spite of having practiced what James says will save the sick. This disappointment leads to the introduction of a caveat concerning healing, namely, that James 5:13–18 applies only if the Lord wills.

While such a caveat demonstrates theological sensitivity to the overarching sovereignty of God, it also introduces two difficulties. First, a qualified approach to James’s use of ἀσθενεῖ appears to contradict similar instances of ἀσθενέω/ἀσθένεια in the Gospel accounts. Jesus and his disciples could heal all manner of sickness (Matt. 10:1) and even raise people from the dead (Matt. 10:8). In only one instance was an attempted exorcism unsuccessful (Matt. 17:14–21), and its ineffectiveness was due

⁶ R. Kent Hughes, *James: Faith that Works*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton: Crossway, 1991), 254.

⁷ Roger L. Omanson notes that even the Catholic Church did not view the passage as preparatory for death until the ninth century. “The Certainty of Judgment and the Power of Prayer: James 5,” *Review & Expositor* 83/ 3 (1986): 433.

⁸ John Christopher Thomas, for example, rejects the Roman Catholic doctrine and observes, “The purpose for the anointing he describes is to bring healing and preserve life, not to prepare for death.” “The Devil, Disease, and Deliverance: James 5.14–16,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 2 (1993): 36.

⁹ See Hughes, 255–60; Dan G. McCartney, *James*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 252–57; and Scot McKnight, *The Letter of James*, NICNT, ed. Gordon D. Fee (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 434–44.

not to variance with God’s will but to unbelief on the part of the disciples. Interpreting James 5:14 as physical healing introduces variance in the successfulness of healing in the NT—a variance that puts situational distance between the historical events of the Gospels and the ongoing events of James. Yet this new paradigm undermines the argument that James is using ἀσθενέω in a manner conditioned by the Gospel accounts. At very least, James is not addressing an ongoing capacity to heal that matches the disciples’ authority while Christ was on earth, yet James writes during the earliest stage of apostolic labor—a time in which miraculous sign gifts were still operational.

Second, replacing “the prayer of faith” with “the prayer that believes that the Lord will do what He wills” does not obviate the difficulty that the passage locates effectiveness in “the prayer of faith.” The main verb still indicates success in healing. See Table 1 below for a visual depiction of this attempted resolution to the problem

Table 1—The logical problem with substituting for “the prayer of faith”

the prayer of faith	will save the sick
the belief that God will do what he wills	will save the sick

Essentially this solution produces the statement “the belief that God will do whatever he wants to do will in fact save the sick.” The resultant statement asserts that the sick are saved on the basis that the one praying *believes* that God will do what he wants to do.

The dissonance between the Gospel accounts of healing and James’s accounts coupled with the seemingly intractable problem concerning the phrase, “the prayer of faith will save,” does not rule out the majority Protestant interpretation.¹⁰ It simply shows how hard it is for a single interpretation to explain all of the available data. This article will examine key concepts in both context and intertextuality that have a direct bearing on the interpretation of this passage.

The Context

One of the first complexities in the passage occurs in verse 14. James commands that the one who is ἀσθενεῖ (weak/sick) must call for the elders of the church to engage in a series of activities relevant to his weakness. Several contextual features may favor the perspective that ἀσθενεῖ addresses spiritual weakness or discouragement in regard to the faith.

¹⁰ Although the physical sickness/physical healing view has become the majority position, Bowden claims that “the earliest interpreters held to [the spiritual weakness] position, and the early church is silent about any sort of ritual for healing the sick as described in James” (73). The early church lay close to the era in which the apostolic gifts of healing were operative. It is demonstrable that both the Apostolic church father Clement and the Ante-Nicene commentators Origen and Chrysostom held that James 5 addresses spiritual sickness, not physical.

The Meaning of ἀσθένεια/ἀσθενέω

Conservative commentators generally agree that James was very likely the first written New Testament book.¹¹ It has strong connections with the Old Testament in both style and content,¹² and it clearly falls into the dual genres of wisdom literature and paraenetic epistolary writing.¹³ These facts have direct bearing on James’s usage of ἀσθενέω. James also personally witnessed some of the miracles of Jesus, and so any analysis of the vocabulary of James ought to consider the NT historical context as well.

James 5:14 uses the verb ἀσθενέω, which is related to the cognate noun ἀσθένεια. The noun occurs 29x in the combined LXX and GNT (5x LXX; 24x GNT). Three key observations stand out. First, as Table 2 below illustrates, *none* of the OT uses of ἀσθένεια indicate sickness.¹⁴

Table 2—Representative uses of the noun ἀσθένεια

Psalm 16:4 The sorrows of those who run after another god shall multiply; their drink offerings of blood I will not pour out or take their names on my lips.	spiritual/emotional weakness
Ecclesiastes 12:4 And the doors on the street are shut—when the sound of the grinding is low , and one rises up at the sound of a bird, and all the daughters of song are brought low.	generic weakness
Jeremiah 6:21 Therefore thus says the LORD: “Behold, I will lay before this people stumbling blocks against which they shall stumble; fathers and sons together, neighbor and friend shall perish.”	generic weakness

¹¹ For one such example, see Andreas J. Köstenberger, L. Scott Kellum, and Charles L. Quarles, *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown: An Introduction to the New Testament* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2009), 712.

¹² Henry Clarence Thiessen claims that “there is no more Jewish book in the New Testament than the Epistle of James.” *Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1943), 271. Doremus Almy Hayes concurs, “The Ep. of Jas is the most Jewish writing in the NT. . . . If we eliminate two or three passages containing references to Christ, the whole epistle might find its place just as properly in the Canon of the OT as in that of the NT, as far as its substance of doctrine and contents is concerned.” “James, Epistle Of,” *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. James Orr, et al. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1939), 3:1562. The Jewishness of James is so strong that Joseph B Mayor felt it necessary to combat Spitta’s claim that the book of James was a Jewish book from the first century B.C. that the Christians simply took over. *The Epistle of James* (London: Macmillan, 1913; Reprint, Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1990), cxcii.

¹³ Hayes, 1562; see Mayor’s list of analogs to the OT in which the wisdom books (Job, Proverbs) are heavily represented in James (cxi–cxiii). While Moo does not point specifically to wisdom literature, he observes that James utilizes images and metaphors from the natural world, a phenomenon characteristic of wisdom literature. Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James*, The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, ed. Leon Morris (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 36. See also Patrick Gray, “Points and Lines: Thematic Parallelism in the Letter of James and the Testament of Job,” *New Testament Studies* 50 (2004): 406–24. One does not have to accept all of his conclusions to realize that Gray demonstrates the proximity of James to wisdom literature in general.

Lenski observes the following connections with wisdom literature: “James is concrete and not abstract in thought. . . . His figures and his illustrations are taken from rural life, from sea and sun, from domestic life and from public life. . . . James certainly loves *paronomasia*; he has an ear for alliteration, homoeoteleuton, and rhythm. . . . Some of [his statements] have Hebraistic parallelism.” R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Epistle of St. James*, Commentary on the New Testament (Augsburg; Reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), 512.

¹⁴ The full data set appears in the Appendix as Table 2–A.

Matthew 8:17 This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: “He took our illnesses and bore our diseases.”	sickness indicative of spiritual weakness ¹⁵
Luke 5:15 But now even more the report about him went abroad, and great crowds gathered to hear him and to be healed of their infirmities .	sickness
John 5:5 One man was there who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years.	physical weakness
Romans 8:26 Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness . For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.	generic or spiritual weakness
Hebrews 4:15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses , but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.	spiritual weakness
Hebrews 5:2 He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness .	spiritual weakness

Second, the NT book that most closely matches the hortatory tone of James—namely, Hebrews—consistently uses ἀσθένεια to refer to *spiritual* weakness. Only the Gospels, written *after* the book of James, use ἀσθένεια to refer consistently to sickness.¹⁶ Such data are inconclusive, however, because they are equivocal. Readers who prefer to see James’s usage in the context of Jesus’ healing ministry will gravitate toward interpreting the weakness in James as physical sickness. Those who emphasize the genre and OT context of James will view ἀσθένεια as generic or spiritual weakness.

Third, while ἀσθενέω slightly edges out the individual occurrences of other words pertaining to sickness in the Gospels, it does so in a qualified fashion. See Table 3 below. For instance, Luke 4:40 uses ἀσθενέω qualified by νόσος, *disease* (ὅσοι εἶχον ἀσθενοῦντας νόσοις ποικίλαις). In this location at least, Luke treats ἀσθενέω as a broad weakness that requires further limitation in order to be clear.

Table 3—Frequency of the most common words for “sickness” in the Gospel accounts

ἀσθένεια	8x
ἀσθενέω	16x
βάσανος	3x
μαλακία	3x
μάστιξ	5x
νόσος	11x

¹⁵ Leon Morris represents a significant number of commentators when he says, “Isaiah 53 is generally understood as setting forth in prophetic form some of the great truths of the atonement for sin brought about by the death of Jesus; it is unusual to see it applied to illness rather than to moral evil. . . . There is certainly the thought that the final answer to sickness is in the cross.” *The Gospel According to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 198.

¹⁶ It is a bit surprising to see numerous commentators claiming “James likely borrowed his language from the Gospels, where it nearly always refers to physical sickness” (Bowden, 69). This assessment is anachronistic. All of the Gospels were written after James.

The verb ἀσθενέω occurs much more frequently than its cognate noun (approximately 100x in the LXX and GNT combined), and it corroborates the noun-use data. The OT usage points strongly toward general weakness or spiritual weakness, *not* sickness; the Gospels use ἀσθενέω to refer to sickness; and the epistles concur with the OT usage by inclining toward either generic or spiritual weakness depending on the context.

The data in Table 4 below illustrates the breadth of OT and NT usage. Significantly, *no* passage in the OT uses ἀσθενέω to refer unequivocally to sickness. Although Daniel 8:27 might appear to be an exception, the context implies that while emotional/spiritual/physical exhaustion is in view, sickness is not. It is unlikely that the passage points to Daniel’s experiencing a viral or bacterial infection following his visions. A parallel incident occurs in Daniel 10:17–19, which clarifies that the weakness involved is a weakness of spirit and body, not sickness.

“How can my lord’s servant talk with my lord? For now no strength remains in me, and no breath is left in me.” Again one having the appearance of a man touched me and strengthened me. And he said, “O man greatly loved, fear not, peace be with you; be strong and of good courage.” And as he spoke to me, I was strengthened and said, “Let my lord speak, for you have strengthened me” (Dn 10:17-19).

Table 4—Representative uses of the verb ἀσθενέω¹⁷

Judges 16:7 Samson said to her, “If they bind me with seven fresh bowstrings that have not been dried, then I shall become weak and be like any other man.”	physical weakness
2 Samuel 3:1 There was a long war between the house of Saul and the house of David. And David grew stronger and stronger, while the house of Saul became weaker and weaker .	generic weakness
Job 4:4 Your words have upheld him who was stumbling , and you have made firm the feeble knees.	spiritual weakness
Psalms 18:36 You gave a wide place for my steps under me, and my feet did not slip .	spiritual weakness
Psalms 26:1 Vindicate me, O LORD, for I have walked in my integrity, and I have trusted in the LORD without wavering .	spiritual weakness
Psalms 31:10 For my life is spent with sorrow, and my years with sighing; my strength fails because of my iniquity, and my bones waste away.	spiritual weakness
Psalms 88:9 My eye grows dim through sorrow. Every day I call upon you, O LORD; I spread out my hands to you.	spiritual weakness
Isaiah 7:4 And say to him, ‘Be careful, be quiet, do not fear, and do not let your heart be faint because of these two smoldering stumps of firebrands, at the fierce anger of Rezin and Syria and the son of Remaliah.	spiritual weakness
Jeremiah 6:21 Therefore thus says the LORD: “Behold, I will lay before this people stumbling blocks against which they shall stumble ; fathers and sons together, neighbor and friend shall perish.”	generic weakness (lowness)

¹⁷ The fuller data set appears in the Appendix under the designation Table 4–A.

Ezekiel 17:6 and it sprouted and became a low spreading vine, and its branches turned toward him, and its roots remained where it stood. So it became a vine and produced branches and put out boughs.	lowness
Daniel 8:27 And I, Daniel, was overcome and lay sick for some days. Then I rose and went about the king's business, but I was appalled by the vision and did not understand it.	generic weakness (lowness)
Daniel 10:17 How can my lord's servant talk with my lord? For now no strength remains in me, and no breath is left in me.	generic weakness (lowness)
Zechariah 12:8 On that day the LORD will protect the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the feeblest among them on that day shall be like David, and the house of David shall be like God, like the angel of the LORD, going before them.	generic weakness
Matthew 10:8 Heal the sick , raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. You received without paying; give without pay.	sickness
Mark 6:56 And wherever he came, in villages, cities, or countryside, they laid the sick in the marketplaces and implored him that they might touch even the fringe of his garment. And as many as touched it were made well.	sickness or weakness
Luke 4:40 Now when the sun was setting, all those who had any who were sick with various diseases brought them to him, and he laid his hands on every one of them and healed them.	sickness
John 4:46 So he came again to Cana in Galilee, where he had made the water wine. And at Capernaum there was an official whose son was ill .	sickness
Acts 9:37 In those days she became ill and died, and when they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room.	sickness
Acts 20:35 In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”	fiscally weak
Romans 4:19 He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. (Rom 4:19 ESV)	spiritual weakness
Romans 14:1 As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions.	spiritual weakness
1 Corinthians 8:11–12 And so by your knowledge this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died. Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak , you sin against Christ.	spiritual weakness
Philippians 2:26 for he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill .	sickness

Knowing (1) that James follows the genre patterns of OT wisdom literature, (2) that James was the earliest NT book, and (3) that James did not borrow from the *written* gospel accounts (it is impossible to determine how stylized the oral gospel was at the point of James's writing) leaves the

reasonable inference that James 5:14 may refer to spiritual weakness. This claim becomes stronger if James drew from wisdom literature for his vocabulary. The passages in Job and Psalms tend to use ἀσθενέω to reflect discouragement, depression, emotional weariness, or indecision—all of which connect with some form of spiritual weakness. Table 5 summarizes the scriptural data by usage.

Table 5—Summary of ἀσθενέω

Old Testament	ἀσθενέω as generic or spiritual weakness	62/62x
New Testament	ἀσθενέω as sickness	16/33x
	ἀσθενέω as generic or spiritual weakness	14/33x
	ἀσθενέω equivocal	3/33x

Finally, some commentators recognize that Second Clement drew heavily from James in framing his own *Epistle to the Corinthians* (ca. A.D. 130–160).¹⁸ As Table 6 indicates, this epistle from a second-century church father has important implications for the interpretation of James 5.

Table 6—The Evidence from Second Clement

<i>Corinthians XVII.1–3</i>	
<p>Μετανοήσωμεν οὖν ἐξ ὅλης καρδίας, ἵνα μή τις ἡμῶν παραπόληται. εἰ γὰρ ἐντολὰς ἔχομεν ἵνα καὶ κατηχεῖν, πόσω μᾶλλον ψυχὴν ἤδη γινώσκουσιν τὸν θεὸν οὐ δεῖ ἀπόλλυσθαι; συλλάβωμεν οὖν ἑαυτοῖς καὶ τοὺς ἀσθενοῦντας ἀνάγειν περὶ τὸ ἀγαθόν, ὅπως σωθῶμεν ἅπαντες καὶ ἐπιστρέψωμεν ἀλλήλους καὶ νοθετήσωμεν. καὶ μὴ μόνον ἄρτι δοκῶμεν πιστεύειν καὶ προσέχειν ἐν τῷ νοθετεῖσθαι ἡμᾶς ὑπὸ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων . . .</p>	<p>Therefore, let us repent from our whole heart lest anyone of us might perish along the way. For if we have commands that we might do them, how much more isn't it necessary that we keep from perishing a soul which already knows God? Therefore, let us help each other and be leading back those who are weak concerning the good, in order that we all might be saved and let us turn back one another and exhort. And let us not only seem to be believing and to be taking heed now while we are being exhorted by the elders . . .</p>

Verbal parallels to James (highlighted above) include the expressions “anyone of,” “soul,” “the weak,” “be saved,” “turn back,” and “elders,” and additional conceptual parallels (bolded above) include repentance, perishing, the one who knows God/the truth, helping through admonishing/exhorting, and “not merely seeming to believe.” Clement uses wording similar to James to express the spiritual condition of believers. He is highly concerned with those who are spiritually discouraged and beginning to swerve from the truth. While Clement may not have James 5 in mind, he demonstrates that a writer could use the same vocabulary as James to express a spiritual state in a context similar to James’s.

¹⁸ W. E. Oesterley, *The General Epistle of James*, in vol. 4 of *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, ed. W. Robertson Nicoll (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), 386.

The Meaning of κάμνω

The evidence that κάμνω (James 5:15) provides is even more interesting. κάμνω occurs only four times in Scripture—twice in the OT; twice in the NT. Table 7 provides all of these citations.

Table 7—Total occurrences of κάμνω in Scripture

κάμνων τῇ ψυχῇ μου στένων ἐπαφήσω ἐπ’ αὐτὸν τὰ ῥήματά μου λαλήσω πικρία ψυχῆς μου συνεχόμενος (Job 10:1)	I <u>loathe</u> my life; I will give free utterance to my complaint; I will speak in the bitterness of my soul.
λίσσομαι κάμνων καὶ τί ποιήσας (Job 17:2)	I pray <u>being discouraged</u> and having done what? ¹⁹
ἀναλογίσασθε γὰρ τὸν τοιαύτην ὑπομεμενηκότα ὑπὸ τῶν ἁμαρτωλῶν εἰς ἑαυτὸν ἀντιλογίαν, ἵνα μὴ κάμνητε ταῖς ψυχαῖς ὑμῶν ἐκλυόμενοι (Hebrews 12:3)	Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not <u>grow</u> <u>weary</u> or fainthearted.
καὶ ἡ εὐχὴ τῆς πίστεως σώσει τὸν κάμνοντα καὶ ἐγερεῖ αὐτὸν ὁ κύριος· καὶ ἁμαρτίας ἧ πεποιηκώς, ἀφεθήσεται αὐτῷ (James 5:15)	And the prayer of faith will save <u>the one who is sick</u> , and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.

In every instance, with the possible exception of James 5:15, κάμνω refers to being bowed down in spirit.²⁰ Since spiritual weakness is already a well-attested use of ἀσθενέω, κάμνω aligns well with this established meaning.²¹ The burden of proof would seem to rest on those who would choose a meaning for κάμνω not attested elsewhere in Scripture. However, James likely knew the broader range of meaning for κάμνω that was current in the first century. And this broader range of meaning complicates the simplicity of this conclusion. As Liddell & Scott indicate, κάμνω could mean either “to be sick or suffering” or “to be distressed, meet with disaster.”²² Again, the lexical data are equivocal.

¹⁹ Modern English versions all follow the MT here instead of the LXX. The Hebrew says :יִנְיָ לְךָ הַמְּהַרְבֵּי עֲמִי אֵינִי מֵעַל מְהַרְבֵּי (Surely there are mockers about me, and my eye dwells on their provocation).

²⁰ In the apocryphal books of Maccabees and Wisdom of Solomon, κάμνω does address physical distress rather than spiritual distress. Moo finds this determinative, and James’s connection with wisdom literature makes this a possibility. Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James*, PNTC, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 243.

²¹ Incidentally, outside the NT, κάμνω appears to maintain the same basic meaning, as various texts demonstrate. See for example Chrysostom’s paraphrase of Paul, Κάμνω, οὐκέτι ἐγώ, ἰσχύει δὲ ἐν ἐμοὶ Χριστός (*Oratio de epiphania* 2062.452). Chrysostom seems to be referring to physical weakness, not sickness, and he is conflating ideas from Philipians 4:13, Galatians 2:20, and possibly elsewhere.

Another text extends κάμνω to old age: Ἀδελφὸς παρέβαλε γέροντι δοκιμωτάτῳ, καὶ λέγει αὐτῷ· Κάμνω. Καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῷ ὁ γέρων· Κάθου εἰς τὸ κελλίον σου, καὶ ὁ θεὸς παρέχει σοι ἄνεσιν. *Apophthegmata Eccl., Gnom. (collection anonyma) (e cod Coislin 126)*. Both of the above were accessed May 9, 2016 from <http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/>.

²² H. G. Liddell, R. Scott, and Henry Stuart Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1940), *op cit*.

The Meaning of ἀλείφω

Oil had several basic functions in the ancient world. In the uses that could be relevant to James 5, oil could be used for (1) medicine, (2) ceremonial/sacramental anointing, and (3) cosmetic or social function. Commentators who accept either of the first two positions argue strenuously against the other position as contextually illogical. For example, Moo and Kent accept a sacramental anointing and so contend that a medicinal use does not fit James’s context well. They observe that (1) oil heals a relatively small number of ailments yet was commanded to be applied in all cases, and (2) a medicinal function would better be met by a doctor than an elder.²³ On the other hand Lenski argues that since James uses ἀλείφω instead of χρίω, he was not drawing attention to a sacramental anointing.²⁴ Moreover, it is inconsistent for a sacramental anointing to be in use at this (earliest) stage of church history. No record of such an anointing exists in Acts or Paul, though both give abundant testimony concerning the existence and proper protocols for the use of sign gifts.

The third perspective on the anointing believes that James is referring to a social grace that is designed to refresh and cheer one who is discouraged or otherwise weak. This position takes its evidence from both of the critiques of the previous two views, and it also argues from the prevailing NT use of ἀλείφω. Table 8 cites all of the occurrences of ἀλείφω in the NT. It shows that the bulk of the evidence lies in favor of social custom over against a sacramental or medicinal view. In six out of eight instances ἀλείφω refers to social custom that included cosmetic adornment and refreshment among its purposes. Only once is a medicinal or sacramental meaning certain.

