

JESUS: A PRETERIST OR A FUTURIST?*

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This essay examines Dr. R. C. Sproul's thesis in The Last Days According to Jesus,¹ that moderate preterism as it relates to Christ's second coming is convincingly proven by three time-indicators in the Gospels² and the writing date for John's Revelation.³ The essay evaluates each of these four time referents historically and/or exegetically in order to determine if Sproul's claims can be biblically substantiated. The three Matthean time-frame references have better alternative interpretations (both before and after A.D. 70) in regard to time of fulfillment than the A.D. 70 date, which preterism requires of all three. Also, the late writing date for Revelation (mid-90s) has the preponderance of evidence on its side; this one conclusion alone invalidates postmillennial preterism. Since these time-indicators that are critically important to the preterist position do not support the system's foundational claim that Christ's parousia occurred within the lifetime of His disciples, this reviewer⁴ concludes that Scripture does not teach preterism, moderate or otherwise, as claimed by Dr. Sproul. Therefore, Jesus was a futurist in regard to biblical prophecies of His second coming.

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¹R. C. Sproul, *The Last Days According to Jesus: When Did Jesus Say He Would Return?* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998).

²Ibid., 24-25. They include Matt 10:23; 16:28; 24:34.

³Ibid., 131-49.

⁴Other reviews of Dr. Sproul's volume include Meredith G. Kline, "Book Review," *Kerux: A Journal of Biblical-Theological Preaching* 14 (1999):52-70; Robert P. Lightner, "Book Reviews," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 155 (1999):242-43; and Mike Stallard, "Review of The Last Days According to Jesus," Pt. 1, *The Conservative Theological Journal* 6 (2002): 55-71 and Pt. 2, 6 (2002):184-202.

The English word “preterist” comes from the Latin term *praeteritus* which basically means “past” in regard to time. Thomas Ice explains that there are three types of preterists/preterism.

It is important to realize that there are three kinds of preterism that I have labeled as (1) mild; (2) moderate; and (3) extreme. Mild preterism holds that the Tribulation was fulfilled within the first three hundred years of Christianity as God judged two enemies: the Jews in A.D. 70 and Rome by A.D. 313; but adherents still look for a future Second Coming. Moderate preterism, which is the position of Dr. Kenneth L. Gentry Jr., sees the Tribulation and the bulk of Bible prophecy as fulfilled in events surrounding the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in A.D. 70; but they still hold to a future Second Coming, a physical resurrection of the dead, an end to temporal history, and the establishing of the consummate new heaven and new earth. Extreme or consistent (as they like to call themselves) preterism believes that the Second Coming, and thus the resurrection of believers, is all past. For all practical purposes all Bible prophecy has been fulfilled, and we are beyond the millennium and even now in the new heaven and new earth. They believe that if there is an end of current history it is not recorded in the Bible.⁵

J. Stuart Russell,⁶ whom Sproul quotes frequently and favorably with regard to time-indicators,⁷ was unquestionably an extreme or radical preterist who believed that the general resurrection of the dead spoken of in the NT occurred before A.D. 70.⁸ With the exception of radical preterists themselves, all other preterists and all conservative non-preterists consider this Hymenaen/Philetean doctrine of extreme preterism (cf. 2 Tim 2:18) to be heretical.⁹ In fairness to Dr. Sproul, it must be pointed out that he rejects radical preterism.¹⁰

⁵Thomas Ice and Kenneth L. Gentry Jr., *The Great Tribulation: Past or Future?* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999) 7. Sproul, *The Last Days* 25, distinguishes between only two kinds—moderate and radical.

⁶J. Stuart Russell, *The Parousia: A Critical Inquiry into the New Testament Doctrine of Our Lord's Second Coming* (London: Daldy, Isbister, 1878; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983, 1999).

⁷Sproul, *The Last Days* 24-25.

⁸*Ibid.*, 159-65. Sproul distances himself from Russell's full preterism.

⁹Ice and Gentry, *The Great Tribulation* 7; John F. MacArthur, *The Second Coming: Signs of Christ's Return and the End of the Age* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1999) 13; Stallard, “A Review” 56-57; Dennis M. Swanson, “Reformation or Retrogression? An Examination of the International Preterist Association's Claims and Methodology” (unpublished paper delivered at the Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society in Toronto, Canada on November 22, 2002) 25.

¹⁰Sproul, *The Last Days* 159, 203: “The great weakness of full preterism—and what I regard to be its fatal flaw—is its treatment of the final resurrection.”

Background

Both Sproul and Russell (plus others of their general persuasion) have proposed that only their preterist understanding of Jesus' statements regarding His parousia being fulfilled in A.D. 70 rescues the Bible from the liberal's charge of "errant" and "unreliable."¹¹ Or, put another way, without the preterist view of NT prophecy being fulfilled in A.D. 70, the Scriptures are proven highly suspect or even guilty of substantial error, especially in matters relating to biblical eschatology.

Referring to the Olivet Discourse in his foreword to the reprint of Russell's book, Sproul states,

Though critics grant that Jesus' prophecy of Jerusalem's destruction was correct, they insist that his predictions at the same time, in the same context, and within the same time-frame reference, of his parousia, were incorrect. This poses a higher problem for those with a high view of Scripture and Jesus. An error in Jesus' forecast of his parousia would be fatal to historic Christianity.¹²

Sproul writes elsewhere,

From the Enlightenment onward, the church has been gripped by a severe crisis regarding the trustworthiness of Scripture.... Due to the crisis in confidence in the truth and authority of Scripture and the subsequent crisis regarding the real historical Jesus, eschatology must come to grips with the tensions of time-frame references in the New Testament.¹³

As I have indicated throughout this book, one of my overarching concerns regarding the points in dispute is the authority of Scripture. As the inerrant Word of God, it precludes all efforts to ignore or downplay any aspect of its teaching. The evangelical world cannot afford to turn a deaf ear to the railing voices of skepticism that gut Scripture of its divine authority, that assault the credibility of the apostolic witness and even of Christ himself. We must take seriously the skeptics' critique of the time-frame references of New Testament prophecy, and we must answer them convincingly.¹⁴

Dr. Sproul strives to answer the objections to biblical prophecy of such critics as Bertrand Russell and Albert Schweitzer.¹⁵ One almost gets the idea that he is bordering on a kind of theodicy in his quest to protect the Scriptures from its unbelieving detractors. He certainly appears to be engaging in a Hal Lindsey-type

¹¹Ibid., 11-26.

¹²Russell, *The Parousia* ix.

¹³Sproul, *The Last Days* 26.

¹⁴Ibid., 203.

¹⁵Ibid., 12-24.

approach to biblical prophecy by reading or placing historical events—e.g., those of A.D. 70—into Scripture just as Lindsey does with contemporary events. To reach sound conclusions in interpretive labor, one must meticulously avoid both critical objections and a Lindsey-type approach.¹⁶

The advocates of preterism appear to have missed, or at least undervalued, Peter’s reminder that in the days prior to A.D. 70 there also were scoffers similar to Russell and Schweitzer. Instead of foretelling the events of A.D. 70, just a few years away, Peter encourages them to wait in faith, believing that all will eventually happen in God’s timing, which is different from man’s timetable (2 Pet 3:3-4, 8-9). Attempting to answer objections from skeptics is no way to validate or elevate a particular eschatological system.

Both J. Stuart Russell and R. C. Sproul have tried to prove preterism to be the correct time-framework for understanding biblical prophecy, which time-frame then becomes the supposed savior of Scripture’s integrity. Russell appeals to three distinct declarations of the Lord respecting the time of His coming (Matt 10:23; 16:28; 24:34). He states, “The plain grammatical meaning of these statements has been fully discussed in these pages. No violence can extort from them any other sense than the obvious and unambiguous one, viz. that our Lord’s second coming would take place within the limits of the existing generation.”¹⁷

Sproul affirms Russell’s assessment:

The central thesis of Russell and indeed of all preterists is that the New Testament’s time-frame references with respect to the parousia point to a fulfillment within the lifetime of at least some of Jesus’ disciples.¹⁸

The purpose of *The Last Days According to Jesus* has been to examine and evaluate the various claims of preterism, both full and partial. The great service preterism performs is to focus attention on two major issues. The first is the time-frame references of the New Testament regarding eschatological prophecy. The preterist is a sentinel standing guard against frivolous and superficial attempts to downplay or explain away the force of these references.¹⁹

J. Stuart Russell argues that 99 persons in every 100 would immediately understand Jesus to mean that the events he was predicting would fall within the limits of the lifetime of an existing generation. This means, not that every person present will necessarily be

¹⁶Gary DeMar, *Last Days Madness: Obsession of the Modern Church*, 4th rev. ed. (Atlanta: American Vision, 1999) vii; Keith A. Mathison, *Postmillennialism: An Eschatology of Hope* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1999) 237-38.

¹⁷Russell, *The Parousia* 539-40.

¹⁸Sproul, *The Last Days* 26.

¹⁹Ibid., 202-3.

alive at the time of the fulfillment, but that many or even most will be.²⁰

This essay will show that an understanding of the “time-frame references” or “time-text indicators” different from that of preterism does not necessarily involve (1) violent extortion of the text’s meaning, (2) frivolous interpretive efforts, or (3) superficial exegesis. Nor do other eschatological approaches necessarily downplay or explain away the meaning or the importance of these supposed watershed texts in determining one’s prophetic views. Preterism is not necessarily the only eschatological paradigm or the *a priori* superior approach to serve as the apologetic approach of choice when supporting or defending the impeccable character of Scripture, as Dr. Sproul asserts. Though we commend and agree wholeheartedly with Dr. Sproul in his strong stand for a high view of Scripture, championing preterism is not the best way to achieve that goal.

To demonstrate this, the following discussion will briefly examine the four time-indicators by which preterism, not the inerrancy and infallibility of Scripture, lives or dies. They are: (1) the writing date of Revelation; (2) Matt 10:23; (3) Matt 16:28; and (4) Matt 24:34. The examination will demonstrate that (1) Jesus was a futurist, not a preterist and (2) sound exegesis is the best defender of Scripture’s integrity, not the presuppositions of a particular eschatological system.

The Writing Date of Revelation

Regarding possible writing dates for Revelation, Bible scholars generally recognize two possibilities. First, the *early* date is shortly before A.D. 70 (ca. A.D. 68) during Nero’s reign (A.D. 54-68).²¹ Second, the *late* date would be ca. A.D. 95 during Domitian’s time (A.D. 81-96).²²

Significantly, a futurist would not have to change his eschatological thinking if a pre-A.D. 70 date for the writing were to be established. However, the preterist position is eliminated from consideration if the late date of ca. A.D. 95 can

²⁰Ibid., 53.

²¹Albert A. Bell, Jr., “The Date of John’s Apocalypse,” *New Testament Studies* 25 (1978):93-102; Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., *Before Jerusalem Fell: Dating the Book of Revelation*, 3d ed. (Atlanta: American Vision, 1999); John A.T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976); J. Christian Wilson, “The Problem of the Domitianic Date of Revelation,” *New Testament Studies* 39 (1993):587-605.

²²D. A. Carson, Douglas J. Moo, and Leon Morris, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992) 473-76; Adela Yarbro Collins, “Dating the Apocalypse of John,” *Biblical Research* 26 (1981):33-45; Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1970) 947-59; Everett F. Harrison, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971) 472-75; H. Wayne House and Thomas Ice, *Dominion Theology: Blessing or Curse?* (Portland, Ore.: Multnomah, 1988) 249-60; Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 1-7* (Chicago: Moody, 1992) 20-23; “Theonomy and the Dating of Revelation,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 5 (1994):185-202.

be validated.²³

All discussions of Revelation's writing date are divided into two categories of evidence—internal and external. Regarding internal evidence, this writer has foregone any discussion in this essay for two reasons. First, it is too voluminous a subject for an essay of this size. Second, Revelation contains no direct statements as to its writing date. Therefore, the subjectivity that could be introduced through biased eisegesis (by both positions) would generally skew the discussion and would not be decisive. Put another way, because of the frequent use of figurative language in Revelation, one could easily read one's prophetic choice into the interpretation to prove his historical and/or theological conclusions. On a matter of this importance, it is best to avoid those kinds of questionable speculations and look at the more objective witness of history. Theorizing and hypothesizing one's way to a conclusion proves highly unsatisfactory, regardless of one's eschatological leanings.

Therefore, several salient points of external evidence are relevant. First, the history of dating Revelation decidedly favors the late date. From the second through the eighteenth centuries, the late date was essentially the exclusive view. Only in the nineteenth century, when postmillennialism was a dominant influence, did the early date enjoy a brief time as the majority view. Certainly in the last two centuries, the late date has rebounded to its former place of prominence. Though challenged by a few in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the vast majority of Christian scholars support the later date, regardless of their eschatological beliefs.

Second, only direct statements from primary sources should be considered. At least four direct witnesses in the second to fourth centuries A.D. support the late date.²⁴ However, only several obscure sixth-century witnesses and the ninth-century writer, Theophylact, advocate the early date. The earliest historical attestation to Revelation's date of writing clearly supports the late date. A general axiom states that ancient documents whose date is closest to the historical event reported contain more accurate and reliable information than documents further removed in time.

Third, the historical conditions of the seven churches of Asia Minor in Revelation 2–3 point to a late date. The status of the churches is radically different from the immediate post-Pauline days of the late 60s.²⁵ Therefore, that they represent churches much later than the 60s is the reasonable conclusion, thus eliminating a pre-A.D. 70 writing date for Revelation.

Fourth, if Christ's parousia had actually occurred in conjunction with Jerusalem's fall, it was certainly to be expected that John would then have taught

²³Gentry acknowledges that a late writing date for Revelation would be fatal to the preterist position in *Before Jerusalem Fell* 342.

²⁴Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.30.3; Victorinus, *Common Apocalypse* 7:353; Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.18.3; 5.8.6; and Jerome, *Ag. Jovinianum* 1.26.

²⁵See Thomas, "Theonomy" 200-201 for a most convincing discussion; also Harrison, *Introduction*, 473-74.

something so important after the fact and that John's teaching would have been reflected prominently in the writings of the church fathers. However, there is nary a word about an A.D. 70 parousia of Christ in John's post-70 writings or in the fathers. Far more critical than establishing the writing date of Revelation is uncontested evidence that the late-first- and second-century churches were preterists. Here overwhelming testimony points to the fact that they were premillennial.²⁶

Though admittedly such discussion does not prove once-for-all that Jesus was a futurist, it does argue strongly and even demand that He was not a preterist. The burden of proof is on the preterist to overturn such compelling external evidence for a late date of Revelation's composition by John. In spite of valiant attempts, preterists have not accomplished this. As an interesting final comment, even the introductory notes in the *New Geneva Study Bible*, for which Dr. Sproul served as General Editor, state, "Most scholars favor a date about A.D. 95" (2004).

Matthew 10:23

The first of three Matthean time-indicators that supposedly support preterism can be translated, "You will not finish (complete) the cities of Israel until/before the Son of Man comes" (Matt 10:23). The text has no synoptic parallel; it has no significant textual variants; and it has no translation difficulties. However, its interpretation presents a huge challenge. About this passage, D. A. Carson comments, "This verse is among the most difficult in the New Testament canon."²⁷ Certainly, the verse should not be among the *sine qua non* features of any major doctrine.

Jesus, in sending out the twelve, tells them what they are to do, proclaim that "the kingdom of heaven is at hand" to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (vv. 6-7), which will not be accomplished until (before) He comes. To what "coming" does Christ refer? At least six distinguishable possibilities exist.

1. Jesus meant an immediate coming or "catching up" in the sense that, "I will be close behind, so get moving!"²⁸ The major problem with this view is that the persecutions of vv. 16-23 were not experienced until after Christ's death and resurrection.

²⁶Larry V. Crutchfield, "The Apostle John and Asia Minor as a Source of Premillennialism in the Early Church Fathers," *JETS* 31 (1988):411-27.

²⁷D. A. Carson, "Matthew," *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984) 250.

²⁸Jacques Dupont, "Vous N'Aurez Pas Acheve Les Villes D'Israel Avant Que Les Fils De L'Homme Ne Vienne," *Novum Testamentum* 2 (1958):228-44.

2. Jesus spoke of His coming by way of resurrection.²⁹ This is out of place in light of the fact that His resurrection is nowhere spoken of as “a coming” and in light of Christ’s NT “coming” being defined as post-ascension by the angels in Acts 1:11.
3. Jesus referred to His coming as it related to the coming of the Holy Spirit (cf. John 15:26-27; 16:7-11).³⁰ Since the Holy Spirit is a separate person in the triune Godhead, that would not really fulfill the promise of a personal “coming” by Christ.
4. Jesus indicated God’s judgment against Israel in A.D. 70 associated with Rome’s destruction of Jerusalem,³¹ but this did not fulfill the parousia promises of Christ.
5. Jesus plainly meant that his parousia would occur within the lifetime of the disciples and that it would be in conjunction with the A.D. 70 plundering of Jerusalem.³² The problem here and with possibility four is that Jesus did not come.
6. Jesus referred to His future second coming in the sense that God’s gospel mission to the Jew would not cease or be completed prior to His promised eschatological return and to the completion of God’s redemptive purposes among the Jewish nation.³³

For several reasons, this reviewer favors the view that the “coming” in Matt 10:23 refers to Christ’s future second coming.

1. It accounts for the context that looks beyond the disciples’ immediate ministry (cf. vv. 16-23).
2. It allows for 10:22b occurring elsewhere in an eschatological context (cf.

²⁹Leopold Sabourin, “You Will Not Have Gone Through All the Towns of Israel, Before the Son of Man Comes (Matt 10:23b),” *Biblical Theological Bulletin* 7 (1977):5-11.

³⁰John Calvin, *Harmony of the Evangelists*, in *Calvin’s Commentaries*, vol. 16 (reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989) 458.

³¹A. B. Bruce, *The Training of the Twelve* (reprint, Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1971) 118; D. A. Carson, “Matthew” 252-53; Alfred Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (reprint, Grand Rapids: MacDonald, n.d.) 645-47; Donald Hagner, *Matthew 1–13 in Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 33a (Dallas: Word, 1993) 278-80; J. Dwight Pentecost, *The Words and Works of Jesus Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981) 195.

³²Russell, *The Parousia* 26-29; Sproul, *The Last Days* 9, 13, 24, 38, 56, 86. One is tremendously disappointed to find no exegetical or theological discussion of this text by Sproul, who is eminently capable of such. Because Sproul places such an extreme importance on these time-indicators, it is unfathomable why such a treatment has not been included in his volume.

³³Craig Blomberg, *Matthew* (Nashville: Broadman, 1992) 175-76; F. F. Bruce, *The Hard Sayings of Jesus* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1983) 109; Charles H. Giblin, “Theological Perspective and Matthew 10:23b,” *Theological Studies* 29 (1968):637-61; William Hendricksen, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973) 466.

- Matt 24:13; Mark 13:10).
3. The phrase “the Son of Man comes” (cf. Matt 24:30, 44; 25:31) is most compatible with the future parousia view.
 4. It does justice to the eschatological imagery that “a Son of Man was coming” in Dan 7:13.
 5. The aorist subjunctive use of *τελέω* (*teleō*, “complete, finish”) with the double negation of οὐ μή (*ou mē*, “not”) makes the most sense grammatically in an ultimate redemptive context, e.g., “the disciples will not have come to the end of the towns of Israel before the parousia breaks upon them.”³⁴
 6. Hermeneutically and theologically, it allows for the phrase “shall not finish the cities of Israel until” to be taken in a qualitative sense in full harmony with Paul’s later unambiguous writings about Israel’s redemptive future in Rom 11:1-2, 25-32.
 7. It does not require calling an A.D. 70 “non-coming” a “coming” as proposed by preterists.
 8. It allows for the gospel to reach the Gentiles (cf. Matt 28:19; Mark 13:10) without God forsaking Israel salvifically. Christ intended to communicate that what began redemptively for Israel at Christ’s first advent (Matt 1:21) would be continued until He returns at His second advent.

A futuristic interpretation of “coming” in Matt 10:23 is contextually, grammatically, hermeneutically, and theologically more reasonable than the other views. The noted NT scholar F. F. Bruce summarizes Jesus’ intended meaning in this text:

What, then, does the saying mean in *this* context? It means, simply, that the evangelisation of Israel will not be completed before the end of the present age, which comes with the advent of the Son of man. . . . Paul, from his own perspective, expresses much the same hope when he foresees the salvation of ‘all Israel’, the sequel of the ingathering of the full tale of Gentile believers, being consummated at the time when ‘the Deliverer will come from Zion’ (Rom. 11:25-27).³⁵

In this case, Jesus is a futurist!

Matthew 16:28

This second of three Matthean time references that supposedly supports a preterist view of Christ’s second coming (Matt 16:28) has two synoptic parallels (Mark 9:1; Luke 9:27), a text with no remarkable textual variants, and no translation

³⁴R. Schippers, “τέλος,” *DNTT* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 2:62-63.

³⁵Bruce, *Hard Sayings* 109.

challenges. However, as with Matthew 10:23, interpreting the text is no easy matter. C. E. B. Cranfield calls the parallel in Mark 9:1 “one of the most puzzling [sayings of Christ] in the gospels.”³⁶ One wonders why a text of this interpretive difficulty would be included as a critical feature to defend/support a major theological position.

Jesus has been expanding the disciples’ thinking to include His death (16:21). He then moves from the unthinkable to the sublime—His second advent (16:27). He immediately promises that a few of the disciples would not die until they saw the Son of Man coming in His kingdom. What event did Jesus have in mind when He made this somewhat enigmatic promise?

At least six plausible possibilities have been advanced.

1. Jesus looked to His resurrection.³⁷
2. Jesus meant His ascension.³⁸
3. Jesus looked ahead to the Holy Spirit coming at Pentecost.³⁹
4. Jesus pointed to a coming in A.D. 70—the preterist view.⁴⁰
5. Jesus referred to the advance of His kingdom through the church.⁴¹
6. Jesus had the transfiguration in mind.⁴²

Some compelling reasons why this reviewer prefers the near/immediate historical view of the transfiguration are as follows:⁴³

1. This was the majority view of the early church fathers.
2. It fits the sense of immediacy raised by Christ.
3. Though the unfortunate chapter division between Matthew 16:28 and 17:1

³⁶C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Gospel According to Saint Mark* (Cambridge: University Press, 1972) 285.

³⁷Bruce, *Hard Sayings* 154; Cranfield, *Saint Mark* 287-88; I. Howard Marshall, *Commentary on Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978) 377-79.

³⁸Hendricksen, *Matthew* 659-60.

³⁹Gleason L. Archer, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982) 327.

⁴⁰Donald Hagner, *Matthew 14–28* in *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 33b (Dallas: Word, 1995) 485-87; Russell, *The Parousia* 29-33; Sproul, *Last Days* 23, 53, 55.

⁴¹Carson, “Matthew” 382.

⁴²Blomberg, *Matthew* 261; D. Edmond Hiebert, *Mark* (Chicago: Moody, 1974) 211-12; S. Lewis Johnson, “The Transfiguration of Christ,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 124 (1967):133-43; A. L. Moore, *The Parousia in the New Testament* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1966) 127, 130.

⁴³If the reader wonders at this point why the reviewer has not interacted with Dr. Sproul in discussing these time-reference texts, it is because there is nothing with which to interact except his assertions with little or no attempt to support them. *The Last Days According to Jesus* is long on assertion/conclusion and inadequately short on exegetical or theological substantiation.

might lead one to believe that there is no contextual connection between 16:28 and that which follows, the parallel passages in Mark 9 and Luke 9 where no intervening chapter breaks appear, prove that what follows on the Mount of Transfiguration is a vital part of the immediate context.

4. The “some” of 16:28 is fulfilled by the “three” of 17:1. It was to be an exceptional experience, not a unanimous one. The resurrection, the ascension, Pentecost, and the kingdom were occasions experienced by all of the disciples, and therefore could not have been what Jesus meant.
5. No one “saw” Christ in A.D. 70; this is a major disqualifier for the preterist interpretation.
6. Only John survived to see Christ in His later glory (Rev 1:12-20), but Peter, James, and John—i.e., some of the disciples (three out of the twelve)—actually saw Christ in His kingdom glory and power on the Mount of Transfiguration, plus they heard the glorious, powerful voice of God the Father. Additionally, they saw kingdom power manifest by the appearance on earth of Moses who died about 1405 B.C. and Elijah who was caught up alive by God’s chariots to heaven about 850 B.C.
7. Both John (John 1:14) and Peter (2 Peter 1:16-18) later wrote about this powerful, kingdom preview. Their descriptions of the actual event closely parallel the expectations raised by Christ’s promise.

Matthew 16:28 refers to the prophetic preview of Christ’s future parousia glory on the Mount of Transfiguration, because it is contextually superior (3), the only acceptable view with regard to substance (2, 4, 5, 6, 7), and the historically preferred view (1). Therefore, the passage definitely shows Jesus to be a futurist, because He promised to be seen at His future parousia just as He previewed it at the Transfiguration. He could not have been a preterist, because no one saw Christ at the A.D. 70 destruction of Jerusalem.

Judging from the above factors and the place of the narrative in the Gospels, it seems safe to affirm that the transfiguration event was a kind of preview, and thus anticipation, of kingdom power and glory which would come permanently at the parousia.⁴⁴

Since this text refers a time in Christ’s earthly ministry, it does not directly prove that Jesus was a futurist; but given the implications of what Christ previewed for the three disciples, it strongly points in that direction. It clearly does not teach that Christ would come in A.D. 70.

Matthew 24:34

Matthew 24:34 is the third of three Matthean time-indicators used to

⁴⁴Charles Holman, “The Idea of an Imminent Parousia,” *Studia Biblica Et Theologica* III (1973):23.

support the preterists' contention that Christ's parousia occurred in A.D. 70 when Rome sacked Jerusalem. It has two synoptic companions (Mark 13:30; Luke 21:22) and has no textual variants. All three texts involve a straightforward translation.

One very confident preterist has claimed that, after a complete study of Matt 24:34, his view is "indisputably clear" and "absolutely demanding."⁴⁵ In contrast, noted NT scholar J. Fitzmeyer lamented that this is "...the most difficult phrase to interpret in this complicated eschatological discourse."⁴⁶ When dealing with such complexity as "this generation will not pass away until all these things take place" involves, Fitzmeyer's approach is the sensible one.

At least seven plausible views have arisen regarding Matthew 24:34.

1. Christ was mistaken.
2. Christ was speaking of the human race in general.
3. Christ was referring to A.D. 70. This is held by preterists⁴⁷ and non-preterists.⁴⁸
4. Christ spoke of faithful Christians in general.
5. Christ referred to the Jewish race generically (futurist view).⁴⁹
6. Christ referred to a future evil generation.⁵⁰
7. Christ was indicating the generation which would be alive at His future parousia.⁵¹

In this passage, the futurist possibilities (6 & 7) are preferred over the preterist option (3a) for very convincing reasons:

⁴⁵Ice and Gentry, *Great Tribulation* 26-27.

⁴⁶Joseph A. Fitzmeyer, *The Gospel According to Luke X-XXIV* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1985) 1353.

⁴⁷Ice and Gentry, *Great Tribulation* 26-27, 181; Russell, *The Parousia* 83-89; Sproul, *Last Days* 51-68.

⁴⁸Bruce, *Hard Sayings* 228; Carson, "Matthew" 507; Hagner, *Matthew 14-28* 715; David L. Turner, "The Structure and Sequence of Matthew 24:1-41: Interaction with Evangelical Treatments," *Grace Theological Journal* 10 (1989):3-27; David Wenham, "'This Generation Will Not Pass....' A Study of Jesus' Future Expectation in Mark 13," *Festschrift for Donald Guthrie* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1982) 127.

⁴⁹Duane A. Dunham, "TENEAE in Matthew 24:34," *New Testament Essays in Honor of Homer A. Kent, Jr.*, ed. Gary T. Meadors (Winona Lake, Ind.: BMH, 1991) 125-41; Hendricksen, *Matthew* 867-69.

⁵⁰Evald Lövestam, *Jesus and 'this Generation'* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1995) 81-87; Neil D. Nelson, Jr., "'This Generation' in Matt 24:34: A Literary Critical Perspective," *JETS* 38 (1996):369-85; Robert L. Thomas, unpublished class notes (Sun Valley, Calif.: The Master's Seminary, n.d.).

⁵¹Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53*, in Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996) 1688-92; Hiebert, *Mark* 331; John MacArthur, *Matthew 24-28*, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody, 1989) 63-67.

1. Options 1, 2, 4, and 5 have been set aside as less than compelling because of faulty theology (1) or being too general for such a specific text (2, 4, 5).
2. Contextually, Matthew 24 and 25 must be taken as a whole, not separated. The preterist view cannot handle the content of “the coming of the Son of Man” throughout 24:37–25:30, a theme which began in 24:3, 27, 30. The “coming” of 24:30-31 is the same coming of 25:31 and cannot possibly be accounted for or said to be fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.
3. Historically, the church that existed after A.D. 70 and in close time proximity to the event was still looking for a future fulfillment of Matthew 24–25, i.e., the second advent of Christ. Since John lived beyond A.D. 70, one would have expected him to have at least commented on this and for it to be reported by those who might have heard him, that Jesus had come in accord with the preterist view. However, there is no evidence of this whatsoever. Just the opposite is true in the *Didache* and Justin’s *Dialogue with Trypho*,⁵² both written decades after A.D. 70.
4. Grammatically speaking, “all these things” (πάντα ταῦτα, *panta tauta*) give direction to help determine the meaning of the text. Whether one looks back or ahead in the passage, “these things” are the features which both precede and accompany Christ at His second coming (cf. vv. 27, 30, 37, 39, 42, 44). Keep in mind that Matt 24:4-44 is all part of Christ’s direct answer to the disciples’ question in 24:3, “What will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?”
5. Because it has been concluded contextually, historically, and grammatically that Christ’s second coming is yet future, not historically fulfilled in A.D. 70, one can then deal with the meaning of “this generation.” The interpretation has two possibilities: “generation” can be taken pejoratively (view 6) or temporally (view 7). The *pejorative view* understands “generation” in the sense of referring to the category of rebellious, sinful people who have rejected God’s truth and righteousness (cf. Matt 12:45; 23:35-36); this has an OT precedent in Deut 32:5, 20 and Prov 30:11-14.⁵³ The *temporal view* understands “generation” to be the group of contemporaries who are alive at the time of Christ’s parousia, extending from the birth pangs of 24:3 through the coming of the Son of Man (24:44).

Either of these last two views deals with Matthew 24–25 in a futurist sense. Whether one opts for the “evil generation” view or the “eschatological generation” view, an eschatological period of time beyond A.D. 70 is in view. Thus, it is

⁵²For example, *Didache* 16 (ca. A.D. 100) and Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 110 (ca. A.D. 140-150).

⁵³“γενεά,” *BAGD* 154; γενεά,” *DNTT* 2:36.

concluded from this text that Jesus was a futurist.

Conclusions

The preterist view, by its own definition and admission, essentially rests upon (1) a Revelation writing date before A.D. 70 and (2) the “time-text” indicators in Matt 10:23, 16:28, and 24:34 all pointing to an A.D. 70 fulfillment.

In regard to the writing date of Revelation, the overwhelming consensus of second to twenty-first century scholars, with good reason, embraces a late writing date of Revelation (ca. A.D. 95) rather than the early date (pre-A.D. 70), with the exception of the nineteenth century when postmillennialism was the majority opinion. This one conclusion alone eliminates a preterist approach from viable consideration.

The biblical focus of preterism on A.D. 70 is not as dominant, or clear-cut, or even obvious to the careful interpreter as preterists would have one believe; this is evidenced by numerous other attractive interpretive options which preterists fail to appreciate fully when dealing with Matt 10:23, 16:28, and 24:34. Preterists unanimously interpret all three Matthean “time-indicators” as referring to A.D. 70, while others of differing eschatological schools of thought generally deal with these texts independently and exegetically. It would appear that the preterist view has been used to interpret these passages, rather than the texts being treated independently of one another and without undue concern for particular theological outcomes. Put another way, only the preterist position demands a unanimous A.D. 70 interpretation for all three time-reference indicators—Matt 10:23; 16:26; 24:34. However, the three “time-text” indicators, so critical to proving a preterist approach correct, have better alternative interpretations (both before and after A.D. 70) than A.D. 70 alone.

To build one’s eschatology on textual interpretations that have other, more compelling views is risky if not fatal. The three Matthean texts used by preterists are generally judged by scholars to be less than immediately clear, not to mention that they are among the most elusive texts to interpret in the entire NT. In this reviewer’s opinion, preterism has erected its eschatological superstructure on just such a weak foundation as understanding all four of these “time-frame” references in relationship to A.D. 70. They do not effectively support the weight of preterism (moderate or otherwise) as proposed by R. C. Sproul, which, by the way, actually involves three separate comings of Christ, but that is the subject of another essay.⁵⁴ Therefore, it is concluded, based on a review of these four time-text indicators, that Jesus was a futurist in His teachings, and certainly not a preterist.

⁵⁴Sproul, *Last Days* 170, in Table 7.2 illustrates Christ’s first advent at His birth (assumed), Christ’s second advent in A.D. 70 (explicit), and Christ’s third advent at some unknown time in the future (explicit).

MODERN LINGUISTICS VERSUS TRADITIONAL HERMENEUTICS*

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An emerging field of study among evangelicals goes by the name modern linguistics. Its terminology, self-appraisal, approach to language analysis, and relationship to traditional exegesis furnish an introduction to a comparison with grammatical-historical hermeneutics. Indispensable to an analysis of modern linguistics is a grasping of its preunderstanding—its placing of the language of the Bible into the same category as all human languages and its integration with other secular disciplines—and the effect that preunderstanding has on its interpretation of the biblical text. Its conflicts with grammatical-historical principles include a questioning of the uniqueness of the biblical languages, its differing in the handling of lexical and grammatical elements of the text, its differing in regard to the importance of authorial intention, its lessening of precision in interpretation, its elevating of the primacy of discourse, its elevating of the impact of stylistic considerations, and a questioning of the feasibility of understanding the text in a literal way. Such contrasts mark the wide divergence of modern linguistics from traditional grammatical-historical interpretation.

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Introductory Facts about Modern Linguistics¹

“Modern linguistics” is the chosen title for an emerging field of studies that has potential for radically affecting many long-held principles of biblical interpretation. Though it so recent that it does not yet have widespread-agreed-upon

¹The following essay is an abridgment of chapter 8 in Robert L. Thomas, *Evangelical Hermeneutics: The New Versus the Old* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002), and is used by permission.

¹For detailed information about this portion of the essay, see Robert L. Thomas, *Evangelical Hermeneutics* 196-208.

terminology, the discipline has adopted some terms that may not be familiar to most. “Phonology” refers to the elementary sounds of language (phonemes), “morphology” to the smallest meaningful units of language (morphemes), “syntax” to the formation of phrases and sentences from these smaller units, and “semantics” to the meanings of morphemes and words and various ways to construct larger units. “Discourse” is a structural portion of language longer than a sentence.

Modern linguists look upon their approach to language as indispensable to an interpretation of Scripture. They profess to trace a thought as it begins in the human mind to physiological abilities in making sounds to how these sounds become words, then sentences, paragraphs, and discourse. Following this sequence leads them to be strongly critical of what have been viewed as standard lexical works for NT study because of those works’ neglect of discourse, sentences, and paragraphs. At the present stage in the development of modern linguistics, much uncertainty prevails among its adherents regarding definitions and procedures.

In certain respects this relatively new field agrees partially with traditional principles of biblical interpretation, usually called grammatical-historical hermeneutics. The areas of agreement include matters like divine inspiration, the importance of literary context, the need for careful study of words in their developing usage, and thorough understanding of grammatical relationships and historical-cultural backgrounds. Proponents of modern linguistics recognize the overlap of their studies with traditional exegesis, but feel that their new discipline has additional contributions to make to biblical understanding.

With these brief facts in mind, the remainder of this essay will deal with principles that differentiate modern linguistics from traditional grammatical-historical hermeneutics.

THE PREUNDERSTANDING OF MODERN LINGUISTICS

Modern linguistic advocates accept the inevitability of the interpreter’s bias affecting his interpretation of Scripture. Silva’s words typify the position of others in expressing this:

I take it as a valid assumption that the interpreter approaches any text with a multitude of experiences (‘filed away’ with some degree of coherence) that inform his or her understanding of that text. I further assume that it is impossible for the interpreter to evaluate the text without the point of reference provided by those presuppositions. But I believe just as strongly that the interpreter may *transcend*, though not eliminate, that point of reference. This can be done not by assuming that we can set aside our presuppositions in the interest of objectivity, but rather by a conscious *use* of them. The moment we look at a text we contextualize it, but a self-awareness of that fact opens up

the possibility of modifying our point of reference in the light of contradictory data.²

He even goes so far as to call a quest for objectivity in interpretation a hindrance to good exegesis: “The (usually implicit) claim that proper exegesis may be done, or even can only be done, if one avoids commitments to broader issues seems to me not only to be a delusion, but to create an obstacle for interpretation.”³

Likewise, Cotterell and Turner reject the possibility of objective exegesis when they write, “In fact, the criticism goes, the Cartesian or Baconian ideal of ‘objective’ exegesis, an exegesis that is unaffected by the world of the analyst, is unattainable. Every attempt to define an author’s intended meaning actually only discovers a meaning which is somehow related to ‘meaning-for-me’.”⁴ They later add, “All that we can do is to infer the meaning, and that will in some measure be affected by our present understanding of our world.”⁵

This provision for preunderstanding contrasts distinctly with the grammatical-historical emphasis on maintaining objectivity in approaching the text of Scripture. In representing traditional hermeneutics, Terry has written,

In the systematic presentation, therefore, of any scriptural doctrine, we are always to make a discriminating use of sound hermeneutical principles. We must not study them in the light of modern systems of divinity, but should aim rather to place ourselves in the position of the sacred writers, and study to obtain the impression their words would naturally have made upon the minds of the first readers. . . . Still less should we allow ourselves to be influenced by any presumptions of what the Scriptures ought to teach. . . . All such presumptions are uncalled for and prejudicial.⁶

The fact that the goal of complete objectivity may never be reached does not relieve the interpreter of aiming for that goal. If an interpreter accepts his own preunderstanding as a starting point in exegesis, his bias will inevitably find a place in his conclusions about a passage’s meaning. If, on the other hand, he seeks to repress any personal expectations regarding what he will find in the passage and uses sound hermeneutical principles, he can make great progress toward attaining that goal of objectivity. That will allow the passage to speak for itself rather than having its meaning colored by the interpreter’s bias.

Two types of preunderstanding have great impact on the hermeneutics of modern linguistics. One is the assumption that the language of the Bible will bear

²Moisés Silva, *Biblical Words and Their Meaning: An Introduction to Lexical Semantics*, rev. and exp. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994) 148.

³Ibid., 158.

⁴P. Cotterell and M. Turner, *Linguistics & Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1989) 59.

⁵Ibid., 68.

⁶M. S. Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics* (reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n.d.) 595.

all the characteristics of human language in general as propounded by modern linguistic study. The other is that the hermeneutics of modern linguistics must be integrated with human discoveries in other secular fields. The following description will illustrate how these two presuppositions work their way into much of modern-linguistic interpretation of Scripture.

