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Journal of Grace Theology

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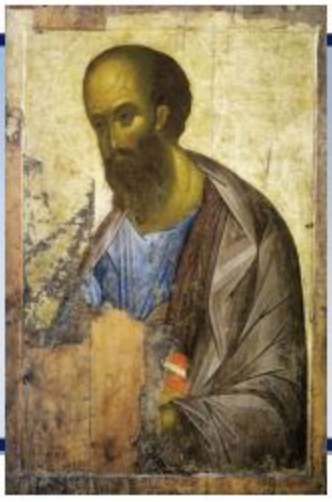

Journal Of Grace Theology

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EDITORIAL

In the fall of 1964, Jack Dean, then Associate Professor of Practical Theology at Grace Bible College, introduced *Journal of Grace Theology* as an for opportunity pastors and scholars within the Grace Movement to discuss theological and philosophical issues that may not be appropriate for a popular level publication. The members of the editorial committee of the original *Journal* were all associated with Grace Bible College: Jack Dean served as editor, Charles Baker (President), Evlyne Beyer (Instructor in Christian Education), Dale DeWitt (Assistant Professor of New Testament), and Wayne Webb (Pastor of Berean Bible Church, Grand Rapids, Michigan).

The original journal ran about thirty-two pages three times a year at an annual subscription rate of $1 (although this rate was bumped to $1.50 the second year). David Weddle contributed the first article, "The Dispensational Meaning of the New Covenant." Dale DeWitt wrote an article on the destination of Hebrews, Henry Hudson offered a short article on "Spiritual Blessings" and Pastor Grant Barrett wrote an article on "The Glory of God." That first issue had a few book reviews as well, including Charles H. Welch's *Alphabetical Analysis*, volume 10 (which was, at the time, a recent publication).

The original *Journal* did not continue long. By the spring of 1967 too many objections were raised over some of the articles and the *Journal* suspended publication. In 1987, Dale DeWitt and Tim Conklin revived the idea of the *Journal*, proposing to "stimulate constructive thought, awareness, devotion, and practice in matters of ministry, theology, and dispensational studies." At the time, they proposed the name "Journal for Grace Theology and Ministry," signaling their interest in making the *Journal* useful for both scholars and pastors. Their proposal offered a clear vision for the objectives of a *Journal of Grace Theology*, but the costs of production were too high at the time. In the last twenty-five years, however, the cost of publishing has steadily dropped, making the *Journal* feasible again.

In November of 2012, pastors and leaders from several Grace organizations gathered to discuss a variety of theological issues. There was general agreement that one of the major factors hindering the growth of the Grace Movement was a lack of quality published biblical and theological studies written by members of the movement. The suggestion was made at that time to explore reviving the

Journal of Grace Theology as an opportunity to discuss not only issues of interest to mid-Acts Dispensationalism, but a wider range of topics as well.. The participants at that meeting were interested in a journal that was scholarly, yet appealed to the pastors and teachers serving in Grace churches in America and abroad. I volunteered to help steer the project with the goal of producing a journal by March of 2014.

The present *Journal of Grace Theology* attempts to pick up the challenge given by Jack Dean fifty years ago. While some articles might be described as "scholarly," the Journal will have a pastoral appeal. Articles will certainly deal with Dispensationalism and issues generated by our distinctive Pauline, mid-Acts perspective. But the *Journal* will include topics that touch on other biblical and theological problems as well. In addition, the members of the 2012 meeting wanted the journal to be practical, including articles on pastoral theology. It was noted most journals include book reviews for the purpose of familiarizing readers with newer publications which might be of interest.

Someone might object that launching a theological journal in the twenty-first century ignores trends towards electronic publishing and web-based discussions. It is true the iPad and Kindle, et al. have changed the way people read books, and the Internet provides every user with a web-browser the opportunity to publish whatever they like. Yet colleges and seminaries continue to publish peer-reviewed journals in order to give scholars an outlet for their studies. A peer-reviewed printed journal has an authority missing from online discussion forums or blogs.

The first issue of the new *Journal of Grace Theology* offers articles on Dispensational issues from Dale DeWitt and Mat Loverin, a biblical study on the messianic banquet in Matthew 8:11, a historical study about E. W. Bullinger by Bryan Ross, and a short article on pastoral ministry from Josh Befus, a current pastoral student at Grace Bible College. In addition, there are several reviews of recent books. I offer thanks to Tim Conklin who helped edit the whole document. Maggie Segalla made many helpful corrections and suggests as well.

I look forward to future issues of the *Journal* and I look forward to your contributions and the conversations these articles will stimulate.

Phillip J. Long, Editor
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BIBLICAL THEOLOGY, SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY AND THE DISPENSATION OF PROMISE

Correlating a Biblical Dispensation And a Theological Method

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INTRODUCTION

This is a non-technical methodological essay on a block of integrated narratives covering what appears from data below to be the first dispensation—Promise. The essay's purpose is to advocate a biblical theology reading of Genesis 1-Exodus 18. It is limited to the biblical Old and New Testaments. The given body of material in its simplest appearance looks like a series of stories about a group of men and their linear offspring who were Israel's progenitors—Adam, Abraham, Jacob, Joseph and Moses. While other descriptions are possible, this description is basic and is satisfactory as an initial statement about the contents of the portion.

GENESIS 1—EXODUS 18

This block of stories uses a thematic term, *toledot* as a heading for a series of related histories and genealogies: "These are the generations (*toledot*) of . . . ." The phrase represents a source or sources of Genesis 1-37:2, or is an author's literary device[1] possibly both. A slightly modified use in 5:1 reading "this is the

[1]The thematic formula has attracted very much attention. A very recent article assessing it is Jason S. DeRouchie, "The Blessing-Commission, the Promised Offspring, and the *Toledot* Structure of Genesis," *JETS* 56 (2013): 219-48, where much of the

book of the generations of . . . (only here)" seems to point to a source or sources. The *toledot* texts occur in Genesis 1-37:2 ten times, and in Numbers 3:1.
Two more uses in Genesis deviate from the formula (10:32; 25:13). Genesis 37:3-50:26 does not use *toledot*; the *toledot* of Numbers 3:1 denotes an Aaron-Moses genealogy which also appears in Exodus 6:13-27 and Numbers several times of which 3:1-3 is most important. Editorial displacement may have occurred with Genesis *toledot* material in some places as occurred in original Judges material shifted to 1 Samuel 1-12. The account of Joseph's activity occurs right after the Jacob *toledot*, suggesting a connection. Thus the *toledot* material now found in Genesis 1:1-50:26 with the fragment of Numbers 3:1-3 may have once been a history-genealogy *toledot* series including the whole Genesis 1—Exodus 18 pre-law material for which the label "dispensation of promise" is literarily suitable.[2] The result would be a single *toledot* series covering the whole portion, later somewhat re-arranged, but nonetheless a unified pre-law block.[3]

Much later, Paul refers to the portion's main characters as "the fathers," or "our fathers" and sometimes cites individuals like Adam or Abraham by name.[4] New Testament books also refer to secondary characters like Noah or Isaac. Paul perceives this material in framework or single-era language: ". . . death reigned from Adam to Moses (Rom 5:14)," a description guided by his view of the law which in turn follows the Genesis 1-Exodus 18 block. In another perception of this material, Paul spoke of it no less than six times as an era of

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literature is cited. The article is an extension of work on the subject by D. Garrett and M. Thomas.

[2]This suggested reconstruction of the now fragmented *toledot* elements at the end of the block is my own. But it was stimulated by comments of Matthew H. Thomas' discussion in *These Are the Generations* (London: T&T Clark, 2011), 42 and passim. It has an analogy in the way the proposed second Judges series is also spread out into 1 Samuel's early chapters.

[3]The seventeenth-century reformed scholar Johannes Cocceius outlined the sequence of biblical eras as (1) before law; (2) under law (3) after law, thus recognizing a unified pre-law section of the Pentateuch; cited by J. Sailhammer, *The Meaning of the Pentateuch* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity, 2009), 286, n 2.

[4]The inner-biblical exchange of interpretive concepts between the testaments is the basis for an appeal to Paul here. This hermeneutical back-and-forth I think of in a way similar to Sailhammer, *ibid.,* 243-282. The ideas cannot be discussed more fully here for lack of space.

"promise (Gal 3:15-22)," or "promises (Gal 3:16, 21)." Since he nowhere identifies the pre-law material of Genesis and Exodus by any other general name, it appears that "promise" was his name for the whole Adam to Moses block.

