THE MASTER’S SEMINARY JOURNAL

CONTENTS

Editorial ................................................................................. 1–4
Richard L. Mayhue

Have They Found a Better Way? An Analysis of Gentry and Wellum’s, Kingdom through Covenant ........................................ 5–24
Michael J. Vlach

Three Searches for the “Historical Jesus” but No Biblical Christ (Part 2): Evangelical Participation in the Search for the “Historical Jesus” ........................................... 25–67
F. David Farnell

Did God Fulfill Every Good Promise? Toward a Biblical Understanding of Joshua 21:43–45 (Part 2) ................................. 69–96
Gregory H. Harris

Repentance Found? The Concept of Repentance in the Fourth Gospel ...... 97–123
David A. Croteau

The Question of Application in Preaching: The Sermon on the Mount as a Test Case ........................................... 125–136
Bruce W. Alvord

Reviews ................................................................................ 137–177

J. Andrew Dearman
The Book of Hosea ............................................................. 137–138
Reviewed by Irvin A. Busenitz

Gregg L. Frazer
The Religious Beliefs of America’s Founders: Reason, Revelation, and Revolution ........................................... 138–141
Reviewed by Dennis M. Swanson

Mark D. Futato and George M. Schwab
The Book of Psalms, The Book of Proverbs ............................. 141–143
Reviewed by William D. Barrick

Donald W. Hagner.
Reviewed by F. David Farnell
Greg Heisler  
*Spirit-Led Preaching: The Holy Spirit’s Role in Sermon Preparation and Delivery*  
Reviewed by Jeff Crotts  
147–149

James K. Hoffmeier and Dennis R. Magary, eds.  
*Do Historical Matters Matter To Faith? A Critical Appraisal of Modern and Post Modern Approaches to Scripture*  
Reviewed by F. David Farnell  
149–157

Andreas J. Köstenberger and L. Scott Kellum, and Charles M. Quarles  
*The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown: An Introduction to the New Testament*  
Reviewed by Keith Essex  
158–159

Michael J. McClymond and Gerald R. McDermott  
*The Theology of Jonathan Edwards*  
Reviewed by Jonathan Moorhead  
159–161

Martin McNamara  
*Targum and Testament Revisited: Aramaic Paraphrases of the Hebrew Bible*  
Reviewed by William D. Barrick  
161–163

David G. Peterson  
*The Acts of the Apostles*  
Reviewed by Keith Essex  
163–165

Andreas Schuele  
*An Introduction to Biblical Aramaic*  
Reviewed by William D. Barrick  
165–166

Marion Ann Taylor (editor)  
*Handbook of Women Biblical Interpreters: A Historical and Biographical Guide*  
Reviewed by Dennis M. Swanson  
166–168

Peter T. Vogt  
*Interpreting the Pentateuch: An Exegetical Handbook*  
Reviewed by William D. Barrick  
168–170

Daniel B. Wallace, ed.  
*Revisiting the Corruption of the New Testament: Manuscript, Patristic and Apocryphal Evidence*  
Reviewed by Kelly T. Osborne  
171–177
Avoiding the Unavoidable: Protecting the Master’s Seminary for Future Generations

You “have kept My Word, and have not denied My name.” When the church in Philadelphia heard this commendation from the Lord Jesus (Rev 3:8), I can only imagine how thrilling it must have been for this small band of believers. Yet they were the exception to the rule. In Christ’s messages to seven churches in Revelation 2–3, five receive strong rebukes. Ephesus forgot their love for Christ. Pergamum entertained false teaching. Thyatira tolerated sin. Sardis was spiritually dead. Laodicea became self-righteous.

I remember my favorite professor, Dr. John Whitcomb, being concerned about the future of the seminary that I attended. He sent me an article recalling the first graduate seminary in America, Andover (now Andover Newton). Begun in 1807 as a beacon of doctrinally sound pastoral training, Andover produced graduates like Adoniram Judson, the nineteenth-century missionary whom God used mightily to preach the gospel in Myanmar (Burma). Andover long ago began abandoning the Christian faith, and just this year formed a sweeping interfaith education program, offering training in multiple religions. In fact, their student body now represents over thirty different faiths.

This is a sobering thought as we look to protect the future integrity of The Master’s Seminary. Seminaries are almost unavoidably corrupted by doctrinal error and sin within several generations. Given the bleak forecast from history, our challenge is to obey Christ’s command to Philadelphia, “I am coming quickly; hold fast to what you have.” The mission is clear: Avoid the unavoidable.

The life-expectancy of integrity in Bible-believing seminaries is usually brief, so we have given great thought for years as to what might threaten The Master’s Seminary. What flaming arrows in his packed arsenal will Satan try to use? With Scripture guiding us, we have identified (a) two broad threats, (b) six examples of specific threats, (c) ten specific shields of protection, and (d) one shield of shields.

Knowing Satan’s ploys from Scripture, I’ve asked myself, “If I were Satan, how would I try to ruin The Master’s Seminary?”

Overall, I would bring two broad, deviously subtle threats. I would try to slowly change the mission and the doctrine of TMS. I would create tiny fissures and
weaknesses, so imperceptible that they would cause no alarm. After a sufficiently weakened structure, then would I launch a bold offensive to detonate one fatal explosion.

If I were Satan, what specific threats would I slowly introduce? First, I would encourage hiring the wrong faculty. History shows that one wrong faculty member can lead to the eventual demise of a seminary by his subtle altering of the seminary’s mission.

Second, I would encourage neglecting commitment to the local church. TMS exists to serve the church by training qualified shepherds. Once we forget our dedication to Christ’s bride, we become a self-serving institution instead of an instrument in the hands of God to bless His people.

Third, I would encourage neglecting finances. As a 40-year student of seminary history, the foot-high stack of articles in my office proves that a seminary’s approach to money has staggering implications. The Master’s Seminary is a spiritual enterprise, but pragmatically fueled by finances. Economic pressure can tempt a seminary to slide down the icy slope of increasing enrollment at all costs. Typically, this includes relaxing doctrinal standards, lowering admission requirements, accepting unsaved students, and broadening degree programs to widen overall marketing appeal. For the sake of money, the seminary abandons its roots.

Fourth, if I were Satan, I would erode a focused curriculum. The curriculum at TMS, designed to mold Bible expositors and shepherds, is the expression of our mission. As Andover has done, I would replace Hermeneutics, Greek, Hebrew, Apologetics, and Evangelism with World Religions, Interfaith Engagement, The Arts, and Ethics in Society.

Fifth, I would distract the board of directors, the leadership, and the faculty away from the importance of vibrant relationships with one another. While love for God, the Scriptures, and the church motivates these men, it is their love for each other that provides encouragement and accountability.

Finally, if I were Satan and wanted to ruin TMS, I would overemphasize the intellectual and undermine the spiritual. Devotion to God would become devotion to research. Vast numbers of self-labeled evangelical seminaries have venerated scholarship ahead of the “simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ” (2 Cor 11:3). Scholarship is a vital tool, but not the goal. The goal is to love and obey God more fully in order to be equipped to shepherd others into Christ-likeness.

Clearly, Satan has formidable weapons. Seeing history’s poor record, we could embrace an Elijah complex and simply give up. Or we could conclude that TMS has arrived as the best seminary ever, thus testing the Lord by taking human credit. With either extreme, God could easily snatch away His abundant grace that He has bestowed upon us.

We have a solemn responsibility to protect The Master’s Seminary, which I take extremely seriously and personally. We have identified ten shields that serve in harmony to defend the Lord’s work here. We can hope that if the enemy makes a massive attack, all ten would be employed, particularly if it seemed that the seminary was retreating in mission and doctrine.
The first shield involves the history, mission statement, and doctrinal statement of TMS. We have a founding mission, and we have an extensive doctrinal statement. These are the metrics, the benchmarks by which we evaluate ourselves. Each year we ask, “Is our core mission and doctrine today what it was when we started?” We also scrutinize possible changes to make us more biblical and help us more effectively carry out our fundamental purpose.

The second shield is the Board of Directors for The Master’s College and Seminary. Comprised of godly men in ministry and business, they sign annual statements of agreement with the mission and doctrine of TMS. They are passionate about the Lord’s work and will faithfully guard our integrity.

The third shield is the current faculty and leadership. Our president, John MacArthur, is passionate for the long-range consistency of The Master’s Seminary. Our faculty is charged with the careful and prayer-filled protection of TMS. As an officer in the United States Navy, I learned a simple axiom: If you are in charge, you are responsible. You are accountable. And now, as the dean at TMS, I apply the same lesson. I not only adhere to the classic motto, “Not on my watch,” but hope to build enough strength and protection into the seminary that will serve future deans well. Then I would prayerfully add, “Not after my watch either.”

The fourth shield is our former faculty. Now in our 25th year, we are just at the point where we have faculty members who have either moved into a new ministry or retired, but maintain commitment to The Master’s Seminary. If they saw an actual breach of uprightness, I think they would unite with the board, faculty, and leadership in addressing this.

Possibly the most vital defense, the fifth shield, is careful new faculty hiring. History demonstrates that one wrong man will, often sooner than later, disrupt the classroom and the faculty. Since the beginning, we have utilized an extensive screening process. Prior to an invitation to visit, the candidate is reviewed thoroughly. When invited to visit, he stays for a week or longer, giving us ample opportunity to get to know him, his wife, his doctrine, and his giftedness. He may be a good guy, but not right for TMS or not at this time. Or he may be a wolf in sheep’s clothing and not good for TMS at any time. Consequently, to hire a new faculty member, we must have the agreement of the entire faculty, leadership, and board. This serves us well now and in the future, and serves the candidate well whether hired or not.

The sixth formidable shield is our alumni. The vast majority of over 1,100 graduates stay well-connected to the seminary. They stay in contact with faculty, receive the Journal, support us financially, attend the Shepherds’ Conference, and return to preach in chapel. They are a tight group of guys, staying in close contact with each other, whether here in America or overseas. If TMS were to deviate from our mission or doctrine, the response of this army of God’s men would be astounding.

Similarly, the seventh shield is our current student body. Our students came to TMS to learn under the faculty’s unified doctrinal stands, so I am certain that if one of our faculty said something in class even remotely off-base, such as suggesting
that Jesus was not fully God and fully man concurrently, I would have a line of students at my door the minute class dismissed.

The eighth shield involves our supporters and donors, standing almost 15,000 strong. We have deep affection for their ministry to us. Although most are not intimately acquainted with the daily operation of the seminary, our major donors have a highly keen interest. These men, having worked hard for a lifetime and sacrificially given generously to TMS, are wise stewards of wealth and want to see a return on their investment. They want to see doctrinally sound men of God trained to rise to the challenge of ministry. We love all our supporters, but we particularly try to stay close to those who make such deep sacrifices to help us keep tuition down and pay decent salaries to our staff and faculty. We want to bless them with good reports of God’s work even as they bless us by holding us accountable to our mission.

The ninth shield is Grace Community Church. As I look out my office window, I see the campus of our first and dearest partner in ministry. The elders and thousands of worshippers at Grace Church stand as sentinels over TMS, having been invested since day one. Each May we hold graduation in the worship center. Though graduation almost always falls on Mother’s Day, it is invariably packed with thousands of members and all the elders of Grace Community Church, in addition to the families of the graduates. Grace Church members have loved our students, being actively involved in their lives in countless ways. And since the doctrinal statements of the church and seminary are the same, we are bound together in love and belief.

Finally, keeping a watchful eye is the shield of Grace to You. The GTY leadership is very concerned with perpetuating the ministry and Bible teaching of John MacArthur, which is doctrinally what we teach at TMS. If it looks like we are going off-track, they will certainly ask tough questions and get involved with correcting the course.

While these ten shields are effective, the overarching shield of shields is prayer: humble, constant, grateful, faith-filled, God-centered prayer. John MacArthur writes in his book, *Lord, Teach Me to Pray*, “Believers are in a spiritual war, and we ought to be praying constantly for victory.” Our faculty gathers regularly to intercede on behalf of TMS. Many of our students gather twice weekly to pray for the seminary and for one another at our Associated Student Body prayer time. We cherish the faithful prayers of you, our faithful friends and supporters. Yes, we have thought carefully about the possible threats to TMS and our defenses, but it is only the merciful power of God, sought in prayer, that neutralizes the threats and empowers the defenses.

Can we avoid the unavoidable? Philadelphia is proof that by God’s grace and our faithfulness, we can. Our president, our board, our leadership, our faculty, our alumni, our students, and I have a common yearning: to stand with Philadelphia and hear from our King, “You have kept My Word and have not denied My name.”

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HAVE THEY FOUND A BETTER WAY?
AN ANALYSIS OF GENTRY AND WELLUM’S,
KINGDOM THROUGH COVENANT

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In their book, Kingdom through Covenant, authors Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum offer what they consider to be a better approach for understanding God’s purposes than either dispensationalism or covenant theology. The purpose of this article is to give a critical review of their book, pointing out various strengths and weaknesses. While there is good information in the book about the biblical covenants, misunderstandings about typology and the role of Israel in God’s plans hinder the book from offering a better alternative than dispensationalism.

* * * * *

Introduction

Is there a better theological path than the ones given by dispensationalism and covenant theology? Two professors at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary believe there is. They offer an attempt at a via media or middle-road approach in their 2012 book, Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants.¹ The authors are Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum. Gentry is professor of Old Testament. Wellum is professor of Christian theology. The purpose of this article is to offer a critical review of the book. Since I am writing from a dispensational perspective, much of the analysis will focus on how the book’s contents relate to dispensationalism. In sum, I will argue that the authors have offered some good insights on the biblical covenants, but their understanding of how these covenants relate to the Bible’s storyline is insufficient

¹ Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012).
in some important areas. My main areas of disagreement will be in regard to their understanding of typology and how they view Jesus’ relationship with Israel. I also do not think that the authors understand the significance of nations in the eschaton as a result of Jesus’ coming. Thus, their proposal is not more accurate than that offered by dispensationalism.

Summary of the Book

The authors state in their weighty 848-page book that their purpose is twofold. First they “want to show how central the concept of ‘covenant’ is to the narrative plot structure of the Bible.” Second, they desire to demonstrate “how a number of crucial theological differences within Christian theology, and the resolution of those differences, are directly tied to one’s understanding of how the biblical covenants unfold and relate to each other.” In doing so the authors are not claiming that the covenants are the center of biblical theology. But they do assert that “the covenants form the backbone of the metanarrative of Scripture.” Thus, putting the covenants together accurately is essential to understanding the whole counsel of God. They readily admit that “this is not a new insight” since “almost every variety of Christian theology admits that the biblical covenants establish a central framework that holds the story of the Bible together.”

But where the authors want to make a significant contribution is in regard to their understanding of how to “put together” the biblical covenants. They assert that both covenant theologians and dispensationalists have presented understandings of the covenants that “are not quite right” and “go awry at a number of points.” The authors want to present a via media—an alternative approach to covenant theology and dispensationalism that is not entirely dismissive of either but offers a better way. This middle path approach they identity as “progressive covenantalism” which is a species of “new covenant theology.”

What the authors claim is bold. Not only are they asserting that they have helpful insights in regard to the biblical covenants and the Bible’s storyline, they are claiming to offer a better approach than the two dominant evangelical systems. An ambitious task indeed! Gentry and Wellum are respectful of these rival positions. And they are not dismissing all aspects of either covenant theology or dispensationalism. In fact, the authors believe these traditions offer good insights at times. Gentry and Wellum believe that covenant theologians are in error for holding that the genealogical principle of “to you and your children” in the Abrahamic

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2 Ibid., 21.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.
5 Ibid., 22.
6 Ibid., 23.
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid., 37.
9 Ibid., 23.
10 Ibid., 24.
covenant is still in effect today for the church. For the authors, this wrongly leads to accepting infant baptism as entrance into the new covenant and the church. But according to the writers, who are Baptists, the genealogical principle has changed with Christ and there is no biblical basis for infant baptism.

On the other hand, the authors say that dispensationalism makes a significant error by holding that the land promises of the Abrahamic covenant are still in force for national Israel. They say that dispensationalists do not rightly grasp that the land is fulfilled in Christ and is typical of the coming new creation. Thus, there will be no literal fulfillment of land for national Israel.

The authors believe irony exists in that both covenant theologians and dispensational theologians adopt a similar hermeneutic at times by relying on too much continuity with the Abrahamic covenant and not taking into consideration the implications of typology as they relate to Christ and the new covenant. Thus, both sides, allegedly, are not seeing the proper typological connections, although they err in different areas—covenant theologians with the genealogical principle and dispensationalists with the land.

The book consists of seventeen chapters that are divided into three parts. Part One is “Prolegomena.” The three chapters in this section are written by Wellum and cover: (1) The Importance of Covenants in Biblical and Systematic Theology; (2) Covenants in Biblical-Theological Systems: Dispensational and Covenant Theology; and (3) Hermeneutical Issues in “Putting Together” the Covenants.

Part Two is “Exposition of the Biblical Covenants” and is written by Gentry. These twelve chapters, according to the authors, are the heart of the book and the framework for their main argument. Together they address the major covenants of the Bible, including the Adamic/Creation covenant along with the Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic, and new covenants. The section ends with some discussion on speaking the truth in love based on Eph 4:15. Part Three is written by Wellum and consists of two chapters dealing with a biblical and theological summary, and theological implications in regard to the “Kingdom through Covenant” concept. There is also an appendix on berit (“covenant”).

The main argument of the book runs through the framework of the six covenants mentioned in Part Two. What follows is a brief attempt at summarizing some of their conclusions about the covenants.

Adamic Covenant

First, for the authors, the Bible’s storyline begins with Adam and the Adamic covenant. Adam functions as the archetypal covenant partner and mediator between God and creation. Adam being the “image” of God pertains to Adam’s role as “servant-king” over God’s world. Being the “likeness” of God emphasizes Adam’s relationship to God as a son. In sum, the “likeness” concept emphasizes man’s relationship to God while “image” focuses on man’s relationship to creation. The

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Garden of Eden was the place where Adam and God dwelled together and it functioned as an archetypal sacred place or sanctuary. Adam’s role was to rule and subdue the earth and thus expand the sacred space throughout God’s creation. With his sin and fall, though, Adam (as representative of mankind) failed in the mission given to him by God.

Noahic Covenant

With man’s failure of the Adamic covenant, God started afresh with a new Adam—Noah. To him the Noahic covenant was given. This Noahic covenant was not a brand new covenant but a continuation in some ways of the creation covenant made with Adam. As a second Adam, Noah was to succeed where Adam failed. But he did not succeed. With the account of Noah’s drunkenness in Genesis 9, Noah, like Adam, “is also a disobedient son whose sin results in shameful nakedness.”

Thus, “the family of Noah ends up in the same chaos and corruption as the family of the first Adam.” So not only did the first Adam fail, the second Adam, Noah, failed as well. The search for a faithful covenant adherent continues.

Abrahamic Covenant

God then starts fresh again with Abraham who is then given the commission that was first mandated to Adam and then Noah. As Gentry puts it, “God intends to establish his rule over all creation through his relationship with Abram and his family: kingdom through covenant.”

Through Abram and his descendants “the broken relationship between God and all the nations of the world will be reconciled and healed” (245). The land promised to Abraham is to function as a new Eden.

Mosaic Covenant

Through Abraham, the nation Israel picks up the mantle of new Adam. Israel was to be the mediator between God and the world: “Israel is also a vehicle for bringing the nations to the divine presence and rule.” Israel’s tabernacle “is also a replica of the garden of Eden and a representation of the universe.” This means that “just as Adam was to fulfill his mandate by devoting himself to worship as a priest in the garden sanctuary, so Israel as a new Adam is to fulfill her mandate by devoting herself to worship as a priest in the tabernacle and later the temple.”

12 Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 170. Italics are in the original.
13 Ibid., 247.
14 Ibid., 245.
15 Ibid., 322.
16 Ibid.
17 Ibid.
Dvidic Covenant

The next new Adam was David via Abraham and Israel. Like Adam, David is God’s son and like Adam, David was to mediate God’s blessings on a universal scale. The Davidic covenant which was given to him had the purpose of being “the instruction for humanity” (2 Sam 7:19), indicating that the covenant’s aim was universal blessing. Yet the record shows that both David and his descendants were sinful and failed.

New Covenant

With the new covenant, the baton of “new Adam” is then passed to the Davidic Messiah who we now know as Jesus. He is the one who restores Israel for the good of the world. While all of the other “Adams” failed—Adam, Noah, Abraham, Israel, and David—Jesus the Davidic Messiah succeeds.

Thus, the authors see the kingdom being carried out through six biblical covenants. With each covenant there is a representative who functions as an “Adam” figure. Yet these covenants and Adam figures point ultimately to Jesus and the new covenant. And with the coming of Jesus some of the promises and expectations of the previous covenants are transcended. The authors believe that both covenant theology and dispensationalism miss some of the changes that have occurred because of the coming of Jesus and the new covenant. Covenant theologians err on the genealogical principle and view too much continuity between circumcision for Israel and infant baptism for the church. On the other hand, dispensationalists are wrong for seeing the land promises as still being in effect for national Israel. It is from this framework that Gentry and Wellum present their via media approach and contrast it with that of covenant theology and dispensationalism.

Areas of Appreciation

As will become evident, I have disagreements with some key points of the book. But before delving into those I want to highlight some commendable features. This is a serious work written by two fine scholars and is worthy of consideration. The authors have an unwavering commitment to God and the authority of Scripture. Gentry’s chapters on the biblical covenants in the Old Testament are full of helpful information and reveal the result of years of fruitful study. Wellum’s interactions with dispensationalism and covenant theology are mostly well done. The tone of the authors was respectful of both covenant theologians and dispensationalists. They are also correct that when it comes to “a basic understanding of the gospel” both covenant and dispensational theologians “agree more than they disagree.” I also appreciated how the authors at times quoted representatives from the opposing camps favorably. Both Michael Horton (a

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18 Ibid., 399.
19 Ibid., 39.
covenant theologian) and John Feinberg (a dispensational theologian) were noted as making good points. This shows the ability of the authors to interact with others on the merits of their arguments.

As a dispensationalist, I also was pleased to see the authors interact with John Feinberg’s explanation of dispensationalism from Feinberg’s chapter, “Systems of Discontinuity” in the book *Continuity and Discontinuity*. This chapter appeared in 1988, but most books critical of dispensationalism after this date have ignored Feinberg’s contributions, which offer a formidable defense of the dispensational perspective. The fact that the authors were willing to interact with Feinberg shows their desire to interact with real issues and not straw man presentations which often characterize books critical of dispensationalism.

Then in regard to content, I agree with the authors on a major point that “covenant” and the progression of the covenants form the framework of the Bible’s storyline and that a proper understanding of the covenants is the way to understand God’s kingdom purposes. My own view is that “kingdom” is the theme of Scripture, and I agree that the covenants are the vehicle through which the kingdom program is carried out. Thus, the “kingdom through covenant” concept has merit. This does not mean that I always agree with how they understand the covenants or the kingdom of God, but I do agree that biblical covenants are the framework for understanding God’s kingdom program.

I also found myself in hearty agreement with the authors’ affirmation of believer’s baptism and their stance that covenant theology is in error for supporting infant baptism. Of all the issues discussed in the book, I think this is the one with the most importance since it influences how we view the church and who is in it. The new covenant ministry of the Holy Spirit applies only to those who have consciously placed their faith in Jesus, and baptism is the proper response for those who have made this commitment.

Now at this point I will discuss some differences I have with the book. The first is a structural issue. Then this is followed by key theological differences.

**Structural Issue: Where Is the New Testament?**

My first criticism involves the structure of the book. The authors present their approach as a whole-Bible approach that is better than covenant theology and dispensationalism. But surprisingly there is very little discussion of key New Testament passages other than one chapter devoted to Ephesians 4, which seems somewhat arbitrary and does not seem to help their argument. While reading, I kept wondering, “When are they going to deal with NT texts?” But the New Testament discussion did not come, even in regard to significant New Testament passages dealing with the covenants. If one skims the Scripture Index at the back of the book one will see references to New Testament verses, but significant treatment of key passages is critically lacking. The issue is not just with a verse here or there, but

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major sections that go with little or no comment. Key passages that are not adequately discussed include Matthew 24–25; Luke 1–2; and Acts 1–3, etc. There is very little discussion of Romans 9–11 and no treatment of the key millennial passage of Revelation 19–20. My perception is not alone. In his review of *Kingdom through Covenant*, New Testament scholar Douglas Moo expressed his bewilderment at the lack of NT discussion:

> Yet, at the risk of exposing my own disciplinary prejudice, I’m puzzled at the lack of any sustained exegetical argument for the point from the New Testament (NT). To be sure, the authors appeal to NT texts in the course of their discussion of the OT covenants, but there is little if any exegesis and a distressing lack of recognition of alternative viewpoints and of bibliography. The one sustained NT chapter, on Ephesians 4–6, contributes little to the key argument, while critical NT texts about “covenant” or “law” are only briefly mentioned.

Likewise Darrell Bock made a similar point about the book when he said, “it is amazing to see no detailed treatment of Romans 9–11 or how Israel is seen in several texts within Luke–Acts. These texts depict the role of Israel in the New Testament and in light of new creation realities.”

This lack of New Testament treatment is a structural flaw and hinders the book’s attempt to offer an approach that is better than that of covenant theology and dispensationalism. The book has an Old Testament scholar in Gentry who makes detailed points from the Old Testament, and a theologian in Wellum, who is making big-picture theological statements and comparisons with covenant theology and dispensationalism. But the presence of a comparable New Testament influence would have given the book a much-needed symmetry.

This lack of New Testament interaction is glaring when it comes to New Testament references to the biblical covenants. It would be helpful to see how the authors address New Testament passages that refer to the biblical covenants. In Luke 1:32–33 the angel Gabriel told Mary that Jesus’ coming is linked with the Davidic covenant and a kingdom reign over national Israel. Under the influence of

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21 Douglas Moo, “Kingdom through Covenant: A Review by Douglas Moo,” [http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/tgc/2012/09/12/kingdom-through-covenant-a-review-by-douglas-moo/](http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/tgc/2012/09/12/kingdom-through-covenant-a-review-by-douglas-moo/) (accessed January 9, 2013). In response to Moo, the authors made a defense for the lack of New Testament discussion by offering three reasons: “(1) We wanted to deal thoroughly with the NT, but this would require another big book, as can be seen from the works of Beale and Hahn, which focus largely on the NT; (2) in circles of thought somewhat similar to our own, the OT is often neglected or people are relying upon exegesis that already assumes a specific theological system; (3) only when we correctly construct the OT scaffolding can we rightly understand what Paul is doing in Romans 9–11 and other NT texts.” “Kingdom through Covenant’ Authors Respond to Bock, Moo, Horton.” These answers are not sufficient in our view. Offering a big-picture storyline of the Bible in a way that is better than other whole-Bible storylines requires New Testament interaction. It may appear to some that the authors believe they did such a good job with the Old Testament that there is no need to address the New Testament.

the Holy Spirit, Zacharias referred to both the Davidic and Abrahamic covenants as evidence that Israel would be saved and rescued from her enemies (see Luke 1:67–74). In Rom 9:4 Paul says that the “covenants” still belong to Israel even though Israel as a whole is in a current state of unbelief. In Acts 3:25 Peter tells the leaders of Israel that they are still “sons of the prophets and of the covenant” that God made with their fathers and Abraham. In addition, isn’t it significant that Paul appeals to Isa 59:21, a new covenant passage, as support for his claim that all Israel will be saved (Rom 11:26–27)? This seems to link the new covenant with national Israel’s salvation. But since the book does not address major sections of the New Testament, including those that refer to the biblical covenants, the book leaves many important issues uncovered and is vulnerable to those who appeal to New Testament passages for support of their view.  

Theological Issues

Israel, the Land, and Typology

Now I want to focus on four key theological issues related to the book where I have important differences with the authors: (1) Israel, the land, and typology; (2) Jesus’ relationship to Israel; (3) Israel, Gentiles, and the people of God; and (4) the Old Testament expectation.

At the heart of Gentry and Wellum’s disagreement with dispensationalism is dispensationalism’s position on Israel and the land. Dispensationalists assert that both Israel and Israel’s land have future significance in God’s plans. This is because God’s plan to restore all things involves nations and the restoration of nations (Isa 2:2–4). The ultimate Israelite, Jesus the Messiah, uses the nation Israel as a platform to bless the other nations of the earth as God deals with nations as national entities. Israel failed her mission in the Old Testament, but under her Messiah, Israel is enabled to minister to the nations at His return. But according to Gentry and Wellum, dispensationalism errs in regard to Israel and her land by not understanding how these issues relate to Christ in the realm of typology. They state:

In the case of dispensational theology, if they viewed as typological both the land of Israel and the nation itself, then their view, at its core, would no longer be valid. Why? For the reason that the land promise would not require a

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23 I think Bock makes a legitimate point that a major passage such as Romans 9–11 needs treatment. Interestingly, in response to Bock’s point that Gentry and Wellum do not deal with Romans 9–11 and Luke–Acts, the authors responded, “The metanarrative we bring to these texts determines our exegetical outcomes, and we are questioning DT’s storyline.” See Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, “Kingdom through Covenant’ Authors Respond to Bock, Moo, Horton. http://thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/tgc/2012/09/20/gentry-and-wellum-respond-to-kingdom-through-covenant-reviews/ (Accessed October 3, 2012). This is not a helpful response in my opinion. It seems that the authors are claiming that the metanarrative they have supposedly discovered makes Bock’s challenge irrelevant. Bock wants to challenge their metanarrative with a major portion of Scripture, but the authors seem to claim that this is not necessary, because Romans 9–11 must align with the metanarrative they have allegedly established so why even deal with Bock’s challenge. But what if a proper exegesis of Romans 9–11 contradicts the authors’ metanarrative?
future, “literal” fulfillment in the millennial age; the land itself is a type and pattern of Eden and thus the entire creation, which reaches its fulfillment in the dawning of a new creation. Christ, then, as the antitype of Israel, receives the land promise and fulfills it by his inauguration of a new covenant which is organically linked to the new creation.24

The authors also say:

In other words, “land,” when placed within the biblical covenants and viewed diachronically, was intended by God to function as a “type” or “pattern” of something greater, i.e. creation, which is precisely how it is understood in light of the coming of Christ and the inauguration of the new covenant.25

According to the authors, Jesus is the “antitype” of Israel who fulfills both Israel and Israel’s land. Since Jesus is the fulfillment of Israel and the land, dispensationalists err in expecting future significance for Israel and the land. Typology, then, is at the heart of the difference between dispensationalism and the approach offered by Gentry and Wellum. This argument from typology against dispensationalism is not new and has been used often by covenant theologians and others who disagree with dispensational theology.

But it is on this issue of typology in regard to Israel that I think dispensationalism has a significant edge. The theory that Israel and the land are no longer significant because of Jesus is refuted by explicit texts in the New Testament that show the future significance of Israel. If Gentry and Wellum are correct, then the New Testament should not speak of a future for national Israel after Jesus comes on the scene. But it does.

For instance, when Peter asked Jesus about future rewards Jesus responded by saying, “Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Matt 19:28). Here Jesus is referring to the relevance of Israel in the eschaton. When the renewal of the cosmos (“regeneration”) occurs and Jesus sits on His glorious throne (i.e. Davidic throne), the restored twelve tribes of Israel will be ruled by the twelve apostles. In this case the ultimate Israelite, Jesus, predicts a future existence for the tribes of Israel. But if Israel has been transcended into Jesus, this text would make no sense since it would be asserting that the twelve apostles would have positions of authority over Jesus.

Other such examples abound. With Luke 22:30 at the Last Supper, Jesus again tells the disciples that they will be “judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” Also, on the day of Ascension, after forty days of instruction about the kingdom from Jesus (see Acts 1:3), the disciples asked, “Lord, is it at this time you are restoring the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6). This shows how the apostles understood the nature of the kingdom after forty days of kingdom instruction from Jesus. As apostles of the ultimate Israelite, Jesus, they believed there was a future for the nation Israel or

24 Gentry and Wellum, Kingdom through Covenant, 122.
25 Ibid., 706.
they would not have asked the question. Jesus does not say they are wrong in their expectation, nor does He say, “Don’t you get it? I am the true Israel! Why are you talking about the nation Israel?” Jesus does not contradict their view but tells them that the timing of the restoration of the kingdom to Israel is not for them to know (Acts 1:7). This offers evidence that Israel is significant as an entity after the arrival of Jesus.

Even in a state of unbelief after the era of the church has begun, Paul explicitly affirms that the “covenants,” “temple service,” and “promises” still “belong(s)” (present tense) to Israel (Rom 9:4–5). Romans 11 affirms a future for Israel by declaring that after the time of the fullness of the Gentiles, “All Israel will be saved” (see Rom 11:25–26). Other passages like Acts 3:19–21 also speak of a future for Israel. So Jesus and the New Testament writers affirm a future for the nation. Also, the perpetuity of Israel specifically as a nation is affirmed in Jer 31:35–37, a key new covenant passage:

Thus says the LORD,
Who gives the sun for light by day
And the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night,
Who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar;
The LORD of hosts is His name:
“If this fixed order departs
From before Me,” declares the LORD,
“Then the offspring of Israel also will cease
From being a nation before Me forever.”
Thus says the LORD,
“If the heavens above can be measured
And the foundations of the earth searched out below,
Then I will also cast off all the offspring of Israel
For all that they have done,” declares the LORD.

God explicitly links Israel’s existence as a nation with the functioning of the cosmic bodies as part of His new covenant promises. What stronger language could God use to convey His commitment to Israel as a nation?

Gentry and Wellum’s theory of Israel’s land being transcended into Jesus in a type/antitype relationship does not work. In His Olivet Discourse, Jesus gives prophetic significance to the land of Israel. Those who are in Judea are told to flee as a result of the Abomination of Desolation spoken by Daniel (see Matt 24:15ff.). The trampling of Jerusalem by Gentiles is said to be limited “until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled” (Luke 21:24). The word “until” means that Jerusalem’s fortunes will be reversed. In 2 Thessalonians 2 Paul predicts that a coming “man of lawlessness” would enter the temple of God which must be a temple located in Jerusalem (see Rev 11:1–2). In addition, since Israel and its land are so closely connected, if it can be proven that Israel has future significance, this means the land has significance since a nation must have a geographical location from which to operate.
Not only do early portions of the Old Testament predict a future significance for Israel and the land after a time of judgment and dispersion (see Deut 30:1–6), the prophets of the OT continue to give prophetic significance to Israel and the land. The land is affirmed in Jer 16:14–15:

“Therefore behold, days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when it will no longer be said, ‘As the LORD lives, who brought up the sons of Israel out of the land of Egypt,’ but, ‘As the LORD lives, who brought up the sons of Israel from the land of the north and from all the countries where He had banished them.’ For I will restore them to their own land which I gave to their fathers.”

Notice here that God still intends to fulfill the land promise to Israel based on His promise to Israel’s fathers. Even the “new covenant” sections of Jeremiah affirm the land promise to Israel. Jeremiah 30:3 states that “days are coming” when the Lord will “restores the fortunes” of “Israel and Judah” with the result that God will “bring them back to the land” that He “gave to their forefathers.” The “city [Jerusalem] shall be rebuilt” (Jer 31:38). God “will faithfully plant them in this land” (Jer 32:41). I find these references highly significant since the new covenant itself on multiple occasions affirm Israel’s relationship to the land of promise. The new covenant is not evidence against the land for Israel, it is evidence for it.

Very late in the Old Testament story, Zechariah 14 indicates that the Lord will return to the Mount of Olives to deliver Jerusalem and begin His kingdom reign over the nations from Jerusalem (Zech 14:1–9). So even with the later prophets the promise of the land to Israel is affirmed. If God intended for the earlier discussion of the land in Genesis to be typical, this is not evident from the prophets who keep emphasizing the importance of Israel’s land.

Nor can it be rightly argued that since the Abrahamic covenant has an “international purpose” to it that this means there are textual clues that one should not expect a future land fulfillment with Israel. These are not mutually exclusive concepts. It is not the case that God promises land but then embeds language to indicate that it’s not really about land or that this land is just typical of something else. If one views Israel’s promised land as a “microcosm” of what God will do for all the nations, then why can’t there be a literal fulfillment of land for Israel? God can bless both Israel as a nation and the international community. This does not have to be an either/or proposition; it is both/and. What God will do for Israel is a microcosm of what He will eventually do for nations on an international scale. Since the beginning of the Abrahamic covenant, Israel was intended to be a vehicle for blessings to the Gentiles (see Gen 12:2–3). Israel failed that mission in the Old Testament, but Israel’s Head, Jesus the Messiah, is able to restore the nation and

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26 Emphases are mine.
27 In a response article the authors made the statement, “especially in the prophets, the land is viewed as a type that looks back to Eden and forward to the new creation.” “Kingdom through Covenant’ Authors Respond to Bock, Moo, Horton.” But I don’t think this was proven. The land promises of Genesis are affirmed. They are not viewed typologically.
28 The authors appear to make this point on pages 707–09.
use the nation to bring blessings to the other nations of the earth—blessings that are spiritual and physical. Thus, God’s plans are national (Israel), but the nation is an instrument to bring international blessings.

This is a case where I think explicit Bible texts trump a theory of typology in regard to Israel. To clarify, this is not an issue of whether types exist or not. Dispensationalists affirm that types exist in the Bible. And as a dispensationalist, I affirm that events in Israel’s history correspond to Jesus. So this is not about whether one believes in types or typological connections. It has more to do with what are legitimate types and what are the implications if a typological connection exists.

The dispensational view is that Jesus is coming again to rule and bless the nations of the earth (see Psalm 2; 110; Rev 2:26–27). The land of Israel, with Jerusalem as its capital, will function as the headquarters of Jesus’ international reign (see Zech 14:9). Both the Old Testament (Isa 19:24–25; Zechariah 14) and the New Testament (Rev 2:26–27; 21:21, 24; 22:2) affirm the presence of plural nations in the eschaton. So as God takes back this planet for His purposes, Jesus will use a restored nation Israel, with its geographical boundaries, as a beachhead or platform to bless all the nations of the earth. This will occur in an intermediate kingdom as described in Rev 20:1–6, yet the interaction between God and the nations will continue on into the eternal state as well (see Rev 21:24, 26; 22:2).

That the nation Israel has influence both now and in the future is also affirmed in Romans 11. Here Paul is undeniably addressing the people of Israel as they currently stand in unbelief. Paul strongly declares that “God has not rejected His people, has He? May it never be!” (Rom 11:1). Then in Rom 11:11–12 Paul addresses both the current and future influence of Israel on the world. The current influence is found in Rom 11:11b: “But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles to make them jealous.” So Israel presently has an impact on Gentile salvation.

But next Paul discusses Israel’s future influence: “Now if their transgression is riches for the world and their failure is riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their fulfillment be!” (Rom 11:12). What Paul is saying is that Israel matters both now and in the future. His argument could be called the ‘lesser to the greater’ argument. In more informal terms I call this the “You ain’t seen nothin’ yet!” argument. If Israel’s current unbelief has brought blessings to the world in the present, just wait until the “fulfillment” takes place in the future. That will really be something! This fulfillment is linked with the salvation of “all Israel” at the coming of Jesus in Rom 11:26. What this passage shows is that Israel has not faded in significance. Israel is relevant now and in the future.

The authors appear to be working off a model of typology in which the arrival of an antitype must always mean the non-significance of a type. Thus, if it can be shown that there is a typological connection between Israel and Jesus, then Jesus assumes the identity of Israel so much that national Israel is no longer relevant as an entity in God’s plans. But while this ‘antitype negates type’ approach may apply in some cases, it does not work in regard to Israel and Jesus. This is not a case of an antitype swallowing up a type in significance but the Corporate Head (Jesus)
restoring the many (national Israel). This ties into the next point concerning the relationship of Jesus to Israel.

Jesus’ Relationship to Israel

I believe the book is off-key on the significance of Jesus’ relationship to Israel. I affirm with the authors that Jesus is identified with Israel, but I do not agree with the significance they give to this relationship. The authors appear to view the relationship in the sense of the type, Israel, being transcended by the greater antitype, Jesus. Since Jesus is the fulfillment of Israel, it is argued that there is no future significance for Israel as a nation. A better understanding, though, is to see the relationship between Jesus and Israel as that of corporate solidarity in which the One (Jesus the true Israelite) represents and restores the many (the nation Israel). 29

This corporate solidarity relationship between Jesus and Israel is revealed by typological connections such as those found in Hos 11:1/Matt 2:15 and Jer 31:15/Matt 2:17–18. In these cases events in Israel’s history correspond to events in Jesus’ life to show that Jesus is the true Servant of Israel. But these typological connections do not mean the non-significance of the nation Israel. Instead they show corporate solidarity between Jesus and Israel. For instance, Isa 49:3–6 highlights this understanding since it teaches the true Servant of Israel (Jesus) will “restore” the nation Israel with consequent blessings for the nations:

He says, “It is too small a thing that You should be My Servant
To raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the preserved ones of Israel;
I will also make You a light of the nations
So that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”

The concept of “servant,” which is sometimes used by Isaiah of Israel, is here used of the ultimate Servant, Jesus. But note that this “Servant,” who represents Israel, restores Israel and blesses the Gentiles. He does not make the people of Israel pass away in significance. Jesus does not absorb Israel; He restores Israel. Compare:

It is not:
Jesus’ identification with Israel means the non-significance of the nation Israel.

Instead:
Jesus’ identification with Israel means the restoration of the nation Israel.

29 Thus, typological connections such as those found in Hos 11:1/Matt 2:15 and Jer 31:15/Matt 2:17–18 show the relationship between Jesus and Israel.
Israel, Gentiles, and the People of God

Another disagreement I have is in regard to how Israel and the Gentiles relate as the people of God. Gentry and Wellum assert that the Old Testament prophets foretold that nations would be integrated into a transformed Israel. Thus, Israel is expanded to include believing Gentiles. They claim that passages like Isaiah 2, 19, 56 and Jeremiah 16 teach such a transformation of Israel. But these passages do not teach a transformed Israel. These passages teach that the people of God will be expanded to include believing Gentiles alongside Israel, but they do not teach that Israel has been expanded to include Gentiles. The ‘people of God’ is a broad concept that can encompass both believing Jews and Gentiles. Note Isa 19:24–25:

In that day Israel will be the third party with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, whom the LORD of hosts has blessed, saying, “Blessed is Egypt My people, and Assyria the work of My hands, and Israel My inheritance.”

Here terminology once used of Israel is now applied to Gentile nations. Egypt is called “My people.” Assyria is the “work” of God’s hands. Thus, the people of God concept is expanded to include Gentiles, so much so that language once used of Israel is now used of Gentile groups. Yet Israel still retains its identity as Israel—“Israel my inheritance.” Egypt and Assyria are not called “Israel.” Instead, they become the people of God alongside Israel who still retains her identity as Israel. Thus, there is unity in that the people of God includes believing Gentiles alongside Israel, yet there is still diversity in that Egypt is still Egypt, Assyria is still Assyria, and Israel is still Israel. Compare:

It is not:

Egypt and Assyria are morphed into a redefined Israel.

Instead:

Egypt and Assyria are incorporated into the people of God alongside Israel.

In Isa 2:2–4 the nations stream to Jerusalem to worship God but they do so as Gentile nations, not as part of a transformed Israel. A similar truth is found in Isaiah 56. Isaiah 56:3–8 indicates that foreigners will become God’s servants and will be brought to God’s mountain as the people of God, but this passage does not indicate that Gentiles become Israel. They participate with Israel in the people of God. Jeremiah 16:19 says that nations will come from the ends of the earth, but this in no way means Gentiles become Israel.

In sum, it seems that Gentry and Wellum interpret passages in which Gentiles are included in the people of God and participate in Israel’s land and temple as evidence that the concept of Israel has been transformed and that believing Gentiles

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30 Gentry and Wellum, “‘Kingdom through Covenant’ Authors Respond to Bock, Moo, Horton.”
are integrated into Israel. But this is going beyond what the texts are saying. The biblical evidence indicates that the prophets predicted that believing Gentiles would become the people of God as Gentiles alongside believing Israel (see Amos 9:11–15). This truth is affirmed in Eph 3:6 in which believing Jews and believing Gentiles are “fellow heirs,” “fellow members of the body,” and “fellow partakers of the promise.” Believing Gentiles participate with believing Jews as the people of God but are not incorporated into Israel. Note the following:

It is not:
Israel expands to include Gentiles.

Instead:
The people of God expands to include Gentiles alongside Israel.

The Old Testament Expectation

I also disagree with how the authors view the connection between the Old Testament expectation and New Testament fulfillment. They claim that “precisely because Jesus has fulfilled the Old Testament, there is also massive change or discontinuity from what has preceded, which entails that in Christ an incredible epochal shift in redemptive-history has occurred.” 31 They also go on to say that because of the coming of Christ and the inauguration of the entire new covenant age, “many of the themes that were basic to the Old Testament have now been transposed and transformed.” 32 Note the terminology in regard to how they view the transition from the Old Testament to the New Testament:

- “massive change”
- “discontinuity”
- “transposed”
- “transformed”

They then quote another author favorably who says, “Eschatology is thereby transformed.” 33

But I do not find such massive changes as the authors do. The New Testament on many occasions relies upon the eschatological expectations of the Old Testament. In addition to the reaffirmations of the significance of the nation Israel mentioned earlier, the concepts of temple and an antichrist figure found in passages such as Dan 9:24–27 still have eschatological significance in the New Testament. Paul tells of a coming “temple of God” that a “man of lawlessness” will occupy during the Day of the Lord (see 2 Thess 2:4). This evil person will attempt to display himself as God, yet his evil activity in the temple is met by the wrath of

31 Ibid., 598.
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid.
Jesus the Messiah who slays him (2:8). In addition, both the temple and city of Jerusalem are given future significance by John in Rev 11:1–2. Writing in the 90s, John spoke of a coming “temple of God” in the “holy city” of Jerusalem. The holy city is said to be tread under foot by the nations for “forty-two months” with the implication that after the forty-two months the city’s fortunes would be reversed in a positive manner. Even the time period of 42 months is consistent with the time period of Dan 9:27.

Jesus Himself gave prophetic significance to Jerusalem when He declared that “Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled” (Luke 21:24b). The key word “until” indicates that Jerusalem’s trampling by Gentiles will be reversed. Not only these, but Old Testament predictions of the Day of the Lord and its cosmic signs are reaffirmed in the New Testament (see Matt 24:29; 1 Thess 5:1–4; 2 Thess 2; 2 Pet 3:10–12). The judgment of Gentile nations that was predicted in Joel 3, is reaffirmed by Jesus in Matt 25:31–46. The following are other examples where Old Testament eschatology is reaffirmed in the New Testament:

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<tr>
<th>OT</th>
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<tr>
<td>Consolation of Israel</td>
<td>Luke 1:25</td>
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<tr>
<td>Descendant of David will rule over Israel</td>
<td>Luke 1:32–33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fulfillment of Abrahamic covenant with Israel</td>
<td>Luke 1:54–55</td>
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<tr>
<td>Physical deliverance from Israel’s enemies</td>
<td>Luke 1:70–74</td>
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<tr>
<td>Salvation for both Gentiles and Israel</td>
<td>Luke 2:32</td>
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<tr>
<td>Salvation for people of Jerusalem</td>
<td>Matt 23:37–39</td>
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<td>Abomination of Desolation</td>
<td>Matt 24:15</td>
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<td>Tribulation for Israel</td>
<td>Matt 24:9–21</td>
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<tr>
<td>Worldwide Tribulation/Judgment/Wrath</td>
<td>Rev 3:10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Restoration of the creation</td>
<td>Matt 19:28/ Rom 8:19–22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New covenant fulfilled with Israel</td>
<td>Rom 11:27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kingdom of God after worldwide Tribulation</td>
<td>Luke 21:31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OT covenants, promises, temple service for Israel</td>
<td>Rom 9:4</td>
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</tbody>
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As these examples show, far from offering “massive” changes and transformation of the Old Testament expectations, the opposite is the case. The New Testament affirms the Old Testament themes and promises. The better understanding is that God is “building upon” the contextual understanding of what He promised in the Old Testament. Of course, in the progress of revelation God can and does offer more than what He promised in the Old Testament (i.e., two comings of Messiah), but such additions are consistent with what was revealed earlier. Not only is this a better and simpler understanding, but it does justice to what the original writers meant and what the readers of the Old Testament revelation would have understood. If there are “massive change(s)” from the expectation of the Old Testament to the New Testament, in what sense was the Old Testament a revelation to the Old Testament authors and readers? Or why would God lead the Old Testament people to believe one thing only to have it be fulfilled in a totally different way in the New Testament?
I also find the claim that the New Testament is making massive changes to the Old Testament to be ironic since the authors have no significant sections devoted to the New Testament. The reader is asked to believe that the New Testament introduces massive changes to the Old Testament expectation, but no significant proof is offered from the New Testament that such a change has occurred.

Other Issues

The points above are the major theological issues where I have differences with *Kingdom through Covenant*. But there are some other areas that I would like to mention as well.

Presentation of Dispensationalism

The last few decades have witnessed several misrepresentations of dispensationalism. That is why I appreciate the authors’ attempt to represent dispensationalism accurately. I also like how they interact with some of dispensationalism’s most able explainers and defenders. Their interactions with those like John Feinberg and Craig Blaising allowed for a true discussion of the issues. The authors are correct that dispensationalism holds a distinction between Israel and the church, and that Israel’s land is important in God’s future purposes. It is the latter point the authors really emphasize. I do think, however, that the emphasis they give to the land in dispensationalism is out of balance. So on this issue I have a minor quibble. At least to me, their argument appears like this:

—Dispensationalism is about land for Israel
—Dispensationalism is wrong about the land because the land is typical of Christ and points to the new creation.
—Therefore dispensationalism is wrong.

