

HELL: NEVER, FOREVER, OR JUST FOR AWHILE?

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The plethora of literature produced in the last two decades on the basic nature of hell indicates a growing debate in evangelicalism that has not been experienced since the latter half of the nineteenth century. This introductory article to the entire theme issue of TMSJ sets forth the context of the question of whether hell involves conscious torment forever in Gehenna for unbelievers or their annihilation after the final judgment. It discusses historical, philosophical, lexical, contextual, and theological issues that prove crucial to reaching a definitive biblical conclusion. In the end, hell is a conscious, personal torment forever; it is not “just for awhile” before annihilation after the final judgment (conditional immortality) nor is its final retribution “never” (universalism).

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A few noted evangelicals such as Clark Pinnock,¹ John Stott,² and John Wenham³ have in recent years challenged the doctrine of eternal torment forever in hell as God’s final judgment on all unbelievers. James Hunter, in his landmark “sociological interpretation” of evangelicalism, notes that “. . . it is clear that there is a measurable degree of uneasiness within this generation of Evangelicals with the notion of an eternal damnation.”⁴ The 1989 evangelical doctrinal caucus “Evangelical Affirmations” surprisingly debated this issue. “Strong disagreements did surface over the position of annihilationism, a view that holds that unsaved souls

¹Clark H. Pinnock, “The Conditional View,” in *Four Views on Hell*, ed. by William Crockett (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996) 135-66.

²David L. Edwards and John R.W. Stott, *Evangelical Essentials: A Liberal-Evangelical Dialogue* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1988) 312-29.

³John W. Wenham, “The Case for Conditional Immortality,” in *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell*, ed. by Nigel M. de S. Cameron (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992) 161-91.

⁴James Davison Hunter, *Evangelicalism: The Coming Generation* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1987) 38.

will cease to exist after death. Debate arose in the final plenary session over whether such a view should be denounced in the affirmations.”⁵ In forecasting the theological directions of the future, Millard Erickson cites the doctrine of “Annihilationism” as growing in popularity among evangelicals.⁶

The subject has been debated in both the popular press⁷ and scholarly circles⁸ with no apparent consensus being reached. So what is a Christian to believe? How is this aspect of the gospel to be presented? How should the doctrinal statement of a local church read? What should the pastor preach on this issue of personal eschatology which has such a direct, relevant bearing on all unbelievers?

All of the articles in this issue of *TMSJ* were topics covered by selected members of The Master's Seminary faculty in the Winter 1998 Faculty Lecture Series, the lectures being adapted for *TMSJ* to answer the theological question, “Is hell never, forever, or just for awhile?” Hopefully, answers to the practical questions above will emerge at the conclusion of this series.

SETTING UP THE DISCUSSION

The subject of hell raises at least three key questions. Are unbelievers (i.e., those who have not repented of their sin and embraced saving faith in the person of, the death of, and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ) destined for an eternity of conscious torment in a real place that the Bible refers to as the lake of fire or Gehenna (commonly called Hell)? Or, are unbelievers annihilated, i.e., put out of both material and spiritual existence? Or, do all humans eventually receive the grace of God's salvation, although for many after a time of purgatorial purification?

The Master's Seminary Statement of Faith addresses these inquiries in the following manner. “We teach that this resurrection of the unsaved dead to judgment will be a physical resurrection, whereupon receiving their judgment (John 5:28-29), they will be committed to an eternal conscious punishment in the Lake of Fire (Matt. 25:41; Rev. 20:11-15).”⁹

⁵“What Does It Mean to be Evangelical?” *Christianity Today* 33 (June 16, 1989):60, 63.

⁶Millard J. Erickson, *Where is Theology Going?* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994) 187-88.

⁷E.g., *Christianity Today* 31 (March 20, 1987).

⁸E.g. *Criswell Theological Review* 4/2 (1990) and *Evangel* 10 (Summer 1992).

⁹*The Master's Seminary 1998-2000 Catalog* (Sun Valley, Calif.: The Master's Seminary, 1998) 34.

Even though that defining statement reflects TMS's solid conclusions on the matter, the subject is immense in scope, embracing elements of Theology Proper, Anthropology, Hamartiology, Soteriology, and Eschatology. Some of the discussions are quite complex and at times confusing, especially if the student is not exegetically tethered on a continual basis to the text of Scripture.

However, the matters are crucial to a clear understanding of the gospel and relevant to the eternal destiny of people. Thus, few theological subjects could be as important and have so much depending on them personally. As a faculty, we at TMS believe that the Bible speaks definitively to the subject and successfully confronts the challenges put forth with any lingering issues satisfactorily resolved.

Since the essays in this issue of *TMSJ* are not merely statements of what we believe, but also why we believe, then their purposes will be to (1) identify/recognize the significant questions/issues; (2) sort through and analyze the appropriate biblical data; (3) focus on key issues; and (4) think exegetically toward solution/resolution to the end of confidently presenting and defending the conclusions, from a Scriptural vantage point.

Lest this topic be treated as merely academic or anyone tragically revel in his own salvation and hope of heaven to the minimizing or exclusion of taking the gospel to the ends of the earth to every person, be reminded that the final judgment of God and the ultimate destiny of unbelievers are fearful things. Jeremiah wept over the LORD's judgment on Jerusalem (Jer 9:1; 14:17-18). And similarly, Jesus shed tears over the impending divine wrath to fall on the same city later (Luke 19:41-44). Likewise, writer and reader alike should be sobered by the subject matter at hand. The OT clearly affirms that God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezek 18:23, 32) and the NT asserts that God desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim 2:4). Neither a cavalier attitude toward the lost nor a compassionate compromise are appropriate for a subject of such grave import.

FRAMING THE PARAMETERS

In regard to this series of articles, three caveats are in order. First, they address the final or eternal state of humanity, not the intermediate state. Next, they will not engage every nuance of challenge to the classic position of the church on hell, but rather will primarily take a proactive approach in order to build a biblical case. Third, their major emphasis will be on exegetical issues, not philosophical or even historical considerations.

Now concerning this introductory article in relationship to the rest, three clarifications need to be made. First, this study is designed to introduce and give an overview of the subject, but not render the final word on it. Second, this article will identify the key elements for evaluation, rather than plumb the depths of any one aspect. And finally, this essay will be foundational so that the remaining articles can

build the superstructure of the discussion.

EXAMINING THE BACKGROUND

Historical

A belief in the eternal, conscious torment of the lost in hell has been the almost unbroken testimony of the church, as has been the doctrine of the certain immortality of mankind.

As regards the fate of the wicked . . . , the general view was that their punishment would be eternal, without any possibility of remission.¹⁰

Everlasting punishment of the wicked always was . . . the orthodox theory.¹¹

The punishment inflicted upon the lost was regarded by the Fathers of the Ancient Church, with very few exceptions, as endless.¹²

The major exception to this doctrinal unanimity in the early church, was Origen (ca. 185-254) in *De Principiis*. Gregory of Nazianzus (ca. 300-374) and Gregory of Nyssa (ca. 330-395) might also have followed Origen's thoughts. However, by the fifth century, the doctrine of everlasting punishment in hell was not seriously challenged.

With regard to a complementary doctrine, the unconditional immortality of mankind has generally been universally accepted both in and outside of the church. W. O. E. Oesterley, no friend of the Christian faith, documents the general belief in immortality which predates Plato (ca. 429-347 B.C.), thus minimizing the thinking of most annihilationists that Platonian teaching later influenced Christian thought toward an unbiblical view of human immortality.¹³

This (immortality) is taken for granted in such a way, and is believed to be demonstrated so obviously, that it stands on the same level with the recognition

¹⁰J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, rev. ed. (San Francisco: Harper, 1976) 483. F. W. Farrar, *Eternal Hope* (New York: Macmillan, 1879) 56-57, found the idea of eternal conscious torment abhorrent but admitted that ". . . such has been and is the common belief of Christendom."

¹¹Philip Schaff, *The History of the Christian Church*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: A P & A, n.d.), cites and quotes numerous early church fathers to bolster the point (273-74).

¹²William G. T. Shedd, *A History of Christian Doctrine*, vol. 2 (Minneapolis: Klock & Klock, n.d.) 414. Also see Jon E. Braun, *Whatever Happened to Hell?* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1979), and E. B. Pusey, *What is of Faith as to Everlasting Punishment?* (New York: Oxford, 1880), for extensive historical discussion.

¹³W. O. E. Oesterley, *Immortality and the Unseen World* (New York: Macmillan, 1921).

of the fact that men live in the ordinary way.¹⁴

We have found that so far back as we can penetrate there is evidence of the fact that it has been natural to man to believe in some sort of existence after death.¹⁵

¹⁴Ibid., 190.

¹⁵S. D. F. Salmond, *The Christian Doctrine of Immortality*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1903) 463.

From the fifth century A.D. until the latter half of the nineteenth century, no orthodox leader seriously challenged the doctrine of hell. Perhaps the most notable nineteenth century exchange was between F. W. Farrar¹⁶ (conditional immortality) and E. B. Pusey¹⁷ (unconditional immortality). B. B. Warfield has provided a representative bibliography of the literature pertaining to that period.¹⁸

The issue has not seriously surfaced since then until the 1980's and 1990's, when an avalanche of books written on hell appeared (see "Providing a Selected Bibliography on Hell" below).¹⁹ Dozens of books and journal articles have dealt with the subject.

Theological

Over the millennia six basic approaches have examined the issue of the last state of humanity. Some have been philosophical and others theological.

Simple/Immediate Annihilationism

This represents the position that at death a human being goes out of

¹⁶Farrar, *Eternal Hope*.

¹⁷Pusey, *What is of Faith as to Everlasting Punishment?* Many suggest that William G. T. Shedd, *The Doctrine of Endless Punishment* (1980 reprint, Minneapolis: Klock & Klock, 1886) was also among the best defenses of unconditional immortality.

¹⁸Benjamin B. Warfield, "Annihilationism," *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, vol. 1 (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1908)183-86. This article has been reprinted in *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield*, vol. 9 of *Studies in Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991) 447-57.

¹⁹See "Hell's Sober Comeback," *US News & World Report* (March 25, 1991):56-63, and "Heaven and Hell," *Christianity Today* (May 27, 1991):29-39.

existence forever, i.e., there is no future life for anyone. It has also been termed “materialism”²⁰ and “Pure Mortalism.”²¹ Democritus (ca. 460-380 B.C.), Aristotle (ca. 384-322 B.C.), Epicurus (ca. 341-270 B.C.), and more recently Bertrand Russell (1872-1970) championed this decidedly unchristian view.

Simple/Immediate Universalism

At death everyone passes immediately into an eternal life of bliss in the hereafter. Raymond Moody²² and Elizabeth Kubler-Ross²³ represent recent non-Christian advocates of this view.

²⁰Robert A. Morey, *Death and the Afterlife* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1984) 185-98.

²¹Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield* 447-48. This language is also used by Millard J. Erickson, “Is Hell Forever?” *BibSac* 152 (July-September 1995):259.

²²Raymond A. Moody, *Life After Life* (Carmel, N. Y.: Guideposts, 1975).

²³Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, *On Death and Dying* (New York: MacMillan, 1970).

Postponed Universalism/Restorationism

This view posits that at the resurrection all will be given eternal life. John Hick²⁴ represents a pluralistic variation of this position while Origen and John A. T. Robinson espouse a supposed Christian version of it.²⁵

Postponed Annihilationism

The mainstream of annihilationists believe that at the resurrection unbelievers will be judged and then put out of existence forever. This approach has rarely been affirmed before the mid-nineteenth century, e.g., by Arnobius (early fourth century A.D.) and Socinius (ca. 1539-1604). Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-Day Adventists, and Christadelphians embrace this doctrine. The most recent published advocates include LeRoy Froom,²⁶ Edward Fudge,²⁷ Michael Green,²⁸

²⁴John Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (New York: Macmillan, 1966).

²⁵John A. T. Robinson, *In the End God* (London: James Clarke, 1950).

²⁶LeRoy E. Froom, *The Conditionalist Faith of Our Fathers*, 2 vols. (Washington, D. C.: Review and Herald, 1965). This is the standard Seventh-Day Adventist work on annihilationism/conditional immortality.

²⁷Edward W. Fudge, *The Fire that Consumes* (Houston, Tex.: Providential, 1982).

²⁸Michael Green, *Evangelism Through the Local Church* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1990).

Philip E. Hughes,²⁹ John Stott,³⁰ Steven Travis,³¹ and John Wenham.³²

Possible Annihilationism/Postmortem Evangelism

²⁹Philip E. Hughes, *The True Image* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989).

³⁰David L. Edwards and John R. W. Stott, *Evangelical Essentials*. While not dogmatic on the issue, Stott noted in “The Logic of Hell: A Brief Rejoinder,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 18 (January 1994):33-34, “The late Professor F. F. Bruce wrote to me in 1989 that ‘annihilation is certainly an acceptable interpretation of the relevant New Testament passages.’ He added: ‘For myself I remain agnostic.’ My position is similar.” To the best knowledge of the writer, this is the last published statement by Stott on this issue.

³¹Stephen Travis, *I Believe in the Second Coming of Jesus* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1982).

³²John Wenham, *The Goodness of God* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1974). Just recently his autobiography, *Facing Hell: The Story of a Nobody* (Carlisle, England: Paternoster, 1998), was released posthumously in which Wenham candidly describes the detailed development of his thinking and the strong conviction he held at his death (1996), especially 68-69, 178-79, 229-57. See also Wenham’s essay, “The Case for Conditional Immortality” 161-91.

This "second chance approach" reasons that after resurrection, unbelievers will have another opportunity to receive or reject Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Those who reject Christ for a second time will then face annihilation. Clark Pinnock is the most vocal advocate of this idea.³³

Certain Eternal Existence³⁴

The generally accepted, historic position of the church has been that after the final resurrection and judgment, mankind will either live blessedly in the presence of God or live in conscious torment in the fires of hell away from the presence of God forever. Contemporary proponents would include John

³³Clark Pinnock, "Conditional View" 135-66; idem, *A Wideness in God's Mercy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992) 168-75, idem, *Unbounded Love* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1994) 87-95. See the thoughtful critique by Paul R. House, "Biblical Theology and the Inclusivist Challenge," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 2 (Summer 1998):2-4, and John K. Barrett, "Does Inclusivist Theology Undermine Evangelism?" *EQ* 70/3 (1998):219-45.

³⁴Another way to categorize the various views would be (1) No Immortality (Simple/Immediate Annihilationism); (2) Conditional Immortality (Postponed Annihilationism and Possible Annihilationism); and (3) Unconditional/Certain Immortality (Simple Universalism, Postponed Universalism, and Certain Eternal Existence).

Blanchard,³⁵ Harry Buis,³⁶ Larry Dixon,³⁷ Robert Morey,³⁸ Alec Motyer,³⁹ Robert A. Peterson,⁴⁰ and John Walvoord.⁴¹

Polemical

Philosophical Issues

³⁵John Blanchard, *Whatever Happened to Hell?* (Durham, England: Evangelical, 1993).

³⁶Harry Buis, *The Doctrine of Eternal Punishment* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1957).

³⁷Larry Dixon, *The Other Side of the Good News* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor, 1992).

³⁸Morey, *Death and the Afterlife*.

³⁹Alec Motyer, *After Death: A Sure and Certain Hope* (Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 1996).

⁴⁰Robert A. Peterson, *Hell on Trial: The Case for Eternal Punishment* (Phillipsburg, N. J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1995); cf. idem, "A Traditionalist Response to John Stott's Arguments for Annihilationism," *JETS* 37 (December 1994):553-68.

⁴¹John Walvoord, "The Literal View," in *Four Views on Hell*, 11-28. Additionally, see Harold O. J. Brown, "Will the Lost Suffer Forever?" *Criswell Theological Review* 4 (1990):261-78; Millard J. Erickson, "Is Hell Forever?" 259-72; Alan W. Gomes, "Evangelicals and the Annihilation of Hell," *Christian Research Journal* 13 (Spring 1991):15-19 and "Evangelicals and the Annihilation of Hell," Part 2, *Christian Research Journal* 14 (Summer 1991):9-13.

The questions concerning eternal torment raised by various opponents include “Isn’t eternal conscious torment needless cruelty?” and “Isn’t forever punishment incompatible with God’s love and mercy?” Preliminarily, one might observe that, for annihilationists, life imprisonment is more humane to the thinking of most than capital punishment or suffering through this life is more righteous than euthanasia. No major complaints are raised by annihilationists to the hundreds or thousands of years during which unbelievers suffer in the intermediate state. So why then be opposed to endless punishment in hell? This writer’s opinion would be that those sincere Christian scholars who have opted for conditional immortality have been far more influenced by an overemphasized anthropocentric view of the world and Scripture than a theocentric view (maybe more than they realize) and that this has colored their thinking.⁴²

The question is raised, “To whom and when, if ever, is immortality bestowed to a mortal creature?” Opponents of eternal torment in hell often assert that the church was dramatically affected by Platonic thought which taught that the soul was naturally created immortal. To that it must be hypothetically admitted that one Christian generation could possibly be deceived by an unbiblical philosophy. However, to support the idea that 2,000 years of doctrinal history has been almost universally blind to embracing pagan thought on this issue is beyond acceptable reason.

God’s justice is often brought to the forefront of the discussion. “Isn’t eternal punishment unjust as retribution for a non-eternal violation?” Yet, it must be remembered that God defines and sets the standard for what is just and unjust. The Scriptures reveal what that measure is, and thus an exegetical, not a philosophical, approach is the only one that will yield satisfactory answers. It could just be that sin against an eternally holy God is far more serious from His perspective than from the human point of view.

It has also been asked, “Would not the joy of the saints be greatly diminished in heaven to know that others are suffering in hell?” Again, one must retreat to Scripture, particularly Rev 21:4, for an answer. Also, it could be asked of annihilationists in response, “Would not the joy of the saints be greatly diminished in heaven to know that their unsaved acquaintances and family have now gone out of existence?” Humanly speaking, that latter hypothetical situation seems as

⁴²On the other hand, those who espouse conscious torment in hell have in their imaginative descriptions of hell’s awfulness often greatly exceeded what little detail the Scripture provides, beyond the fact of torment. For example, Dante Alighieri, *Dante’s Inferno* (Chicago: Thompson & Thompson, 1902), written in the thirteenth century.

sorrowful, if not more so, as the former.

Exegetical Issues

In this brief section, the writer raises some critical issues without attempting to settle them, due to the purpose and scope of this article.

1. Are *ᾠλεια* (*ap_leia*, “destruction”), *λεθρος* (*olethros*, “destruction”), and *ᾠλλυμι* (*apollymi*, “I destroy”) in such passages as Matt 7:13 (“the broad way of destruction”), 2 Thess 1:9 (“the penalty of eternal destruction”), and Matt 10:28 (“destroy both body and soul”) meant to convey “annihilation” or a substandard/ruinous life in the hereafter as compared to eternal life in the presence of God?
2. Is the fire imagery of *πῦρ* (*pur*, “fire”), associated with Gehenna, picturing “annihilation” or conscious, continuous torment in such NT phrases as “lake of fire” (Rev 20:10), “furnace of fire” (Matt 13:42), “unquenchable fire” (Matt 3:12), and “fire and brimstone” (Luke 17:29)? What kind of fire produces continual “weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matt 8:12)?
3. Does *θανατος* (*thanatos*, “death”) connote “end of existence” or transition to “another kind of existence”?
4. Does the noun *αιων* (*ai_n*, “eternity”) and the adjective *αιωνιος* (*ai_nios*, “eternal”) primarily reflect lasting effect or lasting existence?

Theological Issues

1. Was Platonic thought regarding the natural immortality of man’s spiritual being actually integrated into Christian theology, or do the ideas of “eternal life” and “second death” come from the Scriptures?

2. Is there really a second chance for salvation after physical death?
3. Is one's salvation based on one's level of light/desire for God, or is salvation based on a true knowledge of and repentant response to the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ in a person's normal lifetime?
4. Does Scripture teach the ultimate reconciliation of all things in such a way that the ongoing, eternal existence of hell, Satan, demons, and unbelievers would be a contradiction or that would militate against God's full glory (cf. John 12:32; 1 Cor 15:28; Eph 1:10; Phil 2:10-11)?

DELIVERING GRIST FOR THE MENTAL MILL

Key Words

α_ὄν/α_ὄνιος (*ai_n, ai_nios*)

1. Context strongly determines the meaning of eternity/eternal, whether it be “for an extremely long time” or “forever.”
2. With rare exceptions (e.g., Rev 19:3), the plural is always used in the sense of “forever.”
3. Would not Rev 14:11 indicate an eternal experience not just eternal results, as also the lake of fire experience (Rev 20:10)?
4. The use of the plural α_ὄνα (*ai_na*) in Jude 13 to describe the experience of “black darkness” is utterly unexpected and unnecessary if annihilationism were in view (cf. 2 Pet 2:17 where *ai_na* is not used).

_πόλεια/_πόλλυμι/_λεθρος (*ap_leia/apollymi/olethros*)

1. These words for destruction/ruin are never translated “annihilation”

in the NT.

2. These words are used in a temporal sense without the meaning of annihilation, e.g., Acts 8:20; 1 Cor 5:5; 2 Pet 3:6. Therefore, why should the meaning of annihilation be attached to them in an eternal sense?
3. Since *λεθρος* (*olethros*) and *απόλεια* (*ap_leia*) are used together in 1 Tim 6:9, would this not strongly militate against *ap_leia* meaning annihilation?

βασανίζω/κόλασις/_δυνάομαι (*Basaniz_/kolasis/odynaomai*)

1. Would not the idea of everlasting punishment demand the experiencing of hell, and not annihilation (cf. Matt 25:46)?
2. Do not the descriptive terms in Rev 14:10, 11 and 20:10 (“torment . . . forever,” “no rest day and night,” “tormented day and night,” and “forever and ever”) associated with torment/punishment point decidedly to an eternal experience?
3. If *βασανίζω* (*basaniz_*) is used of ongoing torment temporally (cf. Rev 9:5, 11:10), then would it not be reasonable to expect it also to describe continuous torment eternally?

Key Texts

Matthew 25:46

This writer asserts that “eternal life” shares a common idea with “eternal punishment,” i.e., they both imply a forever conscious existence. The contrast is obviously in a differing quality of existence that is endless in both cases.

Mark 9:43, 48 (cf. Isa 66:24)

The “unquenchable fire” of 9:43 must have an endless supply of fuel (otherwise it would be quenchable), which would be impossible if one took the annihilation view. Since the worm does not die, it implies an endless supply of food which could not be with the annihilation view.

John 3:36

With parallelism much like that in Matthew 25:46, the verse declares that the true believer has eternal life and the unbeliever has God’s wrath abiding, with the sense of continuation, on him. The concept of annihilationism would contradict the biblical sense of “continued abiding.”

2 Thessalonians 1:9 (cf. Matt 10:28)

This text is seemingly meaningless if “eternal destruction” meant annihilation. Rather the vocabulary (see the discussion of *λεθρος* above) and the implied contrast to believers in the presence of God point to eternal existence in a ruinous state.

Revelation 14:10-11

There are at least four major contextual/exegetical indicators that a conscious, continual experience is in view here, not annihilation.

1. The torment/*basaniz_* is done in the presence of the holy angels and the Lamb.
2. The smoke of torment is an eternal phenomenon. Where there is smoke, there must be fire; and where there is fire, there must be fuel. So, eternal smoke demands eternal fuel, i.e., the lost.
3. Those being tormented have no rest or, in other words, they are in torment. This would not be true if this referred to

annihilation.

4. The torment goes on “day and night,” which would be incompatible with annihilationism.

Revelation 19:20 and 20:10 (cf. Matt 25:41)

In Rev 19:20, the beast and the false prophet are thrown alive into the lake of fire. One thousand years later they are still alive (20:10). The phrase in 20:10, “tormented day and night forever,” indicates that what their previous tormented experience had been for a millennium would continue throughout eternity. This also describes the experience provided by the “eternal fire” of Matt 25:41. Since this is true of them, would it not also be true of others who eventually reside in the lake of fire?

Revelation 22:15

The focus of attention here is the New Jerusalem whose occupants have washed their robes (22:14). Those who have not and are unclean dwell outside, implying a continuing existence, not a non-existence.

Key Theological Concepts

Intermediate Torment

Luke 16:24, 25 points to lasting, conscious torment on the part of unbelievers immediately after death, just as Rev 20:10 (cf. Matt 25:41; Rev 19:20) indicates one thousand years of torment during the millennium—these are essentially indisputable facts. Now, it would seem that philosophical arguments used by annihilationists against eternal conscious torment would be equally applicable here, but the facts of the texts contradict them. Since the annihilationist's thinking is not true here in the temporal sense, nothing would then make them valid in the eternal sense.

Degrees of Eternal Punishment

Matthew 10:15; 11:22, 24 and Luke 10:12, 14; 20:47 point to the decided idea that there will be degrees of punishment in Gehenna for unbelievers appropriate to the evil deeds done during one's life. This would strongly argue against annihilationism which basically calls for a "one size fits all" approach in that all are annihilated without variation.

Resurrection and the Second Death

Both Dan 12:2 and John 5:29 point to the ultimate resurrection of the lost. Then, Rev 20:11-15 describes their judgment by God with the outcome of a "second death" in the lake of fire (cf. 21:8). Just as the first death did not result in annihilation, as evidenced by

resurrection, neither will the second death.

Suffering in This Life

Annihilationists argue that it would be unloving and unmerciful for God to allow a person to experience eternal torment. They also reason that the punishment of eternal torment does not fit the nature of a temporal crime. Such logic seemingly fails to take into account that, from a human perspective, the sufferings of Job (Job 1–2) were not deserved, but God allowed them or that the sin of Achan (Joshua 7) did not seem to deserve death as the consequence, but God demanded it of both him and his family. Remember also the death penalty imposed on the one caught gathering wood on the Sabbath (Num 15:32-36). None of these, apart from divine revelation, seem to square with the character of God as humanly defined, yet Scripture authenticates them all as true and consistent with God’s perfect being. Thus annihilationists, who rest a large part of their case on this kind of thinking, should be extremely cautious in practicing theodicy.

REACHING A WORKING CONCLUSION

Because this essay is introductory in nature, not the final word in the anthology, let this writer propose a “working solution” to be affirmed and strengthened by the articles that follow. It is concluded,

No variation of Universalism nor any form of Annihilationism/Conditional Immortality is biblically or otherwise acceptable as a legitimate Christian view of Hell (Gehenna), i.e., life hereafter in the final state for unbelievers. Overall views other than “Certain Eternal Existence” as espoused in this essay are deemed to be historically, lexically, exegetically, contextually, and theologically deficient.

We find satisfying the confident conclusion drawn by S. Lewis Johnson: “It is doubtful that there is a doctrine in the Bible easier to

prove than that of eternal punishment (cf. Matt. 25:46).⁴³

PROVIDING A SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY ON HELL

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JESUS' VIEW OF ETERNAL PUNISHMENT

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Jesus' last extended teaching about how the lost would spend eternity came in His description of the sheep-and-goat judgment in Matt 25:31-46 where He made pronouncements of judgment regarding two groups. The pronouncements will come when He returns to earth to initiate His millennial reign and will deal specifically with the living Gentiles on earth at that time. He will reach His verdict on the basis of how the two groups have treated believing Israelites during the persecutions of Daniel's seventieth week, treatments that will reflect whether they have trusted in Him to receive eternal life. The consequences of Jesus' pronouncements will be happy for believers, but for unbelievers they will be unspeakably horrible. The latter group, the goats, will depart from His presence into unending punishment worse than the suffering one experiences when he has his flesh consumed with fire. Evangelicals who have flirted with notions of watering down Jesus' teachings on the subject would do well to pay closer attention to His words.

* * * * *

In an investigation of a subject like Jesus' view of eternal punishment, many options present themselves. (1) One could with great profit select from Jesus' teachings a response to each of the evangelicals who has gone astray in his view of this doctrine. (2) Or he could profitably study a number of Greek words Jesus used that are crucial to this doctrine. (3) Or an examination of all the passages in which Jesus spoke of this doctrine would be of profit. Since space does not allow for this last alternative, the following essay will concentrate on one of those passages. In doing so, it will also give limited attention to recent evangelical deviations from Jesus' teaching and several especially significant Greek words. The passage in focus is a critical one because it is the last occasion known when Jesus elaborated on the subject of eternal punishment. It is a passage that is important for a number of other reasons. For example, George Ladd said this was the passage that turned him away from being a dispensationalist,¹ and Clark Pinnock acknowledges this as a passage

¹George Ladd, "The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats in Recent Interpretation," in *New Dimensions in New Testament Study*, Richard N. Longenecker and Merrill C. Tenney, eds. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan,

that could go against his doctrine of annihilationism.² Also, Heil notes that it is a passage about which no consensus exists regarding its meaning.³

The passage selected for investigation is Matt 25:31-46, Jesus' description of the King's judgment of the sheep and the goats. Some call this description a parable, perhaps because they are under the influence of more liberal scholars,⁴ but it is most basically a prophetic picture of future judgment. The only parabolic features are the similes of the sheep and goats in v. 32 and the metaphors of the sheep and goats standing in v. 33.⁵ The following is an enhancement of Jesus' words—not a translation of them—based on various exegetical features of the account:

25:31 After strong words against the Jewish leaders and words about accountability during Israel's future judgment (Matt 23:1-24:44), Jesus illustrated the implications of that judgment through three parables: that of the faithful and unfaithful servants (the lesson of readiness [24:45-51]), that of the wise and foolish virgins (the lesson of watchfulness [25:1-13]), and that of the profitable and unprofitable servants (the lesson of diligence [25:14-30]). He followed the parables with a direct prophecy about and description of a future judgment scene that will deal with the remainder of the human race, the Gentiles. This judgment scene picks up from Matt 24:20-31, the direct prediction of His return to earth, a return that will follow the predicted great tribulation (Matt

1974) 196.

²Clark H. Pinnock, "The Conditional View," in *Four Views on Hell*, ed. by William Crockett (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996) 156.

³John Paul Heil, "The Double Meaning of the Narrative of Universal Judgment in Matthew 25:31-46," *JSNT* 69 (1998):3.

⁴E.g., Ladd, "Parable of the Sheep and the Goats" 191.

⁵Henry Alford, *The Greek Testament* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1898) 1:255; Alan Hugh M'Neile, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* (London: Macmillan, 1961) 368; John Peter Lange, "Matthew," in *Commentary on the Holy Scriptures*, trans. and ed. by Philip Schaff (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n.d.) 448; David Hill, *The Gospel of Matthew*, NCB (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972) 330.

24:29). The Judge on the earthly throne radiating the supernatural glory of God is the Son of Man, to whom the Lord has delegated this responsibility. Spirit beings known as angels, who are witnesses and executors and who take a deep interest in man's final destiny, will accompany the Judge on that occasion. As the Judge takes His position of royal authority on the throne, which incidentally is the expected throne of David on earth, His sitting posture pictures finished victory.

25:32 In preparation for the judicial hearing and pronouncement of sentences, the angels will gather all living people of a Gentile lineage before the Judge, those not numbered among the servants in Israel about whom the three parables have just spoken. These are people who, in one way or another, have survived the horrors of the great tribulation until this moment. Next, the Judge will separate this larger group of Gentile defendants into two groups the way a shepherd separates his sheep from his goats at night when assigning each species to appropriate overnight quarters. That separation recalls how Matthew records the teachings of John the Baptist and Jesus about such a future separation of wheat from the chaff (Matt 3:12), the sincere from the hypocrites (6:2, 5, 16), the wise builder from the foolish (7:24-27), the wheat from the tares (13:30), the good fish from the bad (13:48-49), and the profitable from the unprofitable servants (25:14-30). Here it is a separation of those who are teachable, gentle, and profitable—the sheep—from those who are stubborn and egotistical—the goats.

25:33 The Judge will place the two groups of defendants, one in a position of honor and the other in a less favorable role. That positioning indicates He has already reached a verdict, even before He pronounces the sentence.

25:34 Then the Son of Man who now receives recognition in His office as King, as anticipated often in the OT and in earlier gospel accounts, will speak to the group on His right. He will invite them to join Him as those blessed by the Father to accept their inherited position in the Messianic kingdom, an inheritance assigned to them and in readiness since the foundation of the world. This is the practical equivalent of granting them salvation. Gentiles along with Israel will have a place in the kingdom.

25:35-36 The King explains the basis for His invitation by listing six temporal needs of His that the group on the right have met, needs that are universally recognized the world over even though those who have not experienced them seldom sense them as those who are so afflicted. Furnishing food, drink, and hospitality provides relief for the first three needs, but meeting the last three needs requires more. Clothing someone who is ill-clad, visiting and helping the sick, and experiencing the shame of association with someone in jail demand much more by way of charity.

25:37-39 Calling the ones on the right by a new name, the King predicts the response of the righteous ones. For the moment, they will have forgotten the

unity of the King with His people. They will demonstrate that whatever they did for others, they did because of unselfish love, not because of a desire to earn merit with the King. Because of their humility, they will ask six questions corresponding to the six needs they are credited with meeting. They will ask the King when they met His needs in these different ways. Their professed ignorance of how they have gained approval will simply reflect hearts that were disposed to act kindly toward others, regardless of what it would mean to themselves.

25:40 The King's response to their professed ignorance of how they won approval informs the sheep that their acts of kindness toward Jewish people who will have embraced Jesus as their Messiah were acts directed toward the King Himself. That response aligns with part of Jesus' commissioning of the twelve in Matt 10:40: "the one who receives you receives Me." It also aligns with Jesus' words to Saul the persecutor of Jewish believers in Acts 9:4: "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" Acts of benevolence toward Jewish believers during the severest of persecutions in the midst of the great tribulation will identify Gentiles who have accepted the gospel message. They will extend a helping hand to persecuted Jewish saints at the risk of their own lives.

25:41 At that point the King will turn to those on His left side and will make remarks correspondingly opposite to those He made to those on the right. Instead of the invitation to join His company, He will command them to depart from His presence. Instead of speaking of the blessedness that is theirs from the Father, He will refer to the curse they have brought on themselves. Instead of telling them to enter the kingdom, He will dispatch them into never-ending fire. Instead of a place prepared for them, He will speak of a place prepared for the devil and his angels. The righteous will inherit what has been prepared for them, but the accursed will enter what was prepared not for them but for others.

25:42-43 Then the king will repeat His list of benevolent acts, this time as charges against the accursed ones because of their failure to render assistance to Him when He was in need. Sins of omission caused by an overruling concern for self will be sufficient not only to deny entrance to the kingdom, but also to consign the negligent to everlasting fire.

25:44 As with the righteous, the accursed people will profess ignorance of the relevance of their failures to the King. They will claim innocence by asking, "When did we ever see you hungry without giving you food, as you have accused? Such an occasion never occurred, because we have never seen you in those circumstances. So we never could have refused You our good services." In their self-justification they imply that if they had ever seen the King in those circumstances, they would have responded with acts of kindness toward Him.

25:45 In response to this claim of innocence, the King will then reply along the same lines as He did to the righteous: "Because you failed to assist my Jewish followers in their predicament of persecution, you failed to assist Me."

When Will the Pronouncements Come and Who Are the People Involved?

The first question comes in two parts, the first dealing with the time of the verdicts and the second with the people involved.

The Time

The time of the judgment coincides with the central focus of the earlier part of this same discourse, the return of Christ as specified in 24:29-31. The account at 25:31 picks up the action from Matt 24:31, the intervening material being mostly parables about how to watch for the Son of Man's return.⁶ The Son of Man has now taken His seat on the earthly throne of His father David.

More specifically, the time of the pronouncements is the occasion for assigning individuals either to participation in the promised kingdom or to eternal fire (25:34, 41). The former assignments necessarily come at the beginning of the kingdom period, a period specified in Revelation 20 to be 1,000 years. The assignments to eternal fire do not come at that precise moment, however. Later revelation discloses the need to understand an instance of prophetic foreshortening in this case. Revelation 20:5, 12-15 shows that 1,000 years will separate the resurrections of the just and the unjust, requiring the judgment of the unjust to come a thousand years later than the entrance of the just into the kingdom.⁷

The case resembles Jesus' description of resurrection and future judgment in John 5:24-30, where He spoke of two future resurrections without referring to elapsed time between them. He likewise speaks here of an assignment to the kingdom and an assignment to eternal fire without referring to the time interval that will separate them. The final relegation of the lost to the lake of fire will not come until after the second resurrection that will follow the enjoyment of the temporal

⁶H. N. Ridderbos, *Matthew*, Bible Student's Commentary, trans. by Ray Togtman (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987) 465. Toussaint is more precise in fixing the time when he points out that the $\tau\alpha\nu$ (*hotan*, "when") and the $\tau\acute{o}\tau\epsilon$ (*tote*, "then") of v. 31 set the time of the judgment as coinciding with the return of Christ to earth (Stanley D. Toussaint, *Behold the King* [Portland, Ore.: Multnomah, 1980] 289). The $\tau\alpha\nu$ ties 25:31 to the coming of 24:29-31, and the $\tau\acute{o}\tau\epsilon$ locates the judgment at the time of the coming.

⁷Cf. Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 8–22: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1995) 420-21, 428-35.

phase of the kingdom by those assigned thereto. The “goats” of this judgment will be in a place of waiting with the rest of the lost until time for the second resurrection.

The People

Two groups of people require special identification.

Πάντα τ_θνη (*panta ta ethn_*, “all the nations”). The identity of the people judged on this occasion—πάντα τ_θνη (*panta ta ethn_*, usually translated “all the nations,” 25:32)—has been the subject of wide discussion. Various theories have suggested that they are (1) Christians,⁸ (2) non-Christians who are judged on the basis of how they treat one another,⁹ (3) non-Christians who are judged on the basis of how they treat Christians,¹⁰ (4) all men,¹¹ (5) all the Gentiles alive at the time of Christ’s return.¹²

The theory that the people being judged are all Christians is weak because the sheep are not the only ones who stand before the king. Goats will receive their sentences too. Further, Jesus can hardly mean that all the nations will have been converted by the time of Christ’s second advent, because Matthew has indicated that persecution by non-Christians will last right up to the end (Matt 10:22-23; 24:9, 30; cf. 10:14-15, 35-36; 22:5-7).¹³

The second view—that non-Christians are the ones judged on the basis of how they treat one another—is beset with even more weaknesses. The Messianic kingdom has not been prepared for nonbelievers (cf. 25:34), nor is that group compatible with *π_ καταβολ_ς κόσμου* (*apo katabol_s kosmou*, “from the foundation of the world,” 25:34) which implies they are among the *_κλεκτο_ι* (*eklektoi*, “elect”).¹⁴ In addition, *ο_ δίκαιο_ι* (*hoi dikaioi*, “the righteous,” 25:37) could hardly refer to unbelievers.¹⁵ Non-Christians could not perform the kind of works

⁸Heinrich August Wilhelm Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Gospel of Matthew*, 6th German edition trans. and ed. by Peter Christie and William Stewart, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1879) 2:178-79.