Thus, "promise" as the name of the Genesis 1—Exodus 18 block is understood here as a thematic conception of the era and thus a relevant name for the first dispensation. Paul can speak of "the promises" (plural with article), "the promise" (singular with article), or more generally "promise" (singular without article) as a principle or mode by which God revealed himself and his plan to selected persons. Internally the narrative scheme pictures God's enactments of his plan for the origin and salvation of Israel and ultimately for that of the emerging nations as well. Covenants are also included with promises as Paul notes, referring to them in singular or plural (Gal 3:15; Rom 9:4; Eph 2:12). Within this material, no biblical evidence exists for a single biblical covenant. Covenant enactments are included as special provisions to assure stable behavior or to narrow genealogical lines as in the cases of Noah, Shem and Moses.[5]

DISPENSATIONALIST CONSTRUAL OF THE PROMISE ERA

The term "dispensation" or "dispensations" (or some equivalent like "economies") gained ground within the Calvinist stream during the Post-Reformation years.[6] Varied outlines for biblical revelation eras emerged well before 1800, with even more proposals for the "dispensations" after 1800. Such outlines tried to articulate the progression of biblical revelation in a quasi-historical fashion.[7] One line of this post-Reformation development evolved into

[5]M. Thomas, These Are the Generations, 124-125.

[6]An observation made again recently by R. T. Mangum in a paper delivered at the November 2010 meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society under the title "The Dispensational-Covenantal Rift," 2, based on his book of the same title (Waynesboro Ga.: Paternoster, 2007)

[7]A. Elert, *A Bibliographic History of Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 1965) has gathered many samples of assessments from the Reformation to the present of the biblical periods of revelation, sometimes under the name "dispensations" or "economies" of the covenant of grace. This research is basic to the history of periodizing biblical material and its dispensational implications. The writers surveyed varied in the number of such biblical revelational eras; some writers in this history adopted a less than seven-era outline, some more than seven. Elert unfortunately erred in

C. I. Scofield's outline of the dispensations in his *Reference Bible*. This essay views Scofield's first three dispensations as arbitrary human constructs imposed on the text without any real internal or New Testament authority. Only "promise" and "law" are named in the New Testament as Old Testament redemptive eras ("economies," "dispensations").

Dispensationalists have been mostly content to teach an outline of the dispensations with little study of the promise era. One would think that once the outline had shifted from naming the "economies" by their chief biblical character (as "The Adamic Dispensation," or "The Mosaic Dispensation") to naming the eras by the mode of revelation or kind of provision (as in "*promise*" or "*Law*"), efforts at studying and teaching the details of each era from their internal *thematics* (longitudinal, recurring themes) and individual *pericopae* (short stories, "paragraphs") would have become a natural step. But mostly this has not happened.[8] Instead, Scofield's outline is repeated without much modification, or neglected with little effort to critically sift the material or revise constructively.

One reason for this situation may be the tendency of ministers to be practical and simple, often settling for practical aspects of main characters' experiences, perhaps engaging congregations in some selected features of the story line, or citing modest detail of the biblical geography. In the author's judgment, one important factor in this situation is the lack of a workable analytical grid for identifying and discussing our portion's repeated thematic features, its developments, or the way the biblical story moves from segment to segment with literary devices or connectors. Hence, the purpose of this article is to discuss two available methods of studying Genesis 1—Exodus 18 from the discipline of biblical theology.

In a sense, this is a discussion of "hermeneutics," but not in the more traditional sense as in the general hermeneutics manuals. Rather, this essay seeks to relate dispensational theology to the theological method and format known since J. P. Gabler (1787) as "biblical theology." Tying dispensational theology to biblical theology as a method is a way to deepen or expand

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labeling all such outlines "dispensationalism," which they were not. Recently, D. DeWitt, *Dispensational Theology in America* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Grace Bible College, 2003), 156-196, adopted the idea of four dispensations.

[8]For further comments on promise as the first dispensation, and occupying Genesis 1—Exodus 18, see D. DeWitt, *Dispensational Theology in America*, 190.

dispensational theology by focusing attention on its *biblical* roots and details. I mean by this a thorough analysis of the themes of the story-line, its many individual pericopae (roughly paragraphs), and the supporting details which give particular pericopae their unique contributions to the promise nature of the narrative.

This kind of study should be able to gather the biblical materials to show why the material itself evoked the term "promise" as its New Testament name. The term "promise" is a cover term for a repeated series of divine utterances articulating the grant to Abram and his posterity of *land* and *offspring* projected to become a nation-people in the ancient Near East. Both of these promises in turn are related to the *faith* of Abram, Isaac and Jacob, and their *functions under divine mandates*. This focus sees the promise idea as a sustained theme—in fact the central theme—of the whole material (Gen 1—Exod 18). In other words, repeated theme elements in the patriarchal stories make up that segment of the Pentateuch's whole content; "promise" is not just the name for a group of isolated texts containing specific promises.

This means in turn that Genesis 1—Exodus 18 has *its own themes*, sub-themes, individual related pericopae (story "paragraphs"), and trajectories toward Israel's origin and redemption. Furthermore, the God who was creating a national land and people already shows himself under striking titles such as El Elyon and El Shaddai, names which belong to the narrative thematics: the names have their own functions in context. Their functional meanings are determined by the contextual flow, not by topical treatment of names of God separated from the theology of the narrative contexts in which they occur. The latter is, of course, a perfectly good operation if one is seeking a statement of what Christians now believe about God or his many names. These names (and quite a few others) rather have their primary meaning in their own contexts in relation to the four companion themes—promise, land, offspring and faith.[9] This contextual usage should be shown as evident in teaching this portion of Scripture.

[9]For discussions of theme, see J. Blenkinsopp, *The Pentateuch* (New York: Doubleday, 1992); T. Mann, *The Book of the Torah* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1988); and from an earlier era, D. J. A. Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch* (Sheffield: Sheffield University Press, 1978).

BASIC METHOD IN BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

More precisely, the purpose of this study is to illustrate how dispensational theology's interests and biblical theology's methods belong together to form a companionship of study and thought for more effective recognition and presentation of biblical material—analytic methods which systematic theology's methodology grid does not use. A few introductory thoughts may help to clarify these comments.

In *Dispensational Theology in America During the Twentieth Century* (2003), I spoke of the four branches of theology—biblical, systematic, historical and practical theology—and of biblical theology in particular:

> Dispensational theology's closest affinities are to biblical theology since its biblicist concerns propel it constantly toward the Bible itself and the differentia of the biblical record of revelation and redemption (for example: law and grace, church and kingdom, Old Testament and New Testament, and promise and fulfillment).[10]

This four-part description of the theological organism is likely to remain intact for some time as a useful quadrilateral for thinking about what theology is and how it does its work. It continues to invite thoughtful definition of the differences among the four "branches" over how each operates. Even if considered an organic-like unity, or thought of more for their "methodologies" or "procedures" than as names for subject matters, the four branches may also be defined as having different points of focus and practice, if not different mentalities or ways of thinking. As a unity, each works with a different dimension of theological knowledge, even as they intersect and correlate. Only if separate can they do their own work *and* converse with each other. I shall state the procedures of biblical and systematic theology below, but only to be clear about how biblical theology as a set of procedures works, while not meaning to suggest there are no procedural issues, or that that the grid is beyond criticism or even serious modification and development.[11]

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[10]D. DeWitt, Dispensational Theology in America, 16.

[11]A useful recent discussion of all the issues in and around the biblical theology grid of methods and procedures is James Mead, *Biblical Theology: Issues, Methods, and Themes* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox); a biblical theology like John

Biblical Theology describes the theology of the biblical books and their sub-sections in relation to their historical-literary context. Its focus is on the theology of the biblical books as they are—in their own literary forms and historical-cultural bearings. "Theology" describes God's speech, his acts, and what Israel wrote about them.

Biblical theology works with narratives and other literary forms which were frequently oral before they were written down. Parts of the story line were sung as ballads by Hebrew minstrels (Exod 15:1, 20-21; Jud 5:1). Shorter pieces were gathered into connected stories, or groups of laws and wisdom sayings, following thematic concepts visible in their final written forms, and probably in earlier forms as well. Biblical narratives were originally meant for immediate local situations. In the early parts of the Bible, historical reconstruction of those situations is still hardly possible

In studying narrative, biblical theology: (a) identifies the smallest literary units (usually paragraphs or "pericopae" [pl]),[12] unified segments and sections in their beginning and end-points, and searches for their larger contextual literary-rhetorical structures like the *toledot* discussed above; (b) identifies themes sustained in smaller pericopae. Biblical themes reflect basic sustained theological interests of a portion of text, whether in a whole book, a portion of a book, or a cross-book section; (c) identifies the language (especially nouns and verbs) and meanings which carry the main ideas and concepts of smaller or larger portions' themes or agendas, and the placement and frequency of key or repeated terms and phrases; (d) identifies the largest literary forms of the biblical books, sections and individual pericopae. The Bible's literary *forms* are variably native to Israel (or the apostolic church), being partly or wholly adapted from non-Hebrew literary works of the region.[13]

Sailhammer's, *The Meaning of The Pentateuch* includes a long theological-philosophical introduction before actually discussing the theology of the Pentateuch itself.