But dispensationalism’s approach to the land is more like:

—Dispensationalism holds that God’s plan to restore all things includes a restoration of all nations.
—God uses Israel as a nation, under Israel’s Messiah, as a vehicle and microcosm to bless the nations of the earth.
—Thus, Israel’s land functions as the platform for the nation Israel, under her Messiah, to perform a ministry of blessing to the nations.

With this scenario, Israel’s land is not *the* primary aspect of dispensationalism. The primary issue is how God uses a nation to bless other nations and the geographical platform that nation is granted by the Messiah. So more than “land,” a deeper structural issue is dispensationalism’s views on nations in the *eschaton*. Israel and the land are microcosms of what God will do for all the nations of the earth. These points help put the land issue into perspective. For me, the primary issue is about nations in the plan of God and Israel’s role to those nations under the Messiah, not just “land” as its own entity. If God has a plan for nations as national entities, and
Israel has a role to play to those nations, the land issue naturally follows. It would be odd to think God would use a nation for His purposes but do so in a way without a geographical platform. So, yes, the land is an important part of dispensationalism, but the land promises come within a broader context. In the attempt to refute dispensationalism, I believe it would be more effective for critics to tackle dispensationalism’s views on nations in the eschaton.

The Kingdom

The title of the book, Kingdom through Covenant mentions “kingdom” in the title, but I found discussion of what this kingdom actually is to be lacking. The authors offer “five points” that “capture” what they affirm about the kingdom. Most of what is said is good and accurate, yet not specific enough to be of much help. I could see representatives from all three major millennial views agreeing with most of what was said here. I understand that the concept of “covenant” as the framework for the Bible’s storyline is their emphasis and not millennial issues. Yet if it is true that kingdom comes through covenant it would have been helpful to know more specifics of how they viewed the kingdom and which view of the millennium they hold. Are they amillennial or premillennial? Do they see this issue as significant in any way? If the premillennial view is correct, would not this be an ideal place for the physical and land promises to Israel to be fulfilled? For argument’s sake, even if we granted that Israel’s land is typical of the new creation, there could still be a millennial phase in which the land promises are literally fulfilled en route to conditions in the eternal state. Thus, one could hold that the land promises are typical and temporary but still see a need for a future era in which the land promises are literally fulfilled before the new earth conditions.

Messiah and the Prince of Daniel 9:24–27

This point is not as major as some of the others discussed, but in one of the chapters, Gentry makes a case for the view that “Messiah the Prince” and the “prince to come” mentioned in the Dan 9:24–27 section are “the same individual.” This is in contrast to the more popular view that there are two individuals—“Messiah the Prince” being a reference to the Messiah, and the “prince to come” being a negative person, an “Antichrist” figure. Gentry sees no reason, though, to posit two different individuals. For him, the Messiah is in view in both references. Also, Gentry sees the “firm covenant” of verse 27 as a reference to the new covenant that the Messiah establishes vicariously for His people. This contrasts with the more popular view which sees the “covenant” as a deceptive covenant that the Antichrist makes with the people of Israel.

I believe Gentry’s case is well argued. But the context of Daniel and canonical considerations contribute to the view that Dan 9:24–27 tells of a negative Antichrist figure who makes a covenant with the people of Israel. First, Daniel 7 presents both

34 See pages 592–97.
35 Ibid., 562.
the Messiah and a negative person in the same context. Daniel 7:13–14 speaks of the Son of Man who was given a kingdom but then it tells of a coming “horn” (Dan 7:8, 21) who will oppose the Son of Man and wage war with the saints. Daniel 7, therefore, places the Messiah and an anti-Messiah figure in the same context. This does not mandate that Daniel 9 does this as well, but it has already occurred in Daniel. So to see this again in Dan 9:24–27 is not surprising. Plus, as other Scripture indicates, the coming evil one is an “antichrist” (see 1 John 2:18) He is a false Christ and satanic counterfeit to the real Christ, Jesus. It is reasonable, then, that the term “prince” could be used of both the real Messiah (Jesus) and the false messiah (the antichrist). This also seems natural in the context of Daniel 9 where the “prince to come” is mentioned after the reference to the Messiah being cut off.

Also, that a negative figure is in view in Daniel 9 is supported by canonical factors from the New Testament. Revelation 13 uses time indicators from Dan 9:24–27 when discussing the negative ministry of the coming beast. According to Rev 13:5 the beast speaks “arrogant words and blasphemies” along with “authority to act” for the time period of “forty-two months.” The “forty-two” months fits with the statement that the prince will stop sacrifice and grain offerings at the middle of the seventieth week which is the 42-month point. Thus both the “prince” of Dan 9:27 and the “beast” of Rev 13:5 are linked with the same time period.

In addition, in Paul’s discussion of a future day of the Lord, he speaks of a “man of lawlessness,” a “son of destruction” who “takes his seat in the temple of God displaying himself as being God” (2:3–4). Paul appears to be relying on Dan 9:27 and 11:36 for his statements about this evil figure. According to Dan 9:27 the prince puts a stop to sacrifice and grain offerings in the Jerusalem temple. So in both Dan 9:27 and 2 Thess 2:3–4 negative things happen to the temple in Jerusalem because of an evil person. Also, in Matt 24:15 Jesus refers to the “ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION” that was spoken of by Daniel. This event causes terrible consequences for the people of Israel. This is a great persecution that comes upon Israel; it is not caused by Israel. This highly negative event that happens to Israel that Jesus refers to fits well with a negative event described in Dan 9:27. This is a case where a proper canonical approach informs us that Daniel had a negative person in mind in Dan 9:27.

Concluding Thoughts

As this review indicates, I do not think that Kingdom through Covenant establishes a storyline or metanarrative that is more accurate or more biblical than that offered by dispensationalism. Major sections of Scripture that should be examined to offer a whole-Bible theology are not considered. Plus, the authors draw conclusions from biblical data that are not accurate, especially when alleged typological implications are given more weight than explicit Bible texts in both testaments. While I do not claim that the storyline they are offering is entirely wrong, I do find it to be incomplete and insufficient. The understanding of typology is off-key. Also, I think they miss the significance of the relationship between Jesus and Israel and see too much discontinuity between the Old Testament expectation and the New Testament fulfillment.
There is much good information in the book, especially on the meaning of the image of God, details about the covenants, and the close relationship between persons like Adam and Noah, but the theological dots are not connected in such a way that leads to a more accurate understanding of the Bible from Genesis 1 through Revelation 22. Even when discussing the covenants of the Bible, there is not enough consideration of how the covenants of promise still relate to Israel according to the New Testament. I find the dispensational understanding of the Bible’s metanarrative to be better since I think it has a more complete and holistic understanding of what the “restoration of all things” includes (Acts 3:21). Plus, it has a better understanding of typology and properly takes into account the role of nations and Israel in God’s plans through Jesus the Messiah.

In spite of my criticisms, though, *Kingdom through Covenant* offers the Christian community a serious work that challenges us to think through important “big-picture” issues in the Bible. As we wrestle with these issues hopefully our understanding of God’s glorious plans for the ages will become even more clear and serve as a motivation for godliness in the here and now.

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36 This includes matters both spiritual and physical and matters that are individual, national (Israel), and international.
THREE SEARCHES FOR THE “HISTORICAL JESUS”
BUT NO BIBLICAL CHRIST (Part 2):
Evangelical Participation in the
Search for the “Historical Jesus”

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This is the second of a two-part series surveying the ongoing search for the “historical Jesus” that has been conducted the last 250 years. This article covers the growing, as well as alarming, evangelical participation in this quest. Central to the evangelical participation is the concept of postmodernist historiography where “probability” is the best that can be asserted about key Gospel events, while judgment about the historicity of other events in the Gospels must be suspended if they cannot be demonstrated through subjective application of criteria of authenticity. The number four (4) looms strategic in the difference between many evangelicals and liberals, for Part One of this series showed that while E. P. Sanders held to 8 events that may have probability in the Gospels, evangelical participants in the search hold to 12 key Gospel events that have “probability” of occurrence.

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Introduction:
Does the Evangelical Search for the “Historical Jesus” Demonstrate the Modernist-Fundamentalist Battle of History Repeating Itself?

A wise old saying has warned, “Those who do not learn from the lessons of history are doomed to repeat them.” Does history repeat itself? Pondering this question is important for current evangelical Gospel discussions, especially in reference to modern Gospel research. In terms of searching for the “historical Jesus,” history has repeated itself at least two, if not three, times as catalogued in Part One. All three quests have failed to find Him and have been declared a failure.
The First Quest for the Historical Jesus (1778–1906)  
Ended in Failure but Produced New Beginning

At the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, the battle between liberals and fundamentalists had reached somewhat of a crescendo. In response to the alarming inroads of perceived liberalism in the mainline denominations at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century, conservatives in many places separated, and many started their own denominations and schools, especially in the United States. This separation occurred approximately concomitantly with the end of the First Search period’s declaration of failure in the early part of the 1900s (see Part One). In Britain, during the late A.D. nineteenth century, “in a period of theological decline,” Charles Spurgeon warned the Baptist Union regarding “New Theology” that was arising in its ranks. Eventually, Spurgeon withdrew from the Union and was censured by vote. This became known as the “Downgrade Controversy” where evolution and higher critical thought raged within his denominational group. History proved Spurgeon was correct, but no one listened to him at the time. He died a broken man in 1892.

R. A. Torrey and The Fundamentals

In 1909, A. C. Dixon, Louis Meyer, and others produced a work called The Fundamentals. Originally, this work consisted of a 12-volume set that set forth the fundamental beliefs of the Christian faith and was sent without cost to over 300,000 ministers, missionaries and other workers throughout the world. It had been funded by Lyman and Milton Stewart who were involved with Union Oil, as well as being influential in the founding of Bible Institute of Los Angeles (founded in 1908). The work essentially was a firm reaction against the fundamentalist-modernist controversy that occurred at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth. At its time, many Bible-believing conservatives considered it one of the finest apologetic stances for Scripture and against current liberalism of the day. The Fundamentals was one of the most widely distributed statements of Christian doctrine ever produced and was written to combat the inroads of liberalism that had spiritually deadened the mainline denominations. The work defended the deity of Christ, the full inspiration of Scripture, the bodily resurrection of Christ and

1 For further information on this period see George M. Marsden, Fundamentalism and American Culture, The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism 1870–1925 (Oxford: Oxford University, 1980).


foundational truths of Scripture that had been historically held in the orthodox church. It constituted a strong apologetic against the history of higher criticism produced during this time and decried the atheistic philosophies that lay at the core of historical-critical ideologies.

Modernists during this time had refused to give voice to anything approaching the trustworthiness of Scripture. Conservatives were isolated and shunned within mainline denominations. From May 25 to June 1, 1919, six thousand gathered in Philadelphia for “The World Conference on Christian Fundamentals,” in reaction to this denominational liberalism, comparing the conference’s importance to Luther’s nailing of the 95 Theses on the door at Wittenberg.5 The 1925 Scopes trial regarding evolution also marked a watershed issue for fundamentalists during this period.6 Fundamentalists refused participation in the First Search, for they realized its a priori destructive presuppositional foundations and its intent of the destruction of the influence of the Gospels and Christianity.

The Separation of the Faithful from the Modernists

In subsequent years across America, scores of Bible schools and seminaries were launched by fundamentalists. One need mention only a select few. Moody Bible Institute was founded in 1886 by evangelist Dwight L. Moody. In 1907 Lyman Stewart funded the production of The Fundamentals heralding the founding of the Bible Institute of Los Angeles. By 1912, Torrey, coming from Moody Bible Institute, became Dean of the Bible Institute of Los Angeles as well as assuming editorial leadership in publishing The Fundamentals as a four-volume work in 1917. The warning of J. Gresham Machen that “as go the theological seminaries, so goes the church” struck deep at the heart of Bible-believing scholars everywhere: “many seminaries today are nurseries of unbelief; and because they are nurseries of unbelief the churches that they serve have become unbelieving churches too. As go the theological seminaries, so goes the church.”7 In 1929, Machen was influential in founding Westminster Theological Seminary as a result of Princeton’s direction.8 Dallas Theological Seminary was founded in 1924.9 Fuller Theological Seminary

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5 William Riley, a leader of this movement, commented “The importance of this occasion exceeds the understanding of its originators. The future will look back to the World Conference on Christian Fundamentals, held in Philadelphia, May 25, to June 1, 1919, as an event of more historical moment than the nailing up, at Wittenberg, of Martin Luther’s ninety-five theses.” William B. Riley, “The Great Divide, or Christ and the Present Crisis,” in God Hath Spoken (Philadelphia: Bible Conference Committee, 1919), 27.


The Master's Seminary Journal

was established in 1947 by a Biola graduate, Charles E. Fuller, and Harold Ockenga.

The Second Quest (1953–1988?)

This minimalistic, negative state of affairs regarding historical Jesus studies was not substantially changed by the inauguration of the “New” or “Second” Quest (1953–1988). During this time, evangelicals continued to establish more Bible colleges and seminaries. In 1952 Talbot Theological Seminary was started as a graduate training-arm of Biola. In 1949, the Evangelical Theological Society (ETS) was formed. In 1958, Charles Feinberg republished The Fundamentals in the 1958 Biola Year of Jubilee (50 years after its founding) to reaffirm its historical positions against the encroachment of modernism as well as historical criticism. This is admittedly a selective history, but it is significant to mention a few of the many events that happened as a result of the fundamentalist-modernist controversy and its questing for Jesus.

Lessons Soon Forgotten

After this strategic withdrawal by fundamentalists of the first generation who fought the battle to preserve Scripture from the onslaught of historical criticism as well as its subsequent searching for the historical Jesus, subsequent generations from fundamentalist groups grew discontent with isolation from mainstream biblical scholarship that was dominated by liberals. By the mid-1960s, prominent voices were scolding fundamentalists for continued isolation. Dialogue and interaction once again became the rallying cry. Carl F. H. Henry’s criticisms struck deep: “The preoccupation of fundamentalists with the errors of modernism, and neglect of schematic presentations of the evangelical alternative, probably gave neo-orthodoxy its great opportunity in the Anglo-Saxon world . . . . If Evangelicals do not overcome their preoccupation with negative criticism of contemporary theological deviations at the expense of the construction of preferable alternatives to these, they will not be much of a doctrinal force in the decade ahead.”

Echoing similar statements, George Eldon Ladd of Fuller Theological Seminary became a zealous champion of modern historical-critical methods, arguing that historical critical methods like the two-source hypothesis should be accepted “as a literary fact” and that form criticism “has thrown considerable light on the nature of the Gospels and the traditions they employ” adding, “Evangelical scholars should be willing to accept this light.” Indeed, for Ladd, historical-critical methods have derived great benefit for evangelicals:

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It has shed great light on the historical side of the Bible; and these historical discoveries are valid for all Bible students even though the presuppositions of the historical-critical method have been often hostile to an evangelical view of the Bible. Contemporary evangelicals often overlook this important fact when they condemn the critical method as such; for even while they condemn historical criticism, they are constantly reaping the benefits of its discoveries and employing critical tools.13

Ladd asserts, “One must not forget that . . . everyday tools of good Bible study are the product of the historical-critical method.”14 George Ladd catalogued the trend of a “substantial group of scholars” whose background was in the camp of “fundamentalism” who had now been trained “in Europe as well as in our best universities,” who were “deeply concerned with serious scholarship.”15 He chided fundamentalists also for their “major preoccupation” with defending “inerrancy of the Bible in its most extreme form,” but contributing “little of creative thinking to the current debate.”16 Although Ladd acknowledged that historical-critical ideology was deeply indebted for its operation in the Enlightenment and that German scholarship who created it openly admitted that its intention was designed for “dissolving orthodoxy’s identification of the Gospel with Scripture,”17 instead, Ladd sent many of his students for subsequent study in Britain and Europe to enlarge the influence of conservatives, the latter of which influence was greatly responsible for the fundamentalists split at the turn of the twentieth century.18

Today, Ladd serves as the recognized paradigm for current attitudes and approaches among evangelical historical-critical scholarship in encouraging evangelical education in British and Continental education as well as the adoption and participation in historical criticism to some form or degree, which actions previously were greatly responsible for the fundamentalist/modernist split.19

13 Ibid., 10.
17 Ladd, “The Search for Perspective,” 49; cp. Ladd's citing of this admission by Ernst Käsemann may be found in the latter's, Essays on New Testament Themes (London: SCM, 1964), 54–62.
18 An example of one of Ladd's students is the late Robert Guelich, The Sermon on the Mount, A Foundation for Understanding (Waco, TX: Word, 1982), 23 promoted an exegesis “that . . . makes use of the literary critical tools including text, source, form, tradition, redaction, and structural criticism” and goes on to assert “for many to whom the Scriptures are vital the use of these critical tools has historically been more ‘destructive’ than ‘constructive.’ But one need not discard the tool because of its abuse.”
19 Mark Noll conducted a personal poll/survey among evangelicals and has, as a result, described Ladd as “the most widely influential figure on the current generation of evangelical Bible scholars.” Ladd was “most influential” among scholars in the Institute for Biblical Research and was
Lessons from what caused the last theological meltdown were long forgotten or carelessly disregarded.\(^{20}\)

### The Evangelical Participation in the Search for the Historical Jesus

#### The End of the Twentieth and Beginning of the Twenty-first Century

Now, flash forward to the latter third of the twentieth century and beginning the twenty-first.\(^{21}\) Another historical-critical crisis may well have been brewing in the fundamentalist camp, now also known as the evangelical camp, that reveals a widening cleavage among its members due to the growing evangelical participation in the third quest.\(^{22}\) In 1979, Jack Rogers and Donald McKim produced, *The Authority and the Interpretation of the Bible, An Historical Approach* that challenged current views among some evangelicals concerning concepts of inerrancy and biblical interpretation.\(^{23}\) John Woodbridge’s *Biblical Authority, A Critique of the Rogers/McKim Proposal* issued an effective critique of their proposal.\(^{24}\) In 1976, Harold Lindsell produced his now famous *The Battle for the Bible* that greatly disturbed parts of the evangelical world that had been founded at the turn of the twentieth century. Lindsell, part of the founding members at Fuller Seminary, traced what he felt were troubling events at Fuller and other evangelical seminaries and denominations regarding the “watershed” issue of inerrancy.\(^{25}\) Lindsell’s negative historical take on problems received counter-balancing by

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20 For further historical details, see F. David Farnell, “The Philosophical and Theological Bent of Historical Criticism,” in *The Jesus Crisis, The Inroads of Historical Criticism into Evangelical Scholarship* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1998), 85–131.


25 Lindsell, *The Battle for the Bible*. 
Marsden’s *Reforming Fundamentalism*, produced in 1987.\(^{26}\) By 1978, conservative evangelicals felt the need to produce *The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy*, and in 1982 produced another on *Hermeneutics* to reaffirm their historical positions in these areas as a result of Rogers’ and McKim’s work.\(^{27}\) In 1982, Robert Gundry was removed from membership of ETS due to his involvement in alleged dehistoricizing of Matthew reflected in his commentary, *Matthew, A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art*.\(^{28}\)

In 1982, Alan Johnson, in his presidential address to ETS through analogy, asked whether higher criticism was “Egyptian gold or pagan precipice” and reached the conclusion that “the refinement of critical methodologies under the magisterium of an inerrant scriptural authority can move us gently into a deeper appreciation of sacred Scripture.”\(^{29}\) At another ETS meeting in Santa Clara, California in 1997, Moisés Silva, in his presidential address, chided conservative scholarship for their lack of openness to methods of modern critical methods in an address entitled, “Can Two Walk Together Unless They Be Agreed? Evangelical Theology and Biblical Scholarship.”\(^{30}\)

The next year, in 1998, Norman Geisler, taking the opposite tone, warned evangelicals regarding the negative presuppositions of historical-critical ideologies in his “Beware of Philosophy.” In his address, Geisler featured a 1998 work entitled, *The Jesus Crisis*, that detailed growing evangelical involvement in historical-critical ideologies like questing. To say the least, Geisler’s address, as well as *The Jesus Crisis*, created a hornet’s nest of controversy. While some praised it as needing to be written,\(^{31}\) other evangelicals disdained the work as strident, fundamentalistic rhetoric that was closed-minded to a judicious use of historical criticism.\(^{32}\) In a highly irregular move for the Evangelical Theological Society, Grant Osborne was given an opportunity in the next issue of *JETS* to counter Geisler’s presidential address, wherein Geisler’s address was criticized as well as *The Jesus Crisis* saying, “the tone is too harsh and grating, the positions too extreme.”\(^{33}\) In 2002, Geisler, a world-renown Christian apologist and long-time


\(^{31}\) See the back cover page of the work where some called it “a blockbuster” and “the best up-to-date analysis in print of the dangerous drift of evangelical scholarship into negative higher criticism.” Robert L. Thomas and F. David Farnell, *The Jesus Crisis*.

\(^{32}\) Osborne’s article constitutes a criticism of not only Geisler but *The Jesus Crisis*, Grant Osborne, “Historical Criticism and the Evangelical,” *JETS* 42, No. 2 (June 1999): 193–210.

\(^{33}\) Ibid., 209.
member of ETS, cited the Society’s acceptance of open theists among the ETS group and withdrew as a member.

Interestingly, Craig Blomberg blames books like Harold Lindsell’s *Battle For the Bible* (1976) and such a book as *The Jesus Crisis* for people leaving the faith because of their strong stance on inerrancy as a presupposition. In an interview in 2008 conducted by Justin Taylor, Blomberg responded this way to books that hold to a firm view on inerrancy. The interviewer asked, “Are there certain mistaken hermeneutical presuppositions made by conservative evangelicals that play into the hands of liberal critics?” Blomberg replied:

Absolutely. And one of them follows directly from the last part of my answer to your last question. The approach, famously supported back in 1976 by Harold Lindsell in his *Battle for the Bible* (Zondervan), that it is an all-or-nothing approach to Scripture that we must hold, is both profoundly mistaken and deeply dangerous. No historian worth his or her salt functions that way. I personally believe that if inerrancy means “without error according to what most people in a given culture would have called an error” then the biblical books are inerrant in view of the standards of the cultures in which they were written. But, despite inerrancy being the touchstone of the largely American organization called the Evangelical Theological Society, there are countless evangelicals in the States and especially in other parts of the world who hold that the Scriptures are inspired and authoritative, even if not inerrant, and they are not sliding down any slippery slope of any kind. I can’t help but wonder if inerrantist evangelicals making inerrancy the watershed for so much has not, unintentionally, contributed to pilgrimages like Ehrman’s. Once someone finds one apparent mistake or contradiction that they cannot resolve, then they believe the Lindsells of the world and figure they have to chuck it all. What a tragedy!34

To Blomberg, anyone who advocates inerrancy as traditionally advocated by fundamentalists is responsible for people leaving the faith.

**Evangelical Questing Begins**

What distinguishes the Third Quest from the other two questing periods is the rapidly growing evangelical participation in it, rather than rejection as happened in the first two. These evangelicals have largely been stimulated by their participation in the Society of Biblical Literature as well as 1980s renewed interest in historical Jesus studies that was led by Robert Funk of the Westar Institute, resulting in the latter’s work entitled, *The Five Gospels, The Search for the Authentic Words of...*  

Jesus that demonstrated atomistic voting on the historicity of Jesus’ sayings in the four canonical Gospels as well as the Gospel of Thomas.  

However, with the perceived shift from a minimum to a *modicum* of historicity in the Gospels—a shift in the burden of proof—as well as a perceived openness to the miraculous among some Third Questers, some evangelicals now desired to participate. While protesting the charges in Geisler’s presidential speech as well as *The Jesus Crisis* (1998), soon afterwards a significant number of evangelicals joined the effort. One young evangelical wrote, “this Third Quest for the historical Jesus . . . provides the greatest possible hope for a more sympathetic reading of the gospels as historical sources and is likely to provide a reasonable answer as to why the church began, and why it believed what it did and acted how it did.” Craig Evans wrote about the Third Search that “the miracle stories are now treated seriously and are widely accepted by Jesus scholars as deriving from Jesus’ ministry” and “myth has ceased to be an item of importance . . . the miracle tradition is no longer the stumbling block that it once was.” In 2004, Evans edited *The Historical Jesus: Critical Concepts in Religious Studies*, as well as the *Encyclopedia of the Historical Jesus* (2008) wherein many evangelicals participated. No exaggeration exists to say that a plethora of books by evangelicals, to some degree or another favorable to questing, have been produced in the last decade of the twentieth and first decade of the twenty-first century.

As of 2010, however, Scot McKnight, in *Christianity Today*, made public that he had withdrawn from participation in the Third Search as an evangelical, citing that “historical method cannot prove . . . that Jesus died for our sins and was raised for our justification” and that scholarly attempts at discovering the “‘real’ Jesus have failed,” with the attempts resulting in “making Jesus in their own [historical Jesus scholars’] image.” Other evangelicals have reacted strongly to McKnight’s withdrawal. British evangelical N. T. Wright, in the same edition of *CT*, reacted negatively to McKnight’s declared failure to the Third Search. Wright declared that “[n]ot all historical Jesus scholarship is skeptical in intent or effect.” He also attacks “shallow would-be ‘orthodox’ Christians, who misreading the texts, marginalize Jesus’ first-


39 Scot McKnight, “The Jesus We’ll Never Know, Why scholarly attempts to discover the ‘real’ Jesus have failed. And why that is a good thing.” *Christianity Today* (April 13, 2010), 26, 23.
Evangelical Craig Keener also reacts negatively, encouraging evangelicals “to stay in the conversation” and that “historical Jesus studies remain valuable.”

Again, in the same CT article, evangelical Darrell Bock also argues for the importance of historical Jesus research, asserting “historical Jesus work matters, and it matters a lot.” He argues that “History at best is reconstructive work, based in probability and working in a discipline that is severely limited by what it can deliver.” Bock admits that: “Yes, we cannot ‘prove’ it all, but we can make a compelling case for much of it, even key parts of it. When a compelling case is made, and when the burden of proof is high, that is impressive.” He continues, “historical Jesus studies give us a context for Jesus’ actions and help us understand the sources,” and that it is good because “This discussion is happening in the public square.” He insists that historical Jesus studies push “people to appreciate that if even the gist of the gospel story is right, then they must think through who Jesus is” and the Gospels convey “the footprints God leaves behind when we appreciate the context in which he acted.” For Bock, Gospel study has, at best, “burden of proof,” “probability” and “gist” in historical demonstration of the Gospels.

Bock has also declared that one of his works, Studying the Historical Jesus, on the Gospels “belongs to the third quest” even though he admits that the Third Quest is not “fundamentally conservative.” He sees the “strength” of the Third Quest in the following terms, “the strength of the so-called third quest, whether or not it is really a third quest, is its starting point in the very milieu in which Jesus lived and spoke . . . . So there is value in seeing what can be shown historically to be likely in understanding Jesus and his relationship to his Second Temple Jewish context, as long as one keeps in mind that the Jesus of Scripture is a Jesus remembered.”

In 2009, in a very recent book on the Third Quest, Bock wrote:

Can the lion and the lamb lay down together? For many people, the idea of an evangelical engaging in a historical Jesus discussion is oxymoronic. For many critics, the evangelical view of Scripture is said to skew evangelicals’ discussion of Jesus issues . . . . So can there be evangelical approaches to the historical Jesus?

I believe the answer is yes. To get there, however, one must appreciate the nature of what historical Jesus work seeks to achieve as well as the limitations

40 N. T. Wright, “No, We Need History,” in “Should We Abandon Studying the Historical Jesus? Two Responses.” Christianity Today (April 13, 2010), 28.

41 Craig Keener, “No, We Need to Stay in the Conversation,” in “Should We Abandon Studying the Historical Jesus? Two Responses.” Christianity Today (April 13, 2010), 27.


43 Darrell L. Bock, Studying the Historical Jesus (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 148, 152.

under which such a historically oriented study operates when it seeks to cross thousands of years to do its work.⁴⁵

Some evangelicals also display some interesting parallels with their more liberal counterparts in their questing for Jesus. Similar to Sanders’ list of Gospel events that are considered historically certain, the evangelical Institute for Biblical Research Jesus Group identifies 12 events having probability of occurrence, while, as has been cited previously, E. P. Sanders identified 8 (see Part 1):

The IBR Jesus Group has been meeting annually since 1999 to consider twelve key events in Jesus’ life for which the group thought it could show core authenticity and the combination of which made a case for what Jesus’ mission was about. The project also has introductory and concluding essays that were discussed . . . The twelve events and the authors: John the Baptist and Jesus (Robert Webb), Choosing the Twelve (Scot McKnight), Exorcisms and Jesus’ Kingdom Teaching (Craig Evans), Sabbath Healings (Donald Hagner), Jesus’ Table Fellowship with Sinners (Craig Blomberg), Peter’s Declaration at Caesarea Philippi (Michael Wilkins), Entry into Jerusalem (Brent Kinman), The Temple Act (Klyne Snodgrass), The Last Supper (Howard Marshall), Jesus’ Examination by the Jewish Leadership (Darrell Bock), Jesus before Pilate and Crucifixion (Robert Webb), and Resurrection (Grant Osborne). [Bob did the introductory essay, and I have the conclusion].⁴⁶

At this point, one is left wondering about the implications of their positions on “core authenticity” as well as the historiographical “probability, “possibility,” “footprints” not only of the 12 Key Events but also of many other events in the Gospels not on their list.

Although the IBR Jesus Group distances itself from the Jesus Seminar’s voting on sayings of Jesus, they have developed their own scheme of certainty, probability, etc. on their evaluation of events in Jesus’ life, noting:

Jesus Group does not vote on the specific sayings or events from the life of Jesus. Rather, each event is assessed as a complete unit. It is examined to determine the evidence for the event in question, as well as the elements that make up this event. Then, given these results, the examiner develops the event’s significance for understanding Jesus’ life and ministry. Sometimes ratings assessing the possibility or probability of an event or a detail within it are used as a way of expressing what can be demonstrated historically. In other cases, alternative configurations of the sequencing of events are assessed. Judgments like these belong to the author of the article, not

⁴⁵ Ibid., 249.
necessarily to the entire group, but they are made after interaction with the
group.47

Thus, in terms of Jesus’ baptism, one evangelical writer asserts, “The historicity of
Jesus’ baptism by John is virtually certain. The historicity of the theophany (the
Spirit’s descent and divine voice) is probable, but its timing as contemporaneous
with the baptism is open to question. As a prophetic call-vision, the theophany quite
possibly happened at a later time.”48 In Key Events, Webb updates his conclusions
as follows:

My own judgment is that it is probable that Jesus did at some time experience
a prophetic call-vision, and it is somewhat probable that it incorporated the
elements of divine sonship and spirit anointing. It is possible that such a call-
vision may have taken place at Jesus’ baptism, but there are also problems
with their association. It is equally possible that it occurred at some point in
time subsequent to the baptism and again the theophany narrative is somewhat
problematic . . . rendering such a temporal placement only a possibility.49

He makes this assertion especially in his comparison of the Synoptics (Matt 3:13–
17; Mark 1:9–11; Luke 3:15–22) with John 1:32, where in John’s Gospel John and
Jesus meet and John relates that he saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a
dove and remaining on Him.

Webb’s comments regarding the “possibility” of a disjuncture between Jesus’
baptism and His commission/call, however, are highly unlikely and cast a
completely unnecessary pale of doubt regarding Gospel writers as careful
historians. One does not at all have to imagine that the Gospels, especially the
Synoptics, played so loose with history in their records as Webb would lead his
reader to suppose is a distinct possibility. All three Synoptics place the prophetic
vision in clear language right after time of Jesus’ baptism. The Synoptic language,
with its use of εὐαναγίαν (“immediately”—Matt 3:16; Mark 1:10) would not seem to
allow for such loose language to imagine separating Jesus’ baptism from His call.
Plus, John’s statement that he “did not recognize Him” twice (John 1:31 and 1:33)
would give the strong implication that John had baptized Jesus earlier, as indicated
in the Synoptics, but that John did not recognize the full implications of who Jesus
was at that time, i.e. John did not immediately know, at Jesus’ baptism earlier, that
he was the Coming One. John the Baptist’s testimony in John the Apostle’s Gospel
(John 1:29–34) about Jesus is viewed most naturally subsequent to the Synoptic
event, with John gaining full understanding about Jesus some time after Jesus’
baptism by John. This does not mean that John did not know Jesus at all, but that
John’s full recognition came after Jesus’ baptism, so that John’s Gospel reveals the

aftermath. Such a conclusion is also enforced by the τεθέαμαι that would imply a settled conviction following Jesus’ baptism. Furthermore, while Jesus Himself witnessed the descent of the Spirit and the Father’s declaration in the Synoptics, John testifies to his own vision of the Spirit’s descent as a confirming witness to John, separate from the previous events in the Synoptics.  

**Evangelicals Embrace Aberrant and Unorthodox Concepts of Historical Criticism**

What immediately becomes apparent in this evangelical participation in “questing” is that many evangelicals are now embracing concepts that have deep roots in unorthodoxy and atheism. That which is truly aberrant is now normalized or standardized as acceptable to evangelical scholarship in their efforts to sanitize its negative underpinnings. As demonstrated in Part 1 of this series, the term “historical Jesus” is historically, presuppositionally, and in practice a technical term that sharply distinguishes between the Jesus who is presented in the Gospels with how He is theorized to have actually existed in history. Ladd well-recognized this cleavage when he wrote regarding the term “historical Jesus”: “This is a technical term which is easily misunderstood and misinterpreted, even by New Testament scholars. It does not mean the Jesus who lived in history, Jesus as he actually was. It means rather the Jesus who is reconstructed by the historical-critical method—a Jesus who is altogether and only human—a Jesus without transcendence.”

James Robinson also understood the implications of this term when he notes, “The clear implication is that the term signifies ‘Jesus of Nazareth as he actually was’ may be considerably more than or quite different from ‘the historical Jesus.’” Evangelicals are now attempting to wrest this term away from its normative sense and apply an abnormal meaning to it. In doing so, they also attempt to turn an aberrant, unorthodox term into something that they willingly embrace. They also cast doubt upon the Gospels’ record of Jesus’ life, placing those canonical records as somehow contrary to what actually happened in history.

Perhaps some of these evangelicals think that their recent dialogue and participation in the Third Search has now sanitized the term from its roots; after all, has not 250 years of discussion of the historical Jesus caused changes in ideology—they might reason. An examination of the Third Search has revealed that no substantial differences in ideology have changed, except that some now allow arbitrarily for a modicum, rather than minimum, of historical accuracy in the Gospels. No amount of evangelical dialogue has successfully sanitized historical criticism from its presupposition’s roots and ideology. For evangelicals to think otherwise is to rationalize the facts to justify their participation. The net result is that evangelicals are now creating a fifth Gospel that is different from the canonical Gospels in that these evangelicals separate parts of the Gospels as demonstrably

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51 Ladd, “The Search for Perspective,” 50.

more historically probable than other parts. McKnight has now withdrawn from such studies for this very reason, admitting openly “a fundamental observation about all genuine historical Jesus studies: Historical Jesus scholars construct what is in effect a fifth Gospel.” The reconstructed Jesus is not identical to the canonical Jesus or the orthodox Jesus. He is the reconstructed Jesus, which means He is a ‘new’ Jesus.” It makes the “authentic Jesus” different from the Jesus in the Gospels as well as creates shades of gray as to what can be trusted as historically verifiable in those four canonical documents. While evangelicals who participate in the questing attempt to separate themselves sharply from the Jesus Seminar and its voting on Jesus’ sayings, their approach results practically in a similar scheme of what may be affirmed and what may not be confirmed in the Gospel records.

12 Key Events Based in Probability of Occurrence According to an Evangelical Adoption of Post-Modernist Historiography

At the end of the twentieth century (ca. 1999), the Institute for Biblical Research began a series of meetings “that spanned more than a decade from start to finish” resulting in the publication of Key Events in the Life of the Historical Jesus, A Collaborative Exploration of Context and Coherence (2009). At the time of the writing of this journal article, this work constituted one of the latest, and most significant, evangelical attempts at the Third Quest. The editors discussed this meeting over the decade in the following terms as they dialogued on historical Jesus research among a diverse group of evangelicals:

[T]he meetings of the IBR Jesus Group have been a pleasure from start to finish. Our participants came from three continents, and though separated by geographical distance, close relationships have been built, and friendships have been deepened as a result of our annual meetings. Our meetings were marked by lively conversations about Jesus, Second Temple Judaism and historical method. But these times also included wonderful snacks as we worked (M&Ms, cake, cookies, and chips) as well as marvelous evening meals out to close our meetings. The closing meal each year became a traditional adjournment of our time together. Nothing quite equals a Brazilian steak house to a bunch of hungry scholars!

53 In a very similar way, Ernest Renan posited a “fifth gospel” by adding to the canonical Gospels his own subjective experience of visiting the Holy Land. See Ernest Renan, The Life of Jesus (London: A. L. Burt, 1863), 61.

54 McKnight, “The Jesus We’ll Never Know,” 25.


One is immediately impressed by this statement as an oddly casual comment as these evangelical scholars met to decide the future of evangelical conceptions of the Gospels as well as Jesus in history.

Bock’s and Webb’s IBR group chose 12 events that they considered strategic in this work, relating that the group made the decision “to focus our attention on exploring key events and activities in the life of Jesus which met two criteria: a strong case could be made for a judgment of high probability that the core event was historical, and that it was likely significant for understanding Jesus.”

They continue,

The goal was to see the extent to which a study of key events might provide an overall framework for understanding Jesus. Once these key events had been selected, each essay was to do three things: first, it was to set forth a case for the probable historicity of the event using the criteria of authenticity. The focus was to, first, establish the probable historicity of the event’s core rather than concerning itself with all of the details. Second, explore the socio-cultural contextual information that contributes to understanding the event in its first-century context. Third, in light of this context, to consider the significance of the event for understanding Jesus. Thus, each study would have both macro and micro concerns, being both analytic and synthetic.

The term “probability” or even “high probability” as a label to apply to the historicity of these events also strikes one as an odd term to apply to Gospel events by evangelicals, for it immediately implies a relative degree of doubt concerning the event. That is, it casts a pale of uncertainty over the Gospel materials. To assert that an event probably happened or even had a high probability also opens the possibility for the event not to have taken place or at least not to have taken place as described. To assert that the “core” of the Gospels is reliable in probability opens up the issue that other elements apart from the core may not be reliable.

Bock and Webb go on to issue a caveat, “[I]n a very real sense this work reflects the input of the group. The collaborative learning experience was very stimulating. Each author, however, remains alone responsible for the views expressed in their particular essay. In other words, the author of each essay had the final call on its contents,” but also assert that “Among the team there are differences in particulars, but in general the synthesis set forth is one the team [italics added] embraces as providing the most coherent understanding of what Jesus did as a historic figure.”

Bock and Webb note, significantly, that Robert Webb’s article on history, historiography, and historical method [“The Historical Enterprise and Historical Jesus Research”] is important for it “opens the book to set the direction of what we sought to do and the issues we consistently faced throughout our meetings [italics

57 Bock and Webb, “Introduction to Key Events and Actions in the Life of the Historical Jesus,” in Key Events, 4.
59 Ibid.
added. It reflects discussions that regularly came up as individual events were considered and assessed. In other words, this essay was written at the end of our process; it was not written as a guideline at the beginning of it.”

They continue,

We write for an audience interested in historical Jesus study . . . . Such a study concentrates on what it thinks can be demonstrated in a corroborative manner about Jesus. All sources are available for consideration and each is sifted critically. By working with the criteria, our goal was to work with a method that is generally used in such study. We are quite aware that such methods have been subject to important critiques from all sides of the debate, but in many ways these are the best means we have to engage in such a sifting process. Webb’s essay summarizes the criteria we used and how we intended to see their importance after we completed our study. It also places the criteria within a larger framework of broad historical method.”

The introduction concludes by acknowledging “the importance of recognizing, taking into account, and making one’s horizon, including one’s biases and preunderstanding,” noting that this IBR Jesus Group has as its vision “to foster excellence in biblical studies, doing so within a faith commitment. Thus each of us has a commitment to the Christian faith. While some of us would call ourselves ‘evangelical Christians,’ others might prefer ‘biblically orthodox Christian.’” The often repeated use of the term “probable” or “probability” of Gospel events in this introduction also struck the present writer of this two-part series with unease as to the possible widespread implications of the term for evangelicals today.

**Questing Evangelicals Embrace a Post-Modernistic View of Biblical History: Certainty Is Out, Probability Is In**

Since Webb’s article plays such an important role in fostering their approach to Jesus studies in the work, one must examine its assertions. The article is complex, but an examination of it reveals how history is now being theorized and approached by many evangelicals. Webb’s article follows immediately after the introduction to the work and constitutes Chapter 2, “The Historical Enterprise and Historical Jesus Research.” One notices immediately that Webb attempts to issue a counter to Bock’s and Webb’s Introduction’s focus on the importance of his essay, asserting that his discussions “represent my [Webb’s] view on the subject, and they do not necessarily represent all members of the project . . . . I remain solely responsible for its contents . . . . this chapter was written at the conclusion of this project . . . . but it never functioned as the guide that preceded the project.”

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60 Ibid., 5–6.
61 Ibid., 6. emphases added.
62 Ibid., 6–7.
64 Ibid., 11.
Webb’s statement, however, is immediately reduced in its attempt to distance his assertions from others participating in the work when one observes that the volume presents no substantial counter to his view of the philosophy of history and historiography. His essay also received prominence as setting the stage after the Introduction and prior to any discussion or evaluation of the “historicity” of the key events chosen by the participants. The very nature of choosing 12 key events that the group as a whole felt could be demonstrated as historically “probable” also affirms this chapter as the underlying thinking of the project. It also subtly reveals that the editors of the work should realize the implications of its impact on the Gospel material.

For Webb, the distinctions between concepts of the “Jesus of history” and the “Christ of faith” are “not to be preferred over the other” for both “are equally legitimate subjects of inquiry” that use “different means to provide answers to different questions.” The logical result of his assertion here is to legitimize fully possible distinctions of a sharp cleavage between Jesus as He is presented in the Gospel accounts with scholarly speculations of how He might have “actually” existed in history. This distinction of Webb also smacks of the German theological distinction between historie (actual history) and faith interpretation (geschichte).

He next provides “the foundation for the historical enterprise” in questing by defining history, historiography and historical method. In Webb’s view, history is not what happened in the past, since “we do not have direct access to these past events . . . . What survives might be a written document or some form of inscription alluding to the event.” Instead, what remains, according to Webb are “traces” that have survived. He adopts Elton’s view of postmodernistic history that “historical study is not the study of the past but the study of present traces of the past.” The term “traces” is used because “in most cases (if not all) these are only partial and fragmentary, but they are all we have to provide access to the past event. Thus, rather than having direct access to past events, all we really can access today is the surviving traces from the past. The practical impact is “in actuality what one really ‘knows’ [about what happened] is based on the surviving traces . . . . Thus, while in popular parlance the term ‘history’ may be used to refer to past events, this usage is problematic and may ultimately be misleading.”

Surviving traces (i.e., ST) are the material used by the historian. Usually this material consists of written records of past events as reported and recorded by those closely (or not so closely) involved in the events. These written accounts may be based upon oral traditions that have been collected later or an account derived from eyewitnesses of the events. It may even be written by an eyewitness or, to the other extreme, it may be written by someone who has no

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66 Ibid., 11, 13.
69 Ibid., 14.
real knowledge of the events but has an idea what could have, or should have, happened. Whatever is the case, surviving traces involve the perspectives and interests of the eyewitnesses, the perspectives and traces of those who passed on the traditions, and the perspectives and interests of the person who wrote the account . . . . So surviving traces (ST) are hardly “raw” or “objective” data. The nature of those surviving traces is such that they require the later historian to develop a historical method . . . to properly handle these surviving traces. So these surviving traces are not ‘history’ either, for they are only the ‘stuff’ that has survived from the past—fragmentary, incomplete, and quite possibly biased, and perhaps even contradictory and incorrect.70

What the modern historian must do, in Webb’s reasoning, is to “sift through and interpret these surviving traces using the tools and processes of the historical method to come to their understanding of the past event being studied.”71 After completing all the research an analysis, “the historian procures an account of his/her understanding of the past event which narrates a description and explanation of his/her understanding of the past event which narrates a description and explanation of it.”72 Thus, according to this view, all events are mediated through the subjective understanding of the interpreter of the events (i.e. historian) as he/she understood them through the surviving traces.

For Webb, “the term ‘history’ should be reserved for a later historian’s narrative account (i.e. NA) of a past event (i.e. PE) that is his/her understanding of that event based upon the interpretation [italics added] of surviving traces (i.e. ST).”73 In other words, “history” is a narrative account that involves interpretation or, in other words, the potential biases of the historian, conscious or otherwise, that interplay with the surviving traces; thus history is mainly indirect knowledge rather than direct. Webb directly applies these principles to the Gospels and historical Jesus studies with some observations: “[w]ith reference to Jesus, the surviving traces . . . consists of two basic types: the discrete narrative episodes in the Gospels (i.e. the individual pericopae) and other sources (e.g. Josephus), as well as the overall portraits created by these early authors . . . . these earliest portraits are . . . the earliest surviving attempts” [to give ] “a coherent picture” [about Jesus].74 (This term “surviving traces” seems to correspond closely to Bock’s “footprints” of Jesus in the Gospels.75)

Importantly, the writing of history involves one’s philosophy of history or what is known as “historiography.” Webb contends that under the Enlightenment’s influence, history has been wrongly understood as “scientific history,” or a scientific endeavor that can be pursued with neutrality, objectivity, and value-free
observations. Webb rejects the possibility of these factors in the writing of history or historiography, and instead, he argues, “The rise of postmodern historiography has contributed significant insights into the historical enterprise . . . . All historians interpret and write from their own perspective.” As a result, “the historian’s explanation and interpretation of the facts and providing causal and explanatory links between them is a contribution made by the historian and thus is ‘invention.’”76 For Webb, such an invention “does not mean that which is fictional and purely imaginary” and “It is possible to embrace the strengths of what postmodern historiography can teach us, without slipping into total relativism.”77

To avoid extremes of postmodernistic historiography, he adopts twin principles: understanding of history as representation [“re-presentation of the past” and “not a description referring to something in the past; rather, it is a representation portraying something about the past”] and adopting the philosophical stance of the principle of critical realism [exemplified by the hermeneutical circle or spiral as expressed by existentialist Gadamer].78 Practically, this involves allowing one’s own experience, initial understanding and continuing critical judgment [the subject] to affect understanding of what one is studying [the object]. Such understanding resulting is only provisional, and subject to expansion and development as the process continues and these two elements interact and fuse with each other. Although Webb may not admit the practical impact of this approach, the practical impact, nonetheless, is that understanding of history is always changing and temporary, greatly impacted by the changing bias(es) of the interpreter as he “dialogues” or examines the object studied. Any such information gained in the process would be fleeting and temporary as views changed through time and interaction. Biblical understanding has no objective basis, for the moorings are always subject to change and even contradiction.

Yet, such complexity is dubious in understanding God’s Word. Objectivity in interpretation is possible and must be defined in understanding God’s thoughts as a Spirit-guided process of thinking God’s thoughts in His Word as He intended. This latter position is a firm biblical position for those who are truly born-again. Jesus promised the disciples that the Spirit of truth (John 14:26; 16:13; cp. 1 John 4:6) would guide them into truth. Such is the result of the new covenant process whereby the genuine believer is provided with the teaching ministry of the Holy Spirit (1 John 2:26–27 cp. Ezek 36:25–27; Jer 31:31–33). To today’s evangelicals, this explanation might appear simplistic compared to the perceived sophistication of historical criticism that is rooted in the wisdom of men (1 Cor 1:18–2:14). The ground for understanding the Gospels as God intended is fully provided by the Holy Spirit who indwells the believer, providing a check against false teaching as well as an affirmation of the truth of God’s Word. As a result of postmodernism, evangelicals reject any conceptions of certainty and replace it with, at best, probability, i.e. these events probably happened. The latter of which leaves the door

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76 Webb, “The Historical Enterprise and Historical Jesus Research,” Key Events, 23.
77 Ibid., 23–24.
wide open for allowing that a significant possibility looms that they did not occur as asserted in the Gospels or cannot be affirmed. Moreover, because some believers are not entirely filled with God’s Spirit (or controlled by Him), as well as due to differing mental capacities by exegetes, some variance in interpretation is to be expected.

In terms of historical criticism, evaluation of the Gospel material, or for that matter, any historical record, for Webb (and others in Key Events) involves: (1) the preliminary phase where the interpreter must be self-aware of his/her horizon or biases/predispositions that are brought to the study; (2) the first main phase then involves the historian gathering and interpreting/evaluating the surviving traces or “raw data,” (3) the second main phase is the historian interpreting and explaining the relevant data with hypotheses; and (4) the concluding phase it to gather the evidence (i.e. surviving traces), arguments and hypotheses into a coherent and complete historical narrative that the historian considers to be the most plausible representation (i.e. “narrative account or N/A) of that chunk of past reality being considered (i.e. the “past event” or PE). Again, although Webb may not directly admit the impact of such assertions, the practical impact here in interpreting the Gospels would again depend upon the a priori biases and prejudices of the interpreter and be anchored firmly in relativity and subjectivity of the resulting interpretation.

Applying his study to the Bible accounts like the Gospels, Webb allows for possible distinctions between the biblical event itself (the event that is being described by the biblical author) and the biblical author’s interpretive explanation of divine causality for that event. He also asserts that “the possible history of an event itself is a distinct matter from discussing the causal explanation provided in the ancient text.”

