OPEN THEISM’S ATTACK
ON THE ATONEMENT*

John MacArthur
President and Professor of Pastoral Ministries

Open theism arose in evangelicalism over a decade ago when evangelicals posited a God to whom one can easily relate and who is manageable in place of a God who punishes sinners for their sin. This they did by proposing a model of Christ’s atonement that was not substitutionary. To do so they adopted the model of the 16th-century Socinian heresy, which taught that God could forgive without the payment of a ransom. The biblical doctrine, however, is that Christ’s atonement was substitutionary, a teaching that was not immediately defined in the early church, but which Anselm stated clearly during the 16th century. Open theists on the other hand tend to vacillate between the inadequate positions of Abelard and Grothus in their views of the atonement. Because of their distorted views of the atonement, open theists do not belong in the ranks of evangelicalism.

* * * * *

More than a decade ago a controversial article in Christianity Today heralded the rise of open theism. The article, “Evangelical Megashift,” was written by Robert Brow, a prominent Canadian theologian. Brow described a radical change looming on the evangelical horizon—a “megashift” toward “new-model” thinking, away from classical theism (which Brow labeled “old-model” theology). What the article outlined was the very movement that today is known as the “open” view of God, or “open theism.”

Although Brow himself is a vocal advocate of open theism, his 1990 article neither championed nor condemned the megashift. In it, Brow sought merely to describe how the new theology was radically changing the evangelical concept of God by proposing new explanations for biblical concepts such as divine wrath, God’s righteousness, judgment, the atonement—and just about every aspect of evangelical theology.

---

*This essay will appear in Taming the Lion: The Openness of God and the Failure of Imagination, which is scheduled for release by Canon Press early in 2001.

The Quest for a Manageable Deity

Brow’s article portrayed new-model theology in benign terms. He saw the movement as an attempt to remodel some of the more difficult truths of Scripture by employing new, friendlier paradigms to explain God.

According to Brow, old-model theology casts God in a severe light. In old-model evangelicalism, God is a stern magistrate whose judgment is a harsh and inflexible legal verdict; sin is an offense against His divine law; God’s wrath is the anger of an indignant sovereign; hell is a relentless retribution for sin; and atonement may be purchased only if payment in full is made for sin’s judicial penalty.

In new-model theology, however, the God-as-magistrate model is set aside in favor of a more congenial model—that of God as a loving Father. New-model thinkers want to eliminate the negative connotations associated with difficult biblical truths such as divine wrath and God’s righteous retribution against sin. So they simply redefine those concepts by employing models that evoke “the warmth of a family relationship.” For example, they suggest that divine wrath is really nothing more than a sort of fatherly displeasure that inevitably provokes God to give us loving encouragements. God is a “judge” only in the sense of the OT judges (such as Deborah or Gideon or Samuel)—meaning He is a defender of His people rather than an authority who sits in judgment over them. Sin is merely “bad behavior” that ruptures fellowship with God—and its remedy is always correction, never retribution. Even hell is not really a punishment; it is the ultimate expression of the sinner’s freedom, because according to new-model thought, “assignment to hell is not by judicial sentence”—so if anyone goes there, it is purely by choice.

Gone are all vestiges of divine severity. God has been toned down and tamed. According to new-model theology, God is not to be thought of as righteously indignant over His creatures’ disobedience. In fact, Brow’s article was subtitled “Why you may not have heard about wrath, sin, and hell recently.” He characterized the God of new-model theology as a kinder, gentler, more user-friendly deity.

Indeed, one of the main goals of the open-theism megashift seems to be to eliminate the fear of the Lord completely. According to Brow, “No one would deny that it is easier to relate to a God perceived as kindly and loving.”

Of course, the God of old-model theology is also unceasingly gracious, merciful, and loving (a fact one would not be able to glean from the gross caricature new-model advocates like to paint when they describe “old-model orthodoxy”). But old-model theologians—with Scripture on their side—teach that there is more to the

---

2 Ibid., 12.
3 Ibid., 13.
4 Ibid.
5 Ibid., 14.
divine character than beneficence. God is also holy, righteous, and angry with the wicked every day (Psalm 7:11). He is fierce in His indignation against sin (cf. Ps 78:49; Isa 13:9-13; Zeph 3:8). Fear of Him is the very essence of true wisdom (Job 28:28; Ps 111:10; Prov 1:7; 9:10; 15:33). And “the terror of the Lord” is even a motive for our evangelism (2 Cor 5:11). “Our God is a consuming fire” (Heb 12:29; cf. Deut 4:24), and “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb 10:31).

Nonetheless, open theists are determined to eliminate or explain away every feature of the divine character except those that are instantly “perceived as kindly and loving.” They want nothing to do with a God who demands to be feared. Their theology aims to construct a manageable deity, a god who is “easier to relate to”—a quasi-divine being who has been divested of all the features of divine glory and majesty that might provoke any fear or dread in the creature. Instead, they have made Him into a kindly, non-threatening, heavenly valet.

Redefining the Atonement

Above all, the new-model god never demands any payment for sin as a condition of forgiveness. According to the new-model view, if Christ suffered for our sins, it was only in the sense that he “absorb[ed] our sin and its consequences”—certainly not that He received any divinely-inflicted punishment on our behalf at the cross. He merely became a partaker with us in the human problem of pain and suffering. (After all, earthly “pain and suffering” are just about the worst consequences of sin new-model theologians can imagine.)

The most disturbing line in Robert Brow’s article is an almost incidental, throwaway remark near the end, in which he states that according to new-model theology, “the cross was not a judicial payment,” but merely a visible, space-time expression of how Christ has always suffered because of our sin.7

In other words, according to new-model theology, the atoning work of Christ was not truly substitutionary; He made no ransom-payment for sin; no guilt was imputed to Him; nor did God punish Him as a substitute for sinners. None of His sufferings on the cross were administered by God. Instead, according to the new model, atonement means that our sins are simply “forgiven” out of the bounty of God’s loving tolerance; our relationship with God is normalized; and Christ “absorbed the consequences” of our forgiveness (which presumably means He suffered the indignity and shame that go with enduring an offense).

So what does the cross mean according to new-model theologians? Many of them say Christ’s death was nothing more than a public display of the awful

---

1 Scripture quotations here and throughout the essay are from the King James Version of the Bible.

7Brow, “Evangelical Megashift” 14. For a reply to the erroneous suggestion that God “suffers” at the hands of His creatures, see the chapter by Phil Johnson that will appear in Taming the Lion: The Openness of God and the Failure of Imagination.
consequences of sin—so that rather than offering His blood to satisfy God’s justice, Christ was merely demonstrating sin’s effects in order to fulfill a **public** perception of justice.\(^8\) Other new-model theologians go even further, virtually denying the need for any kind of ransom for sin altogether.\(^9\) Indeed, the entire concept of a payment to expiate sin’s guilt is nonsense if the open theists are right.\(^10\)

Thus new-model theologians have rather drastically remodeled the doctrine of Christ’s atonement, and in the process they have fashioned a system that is in no sense truly evangelical—but is rather a repudiation of core evangelical distinctives. It is surely no overstatement to say that their emasculated doctrine of the atonement obliterates the true meaning of the cross. According to open theism, the cross is merely a demonstrative proof of Christ’s “willingness to suffer”—and in this watered-down view of the atonement, He suffers **alongside** the sinner, rather than in the sinner’s stead.

It is my conviction that this error is the bitter root of a corrupt tree that can never bear good fruit (cf. Matt 7:18-20; Luke 6:43). Church history is rife with examples of those who rejected the vicarious nature of Christ’s atonement and thereby made shipwreck of the faith.

---

\(^8\)This is a version of Grotius’s governmental atonement theory discussed later in this chapter. See also Appendix 1 ("How Are We to Understand the Atonement?") in John MacArthur, *The Freedom and Power of Forgiveness* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1998) 197-203, for a more thorough critique of Grotius’s view of the atonement.

\(^9\)John Sanders, a leading proponent of open theism, begins his discussion of the cross by writing, “I understand sin to primarily be alienation, or a broken relationship, rather than a state of being or guilt” (*The God Who Risks* [Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1998] 105) With such a definition of sin, what need is there of any propitiation? Indeed, Sanders goes on to characterize the cross as a public display of God’s willingness to “suffer the pain, foregoing revenge, in order to pursue the reconciliation of the broken relationship.” In other words, the “cost of forgiveness” in Sanders’s system is a sacrifice God makes pertaining to His personal honor and dignity, rather than a price He demands in accord with His perfect righteousness. So Sanders believes God ultimately **relinquishes** the rightful claims of His justice and holiness rather than **satisfying** them through the atoning blood of Christ. That is the typical view of open theism toward the atonement.

\(^10\)Open theist David Basinger suggests that the believer’s own free-will choice—rather than Christ’s atonement—is what “bridges” the “initial separation . . . between God and humans” (Clark Pinnock, et al., *The Openness of God* [Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1994] 173-75).

Basinger moreover describes the gap “between God and humans” without a reference to sin whatsoever; it is merely “an initial inability for God and humans to interact to the extent possible” [ibid.]. He depicts the gospel as “good news”—the joy and excitement of being properly related to God” [ibid.,]. Utterly missing from his discussion of open theism’s evangelistic ramifications is any reference to the **cross of Christ** or the meaning of atonement. No wonder—for if Basinger and other open theists are right, the cross is really superfluous as far as divine forgiveness is concerned. The crucifixion of Christ becomes little more than a melodramatic display of sentiment, not a ransom for anything.
Socinianism Redux

In fact, the “new-model” innovations described in Robert Brow’s 1990 article—and the distinctive principles of open theism, including the open theist’s view of the atonement—are by no means a “new model.” They all smack of Socinianism, a heresy that flourished in the 16th century.

Like modern open theism, 16th-century Socinianism was an attempt to rid the divine attributes of all that seemed harsh or severe. According to Socinianism, love is God’s governing attribute; His love essentially overwhelms and annuls His displeasure against sin; His goodness makes void His wrath. Therefore, the Socinians contended, God is perfectly free to forgive sin without demanding a payment of any kind.

Moreover, the Socinians argued, the idea that God would demand a payment for sins is contradictory to the very notion of forgiveness. They claimed that sins could be either remitted or paid for, but not both. If a price must be paid, then sins are not truly “forgiven.” And if God is really willing to pardon sin, then no ransom-price should be necessary. Moreover, according to the Socinian argument, if a price is demanded, then grace is no more gracious than any legal transaction, like the payment of a traffic ticket.

That argument may seem subtly appealing to the human mind at first. But biblically it falls far short. In fact, it is completely contrary to what Scripture teaches about grace, atonement, and divine justice. It hinges on definitions of those terms that ignore what Scripture clearly teaches.

Grace is not incompatible with the payment of a ransom. It was purely by grace that God Himself (in the Person of Christ) made the payment we owed. In fact, according to 1 John 4:9-10, this is the consummate expression of divine grace and love: that God willingly sent His Son to bear a world of guilt and die for sin in order to propitiate His righteous indignation, fully satisfy His justice, and thereby redeem sinners: “In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (emphasis added). Christ came to be “the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). That language is a plain reference to the OT sacrificial system, deliberately evoking the concept of expiation, which in the Jewish sacrificial system involved the payment of a blood-price, a penalty for sin.

Furthermore, anyone who studies what Scripture has to say about the forgiveness of sin will see very quickly that the shedding of Christ’s blood is the only ground on which sins may ever be forgiven. There can be no forgiveness unless the ransom-price is paid in blood. Remember, that is the very thing both Socinians and open theists deny. They say forgiveness is incompatible with the payment of a penalty—sins that must be paid for have not truly been remitted. But Heb 9:22 clearly refutes their claim: “Without shedding of blood [there] is no remission.”

The Biblical Doctrine of Substitutionary Atonement
On the cross, God made Christ a propitiation—a satisfaction of the divine wrath against sin (Rom 3:25). The sacrifice Christ rendered was a payment of the penalty for sin assessed by God. Christ offered Himself on the cross to God. He “loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savour” (Eph 5:2, emphasis added). His death was a sacrifice offered to appease God’s justice. It was the only way God could remain just while justifying sinners (Rom 3:26). It was the only way He could forgive sin without compromising His own justice and holiness.

Scripture expressly teaches this. Christ died in our place and in our stead. He “was once offered to bear the sins of many” (Heb 9:28). He “bore our sins in His own body on the tree” (1 Pet 2:24). And as he hung there on the cross, he suffered the full wrath of God on our behalf. “Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.” (Isa 53:4-5). “The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all” (v. 6). “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us” (Gal 3:13). These are principles established in the OT sacrificial system, not concepts borrowed from Greek and Roman legal paradigms, as open theists are so fond of claiming.

It was God who decreed and orchestrated the events of the crucifixion. Acts 2:23 says Christ was “delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God.” God’s hand and His counsel determined every facet of Christ’s suffering (Acts 4:28). According to Isa 53:10, “it pleased the Lord to crush him; he hath put him to grief.” That same verse says the Lord made His Servant “an offering for sin.” In other words, God punished Christ for sin on the cross and thereby made Him a sin offering. All the wrath and vengeance of the offended Almighty was poured on Him, and He became the sacrificial Lamb who bore His people’s sin.

This is the whole gist of the book of Hebrews as well. “It is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins” (Heb 10:4). Verse 10 says “we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.” Verse 12 says His death was “one sacrifice for sins for ever.” Very clearly those verses are teaching that Christ was sacrificed as a blood atonement to meet the demands of God’s righteousness. No wonder many find that a shocking truth. It is shocking. And it is profound. It ought to put us on our faces before God. Any “new model” that diminishes or denies the truth of Christ’s vicarious suffering at God’s own hand is a seriously flawed “model.”

What do you think of when you ponder Christ’s death on the cross? Open theism reasserts the old liberal lie that He was basically a martyr, a victim of humanity—put to death at the hands of evil men. But Scripture says He is the lamb of God, a Victim of divine wrath.

What made Christ’s miseries on the cross so difficult for Him to bear was not the taunting and torture and abuse of evil men. It was that He bore the full weight of divine fury against sin. Jesus’ most painful sufferings were not merely those inflicted by the whips and nails and thorns. But by far the most excruciating agony
Christ bore was the full penalty of sin on our behalf—God’s wrath poured out on Him in infinite measure. Remember that when He finally cried out in distress, it was because of the afflictions He received from God’s own hand: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34). We cannot even begin to know what He suffered. It is a horrible reality to ponder. But we dare not follow open theism in rejecting the notion that He bore His Father’s punishment for our sins, for in this truth lies the very nerve of genuine Christianity. It is the major reason the cross is such an offense (cf. 1 Cor 1:18).

Scripture says, “[God] hath made [Christ] to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him” (2 Cor 5:21). Our sins were imputed to Christ, and He bore the awful price as our substitute. Conversely, His righteousness is imputed to all who believe, and they stand before God fully justified, clothed in the pure white garment of His perfect righteousness. In other words, this is the meaning of what happened at the cross for every believer: God treated Christ as if He had lived our wretched, sinful life, so that He could treat us as if we had lived Christ’s spotless, perfect life.

Deny the vicarious nature of the atonement—deny that our guilt was transferred to Christ and He bore its penalty—and you in effect have denied the ground of our justification. If our guilt was not transferred to Christ and paid for on the cross, how can His righteousness be imputed to us for our justification? Every deficient view of the atonement must deal with this same dilemma. And unfortunately, those who misconstrue the meaning of the atonement invariably end up proclaiming a different gospel, devoid of the principle of justification by faith.

The Battle for the Atonement

The atonement has been a theological battleground ever since Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109) first began to focus the clear light of Scripture on this long-neglected and often misunderstood aspect of redemption. The early church, consumed with controversies about the Person of Christ and the nature of the Godhead, more or less took for granted the doctrine of the atonement. It was rarely a subject for debate or systematic analysis in early church writings. But when Church Fathers wrote about the atonement, they employed biblical terminology about ransom and propitiation.

Few would argue that the Church Fathers had a well-formed understanding of the atonement as a penal substitution, but Augustus Hodge pointed out that the idea of vicarious atonement was more or less implicit in their understanding, even if it was “often left to a remarkable degree in the background, and mixed up confusedly with other elements of truth or superstition.” Specifically, some of the Fathers seemed confused about the nature of the ransom Christ paid—especially on the question of to whom the ransom was due. Some of them seemed to think of it as

a ransom paid to Satan, as if Christ paid a fee to the devil to purchase release for sinners. That view is often called the ransom theory of the atonement.

Nonetheless, according to Hodge, “With few exceptions, the whole church from the beginning has held the doctrine of Redemption in the sense of a literal propitiation of God by means of the expiation of sin.” Selected Church Fathers’ comments about the ransom of Christ should not be taken as studied, conscientious doctrinal statements but rather as childlike expressions of an unformed and inadequate doctrine of the atonement. Philip Schaff, commenting on the lack of clarity about the atonement in early church writings, said, “The primitive church teachers lived more in the thankful enjoyment of redemption than in logical reflection upon it. We perceive in their exhibitions of this blessed mystery the language rather of enthusiastic feeling than of careful definition and acute analysis.” “Nevertheless,” Schaff added, “all the essential elements of the later church doctrine of redemption may be found, either expressed or implied, before the close of the second century.”

Until Anselm, no leading theologian really focused much energy on systematizing the biblical doctrine of the atonement. Anselm’s work on the subject, Cur Deus Homo? (Why Did God Become Man?), offered compelling biblical evidence that the atonement was not a ransom paid by God to the devil but rather a debt paid to God on behalf of sinners, a satisfaction of divine justice. Anselm’s work on the atonement established a foundation for the Protestant Reformation and became the very heart of evangelical theology. The doctrine Anselm articulated, known as the penal substitution theory of the atonement, has long been considered an essential aspect of all doctrine that is truly evangelical. Historically, all who have abandoned this view have led movements away from evangelicalism.

A close contemporary of Anselm, Peter Abelard, responded with a view of the atonement that is virtually the same as the view held by some of the leading modern open theists. According to Abelard, God’s justice is subjugated to His love. He demands no payment for sin. Instead, the redeeming value of Christ’s death consisted in the power of the loving example He left for sinners to follow. This view is sometimes called the moral influence theory of the atonement. Abelard’s view was later adopted and refined by the Socinians in the 16th century (as discussed above).

Of course, as is true with most heresies, there is a kernel of truth in the moral influence theory. The atoning work of Christ is the consummate expression of God’s love (1 John 4:9-10). It is also a motive for love in the believer (vv. 7-8, 11). But the major problem with Abelard’s approach is that he made the atonement nothing more than an example. If Abelard was correct, Christ’s work on the cross accomplished nothing objective on the sinner’s behalf—so that there is no real

---

12Ibid., 269.
14Ibid.
propitiatory aspect to Christ’s death. That essentially makes redemption from sin the believer’s own responsibility. Sinners are “redeemed” by following the example of Christ. “Salvation” reduces to moral reform motivated by love. It is a form of works-salvation.

Abelard’s view of the atonement is the doctrine that lies at the core of liberal theology. Like every other form of works-salvation, it is a different gospel from the good news set forth in Scripture.

A third view of the atonement was devised by Hugo Grotius (1583-1645) during the Arminian controversy in Holland. Known as the governmental theory of the atonement, this view is something of a middle road between Abelard and Anselm. According to Grotius, Christ’s death was a public display of God’s justice, but not an actual payment on behalf of sinners. In other words, the cross shows what punishment for sin would look like if God recompensed sin. But no actual vicarious payment of the sinner’s debt was made by Christ.

Grotius, like Abelard and the Socinians, believed God could forgive sin without any payment. But Grotius said the dignity and authority of God’s law still needed to be upheld. Sin is a challenge to God’s right to rule. If God simply overlooked sin, He would in effect abrogate His moral government of the universe. So Christ’s death was necessary to vindicate God’s authority as ruler, because it proved His willingness and his right to punish, even though He ultimately relinquishes the claims of His justice against repentant sinners. Christ’s death therefore was not a substitute for anyone else’s punishment, but merely a public example of God’s moral authority and His hatred of sin.

In other words, unlike Abelard, Grotius saw that the death of Christ displayed the wrath, as well as the love, of God. Like Abelard, however, Grotius believed the atonement was exemplary rather than substitutionary. Christ did not actually suffer in anyone’s place. The atonement accomplished nothing objective on the sinner’s behalf; it was merely a symbolic gesture. Christ’s death was an example only. And redemption therefore hinges completely on something the sinner must do. So the governmental theory also results inevitably in works-salvation.15

New-model open theists seem to halt between two wrong opinions—sometimes echoing Grotius’s governmentalism; sometimes sounding

---

15Most governmentalists stress repentance as a human free-will decision. Charles Finney, a conscientious defender of Grotius’s view of the atonement, preached a message titled “Making a New Heart,” in which he argued that regeneration (and particularly the change of heart that involves removal of the stony heart and implantation of a heart of flesh—cf. Ezek 36:26), is something each sinner must accomplish for himself. Moreover, in his Systematic Theology, Finney wrote, “[Sinners] are under the necessity of first changing their hearts, or their choice of an end, before they can put forth any volitions to secure any other than a selfish end. And this is plainly the everywhere assumed philosophy of the Bible. That uniformly represents the unregenerate as totally depraved [a voluntary condition, not a constitutional depravity, according to Finney], and calls upon them to repent, to make themselves a new heart” (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1994) 249 [emphasis added].
suspiciously Abelardian. But one thing all open theists would agree on is this: Anselm and the penal substitution view of the atonement are obsolete, part of an outdated model they can hardly wait for the evangelical movement to shed.

**Evangelicalism? Hardly**

Clearly, Brow, Pinnock, Greg Boyd, and most other leading advocates of new-model open theism want to be accepted as evangelicals. Near the end of his article, Brow wonders aloud whether new-model thinking has any place under the evangelical umbrella. Does it provide a more helpful picture of God’s good news, or is it ‘another gospel’?

Earlier generations of evangelicals without qualm or hesitation would have answered that question by declaring that open theism’s message is “another gospel” (Gal 1:8-9). Indeed, that is precisely how they have answered whenever Socinians, Unitarians, liberals, and various other peddlers of new theologies have raised these very same challenges to the “old model.”

Unfortunately, the major segment of this generation of evangelicalism seems to lack the will or the knowledge to decide whether open theists are wolves in sheep’s clothing or true reformers. But let it be clearly stated: by any definition of evangelicalism with historical integrity, open theism opposes the very core truths that evangelicals stand for. And by any truly biblical definition, they are heretics, purveyors of a different gospel. Both of these charges are substantiated by open theism’s abandonment of substitutionary atonement alone.

In fact, the only significant difference between today’s open theists and the Socinians of yesteryear is that the Socinians denied the deity of Christ, whereas open theists ostensibly do not. But in effect, open theists have denied the deity of God Himself, by humanizing Him and trying to reconcile Him with modern standards of

---

16In his article “From Augustine to Arminius: A Pilgrimage in Theology,” Clark Pinnock recounted his own retreat from the penal substitution view via a route that took him from Anselm to Grotius to Barth (Pinnock, ed. The Grace of God, the Will of Man: A Case for Arminianism [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990]).


18The Baptist General Conference’s recent refusal to clarify their doctrinal statement and rule out open theism’s deficient view of divine omniscience is clear evidence that modern evangelicals are vacillating and ambivalent on these issues.

19Quite simply, the label evangelical has historically been used to identify those who hold to both the formal and material principles of the Reformation—sola Scriptura (Scripture as the supreme authority) and sola fide (justification by faith alone). Although in recent years much broader and more complex definitions have been proposed, the history of the evangelical movement is inextricably linked with a resolute defense of those two vital principles. Absolutely essential to the doctrine of justification by faith is the truth of a vicarious atonement, where the guilt of the sinner is imputed to Christ and paid for, while the merit of Christ is imputed to the believer as the sole ground of acceptance with God. All who have denied substitutionary atonement have either been far outside the historic evangelical mainstream, or they have led movements that quickly abandoned evangelical distinctives.
political correctness.

In “Evangelical Megashift,” Robert Brow claims that “the wind of [new-model theology’s] influence blows in through every crack when we read C. S. Lewis’s Chronicles of Narnia stories.” Lewis was no theologian, and there’s no doubt that his views were squishy on the question of eternal punishment. He held other views that make old-model evangelicals shudder. But one wonders if he really would have been in sympathy with open theists’ quest for a tamed and toned-down deity.

In the Narnia Chronicles, Aslan, the fierce but loving lion, represents Christ. His paws are frighteningly terrible, sharp as knives with the claws extended, but soft and velvety when the claws are drawn in. He is both good and fearsome. When the children in Lewis’s tale looked at him, they “went all trembly.” Mr. Beaver says of him, “He’s wild, you know. Not like a tame lion.” And Lewis as narrator observes, “People who have not been in Narnia sometimes think a thing cannot be good and terrible at the same time.”

That same basic false assumption was the starting point for the heresy of open theism. New-model theologians began with the assumption that God could not be good and terrible at the same time, so they set out to divest Him of whatever attributes they did not like. Like the Socinians and liberals who preceded them, they have set out on a misguided quest to make God “good” according to a humanistic, earthbound definition of “good.” They are devising a god of their own making.

In the final book of the Narnia series, a wicked ape drapes a lion skin over a witless ass and pretends the ass is Aslan. It is a sinister and dangerous pretense, and in the end it leads countless Narnians astray. The god of open theism is like an ass in an ill-fitting lion’s skin. And it is leading many away from the glorious God of Scripture.

God is both good and fearsome. His wrath is as real as his love. And though He has “mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, [He] will by no means clear the guilty” without satisfying His own justice and wrath (Exod 34:7).

True evangelicals will never relinquish those truths. And those who cannot stomach God the way He has revealed Himself have no right to the label “evangelical.” These are issues worth fighting for, as both church history and Scripture plainly prove. The rise of open theism is a grave threat to the cause of the true gospel. May God raise up a new generation of evangelical warriors with the courage and conviction to contend for the truth of substitutionary atonement.

---

22Ibid., 123.
23Ibid., 180.
24Ibid., 123.
THE INTEGRATION OF OT THEOLOGY WITH BIBLE TRANSLATION

William D. Barrick
Professor of Old Testament

Translation of Scripture should be faithful to the original languages of the text, but should also communicate the text’s meaning accurately to the modern reader so that he may reach proper theological conclusions. That poses a difficult challenge because of the great distance between classical Hebrew and various modern languages. Three passages from Genesis illustrate the interaction between translation and theology. Genesis 12:3 illustrates the importance of Hebrew syntax in translation. Genesis 15:5 reflects the effects of archaeology on translation and the importance of not excluding possible interpretations in passages with debated meanings. Genesis 19:24 shows how translations may obscure important details and why one should not impugn the theological positions of translators on the basis of renderings of isolated verses. Evangelicals with sound theology should take the lead in Bible translation because of the inevitable effect of a translator’s theology on the accuracy of his translation.

* * * * *

Biblically based theology has no choice but to be wedded to Bible translation. One’s theology is heavily dependent upon one’s understanding of Scripture in translation, whether it is one’s own or that of a published version. On the other side of the coin, Bible translation is inextricably linked with theology. As evangelicals we tend to guard ourselves with the dictate that the Scriptures in their original languages are the final authority in all matters of faith and practice. In reality, however, an OT theology teacher must communicate with his students via some form of translation. The students themselves will interact with theological teaching on the basis of the translations with which they are most familiar.

Translation of Scripture must aim for the elucidation of the whole truth and nothing but the truth of the ancient text for the modern reader. The array of translations for any particular text of the OT is like a smorgasbord. Quick-fix, calorie-heavy, junk-food translations offering little in the way of exegetical nourishment exist alongside protein rich translations that are hard to chew and practically impossible for the spiritually immature to digest. Each one contains its own dose of the text’s truth. Even in the best of translations, unfortunately, a
balanced diet containing the whole truth is rare.

Bible translators are limited by the very nature of the daunting task to which they have committed themselves. They must immerse themselves as deeply as possible into each biblical text, mindful that it was produced in a specific cultural and historical context in the ancient Hebrew, Aramaic, or Greek. The problems inherent in recreating those components can be staggering. The text was the product of authorial intentions quite alien to those of the present day. The linguistic features, literary traditions, and cultural contexts are vastly changed and either lacking current vitality or poorly understood—sometimes both.\(^1\)

Bible translation cannot be discussed without touching upon the linguistic distance between the ancient and modern languages. Classical Hebrew is very different from modern American English, Mexican Spanish, or Bangladesh Bengali. That is vexing to the literalist tendencies we possess as evangelicals. In the attempt to close the gap between the ancient text and the present reader, some translations convert the modern receptor language into Hebraistic English or Hebraistic Spanish. However, that approach does not really resolve the distance problem. The resultant translation can end up misrepresenting the original author’s meaning and tone. Why is it that in the vast majority of OT translations into English, the entire OT sounds the same?—tends to be identical in style and manner of expression? It certainly should not be due to the single language factor—viz., that it was penned in classical Hebrew.\(^2\) Just as there are significant differences in the English styles of Walter Kaiser, Eugene Merrill, and Edwin Yamauchi in their respective histories of the OT, there are obvious differences between the Hebrew narrative styles of, for example, Moses and the Chronicler. Such contrasts should be readily apparent to the reader of the Pentateuch and 1 and 2 Chronicles in translation.

On the one hand, an overly idiomatic translation might produce insuperable difficulties by disrupting the intricate unity of Scripture. Such a translation could result in an equally idiomatic theology freely altering elements of biblical theology to fit a modern culture. Thus, in a society dominated by a particular sinful activity, one might reason that the Bible’s condemnation of that sin was solely a cultural matter—perhaps the activity was simply unacceptable to the majority at that time and place. The converse would indicate that such activity might now be acceptable because of society’s current acceptance. Does Scripture embody absolute truth (transcultural or universal truths) that ought to be preserved in either form or meaning? A translation must preserve such truths if it is to maintain theological as well as linguistic and cultural integrity.

---


2The author hastens to remind the reader that the OT was written in two languages: Hebrew and Aramaic. Unfortunately, the latter tends to be the ignored child in the biblical language curricula of Bible colleges and seminaries. Since Aramaic is seldom required, students graduate with M.Div. and Th.M. (or their equivalent) degrees without ability to read Dan 2:4–7:28 in the original language.
On the other hand, an overly literal translation might tend to obscure the meaning to such an extent that the reader either does not understand what it says or comes away with an erroneous conception of what the text means. A simple example might illustrate this point: ישornings (“the sons of Israel”) has a meaning quite different in Gen 42:5 from that in 32:33. The first refers to literal sons (male offspring) while the second refers to a national or ethnic group. The older translations, by employing “the children of Israel,” add a third potential meaning: male and female offspring. The reader unfamiliar with the peculiarities of traditional biblical English might misunderstand some of the more vague references in a literal translation. Translating the national or ethnic references as “Israelites” would be much clearer as well as being more accurate with regard to the meaning intended by the Hebrew author. Obviously, a single translation of the phrase is not adequate for the translator committed to accuracy of meaning as opposed to mere replication of form. As in the case of Aquila’s Greek translation of the OT, replication of form might indicate more clearly the translation’s base, but it would be of use only to those who have an extensive knowledge of classical Hebrew and significant exposure to the technicalities of textual criticism. It is more than foolish to foist such literalism upon the average reader, it smacks of both elitism and rebellion against the divine intent that the Scriptures be understood and obeyed (cf. Nehemiah 8; Matt 13:18-23).

In a worst case scenario, a translation might even obscure the truth, thereby limiting or hindering the development of a consistent theology—consistent, that is, with the original text. An examination of various translations of select texts in the Book of Genesis reveals the dynamic interaction of translation and theology. For the sake of convenience, the texts will be discussed in their canonical order.