Table 8—ἀλείφω in the New Testament

Matthew 6:17 σὺ δὲ νηστεύων ἄλειψαί σου τὴν κεφαλὴν καὶ τὸ πρόσωπόν σου νίψαι,	social, physical refreshing
Mark 6:13 καὶ δαιμόνια πολλὰ ἐξέβαλλον, καὶ ἤλειφον ἐλαίῳ πολλοὺς ἀρρώστους καὶ ἐθεράπευον.	medicinal or sacramental
Mark 16:1 Καὶ διαγενομένου τοῦ σαββάτου Μαρία ἡ Μαγδαληνὴ καὶ Μαρία ἡ [τοῦ] Ἰακώβου καὶ Σαλώμῃ ἡγόρασαν ἀρώματα ἵνα ἐλθοῦσαι ἀλείψωσιν αὐτόν.	social, cosmetic embalming
Luke 7:38 καὶ στᾶσα ὀπίσω παρὰ τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ κλαίουσα τοῖς δάκρυσιν ἤρξατο βρέχειν τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ καὶ ταῖς θριξίν τῆς κεφαλῆς αὐτῆς ἐξέμασεν καὶ κατεφίλει τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ καὶ ἤλειφεν τῷ μύρῳ.	social, physical refreshing
Luke 7:46 ἐλαίῳ τὴν κεφαλὴν μου οὐκ ἤλειψας · αὕτη δὲ μύρῳ ἤλειψεν τοὺς πόδας μου.	social, physical refreshing
John 11:2 ἦν δὲ Μαριὰμ ἡ ἀλείψασα τὸν κύριον μύρῳ καὶ ἐκμάξασα τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ ταῖς θριξίν αὐτῆς, ἧς ὁ ἀδελφὸς Λάζαρος ἡσθένει.	social, physical refreshing

²³ Moo and Kent take the anointing as purely symbolic and explicitly reject medicinal and other uses for this verse, See Moo, 177–81; Homer A. Kent Jr., *Faith that Works: Studies in the Epistle of James* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1986), 188–89.

²⁴ Lenski, 660–61.

John 12:3 Ἡ οὖν Μαριὰμ λαβοῦσα λίτρον μύρου νάρδου πιστικῆς πολυτίμου ἡλείψεν τοὺς πόδας τοῦ Ἰησοῦ καὶ ἐξέμαξεν ταῖς θριξίν αὐτῆς τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ· ἡ δὲ οἰκία ἐπληρώθη ἐκ τῆς ὁσμῆς τοῦ μύρου.	social, physical refreshing
James 5:14 ἁσθενεῖ τις ἐν ὑμῖν, προσκαλεσάσθω τοὺς πρεσβυτέρους τῆς ἐκκλησίας καὶ προσευξάσθωσαν ἐπ’ αὐτὸν ἀλείψαντες [αὐτὸν] ἐλαίῳ ἐν τῷ ὀνόματι τοῦ κυρίου.	in question

At this point the evidence is beginning to accumulate. While each isolated argument might be equivocal, in each case the stronger evidence lies on the side of a spiritual or general weakness being addressed by the body of Christ through a combination of prayer and social grace.

The Connection between James 5 and the Rest of the Book

The theme of James seems to lie closely along the lines of *proofs of genuine faith*.²⁵ Table 9 summarizes the application of this theme to the entirety of the book. While it is certainly possible that 5:13–18 treats the attitude of faith toward physical sickness, it seems to be more consistent with the spiritual nature of the book to see this crucial section as addressing crises of faith. In other words, James seems to close his book with the vital topic: *what should I do if my faith is struggling—if I am disheartened?*

Table 9—James: A Study in Faith²⁶

James 1:1–4	Faith considers the troubles that we face in life to be a cause for rejoicing.
James 1:5–8	Faith faces the pressures of uncertainty and ignorance by asking God for wisdom.
James 1:9–11	Faith maintains a biblical perspective on self-worth.
James 1:12–15	Faith endures temptation without falsely accusing God of trying to harm us.
James 1:16–18	Faith recognizes that God is the source of all good.
James 1:19–21	Faith rests in the justice of God and wisely suspends its own right to judge.
James 1:22–25	Faith intentionally applies what it claims to believe about Scripture to life.
James 1:26–27	Faith generates external religious activity that reflects true internal worship.
James 2:1–9	Faith views others impartially, discerning correctly.
James 2:10–13	Faith seeks a consistent response to the law of God.
James 2:14–26	Faith works.
James 3:1	Faith accepts the justice of God.
James 3:2–11	Faith achieves a victory in speech that is not naturally attainable.
James 3:12–18	Faith aspires to and acquires true wisdom.
James 4:1–6	Faith recognizes and removes the source of conflict—selfishness.
James 4:6–10	Faith receives the grace of God by submitting humbly to the God of grace.
James 4:11–12	Faith lets God’s law, and not our own opinion, be the judge.

²⁵ Kent’s commentary title, *Faith That Works*, indicates his concurrence.

²⁶ This table reflects the author’s own exposition of James.

James 4:13–17	Faith rejects self-sufficiency and rests instead on the providence of God.
James 5:1–6	Faith acts justly because it recognizes true values.
James 5:7–11	Faith endures until Christ’s return.
James 5:12	Faith follows God, not culture, in speaking the truth.
James 5:13–18	Faith solves crises of faith biblically through the intervening prayer of spiritual leaders.
James 5:19–20	Faith restores sinning fellow believers.

James teaches his readers that genuine faith is not immune to frustration, despondency, and even depression; however, he urges the crucial thought that genuine faith looks to God (and his divinely ordained solutions) even when facing crises of faith.²⁷ In other words, God’s people may question him at times due to the severe trials and circumstances of life, but if they are truly God’s people, they cannot abide the vacillation of spirit that they sense in themselves, and they turn to Scripture for the solution. Those who merely appear to be Christian face the same crisis of “faith” and turn entirely away from God—renouncing him completely. Those who genuinely trust in God cry out in the agony of their pain, “I believe; help my unbelief!” (Mark 9:24).

Two crucial connections look back to James 5:7–12 and forward to James 5:19–20. First, one of the great stresses on faith is the lack of evident victory. If James’s immediate audience already felt the tension of an unrealized hope (5:7), those who follow nearly 2,000 years later experience this frustration even more. As people of faith consider the apparent inactivity of God in their world, their faith is challenged. James uses the illustrations of the OT prophets and of Job to counteract the all-too-human tendency to become disillusioned with the truth of the gospel. While Job suffered a physical ailment in the boils that Satan introduced, it is the crisis of faith and Job’s patience in the midst of that crisis that James seems to be addressing.

A brief recapitulation of the evidence of the terms common to James and Job illumines James 5:13–16. Table 10 depicts how the LXX text of Job uses ἀσθεν- and κάμνω.

Table 10—James and Job

Your words have upheld him who was stumbling , and you have made firm the feeble knees. But now it has come to you, and you are impatient; it touches you, and you are dismayed. (Job 4:4–5)
I loathe my life; I will give free utterance to my complaint; I will speak in the bitterness of my soul. (Job 10:1)
I pray, being discouraged , and what should I do? (Job 17:2, translated from the LXX)
<i>They cut</i> the shaft of a valley from a dusty place, and they having forgotten the right way languish away from mortal man. (Job 28:4, translated from the LXX)
He seals up the hand of every man, that all men whom he made may know his own weakness . (Job 37:7)

²⁷ Thomas Ice and Robert Dean Jr. articulate this concept as well: “The entire thrust of James, and especially this last chapter, is on patience (5:7, 8, 10) and endurance (5:11).” They also note, “There are excellent biblical grounds for understanding this passage to be talking about what to do if and when a believer is growing weary.” *Overrun by Demons: The Church’s New Preoccupation with the Demonic* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1990), 172.

In Job 4 Eliphaz rebukes Job, saying, “When other people have been discouraged and ready to give up, you have given good counsel, but now that trouble comes to you, you are despondent.” Both the Greek and Hebrew underlying this translation point to a slackness, weakness, or bowed down condition attributable to emotional/spiritual discouragement. The *reason* for the discouragement is not the focus of Job 4:4–6. The dismay itself is the focus. As the various English translations suggest, the imagery in Job 28:4 is poetic and difficult to grasp, but the weakness in view in the verse is not sickness. It could refer to a general wearing away of life, a vacillation of mind or spirit, or other emotional/spiritual discouragement. Job 37:7 differs in the MT and LXX. The MT makes the referent *God* and has “his work” in the place of “his own weakness.” Both Job 10:1 and 17:2 (in the LXX) pertain to emotional and spiritual despondency. What this evidence seems to imply is this: when James points to Job’s patience, he is doing so in light of the crisis of faith that Job endured.

Second, the context that follows James 5:13–18 also points to a crisis of faith. While most biblical texts mark vv. 19–20 as a distinct paragraph, James may not be starting a completely new idea. Rather, he seems to be summarizing, extending, and drawing a conclusion from the previous section. The following key points emerge: (1) the danger of swerving from the truth exists; (2) other believers need to participate in the spiritual life of the one who is so endangered; and (3) successful spiritual interdiction in the life of one who is deviating from the faith results in a rescued soul. This may further expound the intervention described in James 5:14–16.

The τίς + Situation + Response Connection

James 5:13 uses a grammatical pattern common to the rest of the book. Table 11 illustrates the other instances of this formula. In each of the other instances, James provides a particular situation connected with the subject, *anyone*. When James describes a result of the main verb (with the possible exception of 5:14), that result is a promise conditioned by nothing other than faith. This might suggest that the effectiveness of the prayer of faith in 5:15 is likewise unconditioned beyond faith. But if so, James 5:15 is not true.

Table 11—*The τίς Formula in James*

			Situation	Response	Result
1:5	anyone	of you	lacks wisdom	let him ask God	it will be given him
3:3	anyone	among you	is wise	let him show works	N/A
5:13	anyone	among you	suffering hardship	let him pray	N/A
5:13	anyone		cheerful	let him sing	N/A
5:14	anyone	among you	weak	let him call the elders	will save, will be forgiven, will raise up
5:19	anyone	among you	wanders from the truth	N/A	N/A
5:19–20	anyone		should turn him	let him know	will save soul from death will cover a multitude of sins

The parallel expression in the τίς-situation-response-result chain implies an assured outcome, but the reader finds exactly the opposite—the prayer of faith usually does *not* heal a sick person. Thus the interpreter who sees sickness as James’s primary referent must introduce qualifications and concepts foreign to the context in order to explain the failure of prayer to achieve its intended result. James’s grammatical pattern conveys a correlation between action and result.

The Connection between James 5 and Hebrews 12

Important lexical and logical connections exist between Hebrews 12 and James 5. Table 12 highlights a few of these connections. Remember that *καμνω* occurs only twice in the NT.

Table 12—James/Hebrews connections

<p>¹³ Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise.</p>	<p>³ Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted.</p>
<p>¹⁴ Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.</p>	<p>⁴ In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.</p> <p>⁵ And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? “My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him.</p>
<p>¹⁵ And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. <u>And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.</u></p>	<p>⁶ For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.”</p> <p>⁷ It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline?</p>
<p>¹⁶ <u>Therefore, confess</u> your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working. (Jam 5:13-16)</p>	<p>⁸ If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.</p> <p>⁹ Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live?</p> <p>¹⁰ For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness.</p>
	<p>¹¹ For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.</p> <p>¹² Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees,</p> <p>¹³ and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed. (Heb 12:1-13)</p>

Those two occurrences are in Hebrews 12 and James 5. Hebrews also picks up the concept of healing as redressing the condition of spiritual discouragement (12:13). Moreover, Hebrews 12 indicates that some of this spiritual weariness and despondency stems from unconfessed sin that eats away at a believer’s faith (12:5–11). This concern parallels James’s admonishment that confession may be

necessary to healing. It seems stronger than mere coincidence that Hebrews uses terminology exactly parallel to James in describing a spiritual situation that matches *one of the three viable interpretations* of James.

Hebrews 12 follows Hebrews 11. That much is obvious. But Hebrews 11 stems from a long argument concerning the necessity of abiding in the faith (the confidence [3:3]; the hope [3:3]; the promise [4:1]) once professed. Hebrews 11 provides a series of illustrations from the lives of those who had reason to renounce faith on the basis of their circumstances, but who refused to do so. Hebrews 12 strengthens this argument with the final example of Jesus Christ. Is spiritual discouragement likely in the face of trials (12:3)? Absolutely, but believers must hold to the faith nonetheless. The overall context and placement of Hebrews 12 in the middle of an extended homily on faith fits very well with James’s overall context and placement of chapter 5.²⁸

*Intertextuality*²⁹

Intertextuality describes the way that literary works interrelate. More narrowly, intertextuality indicates that one literary work has alluded to another while expecting the reader to incorporate broader components of the cited work. The writer expects his readers to be sufficiently knowledgeable that they not only understand his allusion but also incorporate more of the plot or meaning of the previous work than he specifically references. If a modern writer dropped “*veni, vidi, vici*,” into his story, he might mean nothing more than “I came, I saw, I conquered.” On the other hand he might want his readers to draw parallels between the story that they are presently reading and the life of Julius Caesar. The second, deliberate use by the author would be an example of intertextuality.

James alludes to four Old Testament figures: Abraham (2:21–23), Rahab (2:25), Job (5:11), and Elijah (5:17).³⁰ In each case, James assumes that his reader understands the details from the life of the OT saint that are relevant to his point. He does not thoroughly develop how the OT figure undergirds the theological point but expects the listener to supply the necessary information.

Having given his already problematic and terse description of “weakness” and its cure, James drops Elijah into the text as an illustration of his point. Elijah, after all, performed a miracle with oil in 1 Kings 17:14–16, and he raised a dead child in 1 Kings 17:17–24 (not through the use of oil, however). They are the most natural possible points of connection, and they would enhance James’s point in verse 16 (“The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working”). But James does

²⁸ It might not be incidental that commentators have recognized both Hebrews and James to be close to a homiletic or sermon structure. “The strong tone of pastoral exhortation” points to James’s use of the rhetorical category of homily (Moo, 36). Carson and Moo conclude in reference to Hebrews, “The wealth of rhetorical devices in Hebrews has suggested to many (probably rightly) that this work was originally a homily.” D. A. Carson and Douglas J. Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 596.

²⁹ See Leroy A. Huizenga, “The Old Testament in the New, Intertextuality and Allegory,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 38/1 (2015): 17–35 for a discussion of the adaptation of secular literary-critical terms by biblical scholars. Conservatives use *intertextuality* to describe the full range of allusion, quotation, and literary and theological relationships among the biblical books.

³⁰ See Giovanni Claudio Bottini, “Continuity and Innovation in Biblical Tradition: Elijah from 1 Kgs 17–18 to Jas 5:17–18,” *Studia Biblica Slovaca* 11/2 (2019): 126.

not allude to either of these incidents. In addition, James could have used Elisha as his illustration. Elisha raised the Shunammite woman’s son (2 Kings 4:18–37, without oil) and healed Naaman (1 Kings 5:1–14, also without oil). So at least three classic examples of intercessory prayer leading to healing from physical sickness were available to James, but he passed over all of these to draw from Elijah’s prayer for rain. Why? At least two possibilities exist.

Texts that Span the Healing

James may have chosen this illustration because Elijah’s two prayers about rain bracket the incident in which he healed the widow’s son. Table 13 depicts this first form of intertextuality. As a form of *inclusio*, this solution is stylistically and logically pleasing, but introduces a problem into James’s argument. James draws attention to Elijah’s being “a man with a nature like ours.” In fact, this little detail overarches James’s use of Elijah as an example.

Table 13—Elijah’s Prayer as an Inclusio with the Incident of Healing

1 Kings 17:1	Elijah predicts absence of rain
1 Kings 17:2–24	Elijah’s miracles for the widow of Zarephath, including the healing of her son
1 Kings 18:1–40	Conflict with prophets at Mt. Carmel with the expectation that God would send rain
1 Kings 18:41–46	Prayer for rain and its arrival

But there is no evidence of this “like-passion” quality in Elijah in 1 Kings 17–18. In these two chapters, Elijah speaks very matter-of-factly, and the OT develops no psychological depth to him with the possible exception of his mocking the prophets of Baal. He shows no fear in declaring the famine to Ahab in the first place (17:1). He shows no doubt or anxiety when the brook Cherith dries up (17:7). He exhibits no worry or frustration when he left the territory of Israel to go to a Gentile nation (17:10). He displays no amazement or wonder at the miracle of food (17:14–16). He has no hesitation at the raising of the widow’s son (17:21). He exhibits no uncertainty in his returning to Ahab (18:2). He shows no fear in rebuking Ahab to his face (18:18). He indicates no unbelief or vacillation in confronting hundreds of false prophets (18:20–40). So far, Elijah seems almost super-human. He’s a spiritual giant—impassive, utterly courageous, and unwavering.

In other words, overemphasizing the possible intertextuality of 1 Kings 17–18 with James 5 seems to miss the point that James is trying to make. The reader would come away with a far different conclusion (namely, that rare, specially-chosen, ultra-spiritual prophet types can pray, and God will hear) than the one to which James points (that frail, spiritually-exhausted, spiritually discouraged people of faith can pray, and God will still hear).

Texts that Connect Causally

A second solution exists. James definitely draws upon Elijah’s prayer for rain, but James provides the direction in which the intertextuality should move—forward into 1 Kings 19. By introducing Elijah through terms of weakness (James 5:17a) then citing Elijah’s prayer concerning

rain (James 5:17b–18), James brackets the rain/flight from Jezebel incident, not the rain/healing of the widow’s son incident. Table 14 depicts this movement in the story.

Table 14—Elijah’s Prayer and Flight as Intertextual with James 5

1 Kings 17:1–24	Elijah predicts absence of rain & exercises faith
1 Kings 18:1–40	Elijah prays for rain and exercises faith
1 Kings 19:1–21	Elijah flees in fear and discouragement

This analysis of Elijah’s work is less literarily satisfying because it does not emphasize the *inclusio* outlined above, but it provides the greater logical and contextual explanatory power on the basis of James’s argument. In particular, in the middle of Elijah’s spiritual discouragement, he could not escape such weakness through simply “bucking up” on his own. He was spiritually despondent (1 Ki. 19:4), physically exhausted (1 Ki. 19:5), thinking irrationally, and not exercising the evident, implicit faith he had previously exhibited (1 Ki. 19:10, 14), and feeling completely alone spiritually (1 Ki. 19:10, 14). Elijah’s complaint (1 Ki. 19:10, 14) included (1) the futility of faithfulness, (2) the powerlessness of the truth, (3) an expressed feeling of isolation, and (4) fear. This fits very well with James’s description of Elijah as a man of like-passion (ὁμοιοπαθής).

God’s response to Elijah prefigures James’s instruction to the church. God provided the physical nourishment that Elijah needed (1 Ki. 19:5–7), a point paralleled by James’s anointing with oil (5:14). God provided spiritual companionship (1 Ki. 19:5, 7, 9, 13), a point paralleled by James’s bringing in of elders (5:14). God also addressed Elijah’s wrong thinking through the combined exhibition of his power and command (1 Ki. 19:11–12, 15–18). Essentially, God strengthened and recommissioned Elijah, told him he was not alone, and provided for his physical needs. These issues parallel James’s requirement for spiritually mature people to intervene in the life of others and deal with their physical, social, and spiritual needs in the process of restoration. This second treatment of intertextuality connects 1 Kings and James much more directly and leaves fewer inferences to be supplied by the interpreter.

Problems with Intertextuality

Intertextual analysis suffers the persistent problem that the extent of an author’s allusion or borrowing is not always clear.³¹ The scope of information that author expects the reader or listener to supply from the earlier text remains unstated. So readers will vary in their assessment of how the earlier text supports the present one.³² This makes biblical theology crucial to interpretation. Without the

³¹ Where an author does not make his borrowing known at all, attempts to draw connections between two pieces of literature risks succumbing to the *post hoc* fallacy. This is evident throughout most source critical works on the Gospels.

³² This is especially evident in the promising-sounding article by Mariam Kamell Kovalishyn, “The Prayer of Elijah in James 5: An Example of Intertextuality,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 137/4 (2018): 1027–45. Kovalishyn identifies the whole of 1 Kings 17:1–18:46 as the source of James’s allusion, but she develops a summary of the entire chapter in James from this section in 1 Kings—seeing connections with a care for widows, renunciation of idolatry, effectiveness of prayer in healing, and steadfastness in prayer.

“fences” established by a careful interpretation of the previous text, the interpreter has a higher probability of straying into unwarranted theological conclusions. Without the historical and theological context of the passage alluded to *and* the context of the passage making the allusion, the interpreter runs the risk of importing too much, too little, or the wrong information into a current text.³³

Intertextuality does not settle the interpretive difficulties in James 5, but it does help the reader understand how Elijah may relate to James’s argument. Intertextuality also implies that James 5 treats spiritual discouragement or a crisis of faith.

The fact that James chose *not* to refer to Elijah’s healing ministry—where such a reference would have naturally and decisively undergirded an argument for healing in the church—calls the physical-healing perspective into question. The fact that James draws attention to Elijah’s weakness in relation to his faith and faithfulness points toward a spiritual-discouragement view. The fact that God addresses in Elijah’s own thinking some of the same concerns that James addresses in relation to “the prayer of faith will save the weak” seems to strengthen the spiritual-discouragement view.

Conclusion

The view that James addresses spiritual weakness, not physical sickness, is reasonable and theologically consistent. While physical trials can produce spiritual ones, James’s focus is on the *faith* of his readers, not their *health*. He does not encourage the perspective that God will heal the physical illnesses of his people in an ongoing fashion throughout the church age. Prayers for the sick *do* sometimes result in healing, even in recent days, but these prayers do not capitalize on the teaching of James so much as on the genuine necessity of faith, which is incumbent on all believers, and on the unchanging graciousness of God.

However, this interpretation of the text is not certain. The evidence throughout is equivocal. The reader will need to decide where the preponderance of the evidence lies. Table 15 summarizes the preceding arguments and marks the view best supported by each piece of evidence. It does not seek to prejudice the reader by implying that there is *no* evidence to support the alternative position. It simply portrays the categories in which the preponderance of the evidence supports a position.