⁹Alford, *Greek Testament*, 1:256.

¹⁰Ibid.; Alexander Balmain Bruce, “The Synoptic Gospels,” in *The Expositor’s Greek Testament*, ed. by W. Robertson Nicoll (1956 reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d.) 1:304.

¹¹Ridderbos, *Matthew*, 466; D. A. Carson, “Matthew,” in *EBC*, 8:521; Craig L. Blomberg, in vol. 22 of *The New American Commentary*, ed. by David S. Dockery (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman, 1992) 742.

¹²Ed Glasscock, *Matthew*, Moody Gospel Commentary (Chicago: Moody, 1997) 489; John F. Walvoord, *Matthew: Thy Kingdom Come* (Chicago: Moody, 1974) 201.

¹³Robert H. Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a mixed Church under Persecution*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994) 511.

¹⁴Meyer, *Matthew* 2:178.

¹⁵Ibid.

attributed to some of the *ethn_* in 25:35, 36, 40.¹⁶ To identify the *ethn_* as unbelievers would necessitate allowing that people will find eternal life (cf. 25:46) through “real, though unconscious, faith in Christ.”¹⁷ Nothing could be further from the spirit of Christ’s teachings (cf. Matt 7:22-23). How can faith in Christ be an unconscious act?

The same problems as those that eliminate the second view face the third view that the *ethn_* are non-Christians judged on the basis of how they treat Christians.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Lange, “Matthew,” 447.

The fourth view is a very popular one, that is, the inclusion of all human beings in *panta ta ethn_*. One supporter reasons that all will have heard the gospel by this time—erasing the distinction between those who have never heard of the Messiah and those who have heard and rejected Him—and that the King asks no question that would be applicable only to professed Christians.¹⁸ Others see this as a universal judgment in agreement with Christ's earlier teachings (Matt 13:37-43, 49; 24:31),¹⁹ at which time all will have become nominal Christians.²⁰ A further observation that supports this fourth view is the use of the same phrase in Matt 28:19 to speak of universality.²¹

Yet the universality view cannot overcome the same obstacles faced by the second and third views. No rationale exists to justify the inclusion of non-Christians as part of *panta ta ethn_*. Further, it leaves no room for "my brothers" (25:40) as a group distinct from *panta ta ethn_*. If "all the nations" covers all humanity, "my brothers" must be a part of that group. Yet a natural reading of the passage indicates that the two groups are different.

A far better solution is to refer the expression to all the Gentiles alive at the time of Christ's return. The common usage of *ethn_* to distinguish Gentiles from God's chosen people, the Jews, is an important consideration.²² The Gentiles are different from God's chosen people and stand in contrast to the "brethren" of 25:40 who as wise virgins (25:10) and faithful servants (25:21, 23) had already received their reward. The parables preceding this judgment scene have focused on privileged Israelites, specifically the servants of the Son of Man, so this scene must

¹⁸ Alfred Plummer, *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953) 350.

¹⁹ Lange, "Matthew" 447; Ridderbos, *Matthew* 466.

²⁰ Lange, "Matthew" 447; A. B. Bruce, "Synoptic Gospels" 305.

²¹ Blomberg, *Matthew* 742.

²² Alford, *Greek Testament* 1:255; A. Carr, *The Gospel According to St Matthew*, CGT (Cambridge: University Press, 1906) 279; Walvoord, *Matthew* 201.

pertain to Gentiles.²³ Jesus began this segment of His ministry with judgment against Israel (23:1–24:22)²⁴ and followed that with four parables alluding to Israel's eternal judgment (24:43–25:30). It is fitting that He end His remarks with words about eternal judgment of Gentiles (25:31–46). The criteria for judgment will be how the Gentiles have treated “the brothers” (25:40, 45).

A major reason why interpreters have preferred the fourth view over this fifth and more obvious view is their confusing of this judgment with three other judgment descriptions. This is different from the judgment of John 5:24–30 in that no resurrection is involved here as it is in that passage. The Olivet Discourse contains nothing about resurrection and thereby limits the sheep-and-goat judgment to those who will be alive when Christ returns. This judgment differs from the one in 2 Cor 5:10 also. In that passage about “the judgment seat of Christ” Paul writes only about Christians, including those of both Jewish and Gentile backgrounds. It is not limited to Gentiles. The Olivet Discourse judgment-scene is also distinct from the Great White Throne Judgment of Rev 20:11–15. That judgment follows resurrection which is not in view in this one. It also involves only unsaved people, in contrast to this one which directs itself toward both goats and sheep. The place will also be different, that one transpiring after the disappearance of the present heaven and earth. The King will conduct this judgment on the earth as presently known.

These distinctions do not mean that the saved in this description will enjoy less felicity than the saved in John 5 and 2 Corinthians 5, or that the lost will experience less misery than the lost of Revelation 20 and John 5. It simply notes that they will receive their sentences on separate occasions.

²³Glasscock, *Matthew* 489.

²⁴Cf. A. B. Bruce, “Synoptic Gospels” 305, and Blomberg, *Matthew* 375.

Τῶν ἀδελφῶν μου (*t_n adelph_n mou*, “my brothers”). The next step in an elaboration of Jesus' view of eternal punishment as reflected in His description of the sheep-and-goat judgment is to identify τῶν ἀδελφῶν μου (*t_n adelph_n mou*, “my brothers”) in 25:40. Several of the proposed identifications are very improbable. One of them, that “the brothers” include all poor and miserable sufferers,²⁵ lacks support in that it finds its basis in a universal fraternity with Christ. Matthew and the rest of the NT contain no sign of such a teaching.²⁶

Another view holds “the brothers” to be the Christian church in distress.²⁷ This explanation provides a very unlikely possibility because it ignores the context of the Olivet Discourse with its relevance primarily to the Jewish nation. The view is also incapable of finding a distinction between the brothers and the sheep who are judged.

²⁵M'Neile, *Matthew* 371; Meyer, *Gospel of Matthew* 2:181-82.

²⁶Ladd, “Parable of the Sheep and Goats” 195; Carson, “Matthew” 519.

²⁷Meyer, *Gospel of Matthew* 2:181.

A view that holds a little more plausibility identifies the brothers as Christian brothers.²⁸ It does so on the grounds that the adjective μικροί (*mikroi*, “little ones”)—of which *λαχίστων* (*elachist_n*, “least ones,” 25:40, 45) is the superlative form—without exception in Matthew refers to the disciples (10:42; 18:6, 10, 14; cf. also 5:19; 11:11).²⁹ This writer always uses “brothers” to refer to spiritual kin whenever he is not referring to literal, biological siblings. A special case in point is Matt 12:46-50 where Jesus calls all His followers “brothers.”³⁰ The problem with this view, however, is that it ignores the fact that three groups are involved in this judgment: the sheep, the goats, and the brothers.³¹ The brothers differ from the sheep and the sheep must be Christ’s spiritual brothers, so the brothers cannot refer to the same group.³²

An explanation that identifies “the brothers” as the apostles rather than as all believers has in its favor Christ’s instructions to the Twelve in Matt 10:40, 42 (cf. Matt 18:6, 10, 14).³³ There He refers to the Twelve as “little ones,” and says that whoever receives them also receives Himself, a close parallel to 25:40, 45. Yet this view unjustifiably restricts the reference to the apostles and excludes those who are disciples in general.³⁴ Some of the passages cited in support of it—Matt 18:6, 10,

²⁸Ridderbos, *Matthew* 468.

²⁹Blomberg, *Matthew* 377-78; Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, vol 33B of *Word Biblical Commentary*, ed. by David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker (Dallas: Word, 1995) 744-45.

³⁰Glasscock, *Matthew* 491.

³¹E. W. Bullinger, *The Companion Bible*, Part V (London: Oxford University Press, n.d.) 1369.

³²Heil proposes that the brothers represent the same group—the Matthean audience, presumably Christians—as do the sheep. He does so by assigning two levels of meaning or a double meaning to the passage (Heil, “Double Meaning” 11, 14). That, of course, violates sound principles of interpretation and makes the account self-contradictory.

³³Ladd, “Parable of the Sheep and the Goats” 197-98; cf. Carson, “Matthew” 519.

³⁴Ladd, “Parable of the Sheep and the Goats” 199; Carson, “Matthew” 519.

14; 23:8—apply to all true disciples, not just to those who are apostles and missionaries in a technical sense. In addition, it is doubtful that Jesus would have referred to the apostles as “the least” of His brethren.³⁵ In its essence, then, this view is the same as the “Christian brothers” view and suffers from the same disadvantages as that view.

³⁵Meyer, *Matthew* 181.

The only view that is not beset with insuperable obstacles is the one that sees “the brothers” as Jesus’ Jewish Christian brothers alive at the time of His return.

The ones separated from one another (i.e., $\alpha_το_ς$ [*autous*, “them”], 25:32) in preparation for this sentencing must be the Gentiles ($\tau_θηνη$ [*ta ethn_*], 25:32), so the Gentiles are the ones being judged for their conduct toward Jewish Christians.³⁶

In this description, the brothers are neither sheep nor goats. True Israelites are the only remaining people who remain to be contrasted with all the Gentiles.³⁷ These will be faithful Jews who suffer during Daniel’s predicted seventieth week.³⁸ The claim that Jesus never called Jewish people His brothers³⁹ overlooks the fact the group to whom Jesus pointed in His statement of Matt 12:46-50 were Jews.⁴⁰ It was quite natural for Jesus to refer to His Jewish brothers in this manner at the conclusion of a discourse devoted primarily to the future of the Jewish people.

What Are the Grounds for the Pronouncements?

The basis for judgment of Gentiles on this future occasion will be their treatment of faithful Jewish followers of the Messiah, those who at greatest risk have remained true to Him. By helping the besieged faithful remnant of Israel, the sheep among the Gentiles will demonstrate the reality of their own close relationship with Jesus. The goats, on the other hand, will be callous to the needs of Jewish Christians in those days of harshest persecution and will be participants in inflicting that suffering.

This is not the only ground for condemning people to eternal punishment, however. During his ministry on earth, Jesus taught many others. Sometimes he emphasized the consequences of the wrong kinds of external fruit, such as calling someone a fool (Matt 5:22), having lustful desires (Matt 5:28-30), choosing the broad way rather than the narrow one (Matt 7:13; Luke 13:24-30), or practicing

³⁶Willoughby C. Allen, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Matthew*, ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1912) 265.

³⁷Walvoord, *Matthew* 201.

³⁸Glasscock, *Matthew* 492.

³⁹Carson, “Matthew” 520.

⁴⁰Glasscock, *Matthew* 491.

lawlessness (Matt 7:23). Other types of actions He connected with eternal loss include careless words spoken (Matt 12:35-37), a false profession of faith (Matt 13:37-43), wickedness (Matt 13:49-50), a wrong value system (Matt 16:25-26; Mark 8:35-37), becoming a stumbling-block to others (Matt 18:7-9; Mark 9:42-49), failure to dress properly for a wedding feast (Matt 22:12-13), hypocrisy (Matt 23:2-33), a lack of watchfulness (Matt 4:50-51), a lack of readiness (Matt 25:10-12), a lack of diligence (Matt 25:29-30; Luke 12:45-48), an “eat, drink, and be merry” philosophy (Luke 12:20), and a failure to respond to God’s Word (Luke 16:23-31).

But Jesus gave closer attention to the root of such adverse activities, the inner condition of a person’s heart. He spoke of the consequences of a lack of faith in Israel: “I have not found such faith with anyone in Israel. . . . The sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth there”⁴¹ (Matt 8:10, 12). He denounced a lack of repentance in those who had witnessed His miracles: “Then He began to upbraid the cities in which His greatest miracles had occurred, because they did not repent” (Matt 11:20-24; Luke 10:15).

He noted the severe consequences of unbelief: “Then the Lord of that servant will come in a day when he does not expect and in an hour which he does not know and will cut him in two and assign his part with those who are unbelieving” (Luke 12:46).

He promised the condemnation of those who fail to trust the one and only Son of God: “The one who believes in Him is not condemned, but the one who does not believe has been condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the one and only Son of God” (John 3:18). He touched on the consequences of failure to hear Christ’s word and believe on Him who sent Christ: “Truly, truly I say to you that the one who hears My word and believes the one who sent me has eternal life, and shall not come into condemnation, but has passed from death to life” (John 5:24). He also spoke bluntly of the result of not abiding in Christ: “Unless one abides in Me, he is thrown outside as a branch and is burned, and they gather them and throw them into the fire and they are burned” (John 15:6).

The ultimate basis for a negative pronouncement by the Lord in future judgment will be a person’s inner condition. Jesus was very clear about the root of evil being the human personality: “The thing coming from within man, that defiles the man. For from within, from the heart of men, come evil reasonings, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, covetousness, iniquities, guile, licentiousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, arrogance, foolishness. All these things that are evil proceed from within and defile the man” (Mark 7:20-23). A person’s inner condition is the ultimate basis for his placement among the goats—lacks of faith, repentance, and abiding in Christ.

What Are the Consequences of the Pronouncements?

⁴¹All Scripture quotations in this essay are personal translations.

The sheep receive good news from the pronouncements: an inheritance of the kingdom prepared from the foundation of the world (25:34) and everlasting life (25:46). News for the goats is far from cheerful, however. “Everlasting fire” (25:41) and “everlasting punishment” (25:46) define their destiny.

With the focus of this discussion on Jesus’ teaching about eternal punishment, an elaboration on the meanings of three words is imperative. The words $\alpha\ \acute{\omega}\nu\iota\omicron\nu$ (*ai_nion*, “everlasting”), $\pi\ \rho$ (*pur*, “fire”), and $\kappa\acute{\omicron}\lambda\alpha\sigma\iota\nu$ (*kolasin*, “punishment”) combine to tell what Jesus said about that subject on this occasion.

$\text{A}\ \acute{\omega}\nu\iota\omicron\nu$ (*Ai_nion*, “Everlasting”)

Some debate revolves around the adjective translated “everlasting” or “eternal” in 25:41, 46. One opinion calls for a limited meaning of “age-long,” necessitating the conclusion that the fire (v. 41) and the punishment (v. 46) will some day come to an end. This approach usually seeks support in the etymological derivation of *ai_nion* from the noun $\alpha\ \acute{\omega}\nu$ (*ai_n*, “age”). It matches the idea of a time or corrective punishment, after which punishment will end, leaving hope of ultimate salvation. But the doctrine of future states must rest on more basic considerations than those of etymological derivation.⁴² The contextual emphasis of Jesus’ statements must be the determining factor.

⁴²A. B. Bruce, “Synoptic Gospels” 306.

Another way of handling the adjective “everlasting” has been to deny its temporal aspects and limit it strictly to a qualitative significance. For example, Hill says the word “eternal” refers to “that which is characteristic of the Age to come” and whatever emphasis it puts on temporal lastingness is secondary.⁴³ Plummer concurs: “The meaning of ‘eternal’ may possibly have no reference to duration of time. Nor is the expression ‘eternal *punishment*’ synonymous with ‘eternal *pain*,’ still less with ‘*unending* pain,’ and we are not justified in treating these expressions as equivalent. ‘Eternal punishment’ may mean ‘eternal *loss*’ or ‘*irreparable* loss’; but there is no legitimate inference from ‘irreparable loss’ to ‘everlasting suffering.’”⁴⁴

Lange veers away from the temporal connotation of *ai_nion* also when he calls the dominant idea of κόλασιν α_ώνιον (*kolasin ai_nion*) an intensive one.⁴⁵ He says the same is true with ζω_v α_ώνιον (*z_n ai_nion*) which speaks primarily of the intensive boundlessness of life because an abstract endless life might be one in torment. He views the distinguishing between religious and chronological notions and calculations as important.⁴⁶ By this, he avoids finding eternal punishment taught in this description of the sheep and the goats.

In an evaluation of the foregoing theories, a distinction between the noun *ai_n* and the adjective *ai_nios* is significant. The noun sometimes may refer to limited time as it does, for example, in Matt 28:20—“the consummation of the age”—but even the noun appears most of the time in phrases that have eternal connotations.⁴⁷ An example of the latter is Matt 21:19, Jesus’ cursing of the fig tree

⁴³Hill, *Gospel of Matthew* 331.

⁴⁴Plummer, *Gospel According to S. Matthew* 352; cf. Colin Brown, “Punishment,” *NIDNTT* 99.

⁴⁵Lange, *Matthew* 450.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*

⁴⁷Other passages where Matthew uses the noun α_ών (*ai_n*, “age”) for a limited duration include 13:22, 39, 40, 49; 24:3, but in each of these some contextual indication shows the speakers to have in mind an ending of some kind—“the worries of this life” (13:22), the “end of the age” (13:39, 40, 49; 24:3), or the spread of the gospel till the return of Christ (Matt 28:20) (Scot McKnight, “Eternal Consequences or Eternal Consciousness?” *Through No Fault of Their Own?*,” ed. by William V. Crockett and James G.

meant that the tree would never bear fruit again: “No longer will fruit come from you forever (*eis ton ai_na*).” The consequences of the cursing were not temporary in nature.

The NT usage of the adjective, on the other hand, is quite consistent in referring to endless or unlimited time, a meaning consonant with the word *αἰ* (*aei*, “always”) from which it is probably derived.⁴⁸ In its seventy-four occurrences in the NT, it always has the connotation of something that is unending or without time limitations.⁴⁹ Seventy-one of the uses look forward to eternity future, and only three refer back to what mortals would call eternity past (Rom 16:25; 2 Tim 1:9; Tit 1:2).

The OT counterpart to *ai_nios* supports that extended meaning. *ἀόλιμος* (*‘ól_m*) pointed to futurity of indefinite length, because its duration was unknown. Sometimes plural of *‘ól_m* had the effect of intensifying. Based on the usage of its Hebrew counterpart, *ai_nios* denoted perpetuity, permanence, inviolability, such as that of God’s covenant (Gen 9:16), ordinance (Exod 12:14), gates of Zion (Ps 23[24]:7, 9) and her foundations (Isa 58:12), boundaries of the sea (Jer 5:22). This is the meaning of the Greek adjective in both classical Greek and in later vernacular Greek.⁵⁰

Efforts to tone down the force of *ai_nios* cannot sidestep the absolute idea of eternity in connection with Jesus’ teaching of eternal punishment. It is an exegetically established reality in this passage (cf. Matt 3:12; 18:8) because it is antithetical to ζῶν αἰώνιον (*z_n ai_nion*) in v. 46, the latter being a designation for everlasting Messianic life (Meyer, 183).

Πῦρ (*Pur*, “Fire”)

Jesus made extensive use of fire, burning, or a flame to portray the agony of those who will experience everlasting punishment. The gospels record at least thirteen instances of such descriptions from the lips of Jesus (Matt 5:22; 7:19; 13:40,

⁴⁸John A Broadus, *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, An American Commentary on the New Testament, ed. by Alvah Hovey (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1886) 512.

⁴⁹Referring to Matthew alone, McKnight writes, “Matthew never uses the adjective *ai_nios* (‘eternal’) in the sense of ‘belonging to this temporally limited age.’ . . . [I]n Matthew the adjective *ai_nios* refers to something eternal and temporally unlimited” (“Eternal Consequences or Eternal Consciousness?” 153).

⁵⁰M’Neile, *Matthew* 263.

42, 50; 18:8-9; 25:41; Mark 9:43, 48-49; Luke 16:24; John 15:6) and six more mentions of the same by John the Baptist (Matt 3:10, 11, 12; Luke 3:9, 16, 17).⁵¹ Jesus used the related figure of Gehenna eleven times to portray the misery of eternal punishment (Matt 5:22, 29, 30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15, 33; Mark 9:43, 45, 47; Luke 12:5). In two instances He combined the two words into the expression "Gehenna of fire." Gehenna was the designation of a valley to the south and southwest of Jerusalem where garbage was dumped to furnish fuel for a fire that burned continually.⁵² Earlier the place had acquired a bad reputation because of sacrifices offered to the god Moloch there. The name became the equivalent to the hell of the last judgment.⁵³

⁵¹Cf. M^cNeile, *Matthew* 28.

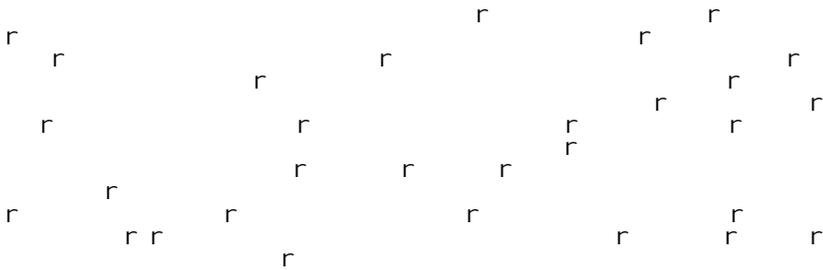
⁵²R. E. Davies, "Gehenna," *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, ed. by Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975) 2:671.

⁵³Joachim Jeremias, "γέεννα," *TDNT* 1:657.

Yet some contend that Jesus' mention of eternal fire (Matt 25:41) "does not necessarily imply that those concerned go on being judged or continue to be consumed. If the metaphor of fire is to be pressed at all, it would imply that the fire of righteousness continues to burn, but that what is consumed once is consumed for good. . . ." ⁵⁴ When combined with the idea that the soul of man is not necessarily immortal, this teaching leads to the conclusion that the torment of the unrighteous is not necessarily endless, ⁵⁵ a position otherwise known as conditional immortality.

Such a conclusion runs counter to a person's permanent exclusion from the Messianic kingdom Jesus mentioned in His description (25:34). A person so excluded has no other expectation than to experience this constant burning. Broadus describes that fate thus: "Whether eternal punishment involves any physical reality corresponding to fire, one cannot tell. However, it will be something as bad as fire and doubtless worse, something earthly images are inadequate to describe." ⁵⁶ One difference between fire as known in the present life and eternal fire is that this fire will never run out of fuel and burn out. Jesus described the fire as "unquenchable" (Mark 9:43), as did John the Baptist (Matt 3:12; Luke 3:17). Jesus said it will be a fire that acts like salt, preserving rather than destroying, when He said, "Everyone will be sated with fire" (Mark 9:49). ⁵⁷ Its burning will never end.

A description of its opposite—the bliss of the Messianic kingdom and the new Jerusalem—is perhaps the best way to comprehend the awfulness of such a condition.



⁵⁴E.g., Brown, "Punishment" 3:99.

⁵⁵Ibid.

⁵⁶Broadus, *Gospel of Matthew* 511.

⁵⁷Ibid., 514.

the hope of ultimate salvation.⁶⁵ To his credit, however, he notes that the doctrine of future states must rest on more basic considerations than those of etymological derivation. In the present context, the contrast with eternal life establishes that eternal punishment is not a limited period of discipline, but is without limits.

⁶⁵Ibid.

Still another approach compares the term *kolasis* with one of its synonyms, τιμωρία (*tim_ria*, “vengeance”). The former word, according to Aristotle, is disciplinary and refers to the sufferer, and the latter is penal, referring to the satisfaction of the one who inflicts the penalty.⁶⁶ *Kolasis*, then, is the milder term that in classical usage suggested the betterment of the punished one.⁶⁷ That distinction between the two words did not continue with consistency in later Greek, however.⁶⁸ It is a very serious error to press the distinction in its entirety in the NT, because “the κόλασις αὐτῶν of Matt. xxv. 46, as it is plain, is no merely corrective, and therefore temporary, discipline. . . .”⁶⁹ The only element of Aristotle’s distinction that remains is *kolasis* and its special relation to the punished and *tim_ria* and its special reference to the punisher (cf. Heb 10:29).⁷⁰

A basic principle for interpreting NT synonyms dictates that a distinction in meaning between two words does not necessarily exist unless they occur in the same immediate context. That principle applies to pairs such as ἀγαπάω (*agapa_*, “I love”)/φιλέω (*phile_*, “I love”) and ἄλλος (*allos*, “other”)/ἕτερος (*heteros*, “other”). Unless they occur together, an interpreter cannot press for differences. The same applies to *kolasis/tim_ria*. It is poor exegetical methodology to try to evade the teaching of eternal punishment on the basis of a distinction in vocabulary.

As for the idea that *ai_nios* is qualitative rather than quantitative, speaking of possessing eternal life in the present and having no reference to the future, that signification of the adjective appears in the Gospel of John, not in the Synoptic Gospels.⁷¹ Usage in the synoptics requires the quantitative connotation.⁷² That is especially true in the present passage where, even if “eternal punishment” were taken as an irrevocable decree of annihilation, still the parallel “eternal life” makes the meaning of eternal torment more probable.⁷³ It is a punishment that continues indefinitely for an endless duration.⁷⁴

A survey of the rest of Jesus’ teachings about the destiny of the lost leads

⁶⁶Cf. Bullinger, *Companion Bible* 1370; Broadus, *Gospel of Matthew* 513; Joseph Henry Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (New York: American Book, 1889) 353.

⁶⁷Broadus, *Gospel of Matthew* 513; Richard Chenevix Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament*, 9th ed. (1958 reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1880) 25.

⁶⁸Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon* 353.

⁶⁹Trench, *Synonyms of the New Testament* 25.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, 26.

⁷¹Even in the Gospel of John, however, the quantitative dimension is not totally absent.

⁷²Cf. McKnight, “Eternal Consequences or Eternal Consciousness?” 152 n. 14.

⁷³Eduard Schweizer, *The Good News According to Matthew*, trans. by David E. Green (Atlanta: John Knox, 1975) 478.

⁷⁴Phillip Schaff in Lange, *Matthew* 450.

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Nothing short of endless, unspeakable agony can characterize Jesus' descriptions of how the lost will fare in the future.

Luke 12:47-48 clarifies that all the goats will not endure the same degree of suffering:

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The measure of a person's punishment will depend on how much of the Lord's will a person knew and disobeyed, but even those knowing the least will face unimaginable anguish that never ends. Incidentally, an annihilationist has no response to the biblical teaching of degrees of punishment. If the lost are to become obliterated, degrees of nonexistence are impossible.

All this sounds too horrible to imagine. Yet one more aspect of the destiny of the goats is worse than all others. That comes in Matt 25:41 when Jesus tells them, "Depart from Me." Separation from the Lord Jesus Christ and from God forever is the worst punishment anyone could ever bear. Jesus had spoken of it earlier when He told those with an empty profession, "I never knew you; depart from me" (Matt 7:23); when the bridegroom responded to the five foolish virgins, "I do not know you" (Matt 25:10, 12); and when the head of the household pronounced sentence on the unprepared servant, "I do not know where you are from" (Luke 12:25, 27). The victim of everlasting punishment will have no one to turn to in his time of hopelessness. The child of God can always turn to Him when everyone else forsakes him, but helplessness will compound the goats' hopelessness. They will have no one left to resort to because they have distanced themselves from the only one who could have given them encouragement.

Predicaments Resolved by the Pronouncement

A serious predicament faces today's evangelicals, who must decide between a number of options as to how and where the lost will spend eternity:

gave a deeper meaning to the expressions that went beyond any idea of a culmination of suffering for the lost, contrary to the way Fudge interprets the expressions.

(1) The metaphorical view of punishment suggests that the punishment will be bad but nowhere near as awful as a literal interpretation of relevant passages would dictate.⁷⁷ It rests heavily on extrabiblical writings, however, rather than on Scripture itself, and upon a nonliteral interpretation of prophecy.⁷⁸

⁷⁷Cf. William V. Crockett, "The Metaphorical View," in *Four Views of Hell* 43-76; cf. Millard J. Erickson, "Principles, Permanence, and Future Divine Judgment: A Case Study in Theological Method," *JETS* 28/3 (September 1985):323-25.

⁷⁸Cf. John F. Walvoord, "Response to William V. Crockett," in *Four Views of Hell* 77-81.

(2) The annihilationist or conditional-immortality view proposes that the punishment will be unpleasant but that it will have an end, after which the victims will cease to exist.⁷⁹ Various comments in earlier discussion have shown how this view fails to meet the criteria set down by Jesus' teaching in Matt 25:31-46 and elsewhere.

(3) A second-chance view proposes that those who have heard the gospel and learned their lesson will eventually find salvation following a period of disciplinary punishment after being judged as a goat.⁸⁰ Jesus in His account of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31) clarifies that such will never be the case, however.

(4) Another second-chance view upholds the possibility that those who never heard the gospel will have another chance after the future judgment occurs,⁸¹ but Jesus in John 14:6 made it perfectly clear that He is the only way to God. A person failing to find that way, regardless of the reason, must face the same eternal consequences as the rest who are not among the sheep.

(5) The anonymous-Christian view supports the possibility of people meeting the King's criteria for entering the kingdom without ever hearing about Jesus.⁸² That view also is contrary to what Jesus taught in John 14:6: no one comes to the Father except through Jesus.

(6) The easy-believism view proposes that a person can enter the kingdom without works that evidence faith.⁸³ That view violates the principle that Jesus taught so consistently, i.e., that a person's faith will evidence itself by his works. The treatment of Jesus' brothers in the description of the sheep-and-goat

⁷⁹Pinnock, "The Conditional View" 135-66.

⁸⁰Cf. A. B. Bruce, "Synoptic Gospels" 306.

⁸¹Clark H. Pinnock, "Toward and Evangelical Theology of Religions," *JETS* 33/3 (September 1990):367-68.

⁸²Plummer, *Gospel According to S. Matthew* 350. A. B. Bruce writes, "All who truly love are implicit Christians" ("Synoptic Gospels" 306).

⁸³Zane C. Hodges, *The Gospel under Siege* (Dallas: Redención Viva, 1981) 33, 44-45, 65-66, 76-78, 96-97, 106-7, 122-23.

judgment is one way that a person's faith will show itself.

(7) The universalism view holds to the prospect that everyone will receive eternal life. One version of it suggests that by the time of the sheep and goat judgment everyone will have heard about Jesus and become Christians.⁸⁴ The problem with this view is that it ignores the presence of goats at this judgment scene as representative of those who will not receive eternal life.

⁸⁴Lange, "Matthew" 447; A. B. Bruce, "Synoptic Gospels" 305.

The wide diversity of options open to evangelicals regarding eternal punishment is unfortunate. Evangelical leaders could have put the position of annihilationism to rest at a conference held in 1989. In May of that year, The National Association of Evangelicals and Trinity Evangelical Divinity School co-sponsored a consultation on Evangelical Affirmations. The consultation debated the issue of conditional immortality versus eternal punishment vigorously both in private and plenary sessions and by a narrow vote stopped short of labeling annihilation as an unacceptable doctrine for evangelicals.⁸⁵ A substantial number of Seventh Day Adventists who had been invited to the consultation were instrumental in increasing the vote against the traditional doctrine of eternal punishment. The evangelical church today suffers the consequences of that unfortunate decision. That vote has enabled evangelicalism to swell its numbers by including groups and individuals who embrace the doctrine of conditional immortality, but the evangelical movement is inwardly weaker because it has shrunk back from endorsing what Jesus taught on the subject.

Throughout His ministry Jesus taught that the lost would depart into eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels and eternal punishment. In other words, they will suffer endless, conscious agony away from the presence of God and His Son. None of the other options that confuse the evangelical spectrum are viable in light of Jesus' view of eternal punishment.

⁸⁵The relevant paragraph in the statement approved by the conference reads, "We affirm that only through the work of Christ can any person be saved and be resurrected to live with God forever. Unbelievers will be separated eternally from God. Concern for evangelism should not be compromised by any illusion that all will be finally saved (universalism)" (*Evangelical Affirmations*, ed. by Kenneth S. Kantzer and Carl F. H. Henry [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990] 36). The paragraph avoids dealing with annihilationism or conditional immortality in that being "separated eternally from God" can mean being separated because of annihilation.

PAUL'S CONCEPT OF ETERNAL PUNISHMENT

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Paul did not deal in as much detail with eternal punishment as did Jesus in the gospels and John in Revelation, but what he did write matches with their fuller descriptions in many points. This is to be expected because of Paul's strong commitment to Jesus Christ. In Rom 2:6-10 he wrote about God's anger in punishing the lost and the anguish they will suffer as a result. In Rom 9:22-23 he spoke of "vessels of wrath fitted for destruction," a destruction that consists of an ongoing grief brought on as a consequence of God's wrath. Second Thess 1:8-9 is a third passage that reflects his teaching on eternal punishment. There "eternal destruction" represents a different Greek expression, one that depicts a ruin that lost people continue to suffer forever as they are denied opportunity to be with Christ. Paul's failure to use a number of other words in expressions that could have expressed annihilation of the unsaved is further indication of his harmony with Jesus and John in teaching an unending punishment that the unsaved will consciously experience.

* * * * *

Paul's remarks about eternal punishment do not delve into as much detail as Jesus' in the gospels or John's in the Apocalypse. Paul is reasonably clear that this destiny is a process that never ends and is consciously felt. Still, some have argued annihilation from his words in a fashion that puts a strain on the words' natural, probable idea. Where his terms for eternal punishment do not in themselves immediately nail down the duration or conscious nature of divine retribution, his intent is most reasonably in unity with what Jesus his Lord taught more explicitly and what fellow believers wrote in other New Testament books.

This study will show how Paul is consistent with Jesus¹ and John.² Then

¹Cf. in this issue Robert L. Thomas, "Jesus' View of Eternal Punishment"; also cf. Robert Peterson, *Hell on Trial* (Phillipsburg, N. J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1995).

²Cf. in this issue Trevor Craigen, "Eternal Punishment in John's Revelation"; Peterson, *Hell on Trial*.

it will review Paul's three clearest passages (Rom 2:6-10; 9:22; 2 Thess 1:8-9) and correlate his stance in further references.

Paul's Unity with Jesus and John

Jesus and John spell out the fullest detail in the NT on the duration and nature of punishment. Jesus said of the unsaved regarding retribution, "Their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched" (Mark 9:44). The natural force of those analogies is that the worm continues to be active while death as a process continues and that as the fire is never put out, the suffering which it is causing never ceases.

In the condition that the analogy illustrates, the reality is far worse. This also seems plain enough in Jesus' direct contrast: He distinguishes those cast into *eternal* damnation from those who enter into *eternal* life (Matt 25:46). As the eternal life never ends, it is natural on the other side in the verse that the eternal punishment never terminates. Many reason the greater probability that such passages convey unceasing, consciously felt retribution.³ Their arguments are more conclusive on what the words really mean than are attempts to construe annihilation.⁴

³E.g., Peterson, *Hell on Trial*.

⁴For annihilation, e.g., Clark Pinnock, *Theological Crossfire* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990); John R. W. Stott, *Essentials: A liberal-evangelical dialogue*, by David L. Edwards and John Stott (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1988) 312-20; Stephen Travis, *Christian Hope and the Future* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1980) 133-36; also idem, *I Believe in the Second Coming of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982) 198-99, where the author reasons strangely that a relation to God or non-relationship to Him is what matters, as if details with which Scripture fills out the destiny, including heaven or hell, can simply be set aside (cf. 199). "And if hell means being without Christ, that is an enormous tragedy, and the New Testament writers [sic., writers shaving off part of the NT claim, such as Travis] see little point in asking whether the lost continue to be conscious or are annihilated" (198). Cf. Travis for a fuller discussion in his work "The Place of Divine Retribution in the Thought of Paul," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Cambridge, England, July 1970, 116-42, particularly 136; cf. also Edward Fudge, *The Fire That Consumes* (Fallbrook, Calif.: Verdict, 1982), and idem, "The Final End of the Wicked," *JETS* 27 (1984):325-34, and "Putting Hell in its Place," *Christianity Today* 20 (Aug. 6, 1976):14-17.

John, one of the twelve whom Jesus disciplined and the writer of the Book of Revelation,⁵ adds further clarity in a consistent picture. Punishment that engulfs the unsaved has smoke that keeps rising up forever. The most persuasive inference is that the fire itself keeps burning perpetually (Rev 14:9-10). John in the same passage writes that the punished “have no rest day or night.” The picture is natural to claim that the anguish never at any time abates. Later, John depicts the unsaved, at their final judgment, being cast into the “lake of fire” in which they experience a “second death” (20:12-15). John also articulates the distinct idea that unsaved people continue to exist “outside” the eternal New Jerusalem (22:15), but in a place and state distinct from the blessed environment that all the redeemed share (21:1–22:5). He also relates that the “beast” and “false prophet,” apparently unsaved humans, join the rest of the lost in the “lake” (19:20). Later he tells about Satan also being cast in where these two humans yet exist, enduring punishment in that state (20:10). John never gives any hint that the punishment reaches a termination point.

Paul does not detail all this in full. But that he stands in unity with Jesus and John is most probable because of his commitment to Jesus Christ and because his conciseness is true to Scripture detail elsewhere.

Paul's Commitment to Jesus Christ

One can draw up a list of doctrinal details from Jesus' teachings that Luke, Paul, James, Peter, John, or Jude does not mention. He can also list facets any one of these include that one or more of the others never explicitly touch upon. The diversity of emphasis is natural even when these hold the same position as to details on various doctrines. A reader soon sees that most aspects of belief do expressly appear in several or all of them.

For example, Paul's letters delve into many matters not expressed in such detail, some not even mentioned, by Jesus or the others. Instances of this come to mind: the focus that all sinned in Adam (Rom 5:12 ff.), circumcision (2:25-29; Col 2:14), a detailed portrayal of human struggle with sin (Rom 7:14-25), specifics on the Spirit's help in prayer (8:26-27), massive correlation on God's plan for Jews and Gentiles (Romans 9–11), principles for dealing with “doubtful practices” (Romans 14; 1 Corinthians 8-10), and considerable detail about the believer's future resurrection (1 Cor 15:12 ff.).

Where checking is possible, these followers of Jesus stand in harmony, allegations of disagreement notwithstanding. Explanations in response to the allegations have been quite convincing.

