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Feeling the Fall: A Biblical-Theological Examination of Melancholy as an Emotional Mirror of a Fallen World

by Brian R. Hand[1]

There is a kind of darkness that can be felt—really felt. Some people live as though already entombed. No matter where they turn, there is no path. No matter how hard the eyes strain, there is no light, only tears. Darkness rushes in, presses down. Its weight is immense, interminable, insufferable. They claw for relief as a drowning person gasps for air, but there is no rescue, no escape. They sink until their emotions are ready to give out, exhausted. They live in a darkness that swallows up light. Pleasure itself becomes a distant and distorted memory. For a while those who are so entombed can mask their failing energy and increasing lethargy of spirit. The resilient last longer than most, but many who fall into this mist and shadow eventually succumb to a crushing gloom.

Melancholia—on a spectrum from simple sadness to profound discouragement, then crossing a moral line into despair—marks nearly every life at some point. People often have strong opinions on melancholy—at least regarding its more serious and durable forms. Some assert that it is a disease. In reference to one form, clinical depression, Gary Kinnaman and Richard Jacobs assert, "Depression is not grief. It is not sadness. It is not a person feeling sorry for themselves. Rather, the serious disease known as depression strikes at the welfare of body, spirit, and soul. In other words, it affects every part of us."[2] Some well-intentioned but unskilled advice merchants declare that melancholy is always—or at least nearly always—sin.[3] Sometimes authors start with their own presuppositions, personal

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[1] Dr. Brian Hand is professor of NT interpretation at BJU Seminary and a deacon of Cornerstone Baptist Church in Greenville, SC. His writings include *The Climax of Biblical Prophecy: A Guide to Interpreting Revelation* (Greenville, SC: BJU Press, 2012) and *Web of Iniquity: The Entangling of Sin* (Greenville, SC: BJU Press, 2016).

[2] *Seeking in the Dark: Getting the Facts on Depression & Finding Hope Again* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 2006), 53. See also Zack Eswine, *Spurgeon's Sorrows: Realistic Hope for Those Who Suffer from Depression* (Glasgow: Bell and Bain, 2014). "Contrary to what some people tell us, sadness is neither a sign of laziness nor a sin; neither negative thinking nor weakness. On the contrary, when we find ourselves impatient with sadness, we reveal our preference for folly, our resistance to wisdom, and our disregard for depth and proportion" (30). Notice that the authors differentiate other forms of melancholy (sadness in general) from depression. Compare the many books written by Paul Meier, who boasts about writing two to three books every year on depression. See, for example, *Blue Genes: Breaking Free from the Chemical Imbalances That Affect Your Moods, Your Mind, Your Life, and Your Loved Ones* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2005). Meier aggressively advocates the chemical theory of depression, and his books sound like an infomercial for the pharmaceutical industry as he constantly references various drugs he prescribes.

[3] This mistake should *not* be confused with the hope offered by biblical counselors who recognize a close nexus between depression and despair but who also recognize that other forms of melancholy, like severe discouragement, can mimic some of the traits of depression. These counselors nuance the discussion by adding "despair" or "spiritual hopelessness" to the traits characterizing depression. For example, see Bud Calvert, *Emotional Victory: How to Deal with How You Feel* (Lancaster, CA: Striving Together, 2012). Having defined depression as despair, Calvert dismisses endogenous (arising from internal chemical or pathogenic) causes almost entirely. The Christian who struggles with severe discouragement but continues to hope in God has not, by this definition, become depressed. Representative statements include: "[Jesus] was never depressed, because depression was not an option" (41); "recognizing sin as the root of depression can be difficult" (46); "there is no person that can make me depressed. There is no circumstance that can make me depressed" (47). Note

experiences, personality, or theological traditions and later select biblical evidence to warrant a cherished position. And, given the complexity of human emotions and the breadth of biblical information on these emotions, one can find adequate, if mishandled, support in Scripture for every theory on melancholy—for instance, it is entirely endogenous (disease, chemistry, or malformity), entirely spiritual, entirely circumstantial, entirely emotional, or some combination of these.

Sorrow appears throughout Scripture, and the biblical evidence seems to run the gamut of mild sorrow (the rich young ruler in Matthew 22, whose sorrow was induced by personal sin) through severe despondency (Job and David among others, whose sorrow was induced by circumstance, sickness, or Satan) to depression with despair (Judas), and it does so without ever using modern, scientific designations.[4] A biblical-theological examination of melancholy should help us nuance our understanding of human sadness, and it shows us that melancholy is an emotional reflection of a fallen world.[5]

Problems in Studying Melancholy

In any line of inquiry, the mind naturally runs to the instances *par excellence*. If we want to know what good basketball looks like, we do not start our research with non-athletes. Instead, we turn to Michael Jordan, Kobe Bryant, and other "greats" in the sport. Similarly, when people think of melancholy, they do not normally think of passing sadness but of depression (or at least a depressive state). But important issues punctuate a consideration of depression.

Foundational Problems

Every study of the human soul, will, emotions, or intellect is fraught with difficulties. For instance, scientists recognize "that the human brain has close to one hundred billion neurons. Neurons release brain chemicals, known as neurotransmitters, which generate these electrical signals in neighboring neurons. The electrical signals propagate like a wave to thousands of neurons, which leads to thought formation."[6] But this statement merely describes how the existing brain does the process of thinking.

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that definitions are vital, particularly when dealing with melancholy. Biblical counselors do not treat *sadness* as sin. They treat *despair* as sin. This means the reader or listener must take great care to discern which definition of *depression* an author or speaker is using: (1) profound sadness, (2) despair, or (3) something else (disease, malformity).

[4] It is telling in the biblical examples selected for this sentence that the weakest form of melancholy (sadness) can have sin as its cause while one of the strongest forms of melancholy (severe discouragement) may be innocent. Of course, neither is always the case, and Scripture gives abundant evidence of both endogenous and exogenous melancholy with and without sin as its cause. Note that some biblical counselors use *depression* to reflect the additional trait of despair.

[5] This paper does not address the specific, known sins that often attend melancholy. The emotional state of sadness produces certain specific tendencies in fallen creatures that wed their corrupted affections with an emotion to produce all manner of spiritual problems. For instance, it is well known that sadness can lead to hopelessness. It can also produce impatience, anger with God and others, sloth, acedia, and many other specific sins. Sadness can influence the human will so that the person then responds with faith or despair during times of profound discouragement. A discussion of the potential sins that stem from melancholy lies outside the scope of this paper.

[6] Lina Begdache, "Ask a Scientist: Neurons Help Explain How Our Brains Think," *PressConnects,* 27 March 2019, accessed 18 July 2023, https://www.pressconnects.com/story/news/local/2019/03/18/ask-scientist-how-do-thoughts-work-our-brain/3153303002/.

It cannot tell the reader what thinking is, or how it occurs at a more foundational level. Mere electrical impulses do not constitute thought; otherwise, lightning would be the most intelligent of beings.

The same difficulties occur in the attempt to define emotions.[7] We have a reasonable grasp of what emotions feel like. We understand that certain phenomena can cause (or at least influence) emotions, attend emotions, or result from emotions. We recognize that emotions intersect not only the body, intellect, and will, but also the spirit, so that emotions can generate (and be generated by) good and bad health, thoughts, decisions, and actions. But we still have not defined what emotions *are*. And God chose not to resolve the issue in his Word.[8] Instead, the Bible focuses on the whole person—how each facet of our being influences other facets so that the child of God must guard his heart (Prov 4:23), his soul (Prov 22:5), his spirit (Mal 2:15), his body (1 Thess 4:4), and his actions (Ps 119:9; Luke 12:15) because of their respective ability to influence the whole person.

The inability to define emotion generally or a single emotion specifically to the satisfaction of philosophers, scientists, theologians, and counselors invites us to use inductive or phenomenological methods in studying the biblical evidence lest we stray into unwarranted assumptions.

The Problem of Diagnosis

One reason to resist an investigation of melancholy by modern psychiatric methods stems from the inability of psychiatry to produce evaluative criteria that are simultaneously reliable and valid. Take, for instance, a single, severe form of melancholy, *depression*. Although the medical community must stick to material, pathogenic causes, "no physical findings are specific to or diagnostic of depression."[9] In spite of this defect in methodology, the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) declares that in 2020 alone "an estimated 21.0 million adults in the United States had at least one major depressive episode. This number represented 8.4% of all U.S. adults."[10] Of this number "an estimated 14.8 million U.S. adults aged 18 or older had at least one major depressive episode with severe impairment," which often manifests as chronic pain, fatigue, inability to work, listlessness, anxiety, other mental disturbances, or suicidal ideation.[11] Moreover, numerous studies rank depression among the top five mental disorders—affecting at least 300 million people worldwide at any given

[7] A number of older philosophers speak only of *affections* and *passions*. When secularists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries coined the word *emotion*, some theologians pushed back on the concept—feeling that the recognition of the category of *emotion* is inherently secular. However, this perspective that rejects emotions altogether does not seem to reflect the full breadth of scriptural and empirical evidence. It seems that emotions are not affections or passions *per se*, but rather a difficult-to-define language by which mind, body, soul, affections, will, and passions communicate.

[8] J. Alasdair Groves and Winston T. Smith observe, "The Bible doesn't offer a technical answer to the question What are emotions?—as if testifying before a panel of psychological researchers. . . . What the Bible can teach us about emotions is there to guide us in our relationship with God and others." *Untangling Emotions* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2019), 32.

[9] Charles D. Hodges, *Good Mood Bad Mood: Help and Hope for Depression and Bipolar Disorder* (Wapwallopen, PA: Shepherd, 2012), 40.

[10] "Major Depression," National Institute of Mental Health, accessed 5 July 2023, https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/major-depression.

[11] Ibid.

time. The problem is so severe that "one in six people (16.6%) will experience depression at some time in their life."[12]

While the weightiness of the NIMH and the self-proclaimed certainty of the medical community imply an objective standard for diagnosing melancholy, there are significant problems with this process. First, depression is not sadness. So researchers and writers that equate the two are merging distinct concepts. Second, some professionals question the validity of both these statistics and the associated methods of research. Charles D. Hodges, a medical doctor and theologian, observes that while diagnoses of depression increased over 300 percent in the ten-year span 1987–1997, this "rapid increase in the rate of depression was better explained by changes in the criteria used to make the diagnosis rather than as increase in the prevalence of the disease."[13]

The same author observes that all attempts to articulate a defined material pathology for depression have failed. This is not to say that known diseases are unable to induce depression. Multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's, lupus, and many other illnesses can influence one's propensity toward depression via unknown mechanisms. In addition, certain medications, trauma, and childbirth can provoke severe forms of melancholy, occasionally including depression—also by unknown processes. Scientists have proposed and dismissed, in succession, the theories that deficiencies in serotonin, dopamine, or norepinephrine cause depression.[14] "Even today we do not know what the correct balance of serotonin, dopamine, or norepinephrine should be in the human brain."[15]

Even prior to the lack of results from scientific investigations into material causes for severe forms of sadness, theologians turned to God's Word for input; however, the word *depression* never appears in Scripture.[16] Neither do its cognates *depressive*, *depressing*, *depressed* and *antidepressant*, or the associated words *clinical*, *mental illness*, *episode*, *dysphoria*, *bipolar*, *manic*, *mania*, *dysthymia*, *seasonal affective disorder*, or the milder words *mood*, *emote*, *emotion, melancholy*, or *despondency*.[17] Depression warrants thorough study, but in any forms that involve despair or hopelessness, it is outside the

[12] "What Is Depression?" American Psychiatric Association, accessed 30 June 2023, www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/depression/what-is-depression. Richard F. Berg and Christine McCartney cleverly label depression as "the common cold of the mind." *Depression and the Integrated Life: A Christian Understanding of Sadness and Inner Suffering* (New York: Alba, 1981), 3.

[13] Hodges, 13n2. It is unfortunate that Hodges references depression as "disease," but he is arguing against the accuracy and reliability of the DSM even when measured by its own standards.

[14] Meier rather oddly asserts as objective fact what the scientific and medical communities know is merely unproven theory: "Four key chemicals—serotonin, norepinephrine, dopamine, and GABA . . . —are responsible for influencing your ability to experience love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, humility, energy, motivation, memorization, concentration, a positive attitude, self-acceptance, your dreams, and sanity itself" (1). Note that Meier actually links virtue with chemistry. It would seem that to him the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22) is merely the fruit of healthy chemistry.

[15] Hodges, 45. Specifically, scientists have attempted to treat depression via drugs designed to inhibit the re-uptake of these neurotransmitters so that they remain more readily available in the brain. All such pathological investigations have hit a dead end. Though the chemical imbalance theory has prevailed for fifty years and has been the subject of numerous studies, inadequate evidence exists to support it.

[16] The Holman Christian Standard Bible does include the word *depression* five times in Psalms 42–43 and Lamentations 3. It also shows the contrast to depression in Psalm 43:5 to be "hope in God."

[17] A single reference in the New American Standard Bible (Exod 6:9) does refer to *despondency*, but this is a dynamic translation of a phrase in Hebrew.

purposes of this paper. This absence of modern designations for the more severe forms of melancholia in Scripture leads to several possibilities:

1. Melancholy is a modern phenomenon that did not occur in the premodern, biblical era.
2. Melancholy is an illusion; therefore, Scripture need not address it.
3. Melancholy occurred in the past, but Scripture treats it only by encouraging positive counter-emotions.
4. Melancholy occurred in the past, but Scripture treats it only by critiquing its sinful characteristics.
5. Melancholy occurred in the past, but Scripture uses different phrasing to express it.

The trans-temporally recognizable characteristics of melancholy discredit options (1) and (2). Historically, Hippocrates (c. 460–370 BC) described melancholy (μέλας + χολή, literally "black bile") as resultative from an excess of certain bodily fluids. While his analysis of the cause seems humorous to us (pun intended), his awareness of its symptoms was sound enough. Aretaeus of Cappadocia (second century AD) listed dullness, dejection, and torpor among the key traits that help the physician diagnose melancholy. Caelius Aurelianus, writing in the fifth century AD, concurs: the onset of melancholy is identifiable through its characteristics of dejection, silence, brooding, and occasionally a death wish. Melancholy cannot be merely a modern phenomenon or an illusion if it persists across millennia and exhibits identifiable traits.

A number of church fathers seem to have adhered to some form of (3) or (4), reasoning that since "the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Gal 5:22–23); and since Jesus and Paul seem to have a dim view of "fainting" (ἐγκακέω) in Luke 18:1, 2 Corinthians 4:1, Galatians 6:9, and 2 Thessalonians 3:13, anything that seems antithetic to these traits must be evil.[18] This thinking led a number of theologians in the second and subsequent centuries to treat the stronger forms of melancholy as vices warranting criticism.[19]

The instinct to avoid sin reflects spiritual prudence, but the instinct to treat select emotions as entirely immoral might exhibit a category error. *Love* in Scripture is not always an emotion (though it produces analogous emotions). It is in this context a virtue (also described in 1 Corinthians 13). Joy is not strictly identical with happiness (though it may result in happiness) but is sometimes a spiritual delight in God and his work that may operate while a person is sad. Peace is not always an emotion (though it has emotional implications). It can be a spiritual wholeness and soundness that generates tranquility of spirit in the midst of turmoil. Similarly, patience, kindness, and the remainder of the fruit of the Spirit are more properly described as virtues in Galatians 5, not emotions. While virtues/vices and emotions influence each other, and while some of the same words describe both

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[18] Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright ©2016 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

[19] John Cassian listed λύπη and ἀκηδία as distinct but core sins that lead to a number of other sins. The Latin fathers used *tristitia* in place of λύπη to describe melancholic tendencies. In both instances, they left little room for depression as anything other than a sin.

virtues and emotions (e.g., love), they are not always identical. Juxtaposing an emotion to a virtue can create a fallacy of false equivalence. It contrasts dissimilar concepts inappropriately. In addition, emotions are notoriously complex—they can be stacked! A person may experience sadness and happiness simultaneously. Sadness may reflect loss of a child, while simultaneous happiness may reflect another child's recent salvation. Scripture nowhere requires the renunciation of the former in order to possess the latter. In fact, Paul rather clearly indicates that sorrow continues to exist, but that God's people do not sorrow in isolation from hope (1 Thess 4:13). This stackability of dissimilar emotions does not imply a corresponding stackability of virtues with vices. It would be impossible, for example to have joy simultaneously with the despair that is often characteristic of depression. The Christian must give up any sense of despair or hopelessness as a matter of obedience to God. He cannot maintain a virtue (joy) and a corresponding vice (despair) at the same time. Until and unless theologians investigate the nature and kinds of melancholy as revealed in Scripture, they must reserve judgment on whether certain forms of profound melancholy are inherently sinful (and not primarily emotional, pathogenic, or morally neutral). After all, sound theologians do not wish to be as guilty as psychiatrists of postulating a universal cause without adequate evidentiary support.

This leaves option (5), namely, that some form of severe melancholy has occurred throughout human history since the Fall, but Scripture uses different phrasing to express it. This solution is empirically testable and can yield a clear set of biblical data relating to melancholy. We need not be able to define exactly what an emotion *is* in order to discuss what a specific emotion looks like. Common human experience intuits that anger is not the same as tranquility, but it also differs from sadness. Anger responds to a violated sense of justice (or a standard of right and wrong), however corrupted that sense of justice might be. Melancholy occurs in response to loss (sometimes inarticulable) or pain (including internal pain of a guilty conscience). In order to qualify as an expression of melancholy, a text ought to exhibit (1) loss coupled with (2) an emotional response to that loss.[20] We have already observed that the Bible never uses modern, clinical designations of melancholy; so the emotional response to loss may take the form of emotionally laden, picturesque language.

Scripture is strikingly metaphorical when it addresses melancholic states. Some of the most poignantly brooding Psalms (such as Ps 88) have almost no direct reference to sorrow at all. Instead, they are full of images that reflect profound discouragement or sadness. Table 1 exhibits the figures of speech that occur in this psalm.

[20] There is another possible avenue for exploration in this regard. Some people experience sadness but cannot identify a specific pain or loss that is causing that sadness. This does not mean that one is missing. The Fall is an adequate loss to produce sadness even among unregenerate people who cannot articulate the reason for that sadness. In the Fall, humanity lost a kind of fellowship with God that was intuitive, automatic, and holy. In the Fall, humanity lost a perfect earth and a life of perfect purpose. A portion of the malaise of spirit that is evident in the world is, of course, directly due to sin, but a portion of it may relate to the spiritual awareness that inheres in us (e.g., Eccl 3:11, "he has put eternity into man's heart).

Table 1. Figures of Speech in Psalm 88[21]

Metonymy	My life draws near to Sheol
Metonymy	Those who go down to the pit
Simile	Like one set loose among the dead
Simile	Like the slain that lie in the grave
Simile	Like those whom you remember no more
Metonymy	In the depths of the pit, in the regions dark and deep
Metaphor	You overwhelm me with all your waves
Metonymy	My eye grows dim
Metaphor	Dead, departed, grave, Abaddon, darkness, land of forgetfulness
Metaphor	Wrath has swept over me
Metaphor	Dreadful assaults destroy me
Simile	Surround me like a flood
Metaphor	Close in on me together
Metonymy	Companions have become darkness

In its use of metaphor and other figures of speech, the divinely breathed-out record of human sorrow in the Psalms aligns more closely with the poets, who describe their profound grief as "the 'crowding gloom,' the 'gathering murk,' 'the poisonous mood,' 'the howling tempest in the brain,' 'the interior doom,'" than with the clinicians and scientists.[22] Yet it is precisely the poetry of the divine record that provides hope for those who suffer today. Scientifically precise labels are unnecessary. In fact, they can obscure the emotional states reflected in Scripture. Job, the Psalms, Jeremiah, Lamentations, and even the life of the Lord Jesus provide adequate input for us to see our own melancholy reflected, to parse its causes and effects, and to live in a fallen world in which we find ourselves grieving but not cast out.

A Problem of Definition

It is difficult to assemble biblical evidence regarding severe forms of melancholy. We do know that Judas's experience (Matt 17:5) differs from the profound melancholy of the psalmists in that Judas despaired whereas the psalmists did not. But beyond this distinction between sorrow with and without hope, the Scriptures do not categorize the variations in human melancholy. Scripture does not use modern clinical phrasing; so how can the reader identify the biblical texts that address or depict what we now call depression versus those that describe profound sadness without despair?

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[21] Eswine observes, "[Andrew] Solomon then highlights the commonly used metaphors for depression of going over the edge of a cliff or falling into an abyss. William Styron likewise leaned upon the images of drowning and suffocation to attempt description of his affliction" (68). Additionally, "historian Stanley W. Jackson wrote about this necessary use of metaphor in his *Melancholia & Depression: From Hippocratic Times to Modern Times*. Jackson found 'no literal statement,' no one-word diagnosis, that was able to describe adequately the diversity of our sadnesses along with their varying fits of gloom and mood. What he found instead were two recurring word-pictures: 'being in a state of darkness and being weighed down'" (69). Note that the author blends depression with profound sadness while many biblical counselors would reserve the word *depression* exclusively for the profoundly sad state *coupled with* despair.

[22] Ibid., 71–72.

The reader could surmount this obstacle by yielding to the conclusions of secular psychology, but this approach is unnecessary. Words usually reflect shared human experience. This commonality makes the essential characteristics of words and even feelings self-evident. There is still significant room for debate regarding the influences, effects, and essential nature of an emotion even when we agree on its basic characteristics. In working from the most extreme melancholic state of depression back to simple sadness, we will use the DSM-5-TR characteristics of a major depressive disorder as a starting point—though we will heavily qualify the inclusions and conclusions derived from that diagnostic list.[23] These characteristics include the following:

1. Depressed mood.
2. Loss of interest/pleasure.
3. Weight loss or gain or loss of interest in eating.
4. Insomnia or hypersomnia.
5. Psychomotor agitation or retardation.
6. Fatigue.
7. Feeling worthless or excessive/inappropriate guilt or loneliness.
8. Decreased concentration.
9. Thoughts of death/suicide.

According to the DSM, each symptom must last for two or more weeks, must occur pervasively either every day or nearly every day, and must rise to a level of intensity that transcends normal sadness. That last phrase is crucial. The DSM-5-TR treats depression as a major step beyond normal sadness. In addition, the sufferer must experience five or more of these symptoms to be classified as depressed. Although this list purports to be diagnostic, and although the medical community uses the list in precisely this fashion, the DSM-IV admits that "no laboratory findings that are diagnostic of a Major Depressive Episode have been identified."[24] The DSM-5-TR updates the clinical evidence nearly thirty years: "Although an extensive literature exists describing neuroanatomical, neuroendocrinological, and neurophysiological correlates of major depressive disorder, no laboratory test has yielded results of sufficient sensitivity and specificity to be used as a diagnostic tool for this disorder."[25] Hodges deduces an additional problem with the DSM traits: "The problem with these criteria as a diagnostic tool is that they include feelings and experiences that almost everyone has in the course of normal life. Far too many normal things are said to be indicators . . . according to these criteria."[26] In fact, using these "diagnostic" criteria, some case studies found an eighty percent incidence rate of major depression

[23]M. B. First, ed., *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder*, 5th ed., Text Revision (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 2022), 183.

[24] Cited in Hodges, 24n1.

[25] First, 187.

[26] Ibid., 28.

among the general population.[27] Finally, imposing a two-week duration of symptoms as a metric presupposes that all sorrows warrant short periods of grieving or that mere passage of time constitutes a radical upgrade in the level of sadness involved. These assumptions are neither scientific nor sensible.

Profound loss can and ought to induce stronger and longer grief. One might grieve the loss of a job and the loss of a child for significantly different periods of time and with significantly different intensities without the latter's automatically becoming a different category of grief altogether. Yet both outside and inside the church, people have grown uncritically accustomed to the label *depression* without distinguishing it from normal, but profound, sadness. Given the serious limitations of the DSM diagnostic criteria, it is better to grant that while these criteria work as a starting point for recognizing some form of severe melancholic state, they cannot truly discriminate between sadness and depression. Melancholy, even in its most intense forms, does not entail despair or hopelessness.[28]

Characterizing Melancholy

This conclusion encourages us to focus on the qualities of sadness in Scripture. The DSM traits relating to depression do *characterize* severe melancholy, but they lack diagnostic capability—being unable to discriminate legitimate (though profound) sorrow from despair. So if we search the Scriptures for the characteristics of sadness (in both exact words and metaphorical expression), we gain an appreciation for what God says about melancholy. All of the DSM traits appear in Scripture, and they tend to appear in close and frequent conjunction with each other. Table 2 cross references the nine DSM criteria with the passages of Scripture most indicative of melancholy.

Table 2. Intersection of DSM Characteristics of Depression and Key Biblical Texts

	Sadness, grief, misery, sorrow	Loss of interest or pleasure	Changes in appetite	Trouble sleeping, no rest	Loss of energy, increased fatigue	Purposeless activity	Feeling worthless, guilty, rejected, lonely	Difficulty thinking, concentrating	Death ideation, wish, or obsession	Sustained over time, endless, interminable
1 Sam 1 (Hannah)	vv. 6–8, 10, 15ff.	v. 7	v. 7							v. 7
1 Sam 2 (Hannah)	v. 1		v. 5				vv. 1, 7			
1 Kgs 19 (Elijah)	v. 4				vv. 5–7	v. 4	v. 10		v. 4	

[27] Hodges illustrates the problem with the DSM criteria: "What would happen if the diagnostic standard for pneumonia included everyone who coughs?" (28).

[28] While not all biblical counselors use terminology in the same way, they all agree that despair involves sin. Some biblical counselors reserve the designation of *depression* for sadness that has crossed into despair. They prefer designations like *severe despondency* or *profound sadness* to describe an extreme intensity of sorrow that retains hope in the Lord.

	Sadness, grief, misery, sorrow	Loss of interest or pleasure	Changes in appetite	Trouble sleeping, no rest	Loss of energy, increased fatigue	Purposeless activity	Feeling worthless, guilty, rejected, lonely	Difficulty thinking, concentrating	Death ideation, wish, or obsession	Sustained over time, endless, interminable
Job 3	vv. 20–24	vv. 6–7	v. 24	vv. 13, 17, 26	v. 13		v. 23	vv. 3–12	vv. 3 – 19, 21–22	v. 26
Job 6	v. 2		vv. 5–7		vv. 11–12		vv. 4, 27	vv. 3, 10, 26	v. 9	v. 11
Job 7	vv. 1, 11	v. 7		vv. 4, 13–14		v. 3	vv. 16, 19	vv. 7, 9, 16	vv. 15–16	vv. 2–3
Job 10	v. 1					v. 8	vv. 15–17	vv. 2ff., 20	vv. 1, 18–22	vv. 16–17
Job 16	vv. 1, 16, 20		v. 8		vv. 2, 15		vv. 2, 7, 9–14	vv. 11–14	v. 22	v. 14
Job 17	vv. 1, 7	v. 7		v. 12	v. 7	v. 11	vv. 2, 6	v. 12	vv. 1, 11, 13–16	v. 15
Job 19	v. 2					v. 8	vv. 2, 11–19	v. 7		vv. 8, 10
Job 30	vv. 16, 31			v. 27			v. 20		v. 23	v. 26
Job 31 (Elihu)	v. 19	v. 20	v. 20						v. 21	
Ps 6 (David)	vv. 2, 6			v. 6	v. 7		vv. 1, 4		v. 5	v. 3
Ps 13 (David)	v. 2						v. 1	v. 2	v. 3	v. 1, 2
Ps 38 (David)	v. 6	v. 10			v. 10	vv. 13, 14	v. 1	v. 8		v. 15
Ps 69 (David)	vv. 3, 10			v. 3	v. 3		vv. 4, 11, 20		vv. 2, 15	
Ps 77 (Asaph)	v. 3	v. 2		v. 6		v. 4		vv. 3, 6		v. 7
Ps 88 (Heman)	vv. 3, 9				v. 4	vv. 10–12	vv. 5–7		vv. 3–6	v. 1, 17
Ps 102 (Unknown)	vv. 5, 9	v. 4	v. 4	v. 8	v. 23	v. 11	vv. 6, 10		vv. 3, 11, 23	v. 3
Lam 3 (Jeremiah)	vv. 1, 15, 49, 51	v. 17	v. 16	v. 17	v. 20	v. 9	vv. 10ff.	v. 17	v. 6	v. 3, 7
Lam 1 (Judah)	vv. 2, 4, 12, 16	v. 16	v. 20	v. 3	vv. 6, 13, 14	v. 17	vv. 2, 19		v. 20	v. 13
Jonah	2:1, 7; 4:1	4:5			2:7; 4:8		2:4	4:4, 9–11	2:5–6; 4:3, 8	4:5
Isa 53 (Jesus)	vv. 3, 4, 10–11						vv. 3, 4		v. 12	

	Sadness, grief, misery, sorrow	Loss of interest or pleasure	Changes in appetite	Trouble sleeping, no rest	Loss of energy, increased fatigue	Purposeless activity	Feeling worthless, guilty, rejected, lonely	Difficulty thinking, concentrating	Death ideation, wish, or obsession	Sustained over time, endless, interminable
Matt 26–27	26:37						27:46		26:38	
Mark 14–15	14:33						15:34		14:34	
Luke 22	v. 44				v. 43					

By DSM reckoning, a *secular* psychologist would likely conclude that Hannah, Elijah, Job, David, Asaph, Heman, the unknown author of Psalm 102, Jeremiah, Jonah, Jesus and possibly others in Scripture were clinically depressed (experiencing a "Major Depressive Episode"). But Hodges observes, "The tools given to us by the creators of the DSM—the nine criteria . . . —are unable to distinguish between normal and disordered sadness."[29] So this dubious diagnosis that shoves all profound sadness into an undifferentiated lump called *depression* is not as helpful as recognizing the incredible depth and breadth of human sadness in Scripture. If a diagnosis is medical without a known pathogenic cause, the sufferer is left without many avenues of recourse (therapeutics, pain killers, alternative medicines). But if the *full* spectrum of sadness reflects normal human experience that relates to the intensity and duration of loss in a fallen world, there is hope. Table 3 charts such depths of sorrow.

Table 3. Key Biblical Descriptions of Profound Sorrow

Text	Key Descriptions
1 Sam 1	provoke grievously, irritate, wept, would not eat, weep, sad, deeply distressed, wept bitterly, affliction, troubled in spirit, pouring out my soul, anxiety, vexation
1 Kgs 19	afraid, take away my life, no better, I only am left
Job 3	perish, darkness, nor light shine, gloom, deep darkness, clouds, blackness, terrify, not rejoice, barren, no joyful cry, curse, trouble, die, expire, misery, bitter in soul, long for death, grave, sighing, no bread, groanings, fear, dread, not at ease, no rest
Job 6	vexation, calamity, heavier, rash, poison, terrors, tasteless, crush, cut off, exult in pain, no strength, driven from me, despairing, wind
Job 7	hard service, shadow, emptiness, misery, night is long, tossing, worms and dirt, hardens, breaks out, without hope, breath, never again see good, gone, fades, vanishes, Sheol, returns no more, anguish, bitterness, scare, terrify, choose strangling, death, loathe life, leave me alone, made me your mark, burden, lie in earth
Job 10	loathe life, complaint, bitterness, why contend, oppress, despise, destroyed me, clay, return to dust, disgrace, hunt like a lion, work wonders against me, vexation toward me, died, grave, darkness, deep shadow, gloom

[29] Hodges, 64. See also the fuller description of this problem on pp. 66–68.

Text	Key Descriptions
Job 16	pain, worn out, desolate, shriveled up, witness against me, leanness, torn, hated, gnashed at, struck, broken, seized, dashed, set up as a target, slashes open, pours out gall, breach upon breach, sackcloth, strength in the dust, red with weeping, deep darkness, scorn, tears, no return
Job 17	spirit is broken, days are extinct, graveyard, mockers, byword, men spit, eye dim, vexation, shadow, appalled, days are past, plans broken off, night, darkness, Sheol, pit, worm, descend, dust
Job 19	violence, no justice, walled up, darkness, stripped, broken down, hope pulled up, wrath, adversary, put far, estranged, stranger, foreigner, breath is strange, stench, despise, abhor, turned against, bones stick, destroyed, heart faints
Job 30	byword, humbled, calamity, terrors, passed away, poured out, affliction, night, racks my bones, pain, no rest, disfigured, mire, dust, ashes, cry, no answer, cruel, toss about, death, ruins, disaster, evil came, darkness, turmoil, never still, affliction, skin turns black, bones burn, mourning, weep
Job 31	pain, continual strife in bones, loathes bread, flesh wasted away, bones stick out, soul draws near the pit, death
Ps 6	languishing, bones troubled, soul troubled, how long, no remembrance, Sheol, weary, moaning, flood my bed with tears, weeping, eye wastes away, grief, weak
Ps 13	how long, forget, hide your face, counsel in my soul, sorrow all the day, sleep of death, shaken
Ps 38	no soundness, no health, heavy burden, too heavy, stink and fester, bowed down, prostrate, all the day, mourning, burning, feeble, crushed, groan, tumult of heart, sighing, throbs, strength fails, light of my eyes has gone, stand aloof, deaf, mute, ready to fall, pain is ever before me
Ps 69	waters to my neck, sink in deep mire, no foothold, deep waters, flood sweeps over me, weary with crying, throat is parched, eyes grow dim, hate me without cause, destroy me, attack me with lies, reproach, stranger, alien, humbled, fasting, sackcloth, byword, pit, distress, shame, dishonor, despair, no pity, no comforter, poison for food, sour wine, afflicted, in pain
Ps 77	cry, trouble, refuses to be comforted, moan, spirit faints, hold my eyelids open, cannot speak, spurn, never favorable, love forever ceased, promises at an end, forgotten, shut up compassion
Ps 88	cry, troubles, Sheol, pit, no strength, dead, slain, grave, remembered no more, cut off, depths, dark and deep, heavy, overwhelm, shun, horror, shut in, cannot escape, dim, sorrow, Abaddon, darkness, forgetfulness, cast away, hide your face, afflicted, terrors, helpless, swept over, dreadful assaults, destroy me, surround me, flood
Ps 102	cry, distress, pass away, smoke, bones burn, heart is struck down, like grass, forget to eat bread, loud groaning, bones cling, like a desert owl, lie awake, like a lonely sparrow, eat ashes, mingle tears with my drink, thrown me down, like an evening shadow, wither away, destitute, groans, prisoners, doomed to die, broken my strength, shortened my days
Lam 3	affliction, driven, darkness, no light, the whole day long, flesh wastes away, broken bones, besieged, enveloped, bitterness, tribulation, like the dead, walled about, cannot escape, heavy, cry, blocked, crooked, torn to pieces, bent his bow, target for his arrow, laughingstock, taunts, wormwood, gravel, ashes, bereft of peace, forgotten happiness, endurance perished, gall, bowed down, silence, dust, grief, eyes flow without ceasing, hunted, pit, lost
Isa 53	no form or majesty, no beauty, despised, rejected, man of sorrows, acquainted with grief, hide their faces, stricken, smitten by God, afflicted, pierced, crushed, chastisement, wounds, oppressed, opened not his mouth, stricken, grave, death, anguish, poured out soul to death
Jonah	distress, belly of Sheol, deep, heart of the seas, flood, waves, billows, driven from your sight, waters closed in, deep surrounded, went down, bars closed upon me forever, pit, fainting away, displeased, take my life (2x), faint, asked to die

Text	Key Descriptions
Matt 26–27; Mark 14–15; Luke 22[30]	sorrowful, troubled, very sorrowful, even to death, forsaken, greatly distressed, agony, sweat like drops of blood

An initial observation on this biblical data seems appropriate. Except in the case of Jonah, these expressions of sorrow—even to the point of severe despondency that *secular* clinicians would label depression—receive no condemnation. They are not declared to be wrong (nor are they declared to be right). Scripture treats them matter-of-factly as part of normal human experience. The Holy Spirit moves the writers of Scripture seamlessly between praise (Ps 103) and lament (Ps 102) without apology or rebuke for the sorrows that men feel. And in many psalms this shift is even more immediate because it is internal to the psalm. The praise of Psalm 89:1–37 gives place to the sorrows and agitation of Psalm 89:38–51 before swinging back again to praise in v. 52. Where God has not clearly condemned an action, thought, or feeling (especially sorrow, which he covers in such intimate detail and frequency), we would do well to tread lightly and hesitantly in pronouncing our own condemnation, lest we find ourselves numbered among Job's "friends," who, somewhat ironically, receive severe rebuke from God (Job 42:7–8).