**Tools and Methods in Historical Jesus Research**

Further doubt is cast regarding the Gospel material as seen in discussion of the tools and methods in historical Jesus research that were utilized throughout the work. Webb allows for a distinction between what the Gospels relate about Jesus’ life as He lived in A.D. 30 with alleged beliefs that arose later in the composition of the Gospels after those events, so that the Gospels do not necessarily convey what actually happened in Jesus’ day but may be beliefs of His life that developed later: “As primary sources written some 40 to 60 years after the events they portray, these three Synoptic Gospels are first and foremost evidence for the beliefs and viewpoints of their authors and some within their respective communities in the 70s and 80s C. E.” and the question should revolve around “what extent can the pieces of the data also be used as evidence for 30 C. E.? This is the question of ‘historicity’ or ‘authenticity.’” One is left wondering if and when the Gospels are

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80 Ibid., 39.
81 Ibid., 55.
truly portraying the events of Jesus’ life or that of the church and how would one know the difference.

Webb also allows for creativity involved in the composition of the Gospels, as well as a layering process (“stages”) that occurred prior to the Gospels being written:

[T]he traditions contained within the Gospels are understood to have passed through various stages before they were written down in the Gospels . . . . At any time in this process, it is historically possible and even likely that an event or saying that had been observed or heard was later added to or changed in some way, and it is equally possible that an event or saying was created by someone and inserted into the traditioning process at any stage, whether as an oral tradition, a part of an early collection, or a periscope in a written Gospel . . . . Thus, the purpose of the critical methods and criteria are to ascertain the probability of whether or not—and to what extent—something stated in the written Gospels can be traced back to the events stage. ⁸²

In order to evaluate whether or not a particular piece of data was changed and how it might have been changed, critical methods are applied for their purpose is to “ascertain the probability of whether or not—and to what extent—something stated in the written Gospels can be traced back to the events stage” and again “Gospel studies generally and historical Jesus studies in particular have developed a number of critical methods and criteria to help the historian evaluate the Gospel data, weighing the probability of whether or not a particular piece of data or part thereof is ‘historical’ or ‘authentic.’”⁸³ These are preliminary (source, redaction and tradition criticisms), primary (criteria of authenticity—“criteria given the heaviest weight in making a judgment concerning the authenticity of an event or saying, or a particular element within such a pericope”) and secondary criteria (criteria of authenticity that “contribute less weight to judgment concerning the authenticity of a particular piece of tradition”).⁸⁴ Importantly, in response to such criteria, their practical impact would automatically cast further doubt about the trustworthiness of the Gospel traditions as practiced by the evangelical questers rather than add confidence to trustworthiness.

The natural result of utilizing these “preliminary” criteria of source, redaction and tradition criticism used by these evangelical questers is to open up the distinct possibility that the Gospels are not direct eyewitness accounts (Matthew, John) or related to eyewitnesses (Luke carefully investigating information from eyewitnesses—Luke 1:1–4; Mark relating Peter’s preaching), but instead may have had multiple layers that must be peeled back to discover what actually happened in Jesus’ life. The impact is that these eyewitness accounts no longer are direct but indirect mediations of Jesus’ life.

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⁸² Ibid., 55–56.
⁸³ Ibid., 56, 57.
⁸⁴ Ibid., 60, 69.
In terms of these primary criteria of authenticity, Webb admits that “[t]he relative importance or weight for each of these primary criteria is somewhat subjective among scholars—I have placed them . . . in an order that makes sense to me.”85 This statement constitutes a tacit admission that criteria of authenticity are replete with subjectivity and contribute little to any valid discussion, since they assume what they are trying to prove (see Part 1 of this series for further discussion). Criteria of authenticity are *a priori* assumptions that are used to guarantee the desired outcome of what has already been decided as the conclusion regarding Gospel historicity. They assume what they are attempting to prove. They lack any objective anchor or ground for the interpreter. If the outcome desired is not forthcoming, then questers invent new criteria that ensure that outcome they desire. Such criteria also place a burden on the Gospel material to prove any ground or basis in historicity, i.e. their mere application implies doubt about historicity or authenticity.

In discussing, for instance, the primary criterion of multiple attestation (based in the 2/4 source hypothesis), Webb had related, “Most of the scholars in this project hold to the Two Source Hypothesis, but they differ over the extent to which they use a reconstructed *Sayings Gospel Q*.”86 One must remember that multiple attestation depends for its validity on the 2/4 Source Hypothesis (e.g. Mark, Q). In order to prove anything about “probability,” multiple attestation operates direct from this assumption. If this Synoptic approach is invalid, then all operating principles based directly upon it, such as multiple attestation, prove nothing regarding the Gospel material whatsoever. It does, however, raise questions of doubt about material that cannot be in some way affirmed through this criteria.

In discussing the criterion of multiple attestation, Webb protests that “just because a particular event has only one eyewitness and/or chain of transmission, does not make it any less probable than one that has multiple witnesses and chains of transmission,” (i.e. single attestation) but he argues at the same time:

[M]ultiple attestation raises the level of probability because the material has independent corroboration. But single attestation means that this material does not benefit from independent corroboration; this does not, by itself, lower the judgment on the material. Viewed comparatively, material benefiting from multiple attention has a higher probability than singly attested material, but this is only because this criterion has raised the probability of multiply attested material; it has not lowered the probability of singly attested material . . . Just because a tradition is multiply attested does not mean it is *necessarily* authentic, but more so, just because it is singly attested does not *necessitate* a judgment of inauthenticity.87

One is immediately impressed by the obvious confusion that this criterion presents, rendering it dubious in effectiveness. To raise one Gospel element as

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85 Ibid., 60.
86 Ibid., 59.
87 Ibid., 61–62.
multiply attested is to immediately or naturally lower other elements that cannot be multiply attested, whether Webb or other evangelicals admit this or not. One cannot have it both ways, with one raised in probability, the other not impacted. If something is raised in probability through multiple attestation, then shades of doubt are automatically implied about other elements that cannot be multiply attested. Of course, one could perhaps “suspend judgment” about the historicity of a singly attested event, but the mere act of suspension of judgment automatically casts doubt on the event itself by the need to suspend judgment.

An example of another primary criterion that Webb commends is that of the criterion of dissimilarity. His conclusion regarding the historicity of Matthew 16:18 in his application of dissimilarity is significant:

An example of this criterion functioning to lower the level of probability may be observed in Jesus’ statement in Matthew 16:18, “... and upon this rock I will build my church.” Evidence in the Gospels indicate that the focus of Jesus’ ministry was upon “the kingdom of God” and not the “church” as it would have been understood by Matthew’s audience—A Christian entity distinct from Israel. The term “church” (ἐκκλησία) is only found one other time on the lips of Jesus in the canonical Gospels, also in Matthew (18:15). This suggests the probability that this language is a result of Matthean redaction, and it is quite unlikely that this clause, at least as it is understood in Matthew 16:18, is authentic. 88

Webb continues that his conclusion here “does not mean that the entire periscope of Matt 16:17–19 should be viewed as inauthentic.” 89

Also strategic is Webb’s admission about using this criteria in opposite directions: at one time proving and at another time disproving Gospel material. He relates caution regarding language of raising and lowering levels of probability: “All judgments of this nature should be understood on a scale of probabilities: Yes, it is possible in either example to conceive of a way that the opposite could be the case. But historical judgments using the criteria of authenticity are a means of judgment which is more probable.” 90 One can only wonder: How valid is such a principle (or, principles-plural) that can be used either way in antithetical possibilities regarding historicity? Ironically, not only do these evangelicals allow doubt about the Gospel materials but they also have great doubt as to their scale assessing the surrounding level of doubt.

Webb also is driven to admit that use of criterion of authenticity “is much more an art than it is science.” Furthermore, and perhaps more telling, he goes on to note,

[G]iven the nature of historiography [i.e. the adoption of a form of postmodernism by these evangelicals] discussed . . . and the manner in which the

88 Ibid., 65–66.
89 Ibid., 66.
90 Ibid.
criteria of authenticity function, one must realize that judgments of authenticity or historicity are matters of greater or lesser probability, as are the explanations and hypotheses built upon them. Certainty—as one assumes in mathematics or hopes for in the sciences—is not realistic or possible in the historical enterprise. Thus the judicious historian weighs the evidence and provides judgments along a scale of ‘highly probable’ through ‘possible’ to ‘unlikely.’ Occasionally a historian might even use terms like ‘virtually certain’ or ‘most unlikely,’ but such extreme judgments should probably be reserved for situations in which virtually all the evidence overwhelmingly points in one direction. Otherwise, readers and other historians may in turn judge the evidence as ‘going beyond the evidence.’

Apparently, in this reckoning, to believe in the virtual certainty of the Gospels as a whole would be “an extreme judgment.” While distancing themselves from the voting of the Jesus Seminar on sayings of Jesus, these evangelicals create a scale of probability that resembles what the Jesus Seminar attempts, except on the macro-level of events rather than Jesus’ sayings. Barriers that might exist between the conclusions of these evangelicals and the Jesus Seminar have little substance, except perhaps in terms of the degree of dehistoricization. What Webb and other evangelical questers who would agree with his approach have done is take the Gospel accounts and place them on the shifting sands of acute subjectivity and whim of the interpreter. All objectivity is lost. Certainty is now viewed as an extreme position in relation to the record of Jesus as presented in the Gospels.

Finally, Webb concludes his discussion by giving the reasoning behind why these particular twelve events were chosen in the work: “Three overarching questions have guided the project: (1) What are the key events in the life of Jesus that we think can be best demonstrated as being probably historical? (2) . . . what is the significance of each event for understanding the historical Jesus? (3) What is the portrait of Jesus that results from considering these events and their significance?”

Thus, the practical impact of such an approach is that a fifth Gospel has been created by these evangelicals associated with IBR in this work in their decision as to which events in the Gospel material have the best chance of being “probably historical,” i.e. the historically probable, essentially affirmable core Gospel. One wonders about the events that they left out—are they now to be considered less historical? Should evangelicals suspend judgment about the historicity of those not mentioned? Does this not result in a fifth Gospel that actually constitutes a qualitatively different gospel that Paul warned about (ἔτερον εὐαγγέλιον—Gal 1:6) in that they cast doubt on the Gospels received in the canon that were written by eyewitneses to Jesus’ life? Who would be convinced to trust the canonical Gospels by such an evidential “apologetic” of the material?

Webb also attempts to insulate the work against criticism in concluding his article by noting that “each author remains alone responsible for his views expressed in his particular essay . . . the authors of the essays . . . in this volume do
not all agree with everything that is stated in this introductory essay . . . it is quite possible that there may be some tensions between the views expressed in this chapter [Webb’s introduction to historiography] and particular elements in some of the chapters to follow. Though I suspect that they will be relatively few and not overly significant.”

Serious Historical Study?

In reply to Bock’s desire for “serious” historical study, several comments are necessary. First, it is highly dubious that postmodernistic historiography, as well as historical criticism, can be truly considered “serious” historical study. These evangelicals fail to understand, or choose to ignore, that these ideologies bristle with hostile *a priori* criteria that always place the burden of proof heavily on the NT, resulting in acute accentuation of uncertainty and doubt about the documents that can never be overcome. Both historical criticism and postmodernism do not operate from any perceived “scientific” or “objective” basis. They are designed to make the Scriptures wholly pliable to modern sensibilities and remove any perceived objectionable elements that the documents may have to critical scholarship (e.g. supernatural, uniqueness of Jesus). When scholars apply postmodernism to the NT, they are seeking to remake any objectionable elements in the NT into images that are acceptable to them, as is clearly demonstrated in searching for the ‘historical’ Jesus. These ideologies deliberately render all opinions tenuous so that no one view is able to prevail. The NT documents can never overcome the skepticism of postmodernism or historical criticism, and indeed, these ideologies intend to be so. Pliability and skepticism regarding the NT documents are by design.

Second, if someone truly is to undertake “serious” historical study, one must clearly identify presuppositional and ideological factors involved in evaluating NT historical issues. This axiom applies to all evangelical approaches with no exceptions, for all have presuppositions. But not all presuppositions are equal or benign in their evaluative impact. Evangelicals adopt current trends in postmodernistic historiography with weight given to the negative ideology behind it or its impact on the perimeters of conclusions reached. The old adage of a “text, without a context, is a pretext,” applies here. Here ignorance or failure to acknowledge history and presuppositions is very much enabling these evangelicals to engage in popular trends while ignoring the proverbial “elephant” in the room of negative underpinnings. It also enables them to convince their readers of their conclusions, whose readers probably do not fully realize the existence of these negative bases. Clearly, the defense of the NT documents as reliable history comes through decisively, openly delineating these negative operational bases—not assuming them.

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93 Ibid.

Third, many of the operating assumptions of searching and criteria of authenticity are based on other dubious foundational assumptions, e.g. source criticism (2/4 Source) or form/tradition criticism (the latter contradicted by eyewitnesses who stabilized tradition). If the foundations are tenuous, any conclusions involved in searching are rendered entirely suspect.95

Fourth, the “myth of influence” needs crucial attention by these evangelicals. Scripture makes it clear that any convincing of an unbelieving person by human logic is dubious (1 Cor 1:18–2:14). The whole message involved in Jesus is rejected by the unbelieving as a default response (1:18–21). The default response of Jews to a crucified Messiah is to see it as “offensive” (1:22–23). God has deliberately designed a “foolish message” (1:21) to save against human logic. Thus, the human logic involved in posting “criteria of embarrassment” is dubious since it only accentuates Jewish offense to Jesus, resulting in further offense. The default response of unsaved Gentiles is to view information about Christ as “foolishness,” so no human logic applied will convince. Instead, God has chosen “foolish people,” “base things, “despised” with a “foolish message” to nullify human wisdom (1:24–28) so that no person can boast of human wisdom leading to faith (1:29–30). For as Paul says, “your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but the power of God (1 Cor 2:5). The power to convince, biblically, resides in the Word of God and the Holy Spirit, not the wisdom of men (1 Cor 2:14). True power to convince is through the proclamation of God’s Word and the power of the Holy Spirit, otherwise man would have a boast before God (1:29). At the very least, such NT passages place severe limits on human logic for persuading. Would anyone suggest that their powers of persuasion are on an equal or greater par than the Holy Spirit? Perhaps this is too simple an approach for sophisticated evangelicals today (cp. Rom. 10:17). The New Testament documents find much safer harbor among “lay evangelicals” who are identified as not having the education or being as skilled as these scholars.96

Fourth, closely associated with the previous point is: who among NT skeptics would be convinced by evangelical adoption of these ideologies or resulting conclusions? Do these evangelicals believe in the NT assertions of resurrection because criteria of authenticity affirmed it, or did they already (a priori) believe in the resurrection and impose their beliefs upon their research in such works as Key Events? The latter is more likely. It is also more likely that skeptics also would realize such impositions and reject any such evangelical assertions outright. The retort of Society of Biblical Literature’s Robert Miller suffices, “arguments about the historical Jesus can be productive only among those who already agree on a number of contested questions about historiographical method and the nature of the Gospels. Therefore, debates about the historical Jesus that occur between the ‘evangelical’ camp’ (which sees the canonical Gospels as fully reliable historically)
and the ‘traditional camp’ (which sees the Gospel as blends of fact and fiction) are futile.”

Finally, the answer to the question imposed as to whether faith precludes “serious historical engagement” finds its answer: clear doubt exists as to whether these evangelicals have truly engaged in serious historical debate. The present writer still searches for genuine examples of true Gospel skeptics who are now believers due to the work of these evangelicals in “searching for the ‘historical’ Jesus.”

A Brief Cataloging of Some Assertions in 12 Key Events

In light of Webb’s setting forth of historiography, a brief examination of some of the various assertions regarding historicity in the Gospels is warranted. An examination of this IBR collaborative work reveals some interesting conclusions among some of the essays. Only a few examples can be cited due to space limitations. These observations reveal that some of these evangelicals are all too readily willing to surrender the Gospels to dubious Synoptic hypotheses that are fleeting, arbitrary and subjective (i.e. 2/4 Source, Q, criteria of authenticity). Moreover, if these current approaches are ill-founded, then they have actually proven nothing about Gospel historicity, or the lack of it—depending on their approach, in the end. All that was accomplished was an exposure of their willingness in opening up the Gospels to the subjective bias of scholarly whim that allows for the definite possibility that the Gospels are not historically trustworthy or that they cannot be affirmed beyond probability at best. Moreover, one receives the strong impression that a rule by scholarly consensus prevails among them, somewhat reminiscent of indirect voting on the historical nature of the events.

While Craig Evans, in his chapter, affirms the historicity of Jesus’ exorcisms, he allows for a level of creativity in the Gospel accounts that, in turn, denigrates Gospel historicity: (1) “The evangelist Luke [he does not identify if this is actually the historical physician Luke] draws upon his Markan source at this point [in Luke 11:16–20] pulling together elements from Mark 3, as well as the request for a sign in Mark 8:11–13” of the request for a sign into Luke 11:16 into the composition of the pericope in Luke, alleging that “the synthetic nature of the composition complicates the question of the original context.” He argues that “[i]t is quite possible that the saying in v. 20 [Luke 11] derives from a different context” and “the parallel [to Luke 11] saying in Matthew 12:28 also seems to be out of its original context, being coupled—somewhat at cross–purposes—with 12:27 . . . . Either the sayings of vv. 27 and 28 were uttered in different contexts or they related to one another in a different way.” For Evans, some evidence exists that Jesus’ healings were linked to a perception of disease as being caused by demons and the need for exorcism: “We see this in the healing of Simon Peter’s mother-in-law,

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98 Craig Evans, “Exorcisms and the Kingdom: Inaugurating the Kingdom of God and Defeating the Kingdom of Satan,” *Key Events*, 170.

99 Ibid., 170 and 170 n43.
where Jesus is said to have ‘rebuked the fever’ (Luke 4:39), as though a sentient being was responsible for the fever.”

One is left with the impression that Evans implies that the Gospel had misperceptions of demons behind physical maladies, which were wrong, primitive, or accommodations here. The entertainment of the possibility of dubious compositional factors being involved here immediately raises questions about the historicity of the passage that give conflicting elements with his attempts at confirming the historicity of Jesus’ exorcisms at the same time.

Craig Blomberg, in defending the historicity of Jesus’ table fellowship, readily admits that he proceeds on a basis “in an order that progresses from those [12 passages he cites in his article] in an order from those with the strongest cases for authenticity to those that are not quite as secure.” Security of historicity for Blomberg centers in evaluative compliance with Markan priority and the Q hypothesis as well as the value criteria of authenticity that are applied. Based in this, the story of Jesus’ participation at Levi’s party (Mark 2:13–17 and parallels) has the greatest chances of historicity with verse 2:17 “on form critical grounds” having “the most demonstrably historical core of the passage.” Such wording as “historical core” leaves one with the impression of varying elements of surety regarding historicity in the individual Gospel narratives as well. He asserts that the “core of the Markan version of the feeding of the 5000 is most likely authentic” leaving open the definite possibility existing that it might not be.

Commendably, Donald Hagner recognizes clearly that questions of historicity center in a priori thinking, “One’s a priori inclination becomes a crucially important factor in deciding for or against historicity” and “the initial bias one assumes regarding the historicity of the gospel tradition, whether negative or positive, will largely determine the conclusion to which one is attracted.”

What does seem to emerge is one indubitable fact: the crucially determinative role that is played by one’s predisposition to the question [historicity of the Synoptic Sabbath controversy passages]. This should not be surprising in a day when we are learning that there is no truly ‘objective’ or ‘neutral’ knowledge and that every position necessarily begins from some kind of ‘faith’ basis. This does not excuse us from doing our homework well. Nor does it mean that we accept everything blindly and uncritically, ‘by faith’ so to speak. But we are made freshly aware of the difficulty of the historical enterprise.
Hagner then delineates “the strange paradox, then, is there is no more helpful tool for the Gospel interpreter than faith in the truthfulness of the Gospels themselves.” For him, “The burden of proof here must remain with those who would deny historical authenticity to the material.” If he affirms such a position in his lengthy discussion, then subjecting the Gospels to such dubious and fleeting ideology (e.g. criteria of authenticity) does little but significantly raise questions of doubt, skepticism and uncertainty and settles nothing about historicity. Such an effort is futile from its start and is defeated before it even begins. It is unable to accomplish anything. Hagner also labels that the reference to Abiathar” in Mark 2:26 as “the mistaken reference” and that “it hardly seems fair to make this confusion of names, really a minor point and found in other texts, a determining factor in whether Jesus spoke these words.” While Hagner allows historical inaccuracy on some things, he chooses to maintain the general accuracy of the pericope. Once this level of inaccuracy is allowed or permitted, it becomes even more difficult or capricious (the slippery slope) for evangelicals to insist on the general accuracy of the story as a whole. He concludes his article by noting the “quest of the historical Jesus is a misnomer. It is not the search that can bring us the real Jesus . . . but rather a search that provides what necessarily and finally must remain an artificial construct . . . . The fact remains that the historical method, strictly practiced . . . is ill-equipped to deal with the uniqueness represented by the story of Jesus.”

Interestingly, here Hagner runs away from historical criticism while attempting to apply it to the Gospels.

In his work on Peter’s declaration concerning Jesus’ identity in Caesarea Philippi (Matt 16:13–20; Mark 8:27–30; Luke 9:18–21 and John 6:66–69), Michael Wilkins spends a great deal of effort and length in his discussion applying criteria of authenticity to the events surrounding this incident. He argues, “the collective testimony of the criteria of Semitism and Palestinian background, Embarrassment, and Historical Coherence present convincing evidence that Peter’s declaration of Jesus as the Messiah is historical” and “These collective criteria lead to the conclusion that the Gospel writers recorded an [sic] historically authentic account of Peter’s declaration that Jesus was the Christ/Messiah.” Yet, at the end of his article, Wilkins laments, “The so-called distinction between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith is an unhelpful divide. Jesus is the Christ of history and . . . .

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107 Ibid.
108 Ibid., 254.
109 Ibid., 259–60.
110 This reference may be anything but mistaken. Simple solutions to its resolution are readily available. For instance, the phrase “in the days” can also mean “during the lifetime.” According to 1 Sam 21:1, Ahimelech was the priest who gave the bread to David, while Abiathar was his son who later was the High Priest during David's reign. Since Ahimelech died shortly after this incident (cp. 1 Sam 22:19–20), it is likely that this mention of Abiathar was used since he was the well-known companion of David who later became High Priest in David’s reign, along with Zadok (2 Sam 15:35).
111 Donald Hagner, “Jesus and the Synoptic Sabbath Controversies,” 288.
112 Michael J. Wilkins, “Peter’s Declaration Concerning Jesus’ Identity in Caesarea Philippi,” Key Events, 349, 367.
Christ of faith.” On one hand, Wilkins affirms the validity of these criteria in his article, while at the same time rejecting the divide that the application of such criteria of authenticity *a priori* create and, in practice accentuate, between Jesus in the Gospels and Jesus in history. The standard operating assumption in these criteria is that a divide exists, and their application is to determine the extent or nature of the divide. Why then does Wilkins so diligently affirm such criteria while at the same time insisting no divide exists? This is a manifest contradiction.

For Klyne Snodgrass, the Temple cleansing incident in the Synoptics placed at the end of Jesus’ ministry after His triumphal entry into Jerusalem (Matt 21:12–17; Mark 11:12–19; Luke 19:45–48) versus John 2:12–22 where the latter places a cleansing at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, leads to the conclusion that only one cleansing really occurred, not two: “The difference between the Synoptics and John on the chronology of the temple incident leads some to conclude there were two cleanings. While this cannot be absolutely precluded, it is not likely. Not only are the accounts very close in what happened, both traditions have the temple incident followed by questioning from the religious leaders . . . Whether the Synoptic or the Johannine chronology is to be preferred is not easily determined.” Snodgrass concludes, “I lean toward the Synoptic chronology because of the incident’s logical connection with Jesus’ arrest, but in the end I do not think that either option may be excluded.” To Snodgrass’ credit, he does not deny the historicity of a temple cleansing—just the idea of two cleanings. However, his allowance for such latitudes in historicity in that only one cleansing is proposed as possible, immediately opens up a Pandora’s box that leads to the destruction of the trustworthiness of the Gospels as historical records. If the Gospel writers are postulated to have such laxity in inventing separate, as well as disparate, contexts for the same events for alleged theological (redactional) reasons, very little if anything in the Gospels can be trusted as historical. Snodgrass is reflecting the capricious scholarly bias against doubles occurring in Scripture and also its bias for an evolutionary development in the Gospel tradition, resulting in one account developing into another, the latter of which is grossly speculative. The temple connections in the Synoptics as well as John make the events rather tight, not allowing for such creative liberty. One would also wonder why Jesus’ cleansing would occur only once. Why would the Temple authorities, who rejected Jesus’ Messianic claims, ever respond to His cleansing the first time in conforming to Jesus’ corrections of their activities? Most likely, they would have immediately returned the Temple to its prior status before Jesus’ disruption of it the first time as witnessed by John. The idea of need of cleansing is far more natural in light of the persistent rejection of Jesus by the authorities. If he did it once at the beginning of His ministry, that He did it twice, at the end also, would be very natural in light of such resistance to His messianic authority.

I. Howard Marshall’s article, “The Last Supper,” affirms, “denials of the historicity of the essential elements in that narrative are untenable. It is one thing to

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113 Ibid., 371.
115 Ibid., 447.
cast doubt on details of the story; it is another thing to rule out any possibility of basic historicity... The suspicions that may attach to some parts of the story and the historical difficulties created by others are not on such a scale as to call in question the essential historicity of what is recorded.”

Marshall is also strategic, not only for his article’s inclusion and its affirmation of “basic historicity” but also for Marshall’s influence that he has had on some contributors to Key Events. Several were mentored in their doctoral program by Marshall at Aberdeen University. His influence among them is frequently seen.

In 1977, Marshall wrote I Believe in the Historical Jesus. In this book, Marshall did much to add confusion to the term “historical Jesus” among British evangelicals and Americans who trained in British universities for theology. He attempted to take the term “historical Jesus” and redefine the traditional meaning of its usage in terms of its presuppositions, history and origins, i.e. somehow rehabilitate the term from its radical contexts of Schweitzer and Käsemann. Michael Green (who also studied under Marshall), in the editor’s preface to Marshall’s book, comments that the purpose of the book will have “a very wide impact in clarifying these muddied waters” that the first and second searches for the historical Jesus had caused. This two-part series has demonstrated that the term makes a distinction between what the Gospels assert about Jesus and hypotheses how he actually was based in historical-critical suppositions that a difference exists between the Gospel accounts of Jesus’ life and how he is alleged to have truly existed in history. Marshall, however, did not add clarification but muddied the waters further, relating that the term could also mean that the person actually existed so that the person is historical. So his title, “I believe in the historical Jesus” means that for Marshall, Jesus was truly a person who existed in history—”I believe that there was a historical person called Jesus.” Both Schweitzer and Käsemann, however, never denied Jesus’ existence in history but the Gospel portrayal of Jesus in history. For Marshall, to define the term otherwise, was to do so as to assign an aberrant significance to the term. Marshall went on to argue that “methods of historical study applied to the Gospels leave us in no doubt that some knowledge of Jesus is possible and that the existence of such knowledge naturally implies that Jesus really existed.”

Furthermore, much of the postmodernistic historical approach of Key Events is foreshadowed in Marshall who explains the historian’s task as determining what actually happened as opposed to a historian’s account that related what happened. In other words, history always involves interpretation of what happened. This means that the historian must evaluate evidence with critical skill and knowledge to separate “reliable evidence” from “unreliable.” For Marshall, “historical statements are attended by various degrees of probability, and that the lines between ‘certainly

119 Marshall, I Believe in the Historical Jesus, 11–16, note esp. 16.
120 Ibid., 16.
121 Ibid., 28.
historical,’ ‘probably historical’ and ‘possibly historical’ are hard to draw” for “the historical is compelled to use ‘probably’ and ‘possibly’ very often.”122 Such an approach, for Marshall, leads to a more accurate knowledge of “what happened,” for the aim of the historian (or, gospel critic) is “to ascertain precisely what can be proved to have taken place during a particular period in time” and to be aware of his own biases as an interpreter.125

As applied to Gospel studies, that Marshall chided British evangelical Donald Guthrie for his traditional approach is very significant and reflects an attitude that has undoubtedly influenced some of his students today,

A very traditional type of picture of Jesus is presented by D. Guthrie in Jesus the Messiah. Although Guthrie is well aware of the methods of modern historical research, he tends to ignore them in this book and to take it rather for granted that we can read the Gospels more or less as they stand as straight historical sources for the life of Jesus. The result is that the reader who is puzzled by historical questions will not find any help with his problems, and the insight which might be gained by the application of historical methods are missing. The modern reader needs more help than Guthrie is prepared to give him and might mistakenly conclude that there are in fact no historical problems.124

For Marshall, apparently, to take the Gospels as straight historical sources is to be uncritical and unscholarly as a historian. In addition, Marshall believed that traditional views of Gospel authorship (e.g. Matthew written by tax-collector Matthew or John the Apostle writing the Gospel of John) are to be rejected: “In various ways this simple picture of the situation has been shattered” so that “The case that the Gospels are reliable because they were written by eyewitnesses seems to have evaporated.”125 Again, “even if the original apostles were writing the story, this was no guarantee that they themselves have not modified the facts in the course of repeated re-tellings by themselves and under the influence of the way in which other Christians recounted them.”126 For Marshall, the 2/4 document hypothesis, form and redaction criticism, criteria of authenticity must all be applied in adjudicating the historical claims of the Gospels. Marshall notes especially that criteria of authenticity (dissimilarity, multiple attestation, coherence, unintentionality, traditional continuity) are helpful “for separating off inauthentic elements from authentic elements” in the Gospels.127 Marshall’s conclusion is positive toward such historical-critical: “historical study can be the servant of

122 Ibid., 36.
123 Ibid., 37.
125 Marshall, 143, 144.
126 Ibid., 144.
127 Ibid., 200–11.
faith.” In another work, *New Testament Interpretation*, Marshall defined such “historical criticism” as “the study of any narrative which purports to convey historical information in order to determine what actually happened and is described or alluded to in the passage in question” as well as “to test the historical accuracy of what purports to be historical narrative.”

Darrell Bock’s intent in his article is partly to defend the Markan account of Jewish charges against and Examination of Jesus as “essential historicity.” He considers Mark 14:61–64 (Matt 26:63–66; Luke 22:66–71) under the Two-Document Hypothesis, “likely to be the earliest form of this tradition” and applies criterion of historical plausibility, dissimilarity, ambiguity and Jewishness to the pericope of their examination of Jesus. He concludes his discussion by noting that “the scene has great historical plausibility” and that it is “far more likely that it goes back to the examination and not to Mark.” Furthermore, “the scene as a summary of trial events has a strong claim to authenticity, a stronger claim than the alternative, that the scene was created by Mark or by the early church,” and “I have argued that the case for the authenticity of this historic clash is strong.” Bock’s usage of terms as “essential historicity” and “historical plausibility” in terms of this Gospel account is troubling for evangelicalism. One wonders, is Bock’s decision for this commendable conclusion regarding historicity firmly centered in his assumptions of the validity of criteria of authenticity that he has applied and the alleged earliest nature of Mark that he assumes is true? What if these criteria and his synoptic assumptions in succeeding generations are dismissed, demonstrated to be invalid or tenuous? What if others apply these same criteria and reach the opposite conclusion? Church history is littered with such examples of scholarly trends that dominate in one period but are rejected in another. What has Bock proved ultimately? The only thing that has happened is that Bock has centered questions of historicity upon the shifting sands of scholarly opinion and fads. Surely one would hope that Bock would still believe the historicity of the Gospels even without the application of these assumptions and criteria. Do these assumptions add any real demonstration to the historicity of this event in the Gospels or are the Gospels self-validating as God’s inspired Word? Are people convinced of God’s Word through argument or through God’s Spirit (Rom 1:18–20; 1 Cor 1:22–24). The latter assertion is admittedly not attached to any scholarly trends or ideologies that are currently practiced by some evangelicals. One is reminded of Jesus’ words in Luke 16:31, “But he said to him, ‘If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.’” In other words, if belief in God’s Word is not already (*a priori*) present, even the most convincing arguments will never succeed in fostering belief or assurance of historicity.

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128 Ibid., 211.
131 Ibid., 592.
132 Ibid., 656.
133 Ibid., 660–61.
including assumptions of criteria as well as the early nature of Mark. Paul’s words in 1 Cor 2:1–5 are vital:

And when I came to you, brethren, I did not come with superiority of speech or of wisdom, proclaiming to you the testimony of God.
For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.
I was with you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling,
and my message and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power,
so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God.

And again, in 1 Cor 2:6–8:

Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away;
but we speak God’s wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory;
the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

Conviction or assurance of God’s Word always rests in God’s Spirit (John 14:26; 16:8–11, 13). Accentuation of doubt is produced by historical criticism. Does IBR’s approach to affirm the “essentials” of the Gospel rest in God’s power or the wisdom of human ideology? The responsibility of believers is to proclaim that Word that inherently is a sharp, two-edged sword (Heb 4:12), for it alone has the power to persuade regarding its historicity, not criteria of authenticity or shifting beliefs in synoptic approaches. Would these historical critics claim that such ideologies have any power to convince through approaches that were designed historically, not to affirm, but to destroy the Word? Would they affirm that they have greater powers of persuasion through these endeavors than God’s Spirit?

In another recent book, *The Historical Jesus: Five Views* (2009), Dunn rightly criticizes Bock’s approach with erroneously trying to equate the term “historical Jesus” with the biblical Jesus of the Gospels: “The question of what we mean by historical is also raised by . . . [his] somewhat casual use of the term ‘the historical Jesus.’” Dunn goes on to criticize this evangelical rightly in his incorrect use of this term in that “properly speaking, ‘the historical Jesus’ denotes Jesus as discerned by historical study. Those engaged in the quest of the historical Jesus, those at least who have sought to clarify what the phrase ‘the historical Jesus’ denotes, have usually made the point that the term properly denotes the life and mission of Jesus as they have been ‘reconstructed’ by means of historical research—‘historical’ in that sense.” He then criticizes this evangelical for his improper defining of the term “as a reference to the historical actuality of the first-
century Jesus of Nazareth.”134 For Dunn, this evangelical’s concept of Jesus came too close to the biblical presentation of Jesus for it to be a permissible view of the “historical Jesus” in the Third Quest, especially in any certainty of the resurrection.135 In other words, the view in the Third Quest that will not be accepted in searching is one that comes closest or wholly approximates that of the portrayal of Jesus in the Gospels. While this evangelical commendably sought to convince Third Questers that the Jesus of the Bible can be proven through the ideologies of Third Questing, such an attempt is flatly rejected as coming too close to the biblical portrait of Jesus. While Dunn, Sanders, Charlesworth, and Wright will allow a modicum of historicity in the Gospels as noted above, they do not appear to tolerate these evangelicals superimposing their evangelical presuppositions upon the text, even for “core” or “essential” historicity. For Dunn, at best, only “probabilities” are possible “rather than certainties.”136 Ironically, under the Third Search, the closer evangelicals attempt to equate the “historical Jesus” with the biblical Jesus, the more the Third Questers outright reject their suppositions and cry foul for imposing evangelical views on the concept.

Grant Osborne’s article on the resurrection concludes, “The empty tomb and appearance narratives show a core of history”137 and “This essay has contended that a genuine resurrection event supplies the best explanation for why we have the creed of a resurrection early on . . . . This case has been made using the criteria of historical Jesus study and setting these events in their conceptual and historical background. With this perspective, the most natural conclusion would be that there is a personal God who acted that remarkable day and raised Jesus from the dead.”138 Osborne affirms N. T. Wright’s observation as “a propos: Not only does a true bodily resurrection provide a ‘sufficient condition’ for the empty tomb and appearances; it provides ‘a necessary condition for these things . . . no other explanation could or would do. All the efforts to find alternative explanations fail, and they were bound to do so.’”139 While Osborne’s assertion is welcome, his somewhat tepid endorsement of the resurrection through the language of historical criticism stands in stark contrast to the bold assertions in the language of the New Testament. John 21:26–31 states:

After eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst and said, “Peace be with you.”

135 Ibid.
136 Ibid., 299.
137 Grant R. Osborne, “Jesus’ Empty Tomb and His Appearance in Jerusalem,” Key Events, 818.
138 Ibid., 818–19.
139 Ibid., 819.
Then He said to Thomas, “Reach here with your finger, and see My hands; and reach here your hand and put it into My side; and do not be unbelieving, but believing.”

Thomas answered and said to Him, “My Lord and my God!”

Jesus said to him, “Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed.”

Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book;

but these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name.

As well as Acts 1:3: “To these He also presented Himself alive after His suffering, by many convincing proofs [Greek—παρασίτοις τεκμηρίων], appearing to them over a period of forty days and speaking of the things concerning the kingdom of God.” As well as 2 Pet 1:16–17: “For we did not follow cleverly devised tales [Greek—μυθώνις—“myths”] when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, ‘This is My beloved Son with whom I am well–pleased.’” Finally, Paul’s words in 1 Cor 15:1–8 reveal the startling facts of His resurrection:

Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles; and last of all, as to one untimely born, He appeared to me also (emphases added).

Concluding Observations

In reply to Bock’s desire for “serious” historical study through utilizing the historical-critical approach of “searching for the ‘historical Jesus,’”140 several comments ensue:

First, one receives the impression from these evangelicals who participate in some form of questing for “the historical Jesus” that they are sincere and sincerely believe that they are benefiting Gospel studies through such activities. The reality of the evidence reviewed here is that they have subjected the Gospels to marked

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doubt as well as the shifting sand of scholarly whim and opinion. The Gospels have clearly lost. An old proverb relates that the road to hell is paved with good intentions. In this case, however, a mega-size corridor has been opened on this highway to the Gospels’ destruction. The impact on the next generation of preachers is ominous, for will “probability” put proverbial “fire in the belly” of their preaching of the Gospels? Not likely.

Second, it is highly dubious that postmodernistic historiography, as well as historical criticism, can be truly considered “serious” historical study. These evangelicals fail to understand, or choose to ignore, that these ideologies bristle with hostile a priori criteria that always place the burden of proof heavily on the NT, resulting in acute accentuation of uncertainty and doubt about the documents that can never be overcome. Both historical criticism and postmodernism do not operate from any perceived “scientific” or “objective” basis. They are designed to make the Scriptures wholly pliable to modern sensibilities and remove any perceived objectionable elements that the documents may have to critical scholarship (e.g. supernatural, uniqueness of Jesus). When scholars apply postmodernism to the NT, they are seeking to remake any objectionable elements in the NT into images that are acceptable to them, as is clearly demonstrated in searching for the “historical” Jesus. These ideologies deliberately render all opinions tenuous so that no one view is able to prevail. The NT documents can never overcome the skepticism of postmodernism or historical criticism, and indeed, these ideologies intend to such. Pliability and skepticism regarding the NT documents are by design.

Third, if someone truly is to undertake “serious” historical study, one must clearly identify presuppositional and ideological factors involved in evaluating NT historical issues. This axiom applies to all evangelical approaches with no exceptions, for all have presuppositions. But not all presuppositions are equal or benign in their evaluative impact. Evangelicals adopt current trends in postmodernistic historiography, with weight given to the negative ideology behind it or its impact on the perimeters of conclusions reached. The old adage of a “text, without a context, is a pretext,” applies here. Here ignorance or failure to acknowledge history and presuppositions is very much enabling these evangelicals to engage in popular trends while ignoring the proverbial “elephant” in the room of negative underpinnings. It also enables them to convince their readers of their conclusions, whose readers probably do not fully realize the existence of these negative bases. Clearly, the defense of the NT documents as reliable history comes through decisively, openly delineating these negative operational bases—not assuming them.

Fourth, while attacking the Jesus Seminar for their radical opinions, the solution of these evangelicals is not much better. The Jesus Seminar uses the same or similar approaches to criteria of authenticity as do these evangelicals but reaches startling opposing or contradictory conclusions regarding historicity. If such polar opposite conclusions can be reached, then the application of this ideology is highly suspect. No distinct line of demarcation prevents evangelicals from slipping further into skepticism, since they operate on a similar presuppositional and ideological grid.

Fifth, many of the operating assumptions of searching and criteria of authenticity are based on other dubious foundational assumptions, e.g. source
criticism (2/4 Source) or form/tradition criticism (the latter contradicted by eyewitnesses who stabilized tradition). If the foundations are tenuous, any conclusions involved in searching are rendered entirely suspect.  

Sixth, his evangelical questing gives strong evidence that the views of Rogers and McKim regarding inerrancy may now predominate among those who participate. The question must be posed as to whether a recent revival of Rogers’ and McKim’s viewpoint exists among conservative evangelicals. Rogers and McKim attacked fundamentalist belief in inspiration and inerrancy as a product of seventeenth-century Protestant scholasticism that allegedly was wrongly associated with classic orthodoxy by nineteenth-century Princeton theologians. The concept here is that while the historic position of the church is that the Bible may be accurate in terms of faith and practice, it may not be in terms of science, history, geography, origins. The watch-cry that fundamental, conservative evangelicals impose a twentieth-century concept of inerrancy upon an ancient world that did not have such high standards may be heard among their approach.

History, however, is being overlooked or forgotten. As a result of Rogers’s and McKim’s misleading historical association of inerrancy with scholasticism, the “Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy” was formulated by the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy. The purpose of the organization, along with its statements on inerrancy, was expressed as follows: “to counter the drift from this important doctrinal foundation [of inerrancy] by significant segments of evangelicalism and the outright denial of it by other church movements.” Furthermore, Article XVI states: “We affirm that the doctrine of inerrancy has been integral to the Church’s faith throughout its history. We deny that inerrancy is a doctrine invented by scholastic Protestantism, or is a reactionary position postulated in response to negative higher criticism.”

In 1978, evangelicals met in Chicago to discuss biblical inerrancy in response to the trends of the day that were largely inspired by the works of evangelicals like

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141 Much has already been written about this point. See F. David Farnell, “Philosophical and Theological Bent of Historical Criticism,” and “Form and Tradition Criticism, in The Jesus Crisis, 85–131 and 185–232.

142 Rogers and McKim use this logic of “Scottish ‘Common Sense’ Philosophy or Realism” to attack orthodox concepts of inerrancy. See Jack Rogers and Donald K. McKim, The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1979), 235–48. Interestingly, Daniel B. Wallace seems to have revived a similar argument to Rogers and McKim that evangelicals maintain too exacting a concept of inerrancy, arguing that “Our modern descriptions of bibliology grow out of this [Scottish common sense and 19th century Princeton] era.” See Daniel B. Wallace, “An Apologia for a Broad View of Ipsissima Vox,” (Unpublished ETS Paper), 51st Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Danvers, MA., [November 18, 1999], 2–3 n2 and 18–19 n76.

143 Rogers and McKim’s work raised a number of responses, one of which was the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy with its “Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy.” See Marsden, 285.


Rogers and McKim at Fuller Seminary in their attempt to rework views of inerrancy. In response, the Chicago Statement Article XVIII:

We affirm that the text of Scripture is to be interpreted by grammatico-historical exegesis, taking account of its literary forms and devices, and that Scripture is to interpret Scripture. We deny the legitimacy of any treatment of the text or quest for sources lying behind it that leads to relativizing, dehistoricizing, or discounting its teaching, or rejecting its claims to authorship.\(^{146}\)

The Chicago statement continued later to note,

Since the Renaissance, and more particularly since the Enlightenment, world views have been developed that involve skepticism about basic Christian tenets. Such are the agnosticism that denies that God is knowable, the rationalism that denies that He is incomprehensible, the idealism that denies that He is transcendent, and the existentialism that denies rationality in His relationships with us. When these un- and anti-Biblical principles seep into men’s theologies at presuppositional level, as today they frequently do, faithful interpretation of Holy Scripture becomes impossible.\(^{147}\)

The review of the current evangelical discussion on the Third Quest and searching clearly places much of the questing into a dubious category that contradicts the Chicago agreement. However, the Evangelical Theological Society never adopted it as a basis for defining inerrancy. The concept of the “historical Jesus” in all three Quests is motivated by hostile philosophical concepts that stand opposed to the full integrity of the Gospels. In other words, no “historical Jesus” ever existed except in the minds of those who pursued all three Quests, for the conception of “the historical Jesus” is that of Jesus divorced from the biblical portrayal in important ways, especially in terms of Jesus’ distinctiveness as well as supernatural content relayed of Him in the Gospels. Hence, the term “historical Jesus” is very, very ironic in that it really is a fiction of historical criticism without any connection to how Jesus really was. For those who would take the Bible as \textit{a priori} an inspired work as hopefully evangelicals would, the Jesus in the Gospels is how He actually was. No separation exists.

Evangelical participation in the Third Search is a direct consequence of the growing evangelical acceptance of historical-critical ideologies of source, form/tradition and redaction and other scholarly fads. These are philosophically-motivated hermeneutical constructs that, regardless of whatever search, philosophically construct a separation from Jesus in the Bible from some concept of Jesus in history. The more one adopts these premises, as well as their philosophical underpinnings, the more one is forced to search for the historical Jesus. These evangelicals are merely reactive and adaptive to current trends. If, however, the

\(^{146}\) Ibid., 292.

\(^{147}\) Ibid., 295–96.
integrity of the Gospels is maintained and that they are, as the early church so strongly and unanimously espoused from its nascent beginnings, then they are eyewitness accounts of the actual life and activities of Jesus written by the men whose names the Gospels were connected with in church history. The anonymity of the canonical Gospels is a potently powerful witness to the apostolic origin of these documents, for only the certainty of their having come from apostolic origins can reasonably explain their unanimous acceptance. If evangelicals are operating from this supposition instead of adopting historical-critical approaches, any need for searching for the historical Jesus is null and void, i.e. unnecessary.

The data as reviewed in this series demonstrates that fundamentalist, evangelical history is once again repeating itself in a debate between fundamental beliefs and an encroachment of modernism. The conditions of the early twentieth century that resulted in separation of believers to preserve the fundamentals of the faith is now again repeating in the twenty-first century. Lessons of history have not been learned, or they have been forgotten, or worse, ignored. Since ETS is now largely influenced by evangelicals who affirm and practice historical-critical ideologies, perhaps the Society should merge with the Society of Biblical Literature, for the distinctions between these organizations grow less and less as time progresses. What separates them now appears to be 12 events instead of Sanders’ 8. The thin line that distinguishes many prominent evangelicals is now four key events, Sanders’ 8 versus these evangelicals’ 12 Key Events, as well as the “probability” or “possibility” that the “core historicity,” or “essential historicity” of these “footprints” or “historical traces,” actually happened. They have not succeeded in their attempt but placed instead a significant shadow of doubt over the record of Jesus’ life contained in the Gospels.

Seventh, the “myth of influence” needs crucial attention by these evangelicals. Scripture makes it clear that any convincing of an unbelieving person by human logic is dubious (1 Cor 1:18–2:14). The whole message involved in Jesus is rejected by the unbelieving as a default response (1:18–21). The default response of Jews to a crucified Messiah is to see it as “offensive” (1:22–23). God has deliberately designed a “foolish message” (1:21) to save against human logic. Thus, the human logic involved in posting “criteria of embarrassment” is dubious since it only accentuates Jewish offense to Jesus, resulting in further offense. The default response of unsaved Gentiles is to view information about Christ as “foolishness” so no human logic applied will convince. Instead, God has chosen “foolish people,” “base things,” “despised” with a “foolish message” to nullify human wisdom (1:24–28) so that no person can boast of human wisdom leading to faith (1:29–30). For as Paul says, “your faith should not rest on the wisdom of men, but the power of God (1 Cor 2:5). The power to convince, biblically, resides in the Word of God and the Holy Spirit, not the wisdom of men (1 Cor 2:14). True power to convince is through the proclamation of God’s Word and the power of the Holy Spirit, otherwise man would have a boast before God (1:29). At the very least, such NT passages place severe limits on human logic for persuading. Would anyone suggest that their powers of persuasion are on an equal or greater par than the Holy Spirit? Perhaps this is too simple an approach for sophisticated evangelicals today (cp. Rom 10:17).
The New Testament documents find much safer harbor among “lay evangelicals” who are identified as not having the education or skill of these scholars.148

Eighth, closely associated with the previous point is: who among NT skeptics would be convinced by evangelical adoption of these ideologies or resulting conclusions? Do these evangelicals believe in the NT assertions of resurrection because criteria of authenticity affirmed it, or did they already (a priori) believe in the resurrection and impose their beliefs upon their research in such works as Key Events? The latter is more likely. It is also more likely that skeptics also would realize such impositions and reject any such evangelical assertions outright. The retort to Bock, who tries to convince more critical scholars of the Gospels’ validity at the Society of Biblical Literature meeting by Robert Miller suffices, “arguments about the historical Jesus can be productive only among those who already agree on a number of contested questions about historiographical method and the nature of the Gospels. Therefore, debates about the historical Jesus that occur between the ‘evangelical camp’ (which sees the canonical Gospels as fully reliable historically) and the ‘traditional camp’ (which sees the Gospel as blends of fact and fiction) are futile.”149 He further notes, “Scholarship from the one camp is unavoidably unpersuasive to the other camp.”150 To the present writer, the result of this interaction is clear, however, i.e. the Gospels lose in being defamed, undermined in the process by both of these camps.

Ninth, all the efforts of these evangelicals are now dubious. Recent British-influenced scholars are now calling for the rejection of these criteria so diligently used by Bock, Webb, et. al. Keith, echoing Hooker, says about these criteria is that “they cannot deliver” what they are designed to do.151 Keith argues instead that scholars need “to set these particular tools down and find other means of searching” such as “memory” theories.152 Bottom line: all of these efforts are futile, founded on the constantly shifting sands of the whim of scholars. The loser will always be God’s Word.