Paul is deeply committed to Jesus Christ who turned his life around on the road to Damascus (Acts 9). He styles himself a “bondslave” of Christ (Rom 1:1),

⁵So Robert L. Thomas, *Revelation 1-7: An Exegetical Commentary* (Chicago: Moody, 1992) 2-19; Leon Morris, *The Revelation of St. John* (London: Tyndale, 1969) 25-34.

regards all things but loss that he may win Christ (Phil 3:4-10), expects Christ to judge even his motives (1 Cor 4:3-5) and the quality of his work (3:10-15; 2 Cor 5:10), and is careful to build on Christ the foundation (1 Cor 3:10-11). He counsels others to think what is true (Phil 3:8), celebrates that Christ within believers is the hope of glory (Col 1:27), and estimates Christ as the fulness of the Godhead in a bodily state (Col 2:9). Paul thinks it ever so important to speak the truth about God (Rom 3:4).

Paul's doctrine testifies to his fidelity to Christ. His emphases catch the eye as boldly as streaming banners. They claim Christ's atoning death (Rom 3:23-32) and faith as the means to gain justification through Christ's work on the cross (Romans 3-5). They teach believers' death and resurrection with Christ (Romans 6), and Christ as made to believers wisdom (1 Cor 1:30). They show that Christ is speaking in Paul (2 Cor 13:3). Paul was zealous that "the word of Christ" dwell richly in saints (Col 3:16). He testified that he delivered doctrine he had received from Christ (1 Cor 11:23; 15:3), and fervently anticipates being conformed to Christ (Phil 3:10). He sharply warns against false teaching (Rom 16:17). To him all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are in Christ (Col 2:3).

So utterly devoted to Christ was Paul that it is quite improbable that he was out of step with Jesus on the very crucial point of eternal punishment, a point that relates to those who reject the gospel which he championed so passionately (1 Cor 9:19-23). He maintained integrity with this gospel (cf. 2 Cor 4:2, 5; 13:8), and contemplated judgment for any who distort it (Gal 1:6-9). He honored the message that Christ entrusted (1 Thess 2:3-4). Likewise he appealed to others to rally steadfastly to the teaching (2 Thess 2:15).

Paul also is in concord with Peter, as at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15), and agrees with Christ's leaders on matters relating to the gospel (Gal 2:2). On points of doctrine Paul was right down the line with what all those loyal to Christ hold. He rebuked those who differ from what is properly taught about Christ (1 Cor 15:12).

Paul's expectations for the future were in accord with Christ about Christ giving reward to believers (Luke 19:12-27; 1 Cor 3:12-15), judging the unsaved (Matt 25:46; 2 Thess 1:8-9), giving eternal life to the justified and rendering eternal judgment to the unsaved (2 Thess 1:8-9).

In view of Paul's stalwart commitment to Christ, he would have been insincere and disloyal to pose a meaning on the destiny of the unsaved different from what Jesus taught or His other followers maintained. The consistent position is to see Paul in complete harmony with the view coming from the one he made it his ambition always to please (2 Cor 5:9), the One to whom his every thought was captive (2 Cor 10:4-5).

Hopefully Paul's unity with Christ clears the air about the concept he most probably means to convey on future punishment, just as on any issue.

Paul's Conciseness Is True to Scripture Detail Elsewhere

Where Paul or any biblical writer, inspired by God, is more brief than another, this does not suggest conflict. Two writers can agree in essence on truth even if one is more definitive. If they are truthful channels relating what the God who masterminds His Word directs them to write, He helps them have their act together.

The following sections will develop Paul's expressions about eternal punishment. These integrate with other Scripture about ultimate retribution. Paul's words at a given point harmonize with others' words and his own writings elsewhere.

Attention will focus on three passages where Paul says the most about eternal punishment.

Romans 2:6-10

The context of Rom 2:6-10 reasons that all in the human race are guilty of sin (cf. 3:23). They need justification through grace (1:17–3:20). Those who fault others while guilty themselves only register a self-indictment; they themselves are ripe for God's judgment. Those who oppose God, rather than humbly seeking His merciful salvation, keep heaping up a "treasury" (θησαυρός, *thesauros*) of wrath (v. 4).⁶ Their guilt stores up wrath, and God will hold them liable in final judgment.

Paul makes the point in Rom 2:6 that God will judge every human according to his/her works. True to Scripture, he writes what others have testified (Ps 62:12; Prov. 24:12). Works never save, but they become an index—even an out-flowing expression—of heart realities in faith or in a lack of faith. An illustration is the hands on a clock; they reflect the way the hidden mechanism is set within. This is true in respect to faith. God can indict sinners for their sin, provide for their salvation, actually save them, and after this enable them to have works that are the outworking of faith's transformation as His grace is a dynamic effectively at work within them (1 Cor 15:10). On the other hand, unbelief fosters works reflecting a sinful nature, its values and its motivations.

The OT has many examples of works of both saved and unsaved. Passages refer to the produce of the life that is, in faith and with God's blessing, good fruit (Ps 1:1-3; Mic 6:8; Zech 4:6). The just person, made and declared just by God's merciful gift (cf. Gen 15:6; Rom 4:1-5), exhibits faith's faithfulness to some degree in behavior. This is a product of God's enabling grace; it shows the reality of the salvation received as God's gift (Rom 6:22 f.). Those who have faith in God are of a genuine circumcision that is of the heart (Deut 4:6; Jer 4:4; Rom 2:25-29). On the other hand, the person without justification from God lives only out of the vacuum of his own insufficiency. His works are the products of sin's selfish instigations, reflecting disobedience in the heart's response to God. In Psalm 1, the ungodly do

⁶BAGD, 361.

not please God and gravitate to His judgment bar where they are discomfited, unable to maintain a case for their value system and its fruits (1:4-5). Similarly, in Hab 2:4, the unjust show no confidence in God. On the contrary, they reflect a collapse that betrays human insufficiency in all the things on which they rely. Habakkuk gives an example of such people right in his context, the Babylonians whom God will use to invade Judah. The invaders work out their own selfish impulses; their motives are not to do what pleases the Lord. God will indict them at the time He chooses and deal with their guilt that the same context goes on to list (2:5-20).

In Romans 2, Paul, as well, contrasts saved and unsaved. In the saved, grace through faith has its God-glorifying exercise in what they “seek”—Paul does not say that they “merit.”⁷ The values that they seek Paul makes clear in three examples in v. 7 and again in three at the close of the contrast in v. 10. The unsaved draw Paul’s focus second, in vv. 8-9. The apostle sees them as styled by their ambition keynoted in disobedience to God and His truth. Paul says that these must, as a result of their rejecting God, meet with His punishment.

In comments describing the punishment, Paul utilizes four terms. He sets these forth in two pairs. The first pair of words spotlights God’s anger in punishing (ὀργή [*org_*] and θυμός [*thymos*]). The last pair deals with the offenders’ anguish. They feel retribution that their own sin invited God to bring on them (θλ_ψις [*thlipsis*] and στενοχωρία [*stenoch_ria*]).

The word “and” (καί [*kai*]) joins the two words of the first pair and also the two of the last pair. But no “and” connects the two pairs. Paul’s first duet brings together *org_* (“anger, wrath”) and *thymos* (“fury, indignation”) which depict the standpoint of God, His displeasure in zeal that carries out retribution on those who have not believed Him (cf. 1:1-17), and have not repented in response to His kindness (2:4). After these two terms depict God’s punishment, Paul shifts the spotlight to the consequences, the pain or ordeal the condemned must endure.

“Wrath” (*org_*) and “fury” (*thymos*) occur together in Paul only here. In examples outside Paul they combine as here. In the LXX, Ps 78[79]:49 is an example. Another instance is Nebuchadnezzar, filled with “rage (*thymos*) and fury (*org_*)” at three Hebrews who defy his will, refusing to bow to his golden image (Dan 3:13). Micah 5:15 expects God to unleash vengeance in “anger (*org_*) and wrath (*thymos*)” on disobedient nations. As either term can be put first in the OT word order, the order also varies in the NT. Ephesians 4:31 uses *thymos* before *org_* of angry attitudes saints should avoid; Col 3:8 employs the reverse order of

⁷So C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Edinburgh, Scotland: T. & T. Clark, 1975) 1:147. To “seek” is frequently a good attitude in Scripture, e.g. to seek God (Ps 105:4; Heb 11:6), peace (Ps 34:14), justice (Isa 1:17), righteousness (Zeph 2:3); wisdom (Prov 2:4), God’s kingdom (Matt 6:33), etc. The point is in seeking what God elsewhere represents as the blessedness that His grace will bestow, i.e., glory (Rom 8:18, 21, 30; 1 Thess 2:12), honor (1 Pet 1:7), immortality (1 Cor 15:42, 50, 53 f.; 2 Tim 1:10), eternal life (Rom 5:21; 6:22-23).

attitudes; and in Rev 19:15 God judges massed armies in *thymos* and *org_*. Uncertainty attaches to making a clear-cut distinction in meaning between the two. Both refer to wrath, but some who comment on Romans 2 render *org_* as “wrath,” then *thymos* as God’s intense execution of this, His “indignation.” This distinction makes sense, yet falls short of unequivocal proof.

Whether or not one opts for these meanings in differentiating between the two words, one point is sure. As a pair, the words convey God’s anger to confront in a showdown those who have set themselves against Him. Paul does not in Romans 2 define the duration of the wrath that finalizes God’s posture toward the unsaved. As already said, Paul would reasonably fill in this detail in accord with the eternally continuing conscious punishment taught by his Lord and fellow-leaders writing NT books. Examples of the latter are John⁸ and Jude.⁹

“Wrath” can occur in the present situation (Rom 1:18-32; 1 Thess 2:16) as man’s sin ensnares him in its consequences and has its appropriate effect. In some passages wrath is future, as is Paul’s emphasis (Rom 2:5, 8; 1 Thess 5:9). Jesus warned the unsaved of “wrath” yet to come (Matt 3:7), and later set eternal punishment in contrast to eternal life (25:46). As the “life” goes on without end, the other destiny, punishment, would also most naturally be just as perpetual. John understood the unsaved to continue still existing in their ultimate state while New Jerusalem bliss is experienced without cessation by the redeemed. The unsaved are still present, even while excluded, “outside,” in a place that is fitting for them, distinct from the city where the saved enjoy bliss without cessation (22:15). Of course, John in context specifies that other place as the “lake of fire” (20:15; 21:8).

As Jesus did, Paul forecast a “day of wrath” when God will reckon ultimately with those who have rejected Him (Rom 2:5; cf. Col 3:6). Romans 5:8 follows up on Romans 1–2 with the wrath God will mete out in that time. Paul conceives of those who have faith as being saved from wrath through Christ (Rom 5:9). In Rom 2:8, the “wrath and indignation” refer to a destiny that is opposite to “eternal life” in v. 7. Of course, Paul sees retribution as “eternal” in 2 Thess 1:8-9. And in 9:22-23, “vessels [recipients] of mercy” with eternal life are put in awesome contrast to “vessels [recipients] of wrath,” the latter not having eternal life.

Paul’s other word pair in Rom 2:8-9 about final punishment concentrates

⁸Cf. Craigen, “Eternal Punishment in John’s Revelation”; cf. also earlier in the present article.

⁹Cf. Jude 13: these rejecters of God’s way fit various descriptions (vv. 12-13), e.g., “wandering stars,” etc. For such stars (persons), the ultimate destiny is “the black darkness . . . reserved forever.” Reserving a state for people assumes that the people are to be consigned there, still existing, or the need for reservation is pointless.

on the painful ordeal of the unsaved. *Thlipsis* means “affliction” or “tribulation,” sometimes that of believers’ sufferings in present life trials (Rom 5:3; 8:35; 12:12). But, as in Rom 2:8, the term also can describe the woeful pressure God justly deals unbelievers in ultimate retribution (2 Thess 1:6).

The second word, *stenoch_ria*, depicts the “distress” or “anguish” the unsaved undergo. Th term occurs often with *thlipsis* in the LXX here and elsewhere in the NT for believers’ painful present difficulties (Rom 8:35; 2 Cor 6:4). But in its context in Rom 2:9, the ordeal is that of the *unsaved*; it is *their* ultimate situation.

As with the first two terms already discussed, those who write about this second pair frequently suggest a distinction that is possible but lacks certainty. Cranfield in his Romans commentary, for example, sees here the painful distress that God’s dealing of affliction brings when the punished feel it.

Whether the two terms are synonymous or distinct for pain, the afflicted feel the pain. Paul does not go on into detail to clarify the duration of the punishment. However, Paul’s utter avowal of Christ’s lordship places its powerful impress on what he teaches as truth *even about final destinies*. This points to his harmony with Jesus. The duration is unending, not only as pertaining to eternal *life* but just as much to eternal *punishment* (cf. “eternal destruction [ruin],” later on 2 Thess 1:9).

Among points etched clearly in Rom 2:6-10 is this. Paul expects the unsaved to bear God’s *indignation*, a reality very different from *annihilation*. And in the second pair of words, Paul’s concept is people’s *distress*, not their *deletion*.

One is free to think differently, to imagine that he has insight to modify the meaning of what Paul says in an outright fashion or to resolve Paul’s words to mean something not really as natural as what the words normally call for. But an insistent sensitivity to keep fidelity with Paul’s words and a conviction that he writes the truth leads others to an unwavering concept of what God verily conveys by His servant.

To Paul in Romans, the God who loves (5:8) also is resolute to uphold justice, in a balance. God is righteous (2:5), true (3:4), faithful (3:3). Apart from the transforming that His grace can effect, men are unrighteous and untruthful (1:18), unthankful (1:21, 25), perverters of His glory (1:23), lustful (1:24), and deniers of His rights as Creator (1:25). They prove worthy of the penalty God thinks it just to assign them (1:27; 3:23), profiled by a veritable “syllabus of sins” (1:29-31). They stand self-condemned by their inconsistency (2:1), treasuring up wrath that will inevitably exact its toll on themselves (2:5). Paul urges, “Let God be true,” even though every man be found a liar (3:4). He discerns that man is an upstart having no valid right to take issue with God’s sovereign wisdom or code of ethics in doing what He does (9:20).

Paul’s contrast in Rom 2:7-10 is between blessing and blight. Some persevere in doing good. They “seek” validly (never “merit”!) glory, honor, immortality. They will receive in its ultimate fulness God’s gift, eternal life. Otherwise in Romans, Paul holds in forthright clarity that indeed some *do* obey the

Lord. They do this as the saved, moved of course by grace through faith and manifesting what is good, i.e., fruit (2:25-29; 4:19-21; 6:17, 22; 8:3, 14; 13:8-10). They obey even if imperfectly, helped by the Spirit, who gives a true circumcision of the heart (2:29; 8:3, 14). Paul always expects the Spirit's power for pleasing God (15:13). These who "seek" in the way of 2:7, 10 are viewed as reaching the consequence on which they set their values, realizing fulfillment of a hope that shaped the way they lived (cf. 8:25), as in Psalm 1. Their destiny has its eventual eternal daybreak in a state of "glory, honor, and peace." Paul refers to "peace" (v. 10), whereas in v. 7 his third word for what is hoped for is "immortality." This is plausibly because that immortal bliss is free of the sin principle that stirred discord with and enmity toward God (cf. 7:14-25). In it the saved will realize peace as there at last they devote themselves exclusively to God, set free forever from any taint of what causes friction with Him, people or things.

On the other hand, those who insist on clutching the bubble of selfish will must see that bubble burst due to God's moral judgment. God prevails. He has the moral perfection, the justice and its right, to judge as infinite wisdom knows best. In this case Paul's concept of the punishment that the unredeemed feel is thoroughly integrated in the will of the Lord who is his life (Phil 1:21; Col 3:1-4), his authority, his all in all.

Romans 9:22-23

The significance of Rom 9:22-23 for this study centers in Paul's figure to describe the unsaved. They are "vessels of wrath fitted for destruction." Paul portrays those whom God condemns in contrast to "vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand to glory." The main issue crucial to this study attaches to the meaning of the word "destruction" in relation to the nature of future punishment.

Another exegetical issue is to identify whom Paul sees as fitting vessels for destruction. "Fitted" is from the middle/passive form of the aorist tense of *κατατίζω* (*katartizō*). Viewed as passive, the vessels (unsaved) are prepared by *God* for destruction. This follows from God's being the potter who shapes people in the context (vv. 20-21). But if Paul means the middle idea, the *people* shape or fit themselves for destruction by their unbelief and lack of repentance. Reasons are plentiful for either view, but one's view on this does not affect the main issue of this paper, what "destruction" means.

God fitting vessels for this destiny is cogent. (1) *God* hardened the Pharaoh (v. 18); (2) *God* is the potter who prepares a vessel, representing a person (21-23); (3) *God* being the one who prepares some for glory, it would appear that *God* prepares others not for glory, i.e., for wrath and destruction; (4) *God* in other passages prepares for destinies, in Paul (1 Thess 5:9) and in other writers (1 Pet 2:8; Rev 13:8).

One also observes factors that favor the middle voice idea, that *people* suit themselves to a destiny. (1) Paul states definitely that *God* prepares vessels for glory,

yet Paul withholds this particularity from the phrase about other vessels, possibly doing this deliberately; (2) God is immediately regarded as “enduring” vessels, as if *they* were fitting themselves in a sense, disobedient to Him, and He was bearing this (cf. 2:8); (3) “Whoever” in 10:11, 13 has its place, as does the phrase in 5:17, “those who receive,” showing that a legitimate *human* response has a role as to destiny. (4) Other Scripture sees *people* as responsible to believe, and condemned because *they* do not (John 3:16, 18-19; 8:24; Rom 10:3-4). (5) In a similar passage about destroying a vessel, Jeremiah shatters the vessel to bits (Jeremiah 19). That context rather heavily shows that the vessel, representing *Israel* whom God must judge, fits *itself* for destruction by refusing to believe and repent.

Reason fairly favors either view. God in His sovereign control of all fits men, and in concord with this men also fit themselves even if the final resolution of the tension lies only within God’s infinite mind. The opposite also has some kind of interplay: God fits some for glory in the final, ultimate sense as taking the initiative and giving certainty. It is compatible with this that men in their response prepare themselves to enter into and have eminence within the realm of glory finally as those who remain unjustified are liable to punishment because they do not believe and turn to God (cf. Paul in Acts 20:21; 26:18-20).

But again, whichever way one resolves the above issue, the crux for the present study is the nature of punishment. What is meant in the “destruction” (*πόλεια*, *ap_leia*)? Paul in Phil 3:19 uses the same word in writing of the ungodly who thrive on self-serving, sensual cravings. Their “end is destruction.” Both the word “end” (*τέλος*, *telos*) and the term “destruction” (*ap_leia*) are part of Paul’s vocabulary to describe the final state of the unsaved.

The “end.” The *telos* in Philippians 3 is that of the unsaved, “enemies of the cross of Christ” (v. 18). Their god is not the Lord, but their lust, gratifying self-indulging appetites. Not God’s glory but what caters to their own shame characterizes them. Their minds fix on earthly things as the value base that inspires them and consumes their thoughts.

By sharp contrast, Paul clarifies, “our citizenship,” that of believers in Christ, is not earthly but in heaven (cf. Col 3:1-4). From the throne of government in the heavenly capital of their spiritual empire, believers await a scheduled visitation by their Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ (3:20; cf. 1 Thess 4:13-18). Their future will be one of Christ transforming their bodies into glorious resurrection bodies styled after His own (3:21). As the saved, the destiny awaiting them is God’s kingdom and glory (1 Thess 2:12), consistent with other NT passages in which it is eternal in Christ’s presence (1 Thess 5:18; cf. John 14:1-2; Rev 21:1-22:5). How great is the contrast between this and the outlook for the unsaved, whose “end” or *telos* is “destruction.” In such a contrast, the picture is not that of *cessation by extinction* but of ruin and emptiness, void of all that gives blissful meaning to the saved. Paul also would agree with the awful anguish in whatever fiery retribution entails in 2

Thessalonians 1.

In Rom 6:21-22, Paul conceives of the *telos* for the unjustified. He contrasts it with the *telos* God holds in prospect for the justified. This *telos* is the “end, goal, or final outcome.” The goal is the fitting fruition to which a given life leads. For the unsaved, Paul sees the *telos* as “death” (6:21), defined soon afterward as the wages or pay-off that sin hands out, or to which it leads (6:23). By contrast, the justified are having (present tense) fruit of their eternal life in relation to sanctification now, and the *telos* or ultimate outcome, the final goal to which justification and sanctification reaches, “eternal life” in its fuller realization. This eternal life Paul sees as God’s gift (23) as distinguished from the merited pay check that sin drafts, “death.”

Setting the two in direct opposition does not suggest that the “end” or “death” for the unsaved is extinction. It suggests a destiny that is the appropriate outcome, the final, irreversible state in contrast to “eternal life” that has its ongoing duration. Such a finalized outcome, yet continuing existence, though in wreckage willfully self-inflicted, is consistent with Jesus’ direct contrast of eternal *punishment* with eternal *life* (Matt 25:46). It also is in concord with His figure of the ungodly persons’ worm [in their estate of death] not dying, the flame that brings them grief not being snuffed out, their weeping and gnashing of teeth in suffering. The “end” is not a situation of nothingness void of any existing being that remains to suffer anguish. No passage envisions persuasively that the grief is brought to a finish and after that all is nothingness.

Paul’s concept of the “end” and “destruction” is also consistent with John’s words. John is clear enough that punishment is ongoing (Revelation 14, 20, 21, 22). Paul’s idea further makes sense with the two destinies he sees in Romans 9, “destruction” or “glory.” Those are the two that his epistles consistently distinguish. In contrast to the final condition of the unjustified, the justified will be in a sphere of glory (Rom 8:18-25; 2 Cor 4:17 f.; Col 3:4; 1 Thess 2:12; 2 Thess 1:10-12).

The destruction. Thomas has shown in this issue that *ap_lean* is widely used of a state that continues on.¹⁰ Besides this term, Paul has another word for “destruction,” *λεθρος* (*olethros*). It will emerge in the section on 2 Thess 1:9. Paul defines the span of destruction there by the adjective “eternal.” And in that same context Paul writes other details that reflect on an unceasing state in which the unsaved are to experience the destruction (ruin). Geisler’s analogy seems apt, even though falling short of the awful fullness to picture eternal ruin. He describes eternal human destruction by automobiles that still exist but are in a wreckage area.¹¹

In 2 Cor 11:15 Paul says that the *telos* of false teachers will be “according to their works.” This shows that the final outcome will be in a destiny that God

¹⁰Cf. Thomas, “Jesus’ View.”

¹¹Norman Geisler and Thomas Howe, *When Critics Ask* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor, 1992) 493.

deems suited to a false teacher's works. Paul would understand the works as the ungodly issue (cf. Rom 6:21) of a life void of faith (cf. Rom 10:17) and repentance (2:4; cf. Acts 20:21; 26:18-20).

Now Paul's third main passage deserves attention.

2 *Thessalonians 1:8-9*

In 2 Thess 1:8-9 is Paul's fullest word on final punishment. In his context two things stand out in sharp contrast (1:3 ff.). The first is for *believers* who are hurt by persecutions now (1:3-6), but God will give them eternal "rest" in their ultimate estate (1:7a, cf. vv.10-12). Then Paul's second contrast is for the *unsaved*. They now have the upper hand, afflicting believers, but ultimately God will punish the afflicting ones themselves in a great turnabout.

Paul uses this flow of thought to spell out the *nature* and *duration* of punishment. This, Paul reasons, will include three details that he mentions in this passage.

(1) The revelation of Christ (v. 7). The apostle says that the Lord Jesus shall be "revealed," using the word *ποκαλύπτω* (*apokalyptō*, "I reveal"). The future tense looks to Christ's second advent unveiling. The statement harmonizes with many NT texts that place the process of judgment at and following the end of this present age, or Christ's second coming. This is the affirmation of Jesus (Matt 16:27 f.; 26:64; Mark 14:62), John (Rev 1:7; 14:9-11), and other NT witnesses (Jude 13). The Lord's coming "from heaven" fits with other biblical passages. Judgment issues from a *heavenly* source, with the God of heaven wielding the last, unanswerable word over those whose power runs out (Dan 2:35; Matt 26:64; Rev 14:13 ff.).

The revelation is of the *Lord* Himself, and from *heaven*. It is also "in a fiery flame" (*en puri phlogos*). Some refer the fire to the appearance of Christ and the angels when revealed. The meaning that this conveys relates to the glorious, majestic splendor shining out at Christ's coming to reign, as He was dazzling at His transfiguration (Matt 17:2). Thomas associates fire, for example, with the glory when Christ is revealed, as earlier in v. 7.¹² One recalls the glory sheen from God who judges in Ezek 1:26-28. Or it possibly connects with the example of the bright flame of literal fire attending the appearance of the angel of the LORD (a theophany, cf. Acts 7:30), miraculous as when it blazed in the burning bush (Exod 3:2).¹³ Still others view fire in Paul's language here as related to the words that follow, i.e., the

¹²Robert L. Thomas, "2 Thessalonians," *EBC* 11:86.

¹³Cf. Thomas Constable, "2 Thessalonians," *Bible Knowledge Commentary* (Wheaton, Ill.: Scripture Press, 1983) 2:715; J. E. Frame also points to the manner of the revelation from heaven, using Exod 3:2 (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Paul to the Thessalonians* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1970] 232). One should remember that Exod 3:2 and other passages describe the theophanies not only as shining but as connected with fire also. He should also note that listing references about shining where contexts do not focus on judgment is not relevant to 2 Thess 1:7-8, a context in which judgment is prominent.

irresistible and unceasing sentence of fire from Christ that will lash forth upon and envelope those He judges.¹⁴

Any of the views glorifies Christ. The last interpretation appears to have more evidence in its favor in 2 Thessalonians 1. First, Paul claims that Christ speaks in him (2 Cor 13:3), and it is fitting that Paul be a channel of Jesus' teaching about *judging* men with the fire of Gehenna. This can be the case whether that be taken to mean future fire of the same literal nature as that known now on earth, a fire that is literal but of a unique nature suited to judging humans eternally without incinerating them, or a figure (fire) depicting a means of real punishment bringing agony beyond what human minds now are capable of grasping (cf. Dan 7:9-10; Matt 5:22, 29; 10:28).

¹⁴So Charles Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990) 226-27; I. H. Marshall, *First and Second Thessalonians*, New Century Bible (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983) 177; Friedrich Lang, "π_ρ," *TDNT* 6:944-45. The above sources portray fire as a means that Christ uses in judgment, unlike George Milligan, who says, "There is certainly no thought here of 'fire' as the actual instrument for the destruction of the ungodly" (*St. Paul's Epistles to the Thessalonians* [1980 reprint, Minneapolis: Klock & Klock, n.d.] 90), or Ernest Best (*A Commentary on the First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians* [London: Adam and Charles Black, 1972] 259).

Second, Paul's phrase more naturally means a fiery flame than an outshining magnificence, though fire could have a bright appearance.¹⁵ Third, judgment that involves fire *coming upon the unsaved* suits Isa 66:15. Isaiah writes of the Lord coming "in fire" dealing out "flames of fire" in judgment (cf. again Dan 7:9-10; cf. also passages where the Lord coming with fire refers to His judging of sinners, Ps 50:3; 97:3). Fourth, John, tutored by the same Lord Paul knew, writes of a "lake of fire," i.e., some kind of judgmental reality that he describes as "fire" (Rev 20:15).

That refers to the ultimate state into which God casts the unsaved (cf. 21:8). Paul likewise sees it as relevant in his context with "eternal destruction" (2 Thess 1:9). Fifth, at this point in Paul's context in 2 Thessalonians his focus is directed to judgment that causes *affliction* to the unsaved, not just to the *appearance* of Christ.

This does not deny that He will shine in His coming. For His glory belongs to one capable of judging sinners and sin, as many passages bear witness.¹⁶ The "flame of fire" is more than a radiance; it depicts fire used as the element in the judgmental process itself.¹⁷ It is fire issuing from Christ as He slays the wicked (Isa 11:4; 2 Thess 2:8). This fire continues in a process of "eternal" punishment as in v. 9 and Rev 20:15. The context of 2 Thessalonians speaks of the implementing of retribution against the unsaved when it mentions "retribution" or "vengeance" and "eternal destruction."

Paul's thought in context directly emphasizes the punishment.

(2) The retribution by Christ (2 Thess 1:8-9). Paul writes of Christ and His angels dealing out "retribution" (κδικησις, *ekdik_sis*). The use of *ekdik_sis* is appropriate to refer to future judgment. The term means "vengeance," but does not suggest a vindictive spirit in God, rather "*righteous* retribution" in a fair view of what God discerns the unsaved deserve. In context they afflicted *God's* people, and this was striking against the *God* of these people. In 1 Thess 4:6 Paul uses a form of the word; the Lord renders "retribution," as in 2 Thess 1:8. *Ekdik_sis* is "*just* vengeance," consistent with the "judgment" that the context shows is "*righteous*" in v. 5; both words come from the same word stem as does the term for God's being "*just*" in v. 6.

God the Father has rendered to God the Son, described as like a son of man in Dan 7:13-14, authority to measure out judgment as in the latter verses of Daniel 7. This is true also in John 5:27. Luke writes of Paul saying that Christ will judge as the man God has appointed to do this (Acts 17:31). God deals deserved judgment

¹⁵It is, lit., "flame of fire," whereas NT descriptions quite different from it depict Christ's brightness when He appears or thereafter: the sign of His glory in the clouds (Matt 24:30; cf. 16:27); eyes like a flame of fire, i.e., bright and penetrating to judge thoroughly (Rev 1:14; cf. 2:23); His feet glistening as polished bronze glowing in a furnace (Rev 1:15), and Christ shining as the light that lights up the New Jerusalem (Rev 21:23). Also, none of the NT passages about Jesus' transfiguration refer to *fire* or *flame* in connection with *shining* or *glory* (cf. Matt 17:2-5; Mark 9:2-3; Luke 9:29-32; 2 Pet 1:16-17).

¹⁶In Daniel 7, the picture is books, open to depict exposing men's works, which God judges.

¹⁷Cf. n. 15; cf. also n. 14, especially in Lang, "π_ρ" 944-45, and BAGD, 737.

(Deut 32:35; Ps 93:1; Is. 59:17 f.; Nah 1:2; Rom 12:19; 2 Cor 7:11; Heb 10:30). The same word, *ekdik_sis*, occurs again of God's second advent justice, vindicating His elect (Luke 18:7). Paul in 2 Thessalonians 1 does as Jesus did, referring to God's retribution on the unsaved in relation to wrong they inflicted on His people. This does not deny other sins they also must answer for, as Thomas in this series shows (cf. 2 Thess 2:10, 12).¹⁸

¹⁸Cf. Thomas, "Jesus' View."

Paul says that this just judgment comes “to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.” Since he uses the phrase “to those” twice here, he may intend to mark out two groups. If so, he allows for some who do not know God—these who did not hear the gospel per se but are still without excuse before God (cf. Rom 2:12-15)—and others who did hear the gospel but did not honor it in a faith/obedience response.¹⁹ Another view of the repeated “to those” has Paul’s wording embrace all of the unsaved as defined in a twofold description.

All do not *know* God in a saving reality and all of these also do not *obey* His gospel. That is, every one of these lacks both the *relationship* with God that the saved have and the *response* that those who do know him in genuine salvation have.²⁰

Either view fits well with Scripture. Overall, more evidence favors relating both descriptions to all the unsaved. Paul’s context has not been referring to the heathen who never heard as he does in Rom 2:12-15. Also, the focus here is on *disobedience*, rather than *not hearing*. Paul has a Hebraic background which often describes the same truth two ways in parallelism (Ps 149:7; Jer 10:25). In the very context of 2 Thessalonians 1, v. 10 uses a repeated *tois* for “saints” and “those who believed,” the same group. Paul refers even to Gentiles as disobedient (Rom 11:30-32). Not only this, but unsaved Jews also do not genuinely know God (Jer 2:8; 4:22; 9:3, 6; Hos 5:4; John 8:19, 44, 55; 15:21; 16:3; 17:25; cf. 1 John 3:1).

Whether the phrases distinguish two groups that make up all the condemned

¹⁹Thomas sees the unsaved in two distinct groups (“2 Thessalonians” 87). The first is Gentiles who are “without God” (Eph 2:12), the phrase being an OT way of referring to Gentiles (Jer 10:25; cf. Ps 79:6[LXX, 78:6]). The second includes Jews who know God but do not believe and obey, as in Rom 10:16. Cf. Frame, *A Critical Commentary* 233, and Marshall, *Thessalonians* 177 f., for the same essential view.

²⁰Leon Morris, *The Epistles of Paul to the Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984) 121; Best, *Thessalonians* 260, who holds that repetition of the article does not imply two groups but is “to emphasize the enormity of their action”; Wanamaker, *Thessalonians* 227-28; Roger Aus, *Comfort in Judgment: The Use of the Day of the Lord and Theophany Tradition in Second Thessalonians 1* (unpublished PhD dissertation, Yale University, New Haven, Conn., 1971) 88; John R. W. Stott, *The Gospel and the End of Time: The Message of 1 and 2 Thessalonians* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1991) 148.

or refer to all by two descriptions that profile all, Paul's essential concept on the nature of punishment remains. Paul expects punishment for all the unsaved. It is to "pay the penalty of eternal destruction," a reality that is stark and certain, like his phrase "the wages of sin is death" (Rom 6:23), i.e., the wages that sin will pay to the unsaved. All who reject God's free gift must face this eternal death as they depend on their own works and fall liable to God's righteous judgment without having Christ's righteousness to be their surety.

"Eternal destruction" is, without a definite article, *λεθρον α_ώνιον* (*olethron ai_ nion*). Paul's use is the only NT instance which combines this word for "destruction" with the adjective "eternal."

Olethros has various usages. In secular Greek, it depicts "destruction" in corruption of physical death.²¹ The term also can denote a loss of money, being "wiped out" or "reduced to ruin."²² In the LXX the word appears in Jeremiah's description of an army wiped out (Jeremiah 31(48):3). Then Paul uses *olethros* of destruction that overtakes those who hold out foolish hopes of peace and safety (1 Thess 5:3). In 1 Tim 6:9, temptations and lusts catapult the indulgent into "corruption and ruin," using first *olethros*, then *ap_ leian*. The earlier term depicts "corruption," possibly in a shattered state of existence that is pathetic in debauchery, or else the final temporal step in corruption, physical death. In the same phrase, *ap_ leian* portrays "ruin."²³ The words together convey "complete destruction,"²⁴ or the derelict stage of wreckage while yet physically alive is followed by the more final, utter temporal ruin in physical death. Another possibility is that the ruin that comes in bodily death also thrusts one on to the utter, irrevocable eternal spiritual ruin (cf. Heb 9:27). The context suggests this as it refers to ultimate destiny (vv. 7, 12, 14, 17, 19).

In 1 Cor 5:5, Paul counsels the church at Corinth to deliver over to Satan an unrepentant church member guilty of sexual offense for "destruction (*olethron*) of the flesh." Probably this refers to bodily ruin in physical death.²⁵ Paul hopes that the discipline will provoke a remedy before death, repentance, so that the offender might turn out to be saved at the future judgment.²⁶

²¹J. S. Schneider, "*λεθρος*," *TDNT*, 5:168.

²²Cf. *ibid.*, "loss of money"; for military destruction, cf. several references in Wanamaker, *Epistles to the Thessalonians* 228.

²³George W. Knight, *Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992) 256.

²⁴Cf. Schneider, "*λεθρον*" 169; cf. also Knight, *Pastoral Epistles* 256.

²⁵Lieselotte Mattern, *Das Verständnis des Gerichtes bei Paulus, Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments*, XLVII (Zurich/Stuttgart: Zwingli Verlag, 1966) 103-8.

²⁶Cf. John A. Witmer, "Who is My Brother?," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 126 (1969):156: as in a case where the same phrase occurs ("deliver to Satan"), 1 Tim 1:20, Paul's aim is not condemnation but reclamation through repentance. The man's sinful indulgence, similar to that of the "unrighteous" who are unsaved (6:9 f.) "casts suspicion on the reality of his profession of faith (1 Cor 5:11)." Whatever his state, repentance can assure his winding up saved in the ultimate situation.

In 1 Corinthians 5, ruin exacting its toll on a person who still exists is in view. Distinct from this, *olethros* in 2 Thessalonians 1 as “eternal destruction” is the ultimate kind of ruin. Destruction in 1 Cor 5:5 leaves an offender still existing (even when physical death occurs), but he must face a later verdict, after physical death, in “the day of Jesus Christ.” Likewise God can carry through with the destruction in 2 Thessalonians 1 though those upon whom He is executing it are continuing to exist while suffering it.

Ai nios is, of course, related to the noun *αἰών* (*ai n*), “age, generation, space of time in the past or future.” The word’s usage in a given contextual connection (secular Greek or NT) suggests the meaning span that is most pertinent in each case. In the NT the word family often means eternity absolutely, what will not end (Luke 1:55; John 6:51; 12:34; Heb 7:17; 1 John 2:17). Used of God, the word bears this absolute sense. He is “the eternal God” (LXX, Gen 21:33; Isa 26:4; 40:28; Rom 16:26), and other NT writers employ it of Christ as absolutely eternal (Heb 1:10 [from Ps 101:26]; 13:8; Rev 1:17; 2:8). The adjective *ai nios* is linked not only with God (Rom 16:26), but also with “eternal comfort” in the same context of 2 Thessalonians (2:16). It occurs for God’s “eternal purpose” (Eph 3:11) and a believer’s glorified body as an “eternal house in the heavens” (2 Cor 5:1).

In other descriptions the word also refers to what will never end: “the eternal covenant” (Heb 13:20), “eternal salvation” (5:9), “eternal redemption” (9:12), and “eternal inheritance” (9:15). The term speaks of eternal realities such as “judgment” (6:2), God’s eternal power and Godhood (Rom 1:20), eternal “fire” (Matt 18:8; 25:41), “punishment” (25:46), “dominion” (1 Tim 6:16), “glory” (2 Tim 2:10; 1 Pet 5:10), unpardonable “sin” (Mark 3:29), “bonds” that hold wicked angels in their sinful condition (Jude 6), and the “gospel” that will never cease to have relevance (Rev 14:6).

Every reality here denotes what continues, never ceasing. Such a duration is distinct from something blotted out, gone, put in the past forever. That gives additional confidence about Paul’s natural meaning as unending punishment when he writes of “eternal destruction [ruin]” in 2 Thess 1:9. The destruction is a reality in which the unsaved are in a ruin that continues to be their state while they go on enduring the “affliction” that God repays them in 2 Thess 1:6.