Since the Scriptures address melancholy in significant detail, the biblical theologian has numerous avenues of research:

- Do *other* passages outside of the classic severe cases in Job, the Psalms, and Jeremiah indicate that sadness is always, often, seldom, or never sin?
- If there are forms of sadness that cross a moral line between right and wrong, what are their distinguishing characteristics?
- Do additional texts unfold the workings of sadness?
- How does God personally interact with those who are sad? Is the corrective for sadness one of rebuke, warning, encouragement, restatement of theological fact, or something else?
- What are the immediate causes/influences of melancholy?
- What consequences stem from melancholy? Even if the emotion is not sin in itself, does it *cause* sin?
- Do the Scriptures encourage us to avoid sadness?

[30] In Matthew 16:14, the disciples respond variously to Jesus' question, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" Some said, "John the Baptist." That is not difficult to understand. The Jews knew that John and Jesus preached the same message ("repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand"; Matt 3:2; 4:17) in some of the same places (the Judean wilderness, alongside Jordan, outlying districts). Others said, "Elijah." That is also easy to see. Both Elijah and Jesus performed miracles and spoke with a boldness that marked them as men of God. But the most puzzling assessment is this: "Jeremiah." Jesus' message, location, origin, background, and manner were radically different from Jeremiah's; so what did people see to connect them? Possibly their *mood*. Jeremiah was a weeping prophet, apparently melancholic at times, and Jesus was a man of sorrows, acquainted with griefs. While it is impossible to prove conclusively, it is conceivable that the connection the Jews saw between Jeremiah and Jesus centered on their emotional disposition.

- What does it mean that Jesus is a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief? How close did he come to what secular clinicians today would call *depression*? And how did his profound sorrow differ from depression?

Our concern lies elsewhere. In both its endogenous and exogenous forms, melancholy seems to reflect a theological truth: the Fall has fatally marred this world and everything in it, especially those creatures made in the image of God. The Fall damaged the entirety of our being—body, will, intellect, spirit, and emotions.[31] Melancholy is the emotion distinctly situated to express the Fall.

Key Theological Concepts

Two theological concepts guide a study of melancholy and the Fall. First, because God created humans as his image bearers, God's own emotions have direct bearing on what people should experience in response to their circumstances. Second, the Fall marred everything that adjoins humanity. A study of the effects of the Fall—both its stated and implied consequences—will guide the expectation of what constitutes legitimate and illegitimate responses to the Fall.

Sadness in the Divine

Several passages indicate that God can experience sadness. This does not entail that he undergoes change, for his impassibility means that his sorrow must stem ultimately from his own essential being rather its being "inflicted" on him externally.[32] Ephesians 4:30 warns believers, "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God." *Grief* is the ordinary word λυπεῖτε in the imperative, directed at people, and in regard to what *they* do in reference to the Holy Spirit (since the Spirit is the direct object of the verb). Whatever impassibility *does* mean, it *cannot* mean that actions of God's people have no bearing on what God himself chose to describe as "grief" of the Spirit. Perhaps emotions do not represent *change* at all but an effulgence or instantiation of our inner person with all of its loves, hates, and values (affections). In this case, grief in this passage is not a change in the divine person but the intersection of what God loves and values with the corrupted values and actions of his people. God does not move or change, but our conduct may strike at what he loves and values so that it instantiates an emotion already inhering in his person and elicits the proper feeling in relation to that injured love or injured value. In this case, it is grief.

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[31] One might add or subtract specific components here depending on whether he holds a more synthetic or analytical view of humanity, but orthodox theology addresses the impacts of the Fall on the entirety of the human person.

[32] As representative of the arguments defending impassibility, see Norman L. Geisler, *Systematic Theology in One Volume* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 2011), 462–70. But note that like many other systematic theologians, Geisler spends almost no time on the emotions that God does experience (five lines on p. 469). He is more concerned with defending the systematic-theological conclusions regarding divine impassibility than with specific biblical evidence for divine emotions. For a study that emphasizes the biblical-theological data, see Layton Talbert, "'Greater Is He Than Man Can Know': Divine Repentance and a Brief Inquiry into Anthropomorphism & Anthropopathism, Impassibility & Affectability," *JBTW* 2, no. 2 (Spring 2022): 73–93, available at https://seminary.bju.edu/files/2022/03/JBTW2.2_Article05_GreaterIsHeThanManCanKnow.pdf.

We need not settle the debate regarding divine passibility or impassibility or arrive at a full comprehension of its meaning in order to recognize that Scripture attributes grief to the Spirit. This grief is based on a real "pain" incurred through the failure of God's image bearers to respond in a fashion that reflects his glory as they ought. Humanity had (and has) a responsibility to reflect God's person accurately and truly as his image bearers, and when we fail to do so through sin, God is deprived of his due (Rom 3:23)—a mystery to be sure, but a clear biblical statement nonetheless.

Jesus, too, experienced sadness—even profound sadness—but writers often feel the need to qualify this fact.[33] When we observe that "he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled" (John 11:33; cf. 12:27, 13:21) at the grief of others, that he himself "wept" (John 11:35) at loss, that "he began to be sorrowful and troubled" (Matt 26:37) when approaching the cross, or that he could be "grieved at their hardness of heart" (Mark 3:5), we have evidence of sadness that corresponds to loss.

Finally, the Scriptures record God the Father feeling sorrow (and delight; cf. Matt 3:17). Hodges notes, "Remarkably, the first use of any word pertaining to sad, sadness, or sorrow appears in Genesis 6:6. There God said that he was 'sorry' that he had created man," and it "grieved him to his heart."[34] While Hodges overlooks the connection between "pain" (Gen 3:16, 17) and "grief" (6:6)—and so overstates the claim that Genesis 6:6 is the first reference to sorrow—his overall point still has value. After God explicitly announces the effects of the Fall, the "pain/grief" that the Fall caused was shared by God as a form of personal loss when his creatures strayed even further from him into darkness. Adam felt the Fall in specified forms of loss, but God felt certain effects of the Fall as well (Gen 6:6).

Given that God made humans in his own image (Gen 1:26–27), that Scripture appears to represent divine emotions, and that the emotion of sadness correlates to the losses brought by the Fall, it seems reasonable to conclude that human sadness may likewise reflect the Fall. Since God's responses to the Fall are untainted by sin, it is, perhaps, too audacious to assume that *every* expression of profound grief is inherently sinful. The fact that all humans are marred does not necessitate that every action, thought, and feeling of a marred being—especially one who is redeemed by Christ—is sin.[35]

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[33] E.g., Geisler writes that Jesus' divine nature did not suffer. Only his human nature did (468). While this position safeguards impassibility, it may be begging the question since it presupposes that there can be no sorrow at all in the divine nature. But this presence or absence of emotion in the divine is precisely the point to be tested. The divine nature could not suffer *physically* since the divine nature is not physical, but if Scripture implies that the divine nature can experience the emotion of grief or sadness, perhaps our philosophical theology should give place to what God has revealed about himself. Note as well that Geisler and others who defend strong impassibility tend to resolve the tension through an appeal to anthropomorphisms (the Bible describes God in human terms in order to communicate effectively). But Scripture provides more warrant for viewing humanity deo-morphically than it does for viewing God anthropomorphically. See Judson D. Greene, "At the Left Hand of the Son: God the Father's Spatial Manifestation in Heaven" (unpublished MA thesis, BJU Seminary, 2020), for the biblical evidence that depicts a visible, localized manifestation of the Father's person or presence in a fashion that implies Scripture may view humanity at least as deo-morphically as it speaks of God anthropomorphically.

[34] Hodges, 75. Is it accidental that the word used near the end of the verse to describe God's feeling (עצב) appears in Genesis 3:16 and 3:17 (here a cognate, עִצָּבוֹן) to describe the "pain" that both the woman and the man would experience as a result of the Fall?

[35] Again, the debate is not whether the Bible presents the reality that there is no conduct of the wicked that is, in fact, righteous. Rather, are the sorrows of the redeemed inherently sinful?

The Nature of the Fall

Although Arminian and Calvinist theologians differ in regard to the nature of the imputation of Adam's guilt, orthodox Protestants recognize and confess that every human is fatally flawed spiritually, having inherited a sinful nature from Adam, and is unable to do good on his own. This does not mean that humans are as evil as possible. We could always commit more sin more grievously, more intentionally, and more extensively than we do at present. But we are marred in body, intellect, will, and spirit so that we are incapable of having a right standing with God through our own merit.[36]

The Fall damaged humanity spiritually, socially, and physically. Its most notable effects include separation from God, loss of fellowship with him, loss of innocence, conflict (especially in fractured marital relationships), pain in childbearing, pain in daily work and survival, loss of peace and wholeness, expulsion from the garden, and physical death. Very soon, other losses would pile up as it became evident that humanity would now experience every form of sin and misery—the loss of humility, altruism, joy, love, peace, and truth. Every effect of the Fall displays both *pain* and *loss*. The pain that resulted from the Fall is explicit (Gen 3:16–17). The loss is often implicit. Every loss inflicts pain. Every pain is a loss. Loss and sadness connect so intimately that we describe those who do not experience sadness as a result of loss as *pathological*. Hodges observes, "If sadness is connected to loss, the history of normal sadness starts in the garden of Eden, the scene of humanity's greatest loss."[37] How is it that the world treats those who do exhibit profound sadness in the face of loss as mentally disordered (depressed) while it treats those who do not exhibit sadness in the face of loss as even more mentally disordered (pathological)? Something ought to give. And a sound theology of melancholy might orient believers to view the world as God does—handling sorrow in a more thoroughly biblical way regardless of how deep that sorrow may become.

Those who experience melancholy find that some within the Christian community perpetrate a bitter irony and injustice through intellectual preferentialism and bias. If a theologian has a precise and orthodox *intellectual* understanding of the Fall and its consequences so that he can define accurately the extent and nature of depravity, its effects on the earth, the deadness of the human spirit, and the necessity of external redemption and restoration, the theological community praises him. If that same person experiences profoundly dark *emotions* that are an accurate, direct emotional assessment of and response to the Fall (that is, he "*feels* the Fall"), the same theological community (well-intentioned, but uninformed friends) may treat him as spiritually immature or as actively sinning. Somehow, it is appropriate to philosophize about the Fall, but we dare not feel its effects (or at least admit that we do). Such intellectual prejudice treats mental accuracy regarding the Fall as more

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[36] Any number of conservative theologians present the essential concept of total depravity effectively. See Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 494–504; Rolland McCune, *A Systematic Theology of Biblical Christianity*, vol. 2 (Detroit: Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, 2009), 62–70.

[37] "You can begin to sense the crushing emotional weight Adam and Eve must have felt, standing outside the garden and knowing they would never get back inside. . . . They could see all the good things they had lost. Fear of God replaced the fellowship they had enjoyed. Pain would be a part of childbirth. Toil would be added to labor because the ground would grow thorns and thistles as quickly as grain. An angel with a flaming sword stood at the garden gate to prevent their return. An uncertain world awaited them into which the ultimate Enemy had been introduced" (Hodges, 75).

true, real, and godly than emotional accuracy regarding that same Fall. Does melancholy not depict accurately the depth to which humanity has sunk? Far from being an unbridled and extreme reaction to "slight" and "temporary" reversals, melancholy—especially in its strong forms that approach depression—more accurately reflects the true depth and darkness of the current human condition than any optimist could. At the Fall, we lost everything worth having. That loss is worth grieving.

The Mirror of Melancholy

The entire world has experienced damage through the Fall, but it does not entail that people experience the depths of the Fall equally. The full spectrum of melancholy as exhibited in Table 4 mirrors the same stages of decay, degeneration, pain, and sorrow that exist around and in us.

Table 4. A Spectrum of Melancholy

Base-line living	Sadness	Despondency	Depression
Does not recognize loss Happiness Wholeness Views the world neutrally or optimistically	Normal response to loss Significant response to loss Grief, sorrow Temporary or iterative sense of pain Biblical self-image remains intact Death thought about only in terms of eventually joining a loved one	Profound response to loss Dysthymia (despondency) Enduring sense of pain Traits mimicking depression but without its despair Significant irritability Longing for death	Profound response to loss "Major depression" Long enduring sense of pain Loss of interest or pleasure in activities and eating Trouble sleeping/oversleeping Fatigue; torpor Purposelessness; abulia (lack of will) Feeling worthless Difficulty concentrating or thinking Death wish as inflicted by self
Emotional "health"	Emotional "health," but undesirable condition	Emotional "sickness"	Emotional "flatlining"

A few crucial caveats are in order. First, Table 4 does not include despair since despair (in most cases excepting actual disease or trauma as its immediate cause) involves a hopelessness and faithlessness that has moved beyond a mere emotional state into a moral one. Despair (usually) involves sin. In addition, the biblical-counseling movement often uses the designation of *depression* to reference category four *with despair included*; that is, in order to communicate clearly, we have to understand what each position means by using key words such as *melancholy*, *despondency*, and *depression*. Second, the bottom row does not imply that melancholia relates *in fact* to disease. The materialist view of the human person (a purely pathogenic assessment of melancholy) finds warrant in neither Scripture nor medical science. There are, however, enough analogies between what happens in the physical and the emotional realms to warrant their juxtaposition. Moreover, the biblical authors use phrasing that refers to sadness metaphorically in terms of sickness and despondency metaphorically in terms of death. Therefore, while we must guard against a "disease mentality" toward melancholic states, we are on sure footing when we retain biblical imagery that conveys respective states of emotional health, sickness, and death. Finally, there is no strong allegiance to the number of divisions in the table. In

fact, a continuum would represent the spectrum of melancholy better than a fixed-column table can. Whether an analyst believes there are two, three, five, or more categories, the sense of progression from health through sickness to death appears throughout the created order.

The earth itself desperately needs divine hospitalization (Rom 8:19–23) and final resurrection (2 Pet 3:10, 12–13) to reverse the thousands of years of accumulated ruin since the Fall. Apart from divine intervention, everything in the created order is headed toward death in every possible way (heat death, resource death, human death, animal death, emotional death, spiritual death). (1) Because the biblical descriptions of severe melancholic conditions heavily utilize phrasing that pertains to death; (2) because medical diagnostics (as unproductive as they may sometimes be) recognize a strong death wish among those suffering from extreme forms of melancholy; and (3) because the personal reflections of those who have passed through profound, prolonged levels of sorrow involve a palpable darkness, heaviness, and torpor that reflects death, severe melancholy appears to be the emotional equivalent of flatlining. One reason that depressed people find no pleasure in any activity, have no desire to eat, spend so much time sleeping, and experience profound fatigue is that they are experiencing a sort of emotional near-death experience. While this assessment might, itself, seem hopeless, the biblical record points us to a God who raises the dead. Whether this takes the form of drawing out one who is sinking in quicksand (Ps 69:14), throwing a life preserver to the drowning (Ps 69:15), or reviving a dead heart (Ps 69:32), God can bring the dead to life; so he certainly can bring the "near dead" to life.[38]

What Melancholy Shows

There is no simpler way to demonstrate that melancholy mirrors the pain and loss of the Fall than to look at the wealth of biblical evidence. Here we find an embarrassment of riches. Even leaving out the metaphoric descriptions of loss, ordinary words for grief occur hundreds of times in Scripture (some of the more common include λυπέω 90x, λύπη 65x, κλαίω 206x, κλαυθμός 49x, ὀδύνη 76x, ὀδυνάω 15x, στενάζω 33x, πένθος 57x, ὀλολύζω 22x, θρηνέω 34x; and these leave out words relating to pain and loss specifically, which would add many more). Methodologically, we must examine how the Fall and grief interrelate if we are to test the thesis that the melancholic emotions mirror that Fall.

Every instance of grief, sorrow, discouragement, and profound sadness in Scripture stems from and reflects the Fall. The Fall damaged the physical and social order so that every operation in this world has succumbed not only to the vanity of Ecclesiastes but also to pain and loss. The scientist who studies chemistry may rejoice in its structure while remaining unaware that the beauty and order in chemistry are broken. He observes a disordered order. Prior to the Fall, the chemistry of the human body functioned perfectly and harmoniously so that there was no pain, sorrow, and death. So when people experience genuine chemical problems that produce profound sorrow, that emotion accurately

[38] See my "'The Prayer of Faith Will Save the Sick': Revisiting a Complex Passage in Light of Biblical Context—James 5:13–18," *JBTW* 1, vol. 1 (Fall 2020): 44–68, available at https://seminary.bju.edu/ seminary-journal/volume-1-number-1-fall-2020/. The intersection of that article with the present one may explain why depression requires intervention from spiritual leaders. If sufferers have emotionally "flatlined," they may no longer be able to pray effectively for themselves. Perhaps God has designed his people to provide the emotional equivalent of cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) for others who are suffering.

reflects a real loss experienced in the Fall. When a young person is isolated by her peers and she spirals into teen depression, her grief reflects the loss of companionship and the fracturing of relationships incurred in the Fall. If her well-intentioned but unskilled friends merely tell her to "cheer up" or admonish her that discouragement is sin, they do not always resolve the problem, because fundamentally the melancholic person knows (and has correctly assessed and felt) intuitively the loss brought about by the Fall. When the philosopher or historian investigates his respective field and finds an endless litany of dead ends, injustice, brutality, and nihilistic futility, and these precipitate his descent into emotional darkness, that darkness accurately reflects the trauma of the Fall. Glossing over the barbaric inhumanity of every generation, the mass slaughter, the totalitarian egoism of political rulers in every age, and the raw pointlessness of it all does not help. The world *is* as damaged as the historian observes. Humanity *is* cruel. Life *is* nasty, brutish, and short.[39] Table 5 plots the major effects of the Fall, which are themselves representative causes of grief.

Table 5. The Fall, Via Pain and Loss, as the Source of All Forms of Melancholy

<table>
<tr><th></th><th>Representative Influences</th><th></th><th>Sinful Responses</th></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="4">The Fall</td><td>Physical Influences
• Hormonal (e.g., postpartum)
• Genetic (e.g., hyperthyroidism)
• Microbial (e.g., Covid-19)
• Injury (e.g., head trauma)
• Atmospheric (e.g., air pressure)
• Suffering (e.g., ME, CFS, toil)</td><td rowspan="4">Melancholia</td><td>Pride</td></tr>
<tr><td>Emotional Influences
• Normal sorrow intensified
• Unresolved anger
• Loneliness
• Disaffection
• Injustice (experienced)</td><td>Acedia
• Ennui
• Inertness
• Torpor
• Inactivity</td></tr>
<tr><td>Intellectual Influences
• Philosophy (e.g., nihilism)
• History (e.g., war/politics)
• Projection (e.g., climate issues)</td><td>Tristitia
• Despair
• Hopelessness
• Suicide</td></tr>
<tr><td>Spiritual Influences
• Guilt
• Underlying vice (e.g., anxiety)
• Unanswered prayer
• Unfairness of life</td><td>Ira
• Wrath
• Anger
• Impatience
• Frustration</td></tr>
</table>

[39] Is it an accident that the philosopher Thomas Hobbes generated this expression in his *Leviathan*?

Melancholia speaks truth about the Fall.[40] Cain ought to have been grieved when God disapproved of his sacrifice (Gen 4:5). He really did experience the loss of divine favor, but he ought to have handled his grief differently. Lamech was right to feel sorrow over the "painful toil" of the curse (Gen 5:29); he understood the loss of harmony and peace that the Fall incurred. Hannah properly grasped another kind of loss—a loss that reveals a strikingly godlike quality all humans possess in their ability to grieve not only what is but what could be (1 Sam 1:5–11). We grieve loss in the past (regret, guilt, remembered sorrows). We mourn loss in the present (active sorrows). And we look toward the future and grieve losses that are yet to come. Hannah had not lost a child. She did not have a child to begin with. Her sorrow reflected loss, but it was a loss of what ought to have been, not a loss of what already had been.[41] We experience loss when violence occurs to us or to someone we love (Gen 34:7), loss over our own sin (Gen 45:5), loss over the apathy of others (2 Kgs 13:19, which is also another example of an anticipated loss of a future blessing), loss of health (Ps 41:3), loss from threats made by others (Ps 55:2), loss from foolish children (Prov 17:21, 25), loss from discomfort (Jonah 4:9), losses due to natural disasters and war (Isa 19:10), and losses in death (2 Sam 19:3).[42]

Nothing in Scripture specifies what God considers an acceptable duration for our grief. The sensitive soul may carry grief longer and bear its scars far more deeply than someone of even temperament, but every one of these griefs reflects the Fall.[43] In fact, like no other emotion we possess, sadness is a mirror of the Fall. Wherever there are tears, there is evidence of the Fall. Wherever you see sorrow—whether it is mild or morose—the Fall is written raw in emotion. Table 6 serves as both a foundation and a capstone to our theme by depicting expressions of sorrow throughout Scripture as directly correlated to the losses experienced by the Fall.

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[40] "For the Christian, these emotions are literally a right and reasonable reaction to a fuller knowledge of the creation of which they are a part." George A. Benson, *What to Do When You're Depressed: A Christian Psychoanalyst Helps You Understand and Overcome Your Depression* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1975), 11.

[41] Hannah was not alone in carrying this burden of an unrealized desire. Genesis 30:1–2 depicts Rachel's similar frustration over the lack of children, but it provides no evidence of her seeking the Lord in the midst of her sorrow until Genesis 30:22–24.

[42] A poignant example of the loss of children to death comes from the private correspondence of Robert Lewis Dabney. A minister, chaplain, and theologian of the mid-1800s, Dabney lost three sons to diphtheria, two of which occurred within a week. His testimony is emotionally compelling: "When my Jimmy died, the grief was painfully sharp, but the actings of faith, the embracing of consolation, and all the cheering truths which ministered comfort to me were just as vivid; but when the stroke was repeated, and thereby doubled, I seem to be paralyzed and stunned. I know that my loss is doubled, and I know also that the same cheering truths apply to the second as to the first, but I remain numb, downcast, almost without hope and interest. When I turned away from Jimmy's corpse to my lovely infant, my affections and fears seemed to flow out towards him with a strength both sweet and agonizing. I never tired of folding him in my arms, as the sweet substitute for my loss, nor of trembling for him also, lest the loss should extend to him. But when Bobby was taken, and our little one remained our only hope [of a lasting lineage], it seemed to me, I was both afraid and reluctant to center my affections on him. I feel towards him a mixture of weak, listless feelings and pain, not having the heart to be happy in his caresses, and not daring. This is strange, perhaps inexplicable. Death has struck me with a dagger of ice." Thomas Cary Johnson, *The Life and Letters of Robert Lewis Dabney* (1903; reprint, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1977).

[43] "'Normal sadness' is something that happens to most of us when we lose something very important to us. . . . The intensity and duration of our sadness corresponds to the size and duration of the loss" (Hodges, 62).

Table 6. Select Texts Correlating Sorrow to the Fall

Passage	Text	Effects of the Fall that Cause Sorrow	
		Pain	Loss
Gen 3:16	To the woman he said, "I will surely multiply your **pain** in childbearing; in **pain** you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you."	childbearing, fractured relationships	wellness, harmony
Gen 3:17–19	And to Adam he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in **pain** you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return."	curse, pain (general), toil, death	shalom, ease, productivity, life
Gen 4:5; cf. v. 6	But for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very **angry**, and his face fell.	rejection	divine approval
Gen 5:29	And [Lamech] called his name Noah, saying, "Out of the ground that the LORD has cursed, this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the **painful** toil of our hands."	toil	rest
Gen 6:6	And the LORD regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it **grieved** him to his heart.	wickedness	unspecified
Gen 34:7	The sons of Jacob had come in from the field as soon as they heard of it, and the men were indignant and **very angry**, because he had done an outrageous thing in Israel by lying with Jacob's daughter, for such a thing must not be done.	sexual assault, shame	purity, honor
Gen 35:18; cf. 48:7	And as her soul was departing (for she was dying), she called his name **Ben-oni**; but his father called him Benjamin.	death	life
Gen 42:38; cf. Gen 44:29; Gen 44:31	But he said, "My son shall not go down with you, for his brother is dead, and he is the only one left. If harm should happen to him on the journey that you are to make, you would bring down my gray hairs with **sorrow** to Sheol."	death of child	child's presence
Gen 45:5	And now do not be **distressed** or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life.	guilt	innocence
Gen 50:10	When they came to the threshing floor of Atad, which is beyond the Jordan, they lamented there with a very great and **grievous lamentation**, and he made a **mourning** for his father seven days.	death, deprivation of father	life, father's presence
Exod 1:14	And made their lives **bitter** with hard service, in mortar and brick, and in all kinds of work in the field. In all their work they ruthlessly made them work as slaves.	toil, cruelty	rest, proper service relationships
Exod 3:7	Then the LORD said, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their **sufferings**."	toil, cruelty	rest, proper service relationships

Passage	Text	Effects of the Fall that Cause Sorrow	
		Pain	Loss
1 Sam 1:4–10	But to Hannah he gave a double portion, because he loved her, though the LORD had closed her womb. And her rival used to provoke her grievously to irritate her, because the LORD had closed her womb. So it went on year by year. As often as she went up to the house of the LORD, she used to provoke her. Therefore Hannah wept and would not eat. And Elkanah, her husband, said to her, “Hannah, why do you weep? And why do you not eat? And why is your heart sad? Am I not more to you than ten sons?” After they had eaten and drunk in Shiloh, Hannah rose. Now Eli the priest was sitting on the seat beside the doorpost of the temple of the LORD. She was **deeply distressed** and prayed to the LORD and **wept bitterly**.	barrenness, provocation, irritation, marital tension	present favor, future child, peace, divine favor, understanding
1 Sam 2:33	The only one of you whom I shall not cut off from my altar shall be spared to weep his eyes out to **grieve** his heart, and all the descendants of your house shall die by the sword of men.	outcast, misery, death	ministry, prosperity
1 Sam 15:35–16:1	And Samuel did not see Saul again until the day of his death, but Samuel **grieved** over Saul. And the LORD regretted that he had made Saul king over Israel. The LORD said to Samuel, “How long will you **grieve** over Saul, since I have rejected him from being king over Israel?”	rejection	office
1 Sam 20:3	But David vowed again, saying, “Your father knows well that I have found favor in your eyes, and he thinks, ‘Do not let Jonathan know this, lest he be **grieved**.’ But truly, as the LORD lives and as your soul lives, there is but a step between me and death.”	family dishonor, injustice	honor, justice
1 Sam 20:34	And Jonathan rose from the table in fierce anger and ate no food the second day of the month, for he was **grieved** for David, because his father had disgraced him.	family dishonor, injustice	honor, justice
1 Sam 25:31	“My lord shall have no cause of **grief** or pangs of conscience for having shed blood without cause or for my lord working salvation himself. And when the LORD has dealt well with my lord, then remember your servant.”	injustice	justice
2 Sam 19:2–3	So the victory that day was turned into **mourning** for all the people, for the people heard that day, “The king is **grieving** for his son.” And the people stole into the city that day as people steal in who are ashamed when they flee in battle.	death, dishonor, defeat	son’s life, honor, victory
2 Kgs 13:19	Then the man of God was **angry** with him and said, “You should have struck five or six times; then you would have struck down Syria until you had made an end of it, but now you will strike down Syria only three times.”	apathy, defeat	opportunity, victory
2 Chr 6:29	Whatever prayer, whatever plea is made by any man or by all your people Israel, each knowing his own **affliction** and his own **sorrow** and stretching out his hands toward this house.	generalized pain	generalized loss
Esth 6:12	Then Mordecai returned to the king's gate. But Haman hurried to his house, **mourning** and with his head covered.	humiliation	honor, pride
Esth 9:22	As the days on which the Jews got relief from their enemies, and as the month that had been turned for them from **sorrow** into gladness and from **mourning** into a holiday.	threat, death, despoilment	peace, life, property

Passage	Text	Effects of the Fall that Cause Sorrow	
		Pain	Loss
Ps 13:1–2	Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I take counsel in my soul and have **sorrow** in my heart all the day? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?	abandonment, oppression	divine attention, peace
Ps 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.	waste, weakness, guilt, illness	productivity, strength, righteousness, health
Ps 41:3	The LORD sustains him on his **sickbed**; in his illness you restore him to full health.	illness	health
Ps 42:5, 11; cf. 43:5	Why are you **cast down**, O my soul, and why are you in **turmoil** within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation.	dejection, anxiety	sense of favor, peace
Ps 55:2–4	Attend to me, and answer me; I am restless in my complaint and I **moan**, because of the noise of the enemy, because of the oppression of the wicked. For they drop trouble upon me, and in anger they bear a grudge against me. My heart is in **anguish** within me; the terrors of death have fallen upon me.	abandonment, fear, oppression, death	divine answer, peace, rest, life
Ps 69:20	Reproaches have **broken my heart**, so that I am in **despair**. I looked for pity, but there was none, and for comforters, but I found none.	social attacks, pitilessness	social favor, pity
Ps 88:9–10	My eye grows dim through **sorrow**. Every day I call upon you, O LORD; I spread out my hands to you. Do you work wonders for the dead? Do the departed rise up to praise you?	weakness, rejection	health, divine favor
Ps 107:38–39	By his blessing they multiply greatly, and he does not let their livestock diminish. When they are diminished and brought low through oppression, evil, and **sorrow**.	decreased wealth, oppression	property, peace
Ps 116:3	The snares of death encompassed me; the pangs of Sheol laid hold on me; I suffered **distress** and **anguish**.	death	life
Ps 119:28	My soul melts away for **sorrow**; strengthen me according to your word!	unspecified	unspecified
Ps 127:2	It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of **anxious toil**; for he gives to his beloved sleep.	toil, hardship	peace, rest
Prov 10:1	The proverbs of Solomon. A wise son makes a glad father, but a foolish son is a **sorrow** to his mother.	generalized	generalized
Prov 14:10	The heart knows its own **bitterness**, and no stranger shares its joy.	unspecified	unspecified
Prov 14:13	Even in laughter the heart may **ache**, and the end of joy may be **grief**.	unspecified	unspecified
Prov 15:3	A glad heart makes a cheerful face, but by **sorrow** of heart the spirit is crushed.	unspecified	unspecified
Prov 17:21; cf. 17:25	He who sires a fool gets himself **sorrow**, and the father of a fool has no joy.	dishonor, shame	respectability, child
Prov 17:22	A joyful heart is good medicine, but a **crushed** spirit dries up the bones.	unspecified	unspecified
Prov 25:20	Whoever sings songs to a **heavy** heart is like one who takes off a garment on a cold day, and like vinegar on soda.	unspecified	unspecified

Passage	Text	Effects of the Fall that Cause Sorrow	
		Pain	Loss
Prov 31:6	Give strong drink to the one who is **perishing**, and wine to those in **bitter distress**.	poverty, misery	resources, strength
Eccl 1:18	For in much wisdom is much **vexation**, and he who increases knowledge increases **sorrow**.	knowledge	simplicity
Eccl 2:22–23	What has a man from all the toil and striving of heart with which he toils beneath the sun? For all his days are full of **sorrow**, and his work is a **vexation**. Even in the night his heart does not rest. This also is vanity.	toil	rest
Eccl 7:2–3	It is better to go to the house of **mourning** than to go to the house of feasting, for this is the end of all mankind, and the living will lay it to heart. **Sorrow** is better than laughter, for by **sadness** of face the heart is made glad.	death	life
Isa 1:5	Why will you still be struck down? Why will you continue to rebel? The whole head is sick, and the whole heart **faint**.	sickness, weakness	health, strength
Isa 8:21	They will pass through the land, greatly **distressed** and hungry.	desolation, hunger	prosperity
Isa 15:2	He has gone up to the temple, and to Dibon, to the high places to **weep**; over Nebo and over Medeba Moab **wails**.	desolation, destruction, humiliation	prosperity, strength, glory
Isa 19:10	Those who are the pillars of the land will be **crushed**, and all who work for pay will be **grieved**.	usurpation and slavery	finances
Isa 35:10; cf. 51:11	They shall obtain gladness and joy, and **sorrow** and **sighing** shall flee away.	weakness, sickness, aridness, wild beasts	strength, health, fertility, safety
Isa 53:2–5	For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of **sorrows** and acquainted with **grief**; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our **griefs** and carried our **sorrows**; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.	dishonor, rejection, ostracism, injustice, torture, death, carrying sin	honor, exaltation, social connection, ease, life, living in purity
Jer 8:18	My joy is gone; **grief** is upon me; my heart is **sick** within me.	destruction, dishonor	prosperity, honor
Jer 20:18	Why did I come out from the womb to see toil and **sorrow**, and spend my days in shame?	toil, shame	rest, nonexistence
Jer 45:3	You said, 'Woe is me! For the LORD has added **sorrow** to my **pain**. I am weary with my **groaning**, and I find no rest.'	maltreatment, reproach, weariness	honor, rest
Jer 49:24	Damascus has become feeble, she turned to flee, and panic seized her; **anguish** and **sorrows** have taken hold of her, as of a woman in labor.	weakness, fear, destruction	strength, confidence, prosperity

Passage	Text	Effects of the Fall that Cause Sorrow	
		Pain	Loss
Lam 1:22	"Let all their evildoing come before you, and deal with them as you have dealt with me because of all my transgressions; for my **groans** are many, and my heart is **faint**."	injustice	justice
Dan 6:14	Then the king, when he heard these words, was much **distressed** and set his mind to deliver Daniel. And he labored till the sun went down to rescue him.	injustice, inability to rescue	justice
Jonah 4:1	But it **displeased** Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry.	miffed sense of justice and revenge	destruction of enemies forestalled
Jonah 4:9	But God said to Jonah, "Do you do well to be **angry** for the plant?" And he said, "Yes, I do well to be **angry**, **angry** enough to die."	scorching sun	comfort, shade, ease
Matt 17:22–23	As they were gathering in Galilee, Jesus said to them, "The Son of Man is about to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him, and he will be raised on the third day." And they were **greatly distressed.**	deprivation, confusion	social connections, Messiah's presence
Matt 18:31	When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were **greatly distressed**, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place.	injustice, cruelty	justice, kindness, mercy
Matt 19:22	When the young man heard this he went away **sorrowful**, for he had great possessions.	divestment of wealth	wealth
Matt 26:22	And they were very **sorrowful** and began to say to him one after another, "Is it I, Lord?"	betrayal	loyalty
Matt 26:37–38	And taking with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, he began to be **sorrowful** and **troubled.** Then he said to them, "My soul is very **sorrowful**, even to death; remain here, and watch with me."	relational rift, bearing sin, death	filial affection, purity, life
Mark 3:5	And he looked around at them with anger, **grieved** at their hardness of heart, and said to the man, "Stretch out your hand." He stretched it out, and his hand was restored.	injustice, hardness of heart	justice, responsiveness
John 16:6	But because I have said these things to you, **sorrow** has filled your heart.	deprivation of fellowship	presence of a friend
John 16:20–22	Truly, truly, I say to you, you will **weep** and **lament**, but the world will rejoice. You will be **sorrowful**, but your **sorrow** will turn into joy. When a woman is giving birth, she has **sorrow** because her hour has come, but when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the **anguish**, for joy that a human being has been born into the world. So also you have **sorrow** now, but I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your joy from you.	deprivation of fellowship, physical pain	presence of a friend, painlessness
John 21:17	He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was **grieved** because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" and he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you."	repeated questioning	loyalty
Acts 20:37–38	And there was much **weeping** on the part of all; they embraced Paul and kissed him, being **sorrowful** most of all because of the word he had spoken, that they would not see his face again. And they accompanied him to the ship.	deprivation of fellowship	presence of a friend

Passage	Text	Effects of the Fall that Cause Sorrow	
		Pain	Loss
Rom 9:2	I have great **sorrow** and **unceasing anguish** in my heart.	people dying w/o Christ	peace, joy, confidence
Rom 14:15	For if your brother is **grieved** by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died.	unease, sense of wrong, offense	harmony
2 Cor 2:1–5	For I made up my mind not to make another **painful** visit to you. For if I cause you **pain**, who is there to make me glad but the one whom I have **pained**? And I wrote as I did, so that when I came I might not suffer **pain** from those who should have made me rejoice, for I felt sure of all of you, that my joy would be the joy of you all. For I wrote to you out of much **affliction** and **anguish** of heart and with many **tears**, not to cause you **pain** but to let you know the abundant love that I have for you. Now if anyone has caused **pain**, he has caused it not to me, but in some measure—not to put it too severely—to all of you.	harsh words, sins, loss of respect, uncertainty, unrequited love	gentleness, purity, respect certainty, love
2 Cor 2:7	So you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him, or he may be overwhelmed by **excessive sorrow**.	ostracism	harmony, fellowship
Eph 4:30	And do not **grieve** the Holy Spirit of God	sin	purity
Phil 2:27	Indeed he was ill, near to death. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have **sorrow** upon **sorrow**.	death of friend	presence of friend
1 Thess 4:13	But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not **grieve** as others do who have no hope.	death, hopelessness	life, hope
1 Pet 1:6	In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been **grieved** by various trials.	trials, testing	tranquility, ease

Avenues for Application

A biblical-theological look at human melancholy trains our responses to the pain that is around and within us. First, the Church should strive to exercise great tenderness in handling cases of melancholy. As Job's example demonstrates, friends may assume that a person's distress must be causally connected with his own specific sins. In Job's case, his friends were entirely wrong. But since they were wrong, then it would be unbiblical to conclude that Job's sorrow that resulted from his losses was sinful. In four full chapters of God's reconfiguring Job's thinking (Job 38–41), God never rebukes Job's discouragement. Job's error lay in his "speaking without knowledge" about the way things ought to be in the world and with God. He entered into the realm of sovereignty and providence and spoke untruth. Job's complaint was not untrue regarding the reality of personal losses or the spirituality of a prolonged emotional response to that loss. Rather, his error lay in challenging the right or authority of God to do as he pleases with his creatures in the process of accomplishing divine purposes and providence. As Layton Talbert observes, Job's grief remained intact (however briefly) even once his relationship with God was restored.[44] Therefore, his profound grief was not treated by God as sinful.