Finally, the answer to the question imposed as to whether faith precludes “serious historical engagement” finds its answer: clear doubt exists as to whether these evangelicals have truly engaged in serious historical debate. The present writer still searches for genuine examples of true Gospel skeptics who are now believers due to the work of these evangelicals in “searching for the ‘historical’ Jesus.”

150 Ibid., 89.
Appendix: Overview of Methodology
The Jesus Seminar (Westar Institute) vs. British-influenced Evangelical Critical Scholarships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IDEOLOGICAL &amp; METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES</th>
<th>USED TO DETERMINE VERACITY OF GOSPELS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jesus Seminar</td>
<td>British-trained evangelical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westar Institute</td>
<td>critical scholars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2/4 Source Hypothesis</td>
<td>2/4 Source Hypothesis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>form criticism</td>
<td>form criticism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>redaction criticism</td>
<td>redaction criticism</td>
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<tr>
<td>criteria of authenticity</td>
<td>criteria of authenticity</td>
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<tr>
<td>tradition criticism</td>
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<td>postmodernistic historiography</td>
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</tbody>
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**ATOMISTIC approach:**
- centers on Jesus’ sayings
- What did Jesus really say?

*IMPORTANT—Also WHOLISTIC:*
- focuses on what Jesus did

**BURDEN OF PROOF:**
- shifted to The Jesus Seminar scholars to demonstrate reliability:
  - “The Seminar has accordingly assumed the burden of proof: the Seminar is investigating in minute detail the data preserved by the gospels and is also identifying those that have some claim to historical veracity” (*Five Gospels*, p. 5)

  &
  - “What do we know about the deeds of Jesus? About the shadowy figure depicted in snapshots in more than twenty gospels and gospel fragments that have survived from antiquity? The short answer is that we don’t know a great deal. But there are some stories that probably preserve distant historical memories, and we can infer some deeds from his parables and aphorisms.” (*What Did Jesus Really Do?*, 527)

  "burden of proof should lie with historian who is making the case, whether for authenticity or against it” (*Key Events*, p. 74)

**WHOLISTIC approach:**
- centers on Jesus’ deeds & events
- What did Jesus really do?
- Investigates predetermined key events in Jesus’ life to see if the event is post-modernistically verifiable in terms of history
- IMPORTANT: considers many events not verifiable historically using postmodernistic historiography
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“whisper of his voice” contained in Gospels</th>
<th>“footprints” of Jesus contained in Gospels</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>posits Christ of faith vs. historical Jesus</td>
<td>posits Christ of faith vs. historical Jesus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>color-coding of Jesus-sayings</strong> in terms of red, black, gray, white that indicates probability of whether the real Jesus actually spoke the saying or performed a deed</td>
<td>**probability scaling of Jesus’ events “probability,” “possibility” or historically non-verifiable scale for pericopes as to whether Jesus’ deeds or events surrounding Jesus happened or did not happen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>RESULT:</strong></td>
<td><strong>RESULT:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 SAYINGS &amp; A FEW DISTANT HISTORICAL MEMORIES (events) <strong>DEEMED “PROBABLY” AUTHENTIC</strong> out of hundreds of sayings in the Gospels</td>
<td>12 EVENTS <strong>DEEMED HISTORICALLY “PROBABLE”</strong> out of hundreds of acts/deeds in the Gospels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RESULT: COMPLETELY REJECTS any assertions of “probability” from evangelical critical scholarship! score = 0 i.e. neither convinces the other</td>
<td>RESULT: REJECTS many assertions from The Westar Institute! score = 0 i.e. neither convinces the other</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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DID GOD FULFILL EVERY GOOD PROMISE?
TOWARD A BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING
OF JOSHUA 21:43–45 (Part 2)

Gregory H. Harris, Th.D.
Professor of Bible Exposition
The Master’s Seminary

As discussed in Part 1 of the previous edition, some claim that the land promises God made to Abraham were entirely fulfilled with the initial conquest of Canaan. This allegedly means that we should not expect any future fulfillment of the land with Israel. Joshua 21:43–45 is offered as evidence for this view. This understanding, though, does not properly take into account later passages that still affirm the significance of Israel’s land after Joshua. Thus, a proper understanding of the land promises must account for the dimensions of the land as given in the Abrahamic covenant, the affirmation of God’s faithfulness in Joshua, and later passages affirming the importance of the land.

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Introduction, Purpose, and Format

In a previous ETS paper on Joshua 21:43–45, five reasons were given to show why both amillennialists and premillennialists have many proponents who believe that these verses are proof that God had already fulfilled all His land promises to the nation of Israel by this time, and thus there is no expectation for any future fulfillment. A summary of the five reasons is as follows:

(1) The virtually unanimous understanding from most theological persuasions is that the nation of Israel never had complete possession of the land boundaries of the Abrahamic covenant, which are approximately 300,000 square miles. The

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1 Gregory H. Harris, “Did God Fulfill Every Good Promise? Toward a Biblical Understanding of Joshua 21:43–45.” Annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Atlanta, 2010. A slightly amended published article of the same title can be found in MSJ 23, No. 1 (Spring 2012): 55–83. All subsequent references and page numbers will be cited from the MSJ article with the shortened title, “Did God Fulfill Every Good Promise?”
recognized area of the land of Israel was only 10,000 square miles, and thus Israel claimed only 1/30th of the promised land boundaries.2

(2) Not only do the original land boundaries that God granted in the Abrahamic covenant in Genesis 15:18 include the Euphrates River as the northern most part, but also do subsequent verses from the Pentateuch/Mosaic covenant (Exod 23:31; Deut 1:7 and 11:24). The book of Joshua likewise opens with God including the Euphrates River as part of the land boundaries (Josh 1:4). Joshua would have been aware of or present for all of these additional references. Yet this is the only reference to the Euphrates River that occurs in the entire book of Joshua. Further, no record is given that shows that the twelve spies, which included Joshua, were sent out that far (Numbers 13–14).3

(3) The eschatological significance of Leviticus 26, especially 26:40–45, and Deuteronomy 30:1–10 must be considered regarding the promise of God for His future restoration of national Israel back to the land from which He will have dispersed them because of their blatant covenant violations.4

(4) In addition to God’s opening charge to Joshua that contains the reference to the Euphrates River (Josh 1:1–4), two other extremely significant factors from the book of Joshua show that Josh 21:43–45 does not fulfill the land promises:

(a) Joshua 13–21, where God disperses the land, must be read as one unit.

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God’s opening statement in Josh 13:1–7 clearly shows that very much of the land remained yet to be conquered with specific geographical sites included.\(^5\)

(5) Similar markers occur elsewhere in Scripture, including Rom 16:25–27 and Col 1:23 (stating that the Gospel had already gone out into all the nations), that show Josh 21:43–45 to be just a historical marker of God’s faithfulness up to that point and not the pinnacle or completion of His covenant faithfulness.\(^6\)

The first article on Josh 21:43–45 used verses only from Genesis through Joshua; this second article deals with subsequent verses from Joshua 21 onward, and this is important because sometimes proponents who believe that the land promises have already been fulfilled also point to 1 Kings 4:20–21 to further support their claim that God has already fulfilled all the land promises for the nation of Israel; therefore, the land promises have no future relevance in prophecy:

Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sand that is on the seashore in abundance; they were eating and drinking and rejoicing. Now Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the River to the land of the Philistines and to the border of Egypt; they brought tribute and served Solomon all the days of his life.\(^7\)

Special note is made here that 1 Kings 4:20–21 specifically names the Euphrates River as the northern boundary that God first gave in Gen 15:18. Consequently it is held:

On the surface of things, these verses simply tell us the size of Solomon’s kingdom, in terms of both population and geography. His people were countless in number, like the sand on the seashore. His borders stretched from Egypt to Iraq. But to understand fully the significance of these verses, we need to remember the ancient promises of God. The vocabulary of 1 Kings 4—with all its talk of sand by the seashore and kingdoms from Egypt to Euphrates—refers directly and explicitly to the covenant promises that God made to Abraham. Now the promises of the covenant were coming true, to the joy of God’s people.\(^8\)

Therefore this conclusion follows by the same author:

The extent of Solomon’s dominion was a direct fulfillment of the covenant promises that God once made to Abraham. At the same time he promises Abraham descendants like the stars in the desert sky, God also promised that

\(^{5}\) Harris, “Did God Fulfill Every Good Promise?,” 70–75.

\(^{6}\) Ibid., 82–83.

\(^{7}\) All Scripture references used are from the NASB 1971 edition unless otherwise indicated. The use of “Thee” and “Thou” in the Psalms will be changed to modern English usage.

the children of Abraham would have a land to call their own: “To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates” (Gen. 15:18). From Egypt to Turkey, God’s covenant promise was fulfilled in Solomon’s wide dominion.9

DeVries reasons regarding 1 Kings 4:20–21: “The promises to the Genesis patriarchs were focused on (1) possession of the land and (2) a prosperous people. Gathered together for comment here are the verses that depict Solomon’s reign as an ideal fulfillment of these very promises.”10 Alexander concurs:

The promises associated with the patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, also set the agenda for the books of Joshua to Kings. The subject of nationhood is particularly prominent in Joshua, Judges and Samuel. Whereas Joshua gives a predominantly positive description of the Israel settlement in the land of Canaan, this process is reversed in Judges due to the recurring apostasy of the Israelites. Only through the divine provision of the monarchy is Israel enabled to gain possession of all the land promised to Abraham. Consequently, during the reigns of David and Solomon the Israelites come to possess the land as far as the boundaries defined in Genesis 15:18–21 (cf. 2 Sam 8:1–14; 1 Kgs 4:21; 9:20–21).11

Leithart likewise agrees:

Solomon’s reign not only fulfills the promise to Joshua’s conquest, but also demonstrates Yahweh’s faithfulness to his promises to Abraham. Under Solomon, Israel’s life is a utopia of peace, harmony, safety, and joy. Israel finally becomes as numerous as the sand on the seashore (4:20; cf. Gen 22:17), a description that between Abraham and Solomon applies only to Israel’s enemies, false Israel (Josh 11:4; Judg 7:12; 1 Sam 13:5; 2 Sam 17:11).12

Interestingly, some theologians point to both Josh 21:43–45 and 1 Kings 4:20–21 to prove that God has already fulfilled the land promises. Kline writes:

9 Ibid., 114.
11 T. D. Alexander, From Paradise to the Promised Land: An Introduction to the Pentateuch, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002), 279. Brueggemann adds: “Three allusions show that Solomon has fulfilled all the old promises of God made to the ancestors: (a) ‘As many as the sand of the sea’ is an old promise of fruitfulness and fertility bade to the ancestors (Gen. 22:17; 32:17). (b) The boundaries of ‘Euphrates…to the border of Egypt’ voices the boldest version of ‘Greater Israel’ promised by God (Gen 15:18–21), a vision never actualized but the basis of dreams of power, prestige, and security given by the God who keeps promises. (c) The term ‘happy’ refers to exuberant festival celebration.” Walter Brueggemann, 1 & 2 Kings, in Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2000), 63.
12 Peter J. Leithart, 1 & 2 Kings, in Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (Grand Rapids: Brazo Press, 2006), 48–49.
Step by step what was included in the promised kingdom land at the first level of meaning was more precisely defined. It was a land to be designated later as Abraham followed the Lord (Gen 12:1); the land of Canaan (Gen 12:7); Canaan extending in all four directions (Gen 13:15–17); the area bounded on the northeast by the river Euphrates and on the southwest by the river of Egypt (Gen 15:18) and comprising the territories of a series of specified peoples (Gen 15:1–21). Subsequent reaffirmations of the promise to the patriarchs after Genesis 15 do not further define these boundaries (cf. Gen 17:8; 22:17; 24:7; 26:3,4; 28:13,14; 35:12; 48:4; 49:1ff.; 50:24). That the territory eventually occupied by Israel fully corresponded with the geographical bounds defined in the promise is explicitly recorded in Joshua 21:43–45 and 1 Kings 4:20,21 (cf. Num 34:2ff.; 1 Chr 18:3; Ezek 47:13–20).13

Cox simply states: “The earthly promises to national Israel have been fulfilled.”14 He further concludes with similar reasoning:

We could summarize these promises concerning the land of Canaan being inherited by Israel, as follows: The land was promised through Abraham; the promise was renewed to Isaac, Jacob, and Moses. It was fulfilled literally through Joshua. Some Bible scholars find the actual fulfillment in Solomon’s day. Compare 1 Kings 4:21 and 5:4 with Genesis 15:18. How sad it is then that some theologians are still arguing that they are yet future! Much of the futurist belief rests on the assumption that God has never given Israel all the land promised through Abraham.15

Mathison follows suit saying, “Dispensationalists argue that the Abrahamic covenant has never been fulfilled completely by the physical descendants of Abraham. But is that true?”16 He further argues for support from both Joshua 21 and 1 Kings 4:

God also promised Abraham that his seed would possess the land of Palestine and more (Gen. 12:7; 13:15, etc.). In Genesis 15:18 we read, “On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, ‘To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates.’” If we compare the promise to 1 Kings 4:20–21, we notice striking parallels. First Kings 4:20 reminds the readers of the promise recorded in Genesis 22:17. Then verse 21 says, “Now Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the River to the land of the Philistines and to the border of

15 Ibid.
Egypt.” The author of 1 Kings is obviously referring back to the promise in Genesis, which his readers and hearers would know by heart. There are numerous other passages in the Old Testament that tell us God has already fulfilled the land promises given to Israel (Josh. 11:23; 21:41–45; Neh. 9:21–25). Joshua 21:43–45 explicitly declares that all the land that God promised Israel was given to them.17

Hanegraaff sees more of a progressive fulfillment of the land promises:

First, the land promises were fulfilled in the fore future when Joshua led the physical descendants of Abraham into Palestine. As the book of Joshua records, “The LORD gave Israel all the land he had sworn to give their forefathers, and they took possession of it and settled there.” Indeed says Joshua, “Not one of all the LORD’s good promises to the house of Israel failed; everyone was fulfilled” (Joshua 21:34, 45). Even as the life ebbed from his body, Joshua reminded the children of Israel that the Lord had been faithful to his promises. ‘You know with all your heart that not one of all the good promises the LORD your God gave you has failed. Every promise has been fulfilled, not one has failed’ (Joshua 23:14).18

Hanegraaff elsewhere states, “the land promises reached their zenith under Solomon—whose rule encompassed all of the land from the Euphrates River in the north to the River of Egypt in the South (1 Kings 4:20–21; cf. Genesis 15:18)” 19 He further concludes:

Solomon, during whose reign the glorious temple was constructed, was equally unambiguous. ‘Not one word has failed of all the good promises [the LORD] gave through His servant Moses’ (1 Kings 8:56). In fact, at the height of the Solomonic kingdom, ‘the people of Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sand on the seashore; they ate, they drank and they were happy. And Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the River [Euphrates] to the land of the Philistine, as far as the border of Egypt’ (4:20–21).20

It could seem on an initial reading that 1 Kings 4:20–21 does indeed support the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant land promises also found in Josh 21:43–45, although this interpretation is far from free of its own problems.21 However, it is

17 Ibid., 27 [emphasis in the original].
19 Ibid.,52.
20 Ibid.,178–79 [emphasis in the original].
21 Townsend, “Fulfillment of the Land Promise in the Old Testament,” 323 writes: “Other passages modify this understanding of 1 Kings 8:65. For example, the Solomonic administrative districts in 1 Kings 4:7–19 did not include the area of Philistia which was within the Promised Land. Confirmation that Philistia was not under direct Solomonic rule is provided in 1 Kings 4:21 (cf. 2 Chron 9:26) which states that ‘Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the River [Euphrates] to the land of
the position of this paper that just the opposite occurs: including both passages to show the fulfillment of all the land promises of God does not strengthen their position, only weakens it. As a point of logic, if Josh 21:43–45 totally fulfilled the land promises given by God to the Jewish nation, then 1 Kings 4:20–21 becomes irrelevant to their argument: both passages cannot prove the same fulfillment of the same event centuries removed from one another. In the same way, if 1 Kings 4:20–21 is the fulfillment of all of the land promises, then Josh 21:43–45 becomes irrelevant to their argument. Each passage must stand or fall on the weight of its own merits (or lack thereof).

Subsequent verses should be studied because, after all, if either Josh 21:43–45 or 1 Kings 4:20–21 demonstrates that God has already fulfilled all the land promises for the nation of Israel, then no additional land promises from God would be expected past these two sections of Scripture, especially past 1 Kings 4. However, if Scripture does indeed contain the same promises that God made prior to Joshua 21 or 1 Kings 4, then the theological position that all the land promises have already been fulfilled very much comes into question, and their bearing on interpreting other prophecies must be considered as well.

The purpose of this second article is to continue the present study past Joshua 21 and 1 Kings 4 to see whether or not the Bible gives any evidence that God has indeed fulfilled all the land promises He made. An examination of the following interconnected elements will do this. First, a study will be made of selected Scriptures to see if God made any of the promises regarding Israel and the land after 1 Kings 4, and then determine if these promises are similar to the previous promises God had made. Second, because the Euphrates River occurs as part of the Abrahamic covenant in Gen 15:18 and, as was shown, is cited by those who hold 1 Kings 4:20–21 to be a fulfillment of this promise, examination will be made to see if prophecies made after the time of Solomon’s reign directly refer again to the Euphrates River as the northern land boundary. Finally, a comparison will be

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the Philistines and to the border of Egypt.' There would be no need to mention the Philistines unless they were an exception to Solomonic rule (cf. 4:24). The verse adds that these kingdoms ‘brought tribute and served Solomon all the days of his life.’ Again the clear indication is that much of the Promised Land was not under direct Israelite sovereignty but was only under tribute. In addition it appears that the Phoenician coastal area above Tyre inhabited by the Sidonians was never included under Israelite rule or tribute.” According to Aharoni, “No appreciable changes took place in David’s great kingdom during the latter part of his reign…. The kingdom’s territory began to shrink remarkably during Solomon’s reign” (Aharoni, The Land of the Bible, 306–307).

22 Obviously all related prophetic passages cannot be surveyed in this article. For an excellent article for the future rebuilding of Jerusalem and argument for a literal fulfillment of the land promises in Jeremiah 31 in the future and how these relate to other land promises, see Dennis M. Swanson, “Expansion of Jerusalem in Jer 31:38–40: Never, Already or Not Yet?” MSJ 17, No. 1 (Spring 2006): 17–34. Specially see critiques for the “never to be fulfilled” land promises (27–29) and the “realized” or “already fulfilled” land promises (29–32). Based on the specifics given in Jer 31:38–40, Swanson argues that these promises await a future fulfillment at the return of Jesus (32–34).

23 The southern boundary, while important, will not receive as much focus in this paper because of the subsequent prophecies that specifically relate to the Euphrates River as the northern boundary of the Abrahamic covenant land promises. For matters related to the southern border and matters therein, see Walter C. Kaiser, “The Promised Land: A Biblical-Historical View,” BSac 138 (1981): 303–05. See also Townsend’s superb article, “Fulfillment of the Land Promise in the Old Testament,” 324–29.
made from the elements of the Josh 21:43–45 (Part 1) paper to see how subsequent verses relate to these findings.

**Selected Post-Joshua 21/1 Kings 4 Promises from God for National Israel**

Though not mentioned in the previous article because it contained only verses up to Joshua 21, the ratification of the Davidic covenant and the prophetic revelation of the promised Messiah play more and more into God’s unfolding revelation and become included in God’s future plans for the nation of Israel. For instance, as God’s pending judgment on the ten northern tribes approached because of their habitual covenant disobedience, came this divine promise in Hos 3:4–5: “For the sons of Israel will remain for many days without king or prince, without sacrifice or sacred pillar, and without ephod or household idols. Afterward the sons of Israel will return and seek the LORD their God and David their king; and they will come trembling to the LORD and to His goodness in the last days.” The specifics of this prophecy should by no means be overlooked as it relates to the overall fulfillment of prophecy elsewhere in Scripture. Hosea 5:15 adds: “I will go away and return to My place until they acknowledge their guilt and seek My face; in their affliction they will earnestly seek Me.” Though the land is not specifically mentioned, the nation of Israel returning to God—and at some time in the future to God’s promised Messiah—harmonizes with previous prophecies regarding the Jewish peoples’ return to Yahweh in covenant obedience, as was previously seen in the passages of Lev 26:40–45 and Deut 30:1–10. Further:

The point here should be obvious. The call to repentance in the OT, if there was such a call, was to a nation already in covenant relationship with Yahweh. They were viewed as married or as the children of a loving Father (Jer 31:3,

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25 For an excellent article showing the importance of these promises made by God in Hos 3:4–5 and how this specificity of fulfilled prophecy relates to addition miracles of God elsewhere, see Robert C. Newman, John A. Bloom, and Hugh G. Gauch, Jr. “Public Theology and Prophetic Data: Factual Evidence That Counts For the Biblical World View,” *JETS* 46, No. 1 (March 2003): 82–92. They conclude the importance of fulfilled prophecy: “Being a kind of miracle, fulfilled prophecy has important ramifications for the wider discussion of miracles” (ibid., 110).

26 See John A. Jelinek, “The Dispersion and Restoration of Israel,” in *Israel the Land and the People: An Evangelical Affirmation of God’s Promises*, ed. H. Wayne House (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1998) for a well-reasoned presentation of the nature and rationale for judgment and dispersion from Lev 26:14–46 (233–38) and for the spiritual condition of the nation of Israel as necessary for restoration in Deut 30:1–10 (239–40). Jelinek concludes: “The picture that a biblical theology of dispersion and restoration presents is ultimately that Israel is grafted back into God’s salvific promises by means of a marvelous intervention of God’s own power in their hearts. Then God’s promises to Abraham will be fulfilled as promised in both a spiritual and national sense” (ibid., 249). See also George M. Harton, “Fulfillment of Deuteronomy 28–30 in History and Eschatology” (unpublished Th.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1981), for well-reasoned argument regarding God’s future faithfulness to the nation of Israel based on God’s covenant-keeping word.
9). The turning summoned by the prophets was a return to fellowship with a God with whom they already had a relationship. Failure to return to the Lord would bring temporal judgment.27

In Amos 9:8–10, God promised judgment on Israel for her sins, concluding with this summary:

“Behold, the eyes of the Lord GOD are on the sinful kingdom, and I will destroy it from the face of the earth; nevertheless, I will not totally destroy the house of Jacob,” declares the LORD. “For behold, I am commanding, and I will shake the house of Israel among all nations as grain is shaken in a sieve, but not a kernel will fall to the ground. All the sinners of My people will die by the sword, those who say, ‘The calamity will not overtake or confront us.’”

As with so many other passages, Yahweh promises that His divine judgment will be followed in the future by His divine blessing of the same people whom He previously had judged, as seen in the verses in Amos that immediately follow:

“In that day I will raise up the fallen booth of David, and wall up its breaches; I will also raise up its ruins, and rebuild it as in the days of old; that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations who are called by My name,” declares the LORD who does this.

“Behold, days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when the plowman will overtake the reaper and the treader of grapes him who sows seed; when the mountains will drip sweet wine, and all the hills will be dissolved.

“Also I will restore the captivity of My people Israel, and they will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them, they will also plant vineyards and drink their wine, and make gardens and eat their fruit.

“I will also plant them on their land, and they will not again be rooted out from the land which I have given them,” says the LORD your God (Amos 9:11–15).

It is not within the scope of this paper to argue the related points to show how this prophecy relates to the Davidic covenant and James’ use of Hosea in Acts 15.28 What is germane to this paper is that God once again promised the nation of Israel a return to the land from which He had removed them, just as He had promised centuries before: “And they will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them, they will also plant vineyards and drink their wine, and make gardens and eat their fruit. I will also plant them on their land, and they will not again be rooted out from their


28 For a critique of the supersessionists’ position that James’ use of Hosea in Acts 15 indicates a nonliteral fulfillment of an OT text, and for support that this is merely the initial fulfillment, see Michael J. Vlach, Has the Church Replaced Israel? (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2010), 99–104. See also the strong arguments presented by Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. “The Davidic Promise and the Inclusion of the Gentiles” (Amos 9:9–15 and Acts 15:13–18): A Test Passage for Theological Systems,” JETS 20, No. 2 (1977), 97–111.
land which I have given them,’ says the LORD your God” (Amos 9:14–15). This harmonizes perfectly with the promises God made in Lev 26:40–45, and with all the other verses so cited that occur long after Solomon’s reign in 1 Kings 4.29

Centuries later, after God had exiled the northern kingdom, and while God’s promised exile of Judah by means of the Babylonians approached, Yahweh still gave many indications of the permanency of the land promises as still being in effect. For instance, in calling the nation to repent, part of the blessing God promised in Jer 7:7 was, “then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers forever and ever.” This again points not only to the future regathering, but also, as becomes clearer, to the promised advent and reign of the Messiah in Jer 23:1–5:

“Woe to the shepherds who are destroying and scattering the sheep of My pasture!” declares the LORD. Therefore thus says the LORD God of Israel concerning the shepherds who are tending My people: “You have scattered My flock and driven them away, and have not attended to them; behold, I am about to attend to you for the evil of your deeds,” declares the LORD.

“Then I Myself shall gather the remnant of My flock out of all the countries where I have driven them and shall bring them back to their pasture; and they will be fruitful and multiply. I shall also raise up shepherds over them and they will tend them; and they will not be afraid any longer, nor be terrified, nor will any be missing,” declares the LORD.

“Behold, the days are coming,” declares the LORD, “When I shall raise up for David a righteous Branch; and He will reign as king and act wisely and do justice and righteousness in the land.”

Feinberg highlights the Messianic significance of this passage:

The formula “days are coming” is a messianic formula; Jeremiah uses it to direct special attention to what is stated. The phase is used fifteen times in the book. In contrast to the troublous times of Jeremiah’s day, there will be a time of blessing ahead. The promise is centered in David in view of the covenant in 2 Samuel 7:8–16.

After Jeremiah has denounced the faithless shepherds of the nation and has predicted the coming of good shepherds, he describes as a climax the incomparable rule of King Messiah, the “Branch.” This designation has much in common semantically with “seed” (Gen. 3:15), the Davidic “son” (2 Sam. 7), and the “servant of the LORD” (Isa. 42–53). In each case there is a general reference to a number of individuals, but by a process of strict selection and narrowing down, the seed, the son, and the servant ultimately find highest

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fulfillment in the Lord Jesus the Messiah, “the Seed of the Woman,” “the Son of David,” and “the Servant of the LORD.” The Lord was thus superintending the historical process in such a way that his ultimate choice unmistakably was Jesus of Nazareth (cf. KD).30

And in keeping with His previous promises, Jer 25:4–5 once more presents similar promises from God as well as again demonstrating how God viewed the land He had previously given to the Jewish people:

And the LORD has sent to you all His servants the prophets again and again, but you have not listened nor inclined your ear to hear, saying, ‘Turn now everyone from his evil way and from the evil of your deeds, and dwell on the land which the LORD has given to you and your forefathers forever and ever.

No indication exists in these texts that Yahweh considered neither His previous promises concerning the land no longer to be in effect, nor to have been fulfilled either in Joshua 21 or 1 Kings 4. In fact, God Himself acknowledged that the land He has previously given “to you and to your forefathers forever and ever” (Jer 7:7, 25:5). If this promise is not taken literally, it would cast suspicion on other uses of “forever and ever” in other multiple passages because this phrase frequently relates to the attributes and activities of God.31 Those who hold otherwise must answer: what did God mean then about the land promises being “forever and ever” even at this time in the nation’s history, and since these verses occur long after Joshua 21 and 1 Kings 4, exactly when were these divine promises fulfilled, if indeed they already have been fulfilled and therefore have no future relevance?

Not long after the prophecy by Jeremiah, with Judah in exile in Babylon (in perfect keeping with God’s previous promised judgment), came these prophecies in

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31 All of the following have “forever and ever” as part of their description and would not be reduced or eradicated by those who accept the Word of God as true: God to be blessed forever and ever (1 Chron 29:10; Neh 9:5; Ps 145:1–2, 21; Dan 2:20); God blotted out the name of the lost forever and ever (Ps 9:5); the LORD shall reign forever and ever (Exod 15:18; Rev 11:15); the LORD is king forever and ever (Ps 10:16); the LORD’s throne is forever and ever (Ps. 45:6); the LORD is to be blessed by the peoples forever and ever (Ps 45:17); His own existence/who lives forever and ever (Ps 48:14; Rev 4:9; 10:6; 15:7); God’s lovingkindness (Ps 52:8), precepts (Ps 111:8), and decrees (Ps 148:6) are forever and ever; the LORD established the earth on its foundations so that it will not totter forever and ever (Ps 104:5); the length of time for those in hell (Isa 34:10; Rev 14:11; 22:10); commanded to walk in the name of the LORD forever and ever (Mic 4:5); the shining brightness of the redeemed (Dan 12:3); glory to God in the church (Eph 3:21; 1 Pet 4:11) and glory to our God and Father and Jesus forever and ever (Phil 4:20; 1 Tim 1:17; 2 Tim 4:18; Heb 13:21); God’s glory and dominion/to be worshiped forever and ever (1 Pet 5:11; Rev 1:6; 4:10; 5:13; 7:12); and finally, the reign of the redeemed is forever and ever (Rev 22:5). Only Ps 21:4 (“He asked life of You, You did give it to him, length of days forever and ever”) at first may seem questionable as truly “forever and ever,” yet with its listing as part of the royal psalms, this too points ultimately to the reign of the Messiah, so it also should be understood in a literal fashion (see John L. Durham, “The King as ‘Messiah’ in the Psalms,” RevExp 81, No. 3 [Summer 1984], 425–30). The only two remaining uses of “forever and ever” are the two land promises given by God in Jer 7:7 and 25:5. From all of the previous uses, great care should be taken before removing /limiting “the forever and ever” land promises that God gave “to you and your forefathers” as well.
Ezek 20:33–44 of God’s previous and repeated promise of blessing, beginning with a reminder of the Davidic covenant heir:

“As I live,” declares the Lord GOD, “surely with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm and with wrath poured out, I shall be king over you. And I shall bring you out from the peoples and gather you from the lands where you are scattered, with a mighty hand and with an outstretched arm and with wrath poured out; and I shall bring you into the wilderness of the peoples, and there I shall enter into judgment with you face to face. As I entered into judgment with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so I will enter into judgment with you,” declares the Lord GOD. And I shall make you pass under the rod, and I shall bring you into the bond of the covenant; and I shall purge from you the rebels and those who transgress against Me; I shall bring them out of the land where they sojourn, but they will not enter the land of Israel. Thus you will know that I am the LORD” (Ezek 20:33–38).

Osborne’s assessment is worthwhile:

The focus shifts in verse 33 from historic rebellion to futuristic regathering as Yahweh continues to engage his interlocutors. Describing a “second exodus,” Yahweh declares to Israel: “I will cause you to come out from the peoples and gather you from the lands among whom you were scattered.” However, such deliverance is described as “judgment.” “I will bring you to the wilderness of the peoples and I will judge you there face to face.” Ironically, however, it is only through face-to-face judgment that Israel will be brought into the “obligation of the covenant” (v. 37). Yahweh himself will act with “a mighty hand and an outstretched arm” (vv. 33, 34) reassuring any who might have perceived Israel’s unbreakable cycle of sin as a sign of divine impotence. Israel’s deliverance and salvation will come through judgment. 32

Then, in keeping with His previous prophecies such as Hos 3:4–5 and 5:15, God once more promised in Ezek 20:41–44:

“As a soothing aroma I shall accept you, when I bring you out from the peoples and gather you from the lands where you are scattered; and I shall prove Myself holy among you in the sight of the nations. And you will know that I am the LORD, when I bring you into the land of Israel, into the land which I swore to give to your forefathers. And there you will remember your ways and all your deeds, with which you have defiled yourselves; and you will loathe yourselves in your own sight for all the evil things that you have done.”

32 Rusty Osborne, “Elements of Irony: History and Rhetoric in Ezekiel 20:1–44,” CTR 9, No. 1 (Fall 2011), 13 [emphasis in the original].
Then you will know that I am the LORD when I have dealt with you for My name’s sake, not according to your evil ways or according to your corrupt deeds, O house of Israel,” declares the Lord GOD.

God not only reveals what will take place with Israel in the future and the effect that His grace will have on that nation, but also He reveals how important the fulfillment of these promises will be in vindicating His holy name:

Ironically, when Israel gathers in this future-oriented worship on the mountain of God, the people will be plagued with visions of their past. “And you will remember there your ways and all your ways which defiled you and you will feel disgust before them and all of your evils which you have done” (v. 43). However, there in the midst of Israel’s self-perceived shame, Yahweh’s actions are grace filled and for the sake of his name. “The future will recapitulate the past,” and Yahweh will once again relent from dealing with his people according to what they deserve. “And you will know that I am the Lord when I deal with you on account of my name, not according to your evil ways and your corrupt deeds” (v 44). The chapter concludes by revealing the same divine motivation that lay behind Yahweh’s negative and disciplinarian stance toward his people throughout their history—his desire to be known. The irony of these verses reveals the truism that grace, not retribution, often brings the greatest pangs of guilt upon the sinful.33

Again, special note should be made of exactly what Yahweh promises in this section of Ezekiel and how these prophecies fit perfectly with previous promises made by God in Lev 26:40–45 and Deut 30:1–10: (1) God Himself will be king over them (Ezek 20:33); (2) God will bring Israel into covenant obedience to Him by means of His rod of judgment on them, purging out the rebels (Ezek 20:34–38); (3) but before doing so, Israel will continue to worship their idols (Ezek 20:39); (4) after God’s purging of the nation, all of Israel will serve Yahweh in the land and Yahweh will accept them there (Ezek 20:40–43), which means national Israel will once again be in covenant obedience to Him.34 With the nation of Israel properly walking in covenant obedience, Yahweh’s covenant faithfulness is again seen in how He refers to the land and to the nation of Israel’s relationship to Himself: “And you will know that I am the LORD, when I bring you into the land of Israel, into the land which I swore to give to your forefathers” (Ezek 20:42), the very land that Yahweh Himself had just a few years earlier referred as “in the land that I gave to your fathers forever and ever” (Jer 7:7), and for them to “dwell on the land which the LORD has given to you [present generation] and your forefathers forever and ever” (Jer 25:5). Each item harmonizes perfectly with promises previously made by Yahweh; each item gives every indication that God did not consider His promises

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33 Ibid., 14.

regarding neither the land nor the nation of Israel already to have been fulfilled by this time.

Later again in Ezek 28:25–26 came these additional prophecies that once more harmonize with what God had repeatedly promised before and after Joshua 21 and 1 Kings 4:

Thus says the Lord GOD, “When I gather the house of Israel from the peoples among whom they are scattered, and shall manifest My holiness in them in the sight of the nations, then they will live in their land which I gave to My servant Jacob. And they will live in it securely; and they will build houses, plant vineyards, and live securely, when I execute judgments upon all who scorn them round about them. Then they will know that I am the LORD their God.”

In addition to the land promises still being relevant to God at this time in history (“then they will live in their land which I gave to My servant Jacob,” Ezek 28:25), Feinberg emphasizes another tremendously important aspect of God’s promise:

As in numerous other passages of the prophetic Scriptures, when the enemies of Israel were judged by the Lord, her restoration and blessing were foretold. Notice how clearly the contrast was given in the famous prophecy of Isaiah 61:2. Ezekiel predicted the Lord’s agency in the regathering from all the nation of their dispersion, and it will be accomplished in such a manner that the nations will have it plainly shown them that God’s omnipotence has been exerted on behalf of His people Israel. They will no longer be uprooted from their own land but with ease and confidence will live in the inheritance given them by God Himself (cf. Isa. 65:21; Jer. 23:6; Ezek. 34:27; 38:8; 39:26; Amos 9:14–15). It is utterly false and wicked to claim, as some erroneously do, that the land does not belong to Israel, for this is to impugn the clear statements of God. Fifty-four times Ezekiel used the expression or its equivalent: “And they shall know that I am the LORD.” The thought is that all people must ultimately know that the Lord is the source of all blessings, calamities and overturnings of nations, so that His will may be recognized by all men.35

After having severely judged the Jewish people, Yahweh once more offers eschatological hope with these promises regarding Yahweh, the people, and the land in Ezekiel 34:36

35 Charles Lee Feinberg, The Prophecy of Ezekiel (Chicago: Moody Press, 1969), 165. However, it should be noted that while it is the position of this paper to be in agreement with Feinberg’s interpretation of the passage, I would not label those who do not hold this view as necessarily committing a “false and wicked” act. Many godly scholars take the land prophecies to have been already fulfilled.

36 Contra Samuel L. Adams, “Between Text and Sermon: Ezekiel 34:11–10,” Interpretation 62:3 (July 2008), 304–06, who notes Yahweh’s displacement of the Jews from the land for their sins, but
For thus says the Lord GOD, “Behold, I Myself will search for My sheep and seek them out. As a shepherd cares for his herd in the day when he is among his scattered sheep, so I will care for My sheep and will deliver them from all the places to which they were scattered on a cloudy and gloomy day. And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries and bring them to their own land; and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the streams, and in all the inhabited places of the land. I will feed them in a good pasture, and their grazing ground will be on the mountain heights of Israel. There they will lie down in good grazing ground, and they will feed in rich pasture on the mountains of Israel. I will feed My flock and I will lead them to rest,” declares the Lord GOD. “I will seek the lost, bring back the scattered, bind up the broken, and strengthen the sick; but the fat and the strong I will destroy. I will feed them with judgment” (Ezek 34:11–16).

Mein offers a cogent summary of these promises for Israel in Ezekiel 34:

If the basic problem is that the shepherds have misappropriated YHWH’s property, the solution to this problem is for YHWH to take back his flock and care for it himself. This he promises to do with spectacular success, turning the whole land of Israel into a secure and prosperous pasture. This is unquestionably a good deal for the sheep, and it is true that in many respects the interests of sheep and owner coincide—health and security are vital for both. However, it should not blind us to the fact that both in the real world and in Ezekiel’s notoriously hierarchical world, the owner’s interests remain paramount.

With all of this in mind, the contradiction between Ezekiel 34 and the tone of Ezekiel’s other restoration oracles begins to resolve itself. It may be better to understand YHWH’s love and compassion for his people (expressions which still remain absent from the text) and more as part of the demonstration of divine might that characterizes the restoration oracles more generally. The logic of the oracle is therefore of a piece of the refrain of ch. 36: “it is not for your sake, O Israel, that I am about to do this, but for the sake of my holy name.”

In keeping with previous prophecies, after judging and refining His people Israel, Yahweh then promises the Messiah’s presence among them in Ezek 34:23–31:

severely restricts any eschatological hope by describing Yahweh’s “larger purpose in ch. 34 is to explain that salvation, a return from exile, is available through YHWH the ‘shepherd’” (305). While it is true God will return the Jews to the land, His salvation for them requires a bringing back into covenant obedience to Him, not merely the movement from one land to another.

“Then I will set over them one shepherd, My servant David, and he will feed them; he will feed them himself and be their shepherd. And I, the LORD, will be their God, and My servant David will be prince among them; I, the LORD, have spoken.

And I will make a covenant of peace with them and eliminate harmful beasts from the land, so that they may live securely in the wilderness and sleep in the woods. And I will make them and the places around My hill a blessing. And I will cause showers to come down in their season; they will be showers of blessing. Also the tree of the field will yield its fruit, and the earth will yield its increase, and they will be secure on their land. Then they will know that I am the LORD, when I have broken the bars of their yoke and have delivered them from the hand of those who enslaved them. And they will no longer be a prey to the nations, and the beasts of the earth will not devour them; but they will live securely, and no one will make them afraid. And I will establish for them a renowned planting place, and they will not again be victims of famine in the land, and they will not endure the insults of the nations anymore.

Then they will know that I, the LORD their God, am with them, and that they, the house of Israel, are My people,” declares the Lord GOD. “As for you, My sheep, the sheep of My pasture, you are men, and I am your God,” declares the Lord GOD.”

Among other promises within this text, notice should be made of these repeated land promises: “And I will bring them out from the peoples and gather them from the countries and bring them to their own land; and I will feed them on the mountains of Israel, by the streams, and in all the inhabited places of the land” (Ezek 34:13), and “they will be secure on their land” (Ezek 34:27).

None of these verses cited (which are only a very small sampling) give any indication that God considered His multiple promises for the land and for the Jewish people fulfilled by Josh 21:43–45 or 1 Kings 4:20. None of these verses give any indication that Yahweh no longer considered the land to be the land that He Himself had sworn to give to the nation of Israel and their forefathers to possess “forever and ever” (Jer 7:7; 25:5). Not only that, but all of these verses are in harmony with God’s previous promises that He would bring the Jewish people back to their promised land at some undisclosed time in the future (Lev 26:40–45). Also in harmony is the promise of the proper spiritual condition of the nation of Israel in Deut 30:1–10, where God promises to bring the wayward Jewish nation back into covenant relationship with Himself and allow them to enjoy all the promises that God had given them—including the land promises—only now expanded to include both Himself and His Messiah.

The Significance of the Euphrates River in the Land Promises

The Euphrates River, whose name means “the good and abounding river,” is approximately 1,780 miles long, considerably longer than its companion stream, the
Tigris. So prominent is the Euphrates in the Bible that it is called by other name designations including “the great river, the river Euphrates,” or simply “the River” (Exod 23:31; Deut 11:24). The Bible contains thirty instances where the word “Euphrates” is specifically used, occurring first as one of the four rivers recorded in the Garden of Eden (Gen 2:14). Of the thirty uses where the word “Euphrates” specifically occurs, five of these are designated as “the great river, the river Euphrates,” with each usage in the Old Testament specifically detailing the land boundaries of the Abrahamic covenant (Gen 15:18; Deut 1:7; Josh 1:4). Joshua would have known about the Gen 15:18 reference, and he was directly involved with hearing the other two designations, especially God’s opening charge to him where again He refers to the land boundaries including the Euphrates River (Josh 1:1–4). The remaining two references of “the great river, the river Euphrates” occur in the New Testament, both of which are in the book of Revelation (9:14; 16:12). With the exception of the two uses in Revelation, the Euphrates River is virtually universally accepted as being the actual Euphrates River in all of the Old Testament instances. Even those who cite 1 Kings 4:21 as their proof text for the fulfillment (“Now Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the River to the land of the Philistines and to the border of Egypt”) recognize that the designation “the River” clearly refers to the Euphrates and understand it to be indeed the literal river, and not an allegorical interpretation, and thus it fulfills the Abrahamic land boundary promises.

The accepted universal understanding of “the River” as being the literal Euphrates River is important for two prophecies in particular for the present study and for the promised reign and rule of the Messiah, namely Psalm 72 and Zech 9:9–10. Psalm 72 is a royal psalm, in similar fashion to Psalm 2, celebrating the coronation of the king of Israel, either at the time of his inauguration as king or at the annual festival in which his coronation was celebrated. While the language is such as to apply to any of Israel’s kings, both Jewish and Christian teachers interpret this psalm as messianic, although surprisingly, the New Testament never

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40 See Robert L. Thomas, Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 43–44 for reasons to accept the two references used in Revelation as the literal Euphrates on earth and not an allegorized interpretation.

41 For example Ryken, 1 Kings, 104; DeVries, 1 Kings, 72; Leithart, 1 & 2 Kings, 48–49; Kline, Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview, 336; Cox, The New-Covenant Israel, 20; Mathison, Dispensationalism: Rightly Dividing the People of God?, 26; and Hanegraaff, The Apocalypse Code, 178.

cites Psalm 72 as a messianic psalm.\(^{43}\) Of significance also is that the subscript of Psalm 72 presents Solomon as the author, although all do not universally hold to Solomonic authorship.\(^{44}\)

Though it is not within the breadth of this paper to give a full exposition of the entire Psalm, nonetheless, pertinent factors should be noted. For instance, in writing about the righteous rule of the king, the author initially prays in Ps 72:1–7:

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\text{Give the king Your judgments, O God, and Your righteousness to the king's son. May he judge Your people with righteousness, and Your afflicted with justice. Let the mountains bring peace to the people, and the hills in righteousness. May he vindicate the afflicted of the people, save the children of the needy, and crush the oppressor. Let them fear You while the sun endures, and as long as the moon, throughout all generations. May he come down like rain upon the mown grass, like showers that water the earth. In his days may the righteous flourish, and abundance of peace till the moon is no more.}\(^{45}\)
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Solomon then prays for these divine blessings at the conclusion of Psalm 72:

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\text{“May there be abundance of grain in the earth on top of the mountains; its fruit will wave like the cedars of Lebanon; and may those from the city flourish like vegetation of the earth. May his name endure forever; may his name increase as long as the sun shines; and let men bless themselves by him; let all nations call him blessed. Blessed be the LORD God, the God of Israel, Who alone works wonders. And blessed be His glorious name forever; and may the whole earth be filled with His glory. Amen, and Amen” (Ps 72:16–19).}\(^{46}\)
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\(^{43}\) Walter Kaiser, “Psalm 72: An Historical and Messianic Current Example of Antiochene Hermeneutical Theoria,” *JETS* (June 2009), 259. Kaiser adds, “Nevertheless, so clear is the picture of the king described in this Psalm, and so extensive and far-reaching are the boundaries of his reign, not to mention the similarities seen between this psalm and the prophecies of Isa 11:1–5 or Isaiah 60–62 that the case for its being a messianic psalm can hardly be diminished, even when taken solely on its own terms apart from subsequent use or application’’ (ibid.).

\(^{44}\) Obviously, it is not within the scope of this paper to argue the authorship of Psalm 72. See Bratcher and Reyburn, who hold: “There is nothing in the text to indicate the identity of the king; the Hebrew title attributes the psalm to Solomon, but there is no certainty that this is historically accurate” (621). See also Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Psalms*, 3 vols., trans Francis Bolton, (n.d.; repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1977), 298–300 for those who hold to Solomon being the author and the subject of the psalm being either himself or the Messiah. “Both are correct” but emphasize the Messianic aspects of this psalm. Further see Kaiser, “Psalm 72,” 262–63 for whether Psalm 72 was authored by Solomon or dedicated to him. This paper holds to Solomonic authorship.

\(^{45}\) See Walter Houston, “The King’s Preferential Option for the Poor: Rhetoric, Ideology and Ethics in Psalm 72,” *BibInt* (Oct 1999), 341–67, who emphasizes the justice enacted by the one who will ultimately fulfill Psalm 72.

Yet included in Solomon’s understanding and expectation for the future comes this important prayer item in Ps 72:8: “May he also rule from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.” This is not a prayer for the author himself to reign from those designated boundaries; this well-known designation for the Euphrates River emerges from the original land promises made to the nation of Israel, and they will be fully enjoyed when Messiah reigns. Psalm 72 concludes with the worshipful prayer “and may the whole earth be filled with His glory. Amen, and Amen” (Ps 72:19), attributes fitting only for God, not for Solomon:

The historical event is clearly what is most obviously at hand, for Solomon’s reign in some important ways is an adumbration of the glorious rule and reign of the Messiah who is to come. But the historical base and the final fulfillment are linked together not as two separate realities, but as one whole event. The rule and reign of Messiah will indeed be coextensive with the extent of the shining of the sun and the moon. His kingdom will spread from shore to shore as people and realms of every tongue focus on his love and majesty forever. 47

Obviously, Solomon looked well past his own present reign to some future descendant of David who would fulfill these promises, including Ps 72:8 “May he also rule from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.” It would be hard to argue that if Solomon looked forward to the universal reign of a future descendant how he would in any way apply all of these prophecies to his own life, such as in the last part of the verse where he prayed that this one’s reign would be, in keeping with Psalm 2 and other Messianic Psalms, “to the ends of the earth”:

These key things, desired by God from David and the line of kings descended from him, are stressed in Psalm 72: justice in the king’s rule (72:2–4), the king’s rule over the entire kingdom (72:8), and peace in the land and the fullness of harvest under the king’s rule (72:16). Solomon, who was the writer of this psalm, also may have written Psalm 127. The “king” (72:1) refers historically to Solomon, but the expansive nature of the prayer (72:8, 11, 17) suggests that the prophetic reference looks to Christ in his kingdom to come. Universal worship of Christ by kings and nations will be characteristic of the messianic kingdom (72:11; cf. Zech. 14:9). 48

The Euphrates River will be the northern boundary of Israel over which Messiah will reign, but ultimately His reign will extend far beyond this to the very ends of the earth.

In similar fashion, Zechariah offers one final significant promise of the Messiah’s reign, among many of the other promises regarding God and Israel, in

47 Kaiser, “Psalm 72,” 269–70.
addition to other promises made regarding both the people and the land.\textsuperscript{49} It should be noted that these promises came long after Solomon’s reign and the writing of Psalm 72, long after the exile and regathering, and in the midst of “the times of the Gentiles” (Luke 21:24) when no one reigned on David’s throne, and all are once more in complete harmony with what God had previously promised. For instance, after promising that the coming priest/king Messiah will hold both offices (Zech 6:12–13), God once more makes land promises in Zech 8:1–8 which are in perfect agreement with previous promises made by God in such passages as Ezekiel 20, 28 and 34:

Then the word of the LORD of hosts came saying, thus says the LORD of hosts, “I am exceedingly jealous for Zion, yes, with great wrath I am jealous for her.”
Thus says the LORD, “I will return to Zion and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem will be called the City of Truth, and the mountain of the LORD of hosts will be called the Holy Mountain.”
Thus says the LORD of hosts, “Old men and old women will again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each man with his staff in his hand because of age. And the streets of the city will be filled with boys and girls playing in its streets.”
Thus says the LORD of hosts, “If it is too difficult in the sight of the remnant of this people in those days, will it also be too difficult in My sight?” declares the LORD of hosts.
Thus says the LORD of hosts, “Behold, I am going to save My people from the land of the east and from the land of the west; and I will bring them back, and they will live in the midst of Jerusalem, and they will be My people and I will be their God in truth and righteousness.”