Genesis 12:3

The Mosaic record of Yahweh’s pronouncement of blessing through Abraham is a text whose translation has significant theological implications. In some translations, this text might imply a kind of double predestination. Again, its translation might be either a direct or an obscure reference to divinely bestowed
blessing upon all peoples. Both issues can affect one’s theological summary of the contents and implications of the Abrahamic Covenant. Patrick Miller declared that

The critical theological place of Gen. xii 1-4a in the book of Genesis and more particularly in the Yahwistic form of the patriarchal narratives has understandably prompted a considerable amount of analysis and interpretation. Much attention has been given to explaining the syntax of the whole, especially the relation of vs. 3b to the preceding verses. The issues in understanding the syntax are not merely superficial, for the meaning of the text is to a large degree uncovered by a careful understanding of the relation of the clauses to each other.\(^5\)

Consider the following translations of verse 3:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Translation</th>
<th>Text</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NJB:⁶</td>
<td>“I shall bless those who bless you, and shall curse those who curse you, and all clans on earth will bless themselves by you.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| NJPS:⁷      | “I will bless those who bless you  
And curse him that curses you;  
And all the families of the earth  
Shall bless themselves by you.”   |
| REB:⁸      | “those who bless you, I shall bless;  
those who curse you, I shall curse.  
All the peoples on earth  
will wish to be blessed as you are blessed.” |
| KJV:⁹      | “And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.” |
| NIV:¹⁰     | “I will bless those who bless you,  
and whoever curses you I will curse;  
and all peoples on earth  
will be blessed through you.”

\(^{1}\)Patrick D. Miller, Jr., “Syntax and Theology in Genesis XXII 3a,” VT 34/4 (October 1984):472.
\(^{2}\)NJB = The New Jerusalem Bible (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1990).
\(^{4}\)REB = The Revised English Bible (n.p.: Oxford University and Cambridge University, 1989).
\(^{5}\)KJV = King James Version.
\(^{10}\)NIV = New International Version (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984).
The Integration of Theology with Bible Translation

11 NLT = New Living Translation (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House, 1996).


13 Miller, “Syntax and Theology in Genesis XII 3a” 473.

NLT:11 “I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you. All the families of the earth will be blessed through you.”

The same translation problem occurs again in Gen 18:18 and 28:14 with all of the translations seeking to be consistent in all references. Thus, this example helps to illustrate the fact that a translation in one passage might affect the translation of related passages. In this case, it also might affect the translation of the NT quotation of Gen 12:3 in Acts 3:25 and Gal 3:8.

Hebrew word order, syntax, and vocabulary in Gen 12:3 are central to the interpretation of the verse:וָאָבֹא אֵלַי יְהֹוָה וְלַאֲלֹהִים יְהוָה וְלַאֲלֹהִים יְהוָה יִבְרֹא לְאַבְרָהָם (וָאָבֹא אֵלַי יְהֹוָה וְלַאֲלֹהִים יְהוָה יִבְרֹא לְאַבְרָהָם). The word order of the first half of the verse is a chiasm in which each word or phrase is mirrored by an equivalent word or phrase in reverse order:

A I will bless
B those blessing you
B’ the one disdaining you
A’ I will curse

The purpose of such a structure is to emphasize the central members. In this particular case the people blessing or cursing Abraham and his descendants are highlighted. That leads naturally into the last part of the verse whose emphasis is again on people: “all the families/clans of the earth.” It is noteworthy that the first B element is plural while the second one is singular. This difference in number could imply that “more people will bless Abraham than will maltreat him, and that God desires to bless many and curse few.”12 The chiastic structure might also be considered a convenient and natural means of breaking the chain of four cohortative verbs with waw (וְאָבֹא אֵלַי יְהֹוָה וְלַאֲלֹהִים יְהוָה יִבְרֹא לְאַבְרָהָם), “and I will make you”; יִבְרֹא אֵלַי יְהוָה וְלַאֲלֹהִים יְהוָה יִבְרֹא לְאַבְרָהָם), “and I will bless you”; יִבְרֹא אֵלַי יְהוָה וְלַאֲלֹהִים יְהוָה יִבְרֹא לְאַבְרָהָם), “and I will magnify”; יִבְרֹא אֵלַי יְהוָה וְלַאֲלֹהִים יְהוָה יִבְרֹא לְאַבְרָהָם), “and I will bless”) and one imperative with waw (וְאָבֹא אֵלַי יְהוָה וְלַאֲלֹהִים יְהוָה יִבְרֹא לְאַבְרָהָם), “and let it be”) in v. 2 following the initial imperative (וְאָבֹא אֵלַי יְהוָה וְלַאֲלֹהִים יְהוָה יִבְרֹא לְאַבְרָהָם) of v. 1. The disjunctive clause (וְאָבֹא אֵלַי יְהוָה וְלַאֲלֹהִים יְהוָھוּ יִבְרֹא לְאַבְרָהָם), “and the one disdaining you I will curse”) serves to make this concept distinct “so that there can be no confusion between the form and the function of the clause . . . and the preceding clauses.”13 The result is that the curse is made to appear as though it were not a part of Yahweh’s intention:

God commands Abraham to go out in order to receive a blessing and bring about a stream of blessing in the world. But Yahweh does not command Abraham to go out in
Miller applied this interpretation of the Hebrew syntax to a description of God’s purpose in blessing Abraham and, through him, the nations: “When Yahweh sent Abram out, it was to bring about blessing, not curse. That is the good report which the Bible transmits to each generation.” Having thus related the text to a denial of the doctrine of double predestination, Miller then provides a suggested translation that would be conducive to the reader reaching the same conclusion:

1. And Yahweh said to Abram:
   “Go from your land, from your kindred, and from your father’s house to the land which I will show you,
2. that I may make you a great nation, and bless you, and make your name great that you may effect blessing,
3. and that I may bless the ones blessing you—and should there be one who regards you with contempt I will curse him.
   So, then, all the families of the earth can gain a blessing in you.”

Another aspect of the text involves the use of two different Hebrew words for “curse” (translated in the chiasm diagram above as “disdaining” and “curse”). “Traditional English translations fail to bring out the difference between these words, usually translating both ‘curse.’” The point of the text seems to be that even if an individual treats Abraham lightly, treats him with contempt, or despises him, the judicial curse of God will be upon him.

One element in the last half of v. 3 is responsible for the most serious variation in translation—the verb יָכַר (also employed in 18:18 and 28:14). Its form is that of the Niphal stem, which might be passive, reflexive, reciprocal, or middle in its grammatical voice. In all four the subject of the verb is also the object of the verb (the recipient of the verb’s action). The passive implies an outside agent (“they will be blessed [by someone]”), the reflexive makes the subject the agent.
The Integration of Theology with Bible Translation

(“they will bless themselves”),20 the reciprocal consists of a plural subject that normally participates in mutual action (“they will bless each other”), and the middle in which the subject is affected in some way by the action (“they will acquire blessing for themselves”). The middle voice is somewhat ambiguous because it might speak of either an outside agent (as in the passive) or the subject as agent (as in the reflexive). The question is not a minor one. It is a crucial interpretational issue. “Significant theological conclusions follow from the interpretation of these passages [Gen 12:3; 18:18; 28:14].”21 How can the translator know which usage is involved? Only the context can reveal the usage.

Frankly, this particular context is of little help in resolving the issue. Observing this impasse, translators normally fall back on their knowledge of the rest of Scripture as well as their own theological backgrounds.22 Some appeal to the alternate form of the concept in 22:18 and 26:4. In these two verses a different form of the Hebrew verb is employed: רָחַעְּבָּר (Hitpael). The Hitpael is normally a reflexive, so the expected translation would be: “all the nations of the earth will bless themselves through your seed/offspring.” According to Waltke and O’Connor, the Hitpael “historically tends to take on the passive functions”23 of the Niphal. In other words, both forms may express the passive sense.24 However, both forms could also express the reflexive sense.25 Mitchell offers strong arguments supporting the middle voice.26 Ultimately, however, “grammatical arguments are not decisive.”27

Does it make any difference which voice is attributed to the verb in this


22Cf. Daniel C. Arichea, Jr., “Taking Theology Seriously in the Translation Task,” The Bible Translator 33/3 (July 1982):309. Arichea cites the example of a missionary translator who rejected the reflexive solely on the basis that he believed that it would support the doctrine of universalism.

23Bruce K. Waltke and M. O’Connor, An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1990) 395 ([§23.6.4a]; hereinafter referred to as IBHS. Waltke and O’Connor declare that “it is not surprising that the stems are occasionally confounded” (ibid.). This study takes issue with that conclusion for the passages under discussion.


26Mitchell, The Meaning of BRK 31-36. Cf. also C. A. Keller, “יֵדּוֹ,” TLOT 1:274: “Yet the usage of this conjugation—in contrast to the pu. and hitp.—probably emphasizes its specific meaning. It indicates an action completed on the subj., without viewing the subj. itself (hitp.) or another person (pu.) as the author of the action. . . . בְּרָחַעְּבָּר mean, then, ‘to experience blessing, participate in blessing,’ etc. . . . Gen 12:3b means, then, ‘by you shall all the families of the earth gain blessing.’” Unfortunately, the problem is ignored completely by John N. Oswalt, “יֵדּוֹ,” TWOT 1:132-33.

case? According to Westermann, it makes no difference at all—the Abrahamic blessing still reaches all of earth’s peoples.\textsuperscript{28} On the other hand, Hamilton (“this is not a point of esoteric grammar”\textsuperscript{29}), Speiser (“it is of great consequence theologically”\textsuperscript{30}), and Kaiser\textsuperscript{31} stress that the voice chosen is extremely significant theologically. As Michael Brown observes, “In point of fact, it is one thing to receive blessing through Abraham’s seed (passive or middle sense); it is another thing to desire to be like Abraham’s seed (based on the reflexive sense).”\textsuperscript{32} Kaiser is quite clear in regard to the theological distinction between the reflexive and passive:

It would not be a matter of the nations looking over the fence to see what Israel had done and then, in copy-cat fashion, blessing themselves. It would be only by grace, by a gift of God—not by works. This would be the basis for God’s blessing humanity in personal salvation.\textsuperscript{33}

The Samaritan Pentateuch, Aramaic Targums, Latin Vulgate, and Syriac Peshitta all employ what would be best identified as a passive/middle to translate the Hebrew verb in this passage. The Greek Septuagint and the NT (cf. Acts 3:25 and Gal 3:8)\textsuperscript{34} use a passive voice to translate it here.

Why would the Hithpael be employed in Gen 22:18 and 26:4? Does it possess any exegetical significance? When a reoccurring word or phrase is suddenly altered in any way, the interpreter or translator is obligated to seek a reason for the change. Although grammar alone may not determine which voice (passive, middle, reflexive, or reciprocal) is to be used in translating these five occurrences of ר"ב, grammar might very well provide an answer for the question regarding the variation between Niphal and Hithpael. In the Hebrew intensive stems (Piel, Pual, and Hithpael) there is the potential for an iterative or plurative meaning.\textsuperscript{35} Roots like רבב

\textsuperscript{28}Ibid., 152. Also Wenham,\textit{ Genesis 1–15} 278.
\textsuperscript{29}Victor P. Hamilton,\textit{ The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17}, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990) 374.
\textsuperscript{32}Brown, “ר"ב” 1:760.
\textsuperscript{35}Cf. Frederic Clarke Putnam,\textit{ Hebrew Bible Insert: A Student's Guide to the Syntax of Biblical Hebrew} (Quakertown, Pa.: Stylus, 1996) 26 (Piel, §2.1.4b), 27 (Pual, §2.1.5b). The Hithpael is basically the reflexive of the Piel, thus partaking of the various usages of that stem, including the iterative (Paul Joüon,\textit{ A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew}, trans. and rev. T. Murasko, Subsidia Biblica 14/1 [Rome:
(“bury”) in the simple stems (Qal and Niphal) maintain a non-iterative or non-plurative meaning especially with singular subjects (cf. Gen 23:19) while taking a plural meaning in the intensive stems with a plural object (cf. Deut 29:18, “Abraham and his wife Sarah were buried,” 25:10). Interestingly, the Niphal forms of בְּרָא in 12:3, 18:18, and 28:14 are all modified by the preposition ב with a singular pronominal suffix (2ms in 12:3 and 28:14; 3ms in 18:18). The Hithpael forms in 22:18 and 26:4, however, are modified by the preposition ב with a collective noun (יִשְׂרָאֵל, “your seed/offspring”). It would appear that the plurative concept is a viable explanation for the variation in the verbs. When the blessing emphasizes the agency of Abraham the verb is Niphal, but when the agents are the descendants of Abraham the verb is Hithpael—it implies the repetitive nature of the blessing generation after generation. This explanation would negate, to a certain degree, the argument claiming that the use of the Hithpael in 22:18 and 26:4 is driven by its reflexive meaning (which is then imposed upon the Niphal in 12:3, 18:18, and 28:14). As Grisanti aptly concludes, no translational distinction “between the Niphal and Hithpael constructions naturally arises from the text. Consequently, they should all be translated in the same fashion.”

Proposed translation:

I will bless those who bless you, [Abram]—
But, should any treat you with contempt, I will curse him.
[In conclusion,] all of earth’s peoples will be blessed through you.
Genesis 15:15
The translation of a phrase in its first occurrence might set the tone for all subsequent occurrences of the phrase or phrases similar to it. Translators sometimes discover that the interpretation which guided them in the first occurrence does not hold up under scrutiny in other contexts. Yahweh’s declaration to Abram in Genesis 15:15 consists of a parallelism that would seem to be synonymous:

NASB: “And as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age.”

NJPS: “As for you, You shall go to your fathers in peace; You shall be buried at a ripe old age.”

NRSV: “As for yourself, you shall go to your ancestors in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age.”

REB: “You yourself will join your forefathers in peace and be buried at a ripe old age.”

NLT: “But you will die in peace, at a ripe old age.”

The concept of יִבְיֹסֵך (you shall go to your fathers) is to be found also in the phrase “be gathered to his people” (לֵבָנָה לֵבָנָם; cf. 25:8, 17; 35:29; 49:29-33; Num 20:24, 26; 27:13; 31:2; Deut 31:16; 32:50). It is often treated as an idiom or a mere “euphemism for death without clear theological import.”

Among various scholars there are three different views concerning these phrases: (1) they indicate a belief in immortality, (2) they have no theological connotations and

Cf. also 2 Kgs 22:20 / 2 Chr 34:28.

are mere euphemisms, and (3) they indicate the practice of multiple burial.47

Out of the translations quoted above, only NLT employs a rendering that would indicate a euphemistic interpretation ("you will die"). A number of arguments may be made for the immortality view: (1) Abraham had no "fathers" (Gen 15:15) in his grave—only his wife, Sarah (25:8-10). (2) Jacob had no people in Egypt with whom to be buried and had no tomb, yet he "breathed his last, and was gathered to his people" (49:33; cf. v. 29). (3) Aaron was buried alone on Mount Hor near the Edomite border, yet Yahweh said, "Aaron shall be gathered to his people" (Num 20:24).48 (4) Yahweh also told Moses that he would "be gathered" to his people (Num 27:13), but he was buried in an unidentifiable grave site (Deut 34:6). His body was also a matter of dispute between Satan and Michael (Jude 9).49 (5) The patriarchs did possess a concept of immortality and a belief that God could resurrect them from the dead (cf. Job 19:25-27; Heb 11:17-19). This was consistent with God referring to Himself as the "God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" (cf. Exod 3:6). Mark


48In a recent work on patriarchal religion, Pagolu concurs: “[T]he desire for a proper burial, the desire to be buried in the family grave and the stereotyped phrase ‘gathered to his people’ suggest some belief in the afterlife. Moreover, this formula is used only for the patriarchs and for Moses and Aaron. It could not have meant burial in the family grave since this is mentioned after the record of death and before burial in the case of the patriarchs, except that for Jacob ‘died’ and for Ishmael ‘buried’ is omitted; and in any case it cannot be applied to Moses and Aaron as they were not buried in their family grave” (Augustine Pagolu, The Religion of the Patriarchs, JSOTSS 277 [Sheffield, England: Sheffield, 1998] 80). Cf. P. S. Johnston, “The Underworld and the Dead in the Old Testament” (PhD dissertation, Cambridge University, 1993) 90.

49Eichrodt’s counter-argument that the terminology had already become generalized and euphemistic by the time of Abraham (Theology of the Old Testament 2:213) is conjectural.
Regardless of the interpretation of such phraseology taken by the Bible translator, it would be the better part of wisdom to avoid employing the NLT’s reduction of the phrase. With so many evangelical scholars defending the literalism of the phrase and the implications for the OT doctrine of life after death, it would be better to translate the text literally and leave the debate to the commentators and theologians. Perhaps this is one example to which Arichea’s warning might apply:

One should guard against some rather particularistic views, that is, views held only by one or two scholars. Often such views present the eccentricities of scholars rather than serious contributions to the interpretation of a text.

Leaving the text as it is does no damage to any of the interpretive views. NLT’s translation purposefully excludes other views, including the majority evangelical interpretation.

Proposed translation:

But as for you, you will go to your ancestors in peace; you will be buried at a ripe old age.

**Genesis 19:24**

Unfortunately, translation can obscure theological details. An example of that kind of problem is to be found in Gen 19:24. The Hebrew text has רֵעֶיהַ יָהֵה בָּר יָהֵה וְעָם עָלֶיהַ יָהֵה יָהֵה וְעָם עָלֶיהַ יָהֵה יָהֵה וְעָם עָלֶיהַ יָהֵה יָהֵה וְעָם עָלֶיהַ יָהֵה יָהֵה יָהֵה יָהֵה יָהֵה יָהֵה יָהֵה יָהֵה יָהֵה יָהֵה יָהֵה יָהֵה יָהֵה יָהֵה יָהֵה יָהֵה יָהֵה יָהֵה יָהֵה יָהֵה יָהֵה יָהֵה יָהֵה יָהֵה Yahuwah at the head of the clause, the author emphasized “Yahweh’s” role in the event. As Ross puts it, “The text ... simply emphasizes that, whatever means were used, it was the Lord who rained this judgment on them.” While this is an accurate observation, it is only one part of the overall meaning of this clause. There is a second occurrence of רֵעֶיהַ יָהֵה later in the verse: רֵעֶיהַ יָהֵה (“from Yahweh”). Is it a redundant expression in order to extend the emphasis of the first word, or is it the result of Moses’ careful attention to a theological detail? Notice what some translations have done with this second reference to Yahweh:

---

50 Cf. Kaiser, Toward an Old Testament Theology99. For a taste of the debate involved with this OT quotation in the NT, see Richard T. Mead, “A Dissenting Opinion about Respect for Context in Old Testament Quotations,” in The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts?: Essays on the Use of the Old Testament in the New, ed. G. K. Beale (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994) 153-63 (esp. 160). It would be precarious theologially to explain away a patriarchal belief in immortality on the basis that Jesus employed midrashic interpretation allowing Him to quote the OT out of context or that the early church put these words in His mouth.

51 Arichea, “Taking Theology Seriously in the Translation Task” 316.

52 Ross, Creation and Blessing 362.
The Integration of Theology with Bible Translation

NJPS: “the LORD rained upon Sodom and Gomorrah sulfurous fire from the LORD out of heaven”

NIV: “Then the LORD rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah—from the LORD out of the heavens.”

KJV: “Then the LORD rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven.”

REB: “and the LORD rained down fire and brimstone from the skies on Sodom and Gomorrah”

NLT: “Then the LORD rained down fire and burning sulfur from the heavens on Sodom and Gomorrah.”

NJB: “Then Yahweh rained down on Sodom and Gomorrah brimstone and fire of his own sending.”

There are three variations among translations of this verse:

“brimstone and fire” / “fire and brimstone” / “fire and burning sulfur” / “burning sulfur” / “sulfurous fire”
“heavens” / “heaven” / “skies”
“from the LORD out of heaven” / “from the heavens” / “of his own sending”

The first of these variations involves the possibility of a nominal hendiadys wherein the first noun of a pair “modifies the second, so that their translation often sounds like a noun with an adjective.”53 KJV’s and NJB’s “brimstone and fire” is a very literal rendering. REB’s “fire and brimstone” reorders the two terms to match the normal English idiom. NLT also reorders the terms, but avoids depicting chunks of sulfur falling from the skies by saying that it is “burning sulfur.” A similar concept is conveyed by NIV’s use of only “burning sulfur” in an attempt to translate the two nouns as a nominal hendiadys. However, such a translation is not in accord with the principle of Hebrew grammar by which the first term should describe the second, not the reverse. Therefore, the most faithful treatment of the two nouns as a hendiadys is the translation of NJPS: “sulfurous fire.”54

The second set of variations reveals the interpretive decision the translators made regarding the meaning of דָּקְשֶׁה. NIV and NLT opted to translate the Hebrew form very literally and leave the actual meaning up to the readers to determine for

---

53Putnam, Hebrew Bible Insert 22 (§1.8.3a).
themselves. “Heavens” could mean either the sky or the celestial abode of God. REB opted to specify that it was only the “skies” that were intended. Both NJPS and KJV decided to use “heaven” as a way of indicating their preference for the interpretation that Yahweh sent the judgment from His own residence.55 NJB’s translation would also imply that the reference is to the divine residence since it is taken as representative of the Lord Himself.

The third variation in this text is the one under examination. REB, NLT, and NJB chose to eliminate the second reference to Yahweh as being a redundant expression. In his commentary on Genesis, Gordon Wenham opts for a similar conclusion but for different reasons. He believes that the “narrator stresses that ‘it was from the Lord.’”56 These translations have obscured the presence of two different persons of the Godhead. If the expression were an intentional redundancy, one would expect to see it used elsewhere in the OT. However, it does not occur elsewhere. This is a unique expression that is clarified by later revelation. The OT reveals that in a number of cases the “Angel” or “Messenger of the Lord” was the immediate agent of judgment (cf. 2 Sam 24:16-17; 2 Kgs 19:35; Ps 35:6-7).57 Therefore, it is no surprise to the theologian that the same arrangement for judgment might apply in the matter of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Such a verse as Gen 19:24 would hit at the heart of the aberrant theology of cultic groups like the Jehovah’s Witnesses. This text speaks of two persons with the title of Yahweh/Jehovah: one in heaven above and one with a presence nearer to or upon the earth. This is the opinion of a number of theologians. Augustus Hopkins Strong places this text alongside Hos 1:7 and 2 Tim 1:18 as examples of passages in which “Jehovah distinguishes himself from Jehovah.”58 James Borland points to the same distinction of persons in Gen 19:24.59 Victor Hamilton argues that

55Eichrodt appealed to passages like Gen 19:24 as proof of an early belief that God’s dwelling-place is in heaven (Theology of the Old Testament 2:190).

56Gordon Wenham, Genesis 16–50, vol 2 of Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1994) 59. Therefore, Wenham translates the verse as follows: “and the LORD rained brimstone and fire on Sodom and Gomorrah: it was from the LORD from the sky” (ibid., 35). This is a legitimate attempt to translate the text as it stands. It takes into account the Masoretic accents dividing the verse. However, the treatment of this final portion of the verse as a noun clause (viz., it was) lacks convincing grammatical evidence. Instead, it would be more natural grammatically to take these last two phrases as adverbial prepositional phrases modifying the main verb, “rained.”


59James A. Borland, Christ in the Old Testament, rev. ed. (Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus, 1999) 152. Others who note this same distinction in the text include David L. Cooper, The God of Israel, rev. ed. (Los Angeles: Biblical Research Society, 1945) 23; Oehler, Theology of the Old Testament 133. Oehler granted that some sort of distinction was being made in Gen 19:24 but did not think that, in and of itself, it supported the view of identifying the one manifestation directly with the Logos, the Son of God, the second person of the Godhead.
the phraseology is not to be “dismissed as a doublet or a gloss.”\(^6\) However, in so doing, he stops short of mentioning any distinction between divine persons in the passage.

Does this mean that the translators of REB, NLT and NJB are anti-trinitarian? Absolutely not. A theologically insensitive translation does not tell the reader anything about the theological position of the translators. All that the translation indicates is that such a particular theological topic was not significantly clear to the translators in this one passage. When evaluating a Bible translation, it is irresponsible to stigmatize the translators with a particular theological error or heresy solely on the basis of a single passage’s translation. For example, the RSV’s translation of Isaiah 7:14 (“a young woman”) does not indicate that the translators took a theological position denying the virgin conception of Jesus Christ. Likewise, the ASV’s “every scripture inspired of God” in 2 Tim 3:16 is no proof that the translators held to a view claiming that only some of the Scriptures are inspired.

Do such translations weaken the evidence supporting a particular doctrine? Yes, but that is not the same as denial of that doctrine. Those doctrines to which readers ought to adhere usually receive support in a number of passages throughout the Bible. It must be remembered that even

\[\text{though the fruit of prejudice may be evident in a translation, it rarely affects the reader’s broad conclusions about doctrine when doctrinal matters are studied in the broad scope of a whole translation. It may mislead him regarding a detail on a few occasions, but in almost every case he can formulate teachings that are generally sound.}\]

Any doctrine that relies upon a single text of Scripture is probably not a cardinal doctrine of the Christian faith. If that one text is problematic, it is unwise to base a doctrine or practice upon it (e.g., snake handling on the basis of the disputed final verses of the Gospel of Mark).

Proposed translation:

Then Yahweh rained sulfurous fire upon Sodom and Gomorrah from Yahweh in heaven.

or,

Then Yahweh rained sulfurous fire upon Sodom and Gomorrah from Yahweh—from heaven itself.

\(^6\)Hamilton, *Genesis: Chapters 18–50*. Westermann is representative of those who think that the repetitive reference to Yahweh is awkward and due to a merging of two different accounts (*Genesis 12–36* 306).

Conclusion

Bible translators must approach every passage of Scripture with reverence and careful attention to detail. They must not make the text say something that the original author did not intend for it to mean. Translators must not add meaning, nor must they subtract any of the meaning. The goal should be to translate the text into its receptor language accurately and fully. Since the Scriptures ought to be the sole source of theology, their translation is vitally wedded to theologizing. Translation affects theology just as much as theology can affect translation. The translator must be keenly aware of the interaction of the two disciplines.\(^\text{62}\)

The example of Gen 12:3 revealed how the Hebrew text’s theological implications are not fully exposed by any translation. It is as though the various translators pursued their task unaware of the significance of the text. Some commentators, linguists, and theologians have recognized one or two of the issues, but none of them has dealt with all of the issues. Translators dependent upon such resources are not helped in their difficult task by the absence of full discussion for such theologically laden passages. This text also demonstrated how important Hebrew syntax is to the exegesis, theology, and translation of the Hebrew. Bible translators need to pursue a high degree of facility in the biblical languages as well as a full study of theology (biblical, systematic, and historical).

The second text, Gen 15:15, presented an opportunity to see the interaction of archaeology with interpretation—multiple burials in family tombs have caused some to turn an ancient phrase into an old euphemism. The matter is not so readily settled, however, when various contexts are taken into account and the NT testimony is also consulted. Perhaps the translator of such a debated text should avoid locking the translation into a minority viewpoint. No doctrine should be based upon a questionable text. Likewise, the translator of a debated text should not employ a questionable translation to push a minority theological agenda. On the other hand, a time might come when such a general rule should be violated in order to protect the integrity of the biblical text and its teachings. Such a move, however, should not be made without much exegesis, thought, counsel, and prayer.

The final passage, Gen 19:24, illustrated the way in which translations can obscure key theological details. It was also a useful springboard to discuss the pitfalls of appealing to what might be perceived as a translational error or indiscretion in order to impugn the theological position of the translators. One translational decision in one text does not make one a heretic. Robert Thomas wisely cautions the readers of Bible versions with the following words:

The words of the translation are, after all is said and done, the heart of the issue. From

\(^{62}\text{Cf. Arichea, “Taking Theology Seriously in the Translation Task” 309-16; and a brief response to Arichea’s article: Michel Bulcke, “Note: The Translator’s Theology,” The Bible Translator 35/1 (January 1984):134-35. Arichea discusses three factors: “(1) unjustified theologizing by the translator; (2) making translational decisions in the light of one’s own theology, and (3) insufficient exegetical follow-through” (Arichea, “Taking Theology Seriously in the Translation Task.” 309).}
them the reader can derive a variety of insights about the doctrinal preferences of translators. He must be cautious, however, in drawing conclusions from this type of resource, because sometimes a translator may conform to a given doctrinal pattern unconsciously. He may choose a rendering without realizing its theological implications. All translators are not theologians, so they cannot always foresee the nuances of meaning conveyed by various English expressions.63

Evangelicals with a high regard for the inspiration and inerrancy of the Scriptures should take the lead in Bible translation projects around the world. May God lead more men into the vital work of Bible translation—men highly trained in both the biblical languages and theology. All Bible translators ought to be theologians.

63Thomas, How to Choose a Bible Version 105.
THE PRINCIPLE OF SINGLE MEANING

Robert L. Thomas
Professor of New Testament

That a single passage has one meaning and one meaning only has been a long-established principle of biblical interpretation. Among evangelicals, recent violations of that principle have multiplied. Violations have included those by Clark Pinnock with his insistence on adding “future” meanings to historical meanings of a text, Mikel Neumann and his expansion of the role of contextualization, Greg Beale and Grant Osborne and their views about certain features of Revelation 11, recent works on hermeneutics and their advocacy of multiple meanings for a single passage, Kenneth Gentry and his preterist views on Revelation, and Progressive Dispensationalism with its promotion of “complementary” hermeneutics. The single-meaning principle is of foundational importance in understanding God’s communication with mankind, just as it has been since the creation of the human race. The entrance of sin in Genesis 3 brought a confusion in this area that has continued ever since.

* * * * *

Many years ago Milton S. Terry laid down a basic hermeneutical principle that contemporary evangelicals have difficulty observing. That is the principle of single meaning:

A fundamental principle in grammatico-historical exposition is that the words and sentences can have but one significance in one and the same connection. The moment we neglect this principle we drift out upon a sea of uncertainty and conjecture.¹

Not quite as many years ago, Bernard Ramm advocated the same principle in different words: “But here we must remember the old adage: ‘Interpretation is one, application is many.’ This means that there is only one meaning to a passage

¹Milton S. Terry, Biblical Hermeneutics, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n.d.) 205. Milton Spenser Terry (1840-1914) was a nineteenth-century Methodist Episcopalian. He was a graduate of Yale Divinity School and professor of Hebrew and Old Testament exegesis and theology at Garrett Biblical Institute. He was the author of Biblical Apocalyptics and numerous commentaries on Old Testament books, but is most often remembered for his book Biblical Hermeneutics, which was viewed as the standard work on biblical hermeneutics for most of the twentieth century.
Current Status of the Single-Meaning Principle

Almost anywhere one turns these days, he finds violations of this principle, however. As a consequence, evangelicals have drifted out “upon a sea of uncertainty and conjecture,” as Terry predicted about a hundred years ago. The following discussion will cite several examples to illustrate this sea of uncertainty and conjecture, and will then elaborate on the importance and background of the principle.

(1) Clark Pinnock

In November of 1998 I was asked to respond to a paper by Clark Pinnock in the Hermeneutics Study Group that met prior to the Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society. The title of his paper was “Biblical Texts—Past and Future Meanings,” a paper that has since appeared in print. In his paper and his article he offered an alternative to Antiquarian hermeneutics—as he called them—otherwise known as grammatical-historical hermeneutics. I studied his alternative carefully and came to the conclusion that his approach was extremely close to Aquarianism. In responding to my response, he denied any leanings toward New Age teaching, but the similarities are undeniable.

As the title of his paper suggests, he proposed the combining of future meanings with past meanings in interpreting Scripture. I addressed this proposal in one section of my response:

Professor Pinnock is apparently unwilling to sever connections with past methods of

---


4Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., noted this same trend among evangelicals over twenty years ago when he said that the assigning of multiple meanings was part of the slippage of evangelical scholarship into “easygoing subjectivism” (“The Single Intent of Scripture,” in Evangelical Roots: A Tribute to Wilbur Smith, ed. Kenneth Kantzer [Nashville: Nelson, 1978] 123). He urged evangelicals “to begin a new ‘hermeneutical reformation’ to correct this type of growing malpractice” in exegetical practice (ibid., 138). His warning has gone unheeded by many.


6Ibid., 137, 138.
The Principle of Single Meaning

hermeneutics as evidenced in these words: “While making use of literary and historical scholarship, we are not the prisoners of the textual past, but are privileged for the opportunity and accountable for listening for the Word of the Lord and watching for the fulfillment of God’s promises which are still outstanding.” But he wants to combine the “traditional” method with the method that will yield the “new” and “fresh” meanings.

He seems unaware, however, that the moment he does that he has junked the traditional method. Traditional grammatical-historical hermeneutics place tight restrictions on what the text can yield by way of interpretation. Proposals such as Professor Pinnock’s violate those restrictions so that his approach cannot fall into the category of “literary and historical scholarship.”