Table 15—Summary and Tabulation of Evidence

Evidence	Physical Weakness	Spiritual Weakness
The lack of need to qualify the prayer of faith with tacit conditions		•
The meaning of ἀσθεν- in wisdom literature		•

³³ Conservative hermeneutics texts tend to address the concept of intertextuality (often without using the word) in sections that address the New Testament’s use of the Old or typology, allegory, and allusion. See, for instance, Andreas J. Köstenberger and Richard D. Patterson, *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation: Exploring the Hermeneutical Triad of History, Literature, and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011), 703–10; Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, rev. ed. (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2006), 323–44.

The meaning of ἀσθεν- in the Gospels	•
Genre alignment of James with wisdom literature	•
Interpretation by Clement of Rome	•
Uniform meaning of κάμνω in OT and NT	•
Common and typical meaning of ἀλείφω	•
Context of James 5:13–18 in relation to James as a whole	•
Context of James 5:13–18 in relation to James 5:7–12	•
Context of James 5:13–18 in relation to James 5:19–20	•
The τις formula in James	•
Connection of James 5 and Hebrews 12	•
Intertextuality	•

The practical implications of expanding one’s interpretation to include a spiritual-discouragement view are immense. First, if James is *not* addressing sickness, the church has a reasonable explanation for the apparent failure of his recommended procedure in practical attempts to heal the sick. This recognition would in no way prevent the church from continuing to pray for its sick or minimize the importance of such intercession. It would explain, however, how an unqualified scriptural command and promise have met such stubborn resistance in the facts of everyday experience. If the church has misinterpreted James, it has misunderstood both the command and promise that God has actually given.

Second, if spiritual weakness is in view, the church must train its saints to seek help when facing crises of faith. Instead of continuing a maverick, individualistic silence, believers must interact on a deeply personal, spiritual level in times of spiritual distress. James does not depict spiritual discouragement as unusual. In fact, his use of Elijah as an illustration would prove that even spiritual giants and great men of God can become so disillusioned that they wish to quit ministry altogether. James provides the answer that is consistent with the message of his entire letter: People of faith meet crises of faith by seeking the spiritually undergirding intercessory prayer of other believers.

Third, if the spiritual weakness view is correct, it provides a clear process of restoration. Spiritual discouragement or vacillation may have roots in physical causes (hence the need for the social grace of anointing with oil) or in spiritual causes (hence the need for confession of sin). Neglect of either of these areas may leave the discouragement intact. In addition, James 5 reveals that the spiritually discouraged individual may be so worn down that he is unable to pray effectively for himself. He *needs* the intercessory prayer of others. This is entirely consistent with what we find elsewhere in the NT (e.g., Gal 6:1).

Fourth, like all passages of Scripture James invites application of the principle to each era and culture in which believers find themselves. The discouraged or spiritually wavering brother might not find much encouragement in having oil poured on his head, but he does need men of God to surround him, get him out of bed, shaved, cleaned up, dressed up, and out for a good meal, an excursion to the lake, or some other socially stimulating activity while nurturing him spiritually. God knows that the distress of the heart may stem from multiple causes.

Fifth, on the spiritual side of the equation, James’s use of Elijah indicates that the discouraged or wavering individual may need direct confrontation of the false thinking (one of the sins he may need to confess) that has led to his spiritual enervation. God gently confronted Elijah’s complaints: (1) faithfulness is not futile because God has plans for the future; (2) truth is not powerlessness because it is backed by omnipotence; (3) isolation is an emotional perception but not a reality; and (4) fear is unwarranted because the Almighty knows your situation and still reigns and provides for his own. In similar fashion the spiritual leaders within the body of Christ need to confront the distorted thinking that leads to spiritual capitulation.

The combination of context and intertextuality could reorient the perspective of the church on the interpretation of James 5:13–18 and lead interpreters to conclude that James urges the following upon his readers:

Is anyone among you suffering, let him pray. Is anyone cheerful, let him sing.
Is anyone spiritually weak, let him call the elders of the church and let them pray for him anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord.
And the prayer of faith will rescue the one who is despondent, and the Lord will raise him up; and if he has committed sin, it will be forgiven him.

Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another in order that you may be spiritually healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful as it works.

Elijah was a man with the same emotions as we have, and he prayed that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months; and he prayed again, and heaven gave rain and the earth yielded its fruit.

Appendix

Table 2-A—Significant uses of the noun ἀσθένεια

Job 37:7 He seals up the hand of every man, that all men whom he made may know it .	generic weakness
Psalms 16:4 The sorrows of those who run after another god shall multiply; their drink offerings of blood I will not pour out or take their names on my lips.	generic weakness
Ecclesiastes 12:4 and the doors on the street are shut-- when the sound of the grinding is low , and one rises up at the sound of a bird, and all the daughters of song are brought low—	generic weakness
Jeremiah 6:21 Therefore thus says the LORD: “Behold, I will lay before this people stumbling blocks against which they shall stumble; fathers and sons together, neighbor and friend shall perish.”	generic weakness
Jeremiah 18:23 Yet you, O LORD, know all their plotting to kill me. Forgive not their iniquity, nor blot out their sin from your sight. Let them be overthrown before you; deal with them in the time of your anger.	generic weakness
Matthew 8:17 This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: “He took our illnesses and bore our diseases.”	sickness indicative of spiritual weakness
Luke 5:15 But now even more the report about him went abroad, and great crowds gathered to hear him and to be healed of their infirmities .	sickness
Luke 8:2 and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities : Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out,	sickness
Luke 13:11 And behold, there was a woman who had had a disabling spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not fully straighten herself.	physical weakness
Luke 13:12 When Jesus saw her, he called her over and said to her, “Woman, you are freed from your disability .”	physical weakness
John 5:5 One man was there who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years.	physical weakness
John 11:4 But when Jesus heard it he said, “This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.”	sickness
Acts 28:9 And when this had taken place, the rest of the people on the island who had diseases also came and were cured.	sickness
Romans 6:19 I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations . For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification.	generic weakness
Romans 8:26 Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness . For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.	generic weakness
1 Corinthians 2:3 And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling,	generic weakness
1 Corinthians 15:43 It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness ; it is raised in power.	generic weakness

2 Corinthians 11:30 If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness .	generic weakness
2 Corinthians 12:5 On behalf of this man I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses--	generic weakness
2 Corinthians 12:9 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness ." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses , so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.	generic weakness
2 Corinthians 12:10 For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses , insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.	generic weakness
2 Corinthians 13:4 For he was crucified in weakness , but lives by the power of God. For we also are weak in him, but in dealing with you we will live with him by the power of God.	generic weakness
Galatians 4:13 You know it was because of a bodily ailment that I preached the gospel to you at first,	sickness
1 Timothy 5:23 (No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments .)	sickness
Hebrews 4:15 For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses , but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.	spiritual weakness
Hebrews 5:2 He can deal gently with the ignorant and wayward, since he himself is beset with weakness .	spiritual weakness
Hebrews 7:28 For the law appoints men in their weakness as high priests, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever.	spiritual weakness
Hebrews 11:34 quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness , became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.	generic weakness

Table 4-A—Uses of the verb ἀσθενέω

Judges 6:15 And he said to him, “Please, Lord, how can I save Israel? Behold, my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house.”	generic weakness
Judges 16:7 Samson said to her, “If they bind me with seven fresh bowstrings that have not been dried, then I shall become weak and be like any other man.”	physical weakness
1 Samuel 2:4 The bows of the mighty are broken, but the feeble bind on strength.	generic weakness
2 Samuel 3:1 There was a long war between the house of Saul and the house of David. And David grew stronger and stronger, while the house of Saul became weaker and weaker .	generic weakness
Job 4:4 Your words have upheld him who was stumbling , and you have made firm the feeble knees.	spiritual weakness
Job 28:4 He opens shafts in a valley away from where anyone lives; they are forgotten by travelers; they hang in the air, far away from mankind; they swing to and fro .	vacillation
Psalms 9:3 When my enemies turn back, they stumble and perish before your presence.	spiritual weakness
Psalms 18:36 You gave a wide place for my steps under me, and my feet did not slip .	spiritual weakness
Psalms 26:1 Vindicate me, O LORD, for I have walked in my integrity, and I have trusted in the LORD without wavering .	spiritual weakness
Psalms 27:2 When evildoers assail me to eat up my flesh, my adversaries and foes, it is they who stumble and fall.	spiritual weakness
Psalms 31:10 For my life is spent with sorrow, and my years with sighing; my strength fails because of my iniquity, and my bones waste away. (Psa 31:10 ESV)	spiritual weakness
Psalms 58:7 Let them vanish like water that runs away; when he aims his arrows, let them be blunted .	generic weakness
Psalms 68:9 Rain in abundance, O God, you shed abroad; you restored your inheritance as it languished ;	generic weakness
Psalms 88:9 my eye grows dim through sorrow. Every day I call upon you, O LORD; I spread out my hands to you.	spiritual weakness
Psalms 105:37 Then he brought out Israel with silver and gold, and there was none among his tribes who stumbled .	generic weakness
Psalms 107:12 So he bowed their hearts down with hard labor; they fell down , with none to help.	physical weakness
Psalms 109:24 My knees are weak through fasting; my body has become gaunt, with no fat.	physical weakness
Proverbs 24:16 for the righteous falls seven times and rises again, but the wicked stumble in times of calamity.	spiritual weakness
Isaiah 7:4 And say to him, 'Be careful, be quiet, do not fear, and do not let your heart be faint because of these two smoldering stumps of firebrands, at the fierce anger of Rezin and Syria and the son of Remaliah.	spiritual weakness
Isaiah 44:12 The ironsmith takes a cutting tool and works it over the coals. He fashions it with hammers and works it with his strong arm. He becomes hungry, and his strength fails ; he drinks no water and is faint.	generic weakness

Jeremiah 6:21 Therefore thus says the LORD: “Behold, I will lay before this people stumbling blocks against which they shall stumble ; fathers and sons together, neighbor and friend shall perish.”	generic weakness (lowness)
Jeremiah 18:15 But my people have forgotten me; they make offerings to false gods; they made them stumble in their ways, in the ancient roads, and to walk into side roads, not the highway.	generic weakness (lowness)
Jeremiah 46:6 The swift cannot flee away, nor the warrior escape; in the north by the river Euphrates they have stumbled and fallen. (cf. also vv. 12, 16)	generic weakness (lowness)
Lamentations 1:14 My transgressions were bound into a yoke; by his hand they were fastened together; they were set upon my neck; he caused my strength to fail ; the Lord gave me into the hands of those whom I cannot withstand.	spiritual weakness
Ezekiel 17:6 and it sprouted and became a low spreading vine, and its branches turned toward him, and its roots remained where it stood. So it became a vine and produced branches and put out boughs.	lowness
Daniel 8:27 And I, Daniel, was overcome and lay sick for some days. Then I rose and went about the king’s business, but I was appalled by the vision and did not understand it.	generic weakness (lowness)
Daniel 10:17 How can my lord’s servant talk with my lord? For now no strength remains in me, and no breath is left in me.	generic weakness (lowness)
Daniel 11:19 Then he shall turn his face back toward the fortresses of his own land, but he shall stumble and fall, and shall not be found. cf. vv. 33, 34, 35, 41)	generic weakness (lowness)
Hosea 4:5 You shall stumble by day; the prophet also shall stumble with you by night; and I will destroy your mother.	spiritual weakness
Hosea 5:5 The pride of Israel testifies to his face; Israel and Ephraim shall stumble in his guilt; Judah also shall stumble with them.	spiritual weakness
Nahum 2:5 He remembers his officers; they stumble as they go, they hasten to the wall; the siege tower is set up.	generic weakness
Zechariah 12:8 On that day the LORD will protect the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that the feeblest among them on that day shall be like David, and the house of David shall be like God, like the angel of the LORD, going before them.	generic weakness
Matthew 10:8 Heal the sick , raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. You received without paying; give without pay.	sickness
Matthew 25:36 I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.	equivocal: sick, weak, despondent
Mark 6:56 And wherever he came, in villages, cities, or countryside, they laid the sick in the marketplaces and implored him that they might touch even the fringe of his garment. And as many as touched it were made well.	sickness or weakness
Luke 4:40 Now when the sun was setting, all those who had any who were sick with various diseases brought them to him, and he laid his hands on every one of them and healed them.	sickness

John 4:46 So he came again to Cana in Galilee, where he had made the water wine. And at Capernaum there was an official whose son was ill .	sickness
John 5:7 The sick man answered him, “Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, and while I am going another steps down before me.”	weakness
John 11:1 Now a certain man was ill , Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. (cf. vv. 2, 3, 6)	sickness
Acts 9:37 In those days she became ill and died, and when they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room.	sickness
Acts 19:12 so that even handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were carried away to the sick , and their diseases left them and the evil spirits came out of them.	sickness
Acts 20:35 In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”	fiscally weak
Romans 4:19 He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. (Rom 4:19 ESV)	spiritual weakness
Romans 14:1 As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions.	spiritual weakness
1 Corinthians 8:11–12 And so by your knowledge this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died. Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak , you sin against Christ.	spiritual weakness
2 Corinthians 11:29 Who is weak , and I am not weak ? Who is made to fall, and I am not indignant?	spiritual weakness
2 Corinthians 12:10 For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses , insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak , then I am strong.	generic weakness
Philippians 2:26 for he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill .	sickness

Jesus, the Sadducees, and the Resurrection: A Case Study of Systematic Theology in the Bible—The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

Layton Talbert¹

Jesus' reply to the Sadducees is a celebrated Scripture passage for demonstrating the use and role of systematic theology in the Bible itself. The theological method of the Son of God is worth examining, understanding, and emulating, especially with regards to the interplay between systematic theology (ST) and biblical theology (BT). But Jesus is not the only one doing theology in this pericope. The theological method of the Sadducees is also worth exploring for theological lessons and modern application.²

Matthew 22:23–33	Mark 12:18–27	Luke 20:27–40
<p>²³ The same day Sadducees came to him, who say that there is no resurrection, and they asked him a question,</p> <p>²⁴ saying, "Teacher, Moses said, 'If a man dies having no children, his brother must marry the widow and raise up offspring for his brother.'</p> <p>²⁵ Now there were seven brothers among us. The first married and died, and having no offspring left his wife to his brother.</p> <p>²⁶ So too the second and third, down to the seventh.</p> <p>²⁷ After them all, the woman died.</p>	<p>¹⁸ And Sadducees came to him, who say that there is no resurrection. And they asked him a question, saying,</p> <p>¹⁹ "Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies and leaves a wife, but leaves no child, the man must take the widow and raise up offspring for his brother.</p> <p>²⁰ There were seven brothers; the first took a wife, and when he died left no offspring.</p> <p>²¹ And the second took her, and died, leaving no offspring. And the third likewise.</p> <p>²² And the seven left no offspring.</p> <p>Last of all the woman also died.</p>	<p>²⁷ There came to him some Sadducees, those who deny that there is a resurrection,</p> <p>²⁸ and they asked him a question, saying, "Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies, having a wife but no children, the man must take the widow and raise up offspring for his brother.</p> <p>²⁹ Now there were seven brothers. The first took a wife, and died without children.</p> <p>³⁰ And the second</p> <p>³¹ and the third took her, and likewise all seven left no children and died.</p> <p>³² Afterward the woman also died.</p>

¹ Layton Talbert serves as professor of theology at BJU Seminary. He is the author of *Not by Chance: Learning to Trust a Sovereign God* (Greenville, SC: BJU Press, 2001) and *Beyond Suffering: Discovering the Message of Job* (Greenville: JourneyForth, 2007).

² I am using the term "theological method" to describe *the procedure by which one decides what the Bible does and does not teach*. Serious practitioners of biblical interpretation make use of a shared set of theological disciplines—notably exegetical, biblical, systematic, historical, and practical. This essay incorporates each of these to some degree but focuses predominantly on the first three.

<p>²⁸ At the resurrection, therefore, of the seven, whose wife will she be? For they all had her.”</p> <p>²⁹ But Jesus answered them, “You are deceived, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God.</p> <p>³⁰ For at the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.</p> <p>³¹ And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God:</p> <p>³² ‘I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?’</p> <p>He is not God of the dead, but of the living.”</p>	<p>²³ At the resurrection, when they rise again, whose wife will she be? For the seven had her as wife.”</p> <p>²⁴ Jesus said to them, “Is this not the reason you are deceived, because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God?</p> <p>²⁵ For when they rise from the dead, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.</p> <p>²⁶ And as for the dead being raised, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the passage about the bush, how God spoke to him, saying, ‘I [am] the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?’</p> <p>²⁷ He is not God of the dead, but of the living. You are quite deceived.”</p>	<p>³³ At the resurrection, therefore, whose wife will the woman be? For the seven had her as wife.”</p> <p>³⁴ And Jesus said to them,</p> <p>“The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage,</p> <p>³⁵ but those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and to the resurrection from the dead neither marry nor are given in marriage,</p> <p>³⁶ for they cannot die anymore, because they are equal to angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection.</p> <p>³⁷ But that the dead are raised, even Moses showed, in the passage about the bush, where he calls the Lord the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.</p> <p>³⁸ Now he is not God of the dead, but of the living, for all live to him.”</p>
--	---	---

**Bold denotes details unique to one Gospel.*

Bad Systematic Theology

Systematic theology is not bad, but there is bad systematic theology. Jesus’ theological method usually gets all the attention in this passage. But it is worth noting that the Sadducees are also doing ST; they are just doing it very poorly. That makes the Sadducees in this passage a good example of bad ST. What makes it bad?

First, their theological position (denial of the resurrection) begins with *a deficient view of textual authority*—indeed, a deficient view of the canon. Our sources are limited,³ but there seems to be broad

³ “Reliable information about the Sadducees is difficult to obtain because no documents that are clearly Sadducean have been preserved.” Walter W. Wessell and Mark L. Strauss, “Mark,” in *REBC*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 9:902.

consensus (though not universal agreement⁴) that the Sadducees accepted only the writings of Moses as authoritative.⁵ A flawed view of canonical scope or authority will necessarily result in defective theological conclusions. Such flawed views can take different shapes and expressions—from the older liberal theologies of men such as Harnack or Bultmann, to neo-orthodoxy's subjective bibliology, to the more recent sophisticated expressions of genre-redefinition in Genesis. As Jesus demonstrates in his rebuttal, the Sadducees failed to grasp the full theological implications of even the portion of the canon to which they *did* subscribe. To put it as bluntly as Jesus did, they simply did not know the Scriptures.

Second, their ignorance of Scripture is, itself, rooted in another flaw in their theological method: they approached the text with *an anti-supernaturalistic presupposition* that impacted their interpretation of even the Pentateuch itself. In addition to this incident in his Gospel, Luke also later informs us that the Sadducees “say that there is no resurrection, nor angel, nor spirit” (Acts 23:8).⁶ And yet the Pentateuch alone contains no less than 32 references to angels. A theological method driven by presuppositions that compel one to deny or reinterpret doctrines that are clearly and

⁴ Alfred Plummer disputes the notion that “the Sadducees accepted only the Pentateuch” (a view he attributes to Tertullian and Origen). *The Gospel According to Luke* (1896; reprint, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1981), 470. Henry Alford, likewise, insisted that this common view “is a mistake into which many Commentators have fallen,” adding that the Sadducees “acknowledged the prophets also.” If that is so, one wonders why Jesus would not have appealed to “the strong testimonies of the Prophets” on the issue of resurrection. Alford explains: “The books of Moses were the great and ultimate appeal for all doctrine; and thus the assertion of the resurrection comes from the very source whence their difficulty had been constructed”—viz., the Mosaic levirate law, which was the basis for the Sadducees’ question. *Alford’s Greek Testament* (1844, reprint, Grand Rapids: Guardian Press, 1976), 1:222–23, original emphasis.

According to Richard Johnson, Gunter Stemberger’s *Jewish Contemporaries of Jesus* (Fortress, 1995) demonstrates that “the sharp distinctions between Pharisees and Sadducees on such issues as . . . resurrection and afterlife” are uncertain at best. Johnson concludes that “students of the NT should be hesitant to accept unquestioningly the caricatures of Pharisees and Sadducees presented in some NT introductions, Bible dictionaries, and commentaries.” “Review of Gunter Stemberger’s *Jewish Contemporaries of Jesus*,” *The Theological Educator*, Fall 1997. The only entirely reliable, definitive identification of Sadducean theology is the NT, which specifies only that the Sadducees confessed no *resurrection* (Mt 22:23; Mk 12:18; Lk 20:27), “nor angel, nor spirit” (Acts 23:8). Some question whether “angel” and “spirit” are intended to distinguish between angelic spirits and human spirits, or simply to refer synonymously to the category of supernatural beings. Alfred Edersheim regarded the suggestion that Sadducees were full-bore annihilationists who rejected immortality as an exaggeration. *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (1883, reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 1:315. That seems to fit with the repeated point of the Matthew 22 passage that the issue at stake between Jesus and the Sadducees is not merely the afterlife, but specifically the resurrection.

⁵ For example, see Andreas Köstenberger, L. Scott Kellum, and Charles L. Quarles, *The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown: An Introduction to the New Testament* (Nashville: B&H, 2009), 95. See also N. T. Wright and Michael Bird, *The New Testament in Its World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019), 130. Even those who stop short of saying that the Sadducees recognized only the Pentateuch nevertheless acknowledge that “the Sadducees prized the Pentateuch more highly than the rest of Scripture” (D. A. Carson, “Matthew,” in *REBC*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010], 9:520), as bearing “the authority of Moses, whom the Sadducees revered (rejecting later oral tradition)” (Walter L. Liefeld and David W. Pao, “Luke,” in *REBC*, ed. Tremper L. Longman III and David E. Garland [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007], 10:301).

⁶ Significantly, Jesus’ direct critique of their bad theology showed no noticeable impact on their groupthink even 25 years later when the incident recorded in Acts 23 occurred.

repeatedly revealed even in one's own authoritative texts inevitably leads to erroneous theological conclusions.