Barker notes, “The purpose of both sections is essentially the same: In the preceding section Israel was to repent and live righteously after the punishment of her captivity; here, she is to repent and live righteously because of the promise of her future restoration.”\textsuperscript{50} Feinberg concurs, concluding that this is one of the most comprehensive promises in reference to Israel’s restoration and conversion found in prophetic Scriptures:

The directions of east and west stand here representatively for all the earth; it is a world-wide regathering. (Compare Ps. 50:1: 113:3; Isa. 43: 5, 6; Mal. 1:11; Matt. 8:11, 12). In that day Israel will be settled in Jerusalem; they will in truth be the people of God with all covenant privileges in effect (See Hosea 2:19–22).

The return spoken of here cannot be the restoration from Babylonian Captivity, because from the ‘west’ they could not have been brought back,


since very few of the Jewish nation had as yet wandered westward. It was only at the second stage of Israel’s dispersion, which was brought about by the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple by the Romans, that Israel became in the fullest sense a Diaspora—scattered over all the face of the earth—the majority always found in land more or less to the west of Palestine. Wright maintains that “The promise that all Israel shall dwell in Jerusalem is peculiar . . . Such prophetic statements as that which occurs here (chap. 8:8) are not, of course, to be taken as literal.” Literal promises to Israel like these are peculiar only when the force of similar prophecies in the Word has been vitiated and dissipated by spiritualizing methods of interpretation. It seems as the more inescapable the fact, the more positive the denial of it.\(^{51}\)

Zechariah 9:9 then presents this prophecy which the Bible so obviously connects with the First Advent prophecy of Jesus (Matt 21:5; John 12:15–16): “Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion! Shout in triumph, O daughter of Jerusalem! Behold, your king is coming to you; He is just and endowed with salvation, humble, and mounted on a donkey, even on a colt, the foal of a donkey.” The verse that immediately follows Zech 9:9 relates to the Second Advent of this same Messiah and is practically identical to the promise made long before in Ps 72:8 and currently remains unfulfilled prophecy:\(^{52}\)

And I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horse from Jerusalem; and the bow of war will be cut off. And He will speak peace to the nations; and His dominion will be from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth (Zech 9:10).

Feinberg presents four arguments, that while Zech 9:9 was perfectly fulfilled during the Incarnation, Zech 9:10 must refer to Messiah’s Second Advent:

First, there is the testimony of the New Testament, especially our Lord Himself (Matt. 21:4,5; John 12:12–16). Second, the tradition of the Jews, though insufficient in itself, is valuable in conjunction with other proofs. Third, the parallel passages are clear in this direction (Ps. 72; Micah 5:9ff., Hebrew). Fourth, the elements of the prophecy itself are unmistakable. They can only refer to the Lord Jesus Christ who is the only King of Israel, \(\textit{kat’ exochen}\). For this King and His rule Israel and all the earth groans this hour.\(^{53}\)

Note the promised activities of Messiah at His Second Advent: He will cut off the implements of war; He will speak peace of the nations; His dominion will be

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The Master’s Seminary Journal

from sea to sea and from the Euphrates River to the ends of the earth. Just as with the original promises related to the Euphrates River being the northern boundary of the land promises for national Israel, and in keeping with Ps 72:8, appropriately comes this last use of the Euphrates River in the Old Testament, with Messiah reigning on David’s throne, and fulfilling the promises of God regarding both the land and His people Israel.54

As stated before, in every previous passage where the Euphrates River is designated, the literal interpretation makes perfect sense.55 If Ps 72:8 and Zech 9:10 are taken allegorically in these passages, the question must be asked as to why these would not be taken as the literal Euphrates River, and if so, why would the Euphrates not be taken allegorically elsewhere.

Comparison with Elements from the Joshua 21:43–45 (Part 1) Paper

The first Josh 21:43–45 paper offered specific reasons why many scholars from virtually all theological camps do not view these verses as showing by any means a complete fulfillment of the land promises of the Abrahamic covenant. This is extremely important because for many so much of the rationale for their interpreting other prophetic texts are predicated on the premise that Josh 21:43–45 and/or 1 Kings 4:20–21 offer indisputable proof texts that God has already fulfilled all the Abrahamic covenant land promises to the nation of Israel. In other words, their interpretation of these two passages greatly affects their interpretation of subsequent prophetic passages, and thus they consider as folly anything other than an allegorical understanding of these promises. However, having shown that the Joshua 21 and/or 1 Kings 4 passages do not prove the fulfillment of the land promises, then other prophecies past these texts must be considered on their own merit. Since the first article dealt with verses up to Joshua 21, comparison can now be made with the Josh 21:43–45 (Part 1) paper to see if the findings there harmonize with or contradict other promises God made with the nation of Israel past Joshua 21.

For instance, initially, as shown in the first article, Yahweh made specific, eternal promises regarding the land and the Abrahamic covenant land promises (Lev 26:40–45), as well as the spiritual conversion He will accomplish for the Jewish people at some point in the future, bringing them back into covenant obedience with Him after He has judged them severely (Deut 30:1–8).56 With this future spiritual conversion of the nation, they will thus enjoy the fullness of all the

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54 These by no means conclude all the prophecies for the return to the promised land for the nation of Israel; several additional verses call for the same thing. For instance, see Kaiser, “The Promised Land: A Biblical-Historical View,” 302–12, who notes regarding the future return of Israel to the land: “the sheer multiplicity of texts from almost every one of the prophets is staggering” (309). For those who would see a fulfillment of all the land promises having already taken place, he asks: “why then did Zechariah continue to announce a still future return (10:8–12) in words that were peppered with phrases and formulas of such prophecies as Isaiah 11:11 and Jeremiah 50:19?” (ibid.).

55 For instance, Clark and Hatton, A Handbook on Zechariah, 245–46, acknowledge “the River” is generally understood to be the Euphrates the idealized northern boundary of the Promised Land.

56 Harris, “Did God Fulfill Every Good Promise?,” 65–70.
promised covenant blessings by Yahweh as multiple verses past Joshua 21 and 1 Kings repeatedly promise this same thing. Yet in spite of the multiplicity of other prophetic passages shown, proponents strongly argue just the opposite: “The entitlement of any one ethnic or religious group to territory in the Middle East called the ‘Holy Land’ cannot be supported by Scripture. In fact, the land promises specific to Israel in the Old Testament were fulfilled under Joshua.” For the sake of argument, even if it were true that all the land promises were fulfilled by Joshua 21, then they must answer why the same God gave the same additional promises to the same Jewish people well past Joshua 21, including both Pre-exilic and Post-exilic times and even expanded it to include the reign of the Messiah and the unfathomable blessings associated with His reign.

It is noteworthy that some who look to Joshua 21 for a literal fulfillment of a literal promise that God made also hold that any other promise of God to the nation of Israel post Joshua 21 should not be considered as a literal promise. As before, those who hold such a position would have to explain what then did God mean by making the exact promise that they themselves understood to be literally fulfilled elsewhere but not so in other passages of Scripture. Instead of God viewing the land promises as already being fulfilled, He instead implored the brazenly sinful Jewish people just before the Exile to repent and return to Him, “then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers forever and ever” (Jer 7:7), and elsewhere warning but declaring, “Turn now everyone from his evil way and from the evil of your deeds, and dwell on the land which the LORD has given to you and your forefathers forever and ever” (Jer 25:5). It is hard to argue from these passages, even as late as the time of Jeremiah that “The entitlement of any one ethnic or religious group to territory in the Middle East called the ‘Holy Land’ cannot be supported by Scripture,” since so much Scripture does indeed support this very thing—and does so repeatedly.

Secondly, as previously shown in the first paper, the virtual unanimous understanding by those in all theological camps (Calvin included) that Israel never received all of the land that God promised, partly due from God’s own statements that very much of the land remained yet to be conquered (Josh 13:1–2) and partly due to the size of the territory originally promised (roughly 300,000 square miles) versus that which Israel actually possessed (approximately 10,000), which is only about 1/30th of the promised amount. Consequently, using the Josh 21:43–45 passage as a proof text is untenable, such as Mathison does: “There are numerous other passages in the Old Testament that tell us that God has already fulfilled the land promises given to Israel (Josh 11:23; 21:21–45; Neh 9:25). Joshua 21:43–45 explicitly declares that all the land promised Israel was given to them.” In spite of

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57 This is Affirmation #9 of their doctrinal statement for The Bible Researcher web site, Michael D. Marlowe, editor. (http://www.bible-researcher.com/openletter.html). A list of signatories for this open letter is at the bottom of the page.

58 Ibid.

59 Harris, “Did God Fulfill Every Good Promise?,” 63–64, 70–75.

60 Mathison, Dispensationalism: Rightly Dividing the People of God?, 27 [emphasis in the original].
God saying that very much of the land remained yet to be possessed and that only a small fraction of the land had been occupied, Cox argues:

Did God keep the promise to Joshua? The futurist cannot allow it . . . We could summarize these promises concerning the land of Canaan being inherited by Israel as follows: The land was promised through Abraham; the promise was renewed to Isaac, Jacob and Moses. It was fulfilled literally through Joshua . . . How sad it is then that some theologians are still arguing that they are yet future! Much of the futurist belief rests on the assumption that God has never given Israel all the land promised through Abraham.61

Simply put, Cox states: “The earthly promises to national Israel have been fulfilled.”62 So, according to Cox’s reasoning, regardless of what other land promises God gives elsewhere in Scripture, these cannot be understood to be literal promises from God but instead should be understood as a concoction of “the futurist.” For instance, as part of his theological rationale, Cox insists that “[t]he theory of futurism concerning Israel is only a comparatively recent teaching, having originated in 1830,”63 which is not at all true because all of the arguments for this paper are solely derived from the biblical texts that God gave often fifteen hundred years or more before 1830. Furthermore, for most of the biblical citations and with only a very few exceptions, the vast majority of the prophetic texts repeatedly have God Himself as the speaker of the future blessing that He would bring to both the people and to the land. Cox further concludes his book with this strong warning:

If some readers should still hold to the futurist view, it is suggested that they owe it to themselves to attempt to find New Testament scriptures to warrant their acceptance of the assumptions listed herein. These after all form the framework for this school of thought. If the assumptions cannot be supported by the Word of God, then it would seem logical to drop this theory.64

However, if these “assumptions” are, in fact, the stated Word of God—quite often beginning or containing the phrase, “Thus says the Lord”—and Scripture repeatedly presents them as such, they are neither assumptions nor theory. For instance, and as previously noted, God twice referred to the land that He had given to the Jewish people and their forefathers “forever and ever” (Jer 7:7; 25:5). This is not an assumption but the direct statement from God. So, if “the assumptions” can be supported by God’s Word, then they cease being assumptions, and it would be logical instead to drop Cox’s position that no future exists for the nation of Israel because God has already fulfilled the land promises by Joshua 21 and/or 1 Kings 4.

Finally, the importance of the Euphrates River in not only the original land promises, but as was shown, is considered by some to be additional proof that

62 Ibid., 20.
63 Ibid., 73.
64 Ibid., [emphasis in the original].
coupled with Joshua 21:43–45 and 1 Kings 4:20–21 clearly shows the fulfillment of all the land promises that God had given. Hanegraaff holds such an interpretation in *The Apocalypse Code.* Hanegraaff’s statements will be considered because he makes sweeping claims that by reading his book and employing his “Exegetical Eschatology” interpretational principles, that “you will not only be equipped to interpret the Bible for all it’s worth” (xxvii) but also learn a methodology one should employ in any legitimate Bible study, warning against *eisegesis*, the reading into the biblical text something that simply isn’t there.” Further, Hanegraaff explains that he is not committed “to any particular method of eschatology” but rather argues for “the plain and proper meaning” of a text. He further instructs that the “plain and proper meaning of a biblical passage must always take precedence over a particular eschatological presupposition or paradigm” (2). Using an acronym “LIGHTS” for his hermeneutical system for studying eschatology, the “L” stands for a “literal understanding” of the biblical text. While this sounds very similar to a premillennial understanding of the text, it is the outworking or application of the hermeneutics that cause the interpretational paths to diverge in diametrically different directions. Hanegraaff often does indeed take “the plain and proper meaning of a biblical passage” (2), which in reality is calling for a literal, grammatical, historical interpretation of the text.

Hanegraaff likewise argues that the scriptural synergy principle is the means of safeguarding sound Bible study, and of course, with the thrust of his book, this would especially relate to eschatological studies:

Finally, the S in LIGHTS represents the principle of *scriptural synergy.* Simply stated, this means that the whole of Scripture is greater than the sum of its individual passages. You cannot comprehend the Bible as a whole without comprehending its individual parts, and you cannot comprehend its individual parts without comprehending the Bible as a whole. Individual passages of

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66 Hanegraaff, *The Apocalypse Code*, 1 [emphasis in the original]. In the discussion that follows, page numbers from this work will be cited at the conclusion of each quote.

67 One of Hanegraaff’s most astounding claims is, “In the final analysis, my purpose is not to entice you to embrace a particular model of eschatology but to employ a proper model of biblical interpretation” (3). This being written after Hanegraaff excoriates in his prologue anyone who would hold to a future for the nation of Israel, i.e. Zionism, and strongly rebukes those who hold “such unbiblical notions” (xxii) calling it “inflammatory rhetoric” (xxvii). He further warns: “In the pages that follow, you will answer these and a host of other questions by internalizing and applying the principles of a methodology called Exegetical Eschatology . . . In the process you will not only be equipped to interpret the Bible for all it’s worth but you may well discover that you hold the key to the problem of terrorism in one hand and the fuse of Armageddon in the other” (xxvii).

68 For instance, the “T” section of his acronym “LIGHTS” is chapter six, “Typology Principle: The Golden Key” (161–203). From these previous statements, in reality what Hanegraaff does is employ an allegorized hermeneutic whenever any text does not meet his preterist theology. This allegorizing of different texts basically undermines a great deal of what he would argue against as a literal approach to the text (his “L” section in the LIGHTS acronym). Hanegraaff does not explain what to do if the “L” (literal principle) and the “T” (typology principle) stand at odds with each other.
Scripture are synergistic rather than deflective to with respect to the whole of Scripture.

Scriptural synergy demands that individual Bible passages may never be interpreted in such a way as to conflict with the whole of Scripture. Nor may we assign arbitrary meanings to words or phrases that have their referent in biblical history. The biblical interpreter must keep in mind that all Scripture, though communicated through various human instruments, has one single Author. And that Author does not contradict himself, nor does he confuse his servants.69

Obviously, no book on prophecy can contain every prophetic reference in Scripture, but it would be very enlightening to see how Hanegraaff would, based on the exegetical study he espouses, interpret the promise that God made to the Jewish people regarding giving them the land of Israel “forever and ever” (Jer 7:7; 25:5), as well as for the reign of the Messiah’s northern boundary being the Euphrates River (Ps 72:8; Zech 9:10). Would he argue for exegesis, “the method by which a student seeks to uncover what an author intended his or her original audience to understand” (1) and not eisegesis, “reading into the biblical text something that simply isn’t there” (1), and that the “plain and proper meaning of a biblical passage must always take precedence over a particular eschatological presupposition or paradigm” (2)? Would Hanegraaff employ the Scriptural Synergy principle which “demands that individual Bible passages may never be interpreted in such a way as to conflict with the whole of Scripture” (9)? If Hanegraaff did consistently employ these very hermeneutical principles with the remaining prophecies given past Joshua 21 and 1 Kings 4, he would be a premillennialist in his theology.

Another reason why it would be intriguing to see how Hanegraaff would handle the afore mentioned texts is because The Apocalypse Code does contain one reference to Jer 7:3–8 in the Scripture index and does so at the conclusion of “The Typology Principle: The Golden Key” chapter. That Hanegraaff would refer to the Typology Principle as “The Golden Key” of sound biblical interpretation and not the Literal Principle or the Scriptural Synergy principle (“individual Bible passages may never be interpreted in such a way as to conflict with the whole of Scripture”) by the same designation shows that he does not consider these other hermeneutical principles as being of equal importance or value as his typological method. So in summing up his case for interpreting much of prophecy in a typical fashion, Hanegraaff cautions his readers who would not follow his prescribed methodology:

Just as it is a grievous sin to turn a blind eye to the evil of anti-Semitism, so it is a grievous sin to turn a blind eye to the theology that divides people on the basis of race rather than uniting them on the basis of righteousness, justice and equity. Those who presumptuously appeal to the words of Moses—“I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse” (Genesis 12:2)—as a pretext for unconditionally supporting a secular state that

69 Hanegraaff, 9–10.
prohibits the advance of the gospel while simultaneously disregarding the plight of the Palestinians should, according to their own hermeneutical standard, heed the words of the prophet Jeremiah:

This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says: “Reform your ways and your actions, and I will let you live in this place. Do not trust in deceptive words and say, ‘This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD!’ If you really change your ways and your actions and deal with each other justly, if you do not oppress the alien, the fatherless or the widow and do not shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not follow other gods to your own harm, then I will let you live in this place, in the land I gave your forefathers forever and ever. But look, you are trusting in deceptive words that are worthless” (Jer 7:3–8).  

Yet even within this quote from Jeremiah, Hanegraaff italicizes the part about “if you do not oppress the alien” and is obviously looking for a literal fulfillment of Jer 7:6. Yet to use his own words, according to his “own hermeneutical standard,” should he not likewise emphasize the passage in this same text where God calls Israel to turn from their sin “then I will let you live in this place, in the land that I gave your forefathers forever and ever” (Jer 7:7)—and look for a literal fulfillment of this promise as well? Yahweh still considered the land that He Himself had given to Jewish people and their forefathers forever and ever, even at that point in their history, and by no means fulfilled by Josh 21:43–45 and/or 1 Kings 4:20–21.

Conclusion and Significance

Instead of all the land promises being fulfilled by Josh 21:41–43 and/or 1 Kings 4:20–21, the Bible clearly, repeatedly, and persistently presents just the opposite, and does so in a way that beautifully harmonizes with previous prophecies given by God, as in Lev 26:40–45 and Deut 30:1–10. In fact, nothing indicates that a fulfillment of these prophecies occurred by the time of Solomon’s life or even up to our present time. Not only are these land boundary promises originally given in the Abrahamic covenant, reiterated in the Mosaic covenant as well as in opening of the book of Joshua, but also the Bible again presents the Euphrates River as the northern boundary for the nation of Israel long after 1 Kings 4. Yet even beyond this, as becomes more evident in the unfolding of God’s revelation, twice the Euphrates River also specifically relates to the Messiah’s reign, first in Ps 72:8, and then centuries afterward in the midst of “the times of the Gentiles” (Luke 21:24) came the second promise in Zech 9:10 that the Euphrates River will be the northern boundary of Israel for His worldwide rule.

Walvoord, in dealing with the claims made by Allis who argued that God had fulfilled all of the land promises to Israel, summarized accordingly:

According to the Abrahamic Covenant, the land would be completely possessed, and would be permanently possessed as “an everlasting
The fulfillment under Solomon breaks down under every requirement. As Allis very well knows, neither David nor Solomon “possessed” all the land for which the boundaries are given with precision in Genesis 15:18–21. At best much of this land was put under tribute, but was never possessed. Further as Allis admits, it was soon lost again, which in no wise fulfilled the promise of permanent or everlasting possession (Gen 17:8). Besides, Allis is quite oblivious to a fact that nullifies his entire argument here. That is that the prophets who lived after Solomon were still anticipating the future fulfillment of the promises of the everlasting possession of the land (cf. Amos 9:13–15) and reiterate in practically all the Minor Prophets the theme song that Israel is to be restored to the land, to be regathered there, and to continue under the blessing of God. While the promises relative to a large progeny may have been fulfilled in Solomon’s day, the promises relative to the land were not.71

So harmonious are God’s prophecies regarding the land promises, that if one did not know that an interpretational controversy already exists regarding whether or not the land promises had been completely fulfilled by the time of Josh 21:41–43 and/or 1 Kings 4:20–21, one would never get this from the text because the promises made by God after Joshua 21/1 Kings 4 harmonize perfectly—in some case even mirror—the multiple promises that God had previously made. Actually, if anything, the Bible gives even more support past Joshua 21 and 1 Kings 4 regarding the future promises of God and His Messiah who will reign over the entire world (Ps 2:7), which includes the Euphrates River as part of the boundary for the northern part of the nation of Israel. When His reign does occur, as prophecy is fulfilled in the future, indeed will this verse likewise be fulfilled: “plans formed long ago with perfect faithfulness” (Isa 25:1).

Advocates of No-Lordship theology often claim that since the terms “repent” and “repentance” are not found John’s Gospel this means that repentance is not required for a sinner to be saved. Yet such a view does not rightly consider that lack of a specific term does not mean that the concept is absent. A close look at the Fourth Gospel reveals that this Gospel does teach that repentance is a part of saving faith and without it salvation cannot occur.

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Introduction

According to some, repentance is merely a change of mind whereby a person recognizes his sinfulness and need of salvation. Therefore, an alcoholic should not be told that he needs to change his lifestyle, or even be willing to do so in order to obtain salvation. The only form of repentance that is required for eternal salvation is a change of mind about Christ. The idea that repentance means, “to turn from sins for salvation” amounts to salvation by works. If people need to turn from their sins in order to obtain salvation, then no one would have eternal life! Not only is this view a distortion of the Gospel, but also it completely undermines assurance. Therefore, while repentance is not a condition for receiving eternal life, it is a condition for possessing eternal life and enjoying the quality of life that comes with it.¹

These are the teachings of certain evangelical groups. But none of these beliefs find agreement with the position being defended in this current study. One of the pieces of evidence that these groups often mention is the absence of repentance in the Fourth Gospel. Wilkin invites those who are studying the doctrine of repentance to read the Fourth Gospel to “(d)iscover what, if anything, John tells us about the role of repentance in salvation.” That is the challenge this article examines.

Methodology for Word/Concept Studies

There are two ways, according to Cotterell and Turner, in which linguistics can assist in exegesis: (1) linguistics can add further precision to the meaning of a word; (2) linguistics can increase the ways to analyze a text. When studying any concept, one naturally begins by examining all texts containing that concept. While this a good start, it is not acceptable to end there. Contexts where the concept is present (where the word is absent) need to be studied as well. Consideration needs to be given to related words or phrases and the clusters in which those occur.

When studying repentance in the Fourth Gospel, one quickly realizes that the first step, studying occurrences of the word in its context, cannot be done. Neither μετανοέω nor μετάνοια occurs in the Fourth Gospel. This does not necessitate the conclusion that the concept of repentance does not occur. However, it does allow for this possibility after, but only after the Fourth Gospel has been carefully read and found not to contain it.

The Meaning of Repentance

The meaning of the word needs to be decided upon before endeavoring to see if the Fourth Gospel contains the concept of repentance. Therefore, an evaluation of several significant passages containing either μετανοέω or μετάνοια will occur to derive a meaning for repentance. Then a decision will be reached as to whether the Fourth Gospel contains this concept.

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3 Lewis Sperry Chafer, Systematic Theology, (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1947–48), 3:376–77, says that since repentance is missing from the Fourth Gospel and Romans, “No thoughtful person would attempt to defend such a notion against such odds, and those who have thus undertaken doubtless have done so without weighing the evidence or considering the untenable position which they assume.” Also, note that John MacArthur has responded specifically on this issue. See www.sf pulp it.com/2006/10/26/repent ance-in-the-gospel-of-john. (Accessed January 22, 2013).


5 Neither does either occur in 1–3 John. While μετάνοια does not occur in Revelation, μετανοέω occurs ten times: Rev 2:5, 16, 21, 22; 3:3, 19; 9:20, 21; 16:9, 11.

6 Some of the attempts and pitfalls associated with utilizing the etymology of this word for ascertaining a definition will be mentioned.
Matthew 3:2 provides the beginning cry of the ministry of John the Baptist: “Repent, for the kingdom of Heaven is near.” His first word was the command (μετανοεῖτε) to repent. Similarly, in Mark 1:15, Jesus’ first words in the Gospel are: “The time has been fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.” Jesus’ first words include the idea of repenting and believing, and His first command is to repent (μετανοεῖτε). In Matt 4:17, after Jesus had been baptized by John the Baptist and tempted in the wilderness, He began his public preaching ministry with these words: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.” Again, repentance is prominent in both Jesus’ and John’s ministries.

One significant passage for determining the meaning of repentance in the New Testament is Matt 3:7–9. The Pharisees and Sadducees came to the place where John was baptizing. Upon seeing these religious leaders, John scolds them saying: “You brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath about to come? Therefore, bear fruit worthy of repentance.” This final phrase, “bear fruit worthy of repentance,” is significant enough for us to take a closer look.

First, John is not actually declaring that they in fact are fleeing from the wrath to come; it is sarcasm. This can be seen in that he just referred to them as the “offspring” or “brood of vipers,” a negative reference to their character. By first pointing out their poor character and then calling for fruit worthy of repentance before they would be allowed to be baptized, John is asking for “concrete evidence of repentance.” What does concrete evidence of repentance look like? When someone has repented, it will be demonstrated in their lifestyle and behavior; it will flow from a heart that has been changed.

Notes:

7 Note that the NASB, NLT, and NRSV say that they came to be baptized, but ἔπιπα here most likely refers to the place where baptism was taking place, as the NIV (NKJV?) has it. So Craig L. Blomberg, Matthew, New American Commentary 22 (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 77; Donald A. Hagner, Matthew 1–13, Word Biblical Commentary 33A (Dallas: Word, 1993), 49. While D. A. Carson, “Matthew,” in The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 8:103, raises this point, he is less sure than Blomberg and Hagner. Contra Barclay M. Newman and Philip C. Stine, A Translator’s Handbook on The Gospel of Matthew, Helps for Translators (New York: United Bible Societies, 1988), 66, who unequivocally declare this phrase to mean that they came to be baptized, giving five different ways to translate it with that meaning.

8 The Greek word γέννηματα refers primarily to offspring, and when in reference to snakes or vipers, to “brood.”

9 So Blomberg, Matthew, 78; Carson, “Matthew,” 103.

10 Newman and Stine, A Translator’s Handbook on The Gospel of Matthew, 66, say it refers to them being “clever and wicked deceivers, hypocrites who lead people astray.”

11 Hagner, Matthew 1–13, 50. Hagner also mentions that “(r)epentance and good works are very frequently associated in rabbinic thought (see Str–B 1:170–72)” (ibid). Note that Charles C. Bing, “Why Lordship Faith Misses the Mark for Salvation,” JEGS 12, No. 22 (1999): 27, criticizes the idea of looking at fruit. However, that is exactly what John the Baptist does: he looks and finds the Pharisees and Sadducees’ fruit wanting.

12 Blomberg, Matthew, 78.
has been changed. Kümmel said, “Only he who produces such fruit shows thereby that he is converted.” In order to escape the coming wrath the repentance needs to be genuine; it will be reflected by their entire lifestyle being “in harmony with … oral repentance.” Blomberg said, “without the evidence of a changed life and perseverance in belief, all such grounds of trust prove futile.” Tannehill (commenting on the parallel verse in Luke 3:8) incisively concludes: “The reference to ‘fruits’ and ‘deeds’ make clear that this is an ethically transforming event, one that results in changed behavior. In 3:9, John the Baptist warns them not to rely upon their ancestry; they must produce good works (fruit) to demonstrate that they have repented. Therefore, there exists a connection between repentance and the evidence of it: good fruit.

As mentioned above, Jesus’ initial proclamation in Mark’s Gospel contained the dual imperatives of repentance and believing. He said that the has been fulfilled, a term which he used to refer to the idea that the decisive moment had arrived. This twofold description, involving repentance and belief, is similar to Acts 20:21, and denotes the basis for discipleship in the Synoptic Gospels. Both the verbs, and their noun forms, occur frequently in the New Testament. Regarding Jesus’ call to believe in the gospel, it means “not only an intellectual acceptance that the ‘news’ is true, but a response of acceptance and commitment.”

This narrative is paradigmatic for the entire Gospel. Every time Jesus is described as teaching or preaching, the desired response is faith and repentance; every time the mystery of the kingdom is discussed, it is to be viewed through the

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13 Newman and Stine, *A Translator’s Handbook on The Gospel of Matthew*, 67. Arthur W. Pink, *Repentance: What Saith the Scriptures?* (Swengel, PA: Reiner Publications, 1967), 28–29, lists six genuine fruits of repentance: (1) hatred of sin; (2) deep sorrow for sin; (3) confessing sins; (4) turning from sin; (5) restitution; (6) permanence (all five above must last). He clarifies “permanence” by saying that repentance is never perfected, but is a life–long, daily act (30).


16 Carson, “Matthew,” 103.


18 Pink, *Repentance*, 10–12, lists a few “false signs” (or false fruits) of repentance, which are not evidences by themselves: (1) trembling under preaching; (2) being almost persuaded; (3) humbling ourselves to God; (4) confessing sins; (5) good works that appear to demonstrate repentance without a changed heart and mind.

19 It is nearly inconceivable that Wilkin, “Repentance and Salvation, Part 3,” 13–21, never dealt with the phrase “fruit worthy of repentance” in his articles. His dissertation was not reviewed which may or may not contain an explanation of this phrase.


21 Note that Robert N. Wilkin, “Part 4: New Testament Repentance: Repentance in the Gospels and Acts,” *JEGS* 3, No. 1 (1990): 22, proposes that the might be used ascensively, meaning “that is.” Therefore, “Repent, that is, believe in the gospel.” The problem is that how do you “repent in the gospel.” He fails to wrestle with this. Wilkin proposes this as simply a possibility.

22 France, *Mark*, 94.
eyes of repentance and faith. For example, when the Twelve were sent out (6:7–13), their message was for all to repent (6:12); faith is not mentioned, but implicitly included.

There are a few points that need comment. First, the message of John the Baptist and Jesus can be seen to have continuity in the call to repent; they can be distinguished by Jesus’ additional command to believe. While it may be possible to see faith implicitly included in John’s preaching on repentance, it explicitly emerges in Jesus’ ministry. What is the best way to view the relationship between repentance and faith in Mark 1:15? They are inseparable; repentance is a beginning part of conversion; faith is the overarching term. Pink said it well: “Repentance is the heart’s acknowledgement of the justice of God’s sentence of condemnation; faith is the heart’s acceptance of the grace and mercy which are extended to us through Christ.”

They can be seen as inseparable or overlapping in that the call to either is a call to both (e.g. Mark 6:12). John the Baptist’s preaching was to prepare the way for Jesus’ ministry, which among other things, included the initial preaching of repentance to prepare for Jesus’ call to believe. Faith is therefore the larger term; it includes repentance though they can be semantically distinguished. Repentance must lead to faith; faith cannot exist without repentance.

Jesus’ description of the Ninevites in Matt 12:41 includes that they “repented at the preaching of Jonah.” Jesus uses μετανοέω to describe their actions; what does the book of Jonah say? “Then the people of Nineveh believed in God” (Jon 3:5). This belief was demonstrated by a call for a fast and putting on sackcloth (3:6) and ashes (3:7), followed by a declaration of the king for people to turn from their wicked ways. Therefore, what Jesus calls “repenting,” the book of Jonah describes

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25 The question then arises as to the “who” to believe in and the “what” to believe that John would have been calling people to. In Mark’s Gospel, “we are justified in assuming the presence of repentance where faith is active in the story, and it’s want where unbelief is encountered.” Marshall, *Faith as a Theme in Mark’s Narrative*, 52.


27 Repentance should not be considered to occur prior to faith, however. See David R. Anderson, “Repentance is for All Men,” *JEGS* 11, No. 20 (1998): 10; Horton, *Christ the Lord*, 30–43. Though Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 3.375, understands this issue quite differently from the position defended in this paper, he shows the faults with viewing repentance as following believing. See also Lewis Sperry Chafer, “The Terms of Salvation,” *JEGS* 1, No. 1 (1988): 37–39.


29 Translated in the LXX with ἔμπιστεύω, from the Hebrew word עָנָק.

30 Not rendered in the LXX by μετανοέω, but by ἀποστρέφω from the Hebrew word עָנָק.
as believing and turning. This provides more evidence that Jesus’ use of \( \mu \varepsilon \tau \alpha \nu \omicron \omicron \varepsilon \omega \) includes more than a change of mind, but includes a turning and relates to believing.  

The relationship between repentance and believing continues to be developed in Acts of the Apostles. For example, while 3:19 says “repent and return (\( \varepsilon \pi \iota \sigma \tau \rho \varepsilon \phi \omega \)), so that your sins may be wiped away,” 32 11:21 says, “a large number who believed turned (\( \varepsilon \pi \iota \sigma \tau \rho \varepsilon \phi \omega \)) to the Lord.” From this, it can be concluded that repenting and turning are related (3:19) and believing and turning are related (11:21). Those verses (especially 3:19) combined with 10:43 (“everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins”) shows that repentance, believing, and turning are all related to each other and to forgiveness of sins. Therefore, repentance is understood as “turning” or “changing” in a salvific context.

The order and description in 20:20 is helpful to understand this. Paul says that he testified to both Jews and Greeks “of repentance toward God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.” This text proves to be exegetically problematic. Wallace concludes that “saving faith includes repentance … Luke envisions repentance as the inceptive act of which the entirety may be called \( \pi \iota \sigma \tau \iota \zeta \). Thus, for Luke, conversion is not a two-step process, but one step, faith— but the kind of faith that includes repentance.” 33 Bock defines it as “a turning in direction . . . to make a conscious turn toward God and God’s actions through Jesus.” 34 Finally, Paul describes his ministry as calling people to “repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance” (26:20). 35 Here the term “repent” should be viewed as the initial act of coming to faith; 36 it contains the idea of turning and will produce good deeds 37 which demonstrate that the repentance was genuine, not merely sorrow, conviction, shame, guilt, or grief. 38 “Repentance” stresses the need for a change in direction, “turning” conveys a changing of direction with the result...

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31 This linking and interdependence of believing and repenting can also be seen in Luke 5:32: “I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.” The idea of turning can also be seen in Luke 17:4: “And if he sins against you seven times a day and seven times returns to you saying, ‘I repent,’ (then) forgive him.”

32 Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 175, concludes that while repentance in Acts 3:19 “stresses the need for a change in direction,” turning “also makes this point and highlights the process of ending up in line with God.”


35 Similarly, 2 Pet 3:9 says that the opposite of people perishing is that they come to repentance. This is in a salvific context and should be considered the first act of believing by turning away from sins and to God.


38 More on the distinction between \( \mu \varepsilon \tau \alpha \nu \omicron \omicron \varepsilon \omega \) and \( \mu \varepsilon \tau \alpha \mu \chi \ell \varepsilon \omicron \omicron \varepsilon \omega \) is said below.
of being in line with God, and faith is the result of repenting and turning, that is, trusting in God.

**Metanoeó and Metamevlomai**

While μετανοέω and μετάνοια are frequent in the New Testament, μεταμέλομαι is not; it occurs only six times. Wilkin is correct when he says, “there are no uses of metamelomai in the New Testament where ‘repentance’ is a good translation. It always refers to regret, remorse, or to a change of mind. It never refers to turning from one’s sins.” In fact, only one scholar could be located who referred to these terms as synonymous, but all the rest saw some level of distinction between them. However, the discussion was not altogether clear in the lexicons. For example, Thayer says that μεταμέλομαι refers to an emotional change, regret, even remorse and μετανοέω to a change of choice, entire life. He then proceeds to reject this distinction. He concludes by saying “μετανοέω is the fuller and nobler term, expressive of moral action and issues.” Similarly, Abbott-Smith is the only example of believing that these words are actually “synonymous,” and he cites Thayer for support (who actually distinguished between the two words).

Wilkin begins most of his discussions on the meaning of repentance from the meaning μετάνοια had in Classical Greek, as if that meaning would naturally carry over and should be the assumed meaning. In fact, at one point he refers, etymologically, to “after thought” or “second thoughts.” Abbott-Smith also defines μετάνοια as “after-thought, change of mind, repentance.” Anderson refers to this as the root fallacy and counters by saying that in the contexts in which

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39 Matt 21:29, 32; 27:3; 2 Cor 7:8 (twice); Heb 7:21.
40 Wilkin, “Repentance and Salvation, Part 3,” 19; it should be kept in mind that Wilkin does not think “repentance” is a good translation for μετανοέω either. He does see some uses where μεταμέλομαι refers to changing one’s mind, and therefore would be synonymous with his understanding of μετανοέω (2 Cor 7:9; Matt 21:29), though he never says this explicitly. He does not view all uses of μεταμέλομαι this way (Matt 27:3). See also O. Michel, “μεταμέλομαι, κτλ,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, eds. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 4:629, who says that all uses of these words are distinct.
41 Consistent with this, but with a major variation, Pink says that the three Greek words for repentance (μετανοέω, μετάνοια, and μεταμέλομαι) need to be combined to form genuine repentance. The first refers to a change of mind, the second, to a change of course or life, and the third to a change of heart. See Pink, *Repentance*, 27.
45 Wilkin, “Part 6,” 17. He is not alone in doing this. Michel, “μεταμέλομαι, κτλ,” 626–27, mentions that μετανοέω comes from νοῦς (therefore referring to a change in mind or view) and μεταμέλομαι comes from μέλει (therefore referring to a change in feeling).
μετανοέω occur, it must mean more than both “after thought” and “change your mind.”47 This kind of dependence upon etymology has long been abandoned by scholarship, but it continues to rear its ugly head from time to time.48

Conclusion: The Meaning of Repentance49

The three main views on the definition of μετανοια are: (1) a turning away from one’s sins (not just a willingness or resolve to do so); 50 (2) the intention, resolve, or willingness to turn from sins;51 (3) to change one’s mind (about something).52 Μετανοεω and μετανοια do not mean “to be remorseful,” “to be sorry,” or “to regret”;53 that is the primary meaning of μεταμελομαι. It is more

47 Anderson, “Repentance is for All Men,” 17.
49 See Appendix 2 for a comparison of how two translations (NASB 1995 and NLT 1997) translated the Greek words for repentance.
51 See Billy Graham, How to Be Born Again (Carmel, NY: Guideposts, 1977), 156–60; George Ladd, The Gospel of the Kingdom (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 95–106; John R. W. Stott, Basic Christianity (London: InterVarsity, 1958), 112–13; 125–32; Pink, Repentance, 5 (at times he seems to say it is an actual turning, at other times a determination to turn).
than a “change of mind.” It is not “turning over a new leaf.” Rather repentance involves a change in the mind and conduct, which involves a turning away from sins and turning to God, which produces demonstrable results. The Bauer-Danker-Arndt-Gingrich lexicon says that μετανοεῖν means “‘a change of mind’ … w. the nuance of ‘remorse’”. This is an unsatisfactory conclusion. However, Louw and Nida say, “to change one’s way of life as the result of a complete change of thought and attitude with regard to sin and righteousness.” Interestingly, they define επιστροφή as “to change one’s manner of life in a particular direction, with the implication of turning back to God.” The difference is minimal. To change one’s way of life versus to change one’s manner of life is insignificant. While in μετανοεῖν the change is the result of a change in thought and attitude toward sin, in επιστροφή the change is toward a particular direction, namely toward God. While these words are not synonyms, to differentiate between them sharply would be inappropriate.

Some have bemoaned that μετανοεῖν and μετανοέω were translated by our English word repent. Dement says the concept of repentance is “very difficult to express in other languages.” Kümmel prefers the translation “conversion” or

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59 Ibid. Robert C. Tannehill, *The Shape of Luke’s Story: Essays on Luke-Acts* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2005), 86, has a similar conclusion. He says that μετανοέω and μετανοεῖν emphasize “a change in thinking and attitude, compared to one’s previous life, and επιστρέφω is suggesting the positive side of this change: the reestablishment of a harmonious relation to God.”
60 The best discussion found on the translation history of μετανοέω is in Chamberlain, *The Meaning of Repentance*, 27–32. Wilkin, “Repentance and Salvation, Part 3,” 21, calls it an “extraordinary mistranslation.”
"convert." Genuine repentance contains three elements: cognitive (understand some things about God and sin), emotional (abhor sin), and volitional (determination to forsake sins).

Some would accuse those viewing repentance this way as denying justification by grace through faith (alone). This understanding does not make repentance a work; instead, Scripture clearly calls it a gift. This can be seen specifically in Acts 11:18, Rom 2:4, and 2 Tim 2:25: repentance is not achieved, but received. It is not a work; it is not a way to merit or be rewarded salvation. Therefore, repentance is a God-enabled human response.

Can the Old Testament help us understand the New Testament meaning of μετάνοια? The data is agreed upon, but conclusions differ. If anything, the idea of turning from sins may not have been dominant, but changing one’s mind may have been. Conclusions are tenuous. This is the reason that the emphasis has remained on the evaluation of the data from the New Testament. Two aspects of repentance need to be distinguished. The emphasis in Scripture is upon the initial act of an unbeliever turning away from his sins and coming to faith in Christ. However, repentance is also a part of progressive sanctification, whereby Christians continually confess and align their lives with God’s will (see Luke 22:31–32; Eph 4:22–23; Rev 2:5, 16; 3:3, 19). It exists throughout one’s Christian life.

However, this is based upon the following tenuous grounds: “For the Aramaic word which is translated as ‘repentance’ in actuality denotes the turning around, the abandoning of the wrong road and the resolute taking of the right road.” See Kümmel, The Theology of the New Testament, 29. Stagg, New Testament Theology, 119, and France, Mark, 93, agree with Kümmel’s suggestion of “conversion.” Hodges, Absolutely Free!, 146, is content with the translation “repent.”

Cf. Demarest, The Cross and Salvation, 254; Barclay, Great Themes of the New Testament, 73; Graham, How to Be Born Again, 156–60; Talbot, The Signs of True Conversion, 14. Pink, Repentance, 5, says it contains four elements: (1) the occasion of repentance is sin; (2) changed mind; (3) sorrow for sin; and (4) the fruit is a determination to change.

Note Richardson, An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament, 29: “Salvation by faith alone must inevitably be rejected if faith is defined as intellectual assent.”

See Ibid., 32; Stagg, New Testament Theology, 119.

Cf. Grant, New Testament Thought, 310. Despite the fact that “Throughout church history nearly every theologian has taught that repentance is essential for salvation from hell” (Wilkin, “Repentance and Salvation, Part 1,” 11), certain individuals have found ways around this. Particularly disturbing is Wilkin’s use of “the analogy of faith” (the hermeneutical principle that clear passages should be used to understand the unclear passages). He essentially labels any passage that on the surface may contradict his conclusions as “unclear.” It is hard for this interpreter to understand what is so unclear about Luke 24:47, for example.

See Demarest, The Cross and Salvation, 256.


Since the author repeats “repent” at the conclusion of the verse, he is suggesting that the content of the middle of the verse (“do the deeds you did at first”) communicated how repentance is to be demonstrated.

See Demarest, The Cross and Salvation, 255.
Repentance Found?

Summary of Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>Concept</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Matthew 3:7–9</td>
<td>Genuine repentance includes good fruit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark 1:14–15</td>
<td>Repentance and faith are inseparable, linked; repentance precedes faith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matthew 12:41</td>
<td>Repentance linked to turning; also related to believing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acts 3:19</td>
<td>Repenting and turning are related</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acts 10:43</td>
<td>Repentance, believing, and turning are all related to each other and to forgiveness of sins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acts 11:19</td>
<td>Believing and turning are related</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acts 20:20</td>
<td>Repentance is directed toward God; it precedes believing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acts 26:20</td>
<td>Paul characterized his ministry as a call to repent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Repentance and the Fourth Gospel

Previous Conclusions

Bing’s brash challenge will now be undertaken: “Let the debate over the Gospel begin with John’s Gospel, unless we would accuse him of preaching half a gospel or easy-believism.”

It has been frequently noted that the Fourth Gospel never uses µετανοια nor µετανοια, and Wilkin concludes that “nowhere in the book is the concept of turning from sins given as a condition for obtaining eternal life.” In fact, supporters of what is commonly referred to as “No Lordship Salvation” have gone as far as saying that John “took great care not to mention it.”

The most extensive examination in print is by Bing, “The Condition for Salvation in John’s Gospel.” However, he considered only a few figures of speech: look (3:14–15); hear (5:24; 8:43, 47; 10:16, 27); enter (10:9); feed (6:57); come (6:35); and receive (1:12). Many of his conclusions are well supported. However, his evaluation left out many other possibilities.

The “No Lordship” argument is along the following lines: The Fourth Gospel was obviously written as an evangelistic tract (John 20:31), attempting to lead people to receive Christ. Since this is true, how could repentance not be mentioned if it was truly part of the gospel? It would mean that John failed in presenting the gospel.

Pink, who wrote many years before the current controversy, said, “But

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73 Wilkin, “Part 6,” 15. He adds that Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman, the man born blind, and Martha were never told to repent.
75 For one example among many, see Zane Hodges, Absolutely Free!, 146–47.
John’s Gospel is plainly addressed unto those who are saved (see 1:16). It is that Gospel which sets forth the Son in relation to the sons of God. John 20:31 obviously means that this Gospel is written to strengthen the faith of believers. The complicated issue of the tense of πιστεύω in John 20:31 cannot be evaluated currently, but the conclusion of Silva and Carson that regardless of the tense there remains an evangelistic intent is surely judicious.

Method

After arriving at a definition of the concept of repentance in the New Testament, the Fourth Gospel was read to see if any texts presented themselves as candidates for a closer look. After these texts were designated, they were evaluated to see if they (1) contain the concept of repentance, (2) contain aspects of the concept of repentance; (3) contain the concept of repentance but not in reference to eternal life/salvation; or (4) contained no reference to the New Testament’s concept of repentance. The claim is that not only does the Fourth Gospel’s silence refute repentance as a part of salvation, but also there is no reference whatsoever to this concept.

Thoughts on Items Missing from the Fourth Gospel

In order to provide a small amount of evidence to the proposition that because something is not explicitly stated that it is not communicated, some items will now be brought forth to show that this idea is incorrect. The virgin birth is not mentioned in the Fourth Gospel, but that does not mean that the author did not know about it or intentionally left it out because he disagreed with it. The word (noun form) “faith” is absent from the Fourth Gospel. Hell (ᾍδης [Hades], γῆνα [Gehenna], ταρταροῦ [Tartarus]) is not mentioned in the Fourth Gospel. Regarding other New Testament books, the verb “to believe” is absent from Revelation, and the noun form occurs only four times. While the verb “to save” occurs in Matthew fifteen times, Jesus is never called Savior. Similarly, the verb “to save” occurs in Mark fourteen times and “salvation” just once, but Jesus is never called Savior. If the absence of a word means de facto that the author purposefully left it out and/or the concept is not present then:

(1) The concept of Jesus as Savior is absent from Matthew, Mark, Romans, Colossians, Hebrews, and Revelation;
(2) The concept of grace is absent from Matthew and Mark;
(3) The concept of salvation is absent (in noun form) from Matthew and completely in Colossians;

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76 Pink, Repentance, 10.
78 Hodges, Absolutely Free!, 148.
79 See Appendix 3 for the chart containing some of the evidence for the following conclusions.
(4) The verb πιστεύω does not occur in Colossians or Revelation and the noun πίστις does not occur in the Fourth Gospel.

These conclusions are unwarranted: the absence of a word does not necessitate the absence of the concept.

Possibilities

The following texts were identified as possibilities and examined to test their merits:

(2) Jesus as the “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world”: 1:29.
(3) The wedding at Cana: could the reference to the purification jars be a reference to repentance: 2:1–13?
(5) The lifting up of the snake in the wilderness: 3:14 (see Num 21:4–9).
(8) Jesus pointing out the Samaritan woman’s sinful life: 4:16–18.
(9) Jesus’ command to not sin: 5:14; 8:11.
(11) The motif of “coming”: 5:40; 6:35.
(12) “die in sin”: 8:21.
(13) “continue to follow”: 8:31.
(14) obeying Jesus’ teaching equals never seeing death: 8:51; 17:6.
(15) “turn to me” from Isaiah: 12:40.
(16) Obedience and love: 14:15, 21, 23–24.

An analysis of the majority of these concepts and texts in relationship to repentance has not been accomplished. While space does not permit an extensive discussion of each text, the most helpful texts will be evaluated now. Some texts were found to provide no concrete evidence for the concept of repentance and others that may have provided some, albeit weak evidence, are excluded from the current study.80

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80 Those that are not discussed and are rejected include: the motif of “coming”: 5:40; 6:35 (so Bing, “John’s Gospel,” 26); “die in sin” of 8:21 (D. A. Carson, The Gospel According to John (Leicester: InterVarsity, 1991), 341, says that the singular “sin” refers to the sin of unbelief, a rejection of Jesus). Admittedly, this phrase could be stretched to fit the concept of repentance, but it would put this analysis on tenuous ground. The passages considered but ultimately rejected include: John the Baptist and baptism (1:23–28); Lamb of God (1:29); the wedding at Cana (2:1–12); Jesus pointing out the Samaritan woman’s sinful life (4:16–18); the motif of “coming” (5:40; 6:35); “continue to follow” (8:31); obeying Jesus’ teaching equals never seeing death (8:51; 17:6); and obedience and love (14:15, 21, 23–24); Peter’s restoration (21:15–17, 19b).
Discussion of Texts

Born Again or Born From Above: 3:3–5

Jesus informs Nicodemus that he must be γεννηθεν ἀπ’ ονωπιον. The first problem is the meaning of ἀπ’ ονωπιον: is it “again” or “from above”? The occurrence of this same word in 3:31 with the unquestioned meaning “from above” quickly tilts the evidence in that direction. Therefore, what does the phrase “born from above” mean in this context? While the expression likely harkens the readers of the Fourth Gospel to think back to 1:12–13 (which it then would mean “born of God”), Jesus himself explains it again to Nicodemus in 3:5: to be born from above means to be born of water and spirit. While water has been interpreted as a reference to baptism, purification, and natural birth, utilizing Ezek 36:25–27 makes an explanation easier. The themes in the Ezekiel 36 passage are of cleansing (“sprinkle clean water … and you will be clean”) and a new spirit (“put a new spirit within you”). God’s desired response is that the people will “walk in My statutes” and “observe My ordinances.” The whole passage is a call to repentance, to return to God, and a description of what God will

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82 For example, Hendriksen, John, 135; Ridderbos, The Gospel of John, 125.