Paul’s says more about the nature of punishment.

(3) The exclusion from the presence of Christ (2 Thess 1:9). Paul depicts that the punishment is “away from [*πρό*, *apo*] the presence [face] of the Lord and away from [second *apo*] the glory of His power.” If the apostle’s idea is annihilation, he does not use any clear term to specify a blotting from existence. Rather, his double *apo* places a marked emphasis on exemption from being in the Lord’s presence. This is not absolute, for God is everywhere present, having awareness and ability to operate there. The exclusion is rather in the sense of any possibility for acceptance, bliss, or fellowship. The picture describes rejection, being shut out (cf. Luke 13:30, the door shut), not rubbed out of existence; it is exclusion, not extinction.

It refers to banning and barrenness (privation), not blotting out. It is more than even this as it involves, actively, the indescribable anguish (cf. Rom 2:9) of the fire so many passages use to depict suffering pain.

In the banishment is utter ruin, the final step in having failed to seize the opportunity to know the God whom to know is “glory, honor, immortality, eternal life” (Rom 2:7). Paul sees the saved eternally “with Christ” (Phil 1:23; Col 3:4; 1 Thess 4:17), but the unsaved separated to exist without Him.²⁷ Plummer’s preference for *olethron* meaning “ruin,” not destruction into nothingness, is sensitive to the evidence.²⁸

Paul is explicit about realities from which the banishment excludes the unsaved. These the saved enjoy: relief that soothes (7a), glorifying Christ (10), and marveling at what is wonderfully exhilarating (10).

Other Considerations

Two other factors in Paul’s letters agree with the above evidence that punishment is conscious and continuous.

Assertions of not inheriting the kingdom. In accord with Jesus, Paul viewed God’s kingdom as a leading designation for the realm of blessedness. Jesus saw the benefit of the saved as one of being forever in the kingdom in the final, unending sense (Matt 19:16 ff.; Luke 19:12-27). Paul conceived of the privilege the unsaved miss under the phrase “shall not inherit the kingdom” (1 Cor 6:9-10; Gal 5:21; cf. Eph 5:5). He said, as well, that flesh and blood—man in his natural, mortal estate only—shall not inherit the kingdom, i.e., live in a glorified estate (1 Cor 15:50).

²⁷Herman Sasse, “α_ὄν,” *TDNT*, 1:197.

²⁸Alfred Plummer, *A Commentary on St. Paul’s Second Epistle to the Thessalonians* (London: Paternoster Row, 1918) 25. He adds: “Disastrous loss seems to be implied rather than the extinction of existence.”

The penalty for the unsaved is being *barred* from entrance into the blessing, not *blotted* out of existence. They will continue to have their being though shut out from welfare with God and with His people, rejected from the blessing that the saved share and the sphere in which they enjoy it. Paul's phrasing is very naturally in harmony with Jesus' descriptions of those God rejects. Access is denied them to the state of blessedness, being pictured by a door that shuts them out (Matt 8:11-12; Luke 13:23-30). It is consistent in Matt 25:30 that a so-called but bogus servant, not genuinely saved,²⁹ cannot enter as others do into the sphere of gladness and festivity (vv. 21, 23). He, by contrast, is cast into "outer darkness."³⁰ There, rather, he undergoes distress in weeping and gnashing of teeth (25:30).³¹

²⁹That Matt 25:30 refers to an unsaved person is probable because: (1) this fits best with Jesus' pattern in contrasts between people in Matthew 24–25 (cf. 24:40-41 and 24:45-51 where the wicked "servant" is cut in pieces [v. 51] and placed with the hypocrites and with "unbelievers" [Luke 12:46]); (2) "cast" to some other place normally refers to the rejected (Matt 8:12; 13:42, 50; Luke 13:28).

³⁰So it appears to be in other passages (Matt 8:12; 22:13). Scripture nowhere supports a "zone" of "darkness" for the saved, whether in passages referring to a future millennium or to the eternal state. However, the unsaved are banished into darkness (Jude 13).

³¹The reasonableness of weeping relating to anguish of the unsaved fits from Ps 112:10.

Paul's concept also harmonizes with the apostle John's descriptions, which contrast the estate in which the unsaved exist³² with that which the redeemed enjoy.³³ The saved enjoy various aspects of blessing in the New Jerusalem (Rev 21:3-7; 22:1-5). On the other hand, the unsaved are not only excluded *from* such blessing, they are rather *in* the "lake of fire" (21:8).³⁴ Revelation 22:15, where the immediate context depicts the blessedness of the redeemed, pointedly says that the unsaved are "outside" the eternal city in which the only human heirs are Christ and all the saved (21:7).³⁵ As with Paul's idea of the rejected being barred from inheritance privileges, so John draws a definite distinction between these *in* the "lake of fire" (21:8) and people *in* the New Jerusalem who are sons, overcomers, heirs (21:7).³⁶ The text represents the unsaved not as *obliterated*, but *outside*—still existing but at a distance—in another place suitable to them.³⁷ Paul and John alike introduce no question about their *being*. The focus is on their having existence and God excluding them from the destiny of the saved. The statement does not indicate that they are extinguished.

Paul also agrees with Jesus and John in another detail. The unsaved are consigned (cf. "cast," Rev 20:15; "away from," 2 Thess 1:9) to their own separate destiny because they did not believe unto life (John 3:36 and Rev 20:12-15; Rom 6:23). In addition, they are there as a consistent order of things reflected in their not having the dynamic of God's life producing fruit true to His character. In Paul, the lack of a relationship with God shows in produce of a sinful kind (Rom 6:21; 1 Cor 6:9-10; Gal 5:19-21). In John the same reality is essentially the case (1 John 2:15-17). The unsaved are marked by characteristics that are sinful (Rev 9:20; 21:8, 27; 22:15). God judges those destined for punishment as unfit to share in His blessedness due to their names not being in "the book of [eternal] life" by grace through faith in receiving a gift (cf. "without cost," 21:6; 22:17). It is also true that their works in God's divine record "books" manifest that they have not flowed from a true relationship with Him (Rev 20:12-13; cf. 22:15). Paul concurs that having the life that is a gift has a fruit of its own nature (Rom 6:22), the fruit that grace

³²Cf. Rev 14:9-11; "second death" in 20:14-15 and 21:8; 22:15.

³³Cf. Rev 14:12-13; "life" in 20:11-14; 21:1-7; 22:1-5, 14.

³⁴Locality is in view, with no inferences of being taken out of existence.

³⁵Cf. also Rev 21:27; 22:14, 19.

³⁶Note the Greek *δέ* that introduces 21:8, marking those of the "lake of fire" off from those who in 21:7 are overcomers, heirs, sons of God in the New Jerusalem. For evidence that the terms in 21:7 describe all the saved, see Daniel K. K. Wong, "The Johannine Concept of the Overcomer" (Ph.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, Dallas, Tex., 1995) 118-300.

³⁷In Revelation 21, vv. 1-2 refer to the place the saved inhabit, v. 3 to God's presence with the saved and their relation as His possession (cf. Eph 1:14; 4:30), v. 4 to the privileges in the blessed estate, v. 5 to the prospect of God's making all things new, v. 6a to the profile of God who pledges the blessing, v.6b to the grace that assures a place there, v. 7 to the kind of person who inhabits blessedness, then v. 8 to the kind of people who do not populate bliss but are in the lake of fire.

promotes, fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22 f.).

Absence of language for annihilation. Like Jesus and other NT writers, Paul never uses words for God's retribution that mean extinction. If they thought that the unsaved would be blotted out, they bypassed NT words that could have made that pointedly clear.

(1) The word *ξαλείφω* (*exaleiph*) means "to smear out, to blot out, to obliterate, to expunge."³⁸ Several times it distinctly indicates a blotting out. Paul himself uses it of God canceling or blotting out the certificate of death against those who receive Christ (Col 2:14). Luke writes of Peter's and John's appeal to fellow Jews to repent that their sins might be "wiped away" (Acts 3:19). John uses the word three times of Christ's promise not to "blot out" names of overcomers from His book of the saved (Rev 3:5) and of God's wiping away every tear from the saved (7:17; 21:4). In Revelation 7, John emphasizes that certain things are no longer present with the saved in heaven—hunger, thirst, the sun's burning heat, and any hurt from heat. In Revelation 21, the prospect that tears no longer even exist in the blessed realm accompany other things—death, mourning, crying, and pain—that are not there.³⁹

Had Paul or any NT writer looked for an apt way to say that punishment of the unsaved comes to the point of their ceasing to exist, this word could express that. But no NT author uses the term to make that point.

(2) Another word is *σβέννυμι* (*sbennumi*, "quench").⁴⁰ It occurs for quenching fire, as in Jesus' words drawn from Isa 42:3 about the Messiah not extinguishing the feeble who look to Him. Jesus conveys this in the picture of snuffing a wick's flame, flickering dimly in a lamp (Matt 12:20). The same word surfaces in Jesus' parable of ten virgins. He pictures the lamps of the foolish in the process of "going out" as the women are frantic to coax light to join the coming bridegroom (Matt 25:8). Mark 9:48 has the same word for the doomed; the "fire" punishing them will *not* be "quenched."

The adjective form of the word *σβεστος* (*asbestos*, "not quenched") represents the "fire" of punishment not being extinguished (Mark 9:43),⁴¹ when God burns⁴² up the unsaved. John the Baptist portrays the people doomed to the

³⁸BAGD, 272.

³⁹These continue to exist in the "lake of fire," i.e., remain for the unsaved in their state of punishment. In the New Jerusalem the conditions of woe have no part.

⁴⁰BAGD, 752.

⁴¹BAGD, 114.

⁴²*Κατακαύω* means "burn up." It does not imply that the unsaved are incinerated out of existence as people. The punished still exist in Rev 22:15, and the description of the smoke relating to their punishment still continuing and their having no rest continuously (Revelation 14) shows the same. Also, the natural idea of "eternal" for what continues to exist suggests their ongoing consciousness. The descriptions of them point to their *separation* from the saved, not their *extermination*. The fire is described as unquenchable (Mark 9:43), also as eternal (Matt 8:18; 25:41). That fits with Paul's phrase "eternal

unquenchable fire as chaff (Matt 3:12; Luke 3:17).

Ephesians 6:16 employs the term *sbennumi* for believers' "shield of faith" that quenches (putting out) the fire of enemies' darts. And Paul urges believers not to "quench" the Spirit, i.e., not douse His work as believers minister to edify believers (1 Thess 5:19). Paul and others in the NT never enlist the word to say that the *unsaved* when punished are snuffed out, or that God causes *punishment* itself to cease.

(3) A further word, *παύω* (*pau*), is Paul's term for tongues ceasing ("whether there be tongues, they shall *cease*," 1 Cor 13:8). But Paul never says that punishment or the punished unsaved person *ceases*.

(4) Further terminology regarding the unsaved that is absent from Paul and others in the NT is a phrase used for the sea no longer existing, *ο_κ_στιν_τι* (*ouk estin eti*, "it is no longer," Rev 21:1). Paul might have utilized the phrase to state that the punished come to be present no longer if he thought annihilation were true. John uses similar terminology for light from a lamp no longer being seen in Babylon after God has judged it (Rev 18:23). Indeed, the word *eti* occurs six times of things that no longer "still" exist in regard to Babylon (Rev 18:21-23).

Again Paul, just as Jesus and other NT writers, never sees fit to use such a phrase to suggest that punishing the unsaved involves their extinction.

Summary and Conclusion

Paul reflected a thorough commitment to and unity with what his Lord taught in the gospels. Though he did not go into as much detail as Jesus on punishment, the words he selected most naturally have the same meaning. In passages reviewed here, Paul was clear enough that the destiny of the unsaved is of the same essence that Jesus and John taught. The punishment is felt (Rom 2:8-9). It consists of a state of "ruin" though not deletion from existence (Rom 9:22; Phil 3:19), an "eternal destruction," most probably denoting it as continuing, never ceasing. The unsaved themselves exist eternally to bear it (2 Thess 1:8-9).

In other passages, Paul was also in accord with unending punishment, not annihilation. The "end," "goal" or "final outcome" that the unsaved gravitate to is "death" (Rom 6:21). Paul did not conceive of this as ceasing to exist but as reaching a finalized goal, a separation from God and His blessing, the ultimate spiritual "death" (separation from God) beyond the spiritual death that is already the state of the unsaved.

At the same time, Paul agreed in essence with Jesus' and John's concept that the unsaved in their final punishment still exist, but are excluded from the realm of the saved. They are ultimately in a situation God suits to their own case. As the

destruction" (2 Thess 1:9).

others, Paul expressed sharp contrasts between the destiny of saved and unsaved, e.g., “death” contrasted with “life,” and “destruction” in distinction to “glory.” He also phrased the destiny of the unredeemed as, negatively viewed, not inheriting the realm of blessedness to which the saved will be heirs (cf. Rom 8:17, 18-25; Gal 5:21). John also held this contrast about the inheritance (Rev 21:7), and immediately contrasted it with the destiny of those who do not enter the inheritance, the unsaved (v. 8). To be refused inheritance is exclusion from the blessing that accrues to all of the saved. For Paul as for John it was not extinction of the very being.

Paul, as also others writing NT Scripture, never called on terms that could distinctly suggest an elimination from existence. The terms they do chose seem in their most sensible meaning to point to the unsaved continuing to exist, this in punishment that never stops.

What Paul writes reflected an outlook that is clear enough. Its natural sense should not be softened to suit human reasoning more easily, or cast in doubt. Biblical language firmly resists being construed to support other views on the nature and duration of punishment. Paul expected eternally continuing ruin awaiting those who do not receive the redemption the saved receive as God’s gift. Paul, having the heartbeat of his Lord, found this conviction about destinies of saved and unsaved a great prompt. It was a reality that led him sacrificially to pray for others (Rom 10:1) and proclaim the gospel with urgency (Rom 1:15-17; 2 Cor 5:14-21).

ETERNAL PUNISHMENT IN JOHN'S REVELATION

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Church history has witnessed many challenges to the traditional doctrine of eternal punishment, but John's Revelation—particular chapters 14 and 20—emphasizes the effect of this life's belief or unbelief on afterlife consequences. The angelic warning in Revelation 14 speaks of the eternal penalty resulting from the wrath of God in concert with Revelation 20 and its apostolic announcement that describes the same in terms of the lake of fire and the second death. The two passages specifically contradict recent claims that future punishment is remedial, not retributive. They also point out that God's righteousness and holiness will prevail over His love, mercy, and grace in dealings with the lost after this life ends. Neither do they allow for the idea that the punishment is not conscious torment. They teach that the unsaved will experience the same fate as Satan, the beast, the false prophet, and demons. These chapters in John's Revelation do not constitute an empty threat that God will not implement. They instill a fear that is justified in light of the irreversible consequences of divine judgment.

* * * * *

The reality and validity of eternal punishment in hell has been called into question frequently throughout church history.¹

¹Thomas Talbot, "The Doctrine of Everlasting Punishment," *Faith and Philosophy* 7/1 (January 1990):23, remarked, "The evil of everlasting separation is itself . . . inconsistent with the existence of God." He also opined, "God would never promote the happiness of one loved at the expense of

another" (28) and "A doctrine of hell is defensible only if modified in one of two ways: one must either deny that hell is *everlasting* or deny that it is a place of *punishment*" (34). Charles H. Pridgeon, *Is Hell Eternal or Will God's Plan Fail?* (Pittsburgh: The Evangelization Society of the Pittsburgh Bible Institute, 1931) unashamedly declared, "Hell was invented by pagans" (35), and Paul S. L. Johnson, *Life, Death, Hereafter*, revised and enlarged (Philadelphia: P. Johnson, 1937) 46, stated, "Thinking people cannot but disbelieve this legend." He added further that the doctrine of eternal torment was undoubtedly introduced by the Papacy to induce the pagan to join in support of her system (49). Useful bibliography may be found in Freeman Barton, "Evangelicals in Defense of Hell—An Annotated Bibliography with Extended Introduction," *Journal of Religious & Theological Information* 2/2 (1996):73-94.

Such questioning also stands attested as one of the hallmarks of different cults and sects.¹ When proposing a position that quite obviously sounded different from the propositions of the biblical text, then the literal words of that text had to be explained in another way in order to maintain that new proposition.² Either (1) the hermeneutic was deliberately faulty, (2) the proposer redefined his bibliology to warrant challenging the text and altering the meaning of different terms, or (3) he used inferential reasoning from the character of God, His love, mercy, and grace to establish the total unreasonableness of eternal punishment.³ Of course, all of this happened alongside fervent declarations of letting the Word of God speak for itself, so that it would be appropriate thereafter to assert that hell is indeed a grim prospect, and the proposer intended nothing to lessen it.⁴

¹Alan W. Gomes, "Evangelicals and the Annihilation of Hell," *Christian Research Journal* (Spring 1991):15, writes, "Denial of this teaching [conscious everlasting torment] has, until recently, been limited almost exclusively to cultic or quasi-cultic groups." He then names Jehovah's Witnesses, Armstrong's Worldwide Church of God, Christian Science, Mormonism, the New Age movement, and Seventh Day Adventism.

²William G.T. Shedd, *The Doctrine of Endless Punishment* (1980 reprint, Minneapolis: Klock & Klock, n.d.) 5-6, reminds that "the denial of endless punishment is usually associated with the denial of those tenets which are logically and closely connected with it, such as original sin, vicarious atonement, and regeneration. Thomas Talbot, "The Doctrine of Everlasting Punishment" 20, goes further by concluding that Jesus' rhetoric left room for His disciples to reinterpret Him as they matured in the faith. It was not, he says, "intended to provide final answers to their theological questions."

³William Crockett, "The Metaphorical View," in *Four Views on Hell* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992) 50, cites Celsus' words of God becoming a "cosmic cook." See also Clark Pinnock, "The Destruction of the Finally Impenitent," *Criswell Theological Review* 4/2 (Spring 1990):253, who forcefully observes that everlasting torment turns God into a "bloodthirsty monster."

⁴Pinnock, "Destruction of the Finally Impenitent" 259.

This essay does not cover (1) the evidence for eternal punishment in John's Gospel, since a previous essay on the teachings of Jesus dealt with that, and (2) the sole mention of the day of judgment in John's epistles (1 John 4:17), which obviously recalls all other instances in both Old and New Testaments of such a day at the end of time, a day which the believer knows he need not fear.

It will rather focus on John's Revelation,¹ a book replete with details about the outbreak of God's wrath upon the earth prior to the kingdom's being established, but also with information on hellfire and torment beyond time and history (Rev 14:9-11; 20:10-15 with additional identification of its victims in 21:8 and 22:15). The unmistakable attestations of John's inspired words on the irreversible nature of the final state rule out (1) any idea of pagan legend or myth or metaphorical/symbolical language as somehow having crept into the record making restatement essential, and (2) any attempt to determine punishment as temporary and/or remedial. Rather, they bring to the forefront the reality that this life's belief or unbelief has after-life consequences.

Revelation 14 and 20, then, may function as the matrix through which to respond to selected issues related to eternal punishment and conditional immortality.

PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS ON CONTEXT, VOCABULARY, AND EMPHASIS

In the interests of brevity, this essay sets aside needless repetition of standard comments available from good exegetical commentaries. The observations made below are most worthy of note.

The Angelic Warning

In both contexts the judgment of God is definitely the setting for the words of angelic warning (Revelation 14) as well as for the words of apostolic announcement (Revelation 20). The divine messenger specifically says, "The hour of His judgment has come" (14:7), bringing to attention—as it most assuredly does—the extensive information in both testaments about God's judgment day and the irruption of wrath with which it is associated.² The angelic warning follows with a selection of specific, graphic terminology reminding of

¹Faulty hermeneutic arises when the Book of Revelation is summarily evaluated as being so symbolic and pictorial that its statements are non-propositional or unable to sustain doctrinal conclusion. See Larry Dixon, "Warning a Wrath-Deserving World: Evangelicals and the Overhaul of Hell," *The Emmaus Journal* 2 (1993):11 n 16. He cites Michael Green, *Evangelism Through the Local Church* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1990) 70, who pointedly notes that Revelation is a highly pictorial book, i.e., something "not enough to hang a doctrine of such savagery on. . . ."

²Cf. Psalms 49; 75; Isaiah 24; 66; Jeremiah 25; John 5:22 ff.; Acts 17:11; 2 Tim 4:1; 1 Pet 4:5; *inter alia*,

such irruption, namely “drink of the wine of the wrath of God . . . in the cup of his anger” (v. 10). The succeeding context underscores the judgment terminology already used as it vividly describes what would soon occur within future world history—note “hour to reap” (v.15), “harvest of the earth” (v. 15), and “the great winepress of the wrath of God” (v. 19).

Although John did not use specific terms of judgment and wrath (θύμος [*thumos*] and ὀργή [*orgē*]) in relation to Satan, the actions of God reported by the apostle—the binding and incarceration in the abyss (20:1-3) and the casting into the lake of fire (20:10)—constitute judgment, one temporary and one permanent. Furthermore, the account of the final assizes that follows (vv. 11-15) only serves to maintain the picture of final judgment wherein the destiny of the unsaved is alongside that of the devil, the beast, and the false prophet (vv. 13-14; cf. 19:20).

Employment of “torment”³ and “fire and brimstone”⁴ augments the tenor of doom that pervades the immediate contexts. The absence of a specific mention of torment in connection with the sentencing at the final assizes is not that significant because the threefold mention of the lake of fire (20:14-15) is sufficient and emphatic enough to point back to any previous description given.

Furthermore, emphasis on the ceaseless, unrelenting nature of that torment comes out in the adverbial phrases “day and night” and “forever and ever.”⁵ Endlessness receives emphasis both from the absence of the definite article in the one phrase and the doubled use of the definite article in the other.⁶ All other occurrences of the plural αἰών (*aiōn*, “forever”) formula in Revelation are marked by an absence of any such additional temporal indicators to stress endlessness. Nothing extra is necessary to produce the meaning of “unlimited duration” and at that beyond time when the formula describes God who lives forever (4:9-10; 10:6; 15:7), of His attributes being eternal (1:6; 4:9; 5:13; 7:12), or of Christ who reigns forever, His saints also being with Him (11:15; 22:5). But when the formula describes Babylon’s smoke ascending forever (19:3),

³The future βασανισθήσεται (*basanisthēsetai*) and the noun βασανισμού (*basanismou*) in 14:10-11 and the future βασανιθήνται (*basanisthēsontai*) in 20:10.

⁴Ἐν πυρὶ καὶ θείῳ (*en puri kai thei*) in 14:10 and τοῦ πυρὸς καὶ θείου (*tou puros kai theiou*) in 20:10.

⁵Εἰς αἰῶνας αἰῶνων (*eis aiōnas aiōnōn*) in 14:11 and εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰῶνων (*eis tous aiōnas ton aiōnōn*) in 20:10.

⁶*TDNT*, s.v. “αἰών, αἰώνιος,” by Herman Sasse, 1:199, the twofold use of αἰώνιος emphasizes the concept of eternity. Cf. R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John's Revelation* (Columbus, Ohio: Wartburg, 1943) 38, “The strongest expression for our ‘forever’ is . . . ‘for the eons of eons.’ . . . The Greek takes its greatest term for time, the eon, pluralizes this, and then multiplies it by its own plural, even using articles which make these eons the definite ones.” See also the examination of αἰώνιος undertaken by Shedd, *Doctrine of Endless Punishment* 76-90, wherein he shows that αἰών and αἰώνιος denote the “one infinite and endless aeon, or age, of the future.”

nothing additional is necessary to indicate that the “forever” formula is a “forever” of “limited duration.”⁷ That the ascending smoke will terminate at the end is something to be reasoned out from Babylon being in this age and this age coming to a definite end. It is a very long but limited time-span, but a very long, limited stretch of time in this world is not descriptive of what belongs in the coming ages beyond world history. The plural formula and its accompanying temporal indicators in the angelic announcement are different from Babylon’s smoke then and are significant: they do point to what belongs beyond time and history, they do stress “of unlimited duration” or “for eternity.” Torment is forever and ever and evermore!

“They will have no rest,” describing the fate of the worshipers of the beast, functions as a third adverbial phrase emphasizing ceaselessness, but it also stands in stark contrast to the promised rest for those martyrs who will remain loyal to their Lord (14:12-13; cf. 13:15). This life’s religious loyalties and beliefs do indeed have endless consequences for the afterlife.

Different overt symbols will portray, or betray, religious loyalties—the name of the Lord written in the forehead of the 144,000 (14:1) or the particular mark of the beast on the forehead or hand (14:9). The latter will have rejected the appeal of the angel to worship the Lord and give Him glory (14:7). The particular mark of identification for other believers will be their obedience and steadfastness. Such marks of identification, of religious loyalties, come with their own sets of works (τὰ ἔργα [*ta erga*] in 20:12, 13; τῶν κόπων and τὰ ἔργα [*tōn kopōn* and *ta erga*] in 14:13), that is, the inevitable outworking of their worldviews. The listings of those whose place will be in the lake of fire (21:8) and of those who will be outside the New Jerusalem (22:15) reflects something of the spectrum of the evidence of unbelief which had been and would be worked out.

In both contexts, notwithstanding the events of the future taking place on earth—whether before, during, or after the millennial reign of Christ—the references to the lake of fire and torment are neither earth-bound nor time-bound. The reader moves easily from history to eternity to history.

Each context, however, also provides its own perspective. The angelic warning includes a reference to the presence of the holy angels and the Lamb (14:10). In so doing, it draws attention to the quite different relationship of two groups, the 144,000 and the beast-worshipers, to the Lamb (14:1, 7). Seven angels carry out God’s purpose (14:6, 8, 9, 15, 17, 18, 19) and serve to remind the reader that nought will happen apart from His design. The repetition of the warning’s protasis (14:11, καὶ εἴ τις λαμβάνει . . . [*kai ei tis lambanei* . . . , “and if anyone receives . . .”]) suggests that the reader should pause, fill in the ellipsed apodosis, and then reflect on the graphic description of the lot of the wicked. As

⁷ *TDNT*, s.v., “αἰών, αἰώνιος” 202-3, has a helpful discussion on αἰών as limited by creation and conclusion.

a warning and threat, it bears repetition!

The Apostolic Announcement

The apostolic announcement mentions the second death, defined by appositional statement (20:14) and adjectival subordinate clause (21:8) as the lake of fire. In so doing, it draws attention to earlier comments on resurrection and second death (20:6) and indicates that the righteous are immune to its power. The unrighteous, on the contrary, are those over whom the second death does have power because their names are not recorded in the book of life (20:15). An individual's works will not mandate favorable relief from punishment (cf. e.g., Mt 7:22).⁸ No record in the book of life justifies the sentence passed.

The intermediate state, personified in the double title "death and Hades" (20:13), releases its grip with the result that the unrighteous dead are raised for their individual accounting. The use of the personification a second time (v. 14) may simply refer to the end of death and the intermediate state, that is, death will meet its end and will not be there to disturb the new heavens and the new earth. Thus, none of the unrighteous dead will escape sentencing.

Not only a tenor of doom but one of finality pervades this context as well; it is an "absolute finality."⁹ And that sense of finality also pertains to the destiny and experience of the righteous whom the closing two chapters (Revelation 21–22) clearly show to be the insiders—those in heaven rejoicing in the light of the Lord's presence and having everlasting life.

THEOLOGICAL RESPONSES, QUESTIONS, AND REFLECTIONS

Responses to amendments to the traditional evangelical understanding of the unsaved enduring hell forever should come in light of the preliminary observations above.

Punishment Retributive Not Remedial

Does the thought of remedial suffering or punishment spring immediately to mind when reading the passages in John's Revelation? On the basis of the observations made above, the answer must be a ringing No!

Being subject to wrath, being made to drink of the cup of God's anger,

⁸Any discussion on the degrees of punishment suggested by the judging of works does not detract from the length of the sentence passed. Peterson, *Hell on Trial* 198, sums it up well: "Scripture teaches that although hell is everlasting for all its inhabitants, some suffer worse than others. God's justice demands that there be degrees of punishment."

⁹Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, "Conditional Immortality," *Evangel* 10/2 (Summer 1992):11, although, when treating the second death, did not use these words to mean finality in the sense of irreversible but in the sense of ongoing; the above discussion nevertheless lifts them out as an appropriate expression to convey that idea.

and being tormented forever, without rest day and night, hardly seems like one last attempt to motivate a renewed consideration of religious-loyalty decisions previously made. No, the warning delivered points to a just recompense for deeds done and decisions made this side of the grave.¹⁰

The message of judgment and hellfire may very well be preventative, and in that sense might be spoken of as remedial. Change could always occur before death, but when the time comes to be actually part of the reality proclaimed, then the experience will only be retributive. Never does the Scripture suggest that hell is some kind of anteroom or a temporary school from which the unbeliever might eventually graduate and pass from death to life. The second death is not life but death, an existence of permanent confinement excluded from the pleasurable presence of God enjoyed by the assembly of the righteous. An everlasting existence it will be, and *not* just a moment of agonizingly realizing too late that exclusion from God's kingdom and glory was their plight—that is, exclusion in the sense of being cast without hope into the “abyss of obliteration.”¹¹

This already impinges upon any discussion of God's purposes and power. Surely God fails in His purposes if He is unable to do something effective for salvation before death and, moreover, remains unable, even when presenting torment, to retrieve an unbeliever after death? Why leave it until after death to convince of heaven and hell? To remove retribution is to be influenced by a foreign agenda which (1) takes no account of the full-measure of divine wrath poured out—“mixed in full strength” (14:10)—and (2) ignores the force of the most serious term for wrath—eschatological *orgē* does not reform¹²—and (3) conveniently overlooks, in the immediate context, the threat which itself indicates that not all will be saved.

God's Love and His Actions

No matter how commendable it may be to elevate the love, mercy, and grace of God, it should not be done at the expense of God's wrath and vengeance, nor should it be prefaced by emotive comments on God's character being impugned if He were to sentence unbelievers to eternal torment.¹³ Being

¹⁰Peterson, *Hell on Trial* 212, cross-references 2 Thess 1:5-9 and concludes, “This punishment is retributive: God ‘will pay back’ the wicked with eternal ruin.” Cf. also Heb 10:27 and the “certain terrifying expectation of judgment” with its accompanying citation from Isa 26:11, “the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries.”

¹¹Hughes, “Conditional Immortality” 12.

¹²William Crockett, “Wrath That Endures Forever,” *JET S* 34 (1991):196, writes that ὀργή, the apostle Paul's most serious word for divine wrath, “expresses the utter hopelessness of the wicked in the face of an angry God.” “Eschatological ὀργή,” he writes, “is genuine anger devoid of love.”

¹³Steward D. F. Salmond (*The Doctrine of Immortality* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1897] 666) explains the motivation to elevate divine love as “an intense craving for the triumph of God's love

uncomfortable with God's plan does not mean ignoring the plain meaning of the biblical text. What is sometimes forgotten is that all God's acts are acts of righteousness and holiness but not all His acts are always and only acts of love and mercy.¹⁴ In fact, "there is no meaningful way to speak of God loving the wicked after death."¹⁵

Acknowledgment of perfection and trueness in all His attributes rules out speaking of divine vengeance and wrath in terms of human vindictiveness and sinful anger. God definitely does not act with malice aforethought, and the apostle John's two key passages should not be treated as portraying the Lord in that light.

Acknowledging the horribleness of eternal hellfire does not reduce God to some sort of monster running His own Auschwitz.¹⁶ Being tormented at the hands of cruel, unjust tyranny is a far cry from punishment inflicted by a totally pure, righteous, holy, and perfect Lord. His holiness has already been the subject of praise in Revelation (4:8, 11) and should recall the many statements of Scripture about His character and attributes.

Smoke Signals and Poena Sensus

Does "the smoke of their torment" (14:11) merely signal punishment previously carried out? At the least, recognition of the durative present ἀναβαίνει (*anabainei*, "is ascending") in the text is necessary, but appending "no rest day or night" adds force to the previous adverbial phrase "forever and ever" and forbids mistaking (1) the nature of personal and individual torment of the lost to be something less than eternal, (2) the smoke as only the ever-ascending evidence of what had been done, and (3) the punished as having become eternal non-entities unable to experience anything consciously. "One can exist and not be punished, but one cannot be punished and not exist."¹⁷ That which becomes nothing cannot be referred to in anything else but the past

and grace over all obstacles" because it is so inconsistent to have evil alongside love and grace. See also Talbot, "Doctrine of Everlasting Punishment" 39, who concludes, "An omnipotent and perfectly loving God would never permit sinners to damn themselves."

¹⁴Carl F. H. Henry (*God, Revelation & Authority* [Waco, Tex.: Word, 1983] 6:352) observes that God's love should not be manipulated so as to strip judgment of its substance in Christ's declarations and warnings. This observation applies equally well to John's two key passages. Dixon ("Warning a Wrath-Deserving World" 20) states plainly, "God does *not* remain infinitely loving; there are *limits* to His love."

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 201.

¹⁶See n. 4 above. David Moore, *The Battle for Hell: A Survey and Evaluation of Evangelicals Growing Attraction to the Doctrine of Annihilationism* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1995) 28, calls Pinnock's remarks an "absurd analogy."

¹⁷Gomes, "Annihilation of Hell" 11.

tense—"they were" not "they are." A witness to this smoke would not exclaim, "Ah! There's the evidence of them once having been," but "Ah! There's the evidence of them currently being in the fire."

If in the future they are outside, banished from among the redeemed, but still there and described by well-known terms for the unrighteous, *and* if reference to the lake of fire and second death recalls the description of eternity from the previous references (21:8)—and it does so without prompting—then the dead are not non-entities but still existing. "If non-existence is actually a state, then nothing has become something."¹⁸ Nothing is simply nothing and no ingenuous arguing will make it otherwise.

Poena damni (the punishment of the damned) is inextricably linked with *poena sensus* (punishment of the senses). To speak of torment is to understand immediately, without necessarily having to say so explicitly, that it is a painful experience. "What other kind of torment is there besides conscious torment? Torment, by its very nature, demands a sentient (i.e., feeling) subject to experience it."¹⁹ End of sentient being, therefore, must mean end of punishment in which, at the very most, torment or punishment would be transient, something felt only at the instant of affliction. A "transient instant," a flash of pain, hardly projects forever and ever with no rest day or night.

Descriptions of being outside and cut off from the tree of life (22:15) also quickly recall the book of life and names written or not written therein as well as the finality of judgment day. The first death removes a person from life in the present creation but without ending his existence. Similarly the second death removes that person from the new creation, the new heavens and the new earth, without signifying that absence from the place where only righteous dwells equals non-existence.

¹⁸Samuel C. Bartlett, *Life and Death Eternal: A Refutation of the Theory of Annihilation* (Boston: American Tract Society, 1866) 274.

¹⁹Gomes, "Annihilation of Hell" 18.

Identical Fates and Afterlife Choices

Unsaved humans and wicked angels share the same fate. The close proximity of the final assizes and its reference to the lake of fire and the second death into which the condemned dead are cast precludes making their fate different from that of Satan, the beast, the false prophet, and the demonic host.²⁰ Although torment may not be specifically mentioned with the judgment of the dead, it carries over with ease from earlier references. Indeed, mention of fire/lake of fire should suffice to recall for the reader other references in earlier revelation confirming everlasting suffering for condemned humans in the place of unquenchable fire and the undying worm.²¹

To conclude blithely that only the “infernal troika” are the eternal, suffering inhabitants of the lake of fire is to ignore willfully the impact of both the surrounding and wider contexts. More, to do so suggests that it is right and acceptable for the God of love to sentence the evil trio to eternal damnation but that it is not right with respect to unrighteous humanity for Him to do so.

The two listings of the *outsiders* (21:8; 22:15) form a litany of depravity showing that unsaved man has no redeeming features or graces to offer in mitigation or to prod himself to submit voluntarily to God's love and mercy. Those in hell never truly repent of their sin. They forever remain in a state of rebellion toward God, because their fallen nature does not carry the ability to recognize its own depravity and need for God.²² Final judgment hinges on decisions made in this life before the first death and not in some future life or state. Unbelieving men are declared in this life to be without excuse (Rom 1:20) and facing judgment after death (Heb 9:27). “Scripture nowhere affirms that opportunity for regeneration exists beyond the grave.”²³ Nor do John's words in Revelation present judgment as a post-mortem chance to convert from “without excuse” to “with excuse,” thereby allowing for a personal choice before entering the final state.

Threat, But No Threat

A threat devoid of authenticity because the deliverer had neither the authority nor the intention to carry it out becomes a hollow sham that

²⁰Cf. Matt 25:41. Although Revelation 20 says nothing about demons, they obviously receive their sentence with Satan.

²¹See Peterson, *Hell on Trial* 190-91, where he deals with the imagery of fire in the NT, and concludes, “Damned humans, therefore, will suffer forever.”

²²Moore, *Battle for Hell* 48. Cf. Rev 9:20, 21 and 16:9-11 where people under God's judgment unrepentantly blaspheme the more.

²³Henry, *God, Revelation & Authority* 6:511; Harold O.J. Brown, “Will the Lost Suffer Forever?” *Criswell Theological Review* 4/2 (1990):271, concurs: “Nothing will soften or alleviate their conscious misery ever.”

casts aspersion on the integrity of the one who delivered it. Once the Lord delivered the warning via His angelic messenger (14:10-11), its authenticity was beyond doubt and His authority to enact it was beyond question.²⁴ The words of the threat also imply that some would not heed the warning and upon them the stated judgment would fall. The record of Revelation bears out the reality of disobedience, wickedness, hostility against God, and rejection of His message. Given that record and that of the Lord's character, the reader of Revelation, unless primed in advance, (1) takes seriously the threat and does not think of it being just an exhortation with no sting, and (2) takes seriously the sentence passed without thinking of it as being wholly unfair and disproportionate.

All God's warnings to repent, all His prophetic pronouncement of judgment to come and of wrath outpoured cannot be re-evaluated and downgraded to only an hortatory level with the result that they are rebuffed by sinners without fear of the sentence being carried out in full.

CLOSING REMARKS

"No correct view of final judgment can be elaborated that empties hell of its terrors and depicts God's last judgment as a benevolent act toward the impenitent and ungodly."²⁵ Further, Carl Henry recalls that the Bible's exposition of the torment of hell keeps in the foreground the fact of divine moral judgment and does not offer the reader a lurid portrayal of torture.²⁶ The sentence to which the worshipers were alerted and which God doubtlessly carries out at the final assizes, will be deserved. The stark clarity of the accounts hints not at any post-mortem chance to escape the second death either before or after the books are read. Punishment after death is outside time and thus eternal. It is not benevolence but justice in operation. Judgment is neither prefaced by opportunity to believe nor constituted as forcing or persuading belief.