Third, their theological argument (against resurrection) is *based on assumption*. Inferences are ST's stock in trade. But distinguishing an *inference* from an *assumption* can be a tricky business, especially when one's assumptions are driven by a presuppositional bias. What appears to some to be a *necessary inference* may merely be a *logical assumption*—and, upon closer examination, maybe not even a particularly logical one. Some assumptions are downright silly.

In this case, what drove the Sadducees' error was a *uniformitarian assumption of the fundamental similarity between this life and resurrection life*.⁷ It is perfectly logical to expect resurrected life to follow all the norms of this present life; after all, we are never informed otherwise. Consequently, the assumption that marriage in this life would obviously continue in the resurrection life leads to the natural conclusion that multiple marriages in this life (even if they are all legal and legitimate) must surely create insuperable problems for any kind of post-resurrection existence. Pressing divine revelation into the scaffolding of human reasoning and assumption effectively makes the theologian's imagination the measure of divine truth.

Ugly Systematic Theology

The above flaws are hardly an exhaustive description of bad ST, but they are timeless. What marks the transition from bad ST to ugly ST, however, is an attitudinal dimension. Taking the theological conclusions of bad ST, ugly ST pronounces and perpetuates them with a self-assured cockiness, a smug certainty that they have cornered the market on this doctrine.⁸ The move from bad to ugly incorporates a further assumption: *there can be no solution because they cannot imagine one*.⁹

Jesus combines all these deficiencies in his critique of their theological method and its unorthodox conclusion: "Your mistake is that you do not know the Scriptures, and you do not know

⁷ I have emphasized references to assumption in the following quotations. The Sadducees "*assumed* that the idea of resurrection involves sexual reunion with one's earthly partner(s)" (Liefeld and Pao, 300), "*assuming* that if God raises the dead he must bring them back to an existence just like this one" (Carson, 520). "The dilemma requires the . . . *assumption* that . . . human relations continue unchanged in the putative world to come." Rikk E. Watts, "Mark" in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 215. "The question *confidently assumed* that she would be the wife of one of them." D. Edmond Hiebert, *Mark: A Portrait of the Servant* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1979), 299. "The Sadducees had completely misrepresented the life of the resurrection in *supposing* that in it there would be a continuation of the ordinary earthly relationships and way of living." Norval Geldenhuys, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 511.

⁸ "The extreme case they offer for His opinion is clearly intended as a *reductio ad absurdum* of any view but their own." H. B. Swete, *The Gospel According to Mark* (London: Macmillan, 1927), 278. Perhaps I have hitched my organizational wagon to an unnecessary titular horse, obligating myself to differentiate between bad and ugly for the sake of a dated, throwaway, cultural reference; but I do think there is a degree of accuracy and relevance in the distinction, and the possibility that even good ST can be ugly when it lacks humility.

⁹ Not only do they lack imagination, but they actually believe that they can disprove the doctrine of resurrection from Scripture itself, "that the scriptures (and the levirate law in particular) render a belief in resurrection problematic." B. R. Trick, "Death, Covenants, and Proof of the Resurrection in Mark 12:18–27," *NovT* 49 (2007), 240.

the power of God. You have made a serious error” (Mk 12:24, 27 NLT).¹⁰ Jesus’ first critique (“you do not know the Scriptures”) highlights not only their deficient view of the canon but also their shallow approach even to the Pentateuch. Jesus’ second critique (“you do not know the power of God”) rebukes the absurdity of overlooking God’s ability to overcome any imaginable problems in order to do what he has said.¹¹ And both critiques censure their anti-supernaturalist predisposition because God can do anything he says, and will do everything he says, no matter how unimaginable it may seem to us. That brings us to Jesus’ reply.

Good Systematic Theology

Many interpreters have pointed out that Jesus actually unfolds his critique in reverse order. He mentions two problems (their ignorance of Scripture, and their ignorance of God’s power), then addresses the second one first. To begin with, Jesus points out, deficient theology proper leads to erroneous ST conclusions. Specifically, a failure to factor in God’s ability to overcome our little logical conundrums evidences a flawed theological method.

A Correct Respect for God’s Reliability

First, good ST begins with the persuasion that God not only can do anything he says, but that he will do everything he says. In Scripture he repeatedly demonstrates his capacity for surprising us by “finding a way” to do even the unimaginable and unlikeliest of things that he has promised.¹² This is not merely a matter of conceding God’s omnipotence—a doctrine the Sadducees would not have disputed. Jesus never said they *denied* the power of God; he said they failed to understand it and to calculate it fully into their reading of Scripture.

God’s attributes seamlessly interpenetrate each other. Omnipotence is not a self-contained, abstract attribute. If God is omnipotent, then he has the ability to do anything he says. When the doctrine of divine omnipotence is applied to the doctrine of divine revelation, the byproduct is divine trustworthiness.¹³ Failing to factor in God’s ability to do exactly what he says, however unlikely it may seem to human imagination or logical assumption, leads to bad ST. One of the fatal flaws of bad ST is a tendency to underestimate God’s commitment to his own words. A theologian may conclude (rightly or wrongly) on the basis of other clear Scripture that a particular passage does not mean what it seems to say. But no sound ST begins with the assumption that God is incapable of doing exactly what the text says.

¹⁰ Mark records that Jesus twice refers to their outrightly erroneous theological conclusions; the passive form of *planaomai* implies that they have been *deceived, misled, led astray* by their own way of thinking.

¹¹ In this case, God “is capable of raising the dead to an existence quite unlike this one.” Carson, 520.

¹² Despite direct revelation that he would do so, even Moses expressed incredulity that God could deliver enough meat to feed Israel in the wilderness (Nm 11:18–23ff). When the besieged city of Samaria was experiencing famine to the point of cannibalization, no one imagined how God could possibly flood the bread market overnight, as he said he would; but the man who mocked the possibility died (2 Kings 6:24–7:20).

¹³ I say “byproduct” rather than “result” because other divine attributes figure into this formula as well, such as divine integrity.

Granted, to some degree Jesus' correction of their thinking regarding God's power incorporates new revelation. The fact that Jesus adds previously unrevealed truth at this point, however, in no way mitigates his rebuke. That they did not know *how* resurrection could be possible in spite of potential complications is irrelevant to Jesus' criticism. We do not need to know *how* God could do something he says in order to believe *that* God will do something he says. But that raises the other question: *does* God, in fact, *say* that he will raise the dead? That brings us back to the first point Jesus made to the Sadducees. Not only are they functionally ignorant of God's power, they are functionally ignorant of God's words as well.

A Correct Evaluation of God's Word

Second, good ST begins with a believing attentiveness to everything God says. For whatever reason—whether the Sadducees actually accepted only the Pentateuch as authoritative and Jesus simply chose to play by their canonical rules, or whether Jesus chose to source his reply in the Pentateuch because that is where their question originated—Jesus limited himself to the Torah in answering the Sadducees' question.¹⁴

If doctrine must be demonstrated on the basis of Torah, then he must find a text in the five books of Moses that teaches about resurrection. Since there is no obvious text, in good rabbinic fashion Jesus must derive the notion from a less obvious passage.¹⁵

But this is not quite the impression we get from the Synoptic account. Jesus is not just being a good rabbi. One perceives no hesitation on Jesus' part, no sense that he is laboring at a disadvantage, no concession that this is "a less obvious passage."

- "You are misled!" (Mt 22:29; Mk 12:24)
- "You do not understand the Scripture!" (Mt 22:29; Mk 12:24)
- "Have you not read?" (Mt 22:31; Mk 12:36)

¹⁴ I imagine with amusement the smile of an omniscient God when he gave this original self-revelation in Exodus 3 (and directed Moses to record it as he did), knowing that this question would surface fourteen centuries later. It is all the more amusing if, as I believe, the specific person of the Godhead revealing himself to Moses in Exodus 3 was the same one who would be answering this question in the Gospels.

¹⁵ Craig Blomberg, "Matthew" in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 77. Oddly, Blomberg's explanation of Jesus' argument *seems* to imply a misunderstanding of resurrection: "Because God identifies himself to Moses as currently the God of the patriarchs ('I *am* the God of Abraham . . .'), Jesus infers that they must still be living; but since they have physically died by the time of Moses, *their life must be a new resurrection life*" (ibid., emphasis added). Does Blomberg believe that the patriarchs had already experienced bodily resurrection? Or is he simply using "resurrection" a bit too loosely? (See footnote 31 below.) Grant Osborne seems to demonstrate the same confusion: "Since their deaths were recorded in the OT and yet they were alive in Moses' day, Jesus is arguing, *they had to have been raised by God to heavenly life*." *Matthew*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 818, emphasis added. "Raised" would seem to imply "resurrection," but surely Osborne doesn't mean to say that the patriarchs were already in their resurrection bodies in Moses' day.

- “Even Moses showed¹⁶ that the dead are raised!” (Lk 20:37)
- “You are seriously misled!” (Mk 12:27)

As far as Jesus is concerned, the implication of resurrection in Exodus 3:6 is as plain as the proverbial nose on their face.¹⁷

Analyzing Jesus’ Argument for Resurrection

Nevertheless, Jesus draws a doctrine from a passage that everyone agrees does not explicitly *state* that doctrine outright. It seems safe to posit, therefore, that his theological method employs some level of ST. In order to evaluate that theological method, we need to understand Jesus’ argument. On that point, however, opinions diverge, in part because analyzing Jesus’ argument and theological method is, itself, an exercise in ST to some degree. Explanations of Jesus’ line of reasoning in this passage abound. Craig Blomberg outlines “seven major options [that] have been put forward for understanding Jesus’ hermeneutic” but concludes, “None of these approaches, even in various combinations, seems entirely satisfactory.”¹⁸

A Grammatical Deduction?

An axiom of logic is that the simplest solution is the preferred solution. On the surface, the simplest explanation of Jesus’ argument is that he rests his case on a verb tense.¹⁹ Verb tenses can, of course, carry decisive theological significance. The question is whether that is where Jesus leans the weight of his argument in this instance.

¹⁶ The term “showed” (μηνύω) denotes the disclosure of secret or privileged information not otherwise apparent. See Jn 11:57; Acts 23:30; 1 Cor 10:28. In each case it implies disclosing information to which one is privy and which is otherwise not publicly known. It is important to note, however, that Jesus does not say he is the one “showing” what would otherwise be unknown; he says that Moses “showed” it—making it accessible knowledge for the fourteen centuries prior to Jesus’ conversation with the Sadducees.

¹⁷ This is an interesting metaphor, since it implies something that is both blatantly obvious and yet completely unseen; one cannot see one’s own nose without concerted effort (or a mirror).

¹⁸ Blomberg, 79. “(1) Jesus is simply contrasting the present tense with what otherwise would have been the expected past tense; (2) the Sadducees’ objection involved cases of sterility, so Jesus is pointing out how God overcame sterility among the patriarchs and matriarchs and thus how he can bring life from death; (3) God’s covenant promises to the patriarchs were not entirely fulfilled in this life, demonstrating that their complete fulfillment must be in a life to come; (4) it is absurd for the immortal to define himself in terms of the mortal, therefore the patriarchs are not dead; (5) the text assumes that the three patriarchs are now dead, but because of God’s covenant with them their resurrection is assured; (6) the consonants of the Hebrew word for “Yahweh” should be repointed to create the verb ‘to be,’ showing that God makes Abraham to exist; (7) Jesus has adopted an argument somewhat parallel to Philo’s in which the patriarchs stood for imperishable virtues.” Ibid. Views (1), (3), (4), and (5) are represented in this study. Blomberg’s rather pessimistic conclusion would seem to imply that Jesus’ theological method is ultimately undiscernible—which is, itself, not “entirely satisfactory” if we are to think God’s thoughts after him.

¹⁹ This is view (1) in Blomberg’s list of seven major explanations for Jesus’ hermeneutical method in Matthew 22. See footnote 18 above.

Kevin Bauder spells out this view more clearly than most in a blog series on doing systematic theology:

Jesus' argument hangs on the tense of the verb: "I am the God," not "I was the God." Interestingly, the verb does not even appear in the Hebrew text. It is an implied term that must be supplied by the reader. Even so, Jesus did not merely quote the text. He went on to reason from it. He had to, because the text does not say, "There will really be a resurrection." It says, "I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." That is not exactly a straightforward declaration of a future resurrection. Yet Jesus insisted that it is clear enough. God is not the God of the dead, He asserted, but of the living. Therefore, a resurrection is absolutely necessary.²⁰

This explanation of Jesus' argument has been around for a long time.²¹ It is reasonably common among interpreters of Matthew,²² though interestingly (for reasons I will mention shortly) it is rare among commentators on Mark or Luke.²³ Even though there is no verb of being in the Hebrew text of Exodus 3:6, the Hebrew construction assumes an implied present-tense verb. The Septuagint correctly inserts a present-tense verb, accurately reflecting the intention of the Hebrew text.

Nevertheless, the assertion that Jesus' argument rests on the present tense (implied in Hebrew and inserted in the LXX) encounters some difficulties. One problem is immediately apparent when you examine the parallel accounts: *both Mark and Luke bypass the present tense verb altogether*. So, if the verb ("I am") is the key to unlocking Jesus' argument, it is difficult to explain why the Spirit would

²⁰ "Shall We Reason Together? Part 4: Ye Know Not the Scriptures," *In the Nick of Time* (October 6, 2006), <https://sharperiron.org/article/shall-we-reason-together-part-four-ye-know-not-scriptures>, accessed September 17, 2020.

²¹ John A. Broadus rejects this grammatical line of argument but traces it back to Chrysostom. *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1886), 456.

²² In fact, this view seems most common among two classes of interpreters: (1) systematic theologians, who tend to rely exclusively on Matthew's version, and (2) interpreters focused exclusively on Matthew's text. For examples of systematic theologians see Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 181; Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Colorado Springs: Chariot Victor Publishing, 1997), 92; John MacArthur and Richard Mayhue, eds., *Biblical Doctrine* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2017), 92; Rolland McCune, *A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity: Prolegomena and the Doctrines of Scripture, God, and Angels*, vol. 1 (Allen Park, MI: Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, 2009), 1:93. For examples of Matthew-focused interpreters see Blomberg, 77; Osborne, 818; Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 561; Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, WBC, vol. 33B (Dallas: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 642; David L. Turner, *Matthew*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 532; Louis A. Barbieri, "Matthew," *BKC*, ed. John Walvoord (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1983), 72.

²³ This is because neither Mark nor Luke include the present tense verb. So, for example, Evans states matter-of-factly, "Grammar and tense play no role here." Craig A. Evans, *Mark 8:27–16:20*, WBC, vol. 34B, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 256. Strauss, too, dismisses the grammatical argument as untenable: "It is sometimes claimed that Jesus makes his argument based on the tense of a verb, a present rather than a past tense: God 'is' rather than 'was' the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. But this is not quite right, since neither the Hebrew text of Exod. 3:6 nor Mark's Greek quotation . . . includes the verb 'I am.' In both the verb is implied." Mark L. Strauss, *Mark*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 535. Likewise, France writes of Mark's account: "The absence of the LXX verb εἰμί corresponds to the Hebrew syntax, and shows that the argument is not based on its tense." R. T. France, *The Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 475. France also rejects the grammatical argument in his later commentary on Matthew. *The Gospel of Matthew*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 480. It seems likely that his exegetical work on multiple Gospel accounts of the same incident helps him avoid hermeneutical tunnel vision—a valuable lesson for students of the Gospels.

direct both Mark and Luke to omit it, putting their readers at a distinct disadvantage for understanding Jesus' argument. Far from pointing to the present tense as central to Jesus' argument, Luke's account especially underscores the significance of the bare title itself; according to his account of Jesus' words, what shows that the dead are raised is when *Moses* calls the Lord "the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob" (Lk 20:37).

Another difficulty with the grammatical view is the specificity of the question at issue. The conventional grammatical explanation actually proves only immortality (that the patriarchs had not ceased to exist), not resurrection (that the patriarchs would be bodily raised to life again). Craig Blomberg admits as much when he notes that Jesus appeals to the Torah to settle disputes on other occasions, but this one is different:

In none of those [other] texts, however, did we sense so 'strained' an interpretation of an OT passage, apparently turning on the tense of a single verb ('I am'), as we do here. From our modern perspective, 'I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob' need mean nothing more than 'I am the same God . . . who disclosed himself to the patriarchs'—that is, even though the patriarchs are now dead. It does not seem to imply anything about the existence or nonexistence of resurrection life. . . . Strictly speaking, one could argue that . . . all that Jesus has demonstrated is immortality of some kind, not actual bodily resurrection.²⁴

It is surprising that so many seem to see no problem with Jesus' apparent failure to actually answer the Sadducees' question.²⁵ Carson admits that "at first glance the text Jesus cites is sufficient . . . to prove immortality but not resurrection," but asserts that the Sadducean conception did not distinguish immortality from resurrection (rejecting both) and warns against retro-reading into the passage "a neoplatonic dualism" that differentiates between immortality and resurrection.²⁶ As others have pointed out, however, our knowledge of Sadducean doctrine is minimal and sketchy at best.²⁷ The idea that the Sadducees were pure materialists is far from certain. The only authoritative insight we have on their views is the very narrow window provided by a pair of biblical statements (Mt 22:23; Acts 23:8).

²⁴ Blomberg, 79. Blomberg defends Jesus' reply, however, by adding that "*in this specific context*, Jesus can assume that the only debate is between bodily resurrection and cessation of all existence."

²⁵ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (1871, reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1981), 3:770; Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1907), 999; Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1941), 279.

²⁶ Carson, 520: "The Sadducees denied the existence of spirits as thoroughly as they denied the existence of angels (Acts 23:8). Their concern therefore was not to choose between immortality and resurrection but between death as finality and life beyond death, whatever its mode." The precise implications of Acts 23:8, however, seem far from certain. For a list of six views on the meaning of this verse see Darrel Bock, *Acts*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 671-72. Plummer offers an interesting though undocumented view: "All Sadducees held that the resurrection was not an article of faith, but some may have believed that it was true" (468). Such statements simply underscore our uncertainty about the largely undocumented beliefs of a 2,000-year-old Jewish minority. In light of such uncertainty, our primary recourse must be to the Scripture itself which, as it turns out, is not at all ambiguous that the specific point at issue is a future, bodily resurrection.

²⁷ Wessell and Strauss, 902.

In the end, whether or not the Sadducees bundled immortality and resurrection, and denied afterlife altogether²⁸ is not only uncertain but irrelevant. The biblical text is determinative and clear that the issue specifically pinpointed (by the Sadducees and by Jesus) in this confrontation was not an assumed conceptual linkage between immortality and resurrection; the point at issue is the validity of *a specific future event*.²⁹ Several exegetical observations bear this out. (1) All the Synoptic versions of this pericope use the term ἀνάστασις multiple times to denote the issue at stake.³⁰ In the ancient world this word “was never used to mean life after death. *Resurrection* was used to denote bodily life *after* whatever sort of life after death there might be.”³¹ (2) All the Synoptics set the stage by spelling out the Sadducees’ explicit denial of the resurrection. (3) The grammar used in both the question and the answer points to a specific event at a future time;³² the Sadducees ask about future conditions “at the resurrection” (Mt 22:28; Lk 20:33), and Jesus replies regarding future conditions “at the resurrection” (Mt 22:30) during “that age” (Lk 20:35). (4) According to Jesus, Moses’ words prove not that the patriarchs are still alive spiritually but “that the dead are raised” (Lk 20:37). (5) Jesus had already publicly taught the Jerusalem religious leadership that he was the divinely appointed agent of the future

²⁸ According to Josephus, the Sadducees held “that souls die with the bodies” (*Antiquities* 18.1.4). Josephus’s remarks on the Sadducees are well-known and widely referenced (*Antiquities* 13.5.9, 13.10.6, 18.1.4; *Wars of the Jews* 2.8.14). Nevertheless, Edersheim dismisses this particular characterization of the Sadducees as one of “those inferences which theological controversialists are too fond of imputing to their opponents” and says that Josephus was “merely reporting the common inference of his party” (1:315).

²⁹ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 580.

³⁰ Matthew and Luke use it four times; Mark uses the noun twice and the verb twice. Cf.: “Note the repetition of the word ‘resurrection’ and the absence of any reference to the Greek concept of ‘immortality.’ It is not persistence of life but that ‘the dead rise’ that Jesus is teaching” (Liefeld and Pao, 301).

³¹ N. T. Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church* (New York: Harper One, 2008), 36. “When the ancients spoke of resurrection, whether to deny it (as all pagans did) or to affirm it (as some Jews did), they were referring to a two-step narrative in which resurrection, meaning new bodily life, would be preceded by an interim period of bodily death. . . . This meaning is constant throughout the ancient world until the post-Christian coinages of second-century Gnosticism. Most of the ancients believed in life after death . . . but outside Judaism and Christianity . . . they did not believe in resurrection.” Ibid. This is consistent with the NT use of the word. All NT uses of ἀνάστασις (except Lk 2:34) are theological, referring to the bodily rising of the dead; it is never used of the rising/raising of spirits from the dead. Spirits depart the body at physical death and neither die nor descend into the grave.

³² The grammar here corroborates that the Sadducees and Jesus are discussing a future event. (I am indebted to my colleague Dr. Brian Hand for the technical aspects of this footnote.) (1) In Matthew 22:28 (cf. Mk 12:23) the Sadducees’ initial question is posited with a future tense main verb (ἐν τῇ ἀναστάσει οὗν τίνος τῶν ἐπτά ἔσται), which implies that the resurrection under debate is a future event—an implication Jesus never contested or corrected. (2) The future tense in Mark 12:28 establishes a chronological orientation indicating that the present tense verbs in Matthew 22:30 (γαμοῦσιν and γαμίζονται) use the futuristic present tense (a common present tense use in which the future event is brought forward into present consideration). (3) Mark 12:25 (ὅταν γὰρ ἐκ νεκρῶν ἀναστῶσιν) uses the subjunctive mood to express a future probability (the common function of the subjunctive). In short, the Sadducees’ question sets the framework as a discussion of a future event (or, for the Sadducees, an *alleged* future event), and Jesus’ reply corroborates that conception.

resurrection (Jn 5:26–29).³³ The proximity of this debate to Jesus' own bodily resurrection five days later is also significant in terms of its literary focus and theological intent.