87 See Carson, The Gospel According to John, 188 (who also references Jer 31:28ff.; Isa 32:15–20; 44:3; Ezek 11:19–20; 39:29). One reason to look for the background in the OT is Jesus’ astonishment that Nicodemus was the teacher of Israel, but did not understand Jesus (3:10) (Cf. Carson, The Gospel According to John, 190). On the other hand, Ridderbos, The Gospel of John, 128, declares that the background is John’s baptism: “The message of the kingdom was bound up from the beginning not only with the call to repentance but also with water baptism.”
do: “cleans(e) human hearts” and “inner transformation by his Spirit.” In fact, “Qumran’s Manual of Discipline connects Ezekiel 36 with immersion and repentance (1QS 3.8–9).”

However, Ezekiel 36 is not quoted nor directly alluded to in John 3. Therefore, this likely background text should not be pressed too far. Regardless, enough exists in Jesus’ own words to formulate a conclusion: “be born from above” means “to be born of water and spirit.” To be born of water refers to being cleansed and being born of the spirit refers to the Spirit that God will place in us. This “water-spirit” is the origin of the regeneration that is demanded. Both of these result in living a radically different life; they involve changing. Jesus is exhorting Nicodemus to change his life, his manner of living; He is not calling for a change just in his way of thinking, but all of himself. Hendriksen refers to being born from above as a “radical change,” and Morris as a “divine remaking.” Certainly, Carson’s understanding that this passage’s focus is on “the need for transformation” fits the current understanding as well. Both relate to the concept of repentance, whereby someone is called to change their ways.

The Snake in the Wilderness: John 3:14–15 and Numbers 21:4–9

The primary connection being made between these passages both in John and Numbers is the lifting up of the serpent to the lifting up of Jesus. Secondarily, as the Israelites were to turn to the serpent to preserve (physical) life, people are called upon to believe in Jesus for eternal life.

Numbers 21:4–5 contains an explanation of the sin of the Israelites; verse 6 provides the consequence of that sin (serpents attacking and killing the Israelites). The people came to Moses in Num 21:7 and said, “We have sinned, because we have spoken against the LORD and you; intercede with the LORD, that He may remove the serpents from us.” This verse describes the repentance of the Israelites from their sin. In response, God told Moses to place a serpent upon a bronze pole, and whoever looked at it would not die. Therefore, the connection between Numbers and the Fourth Gospel is twofold. Primarily, the author of the Fourth Gospel is discussing Jesus’ lifting up (which Nicodemus probably did not understand until sometime after the crucifixion). Second, just as the Israelites “looked” at the serpent and were given life, so belief in Jesus gives life. However, Numbers 21 portrayed the Israelites as repenting, turning from their sin, and then

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90 Hendriksen, New Testament Commentary, 133.
93 Note that Bing, “The Condition for Salvation in John’s Gospel,” never considers the Numbers 21 text.
“‘looking’ in faith.” While the background of Ezekiel 36 proposed for John 3:3–5 was not a direct reference, this background is a direct reference. Bing examined the idea of “looking,” but failed to examine the context of the passage and its OT background.

Light and Darkness Motif: 3:19–21; 8:12; 9:5

The main passage dealing with the light and darkness motif is 3:19–21. While 1:4–9 uses similar terms to 3:19–21, this latter passage can be distinguished since light and darkness here “have clear moral connotations.” The themes of light and darkness can be found in the OT: “The people who walk in darkness will see a great light; those who live in a dark land, the light will shine on them” (Isa 9:2). This was understood to be a messianic reference by some.

John 3:19–21 comes at the end of the Nicodemus narrative with the Evangelist reflecting upon believing in Jesus, which leads to eternal life. Jesus is the Light who has come into the world so that people could have eternal life, rather than judgment. However, people love darkness because by staying in darkness the evil deeds that they practice can stay hidden. They did not want their life to be examined and shown wanting; they did not want to stop living in sin. This reflection by the Evangelist tells why Nicodemus’ belief was inadequate, and consequently, why those in 2:23–25 had an unacceptable faith: men love the darkness rather than the light. Rather than coming to the Light (Jesus), they flee

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99 Ibid.
from it so they do not have their sins exposed. The word ἔλεγχω refers to “not only exposure but shame and conviction.”¹⁰² The Evangelist continues (3:20) by saying that those who refuse the Light actually hate the Light. This is followed by a contrast with those who “practice the truth.” These ones do not flee from the Light because their life is full of deeds “worked in God.” The comparison is between those who believe in Jesus and those who do not. The description of those who believe is that they are obedient, abiding, and following the commands of Christ (thereby loving Him). The description of those who do not believe is that they have refused to turn from their evil ways; this is a description of those who have refused to repent. They do not turn from their sins and turn to God in belief. Therefore, one who believes is characterized as having turned from their evil ways and is living a life where their deeds are “accomplished in God.”

This passage is paradigmatic for the concept of “believing” in the Fourth Gospel. Whenever this concept is discussed, readers of the Fourth Gospel would (at least from this point on) understand that one who believes is one who has changed his life, been radically transformed. In addition, future passages that refer to light (8:12; 9:5) should be viewed alongside this passage: Jesus, as the light of the world, causes people to choose sides. Some walk in darkness and are judged; others do not walk in darkness and possess eternal life.

A verse that may not seem connected on the surface to believing and the motif of light and darkness is 16:9.¹⁰³ While the Fourth Gospel describes sin in 15:21–25, it is now explicitly defined as unbelief: “The world reacts to Jesus by clinging on to itself, by μεμνείναινηστιν κοίτι.¹⁰⁴ In 16:9, the problematic ἔλεγχω occurs: “in every instance the verb has to do with showing someone his sin, usually as a summons to repentance.”¹⁰⁶ Therefore, to convict the world is shaming it and attempting to persuade it of its guiltiness, and in this way “calling it to repentance.”¹⁰⁷ The goal of the Holy Spirit is to convince the world that it is guilty in sin so that it will turn to God and stop sinning. Repentance is always turning from sin; the Fourth Gospel defines sin as unbelief. When one is said to believe, they have repented from the unbelief, the sin.

When a character in the Fourth Gospel is portrayed (positively) as believing, there is always a description of action in the context to communicate to the reader what Johannine belief demands of one who responds to Jesus. Those who are

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¹⁰² Carson, The Gospel According to John, 207. See comments on John 16:9 below for further analysis on this word.
¹⁰⁷ Ibid.
portrayed negatively are not described as doing these actions; therefore, their response of belief is less than what Jesus was demanding. John 3:19–21 connects the ideas of believing and ethics (moral activity). Those who do not believe have their “moral actions” described as “evil deeds.” Those who believe have ceased from partaking in “evil deeds” and now are doing works “wrought in God.” They have turned away from their sinful lives. In John 3 terminology, they are now born from above, born of water and spirit. They have been cleansed and have a new heart; this has been evidenced by their changed life (see Ezek 36:27). These words are reminiscent of John the Baptist’s preaching in Matt 3:8: “bring about fruit worthy of repentance.” Those who the Fourth Gospel describes as πιστεύουσιν are also described as having a changed life (not just mind). No one is portrayed positively as believing when this component is missing.

Belief and Obedience: 3:36

Including the passage of John 3:36 in this discussion is based primarily on three reasons: (1) the relationship between believing and obedience has been controversial;108 (2) the relationship is significant for understanding believing; and (3) the lack of attention given to this verse in relationship to this discussion.109

The primary purpose of this verse is twofold: (1) unbelief is shown by disobedience; and (2) a contrast in the results of each. The verb απειρήσατε is antonymous to πίστευσαν. The present participles in both verbs reinforce the concept of continuity. Obedience is presented as a natural result of one who believes.110 Therefore, the Evangelist’s111 portrayal of people’s belief can be known by their actions of obedience or disobedience to Jesus. Part of a correct understanding of repentance relates to this: one aspect of repentance is the changing of one’s actions in order to line up with God’s Word. This is very similar to obedience. Therefore, while obedience and repentance are not synonyms, nor nearly synonymous, obedience in 3:36 is a result of belief, and it is also a result of repentance.

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110 Riddlebarger, “What is Faith?,” 104, says, “one who has exercised faith in Christ, and is united to Christ by that faith, will repent and will struggle to obey and yield. Nevertheless, these things are not conditions for nor component parts of faith itself. They are fruits of saving faith. They are the inevitable activity of the new nature.”

111 Note that that 3:31–36 is taken as a reflection by the Evangelist (so Carson, The Gospel According to John, 212; however, Keener, The Gospel of John, 1:581, is undecided). Contra Wilkin, “Repentance and Salvation, Part 3,” 21, who says that John the Baptist was speaking in 3:36. Therefore, significantly, John the Baptist presents believing in Jesus as the sole condition of eternal salvation.
Stop Sinning: 5:14; 8:11

Two passages exist where Jesus tells an individual not to sin: 5:14 and 8:11. In 8:11, the woman caught in adultery is told to go and sin no more. While an analysis on how this phrase may be linked to repentance could be convincing, because this text is not accepted as part of the original text of the Fourth Gospel, it cannot be utilized for the current purposes.112

However, the text in 5:14 does not pose the same textual problems. While the connection between the sin and the disease may be unclear, Jesus’ words concerning what He is supposed to do are not. Jesus’ words have been translated in two ways (“stop sinning;”113 and “do not continue sinning any longer”),114 which essentially have the same meaning. Grammatically, some have assumed that a present imperative that is prohibitive must be understood as “stop” doing something. However, while “that may be the correct interpretation in this instance . . . there are too many exceptions to this grammatical ‘rule’ to base the interpretation on the present tense.”115 Carson points out that the present imperative is used to stress urgency (as compared to an aorist imperative).116 Therefore, this is essentially an injunction to repent. Jesus is telling him to change his ways, turn his life around, and turn to God. The command to “stop sinning” is conceptually equivalent to “turn away from sin.” The narrative about the man who received sight in chapter 9 may be viewed in contrast to the lame man in chapter 5:117 while the blind man is viewed positively, the lame man is portrayed negatively. As the pericope closes, the reader is left viewing the lame man as unbelieving. Jesus confronts one who does not believe with these words: “stop sinning.” The context is salvific, not of progressive sanctification. The conclusions by some,118 that calling for unbelievers to turn from their sin is adding works to the gospel, is strongly questioned by this verse. It is fascinating that, in the discussions on repenting in the Fourth Gospel, no one was found who raised this verse as a possibility.


116 See ibid.

117 See Culpepper, Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel, 139–40, for a detailed comparison and contrast.

118 See fn 1.
Another candidate for repentance in the Fourth Gospel occurs in John 12:40 with the Evangelist’s use of \( \sigma\tau\rho\epsilon\phi\omega \). The Fourth Gospel paraphrases Isaiah saying, “He has blinded their eyes and He hardened their heart, so that they would not see with their eyes and perceive with their heart, and be converted (or turn back) and I heal them.” This text,\(^{119}\) from Isa 6:10,\(^{120}\) while it could be understood as referring back to the rejection described in 1:11,\(^{121}\) is better understood in the immediate context of 12:36–12:39, 41–42.\(^{122}\) Evans says that chapter 12 functions “to explain how a messianic claimant who performs one messianic sign after another finds himself rejected and crucified.”\(^{123}\) The context in Isaiah 6 is that after Isaiah had a vision which resulted in his “repentance and cleansing,”\(^{124}\) he offers to serve the Lord saying, “Here I am.” God informs Isaiah of the response he will receive from the people. What is God saying to Isaiah? “Later rabbis emphasized the note of repentance”\(^{125}\) in this text. Most all scholarly research on repentance has connected the underlying Hebrew word used in Isa 6:10 (נַפְשָׁ) with the concept of the definition of repentance presented in this research: turning away from sin.\(^{126}\) The Greek word used here, \( \sigma\tau\rho\epsilon\phi\omega \), means to turn.\(^{127}\) The Septuagint used the word to

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\(^{120}\) Which is also quoted in the NT at Matt 13:13–15; Mark 4:11–12; 8:17–18; Luke 8:10; 19:42; Acts 28:26–27. It may be alluded to in Rom 11:8, 10. Interestingly, while Isa 6:10 comes from Jesus’ lips in the Synoptic Gospels, it is presented as a Christian explanation in the Fourth Gospel (Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, 1:485).


\(^{122}\) Regarding 12:41, “the Evangelist justifies the interpretation of Is. 6.10 in relation to the word of Jesus. The beholding of the glory of Jesus by the prophet must mean the Temple vision of Is. 6” (Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 452, n. 4).


\(^{126}\) However, Wilkin, “Repentance and Salvation, Part 3,” 20, after footnoting this verse and saying that \( \tau\rho\phi\on\delta \) compounds can refer to “turning from sins,” “Nowhere in the NT are these verbs used to indicate that one must turn from his sins to obtain salvation.”

\(^{127}\) In the LXX, the word used is \( \varepsilon\pi\upsilon\sigma\tau\rho\epsilon\phi\omega \); the Hebrew word is נפש. For נפש meaning “repent,” see 1 Kings 8:47; 2 Chron 6:37; Ps 7:12; Jer 5:3; 8:4; 15:7, 19; 18:8; 31:19; 34:15; Ezek 14:6; 18:30, 32; Hos 11:5; Zech 1:6; Job 36:10; Isa 30:15; 59:20. For more great insights on נפש and \( \varepsilon\pi\sigma\tau\rho\epsilon\phi\omega \) and \( \mu\tau\alpha\nu\omega\), see Tannehill, *The Shape of Luke’s Story*, 87. Regarding \( \sigma\tau\rho\epsilon\phi\omega \), Brown (*The Gospel According to John*, 1:484) says that it “really has the sense of a middle voice: ‘turn themselves.’” Anderson, “Repentance is for All Men,” 19, concludes that in Isa 6:10 it must refer to an external turning, not an internal. Therefore, turning from sins would then be the fruit of repentance and believing. His definition: “an internal resolve to turn from one’s sins.”
refer to repentance. The quote of Isa 6:9–10 in Matt 13:15 and Mark 4:12 uses the word ἐπιστρέψῃ rather than simply στρέψῃ. As mentioned above, ἐπιστρέψῃ and μετάνοια should not be distinguished sharply.128

The paraphrase in 12:40129 is connected to the quote in 12:38.130 The main theme connecting them is the question of why the Jews did not believe; they also contain themes of being lifted up, glory, and sin.131 The aspect of their unbelief addressed is that of hardening (obduracy), which is the opposite of repenting.

The author of the Fourth Gospel has taken some liberties in his citation of Isa 6:10. He emphasizes the blinding of eyes and hardening of hearts, and changes (from the Septuagint) the passive (“has become hardened”) to the active (“He blinded”). This change presents the people’s hardness as “a regrettable fact.”133 The Hebrew uses an imperative: “Make the heart of this people.” He has not included the “deafness” mentioned in Isaiah 6:10.134 Goodwin concludes that the text the Evangelist was using was, nonetheless, the Septuagint.135

There are two major, conflicting ways to understand this verse. First, this hardening in no way rejects human responsibility. Israel had consistently been confronted with following God and consistently rejected Him.136 Unbelief is not blamed upon a harsh, predestinarian God, but is portrayed as a punishment.137 This

128 In fact, Tannehill, The Shape of Luke’s Story, 85, says that sometimes ἐπιστρέψῃ is equivalent to repentance: a change in attitude and orientation that results in a new relation to God and fellow humans.” Later he says that ἐπιστρέψῃ and μετάνοια are largely interchangeable terms.

129 Note another possible parallel (allusion) is Deut 29:3–4: “the great trials which your eyes have seen, those great signs and wonders. Yet to this day the LORD has not given you a heart to know, nor eyes to see, nor ears to hear” (see Brown, The Gospel According to John, 1:486).

130 Note that since the quote in 12:38 is exactly parallel to the LXX and 12:40 is not, Bultmann, The Gospel of John, 452–53, concludes that the ecclesiastical redactor added the latter. Regarding the quote from Isa 53:1 in 12:38, Ridderbos (The Gospel of John, 444 [italics added]) says that not only the similarity between unbelief in Jesus’ and Isaiah’s day are correlated, but this unbelief is placed “in the light of God’s ongoing dealings with his backsliding people in the whole history of revelation.” In other words, the idea of unrepentant people is a prevalent theme or correlation even in John 12:38. For a discussion on 12:38 and the Servant Song’s influence on Christianity and the Fourth Gospel, see M. D. Hooker, Jesus and the Servant: The Influence of the Servant Concept of Deutero-Isaiah in the New Testament (London: SPCK, 1959). For a rejection of this thesis, see R. T. France, Jesus and the Old Testament: His Application of the Old Testament Passages to Himself and His Mission (London: Tyndale, 1971), 110–35.


132 Some refer to this text as explaining theodicy (the question of how evil could exist in this world if God is a good God). For a well-thought-out treatment of theodicy and John 12, see Borchert, John 12–21, 63–65. Note the parallel theme by Paul in Romans 9–11.


135 Goodwin, “How Did John Treat His Sources?,” 71, also says he was not using “some freak version” of the Hebrew.

136 See Barrett, The Gospel According to St. John, 431. The concept of salvation history should be kept in mind when considering the Jews’ rejection of Jesus (cf. Morris, The Gospel According to John, 537). After their rejection was complete, salvation was opened to the Gentiles.

137 So Ridderbos, The Gospel of John, 444.
punishment takes the form of God abandoning them in their unbelief “which whatever God gives them to see and hear can no longer lead to salvation, that is, to repentance and healing.”

The second way to understand the original Isaiah text is as a use of irony. Hollenbach is the major promoter of this view. First, Hollenbach defines irony as “an expression of scorn directed against someone made by the speaker taken at face value.” The problem with irony is that, especially in English, there is no way to communicate it in the text. Therefore, context remains determinative in deciding where irony exists.

Hollenbach said, “Isaiah 6.9, 10a serves largely to characterize the audience to which Isaiah’s message will be directed.” It was not that Isaiah was told to command them to be hardened (as the Hebrew text appears to indicate) but he was told that they would be hardened (as the Septuagint appears to indicate). It seems as though the translators of the Septuagint were making the irony more explicit. This can also be seen in Matt 13:15 and Acts 28:27, in which they say, “they have closed their eyes.” Therefore, the people rejected God. “John 12:40a basically quotes Isaiah 6.10a to show that the whole of Jesus’ ministry was prophesied by Isaiah to effect stubborn unbelief.” Since Jesus is the subject in 12:40, He would be the one who was blinding the people. This makes His appeal in 12:35–36 seem disingenuous. Hollenbach concludes that the most plausible way of understanding Isa 6:10b (and John 12:40b) is as a statement of irony, “showing God’s disgust with the unwillingness of His people to respond to Him.” If that is true, then the attitude of God toward his people in Isaiah is parallel to Jesus’ attitude toward the crowd in 12:35–36: “although time is running out, they are reluctant to respond.” According to Hollenbach, this verse is used by the Evangelist to explain why the crowd did not want to repent.

Both of these views have much to commend them, but since the evidence for Johannine irony has been mounting in recent research, Hollenbach’s argument has more to favor it. With this understanding, the themes of believing and repentance have come to the front as the themes for this passage. In opposition to this, it could be argued that the mentioning of στρεφθῶ is inconsequential to the argumentation of this passage (especially if the first view is taken) and that the author of the Fourth Gospel is not, himself, using the word, but he is just quoting the Isaiah passage. In

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138 Ibid., 444–45.
139 Hollenbach, “Lest they should turn and be forgiven: Irony,” Bible Translator 34 (1983): 312–21. The following discussion is heavily dependent upon his article.
140 Ibid., 314.
141 Ibid., 313 (italics added).
142 Ibid., 316.
143 Ibid., 317.
144 Ibid., 318. Since irony is marked only in English by tone of voice, it might be better to clearly explain the meaning so readers will understand it. This is what the translator of the LXX did when they changed the imperatives of the Hebrew to a description of the people. Therefore, Hollenbach suggests the following translation: “He had blinded their eyes and hardened their heart, because of course the last thing they want is to see with their eyes, and perceive with their heart, and turn for me to heal them” (ibid., 320).
response to the former, 12:39 and Hollenbach’s hypothesis argues against \(\sigma\tau\rho\varepsilon\phi\omega\) being an inconsequential word in this passage. This verse frames the discussion into a salvific context by the use of “believe.” The argumentation is as follows: “The Jews refused to believe and repent and have hardened their minds and eyes to the signs of Jesus.” The inclusion of the statement in 12:42 that many believed gives an “implicit appeal to believe” to 12:37–40. The closing words of John 12:40 discuss “turning” and “healing.” Taken as irony, these words are a condemnation to the Jews who have hardened their hearts and blinded their eyes because they did not want to repent and be healed. The latter argument, that the author of the Fourth Gospel is not actually employing the term himself, is a little uncertain. While it is true that the Fourth Gospel is referring to Isa 6:10, it is not a quote from the Hebrew nor the Septuagint. The Septuagint used a different (though related) word; the Hebrew has many differences from this reference. Therefore, the author is probably reciting the verse from memory, paraphrasing it for convenience, or making the original authorial intent (irony) clearer. Regardless, they are his own words that occur in John 12:40, not a slavish copying of Isa 6:10. Ridderbos paraphrases the final words of John 12:40 (on turning and healing) as “to repentance and healing.”

Abiding in the Vine: John 15:1–5

The exegetical issues involved with this passage are too numerous for a detailed discussion and interaction with scholarship. However, while these will be avoided, an attempt to discern if this passage contains the word-picture of repentance will still occur. Three aspects of these verses could possibly portray the concept of repentance. (1) Does the concept of “bears fruit” allude to John the Baptist’s teaching in Matt 3:8? (2) Can the idea of being cleansed be related to repentance? (3) Does the phrase “apart from me” mean the opposite of repentance (turning away from God, not away from sin)?

The relationship between the Synoptic Gospels and the Fourth Gospel cannot be examined in detail at this time. Scholarship has essentially come to the

145 “For this reason they could not believe, for Isaiah said again.”

146 If Hollenbach’s hypothesis were to be rejected, then the argument would be: “The Jews were unable to believe because God has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts. If God had not done this then they would have . . .” While the word that would be expected in the Fourth Gospel is “believed,” instead it says “turned.”


148 Again, if Hollenbach’s hypothesis is rejected, then the end of the verse would be saying that I, Jesus (so Bultmann, The Gospel of John, 453, n2), would have healed them. This healing is ultimately a spiritual healing: that they would be able to see with their eyes and perceive with their hearts (it should also be noted that “heart,” particularly in this context, should be understood as a reference to the seat of decision making: the mind).

149 So Goodwin, “How Did John Treat His Sources?,” 71.

The consensus that the Fourth Gospel is independent. However, several commentaries (like Morris) link the author of the Fourth Gospel as being a disciple of John the Baptist. This would leave the possibility that the author (and Jesus) could be drawing from John the Baptist’s words. While the phrase appears to be functioning in the same way with the same meaning (see discussion above under Matt 3:8), this appears to be too far of a stretch to put any significant weight on it.

Can καθίστημι be connected to repentance? In 15:2 it is used metaphorically, referring exclusively to pruning, with no moral or cultic imagery. It is used differently in 15:3: here it does not refer to conversion. The λόγος is the reason for the disciples’ purity: “this λόγος includes the forgiveness of sins, but does not refer specifically to it.” The theme of outward ritual purification (John 2:6; 3:35) may be held in contrast to this cleansing. The last use of this word in the Fourth Gospel was in 13:10.

In 15:5, being “apart from” the vine is contextually the opposite of “abiding.” The idea of being apart from the vine contains slight connotations to being the opposite of repentance. Repentance is the turning away from sin and is demonstrated by bearing fruit (Matt 3:8); abiding is remaining in God and is demonstrated by bearing fruit. Regarding φιλοκαρπον in John 15, Bultmann says that it is not specifically missionary work, nor does it refer to success or reward; rather, “similarly to Matt. 3:8,” it “signifies the evidence for vitality of faith.” Abiding appears to be the other side of the same coin as repentance: abiding is loyalty, a remaining in God; repentance is turning away from sin. This final proposal is the most helpful source in seeing the concept of repentance. Again, repentance is linked with faith.

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153 Bultmann, The Gospel of John, 533, n3–4. The word can have a moral meaning (Barrett, John, 473), but it does not here.


156 Bultmann, The Gospel of John, 532, n6. While various proposals have been put forth (fruit equals obedience or new converts or love or Christian character), many narrow the meaning of fruit too much. Carson, The Gospel According to John, 517, contextually links “fruit” to the “product of effective prayer” and includes many of the proposals mentioned. Keener, The Gospel of John, 997, calls it “moral fruit.”

157 Bultmann, The Gospel of John, 535, n1. Ibid., 535, n2 continues: “Thus μενειν is not identical with the ὑπομονη that is demanded elsewhere in the NT, although the μενειν of faith certainly includes ὑπομονη.” Further, “Μενειν means holding on loyal to the decision once taken, and one can hold on to it only by continually going through it again” (ibid., 536).
Conclusion

Seven texts (or motifs) have been analyzed to discover that the concept of repentance is present in the Fourth Gospel. Not all of the arguments are equally convincing. Here is the list of arguments in order from the strongest to the weakest:

1. The Fourth Gospel’s Paraphrase of Isa 6:10: John 12:40
2. Stop Sinning: 5:14 (8:11)
3. Light and Darkness Motif: 3:19–21; 8:12; 9:5
5. Born Again or Born from Above: 3:3–5
6. Belief and Obedience: 3:36

The Abiding Passage in John 15 contained three possible arguments, but only one stood the test: “apart from me” is conceptually the opposite of repentance. In John 3:36, obedience was described as the outcome of both belief and repentance. While the discussion of being “born from above” has its exegetical difficulties, the translation “from above” over “again” or “anew” and Ezekiel 36 being an OT background are a fairly solid foundation to understanding the passage. Since regeneration is the overall theme, of which repentance is a part, the concept is contained within this passage. This is, admittedly, a veiled reference to our concept. The background text to John 3:14–15 fairly clearly contains the picture of Israelites repenting. The Numbers 21 text is specifically the background text and there are no reservations in commending a reference to repentance in this text. The light and darkness motif contains the third strongest argument for repentance. The picture of those in unbelief fleeing the Light and those who believe coming to the Light portrayed our previously understood definition of repentance. The analysis of this passage concluded that every time the Fourth Gospel mentions believing (after 3:21), the concept of repentance should be kept in mind. The man whom Jesus healed in John 5 and then told to “stop sinning” contained our second strongest connection to repentance. Finally, the Johannine paraphrase of Isa 6:9–10 actually contains the term used for repentance in the Septuagint.

While repentance cannot be said to be an overwhelming theme of the Fourth Gospel, it should not be considered absent. Those claiming that since the Fourth Gospel contains no references to repentance then Christians should avoid using the word in evangelism and gospel presentations have not studied close enough the conceptual links to repentance in the Fourth Gospel. Ironside concluded that John “does not ignore the ministry of repentance because he stresses the importance of

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158 Since the Fourth Gospel contains the verb πιστεύειν ninety-eight times, this is surely a conclusion worth noting. Note James E. Rosscup’s conclusion (“The Relation of Repentance to Salvation and the Christian Life,” [unpublished paper], 17; cited from Wilkin, “Repentance and Salvation, Part 3,” 14), that John’s “use of only ‘believe’ can have a reasonable solution. To him, believing draws into its attitude all that it means to repent, to change the attitude in a turn from the old life to Christ and the new life.”
faith... he shows to repentant souls the simplicity of salvation, of receiving eternal life, through a trusting in Him who, as the true light, casts light on every man, thus making manifest humanity’s fallen condition and the need of an entire change of attitude toward self and toward God.”

Appendix 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Μετάνοια</th>
<th>Μετανοέω = 22 times</th>
<th>Μετανοέω = 34 times</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Matt 3:8, 11</td>
<td>Matt 3:2; 4:17; 11:20, 21; 12:41</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark 1:4</td>
<td>Mark 1:15; 6:12</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rom 2:4</td>
<td>2 Cor 12:21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Cor 7:9, 10</td>
<td>Rev 2:5 (twice), 16, 21 (twice), 22; 3:3, 19; 9:20, 21; 16:9, 11</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 Tim 2:25</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Heb 6:1, 6; 12:17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Pet 3:9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Μετάνοια and μετανοέω occur a total of fifty-six times. Note that Wilkin, “Repentance and Salvation, Part 3,” 11, says that they occur fifty-eight times. Luter, “Repentance,” 673, says they occur fifty-eight times. Chamberlain, The Meaning of Repentance, 31, says fifty-six times and that μεταμέλομαι occurs five times.

Appendix 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Μετανοέω (NASB 1995)</th>
<th>Μετανοέω (NLT 1997)</th>
<th>Μετάνοια (NASB 1995)</th>
<th>Μετάνοια (NLT 1997)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Repent (26)</td>
<td>Repent (7)</td>
<td>Repentance (22)</td>
<td>Turn from your sins and turn to God (10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repented (5)</td>
<td>Turn from your sins and turn to God (6)</td>
<td>Repentance (3)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Repents (3)</td>
<td>Turn back/away (4)</td>
<td>Turn from sins (3)</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Turn from sins (3)</td>
<td>Turn away (2)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Turn (to me) (3)</td>
<td>Returns to God (1)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Repentance (2)</td>
<td>Repent (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Repents (2)</td>
<td>Change (1)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Repented (2)</td>
<td>Change your ways (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Turn to God (1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

159 Ironside, Except Ye Repent, 38.

Wilkin, “Repentance and Salvation, Part 3,” 8, said: “It seems that ‘repentance’ as a translation for *metanoia* (and *metamelomai*) will probably be with us for a long time.” Less than a decade later, translation committees have decided to evaluate each occurrence of these Greek words. Their conclusions, however, will not be to Wilkin’s liking.

### Appendix 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>(\sigma\phi\zeta\omega)</th>
<th>(\sigma\omega\tau\eta\pi\alpha)</th>
<th>(\sigma\omega\tau\eta\rho)</th>
<th>(\pi\iota\sigma\tau\epsilon\upsilon\omega)</th>
<th>(\pi\iota\sigma\tau\iota\varsigma)</th>
<th>(\chi\acute{\alpha}\rho\iota\varsigma)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Matthew</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1(^{165})</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14(^{164})</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Luke</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>John</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acts</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2(^{165})</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romans</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>40</td>
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<td>Colossians</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hebrews</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Revelation</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{161}\) Or \(\sigma\omega\tau\eta\rho\iota\upsilon\nu\), which also means salvation.

\(^{162}\) Or \(\chi\acute{\alpha}\rho\iota\nu\).

\(^{163}\) Note that there is one significant textual variant in Mark 16.

\(^{164}\) Four are possible textual variants from Mark 16.

\(^{165}\) On a side note, the word \(\kappa\epsilon\rho\iota\omega\varsigma\) occurs 107 times in Acts.
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THE QUESTION OF APPLICATION IN PREACHING:
THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT AS A TEST CASE

Bruce W. Alvord, D. Min.
Professor of Bible Exposition
Irpin Biblical Seminary, Kiev, Ukraine

Some pastors preach the Word as if their sole responsibility is to explain the original meaning of the text. However, if you examine the greatest sermon Jesus ever preached, the Sermon on the Mount, you will see that He considered application to be a critical component. If you outline the sermon, you can observe how He valued it so highly that He included application not only in every one of His points, but also in each sub-point. To follow His example, we should not only explain the text well, but also help our listeners understand the present-day implications of that truth.

Some pastors teach as if their only duty is to explain the original meaning of the text they are preaching. They focus their energies solely on explaining the passage and fail to give exhortations to implement the information they have taught. John Stott admitted to this when he related the following: “In my early days I used to think that my business was to expound and exegete the text; I am afraid I left the application to the Holy Spirit.” Yet is that what Jesus modeled in His preaching? Did He only explain His text and leave the application to the hearers, or did He also give exhortations to life-change as a significant part of His teaching process?

Obviously, an exhaustive study of all of Jesus’ discourses would be most profitable to ascertain if and how often He included application in His preaching. However, such a large undertaking is beyond the scope of this article. My aim is a much more modest attempt to singularly examine Jesus’ most significant sermon recorded in Scripture—the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–7). Since this

discourse is considered Jesus’ magnum opus and the greatest sermon He ever preached, it will be used as a test case to see whether or not Jesus communicated specific, concrete applications in His teaching, and what implications that holds for preachers today.

**Definition of “Application”**

Before our examination of the Sermon on the Mount, we need to define this foundational term. In its simplest form application is “the present, personal consequence of scriptural truth.” It is “when listeners are enabled to see how their world, like the biblical world, is addressed by the Word of God.” Application “exhorts and encourages Christian duty” and is the present-day response called for by a given text(s). “The word response is used intentionally because too often application suggests [only] action.” However, a response is more than performing an outward deed. It can also include an inward attitude change. The Scriptures are clear that out of the heart “flow the springs of life” (Prov 4:23), and “the good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil” (Luke 6:45). Therefore, an accurate definition of application must include not only what the hearer must do, but also the inward heart attitudes necessary to produce such actions.

**Presuppositions**

Another preliminary matter is to say a few words about the presuppositions permeating this article. First, it is assumed that most Bible teachers desire to preach somewhat like Jesus, and that His teaching should be considered an example for contemporary preachers who strive to follow and be like Him. Second, the Sermon

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8 Homiletics books like Ralph Lewis’ and Gregg Lewis’, *Learning to Preach Like Jesus* (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1989) assume Jesus’ preaching is exemplary for contemporary teachers. While giving some warnings concerning excesses, York and Decker underscore several areas, including
on the Mount is assumed to be a single sermon given by Jesus on one occasion. The inspired text presents itself this way: Jesus “opened His mouth and began to teach them saying…” (Matt 5:2). The entire discourse appears to follow without interruption, ending with “when Jesus had finished these words” (Matt 7:28). There is no indication that it is a compilation of sayings; it is presented as a single sermon given at one time.

**Outline**

To examine Jesus’ use of application in the Sermon on the Mount, we will use the following outline from Matthew’s Gospel:

I. Introduction: The Identification and Influence of True Believers (5:3–16)
   - The Privileges and Character of Believers—the Beatitudes (5:3–12)
   - The Believer’s Influence—like Salt and Light (5:13–16)

II. Main Body of the Sermon: The Greater Righteousness of True Believers (5:17–7:12)
   - The Continuing Relevance of the OT Demands a Greater Righteousness (5:17–20)
     - The Continuing Relevance of the Old Testament (5:17–19)
     - The Theme of the Sermon (5:20)

application that contemporary preachers should follow Jesus’ example. “Certainly we should emulate many elements of Jesus’ preaching: his passion, his high view of Scripture, his confrontation and application, and his tendency to force a decision of acceptance or rejection,” Hershael W. York and Bert Decker, *Preaching With Bold Assurance: A Solid and Enduring Approach to Engaging Exposition* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2003), 15.

9 This is the view of Carson, Blomberg, and Morris in their Matthew commentaries. Hagner, Betz, and France believe the Sermon on the Mount is a compilation by Matthew of several of Jesus’ sayings.

• Six Contrasts Between Jesus’ Interpretation of the Law and the Common Misinterpretations of them— the Demands for a Greater Righteousness (5:21–48)
• The Genuine Righteousness of the Believers Seen in Their Non-hypocritical Alms, Prayers, and Fasts (6:1–18)
• The Greater Righteousness of the Believer Properly Relates to Riches and Anxiety (6:19–34)
• The Greater Righteousness of the Believer Judges and Prays Properly (7:1–12)

III. The Conclusion of the Sermon: The Call to Decision and Application (7:13–27)
• The Call to Enter the Kingdom (7:13–14)
• The Call to Beware of Hindrances to Entering the Kingdom (7:15–23)
• The Call to Respond and Continually Apply Jesus’ Teaching (7:24–27)

Introduction (Matt 5:3–16)

Now we will employ the outline above to consider each point and sub-point, determining how often Jesus specifically applied His sermon to His listeners.

Jesus’ introduction includes two sub-sections. The first is the beatitudes, which describe the privilege and character of those who will inherit the kingdom (Matt 5:3–12). As we can see, the final two beatitudes speak of the blessing of being persecuted (Matt 5:10–11), after which Jesus concluded with the exhortation to “Rejoice and be glad for your reward in heaven is great” (Matt 5:12). That is present-tense action describing how to apply the truth.

The second sub-section of the introduction regards the disciples’ influence on the world as salt and light (Matt 5:13–16). Jesus concludes this part of the sermon with directions to His listeners to “Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven” (Matt 5:16)—a direct application. Thus, both of Jesus’ sub-points include specific advice on how His listeners should respond.

Sermon Theme and Six Contrasts (Matt 5:17–48)

Next is the body of the sermon, where Jesus explained three things: the continuing relevance of the Old Testament (Matt 5:17–19), the theme of the sermon (Matt 5:20), and six contrasts between Jesus’ interpretation of the law, and the common misinterpretations at the time (5:21–48). Each one of those three sub-points include application. Let us briefly see how, below:

---

First (regarding the relevance of the Old Testament), after explaining that He is not abolishing but fulfilling the law, Jesus applied this concept to His hearers saying, “Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (5:19). Second His theme—that our righteousness should surpass that of the scribes and Pharisees or we will not enter the kingdom of heaven—is exhortative (and therefore applicational) in nature. Third, regarding the six contrasts, Jesus compares His knowledge of the law with the prevailing misinterpretations of the time. Each one is followed by application.

In the first contrast, Jesus taught that not only is the outward act of murder wrong, but also the inner anger that motivates it. Instead of letting anger fester, Jesus urges His listeners to “make friends quickly with your opponent,” even to the point of leaving one’s offering if need be so as to be immediately reconciled (5:23–25).

The second contrast is between the outward act of adultery and the inward act of lust. Jesus condemns both and urges His disciples to do whatever it takes to not lust—even to the point of plucking out one’s eye or cutting off one’s hand (5:29–30). Within these first two contrasts (5:21–30) Jesus spent more time on application (6 verses) than exposition (4 verses).

Third is the contrast between the Jewish requirements for divorce and Jesus’ sole exception in the case of adultery. Doing the paperwork and giving a certificate of dismissal was not enough (5:31)—only sexual immorality (pornea) was a just cause (5:32). Anyone who divorced other than for the reason of unchastity was committing adultery (5:32).

The fourth contrast is between lying and honesty. The Jews of the time had a complicated system of oath-taking whereby some were considered more binding than others. Some had twisted things to look like they were telling the truth when in fact they were lying. Jesus taught what people should do, which is “make no oath at all” (5:34) and be so honest that our simple word is enough (“let your statement be ‘Yes, yes’ or ‘No, no’; and anything beyond these is of evil”—Matt 5:37).

In the fifth one, revenge is contrasted with forgiveness (5:38–42). The OT teaching regarding “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” had been taken out of its judicial setting and twisted into permission for personal revenge. Jesus applied a
more accurate understanding, teaching that instead of repaying a slap for a slap, “turn the other cheek.” Instead of vengefully paying back the Romans for forcing you to carry their pack for the required mile, Jesus says to voluntarily go with them another.

The sixth contrast concerns the accepted sinful attitude of loving your neighbor and hating your enemy. Jesus commanded otherwise, telling people to “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (5:44). All of those contrasts contain specific examples on how His sermon should work itself out in the lives of His listeners.

Piety Section (Matt 6:1–18)

In the next part of His sermon Jesus talks about the hypocrisy of practicing our righteousness to be noticed by others, rather than to be pleasing to the Lord. This group of verses concerns three religious practices: giving to the needy, prayer, and fasting.

First, we are not to give our offering while “sounding a trumpet before you” (6:2). Jesus directed His hearers to give their gifts secretly—so secretly it would seem that one hand would not know what the other had done (6:3–4). Similarly, we should not make a big show of our praying, such as waxing eloquent on a busy street corner (6:5), but rather pray in private, and without meaningless repetition (6:6–7). Fasting too involves the same principle. Jesus directs those who are fasting not to put on a sad, suffering, “deprived-looking” face, but rather to look “business-as-usual” so no one will notice (6:17–18).

Riches and Anxiety Section (Matt 6:19–34)

Jesus addresses these two subjects to help His followers have an eternal perspective on money and other earthly concerns. Regarding money, He instructs, “do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth” “but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal” (6:19–20).

---

14 The occupying Romans could demand immediate service or transportation from anyone to carry their supplies and equipment up to one Roman mile (John Nolland, The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text, in the New International Greek Testament Commentary [Grand Rapids: MI; Eerdmans, 2005], 259, n242; John MacArthur, Matthew, in the MacArthur New Testament Commentary [Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1985], 334). This would of course infuriate any Jew being forced to assist their hated occupiers and would naturally cause them to want to take revenge.

Regarding anxiety, Jesus taught that we need to look to the One who even provides for the birds and the flowers. He explained that our worrying about our lives will not help (can you add a cubit to your life?), and “each day has enough trouble of its own” (6:34). He described how to stop worrying—“seek first His kingdom and His righteousness and all these things will be added unto you” (6:33).

Judging and Prayer Section (Matt 7:1–12)

Turning to the way we interact with each other, Jesus urges us to be neither hypercritical nor hypocritical in assessing others (7:1–5). He says, “Do not judge so that you will not be judged,” and “you hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye.” He wants us to evaluate our own hearts first. Where do we get the wisdom and discernment required to properly judge ourselves and others? We must “ask,” “seek,” and “knock” (7:7). To sum up, Jesus helps us know how to apply what He just said—by treating others however we would want them to treat us (7:12).

Conclusion (Matt 7:13–27)

Jesus finishes His famous sermon with three couplets. He describes two different paths we can take in our lives (the broad or the narrow way), two kinds of fruit we can bear (good and bad), and two different professions of faith (empty or true). Jesus warns that the broad path of the world leads to destruction, and teaches His listeners to enter by the narrow gate because it is the way to eternal life (7:14).

Regarding the two kinds of fruit, Jesus warns that false prophets in “sheep’s clothing” will come who will attempt to deceive (7:15–16). How can we know the difference between true and false teachers? Jesus tells us to consider their fruit. Good trees produce good fruit and bad trees produce bad.

The last couplet is a warning against professing faith in word only, versus true faith that is accompanied by obedience to the Lord. It isn’t the one who says “Lord, Lord, that will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven” (7:21).

Jesus concludes the entire Sermon on the Mount with a call to be like the wise man who built his house on the rock, instead of the foolish person who built his house on the sand. When the time of final judgment comes, that person will be destroyed as surely as one whose home is built in a flood plain when a flash flood comes and destroys everything in its path.16

---

16 That Matt 7:25–17 is referring to the winter flash floods that occur in Israel when wadis are filled and destroy anything in their paths is supported by Bauer, Danker, Arndt and Gingrich, who say that the word “floods” (πτοραΐός) in Matt 7:25, 27 are “the mountain torrents or winter torrents which arise in ravines after a heavy rain and carry everything before them” (William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer, A Greek–English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, 3rd ed. [Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000], 856). Hagner says the floods referred to in these verses are “torrential rains that produce sudden rivers where formerly there were dry wadis” (Hagner, Matthew 1–13, 191).
The following table summarizes the above information in a more visual format demonstrating how Jesus included application in every paragraph or sub-section of the Sermon on the Mount.

**Summary Table of Jesus’ Use of Application in the Sermon on the Mount**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sermon on the Mount Text</th>
<th>Theme of Each Passage</th>
<th>Do These Verses Include Application?</th>
<th>Application</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Matt 5:3–12</td>
<td>Beatitudes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>“Rejoice and be glad for your reward in heaven is great” (Matt 5:12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt 5:13–16</td>
<td>The influence of Jesus’ disciples</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>“Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven” (Matt 5:16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt 5:17–20</td>
<td>Jesus’ view of the law</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>“Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 5:19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt 5:21–26</td>
<td>Mental murder</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>23“So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. 25 Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison. 26 Truly, I say to you, you will never get out until you have paid the last penny” (Matt 5:23–26)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt 5:27–30</td>
<td>Heart adultery</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>29 If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. 30 And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell” (Matt 5:29–30)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Matt 5:31–32             | Divorce                | Yes                                  | “I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Application</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Matt 5:33–37</td>
<td>Importance of speaking the truth</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Commit adultery, and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery” (Matt 5:32)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt 5:34–37</td>
<td>Non-retaliation</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let what you say be simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything more than this comes from evil” (Matt 5:34–37)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt 5:38–42</td>
<td>Love your enemies</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you” (Matt 5:39–40)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt 5:43–48</td>
<td>Giving to the needy</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you…. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matt 5:44, 46–48)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt 6:1–4</td>
<td>Giving to the needy</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people in order to be seen by them, for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven. Thus, when you give to the needy, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you” (Matt 6:1–4)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt 6:5–15</td>
<td>Prayer</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
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<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt 6:16–18</td>
<td>Fasting</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt 6:19–24</td>
<td>Store up treasures in heaven</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt 6:25–34</td>
<td>Worry</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scripture</td>
<td>Theme</td>
<td>Action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt 7:1–6</td>
<td>Judging others</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt 7:7–12</td>
<td>Prayer</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt 7:13–20</td>
<td>The call to enter the kingdom and warning against false prophets</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matt 7:24–27</td>
<td>The call to put the Sermon into practice</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results and Conclusions from Examining the Sermon on the Mount

Several important conclusions can be drawn from this survey. First, Jesus highly valued application and employed it liberally in what is considered His greatest sermon recorded in Scripture. Second, He included application throughout this sermon, even within the introduction. Every one of His main points and even every sub-point included it—18 out of 18 pericopes. Third, consider how large a portion of the sermon Jesus dedicated to application—57 out of 107 verses, which is 53 percent. Fourth, application was not only the goal but also the main point of His conclusion. Jesus said only the one who “acts upon” His words can be considered like the wise man who built his house on a rock. Anyone who does not continually act upon His words is a fool, building their house on sand, and awaits eschatological destruction (Matt 7:26). Fifth, Jesus directed His application not only to outward actions but also to inward attitudes. Nine out of eighteen of His applications (50 percent) were directed toward internal attitudes, while the other nine (50 percent) concerned outward actions. Jesus valued both and neglected neither.

Since Jesus’ example is worthy of emulation, we should consider the major emphasis He placed on application and follow in His footsteps. So, is application necessary in preaching? For those who want to be like the Master, the answer is a resounding, Yes!

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REVIEWS


Reviewed by Irvin A. Busenitz, Vice President for Academic Administration and Professor of Bible and Old Testament.

Andrew Dearman is professor of Old Testament at the regional campus of Fuller Theological Seminary in Houston, Texas. His contribution adds another helpful volume to the growing NICOT series. In spite of the fact that Hosea displays some of “the most obscure passages of the entire Hebrew Bible” (9), explained in part by Hosea’s poetic style, penchant for wordplay and formidable vocabulary, Dearman provides both a translation and a detailed historical-theological commentary.

Standing at the head of the Minor Prophets, this Old Testament book sets forth Yahweh’s prophecy through this remarkable prophet, making it anything but minor. The message provides, by means of poetry, prophetic oracles, and family circumstances, a major and at times rather dramatic vista into the northern ten tribes. Throughout the volume, Dearman makes a valiant effort to elucidate the marriage of the prophet to Gomer and the marriage of Yahweh to Israel.

In his discussion of the origins and transmission of the text, Dearman “accept[s] some examples of editorial updating” (6) and acknowledges, “anonymous disciples had a role in collecting and editing what became of the book of Hosea” (4). Nevertheless, he argues that the book is a unified product (5–6) dating to the middle to latter part of the eighth century BC (21–22; 77–79). His treatment of literary features and composition is excellent, devoting an extensive section (11–21) to similes and metaphors.

The author gives considerable attention to how one is to understand chapters 1–3. Was Gomer a harlot before marrying Hosea? Are three different women depicted in chapters 1–3, or are they the same? Following the conclusions of H. H. Rowley’s earlier work (Men of God [London: Nelson, 1963]), Dearman contends that Gomer is in view throughout and that the third chapter should be taken as a sequel to chapters one and two (80–88, 133–34).

Regarding the cryptic phrase in 6:2, “He will revive us after two days; He will raise us up on the third day,” Dearman admits that it is difficult to know if it is a
reference to recovery from sickness or resurrection from death. Ultimately, he concludes, “Hosea’s own poetic allusiveness may intentionally include both” (194). He goes on to add that “interpreters have rightly asked whether Hos 6:2 is one of the texts in the mind of Paul when he claims that the resurrection of Christ on the third day is in accord with the Scriptures (1 Cor 15:4)” (195).

In his discussion of Hos 11:1 (“out of Egypt I called My son”), he believes that its use by Matthew (2:15) “is best understood as an example of typology…, portraying a different significance for 11:1 than that intended by Hosea for his generation, but demonstrating a coherence to divine activity in the historical process. Matthew seeks to show that eschatological and messianic aspects of Israelite history are revealed in God’s Son Jesus and that this is in accord with Scripture and God’s prior activity in and through his corporate son Israel” (280).


The author’s adherence to higher critical perspectives requires caution on the part of the reader. Nevertheless, his commitment to the MT makes this commentary a very helpful addition to understanding the prophecy of Hosea.


Reviewed by Dennis M. Swanson, Vice-President for Library and Educational Assessment

In the 1970s the emerging neoconservative political movement found a ready ally in the also emerging Christian Right (particularly in such organizations as Jerry Falwell’s Moral Majority and James Dobson’s Focus on the Family). So thorough was the alliance, that evangelical Christianity in the United States became, sadly enough, almost synonymous with conservative and Republican politics in the last quarter of the twentieth century.