[12]Greek *pericope* meaning III in Liddell-Scott-Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 1877: in rhetoric, a section or passage.

[13]A work giving careful attention to the language and devices biblical authors use to connect segments of their history or literature is W. Kaiser, *Toward an Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1978), especially chapters 4 and 6. Kaiser believes biblical authors were conscious of such connections and developed rhetorical devices by which to articulate them in their books—in very different and unique ways per

Discussion of several other operations of biblical theology would require more space than is here available and would move beyond the scope of this article. The foregoing is a description of some basic aspects of biblical theology's operations. Only two major analytic methods will be used here to illustrate: themes and pericopae. (1) *Themes* in a large block like Genesis 1—Exodus 18 are appear in sustained longitudinal recurrence. Discussion of themes below will raise awareness of many such themes in the portion. (2) The term *pericope* (singular) is a Greek word used in biblical studies to describe small biblical story units or segments roughly equivalent to our "paragraph" or biblical short narrative episode, with their own internal structure, vocabulary, thought movements and scope. "Pericope" is usually used for shorter pieces in New Testament books, but now also for short pieces in Old Testament narrative, and to some extent in the prophetic books. This essay will work only with these two aspects of biblical theology—themes and pericopae.

BASIC METHOD OF SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

Systematic theology's purpose is to state topically the doctrinal content of Christianity in its logical coherence to produce a clear knowledge of its distinctive beliefs in general and in detail. Systematic theology intends to be biblical, but its method is necessarily biblically selective as required by its topical outline.

The method of systematic theology involves at least the following operations: (a) it aims at a full, logically coherent description of the *topical loci* of Christian belief, often as drawn from point by point creeds, confessions, doctrinal statements or summaries like the Apostles' or Nicene Creed, for example; (b) it identifies and defines its doctrinal loci by gathering relevant and crucial biblical texts per topic, relying for doctrinal definition on this assemblage of biblical texts selected by their topical relevance; (c) it discusses doctrines or religions systems of thought foreign to Christianity's basic confessional statements, since its concern is to distinguish essential Christian beliefs from all others. It discusses deviant Christian beliefs like Unitarianism, or compares Christian doctrine with *philosophical* systems; (d) an extension of this enterprise is the formation of the Christian world-view—how Christians view the world,

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biblical book.

what they value in their world life, how they account for things as they are, and how they behave accordingly.

Systematic theology's topical—definitional—logical method has no analytical grid for studying biblical narrative, or law and wisdom collections as they are. What interest it has in narrative thematics and pericopae is limited to how they might inform systematic theology of biblical meanings of words or concepts. Systematics is focused on Christian belief about the topics of its loci—God, creation, revelation, scriptural inspiration, man, sin, Christ, salvation, the church and the end times. Its principle of organization is not the linear flow of biblical texts and thought, but the topical-logical definition, correlation and harmony of the distinctive Christian ideas. Before biblical theology was defined by J. P. Gabler (1787) and his successors, biblical study was rather understood simply as study of biblical history, law, wisdom or prophecy, and so on.

Systematic theology as one part of the theological organism is an entirely proper and legitimate discipline as are the other parts of the organism—biblical theology, historical theology and practical theology. But none of the latter three is useful for biblical study or exposition based on the movement and structure of biblical narrative, law, wisdom or prophecy. Systematic theology tends to impose its topics and logic on biblical texts—although this tendency is avoided by more method-conscious systematic theologians. Biblical theology is that part of the organism designed for biblical study—the study of the flow and details of the biblical material.

We may, then, undertake a sample study of two selected aspects of biblical theology's analytic procedures. Pastors and teachers should realize, however, that this analysis can only tell them what the primary values and concepts of the biblical materials are in their own thought movement. Application to one's own life and the life of congregations is a matter of practical needs and creativity in the pastor-teachers' own situation—the point of shift from "what it meant" to what it means.

Toward The Theology of the Dispensation of Promise: Thematic Elements

Since this essay is a kind of proposal, I have selected only two aspects of biblical theology's method as examples of its application to the large block of biblical material occupying Genesis 1—Exodus 18—the stories of the five

patriarchs of Israel: Adam, Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, and Moses before the law.

One basis for definition and perspective within the canon is how Paul views this section of the Old Testament as only one era ("dispensation") which he calls "promise," and speaks of the period as extending from Adam to Moses (Rom 5:14, meaning Adam to the giving of the law) with only a few further details. A closer internal basis for definition is the observation of biblical theology that the portion's material has its own forms for its purpose of *explaining the rise of Israel.* Another way to say this is that the story is told as *a national Israelite epic*—the story of how the nation emerged from *creation,* under the acts and purpose of God, to become *Israel*, including a series of historical events and linear genealogies (continuous genealogical lines). This genealogical-historical sense of origins parallels other east Mediterranean types of historical origins material.[14]

An obvious clue this is a uniquely *Hebrew* story of Israel's national epic is that it is told in Hebrew and uses ideas found elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible like the direct speech and actions of the *one God*, and the structuring of the creation story into the Hebrew six days of work and one day of *Sabbath* rest. A related region of the ancient Near East, Mesopotamia, also had national epics—the Mesopotamian Sumerians and the Akkadians—and their national epics also told their story from creation onward with their own gods and their activities. The stories that make up the Hebrew account of the five patriarchs have many literary and thematic parallels which appear to have borrowed their forms and some images or motifs from Mediterranean and early Greek literary environments. However, borrowed elements were re-contextualized, re-theologized and re-themed when included in the Hebrew epic. In a full-development biblical theology, such background elements and many other factors should be discussed. This study will apply only two basic aspects of biblical theology method to Genesis 1—Exodus 18—longitudinal themes and two sample pericopae.

The ground-theme of the stories is the *promise* of Israel's emergence from among the nations resulting from creation—the Hebrew national epic.[15] Several recent treatments of Genesis 1—Exodus 18 recognize one or more major themes in this portion, although not all studies state it the same way. These auxiliary or sub-themes are fairly widely agreed:

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[14]See the cautious discussion of J. Blenkinsopp, *Pentateuch,* 37-42.

[15]M. Thomas, These are the Generations, 6, 19.

1. A divine *blessing* with persistent thematic attention to increase, flourish and success, complicated by sin, struggle, and setbacks, with related sub-themes of trust, faith and patience.
2. The *promise of a multiplied offspring*—of Adam, then of Abraham, then the origin of each of the twelve tribes and their travail through the Egyptian enslavement and final deliverance.
3. The *promise of land* on which Abraham's offspring will live, the problem of its prior occupation by "Canaanites," and the delay of fulfillment due to Egyptian slavery.
4. The presence of a *moral order* requisite to fulfillment of the promised blessings themed as righteousness, justice and love, but complicated by sinful inclinations within both Israel and surrounding enemies.

Each of these themes and their support details, some of which are already suggested in these theme descriptions, can be traced in how they reflex through the portion in multiple repetitions. The whole is gradually created, provisioned and guided by Israel's God who little by little moves promise events toward fulfillment.[16] He also carries on communications with the human operatives at crucial points, speaking direct words or messages, sometimes in dreams or visions. The greater emphasis, however, is on his acts, often aimed at or in actual fulfillment of promises. The promises are accompanied by mandates or commands—God's orders to Noah, Abraham or Moses. The provisions and mandates are undergirded by a special divine name during this era—*El Shaddai*/God Almighty—recognized as uniquely patriarchal but supplanted by *Yahweh* in Exodus 3 and 6. The names characterize God as powerful and the source of fertility and increase. As Yahweh (Exod 3), he becomes Israel's national God, establishes Moses as leader, judges with plagues, and finally delivers Israel from slavery. Yahweh means "I am he who brings to pass" or "he who causes events to happen." He also establishes treaties (covenants) on crucial issues in specific enactments at special times, is worshipped by Israel's founders and people, and reveals himself and his plans at altars and holy places like Bethel.