Neither the Sadducees' question nor Jesus' answer are about whether people continue living after death, but whether they would experience a bodily resurrected existence in the future. On the grammatical explanation of Jesus' argument (in addition to its other serious deficits), Jesus simply fails to address the issue raised by the Sadducees; but that is not the impression we get from the conclusion of the pericope (Lk 20:39–40).

A Logical Deduction?

Craig Evans sees a different line of argument: "Grammar and tense play no role here. The argument turns on an inference from parallel truths. God is the God of the patriarchs; he is also the God of the living. Therefore the patriarchs, though presently dead, must someday live."³⁴ Those who adopt some form of this view sometimes also suggest that this was a typical style of rabbinic argument which, while not necessarily convincing to moderns, has to be evaluated on the merits of its own contemporary context. Blomberg, for example, explains that Scripture writers sometimes adopt the fallacious logic of their opponents in order to make a counterpoint.³⁵ But this is not at all what Jesus seems to be doing in the Sadducean confrontation. Moreover, like the grammatical explanation, its relevance to the specific issue of a future bodily resurrection is utterly unconvincing.

An Anthropological Deduction?

Some argue that the key to understanding Jesus' argument here is to recognize that the Hebrews conceived of man as an inseparable unity—both material and immaterial, body and soul—so that any implication of ongoing existence automatically assumed bodily resurrection.³⁶ The simplicity is appealing: man is a material-immaterial unity, so if there is an afterlife the body must be part of that afterlife. This explanation does not seem to appear as a stand-alone argument, but only as a supplemental explanation accompanying one of the other views—a necessary qualifier to answer the

³³ Only weeks before this confrontation Jesus had also expressly asserted, in response to Martha's confidence in Lazarus's future resurrection, "I am the resurrection" (Jn 11:25); though that seems to have been a strictly private conversation, it seems highly unlikely that Martha kept this revelation to herself for any length of time.

³⁴ Evans, 256. Green and Garland seem to argue similarly. Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 721–22; David E. Garland, *Luke*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 809.

³⁵ Some "arguments in Scripture . . . seem designed simply to apply the logic of a person or group with which the inspired author disagrees in order to make a point that is convincing by that very logic, even though the logic itself may be flawed (e.g., the appeal to Ps. 82:6 in John 10:34)" (Blomberg, 79).

³⁶ Cf. Hiebert, 301–02; Geldenhuys, 511: "If these patriarchs were not immortal, God would never call himself their God (such a thing would be unworthy of him), for he is not the God of the dead but of the living." This represents view (4) in Blomberg's list of seven major explanations for Jesus' hermeneutical method in Matthew 22 (see footnote 18 above).

objection that Jesus' argument defends only the concept of immortality, not resurrection.³⁷ So the basic reasoning runs something like this: God identified himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; he is the God of the living not the dead; if they, then, are living then there must be a coming resurrection (since man is a corporeal-incorporeal unity).³⁸

The main weakness of this explanation, in my opinion, is that there seem to be a number of other more obvious passages that Jesus might have appealed to even in the Pentateuch (beginning with Genesis 2:7). The explicit appeal to God's covenantal title seems unnecessary and distracting if the point is man's corporeal-incorporeal unity. But from an even more basic rhetorical standpoint, if the Jewish belief in man's spirit-body unity would naturally necessitate a resurrection, the Sadducees would have to accept that belief as well for Jesus' argument to carry any weight. If the Sadducees rejected that belief and, with it, immortality altogether (as we are told they did), why should this argument carry any weight with them? In the end, differentiating between afterlife in an intermediate state and future bodily resurrection is not a foreign, neoplatonic construct; it is the teaching of Scripture.

A Theological Deduction?

Many commentators suggest that the emphasis of Jesus' argument falls specifically on the covenantal character of God who bound Himself in covenant relationship to the patriarchs.³⁹ This amounts to arguing a theological implication, rather than a grammatical, a logical, or an anthropological one. I have bolded references to **covenant** and **relationship** in the following quotations to underscore this emphasis.

- "It is sometimes claimed that Jesus makes his argument based on the tense of a verb, a present rather than a past tense. . . . But this is not quite right. . . . Jesus' point is instead based on the reality of a continuing **relationship** with God by virtue of his **covenant** with them. He remains their God even after their physical death because of the abiding nature of that **covenant**."⁴⁰
- The grammatical argument "is too superficial an account of Jesus' reasoning. The argument is not linguistic. . . . The argument is based rather on the nature of God's **relationship** with his human followers: the **covenant** by which he binds himself to them is too strong to be terminated by their death."⁴¹

³⁷ Carson represents probably the most concise expression of this combination view, arguing more broadly for Marshall's explanation (see below) "read against the background of biblical anthropology and eschatology." Carson, 520.

³⁸ B. R. Trick critiques this "jump from immortality to resurrection by appealing to the unity of human nature" on other grounds than the brief objections I offer here. Trick, 250–51

³⁹ This is view (5) in Blomberg's list of seven major explanations for Jesus' hermeneutical method in Matthew 22. See footnote 18 above.

⁴⁰ Strauss, 535.

⁴¹ France, *Matthew*, NICNT, 480.

- “At issue, then, is not the phrase itself, but rather the nature of God, who uttered it. And in the context of Exodus 3 this means the character and power of the self-sustaining I AM, who is the source of creation’s order and life. . . . Since God has faithfully exercised his matchless power in order to keep the **covenant**, it is inconceivable that **those with whom he chooses to identify** would not also participate in that life. In terms of the Sadducees’ question, this can mean nothing else but resurrection.”⁴²
- “God is the eternal God of the **covenant**, a fact especially stressed wherever reference is made to the patriarchs. He always loves and blesses **his people**; therefore, it is inconceivable that his blessings cease when **his people** die.”⁴³
- “Jesus held that for God to describe himself to Moses as Abraham’s God, Jacob’s God, and Isaac’s God did not merely refer to a past **relationship** which no longer existed. By his very nature he is not the God of the dead but of the living. In calling these patriarchs into **covenant relations** with himself, he had established a **relationship** with them that was not terminated with physical death. Death did not break the spiritual **relationship** into which they had been brought.”⁴⁴
- “[T]he fact that in Moses’ time God could still call himself the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob implies that at that time **he still remembered and cared for them**, and, since he is the living, almighty, faithful God, **those whom he remembers and cares for** must still be alive. . . . And, if they were still alive with God in the time of Moses, we may be confident that at the last God will also raise up their bodies, so that they may share the final blessedness. The kernel of the argument is the *faithfulness* of God.”⁴⁵
- “God implied that the patriarchs were still alive and that He had a continuing **relationship** with them as their **covenant-keeping** God, even though they had died long before. . . . And His **covenant faithfulness** implicitly guarantees their bodily resurrection.”⁴⁶
- “The fact that the phrase, ‘the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob,’ carried with it the idea of the **covenant** God whose *promises* can be relied on and whose **relationship** with his people endures forever.”⁴⁷

Some of these statements of Jesus’ argument are logically and theologically stronger than others.⁴⁸ All of them argue that Jesus is not reasoning from grammar or logic, but from the theological

⁴² Watts, 216.

⁴³ Carson, 520.

⁴⁴ Hiebert, 301.

⁴⁵ C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 376.

⁴⁶ John D. Grassmick, “Mark” in *BKC*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1983), 163.

⁴⁷ Wessell and Strauss, 902. It is worth noting here that the 2010 revision of Wessell’s original 1984 commentary subtly alters Wessell’s original statement. See footnote 50 below.

⁴⁸ Some statements deteriorate into rather vague, question-begging generalities that seem to have little to do with the text or the issue at hand. Pao and Schnabel suggest that Exodus 3:6 implies resurrection because “God committed

implications of the covenantal character of God rooted in the title by which he introduces himself to Moses. Again, Luke's account especially underscores the significance of the title itself; Moses "showed" that the dead are raised when he calls the Lord "the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob" (Lk 20:37). It is hard to see, however, why a theological argument based purely on covenantal *relationship* compels the conclusion of a *resurrection*; afterlife yes (he is "not the God of the dead but of the living"), but not physical resurrection. And the text repeatedly highlights that the point at issue is a future, physical resurrection.

But what if that covenantal relationship with the patriarchs includes earth-related promises to the patriarchs themselves—including promises that everyone agrees were not fulfilled in their lifetime? That would create a compelling argument for resurrection. Two of the last three statements in the above list add a distinctive note: the *faithfulness* of God. And the final statement introduces an additional emphasis absent from the others: the concept of God's *promises*. That's a noteworthy addition, because the covenant did not merely establish a relationship; the covenant articulated specific promises that require physical resurrection to be fulfilled. That suggests the possibility that our Lord was implying another category of argument.

A Biblical-Theological Deduction?

A number of commentators suggest that the linchpin of Jesus' argument is not merely the covenantal *relationship* between God and the patriarchs, but his necessary *faithfulness* to the covenantal bond itself. That covenantal bond consisted of certain specific promises to the patriarchs—including some that were not fulfilled in their lifetime.⁴⁹ I have emphasized the references to *promises* in the following quotations to underscore this point.

- The fact that God's self-chosen title in Exodus 3:6 "carried with it the idea of the covenant God whose *promises* can be relied on, underscores the basic thrust of Jesus' argument—viz., the faithfulness of God."⁵⁰
- "The covenantal relationship God established with the patriarchs and the fact that long after their death he still identifies himself as their God indicates that they are alive and in fellowship with him. God's *promises* and his relationship with the patriarchs and prophets are not broken by death"⁵¹

himself to Abraham . . . expressing a love for Abraham 'which can only mean that Abraham will be forever with God'" and that "Yahweh's love that caused the exodus from Egypt also guarantees the resurrection from the dead." David Pao and Eckhard Schnabel, "Luke" in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 370.

⁴⁹ This is view (3) in Blomberg's list of seven major explanations for Jesus' hermeneutical method in Matthew 22. See footnote 18 above.

⁵⁰ Walter L. Wessell, "Mark," in *EBC*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 736. I have purposely reverted here to Wessell's 1984 commentary on Mark for this language. The 2010 revision by Mark Strauss cited earlier (see footnote 47) replaces Wessell's original emphasis on God's covenant *faithfulness* with God's covenant *relationship* (Wessell and Strauss, 902). The difference is not insignificant (otherwise, why make the change?).

⁵¹ Robert H. Stein, *Mark*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 555.

- “Jesus . . . argues that the *promises* of God are made not to the dead but to the living. If Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are dead . . . then God’s *promise* to them was limited to the duration of their earthly lives, which renders his *promises* finite and unfulfilled. God’s word, however, cannot be bound. . . . God would not pledge himself to the dead unless the dead were raised to life. Jesus’ argument for the reality of the resurrection is based on the assumption that the call of God establishes a relationship with God, and once a relationship with God is established, it bears the *promise* of God and cannot be ended, even by death. The relationship is the result of the power and *promise* of God that conquers the last enemy, death itself.”⁵²
- “If the death of the patriarchs is the last word of their history, there has been a breach of the *promises* of God guaranteed by the covenant, and of which the formula ‘the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob’ is the symbol. It is in fidelity to his covenant that God will resurrect the dead. . . . It was the failure to appreciate the essential link between God’s covenant faithfulness and the resurrection which had led the Sadducees into their grievous error.”⁵³
- Jesus’ argument in Matthew 22 implies “resurrection, since if the patriarchs are dead, the God of *promise* cannot be their God. The point is that the patriarchs are not dead and neither are God’s *promises* to them. For the *promises* to the patriarchs to come to pass and for God to still be their God, resurrection must be a reality.”⁵⁴
- “[T]he argument . . . simply asserts that God will raise the dead because he cannot fail to keep his *promises* to them that he will be their God.”⁵⁵

The specific emphasis of these statements on the importance of God’s promises to Jesus’ argument for resurrection from Exodus 3:6 suggests a fruitful avenue of exploration. R. T. France remarks that Jesus’ argument “is so compressed as to seem quite unconvincing. But study of the context from which the quotation is taken suggests a deeper theological reasoning than is apparent on the surface.”⁵⁶ I could not agree more. That conviction drives the contextual study that follows.

The Importance of Core Covenant Promises

The emphasis on God’s promises moves to the heart of the covenantal issue.⁵⁷ A covenant is not merely a relationship; it is a relationship grounded on specific promises. But *what promises*, exactly, would entail the patriarchs’ resurrection? I. Howard Marshall specifies (in the last quotation above),

⁵² James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 368-69.

⁵³ William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 430.

⁵⁴ Darrell Bock, *Luke*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1996), 1625.

⁵⁵ I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 743.

⁵⁶ R. T. France, *Matthew*, TNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 318.

⁵⁷ My point is not that all those I have quoted as examples of this emphasis on promise would agree with my conclusion, but rather that many who have put their finger on this core covenantal issue fail to carry it to its natural, biblical-theological conclusion.

“his *promises* to them that he will be their God.” One might object that the eternity of God himself does not require the eternal existence of the patriarchs unless God specified that he would be their God forever; but in fact, that is one clear implication specified in the covenant (Gn 17:7). Even that promise, however, does not compel *physical resurrection*. God could be their God eternally and spiritually without necessarily raising them physically from the dead.

What promises are at the core of God’s covenant with the patriarchs that assume an earthly, physical existence, and yet were not fulfilled in their lifetime? Such covenantal promises would require their resurrection for God to be able to fulfill his word as their faithful covenant God. The answer surfaces in the very next verse: “I will give to you and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession” (Gn 17:8).

There are three vital points to note here. First, the promise of the possession of the land is repeated regularly precisely because it is at the core of the covenant God made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.⁵⁸ Second, God promised the land not merely to the patriarchal descendants of the future, but to the patriarchs themselves—a point that God himself repeatedly emphasizes in his covenantal statements.

- “. . . all the land which you see, I will give it **to you** and to your descendants forever” (Gn 13:15).
- “Arise, walk about the land through its length and breadth; for I will give it **to you**” (Gn 13:17).
- “I am the LORD who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, **to give you** this land to possess it” (Gn 15:7).
- “I will give **to you** and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God” (Gn 17:8).
- “. . . for **to you** and to your descendants I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath which I swore to your father Abraham” (Gn 26:3).
- “May he also give you the blessing of Abraham, **to you** and to your descendants with you, **that you** [singular] **may possess the land of your sojournings**, which God gave **to Abraham**” (Gn 28:4).
- “. . . the land on which you lie, I will give it **to you** and to your descendants” (Gn 28:13).
- “The land which I gave **to Abraham and Isaac**, I will give it **to you** . . .” (Gn 35:12).

Significantly, this emphasis on the covenantal land-promise to the patriarchs themselves continues into the Exodus context to which Jesus appeals as evidence of resurrection:

- “I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, as God Almighty. . . . I also established My covenant with them, **to give them** the land of Canaan, the land in which they sojourned” (Ex 6:3-4)

⁵⁸ Genesis 12:1, 7; 13:15, 17; 15:7, 18; 17:8; 24:7; 26:3; 28:4, 13; 35:12; 50:24. Each of these references explicitly reiterates the land promise as being at the core of the Abrahamic covenant.

- “I will bring you to **the land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob . . .**” (Ex 6:8)

Third, the land promise remained unfulfilled in the patriarchs’ lifetime and, therefore, requires their physical resurrection if God is to keep this repeated promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

The patriarchs lived as strangers and sojourners in Canaan only as “the land of promise” (Heb 11:9). It is a stubborn biblical-theological datum that the land was promised not just to future generations, but to *them*—the patriarchs themselves. Yet they died without ever inheriting that promise (cf. Heb 11: 39). But death cannot cancel covenant promises that the character of God compels him to keep. Spirit beings neither need nor inherit physical land. How, then, can God be true to his promise to give them the land he swore to give them? The Bible’s solution is resurrection. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will inherit the land God promised them—literally and physically—because of the future bodily resurrection.

The Importance of Historical Context

The historical context of the passage to which Jesus alludes (Exodus 3) is indispensable to a biblical theological understanding of his argument. In commissioning Moses to lead the Israelites out of slavery, God introduced himself to Moses as “the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” (Ex 3:6). Why? “The expression *God of Abraham* is another way to say the ‘God of Promise.’”⁵⁹ Why was that relevant in historical context of Exodus 3? What about the covenant with Abraham was relevant to Israel’s bondage in Egypt?

Genesis 15 explains *prophetically* exactly what God was doing in Exodus 3, and why: “I am the Lord who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans *to give you this land to inherit it*. . . . Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers *in a land that is not theirs* [for] four hundred years. . . . But . . . they shall return *here*” (Gn 15:7, 13, 16). Why? Because “the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, ‘To your descendants *I have given this land*’” (Gn 15:18).

Exodus 6 explains *retrospectively* exactly what God is doing, and why: “I appeared to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. . . . I also established my covenant with them *to give them the land of Canaan*. . . . and I have remembered my covenant. . . . and I will bring you out. . . . *I will bring you to the land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and I will give it to you as a possession*” (Ex 6:3-8 NASB).

In other words, the land-promise is at the heart of what God is doing in Exodus 3, and therefore at the heart of why he introduces himself to Moses as “the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob”—and therefore at the heart of Jesus’ allusion to that particular passage as Pentateuchal proof of future bodily resurrection. B. R. Trick advances the same argument, though he approaches it from an intriguingly different angle—the patriarchs will not be resurrected because God must keep his promises to them but, rather, God must keep his promises to the patriarchs because they are still alive:

⁵⁹ Bock, *Luke*, 1629.

I propose that Jesus' argument runs as follows. Because it is based on God's faithfulness to his covenant with the patriarchs, the Exodus out of Egypt proves that the patriarchs are in some sense still alive to God, the conclusion drawn in [Mark] 12:27a. But if they are still alive, then God remains obligated to fulfill all of his covenantal promises, one of which is to give the land of Canaan as an everlasting possession to the patriarchs (e.g., Gen. 17:8; Exod. 6:4; Num. 14:23; Deut. 11:21) and their descendants. Indeed, the Exodus context of the verse that Jesus cites evokes this very promise: almost immediately after revealing himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Yahweh goes on to identify the giving of this promised land as part of the motivation for the Exodus itself (Exod. 3:8, 17; cf. Gen. 15:13-16). For the patriarchs to receive the land personally as an everlasting possession, however, would presumably require their eventual resurrection.⁶⁰

In the full historical context of Exodus 3, the divine title implies not only that the patriarchs are still very much alive (immortal), but also that they must be physically resurrected if the core promises of God's covenant *with them* are to be fulfilled to *them*. "If the patriarchs . . . are to experience the promise, they must be raised."⁶¹ And they must experience the promise because God's promises are infallibly reliable. The measure of God's covenant faithfulness is the trustworthiness of God's covenant words.

The Importance of Applying the Biblical Theological Data

In the context of discussing this very controversy with the Sadducees, John Frame observes:

The Sadducees' problem was not that they didn't know the text, but that they were unable or unwilling to apply it to the current discussion of resurrection. Jesus teaches them that to the extent that one cannot apply Scripture, he is actually ignorant of Scripture. Knowing Scripture cannot be separated from knowing its applications.⁶²

Many interpreters correctly grasp that when Jesus stakes his argument for resurrection on the divine title in Exodus 3, he is grounding that argument in the certainty of God's covenantal promises to the patriarchs. Some interpreters (for other ST reasons, it seems) come right up to that threshold but stop short of the application of that argument to the land promise and its obvious implications for resurrection. To cite I. Howard Marshall again: "God will raise the dead because *he cannot fail to keep his promises to them* that he will be their God."⁶³ Why not, then, God's other promises to them—especially promises that specifically demand resurrection? Why should not the fact that God "cannot fail to keep His promises" not extend to his promises of the land to the original patriarchs themselves? Brian Collins makes the connection:

⁶⁰ Trick, 252.

⁶¹ Bock, *Luke*, 1625.

⁶² John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Word of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2010), 229.

⁶³ Marshall, 743, emphasis added. Marshall's statement clearly resonates with others; it is quoted by both Carson (520) as well as Pao and Schnabel (371). Few, however, seem prepared to apply this statement at its full face-value to all God's covenantal land promises to the patriarchs, even though the result is an even stronger, clearer argument for resurrection from Exodus 3.

God had told Abraham, “I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession” (Genesis 17:8). But Abraham never received this promise during his lifetime (Heb. 11:13). It is this truth that lies behind Jesus’s affirmation that Exodus 3:6 teaches the resurrection. God is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob because he has covenanted with them. . . . He is not the God of the dead but of the living, because the patriarchs must be raised one day for the promises to them to be fulfilled.⁶⁴

He is “the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” precisely because he entered into covenant with them. A covenant entails promise. And a “promise entails an obligation. When somebody makes a promise, they’re not just stating something, they are doing something. They are forming a relationship and creating an expectation that carries moral obligation.”⁶⁵ That is true enough on the human level, but infallibly so on the divine level. Through the Abrahamic covenant, “God has made a commitment to the patriarchs as the God of promise. To fulfill that commitment to them they must be alive to receive what he promises. All of this presupposes resurrection and the capability of God’s power to bring it to pass.”⁶⁶

One of those core promises was that the patriarchs themselves would possess a piece of land that God repeatedly defined with geographical specificity, and which they never possessed in their lifetime. Few underscore this point with more surprising clarity than Blomberg: “Part of that covenant also involved giving [the patriarchs] embodied life in the land of Canaan forever, so therefore they must be awaiting a resurrection in order to inherit that part of the promise.”⁶⁷

God can always give more than he promised; but he cannot give less, or other, than he promised. Nor can he give to others instead what he promised to the patriarchs. At its most basic level, Jesus’ argument for resurrection is grounded in the inviolability of God’s promises to those with whom he covenants himself.