[44] *Beyond Suffering: Discovering the Message of Job* (Greenville, SC: BJU Press, 2007), 250–251.

Assuming that severe sadness is automatically and inevitably a reflection of specific sin makes no more sense (and is potentially no more accurate) than assuming that a man born blind must have sinned (John 9:2–3).[45] Jesus swiftly corrected this misguided thinking on the part of his disciples. By itself, melancholy is a reflection of loss—a loss that has actually occurred because of the Fall. Of course, sin can attend any emotional state. Happiness can result in drunken carousing (1 Pet 4:2–3) just as sadness can give way to despair (1 Sam 31:3–4). Wholeness and wellbeing can lead to passivity and self-satisfaction (2 Kgs 20:16–19) just as anger can produce violent outbursts (Exod 2:12; Num 20:10–11). Sin must be diagnosed independently of emotions, though emotions can provide a window into the soul by revealing the affections of the heart.

Second, Scripture addresses the full range of melancholic emotions by depicting them as part of normal human experience under the curse. Job and the Psalms, in particular, provide rich resources to guide our nearly unutterable cries so that we do not cross over into despair in the midst of depressive emotions. The Psalms invite the present-day sufferer to join in a prayer of outright anguish.[46] These texts do not pull punches in describing melancholy in terms of darkness, pain, and death. They also do not rebuke the sufferer who retains faith in the Lord while walking through the "pit," "Sheol," "deep darkness," and "deep distress." Like every other emotion, melancholy reveals what we value, love, and believe, but it does not have to be antithetical to faith.[47] By recognizing that God designed our emotions in such a way that melancholy actively mirrors the Fall, the sufferer may wield it as a tool to affirm how badly he feels without succumbing to the imprisoning assessment that melancholy is a disease that has no useful function. The Psalms view depressive emotions as an impetus and warrant for confessing how badly we hurt, how dark this world really is, and, therefore, how desperate and vital our faith really is. A faith that clings to God with eyes wide open to the realities of sin, sorrow, and suffering is, frankly, superior to a faith that knows nothing of sorrow. A life without sorrow says, "Life is good, and I trust God," but a life punctuated with melancholy says, "Though he slay me (and it is a very real possibility under the Fall), I will hope in him" (Job 13:15). There is genuine value in experiencing melancholy that a non-sufferer never shares.

Third, while melancholy often "tells the truth" about the Fall, it does not tell "the whole truth, and nothing but the truth." It is a genuine mirror of reality, but it is also a defective mirror because it shows only part of the picture. It does no good to contradict the melancholic, "It's not that bad," while he correctly and accurately replies in heart, "Oh, yes, it is!" It also does no good to transfix oneself in

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[45] Most such assumptions stem from well-meaning, popular-level pastoral care or peer-group input. Trained biblical counselors work very hard to discern the influences, life factors, and responses that are generating a person's sadness so that they can evaluate whether sin is a factor, but they do not assume this up front.

[46] "What implication does God's manner of using metaphor have for us? You and I need a language of sorrows and God teaches it to us. . . . When we look to the language of God given in the Bible, we find within it a language that the miserable would recognize as native and not foreign to the geography of their inward anguish. We begin gradually to speak and to refrain from speaking as those who know this terrain of anguish first hand. When such speaking takes place, realistic hope has a chance" (Eswine, 70–71). For a helpful resource in this regard, see Mark Vroegop, *Dark Clouds, Deep Mercy: Discovering the Grace of Lament* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2019).

[47] Groves and Smith, 39.

the misery of one truth while neglecting the hope of other truths.[48] The mirror of our emotions may be both correct and incorrect in different ways simultaneously.

Affirming with the sufferer that life *is* as dark as he feels it to be, this world *is* as corrupt as he feels it to be, and the body, mind, and emotions *are* indeed crumbling can exhibit much needed sympathy.[49] This is not the *only* truth or *all* the truth, but it is the truth. It can be constructive, then, to recognize the full depth and rightness of sadness while guiding the severely discouraged person to reaffirm "the whole truth." Recognizing that melancholy mirrors the Fall gives the biblical counselor the opportunity to affirm the decay that has touched everything in this world while insisting that the sufferer also see and confess the restoration that Christ has begun and will continue to eternity. We must not minimize the former in the rush to the latter, or we will seem disingenuous to the sufferer.

As counselors, we can help the sufferer remember that the people of God rest on him and voice a reliance on him even when they cannot see or feel him. Often, pain remains. There is no guarantee that God will deliver us from sadness of heart this side of the Fall any more than he guarantees deliverance from disease and death.[50] But though the pain remains, it can become like the pain of childbirth—giving rise to something of value, purposeful, God-designed—for that is his plan in all our suffering (Jas 1:12).[51]

For the people of God, the Fall will come to an end, swept away in a majestic display of divine power, wisdom, and compassion involving the redemption and glorification of our bodies, the creation of the new heavens and new earth, and the end of sorrow forever. Melancholy, that eminent emotional mirror of the Fall, will be forever shattered. We will never again know loss, for God will be with us.

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,
"Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man.
He will dwell with them, and they will be his people,
and God himself will be with them as their God.
He will wipe away every tear from their eyes,

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[48] "Real grief is not easily comforted. It comes like ocean waves rushing up the sand, subsiding back, only to roll in again. These waves vary in size, frequency, and intensity." James W. Bruce III, *From Grief to Glory: Spiritual Journeys of Mourning Parents* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2002), 56.

[49] "It was the most rational thing in the world for Elijah to be sick at heart and to desire to die. His miseries were not illusory but real. His wish for death did not reveal his insanity but demonstrated the opposite." Charles Haddon Spurgeon, "Faintness and Refreshing," *MTP* (Ages Digital Library), 54:588.

[50] "I am sure that I have run more swiftly with a lame leg than I ever did with a sound one. I am certain that I have seen more in the dark than ever I saw in the light,—more stars, most certainly,—more things in heaven if fewer things on earth. The anvil, the fire, and the hammer, are the making of us; we do not get fashioned much by anything else. That heavy hammer falling on us helps to shape us; therefore let affliction and trouble and trial come." Eric W. Hayden, *Searchlight on Spurgeon: Spurgeon Speaks for Himself* (Pasadena: Pilgrim, 1973), 178.

[51] Eswine lists benefits that accrue from suffering that are difficult to be gained any other way: "*Sorrows deepen our intimacy with God*" (139). "*Sorrows enable us to better receive blessings*" (140). "*Sorrows shed our pretenses*" (140). "*Sorrow exposes and roots out our pride*" (141). "*Sorrow teaches us empathy for one another*" (141). "*Sorrows allow small kindnesses to loom large*" (141). "*Sorrows teach us courage for others who face trials*" (141). C. S. Lewis famously observed, "God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains; it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world." *The Problem of Pain* (New York: Macmillan, 1944), 91.

and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore,
for the former things have passed away." (Rev 21:3–4)

The Scriptural View of Church History? The Historical-Prophetic Interpretation of the Seven Churches of Revelation

by Mark Sidwell[1]

Understandably, Christians would like to use the Bible as a guide to studying history.[2] Christians rightly insist on the historical accuracy of Scripture, and they also insist on treating historical materials according to a biblical ethic of honesty, scrupulousness, fairness, and diligence, qualities any historian should strive to achieve when writing about the past.

Some Christians have laid out historical patterns that they believe are Bible-based. An obvious example is the image from Nebuchadnezzar's dream in Daniel 2. A broad swath of interpreters agrees that the four metals in the image represent four consecutive major kingdoms. The Bible itself says that the Chaldean empire of Nebuchadnezzar is the gold head (v. 38). Although the other three are not identified in Scripture, interpreters normally see the silver as the Persians, the bronze as the Greeks/Macedonians of Alexander the Great, and the iron as the Romans. Even secular historians recognize the significance of these kingdoms in the ancient world.

Other approaches of historical periodization that appeal to the text of Scripture are less clear. One view that has twice experienced surges of popularity is the idea that history follows the pattern of the Creation week in Genesis. Appealing to 2 Peter 3:8 ("one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day"; cf. Ps 90:4), advocates of this view argue that there will be six thousand years of human history followed by a seventh period of rest as a "Sabbath" (variously interpreted as an era of peace, the Millennium, or eternity). Some in the early church gravitated to this view because they used the Septuagint as their standard translation of the OT. The numbers in the genealogies of Genesis along with other chronological data are greater in the Septuagint than those in the Masoretic Text, resulting in the calculation that the sixth "day" would end by AD 500.[3] Among the early proponents were reputedly Julius Africanus (c. 160–240), "the father of Christian chronography,"[4] and unquestionably Augustine of Hippo.[5] When the use of translations based on the Masoretic Text

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[2] I would like to thank Jeff Straub, Brian Hand, and John Matzko for reading this article and providing helpful comments and suggestions.

[3] See Gerhard Larsson, "The Chronology of the Pentateuch: A Comparison of the MT and LXX," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 102 (1983): 401–9.

[4] Martin Wallraff, "The Beginnings of Christian Universal History: From Tatian to Julius Africanus," *Zeitschrift für antikes Christentum* 14 (2011): 540.

[5] See ibid., 546, 549, 550–51, in particular. Wallraff does note, however, that the extant fragments of Julius Africanus do not contain this scheme (551). See "The Extant Writings of Julius Africanus," in Alexander Roberts and James Donald, ed., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (N.d.; reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 6:125–40; and Augustine, "The Catechizing

became more common, the chronology calculated led to an apparent conclusion of the six thousand years around the year 2000. As a result, some modern advocates revived the concept, particularly for calculations of prophecy.[6]

Another allegedly biblical pattern of history views the seven churches addressed by Christ in Revelation 2–3 as consecutive eras of church history. Trench labeled its supporters as "Periodists" who advocate a "historico-prophetical" view of the churches.[7] In these schemes, Ephesus (the first church described) portrays the earliest period of church history, and those described later proceed chronologically to Laodicea (the seventh church) picturing the final period of church history. Although one advocate called this understanding of the seven churches "The Scriptural View of Church History,"[8] a careful study reveals the scheme to be inadequate exegetically, theologically, and historically.

History of the Historical-Prophetic View

The origin of the view appears to be medieval.[9] The earliest certain use of this scheme was among followers of the medieval prophetic writer Joachim of Fiore (1135–1202). Joachim, an Italian monk, was an oddity in medieval theology, advancing prophetic views that were essentially premillennial and futurist in contrast to the dominant amillennialism of his day. Furthermore, his writings speculated on the relation of prophecy to the understanding of history. He is perhaps best known for his trinitarian view of history, dividing human history into three overlapping eras that corresponded to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.[10]

One source of Joachim's influence was his popularity among the Spiritual Franciscans, a minority of the order who demanded a return of the Franciscans to the ideals of Francis of Assisi regarding poverty and humility. Because the papacy backed the majority in modifying Francis's pattern, the Spirituals also became fervent critics of the popes, identifying the pope as the antichrist. Joachim's

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of the Unlearned," sect. 28, in *Seventeen Short Treatises* (Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1847), 218–19. I would like to thank one of my graduate students, Alwin Reimer, whose research on the Venerable Bede's *De temporum ratione* helped me with the background for this section on ancient approaches to the Creation-day pattern.

[6] See, e.g., Edgar C. Whisenant, *88 Reasons Why the Rapture Will Be in 1988,* 44, and *On Borrowed Time,* 20 (published together), accessed 8 June 2023, Internet Archive, https://ia801303.us.archive.org/19/items/ReasonsWhyTheRaptureWillBeIn1988PDF/14080011-88-Reasons-Why-The-Rapture-Will-Be-in-1988.pdf.

[7] Richard Chenevix Trench, *Commentary on the Epistles to the Seven Churches in Asia* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1863), 296. His "Excursus" on this view (291–312) is a helpful overview and critique of the history and nature of this approach.

[8] Charles Nash, "The Scriptural View of Church History," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 100 (January 1943): 188–98.

[9] Trench, 298, says some advocates have claimed to find this view among the Church Fathers but without offering any convincing evidence for a date that early.

[10] The acknowledged leader in studies of Joachim is Marjorie Reeves. See her *Influence of Prophecy in the Later Middle Ages: A Study in Joachimism* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969). See also Delno C. West, ed., *Joachim of Fiore in Christian Thought: Essays on the Influence of the Calabrian Prophet* (New York: B. Franklin, 1975); and Matthias Riedl, ed., *A Companion to Joachim of Fiore,* Volume 75 in Brill's Companions to the Christian Tradition (Leiden: Brill, 2018).

ideas of judgment and renewal appealed strongly to the Spirituals and inspired their own studies of prophecy.[11]

Despite his focus on the number seven in prophecy, Joachim never treated the seven churches as ages of history, but his followers did. In fact, one writer included Joachim himself in the scheme, making him the terminus in the age of Sardis, which began with Charlemagne.[12] At least two writers developed the historical-prophetic view in their works: Franciscan Henry of Cossey (d. 1336) in his *Super Apocalypsim* and Augustinian Agostino Trionfo (1243–1328).[13]

Table 1. Examples of the Historical-Prophetic Interpretation of Revelation 2–3[14]

	Thomas Brightman	**Campegius Vitringa**	**William Trotter**	**Clarence Larkin**	**C. I. Scofield**	**Charles Nash**
Ephesus	Apostles to Constantine	NT to Decian persecution (250)	Apostolic age to the death of John	70–170	State of the Church in John's day	Apostolic 30–100
Smyrna	Constantine to Gratian (382)	Decian persecution to Diocletian persecution	John to Constantine (311): Ten persecutions	170–312	John to Constantine (316)	Patristic 100–325
Pergamos	382–1300	End of Diocletian persecution to 700	Constantine to the establishment of the papacy (c. 700)	312–606	Constantine (316) to the rise of the papacy	Patronic 325–590
Thyatira	1300–1520	700 to the Waldensians (1200s)	C. 700 to the Reformation	606–1520	Rise of the papacy to the Reformation (1500)	Papal 590–1517
Sardis	First Reformation: German	1200 to the Reformation (1500)	The Reformation (perhaps concurrent with Philadelphia)	1520–1750	Protestant Reformation	Reformation 1517–1648

[11] See David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans: From Protest to Persecution in the Century After Saint Francis* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001).

[12] Reeves, 86. She commented wryly, "Thus Joachim himself achieved a place in one of those patterns of history which Henry of Cossey took so eagerly from him."

[13] See Colin Hemer, "Seven Churches" in David Lyle Jeffrey, ed., *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 696–97.

[14] The view of Brightman is from his *A Revelation of the Apocalyps* (Amsterdam: Iudocus Hondius & Hendrick Laurenss, 1611), 50–105 *passim*. The views of Vitringa and Trotter are taken from E. B. Elliott, *Horae Apocalypticae,* 5th ed. (London: Seeley, Jackson, and Halliday, 1862), 1:77. Larkin's view is from his *Book of Revelation: A Study of the Last Prophetic Book of Holy Scripture* (Philadelphia: Clarence Larkin Estate, 1917), 20–29 *passim.* Scofield's view is from the comments on Rev. 1:20 in C. I. Scofield, ed., *The Scofield Reference Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1917), 1331–32. Nash's view is from his "The Scriptural View of Church History," 188–98.

	Thomas Brightman	Campegius Vitringa	William Trotter	Clarence Larkin	C. I. Scofield	Charles Nash
Philadelphia	Second Reformation: Reformed (Swiss, Scottish, etc.)	Early period of the Reformation	The Reformation (perhaps concurrent with Sardis)	1750–1900	Faithful Christianity since the Reformation (concurrent with Laodicea)	Missionary expansion, 1648 to the present (concurrent with Laodicea)
Laodicea	Third Reformation: English	Later Reformation to 1700	The Church prior to the Second Coming	Since 1900	Lukewarm Christianity since the Reformation (concurrent with Philadelphia)	Rationalistic (concurrent with Philadelphia)

With the renewal of biblical study that accompanied the Renaissance and the Reformation, a new set of interpreters saw a pattern of history in Revelation 2–3. The view appealed to several English writers.[15] Thomas Brightman (1562–1607) identified the first four churches with consecutive eras up to the Reformation. However, after the condemnation of "Jezebel" in the Thyatira age (which Brightman interpreted as the fall of the Catholic Church), he divided the last three churches into phases of the Reformation: German (Sardis), Reformed (Philadelphia), and English (Laodicea).[16] (See Table 1.) Cambridge Platonist Henry More (1614–87) provided one of the fullest and most influential expositions of the idea, although he did not outline his eras precisely.[17] Reformed writers also promoted the concept, notably Johannes Cocceius (1603–69), perhaps best known as the systematizer of covenant theology, whom Trench regards at the major popularizer of his era.[18] Later Dutch theologian Campegius Vitringa (1669–1723) promoted a version that seems to have been even more widely disseminated. (See Table 1.)[19]

With the nineteenth century came a surge in prophetic study that also gave new impetus to the historical-prophetic interpretation. One influential, relatively mainstream scholar who advanced the

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[15] Worth mentioning from this era is the scheme of famed scientist and mathematician Sir Isaac Newton (1642–1727), although his interpretation—like his theology in general—was rather eccentric. Newton placed all seven eras in early church history, beginning with Domitian and the Ephesus age in the late first century and identifying Laodicea with the era of Emperors Valentinian and Valens (late 300s). See Elliott, 1:77.

[16] *Revelation of the Apocalyps,* 50–105 *passim*.

[17] Henry More, *An Exposition of the Seven Epistles to the Seven Churches Together With a Brief Discourse of Idolatry, With Application to the Church Of Rome* (London: James Flesher, 1669).

[18] Trench, 303–4.

[19] A curious footnote on the use of this framework is the Philadelphian Society founded in the late seventeenth century by Jane Leade. A mystic, theosophical group, the society took the name in part because of how they believed they fit into the prophetic scheme of history. See Arthur Versluis, *Wisdom's Children: A Christian Esoteric Tradition* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 61. Note the even fuller discussion of the Philadelphian name in E. H. Broadbent, *The Pilgrim Church* (London: Pickering and Inglis, 1931), 281, although Broadbent does not mention the unorthodox nature of the society.

view was German theologian John Peter Lange (1802–84). His influence in America was particularly widespread through the edition of his commentary on the Scripture translated and edited by Philip Schaff.[20] However, many major contributors to the spread of the view were writers in the growing dispensationalist school. The view found support among the earliest promoters of dispensationalism, Plymouth Brethren teachers such as William Trotter (1818–65).[21] Also promoting the view was Clarence Larkin (1850–1924), a Baptist pastor and skilled draftsman whose beautifully crafted charts of prophetic teaching appeared on the walls of classrooms in Sunday schools, Bible colleges, and seminaries.[22] Undoubtedly, the greatest popularizer of the historical-prophetic view in modern times was C. I. Scofield (1843–1921), whose best-selling *Scofield Reference Bible* disseminated and popularized dispensationalism among generations of fundamentalist and evangelical Christians wherever English was spoken. So when Scofield advanced the historical-prophetic view in his comments on Revelation 1:20, he publicized the view perhaps as it had never been publicized before.[23] (See Table 1 for the specifics of his outline.)

Although the historical-prophetic view may be less prevalent now as in earlier years, it is still far from unknown. For example, Charles Nash (1888–1963) of Dallas Theological Seminary presented a standard exposition resembling Scofield's (see Table 1), and James L. Boyer (1911–2003) of Grace Theological Seminary offered a somewhat more nuanced defense of the view.[24] Less reputably, leaders of some unorthodox sects used the pattern to promote their own views.[25] Even today the historical-prophetic view retains a following among popular Bible expositors.[26]

Nature of the Historical-Prophetic View

Why do supporters of this view believe it is a proper approach to church history? Advocates argue in part that the historical-prophetic scheme is valid because of its relationship to the number seven, which appears throughout the Book of Revelation and is obviously significant to the book's interpretation. Boyer saw "that significance as representing completeness, fullness, the 'whole' of something." In chapters 2–3, therefore, "this symbolic significance to the seven churches of Revelation points to this sevenfold picture as presenting in some way the whole of the church." Boyer argued that this wholeness was obviously not all of the churches in John's day, for there were far more than seven

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[20] Lange's argument for the historical-prophetic approach is found in John Peter Lange, *James–Revelation,* 10:139–41, vol. 12 in *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures,* trans. Philip Schaff (N.d.; reprint, Grant Rapids: Zondervan, 1960). This modern multivolume edition preserves the volume and page numbers of the original volumes.

[21] William Trotter, *Plain Papers on Prophetic and Other Subjects* (London: Pickering and Inglis, n.d.), 308–11.

[22] *Book of Revelation,* 20–29 *passim.*

[23] *Scofield Reference Bible,* 1331–32.

[24] James L. Boyer, "Are the Seven Letters of Revelation 2–3 Prophetic?," *Grace Theological Journal,* 6 (1985): 267–73.

[25] Herbert W. Armstrong (1892–1986), leader of the cultic Worldwide Church of God, regarded his own ministry as the transition from Sardis to Philadelphia. See his sermon on Revelation 12, 18 April 1981, accessed 19 June 2023, https://www.hwalibrary.com/cgi-bin/get/hwa.cgi?action=getsermon&InfoID=1335271765.

[26] See, e.g., David Jeremiah, "The Seven Churches of Revelation in Church History," accessed 19 June 2023, https://davidjeremiah.blog/christs-message-for-the-seven-churches-of-revelation-and-today/.

in existence. Nor did he think they represent seven types of churches, because there are more types than these seven. Almost by default and the process of elimination, one is left with the conclusion that the seven churches must represent the whole of Christian history.[27]

Another argument derived directly from the text is based on Revelation 1:19, where Christ says to John, "Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter." Viewing this verse as an outline of the book, some interpreters see chapter 1 as things John had seen in the past, chapters 2 and 3 as the "things which are," and material from chapter 4 onward as things yet to come. In the historical-prophetic approach, the seven churches and "things which are" do not portray only conditions in John's own day but rather describe all events from John's day to the onset of things yet to come at the coming of Christ. The seven churches then are the description in symbolic form of events between Christ's first and second comings.[28]

A somewhat subtler argument has to do with the selection of these seven representative cities. The argument is that Christ chose to address these particular churches because, despite their relative unimportance individually, they lent themselves to a larger purpose. Joseph Mede (1586–1638), for example, noted that the seven churches were not "the most famous Churches then in the world, as *Antioch, Alexandria, Rome,* and many other, and such (no doubt) as had need of instruction as well as those here named." Therefore, he cautiously argued that "these *Seven Churches,* besides their *Literal* respect, were intended (and it may be chiefly) to be as *Patterns* and *Types* of the several Ages of the Catholick Church from the beginning thereof unto the end of the World."[29]

Perhaps the most common argument is that the scheme agrees with the evidence of history. Scofield wrote, "Most conclusively of all, these messages do present an exact foreview of the spiritual history of the church, and in this precise order."[30] Although John Walvoord did not endorse the concept, he noted the weight of this argument: "What is claimed is that there does seem to be a remarkable progression in the messages. It would seem almost incredible that such a progression should be a pure accident, and the order of the messages to the churches seems to be divinely selected to give prophetically the main movement of church history."[31]

One of the fuller defenses of this argument, and in fact the entire historical-prophetic interpretation, was by popular Bible expositor and teacher H. A. Ironside (1876–1951).[32] Noting that Revelation 1:20 refers to a "mystery" concerning "the seven golden candlesticks," which are the seven churches, Ironside speculated on what this mystery might be. He told a "parable":

> Sometime ago, rummaging through an old castle, some people came across a very strange-looking old lock which secured a stout door. They shook the door and tried to open it, but to no avail.

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[27] Boyer, 270.

[28] See Arno Clemens Gaebelein, *The Annotated Bible* (New York: Our Hope, n.d.), 9:214–22.

[29] Joseph Mede, "Discourse 52. Revel. 3:19," in *The Works of the Pious and Profoundly-Learned Joseph Mede* (London: Roger Norton, 1672), 297 (emphasis original). Boyer, 270, argued along similar lines.

[30] *Scofield Reference Bible,* 1331.

[31] John Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago: Moody, 1966), 52.

[32] H. A. Ironside, *Lectures on the Book of Revelation* (New York: Loizeaux Brothers, 1920), 33–78.

> They tried one way and another to move the lock, but could not turn it. By and by somebody picked up a bunch of old keys from rubbish on the floor and he said, "Maybe I can unlock it." He tried one key and it made no impression. He tried another and it gave a little; another and it gave a little more; and so on, but none would open the lock. At last he came to a peculiar old key. He slipped it into the lock, gave a turn, and the lock was open. They said, "Undoubtedly this key was meant for this lock."[33]

The "key"—the answer—to the "mystery" of the seven churches, he suggested, was to see "a prophetic history of the church for the entire dispensation." He compared the history of the church to each of the situations in the seven churches and said the key "fitted perfectly," concluding "There, the mystery is all clear. The lock has been opened; therefore we have the right key."[34]

Critique

Despite these arguments, the case for the historical-prophetic position is weak.[35] The biblical data, which should be the heart of any argument over the meaning of Scripture, are far from definite. The appeal to the use of the number seven in Revelation and the Bible in general is an argument of some weight, but it by no means leads decisively to the idea of a historical pattern. "Seven" likely does communicate wholeness or completeness as in Revelation's pattern of seven found in the seals, trumpets, bowls, and much more, but that fact hardly proves that the "wholeness" the seven churches represent is clearly the history of the Christian church.

Likewise, the appeal to Revelation 1:19 does not clinch the case. The reference to "things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter" may indeed provide the outline for the prophecy, but saying "the things which are" refers to the whole history of the church is an assumption. Elliott just as cogently argued that "the things that are" meant "the state of things in the Church *as they then were*" in the first century and that these chapters were not part of "things which shall be hereafter."[36] A possible interpretation of this phrase as encompassing the whole Christian era does not conclusively prove the idea true.[37]

What is supposedly the strongest argument for the view, its apparent congruity with the known course of the church's history, is not nearly so convincing as it appears at first glance. One problem is

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[33] Ironside, 35.

[34] Ibid., 36.

[35] Among those who have previously critiqued this view in addition to Trench was Robert L. Thomas, "The Chronological Interpretation of Revelation 2–3," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 124 (1967): 321–31; see particularly 323–27. Thomas briefly outlined shortcomings of the view and provided good citations both of proponents and critics. The essential content of this article is also found in his commentary *Revelation 1–7: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1992), 1:505–15. Even a defender such as Boyer noted weaknesses in the traditional arguments for the view (268–69).

[36] Elliott, 79 (emphasis original). Likewise, Trench, 308, thought the emphasis is "simultaneity" not "succession."

[37] One may argue along these same lines against Mede's idea that the very selection of these seven churches indicates that they have a larger purpose that supports the historical-prophetic view. For example, Trench, 294, allowed that the selection of these cities over more significant locations pointed to some fitness in considering them but did not consider this fact of a proof of the historical view.

evident on the surface: the diversity of the schemes. A survey of just the outlines described in this article reveals that they differ in how to delineate each period of history. Does the Ephesian era end with Constantine (Brightman), Decius (Vitringa), the death of the Apostle John (Scofield), or AD 170 (Larkin)? On what basis do we make this decision? [38] Neal noted that the overlap in periods that some interpreters suggest (one thinks of the schemes of Brightman, Trotter, and Scofield) also undermines the idea of the churches representing distinct historical periods. If anything, such overlapping suggests that the interpreter rather than the data shapes the interpretation of the supposed pattern.[39]

This diversity reveals the subjectivity that underlies the approach. Ironside viewed an apparent congruity of scriptural with historical data as the key that unlocked the mystery of the seven churches—we have only to look at the history of the church and then compare it to Revelation 2–3. Trench, however, anticipated this argument, noting that when a key opens a complicated lock, "it is difficult not to believe that they were made for one another. But there is nothing here of the kind."[40] In other words, the superficial appearance of congruity is subjective and therefore deceiving.

Part of the problem arises from misunderstanding the complicated nature of history and assuming too great a human ability to grasp it. Historians do not have access to all the data concerning a period of history and disagree on interpreting the data they do have. Although some followers of the nineteenth-century German historian Leopold von Ranke thought they could write "history as it really happened," assuming that thorough study of available primary sources would lead to absolute historical truth, few historians today would profess to believe such a notion. The subjectivity of historical knowledge is all too obvious, regardless of the historian's sincerity, care, or diligence.[41] *If* one knew that the Bible teaches a historical pattern of the seven churches by plain statement of that fact, then one could proceed with some confidence to organize the data of history by that pattern. But simply to assume that the pattern is correct and then to offer as proof the data of history that fits the pattern is circular reasoning. Boyer tried to avoid this problem by arguing that the seven churches are not the Church in general but only genuine gospel churches in each age,[42] but his interpretation actually makes the historical argument even more difficult to prove because historical evidence of such churches is painfully thin in periods such as the Middle Ages, as well as involving further subjective challenges in determining what is a "gospel church."

Another problem for futurist interpreters such as Scofield is that the historical-prophetic view of the seven church repeats the problems of the historical approach to prophecy, problems which futurists cite as a shortcoming. Historical interpreters view the whole of Revelation as a symbolic picture of the history of the Church, identifying the various visions as representing the events of history. Futurist

[38] Neal noted that "the fact that interpreters have not been able to agree which church matches which period seems to prove that there is not enough real evidence to connect each church with a specific period of history." Marshall Neal, *Seven Churches: God's Revelation to the Church Today* (Greenville, SC: Bob Jones University Press, 1977), 10.

[39] Ibid., 10.

[40] Trench, 308–9.

[41] A good discussion of the challenges of historical research and writing, from a Christian perspective, is Carl R. Trueman, *Histories and Fallacies: Problems Faced in the Writing of History* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010).

[42] Boyer, 272.

critics note that proponents of the historical approach need to regularly reshuffle events to keep their theories current with history as it continues to unfold. But by adopting a historical view of the seven churches, futurists undercut one of the strengths of their position and end up like historical interpreters trying to fit the course of history to their pattern and then make changes as history moves on. As Trench noted, the historical approach to the churches "would require readjustment and redistribution throughout, at once chronological and dogmatic."[43]

Likewise, holding to a historical pattern of the seven churches in history militates against the idea of Christ's imminent return. Christ's return could not take place until the seven ages were complete. James Boyer noted this argument and offered a nuanced reply. He said that the nature of the seven churches was not an "explicit" prophecy expressly set down in the text but rather an "implicit" prophecy apparent only after the fact. Just as the OT prophecies about Christ's incarnation and his Second Coming were not understood as separate events until Christ first came to earth, so the prophetic nature of the seven churches was not evident until time had passed and revealed the historic pattern.[44] Although this explanation eliminated the problem of denying the imminence of Christ's return, Boyer's approach still assumed that his generation could discern the pattern because history had clearly reached the last age. However, if Christ's return remains some years in the future, then the argument has no weight, because only Christians of some future era could discern the meaning. We cannot recognize the pattern without first presuming the correctness of the view.

The historical-prophetic view also raises a question about interpreting the meaning of the churches. Elliott argued that the seven churches are intended to have universal application, as shown by the repeated exhortation, "He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches."[45] Yet the historical-prophetic approach would limit such application for eras before the last because Christians in earlier ages could not know about churches after their own day and therefore not know how to understand and apply these passages.

Another problem with the historical-prophetic approach is the common assumption that the interpreter's own era is the "Laodicean age," the final period of lukewarmness and apostasy. Admittedly, as has been seen, not every interpreter of this school viewed himself as living in the final age, although virtually all were sure that the first three or four eras were already behind them.[46] Many interpreters assumed they were living in the final age, however, and there are significant ramifications to this assumption, one being that the course of history is downward. But what if the present era should happen *not* to be the last age. How would we know what the character of this age should be? Also, such interpreters tend to read their own situation into the whole era. Perhaps contemporary churches in the West are "Laodicean": smug, satiated, rich, and lukewarm, but what objective, empirical

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[43] Trench, 301.

[44] Boyer, 269–70.

[45] Elliott, 79–80.

[46] For example, Lange, 10:189, cited the Catholic interpreter Bartholomew Holzhauser (1613–58), who saw himself in the Sardis age with the Philadelphia age perhaps in the "immediate future." For a summary of Holzhauser's approach, see Francis Mershman, "Bartholomew Holzhauser," *The Catholic Encyclopedia,* Vol. 7 (New York: Robert Appleton, 1910), accessed 29 June 2023, https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07439b.htm.

data exist for making such a generalization? Furthermore, do the non-Western churches count? For instance, do the house churches of China reflect a Laodicean lukewarmness?

Conclusion

Although the historical-prophetic approach to the seven churches is problematic, those who affirm this view believe in the inspiration of Scripture, the certainty and supernatural character of prophecy, and God's sovereignty over history. Therefore, criticism of this view does not imply proponents are heretical or disobedient.