Life's religious loyalties and beliefs demonstrate the reality of not having had one's name in the book of life, and they, in recognizable tension, hold the sinner responsible and without excuse, and might determine degree of everlasting punishment. Punishment is eternal but so is the unrepentant condition of the unredeemed dead.²⁷

²⁴See Paul Helm, "Universalism and the Threat of Hell," *Trinity Journal* 4 (1983):35-43, for a good treatment of when a threat is not a threat in his discussion on universalism.

²⁵Henry, *God, Revelation & Authority* 6:352.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 510.

²⁷Talbot, "Doctrine of Everlasting Punishment" 39, presents a transmogrified caricature of man's sinful condition: the more one freely rebels against God the more miserable and tormented one becomes; and the more miserable one becomes, the more incentive one has to repent of one's sin and to give up one's rebellious attitudes."

After a final one thousand year period, it is clear that the depravity of evil mankind is so great that an eternity of opportunities would not suffice. This in a very real sense is a theodicy of eternal punishment, showing the justice behind the final judgment of God. In the light of an eternity of rejections, eternal punishment is mandated.²⁸

Both the angelic warning and the apostolic announcement unmistakably attest the reality of the irreversible consequences of divine judgment.

²⁸Grant Osborne, "Theodicy in the the Apocalypse" *Trinity Journal* 14 (1993) 70.

A KINDER, GENTLER THEOLOGY OF HELL?

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Annihilationism has, as the Niagara Creed of 1878 foresaw, become a doctrine that plagues the evangelical church of the late twentieth century. It comprises a multifaceted compromise of biblical systematic theology, affecting most major doctrines of the Christian faith, not just the area of eschatology. Its compromise stems from the influence of postmodernism as proponents of annihilationism bring to the text unwarranted theological preunderstandings. Their emphasis on God's nature to love disregards His many other attributes such as holiness, justice, truth, grace, and omnipotence and thereby sentimentalize God's love. Further, their preunderstandings distort biblical teaching about man's immortality of the soul that is derived from God. A third affected area is the doctrine of sin when they assert that God would be vindictive to mete out eternal punishment for finite sin. In addition, the system of annihilationism undervalues Christ's atonement for sin by claiming that His death only paid the price for man's temporary rather than our eternal punishment.

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In midsummer of 1878, several hundred enthusiastic Christian ministers and lay people gathered at a hospital in Clifton Springs, New York, for a week of Bible conference. The founder of the hospital, a Methodist layman named Dr. Henry Foster, had erected a 50x80 foot tabernacle that seated about 650 people. Dr. Foster invited missionaries, teachers, pastors, and evangelists to stay in the hospital facilities free of charge for the purpose of rest and relaxation, and to use the tabernacle for Christian services.

The Christians who conducted the Bible conference in the summer of 1878 were known as the Believers' Meeting for Bible Study.¹

¹James H. Brookes, "Believers' Meeting at Clifton Springs," *The Truth* 4 (1878):402.

They continued to meet at Clifton Springs for two more years, but eventually held their annual meetings at Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario, Canada, and became better known as the Niagara Bible Conference. Some historians consider the Niagara Bible Conference, and the First and Second American Bible and Prophecy Conferences which it spawned, to be the primary sources from which the American fundamentalist and premillennial evangelical movements came.¹

Unfortunately, the Bible conference at Clifton Springs in 1878 was somewhat of a disappointment to the leaders. Among other reasons, “there were those hanging upon the outskirts who had no sympathy with the objects of the meeting, and there was danger of controversy, which always grieves the Holy Ghost.”² Postmillennialists and annihilationists had apparently caused the controversy. So in the following months, the Believers’ Meeting for Bible Study adopted a fourteen-point confession of faith, later known as the Niagara Creed, as a basis for their meetings.³ Significant for this study of annihilationism is Article 13 of the Niagara Creed. It reads,

¹For examples, see Ernest R. Sandeen, *The Roots of Fundamentalism* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1970) 132-61, and David O. Beale, *In Pursuit of Purity* (Greenville, S. C.: Unusual Publications, 1986) 23-67.

²Brookes, “Believers’ Meeting at Clifton Springs” 402.

³The first historian to write a book about the fundamentalist movement, Stewart Cole, somehow came up with the incorrect idea that the Niagara Bible Conference had adopted a five-point creed in 1895 (*The History of Fundamentalism* [Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1931] 34). Ernest Sandeen corrected his mistake in 1970 (*Roots of Fundamentalism* xviii), but it continues to be repeated even in recent studies of fundamentalism and evangelicalism.

We believe that the souls of those who have trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation do at death immediately pass into His presence, and there remain in conscious bliss until the resurrection of the body at His coming, when soul and body reunited shall be associated with Him forever in the glory; but the souls of unbelievers remain after death in conscious misery until the final judgment of the great white throne at the close of the millennium, when soul and body reunited shall be cast into the lake of fire, not to be annihilated, but to be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power: Luke 16:19-26; 23:43; 2 Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:23; 2 Thess. 1:7-9; Jude 6:7; Rev. 20:11-15.¹

In one of his reports of the 1878 meeting, Niagara's president, James H. Brookes, gives a summary of the participants' doctrinal position and concludes with this admonition to those who might want to participate in future conferences:

Such in brief is the simple ground on which we meet, and any who accept it are welcome to attend. If they do not stand upon it, and yet choose to attend, they are expected to keep silent. We do not deny the right of those who hold what are known as "annihilation views," to assemble when and where they please; but we do deny their right to thrust these views upon a meeting that rejects their dangerous errors.²

For the leaders of this historic Bible Conference, annihilationism was considered such a "dangerous" doctrinal error that it excluded its adherents from participation with them.

Were these nineteenth-century evangelicals justified in their fear of annihilationism? In recent years a renewed effort has arisen among some who call themselves evangelicals to reassert the doctrine of annihilationism—that the wicked who reject Christ will not have to spend eternity in hell, but after some time of suffering will be annihilated. This is somewhat puzzling in light of the many Scriptures that teach the eternal punishment of the wicked in hell.³ "If exegesis is the final factor," writes John Walvoord, "eternal punishment is the only proper conclusion; taken at its face value, the Bible teaches eternal punishment."⁴

It is the purpose of this paper, therefore, to demonstrate by a survey of

¹James H. Brookes, "Believers' Meeting for Bible Study," *The Truth* 4 (1878):452-58. Others who include the full text of the Niagara Creed include Sandeen, *Roots of Fundamentalism* 273-77, and Beale, *Pursuit of Purity* 375-79.

²Brookes, "Believers' Meeting at Clifton Springs" 404.

³Such clear Scriptures include Dan 2:2; Matt 3:12;18:8; 25:41,46; Mark 9:43-48; 2 Thess 1:9; Heb 6:2; Jude 12-13; Rev 14:11. The other writers in this issue have explained some of these and other important Scriptures.

⁴John Walvoord, "The Literal View," in *Four Views on Hell*, ed. by William Crockett (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992) 27.

the doctrinal categories that annihilationists often come to the Scriptures with cultural and theological preunderstandings that negate the historical-grammatical meaning of the passages. The result is, in fact, a multi-faceted compromise of a biblical systematic theology that infects most of the major doctrines of the Christian faith.⁵

PROLEGOMENA: THE IMPACT OF POSTMODERNISM

It is true that no one can or should totally rid himself of presuppositions. For Christians the entire worldview stands on the biblically based epistemological presupposition that “the one living and true God has self-attestingly revealed Himself in the Christian Scriptures.”⁶ Moreover, every Bible student must come to God’s Word believing the soteriological teachings of Scripture (1 Cor 1:14-15). Otherwise, he would be denying the faith even as he studies it. The basic presuppositions of the Christian faith certainly do not prohibit interpreting a text accurately.

But other preunderstandings can make it difficult to interpret a passage of Scripture correctly. Some preunderstandings are cultural.⁷ Postmodernism, for example, has had its impact on evangelical thinking.⁸ Postmodernism teaches “that there is no objective truth, that moral values are relative, and that reality is

⁵Some annihilationists are a part of the post-conservative evangelical movement (see further Millard J. Erickson, *The Evangelical Left* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997] 123-30). Post-conservative evangelicals claim to be evangelicals, but not conservative in their theology.

⁶Robert L. Reymond, *The Justification of Knowledge* (Phillipsburg, N. J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1979) 72.

⁷The recurring accusation of some of the historians of the fundamentalist and evangelical movements is that these movements have been held in intellectual bondage by early modern rationalism—more specifically to Scottish Common Sense Rationalism. For typical discussions, see Ernest Sandeen, *Roots of Fundamentalism* 103-31; James Barr, *Fundamentalism* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977) 272-79; Jack Rogers and Donald McKim, *The Authority and Interpretation of the Bible: An Historical Approach* (New York: Harper and Row, 1979) 185-379, especially 236-60; Douglas Frank, *Less Than Conquerors* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986) 15-16, 48, 83; Mark Noll, *The Disaster of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986) 90-93; idem, “The Common Sense Tradition and American Evangelical Thought,” *American Quarterly* 37 (Summer 1985):216-38; and George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University, 1980) 14-17. The suggestion is that those who believe in such doctrines as inerrancy accept it not because the Bible teaches it, but because of the influence of a rationalistic worldview. But those who make these kinds of assertions must be aware of the impact of culture on their own thinking. Cultural preunderstandings are not limited to fundamentalists.

⁸For discussions of evangelicalism and postmodernism, see Roger Olson, “Whales and Elephants,” *Pro Ecclesia* 4/2 (Spring 1995):165-80; idem, “Postconservative Evangelicals Greet the Postmodern Age,” *The Christian Century* (May 3, 1995):480-83; and Kevin J. Vanhoozer, “Exploring the World, Following the Word: The Credibility of An Evangelical Theology in An Incredulous Age,” *Trinity Journal* 16/1(Spring 1995):3-27.

socially constructed by a host of diverse communities.”⁹ It does not see religion as a set of beliefs about what is real and what is not. Rather, religion is a choice—something to be incorporated into one’s worldview if he chooses. Thus, postmodernism leads a person to believe in what he likes rather than what the Bible presents as universal truth.

Probably no one really likes to include the doctrine of eternal hell in his belief system. Veith observes, “Today even conservative and evangelical ministers seldom mention Hell. . . . People have never liked to hear about Hell. The difference is that today, unlike any other time in history, many people are *unwilling* to believe . . . what they do not *enjoy* (as if aesthetic considerations determined questions of fact).”¹⁰ The influence of postmodernism on the theology of Clark Pinnock, one of the leading evangelical annihilationists, seems to be clear in statements such as the following:

There is a powerful moral revulsion against the traditional doctrine of the nature of hell. Everlasting torture is intolerable from a moral point of view because it pictures God acting like a bloodthirsty monster who maintains an everlasting Auschwitz for his enemies whom he does not even allow to die. How can one love a God like that?”¹¹

Is not Pinnock saying that people believe in what they enjoy, and since they do not enjoy the thought of eternal hell, they can dismiss it, and thus construct their own narrative, their own reality? With such cultural preunderstandings, it is impossible for one to interpret Scripture accurately.¹²

Some preunderstandings are theological. If one already has his mind made up about what God is like, what man is like, what sin and salvation are like, he may bring those preunderstandings to the passage of Scripture he is trying to understand. In other words, one’s larger theological system will probably impact his interpretation of an individual passage of Scripture. The purpose in the rest of this study, therefore, is to demonstrate that annihilationism is not an isolated deviation from orthodoxy, but is only a part of a larger theological breakdown. Annihilationists thus have not only departed from a biblical understanding of eschatology, but also from the doctrines of God, man, sin, and salvation.

THEOLOGY PROPER: A REDUCTIONIST VIEW OF GOD

⁹Gene Veith, *Postmodern Times* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1994) 193.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 194.

¹¹Pinnock, “The Conditional View,” in *Four Views of Hell* 149.

¹²See further, Larry D. Pettegrew, “Liberation Theology and Hermeneutical Preunderstandings,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 148/591 (July-September 1991):274-87.

In Theology Proper, annihilationists have nearly reduced God's nature to love. In the words of Pinnock and Brow, "Love, then is not just something that God decides to do, not just an occasional attribute. Love is what characterizes God essentially—as a dynamic livingness, a divine circling and relating."¹³

Of course, Scripture does emphasize the love of God (John 3:16; 1 John 4:8), and evangelicals from the days of John Wesley have given proper recognition to it. Some have even elevated love over God's other attributes. Lewis Sperry Chafer, in a burst of enthusiasm insisted that "as no other attribute, love is the primary motive in God, and to satisfy His love all creation has been formed."¹⁴ But clearly Chafer was not teaching that "love is what characterizes God essentially," nor that love is "ontologically ultimate."

For evangelical annihilationists, however, God's love serves as a preunderstanding to the study of hell. Pinnock calls the love of God one of his "control beliefs." "The foundation of my theology of religion," he says, "is a belief in the unbounded generosity of God revealed in Jesus Christ."¹⁵ This means, therefore, that "the nature of hell must not contradict what we know about God's love. . . ."¹⁶ "God is not vindictive and does not practice sadism. The lurid portrayals of hellfire in the Christian tradition contradict God's identity, according to the gospel."¹⁷ Thus it is impossible for the annihilationists to believe in eternal hell, because God's love serves as an immovable roadblock to such a doctrine.

In fact, logically, a God who is essentially love could never send people to an eternal hell. Thomas Talbot uses the following set of beliefs to prove that eternal hell is absolutely illogical.¹⁸

- (1) God exists.
- (2) God is both omniscient and omnipotent.
- (3) God loves every created person.

¹³Clark Pinnock and Robert C. Brow, *Unbounded Love* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1994) 45. This is consistent with how some non-evangelical theologians have viewed God's nature and attributes. Liberation theologian, Jose Miguez Bonino, for example, claims that "love is ontologically ultimate" in God (*Christians and Marxists: The Mutual Challenge to Revolution* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976] 105).

¹⁴Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press, 1947) 205.

¹⁵Clark Pinnock, *A Wideness in God's Mercy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992) 18.

¹⁶Pinnock and Brow, *Unbounded Love* 88.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 89-90.

¹⁸Thomas Talbot, "The Doctrine of Everlasting Punishment," *Faith and Philosophy* 7:1 (January 1990):21.

- (4) Evil exists.
- (5) God will irrevocably reject some persons and subject those persons to everlasting punishment.

Talbot insists that either (3) or (5) is illogical. He writes, “When the doctrine of everlasting punishment is conjoined with other doctrines essential to the Christian faith, a logical paradox arises that proponents of the doctrine have failed to appreciate; as a consequence, a Christian theist must either reject the doctrine as incompatible with Christianity or else admit that Christianity is itself logically inconsistent.”¹⁹ Such arguments from “control beliefs” and logical negations clearly demonstrate that evangelical annihilationists cannot take the Scripture passages on hell at face value. They have already decided that a God of love could not send people to an eternal hell.

God Revealed with Many Attributes

Some theologians have suggested other attributes of God as primary or ultimate. Augustus Hopkins Strong, in his early-twentieth-century theology book nominated holiness as God’s “preeminent” attribute. Strong was concerned about the liberal developments in theology that infected the doctrines of sin, law, and the atonement. He wrote:

There can be no proper doctrine of the atonement and no proper doctrine of retribution, so long as Holiness is refused its preeminence. Love must have a norm or standard, and this norm or standard can be found only in Holiness. The old conviction of sin and the sense of guilt that drove the convicted sinner to the cross are inseparable from a firm belief in the self-affirming attribute of God as logically prior to and as conditioning the self-communicating attribute. The theology of our day needs a new view of the Righteous One.²⁰

Certainly God’s holiness defined as God’s self-affirming purity is a worthy possibility for the primary attribute of God if there were one.²¹ But can any one

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 20.

²⁰ Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Valley Forge, Pa.: Judson, 1907) x-xi.

²¹ Stephen Charnock says that holiness “is the crown of all His attributes, the life of all His decrees, the brightness of all His actions” (*The Existence and Attributes of God* [1977 reprint, Minneapolis: Klock and Klock, n.d.] 452). However, one vital question in this discussion is how should holiness be defined? Strong’s and Charnock’s understanding of holiness is that it is moral purity. The word “holiness” does carry implications of moral purity, but the basic idea is that of “unapproachableness,” “separation” from His creation, “godness” (see A. B. Davidson, *The Theology of the Old Testament* [New York: Scribner’s, 1904] 145). Roy Beacham writes, “Holiness is that in God which is self-asserting and self-differentiating. The term came to be used as an appellative of deity itself (Isa. 5:16, cf. 5:19, 24). Therefore, to speak of God’s holiness is to speak of His ‘Godness.’ God’s holiness distinguishes Him from His creation (Isa. 40:25,26). It marks Him off from men (1 Sam. 2:2), angels (Job 15:15), and other supposed deities (Exod. 15:11). God is entirely unique” (“The

attribute be elevated above the others? Should one minimize God's justice, truth, grace, or omnipotence? Are they any less important in God than holiness or love? Even the terminology as to what to call God's most important attribute can be confusing. Gerald Bray, in his otherwise excellent study of the doctrine of God, says that "there is good reason for regarding omnipotence as God's most fundamental attribute."²² But he also claims that holiness is the "most fundamental characteristic of God,"²³ and that love is "the greatest of God's personal attributes."²⁴ How can anyone tell the difference between "the most fundamental attribute," the "most fundamental characteristic," and "the greatest of God's personal attributes"? Grudem is right in proposing that "all such attempts seem to misconceive of God as a combination of various parts, with some parts being somehow larger or more influential than others. It is even difficult to understand exactly what 'most important' might mean."²⁵ In the words of Lewis and Demarest, "God's love is always holy love, and God's holiness is always loving holiness. It follows that arguments for the superiority of one attribute over another are futile. Every attribute is equally essential in the divine Being."²⁶ Evangelical annihilationists, therefore, have erred in their extreme reductionism of God's nature.

Purification Ritual: A Preliminary Study" [unpublished paper, Grace Theological Seminary, Winona Lake, Ind., 1985] 22-23). The holiness of God therefore speaks more of His divine distinctiveness than of His moral purity.

²²Gerald Bray, *The Doctrine of God* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1993) 103.

²³*Ibid.*, 215.

²⁴*Ibid.*, 220.

²⁵Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994) 180.

²⁶Bruce Demarest and Gordon Lewis, *Integrative Theology*, vol.1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987) 197.

Annihilationists Sentimentalize Love

They have also sentimentalized God's love. "Love" in Scripture is clearly defined in its meaning and expression. God loves Israel in His election of her (Deut 7:7-9). God loves the world in the sense that He providentially rules over it with mercy (Matt 5:45). God loves the fallen, wicked moral order "with specifically salvific intent."²⁷ God peculiarly loves His elect (Eph 5:25). Scripture consistently presents love as ultimately expressed in the giving of His Son to die on the cross (John 3:16; Rom 5:8).

But God limits the expression of His love to those who refuse to accept Christ as their Savior. According to the Scriptures, "He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him"²⁸ (John 3:36). From the original pair's expulsion from the Garden of Eden through the Book of Revelation, the plot-line of the biblical message includes God's judgment of sin. "The point that cannot be escaped," writes D. A. Carson, "is that God's wrath is not some minor and easily dismissed peripheral element to the Bible's plot-line. . . . It is not going too far to say that the Bible would not have a plot-line at all if there were no wrath."²⁹

What one understands God to be like is a determining factor in his theology. It is extremely dangerous to minimize or nullify any of God's attributes. If people are not careful at this point, they may find themselves worshipping a God other than the God of Scripture. As John MacArthur warns, "Several of the very worst corruptions of Christian truth are based on the notion that God can be understood solely in terms of His love."³⁰

ANTHROPOLOGY: A DEPRECIATION OF THE HUMAN SOUL***Annihilationism: Conditional Immortality***

Anthropology is another doctrine involved in the theological breakdown of those who hold to annihilationism. Annihilationists teach conditional immortality, which may be defined as "the idea that humans were made mortal with everlasting life being a gift, not a natural capacity."³¹ Of course, physically human beings are mortal and will die unless the Lord's returns first. But the question being debated is, Is the human *soul* inherently immortal (as the traditionalists teach), or does it become immortal only through salvation (as the

²⁷D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996) 240.

²⁸All quotations of Scripture are from the New American Standard Bible unless otherwise indicated.

²⁹Carson, *The Gagging of God* 223.

³⁰John MacArthur, *The Love of God* (Dallas: Word, 1996) xiv.

³¹Pinnock and Brow, *Unbounded Love* 91.

Annihilationists typically teach that immortality is bestowed on the righteous at the resurrection. Clark Pinnock explains,

The Bible does not teach the natural immortality of the soul; it points instead to the resurrection of the body as God's gift to believers. . . . The Bible teaches conditionalism: God created humans mortal with a capacity for life everlasting, but it is not their inherent possession. Immortality is a gift God offers us in the gospel, not an inalienable possession.³²

Immortality in Scripture and Theology

Part of the difficulty in the debate over the immortality of the soul is that the term, "immortal" is used somewhat differently in theology than it is in Scripture. Scripture tends to use the words, "everlasting," or "eternal" instead of "immortal." Through these words, the immortality of the soul is clearly taught. The following charts attempt to clarify the use of "immortality" in Scripture and theology.

Biblical Use of "Immortality"

God—1 Tim 6:16

"Only God has immortality."



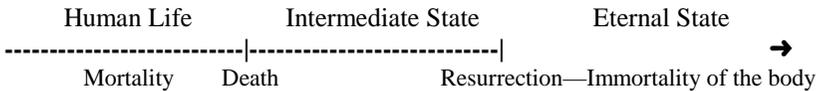
God is the source of life and immortality for all.
God has no experience with sin or death.

The Body of Man—1 Cor 15:54

"But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, 'Death is swallowed up in victory.'"

Point: Immortality of the Resurrected Body

Believer



³²Pinnock, "Conditional View" 148.

done more than anything else (specifically more than the Bible) to give credibility to the doctrine of the everlasting conscious punishment of the wicked. This belief, not holy Scripture, is what gives this doctrine the credibility it does not deserve.³³

But this argument is not convincing. First of all, the traditional Christian understanding of the immortality of the soul is different from Greek philosophy. Plato taught that souls were inherently immortal. Christians have taught that souls are derivatively immortal, that God grants immortality to human beings because they are made in His likeness.

Second, traditionalists insist that the doctrine of the everlasting nature of the soul comes from Scripture, not philosophy. In the Old Testament, the immortality of the soul is clearly implied at the creation of the human race. When God created the first man and woman, He said, “Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness. . . . So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. . . . And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul” (Gen 1:26-27; 2:7, personal translation).

In this passage, there are two significant statements. First, God addresses Himself when He creates man—“Let us. . . .” This is different from the way He creates animals. The great nineteenth-century theologian, William Shedd, noted that “when God creates man, he addresses himself: ‘Let us . . . ,’ Gen. 1:26. But when he creates animals, he addresses the inanimate world: ‘Let the waters bring forth the moving creature,’ Gen. 1:20.”³⁴ The immortality of the soul is implied in the divine personal relationship with mankind.

The second significant statement in this passage is that God breathes the breath of life into man’s lungs. Again, this is totally unlike the way God brings life to the animals. There is an intimate inbreathing of God’s breath into man. In the opinion of Robert Landis, “The usage of the word (‘breathed’) cannot be mistaken. As used in the text, it is descriptive of imparting the immortal spirit. . . .”³⁵

Many NT passages also teach immortality of the soul. The many Scriptures that the other writers emphasize in this issue of *The Master’s Seminary Journal* all teach the immortality of the soul. Matthew 25:46, for example, says that at the judgment, some “will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” Only an immortal soul can suffer eternal punishment

³³Clark Pinnock, “The Destruction of the Finally Impenitent,” *Criswell Theological Review* 4:2 (1990):254.

³⁴William G. T. Shedd, *Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy* (New York: Scribner’s, 1893) 5.

³⁵Robert W. Landis, *The Immortality of the Soul* (New York: Carlton and Porter, 1859) 142.

or enjoy eternal life. As Robert Peterson testifies, "I do not believe in the traditional view of hell because I accept the immortality of human beings, but the other way around. I believe in the immortality of human beings because the Bible clearly teaches everlasting damnation for the wicked and everlasting life for the righteous."³⁶

Annihilationism: Only God Has Immortality

Annihilationists also support the doctrine of conditional immortality with 1 Tim 6:16, that "only God has immortality." If only God has immortality, they argue, humans do not. But traditionalists have a number of responses to this argument. First, the argument proves too much because it would also prove that believers do not have immortality and cannot live forever. Second, it proves too much because it would prove that the elect angels would not live forever. Third, it misses the point of the verse, which is that "the essential difference between the Creator and all His works [is] that he alone by Himself subsists."³⁷ God is an invisible, personal, living Spirit. "Living" simply means that God has energy of intellect, emotions, and will in Himself, and the source of life is in Him, not in any other being or thing external to Himself. God's very nature is to exist. He does not have to will it. Fourth, this verse is emphasizing that only God has lived from eternity past as well as into the eternity future. And fifth, this verse teaches that only God has innate and essential immortality. Human immortality is dependent upon and derived from God.

The traditional view of the immortality of the soul is correct. The Westminster Confession states the doctrine simply: "After God had made all other creatures, he created man, male and female, with reasonable and immortal souls" (IV, 2).

HAMARTIOLOGY: A DEVALUATION OF THE NATURE OF SIN

Another change in the theological system of annihilationism relates to the doctrine of sin. Annihilationists boldly teach that human sin is not wicked enough to be punished eternally. Sin against an infinite God, they say, does not justify infinite penalty. Pinnock explains:

Anselm tried to argue that our sins are worthy of an infinite punishment because they are committed against an infinite majesty. This may have worked in the Middle Ages, but it will not work as an argument today. We do not accept inequality in judgments on the basis of the honor of the victim, as if stealing from a doctor is worse than stealing from a beggar. The fact that we have sinned against an infinite God does not

³⁶Robert A. Peterson, *Hell on Trial* (Phillipsburg, N. J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1995) 178.

³⁷Frederick Grant, *Life and Immortality* (London: Robert L. Allan, 1871) 113.

justify an infinite penalty.³⁸

Pinnock insists, moreover, that eternal punishment would be vindictive on God's part. "What purpose of God would be served by the unending torture of the wicked except sheer vengeance and vindictiveness?"³⁹

Once again, however, it is important to note that this is not a matter for human evaluation but of understanding Scripture. God alone, after all, can tell us what punishment for sin is appropriate, and we can learn that only in Scripture. Blanchard well asks, "Does anyone seriously claim to know how enormous an evil sin is in God's eyes?"⁴⁰

The biblical view teaches that sins against an infinite God do require eternal punishment. To begin with, the argument that something done finitely cannot have infinite consequences is not consistent. The Christian's finite good works here on earth are graciously rewarded infinitely. Likewise, an unbeliever's wickedness can be punished infinitely.

But it is also certain that ongoing rebellion demands ongoing punishment, and there is no evidence in Scripture that a depraved person ever of his own initiative or power gives up his sinful autonomy. The evidence is actually to the contrary (Rev 9:20-21; 21:27; 22:15). No one can, in fact, repent of his sin without the grace of God, so there can be no repentance in hell. Strong observes, "Since we cannot measure the power of the depraved will to resist God, we cannot deny the possibility of endless sinning. . . . Not the punishing, but the non-punishing, would impugn his justice; for if it is just to punish sin at all, it is just to punish it as long as it exists."⁴¹

Moreover, endless guilt requires eternal punishment. Strong writes, "However long the sinner may be punished, he never ceases to be ill-deserving. Justice, therefore, which gives to all according to their deserts, cannot cease to punish. Since the reason for punishment is endless, the punishment itself must be endless."⁴² The quality of God's justice is at stake here. Eternal punishment is the only punishment that could satisfy a perfectly holy and just God.

SOTERIOLOGY: A MINIMIZING OF CHRIST'S ATONEMENT FOR SIN

³⁸Pinnock, "Conditional View" 152-53. See further, Frank Burch Brown, "The Beauty of Hell: Anselm on God's Eternal Design," *The Journal of Religion* 73 (1993):329-55.

³⁹Pinnock, "The Destruction of the Finally Impenitent" 254.

⁴⁰John Blanchard, *Whatever Happened to Hell?* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1995) 223.

⁴¹Strong, *Systematic Theology* 1048.

⁴²*Ibid.*

As noted above, annihilationists teach that finite human sin is not deserving of eternal punishment. "Is it not plain," says Pinnock, "that sin committed in time and space cannot deserve limitless divine retribution."⁴³ However, if it were temporary punishment that Christ paid for, His death was certainly less significant than if he took our eternal punishment. Shedd says,

If sin is punishable and to be punished for only one thousand years, is it probable that one of the persons of the Trinity would submit to such an amazing humiliation as to become a worm of the dust, and undergo the awful passion of Calvary, in order to deliver his rebellious creature from a transient evil which is to be succeeded by billions of millenniums of happiness? A thousand years is indeed a long time, and a thousand years of suffering is indeed a great woe; but it shrinks to nothing in comparison with what is involved in the humiliation and agony of God incarnate.⁴⁴

Again, this is a vital theological point, as Shedd notes, "A suffering that in time would cease, surely would not justify such a strange and stupendous sacrifice as that of the only-begotten and well-beloved Son of God. We affirm therefore that the doctrine of Christ's atonement stands or falls with that of endless punishment."⁴⁵

CONCLUSION

It has been the purpose of this essay to demonstrate by a survey of the doctrinal categories that the doctrine of annihilationism as taught by a few contemporary evangelicals is a significant part of a multifaceted compromise of a biblical systematic theology. I have also suggested that annihilationists often come to the Scriptures with cultural and theological preunderstandings that negate the historical-grammatical meaning of the passages. Carson is right in his observation:

Despite the sincerity of their motives, one wonders more than a little to what extent the growing popularity of various forms of annihilationism and conditional immortality are a reflection of this age of pluralism. It is getting harder and harder to be faithful to the "hard" lines of Scripture. And in this way, evangelicalism itself may contribute to the gagging of God by silencing the severity of his warnings and by minimizing the awfulness of the punishment that justly awaits those untouched by his redeeming grace.⁴⁶

⁴³Pinnock, "Conditional View" 39.

⁴⁴Shedd, *Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy* 184.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, 185.

⁴⁶Carson, *Gagging of God* 536.

Moreover, the doctrinal compromises of annihilationism have serious consequences. J. I. Packer concludes this study with this penetrating question:

Does it matter whether an evangelical is a conditionalist or not? I think it does: for a conditionalist's idea of God will miss out on the glory of divine justice, and his idea of worship will miss out on praise for God's judgments, and his idea of heaven will miss out on the thought that praise for God's judgments goes on (cf. Rev. 16:5-7, 19:1-5), and his idea of man will miss out on the awesome dignity of our having been made to last for eternity, and in his preaching of the gospel he will miss out on telling the unconverted that their prospects without Christ are as bad as they possibly could be—for on the conditionalist view they aren't! These, surely, are sad losses. Conditionalism, logically thought through, cannot but impoverish a Christian man, and limit his usefulness to the Lord. That is why I am concerned about the current trend towards conditionalism. I hope it may soon be reversed.⁴⁷

⁴⁷James I. Packer, "The Problem of Eternal Punishment," *Evangel* 10/2 (Summer 1992):18.

BOOK REVIEWS

S. M. Baugh. *A New Testament Greek Primer*. Phillipsburg, N. J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1995. 240 pp. \$29.99 (paper). Reviewed by Thomas A. Halstead, Professor of Bible, The Master's College.

Dr. Baugh, Associate Professor of New Testament at Westminster Theological Seminary in California, has written this primer specifically to “analyze the process of reading Greek, breaking it down into its constituent ‘sub-skills,’ and then to teach these skills discretely.” He mentions several features of this primer that he sees as important. First, he uses a number of “sub-skills” exercises that lead the student in learning word identification, rather than being confronted with Greek syntax before the noun forms are mastered. Second, every form taught in this primer represents patterns that occur with great frequency because of the author’s use of GRAMCORD, a computer program that quantifies the occurrences of each word in the NT text. Third, Dr. Baugh has attempted to “communicate the distinctive nature of the Greek verb system carefully from the beginning.”

Several strengths are worthy of mention. The exercises at the end of each chapter are very helpful, generally including a section for parsing verbs and analyzing sentences. The section of paradigms at the end of the book cross-references chapters with each section. Probably the most valuable part of the primer is the section at the end of the book that gives all the answers to the exercises. Checking oneself when doing exercises is very important because it gives an individual an opportunity for immediate feedback,

Several areas could stand improvement, however. The organization of the primer alternates between discussing nouns, verbs, and pronouns. Two chapters discuss nouns, then several chapters talk about verbs, then discussion reverts to nouns, then to adjectives, etc. To have covered the nouns, pronouns, and adjectives all at one time and then to cover verbs would have been more effective. Too much jumping back and forth causes some confusion. In addition, chap. 2 discusses first declension nouns but never defines or describes a declension. In the Morphology on p. 8, the author states, “Notice that the genitive singular and accusative plural forms . . . are the same.” But he does not discuss the cases until p. 9, leaving the student in a state of confusion on p. 8 as to what the terms genitive and accusative mean. Perhaps repositioning the paragraphs in the chapter would be helpful. The same is the case for the article in chap. 2. Furthermore, the book fails to mention the

predicate nominative when discussing the nominative case. On p. 10, Part A, the author instructs to read and parse, but he has no description of what parsing is.

Those criticisms aside, the primer accomplishes its purpose well and will be a good resource for first-year Greek students.

Gerald Bray. *Biblical Interpretation Past & Present: A Comprehensive Textbook & Resource*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1996. 608 pp. \$34.99.
Reviewed by James E. Rosscup, Professor of Bible Exposition.

The Professor of Anglican Studies at Beeson Divinity School, Samford University, in Birmingham, Alabama, has written his impressive survey of how Scripture has been interpreted from NT times to the present. Bray's work is a guide to this history for seminarians, pastors, and lay leaders. The effort is in three parts. First is "Before Historical Criticism," interpretation up through the Renaissance and Reformation; second is "The Historical-Critical Method," i.e., critical study in its beginning and the 19th and 20th centuries; and finally "The Contemporary Scene" with its academic, social, and evangelical trends.

Bray includes 29 bibliographies scattered at ends of sections throughout, then a 3-page general bibliography at the end, plus indexes of names, subjects, and Scripture.

In the introduction, the writer is disturbed when scholars' reasoning confuses issues, muddies waters, and becomes difficult even for professional experts to follow. Many read their own agendas into Scripture and make it conform. He also finds disturbing the way scholars contribute only to the interests of a small circle and not to the teaching of the church. He wants to provide a source-book useful to the church.

The first of 13 chapters offers basic concepts in biblical interpretation that last through all eras. Among these are the ideas that God revealed Himself and the nature of the canon. Chapter 2 looks at hermeneutical methods in biblical times, chap. 3 at the patristic period (A.D. 100 to ca. 604) to see exegesis of texts to decide theological definitions in controversies, such as the ones on the trinity and the incarnation of Christ. Chapter 4 takes up the Middle Ages until Erasmus, during which, despite corruptions, many important trends developed that influenced later thought on the rule of law, Parliament, universities, the parochial system, etc. Chapter 5 surveys the impact of Renaissance humanism and the Reformation on the exegesis of Scripture. Here, Christian doctrine began to be systematized and biblical interpretation thrived under the Reformers' aim to find the literal sense.

Chapter 6 covers why and how historical-critical study developed from the late Reformation debates and how the first modern critics gained their perspective

on Scripture. Out of this, to some degree, came ideas for subsequent scholars as well as reactions against the criticism and the development of two camps, the “liberals” and the “conservatives.” Chapters 7-8 sketch 19th-century specialization in OT and NT exegesis, great progress in philology, archaeology, and “scientific” interpretation. Continued OT and NT research is the subject of chaps. 9-10, with further specializations of study developing to place increasing pressure on being able to synthesize so much thought. With this developed a pessimism by many, doubting that the historical-critical method is able to furnish creative resolutions to hermeneutical issues. It can, when used wisely, even if, as Bray says, some deny this.

Later chapters deal with more recent trends that offer alternatives to historical-critical methodology. Chapter 11 discusses a scholarly desire to achieve a new hermeneutic based in literary and philosophical thought, a hermeneutic that at times increasingly blurs the clarity of meaning. Chapter 12 deals with a hermeneutic that can cope with oppression to the poor, women, and minority groups (as though that takes a different hermeneutic than one that represents true biblical teaching). Chapter 13 is devoted to methodology to which conservative groups gravitate—sensitive to biblical authority and sufficiency—where Scripture itself helps in its own interpretation, submitted to in faith. The last chapter is a wrap-up.

The ponderous nature of the discussion as well as the detailed integration of many issues will make the book primarily useful to teachers and students who strive to grasp the whole picture and maintain an awareness of it. For the most part, these will find the bibliographies and the broad summations most valuable.

To those who do use the source, a veritable larder of information is available. The sketches of how interpretation was conducted in the different periods is very beneficial. In reflecting on biblical meaning, one finds bold-faced listings and paragraph profiles about many of the great names in history. A very few among the many are Shammai and Hillel, Irenaeus, Origen, Chrysostom, Jerome, Augustine, David Kimchi (Jewish), Luther, Calvin, Thomas Scott, Bengel, DeWette, Hengstenberg, Keil, Delitzsch, Kittel, Baur, Strauss, C. Hodge, Henry Alford, J. B. Lightfoot, Hort, Westcott, Billerbeck, and Bultmann. More recent names among evangelicals are E. J. Young, Everett Harrison, Bruce Waltke, Howard Marshall, Donald Carson, and Douglas Moo. Bray omits many others who have made great contributions in exegesis.

The bibliography at the end leaves out many evangelical names, such as B. Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Hermeneutics*, and Elliott Johnson, *Expository Hermeneutics*, but does include names such as Donald Carson, A. B. Mickelsen, and Grant Osborne. To use the work is similar to using an encyclopedia, as it discusses each subject under such headings as different stages of history and guiding principles pertinent to periods. One finds, for example, a Medieval list of ten hermeneutical principles (155-56), Calvin’s hermeneutics stated in six points (201-3), and five points for rationalism in connection with the historical-critical method (251-53).