An Objection

This view faces a natural objection, of course: if this is Jesus’ argument, he certainly could have expressed it more clearly. Why did not he simply say, “If there is no resurrection then how will God’s promise of the land to patriarchs be fulfilled?” This objection, however, applies equally to all of the proposed views above. None of the other explanations is immediately transparent from Jesus’ words. The reason there are multiple explanations of the logical and theological arc of Jesus’ reply is precisely because he did *not* make his line of reasoning explicit. As he sometimes did especially with his most obdurate opponents, he gave a reply (without explanation) which was perfectly clear and obvious to him but, to his enemies, was opaque and compelled them to process and apply the Scriptures they

⁶⁴ Brian Collins, “Scripture, Hermeneutics, and Theology: Evaluating Theological Interpretation of Scripture” (PhD diss., Bob Jones University, 2011), 245. I am indebted to my former doctoral student and present theological colleague for sharpening my thinking on the topic of this essay; I have, I hope, expanded and strengthened the argument’s foundation and extended its ramifications for theological method.

⁶⁵ Craig L. Blaising, “Israel and Hermeneutics,” *The People, the Land, and the Future of Israel*, ed. Darrell Bock and Mitch Glaser (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2014), 160.

⁶⁶ Darrell L. Bock, *Jesus according to Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 330.

⁶⁷ Craig L. Blomberg, *Jesus and the Gospels*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: B&H, 2009), 372.

already possessed. I should add, however, that Jesus is not (on this view) relying on some miniscule, pedantic detail buried away in some obscure passage; the promise of the land to the patriarchs themselves is repeatedly at the heart of multiple confirmations of the Abrahamic covenant (note the ten sample statements from Genesis and Exodus listed above). This is one of those mundane exegetical facts that is easily overlooked precisely because it is in such plain view. And, as Adolf Schlatter memorably described it, “exegesis is seeing what is there before your eyes.”⁶⁸

The additional explanatory advantage of the view proposed here is that it is the only one that specifically addresses the controversy’s explicit focus on bodily resurrection, by capitalizing on the key component of promise that is at the heart of the covenant that is at the heart of the divine title to which Jesus turns for proof of the future event of bodily resurrection—a component which a number of other interpreters single out as central to Jesus’ argument. The other explanations ultimately prove only immortality or depend on dubious evidence that (a) the Sadducees completely denied any concept of an afterlife, or that (b) an argument for immortality automatically *necessitates* bodily resurrection.

Summary of Jesus’ Theological Method

Key contextualizing strands of this pericope are essential for arriving at an accurate evaluation of Jesus’ theological method:

- The Sadducees specifically denied “the resurrection” (Mt 22:23; Mk 12:18; Lk 20:27).
- The Sadducees’ question specifically addressed an explicit *event* in the *future*—“at the resurrection” (Mt 22:28; Mk 12:23; Lk 20:33).
- Jesus’ answer specifically addressed an explicit *event* in the *future*—“at the resurrection,” “when they rise from the dead,” “that age and the resurrection of the dead” (Mt 22:30; Mk 12:25; Lk 30:35), “concerning the dead that they rise,” and “that the dead are raised” (Mt 22:31; Mk 12:26; Lk 20:37).

These contextual details are the guardrails necessary to keep one’s explanation of Jesus’ argument on track.

Jesus’ argument is an essentially ST conclusion in the sense that he infers a doctrine that is not explicitly stated in the text he chooses. He is modeling ST at its very best: a ST conclusion inferred on the basis of both *explicit* and *implicit* BT data grounded in exegetical data emerging from the covenantal implications of a specific divine title embedded in a specific historical context. *The covenant relationship God formed with the patriarchs requires resurrection so that he can fulfill the covenant promises he made not just to their seed, but to them.*⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Andreas Köstenberger, “Translator’s Preface” to Adolf Schlatter’s *The History of the Christ: The Foundation of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 17.

⁶⁹ Some interpreters mention rabbinical teaching which explicitly argued for resurrection based on this same BT textual inference. “Gamaliel is said to have silenced Sadducees by quoting such promises as Deut. 1:8, 11:9. God’s promises must be fulfilled, and these were not fulfilled to the patriarchs during their lifetime. . . . (Edersheim, *History of the Jewish Nation*, p. 316)” (Plummer, 471). See Lane, 428; Broadus, 456; Trick, 252–53. Edersheim regards Gamaliel’s line of argument “far inferior in solemnity and weight to that employed by our Lord, Matt. 22:32” (1:316), which he takes as

To be sure, Jesus is not hanging from the slender thread of a single inferential datum the entire weight of a doctrine that is not also expressly taught elsewhere. He might have taught the resurrection from multiple passages in the Prophets (e.g., Is 26:19 or Dn 12:2) or the Writings (e.g., Ps 16 or Jb 19).⁷⁰ Nevertheless, the theological method he employed in answering this specific question from this particular text is both adequate and sound:

- *a systematic-theological inference* (the doctrine of a physical resurrection)
- *based on biblical-theological implications* (God's covenantal relationship with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob which includes promises to them personally not yet fulfilled)
- *grounded in exegetical-theological data* (God's chosen title as "the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" in a historical context where the land promise is central; multiple texts that specify God's promise of the land to the patriarchs personally, not just corporately to their descendants)

Jesus does not, of course, make these connections explicit; but that is true regardless of one's explanation of Jesus' argument. Nevertheless, to reference God's title as "the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" is to reference the covenant relationship, and the promises *are* the covenant. The covenantal promises to the patriarchs are the very reason God appeared to Moses in Exodus 3 and commissioned him to lead the children of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob out of Egypt. And that is the passage to which Jesus turns in order to prove specifically "that the dead are raised" (Lk 20:37), in response to the Sadducees' proposed dilemma about what will happen "at the resurrection" (Mt 22:28; Mk 12:23; Lk 20:33).⁷¹

How does Jesus' clinching statement ("He is not the God of the dead but of the living, for all live to him," Lk 20:38) relate to this line of reasoning? The NET Bible note on Jesus' conclusion (in all three Synoptics) states succinctly, "Jesus' point was that if God could identify himself as God of the three old patriarchs, then they must still be alive when God spoke to Moses; and so they must be raised." Like so many other interpretive remarks on this passage, however, the explanation labors under a logical lacuna. *Why* must they be raised just because they were "alive when God spoke to Moses"? Why does the patriarchs' ongoing personal existence after death logically *demand* bodily existence at a future "resurrection"? The only exegetical or theological link between those two posited statements ("they must still be alive" therefore "they must be raised") is the covenant promises of God to them.

grounded in the character of God: "He who, not only historically but in the fullest sense, calls Himself the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, cannot leave them dead. Revelation implies . . . a living relationship" (2:402). But surely God sustains "a living relationship" with them after their physical death without resurrection. Again, nothing in Edersheim's line of reasoning compels *physical resurrection*.

⁷⁰ For a defense of the doctrine of the resurrection in Job 19, see Layton Talbert, *Beyond Suffering: Discovering the Message of Job* (Greenville, SC: Bob Jones University Press, 2007), 121–23.

⁷¹ To avoid textual and historical tunnel vision, it is also helpful to remember that Jesus had already taught the Jerusalem religious leadership publicly that there would be a resurrection, and that he alone was God's authorized agent of that resurrection (Jn 5:26–29). And only weeks before the Sadducean controversy, he bolstered Martha's confidence in Lazarus's eventual future resurrection with the stunning assertion, "I am the resurrection and the life" (Jn 11:24–26).

But even God's "everlasting covenant to be God to you" (Gn 17:7) does not, in itself, demand *future resurrection* unless some aspect of that covenant requires their resurrection. And the only aspect of that covenant that requires their resurrection is a specific promise repeated explicitly to the patriarchs themselves that was not fulfilled in their lifetime: the inheritance of the land.

Even Abraham understood the necessary connection between resurrection and another one of God's covenant promises (Heb 11:17–19). Because of God's inviolable promise that Isaac would be the one to perpetuate his line, Abraham logicized (the verb in Heb 11:19 is from λογίζομαι) that the sacrifice of Isaac could not possibly be the end of Isaac, even if it meant that God would have to raise him from the dead. Abraham's willingness to imagine an outcome as necessary in order for God to keep his word, even when it entailed an experience for which he had no precedent or revelation, is an astonishing lesson to theologians: God cannot lie and will always do what he says.⁷² Indeed, Abraham's imaginative application of God's omnipotence in order to keep his word is a fitting foil to the Sadducees whom Jesus rebuked for their failure to understand God's power.⁷³

Jesus' final statement is not merely a generalized principle, but a very specific application of purposeful terminology. The transition from "God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob" to "God of [the] living" perpetuates the covenantal title and relationship that God bears to all those with whom he is in covenant. After all, other passages assert his universal deity (Nm 16:22; 27:16; Jer 32:27); so in an absolute theological sense, he is also "the God of the dead"—but not in the covenantal sense of that title in this context. Jesus is clearly making a much more specific point here about the nature of those with whom God bears a covenantal relationship. If God has become someone's covenant God and that covenant relationship includes promises, then God cannot fail to fulfill them. And if those promises are of an earthly, physical nature and remain unfulfilled in that person's lifetime, God cannot fail to fulfill them even if it means—as Abraham reasoned (Heb 11:19)—raising them from the dead. So it is not surprising that many other Scriptures go far beyond the implications of Exodus 3 to declare the certainty of a future resurrection.

The specific text Jesus cites never states a doctrine of resurrection, yet his inference silences his critics and astonishes the crowd. Even some of the scribes were impressed by Jesus' argument ("Well said, Teacher!" Lk 20:39). The original audience clearly understood it to be a valid conclusion. The remarkable use that Jesus makes of God's words here demonstrates their trustworthiness, including biblical-theologically grounded implications not directly stated in the text.

⁷² For a fuller discussion of the implications of Hebrews 11:17–19, see <https://seminary.bju.edu/theology-in-3d/theological-imagination/>.

⁷³ When theologians doubt whether God will actually do something he has said, especially when it seems unlikely or impossible, the fact of God's omnipotence ought to be "a stimulus to the theological imagination" (Richard Hays, cited by Trick, 252).

Book Reviews

Jonathan Leeman. *How the Nations Rage: Rethinking Faith and Politics in a Divided Age*. Nashville: Nelson, 2018. 239 pp. + 11 pp. (back matter).

Jonathan Leeman, a pastor and a theologian with a degree in political science, writes to test common American political assumptions against the standard of Scripture. In the first two chapters, Leeman articulates an alternative vision to the common American assumption that religious matters belong in “the private domain” while the work of government belongs in the public domain (12). Matthew 28 will not permit the sequestering of religion to a private realm: “Jesus said he possesses all authority in heaven and on earth” (12). So while Leeman affirms that the church and state are two separate institutions, he rejects “the separation of religion and politics” (12).

This places Leeman in opposition to two thinkers who have been formative for American political thinking: John Locke and Thomas Jefferson. Both affirmed that the state should rule over “outward things” while the church rules over personal, inward, religious matters. But Leeman observes that people who hold this view delude themselves into thinking that certain parts of life are not religious. For instance, the American values of “rights, equality, and freedom” may seem neutral. But when you ask, *freedom to do what? rights to what? equality in what respects?* it becomes clear that religious viewpoints are smuggled in under these allegedly neutral terms. A public square that claims to be neutral, but isn’t, damages the public good because it is a fiction. Leeman concludes, “What you really have is a square rigged against *organized* religion. Organized religions are kept out. Unnamed idols are let in” (34).

In chapter three Leeman turns to the challenge that Christians face in fallen world: the nations rage against the Messiah. Some address this challenge by proposing that Christ rules over two kingdoms in two different ways. Leeman rightly observes that the Bible presents Christ ruling over only one kingdom, and he proposes a politics of two ages: “We don’t live in two kingdoms; we simultaneously live in two ages, the age of the fall and the age of new creation” (64).

In chapter four Leeman begins to address in concrete terms what it means to live in a fallen age as a participant of the age to come. In particular, he examines the role of the Bible in the political realm. Leeman argues that “when it comes to thinking about politics, the Bible is less like a book of case law and more like a constitution. A constitution does not provide a country with the rules of daily life. It provides the rules for making the rules” (79). Leeman does not deny that the Bible makes some direct demands that should be translated into law. Laws against murder come to mind. But in most cases the Christian seeking to apply the Bible to the political realm needs wisdom. Leeman describes wisdom as “both the *posture* of fearing the Lord, as well as the *skill* of living in God’s created but fallen world in a way that yields justice, peace, and flourishing” (84; cf. Prov. 8:15-16). His point is that while there are some “straight-line issues” where the Bible can be directly applied (no murder means no abortion), most issues are “jagged line issues” where the Bible still applies, but not directly (e.g.,

health-care policy) (89). Leeman argues that churches can bind people's consciences on straight-line issues but should not do so with jagged line issues.

In chapter five Leeman turns to the Bible's teaching about the origin, purposes, and forms of government. "The American democratic tradition" teaches that "governments derive their powers ... 'from the consent of the governed'" (101). In this "social contract" proposal, people are imagined as having lived in a pre-political state until they consented to form a government. The formation of government created public aspects for everyone's life while leaving a substantial portion of life (including religion) private. Leeman argues that the Bible leaves no room for a "pre-political" state because everyone is "always under God's rule." When people form a social contract, they ought to do so under the rule of God since, according to the Bible "a government's authority comes from God" (Rom 13:1, 2, 4; Jn 19:11) (105).

Since governments receive their authority from God, they should fulfill three major purposes: (1) "To Render Judgment for the Sake of Justice" (Gn 9:6; 1 Kgs 3:28; Prv 20:8; Rom 13:3-4) (109). (2) "To Build Platforms of Peace, Order, and Flourishing" (Gn 9:1, 7; Prv 29:4; 16:12, 15; Mosaic regulations that provide for the poor) (112). (3) "To Set the Stage for Redemption" (1 Tm 2:1-4). A good government "clears a way for the people of God to do their work of calling the nations to God" (117). Though the government should clear the way for the church to do its work, Leeman does not think that governments should prohibit the exercise of false religions. He argues that Scripture authorizes no government, except Old Testament Israel, to punish people for false worship. Nor does government have the "ability to coerce true worship" (122). Notably, this argument for religious freedom is not based on the freedom of the conscience but on the authorization that God gives to government.

Leeman closes chapter 5 by raising the question, "What is the best form of government?" Americans may be tempted to answer, "democracy." But Leeman observes that a democracy functions well only when "the right kind of political culture must be in place" (e.g., rule of law, citizens of good character, valuing a stable system of government more than prevailing in particular elections, etc.). Leeman answers that the Bible itself provides "no abstract ideal form of government" (123). Instead, a good government is any government that fulfills the three biblical purposes for government noted above.

In chapter 6 Leeman discusses the role of the church. He emphatically rejects the claim that the church focuses on spiritual matters while the government focuses on political matters. Instead he asserts, "Every week that a preacher stands up to preach he makes a political speech. He teaches the congregation 'to observe all' that the King with all authority in heaven and on earth has commanded (Matt. 28:20)" (131-32). On the other hand, Leeman resists making the church into a lobbying organization. It is beyond the church's mission and competency to formulate public policy: "churches should ordinarily not seek to influence government policy directly.... It risks misidentifying Jesus' name with human wisdom. It risks abusing the consciences of church members. And it risks undermining Christian freedom and unity" (145). Leeman acknowledges there are certain issues that are so clear that the church can speak directly to them. In fact, he notes that "churches can sin and prove faithless *by not speaking up in matters of government policy when they should*" (147). But the church

has to be able to discern when to speak, concerning what, and to what degree of specificity. There are some issues regarding which it has the authority to bind consciences. But on other matters even Christians who agree on basic principles may legitimately disagree on particular policies or political strategies. The church ought not step beyond its mission or competence to address these particulars.

In chapter seven Leeman turns from the church to Christians. Leeman promotes Christian involvement in politics, but he cautions, “Be leery of being captivated by any political worldview” (181). Neither the right nor the left provide the Christian with a biblical worldview. To simply embrace a given party will result in conformity to the world in some areas of life. Leeman also warns Christians against worldliness in their political engagement: “There is a way of engaging that’s right on the substance but wrong on the strategy or tone” (164).

In this chapter Leeman also evaluates three common strategies for Christian political engagement: (1) find common ground (e.g., religious freedom arguments), (2) appeal to natural law (e.g., arguments that marriage must involve the potential for procreation), (3) demonstrate social good (e.g., arguments that two-parent homes have better social outcomes). Leeman does not object to Christians deploying any of these approaches when appropriate. But he does issue a warning about these strategies: “All three lack the force of conviction because the very thing they are good at—finding common ground—affirms our modern intuitions that all authority and moral legitimacy rests in every individual’s consent.” (184). It reinforces John Rawls’s argument that “we are morally obligated to only bring arguments that everyone can understand on his or her own terms” (186). Leeman calls this view “a Trojan horse for small-g god idolatry.” Governments do not make laws only about matters for which there is consensus. When there is no consensus, on whose terms is the decision made? Leeman argues that it is better to observe that everyone’s god is attempting to set the terms of the debate. There is no religiously neutral public square or religiously neutral public argument. Everyone should be open about the moral underpinnings of their argument instead of pretending to be neutral.

Leeman’s final chapter addresses the issue of justice. The primary responsibility of government is to ensure justice, and Americans have a particular viewpoint on justice. “Together Jefferson’s Declaration and Lincoln’s Address present America’s mission statement on justice: we are a people dedicated to the principles of equality, freedom, and natural rights” (204).

Leeman doubts that this view of justice works. Just as there is no religiously neutral public argument, so there is no religiously neutral approach to justice: “Pick your God or gods; out will come your views on justice. Pick your conception of justice; out will come your views on equality, freedom, and rights” (206). Leeman’s point is that “equality,” “freedom,” and “rights” are themselves empty concepts that will be filled with different content depending on one’s worldview.

Leeman also challenges identity politics. He notes that identity politics deny the Bible’s teaching about our “common humanity” and speak as if both truth and morality are social constructs generated by different groups (221). Instead of bringing about justice, identity politics pits groups against each other so that they cannot communicate with each other, much less work together as citizens. In contrast, Leeman says, “The Christian path affirms both our common humanity and our created differences. It requires color-blindness with respect to our oneness in Adam and (if believers) in Christ (Gal 3:28). It requires color-consciousness with respect to our different experiences, histories,

and cultural traditions, as well as the unique ways different people can glorify God (1 Cor. 12:13–14; Rev. 7:9)” (221).

Good books on Christians and politics are difficult to find. Christians are tempted to baptize current political philosophies (whether from the left or right) rather than testing these philosophies against Scripture. Leeman does an excellent job of letting the Bible challenge our customary ways of thinking. This is probably the best brief book on politics that is in print.

Brian Collins

Biblical Worldview Lead Specialist | BJU Press

Scott B. Rae. *Moral Choices: An Introduction to Ethics*. 4th Edition. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2018. 528 pp.

Scott Rae offers guidance to Christians in a field (ethics) whose practitioners are increasingly discarding objective morality in favor of relativism. Ethics tends to be dominated by arguments that are philosophically and psychologically dense, narrowly focused, culturally fashionable, and increasingly subjective. Many books, blogs, and lectures spend the bulk of their time presenting ethical conundrums, implying that life consists of impossibly difficult moral decisions; but Rae has chosen a more helpful path. By rooting all ethical decision making in Scripture and then by teaching a thoughtful procedure for making day-to-day moral choices, Rae trains his reader in the non-exceptional cases so that the reader gains both competence and practice before making harder ethical decisions.

Ethical Christian thinking is not proving to be fully resilient against secular culture, especially in the face of social media and other media pressure. Many believers find greater homogeneity with the thought processes of the world than they do with Scripture. These thought patterns erode a distinctly Christian ethic and shift believers toward pragmatism and relativism. Rae seeks to restate the value of Christian ethics and to reinstate biblical thinking about moral questions.

Each edition of *Moral Choices* has added significantly to the previous edition. The fourth edition includes new chapters on the topics of “Creation Care and Environmental Ethics” (ch. 12), “Violence and Gun Control” (ch. 14), “Race, Gender, and Diversity” (ch. 15), and “Immigration, Refugees, and Border Control” (ch. 16). By grounding each of these current issues in Scripture and a general pattern of biblical thinking, Rae achieves a measure of timelessness that will remain helpful for ethical thinking even as the specific issues fade or as the questions surrounding them shift.

The first three chapters of *Moral Choices* provide a background to ethics by discussing “Why Morality Matters” (ch. 1), “How to Think About Morality” (ch. 2), and “Christian Ethics” (ch. 3). The first chapter demonstrates that although human cultures differ and are corrupted by the Fall, each has a sense of morality, and each insists on adherence to moral norms. Chapter 2 walks the reader through the major ethical systems from Socrates to the modern era. Rae provides a concise and

understandable description of each system and points out the logical or moral problems with each. This chapter helps the Christian address the common ethical belief systems that he will find in his co-workers and surrounding society. Chapter 3 urges a scripturally based Christian ethic, which requires a thorough knowledge of the Word of God as the non-negotiable foundation for moral decision making. Rae then shows the reader that the best components of human ethical systems (e.g., justice when properly understood, and utility when constrained by underlying truth) were not originated by their leading philosopher. Instead, they already appear in Scripture as secondary guiding principles. Rae rejects “noble pagan” theories, in which unregenerate human thinking closely approximates biblical reality, and he observes that human ethical systems are fatally flawed because they have no ultimate authority underlying them. He also carefully distinguishes the ethics of *divine command* from that of *natural law*, and he emphasizes the superiority of the former.

Chapter 4 presents a seven-step model for “making ethical decisions.” Given Rae’s clear commitment to Scripture, it was a little disappointing to see the statement, “Biblical principles are always relevant and should be included,” as the only directly scriptural element in the process. Unless the reader has a prior commitment to Scripture, this statement seems to indicate that the Bible is reducible to one-among-many equal inputs. Granted, the author is trying to appeal to a wider audience than a merely Christian one, but the non-negotiable value of Scripture could have received stronger emphasis.