The first group of *promise* motifs circulates around the idea of *blessing*, rooted in the primal blessing of Genesis 1:28: be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth

[16]D. J. A. Clines, The Theme of the Pentateuch.

and rule it. This concept links Genesis 1-11 with 12-50. The whole contains increasingly more promise detail. "Blessing" translates Hebrew *barak* (Gen 1:22), used first of birds and water creatures and thereafter about sixty times in Genesis, mostly of advances planned or enacted for *man*, but concentrated on *Abram and descendants* (Gen 12:2-3).[17] From the beginning the chief, repeated blessings are fruitfulness, increase and dominion. Sea and land produced water and land animals, and God added to the blessing a pronouncement of "good." Fertility and reproduction are related to Hebrew *yalad* (bear, give birth). The related noun *toledoth* ("generations") is used for headings comprising the history and genealogy combination no less than ten times in Genesis 2:4-37:2, whether or not it was first a source or later a structuring theme. Additionally "blessing" carries connotations like capacity, power, culture, and joyous flourish

The second motif is the *promise of perpetually multiplying offspring*; the way of connecting family and offspring is genealogy and selections from family history.[18] The offspring theme is repeated over and over, and is focused by election on specific, successive individuals who produce more offspring in abundance (Exod 1-6). Israel thereby becomes a nation-people. Begetting includes vitality ("life"), lineage, offspring, and the gradual enlargement and fulfillment of family promises. Hence, the main point of Genesis 1-11 is to move the story from Adam to Abraham through lineal genealogy. From the promises arise repeated conflicts (Exod 1-12), trickery and manipulations born of impatience, doubt and uncertainty (Gen 15; 16; 26-37).[19] Begetting generates social ties and gains: marriage, family, slaves, wealth and forms of prosperity, especially flocks, herds, donkeys, camels, and even gold and silver; Abram and sons become wealthy nomadic chieftains.[20] Avoidance of intermarriage with

[17]W. Kaiser, *Toward an Old Testament Theology,* 55-59. See also J. De Rouchie, "The Blessing-Commission."

[18]There is no Hebrew word for "promise" equivalent to Greek *epaggelia* (promise). What is called "promise" is expressed by Hebrew *amar*, "speak, say,"—usually "the Lord said." The New Testament infers "promise" not from any Hebrew verb, but from what is said in the larger context of the divine determination to bless.

[19]C. Westermann, *The Promise to the Fathers: Studies in the Patriarchal Narrative*, (Trans D. Green*;* Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976), 65-68 and *passim.*

[20]W. F. Albright's proposal that Abram was a trader conducting donkey caravans from Mesopotamia to Egypt. Albright, *The Biblical Period* (New York: Harper, 1949), has lost its charm among scholars, perhaps unjustly. One wonders about the source of silver and gold and about the mixture or even shift of caravan donkeys to camels.

resident Canaanites is strong enough that Abraham seeks a wife for Isaac by sending a servant to find her among his own ancestor descendants (Gen 24)—one of several journeys out and back in marital or other interests (also Jacob, Moses). Since fertility and children are so central, problems with infertility and lack of children and related preoccupations with conception and birth are a repeated motif. Patriarchs may take the promise into their own hands (Gen 16). The plentitude of social powers and relations comes to include nations and kings (Gen 17), and manipulative or struggling relations with governments—Abraham with Abimelech (Gen 13, 20), and climactically Moses and Israel with Pharaoh (Exod 1-12). The relations-with-government motif becomes central in the Joseph and Moses segments (Gen 37—Exod12).

The third motif—*the promise of land*—is also persistent. Land is an interest even in Egypt (famine and famine relief, Israel out of its place). Several scenes in Genesis picture building an altar, establishing a holy place, or making treaties over wells and water rights. Water as a dominant motif in Genesis one shows up later in well negotiations, and becomes decisive in the escape from Egypt through the sea. Water is both sustenance and power. Both too much and not enough are threats. In one scene, Abram and Lot settle space problems as Abram offers Lot the option of taking what land he wants. After this settlement, Abram is told by the Lord to walk the length and breadth of the promised area. In yet another scene, a whole chapter (23) is given to purchasing a small portion of land at Hebron as the family burial site. Thus, bit by bit the land promise begins fulfillment. The promise is even repeated in Exodus (3:8; 6:8; 13:11; 15:15). Location is usually focused by site names and landmarks. Separation of Abraham from Ur, Lot from Abraham (Gen 13), Esau from Jacob, and Israel and Moses from Egypt become definitions of territories as do wells and holy places. Blenkinsopp thinks land has logical priority in that everything depends on it.[21] Agonizing postponements and slowness of fulfillment characterize this theme as well as the fertility issue.

The fourth promise motif is *righteousness, justice, deliverance and peace*—the coordinates of the moral order and the opposites of ever threatening sin, violence, failure and disaster. In early Genesis, sin spreads (Gen 1-11) along with man and culture—everything is subject to corruption, insecurity, danger, conflict, deceit, arrogance (Babel), manipulation (Joseph), murder (Hamor), hatred, abuse (Joseph and brothers), slavery and the like. Danger, threats and

[21]J. Blenkinsopp, *Pentateuch*, 110.

violence are persistently overcome. Righteousness is the segment's counter-power. It includes righteousness of character (Noah), righteousness by faith (Abram) and righteousness and obedience as conditions for fulfillment of promise. Related themes are love, tenderness, foresight and wisdom (Joseph). Narrow escapes and agonizing negotiations with evil powers occupy blocks of the story-line (Jacob and Laban; Moses and Pharaoh). Oppression as slavery (Moses), and even the threat of the horrifying Sinai desert appear. Famine, disorder and weariness of leadership occur, along with separation from incompatible powers (Lot and Pharaoh). To maintain the moral order, severe divine judgments occur (expulsion from the Garden, flood, and plagues on Egypt).

TOWARD THE THEOLOGY OF THE DISPENSATION OF PROMISE: TWO SAMPLE PERICOPAE

It is not difficult to see the above network of longitudinal themes outcropping throughout the individual pericopae of Genesis 1—Exodus 18. It is more difficult to grasp the main point, the structure and the details of varied pericopae. Two examples of pericopae analysis will suffice using the elements of movement, structure, word placement, and motif identification per details of each pericope. The first example is the story of Abraham and Lot's separation (Gen 13:1-18). The second example is the fifth plague against Egypt (Exod 9:1-7).

Abraham and Lot

The Abraham-Lot story of Genesis 13 is correctly marked off by chapter divisions in most English translations, including the NIV and ESV. G. Coats calls the story a "novella."[22] The NIV seems over-paragraphed while the ESV's divisions of the periscope are closer to the Hebrew Bible. Both modern English versions correctly make a thought-movement shift between verses 13 and 14. On 13:1-13, the ESV's segmenting overcomes the atomized paragraphing of the NIV. The ESV makes verse 1 a separate segment, verses 2-8 a segment and

[22]G. Coats, *Genesis with an Introduction to Narrative Literature* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1983), 115. Coats defines a "novella" as a story that "develops a point of tension to a final resolution." "Novella" thus defined does not pass judgment on historical reality. Questions about exact historical reality are left open.

verses 9-13 a segment. I divide a little differently by making verses 1-5 a segment, verses 6-13 a segment, and verses 14-18 a segment; this analysis sees a balance in quantity of material between the first and third segments, with about five lines of Hebrew text in each. The center segment has eleven lines of Hebrew text. It contains small clusters of key internal motif words.

The first segment (13:1-5) is the set-up of the story. The principals (Abram and Lot) move from Egypt to Canaan; there are several topographic notes. Scenes include camp-breaking, tent-pitching, holy sites, and wealth and possessions of both principals. This segment sets up the characters and the ingredients of the story.

The second segment of the pericope (13:6-13) is about conflict over sufficient west bank space for both Abram and Lot's possessions—their herdsmen's respective portions of their flocks and herds. Verse 6 explains how a *conflict* arose between Abram and Lot over space. The portion features two centered uses of a word-group in Hebrew meaning "dispute" or in Old Testament court contexts, "lawsuit" (Heb *rib*; ESV "strife," vss 7, 8), the story's name for the problem. *Resolution* is represented by two more centered uses of a verb for "separate" (Heb *parad*, "spread out," "separate," ESV "separate," vss 9, 11) to complete the conflict-resolution sequence. The two men and their herdsmen gain the needed space through Abram's offer that Lot choose whichever part of the land he wishes, while Abram himself will take the other. Lot chooses east Jordan. Two unwritten values are suggested but not verbalized as such—Abram's generosity, and God's sovereign overruling of Lot's choice, which would have conflicted with the promise. The segment ends with evil lurking in Lot's choice, which shortly materialized. Lot moved too close to wicked Sodom—a connection which soon became a horrific problem (Gen 18:16-19:38).

The third segment (13:14-18) is the story's conclusion: the divine blessing-promise of land and large offspring is renewed to Abram, who is ordered thereupon (a mandate) to walk the land's length and breadth and move south from Bethel to the area of Hebron near a seer's tree—apparently an oracle. This he did, and built another altar to retain contact with God and the holy. There the pericope ends. The three gross segments can be seen as following an inclining gradient (A—B—C) moving upward to a climax (C), or as a rondo construction (A—B—A); the former of the two seems more likely correct.