Principle number 5 in the last list is that “Religion and the Bible must be purified of irrational and immoral elements,” which permits rational thinking to reject whatever it does not like. At one point Bray gives interesting remarks about how a “liberal” and a “conservative” could be characterized in 19th-century study (272-74).

As for an assessment, the work is a standout survey informed by meticulous study. It is bound to offer much help where inquiry seeks principles guiding Scripture interpretation in different time periods. It also helps readers to grasp situations in which issues arose and to give them an integrated picture of how some key interpreters fit into history.

Allen Dwight Callahan. *Embassy of Onesimus: The Letter of Paul to Philemon*. Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity, 1998. 96 pp. \$11.00 (paper). Reviewed by Dennis M. Swanson, Seminary Librarian.

It is refreshing to see Paul's small Epistle to Philemon dealt with in a stand-alone commentary, as too often this small book is relegated to a few pages of brief comments at the end of larger works. This commentary is part of “The New Testament in Context” series of NT commentaries.

The author, an Assistant Professor of New Testament at Harvard Divinity School, presents six full pages of bibliography and promises a fresh interpretation as he “put[s] his exegetical hand to the plow” (xi). This work is built on two articles previously published in the *Harvard Theological Review* (*HTR* 86/4 [1993]:357-76, and 88/1 [1985]:149-56). In this work the author spends the introduction defending his thesis that the traditional interpretation (Onesimus as a runaway slave being returned to Philemon with a letter from Paul under whose ministry Onesimus has become a Christian) is false.

The basis for this conclusion is, in brief, twofold: (1) nowhere in the text is this interpretative scheme presented clearly (5), and (2) the “fugitive slave hypothesis” is an invention of John Chrysostom, whom all others have simply followed without any critical thought (16). While the reevaluation of any “traditional” understanding can be helpful, the author's reasoning seems to be both subjective and incomplete. A few examples will illustrate. One of the arguments presented is that Philemon could not be a slave holder at all because “Philemon appears throughout the letter as a good and generous man” (5) and that

Cruelty of a master towards his slave can never be ruled out in the Graeco-Roman world, where severity bordering on sadism was a common feature of the servile relationship. Mildness and forbearance in this respect would have made Philemon not only an exception but an oddity in his own world, so conditioned by violence against all purported inferiors (*ibid*).

This reasoning is patently unsound. Should not the results of becoming a Christian and living according to the Spirit suffice to make one “an oddity in his own world” (cf. Gal 5:22-25). Additionally, although the author seems to wish that Paul was neither condoning nor regulating slavery (xiv, 3, 5), he fails to interact with passages such as Eph 6:5-9 and Col 3:22–4:1 (passages never referenced in the book). He seeks to support his view by stating that “the entire fugitive slave hypothesis was cogently challenged by John Knox” (6). However, he fails to mention that Knox did not question the hypothesis, only that Archippus, not Philemon was the slave-owner (see Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* [InterVarsity, 1990] 661-64 for a thorough refutation of Knox’s view).

He states that the traditional interpretation originated as the “imaginative and ingenious hypothesis of John Chrysostom” (16). However, his interaction with the sources and other writings which predate Chrysostom, are superficial at best.

The actual commentary on the text is slanted, often forced, to coincide with the author’s predetermination. He agrees that Onesimus and Philemon are certainly estranged and Paul is working to reconcile them, but concludes that he is not trying to reconcile slave and master, but two brothers (ix, 51-54).

Throughout the work the author equates the experiences and situation of NT-era slavery under the Roman system and the race-based slavery of 19th-century America. The results are an unsatisfactory commentary built upon a poorly devised theme for the book. This reviewer cannot recommend this work.

Conrad Cherry. *Hurrying Toward Zion: Universities, Divinity Schools, and American Protestantism*. Bloomington, Ind: Indiana University, 1995. xiii + 384 pp. \$24.95 (cloth). Reviewed by J. Gregory Behle, Professor of Christian Education, The Master’s College.

Most evangelical scholars are acquainted with the emergence of conservative Bible colleges and seminaries that were established in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries as a reaction to encroachment by mainline Protestant liberalism. The fifty-year period between 1880 and 1930 witnessed the proliferation of many institutions of Christian higher education, most emerging in reaction to theological shifts within historic denominational-associated institutions.

Conservatives are less familiar with the paralleling developments within the religious-studies departments of the major universities and divinity schools they abandoned during those theologically tumultuous decades. Having pronounced *ichabod* over these institutions, most conservatives are unfamiliar with the historic developments, issues, conflicts, and tensions that have shaped and reshaped mainstream liberal American Protestantism. Conrad Cherry’s *Hurrying Toward*

Zion: Universities, Divinity Schools, and American Protestantism offers a critical appraisal of the emergence and development of liberal Protestantism within the United States, its ministerial and social agenda, and perspectives on future directions as they relate to the universities' religious-studies programs and divinity schools.

Cherry is currently a Distinguished Professor of Religious Studies, Adjunct Professor of American Studies, and Director of the Center for the Study of Religion and American Culture at Indiana University-Purdue University at Indianapolis, Indiana. In addition to *Hurrying Toward Zion*, he has authored *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards: A Reappraisal* and co-edited *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation*.

Hurrying Toward Zion: Universities, Divinity Schools, and American Protestantism is a fascinating historical analysis of one hundred years of theological and ministerial education within eleven of America's leading college religious-studies departments and university divinity schools. Those carefully selected institutions represent both theological and geographical diversity across the United States. The book examines the cultural, theological, intellectual, and social forces that shape, move, and mark the development of these schools. Documentation is extensive throughout the work and Cherry draws his rich sources from deep archival wells.

The book has four parts: Specialization; Professionalization; Formation and Reform; and Pluralism. Each section is thoroughly noted, tracing developments both internally and externally as they concern the schools. Those factors are carefully woven throughout the narrative creating a tight, information-packed text. In each section, the author raises significant questions and critical problems facing the institutions. The work is not a glowing testimonial to the progress of liberal Protestantism, but rather an honest, well-documented, critical appraisal of a neglected aspect of the history of American religious higher education. The avoidance of rehearsing the progressive successes of these schools is intellectually refreshing, given the past trends in much higher-education historiography.

Though many conservative readers may find the book theologically unpalatable, Cherry does raise many important questions that are latent in conservative theological communities and worth an honest assessment and dialogue.

For example, Cherry broaches the issue of the tension between university divinity schools and local churches regarding the nature and content of ministerial education and training. This reviewer has had frequent conversations regarding what is essential and non-essential to ministry preparation with local church practitioners.

Disagreements do exist between the "scholarly" interests of the college and "practical" concerns of the church. Such discussion was the central component of a dialogue between the North American Professors of Christian Education (NAPCE) and the Professional Association of Christian Educators (PACE) at a joint conference in 1994. Movements toward church-based ministerial training schools or pastoral apprenticeship programs are indicative of the belief that many traditional

Christian seminaries and colleges have lost touch with the training needs of the local church.

Conservative readers will be quick to note the shift from a unified, optimistic vision of social and theological potentiality to pessimistic fragmentation, both theologically and intellectually. Cherry discusses this reality well with detailed documentation of the events, ideas, and individuals that precipitate this breakdown.

The illustration of the rose window at Drew Theological Seminary poignantly illustrates the shift and challenge of the “multiversity” as fragmentation within the academy occurs and theology is abandoned as the historic center-point of learning as “Queen of the Disciplines” (269).

Hurrying Toward Zion: Universities, Divinity Schools and American Protestantism is an important and excellent contribution to the understanding of the historic emergence of liberal Protestantism within America’s universities. Readers interested in educational and ministerial developments that parallel the conservative heritage will be well-served by this fine historical treatment of a previously neglected aspect of religious higher-education history.

L. W. Countryman. *The New Testament Is in Greek: A Short Course for Exegetes*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993. 205 pp. \$14.99 (paper). Reviewed by Thomas A. Halstead, Professor of Bible, The Master’s College.

As the subtitle states, this book views itself as a short course for the new Greek student. In fact, the author, Professor of New Testament at Church Divinity School of the Pacific in Berkeley, California, states in the preface that it “offers a one-semester introduction to the Hellenistic Greek language as used in the New Testament.” It is primarily focused on getting the student to read the Greek New Testament.

The advantage of this type of book is that it will help a student to begin reading and understanding some basic concepts of biblical Greek and will help him be able to research from Greek sources.

However, the disadvantages outweigh the advantages. The most significant disadvantage is the lack of thoroughness in understanding the language.

Being able to read Greek if a person cannot understand what he is reading is of little value. The purpose of studying the Greek language is not to know Greek, but to be more accurate students of the Word, and thereby give greater glory to God. Just being able to read in Greek will not necessarily help someone understand the Bible better. A second disadvantage is in having to look up many words while reading, making for much slower progress in translation.

As to the book itself, its strengths are in the glossary and index, the paradigms at the end, and some of the bibliography (152 ff.). All of these can be

helpful tools for learning. The notes for the passages at the beginning of each chapter are also valuable if the student understands what the notes say.

The weaknesses have been noted above. It is the lack of depth in the book to facilitate understanding the material. In addition, the layout of the book is not consistent. It moves from verbs to nouns, back to verbs, etc.

For someone who simply wants a basic overview of the language, the book will accomplish the goal. But for anyone who wants to learn the language, he should use a text with greater depth.

William Crockett, ed. *Four Views on Hell*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996. 190 pp. \$14.99 (paper). Reviewed by Thomas A. Halstead, Professor of Bible, The Master's College.

The doctrine of hell has been the subject of much discussion throughout church history with various understandings by different theologians. This book sets out to compare and contrast four different views of hell. John Walvoord, Chancellor of Dallas Theological Seminary, defends the first view, called "The Literal View."

He takes the orthodox view that punishment for the wicked is everlasting and that it is punitive, not redemptive. He shows from both the Old and New Testaments that there is punishment after this life and that this punishment has everlasting duration. He also states, "[F]ire in connection with eternal punishment supports the conclusion that this is what the Scriptures mean."

William Crockett, Professor of New Testament at Alliance Theological Seminary, discusses the second view, called "The Metaphorical View." He takes the position that the scriptural revelation concerning hell cannot be interpreted literally. "The Bible does not support a literal view of a burning abyss. Hellfire and brimstone are not literal depictions of hell's furnishings, but figurative expressions warning the wicked of impending doom." The pictures that Scripture gives of a flaming pit or darkness are just that, pictures used to demonstrate the great seriousness of divine judgment. He states that the strongest reason for taking the terms for hell as metaphors is the conflicting language used in the NT to describe hell. He poses the question that if the eternal fire was originally created for spirit beings such as the devil and his angels (Matt 25:41), how will people with spirit bodies be affected by a physical fire? He does admit that this view is somewhat recent, having been advocated only since the sixteenth century. The question that must be asked is, How well does this view conform to the biblical data?

Zachary Hayes, Professor of Theology at Catholic Theological Union, supports the third view, called "The Purgatorial View," the view advocated by the Roman Catholic Church. Purgatory "is commonly understood to refer to the state, place, or condition in the next world between heaven and hell, a state of purifying suffering for those who have died and are still in need of such purification. This

purifying condition comes to an end for the individual when that person's guilt has been expiated." The author states that since the beginning of the church there has been an incompleteness between those who have died before the end of history and the return of the Lord in judgment at His coming. This raises the need for an interim state, which will end at the parousia. "If we are not quite ready for heaven at the time of death, neither do we seem to be evil ogres." Therefore, purgatory gets us ready for heaven through purification.

The final view, postulated by Clark Pinnock, Professor of Theology at McMaster Divinity College, is "The Conditional View," also called "The Annihilationist View." Pinnock states that Christians are asked to believe the traditional view that God endlessly tortures sinners who have perished because He has decided not to elect them to salvation. He argues that it is more practical to interpret the nature of hell as destruction rather than the endless torture of the wicked. "I will maintain that the ultimate result of rejecting God is self-destruction, closure with God, and absolute death in the body, soul, and spirit." He concludes that the Bible does not teach immortality of the soul, that there is nothing in the nature of the human soul that requires it to live forever, and that the Bible teaches conditionalism. But he also states that though annihilationism makes hell less of a torture chamber, it does not lessen the extreme seriousness of that doctrine.

The strength of this book lies in its exposing the reader to what the four views advocate. One will also be able to read what each of the authors says about the other views. That can be very helpful for anyone studying this doctrine. One weakness noted was that all the views with the exception of the orthodox view do not include much biblical support. In fact, the author of the conditional view seemed to spend most of his time speaking against the orthodox view rather than supporting his own.

Overall, this is a very helpful book and is worth the reading and studying. This reviewer heartily recommends it.

LaMoine F. DeVries. *Cities of the Biblical World*. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1997. 398 pp. \$24.95 (cloth). Reviewed by Dennis M. Swanson, Seminary Librarian.

One of the often neglected aspects of biblical interpretation is what might be called the "picture-frame" surrounding the text: the history, culture, and physical settings. The "frame" can either enhance the view of the text or distract from it, depending on how it is used. In the last several years many good sources for background information have come into print, including *Cities of the Biblical World*.

The author, an Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Southwestern

Missouri State, intends his book to “introduce students of the Bible to the archaeology, geography and history of several important sites of the OT and NT worlds” (xv). To this end, he has achieved his goal with remarkable excellence. The book has two major parts: Old Testament cities and New Testament cities. DeVries divides both sections regionally: in the OT section, Cities of Mesopotamia, Cities of Aram/Syria and Phoenicia, Cities of Anatolia, Cities of Egypt, Cities of Palestine; and in the NT section, Cities of Palestine and Cities of the Roman World. He lists individual cities of each section in alphabetical order.

Entries for each city vary in length from three to several pages, with an excellent bibliography for further study at the end of each entry. The entries follow a format of basic geographic situation, history, and culture and the site’s relationship to the biblical text. Not all cities dealt with are specifically mentioned in the Bible (e.g., Mari, 26-30, and Hattusas, 99-104), but their impact on the overall affairs of the Ancient Near East merits their inclusion. The author has incorporated a helpful chart of historical periods in Egypt, Israel, and Mesopotamia in relation to the standard archaeological designations. Also included are place and Scripture indexes and a list of abbreviations.

Only a few criticisms of the book are in order. Although amply illustrated, the photographs are too often of individual structures or artifacts and fail to give the reader a good visual understanding of the physical settings. This problem is compounded by a surprising lack of cartographic illustrations. The author gives rather superficial treatment to the location of “Ur of Chaldees” (38-42), dismissing, in this reviewer’s opinion, the more likely northern location with one sentence (cf. Barry J. Beitzel, *The Moody Atlas of Bible Lands* [Moody, 1985] 80). He also avoids taking a precise stand on the dating of the Exodus, and even its location on the Historical Chart (386) is ambiguous. Additionally, it would have seemed that in a book of this genre at least a general discussion of the seven cities of Revelation (only Ephesus is dealt with) would have been warranted.

These however, are minor criticisms of an otherwise excellent work which should serve the student and pastor well.

Charles H. Dyer and Gregory A. Hattenberg. *The Christian Traveler’s Guide to the Holy Land*. Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman and Holman, 1998. 238 pages. \$19.99 (paper). Reviewed by William Varner, Professor of Bible and Director of the IBEX Israel-Extension Campus, The Master’s College.

“A trip to the Land of Israel is worth a year of Bible College.” Many a Christian—lay and otherwise—has proven the truth of that adage, even some who had been doubters prior to such a trip! A *good* trip that has a *good* host with a *good* guide following a *good* itinerary will be a great experience that can permanently

alter the way one reads the Bible. Yet many Israel trippers lack one necessary requirement to make the trip truly successful: a good preparation beforehand. Over a hundred years ago, church historian Philip Schaff, after a long trip to the Middle East, wrote, "A trip to the Holy Land is worth more than a year of lectures at Oxford and Cambridge. The benefit of travel, however, depends on the preparation of the traveler. The more knowledge we carry with us the more we shall bring back."

Israel-trip planners usually prepare their own notes and syllabi as a handout to their group members beforehand. Such books as "The Source," "Exodus," and "O Jerusalem" have been recommended. The old Vilnay Guide and some of the standard newer ones like Baedeker and Fodor have also been used. But these books do not usually provide the help that an evangelical Christian is seeking.

It is hard to include everything that a traveler should know to prepare best for this trip of a lifetime. Practical information necessary for travel must accompany the biblical and historical information so necessary to provide context for what travelers will see—What to bring?, Do I need?, What will the weather be like?, Is it safe? Those and a host of other questions often arise, and sometimes many wish they had asked the questions before they left home.

Most visitors to the Land will be there only for a week or two at the most. They are looking for something that can help them get the most out of that short time. Dyer and Hatteberg, both associated with Dallas Theological Seminary, have written a book that will be of incalculable help to the average Israel traveler. They have made many trips there and Dyer is also a licensed Israel tour guide.

The book's first section, "Preparing for the Trip" (6-35), supplies important practical information on *safety* ("the best international security system in the world," 7), *jet lag* (18), *travel tips* (8-14), a suggested *packing list* (15-16), *passports* (20-21), and even some conversational *Hebrew and Arabic* (17). It also suggests four-week schedules for Bible reading and Bible studies to enhance one's spiritual preparation (22-35). One serious criticism is in order, however: the book includes a total of only four maps (37, 38, 167, 178), not enough and not detailed enough to provide the geographical context needed for even the average Christian visitor.

The heart of the book is a listing of fifty sites in Israel with a brief description of each and the appropriate Scripture passages illustrating the site's role in biblical times (44-136). The summary of these sites and their role will be the guide's most valuable aspect for the Israel tourist. Jerusalem has seven pages, but these consist mostly of a scriptural summary of the city's overall role in biblical periods. They describe no individual site of the hundreds in the city. They should have included at least a survey of the sections of the "Holy City." This lack illustrates what is probably the weakest aspect of the book: its lack of archaeological and historical information. Most first-time travelers to Israel complain that they are bewildered by the unfamiliar time periods (Roman, Byzantine, Crusader,

Mameluke, Ottoman, etc.). Some help in this regard with the post-Biblical period would have been helpful.

Two other important sections are brief descriptions of the main sites in Jordan (137-57) and in "The Lands of the Aegean" (Athens, Corinth, Crete, Ephesus; 158-66), which are often omitted in such books. There is also a section of beautiful color photographs (168-97). The Appendix contains the words of thirty-six familiar Christian hymns and gospel songs (199-236) for times of worship at special sites or on the bus while the group is "on the way." My only suggestion here is that some simple Hebrew folk and Scripture songs should be among them ("Hevenu Shalom Aleichem," "Hava Nagila," etc.). It has been my experience (24 trips) that people of all ages deeply appreciate some exposure to such Jewish songs in the Jewish land.

The Land did not just exist in biblical times. It has had a vast and varied history the last two thousand years as well. Though the biblical information is what the Christian traveler most wants, travelers need to know a much wider context of historical and cultural information, whether they realize it or not. One such example is the dynamics of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Something should be written to orient the visitor to the current "political" situation that he will encounter there firsthand. Israel is not a "hothouse" composed of isolated biblical sites, pristine and unchanged in all of their ancient glory. The Middle East has crime and grime—all the modern problems existing alongside the past. Right beside a "tell" can be a modern city or even a refugee camp. This sometimes shocks the traveler who is unprepared and arrives with an idealistic and even mystical outlook on the "Land of the Bible."

Such a book as this that attempts to include so many types of information is bound to lack in some areas, and this book simply lacks enough specific information about each site. For the more serious traveler, the best book is still *The Holy Land* by Jerome Murphy O'Connor (4th ed., New York: Oxford, 1998). But it is hard to be too critical of a book that definitely meets a felt need. The best option to see the Land of the Bible is a serious study trip of 2½–3 weeks or, even better, to spend an entire semester there. Not everyone can do that, however. Anyone going on a brief trip or leading one definitely will want to consider this very helpful little guidebook. Hopefully, your guide or teacher can fill in the important archaeological and historical information.

Millard J. Erickson. *Postmodernizing the Faith*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998. 163 pp. \$11.99 (paper). Reviewed by Richard L. Mayhue, Senior Vice-President and Dean.

The church has been faced with numerous volumes on "postmodernity" as

the 21st century approaches. Though this idea is philosophical in its origins, it nonetheless has crept into Christian thinking and literature. Most Christians have hardly become accustomed to and understood the term “modernity;” so Millard Erickson has done the Christian community a great favor by writing this basic volume in which he defines “premodern,” “modern,” and “postmodern.”

Postmodernizing the Faith is a helpful primer to understand the sides being taken in evangelicalism with regard to a movement called “deconstructionism,” which underlies postmodern thinking by rejecting any idea of objectivity or rationality. In repudiating the concept that language has any sort of objective reference at all, it moves from relativism to pluralism. The meaning of a statement is not to be found objectively in that intended by the speaker or writer, but is the meaning that the hearer or reader finds in it. Put another way, reality is what you make of it.

Erickson looks at three negative responses to postmodernism by David Wells, Tom Oden, and Francis Shaeffer, followed by an analysis of three positive responses to post-modernism by Stanley Grenz, J. Richard Middleton and Brian J. Walsh, and B. Keith Putt. He summarizes their individual writings and concludes each summary with an analysis of what he thinks is positive and what is negative about their contributions. For people who are not familiar with the writings of postmodernity advocates, they will be shocked at how far so-called evangelicals have drifted, even to the point that those evangelicals’ affections for postmodern thinking will most likely take them beyond liberal Christianity that has the philosophy of modernity as its foundation (53).

In Erickson’s concluding chapter, “Postmodern Apologetics: Can Deconstructed Horses Even Be Led to Water?” (151-57), he analyzes the various positions regarding postmodernity and then concludes with his own. Though Erickson approaches the issues philosophically, he does seem to distance himself from the movement. One could only wish that he had analyzed this “worse-than-liberal” movement from a more exegetical, biblical perspective. Nevertheless, this volume should be quite helpful as an overview of the postmodern landscape.

Steve Gregg, ed. *Revelation, Four Views: A Parallel Commentary*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997. 528 pp. \$29.99 (cloth). Reviewed by James E. Rosscup, Professor of Bible Exposition.

Here is work closely akin to the book edited by Marvin Pate (*Four Views on the Book of Revelation*). In this case, the editor combines the four major ways for interpreting the Revelation by selecting summaries out of writers for the four views in four columns laid side by side in each two-page spread. He works his way through the Revelation, dealing with a few verses at a time.

The four approaches chosen are the preterist (postmillennial, today Christian Reconstruction), historical (all through history), futurist (Rev 4:1–22:5 mostly features what is yet to occur), and idealist view (principles of righteousness and evil have their application at any time).

Gregg directs the Great Commission School, also Good News Underground, which is an evangelistic ministry providing literature. He admits years of flip-flopping from one view to another and just giving his students arguments for different views (1). He does not want to divulge his own present view, which he says has kept changing (4).

The work has an advantage of giving a quick comparison of views on specific sets of verses, often even showing diverse explanations of writers who contend for one of the four overall positions. At times it is clear and fair, at times it does not provide for a given view the best evidence available. It is an energetic project, but varies in representing the approaches. Overall, it offers great convenience in glancing at views pulled together, at least parts of them, that the editor chose to incorporate.

Some generalized inaccuracies occur, as on p. 2: “Futurist interpreters usually apply everything after chapter four to a relatively brief period before the return of Christ.” In reality, they see only chaps. 4:1–19:10 this way, for Christ comes in chap. 19, chap. 20 is after His coming, and 21:1–22:5 pictures descriptions of the New Jerusalem even after chap. 20. Also, some details such as the references to Christ’s death (5:9-10) and His birth (12:2, 4-5) go back to His first advent.

At the outset, Gregg has a two-page Foreword by Robert Clouse, who edited *The Meaning of the Millennium: Four Views* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1977). Gregg then provides an introduction to the Book of Revelation, also a survey of the four major views (28-49). Commentary on Revelation 1–3 is his own, because he sees much agreement here among the views, though he points out occasions when the four differ, such as with “the time is near” (1:1-2) or Christ’s coming (1:7). But in Revelation 4–19 he deals in short sets of verses and presents the four-column format with the four views. For chaps. 20–22 he switches to a three-view consideration, presenting the postmillennial, amillennial, and premillennial positions. His 3-page bibliography (6-8) does not include Robert L. Thomas’s detailed exegetical case for a premillennial view (*Revelation 1–7* and *Revelation 8–22* [Moody, 1992 and 1995]).

As in commentaries in general, this work handles some points well, others weakly and generally, as with the fuzzy statements that do not define the one who “overcomes” (2:7, p. 65). However, Gregg has a good, quick review of explanations on the “white stone” in 2:17. He is weak on what it means not to be blotted from the book in 3:5 and has surface-type remarks about being kept from the hour of trial in 3:10 that do not represent the pretribulational rapture position’s better arguments. The views of the 24 elders (human or angelic) among futurist interpreters are given without better arguments for either view. Sometimes the work

gives space to a view that is by no means among the better examples representing a system. For instance, the book cites a Henry Morris view that the 24 elders are the 24 ancestors of Christ, Adam to Pharez, which Morris alone holds (87). Going with this is the idea that the elder who speaks to John is the OT Judah (95).

At Rev 6:1, differences in viewpoints increase. Even among futurists, the rider on the white horse can be Christ, Antichrist, or a military trend. Historicists say this pictures Roman imperialism from the death of Domitian (A.D. 96) to A.D. 180, preterists hold it to be symbolic of warfare and its results, and the spiritualist (idealist) view sees Christ and the preaching of the gospel. How to interpret the 144,000 also varies—all believers, Jewish Christians, racial Jews who are saved during a future tribulation time, etc. Great diversity of explanation appears on seals, trumpets, and bowls as well, also on the 42 months, mystery Babylon, the woman of chap. 12, the two witnesses, 666, the bride and those invited, the thousand years, the binding of Satan, and the coming to life in 20:4, to name a few.

Gregg provides indexes of Scripture, subjects, and authors.

As a help to teachers, pastors, students and laypeople, the work can be of benefit along with Pate's work on *Four Views* (see separate review below). Whereas Pate has four scholars write many pages each to contend for their approaches, each covering the entire book, Gregg dips in to differing representatives of four positions on countless details that are bits of the picture as he comes to them in the Revelation. Gregg pulls out citations that vary, some carefully and others by strange conjecture, whereas Pate's work has the sustained mind of a given scholar advocating his view. On the other hand, Gregg's work shows comparisons on far more of the details. So, both books can make contributions in study of the issues.

For those who already know a position well, the two books will be of more help. For beginners or those not far along in grasping any position well, trying to deal with the books at such an early point might put them "more at sea" than before, because they have no clear-cut, solid reference points to help them evaluate arguments wisely. They may be diverted on some flimsy basis without being aware of how unwise that direction is.

William W. Hallo and William Kelly Simpson. *The Ancient Near East: A History*. 2nd ed. Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace, 1998. xi + 324 pp. \$37.00 (paper).
Reviewed by Keith Essex, Assistant Professor of Bible Exposition.

Since the appearance of the first edition of *The Ancient Near East: A History* in 1971, the work of Hallo and Simpson has become a standard introduction to the fields of Assyriology and Egyptology. Both William Hallo and William Simpson serve as professors at Yale University. Twenty-seven years ago, when both were younger scholars, they collaborated on a work that would survey the

political and cultural development of preclassical antiquity. Now, as older scholars, they have revised their text, taking into account the material that has appeared in the interim. The second edition retains the basic structure and content of the first edition. However, the maps and charts have been revised and the footnotes and bibliographies updated. The authors have sought as much as possible to base their history on textual sources, and, to a lesser extent, on art and artifacts. As Hallo explains, “In an age of increasing skepticism, we hold fast to a middle position that treats the ancient sources critically, but respectfully” (vii). This critical respect is also extended to the OT (28-29, 69-71, 125).

The book is in two parts. In Part One, Hallo surveys the history of Mesopotamia and the Asiatic Near East to 333 B.C. (1-181). In Part Two, Simpson concentrates on the political history of Egypt to 332 B.C. (183-296). A helpful appendix lists the rulers of Egypt chronologically to the Roman conquest in 30 B.C. (297-300). The authors have included an extensive bibliography, annotated in places, that directs the student to further resources for investigation of the Ancient Near East (301-14). A detailed index completes the book and is a helpful tool in directing the reader to the location of specific topics (315-24).

Hallo begins his contribution by defining history “as temporal analysis of causality applied to the texts and other documentary remains of the past” (4). Thus, the period of time to 3100 B.C. is prehistory, which is rapidly surveyed using the contemporary evolutionary perspective (5-23). With the invention of writing, the study of history commences. Hallo takes his readers through Mesopotamian history from 3100-333 B.C. in four chapters (25-149). At strategic points, he references the OT into this historical survey, but not always with a conservative understanding. For example, Hallo correlates the flood of Genesis 6–8 with other accounts and concludes, “[T]he great deluge of the Mesopotamian sources was somewhat more localized than the texts picture it but it was nonetheless a historical event associated with a specific point in time” (33). The final chapter on Mesopotamia is a helpful survey on culture, including literature, religion, and government (151-81).

Simpson has an important section on the determining of Egyptian dating in his opening chapter (189-95). It is difficult to reconstruct the chronology on which to base a historical survey. Simpson describes the evidence and procedure used, but concludes, “Dating is a complex matter still under study” (195). The dates given in this text for the New Kingdom Pharaohs are substantially different from those used by most conservative biblical scholars, e.g., Thutmose III (1495-1425 B.C.), Rameses II (1279-1212 B.C.). A short introduction to Egyptian culture concludes the chapter (195-97). Simpson devotes five chapters to a historical survey of Egypt from 3100-322 B.C. (199-296).

For the student of the OT, this is an essential work to read and master. *The Ancient Near East: A History* lays the foundation for the student upon which works on OT archaeology, history, peoples, and culture can build.

Richard T. Hughes and William B. Adrian, eds. *Models for Christian Higher Education: Strategies for Success in the Twenty-First Century*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997. ix + 461 pp. \$30.00 (paper). Reviewed by J. Gregory Behle, Professor of Christian Education, The Master's College.

Models for Christian Higher Education, subtitled *Strategies for Success in the Twenty-First Century*, opens with two fundamental questions: How is it possible for Christian institutions of higher learning to develop into academic institutions of the first order and, at the same time, to nurture in creative ways the faith commitments that called these institutions into existence in the first place? More than this, how is it possible for Christian colleges and universities to weave first-class academic programs from the very fabric of their faith commitments? (1)

Funded by the Lilly Endowment and edited by Richard T. Hughes (Distinguished Professor of Religion at Pepperdine University, Malibu, California) and William B. Adrian (Provost Emeritus at Pepperdine University, Malibu, California), *Models for Christian Higher Education* is a panoramic compilation of varying theological traditions and the expression of these traditions in selected institutions of higher learning. The work divides into seven sections, each representing a distinct faith community—Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Reformed, Mennonite, Evangelical, Wesleyan/Holiness, and Baptist /Restorationist. Each section begins with a foundational essay that focuses on the theological distinctives and denominational nuances of that tradition, followed by the implications of those distinctives for higher learning. Following the theological discussion, specific examples in the form of institutional histories provide case-studies of putting theory into practice.

Several observations are noteworthy for potential readers. The introductory essays for each faith community are generally well-written, scholarly, and thought-provoking as they challenge the reader to consider the implications of theology and denominational affiliation as well as the ramifications of that theology or affiliation for higher education. The use of footnotes also helps the reader track digressions and scholarly commentary without shuffling back and forth between endnotes and the text proper. The editors have attempted to provide a broad sampling both geographically and denominationally. By their own admission, funding limited the extent of the project (9). The work demonstrates high caliber scholarship in general and the editors have assembled a respectable team of scholars for the project. Accolades by historians Noll and Marsden further attest to the general quality of the book.

Second, it should be noted that the subtitle of the book, *Strategies for Success in the Twenty-First Century*, suggests to the reader that the work will include *prescriptive* strategies for institutional decision-making. However, the book

is essentially *descriptive* of the state of the practice within selected colleges and universities. Though it might be said the book intends to leave the reader with varying options, the book subtitle suggests a more focused approach that will offer the reader specific strategies to be implemented in the impending millennium.

Third, the individual "house histories" employed as case examples are a scholarly mixed-bag. Many are well-written and evidence serious attention to historical detail. Drawing from the rich cultural, social, and intellectual milieu that founded and impacted these institutions, the writers provide the critical reader with a scholarly feast. Supplemented with archival documentation and primary source materials, these essays offer tremendous insight into the variables that brought the historic change described in the institutional story. However, other historical essays are somewhat lackluster and appear to rely heavily on secondary sources that take the reader in a predictable pattern from the institution's "humble beginnings," "to the struggle for identity and academic formation," "to the emergence as a contemporary paradigm of excellence," usually structured chronologically around presidential tenure. Thelin (1985) and Goodchild & Huk (1990), in their reviews of the scholarly literature, both refer to this historiographic approach in less than a positive light. (Thelin, "Beyond Background Music: Historical Research on Admissions and Access in Higher Education," *Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research* 1 [New York: Agathon, 1985] 351; Goodchild and Huk, "The American College History: A Survey of Historiographic Schools and Analytic Approaches from the Nineteenth-Century to the Present," *Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research* 6 [New York: Agathon, 1990] 221). In fairness to the editors, a call was made to the writers to be critical of the institution surveyed (2), yet many of the histories maintained remarkable predictability and lacked the requisite objectivity due to the writer's current association with the institution.

It might also be observed that the title, *Models of Christian Higher Education*, is relatively ambiguous. The editors assert that they ". . . deliberately selected institutions for this project that have strong academic reputations and that continue to work within the context of their historic faith commitments. This means that from the perspective of this book, each institution whose narrative appears in this volume is, in a fundamental sense, a success story" (2). Though geographic and theologic sample stratification is evident and justified in the text by the editorial team (3), the "academic reputation" qualification is left undefined. It would assist the reader to have further clarification of the sampling decision in this regard. Using the Carnegie Classification system, fifteen institutions were chronicled in the book.

Only one represented doctoral-level categories (Doctoral University II), namely Pepperdine University, which was also the base institution of the two editors. One might wonder why other Christian doctoral level institutions were not considered, such as Biola University (also Doctoral University II) which has maintained a rich Christian heritage and resides in geographic proximity to Pepperdine University. Charges of institutional favoritism might be raised by some readers from colleges

and universities excluded from the text but equally worthy of inclusion. On the other side of the scale, only one institution, Messiah College, was included in the Baccalaureate II classification, yet many smaller Christian liberal arts colleges fall into this category. Approximately half (N=8) of the included institutions are members in the Coalition of Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU), which serves as the central association of Christian institutions of higher learning. Questions regarding the inclusion of seven institutions that fall outside the purview of the CCCU are justified. It is also worth noting that all of the institutions were American. Canadians, who share a similar ecclesiastical and educational heritage to their southern neighbors, might take issue with what appears to be an American bias, particularly if it is assumed that only “American” institutions are *Models of Christian Higher Education* (e.g., Trinity Western University in Langley, British Columbia—an Evangelical Free institution with a strong academic tradition).

Finally, some readers may question the definition of “Christian” employed in the book. It apparently makes no formal attempt to define the term theologically or ecclesiastically. It leaves the reader to assume the broadest possible definition for the sake of inclusiveness. Interestingly, the problem of religious “identity” as a tension point was best raised in the Catholic essay concerning the University of Portland (64-65).

This reviewer suggests that *“Mosaics of Christian Higher Education”* would have been a more appropriate title. Although lack of clarity regarding institutional inclusion, definition of academic reputation, and the mixed quality of institutional histories results in some disappointment, the overall tenor of the book is scholarly and enlightening. The massive sweep across the landscape of American church history and Christian higher education in the United States provides the reader with much to ponder. Though the book will likely receive a limited readership, those who read it will find rich intellectual material to consider. *Models of Christian Higher Education* represents the diversity that forms the mosaic of Christian higher education in America.

David Jeremiah. *Prayer, The Great Adventure*. Sisters, Ore.: Multnomah, 1997. 263 pp. \$18.99 (cloth). Reviewed by James E. Rosscup, Professor of Bible Exposition.

This new contribution comes from the pastor of Shadow Mountain Community Church in the San Diego, California area. Jeremiah has several tributes in the book to Howard Hendricks, one of his tutors while at Dallas Theological Seminary, and Hendricks writes one of the praises of the work on the first two pages.

Jeremiah includes 13 chapters, among them titles such as “Too Busy Not to Pray” (earlier the title of a Bill Hybels book on prayer), “Priorities: Aligning Our

Will with God's," and "The Greatest Prayer Ever Offered" (John 17). The book focuses on prayer as saturating all that Jesus did on earth, and His putting more emphasis on teaching His disciples to pray than to preach (11). A big point is that Christians need a sense of being helpless without God so that they pray out of desperation, not mere duty. Problems can drive one to prayer, as Jeremiah's own desperation came in his bout with cancer. He learned, he says, to use prayer not as a last resort but as the first line of defense (13). He has many statements that grab, such as "A prayerless Christian is like a bus driver trying alone to push his bus out of a rut because he doesn't know Clark Kent is on board . . ." (14). Of course, Jeremiah believes that God is much greater than even the legendary power of Superman.

The book is written simply, with many fine illustrations, and communicates very well as a stimulant to pray. Jeremiah deals with how to find time to pray in a busy life, overcome discouragement, and what to ask when praying. It may not appear gracious when he berates books on prayer that he views as "little more than guilt-ridden tirades on why we don't pray and why we should pray more" and as "a depressing collection." One can easily commend his own book as superior that way, and put a spin on other books which in their context may in the view of others have their point. It is valid, among other things, to speak of why people do not pray and why they ought to pray more. Sometimes the present book has statements that are not thought through well. One is, "prayer is the most wonderful gift in God's great bag of blessings" (19). But what about 2 Cor 9:15, "the indescribable gift," Christ and His salvation? What about God's presence with believers, and His Word, which can be seen as a gift surely as important as, or more so, than our words to Him?

Readers find in this book a fine discussion of what Jesus teaches on prayer in Matt 7:7-11 (ask, seek, knock), Luke 11:5-8 (the parable), Matt. 6:9-12, and John 17. Chapter 2 shows that Jesus Himself was incredibly busy but prayed even when pressed with the most duties, and seeks to answer common reasons to excuse one from praying. Jeremiah says that believers need to guard against feeling that prayer is useless (59), or letting changing moods elbow prayer out of the life (59), or losing heart and not talking with God (64). Chapter 5 is "Praise" to the Father of Matt 6:9-12. It also explains the meaning of "Hallowed" and gives seven benefits of praise.