The remainder of the book treats specific ethical topics—applying the procedure from Chapter 4 and scriptural support to each. Chapters 5–6 cover “Ethics at the Beginning of Life.” Rae does not apologize for insisting that abortion is murder (p. 133). He correctly observes that although Scripture does not use the term *abortion*, it provides enough evidence concerning the personhood of the unborn child that all arguments attempting to support the alternative are biblically indefensible. All defenses of abortion resort to selfishness, pragmatism, and a misrepresentation of the nature, authority, and responsibility of humanity before God. Rae then moves to a discussion of reproductive technologies and surrogacy—ethical issues that no previous generation had to face. Chapter 7 addresses the ethical issues surrounding “Biotechnology, Genetics, and Human Cloning.” This chapter provides a detailed analysis of issues such as the ethics of gene selection, gene therapy, sex selection, designer babies, cloning, and trait enhancement through genetic manipulation. Chapter 8 shifts to the end of life and covers euthanasia, physician-assisted suicide, termination of life support, and non-intervention issues such as “do not resuscitate” orders. Rae provides a carefully nuanced discussion of these, and, on the basis of the biblical statements concerning both compassion and the inevitability of death, he distinguishes accurately between *active* support of death and *passive* allowance of it. The entire discussion is undergirded with Scripture.

Rae turns to external social concerns in the remaining chapters. Chapter 9 addresses arguments for and against capital punishment. While Rae cites Scripture throughout, he does not always draw attention to the hermeneutical fallacies inherent in the position that opposes capital punishment. Christian opponents of capital punishment use New Testament passages on the *individual believer’s* responsibility to exhibit Christian attitudes and actions (an insistence on love, forgiveness, and a lack of revenge) to warrant the overthrow of a *secular authority’s* responsibility to carry out justice. But this

shift is a serious hermeneutical error. The New Testament never repeals the responsibility of government to carry out justice. By omitting these hermeneutical observations, Rae leaves both support for and opposition to capital punishment on the table as viable Christian responses to the crime of murder. Chapter 10 treats war and other forms of physical violence. While Rae exhibits sympathy toward pacifists, he ultimately seems to support *just war* theory and self-defense.

Chapter 11 unapologetically addresses “Sexual Ethics” from a biblical perspective. While Rae continues to show compassion for the fallen human condition, his treatment of premarital sex, homosexuality, incest, and transgenderism rest firmly on Scripture. Rae rejects the hermeneutical twisting of New Testament passages relating to homosexuality and shows that Scripture utterly forbids this sin. But a rejection of the sin is not the same as a mistreatment of the sinner; so Rae addresses the Church’s handling of sexual issues in relation to its own community and the surrounding world. Chapter 12 shifts to a discussion of the Christian’s responsibility toward the environment. Here, Rae displays a moderating position between environment worshipers and environment abusers, and he warrants this moderation through the Creation mandate and created order. Mankind is superior to the rest of creation; so the Christian cannot favor the environment over people. However, mankind has dominion over the environment; so the Christian cannot wantonly abuse his stewardship. Chapter 13 addresses “Ethics and Economics.” It raises issues concerning macroeconomic systems, labor relations, the acquisition of wealth, and specific examples of ethical lapses in business. Chapter 14 takes a moderate stance on gun control in which Rae offers a solution that allows for self-defense while restricting firearm ownership from those whom society deems unworthy of their possession. Since this is a book on ethics rather than on the viability of political mechanisms for determining who is “worthy,” Rae avoids the more difficult issues concerning those mechanisms. Rae does observe that self-defense is biblically justifiable, however, and that the U. S. Constitution recognizes a pre-existing right rather than enshrining a new one when it prohibits the government from infringing upon personal ownership of firearms.

Moral Choices does not shy away from confronting believers concerning their unbiblical attitudes when it addresses “Race, Gender, and Diversity” in Chapter 15. Again building on a biblical foundation, Rae observes that God authored the diversity that occurs in the world. He created the two, distinct genders and the single, unified human race from which various ethnic groups have arisen. While some biblically defined roles may differ, the mistreatment or oppression of other people on the basis of gender or ethnicity contradicts biblical instruction. Finally, Chapter 16 focuses on the recently developing issue of “Immigration, Refugees, and Border Control.” It uses a detailed argument from different Hebrew words in the Old Testament to distinguish between immigrants who are integrating into a culture and “strangers,” while defending the necessity of treating all people with kindness and dignity.

The reader should note a couple of weaknesses in *Moral Choices*. First, in his chapter on economics, Rae raises common critiques against capitalism without doing the same for socialism. While a Christian can answer the critiques against capitalism easily, the same cannot be said of socialism. But by critiquing only one of the major economic systems, he leaves the impression that socialism might be a valid option. A nuanced biblical critique of socialism could have exposed it as a

system pervaded by envy, theft, and tyranny. Second, the chapter on gun control is already outdated. As of the publication date in 2018, Rae could state, “Even the most passionate defenders of gun control recognize that gun ownership can be justified” (416), but this is no longer true. Radical leftists have dropped the pretense of mere “control” of firearms to reveal an agenda of complete eradication of the right of self-defense—an agenda that became clearer in the Democratic presidential debates. Similarly, the left abandoned any pretense of upholding the Second Amendment and has begun openly calling for its repeal. However, as of 2018 Rae could not have predicted this attempt to overthrow both the Constitution and the divinely given right of self-defense; so the shortcoming is entirely understandable.

The value of *Moral Choices* far outweighs its minor weaknesses. One of the most important aspects of *Moral Choices* is its presentation of the reality that the Bible often sets boundaries around an ethical question without addressing the issue comprehensively. To be a viable solution for a Christian, an ethical resolution must lie within those biblical parameters, but the existence of those parameters does not necessarily entail that all Christians will agree perfectly. Rae does not simplistically resolve the tensions by forcing his preference on the reader. Instead, he articulates the biblical parameters clearly and leaves the final ethical decision up to the individual believer. On the other hand, Rae tries to develop the key biblical fences around each issue in such a way that he excludes unbiblical thinking that is thinly disguised as Christian.

The reader will find that *Moral Choices* avoids unnecessary jargon without reducing the nuances of each ethical issue. Rae blends a clear writing style and excellent reasoning (by reducing flawed arguments to their premises and then dismantling them) with strong biblical support. *Moral Choices* also exhibits a high level of specificity on each issue. The author raises real situations and addresses them in a detailed and helpful fashion. The Christian Church would do well to read *Moral Choices* for its helpful treatment of ethical questions and its insistence on the unchanging and foundational qualities of Scripture for Christian decision making.

Brian Hand

Professor, New Testament Interpretation | BJU Seminary

Nancy R. Pearcey. *Love Thy Body: Answering Hard Questions about Life and Sexuality*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2018. 264 pp. + 92 pp. (back matter).

Nancy Pearcey serves as professor of apologetics and scholar in residence at Houston Baptist University and is a fellow at the Discovery Institute’s Center for Science and Culture. In *Love Thy Body* she tackles “the watershed moral issues of our age” (9) and demonstrates that the secular worldview underwriting society’s immoral positions and practices is itself bankrupt. It “doesn’t fit the real universe” (11). Drawing on Francis Schaeffer, Pearcey describes this worldview as a two-story building constructed during the Enlightenment. The lower story houses objective facts; subjective values reside in the upper story. The first floor belongs to modernists who embraced Enlightenment

rationalism and empiricism. The second floor is the realm of romanticism's postmodern progeny. The book applies this "fact-value split" to modern anthropology, which severs bodies from persons, wreaking havoc on individuals and societies. By way of contrast, the Christian worldview presents "a reality-based morality that expresses a positive, life-affirming view of the human person" (15).

Chapter 1 overviews the two-story viewpoints of these moral issues. The dehumanizing yet increasingly influential concept of personhood has changed the nature of abortion arguments. Most bioethicists now admit that life begins at conception but deny that a breathing being inside a woman's womb is a person. Similarly, proponents of euthanasia have suggested "conditions" beyond mere life are necessary to validate personhood (27). The modern view of sexual relations divorces the physical act from love, encouraging the disentanglement of sexual union from personal relationship. Homosexuality severs the very evident teleology of human anatomy from sexual feelings and behavior, while transgenderism dichotomizes one's biological sex from identity altogether. Finally, the social contract view of human relationships disintegrates society's human fibers.

For Pearcey, a response begins with "a biblical philosophy of nature" (34), which affirms that God made us in His image as embodied beings and leaves no room for the Gnostic denigration of the human body. Though the fall of Adam and Eve marred this embodied image, the incarnation and resurrection of Christ provide powerful testimony of its significance. Furthermore, those who are in Christ will be raised bodily to inhabit a material creation, the new earth, forever. Pearcey addresses the common criticism that Christianity demeans the human body by distinguishing biblical anthropology from asceticism in the early church based on Platonic and Gnostic ideas. However, she also critiques modern "versions of Christianity [that] speak of the body as though it were shameful, worthless, or unimportant" and "sexual sins as the most wicked on the scale of sins" (41).

In chapter 2 ("The Joy of Death") Pearcey responds with simple logic to the alleged neutrality of abortion decisions such as *Roe v. Wade*: either a mother's fetus is a human person with rights, or it is not. She convincingly argues that abortion activists, not those who uphold the value of unborn life, are discriminating based on "personal views and values" and giving precedence to religion over science (60). Chapter 3 ("Dear Valued Constituent") shows that decisions about euthanasia, stem cell research, surrogacy, and transhumanism are moral, a result of worldview, whether conservative or liberal. Drawing from statements by noted atheists, Pearcey points out that, although transhumanists envision a biotechnological utopia, human rights have prospered historically in places influenced by Christianity. Unbelief in the Creator dissolves the only true basis for human dignity. Some trumpet the tolerance of ancient cultures such as Rome, but the NT ethic of Jesus and the apostles surpassed and eventually overturned cultural mores in the ancient world by valuing women, children, and slaves.

Chapter 4 ("Schizoid Sex") takes aim at the hookup culture, in which love is mental and emotional, but otherwise disembodied. Pearcey rightly asserts that "in reality [sexual hedonism] gives sex *too little* importance" (121). Free sex reigns on college campuses, but so does emotional carnage, as campus counseling center data attests. Nor is education alone to blame. Advertising and entertainment pump this deformed worldview through their seductive outlets. Studies are showing that pornography even rewires the brain. But as much as it feeds on raw impulses, the hookup culture is actually a "religion" (131). The purveyors of "today's politically correct sexual orthodoxy" promote

“a vision of redemption” (136), not just an erotic thrill but the quest for a liberated soul. On the contrary, the Bible teaches a positive, though countercultural, view of sexuality that is truly human and good. Severed from the biblical narrative of creation, fall, and redemption, sex has no meaning.

Chapter 5 (“The Body Impolitic”) on homosexuality argues that potential genetic factors are neither “fixed” nor “unchangeable” (158). In fact, “the most reliable correlate with same-sex eroticism” is “childhood gender nonconformity,” not genetic or mental traits (159). The crucial question is whether an individual will understand his identity in terms of how he was created biologically rather than how he feels. Postmodern theory localizes the *self* in the upper story, where it is “free to impose its own interpretations on the body,” which becomes “raw material with no intrinsic identity or purpose” (165). Cultural authority first transferred moral categories (“right and wrong”) into scientific ones (“healthy and deviant”). Now some advocates of homosexuality insist that being “born this way” is a deficient, antiquated view that must be replaced by personal autonomy, “that we can change our sexual desires at will” (167). In response, Pearcey counsels a renewal of the mind in pursuit of sanctification and the integration of one’s body and thinking, while understanding that wholeness in this life is not promised. Being male or female is “not a meaningless or oppressive fact of nature but a reflection of history’s great storyline” (182). Accordingly, Levitical law prohibits any kind of homosexual behavior, a moral stance affirmed in the NT Gospels and Epistles.

“Transgender, Transreality” (Chapter 6) relates how sexual revolutionaries have turned ontological reality on its head so that “gender has become a purely mental trait with no grounding in physical reality” (203), and even biological sex is labeled a social construct. Pearcey traces back the evolutionary thought flowing from Hegel and Darwin that created an impression of universal fluidity, which has now been employed to reconstruct gender and assault “heterosexual morality” (207). The implications of a *transformed* culture are deep (and have only deepened since Pearcey’s publication in 2018), comprising realms ranging from public facilities to parenting. SOGI laws (Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity) trumpet the rights of transgender persons while muting the bases on which any inalienable rights are founded.

One highly significant statistic from secular studies is that “roughly 80 to 90 percent of children who experience some gender incongruence lose those feelings before adulthood” (223). If so, Pearcey opines, it is destructive to force one’s body into artificial conformity with one’s present feelings. The notion that gender is “assigned at birth” (and, therefore, can be reassigned autonomously) stems from *intersex* babies, but such *disorders of sexual development* provide no justification for transgender arguments. *Intersex* is a painful result of the fall; however, such anomalies do not overturn the binary norm but rather prove it. (It is worth noting that those “born that way” [Mt 19:12] were *men* who could not reproduce, not a *tertium quid* of human sexuality.) “Our only choice is whether we accept our biological sex as a gift from God or reject it” (225).

Finally, chapter 7 (“The Goddess of Choice Is Dead: From Social Contract to Social Meltdown”) discusses the reinvention of society in terms of human consent rather than biblical and creational realities. To the contrary, people are born into families by divine design. Though always imperfect, innate familial bonds provide a template for relationships. “The bonds of biology train us to extend love *beyond* biology” (237). These God-given social instincts factor massively into questions

concerning the life of the unborn and the public institution of marriage. Marriage is so much more than an “emotional commitment” (246), a definition that not only redefines marriage (i.e., *Obergefell v. Hodges*) but will render it extinct by unraveling society’s fabric, leaving individuals isolated and even more vulnerable, and transferring power to the state. On the contrary, humans did not construct society; God did. He saves his children to have truly loving relationships within the church that provide an authentic witness to and pattern for society.

Love Thy Body is well-researched, clear, and insightful. It presents a compelling narrative that exposes the vacuous nature and destructive outcomes of contemporary worldviews. Pearcey builds a strong case that true science supports the Christian worldview. Naturalism and its philosophical offspring actually promote a low view of the body. Furthermore, Pearcey ably demonstrates that these modern moral issues are interconnected philosophically in their appropriation of the fact/value split. Her commentary on these wastelands of the sexual revolution evinces the gravity of our times. Surely Pearcey is correct in saying, “Once a society gives up the bright line containing sex within male-female marriage, it is difficult to draw the line anywhere else” (189).

Pearcey’s solution is uncomplicated. Operating from a narrative framework of creation–fall–redemption, Pearcey consistently moves from dissecting the secular worldview that shapes current immoral stances to offering the Christian alternative that makes sense of reality, promotes human flourishing, and offers eternal hope. She repeatedly draws attention to early Christianity, arguing that its ethic protected and promoted human dignity. “From the beginning, Christians have not defended ‘traditional values.’ They have stood for truth *against* prevailing cultural norms” (188). This appeal to church history serves multiple apologetic purposes, not only challenging the false hopes propounded by modern sexual orthodoxy but also calling Christians to live distinctively. The church must perpetuate biblical morality. “A loving response also holds each person to the biblical standard of chastity” (176). To do otherwise is to recapitulate Gnostic dualism. Yet, serving those who have been duped by these false ideologies is also critical. “Christians must be prepared to minister to the wounded, the refugees of the secular revolution whose lives have been wrecked by its false promises of freedom and autonomy” (264).

Appreciation for Pearcey’s work notwithstanding, two weaknesses merit remark. First, *Love Thy Body* lacks theological precision in places. Pearcey warns of the “danger of overemphasizing the doctrine of the fall, tipping it out of balance with the other doctrines of Scripture” (45). Yet, all of Scripture after Genesis 1–2 entails the account and implications of the fall, a fact that should calibrate conceptions of overemphasis. Also, while it is true that “the Bible does not treat the body as the source of moral corruption” (43), the body is corruption’s base of operations. In relating sin and temptation Pearcey quotes the following testimony: “It’s not a sin to be tempted. Jesus was tempted all the time, but He never sinned” (173). But the statement does not go far enough. Temptation that arises from within is not morally neutral; rather it manifests our innate sinfulness, often designated *indwelling sin*, and must be mortified (Rom 8:13; Col 3:5).¹

¹ See “PCA Ad Interim Committee on Human Sexuality” (May 2020), 8, <https://pcaga.org/aicreport/>, accessed July 23, 2020.

Second, the book's eschatology tends toward over-realization, expecting from the *already* what belongs to the *not yet*.² Pearcey takes issue with the promotion of "an escapist concept of salvation," like the Lutheran pastor she once heard who emphasized "asking for God's forgiveness 'so we can go to heaven'" (41). While knowing one's eternal security in God's presence is not all that should be said about forgiveness, this reviewer struggles to conceive of a biblical eschatology that lacks this emphasis. (One possible explanation comes from the book's footnotes, which reveal theological sources such as Miroslav Volf and N. T. Wright.) Certainly, Christians should redeem our time to influence those around us for Christ's sake. But can the culture be turned around (191)? The heart of the remedy lies not in cultural influence but in a regenerated knowledge of God that matures in the members of Christ's body.

These cautions notwithstanding, *Love Thy Body* helpfully evaluates critical contemporary issues and asserts an apologetic for Christian anthropology. God's people need to think discerningly and live faithfully in response to today's massive moral issues. Pearcey unmask the dehumanizing effects of twenty-first-century humanism and paints a picture of humanity that offers hope.

Eric Newton

Professor, Theology | BJU Seminary

Benjamin L. Merkle. *Discontinuity to Continuity: A Survey of Dispensational & Covenant Theologies*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020. x + 212 pp. + 22 pp. (back matter).

Forty years ago, there were two major competing theological systems: covenant theology and dispensational theology. That's not to say that either view was entirely monolithic; but they were the definitive camps comprising the two distinct orientations toward the intertwined fields of ecclesiology, eschatology, and hermeneutics. The last four decades have seen an astonishing burst of microevolution, with multiple permutations of each of those systems into new subspecies.

Benjamin Merkle (professor of NT and Greek, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary) provides a taxonomy for a range of six systems along a continuum of (dis)continuity that maps each system's perspective of the theological relationship between the Old and New Testaments. (Merkle's work is reminiscent of, and in some senses builds upon, John Feinberg's 1988 collection of essays in *Continuity and Discontinuity*, but with the benefit of 30 years of hindsight.) Merkle proposes four key questions to probe the differences between these systems and their relative locations on that continuum: (1) What is the basic hermeneutic? (2) What is the relationship between the covenants? (3) What is the relationship between Israel and the Church? (4) What is the kingdom of God? (7–24). Those questions (most consisting of specific sub-questions) form an evaluative rubric that gives Merkle's survey a sense of uniformity. His overviews are drawn primarily from the writings of three

² I am grateful to Bryan Smith for making this observation in a SITS worldview session, June 19, 2020.

key proponents for each system, and a concluding assessment of each system seeks to identify three strengths along with related weaknesses.

Classic dispensationalism is represented by Darby, Scofield, and Chafer. That alone is suggestive; when you have to confine yourself to representatives who have been dead since 1882, 1921, and 1952 respectively, you're probably not dealing with a live system. Still, the historical-theological perspective is helpful. Merkle's overview is, nevertheless, marred by few flaws. For example, he states categorically that "classic dispensationalists insist" on two distinct new covenants (38); but this is immediately contradicted when he cites Scofield's view that there is only one new covenant with "a twofold application" (39). (And, in fact, Darby held a third view.) Merkle cites the common criticism that classic dispensationalists taught different ways of salvation, but also includes Chafer's statement unequivocally rejecting that view (40–41); and yet his concluding assessment resurrects the criticism, ignoring his own principle that "if a person clarifies their position, that clarification should be honored" (50).

Revised dispensationalism is represented by Ryrie, Walvoord, and Pentecost—choices that are disappointingly predictable. Granted, these were major writers for the system; but why choose a tight-knit circle of dead men from one school to represent a view that is broadly held and still very much alive? Why not include Alva McClain, or any number of living revised dispensationalists (as Merkle does for covenant theology)? Merkle also limits old voices to even older works; Pentecost citations are almost exclusively from *Things to Come* (1964), even though he continued to write extensively long after that and—significantly—changed his views on certain dispensational interpretations. Again, Merkle's overview is informative even if occasionally less than objective. He cites only three distinctions between the revised and classic views: "less emphasis on typology"; a general rejection of any distinction between the kingdom of God and of heaven; and a "clear rejection of two ways of salvation" (so much for 'honoring one's clarification' after indicating twice in the previous chapter that classic dispensationalists *themselves* clearly rejected this view.) "Because of these differences, Blaising and Bock contend that 'revised dispensationalism is a distinctive form of the dispensational tradition'" (53). In fact, Blaising and Bock cite quite a few more differences to justify differentiating revised dispensationalism as a modified and improved version of the classic view. (Indeed, Ryrie himself insisted in *Basic Theology* that "no theological system should be so hardened that it is not open to change or refinement from the insights of exegesis").

Merkle rightly underscores the dispensational principle of maintaining a distinction between Israel and the church, but he misconstrues the hermeneutic as arising from the ecclesiology rather than vice versa; from the dispensational viewpoint (which is presumably what the chapter is intended to represent), the ecclesiology is not a random decision that then drives their hermeneutic but is, itself, derived from a literal hermeneutic progressing from OT to NT. In his assessment, Merkle laments that sometimes revised dispensationalists "unnecessarily impugn the motives of those who do not embrace a strict literal interpretation" (75), but in the theological atmosphere of the time motive-impugning was very much a two-way street; that hardly excuses it on either side, but it certainly contextualizes it more fairly. Merkle also critiques Pentecost's interpretation of the parable of the hidden treasure as signifying Christ's purchase of the treasure through his death on the cross. Calling

it “allegorical” (?), he asks, “Is that really the most ‘plain’ or ‘natural’ reading of the text?” (77). Merkle knows better than this; he already explained that a dispensational hermeneutic allows for figurative and symbolic language (57) and it certainly does in a parabolic genre, so his charge of hermeneutical inconsistency here is disappointing.