The Fifth Plague on Egypt

The fifth plague of Exodus 9:1-7 (against Egypt's livestock) is also easily identified as a pericope—a self-contained plague story, called satisfactorily a "mighty-act narrative" by J. Durham.[23] Durham divides the pericope between verses 1-4 and 6-7 as a two-part pericope consisting basically of "the Lord said (spoke) . . . the Lord did (acted)." I prefer to see three segments with verse 4 as a very short center, contrasting with the more elongated center of the Abram-Lot story. The centered verse 4 announces the divine purpose, namely to cause a division between Israel and Egypt—the same thought as the resolution in the center of the Abram-Lot story, but using a different Hebrew word translated in English "make a distinction" (Heb *palah*; cf Gen 13:9, 11 *parad*). Thus the structure can be analyzed as 9:1-3: God's plan; 9:4: God's purpose; 9:5-9: God's action. This yields a balanced pericope with four lines of Hebrew narrative before the center, just over one line at the center, and four lines after the center, or a much-shortened A—B—A pattern, but more compact than the Abram-Lot piece with its thick detail spread over ten lines of Hebrew narrative at the center. The plague story too has a key word placement (*palah*) in support of the central theme of separation.

I chose this pericope initially because it seemed quite different from the Abram-Lot story. I was surprised to find that it too contained thematic elements similar to the whole of Genesis 1—Exodus 18, and even a few details parallel to the Abram-Lot piece. The basic theological motif is *separation* as with Abram-Lot. Separation is a theme noted for the whole *toledot* material by Thomas; "separation" refers to exclusion of persons and offspring-nations incompatible with the blessing-promise genealogical line.[24] Exclusion (separation) may be incurred by free choice (Lot) or may result from hostile obstruction of progress toward promise-fulfillment (Pharaoh). Another theme manifested here is that severe judgment was at times required to service forward movement of the chosen line. A further connection with the larger thematics and with Abram and Lot in particular is the issue of possessions. Like Lot, Pharaoh's possessions (Heb *miqneh* in both pericopae) are listed. The Abram line also had possessions, but the narrative in both cases listed mainly those of the excluded parties. The reason is not clear, but it may have been to emphasize how an excluded party's possessions were placed in jeopardy along with the party himself.

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[23]J. Durham, *Exodus* (WBC 2; Waco: Word, 1987), 117.

[24]Thomas, *These are the Generations*, 57, 73.

God's acts here keep the line of Israel and redemption moving forward toward fulfillment of the blessing-promise. With Lot the separation is humanly initiated by Abram in a generous action toward Lot to solve the space problem. Abram's action is assumed—but not stated as such—to be guided by God. In the plague against Pharaoh and Egypt separation is again necessary, but in this case it is through a severe judgment.

In an age of inclusiveness and internationalism, the idea of a divinely purposed exclusion may be disturbing. While a fully-developed theology of the dispensation of promise would have to consider all such election-exclusion events before a final statement could be made about the two stories' theology, two points can be noted. (1) Lot's exclusion was based on a generous offer by Abram that Lot select for himself his preferred location. Both men's actions seem entirely free. Lot chose the east Jordan plain for his own reasons. But his self-determined location put him close to a serious moral problem into which he was soon drawn. There was no divine compulsion in these moves, although the larger story-line implies divine guidance in Lot's choice which left Abram in the promised territory. (2) In the case of Pharaoh, the exclusion resulted from his intractable resistance to God's plan and an economically interested enslavement of Israel. A judgment had to follow for both reasons—intractable resistance and horrific slavery. So the exclusionary events were not ethically arbitrary.

CONCLUSIONS

Genesis 1—Exodus 18 is a large block of homogeneous pre-law material with its own themes, interests and supporting pericopae. Its theme is a combination of God's *blessing and promise*, a theme aimed at the *emergence of Israel* as a nation. Two of biblical theology's several methods yielded something of the portion's repeated themes, the focus of two of its local pericopae, and, finally some aspects of its theology. In contrast, systematic theology is not a method for analyzing the flow of biblical thought. Only biblical theology since J. P. Gabler offers a grid of analytical concepts for discerning the meaning of large blocks of biblical text and their smaller supporting pericopae. While a biblical theology analysis finds many themes and sub-themes in the block, two sample pericopae exposed divine separating actions aimed at Israel's emergence in its divinely granted land. One of the two samples viewed the separating action as humanly initiated but divinely guided, the other as direct divine judgment against

stubborn resistance and ruinous slavery as an impediment to a stage of blessing-promise fulfillment.

A practical theology application of what has been learned to persons and groups is best brought about by insights from practical theology and the thoughtful creativity of a pastor, teacher or leader. A biblical theology analysis only furnishes the interpreter-teacher with a tool for discerning the original meaning of texts. Application comes from guidance of the Spirit, creative insights into human spiritual and social needs, and awareness of many aspects of practical theology.

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BEYOND RETRENCHMENT: TOWARD A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

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Let me begin with the observation mid-Acts dispensational theology (hereafter called Grace theology) employs a strategy of retrenchment with respect to the biblical idea of the kingdom of God.[1] We have a strong sense that what must be conserved or protected is our classic dispensational thinking about the kingdom of God. What we normally mean by the "kingdom of God" is that future time when Jesus Christ will return to establish his millennial reign, restoring Israel to national prominence, and sitting on the throne of his father David. But to an even greater extent than classical dispensational theology, Grace theology attempts to conserve and *reserve* the meaning of the phrase "kingdom of God" for the future of the nation of Israel. Because of our emphasis on the revelation of the mystery to the apostle Paul and the mid-Acts beginning of the Body of Christ, our Grace theology represents a more concentrated form of this key tenet of classical dispensational theology.[2] This is especially true when thinking of the biblical concept of the kingdom of God. If, for example, the future dimensions

[1] By retrenchment, I mean a cutting down, a cutting back, a curtailment, a strategic limitation of resources. Typically, the idea of retrenchment has its most common applications in economic and military contexts – the conservation or scaling back of resources for the purposes of strengthening.

[2] Thus I do not see Ryrie as wrong to characterize mid-Acts dispensational theology as ultra-dispensationalism – certainly with respect to the uniqueness of the Body of Christ and the church as a "heavenly" people as distinct from Israel. Grace theology draws the lines more sharply than other kinds of dispensationalism.

of the messianic kingdom were to somehow overlap with the *oikonomia* of Grace (the Church age), or if there were dimensions of the kingdom of God that were already present in both the ministry of Jesus and Paul, this could constitute a blurring of the distinction between Israel and the Church, thus violating one of the "essentials" of classical dispensational theology.[3] This strategy of retrenchment attempts to build up a powerful *defensive* fortification around one of the *sine qua nons* of dispensationalism, namely the distinction between Israel and the Church and the uniquely Pauline character of the revelation of the mystery and the beginning of the Body of Christ.

In this article I will argue these theological strategies actually fail to build up the Body of Christ, because such retrenchment does not attend fully to the biblical dimensions of the present reality and immediacy that characterize the kingdom of God as preached by Jesus and Paul. This has the unintended consequence of limiting our theological resources and weakening our theology of the Church's mission, particularly in the areas of ethics and eschatology. The chief problem here is that these strategies of retrenchment are born from presuppositions based on the *sine qua non* of dispensational theology. To put it another way: rather than reading the Bible again to determine a biblical understanding of the kingdom of God, the dispensationalist can often tend to read his system and its presuppositions back into the Scriptures. Whenever and wherever this happens, dispensational theology begins to function as more authoritative than the Scriptures themselves, which in turn clouds the Church's ability to hear the Word of God speak afresh to our generation. In this article I will argue that by missing the immediacy of the biblical idea of the kingdom of

[3] This is more dangerous when one has only three essentials or *sine qua non*. DeWitt (*Dispensational Theology in America during the Twentieth Century*) is more helpful in that he offers seven "essentials." From teaching dispensational theology at Grace Bible College, however, many students make the observation that the difference between the Church and Israel is the "essential of essentials," that which catalyzes all the others essentials for dispensational theology. That being said, the retrenchment mindset of Grace theology in this area is sometimes so powerful that even correlations of Jesus' and Paul's language regarding the kingdom of God are sometimes excluded out of hand. Jesus and Paul simply *cannot* be talking about the same thing – or even related things – because Jesus is the prophesied Messiah of Israel and Paul is the *oikonomos* of the mystery revelation of the Church the Body of Christ. The two are mutually exclusive for a large segment of Grace theology. I hope to show in the article why this should not be the case.

God and seeing it as strictly future, a retrenchment strategy in our approach to the kingdom of God actually prevents the Body of Christ from fully understanding and achieving its God-given ministry of reconciliation.