Still it is important to note the problems that can arise from a historical-prophetic interpretation of the seven churches. We could easily mishandle or misinterpret historical evidence if we try to force it into an invalid framework. Also, the tendency to classify one's own era as "Laodicean" can become a self-fulfilling prophecy and can contribute to negative assumptions about the course of history. Even if the aforementioned belief in inevitable decline is true, we would still need to know for certain where we stand in the prophetic calendar in order to apply this fact. Finally, it is important to let the Scripture speak for itself. Trench warned that "it will be good always to remember, that there is a temptation to make Scripture mean more than in the intention of the Holy Ghost it does mean."[47]

Positively, we ought to redirect our energies toward forming a valid Christian approach to history. Rather than focus on alleged patterns, we might lay out those qualities that Scripture outlines for the calling of a historian and for the nature of historical work. Believing as we do in an inspired, inerrant Bible given for our edification, we might study a passage such as Luke's preface to his Gospel (Luke 1:1–4) and see what it suggests about how we should write history. We could likewise use the data of Scripture as a firm basis for describing the course of history. We might, for example, look at Revelation 2–3 not as an outline for historical events but in order to study the seven churches for what they tell us about Christianity in the NT era. Such approaches would more firmly ground a Christian approach to history in what the Bible clearly reveals and teaches.

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[47] Trench, 292.

The Invisible Pastor

by Greg Stiekes[1]

It is a curious irony of the NT church that, though the office of the pastor is given such a prominent place in the growth and development of the Lord's people, it is nearly impossible to identify clearly from the Scripture a single pastor by name. Local ministers and their ordination are ubiquitous in the Book of Acts, and the prominent subject matter of three of Paul's letters, typically referred to as "the pastoral epistles," is the qualification and establishment of pastors and their churches. We may also deduce based on the number of churches mentioned from Acts to Revelation the ordination of hundreds of pastors who oversaw these local assemblies. Besides the ten cities with churches to whom Paul wrote and those seven whom the Lord addresses personally in Revelation 2–3, the NT mentions in particular the church at Syrian Antioch (Acts 13:1) and Cenchreae (Rom 16:1). Beyond these, there are at least twelve identifiable cities where it is implied that a church had been established.[2] Sometimes numbers of churches are mentioned according to regions, such as Judea, Galilee, Samaria, Phoenicia, Asia, Macedonia, Crete, Pontus, Cappadocia, and Bithynia (Acts 9:31; 15:3, 41; 1 Cor 16:19; 2 Cor 8:1; Titus 1:5; Jas 5:14; 1 Pet 1:1).[3] We must also bear in mind that in these cities there could have been any number of local congregations or house churches present, each requiring pastoral leadership.[4] Furthermore, though no specific number of pastors was required for each congregation, it would not have been unusual for a single local assembly to have more than one pastor.[5]

With all the attention the NT gives to the office we commonly refer to as "the pastor," one would expect to see several pastors clearly identified in its pages. Yet, the reader of the NT is hard put to

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[2] For example, Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission: Jesus and the Twelve* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity), 2:1231, says that Paul's meeting with the Ephesian elders at Miletus (Acts 20:17–38) implies that a church had already been established there. Likewise, other established congregations are implied when the text indicates that significant ministry or numbers of believers are already present in these locations: Damascus (Acts 9:1–2), Lydda, Sharon, and Joppa (Acts 9:35–36, 42), Caesarea (Acts 8:40; 10:48), Cyprus and Cyrene (Acts 11:20), Tyre (Acts 21:3–4), Puteoli (Acts 28:13–14), Troas (2 Cor 2:12–13), and Hierapolis (Col 4:13).

[3] The ministry of Paul alone no doubt produced numbers of churches that are never mentioned by name, including those that may have been planted before his first missionary journey. David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 449.

[4] Roger W. Gehring, *House Church and Mission: The Importance of Household Structures in Early Christianity* (2004; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 86–87, analyzes the reality of the earliest Christian communities gathering in villas for worship and the number of house churches that must have been represented in Jerusalem after 3,000 were converted.

[5] Most of the references to "pastors" in the NT could refer to more than one pastor in a single congregation, or a single pastor in multiple congregations in an urban area. For example, when Paul writes to the Philippians addressing "the bishops and deacons," the likelihood that there was more than one house church in Philippi renders untenable any serious conclusion discerning how many "bishops" served each congregation. However, Luke's report that Paul and Barnabas "appointed elders for them in every church" (Acts 14:23) and James's instruction to "call for the elders of the church" (Jas 5:14) demonstrate that some congregations had more than one local pastor.

identify a single pastor by name. Shepherds of local churches dot the landscape of the early church in every part of the empire, but they are virtually invisible in the text. This observation is even more extraordinary when we compare the anonymous nature of the NT pastor with the culture of the high-profile pastor today. In the modern West, churches are known by their pastors, whose names often appear on the signs in front of their buildings. Pastors with large churches are celebrated as successful ministers of the gospel, and some pastors even enjoy household name recognition. This does not, however, appear to be the way pastors were regarded in the days of the early church.

The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate the virtual invisibility of the pastor in the NT and to briefly explore the implications of the "invisible pastor" for local church ministry. We will begin by establishing the criteria that would allow us to identify pastors, and then we will use those criteria to see if we can find any.

The Identifying Marks of a Pastor in the NT

The Marks of Pastoral Terminology

In order to identify those who serve as pastors in the NT, we must first determine how to recognize them. But such a project is more complicated than it might seem, for no single person is actually called a "pastor," literally a "shepherd" (ποιμήν), of the Lord's people except the Lord himself. Jesus is "the good shepherd" (John 10:11), "the great shepherd" (Heb 13:20), and "the chief Shepherd" (ἀρχιποίμην, 1 Pet 5:4).[6] Otherwise, the only place the term *shepherd* is used to describe those who lead the church is Ephesians 4:11, where Paul refers to them as "pastors and teachers." But even here there is a perennial discussion about whether Paul's phrase, καὶ αὐτὸς ἔδωκεν . . . ποιμένας καὶ διδασκάλους ("and he gave . . . pastors and teachers"), should be interpreted as referring to a single office ("pastor-teachers") or two.[7] In other words, Paul may not have intended to use the term as a formal title but only as an illustrative reference to the pastor's task. This observation coincides with the way various NT authors use the verb form (ποιμαίνω) to refer to the caring activity of the one who leads the church (John 21:16; Acts 20:28; 1 Pet 5:2; Jude 1:12). In fact, Paul may have used the term *shepherd* in Ephesians 4:11 precisely because he had encouraged the Ephesians elders in particular to shepherd their "flock" (Acts 20:28).

Two other terms are used more prominently in the NT to refer to the office of the pastor, bearing in mind that in the early days of the church there had not been enough time for these terms to become standardized. Accordingly, the terms *overseer* (ἐπίσκοπος) and *elder* (πρεσβύτερος) refer

[6] Scripture quotations are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright ©2016 by Crossway Bibles, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

[7] Whether the two terms should be combined or not, both refer to ongoing ministry within the local assembly. Excellent treatments of this interpretive issue appear in the commentary literature: Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, WBC 42 (Dallas: Word, 1990), 249–50; Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 542–47; Frank Thielman, *Ephesians*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 275–76; and Constantine R. Campbell, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2023), 178–79.

interchangeably to the pastoral role, the former being of Greek origin and the latter of Jewish.[8] The term *overseer* (sometimes translated "bishop") as a church office is found only in the speech or letters of Paul (Acts 20:28; Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 3:1, 2; Titus 1:7) and was used in the sense of one who superintends or presides over the affairs of the Christian community.[9] In fact, in one of the earliest noncanonical Christian writings, the *Didache* (c. 100), the term *overseer* is still used to refer to the pastoral office. The author appears to channel Paul's words from 1 Timothy 3 when he instructs, "elect for yourselves bishops ["overseers"] and deacons who are worthy of the Lord, gentle men who are not fond of money, who are true and approved" (*Did* 15.1).[10]

Nevertheless, the term *elder* is clearly the preferred NT term, appropriated intuitively from its Jewish use during the earliest days of the church that sprang from Jewish soil.[11] The role of the elder in the Christian community followed naturally as the growth of the church outpaced the apostles' number and abilities to manage it. First, deacons were elected to assist with the daily needs of believers (Acts 6:1–7), and sometime later elders were obviously ordained.[12] By the time Barnabas and Saul carried relief funds to the church in Jerusalem in Acts 11:27–30, elders had already been established there, serving alongside the apostles to care for the church (e.g., Acts 15:2, 4, 6, 22, 23; 16:4). Indeed, the very early, Jewish letter of James already assumes the leadership of elders in the church (Jas 5:14). Also, after Paul had established churches in the Galatian region on his first missionary journey, it was a matter of course for him, requiring no comment by Luke, to appoint elders "in every church" (Acts 14:23).

Furthermore, the term *elder* appears to be the dominant term among the three. In Acts 20:17, Luke says that Paul called to Miletus the "elders" of the Ephesian church, though he tells them that the Holy Spirit has made them "overseers" over the "flock" that they must shepherd (20:28). Paul instructs Titus to "appoint elders in every town" (Titus 1:5). Also, Peter addresses the leaders of the church primarily as "elders," though he also instructs them to "shepherd the flock of God" (ποιμαίνω) by "exercising oversight" (ἐπισκοπέω) (1 Pet 5:1–2).

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[8] See, for example, Titus 1:5 and 7, where Paul refers to "elders," then calls them "overseers" with no distinction. Though not a unanimous opinion, especially in the past few decades, the broad, scholarly understanding of the use of these terms "indifferently" in the NT is defended as far back as J. B. Lightfoot, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Philippians*, 4th ed. (London: MacMillan, 1878), 95–96. This understanding has been more recently defended by Benjamin L. Merkle, *The Elder and Overseer: One Office in the Early Church*, SBL 57 (New York: Lang, 2003), who analyzes the two terms in their Jewish and Greco-Roman contexts respectively and then demonstrates how they are used interchangeably in the early church.

[9] *TDNT* 2:615–617; *NIDNTT* 1:190–92. Significantly, Peter refers to Jesus as "the Shepherd (ποιμήν) and Overseer (ἐπίσκοπος) of your souls" (1 Pet 2:25).

[10] Not only are overseers and deacons the two offices Paul speaks of in 1 Timothy 3:1–12, but also the four qualifications mentioned here seem to correspond in the same order, though randomly, with Paul's list of qualifications.

[11] The "elders" of the Jewish community served as spiritual leaders in various capacities, often serving alongside priests and scribes (Matt 16:21; 21:23; 26:57; 27:41; Mark 14:43; Luke 7:3; Acts 4:5, 8, 23; 6:12; etc.). For an excellent treatment of the church's appropriation of the role of the Jewish elder in the Christian community, see Timothy Willis, "Elders in the Old Testament Community," *Leaven* 2, no. 1 (1992): 8–12, available at https://digitalcommons.pepperdine.edu/leaven/vol2/iss1/4.

[12] A helpful and insightful history of this progression can be seen in Schnabel, 1:426–35.

It should come as no surprise, then, that as the terminology of church leadership became standardized the term *elder* became the primary nomenclature to refer to the person we now commonly call the "pastor." In the letters of Ignatius of Antioch (early second century), we can clearly see that the terms ἐπίσκοπος ("overseer," or "bishop") and πρεσβύτερος ("elder") had developed to refer exclusively to two distinct offices. In Ignatius, the term *overseer* (ἐπίσκοπος) consistently refers to a regional bishop who oversees the "elders" (πρεσβύτεροι) in various urban centers. For example, Ignatius writes to the church at Magnesia, "I urge you to hasten to do all things in the harmony of God, with the bishop [ἐπίσκοπος] presiding in the place of God and the presbyters [πρεσβύτεροι] in the place of the council of the apostles" (Ign. *Magn.* 6.1).[13]

By the end of the second century, this hierarchy of church governance reflected in Ignatius and his contemporaries began to open the way for sacerdotalism. Nevertheless, the post-apostolic church was merely continuing the form of church leadership modeled for them through the work of the apostles and their co-laborers, especially seen in the ministry of Paul. For example, the apostle Paul established churches (1 Cor 3:10; Rom 15:20) but depended upon his associates to oversee the proper establishment of those churches, including the ordination of pastors. Thus, he reminds Titus, "This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you" (Titus 1:5). Paul charged Timothy with the same set of responsibilities, including the ordination of "elders" (1 Tim 5:17–22). Though Paul refers to these elders as "overseers" when he begins to list their qualifications (1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:7), there is no instance where Paul instructs Timothy or Titus to ordain "overseers." Furthermore, this succession of church leadership is reflected in Paul's instruction to Timothy, "What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also" (2 Tim 2:2).

The Marks of Pastoral Responsibility

Because the terminology for the pastoral office had not been standardized in the first century, we must also attempt to identify pastors by their ministerial tasks. This approach can also seem complicated, for while pastors are called to perform certain ministry tasks, not all who performed those tasks in the NT church held the pastoral office. For example, Paul says that a pastor must have an unusual ability to teach and defend sound doctrine (1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:9). Yet the apostles and their co-laborers also taught and preached (Acts 2:42; 5:42; 15:35; 1 Tim 4:13; 2 Tim 4:1–5; Titus 2:1). Likewise, the pastor who shepherds his people according to the example of the chief Shepherd, Jesus, should feed and tend the flock with great compassion and sacrifice. Yet it is Paul the Apostle who offers us one of the best examples of this kind of service in his ministry to the Thessalonians (1 Thess 2:1–12). So, while there are ministers in the NT who are not "pastors," they may from time to time fulfill a pastoral role.

[13] This distinction of the office of "bishop" overseeing the local "elders" is consistent throughout Ignatius's letters. E.g., *Ignat Trall* 2.2; 3.1; 13.2; *Mag* 13.1; *Eph* 2.2; 4.1; 20.2; *Rom* 9.1; *Smyrn* 8.1, 2; 12.2; *Phil* 1.1–3.1. Intriguingly, Ignatius also uses the terminology of the pastor (shepherd), but only metaphorically to encourage the church to follow its regional bishop as sheep follow their shepherd (*Ignat Rom* 9.1; *Phil* 2.1).

Nevertheless, at least one quality of a pastor sets him apart from other offices. While many teachers and preachers of the gospel are mobile, the pastor, by design, remains local, ministering on a long-term basis to a single flock. This distinction may be seen in the list of "gifts" that Christ gave to the church in Ephesians 4:11. "And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers." Though these offices each share in proclamation of truth for the building up of the body of Christ (Eph 4:12–16), they were given by the Lord to fulfill different ministries for the birth and growth of the church. In the same letter, Paul has already referred to apostles and prophets (Eph 2:20) as being the "primary and authoritative recipients and proclaimers of revelation."[14] Their ministries laid the foundation for truth from the Lord himself all across the empire. The evangelists were itinerant proclaimers of this truth like Philip, who preached in various locations for the advancement of the gospel and the establishment of churches (Acts 8:4–40).

Though we may see apostles, prophets, and evangelists staying in a single location for some time, the office of pastor-teacher is a local gift by design.[15] This is the reason Peter encourages pastors to "shepherd the flock of God *that is among you*" (1 Pet 5:2, ποιμάνατε τὸ *ἐν ὑμῖν* ποίμνιον τοῦ θεοῦ), and to be living examples to those in their charge (5:3).[16] When Paul meets with the Ephesians elders, he reminds them that the Holy Spirit himself made them overseers to shepherd a particular flock, and charges them to remain and defend their people (Acts 20:28–29). Titus is stationed in Crete, yet only for the time needed to fulfill the mission of appointing (local) elders in every town, men who will remain (Titus 1:5). And Paul is able to encourage the Thessalonian church to "respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work" (1 Thess 5:12–13). So, pastors may be recognized by the fact that they discharge spiritual gifts of preaching, teaching, and overseeing at the day-to-day, congregational level, with the understanding that they are ordained to serve for the long haul in a single location.

In Search of NT Pastors

Searching by Way of Pastoral Terminology

Based on the ways pastors are identified in the NT, the search for pastors should follow upon the lines of both pastoral terminology and pastoral responsibility. Beginning with terminology, we noted earlier that no specific church leader is called a "pastor" in the NT. What about the other terms?

In Philippians 1:1, Paul addresses his letter to the Philippian church "with the overseers and deacons." When Paul summons the Ephesians elders in Acts 20, he also identifies them as "overseers" (v. 28). But these two groups of unnumbered men are as close as the NT comes to identifying specific

[14] Lincoln, 153. He also remarks, "The apostles were those with special authority from their commissioning by the risen Lord, while the prophets were those with charismatic authority."

[15] Hermann W. Beyer, *TDNT* 2:615, observes that the overseer "never refers to the wandering or charismatic preacher, but only to one who is localized."

[16] The pastoral qualifications themselves assume that the church is able to observe their pastors for an indefinite period of time, noting, for instance, how they manage their households and their children and how they are perceived by others in the community at large (1 Tim 3:4, 7; Titus 1:6).

"overseers." There is a possibility that among the group of elders who came to see Paul at Miletus are Aquila and Prisca, who followed Paul to Ephesus in Acts 18, hosted a church in their home (1 Cor 16:19) and are greeted by Paul in his final letter to Timothy in Ephesus, along with the household of Onesiphorus (2 Tim 4:19). But whether they were considered pastors will be touched on below.

In searching for those who are called "elders," however, we find two men in the NT who self-identify as elders and another who may be counted among the elders of the Jerusalem church. The first self-proclaimed elder is Peter, who writes (1 Pet 5:1–3),

> [1] So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: [2] shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; [3] not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.

It is somewhat surprising that Peter the apostle should identify himself as an "elder."[17] So, in what sense does Peter, who is first and foremost an apostle of Christ, refer to himself as a "fellow elder" (συμπρεσβύτερος)? There is some consensus in the commentary literature that Peter is not counting himself as an elder of the church in the same sense as the elders to whom he is writing. Rather, with true humility, not desiring to magnify his authority, Peter is encouraging the elders by identifying with them as one who had himself received a shepherding commission from Jesus Christ (John 21:15–17).[18] This understanding coincides perfectly with Peter's admonishment to lead in an undomineering way (1 Pet 5:3). Thus, Peter is simply saying, "Your task in your local congregation is the same in essence as mine in caring for the church more widely."[19] Peter, then, is not claiming to be the pastor of a local assembly.[20]

Another example of a self-proclaimed elder is the author of 2 and 3 John, which begin, respectively, with the words, "The elder to the elect lady and her children" (2 John 1:1) and "The elder to the beloved Gaius" (3 John 1:1). The reference to himself as "the elder" could mean that the author of these letters is an elder in the sense of leading a local church.[21] Given the traditional view that the

[17] In fact, Karen H. Jobes, *1 Peter*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 300, says that the self-designation of the author as an "elder" has caused some scholars to reject Petrine authorship of the letter.

[18] For example, Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003), 232; Peter H. Davids, *The First Epistle of Peter*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 176.

[19] I. Howard Marshall, *1 Peter*, IVPNTC (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1991), 161.

[20] Agreement on this point is not universal, however. Jobes, 300, believes that during the first century an apostle could still be considered an "elder" in his church and "throughout the church at large." However, we have already noted that various offices may share pastoral responsibilities. And being an elder in the church at large is a different kind of leadership than serving as a pastor in a single location. Paul J. Achtemeier, *1 Peter: A Commentary on First Peter*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 323, surmises that the term *elder* at this point in the history of the church may also have been used as a general reference to leadership and not to any formal office. He finds affirmation for this view in the fact that the word *elders* in the admonition that follows in 1 Peter 5:5, "You who are younger, be subject to the elders," seems to refer merely to older people.

[21] So Stephen S. Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, WBC (Nashville: Nelson Reference & Electronic, 1984), 317.

author is John the Apostle, however, there are several reasons to believe that he, like Peter, is styling himself as an "elder" in a non-official sense.[22] It could be that John, by calling himself "the" elder (ὁ πρεσβύτερος), is writing simply in a tender and fatherly manner as the last living apostle, an aged man who refers affectionately to the church as his "little children" (1 John 2:1, 12, 28; 3:7, 18; 4:4; 5:21; cf. 2 John 1:1).[23] It could also be that John is pointing to the fact that he is an elder over other elders in the same sense as "overseer."[24] Either way, we should not take an apostle's reference to himself as an "elder" to mean that he is the pastor of a single local church.

One final example is a possible allusion to the eldership of James, the brother of Jesus, who appears in Acts 15 to preside among other elders over the Jerusalem church. James is not called an "elder," but he is among the group identified as "the apostles and the elders" who convene to discuss the matter of Gentile inclusion in the churches (Acts 15:4–6). At the climax of the deliberations, James appears to have the final word (Acts 15:13–18). Because James was not a disciple of Jesus Christ during his earthly ministry and was not, therefore, numbered among the original apostles, it would appear that James must be numbered with the elders here. In fact, Eusebius reports that James was chosen by the other apostles to hold the "throne" (θρόνος) of the office of (regional) bishop (ἐπισκοπή) of the church of Jerusalem (Eusebius, *Ecc. Hist.* 2.1.2).

However, Wayne Grudem makes a convincing case on textual grounds that James is actually to be counted not among the elders but among the apostles.[25] Paul states in Galatians 1:19 that when he went to Jerusalem he "saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother." And when Paul recounts the resurrection appearances of Jesus, he includes James among the apostles: "[7] Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. [8] Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. [9] For I am the least of the apostles" (1 Cor 15:7–9a). Eckhard Schnabel concurs with the observation that James was actually an apostle, for it is the only explanation for James's prominence in the Jerusalem church (Acts 15:13–21; 21:18–23).[26] Most likely, James was not numbered among the elders of the church but oversaw the elders as an apostle of Christ.

In summary, when we follow the trail of NT terminology for the pastoral office, our search yields only three high-profile ministers of Christ: two original apostles and another who had, it appears,

[22] For a basic scholarly defense of the Johannine authorship of the Letters of John, see D. A. Carson and Douglas Moo, *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 670–75.

[23] Colin G. Kruse, *The Letters of John*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 204. Also, Eusebius refers to John as "John the elder," with reference to his advanced years (*Ecc. Hist.* 3.39).

[24] I. Howard Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 60. Marshall admits that we have no other example of "elder" used in the sense of regional bishop. But there is no reason why the aged John would not have used this term to refer to his fatherly care over the churches in the Ephesus region. Smalley, 344, reasons that the term *elder* indicates the author's leadership over several congregations.

[25] Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 1118–19. Grudem argues that once we recognize that the number of apostles could be expanded, evidenced by Paul's repeated claim to have been added to the apostolic number, we recognize that the NT actually names others as apostles, such as James and Barnabas (Acts 14:14). Grudem also says that recognizing James as an apostle offers full apostolic authority to his letter, though he makes no mention of Jude in this respect.

[26] *Early Christian Mission*, 1:433–35.

become an apostle. Needless to say, these men were not the typical NT pastors helping to lead a single assembly. Rather, they were shepherds of such pastors.

Searching by Way of Pastoral Responsibility

We must turn now from our search for the pastor based on terminology to a search based on analysis of pastoral responsibility. We are looking for those who not only exercise pastoral gifts (preaching, teaching, overseeing) but who also remain stationed in a single place, ministering to a local congregation.

These criteria immediately rule out several candidates who exercise pastoral gifts but whose role is to move from place to place, especially serving as co-laborers with or assistants to the apostles.[27] Timothy and Titus are prime examples. It is common for people to assume that these two men are pastors because they are the recipients of what the church has come to call the "pastoral epistles." But as we have seen, the mission of these two men was to expand the ministry of the apostle Paul by establishing pastors and churches.[28] As such, they moved from place to place where Paul had need of them. Timothy joined Paul on his second missionary journey (Acts 16:1–3), was sent back to Thessalonica before rejoining Paul in Corinth (1 Thess 3:1–6), ended up in Ephesus with Paul (Acts 19:22), was sent to Macedonia (Acts 18:5), and to Corinth (1 Cor 4:17; 16:10, 11), and eventually ended up with Paul in his Roman imprisonment (Phil 1:1; Col 1:1; Phlm 1:1) before being stationed in Ephesus where he receives 1 and 2 Timothy. We know far less about Titus's assignments, but Paul used him to deal with the difficult situation with the Corinthian church (2 Cor 8:23; 12:18) and to minister among the Cretans where Paul wrote to him.

Some lesser-known associates of Paul appear to exercise pastoral gifts. But they all appear to be mobile, relocating from time to time, consciously placed by Paul to assist him in various circumstances. For example, Paul commends Epaphras to the Colossian church as one who taught them, one who "is a faithful minister of Christ" on their behalf (Col 1:7). In fact, Paul tells the Colossians that Epaphras is "always struggling" in his prayers for their spiritual maturity (Col 4:12). This sounds like pastoral ministry. But Paul himself also taught and prayed for his churches (e.g., Col 1:3–4). And when Paul writes to the Colossian church, Epaphras does not return to Colossae when the letter is dispatched but remains with Paul, who refers to him as "my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus" (Phlm 1:23). Besides this, it is clear that Epaphras has more than one church he is overseeing, for Paul says that Epaphras has worked hard for the Colossian church as well as for the churches in Laodicea and Hierapolis (Col 4:13). Epaphras, then, is not a local pastor but one of Paul's co-laborers.

[27] Margaret M. Mitchell, "New Testament Envoys in the Context of Greco-Roman Diplomatic and Epistolary Conventions: The Example of Timothy and Titus," *SBL* 111, no. 4 (1992): 641–62, helpfully explores the essential mission of the apostolic co-laborers. Mitchell demonstrates that these representatives of Paul were no mere assistants, but those who represented the apostle's presence all over the empire, fulfilling intermediary roles to accomplish tasks that even Paul himself could not have achieved.

[28] Andreas J. Köstenberger, *Commentary on 1–2 Timothy & Titus*, BTCP (Nashville: Holman Reference, 2017), 5–6, discusses the problematic nature of referring to the letters to Timothy and Titus as the "pastoral epistles," noting that, "technically, Timothy and Titus were apostolic delegates, not local pastors." Grudem, 1130, places Timothy and Titus in a special category of "apostolic assistants."

Similar observations can be made about Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus (1 Cor 16:15–18), and about Epaphroditus (Phil 2:25; 4:18), Archippus (Phlm 1:2; Col 4:17), Tychicus (Eph 6:21; Col 4:7), Onesiphorus (2 Tim 1:16–18), and Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 18:2). All appear to exercise some measure of responsibility one could construe as pastoral, but a careful reading of the text reveals that they are most likely part of Paul's mobile co-workers. Of these, a few deserve special mention.

The question of identifying Archippus as a local pastor arises for two reasons. First, Paul includes Archippus alongside Philemon and Apphia as one of the recipients of the Philemon letter, referring to him as "fellow soldier" (συστρατιώτης) followed by the words, "and the church in your house" (Phlm 1:2). Second, he calls out Archippus by name in Colossians 4:17 when he instructs the church, "And say to Archippus, 'See that you fulfill the ministry that you have received in the Lord.'" However, the host of the house church that Paul speaks of in Philemon 1:2 is clearly Philemon, the first addressee of the letter and therefore its primary recipient.[29] Also, though Archippus's ministry must be somewhat urgent for Paul to mention it, the nature of that ministry is unclear. The general word "ministry" (διακονία) could refer to any activity from collecting relief funds for the poor to any form of teaching or preaching ministry, whether evangelistic or pastoral.[30]

Even though the references to Archippus are brief and lacking in specific context, we may be able to at least rule out Archippus as fulfilling the role of a local pastor with three observations. First, the expression "fulfill one's ministry" is used by Paul only two other times but each in the context of his apostolic mission, not the context of local church ministry.[31] Second, Paul uses the term συστρατιώτης ("fellow-soldier") in his letters to identify only one other person, namely Epaphroditus, who is clearly one of Paul's co-workers and one who "nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life" (Phil 2:25–30). Based on the normal use of the term συστρατιώτης in a military context and the way Paul uses military language, it is not likely that Paul would apply the term to Archippus unless there was some way in which he, like Paul, behaved or had been asked to behave as a soldier, sharing in Paul's suffering (2 Tim 2:3), or risking his life for the sake of the gospel (2 Cor 1:9; Phil 1:21; 2 Tim 4:6).[32] This ministry would appear to go beyond that of a normal, local pastor. Third, it seems strange that Paul would admonish the church as a body to charge Archippus with the fulfillment of his ministry if he were the pastor of the congregation. What seems more likely is that Archippus is a young co-worker

[29] Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter to the Colossians and to Philemon*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 381–82. Moo says that, notably, John Knox argued that Archippus was the main recipient of the letter, that he was the owner of Onesimus, and that the church met in his house. But few have followed this reading.

[30] Scot McKnight, *The Letter to Colossians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 397, prefers the view that Archippus is being urged to fulfill an assignment to collect funds, with reference to 2 Cor 8:4; 9:1, 12–13; 11:8; Rom 15:31).

[31] Paul writes directly to his co-worker, Timothy, to urge him to "fulfill" his "ministry" (2 Tim 4:5). He also uses the expression to speak of his own fulfilled ministry (Rom 15:19).

[32] Nathan Leach, "Epaphroditus and Archippus, Paul's Fellow Soldiers: Reexamining Paul's Rhetorical Use of συστρατιώτης," *JBL* 140, no. 1 (2021): 187–206, demonstrates that Paul is not using this terminology loosely to simply refer to a "co-worker." Most likely, Archippus has done or is being asked to do something risky in the fulfillment of his ministry.

with Paul, possibly Philemon and Apphia's son, making it more natural for Paul to encourage this young man in the presence of the congregation.[33]

Priscilla and Aquila also deserve special mention. They help educate Apollos (Acts 18:24–26), and they host a church in their home (1 Cor 16:19). However, Paul refers to them as his "fellow workers in Christ Jesus" (Rom 16:3), and they travel with him from Corinth to Ephesus (Acts 18:18).

Nevertheless, the fact that Priscilla and Aquila have a church in their house (1 Cor 16:19) raises a question about the spiritual leadership of that house church. Roger Gehring, relying in part on Alastair Campbell, suggests that the family structure of the ancient household would have helped to determine the leadership of the nascent church. The head of the household, for instance, would naturally assume the leadership of the congregation.[34] This idea makes sense on some level, for Paul refers to the church at the "household of God" (1 Tim 3:15), and the qualifications for a pastor suggest that he must be a good father, managing his household well (1 Tim 3:4–5). This theory implies, then, that Aquila, alongside Priscilla, would under normal circumstances have served as the pastor of the church that was in his home. This also indicates that Philemon would have overseen the church in his house (Phlm 1:2) and even, as some argue, that Nympha would have overseen the church in her house (Col 4:15).[35]

We cannot assume, however, that the head of the home naturally provided the leadership for the church that met there. To begin with, the apostles would not have been so indiscriminate as to ordain pastoral leadership on the basis of owning property alone. Second, offering one's home as a matter of hospitality was common in that day. For this reason, Lydia insisted that Paul and his co-workers live with her during the Philippian mission (Acts 16:14–15). Consequently, the young church gathered in her home (Acts 16:40). Lydia would have therefore shown hospitality to those coming under her roof, but there is no implication that she would have provided any measure of church leadership.[36] Likewise, when Paul writes from Corinth to Rome, "Gaius, who is host to me and to the whole church, greets you" (Rom 16:23), we know nothing more than that Gaius was hosting part of the Roman congregation.

There is another line of inquiry that we find in the Lord's messages to the seven churches of Revelation 2–3. Each message is addressed to "the angel of the church." Could Jesus be using the word "angel" (ἄγγελος, messenger), as some have interpreted, to refer to a human pastor?[37] Most modern interpreters answer no, taking the use of ἄγγελος here to refer in some sense to a literal angel or to the

[33] G. K. Beale, *Colossians and Philemon*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019), 362, and F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 186, who sees the potential for Archippus's embarrassment.

[34] Gehring, 103.

[35] McKnight, 394–95.

[36] The same could be said for Phoebe, "a servant of the church at Cenchreae," whom Paul calls a "patron" (προστάτις) of himself and other believers. It is likely, then, that Phoebe was a woman of means who used her home to provide a place for believers to stay or even meet regularly. See Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 915–16.

[37] These are typically older commentators such as Zahn, Brownlee, Lenski, Walvoord, and Hendrickson, according to Grant Osborne, *Revelation*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 99; though also Paige Patterson, *Revelation*, NAC 39 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2012), 78–80, with some reserve.

personification of the church in angelic form.[38] These interpretations not only correspond with the way angels are presented in the remainder of the Book of Revelation, but they also make better sense logistically. It is implausible that Jesus would address his message to a single "messenger" (i.e., pastor), when there were many house churches and pastors represented by each of the seven cities he names. But even if one could demonstrate conclusively that these angels are, in fact, human pastors, it still leaves the identity of these unnamed recipients shrouded in mystery.

Finally, in scouring the NT to consider the names of men and women who were known to Paul or to other apostles, who were servants to them and to the churches, we may surmise that a few served as pastors in their congregations. Two texts point us in this direction. The first, Acts 13:1–3, reads,

> [1] Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. [2] While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them." [3] Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

Clearly, these five men are identified as "prophets and teachers," two of the offices that Christ gave to the church in Ephesians 4:11. Prior to this event, Barnabas had brought Saul to Antioch from Tarsus where, Luke says, "For a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many people" (Acts 11:26). Sometime during that year, prophets had arrived from Jerusalem (11:27), though we cannot know whether the other three men mentioned in Acts 13:1 were among them. Neither is it possible to decide which of the three remaining are "prophets" and which are "teachers." Likely, it is best to follow John Polhill's suggestion that Luke is simply using these two words to refer to the men who provided leadership for the congregation, i.e., "prophet-teachers" or "prophetic teachers."[39] Still, it is striking that Luke does not refer to any of these men as "elders," even though he has already used the term to describe the leadership in the Jerusalem church (11:30), and that Saul already knew to establish elders in the churches he would soon launch (14:23). Perhaps Luke refers to the leadership of this entire group in terms of their giftedness rather than their position because Saul and Barnabas are considered apostles. Nevertheless, at least three of these men may embody what we would call a local pastor.

The second text where we find evidence for local pastors is John's third letter, addressed to "the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth" (3 John 1:1). Might Gaius have been one of the elders of a congregation over which John the Apostle exercised oversight? Stephen Smalley concludes that Gaius was "an unknown Christian leader, perhaps ordained."[40] Evidence that Gaius was a church leader in

[38] Osborne, 98–99; G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text,* NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 217–19; Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, rev. ed., NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 63.

[39] John B. Polhill, *Acts*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1992), 288–89.

[40] Smalley, 344.

some capacity is suggested by a church tradition that says he became the bishop of Pergamum.[41] I. Howard Marshall, on the other hand, states that Gaius is simply a member of one of John's churches and there is no indication that he holds any official position in that church.[42] It is difficult to come to a strong conclusion regarding Gaius.

However, John informs Gaius about the negative example of another man, Diotrephes, who had been troubling another one of the churches. John says (3 John 1:9–10),

> [9] I have written something to the church, but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority. [10] So if I come, I will bring up what he is doing, talking wicked nonsense against us. And not content with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers, and also stops those who want to and puts them out of the church.

Identifying the formal position of Diotrephes in the church centers on the statement that he "likes to put himself first," a translation of the verb φιλοπρωτεύω, to love the chief place or to desire prominence. The question, then, is whether Diotrephes is a regular member of the church who aspires to take control of the congregation, or an elder whose position has gone to his head. Smalley takes Diotrephes to be a "powerful leader," though still a "layman."[43] Yet it is difficult to think that a layman in the church would have the ability to excommunicate people from the assembly, especially one who was speaking out harshly against an apostle such as John (v. 10). Surely the elders would have handled such a situation. Here is a man, then, who appears to exercise pastoral authority, however wrongfully, who is stationed at a single location. We cannot conclude with certainty, but it is not without irony that, in the entire NT, the single name that is most definitely associated with local pastoral ministry may be none other than Diotrephes.

Our search for named pastors in the NT, therefore, has yielded scant results. We may believe that Simeon, Lucius, and Manaen of Acts 13:1 functioned as local pastors in the church. There is also a slight probability that the addressee of John's third letter, Gaius, was a pastor, and that even more probably, with some irony, the villain of John's letter, Diotrephes, exercised pastoral authority. Nevertheless, none of these men are specifically identified by the leading terminology used to identify such leadership (pastor, overseer, elder). We discover their possible identities only by a careful analysis of the text in a pastoral context.