One of the rallying cries of the Christian Right was the return to the values of the so-called “Christian America,” which portrays the Founding Fathers, almost to the man, as “born again Christians” with evangelical ideals for ruling the new country. The counter movement, most popularly articulated by Americans United for the Separation of Church and State, postulated a nearly opposite view, that the Founding Fathers were essentially Lockean secularists who designed government and religion to function in complete isolation from one another.
Gregg L. Frazer, Professor of History and Political Studies at The Master’s College, has sought to bring a fresh perspective to the subject of the “Christian” origins of both the Founding Fathers and the country that they pledged, “lives, fortunes, and sacred honor” to birth. Frazer states, “I saw both sides as clearly wrong and as interested parties who were willing to manipulate the historical record in support of their agendas” (ix). Frazer’s goal is lofty as he seeks to pull apart the tar baby that the triad of history, politics, and theology often create. He states,

My purpose in writing this book spans both disciplines and includes both motives. I want to get the history right. More than that, though, I want to force extremists on the Left and on the Right to make the case for their vision of what American should be on its own merits, without hijacking the fame of the Founders and without holding their reputations hostage to causes of which they would not approve (ix).

In this work Frazer demonstrates that neither view appropriately belongs to the Founders of America, and the most influential of them (along with a significant number of the influential pastors and thinkers of the day) were neither Deists nor Christians; but rather, theistic rationalists. Frazer states, “What, exactly, was this new belief system at the center of the American Founding? Theistic rationalism was a hybrid belief system mixing elements of natural religion, Christianity, and rationalism, with rationalism as the predominant element” (14). Frazer presents a detailed explanation of this hybrid that “was not really a religion or denomination per se rather a religious belief system and an approach to religious belief” (ibid).

As Frazer notes, “one of the prevailing views today of the political theology of the Founding era is that most of the Founders were deists” (15). Frazer discusses Lord Edward Herbert of Cherbury (1583–1648), the “Father of English Deism” and his work _De Veritate_ and examines what exactly Deism, as a religious system in the eighteenth century, consisted of. Frazer later builds on this discussion and thoroughly discusses the religious beliefs of Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson (125–63). He concludes, “although Jefferson and Franklin are routinely identified as deists, investigations into what they actually said that they believed reveals that they did not hold to the most fundamental beliefs of deism (161).

One of the key discussions by Frazer is that of the American pulpit in the pre-revolutionary era. He notes that, “none of the political theologies of the religious groups in America were particularly friendly to liberal democratic thought or republicanism” (69). He notes that the “main obstacle to an acceptance of democratic theory in American churches was Calvinism” (ibid). Several aspects of Calvinistic theology were viewed increasingly as “undemocratic,” particularly the constructs of predestination and limited atonement (70). As a result he concludes that preachers in the pre-revolutionary pulpits were leading a “revolt against Calvinism, which was abandoned by many at the time of the Revolution because it was viewed as inconsistent with the Revolutionary emphasis on liberty” (6).

A significant strength of Frazer’s work is the discussion of the important “divines” as the “theologians and clergymen were called at that time” (23). Starting with the English nobleman and philosopher, Anthony Ashley Cooper, Earl of
Shaftesbury (1671–1713) he moves onto detailed discussions of the central theological contributors to theistic rationalism, particularly Joseph Priestly (27–30); John Witherspoon (39–46); Samuel Clarke (47–51); Charles Chauncy (52–58); and Jonathan Mayhew (59–68). The influence of Priestley on Jefferson, Adams, and Franklin is particularly noted (28ff). As Frazer notes, “it would be difficult to overstate the importance of Priestley to the development of the political theology of the American Founding” (28).

One key component to the success of “theistic rationalism” as a system was that while it remained a creation of the elite political thinkers of the era, it did not offend the masses in the process. Frazer notes:

Theistic rationalism was an elite understanding of the eighteenth century, shared by the key Founders and many preachers. A gentle, hopeful, and nondenominational belief system that borrowed from Christianity and from deism, but it never became the property of the masses. But it equipped elites to describe the projects of the Revolution and the Founding in terms that did not offend popular religion (22).

The Founders, as generally loyal church members, were rightly viewed as promoting religion, particularly a Christian-oriented religion, as a “necessary support for a free society” (234). In this they were not being duplicitous, but rather consistent with their own theistic rationalism. As Frazer notes, “by making their own reason the final determinant on what counted as legitimate revelation and the final determinant of the meaning of revelation, the theistic rationalists essentially defined away any independent divine influence on their own religion and politics” (235).

Frazer’s chapter on “The Theistic Rationalism of George Washington” (197–213) is a singularly significant contribution. His discussion of Washington, whom he notes was “famously taciturn about his religious beliefs” (29), in relation to theistic rationalism is perhaps the high-water mark of the book. Frazer discusses and disassembles the hagiographic work on Washington by Mason Locke Weems (203–05). The discussion of Washington’s affiliation with and affinity for the Freemasons (208–10) is also thorough and well accomplished. After quoting several contemporary sources that deny Washington was in any manner a “Christian,” Frazer states that for Washington,

Religion, regardless of specifics, was vital as a pillar of a free society because of the moralizing effect it had on the people. Personally, Washington believed in a wise and good God to whom all roads led, an active and particular Providence, prayers, some miracles and revelation, and the central part played by morality. Those were the beliefs that seemed to him to be rational (212).

As Frazer concludes, theistic rationalism was a system, particularly for Washington, in which “God became whoever they preferred Him to be and made only those demands they wished Him to make. They had truly created a god in their own image” (236).
Frazer’s bibliography (281–91) is thorough and his notations (237–80) are extensive. Given the nature and detail of this work one could have wished that the publisher had committed more effort to the index (293–99) and provided more than the barebones listing that is made. Table 1.1 “Christianity in Eighteenth-Century in America” (19) is not particularly helpful, and the author’s notation on why he included Catholics as affirming “justification by faith,” while correct, probably should have been lengthened to beyond a single sentence to provide more clarity. In the same chart the denominational statistics could have been improved if Methodism, although during the Revolutionary era still officially part of the Anglican/Episcopalian church, had been separated out (especially to note its growth after the Revolution).

These, however, are quibbles in an overall excellent work. Frazer has provided an important study that deserves a wide reading. We highly recommend this work as a clear, well-researched, and persuasive argument for the actual belief system of the Founders and founding of the United States, theistic rationalism, which in large part remains today as the foundation of what Robert Bellah and others have called “America’s Civil Religion.”


Reviewed by William D. Barrick, Professor of Old Testament.


The Cornerstone Biblical Commentary (gen. ed. Philip W. Comfort) bases its commentary upon the translation of the second edition of the New Living Translation (NLT). Nearly one hundred biblical scholars of various evangelical church backgrounds from the United States, Canada, England, and Australia have participated in the writing of this series. Each commentary commences with an “Introduction” (“Psalms,” 3–29; “Proverbs,” 453–70). The main body of each commentary then provides the full NLT text for each text unit, followed by “Notes” (dealing with the Hebrew text) and “Commentary” interpreting that text unit. At the end of each commentary, the volume includes a brief “Bibliography” (“Psalms,” 442–50; “Proverbs,” 662–69).
These commentaries include minimal direct interaction with other commentaries or with journal literature (Futato has less interaction with such sources than Schwab). Such interaction occurs primarily in the introductions to each commentary where the authors identify sources by means of a reference to the surname and date of publication for references. Occasional references to sources other than lexicons (e.g., *HALOT*), theological dictionaries (e.g., *NIDOTTE*), and grammars (e.g., GKC) occur in the “Notes” following the translation (e.g., 114–15 regarding Ps 27:12) and less often in the “Commentary” itself (e.g., 321 regarding Ps 101). No footnotes appear anywhere—presumably to display a clean text—but the “Introduction” for Psalms does close with endnotes (28–29) and an occasional commentary for a text unit concludes with endnotes (75, 107, 325). Cross-references by means of a word-study numbering system connect readers to tools like *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance to the Bible* (xiv). This reviewer found such references distracting and disruptive to the flow of the commentary, but some readers will find them helpful.

Futato believes that the psalm titles are canonical and authentic (5), although he does not indicate whether he thinks that they are inspired. He does not refer to James Thirtle’s *The Titles of the Psalms: Their Nature and Meaning Explained* (Henry Frowde, 1904) either in the introduction or in his bibliography. In regard to the authorship of individual psalms, Futato accepts the view that the Hebrew *lamed*-preposition indicates authorship (5–6). His “Introduction” is brief but helpful to most readers without any technical background. The Psalms commentary provides readers with a concise, evangelical commentary that pays attention to significant grammatical, literary, and lexical details. His theological insight and explanations are also well-written and beneficial for understanding a psalm’s interpretation and theological and/or practical implications (e.g., 79 regarding Ps 16; and, 269 regarding Ps 81). Treatment of some psalms could have been more informative and constructive had Futato paid more attention to the proper division of the headings in accord with Thirtle’s theory (e.g., Ps 87’s message ties in quite well with the musical heading currently attached erroneously to the start of the literary heading for Ps 88). However, he still manages to present a valuable commentary on Psalm 87 (282–84). Regrettably, his commentary on Psalm 119 suffers from being overly brief (372–74).

Futato’s “Introduction” provides only very minimal exposure to poetic devices (8–10), since he chooses to focus more on the genres (10–16). Schwab, however, presents a more practical introduction to poetics (459–63). Proverbs, for Schwab, “is first of all instruction material for young people to help guard them from beguiling influences and point them in the right direction for life” (471). He does advise the exegete to give proper attention to the potential for at least some portions of Proverbs serving as training for court officials (456). His explanation of the nature of the “naïve” helps readers to rightly understand the meaning of the term in Hebrew (473, 474). Occasional diagrams and charts help to reinforce the interpretation of the biblical text (461, 518, 591). His notes following the translation are often more extensive than his commentary section for the same text unit. For example, for 17:7–18:7 the “Notes” take up two full pages (568–70) while the “Commentary” barely fills a single page (570–71). His greatest omission comes

Both of these commentaries will prove beneficial to students of Scripture studying Psalms and Proverbs. Futato’s commentary is more detailed in its interpretation than Geoffrey W. Grogan’s Psalms (Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary; Eerdmans, 2008), although Grogan’s significant advantage comes in the second half of his commentary, which comprises an excellent theology of the Psalms. Schwab’s commentary falls short of the exegetical scholarship of Bruce K. Waltke’s magisterial work, The Book of Proverbs (2 vols., NICOT; Eerdmans, 2004–2005), and Tremper Longman’s significant volume on Proverbs in the Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms (Baker Academic, 2006). It also does not match up to the development of practical and theological implications offered by Paul E. Koptak in his Proverbs (NIV Application Commentary; Zondervan, 2003). Nonetheless, readers will find Schwab’s commentary a sound addition to their libraries and will gain valuable insights from it.


Reviewed by F. David Farnell, Ph.D., Professor of New Testament.

The work is praised as follows on the Amazon website, reflecting similar wording on its jacket cover: “This capstone work from widely respected senior evangelical scholar Donald Hagner offers a substantial introduction to the New Testament. Hagner deals with the New Testament both historically and theologically, employing the framework of salvation history. He treats the New Testament as a coherent body of texts and stresses the unity of the New Testament without neglecting its variety. Although the volume covers typical questions of introduction, such as author, date, background, and sources, it focuses primarily on understanding the theological content and meaning of the texts, putting students in a position to understand the origins of Christianity and its canonical writings.” The book includes summary tables, diagrams, maps, and extensive bibliographies. Such scholars as James D. G. Dunn, I. Howard Marshall, Craig Keener and Thomas Schreiner also praise it.

One may note two strategic factors regarding Hagner’s New Testament introduction: First, his work represents the cutting edge of evangelical, British-influenced and trained critical scholarship who are currently teaching the next generation of preachers and scholars in the United States, both on a college and seminary level. Second, Hagner’s work will most likely replace the late Donald Guthrie’s New Testament Introduction, which was last revised in 1990, as the
standard seminary-level text. If one wants to know where evangelical critical scholarship is moving, Hagner’s work provides that trajectory.

These two strategic factors are also the work’s gravest weaknesses. The work attributes the word “inspired” to the New Testament Scripture (4). Yet, Hagner maintains, “the inspired word of God comes to us through the medium of history, through the agency of writers who lived in history and were a part of history” which “necessitate the historical and critical study of Scripture.” (ibid). He says that the use of the word “critical” does not mean “tearing it down or demeaning it—but rather to exercising judgment or discernment concerning every aspect of it” (5). Therefore, Hagner asserts that “[w]e must engage in historical criticism, in the sense of thoughtful interpretation of the Bible” and “the historical method is indispensable precisely because the Bible is the story of God’s act in history” (ibid). What Hagner means is there is a need for historical critical ideologies rather than grammatico-historical criticism. This is the first signal that British-influenced evangelical scholars are shifting markedly away from the Reformation tradition of grammatico-historical criticism. The training of the next generation of preacher’s in historical-criticism is troublesome since this methodology markedly differs in approach in terms of presuppositions and historicity; as well as the qualitative kind of conclusions such an ideology reaches.

Like many British-influenced evangelical critical scholars, he believes that he can use historical-criticism and be immune from its more negative elements: “The critical method therefore needs to be tempered so that rather than being used against the Bible, it is open to the possibility of the transcendent or miraculous within the historical process and thus is used to provide better understanding of the Bible” (7). This latter admission is telling, since it is an admission, no matter how indirect, of the dangers of historical criticism. Hagner argues that “[k]eeping an open mind concerning the possibility of the transcendent in history does not entail the suspension of critical judgment. There is no need for a naïve credulity and acceptance of anything and everything simply because one’s worldview is amenable to the supernatural” (7). Hagner apparently believes that he has discovered the proper balance of presuppositions and practice in the historical-critical method displayed in this work.

It must be stressed once again that the critical method is indispensable to the study of Scripture. It is the sine qua non of responsible interpretation of God’s word. The believer need have no fear of the method itself, but need only be on guard against the employment of improper presuppositions (11).

An old pithy saying, however, is that the “devil is in the details.” Hagner’s argument here ignores the marked evidence or proof from history of the presuppositions and damage that historical criticism has caused by even well-intentioned scholars who have eviscerated the Scripture through such an ideology. History constitutes a monumental testimony against Hagner’s embracing of the ideologies of historical criticism as well as the damage that it has caused the church. Hagner excoriates “very conservative scholars” and “obscurantist fundamentalism” (10) that refused to embrace some form of moderated historical
critical ideology. Hagner commends Hengel’s belief that “fundamentalism” and its accepting belief in the full trustworthiness in Scripture is actually a form of atheism (Martin Hengel, “Eye-witness Memory and the Writing of the Gospels: Form Criticism, Community Tradition and the Authority of the Authors,” in The Written Gospel [Cambridge, 2005] 70–96), quoting and affirming Hengel’s position that “Fundamentalism is a form of ‘unbelief’ that closes itself to the—God intended—historical reality” (Hengel, 94, n100). Hagner insists “repudiation of the critical Study of Scripture amounts to a gnostic-like denial of the historical character of the Christian faith” (10). Hagner agrees with Hengel that a “Fundamentalist polemic against the ‘historical-critical method’ does not understand historical perception” (ibid) and that “Fundamentalism is a form of ‘unbelief’ that closes itself to the—God intended—historical reality” (10, n17). Apparently, Hagner (and Hengel) believes that since the Scriptures were mediated through history and human agency, this opens the documents up to being fallible human products. Because of the Scripture being based in historical knowledge, one cannot use the word “certain” but only “probable,” for Hagner insists that the “word ‘prove,’ although perhaps appropriate in mathematics and science, is out of place when it comes to historical knowledge” (9).

In studying Scripture, compelling proof will always be lacking (9). Hagner’s assertion is a non-sequitur because fundamentalism or conservative evangelicalism (e.g. The Jesus Crisis) never argued against criticism but only the kind of criticism utilized and the philosophical principle involved in such criticism that closed off the study of Scripture a priori before any analysis could be done, (i.e., historical-critical ideologies). Historical criticism is a purposeful, psychological operation designed to silence Scripture and deflect away from its plain, normal sense implications, (i.e., to dethrone it from influence in church and society). While left-wing critical scholarship will openly admit this, “moderate” evangelicals like Hagner choose to ignore the intent of historical criticism.

With this operating assumption about understanding Scripture, some sampling highlights of Hagner’s “balanced” approach to historical-critical ideologies: First, “we have no reliable chronology of Jesus ministry” in the Gospels (63). Since the Gospels are “historical narratives” they involve “interpretation” by the evangelists and that “level of interpretation can be high” (63). Since the gospel writers largely (but not completely) reflect ancient Roman bioi as the “closest analogy” from antiquity” and since bioi were not necessarily always without interpretation (61), “[t]he Evangelists compare well with the secular historians of their own day, and their narratives remain basically trustworthy” (65).

Second, like other critically-trained European scholars, Hagner accepts Lessing’s “ugly ditch” and the German/British concept of historie- (actual verifiable events) vs. geschichte—(faith interpretations of events) as a dichotomy between the Jesus of the Gospels and the “historical Jesus” (83–104). Although critical of some historical Jesus research, Hagner concedes that “the Jesus of history was to some extent different from the Gospels’ portrayal of him” and “if we cannot look for a one-to-one correspondence between the Jesus of history and the Jesus of the early church’s faith, we can at least establish a degree of continuity between the two” (97). Furthermore, “we are in no position to write a biography of Jesus” based
in the information from the New Testament since the gospels are “kerygmatic portrayals of the story of Jesus” (98).

Third, Hagner embraces the idea that a book can be “pseudonymity” as acceptable in the New Testament canon. Hagner argues, “We have very little to lose in allowing the category of Deutero-Pauline letters. If it happens that some other person may have written these four, or even six documents [e.g. Ephesians, Pastorals] in the name of Paul, we are not talking about forgery or deception” (429). Hagner asserts, “The ancient world on the whole did not have the same kind of sensitivity to pseudonymity that is typical in the modern world, with its concern for careful attribution and copyright.” (ibid). “The authority and canonicity of the material is in no way affected by books put into final shape by disciples of the prophets” (ibid). He continues, “The fact is that the Pauline corpus, with deuteronymous letters as well as without them, stands under the banner of the authoritative Paul” (ibid).

Hagner supports the late British scholar I. Howard Marshall’s view on “pseudonymous” writings in the New Testament: “In order to avoid the idea of deceit, Howard Marshall has coined the words ‘allonymity’ and ‘allepigraphy’ in which the prefix pseudos (‘false’) is replaced with allos (‘other’) which gives a more positive concept to the writing of a work in the name of another person” (431).

Hagner notes that another British scholar, James Dunn, has come to a similar conclusion (see I. Howard Marshall, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles, 84). Hagner says, “We do not know beyond a shadow of a doubt that there are Deutero-Pauline letters in the Pauline corpus, but if in the weighing of historical probabilities it seems to us that there are, we can freely admit that this too is a way in which God has mediated Scripture to us” (432). Apparently, to Hagner and others, God uses false attribution to accomplish His purpose of communication of His Word that encourages the highest ethical standards upon men! Thus, for Hagner, Paul most likely did not write Ephesians as well as the Pastoral Epistles (1– 2 Timothy and Titus) (428). They should be viewed in the category of Deutero-Pauline letters (429). Hagner even devotes a whole section of his Introduction to this category of Deutero-Pauline letters (585–642). He regards the book of James as possibly not written by James: “we cannot completely exclude the alternative possibility that the book is pseudonymous. Already in the time of Jerome it was regarded as such . . . Least likely of all, but again not impossible, the letter could have been written by another, little known or unknown, person named ‘James’” (675). Second Peter is “Almost certainly not by Peter. Very probably written by a disciple of Peter or a member of the Petrine circle” (714). The author of Revelation is “Almost certainly not by the Apostle John. Possibly, by John ‘The Elder,” but more probably by another John, otherwise unknown to us, who may have been a member of the Johannine circle” (761).

In sum, Hagner’s work represents what may well replace Guthrie’s New Testament Introduction. One can only imagine the impact that British and European evangelical critical scholarship represented by Hagner’s assertions regarding his “balanced” use of historical-critical presuppositions will have on the next generation of God’s preachers and teachers! As Machen said long ago, “as go the theological seminaries, so go the churches” (J. Gresham Machen, The Christian Faith in the Modern World, 65).
In an attempt to address what he sees as a deficiency in the majority of homiletical books, Greg Heisler wrote *Spirit-Led Preaching* to address that lack. He is presently senior pastor of Mount Vernon Baptist Church in Boone, North Carolina. He previously was assistant professor of preaching at Southeastern Seminary.

Heisler perceives a failure in much sermon preparation and delivery to promote the “theological fusion of the Word and Spirit” (3). This book is not a “how-to” manual for Spirit-led sermons. Rather, the author wants to convey an approach to preaching in which the preacher is led by the Holy Spirit in his personal sanctification, sermon preparation, and delivery in order to develop “a heightened sensitivity to the Spirit’s leadership” (6). In chapters 1–5 he addresses Spirit-led preaching in terms of its theological and theoretical dimensions, offering an overview from both the Old and New Testaments. The remaining four chapters of the book address the practical out-workings of Spirit-led preaching. In essence, the first half challenges preachers to redefine preaching to include the ministry of the Holy Spirit, and the second half applies this new definition.

Two different models of expository preaching are presented. The first, “Text-Driven Preaching,” is portrayed as a train “driven by the text” with the destination being a “proper presentation of the Word of God” (18). In this model the Holy Spirit’s role is merely implied. The second model, “Spirit-Driven Preaching,” is portrayed as a train “driven along by the Holy Spirit in accordance with the biblical text” (18). In this version, “the preacher’s responsibility is to keep the train on the tracks” as he is propelled by the Spirit’s power (18–19). The goal for this model of preaching is “Christological witness and Spirit-filled living” (19). Based on the work of NT scholar Robert Stein, Heisler defines illumination as “the process whereby the Holy Spirit so impresses, convinces, and convicts the believer as to the truthfulness and significance of the author’s intended meaning in the text that a change in action, attitude, or belief occurs, resulting in a more transformed, Spirit-filled life” (43–44). This reality enables Spirit-led preaching to be the connection between what transpires in the preacher’s study and the preaching event.

Heisler clearly shows the link between the preacher’s personal holiness and empowered preaching. He emphasizes the preacher’s pursuit of having a “vital relationship . . . with the Spirit” (68) over against “following a mechanical process” (76). From Heisler’s perspective, the audience “can discern our authenticity as preachers. Any breakdown in that dynamic [between Spirit and preacher] severely hinders the process of communication” (83). He also calls preachers not to be exegetically lazy—never to see the Spirit’s empowerment as an excuse to be lax in prayerful study of the text (93–94). His call for Spirit-led, illumined preaching is not designed to create “sensational experiences,” but a “humble and obedient attitude toward the Word of God” (94).
Unique among books on preaching, Heisler introduces the concept of “sermonic indeterminacy,” the subjective dimension of preaching which responds to and interacts with the preaching environment (107). In describing the spontaneous editing that the preacher does based on his audience in any particular preaching event, Heisler envisions a three-way “conversation” or “trialogue” between the preacher, the audience, and the Holy Spirit (114).

Heisler’s final chapter stands alone. Recognizing that the topic of the “anointing” of the preacher is “confusing and controversial” (127), he sees the “anointing” as “the Spirit’s supernatural power attending the proclamation of the Word of God” (129). He understands the Spirit’s empowerment to be primarily “manifest in both faithful and consistent dependency,” but also allows for the “unusual and dramatic” times where the “anointing” is experienced in preaching (142–43).

Spirit-Led Preaching is a niche book. It is rare to find a work that so concisely captures the theology of the Holy Spirit and the implications for expository preaching. Heisler answers the dilemma that today’s typical evangelical “Spirit-shy Christians” face (13). Many contemporary preachers may fear being labeled “unbiblical” for considering the need to surrender to the control of the Spirit because of how the church has attributed crazy experiences to the ministry of the Spirit in preaching (16). Heisler values expository preaching as that which “holds the powerful combination of Word and Spirit together” (23). While Heisler acknowledges the “subjective aspect” found in Spirit-led preaching, he affirms it is “governed by the grammatical-historical method” (39). Heisler emphasizes this point throughout his work by marking the “benefits of the revealing ministry of the Holy Spirit” that come from preaching “within the bounds of the biblical text” (58).

Heisler’s definition of illumination is the theological thread that ties together his emphasis of Word and Spirit in both preparation and delivery. He writes, “What is bright light in the study will be white hot in the sanctuary” (51). For Heisler, this plays practically into what the preacher chooses to edit out or keep in his sermon notes, and how he animates his preaching points and biblical narratives (49). With this doctrine Heisler challenges preachers to practice the spiritual disciplines as part of their sermon preparation (50). Citing Paul’s example, he calls preachers to preach in weakness and dependence upon the Spirit, spending more time “pleading with God to open the eyes of our listeners and less time worrying about remembering our illustrations” (34). He sees depth in study and personal holiness as what adds depth to sermons (86).

Heisler’s emphasis on preaching Christ and the cross is much needed. He makes the clear connection between the preacher’s effectiveness and the preacher’s willingness to exalt Christ in his sermons. He states, “So much of what is done in the name of the Holy Spirit today is not of the Spirit because Jesus is never mentioned or glorified” (57). He maintains that without Christ at the center of sermons “the Spirit’s power will have nothing to do with them” (57). Throughout, Heisler points to the way Paul located the power of his preaching not in “human wisdom” but in “the cross of Jesus” (1 Cor 1:17).

Regarding the preacher’s holiness, Heisler neglects to mention God’s sovereign prerogative to bless in spite of the preacher (e.g., Phil 1:15–18). Heisler sees the
Spirit’s involvement in a sermon to be determined by the preacher’s and the audience’s willingness to involve the Spirit in a “trialogue” (114). This concept ought to be harmonized with the Spirit’s freedom to blow where he wills (John 3:8).

Functionally, Heisler attributes the preacher’s decision to leave material in or take it out as the Spirit’s prompting (78). He uses this idea of prompting in sermon selection as well. He refers to a time when he preached on the transition from Moses to Joshua when he was candidating for an interim pastorate. Heisler attributes both his text selection and his points to the prompting of the Holy Spirit: “the Spirit prompted me to talk about the doubts Israel may have experienced” (92). Surely this message was providentially timed, but his bold affirmation that the Spirit prompted his sermon’s inferences seems out of keeping with the rest of his book.

The extent a preacher faithfully exposit the biblical text is the extent to which he may boldly affirm that what he said was from the Holy Spirit. The most dramatic representation of Heisler stepping outside his own definition of Spirit-led preaching is found in the personal testimonies of preachers “anointed” during their sermons (142). With deep respect to the men Heisler quotes in the following excerpts, these testimonies read more as existential than theological examples of what it means to be anointed when preaching: “The words are his but the facility with which they come compels him to realize that the source is beyond himself” (138); “You are a man ‘possessed,’ you are taken hold of, and taken up . . . [You] have a feeling that you are not actually doing the preaching, you are looking on at yourself in amazement as this is happening” (140); “I don’t want this to sound spooky—but there are times I feel almost outside myself . . . [thinking,] ‘I could not have arranged these thoughts this well’” (141).

Although Heisler seems to overstep his own definition in some of his applications, overall the theological precision of this book and the desperate need for the Holy Spirit to be emphasized in preaching makes it a must-read for all biblical expositors. Heisler’s desire is to influence expositors in an area that has been markedly deficient in expository preaching and to bring “a fresh and continual dependence upon the Holy Spirit” (153). This dependence on the Spirit will indeed promote Spirit-led preaching.


Reviewed by F. David Farnell, Professor of New Testament.

Do historical matters matter to faith? In the foreword for Do Historical Matters Matter? John D. Woodbridge states that the purpose of the book is to demonstrate that “the Bible’s historical narratives are trustworthy” (13). It also purports to be a “fresh” look at the Bible’s (OT and NT) historical reliability: “the Bible’s historical narratives are indeed trustworthy” (ibid).

The two editors of the volume, Hoffmeier and Magary, assert, “During the past thirty years biblical and theological scholarship has had to cope with many serious
challenges to orthodox and evangelical understanding of Scripture” (9). It seeks to counter modernist and postmodernist impacts upon the understanding of the historical trustworthiness of the OT and NT. The work is a “collaborative book” as “an outgrowth of panel discussion by faculty members of the Department of Old Testament and Semitic Languages at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in February 2009” (21).

The book expands the discussion to New Testament subjects as well (210). Peter Enns’ work, Inspiration and Incarnation, as well as Kenton Sparks’s, God’s Word in Human Words, provide the stimulus for these articles. In the “Preface,” the editors “offer this book to help address some of the questions raised about the historicity, accuracy, and inerrancy of the Bible by colleagues within our faith community, as well as those outside of it” (23). “There will be a special emphasis placed on matters of history and the historicity of biblical narratives, both Old and New Testaments, as this seems presently to be a burning issue for theology and faith. Hence, we begin with a group of essays that deal with theological matters before moving on to topics in the Old Testament, the New Testament, and archaeology” (21).

Significant evangelical scholars, including, John D. Woodbridge, Ravi Zacharias, D. A. Carson, and Timothy George wrote endorsements for this volume, leading this reviewer to anticipate a high quality book defending the trustworthiness of Scripture. Unfortunately, that was not the case. If the presentations in this work are accepted as representing the state of evangelicalism regarding OT and NT trustworthiness, then both the 1978 and 1982 ICBI statements are now null and void among the younger generation of evangelical scholars.

After reading this work, the answer to the question the work poses, “do historical matters matter?” the answer must be in the negative, at least not to these scholars. The fresh solutions that they offer are worse than the disease that they purport to be curing. This reviewer was left wondering if all the endorsers of this work truly, really read the contents of this work. Because of the length limitations, this reviewer can only review a few salient highlights of this work.

In Chapter One, “Religious Epistemology, Theological Interpretation of Scripture, and Critical Biblical Scholarship,” Thomas McCall sets forth philosophy of biblical scholarship for the group. McCall advocates a type of “methodological naturalism”: “MN holds only that the method of CBS [critical biblical scholarship] ‘can be followed and may be valuable for historians’ but do not give the only or final word on all matters (historical or otherwise)” (52). What McCall fails to consider in his discussion is that often a “methodology” is really an ideology that has an underlying agenda in its presuppositional bases (Col 2:8; 2 Cor 10:5). This chapter suggests a Hegelian/Fichtian dialectic: Fundamentalism (i.e. Reformed Epistemology) is too dismissive or critical of critical biblical scholarship (thesis), critical biblical scholarship in its historic form is too “binding and obligatory” (antithesis), with the synthesis expressed by evangelicals who use critical methods to engage in dialogue: “critical biblical scholarship can be ‘appropriated’ in a way that is both intellectually and spiritually healthy” (54). Acceptance of critical biblical scholarship in various, limited ways is the only way to have influence in the larger marketplace of ideas in biblical criticism.
McCall’s idea of influencing, however, is negated by 1 Cor 1:18–2:14 where Paul sets forth the myth of influence, i.e. the fact that the default response of anyone who does not have the Spirit of God (i.e. unbelievers) is to conclude that the things of God are “foolishness” or “an offense” (1 Cor 1:23) and that God deliberately has planned that wisdom of unsaved men is inherently unable to arrive at a true understanding of the truth of God’s Word (1 Cor 2:8–14). This places “critical biblical scholarship” (CBS) in a tenuous light, for it operates decidedly on foundational unbelief. Only those with the Spirit of God can understand the thoughts of God, for no one will boast before God concerning his own wisdom (1 Cor 1:30).

In Chapter 3, “The Divine Investment in Truth, Toward a Theological Account of Biblical Inerrancy,” Mark Thompson asserts a belief in inerrancy but argues strongly that suspicion regarding inerrancy “stems from the way that some have used assent to this doctrine [inerrancy] as a shibboleth. Individuals and institutions have been black-listed for raising doubts about the way the doctrine has been construed in the past. Only those who are able to affirm biblical inerrancy without qualification are to be trusted.” Thompson singles out Harold Lindsell as “one of the most conspicuous examples” of those who cause this distrust (71, n2). For Thompson, the greatest suspicion against inerrancy “[m]ost serious of all . . . is the way still others, reared on the strictest form of the doctrine of biblical inerrancy, have abandoned the faith under the intense questioning of biblical criticism. Forced to choose between a perfect, unblemished text and seemingly incontrovertible evidence of error in Scripture, such people begin to lose confidence in the gospel proclaimed throughout Scripture. In light of such cases, the doctrine of biblical inerrancy might even be deemed dangerous” (72). These evangelicals have apparently forgotten that it was Harold Lindsell who was a great impetus in the ICBI discussion of both 1978 and 1982. History is now being forgotten. He blames people who hold to a strong view of inerrancy for causing people to depart from the faith. Apparently, for Thompson, inerrancy is a cause of defection, especially if one holds to it strongly.

Thompson argues that, instead, “the doctrine should not be judged by the abuse of it or by inadequate explanations. He argues for a solution in the following terms: “Strong convictions about the inerrancy of Scripture need not mean that his aspect of the of Scripture is elevated above all others in importance. Biblical inerrancy need not entail literalism and a failure to take seriously the various literary forms in which God’s words come to us, nor need it repudiate genuine human authorship in a Docetic fashion” (72). Such a statement clearly indicates that Thompson places Scripture on the same level as any other book, subject to the same assault that historical-critical ideologies, far from neutral, have perpetrated upon it. Thompson concludes that a solution toward resolving any distortions in the doctrine of inerrancy is as follows: “the doctrine of inerrancy almost inevitably becomes distorted when it becomes the most important thing we want to say about Scripture.” (97). He affirms Timothy Ward’s solution, “Timothy Ward’s assessment that inerrancy is ‘a true statement to make about the Bible but is not in the top rank of significant things to assert about the Bible’ is timely” (97). Thus, Thompson’s solution appears to downplay the significance of inerrancy for biblical issues as a way of overcoming difficulties regarding the doctrine as well as
recognizing not all statements in the Bible are to be taken as literal in terms of genre.

In Chapter 14, Robert W. Yarbrough wrote “God’s Word in Human Words—Form-Critical Reflections,” argues for seeing a value to historical critical approaches such as form critical studies by evangelicals even if in a limited way: “Form criticism did call attention to the important point that the Gospels comprise units of expression that may be sorted into discernible categories. Admittedly, form critics approached Gospel sources with premises and convictions that created blind spots in their observations. Limitations to the method as typically practiced amounted to built-in obsolescence that would eventually doom it to irrelevancy in the estimation of Gospels [sic] interpreters today” (328). However, Yarbrough argues that “to study works from the form-critical era is to be reminded that literary sub-units—even sacred sources—can be grouped and analyzed according to the type of discourse they enshrine and the clues to the cultural surroundings that may yield” (328). He acknowledges that Eta Linnemann “renounced her lifelong professional and personal commitment to what she called historical-critical theology . . . she tested the claims of historical-critical views that she had been taught as a student and then as a professor had inflicted on hapless university undergraduates in an attempt to disabuse them of their Christian faith in Jesus and the Bible, the better to equip them for service in enlightened post-Christian German society” (332).

Yet, Yarbrough, delving into his perceived psycho-analysis of Linnemann’s perceptions of biblical scholarship, labels her as someone among evangelicals who overreacted to the historical-critical approaches. He noted that “In academic mode, whether lecturing or writing, Linnemann tended toward overstatement and polemics. It is as if a couple of decades of vehement rejection of the Gospels’ trustworthiness created a corresponding zeal for their defense once she rejected the ‘critical’ paradigm she embraced in Bultmann’s heyday and under the spell of her identity as one of his students. Her scholarly pro-Bible writings are not a model of balanced scholarship, cautious investigation, and measured, gracious interaction with those she viewed as soft on the question of the Bible’s inaccuracy” (332). However, Yarbrough’s psycho-analysis of Linnemann is directly challenged by Linnemann’s own story as a former post-Bultmann who witnessed first-hand the dangerous nature of historical criticism, for she based it on a thorough understanding and analysis of the approach as an ideological approach. Eta Linnemann, herself a student of Rudolf Bultmann, the renown formgeschichtliche critic, and also of Ernst Fuchs, the outstanding proponent of the New Hermeneutic, notes regarding historical criticism,

[Instead of being based on God’s Word . . . it [historical criticism] had its foundations in philosophies which made bold to define truth so that God’s Word was excluded as the source of truth. These philosophies simply presupposed that man could have no valid knowledge of the God of the Bible, the Creator of heaven and earth, the Father of our Savior and Lord Jesus Christ” (Linnemann, Historical Criticism (Baker, 2001) 17–18).}
She stresses that the Enlightenment laid the atheistic starting point of the sciences but that of biblical criticism as a whole (ibid, 29). One comment is especially insightful that in the practice of the historical-critical methods, “What is concealed from the student is the fact that science itself, including and especially theological science, is by no means unbiased and presuppositionless. The presuppositions which determine the way work is carried on in each of its disciplines are at work behind the scenes and are not openly set forth” (ibid, 107). Linnemann notes, “a more intensive investigation [of historical criticism] would show that underlying the historical-critical approach is a series of prejudgments which are not themselves the result of scientific investigation. They are rather dogmatic premises, statements of faith, whose foundation is the absolutizing of human reason as a controlling apparatus” (ibid, 111). Her rejection stemmed not from psychological motives but years of academic research into its dangers.

In Chapter 15, “A Constructive Traditional Response to New Testament Criticism,” Craig Blomberg sets forth “constructive” solutions to problems in the New Testament text that he believes would be in line with inerrancy to solve difficulties that evangelicals face. In Blomberg’s article, he decries the Evangelical Theological Society’s dismissal of Robert H. Gundry from the society and reaffirms his support for Gundry to be allowed to make a midrashic approach to dehistoricizing (i.e. allegorizing) the story of the Herod’s killing of babies in Bethlehem in Matthew 2 as consistent with a belief in inerrancy.

For Gundry, inerrancy would only be called into question only if Matthew were making truth claims that were false. But if Matthew were employing a different style, form of genre that was not making truth claims about what happened historically when he added to his sources, then he could not be charged with falsifying the truth. Preachers throughout church history have similarly added speculative detail, local color, possible historical reconstruction, and theological commentary to their retelling of biblical stories. As long as their audiences know the text of Scripture well enough to distinguish between the Bible and the preacher’s additions, they typically recognize what the preacher is doing and do not impugn his or her trustworthiness.

A substantial number of voting members of the Evangelical Theological Society present at the annual business meeting of its annual conference in 1983 disagreed that Gundry’s views were consistent with inerrancy, at that time the sole tenet in the Society’s doctrinal statement, and requested his resignation from the society. I voted with the minority. Following the papers and writings of my own professors from seminary, especially D. A. Carson and Douglas Moo, I believed Gundry had shown how his view could be consistent with inerrancy, even though I did not find his actually approach to Matthew convincing. In other words, the issue was a hermeneutical one, not a theological one. The trustees of Westmont College, where Gundry taught, agreed, and he continued his illustrious teaching and writing career there until his retirement” (349).
In accordance with Gundry, one of Blomberg’s solutions for difficult problems in New Testament in relationship to inerrancy is to allow for a genre of non-historicity to be considered: “Though not a panacea for every conceivable debate, much more sensitive reflection over the implications of the various literary and rhetorical genres in the Bible would seem an important first step that is not often taken enough . . . . in some contexts it may take some careful hermeneutical discernment to determine just what a text is or is not affirming. Style, figures of speech, species of rhetorical and literary form and genre all go a long way toward disclosing those affirmations.” (351). For Blomberg, difficulties can be resolved at times by realizing the non-historical nature of some portions of the New Testament.

In a 1984 article, Blomberg uses this as an explanation of the story of the coin in the fish’s mouth in Matt 17:21–24: “Is it possible, even inherently probable, that the NT writers at least in part never intended to have their miracle stories taken as historical or factual and that their original audiences probably recognized this? If this sounds like the identical reasoning that enabled Robert Gundry to adopt his midrashic interpretation of Matthew while still affirming inerrancy, that is because it is the same. The problem will not disappear simply because one author [Gundry] is dealt with ad hominem . . . . how should evangelicals react? Dismissing the sociological view on the grounds that the NT miracles present themselves as historical gets us nowhere. So do almost all the other miracle stories of antiquity. Are we to believe them all?” (Blomberg, “New Testament Miracles,” JETS, 27, No. 4 [Dec 1984]: 436).

Blomberg noted, “It is often not noticed that the so-called miracle of the fish with the coin in its mouth (Matt. 17:27) is not even a narrative; it is merely a command from Jesus to go to the lake and catch such a fish. We don’t even know if Peter obeyed the command. Here is a good reminder to pay careful attention to the literary form” (354, n32). Unfortunately, this solution would seem to be at odds with the ICBI statement on hermeneutics when it states in Article XIII: “generic categories which negate historicity may rightly be imposed on biblical narratives which present themselves as factual.”

Blomberg offers another solution toward solving problems surrounding pseudonymity in relation to some New Testament books whereby the “critical consensus approach could . . . . be consistent with inerrancy, “benign pseudonymity” (353, 360). Blomberg also uses the term “ghost-writer” to describe this activity. (ibid). Another name for this would be pseudepigraphy (e.g. Ephesians, Colossians, Pastorals).

A methodology consistent with evangelical convictions might argue that there was an accepted literary convention that allowed a follower, say, of Paul, in the generation after his martyrdom, to write a letter in Paul’s name to one of the churches that had come under his sphere of influence. The church would have recognized that it could not have come from an apostle they knew had died two or three decades earlier, and they would have realized that the true author was writing thoughts indebted to the earlier teaching of Paul. In a world without footnotes or bibliographies, this was one way of giving credit where credit was due. Modesty prevented the real author from using his own name, so he wrote in ways he could easily have envisioned Paul writing were the apostle still alive today. Whether or
not this is what actually happened, such a hypothesis is thoroughly consistent with a high view of Scripture and an inerrant Bible. We simply have to recognize what is and is not being claimed by the use of the name “Paul” in that given letter (352).

For Blomberg, the key to pseudonymity would also lie in motive behind the writing. Blomberg argues that “One’s acceptance or rejection of the overall theory of authorship should then depend on the answers to these kinds of questions, not on some a priori determination that pseudonymity is in every instance compatible or incompatible with evangelicalism.” (353). He argues, “[i]t is not the conclusion one comes to on the issue [pseudonymity] that determines whether one can still fairly claim to be evangelical, or even inerrantist, how one arrives at that conclusion” (352). Yet, how could one ever know the motive of such ghostwriters? Would not such a false writer go against all moral standards of Christianity? Under Blomberg’s logic, Bart Ehrman’s work, Forged (HarperOne, 2011) only differs in one respect: Blomberg attributes good motives to forgers, while Ehrman is honest enough to admit that these “benign” writings are really what they would be in such circumstances. Are apparently both of these scholars able to read the proverbial “tea leaves” and divine the motives behind such perpetrations. That is highly unlikely.

He also carries this logic to the idea of “historical reliability more broadly.” He relates, “Might some passages in the Gospels and Acts traditionally thought of as historical actually be mythical or legendary? I see no way to exclude the answer a priori. The question would be whether any given proposal to that effect demonstrated the existence of an accepted literary form likely known to the Evangelists’ audiences, establishes as a legitimate device for communicating theological truth through historical fiction. In each case it is not the proposal itself that should be off limits for the evangelical. The important question is whether any given proposal has actually made its case” (354).

Finally, Blomberg, seemingly anticipating objections to his ideas, issues a stern warning to those who would oppose such proposals that he has discussed, [L]et those on the ‘far right’ neither anathematize those who do explore and defend new options nor immediately seek to ban them from organizations or institutions to which they belong. If new proposals . . . cannot withstand scholarly rigor, then let their refutations proceed at that level, with convincing scholarship, rather than with the kind of censorship that makes one wonder whether those who object have no persuasive reply and so have to resort simply to demonizing and/or silencing the voices with which they disagree. If evangelical scholarship proceeded in this more measured fashion, neither inherently favoring nor inherently resisting ‘critical’ conclusions, whether or not they form a consensus, then it might fairly be said to be both traditional and constructive (364).

Blomberg once received strong criticism due to his involvement co-authoring a book with Stephen E. Robinson, a New Testament professor at Brigham Young University entitled, How Wide the Divide? A Mormon and an Evangelical in Conversation (IVP, 1997). As a result, he states, “Many of us who were trained at seminaries that were vigorously engaged in labeling (rightly or wrongly) other historically evangelical seminaries as no longer evangelical and who then came to
the UK for doctoral study found the breadth of British definitions of evangelicalism and the comparative lack of a polemical environment like a breath of fresh air” (Trueman, Gray, Blomberg, Solid Ground: 25 Years of Evangelical Theology [IVP, 2000] 315). Yet, this desire for lack of criticism and just an irenic spirit in Christian academics hardly finds legitimacy in terms of the biblical model displayed in the OT and NT. Much of the OT castigated God’s people for their compromising on belief or behavior (e.g. Numbers 11–14; Psalm 95). Under today’s sentiments, the OT might be labeled anti-Semitic due to its criticism of Jewish people. In the New Testament, whole books were composed to criticize false teaching and wrong behavior on the part of God’s people (Gal, 1–2 Cor, Pastorals, 1–3 John, Rev 2–3). Jesus himself fearlessly castigated powerful groups of important people (Matt 21–23). One is reminded of the satirical pieces that have been done on the fact that if Paul wrote Galatians today, he likely would have been vilified in many popular Christian magazines today.

In Chapter 16, “Precision and Accuracy,” Bock asserts that the genre of the gospels is a form of ancient Greco-Roman biography known as bios: “[w]hen we think about the Gospels, there sometimes is a debate about the genre of this material. There was a time when this material was considered unique in its literary orientation. However, recently a consensus has emerged that the Gospels are a form of ancient bios” (368). He echoes the thinking of Charles Talbert and British theologian Richard Burridge who popularized this view (Burridge, What Are the Gospels? [Cambridge, 2004] and Talbert, What is a Gospel? [Fortress, 1977]). Yet, this assertion that the gospels being a form of ancient bios is fraught with dangers for historical matters surrounding the Gospels since it can lead readily to de-emphasizing the Gospels as historical documents. For example, this opinion of the gospels as bios has recently created a storm of controversy with Michael Licona’s work, The Resurrection of Jesus, A New Historiographcial Approach (IVP, 2010) where he uses bios as a means of dehistoricizing parts of the Gospel (i.e. Matt 27:51–53 with the resurrection of the saints after Jesus crucifixion). Licona argued “Bioi offered the ancient biographer great flexibility for rearranging material and inventing speeches . . . and they often included legend. Because bios was a flexible genre, it is often difficult to determine where history ends and legend begins” (ibid, 34).

Bock argues, “[i]n ancient biography actions and sayings are the focus of the portrayal. The timing of the events is of less concern than the fact that they happened. Sometimes figures from distinct periods can be juxtaposed in ways that compare how they acted. The model of the figure that explains his greatness and presents him as one worthy of imitation stands at the core of the presentation. The central figure in a bios often is inspiring. The presentation of Jesus in the Gospels fits this general goal . . . This genre background is our starting point” (368).

Operating from this consensus of the gospel as bios, Bock argues that the Olivet Discourse may have an “updated” saying. Comparing the disciples’ question in Mark 13:4 (“Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign when all these things are going to be fulfilled?”) as well as Luke 21:7 (“Teacher, when therefore will these things be? And what will be the sign when these things are about to take place?”) with Matt 24:3 (“Tell us, when will these things be, and what
will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?”). Bock notes, “something is going on between the versions in Mark and Luke in comparison to Matthew.” Bock continues,

Matthew has taken the question as it was in Mark and Luke and has presented what the disciples essentially were asking, even if they did not appreciate all the implications in the question at the time . . . . Whether the disciples say the end is in view or Matthew is drawing that out as inherent in the question asked, the point is that Matthew has made the focus of the question clearer than the more ambiguous way it is asked in Mark and Luke” (372).

Bock asserts that “Matthew may actually be giving us the more precise force and point of the question, now paraphrased in light of a fuller understanding of what Jesus’s career was to look like.”

Apparently, Bock allows for the possibility that the disciples may not have asked the question as is set forth in Matt 24:3 but that Matthew updated the question by adding this comment to the lips of the disciples regarding the end of the age: “Matthew has simply updated the force of the question, introducing the idea of the end [of the age] as the topic Jesus implied by his remark about the temple” (ibid). One is left wondering with Bock’s postulation whether the disciples actually asked the question as Matthew presented (“end of the age”) or did Matthew add words to their lips that they did not say? Bock’s approach here is essentially a subtle form of dehistoricizing the Gospels at this point. Equally plausible, however, is that the disciples did ask the question in the way in which Matthew phrased it and that a harmonization of the passage could be postulated that would not require such creative invention on the part of Matthew.

In answering the question, Do Historical Matters Matter to Faith?, an alarming trend has been noticed among these evangelicals who pursue such a *modus operandi* based in historical-critical ideologies as delineated above. A subtle, and at times, not so subtle dehistoricization of the Gospels is taking place. Such an evangelical trend dangerously impacts the ICBI statements forged in 1978 (Inerrancy) and 1982 (Hermeneutics) for views of the inerrancy and interpretation of the Gospels as well as the entire OT and NT. While these evangelicals involved are to be commended for their assertion that they affirm a belief in inerrancy, their practice seems to be at odds with such an assertion. This question of historical matters mattering would seem to need a negative answer in many instances. Because these evangelicals have a problematic view of the historical basis of the Gospels, many of them have joined together in the pursuit of what is termed “searching for the ‘historical Jesus,’” which is based in a philosophically driven postmodernistic historiography.
A volume that begins with a chapter entitled “The Nature and Scope of Scripture” and concludes with one on “Unity and Diversity in the New Testament” is a unique NT Introduction. The Cradle, the Cross, and the Crown is a NT introduction, NT survey, and NT theology all in one book. Charles Quarles of Louisiana College in Pineville, Louisiana joined with Andreas Köstenberger and L. Scott Kellum of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, North Carolina in authoring this work.