Human Language and the Language of the Bible

Linguistic theory assumes many things regarding human language and through further anachronistic assumptions puts the language of the Bible into the same categories of usage as modern languages that have thus far been analyzed. Nida, for example, states the following:

The fact that language in discourse is approximately fifty percent redundant, whether on the phonological, syntactic, or semantic levels is important, and this helps one to realize why verbal communication cannot be one hundred percent efficient. Such a measure of redundancy is essential if verbal communication is to overcome physical and psychological 'noise.'⁷

Even if someone accepts Nida's statistic about redundancy as accurate—and this is open to question—how can he be assured that the same was true in ancient times when human memories were more highly developed and other different conditions existed? Even fellow linguist Silva offers a precaution about such an anachronistic assumption.⁸ Furthermore, even if the same linguistic principles are applicable to ancient languages, who would dare to say that words written by divine inspiration would show the same redundancy that allegedly characterizes modern communication? To be sure, God used normal human language when He inspired the Bible, but the ultimately divine origin of that language certainly puts it into a unique category.

Yet modern linguistics proceeds under the assumption that biblical interpretation should fully endorse and utilize the newly developed principles delineated by its system. Even Silva, in spite of his word of caution about doing such a thing, seems fully supportive of that anachronistic type of reasoning:

Moreover, we should keep in mind that, while we have no access to the spoken form of many ancient languages (including of course Old Testament Hebrew and New Testament Greek), *general* linguistics seeks to formulate principles and rules that are characteristics of human language as such, not necessarily those that belong exclusively to specific languages. Therefore, many of the results arising from modern linguistic research are

⁷E. A. Nida, "Implications of Contemporary Linguistics for Biblical Scholarship," *JBL* 91/1 (March 1972):74.

⁸Silva, *Biblical Words* 125.

applicable even to communities in the past for which a spoken form is not extant.⁹

Modern linguistic theories about the relationship of contemporary human language in general to language of the Bible is a significant preunderstanding that noticeably impacts principles of biblical interpretation.

Integration of Modern Linguistics with Other Secular Disciplines

Wrong views of general revelation have distorted biblical hermeneutics through attempts to integrate biblical hermeneutics with human discoveries in various secular fields.¹⁰ The same problem arises in trying to integrate modern linguistics with biblical hermeneutics, because modern linguistics draws upon several secular fields of knowledge in building its own system of analyzing human language. Black has listed some of these: “Linguistics is not, of course, wholly autonomous. It must draw upon such sciences as physiology, psychology, anthropology, and sociology for certain basic concepts and data.”¹¹ He later adds philosophy to the list of integrated fields: “What language is and how it functions are also important philosophical concerns.”¹² The integration of these with modern linguistics, which in turn is integrated with biblical hermeneutics, amounts to a formidable preunderstanding that drastically affects biblical interpretation not only in the direction of humanly derived linguistic principles, but also in the direction of various humanly derived principles in the other secular fields of specialization.

Without endorsing a particular psychological theory, Nida writes, “There is no generally recognized psychological theory which is adequate to explain all that is involved in language acquisition, competence, and performance, but it is quite clear that many universal features of language point to a number of what may be called ‘predispositions’ of mental activity and structure.”¹³ Through linguistic theory, can linguists actually understand the human mind and its functioning as Nida asserts? And if so, what effect does that have on interpretation of a divinely inspired book whose human authors had minds supernaturally impacted by the Holy Spirit?

Linguistics is closely related to anthropology, as Black notes, “Anthropologists and linguists have long enjoyed close ties with each other, especially in the United States.”¹⁴ Do anthropological theories of the present day tell us anything reliable about how man operated in ancient times? And if so, how does that help our understanding of the Bible at the time when God was granting direct revelation to

⁹Moisés Silva, “God, Language and Scripture,” in *Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation*, ed. M. Silva (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996) 223.

¹⁰See Thomas, *Evangelical Hermeneutics* 113-40, for further elaboration on this point.

¹¹D. A. Black, *Linguistics for Students of New Testament Greek: A Survey of Basic Concepts and Applications*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995) 5.

¹²Ibid., 19.

¹³Nida, “Implications” 77.

¹⁴Black, *Linguistics* 18.

writers of Scripture? Do current anthropologists agree with one another in their writings? Do those writings agree with what God says about man? Answers to those questions raise serious doubts about the practice of integration.

The Effect of Preunderstanding

The doubts of Cotterell and Turner that interpreters can ever reach a point of certainty regarding authorial intentions of biblical writers has already been noted.¹⁵ They later add, "The original meaning is hidden from us, and we have no way of resurrecting it. . . . All that we can do is to infer the meaning, and that will in some measure be affected by our present understanding of our world."¹⁶ Carrying the point a bit further,

Rather, awareness of the problem should generate the appropriate caution, both in respect of method and in the degree of certainty we attach to our 'conclusions'. We need fully to recognize that *our* reading of the letter to Philemon (or whatever), however certain we may feel it is what Paul meant, *is actually only a hypothesis—our hypothesis—about the discourse meaning.*¹⁷

With the approach of modern linguistics, the best an interpreter can hope for is his own subjectively conceived impression of what the biblical text meant in its original setting. That prospect obliterates the possibility of deriving propositional truth from Scripture. Whatever one comes up with will be distinctly colored by what his preunderstanding has read into the text. It will not be divinely revealed meaning with absolute doctrinal implications. That, of course, is quite the opposite of the results yielded by grammatical-historical interpretation.

Traditional hermeneutics is void of such sweeping statements of uncertainty as those coming from modern linguistics. Terry has written,

[I]t is of fundamental importance that all formal statements of biblical doctrine, and the exposition, elaboration, or defence of the same, be made in accordance with correct hermeneutical principles. The systematic expounder of Scripture doctrine is expected to set forth, in clear outline and well-defined terms, such teachings as have certain warrant in the word of God. He must not import into the text of Scripture the ideas of later times, or build upon any words or passages a dogma which they do not legitimately teach. . . . [N]o man has a right to foist into his expositions of Scripture his own dogmatic conceptions, or those of others, and then insist that these are an essential part of divine revelation. Only that which is clearly read therein, or legitimately proved thereby, can be properly held as scriptural doctrine.¹⁸

¹⁵See quotation at n. 4 above.

¹⁶Cotterell and Turner, *Linguistics and Biblical Interpretation* 68.

¹⁷Ibid., 70.

¹⁸Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics* 583-84.

Incorporation of preunderstanding into the interpretive process directly violates the fundamental tenets of grammatical-historical interpretation and its goal of discerning the meaning of the text as intended by the author and as understood by the original readers.

CONFLICTS WITH GRAMMATICAL-HISTORICAL PRINCIPLES

Aside from the conflict with traditional interpretation at its starting point—i.e., the foundational level of preunderstanding—modern linguistics alters other longstanding principles in specific areas.

Questions about the Uniqueness of the Biblical Languages

The Traditional View. Granting that the Bible results from a combination of divine and human elements, traditional grammatical-historical principles have given due consideration to the divine side of inspiration. Terry has expressed that consideration thus:

[W]e conceive that the language and style of a writer may be mightily affected by divine influences brought to bear upon his soul. Such influences would produce important effects in his thoughts and his words. To affirm, with some, that God supplied the thoughts or ideas of Scripture, but left the writers perfectly free in their choice of words, tends to confuse the subject, for it appears that the inspired penmen were as free and independent in searching for facts and arranging them in orderly narrative as they were in the choice of words. (Luke i, 3.) It seems better, therefore to understand that, by the inspiring impulse from God, all the faculties of the human agent were mightily quickened, and, as a consequence, his thoughts, his emotions, his style, and even his words, were affected. In this sense only we affirm the doctrine of verbal inspiration. We have seen above, that *form* and *style* are often essential elements of an organic whole, and to attempt to give the sentiment, without the form, of some compositions, is to rob them of their very substance and life.¹⁹

Terry observes that inspiration impacted the form, style, and words of Scripture so that the result is not just another form of human communication. He sees the biblical use of Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek not as an “accident of history, but a particular providence, grounded in highest wisdom.”²⁰ He also notes the special suitability of the biblical languages for conveying divine revelation to the human race.²¹ By contrast, modern-linguistic advocates see nothing special about the languages of the

¹⁹Ibid., 144.

²⁰Ibid., 128.

²¹Ibid., 105-6, 127.

Bible and proceed to analyze biblical writings the same way they analyze an exclusively human communication.

The Modern Linguistic View. Silva represents the linguists in writing, “At the most fundamental level, Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic share all the features that constitute them, quite simply, as human languages.”²² Elsewhere he is critical of those who grant special consideration to divine inspiration: “One common way of overemphasizing the biblical languages is by romanticizing them, by giving the impression that Greek and Hebrew have a unique (and almost divine?) status.”²³ Black joins Silva in this perspective:

Linguists reject the notion that any one language can be more expressive than all other languages, an opinion incorrectly held by many teachers of New Testament Greek. God has undoubtedly conferred special honor upon Greek as the language chosen for the inscripturation of the New Testament, but Greek is not inherently superior to the other languages of the world. At present, both linguists and Bible translators agree that any language can express whatever ideas its speakers are capable of having, and that a language can and does expand and change to fit new needs or ideas those speakers may have.²⁴

This normalization of the biblical languages brings the proposal that biblical languages be studied in the same way as foreign languages are studied in modern times: “By concentrated approaches to the total structure of a language and with emphasis upon the distinctive features of language rather than on the subordinate mass of details, students have gained remarkable facility in modern languages. There is absolutely no reason why the biblical languages cannot be equally well taught, but in so many instances they are not.”²⁵ Yet anyone who learns to speak a foreign language by the method thus prescribed realizes that he/she has no depth of understanding of vocabulary and grammar that would permit a close scrutiny of that language. Such a superficial knowledge of Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic renders fruitless efforts to probe the meaning intended by the author and understood by the first readers.

The Effect on Bible Translation. Modern linguists’ view of the biblical languages directly impacts their translation philosophy. It directs their attention away from divine inspiration of the thoughts and words to the contemporary readers of the translation: “[A]ny legitimate analysis of the adequacy of a translation must

²²Silva, “God, Language” 232.

²³Moisés Silva, “Let’s Be Logical,” in *An Introduction to Hermeneutics*, eds. Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. and Moisés Silva (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994) 52.

²⁴Black, *Linguistics* 17-18.

²⁵Nida, “Implications” 87.

accept as a *primary* criterion of correctness the manner in which such a translation is understood by the majority of persons for whom it is designed.”²⁶ It directs attention away from verbal inspiration, as Black reflects in these words: “One of the benefits of semantic classification is that the translator is liberated from the burden of always having to find nouns to translate nouns, verbs for verbs, and so on. He recognizes that while the semantic classes are universal, the parts of speech each language uses for surface expression are variable.”²⁷

Silva speaks of two types of translations: “The most fundamental difference, however, is that which pertains to philosophy of translation. We often speak of translations as being ‘literal’ or ‘free.’ More precisely some translations aim at representing the *form* of the original as closely as possible (without, however, doing violence to English grammar) while others, especially those influenced by linguistics, do not.”²⁸ He then acknowledges the preference of linguists: “The principle of dynamic equivalence is widely favored by professional linguists, and so it has become common to denounce versions such as the NASB as linguistically naive and inadequate. From the other side, it is just as common to hear complaints that the dynamic-equivalence [i.e., free-translation] approach reflects a low view of the authority of Scripture.”²⁹

Modern linguists have no interest in approximating the original languages of Scripture as closely as possible when they translate to a different language. Though this may not reflect directly their stated view of inspiration, it does reflect their view that the languages of the Bible are no different from any other language that has ever been spoken or written. It reflects their persuasion that regular linguistic rules can apply to interpreting the Bible, with no special consideration being given to the divine input in the inspiration process.

Lexicography

The de-emphasis of diachronics. A pronounced tendency of modern linguistics is to downplay the importance of diachronics. Cotterell and Turner exemplify this tendency:

The history of a word (a *diachronic* study of its use) may explain *how* a word came to be used with some particular sense at a specified time, but in order to find out *what* a lexeme means at that particular time we have only to look at the contemporary *usage*. The state of a language, and of its lexical stock, can be understood entirely by direct observation of usage at the time in question (synchronous study). We no more need to know the *history* of the language, or of its lexical stock, to understand the sense of utterances today,

²⁶Ibid., 88 [emphasis added].

²⁷Black, *Linguistics* 129.

²⁸Silva, “God, Language” 274.

²⁹Ibid., 275.

than we need to know precisely what moves have been made in a game of chess in order to understand the state of the game and its potentialities now.³⁰

Nida echoes the same opinion: "Etymologies, whether arrived at by historical documentation or by comparative analysis, are all very interesting and may provide significant clues to meaning, but they are no guarantee whatsoever that the historical influence is a factor in the people's actual use of such linguistic units."³¹ Silva supports this opinion: "This whole discussion is of the greatest relevance for biblical studies. We must accept the obvious fact that the speakers of a language simply know next to nothing about its development; and this certainly was the case with the writers and immediate readers of Scripture two millennia ago."³² Cotterell and Turner even speak of the danger of diachronic study: "Appeal to etymology, and to word formation, is therefore always dangerous. Even if a word did originally mean what etymology and word formation suggest, there is *no guarantee whatever* that the word has not changed meaning by the time a particular biblical writer comes to use it."³³

Silva quotes Sausure with apparent favor toward the latter's endorsement of the exclusive use of synchronics: "[T]he linguist who wishes to understand a state must discard all knowledge of everything that produced it and ignore diachrony. He can enter the mind of speakers only by completely suppressing the past. The intervention of history can only falsify his judgment."³⁴

Modern linguists have little if any interest in the historical backgrounds of words. They argue that such history is absent from the immediate consciousness of speakers and writers and therefore has little or no contribution to understanding meaning. Traditional grammatical-historical interpretation, however, sees such etymological input as of great value. Terry writes, "To understand . . . the language of a speaker or writer, it is necessary, first of all to know the meaning of his words. The interpreter especially, needs to keep in mind the difference, so frequently apparent, between the primitive signification of a word and that which it subsequently obtains. We first naturally inquire after the original meaning of a word, or what is commonly called etymology."³⁵

The modern linguist admits that such a history is interesting, but insists that the history was not a part of the direct consciousness of the biblical writer. To this, grammatical-historical hermeneutics would respond that it did not need to be part of

³⁰Cotterell and Turner, *Linguistics & Biblical Interpretation* 132.

³¹Nida, "Implications" 85.

³²Silva, *Biblical Words* 38.

³³Cotterell and Turner, *Linguistics & Biblical Interpretation* 132.

³⁴Saussure, cited by Silva, *Biblical Words* 36.

³⁵Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics* 175.

his direct awareness to be relevant. The writer belonged to a culture in which this kind of awareness was intuitive, an intuition that the modern interpreter lacks. To atone for that missing intuition, an interpreter must reconstruct the history in order to appreciate what was subconsciously available for an ancient culture and therefore an implied element in his usage of a given word. This is the only way modern man has to “get into the minds” of the ancients and so better understand their intentions in the choice of words. Without knowing how word meanings have developed, the understanding of an exegete is impoverished.

An illustration of the difference in approaches to diachronics relates to the Greek noun *ekkḗsía*. Terry devotes over a page to discussing the historical background and make-up of the word along with its usage in various NT contexts—in other words both diachronics and synchronics.³⁶ Cotterell and Turner, on the other hand, spend almost two pages telling why Barr disallowed the relevance of diachronics in determining what *ekkḗsía* means in any given context.³⁷ Their final paragraph closes with their approval of the way “Barr mercilessly elucidates the etymologizing and related errors of a panoply of scholars.”³⁸

The traditional method is, of course, just as interested in synchronics as is the modern linguist, but not in the exclusive or near-exclusive use of synchronics. Leaving diachronics out of the interpretive process can lead only to an incomplete understanding of what is written.

Words versus concepts. Another pronounced tendency of modern-linguistic lexicography is to emphasize that a word cannot denote a concept. Only sentences and larger units of literature can specify concepts. In speaking of the *TDNT* article on *agapḗ* and its failure to limit itself to the *lexical* concept of love instead of including the broader notion of the concept of love, Cotterell and Turner observe, “One suspects that the reason for this lack is the failure adequately to distinguish between words and concepts, and a resultant tendency to use the terms interchangeably.”³⁹

The area of words/concepts is where modern linguists are critical of most established reference works dealing with lexical matters for this reason: those tools fail to distinguish between words and concepts. Cotterell and Turner broaden their criticism to include the whole of *TDNT* when they say, “It cannot be said there is much consensus as to the precise nature of the relations between words, senses, concepts and *things-in-the-world*. But that does not excuse Kittel’s repeated failure

³⁶Ibid., 176-77.

³⁷Cotterell and Turner, *Linguistics & Biblical Interpretation* 114-15.

³⁸Ibid., 115.

³⁹Ibid., 119.

to distinguish them. . . .”⁴⁰ Silva joins this line of criticism in naming *TDNT*,⁴¹ Cremer’s *Biblico-Theological Lexicon of New Testament Greek*,⁴² and Bauer’s *Lexicon* (BAGD).⁴³ Black extends the criticism to include other lexical tools that “arrange their material alphabetically according to individual words.”⁴⁴

Such a negative appraisal of standard lexical tools differs substantially from the perspective of traditional hermeneutics, which values such tools very highly. Speaking of similar works coming from the nineteenth century, Terry calls parts of Cremer’s work “a very excellent treatment” and says Wilson’s *Syntax and Synonymes of the Greek Testament* (London, 1864) “is well worthy of consultation.”⁴⁵ Traditional approaches recognize that through extensive usage in various contexts, some words do equate to concepts and so would dispute the claims of modern linguistics that words and concepts must be distinct from each other.

Synonyms. Representing traditional grammatical-historical principles, Terry offers the following in introducing a section on synonyms:

The biblical interpreter needs discernment and skill to determine the nice distinctions and shades of meaning attaching to Hebrew and Greek synonymes. Often the exact point and pith of a passage will be missed by failing to make the proper discrimination between synonymous expressions. There are, for instance, eleven different Hebrew words used in the Old Testament for *kindling a fire*, or *setting on fire*, and seven Greek words used in the New Testament for *prayer*; and yet a careful study of these several terms will show that they all vary somewhat in signification, and serve to set forth so many different shades of thought and meaning.⁴⁶

The importance of studying synonyms and allowing for their shades of meaning has long been a part of conservative evangelical interpretation.

Yet this is an area where modern linguistics differs from traditional interpretation more than any other. Silva, for instance, observes,

⁴⁰Ibid., 118.

⁴¹Silva, *Biblical Words* 24-25.

⁴²Ibid., 27.

⁴³Ibid., 172-77. Walter Bauer’s *Lexicon* is best known to modern students as *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, rev. and ed. by Frederick William Danker, previous English editions by W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, and F. W. Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2000).

⁴⁴Black, *Linguistics* 123.

⁴⁵Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics* 202 n. 1.

⁴⁶Ibid., 191-92. Silva acknowledges that Terry was “the standard hermeneutical manual” at the turn of the twentieth century (Silva, *Biblical Words* 123).

In Philippians 1:3-4, for example, Paul appears to include the giving of thanks (not only the petitions) under *deēsis*; that is, in this particular context *proseuchē* could have been substituted without any loss of meaning. Similarly, we could argue that in Philippians 4:6, where both of these terms are used, no special distinction is intended; rather, Paul is probably exploiting their similarity to strengthen the stylistic force of his exhortation.⁴⁷

Such an observation is shocking to those who hold to verbal inspiration of Scripture. To substitute one word for another is to tamper with the words God used in inspiring the author. It is true that one may not press for distinctions in meaning of synonyms when synonyms occur in widely separated contexts, but to say that a substitution can be made “without any loss of meaning” veers off in the direction of dynamic inspiration rather than verbal inspiration. To go further and say the author intended no special distinction when synonyms are used side by side as in Phil 4:6 in the same context, contradicts traditional principles. Once that course is taken, no limit to other possible substitutions and verbal equations is in sight.

Black’s position is essentially the same as Silva’s. He writes, “In each instance [i.e., of the use of synonyms], the principle of *semantic neutralization* informs us that any of the terms in these pairs may be used interchangeably without any significant difference in meaning, depending upon the purpose of the biblical author.”⁴⁸ Among such synonyms he includes pairs such as *agapaō* and *phileō* (“I love”) and *oida* and *ginōskō* (“I know”). By contrast, Terry makes a major point of distinguishing the meanings of each of these two pairs.⁴⁹

Silva supports the modern-linguistic equating of the meanings of such synonyms as these:

One question that arises generally in the Pauline corpus, but pointedly in Philippians, is whether the apostle intends clear semantic distinctions when similar terms are grouped together. Many commentators, persuaded that Paul could not be guilty of redundancy, look for these distinctions and emphasize them. . . . Linguists, drawing on the work of communication engineers, have long recognized that redundancy is a built-in feature of every language and that it aids, rather than hinders the process of communication.⁵⁰

He departs from a traditional approach to the text in light of “communication engineers” who side with the recognized tendency of human speech and writing toward redundancy. In other words, inspired Scripture has no more precision than everyday human communication. Here preunderstanding reads into biblical interpretation what is known about other forms of communication. In other words,

⁴⁷Silva, “God, Language” 249.

⁴⁸Black, *Linguistics* 126.

⁴⁹Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics* 200-201.

⁵⁰Moisés Silva, *Philippians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992) 12.

when God inspired the Word, He did so through incorporating human imprecision that requires the repetition of the same generalized thought two or more times. This is one of the qualifications he makes in reference to the time-honored works of Trench and Terry in their discussions of synonyms.⁵¹

This philosophy of substituting one word for another without changing the meaning of a sentence in the least bit lies behind the strong endorsement of Louw's and Nida's *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains* (2d ed., 2 vols. [New York: United Bible Societies, 1989]). Here is a work that modern linguists see as offering alternatives to various words that Scripture does not distinguish from one another even when used together in the same context.

Grammar

For modern linguists, the theory of substitution without change of meaning carries over into the area of grammar. Nida typifies the approach:

One of the severe handicaps to objective analysis of grammatical structures has been the mistaken concept that there is something so uniquely individual about the grammatical structure of each language and so intimately connected with the entire thought processes of the speakers of such a language, that one cannot really comprehend the meaning of a message without being immersed in the syntactic formulations.⁵²

He adds, "The requirement that language provide for novelty means that conceptual determinism based on syntactic forms is basically false."⁵³ In other words, the biblical languages have nothing unique to say, based on their syntactical relationships. Divine inspiration did nothing for the Bible's message that cannot be done by human imitation. Ultimately, that is the position of modern linguistics.

Black exemplifies the same posture as Nida: "The use of transformations, for example, permits us to change the overt grammatical structure of an expression in a variety of ways without materially altering the meaning."⁵⁴ Silva does the same: "One specific syntactical question that requires comment is that of tense (or better, *aspectual*) distinctions. The viewpoint adopted in this commentary is that the significance of such distinctions for biblical interpretation has been greatly overestimated by most commentators, particularly conservative writers."⁵⁵ As Silva's statements imply, that represents a substantial departure from traditional hermeneutics.

He shows a bit more caution elsewhere:

⁵¹Silva, *Biblical Words* 123.

⁵²Nida, "Implications" 83.

⁵³*Ibid.*, 84.

⁵⁴Black, *Linguistics* 140.

⁵⁵Silva, *Philippians* 13.

We would go too far if we were to argue that a writer's decision between, say, an aorist and a present subjunctive never reflects a stylistic decision that may be of some interest to the interpreter. But we can feel confident that no reasonable writer would seek to express a major point by leaning on a subtle grammatical distinction—especially if it is a point not otherwise clear from the whole context (and if it *is* clear from the context, then the grammatical subtlety plays at best a secondary role in exegesis).⁵⁶

Yet even here, he reflects the unimportance placed upon grammatical relationships found in inspired Scripture. He places himself at the opposite pole from Terry, a foremost spokesman for traditional grammatical-historical interpretation. Terry has written,

The significance of the presence or the absence of the article has often much to do with the meaning of a passage. . . . The position of words and clauses, and peculiarities of grammatical structure, may often serve to emphasize important thoughts and statements. The special usage of the genitive, the dative, or the accusative case, or of the active, middle, or passive voice, often conveys a notable significance. The same is also true of conjunctions, adverbs, and prepositions. These serve to indicate peculiar shades of meaning and delicate and suggestive relations of words and sentences, without a nice apprehension of which the real sense of a passage may be lost to the reader.⁵⁷

That is grammatical-historical interpretation in the traditional sense.

Authorial Intention

Much that was said above under the heading “The Preunderstanding of Modern Linguistics” applies to the discussion of “Authorial Intention.” Barr observes, “Today it is increasingly realized that a written document does not necessarily give access to the intentions of the author and, correspondingly, cannot necessarily be interpreted on the basis of these intentions. A document takes on a sort of life of its own and has its own meaning, created and expressed by its own wording and its own shape.”⁵⁸ He argues that readers must take into account not only what is written, but also what is only implied. That, he says, opens the door for a wide variety of understandings which may or may not represent authorial intention. From this uncertainty he reasons that a quest for authorial intention is fruitless and that literal interpretation leads to different interpretations for different people.

From a slightly different perspective, Cotterell and Turner see merit in seeking authorial intention up to a certain point, but beyond that point concede that an interpreter is never able to divorce his own circumstances from the authorial

⁵⁶Silva, “God, Language” 261.

⁵⁷Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics* 208. Regarding *en huō* in Heb 1:2, Silva has written, “In fact, the presence or absence of the article here does not alter the meaning of the clause” (Silva, “Let’s Be Logical” 62). That statement is the opposite of Terry’s points about grammatical precision.

⁵⁸James Barr, “Literality,” *Faith and Philosophy* 6/4 (October 1989):423.

intention he is seeking. They write,

However, when we come to the study of language as it is actually used, we find a second category of meaning intruding itself: connotative meaning. Here we move away from objectivity to subjectivity, away from cold grammar to flesh-and-blood utterances. Words are not, in fact, the neutral entities we might intuitively assume them to be. . . . We know the word 'father' and we know also our own experience of 'father': a kindly figure, a bullying figure, an absent figure, a suffering figure or whatever. We also have some experience of other people's fathers, and we have our attempt to formalize this diverse experience. Inevitably then the word 'father' carries for each individual a connotation.⁵⁹

That "connotative meaning" for Cotterell and Turner is the obstacle that hides a pure understanding of authorial intention. They observe that getting back to the author's intended meaning "is not only practically impossible: it is also theoretically impossible, as modern hermeneutical philosophers from Schleiermacher and Gadamer onwards have insisted."⁶⁰ This is where subjectivity intervenes with the interpreter unable to separate a text's significance for himself from what the author intended. Note the definition of interpretation offered by Cotterell and Turner: "the bringing to expression of the interpreter's understanding of the significance for his own world of the discourse meaning of the text."⁶¹ They include "the interpreter's understanding of the significance for his own world" as a part of interpretation, which clearly confuses application with interpretation.⁶²

Earlier discussion has cited Terry's caution against allowing any contemporary considerations, whether doctrinal or practical, to infringe on the meaning intended by the author and comprehended by the original readers.⁶³

Precision

Modern linguistics is more pessimistic about success in the interpretive task than traditional hermeneutics. In writings of its proponents, one finds repeated statements about uncertainty in grasping the intention of the communicator. In a chapter entitled "Determining Meaning," Silva writes about his approach creating greater uncertainty: "The title of this chapter . . . is . . . likely to raise unrealistic expectations, as though mastery of the contents of this book meant the end of uncertainty in the study of words. The truth of the matter is that, at least in some

⁵⁹Cotterell and Turner, *Linguistics & Biblical Interpretation* 46.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 58.

⁶¹*Ibid.*, 72.

⁶²Brian A. Shealy shows the importance of distinguishing application from interpretation in Thomas, *Evangelical Hermeneutics* 165-94.

⁶³See quotation cited by n. 18 above.

cases, our discussion will lead to *greater* uncertainty. . . .⁶⁴ God's purpose in granting biblical revelation to the human race was to make His will known, not to create uncertainty among the recipients of His revelation.

The tone of uncertainty is a far cry from the optimism of traditional hermeneutics about man's ability to receive communication accurately. Years ago Stuart penned these words:

I venture . . . to aver that all men are, and ever have been, in reality, good and true interpreters of each other's language. Has any part of our race, in full possession of human faculties, ever failed to understand what others said to them, and to understand it truly? Or to make themselves understood by others, when they have in their communications kept within the circle of their own knowledge? Surely none. Interpretation, then, in its basis or fundamental principles is a native art, if I may so speak. It is coeval with the power of uttering words. It is, of course, a universal art; it is common to all nations, barbarous as well as civilized.⁶⁵

In continuing, Stuart indicates that the ability to communicate and to receive communication is not dependent on acquired skill for discovering and developing principles of communication. In the case of modern linguistics, attempts to discover and develop principles of communication have clouded human understanding of God's Word rather than increasing it.

Plagued with uncertainties about meaning, modern linguistics has the related problem of assuming imprecision in biblical communication, as indicated in the following words:

It is, perhaps, a danger of exegesis that we tend to demand a precision in the use of words which our everyday experience should tell us is not to be expected, and to find differences in meaning where none is demonstrably intended. A case in point is John 21 and the alternation between two Greek words for 'love' in Jesus' questioning of Peter. It is probable that we are right in seeing significance in the three-fold question in vv. 15-17, less probable, however, that the change in *word* is significant.⁶⁶

Terry's discussion of John 21 contrasts sharply with this opinion. He goes to great lengths to discuss distinctions in meaning not only between the two words for "love," but also three other pairs of synonyms that appear in the three verses—i.e., two words for "know," three words for "sheep," and two words for "feed."⁶⁷

⁶⁴Silva, *Biblical Words* 137.

⁶⁵M. Stuart, cited by Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics* 174.

⁶⁶Cotterell and Turner, *Linguistics & Biblical Interpretation* 159. See also their words, "Of course it is arguable that every human communication is only more-or-less competent and might have been made more effectively, more precisely, less ambiguously" (*ibid.*, 60).

⁶⁷Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics* 200-201.

By assuming that the Bible has no more precision than everyday human speech, modern linguistics reduces exegesis to a “ballpark” estimate of what were the intentions of the human author and, ultimately, of God who inspired the Bible. In other words, God’s revelation to man furnishes only the “gist” of what God wanted man to know. Such an assumption, if implemented, results in a great loss of propositional truth for the church.

Discourse

Modern linguistics emphasizes the dominance of discourse considerations in determining meaning. Black writes, “Moreover, because macrostructures dominate the composition and structure of texts, discourse is analyzed from the top down.”⁶⁸ In another place he indicates, “A spoken or written word in isolation may have many different possible meanings, but a discourse, which is the environment in which words exist, imposes limitations on the choice of possible meanings and tends to shape and define the meaning of each word.”⁶⁹ Silva holds the same perspective: “[I]n recent decades linguists have given increasing attention to the paragraph as a basic unit of language. This new approach, usually referred to as *discourse analysis*, has led to a renewed concern for the textual coherence of biblical writings.”⁷⁰

Discourse analysis is the ultimate court of appeal for modern linguistics. The advocates refrain from deciding meaning based on the details of a text and even speak somewhat disparagingly of those who do emphasize those details. In speaking of traditional exegetical approaches, Cotterell and Turner have this to say: “English exegesis in the past has excelled in the study of the meaning of words, lexical semantics, rather than in the study of chunks of text, because of the *assumed* precision of such studies.”⁷¹

Yet among modern linguists disagreement and confusion reigns regarding how to use discourse analysis, as noted by Cotterell and Turner: “[A]t the present there are no firm conclusions, no generally accepted formulae, no fixed methodology, not even an agreed terminology.”⁷² If so much is unsettled regarding discourse analysis, a field looked upon as the determining factor in interpretation, it is no wonder that so much uncertainty prevails among modern linguists.

The subjectivity of discourse analysis should be obvious. In taking a larger section of material to analyze before probing the details within that section, a person can come up with a goodly number of different understandings of what an author

⁶⁸Black, *Linguistics* 171.

⁶⁹Black, *Linguistics* 138.

⁷⁰Silva, *Philippians* 13; cf. also Silva, “God, Language” 221.

⁷¹Cotterell and Turner, *Linguistics & Biblical Interpretation* 18 [emphasis added].

⁷²Cotterell and Turner, *Linguistics & Biblical Interpretation* 233.

meant. A comparison of utilizations of discourse analysis in Paul's Epistle to the Philippians furnishes an instructive example of the method's subjectivity. Two proponents of discourse analysis applied the method to the epistle and came up with drastically different understandings of Paul's intent in the letter. They agree that 1:27–2:18 is the heart of the epistle, but in analyzing that section they disagree regarding its meaning. Silva concludes, "The pervasive theme in this section [i.e., 1:27–2:18] is Christian sanctification, as reflected in the commands to behave in a manner worthy of the gospel (1:27), to obey (2:12), to become blameless (2:25)."⁷³ Black differs: "Paul's purpose in Philippians is to persuade his readers to undertake a united course of action in the future on the grounds that it is the most advantageous course."⁷⁴ So what does the section and the epistle as a whole teach, Christian sanctification or united action? The subjective inclinations of the interpreters, not the text itself, determine the answer. Far more agreement exists among practitioners of traditional exegesis regarding the theme of the epistle because they have analyzed the details within the epistle before moving on to the overall emphasis. Traditional exegetes may differ regarding some interpretive matters within the text, but there will be a consensus among them that the purpose of the epistle is not found in 1:27–2:18, but in the expression of Paul's gratefulness to the Philippian church for its generous gift.⁷⁵

Stylistic Considerations

Three stylistic matters that frequently arise in modern-linguistic discussions are redundancy, ambiguity, and vagueness.

Redundancy. Modern linguists make much of the human tendency to repeat the same idea using different vocabulary without a difference in meaning. They call this "redundancy." The following briefly describes this tendency:

We can never forget, however, that writers often use a diverse vocabulary for simple reasons of style, such as a desire to avoid repetition. In these cases, we may say that the differences among the words are 'neutralized' by the context. Even when an author makes a lexical choice for semantic (rather than stylistic) reasons, it does not follow that our interpretation stands or falls on our ability to determine precisely why one word was chosen rather than another. After all, people normally communicate not by uttering isolated words but by speaking whole sentences.⁷⁶

⁷³Silva, *Philippians* 20.

⁷⁴Black, *Linguistics* 193.

⁷⁵E.g., Homer A. Kent, Jr., "Philippians," in *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 11, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978) 99.

⁷⁶Silva, "Let's Be Logical" 60.

For that reason they feel that synonyms in proximity to each other have at best only secondary contributions to make.

Yet the burden of proof rests on those who would explain away distinctions in meaning. NT writers in general did not concern themselves with stylistic matters such as avoiding repetition. Their language was the language of the man on the street, not of the classical poet or author who sought to entertain his readers with clever stylistic maneuvers.⁷⁷

Ambiguity. Silva insists that ambiguity is for practical reasons a characteristic of all languages: “But even that consideration misses the important point that ambiguity is a valuable and even necessary aspect of all languages, since otherwise the number of words in everyone’s active vocabulary would grow to unmanageable proportions.”⁷⁸ He illustrates from Scripture:

For literary effect, however, authors sometimes tease their readers with double meanings, as when the Gospel of John 1:5 tells us that the darkness did not understand the light; since the Greek verb (*katalambanō*) can also mean “overcome,” quite possibly John has deliberately used an ambiguous word. Before drawing such a conclusion, however, one should have fairly strong contextual reasons. In the case of the Gospel of John, the character of the book as a whole and other likely instances of ambiguity support the conclusion.⁷⁹

Yet the verdict is not decisive in favor of ambiguity in John 1:5 or in the Gospel of John as a whole. Traditional hermeneutics has limited each passage one meaning and one meaning only, unless a contextual feature indicates an exception.⁸⁰ No such indicator exists in John 1:5 or, for the most part, in the rest of the Gospel of John in examples usually cited by those embracing modern hermeneutical trends.

Rather than viewing such instances as ambiguous, the interpreter should apply various exegetical considerations in determining which of the possible meanings the writer and/or speaker intended. Defending an interpreter who cannot decide between two possibilities on the ground of ambiguity⁸¹ directly violates the time-honored principle of single meaning.

Vagueness. Silva specifies two kinds of vagueness: “We must carefully distinguish between, on the one hand, vagueness in the sense of sloppiness (that is,

⁷⁷A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville: Broadman, 1934) 49-75.

⁷⁸Silva, “God, Language” 249.

⁷⁹*Ibid.*, 250-51.

⁸⁰Cf. Thomas, *Evangelical Hermeneutics* 141-64.

⁸¹Cf. Cotterell and Turner, *Linguistics & Biblical Interpretation* 175.

in contexts where some precision is appropriate and expected) and, on the other, vagueness that contributes to effective communication (that is, in contexts where greater precision may mislead the reader or hearer to draw an invalid inference).⁸² Only deliberate vagueness falls into the category of stylistic considerations.

He offers a lengthy discussion of one example of vagueness:

The classic example here is *to euangelion tou Christou*, “the gospel of Christ” (e.g., Phil. 1:27). What precisely is the relationship between the two nouns in this phrase? The gospel that belongs to Christ (genitive of possession)? The gospel that comes from Christ (genitive of source)? The gospel that Christ proclaimed (subjective genitive)? The gospel that proclaims Christ (objective genitive)? Perhaps the very asking of the question throws us off track. Countless readers of Paul’s letters, without asking the question, have understood the apostle perfectly well. It would not be quite right to say that Paul meant *all* of these things at once—a suggestion that aims at stressing the richness of the apostle’s idiom, but at the expense of misunderstanding the way that language normally works. The point is that Paul was not thinking about any one of these possibilities in particular: he was using a general (‘vague’) expression that served simply to identify his message.⁸³

Vagueness offers another alternative for violating the principle of single meaning. Grammatical-historical principles dictate that “the gospel of Christ” in Phil 1:27 has only one meaning. Since it is a gospel about Christ, the usual explanation is that “of Christ” is an objective genitive. To posit that the apostle did not distinguish between four different meanings does injustice to his precision of language and beyond that to the Holy Spirit who inspired the apostle to write what he did. God does not intend for His people to grasp only a vague idea with several possible facets. He wants them to know specifically what is in His mind.

Literality

Modern linguistics opposes the categorization of literature as either literal or figurative: “We would not wish to support the notion of a simple dichotomy between literal and figurative language.”⁸⁴ Cotterell and Turner contend that no utterance is without its figurative aspects: “Just as there can be no music other than mood music, so there can be no utterance which is not emotive, and to that extent non-literal.”⁸⁵ Since all language affects the emotions, they contend that no clearcut line divides literal from figurative.

Barr builds a similar case against literality. He concludes that literality “can be salutary but also damaging, progressive and creative but also dulling and

⁸²Silva, “God, Language” 258.

⁸³Ibid.; cf. Silva, *Biblical Words*, 150-51, for other examples.

⁸⁴Cotterell and Turner, *Linguistics & Biblical Interpretation* 294.