Additional Factors in the Search for NT Pastors

The virtual invisibility of the local pastor within the pages of the NT must be considered within the context of additional factors that make this observation even more peculiar. The point was already made in the introduction that there must have been hundreds of functioning local pastors in multiple

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[41] According to *Apostolic Constitutions* 7.46.9 (fourth century), John installed Gaius as the regional bishop at Pergamum.

[42] Marshall, 81. Likewise, Kruse, 220, says that "there is no indication that [Gaius] is the head of a house church or holds any position of authority in the church."

[43] Smalley, 356.

regions and cities in the days of the early church. We may add to this the sheer importance of the pastor to the life of the local church. The pastoral office is the only one in the NT that is given two lists of qualifications, not to mention numerous instructions through Paul's letters to Timothy and Titus that relate directly to the responsibilities of the pastor's calling and oversight. Furthermore, the church is called upon in several locations to imitate pastors and submit to their authority (1 Thess 5:12–13; 1 Thess 5:17–18; Heb 13:7, 17; 1 Pet 5:5).

Also, there does not appear to be any hesitation on the part of NT authors to identify and even commend those who fellowship in the church and serve in various capacities. We read the names of apostles, prophets, evangelists, deacons, servants, co-laborers, fellow-prisoners, letter-bearers, brothers and sisters, disciples, and so on. In the pages of the NT, we meet "the apostles, Barnabas and Paul" (Acts 14:14), "Phoebe, a servant" (Rom 16:1),[44] "Philip, the evangelist" (Acts 21:8), "a disciple named Tabitha" (Acts 9:36), "a prophet named Agabus" (Acts 21:10), "James, a servant" (Jas 1:1), and so forth. It is therefore all the more curious that we do not find even one reference to a specific person who is explicitly named a pastor, overseer, or elder.[45]

Moreover, the fact that there are no examples of a person explicitly given a pastoral title in the NT does not appear to be because their names were not widely known. Eusebius, for example, is aware of several names of pastors from the first century, especially names of those who were martyred. Furthermore, Schnabel, citing Richard Bauckham, believes that Eusebius may have unwittingly supplied the names of the elders who served in the Jerusalem church under James.[46] Eusebius lists fifteen men he identifies as bishops who succeeded James until the siege of Hadrian in 132: Simeon, Justus, Zacchaeus, Tobias, Benjamin, John, Matthias, Philip, Seneca, Justus, Levi, Ephres, Joseph, and Judas (*Ecc. Hist.* 4.5.1–3). Historians have puzzled over Eusebius's list because of the necessary brevity of each bishop's tenure if indeed all fifteen men served in the seventy years between James and Hadrian.[47] But a solution is suggested by the *Epistle of James to Quadratus*, an apocryphal writing independent of Eusebius, where James ostensibly writes, "Philip, Senicus, Justus, Levi, Aphre, and

[44] Some translations such as the NIV and the NLT refer to Phoebe as a "deacon" of the church at Cenchreae, rendering the word διάκονος as if it refers here to the formal office. But this is a matter of interpretation. Of the one hundred appearances of διάκονος or its cognates in the NT, only five are commonly translated using the word "deacon" (Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 3:8, 10, 12, 13). Most other occurrences are translated using derivatives of "servant" or "minister." Διάκονος can refer in context to any person who serves others beneficially, such as a household servant (Matt 22:13; John 2:5, 9), apostles and other ministers of the gospel (1 Cor 3:5, 6; Eph 3:7; 6:21; Col 1:23), and even pagan rulers (Rom 13:4). I have chosen to say with the ESV translation, "servant." However, if, in fact, the translation should be "deacon" here, then Phoebe is the only named deacon in the NT.

[45] It is not until Ignatius's letter to the Magnesians that we finally see a clear example of pastors being addressed in a letter. Ignatius writes, "Since, then, I have been found worthy to see you through Damas, your bishop who is worthy of God, through your worthy presbyters Bassus and Apollonius . . ." (*Ignat Mag* 3.1).

[46] Schnabel, 1:431–32, citing Richard Bauckham, *Jude and the Relatives of Jesus in the Early Church* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1990), 73–76.

[47] J. Edward Walters, "The Epistle of James to Quadratus," trans. Brent Landau, Bradley Rice, and J. Edward Walters, in *New Testament Apocrypha: More Noncanonical Sources*, vol. 3, ed. by Tony Burke (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2023), 528, citing Roelof van den Broek, "*Der Brief des Jakobus* an Quadratus und das Problem des judenchristlichen Bischöfe von Jerusalem (Eusebius, HE IV, 5, 1–3)," in *Text and Testimony: Essays on New Testament and Apocryphal Literature in Honour of A. F. J. Klijn*, ed. Tjitze Baarda and A. F. J. Klijn (Kampen: Kok, 1988), 56–65.

Juda, renowned scribes of the Jews, came to me with their companions and confessed Christ, and they received baptism. And behold, they are disputing with their kindred over the writings of the prophets" (*Epist. Jas. Quad.*, 10). Because these servants of the church under James are identical both in name and order to some of Eusebius's list of bishops, Bauckham believes that Eusebius is mistaken about the true identity of these men. It is entirely feasible that the first few men in Eusebius's list served as bishops over the church in Jerusalem but that the other men on his list are actually the names of the elders who served under James, some if not all of whom were even present at the council in Acts 15.

Finally, we must consider the fact that references to pastors are absent from contexts where we would expect to find them. For example, it seems that Paul could easily have commended pastors or encouraged them in general for their faithful work in one of the conclusions of his letters to the churches, especially in those letters where he knew the people so well. But, as far as we can determine, he does not. More strikingly, Paul does not even address his letters to the pastors of these churches, but always or primarily to the church in general, and to "brothers" and "saints" (e.g., Rom 1:7, 13; 1 Cor 1:2, 10, 11; 2 Cor 1:2, 8; Gal 1:11; Eph 1:1; Phil 1:1, 12; Col 1:2; 1 Thess 1:1, 4; 2 Thess 1:1, 3). The only exception to this observation is Paul's greeting to "all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons" (Phil 1:1). But even here, the church is the primary recipient, while the nameless church leadership is merely included "with" (σύν) the rest.

The fact that Paul even addresses important matters of church life and policy not to the church leadership but to the people in general throws the invisibility of pastors into even greater relief. Examples abound, but taking only the letter of 1 Corinthians, Paul lays before his "children" as their "father" (1 Cor 4:14–15) all the important and sometimes highly sensitive matters that were causing the church to be torn apart: their divisions (chs. 1–4), the high-profile instance of immorality (ch. 5), the issue of pagan courts (ch. 6), questions pertaining to marriage and divorce (ch. 7), eating food offered to idols (chs. 8–10), head coverings and the misuse of the Lord's Table (ch. 11), the use and misuse of spiritual gifts (chs. 12–14), the doctrine of the Resurrection (ch. 15), and the collection for the suffering believers in Jerusalem (ch. 16). The way Paul addresses each of these matters puts the pastors on the same level as the other brothers and sisters in the community, as those of Paul's children receiving instruction. Finally, at the end of the letter, Paul comes nearest to encouraging the church to follow its pastoral leadership, yet the identification of that leadership is characteristically vague. Paul commends the entire household of Stephanas for their example of devotion to the church and then instructs the church to "be subject to such as these, and to every fellow worker and laborer" (1 Cor 16:15–16). Thus, Paul encourages the Corinthians to be subject to "the such" (τοῖς τοιούτοις). But who those laborers are among them will be up to them to determine.

The Implications of the Invisible Pastor for Local Church Ministry

Modern Christian authors who have an intriguing ability to take the EKG of the church and discern its health have been warning for some time now about the tendency pastors have to become the local attraction of their churches, even ministerial superstars. Pastors who are winsome speakers and world-class organizers can become the CEOs of their own kingdoms, the rock stars of their own venues. Some become recognized names in Christian households. Some even travel the world as

celebrated Christian personalities. But this picture is the antithesis of pastoral leadership in the NT, where we can scarcely discern in its pages a specific, local pastor, faithfully serving his congregation.

This foreign image of pastoral ministry is one of the reasons that John Piper (himself a household name among believers) seeks to encourage his fellow pastors in his book, *Brothers, We Are Not Professionals*. In no less than thirty-six passionate mini-sermons, Piper urges pastors not to professionalize their calling but to be purposefully and singularly devoted to Jesus Christ. He also warns that the temptation to be "professional" is not only for the CEO-types with their "three-piece suit and the stuffy upper floors," but the pop-culture types also, "the understated professionalism of torn blue jeans and the savvy inner ring." The former is learned by "pursing an MBA" but the latter by "being in the know about the ever-changing entertainment and media world" and learning to have a certain "ambiance, and tone, and idiom, and timing, and banter."[48]

Howard Snyder addressed this very issue nearly fifty years ago when he asked the question, "Must the pastor be a superstar?" Snyder writes,

> I confess my admiration, perhaps slightly tinged with envy. Not because of the talent, really, the sheer ability. But for the success, the accomplishment. Here is a man who faithfully preaches the Word, sees lives transformed by Christ, sees his church growing. What sincere evangelical minister would not like to be in his shoes? Not to mention his parsonage.

But then he continues,

> I think of all the struggling, mediocre pastors, looking on with holy envy (if there be such), measuring their own performance by Pastor Jones's success and dropping another notch into discouragement or, perhaps, self-condemnation.
>
> For after all, the problem is plain, isn't it? The church needs more qualified pastors, better training. More alertness to guiding those talented young men God may be calling into the ministry. Better talent scouting to find the superstars.[49]

No one is going to suggest that pastors perform their ministries incognito. To the contrary, we need strong examples of biblical pastoral ministry. But the mood of contemporary church leadership where pastors are promoted and celebrated and become the center of attention in their churches is far afield from the way the NT portrays pastoral ministry.

What should we take away from the observation that pastors in the NT are virtually invisible? First, we need to reflect seriously upon Piper's criticism that the pastoral office has become "professionalized." The office itself is certainly honored in the NT. But pastors are called by the Lord to humbly fill that office. They can be rebuked and removed (1 Tim 5:17–20). They serve alongside

[48] John Piper, *Brothers, We Are Not Professionals: A Plea to Pastors for Radical Ministry,* rev. ed. (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2013), viii–ix.

[49] Howard A. Snyder, *The Problem of Wineskins: Church Structure in a Technological Age* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1975), 20–21.

their congregations (1 Cor 12:4–30). They are not called to be the center of attention in the church but are called to serve the Lord and their congregations sacrificially, after the example of Christ (1 Pet 5:1–4).

Second, the virtual invisibility of pastors should encourage the congregation to identify their own giftedness to serve one another in the body of Christ. It is common to hear the criticism that the church is not the pastor, that the body has to be engaged with one another, that the pastor should not be doing all the work of the ministry himself. Yet pastors themselves can create this problem. They can easily become the face of their church, the dominant presence on their church website, or worse, the main attraction in the worship services. Thus, they can invite upon themselves the kind of culture where they "run the show" because they have become the personality at the center of their church, rather than making themselves dependent on the congregation as all are dependent on Christ. The teaching of the apostle Paul in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12–14 about the use of believers' gifts is addressed to the entire congregation, the pastor included. Church members will shy away from offering their gifts in service to Christ if pastors are always pushing ahead to perform ministry works in the sight of their congregations.

Third, the invisible pastor creates a shared-leadership approach to pastoral ministry that ought to be intuitive for a church that does not revolve around a single leader. As stated earlier, it seems evident that there was often more than one elder serving in any given congregation in the NT. A multiplicity of pastors encourages the unenvious and gracious sharing of the burdens of pastoral ministry among several men whom the Lord has called, while it also models the sharing of ministry for the entire church.

Fourth, the virtual invisibility of the NT pastor encourages pastors to focus primarily on the work that God has called them to do. They should be satisfied with ministering to their own congregations, performing the thankless tasks of a servant, even if no one will ever see, or know, or care. In today's world of social media, it is all too tempting and too easy for pastors to seek recognition for their accomplishments by putting their lives on display, spending so much of their time blogging, becoming embroiled in meaningless online debates, or in other ways seeking recognition that they lack from merely pastoring their churches faithfully. May God give us pastors the grace to be satisfied with the invisible ministry to which he has called us, and to seek after recognition only from our meek and exalted Savior.

Finally, and most obviously, pastors need to be invisible so that they do not upstage the Lord himself. After all, the church should never love and follow their pastor more than they love and follow Christ. He must increase, and the pastor must decrease. This does not mean that the pastor is practically "invisible" to his congregation. But it means that, when people look at the church from the outside, they should not particularly notice him first. Instead, they should first see a body of people devoted to the Lord, each of them exercising his or her gifts, worshiping and serving together for the glory of the chief Shepherd.

An Inquiry into the Hardness, and Hardening, of Pharaoh's Heart

by Layton Talbert[1]

This article does not pretend to present a comprehensive examination of all the data pertaining to the hardening of Pharaoh's heart. The goal of this essay is much more modest: to evaluate and interact with one recent presentation of that topic, and to explore a biblically grounded model for understanding the divine method of providentially shaping and restraining the inclinations and choices of sinful people. Like everyone else who wades into these contested waters, I bring with me certain biblical parameters that form the theological scaffolding within which I propose to interpret the phenomenon on which this essay focuses.[2] (1) *Divine Sovereignty*—God is absolutely sovereign over all individual humans, collective nations, and creation itself (Deut 32:39; Pss 33:10–11; 103:19; Dan 4:35). (2) *Divine Integrity*—God is entirely holy and incapable of either tempting or compelling humans to sin (Job 34:12; Hab 1:13; Jas 1:13–16); indeed, he does not need to because of the next point. (3) *Human Depravity*—Humans are innately fallen and twisted away from God in all their natural inclinations; depravity renders us nascently and instinctively antipathetic toward God apart from his gracious intervention (Gen 6:5; Rom 1:18–32; Eph 2:1–9).

If we ask, "Who hardened Pharaoh's heart, God or Pharaoh?" the textually indisputable answer is, "Yes." God hardened Pharaoh's heart and Pharaoh hardened his heart. If we ask, "Who *first* hardened Pharaoh's heart, God or Pharaoh?," one would think the answer should be just as textually indisputable. And yet dispute continues to smolder.

> Some scholars insist that God's role here is responsive, confirming Pharaoh's decision to harden his own heart; others insist that God's role is creative, causing Pharaoh to harden his heart. The debate is heated because these passages in Exodus form the backdrop for the most famous hardening text, Romans 9:18.[3]

This debate was recently revisited publicly in John Piper's monumental work, *Providence*. This article will use Piper's treatment of the issue as its primary point of reference and engagement, though it will also interact with other significant treatments along the way. Because there is so much that I love and appreciate about this book (see my review in this issue of *JBTW*), this article should be

[1] Dr. Layton Talbert is professor of theology at BJU Seminary and the author of *Not by Chance: Learning to Trust a Sovereign God* (Greenville, SC: BJU Press, 2001), *Beyond Suffering: Discovering the Message of Job* (Greenville, SC: BJU Press, 2007), and *The Trustworthiness of God's Words* (Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus, 2022).

[2] I am inclined to call these "presuppositions," but not in the sense that they precede or originate outside of Scripture; they are *biblical* presuppositions grounded in the broader revelation of Scripture and brought to bear on a passage that may not necessarily mention them explicitly. In that sense, John Piper would call them not presuppositions but biblical *conclusions*. *Providence* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2020), 411–12.

[3] D. J. Moo, "Hardening," *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander, Brian S. Rosner, D. A. Carson, Graeme Goldsworthy (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000), 533.

construed not as an inimical polemic but as a friendly critique.[4] First, however, it will be helpful to identify the major views on the hardening of Pharaoh's heart (two of which are identified in Moo's statement above).

Three Views on Pharaonic Hardening

No one who takes seriously the authority of the biblical account of Exodus can deny that, as far as the text is concerned, both God and Pharaoh had a hand in the hardening of Pharaoh's heart. Raising the issue of *precedence* or *cause*, however, immediately raises theological hackles. Who hardened Pharaoh's heart first, God or Pharaoh himself? Why did God harden Pharaoh's heart? Was it because Pharaoh first hardened his own heart? If not, how can that be fair, or how can Pharaoh be held accountable for his refusal to release God's people from bondage?

Three basic approaches may be differentiated here with minimal elaboration. (1) *Responsive/ Retributive View.*[5] This view explains God's hardening of Pharaoh's heart as God's *judicial response* to Pharaoh's prior hardening of his own heart. By virtue of his own prior self-hardening, Pharaoh was entirely culpable and therefore God is entirely just. The weakness of this explanation is that it is too narrow and does not take enough into account.[6] (2) *Creative/Causative/Determinative View.* This view explains God's hardening of Pharaoh as exclusively God's sovereign decision and action, entirely irrespective of anything that Pharaoh did or was. By virtue of his own unconditional and sovereign determination to harden Pharaoh, God is entirely just and Pharaoh is accountable, though "how God freely hardens and yet preserves human accountability, we are not told."[7] The weakness of this explanation, likewise, is its explanatory narrowness and its failure to adequately factor in other important doctrines. (3) *Conjunctive/Concurrent View.* This view sees God's hardening not as divine retribution *because* of Pharaoh's prior self-hardening (View 1) but nevertheless entirely *in keeping with* Pharaoh's own innate depravity and native hardness. Because he, like all of us, was born in sinful rebellion against God (Rom 1, 3), he did not need to "harden himself" or do anything to warrant

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[4] It is appropriate that I preface this article with a warm acknowledgement of my appreciation for John Piper's writings. Decades ago, reading his book *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist* (New York: Multnomah, 1986, 1996, 2003, 2011) was a life-changing experience for my view of and relationship to God. His book *God's Passion for His Glory: Living the Vision of Jonathan Edwards* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1998), introducing, featuring, and interacting with one of Edwards's most paradigm-shifting sermons ("The End for Which God Created the World"), is a treasure. I have the greatest respect for him as a theologian and an older brother in Christ.

[5] I am not aware that these views have been labeled the way I am labeling them; some of these terms I have drawn from words sometimes used to describe these varying views, while others are my attempt to summarize them succinctly.

[6] My explanation in *Not by Chance* needs some clarification: "God did, in time, add his judicial hardening to the process. But in doing so he was not forcing Pharaoh to choose contrary to his own desire or inclination. He was merely confirming Pharaoh in his hardness, in keeping with the choices and inclinations Pharaoh had himself already expressed—the 'free acts' he himself initiated" (90). The functional word (in my intention) was "confirming," suggesting View 3; however, the word "merely" seems to imply that God's hardening was *exclusively* responsive and secondary. While I believe the textual data in Exodus (see this article's Appendix), along with the additional theological argumentation developed in this article, still support the rest of the statement, I think the fuller scriptural depiction of this phenomenon goes beyond the "mere" responsive/retributive view.

[7] Piper, *Providence,* 444.

God's hardening. If God responded this way to everyone whose heart was, from birth, already hard against him and his will, there would be no hope for any of us and no one would be saved (so thank God for Rom 9:15). All of us are altogether conceived with a predisposition contrary to God (Ps 51:5; Rom 3:10ff.). The same was true of Pharaoh.

View 3 is the position from which I will be operating in this article, and it is important to distinguish it from the other views. View 3 does not negate the emphasis of View 1 on God's justice; but a strict causal explanation (View 1) can be as misleading as a strict sovereignty explanation (View 2). God does not harden *because* we are depraved, nor does he harden only when and because we act on our depraved inclinations; if that were the case, he would harden everyone. God is, however, entirely just in hardening the depraved because whenever he chooses to do that, his hardening is always concurrent with the inclinations of their own depravity. Nor does View 3 exclude or minimize divine sovereignty.[8] God may be said to be the ultimate cause for Pharaoh's hardening since he is (by virtue of his omniscience, omnipotence, and creation) the ultimate cause for everything.[9] My objection to View 2 (like View 1) is its exclusivity and consequent minimizing of the relevance of depravity to the issue. At least part of the Scripture's presentation and explanation of the mystery of divine sovereignty vis-à-vis human responsibility includes the doctrine of human depravity. As pedestrian as that observation may seem, it is surprising how frequently it is left unmentioned.

To be clear, then, *I am not arguing* that God hardened Pharaoh's heart only because and/or in response to Pharaoh's hardening of his own heart. In fact, *I am not even arguing* that God necessarily hardened Pharaoh's heart only after Pharaoh actively hardened his own heart (though, in my opinion, that seems to be the natural implication of the grammatical progression of the text). Rather, on the basis particularly of the biblical doctrines I enumerated in the introduction, *I am arguing* that in hardening Pharaoh's heart, God was hardening a heart that was, from birth and by native disposition, depraved and aligned against God, and that this is part of the Bible's explanation of the hardness, and hardening, of Pharaoh's heart.[10] Finally, I will also propose a biblical illustration that I believe sheds

[8] Even the earliest reference to the entire God-Pharaoh encounter—which is not Exodus 4:21 but Exodus 3:19–20—may convey the sovereignty of God's determination: "But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go unless compelled by a mighty hand. So I will stretch out my hand and strike Egypt with all the wonders that I will do in it; after that he will let you go." The Hebrew verb *know* [*yada'*] may convey not merely divine prescience but also divine determination. As the encounter progresses through Exodus, God even sees to it that Pharaoh is not permitted to weasel out of the consequences of his refusal until God is done displaying to Egypt and the nations his glory over Egypt and Pharaoh (Exod 9:16; Rom 9:17). Exodus 3:19—which is surprisingly missing from Piper's treatments of this subject—is one reason I acknowledge the ultimacy of God's sovereignty, just not its exclusivity, as an explanation.

[9] Such a statement (to borrow from Tolkien) "stands upon the edge of a knife." In describing God as the ultimate cause of all things, I am not saying (1) that God "created evil"—a somewhat nonsensical assertion that betrays a fundamental misconception of what "evil" is, as I have briefly argued in a blogpost titled "The Problem of 'Evil': What Is It?"; accessed 12 October 2023, https://g3min.org/the-problem-of-evil-what-is-it/. Nor am I saying (2) that God compels people to sin in contradiction to or conflict with their own nature and native disposition. I am saying (a) that had God not "made the world and everything [and everyone] in it" (Acts 17:24) none of what we do or experience would have happened, and (b) "that in choosing whom to treat with hardening and whom to treat with mercy, God is not constrained by anything outside himself" (Piper, 440), but he is certainly constrained by what he is within himself.

[10] It is also important to clarify up front that none of the views described boil down to a simplistic confrontation between Calvinism versus Arminianism, nor do they signify just *how* Calvinistic one is. We are all trying to understand

light on the methodology of God's providence in conjunction with human responsibility, and particularly in relation to divine hardening.

Engaging a Recent Presentation of the Hardness of Pharaoh's Heart

Set within the much larger context of a study of God's providence, John Piper's presentation of the hardening of Pharaoh begins by observing that God intended to harden Pharaoh's heart before Moses ever returned to Egypt. "The earliest statement to this effect is Exodus 4:21," where God expressly foretells his intention to harden Pharaoh's heart. The next reference to "hardness" is 7:3, another expression of God's intention. At least two statements explain why God intended to do this: to display and multiply his signs in Egypt (Exod 10:1–2; 11:9).[11] Piper then underscores the importance of this data:

> The point I am making is that God's hardening of Pharaoh's heart was not a mere response to Pharaoh's self-hardening. It was a plan from the beginning. Not only that, but it can be shown that Pharaoh's being hardened, and even his self-hardening, is the effect of God's hardening, not its cause. Many people deny this and point out that the explicit statement that God hardened Pharaoh's heart occurs first in Exodus 9:12, *after* Pharaoh had already twice hardened his own heart (8:15, 32). They infer from this that God's hardening is the effect of Pharaoh's self-hardening.
>
> But there is a serious problem with that inference. We have seen that *before* the encounters with Pharaoh begin, God said to Moses, "I will harden his heart" (4:21). But what we have not yet seen, which is absolutely crucial to see, is that Moses (the author of Exodus) refers back to this promise four times as he describes Pharaoh's hardening. In other words, four times Moses tells us that the hardening is happening "as the Lord had said." And it is all-important to remember what, in fact, the Lord had said when it says, "as the Lord had said." What he said was, "I will harden his heart." He had *not* said, "He will harden his own heart."[12]

A number of interpreters, like Piper, load an enormous amount of freight on the expression "as the Lord had said" (7:13, 22; 8:15, 19), linking it back to God's statement that he would harden Pharaoh's heart (4:21; 7:3).[13] An exegetical elephant residing in 8:15, however, seems to receive

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exactly what the text says and how it says it, and we are all doing so within the larger framework of biblical and theological ideas that we are carrying with us into the text in order to understand and explain what the text itself may not state directly.

[11] Piper, *Providence,* 436–37. I have already hinted at the relevance of Exodus 3:19–20 as an even earlier expression of the divine intention (note 8 above); indeed, the divine intention is hinted at, however vaguely, even as early as Genesis 15:13–14.

[12] Ibid., 438 (emphasis original).

[13] G. K. Beale states that this phrase in 7:13 "is probably the most significant in the plague narrative complex, especially as it pertains to the *cause* of the hardening." See "An Exegetical and Theological Consideration of the Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart in Exodus 4–14 and Romans 9," *TJ* 5NS (1984): 140 (emphasis original). James Hamilton makes a similar argument in *God's Glory in Salvation Through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 92.

insufficient attention; it is the first explicit reference to Pharaoh's actively hardening his own heart ". . . as the Lord had said." But as Piper notes, God never said that Pharaoh would harden his own heart. How does he interpret this seeming conflict?

> What is remarkable is that, in Exodus 8:15, Pharaoh's self-hardening is traced back to God's hardening: "He hardened his heart . . . as the Lord had said." That is, he hardened his heart, as it was said, "[the Lord] will harden his heart." The point is this: whether it says that Pharaoh hardened his own heart (8:15) or that his heart "was hardened" (8:19), in each case the hardening is happening "as the Lord had said." And what he had said was, "I will harden Pharaoh's heart." This means that behind the "self-hardening" and behind the "being hardened" were the plan and purpose of God to harden. God's hardening is not described as a response to what Pharaoh does. It's the other way around. What Pharaoh does—his self-hardening—is described as the effect of what God does.[14]

The ellipsis in 8:15 above—omitting the phrase "and he would not listen to them"—nullifies Piper's conclusion, in my opinion. Since God never said that Pharoah would harden his own heart, Piper regards the juxtaposition between God's saying that he would harden Pharaoh's heart (4:21; 7:3) and the statement that Pharaoh hardened his own heart "as the Lord had said" (8:15) as proof that Pharaoh's self-hardening and God's hardening of Pharaoh are one and the same phenomenon.[15] That same anomalous juxtaposition compels others, however, to wonder whether such an interpretation is correctly identifying the connection to what "the Lord had said." Exodus 7:13 and 22, 8:15 and 19 *all* cite one explicit statement that God *did*, in fact, make—not in 4:21 or 7:3, but in 7:4.[16]

> "But *I will harden Pharaoh's heart*, and though I multiply my signs and wonders in the land of Egypt, ***Pharaoh will not listen to you***. Then I will lay my hand on Egypt and bring my hosts, my people the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great acts of judgment." (Exod 7:3–4 ESV)[17]

> . . . Pharaoh's heart was hard, and he did not listen to them, as the LORD had said. (Exod 7:13 CSB)[18]

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[14] Piper, *Providence,* 439.

[15] Cf. Piper, *The Justification of God: An Exegetical & Theological Study of Romans 9:1–23* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 165, 168. Hamilton, 149, comes to essentially the same conclusion but without explicitly calling attention to the elephant. Because of the phrase "as the Lord had said," 8:15 "cannot refer to Pharaoh *independently* hardening his heart" even though he is the grammatical subject of the statement.

[16] While Piper actually quotes 7:4 two pages earlier (436), it is otherwise missing from the book's Scripture index and is entirely absent from Piper's explanation of the relevance of the phrase, "as the Lord had said."

[17] The ESV of Exodus 7:3–4 appropriately reflects the grammatical connection between the two verses.

[18] The CSB (correctly, in my opinion) translates the verbs in 7:13, 22, and 8:19 as statives, not passives (see Appendix). The passive rendering "was hardened" is a translational choice that artificially privileges the assumption that those instances imply that Pharoah's heart "was hardened" by God.

> . . . Pharaoh's heart was hard, and he would not listen to them, as the LORD had said. (Exod 7:22 CSB)

> . . . Pharaoh . . . hardened his heart and would not listen to them, as the LORD had said. (Exod 8:15 CSB)

> . . . Pharaoh's heart was hard, and he would not listen to them, as the LORD had said. (Exod 8:19 CSB)

In every case the text directly links "as the Lord had said" not to God's hardening of Pharaoh's heart (8:15 is the exception) but to his predicted refusal to listen to them—something God has actually been saying even *before* 4:21 (see 3:19). Establishing a theological point by creating an ellipsis that omits the one thing God actually did say ("he would not listen to them") looks too much like the theology is driving the exegesis rather than the exegesis defining and refining the theology.

Now, are God's hardening and Pharaoh's refusal linked? Of course. Could 7:13, 7:22, 8:19, and even 8:15 be understood to imply that Pharaoh's hardness and self-hardening are an evidence or manifestation of God's hardening? Yes. But that conclusion is subject to at least as much critique as the interpretation that 7:13, 22 and 8:15, 19 reflect Pharaoh's refusal to listen to God because of his inborn fallen hardness against God, already demonstrated in 5:2; indeed, his personal culpability is repeatedly underscored throughout the encounter (8:32; 9:17, 34; 10:3; 13:15; cf. 18:11). Piper is correct that God's plan from the beginning was to harden Pharaoh's heart, by virtue of his own independent sovereign determination to magnify himself in the eyes of Pharaoh, the Egyptians, the Israelites, and all the nations (Exod 3:19–20). That does not, however, necessitate the conclusion (scripturally, theologically, or logically) that the sole explanation for every single reference to Pharaoh's hardness was the direct result of nothing but divine activity in the heart of Pharaoh. Nor does it make any attempt to explain what, precisely, was the *nature* of that divine hardening. Pharaoh's depravity (like yours and mine) not only rendered him incapable of mustering in himself any desire or disposition that would please God, but also thoroughly furnished him for every evil work (to turn 2 Tim 3:17 on its head). So why *did* God "harden" him instead of just leaving him alone? We will return to that question later.

Theological Juxtapositions

Within the expansive horizons of his work on God's providence, Piper frequently makes really insightful observations and qualifications about our understanding of the workings of providence. Some of them would, I think, go a long way toward providing a more robust explanation of the hardening of Pharaoh's heart, if they were consistently applied to that phenomenon as well. It seems to me that a view of divine sovereignty can become *so* dominating and all-inclusive that it begins marginalizing the relevance and explanatory power of other equally biblical doctrines.

Divine Providence and Divine Integrity

"That which is undefined leads astray." One of Aristotle's most frequently cited quotations is as applicable to theology as to any other field. Ambiguous theological writing can be a seedbed of potential error if theologians do not carefully clarify and qualify their terminology. Accordingly, Piper fences his language regarding God's providence in order to defend God's moral integrity amid the murky waters where the current of God's purposeful sovereignty over human actions meets and mixes with the current of human responsibility for those actions.

> Whatever verb I use to describe God's relation to human choices, I always mean a kind of 'seeing to it' (providence) that never means God sins, or that man is not accountable for his choices. To be specific, God can see to it that sin happens without himself sinning or taking away the responsibility of the sinner. This is not a presupposition. It is a conclusion from biblical texts.[19]

For example, in dealing with passages that seem to describe God's apparent involvement in deception, he writes that

> we are led to think of God's deception in the same way we think about his regretting [e.g., 1 Sam 15:29]. Just as his regretting seems to compromise his divine omniscience, so his sending a lying spirit (1 Kings 22:22), or his deceiving a prophet (Ezek. 14:9), or his sending delusion (2 Thess. 2:11) seems to compromise God's truthfulness. But the point of 1 Samuel 15:29 is that what looks like sinful, human lying or regretting in God is, in fact, *not* that.[20]

How does God do that? Piper answers: "We are not told *how* God prevents his providence in deceit from being sinful."[21] It just is not, and we know it is not because we know God's character, and we can know God's character because of his self-revelation in Scripture.[22] Everyone agrees that a curtain of mystery descends at some point on our understanding of the workings of providence. Where we disagree is when that curtain drops. Granted, there are moments where revelation ends and the curtain of mystery must drop, but Piper's curtain cue here seems both unnecessary and awkward: "With God, there is a kind of regretting and a kind of deceiving, that is not like man's regretting and man's deceiving."[23] But is not "a *kind* of deceiving" still "a kind of *deceiving*"? To put an even finer point on it, we might just as well say that God *does* lie, he just doesn't lie like men lie.[24] That is not just unsatisfying; it is problematic. We have no right to demand a satisfying explanation where the

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[19] Piper, *Providence,* 411–12.

[20] Ibid., 473.

[21] Ibid., 473.

[22] See Talbert, *Trustworthiness of God's Word,* chapters 4 and 5.

[23] Piper, *Providence*, 473.

[24] Numbers 23:19 does not say that God does not lie like men do; it says that God is not like men (who lie) because he does not lie; in fact, he cannot lie (Titus 1:2).

Bible is silent. But we do have the right to ask whether the Bible really is silent, and whether the Bible itself might not provide a more satisfying explanation.

The focus of this article, however, is not divine deception or divine repentance,[25] but God's hardening of Pharaoh—a phenomenon that also compels us to acknowledge some degree of mystery. The question is, at what point do we invoke that final, silencing answer of "mystery"? Graham Cole concedes,

> God is mysterious. But there are genuine problems thrown up by revelation that require clarification, and those clarifications need to be argued and therefore justified. . . . Do we simply say 'Mystery!' and be done with it? Or do we attempt to offer a plausible account of how such a joint action (double agency) may be possible?[26]

Sometimes those clarifications may be of a logical nature. Scripture compels us—on the basis of clear exegetical and biblical theological data—to hold simultaneously that Jesus is fully God and genuinely human. The church has attempted to clarify and justify that revealed reality without mitigating the textual data on either side, and without resolving the tension of that mystery. Likewise, in the area of bibliology, concursive inspiration (aka dynamic inspiration[27]) attempts to clarify and justify the simultaneous human and divine source of Scripture. In coming to such conclusions (to borrow Piper's language), "[we] have not removed a mystery; [we] have stated a mystery"—which is precisely where Piper lands on the issue of Pharaoh's hardness.[28] When all is said and done, Piper concludes, mystery remains.

> God's hardening does not make human fault impossible; it makes it certain. Here is our familiar mystery: people who are thus hardened against[29] God are really guilty. They have real fault. They really deserved to be judged. There is no injustice with God. And it was God who decided who would be in that condition and who would be rescued from it in mercy. If we demand an explanation for *how* this can be . . . we will probably be disappointed in this life. I do not offer such an explanation. I say what I see in the word: God hardens whom he wills, and man is accountable.[30]

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[25] On the issue of divine repentance, I think the Bible provides ample material for a more satisfying answer than "God's regretting is not like man's regretting and there's an end of it." See "'Greater Is He Than Man Can Know': Divine Repentance and a Brief Inquiry into Anthropomorphism & Anthropopathism, Impassibility & Affectability" *JBTW* 2, no. 2 (Spring 2022): 73–93.

[26] *He Who Gives Life: The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2007), 56.

[27] Christopher W. Morgan and Robert A. Peterson, *A Concise Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2020), 95.

[28] Piper, *Providence*, 443.

[29] Based on all he has argued, however, I would assume that Piper means not merely "hardened against God" but hardened *by* God.

[30] Piper, *Providence*, 440–41.

But there is much more than this to be seen in the Word. When it comes to the question of *how* "people . . . hardened against God are really guilty," this is not where revelation dead-ends.