Careful interpretation falters at times, as in saying that Luke 17:21 teaches that the kingdom of God is within you. A problem is that the verse is variously translated as "within you" (but unsaved Pharisees were in Jesus' audience, and the true kingdom was not in their hearts) or as "among you, in your midst," and then the issue of whether that is by Jesus the King Himself being among people *at that time* for a while, or by His being among them as publicly and unmistakably at His future coming as the Son of Man (cf. vv. 22-37; 18:8). Many have written journal articles on the meaning of 17:21.

The author calls the prayer Jesus taught His disciples (Matt 6:9-12) "the best known prayer in the world" (71), and styles it as a road-map to guide in prayer.

His book turns out to be in large part one more work giving a chapter-by-chapter discussion of the Disciples' Prayer, which Jeremiah often calls "The Lord's Prayer," although in one place he acknowledges that the true Lord's Prayer, the one Jesus prayed, is in John 17 (191). Chapter 12 is "Secrets of the Directed Life," and it continues what chapter 11 began on John 17. Jeremiah says this is living by divine purpose and divine power and writes on how living by God's plan guarantees five things God promises: nothing can distract, destroy, discourage, disappoint, or defeat the believer. That guarantee requires further clarification for imperfect people.

Chapter 13 shows the value of keeping a journal and what to include in it. The author is against putting in so much that it becomes so big a project and invites its own discontinuance. To put in everything "except the kitchen sink," i.e., to make the journal so broad and inclusive as an overall writing project, can work against a real focus on *prayer*. Jeremiah even suggests putting in quotes from books read.

This *can* get out of hand fast. A mature believer with many years of discipline in writing and note-taking, such as the author, can do this, whereas many believers have little discipline for such a daily journal, and need the simplest, most prayer-focused, most uncluttered methods, at least for a good while as they are building the discipline. It can be a big and fast-growing project just to maintain daily entries on new prayers/answers featuring petition, intercession, praise/thanks, affirmations about God, confessions, questions where God's help is needed. Notes on Bible study and reading can be kept in other records, and a prayer journal should be a focused record of *prayer*.

The list of suggested prayer books at the end, a bit over a page, has some notable titles by E. M. Bounds, Dick Eastman, O. Hallesby, John MacArthur, Dwight Moody, J. O. Sanders, Ray Stedman, R. A. Torrey, and Warren Wiersbe. But many of the great titles are not there, such as by Andrew Murray (though he appears in some of the footnotes), W. B. Hunter, Donald Carson, and Evelyn Christianson, to name but a few.

An overall assessment would rate this as a highly readable motivation book for seeing the urgency to pray and finding guidance for prayer in some passages of the NT. It is refreshing for teachers, pastors, and lay people, and has many one-liners and illustrations of a riveting nature. The book has those benefits without plowing ground beyond what many books have already essentially covered.

David Jeremiah. *What the Bible Says about Angels*. Sisters, Ore.: Multnomah, 1996. 237 pp. \$12.99 (cloth). Reviewed by Thomas A. Halstead, Professor of Bible, The Master's College.

With interest in the subject of angels at a fever pitch in today's society, reading this work by Dr. Jeremiah is refreshing because he gets away from the contemporary focus on angels to concentrate on what the Bible says. As

endorsements on the book jacket state, this is a welcome work reflecting a theologian's concern, a pastor's heart, and a biblicalist's accuracy. It furnishes an encouraging look into God's powerful messengers and what that says about the Creator.

The purpose of the book appears in chaps. 10 and 11 when the author focuses on two important lessons readers can learn from angels: "We can learn to worship the Lord with all our heart," and "we can learn the great joy of obeying God quickly." Those two chapters are excellent applications of the truths stated in the first nine chapters, and they bring the subject to a proper climax.

Though the book contains no new information that has not already appeared in systematic theology books, Jeremiah has organized his material in a refreshing way that makes it quite readable for laymen. One of the most obvious strengths of the book is the biblical support given for every point made. That gives the work the biblical authority needed today. The author also covers several of the main issues discussed today in angelology: (1) Who is the Angel of the Lord? (2) Do believers have Guardian angels? (3) Do the passages in Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 refer to Satan? This reviewer was disappointed, however, in his discussion of the "angels of God" in Genesis 6, as he only states the possible views and does not divulge his preference.

One final concern is that of the 207 pages (13 chapters) devoted to God's angels, only 14 pages (1 chapter) discusses demons or Satan's angels. This is disappointing especially in light of the author's statement that he has drawn the greatest response from his congregation when he has preached on the devil and his fallen angels. This part of the subject is deserving of greater attention.

Overall, this book will make a valuable contribution to the study of angels, and especially will help Christians to worship and obey the Lord more devotedly.

Simon J. Kistemaker. *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997. 495 pp. \$34.99 (cloth). Reviewed by James E. Rosscup, Professor of Bible.

Kistemaker's product is the latest in his series of works continuing the William Hendriksen *New Testament Commentary* after Hendriksen's death. Before 2 Corinthians Kistemaker has done Acts, 1 Corinthians, Hebrews, James, 1 and 2 Peter, the Epistles of John, and Jude. He has another good book, *The Parables of Jesus*. He has continued this commentary series while serving as Professor of NT, Reformed Theological Seminary, but now in retirement as a Professor of NT Emeritus at that same institution.

Throughout, the writer uses his own translations, also the NIV. His commentary is very well organized, as in giving specific lists on points that develop

passages. He explains a set of verses, then has distinct additional material and comments on Greek words, phrases, and constructions there. Footnotes show a judicious use of other scholarly literature as in journals. He includes sections on the practical considerations in sets of verses. Kistemaker's awareness of sources even enables him to cite the standout work by Hendrik Versnel, *Triumphus: An Inquiry into the Origin, Development and Meaning of the Roman Triumph* (Leiden: Brill, 1970).

Kistemaker has a good section on six theological themes in 2 Corinthians (20-25): suffering and glory, covenant and transformation, dwellings on earth or in heaven, reconciliation and righteousness, eschatology and Christology, and trust and apostolicity. He sees the purpose of the letter as "proclaiming God's glory" in its transforming sufficiency, and points out that "glory" appears 19 times out of its 165 NT occurrences, whereas the Gospel of John has only 18, Revelation only 17, and Romans only 16. He identifies the opponents in 2 Corinthians as Judaizers with Jewish roots, who are also the so-called superapostles (11:5; 12:11) and the self-appointed false apostles (11:13). But, he holds that all true apostles are equal to, none super over, others and are supportive of one another (28).

The commentator shows that 2 Cor 2:14-7:4 is one of Paul's several digressions in his epistles, but defends a smooth transition into and out of the section as a legitimate part of the unity of the epistle, as opposed to its being another inserted document (8-9). Likewise he argues for the unity and integrity of chaps. 10-13 with 1-9 (14-15). His idea is that the breaks in Paul's flow of presentation can be due to his traveling from place to place (cf. 2:12-13), or to his turning briefly from one subject to work on another important thought (6:14-7:1), or to introduce some tone to carry out a pastoral aim, as in chaps. 10-13.

Kistemaker sees the Roman triumph as background in 2:14, but thinks that God leads Paul as a *captive* in Christ and uses him as a servant in this role (89). With the analogy of the triumph, this is not necessary. More consistently with the figure, God leads Paul as one of His own army, not as a captive, in a pageant of triumph. In the Roman custom the conquered enemies were not participants in the victory but destined to be put to death or slavery. To mix with the triumph picture the idea of Paul's being a suffering slave facing death is to distort the idea into its opposite and to make a picture represent a mixture of conflicting conceptions. The context does not mingle Paul with captives, but directly contrasts believers as marked for life from unbelievers destined for death (v. 15).

Readers will find in Kistemaker's work a fine job on Corinthian believers being a letter from Christ (3:3), on the comparison of glory (3:7-11), the unveiled faces (3:12-18), and many other passages. He is graphic in displaying customs, for example, in Paul's comparing believers and their treasure of the good news about salvation with earthenware pots containing precious treasure in 4:7. He is vividly clear in comparing Paul's temporary suffering with eternal glory (4:17 f.), distinguishing the trifling from the weighty, the affliction from the glory (160). The

section on chaps. 8–9 concerning the collection contains rich explanation with a distinguishing of principles for giving. The indescribable gift for which Paul in doxology prays with thanks in 9:15 is Jesus Christ and His salvation. He is God's gift in His birth, ministry, suffering, death, resurrection, ascension, and return (322).

The author also has a good section elaborating on Paul's "thorn" (12:7). But in describing views, he is vague and weak as he bypasses (slights) evidence one can adduce for human enemies; he casts this aside with the thin objection that Paul would not pray for removal of his enemies, he would only pray for deliverance from attacks by Satan (417-19). One can feel after looking at the brief sketches of views that the author has not done in-depth work or decided to use only a light survey of views that does not provide readers with the benefit of detail. The picture of thorns, for example, was an OT analogy for human enemies, and Paul in his context has many trials, several of which are those by persecutors. Also, not all will concur on 13:5 that Paul refers to examining whether people are in the living, subjective faith of intimate communion, rather than to being authentically in the objective, saving faith. Kistemaker's assertions do not appear to prove his case.

The 10-page bibliography at the end can be helpful with its commentaries, journal literature, special studies, and tools. Kistemaker also furnishes indexes to authors and Scripture.

All in all, the effort supplies well-reasoned assistance to teachers, pastors, and Christian lay people serious about the study of Scripture. The commentary will take its place as one of the better works on 2 Corinthians, along with efforts by Alfred Plummer, Paul Furnish, Paul Barnett, and Philip Hughes.

William Sanford LaSor, David Allan Hubbard, and Fredric William Bush. *Old Testament Survey: The Message, Form and Background of the Old Testament*. 2nd ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996. xvii + 860 pp. \$45.00 (cloth).
Reviewed by Keith Essex, Assistant Professor of Bible Exposition.

The widespread use of the first edition of *Old Testament Survey* (1982) encouraged the authors to make the work even more serviceable in this second edition (x). The writers, all associated with Fuller Theological Seminary, have designed this volume as a basic text for college and seminary students in Old Testament survey courses (xiii). During the revision process, LaSor (1991) and Hubbard (1996) died. However, LaSor's suggestions and queries were used in this revision and Hubbard carried the complete editorial responsibility for the second edition (x-xi). Evangelical biblical scholars Leslie C. Allen, James R. Battenfield, John E. Hartley, Robert L. Hubbard, Jr., John E. McKenna, and William B. Nelson, Jr., made further contributions to the work.

Building upon the form and content of the first edition, this new textbook

is a thorough revision of the earlier work. First, much of the text is rewritten in simpler, shorter sentences. For instance, “In these documents, which shaped the understanding of their life, faith and destiny, they recognized the word of the one Lord whom they knew to be the only true God” (1982, 2) becomes “These documents shaped the understanding of their life, faith, and destiny. They recognized in them the word of the one Lord whom they knew to be the only true God” (1996, 586). Second, additional charts, illustrations, and maps are added. Further, previous illustrative material is sharpened and much of it colorized. Third, the background material now appears after the discussion of the biblical content and not before as previously. This allows the reader to plunge immediately into the biblical material. A new chapter of 47 pages on archaeology is part of the background section. Fourth, the updated footnotes are now placed at the end of the volume (743-840) instead of at the bottom of the page. Because many of the endnotes give more information, particularly for the seminary student, rather than only cite sources, the reader would be better served to have them on the same page as the material they elucidate. Fifth, the updated suggestions for further reading appear together (699-742) rather than at the end of each chapter as in the previous edition.

The ordering of the text follows broadly the progression of the Jewish canon. Part One discusses the Torah (1-127). Part Two deals with the Prophets (129-422). However, the Latter Prophets are discussed according to the authors’ perceived historical progression and not by their canonical order. Part Three overviews the Writings (423-582). Again, the canonical pattern is not strictly followed. Part Four looks at the Background of the OT (583-694). Here, discussions of the authority, inspiration, canonicity, and formation of the OT precede chapters on geography, chronology, and archaeology. A final chapter looks at messianic prophecy where the assertion is, “[W]e can acknowledge as ‘messianic’ any prophecy which ties the present with God’s ultimate purposes” (690).

The volume exhibits strengths as an introductory survey of the OT in a number of ways. First, it clearly and succinctly presents the historical background to the OT as the text progresses. Second, it handles well the literary features and structure of both the major sections (i.e., Torah, Former Prophets, Latter Prophets, and Writings) and the individual books of the OT. Third, it isolates and discusses at length the major themes of each book. Fourth, it introduces the reader to contemporary OT scholarship from a broadly evangelical perspective.

To mine the treasures of this work, the student has to read with discernment. Although the authors affirm the divine inspiration of the Scripture, they state that “. . . it is not necessary to infer from the fact of inspiration a doctrine of inerrancy, which tends to build a fence of protective arguments around the Bible” (596). For them, the OT is the result of a long process of work on the part of editors and arrangers and circles who preserved oral traditions and presented them to later generations of God’s people. Thus, as an example, “it is unlikely that Moses wrote

the Pentateuch as it exists in its final form" (9). The authors declare, "To speak of inspiration, as one must to be true to the Bible, there has to be an acknowledgment of God's inspiring providence so that the written word eventually reflected the divine intention" (595). The result of this viewpoint is the questioning of the historical veracity of Scripture. Thus, Genesis 1–11 makes no claim to objective description, but conveys "theological truths about events, portrayed in a largely symbolic, pictorial style" (20-21), and ". . . Daniel's main purpose is not to record detailed history but to use stories and symbols to demonstrate God's control of history" (567).

Though a discerning OT survey teacher can find some helpful material in this textbook, the beginning OT student should consult other works instead.

A. A. Macintosh. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Hosea*. ICC, ed. by J. A. Emerton, C. E. B. Cranfield and G. N. Stanton. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997. xcix + 600 pp. \$69.95 (cloth). Reviewed by William D. Barrick, Professor of Old Testament.

A. A. Macintosh is President of St. John's College, Cambridge. He is one of those very accomplished English commentators who has only a B.D. but whose scholarship surpasses that of most Americans with a Th.D. His volume on Hosea in the ICC continues that series' history of scholarly contributions to biblical studies. This volume replaces W. R. Harper's *Amos and Hosea* (1905) in the old series of ICC. It is more conservative than Harper's volume, especially in matters of textual criticism (cf. lxxiv-lxxxiii, 109-10). Macintosh observes that many past textual emendations were based upon an assumption of the corrupt state of the MT rather than upon the more accurate assessment that the problems are often due to contemporary scholars' ignorance of the author's language or dialect (liii). That improvement alone commends the volume to conservative exegetes.

ICC as a series assumes that the reader's working knowledge of Hebrew, Aramaic, Greek, and Latin as well as a knowledge of the fundamentals of some of the cognate languages (Akkadian, Ugaritic, Syriac, and Arabic). Macintosh's scholarly treatment extends to the intricacies of rabbinic materials (e.g., xlv-xlv, 90). Unfortunately, he omitted the following conservative commentaries from the Bibliography (xix-xli): David Allan Hubbard, *Hosea-Jonah* in TOTC (InterVarsity, 1990) and Douglas Stuart, *Hosea: An Introduction and Commentary* in WBC (Word, 1987). The detailed introduction to the Book of Hosea (li-xcix) contains an up-to-date discussion of the northern dialect theory and the potential presence of Aramaisms in Hosea (liv-lxi). Macintosh's liberal theological stance and historical criticism comes to the fore in his discussion of the composition of the Book of Hosea (lxv-lxxiv). He believes that the book represents a later literary rendition (by

Hosea or later editors) of Hosea's oral prophecies (lxvi). The whole discussion of Hosea's state of mind and musings suffers from a lack of theological evaluation with regard to biblical inspiration (lxvi-lxx). Ultimately, Macintosh opts for a history of the book that involves Judean redactors adapting and appropriating Hosea's prophecies for use in the southern kingdom (lxx-lxxiv, 19, 25-26, 108-12). Of course, that position presupposes similar redactions of other pertinent pericopes.

An example would be the author's opinion that the Lord's election of His people was "narrowed to Judah following his rejection of the Northern Kingdom" (25). Such a view would hold to a late date for Gen 49:10 as well.

One of the greatest contributions of the volume is in the author's skill in weaving the historical background into the interpretation of the Book of Hosea. The introductory section on historical background (lxxxiii-lxxxvii) is but the first of many pleasant and informative incursions into the setting of Hosea's life and ministry (cf. 18, 20, 35 n. 16, 194-98, 428-30). A table of dates related to Hosea provides the reader with a ready reference for the significant details of that history (xcviii-xcix). Macintosh provides helpful grammatical observations (e.g., the first annotation on 2:4 [39]) and pertinent linguistic discussions (e.g., Hebrew idioms involving particular parts of the body [fourth annotation, 39]).

It is a delightful surprise to find a commentator who is willing to specify his arguments for or against any particular interpretation (e.g., the crux in 2:2 [31-38]; cf. also, 59-60). Whether or not one agrees with the conclusions, it is helpful to have such detailed interpretative information. No detail, in fact, is beyond Macintosh's attention. The reader will find comments on everything from the ancient use of thorns to block human passage along footpaths (51) and the taste of grapes dependent upon ancient agricultural technologies (74 n. 11) to the interpretative contribution of the Massoretic accents (93, 343).

Macintosh's excursus on Hosea's marriage (113-26) admits to the lack of sufficient information within the text itself but proceeds to argue that Gomer's infidelities are best understood as post-marital and all the children as Hosea's. The author describes the various views and presents responses to each. He could have reached the same conclusions without positing that the account was organized and expanded by a later redactor.

The weakness of the volume is in its equal lack of detail when it comes to theology. The discussion of the opening formula of the book ("the word of Yahweh which came to Hosea") is inadequate because it neglects the theological implications for divine revelation, biblical prophecy, and inspiration (1-5). It is also disappointing to find a gravely inadequate treatment of a crux like 11:1 with its implications for the NT use of the OT (436-39). A similar lack of adequate discussion of the NT quotation of a passage in Hosea occurs in the commentary on 13:14 (546-49).

The format of the commentary proper is typical of contemporary technical commentaries. The author's verse-by-verse translation of the text is followed by

technical annotations keyed to words in the translation by means of superscript letters. The annotations include matters of grammar and translation. The exegesis follows in a larger and more readable typeface. Lastly, textual critical notes come under the heading "Text and Versions." An excursus regarding the problem of Hosea's marriage concludes the author's treatment of chap. 3 (113-26).

The specialized appendix on the vocabulary of Hosea (585-93) provides readers with a valuable resource for the study of the book. A Scripture index, however, would have made the volume a more complete resource. A peculiarity of this commentary is the absence of capitalization in reference to the Bible ("the bible," 5, 102). Problems in editing include the omission in the Bibliography of the significant work by Williamson on Jezreel, even though it is cited in the text (e.g., 15 n. 27).

Although the volume presents a perfect example of the extremes of redaction criticism (cf. lxxii-lxiv) and is far from a conservative theological viewpoint, it should not be ignored. Every exegete dealing with the Book of Hosea should avail himself of the valuable information provided in Macintosh's work.

Robert P. Martin, ed. *A Guide to the Puritans*. Carlisle, Pa.: Banner of Truth, 1997. xiv + 532 pp. \$25.99 (paper). Reviewed by J. Gregory Behle, Professor of Christian Education, The Master's College.

The quantity of Puritan literature offers an importune call for an annotated bibliography that can assist interested researchers in locating citation data and thematic information. Robert Martin's *A Guide to the Puritans* is a response to such a need. The work is a bibliographic guide edited for ministers by a pastor (ix). *A Guide to the Puritans* attempts to navigate the myriad of Puritan sources and help the reader identify citation information based upon a thematic and scriptural indexing system for ministerial or devotional purposes.

Edited by Robert P. Martin, pastor of Emmanuel Baptist Church, in Seattle, Washington, *A Guide to the Puritans* reflects current interest in Puritan scholarship and the desire to integrate Puritan theology into contemporary ministry.

The book is in two major sections: a topical index using theological terminology and a scriptural index that cites specific biblical texts within the Puritan literature.

In both cases, ministers and teachers will appreciate the book as a resource in locating illustrative material for homiletical or pedagogical purposes. The editor offers a brief biographical bibliography on entrants, in addition to an index listing of particular sermons that could be of pastoral help (funerals, ordinations). The guide concludes with a full bibliographic essay of all works cited. The general structure of the book offers the reader a quick and logical identification of several suggested Puritan sources under a desired theological theme, biblical passage, or

ministerial need. In this regard, the guide is straightforward and simple to understand.

Indexing Puritan literary sources for ministerial purposes is a difficult undertaking at best. This frustration is readily shared by the editor in the preface to the guide (ix), where he openly identifies with those ministers who desire to use Puritan narrative material within their ministries, but feel the tension of locating such material, either because of time constraints or a lack of familiarity with the literature itself. The editor offers a brief explanation of his inclusion rationale and organizational strategy in the preface.

Several points for consideration emerged in the review of this. First the title of the work, *A Guide to the Puritans*, can create a misunderstanding in terms of the definition of *Puritan*. Due to the ministerial nature and intent of the guide, the editor has chosen to limit citation to only those works which are currently available in print (x). He graciously acknowledges that a more comprehensive review is needed, but outside the purview of his own ability. Readers expecting a full treatment of Puritanism should recognize this limitation. It might be better to subtitle or retitle the book to take this reality into perspective.

Second, the definitional problem of the term *Puritan* immediately surfaces in light of the list of writers included under the canopy of "Puritan." The editor opts for a broader, more theological understanding that encompasses more than the English and American Puritans associated with the sixteenth and seventeenth century. The definition of Puritanism as an historical movement vis-a-vis a broader theologically oriented tradition may create confusion and misunderstanding as to the nature and scope of this guide. This reviewer expected greater, more comprehensive interaction with the historical, social, cultural, and non-homiletic literary material associated with Puritanism based upon titular nomenclature. In contrast, the guide is rather expansive in its inclusion of many later authors in the greater Reformed tradition (e.g., C. Hodge, Warfield, Pink, Machen), yet self-limited by the exclusion of rarer, out-of-print manuscripts in the truer, historic Puritan vein. Historical "purists" may argue the notation of a *modern* Puritan (x) as an open-ended question worth scholarly debate. The absence or minimal citation of such Puritan notables as John Cotton, the Mathers, or William Perkins further exacerbates the concern raised by the title. Again, this is due largely to the limitation of available sources in print today and the editor's ministerial vis-a-vis scholastic intentions. Citing the editor,

Second, with reference to the older writers, I have limited my efforts to recently republished works. Many valuable works, of course, have not reappeared in our day, but are available only in libraries and private collections. I have not tried to include any such items (x).

The editor makes it quite clear in the preface that there is a real decision-making

tension in bibliographic inclusion and exclusion, and graciously advises the reader of this tension in advance with several disclaimers. With this in view, the title of the book should be rephrased in such a way as not to suggest that this is a comprehensive guide which includes the Puritan divines in the older literature, and as to reflect that it does include scholars, pastors, and authors within a broader Reformed tradition that finds its antecedent in the historical dimension of the Puritan movement.

In terms of the bibliographical citations found within the guide, this reviewer randomly checked several citations for ease of usage. A more complete explanation of the indexing system in the preface would be helpful, particularly for readers unfamiliar with the usage of such bibliographic resource tools. Full bibliographic citation, which contains publication data, might be included in the entry to assist the reader in knowing which edition the editor was working with when he made the inclusion. The myriad of reprints and editions of Puritan literature compound the problem—to say nothing of the speed with which the cited works return to out-of-print status. The editor does include a full bibliography of works at the conclusion of the guide, but it is inconvenient for the reader to jump between the citation proper and the full bibliography. When the editor offers annotations of citation information, the reviewer found it informative and helpful. Future editions might consider additional abstraction, annotation, and background commentary. That would be especially helpful for those users who lack familiarity with the cited work and need greater direction in locating data. It is important to observe that the editor did opt to use full, albeit lengthy, titles in the bibliography. As pointed out in the preface, the titles often function as table-of-contents and are very helpful in understanding authorial intent. Most bibliographies would edit such titles and deprive the reader of the richness the author intended.

Recognizing the limitations and selectivity of any bibliographic resource, a general bibliography of Puritan secondary materials as background assistance would be a welcome inclusion, particularly for novices who are wading into the sea of Puritan literature for the first time. The editor includes many of such works in the full bibliography at the conclusion of the guide. However, the concluding bibliography should be organized in such a way as to assist the user in distinguishing primary from secondary materials. The full bibliography at the conclusion of the guide should have better organization. Furthermore, a brief biographical sketch of authors who are cited in the guide could be helpful to those unfamiliar with the Puritan author and assist in contextualizing the cited work. The editor includes a “biographical sketch” of included authors (451-62), but refers the reader to other works rather than offering biographical information within the guide proper (cf. Allen Carden, “Appendix: Biographical Overview of New England Ministers Quoted,” in *Puritan Christianity in America* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990) 223-29, as an example).

A Guide to the Puritans is a welcome tool for pastors interested in locating

homiletic or didactic material for use in their ministries. The work may require some patience in using and locating information, but it is the only tool of its kind available to the clergy. The editor has accepted a very difficult challenge in identifying the literature and indexing these materials for the potential reader—a task that should not go unappreciated. The work is an earnest attempt at indexing materials in the broader Reformed tradition, a point potential users should keep in mind if they anticipate a more complete indexing of Puritan literature. Readers should also be aware that the title, *A Guide to the Puritans*, is confusing and suggests a comprehensive guide rather than a “selective bibliography”—a phrase commonly used in the academic community to designate such a limitation. Those readers interested in Puritan literature and Reformed theology will appreciate this tool.

Eugene H. Merrill. *Deuteronomy*. Vol. 4 in *The New American Commentary*, ed. by E. Ray Clendenen. Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman & Holman, 1994. 477 pp. \$36.99 (cloth). Reviewed by William D. Barrick, Professor of Old Testament.

Eugene H. Merrill is professor of Old Testament at Dallas Theological Seminary. He has published books and periodical articles in the areas of OT history, OT theology, Palestinian archaeology and the OT, Genesis, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Isaiah, the minor prophets, and the Qumran Thanksgiving Hymns.

The New American Commentary is the continuation of the tradition established by the older *An American Commentary* series under the editorship of Alvah Hovey at the end of the nineteenth century. In keeping with that tradition, the current series affirms “the divine inspiration, inerrancy, complete truthfulness, and full authority of the Bible” (from the Editors’ Preface). The format makes the materials available to layman and scholar alike. Technical points of grammar and syntax occur in the footnotes rather than in the text. The commentaries are based upon the NIV. The individual commentators, however, have the freedom to develop their own translations of the original text where they differ from the NIV.

The brief but helpful Introduction (21-57) is notable for its uncompromising stand on Mosaic authorship and an early date prior to 1400 B.C. (22-27). At pertinent points in the commentary, Merrill defends his acceptance of the early date for the Exodus by offering an explanation for the existence and/or lack of archaeological evidence for the conquest of Canaan (170, 207). He often disagrees with the identification and interpretation of alleged anachronisms that critical commentators use to support either non-Mosaic authorship or extensive post-Mosaic editing (69, 86 n. 62, 87, 94, 97-98, 362, 385). Sometimes, however, he agrees with those commentators (106 n. 129). In at least one case, the author contradicts himself. He cites the mention of Naphtali in 34:2 as an obvious indication that a

later addition was made to the text (452). However, his commentary on 33:23 seems to indicate that Moses was perfectly capable of identifying the land holding of Naphtali (445-46). In fact, his similar use of the mention of Ephraim and Manasseh in 34:2 to argue for a later addition would find vigorous opposition from Jacob himself since he had transferred his land holding to Joseph 400 years before Moses lived (Gen 48:22). Jacob and Joseph knew exactly which piece of Amorite territory was involved. These last points regarding Deuteronomy 34 are but two examples of many unmentioned issues in the debate over Mosaic authorship of that chapter.

His summation of the theology of Deuteronomy provides readers with a clear understanding of the significance of covenant for the theocratic community of Israel (47-56). In the commentary proper, he consistently identifies the presence of prophetic revelation requiring a future eschatological fulfillment for Israel (353, 355, 388, 389). However, Merrill's identification of the modern port of Haifa as a fulfillment of 33:19 and Gen 49:13 is questionable (444).

Throughout the commentary the author identifies interpretative problems, discusses them carefully, and offers viable solutions. The following are examples of such problems: 1:37-38 (Moses apparently blaming the people for his being barred from entering the land of promise, 82-83); 1:46 and 2:14 (apparent contradiction involving arrival, departure, and stay at Kadesh Barnea, 89-90, 95); 2:27-29 (the ethical dilemma of Moses' message to Sihon, 101); 4:19 (God's apparent apportioning of heavenly bodies to heathen nations so that they might worship them, 122-24); 15:12-18 (the meaning of "Hebrew," 247-49); 22:9-12 (the significance of regulations forbidding seemingly non-moral and innocuous mixing of seeds, plow animals, and cloth, 299-301); and 32:48-52 (the grounds for Moses's disqualification from entering the promised land, 429).

Merrill's identification of the various sections of 12:1-25:16 with the appropriate one of the Ten Commandments (esp. 219, 227, 229, 234-35 n. 34, 239, 299, 314) provides a worthy alternative to the divisions proposed by Stephen Kaufman (in "The Structure of the Deuteronomic Law," *Maarav* 1/2 [1978-79]:105-58). Kaufman's structure is the basis for Walter C. Kaiser's discussion of the laws in Deuteronomy (*Toward Old Testament Ethics* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983] 129).

Some problems could have been discussed more fully. The discussion of the Rephaites ignores references such as Ps 88:10; Job 26:5; Isa 14:9; 26:14 (93-94). Comment on the Shema (6:4-5) lacks a clear discussion of trinitarian interpretations as well as a more specific conclusion regarding the matter of unity (163). Texts supposedly supporting a variety of sanctuaries contemporary with the central sanctuary are offered without observing that each case may involve a one-time occurrence without continued usage (224, 226 fn 20). The associations of the "angel of the LORD" or the ark of the covenant with the altars of Gideon, Manoah, and Beth Shemesh may in some way be sufficiently exceptional to disqualify those

altars as continuing places of worship parallel to the central sanctuary. In addition, the exceptional nature of Samuel's ministry related to such altars needs discussion rather than mere citation.

The author's comment that leaven suggests corruption (253) fails to note that leaven was a required ingredient in the thanksgiving offering (Lev 7:13) and the offering of first fruits (23:17). The biblical explanation for unleavened bread in the festival of unleavened bread contains no mention of corruption (cf. Exod 12:39; Deut 16:3). Likewise, the claim that Num 35:31 suggests that a ransom could be paid as a substitute for one's life (281) ignores the problem presented by Ps 49:7-9.

The greatest omission, however, is in Merrill's failure to even mention the debate over a "Palestinian Covenant" in his commentary on 29:1 (372-73).

The suggestion that the availability of interest-free loans "must have served as an inducement to the foreigner to contemplate" conversion to the covenant faith begs for further discussion in the light of missions (244). Is it possible that the divine program even under covenant law encouraged what would appear to be the use of economic inducements? How would that affect missionary enterprise in the world's needy countries? Alarms went off in this reviewer's mind because of 15 years as a missionary in Bangladesh.

Merrill is to be congratulated for his identification of key elements of Hebrew grammar. One of the important distinctions for Deuteronomy is in the matter of the usage of the second person singular and plural. Merrill clearly defines the exegetical significance of both usages of the second person (162, 383). Sometimes, however, an explanation of the significance of a point of grammar is not offered (e.g., the Hebrew negative, 144) or the explanation is given much later than the mention of the grammar (e.g., the infinitive absolute, 144 and 211 n. 191).

Occasionally an unfortunate wording mars the commentary. One example is Merrill's discussion of the wrath of God. He indicates that God can be tempted to imitate Israel's unfaithfulness to the covenant (81). Another occurs when the terms "heart" and "soul" are being defined. The author defines only the soul (not the heart) as being "the invisible part of the individual" (164). His statement that the two tablets of the law were duplicates in order to supply a copy for each party of the covenant (120; cf. 399) leaves the reader wondering why God would need a copy for Himself—as though He would not remember its contents. Mention of a "dominion mandate" (122) desperately needs clarification in today's theological environment with its proponents of dominion theology. Identifying Abraham as a candidate for the first prophet in the OT (230) ignores both Abel (Luke 11:51) and Enoch (Jude 14). Defining the "supernatural power" of false prophets as "granted" by God or "God-ordained" (231), the author omits any mention of the alternative: divine permission.

More mundane errors in the volume include "heavenly beings" for "heavenly bodies" (124 n. 174), the erroneous insertion of the NIV text of 1:41-43 where 4:41-43 should have been printed (136), omission of a paragraph indentation

(257), omission of lines of text (329, 398), and a displaced footnote (441, 442).

In the volume's footnotes Merrill provides the reader with a wealth of significant bibliographic references to a wide range of resources. Students and professors alike will find these paths to further research extremely helpful and rewarding. The work as a whole deserves the same evaluation. The volume is a welcome and valuable addition to commentaries on Deuteronomy.

Bruce Manning Metzger. *Reminiscences of an Octogenarian*. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1997. 242 pages. \$24.95 (cloth). Reviewed by William Varner, Professor of Bible and Director of the IBEX Israel-Extension Campus, The Master's College.

Any Greek student, current or former, will readily recognize the name of Bruce Metzger, George Collard Professor of New Testament Language and Literature Emeritus at Princeton Theological Seminary. He has been at the forefront of Greek studies and translation projects for over fifty years. Three generations of students have used his little *Lexical Aids for Students of New Testament Greek* (Princeton, N. J.: Theological Book Agency, 1946-1991). This reviewer belonged to the second of those generations and is using it on the third. The sheer number of his scholarly publications (over twenty volumes), his extensive editorial work (Bibles, dictionaries, serialized journals, Greek New Testaments), and his numerous journal articles have firmly established him as what some might call the leading New Testament scholar in America in the twentieth century. His distinguished teaching career at Princeton Theological Seminary stretched from 1938 until his retirement in 1984.

Metzger's "memoirs" are simple, straightforward, and unassuming. He takes the reader from the roots of his "Pennsylvania Dutch" upbringing to interviews with Popes and Patriarchs in his later years. Along the way, he provides some fascinating background to some of the biggest scholarly projects of the century. His description of the many scholars with whom he has worked, some of whom are household names, provide a "human face" to this esoteric world of theological academia.

Metzger's description of his classical preparatory school and college education in Pennsylvania serves to recall how different the "typical" education is today. He delights writing about his purchase of second-hand book bargains during those days. Two such discoveries (Hasting's *Dictionary of the Bible* and Alford's *Greek Testament*) were in "Weaver's Book Barn" in the Lancaster County village of Blue Ball. This was of particular interest to this reviewer since I have made a few such discoveries there myself many years later!

His decision to attend seminary is worthy of serious consideration:

When a friend suggested that perhaps I might become a teacher of New Testament Greek, I immediately recognized that this was the kind of work I would find altogether congenial. I therefore began to make plans to study at Louisville under A. T. Robertson, one of the leading New Testament scholars of the time. However, before actually making formal application I learned that Robertson had died in September of 1934. I therefore began to consider other institutions, and ultimately decided upon Princeton Theological Seminary (11,12).

Thus, the reality of mortality led to a Southern Baptist loss and a Presbyterian gain!

Metzger's chapter on his Princeton student days (13-32) involves gracious appreciation for his two academic mentors there, William Park Armstrong and Henry Snyder Gehman. He arrived after the "Westminster departure" of Machen, *et al.* He even had a brief connection with the last of the Hodge dynasty—Caspar Wistar Hodge taught him systematic theology. The seminary recognized what they had and offered him a teaching position upon graduation, while he finished his doctorate in classics at nearby Princeton University. Marriage and family soon followed (two sons). Throughout the book, Metzger majors on his academic and writing activities. This reviewer wishes that Metzger had included a few more personal items about his family life and personal interests. In other words, one is at a loss to know what he did in his "spare" time.

It appears, however, that one of the reasons for his prodigious scholarly output over the years is that scholarship has been almost his sole personal interest. The rest of the book details his many activities involving translation and editing projects, often revolving around professional colleagues in the Society of Biblical Literature. He explains how many of his books grew out of courses he taught and lectures he gave. Consider the following:

During the following months (of 1944) I began collecting information for another publication, entitled *Lexical Aids for Students of New Testament Greek*. The work of compilation involved the laborious task of counting the number of citations of each word in Moulton and Geden's concordance to the Greek New Testament—information that today can be obtained quickly by means of a computer. My next task was to prepare on a Vari-Typer each page for photographic reproduction and printing by lithography (34, 35).

Metzger goes on to describe how publisher after publisher did not believe that the book would sell and how he finally had to get it printed himself. He concludes by remarking on how amazing it is that more than two hundred thousand copies have been distributed!

Metzger's firsthand description of his role in the production of the Revised Standard Version of the Bible (chap. 7) and the "New" RSV (chap. 8) provide fascinating insights into the challenge of translating the Word of God. He even includes a photograph of the ashes of an RSV that a North Carolina pastor publicly

burned in 1952! The author provides firsthand accounts of the UBS Greek New Testament (chap. 6); his significant contributions to the science of textual criticism (chap. 14); his editorship of the Reader's Digest Condensed Bible (chap. 10); and his most recent achievement, the Oxford Companion to the Bible (chap. 15). He also tells about some "literary forgeries" that he has helped to uncover (chap. 11) as well as his help in exposing "the saga of the Yonan Codex" which has something of a happy ending (chap. 9). He even concludes with a chapter on "Interesting People I Have Known" (chap. 18, pp. 216-28).

Bruce Metzger has been a conundrum to some. He has moved in the highest levels of higher critical scholars, always maintaining the highest standards of scholarship. Yet he apparently has maintained throughout his career a higher view of Scripture than some of his more liberal associates and a generally evangelical faith. One wishes that he had written more about those matters, but one also looks in vain to find in these "reminiscences" anything about his personal views on any controversial matters. It is truly an irenic collection of reflections that more than repays the short time it takes to read them.

Thomas C. Oden and Christopher A. Hall, eds. *Mark*. Vol. 2 in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*, ed. by Thomas C. Oden. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1998. 281 pp. 39.99 (cloth). Reviewed by F. David Farnell, Associate Professor of New Testament.