⁸⁵Ibid., 295.

restrictive.”⁸⁶ He says it can make a sharp distinction between physical and spiritual, but finds it difficult to handle in a category that is somewhere between, “such as legend, or imprecise narration, or events such as the resurrection where the Bible is as firm on its non-physical as on its physical character.”⁸⁷

By viewing biblical interpretation without the philosophical lens used by modern linguists, traditional principles define literal as follows:

The grammatico-historical sense of a writer is such an interpretation of his language as is required by the laws of grammar and the facts of history. Sometimes we speak of the literal sense, by which we mean the most simple, direct, and ordinary meaning of phrases and sentences. By this term we usually denote a meaning opposed to the figurative or metaphorical. The grammatical sense is essentially the same as the literal, the one expression being derived from the Greek, the other from the Latin.⁸⁸

Philosophical preunderstanding has created the confusion that hinders modern linguistics from making a clear distinction between literal and nonliteral language. By eliminating that preunderstanding, traditional hermeneutics does make a clear distinction between the two, with no middle ground.

FINAL APPRAISAL

Modern linguistics has usefulness in analyzing an unwritten language, in devising an alphabet for that language, in teaching the users of that language to read and write literature composed in their language. It also has positive features in relation to hermeneutics when it coincides with principles of traditional grammatical-historical principles. But in an overall appraisal of the value of the field, it stands opposed to that traditional method in so many crucial areas that it can only detract from interpretive analyses of the meaning of the biblical text.

The system's use of the interpreter's preunderstanding as the starting point in exegesis forces the interpretive procedure into a subjective mold that inevitably steers his conclusions away from an objective understanding of the author's meaning. Based upon this beginning, other fallacious principles such as underestimating the divine role in inspiration, mishandling various lexical and grammatical issues, its mixing of application into the interpretive step, its assumption of imprecision in the text, its demeaning of the importance of details, its assumption of stylistic guidelines, and its muddying of the difference between literal and figurative language combine to constitute modern-linguistic hermeneutics as a system distinct from traditional grammatical-historical hermeneutics, and therefore as a hindrance

⁸⁶Barr, "Literality" 425.

⁸⁷Ibid.

⁸⁸Terry, *Biblical Hermeneutics* 203.

to accurate interpretation of the biblical text.

Summary of Modern Linguistics Versus Traditional Hermeneutics

	<i>Modern Linguistics</i>	<i>Grammatical-Historical</i>
Agreement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • divine inspiration • importance of context • lexicography (partial agreement) • grammatical analysis (partial agreement) • historical-cultural background • possible supplement to g.-h. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • divine inspiration • importance of context • lexicography (partial agreement) • grammatical analysis (partial agreement) • historical-cultural background
Disagreement	<p>preunderstanding, starting point:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • biblical languages not unique • integration with general revelation • impossibility of absolute certainty 	<p>objectivism, starting point:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • uniqueness of Bible languages • prefer special revelation • yields propositional truth
Conflicts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • inspiration does not matter • diachronics minimized • words cannot denote concepts • substitution of synonyms permissible • grammatical relationships not unique • authorial intention evasive • uncertainty and imprecision • subjective meaning from discourse • redundancy, ambiguity, and vagueness • literal and figurative not distinguished 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • inspiration does matter • diachronics equal to synchronics • words can denote concepts • substitution of synonyms not permissible • grammatical relationships unique • authorial intention available • certainty and precision • objective meaning from details • single meaning and clarity • literal and figurative distinct

DO WE NEED MESSIANIC SYNAGOGUES? BIBLICAL, HISTORIC, AND PRAGMATIC ISSUES*

William C. Varner**

An assessment of the Messianic Synagogue movement is difficult because it exists in so many forms, but some general observations to cover all the forms are possible. Early in the twentieth century, a Jewish Christian named David Baron evaluated the Messianic Judaism of his day. In the movement he saw specific dangers for the body of Christ, stressing how the movement tends to destroy unity in the body of Christ by erecting a wall of partition between Jewish believers and Gentile believers. Similar concerns about the Messianic Jewish movement prevail in its revival during the last several decades. They touch on biblical-theological matters, including the movement's bringing into the present the Judaism that Paul relegated to the past (cf. Gal 1:13-16), its tendency to promote divisions among Christians (cf. Gal 3:28; Eph 2:11-22), its emphasis on the shadow rather than the substance of NT fulfillments (cf. Col 2:16-17), and its tendency to redefine Jesus' deity. Other concerns arise in historical and pragmatic matters: a return to the Judaism of apostolic times is impossible; history teaches that Messianic Synagogues are not more effective in witnessing to the Jewish community; taking Jewish believers away from churches contributes to "Gentilization" of the church; Messianic Synagogues may become an excuse for the church to transfer efforts in Jewish evangelism; and emphasis on non-biblical Jewish observances is subject to Jesus' condemnation of the Pharisees' Oral Law. The early church in Antioch of Syria in its assimilation of Jewish and Gentile believers into one body offers a suitable model for the contemporary church to follow.

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The one who writes about Messianic Judaism/Synagogues faces serious challenges. Not the least of these is what exactly to call the movement. The problem is that the term “Messianic” could possibly refer to any Jewish person who believes in a personal Messiah, whether or not that Messiah is identified with Jesus of Nazareth. For example, the Lubavitcher Hasidim fervently proclaim their belief in “Moshiach,” some even to the point of identifying their former “Rebbe” (Menachem Mendel Schneerson) with that Moshiach. Does that mean that Lubavitchers are also “Messianic Jews”?

The title “Messianic Judaism” is here to stay, and to argue about its semantic nuances is fruitless. This essay will use the expression even though many may not believe it to be the best title. It is also true that some prefer “congregation” to “synagogue” to describe their local body of believers. I will simply use “Messianic Synagogue” for convenience, while recognizing the great diversity of expression among both adherents and opponents of the movement. Messianic Judaism, whatever be the strengths or shortcomings of the title, is a “fait accompli”—and that is the movement to be evaluated here in the light of theological, historical, and pragmatic considerations.

The movement in its modern form is now over thirty years old. Most of those involved in Messianic Judaism for any length of time have by now made up their minds and will probably not be dissuaded by arguments proposed against it. On the other hand, persons interested in exploring the questions that Messianic synagogues inevitably raise may find some help here as they sort through those issues.

Evaluating the movement creates another obstacle, that of which form of Messianic Judaism to address. In the early 1990s a Reconstructionist Rabbi named Carol Harris-Shapiro made an ethnographic study of Messianic Judaism.¹ Ethnography requires the researcher to enter a community as both an observer and, to some extent, a participant. Though other full-length treatments of Messianic Judaism have been done by non-Messianic Jewish writers,² Harris-Shapiro’s work is a fairly reliable treatment by someone who, as an outsider, tried to view the movement from the inside. She categorizes the various organizational strands of Messianic Judaism into five basic groups: 1. Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations; 2. International Alliance of Messianic Congregations and Synagogues; 3. Fellowship of Messianic Congregations; 4. Association of Torah-Observant Messianics; and 5. The International Federation of Messianic Jews. Referring to the last three as the smaller of the five, Harris-Shapiro adds, “These Messianic margins point to the increasing diversity in the movement, while their small numbers

¹Carol Harris-Shapiro, *Messianic Judaism* (Boston: Beacon, 1999).

²David Rausch, *Messianic Judaism: Its history, theology and polity* (Lewiston, N.Y.:Edwin Mellen,1982) and B.Z. Sobel, *Hebrew Christianity: The Thirteenth Tribe* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1974).

highlight the strength of the mainstream expression of Messianic Judaism.”³

Therefore, to whom do these observations apply? I will leave that question to be answered by the reader, who must realize that I may paint at times with a broad brush. If I wrongly cover someone, I fully realize that such is inevitable in light of the movement’s great diversity.

Before I address my concerns, I would like to share a few personal observations about my involvement in this subject. First, I rejoice greatly in the fact that God is preserving a remnant of Jewish believers, as Paul would say, “at this present time” (Rom 11:5). Jewish evangelism has always been a major factor in my life, first, following seminary during my seven years as a pastor. I then had the privilege of working with a ministry to Jewish people for seventeen years, ten of which I served as dean of a Bible institute dedicated to teaching students, many of whom were Jewish believers, about the history and culture of the Jewish people both in America and Israel. I received a master’s degree in Judaic studies under the tutelage of a well-known conservative rabbinical scholar and gave the valedictory address at the commencement in a Philadelphia synagogue. Recently my teaching in a Christian liberal arts college has been primarily to Gentile Christian students, and it has been a joy to introduce them to the culture, history, and spiritual needs of the Jewish people. In addition to teaching, I am also the director of our college’s branch campus program in Israel and have led thirty-six study trips to that country. There I have tried to familiarize myself with the challenges that “Yehudim Meshichim” (Messianic Jews) face in their homeland.

I write this, not to impress anyone, but to let the reader know that, although I am a Gentile, I write as one who is a sympathetic friend to Jewish believers. One of my ministry goals has also been to educate the churches where I minister about the Jewish people and Israel and to expose anti-Jewishness wherever it raises its ugly head. So let my criticisms of Messianic Judaism be understood in that light. If I wound anyone be assured that it is done in the spirit of Proverbs 27:6, “Faithful are the wounds of a friend. . . .”⁴

A Voice from the Past

Jewish Christianity is certainly not a modern phenomenon, but has existed since the first century. As an identifiable movement within the church, however, it ceased to exist by the sixth century A.D.⁵ There was a renaissance of faith in Jesus as the Messiah during the nineteenth century, when literally thousands of Jewish

³Harris-Shapiro, *Messianic Judaism* 28-29.

⁴Scripture quotations are taken from the *English Standard Version* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2001).

⁵Hugh J. Schonfield, *The History of Jewish Christianity* (London: Duckworth Press, 1936), chapter IX.

people came to such faith.⁶ Jewish Christian organizations formed and new Jewish missions appeared in England, in America, and on the Continent. Some of the greatest “giants” in Jewish Christianity lived and ministered in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Among the most notable was the great David Baron, who came to faith in Jesus as Messiah from an Orthodox European background and went on to found the Hebrew Christian Testimony to Israel in England. Baron contributed major scholarly works that are still read and appreciated today, such as *Rays of Messiah's Glory, Types, Psalms and Prophecies, Israel in the Plan of God*, and the invaluable commentary, *Visions and Prophecies of Zechariah*. A highly respected Jewish believer who died just recently has written, “Many of David Baron's friends testified that he was the most Christlike man they had ever known.”⁷

Most of Baron's writing originally appeared in the periodical *The Scattered Nation*, magazine of the “Testimony.” In 1911 he published an article in that periodical titled, “Messianic Judaism; or Judaising Christianity.” Reading this article should recall Kohelet's statement that “there is nothing new under the sun” (Eccl 1:9). That article makes it clear that the movement is not a new phenomenon, but was significant enough at the turn of the century to cause great concern to David Baron. The issues he raised ninety years ago are important for today, especially since he was regarded so highly as Jewish believer.

Baron writes that Messianic Judaism's founders such as Theodore Lucky advocated

that it is incumbent on the Hebrew Christian not only to identify themselves with their unbelieving Jewish brethren in their national aspirations—as explained, for instance, in Zionism . . . but to observe the national rites and customs of the Jews, such as the keeping of the Sabbath, circumcision, and other observances, some of which have not even their origin in the law of Moses, but are part of the unbearable yoke which was laid on the neck of our people by the Rabbis.⁸

He cites writers who prepared both a “Minimum Programme” and a “Maximum Programme” for their turn of the century form of Messianic Judaism. The “Minimum Programme” advocated the following:

A Hebrew Christian movement will hold fast to Passover, Pentecost, Tabernacles, Chanukah and Purim; will include in its liturgy a good deal of the traditional Synagogue prayer; will be favorably disposed towards every ceremony that has entwined itself in the

⁶Ibid., chapters XVIII-XX.

⁷Louis Goldberg, *Our Jewish Friends* (Neptune, N.J.: Loizeaux Brothers, 1983) 167.

⁸David Baron, “Messianic Judaism,” *The Scattered Nation* (October 1911):4. Reprinted by American Messianic Fellowship (Chicago, Ill.). For further information on an example of this movement, Joseph Rabinowitz and his congregation, see Schonfield, *History of Jewish Christianity* 223-26.

Hebrew consciousness; . . . insists on circumcision; attaches itself to the Hebrew consciousness and holds by the historical and Biblical continuity of Israel's mission.⁹

This was the "Minimum Programme." In Baron's words, the "Maximum Programme" also included "joining in all forms and ceremonies of the Christ-rejecting synagogue, to wear phylacteries and the talith, to use the Jewish liturgy, just as the other Jews do, only to smuggle in now and then the Name of Jesus into their prayers."¹⁰

Baron also mentions the following in a section he calls the "Dangers of the Movement."

These Judaizing brethren forget that during the period of Israel's national unbelief a *new thing* is being formed. Every essential element of what constitutes *nationality* is to be found in this new brotherhood. Those who profess allegiance to Christ become members of the body of which He is the Head, and must be ready to take up the cross and follow Him. And one very heavy part of the cross is the separation which it involves to disciples . . . for those near and dear to them. It is hard to bear suffering and reproach, but the conditions of discipleship are not different now than they ever were. 'He that taketh not his cross and followeth after me is not worthy of me'.¹¹

He compares the present situation of the Jewish believer to the scene in Exodus when "everyone who sought the Lord went out into the tent of meeting which was without the camp" (Exod 33:7). "So also during this much longer period of national apostasy God's tabernacle is removed from the camp of corporate official Judaism, and everyone from among Israel who in truth seeks the Lord must be prepared to go forth unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach."¹²

Lastly, Baron stresses the unity of Jews and Gentiles in the terms of Gal 3:28 ("neither Jew nor Greek") and the picture of unity in one body found in Eph 2:11-22.

Now, to say that in the one Church of Christ are one set of rules, one attitude in relation to certain rites and observances enjoined in the law, and certain earthly or "ritual hopes" and expectations are incumbent on its Jewish members, which are not incumbent on its Gentile members, is nothing less than to try to raise up again the middle wall of partition which Christ by His death hath broken down, and to introduce confusion into the one "House of the Living God." The New Testament nowhere tells the Gentile believer that he is 'free' from anything from which the Jewish believer is not freed.¹³

⁹Ibid., 4.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Ibid., 6.

¹²Ibid., 7.

¹³Ibid., 8.

Baron concludes this section by offering that Paul also had in mind Jewish as well as Gentile believers in his strong warning against law-keeping in Galatians 4–5.¹⁴

One more significant point that Baron makes lays the groundwork for something to be expressed later in this essay. He notes the claim often made by advocates of Messianic Judaism that early Jewish believers remained in unbroken continuity with the Hebrew nation and attended the Temple and synagogue worship, kept the Sabbath, and the Jewish festivals, as is evident in the Acts of the Apostles. He deals with this issue by declaring that it was the unbelieving synagogue which made this “unbroken continuity” between church and synagogue an impossibility by driving the Nazarenes from their midst. “What these brethren overlook is that in relation to this and other matters the Acts of Apostles introduces us to a transition period and describes conditions which most evidently were not intended by God to be permanent.”¹⁵

Baron’s point is that the destruction of the Temple should have ended once for all any perplexity that the Hebrew Christian may have had about what were called those “national observances.” “With the breaking up of the Jewish national polity there emerged the Church of Christ—not dependent upon any building or land for its center of unity, and whose worship does not consist in observances but in spiritual sacrifices and service which are acceptable to God through Christ Jesus.”¹⁶

I have summarized Baron’s article to illustrate that Messianic Jewish issues were a live concern well over a century ago—and also were strongly opposed by one of Hebrew Christianity’s greatest lights. The rest of this essay will build upon what Baron so passionately wrote out of concern for his fellow Jewish believers and for the overall cause of the Messiah.

Biblical-Theological Concerns

Concerns expressed about the Messianic Jewish movement have been largely theological in nature. To these biblical-theological issues can be added some historical and pragmatic issues. Though the first area is the most important, the last two also raise significant questions about Messianic Judaism and Messianic Synagogues. Three general propositions will summarize the biblical-theological concerns. The fourth proposition expresses what is only a potential theological danger at the present time.

1. The Apostle Paul described his previous life in “Judaism” as something that was part of his past life, not something that was part of his present life. The word “Judaism” (Ἰουδαϊσμός) occurs in the NT only in Gal 1:13-14 (emphasis

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid., 13.

¹⁶Ibid.

added):

For you have heard of my former life in *Judaism*, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it. And I was advancing in *Judaism* beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers.

The context of this passage indicates clearly that those practices that were part of Paul's "Judaism" ended when God revealed His Son to him (1:15-16). This "Damascus Road" experience in Acts 9 so completely re-oriented Paul's thinking that he never afterward identified with "Judaism" as a way of life. Why, therefore, would Jewish believers desire to be part of any form of "Judaism"?

That does not mean that Paul thought he had ceased being a Jew. He evidences that in many places, both in Acts and in his epistles (Acts 22:3; Rom 11:1). But his involvement in "Judaism" ended when Jesus was revealed in him. He was then part of something new. How, then, can modern Messianic Jews desire to take part in the rituals of their pre-Messiah life?

Paul uses even stronger language about that past life in Phil 3:4-8:

Though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness, under the law blameless. But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ.

In listing the privileges and attainments of his life before the Messiah, Paul first grouped together privileges that were his by birth and could never be changed (circumcision, membership in Israel and the tribe of Benjamin, and his Hebrew-speaking heritage). The second set of attainments were those things he attained by his own effort (Pharisaic membership, persecuting zeal, and his Torah-observant life). He did not view these things as badges of honor, however, but rather as impediments to pleasing God. He describes them with a very strong word—"rubbish." Although he lost all these human attainments, he had no regrets. The knowledge of Jesus as his Messiah was far more valuable than any of those privileges and accomplishments.

That does not mean that Paul became an example of the "self-hating Jew" described in so much recent Jewish literature. It means that those practices that some Messianic Jews emphasize so strongly are the very things that often can lead to self-righteousness and actual loss of the real knowledge of the Messiah. Though many today want to find their identity in "Jewishness," Paul found his identity in the Messiah.

I know that these are strong words, but Paul's words are even stronger. The

usual response to this is to point out the incidents in Acts where Paul observed certain Jewish rituals such as the Nazirite vow (Acts 18:18; 21:23-26). Such incidents, however, cannot be interpreted as contradictions of his clear teaching in Galatians and Philippians, as well as what will be seen in Ephesians and Colossians—letters written by Paul himself! Paul's actions should be viewed as illustrating *personal* choices motivated by the pragmatic concern of becoming a Jew to the Jews. Those actions, recorded in the narrative genre of the book of Acts, were never intended as normative for others or to set forth a norm for congregational worship. His choices have been “over-interpreted” to justify a pattern of observances that were never intended.

Furthermore, the present-day absence of the Temple with its elaborate ritual is a serious factor that needs to be taken into sober consideration. How does the lack of the Temple impact the observance of these and other ritual practices that belong to another time and often cannot be observed today in the way they were originally commanded? A more serious question also arises. Where in the NT are the ritual practices of Second Temple “Judaism” and did they ever characterize the congregational pattern for early churches?

2. *Messianic Judaism tends to promote divisions that the redemptive work of Jesus has torn down.* The key texts in this regard are Eph 2:11-22 and Gal 3:28. Even without a citation of the entire Ephesians passage, it is evident that it clearly proclaims the spiritual unity of all Gentile and Jewish believers in one body. Verses 14-15 deserve special notice:

For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace. . . .

Most interpret this text with a layout of the Herodian Temple as its background. Paul declares that the Messiah's work has resulted in His abolishing “the law of commandments and ordinances.” The Greek text reads literally “the law of commandments *in* ordinances” (τὸν νόμον τῶν ἐντολῶν ἐν δόγμασιν, *ton nomon ĩn entoĩn en dogmasin*). At the very least this would refer to the disannulling of the ceremonial laws and also the so-called “civil laws” of Exodus 21–24. The phrase “the law of commandments” occurs in Exod 24:12 (הַתְּוָהבֵּית־יְהוָה) [wĕhatōrah wĕhammišwāh in the Masoretic Text; τὸν νόμον καὶ τὰς ἐντολάς [*ton nomon kai tas entolas*] in the LXX), referring to what God had given to Moses on the mount up to that point.

Paul further illustrates this unifying work of the Savior by referring to the fence (*soreg* in Hebrew) in the Herodian Temple that kept Gentiles from entering into the more sacred area of the Temple (ναός, *naos*) where only Jews could enter and worship. That dividing wall, in the Pauline spiritual analogy, has been abolished because that which kept the two peoples apart, “the law of the commandments,” has

been disannulled. Both Jewish and Gentile believers can now enter together, not into a physical temple, but into something brand new, the spiritual body of the Messiah.

It has sometimes been charged that Messianic Judaism is rebuilding this wall of partition. Actually, no one can rebuild the wall—it is done away with forever. But Messianic Judaism, by its emphasis on laws that have no continuing spiritual relevance for either Jews or Gentiles, is creating an appearance that the wall still separates the two groups.

A prominent Messianic Jewish commentary on the NT spends pages trying to explain these verses as having no reference to the Mosaic laws. The commentary states that the “ordinances” referred to in Eph 2:15 are not the laws of Exodus but are the “takkanot,” i.e., Rabbinic ordinances added to the Torah, such as the “soreg” or dividing wall.¹⁷ This bifurcation of “commandments” and “ordinances” with the idea that the Messiah abolished the latter and not the former is unsupportable by any fair reading of the text. Is a preconceived position forcing this commentator to avoid the plain reading of the text? Scholarly commentaries on Ephesians do not support his imagined distinction between divine and human commands in the passage. Hodge represents the scholarly consensus:

This may mean the law of commandments *with* ordinances—referring to the two classes of laws, moral and positive; or it may refer to the form *in which* the precepts are presented in the law . . . *ἰὼν ἐντολῶν* giving the contents of the law, and *ἐν δογμασι* the form.¹⁸

The most often recognized Greek lexicon in use today does not support the idea that the “ordinances” are Rabbinic decrees, but defines them as the specific ordinances in which the commandments are expressed.¹⁹ Therefore, it appears that the author of the previously cited Messianic commentary employs a questionable meaning when calling these ordinances “takkanot.” Furthermore, that is a rather anachronistic comment, since the Rabbinic decrees refer almost exclusively to decisions made by the rabbis much later than the NT period. An example of such a takkanah is the one by Rabbenu Gershom banning polygamy in the eleventh century A.D.²⁰ The article on “takkanot” in the highly regarded *Encyclopedia Judaica* nowhere refers to the fence in the Temple as an example of a “takkanah.”²¹

¹⁷David H. Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary* (Clarksville, Md.: Jewish NT Publications, 1999) 588.

¹⁸Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians* (reprint; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966) 134.

¹⁹F. W. Danker, ed. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago, 2000) 254.

²⁰Jacob Neusner, ed., *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1996) 614.

²¹“Takkanot,” *Encyclopedia Judaica*, CD-ROM ed. (Jerusalem: Judaica Multimedia, 1997).

Messianic Judaism proponents will go to great lengths to explain away texts which clearly teach that observance of Jewish ordinances confounds the unity of Jewish and Gentile believers in Christ.

One of the key texts in this discussion is Gal 3:28: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." The three pairs of people mentioned in this verse focus on ethnic (Jew/Gentile), social (slave/free), and gender (male/female) distinctions. Obviously, such distinctions do not just disappear when someone comes to the Lord. To say that no one can speak of himself as a Jew or a Gentile anymore is foolish, for then one could not speak of himself as a free man, a slave, a man, or a woman! Paul addresses all such groups by name in his epistles (e.g., Col 3:18–4:1).

The unity described is clearly a spiritual one. But how Christians manifest that unity in personal practice and congregational life is the crucial question. If it is necessary to establish Jewish congregations to accommodate Jewish believers, is it necessary to establish slave congregations or female congregations to meet the needs of those social and gender groups? The epistles indicate that the early churches had all groups in them, each finding its needs met in the Messiah and not in ceremonial observances or cultural "identity." Is not the establishment of such congregations contrary to the whole emphasis of Gal 3:28? Should not the ideal be for congregations to exemplify the spiritual unity of a body in which ethnic, social, and gender differences do not matter? Should not worship be patterned in such a way as to "flesh out" what it means to be "all one in Christ Jesus"? Should not our congregants seek their identity in their Lord and not in their culture?

3. *Messianic Judaism emphasizes the "shadow" of OT typical practices when believers should be emphasizing the "reality" of NT fulfillments.* The key text here is Col 2:16-17, but Galatians 4 and Hebrews 10 also affirm what this passage teaches. "Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ."

Paul states that two main categories of the Mosaic Law, dietary restrictions and festival observances—as important as they were to the OT Israelite—were intended to be temporary from the very beginning. For many centuries these ordinances were only a shadow (σκιά, *skia*) of the Messiah. Now that believers have the "substance" (literally, "body"—σῶμα, *sōma*), why would anyone want to encourage others to continue to practice the shadow? F. F. Bruce writes,

Under the Levitical economy the observance of such days, like the food laws, was obligatory on the Jews. But now the Christian has been freed from obligations of this kind. If a Christian wishes to restrict himself in matters of food and drink, or to set apart days for special observance or commemoration, good and well. . . . But to regard them

as matters of religious obligation is a retrograde step for Christians to take.²²

The stress on those observances in many messianic circles leaves the impression that they are not personal preferences but “as matters of religious obligation.”

Some defenders of Messianic Judaism have argued that Paul addresses only Gentiles here and that the words do not apply to Jewish believers. This also is the case, according to some, when Paul so strongly opposes the observance of time-bound festivals in Gal 4:10-11: “You observe days and months and seasons and years! I am afraid I may have labored over you in vain.”²³ Yet no one can prove that the Colossian and Galatian churches were completely or even predominantly Gentile. Scholarly commentaries provide abundant evidence of large Jewish communities in the Lycus Valley location of Colosse.²⁴ Though it is true that the Colossian heresy was a mixture of Jewish and Gnostic ideas, it also involved plenty of Jewish elements, enough to argue for a significant Jewish presence in the church. Why would Jewish believers be exempt from the warning? Also, J. B. Lightfoot provides extensive evidence for a large Jewish population in the region of Galatia during the first century A.D. and shows there were a significant number of Jewish believers in the Galatian church.²⁵ Paul nowhere indicates in either of the two epistles that he is addressing Gentile believers without including Jewish believers in the warnings. If it is wrong for Gentiles to follow shadows, it is wrong for Jews as well.

Such a supposed disjunct in the apostolic teaching regarding the “shadows” (i.e., that the warnings apply to Gentiles and not Jews) is certainly answered by the epistle to the Hebrews: “For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near” (Heb 10:1). This verse is only a small part of the much larger “word of exhortation” found in a book written primarily to Jewish believers. If there is any support for Messianic Judaism, it should be here, but just the opposite is the case. The anonymous author states that as good as were the prophets, the angels, Moses, and the ceremonial law, Jesus is better! After a careful consideration of Hebrews 8–10, one must conclude that the institutions of the Mosaic Law have been replaced by something far better—the reality of which they were only the shadows. Therefore, why would anyone want to confuse believers by emphasizing ephemeral observances, when they have the reality for which the observances were only a shadow? To use such “shadows” as teaching tools is proper; to use them as worship ordinances in Christian congregations is to reverse redemptive history.

²²F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Colossians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957) 244.

²³Cf. Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary* 558, 611.

²⁴E.g., Bruce, *Epistle to the Colossians* 244.

²⁵J. B. Lightfoot, *Epistle of St. Paul to the Galatians* (reprint; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1957) 9, 10, 26, 27.

Much more could be said about the implications of Hebrews for this study. But a reminder of the last of the author's famous "hortatory subjunctives" must suffice: "Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured" (13:13). All believers, Jewish or Gentile, are called to suffer outside the camp of whatever religious system they followed previously. Jesus did not please the Jewish religious leaders of His day, and He suffered because of it. Messianic Jews will never be able to please the Jewish religious leaders today, no matter how "Jewish" they try to be. They must be willing to suffer because of that fact. May believing Jewish readers be willing to join Him outside the camp of Rabbinic "Judaism," the Judaism of the last nineteen centuries. His company will sweeten any suffering they may be called upon to endure.

4. A last concern may or may not develop into a major problem. *Christians should beware of a few Messianic writers who have tended to raise the issue of Jesus' deity in ways that seek to redefine that aspect of His person for Jewish believers.* The reason given is that the Trinitarian discussions of the fourth century were framed in Greek philosophical terminology rather than in Jewish categories. Framing truths in ways that Jesus and the NT writers expressed them is commendable, but concern about where this tendency leads is justified. In the ancient church, some Nazarenes (the general term for Jewish Christians from the first through the fifth centuries) slipped into a heresy called Ebionism, which affirmed Jesus' messiahship but denied His deity. Attempts to redefine the doctrines so carefully hammered out at Nicea and Chalcedon is cause for alarm. Will this result in limiting the full deity of Messiah? Since any teaching that portrays Jesus as more than human will be rejected by Judaism, what purpose will be served? What appears to be a desire to express truths in less of a "Greek" way may actually be encouraging an unintended slide toward Ebionism. Messianic Jewish leaders in Israel have recognized that there are congregations in that country that espouse views similar to Adoptionist and Arian positions.²⁶ Believers must heed the warning "Caveat Lector" ("Let the reader beware!").

Historical and Pragmatic Concerns

Having traced four areas of theological concern, a brief discussion of some historical and pragmatic issues about Messianic Judaism is necessary.

1. *Messianic Judaism must face the reality that returning to the same situation that Jewish believers faced in apostolic times is impossible.* Many Messianic Jewish authors seek to recreate for today conditions that existed before A.D. 70. That recreation is simply impossible and unwise. Three historical events must factor into a discussion of why this is so: 1. The Destruction of the Temple in

²⁶Personal email correspondence with Israeli pastor wishing to remain unnamed, August 14, 2002.

A.D. 70; 2. The Decisions at Yavneh around A.D. 80; and 3. The Bar Cochba Aftermath in A.D. 132-135.

The first event ended Jewish believers' participation in the Temple observances they practiced in the Book of Acts (e.g., 3:1; 21:26). Early church history records that the Nazarenes even fled to Pella before the Roman siege and returned afterward.²⁷ Recalling their Master's prophetic words recorded in Matthew 24:2 must have been sobering for them. If God allowed the destruction of the Temple, arguments from Acts that are tied to that system cannot be used for Christian participation in the Temple observances. Besides, since so many ceremonial observances were intimately involved with the Temple ritual, how can they be observed today, especially in their modified rabbinical form? The current observances of Shavuot and Yom Kippur, for example, differ radically from their OT format. The rabbis gave entirely different interpretations following the Temple's destruction.

In the post-destruction decade, the Pharisees, under the leadership of Yohanan ben Zakkai, reorganized Judaism along Pharisaic lines at Yavneh (Greek: Jamnia). One of their many decisions was the introduction into the Amidah prayer—also known as the Shemoneh Esreh—of an additional petition to the eighteen in the prayer. This petition was the much-discussed “Birkat Haminim,” which was basically a curse pronounced on the Nazarenes and “heretics.”²⁸ That innovation made it impossible for Jewish believers to continue participating in synagogue worship. In other words, the rabbis at Yavneh finally ejected Jewish believers from official and unofficial participation in any synagogue.

Most Messianic Jews today do not attempt to continue worshiping in non-believing synagogues. That momentous event, however, should cancel any notion that somehow the synagogue will accept Jewish believers. Attempts to contextualize Messianic synagogues to make them more acceptable to modern Jews simply ignore the events at Yavneh.

The Nazarenes could not support Bar Cochba's rebellion in A.D. 132-135 due to Rabbi Akiba's advocacy of him as the Messiah. Although the sources are scanty, it appears that this pseudo-messiah strongly persecuted the Nazarenes,²⁹ which, in addition to their earlier expulsion from the synagogue, effectively led to their final rejection even from the Jewish community.

Faith in the messiahship of Jesus is consistent with the Hebrew Scriptures. Such faith, however, was declared clearly and finally to be inconsistent with the “Judaism” that emerged in the aftermath of A.D. 70. To attempt to remain part of “Judaism” or even the Jewish community is to ignore these historical realities and is an anachronistic action. The “parting of the ways” between synagogue and church

²⁷Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History III*, 5.

²⁸Jacob Jocz, *The Jewish People and Jesus Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979) 51-57.

²⁹*Ibid.*, 71.

clearly and irrevocably took place by A.D. 135. Nothing said by the Rabbis in nineteen centuries since then has even begun to reverse the events. However one may disagree with their decisions, the Jewish community has the right to define who belongs to their community. They may be inconsistent with Scripture and even with later rabbinical rulings about who a Jew is, but they do have the right to be inconsistent and wrong. Therefore, as painful as it may be to some, Jewish believers today are not part of that Jewish community. Like Paul, they need to realize that their identity is not to be found in their Jewishness, but in their Savior—" . . . and in Him you have been made complete" (Col 2:10a).

2. *The idea that Messianic Synagogues are a more effective witness to the Jewish community ignores historical realities.* No hard statistics prove that Messianic Synagogues are more effective in evangelizing Jewish people. The fact is that many Jewish people who come to faith in Jesus find their spiritual home in Bible-teaching churches. All areas of the body of Christ have benefitted from the increased spiritual harvest of Jewish believers in the last thirty years. Only anecdotal evidence shows that Messianic Synagogues are more effective witnesses to Jewish friends and co-workers than are godly believers who attend non-Messianic churches. Many members of the Messianic congregations are actually transfers from Christian churches.

Another historical reality is that most members of Messianic Synagogues were led to the Lord by Gentile believers. Even most of the Messianic leadership today were led to the Lord by Gentile believers or grew up in Jewish believing homes which were not involved in the movement. That some who argue for greater evangelistic effectiveness of Messianic Synagogues were actually evangelized by Gentile believers is strange.

Historically, some current advocates of Messianic Judaism originally opposed the "new" ideas. The American Board of Missions to the Jews, now called Chosen People Ministries, issued a statement against the movement in 1976.³⁰ Consider also the conclusions of another early opponent of establishing separate congregations for Jewish believers:

The main problem with a Hebrew Christian church, however, is that it goes against the biblical ideal of Gentile and Jewish believers worshiping and functioning together in the local church. . . . Establishing Hebrew Christian churches is not the solution to the problem. . . . Such a solution robs the local church of the benefits it can derive from having Hebrew Christian members. . . . The local church must be composed where possible of both Jewish and Gentile believers working together for the cause of Christ.³¹

³⁰Daniel Fuchs, "Messianic Synagogues," *The Chosen People* (January 1976):14.

³¹Arnold Fruchtenbaum, *Hebrew Christianity: Its Theology, History and Philosophy* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1974) 94, 96.

The organizations represented by these authors now support the establishment of Messianic congregations. What happened to cause these and other leaders to change their positions?

3. *By taking Jewish believers away from good churches, Messianic Judaism is actually contributing to the greater “Gentilization” of the church.* Thus, the more the exodus takes place, the legitimate complaint that the church is too “Gentile” becomes more legitimate. We need each other in the body. Gentile believers need their Jewish brethren—not in some theoretical way, but in tangible ways—to remind them of the Jewish roots and Hebraic contours of their shared faith. Jewish believers also need their Gentile brethren to keep them from possible ethnocentricity, a potential danger for any ethnic group, not just the Jewish people.

4. *The more Messianic Synagogues develop, the more the church is relieved of its missionary obligation to reach out to the Jewish people in evangelism and discipleship.* The church has always had difficulty in seeing its duty to include the factor of “to the Jew first” in its mission program. If Messianic Synagogues become the norm, an attitude of “defer and refer” will become the attitude of the church. Churches will think that they cannot reach Jewish people and will “defer” that responsibility to Messianic Synagogues, to which they can then “refer” them. That is clearly an unbiblical attitude and denial of the Great Commission. Churches need to be challenged with their obligation to provide a place where Jewish people are welcome and can hear the gospel. If Messianic Synagogues are the only place where such can happen, then the church is relieved of that sacred responsibility.

5. *By emphasizing so many non-biblical Jewish observances, Messianic Judaism falls under Jesus’ condemnation of the Oral Law of the Pharisees.* Practices such as wearing the yarmulke (*kippah* or head covering) and the *tallit* (prayer shawl) as separate garments, as well as specific ways in which many holidays plus the Bar/Bat Mitzvah celebrations are observed, have no basis in the Torah but date from Rabbinic and sometimes even medieval times. The danger of adding to the Word of God, even unwittingly, needs to be seriously considered in light of Jesus’ warning about the “tradition of men” in Matt 15:3-9 and Mark 7:6-8. All churches have traditions, but a serious problem arises when Messianic leaders make the traditions part of the worship ordinances and give the impression that they are what God desires. Immature believers do not always have the discernment to distinguish between preferences and commands. Unfortunately, many Messianic Synagogues give the impression that God expects these things even when they were added in later centuries by the Rabbis.

A Concluding Model

Many churches have failed to minister the good news in a Jewishly

sensitive way. Insensitive anti-Jewish comments abound. Churches desperately need to rediscover the Jewish roots of their faith. All these are valid criticisms, but Messianic Judaism and Synagogues are not answers to such concerns. Yes, it will take time, but Jewish believers should not give up on the church. The church, however, will not improve its Jewish sensitivity if Jewish believers abandon it. Consider, therefore, an alternative to Messianic Synagogues that was utilized for generations—a Hebrew Christian Fellowship within a church.

The solution is not to organize separate Hebrew Christian churches, thus violating the Biblical norm, but to organize Hebrew Christian Fellowships where believing Jews can come together as often as they like. Such a fellowship would help to meet the needs of new believers, hold children's classes in Jewish studies, and become a center for Jews to reach out to unbelieving Jews, and be a place where Hebrew Christians can gather to study the Scriptures in a Jewish context and perform the functions involved in the various Jewish celebrations.³²

Many Hebrew Christian fellowships are still active in churches today.

In light of the above discussion, a sound biblical-theological, historical, or pragmatic case cannot be made for the establishment of Messianic Synagogues. Though exceptions may occur in extraordinary circumstances, like some situations in Israel, exceptional circumstances should not be the norm to follow for congregational life.

Finally, let me urge my readers to look at a specific church in the NT as a model to emulate. That church was not in Jerusalem but in Antioch of Syria. It was really there that the "church," in its multi-cultural and multi-ethnic dimensions, was truly "born."

Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews. But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists also, preaching the Lord Jesus. And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord. The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose, for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord. So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many people. And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians (Acts 11:19-26).

The Antioch congregation cannot simply be explained away as a "Gentile church," because it is evident from the context of the passage that Jews were already

³²Ibid., 97.

being reached there when Gentiles began to come to the Lord in great numbers. A potentially explosive situation in a mixed Jewish-Gentile congregation was channeled into peaceful paths by the wisdom of the “encourager” Barnabas, and the “exhorter” Saul. Also, in that same church Paul rebuked Peter’s inconsistent Jewish behavior (Gal 2:11-14), rescuing the church from legalistic disaster.

Let us then try to follow in our twenty-first-century churches the example of the first-century church at Antioch. We need congregations like Antioch which “flesh out” the truth of Gal 3:28. We need congregations like Antioch who do not just say “Gentiles are welcome,” but proclaim a Messiah who is for all men and women. We need congregations like Antioch where the center of their fellowship is not culture but Christ. Finally, let us also remember that it was in Antioch where all believers, both Jews and Gentiles, were first called “Christians.”