This work is addressed to “the serious student of the NT” (xiv). It is written within a definite framework of NT (even whole Bible) theology. The authors write, “We advocate a holistic reading of the NT, and of the entire body of Scripture, along the lines of a salvation historical framework that traces the story of God’s progressive revelation and provision of redemption in the promised Messiah and Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ” (xiv). The first two chapters lay a foundation for the ensuing examination of the NT by discussing two topics usually neglected in NT Introductions. The first chapter deals with “The Nature and Scope of Scripture” (2–57). Here, the formation of the NT canon, its inspiration, inerrancy, preservation, and transmission, along with issues pertaining to the translation of the Scripture are discussed. The authors point out, “Unfortunately, this kind of doctrinal instruction is increasingly neglected in many publications on the topic [NT Introduction] in our day” (xiv). They add, “But we judge it absolutely vital because only by understanding Scripture as divine revelation, in keeping with its own claim, will we be able to pursue our study all the way to its intended goal: the application of the ‘word of truth’ to our personal lives and our relationships with others” (xiv). The second chapter, “The Political and Religious Background of the NT” (58–99), is vital because the authors have discovered that today’s students are not adequately prepared for entering the world of the NT since they lack a basic understanding of the historical context of the NT (xv). This, too, is a topic usually missing from other NT introductions.

Once the foundation has been laid, the authors proceed to analyze each NT book using a pattern that is called a “hermeneutical triad” in Invitation to Biblical Interpretation by Köstenberger and Patterson (see MSJ 23, No. 1 [Spring, 2012]: 146–48). This threefold presentation includes: “(1) history (including a book’s authorship, date, provenance, destination, etc.); (2) literature (genre, literary plan, outline, unit-by-unit discussion); and (3) theology (theological themes, contribution to the canon)” (xv). These three discussions have traditionally been divided into three different but overlapping NT textbooks, (1) NT introductions (for example, conservative works by Zahn, Guthrie, or Carson & Moo, and critical works by Kummel, or Brown); (2) NT surveys (for example, the texts by Tenney, Gromacki, Gundry, or Elwell & Yarbrough); and (3) NT theologies (for example, the volumes by Ladd, Marshall, Theilman, or Schreiner). Chapters four to eight and ten through
twenty proceed through the NT books corpus by corpus. Chapter three is devoted to “Jesus and the Relationship between the Gospels” and chapter nine to “Paul: the Man and His Message.”

The authors list six distinctive features that they aimed for in writing this text:

1. *User-friendly.* This has been achieved by introducing each chapter with a listing of Basic (for beginning students), Intermediate (for seminary students), and Advanced (for particularly motivated academic students) Knowledge that should be gained and Study Questions and Resources for Further Study at the conclusion of each chapter. An extensive glossary of terms is found at the back of the volume (897–928).

2. *Comprehensive.* The volume covers the entire NT corpus.

3. *Conservative.* The writers have defended the biblical ascriptions of authorship, destination, and dating. For a fuller overview of the positions taken in this work, see the review in *JETS*, 55, No. 2 (June 2012): 414–17.

4. *Balanced.* Each NT book has been developed according to its historical, literary, and theological context.

5. *Up-to-date.* The discussions interact with both older and more recent scholarship.

6. *Spiritually nurturing and application oriented.* Both the style of writing and the Something to Think About sidebars have been utilized to achieve this aim.

In the main, the authors have fulfilled each distinctive in their work.

*The Cradle, the Crown, and the Cross* should be in every preacher’s library. Along with multiple readings of the NT text itself, this book should be the expositor’s first port of entry before sailing out into the more detailed surveys, introductions, theologies, and commentaries of the NT as he embarks on the preaching of a NT book.


Reviewed by Jonathan Moorhead, Samara Center for Biblical Training (Samara, Russia).

Michael J. McClymond and Gerald R. McDermott are two of the world’s leading scholars on Jonathan Edwards. McClymond is Associate Professor of Theological Studies at Saint Louis University, and McDermott is Jordan-Trexler Professor of Religion at Roanoke College. They have both written extensively on Edwards, and are qualified to write such a groundbreaking work. Although Yale is partnering with the William Eerdmans Publishing Company to produce an encyclopedia on Jonathan Edwards, comprising of 450 entries, *The Theology of*
Jonathan Edwards is the most comprehensive treatment of Edwards’s theology currently available in one volume.

The book is comprised of three parts: (1) “Introduction: Historical, Cultural, and Social Contexts;” (2) “Topics in Edwards’s Theology” (with sections on “Methods and Strategies;” “The Triune God, the Angels, and Heaven;” “Theological Anthropology and Divine Grace;” and “Church, Ethics, Eschatology, and Society”); and (3) “Legacies and Affinities: Edwards’s Disciples and Interpreters.” Throughout the work, the authors identify five driving forces behind the theology of Edwards: trinitarian communication, creaturely participation, necessitarian dispositionalism, divine priority, and harmonious constitutionalism (4–6). Behind these five constituent forces lie two of his chief intellectual strategies: (1) “concatenation,” or the search for the interconnectedness of metaphysics, and (2) “subsumption,” in which Edwards’s theology trickled down into all other aspects of theology (11–12).

Taken as a whole, The Theology of Jonathan Edwards is a significant contribution to Edwardsian studies. Whereas detailed treatments of his works have been isolated to disparate books, articles, and introductions to the Yale editions of the Works of Jonathan Edwards, this volume contains a detailed treatment of all the significant areas of Edwards’s thought. It also takes advantage of Yale University Press’ 73-volume edition of the Works of Jonathan Edwards.

Of particular interest is how the authors discuss Edwards in relation to the history of Catholic and Orthodox thought. Comparing Edwards’ writings on the sacraments and justification to Catholicism, or his thought on divinization with that of the Eastern tradition is thought provoking. However, herein lies a point of caution concerning the book. By imposing these concepts onto Edwards, the reader could interpret Edwards as promoting that which he categorically denied. For example, Edwards was a champion of the doctrine of justification by faith alone, which was the subject of his Quaestio, his first published treatise, and the impetus of the initial phase of the First Great Awakening. Yet, Edwards’s stress on works and perseverance as the great sign of regeneration cause the authors to assert, “Edwards seems to have rejected or significantly qualified sola fide . . . .” and instead maintained “‘conditions’ for salvation that were analogous to Catholic views on ‘merit’” (696; cf. 81–82; 392–404; and 722). While Edwards’s use of words such as “condition” and “infusion” are understandable with definition in a Protestant context, the authors chose to push for Edwards being a bridge to Catholicism by employing a questionable semantic strategy. A similar course was used for interpreting Edwards’s compatibility with the Orthodox view of “divinization.” Although the authors note that Edwards never used the term, and likely never read authors espousing the unique qualities of divinization in the Eastern paradigm, they justify Edwards as a bridge to Orthodoxy (albeit under the guise of early modern Neoplatonism; 413, 423). One may imagine that suggesting Edwards was a bridge to Arminianism would be just as palatable to him as that of Catholicism or Eastern Orthodoxy.

Edwards, as a bridge to the Pentecostal/Charismatic movements, was also discussed, with the conclusion that Edwards “would likely have found much to affirm in this global [Pentecostal-Charismatic] movement, as well as much to
criticize” (725). Considering the theological basis upon which Edwards evaluated such movements (cf. *Distinguishing Marks and Religious Affections*), it is difficult to imagine him responding to these movements with anything but displeasure.

The authors push the limits of Edwards’s thought by affirming his openness to world religions and comparing his thought to Neo-Orthodox and Liberal authors such as Karl Barth and Friedrich Schleiermacher. The authors write, “Edwards’s writings are a challenge for contemporary Christian thinkers to reexamine non-Christian religions and to do so without the presumption that this line of inquiry requires them to abandon Christian truth claims or affirmations of Christianity’s distinctiveness” (726).

While a majority of the book is stellar in its representation of Edwards’s thought, the reader discovers the constituent factors behind the authors’ narrative of Edwards’s writings by making him a theological bridge to other belief systems. For example, the book concludes with the following scenario: “Imagine a Christian dialogue today that included adherents of ancient churches—Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Coptic—with various modern church bodies—Lutheran, Anglican, Methodist, Disciples of Christ—as well as an ample representation from the newer evangelical and Pentecostal-Charismatic congregations from around the world. If one had to choose one modern thinker, and only one, to function as a point of reference for theological interchange and dialogue, then who might one choose? Our answer should be clear” (728). If one understands Edwards’s Puritan heritage, and reads extensively from his theological treatises, Miscellanies, letters and sermons, this claim is difficult to accept. In short, this is a reinvention of Edwards. One must consider the authors’ own warning, “Studies of Edwards thus reveal as much or more about the interpreter as they do about the interpreted” (720).

Despite the above listed shortcomings, the 45 chapters of this volume provide the reader with a wealth of information on the staples of Edwards’s theology, such as theocentrism, divine beauty, the sovereignty of God and the nature of revival. Being the most comprehensive, in-depth, one-volume work on Jonathan Edwards’s theology, it is essential reading for any serious student of Edwards (notwithstanding its size and cost). It is not for the uninitiated, however, as it contains the intricate depths of Edwards’s theology and philosophy.


Reviewed by William D. Barrick, Professor of Old Testament.

McNamara previously published *The Psalms in the Early Irish Church*, Library Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies (T & T Clark, 2000), which contains eight studies on the Latin biblical texts of the Psalter and Irish commentaries on the Psalms from A.D. 600 onward. He is professor emeritus of Sacred Scripture at Milltown Institute of Theology in Dublin, Ireland. The first edition of *Targum and Testament* appeared in 1972. Significant developments in the field of targums and Aramaic produced a need for a re-examination of the topics previously published.
The introductory chapter provides a historical overview of scholarly research on the Targums from the thirteenth through twenty-first centuries (1–16). McNamara observes that scholars are pretty much agreed that the New Testament (NT) writers were not dependent on the Targums, but provides an equal witness to early Jewish traditions (10). One of the purposes of the current volume remains an examination of potential relationships between the Targums and the NT (16).

Chapter 1 (“Ancient Jewish Writings,” 17–38) presents an introduction to rabbinic literature. McNamara closes the chapter with a brief comparison of a few Gospel texts (Mark 7:1–13 and 2:23–28, respectively) with the rabbinic tradition (35–38). Following this first chapter, Part One of the volume looks at the “Formation of Targumic Tradition” (39–138), while Part Two delves into the main purpose of the volume (“The Palestinian Targum and New Testament Studies,” 139–252).

McNamara views the Targums and rabbinic writings as elements of oral law (41). Since the Targums depend upon a biblical text as their foundation, the integrity of the biblical text takes on a significant role. The author states that the Masoretic Text and the biblical texts from the region of the Dead Sea prove to be virtually identical (51), even though three different types of textual traditions appear to have existed (52). In McNamara’s opinion, scribes originally wrote glosses in the margins, which have somehow become part of the biblical text itself (55–58). Furthermore, Jewish updating of the biblical text during the post-exilic period reveals a Judaic tradition of interpreting the biblical text (58–62). Such updating appears, in McNamara’s opinion, to be mainly the effects of rabbinic Judaism. If this is accurate, current evangelical views of textual updating run a risk of following the practice and results of unbelieving rabbinic scholars.

The synagogue acted as the center of Jewish life, scholarship, and worship. It became, then, the primary force in the development of the rabbinic and targumic traditions. After his brief discussion of the role of the synagogue (63–84), McNamara spends several chapters describing the history of the various dialects of Aramaic (85–138). The early church in Jerusalem appears to have been bilingual (speaking either Aramaic or Hebrew as well as Greek), which probably resulted in the transmission of teachings in one or more of these languages (91–92). A careful analysis of the early written Targums demonstrates that, in the main, both the Aramaic Targums and the Syriac Peshitta depended on Jewish interpretative traditions, not on each other (100).

Targumic paraphrases adhered closely to the biblical text, paying attention to the details of the Hebrew (103–4). The attempts to bring out the full meaning of the Hebrew text resulted in the provision of multiple meanings for Hebrew words, an examination of *gematria*, employment of double translation (doublets), development of stylistic translations of key phrases, and rendering one biblical text in the light of other texts in associative or complementary translation (105–7). An additional characteristic of the targumic translation involves a concern that even the unlearned might understand the text. In order to facilitate such understanding, the targumists explain difficulties and contradictions, inculcate a reverential way of speaking about God, pursue a respectful attitude toward the elders of Israel, provide
a homiletic approach to the text, and insert updated terms (107–19). Two chapters regarding the Palestinian Targum round out Part One (120–38).

In Part Two McNamara demonstrates that the characteristics observed in the targumic traditions of the post-exilic rabbis find equivalent translational and interpretive techniques in the NT. Their common traditions provide illumination for numerous NT texts. The author first discusses the reverential manner in which both Targums and NT speak of God (141–45). Next, McNamara examines the way that the Targums and the NT describe creation as the act of the divine Word (Aramaic Memra and the Greek Logos; 146–66). Even the NT doctrine of the Holy Spirit finds a counterpart in post-exilic Judaism (167–76). Coming to the First Person of the Trinity, McNamara discusses the Gospel use of “Father in heaven” and its ties to the Palestinian Targums and rabbinic Judaism (177–86). The volume continues with chapters on “Sin and Virtue” (187–99) and “Eschatology” (200–12). After dealing with the topic of “The Targums and Johannine Literature” (213–27), Chapter 16 looks at “Other Passages and Concluding Remarks” (228–52).

An appendix provides readers with a helpful, descriptive survey of all extant Targums (253–83). Chapter 18 presents a geographical gazette of names in the Palestinian Targum of the Pentateuch (284–309). Chapters 19 and 20 supply introductions to the “Targum of the Prophets” (310–15) and “Targums of the Hagiographa” (316–29). Practical indexes close the volume (332–59), making it a handy reference source for further study.


Reviewed by Keith Essex, Assistant Professor of Bible Exposition.

The Pillar New Testament Commentaries, under the editorship of D. A. Carson, continue to produce excellent commentaries for “serious pastors and teachers of the Bible,” seeking “above all to make clear the text of Scripture as we have it” (xix). This work by David G. Peterson on the book of Acts is a superb addition to the series. The author writes of the genesis of this work:

My most recent journey with Acts has lasted more than fifteen years. After teaching the book to a generation of theological students in Sydney, I was encouraged by the editor of this series to begin work on a commentary. Coincidentally, I was invited to contribute to the first volume of The Book of Acts in Its First Century Setting (1993–96). In a rewarding partnership with Howard Marshall, I then became the editor of a book of essays of the theology of Acts, entitled Witness to the Gospel (1998). Working with Howard and the gifted contributors to that volume forced me to think in new ways about Luke’s theological method and intentions. The writing of the commentary slowed down as I engaged in these tasks, though inevitably the whole project was enriched by such opportunities for scholarly encounter (xvi).
In 1996, Peterson left Australia to become Principal of Oak Hill Theological College in London. After eleven years in England, he returned to Sydney where he now serves as senior research fellow in NT at Moore Theological College.

With such a rich heritage in Acts studies, the reader comes to Peterson’s commentary with high expectations, and those expectations are richly met. There are five strengths to this work. First, the introduction presents a good overview of the contemporary discussion concerning the authorship, dating, genre, historical reliability, structure, purpose, literary techniques, and textual matters of the book (1–52). Second, there is an extensive essay on the theology of Acts (53–97). The theological topics covered are God and His Plan, Jesus as Messiah and Lord, the Holy Spirit, Salvation, the Gospel, the Atoning Work of Jesus, Witness and Mission, Miracles, Magic and the Demonic, and the Church. The author notes that this “is not a comprehensive approach, since certain themes are not explored. There is limited interaction with alternate views and no examination of theories about the evolution of Luke’s theology” (54). Throughout the exposition proper, Peterson cross-references his discussion to the theological essay by means of footnotes. Third, the commentary on the text of Acts is clear, detailed, and well documented (99–725). Peterson balances well his literary, historical, and exegetical material. Variant interpretations are sometimes discussed in the main text, at other times in footnotes. Fourth, many previous works on Acts are referenced in the footnotes. One benefit for preachers is the many salient quotes gleaned by Peterson from these sources. Fifth, the volume concludes with extensive indexes on subjects, authors, scripture references, and extrabiblical literature cited in the work (726–90).

The one major drawback of this commentary for many readers of this journal is the fulfillment of the promises to Israel in the Church perspective (supersessionism) from which Peterson interprets Acts. He quotes with approval P. E. Satterwaite who suggested that Luke’s aim in Acts was to show, “that Jesus and the church he founded were God’s fulfillment of his promises to Israel, thereby assuring both Jewish and Gentile believers of the reliability of the message they have heard, and of God’s faithfulness” (53). While Peterson parts company with those interpreters who see the disciples’ question concerning the restoration of the kingdom to Israel (Acts 1:6) to be misguided because Jesus did not deny their expectation (1:7), he asserts that the restoration of Israel to which Jesus referred began in Acts 2 on the Day of Pentecost (109-10). He entitles Acts 2:1–40 as “The Restoration of Israel Begins” in his outline (129). The blessings offered in 3:19–12 “are the definitive forgiveness of sins, spiritual refreshment through the Holy Spirit, and ultimately a share in the restoration of all things. These blessings are made possible by the suffering, heavenly exaltation, and return of Messiah Jesus” (183). Michael J. Vlach gives a description and biblical critique of supersessionism in “Various Forms of Replacement Theology,” MSJ 20, No. 1 (Spring 2009): 57–69. Stanley F. Toussaint, “Acts” in The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983), 349–432, states a dispensational understanding of Israel in the early chapters of Acts. These resources will give the reader discernment in the reading of Peterson on this topic.
Despite these concerns, Peterson’s *The Acts of the Apostles* is an excellent commentary on the book of Acts. All expositors of Acts should make use of this valuable resource.


Reviewed by William D. Barrick, Professor of Old Testament.


For this volume, the author depends heavily upon the seminal *Grammar of Biblical Aramaic* by Franz Rosenthal (Harrassowitz, 2006). He intends this grammar for use in the classroom. The opening section (“What Is ‘Biblical Aramaic’?”) provides the student with a good, concise description of the history and role of biblical Aramaic (1–2). As Schuele points out, the Masoretes actually spoke Aramaic, so they most likely vocalized biblical Aramaic with the pronunciation of their time (10). Throughout the grammatical sections, Schuele identifies similarities and dissimilarities between biblical Hebrew and biblical Aramaic, assuming, as most Aramaic grammars do, that students have a foundational knowledge of biblical Hebrew.

In his discussion of the Aramaic noun, Schuele instructs readers to parse and translate examples “with the help of a dictionary” (22). However, he does not provide the reader with a recommendation. There are at least a half dozen lexicons available, but they are not co-equal. Students need some direction at this point, so that they obtain and use a practical lexicon. The word lists (84–94) in the closing material of the volume do not cover many of the words employed in the exercises (e.g., seven out of sixteen in Exercise 4 on p. 27). Thankfully, the “Answers to Exercises” (107–19) proves to be at least a partial remedy to this problem.

In his treatment of the jussive (39), Schuele does not vary from the use of “let” for translating these modal verb forms. What the students are not told is that helping verbs like “may,” “could,” “would,” and “might” can also be used to bring out the contextual meaning of the jussive verbs. Controversy dominates the treatment of the verb in Semitic studies. Schuele notes this fact (67) and proceeds to identify verbs primarily by means of aspect theory (the perfect as referring to completed and the imperfect to incomplete action; 68, 70). He rightly reveals the significant role of the participle in biblical Aramaic (68–70), but fails to identify the use of forms of “be” plus the participle as periphrastic participles (merely referring to them as a “combined tense,” 69). One of the strengths of this grammar involves its simple, but helpful, descriptions of various particles and their usages (77–81).
In the back materials for this volume, Schuele provides a handy listing of idiomatic expressions found in Daniel and Ezra (95–97). An appendix introduces students to the Zakkur inscription from the eighth century B.C. by means of a brief description, a transcription, general comments, notes, and translation (98–100). Another appendix contains samples of Aramaic from the Dead Sea scroll finds at Qumran (101–4). A third appendix looks briefly at two sayings from the extrabiblical “Wisdom of Ahiqar” (105–6). Tables of paradigms complete the volume (120–45). These are arranged by verb form and conjugation (e.g., perfect Pe’al). The first set of tables are for the perfect, followed by sets of tables for imperfect, imperative, jussive, participle, and infinitive, respectively. All types of verb patterns are combined together in each respective table—in other words, there are no separate tables for each pattern of weak verb. Such a mixing of patterns can be helpful for comparative purposes, but can also produce confusion and an impression of information overload in tables that could be more effectively presented. Unfortunately, the Aramaic font is too small for comfortable reading anywhere in the entire volume. This also contributes to difficulty in reading the paradigms.

For professors and students, Rosenthal’s volume will most likely remain the grammar of choice, though some might select the more recent Basics of Biblical Aramaic by Miles V. Van Pelt (Zondervan, 2011). The price of Schuele’s grammar ($30.00) may be less than Rosenthal’s ($38.00 or more for new condition) or Van Pelt’s ($44.99), but it lacks appeal due to the font size, the arrangement of verb paradigms, and its sometimes overly brief descriptions. Van Pelt’s volume, in addition to its treatment of grammar, also provides students with an annotated discussion for all of the Biblical Aramaic corpus in Daniel and Ezra, as well as a fairly complete lexical list with basic glosses founded upon Koehler and Baumgartner, eds., Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament (Brill, 1994–2000).


Reviewed by Dennis M. Swanson, Vice President for Library and Educational Assessment.

In the current generation the involvement of women at every level of biblical and theological studies is widely accepted, particularly in academic settings. Apart from limitations on ecclesiastical participation by women (as determined from normative readings of the biblical texts themselves), especially in Catholic and evangelical settings, women currently enjoy the greatest freedom of participation and ability to contribute than at any time in history. Of course, this was not always the case. With a few notable exceptions, women were generally excluded from ecclesiastical, academic, and even popular contributions to biblical interpretation.
The volume under review is a significant contribution, highlighting those notable exceptions and offering biographical/literary introductions to a number of women in church history who contributed to the discipline of biblical interpretation. The editor of this work, Marion Ann Taylor, is Professor of Old Testament at Wycliffe College at the University of Toronto. She correctly notes that the inclusion of the contributions of women in the standard reference works (McKim, *Major Biblical Interpreters* [IVP, 2007] and Bray, *Biblical Interpretation: Past and Present* [IVP, 2000]) is sparse and that, “some exceptional women deserved inclusion in ‘traditional’ histories of the interpretation of the Bible” (2, n9).

In her Introduction (1–22), Taylor details her goals and provides an overview of the purposes of this work. She states,

This volume continues the task of recovering and analyzing the writings of women interpreters of the Bible. It offers scholars and graduate students the challenge mentioned in many entries that the interpretative work of a particular female interpreter has not been fully studied. It provides a resource for those who wanted to include the writings of women in courses on Scripture, theology, history, religious formation, and preaching (3).

The immediate problem the reader is faced with is an exceptionally arcane description of exactly who is, and who is not to be represented in this volume (3–7). She limits the “post-nineteenth-century” women to those who are deceased (5) and, a rather subjective concept, of those whose work was “representative” (ibid). She chose to not include “contemporary biblical scholars” (6) in a sweeping array of important areas of biblical interpretation where women have made notable contributions. For instance, Eta Linnemann (1926–2009) the formidable New Testament and Bultmannian scholar, who at the peak of her career moved to a more evangelical position, is unmentioned. A deeper methodological issue for the work is that Taylor never really defines what she understands a “biblical interpreter” to actually be.

These criticisms aside, her introduction dealing with the history of women interpreters is a helpful contribution. She thoroughly details the specific problems women experienced up through the nineteenth century in relation to acceptance in a male-dominated sphere (although the marginalization of women in biblical and theological studies was often no more or less than other arenas in the academic and professional world). She perhaps makes too much of the often anonymous or pseudonymous works by women, as this was common among male writers as well. Nineteenth-century Plymouth Brethren writers often omitted their names or listed only their initials. Taylor makes reference to women such as Bathsua Makin, who adopted a “male persona” (16–17) for some of her writings. But this also was not an uncommon phenomenon. At a young age Benjamin Franklin adopted the female persona of “Silence Dogood” in order to get published.

The entries are typical for a high quality reference work. They are both signed and often have a useful introductory bibliography. The entries are alphabetically arranged but there is also a helpful chronological listing of the article subjects (557–61). There is a helpful subject index (563–78) and Scripture index (579–85).
One of the strengths of this work is exposing the reader to a host of women interpreters who are largely unknown or to more well-known women whose writings perhaps are not as widely known. As an example, the entry for “Katherine Parr” (393–99), Henry VIII’s sixth wife, is excellently researched and written. Parr’s written works, including her English translation of Thomas a’ Kempis’ *De imitatione Christi*, offers a fascinating study of her transition from Catholicism to Protestantism, which paralleled England in the Reformation. The entry for “Anne Hutchinson” (277–79), provides useful perspective, especially related to her importance in the Antinomian controversies in Puritan America.

Other strong articles are “Christina Georgina Rossetti” (425–29); the staunch defender of Martin Luther, “Argula von Grumbach” (221–23); “Jane T. Stoddart” (477–82); and an excellent article on “Harriet Beecher Stowe” (482–87) are also significant contributions. The article on “Antoinette Louisa Brown Blackwell” (79–82), which details her writing the seminal articles on the exegesis of 1 Cor 14:34–35 and 1 Tim 2:11–12, published in the *Oberlin Quarterly Review* in 1849 (which serve as foundational works in the modern evangelical egalitarian movement) is also excellent.

The overall quality and style of the articles cover a wide spectrum. Occasionally, articles suffer from zealoussness on the part of the contributor that makes their entry read more like a press release. The entry for “Dorothy L. Sayers” (434–36), while highly informative, perhaps is the most glaring example of that tendency. On the opposite end, some articles, while also informative, are tediously detailed, bordering on pedantic (e.g. “Kathleen M. Kenyon,” 306–10). A stronger editorial hand would not have been remiss in more than a few articles.

Sometimes the entries are simply mystifying. For instance in the entry for “Jane Anger” (39–40), the contributor acknowledges that “it might be stretching a point to say ‘Jane Anger’ was a significant interpreter of the Bible” (39). That seems to be an understatement. There is only one work extant and outside a few biblical allusions and indirect references to Scripture, there isn’t anything to suggest any contribution to biblical interpretation or that Anger was even attempting to present an argument based on Scripture.

As a work of reference this volume is certainly a significant contribution. The collection of references and bibliographic detail on obscure or otherwise unknown women who influenced Christianity and the larger culture admirably fulfills the stated purpose to encourage future study on women biblical interpreters.


Reviewed by William D. Barrick, Professor of Old Testament.

Kregel’s Handbooks for Old Testament Exegesis, edited by David M. Howard, Jr., continue to focus on the presentation of principles for understanding the variety of genres and strategies for preaching and teaching such text types (15). A review

This volume’s six chapters deal with “The Genres of the Pentateuch” (25–60), “Major Themes of the Pentateuch” (61–91), “Getting Started” (93–127, focusing on preliminary aspects of interpretation), “Interpreting the Pentateuch” (129–55), “Communicating the Genres of the Pentateuch” (157–78), and “Putting It All Together” (179–209). The end material consists only of a “Glossary” (211–14). The series, though intended for the use of seminarians and pastors, still refuses to include indexes for the retrieval of information. This lack of indexing makes the series impractical for classroom use unless readers can obtain the series in digital format, which has not yet been made available.

The first chapter discusses the genres of law and narrative alone, ignoring the portions of the Pentateuch that are poetry (e.g., Gen 49, Exod 15, Num 23:7–10, 18–24; 24:3–9, 15–24; Deut 32–33). The Pentateuch contains additional poetic text units besides those major portions (e.g., Gen 2:23; 3:14–16; Num 12:6–8; 21:14–15, 17–18, 27–30). Vogt recognizes the existence of poetry in the Pentateuch as well as genealogies, but does not provide guidance for these genres (25). Although the treatment of historical approaches to the interpretation of law makes interesting reading (32–42), the same space could be more profitable to seminarians by discussing the role of poetry and songs in the Pentateuch and giving guidelines as to how to interpret those major contributions to that corpus. Vogt’s treatment of the genre of law touches upon some significant topics that readers will find quite valuable. For example, he argues against the usual division of the law into three categories (civil, ceremonial, and moral; 43–44). His paradigmatic approach looks at how the law functioned as Israel’s witness to the nations concerning a proper relationship to God (45). The discussion of narrative and its features presents a straightforward and normal introduction that can be found elsewhere in greater detail (as he himself notes; 48, n61).

In his chapter on major themes, Vogt assumes that the primary purpose of the creation account relates to a vigorous polemic against the ancient Near Eastern understanding of origins (62). By taking this approach, he minimizes the revelatory significance of the account in Genesis 1–2. While Vogt correctly focuses on a theocentric theme in the creation account, he undermines divine authority by treating the text of the creation account as merely a vehicle of theology rather than of history. By interpreting Gen 3:8 as “the cool of the day” (72), the author’s own interpretative methodology manifests its flaws in a failure to pay attention to detail. In an unfallen, pre-flood world the “wind of the day” (a literal translation of the Hebrew) could be very different than in a post-flood world. It could have been a warm wind. The point is that “the cool of the day” is an imposition of a later environment on the reading of the text. Besides the themes of the sovereignty and supremacy of Yahweh (62–71) and the seriousness of sin (71–79), Vogt provides a
significant contribution regarding the grace of Yahweh in the Pentateuch (79–85). Finally, he examines the metanarrative, which correlates the other themes into the concept of a “restoration project” (85–91), which returns to his paradigmatic approach to the interpretation of law.

Textual criticism (93–99), comparative analysis of ancient Near Eastern materials (99–117), and a recommended bibliography of source materials (117–27) occupy the third chapter. Vogt seems to have an overly-ready willingness to abandon the Masoretic Text in favor of other versions (esp., 94). One would need to examine more than just the two examples he provides in order to determine exactly how ready he is to replace the traditional Hebrew text. Similarities between ancient Near Eastern parallels and the biblical text “can be vastly over-stated” (112, emphasis Vogt’s). Vogt rightly warns readers of making too much of the similarities and too little of the obvious dissimilarities. However, his discussion falls short of fully and clearly answering his own questions: “Should we conclude that the biblical texts simply have adopted the ancient Near Eastern texts and modified them slightly to fit ancient Israelite sensibilities? Or is there another possibility?” (112). John N. Oswalt, The Bible Among the Myths: Unique Revelation or Just Ancient Literature? (Zondervan, 2009) offers a much clearer and more straightforward understanding of this matter—see the review in this journal’s Spring 2010 issue (21, No. 1: 125–27). Unfortunately, Vogt does not even mention Oswalt’s volume.

When Vogt moves on to the specifics for interpreting the Pentateuch, he reveals a bit more of his own set of assumptions. For example, he holds to an essentially Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch, while allowing for later textual insertions and updating (134–36). This reviewer finds the examples of insertions and updating unconvincing and lacking adequate explanation. They appear to be but one more example of inadequate exegetical analysis of particular texts like Num 12:3 (134). The guidelines Vogt presents for interpreting both law (136–46) and narrative (146–55) explain his methodology well. These thirty pages act merely as preparation for the final chapter of the volume, which interprets Lev 19:28 as the sample legal text (179–94) and Genesis 39 as the sample narrative text (194–209). Readers would benefit from the addition of a sample treatment of a crux like Num 12:3 or Genesis 1, but such texts might unveil some of the apparent weaknesses in Vogt’s methodology.

How can the teacher or preacher best communicate the genres of Pentateuchal law and history, so that his hearers rightly understand the biblical text? Vogt offers some well-worded advice in the fifth chapter prefaced by an analysis of the normal mindset of the modern reader to the Old Testament and the Pentateuch (158–64).

Overall, this reviewer remains unimpressed and dissatisfied with the Handbooks for Old Testament Exegesis series. In seeking to be broadly evangelical, they avoid key issues and give too much credence to marginal issues. The volumes remain virtually unusable for the seminary courses in exegesis due to the lack of indexes to provide students with the ability to search for specific texts and issues. Vogt’s most valuable contribution consists of his paradigmatic approach to law and its illustration. But, is that alone worth the price of a book, which discourages readers from repeated use as a handy reference volume?

Reviewed by Kelly T. Osborne, Associate Professor of New Testament.

Since the publication of his *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Zondervan, 1996), Daniel B. Wallace (hereafter DW), has become a household, or perhaps a “seminary-hold,” name to a whole generation of theological students. He is professor of New Testament at Dallas Theological Seminary, as well as the director of the Center for the Study of New Testament Manuscripts.

In *Revisiting the Corruption of the New Testament: Manuscript, Patristic and Apocryphal Evidence* (*RCN*), DW brings his expertise in textual criticism to bear both as editor of the book and a new series entitled Text and Canon of the New Testament, for which this is the inaugural volume. The series and its first entry (*RCN*) are meant to tackle such questions as, “[C]an we recover . . . through rigorous analysis of surviving manuscripts and scribal methods, what [the autographic text of the NT] . . . looked like?” and “[S]hould these twenty-seven [NT] books be treated with more authority than the myriad of [non-canonical] books written by Christians in the early centuries after the death and resurrection of Jesus?” (13). In other words, what is the precise wording of the NT writings, and are Christians right to regard them as authoritative for belief and practice? Although most Bible-believing Christians of any era would, I suspect, almost instinctively affirm the authority of the NT writings, these same believers could be somewhat less sure of their exact wording in every detail. An example of a NT textual variation, which might give many faithful pause as to which reading is correct based on the evidence we currently possess, is the Gospel of Mark and whether it should end at 16:8 or 16:20? Thus, the book and series have the laudable goal of providing their readers with evidentiary support for the authority and accuracy of Christianity’s “founding documents.”

Lest anyone regard this as an exercise in proving the obvious, it must be pointed out that in just the last decade the reception of such runaway bestsellers as Dan Brown’s *The Da Vinci Code* (Doubleday, 2003) and Bart Ehrman’s *Misquoting Jesus: The Story Behind Who Changed the Bible and Why* (HarperCollins, 2005) has revealed a growing interest of the general reading public in claims that the NT documents are neither unique nor authoritative, so challenging what most Bible-believing Christians accept as both clear and settled. To this historical revisionism and its widespread effects, various evangelical authors, such as Ben Witherington, Craig Evans and Timothy Jones, have not been slow to offer reasoned answers accessible to the general reader.¹

RCN, however, was designed for a more scholarly readership than the books just mentioned and specifically interacts with Ehrman’s *The Orthodox Corruption of Scripture* (Oxford, 1993), the book upon which his *Misquoting Jesus* relied heavily. In order to formulate a reasoned reply to Ehrman’s work, especially *Orthodox Corruption*, DW has enlisted the help of five of his former students.


DW’s chapter, “Lost in Transmission: How Badly Did the Scribes Corrupt the New Testament Text?” expands the discussion featured in “The Textual Reliability of the New Testament: A Dialogue” published earlier by Fortress Press. He gives the reader the “big picture” of what is happening in the field of NT textual criticism. He observes that Ehrman has been at the forefront of a group of scholars who attack the NT’s reliability with the claim that its “text is in such bad repair that we must abandon all hope of recovering anything close to the original wording” (19). Nevertheless, DW stakes out common ground with Ehrman, noting their agreement about the large number of variant readings in surviving Greek manuscripts (MSS) of the NT (300,000–400,000), that the vast majority of these do not affect the meaning of the text, that some passages (e.g., Mark 16:9–20, John 7:53–8:11, 1 John 5:7) were not part of the writings as they came from their respective authors, and that later scribes occasionally deliberately changed the NT text (20–21).

The disagreements between DW and Ehrman follow (22–25). After listing their different attitudes, DW responds by posing and answering three questions about “… the number of variants—how many scribal changes are there? … the nature of the variants—what kinds of textual variants are there? …” and “the theological issues … at stake” (26). What do such large numbers of variants actually mean? After all, statistics can be misleading. A better perspective is gained, DW maintains, by contrasting NT MSS with the MS tradition of classical Greek or Roman authors, because these have only a fraction of the variants found in the NT textual tradition. But this small number occurs mainly because so few MSS of


classical authors’ works survive. In addition, there are numerous MSS extant within 200 years of the writing of the NT, whereas the smallest time gap between any classical author and the first surviving copy of his or her work (complete or fragmentary) is at least 300 years. Indeed the abundance of evidence for the text of the NT is overwhelming (26–30).

The large number of variant readings for the NT also demonstrates openness in the process of textual transmission, which contrasts sharply with that of, for example, the Qur’an. This is significant because Ehrman argues (or at least implies) that only after doctrinal orthodoxy had won the day did the text of the NT become standardized, essentially conforming the text’s wording to the theological positions considered orthodox. DW points out that although this clearly happened with the Qur’an, there is no evidence for such a process in the NT MSS (34–40).

DW then addresses the question of the nature of the variants in the NT MSS. The answer is clear. Only a tiny number of variants are what he terms “both meaningful and viable,” and certainly far less than the impression created by Ehrman (40–43). The third question is the kind of theological issue involved in those places in the NT MSS where orthodox scribes (or those directing them) have introduced “major changes” into the text, including specifically Matt 24:36. Here the words οὐδὲ τὸν υἱόν (“nor the Son”) are absent from some MSS. Does this indicate that orthodox scribes omitted them so as to strengthen the case for Jesus’ deity? Ehrman not only argues thus, but also that this omission constitutes the most damning evidence in his case against the reliability of the NT text. DW goes on to show, however, that Ehrman’s skepticism is unwarranted and that there are other just as good or even better explanations for the absence of these words (43–49).

DW concludes his chapter with three reasons for the “essential reliability” of the NT text in the Greek MSS. First, since Matthew’s and Luke’s literary dependence on Mark shows only modest changes from the latter’s text, it follows that scribes tasked with “merely” copying the text of Mark (or any part of the NT) would have been even more careful to reproduce accurately what they read. Second, different NT MSS give evidence of both careless and careful copying, which argues against any conspiracy by misguided believers to change the text of the NT in favor of readings that were more Christologically orthodox. Finally, more influential in textual changes was the scribal tendency of harmonizing Gospel accounts, mostly in places whose wording has little or nothing to do with orthodox doctrine (49–55). The overall result is that, according to DW, we can have complete confidence in the reliability of over 99 percent of the text of the NT (43).

In chapter 2 (57–89), Philip Miller asks whether Bart Ehrman has added another canon of criticism to textual-critical methodology, namely, “the least orthodox reading is to be preferred” (58; italics original). He reviews Patristic evidence and the modern era of textual-critical scholarship, observing a general recognition in both periods that orthodox scribes occasionally altered texts for theological reasons and noting that Ehrman’s contributions have taken “the ‘canon of unorthodoxy’… to a new level” (59–67). From Ehrman’s own writings Miller shows how he applies the canon to Christologically significant texts in Matthew (24:36), John (1:18), Hebrews (2:9) and a number of other passages (67–84). In the end, Miller argues,
Ehrman’s conclusions extend beyond the evidence and may have distorted his perspective of the textual transmission. In addition, the canon of unorthodoxy itself appears to be inadequate due to the lack of evidence supporting it and the distorting force it appears to apply to textual analysis. We can conclude that the least orthodox reading, by itself, is not a viable canon for determining the preferred reading of the NT text (88–89).

By contrast to the breadth of Miller’s work, Matthew Morgan’s chapter (91–126) focuses on only one part of one verse (John 1.1c) by investigating whether its text should, with the eighth-century codices Regius (L, 019) and Freerianus (W⁵, 032-S), insert the Greek (definite) article before θεός (καὶ ὁ θεός ἦν ὁ λόγος, “the Word was the God”), or rather omit it, as all of the remaining NT Greek MS tradition testifies (καὶ θεός ἦν ὁ λόγος, “the Word was God”; 91–95). The first option, read by L and W⁵, supports Sabellianism (Modalism, or, modalistic Monarchianism, the heresy that the persons of the Godhead have “no independent subsistence” as individual persons, but are only differentiated by “three operations”), and if traceable to earlier MS testimonia could be evidence that L and W⁵ retain the original reading of John 1:1. The second option is found in all other Greek MSS and supports the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity (92–102). Morgan then examines in detail the scribal activity in these two codices, in addition to considering the “grammatical viability” of the unique reading of L and W⁵ to see whether there are legitimate signs of a concerted orthodox effort to eliminate from the text of the NT a heretical doctrine which could claim to be more original than the orthodox reading (102–23). His conclusion? L and W⁵ include the extra article because of careless scribal tendencies, not because all other MSS have been conspiratorially conformed to orthodox doctrine (123–24).

Adam Messer evaluates Bart Ehrman’s text-critical methodology in chapter 4 (127–88) by an in-depth investigation of whether or not the words οὐδὲ ὁ θιάος (“nor the Son”) belong to the original text of Matt 24:36. Ehrman claims that they were indeed original (καὶ ὁ θιάος ἦν ἡ ἡμέρα τῶν ἀφελήσεων, etc., according to UBS 4th rev. ed. apparatus), and that later pious scribes, alarmed by the idea of the second person of the Trinity professing ignorance, omitted the phrase (ομιτᾷ Χ L W Δ f 33… Byz [E F G H Σ] Lect, etc.) in a deliberate attempt to conform all texts to orthodox doctrine at the expense of the true original reading of the first Gospel (130–45). Messer then surveys the Church Fathers to see at what point historically the ignorance of the Son seems to have become enough of a difficulty that scribes may have tended to omit the phrase (145–69). The evidence, according to Messer, rather than supporting Ehrman’s conspiracy theory, suggests that the phrase was original in Matthew’s Gospel, but that elsewhere omissions probably occurred as a result of a

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common tendency of later scribes to harmonize to the wording of Mark’s text (169–
79). In his concluding thoughts, Messer notes the disingenuousness of a method
such as Ehrman’s which constantly looks for “orthodox corruption” wherever there
are variant readings in Christologically significant passages (179–82). Two
appendices summarizing the Patristic evidence on Matt 24:36 and outlining how
accidental orthographic corruptions occur bring the chapter to an end (183–88).

Chapter 5 (189–228) has Tim Ricchuiti comparing the three Greek text
fragments of the non-canonical Gospel of Thomas found at Oxyrhynchus in Egypt
(P. Oxy. 1, 654, 655) with the more substantial remains of the Gospel in Coptic,
discovered at Nag Hammadi (NHC II 2.51.32–51). His purpose is to determine,
based on “universally recognized principles of textual criticism” whether the Greek
or Coptic is more likely to represent faithfully the original text and whether scholars
are right to describe the text of Thomas as “fluid,” and furthermore what such
fluidity entails (189–91). He describes the method and limitations of his study as
well as the MS attestation to the Gospel (192–97) before embarking on a line by
line comparison of the Coptic and Greek fragments (198–226). He draws the
conclusion that the Coptic preserves a more original text than P. Oxy. 1 (logia
27–
33), while P. Oxy. 654 and 655 are likely more original as compared with the
parallel logia (“sayings”) in the Coptic MS (226–227). In addition, Ricchuiti
contends, “it does indeed appear that the Coptic scribe altered [the text of] Thomas
in such a way as to make it more amenable to the community that eventually
decided to include it in the Nag Hammadi writings” (228).

Finally, in chapter 6 (229–66), Brian Wright guides the reader through the
seventeen NT passages, which are regarded by the preponderance of scholars as
giving clear evidence that Jesus was explicitly called θεός (“God”). After
eliminating ten of these passages (Rom 9:5, Col 2:2, Matt 1:23, John 17:3, Eph 5:5,
2 Thess 1:12, 1 Tim 3:16, Titus 2:13, 1 John 5:20, and Jude 4), mostly because
there is debate regarding the exegetical understanding of these verses, Wright
continues by evaluating the textual certainty of the remaining seven verses, John
one instance, Wright concludes, it is either certain or extremely probable that the
authors are clearly ascribing deity to Jesus (264–65). A convenient chart
summarizes the results of this study (266).

In general, Bible-believing Christians everywhere owe a debt of gratitude to
RCN’s publisher, editor and authors for the service they have rendered to the
Christian reading public in producing this work. The challenge posed by the lobby
of thoroughly skeptical scholars like Bart Ehrman needs a detailed and articulate
response, if, as a community, evangelical Christians are to be “ready to make a
defense to everyone who asks [them] to give an account for the hope that is in
[them], … with gentleness and reverence” (1 Pet 3:15, NAS95). Not only have the
various authors of RCN vigorously and cogently defended the reliability of 99
percent of the Greek text of the NT even down to the retention or omission of a
single letter (chapters 1 and 3), but they have shown convincingly that, contrary to
the desperate skepticism of a Bart Ehrman, there is no warrant for seeing a vast
orthodox conspiracy cynically expurgating MSS of theologically unacceptable
wording (chapter 2 and 4). In fact, the text of the Gospel of Thomas seems to
suggest just such editorial tendencies for a non-canonical writing (chapter 5). On
the other hand, there is unmistakable evidence that the NT affirms the deity of Christ in numerous places (chapter 6).

A few cautionary notes need to be sounded, however. First, DW and Messer assume the literary connection between the Synoptic Gospels with Markan priority as the best way to explain that relationship (50, 53 and 127). Although this point does not figure prominently throughout his chapter or the rest of RCN, it is a salutary warning that one must read with discernment. Solid reason exists for questioning both the accuracy and usefulness of the Two Document Hypothesis. That DW uses it in his case for the accuracy of scribal transmission of MSS actually weakens his argument, because if Matthew and Luke changed the text of Mark for theological reasons in their writings, does it not at least raise the possibility that later scribes could have thought the same way?

While largely agreeing with the majority of the argumentation and the results of the different authors, this reviewer found several features of the work to be either irritating or badly in need of better editing. Typographical errors appear frequently enough that the publisher needs to give much more thorough attention to it, whether they prepare to publish further volumes in this series or they decide to reprint RCN. For example, page 55, n. 93 should read 94, page 112 second line from the bottom of the text (Neor?), page 170, line 11, read Petersen, page 177, line 16, read “an” for “and,” page 179, n. 185, for “were” read “where,” page 237, last line, the remainder of the word “be-” is not continued on the next page [-havior?]. In addition, italics are lacking twice on page 58, n. 5.

If RCN is meant to be scholarly in nature, then it would surely be necessary to include the full Greek text of the verses which form the context of the variants under discussion. Since this is actually provided on page 256 with Heb 1:8-9, why was it was not done on pages 68 (Matt 24:36), 69 (Mark 13:32), 72 (John 1:18), 77 (Heb. 2:9b), 121 (Rev 18:23), 235 (John 1:1), 241 (John 1:18), 249 (John 20:28) and 254 (Gal 2:20)?

In some places English usage tries one’s patience. It is possible to forego the detailing of such business jargon neologisms as “to reference” and “to source,” but one cannot overlook the last line on page 106, where one should read “lies” for “lays,” a common infelicity these days. Constant use of metaphor becomes distracting, e.g., page 124, where in ten lines one endures “the halls of history,” “uncharted [sic; properly, “uncharted”] territory” and “unsightly myth.” On the matter of clarity, it would be helpful to know what is meant by “diminutive notions of the Son” (144), “politically unfeasible” (160), or whether such a notion as “the modern Christian conception of Christ” even exists (197; do all modern Christians regard Christ in the same way?!).

It is anachronistic to speak of Irenaeus and Hilary writing in France (167; read “Gaul”). Is it too much to ask for definitions of technical terms like Vorlage (112, 240) and Ausgangstexte (229, 236)? Page numbers belong to the cross-references within RCN on pages 54, n. 92 and 238, n. 42. A complete list of the seventeen references in the NT which Brian Wright notes as affirming the deity of Christ

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5 Cf., for example, R. L. Thomas and F. David Farnell, eds., The Jesus Crisis: The Inroads of Historical Criticism into Evangelical Scholarship (Grand Rapids, Kregel, 1998).
would have helped the reader (232), even if he only discusses seven of them. On page 176, the date of the council of Nicea (AD 325) is needed for clarifying the chronology, while it is questionable whether many readers would know without any prompting that it is also the first ecumenical council (231). Is it appropriate to omit documentation when referring to Ehrman’s work “elsewhere” (75, 130–31)? Moreover, a publication of this nature really merits a comprehensive bibliography.

Finally, I find the various dedications to detract from the overall scholarly tone of the book. They become what one might call pro homine arguments, which, like all ad hominem remarks, do not belong in scholarly discourse.

In spite of these criticisms, however, I would urge the readers of this journal to take the time and make the effort to work through the details of RCN. It would be a mistake for anyone to think that the kind of work on textual criticism represented by RCN is irrelevant to the average Christian. Some well-meaning believers might have the attitude of “Why bother with such trivial details in 1,000 (or 1,500) year old manuscripts, since after all, don’t we really all just need to love Jesus?” But how do we know clearly who Jesus is and what He has done, if the NT does not provide a reliable record of Him? And how can we be sure that the NT provides a reliable record if the Greek MSS that have survived cannot be trusted to give us an accurate account of the original eyewitness testimony to this Jesus whom we worship? If we cannot trust the Greek MSS or the testimony that they report, how can we tell whether or not we have followed what the apostle Peter called “cleverly devised tales” (2 Pet 1:16)? In fact the only way to know if we have followed the truth is if we today possess thoroughly trustworthy accounts of who Jesus was (and is) and what He actually did. That is why it is so important for a book like RCN to be published, to be read, and to be understood, not just by a handful of academically-minded scholars, but by as many as possible of those who seek to be faithful followers of our Savior today.
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