In an effort to counteract the strategy of retrenchment in our thinking about the kingdom of God, this article seeks to move our Grace theology in the direction of a more biblically-formed notion of the kingdom of God. This is certainly not an effort to minimize the prophetic witness to the future messianic kingdom in which Jesus will reign on the earth. Nor is it to cloud what is a real biblical distinction between ethnic, national Israel and the Church, the body of Christ which is a "joint-body" of Jews and Gentiles reconciled to God in "one new humanity" (Eph 2:15). Least of all is it intended as an effort to compromise with Covenant Reformed theology or to arrive at some kind of "progressive dispensationalism." On the contrary, it is meant to provide the outlines of a biblical theology of the kingdom of God that will inform and strengthen our Grace theology, not on the basis of our presuppositions or our mid-Acts dispensational understanding as its own kind of hermeneutical circle, but rather on the basis of the clear and straightforward reading of Scripture. I firmly believe this way of approaching the Bible is our heritage as Grace believers, and we would do well to attend to those example examples.

This article proceeds in four parts. First, I will talk about the kingdom idea in the Old Testament with a specific focus on what A.J. McClain called the "mediatorial kingdom" of Israel and the prophetic hope for its fulfillment. Second, I will examine the kingdom idea in the ministry of Jesus, taking note of both its present ("already") and future ("not-yet") dimensions. This will have two results: first, we will be able to identify in a new way the multi-dimensional nature of Jesus' own understanding of the kingdom he was proclaiming. Second, we will be able to observe features of Jesus' kingdom preaching and prophetic activity that parallel the ministry and teachings of the apostle Paul. Third, I will make a brief study of the apostle Paul's use of kingdom language in Acts and in his letters. This will necessarily include consideration of the language of inheritance and of the ruling/reigning of believers in Paul's eschatology. Finally, the study will conclude with observations and recommendations based on the eschatological and ethical themes emerging from the biblical material relating to the kingdom of God. Specifically, how might these eschatological and ethical ideas surrounding the kingdom of God inform the life of the Church the Body of Christ today, and thus begin to counteract the strategies and practical consequences of retrenchment?

KINGDOM IN THE OT – GOD'S KINGDOM VISION

The development of a biblical theology of the kingdom of God must begin with the Old Testament.[4] As a literary unit, the OT reveals the exposition and rising action of God's unfolding plan in history, culminating in the incarnation and ministry of Jesus Christ. Without this backdrop, the ministry of Jesus makes no sense, either in his role as the Messiah of Israel or his headship of the redeemed human race as the second Adam. That said, for any understanding of what Jesus, the Gospel writers, or the apostle Paul mean by the idea of kingdom, it is necessary to understand their ideas with both their Old Testament context—which comprised the only Bible they knew—and within their cultural context of Second Temple Judaism.

An examination of the Hebrew word group *mlk* yields three main theological observations regarding the theme of kingdom in the Old Testament. First, God is the sovereign king over all. Second, God's kingdom is to be exemplified in the nation of Israel, especially through David as Israel's model king, the "man after God's own heart." Third, the kingdom is pictured in Daniel as the eschatological inheritance of the righteous. Israel's vocation – her calling as a nation – is to what Alva McClain called a "mediatorial kingdom."[5] God's

[4] The early thinkers of Grace Theology (I am thinking of J.C. O'Hair, Charles Baker, and C. R. Stam) were onto something in their observations that the Old Testament really continues to Jesus' death on the Cross; the Old Testament, properly understood as the Sinai covenant and the dispensation of the Law, extended up until the "new covenant" in Jesus' blood. Thus when we are talking about the Old Testament we are talking about the literary unit, the books of the Old Testament in the English Bible, as opposed to the theological idea of the Old Testament – which in many cases is our founders' preference. In this article I will use "Old Testament" when I mean the literary unit, and "Old Covenant" when I mean the theological/dispensational concept.

[5] The foundational work for any serious consideration of a biblical theology of the Kingdom of God is still Alva J. McClain's 1959 *The Greatness of the Kingdom*. McClain was the founder and first president of Grace Theological Seminary in Wynona Lake, IN, founded in 1937. No one since has conducted such a thorough analysis of the idea of kingdom in the Old and New Testaments, and the work is basic to any premillennial and dispensational eschatology. The work is also a model for our concerns, as it develops its dispensationalism and futurism on the basis of a close reading of the biblical text.

In Chapter 13 of *The Greatness of the Kingdom*, McClain develops a number of points that connect the priestly or "mediatorial" role of Israel as a nation with the prophetic hope for Messiah's rule and the future of God's people. First, the coming

reign over the earth in and through Israel would have eternal implications for the members of that nation. Taken together, these three theological themes form the backdrop of kingdom for the ministry of Jesus.[6] As they are so important, I will develop them in a bit more detail.

First, God is the sovereign Lord of the universe. This rule and reign of God over all things constitutes, in the broadest possible terms, "the kingdom of God." This is often what dispensationalists mean when they think of the kingdom of God as the "overarching" or "universal" kingdom of God. The Old Testament certainly supports this idea. Psalm 103:19 gives us an indication of the universality of God's reign understood in the Psalms: "The Lord has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all." Similarly, Psalm 145 repeatedly speaks of the rule of God in this broad sense:

> [10] All your works praise you, LORD;
> your faithful people extol you.
> [11] They tell of the glory of your kingdom
> and speak of your might,
> [12] so that all people may know of your mighty acts
> and the glorious splendor of your kingdom.

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kingdom will be related to history. "The rule of Messiah, while something wholly new and without parallel in human history, will nevertheless display and maintain an unbroken historic connection with a kingdom which once existed 'in the days of old'." Second, in contrast to a "purely spiritual" or "heavenly" kingdom, the kingdom anticipated by the prophets will be established in human history. Third, the favored nation of this kingdom will be the Israel of history. McClain writes, "The Old Testament nation of Israel, historically ruptured and scattered among the nations, is the nation which in the prophets is again restored and reunited in the future Kingdom of God." A fourth feature of this future kingdom is that it will have covenantal dimensions that share continuity with the Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic and New Covenants. McClain argues this covenantal basis of the anticipated kingdom grounds it in history, most especially the often repeated land-promises made to Abraham, the patriarchs, the nation of Israel, and to David and the prophets.

[6] For a good, accessible background on how first century Jews interpreted this Old Testament theme, see Wright, N.T. *The Challenge of Jesus: Redisovering Who Jesus Was and Is* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1999). In this present article I am talking about the biblical background against which Jesus would have understood his ministry; not necessarily the cultural understandings and expectations regarding the kingdom of God of Jesus' own time – with which his ministry stands in remarkable contrast.

> **13** Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,
> and your dominion endures through all generations.

Daniel declares repeatedly, "How great are his signs, how mighty his wonders! His kingdom is an eternal kingdom; his dominion endures from generation to generation" (Dan 4:3). From texts like these we learn God's reign in the OT encompasses all time, all generations, and all peoples. We also see the splendor of God's reign is one of the most basic evidences of his glory. In addition, this universal and sovereign reign of God has an ethical dimension, which constitutes the essential moral order of God's rule. "Your throne, O God," says David, "is forever and ever. The scepter of your kingdom is a scepter of uprightness" (Ps 45:6). God's reign over all things has not only dimensions of control, but also dimensions of morality, justice, and fairness that apply to all people for all time, because God's rule and reign is built into the fabric of the created order.

Second, in the broad theology of the Old Testament, God's rule and reign over all things was to be expressed by Israel as his chosen nation, set apart from among all the nations. God stated this explicitly to Israel at the foot of Mount Sinai: "Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exod 19:5-6). God's eternal rule and reign is the basis of all human authority and all human kingdoms, and this rule is the wider context for Israel's vocation as a kingdom of priests and holy nation. Human kingdoms are expected by God to conform to and align with God's own sovereign rule with all the moral dimensions such a kingdom ought to entail. A consistent refrain in the book of Daniel is that God is sovereign over human kingdoms, establishing both them and their rulers, and tearing them down according to his own purposes (Dan 4:17, 25, 32; 5:21). Within the framework of God's sovereign rule, the Old Testament understands the purpose of Israel as a priestly mediation of God's favor and blessing to the world, and also as the means by which God may be truly worshipped by the nations. God makes an everlasting promise to David in 2 Samuel 7 – sometimes called the Davidic Covenant – that he will never lack a man to sit on the throne of Israel. David's kingdom is pictured as the model kingdom; specifically, this kingdom is to be exemplified in the rule of Israel's Messiah as the Son of David (Isa 11; Ezek 37:15-28).