EXEGETICAL AND CONTEXTUAL FACETS OF ISRAEL'S RED SEA CROSSING

R. Larry Overstreet*

If one accepts the inerrancy of the Bible, locating Israel's crossing of the Red Sea in Exodus 14–15 any place other than the northwestern arm of the Red Sea (i.e., the Gulf of Suez) is practically impossible. Reasons for such a placement involve direct references to yam sūph in Num 33:10-11; Exod 10:19; 23:31; Num 21:4; Deut 1:40; 2:1; Judg 11:16; 1 Kgs 9:26; Jer 49:21 and an indirect reference to the body of water in Isa 11:15. The writings of Herodotus, Pindar, and Strabo furnish further evidence that ἐρυθρῆ θάλασσα (erythrē thalassa, "Red Sea") was the name correctly applied to the place of Israel's crossing. From writers involved with translating the LXX and The Genesis Apocryphon and from Josephus comes even more proof of that location. In two instances the NT verifies the "Red Sea" terminology as correct when referring to the exodus. Sūph means "end" or "termination" rather than "reeds." Details of the Red Sea crossing require a supernatural intervention that created a substantial opening in the sea to allow so many Israelites to cross in such a short time.

* * * * *

INTRODUCTION

Some scholars doubt or openly deny the historical reality and validity of the biblical account of the exodus. One example of this was seen in a conference of historians, archaeologists, and Egyptologists at Brown University in 1992. Speakers made such statements as the following: "The themes of the Sojourn and the Exodus, as embellished in the Pentateuch, belong in the realm of folklore to a large extent,"¹

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¹Donald B. Redford, "Observations on the Sojourn of the Bene-Israel," in *Exodus: The Egyptian Evidence*, eds. Ernest S. Frerichs and Leonard H. Lesko (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1997):63.

and “Not only is there no archaeological evidence for an exodus, there is no need to posit such an event. We can account for Israelite origins, historically and archaeologically, without presuming any Egyptian background.”² Concerning the crossing of the Red Sea a participant said, “Moving on to the Sinai tradition, the crossing of the Red (Reed) Sea is obviously a miraculous tale that can in no way be validated or even illuminated by archaeological investigation.”³

The purpose of this article is not to argue against such positions. Instead, it accepts the presupposition that “The Bible alone, and the Bible in its entirety, is the Word of God written, and therefore inerrant in the autographs.”⁴ With that assumption, the problems related to the events of the exodus, including the crossing of the Red Sea, are worthy of careful investigation.

Among interpreters who do interact with the problems of the exodus, many commonly accept that Israel crossed a “sea of reeds” (*yam sūph*), rather than actually crossing the northwestern arm of the Red Sea (that is, the Gulf of Suez). In 1965 Snaith wrote that the “rendering ‘the sea of reeds’” had lately “become fashionable.”⁵ Proposed sites for the crossing include: Lake Sirbonis,⁶ Lake Menzaleh,⁷ Lake Ballah,⁸ Lake Timsah or the northern Bitter Lakes,⁹ or the southern Bitter Lakes.¹⁰

Predominant reasons for postulating a crossing site distinct from the Red Sea itself include: identifying the phrase “Sea of Reeds” as a common noun rather than a proper name, that the Gulf of Suez has no reeds (and the word *sūph* is taken to mean that in Exod 2:3), that the Shur Desert is in northwest Sinai (too far away

²William G. Dever, “Is There Any Archaeological Evidence for the Exodus?,” in *Exodus: The Egyptian Evidence* 81.

³*Ibid.*, 71.

⁴Part of the doctrinal statement of the Evangelical Theological Society.

⁵Norman H. Snaith, “יַם סוּפִּי [sic]: The Sea of Reeds: The Red Sea,” *VT* 15 (1965):395. Nearly thirty years earlier Montgomery observed, “It has become customary to explain the name by a revision of the tradition of the crossing of the Red Sea at the Exodus, whereby the waters crossed were those of the swampy pools in the isthmus of Suez, with which theory the identification of the word *sūph* with Egyptian for papyrus would agree” (James A. Montgomery, “Hebraica,” *JAOS* 58 (1938):131).

⁶T. V. Brisco, “Exodus, Route of the,” *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed., Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982) maps a proposed route through Lake Sirbonis.

⁷Charles F. Pfeiffer and Howard F. Vos, *The Wycliffe Historical Geography of Bible Lands* (Chicago: Moody, 1967), map 2, map of a proposed route through Lake Menzaleh.

⁸Eugene H. Merrill, “Numbers,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Old Testament*, eds. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton: Victor, 1985) 253, has a proposed route through Lake Ballah.

⁹Pfeiffer and Vos, *Wycliffe Historical Geography* 90, map of a proposed route through the area of Lake Timsah and the Northern Bitter Lakes.

¹⁰George L. Kelm, *Escape to Conflict: A Biblical and Archaeological Approach to the Hebrew Exodus and the Settlement in Canaan* (Fort Worth, Tex.: IAR, 1991) 64, maps of a proposed route through the Southern Bitter Lakes.

from the Red Sea), that the Gulf of Suez is too far south from Pi Hahiroth and Migdol, and that Baal Zephon is to be associated with Tahpahnēs in the northeast delta region. In view of these reasons, the conclusion is that Israel must have crossed north of the Gulf of Suez arm of the Red Sea at another location. Many conservative scholars who fully accept the miraculous nature of the crossing of the sea, with its attendant judgment on the Egyptian pursuers, advocate this position.¹¹

This essay does not interact with those arguments. However, an exegetical and contextual evaluation of relevant biblical references to the Red Sea may require reconsideration which will lead to another conclusion. The tables at the end of the essay identify the biblical references to the Red Sea, and the quantity of references indicates the importance that biblical writers placed on this body of water. Exegetes need to consider carefully, therefore, the total impact of their conclusions when evaluating the term in any particular location, particularly that in Exodus 14–15. The essay will focus attention first on significant OT references to the term *yam sūph* apart from those in Exodus 14–15. Pertinent observations will then be made concerning additional historical references and the NT references to the Red Sea. Finally, a few comments concerning the context of Exodus 14–15 will culminate the present study.

THE OT AND THE *YAM-SŪPH*

In order to visualize correctly the location of the bodies of water under discussion, a map showing the entire Red Sea, the Arabian Sea (northern part of the Indian Ocean), and the Persian Gulf will provide helpful reference points. The gulfs of Aqaba and Suez extensions of the Red Sea have special relevance to the exodus since the Peninsula of Sinai is between those two gulfs.

¹¹In contrast to conservatives, liberal scholars have various positions regarding the *yam-sūph*. For example, Kloos connects the whole story of the “Reed Sea” with an alleged Canaanite mythological influence on Israel (Carola Kloos, *Yhwh’s Combat with the Sea: A Canaanite Tradition in the Religion of Ancient Israel* [Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1986] 191).

Towers has another theory. He asserts that it cannot be proved whether or not an actual place called the *yam-sūph* ever existed, but that some Egyptian texts indicate “that the ‘Sea of Reeds’ referred to the ‘world beyond’” (John Robert Towers, “The Red Sea,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 18 [1959]:150).

McCarthy takes yet another approach. He provides a literary analysis of Exod 5–14 and concludes that chapters 11–13 are not “an originally integral part of a literary whole which included the introduction in ch. 5 and the stories of the plagues in chs. 7₈-10₇, with their special structure and vocabulary” (Dennis J. McCarthy, “Plagues and Sea of Reeds: Exodus 5–14,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 85 [1966]:149).

Childs, while agreeing with the idea “of a mythological battle with Yam which was common throughout the Ancient Near East” (413), also agrees that distinct traditions of the exodus and the wilderness cycle were combined over an extended period (Brevard S. Childs, “A Traditio-Historical Study of the Reed Sea Tradition,” *Vetus Testamentum* 20 [1970]:413, 418).

Yam-Sûph and the Gulf of Suez

The Hebrew term יַם סוּף (*yam sûph*) appears in many OT passages. Some of these refer directly to the western arm of the Red Sea known as the Gulf of Suez.

Numbers 33:10-11

Numbers 33 summarizes the journeys of Israel from their exodus to their arrival at the eastern side of the Jordan River. The miraculous crossing of the sea is given in 33:8. After that event they journeyed three more days and camped at Marah. They then traveled to Elim where they camped. Leaving Elim they moved on to an encampment by the “Red Sea” (33:10). Leaving that location they next journeyed from the “Red Sea” to the wilderness of Sin (33:11). This text thus indicates that Israel journeyed at least five days after the miraculous crossing of the sea (33:8), and they were still alongside the “Red Sea” after all that movement.

Ashley finds it surprising that the *yam-sûph* “is not mentioned until three stops after the crossing through the midst of the sea.” He theorizes that in this text traditions were combined which did not originally belong together, but he also admits, “While the words [*yam-suph*] are clearly used to describe the Gulf of Aqabah, they may also designate the Gulf of Suez.”¹² Snaith, like Ashley, sees strands from JEPD through the Pentateuchal narrative, and thinks that “Apparently the sea which the Israelites crossed was somewhere by the Bitter Lakes,” but he also recognizes that in Num 33:8-10 “the *yam-sûp* mentioned here is the Gulf of Suez.”¹³ Budd concurs: “The Sea of Reeds in this itinerary is probably the Gulf of Suez itself.”¹⁴ Although Allen makes no specific identification of the Red Sea in this text, he does locate the Desert of Sin “in the south-central Sinai Peninsula”¹⁵ which requires that the Red Sea here be the Gulf of Suez. Kitchen also agrees, saying that this encampment was “somewhere on the Gulf of Suez coast of Sinai, if Mount Sinai/Horeb be located in the S of that peninsula.”¹⁶

Numbers 33:10-11, therefore, testifies that Moses and the Israelites camped along the *yam-sûph* at least five days after they crossed miraculously through the sea, which Exodus identifies as the *yam-sûph*. That indicates that the identical body of water, the *yam-sûph*, is at the least long enough to parallel five days of journeying.

¹²Timothy R. Ashley, *The Book of Numbers*. The New International Commentary on the Old Testament, ed., R. K. Harrison (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) 628.

¹³Snaith, “The Sea of Reeds” 396.

¹⁴Philip J. Budd, *Numbers*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 5, eds. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker (Waco, Tex.: Word, 1984) 354.

¹⁵Ronald B. Allen, “Numbers,” *The Expositors Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin; (Grand Rapids: Regency-Zondervan, 1990) 987.

¹⁶K. A. Kitchen, “Red Sea,” in *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, ed. Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975) 47.

Any identification of this body of water as a small lake in Egypt is exegetically improbable.

Isaiah 11:15

Although the precise term, *yam-sûph*, is not used in Isa 11:15, its reference to the Red Sea crossing of Israel is unmistakable and pertinent to the discussion because of its contribution to the overall identification of the body of water involved. This prophecy of Isaiah refers to a future time when Israel will return to its land. Different eschatological viewpoints of individual writers affect their understanding of the time of fulfillment, but the identification of the body of water involved remains unaffected by those differences.

The verse states, "The LORD will utterly destroy the tongue of the Sea of Egypt." The crucial word here is "tongue" which occurs about 117 times in the OT, usually referring to the tongue as a physical organ. However, Kaiser states that this word, by extension, "carries geographical meaning such as the 'tongue' of land which protrudes into the Dead Sea (Josh 15:2, 5; 18:19; Isa 11:15). . . ." ¹⁷ Kaiser is correct concerning the verses in Joshua, but he has missed the significance of Isaiah, since the Dead Sea is nowhere in that context. Kedar-Kopfstein is more accurate when he observes that the Isaiah reference is the reverse of the Joshua references: "The topographically opposite phenomenon is intended in Isa. 11:15, which speaks of Yahweh's threat to destroy (or dry up) the *l'son yam-misrayim*. This refers to a water-filled bay in Egypt, namely, the Gulf of Suez."¹⁸ The comments by Martin,¹⁹ Young,²⁰ Oswalt,²¹ and Motyer²² seem to concur with this identification.

Commentators correctly observe parallels between the prophecy of Isaiah and Israel's crossing of the Red Sea. Grogan is an example:

The nations mentioned in v. 14 were small and insignificant when compared with the great militarist regimes of Egypt and Mesopotamia. God's hand of power will be stretched forth in fulfillment of his purposes for his people in both areas. He had dried

¹⁷Walter C. Kaiser, לָשׁוֹן (*lāshôn*) **tongue**, in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, vol. 1, eds., R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago, Moody, 1980) 484.

¹⁸B. Kedar-Kopfstein, לָשׁוֹן *lason*, *TDOT*.

¹⁹John A. Martin, "Isaiah," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary, Old Testament*, eds. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor, 1985) 1058.

²⁰Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah: The English Text, with Introduction, Exposition, and Notes*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965) 399-400.

²¹John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39*, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament*, ed. R. K. Harrison (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986) 289.

²²J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction & Commentary* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1993) 127.

up the water of the Red Sea before. He would act again to dry it up—and for the same liberating purpose (v. 15). He had used a great wind (Exod 14:21) at the Exodus; he would do so again to bring the people back from Mesopotamia, for the wind would produce a delta there not unlike that at the mouth of the Nile. The highway promised (v. 16) may contain an allusion to Exodus 14:26-29, the dry road through the Red Sea; or it may mean that God will bring them back safely across the desert that stretched between Mesopotamia and the Mediterranean sea-board (cf. 35:8).²³

Watts also notices the parallel between Isaiah and the exodus concerning the waving of the hand and the wind: “The parallel to Moses’ outstretched arm and staff and the mighty East wind (Exod 14:21) is unmistakable.” He further comments, “The return of captives from Assyria is being seen as a parallel to Israel’s exodus from Egypt,” and he specifically identifies the “tongue of the Sea of Egypt” as “the upper end of the Gulf of Suez which is referred to simply as יַם סוּף ‘the Sea’ Exod 14:2,9; 15:4,8,22; Isa 51:10; 63:11 and as the יַם סוּף ‘the Reed Sea’ Exod 13:18; Num. 14:25; Deut. 1:40, etc.”²⁴

The prophet Isaiah, therefore, stands as a witness to the crossing of the Red Sea as parallel to the “tongue” of the Sea of Egypt. Since this “tongue” is a reference to the Gulf of Suez, an evidence for the crossing as being at that Gulf becomes integral to the discussion.

Exodus 10:19

At the conclusion of the plague of locusts (the 8th plague) in the land of Egypt, Exod 10:19 testifies that God used a strong wind to drive “them into the Red Sea.” Difference of interpretation concerning this verse does exist. Some writers make no particular identification of this body of water.²⁵ Being more specific, Hyatt states that this “is not properly the Red Sea as we know it today, but the ‘sea of reeds,’”²⁶ which he later identifies as “a very shallow body of water or only a wet marsh,”²⁷ “that is, at the southern end of Lake Menzaleh, or in the marshy lagoon just S. of it.”²⁸

²³Geoffrey W. Grogan, “Isaiah,” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Regency-Zondervan, 1986) 91.

²⁴John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 1–33*, Word Biblical Commentary, eds. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker (Waco, Tex.: Word, 1985) 179.

²⁵For examples, see R. Alan Cole, *Exodus: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, ed. D. J. Wiseman (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1973) 100; and Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary*, The Old Testament Library, eds. Peter Ackroyd, et al. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974) 159-60.

²⁶J. Philip Hyatt, *Exodus*, New Century Bible Commentary, ed. Ronald E. Clements (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971) 125.

²⁷Ibid., 154.

²⁸Ibid., 159.

However, a more consistent contextual interpretation is that it refers to the Gulf of Suez,²⁹ or even to the main body of the Red Sea itself. That this is the correct identification is indicated by the number of locusts involved and the wind that blew them into the sea.

The biblical text is clear that the mass of locusts was huge, that locusts settled throughout the entire land of Egypt, that never before or after were there so many, that their sheer numbers covered the entire country so that they darkened all the ground, and that they stripped the entire land of every green plant and tree in Egypt. To eliminate the millions of locusts involved, spread out over the entire length and breadth of Egypt, would necessitate a mammoth disposal unit.

That disposal unit was arranged by God when He sent a "very strong west wind" to blow them into the sea. This "west wind" literally means "a sea wind," and refers to "a storm coming in from the Mediterranean and blowing the locust swarms down the Nile Valley and into the south, out of the land."³⁰ This wind, therefore, "originated from the Mediterranean to the north or northwest."³¹ Durham writes,

דָּוֶר הַיָּם is often translated "west wind," because of the orientation of the land of Israel to the Mediterranean Sea to the west. As the sea is not to the west of Egypt, however, the more literal translation above [sea wind] is preferable. The locust swarm is blown by this wind into the יַם סוּף "Sea of Reeds," the sea which Israel is later to cross in exodus from Egypt, and the miraculous nature of the mighty act is emphasized by the pointed statement that every single locust was removed from the whole territory of Egypt.³²

Concerning the dispersment of the locusts, Fretheim states that they "were driven into the Red Sea and 'not a single locust was left' (10:19; see 8:31). This is precisely what happens to the Egyptians in 14:28."³³ To imagine that this extensive mass of locusts was destroyed by being blown into a marshy lake is unfathomable. Even such a body of water as the present Bitter Lakes is woefully too small to handle

²⁹Concerning Exod 10:19, Snaith writes, "[T]he *yam-sūp* here apparently means the Gulf of Suez," ("The Sea of Reeds: The Red Sea" 396).

³⁰Nahum Sarna, *Exploring Exodus: The Heritage of Biblical Israel* (New York: Schocken, 1987) 72.

³¹John J. Davis, *Moses and the Gods of Egypt: Studies in Exodus*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986) 132.

³²John I. Durham, *Exodus*, Word Biblical Commentary, eds. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker (Waco, Tex.: Word, 1987) 137. Cassuto makes the following interesting observation on this text: "There may be a preparatory allusion here to what will subsequently be stated concerning the host of Pharaoh, who also sank in the Sea of Reeds, 'and not so much as one of them remained' (xiv 28). Even if we assume that the Sea of Reeds [יַם סוּף] *Yam Sūph* in chapters xiv-xv is not actually the same as that mentioned here . . . , the parallelism remains valid" (U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* [Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, 1983] 129).

³³Terence E. Fretheim, *Exodus*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching, ed. James Luther Mays (Louisville: Knox, 1991) 128.

the disposal problem adequately. However, the Gulf of Suez, which is some twenty miles wide, and/or the Red Sea itself, which is about 100 miles wide, are more likely candidates. That becomes even more probable assuming a northwest wind is blowing the locusts in a southeasterly direction since that would drive them into the waters of the actual Red Sea or its Gulf of Suez. The cultivated land of Egypt, which is where “every plant” and where “all the fruit of the trees” (Exod 10:15) would be located, stretches from the Delta region south along the Nile to a distance some 300 miles south of the Mediterranean.³⁴ Logistically, only the Gulf of Suez and/or the Red Sea itself could possibly be the disposal areas for those locusts which devastated such a geographical stretch. A northwest wind would blow the locusts in a southeasterly direction, straight into that body of water.

Yam-Sûph and the Gulf of Aqaba

In addition to the OT references outside Exodus 14–15 which identify the Red Sea as the Gulf of Suez, several others use the term for the Gulf of Aqaba. Those references are important because they contribute to a knowledge of the general identity of the body of water involved.

Exodus 23:31

While Israel is camped at Mt. Sinai, God again assures Israel concerning their promised land. In Exod 23:31 He identifies the land’s boundary as extending “from the Red Sea to the sea of the Philistines, and from the wilderness to the River *Euphrates*” (NASB). Some writers do not find a reference to the Red Sea in this text.³⁵ However, by examining the context and observing the location of Israel in its travels, other writers are more definitive.

Childs concisely states, “By the *Yam Sûp* (Reed Sea) the Gulf of Aqaba is undoubtedly meant as in I Kings 9:26 and elsewhere. The Sea of the Philistines is naturally the Mediterranean Sea and ‘the river’ is the Euphrates.”³⁶ Cole agrees: “*The Red Sea* (literally ‘Sea of Reeds’) must clearly be the Gulf of Aqaba here (whatever area of water is meant in Exodus 14), because it is considered as the eastern border, as opposed to the Mediterranean in the west.”³⁷ Kaiser takes a similar position, “The borders God would establish would be from *Yam Suph* (here an eastern boundary), the Gulf of Aqabah with its port city of Elath; to the ‘Sea of

³⁴A map of John Baines and Jaromir Malek (*Atlas of Ancient Egypt* [New York: Facts on File, 1980] 21) shows much cultivated and pastoral land in Egypt.

³⁵For examples, see Davis, *Moses and the Gods of Egypt*, 248; and Fretheim, *Exodus*, 252-54.

³⁶Childs, *The Book of Exodus* 488. Montgomery connects Exod 23:31 to Ps 72:8: “May he also rule from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth,” thus identifying the “River” as the Euphrates, and the two seas as the Mediterranean and the Red Sea (“Hebraica” 132).

³⁷Cole, *Exodus* 184.

the Philistines,' the Mediterranean Sea on the west. . . ."³⁸

Sarna states that in this text the reference must be to "the modern Red Sea."³⁹ Does this mean that he takes it as including the Red Sea proper along with both of its two gulfs? Sarna is imprecise, but that is precisely the view that McQuitty takes.⁴⁰ However, this seems to be stretching the bounds of the context of this passage. The Gulf of Aqaba is the body of water involved, and that body is specifically named the Red Sea.

Numbers 14:25

The event of Israel's failure at Kadesh-barnea is detailed in Numbers 13–14. In the judgment of God, Israel must turn away from the promised land and experience years of wilderness wandering. Numbers 14:25 instructs the nation as to which way they are to travel: "[T]urn tomorrow and set out to the wilderness by the way of the Red Sea."

Some writers do not even attempt to locate this "Red Sea."⁴¹ Others recognize that this probably refers to a specific route, but say that the "precise location of the sea remains uncertain."⁴²

Wenham, however, speaks more directly to the issue when he observes, "Geographically this probably means they were to head south-east from Kadesh toward the Gulf of Aqabah, one of the recognized north-south routes across the Sinai Peninsula."⁴³ Ashley correctly expands on this by writing, "Although some commentators see this as a general directive to turn back south, others have realized that it is not likely that so large a group as the Israelites could hope to survive in the wilderness apart from a well-known road or path; *the way of the Reed Sea* was such a road. It stretched from the area of Kadesh to the north shore of the Gulf of Aqabah."⁴⁴

Once again, therefore, the biblical text distinctly refers to the *yam-sûph* and identifies it as a body of water which is a physical extension of the actual Red Sea.

Numbers 21:4

³⁸Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., "Exodus," *The Expositors Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Regency-Zondervan, 1990) 447. See also Snaith, "The Sea of Reeds" 397.

³⁹Sarna, *Exploring Exodus* 107.

⁴⁰Joel D. McQuitty, "The Location and Nature of the Red Sea Crossing" (Th.M. thesis, Capital Bible Seminary, Lanham, Md., May 6, 1986) 141-42.

⁴¹Allen, *Numbers* 821.

⁴²Budd, *Numbers* 159.

⁴³Gordon J. Wenham, *Numbers: An Introduction & Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, ed. D. J. Wiseman (Leicester: InterVarsity, 1981) 123.

⁴⁴Ashley, *Book of Numbers* 262; cf. also Kitchen, "Red Sea."

As the Israelites moved toward the eastern side of the land of Canaan after their years of wandering, the Red Sea again came up for mention. The setting for Num 21:4 is found back in 20:14-21 where Edom would not permit Israel to travel through its land, and in 20:27-29 where the account of Aaron's death on Mt. Hor is given. Instead of traveling north and west, which lead to the promised land, they had to detour south and east where, as Allen observes, they "rejoined the road to the Sea of Reeds to make a broad circuit around Edom."⁴⁵ Although Allen does not here identify this "Sea of Reeds," his identification of the geographical location of Israel necessitates that this is the same one as seen in Num 14:25.

Wenham observes, "Whether Mount Hor is to be located near Petra or near Kadesh-barnea, it seems clear that the Israelites were heading south down the Arabah towards Timna."⁴⁶ In corroborating this, Ashley writes, "Whatever the specific meaning, this term [*the way of the Sea of Reeds*] must indicate a southerly route from Mt. Hor, because by it the Israelites *go around* . . . Edom as they had been forced to do in 20:20-21."⁴⁷ In this text, therefore, the reference must be to "the modern Red Sea," as seen in its extension, the Gulf of Aqaba.⁴⁸

Deuteronomy 1:1

Deuteronomy 1:1 locates the children of Israel "across the Jordan in the wilderness, in the Arabah opposite Suph," at the apparent border of the land of Canaan. The reference to Suph is the integral element here. As Craigie points out, the Arabah denotes "the great rift valley that extends from the Sea of Tiberias in the north to the Gulf of Aqaba in the south." Craigie tentatively identifies Suph as being "in Moab in the vicinity of the Arnon River," but says this is uncertain.⁴⁹ Thompson does not suggest a location.⁵⁰

Kitchen, however, proposes that this naming of Sûph refers to a place in "the wilderness in the vicinity of Kadesh-barnea (Num 10:12; 13:26; etc.), and the Arabah is the S end of the Jordan rift valley, between the Dead Sea and the Gulf of Aqaba. Hence, Suph is some place in this vicinity, if it is not merely an abbreviation for *yam-sup*, the Gulf of Aqaba itself."⁵¹ Similarly, Tigay connects Suph with the *Yam Suph*, which he equates with the "Gulf of Elath" (Aqaba) in this text, adding

⁴⁵Allen, *Numbers* 875.

⁴⁶Wenham, *Numbers* 156.

⁴⁷Ashley, *Book of Numbers* 403.

⁴⁸Sarna, *Exploring Exodus* 107.

⁴⁹Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament, eds. R. K. Harrison and Robert L. Highboard, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976) 90.

⁵⁰J. A. Thompson, *Deuteronomy: An Introduction and Commentary*, The Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, ed. D. J. Wiseman (Leicester: InterVarsity, 1974) 81-82.

⁵¹Kitchen, "Red Sea" 48.

that "Suph could also be a name for some site on the shore of Yam Suph. If 'in the Arabah' and 'near Suph' go together, the phrase refers to the southern Aravah, where the Israelites began their march through Seir-Edom toward Moab (2:1-8)."⁵² Since the rift valley ends at the Gulf of Aqaba, it is probable that this is indeed the meaning in this text. If that is the case, then the Scriptures add another reference to the Red Sea as being that of the geographical body of water itself.

Deuteronomy 1:40; 2:1

In both Deut 1:40 and 2:1 the reference is to events immediately following Israel's disobedience at Kadesh-barnea. Deuteronomy 1:40 is similar in thought to Numbers 14:25, describing how God told Israel they would wander after their disobedience. Deuteronomy 2:1 again indicates that they wandered for "many days" (some 38 years in totality). Interpreters have identified the locale in which this all occurred.

Kalland writes, "In obedience to the Lord's command in 1:40, the chastised Israelites returned to the desert, the area between Kadesh and the Seir range. This range east of the Arabah in Edom ran roughly from the area south of the Dead Sea to the Gulf of Aqabah The period probably encompassed both departures from Kadesh recorded in Numbers 14:25 and 20:22."⁵³ Brown makes no comment on this question,⁵⁴ but Craigie concurs precisely: "After spending a long time in the oasis at Kadesh-barnea, the Israelites set out once again at the command of the Lord through Moses. . . . They set out in a southeasterly direction toward the Gulf of Aqaba, and spent many days travelling in the vicinity of Mount Seir, the mountain range of Edom, south of the Dead Sea and extending down the eastern flank of the Arabah."⁵⁵ Tigay agrees: "That is, 'on the Road to the Sea of Reeds,' a road leading from Kadesh-barnea to the Gulf of Elath."⁵⁶ Thus, here is further testimony that the term *yam-sûph* refers to an arm of the physical Red Sea.

Judges 11:16

Jephthah is judge of Israel in Judges 11. The king of Ammon threatened war against Israel on the basis of his contention that Israel had unjustly taken his land

⁵²Jeffrey H. Tigay, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Deuteronomy* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1996) 4.

⁵³Earl S. Kalland, "Deuteronomy," *The Expositors Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Regency-Zondervan, 1992) 31.

⁵⁴Raymond Brown, *The Message of Deuteronomy: Not by Bread Alone*, *The Bible Speaks Today*, ed. J. A. Motyer (Leicester: InterVarsity, 1993) 45f.

⁵⁵Craigie, *Book of Deuteronomy* 107; others who recognize that the Red Sea mentioned here is the Gulf of Aqaba include Derek Kidner, *Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy*, Scripture Union Bible Study Books (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971) 62-63, and Duane L. Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1-11*, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 6A, eds. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker (Dallas: Word, 1991) 32.

⁵⁶Tigay, *Deuteronomy* 20.

years before when the nation had first come to Canaan under Joshua. Jephthah attempted to reason with that king, rather than go to war, and in the process provided a history lesson of Israel's journeys and battles to demonstrate that they were innocent of the king's charges. In that explanation, Jephthah states that after leaving Egypt, "Israel went through the wilderness to the Red Sea and came to Kadesh" (11:16).

Many commentators give no identification of what the Red Sea is in this context.⁵⁷ Goslinga also makes no direct reference to the Red Sea, but he does provide helpful contextual data:

When they arrived at Kadesh on their journey from Egypt (this was their second stay at Kadesh, in the fortieth year of their desert wanderings; Num. 20:1, 14; cf. Deut. 1:46; 2:1, 14), they asked the king of Edom (Num. 20:14-21) and probably also the king of Moab (Numbers does not mention this, but Jephthah could easily have known it from oral tradition) for permission to pass through their territories.⁵⁸

Other writers have shown that the reference to the Red Sea at this stage of Israel's history is the same as the Gulf of Aqaba.⁵⁹ Fausset writes that "the *Yam Suf*, Israel's last station before reaching Kedesh, was Ezion Gaber [sic], on the gulf of Akaba, the eastern tongue of the Red Sea (Numb. xxxiii. 36, 37; 1 Kings ix. 26. . . .)"⁶⁰ Fausset's mention of Ezion-geber leads to the next reference for investigation.

1 Kings 9:26

First Kings 9–11 summarize the later years of Solomon's reign, providing information about his many accomplishments. One of those, detailed in 9:26-28, relates to Solomon's fleet of ships and their successes in international trade.⁶¹ That endeavor centered at Ezion-geber, which is near Elath on the shore of the Gulf of Aqaba, in the land of Edom.

Although Gray is uncertain about the exact location of Ezion-geber, his

⁵⁷For examples, cf. John Gray, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth*, New Century Bible Commentary, ed. Ronald E. Clements (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986) 317; Robert G. Boling, *Judges: Introduction, Translation and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible, eds. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1981) 202; and Leon Wood, *Distressing Days of the Judges* (Grand Rapids: Academic-Zondervan, 1975) 281.

⁵⁸C. J. Goslinga, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth*, trans. Ray Togtman, Bible Student's Commentary, 1927 (Grand Rapids: Regency-Zondervan, 1986) 384.

⁵⁹Arthur E. Cundall and Leon Morris, *Judges & Ruth: An Introduction & Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, ed. D. J. Wiseman (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1968) 143.

⁶⁰A. R. Fausset, *A Critical and Expository Commentary on the Book of Judges* (reprint of 1885 ed.; n.c.: James & Klock, 1977) 189.

⁶¹Richard D. Patterson and Hermann J. Austel, "1, 2 Kings," *The Expositors Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Regency-Zondervan, 1988) 99.

possibilities all place it clearly on the Gulf of Aqaba.⁶² Other writers, however, are precise in identifying the place.

Keil observes, “*Eziongeber* a harbour at the north-eastern end of the Elanitic Gulf [Gulf of Aqaba], was probably the ‘large and beautiful town of *Asziun*’ mentioned by Makrizi . . . , and situated on the great bay of *Wady Emrag*. . . .”⁶³

Davis provides a more contemporary opinion:

Solomon had an extensive fleet of ships located at Ezion-geber which is located on the Gulf of Aqaba. In all probability the port was under the supervision of Phoenicians who were known for their ship building capabilities (cf. 10:22). Archaeological work conducted at Tell el-Kheleifeh or Biblical Ezion-geber indicates that it was not only extensively occupied in the days of Solomon, but was used as a smelting operation.⁶⁴

DeVries states that “Ezion-geber, with Eilat slightly to the west, lay at the head of the Gulf of Eilat/Aqaba, the eastern arm of the Red Sea.”⁶⁵ Kitchen cogently observes that this reference to Ezion-geber identifies “a location which fits the Gulf of Aqaba but neither that of Suez or Lake Ballah.”⁶⁶ Thus, once again the biblical writers identify the *yam-sûph* indisputably with an arm of the geographical Red Sea.

Jeremiah 49:21

The final OT reference to be examined in this section is found in Jeremiah 49:21. This text is interpreted in two ways. Some connect it to the Red Sea crossing of Exodus 14–15, saying that the cry of Edom in their time of destruction “would carry **to the Red (Reed) Sea**—the site of God’s first destruction of a nation that threatened His Chosen People (cf. Exod 14:21-31).”⁶⁷ If this interpretation is

⁶²John Gray, *I & II Kings: A Commentary*, 2nd ed., The Old Testament Library, eds. Peter Ackroyd, et al. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970) 255.

⁶³C. F. Keil, *The Books of the Kings*, Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament, C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968) 147.

⁶⁴John J. Davis, *The Birth of a Kingdom: Studies in I-II Samuel and I Kings 1–11* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1974) 185; cf. also James A. Montgomery, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Kings*, The International Critical Commentary, ed. Henry Snyder Gehman (Edinburgh: Clark, 1951) 211-12.

⁶⁵Simon J. DeVries, *I Kings*, Word Biblical Commentary, eds. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker (Waco, Tex.: Word, 1985) 139. DeVries goes on to comment, “It is striking that this body of water is called ‘the sea of Reeds,’ *יָם סוּפִי*, for that is also the sea of the Exodus crossing according to Exod 13:18, 15:4, etc.” However, as this essay asserts, if the “Red Sea” is used in a broad sense to refer to several connected bodies of water, then this is not so “striking” at all.

⁶⁶Kitchen, “Red Sea.”

⁶⁷Charles H. Dyer, “Jeremiah,” *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, eds. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor, 1985) 1198. Other scholars who concur with this view include John Bright, *Jeremiah: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, 2nd ed., The Anchor Bible,

adopted, then this prophetic text provides no direct contribution to the identity of the Red Sea in Exodus 14–15.

An examination of the overall context of this verse, however, helps to identify the Red Sea reference properly. Feinberg summarizes the context of 49:13-22:

Here the destruction of Edom is underscored. Bozrah (vv. 13, 22) is referred to because it was the capital of Edom in Jeremiah's time. It was midway between Petra and the Dead Sea, and here it represents all the Edomite cities (cf. Isa. 63:1). It is the modern el-Buseirah. The completeness of Edom's overthrow is left beyond doubt (v. 15). The cause of Edom's downfall was her inveterate pride (v. 16; cf. 48:7, 29; 49:4; Obad 3, 10-14). Jeremiah's message from the Lord (v. 14) is that the nations have been summoned to war against Edom. Because of her fortifications and topography, Edom had convinced herself that she was impregnable. The "rock" (*sela'*; NIV, "rocks" [v. 16]) referred to was later called Sela (*Petra* GR.)—the capital city and chief fortress of the Edomites. The ruin of Edom will be irreversible (v. 17), like that of Sodom and Gomorrah and their neighboring cities Admah and Zeboim (v. 18; cf. Gen 14:2, 8). Edom's foe will pounce like a lion scattering a flock (v. 19). (Verses 19-21 are repeated in 50:44-46 where they refer to Babylon). Dispersion, destruction, and devastation will be the lot of Edom. Its doom shows how fearful a thing it is to fall into the hands of the living God (Heb 10:31).⁶⁸

In his comments on 50:46, which substitutes a reference to the "nations" for that of the "Red Sea," Feinberg states, "The phrase 'among the nations' (v. 46) indicates a wider audience than the one in view in 49:21 because of the greater prominence of the Babylonian power."⁶⁹

If Feinberg's comments concerning the context of Jeremiah 49:13-22 are accurate, it is more in keeping with that context to identify this reference to the Red Sea as being in the vicinity of Edom, rather than across the Sinai Peninsula in Egypt. This would, therefore, point to the Gulf of Aqaba. Kitchen agrees when he says that this verse "alludes to the *yam-sup* in an oracle on Edom, again prob. the Gulf of Aqaba."⁷⁰ Holladay adds, "It is not appropriate here to undertake a full treatment of the meaning of *yam-sup* in the OT, whether the 'Red Sea' or (in the interpretation since the end of the nineteenth century) 'the Sea of Reeds' in the Egyptian Delta, but it is clear that in the present passage the intention is 'the Red Sea' rather than (as Duham, Giesebrecht, Cornill, Volz, Rudolph, Bright, *JB*, and *NJV* have it) 'the Sea

eds. William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freedman (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1984) 331; J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament, ed. R. K. Harrison (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981) 722; R. K. Harrison, *Jeremiah and Lamentations: An Introduction and Commentary*, The Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, ed. D. J. Wiseman (Leicester: InterVarsity, 1973) 181.

⁶⁸Charles L. Feinberg, *Jeremiah: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982) 311-12.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, 323.

⁷⁰Kitchen, "Red Sea."

of Reeds.”⁷¹

Therefore, if Jer 49:21 is interpreted as the Gulf of Aqaba, as seems best, then another biblical writer identifies the *yam-sûph* with an arm of the physical Red Sea.

The other direct references to the Red Sea in the OT point to the event of Israel's miraculous crossing of the sea at the time of their exodus from Egypt. These passages do not contribute to the meaning of the biblical title, Red Sea, as to a precise geographical identification. However, concerning these examined biblical texts where the term *yam-sûph* refers to the Gulfs of Suez and Aqaba, McQuitty draws this conclusion:

In every case where there is sufficient information to determine what body of water is referenced, *יָם סוּף* [*yam sûph*] without exception is to be identified with the Red Sea including its two gulfs. In no case is there ever a usage which in any way suggests that any body of water other than the Red Sea and its gulfs is referenced by this name. The biblical usage of the name *יָם סוּף* [*yam sûph*] provides absolutely no support for the supposition that *יָם סוּף* [*yam sûph*] could be applied to any number of marshy areas or lakes. On the contrary, there is the strongest indication that the biblical authors were not themselves confused nor desiring to confuse their readers, but that they used the name *יָם סוּף* [*yam sûph*] in a completely consistent manner, always as a reference to the Red Sea including its two gulfs.⁷²

LATER CONTRIBUTIONS

In 1 Cor 10:1-2 Paul clearly has in mind the crossing of the sea in the time of the exodus. Yet he refers to it only by the general term “sea.” Because of that, the verse does not contribute to the study at hand. However, two specific NT references do name the Red Sea, Acts 7:36 and Heb 11:29. They are important to the identification of this body of water. The Greek term for Red Sea, used in both Acts and Hebrews, is ἐρυθρὴ θάλασσα (*erythrē thalassa*, “Red Sea”). This is also the usual name for the Red Sea in the LXX and among ancient Greek writers.

Greek Writers

In the Classical Period

Among the Greek writers, one of the most helpful is the Greek historian Herodotus (ca. 485–425 BC) in his *The Persian Wars*.⁷³ He refers to the Red Sea in various contexts, and demonstrates that the name had extensive application. He

⁷¹William L. Holladay, *A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah, Chapters 26–52*, ed. Paul D. Hanson (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989) 378.

⁷²McQuitty, “The Location and Nature of the Red Sea Crossing” 143 (transliteration added).