Elsewhere in his book, Piper justifiably faults Islam for isolating and elevating one divine attribute above all others, viz., absolute sovereignty. "So," he concludes, "no attribute of God should ever be considered in isolation from other biblical doctrines and other attributes of God."[31] Quite so. It is to some of those other biblical doctrines and attributes of God that we now turn.

Divine Providence and Human Depravity

One of the most foundational doctrines of the Bible's redemptive storyline is human depravity. That reality, I propose, goes a long way towards a biblically informed explanation of how God can harden and yet hold humans responsible. All of us are born equally twisted away from God and in on ourselves (Pss 51:5; 58:3; Eph 2:1–5; Col 2:13). Piper concedes this.

> To be sure, all human beings, in themselves, are unworthy of being shown mercy and deserve judgment. One could say, then, that human sinfulness is the cause of hardening. But that is not the question. The question is not why anyone might be hardened. The question is, why this one and not that one, since both are sinful and undeserving?[32]

To that question there is only one scriptural answer: the sovereign choice of God. But that is not the *only* question Piper raises in his discussion of divine providence and the hardening of Pharaoh. He raises the additional question of *how* God's sovereign choice (specifically to harden) can be reconciled with human responsibility. And his repeated answer is that we simply do not know: "How God freely hardens and yet preserves human accountability, we are not told."[33] That is the answer I wish to dispute here because, to some degree, we *are* told. We *do* know something of how sovereign hardening and human responsibility can both be true. The Bible's answer is located in the doctrine of depravity; God's hardening of Pharaoh is—not in response to, nor because of, but—entirely consistent (concurrent) with "the hardness of [his own] heart" (Eph 4:17–18).[34] So, while it is true that "it was not the nature of the clay that determined what God would do with it,"[35] it is also true that the (depraved) nature of the clay determines—that is, explains and vindicates—how God's fashioning of one vessel for dishonor is entirely just and his fashioning of another vessel for honor is entirely merciful.

Perhaps Piper does not intend to dichotomize so radically between divine providence and human depravity when it comes to explaining human responsibility. There is no questioning of his adherence to the doctrine of depravity. He appeals to it elsewhere as well, in justifying Jesus' concealment of truth from some hearers: "Jesus is not dealing with neutral people, but with sinful people who deserve

[31] Piper, *Providence*, 403.

[32] Ibid., 440.

[33] Ibid., Cf. 417–18, 441.

[34] Paul uses the same Greek term in Romans 11:7, 25 to describe Israel's hardening.

[35] Piper, *Providence*, 443.

judgment. But keep in mind that there are *no* neutral people."[36] That includes Pharaoh. What seems confusing, however, is the appeal to mystery when it comes to coordinating divine providence (and specifically hardening) and human responsibility. Repeatedly, the mystery curtain is cued to drop just as the doctrine of depravity is brushing up its lines and preparing to make its entrance on the stage of this discussion.[37]

Piper commends "a biblical mindset that seems to have a built-in presupposition that God, with perfect justice, holiness, goodness, and wisdom, guides the good and evil human choices of all humans. This mindset is, by and large, foreign to our modern world." Instead, the world fixates on the apparent contradiction of this proposition. "Many insist that humans (not God) must provide the final and decisive cause in the instant of decision, or else the decision cannot be justly praised or blamed. That is, they insist on ultimate human *self*-determination in the act of choosing, if there is to be moral accountability. The Bible does not share this assumption."[38]

Granted. But this is precisely where the doctrine of depravity provides a robust and scripturally grounded clarification of the relationship between divine determination and moral accountability, particularly with respect to blameworthy decisions such as Pharaoh's.[39] For example, Piper rejects the following syllogism as invalid:

Premise 1: God holds all human beings accountable for their moral choices.
Premise 2: John is a human being.
Conclusion: Therefore, John has ultimate self-determination.[40]

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[36] Piper, *Providence*, 466.

[37] Why does Piper seem to give so little attention to the biblical doctrine of depravity as at least part of the Bible's explanation of how God can harden an individual such as Pharaoh and yet hold him accountable? I suspect there are a couple of reasons. (1) He is convinced that such an argument forms no part of Paul's explanation in Romans 9:19–24, which he sees as emphasizing God's sovereignty to the exclusion (it seems) of any other consideration; as I will argue below, I am convinced that Paul wrote Romans 9 in the full light of Romans 1–3 and expected his readers to do the same. (2) The establishment of divine sovereignty as the bottom line explanation for everything (including double predestination) can result in making divine sovereignty the *only* explanation for anything, to the minimizing of other equally biblical doctrinal factors and explanations; those, like Piper, who hold to double predestination seem to hold a similar view of Pharaoh's hardness in which divine actions deemed hard to reconcile with the divine character or with human responsibility are left at the door of mystery. In terms of explanation, divine sovereignty not only trumps but (it seems) replaces all other (even equally biblical) explanations; it is an approach that sets apart such theological explanations even from those of other equally Reformed/Calvinistic theologians. I had not appreciated that connection before writing this article. Cf. Richard Monserrat Blaylock, "Vessels of Wrath: A Biblical Theological Study of Divine Reprobating Activity" (PhD diss., The Southern Theological Seminary, 2021).

[38] Piper, *Providence*, 414.

[39] Christopher J. H. Wright highlights Pharaoh's culpability: "This is the man who intensified his predecessor's unjust oppression of an immigrant ethnic minority to unbearably cruel extremes in chapter 5. Nobody made him do that. This is the man who persists in rejecting every request and every warning that he receives from Moses and God, even after his own magicians recognize the finger of God, and his whole government pleads with him to see sense and halt the destruction of his country and suffering of his people. Nobody made him do that. This the man who admits he is in the wrong, confesses his sin, and then chooses the same devastating path time and time again. Nobody made him do that." *Exodus*, The Story of God Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic), 225, Kindle.

[40] Piper, *Providence*, 415.

The syllogism is, indeed, flawed (both formally and theologically). The overlooked doctrine of depravity, however, could reframe the syllogism to reach a conclusion that is not only helpful but biblical.

Premise 1: God holds all humans accountable for their moral choices.
Premise 2: Left to himself, John neither makes nor desires righteous moral choices.
Conclusion: Therefore, God is just in holding John accountable for his moral choices.

Premise 2 provides a more full-bodied biblical expression of the interface between these doctrines and incorporates not only the principles of human depravity and divine justice but also divine sovereignty per Romans 9:15, 18. And the syllogism holds explanatory power whether the name is John, Layton, or Pharaoh.

The Bible explains our natural-born condition of alienation from God (Rom 5:10; Col 1:21), our innate predilection to evil and our preference for darkness (John 3:19), and our instinctual suppression of truth (Rom 1:18ff).[41] This biblical doctrine impacts how we can explain Pharaoh's responsibility and how we understand Pharaoh's hardness and hardening.

First, it explains other references that display Pharaoh's own predisposition prior to any textual reference to the actual hardening of Pharaoh's heart. I will not here belabor the data of hardening in Exodus. I have tried to provide a thorough and accurate listing of that data in an Appendix at the end of this article. Here is the bottom line, however. It seems grammatically indisputable that the first *direct* and *explicit statement* (subject + verb + object) that God (subject) hardened (verb) Pharaoh's heart (object) appears in Exodus 9:12, after two equally direct and explicit statements that Pharaoh (subject) hardened (verb) his heart (object) in 8:15, 32. One is, of course, perfectly free to interpret all the statements prior to 9:12 as implicit references to divine hardening (7:13, 14, 22; 8:19; 9:7); but in view of the indirectness of the grammar, one is compelled to a theologically guided decision. According to Piper, such a decision rests on one of only two opposing theological positions: ultimate divine sovereignty or ultimate human self-determination.[42] I am proposing that human depravity be factored into the discussion as well. Douglas Moo distinguishes the hardening of Romans 9 from "the 'handing over' of sinners to the sin that they had already chosen for themselves" in Romans 1 (vv. 24, 26, 28) and thinks it unlikely that Paul would expect his readers to make any connection between the two passages. "The 'hardening' Paul portrays here," rather, "is a sovereign act of God that is not *caused* by anything in those individuals who are hardened."[43] But that begs the question, because the fact remains that the divine hardening Paul portrays in Romans 9 is nevertheless entirely consistent and concurrent with the fallen condition of humanity that Paul portrays in Romans 1–3.

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[41] At least part of the Bible's explanation for our inherited depravity is our moral and biological connection to Adam as our representative, federal head (Rom 5), but that far exceeds the scope of this essay.

[42] Piper, *Providence*, 414, 416.

[43] Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans,* NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 597–98. It is hard to imagine that Paul would expect his readers to interpret what he says in chapter 9 in isolation from what he said in chapters 1–3 (more on that below).

Second, the text includes other statements that confirm and corroborate the depravity factor by laying the blame on Pharaoh's arrogant and stubborn refusal. God explicitly blames Pharaoh for *exalting himself* against God's people (9:17), *sinning yet again* (9:34),[44] and *refusing to humble himself* before God (10:3); moreover, Moses instructs the Israelites to explain to their future generations that it was Pharaoh's *own stubborn refusal* that led to God's destruction of Egypt's firstborn (13:15). One need not capitulate to the ultimacy of human self-determination in order to acknowledge that God's sovereignty in hardening Pharaoh—whatever the precise interplay between divine hardening and self-hardening—was entirely conjunctive and concurrent with the hardness of Pharaoh's own depraved heart and that he, therefore, remains entirely responsible and accountable for his actions.[45] Why should we ignore the Scripture's own express explanation for this otherwise befuddling juxtaposition of divine activity and human culpability? Commenting on God's censure of Pharaoh's self-exaltation in Exodus 9:17, Douglas Stuart writes:

> The irony of God's upbraiding of Pharaoh in v. 17 is that Pharaoh could not help himself (any longer) and yet well deserved the criticism he received. It was both his natural inclination to keep the Israelites suppressed and localized (cf. 1:9–10) and the attitude subsequently fixed in him by God as a humiliation and punishment. Pharaoh's behavior mirrors the phenomenon described by Paul in Rom. 1:18–32, that of people being fixed by God in the sinful behavior patterns that would eventually bring about their destruction as a punishment for those very behavior patterns. In other words, one of the ways God punishes sin is to allow the sin to continue and therefore to allow it to take its natural, destructive course. Behind this is the biblical truth that people cannot rescue themselves from their own sin; they always need help to break the patterns of sin in their lives. If God withholds that help, they become fixed in those patterns, will see the harmful effects increasingly during their lives, and will die in those sins. Pharaoh had long ago "set [him]self against [God's] people and [would] not let them go," and he was still doing the same. God's hardening of Pharaoh's heart—making him remain stubborn—serves as a punishment although the action itself is also a sin.[46]

The Argument of Romans 9

Some may object that this explanation—that the Bible coordinates how God can sovereignly choose to harden Pharaoh and yet still hold him accountable in terms of innate human depravity—does not match Paul's justification of God exclusively on the grounds of divine sovereignty in Romans 9:19–20ff. Piper protests against those who say,

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[44] "The text explicitly marks the action stemming from Pharaoh's hard heart as sin (9:34)." Michael P. V. Barrett, *The Gospel of Exodus: Misery, Deliverance, Gratitude* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2020), 95.

[45] Wright points out the same dynamic at the other end of Israel's history in the exile: "At a human level, it was the imperial policy of Babylon and the personal decisions of Nebuchadnezzar that destroyed Jerusalem and carried the people into exile. But in prophetic discernment, it was Yahweh himself who had brought it about through his 'servant Nebuchadnezzar.'" *Exodus*, 223–24.

[46] Douglas Stuart, *Exodus*, NAC (Nashville: B&H, 2006), 232–33.

> "God finds fault because human beings have ultimate self-determination and use it to rebel against God." So God's hardening, they say, is not free and unconditional but is caused by man's self-determined hardness. If Paul agreed with that way of thinking, he could so easily have answered the objection of verse 19 that way. . . . How easily Paul could have answered the objection with an appeal to ultimate human self-determination! But he didn't. Because it is the wrong answer. It turns Paul's teaching on its head. Paul's point is that nothing in man explains why one is hardened and another is shown mercy. That distinction lies wholly in God, not man.[47]

I am entirely in agreement on this point; "nothing in man explains why one is hardened and another is shown mercy." On the one hand, nothing in man explains why *anyone* is shown mercy. On the other hand, everything in man explains why *anyone* is hardened, why God is entirely justified in hardening, and why the one thus hardened is nevertheless entirely responsible and accountable.[48] God's hardening is entirely consistent and concurrent with man's depravity. I am not taking issue with the divine discrimination factor; I am asserting that human accountability is explained by human depravity and questioning the premature call for mystery in that regard, as though we do not know how divine hardening and human accountability can coexist.

One might object to the relevance of human depravity, since Paul does not include it in his answer to the objection of Romans 9:19. If the solution to divine justice in hardening is as simple as universal innate human sinfulness, then why does Paul not offer that as part of his justification of God in Romans 9:20–24? Because he already spent the first three chapters of the letter developing a detailed doctrinal justification for the wrath of God on humanity. Insisting on Romans 1–3 as the intentional and indispensable background to one's reading of Romans 9 is not turning Paul's teaching on its head. Why does he not mention human depravity again in Romans 9? In view of Romans 1–3, why should he have to? But in fact, he does allude to it.

Affirming God's sovereign choice in Romans 9:18, Paul entertains the objection, "Why does he still find fault?" (9:20). His response to that objection begins with a direct appeal not to human responsibility but to God's absolute, incontestable sovereignty: "But who are you, O man, to answer back to God?" (9:18–24).[49] But that is not *all* he says. Besides opening the letter with three chapters underscoring the massive ramifications of universal human depravity, Paul proceeds to apply his discussion and Pharaonic illustration of divine sovereignty to the major point under discussion in chapters 9–11: how do we explain Israel's widescale rejection of their Messiah? In 9:30–32 he asks,

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[47] Piper, *Providence*, 442–43. Cf. 440, 441.

[48] I am indebted to my friend and colleague David Saxon for suggesting this clarifying juxtaposition of statements.

[49] Some have asserted, "If you read Paul's answer to the objection in 9:19 and say, 'Ah, now I see, that's fair; that makes sense to me,' then you have not correctly understood Paul's argument." I find this disconcerting on two points: (1) it implies that divine justice is, in the end, irrelevant, but more importantly, (2) it ignores the rest of Paul's answer, not only back in Romans 1–3 but also in the remainder of the context of chapter 9, notably 9:30–33.

> What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith; but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law. Why?

That is the same question Paul entertained back in 9:19 (though the Greek construction is slightly different). His answer here is significant because (a) it corrects the tunnel vision of looking at 9:19–24 in isolation and assuming that divine sovereignty is the whole explanation for Israel's (or Pharaoh's) hardness; and (b) it provides a fuller, more robust answer grounded in the doctrinal reality of Romans 1–3. In answering this "Why?" Paul does not reiterate the argument of divine sovereignty from 9:20ff. (though he could have). Instead, he emphasizes the component of human fallenness and responsibility:

> Because *they did not pursue it by faith*, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone, as it is written, "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame." (Rom 9:30–33)

One may well observe that the Gentiles' attainment of righteousness and Israel's failure in that regard is to be explained in terms of the principle of 9:18 and God's sovereign decision regarding showing mercy and hardening. Nevertheless, Paul's *full* answer involves at least two major complementary doctrinal components, neither of which negates, invalidates, trumps, or replaces the other: divine sovereignty and human depravity. Moo recognizes the two-pronged nature of Paul's argument in Romans 9.

> In 9:6–29, Paul explains this turn of events in terms of God's sovereign choosing. In this second stage of his argument [9:30ff.], he puts the responsibility for Israel's failure on their own shoulders, faulting their stubborn failure to respond appropriately to God's revelation in Christ.[50]

It would be wrong-headed to read Romans 9:30–33 in isolation, assume it is the entirety of Paul's answer, and conclude that God's sovereign choice has nothing to do with who is saved. It is equally wrong-headed to read 9:18–23 in isolation, assume it is Paul's whole answer, and conclude that human fallenness, culpability, and responsibility have nothing to do with who is not saved. While he does not shine the doctrinally relevant light of Romans 1–3 as directly on his discussion of Romans 9 as I think it deserves, Moo (elsewhere) nevertheless captures the necessity of this doctrinal complementarity between divine sovereignty and human depravity:

> Without pretending that it solves all our problems, we must recognize that God's hardening is an act directed against human beings who are already in rebellion against God's righteous rule. God's hardening does not, then, *cause* spiritual insensitivity to the things of God; it maintains people in the state of sin that already characterizes them. This does not mean . . . that God's decision about whom to harden is based on a particular degree of sinfulness within certain human beings; he hardens "whomever he chooses." But it is imperative that we maintain side-by-side the

[50] Douglas J. Moo, *A Theology of Paul and His Letters* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2021), 232.

> complementary truths that (1) God hardens whomever he chooses; (2) human beings, because of sin, are responsible for their ultimate condemnation. Thus God's bestowing of mercy and his hardening are not equivalent acts. God's mercy is given to those who do not deserve it; his hardening affects those who have already by their sin deserved condemnation.[51]

Divine Providence and Human Comprehension

Piper rightly insists that biblical doctrines may not be held hostage by human understanding. The *fact* of divine providence is unambiguous and nonnegotiable; the *means* of God's providence, however, is not always apparent or explained.

> We do not need to know how God's providence preserves human accountability. Nor should we come to the text demanding that we be told *how* God can govern sin and not be a sinner. Or *how* God can govern sinful human behavior and not turn man into a robot. We do not need to know *how*. God may or may not give us insight into the mysteries of how he does this.[52]

If God does not give us insight, Piper argues, that should be enough for us. But if he does give us insight, it is incumbent on us to factor those insights into our theological explanation and presentation of passages such as Exodus 3–14. God does, in fact, provide both doctrinal explanation and illustrative images that may inform how we understand (among other things) the hardness and hardening of Pharaoh's heart. I think we can, with biblical warrant, do better here than simply default to the concept of mystery. I will try to explain and apply those insights below.

Divine Providence as Divine Permission

Piper acknowledges that one of the avenues through which divine providence functions is permission. With respect to the Fall, for example, what God knew in his omniscience would happen ("that Adam and Eve would sin and bring ruin on his creation") he "chose to permit."[53] God neither tempted nor compelled them to sin, but neither did he prevent either their temptation or their sinning (as he could have; cf. Gen 20:6). In biblically coordinating divine sovereignty and human responsibility, then, Piper says that "we may speak of God's *planning* or *ordaining* the fall in this sense. By *planning* and *ordaining* I mean simply that God could have chosen not to permit the fall, but in choosing to permit it for wise purposes, he thus planned and ordained it."[54]

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[51] Moo, *Epistle to the Romans*, 599–600 (emphasis original).

[52] Piper, *Providence*, 417–18 (emphasis original).

[53] Ibid., 176.

[54] Ibid. (emphasis original). Any objection that God's foreknowledge cancels the possibility of choosing not to permit what he already foreknows is specious (i.e., "how can God foreknow any event that he chooses not to permit, for if he chooses not to permit it then its happening cannot be foreknown?"). One passage that informs our understanding of God's foreknowledge in relation to eventualities is 1 Samuel 23; God tells David that the men of Keilah would surrender him to Saul, which they never did since David uses that information to leave before Saul arrives.

Piper extends the idea of providentially "planned permissions" beyond the Fall to include all the acts of Satan.[55] This explanation may furnish insight into a biblically informed explanation of the nature and means of the hardening of Pharaoh's heart. What, exactly, is the meaning, and means, of divine hardening? Michael Barrett underscores the significance of that question:

> Notwithstanding Paul's admonition not to question God's actions or motives (Rom. 9:14, 19–23), the whole doctrine of election, as well as this particular reference to Pharaoh, has resulted in a perceived tension between God's sovereignty and human responsibility. . . . Although Scripture does not put the two in tension, there are legitimate questions as to what hardening the heart means and what God does to harden the heart. Since Paul cites Exodus in his exposition of the issue, Exodus should provide the answer to the theological question that is so vital to understanding the grace of the gospel.[56]

Piper defines hardening as "a condition of heart which renders it insensible to promptings and inflexible to will, and thus, in Pharaoh's case, adamantly opposed to God's demands."[57] What is striking about this description of hardening is its remarkable similarity to Paul's depiction of our native enmity against God from birth (what Paul calls the *flesh*): "The mind-set of the flesh is hostile to God because it does not submit to God's law. Indeed, it is unable to do so" (Rom 8:7 CSB). Richard Blaylock asserts that "divine hardening in Romans 9:18 involves a form of influence that leads to unrighteous behavior."[58] But what is the *nature* of that "influence"? Is it invasive or noninvasive, internal or external (circumstantial), active or passive? This, it seems, goes right to the heart of all our arguments about the precise chemistry between divine hardening and human hardening. Here, indeed, is a mystery. But it is not a mystery without some scriptural guidelines and guardrails.

One of those guardrails is James 1:13–15. James reminds us that God cannot tempt to evil and, what is more, he does not need to. We are equipped from birth with everything we need in this regard: "each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire." What astonishes about James's explanation of the process of sin and temptation is the complete omission of Satan in the process. Not only do we not need God to tempt us, we do not even need Satan to tempt us; we are entirely capable of manufacturing internally our own temptations and sins.[59] The depraved human heart is like a moral garbage can capable of overflowing with all manner of sin; it is God who is in

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[55] Piper, *Providence*, 276. Piper (260–76) outlines ten spheres of Satanic activity in which his actions amount to divinely planned permissions: Satan's delegated world rule, his activities through demons, his delegated life-taking power, his hand in persecution, in natural disasters, in sickness, in the natural world, in blinding unbelievers, and in spiritual bondage.

[56] *Gospel of Exodus,* 93.

[57] Piper, *Justification of God*, 161–62. That is as close as I could find to a definition of hardening in twenty pages of discussion of Pharaoh's hardening, including several pages expressly addressing "The meaning of 'hardening'" (175–78), which predominantly focuses on the soteriological ramifications of the term.

[58] Blaylock, 325.

[59] That is not, of course, to say that Satan is never involved in our temptations, only that we sin not because of what is outside of us but because of what is already inside of us (cf. Matt 15:16–20).

control of the lid, permitting or restraining what emerges. The traditional translation of Psalm 76:10 (which should not be too hastily dismissed)[60] suggests a similar divine posture toward human wrath and evil: "Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain" (KJV; cf. Geneva Bible).

Romans 9, on the other hand, offers a positive biblical image designed to point us toward an answer to the question of the nature of God's providential influence, including when it comes to hardening. The potter imagery in Romans 9:20–23 suggests at least a metaphorical illustration of the nature of that "influence." If, as Piper argues, God "plans to permit sin" and "plan[s] to permit the fall"[61] without actively compelling Adam and Eve to do so, may not this be an equally valid explanation of the divine means of hardening Pharaoh's heart?

How Does God Providentially Harden?

Psalm 33 is a magisterial hymn of praise for God's providence over every area of life, including his sovereignty not only over all nations (33:10–12) but even over all the inhabitants of all those nations (vv. 13–15).

> The LORD looks down from heaven; he sees all the children of man;
> from where he sits enthroned he looks out on all the inhabitants of the earth,
> he who fashions the hearts of them all and observes all their deeds.

Two words in verse 15 are particularly worth exploring. The first is the small but significant term *yachad* (translated above as "the hearts of them *all* [*yachad*]"). The same word appears in Psalm 141:10, traditionally translated, "Let the wicked fall into their own nets while I pass by *safely*." But the image is even more striking and ironic. The term *yachad* signifies "all together," "all at once," or "at the same

[60] While virtually all modern translations depart from this traditional rendering, all acknowledge that the Hebrew is difficult and the meaning obscure. Marvin Tate laments, "No interpretation of this verse inspires much confidence." *Psalms 51–100*, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1990), 262. Nevertheless, support for the traditional rendering still surfaces in the literature. More than one interpreter notes the significance of J. A. Emerton, "A Neglected Solution of a Problem in Psalm LXXVI 11," *VT* 24, no. 2 (Apr 1974): 136–146. For example, Daniel J. Estes remarks, "After a meticulous analysis of the text, Emerton concludes that it is best translated, 'Surely Thou dost crush the wrath of man: Thou dost restrain the remnant of wrath.'" *Psalm 73–150*, NAC (Nashville: B&H, 2019), 60. Tate notes that Emerton's reading of the consonantal text "as 'restrain' rather than 'gird'" rests on "nuances of the word in MT rather than a different reading, arguing that the translation fits well into the context of the psalm," adding that "J. Day (*VT* 31 [1981] 76–78) agrees with Emerton." Cf. also Allen Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms: 42–89* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2016), 611. C. Hassell Bullock comments on the NIV rendering, "the survivors of your wrath are restrained": "The text gives us something like 'You gird yourself with the rest of wrath(s),' perhaps suggesting that when the wrath of humankind praises God, there are still remnants of human wrath, which God then restrains. That is, in general the wrath of humankind praises God, but the remnants that do not God restrains so that they cause him no harm, even though that is the purpose of human wrath." *Psalms, Volume 2: Psalms 73–150,* Teach the Text Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2017), 27. In any case, the traditional rendering would merely be icing on a collection of texts verifying that God's providential dealing with human evil involves permitting what serves his purposes and praise, and restraining whatever does not (cf. Gen 20:6; 31:7, 24, 29; 1 Sam 25:26, 34, 39).

[61] Piper, *Providence*, 177.

time."[62] J. A. Motyer translates, "Let them fall, each in his own nets, *at the same time* as I myself continually pass by."[63] David prays that the wicked would be snared in the same nets they have laid for him (v. 9) *at the very time* he is passing by their trap.

When Psalm 33 describes God's providence over "all the inhabitants of the earth" (v. 14), he narrows the image to a point of astonishing specificity: God not only "fashions the hearts of them *all*" (ESV), but "he fashions their hearts *individually*" (NKJV)—that is, God fashions *all* the hearts of *all* the inhabitants of the earth *all at the* same *time*, *simultaneously*. What is the implication of the word *fashion? Yatzar* means to *shape* or *form*. The word occurs sixty-two times in the OT, but the term surfaces most frequently in Isaiah (27x) and Jeremiah (14x).[64] Most of these passages describe God as the Fashioner or Potter. He knows our frame (Ps 103:14), because he is the Potter that fashioned us out of clay (Gen 2:7, 8, 19). The participial form of this verb gives us the noun *potter*.

How does all this inform our understanding of Psalm 33:15 specifically, and God's sovereign, providential, and yet concurrent governing of all humans generally? God superintendingly and purposefully shapes the hearts of all people—their thoughts and decisions, choices and desires, simultaneously in order to accomplish His sovereign purposes. How does God do this? He himself provides an illustration of what might be termed the "mechanics" of both mercy and hardening in Romans 9:21–24 (cf. Isa 29:16): that of a potter. It is an inspired illustration most detailed in Jeremiah 18, when God sends the prophet to the potter's studio to observe the process firsthand.

Clay figures may be shaped free-form by hand, but vessels are crafted on a turning wheel. Left to itself, the clay would be thrown off in all directions by the centrifugal force of the wheel. The potter does not fight that centrifugal force; he harnesses it and controls it to shape the clay. He may allow (or permit) that force to have its natural effect on the clay, periodically relaxing his control and permitting it here and there to throw out a bulge. In other places, he uses the pressure of his hands to restrain the natural effects of that centrifugal force.

The centrifugal force that drives human nature and that would, if permitted, throw it off the wheel and destroy it is depravity.[65] Left to ourselves, apart from the restraining and guiding intervention of divine mercy, we naturally follow the desires of our fallen nature (Eph 2:3). I suggest that the mechanism behind Psalm 33:15 and God's providential interaction with all humans in their sin is something akin to the centrifugal force of our depravity versus the potter's controlling hands—

[62] William L. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 132; Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Boston: Brill, 2001), I:405. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles Briggs, *Hebrew-English Lexicon* (1906; reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997), 403. Another usage of note is Psalm 19:9 ("The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous *altogether*"); "altogether," however, signified *entirely, completely*. While it is true that God's decisions are *entirely* true and righteous, the psalmist seems to be affirming that they are true and righteous *all together, all at the same time*, *simultaneously*; that is, they never conflict or contradict each other.

[63] *Psalms by the Day* (Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus, 2017), 403. Derek Kidner also acknowledges the potential that *yachad* "may mean 'at the same time.'" *Psalms 73*–150, TOTC (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1973), 472.

[64] See especially Isaiah 27:11; 29:16; 30:14; 43:1, 7; 45:9; 49:5; 64:8.

[65] The analogy, like all metaphors, is not perfect; the centrifugal force of depravity is not outside but within us. The analogy holds, nevertheless, inasmuch as the clay becomes one with and is energized by the wheel.

alternately pressuring and relaxing, restraining and permitting, creating vessels of his choosing for his purposes.[66]

How can God's use of the potter illustration shape our understanding of him and his ways? First, it is a divinely chosen illustration of how God may simultaneously fashion human hearts providentially—whether concurrently and in keeping with the inclinations of our own depravity, or mercifully restraining manifestations and outworkings of our depravity that do not lend themselves to his glory and purposes. Second, the potter illustration displays not only divine sovereignty but also human responsibility, since it frequently surfaces in passages that rebuke people for their own hard-headed, hard-hearted choices (cf. Isa 29:13–16; Jer 18:9–12). Likewise, in Romans 9, both illustrations (Pharaoh and the divine Potter) display God's sovereignty within a context of human blameworthiness and accountability.[67] Third, the potter illustration also suggests a biblical metaphor for explaining the hardening process. To harden a vessel shaped by the divinely controlled centrifugal force of its own fallen nature, all the potter needs to do is leave it alone. It will harden on its own. Barrett, who earlier raised the question of "what hardening the heart means and what God does to harden the heart," makes this very point in connection with Pharaoh.

> Time after time Pharaoh said no, persisting in his stubbornness and obstinacy as he acted according to his rock-hard heart. . . . The narrative of the hardening of Pharaoh's heart helps to resolve the apparent tension between divine sovereignty and human responsibility. *The obvious question is, What did God do to make Pharaoh's heart obstinately stubborn? The simple answer is nothing.* The narrative gives no hint that Pharaoh was forced to do anything against his will. There is no evidence that in his heart he wanted to liberate the people, but God would not let him. In hardening his heart, God simply let Pharaoh be Pharaoh. The Lord did not interrupt the inclinations of his naturally hard and stubborn heart (Jer. 17:9). On the contrary, the Lord provided opportunity after opportunity for Pharaoh to surrender his will to the Lord's. . . . But notwithstanding the multiple offers to comply with God's demands, Pharaoh refused, and each refusal hardened his heart a little more. His heart remained insensitive because he did what he wanted to do, and God did not stop him from doing it. Paul speaks of this in terms of God's judicial abandonment of sinners to their own desires (Rom. 1:26).[68]

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[66] That is not to say that God does not also employ providential circumstantial pressures that he knows will impact human decisions. Matthew 26:5 presents a potential conflict between divine and human timing. The Jews were dead set on destroying Christ, "but not during the feast, lest there be an uproar among the people." Through various means (including, e.g., their fear of the people, Matt 21:46) God had been restraining them from their longtime plot to destroy Jesus, but now God's time had arrived; the Passover Lamb must be slain on the Passover. See Talbert, *Not by Chance,* 168–71.

[67] I am indebted to David Saxon for this helpful observation.

[68] *Gospel of Exodus,* 97–98 (emphasis added). Robert V. McCabe argues similarly that "God's hardening of Pharaoh's heart means that God, in his sovereignty, withholds mercy (or, as it is often called, common grace) from Pharaoh. God's hardening removes the restraining forces used in common grace so that Pharaoh gets exactly what he wants, along with the inevitable (and undesirable) consequences of his choices. God in his sovereign justice withheld his mercy, allowing the

God's hardening (Rom 9:18b) is the opposite of God's showing mercy (v. 18a) by withholding his merciful, restraining intervention. If one protests that divine hardening *must* be some kind of active, negative, internal intervention, the natural counterquestion is, why? We know God cannot *compel* sin (Jas 1:13) and resisting God's will is surely sin; and we know that man does not *need* to be compelled to sin (vv. 14–15). God's sovereign and providential hardening is always exercised in keeping with his own sinless nature and unsullied character, and always concurrent and consistent with the fallen condition of those hardened. With this Piper is clearly in agreement:

> The nature of this providence is such that the preferences and choices of Satan and man are really their own preferences and their own choices. . . . God's providence is decisive in what Satan and man decide and do. But it is not coercive. That is, its ordinary way of working is to see to it that Satan and man decide and act in a way that is their own preference, while fulfilling God's plan at every moment. *How* God does this may remain a mystery . . . but *that* he does it is what the Bible teaches.[69]

To argue that the divine hardening of Pharaoh was consistent, concurrent, or in conjunction with—and even to argue that it was subsequent to—Pharaoh's own native hardness (1) does not require that it was *because* of Pharaoh's self-hardening, (2) does not undermine the ultimacy of God's sovereignty, and (3) does not imply libertarian autonomy or the ultimacy of self-determination. Rather, it defends the doctrine of human depravity and its ramifications for the concurrence of God's hardening of Pharaoh, and the text's repeated demonstration of Pharaoh's inherent condition and inclinations even before (3:19–20; 5:2; 7:4, 13, 14, 22; 8:15, 19, 32; 9:7) and after (9:17, 35; 10:3; 13:15; 14:5) God sealed that native, fallen inclination with judicial hardness (9:12; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 8, 17).[70]

> God's judicial hardening is not presented as the capricious manipulation of an arbitrary potentate cursing morally neutral or even morally pure beings, but as a holy condemnation of a guilty people who are condemned to do and be what they themselves have chosen.[71]

The sovereignty of God is displayed not in compelling Pharaoh to act sinfully contrary to his will; that would be impossible (because of God's character), not to mention unnecessary (because of Pharaoh's depravity). The sovereignty of God is displayed in choosing not to show mercy to Pharaoh (Rom 9:15, 18) and, instead, allowing him to pursue his own native and willful rebellion, and confirming him in

wickedness already resident in Pharaoh's heart to have free reign. Pharaoh and his people then reaped the consequences of Pharaoh's evil actions." See "An Old Testament Sanctifying Influence: The Sovereignty of God," *DBSJ* 15 (2010): 14–15.

[69] Piper, *Providence*, 692.

[70] For the grammatical data on the progression of Pharaoh's hardening in Exodus, see the Appendix.

[71] D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 448–49.

that condition while he displays his glory and power over Pharaoh himself and all the false gods of Egypt.[72]

Scripture suggests this image and reinforces this explanation with the language of abandonment in Romans 1. Paul describes the historical, native fallenness of humanity with a series of willful choices (vv. 18–23) followed by a thrice-repeated divine action: "God gave them up" or "delivered them over" to the impurity of the lusts of their own hearts (v. 24), to the vile passions they had cultivated in their rejection of God's order (v. 26), and to the debased mind resulting from their rejection of the very notion of God (v. 28).[73] Moreover, Romans 2 lays the blame for one's condemnation to divine wrath at the door of one's own hardness and impenitence (v. 5), self-seeking, and disobedience (v. 8). Finally, Romans 3 explains that this condition is so universal (vv. 9–12), so deeply ingrained (vv. 13–18), and so inescapable (vv. 19–20) that only the intervention of a radical act of divine self-sacrifice provides deliverance for anyone (vv. 21–31; cf. Gen 3:15).

Conclusion

Divine abandonment to sin and self and depravity (and all its consequences) is a most fearful and most deserved kind of hardening. Divine hardening may be more than that, but it need not be. And if the nature of this hardening is, indeed, permission or abandonment, then it seems difficult to avoid the conclusion that (1) Pharaoh's hardness, Pharaoh's hardening, and God's hardening were all simultaneous,[74] and (2) God's hardening of Pharaoh was an entirely free and sovereign choice (View 2; cf. Rom 9:18) and an entirely just response (View 1; cf. Rom 2:4–8) because it was entirely consistent and concurrent with Pharaoh's own endemic nature and choices (View 3; cf. Rom. 1:18–32).