Progressive dispensationalism (Blaising, Bock, and Saucy) is represented more fairly and reliably than the two previous overviews; though the vast majority of citations come from works of the 1990s, Merkle frequently incorporates some of their more recent writings as well. He enumerates both the similarities and dissimilarities between the progressive and revised views (79). An important continuity, of course, is a literal hermeneutic, though “they reject as inadequate the traditional dispensational definition of literal as ‘clear, plain, or normal’” (80–81). In contrast, the progressive hermeneutic is more nuanced and incorporates a “complementary hermeneutic” in which the NT can expand the meaning or implications of an OT prophecy without changing the original intent or recipients of that prophecy (82). In addition, Blaising advances the argument that God’s promises are not merely words but *acts* that obligate him to do what he said for those to whom he made the promise (83). Progressives hold to an inauguration of the new covenant; its “spiritual” (soteriological) components have been graciously extended to the gentiles, while its “territorial/political aspects” (i.e., non-soteriological, Israel-specific components) await future fulfillment (95–96) when a converted Israel is restored to the land God promised to them (not only in the Abrahamic covenant but also in the new covenant). Merkle’s concluding critiques again sometimes ring hollow. Taking issue with Saucy’s explanation of “the fullness of the Gentiles” (Rom. 11:25), he counters that “one must ask if that is the ‘clear, plain, or normal’ meaning of ‘fullness’” (106)—again, ignoring his own earlier explanation that progressives disavow those descriptors (81).

Progressive covenantalism is represented by Gentry, Wellum, and “key representatives of new covenant theology.” Despite the fact that Wellum distinguishes his view from new covenant theology, and Merkle delineates not only their separate origins but also several points of dissimilarity between the two views (109–10), Merkle treats them together. It’s also surprising that Merkle never explains one of the major distinctions between progressive covenantalism and historic covenant theology: the abandonment of the overarching theological framework of the covenants of redemption, works, and grace. It’s no wonder that “they prefer to see themselves as a distinct view” from covenant theology (109); and yet other similarities remain, including their view of Israel and its eschatological ramifications. Merkle’s critique of dispensationalism continues into this chapter as well. Progressive covenantalism identifies an Adamic covenant as “the foundation of all other covenants” and “sees this as a major distinction between them and various forms of dispensationalism, which all focus on the Abrahamic covenant as the foundation for the other biblical covenants.” That’s because “dispensationalists fail to fully appreciate the bigger picture of God’s plan to redeem humanity from the beginning” (120–21)—as though dispensational Bibles begin with Genesis 12. (Even revised dispensationalist Robert Lightner insists in *The Last Days Handbook* that dispensationalism “doesn’t deny the covenants of covenant theology.”) Progressive covenantalists also reject the notion of unconditional covenants; viewing covenants like the Abrahamic as unconditional is what leads dispensationalists to “unbiblical conclusions” like expecting the future fulfillment of the land promise

to Israel (122). (But the dispensational expectation of the land promise is rooted not merely in the Abrahamic covenant, but in multiple new covenant reiterations of that promise as well.)

At the same time, though Merkle doesn't call attention to this, surprising similarities with dispensationalism surface. Interpreting "according to the original intention of the author" yet accommodating "when the literal sense includes symbols and types" (111) could equally describe revised and progressive dispensationalism; "grammatical-historical-literary" (112) is the same language used to identify progressive dispensationalism's hermeneutic (81); and, Gentry and Wellum's explanation of the hermeneutical relationship between NT and OT sounds indistinguishable from Bock's definition of a complementary hermeneutic (112). All this is profoundly instructive, because it indicates that the reason these two views arrive at diametrically opposite conclusions regarding "the original intent of the OT authors" must lie deeper than the strictly hermeneutical level. Much of the answer lies in covenantalism's typological assumptions. For example, in Amos 9, "the promised restoration includes the land of Israel But since the land functions typologically, the fulfillment should not be taken literally" (117). Covenantalism's opinions vary on Romans 11:26 (including the possibility of a future conversion of ethnic Israel, 131) and on millennial views (135–37). But there's one thing they are all agreed on: "if the millennial kingdom follows the return of Christ, the nation of Israel will *not* be given the land of Palestine in fulfillment of OT prophecies" (137–38, emphasis added).

Covenant theology (Horton, Robertson, and Kline) combines "a literal interpretation in the sense of a grammatico-historical approach that interprets the Bible according to the intention of the author" with "a Christocentric or Christotelic hermeneutic that sees Christ as the fulfillment of all the promises of God" (142). Again, typology plays a "prominent" role (143). "For example, Robertson insists that the land of Israel is typological, anticipating new covenant realities" (144). Merkle compares this "to how the sacrificial system prefigured the offering of Jesus' body." The similarity is debatable, however, since the sacrificial system was not promised to Israel as an eternal possession or institution, but the land was; in fact, the repeated reaffirmation of the land promise is, itself, a "new covenant reality." Interestingly, Robertson and Horton do not entirely agree on what the land typifies (144)—which seems to signify that typology may, like allegory, be prone to hermeneutical subjectivity (though certainly to a lesser degree). The "three overarching covenants" of redemption, works, and grace form "the heart of covenant theology" (147). Merkle acknowledges that the covenant of redemption "is not explicitly referenced as a covenant in Scripture" (147). (Interestingly, covenant theologians Charles Hodge and John Murray say exactly the same thing about the covenant of works as well, though Merkle does not.) Instead he cites the "implicitly" covenantal arrangement of Genesis 2, a passing statement in Hosea 6:7 (with no reference to alternative interpretations), and even makes the surprising statement that covenant theologians "also look to the Westminster Confession as support for this covenant"—which seems rather retroactive, circular support for so foundational a covenant. One of Merkle's concluding strengths of covenant theology—"its rejection of 'replacement theology' or 'supersessionism'"—seems undermined by its corresponding weakness: "Unfortunately, not all covenant theologians agree here" including Reymond, Ridderbos, and LaRondelle (168–69). He might have added that supersessionism was historically the majority view among covenant

theologians. Fortunately covenant theology, like dispensational theology, has seen some needed biblical refinement over the years.

Christian reconstructionism (represented by Rushdoony, Bahnsen, and North) burst onto the theological scene in the 1980s with a flurry of publicational fury, though Rushdoony had been laying its foundations in the previous decade or two. Its version of covenant theology combines Calvinism, theonomy, presuppositional apologetics, postmillennialism, and dominion theology (171–72). To that list could be added preterism (178) and a vigorous defense of replacement theology (189–91). As to their hermeneutic, according to Merkle, “they reject the literalistic interpretation of dispensationalism” (175). And yet he reports (quite correctly) that they insist “that (most) OT laws must be followed literally” (176), that “*all law*, not just the Ten Commandments, is *eternally binding* and thus applicable to all people at all times and in all places” (185, original emphasis), that this includes OT sanctions for law-breaking “such as public executions and stonings,” and that to teach otherwise is “an act of heresy” (187). One is left dumbfounded, wondering how none of this qualifies as a “literalistic” hermeneutic—a label apparently reserved exclusively for dispensationalism. North identifies “the dominion covenant found in Genesis 1:26–28” as the Bible’s central covenant: “all the covenants of the Bible serve as reiterations” of that covenant (180–81). In keeping with “their larger framework of postmillennialism and dominion theology,” most reconstructionists (though not Rushdoony) anticipate a future largescale conversion of ethnic Jews per Romans 11:26 (189). Merkle’s concluding assessment is on target. More “traditional covenant theologians . . . criticize Christian reconstructionists for failing to see sufficient discontinuity” between the testaments (196). Despite their “high view of the law,” their inability to agree among themselves as to which laws are still applicable is problematic (198). Finally, their “optimistic” postmillennial eschatology lends itself at times to “triumphalism and even cockiness” (199).

Merkle’s concluding chapter (201–12) is perhaps the most helpful in the entire book, since he provides a concise summary of each system virtually devoid of editorialization. He also acknowledges that his survey is far from exhaustive in terms of the systems represented; he briefly describes the Lutheran theological model (favored by Moo) as a significant omission (201–03). If the last 40 years have proven anything about theology, it is that human systems—which is what both covenant and dispensational theologies are—are neither infallible nor static. Both have experienced exegetically induced evolution and refinement. Merkle avoids the kind of overt agenda that characterizes some other surveys (see the review of *Models of Premillennialism*); nevertheless, this work’s covenantal tilt is apparent throughout. Despite the sticky fingerprints of subjectivity here and there, Merkle’s side-by-side analysis can be a valuable tool for exploring these systems in relation to each other.

Layton Talbert

Professor, Theology | BJU Seminary

Sung Wook Chung and David Mathewson. *Models of Premillennialism*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2018. xiii + 138 pp.

Chung and Mathewson, two faculty members at Denver Theological Seminary, divide the labor of outlining, analyzing, and comparing the major versions of premillennialism: Historic (aka Covenant) Premillennial, Classic Dispensational Premillennial, and Progressive Dispensational Premillennial. Two additional chapters address topics that I will comment on later in the review.

Overview

Chung's opening chapter first traces the key features of Historic Premillennialism: (1) a literal, futurist interpretation of Revelation 20:1-6, (2) a chronological interpretation of Revelation 19-20, (3) a posttribulational rapture, (4) two resurrections, and (5) a millennial kingdom on earth. At first glance, with the exception of point (3) this may sound like an outline of both the Classic Dispensational and Progressive Dispensational views as well. Other differences emerge, however, including the nature of the millennial kingdom itself. The reasoning behind an earthly kingdom is rooted in (a) a necessary restoration of the primeval paradise on this present earth, and (b) Adamic Christology in which Christ himself is appointed to "restore the kingdom and dominion originally given to Adam" thus fulfilling "God's original plan and purpose for this earth" (6). Chung follows up with a lengthy historical survey of advocates (66% of the article), from the Ante-Nicene Fathers all the way up to modern day evangelical proponents. His concluding appeal is anything but coy: "In my opinion, the time has come for evangelical theologians to reconsider doctrinal unity within the large framework of historic premillennialism, with its ancient pedigree and its claim to be the most biblical doctrine of eschatology" (28).

The chapter on Classic Dispensational Premillennialism, also by Chung, acknowledges "significant commonalities" with Historic Premillennialism, while noting that adherence to a pretribulational rapture is "the critical and crucial discrepancy" along with other conceptual differences between these views. David Mathewson takes the chapter on Progressive Dispensational Premillennialism, tracing the view's key hermeneutical principles, the importance of OT prophecies regarding Israel, and the interpretation of Revelation 20:1-6 (which resembles the other two premillennial views). Careful to note that the roots of this view's "rationale for a millennial kingdom" on the present earth extend far beyond Revelation 20, Mathewson correctly concludes that "a future for national Israel is what primarily distinguishes a progressive dispensational approach to the millennium from a historic premillennial approach" (66).

The final two chapters treat rather specialized topics, "Thematic Millennialism" and "Historic Premillennialism in South Korea."

Critique

If you're looking for a single book to navigate the complex array of premillennial views that is fair and fully informed, here's my advice in two words: *keep looking*. What could have been a great book labors under the weight of Chung's blatant biases, verbal swipes, and astonishingly antiquated

and misinformed explanations. It is a book with an unveiled agenda; it is telling that of the 126 pages of text proper, 60 pages are devoted exclusively to presenting and praising historic premillennialism (Chapters 1 and 5). That, of course, is the authors' prerogative; but the reader should be aware of what he is getting. Rather than the even-keeled overview of different premillennial models that one might expect from the title, the book is a heavy-handed polemic for historic premillennialism.

Craig Blomberg's foreword sets the book's polemic tone when he asserts, "Dispensationalism has arguably remained as strong as it has . . . because of Americans' obsession with the avoidance of suffering" and that "many who opt for" that view "do so not because they can defend it exegetically but because they simply want it to be true" so that "they can count on getting out of at least the worst of human suffering" (viii). Apart from being simplistically reductionistic (treating pretribulationism as the sum total of dispensationalism), this is not a statement calculated to engender confidence in the book's seriousness or fairmindedness. Nevertheless, it is the note on which Chung opens his first chapter: it is the "trained biblical and systematic theologians [who] align themselves with the historic premillennial view. . . . While dispensationalism finds overwhelming support from the public, historic premillennialism continues to be the dominant view among evangelical scholars" (1–2). And it is a theme that Chung perpetuates (20, 27, 31)—the intelligent, the educated, and the scholarly are historic premillennialists, while dispensationalism is espoused largely by uneducated laypeople (mostly southern, p. 31).

Chung has a penchant for prejudicial terminology. The choice to describe the pretribulational rapture view as the church's "escape" (why not "deliverance"?) from the tribulation is not accidental (35). Occasionally, he dresses up the opposing view in silly language, again describing the pretribulational rapture as Christ's "welcoming the church to the sky" (37).

Equally as troubling as the quirky depictions and tiresome cheerleading for the historic premillennial view, however, are Chung's palpable factual errors. He seems to be unaware of any mediating position between Classic and Progressive Dispensationalism (usually identified as Revised or Traditional); his comparisons with the "dispensational" view invariably have the old "Classic" view in mind. Defending the reference to "God's people" in Revelation 13:10 (lit., "the saints") as a reference to the church, Chung asserts that dispensationalists would "of course . . . interpret 'God's people' here to be the left-behind Jews" (5)—an explanation he repeats later (37–38) without any documentation in either place. He attributes the rise of dispensationalism "to its present standing of fame and prestige" to the "popular literature" of Hal Lindsey, Jerry Jenkins, and Tim LaHaye (19). His overview of classic dispensational premillennialism (Chapter 2) repeats the unqualified charge that "different dispensations have different ways of salvation" (31).

The book's shared authorship results in an unevenly written end product. On the one hand, Mathewson is both fairer and better informed than Chung. For example, he offers twelve pages of uninterrupted, well-documented, even-handed presentation of the views of Progressive Dispensational Premillennialism. On the other hand, his overview departs from the pattern set by Chung, lacking the historical survey and list of proponents that the reader comes to expect after the first two chapters.

The book displays an odd unevenness in another way. Chapter 4 (by Mathewson) presents what he terms "Thematic Millennialism"—a view he acknowledges "cannot strictly be labeled

premillennial” (70). It is, instead, a highly symbolic view of the millennium that sees the “thousand years” not as a temporal reference nor the millennium as an earthly kingdom, but rather as a symbolic portrayal of “the ultimate victory and vindication of the saints who suffered for their faithful witness to Christ” (83–84). One wonders how such a view qualifies to be included in a book on *Models of Premillennialism*. And although Chung says that both he and Mathewson are convinced historic premillennialists (7), Mathewson presents Thematic Millennialism as his own view (76–79). Also, like his overview of Progressive Dispensational Premillennialism, the chapter on Thematic Millennialism lacks any historical survey, apart from a concluding admission that the view “is fairly recent” and “finds minimal support historically in the church’s understanding of the millennium.” A final evidence of the book’s unevenness comes in the “Concluding Reflections on Premillennialism” which asserts that the Thematic Millennial view is espoused not only by (some?) historic premillennialists but also by some progressive premillennialists (122, 123). This new and surprising piece of information is not only utterly undocumented but also at odds with Mathewson’s express contrast of the thematic view with both historic and dispensational views of the millennium (77, 82). In short, coordination of both quality and content is seriously lacking.

Evangelicalism would be well-served by a genuinely fair and fully informed comparative survey of premillennial views. Unfortunately, this isn’t it.

Layton Talbert

Professor, Theology | BJU Seminary

Steven L. James. *New Creation Eschatology and the Land: A Survey of Contemporary Perspectives*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2017. xvii pp + 142 pp. + 22 pp. (back matter).

Steven James, Assistant Vice President for Academic Administration at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary and Assistant Professor of Systematic Theology at Southwestern’s L. R. Scarborough College, offers an incisive overview of select key elements and proponents of what has become known as new creation theology. Written with crystal clarity, the introduction maps out exactly where the book is going, while each chapter conclusion succinctly condenses the salient highlights and their significance.

In chapter 1, James traces the recent “rising theological interest in biblical descriptions of a new creation” (2). The modern shift away from a predominantly spiritualized view of heavenly afterlife began with Anthony Hoekema’s *The Bible and the Future* (1979). Eventually, the emphasis on a physical afterlife in resurrected bodies began to gather steam through the writings of numerous theologians. In order to establish some of the core components of new creationism, James samples the writings of five representatives of rather diverse backgrounds: N. T. Wright, J. Richard Middleton, Russell Moore, Douglas Moo, and Howard A. Snyder. And he cites their own exegetical arguments to establish three themes central to new creationism: the coming of God’s kingdom (Is 11, 57, 60–61;

Dn 7; Rv 21–22, et al.); bodily resurrection (Jb 19; Dn 12; Rom 8; 1 Cor 15; 2 Cor 5); and the reconciliation of all creation (1 Cor 15; Col 1).

Chapter 2 opens with new creationism's affirmation of the future restoration of the old earth (*ex vetere*) into the new earth, rather than a complete annihilation and creation of the new earth (*ex nihilo*). This affirmation rests on a discussion of two key passages (2 Pt 3; Rom 8). James's purpose is to establish—again, through the writings of these new creationists—two important principles that emerge from new creationism's affirmation of restoration versus annihilation. (1) The principle of continuity between the present earth and the new earth means “that elements of the present material creation continue to exist in the new creation” (45). And, (2) the principle of correspondence of identity between the present earth and the new earth; just as Jesus' resurrected body was (despite certain discontinuities) essentially and recognizably the same body with the same identity, the new earth (despite certain discontinuities) will be essentially and recognizably the same earth with the same identity as the original creation. By the end of the chapter, James begins to raise a pertinent question: shouldn't the new creationist view of the essential continuity and identity of the new earth with the present earth have ramifications for “the presence of the territory of Israel” in the very OT passages on which they ground their view of the new earth?

Before fully exploring that question, James first extensively traces “the theme of land in recent theology” (chapter 3)—a 44-page essay that spans a considerable gamut of at least twenty theologians from von Rad, Davies, and Brueggemann up through more recent writers such as Dumbrell, T. D. Alexander, and Gentry and Wellum. The survey demonstrates two major facts: (a) wide recognition that the land is a massive thematic emphasis in the OT; and (b) an overwhelming tendency to interpret the OT references to the land metaphorically—generally either through spiritualization (or Christification—to be “in Christ” is to be “in the land”), or through universalization (“the land” has become the whole earth). Both of these views are metaphorical “in that the particular territorial promise to Israel finds its fulfillment . . . in something other than the giving of the particular land to a particular people,” so that “the original thing that is promised is replaced by something else.” Therein lies the irony and, James suggests, the inconsistency of most new creationist theologians: “those who are emphasizing the regeneration or renewal of the present earth in its materiality are interpreting promises regarding a particular territory of that earth in a metaphorical way” (94).

Chapter 4 explores that irony and inconsistency in more detail. “In arguing for continuity . . . between the present earth and the new earth, new creationists utilize OT prophetic texts which include language referencing the particular territory of Israel . . . while denying an enduring role for the particular portion of territorial Israel as part of that earth” (95). The result is that “new creationists are operating under an inconsistent hermeneutic” in that they (correctly) ground their view of a renewed earth characterized by continuity and correspondence with the present earth in many OT passages “while spiritualizing or universalizing the physical territory of Israel” described in those same passages (97–98). James locates the inconsistency not in a literal versus spiritual hermeneutic (or an arbitrary mixture of the two), but rather in a particularistic and material hermeneutic which proceeds to ignore or deny the particularism and materiality of the details of the text when it comes to the land of Israel in those same texts. The “OT prophetic texts connect the promise of a restoration of the particular

territory of Israel to the promise of a renewed earth”—the two are inseparable. Consequently, “a consistent treatment of the prophetic texts by new creationists should include the affirmation of territorial restoration of Israel as a part of the renewed earth instead of that territorial particularity being subsumed conceptually under cosmic reconciliation” (99). After demonstrating that new creationists use OT texts to describe not only the concept but also the nature of the new earth (100–110), James highlights the logical inconsistency of appealing to such texts to argue for the renewal of the whole while simultaneously rejecting the references in those texts to the particularity of Israel and Jerusalem as a part of that whole. He traces evidences of that particularity through multiple passages used by new creationists (Is 2, 11, 24–27, 35, 65–66; Jer 30–31; Ez 36–37; Zec 2). In short, the new creationist view is not merely implausible but self-contradictory *if* it simultaneously holds to a metaphorical interpretation of the land. Arguing that the particular land expands to become the whole earth (the metaphorical view of universalizing the land promise) is a nonsensical “material impossibility”: “*Would it not be more plausible to conclude that . . . the particular and the universal are complementary instead of mutually exclusive?*” (118, my emphasis). Arguing that “a particular land promise [is] fulfilled spiritually in a new creation conception that emphasizes a restored earth” (the metaphorical view of Christifying the land promise) is, likewise, nonsensical and self-contradictory: “how does one think of promises of earthly territory being fulfilled in a spiritual manner such as this” in the very context of a restored earth? (119).

Finally, James ices the cake (chapter 5) by arguing “that affirming the territorial restoration of Israel 1) represents a consistent utilization of OT new creation texts, 2) is harmonious with NT texts commonly used to deny territorial restoration, and 3) leads to a consistent new creation eschatology that emphasizes the materiality of the final state” (121). Again, James echoes Blaising’s argument elsewhere that seeing the whole and the particular as mutually exclusive creates an unnecessary and false dichotomy—it does not have to be either/or; it can be both/and (122). Despite certain NT texts not discussed by James that arguably reinforce the principle of territorial particularity (Lk 1, Mt 19; Acts 1, 3; Rom 11), the NT’s emphasis on the universal dimensions of eschatology are designed to complement “the OT teaching of place, not replace it” (122). Though briefer than one could wish, James’s treatment of Matthew 5:5, John 4:19–24, and Romans 4:13 is adequate to make the case that none of these statements are incompatible with the territorial particularity of the land promise.

Contrary to assumption, the view of new creation eschatology that James defends is not limited to dispensationalists but, in fact, transcends millennial viewpoints. The “small group of theologians who have argued that upholding the territorial restoration of Israel actually bolsters a new creation conception” includes not only Craig Blaising and Michael Vlach but also amillennialist Vern Poythress (131–34). James’s study is a fresh, thoughtful, well-informed contribution to an important and ongoing eschatological conversation.

Layton Talbert

Professor, Theology | BJU Seminary