Thomas Oden, Professor of Theology at Drew University, is the general editor of the new twenty-seven volume series entitled the *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*. Arranged by the books of the Bible according to chapter and verse and encompassing both the Old and New Testaments plus the Apocrypha, the project offers *selective* excerpts from the patristic fathers as to their exegesis, exposition, interpretation, and commentary on all sixty-six books the Bible. Its goals are "the revitalization of Christian teaching based on classical Christian exegesis, the intensified study of Scripture by laypersons who wish to think with the early church about the canonical text, and the stimulation of Christian historical, biblical, theological, and pastoral scholars toward further inquiry into scriptural interpretation by ancient Christian writers" (xi).

The series explores the patristic writings from the second to the mid-eighth century and includes the writings of such ancient greats as Clement of Rome, Origen, Augustine, Chrysostom, Ambrosiaster, Theodoret, Marius Victorinus, Theodore of Mopsuestia, and Jerome, to name a few. This vast project is largely ecumenical, drawing on the resources and expertise of an international team of scholars from the Protestant, Orthodox, and Roman Catholic traditions.

The first volume to appear in this series is *Mark* (vol. 2 of the New Testament section), edited by Oden and Christopher A. Hall. Hall is Associate

Professor of Biblical Studies at Eastern College, St. Davids, Pennsylvania. (Another volume, *Romans*—vol. 6 in the New Testament series, edited by Gerald Bray, is scheduled for release in September 1998.)

On the whole, this anthology holds great promise to commend itself to laypersons as well as Bible students and teachers, especially since it seeks to fulfill the Reformation goal of *ad fontes* (“to the sources”). It provides Bible students with a much neglected opportunity to explore the writings of the early church fathers as to how they understood and interpreted Scripture. For too long, Bible students have unthinkingly allowed historical criticism to dictate highly dubious interpretive methodologies as well as conclusions in both Old and New Testament scholarship.

Those who stood closer to the events upon which they comment surely must have priority over any Enlightenment latecomers whose conclusions now dominate biblical studies.

Its underlying philosophical approach has some very commendable aspects, operating from a foundational premise: “This is an underlying premise of this whole series: We are not here trying to *correct* the ancient Christian writers from the viewpoint of modern historical criteria, but to *listen* to them reason out of their own premises on such questions as the authorship of Mark” (xxi).

The “General Introduction” refreshingly notes that “[a] commentary dedicated to allowing ancient Christian exegetes to speak for themselves will refrain from the temptation to fixate endlessly upon contemporary criticism. Rather, it will stand ready to provide textual resources from a distinguished history of exegesis which has remained massively inaccessible and shockingly disregarded during the last century” (xi). This assertion causes the reviewer to ruminate on the following: could it be that Enlightenment-spawned historical criticism has so systematically ignored the early fathers because they stand as manifest contradictions to its cherished dogmas, or might it also reflect intellectual arrogance displayed by much of modern scholarship?

Interestingly, by appealing to the ancients, the series circumnavigates such sacrosanct, as well as highly erroneous, historical-critically cherished icons originating out of source, form, tradition, and redaction criticism, revealing some interesting contradictions of post-Enlightenment assertions. For instance, the volume on Mark reveals that the early church fathers overwhelmingly neglected Mark, rarely producing a sustained commentary on Mark. Instead, Matthew and John received most attention. Though one could argue that they held Matthew and John in high esteem because they were apostolic, one still wonders why, if Mark was really the first written gospel as so ardently maintained by source criticism (i.e., the Two-Document Hypothesis), did the fathers so persistently neglect it. Moreover, the volume also reveals that the fathers consistently maintained that Mark (not some unknown “evangelist” as maintained by historical criticism) actually wrote Mark and that it reflected Peter’s preaching rather than being a condensation of Matthew and Luke (contra the Two-Gospel Hypothesis). The conclusion the work reaches is

astoundingly refreshing: "It had always been evident that Mark presented a shorter version of the gospel than Matthew, but the premise of literary dependency was not generally recognized. The view that Matthew and Luke directly relied on Mark did not develop in full form until the nineteenth century" (xxix). Such a perspective also indicates that the fathers regarded Matthew, not Mark, as the first gospel to be written. From this reviewer's perspective, by *a priori* reading into the church fathers of these two recent synoptic hypotheses, recent NT scholarship has moved from acute speculation to enslaving dogma.

Some cautions are in order, however. Since the work is ecumenical, including scholars from such broad theological and interpretive backgrounds (including Roman Catholics), it invites the reader's caution to detect any preconceived biases of the volumes' editors. Heightening this concern is the selective, not exhaustive, nature of the series. Such selection may skew the views of the church fathers to conform to a preconceived approach cherished by the editors rather than accurately reflecting the fathers' viewpoints. For the work to be useful, it must represent faithfully the fathers' positions, not a preconceived agenda of the editors. Another drawback is that the original languages are not included, meaning that the reader must rely on the translation supplied rather than consulting the originals as a check against bias or inaccuracy. Finally, the series' philosophical approach openly admits to "empathizing" with ancient allegorical interpretation (xxxii). In reply, merely because some church fathers allegorized does not legitimate such an approach for exegesis. Perhaps on a more positive note in reference to the series, including such examples for the reader to examine would have functioned as notable instances that militate against legitimizing allegorical interpretation.

Raymond C. Ortlund, Jr. *Whoredom: God's Unfaithful Wife in Biblical Theology*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996. 200 pp. \$18.00 (paper). Reviewed by Michael A. Grisanti, Associate Professor of Old Testament.

The volume by Ray Ortlund, Jr., is the second in the series entitled, *New Studies in Biblical Theology*. This series of monographs seeks to address key issues in the disciplines of biblical theology and attempts "to help thinking Christians understand their Bibles better" (7). Although this book's one-word title, *Whoredom*, is somewhat distasteful, it is no more offensive than the sin to which it refers.

Ortlund contends that if Yahweh is indeed the husband of His people, then His people's rejection of His covenant love constitutes the moral equivalent of whoredom (8). The author's argument falls into three sections. In chap. 1 Ortlund focuses on Gen 2:23-24 in order to delineate the biblical rationale and pattern for marriage. The human marital bond provides the foundation for the biblical use of

the metaphor of the harlot to depict graphically Israel's covenant treachery.

The next four chapters trace the theme of spiritual harlotry through selected passages in the Pentateuch (chap. 2), Hosea 1–3 (chap. 3) and Isaiah, Micah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel (chaps. 4–5). The Pentateuch seems to assume Yahweh's identity as Israel's husband by using the expression "play the harlot" to describe Israel's worship of other gods. Hosea vividly depicts Yahweh's persistent love for promiscuous Israel. Although God's people had a rich heritage, they failed to allow their theology, history, and worship to impact their conduct before a pagan world. With increasing intensity Isaiah, Micah, Jeremiah, and, most fully, Ezekiel develop the presentation of Israel as an unfaithful wife.

Chapter six demonstrates that Jesus and the NT writers share the OT's concern that God's people remain faithful to their relationship with the covenant Lord (Jas 4:4; 1 Cor 6:15-17; 2 Cor 11:1-5). In addition to this, the NT writers anticipate a day when the Savior, Jesus Christ, will take the church as His bride (Eph 5:31-32; Rev 14:4; 19:6-9a; 21:1-3, 9-10).

In his concluding reflections (chap. 7), Ortlund affirms: "More than our popular churches and institutions and movements, God wants us ourselves. He wants our hearts, our loyalty, our love for himself alone. He wants to find in us the same sense of intimate belonging to him that is appropriate to sexual union on the human level. More than our showing the world how 'relevant' the church can be, God wants us to show him how much we treasure him above all else" (176).

The volume concludes with an appendix in which Ortlund interacts with current feminist interpretations of the harlot metaphor.

Ortlund appears open to critical theories concerning the composition of the Old Testament ("recreating pre-canonical forms of the text is a valid, and culturally necessary, exercise" [9]), but limits himself to the existing biblical texts in his own exposition of this biblical theme. Also, in his chapter dealing with the NT, he appears to merge the church and Israel.

In order to avoid a cluttered text, Ortlund relegates a wealth of textual, lexical, and bibliographic information to the footnotes. One editorial oddity is the consistent use of transliteration for all the Hebrew and Greek words in chaps. 1 through 5 and then the use of Hebrew and Greek fonts in chap. 6.

This monograph is quite readable and provides a graphic and painful portrayal of the reprehensibility of spiritual harlotry. It sets before each reader God's demand for spiritual fidelity alongside the painful reality of spiritual whoredom. That stark contrast serves as an exhortation to every member of God's family to honor the intimacy of his or her relationship with God.

John N. Oswalt. *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 40–66*. In *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament*, ed. by Robert L. Hubbard. Grand Rapids:

Eerdmans, 1998. xviii + 755 pp. \$48.00 (cloth). Reviewed by William D. Barrick, Professor of Old Testament.

This volume is the companion to Oswalt's *The Book of Isaiah, Chapters 1–39* (also in NICOT; Eerdmans, 1986). The author is Ralph Waldo Emerson Professor of Biblical Studies at Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Kentucky. These two volumes on Isaiah insure Oswalt a place in Old Testament scholarship. The work is especially welcome in that he takes a clear stand in defense of the unity of the Book of Isaiah. It is a pleasure to read these volumes with their constant references to the mountain of evidence supporting one Isaiah (e.g., 3-6, 8, 16, 47, 48, 61 n. 53, 72, 131, 136 n. 8, 139-40 n. 16, 279 n. 76, 491).

The introduction is brief (3-19) and is followed by a fairly extensive "Supplemental Bibliography" (20-39). Nineteen bibliographic entries are very recent (1990-96). Additional specialized and select bibliographies are included as excursuses on the Servant (113-15) and on 52:13–53:12 (408-10). The format of the commentary proper is utilitarian. The footnoting of the author's translation is commendable for the ease with which the reader can consult the notes without turning pages (a frustrating feature in both the *WBC* series and the new *ICC* series since they do not utilize the footnote format). It is unfortunate that the work makes no distinction between "Lord" (= Adonai) and "Lord" (= Yahweh) in the typesetting. Such a difference would enable the reader to understand better both the translation and the comments. In addition to the two excursuses already mentioned above, it has excursuses on "God and the Gods" (106), "Isaiah 48:6-11 and the Date of the Writing of Isaiah 40–55" (270-72), "The Structure of Chapters 56–66" (461-65), and "The Historical Setting of 63:15-19" (616-17). "Special Notes" appear also on 44:24-28 regarding predictive prophecy (192) and 50:4-9 regarding the identification of the Servant (322-23). Four excellent indexes close the volume (subjects, 694-701; authors, 702-8; Scriptures, 709-41; Hebrew words, 742-55).

Oswalt is to be commended for his reluctance to resort to emendation in order to resolve apparent textual difficulties (e.g., 64 n. 63, 65 n. 70, 87 n. 45, 128 n. 59, 163 n. 4). He does not always opt for the MT reading, however (e.g., 97 n. 86, 199 n. 13, 296-97 n. 45).

The volume contains a number of interpretative gems. Oswalt presents "dependability" as the appropriate meaning of *hesed* in 40:6 (44 n. 8, 53). He provides a viable explanation for the sequence of verb tenses in 40:19-20 (63-64).

An insightful response to the translation of *sedeq* as "victory" or "victor" is provided in the discussion of 41:2 (81-82). Oswalt's extensive comments supporting the Messianic identity of the Servant in appropriate contexts make significant contributions to the Christology of the OT (e.g., 108-12, 116-19). Unfortunately, the volume contains no reference whatsoever to any of the studies by Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., or E. W. Hengstenberg on Messianic prophecy. Oswalt misses the opportunity to mention the Hosea 11:1/Matthew 2:15 interpretative

problem in his very relevant identification of the Servant as ideal Israel (291).

Exegetes dealing with 44:3 should read the author's arguments in support of its reference to the NT day of Pentecost (166-67). The author handles the theological implications of 45:7 briefly but clearly (204-5). Oswalt's discussion of the origin of evil could have been strengthened with some well-chosen references to pertinent works of theology. Students of prophecy will find an invigorating discussion of prophetic understanding and misunderstanding in the excursus on 48:6-11 (271-72). The author also provides a brief but positive discussion regarding Israel's missionary mandate (283-84). Every exegete dealing with 52:13-53:12 will need to consult this commentary's excellent treatment of the pericope (373-410).

It is not thorough, however, since Oswalt offers no comment regarding the plural form in the phrase "in his death" (53:9) and fails to define clearly the meaning of "light" in the phrase "he will see light" (53:11). He also omits any reference to two significant studies of this pericope: David Baron, *The Servant of Jehovah: The Sufferings of the Messiah and the Glory That Should Follow* (1978 reprint, Minneapolis: James Family, n.d.), and Robert D. Culver, *The Sufferings and the Glory of the Lord's Righteous Servant* (Moline, Ill.: Christian Service Foundation, 1958).

The commentary lacks specificity in dealing with many of the details of eschatological passages such as 40:4 (52; no mention of possible geological changes in the millennial kingdom), 60:7 (542; no mention of the possibility of a millennial temple), 63:1-6 (594-99; no discussion of the potential identification with the events of Obadiah 18-21). In fact, Oswalt's treatment of eschatological passages tends to follow a hermeneutic of multiple or telescopic fulfillments (141, 539-40, 675). In spite of an occasional lack of clarity in his discussion of eschatological issues, Oswalt declares that the promises to Israel have not been nullified by the salvation of Gentiles (225 n. 83). He accepts the reality of a future millennial kingdom (656), but omits any reference to the kingdom studies of evangelical theologians like Robert D. Culver, Charles C. Ryrie, Charles L. Feinberg, and Alva J. McClain. The absence of such references makes the commentary's treatment of prophetic interpretative issues incomplete.

Although Oswalt's observation that 43:2 should not be related to the doctrine of eternal security is exegetically sound, his follow-up comment leaves the reader wondering if he actually rejects the existence of such a doctrine anywhere in Scripture (136 n. 10). No discussion was offered for any possible relationship of 43:2 to the fiery furnace incident in Daniel 3. The "further discussion" (297 n. 45) regarding the "Sinim/Syene" problem in 49:12 is disappointingly inadequate (299-300).

This volume makes a significant contribution to the exegetical study of Isaiah 40-66. It deserves to be placed alongside Edward J. Young's 3-volume work that was the original Isaiah commentary in NICOT.

Charles R. Page II. *Jesus & the Land*. Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1995. 201 pp. \$16.95 (paper). Reviewed by William Varner, Professor of Bible and Director of the IBEX Israel-Extension Campus, The Master's College.

This reviewer approached *Jesus & the Land* with great anticipation and expectations. The church greatly needs scholarly works that are informed as to the geographical and cultural backgrounds of the Bible, particularly in the area of accurate treatments of the Jewish context of Jesus' life and ministry. The author is Dean of the Jerusalem Center for Biblical Studies in Jerusalem. He states, "*Jesus and the Land* is an attempt to reconstruct the life of Jesus based on insights gained from the Land" (13). Alas, that word "reconstruct" reveals a large part of the serious problems with this book that disappoints at almost every point!

The biggest problem for the reader who has confidence in the accuracy and consistency of the gospel accounts of Jesus is that Page attempts to "deconstruct" the gospel accounts before he attempts to "reconstruct" them. Over and over again, he asserts that the Synoptics and John are hopelessly in conflict. Oftentimes, he attempts to correct them by insights from the *Mishna* (which he neglects to mention was written well over a century after the gospels). One glaring example of this is when he asserts that Jesus' encounter with the religious elders in Jerusalem (Luke 2:41-51) occurred "after Jesus had reached the age of thirteen and one day" (54). He bases this on a passage in *Mishna Niddah* 5:6 which states that "if a boy is thirteen years old and one day, his vows are valid." One wonders how this helps to "correct" Luke who clearly writes that Jesus was "twelve" when this event took place (Luke 2:42)!

Page's cavalier attitude toward the gospels is evident on almost every page of the book. He cites approvingly the view of the critic, Hendrikus Boers, that the events described in the virgin birth accounts never happened (40). Speaking himself of the virgin birth, Page concludes, "[W]e must understand that this entire theory was a non-issue in Christianity's formative beginnings" (41). This translates into plain English as, "Later generations of Christians invented the idea of the Virgin Birth."

Page often wants the reader to know that he is basing his "reconstruction" on Jewish sources and customs, but his "evidence" is faulty and highly selective.

One of his authorities is David Flusser of the Hebrew University, whom he quotes as stating that some Essenes married, but only after their betrothed wife became pregnant (39-40). However, an examination of the context of Flusser's statement in his work, *The Spiritual History of the Dead Sea Sect*, reveals no source (e.g., Philo, Josephus, Pliny, or any of the "scrolls") that affirms such a practice among the Essenes. Even if that was the case among them (and it would be so un-Jewish as to be "heretical"), one fails to see how this was the case with Joseph and Mary.

This is particularly true when the gospels make it clear that Joseph and Mary did not have sexual relations until *after* the birth of Jesus (Matt 1:25).

Page acknowledges that his approach to the subject is greatly influenced by Father Bargil Pixner of the Dormition Abbey in Jerusalem and Tabgha on the Sea of Galilee, who is also an adjunct faculty member at Page's school. Pixner, in his articles and especially his book, *With Jesus Through Galilee According to the Fifth Gospel* (Rosh Pina: Chorazin, 1992), posits that a Davidic clan settled in Nazareth after the return from the Babylonian Captivity. This family was very "fundamentalist" in its beliefs, with heavy influence from the Essenes. Page even refers to them as "Hasidim" (34, 62, 77, 96)—a strange connection since the only references that Josephus has to the ancient "Hasidim" place them in the second century B.C. in Judea. That this is such a grand assumption is evident in light of the language that Pixner uses in his quotation asserting this connection. Note the phraseology that appears over and over again: "One can justly assume . . . presumably came . . . in all probability . . . One can surmise . . . one may well take it for granted" (36, 37, citing Pixner, 16, 17). The perceptive reader shudders when he realizes that the major thesis of this book rests on so many assumptions and unproven scenarios.

Page's low view of Jesus is again evident in his explanation of the three "conversion experiences" through which Jesus went at various times in His ministry. Page explains each "conversion" by the Greek word *metanoia*, but neglects to mention that this word never describes Jesus' actions in the gospels. His first "conversion" was from his supposed narrow "Hasidism" to a more inclusive "Hillelian Judaism." This took place when He moved from Nazareth to Capernaum (62 ff.). His second "conversion" was from this inclusive Judaism to including the Gentiles. This came in the incident with the Syro-Phoenician woman (99). His third "conversion" was from "Pharisaism" to hiding alone with his friends. This supposedly took place on Tuesday of Passion Week (132, 133). What this declares about Jesus' Messianic self consciousness and the implications it has for a high view of His Deity is obvious to the discerning reader.

Sadly, it is not only theological problems that abound in this volume. It also contains scores of outright factual mistakes. Page ends Solomon's rule in 922 rather than the consensus date of 930 (20); he has the Hasmonean Mattathias refusing to offer "swine," although 1 Maccabees 2:23-25 says nothing about the type of animal (25); he has Herod killing Mariamne five days before his death when he actually killed her over 25 years earlier (31); he writes that a church tradition states that Joseph worked at Sepphoris, when this is only an assumption, not based on any textual evidence (44); he states that John baptized in the Yarmulk River (normally spelled without an "l"), forgetting that it is a fast flowing river, unlike the Jordan (57); he calls the richer section of Capernaum the "upper city" forgetting that both sections of the city are next to each other on the shore (67); his geography of the Temple is either wrong or presented in a confusing way to the reader (photos 60, 61

on pp. 127,128); the captions are erroneous on photos #5 (30), #43 (97), #78 (151), #79 (153). Finally, the photographs are “reversed” on pages 13 and 148 and even the photograph of the Arbel Cliff on the cover of the book is reversed!

This reviewer would like to say more good about this book, but the writer's motive of placing Jesus' life in a more Jewish context is all I can find to commend.

He does not, however, deliver on his goal. A volume that adequately relates the Savior's life to His land remains to be written.

C. Marvin Pate, gen. ed. *Four Views on the Book of Revelation*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998. 252 pp. \$16.99 (paper). Reviewed by James E. Rosscup, Professor of Bible Exposition.

Four scholars write chapters explaining and arguing for their views on the Book of Revelation. Each surveys the entire book, showing how he interprets each section so that readers can follow the exact flow of his reasoning.

Robert L. Thomas, Professor of New Testament at The Master's Seminary, contributes the final chapter, supporting dispensationalism. His larger effort is in his two-volume work, *Revelation 1–7* and *Revelation 8–22* (Chicago: Moody, 1992 and 1995), but here he gives a concise case (179-229). Other presenters are: Kenneth L. Gentry, Jr., Professor of NT at Bahnsen Theological Seminary in Placentia, California (preterist view); Sam Hamstra, Jr., Vice-President for Institutional Advancement and Chaplain at Trinity Christian College in Palos Heights, Illinois (idealist view); and Pate, the editor, who is Professor of Bible at Moody Bible Institute, Chicago (progressive dispensational view).

The book begins with a chapter on general introduction to the Revelation. This ends with a summary of the four leading views to be presented in the book. It leaves out the historicist view since it contends that the events occurred in the course of history and that view has repeatedly failed in demonstrating any compelling identifications of those events (18). The views featured are the ones that have advocates today.

The preterist outlook seeks to show relevancy to first-century times, for example, in persecution; in a second form it deals both with first century (fall of Jerusalem) and fifth century (fall of Rome). Today the system is having a resurgence in Christian Reconstructionism. This posits the kingdom's advance as the church disseminates the gospel and lives as salt in the earth showing the relevancy of God's law. The world, it claims, will get better and better as the gospel triumphs (cf. David Chilton, *The Days of Vengeance: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation* [Fort Worth: Dominion, 1987]).

The idealist (spiritualist) stance interprets the Revelation symbolically as the continued conflict of good versus evil, without connecting with any historical,

social, or political events. The view stresses virtuous living, perseverance, confidence in the overthrow of evil, seeing Christ in His beauty, and seeing history in the mind of God and power of Christ, who will review men's moral destiny. Nothing is predictive except in the sense that good will triumph when Christ returns (cf. Raymond Calkins, *The Social Message of Revelation* [New York: Woman's Press, 1920]; Paul Minear, *I Saw a New Earth* [Cleveland: Corpus, 1968]; Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Revelation: Vision of a Just World* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991]).

Progressive dispensationalism posits that Christ began the heavenly, Davidic reign at His resurrection. The church is part of the one people of God, yet Israel as distinct will be regathered, the millennium will occur after Christ's second coming, the church will be taken out of the world before the Great Tribulation (cf. Craig Blaising and Darrell Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* [Wheaton, Ill.: Victor, 1993]; R. L. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993]).

Gentry reasons for preterism that the great judgments of the Revelation have already been fulfilled. He misrepresents classical dispensationalism in saying that it "almost totally . . . removes the relevancy of Revelation for John's original audience. . . ." That is like a false argument that says principles gleaned from Isaiah's prophecies of the future have no life-shaping relevancy for believers finding comfort and help from them in Isaiah's own day. Or it is like saying that NT references to believers' future rapture produce no urgency in how they live in the present. Gentry sees the seal judgments as enacted in first-century events. For example, the white horse rider was the Roman victor marching to conquer Jerusalem in A.D. 67. The moving of every mountain (Rev 6:14) refers to Romans removing mountainous obstructions from their army's path, or to Romans constructing bank ramps to the tops of Jewish city walls to scale them. The trumpet and bowl judgments also took place back then. The thousand years (Revelation 20) run from the first century and can last for thousands of years. Christ's rule in Revelation 20 is established in the first century (Matt 12:28-29), He is king today (Acts 17:7; Rev 1:5), and believers have their priestly rule of Rev 20:6 which is equated with that in Eph 2:6 and Rev 1:6.

Progressive dispensationalism (PD) tries to have its cake and eat it too, interpreting Rev 6–18 as fulfilled in John's day, but with a "not yet" thrust, i.e., it all will be fulfilled in a final sense just prior to the second coming (146). Still, PD sees the 144,000 as racial Jews, converted during the Great Tribulation; it also sees the thousand-year reign of Revelation 20 as after the Second Advent.

Thomas argues for the continuity of Revelation with Daniel 2 (the Stone = the kingdom on earth) and with the Davidic Covenant (2 Sam 7:8-16) featuring an earthly throne and reign. Rather than seeing Christ on the *Davidic* throne today as PD does, he sees titles of Christ in Rev 1:5 relating to Psalm 89, the titles anticipating Christ's taking the throne in the future when the kingdom is established

on earth as Ps 89:27 specifies (Rev 11:15; 20:4). Thomas, writing last, has a closely-reasoned summary of his own system and, at times, direct attempts to refute other positions. Near the end, also, he refutes each of the other views (224-29), surveying what he regards as weaknesses.

The book gives readers an opportunity to see the main approaches boiled down within a few pages and shows how a given view explains each section of the Revelation. It allows advocates to fire some of their best shots for their positions, as they choose what they regard to be the most cogent evidence, at least what fits in a summary form. Far more detailed reasoning for each view occurs, of course, in the longer works cited, of which the present book only gives condensations. Such a work can take its place with commentaries, books on biblical prophecy, and journal articles as a teacher, pastor, or other students of the Word grapple with making the best sense of the final book in Scripture.

John H. Walton and Victor H. Matthews. *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Genesis-Deuteronomy*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1997. 284 pp. \$19.99 (paper). Reviewed by Michael A. Grisanti, Associate Professor of Old Testament.

As the title suggests, this volume focuses on providing background information of the biblical text. This attention to background information (culture, history, geography, and archaeology) does not have an apologetic agenda, but serves to shed light on the culture and worldview of God's covenant people, Israel. With reference to the background of Israel and the larger ancient Near Eastern world, Walton and Matthews emphasize that the question of whether the Israelites "borrowed" from their neighbors is not at issue. Rather, they argue that the presence of various common elements of the culture is a legitimate part of the inscripturation process.

Since the authors target the nonprofessional market rather than the academic and scholarly communities, they omit footnotes, include less than three pages of bibliographic references, and make only vague references to ancient Near Eastern primary material.

A brief introductory section, which introduces the reader to the kind of comparative material that is relevant for that particular biblical book, precedes the commentary section. The exposition of each biblical book is divided into a number of sections headed by the Scripture reference and a brief statement of that section's theme. In paragraph form, various sections or individual verses from that large section receive treatment. Once again, the verses involved and a brief title that highlights the focus of that material introduces each paragraph.

An asterisk marks important or uncommon terms found in the text of the

commentary and directs attention of the reader to a glossary of 108 words located after the commentary section. Although the book has no indexes, four charts (Major Tablets of Old Testament Significance, Major Inscriptions of Old Testament Significance, Legal Texts of the Ancient Near East, Ancient Near Eastern Literature Containing Parallels to the Old Testament) and four basic maps (Abraham's travels, the Ancient Near East, the Exodus, Archaeological Sites of Palestine: Middle Bronze Age) provide some information especially relevant to the background issues raised in the text of the commentary.

The volume offers any student of the Bible a wealth of information concerning places, peoples, customs, rituals, laws, ceremonies, festivals, worship practices, and seasonal patterns. However, it does not provide a good substitute for commentaries that give more careful attention to the text of Scripture.

One weakness is the book's regular failure to point out the significance of a cited parallel Ancient Near Eastern custom or document. It is up to the reader at that point to perceive the impact of that association on the meaning of a given passage. As one would expect, the reader will not always agree with the interpretations offered. For example, the authors suggest that an approaching thunderstorm caused Adam and Eve to hide from God in Gen 3:8 (drawing on Akkadian terminology). The writers present both the early and late date for the Exodus and remain ambivalent, and reject the face value meaning of the large numbers in the pre-conquest censuses.

In spite of these problems, this volume and others like it open up a new world of information to the student of the Bible. The challenge lies in using that background material properly in interpreting God's Word accurately.

David F. Wells. *Losing Our Virtue: Why the Church Must Recover Its Moral Vision*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998. 228 pp. \$25.00 (cloth). Reviewed by Richard L. Mayhue, Senior Vice-President and Dean.

Few doubt that the evangelical church is in a state of spiritual crisis. Book titles like "Rediscovering the Church," "Rethinking the Church," "Re-engineering the Church," and "The Second Coming of the Church" fill Christian bookstores and propose the solution of a user-friendly, seeker-sensitive, culturally-relevant approach. Over the last six years, however, David Wells has a radically different analysis and proposes a dramatically different solution. This volume is the third in a trilogy, which also includes, *No Place for Truth; or, Whatever Happened to Evangelical Theology?* and *God and the Wasteland: The Reality of Truth in a World of Fading Dreams*. In this third volume, he raises some significant questions like:

1. Can churches really hide their identity without losing their religious character?
 2. Can the church view people as consumers without inevitably forgetting that they are sinners?
 3. Can the church promote the Gospel as a product and not forget that those who buy it must repent?
 4. Can the church market itself and not forget that it does not belong to itself but to Christ?
1. Can the church pursue success in the market place and not lose its biblical faithfulness? (202).

Wells writes about the changing moral and spiritual topography of the late twentieth-century American landscape and its relationship to the evangelical church. He deals with the disintegrating moral culture in American society and what this means for the church by reasoning that, functionally, the world is not morally disengaged, adrift, or alienated, but rather that society is morally vacant. He then attempts to discern the nature of contemporary culture, not for its own sake, but rather for its influence on the church.

This raises two basic questions: (1) As the culture goes, how should the church go? and (2) So goes the culture, how counters the church?

As with his past volumes, Wells does an exceptional job in analyzing society and culture without losing sight of their relationship to biblical truth. His evaluation is clear and incisive. He contends that today's pagan society is much like that of Luther's day, which eventually was reformed dramatically as God poured out His power through a handful of men to reestablish the supremacy and sufficiency of the Word of God. However, Wells does not find this in the church of today, but rather a church that is capitulating to the doubts, lawlessness, and immorality of the world around her. In short, as the world is unraveling, so is the church.

Wells interacts with the psychotherapy movement in chap. 3, "On Saving Ourselves" (81-116). He also deals with the contrast of "remorse versus repentance" as it relates to the self-help movements of the late 90's in chap. 4, "The Bonfire of the Self" (117-45).

He really brings both this volume and the trilogy to a fitting end in chap. 6, “Faith of the Ages” (179–209), with these conclusions. “First, it [i.e., the church] will have to become courageous enough to say that much that is taken as normative in the postmodern world is actually sinful, and it will have to exercise new ingenuity in learning how to speak about sin to a generation for whom sin has become an impossibility.” “Second, the Church itself is going to have to become more authentic morally, for the greatness of the Gospel is now seen to have become quite trivial and inconsequential in its life” (179-80).

He challenges the church with these questions:

1. Does the church have the courage to become relevant by becoming biblical?
2. Is it willing to break with the cultural habits of the time and propose something quite absurd, like recovering both the word and the meaning of sin?
3. Is it sagacious enough to be able to show how the postmodern world is trapped within itself? (199).

As Wells draws to a conclusion, he notes that “men and women of faith have always been confronted by the insurmountable task of proclaiming what seems absurd in a world of unbelief” (208). “It is the reform of the Church of which we stand in need, not the reform of the Gospel. We need the faith of the ages, not the reconstructions of a therapeutically driven or commercially inspired faith” (209). Thus, his bottom line conclusion is that “the most urgent need in the church today, even that part of it which is evangelical, is the recovery of the Gospel as the Bible reveals it to us” (204).

Whatever conclusions and solutions Wells failed to deliver in his previous two excellent volumes, he clearly does so in *Losing Our Virtue*. For those who take God’s mandates in Scripture seriously, this volume is must reading.

George J. Zemek. *The Word of God in the Child of God: Exegetical, Theological, and Homiletical Reflections from the 119th Psalm*. Brandon, Fla.: the author, 1998. xiv, 431 pp. [no price given] (cloth). Reviewed by William D. Barrick, Professor of Old Testament.

George Zemek was a Professor of Theology at TMS for 6 years. Currently, he is pastor-teacher of Grace Bible Church of Brandon, Florida. He regularly taught a class in the Hebrew exegesis of Psalm 119 during his tenure at Grace Theological Seminary (Winona Lake, Indiana) and TMS. He approaches the psalm fully informed in the Hebrew text and maintaining a solid theological

framework. Zemek's commentary seeks to fulfill the role of a much-needed "middle-of-the-road analysis of Psalm 119" (xiv).

Part 1 ("Introductory Matters") commences with a brief discussion of both critical and conservative evaluations of the psalm (3-5). Then the author deals with matters of authorship and date (7-15). Though clearly indicating that the authorship of Psalm 119 is anonymous, the author does reveal a preference for Daniel as the writer (12-15, 93, 111 n. 56, 120 n. 17, 139 n. 32, 175 n. 37). Nowhere in the introductory survey does the author conduct a comparative survey of the vocabulary and phraseology of the psalm and the Davidic corpus. M. Tsevat's *A Study of the Language of the Biblical Psalms* (JBL MS 9 [Philadelphia: Society of Biblical Literature, 1955]) would be a valuable aid in such a survey. Unfortunately, Zemek does not mention it in his volume. A comparable survey of the Daniel corpus might not provide pertinent results since the Hebrew portions of Daniel are a different genre and deal with very different topics. Zemek carefully notes those instances where vocabulary is reminiscent of Daniel, but fails to be equally observant when significant vocabulary is found in clearly Davidic psalms (see 135 n. 8, 153 n. 44 [cf. Pss 68:30; 138:4; 144:10], 151 n. 25 [cf. Pss 31:12; 55:13; 69:8, 9, 20; 109:25], 171 n. 6 [cf. Pss 16:5; 142:6])—all verse references are to the Hebrew text, not the English). Likewise, he avoids any discussion of the Davidic implications of v. 176 (382-85).

In the section entitled "Literary Vehicles," Zemek introduces the reader to an examination of the alphabetic acrostic framework of the psalm (17-25). The same section contains a disappointingly apocopated discussion of the psalm's genre and the nature of Hebrew poetic parallelism (25-27).

Since the textual integrity of the psalm has nearly universal recognition, the section on "Textual Assessment" gives most of its attention to the Psalms Scroll from Qumran Cave 11 (29-32). The contributions of the Septuagint, Vulgate, and Aramaic Targum texts are cited throughout the exegetical sections of the commentary.

Part 2 ("Overview") first evaluates the inter- and intra-strophic development of the psalmist's presentation (35-38). Then a "Theological Overview" presents what the author identifies as the "applied Bibliology" of the psalm (39-60).

This section's focus is upon brief word studies of the 8 synonyms for the Word (e.g., *tôrâ* and *piqqûdîm*) that are employed by the psalmist. Under the puzzling title "Their Solace," the author attempts to discuss the moral or ethical attributes of the Word of God as presented in the psalm (52-54). That section's relationship to the overall discussion is very obscure—especially in its treatment of the inseparable preposition *k* (*k*).

The commentary proper comprises the bulk of the volume (61-385). Each of the 22 stanzas of the psalm is presented in 3 steps: "Translation and Notes," "Synopsis and Outline," and "Commentary." Illuminating syntactical comments show up throughout the commentary. One example involves the negative adverb *l*

(*'al*) and its normal reference to a specific occasion or circumstance (65, 79 n. 62, 88 n. 31) as compared to the more objective negation provided by **לֹא** (*l_'*; 76 n. 43, 90 n. 41).

Word studies give evidence of careful theological evaluation as well as awareness of the contributions of cognate studies. Zemek refers the reader to pertinent literature related to key word studies. Examples of these word studies include _____ (*tôrâ*, 40-43), _____ (*nepeš*, 106 n. 28), and _____ (*bîn*, 120-21 including nn. 17 and 18). In his brief discussion of “the fear of the LORD,” the author properly observes that the scriptural use of the phrase “never fully evaporates into some sort of warm respect or subdued reverence” (142 n. 53). His discussion of _____ (*hesed*, 149-50), however, seems to be overly dependent upon R. Laird Harris’s disappointing article in *TWOT*. Occasionally Zemek admits that *hesed* has a meaning more akin to “personal fidelity” than to “grace” (329).

Frequently the author refers to various lexical connections between the LXX and the NT (69 n. 9, 70 n. 10, 78 n. 52, 80 n. 65, 105 n. 21, 111 n. 58, 162).

The reader will look in vain for an explanation of the semantic and hermeneutical principles involved in the author’s identification of such linguistic bridges (cf. 78 n. 52). He does, however, provide the reader with a reference to James Barr’s *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (London: Oxford, 1961) for some necessary cautions (126 n. 53).

Zemek provides the reader with many valuable interpretative insights. Much of the book, however, bears the stamp of a cardfile of collected quotations from the most helpful commentaries and specialized studies. The book is a handy collection of the best comments gleaned from the major works on the psalm (e.g., Alexander, Allen, Anderson, Barnes, Cheyne, Cohen, Dahood, Delitzsch, Kidner, Kirkpatrick, Leupold, Moll, Perowne, Scroggie, Soll, Spurgeon, and Thrupp).

The final pages of the volume are devoted to an appendix containing the diagrammatical analyses of the entire psalm (388-431). The diagrams are strictly syntactical analyses rather than logical or structural analyses. Some reference should have been made to Lee L. Kantenwein’s *Diagrammatical Analysis* (rev. ed.; Winona Lake, Ind.: BMH, 1991) to provide a resource for readers unfamiliar with the method. Though the diagrams are instructive in the grammatical relationships within the psalm, they are not as valuable as logical displays or structural analyses would be for the exegete and the homiletician. For excellent examples of these latter types of analysis, this reviewer recommends Frederic Bush’s analytical diagrams in his *Ruth/Esther* volume in the *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, 1996).

The author has a delightful penchant for alliteration (particularly fitting in a commentary on a psalm alliterating the start of each set of 8 lines). However, it is sometimes a bit contrived and can be a bit distracting. The diligent who persevere in reading the volume will benefit from its treasure-trove of observations on the Hebrew text.

This reviewer hopes that the volume will be widely read and used. When it is eventually reprinted, the infelicitous white spaces (e.g., 22, 23, 35, 45, 51, 52, 53, 56, 69, 79) and typos (“l” for “1,” e.g., 258-59; inappropriate hyphenation, e.g., 289; mistaken division of Hebrew phraseology between lines, e.g., 294 n. 20; misplaced footnotes, e.g., 371-72 nn. 29 and 30, 374-76 nn. 52 and 56; and the discord of the verse references on facing pages throughout the Appendix) in its current printing should be corrected. A reprinted edition should also contain a series of indexes befitting a scholarly work containing many fine examples of syntactical analysis and exegetical discussion. Such would make the volume far more utilitarian for student and teacher alike.