[72] For a helpful summary of the gods over whose presumed prerogatives God displayed his own inimitable authority, see Barrett, 100–102.

[73] Reformed commentator Dale Ralph Davis applies this language and procedure to the Canaanites: "The Canaanites' day of grace has passed (Gen. 15:16); their iniquity is now full; there has been no turning away from but persistence in their idolatrous and sex-perverting worship; and so Yahweh 'gives them up,' confirms them in that resistance, and leads them by it to destruction (compare Pharaoh in Exod. 4–14, and Paul's repeated 'God gave them up' in Romans 1:24, 26, 28)." *Joshua: No Falling Words* (Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus, 2000), 99.

[74] Acknowledging simultaneity stops short of identifying all of these aspects of hardening as one and the selfsame phenomenon, as Piper does (*Justification of God*, 168; cf. *Providence*, 439). Pharaoh was not only "really guilty" (*Providence*, 440) but really hardened by nature, and really hardened himself.

Appendix

The following table summarizes all the Exodus passages I am aware of that are relevant to the hardness and hardening of Pharaoh. Such charts are standard fare in virtually any discussion of this topic, though they vary in level of specificity of detail.[75] Contributing to the grammatical, and therefore interpretational and theological, confusion is the translation of those verses in which Pharaoh's heart is, itself, the grammatical subject—leaving the personal actor (whether God or Pharaoh) unstated and, indeed, raising the additional question as to whether there is in those instances *any* personal actor at all or whether they are describing an endemic state or condition, viz., depravity (7:13, 14, 22; 8:19; 9:7, 35).[76]

Table 1. Exegetical Map of the Hardness and Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart

Ref	Subject	Verb	Object	Comments
3:19–20	*"But I know that the king of Egypt will not let you go . . . so I will stretch out my hand . . . after that he will let you go."*			Suggests ultimacy of divine sovereignty
4:21	I (Yahweh)	will harden	Pharaoh's heart	Predictive; *chazaq* Piel
5:2	*"Who is the LORD, that I should obey His voice to let Israel go? I do not know the LORD, nor will I let Israel go."*			Pharaoh's initial response
7:3	I (Yahweh)	will harden	Pharaoh's heart	Predictive; *qashah* Hiphil
7:4	*"… but Pharaoh will not heed you…"*			Important for interpreting 8:15, 19
7:13	(Pharaoh's) heart	hardened/was hard	(none)	*chazaq* Qal (not Piel), his heart was strong/hard
7:14	(Pharaoh's) heart	(is)	hard (pred. adj.)	*kabēd* adj., "heavy"
7:22	(Pharaoh's) heart	hardened/was hard	(none)	*chazaq* Qal (not Piel), his heart was strong/hard
8:15 [11]	Pharaoh	hardened	(his) heart	*kabad* Hiph., he made his heart heavy; "he did not heed, as Yahweh said" (7:4)
8:19 [15]	(Pharaoh's) heart	hardened/was hard	(none)	*chazaq* Qal (not Piel), his heart was hard; "he did not heed, as Yahweh said" (7:4)
8:32 [28]	Pharaoh	hardened	(his) heart	*kabad* Hiph., he made his heart heavy
9:7	(Pharaoh's) heart	hardened	(none)	*kabad* Qal., his heart was heavy

[75] E.g., Robert D. Bell, *The Theological Messages of the Old Testament Books* (Greenville, SC: BJU Press, 2010), 42–44; Barrett, 95–96; Hamilton, 92; Piper, *Providence,* 436.

[76] Exodus 7:13 (et al.) "should really be translated 'hard,' for this is the first of six references to Pharaoh's heart that are 'theologically neutral.' That is, there is no indication whether the Lord caused his heart to be hard or whether he hardened it himself. So one may translate 'The king's heart, however, still remained hard' or 'The king, however, remained stubborn' (7:13 TEV). (Similar are 7:14, 22; 8:19; 9:7, 35.) Unless the context demands otherwise, the translator should try to preserve the neutrality in these verses." Noel D. Osborn and Howard A. Hatton, *A Handbook on Exodus*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1999), 161. Walter C. Kaiser Jr. notes on 7:13 that "there is no reflexive or passive idea to the verb *yeḥᵉzaq,* as so many translations render it." "Exodus," *EBCRev,* ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 1:401. Cf. John I. Durham, *Exodus*, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1987), 90.

Ref	Subject	Verb	Object	Comments
9:12	Yahweh	hardened	(Pharaoh's) heart	First direct ref to divine hardening; *chazaq* Piel
9:17	*"You are still exalting yourself against my people and will not let them go"*			God explicitly faults Pharaoh for his own stubbornness ("acting arrogantly," HCSB)
9:34	Pharaoh	hardened	(his) heart	*kabad* Hiph., he made his heart heavy
9:35	(Pharaoh's) heart	hardened	(none)	*kabad* Qal., his heart was heavy
10:1	Yahweh	hardened	(Pharaoh's) heart	*kabad* Hiphil
10:3	*"Thus says the LORD, the God of the Hebrews, 'How long will you refuse to humble yourself before me?'"*			God still faults Pharaoh for his own arrogant refusal before God
10:20	Yahweh	hardened	(Pharaoh's) heart	*chazaq* Piel
10:27	Yahweh	hardened	(Pharaoh's) heart	*chazaq* Piel
11:10	Yahweh	hardened	(Pharaoh's) heart	*chazaq* Piel
13:15	Pharaoh	hardened	(none)	Retrospective; *qashah* Hiphil (lays blame on Pharaoh's own hardness)
14:4	Yahweh	will harden	(Pharaoh's) heart	*chazaq* Piel
14:5	(Pharaoh's) heart	turned	against Israel	*haphak* Niph., turn oneself
14:8	Yahweh	hardened	(Pharaoh's) heart	*chazaq* Piel
14:17	Yahweh	will harden	(Egyptians') hearts	*chazaq* Piel

Key

= relevant assertions of Pharaoh's disposition

= references in which Pharaoh's heart is the grammatical subject

= references in which Pharaoh is the grammatical subject of the hardening

= references in which God is the grammatical subject of the hardening

Brackets [ ] denote verse references in the Hebrew Bible

Osvaldo Padilla. *The Pastoral Epistles: An Introduction and Commentary*. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2022. 284pp. + 29pp. (front matter).

One of the first offerings of the fledgling Tyndale Commentary series was the 1957 volume on the Pastorals, written by Donald Guthrie, who revised his work in 1990.[1] Through his commentary work, his popular *New Testament Introduction*, and other writings, Guthrie became well known for defending the authenticity of the letters against their detractors.[2] Now, after sixty-five years of Guthrie's name gracing the TNTC Pastorals volume, Osvaldo Padilla, professor of divinity at Beeson Divinity School, has provided a new edition, his first foray into commentary writing.[3] His volume is evangelical and egalitarian in its stance, robust for the series in which it appears, and lucid in its style.

Padilla aims to contribute to the understanding of the Pastorals through significant interaction with primary source material and serious theologizing in conversation with Christian dogmatics (x). Given the brevity of the commentary, he largely accomplishes his goals with a work that is well researched and often insightful in its own right, not merely the mediation of larger commentaries for a popular audience. The bibliography is impressive, including French and German works that inform the commentary throughout. Padilla engages scholarship on the letters well overall, including newer contributions by Gerald Bray, Jens Herzer, Chris Hoklotubbe, Lyn Kidson, Jermo van Nes, and Robert Yarbrough, though his complete omission of William Mounce's WBC volume is surprising. He speaks of well-known Pastorals scholars Spicq, Marshall, Towner, Johnson, Oberlinner, and (especially) Malherbe as influential for his work (ix).

Padilla believes the Pastorals are Pauline and does so fundamentally because of the testimony of Scripture itself (2, 10). He expands this understanding with five standard reasons supporting authenticity (1–16): (1) Scripture sees Paul as author. (2) The early church rejected false writings. (3) The early church accepted the Pastorals as Pauline. (4) Arguments for pseudonymity are flawed. (5) The consensus for pseudonymity seems unduly influenced by academic and social pressures (a point elevated by Luke Timothy Johnson, and one still well worth pressing). Padilla's comments on 1 Timothy are refreshing: "The words of Paul in this letter are the written word of God and must be taken as possessing the authority of God himself. To read the letter otherwise is to read against the grain of the document, thereby compromising the reader's potential understanding of it" (47). In the commentary, he points out instances of such potential interpretative compromise, as when Paul's self-portrait in 1 Timothy 1:12–17 is read as pseudonymous (65). He dates 2 Timothy to the mid-60s but leaves open the time of composition for 1 Timothy and Titus.

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[1] Steve Motyer, "Donald Guthrie," in *Bible Interpreters of the Twentieth Century: A Selection of Evangelical Voices*, ed. Walter A. Elwell and J. D. Weaver (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 287–98.

[2] Donald Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles and the Mind of Paul* (London: Tyndale, 1955); *New Testament Introduction*, 4th ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1990), 607–59; "Timothy and Titus, Epistles to," in *New Bible Dictionary*, ed. D. R. W. Wood, 3rd ed. (Leicester, UK: InterVarsity, 1996), 1189–92.

[3] Padilla has published *The Speeches of Outsiders in Acts: Poetics, Theology and Historiography*, SNTSMS 144 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); and *The Acts of the Apostles: Interpretation, History and Theology* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2016). He has commentaries on James (BECNT) and Matthew (Proclamation) in preparation.

Interestingly, Padilla confronts the growing trend of discarding the title "Pastoral Epistles."[4] While recognizing benefits of considering each writing separately, Padilla argues that setting aside this collective designation focuses too narrowly on the letters' historical circumstances and not enough on their theological unity. Padilla's corrective offers helpful nuance, but he may *over*correct at times in his corpus reading. For instance, his introduction seems to conflate the three letters' data on their opponents. While acknowledging that the particulars of the false teaching in view are "difficult to know with exactness" and "unclear," and with only one citation from Titus in the discussion, Padilla proposes that the "false teaching was broadly similar in the situations presented in all three letters" (24–25) and proceeds accordingly, suggesting that the opponents were Jewish Christians with ascetic tendencies.[5] And while the discussion of theological themes in the letters collectively (God, salvation, the Christian life, the church) is salutary, more attention to the thematic profile of each letter would have been welcome.

Padilla's labors in the commentary proper are ambitious and assiduous. Most remarkable is its interaction with Greco-Roman moral philosophers, whether their general practices and vocabulary, or matters connected with a specific school (Stoics, Cynics, Epicureans) or figure (e.g., Seneca, Epictetus). Taking his cue from the work of Abraham Malherbe, Padilla does not intend merely to provide points of comparison and contrast to Paul. Instead, he understands Paul to be purposefully adopting and adapting certain language and ideas which would have resonated with his hearers (63). Padilla's work here is helpful both for better understanding the worldview common in Paul's day and for considering some of the letters' atypical vocabulary, though the commentary's unrelenting attention to Greco-Roman philosophical connections seems at times overzealous.

The commentary work helpfully advances earlier editions by dividing the analysis of each textual unit into discussion of context, content, and theology. Padilla offers not only exegesis of the text but also some degree of interaction with theologians ranging from Calvin to Bavinck to Barth. His exegesis is grounded firmly in the Greek text, though the commentary is accessible for those without knowledge of the language. Padilla addresses text-critical matters, a *desideratum* in some commentaries twice the size, and provides occasional forays into pastoral and liturgical application. In what follows, to provide a sense of Padilla's approach to the letters, I will note some of his interpretive choices in passages typically of interest.

A new commentary on the Pastorals is doubtless often first opened to 1 Timothy 2:11–14, and it is instructive to observe the movement in the Tyndale series' treatment of this *crux interpretum*. Guthrie in 1957 asserted that "the teaching of Christian doctrine . . . is confined by Paul to the male sex" and spoke of "the greater aptitude of the weaker sex to be led astray," though noting that "there may have been local reasons for this prohibition of which we know nothing."[6] Guthrie's 1990 revision shifted his language: "The teaching of Christian doctrine *seems to be* confined by Paul to the male sex,"

[4] This trend was given impetus in Philip Towner's 2006 NICNT commentary, accordingly titled *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*.

[5] For a preferable methodological approach, consult Dillon Thornton, *Hostility in the House of God: An Investigation of the Opponents in 1 and 2 Timothy*, BBRSup 15 (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2016).

[6] *Pastoral Epistles*, 1st ed., 76.

but "it may be possible to regard verse 12 as a relative rather than absolute prohibition. . . . Was Paul, in fact, saying that no woman should teach without first taking time to learn . . . ?"[7] In the third edition, Padilla now states categorically, "Paul's prohibition of women teaching men in the congregations at Ephesus was based on a problem of *character* not gender. . . . This text should not be the basis for the denial of women's ordination" (95–96, emphasis original).

Padilla's interpretation affirms the standard egalitarian argument that *authenteō* ("exercise authority," ESV) in 1 Timothy 2:12 is "without question . . . pejorative" (94). That is, Paul sees the problem not merely as women exercising the authority over men that is associated with teaching the congregation but "instruct[ing] the men in a 'heavy-handed,' domineering and disrespectful fashion" (94). Additionally, the false teaching had made inroads especially among the church's women, and their propagation of it needed to be halted (26, 86, 192, 195–97, 250). Padilla argues that Paul appeals to Genesis not to provide a rationale for excluding women from public teaching altogether, but to illustrate what happens when women seek to dominate the men who are appointed to teach them (95). The debate is too involved to engage in detail here, but two observations may be made. (1) Certain points that Padilla makes to support his understanding—Paul's call for womanly *sōphrosynē* ("self-control," ESV) that frames the passage (2:9, 15), the need for a good testimony among outsiders, Eve's creation as Adam's helper, and the circumstances of the Fall as an instructive illustration—seem as if they would support a complementarian understanding of the passage equally well, or even better. (2) Because Padilla's case rests heavily upon the definition of *authenteō*, he would have done well to engage the most recent edition of the key complementarian volume on the passage, edited by Andreas Köstenberger and Thomas Schreiner.[8] There, Köstenberger responds to the sort of objection Padilla raises against his work on *authenteō,* and Al Wolters provides his most recent treatment of the term, finding it *non*-pejorative.

Interpretations of 1 Timothy 2:15 vary enough that there may be no "majority position," strictly speaking, but Padilla's understanding is not uncommon. He understands *sōzō* ("saved," ESV) as deliverance from sin and explains, "If the women at Ephesus are to be saved, they need to reject the pattern of women who rejected the feminine cardinal virtue *sophrosyne*." Instead, Christian women should "follow the pattern that is 'proper for women who profess reverence for God' (v. 10), which includes a virtuous home life, with the bearing of children" (96).

In 1 Timothy 3, Padilla finds a good deal of overlap between deacons and overseers, arguing that "holding the mystery of the faith" (v. 9; cf. Titus 1:9) parallels "able to teach" (v. 2) and supports an understanding of the office of deacon that involves a teaching ministry—an interpretation that seems difficult to sustain. He suggests that "the overseers *tended* to concentrate on teaching and pastoral care, while the deacons *tended* to concentrate more on assistance to the overseers and congregation. But their respective functions were not as sealed off from one another as is often thought" (109, emphasis original). Padilla sees the "women" of 3:11 as female deacons, who as such were involved in the

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[7] *Pastoral Epistles*, 2nd ed., 86, 90 (emphasis added).

[8] Andreas J. Köstenberger and Thomas R. Schreiner, eds., *Women in the Church: An Interpretation and Application of 1 Timothy 2:9–15*, 3rd ed. (Wheaton: Crossway, 2016). In the interest of full disclosure, note that I assisted in the preparation of this volume.

teaching ministry of the church (39, 107). His view of the two offices and the role of women in the church leads him to assert, "The leaders in the churches must be godly men and women who have been gifted by the Holy Spirit to teach the Scriptures competently and care pastorally for the congregation, similarly to the way parents care for their children" (110). In response, while it is true that older men and women are described in 5:1–2 in a way that suggests a general fatherly and motherly role in the church, it is noteworthy that 3:1–7 clearly envisions males as overseers.[9] Following the work of Andrew Clarke, Padilla also distinguishes elders as church leaders generally (not officeholders) from the overseer (typically one of the elders) as filling a formal office (239).

Padilla rightly doubts that 1 Timothy 5 describes an order of widows (and, oddly, omits discussion of 5:7–8) but understands Paul simply to address a case of limited resources in the church. Unusually, though, while he understands the "one-woman man" of 1 Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:6 to mean a man who is faithful to his wife (106, 242), he interprets the "one-man woman" in 1 Timothy 5:9 more specifically as an *univira*, a widow who had vowed not to remarry and was thus particularly vulnerable financially. He finds the disputed verse 12 to envision young widows apostatizing in marrying unbelievers, rather than reneging on an initial vow of service (129–30).

Padilla frames his discussion of 2 Timothy 3:16–17 in terms of an "orthodox and evangelical understanding of inspiration" against "a liberal view of the Bible" (209), emphasizing the "divine authority" resulting from inspiration (207). He does not mention inerrancy as a corollary of 2 Timothy 3:16 in his commentary discussion and elsewhere has noted, "While, to be sure, the assertion of the God-breathed nature of Scripture provides it with considerable trustworthiness, it is a caricature to say that the text is directly dealing with 'the pristine character of the autographs.'"[10] In describing God speaking through Scripture, Padilla quotes without comment both Calvin and Barth in the same breath (206–7), apparently seeing more continuity between their views than is warranted.[11]

The elder's children in Titus 1:6 as *pistos* are not understood to be "trustworthy" but "believers." Padilla leans on the Greco-Roman understanding that children in a household normally adopted the religion of their father, arguing that an elder's children not doing so would have bespoken his incompetence and hindered gospel ministry. Padilla allows that a different cultural understanding, as in the West today, would modify the requirement.

Padilla's volume has many strengths, not least its unapologetic embrace of Pauline authorship and engagement of the Greco-Roman context. I often found myself nodding along with and gaining insight from Padilla's clear textual exposition. Those who read the Pastorals from an egalitarian stance

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[9] For a view similar to Padilla's in terms of deacon authority, but which maintains the teaching office as limited to overseers and for males only, see Benjamin Merkle, "The Authority of Deacons in Pauline Churches," *JETS* 64, vol. 2 (2021): 309–25.

[10] Osvaldo Padilla, "Postconservative Theologians and Scriptural Authority," in D. A. Carson, ed., *The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 654. This essay provides a fuller discussion of 2 Timothy 3:16 in response to Stanley Grenz.

[11] The discontinuity is demonstrated in, e.g., David Gibson, "The Answering Speech of Men: Karl Barth on Holy Scripture," in Carson, *Enduring Authority*, 277–82. The content of Padilla's 2017 ETS session, "Postliberals and Inerrancy: Do They Point the Way Forward?," suggests more sympathy with Barth's understanding of inspiration than many conservative interpreters would be comfortable with.

will find the work to be a helpful and robust summary treatment of the letters. Padilla's interpretive decisions, however, place the volume into a niche that will make it less likely an acquisition for complementarian interpreters: those looking for a robust egalitarian reading of the Pastorals as a foil will want something more thorough, while pastors and scholars looking for a concise and informed exposition of the text will find a good deal to appreciate, but not as useful a work as they might desire.

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Craig G. Bartholomew. *The Old Testament and God.* Old Testament Origins and the Question of God. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2022. 527pp. + 30pp. (front matter) + 50pp. (back matter).

Bartholomew proposes to do in this book, and in the volumes that follow in the series, what N. T. Wright did in his Christian Origins and the Question of God series. Specifically, Bartholomew wants to move OT beyond the paradigms of historical criticism and postmodernism. He observes, "Especially after the postmodern turn, it is fine in mainstream OT studies to be a naturalist, a Marxist, a new historicist, a Foucauldian, a Derridean, an exponent of queer and transgender theory, a postcolonialist and so on, but heaven forbid one should be a theist, let alone a full-blown Christian theist" (xviii). And yet, Bartholomew does not think it possible to move back to a pre-critical approach to OT studies. For instance, he is ambivalent about when and how the exodus and conquest took place (5n8) or when Genesis 10 is to be dated (6, n. 12).

The book divides into four parts, which Bartholomew helpfully summarizes in the Introduction (xxvii):

• Part 1 seeks to answer the question: "What should we do with the Old Testament?"

• Part 2 develops a range of tools for answering this question from a critical realist perspective.

• Part 3 examines the major world views of the Ancient Near East against which background we read the Old Testament.

• Part 4 brings all this to bear on the central character of the OT, YHWH, the God of Israel.

Bartholomew seeks to begin each part inductively—his work is a species of biblical theology—and then move into debated areas of OT studies, epistemology, ancient Near East (ANE) worldviews, and theology. For instance, Bartholomew begins the book with an examination of the Table of Nations in Genesis 10 from which he concludes that the OT must be studied along *historical, literary*, and *theological* lines. Holding these three dimensions together positions him against historical criticism, which divides books into redactional layers rather than engaging in literary readings, and against postmodernism, which dispenses with history and reads "against the grain" of the Bible's own theology (79).

If part 1 introduces the reader to the literary, historical, and theological dimensions of the OT, part 2 investigates each dimension more deeply, giving a chapter to each. Before these investigations take place, however, Bartholomew devotes a chapter to epistemology. Like Wright, he proposes that Christians adopt a *critical realist* framework. The *critical* points back to Kant and his recognition "that the knower influences the results of the knowing process," and the *realism* indicates that, unlike in Kant's thought, "we can know [the world] as it is" (93). An important concept that Bartholomew introduces at this point is *stratification*, which means that there can be "multiple accounts of the same things or events" that are all true (95). He gives an example of the analyses that a physicist, historian, builder, detective, ecologist, poet, and resident would give of a house that has burned down. Each one could give different, but entirely true, accounts of what happened. In contrast to postmodernism, however, critical realism recognizes that some accounts may be false and contradictory.

In part 3, Bartholomew examines the worldview of ANE people groups. As a preliminary to this survey, he must address the issue of mythology. Bartholomew thinks that ANE myths are not just

metaphors: ANE peoples believed in the gods that their myths spoke of. And yet myth is not to be defined so broadly that it includes all worldviews. Thus, the OT is not a mythological book but a book that stands opposed to myths.

After surveying the worldviews of the Sumerians, Hittites, Assyrians, Babylonians, Arameans, Phoenicians, Canaanites, and Persians, Bartholomew picks up the phrase "the Mosaic distinction" to highlight the great difference between Israel and the surrounding nations in the matter of God and the gods. Among themselves, the various polytheistic cultures could "translate" between their different systems. Different cultures may have had different sun gods, for instance; but both had sun gods. With Israel, however, there was the true God, and all other gods were idols. This "Mosaic distinction" is fundamental, being rooted in Israel's central narrative, the exodus. However, Spinoza, the founder of historical critical approaches to the Bible, equated God and nature. He rejected "the Mosaic distinction." Historical criticism is therefore not "simply . . . the triumph of neutral, objective science" but part of a worldview that is alien to the worldview of the OT and more of a piece with the polytheistic ANE worldviews that surrounded Israel (372).

The final section of the book is a single, lengthy chapter that positively presents the God of the OT. Bartholomew begins with the OT's presentation of God as the *living God,* noting that this presentation of God distinguishes him from dying and rising gods like Baal as well as from idols. It also identifies God as one who acts. Bartholomew recognizes that the OT's descriptions of God's actions, and even its description of him as living, are anthropomorphic. He cautions, however, against the classical theism of Maimonides and Aquinas, which views such language as unworthy of God. He argues that since humans are made in God's image and since God reveals himself through his actions, we come to truly know God through anthropomorphic language rather than through "philosophical speculation" (402).

Drawing on Colin Gunton and Karl Barth, Bartholomew critiques even post-Reformation classical theology for not recognizing sufficiently that their abstract language about God is metaphorical. The danger is that abstract language actually distances interpreters from God's own self-description. Bartholomew argues that "to think of God mainly in terms of intellect," as Thomas does, "results in a conception of God at odds with the biblical rendition of God according to which God is mainly known *through his particular acts in history*" (404). He further argues, "Classical theism tends to restrict its focus to cosmology rather than attending to the divine economy. . . . According to Gunton, such an approach is in danger of collapsing into Spinoza's pantheism or Kant's idealism. If the negative way is pushed, one ends up with the unknowable God of Kant" (405). Bartholomew observes that Spinoza and Kant (both of whom were foundational figures for the historical critics) rejected the historical narratives of Scripture because they were incompatible with their vision of god. Part of the problem, Bartholomew avers, is that Aristotle promoted the view that "metaphorical language can always be replaced with literal language" (407). Thus, the goal of some theologians is to purge their theological talk of metaphor—which puts them at odds with the Bible's speech about God. He notes that more recent linguistic studies have argued that metaphors are inescapable in all language and not something that hinders clear understanding.

This groundwork laid, Bartholomew looks at metaphors used to identify YHWH, the name YHWH itself, and the importance of divine action in the OT. He concludes the book by arguing for the reality of divine revelation and the failure of historical criticism.

Bartholomew's volume makes many significant contributions, not least his survey of how historical, literary, and theological readings of the OT are to be pursued. His defense of the term *Old Testament* and its interpretational relationship with the new are helpful, as is his definition and defense of worldview. Likewise, his treatment of ANE worldviews rightly maintains the "Mosaic distinction" that is blurred in many comparative studies, even from evangelicals. Most worthwhile of all was the sustained critique of historical criticism. Bartholomew rightly recognizes that historical criticism is not a neutral method but part of a worldview at odds with the worldview of the Bible itself. Bartholomew does not always reject the conclusions of historical criticism, however (note his comments above about not returning to pre-critical interpretation of Scripture), and his conversation partners are not conservative evangelical scholars. This means that some of his strong rhetoric against historical criticism loses some of its punch in practice.

A similar dynamic is at work in Bartholomew's discussion of God. He rightly worries that certain versions of classical theism make God inert and unknowable, and he rightly asserts that the Bible presents God as one who speaks and acts. He is correct to resist the impulse to strip all metaphorical language from theological talk about God, since God has chosen to reveal himself in such language. He seems to think that Colin Gunton provides the way forward, however, and he fails to interact with the systematic theologians involved in the current renaissance of classical theism. These theologians rightly warn against Gunton's social trinitarianism, and the best of them seek to root their classical theism in Scripture. Yet some within this movement need the cautions that Bartholomew raises. Bartholomew has a remarkably wide skill set, being well-versed in OT biblical studies, hermeneutics, philosophy, and Christian worldview in the Kuyperian and Dooyweerdian tradition. If, however, he has had the same deep engagement with post-Reformation scholastic theology and its heirs, it is not evident in this volume at the key point where engaging that theology was most important.

In sum, Bartholomew's inaugural volume in the Old Testament Origins and the Question of God series does an excellent job of surveying and critiquing the current state of OT scholarship. Many of his proposals are also valuable. Bartholomew is not always a sure guide, however, and his work would have been strengthened by more interaction with post-Reformation orthodox theology and with conservative scholars.

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Lewis and Sarah Allen. *Resilient Faith: Learning to Rely on Jesus in the Struggles of Life.* Wheaton: Crossway, 2023. 216pp. + 10pp. (back matter).

In a society where reported mental health struggles are skyrocketing and the definition for "adult" continues to be pushed further and further down the age continuum, Lewis and Sarah Allen give us a refreshing and practical book that presses into the question, "How can a believer have resilient faith?" Resilience, "an ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change," is a diminishing character quality in our world today.[1] The Allens (husband and wife) wrote this book specifically targeting young adults, though the material will be helpful for any believer. I think it will be particularly useful for new Christians or for those who have not had much personal discipleship. The book's purpose is to help believers persevere and to give the believer Bible tools in order to do so. The Allens define resilient faith as "the grace-shaped habit of keeping on trusting Christ even when life is hard, of relying on God's power to obey Jesus in difficult times" (4). Lewis and Sarah demonstrate this grace in giving us a fine resource to use with brothers and sisters who are young in years or young in the faith.

The book is divided into nine sections or "parts," with the Allens tag-teaming in the writing of chapters within each section. They take Ephesians 6:10–18 as their "base" passage for the book but utilize many passages of Scripture throughout the book as they walk the reader through the beliefs, attitudes, and actions that shape a resilient faith.

Part 1 examines our initial response to trouble or difficulty. Do we retreat into ourselves? Do we turn to sinful distractions? Or do we retreat, like Jesus did, by running to the Father? Chapter 1 shows us how Jesus exhibited dependence and trust in his loving Father, and we are called to rest in and run to our loving Father. The authors observe, "To be righteous is to be connected and dependent, not disconnected and self-reliant" (14). Chapter 2 points us to the all-seeing, all-caring Lord. It discusses our propensity to turn to self-pity and a downward thought spiral of our losses, hurts, and grievances, rather than running to the Lord with honest words. Jesus sees. Jesus cares. And because he sees and cares, chapter 3 reminds us that we should respond to him in humble, active obedience. Even in the midst of trouble, *especially* in the midst of trouble, we must do the next right thing.

Part 2 points us to the importance of rest in our pursuit of perseverance. I found this section to be particularly refreshing in a book about resilience. Remembering God's design for Sabbath rest (chapter 4) and daily rest (chapter 5) helps recenter our dependence upon God as weak, limited creatures. The Allens are not focused on the theological debates about the Sabbath but on seeing the Lord's Day as a gift, a rest. "Sabbath rest is simple because at its heart it is a celebration of what God has already done and is doing, rather than an attempt to perfect something new ourselves" (40). In discussing the importance of having a spirit at rest rather than a spirit of restlessness, we are pointed to the centrality of our own pursuit of looking to Christ and looking away from distractions (49). Our rest is in a Person.

[1] Merriam Webster online dictionary, accessed 14 September 2023, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/resilience?utm_campaign=sd&utm_medium=serp&utm_source=jsonld.

Hope is the theme of part 3, and chapter 6 asks us to look into our hearts and examine our hopes. Where are our dreams, our aspirations, our expectations centered? We are pointed to Christ, and specifically to his cross. Our true hope is in his gospel work, in what he did through his death, burial, and resurrection on our behalf! Our hope is also grounded in our future expectation, heaven. "Glory is waiting for us" (64), and chapter 7 opens the doors of heaven and lets some of its brightness shine out to us. Chapter 8 asks how our present hope is affected by the truths of the cross and of heaven. It makes the connection that Scripture makes between suffering and hope. Our suffering actually *produces* hope when we respond to it in the Spirit, because hope "is God's powerful gift" (74).

Part 4, entitled "Body Life", reminds us that "spiritual life isn't separate from bodily life" (77). As a biblical counselor, I assent wholeheartedly. Sometimes well-meaning believers focus exclusively on the soul and miss the holistic nature of a person. The soul affects the body, and the body affects the soul. We are, as Nancy Pearcey states, an "integrated psychophysical unity" (78), and we are woven together by God, body and soul (Ps 139:13–16). The authors point to the importance of viewing eating and exercise as gifts from God, to be stewarded for his glory. "Everything we do matters to God" (90). This is a practical section of the book and spoke much needed truth. It is one of the highlights of the book, in my opinion, because of its uniqueness in a book about faith.

The gospel, with its power to save and sanctify, is the center of section 5. Ephesians 6 serves as a springboard to help us meditate on the gospel daily (chapter 11), use the gospel in our battle against sin and Satan (chapter 12), and walk by faith in Jesus' purchased righteousness (chapter 13).

Making much of the means of grace comprises the final four sections. The Word of God, prayer, and the local church are emphasized in turn. Section 6 shows us the power of God's words, the importance of confession and forgiveness, and the necessity of truth (found in the Word) in order to stay faithful in weakness. Section 7 shows us the importance of godly habits. J. I. Packer said, "Habit forming is the Spirit's ordinary way of leading us on in holiness" (151), and the Allens challenge readers to live out their faith in their daily choices. We are called to memorize the Word, storing it in our hearts (Ps 119:11), and to share the Word, ministering grace as Jesus did.

Section 8 is a call to prayer, prayer that shows dependence and prayer that intercedes for others. We are specifically encouraged to pray for those who annoy or frustrate us, looking for evidence of his grace in their lives. We can expect God to work in changing our attitude towards them. Lewis admonishes us to pray for what the Spirit desires. "When the Spirit is at work, he is driving us to Jesus, to his kingdom priorities, and to care about and pray for what he wants" (184).

The final part of the book exalts the local church and God's purpose of having his children grow *together* into Christ. "The hardest thing for struggling Christians to recognize is that church is exactly the community they need" (193). God designed the body to build itself up in love as each part does its work (Eph 4:16). As the Allens remind us, worship nurtures faith (195). The church, like a family, does not choose each other as a friend group would. That is God's wise intention at work. It is the very diversity of the church, united around the truth and the gospel, that allows its people to serve one another well and shape one another into Christlikeness.

I love the conclusion of this book: success in the Christian life is standing firm in Christ (215). It is not easy, but it is simple. So many young Christians flounder in their faith when the going gets

tough. They despair in the battle against sin when the same besetting temptation overtakes them. They grow bitter over the deep hurts or ongoing suffering that plagues them. They search psychological labels and self-help podcasts and Bible app plans for an answer to what they must be missing. Why is this so hard? How are they supposed to keep going? Lewis and Sarah Allen bring us a book with wise answers, set in a readable and simple format. God has given us everything we need that pertains to life and godliness through the knowledge of his Son (2 Pet 1:4). The chapters are short, and the flow of the book overall feels natural. One of the best features is the set of questions at the end of each chapter, placed under the heading "reflect." Each reflection asks specific questions and helps the reader apply the chapter in real-life ways. The reflections are also rich with Scripture and cause the reader to meditate on the Word as he considers the questions posed. At the end of each reflection, the Allens have written a prayer that the reader is asked to pray. This puts into practice the very things the Allens are trying to teach throughout the book.

I believe *Resilient Faith* is an encouraging read for any Christian and a good resource for believers engaged in discipling or for "young" believers. I have no significant criticisms of the book. While I did not find the Allens to be unusually gifted writers, I did find much wisdom to glean. I appreciated the consistent wedding of position and practice, of doctrine and life, all in a spirit of grace and Spirit dependence. This, in my opinion, is one of the greatest gifts we can give the younger generation. We are calling them to look to the great cloud of witnesses that has passed before and to run with endurance the race set before them, looking unto Jesus. Yes, standing firm in Christ *is* indeed the answer.

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Michael J. Vlach. *Dispensational Hermeneutics: Interpretation Principles That Guide Dispensationalism's Understanding of the Bible's Storyline.* N.p.: Theological Studies, 2023. 111pp.

Michael Vlach's *Dispensational Hermeneutics* provides a highly readable primer on the core principles of interpretation that *distinguish* dispensationalism from its theological alternatives. All orthodox systems of theology concur on certain foundational theological and hermeneutical points. These areas of commonality are not the focus of this book. Instead, *Dispensational Hermeneutics* surveys the interpretive concepts of normalcy, consistency, integrity, and induction that lead to dispensational theology. Vlach captures and describes the essential points of conflict between dispensationalism and alternative theological systems while maintaining a resolute but irenic tone. He demonstrates hermeneutical consensus among dispensationalists by referencing credible dispensational academics like Craig Blaising, Darrell Bock, John Feinberg, Paul Feinberg, Elliott Johnson, Robert Saucy, Mark Snoeberger, Paul Tan, and Mark Yarbrough in outlining ten key principles of dispensational interpretation.