⁷³Herodotus, *The Persian Wars*, trans. George Rawlinson, The Modern Library of the World's Best Books (New York: Random, 1942).

writes, for example, that the River Euphrates “empties itself into the Red Sea,”⁷⁴ a clear reference to the Persian Gulf. He further writes, “In Arabia, not far from Egypt, there is a long and narrow gulf running inland from the sea called the Red Sea.”⁷⁵ That “gulf” is the body of water presently called the Red Sea, and the water that he calls the Red Sea is that which is presently identified as the Arabian Sea, the northeast part of the Indian Ocean. At this point, George Rawlinson, the translator of Herodotus, explains, “The Greeks generally did not give the name Red Sea to the Arabian Gulf [the Gulf of Suez], but to all that part of the Indian Ocean [today’s Arabian Sea] reaching from the Persian Gulf to India. It was also applied to the Persian Gulf and Herodotus sometimes gives it to the Arabian Gulf [of Suez], and even the western branch between Mt. Sinai and Egypt.”⁷⁶ Just such a reference to this “western branch,” the modern Gulf of Suez, is found when Herodotus refers to a canal that Pharaoh Neco started to build to join the Mediterranean to the Gulf of Suez, and which was nearly completed by Darius I of Persia. Herodotus states that the Egyptian started

the construction of the canal to the Red Sea, a work completed afterwards by Darius the Persian, the length of which is four days’ journey, and the width such as to admit of two triremes being rowed along it abreast. The water is derived from the Nile, which the canal leaves a little above the city of Bubastis, near Patumus, the Arabian town, being continued thence until it joins the Red Sea.⁷⁷

Herodotus even gives the length of this canal as 115 miles.

Herodotus again refers to the Gulf of Suez when he writes that Phoenician sailors “took their departure from Egypt by way of the Red Sea, and so sailed into the southern ocean.”⁷⁸

In 5th century B.C., therefore, the Greeks commonly referred to the waters of the Gulf of Suez, today’s Red Sea, the Arabian Sea part of the Indian Ocean, and the Persian Gulf all by the name of ἐρυθρῆ θάλασσα. The extension of the name to include all these bodies of water is “understandable since the waterways are connected and maritime trade was the primary means of establishing the geography

⁷⁴Ibid., 1.180.

⁷⁵Ibid., 2.11.

⁷⁶Ibid., 121 n. 10; see also LSJ 693.

⁷⁷Ibid., 2.158.

⁷⁸Ibid., 4.42. Brawer and Avi-Yonah agree with this evaluation of a connecting canal used by ancient sailors: “The Gulf of Clysmia (Suez) was used by the rulers of Egypt as the shortest route to the Mediterranean above the Isthmus of Suez. It was connected via the Bitter Lakes with the Nile and the Mediterranean by a canal which already existed in the days of Neco and which was repaired by Darius I, the Ptolemies, and the Romans” (Moshe Brawer and Michael Avi-Yonah, “Red Sea,” *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (Jerusalem: Keter Publishing House, 1972) 15.

of the seas.”⁷⁹ No reference in extant Greek literature points to any of the lakes in Egypt as ἐρυθρὴ θάλασσα.

Herodotus is not alone in the Classical Period in identifying the Red Sea. The Greek lyric poet Pindar (ca. 520–ca. 438 B.C.), in presenting the story of Jason and his search for the fleece, writes that “they reached the streams of the Ocean, and the Red Sea,” pointing to the same general bodies of water as Herodotus.⁸⁰ In a similar way, the Greek historian Xenophon (431–ca. 357 B.C.), when discussing the “Education of Cyrus,” asserts that the Indian Ocean along with the Persian Gulf and the Red Sea formed the Eastern boundary of the Persian Empire under Cyrus. He also regarded them as one connected body of water.⁸¹

Strabo

The Greek geographer Strabo (ca. 64 B.C.–A.D. 21) in his *Geography*⁸² further confirms how the ancient peoples identified the same bodies of water. He refers to the Red Sea, as it is presently identified, and observes that sailors could start “from the Red Sea” and eventually sail into the south Atlantic,⁸³ which would, of course, take them around the southern tip of Africa.

Strabo also writes that connecting to the “Exterior Sea,” which is the Arabian Sea (that between Arabia and India), are various gulfs, gulfs including the “Persian Gulf” and the “Arabian Gulf.” The Arabian Gulf is also called the Red Sea. This is “particularly” identified as having a “narrow inlet,”⁸⁴ which is exactly the case geographically. Strabo’s knowledge of the Arabian Gulf (the modern Red Sea) included the fact that its “head consists of two recesses: one extending into the region near Arabia and Gaza, which is called Aelanites [the Gulf of Aqaba], after the city situated on it, and the other, extending to the region near Aegypt [the Gulf of Suez] in the neighbourhood of the City of Heroes. . . .”⁸⁵

In describing the area around Egypt, Strabo writes about the ancient canal connecting the Arabian Gulf to the Mediterranean that was nearly completed by

⁷⁹McQuitty, “The Location and Nature of the Red Sea Crossing” 146. A map which shows the connection of the Red Sea to the Arabian Sea to the Persian Gulf will demonstrate the validity of these ancient observations.

⁸⁰Pindar, *Pythian Odes* 4, 448, in John Sandys, *The Odes of Pindar including The Principal Fragments with an Introduction and an English Translation*, The Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard, 1961).

⁸¹Xenophon, *Cyropaedia* 8.6.20-21 and 8.8.1, in Walter Miller, *Xenophon's Cyropaedia with an English Translation*, The Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard, 1961).

⁸²Strabo, *The Geography of Strabo*, 8 vols., trans. Horace Leonard Jones, The Loeb Classical Library, eds. T. E. Page et al. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard, 1959).

⁸³Ibid., 1.2.26.

⁸⁴Ibid., 2.5.18.

⁸⁵Ibid., 16.2.30.

Darius I. He writes:

There is another canal which empties into the Red Sea and the Arabian Gulf [of Suez] near the city of Arsinoe, a city which some call Cleopatris. It flows also through the Bitter Lakes, as they are called, which were indeed bitter in earlier times, but when the above mentioned canal was cut they underwent a change because of the mixing with the river, and now are well supplied with fish and full also of aquatic birds.⁸⁶

His description is especially pertinent to the discussion of the route of the exodus, since it clearly indicates that ancient writers drew a sharp distinction between the Bitter Lakes and the Red Sea/Arabian Gulf (of Suez). In contrast to modern writers who advocate that Israel crossed the Bitter Lakes and that Exodus calls the Bitter Lakes the Red Sea, ancient geographers made no such identification. Such would have been the accepted thinking in the time of the LXX and the NT.

Just as modern scholars wrestle with why this great body of water was called the Red Sea, so ancient writers struggled with the identification. Strabo describes in detail some of the theories in his day about the name's origin, although he does not actually know what the origin of the name is.⁸⁷

Even in early times, considerable discussion of the origin of the name Red Sea indicates that uncertainty abounded. However, for purposes of this study, the significant item that must not be overlooked is that the Red Sea is always identified as the same body of water. That body of water is never a lake in Egypt or anywhere else. The body of water is what encompasses the gulfs of Suez and Aqaba to the present Red Sea to the Arabian Sea to the Persian Gulf.

Jewish Writers

The Septuagint

The LXX normally uses ἐρυθρῆ θάλασσα in its translation of *yam-sûph*.⁸⁸ Although modern scholarship debates the exact origin of the LXX, it seems

⁸⁶Ibid., 17.1.25.

⁸⁷Ibid., 16.4.20.

⁸⁸Exceptions to this are found in two OT texts: Judg 11:16 and 1 Kgs 9:26. The LXX editions of both Swete and Zondervan (Bagster) in Judg 11:16 give the reading θαλάσσης Σείφ, Sea of Siph, instead of ἐρυθρῆ θάλασσα, with the Hebrew word *sûph* being transliterated rather than translated. This reading is based on the strength of Codex Vaticanus. However, Codex Alexandrinus does have the variant reading ἐρυθας. In 1 Kgs 9:26, both editions have the phrase ἐσχάτης θαλάσσης, "last (part) of the sea," or "the extremity of the sea," the sea which was "at the end of the land" (Snaith, "The Sea of Reeds" 395). Montgomery opines, "This gives a novel but admirable name for that Sea, which as an arm of the Indian Ocean is *ultimum mare*" (Montgomery, "Hebraica" 131). See Henry Barclay Swete, ed., *The Old Testament in Greek According to the Septuagint* (Cambridge: University Press, 1887) and *The Septuagint Version of the Old Testament, with an English Translation; and with Various Reading and Critical Notes* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975).

that “the Pentateuch was translated in Alexandria by the middle of the third century B.C.,”⁸⁹ and that “most of the OT existed in Greek by the late 2nd cent. B.C.”⁹⁰ If the LXX was translated in Alexandria, Egypt, during the 3rd-2nd centuries, the LXX translators lived in Egypt during a time when ἐρυθρὴ θάλασσα referred to the bodies of water discussed above, none of which was a lake in Egypt. That is evident from the writings of Herodotus and Strabo. Rather, the Greek name was used of the Gulf of Suez, the modern Red Sea, and even the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Sea. Unless the LXX translators were totally isolated from a knowledge of world and Egyptian geography, did not understand the term ἐρυθρὴ θάλασσα, and were completely insensitive to accuracy, one must conclude that their use of ἐρυθρὴ θάλασσα for *yam-sûph* points to that body of water now identified as the Gulf of Suez for the exodus of Israel from Egypt.

The Genesis Apocryphon

The scroll known as *The Genesis Apocryphon*,⁹¹ one of the Dead Sea Scrolls, retells and expands stories of the patriarchs in the Book of Genesis, usually with a first person narration. The scroll from the first century B.C. confirms the identification of the term Red Sea. In Column XXI.17-19, Abraham summarizes some of his travels stating, “I traveled along the Euphrates, until I came to the Red Sea in the east. (Then) I moved along the Red Sea, until I reached the tongue of the Reed Sea, which goes forth from the Red Sea. (From there) I journeyed to the south, until I reached the Gihon River. Then I returned, came home safely and found all my household safe and sound.”⁹²

Fitzmyer observes that the reference to the Red Sea here “cannot designate anything else but the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean, into which the Euphrates River empties.”⁹³ Although Fitzmyer asserts, erroneously in this writer’s opinion, that the *yam sûph* of the Bible is normally “an inland lake east of Baal-zephon,” he also recognizes that ancient mariners considered the Red Sea as “the sea between Asia and Africa and was gradually extended from the Gulf of Suez to the Persian Gulf including the Indian Ocean. The color was probably derived from the neighboring mountains, desert sands, corals and phosphorescence.”⁹⁴

⁸⁹J. W. Wevers, “Septuagint,” in *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. George Arthur Buttrick (New York: Abingdon, 1962).

⁹⁰S. K. Soderlund, “Septuagint,” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988).

⁹¹Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Genesis Apocryphon of Qumran Cave 1: A Commentary*, 2nd rev. ed. (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1971).

⁹²Ibid., 69.

⁹³Ibid., 153.

⁹⁴Ibid., 154.

Josephus

The Jewish historian Josephus (ca. A.D. 37–ca. 100) adds further confirmation of the identity of the Red Sea. Commenting on the rivers that flowed out of the Garden of Eden, he writes that the “Euphrates also, as well as Tigris, goes down into the Red Sea,”⁹⁵ in other words, the Persian Gulf. In addition, he specifically identifies Eziongeber⁹⁶ and Elath (or Elat)⁹⁷—areas located on the Gulf of Aqaba—as being on the Red Sea. Once again, evidence points to an identification distinct from any lake in Egypt.

The New Testament Writers

Though some modern writers do not discuss the location or identification of the Red Sea in Acts 7:36,⁹⁸ some older commentaries on Acts do. Alexander, for example, identifies the location of the Red Sea, and also discusses the origin of its name, in a fashion reminiscent of Strabo:

The Red Sea, in the earlier Greek writers, is what we call the Indian Ocean, with its two great arms, the Persian and Arabian Gulfs, to the last of which the name is given in the Septuagint version. It was called Red, as some of the ancients thought, from the colour of the water; but even Quintus Curtius speaks of this as an ignorant mistake, and derives the Greek name from that of an old king (Erythra). The moderns trace it to the colour of the sea-weed which abounds in it, and from which it was called in Hebrew (and in the Peshito here) *Yam Sûph* (*Mare Algosum*) the Sea of seaweed. The name Red Sea is still applied to the same narrow gulf between Arabia and Africa, about 1400 miles in length, through the northern extremity of which the Israelites passed (Exod 14, 21.22.). Local tradition still identifies the spot as the Bahr-al-Kolsum or Sea of Destruction, in allusion to the fate of Pharaoh's host (Exod 14, 28).⁹⁹

The case of Heb 11:29 is similar to that of Acts 7:36 in that many

⁹⁵Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 1.1, 3, in William Whiston, trans. and ed., *The Works of Josephus* (New York: Hurst & Co., n.d.).

⁹⁶*Antiquities* 8.6.4.

⁹⁷*Antiquities* 9.12,1.

⁹⁸For examples, see Simon Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990) 260; Richard N. Longenecker, “Acts,” *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 9, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981) 341-42; F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of Acts: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, ed. F. F. Bruce (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974) 151-52.

⁹⁹Joseph Addison Alexander, *Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* (reprint of 1875 ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1956) 286; cf. E. H. Plumptre, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Ellicott's Commentary on the Whole Bible, ed. Charles John Ellicott (reprint of 1903 ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1957) 117.

commentaries do not identify the Red Sea.¹⁰⁰ Westcott makes only a brief comment that the Greek word comes from “the LXX. rendering of ἣν θάλασσαν ‘the sea of weed [sic].’”¹⁰¹ Kent and Bruce express contrasting views. Kent, following much contemporary opinion, writes,

The Red Sea translates the Greek expression in Hebrews (*eruthran thalassan*) which in turn reproduced the Septuagint rendering of Exodus 13:18 (et al.). The Hebrew text in Exodus calls it the Sea of Reeds (*yam sup*). Its precise location has been a problem of long standing. Good reasons exist for placing it in the Bitter Lakes region, north of the Gulf of Suez.¹⁰²

In contrast to Kent, Bruce comments, “Heb. *yam suph* (Ex. 13:18, etc.), used of the Gulfs of Suez and Aqaba, in this instance of a northern extension of the Gulf of Suez. LXX renders it ἡ ἐρυθρὰ θάλασσα (‘the Red Sea’).”¹⁰³

The significance of the two NT uses is pertinent to the issue at hand. Evidence supports the position that Greek writers prior to the time of the NT (e.g., Herodotus), and virtually contemporary with the NT (e.g., Strabo), along with the LXX translators, *The Genesis Apocryphon*, and Josephus consistently identified the Red Sea as water distinct from any lakes of Egypt, the Bitter Lakes in particular. Such evidence, therefore, invariably supports the fact that Israel miraculously crossed the water at a place identified as the modern extension of the Red Sea, the Gulf of Suez.

A person could advocate that Herodotus was wrong in his historical identifications, and that Strabo was mistaken in his geography. One could also argue that the LXX translators, *The Genesis Apocryphon*, and Josephus likewise were in error. Considering the widespread knowledge of maritime identifications of that day, however, such arguments are weak. Furthermore, as McQuitty cogently points out, even if it is admitted that ancient Greek and Jewish writers are erroneous,

it is another matter to argue that the NT writers shared in this error. To do so would be to deny that God communicated through them, for He of all persons knows where the crossing took place and He cannot lie. The NT identification of the body of water crossed by the commonly used Greek name ἡ ἐρυθρὰ θάλασσα would be misleading

¹⁰⁰E.g., Leon Morris, “Hebrews,” *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 12, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981) 128; cf. Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977) 497-501.

¹⁰¹Brooke Foss Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: The Greek Text with Notes and Essays*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d.) 375.

¹⁰²Homer A. Kent, Jr., *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1974) 243.

¹⁰³F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: the English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, ed. F. F. Bruce (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979) 325 n. 214.

if it were not accurate.¹⁰⁴

One may conclude that the testimony of the NT to the identity of the Red Sea, based upon the historical and geographical identifications that precede it and the acceptance of its God-breathed character, points to the location of the Israelite crossing of the sea in the exodus as the Gulf of Suez. In addition to the consistent testimony of the OT, which invariably specifies that location, the totality of Scripture is clear. Hence the interpreter who approaches Exodus 14–15 cannot do so in a vacuum. To postulate that this one section of Scripture must be understood in a manner at odds with the seemingly unanimous testimony of the rest of Scripture places an interpreter in a precarious position. That is especially the case if substantial reasons exist for rejecting the commonly held identification of the Red Sea crossing as being over some body of water renamed the “Reed Sea.”

EXODUS 14–15

To attempt a full study of all the problems connected with this passage is beyond the scope of the present study. Brief observations, however, will show that a viable understanding of the Exodus account points to Israel crossing the Red Sea at the northern end of the Gulf of Suez.

The Word *Sûph*

A mainstay of the position that Israel crossed north of the Gulf of Suez in another body of water is the argument that *yam-sûph* should not be translated Red Sea, but rather “Sea of Reeds.” This is often given in modern Bible translations. The NIV and NASB, for example, consistently have footnotes when the Red Sea is named, giving a literal meaning of *Yam Sûph* as “Sea of Reeds.” The argument is that the word *sûph* is etymologically borrowed from the Egyptian *tʷf(y)*, which means papyrus reed. The word, the argument continues, occurs in Exod 2:3, 5 to refer to papyrus reeds, so it must refer to that in the name of this body of water.

A recent translation which does not follow this reasoning is the English Standard Version. This version always translates *yam-sûph* as Red Sea, and has no footnote to explain it differently.

The position that *yam-sûph* means “Sea of Reeds” is, therefore, not as firmly established as often considered. Concerning this matter, Batto has cogently written that the title “does not designate an expanse of water, but rather a district or area where not only papyrus grows but also where pasturage for animals was found and agricultural enterprises undertaken.”¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴McQuitty, “The Location and Nature of the Red Sea Crossing” 146.

¹⁰⁵Bernard F. Batto, “The Reed Sea: *Requiescat in Pace*,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 102 (1983):29.

Furthermore, the biblical usages of the term *sûph* can point in another direction, as McQuitty observes:

The verb $\eta\text{ו}\text{ט}$ means “to bring to an end, to consume, to cease, or to fulfill” (Ps 73:19; Amos 3:15; Esth 9:28; Isa 66:17; Jer 8:13; Zeph 1:2, 3; Dan 4:30; 2:44). The noun $\eta\text{ו}\text{ט}$ means “end, conclusion” (2 Chr 20:16; Eccl 3:11; 7:2; 12:13; Joel 2:20), and in the Aramaic portion of Daniel the Aramaic equivalent $\eta\text{ו}\text{ט}$ has the identical meaning (Dan 4:8, 19; 6:27; 7:26, 28). The $\eta\text{ו}\text{פָּה}$ was the terrific storm which brought an end to life and property (Job 21:18; 27:20; Ps 83:16; Pro 1:27; etc.), and the verb $\eta\text{ו}\text{פָּה}$ means “to consume or destroy” (Jer 12:4; Ps 40:14; Gen 18:23, 24; etc.). The common element in all of these words is the idea of “end” or “termination.” Even the seemingly remote meaning of $\eta\text{ו}\text{ט}$ as “reed” or more probably “marsh” is nicely understood as that which was customarily found at the end or edge of the water. This is why $\eta\text{ו}\text{ט}$ did not refer to a particular water plant but to the marsh area in general, which was ordinarily composed of a variety of weeds.¹⁰⁶

This description could easily fit the coast of the Gulf of Suez, and it could also be appropriately applied to the area in Exod 2:3, 5.¹⁰⁷

Further Areas

Significant terms are used in the text of Exodus which indicate that Israel's crossing of the Red Sea was not facilitated by natural phenomena. The strong wind was supernatural as indicated by the fact that it caused the water to rise in heaps on the right and left hands (Exod 14:22, 29). A crucial item here is that the waters did not merely get blown in the direction of the wind, but were instead “piled up” (15:8). After the waters were divided, the people crossed over on “dry land” (14:22). The emphasis of the verbs in Exod 15:8, “piled up,” “stood up like a heap,” and “congealed” all point to a supernatural event.

The number of the people involved is another crucial matter. Although some scholars interpret the numbers involved as referring to only a few thousand people, the Scriptures indicate frequently that over 600,000 men were involved in the exodus from Egypt (Exod 12:37; 38:26; Num 1:46; 2:32; 11:21). Adding women and children, the number probably increased to about 2,000,000.

As Wood correctly observes, “A marching line of two million people, walking ten abreast with an average of five feet separating each rank, would be 190

¹⁰⁶McQuitty, “The Location and Nature of the Red Sea Crossing” 138.

¹⁰⁷A recent, well-researched, and cogently written study of the many problems connected with Israel's entire history in Egypt is by James K. Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997). Hoffmeier ably defends the position that Israel crossed at “most likely the Ballah Lakes, Lake Timsah, or Bitter Lakes region” (215), and interacts at length with many questions that surround such an identification. Although his arguments are persuasive, he does not give adequate weight to the many OT passages where *Yam Sûph* cannot be compatible with such an identification.

miles long.”¹⁰⁸ Obviously, therefore, a much wider path must have opened to permit the nation to cross the sea within the few hours of night during “the morning watch” indicated in Exod 14:24 (from approximately 3:00 a.m. to 6:00 a.m.). On the other hand, if the sea opened to allow a path a mile wide and if Israel walked 1,000 abreast (which allows each person to have about 5.28 feet of “personal space”), with an average of five feet between each line, then the distance from front to back would still be 10,000 feet, almost two miles. Since Israel had flocks and herds with them and probably did not march in rigid rank order, requires even more space. The mathematical calculations require a substantial opening in the sea.

Other areas of concern involve such problems as: the identification of all the places named in the Exodus account, many of which are uncertain while others are unknown; the route taken by Israel in their exodus, whether northern, central, or southern; and the significance of the Lord’s command for Israel to “turn back” (Exod 14:2). Did Israel turn north or south at that point? Although some scholars favor a turning north, Hubbard builds a substantial case for turning south, which accords with an actual Red Sea (Gulf of Suez) crossing.¹⁰⁹

CONCLUSION

Assuming the integrity of the biblical accounts of the exodus of Israel from Egypt and the biblical consistency of the terms used in those accounts, this essay has argued that the Hebrew term for Red Sea, *yam-sûph*, is invariably used in Scripture passages not specifically referring to the exodus to identify either the Gulf of Suez (and probably the modern Red Sea itself in one instance) or the Gulf of Aqaba. In no instance does the term refer to any other body of water, especially not a lake in Egypt. A study of ancient Greek writers verifies that the Greek translation of *yam-sûph*, ἐρυθρὰ θάλασσα, consistently refers to the Red Sea and to larger bodies of water with which it connects—the Gulf of Aqaba, the Persian Gulf, and the Arabian Sea. NT references to the Red Sea continue that consistent identification.

When an interpreter explains the biblical text of Exodus 14–15, that passage should harmonize with the testimony of other Scriptures.

Table 1—OT Passages Naming the “Red Sea”

¹⁰⁸Wood, *Judges* 106 n. 88.

¹⁰⁹R. L. Hubbard, Jr., “Red Sea,” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988). Maps for a possible southern route for the Red Sea crossing reaching the Gulf of Suez itself are provided by McQuitty, “The Location and Nature of the Red Sea Crossing” 105, 121.

Exod 10:19	Num 14:25	Deut 11:4	1 Kgs 9:26
Exod 13:18	Num 21:4	Josh 2:10	Neh 9:9, 11
Exod 15:4	Num 33:10-11	Josh 4:23	Ps 106:7, 9, 22
Exod 15:22	Deut 1:40	Josh 24:6-7	Ps 136:13, 15
Exod 23:31	Deut 2:1	Judg 11:16	Jer 49:21

Table 2—Indirect OT References to the “Red Sea”

Num 33:8	Ps 78:13, 53	Isa 43:16	Nah 1:3-4
Ps 66:6	Ps 114:3	Isa 51:10	Hab 3:8, 15
Ps 74:13	Isa 10:26	Isa 63:11-13	Zech 10:11
Ps 77:16-21	Isa 11:15		

Table 3—Additional Pertinent OT References to *Sûph*

Exod 2:3, 5	Deut 1:1	Isa 19:6	Jon 2:5(6)
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Table 4—NT References to the “Red Sea”

Acts 7:36	1 Cor 10:1-2	Heb 11:29
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MATTHEAN PRIORITY/AUTHORSHIP AND EVANGELICALISM'S BOUNDARY

Gary W. Derickson*

Evangelicals' experimentation with critical methodology has resulted in questions being raised about long-held viewpoints regarding the priority of Matthew as the first Gospel to be written and about whether Matthew himself actually wrote the Gospel. Such questions recall instances in the recent past when what looked like a minor departure from a traditional belief soon became an issue of questioning the authority and inerrancy of Scripture. Historical-critical approaches to Scripture have, over time, proven to be a threat to evangelicalism's traditional view of Scripture in both doctrinal and practical realms. The movement among evangelicals to embrace Markan instead of Matthean priority appears to be another first step away from the valued evangelical view of Scripture, because it assumes that someone other than an eyewitness of Jesus' life composed the Gospel of Matthew. The church fathers were unanimous in naming Matthew as the first Gospel to be written and in identifying the apostle Matthew as its author. Their testimony indicates that it was the dominant Gospel in the early church and contains nothing about any literary dependence between writers of the two Gospels. The issue of apostolic authorship is at stake in one's viewpoint on this matter. If at any point a Gospel writer, be it pseudo-Matthew or any other Gospel writer, has embellished eyewitness testimony to promote his own theological viewpoint, that is a violation of biblical inerrancy that lies outside the boundary of evangelicalism.

* * * * *

Historical Criticism, a First Step toward Errancy?

The place in order of composition among the four Gospels and authorship of the Gospel of Matthew was not questioned until the rise of critical scholarship. Evangelicals continued to accept both until recent decades when representatives of

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the movement began to experiment with critical methods. Initially, conservative evangelicals rejected the ideas of the liberal critics.¹ Nonetheless, the trend has been to adopt critical methods in order to “dialogue” with critical scholars under the assumption that their methods in and of themselves are not flawed, just their presuppositions. Additionally, only the antisupernatural presuppositions undergirding their methods should be rejected. This trend has become more and more apparent over the last decade as an attitude of “pushing the limits” of evangelicalism has grown. The question of the day seems to be: How liberal is too liberal and how much of critical scholarship’s methods *and* presuppositions are acceptable without crossing the boundaries of evangelicalism?

In the early eighties, when Robert Gundry in his commentary on Matthew’s Gospel took the redaction-critical method too far, the Evangelical Theological Society censured him and requested his resignation.² But others have used the same method with similar presuppositions and conclusions, couched in less direct language, without being censured.

Evangelical publications contain articles in which those who choose not to use critical methods are described in anything but conciliatory terms. For example, Robert Guelich is critical of those who reject the use of critical methods and talks of a “consensus” among those scholars “who have worked extensively in the gospels themselves” while “the evangelical scene at large—including lay people, pastors, colleagues in other theological disciplines, and *even some in Biblical studies*—still operates on the basis of the gospels’ being essentially verbal snapshots whose red-letter editions highlight the very words of Jesus,” i.e., a naive approach.³ Donald Hagner describes those unwilling to use critical methods as guilty of a “doctetic view of Scripture.”⁴ John Piper accuses traditionalists as being guilty of “epistemological

¹Though Grant Osborne argues for its acceptance by representative leaders of evangelicalism, Robert Thomas amply responds to his misuse of history (Grant R. Osborne, “Historical Criticism and the Evangelical,” *JETS* 42 [1999]:193; Robert L. Thomas, “Historical Criticism and the Evangelical: Another View,” *JETS* 43 [2000]:98-99).

²Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Literary and Theological Art* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982) 623-40. For example, Gundry identified what he considered Matthew’s changes to the story and then argued for his use of midrashist and haggadist “embroidery” of the traditions with no attempt at historicity, comparable to recent novelists who write historical fiction. He says most clearly, “Comparisons with the other gospels, especially with Mark and Luke, and examination of Matthew’s style and theology show that he materially altered and embellished historical traditions and that he did so deliberately and often. ... Matthew’s intent was to tell the story of Jesus with alterations and embellishments suited to the needs of the church and the world at the time the gospel was written” (639).

³Robert A. Guelich, “The Gospels: Portraits of Jesus and His Ministry,” *JETS* 24 (1981):122 (123, emphasis added). Yet, when he lists what must be accepted by evangelicals to proceed with an evangelical use of critical methods, he lists thoroughly liberal presuppositions.

⁴Donald A. Hagner, “Interpreting the Gospels: The Landscape and the Quest,” *JETS* 24 (1981):26.

fiat, which we deny to every other religion.”⁵

Though some evangelical scholars have expressed disapproval,⁶ the legitimacy of their disapproval has been questioned.⁷ Noting a “new series of attacks against the viability of higher critical methodologies” in his article critical of *The Jesus Crisis*,⁸ Grant Osborne responds to Robert Thomas by saying, “In the fourteen years until *The Jesus Crisis* appeared, there were no attacks on the orthodoxy of evangelical redaction critics.”⁹ This ignores the works of Eta Linnemann, someone eminently qualified to know the dangers higher critical methods pose to evangelicals, published in 1990 and 1992, and the statements of Norm Geisler in 1998.¹⁰ Linnemann has continued her warnings to evangelicals in her latest work, *Biblical Criticism on Trial: How Scientific is “Scientific Theology”*?¹¹ Significant scholars have been objecting. But have they been given a hearing?

In 1976 Harold Lindsell, as one of the founding fathers of Fuller seminary, created a firestorm with his exposure of the seminary's departure from evangelicalism. He described inerrancy as a “watershed question” for evangelicalism as a movement.¹² He warned then that departure from inerrancy would lead to further

⁵John Piper, “Historical Criticism in the Dock: Recent Developments in Germany,” *JETS* 23 (1980):325-34. He gives two alternatives, “make one's starting point the unity and infallibility of Scripture and ... rule out the use of criticism” or “renounce this sort of epistemological fiat, which we deny to every other religion and to ourselves in every other area of life” and use critical methods (333). He chose the critical option and used Stuhlmacher as an example of a believing critical scholar in Germany.

⁶Thomas, “The Hermeneutics of Evangelical Redaction Criticism” *JETS* 29/4 (June 1989):447-59; idem, “Historical Criticism and the Evangelical: Another View” 97-111; Robert L. Thomas and F. David Farnell, eds., *The Jesus Crisis* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1998); and Eta Linnemann, *Is There a Synoptic Problem?* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992).

⁷Osborne, “Historical Criticism and the Evangelical” 193-210; and “Historical Criticism: A Brief Response to Robert Thomas's ‘Other View,’” *JETS* 43 (2000):113-17.

⁸Osborne, “Historical Criticism and the Evangelical” 195.

⁹Osborne, “Historical Criticism: A Brief Response to Robert Thomas's ‘Other View’” 113.

¹⁰Linnemann, *Historical Criticism of the Bible: Methodology or Ideology?*, trans. Robert W. Yarbrough (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990); idem, *Is There a Synoptic Problem?* Norm Geisler's presidential address to the Evangelical Theological Society, published in *JETS* 42 (1999):3-19.

¹¹(Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2001).

¹²Harold Lindsell, *The Battle for the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976) 23. Fuller Seminary, per Lindsell, was founded to “be an apologetic institution” that “would provide the finest theological defense of biblical infallibility or inerrancy. It was agreed in addition that the faculty would publish joint works that would represent to the world the best of evangelical scholarship on inerrancy at a time when there was a dearth of such scholarship and when there were few learned works promoting biblical inerrancy” (ibid., 106-7).

departures in orthodox faith over time.¹³ He identified the historical-critical method as “a debilitating influence which brings with it decline and decay for the church.”¹⁴ He described the method as destructive, not neutral.¹⁵ He said then, and it still stands true, “Today an increasing number of evangelicals do not wish to make inerrancy a test for fellowship even though ordinary consistency requires an evangelical to believe it.”¹⁶ But, “any definition of what evangelicals believe must include biblical inerrancy.”¹⁷

Compare Lindsell’s assessment of Fuller Seminary with that of Alan Wolfe who describes Fuller as “conservative.” In his *Atlantic Monthly* article entitled “The Opening of the Evangelical Mind,” Wolfe draws a distinction between an evangelical and a so-called fundamentalist.¹⁸ The recent use of “fundamentalist” as a pejorative designation has become postevangelicals’ way of justifying their departure from evangelicalism’s traditional view of Scripture and silencing any objectors. If one objects to the theological shift, he is not a modern thinker. He is not progressive. He is not *really* evangelical. He is a “fundamentalist” with all its nuances of ignorance, intractableness, and intolerance.

Wolfe’s version of evangelicals is what he calls moving forward with “the rest of American religion” while “fundamentalists moved backward.”¹⁹ And, Fuller Seminary is his model of a “conservative evangelical” institution that illustrates “the sensitivity of the evangelical mind.”²⁰ Where Lindsell warned of erosion of other

¹³Ibid., 120-21. Lindsell notes, “No matter how sincere a man may be, and however carefully he guards against further theological concessions, they are inevitable once inerrancy is given up” (142). And he warns, “The second generation will follow through on the implications contained in the abandonment of inerrancy and will make concessions on questions that pertain to matters of faith and practice as well as to matters of history, science, and chronology” (159). This warning was repeated in *The Bible in the Balance* ([Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979] 184).

¹⁴Ibid., 275.

¹⁵Ibid., 283. He says, “Anyone who thinks the historical-critical method is neutral is misinformed. Since its presuppositions are unacceptable to the evangelical mind this method cannot be used by the evangelical as it stands. ... It appears to me that modern evangelical scholars (and I may have been guilty of this myself) have played fast and loose with the term perhaps because they wanted acceptance by academia. They seem too often to desire to be members of the club which is nothing more than practicing an inclusiveness that undercuts the normativity of the evangelical theological position. This may be done, and often is, under the illusion that by this method the opponents of biblical inerrancy can be won over to the evangelical viewpoint. But practical experience suggests that rarely does this happen and the cost of such an approach is too expensive, for it gives credence and lends respectability to a method which is the deadly enemy of theological orthodoxy.”

¹⁶Ibid., 303.

¹⁷Ibid., 306.

¹⁸Alan Wolfe, “The Opening of the Evangelical Mind,” *The Atlantic Monthly* 286/4 (October 2000):58.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid., 65.

doctrines as a consequence of departing from an inerrant Scripture, Wolfe praises Fuller Seminary for having “evolved a ‘Don’t ask, don’t tell’ policy with respect to homosexuality.”²¹ Fuller is acceptable to him precisely because it pursues all the “politically correct” issues of our humanist media and liberal colleges.²² Yet, can a school be said to have a high view of Scripture when it does not disallow lifestyles that the Scriptures condemn in no uncertain terms? Is this where evangelicalism should be going?

Lindsell’s questions need to be asked again, “When does one cease to be an evangelical? ... How many of the tenets of evangelicalism can one surrender without forfeiting the right to the use of the evangelical label?” Also, “Does the denial of any *one* of the basic evangelical tenets mean that a person has forfeited the right to the use of the term?”²³

In 1980 J. Barton Payne warned against evangelicals using critical methods in order to gain acceptance by the critical community, the *academy*. He wrote, “No theory of literary origins may be considered legitimate that calls into question the historicity of the biblical content it is seeking to explain.”²⁴ He posed the question back then about “limits—of deciding just how far the critic can or should go.”²⁵ Payne gave the example from Matthew’s Gospel of the baptismal formula in the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20) and rejected an appeal to literary genre, called “gospel,” in which the redactor legitimately “reshapes the historical tradition” as justification for denying its historical accuracy.²⁶ The needs of the community—its

²¹Ibid.

²²He defends the school by saying, “It would be inaccurate to describe Fuller’s faculty as liberal. These men and women are, theologically speaking, conservatives; they have all signed Fuller’s credal [sic] statement emphasizing that the Old and New Testaments ‘are the written word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and practice.’ Yet Fuller’s widespread culture of care means that the faculty is hardly right-wing either. ... Once we leave homosexuality and other contentious issues behind, and focus on the way wealth and power are distributed around the world, Fuller seems little different from other campuses that have made issues of globalization and poverty central to their concerns” (ibid., 68).

²³Lindsell, *The Battle for the Bible* 308 (emphasis in the original).

²⁴J. Barton Payne, “Higher Criticism and Biblical Inerrancy,” in *Inerrancy*, ed. Norman L. Geisler (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980) 99.

²⁵Ibid., 90.

²⁶Ibid., 97-98. Payne says, “If ... we follow redaction criticism concerning the Great Commission’s formula for baptism ... and conclude ‘that at some point the tradition of Matthew expanded an original monadic formula ... to make Jesus’ teachings meaningful to their own *Sitz im Leben* rather than to present them unedited,’ we indulge in illegitimate negative higher criticism, especially if we raise questions against the reliability of Matthew’s autograph. The apostle specifies in his inspired statements that Jesus spoke this baptismal formula (28:18) and gives the circumstances of its verbal composition: It was uttered in Galilee, on a mountain, to the eleven disciples who had witnessed Jesus’ resurrection (28:17). We are therefore committed to the validity of God’s inerrant Word. ... This example from the first Gospel raises a crucial issue that seems to be emerging among conservative scholars today. Some interpreters consider themselves advocates of inerrancy, but are willing, nevertheless, to grant the

Sitz im Leben—do not justify lying about what happened.

Eta Linnemann's warning just over a decade ago still needs to be heeded. She identifies the influence of German liberal theology, termed "historical-critical theology," as a very real, though insidious, threat to evangelicalism. It arose from the use of historical-critical methods and presuppositions by German liberal scholars.²⁷ In this system of thought, she notes, "The concept *Holy Scripture* is relativized so that the Bible is nothing more than a religious writing like all other religious writings."²⁸ The foundational presupposition of the approach is that "the content of biblical writings is seen as merely the creation of theological writers, any given verse is nothing more than a non-binding, human theological utterance."²⁹ As a result, "What the text clearly states can, by no means, be true. The exegete's task is to *discover and solve* 'difficulties' in the text of the Bible. The better the interpreter, the more ingenious this will be. For to amount to anything a professor must 'make a name.'"³⁰

But what is the problem of the literary criticism being practiced by evangelicals today? Linnemann notes that in this form of literary criticism every question raised "is answered on the basis of assumptions," none that can be verified, but all made "tenable through their plausibility and through the researcher's artistry of grounding his assumptions in argumentation."³¹ Further, the danger of choosing to accept certain critical assumptions while denying others, is the fact that because they are so intimately related, "knit together," that "bringing in one of them tends to call forth them all."³² She rejects two things characteristic of critical studies, whether done by liberals or evangelicals, in that they end up in "pointless controversies and rationalistic quests for novelty."³³

existence of erroneous statements in Scripture about the circumstances of the origin of a given passage. The errors are due to the literary genre, or form (namely, the gospels) in which the statements occur. Since the Bible contains such literary figures as hyperbole and parable, both of which are fictional, could it not be, they argue, that the Gospels form a particular type of Christian literary genre, in which a redactor, in the interests of his theological message, reshapes the historical tradition he has received? The message is thus said to prevail over historical accuracy, with no attempt to deceive being intended by the author/redactor. In other words, the question is simply one of exegesis and hermeneutics, not of errancy. ... An author who intends to use a fictional form should make this fact, as well as his reason for using such a form, clear to his readers. The four Gospels, however, contain no clues that they are fictional in the sense claimed by those using the methods of current redaction criticism."