One of the restrictions he violates is that which limits the meaning of the text to what it meant in its original setting. He exceeds that limitation in his statement, “Witnesses to the gospel cannot be content with past meanings in an antiquarian way.” That statement is contrary to the principle that according to traditional guidelines the past meanings are the substance of biblical interpretation.

He writes elsewhere, “The meaning of the Bible is not static and locked up in the past but is something living and active.” On the contrary, meaning is static and locked up in the past insofar as traditional hermeneutics are concerned.

He adds to this: “It [i.e., cruciality] means that we ask not only whether a given interpretation is true to the original meaning, but also whether it is pertinent to the present situation or an evasion of what matters now.” From these words it would appear that a given interpretation could be true to the original meaning and also an evasion of what matters now. In the latter case, presumably a traditional interpretation could be at odds with a new interpretation pertinent to the present situation. That too goes against the principles of traditional interpretation.

He evidences that he allows for truthfulness of conflicting interpretations of the same passage when he states, “Interpretation is an unfinished task and even the possibility that there may not be a single right answer for all Christians everywhere cannot be ruled out.”

In such an instance the right brain has clearly gained the upper hand and the rationality of traditional interpretation crumbles into ashes.

Traditional hermeneutics limit each passage to one interpretation and one only. From that one interpretation may stem many applications that are “crucial” to

---

7Ibid., 138. My response took wording from Pinnock’s original paper. His wordings cited here have been revised slightly to match those in the published article.

8Ibid.

9Ibid., 140. In speaking about “the event of Jesus Christ,” the centerpiece of Scripture, Pinnock writes, “To read it properly, we have to go beyond the historical descriptions and consider the extension of the story into the present and future” (ibid., 139). “Going beyond” the historical descriptions necessitates assigning additional meanings to that event and to Scripture.

10Ibid., 137.

11Apparent Pinnock expunged this comment—found on p. 8 of his paper—before submitting his essay for publication, but he still maintains the viewpoint represented in the cited statement. In his published piece he writes, “Different answers are given in the Bible to similar sorts of issues because the text itself has been contextualized in different ways. This leaves room for us to decide about future meanings and applications” (ibid., 143 [emphasis added]).
contemporary situations, but to call those applications interpretations is a serious
mismomer. The practice of assigning “future” meanings to the text cannot be combined
with traditional hermeneutics without destroying the latter.

My response apparently fell on deaf ears, because the version that appeared
in print in 1999 did not differ substantially from what Pinnock read to the
Hermeneutics Study Group in 1998. He appears to be completely oblivious to the
single-meaning principle. Hence the sea of uncertainty.

(2) Mikel Neumann

At that same meeting in November of 1998 I responded to a paper by
missiologist Mikel Neumann of Western Baptist Theological Seminary, Portland,
Oregon. He entitled his paper “Contextualization: Application or Interpretation?”
In his paper he made statements such as the following: “Contextualization might be
seen as an umbrella which covers interpretation and application” (8); “Context is
not merely an addendum called application” (4); again, “Contextualization begins
with the interpreter’s personality as a function of his or her culture and encompasses
the process of interpretation and application” (3).

His point was that contextualization overshadows interpretation of the
biblical text. In defense of that theory he said the following: “However, a
hermeneutical approach that ignores either the culture of the interpreter of Scripture
or the culture of the person to whom he or she desires to communicate, is an
inadequate approach” (3-4). My response to that position ran as follows:

Neither the culture of the interpreter nor the culture of the person to whom the interpreter
communicates has anything in the world to do with the meaning of the biblical text. The
meaning of the biblical text is fixed and unchanging. This is not to say that the
exegetical task is finished. It must ever be open to new insights as to the more refined
understanding of what the Spirit meant when He inspired the writers to pen Scripture, but
that refined understanding must come through a closer utilization of the rules of grammar
and the facts of history surrounding the text in its original setting. It is not open to a
redefined understanding stemming from a reading back into the text of some consider-
ation either from the interpreter’s culture or from that of the one to whom the interpreter
communicates.

Through his insistence on making the cultural situation of the interpreter
and that of the people to whom he communicates the message of the text an integral part of
interpretation, Professor Neumann—unwittingly I believe—introduced meanings additional to the one meaning of the text as determined by its grammar and
historical setting. More paddling around in the sea of uncertainty.

(3) Greg Beale and Grant Osborne

\[12\] Numbers in parenthesis are page numbers in Neumann’s unpublished paper.
In November of 1999 the chairman of the Hermeneutics Study Group invited me back to respond to Greg Beale and Grant Osborne and their handling of apocalyptic genre in the book of Revelation. Both men described their hermeneutical approaches to the book as eclectic. Osborne’s eclecticism combined futurist, preterist, and idealist principles. Beale’s combination was idealist and futurist. It is beside the point for the present discussion, but worth noticing that an eclectic system of hermeneutics allows an interpreter to choose whatever meaning suits his preunderstood theological system in any given passage.

Of relevance to this essay, however, is Osborne’s interpretation of “the great city” in Revelation 11:8. He assigns the designation at least two and possibly three meanings: Jerusalem and Rome and secondarily all cities that oppose God. Beale does essentially the same: Babylon = Rome = the ungodly world-city. Perhaps Osborne’s identification of the two witnesses of Revelation 11 is a more flagrant violation of the single-meaning principle. He sees them both as two individuals of the future and as a corporate picture of the church. Yet the rapture of these two witnesses pictures only the rapture of the church, he says. One would ask, What happened to the two individuals? More waves from the sea of uncertainty.

(4) Grant Osborne

In the panel discussion following papers and responses at this November 1999 meeting, Osborne challenged my statement that a passage can have only a single meaning. Therefore I went to his volume *The Hermeneutical Spiral* to refresh my memory on his view of this principle and found that he differs from the time-honored grammatical-historical standard. In his hermeneutical volume he advocates double meanings in cases of single words. He speaks of “deliberate ambiguity” on the part of authors of Scripture. He cites “the famous word-play on wind/spirit in Genesis 1:2” as “a fairly simple example” of this. He also cites the Gospel of John as famous “for its widespread use of double meaning.” His examples include anēthen gennēthēnai, “born from above/again” in John 3:3, 7; hydor zōn, “living/flowing water” in 4:10-11; and hyposthē, “lifted up (to the cross/the Father)”

---

13 Grant Osborne, “My Interpretive Approach” (paper presented to the Hermeneutics Study Group, November 1999) 1. Osborne’s commentary on Revelation is forthcoming from Baker Book House.
15 By following grammatical-historical principles, the writer of this essay has identified “the great city” as Jerusalem and the two witnesses as two individuals—probably Moses and Elijah—who will testify in Jerusalem during the future seventieth week of Daniel (Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary* [Chicago: Moody, 1995] 87-89, 93-94).
17 Ibid., 89.
in 12:32.\(^{18}\)

Such hermeneutical advice as this creates further turbulence on the sea of uncertainty.

(5) Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard

Among recent books on hermeneutics, Osborne’s volume is not alone in fostering uncertainty. The work *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* by Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard offers the same advice as Osborne. In their chapter on “The Goals of Interpretation,” they entitle one section “An author may intend a text to convey multiple meanings or levels of meaning.”\(^ {19}\) They cite Isa 7:14 as an example of intended double meaning, as being fulfilled in the immediate future (Isa 8:1-10) and in the distant future (Matt 1:23).\(^ {20}\) They also cite John 3:3 and Jesus’ use of *ἀνάθεν* with its double entendre “again” and “from above” followed in its context by the use of *pneuma* with its double entendre of “wind” and “spirit.”\(^ {21}\)

Examples of double meaning cited by Osborne and by Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard are at best highly questionable and at worst outright error. Nothing in either context cited justifies the conclusion that the authors or Jesus, the speaker, intended a double meaning in these passages. In isolated instances elsewhere, however, when a text has a double meaning, the context will always make that clear. One case that comes to mind is John 11:50 where Caiaphas the high priest said, “You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish,” as he addressed the Sanhedrin. In 11:51-52 John takes the words in a sense different from the way Caiaphas intended them. Caiaphas meant them to speak of Jesus’ death being necessary to keep peace with the Romans, but John understood them to refer to Jesus’ sacrificial death for the Jewish nation and for all people everywhere.

The context of John 11 makes the double entendre quite conspicuous. Wherever biblical authors use such a double entendre, it will always be clear. But it is a violation of grammatical-historical principles to find double meanings in a context where no such indicators occur. No such signposts occur with the two witnesses in Revelation 11, Isaiah’s prophecy of the virgin birth of the Messiah, Moses use of “spirit” in Genesis 1, John’s reference to the new birth and his use of *pneuma* (John 3), living water (John 4), and Christ’s being lifted up (John 12).

(6) Gordon Fee

The confusion of application with interpretation also causes violation of the

---

\(^{18}\)Ibid.

\(^{19}\)Ibid. 


\(^{21}\)Ibid.

\(^{22}\)Ibid., 123 n. 19.
principle of one interpretation. The incorporation of application—or as some call it “contextualization”—into the hermeneutical process leads inevitably to multiple meanings for a single passage. Almost every recent work on hermeneutics advocates merging the two disciplines of interpretation and application which were formerly kept quite distinct. With that policy advocated, the transformation of some of the many applications into multiple interpretations is inescapable.

This is a feature that distinguishes an egalitarian explanation of 1 Tim 2:11-15 from a complementarian approach. For example, Fee writes,

My point is a simple one. It is hard to deny that this text prohibits women teaching men in the Ephesian church; but is the unique text in the NT, and as we have seen, its reason for being is not to correct the rest of the New Testament, but to correct a very ad hoc problem in Ephesus.

In applying 1 Tim 2:11-15 to modern situations, Fee has in essence given the text a new meaning that is an exact opposite of what, by his own admission, is Paul’s meaning. As a result, the text has two meanings, one for the kind of conditions that existed at Ephesus and another for the conditions that existed elsewhere and exist today.

Fee’s definition of hermeneutics coincides with his conclusion about multiple meanings, however. In a book he co-authored with Stuart, he says that the term “hermeneutics” includes the whole field of interpretation, including exegesis, but chooses to confine it to a “narrower sense of seeking the contemporary relevance of ancient texts.” In other words, for him hermeneutics is simply present-day application of a biblical text.

No wonder Fee and Stuart in their book on hermeneutics include nothing about limiting interpretation to a single meaning, and no wonder the stormy waves on the sea of uncertainty are getting higher and higher.

(7) DeYoung and Hurty

DeYoung and Hurty strongly advocate seeking a meaning beyond the grammatical-historical meaning of the text. Since the NT writers found such a “deeper” meaning in their use of the OT, they reason, we should follow their
example of exegetical methodology. They call the meaning derived from grammatical-historical interpretation the existential meaning of a passage, and the deeper meaning they call the essential meaning. They allow that a single passage may have a number of essential meanings because the essential meaning of a word may differ from that of a sentence and its passage and its whole story.

How do they limit the possible essential meanings? They apply a paradigm of reality that they call “the Kingdom center.” They call this the central theme and worldview of the Bible. Yet that control seems to have no significant impact on their finding whatever deeper meaning they choose. It does not restrain them from presenting an egalitarian view of women’s role in the church. In this case their “deeper meaning” overrides the grammatical-historical meaning of the text.

(8) McCartney and Clayton; Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard

The work by McCartney and Clayton and that by Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard suggest another route for placing some kind of control on these extra meanings that “go beyond” the grammatical-historical ones. Klein and company advocate a controlled reader-response approach to the text. The limit they place on the meanings beyond the historical meaning of a text is the consensus of the believing community. McCartney and Clayton resemble Klein when they speak of typology or sensus plenior. They reason this way: “Since the NT writers do not cover everything in the OT, we may expect large areas where the typology or sensus plenior has not been stated explicitly in the NT.” How do they propose to place a limit on these additional meanings of the OT? Their solution involves ultimately observing how “the Holy Spirit’s [is] directing of the church.”

That type of limitation essentially leaves the meaning of Scripture “up for grabs.” The evangelical believing community or the church currently uses the Bible to support all sorts of teachings, everything from covenant theology to dispensationalism or somewhere between the two, from complementarianism to egalitarianism, from homosexuality to heterosexuality, from the openness of God to the narrowness of God, from conditional immortality to unconditional eternal punishment for the lost. Ultimately all these differences stem from someone allowing a given passage to have more than its grammatical-historical sense. The believing Christian community has no consensus that enables an interpreter to place

---

26Ibid., 33-48, 225.
27Ibid., 230-31.
28Ibid., 83-98.
29Ibid., 280-87.
32Ibid., 164.
a limit on the meanings beyond the grammatical-historical one. The absence of a consensus leaves him free to follow his own whims.

McCartney and Clayton go so far as to call the practice of limiting a passage to a single meaning “ridiculous from a general hermeneutical point of view” and “perverse from a theological one.” They are obviously disciples of neither Milton Terry nor Bernard Ramm nor grammatical-historical principles. They make such statements in connection with their practice of reading NT meanings back into the OT as additions to the grammatical-historical meaning of the OT. That, of course, is the basis for the system of covenant theology when it allegorizes large portions of the OT.

(9) Kenneth Gentry

The writings of theonomist Kenneth Gentry also illustrate the contemporary practice of finding multiple meanings in a single passage. When discussing the 144,000 of Revelation 7, he expresses the possibility that they may represent the church as a whole, including both Jews and Gentiles. Yet just ten pages later he sees them definitely representing Christians of Jewish extraction. He makes the latter identification because he needs something to tie the prophecy’s fulfillment to the land of Judea as his theological system requires. The double meaning assigned to the same group apparently does not phase him.

He goes further in connection with the theme verse of Revelation. He identifies the “cloud coming”—as he calls it—of Christ of Revelation 1:7 with the Roman invasion of Judea in A.D. 67-70. On the next page he says Christ’s cloud coming was the Roman persecution of the church in A.D. 64-68. So for him, the cloud coming mentioned in the Revelation’s theme verse refers to two comings of Christ in the A.D. 60s. In other words the verse has two meanings.

The waves of uncertainty are about to capsize the ship.

(10) Darrell Bock, Craig Blaising, and Marvin Pate

Another recent example of finding multiple meanings in a single passage comes in the methodology of Progressive Dispensationalism. That system allows for complementary additions in meaning which of necessity alter the original sense conveyed by a passage. These later alterations are in view when Blaising and Bock
write, “There also is such a thing as complementary aspects of meaning, where an additional angle on the text reveals an additional element of its message or a fresh way of relating the parts of a text’s message.” Bock admits at least in part that this amounts to a change of meaning:

Does the expansion of meaning entail a change of meaning? . . . This is an important question for those concerned about consistency within interpretation. The answer is both yes and no. On the one hand, to add to the revelation of a promise is to introduce “change” to it through addition.

He goes on with an attempt to justify the “no” part of his answer by calling the change “revelatory progress.” Revelatory progress, however, has to do with later additional revelation on the same general subject through another writing, not—as he holds—additional meanings being affixed to a single earlier passage.

Blaising and Bock illustrate their “multi-layered” approach to hermeneutics by identifying Babylon in Revelation 17–18 in three different ways: as Rome, a rebuilt Babylon, and other cities in “the sweep of history.” Progressive dispensationalist Pate further illustrates the multi-meaning approach of that system when he joins with preterists in adding Jerusalem of the past to the meanings assigned to Babylon. His approach to Revelation utilizes an eclectic hermeneutic, combining elements of preterism and idealism with futurism. In other words, he can agree with preterists, idealists, and futurists regarding the meaning of almost any passage in the book. His eclecticism leads him to ridiculous interpretations such as having the second, third, and fifth seals predictive of wars occurring long before Revelation was written.

Bock goes so far as to accuse this essay’s writer of holding to “a similar multiple setting view for some prophetic texts in a way that parallels” what he means

38Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, Progressive Dispensationalism (Wheaton: Victor, 1993) 68.
39Ibid.
40Blaising and Bock, Progressive Dispensationalism 93-96. The “layered” approach approximates that of amillennialist Poythress who proposes four levels of communication in the symbolism of Revelation (Vern S. Poythress, “Genre and Hermeneutics in Rev 20:1-6,” JETS 36 [1993]:41-43).
42Ibid., 145-46.
43Ibid., 151-57. Even with Pate’s highly improbable early dating of the Revelation in the sixties, the predicted events preceded the prophecy that predicted them, which sequence is of course absurd.
by typology. He then quotes a lengthy paragraph from my chapter in *Israel: The Land and the People* to prove his point. In that paragraph I point out how Paul in Acts 13:47 applies a portion of one of Isaiah’s Servant Songs (Isa 42:6) to himself and his ministry. Acknowledging my recognition that this is an additional meaning not gleaned from a grammatical-historical analysis of Isa 42:6, he cites my further statement: “The new meaning of the Old Testament prophecies applied to the church introduced by New Testament writers did not cancel out the original meaning and their promises to Israel. God will yet restore the nation of Abraham’s physical descendants as He promised He would.” Then he immediately adds, “This final statement is precisely what progressives say about how complementary meaning works.”

In order to cast me in a “complementary hermeneutical” role, however, Bock had to skip a paragraph between the lengthy paragraph he quoted and my summary statement about God’s continuing purpose to fulfill Isaiah’s prophecy to Israel. In the intervening paragraph that he chose to omit, I made several points that complementary hermeneutics would not tolerate. In the first sentence I stated, “That [i.e., Paul’s use of Isa 42:6] was not a fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy. . . .” Complementary hermeneutics would say that it was a fulfillment. I also stated, “It [i.e., Paul’s use of Isa 42:6] was an additional meaning furnished through the apostle to the Gentiles during the period of Israel’s rejection.” In the same paragraph I made this point: “Any [OT texts] that they [NT writers] used relating to the new program and new people of God, the church, of necessity took on a different nature simply because OT prophecy did not foresee the NT church.”

I cannot say whether or not Professor Bock’s omission of that paragraph was intentional, but the fact is he hopped right over the intervening paragraph so as to portray me in a certain way. His omission could have resulted from another characteristic of progressive dispensational hermeneutics, one that I have elsewhere

---


46Ibid., 107-8.

47Ibid., 108.

48Ibid.


50Ibid.

51Ibid.
called "hermeneutical hopscotch." A player in hopscotch chooses the squares he wants to hop into and avoids stepping in others that would lose the game for him. That parallels PD’s selective use of passages to support their system of complementary hermeneutics. Perhaps that accounts for the exclusion of the paragraph from my work that explicitly opposed complementary hermeneutics.

The Foundational Importance of the Single-Meaning Principle

The Standard

With statements such as the following, Terry puts special emphasis on the importance of single meaning when interpreting prophetic passages.

The hermeneutical principles which we have now set forth necessarily exclude the doctrine that the prophecies of Scripture contain an occult or double sense. We may readily admit that the Scriptures are capable of manifold practical applications; otherwise they would not be so useful for doctrine, correction, and instruction in righteousness (2 Tim. iii, 16). But the moment we admit the principle that portions of Scripture contain an occult or double sense we introduce an element of uncertainty in the sacred volume, and unsettle all scientific interpretation. “If the Scripture has more than one meaning,” says Dr. Owen, “it has no meaning at all.” “I hold,” says Ryle, “that the words of Scripture were intended to have one definite sense, and that our first object should be to discover that sense, and adhere rigidly to it. . . . To say that words do mean a thing merely because they can be tortured into meaning it is a most dishonourable and dangerous way of handling Scripture.”

Terry adds,

We have already seen that the Bible has its riddles, enigmas, and dark sayings, but whenever they are given the context clearly advises us of the fact. To assume, in the absence of any hint, that we have an enigma, and in the face of explicit statements to the contrary, that any specific prophecy has a double sense, a primary and a secondary meaning, a near and a remote fulfilment, must necessarily introduce an element of uncertainty and confusion into biblical interpretation.

Though Terry’s use of his own principles in eschatology are at times suspect, his basic principles of hermeneutics make the most sense. That is what grammatical-historical interpretation consists of. Interpret each statement in light of the principles of grammar and the facts of history. Take each statement in its plain sense if it matches common sense, and do not look for another sense.

---


53 Terry, Biblical Hermeneutics 493.

54 Ibid., 495.
**Initial Departure from the Standard**

That is the way God has communicated with humans from the beginning. His first words to man in Gen 1:27-30 were,

> And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. And God blessed them; and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” Then God said, “Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the surface of all the earth, and every tree which has fruit yielding seed; it shall be food for you; and to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the sky and to every thing that moves on the earth which has life, I have given every green plant for food”; and it was so [NASB].

Scripture does not detail man’s response to God’s instructions, but apparently he understood them clearly, responded properly, and the human race was off to a great start.

But then God added to His communication with man. In Gen 2:16b-17 He said, “From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die” [NASB]. How did Adam understand this statement? Apparently as God intended it, according to the grammar of His command and the historical situation of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the Garden of Eden. In fact, he communicated it to Eve so well that Eve in Gen 3:2b-3 was able to repeat it to the serpent quite accurately: “From the fruit of the trees of the garden we may eat; but from the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, ‘You shall not eat from it or touch it, lest you die’” [NASB]. That was her answer to the serpent when he asked about God’s prohibition against eating from trees in the Garden of Eden. So far Eve’s hermeneutics were in great shape as was God’s communicative effectiveness with mankind. She worded her repetition of God’s command slightly differently, but God probably repeated His original command to Adam in several different ways. Genesis has not preserved a record of every word He spoke to Adam.

When did confusion enter the picture? When the serpent suggested to Eve that God’s plain statement had another meaning. He said, “You surely shall not die! For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (Gen 4b-5, NASB). The serpent was probably not calling God a liar—he knew better than to suggest that in the perfect environment of the Garden of Eden—but simply suggesting to Eve that she had misinterpreted God’s statement, or that by limiting her understanding to the plain sense of God’s words, she had missed a second meaning intended by God’s command. That she had missed God’s double-entendre or *sensus-plenior* was the serpent’s implication. The serpent’s message to Eve was, “This is just God’s way of telling you how to gain a knowledge of good and evil.” The first human experience on the “sea of uncertainty” resulted when Eve and then Adam bought into
the serpent’s suggestion that God’s statement was not limited to a single meaning. Such was how hermeneutical difficulties in understanding God’s Word began.

**Danger of Even a Slight Departure from the Standard**

Zuck chooses the principle of single meaning, but treads on dangerous ground when, in following Elliott Johnson, he adds related implications or “related submeanings.” To speak of a single meaning on one hand and of related submeanings on the other is contradictory. A passage either has one meaning or it has more than one. No middle ground exists between those two options.

Zuck uses Psalm 78:2 to illustrate related implications or related submeanings. The psalmist Asaph writes, “I will open my mouth in a parable.” Zuck limits the passage to one meaning, but says the passage has two referents, Asaph and Jesus who applied the words to Himself in Matthew 13:35. Instead of saying the psalm has two referents, which in essence assigns two meanings to it, to say that the psalm’s lone referent is Asaph, thereby limiting the psalm to one meaning, is preferable. Either Psalm 78:2 refers to Asaph or it refers to Jesus. It cannot refer to both. It is proper to say that Psalm 78:2 refers to Asaph, and Matthew 13:35 refers to Jesus. By itself, Psalm 78:2 cannot carry the weight of the latter referent.

In defending his double-referent view, Zuck apparently makes this same distinction, though he does not repudiate the double-referent terminology. He discusses Psalms 8, 16, and 22, noting that David wrote them about his own experiences, but that the NT applies them to Christ in a sense significantly different from how David used them. His conclusions about these psalms and the NT use of them is accurate, but the psalms themselves cannot have more than one referent, hermeneutically speaking. Such would assign them more than one meaning. Neither the human author David nor the original readers of the psalms could have used the principles of grammar and the facts of history to come up with the additional referent or meaning that the NT assigns to the psalms. The source and authority for that additional meaning is the NT, not the OT.

A discussion of how this single-meaning principle works out in the broader discussion of the NT use of the OT must await a future article on the subject.

**The Contemporary Dilemma**

Evangelicals today are drifting on the sea of uncertainty and conjecture because of their neglect of foundational principles of the grammatical-historical method of interpretation. They have become sophisticated in analyzing hermeneuti-
The Principle of Single Meaning

Cal theory, but in that process have seemingly forgotten simple principles that exegetical giants of the past have taught. They are currently reaping the harvest of confusion that neglect of the past has brought upon them.

Daniel Wallace has provided a recent grammatical work entitled *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament*, a work that has a number of helpful features. In seeking to advance beyond the basics, however, Wallace has fallen into the same pit as so many others by his neglect of the basics of hermeneutics. One of his glaring errors violates the principle of single meaning about which the discussion above has spoken. In his consideration of a category he calls the “Plenary Genitive,” he labors the point that a particular passage’s construction may be at the same time both objective genitive and subjective genitive. In defense of his position he writes,

One of the reasons that most NT grammarians have been reticent to accept this category [i.e., “Plenary Genitive”] is simply that most NT grammarians are Protestants. And the Protestant tradition of a singular meaning for a text (which, historically, was a reaction to the fourfold meaning employed in the Middle Ages) has been fundamental in their thinking. However, current biblical research recognizes that a given author may, at times, be intentionally ambiguous. The instances of double entendre, sensus plenior (conservatively defined), puns, and word-plays in the NT all contribute to this view. Significantly, two of the finest commentaries on the Gospel of John are by Roman Catholic scholars (Raymond Brown and Rudolf Schnackenburg): John’s Gospel, more than any other book in the NT, involves double entendre. Tradition has to some degree prevented Protestants from seeing this.58

Instead of following traditional grammatical-historical interpretation and its insistence on limiting a passage to one meaning, Wallace consciously rejects the wisdom of past authorities so that he can keep in step with “current biblical research” and Roman Catholic scholars advocating multiple meanings for the same passage. His volume could have been very helpful, but this is a feature that makes it extremely dangerous.

Someone needs to sound the alarm about recent evangelical leaders who are misleading the body of Christ. A mass evangelical exodus from this time-honored principle of interpreting Scripture is jeopardizing the church’s access to the truths that are taught therein. Whether interpreters have forsaken the principle intentionally or have subconsciously ignored it, the damage is the same. The only hope of escape from the pit into which so many have fallen is to reaffirm the principle of single meaning along with the other hermeneutical principles that have served the believing community so well through the centuries.

58Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996) 120 n. 134 [emphasis in the original].
EVANGELICALS AND IPSISSIMA VOX

Donald E. Green
Faculty Associate in New Testament

The ipsissima vox position views the Gospels as containing the concepts that Jesus expressed, but not His very words. This essay focuses on the use of ancient history and parallel scriptural passages to support the ipsissima vox view. Advocates of the view regularly cite Thucydides as furnishing a pattern for how NT writers quoted their sources, but this precedent breaks down for a number of reasons. In addition, it does not take into account the difference between Greco-Roman writers and Jewish historiography. The reliance of ipsissima vox on parallel passages in the Synoptic Gospels also falters. On one hand, proponents of the position use accounts of events that prove nothing regarding accounts of spoken words. On the other hand, they make no allowance for explanations in accounts of spoken words that adequately account for differences by assuming an ipsissima verba view of the quotations. A further failing of the ipsissima vox position is its failure to account for the role of the Holy Spirit in the inspiration of the Gospels. Recent evangelical proponents of this system have yielded too much ground in their discussions of the accuracy of these books.

* * * * *

Introduction

To what extent do the four canonical Gospels record the very words of Jesus? That question sparked the work of the infamous Jesus Seminar, and has been the subject of increasing attention in evangelical circles in the past few years. Various writers, including Grant Osborne,1 Daniel Wallace,2 Robert Thomas,3

---

Darrell Bock, and Robert Wilkin have all addressed this issue to some extent in their recent writings.

In technical terms, this discussion centers on whether the Gospels contain the *ipsissima vox* of Jesus ("His very voice," i.e., His teaching summarized) or the *ipsissima verba* of Jesus ("His very words"). The proponents of *ipsissima vox* maintain that the gospel writers never intended to give a verbatim account of Jesus’ words, but rather took the liberty to edit His words to fit their own purposes in writing. Under the *ipsissima vox* view, “the concepts go back to Jesus, but the words do not—at least, not exactly as recorded.”

Given the fast-growing prominence of this issue, an examination of the *ipsissima vox* position in greater detail is timely. To simplify the focus of the present discussion, this essay will evaluate primarily certain views that Darrell Bock expressed in his chapter, “The Words of Jesus in the Gospels: Live, Jive, or Memorex?,” particularly his opinions on the role of ancient history and parallel Scripture passages in the discussion. After an evaluation of those two areas, a brief examination of the relationship between the doctrine of inspiration and current *ipsissima vox* positions will follow.

**An Overview of the Ipsissima Vox Position**

Bock’s article seeks to defend the historical reliability of the Gospels’ record of Jesus’ words from the destructive criticism of the Jesus Seminar. He argues that the Gospels contain an accurate summary of Jesus’ teaching, but not necessarily His precise words. He writes, “The Gospels give us the true gist of His teaching and the central thrust of His message,” but “we do not have ‘His very words’ in the strictest

---


8Bock, “The Words of Jesus” 73-99. There are, of course, differences on certain issues between the *ipsissima vox* proponents. However, the present approach is justified by the recognition given to Bock by others who agree with his views. Wallace states that Bock’s essay represents “the best of evangelical scholarship when it comes to describing *ipsissima vox*” (Wallace, “An Apologia” 6 n. 20). For an evaluation of Wallace’s contribution to the discussion, see the present writer’s Th.M. thesis “Inspiration and Current Positions on *Ipsissima Vox*,” forthcoming at The Master’s Seminary, Sun Valley, Calif., in the spring of 2001.
sense of the term.”

Bock advances three primary reasons for his acceptance of the *ipsissima vox* position: (1) Jesus probably gave most of his teaching in Aramaic, meaning that most of His teaching in the Greek New Testament is already a translation. (2) The Gospel writers obviously abbreviated Jesus’ teachings, because His longest speeches in the Gospels take only a few minutes to read, even though Jesus Himself kept His audiences for hours at a time. (3) The NT citations of the OT are not word for word. If the Bible can summarize a citation of itself in this way, then to see the same technique in its handling of Jesus’ words should come as no surprise. Bock’s positions on these three issues have been addressed elsewhere, and to reexamine those arguments is beyond the scope of this essay. The more modest goal of the present discussion is to consider his use of ancient history and parallel scriptural passages in support of his position. A final section will also consider the impact of the doctrine of inspiration on an analysis of *ipsissima vox*.

**Ipsissima Vox and Ancient History**

*Ipsissima vox* proponents usually support their position by asserting that it is consistent with the general standards of recording speeches in ancient secular history. Supporters argue that classic historians did not use modern quotation marks to set off precise quotations, and as a result, the accepted practice was to be “faithful to the meaning of the original utterance,” while the exact phrasing was left to the discretion of the writer. Writers who so framed their quotations would not be accused of distortion or inaccurate reporting.

---

9Bock, “The Words of Jesus” 77-78. Osborne interprets Bock’s position to mean that while the Gospels may at times contain the “exact words” of Jesus, “summaries and paraphrases predominate” (Osborne, “Historical Criticism and the Evangelical” 203).

10Bock’s point here is that if Jesus spoke in Aramaic, there would have been an inevitable, even if slight, linguistic entropy in translating the spoken Aramaic of Jesus into the written Greek of the Gospels. Bock assumes the long-held scholarly opinion that Jesus spoke and taught primarily in Aramaic, a view represented, for example, in Joseph A. Fitzmyer, “The Languages of Palestine in the First Century A.D.,” *CBQ* 32 (October 1970):501-31. However, more recent writers have marshaled impressive evidence to challenge that presumption and to support the view that Jesus not only spoke but also taught in Greek at various times during His ministry. See Stanley E. Porter, “Did Jesus Ever Teach in Greek?,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 44/2 (November 1993):199-235. It is notable that even fellow *ipsissima vox* proponent Wallace disagrees with Bock on this issue (Wallace, “An Apologia” 6; cf. his Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996] 17-18). Consequently, Bock’s view on this important issue should not be accepted as a given.

11Bock, “The Words of Jesus” 77-78.

12Thomas, “Impact of Historical Criticism” 367-68.