The first chapter treats the *theological* commitments of dispensationalists that are distinct from alternative systems of theology. These set the stage for the interpretive principles that follow in later chapters. These theological commitments include a recognition of "the necessity and centrality of a mediatorial earthly kingdom of God" (12); a "focus on the biblical covenants and all their dimensions" (13); the "continuing significance of ethnic/national Israel" (16); the "distinction between Israel and the Church" (18); the "continuing significance of geo-political nations" (19); and "Premillennialism" (20). Every one of these theological commitments derives from normal, consistent, inductive hermeneutics. To arrive at a different theological conclusion, one must replace normal interpretive principles with special interpretive principles, consistent principles with inconsistent principles, or inductive principles with deductive principles. Dispensationalists defend the nature of Scripture as *different* from any other work of literature in certain respects—having God as its author (inspiration), absolute truth as its quality (inerrancy), and a simultaneous record of God's work through the ages and his plan for the future as its content—but dispensationalists also defend the nature of Scripture as *the same as* other works of literature in other respects—having human authors and readers with human limitations as an audience.

Chapter 2 explains dispensationalism's first three interpretive principles. First, dispensationalists maintain a "consistent use grammatical-historical hermeneutics" throughout all of Scripture regardless of biblical genre (23). Vlach shows how adherents of alternative theological systems tend to follow the grammatical-historical method in their handling of *most* scriptural texts while jettisoning this method in favor of a symbolic hermeneutic in regard to prophecy. Admittedly, they *must* do so in order to justify several theological precommitments. A grammatical-historical interpretation of prophecy leads to a theological outcome similar to dispensationalism. Vlach shows the connection between grammatical-historical and literal interpretation, and he indicates how the use of figures of speech (including symbols and types) is consistent with literal interpretation. He shows how—contrary to claims by dispensationalism's hermeneutical opponents—a literal hermeneutic is necessary to prove Jesus is the Messiah. Jesus would not be recognizable had he not fulfilled hundreds of OT prophecies

regarding his birth, ministry, and death literally. Next, dispensationalists insist on a "consistent contextual interpretation of OT prophecies" (32). This principle intersects integrity because to supplant the grammatical, historical, and contextual meaning with a meaning wholly foreign to what was actually spoken calls into question the integrity of the author. Vlach draws specific attention to "the ethical nature of promises and covenants" (34). Given the necessity of fulfilling a covenant in exactly the terms in which it was given, the reader wonders if theologians who advocate certain alternative systems would feel ill-used if they signed a contract with a mechanic to have their car fixed only to have the mechanic tell them he satisfied the contract by fixing a differing person's house. If God can promise Israel a physical, geographically bounded land but mean that the Church will experience spiritual salvation, then the very essence of truth is shaken. The chapter concludes by clarifying the concept of *testament priority*. While some theologians emphasize "New Testament Priority"—by which they mean that they are the arbiters of what NT ideas to read back into the OT, what promises are to be reinterpreted, and what concepts are to be wholly reimagined in terms foreign to the original—dispensationalists defend "Passage Priority." Vlach describes this simply as "the meaning of any Bible passage is found in that passage" (35). Later passages can add information or clarity, but they never contradict, undermine the meaning of, or reimagine the earlier text in a way that transforms its meaning.

In chapter 3 Vlach expands the interpretive principles of dispensationalism in the direction of integrity by articulating four concepts: "Old Testament prophecies not repeated in the New Testament remain relevant" (40); "Old Testament eschatology expectations are reaffirmed in the New Testament" (43); "Progress of revelation does not cancel or transform unconditional promises to the original audience" (50); and "Fulfillments occur with the two comings of Jesus" (53). Every one of these principles advocates an understanding of what constitutes truth and integrity based on the Scriptures themselves as well as common human experience. That is, Vlach shows that dispensationalists did not invent these interpretive principles in order to substantiate a theological system. Rather, these principles derive from the nature of truth itself and find further warrant in human experience. Far from repudiating, reinventing, reimagining, or reinterpreting the OT, the NT simply shows that the OT properly and correctly predicts both the spiritual and physical promises that relate to Christ's two comings. It is not, then, truly spiritual to do away with the clear historical meaning of the OT in favor of the NT.

Chapter 4 presents three principles of interpretation that relate to the complexity of interpreting OT events and prophecies. These include the existence of "partial fulfillments of Old Testament prophecies" (57); "Jesus as means of fulfillment of the Old Testament" (61); and "Types, yes! Typological interpretation, no!" (71). Each of these principles demonstrates that the spiritual emphasis of the New Testament does not replace the Old, nor does the apparent fulfillment of only certain spiritual aspects of OT prophecies warrant reinterpreting the rest of the prophecy as symbolic. There is strong evidence from Jesus' quotation of Isaiah 61 in Luke 4:18–19 that Jesus understood his first coming was to fulfill only part of the aggregated prophecies of the OT. There is, then, simply no need for theologians to absorb or dismiss the physical promises to Israel by assigning them to alternative symbolic realities.

Chapters 5 and 6 parallel the previous chapters by exploring what other theological systems claim as key interpretive principles that differentiate those systems from dispensationalism. These principles tend to be deduced from a theological examination of the NT evidence regarding the Church coupled with the assumption (which dispensationalists find unwarranted) that Israel either is *replaced* by the Church or *is* the Church. Once theologians deduce these principles, they read them back into the OT. Vlach argues that "there are no examples where a New Testament passage overrides the original meaning of an Old Testament text" as understood by grammatical-historical interpretation (79). Thus, he contends that the deductions that theologians have made are actually founded on air. They stem less from Scripture than from external human assumptions about Scripture. "New Testament Priority" is an assertion and an illusion, and it can even be made to sound very spiritual and sophisticated, but it does not square with biblical reality.

Some of the strongest divergences among conservative theologians stem from competing hermeneutical views. Dispensationalists insist on normalcy, consistency, integrity, and induction as core interpretive principles in reading Scripture. These principles work from the text to the system—they reflect normal communication. Competing systems tend to require interpretive irregularity, inconsistency, a radical reimagination of what was written, and deduction based on axioms within the system. *Dispensational Hermeneutics* does not claim that the "right hermeneutic" can be settled conclusively, but it does offer the reader a clearer understanding of how dispensationalists arrive at their theological conclusions.

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Jack M. Holl. *The Religious Journey of Dwight D. Eisenhower: Duty, God, and Country*. Library of Religious Biography. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021. 329pp. + 15pp. (back matter).

What American president was the first to join a church and be baptized *after* his inauguration? He also is the only president to date who wrote and delivered his own prayer at his inauguration. As president he supported successful efforts to add the words "under God" to the Pledge of Allegiance and to adopt "In God we trust" as the national motto of the United States. He likewise initiated the annual National Prayer Breakfast.

Obviously, anyone reading the title of the book being reviewed knows the answer is Dwight D. Eisenhower. His story stands out among American presidents not because he was religious, for most American presidents have professed some kind of religious opinions that they more or less sincerely believed. Rather, Eisenhower's religious views are important for the way they both reflected and shaped religious discussion during the Cold War in the 1950s. Jack Holl has written a first-rate study of not only what Eisenhower said and did as president but also the background of how the president came to hold his religious opinions.

Eisenhower's views and actions reflect an idea that sociologist Robert Bellah famously described as American civil religion.[1] This quasi-religious public faith entails religious ideas that may be endorsed by the state (such as freedom of religion), an idea of God, and certain "beliefs, symbols, and rituals" that reflect religious ideas. Although respectful of religion, American civil religion is not Christian. However, it sometimes derives concepts from Christianity such as the United States as a new Israel. Civil religion is the sentiment that allowed Martin Luther King Jr. in the March on Washington to tell the crowd, "I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal," *creed* referring to the Declaration of Independence. Some may rightly view the idea of civil religion negatively as a façade or political ploy. Yet the religious ideas of Eisenhower demonstrate how such public faith can be sincere and even coherent, but still ultimately inadequate from a Christian point of view.

Holl covers Eisenhower's entire life in order to provide the fullest possible background to his religious views. Perhaps the most interesting religious facet of his youth was his family's links with the River Brethren, an offshoot of the Mennonites, and his parents' adherence to a branch of the Jehovah's Witnesses, both groups known for pacifist teachings. The irony of such a background for the Supreme Allied Commander in World War II is evident, but there is little evidence that his parents' religious allegiances significantly affected him. Eisenhower's parents allowed their children great liberty in religious matters, and the future president took advantage of that fact to devote little attention to religion.

World War II likely turned Eisenhower's thoughts toward religion. The widespread destruction and death of war would lead almost anyone to consider religious ideas to try to make sense of the carnage, as it did with Abraham Lincoln in the Civil War. For Eisenhower, however, the appeal was even stronger as he opposed totalitarian ideological systems—first Nazism during the war and then

[1] Robert N. Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," *Daedalus* 96 (1967): 1–21.

communism during the Cold War. Religion for him became a component of democratic principles, as seen in a commonly quoted but misunderstood statement by Eisenhower: "Our form of government makes no sense unless it is founded in a deeply felt religious faith, and I don't care what it is."[2] His point was that democracy requires a religious, theistic framework, which Christianity and Judaism provided in the American context. Religious faith is the bedrock of democratic ideals. Eisenhower's religious gestures, such as his inaugural prayer or advocating the motto "In God we trust," served to undergird the democratic traditions of the United States and the West in general.

Holl shows how Eisenhower applied his ideas politically if sometimes inconsistently—notably with the Civil Rights movement and nuclear proliferation, moral issues that challenged the president in working out how religion should influence public policy. Holl also devotes considerable discussion to the friendship of Eisenhower and Billy Graham. Their alliance seemed to be the very embodiment of civil religion and religious renewal in the 1950s, but the author shows that the interests of the president and the evangelist, while compatible, were not identical. There is a revealing discussion, for example, of how the Graham organization interviewed the former president in his retirement about his religious views and sought politely but vigorously to get Eisenhower to recount an evangelical conversion. He never did so.

The author has well described Dwight Eisenhower's religious journey. If the discussion does not always put religion at the center of Eisenhower's life, that has more to do with the subject than with the author. The work is a useful survey of Eisenhower's religion with a relevant consideration of the engagement of religious belief and American politics.

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[2] For the history of this phrase and explanation of its background and meaning, see Patrick Henry, "'And I Don't Care What It Is': The Tradition-History of a Civil Religion Proof-Text," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 49 (1981): 35–49.

Vern S. Poythress. *Redeeming Our Thinking about History: A God-Centered Approach.* Wheaton: Crossway, 2022. 227pp. + 18pp. (back matter).

Those who debate a Christian understanding of history from an academic point of view tend to fall into one of two camps. On the one hand are professional historians who stress the limitations of human knowledge and are cautious about precise applications of biblical ideas, such as how or even whether one may discern the role of providence in history. On the other hand are scholars who focus on theology or biblical studies and who believe that one may use the testimony of Scripture as a basis for firmer conclusions about the nature, course, and analysis of history. The first group emphasizes the uncertainty of human knowledge and the second group the certainty of religious truth. The author of this work is definitely in the second camp, and this book is in fact a fine example of this emphasis.

Vern Poythress is a systematic theologian and NT scholar who has been a long-time member of the faculty at Westminster Theological Seminary. He has given a great deal of thought to a Christian approach to the humanities, having previously written volumes on redeeming the study of mathematics, philosophy, and science. From this perspective, he has written a guide to help show how a Christian might think about history.

Basic to any such discussion is how the author views the nature of history. For his fundamental structure, Poythress follows the common outline for laying out a biblical worldview under the concepts of Creation, Fall, and Redemption. In addition, he adopts a not uncommon fourth point: Consummation. Those who use the simpler framework likely see history subsumed under Redemption, reflecting how Christ's work of redemption unfolds historically and climaxes with the final fulfillment of that work at the end of time. The idea of Consummation, however, does mesh well with the study of history by pointing to the end, or goal, of history with an emphasis on the process through which humanity reaches that end. As for history itself, the author sees its components as events, peoples, and meanings, and he uses those categories for his discussion.

Another feature of any sound Christian approach to history must obviously be how it relates the biblical data to the discussion. This aspect is a strength of this book. Poythress says that when God calls his people to remembrance, as in instructing children, God refers to history in the Bible, providing something of a model for our own approach. To facilitate such an approach, the author provides a handy assembly of texts relating to knowing and studying history. The "Psalms of remembrance" (cf. Pss 105–107), for example, demonstrate how history is wrapped up with revelation. (One could extend the idea to other summaries of the history of God's people in specific portions of Scripture, such as Stephen's defense in Acts 7.) Poythress recognizes human limitations, such as observing that historical generalizations are not the same as natural law. Likewise, he allows for the uniqueness of inspiration as elevating biblical history to a higher level than other forms of history but says the human element of Scripture suggests a role for humans in creating historical writings.

A major portion of Poythress's work considers the Christian's treatment of providence in history. The author illustrates providence in history with two everyday examples: prayer requests (and the answers to those requests) and testimonies of conversion. Both involve events and the interpretation of those events through a biblical lens. Even more to the point, they emphasize the role of God in

those events and interpretation of them. More broadly he lays down what he sees as key principles for understanding providence in history: God's universal control, the glory of God, benefits even to the undeserving, positive value of trials, retribution, and moral and spiritual evaluation. Identifying such principles separates him from popular concepts of providence in history, which focus mainly on nearly miraculous interventions of God in history such as the storm that scattered the Spanish Armada. Poythress's principles suggest wider (and subtler) ways of considering the role of providence in history and point to further avenues for exploring this concept.

Earlier we suggested two camps in approaching the study of history: Christian historians and theologians. Poythress himself highlights this contrast through his extensive interaction with Jay Green's *Christian Providentialism: Five Rival Versions.* Green's work provides a counterpoint, advocating a more circumscribed approach to finding providence in history. Here Poythress firmly argues for ideas such as providentialism and an unambiguous Christian viewpoint in writing history. If nothing else, he reminds us that debates over God's role in history are not over.

There are, however, a couple of cautions. Poythress appears to chide those who write in a neutral, academic tone in order to present their work in scholarly journals or conferences. Granted the need to present a positive Christian viewpoint, there is also a need to address a secular audience in a manner that they will accept, or there will be no forum for presenting anything. We also come back to the nagging question of how well we can discern providence in studying history. Poythress's illustrations of prayer and conversion are helpful, but they are not precise parallels to historical study. In the author's examples, the subjects (the one praying or being prayed for, the convert) have a personal knowledge and experience that make the workings of providence subjectively more evident. Historians, using sources to which they have no such personal relation, lack this insight that validates the role of providence.

These cautions notwithstanding, any Christian who wishes to approach the study of history from a biblical perspective would do well to read this book. Despite its being on a weighty topic, the work is approachable. The structure of the book facilitates study. Poythress writes short, easy-to-digest chapters focused on particular issues. Also, the outline of each chapter is clearly articulated, notably through the headings that guide the reader through the argument step by step. More important is the book's case for bringing the Scripture to bear on the study of history. Perhaps the greatest value in terms of contemporary debate is his defense of providentialism. Poythress does not answer all the challenges in discerning and applying providence, but he does make a case for ongoing work on the topic.

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Dale Ralph Davis. *Luke 1–13* and *Luke 14–22*. Focus on the Bible. Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus, 2021. 240pp. + 10pp. (back matter) + 13pp. (back matter); 240pp. + 12pp. (front matter) + 15pp. (back matter).

I have long recommended Davis's commentaries on the OT books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings; historical narrative is something of a specialty for him. (*The Word Became Fresh* is his excellent guide on how to preach historical narrative.) His work on Luke is of the same character and quality. His commentaries provide an enlightening and enjoyable way to work through any of those books. (I read straight through his two-volume Kings commentary last summer.) Most biblical commentaries tend to be technical resources written for reference. Davis's commentaries, in contrast, are eminently readable texts.

As former professor of OT at Reformed Theological Seminary (Jackson, MS) with decades of pastoral experience to boot, Davis is on familiar terms with highbrow literature and donnish debates. Most of that, however, he confines to occasional footnotes, leaving the commentary itself an undistracted interpretation of the text, interwoven with illustration and application. Especially fond of historical and biographical illustrations, he has a particular penchant for baseball and the Civil War. He does not ramble or fill the page with fluff, devotional or otherwise. His focus throughout remains riveted on the text—an expositional commentary built solidly on a seasoned analysis of the exegetical details of the text. (If you're wondering why an OT prof is writing a commentary on Luke, he explains that in the one-page preface.)

Davis does not think that Luke's "orderly account" (1:3) necessarily implies that it is slavishly chronological but, rather, "a connected, coherent, and generally sequential account." Zechariah's answered prayer in 1:13 was clearly his long-since abandoned prayer for a child (I:21); and his muteness was both a chastisement and a merciful guarantee: "if the mute-threat is true, so is the child-promise!" (I:20). Davis gently chides commentators who explain away kingdom promises (like those in I:32–33, 73–75) as merely metaphorical and spiritual, "whether one sees it occurring in some 'millennial,' earthly reign or in the new heavens and new earth" (I:27, 40–41). He rightly identifies the real gist of the miraculous births by both Sarah (Gen 18:14) and Mary (Luke 1:37); this core issue in both cases was not the ability of divine power but the certainty of the divine promise (I:21, 29).

Davis is selective about which bogs he wades into; even when he steers clear of some of the more technical scholarly textual disputes, his footnotes often weigh in at some length on such issues while the main text remains focused on the bigger issues (I:43, 79). He rejects the notion that "Abba" is merely "a little child's term" for father "equivalent to 'Daddy.'" It is a term of relational familiarity "commonly used within the family circle" by "adult children" as well (I:196). Davis spends two pages arguing that Luke's reference to Jesus' "set[ting] His face to go to Jerusalem" is more than "a mere literary idiom" to describe his resolve, or even a passing allusion to Isaiah 50:7. Rather, Luke wants his readers to connect this reference to the larger Servant Song context of Isaiah 50 and "the words of the 'suffering servant' there"—including not only his obedient resolve but also his confidence in Yahweh's help (I:166–67).

Davis astutely identifies the New Covenant passage Ezekiel 36:23 as the biblical-theological context for the first petition of the Lord's model prayer: "Father, may your name be sanctified." Praying this, then, explicitly involves praying for the coming eschatological reality that will be the means for the international sanctification of God's name prophesied in Ezekiel 36—the conversion and "final restoration" of Israel "to the land." Indeed, "the parallel petition, 'Your kingdom come,' supports this view" (I:198). Davis recognizes a "wisp of humor" in Jesus' follow-up parabolic instruction regarding the friend at midnight (Luke 11:5–13). The interpretational fulcrum, he notes, lies in the word *anaideia* which, he concludes, does not refer to the knocker's "persistence" or the friend's "desire to avoid shame," but the knocker's "chutzpah" (Davis translates it "audacity"). Davis applies this to our willingness to bring even our most "embarrassing" requests to God, but he comes closer to the parable's central point when he suggests that "Jesus may well intend a how-much-more argument" here, as he "clearly" does in 11:11–13. The picture we are meant to carry away is the "contrast between the crabby friend" awakened at midnight and our "willing heavenly Father" (I:201–3). We are incurably suspicious of God; but "He doesn't analyze the grammar and requests in your prayers looking for loopholes in order to" give you something you didn't mean to ask for (I:204).

In the topically related parable of the unjust judge, Davis notes contrasts between God and the unjust judge (in attitude and character) as well as parallels (eventual justice, though delayed) (II:79–80). That parable on the necessity of persevering prayer (18:1) closes with a question: "When the Son of Man comes, will he find [literally] the faith upon earth?" (18:8). This is not a reference to whether the Christian faith will endure, nor whether there will be believers when Christ returns; rather, as Davis notes, "the faith that Jesus speaks of is the faith that shows itself in persevering prayer"—that is, Jesus says, "this kind of faith that I have just been talking about" that keeps praying to God even in the face of delay (II:81).

The rich young ruler's problem, Davis explains, was not with the second table of the law but with the first: "Jesus' demand was a test case . . . that exposed his *first commandment* problem. . . . He was an idolator; he had another God" (II:99–100). Davis insists that the "Son of Man" title in Daniel 7:13 is "an *individual* figure and that 'Son of Man' does not merely denote the corporate people of God" as some have tried to argue (II:153). He is also careful to note the distinction between the plural "you" in 22:31 (all the disciples will be "sifted") and the singular "you" in 22:32 (Jesus promises to pray for Peter specifically) (II:172).

Amid his comments on the last supper, Davis inserts a three-page excursus (II:165–68) on the New Covenant of Jeremiah 31:31–34 that is, on the whole, quite helpful: "Contemporary Gentile believers must not assume that the covenant is all ours and that Israel has no more place in it. It is, strictly speaking, *their* covenant. We must not think that we can high-jack this covenant as our own—rather we piggyback on Israel's privileges in that covenant" (II:166). "The cup" of Jesus' Gethsemane prayer is the cup of God's wrath and judgment on human sin; this explains "the *rightness* of Jesus' request" to avoid it if possible. This aversion to "absorbing God's wrath underscores the *righteousness* of Jesus and the perfection of His human nature. . . . His hesitation is a godly one. There would be something wrong if He *didn't* flinch at this" (II:180). We have no record of Jesus' conversation with

the disciples on the road to Emmaus, but Davis walks through about ten passages that may well have filled the space between 24:27 and 28 (II:227–29).

Davis's commentary incorporates frequent practical, personal applications. He muses whether Mary's mutually edifying fellowship with Elizabeth—despite their decades of age difference—might not be a biblical corrective to the modern church's tendency to divide up its congregation according to age, background, social status, interests, etc. (I:32). Regarding Nazareth's low esteem for one of their own (Luke 4), Davis addresses those who sit unmoved in churches for years or decades: "Being familiar with Jesus can be dreadfully dangerous" (I:82). "Judas," Davis similarly cautions, "becomes a standing warning that closeness [proximity] to Jesus and faithlessness to Jesus can easily coexist" (I:111). To Jesus' seemingly outlandish command that Peter cast his nets despite an entirely fishless night, Davis attaches a caution. "Jesus *does* at times seem to operate in 'foolish' and irrational ways that don't make sense." But be wary of assuming, therefore, that "Jesus *only* works in strange and bizarre and unexpected ways," or that, if it seems nonsensical, it *must* be God's leading. Sometimes, "if it seems weird, it may just be weird," traceable to our thinking rather than God's direction (I:89).

The Martha-Mary narrative (Luke 10) "should keep us from psychological interpretations that go on about how we really need both our Martha- and Mary-types in the church. You may find something like that in another text somewhere, but don't try to drag it out of this one" (I:189). The core of this incident "is that true service for Christ does not consist in what we in our busyness can give Jesus but in receiving what He delights to give us, namely, His word." Adding a pointed application to pastors, Davis—himself a pastor for decades—rubbishes advertisements appealing to the "busy" pastor who apparently "doesn't have time to ponder or think or read" because he is too busy. "I repudiate the busy-pastor model. I don't think there should be any busy pastors" if it means not having time to sit quietly at Jesus' feet with Mary. Such "ministerial busyness . . . empties the soul" (I:192).

Not averse to making pointed applications to his own circle, he titles the second parable in Luke 18 (vv. 9–14) "The Presbyterian and the Publican." Because Christ beheld hell in Gethsemane and in the cup, and experienced it quite literally on the cross, Davis issues a vigorous censure against describing our experience as "hell" or even as "our Gethsemane"—"since the 'cup' is unique, Gethsemane is unique." To suggest that we may have a "Gethsemane" experience is "almost blasphemous" (II:181). Whereas there is much in the OT about Christ, Davis cautions against an overly "'Christocentric' approach to OT exposition" as though "everything or every passage in the OT is about Him"; such a view goes "beyond what Jesus actually says" in 24:44 (II:236).

One reason I like Davis so much is that his interpretational approach and instincts frequently mirror my own. That does not mean, of course, that I never disagree with him. Davis posits that Luke moves the Nazareth synagogue episode (Luke 4) earlier in his account for strategic reasons (I:78). It seems more likely (per some harmonies) that the Luke 4 episode (recorded only by Luke) was, in fact, early in Christ's ministry, whereas Matthew 13 and Mark 6 record a later visit to Nazareth. The reference to a previous ministry in Capernaum (4:23) is easily answered by the long-distance healing of a sick child there, an incident recorded only by John (4:46–54).

Though I agree with Davis's correction of how we understand the term "Abba" (I:196), his data for pre-Christian Jews addressing God as Father in prayer is incomplete; he cites several apocryphal

references, but there is important OT precedent for the practice as well (e.g., Ps 89:26; Isa 63:16; 64:8). Jesus distinctively *accentuates* this relational aspect of prayer, but his instruction in this regard is neither novel nor innovative.

Davis misses (in my opinion) the larger biblical-theological significance of the term "exodus" (9:31) in Luke's version of the transfiguration account (I:157–58). Davis rightly identifies the divine dimension of the disciples' "amazing density" in failing to comprehend Jesus' predictions of his impending death and resurrection (in 9:45 and 18:34); but he never offers any explanation for that divine concealment and seems to overlook its express reversal in 24:45.

Part of Davis's appeal is his down-to-earthiness conversational style, but sometimes it confuses cleverness with corniness and borders on Dad humor. He titles the section on the parable of the unjust estate manager (16:1–8) as "Slick, the Sly Steward," refers to 18:15–17 as the story of "Jesus and the Little Shavers," and summarizes the celestial celebration in 15:7, 10 as a time "when heaven throws parties and angels exchange 'high fives' over a repentant sinner" (II:35). Disagreements over details are to be expected in any commentary, and the intermittent colloquialisms amount to little more than the occasional raised eyebrow or indulgent groan. But Davis's handling of the text itself is consistently serious, insightful, and penetrating.

For the ordinary Christian in the pew who wants to understand a book of the Bible better, I cannot recommend a more accessible or enjoyable commentary; for the Sunday School teacher or Bible study group, a more efficient and usable commentary; or for the pastor ("busy" or not), a more lively fellowship over the Scriptures with an informed and experienced fellow minister, than Davis's commentaries, including this latest one on Luke's Gospel.

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John Piper. *Providence.* Wheaton: Crossway, 2021. 700pp. + 12pp. (front matter) + 40pp. (back matter).

Piper's work on divine providence is a *magnum opus* of mature, seasoned, theological thought that scouts out the global implications of this doctrine. The term *pastor-theologian* has become common currency of late. Piper's *Providence* exemplifies that combination; it is vigorously theological and insistently scriptural but also robustly pastoral, devotional, and applicational. *Providence* does not merely inform—it preaches.

A self-conscious sense of continuity guides the whole journey from beginning to end. Piper has painstakingly mapped out this journey and is careful to explain at the beginning of each chapter where we have been and, at the end of each chapter, where we are going. The excursion is divided into three unequal legs.

Part 1 (thirty pages) centers on "A Definition and a Difficulty." Sovereignty conveys power, but providence adds the dimension of *purposefulness* (29). A concise expression of what Piper means by *providence* is God's all-embracing, all-pervasive, invincible, and purposeful sovereignty (18, 24; cf. 691). To several historic confessional definitions of providence Piper adds one additional clarifying statement: that God "freely and unchangeably ordain[s] and foreknow[s] whatever comes to pass . . . yet in such a way that He never sins, nor ever condemns a person unjustly" and in a way that "is compatible with moral accountability" (37). While Piper distinguishes between *providence* and *fate* (35–40), he never differentiates between *providence* and *miracle*, as is usual in many treatments of providence. The expansive scope of Piper's conception of providence explains the book's breadth (and length!).

The end for which God exercises his all-encompassing providence is no surprise: it is for his glory. But Piper helpfully teases out what that means (and what it does not). Confronting our inherent objections to such a self-exalting Deity, he concludes that "'for his glory' does not mean to *get* glory which he does not already have, but rather to display and vindicate and communicate his glory for the everlasting enjoyment of his people—that is, for all those who, instead of resenting God's self-exaltation, receive him as their supreme treasure" (43). That is, "God is really pursuing the exaltation of his beauty in the *enjoyment* of his praising people," meaning that "*God's* self-exaltation is utterly different from all *human* self-exaltation" (53, 55). Indeed, as he says later, God "is the one being in the universe for whom self-exaltation is an act of supreme love" (208, 209).

Part 2 (150 pages) focuses on "The Ultimate Goal of Providence." This divides into three subsections. Section 1 explores the goal of providence both before creation and in the act of creation. The first category entails election and is most directly addressed in Ephesians 1: "not simply God's glory, but the *praise* of his glory" (1:6, 12, 14), and more specifically, "the praise of the glory of his *grace*." That praise is the response of those chosen by that grace even "before the foundation of the world" (1:4). Then, in the act of creation, God "creates human beings in his image" and "commands that the earth be full of such images of himself," making it "clear that God's goal in creation is the display of God" (62). But it is God's grace before the beginning that guarantees "the final worship of

heaven will be not simply . . . an echo of God's excellence in creation, but also . . . an echo of Christ's excellence in salvation" (64).

Section 2 of part 2 concentrates on the goal of providence in the history of Israel. From God's call and covenant with Abraham to the creation of the nation at Sinai to the distant future "when ethnic Israel . . . will be grafted back into the olive tree of Abraham's covenant blessing," the goal of all God's providential dealings with Israel is the praise of his glory and grace (Isa 43:7, 21; 49:3; 60:21; 61:3; Jer 13:11). It is mildly disappointing that two pages unfold the significance of Isaiah 55:12–13 (82–83) yet overlook the burning bush that guarantees these remarkable eschatological blessings—the absolute trustworthiness of every word from the mouth of God (55:10–11). Piper perceptively explores ten theological ramifications of the divine name "I AM" revealed to Israel in connection with the exodus (90–92) and traces the repeated purpose of God to make himself known not only to Israel and to Egypt but to all the nations (93–94). Insights like gems strew the long journey tracing God's providence throughout Israel's history. "This commandment ("You shall have no other gods before me") was to be no more burdensome than the satisfied experience of a wife who has a perfect husband" (122). "The essence of sin is minimizing God and making much of self" (127). "Hezekiah's prayer did not appeal to the worthiness of Jerusalem to be rescued but to the worthiness of God to be worshiped" (141). "God's God-centeredness . . . is not a threat to our joy but the basis of it" (150).

Section 3 of part 2 explains the goal of providence in the design and enactment of the New Covenant. Here some of the weaknesses (in my opinion) of a covenantal approach surface. For example, the text of Jeremiah 32:39–41 is quoted (160), including the astonishing statement, "I will rejoice in doing them good, *and I will plant them in this land in faithfulness,* with all my heart and with all my soul." Yet Piper's explanation of the passage twice omits the text's explicit connection of God's whole-hearted, whole-souled commitment to Israel's restoration to the land. Instead, Piper's takeaway focuses exclusively on the soteriological and sanctificational blessings of the New Covenant. "God will rejoice over this transformed people with all his heart and with all his soul" (159), and God "pledges to secure these blessings with overflowing joy: 'I will rejoice in doing them good . . . with all my heart and all my soul'" (160). The soteriological blessings are grand indeed, but they are only the starting point of God's New Covenant promises to Israel. Nevertheless, Piper rightly identifies "one of the earliest expressions of the new covenant" in Deuteronomy 30 (161).

Piper writes that "the ultimate goal of God in his saving providence . . . was achieved through the suffering of the Son of God"—which means that "the ultimate reason that suffering exists is so that Christ might display the greatness of the glory of the grace of God by suffering himself to overcome our suffering" (171). But how did suffering originate? "If God planned the suffering of his Son before creation . . . then he foresaw the coming of sin and planned to permit it to enter the world" (175). Piper helpfully defends the notion of God's permission, "since God's providence does not govern all events in precisely the same way, and 'permission' is one way to describe some of his acts of providence"—including the Fall (175–79). Another feature of the New Covenant that Piper develops is the "progressive glorification" of his people (187ff.).

In part 3 (500 pages) Piper explores "The Nature and Extent of Providence." Having identified and elaborated on the goal of God's providence, Piper turns his attention in this largest section of the

book to the "nature and extent" of providence: "The new question is not *Where* is God taking the world? but *How* does he see to it (providentially!) that it gets there?" (207). What does providence include, what does it look like in operation, and—if it includes governing sinful human choices—how does he exercise this providence without becoming culpable for human sin (210)? Each succeeding chapter in this section explores the all-inclusive realms over which God's providence reigns: nature, Satan and demons, kings and nations, life and death, sin, conversion, and Christian living, and global missions. And folded into each chapter are discussions of how his providence operates without impugning his righteousness.

Some of these discussions are extraordinarily astute and helpful. For example, God's providential control over both natural, humanly instigated, and even demonically instigated events should have a profound impact on how we react to them. On the other hand, some of these discussions could use a bit more clarification. What, exactly, *is* the *nature* of God's providential involvement in the growth of grass and the falling of rain, or in the sinful choices of a powerful king? Piper and I appear to disagree on the causes and progression of the hardening of Pharaoh's heart; but we may be closer than it seems if Piper were to apply to his treatment of Pharaoh some of the qualifying statements he makes elsewhere in the book, particularly concerning the *nature* and *means* of his providential control. (See my article on the hardening of Pharaoh's heart in this issue of *JBTW*.)

In any case, Piper's work is peppered with insights that are both thought-provoking and inspiring. "The fear of the Lord is not the opposite of joy in the Lord; it is the depth and seriousness of it" (160). God's judgment on Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 4) demonstrated not only that "self-exaltation dethrones God" but also "dehumanizes man. The irony is that human autonomy feels like we have gained significance, when in fact we have lost sanity" (331). "God's rule of every life is not bad news. It is glorious news" (375). Repentance "is one of the reasons God judged moral evil with physical pain. While fallen people do not value God, they do value being pain free. . . . God puts the call to repentance in the language everyone can understand—the language of pain and death" (504). Piper's argument for the salvation of infants who die based on Romans 1:19–20 is intriguing (507–8).

It is in his conclusion, "Seeing and Savoring the Providence of God" (twenty pages), that Piper summarizes the fundamental tenets of his book most concisely. "Providence is the purposeful sovereignty that carries [God's] plans into action, guides all things toward God's ultimate goal, and leads to the final consummation" of all his purposes (691). It encompasses everything, including "the moral acts of every soul" but in such a way "that the preferences and choices of Satan and man are really their own preferences and their own choices" (691–92). That means that "God's providence is decisive . . . but it is not coercive. That is, its ordinary way of working is to see to it [the literal meaning of *providence*] that Satan and man decide and act in a way that is their own preference, while fulfilling God's plan at every moment" (692). This crucial and biblical qualification would have been enormously helpful and clarifying to incorporate into his discussion of Pharaoh. "*How* God does this" is, indeed, a mystery, "but *that* he does it is what the Bible teaches" (ibid.). (Psalm 33:15, a natural fit for this point, unfortunately does not surface in the book.) Piper tops off this monumental study with ten effects of embracing a biblical understanding of God's providence, including its impact on our worship, our worldview, our appreciation of our salvation, our relationship to the surrounding culture,

our perception and interpretation of all reality, our patience and faithfulness amid difficult and inexplicable experiences, our resistance to unbiblical explanations, our confidence "that God has the right and the power to answer prayer" to change people's hearts, our persuasion of the necessity of evangelism and missions, and our assurance of God's eternal glory in us through our satisfaction in him (694–711).

Providence includes both a general and biblical index but, interestingly, no bibliography. That helps to explain an anomaly that immediately strikes the reader—the sparsity of footnote citations. The book includes only 116 footnotes (an average of one note every six pages); forty percent of the footnotes reference Piper's other works or discussions elsewhere in the book itself. That is not particularly surprising, given Piper's maturity and stature as a theologian and the breadth and theological depth of his other writings. What is perhaps a little surprising, especially for a book of this size and nature, is that only thirty-two percent cite outside sources, the most common being (unsurprisingly) Jonathan Edwards (ten times). The rest furnish either additional Scripture or some expanded explanation beyond the main text. Though Piper never explains this aspect of his writing strategy, one assumes that his goal was to concentrate our attention primarily on the teachings and implications of the biblical text itself, without bogging down the reader in either the debates or corroborations of other theologians—not unlike a massively extended, magisterial sermon. (Another reviewer describes it as "a long, sermonic essay.") It lends the work a certain biblical-theological purity and authority, but some may wish for more pervasive evidence of interaction on a topic with such far-reaching theological implications.

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