²⁷Linnemann, *Historical Criticism of the Bible: Methodology or Ideology?* 84.

²⁸Ibid., 84-85 (emphasis in the original).

²⁹Ibid., 86.

³⁰Ibid., 87 (emphasis in the original).

³¹Ibid., 94.

³²Ibid., 95.

³³Ibid., 111-12.

In his paper entitled "The Social Effect of Biblical Criticism," Walter Sundberg, who describes himself as a member of a liberal church, acknowledges that a critical approach to Scripture "is a serious problem for any community of faith that reveres the Bible as the authoritative source of divine revelation and assumes that its fundamental meaning is clear to the average believer and enduring across the ages."³⁴ He describes the "disruption" higher criticism has produced in "liberal and mainline churches" as it has resulted in "a group that lacks conviction."³⁵ He acknowledges as legitimate Linnemann's "witness to a negative social effect of biblical studies that is felt by more pastors and scholars than is often acknowledged."³⁶ And, as Linnemann has said, he acknowledges that it is precisely

because biblical criticism holds to a set of philosophical presuppositions, originating in the Enlightenment, which inexorably brings it in opposition to the church. Individual biblical scholars may embrace these presuppositions, ignore them, or try to resist them as they go about their work. But the discipline as a whole cannot escape them. These presuppositions involve deep-rooted assumptions or modes of thought that exercise extraordinary influence on academic and religious perceptions. ... They are usually of such inescapable force that they place limits on the possibilities of dialogue with an opposing point of view.³⁷

Yet, having described its dangers and the harm it has done to his own denomination, Sundberg still considers it necessary to teach the method while informing "believers that the discipline of biblical criticism comes with a price tag," a "cost" to the church.³⁸

In contrast to Linnemann, Grant Osborne is an example of an evangelical scholar who believes that one can both use critical methods and remain evangelical when those methods are "properly used."³⁹ He contrasts his approach on the one hand to "radical criticism" and on the other hand to traditional evangelicalism, labeled by him as "fundamentalism."⁴⁰ According to him, radical critics are "Arian"

³⁴Walter Sundberg, "The Social Effect of Biblical Criticism," in *Renewing Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Craig Bartholomew, Colin Greene, and Karl Möller (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000) 69, 80.

³⁵Ibid., 72-73.

³⁶Ibid., 69.

³⁷Ibid., 77-78.

³⁸Ibid., 80.

³⁹For example, he says that "redaction criticism, properly used, is a positive tool for biblical research, and evangelicals should be in the forefront of research into its constructive possibilities" (Osborne, "Redaction Criticism and the Great Commission: A Case Study Toward a Biblical Understanding of Inerrancy," *JETS* 19 [1976]:73).

⁴⁰In "Historical Criticism and the Evangelical," Osborne's objection to Robert Thomas' language is a similar smoke screen that blurs the real life-and-death issue the church faces over this issue (*JETS* 42 [1999]:209).

in their approach to Scripture while traditional evangelicals are “Docetic.” He, on the other hand, is “Athanasian,” combining “the human and divine elements in a God-ordained tension that recognizes the interplay between both aspects behind the origin of the sacred text.”⁴¹ Using the Great Commission in Matthew’s Gospel to model an evangelical redaction critical approach, he seems to argue for an inspired alteration of history by an editor.⁴² Two years later, he clarifies his position: while seeing the evangelists as editors reflecting later church issues, “we refuse to view them as playwrights who construct scenes to fit a later theological emphasis that Christ never intended. Instead, they apply the data from Christ’s life and teaching to their later *Sitz im Leben*.”⁴³ In another follow-up article, he provides further clarification by affirming that the evangelists “never twisted or created new meaning” or data,⁴⁴ though they did “paraphrase” Jesus’ words, but not “out of keeping with the original occurrence.”⁴⁵

In Osborne’s defense, he clarifies his view and defines evangelical

⁴¹Osborne, “Redaction Criticism and the Great Commission” 83.

⁴²He began by affirming, “Too often we have accepted the negative criteria of the radical critics as the only mode within which redactional work may be done. But redaction criticism, properly used, is a positive tool for Biblical research, and evangelicals should be in the forefront of research into its constructive possibilities” (ibid., 73). But then he accepted certain critical assumptions that cut at the heart of inerrancy, while still saying he held to inerrancy. He describes the Great Commission in higher critical terms as having “its foundation in tradition” and being “redacted by Matthew” (ibid., 74). He concludes that “It would seem that the tradition came to Matthew, possibly via Mark, as a single whole, but that he stated it in his own style and words” (ibid., 75). What Osborne seems to be saying in this article, ultimately, is that whoever this “Matthew” is, he is not an eyewitness who heard those words spoken by the Lord. He received them from a “tradition” that had developed, possibly being passed on by Mark. And, he *altered* it for his own purposes, under inspiration. Osborne justifies this later in his article by arguing for inspired alteration of history by an editor. He says further, “(1) Matthew was not freely composing but sought to interpret the true meaning of Jesus’ message for his own day; (2) both *ipsissima verba* and *ipsissima vox* are inspired words of God” (ibid., 80). But what of Matthew’s account? He says, “[I]t is difficult, if not impossible, to trace the exact words that Jesus spoke on the mountain in Galilee. However, we can know that Matthew has faithfully reproduced the intent and meaning of what Jesus said. In fact, we can rejoice because Matthew has rephrased it in such a way that it illuminates his entire gospel and applies the meaning of Jesus’ life and ministry to the present mission and responsibility of the church” (ibid., 85).

⁴³Osborne, “The Evangelical and *Traditionsgeschichte*,” *JETS* 21 (1978):128-29. He precedes this by saying “that the gospels were written by men who selected and shaped the traditions to present a certain theological theme. The selection and shaping process, however, did not involve creating or changing the historical data. Therefore there is no danger in a positive approach to redaction or traditional criticism” (ibid., 127). This is a welcome clarification. In this article, though, he argues that, “Inerrancy is based on inspiration, and the latter covers both fact (the original event) and interpretation (the explanation of the ramifications of the event for the readers). There is no dichotomy between the two, and there is no ‘error’ in the latter aspect” (ibid., 127-28). Unfortunately, his example of interpretation involves alteration of the original event.

⁴⁴Osborne, “The Evangelical and Redaction Criticism: Critique and Methodology,” *JETS* 22/4 (1979):322.

⁴⁵Ibid., 311.

redaction criticism as meaning “that the writer selected his sources and from his memory those details that he wished to highlight. Every saying and every story came from the historical event and from what Jesus originally said.” He also defends his approach by noting that his doctoral dissertation defended the historicity of the synoptic differences, saying that he argued “that all the redactional changes were historical and that the authors under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit were selecting different details from the original historical event.”⁴⁶ This is something a so-called “fundamentalist” non-redactionist would say. But, concern needs to be expressed about other statements, such as that “the evangelist was free to expand, omit or paraphrase on the basis of what Jesus had originally said and done.”⁴⁷ Also holding to Markan priority raises problems since it necessarily assumes that Matthew used and consciously modified Mark’s account for his own theological purposes. It is this conscious modification of inspired, inerrant text that is the concern. Again, evangelicals must ask, how far is too far?

Is the movement to accept the higher critic’s doctrine of Markan priority a departure from evangelicalism, or a legitimate option that one may hold in clear conscience? It seems that a growing number of evangelical scholars are opting for Markan priority in synoptic studies. But is it evangelical?

Markan Priority and Inerrancy

Is the Markan prioritist moving away from evangelicalism’s core belief in inerrancy? Does not the approach necessarily accept certain liberal-critical presuppositions and propositions that would seem to mandate a lower view of inspired Scripture?

To defend Markan priority one *must* assume someone other than an eyewitness of Jesus’ life, the apostle himself, composed Matthew and used Mark and other “traditions” as his source. Yes, some Markan prioritists argue that Matthew himself actually used Mark. But why would an eyewitness *need* or even *want* to use someone else’s account? This is especially difficult to understand in light of Jesus’ personal promise to Matthew and the other eyewitnesses of His ministry that the Holy Spirit would “bring to your [their] remembrance all things that I said to you” (John 14:26).⁴⁸

To arrive at Markan priority is to accept the methods, and key presuppositions, of liberal scholarship that have chosen to deny the overwhelming evidence

⁴⁶Osborne, “Historical Criticism and the Evangelical,” 208-9.

⁴⁷Ibid., 208.

⁴⁸Though some apply this promise to the church as a whole, it has its most specific referent in the apostles dining with Jesus that evening, including Matthew. It is difficult to take “all things that I said to you” and change it to “those oral or written traditions circulating through the church in a few decades,” or “just the concepts but not the actual words,” or “a general gist of what was said.”

contradictory to their purely speculative theories.⁴⁹ The Markan prioritist must ignore the external evidence of history by rejecting the witness of the earliest church fathers. But why does one find this necessary? It is necessary only because liberal scholars over the last century have rejected that witness. The earliest church fathers emphasized both the priority and Matthean authorship of the NT's first Gospel. John Rist's work, *On the Independence of Matthew and Mark*,⁵⁰ argues that the early church fathers at least preferred Matthew's Gospel to Mark's. But, when perusing his evidences, clear indications show that they either did not have Mark or, in fact, ignored it. The idea of Markan priority is the product of liberal scholarship's denial of God's involvement in the authorship of Scripture. This is combined with an assumption of late dates (now disproved) and oral sources necessary to explain away the miraculous without the problem of eyewitnesses still being around to challenge pious myths.

The danger of accepting later dates for the Gospels is reflected in Linnemann's warnings about the danger of assumptions guiding interpretation. Such assumptions include such things as a "Gospel's theology and bias, as well as the nature of the community which it reflects."⁵¹ By moving the author to a different context, interpreters give meaning to the text based on imagined contexts that may or may not have existed and are not demonstrable. Accurate understanding becomes impossible.

Evangelicals have determined already that inerrancy does not permit pious fiction in the Gospels. But, any redactional approach that discusses Matthew's motives for changing Mark, has essentially accused Matthew of altering the truth. Why? We also believe that when Mark penned his Gospel on the basis of Peter's testimony, he did so inerrantly. Its original autograph was inspired. It was verbally and plenary inerrant in matters of history and fact just as much as in faith and practice. And unless there is compelling literary evidence, falling back to *ipsisima vox* (i.e., the very voice) and allowing alteration is a denial of the author's evident intention that his readers understand it as *ipsisima verba* (i.e., the very words).

Matthew's Authorship and Inerrancy

⁴⁹Examples of the Markan-hypothesis advocacy can be seen in such scholarly works as: Frederick D. Bruner, *Matthew A Commentary*, vol. 1 (Dallas: Word, 1987) xvii; C. F. D. Moule, *The Birth of the New Testament*, 3rd rev. ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1982) 107-8; Alfred Plummer, *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Matthew* (London: Elliot Stock, 1910) xi; John A. T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976) 93-97. Examples also abound in "evangelical" works such as Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman, 1992) 41-46.

⁵⁰John M. Rist, *On the Independence of Matthew and Mark*, vol. 32, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series, ed. Matthew Black (London: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

⁵¹Linnemann, *Historical Criticism of the Bible: Methodology or Ideology?* 93.

Denial of Matthew's authorship is disturbing and reflects what appears to stem from an unwillingness of some evangelical scholars to stand against the presuppositions of critical scholarship. When challenged, the answer is given: "Since the Gospel does not claim Matthean authorship, I do not have to hold to Matthew as the author."⁵² So who is the author of the Gospel? Was he a non-apostle from late in the first century?⁵³

Why is the apostle Matthew rejected? Evangelicals reject Matthew only because Markan priority is the accepted view of the academy, controlled by critical scholars, who continue to hold to it in the same way as those who continue to teach Darwinian evolution in the face of overwhelming data to the contrary. Since those reasons for rejecting him as author have proven spurious, we should ask why anyone should doubt Matthew's authorship, in light of the question such doubt raises about apostolic authority?

Testimony of the Church Fathers

David Farnell has produced an excellent description of the problem and an accounting of the evidence from the church fathers for Matthew's authorship of the Gospel bearing his name, as well as its priority in the order of writing.⁵⁴ He demonstrates convincingly that the testimony of the church fathers was "unanimous" that "Matthew was the first gospel written."⁵⁵ He also demonstrates that the early church fathers, legitimate scholars in their own right, identified the Gospel with the apostle Matthew (and not some later redactor) on the basis of widespread testimony and not isolated personal theories.⁵⁶ He aptly notes, "The universal ascription of the

⁵²This was the response given to me by a seminar leader at the Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society in Massachusetts, November of 2000.

⁵³The answer given me by the seminar leader.

⁵⁴F. David Farnell, "The Synoptic Gospels in the Ancient Church: The Testimony to the Priority of Matthew's Gospel," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 10/1 (Spring 1999):53-86. He notes well, "Apostolic origin of the gospels is vital for a canonical document that purports to be a record of Jesus' historical ministry on earth. The anonymity of the Matthean gospel argues strongly for the validity of tradition that attached Matthew's name to it, because such anonymity is inexplicable apart from its direct association with the apostle Matthew. Matthew was a relatively obscure figure among the Twelve, so no adequate reason exists to explain why the early church would have chosen his name rather than a better-known apostle if he had not indeed written it" (ibid., 62).

⁵⁵Ibid., 54.

⁵⁶The so-called existence of an Aramaic Matthew is not a problem since "early and consistent ascription of the Greek gospel to Matthew would indicate that the transfer of connection from Matthew's Aramaic version mentioned by Papias to the Greek gospel occurred at a very early stage well into the first century. Such a very early stage would have placed Greek Matthew into a period when people, such as surviving apostles, eyewitnesses, and others who possessed first-hand knowledge regarding the Gospel would have linked the Aramaic and Greek versions together as coming from the hand of Matthew" (ibid., 67). And, "[T]hough patristic witnesses like Papias uniformly spoke of an Aramaic original for the gospel, they accepted the Greek Matthew as unquestionably authoritative and coming from the Apostle

Greek Matthew to the Apostle Matthew and the failure of tradition to mention any other possible author except Matthew renders unconvincing any suggestion that the early church forgot the true author of the work.”⁵⁷ Better yet, “An analysis of data from the church fathers results in one conspicuous conclusion: they do not support either the Two-Document Hypothesis or the Two-Gospel Hypothesis. The assumed dependence of Matthew and Luke on Mark is totally without historical foundation, as is the assumed dependence of Mark on Matthew and Luke instead of on Peter’s preaching.”⁵⁸

So, why does “modern” scholarship reject or explain away the church fathers? It does so because of the growing “adherence to an assumed hypothesis of literary dependence, which is the basic assumption of Historical Criticism.” And what is Farnell’s solution with which I concur? “Instead of being outrightly rejected, explained, or enervated by a preconceived agenda or predilection toward a particular synoptic hypothesis, the statements of the fathers should have their full weight in any discussion of the synoptic issue.”⁵⁹

But more than the early church fathers speaks against Markan priority.

Evidence Against Literary Dependence

While it seems that more and more evangelicals are willing to accept the critical supposition of literary dependence between the synoptic Gospels, the data does not support the proposal. The works of Rist, Massaux, and Niemelä are just a small sampling.

Rist’s work, now over twenty years old, argues strongly against any literary dependence between the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, questioning the existence of Q, based both on the textual evidences and church fathers.⁶⁰ He describes well the attitude prevalent in liberal scholarship then, an attitude becoming increasingly obvious in so-called evangelical scholarship now. “We are confronted here with a not unfamiliar syndrome in scholarship: my result must be right; if my reasons for

Matthew himself.” Further, “all references to the Gospel of Matthew in the early church fathers reflect the Greek Matthew rather than the Hebrew” (ibid., 68).

⁵⁷Ibid., 69. Farnell is also accurate in saying, “The only adequate explanation for the gospel’s influence and overwhelming popularity in the early church is its apostolic authorship.” What is its significance in the higher critical debates on source? “Besides nullifying the Two- or Four-Source Theory’s view of Markan priority, Irenaeus’ testimony also negates literary dependence of Mark on Matthew as proposed by the Two-Gospel Hypothesis, because it states that Mark depended on Peter’s preaching, not on the other written gospels of Matthew or Luke, for his information” (ibid., 71). Further, there is the stark reality that “the early church fathers overwhelmingly neglected Mark,” which only makes sense if Matthew was all they had to work with from the beginning (ibid., 84).

⁵⁸Ibid., 84.

⁵⁹Ibid., 85.

⁶⁰Rist, *On the Independence of Matthew and Mark* 9.

subscribing to it are demonstrably false, I must hunt up some more.”⁶¹ Rejecting the presuppositions, where does Rist arrive? “In brief there is as yet no convincing evidence that Irenaeus was wrong when, perhaps paraphrasing or rewriting Papias, he declared that Matthew’s Gospel was written while Peter and Paul were gospelling in Rome and laying the foundations of the Church.”⁶² He also notes, “What the tradition says nothing about is any influence of Mark on Matthew or of Matthew on Mark. ... What the ancient traditions do in fact imply is that Matthew and Mark derive independently from apostolic witness.”⁶³ He concludes, “There is no evidence in the texts themselves which necessitates literary dependence of Mark on Matthew or of Matthew on Mark; and there is no evidence whatever in the early tradition to indicate that such dependence was thought to have existed.”⁶⁴

Edouard Massaux’s more recent work, *The Influence of the Gospel of Saint Matthew on Christian Literature before Saint Irenaeus*, challenges the assumption of Markan priority on the basis of its total neglect by the church fathers. Where they knew and quoted extensively from Matthew, Mark was ignored.⁶⁵ He also found that the use of Matthew included far more than the Sermon on the Mount and reflected a “literal dependence” such that it is evident that the church fathers were using a complete Gospel text and not just some separate tradition(s) or “edition of the Sermon on the Mount.”⁶⁶

Most recently John Niemelä has produced a dissertation debunking Markan priority and the need for a Q document by demonstrating through statistical analysis that Mark could *not* have been the basis of Matthew and Luke’s Gospels.⁶⁷ Though his assumption of some form of literary dependence leads him to conclude that Mark used Matthew and Luke, the evidence is more compelling that neither Mark nor Matthew used anybody.⁶⁸ But why is this so important?

⁶¹Ibid., 1.

⁶²Ibid., 7.

⁶³Ibid., 11.

⁶⁴Ibid., 106-7.

⁶⁵Edouard Massaux, *The Influence of the Gospel of Saint Matthew on Christian Literature before Saint Irenaeus*. Book 3. The Apologists and the Didache, trans. Norman J. Belal and Suzanne Hecht, ed., Arthur J. Bellinzoni (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University, 1993) 11-41, 90, 118, 125, 138, 183.

⁶⁶Ibid., 184.

⁶⁷John H. Niemelä, “The Infrequency of Twin Departures: An End to Synoptic Reversibility?,” Ph.D. Dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, Dallas, Tex., 2000. He argues from the practice of “secular writers” like Josephus who, using more than one source, followed an “alternating pattern of citation.” Using statistical analysis, he then shows that Mark’s Gospel can be demonstrated to be the product of utilizing a scroll of Matthew and a scroll of Luke as sources, while they could not have independently used Mark as one of their sources (108-10, 192).

⁶⁸Niemelä’s argument from his analysis of blocks of material, and recognition of verbal differences in those blocks that he determined were copied from Matthew or Luke by Mark, is that Mark used the other Gospels for his outline, but wrote in his own words. The differences in most blocks (and perhaps

Issue of Apostolic Authority

One of the key issues at stake is that of apostolic authority. Though some say it does not matter whether Matthew wrote the Gospel or not, it does matter, because ultimately Peter, Paul, and John all appealed to apostolic authority. John said he saw, heard, and handled embodied Eternal Life, Jesus (1 John 1:1-4). Peter's legitimacy grew out of his eyewitness relationship to Jesus' revelation (2 Pet 1:16-18). Likewise, a non-eyewitness, Paul based his authority on direct revelation from Christ (Gal 1:11-12).

An apostolic connection is important for the normative authority of the Word of God. To say that it is some other elder's writing from the late first century, utilizing and altering traditions passed down and modified over decades, makes it no more authoritative than the writings of any of the church fathers. Also, to say that it does not carry apostolic weight is to deny its authority as God's Word. The non-apostolic Gospels and epistles of the NT all had apostolic connections that resulted in their acceptance by the early church. And there is where the underlying attack to an adequate view of inspiration comes for those who say Matthew does not have to be the author of Matthew. The primacy of Matthew's Gospel over the others, based on the testimony of the early church fathers, came precisely because it *was* from the hand of an apostle and eyewitness. Mark's Gospel did not achieve a similar status and was largely ignored by the church fathers precisely because it was only based on an apostle's testimony and not from the hand of an apostle, and because it contributed essentially nothing new to Matthew's testimony. It may have been of help to the church in Rome, but the rest of the church fathers already had Matthew's Gospel and were obviously satisfied with that. The same can probably be said of Luke's Gospel, though it was quoted more than Mark. Though they were respected as authentic Gospels with intermediate apostolic connections, their intended audiences were much more limited. And as a result, so was their influence.

It is legitimate to say that three of the Gospels reflect eyewitness accounts; Mark is based on Peter's account of what he saw and heard. Their variation in wording reflects differing perspectives of events and memories of Jesus' statements. This is consistent with the veracity and viewpoint of eyewitnesses. It is altogether another thing to say Mark was written in Greek, and pseudo-Matthew took Mark and consciously altered the words of Jesus for theological purposes, knowing that Jesus did not really speak those words, but using the alteration to help him prove his point to his readers. This is no different from Gundry's claiming that Mark's stories were "embellished" by "Matthew" for theological purposes.

Departure from Inerrancy

every block) in Mark from Matthew and Luke should argue against block copying and argue for a separate source (Peter himself) who would have told the same story in his own words (*ibid.*, 125).

The use of redaction criticism, for which Markan priority is a normative assumption, necessarily *requires* that an unknown author other than Matthew, or even Matthew himself, modified the tradition and/or Mark's account in order to express his own theological views and address the problems of his own community, whatever the modern-day scholar determines that to be. It is in the area of the changes made by Matthew that the problem with inerrancy surfaces. Does inerrancy allow for Spirit-inspired changes? Is that consistent with our understanding of God's nature as a God of truth who does not lie? Article 12 of the "Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy" states in part, "We affirm that Scripture in its entirety is inerrant, being free from all falsehood, fraud, or deceit." How does it fit with the expectation that evangelicals will hold to an inerrant Scripture? It is the question of falsehood that must be addressed. If Matthew took some tradition and corrected it in accordance with his recollection of the event, guided by the Holy Spirit, we have no problem. But, if Matthew "corrected" Mark or took some other "tradition" and altered its message to suit his own purposes, and his changes did not happen nor were part and parcel with the meaning of what Jesus said, then a falsehood has been presented as truth by the Holy Spirit! Is this not exactly the point of all redaction-critical analysis and conclusions, especially those Matthean studies that assume Markan priority? Something was *consciously* changed!

But, then, how exact should we be in our definition of inerrancy? Is *ipsissima vox* enough? When addressing the issue of *His* view of Scripture, Jesus said that, "till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled" (Matt 5:18). For Him inspiration extended to the very letters of the text. Why? It was because those letters formed the very words, not just the ideas or sense of a passage. Those exact words were contained in historical narratives as well as prophetic writings. Also, since Peter equated Paul's epistles with "the rest of the Scriptures" (2 Pet 3:15-16) and Paul considered the Gospel of Luke to be Scripture when quoting Luke 10:7 in 1 Timothy 5:18, the NT documents are as equivalent in authority and inspiration as the Old. That being said, Jesus' equation must still stand. Thus we hold to verbal plenary inspiration in the original autographs. How does this impact the issue of *ipsissima vox*? *Vox* does not extend historical accuracy to the very words. *Vox* is not what Jesus meant in His view of the OT Scriptures. *Vox* should not be a sufficient evangelical view of the NT.

How does this impact the so-called evangelical use of redaction criticism? The *modus operandi* of redaction criticism lies in its purpose and presumptions, namely to discover and demonstrate an author's theology on the basis of changes he has made to the received "tradition," whether it is oral, Mark, Q, or some sayings source, reflected in the differences discovered in the synoptic texts. Every redactional study must of necessity argue for an authorial alteration of previously received information, whether from church tradition (arising from source criticism) or a prior Gospel account. Gundry gave us 585 pages of this and then admitted that he believed the author of Matthew produced intentional embellishments. Are evangelical redactionists qualitatively or just quantitatively different?

Conclusion

The anti-supernatural foundation and non-evangelical assumptions that form the basis of the denial of Matthew's priority and authorship must be recognized and avoided by evangelicals if they are to remain true to Scripture's inspiration and authority.⁶⁹ To permit this theological drift within evangelical churches, colleges, and seminaries poses a threat to the vitality and future of evangelicalism as witnessed in the decline of mainline denominations.⁷⁰

Eta Linnemann is correct in her warnings that evangelical adoption of critical methods, such as Redaction Criticism, ultimately leads to the same liberal conclusions, since those methods were designed to prove the evolutionary theory of religious development and deny divine inspiration. The danger arises from accepting the presuppositions of modern scholars and their theories in the face of the evidence of early church fathers whose testimonies can be trusted.

When science told us creation was impossible and the world was billions of years old, theologians came up with theistic evolution as their means of being accepted, at least in part, by the academy. Why? They were too cowardly to confess that God knew what He was talking about in Genesis 1–11. Even today, men like Hugh Ross try to tell us that we must interpret Genesis 1–11 consistent with their present understanding of the universe—what they perceive to be undeniable evidence based on their discipline's theories and interpretation of data.⁷¹ But does science really have the answers? Macro-evolution has been demonstrated to be absolutely impossible at the cell level by Michael Behe, who only put in writing what scientists knew for years and kept quiet about.⁷² Why? The academy, controlled by

⁶⁹I commend the definition of inspiration provided us by Louise I. Hodges ("Evangelical Definitions of Inspiration: Critiques and a Suggested Definition," *JETS* 37 [1994]:109). "Graphic (written) inspiration is the activity by which that portion intended by God of his special revelation was put into permanent, authoritative, written form by the supernatural agency of the Holy Spirit, who normally worked concurrently and confluent through the spontaneous thought processes, literary styles, and personalities of certain divine-selected men in such a way that the product of their special labors (in its entirety) is the very Word of God (both the ideas and the specific vocabulary), complete, infallible, and inerrant in the original manuscripts."

⁷⁰MacArthur speaks of this decline when writing, "By the early part of this century, most of the mainline Protestant denominations had embraced one form or another of Historical Criticism. And as they do so, one denomination after the other began the inevitable process of decay and decline. Today many of those denominations are mere shells of what they once were. Their churches, once bustling, are now lifeless and empty—monuments to skepticism, liberalism, and humanistic rationalism. The damning and destructive fruits of Historical Criticism were thus made manifest for all to see" (John MacArthur, "Foreword," in *The Jesus Crisis* 9).

⁷¹Hugh Ross, *Creation and Time: A Biblical and Scientific Perspective on the Creation Date Controversy* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1994); *The Genesis Question: Scientific Advances and the Accuracy of Genesis* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1998).

⁷²Michael J. Behe, *Darwin's Black Box: The Biochemical Challenge to Evolution* (New York: Free Press, 1996).

evolutionists, could not live with truth that completely invalidated their philosophical underpinnings, which were necessary to maintain a denial of God's existence. Are we not seeing the same thing happen in the area of biblical studies? Are not too many of our numbers adopting discredited theories, created by unbelievers in their rejection of God's revelation, and allowing them to degrade a correct handling of Scripture? How does God feel about this? Paul wrote, "O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane and idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge—by professing it some have strayed concerning the faith" (1 Tim 6:20-21).

Whether from the pulpit or the classroom podium, evangelicals have an obligation to the body of Christ to strengthen its faith, which requires a strong view of the authority of Scripture. This obligation is to the man and woman in the pew. Redactional analyses NEVER strengthen the authority of the text. Redactionists try to make it sound like they are the only ones with a handle on the truth, and they lump dissenters with the common folk who do not know any better. That does not strengthen the authority of Scripture. Have evangelicals forgotten that their task as pastors and teachers comes with a mandate from our Lord to strengthen the faith of that man or woman sitting in the pew, "rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim 2:15), not being puffed up with what is falsely called knowledge?

Evangelicalism must return to its roots and recommit itself to a defense of God's Word against destructive outside influences. This is not just about Matthew and Mark. It is about what distinguishes evangelicals from the rest of the theological world in building up the body of Christ, not weakening its faith.

BOOK REVIEWS

Clinton E. Arnold, ed. *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary*. 4 vols. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002. 2,924 pp. \$39.99/vol. (cloth). Reviewed by James E. Rosscup, Professor of Bible Exposition.

This work (*ZIBBC*) attempts verse by verse comments on each NT book, but skips some verses. The volumes, beautifully produced, have many multi-colored pictures on customs, maps, and special panels on such topics as the background or meaning of key issues. Entries on the Roman calendars, the date of Jesus's birth, Pharisees and Sadducees, and the meaning of the millennium (which never prefers a meaning but is content merely to mention three views) illustrate the kinds of key issues dealt with.

Several noted scholars such as Michael Wilkins (Matthew), David Garland (Mark), Mark Strauss (Luke), Andreas Kostenberger (John), Douglas Moo (Romans, James, 2 Peter, Jude), Ralph Martin (Galatians), Peter Davids (1 Peter), Robert Yarbrough (1, 2, 3 John), and Arnold himself (Colossians) deal with individual books. A major contribution explains customs behind passages, as the custom of the Roman triumph in 2 Cor 2:14. Writers display a rich awareness of ancient literature with details that shed light from the ancient world on the NT. Endnotes for each biblical book reflect an awareness of current scholarly literature.

Here and there, users will find comments especially good for understanding NT statements. Yet the thin and cursory nature of much discussion raises a question about the need for such an elaborate production in light of a plethora of available good commentaries that say much more. The work will help at certain points, adding insights covered by other works, but probably will not be practical for individuals (ca. \$160.00 for the 4 volumes) who have less expensive access to fuller detail regarding the same issues. Vagueness, lack of definition, or scholarly timidity to commit to one view will be disappointing for many. One wonders about the absence of a single meaning for the "kingdom" in Matt 13:11, of a specific identification of the "restrainer" (2 Thess 2:6, 8) where a list of eight views leaves the choice up in the air, of reasons to defend verses in Matthew 24–25 as referring to the church rapture, and of the choice of and reasons for a particular view of the "thousand years" in Revelation 20. *ZIBBC* views Hebrews 5:11–6:11 as referring to the genuinely saved though immature (*ZIBBC* 4:34), but later comments cause ambiguity, calling people as in 6:4-8 "apostates" whose "inevitable outcome . . . is devastation" (38-39), "an inevitable curse" (39). Comments on a similar problem

text in 10:26ff. clearly view those sinning as the wicked in contrast to the genuinely saved (66-67). It is also puzzling to call those in 10:32-34 "Christians" who formerly made a good response to God, then later to say that vv. 38-39 contrast the unsaved who do not persevere with the saved who do (67). Do some who were once saved later lose salvation? No explanation of this inconsistency is given.

On the other hand, the work can also offer help though brief. James 2:14 refers to "that" faith which a person falsely professes. James 5:14 presents a definitive view of physical illness. Christ's preaching in 1 Pet 3:19 is during His time in the tomb, directed to evil angels who fell in Gen 6:2-4. The "dead" in 1 Pet 4:6 are Christians who died when persecutors "judged" them. In 2 Peter 2 false teachers who were never really saved are in view. The "sin unto death" (1 John 5:16-17) is committed by pretenders and deceivers as in 2:19 and 4:1; such persist in sin and wind up in eternal judgment, whereas by contrast those who genuinely know God (5:20) show signs of the life He gives.

In other cases, a mixture of both the good and the confusing appears. Allegorically, John 15:2a, 6 picture a professing but unsaved person; "husband of one wife" (1 Tim 3:2) means an elder who has his one wife should not have one or more concubines also; "stars" in Rev 1:20 symbolize celestial angels. The 144,000 (Rev 7:4-8) related to Israelite tribes are Jewish believers, but it is difficult to explain how in 7:9 the 144,000 Jews are "transformed into an inclusive multitude encompassing every race, ethnic group, and nation on earth" (*ZIBBC* 4:296). Another puzzle is to explain how the temple (Rev 11:1) can be "primarily a figure for the church," but secondarily the temple still standing in Jerusalem (4:311). Why both? The two witnesses in Revelation 11 are not two individuals but "representative of NT spiritual realities," but no explanation clears up what that means (4:313).

On Colossians, Arnold's brief comment takes "firstborn" (1:15) to focus on Christ's sovereignty, not on His being a prior creation. What Paul's filling up afflictions of Christ in 1:24 means is unclear. Imagery of a Roman triumph is clear in 2:15, but the triumph is not related to details elsewhere (2 Cor 2:14f.; Eph 4:8). Like other contributors, Arnold is vivid in his descriptions of background analogies that illustrate truths: the triumph (2:15), chains on a Roman prisoner (4:3), and intense athletic competition (4:12).

The volumes condense a lot of material, and either labor to state a view or to avoid stating a preference. Their main and hopefully extensive use will be as a library reference source, while individuals invest in more detailed helps that expound *all* the verses.

Cyril J. Barber. *The Faithfulness of God: Devotional Studies in I Chronicles*. Santa Ana, Calif.: Promise Publishing, 2002. 287 pp. \$12.95 (paper). Reviewed by James E. Rosscup, Professor of Bible.

Without denying that a person can mingle exegesis, exposition, and devotional truths integral to the spiritual import of God's Word, one can classify commentaries broadly into three categories: exegetical, expositional, and devotional. The present, prolific author of more than 30 books (e.g., *Judges, Ruth, 1 and 2 Samuel, The Minister's Library*) here crafts exposition within a devotional spotlight. As in many of his works, he evidences an ability to gather life-shaping expositional aspects of passages and focus their lessons with crystal clarity and vividly engaging readability.

In this case what Barber has produced is a simplified revision of a detailed manuscript originally intended for a series on Judges through 2 Chronicles. He uses 17 chapters of 15-20 pages each to explain selected sections with provocative spiritual lessons. With lead-on or later illustrations, he surveys passages that furnish key guidelines to enrich readers devotionally.

The author sees Ezra as the probable writer, before 400 B. C., who used various available sources such as Nehemiah's library. Barber cites different views along with well-known scholars against and for his perspective (iv-viii). A two-and-a-half-page outline precedes the chapters. He does not attempt a verse by verse analysis, but picks out main episodes to furnish suggestive spiritual principles. In the long genealogy section (1 Chronicles 1-9), Barber keys on lessons in Jabez's prayer (4:9-10) and their impact for today (4:2-14). Some ideas are good, but others seem subjective and debatable—e.g., Jabez was possibly the youngest in his family, and his father was perhaps slain by raiding Amalekites. Later, Barber has provocative comments on Saul's decision to assure his own death before enemies could humiliate him (19-21). Three chapters on David's mighty men (51-99) have stimulating lessons. Other discussions include The Marks of Friendship (11:15-19), The Power Within (11:20-21), Success Without Compromise or Regret (11:22-25), The Loyalty of a Friend (11:26-27), God-Given Success (18:1-20:8), and God's Wrath and Mercy (21:1-22:1).

The main value lies in the simple, attractive lessons for personal life. Lay people, students, pastors, and speakers seeking priming ideas will receive worthwhile input from flowing emphases along with well-crafted illustrations and sometimes arresting quotes. A similar work on 2 Chronicles by Barber from the same publisher arrived just before press time for this issue of *TMSJ*.

John Barton. *Holy Writings, Sacred Text: The Canon in Early Christianity*. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox, 1997. xiii + 210 pp. \$19.95 (paper).
Reviewed by William D. Barrick, Professor of Old Testament.

Holy Writings, Sacred Text is the American edition of *The Spirit and the Letter* (London, SPCK, 1997). The author is Professor of the Interpretation of Holy Scripture in the University of Oxford. He also wrote *Reading the Old Testament:*

Method in Bible Study (Westminster/John Knox, 1984; revised 1996). Readers with a decided interest in the topic of canonicity will appreciate this in-depth analysis of the early church's views regarding the authority and meaning of the OT and NT. Few seminary graduates would succeed in completing a reading of it—at times it is exceedingly heavy.

Barton's approach to the canon in this volume is historical. He attempts to demonstrate how the believing community has viewed the text of the Scriptures at a variety of points in the past. In chapter 1 (1-34, "The Origins of the Canon: An Imaginary Problem?") Barton proposes that the growth of the canon and the delimitation of the canon are independent of each other. One significant observation is that the acceptance of the Scriptures as authoritative already existed prior to any formal canonization (23). As a result, the NT itself was already established as authoritative for the Christian faith by the early second century (24, 30-31, 64). Early synods (both Christian and Jewish) tended to "concentrate on exclusion rather than inclusion, simply leaving the central core as they find it" (29). This situation paved the way for the views of Marcion.

Marcion's role in canonization is the topic of chapter 2 (35-62, "Marcion Revisited"). Barton takes issue with Adolf von Harnack's view that Marcion was a radical innovator. Instead, he argues that "Marcion can be understood better as a conservative, overtaken by events" (37). Marcion rejected the allegorical interpretation of the OT but proclaimed that it was not Scripture for the Christian even though it had been for the Jew (42, 54).

Chapter 3 (63-15, "Two Testaments, One Bible") discusses five issues. The first is the relationship of age and venerability to the canonizing of the NT (64-68). The second issue is the argument for NT authority on the basis of Christ being the fulfillment of OT prophecy (68-74). The third issue is the tension created by the early Christians who, unlike Marcion, began to view the OT as a Christian book (74-79). Barton's fourth issue is the idea that the NT served as an aid to the memory for gospel proclamation (79-91). The last issue in this chapter is the relation between oral and written traditions (91-104). Barton concludes that the authority of the NT actually derived from the fact that it embodied that which was accepted as authoritative: the gospel message (104-5).

Then, in chapter 4 (106-30, "Writings of Holiness") Barton confirms what the reader who has persevered to this point already knows: this volume is not intended as light reading. As he puts it, "The additional complication which I want to introduce in this chapter is the question whether this [that texts were preserved because of the importance of their contents] is necessarily the case" (107). This chapter touches upon two matters related to the OT canon. One is the Mishnah's use of the phrase "defile the hands" in a discussion of whether the Song of Solomon and Ecclesiastes should be considered Scripture (108-21). Barton presents an intriguing possibility that the question related to whether or not a book not containing the Tetragrammaton could be included in Scripture. This would also affect the problem of the Book of Esther, since it, too, does not utilize the Tetragrammaton. The second

matter concerns the *kethib-qere'* (123-26). Appealing to James Barr ("A New Look at *Kethibh-Qere*," *Oudtestamentische Studiën* 21 [1981]:19-37), Barton claims that the Masoretes were identifying two equally significant traditions of readings. The first was the *kethib* (that which was written in the text). It was to be copied and retained even though the *qere'* (that which was preserved in the margins) preserved the oral traditions that attempted to make the text more understandable and meaningful. According to the author, "The Q is not a *correction* of the K, but a registration of the reading tradition which enables the scribe not to be misled by it" (124). Both of these matters lead to the conclusion that, even in the Gospels, the holiness of the text itself may have been more important to the early Christians than its contents and meaning (130).