The Key Statement of Thucydides

To support that assertion, *ipsissima vox* advocates routinely refer to a famous statement by the ancient historian Thucydides (c. 460-400 B.C.), who was a pioneer in the writing of history. One authority states, “Readers of all opinions will probably agree that [Thucydides] saw more truly, inquired more responsibly, and reported more faithfully than any other ancient historian.” Thucydides explained his historical method in the introduction to his work, and described the nature of the speeches found in his writing as follows:

In this history I have made use of set speeches some of which were delivered just before and others during the war. I have found it difficult to remember the precise words used in the speeches which I listened to myself and my various informants have experienced the same difficulty; so my method has been, while keeping as closely as possible to the general sense of the words that were actually used, to make the speakers say what, in my opinion, was called for by each situation.

*Ipsissima vox* advocates rely heavily on Thucydides’ acknowledgment that he did not use the “precise words” in the speeches found in his history, but rather kept as closely as possible to the “general sense” of what was said. They suggest that Thucydides’ practice established the standard for recording speeches in subsequent historical writing up to the time of the Gospels. Since the Gospel writers were products of their milieu, they should be expected to write in accordance with prevailing historical standards, which only called for adherence to the general sense of the speeches, not their actual words. Consequently, the modern reader of the Gospels should expect to find primarily paraphrases and summaries of Jesus’ words, not His actual words themselves.

Verbal Precision of Speeches in Secular History

In his discussion of the historiographic standards of ancient times, Bock quotes exclusively from Charles Fornara’s work *The Nature of History in Ancient*
Greece and Rome\textsuperscript{18} to establish his position. Fornara starts with the statement of Thucydides and argues that a genuine “core” of the speeches recorded is present in Greek history from the end of the sixth to the first century B.C. Further, while the nature of Roman history is more complicated, he “cautiously” asserts that those speeches are substantially trustworthy from the time of the Second Punic War (c. 218-201 B.C.) to the end of the fourth century A.D.\textsuperscript{19}

Fornara reaches that conclusion by tracing the attitudes of ancient historians from the time of Thucydides through the following centuries. Following a description of historians from Thucydides into imperial times, Fornara concludes that while the importance of speeches in history diminished in the centuries following Thucydides, “the more important principle of reporting the main points of what had actually been said remained (theoretically) an unquestioned rule through Hellenistic times at least.”\textsuperscript{20}

Fornara notes a change with the establishment of the Roman Empire. Some historians were rhetorical in nature, and though some germ of the actual speeches may remain in their record, preserving what was actually said was not a matter of importance to the historical author. Other historians, like Tacitus, demonstrated fidelity to the substance of the speech while still using stylistic freedom. That freedom included the liberty to rearrange, condense, and give arguments in what seemed to him the most appropriate form and order.\textsuperscript{21}

In reviewing the application of that theory in historical practice, Fornara states why he believes that the ancients proved faithful to that doctrine.\textsuperscript{22} He examines the practice of Thucydides, Polybius, and Tacitus in support of his position. Based on this broad examination of evidence, Fornara argues for a general reliability of ancient speeches, even if the historians were not invariably reliable.\textsuperscript{23} He acknowledges up front, however, that his approach is contrary to the prevailing estimation of speeches in ancient history that finds them more questionable.\textsuperscript{24}

Secular History and Gospel Speeches

When he writes on the words of Jesus in the Gospels, Bock adopts Fornara’s arguments and applies them to the Gospel writers, even though Fornara himself does

\textsuperscript{18}Charles William Fornara, \textit{The Nature of History in Ancient Greece and Rome} (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California, 1983). Bock’s thinking may also be influenced by A. W. Mosley, “Historical Reporting in the Ancient World,” \textit{NTS} 12 (1965-1966):10-26, although he does not cite Mosley in his popularly-oriented article in \textit{Jesus Under Fire}.

\textsuperscript{19}Fornara, \textit{The Nature of History} 168.

\textsuperscript{20}Ibid., 151.

\textsuperscript{21}Ibid., 152-53.

\textsuperscript{22}Ibid., 143.

\textsuperscript{23}Ibid., 160.

\textsuperscript{24}Ibid., 142.
not consider the Gospels in his work. Bock believes that Fornara is describing the pattern of careful ancient historians, and finds a parallel in Luke 1:1-4. He writes, “The Evangelists were able to search out what Jesus did and said because they had access to people and communities who had been exposed to Jesus or his intimate followers.”

In one sense, it is easy to see why Bock would adopt Fornara’s historiographic standards and apply them to the Scriptures. Fornara makes a credible case for the substantial trustworthiness of the accounts of speeches in antiquity. If that standard is established and one assumes that the Gospel writers operated in conjunction with the historiographic norms of the day, then Bock has arguably presented a prima facie case that the Bible is substantially more reliable than the Jesus Seminar concluded.

How Accurate Was Ancient Secular History? However, Bock’s reliance on Fornara’s statements regarding ancient historiography is fraught with peril. First, it is not clear that Fornara is accurate in his assessment of the reliability of ancient records of speeches. He is at odds with numerous historians who believe the standard is substantially lower than that for which Fornara argues. The Thucydidean principle may have established an ideal, but whether it was followed in practice is another matter altogether.

Some historians have argued that Thucydides himself did not follow the practice of recording the main substance of the speeches found in his writings. In some places, Thucydides demonstrably did not follow the actual content of the speeches which he records. The Oxford Classical Dictionary has these comments:

> It is much debated whether [Thucydides made his statement about his speeches] early or late [in his career]; and it has been much explained away. But it is unreasonable to doubt that from the start Thucydides took notes himself, or sought for hearers’ notes, of the speeches he considered important. But since he used speeches dramatically, to reveal the workings of men’s minds and the impact of circumstance, it is clear that verbatim reports would not have served even if he could have managed to get them, and he was bound to compromise (unconsciously) between dramatic and literal truth. It is likely that, as his technique developed, dramatic truth would tend to prevail; it is tempting to put his profession of method early, a young man’s intention.

Other writers dispute the notion that subsequent historians followed the Thucydidean principle in their writings, and maintain that subsequent historians strayed far from Thucydides’ standard of accuracy and wrote scarcely believable


26Wade-Gery, Denniston, and Hornblower, “Thucydides” 1518. The authors give several examples to support their assertion. They do not reject Thucydides’ speeches as fiction, and indeed, believe that Thucydides tried to recreate real occasions. One does not have to reject all of Thucydides’ speeches to recognize that he may not have always followed his standard in actual practice.
accounts of speeches. Ferdinand Schevill maintains that some ancient historians obviously made no effort to convey the true substance of the speeches. He writes,

The historians who came after Thucydides throughout the long succession of classical centuries were so hypnotized by what they considered the charms of rhetoric that they tended to hide and even black out the facts they had set out to present behind a blinding curtain of verbal fireworks. It has been universally agreed that the speeches of Thucydides carry so different a content from those of all other classical historians that they rate as a contribution unique of its kind.27

M. I. Finley says that Thucydides had a passion for accuracy in the field of history, but he was "an exceedingly lonely figure in the history of ancient historical writing, for not one man after him, among either the Greek historians or the Roman, shared his passion."28 And Mortimer Chambers, professor emeritus of Ancient Greek History at the University of California, Los Angeles, writes:

After [the time of Thucydides] the integrity of speeches in narrative dropped off considerably. Dionysius of Halicarnassus, for example, who wrote about the time of Jesus or a bit earlier . . . gave way to fantastic, florid speeches about which no one could say, as Thucydides said of his speeches, that they tried to give a summary of what was actually said.29

One need not resolve this dispute among historical experts to see that the "standards of ancient historiography" are not as well defined as Bock’s article suggests. In this respect, Bock’s article suffers from its narrow band of research. At times, Bock almost seems to follow Fornara’s analysis because it supports his conclusions, not because Fornara represents a broad historical consensus on ancient historiographic standards. At the very least, one must conclude that Fornara’s views are contested among modern historians, so that Bock’s exclusive reliance on Fornara is subject to serious question.

**Historical Error in Ancient Secular Speeches.** That weakness in Bock’s position is compounded further as one investigates Fornara’s position more closely. Bock omits some of Fornara’s conclusions that are critical for the evangelical committed to the inspiration of Scriptures. While Fornara adopts a generally high view toward secular speeches in ancient history, he acknowledges that the historical standard of the time often did not even keep to the gist of the speech:

> Always there was the admixture of the imagination and intellect of the historian, and it obviously increased in the degree that the recollection of speeches actually delivered grew

---

29From personal correspondence with Professor Mortimer Chambers, August 10, 2000.
dimmer, or the same speech was recast by a succession of authors to suit the best rhetorical theory. The vagaries of the historical tradition accessible to the writer also facilitated self-deception. Knowledge that a speech actually had been delivered, the conviction that a speech must have been delivered, the inference that a speech probably was delivered because it was required, are easy gradations leading to unintentional perjury, and it would be rash to deny the occasional occurrence of such deflections as these. . . . But these imperfections in the practice of the historians should not detract from the basic integrity of their approach.30

The student of the Gospels should not miss that Fornera’s standard allows for “self-deception,” “unintentional perjury,” and “deflections” in the historical writings. Though that may be acceptable in the realm of secular history, an evangelical commitment to the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture cannot accept such errors in the Bible. The Scriptures that assert their perfection (Ps 19:7), truth (John 17:17), and inviolability (Matt 5:18) preclude such a conclusion.

To be sure, Bock does not argue for such imperfections in Scripture. However, his adoption of Fornera’s standards paves a broad road for the conclusion that the Scriptures must also include deception and perjury. For if Fornera is correct about the historiographic standards, and Bock is correct that the NT authors wrote in accordance with those standards, then the student of Scripture should not only expect paraphrases and summaries of Jesus’ words in the Gospels, he should also expect the kind of errors that Fornera adopts. Bock’s analysis leaves him utterly defenseless against that conclusion.

Other Problems with Assuming the Ancient Secular History Standard.
The foregoing discussion has assumed the validity of the premise that the Gospel writers followed Greco-Roman historiographic standards. However, two points need to be made at this juncture. First, ipsissima vox proponents offer no evidence to support the assertion that the Gospel writers were familiar with Thucydides. Even if such familiarity is assumed, no proof that they consciously patterned their writings after him exists. The ipsissima vox position on ancient historiography has been assumed, not proven.

Second, the citation of Thucydides proves nothing about the habits of the Gospel writers. Over four centuries separate Thucydides from the Gospel writers. Although a verbal parallel exists between Thucydides and what ipsissima vox writers want to prove, to say (without further proof) that a nearly 500-year-old statement proves what the Gospel writers’ standard was when they wrote the Gospels is a logical leap of cosmic proportions. It would be akin to “proving” modern nautical habits by establishing what Columbus did when he sailed the Atlantic in 1492.31

30Fornera, The Nature of History 167-68 [emphasis added].
31Wallace acknowledges this point when he writes, “One of the factors that needs to be addressed is how ancient historiography evolved from Thucydides on” (“An Apologia” 4 n.18). If that evolution is unknown, as Wallace suggests, it is bald speculation to assert that the Gospel writers followed
Jewish Historiography

Is there any historical testimony that would shed light on the regard that the Gospel writers had for Greco-Roman history? Perhaps some clues can be found in the writings of Josephus. It is a reasonable assumption that a first-century Jewish historian would more likely reflect the mindset of the Gospel writers than a fifth-century B.C. Greek historian. If Josephus is to be believed, Jews did not hold Greek historiography in high regard. Josephus goes into this matter at length, beginning with his defense of Jewish historical accuracy:

But what is the strongest argument of our exact management in this matter is what I am now going to say, that we have the names of our high priests from father to son set down in our records for the interval of two thousand years. . . . [E]very one is not permitted of his own accord to be a writer, nor is there any disagreement in what is written; they being only prophets that have written the original and earliest accounts of things as they learned them of God himself by inspiration; and others have written what hath happened in their own times, and that in a very distinct manner also.  

In the quoted section, Josephus argues for a high concern for historical accuracy among Jews, as seen in their careful preservation of the genealogical records of the high priests. Further, he argues that Jews attributed their historical accounts to the direct inspiration of God. Josephus takes great pride in the Jewish distinctives:

For we have not an innumerable multitude of books among us, disagreeing from and contradicting one another, as the Greeks have, but only twenty-two books, which contain the records of all the past times; which are justly believed to be divine; and of them five belong to Moses, which contain his laws and the traditions of the origin of mankind till his death . . . and how firmly we have given credit to these books of our own nation is evident by what we do; for during so many ages as have already passed, no one has been so bold as either to add any thing to them, to take any thing from them, or to make any change in them; but it is become natural to all Jews immediately, and from their very birth, to esteem these books to contain Divine doctrines, and to persist in them, and if occasion be, willingly to die for them . . . that they may not be obliged to say one word against our laws and the records that contain them.  

Of vital importance to the present subject is the contrast that Josephus draws between these esteemed Jewish historical writings, and the Greek writings that were in circulation:

Thucydides.


33Ibid., 1.8, 862.
[T]here are none at all among the Greeks who would undergo the least harm on that account, no, nor in case all the writings that are among them were to be destroyed; for they take them to be such discourses as are framed agreeably to the inclinations of those that write them; and they have justly the same opinion of the ancient writers, since they see some of the present generation bold enough to write about such affairs, wherein they were not present, nor had concern enough to inform themselves about them from those that knew them; examples of which may be had in this late war of ours, where some persons have written histories, and published them, without having been in the places concerned, or having been near them when the actions were done; but these men put a few things together by hearsay, and insolently abuse the world, and call these writings by the name of Histories.  

Josephus claims that Greek histories had “insolently abused the world” and indicates that they were not worthy to bear the name “histories.” Unless one posits that Josephus was totally out of touch with Jewish sentiments in the first century, his writings make it virtually impossible to assert that the Gospel writers modeled their work after their Greek counterparts. The low regard for Greek histories surely meant that they were writing after a different pattern, a pattern inherited from their fathers. Commenting on this section of Josephus, Martin Hengel writes:

Thus the model for the collection and the literary presentation of the ‘biographical’ Jesus tradition is [rooted] in the accounts of history to be found in the Old Testament and Judaism, which to a large degree are composed of ‘biographical’ sections. . . . Josephus shows us that the educated Greek-speaking Jew understood the narrative writings of the Jewish canon as historical works sui generis, which differed fundamentally from the works of pagan historians by virtue of their divine authorization and inspiration and were therefore especially reliable. . . . Conscious though they were of the different character of their message, the New Testament historians wanted to take up the tradition which already existed.  

Birger Gerhardsson concurs as he describes the Jewish attitude toward the words of their teachers from OT times to Rabbinic Judaism:  

The art of reproducing another person’s statements in one’s own words, and of abstracting points of view and ideas from someone’s words, has been carried to considerable lengths in the Hellenized West. But the art was not practised [sic] in ancient Israel. A person’s views were conveyed in his own words. Authentic statements contained the authority and power of the one who uttered them; this we know from the Old Testament.  

This also applies to Rabbinic Judaism, though certain developments and changes have come about. We can distinguish tendencies towards a more abstract mode of thought.

---

34Ibid.
We see above all the method—which was taken to extreme lengths—of subjecting authoritative sayings to thorough penetration and exegesis. But reverence and care for the ipsissima verba of each authority remains unaltered. In the colleges no attempt was made to give a synopsis of the views of the old masters; their words were quoted—together with the name of the one who had uttered them.36

The historical tradition that the Gospel writers drew upon came not from the Greco-Roman tradition, but rather from the Jewish/OT tradition that was conscious of the divine inspiration of its writings. The comparison to secular historians for which the ipsissima vox proponents so valiantly argue is invalid, poorly conceived, and lacking evidence—and cannot stand against the clear testimony of Josephus on this point. The Gospel writers’ pattern for transmission of the words of Jesus does not lie in ancient Greek historiography, but in the Jewish pattern that paid close attention to the actual words used.37

Ipsissima Vox and Parallel Accounts in the Synoptic Gospels

Since Bock believes in advance that the Gospel writers were mostly summarizing and “giving the gist” of Jesus’ statements, it is not surprising that he believes his scriptural examples demonstrate that phenomenon. Bock uses two different kinds of parallel passages in the Synoptic Gospels as evidence of his ipsissima vox position—(1) those that differ in their recording of the order of events; and (2) those that are similar but not identical in their account of sayings. These differences between the Synoptic writers, he believes, inexorably lead the interpreter to the conclusion that they were not concerned to preserve the ipsissima verba of Jesus—only the substance of what He said. The following analysis is not intended to analyze in detail each of Bock’s examples, but simply to show in a broad fashion that the passages can reasonably be understood without resorting to an ipsissima vox position.

Parallel Accounts of Events

The Temptations of Jesus. Bock begins by discussing the parallel accounts of Jesus’ temptations in Matthew 4 and Luke 4. As is well known, Matthew and Luke reverse the order of the second and third temptations. Since Bock offers that example in the context of his discussion of his position on ipsissima vox, he


37 Bock touches on the transmission of oral tradition in Jewish culture, but he creates the impression that there was no fundamental difference between Greeks and Jews in their approach to historical precision (“The Words of Jesus” 79-81). The failure to draw that distinction waters down Jewish standards and unjustifiably lowers expectations for the reader of the Gospels.
apparently believes that the Gospel writers’ arrangement of chronological material somehow proves their willingness to modify the words of Jesus. However, the order of the temptations of Jesus does not contribute to the *ipsissima vox* discussion. There is no logical relationship between an a-chronological arrangement of historically accurate material and the assertion that the Gospel writers did not record the precise words of Jesus. An example that does not involve the words of Jesus is, at best, of only marginal relevance in establishing how the Gospel writers handled His sayings.

Matthew most likely establishes the chronological order with his use of τότε (*tote, “then”) in 4:5, 10, along with the terminal indicator in 4:10-11 of “Begone, Satan! . . . Then the devil left Him.” Luke does not employ temporal markers, using καί (*kai, “and”) and ὄτε (*de, “but”) instead, which indicates that he did not intend to give a chronological arrangement as Matthew did. Consequently, the passages do not contradict each other. Neither do they prove the *ipsissima vox* position.

*Miracle Accounts in Matthew 8–9.* A similar analysis applies to Bock’s citation of the miracle accounts in Matthew 8–9 and its parallels. That Matthew 8–9 is arranged topically rather than chronologically is widely acknowledged. Bock states, “[These differences] reflect differences in theme and emphasis in terms of intended presentation. They give evidence of conscious choices in ordering events within the Gospel accounts.”

Again, however, this ordering of events says nothing about the Gospel writers’ treatment of the words of Jesus. To arrange material topically rather than chronologically does not mean the author has taken liberty to change spoken words. Broadus speaks for the traditional position regarding the arrangement of material when he writes:

> When we compare the Gospels of Mark and Luke, we find several of these miracles, and the attendant sayings, introduced there in such connections as to show that they did not occur in the precise order in which they are here mentioned. . . . They are grouped by Matthew without any particular regard to the chronological order, but in such a way as to promote the special design of his historical argument.

Thus, as with the temptations of Jesus, Bock’s citation of Matthew 8–9 does not advance the *ipsissima vox* position. Chronological arrangement of genuine historical material does not necessarily correlate with Bock’s assertion that the Gospel writers modified Jesus’ words in their effort to summarize His teaching.

---

38 Bock acknowledges the legitimacy of this harmonization (Bock, “The Words of Jesus” 97 n. 21).
39 Ibid., 85.
Arrangement does not negate historical accuracy when the author does not imply chronological sequence.41

Parallel Accounts of Sayings

Gist of the Sayings or Harmonization? More to the point is Bock’s comparison of the accounts of the baptism of Jesus, Peter’s confession, and the trials of Jesus, which actually involve the Gospel writers’ report of words spoken by Jesus and others. By way of overview, Bock asserts that the differences in the manner in which parallel sayings are recorded prove that the writers intended to summarize statements rather than give the equivalent of modern-day quotations. The Gospel writers were content to give the gist of the saying, because otherwise they would have given full and accurate quotations.42

By way of contrast, and before examining Bock’s specific examples, it should be noted that others have examined the differing statements in parallel accounts and reached an entirely different conclusion. Instead of finding a disregard for verbal precision, these writers find harmonization of the differences in the assumption that each writer recorded different aspects of a broader conversation or discourse.

Benjamin B. Warfield writes,

It lies in the nature of the case that two accounts of a conversation which agree as to the substance of what was said, but differ slightly in the details reported, are reporting different fragments of the conversation, selected according to the judgment of each writer as the best vehicles of its substance.43

Similarly, Kelly Osborne says,

When the words spoken by Jesus are similar but not identical between Luke and Matthew, the assumption should not be that one is more authentic than the other, but that the Lord reiterated the same idea in a similar but not identical manner. . . . This does not provide facile solutions to all difficulties in the text, but it avoids the need to say that one or another evangelist inserted into the text of his gospel words or phrases never actually spoken by Jesus.44

Indeed, Scripture itself gives many examples of repeated statements in the same discourse to support this principle. Several illustrations are found where a


42 Bock, “The Words of Jesus” 86.


statement is repeated *in the same immediate context* for the sake of emphasis. Mark 10:23-24 is one example:

And Jesus, looking around, said to His disciples, “How hard it will be for those who are wealthy to enter the kingdom of God!” And the disciples were amazed at His words. But Jesus answered again and said to them, “Children, how hard it is to enter the kingdom of God!

Another example can be adduced from John 14:10-11, where Jesus says, “Do you not believe *that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me?* The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works. Believe Me *that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me.*” Paul’s comments in Phil 4:4 also come to mind in this context: “Rejoice in the Lord always, again I will say, rejoice!”

In light of these examples, one must concur with the writer who said, “Those who so narrowly restrict conversations and discourses to only what is recorded in the gospels apparently have a distorted concept of what communication was like in these early times.” The view of Warfield and Osborne, long held by those who practice traditional harmonization, is not an uncritical failure to deal with problems. Rather, it approaches these issues with common sense and is justified readily by examples from the Scriptures themselves. In the analysis that follows, then, application of that principle will show that the scriptural evidence upon which Bock relies does not prove the *ipsissima vox* position. The data are susceptible to better explanations—explanations that Bock usually does not even consider in his article.

**The Baptism of Jesus.** Bock first refers to the parallel passages on the baptism of Jesus. He notes that separate writers record the voice from heaven differently. Mark and Luke portray the remark as a second person reference made directly to Jesus (“You are my beloved Son”), while Matthew records it as a third person remark (“This is my beloved Son”). From this data, Bock concludes that Mark and Luke have probably given the actual remark, while Matthew relays “the general report of its significance.” In other words, the Father did not actually say, “This is My beloved Son with whom I am well pleased,” as Matthew reports. Instead, Matthew only relayed the general gist of what the Father meant to help his readers understand the significance of the event.

Bock’s assessment, however, lacks precision and underestimates the effect that such a change has on the historical accuracy of Matthew’s account. Bock’s proposal means that Matthew modified the Father’s words and changed what was

---


46Bock, “The Words of Jesus” 86.
really a private dialogue with the Son into a public affirmation of Jesus. In other words, Bock has Matthew putting words on the lips of the Father that He never actually spoke. The reader of Matthew’s gospel, standing alone, would receive a significantly inaccurate perception of Jesus’ baptism. Contrary to Bock’s claims, this is not an issue of getting the “gist” of the meaning. It alters the dynamic of the entire event. One never knows exactly what was said, because he never knows whether the writer is reporting the actual words that were spoken or his interpretation as though that interpretation were the actual words of the speaker.

In the instance of Jesus’ baptism, persuasive reasons lead one to believe the Father uttered both the second- and third-person statements, and the statements thus harmonize with each other without doing violence to the context or wording of any of the passages. The Father could very well have spoken first to Jesus directly, then for emphasis repeated Matthew’s third person version for the benefit of witnesses at the baptism. This approach of traditional harmonization is preferable to an approach that obscures historical clarity and puts non-existent words on the Father’s lips.

**Peter’s Confession.** Bock next centers on Peter’s confession at Caesarea Philippi (Matt 16:13-20; Mark 8:27-30; Luke 9:18-21). He sets forth Jesus’ initial question as follows:

Matthew 16:13: “Who do people say the Son of Man is?”

Mark 8:27: “Who do people say I am?”


Bock maintains that the gist of the statement is present, but with variation. He notes the variation between “Son of Man” and the first-person personal pronoun “I,” along with the difference between “people” and “crowds.” He then asks:

Did the translation of remarks in distinct reports of the event merely use two similar Greek words to render one Aramaic one? Or did one writer put the question in language that was more like his own style? Or did one writer simply intend to summarize the event rather than transcribe it? Any of these options is possible. What is crucial to note is that the texts themselves show no necessity to render each other word for word, even in dialogue.47

Bock’s analysis does not exhaust the possible alternatives, however. Perhaps each writer gave a precise, but not exhaustive, account of the conversation. Nothing

---

47Ibid., 86-87.
about these differences demands that Jesus was speaking in Aramaic at the time, or that one of the writers made a stylistic variation, or that Jesus’ words were paraphrased. The data can be explained equally well by positing an ongoing conversation about Jesus’ identity.

Indeed, variations of the same question would heighten the disciples’ attention and allow them to focus on Jesus’ identity, more so than a single question would. By using repeated questions, Jesus may have been heightening the importance of the moment. He wanted to establish clearly who the people—the crowd—said that He was. Repeated statements of the questions in slightly differing forms would bring that emphasis to the disciples’ mind. By establishing the confusion of the multitudes, He set the stage for Peter’s great confession that followed.

It would also set the stage for the emphatic question that Jesus addressed to the disciples next: “But who do you (ὑμεῖς, hymeis) say that I am?” Jesus used repeated questions about the crowds to establish emphasis, and then turned to emphatic vocabulary and grammar in a single question that crystallized the main issue for the disciples and men of all ages: Who is this Jesus? The disciples, conscious of the significance of the moment, were about to articulate what the rest of the world was missing. Bock notices the following differences in the account of Peter’s reply:

Matthew 16:16: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

Mark 8:29: “You are the Christ.”


Bock says, “There are two possibilities here. Either Mark and Luke have simplified a much deeper confession as recorded here by Matthew, or Matthew has presented in ambiguous terms the fundamental messianic confession of Mark and Luke.”

But again, Bock’s proposal does not exhaust the possibilities. An even more plausible alternative exists. Peter, who only recently had been an unsung fisherman, was suddenly in a position to affirm what the multitudes had missed. Jesus was the Messiah! Matthew and Mark both record Peter’s use of the emphatic pronoun οὗ (sv) as he says, “You are the Christ.” One can almost picture Peter with his index finger pointing at Jesus, and with conviction saying, “I know who You are—you are

---

48 Though Bock does not allude to it in his article, part of the reason that some believe this dialogue originally took place in Aramaic relates to a possible Aramaic word-play involving Peter’s name. For a full discussion and bibliography related to this passage, along with a defense of the position that the dialogue took place in Greek, see Porter, “Did Jesus Ever Teach in Greek?” 229-35.

the Christ, the Christ of God! You are the Son of the living God!”

One further aspect supports this scenario. Peter’s confession came at a
turning point in Jesus’ ministry. As all three Synoptists record, it was immediately
after Peter’s confession that Jesus began teaching them that He must go to Jerusalem,
suffer, be killed, and be raised on the third day (Matt 16:21; Mark 8:31; Luke 9:22).
Jesus fixed His identity in the disciples’ minds before He unfolded for them the
fulcrum of the redemption of mankind. Frederic Godet writes,

The question addressed to the disciples is designed, first of all, to make them distinctly
conscious of the wide difference between the popular opinion and the conviction at which
they have themselves arrived; next, to serve as a starting-point for the fresh communica-
tion which Jesus is about to make respecting the manner in which the work of the Christ
is to be accomplished.50

The grammar and surrounding context in this event all call for an emphasis
that repeated questions and multiple emphatic responses would supply. Traditional
harmonization can well explain the data, preserve the exact words as they are
recorded, and at the same time call attention to the high drama of the moment in the
life of Jesus. Contrary to Bock’s assertion, the choices are not limited to “Either
Mark and Luke have simplified a much deeper confession as recorded by Matthew,
or Matthew has presented in ambiguous terms the fundamental messianic confession
of Mark and Luke.”51 The data are consistent with an entirely different explanation
that Bock does not consider, but that Warfield articulated nearly a century ago—the
Gospel writers simply recorded different parts of a larger whole. Nothing about the
data compels the conclusion that Bock suggests.

**The Trial of Jesus.** Bock’s final example relates to different statements
made at the trial of Jesus (Matt 26:57-68; Mark 14:53-65; Luke 22:54-71). Bock sets
forth the different questions from the high priest:

Matthew 26:63: I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are
the Christ, the Son of God.

Mark 14:61: Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?

Luke 22:67: If you are the Christ, . . . tell us.

Bock says, “Jesus is asked about his messianic claim, though again the
wording differs. So some of the Evangelists must be summarizing.”52 Again,

---

52Ibid., 88.
however, the data simply do not compel his dogmatic conclusion. First, Bock acknowledges that Luke may be describing an event separate from Matthew and Mark. If that is the case (and others would agree), the comparison of Matthew and Mark with Luke on this point is irrelevant to establishing how the Gospel writers reported the same saying made at the same time.

Secondly, even for the differences between Matthew and Mark, Bock takes his conclusions far beyond what the evidence warrants. No reason prohibits the making of both statements: “I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God. Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed One?” Both Matthew and Mark would have exercised verbal precision in quoting only a part of the larger portion of the inquest. It is not at all necessary that one of the writers has put words on the lips of the high priest that he never in fact uttered. Jesus’ reply can be handled similarly. “Yes, it is as you say. I am He.” A verbally precise account could report a portion of the response without giving the response in its entirety.

After considering all of Bock’s examples, one sees that when he is confronted with similar but differing passages, he assumes that, at best, only one statement records the precise words that were actually spoken at the time. He explains differences as some editorial activity by one of the writers—usually Matthew or Luke. It seems that he is drawn to that explanation by his historical presupposition that the Gospels are comparable to ancient secular history in their method of recording speeches. But the Scriptures that he quotes do not prove his position, especially when he utterly omits the possibility that the individual Gospel writers may have preserved only a portion of a larger conversation or statement.

**Inspiration and Ipsissima Vox**

**The Holy Spirit’s Role in Recalling Jesus’ Words**

Not only do ipsissima vox proponents fail in their comparison to ancient history, their failure to account for the doctrine of inspiration in their analysis results in another significant omission. Thucydides clearly states that he resorted to summaries because he had difficulty in remembering the exact substance of the

---


54The present writer has experienced first-hand the often-repetitive nature of legal questioning, having participated in hundreds of hours of courtroom and deposition testimony during his former legal practice. Seldom, if ever, are case-determinative questions asked only one time and in one way. A skilled litigator will ask several questions with only the slightest difference in nuance to highlight an issue when he has the opportunity to nail down a point in his favor.

speaches he heard.\textsuperscript{56} However, such memory lapses were decidedly not a hindrance to the inspired Gospel writers. Neither Bock nor Wallace quotes Jesus’ words in John 14:26, which leave no room for doubt on this issue:

But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you (NASB, cf. John 16:13-14) [emphasis added].

In this verse, Jesus uses the term ὑπομνῆμα (hypomnēma) to describe the Spirit’s work in the lives of the disciples after the resurrection. The term means “to cause one to remember,” “put one in mind,” or “remind one of.”\textsuperscript{57} It is used six other times in the NT: Luke 22:61; 2 Tim 2:14; Tit 3:1; 2 Pet 1:12; 3 John 10; Jude 5. In each verse, the content of the remembrance appears to be something that was previously known or heard. Here in John 14:26, the remembrance means, “The Holy Spirit ratifies, confirms and explains the work of Jesus and thereby brings definitive and conclusive remembrance.”\textsuperscript{58}

Godet puts it this way:

This internal activity of the Spirit will unceasingly recall to their memory some former word of Jesus, so that in proportion as He shall illuminate them, they will cry out: Now, I understand this word of the Master! And this vivid clearness will cause other words long forgotten to come forth from forgetfulness.\textsuperscript{59}

Consequently, the appeal to Thucydides—whatever it may say about secular history—does not clarify the precision of the Gospels in recording the words of Jesus. Thucydides resorted to ipsissima vox because he “found it difficult to remember the precise words used in the speeches.”\textsuperscript{60} Jesus’ promise of the direct inspiration of the Holy Spirit placed the Gospel writers in a different realm in which different standards of memory would be operative. They would be supernaturally enabled to recall Jesus’ words in a manner that freed them from the human limitations of secular historians. As a result, they would not have the same need to resort to ipsissima vox. To compare them with Thucydides at this point is to compare apples and oranges.