Third, the OT pictures the kingdom as firmly tied to the hope of Israel and

as the inheritance of the righteous. Isaiah 9:6-7 pictures the reign of Israel's Messiah as one who will rule on David's throne and have "no end" to the increase of the government and peace associated with his reign. Although this hope is expressed much later, during Israel's exile in Babylon, there is a progressive revelation of what this future kingdom will look like for the righteous. The kingdom, first and foremost, is an inheritance. Although surrounding nations oppress Israel for the time being, and will again in the future, God promises Daniel that Israel's prominence will once again be restored: "But the holy people of the Most High will receive the kingdom and will possess it forever—yes, for ever and ever" (Da. 7:18). Key here is that the possession of God's authority and rule is transferred to his people as an eternal inheritance. This language is repeated and strengthened a few verses later: "Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of all the kingdoms under heaven will be handed over to the holy people of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey him" (Dan 7:27). Here we see God's heavenly rule is not only entrusted to his people, but that this rule, exercised by Israel, becomes the basis for the way in which the nations will worship and obey the Lord. It is in this way the Old Testament anticipates Israel's fulfillment of the mission given in Exod 19:6, to be "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."

This will have to suffice for our broad overview of the Old Testament theology of the kingdom of God. In the broadest possible sense, the kingdom of God is the sphere of God's sovereign rule over all things. More specifically, this kingdom has concrete historical expression in the nations God has established to uphold justice and uprightness on the earth. This is especially true of Israel as God's favored nation, elected to be a "kingdom of priests" among all other nations. The promises made to Abraham and David are echoed through the prophets, who anticipate the future renewal and restoration of Israel, the historical fulfillment of God's promises, effected in and through the Messiah as the Son of David who will reign on David's throne. This theological context, historical background and prophetic hope comprise the backdrop for Jesus and his announcement of the kingdom of God.

KINGDOM IN THE GOSPELS AND THE MINISTRY OF JESUS

Within this context of the reign of God most broadly considered, Israel functions as God's chosen and mediatorial kingdom. Against the Old Testament background then, "kingdom of God" must refer to the rule of God over all creation, and may, depending on the context, refer to aspects of God's mediatorial kingdom in and through Israel.[7] It is here we begin to understand Jesus and his ministry in proclaiming the kingdom of God to first-century Israel.

The Gospels interpret Jesus and his ministry as the fulfillment of Israel; a new Moses and a new David who is the "Christ" or the "Messiah, the "anointed one" of Israel. The primary biblical usage of the term *christos* or "Messiah" is virtually synonymous with "king," framed against the Old Testament (Davidic) background of Israelite kingship. Matthew begins his Gospel account with "the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah (King) the son of David, the son of Abraham" (Matt 1:1). In doing this, Matthew links Jesus not only with David as his legitimate heir and therefore the king of Israel, but also with Abraham and the fulfillment of the Promise – "through your descendants all the nations of the earth will be blessed." In chapter two, the Magi search for

[7] Some dispensationalists have understood the phrases 'kingdom of God" and "kingdom of heaven" as marking this differentiation, respectively, between God's sovereign rule and Israel's role as mediatorial nation. However, this is a false start for an understanding of these terms in the Gospels. Mark and Luke together use the phrase "kingdom of God" over forty times in their two gospel accounts, while the phrase "kingdom of heaven" is not used in either gospel. Additionally, in passages where Matthew, Mark, and Luke give the same account of the teachings or activities of Jesus, Mark and Luke use the phrase "kingdom of God" where Matthew uses "kingdom of Heaven" (e.g., Matt 5:3, Luke 6:20). Matthew uses the phrase "kingdom of the heavens" more than thirty times, and "kingdom of God" only four times (12:28; 19:24 21:31, 44). In Matt 19, the two terms overlap such that their meaning appears synonymous. For example, Jesus says "it is hard for the rich to enter the kingdom of heaven" (19:23), and immediately after that, "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God" (19:24). The simplest explanation for this is that "kingdom of heaven" is Matthew's phrase for the kingdom of God. Charles Baker states simply: "The kingdom of heaven in Matthew is synonymous with the kingdom of God in Mark and Luke" (*Understanding the Gospels*, 106).

"the one who is born King of the Jews" (2:2). Joseph and Mary flee to Egypt to escape Herod's wrath, marking Jesus not only as a new Moses, but as someone who stands in the place of all of Israel: "Out of Egypt I called my son" (2:15). Similarly, Luke's gospel anticipates the role Jesus will play as the king of Israel. The angel Gabriel says to Mary: "He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will never end" (Luke 2:32-33). Mary's song praises God for the mercy he shows to Israel through the child in her womb: "He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised our ancestors" (2:54-55). Clearly, Matthew and Luke understand the birth of Jesus as a turning point in the history of God's people – this is someone who would renew and restore Israel, who would sit on the throne of his father David, who would rule Israel in a never-ending kingdom. The anticipation of this fulfillment includes the prophetic picture of the suffering Servant of Israel. Even the name Jesus is given because he will "save his people from their sins" (Matt 1:21), and will "give his people knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins" (Luke 1:77).

John the Baptist begins his ministry in the Jordan wilderness baptizing those Jews who come to him as the fulfillment of Isaiah 40:3. John's central message is that Israel is to repent, because "the kingdom of heaven has come near" (Matt 3:17); his baptism is a "baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins" (Luke 3:3), a baptism that is symbolic of the cleansing of first-century Jews, and one that paves the way in their hearts for the ministry of Jesus. Jesus seems to understand his ministry in the same context as John the Baptist understood his: the fulfillment of the prophetic vision for God's restoration of Israel. The central proclamation of Jesus is the same as that of John the Baptist: "The kingdom of heaven has come near" (Matt 4:17). Jesus teaches the present availability of this kingdom in his own person and ministry, as an anticipated future fulfillment of the kingdom. In his first public sermon in Nazareth, Jesus understands his messianic ministry as the fulfillment of Isaiah 61 (Luke 4:18ff) and shortly after states that his mission is specifically to proclaim the kingdom of God (4:43). Jesus himself continues to proclaim this message (Luke 8:1), and when he sends out the twelve disciples, he tells them to proclaim the same message: the kingdom of God has come near (Matt 10:7; Luke 9:2). It is notable in this context that Jesus specifically tells his disciples not to go among the Gentiles or to any towns of the Samaritans, but to "go rather to the lost sheep of Israel"

(Matt 10:6). It appears that for the time being at least, Jesus confines his ministry to national, ethnic Israel, offering the gospel of the kingdom to them first and foremost. Jesus pictures the kingdom as a banquet meal in which faithful Israelites, notably the patriarchs, will participate, while unfaithful or unrepentant Israelites will be cast out (Matt 8:11; 23:13; Luke 13:8).

The dimensions of this kingdom in Jesus' public ministry are: release from demonic oppression (Matt 12:28; Luke 11:20), the nearness of God to the poor, the outcast and marginalized (Matt 5:3; 21:31, 43; Luke 6:20), its present availability to those who simply believe (Mark 10:14-15; Luke 18:16-17), and healing from sickness and physical infirmity (Luke 9:2, 11; 10:9). In addition to outward blessings, Jesus sees his kingdom as "in" or "among" his disciples (Luke 17:21), and in John that kingdom is portrayed as a spiritual "new birth" (John 3:3-5). In contrast to earthly, human kingdoms, Jesus' kingdom is "not of this world" (John 18:36), and not so much of a "when" but a "what" – that which is presently available in the ministry of Jesus. In short, Jesus is the "kingdom in person." And although Jesus never says outright, "I am the king of Israel," his teaching about the kingdom of God, his parables (Matt 13), and his symbolic actions (e.g., Matt 21:1-11) make it clear he sees himself as Israel's rightful king. There are numerous instances recorded in the Gospels in which the crowds want to make Jesus king (e.g. John 6:15), but Jesus slips away from them. Jesus also warns the disciples and other individuals not to let anyone know he is the Messiah (e.g., Mark 8:30). Jesus' birth and public ministry represent the culmination of the plan of God for which the history of Israel made up the necessary background.

Much of this is simply scratching the surface, and we have not even addressed the significance of the kingdom of God theme in Jesus' many parables. From this pool of evidence, however, we can make several observations relevant to our formulation of a biblical theology of the kingdom of God. First, the kingdom of God is the central proclamation of Jesus in his preaching ministry; Jesus does not proclaim "the gospel" as we know it (i.e., 1 Cor 15:1-5), since his death and resurrection are not yet the object or the content of believers' faith. Instead, he preaches the present availability of the reign of God in his own personal ministry. Receiving this kingdom consists in faithful response to Jesus and putting into practice his ethical instruction and teachings. Second, the kingdom of God in the ministry of Jesus is directed toward the renewal of Israel, that is, a remnant within Israel who will respond to Jesus in faith. This remnant is the "church" of Matthew 16, which Jesus will build upon

the 'rock' of Peter's confession: "You are the Messiah (read: anointed one/king of Israel), the Son of the Living God." Jesus sees the disciples as "sitting on 12 thrones judging the 12 tribes of Israel" – seeing the 12 as the judicial heads of a (clearly future) reconstituted Israel (Matt 19:28, Luke 22:30). In Jesus' vision, then, the kingdom of God is something presently available in his personal ministry along with the forgiveness and salvation he offers. But the kingdom of God is also something that is a future reality, promised not just to the nation of Israel as a whole, but to the righteous *remnant* of Israel in which the disciples are promised a key leadership role.