That conclusion is carried through into chapter 5 (131-56, "Canon and Meaning") in which the author discusses divergent attitudes about the canon and its meaning. He observes the differences between the ancient readers and modern readers, and between Christian readers and Jewish readers. As Barton's "Conclusion" (157-62) reveals, one of the underlying factors in the writing of this collection of essays was a partial response to canonical criticism.

C. Hassell Bullock. *Encountering the Book of Psalms: A Literary and Theological Introduction*. Encountering Biblical Studies. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001. 266 pp. \$24.99 (cloth). Reviewed by William D. Barrick, Professor of Old Testament.

Encountering Biblical Studies is a series designed for college-level Bible courses (12). This volume is intended as a course subsequent to the OT survey by Bill T. Arnold and Bryan E. Beyer (*Encountering the Old Testament: A Christian Survey* [Baker, 1999]). The layout is functional and attractive with sidebars, chapter outlines, chapter objectives, key terms in boldface type, study questions, reading suggestions, and visual aids (photographs, maps, charts, graphs, and figures). Unfortunately, the employment of endnotes (239-43) instead of footnotes works against the otherwise user-friendly layout of the text.

Bullock rightly recognizes the danger of rampant typology and hyper-messianization in the interpretation of Psalms, urging discretion and the application of NT controls (47). However, interpretation based solely upon historical and typological principles also can abuse the text. Using the words of Ps 22:1 ("My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?") as an example, he insists that "to be fair to the historical context, we should assume that they were spoken by a real person in ancient Israel, very likely even David himself at some God-forsaken moment of his life" (43). The same logic, if applied, for example, to Isa 45:1 ("Thus says the LORD to His anointed, to Cyrus"), could indicate that a contemporary individual named Cyrus existed in Isaiah's day and prefigured the future Cyrus, or that someone other

than Isaiah wrote the prophecy after the fact (*vaticinium ex eventu*). Application of this methodology to the NT could result in a preterist interpretation of passages like 2 Thess 2:1-4 and Revelation 17-18. Such interpretative methods eliminate prophetic pronouncements that have no fulfillment or representation in the author's experiential context. Bullock does not treat all the prophetic elements of Psalms in this fashion, however. Of Psalm 2 he says, "I am inclined to believe that the messianism of Psalm 2 belongs to the initial composition of the psalm and not to a later period of interpretation" (61).

In discussing the editorial seams of Psalms, Bullock declares that "the editor who installed Psalm 1 was a literary tailor of fine expertise, and he stitched these two psalms together masterfully" (60). This implies that the editor wrote parts of Psalms 1 and 2 so that their wording and structure would harmonize. The same logic could lead to the conclusion that "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty" (written by Joachim Neander and translated by Catherine Winkworth) and "Praise the Lord! Ye Heavens, Adore Him" (first published in 1796) must have been edited by Tom Fette, Kenneth Barker, or another editor of *The Hymnal for Worship & Celebration* (Word Music, 1986) in which the two hymns occur back-to-back (numbers 8 and 9). The last line of the former hymn is "Gladly for aye we adore Him," while the first line of the latter hymn is "Praise the Lord! Ye heav'ns, adore Him." Both hymns begin with "Praise (to) the Lord." Additional parallels are present between these two hymns. However, there is absolutely no reason to assume that the editors did anything more than to arrange the placement or order of the hymns. Why should anyone think that the ancient editor(s) of Psalms did anything more than the editors of modern hymnals?

Chapter 3, "The Seams of the Garment of Praise" (57-82), provides a well-written examination of the overall structure of the Psalter in its five books. Bullock demonstrates the affinities between Books 1-3 as well as between Books 4 and 5. He also reminds the reader that the current order of the Psalter was established prior to the translation of the Septuagint between 250 and 150 B.C. (71).

In chapter 5, "Encountering Theology and History in the Psalms" (99-118), the author discusses biblical history as reflected in Psalms. Bullock stresses that the psalmists embraced that history as fact rather than fiction and focused on the divine perspective more than the human.

Nine chapters (chaps. 6-14) focus on nine different psalm genres: psalms of praise (121-33), psalms of lament (135-50), psalms of thanksgiving (151-63), psalms of trust (165-76), psalms of the earthly king (177-86), psalms of the heavenly king (187-97), wisdom psalms (199-212), psalms of Torah (213-26), and imprecatory psalms (227-38). Analytical tables displaying the key elements for each psalm are centerpieces for all nine genre discussions. Bullock's approach is level-headed. He recognizes that biblical writers were somewhat "form conscious, but not nearly so much as modern scholarship has led us to believe" (64). Likewise, on the issue of so-called enthronement psalms, he rightly concludes that even "though some scholars have made much of the supposed existence of a festival in Israel that

enthroned Yahweh, virtually no evidence in the Psalms or elsewhere in the Old Testament supports this view” (196).

There are significant omissions in a number of matters. Space will permit mention of only a few. In regard to the psalm titles (24-30), Bullock fails even to mention the theory of James Thirtle (*The Titles of the Psalms: Their Nature and Meaning Explained* [Henry Frowde, 1904]). Nowhere in the volume is there any discussion of the NT attribution of Davidic authorship to Psalms 2 (cf. Acts 4:25) and 95 (cf. Heb 4:7). Both are listed as anonymous due to the absence of psalm titles (26). In the discussion of the structure of Psalm 19, the author concludes that content alone distinguishes the two strophes of the psalm (41). However, the psalm could be divided on the basis of the occurrences of the tricolon apart from any consideration of content: vv. 1-4 (closed by a tricolon), vv. 5-6 (closed by a tricolon), vv. 7-14 (closed by a tricolon), v. 15. In addition, the formulaic structure of vv. 7-10 (construct noun + Yahweh + predicate adjective followed by construct participle + noun) signals the special nature of these verses as compared to vv. 1-6. Bullock totally ignores Spurgeon’s classic work on Psalms (*The Treasury of David*) and fails to mention the commentaries of J. J. Stewart Perowne (*The Book of Psalms* [Zondervan reprint of the 1878 edition]) and James L. Mays (*Psalms, Interpretation* [John Knox, 1994]).

In spite of some of the problems, *Encountering the Book of Psalms* is still a quality production. It would make an excellent choice as a textbook in college classes studying the Book of Psalms. Bullock is Franklin S. Dyrness professor of Biblical Studies at Wheaton College and is also the author of *An Introduction to the Old Testament Poetic Books* (Moody, 1979) and *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophetic Books* (Moody, 1986).

John Jefferson Davis. *The Frontiers of Science & Faith*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2002. 200 pp. \$11.99 (paper). Reviewed by Trevor Craigen, Associate Professor of Theology.

A glance at the table of contents causes the reader to lift an eyebrow at some of the intriguing chapter headings, e.g., “The Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence & the Christian Doctrine of Redemption.” One almost wants to go to that chapter first!

This collection of essays, subtitled “Examining Questions from the Big Bang to the End of the Universe,” seeks to illustrate and explain certain theological difficulties by paralleling them with various known scientific principles, theorems, and laws. Chapter titles reflect this approach, e.g., “The ‘Copenhagen’ Interpretation of Quantum Mechanics & ‘Delayed-Choice’ Experiments,” which is intended to bring in a new perspective to help understand the doctrine of predestination. Receiving attention are the following: divine omniscience, determinism, full

knowledge of the future and freewill, chance and providence, predestination and election, human personhood and the image of God, the incarnation of Christ and the atonement in relation to multiple worlds, and eschatological cosmic optimism and despair. Receiving attention alongside these and in addition to the two already mentioned above are: quantum indeterminacy, the Chaos Theory, Goedel's Proof, Artificial Intelligence, and the Anthropic Principle. Notably, holding highly favored status in presentation and professed usefulness for origins is "Progressive Creation" (113-28).

In the preface Davis states his basic presupposition, with which there would be no disagreement, namely, "that the results of modern science, properly understood, are no threat to Christian faith" (7), although the phrase "properly understood" becomes the clincher. His conviction is that the Christian faith and the scientific method are complementary ways of knowing God's creative work. Later, he speaks of these as the "book of nature" and the "Book of Scripture" (128). The two "books" are quite disparate in character, however, and cannot be treated as being on a par with each other. Invariably, the interpretation of Scripture is held hostage to the prevailing scientific paradigms, theories, and opinions so that the biblical accounts of creation are treated with a great deal of elasticity. Davis did acknowledge that the scientific method has limitations when it comes to answering humanity's deepest existential questions (7).

Davis assumes that his readers will have a working knowledge of those different principles, theorems and laws to which he refers. This feature, which certainly shows the author's background in physics, could cause a few readers to abandon the book, finding it too difficult to keep up with the material. Reading it is not without benefit, however, because one realizes afresh the obvious design and order in God's creation. Furthermore, the reader also learns of how some researchers use these laws to gag God or make Him less than what He is, e.g., that God has made a universe in which His own knowledge is limited by the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle (41). Surely, it only limits human researchers and certainly not the Intelligent Designer who built it into His world and set it in operation? Summarily imposing limits on God is itself off limits! Thankfully, Davis does not appear to have defended the untenable positions.

In the first chapter, "Genesis 1:1 & Big Bang Cosmology," Davis rightly concludes that Genesis 1:1, standing alone among ancient cosmologies, presents a singular, *ex nihilo* beginning for the universe. But then his conclusion falters when he adds that as such, it exhibits "a convergence with recent big bang cosmological models" (36). Unfortunately, Davis makes no mention of the creation week as a whole, ignoring whether or not the rest of Genesis 1 with its tightly-knit six consecutive 24-hour days really allows for a big bang model. The convergence would seem to be in the eyes of the beholder! To be sure, Davis does emphasize that God by the power of His almighty word called the universe into actual existence. One wonders just what is meant, however, when he also remarks that God worked *through* the mathematical equations and quantum-mechanical laws He Himself

designed and which are uncovered by the sciences (36, 128). The influence of “progressive creation” on his thinking is admitted and causes him to accept far more time for God’s creative activity to take place than Genesis would allow Him to have (127). Further, the polemical nature of the Genesis account and its concern for the relationship between God and His world and human beings (115) does not detract from the impact of the order of events in the creation week and the obviously restricted time span involved. Further, serious deficiencies in big bang theories, which would make it difficult to continue proposing, without some major qualification, such a model for Gen 1:1, were not specifically noted. Supplemental reading is in order here. Readers should refer *inter alia* to John Byl’s *God and Cosmos: A Christian View of Time, Space, and the Universe* and to Douglas Kelly’s *Creation and Change: Genesis 1:1–2:4 in the Light of Changing Scientific Paradigms*, as well as to ICR’s *Impact* 216 (June 1991), “The Big Bang Theory Collapses” by Duane T. Gish, in order to have up-to-date responses to this troubled theory of origins. It is not as settled a theory as Davis implies.

The author reveals bias when he remarks that “a Christian theory of origins must acknowledge and incorporate the evidence for the evolutionary changes that have occurred in the history of life” (127). He apparently also accepts the probability of the emergence of life from inanimate matter over 3.5 billion years ago, the sudden appearance of animal phyla at the Precambrian-Cambrian boundary 570 million years ago, and the sudden appearance of art and other expressions of behaviorally modern humanity some 40 thousand years ago (128). The nature of the creation week and its obvious impact on the age of the earth, and the matter of sin, death, and the fall of man and their impact on the created order must all be considered in any Christian cosmological proposals. These were noticeably absent from the discussion.

In surveying the scientific developments since Bernard Ramm’s *The Christian View of Science and Scripture* in 1954, Davis omits, except for a passing reference to John Whitcomb, Henry Morris, and Gary Parker (114 n. 6, and 127 n. 53), any real mention of the young-earth, recent-creation movement and the wealth of literature and scientific papers it has produced, e.g., via the *Creation Research Society Quarterly* and CEN’s *Technical Journal* as well as the excellent *Impact* bulletins from the Institute for Creation Research. They introduce, at the least, a healthy caution to avoid unwisely identifying the plain teachings of Scripture with even the most compelling contemporary scientific and cosmological theories.

No matter how intriguing the content of the chapters may be, and no matter how interesting an exercise it may be—and that it is—to find parallels and analogies in nature or in scientific principles, theorems, and laws, for explaining theological difficulties, it must be acknowledged that the proper understanding and resolution of these difficulties will come from a study of Scripture. Non-scriptural sources are not definitive here.

The bibliography listed for chapter 6 is actually for chapter 7, which means that the one for the chapter on artificial intelligence is missing. All chapters were

marked (1) by informative reviews or concise surveys of the history and development of the principles being presented, and (2) by extensive footnotes. These resources inform the reader of a host of literature available on a wide array of subjects, constituting a valuable bibliographic resource, reason enough to have the work on one's bookshelf!

Susan E. Gillingham. *One Bible, Many Voices: Different Approaches to Biblical Studies*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999. xx + 280 pp. \$19.00 (paper). Reviewed by William D. Barrick, Professor of Old Testament.

Gillingham is a lecturer in theology at Worcester College, Oxford, England. Her volume incorporates elements from a distance-learning course for students of St. John's College, Nottingham, and elements from a later theology course for undergraduates at Oxford University (xiv). The work is for those who as adults have a relatively new interest in theology or biblical studies (xv).

The spirit of this age, if we are to believe Gillingham, is postmodernism united with pluralism. In *One Bible, Many Voices* she pleads for such an approach to biblical studies (4-5). She seeks "to show that pluralism, as one of the hallmarks of postmodernism, can serve more as friend than foe in relation to biblical studies. Far from threatening and fragmenting our understanding of biblical faith, it offers a more reasonable, open-ended, integrative and ecumenical way forward" (5).

The book has two parts: "Plurality in the Making of the Bible" (7-113) and "Plurality in the Reading of the Bible" (115-244). In the first part, four chapters present the author's view of the "disparate and diffuse nature of the biblical accounts ... with different versions and different texts being used variously by different communities" (4). Throughout these chapters Gillingham presents as fact that both testaments have undergone substantial editing (cf. 17, 20-21). Out of her conclusion that the Bible contains a diversity of theologies (cf. 31, 34), she identifies three complementary approaches to biblical studies: the historical, the theological, and the literary (44). Inherent in this system is a conviction that "it is impossible to give any biblical text absolute meaning" (45). This conviction produces the opportunity "to create new interpretations, properly controlled" (45). What is meant, however, by "properly controlled"? Theologians in a variety of traditions would offer the canon itself as one necessary control. However, Gillingham eliminates that control by arguing that "it is impossible to draw up clear boundaries for the inclusion or exclusion of particular books" (46). Therefore, there is no single authoritative canon. All of chapter 3 ("A Biblical Corpus? The Canon and the Boundaries of Faith," 46-71) develops the author's view of the canon.

Gillingham argues that a variety of translations (both ancient and modern) prove that "a pluralistic, open-ended way of reading is again the only way forward" (72). In the discussion of "The Qumran Scrolls" (77-79), she claims, "One of the

most important aspects about the Scrolls is that they have many affinities with the Septuagint, and seem to suggest a Hebrew prototype somewhat different from that used for the Masoretic Text” (77). This is a popular exaggeration running contrary to the evidence as presented by Emanuel Tov (*Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible*, 2nd ed. [Fortress Press, 2001] 114-17), one of the most highly regarded experts in that field of study.

Contrary to its title, *One Bible, Many Voices*, the conclusion of Part One announces that no single, coherent Bible, no uniform biblical theology, no universally recognized biblical canon, and no standard biblical text exist (112). Gillingham presents Part Two as more positive in its agenda (113). The three major approaches are each granted a chapter: “Theological Approaches to the Bible” (117-43), “Historical Approaches to the Bible” (144-70), and “Literary Approaches to the Bible” (171-86). The first of these three approaches is a survey of the hermeneutics of Jewish tradition (the Samaritan Pentateuch, Septuagint, Targums, Dead Sea Scrolls, Peshet, and Midrash) and Christian tradition (Paul and Hebrews in the NT, a variety of church fathers from Irenaeus to Augustine, Gregory the Great, Aquinas, Richard Hooker, a variety of 17th-century and 18th-century approaches, Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann, and “biblical hermeneutics”). The author’s conclusion is that “theological pluralism holds the key” (143).

In Chapter 6 (“Historical Approaches to the Bible”), Gillingham first presents five problem areas: myth, biblical contradictions, miracles, religious language, and the historical Jesus. Scholars have come to these problems in two different ways: a diachronic approach and a synchronic approach. The diachronic approach, or historical-critical method, can be exemplified in six different methods: biblical criticism, source criticism, form criticism, tradition criticism, redaction criticism, and canon criticism (157-69). The descriptions of these six methods are brief, but fairly objective. For example, Gillingham observes that source criticism is anti-authorial and hypothetical (162), form criticism is not science (164), tradition criticism is the most attractive approach for the pluralist (166), and redaction criticism is theologically biased (167). A very helpful set of charts (170) illustrates the diachronic relationships of these six methodologies.

The synchronic approach involves six examples of the literary-critical method: literary criticism, narrative and poetic criticism, structuralist criticism, rhetorical criticism, reader-response criticism, and holistic criticism (176-86). Again, charts (172) and a table (173) help the reader to visualize the relationships between these methodologies. The concern that is paramount in the literary approach is the readers’ contemporary setting (173, 174). Gillingham argues (quite unconvincingly) that the historical, theological, and literary approaches can be integrated so as to offer “some control and constraints on ... open-ended pluralistic readings” (185).

The final two chapters of the volume apply the three approaches to the Psalter as a whole (187-231) and to Psalm 8 in particular (232-44).

Ironically, although Gillingham argued for controls and constraints to prevent abuse of the text (45, 185), in her formal “Conclusion” (245-47) she accuses

all twelve methodologies in the diachronic and synchronic approaches of being attempts to control the text and its interpretation. Where does that leave her? She confesses that it “leads us with a sense that we should be as critical of pluralism *per se* as we should be critical of any exclusivist approach which assumes that it alone has the key control” (247). Her final paragraph’s call for recognizing a “fixed” text and “open” voices in the text rings hollow. All she has left is “something of a mystery; and herein lies the challenge of biblical studies as an academic discipline” (247).

An adequate knowledge of contemporary theories and schools of thought in the realm of biblical criticism is a necessity. In the first decade of the 21st century new methodologies continue to arise and the conservative theologian finds himself ever on the defensive due to his adherence to biblical inspiration, inerrancy, and authority. What Carl E. Armerding wrote in 1983 still applies two decades later:

The issues persist today. They affect not only the evangelical scholar seeking to preserve viewpoints which radically separate him from his more liberal colleagues, but virtually every student of the OT as well. University lectureships are given on the basis of adherence to critical thought, and textbooks are judged by the extent to which they affirm the current brand of critical orthodoxy, while popular television programs disseminate the latest theories to the waiting masses (*The Old Testament and Criticism* [Eerdmans, 1983] 2).

Conservative evangelical theologians cannot sit idly by, twiddling their thumbs, hoping that the madness might somehow end without their entering the fray. Vital issues are at stake. How we approach the Scriptures determines our theology. Year by year evangelical scholars continue to give up valuable ground to liberal biblical critics by adopting their methodologies. Evangelicals attempt to baptize such theories in evangelical waters without realizing that those methodologies have never been converted. Pressured by publishers and “Christian” academia, evangelicals borrow the cloak of critical terminology to clothe their work. Though valuable kernels of truth exist in contemporary critical studies, evangelicals must take great care to irradiate the material with the unadulterated Word of God so as not to become infected by the Trojan viruses that saturate its thinking.

Gillingham’s volume should be read by conservative evangelical scholars in order to understand that the critical methodologies are part and parcel of an overall philosophy and system driven by a variety of unbiblical concepts. If a pluralist like Gillingham can see the bankruptcy of critical methodologies, what does that say about the thinking of evangelicals who continue to dabble in critical methodologies, attempting to convert them for evangelical use?

Robert Gromacki. *The Virgin Birth: A Biblical Study of the Deity of Jesus Christ*. Rev. ed. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002. 240 pp. \$11.99 (paper). Reviewed by

Trevor Craigen, Associate Professor of Theology.

“About time!” is an appropriate exclamation at the publication of the revised edition of Gromacki’s 1974 book. The first edition was much appreciated by all who read it. Since J. Gresham Machen’s book, *The Virgin Birth of Christ*, was not found that easy to read, Gromacki’s became a most useful adjunct to it. This revised edition, which is not that much of a change from the first edition, will prove again to be a most useful and instructive addition to the personal libraries of layman, pastor, student, and professor alike. Being thoroughly saturated with references to relevant Scriptures only adds to its value as a Bible study tool or textbook. The author advised that he “tried to produce a volume that would deal with the virgin birth of Christ on a level understandable to both the interested layman and the serious Bible student” (10). He succeeded!

The sub-title, “A Biblical Study of the Deity of Jesus Christ,” although certainly indicative of the emphasis given in the book, is nevertheless, in this reviewer’s opinion, not fully descriptive enough since it is also a study of the humanity of Christ. The sub-title should read “A Biblical Study of the Deity and the Humanity of Jesus Christ.”

A concisely summarized survey of the false concepts of Christ’s person provides the reader with an informative snapshot of how down through the ages has come a sharp reaction to or rejection of the scriptural evidence for both Christ’s humanity and deity (194-99). Three chapters furnish information on the different heresies and errant thoughts on Christ Jesus, namely, “Testimony of the Church Fathers,” “Erroneous Concepts,” and “The Onslaughts of False Teaching.” These demonstrate the pride of intellect of those who were critical of the biblical statements and evidence. Rejection of the virgin birth, it was seen, went hand in glove with rejection of the inspired and authoritative, inerrant Scriptures.

Updated bibliographic resources on impeccability/peccability, such as Canham’s article “*Potuit Non Peccare Or Non Potuit Peccare: Evangelicals, Hermeneutics, and the Impeccability Debate*,” *TMSJ* 11/1 (2000):93-114, would have been good additions for chapter 13 on Jesus’ sinlessness. Similarly, updated bibliographic resources on the meaning and significance of *almah*, such as Niessen’s article, “The Virginity of the *almah* in Isaiah 7:14” *BSac* 137/546 (1980):133-50, would have been good additions for chapter 16 on this important verse in Isaiah. At the least, cross-referencing to them in a footnote would have been in order.

Since reference will be made to this book when studying the birth narratives or when seeking clarification on the humanity and deity of Jesus of Nazareth, it is worthy of having near at hand.

Christopher A. Hall. *Learning Theology with the Church Fathers*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2002. 308 pp. \$15.00 (paper). Reviewed by Larry D.

Pettegrew, Professor of Theology.

Most Christians would no doubt have to admit that they do not know enough about their Christian roots. And if this is true, most Christians do not know enough about the church fathers. And if this is true, most Christians do not know enough about theology. For anyone who is willing to read it thoughtfully, this book will help with all three problem areas.

The book is intended only “to be a primer for beginners” (12). And it fulfills its goal admirably. The author writes clearly and carefully, trying not to bore the reader or scare him off through technical theological jargon. He is convinced that the fathers are hardly ever boring, so he tries with good success to present them to the reader with enthusiasm.

The first chapter introduces the fathers and explains why we should know about their contributions to theology. Each successive chapter familiarizes the reader with doctrinal issues that the fathers debated and tried to clarify. These issues include the relation of the Son to the Father, the Trinity, the two natures of Christ, the deity of the Holy Spirit, sin and grace, providence, the Scriptures, the church, and the resurrection of the body and everlasting life. Rather than bring in many voices on every doctrine, the author explains the views of the two or three fathers who led each debate. Usually he summarizes their arguments in some detail, quoting them when helpful.

Hall also tries to let the fathers speak without needlessly intruding into the debate himself. Still, it is apparent that his sympathies lie with the orthodox views. He sides with Augustine, for example, in his debate against Pelagius.

In an age when experience has conquered doctrine in many churches, many believers have difficulty articulating the basics of theology. This book will help the serious reader to think more deeply about the importance that our spiritual ancestors placed on getting the details of theology right.

John D. Hannah. *Our Legacy: The History of Christian Doctrine*. Colorado Springs, Colo.: NavPress, 2001. 395 pp. \$25.00 (cloth). Reviewed by Clifford B. McManis, TMS alumnus and Associate Pastor, First Baptist Church, Los Altos, California.

John D. Hannah has been the department chairman and distinguished professor of historical theology at Dallas Theological Seminary for almost thirty years. This book is the by-product of his many years of study and teaching in that capacity. Hannah specifically directs this book toward pastors, Christian workers, and the laity with the hope of sounding the clarion call for true theological reformation in the evangelical church abroad (9, 20). He avers,

It is time for a reformation in the church.... [T]he greatest need in the contemporary church is to rediscover the gospel, its glory, and its power. It is time to return to the fundamentals of the faith and be refreshed in its truths, to gain anew a love and respect for the Holy Scriptures (20).

The author believes such a reformation in the church is possible, but is contingent upon Christians gaining a new and fresh appreciation of their theological “legacy” via the study of historical theology. Studying key doctrines of the faith through the lens of history has many benefits. It helps the church distinguish between the transient and the permanent. It also helps the modern church to discern error and deception from the wealth of accumulated Spirit-led illumination provided to the saints through the ages. Furthermore, studying theology in the vortex of history manifests the developmental progress that certain doctrines have undergone over time. In this sense history is a teacher and informs theology.

Hannah examines what he considers to be the priority doctrines of the church, dedicating a chapter to each. His analysis of each doctrine is from a “systematic-historical approach” (28), whereby he isolates a particular doctrine, tracing it through every stage of church history, highlighting the positive and negative development through the centuries. His chapter titles represent his doctrines of choice, which include the following:

1. Authority: Where to Go for Truth
2. The Trinity: God as Three-in-One
3. The Person of Christ: Meet the God-Man
4. The Work of Christ: What the Cross Means for Us
5. Salvation: A Story of Sin and Grace
6. The Church: God’s Gathered Community
7. The End Times: Fulfillment of Our Blessed Hope

Before analyzing the above seven doctrines in their historical context, in the preface and chapter one the author lays the foundation of his methodological approach. He warns the reader that when it comes to historical theology, multiple models exist (24-28). The author clearly lays out his presuppositions in this vast field of study. They include the authority of the Bible as a standard of objective truth, the doctrine of illumination as the Spirit leads the saints individually and collectively into truth (1 John 2:27), and the sufficiency of the Scripture. Regarding the latter point, the author believes the canon is closed and the role of history in the progress of dogma is “explanatory” and “static,” not “organic” and “expansive” (27).

One of the strengths of the book is Hannah’s lucid style of writing—he has an uncanny ability for distilling the complexities of history into digestible portions for the reader. And his objectivity as a theologian is admirable. For example, when dealing with the development of “premillennialism,” he seeks to let the historical facts do the talking. Though acknowledging that the early church “Fathers embraced

a premillennial understanding" (306), he notes that in its seminal stages it was not formally systematized by them, nor did they jointly express that the kingdom was "to be one thousand years in duration" (306). Amillennialism came to the fore under Augustine, overshadowing early premillennialism, and enjoyed a hegemonic dominance till Calvin, who labeled it "childish" (320). But with renewed interest in biblical studies following the Reformation, premillennialism began to establish itself once again, this time more systematically and persuasively. The testimony of historical data reveals that premillennialism is neither novel nor faddish, but rather has roots in church history and biblical theology.

The author concludes his book with an impassioned, practical plea for the church to proclaim and teach with clarity the priority doctrines of the Bible (339-44). The book includes a helpful glossary of terms (365-76).

This reviewer highly recommends the book for pastors and serious Bible students. Bible colleges and seminaries would do well to consider it as a fresh survey text in historical theology classes.

David M. Hay. *Colossians*. Abingdon New Testament Commentary. Nashville: Abingdon, 2000. 182 pp. \$ 22.00 (paper). Reviewed by James E. Rosscup, Professor of Bible Exposition.

This book is by the Professor of Religion at Coe College, Cedar Rapids, Iowa. Publishers view the series as giving compact critical exegesis useful for students of theology, university users, and pastors.

In Hay's view, authenticity concerns not who wrote the letter, but whether it gives truth. Yet the epistle claims that Paul wrote it, which is true or untrue. One also has to face forthrightly Paul's personal greetings in 4:10-17. How realistic is it to view the letter as reliable if it is untrue on some matters, yet truthful at other points? Hay does not think it probable that Paul wrote Colossians, yet Paul may have supervised Timothy's writing (20, 23), or a disciple of Paul wrote after Paul died (24). As a matter of convenience in the commentary, Hay refers to Paul as if he was the writer, but this is not his own belief.

Verse by verse comments are closely-knit, often terse, yet much exegetical learning cuts to the point in many cases. On frequent points, careful, good details appear, e.g., "firstborn of all creation" (1:15; 55-57), or "filling up the afflictions of Christ" (1:24; 72-74), or on Christ's triumph (2:15). In other cases, ambiguity is present, as in 1:23 on how a necessity to continue in faith and good works as a condition of salvation fits with NT salvation as a total gift (68).

The work responsibly traces thought in the letter, and tends to be on a scholarly level. Locating a detail on a verse in the course of general remarks on sections is sometimes hard. Headings introduce sections, but individual verses are not in boldface or listed separately. The patient student can by combing slowly find

a lot on essential details. In Colossians 4 Hay's comment on Epaphras' intercession for spiritual growth is interesting. Since the letter calls readers to mature (1:28-29), "one can regard it as part of the answer to Epaphras' prayers" (161).

Hay is hit or miss in relating Colossian details with biblical passages outside this epistle, and this withholds much. An example is discussing Christ's triumph over enemies in 2:15 without mention of a possible link to "led captivity captive" (Eph 4:8) or triumph language in 2 Cor 2:14f.

The bibliography at the end reflects broad, diligent awareness of recent literature. Overall, the work is among the somewhat helpful scholarly works that are brief on detail. Students using fuller commentaries (T. K. Abbott, Markus Barth, and Helmut Blanke, F. F. Bruce, Peter O'Brien, E. Schweizer, or even the older work by J. B. Lightfoot) will glean added assists from Hay only here and there.

Richard S. Hess and Gordon J. Wenham, eds. *Zion, City of Our God*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999. x + 206 pp. \$22.00 (paper). Reviewed by William D. Barrick, Professor of Old Testament.

An international team of scholars approaches the topic of Jerusalem in the First Temple from a variety of perspectives in this collection of essays. All were papers presented in a special meeting of the Tyndale Fellowship Old Testament Study Group meeting at Cambridge in 1996 (ix). Each essay is thoroughly documented by immediately accessible footnotes providing a wealth of sources and supplementary information.

In "The Temple of Solomon: Heart of Jerusalem" (1-22), John M. Monson (Wheaton College) examines Solomon's Temple in the context of recent archaeological parallels in Syria. This study of the biblical account of the Temple in the United Monarchy, the intensification of the Zion tradition, and the contemporary archaeological parallels clearly demonstrates the Temple's significance and nature. Special attention is given to the neo-Hittite temple at 'Ain Dara dating from the early first millennium B.C. (12-21).

Richard S. Hess (Denver Seminary) contributed "Hezekiah and Sennacherib in 2 Kings 18-20" (23-41), focusing on literary studies of Sennacherib's siege of Jerusalem. He emphasizes the problem of what appear to be two different accounts in 2 Kings, dealing also with relevant materials in Isaiah and 2 Chronicles. Examining the historical, critical, and literary approaches to the problem, Hess concludes that 2 Kgs 18:13b-16 is the summary and 18:17-19:37 is a resumption and expansion similar to the technique exhibited in Genesis 1-2 (37-40).

Two essays dealing with Chronicles ("Jerusalem in Chronicles," 43-56, and "Jerusalem at War in Chronicles," 57-76) were written by Martin J. Selman (Spurgeon's College, London) and Gary N. Knoppers (Pennsylvania State College), respectively. Selman develops the long-term plan of God for Jerusalem as

highlighted by the Chronicler. Rebuilding Jerusalem in response to Cyrus' invitation was a necessary step in "becoming involved in the ongoing fulfillment of the Davidic covenant" (46). Knoppers' essay "challenges von Rad's influential view that holy war in Chronicles was entirely cultic in character" (57). His primary arguments involve a proper understanding of the function of the Temple in times of war (61-64) and the pattern of holy war as portrayed in 2 Chronicles 20 with regard to Jehoshaphat (64-73).

"The Use of the Zion Tradition in the Book of Ezekiel" (77-103) by Thomas Renz (Oak Hill College, London) looks at the contribution of ancient Near Eastern beliefs regarding a holy mountain and early Israelite tradition to Ezekiel's message. One of the challenges of such a study is that Ezekiel never uses the term "Zion" even though the Temple in Jerusalem is of obvious significance in the book (86).

Psalms 120-134 receive special attention in Philip E. Satterthwaite's (Biblical Graduate School, Singapore) essay entitled "Zion in the Songs of Ascents" (105-28). The theme of these psalms is the LORD's restoration of Zion on the basis of His sovereign choosing of both Zion and David (107). After evaluating the critical views of L. D. Crow (*The Songs of Ascents*, SBLDS 148 [Scholars Press, 1996]), Satterthwaite concludes that the Songs of Ascents display a greater coherence and unity than Crow's redactionist views would indicate (113). The discussion divides these fifteen psalms into triads "under a heading which seems to encapsulate a leading theme of that triad" (117).

In the volume's longest essay ("The Personification of Jerusalem and the Drama of Her Bereavement in Lamentations," 129-69) Knut M. Heim (Wesley House, Cambridge, England) develops the use of personification in Lamentations in order to understand better how the community of Jerusalem dealt with its pain and anxiety (129-30). He proposes that Lamentations "is not a reasoned treatise on the nature of suffering; rather, it reflects a community's desperate grasping for meaning as the world around it ... has collapsed" (146). After investigating an inventory of nineteen different utterances within Lamentations (147-67), Heim identifies seven voices (three major and four minor) in the public discourse about Jerusalem's grieving process (167). He finds that the book appeals to modern readers "bewildered by their own helplessness when confronted with suffering on a global and local scale" (169).

"Molek of Jerusalem?" (171-206) by Rebecca Doyle (Holy Light Theological Seminary, Kaohsiung, Taiwan) closes the collection of essays by examining the cult of Molech (an alternate spelling more familiar to American readers) by means of biblical and extrabiblical materials. The catalyst for this study resides in the relative scarcity of information about this cult and the resulting scholarly speculation (172). First, Doyle surveys the views of a variety of scholars (172-82), concluding that there is plenty of "room for a difference of opinion as to who Molek is and where he may have come from" (184). Second, an examination of archaeological evidences from Ebla, Mari, Babylon, Ugarit, Turkey, Phoenicia,

and Carthage (184-93) finds that there are only bits and pieces of evidence and that their connections to the OT's descriptions are tenuous (194). Lastly, the study of Molech in the OT (194-204) demonstrates that the Hebrew Scriptures are the "most complete source of information that we have" (206).

The eight essays have a wealth of information about Jerusalem. The breadth of their OT investigations encompasses especially the books of 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezekiel, Psalms, and Jeremiah. Interaction with historical, archaeological, literary, and theological studies reveals the height and depth of the essays' scope. Hess and Gordon J. Wenham (Cheltenham & Gloucester College, Cheltenham, England) have performed a valuable service to OT scholarship by collecting and publishing this book.

Harold W. Hoehner. *Ephesians. An Exegetical Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002. xxix + 930 pp. \$54.99 (cloth). Reviewed by James E. Rosscup, Professor of Bible Exposition.

This monumental work which displays probing exegesis and awareness of scholarly opinion on Ephesians joins and surpasses, at least in detail, highly contributive commentaries by Peter O'Brien, Andrew Lincoln, and the 868 pages of Markus Barth. Hoehner, Distinguished Professor of New Testament at Dallas Theological Seminary where he has taught for more than three decades, argues for Paul as the author and for including "in Ephesus" in 1:1. He writes fully on each verse with penetrating analysis and copious footnotes that draw from a massive range of expertise throughout the Christian era, including primary linguistic works and other firsthand sources.

Hoehner's fairness to views and arguments combine with readable clarity and an adept use of such items as context, word study, grammar, setting, and customs. His work results from several trips for study abroad, a 33-page double-column entry in the *Bible Knowledge Commentary* (1983-85), and persevering research. His drive to "turn every stone" for evidence is plain as he weighs opinions and gives seasoned logic.

Besides the introduction and commentary, excursuses probe the destination in 1:1 ("in Ephesus"), views and structure of 1:3-14, "in Christ," election, *pērōma*, "mystery," the household code, and slavery in Paul's day. Hoehner lists commentaries, even a special bibliography on authorship (114-30), but omits a longer bibliography because it would have added another hundred pages. Other features include historical quotes on the greatness of the epistle among Paul's writings (1-2), support for Pauline authorship with answers to six major objections, problems such as fraud in the view of a pseudonymous author, a 10-page chart on how 390 works since 1519 viewed authorship, and sections on the history of Ephesus and seven theological emphases.

On each verse, Hoehner includes the Greek wording, English rendering, then comments on each word or phrase. Explanations on 1:1-2 show why Paul could know people at Ephesus, not mention personal relations, and write the letter even when 1:15 refers to having *heard* of their faith and love (140-41). Attention to grammar is meticulous, as on sealing in 1:13-14. Hoehner relates sealing to God's ownership of believers, who belong to Him as His heritage, as in 1:11.

Here is a sampling of other well-supported views. "Spirit" rather than "spirit" is meant in 1:17; inheritance in 1:18 is *God's*, but in 1:14 that of the *saints*; in 1:23 God's fullness is filling Christ and the church; in 2:8b, the demonstrative pronoun in "and that not of yourselves" refers back to 2:4-8a and more particularly 2:8a, salvation by grace through faith (Hoehner cites the demonstrative in 1:15 referring back to 1:13-14, and other examples); "mystery" in 3:3, not known by men at all in OT times but now made known is the truth that God unites saved Jews and Gentiles into one body without Gentiles having (as in OT days) to become Jews to belong (433-34). Hoehner has five supports, e.g., the "mystery" was formerly "hidden" (3:9), and a clear parallel in Col 1:26 has "but" instead of "as" in Eph 3:5.

The following are other views of the author. In 3:19 "filled up to all the fullness of God" has the preposition *eis* ("toward") denoting movement toward a goal, here the goal of knowing the love of Christ. Yet saints never are as filled as God, and never are God. "Captives" (4:8) are, in biblical usage, enemies over whom God is victor (cf. Psalm 68). Captives in Ephesians 4 are Christ's enemies (Satan, sin, death), not captives of Satan who now are redeemed captives of Christ. A text by Paul that Hoehner might include but does not is Col 2:15. The "lower parts of the earth" (Eph 4:9) are earth's lower parts, the grave, where Christ was before ascending. In "arise from the dead" (5:14), Hoehner does not favor allusion to an OT verse (e.g., Isa 26:19; 60:1). Rather Paul refers to an early hymn of Christians about repentance/encouragement, relevant to deliverance from a walk in darkness, and rising from deadness to walk in Christ's light. Hoehner needs to clarify, for he says that if "believers" continue in darkness (cf. 5:3-7), they will go into eternal wrath (vv. 5-6). Since God seals genuine believers (1:13-14; 4:30) to the day of future redemption, a true believer is secure from eternal wrath. If not, this would entail a loss of salvation by continuing in sin. Church-related people who face eternal wrath are merely professing believers, not genuine. Hoehner in 5:18a sees the present imperative prohibition ("do not be drunk") not as meaning to stop drunkenness indulged, but as not permitting drunkenness to be a habit. The believer's behavior is to be filled (controlled) with the Holy Spirit (v. 18b).