Absence of Biblical Disclaimers About Historical Accuracy

\textsuperscript{56}See p. 52.
\textsuperscript{60}See p. 52.
Yet another consideration makes the comparison between ancient historians and the Gospel writers untenable. Thucydides gives his reader an honest disclaimer about the extent of his historical accuracy. He tells the reader in no uncertain terms that he is not giving exact quotations, but summaries to the best of his abilities. By contrast, the Gospel writers—who were allegedly following Thucydides’ example—made no such disclaimers. To the contrary, Luke gives the opposite impression when he tells Theophilus that he investigated everything carefully “so that you might know the exact truth about the things you have been taught” (Luke 1:4, NASB [emphasis added]).

That self-conscious claim to precision, combined with the supernatural ministry of the Holy Spirit, is a telling blow against the historical argument framed to date by evangelical ipsissima vox proponents. To argue that the interpreter’s expectations of the historical precision of the Gospels in recording Jesus’ words should be determined by analogy to the pattern of ancient secular history controverts the biblical data that are directly on point. In this regard, ipsissima vox proponents have presupposed the validity of their analogy to ancient history without evaluating their assumptions biblically.

**Conclusion**

The ramifications of recent ipsissima vox writings could have far-reaching effects on evangelical confidence in the historical accuracy of the Gospels. The more the position explains away the words attributed on face value to Jesus in the Gospels as additions, accretions, and editorial modifications, the more the historical authority of the Gospels is threatened. Evangelicals professing a commitment to the inspiration of Scripture should thus tread with utmost care in this area.

Unfortunately, evangelical ipsissima vox proponents have conceded too much ground in their recent writings, and the evidence at hand does not even remotely require the concessions given. The historical and scriptural arguments presently advanced are surprisingly weak and usually fail to consider more viable solutions to the issues at hand.

Not only are those arguments faulty, ipsissima vox writers have thus far neglected a discussion of the role of the Holy Spirit in enabling the Gospel writers to recall the words of Jesus as they wrote. The Gospel writers decidedly did not face the same human limitations as ancient historians. Consequently, one cannot restrict the scope of their ability to reproduce Jesus’ words to the abilities of uninspired secular historians. Evangelical ipsissima vox proponents either need to account for Jesus’ words in John 14:26 in the formulation of their views or explain why His words there are not pertinent to the discussion.

The final word on these matters has surely not yet been written. The interpreter who seeks to uphold the truth that has been delivered once for all to the saints should scrutinize closely the future of this discussion.
THE SUFFICIENCY OF SCRIPTURE IN APOLOGETICS

Michael J. Kruger

A simple statement from a kindergarten song such as “the Bible tells me so” is sufficient to prove the truthfulness of Christianity. That fact should prove to Christians that defending their faith from the standpoint of neutrality is fruitless. Believers have become enamored with a neutral starting point in apologetics because of the influence of modernism and postmodernism in today’s culture. Such a neutral beginning point is impossible because of a disagreement with unbelievers over the nature of knowledge. Also, neutrality is ineffective, because it grants autonomy to the unbeliever by releasing him from the authority of the Bible, and is inconsistent, because the Bible makes clear that Christ is the source of all knowledge. Since the Bible is sufficient in apologetics, Christians should attack the unbeliever’s worldview in addition to defending his own. God’s claim on the human intellect is absolute, not minimalistic. Because of this claim, apologetics is theological and not just philosophical. Arguing presuppositionally by using the Bible as the ultimate authority enables the Christian to cut the legs from under an unbeliever’s argument.

* * * * *

The fundamental question of apologetics, writes Robert L. Reymond, is, “How do I know that what I believe is true?” Although most Christians agree that this is the essential question to be asked, few agree on what the answer should be. Some say they should believe Christianity because it conforms to the scientific, historical, and philosophical evidence. Others suggest they should believe Christianity because it works to solve their problems and improve their quality of life. And still others think they need not offer any reason to believe at all. Ironically, in the midst of these disagreements and discussions, they have had the answer all along. When it comes to apologetics, perhaps all can agree with the title of Robert

---

1Michael J. Kruger is a Ph.D. candidate in New Testament and Early Christianity at New College, The University of Edinburgh. He is a graduate of Westminster Theological Seminary in California and has served as Assistant Pastor at Church of the Redeemer in Mesa, Arizona.

Fulghum’s well-known book, *All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten*. If Christians would only return to the simplicity and profundity of their kindergarten songs such as “Jesus loves me, this I know,” they would discover the answer to their question of why they should believe: the Bible tells us so.

Undoubtedly, some will read this response and shake their heads disapprovingly: “The Bible tells me so? Is that it? That may have been a sufficient answer when I was five years old, but that will never hold up in my university religion class. Everybody knows that you can’t assume what you are setting out to prove; I can’t use the Bible to prove the Bible. I need some neutral starting place—where both the unbeliever and I agree—from which I can prove the Christian position.”

This hypothetical response is all too common in the evangelical church today. Indeed, as the church has slowly abandoned its commitment to the sufficiency of Scripture, nowhere has it been more evident than in the area of apologetics. Some Christian apologists say that in order to gain a hearing from the world in arguing for the truth of Christianity, one must adopt a neutral and unbiased position as to the truthfulness of the Bible. According to this view, a person must begin the defense of the Bible (and the Christian faith) with a “nobody knows for sure” type of attitude, being neither for nor against Christianity from the outset. It is only after having proven the reliability and trustworthiness of the Bible to the unbeliever from some common, neutral starting point that a believer can then turn around and appeal to the Bible as any sort of authority—thus, the Bible is the conclusion of the argument, not its foundation.

This essay purposes to challenge that popular view of apologetics. Although appealing to the Bible as the ultimate epistemological foundation for belief may seem simplistic and naive to some (as well as unpersuasive), the following discussion will argue that this is the key to maintaining the full sufficiency and authority of Scripture. Not only does God not call Christians to put the authority of His word “on the shelf” while they argue for Christianity, but doing so will deny the very thing they are setting out to prove, namely, that God’s Word should be the authority over every area of thought (including apologetics). Indeed, the Bible is not just sufficient for teaching about the Christian worldview; it is sufficient also for defending the Christian worldview.

This does not mean, of course, that apologetics is reduced simply to quoting the Bible over and over again. On the contrary, introducing extrabiblical data into a discussion with the unbeliever is quite allowable and necessary (more on this below). But it does mean that the primary reason Christianity should be accepted as true is because God’s Word declares it to be such. Bahnsen concurs: “The ultimate ground of the Christian’s certainty and the authority backing up his

---

2Dennis MacCullum in his book *Christianity: The Faith That Makes Sense* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House, 1992) holds this view: “If we are fair, we will take a neutral posture when determining what to believe” (11 [emphasis added]).
arguument must be the word of God.”

After all, if the Bible really is God’s word, then to what more authoritative standard could one possibly appeal in order to defend it? What fact in the universe is more certain than the Scriptures? Therefore, when defending the faith, Christians must reject the allure of supposed neutrality and instead follow Peter’s instructions: “[I]n your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have” (1 Pet 3:15, NIV [emphasis added]).

Roots of the Problem: Why Are Christians So Eager to be Neutral?

What has caused modern-day apologetics to be so willing to adopt a “neutral” stance while arguing for the faith? The answer to this question is somewhat complex. Engaging in the apologetic task today involves two distinctive intellectual forces that have caused some to leave the Bible out of the discussion: modernity and postmodernity.

Modernity is a product of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. With the rise of the Enlightenment there came a new guardian of truth to replace the church: science. No longer would human beings stand for the irrational musings and arcania dogmatism of religion—science (with reason as the foundation) was the new god and all intellectual theories had to bow and pay homage in order to be seriously considered. Science viewed Christians as being naively committed to ancient myths, unable to see past their bias and to take an objective and neutral look at the world. So, modernity proffers the idea that mankind, armed with rationalism and science, is able to access absolute truth and make unlimited progress toward a better life for itself. Therefore, at its core, modernity is a celebration of human autonomy.

Charles Darwin, in his 1859 The Origin of Species, exhibited clearly the effects of modernity when he referred to the Christian view of creation as “a curious illustration of the blindness of preconceived opinion.” Darwin, like most modern evolutionists, was eager to frame the debate to offer two options and two options only for those wishing to settle the enigma of origins. On one side was the evolutionist; he was scientific, objective, and empirical. On the other side was the Christian; according to Darwin, he was speculative, biased, and irrational, relying on faith, not on science. A choice between the two was obvious. Who would want to side with religion over science? Who would reject the obvious empirical data in favor of myths and conjecture?

This sort of pressure from modernity has caused many Christians to modify

---

their apologetic strategy. To avoid the charge of having “preconceived opinions” or of being “biased,” many Christians have insisted on leaving the Bible out of the discussion—after all, you cannot use what you are trying to prove. In an effort to show that Christianity passes the scientific test, they insist that scientific evidence, and scientific evidence alone, should decide the debate. Therefore, they start their argument from neutral ground, being neither for nor against Christianity from the outset, in hopes of gaining credibility with the unbeliever and showing him that the facts “speak for themselves” and undeniably lead to Christianity.\(^6\)

But when they argue like this, what they often do not realize is that they are letting modernity set the criteria for truth: reason and science. Instead of challenging modernity’s criteria for truth (insisting it should be the Bible), they simply try to meet their criteria for truth. Thus, in an attempt to beat the scientists at their own game, the apologetic task primarily takes the form of philosophical, historical, and scientific arguments, and the Bible becomes merely the conclusion of the entire process.

Postmodernity, although no friend of modernity, proves itself to be an equally influential factor in the way evangelicals do apologetics today. Postmodernity, in contrast to modernity, rejects any notion of objective truth and insists that the only absolute in the universe is that there are no absolutes. Tolerance is the supreme virtue and exclusivity the supreme vice. Truth is not grounded in reality or in any sort of authoritative “text,” but is simply constructed by the mind of the individual. Consequently, postmodernity has given birth to the radical deconstructionism of Stanley Fish, Richard Rorty, and Jacques Derrida which has taken hold in today’s universities. Deconstructionism has relegated all texts to simply societal constructions—i.e., the readers’ own experience and perspective so conditions interpretations that there can be no one “right” interpretation. Phillips and Okholm furnish an example when they write,

---

\(6\)There are numerous examples of many well-meaning Christians defending the faith as if the “facts” themselves are decisive, irrespective of underlying philosophical presuppositions. There is at least a broad conception that unbelievers have the ability (and the authority) to interpret the facts and decide for themselves. Philip Johnson—who has done an outstanding job cataloging the evidence against Darwinism—in his recent work *Darwin on Trial* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1993) seems eager to keep the Bible out of the picture and stay focused on the facts alone: “One thing I am not doing is taking sides in a Bible-science conflict. I am interested in what unbiased scientific investigation has to tell us about the history of life” (157). Johnson, who is usually very perceptive about underlying assumptions, seems to think the “neutral” and “objective” facts will decide the issue. Paul Little in *Know Why You Believe* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor, 1981) seems not to realize that man’s rational abilities are tainted by sin and unable to interpret the facts correctly. He thinks the problem is with only the moral will of man and not his intellect: “[Unbelievers] don’t want to believe it. It’s not a matter of brain power. . . . It is primarily a matter of the will” (43 [emphasis in the original]). A final example is Bill Bright in the foreword to Josh McDowell’s *Evidence That Demands a Verdict*, vol. 1 (San Bernardino, Calif.: Here’s Life, 1979), who declares: “I personally have never heard a single individual—who has honestly considered the evidence—deny that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the Savior of men. The evidence confirming the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ is overwhelmingly conclusive to any honest, objective seeker after truth” (iii). But who is honest and objective?
Then how can we speak of any reality outside the autonomous self? We create it with words. Postmodernism shares a purely pragmatic instrumental view of language. There are no true propositions. There is only the question of what words we should use.\(^7\)

Thus, postmodernity, just like modernity, also celebrates human autonomy. Despite the fact that the two philosophies are in some ways opposed, the one thing they have in common is that man is both the starting place and the stopping place for whatever can be deemed “truth.”

Obviously this radical relativism and pluralism has also affected apologetic method. Due to the hostility (or should I say “intolerance”) displayed by postmodernists toward those who make absolute truth claims, Christians have tended to act more “neutral” and less assured of their position, leaving the Bible out of the discussion all together. After all, the Bible has a way of being inconveniently dogmatic—which would certainly turn off any listener with a postmodern mindset. Furthermore, the deconstructionist tendencies of the postmodern culture make any appeal to an authoritative text seem almost irrelevant. Phillips and Okholm note, “Postmodern people are reluctant to accept totalizing metanarratives that define reality and truth for them.”\(^8\)

If one cannot appeal to the Bible in an apologetic encounter with the postmodernist, then it must be replaced with some other argument for why Christianity should be accepted. At this point, evangelicals find themselves again trying to meet their opponents’ criteria for truth (as they did with modernity above), rather than challenging their criteria for truth. What are the postmodernists’ criteria for “truth”? Simply what works. The postmodernist is not concerned about absolute truth like the modernist; he defines his “truth” by more pragmatic concerns: What makes me feel good? What solves my problems? What is attractive to me? Consequently, so much of modern apologetics today (and modern preaching) tries to cater to the felt needs of its audience. Thus, the argument for Christianity takes on therapeutic overtones: a person should become a Christian because it will make you feel better; it will improve your quality of life; it will bring you inner peace, etc.\(^9\)

---


\(^8\)Ibid, 22.

\(^9\)Allow me to make some qualifications. I am not suggesting that there is never a time to mention all the blessings and benefits that the Christian life offers. Indeed, it does offer joy and peace and hope, etc.; and many people are attracted by such things and should be. Furthermore, these things should be a large part of our evangelism, i.e., we do want to tell people that real and abundant life is in Christ. However, never should these blessings and benefits of Christianity be presented as the primary reason why Christianity is true, because this simply makes pragmatism the criterion for truth. How then could we respond to the unbeliever when he tells us that Hinduism works “better” for him and brings him more peace and hope? In effect, what we have done by making pragmatism the main argument is grant man autonomy do decide what he likes best and then call that “truth.” Ideally, our apologetic ought to rest solely on the authority of the Bible, but at the same time be willing to share and teach about the obvious blessing and benefits of the Christian life.
It is interesting that Kenneson’s premise that there is no objective truth makes his own title contradictory. In other words, is it objectively true that “There’s No Such Thing As Objective Truth, and It’s a Good Thing Too”? If not, then the title is in error; if so, then the title is still in error because the title claims there is not any objective truth. Either way, Kenneson’s view turns out to be self-contradictory. He tries to avoid this problem by suggesting that he also does not believe in “relativism” which is what he considers to be the flip side of objective truth. So, Kenneson says, if you reject relativism, you must also reject objective truth. However, then we must ask, Is it objectively true that rejecting relativism requires rejecting objective truth? Whether the answer is yes or no, Kenneson’s view is still self-contradictory.

In Christian Apologetics in the Postmodern World, Phillips and Okholm, eds., 156.

Ibid, 167.

The words “Bible” or “Scripture” were never used in the entire article (according to my fallible counting), and a verse was quoted once (1 Pet 3:15), but only as an example of what method is not effective in a postmodern world.

Kenneson, “No Such Thing As Objective Truth” 166.
a hearing from the world and is honoring to God—his attempt to make pragmatic considerations the foundational reason why Christianity is “true” will ultimately deny Christianity any authority to challenge the unbeliever’s autonomy. The discussion to follow will explore this issue and more aspects of Kenneson’s article (and subsequently the book as a whole).

So modernity and postmodernity have had an effect on apologetic approaches and have slowly removed the Bible from the center of defending the faith and replaced it with a demand for neutrality. From this position of supposed neutrality both have their own criteria for truth that they demand be met: the modernist wants to see if it is scientific/reasonable and the postmodernist wants to see if it works to improve his life. Although Christians certainly should be aware of culture and adjust their apologetics to the need of the hour, it seems they may have unfortunately gone too far and allowed non-Christian opponents to set the terms of the debate. They have, perhaps in the name of relevancy, altered the fundamental nature of the Christian argument so that it is more palatable and attractive to those who hear it. But, as Os Guiness has noted, relevancy can be a dangerous venture:

In addition, relevance has a false allure that masks both its built-in transience and its catch-22 demand. Dean Inge captured the transience in his celebrated line “He who marries the spirit of the age soon becomes a widower.” But it was Simone Weil who highlighted the catch-22: “To be always relevant, you have to say things which are eternal.”

Despite the fact that holding a neutral and “nobody knows for sure” attitude seems popular with modern-postmodern culture, evangelicals cannot adhere to such a starting point in their apologetic process.

**The Essence of the Problem: Why Not Be Neutral?**

As culture perpetually pressures Christians toward intellectual agnosticism, it is imperative they understand why they must resist. Does it really matter if they seek to plant their apologetic in the soil of neutrality? Consider three reasons why believers should not to be neutral.

**Neutrality Is Impossible**

Jesus has declared neutrality to be impossible: “No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other” (Matt 6:24, NIV). Failing to comprehend this truth has lured many Christian apologists into a very common mistake: they ignore the philosophical worldviews that lie behind each system of thought and instead quibble over

---

isolated facts only, not realizing that it is the philosophical worldview (or presuppositions) of people that determines what they see as a "fact." In other words, they forget that every person has a "worldview" through which and by which he interprets the evidence—making neutrality an impossibility.\(^\text{16}\) John Frame notes that "there is no 'purely empirical' inquiry. We never encounter 'brute,' that is, uninterpreted facts. We only encounter facts that have been interpreted in terms of our existing commitments."\(^\text{17}\)

Consequently, the disagreement between the Christian and the non-Christian is not over just, for example, whether Pontius Pilate was a real historical figure, rather the disagreement is over the very nature of knowledge itself. The Christian, as he sets out to defend the Bible, will soon realize (if he is perceptive) that his disagreement with the non-Christian is not just about what took place in history, but is about the very nature of historical research, reasoning, and evaluation. In other words, as Christians debate non-Christians, it will soon become apparent that their disagreement covers not only what they claim to know but also, due to their conflicting worldviews, it also covers their method of knowing (epistemology).

Therefore, rather than simply tossing out the facts to the unbeliever as if he were objective and unbiased, Christians need to challenge the unbeliever's philosophy of fact, i.e., to attack his worldview as much as attacking the conclusions of his worldview. As was noted above in the discussion of modernity/postmodernity, believers need to concern themselves not just with meeting their opponents criteria for truth (which is determined by their worldview), but also with challenging their opponents' criteria for truth by showing that it should be God's Word.

Now, if evangelicals fail to consider and respond to the underlying presuppositions of the unbeliever, then he will simply "reinterpret" their facts within his own worldview. For example, imagine an atheist walking down the street in Washington, D.C., when suddenly God appears to him. What would his response be? Well, according to his worldview there is no God and no supernatural, so he would likely pass the event off as a peculiar and rare hallucination. Now, say that he continues down the street and sees the president walking across the White House lawn. Does he think this is a hallucination? No, because it fits with his prior set of beliefs, namely, that the president is a real human being who resides in Washington and lives on Pennsylvania Avenue. The bottom line is this: what a particular individual regards as a fact is dependent upon his prior worldview.

\(^{16}\)A worldview can be defined as a network of assumptions (or presuppositions) not tested by natural science in terms of which all experience is related and interpreted. A worldview is not just one belief, but a comprehensive network of beliefs that deal not only with religious ideas but with every aspect of human experience from science to the arts. Thomas Kuhn reflects such an idea (he calls "paradigms") as it applies to scientific study and experimentation. See Thomas S. Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1970).

Games such as chess and checkers illustrate this point further. Each game has its own rules and standards about what is possible and impossible, what is winning and what is losing, what is a good strategy and what is a bad strategy. How absurd would it be for the chess player to criticize the checkers player for violating the rules of chess? The rules and “facts” of one game are entirely different from those of the other. Similarly, if a Christian engages a non-Christian in a debate without challenging his overarching worldview, then his effectiveness will be minimal; each side is playing by its own set of rules. Consider the words of Cornelius Van Til,

When man became a sinner he made of himself instead of God the ultimate or final reference point. And it is precisely this presupposition, as it controls without exception all forms of non-Christian philosophy, that must be brought into question. If this presupposition is left unquestioned in any field all the facts and arguments presented to the unbeliever will be made over by him according to his pattern.  

So, for Christians to enter into an intellectual debate thinking the brute facts themselves will be decisive is simply naïve. The unbeliever is not only biased, but the Scriptures indicate that he is adamantly biased against God. He hates God and suppresses the knowledge of God every chance that he gets (Rom 1:18-20; 3:10-18).

Neutrality Is Ineffective

Attempts to be neutral have a bit of irony to them. Believers agree to meet unbelievers on some common ground because they are convinced that it will make them more effective, when in fact that is the very thing that hinders them. It is similar to young David’s attempt to wear Saul’s armor in his fight against Goliath (1 Sam 17:38-39). It seemed like the right thing to do in battle, but it proved to be more of a hindrance than a help. In the end, David simply needed to trust that God knew better how to wage warfare than he did.

In a discourse with the unbeliever, he will perpetually demand that Christians be neutral (as he considers himself to be). If they agree with their opponent at this point, they have lost the debate from the outset and minimized their effectiveness. Why? Because the moment they get out their intellectual flashlights and join the unbeliever in the search for truth from some supposedly neutral starting point—claiming “the facts speak for themselves”—then they have conceded that he

---


19Herbert Schlossberg notes the amazing bias against the Christian view of creation by quoting D. M. S. Watson: “Evolution itself is accepted by zoologists not because it has been observed to occur or . . . can be proved by logically coherent evidence to be true, but because the only alternative, special creation, is clearly incredible” (Idols for Destruction [Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1990] 144). He then goes on to note how “the scientific scabbards fall away to reveal ideological swords” (ibid., 145).
Van Til explains the futility of granting neutrality to the unbeliever: "Shall we in the interest of a point of contact admit that man can interpret anything correctly if he virtually leaves God out of the picture? Shall we who wish to prove that nothing can be explained without God first admit some things at least can be explained without him? On the contrary we shall show that all explanations without God are futile. Only when we do this do we appeal to the knowledge of God within men which they seek to suppress. This is what I mean by presupposing God for the possibility of intelligent predication" (Van Til, Defense of the Faith 200).

A great example of granting the unbeliever authority to interpret the facts as he sees fit is found in Terry L. Miehe, ed., Did Jesus Rise From the Dead? The Resurrection Debate (San Francisco: Harper and Row 1987). Miehe, in his introduction to the debate between Habermas and Flew, states, "Each person should study the arguments, sift the evidence, and decide which case best fits the facts. . . . The decision is yours" (xvi). How, then, could the Christian respond when the unbeliever comes back from judging the evidence having concluded against Christianity? Didn’t we tell him that he had the ability and the right to interpret the evidence correctly? Thus, to grant neutrality to the unbeliever is to lose the debate from the outset.

Phillip Kenneson’s article, “There’s No Such Thing As Objective Truth and It’s a Good Thing Too,” falls into this same trap from a postmodern mindset. As was noted earlier, his suggestion that Christianity’s authority is founded on pragmatic grounds grants to the unbeliever the authority and autonomy to decide which

---

20Van Til explains the futility of granting neutrality to the unbeliever: “Shall we in the interest of a point of contact admit that man can interpret anything correctly if he virtually leaves God out of the picture? Shall we who wish to prove that nothing can be explained without God first admit some things at least can be explained without him? On the contrary we shall show that all explanations without God are futile. Only when we do this do we appeal to the knowledge of God within men which they seek to suppress. This is what I mean by presupposing God for the possibility of intelligent predication" (Van Til, Defense of the Faith 200).

21Van Til explains the futility of granting neutrality to the unbeliever: “Shall we in the interest of a point of contact admit that man can interpret anything correctly if he virtually leaves God out of the picture? Shall we who wish to prove that nothing can be explained without God first admit some things at least can be explained without him? On the contrary we shall show that all explanations without God are futile. Only when we do this do we appeal to the knowledge of God within men which they seek to suppress. This is what I mean by presupposing God for the possibility of intelligent predication" (Van Til, Defense of the Faith 200).

22C. S. Lewis, God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics, ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970) 244.
The Sufficiency of Scripture in Apologetics

Kenneson quotes the deconstructionist Richard Rorty on this note. Rorty declares that after giving up on the idea of objective truth, the next step is to decide “what sort of human being you want to become.” Kenneson then goes on to declare that one must choose from among the “communities whose convictions and practices are themselves an embodiment of what they take to be good and true.” The problem with this is quite clear: what if the unbeliever decides that it is the Mormon community that he finds most credible and that embodies the values he desires? Or what if he feels most helped by the Jehovah’s Witnesses? Since Kenneson has left the authority of Scripture out of the argument and turned that authority over to the unbeliever, he has no response to offer.

Yet another example of this occurs in an article by John Gay, enticingly entitled, “How to Pick Your Own God (And Why I Picked Mine).” Although undoubtedly well-intentioned, Gay also seems not to realize that the very title of his article is giving away the store. The question of how the unbeliever should pick his own god is mute because he has already made his choice: his god is himself (Phil 3:19). Therefore, if the believer tells the unbeliever—who is an enemy of God and depraved in sin—to pick whatever god seems to suit his fancy (without challenging the criteria by which he picks that god), he will have a very predictable result: the unbeliever’s god will be just like himself (Deut 4:28; Ps 115:8). After all, if the rule of the game is choice, then on what ground can a believer object to the unbeliever’s decision? Instead of stroking the non-Christian’s autonomy and independence by giving him a “choice,” the Christian should challenge him to abandon his self-sufficiency by submitting to the authority of God’s Word.

Neutrality is Inconsistent

The final reason one should not seek neutrality in intellectual debates is because it is inconsistent with the teachings of Scripture that are the objects to be proven in the first place. Proverbs 1:7 (NIV) records, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.” This verse is not saying that the fear of the Lord is the result of having knowledge or that after a detailed examination of the data a person concludes that he ought to fear the Lord. No, the claim here is that unless one fears the Lord from the outset and subjects his mind to God’s way of thinking, then he can

---

23Kenneson, “No Such Thing As Objective Truth” 162.

24D.A. Carson declares: “The primary criterion for what is right and true and valuable cannot possibly be whether or not you feel helped. This does not mean that the gospel of Jesus Christ cannot help you: it can and it does, and will. It means that the content of that gospel cannot be determined or approved simply on the basis of whether or not you feel helped. For if that were the case, would not the archenemy, whose love of deception is well known, have a field day ‘helping’ people, and helping people feel helped, provided the result is that they are diverted from the cross?”(D. A. Carson, The Gagging of God [Grand Rapids, Zondervan: 1996] 469 [emphasis in the original]).

know nothing at all. This truth is reiterated by Col 2:3 (NIV) which reads, “In [Christ] are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” Christ is not just the source of religious knowledge or some knowledge, but is the source of all knowledge.

Such texts make the incredibly bold assertion that a person cannot have knowledge unless he grounds his thinking in the principles of God’s word, i.e., unless he thinks like a Christian. How inconsistent it would be then to try to convince the unbeliever of this truth from some neutral starting place without thinking distinctively like a Christian? How can anyone claim the Bible is the ultimate source of authority in the universe, when all the while suggesting that it should only be believed because it conforms to some other “neutral” standard (which itself does not have the Bible as its ultimate source of authority)? If the method of argumentation communicates to the unbeliever that he should believe the Bible only because it has received the stamp of approval from science, archaeology, and historical criticism, those disciplines, not the Bible, will be his ultimate authority. Richard L. Pratt says it well:

If, however, trust in Christ is founded on logical consistency, historical evidence, scientific arguments, etc., then Christ is yet to be received as the ultimate authority. The various foundations are more authoritative than Christ himself. To use yet another analogy, if belief in Christian truth comes only after the claims of Christ are run through the verification machine of human judgment, then human judgment is still thought to be the ultimate authority.

The conclusion therefore is this: Christians must think like Christians and appeal to Christian principles even when they argue for the truth of the Christian position. This is the essence of arguing presuppositionally. This is the only way to be consistent with the Bible’s own claims that it and nothing else is the supreme and ultimate intellectual standard in the universe.

Missing the above-stated fact is precisely why so many well-meaning Christians compromise key parts of Scripture. For example, if they only believe the Bible because it is proven by science, then they can hardly believe the parts that do not conform with the current scientific consensus (and thus they must suggest

---

26This is the difference between saying, “I understand in order to believe” (intelligo ut credam) and “I believe in order to understand” (credo ut intelligam).


28Recognizing that Christianity is the foundation for all knowledge is the essence of presuppositionalism and is what sets it apart from other methods of apologetics. Van Til declared that any other type “of apologetics assumes that man can first know much about himself and the universe and afterward ask whether God exists and Christianity is true. The Reformed apologist assumes that nothing can be known by man about himself or the universe unless God exists and Christianity is true” (Defense of the Faith 223 [emphasis in the original]).
"alternate" interpretations or abandon the veracity of certain portions of Scripture. If they submit the Scriptures to be verified by another standard of truth other than itself (whether it be modernity’s science or postmodernity’s pragmatism), then their view of Scripture’s authority will be only as high as those standards.

This does not require one to oppose the use of evidence to bolster confidence in the Christian faith.29 It is important to demonstrate the historical reliability of the biblical documents and show how science supports the scriptural account of creation. Believers should cite extra-biblical facts that help confirm the Bible’s claims. All of these are valid types of arguments. However, they should never act for a moment as though those were neutral facts that hold some authority independent of a scriptural interpretation. They are God’s facts. And they are to be interpreted according to God’s Word. Unless this is made apparent to the unbeliever, the facts are bound to be misinterpreted and used against Christianity. John Frame’s conclusion is correct: “We may use extra-biblical data in apologetics, but not as independent criteria to which Scripture must measure up.”30

At this point the most common objection raised is this, “Are you saying we should assume the Christian worldview as we try to prove the Christian worldview? Isn’t that circular reasoning?” The simple answer is yes, that is circular reasoning. Although most circular reasoning is negative, when one argues for an ultimate intellectual criterion, a certain amount of circularity is unavoidable.31 If I stake the truth of the Bible on anything other than its own self-attesting authority, then the Bible ceases to be the ultimate criterion for truth and is replaced by another ultimate criterion. All other philosophical systems are in the same situation. John Frame notes,

---

29For an excellent treatment of how to use evidence within a presuppositional framework see Thom Notaro, Van Til and the Use of Evidence (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980).
31To deny circularity when it comes to an ultimate authority is to subject oneself to an infinite regress of reasons. If a person holds to a certain view, A, then when A is challenged he appeals to reasons B and C. But, of course, B and C will certainly be challenged as to why they should be accepted, and then the person would have to offer D, E, F, and G as arguments for B and C. And the process goes on and on. Obviously it has to stop somewhere because an infinite regress of arguments cannot demonstrate the truth of one’s conclusions. Thus, every worldview (and every argument) must have an ultimate, unquestioned, self-authenticating starting point. Another example: imagine someone asking you whether the meter stick in your house was actually a meter long. How would you demonstrate such a thing? You could take it to your next-door neighbor and compare it to his meter stick and say, “See, it’s a meter.” However, the next question is obvious, “How do we know your neighbor’s meter stick is really a meter?” This process would go on and on infinitely unless there were an ultimate meter stick (which, if I am not mistaken, actually existed at one time and was measured by two fine lines marked on a bar of platinum-iridium alloy). It is this ultimate meter stick that defines a meter. When asked how one knows whether the ultimate meter stick is a meter, the answer is obviously circular: the ultimate meter stick is a meter because it is a meter. This same thing is true for Scripture. The Bible does not just happen to be true (the meter stick in your house), rather it is the very criterion for truth (the ultimate meter stick) and therefore the final stopping point in intellectual justification.
Every philosophy must use its own standards in proving its conclusions; otherwise it is simply inconsistent. Those who believe that human reason is the ultimate authority (“rationalists”) must presuppose the authority of reason in their arguments for rationalism. Those who presuppose the ultimacy of sense experience must presuppose that in arguing for their philosophy (“empiricism”). And skeptics must be skeptical of their own skepticism (a fact which is, of course, the Achilles heel of skepticism). The point is that when one is arguing for an ultimate criterion . . . one must use criteria compatible with that conclusion. If that is circularity then everybody is guilty of circularity.32

The words of Bahnsen sum up the need to argue presuppositionally:

The Believer must defend God’s word as the ultimate starting point, the unquestionable authority, the self-attesting foundation of all thought and commitment . . . . The fact that the apologist presupposes the word of God in order to carry on a discussion or debate about the veracity of that word does not nullify his argument, but rather illustrates it.33

The Resolution to the Problem: How Then Should Christians Argue?

The previous sections of this essay sought to lay a foundation for apologetics that is faithful to the sufficiency and authority of Scripture. The next question is more tangible: if the Bible is sufficient in apologetics, how should that affect the manner in which Christians argue for the truth of the Christian position? Consider what it means to argue for the faith while having God’s Word as the foundation.

Offensive Not Just Defensive

Unfortunately the term apologetics conjures up certain images in the mind that are not altogether accurate. It causes a person to view the task as primarily defensive, to think his job is to answer questions, respond to objections, deflect attacks, and, most important, not to look like a fool. Although some of those factors are parts of apologetics, the Scriptures reveal a different emphasis. God refuses to take the role of defendant and to be cross-examined by man. Instead He goes on the offensive and calls unbelievers fools (Ps 14:1) and refers to them as bound by the “futility of their thinking” and “darkened in their understanding” (Eph 4:17-18). Furthermore, as noted above, Paul makes it clear that unless men found their thinking on the Scriptures, they can know nothing at all (Prov 1:7, Col 2:3).

Such passages point out the way to argue: rather than simply fending off intellectual blows of the unbeliever, believers must attack the unbeliever’s own

32 John Frame, Apologetics to the Glory of God 10.
33 Bahnsen, Always Ready 75 [emphasis in the original].
worldview and reveal its logical absurdity and incoherence. Being confident in God’s Word, they must go on the offensive and compare worldviews with the non-Christian, showing that only the Christian worldview provides the foundation for knowledge and rationality. How does the Christian worldview provide the foundation for knowledge? The necessary preconditions of knowledge—logic, science, and morality—are intelligible and coherent only within the framework of Christianity. Upon scrutiny, the unbeliever’s worldview cannot account for these preconditions and therefore provides no basis for knowledge.

Thus, the reason the non-Christian should believe Christianity is because he has no other choice if he wants to make sense out of reality. In philosophical terms, this argument shows “the impossibility of the contrary.” Bahnsen makes this point:

As to past experience, it can be allowed to give direct and certain information of those precise objects only, and that precise period of time, which fell under its cognizance: but why this experience should be extended to future times, and to other objects, which for aught we know, may be only in appearance similar; this is the main question on which I would insist. The bread which I formerly eat, nourished me... but does it follow, that other bread must also nourish me at another time...? The consequence seems nowise necessary (David Hume, An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford: Clarendon, 1902) 4:2:29 [emphasis in the original]).

Thus, only if one assumes the Christian worldview, where God orders and establishes nature, can a person assume the future will be like the past.
The Christian apologist, defending his ultimate presuppositions, must be prepared to argue the impossibility of the contrary—that is, to argue that the philosophical perspective of the unbeliever destroys meaning, intelligence, and the very possibility of knowledge, while the Christian faith provides the only framework and conditions for intelligible experience and rational certainty.\(^{36}\)

But, if Christianity alone provides the foundation for knowledge, how is it that non-Christians know so many things? Have they not been some of the brightest people? And have not non-Christians built bridges, cured diseases, and sent men to the moon?

That question gets to the heart of the situation with the unbeliever. Yes, the unbeliever does know many things, but only because he “borrows” principles from the Christian worldview in order to provide a foundation for that knowledge. The unbeliever is inconsistent with his own worldview (whether it be atheism, agnosticism, etc.) and actually does think like a Christian at times. He does use logic. He does use science. He does make absolute moral statements. But—and this is the key—his own worldview provides no foundation for such things. An atheist, for example, makes moral claims (e.g., “murder is wrong”, “we shouldn’t pollute the environment,” etc.), but why, according to his own worldview, would there be moral absolutes? In an atheistic world, where there is simply matter and molecules, morality proves to be an entirely incoherent concept.\(^{37}\) So, in order to live rationally, he has to act as though the Christian worldview were true, as though there really were a God that ordered the universe and provided such laws. In this sense he presupposes Christianity in order to have knowledge and rationality.

In the end, therefore, the unbeliever is really a walking bag of contradictions. He verbally and outwardly rejects the Christian God and claims that He does not exist, but then turns around and lives as though there really were such a God. He says the universe is just all chance and matter in motion, and yet he kisses his wife good-bye as though there were really something abstract called “love” in the world. He proclaims a universe where tooth and claw reign, but then takes moral offense at murders and rapes announced on the evening news. Paul describes this exact situation in Romans 1 when he reveals that in his heart of hearts the unbeliever really knows God, but suppresses that knowledge in unrighteousness (Rom 1:18 ff.).

The bottom line is this: the unbeliever cannot be allowed to critique

\(^{36}\) Bahnsen, *Always Ready* 72 [emphasis in the original].

\(^{37}\) The presuppositional method of argumentation can be used for others besides atheists. Even other religions have to account for the laws of logic, the uniformity of nature, and moral absolutes. Therefore, the Christian will proceed to do an internal critique of these other religions to show that their gods ultimately break down and cannot provide the preconditions of knowledge. For example, the Mormon god is actually not one god, but many gods, i.e., polytheism. It can be shown that polytheism is not a sufficient system to provide moral absolutes because, after all, which of the many gods determines the moral code? If they all obey some higher moral standard, then that is the true god. If they can all do as they please, then there can be no moral absolutes (e.g., perhaps to some god rape is a “good” thing).
Examples of this abound, but I’ll offer just two. Gary Habermas in his debate with Antony Flew over the resurrection concludes only that “the resurrection is a probable historical event” (Terry L. Miethe, ed., Did Jesus Rise From the Dead? The Resurrection Debate 23). William Lane Craig (“Philosophical and Scientific Pointers to Creation Ex Nihilo,” Contemporary Perspectives on Religious Epistemology, Givett and Sweetman, eds. [New York: Oxford University, 1992]) declares that seeing God as the cause of the universe is “eminently more plausible” (196).
something important to say and should be heard; only then should the church suggest that it might be true.”39 Contrast this to the words of Van Til as he comments on “minimalistic” argumentation:

I consider this a compromise of simple and fundamental Biblical truth. It is an insult to the living God to say that his revelation of himself so lacks in clarity that man, himself through and through revelation of God, does justice by it when he says that God probably exists. . . . Christianity is the only reasonable position to hold. It is not merely as reasonable as other positions, or a bit more reasonable than other positions; it alone is the rational and reasonable position for man to take.40

Christ’s Lordship in the area of knowledge, as in all areas, is absolute. Until Christians understand this and implement it into argumentation, they will have difficulty maintaining the sufficiency of Scripture in apologetics.

**Theological Not Just Philosophical**

If apologetics, at its core, is a battle of worldviews, then the Christian defender of the faith must understand and be able to coherently expound his own worldview. Thus, the apologetic enterprise is ultimately a theological and biblical one.41 The defender of the faith must not be able just to reproduce tricky little arguments and nice Christian catch phrases. Rather he must be immersed in the Word of God and its core teachings so that he is able to compare and contrast his worldview with that of his opponent. So, the apologist who recognizes the sufficiency of Scripture in his defense is as much a trained theologian as he is a trained philosopher. Consider the words of John Whitcomb:

The Christian who will be most effectively used by God in winning people to Christ is not necessarily the one who knows the most about secular philosophy, psychology, history, archaeology, or natural science . . . but rather the Christian who knows most about God’s Word and who humbly seeks God’s daily strength and wisdom in obeying it. The best Christian apologist is the best student of Scripture.42

Christians are not just defending some generic “god” or vague “theism.” Rather, they are advocates of a distinctively Christian perception of reality. The defender of the faith who understands the sufficiency of Scripture does not see

---

39Phillips and Okholm, *Christian Apologetics* 16 [emphasis added].
40Van Til, *Defense of the Faith* 197 [emphasis in the original].
41This is not to imply that philosophy is unimportant or harmful to the apologetic task. On the contrary, a strong philosophical background is a tremendous asset to defending the faith. However, I think all would agree that theology is foremost in the apologetic process since the Bible is our foremost authority.
theology as a mere addendum to apologetics; rather he sees apologetics as the very application of theology. To defend the Scriptures is to know and use the Scriptures.

Conclusion

The apostle Paul warned, “See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ” (Col 2:8, NIV). Paul recognizes in this warning that only two kinds of thinking exist: thinking that is founded on Christ and thinking that is founded on the “principles of this world.” It has been the purpose of this essay to warn—as does Paul—against any method of apologetics that seeks to maintain so-called neutral thinking as it defends the faith.

In contrast to this sort of approach, this discussion has insisted that Christians must use the Bible not only as the foundation of theology, but also as the foundation for defense. If the Scriptures are really the highest authority in the universe, no other epistemological justification for the Bible’s truth exists other than its own self-attesting authority. If Christians insist on a neutral starting point and fail to challenge their opponents’ intellectual loyalties, the results will hardly be a surprise: non-Christian presuppositions will lead to non-Christian interpretations and ultimately to non-Christian conclusions.

Arguing presuppositionally allows Christians to go beyond arguing over what science proves or does not prove or what history means or does not mean, and takes them one step further: it cuts the legs from under the unbeliever’s argument by showing him that his worldview negates the possibility of knowledge at all. Thus, Christians have no reason to fear using the Bible as the ultimate authority in apologetics. When asked how they know Christianity is true, they can confidently say, “Because the Bible tells me so.”
THE BENEFACIONS OF ANTONIOCHUS IV EPIPHANES AND DAN 11:37-38
AN EXEGETICAL NOTE

Mark Mercer*  

Daniel 11:37-38 cannot refer to Antiochus IV Epiphanes as four of the five views regarding Dan 11:36-45 hold. The two verses indicate that the individual in view will not show favor to any gods and will honor a god of fortresses who was not worshiped by his ancestors. Antiochus does not fit either of these descriptions, particularly in his religious gifts to Greek cities that were of a religious nature. The balance of evidence favors the fifth view that holds Dan 11:36-45 is a prophecy to be fulfilled by a future king.

* * * *

One of the most difficult problems in the survey of the Hellenistic period in Daniel 11 is the relationship of the King of the North in vv. 36-45 to Antiochus IV Epiphanes.¹ Five different views on the problem exist: (1) all ten verses are a historical account of the reign of Antiochus IV;² (2) vv. 36-39 are a historical account of Antiochus and vv. 40-45 are a prophecy of the latter part of his reign;³


¹Mark Mercer is a missionary with CBInternational serving in Nairobi, Kenya. He teaches Old Testament at the Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology. He holds a Th.D. degree from Dallas Theological Seminary.


³Porphyry (Jerome, Commentary on Daniel 11:24).

vv. 36-45 were historically fulfilled by Antiochus and vv. 40-45 are a summary of his entire reign; 4 (4) vv. 36-45 refer both to Antiochus and a future king; 5 and (5) vv. 36-45 were not fulfilled by Antiochus, but will be fulfilled by a future king. 6

In discussions favoring the fifth view not much has been done to exhaust the argument that the king in vv. 36-39 cannot refer to Antiochus because his benefactions to various cults contradict what is said about the religion of the king of the North. These gifts show that in contrast to what is said about the king in vv. 37-38, Antiochus did honor the ancestral gods and that he did not honor a god of fortresses in place of them.

Verses 37 and 38 read,

He will show no regard for the gods of his fathers or for the one desired by women, nor will he regard any god, but will exalt himself above them all. Instead of them, he will honor a god of fortresses; a god unknown to his fathers he will honor with gold and silver, with precious stones and costly gifts (NIV).

In regard to the religion of the king of the North, these verses state that (1) he will not show favor to any gods, particularly his ancestral gods and the one desired by women, but will honor himself more than any of them. Instead of honoring the ancestral gods and the one desired by women, v. 38 states that (2) he will honor a god of fortresses who was not worshiped by his own ancestors.

Verse 37 says that the King of the North will show no regard for the gods of his fathers. 7 The gods of the Seleucid ancestors of Antiochus IV were Apollo, the patron and ancestor of the dynasty, 8 as well as Zeus. 9 Walbank points out, however,

---


4The phrase הרפתקי does not refer to the God of his fathers. The divine name is a simple plural instead of a plural of majesty because if the author had intended a supreme deity as in v. 37a, he would have used the singular תוהם as he does in vv. 37b, 38, and 39 (Wood, Daniel 306).


6Austin, Hellenistic World #177 (OGIS 245).
that these special relationships did not, of course, deter the various royal houses from the worship of other gods and goddesses as well and from founding cults and temples to them.\footnote{Walbank, Monarchies and Monarchic Ideas 85.} There are numerous examples of this.\footnote{For other cults supported by the Seleucids, see M. Rostovtzeff, The Social and Economic History of the Hellenistic World, 3 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University, 1941) 1:434-39.} Seleucus I sent some gold and silver articles to be dedicated to the Savior gods at the sanctuary of Apollo near Miletos.\footnote{C. Bradford Welles, Royal Correspondence in the Hellenistic Period: A Study in Greek Epigraphy (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University, 1934) #5, ll. 4-5.} Antiochus I had some restorations done to the temple of Nebo\footnote{James B. Pritchard, ed., Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament, 3d. ed. with suppl. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University, 1969) 317.} and he showed piety toward the sanctuary of Athena.\footnote{Roger S. Bagnall and Peter Derow, Greek Historical Documents: The Hellenistic Period, Sources for Biblical Study, 16 (Chico, Calif.: Scholars, 1981) #28 (OGIS 228).} Seleucus II showed favor to the temple of Aphrodite Stratonikis in Smyrna.\footnote{Welles, Royal Correspondence #31 and #44, ll. 17-28.} Antiochus III supported the cult of the goddess Artemis Daita\footnote{Austin, Hellenistic World #139 (OGIS 219, ll. 35-40).} and showed piety toward the temple of Dionysus in Teos.\footnote{Austin, Hellenistic World #151, ll. 15-19, cf. l. 45.}

Verse 37 also says that in addition to showing no regard for his ancestral gods, the king will show no regard for the one desired by women. Numerous proposals have been made concerning the identity of the god\footnote{The phrase מֵאֲשֹׁרָה ("the one desired by women") must refer to a god. This is clear from its position between two prepositional phrases, מֵאֲשֹׁרָה רִיתְנוּ ("for the gods of his fathers") and מֵאֲשֹׁרָה לְעַזַּה ("[for] any god"), the objects of which refer to deities. In addition, it is suggested by the fact that v. 38 refers to the worship of gods.} who was desired by women: Dionysus,\footnote{J. G. Bunge, Der ‘Gott der Festungen’ und der ‘Liebling der Frauen’: Zur Identifizierung der Götter in Dan. 11, 36-39, JSJ 4 (1973):181-82.} Tammuz/Adonis,\footnote{Driver, Daniel 194-95.} or Nanaia/Artemis/Aphrodite, the goddess of the temple in Elymais which Antiochus plundered in his eastern campaign.\footnote{1 Macc 6:1-4; 2 Macc 1:13-16.} Instead of honoring the ancestral gods and the god desired by women,
according to v. 38 he will honor a god of forresses\textsuperscript{22} who was not recognized\textsuperscript{23} by his own ancestors. Several suggestions concerning the identity of this god are Akraios,\textsuperscript{24} Zeus Olympios,\textsuperscript{25} Jupiter Capitolinus,\textsuperscript{26} Kronos-Helios,\textsuperscript{27} Mars,\textsuperscript{28} or Baal Shamem-Melcarth.\textsuperscript{29}

How do the benefactions of Antiochus\textsuperscript{30} contribute to an understanding of vv. 37-38? Many of his gifts to Greek cities were of a religious nature, and they benefitted the cults of the gods of his fathers, mentioned above, for whom the text says the king showed no regard. In addition, these gifts to various cult centers demonstrate that to say Antiochus IV did not regard any god is inaccurate (v. 37). To be specific, he resumed the construction of the temple of Zeus in Athens.\textsuperscript{31} He also made contributions to the temple of Zeus in Olympia.\textsuperscript{32} He built a temple for Jupiter Capitolinus at Antioch.\textsuperscript{33} He contributed in some way to the building\textsuperscript{34} or rebuilding\textsuperscript{35} of the temple of Apollo at Daphne. The imposition of the edict of 167 B.C. involved the introduction of the Dionysus cult.\textsuperscript{36} Finally, during the pany guric

\textsuperscript{22}The noun θεός is not used figuratively here for a thing of supreme value as some have interpreted it (e.g., C. F. Keil, Daniel, vol. 6: Ezekiel, Daniel, 10 vols. (n.p., reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973) 466; H. C. Leupold, Exposition of Daniel (n.p.: Wartburg Press assigned to Augsburg, 1949; reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1969) 517; Walvoord, Daniel 276). Not only is the noun never used in this sense, but the gifts mentioned in the latter part of the verse suggest that the word refers to a deity.

\textsuperscript{23}The verb ἀγνω [“known”] has the idea of recognition or acknowledgement (1 Sam 2:12; Hos 5:4).


\textsuperscript{25}Bunge, Der ’Gott der Festungen’ 181-82.

\textsuperscript{26}Charles, Book of Daniel 316; cf. Livy 41.20.9.


\textsuperscript{28}A suggestion of Driver, Daniel 195.

\textsuperscript{29}J. Morgenstern, The King-God Among the Western Semites and the Meaning of Epiphanes, VT 10 (1960):167 n. 1.


\textsuperscript{31}Livy 41.20.8; Polybius 26.1.11; Strabo 9.1.17; Velleius Paterculus 1.10.1; Vitruvius 7.15.

\textsuperscript{32}Pausanias 5.12.4-5.

\textsuperscript{33}Livy 41.20.9.

\textsuperscript{34}Ammianus Marcellinus 22.13.1.

\textsuperscript{35}Mørkholm, Antiochus IV of Syria 119, 122.

\textsuperscript{36}2 Macc 6:7.
at Daphne in the summer of 166, a vast number of images were involved in the procession\textsuperscript{37} and following these games Apollo was honored with a new coinage of gold staters and tetradrachms.\textsuperscript{38} Antiochus also contributed some statues around the altar at Delos.\textsuperscript{39} Delos was thought to be the birthplace of Apollo and was considered sacred to him.\textsuperscript{40}

The above facts show that Antiochus did indeed show regard for the gods of his fathers, Apollo and Zeus, as well as to others—unlike the King of the North in Dan 11:37-38. In conclusion, the opinions of two ancient historians note the character of Antiochus IV Epiphanes as it relates to religion:

Nevertheless in two great and important respects his soul was truly royal—in his benefactions to cities and in the honours paid to the gods (Livy 41.20.5)

But in the sacrifices he furnished to cities and in the honours he paid to the gods he far surpassed all his predecessors . . . (Polybius 26.1.10)

From what Livy and Polybius have to say about Antiochus IV Epiphanes, to view him as the King of the North in Dan 11:36-45 is difficult. This factor favors the fifth view regarding Dan 11:36-45, that a yet-future king will fulfil the prophecy.

\textsuperscript{37} Polybius 30.25.13-14.


\textsuperscript{39} Polybius 26.1.11.

\textsuperscript{40} Homeric Hymn to Apollo 3.50-60, 140-49.
BOOK REVIEWS


This lucid survey is about Christians uniting for fervent prayer before, during, and after Jonathan Edwards spoke. It seeks to ignite the flame for revival prayer as the new century begins. Bakke is head of the National Broadcast Concert of Prayer. Besides preaching, teaching, and writing, he has led prayer in this and other countries. Before this ministry he pastored Grace Church, Ridgewood, New Jersey. He challenges the church worldwide to engage in intense prayer that God will stir revival and awakening.

The book advocates concerts of prayer for several hours and also deep passion to repent because of prayerlessness, materialism, and other sins. It also pleads for a church on fire locally, nationally and globally. Bakke traces concerts to Jonathan Edwards’ sermon collection in the 1740s in Northampton, Massachusetts, and special prayer meetings before that in Europe, England, and America’s colonies. Using related Bible passages, Edwards wrote “An Humble Attempt to Promote Explicit Agreement and Visible Union . . . in Extraordinary Prayer for the Revival of Religion and the Advancement of Christ’s Kingdom on Earth. . . .” He and many others in the book believed in praying for God to bring Christ’s millennial reign. Only he did this from a postmillennial perspective, with Christ’s personal return after the millennium (55-56). Bakke shows that those of various doctrinal convictions can pray fervently for the salvation of others, revival, and the kingdom’s coming.

Chapter 3 traces prayer concerts on both sides of the Atlantic after Edwards’ ministry. Much space deals with William Carey’s “Enquiry” into Christians’ duty related to converting the heathen. Chapter 4 bemoans the spiritual coldness as a new century begins (136-37), but is optimistic that united prayer can gain great things. Appendix 3 gives the 1999 National Prayer Accord calling Christians to join in daily and other prayer efforts. It lists leaders of many denominations. Pages 151-82 give notes on sections, 183-88 are a bibliography, and 3 pages contain a general index.

The highly readable book does not discuss ways to fan a prayer life, but rather imparts vision for individuals and groups to seek God’s will. Chapter 1, “What Is Prayer?,” sees prayer as communion and union with God as He unfolds His
will. It stresses God’s controlling the life and His Spirit’s giving grace to “agree” with others (Matt 18:15-17) in pleadings during extraordinary prayer vigils.


This festschrift celebrates Marvin Tate’s fifty-year professorial career. Tate is best known for his commentary on *Psalms 51–100* in Word Biblical Commentary (Word, 1990). He is senior professor of Old Testament at Southern Seminary. This volume “is designed to be an entry-level textbook for university or divinity school students of the Wisdom Literature and the Psalms” (3). All essays are by leading Baptist scholars in the field.

After a brief introduction and overview (1-9) and a brief biographical sketch of Marvin Tate (11-20), the core material commences with John D. W. Watts’ survey of the use and interpretation of the Book of Psalms throughout its history (21-35). James D. Nogalski then discusses the superscriptions and groupings of the Psalms (37-54). He describes how the canonical book was developed and what would happen “if one attempts to read Psalms as a book rather than a vessel containing 150 different psalms” (37). In his opinion, the Hebrew psalter was not standardized in its present form until the first century A.D. (49). The final canonical shape of the Book of Psalms may include psalms or parts of psalms written for the purpose of serving as introductions or conclusions to the five books within the collection (53). This same topic appears in Nancy L. deClaissé-Walford’s “The Canonical Shape of the Psalms” (93-110).

Daniel S. Mynatt contributed an essay on “The Poetry and Literature of the Psalms” (55-66) that deals with the characteristics of Hebrew poetry and the form critical contributions of Hermann Gunkel. “The Ancient Near Eastern Context of the Book of Psalms” (67-92) by Joel F. Drinkard, Jr., compares Psalms with Egyptian, Akkadian, and Ugaritic poetry. Greatest attention is given to a study of the concepts of God in the Book of Psalms and in ancient near eastern poetic literature (76-91). “Portraits of Faith: The Scope of Theology in the Psalms” (111-28) is by William H. Bellinger, Jr. He develops the areas of covenant theology, creation theology, and prophetic theology. For Bellinger the theology of the Psalms is “intertwined with life experience” (127), both in its composition and its application.

The last six essays in the volume examine Wisdom literature. “An Introduction to the History of Interpretation” (129-53) by M. Pierce Matheney, Jr., is limited to a study of Wisdom personified (especially Lady Wisdom) in Proverbs 1, 8, and 9, along with Job 28 and selected portions of Ecclesiastes (128). W. Dennis Tucker, Jr., then examines proverb, sayings, riddle, allegory, hymns, disputation, and
autobiographical narrative in “Literary Forms in the Wisdom Literature” (155-66). He also looks at life settings for wisdom literature involving family, royal advisor, and school.

In “Biblical Wisdom in Its Ancient Middle Eastern Context” (167-80), Thomas Smothers describes the wisdom texts of Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Ugarit. Two categories occupy Smothers: prudential wisdom (consisting of “proverbs, aphorism, admonitions, and riddles designed to show the way to success and to life,” 169) and speculative wisdom (involving the examination of human experience “with the vagaries of an inconsistent and often incomprehensible world,” 175). “The Canonical Shape of the Wisdom Literature” (181-93) is Gerald Keown’s contribution to the volume. He seeks to identify the “ways in which hermeneutical goals were achieved through the canonical shape given to the wisdom books” (181). Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, Sirach, and the Book of Wisdom are the objects of Keown’s discussion.

The final essays are Carol S. Grizzard’s “The Scope of Theology in Wisdom Literature” (195-214) and James L. Crenshaw’s “Unresolved Issues in Wisdom Literature” (215-27). Grizzard focuses more on man and his life needs than on the nature and work of God due to biblical wisdom’s “practical, human-centered approach” (195). Crenshaw’s essay considers the validity of defining and classifying biblical wisdom literature as well as the issue of unity and disunity within the corpus. Helpful indexes conclude the volume (Scripture, 229-39; and Name and Subject, 240-42).


This updates a Moody Press work of 1982. Barber was head librarian of the Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, and bibliographer and dean of the Learning Resources Center, Simon Greenleaf School of Law in Anaheim, California. He has authored more than thirty books, among which are A Minister’s Library with various updates and expositions of Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, and Nehemiah. He is now on the pastoral staff of Plymouth Church, Whittier, California, and lives in Hacienda Heights, California, where he continues a writing and speaking ministry. Krauss is the Serials and Public Services Librarian at Biola University in La Mirada, California. Among areas of his expertise are bibliographic instruction in electronic databases and Internet research resources.

This work helps in locating and using theological materials effectively via Internet. It describes each research tool, its strength and weaknesses, and how to find resources worldwide, published or unpublished. It starts with general tools (encyclopedias, dictionaries, lexicons, concordances, etc.) and moves to specialized
helps (books, monographs, periodical databases, electronic resources, bibliographies, and unpublished works).

Chapters also deal with the use of atlases and commentaries, the importance of lexicons, online searching, using Bible software, CD-ROMs, and different aspects of biblical research. Chapter 11 takes up various indexes such as abstracts on sources in theology, OT, and NT. Finding unpublished materials is the concern of Chapter 15. The authors discuss how to consult the outstanding Dissertation Abstracts International (1861 to the present), Internet databases for probing this work, how to use the Comprehensive Dissertation Index (works from 1861 forward), and sources for works in Great Britain, Ireland, Germany, etc. They include American Doctoral Dissertations (1957 to now), as well as a discussion on how to find dissertations now in progress via the journal Religious Studies Review.

Page 7 lists further sources on expertise in finding sources such as Gorman and Gorman’s Theological and Religious Reference Materials, Johnston’s Recent Reference Books in Religion, Kepple and Muether’s Reference Works for Theological Research, and Thomas Mann’s The Oxford Guide to Library Research.

An index at the end helps locate specific discussions in the Barber-Krauss introduction. The work will provide a valuable assist for researchers in both colleges and graduate schools.


Based on my experience as a Bible translator . . . , I have often said, “If you want to discover how little you really know, become involved in translating all the books of the Bible from Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek into English or any other language.” The same applies to writing a commentary (7).

With these words Barker introduces his masterfully written and eminently readable commentary on the Book of Micah (21-136). Every page drips with exegetical insights drawn from the original Hebrew text. Every section includes clear and practical applications for the modern Christian reader (69, 81-82, 115). The breadth of information is impressive: everything from hymns (134, 135) and historical anecdotes (82, 113, 131) to detailed grammatical and textual analyses of the Hebrew. Bailey’s more extensive contribution (commentaries on Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah, 137-500) is equally impressive, informative, and readable.

Barker and Bailey direct the reader to a wealth of resources by means of extensive footnotes. When pertinent to the reader’s understanding of the text, the
commentators identify significant views and related arguments. Anyone studying these four minor prophets will benefit from this volume.

Early in his commentary on Micah, Barker reveals that he adheres to the highest theological standards of evangelicalism in his approach to difficulties in the text. Responding to critical scholars who dispute the integrity of Micah’s prophecies, he declares, “If one’s presuppositions or preunderstandings recognize the reality and validity of supernatural revelation, divine inspiration, miracles, and predictive prophecy (including long-range predictions), most of the ‘problems’ evaporate” (29).

An impressive characteristic of this volume is its translational focus. It begins with Barker’s opening declaration (7) and continues with insightful discussions of translation problems (e.g., 87, 102, 120 n. 40, 181, 205 n. 42, 207 n. 50, 218, 239 n. 92). Bailey even refers to Longman’s reminders “about the problems of how to translate facial expressions of emotions from and into different cultures” (211 n. 69). He repeatedly (32 times) integrates the contributions of veteran Bible translators such as David J. Clark and Howard A. Hatton in A Handbook on the Books of Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah (UBS, 1989) in the Helps for Translators series (185, 199; cf. 130, Barker’s single citation of the handbook on Obadiah and Micah [UBS, 1982] by Clark, Norm Mundhenk, Bryn F. Price, and Eugene Nida).


Barker’s comments about the interpretation of Micah’s prophecies indicate his sympathies with Progressive Dispensationalism:

The approach followed in this commentary includes the principle of progressive fulfillment. What that means is that certain prophecies are of such a nature that they are progressively fulfilled (i.e., in stages). . . . [T]he fulfillment of one part is part of the fulfillment of the whole—a guarantee that the remaining events will definitely follow. Each stage becomes typological of the later stage[s], (i.e., of the fulfillment[s] yet to come) (41; cf. 70, 86, 92-93, 99-100, 129).

This association is confirmed when Barker directs the reader (70 n. 81) to his own essay in Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church, edited by C. A. Blaising and D. L. Bock (Zondervan, 1992). On the other hand, Bailey makes no mention of progressive fulfillment in his commentaries.

Two grammatical features of the Hebrew text receive inadequate treatment. Both Barker and Bailey recite the traditional exaggeration of the prophetic perfect’s exegetical significance by explaining that the action “is so certain that the Hebrew prophetic perfect is used. . . . It is as good as done” (61; cf. 199). The perfect “does
not emphasize the completedness of a situation. Earlier researchers commonly erred in characterizing the suffix conjugation as indicating completed action, instead of indicating a complete situation” (Bruce K. Waltke and M. O’Connor, An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax [Eisenbrauns, 1990] 480). Bailey consistently attributes continuous action to the Hebrew participle rather than recognizing that in certain contexts it indicates characteristic action involving repeated or intermittent action as opposed to continuous action (167, 179, 191 n. 172, 221; cf. 122).

It is unfortunate that there are several errors in the typesetting of the book. An inadvertent paragraph break is inserted in the middle of a sentence (128), sections in the introduction to Nahum are misnumbered (137, 139, 142, 144, 152), and running heads for Zeph 3:2 read “Nahum 3:2” (475-76). Irritating typos also occur (93 n. 75, 114, 193, 227 n. 39, 270, 282, 300 n. 60).

Kenneth L. Barker (Th.M. from Dallas Theological Seminary and Ph.D. from Dropsie College) has served as executive director of the NIV Translation Center, academic dean of Capital Bible Seminary, and professor of Old Testament at three theological seminaries. He is a prolific writer as well as deacon and teacher at First Baptist Church in Carrollton, Texas. Waylon Bailey is the pastor of First Baptist Church in Covington, Louisiana. He has served as professor of Old Testament at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary (the institution from which he received both his Th.M. and Th.D.).


The New American Commentary is a proposed 40-volume series initiated in 1987. Nearly three-quarters of the series has been produced. The series emphasizes theological exposition accompanied by extensive footnotes that assume a working knowledge of the biblical languages. Each commentator has a Baptist background. Daniel I. Block, the author of this volume, is professor of Old Testament Interpretation at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. To date, Judges, Ruth is the largest and most detailed volume in the series.