On 6:14-17, Hoehner sees the six parts of armor in a subjective sense, a practical living of truth, righteousness, peace, faith, safety from the devil's wiles, and the Spirit's empowering with the Word. Prayer in vv. 18-20 is not an added part of armor but vital in all armor to gain supernatural help.

In long works, especially of this great bulk, proofing slips can occur. A few are: p. 23, "It must concluded . . ."; p. 29, "but not to enough to discount authenticity"; p. 38, "chose" in place of "choose"; p. 837, armor to "be able stand." Tributes

on jacket flaps and back cover are by recognized scholars, Clinton Arnold, E. Earle Ellis, Frank Thielman, Martin Hengel, Graham Stanton, Doug Moo, Ralph Martin, Ernest Best, Frederick Danker, I. H. Marshall, Max Turner, and Donald Hagner. A rich use of this longest exegetical commentary ever done on Ephesians will help diligent teachers, pastors, students, and lay readers to reason through issues. The price, at first prohibitive for some, is much more manageable when one watches for discounts.

James S. Jeffers. *The Greco-Roman World of the New Testament Era: Exploring the Background of Early Christianity*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1999. 352 pp. \$19.99 (paper). Reviewed by Keith Essex, Assistant Professor of Bible Exposition.

James S. Jeffers is an associate professor at Biola University who also teaches ancient history at California State University, Dominguez Hills. This combination of expertise in both Roman history and early Christianity evidenced in Jeffers' teaching experience is also reflected in *The Greco-Roman World of the New Testament Era*. He correctly states, "If the New Testament texts are written to make sense to people in the first century, then we must try to put ourselves into their places in order to determine what the writers of the New Testament intended their readers to understand by what they wrote" (11). Therefore, the purpose of this book is to give the non-scholar an understanding of the Greco-Roman world at the time the NT was written as an aid in biblical interpretation (11, 293). This volume "tries to present [Hellenistic] society within the context of Roman control, hopefully in a way that Christians in the first century would have experienced it" (13). The book fulfills its purpose as a good introduction to NT backgrounds.

The author presents in his first chapter a short, fictional dinner discussion supposedly from first-century Jerusalem to orient the readers to the political and cultural environment of the NT (14-18). Those readers who need a fuller historical account to understand the allusions found in the first chapter are directed to an appendix where a summary of Greco-Roman history leading up to and going through the NT era is presented (293-320). The bulk of the volume surveys different aspects of first-century life (19-292). Jeffers introduces the reader to such topics as work, travel, burial practices, city life, religious and secular associations, religious beliefs, government, money, law, military, social classes, citizenship, slavery, family structure, and education in the time of the NT. In each chapter, the topics are presented with data known from Greco-Roman sources as a basis for the insights given by the author on how this aids in the understanding of the biblical material. Jeffers is concise, yet usually clear, in his discussion of both the background material and its biblical application. The volume is enhanced by a chronological chart of significant events from 50 B.C.–A.D. 90 (321-23), seven computer-generated maps

(324-29), and subject and Scripture indexes (343-52). The book has a wealth of useful information on how life was lived in the early Roman Empire.

Although the work is a fine introduction to its subject, the reader should be aware of two weaknesses. First, in his suggestions for further reading at the end of chapters two through thirteen, Jeffers tends to direct the reader to books and journal articles that are usually found only in university libraries. These resources are not the kind of material to which the non-scholar for whom the book is intended would have ready access. A better source would be the wealth of background information in Bible dictionaries, encyclopedias, histories, and archaeologies that can be found in Christian bookstores and many personal and church libraries.

A second, and greater weakness, is found in Jeffers' discussion of women in Greco-Roman culture and the NT (249-52). The author rightly states that women were viewed in the culture to be intellectually inferior to men and that their main function was that of childbearing and child rearing. Some women, particularly those of the upper classes, did break out of the traditional roles, though this was frowned upon within that society. These women were especially active outside the home in religious matters. They were primarily attracted to cults practiced by women, but also to those cults that were open to both sexes and to the official state cults. New cults gave great freedom to women to hold offices alongside men. But as the cult sought greater respectability from society, it would remove women from positions of leadership. Jeffers implies that this also happened in early Christianity. He states that Paul's teaching and descriptions "present a softened version of the larger society's patriarchal family structure" (252). Women were allowed to serve in leadership positions within the early church, although Jeffers does not know the level of leadership exerted by women because of the difficulties in interpreting some of Paul's comments concerning women. However, the only book to which Jeffers directs the reader for further information is Craig S. Keener's *Paul, Women and Wives: Marriage and Women's Ministry in the Letters of Paul* (Hendrickson, 1992). Keener's work argues that women can exercise all the ministries/offices in the church and that mutual submission in Christian marriage are the true interpretations of the Pauline texts. By his favorable citing of Keener, Jeffers apparently concurs. This reviewer would direct the reader instead to *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, edited by John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Crossway, 1991) [see *TMSJ*, Spring, 1991, 107-9].

The Greco-Roman World of the New Testament Era is a valuable introduction to NT backgrounds. However, the biblical exegete and expositor should use Jeffers' volume in conjunction with the more expansive and detailed *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* by Everett Ferguson (Eerdmans, 1993) [see *TMSJ*, Fall, 1994, 216-17].

Hebrew Grammatical Concepts through English Grammar. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2002. xvii + 189 pp. \$19.95 (paper). Reviewed by William D. Barrick, Professor of Old Testament.

Grammatical Concepts 101 for Biblical Hebrew is a manual for students who have found the vocabulary of grammatical description confusing—or, who might have “slept through lessons on grammar during high school and college” (xiii). Simplicity and information are aims of this book intended to complement standard teaching grammars (xv). Its three major parts cover the more basic concepts before the higher levels of biblical Hebrew are addressed.

Long first introduces the student to basic linguistic terms and theory (3-6), providing brief definitions for each general element (e.g., “PHRASE is a language unit referring to a string of words (a *syntagm*)—two or more—that does not involve predication ...; it does not have a subject and a predicate together,” 5). Next, he introduces the vocabulary and concepts of sound production (7-15). These two areas are followed by simple, concise discussions of the syllable (16) and translation (17-21), thereby concluding “Part I: Foundations.”

“Part II: Building Blocks” (23-120) covers twenty basic elements of grammar. It carefully defines each element, illustrates it in English, and then gives an example in biblical Hebrew. Special help is given in areas that are problematic, like distinguishing some conjunctions and prepositions (32-33). Helpful charts supplement the discussions (e.g., the catalog of semantic connections of biblical Hebrew conjunctions, 33-35). The section covering the pronoun is twenty pages long (39-58). Throughout the section, antecedents are clearly marked in the examples by means of graphic arrows and identification labels. Nine tables also provide additional visual means of organizing the information concerning pronouns. Long’s treatment of “Tense” (87-91) and “Aspect” (92-98) are more accurate than the majority of standard grammars. However, categorizing *veqatal* (*waw* + perfect) as expressing the imperfective aspect (96) is a gross oversimplification, ignoring the category of non-consecutive *waw* + perfect (cf. Robert B. Chisholm, Jr., *From Exegesis to Exposition* [Baker, 1998], 128-33) and flirting with the long-outdated theory of *waw*-conversive.

In the final part (“Part III: The Clause and Beyond,” 121-76), the section on “Predicate/Predication” (127-42) is quite detailed. It provides additional technical material to supplement earlier treatments of such elements as the noun, relative clause, adjective, adverb, and participle. “Semantics” (143-50) and “Discourse Analysis” (151-76, limited to past-time narrative) are excellent introductions on these two exegetically significant topics. The “Index of Topics” (179-89) provides an alphabetical classified listing of all major terms for easily accessing the pertinent discussions.

As in every grammar or grammar help, shortcomings (by omission and commission) are present. Participles were presented in a brief seven pages, about equally divided between the English and Hebrew examples (73-79). However,

infinitives received only a page and a half (80-81) without any Hebrew examples. In the section labeled "Verb" (84-86), the student might be just as confused after reading as he was before reading it. The distinctions between fientive transitives and intransitives would have been more readily grasped had an example like that of "run" been employed ("He runs for exercise" is an intransitive fientive while "he runs a factory" is a transitive fientive). In the eleven pages on "Mood" (105-15) there is no mention of the optative (cf. Paul Joüon, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, trans. and rev. by T. Muraoka [Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1996], §112k). The manual also suffers from a lack of grammatical discussion of the verbal concepts of causation (including the various kinds of causatives and the factitive).

Shortcomings aside, however, *Grammatical Concepts 101 for Biblical Hebrew* is a tool that every student of biblical Hebrew should keep close at hand. This reviewer intends to require it for second and third semester Hebrew courses. Grammatically challenged students and their teachers will find it a godsend.

Carolyn Pressler. *Joshua, Judges, and Ruth*. Westminster Bible Companion. Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox, 2002. 312 pp. \$24.95 (paper).
Reviewed by James E. Rosscup, Professor of Bible Exposition.

The authoress is Professor of Biblical Interpretation in United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities, at New Brighton, Minnesota. WBC volumes claim to assist laity, individuals and groups with faith and practice. The present volume is an example of liberal biblical views as distinguished from evangelical views that support the total reliability of Scripture.

In a brief, cursory introduction, Pressler assumes with many a "Deuteronomistic history" of compiling these books, with more final forms in the era of King Josiah to bolster his reforms (7th century B.C.) and the 6th century with events of 2 Kings' last chapter (2).

Small segments of the biblical books receive summary discussions, not verse by verse examination, yet have much relevant material. One can see, for example, the self-manifestation of God in Josh 5:13-15 to give power to win in the promised land; here, God is free to do as He wills, not take sides, to display that He is awesome and His word and will are holy (41-42).

Pressler frequently does not regard historic descriptions as factually accurate. She denies that the biblical version of Jericho's fall "really happened." In her view, archaeology shows that at best few people were on the site when Israel began in Canaan; she assumes a date in the later 13th century (44-45), where many hold a date ca. 1405 B. C. and uphold the factuality. Little doubt can remain that her words assume that the person writing Joshua 6 made a claim that was not historically dependable, that Israel's first battle in the land was at Jericho (45). Instead of such alleged falsifying, many well-studied scholars claim the full veracity for the account.

To Pressler, the record does not tell what happened in history, but illustrates what God regularly has done, is doing, and can do (49). The Ai account, likewise, entails a story-teller's "tale," making up Achan's sin and punishment to get across theological points which Pressler sees as artificial to the battle account. To her, the battle details also are unreliable (54-55).

The trend of undercutting historical dependability keeps popping up. The Gibeonite-Israelite treaty (Joshua 9) did not occur according to Pressler's view on archaeology and textual matters (68). She casts much doubt on the sun standing still in Joshua 10, and favors a metaphorical, not a literal, idea (80-81). The Book of Ruth is a "novella," short story (tale). Somehow, Pressler allows it as "true," yet one has difficulty with inconsistency in her also saying it lacks historical factuality (261). Positively, she does take Ruth's lying on the threshing floor and talking with Boaz, not as some writers suggest, as an invitation for sex but a decent proposal of marriage (289-90). Back in Judges 11, she feels that evidence supports Jephthah offering his daughter as a burnt offering to fulfill a misguided vow.

Helpfully, the work often sums up matters, crystallizes some issues, and explains customs. But overall it does not offer outstanding assistance, and it does not give a high view on the veracity of what the books say. More detailed works will offer far more to laity, students, or pastors who believe in reliable bases for things Pressler pronounces untrustworthy.

Richard Owen Roberts. *Repentance: The First Word of the Gospel*. Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2002. 368 pp. \$15.99 (paper). Reviewed by Trevor Craigen, Associate Professor of Theology.

Displaying something of his pastor's heart—a note that persists throughout the book—Roberts begins not with a formal preface but with "A Letter to the Reader" in which he earnestly calls for no one to leave repentance out until it is too late. The table of contents shows the material organized in sevens—the seven myths, maxims, marks, motives, fruits, models, and dangers of repentance and seven words of advice to the unrepentant. Roberts communicates like a preacher. The introduction, not surprisingly, offers seven reasons why the doctrine of repentance is being neglected or having little impact upon churches today (16-21). Commitment to success and not wishing to be divisive or negative contribute to the doctrine being given such low profile. That is an accurate assessment.

With frequent cross-referencing to and copious citing of Scripture (23-41), Roberts lays out the evidence for repentance being a very important item in the teaching and proclamation of the NT (23-41). The OT data is well summarized under seven foci (44-62), and is accompanied by an extensive use of appropriate Scripture passages drawn from all literary genre. The NT data receives thorough treatment under seven 'doctrines' (63-83). Again, an insertion of appropriate Scriptures

dominates the content. To maintain the “seven-motif,” these chapters could have followed the pattern by being given headings such as “The Seven Foci of Repentance in the OT” and “The Seven ‘Doctrines’ of Repentance in the NT.” In fact, Roberts displays an amazing ability to outline everything in sevens. The reader quickly notices this common denominator but soon begins to appreciate the skillful touch of the author in compiling these breakdowns—they may very well prove to be a good mnemonic device. God’s message to Nineveh, for example, is outlined under seven salient features (58-60), one of which is particularly memorable, namely, “the mercy God is always greater than the mercy of those servants He employs to proclaim it” (59).

Techniques such as the listing of questions and pertinent Scriptures, the use of repetitive lead-in phrases, and numbered lists of information, communicate well and draw the reader in and hold attention. A good listing of the different kinds of sorrows—there are twelve, not seven of them—which have no necessary link to repentance shows that thought had been given to the subject (176). A list of twelve statements on what private confession of sin must be (193-94) and a list of ten suggestions for public confession (196) are both of pastoral value.

In all chapters, appropriate stories from his own personal ministry experience illustrate and enhance the points being made. Some of these highlighted the angry resistance of individuals in the congregation to his preaching. It was instructive to observe how he handled those awkward situations. Judging by such incidents, one sees Roberts as wise and patient, yet a forthright counselor who brought Scripture to bear upon life. He writes as a personal witness of the impact of preaching repentance on a congregation and of the fruit of it in individual lives in different parts of the world. He cites cases of pastors who attempted to justify their immorality while weeping crocodile tears, which should trouble the reader who is in pastoral ministry. It should strengthen the resolve to be an example of purity to those who believe.

Roberts’ pastoral concern rings out in the earnest appeal to the reader to think on whether or not he bears fruit worthy of repentance (27) and in his other calls to think soberly on the possibility of false repentance. One example of this would be the comments made on legal as opposed to evangelical repentance, i.e., what a person does for himself as opposed to what he does for God (115). Discipleship labs or small groups may very well benefit from using this book as a basis for thoughtful reflection on sin and repentance, humility, and sanctified living. Personal devotional use is a valid option.

On the matter of national repentance (289-92), the author concisely surveys the biblical references thereon and then asks if all that could be done today is being done to call a nation to repentance. It makes one stop and think. What of the nations today in the church-age and what of them beyond the rapture of the church?

A degree of overlap in content does occur, with the last three chapters in particular picking up on and reiterating much of what had been put forward in the earlier chapters. The book may not have a systematic theology format, but the reader

quickly realizes (1) that its format and style helps gain a fuller understanding of this important doctrine, and (2) that it is a treasure trove of biblical cross-references. That definitely makes it worth having in one's personal library!

Huub van de Sandt and David Flusser. *The Didache*. Minneapolis: Royal Van Gorcum/Fortress, 2002, and Kurt Niederwimmer. *The Didache*. Minneapolis: Augsburg/Fortress, 1998. Reviewed by William C. Varner, Professor of Bible and Director of IBEX, The Master's College.

Two separate volumes, issued in the last four years by the same publisher, provide the best scholarly studies of the "The Teaching of the Twelve Apostles" that have appeared since the document itself was found in 1883. Fortress Press is to be commended for this achievement, which combines their efforts with those of Dutch and German co-publishers. The first volume, henceforth referred to as "Sandt and Flusser," is part of the multi-volume project originally titled *Compendia Rerum Judaicarum ad Novum Testamentum* ("Collection of Jewish Matters Related to the New Testament"). The series has been a joint effort between Dutch and Israeli scholars, and this volume continues that practice with Huub van de Sandt, a professor at Tilburg, and David Flusser, a late professor at the Hebrew University. The second volume, henceforth referred to as "Niederwimmer," is part of the growing *Hermeneia* series of commentaries on the Bible and related literature.

Continental scholars have had far greater interest in the *Didache* and in Patristic writings in general than English-speaking scholars. Therefore, much that has been written about the *Didache* has been in German or French. Indeed, Niederwimmer's volume was translated by Linda Maloney from a German edition published in 1989.

Before we compare and contrast these volumes, it may be good to summarize the scholarly consensus about the *Didache* which these volumes affirm. In 1873 the Greek Orthodox Metropolitan Philotheus Bryennios discovered a complete copy of the *Didache* in a monastery in Constantinople. He edited and published it in 1883. In 1887 the manuscript was transferred to the Greek Orthodox patriarchate in Jerusalem where it remains today, referred to as "Hierosolymitanus 54." The entire manuscript consists of 120 folio pages and a colophon at the end states that the scribe was one "Leon" and the date he finished his copying was Tuesday, June 11, 1056. The *Didache* portion consists of less than five folio pages in a clear miniscule script. The *Didache* contains fourteen brief chapters and around 100 "verses." Most of the other works contained in the manuscript were already familiar "subapostolic writings" such as the Epistle of Barnabas, the two Epistles of Clement and the twelve epistles of Ignatius of Antioch.

It was the text of the *Didache*, however, that was the real "find." Sandt and Flusser compared the excitement caused by its publication in 1883 to the attention

later given to the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls (24—a bit overstated in my opinion). Scholars had considered it a lost work that had been obliquely referred to as “The So-Called Teaching” by Eusebius and Athanasius in the fourth century. A Latin version known as “*Doctrinae Apostolorum*” was referred to by “Pseudo-Cyprian” around 300 and by Augustine around 400. The last mention of a “Teaching of the Apostles” (“*Didache Apostolon*”) was by the Patriarch Nicephorus in 829. After this, the *Didache* disappeared from history until Bryennios published it in 1883.

The Jerusalem manuscript is the only known complete copy of the *Didache*, although most scholars think it lacks a few final lines due to its sudden ending. There have appeared two small scraps of the Greek *Didache* among the Oxyrhynchus papyri fragments and a small section of it in Coptic was discovered soon after the Greek papyri. Also, two small sections appear in the “Ethiopian Church Order” in a paraphrased translation (Sandt and Flusser, 24-26). Finally, the Greek “Apostolic Constitutions” (ca. 380) incorporates most of the *Didache* in a highly expanded, commentary form.

The *Didache*’s sixteen brief chapters are structured into four clearly separated thematic sections: the “Two Ways” moral document (1-6); a liturgical treatise centering on the Eucharist and baptism (7-10); a treatise on church organization (11-15); and an eschatological section (16). The “Two Ways” section is based on the double love command (“Love God and Love your neighbor”) and also includes a section of positive commands in 1:3–2:1 which clearly echo the admonitions of the Sermon on the Mount. Most scholars, including the authors of these two volumes, clearly discern a Jewish context in much of the Two Ways section. Hillel’s famous dictum about the “Negative Golden Rule” appears, for example, in 1:2. These authors, especially Sandt and Flusser, expend much effort to locate the essence of this section in an already existing Jewish tradition of ethical teaching. With the addition of the admonitions from Jesus, this section probably served as a pre-baptismal catechetical manual. This seems clear from 7:1: “As for baptism, baptize in this way. Having said all this beforehand (i.e., all that was written above), baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, in running (literally ‘living’) water.” The section on the “Eucharist” (sections 9, 10) appears to set the observance in the context of a larger meal (the Agape). The prayers to be recited are very similar to a Jewish prayer ending the meal (the “*Birkat Hamazon*”). The ritual order, interestingly, is the cup and then the bread. While the “liturgy” is very simple, there is a reference to this being a “sacrifice.” Niederwimmer, despite his Catholicism, argues that the language does not at all describe the later sacramental sacrifice of the Mass, but the worshipers’ “sacrifice” was intended to describe their praise and prayer itself. He cites in this regard 1 Pet 2:5, Heb 13:10, 15, and Jas 1:27. “The whole action of the congregation is understood as a sacrifice before God” (196-97).

The section on how to treat traveling apostles, teachers, and prophets (11-15) expands and applies further the command mentioned in the NT to show

hospitality to itinerant teachers (e.g., 3 John 5-8). It also offers some firm guidelines on how best to prevent unethical “teachers” from presuming on the kindness of local congregations as they make their way around. “If the person is just passing through on the way to some other place, help him as much as you can, but he shall not stay with you more than two or three days—if that is necessary” (12:2).

The last section on eschatology (ch. 16) is brief and centers on the ethical parenthesis that should be heeded in light of the future events. Much of it echoes the teachings of the “Olivet Discourse” in Matthew 24. The increase of wickedness, the antichrist (“the one who leads the world astray”), the resurrection of believers, and the “Lord coming on the clouds of heaven” are mentioned. For those hungry to find confirmation for the specifics of their eschatological scheme, the Didache will disappoint with its general description of future events.

As to the date and provenance of this fascinating ancient document, both of the two works affirm the current consensus that the Didache appeared no later than the end of the first century A.D. and that it probably originally circulated in the area of Syria. The evidence that points to this is the “primitive” characteristics of the “liturgy” that it describes; the simple organizational structure of the local assembly (*episkopoi* and *diakonoi*, like Phil 1:1); the continued presence of apostles and others in an itinerant practice, unlike later resident monarchical bishops; and the use by the Epistle of Barnabas of sections of the Didache around the year 125.

What is the difference between the volumes of Niederwimmer and Sandt/Flusser? Simply put, the former is a commentary on the text of the Didache, and the latter is a detailed study about the issues raised in the Didache. That difference between the two justifies their inclusion in the series of works in which they are found. The *Hermeneia* is a series of commentaries and the *Compendia* is a series exploring the Jewish/Christian relationship at the end of the Second Temple Period and the beginning of the Rabbinic period. If a reader is looking for help on a specific passage in the Didache, then Niederwimmer will provide more help than any other work on the Didache that this reviewer has seen. If the reader is looking for a very scholarly and thoroughly researched study of the various issues that the Didache raises, then Sandt and Flusser is the best study of that type that has ever been written.

Protestants, and particularly evangelicals, have generally steered clear of Patristic study. This is understandable in light of their “Sola Scriptura” heritage, but it is, I fear, to our detriment in the long run. Should we not be interested in how those Christians closest to the apostles understood the teachings of the apostles? Should the excessive allegorizing of “Barnabas” or the strong emphasis on the authority of the “episkopos” by Ignatius scare us away from the deep spirituality of a Polycarp or from the simple advice on local church practice in the Didache? Even if someone is simply looking for confirmation of their own beliefs and practices (a less than noble aim for studying the fathers), we should spend more time on these fascinating books.

It is helpful that some Christians around 100 A.D. instructed us to immerse

in cold, running water those being baptized, even if they allow pouring with warm water if the situation demands it (7:1-3). It is helpful to know that around A.D. 100 the episkopoi were selected by the local congregation and not elevated above the presbuteroi as eventually developed in church order (15:1). It is helpful to know that around A.D. 100, the day on which believers were to gather for the breaking of bread was Sunday, not the Sabbath as some would have us believe (14:1). It is helpful to know that around A.D. 100 Christians did not teach that Jesus came in A.D. 70 as some preterists teach. It is interesting to know also that these early Christians taught that a separate resurrection of believers will take place at the Lord's coming (16:6-8) instead of a general resurrection, as some would have us believe today.

No, I do not need the *Didache* as an authority for what I believe, but I also want to know if what I believe is contrary to what the earliest Christians believed. Even if a student does not purchase one of these excellent books, he should check out the *Didache* on his own. He can find it in a number of editions of *The Apostolic Fathers* that are available today.

Mark S. Smith. *Untold Stories: The Bible and Ugaritic Studies in the Twentieth Century*. Peabody, Mass.: Hendickson, 2001. xix + 252 pp. \$29.95 (cloth).
Reviewed by William D. Barrick, Professor of Old Testament.

Ugaritic studies are sometimes overlooked by evangelicals because they have tended to be more enthusiastic about the Qumran scrolls and recent discoveries like the Tel Dan inscription, the James ossuary, and the more recent Jehoash Inscription. Smith's volume demonstrates that Ugaritic studies are alive and well throughout the world. The volume is a selective survey of Ugaritic and biblical studies from 1928 to 1999. Proceeding in historical order, four periods are covered: 1928-1945 (between the two world wars), 1945-1970 (post-World War II), 1970-1985, and 1985-1999. For each of these four periods the author provides a list of basic texts and tools produced, a discussion of major advances, a presentation of the major figures and academic programs, and "an issue representative of the intellectual climate of each period" (7). Smith stresses "questions of grammar, literature, and religion over issues of archaeology and history" (9).

This book has a wealth of anecdotal material about key players in Ugaritic studies. This reviewer found himself drawn into the intriguing web of scholarly interaction between men like Cyrus Gordon, E. A. Speiser, William Foxwell Albright, Theodor Gaster, Marvin Pope, and Frank Moore Cross. Tantalizing tidbits of information open the door for a peek at events in the lives of major Ugaritic and biblical scholars. The following are but a few examples: Frank Moore Cross was a student of Frank R. Blake whom Cross considers "the best language teacher I ever had" (25). Blake characteristically illustrated grammatical phenomena by appealing to Tagalog. Cross commented, "I think I was half through the first term before I

discovered that Tagalog was not a Semitic language, and tradition has it that several finished their degrees still under the impression that Ugaritic and Tagalog were sister languages” (43). Godfrey Rolles Driver, son of Samuel Rolles Driver, “was a young prodigy. At age sixteen he helped his father with the 1910 production of *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*” (57). Marvin Pope (author of the Job and Song of Songs commentaries in the Anchor Bible) was a student of William Stinespring who was Albright’s brother-in-law (65). Cyrus Gordon’s tenures at Dropsie and at Brandeis produced Ugaritic programs in which Kenneth Barker, Walter Kaiser, and Edwin Yamauchi participated (76, 77, 79). David Noel Freedman, whose father wrote material for the Ziegfeld Follies, graduated from UCLA at the age of 17 (109).

Anyone reading this book will gain a heightened appreciation for the role of Ugaritic in biblical studies. Smith provides a thorough report on works still in progress that will continue the production of quality tools for the study of both the archaeology and the texts from ancient Ugarit. His discussion of major themes helps the reader to understand the scope of Ugaritic studies. In one particular area, that of myth-and-ritual (82-100), Smith’s discussion is heavier and more extensive—perhaps due to his own personal interest and involvement in that area of Ugaritic studies.

Mark S. Smith is the Skirball Professor of Bible and Ancient Near Eastern Studies at New York University. His books include *Laments of Jeremiah and Their Contexts* (Scholars Press, 1990), *The Origins and Development of the Waw-Consecutive* (Scholars Press, 1991), and *Ugaritic Narrative Poetry* (Scholars Press, 1997).

David Noel Freedman aided in the editing of *Untold Stories*. He “quipped that the piece sometimes reads like a phone book, with too much detail and too many figures” (8). Those details and many figures were what this reviewer found so interesting. It is a must read for those who love the areas of OT studies, archaeology, and Ugaritic.

R. C. Sproul. *Saved from What?* Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2002. 128 pp. \$8.99 (cloth). Reviewed by Trevor Craigen, Associate Professor of Theology.

A sermon preached, then scripted and printed, led up to this little book, which could be described as an extended gospel tract. It could also serve the purpose of being a primer on the doctrine of salvation, prompting further detailed study of just what salvation is. The book makes for easy reading—an hour or so will do it. The use of personal anecdotes and a number of Scriptures from different settings as illustration adds color to the book. It is neither textbook nor commentary nor exposition of a specific passage, but a topical sermon delivered at a Christian Booksellers Convention, a sermon sparked by a survey which showed that many evangelical believers could not give an adequate definition of the gospel (15).

Eight chapters arranged under three obvious questions—"Saved from What?," "Saved by What?," and "Saved for What?"—nicely cover the points the author wished to emphasize and the different terms he chose to bring forward and define, such as "reconciliation" and "redemption," "expiation" and "propitiation," and "justification" and "adoption." Sin and man's depravity, as well as the absolute necessity of substitutionary atonement, God's holiness, Christ's righteousness, and the believer's blessed future in eternity are also concisely presented.

Interestingly enough, the sermon which gave rise to the book was based on that graphic description of the great day of the Lord in Zeph 1:14-18. However, given the audience and the occasion, the author had a certain amount of freedom in deciding what to use as the launching pad for his subject matter. As he himself indicated, this passage certainly does highlight the outpouring of God's wrath, and as he also noted, the end of this minor prophet's book does give the promise of redemption. His theological system forced him to overlook that this redemption relates to Israel's millennial future. Further, one would have to question the citing of Deuteronomy 28 as having some application for people or church today (73-75). And certainly, one would have to question whether or not the NT teaching of the church as the bride of Christ really does look back to Exodus 21 and the law on indentured servants (87-88). Strange! Inadequate or incomplete comments can always be found when an extensive topic is being so concisely surveyed. Yes, a mental note was made of other points to be explained in more detail were this book to be used in having someone think further about the gospel and salvation.

Provocatively, Sproul answers his first question by stating that the need is to be saved *from God*. As he puts it, "God in saving us saves us from Himself" (25). This unusual way of expressing it makes the reader pause and think a little before nodding okay and moving on.

This book, unless the reader determines to make use of it, is likely to be placed on the shelf with a murmured "that was a nice read" and perhaps thereafter remembered on occasions. The publisher's foreword shows a real desire that readers would have the most important question in life answered for them as they read *Saved from What?* If it serves that purpose, then rejoicing would certainly be in order.

Ben Witherington III. *New Testament History*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001. 430 pp. \$26.99 (cloth). Reviewed by William C. Varner, Professor of Bible and Director of IBEX, The Master's College.

Ben Witherington, Professor of New Testament at Asbury Theological Seminary, has written prolifically on NT themes, especially in the areas of "Jesus Research." (Note especially his *The Jesus Quest: The Third Search for the Jew of Nazareth* [Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1995]). It is not surprising, therefore, that Witherington often refers to his own publications in this present book, especially

his socio-rhetorical commentaries on Mark and Acts.

Inevitably, a book with this title invites comparison with another well-known work by F. F. Bruce (*New Testament History* [New York: Doubleday and Company, 1971]). As a matter of fact, I. Howard Marshall mentions this in his laudatory recommendation on the back cover: "I can think of no higher praise than to say that this book may well do for this generation what F. F. Bruce's *New Testament History* did for an earlier one." Since this reviewer was part of that "earlier" generation that profited from and utilized Bruce's volume often, a comparison is appropriate, especially since Witherington and his publishers chose the same title for this book. Though we should also evaluate Witherington's volume on its own merits, we should explore the question of whether this volume will serve this generation in the same way as Bruce's did his.

The book carries readers from the time of Alexander the Great to the reign of Domitian and the exile of John. More specifically he explores the "intertestamental" events (two chapters); the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus (three and a half chapters); the apostolic events (eight and a half chapters), and the post-70 events (two chapters).

Bruce's treatment was more detailed on the pre-John and Jesus history (fully one third of his book). This reviewer thinks that Witherington could have given more detailed coverage of this period, especially the Hasmonean period (only three pages, 40-42), which left such a deep impression on the background history of Second Temple Judaism.

Witherington seeks to explore the geographical, political, social, and religious influences that shaped the leaders and movements of the day. The degree to which he succeeds in doing this is debatable. He seeks to accomplish this purpose by a series of more focused sections he calls "A Closer Look." In these he gives greater attention, for example, to "The Pharisees" (45-48), "Time and Calendars in Antiquity" (62-64), "Josephus the Jewish Historian" (84-86), "Zealots or Bandits?" (87-89), "Essenes and Qumranites" (93-96), and "Significance of the Sanhedrin" (148-50). These are some of the most helpful contributions of the book, not only for the insight into these important subjects, but for the insight they sometimes provide into Witherington's personal views. This can be seen, for example, in "Q and A on Q" (100-103) and "Miracles and History" (120-21).

The fact, however, that Witherington works in his particular interpretation of the data should not be surprising or objectionable in itself. In a very interesting "Prolegomenon" (14-28) he makes a very good case for the statement, "There is no such thing as uninterpreted history" (15). It is obvious that Luke and John were not attempting to be neutral about their subject matter since they provide clear statements that their writing was evidently tendentious (Luke 1:1-4 and especially John 20:31). The question that must be asked about a historical treatment of certain events is whether the facts are illumined or obscured by the presentation.

Witherington appears to affirm that the "historians" who penned the first five books of the New Testament did not obscure the facts, although it would be

helpful if he made that clearer at times. For example, while our author seems to argue for the historicity of the resurrection (it is the best explanation of the subsequent changed lives of the apostles and the existence of the church), one wishes that he had attempted to address the charge that the Gospel writers present contradictory accounts of the post-resurrection events.

A few more criticisms are in order. Witherington is too dependent on Hayes and Mandell's work, *The Jewish People in Classical Antiquity: From Alexander to Bar Cochba* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1998) and less attentive to the classic work of Emil Schurer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, both in its original and in its revised editions (rev. and ed. by G. Vermes and F. Millar, Edinburgh: Clark, 1973). This shows up also in his refusal to see any real "Jewish" commitment on the part of Herod the Great. Anyone attempting to tout Herod as a consistent, God-fearing Jew has a huge task on his hands. Witherington's rejection, however, of the magisterial work on Herod by Peter Richardson, *Herod the Great: King of the Jews and Friend of the Romans* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1996), is disappointing. It is well known that Herod, in addition to building many lasting monuments for his Jewish subjects, most notably the Temple, also constructed some pagan temples, although not in Judea. To conclude that "Herod was not a monotheistic Jew," as Witherington does (footnote, 53) simply is not warranted by the evidence. Herod was the consummate survivor. He knew whom he had to please to keep his position: the Romans who put him in power and kept him there. His temples in honor of Augustus were simply acts of gratitude to his patron, not indications of his polytheism! These buildings were evidence of his political "kowtowing," not indications of some religious commitment. Richardson's evidence of Herod's many acts of benevolence towards his Jewish subjects also contradicts the charge of his commitment to paganism. This reviewer does not want to be accused of defending the sadistic behavior of Herod, especially toward his own family. Witherington's rejection of his Jewishness, however, does not take into account all the facts. We simply do not know for sure what Herod personally believed. To imply that he was a polytheist, however, goes far beyond a sober consideration of all the facts that we know about him.

Readers who hold to the traditional evangelical positions on authorship of the Gospels and the literary relationships between the Synoptic Gospels need to know that Witherington believes that only Mark was composed before A.D. 70 (363). He assigns the Gospel attributed to Matthew to the mid to late 70s and denies that the apostle assembled its contents, probably only contributing the "M" material unique to the Gospel, such as Matthew 1 and 2 (381-83). He suggests Luke wrote his two volume work in the late 70s or early 80s and ended the account at about A.D. 64 (Acts 28) because he had gotten too old to bring the story any further up to date (387). Such conclusions seem to be motivated by the author's commitment to (1) Markan priority, (2) the literary dependence of Matthew and Luke on Mark, and (3) the existence of the mythical "Q" document (100-103, 378-81). Though this is not

the place to give evaluations of these positions, let it be said that such ideas were foreign to the patristic writers, some of whom remembered the apostles, and also were foreign to Gospel scholarship for 1,700 years after the apostles!

I do not want to leave the impression that Witherington's book is without real value and positive contribution. He knows his subject well and has communicated it clearly. I am not ready, however, to have his book replace the classic work by F. F. Bruce on my course reading lists.

K. Lawson Younger, Jr. *Judges/Ruth*. The NIV Application Commentary. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002. 511 pp. \$ 24.99 (cloth). Reviewed by James E. Rosscup, Professor of Bible Exposition.

This is as a fairly good contribution by the Professor of Old Testament, Semitic Languages, and Ancient Near Eastern History, at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, Illinois. It is in a series representing, on several biblical books, some well-known scholars: Daniel Block (Ezekiel), David Garland (Mark, also Colossians and Philemon), Douglas Moo (Romans, 2 Peter, Jude), Craig Blomberg (1 Corinthians), Scott Hafemann (2 Corinthians), Walter Liefeld (Pastoral Epistles), and Craig Keener (Revelation). Brief evaluations for more of these appear in this reviewer's forthcoming revision/expansion of *Commentaries for Biblical Expositors* (Grace Books International: The Master's Seminary, Sun Valley, California, fall 2003). Several volumes are available, others in preparation. Each volume works through a biblical book, offering three parts on each passage: the original meaning, bridging the biblical setting and today, and then contemporary applications.

One finds a variation in value between different authors' works, with some explaining the text well and others being quite cursory, and with some being top-heavy in application but inadequate in commentary leading up to it. One sometimes wishes for more explanation to lay the groundwork. Younger does a fairly consistent job of providing light on the passages, then making usable applications. He devotes 387 pages to Judges and 104 to Ruth, then provides Scripture, subject, and author indexes. He surveys introductory concerns fairly well, for example on Judges' main theme to give selectively the consequences of disobedience to God and His law (23). One can doubt his concept that numbers such as 40 years may not be literally accurate but a round or figurative number for a generation (25). Quite a number of evangelical works on Judges are unmentioned in an extended bibliography (50-58) even when they have seriously discussed problems (cf. e.g., Paul Enns, *Judges*, and Leon Wood, *The Distressing Days of the Judges*).

Sometimes comments on phrases are missing in general surveys of sections, for instance "lead captive your captives" (Judg 5:12; 151). One looking for verse by verse help is frequently disappointed. The decision of editors to have bits and

pieces of explanations of a passage in three different sections can disunify matters and make it difficult for a student who is trying to work out the whole picture or find where an explanation occurs. One can see, for example, Jael's killing of Sisera (Judges 5) strung out in various places. Still, much insight is present for the patient, even if the "user unfriendly" approach turns readers away with only a partial picture.

Younger often helps on customs, as when he argues in Jephthah's coming home that he was surprised (shocked)—as seen in the word *hinneh*, "look"—in 11:34b, suggesting a look of recoil when off guard (264). The commander, having made a vow, did not expect his daughter, but an animal, to come out first, since homes then included a room for animals (263). Younger favors the view that Jephthah offered his daughter as a sacrifice, a calloused wrong (262-67). He goes on to make helpful applications about wife or child abuse in today's world (268-70).

Insight on Samson's desire for the Philistine woman being "of the Lord" (Judg 14:4) is helpful. "God uses Samson in spite of his wrong motives and actions (cf. Gen 50:20)" (302). Many comments on details are perceptive, for example, on Samson's sins based on selfish will going against God's laws. Yet often no helpful suggestion is offered. One case is the silence about how Samson may realistically have caught 300 foxes or jackals and managed to hold them until he could tie and loose them to destroy Philistine grain (326). Wisely, contrary to some interpreters, Younger sees Ruth's encounter with Boaz by night as showing decency and integrity (463).

All in all, the less technical work is one of the more frequently contributive, careful efforts on the two books. Younger does furnish considerable expertise on context, grammar, words, customs, and overall content, and often is rich in sensible application. Teachers, pastors, students, and lay people will benefit.