Block noted that “commentaries are never the final word” (8, in “Author Preface”). This volume, however, takes a gigantic step forward toward that ultimate goal. In a word, Judges, Ruth is substantial. It is not a frothy commentary, long on application and short on exegetical spade work. Yet the commentary is not complete. It has some disappointing gaps: no reference to the significant work of Leon Wood (Distressing Days of the Judges [Zondervan, 1975]), no discussion of the view that “the angel of Yahweh” is the preincarnate Son of God (and thus no mention of James A. Borland’s Christ in the Old Testament [Moody, 1978; Christian Focus, 1999]), and no reference to the significant studies of Basil A. Rebera (e.g., “Yahweh or

Block promises the reader a treatment involving answers to four basic questions addressed to the authors of Judges and Ruth: “(1) What are you saying? (the text critical issue); (2) Why do you say it like that? (the cultural and literary issues); (3) What do you mean? (the hermeneutical and theological issues); and (4) What is the significance of this message for me today? (the practical issue)” (8). Generally, Block delivers as he promises.

In the “Introduction” to Judges (21-73), Block successfully avoids identifying himself with any particular date for the exodus from Egypt (25-26, 59-63). He concludes that “the final form” (54) of Judges was composed during the reign of Manasseh (66-67, 513). The central theme of the Book of Judges is identified as the Canaanization of Israel (58, 71). From that theme, Block encourages the Christian reader to apply the truths of Judges to the increasingly paganized and worldly character of the church (71-72). Jephthah is presented as a prime example of paganized Israel in his selfish, stupid, and brutal sacrifice of his daughter as a burnt offering (365-79).

The volume employs visual charts and diagrams to convey a wealth of information. A partial list of such visuals includes:

- maps (20, 766-67)
- semantic diagram of sāpat (24)
- the hierarchy of Israel’s genealogical social structure as reflected in Josh 7:14-18 (32)
- the pattern of chronological notices in the Book of Judges (59-60)
- the cyclical pattern of Israel’s premonarchic history (132)
- structural and formulaic elements in the “Book of Deliverers” (Judg 3:7–16:31, 146-47)
- the layout of Eglon’s palace in Jericho (164)
- a synopsis of the prose and poetic accounts in Judges 4–5 (178-81)
- comparison of the sacrifices by Abraham and Jephthah (371-72)
- a schematic representation of the plots of the account of Samson and the Timnite woman’s wedding (428)
- the parallels between Gen 19:4-8 and Judg 19:22-24 (532-34)
- the structure of Ruth’s response to Naomi (640).

The commentary on the Book of Ruth is far more modest in scope than the one on Judges. It is well done, but falls short of Frederic Bush’s *Ruth/Esther* in Word Biblical Commentary (Word, 1996). Unfortunately, in at least one place, a major typographical and editorial error mars the volume’s content (viz., the incomplete first point in Block’s discussion of the premonarchic view of the book’s refrain, 59). In spite of shortcomings, when it comes to the Book of Judges, this commentary should not be neglected. It is indispensable.

This edition of Bright’s widely used history of Israel text was published posthumously (Bright died in March 1995). One of his OT colleagues at Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, Virginia, William P. Brown, edited the present volume. In addition to an expanded abbreviation list and more readable maps/plates (because of a better use of color contrast), Brown provides forty-five additional pages.

At the beginning of the body of the book (1-22), Brown gives an interesting introduction to the volume. After introducing the reader to the man, John Bright, and his basic method—i.e., his approach to Israel’s history—Brown delineates the unique contributions and advancements made by each of the earlier editions of this volume (1959, 1972, 1981). Brown contends that Bright’s attempt to combine theology and history sets his volume apart from a number of histories of Israel written by other critical scholars. God’s establishment and keeping of the covenant He made with Israel serves as the unifying thread or *Mitte* for Bright. Although he made numerous concessions to critical scholarship by the time of his third edition, Bright supported the historicity of a number of individuals as far back as the patriarchal period.

Brown also provides an appendix concerning “An Update in the Search of Israel’s History” (465-85). In this appendix, Brown seeks to survey the debate swirling around the issues of Israel’s “pre-history,” “origins,” “transition to monarchy,” as well as the relationship of history and faith. Throughout this section he seeks to relate what John Bright would have to say concerning the current scholarly debate dealing with the above issues (in light of his teaching and writings since the time of the 3rd edition and probably from his knowledge of John Bright as his teaching colleague). He provides insight into an important change that has taken place among critical scholars relating to the impact of archaeology on understanding the Bible. Whereas in the middle of the twentieth century, W. Albright contended that archaeology could not explain the basic miracle of Israel’s faith, archaeology did contribute to one’s understanding of biblical events (W. F. Albright, *The Archaeology of Palestine* [London: Penguin, 1949] 255). A recent scholar argues that “biblical” archaeology simply describes archaeology carried out in a biblical region (Volkmar Fritz, *An Introduction to Biblical Archaeology*, JSOT Supp. #172 [Sheffield: Sheffield, 1994] 12). He says nothing about the usefulness of “biblical” archaeology as it relates to biblical studies. In recent days, a much wider gap between the positive input of biblical archaeology and biblical studies has become quite apparent. As a matter of fact, a number of critical scholars (called “minimalists” by some) do everything possible to avoid using an archaeological discovery in favor of the historicity of a given biblical event.
Bright’s volume represents a number of contrasts. On the one hand (distinct from the general penchant of modern scholarship to reject the historicity of anything before the Divided Monarchy), Bright sees historical personages and events that go back as far as the patriarchal era. Granted, all that the Bible says about them may not be historical, but there are historically reliable accounts much older than most liberal scholars allow. Throughout his book he rejects numerous conjectural proposals by other scholars that run roughshod over the biblical text. For this he deserves commendation. On the other hand, he is no evangelical. He rejects an Exodus from Egypt by twelve tribes at one time as well as the biblical depiction of the Conquest of Canaan. His understanding of the dating of various OT books and the late development of numerous theological topics betrays his liberal leanings.

Although the average pastor will not find this book of great help, a serious student of Israel’s history needs to give this volume careful attention. It will provide a helpful introduction to various key issues in that realm of study from a less conjectural perspective than most recent histories written by critical scholars.


Martin Luther, in describing the importance of Christian education, once commented, “God has preserved the church through schools. They are the preservers of the church” (“Table Talk, No. 5557.” *Luther’s Works*. 54. Ed. and trans. Theodore G. Tappert and Helmut T. Lehmann [Philadelphia: Fortress,1967] 452). Yet, the great Reformer was not Pollyannaish about the potential danger that such institutions could bring the church. In one particularly passionate moment Luther took aim: “Thus there is no need of Christ and of Scripture, if the teaching of the . . . universities are valid. For this reason I have said that . . . the institutions of higher learning are not good enough to be heretical. No, they surpass all heretics and they are the bilge water pool of all heresies, errors, and idolatries which have existed from the beginning of the world. With them they push Christ and the word of God completely to the side, and they only keep their names as a cover-up” (“The Gospel for the Main Christmas Service.” *Luther’s Works*. 52. Sermons II. Ed. and trans. Hans J. Hillerbrand and Helmut T. Lehmann [Philadelphia: Fortress,1974] 82).

Luther’s indictment of the danger that existed as colleges and universities abandoned their theological moorings is the heart of James Tunstead Burtchaell’s monumental historical work, *Dying of the Light: The Disengagement of Colleges and Universities from Their Christian Churches*. Burtchaell is a former president of the American Academy of Religion and was previously associated with the University of Notre Dame as a professor of theology. No stranger to the discussion
of disengagement, Burtchaell’s two-part essay, “The Decline and Fall of the Christian College” (First Things, April and May 1991), was a sobering reminder of the general trend toward secularization that has plagued America’s religious institutions. Burtchaell has authored numerous works including From Synagogue to Church: Public Services and Offices in the Earliest Christian Communities (Cambridge University, 1992), Rachel Weeping and Other Essays on Abortion (Life Cycle Books, 1990), and Catholic Theories of Biblical Inspiration since 1810: a Review and Critique (Cambridge University, 1969). The work being reviewed resides in the flow of previous scholarly works which have addressed the issue of ecclesiastical disengagement, notably fellow Notre Dame scholar and historian George M. Marsden in The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief (New York: Oxford University, 1994) and Douglas Sloan’s (Teacher’s College, Columbia University) critique in Faith & Knowledge: Mainline Protestantism and American Higher Education (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox, 1994). Burtchaell readily recognizes these critical Protestant works, along with Philip Gleason’s treatment within the Catholic church, Contending with Modernity: Catholic Higher Education in the Twentieth Century (New York: Oxford University, 1995). The tension between church and college is recognized in the aforementioned treatments and in such works as Merrimon Cunnggim’s Uneasy Partners: The College and the Church (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994) (cf. J. Gregory Behle, review of Uneasy Partners: The College and the Church, by Merrimon Cunnggim, The Master’s Seminary Journal 10/2 [Fall 1999]:288-90).

Previous reviews of Dying of the Light have discussed potential theological misrepresentations or biases by Burtchaell, a Catholic scholar, in analyzing the integral nuances of transforming Protestant institutions (cf. Warren Benson’s review of Burtchaell’s Dying of the Light in Christian Education Journal 3ns [Spring 1999]:142-43.). Therefore this review will not rehearse such concerns. Although the author follows an organizational scheme similar to that found in Hughes and Adrian’s Models of Christian Higher Education (cf. J. Gregory Behle, review of Models of Christian Higher Education: Strategies for Success in the Twenty-First Century, by Richard T. Hughes and William B. Adrian [eds.], The Master’s Seminary Journal 9(Fall 1998):234-36), institutional selection is markedly different, given the differing foci of the two works. When institutional replication does occur, one is left with a sense of puzzlement—Burtchaell discusses shifts at St. Olaf College (Northfield, Minnesota) in the context of Lutheran higher education (Dying of the Light, 503–18), while Hughes and Adrian cite St. Olaf College as a “model” of Christian post-secondary education (Models of Christian Higher Education, 82–96). Such tensions point up the difficulty of definition in any discussion of “models” of Christian higher education, particularly among historic denominational schools that have broadened their institutional constituencies and reduced or eliminated confessional or theological distinctives. Burtchaell assumes a broader, more inclusive, definition of “Christian” in the work. Discussion includes disengage-
ment among the Congregationalists, Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists, Lutherans, Catholics, and evangelicals as representative Christian populations.

Burton’s historical work is detailed, being drawn from both primary institutional records and secondary sources. The text is copiously noted and offers a detailed index for referencing purposes. This reviewer would have appreciated a bibliographic essay to synthesize the essential literature and offer a discussion of historiographic method, especially given the mass of literature disseminated in the text. The prefatory material provided by the author is essential reading before one wades into this massive work. Burton’s acknowledgments among consulted scholars reads as a venerable list of “who’s-who” among Christian higher education historians—further bolstering an already strong work.

Theological differences aside, evangelical colleges might consider carefully the case-history of Azusa Pacific University as a paradigm of evangelical disengagement. Though arguments might be made that Burton’s classification of “evangelical” as a distinct denominational grouping is spurious in the literature, owing to problems of definition (both historically, denominationally, and theologically), institutions with fundamentalist heritages might give particular attention to the warnings provided. The case of Azusa Pacific as an evangelical institution is particularly noteworthy.

Burton’s concluding chapter, “The Story within the Stories,” summarizes well the author’s observations on recurring themes among disengaging institutions. Such observations should be noted by administrators and trustees concerned with their own institution’s ecclesiastical commitments and moorings. The regularity of such occurrences across both denominational and theological lines suggests patterns that are both predictable and easily replicated in the rush for academic credibility or institutional prestige.

The author has provided Christian higher education with another important contribution to the disengagement and secularization literature. Readers interested in either denominational developments within American church history and its effect upon the colleges, or readers interested in Christian higher education in general, will appreciate the significance of this work. Potential readers will likely gravitate toward their own denominational heritage; however, the lessons that can be gleaned from the experiences of others should be equally considered. Burton’s observations and conclusions sound uncomfortably familiar to those acquainted with the subject.


Freedman and the other editors offer this volume as “a tool for practical Bible use, reflecting recent discoveries and the breadth of current biblical scholar-
ship, including insights from critical analysis of literary, historical, archaeological, sociological, and other methodological issues” (xxiii). It contains approximately 5,000 alphabetically ordered articles that identify all persons and places mentioned in the Bible as well as cultural, natural, geographical, literary, and theological issues of relevance. Although the editors initially intended simply to revise and update the 1987 edition of the *Eerdmans Bible Dictionary*, this volume represents an entirely new reference work. Unlike multi-volume Bible dictionaries (perhaps more properly regarded as encyclopedias), Freedman regards this volume as a “rapid-response reference work” (xxi). The entries range in length from one sentence to multiple pages. Several entries conclude with a brief bibliography (the editors did not encourage the writers to include lengthy bibliographies). In addition to the sixteen maps at the end of the volume, four maps and a relatively small number of photographs and drawings appear throughout the body of the text.

In light of the breadth and size of this work, it offers helpful information to anyone who uses it. Obscure topics as well as significant issues receive attention. Students of the Bible should have at least a solid one-volume Bible dictionary in their library. However, even though this reviewer and the seminary librarian, Dennis Swanson, contributed articles to the work, it is probably not the best one-volume Bible dictionary on the market for evangelical readers. Most of the major articles are written from a non-evangelical perspective. For example, the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch is discounted, Isaiah and Zechariah both involve two distinct sections by two different authors, Daniel was written in the Maccabean period, the Pastorals were not written by the apostle Paul, nor was 2 Peter written by the apostle Peter. Although evangelicals should not necessarily limit their library to volumes written by evangelicals or books that totally agree with an evangelical position, it would be helpful if a reference work of this kind would at least present the evangelical option as a credible option (something that rarely happens in this volume). If a student of the Bible is able to own more than one single-volume Bible dictionary, the *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* deserves consideration. It will provide its reader with an overview of the current position in biblical scholarship on a number of issues. However, this reviewer would not recommend it as the first or only Bible dictionary a diligent student of the Bible should own.


Reviewed by Thomas A. Halstead, Professor of Bible, The Master’s College.

This is one of several volumes in the *Preaching the Word* series and the author is to be commended for his accurate and articulate exposition of the Gospel of John. At the beginning of the book he states his desire for preachers to experience the pleasure of God through the *logos* (the Word), *ethos* (what you are), and *pathos* (your passion). The commentary then is an exposition of the author’s messages as
he preached them at College Church in Wheaton, Illinois. As the book jacket states, “It is an ideal resource for pastors and teachers as well as for personal Bible study.”

The commentary is much more pastoral and application than an exegetical verse-by-verse treatment. The chapters not only include some exegesis, but many relevant illustrations, such as Harry Ironside’s power for ministry coming from his exposure to the Word (171-72), or a poem written by the English preacher Leslie Weatherhead, which likens Christ’s love at the cross to an eternal blazing fire (126). In fact, the author lists all his illustrations in the back of the book. His discussion of a typical first-century wedding is also helpful (58-59).

The author has sought to make the gospel one of the key thoughts in every chapter, as one can clearly see by his challenge at the end of every chapter for the reader to evaluate himself and his relationship to Christ. One cannot read this book without easily seeing the deity of Jesus Christ, and the demands He makes of man to believe in order to receive eternal life, or the consequence of not believing, which leads to eternal death. The heart of the author as well as the heart of the apostle John is that men and women believe in Jesus Christ as the God of this universe.

Though this book is not the best for an in-depth study of the Gospel of John, it offers the layman and the pastor a valuable practical understanding. It will inspire and convict as well as teach. I heartily recommend the book.


The author, Andreas J. Köstenberger, did his Ph.D. work in New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, with his work in John directed by D. A. Carson, the author of *The Gospel According to John* (Eerdmans, 1991). Köstenberger describes Carson’s commentary as, “One of the best evangelical commentaries on John now available, especially on difficult exegetical issues” (225). However, the present work, though having many echoes of Carson’s commentary, is not simply an abridgment of that volume. Köstenberger seeks to help his readers know John; therefore, his primary focus is on the text of the Gospel of John itself (15). The author is well qualified to write on John since he has written a monograph on John, *The Missions of Jesus and the Disciples According to the Fourth Gospel* (Eerdmans, 1998), along with a number of journal articles on the Gospel of John.
As with all the volumes in the Encountering series, this text contains many features helpful in the learning process. Each chapter is introduced with an outline of the material and the objectives. Study questions conclude each chapter. Tables, charts, and maps greatly enhance the book’s value. Sidebars and excurses explore exegetical, theological, and ethical issues emerging from a study of John. The author has provided a helpful glossary of terms used in the text (223-24) and an annotated select bibliography for further reading (225-26). Most important, the writer enriches his book with a list of the proper names, place names, and important theological terms in John’s Gospel (227-45). This mini-concordance, focused exclusively on John, is extremely useful for the study of geographical, biographical, and theological themes in the Gospel.

Köstenerger begins his discussion of John with chapters devoted to the historical, literary, and theological backgrounds of the Gospel. He presents the evidence for Johannine authorship (22-25). Concerning occasion and purpose he states, “We conclude therefore that John’s occasion for writing was the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem, which he considered an opportunity to present Jesus as fulfilling the void left thereby. John’s purpose for writing his gospel was (indirect) Jewish evangelism” (28). He analyzes the literary structure of John as consisting of two main divisions [1:19–12:50 and 13:1–20:31] introduced with a Prologue [1:1-18] and followed by an Epilogue [21:1-25] (32). Köstenberger does not see 11:1–12:50 as constituting a separate division as Carson does. He takes God, the Christ, salvation, the Spirit, the new covenant community, and last things to be the major theological themes of the Gospel (39-43).

The author devotes the major portion of the book to twelve chapters that expost the Gospel. One divergence from standard expositions of John is to be noted. Though this text delineates seven signs in John’s Gospel, it identifies the second sign as the temple cleansing [2:13-22] (70). It does not list Jesus’ walking on the water [6:16-21] as a sign as do most commentaries. A final chapter on John in the context of Scripture completes the main body of the book. Particularly significant is the discussion of the similarities between John’s Gospel and the Johannine Epistles and the Book of Revelation (203-5). However, the author, in discussing John and the Synoptic Gospels, assumes Markan priority, although he concludes that John wrote his Gospel without conscious and constant reference to the Synoptics (198-200). The assumption of Markan priority, without further discussion, can easily lead a beginning reader to assume that this is the only viable option when in fact it is not. Two appendixes (209-17) and ten excurses (247-63) conclude the written text.

Encountering John is an excellent guide to the Gospel for the beginning student. It is well designed as a college-level text. It could also serve as a good introductory text for a church Bible-study class on John, although the price might be prohibitive for each student to own a copy. Yet the teacher of the class should make use of this work as a reference in his teaching material. In addition, for the expositor of John, this book lays a good foundation before he works through the more

Reviewed by Dennis M. Swanson, Seminary Librarian.

In the last few decades occultic and New Age terminology and symbolism have become so pervasive that they are essentially ubiquitous in modern society. Christians, as C. S. Lewis once pointed out, deal with such matters in one of two extremes, either complete ignorance or unhealthy preoccupation. Part of the problem for the average Christian or even seminary-educated pastor in dealing with these issues is a lack of understanding of the variations within what the editors call the “philosophical kaleidoscope” of occult and New Age manifestations. This being the case, the author and editors have prepared what they call a “unique and concise guide to help Christians navigate the confusing and potentially dangerous minefield of today’s occult and New Age thought” (rear cover).

This work appears in easily read type and a two-column format. The articles are concise, normally only two or three paragraphs, with numerous illustrations that are quite helpful for certain abstract symbols. Two appendices (“Knowing the Truth: God’s Word, Cults, and the Occult” and “Scripture Twisting”) are short, but helpful reminders. Apparently Lardie has written all of the articles, although that is never stated. The preface by Ingram explains the necessity of the work, but never details the role of the author, the consulting editors, or the methodology employed. This is a deficiency since the author, who has a degree in journalism with a stated interest in the subject, seems to lack the academic credentials for such an undertaking; especially when some articles are designed to “compare historic Christian doctrines with New Age teaching” (9). The work also suffers from the lack of indexes.

Though the volume has many helpful articles, it also has several noticeable weaknesses. Most serious is the lack of a bibliography or bibliographic references within the articles or within the work. One of the key functions of a reference work is not only to provide summations but also to provide some gateway to additional study or research. Lacking additional references, this volume fails on the second point. A set of sources would also be helpful because several of the articles betray a level of “conspiracy-theory” mentality common among some sensationalist literature (e.g., articles on the United Nations, Values Clarification, Unity in Diversity Council, Trilateral Commission). Reliable background literature would have been useful to dispel this impression. Some articles, such as the one on Quantum Physics, are so brief (and simplistic) that the reader is left with the impression that the entire scientific discipline is some kind of fraudulent invention...
of the New Age movement. The article on the String Theory, misnamed in the article as the Superstring Theory, suffers from the same problem. The headings on several articles are not well selected. For example the heading “Green” is useless and gives the reader no clue that the article is about the “Green Party,” a socio-political movement and political party active in many countries. Other examples suffering from this problem are the entries for “Peace,” “Drug,” and “Light.” Some articles simply lack detail, such as the failure to mention Louis Farrakan in the article on the Nation of Islam as the current leader of the movement and the main proponent of the ideas that the article criticizes. Some material, such as the entry on “Unicorn,” contains erroneous information.

On the positive side, the book has an abundance of “see also” references that gives the work a level of cohesion. The writing style is certainly clear, and there is undoubtedly a great deal of basic and useful information. However, the items noted above give this reviewer a level of concern about the thoroughness and accuracy in the work. The reader will have to look elsewhere to confirm and expand the information presented.


This is the fourth volume in *The McMaster Divinity College NTS Series* from Hamilton, Ontario, Canada. Thirteen scholars write on such subjects as the history of interpreting the parables (with much detail arguing against allegorizing), genre, parables in early Judaism, parables of the kingdom in Mark 4, Matthew 13, Luke 8 and 13, and parables on judgment, preparedness, love and forgiveness (Luke 15, etc.), poverty and riches, prayer, discipleship, and other emphases.

The book displays a deep grasp of literature on the subject. A bibliography ends each chapter. Also evident is much insight based on probing study and careful inquiry.

In Chapter 1 dealing with the history of interpretation, a good survey looks at the contributions of Adolf Julius, C. H. Dodd, and J. Jeremias. Among other things, the chapter is helpful in assessing strengths and weaknesses of studies on Palestinian culture related to the parables. It shows, for example, that Kenneth Bailey, while offering many beneficial insights, errs at times when he assumes that customs in modern Palestine were the same in Jesus’ day (17). The work also points out problems in using rabbinic materials to explain NT parables, one such difficulty being that many rabbinic parables were written much later than Gospel parables (19) and another problem lying in the rabbinic use of their own creations to support exegetical interpretations of Scripture (19). A beneficial focus is a warning against recent (since ca. 1978) works that allegorize in a new way by assigning several
meanings to a text, even giving it new contexts (i.e., polyvalence). Many will feel those are eisegetical and will confuse rather than contribute insight from seeing NT parables in relation to their own contexts in Jesus’ day (19-22).

Morna Hooker’s chapter on Mark 4 lacks clarity about what and when the kingdom is. Conservatives will reject her view that verses in Mark 4 in their present form and context originated when the parables had become puzzling to the early church, “probably because their original context had been lost” (91). One has arbitrarily to reject Mark’s context as original in order to reach such a conclusion. She suggests that the explanation of the Parable of the Sower in 4:13-20 originated in the later church, not in Jesus’ ministry, because she assumes that explanations do not fit well in the time of Jesus (93). That is highly debatable; many see a very natural relevance to Jesus’ own setting.

Donald Hagner’s chapter 5 on Matthew 13 offers much perception. He does not agree with many who see the Sower and Seed or the Wheat and Tares as additions that the early church devised in creating Jesus’ teaching (105, 110). However, Hagner is not specific on whether the second and third soils represent really saved people or not; his expressions obscure his conclusion. He is helpful on the scribe in 13:52 blending new truth with old, conveying continuity and discontinuity.

R. T. France on the Ten Virgins in most cases treats the details sensibly, but causes unnecessary perplexity in saying that the bridegroom’s statement “I do not know you” appears “strangely out of keeping with the way the rest of the story is told.” “Why?” one might ask. France’s good explanations at times mingle with disturbing narrowness. He says that “enter into your master’s joy” (25:21, 23) “hardly rings true as a real-life businessman’s response to his slave’s successes” (188). So, he reasons, the story’s application dictated what was true only of the kingdom of heaven, and could not be natural for an earthly master to speak. Further, he generalizes reward and does not explain how it may relate to reward taught later in the NT.

Some other stimulating chapters are by Robert Stein (genre), Craig Evans (parables in early Judaism), Walter Liefeld (prayer), and Michael Knowles (discipleship).

All in all, this is probably the best up-to-date summary on parables by a collection of scholars. It shows awareness of views on key passages, and provokes thought. It will assist teachers and students at times, even though it often evinces no interest in making clear how differing viewpoints can answer some key questions in ministry.

“If Herodotus is the father of history, then Eusebius of Caesarea (c. A.D. 260–339) is certainly the father of church history” (9). Thus begins Paul L. Maier’s new translation with critical commentary of Eusebius’ classic work, Ecclesiastical History. Eusebius, Bishop of Caesarea, undertook to compile a record of the history of the early church from the life of Christ to the period of Constantine. Ecclesiastical History provides important historical data, particularly in regards to the post-biblical period. Eusebius integrates Josephus’ writings with a chronology of the post-apostolic church fathers. Eusebius was a prolific writer who also penned additional historical treatments (Life of Constantine, Martyrs of Palestine), numerous apologetic works, one of the earliest Bible geographies (Onomasticon), and a corpus of sermonic materials. Eusebius’ contribution to the history of the primitive church is unrivaled in detail and importance as a primary historical source.

Paul L. Maier is Russell H. Seibert Professor of Ancient History at Western Michigan University. Maier has been previously recognized as “Professor of the Year” as one of America’s twenty-five finest educators by the Council for the Advancement and Support of Education. He has been featured on A&E’s “Mysteries of the Bible” documentary series. Scholarly works include Josephus: The New Complete Works (Kregel, 1999); In the Fullness of Time: A Historian Looks at Christmas, Easter and the Early Church (Kregel, 1997); and A Man Spoke, A World Listened: The Story of Walter A. Maier (McGraw-Hill, 1963). Maier has also written several historical fictions including Pontius Pilate (Kregel, 1990), The Flames of Rome (Kregel, 1991), and A Skeleton in God’s Closet (Thomas Nelson, 1996). He is the son of Dr. Walter A. Maier, a pioneer in Christian radio and founder of the ground-breaking program, “The Lutheran Hour.”

One of the central challenges of Ecclesiastical History has been the lack of a readable modern translation integrated with scholarly commentary. Previous English translations, owing to the difficult nature of Eusebius’ Greek, are often inaccessible to all but the most tenacious readers. Such a situation often relegates Ecclesiastical History to the scholarly fringe and not the mainstream where it belongs. As a primary historical source, The Church History is too important to be ignored. Maier has performed a tremendous service to the Christian community by providing both an accessible translation and a valuable commentary integrated into a single readable volume. He did the same in his excellent treatment, Josephus: The New Complete Works (Kregel, 1999). Clearly, his scholarly knowledge of Josephus is an important asset to his discussion of Eusebius.

The Church History begins with prefatory material consisting of a biographical sketch and a bibliography of Eusebius and his works. Following the bibliographic essay, Maier offers a summary explanation of the critical aspects of The Church History in addition to procedural translation decision-making. He organizes the text into ten “Books” according to Eusebius’ organizational scheme, beginning with the life of Christ and concluding with a discussion of Constantine. The work follows a simple chronological approach built largely around the framework of the Roman emperors. Maier richly illustrates the translation with
photographs, maps, and diagrams. The text finishes with two appendices that (1) explore the critical question of Josephus’ reference to Jesus (Antiquities 18:6) and (2) provide an overview chart of the Roman emperors and Bishops of Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria, and Rome. Bibliographies and indexes conclude this fine treatment.

Each “Book” concludes with an appropriate discussion of an issue identified by Eusebius and explored by Maier. The commentary is appropriate and engaging. Chronological emendations in the marginalia assist the reader in placing the historical context. The narrative is liberally noted and includes both valuable cross-referencing and scholarly digression. Maier identifies textual and historical problems with Eusebius, where appropriate, to inform the reader of potential challenges. The translation does not assume Eusebius’ historical accuracy (see footnote 17). Maier does a fine job of identifying conflict points and alerting readers to alternative renderings or interpretive options.

One point of interest to this reviewer was the passing comment regarding the chronology of Christ and the dating of the crucifixion in A.D. 33 (see footnote 26). Without further elaboration, Maier assumes Harold Hoehner’s argumentation regarding an A.D. 33 dating (cf. Harold W. Hoehner. “The Year of Christ’s Crucifixion,” Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977] 114). The reconciliation of Eusebius dating with an A.D. 30 date is, to Maier, “…three or four years too early to reflect the most accurate date of the Crucifixion (A.D. 33).” Such an authoritative assertion negates dissenting views held by other prominent NT scholars (cf. Robert L. Thomas and Stanley N. Gundry, “Chronology of the Life of Christ,” in A Harmony of the Gospels [New York: HarperCollins, 1978] 324-28). The assumptive nature of Maier’s conclusion, given without additional clarification, led this reviewer to question other scholarly interjections.

Readers interested in early church history will find this work to be both fascinating and informative reading. Though some may relegate the book to academic purposes only, it has a clear devotional vein as the reader considers the commitments and challenges facing the early church. Maier has made a tremendous contribution to the modern reader by making Eusebius accessible.


After a hiatus of nearly three years, the seventh in a proposed series of 14 bibliographies sponsored by the Institute of Biblical Research has been released, this one dealing with the Synoptic Gospels. The publishing schedule for this series has been somewhat sporadic with the first volume issued in 1992 and then five additional
volumes issued between 1994-97. Because of the extended period between releases, this newest volume suffers from a rather embarrassing statement in the preface. The preface, by the series general editor Tremper Longman III, has not been changed from the first volume until the present volume, except to note Longman’s change from Westminster Theological Seminary to Westmont College. Though series prefaces normally remain static, this preface states, “One of the problems with published bibliographies in the past is that they are soon out of date. The development of computer-based publishing has changed this, however, and it is the plan of the Institute for Biblical Research and Baker Book House to publish updates of each volume about every five years” (7-8). To date, no such update has appeared despite the fact that three of the volumes are now five years in print, and the first volume has been out for eight years. Additionally, one has to wonder at the structure of the overall series, with four of the fourteen proposed volumes dealing specifically with the Gospels and three (Jesus, Luke-Acts and this volume) presenting a great deal of overlapping material.

This volume presents a surprisingly small number of entries (only 528) on works related to the Synoptic Gospels. They include articles in reference works and journals, specialized monographs and commentaries. In stating their purpose the authors comment, “We intend this bibliography to be useful to students and scholars alike, but if we had to choose between the two, we would chose the former. Consequently, we have included the items a student of the Synoptics might need to prepare a paper or to undertake some personal hunt—but we have eschewed trying to satisfy the fullness of studies needed for either doctoral studies or scholarly research” (9). The entries and annotations reflect the authors’ preferences for the various literary dependence views for the Synoptics, which would be appropriate if there were any attempt at balance or real commitment to the “usefulness” proposed in the preface. A few examples of the lack of balance will suffice. Only one ofEta Linnemann’s post-conversion works is listed (Is There a Synoptic Problem? Rethinking the Literary Dependence of the First Three Gospels, 44). That this work is listed is certainly an improvement over past IBR bibliographies, but the annotation clearly seeks to discredit her work in an ad hominem fashion as it states, “Formerly a disciple of Bultmann, Linnemann was converted to a Pentecostal type of faith and her entire theological and critical outlooks were reversed. She now advocates (against nearly all current scholarship) a view of Scripture holding that all three Synoptics arose independently and at roughly the same time” (ibid.). The volume does not list The Jesus Crisis: The Inroads of Historical Criticism in Evangelical Scholarship, edited by Robert L. Thomas and F. David Farnell (Kregel, 1998) in any of the relevant categories. Of the ten sub-categories under the main heading of “Methodological Issues,” none deal with harmonization of the Synoptics (in fact not a single Gospel harmony is listed in the bibliography). Of the 528 entries, only the work of Linnemann advocates a view of literary independence, despite the fact that this was the virtually universal view of the church and biblical scholars until the last 200 years.
That being said, this volume is somewhat helpful in detailing the current work (over 75% of the entries date within the last 15 years) in Synoptic studies and particularly in highlighting evangelical contributions to the various higher critical theories and literary-dependence views. The annotations are generally helpful and will give the student a basic grasp of the thrust of various works. Though small sections of commentaries are listed for each of the three Synoptics, one will have to look elsewhere for thorough coverage in this area.

For better or worse, bibliographies are the main source (and in many cases the sole source) of research for students and busy pastors. As such, bibliographies will shape the thinking of those who use them, because they are trusted to present a full-spectrum of materials on a given subject. Bibliographies are not “raw” research, but neither should they be thoroughly pre-digested menus where all unwanted and seemingly irrelevant items are missing. The IBR Bibliographies in general have tended to suffer from the latter, and The Synoptic Gospels in particular is characterized by listings that narrow the spectrum of studies that “students,” whom the authors have sought to help, to a pre-digested and pre-packaged meal which will neither fully nourish nor enlighten.


The latest entry in the Baker Reference Library fills a void in religious reference literature. It has been almost three decades since a significant dictionary on the subject of missions has appeared. Consistent with previous volumes in the series, this is an effort to bring together a wide array of scholarship and experts in various fields. Nearly 250 contributors, traversing the entire spectrum of evangelicalism, have come together in the production of an outstanding volume.

The format follows the same style as previous Reference Library volumes. The articles are all signed, with significant bibliographic references listed for each. The work has several indexes. Most helpful are the articles on various countries that give basic statistical information, religious breakdown, and status of Christian missionary activity. Articles ranging from “Burnout” to “Doctoral Degrees in Missiology” cover the full spectrum of mission information. Articles covering all areas of practical, theoretical, and informational content are to be found.

Especially noteworthy is the extensive article on the “History of Missions,” as well as articles on “Theological Systems” [as they relate to missions], “Theology of Mission,” and “Theology of Religions.” Many of the articles demonstrate the growing trend in integrating sociological theory and theology in the work of missions. The article on “Bible Translation” is most guilty of this problem. In the article, the author states, “Translators must utilize the entire assemblage of
communication style and genres necessary for people to appreciate God’s message to them. This suggests that translation must go beyond the print media utilized by translators from the West and employ a multiplicity of media (audio, video, drama, mime, etc.) with a plurality of formats (stories, comedy, art, musical presentations and dance) recognized and used by the people of the society” (125). Another problem with this article is that the editors decided to make “Translation” and “Translation Theory” into separate articles, which seems to render the material somewhat non-cohesive.

Readers of this journal will find disappointing the lack of articles on the more theologically conservative mission agencies such as Slavic Gospel Association and The Association of Baptists for World Evangelism. In fact, the articles on denominational mission activities (Baptist, Methodist, Presbyterian) are surprisingly brief and lacking in thoroughness. For instance in the entry for Baptist Missions, only the Southern Baptist Convention along with the Northern Baptists receive any lengthy mention. Other significant Baptist groups go unnoticed. In Presbyterian Missions, the work of J. Gresham Machen in founding the Independent Board of Foreign Missions and the work of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church also receive no mention. Also, the considerable contributions of the Plymouth Brethren in world missions goes untreated.

Those shortcomings aside, the volume is certainly both a welcome and a needed addition to the area of religious reference. Both the editor and publisher are to be commended for this overall fine work that continues the outstanding tradition of the Baker Reference Library.


Iain Murray, author of a number of perceptive historical theological books, has provided an invaluable study of the changes and concessions in evangelicalism in the last fifty years. Murray writes from the perspective of one who has first-hand knowledge of the developments in English evangelicalism. His insights into American evangelicalism and the rise of new evangelicalism are also keen.

In Murray’s view, the main problem in evangelicalism is that many of its leaders have decided that the ultimate issue in Christianity is no longer what a Christian is. For example, they have abandoned the policy of the Reformers who left Rome because “the true way of salvation was not taught there” (238). Instead, many twentieth-century evangelicals in both England and the United States have accepted the idea that unity is the most important matter. Thus evangelicals have been joining together in Christian ministry with non-Christians. Such a philosophy has devastated the doctrinal condition of evangelicalism, Murray believes. To be specific, “the new ‘openness’ taken up by the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association, and by Anglican
evangelicals at Keele, could not long co-exist with an insistence on evangelical distinctives. So evangelicalism on both sides of the Atlantic lost its strong centre" (252).

Murray argues that Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) developed the philosophy that many twentieth-century evangelicals adopted. Schleiermacher, sometimes known as the father of liberal theology, asserted that “religion is primarily not a matter of doctrine but rather of feeling, intuition and experience” (5). This thesis was subsequently affirmed by many evangelicals who, though generally maintaining orthodoxy themselves, looked on theology as a second-order issue. In their view, as long as a person said he was Christian, he was to be treated as a Christian, regardless of his doctrinal position.

In practice, the thesis was popularized by the oft-repeated claim of Billy Graham: “The one badge of Christian discipleship is not orthodoxy, but love.” Graham was eventually to claim that “everybody that loves or knows Christ, whether they are conscious of it or not, they are members of the body of Christ” (quoted by Murray, 73). So, with doctrine a second-order issue, working with theological liberals became less and less of a problem for some evangelicals. And theological liberals were happy to reap some of the benefits of the Graham revivals. In the words of one liberal in the middle fifties, “Graham is helping to fill our churches. We can teach people theology when we have got someone to teach” (quoted, 58).

In England, the “evangelical dyke” was broken at a meeting of the National Evangelical Anglican Congress at Keele in 1967. After the opening address was given by the liberal Archbishop Michael Ramsey, the Congress “went on to set out a good statement of evangelical doctrine but coupled with it was a confirmation of the ground rule for all ecumenical dialogue, namely, that so long as anyone confessed Jesus Christ as ‘God and Saviour’ there must be an acceptance of their Christian standing” (43). Not every evangelical accepted the new ecumenical policy.

Murray, who assisted Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones at Westminster Chapel, points out that Lloyd-Jones, along with Francis Schaeffer and many American fundamentalists, warned Graham and other new evangelicals of the consequences of treating theological liberals as genuine Christians. Throughout the book, Lloyd-Jones appears as an insightful defender of the truth.

According to Murray, the compromises of evangelicalism are observable in several significant ways. One is the “transference of leadership from preachers and pastors to evangelical intellectuals teaching in the academic world” (173). This quest for intellectual respectability “was led by Fuller Theological Seminary” in the United States, and also was apparent with the inroads of British evangelicals into senior positions in the British universities. It is a matter of history that evangelicals such as F. F. Bruce, James Barr, James D. G. Dunn, Ian Howard Marshal, and others have had important roles in academia. But Murray demonstrates that the rise to academic power often came at a price of doctrinal slippage, especially in the doctrine of the Scriptures. In Murray’s words, “evangelicals who step into situations where it is professionally unacceptable to teach the infallibility of Scripture come under
immense pressure to show that the difference between them and their non-evangelical colleagues is not as great nor as serious as the Bible says it is.” In such cases, “we should not be surprised if a less ‘rigid’ view of Scripture soon comes to be espoused” (210).

The compromises of evangelicalism are also observable in the events surrounding Evangelicals and Catholics Together. For Murray, ECT may be the ultimate evidence that many evangelical leaders have minimized the question of what a Christian is. Of course, other evangelicals such as John MacArthur, R. C. Sproul, and D. James Kennedy absolutely rejected this minimization of the salvation question. Thus Murray believes that by 1995 it was clear that “there was now a fundamental difference among evangelicals” (224). Evangelicalism was clearly divided.

The benefits and strengths of this book are numerous. Most in the United States do not have a precise understanding of the developments in British evangelicalism in the last fifty years. This book helps to evaluate the positions taken by such well-known evangelicals as J. I. Packer, John Stott, F. F. Bruce, James Dunn, Alister McGrath, and Martyn Lloyd-Jones. Moreover, Murray has researched American new evangelicalism well, and presents interesting anecdotes from unpublished sources perhaps unknown to most (e.g., 189).

Another strength of this book is the author’s ability to identify compromises in evangelicalism in a gracious manner. Murray is never shrill. Also, for those who enjoy reading church history, a strength of this book is the many references and quotations from men of God from the past. Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Wesley, Jonathan Edwards, J. C. Ryle, and others make their appearance at key points in Murray’s analysis. Also helpful are the summaries of lessons learned, in point-by-point fashion, at the end of several chapters. Even the inside cover of the book has a helpful time-line of major events in the story of evangelicalism in the last fifty years.

The analytical sections of the book are full of quotable warnings. For example: “The approval of doctrinal ‘diversity’ has become the hallmark of one-time evangelicals who have risen to high positions in the Church and left definite convictions behind them” (142). “The academic approach to Scripture treats the divine element—for all practical purposes—as non-existent” (185). “[C]urrent apologists for what professes to be evangelicalism have simply taken over arguments from men who were formerly regarded as opponents” (197). “[I]f Christian belief in Scripture is reduced to conjectures and uncertainties, then a broad toleration of almost all opinions is allowable” (203). “The very thought of asking about heresy has itself become the new heresy” (quoting Thomas C. Oden, 203). “To suppose that because of their culture and their learning the universities are somehow neutral when it comes to the Bible is to deny that this whole fallen world is in a state of hostility to God” (211). “To take everything at face value is often treated as the true Christian attitude” (263).

The weaknesses of the book are few. As to the structure of the book, I think
it would have been helpful to the reader had the author inserted divisions and subdivisions in his chapters. In content, the fascinating events leading to the split of Billy Graham from such American revivalists as John R. Rice, Bob Jones, and Monroe Parker are omitted. Of course, Murray had to decide what to include and what to exclude in a book covering fifty years of history.

Finally, I’m not sure that Murray gives American fundamentalists their due. Murray is respectful of fundamentalists and aware that “fundamentalism often suffered from hostile misrepresentation” (298). On the other hand, he seems to share J. G. Machen’s criticisms of fundamentalism, and also adds a few of his own (17, 298). Though Murray’s passing criticisms of fundamentalism are no doubt true of some fundamentalists, many fundamentalists do not fit the standard caricature.

In one case, Murray seems to defend Harold J. Ockenga against an analysis by an American fundamentalist. Murray quotes fundamentalist Ernest Pickering’s 1959 article “The Present State of the New Evangelicalism,” in which Pickering criticizes the philosophy of Ockenga and other new evangelicals for their commitment to ecumenical activity in the denominations. Murray responds, “Critiques of this kind and tone were probably too strident and unfair to have much effect” (31), and goes on to quote some of Ockenga’s more conservative statements. But, though Ockenga’s views may look conservative compared to twenty-first century new evangelicals, he was a major player in setting the direction of new evangelicalism. Would it not have been Pickering who would have most heartily agreed with Murray’s statement later in the book: “The Christian faith is rather at its strongest when its antagonism to unbelief is most definite, when its spirit is other-worldly, and when its whole trust is not ‘in the wisdom of men but in the power of God’ (1 Cor 2:5)” (212).

But perhaps this is quibbling. *Evangelicalism Divided* is a great book, and all who are concerned about the dilemma of evangelicalism—indeed the future of Christianity—will benefit greatly by familiarizing themselves with the information contained in it. I enthusiastically recommend it.

---


For several years a small group, known mainly on the Internet and in e-mail theological discussions and called the International Preterist Association, has been advocating what has been called “consistent preterism,” “full-preterism,” or “hyper-preterism.” In brief, this position builds on the traditional Preterist understanding of prophecy, postulating that all biblical prophecy was fulfilled in A.D. 70 and that no aspect of biblical prophecy awaits fulfillment. Edward E. Stevens, president of this association, says on the cover that this book is “A compelling introduction to
past-fulfillment of Bible prophecy.”

The author, John Noé, who is a motivational speaker and an entrepreneur, has become a chief spokesman for the “full-preterism” position. The introduction says of Noé that he “is not a professional theologian. He has had no formal seminary training, but that may be an advantage—it might have handicapped his communication style” (x). This is a startling admission and the first of a seemingly endless set of logical fallacies strewn throughout this book.

In terms of argumentation and documentation, to detail all of the problems with the book would be impossible in the amount of space available. A few examples will suffice. In the documentation and endnotes, the formatting style changes from note to note. Citations are often incomplete (e.g., 282 n. 11, 283 n. 1); when referencing a periodical, the author never mentions the article title (e.g., 282 n. 2-4), gives either incomplete or no bibliographic information (e.g., 282 n. 5), is inconsistent in his use of underlining, italicizing, and quotation marks (ep. 283 n. 8 with 287 n. 5), and misspells publisher names (e.g., 283 n. 1). Beyond this, the book has numerous typographical errors in both the notes and the body of text and lacks a bibliography and indexes.

The author constantly refers to secondary rather than primary sources (e.g., 291 n. 1; 292 n. 3). He does not cite which editions of Josephus’ History of the Jews, Eusebius’ Ecclesiastical History, and essays by Athanasius and Augustine he uses. Sometimes the information he presents is untrue. In chapter 3 (283) he states, “From Columbus’ Book of Prophecies, which is only available in Spanish and has never been published in this country” (238 n. 5). The fact is that a parallel Spanish-English edition, with commentary, appeared two years before Noé’s work, in 1997 (The Book of Prophecies edited by Christopher Columbus, Berkley, Calif.: University of California), and is currently found in 179 libraries in this country. In dealing with the Second Law of Thermodynamics (63, 283 n. 2), he lifts a selected quotation from the high-school-level World Book Encyclopedia to prove his point, and then gives the wrong page number for the article.

Throughout the notes the author overuses vague ad populum pronouncements such as “some Bible scholars maintain,” “some liberal scholars have insisted,” “some Jewish scholars,” “some interpreters,” “many interpreters,” and so on. Despite the author’s admitted lack of training, he makes numerous pronouncements on the proper translation of the Greek and Hebrew text and lexical meanings, although the only language source ever cited is one reference to the dictionary in Strong’s Concordance (291 n. 28).

The content of the book itself is thoroughly disappointing as well. The structure is confusing with no attempt at a coherent outline. Noé clutters the text with “bullet points” and collections of “Top 12 List,” “Eight Confirmatory Insights,” “Five Side-Stepping Devices,” in which he continually interrupts his own flow of thought. The author strings together a list of anecdotal proofs to demonstrate the dangers of an end of the world scenario. He states,
Prior to the 20th century, the church was culturally relevant, involved, and positive. Not so anymore. After the turn of the century, Hal Lindsey’s brand of premillennialism and its doomsday mentality spread like a wildfire through Christianity’s evangelical ranks and devastated postmillennial gains (38-39).

The anachronistic fallacy is evident, since Hal Lindsey’s foray into prophetic writing did not begin until the late 1960’s. That the author would be concerned that postmillennial gains were “devastated” is also interesting since he later places postmillennialists into the futurist camp that he opposes (271). Since all eschatological positions except his are posited as “futurists,” the author apparently sees all premillennial, postmillennial, and amillennial Christians as culturally irrelevant, uninvolved, and negative.

The foundational thesis of this work is that all events related to the return of Christ have already occurred. That is, the return of Christ, the resurrection of the just and unjust, the casting of Satan into the Lake of Fire, and the establishment of the new heavens and new earth along with any other related biblical prophecy occurred at or about A.D. 70. One chapter of the book entitled “Why the World Will Never End” advocates that eternity is an attribute of this creation (50). The author makes unsupported claims about scientific theory, such as the earth not being subject to the Second Law of Thermodynamics (63). To the question of how the world’s resources can continue without end, he naively responds,

If a little more sun or cosmic substance of any kind is someday needed, He will simply speak it into existence. Likewise, if the speed of light slows down too much—as some scientists worry about—He could give it a boost. These divine acts would only be minor tweaks compared to creating it all in the first place (63).

To make his system work, the author tragically reduces the new heaven and new earth and the new Jerusalem to a spiritual abstraction that he equates to the present Christian life or “New Covenant life” (262-63), thereby erasing all hope associated with that future existence.

For what is billed as a “compelling introduction to past-fulfillment of Bible prophecy” the book fails to deal with some basic issues or objections. First of all, the author nowhere mentions why his view is not comparable with the error of Hymenaeus and Philetus, who also claimed that the resurrection was already past (2 Tim 2:17-18). In fact, “full-preterism” has been called a return to the heresy of Hymenaeus (John MacArthur, The Second Coming [Crossway, 2000] 13). He also nowhere deals meaningfully with Acts 1:9-11, which speaks of exactly the manner in which Christ will return. Amazingly, the entire issue of the dating of NT writings is dismissed with a sentence in an endnote (298 n. 3). He states there that his opinion is that the early date of Revelation is “far superior” but also that the “dating debate will not be addressed in this book.” The traditional dating of Revelation (A.D. 95) eliminates “full-preterism” in one stroke. Other issues left untouched relate to the problem of evil, current Satanic and demonic activity, the resurrection
of today’s believers, and the judgment of unbelievers.

The author calls for a reformation in the church based on the “full-preterist” position. He states that, “This reformation could become as significant as the 16th-century Protestant Reformation” (271). That kind of bluster, combined with a complete disregard for hermeneutics, playing fast and loose with factual information, and an abandonment of the rules of logic, disqualifies the author as a reliable guide in learning the meaning of Scripture. Unfortunately, publications such as this (which appear to contain thorough biblical and scholarly research), and the ubiquitous nature of the Internet mean that this current revival of the heresy of Hymenaeus will probably continue to be a bane for churches and pastors, whether they are premillennial, postmillennial or amillennial.


The ongoing political struggles in the land of Israel continue to be a cause of great concern for world leaders and a never-ending source of material for modern prophecy “experts.” The “prophecy by current event” genre of literature creates a great deal of excitement, sells a lot of books, and now even creates movie screenplays. Fortunately a more safe and sane approach to prophetic matters is still in the Scriptures when examined carefully and thoroughly.

One such book is this effort from the longtime professor of Old Testament at Knox Seminary. Robertson has examined the concept of “The Israel of God” from five directions: Land, People, Worship, Lifestyle, the Coming of the Kingdom, and a detailed examination of Romans 11. He concludes with a series of 12 propositions that summarize the key points of his thesis. He affirms the standard amillennial viewpoint that “the promised messianic kingdom of Jesus Christ has come” (195).

In keeping with the amillennial perspective, Robertson makes a strong presentation that any theological viewpoint that sees a restoration of Israel to the land or a reign of Christ in an earthly kingdom is a “retrogression” (31). Those who believe and teach that viewpoint are a “primary tool in misdirecting their [Jewish people’s] faith and expectation” (ibid). He affirms that “in the realm of new covenant fulfillments, the land has expanded to encompass the whole world” (ibid). With this opinion Robertson seems to have abandoned his previously published view that the land promises to Israel were fulfilled in the reign of Solomon (*Understanding the Land of the Bible* [Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1996] 9, 19). He never deals with the key New Covenant passage, Jeremiah 31, in relation to either God’s affirmation of the perpetuity of Israel (35-37) or the geographic expansion of Jerusalem (38-40). In relation to the land issue, though Robertson
notes several works, he fails to interact with the important work by Robert L. Wilkin, *The Land Called Holy: Palestine in Christian History and Thought* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University, 1992) or with H. Wayne House, ed., *Israel: The Land and the People* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1998), both of which would challenge his thesis at several levels.

In dealing with the subject of the People, Robertson presents a detailed explanation of Gal 6:16 and all the possible interpretations. Although dispensationalists would disagree with his conclusion (that Jews and Gentiles combined constitute the Israel of God), even if his interpretation were correct, he is attempting to pack far too much theological freight into an admittedly difficult and somewhat obscure phrase.

The final two chapters (the Coming Kingdom and Romans 11) are a natural continuation of the author’s amillennial presentation. He postulates that since “Israel” is rarely mentioned in the Book of Revelation, “Nowhere in this book are the Jewish people described as having a distinctive part in this kingdom” (165). However, passages abound elsewhere that discuss the distinct role of Israel in the future kingdom (Isa 61:6 et al.). In dealing with Romans 11, Robertson asserts, “[N]othing in this chapter says anything about the restoration of an earthly Davidic kingdom, or of a return to the land of the Bible, or of a restoration of a national state of Israel” (191). That may be true, but the chapter does say that all Israel will be saved and that “the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable” (Rom 11:29). Romans 11 makes clear that God is not through with Israel as a people. In the future, the totality of all the promises made to national and physical Israel will be fulfilled in a national and physical manner.

Despite clear disagreements dispensationalists have with the conclusions of this work, it remains a worthy addition to the library of those interested in this important subject. It will certainly become a standard text for those affirming covenant theology and an amillennial eschatology and one that cannot be ignored by those holding to dispensational hermeneutics and premillennialism.


volumes (Daniel Block’s Judges, Ruth, and Kenneth Barker and Waylon Bailey’s Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah—both reviewed in this issue of TMSJ). In spite of this apparent dichotomy, the series makes a superb addition to the serious Bible student’s library.

Rooker’s areas of expertise include the Book of Ezekiel, linguistic dating of OT books, and Bible translation. He is currently professor of Old Testament and Hebrew at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary and serves as editor of the Pentateuch for the Holman Christian Standard Bible.

The “Introduction” (21-77) alone is worth the price of this noteworthy commentary on Leviticus. Rooker’s lucid critique of the Documentary Hypothesis and liberal criticism in general (23-38) should be required reading for every course in Old Testament Introduction. He quotes C. S. Lewis’s incisive evaluation of critical scholarship: “These men ask me to believe they can read between the lines of the old texts; the evidence is their obvious inability to read (in any sense worth discussing) the lines themselves. They claim to see fernseed and can’t see an elephant ten yards away in broad daylight” (32, quoting C. S. Lewis, Christian Reflections [Eerdmans, 1967] 154). In view of the failure of critical scholarship to provide any viable alternative, Rooker takes a firm position supporting Mosaic authorship of Leviticus (38-39). His essays on “Theological Themes” (46-77) include outstanding studies of sacrifice and atonement (47-65) and the Law and the Christian (65-77). Unfortunately, one of the most significant contributions to this latter topic is omitted from the sources cited: Alva J. McClain, Law and Grace (Chicago: Moody, 1967). Rooker sees more continuity than discontinuity between the testaments, but is far from being a theonomist (cf. 72-75).

The commentary’s methodology consists of three steps: (1) a thorough examination of the text to determine its meaning for the original audience (43-44), (2) consideration of the relationship of the text to subsequent legal decisions elsewhere in Scripture (44), and (3) a typological treatment of the patterns and correspondences of the text when viewed alongside the NT (44).

The author provides information on Leviticus from a variety of sources and perspectives. In the commentary on 5:14–6:7, he briefly discusses the varying views of Philo, Josephus, Origen, and Augustine regarding the distinction between the sin offering and the guilt offering (122). He cites the Midrash concerning the casting of lots for ash removal duty (129 n 229). A range of theological observations is presented—from the evangelical homiletiian Warren Wiersbe (47 n. 89) to tradition criticism’s primary theologian Gerhard von Rad (263 n. 168). In his commentary on the removal of the corpses of Nadab and Abihu, the author describes the present mortuary at Jerusalem’s Hadassah hospital with its special arrangement of doors to prevent priestly contamination (159 n. 87).

Rooker often presents major interpretive issues by specifying the various interpretive viewpoints and then eliminating them one by one until only one interpretation remains, the one that best resolves the problems. He illustrates this in his discussion of the “strange fire” in 10:1-7 (157-58) and his presentation of seven
different explanations for the distinctions between clean and unclean animals (170-75). Rooker’s comments on 9:24 are indicative of the commentary’s attention to theological significance: “When the glory of the Lord appeared, the people responded with joy and bowed down to worship the Lord. It is significant that the first occurrence of the word ‘joy’ in the Bible is in this context . . . the highest mood of the Old Testament religion was one of joy” (155).


Here is a work on the prayer Jesus taught His disciples (Matt 6:9-12; Luke 11:2-4) that is warm, lucid, stimulating, and practical. It will take its useful place with other books on the subject by R. Kent Hughes and John MacArthur. The author served under the late Pastor James Boice as Associate Minister of Preaching at Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia beginning in 1995. Ryken sat under the same pastor as this reviewer and his family in the Aberdeen, Scotland, Gilcomston South Church of Scotland.

Ryken begins with Matt 6:5-6 on “How to Pray Like a Hypocrite.” He contrasts genuine prayer in a secret place with that of the hypocrite in regard to motives and reward. He has a burden that all believers, not just spiritual giants, will pray well (12). Each chapter ends with pertinent questions to stimulate discussion in personal devotions or a Bible-study group. Other intriguing titles occur, as Chapter 7, “How to Pray Like an Orphan.” The author means as a pagan who does not have the heavenly Father (27) or as saved people who at times have strained attitudes as if they do not have the Father (29).

Ryken offers counsel on having a consciousness of God as Father (29) and simplicity in prayer (30-31). He uses many illustrations such as Hudson Taylor trusting the Father for provisions at a missions hospital during hard times (34) and H. A. Ironside’s story of an elderly man receiving exact answers (113-14).

Readers will benefit from comments on God as Father, on His being holy, and how His children can be holy in actions, words, thoughts, emotions, in fact, as they worship in every part of life (72-75). Also, pages on temptation say much, such as Satan’s power, ingenuity, and deceptiveness in making things appear desirable, and how weak and prone to failure believers are, revealing their need of the Father all the more.

That the author has done his research shows up often, for instance, in “Give us . . . daily bread.” He points out Origen’s error that this could not refer to physical bread since that is too mundane, so it must mean God’s Word, the Bread of Life (105). Jerome wrote similarly. But Tertullian grasped the temporal, literal idea as mentioned along with heavenly things. Chapter notes near the end utilize numerous

The book is commendable for its refreshing flow, provocative points, illustrations, and insights on attentive prayer. It will remind teachers and pastoral staffers as well as God’s lay servants of their privileges to make much of prayer.


Byzantine travel narratives provide an important corpus of literature concerning the post-biblical geography of the Holy Land. Works such as Eusebius’ *Onomasticon* have provided scholars with critical toponymical detail. One such travel narrative was written by a woman named Egeria who visited the Holy Land in A.D. 381-384. Though little is known of this pilgrim, Egeria’s narrative provides important geographical detail concerning the Holy Land and ecclesiastical practice in Jerusalem. Recent multi-lingual treatments of Egeria include Italian (Nicoletta Natalucci, *Pellegrinaggio in Terra Santa* [Bologna: EDB, 1999]), Spanish (*Itinerario de la Virgen Egeria* (381-384), 2nd ed. [Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1996]), Hebrew (Ora Limor and Milka Rubin, *Mas’ot Erets ha-Kodesh: ’ole regel Notsrim be-shilhe ha-’et ha-’atikah: te’uremasa’* Latinym [Jerusalem: Yad Yitshak ben Tsevi, 1998]), German (*Itinerarium Reisebericht* [Freiburg: Herder, 1995]), and now Wilkinson’s English offering of *Egeria’s Travels*.

Largely consigned to the scholarly realm, Egeria’s accessibility has been limited. John Wilkinson recently released an updated translation with supplemental critical commentary. Previous translations (1971, 1981), by the author’s own admission (xiv), contained mistakes that had, heretofore, concerned him. Wilkinson confides, “This third edition will, I hope, interpret Egeria rather better than my previous efforts” (xiv). This is not a simple reprint, but an important reworking of Egeria’s narratives by an honest scholar incorporating new understandings.

John Wilkinson was a canon of St. George’s Cathedral in Jerusalem and the Director of the British School of Archaeology there. He is the author of several books including *Jerusalem Pilgrims before the Crusades* (Aris & Phillips, 1977) and *Jerusalem as Jesus Knew It: Archaeology As Evidence* (Thames & Hudson, 1978). Wilkinson’s knowledge of Jerusalem is an important asset in his treatment of Egeria’s pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Readers familiar with Wilkinson’s earlier publications on Jerusalem will quickly recognize renderings and diagrams in *Egeria’s Travel*.

In his introduction, Wilkinson assists the reader in placing Egeria in context. A brief prolegomenon to Egeria, the person, is followed by a treatment of
the varying manuscripts that reference her and which are foundational to the translation. Wilkinson then addresses the nature and pattern of early Christian pilgrimages, the geographic structure of Byzantine Jerusalem (Aelia Capitolina), and other literary contributions of Byzantine pilgrims (notably the pilgrim of Bordeaux). Finally, Wilkinson outlines Egeria’s travel route, provides a chronological and contextual time line, an overview of the clergy, ecclesiastical customs, the people encountered by Egeria, and finally, a concluding discussion of local liturgical practice. Wilkinson liberally footnotes his narrative for both citation and digression. The text proper is peppered with diagrams and archaeological renderings.

Following introductory treatments, Wilkinson then offers a translation of Egeria’s travelogue. Because of the fragmentation and loss of significant portions of the manuscript (notably the beginning and the end)—the partial principal manuscript having been “discovered” in 1884—Wilkinson offers a reconstruction of the lost portion of the opening section by utilizing Peter the Deacon’s Book on the Holy Places (ca. A.D. 1137). Peter recognized three primary works in the compilation of his text. One of these was Egeria’s travel journals. Wilkinson uses this work to offer the reader a sense of what Egeria may have tried to communicate, albeit through the later work of Peter the Deacon. The author provides clear demarcations to distinguish offered reconstruction from actual translation. The translation ends abruptly and Wilkinson does not attempt to reconstruct the conclusion of Egeria’s travelogue as he did with the lost portion of the beginning.

Wilkinson’s translation of the 1884 text is clear, making Egeria’s Latin accessible to the modern reader. The translation is also liberally noted and includes numerous maps and diagrams to assist the reader in understanding the narrative. Wilkinson utilizes his notes for digressions, clarifications, and corrections, leaving the translation free of scholastic clutter. Egeria’s narratives comprise her detailed discussion of travel experiences, the geography of the Holy Land, as well as an extended discussion of liturgical practice in Jerusalem at the time of her visit.

The final section of the book explores varying and eclectic historical notes that concern the translation or are historically tangential discussions. Egeria’s name, issues of dating the pilgrimage, the “finding of the cross,” the cave of the Anastasis, the old Armenian lectionary (an important cross-reference to the liturgical discussion), the duration of Lent, the finding of Job, Edessa’s water system, Christian-Jewish relations in the travelogue, and the “letter to Valerius” round out the text. Discussion of translation-manuscript authenticity and an exploration of external criticism connected with the 1884 manuscript would be a welcome addition to an otherwise detailed piece of scholarly work.

Readers interested in the Byzantine geography of the Holy Land will appreciate Wilkinson’s refining and reworking of his previous treatments of Egeria. Church historians will be interested in the ecclesiastical customs and liturgical practices that were characteristic of Byzantine Jerusalem.
This Bible dictionary is a companion volume to New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition (see review in TMSJ 7 [1996]:118-20). The first edition of The New Bible Dictionary, with J. D. Douglas as organizing editor, appeared in 1962. It was the product of the Tyndale Fellowship for Biblical Research and aimed to present articles reflective of Anglo-American evangelical scholarship that would contribute substantially to the understanding of God’s Word. The initial volume contained 2,300 articles specially written for the dictionary. In 1982, New Bible Dictionary: Second Edition was released under the revision editorship of N. Hillyer. The second edition featured a new text design and was enhanced by over 200 maps and diagrams. Those features have been carried over into the third edition. The second edition omitted some articles and amalgamated others from the first edition. This third edition neither adds nor omits any entries from the second edition. About ninety percent of the second edition has been carried over into this third edition, with updated bibliographic entries in many of the retained articles.


The articles are uniformly well written, with vast amounts of information clearly and succinctly presented. The material concerning historical and geographical background is especially useful. The theological stance of the dictionary continues to be broadly evangelical. The articles reflect a continuity viewpoint between the Old and New Testaments. For example, F. F. Bruce in “Israel of God” states, “But that the community of believers in Jesus, irrespective of their national origin, is looked upon as the new Israel of God throughout the NT is clear” (532). Also, the former article on the book of Daniel by John Whitcomb, which gave a clear
premillennial explanation, has been replaced by one written by Joyce Baldwin which, though giving useful historical and literary information, is not as clear concerning eschatology.

*New Bible Dictionary: Third Edition* is a welcome tool for the Bible student. It is the best evangelical one-volume Bible dictionary available. However, for those who own either the first or second editions, there is not enough “new” material in this new edition to warrant its purchase.