KINGDOM IN ACTS AND IN PAUL

The central message of Jesus' teaching is what Luke calls "the good news of the Kingdom of God" (Luke 4:43; 8:1). Luke introduces the book of Acts with Jesus, after his resurrection, talking with his disciples about the kingdom of God (1:3). Philip proclaims the "kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ" (8:12) to Jews and, after believing, they are baptized. Facing persecution in Asia Minor, Paul says, "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God" (14:22) In Ephesus, "Paul argues persuasively about the kingdom of God" (19:8). Luke concludes the book with Paul having arrived in Rome, where he explains and proclaims the kingdom of God to all who will listen (Acts 28:23, 31). For Luke (who, we must remember, was a companion of Paul on a number of his missionary efforts), the preaching of the kingdom of God is not only the central teaching of Jesus, but one of the primary descriptions of the ministry of the Apostle. An important question arises from Acts 1:6-8 in which the disciples ask Jesus if he is "at this time restoring the kingdom to Israel." Jesus does not answer the question, but instead responds, "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority." Although we could take this as a dismissal of the disciples' question, it is better to see the rest of the book of Acts as Jesus' answer to their inquiry. Although the kingdom is offered contingently to Israel, the nation will reject the kingdom, which opens the door to Gentiles participating in, and indeed inheriting, the kingdom of God (Rom. 9:30-31). Although no one knew it at the time because it was a mystery "hidden in God" (Eph 3:3), the hardening of Israel in order to bring the Gentiles in was always a part of God's plan – this is the inscrutable, unfathomable grace of God at work.

The primary way in which Paul frames his understanding of the kingdom of

God is with the use of inheritance language. Those who belong to Jesus Christ have been "transferred" into his kingdom and share in its inheritance with God's holy people "in light" (Col 1:12-13). Paul regularly uses this inheritance language to remind believers that "the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Cor 6:9-10; Gal 5:21; Eph 5:5). This in turn encourages an upright life that corresponds to the "kingdom and glory" to which believers are called (1 Thess 2:12). It is possible to see the life of the Spirit, then, as the present possession of the kingdom of God in the life of the believer (Gal 5:20-25). Paul describes presence of the kingdom in the community of believers as "righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Rom 14:15) and "power" (1 Cor 4:20). Inheritance language in Paul indicates the kingdom of God is a present possession of believers, and encourages them to lives of moral uprightness. However, inheritance language also has future, eschatological implications. The kingdom belongs to God, and is finally handed back to the Father by the Son at the conclusion of his rule (1 Cor 15:24). The kingdom is the goal and destination of believers, for which they are counted worthy through their upright lives, suffering, and witness (Acts 14:22; 2 Thess 1:5; 2 Tim 4:18).

If we expand our consideration of Paul's inheritance language to passages wider than those with an explicit reference to the kingdom of God, we discover some surprising implications. Those who by faith are "children of Abraham" are heirs according to the promise given to Abraham. According to Paul, the "promise to Abraham" was not simply that he would inherit the land of Canaan, but that he would be "heir of the world" (Rom 4:13). Those who are believers in the new *oikonomia* of Grace share not just in the blessing of justification by faith, but also in inheritance: "If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal 3:29). Paul's theology of believers' inheritance extends to the realm of the whole creation, consistent with the thought that Abraham would inherit the world. Indeed, in Rom 8:12-25 (a passage we do not have space to treat in detail), Paul brings together the themes of adoption, sonship, inheritance, redemption, hope, resurrection and the "liberation of creation" from its bondage to decay. We may connect this with Paul's quotation of the early Christian hymn in 2 Tim 2: "If we endure, we will reign with him."

With all of this in view, it seems impossible to confine Paul's language about the kingdom of God narrowly to Israel's future, or to say he means the broad Old Testament sense of God's "overarching" and sovereign rule of the universe. Instead, the kingdom of God for Paul means much the same as it did

for Jesus: a present realm of blessing and salvation available through faith in Jesus Christ. This kingdom has a present availability bringing hope as adoption, sonship, and the gift of the Spirit guarantee the inheritance promised to members of the Body of Christ. As in Jesus, Paul's language about the kingdom entails a present, moral dimension that echoes (or better – repeats word-for-word) the fundamental ethical teaching of Jesus in the Great Commandment (Rom 13:8-10). But because Paul is speaking to a joint-body of Jews and Gentiles, he does not speak of the future kingdom of Israel so much as he is interested in the present witness and mission of the Church the body of Christ. Indeed, wherever we find Paul thinking about the future, the moral emphasis is on how believers are to live now in light of their hope for the future. (e.g., 1 Cor 15:58; 1 Thess 4:1-12; Titus 2:11-14). At the same time, Paul does hold onto hope for the renewal of the whole people of Israel (Rom 11).

DIRECTIONS: ESCHATOLOGY & ETHICS

The task before us has been multi-faceted; no simplistic approach to these questions will satisfy the rich theological dimensions of the kingdom of God in Scripture. In many respects this article is only the beginning, an initial effort to start a larger conversation and to begin to pursue the questions in greater depth. The wealth of biblical material concerning the kingdom of God should teach us that no strategy of retrenchment will do. The kingdom of God is too large a theme, its present and future dimensions too clearly intimated in Jesus and in Paul for what traditionally has been our narrow restriction of its theme to a future Israel in the millennium. Perhaps the time has come to honestly ask ourselves if we see any such attitude toward the kingdom of God in the ministry of the Apostle Paul, or whether in his teaching he would restrict Christian thinking about the kingdom to Israel in the millennium. Here I am suggesting that a strategy of retrenchment has actually served to limit our theological resources and weakened our theology of the Church's mission, particularly in the areas of ethics and eschatology.

I will finish this article with two ethical and two eschatological conclusions that should prove helpful as we continue to consider this rich theme and move beyond retrenchment in our theology of the kingdom of God. Let us begin with the two ethical conclusions. First, Jesus' ethical teachings regarding the kingdom of God, specifically in the Sermon on the Mount, must no longer be

disregarded as features of a morality that only characterizes Israel's kingdom. I have tried to make the case in this article that Paul, like Jesus, proclaims the kingdom of God as a normal way of talking about the gospel of God's grace. Similarly, much of Paul's ethical teaching directly echoes both the central thrust (law of love) and the details of Jesus' ethical teaching. Although it may be difficult for us as dispensationalists to always discern those dimensions of the kingdom unique to Jesus' personal ministry in the renewal of Israel, certainly we can agree on a fundamental ethical alignment between Jesus and Paul. This leads us to a second ethical conclusion. There can be no "believing in Jesus" without "following him" as disciples who are faithful to his way. One can believe all the right things and be a "whitewashed tomb," with the wrong attitudes and actions. Racism, indifferent attitudes toward the poor and disadvantaged, blind allegiance to political parties rather than to the gospel, and negative attitudes toward culture and various cultural groups should all be in view here for believers in the gospel of God's grace. Here I recommend renewed, in-depth study of the Sermon on the Mount by pastors and teachers to bring to their congregations new insights of discipleship-oriented Christian living in the way of Jesus.[8]

Finally, two eschatological conclusions. The picture of the kingdom of God developed in this article represents an "Already/Not-Yet" view in which the kingdom of God is already present in and though the ministry of Jesus, his death, the burial, resurrection, and ascension, and the ongoing ministry of the Holy Spirit in the Body of Christ. The "already" dimensions of the kingdom are salvation, forgiveness of sins, and the presence and fruit of the Spirit. However, as we have seen, there is a future dimension of the reality of the kingdom of God for Israel and for the body of Christ, and both entail inheritance, rule, and reign over God's renewed and restored creation. Typically our theology has thought of the kingdom of God as the overarching rule of God having a specific future for the nation of Israel. However, based on the biblical material covered in this article, I would suggest it is better (i.e., more biblical) to think of the kingdom as a present reality with future implications of resurrection, inheritance, rule, and reign for God's people – for both Israel and the Church the body of Christ.

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[8] The best resource by far for this exploration of the relationship between the kingdom of God and the ethical life of the Church today is Stassen & Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity, 2003).

Our first eschatological conclusion, then, is that believers today should live with this kind of eschatology in mind. In this way, our eschatology powerfully informs our ethical life as the Body of Christ, just as it does in Paul's letters. If believers have such an inheritance, they should walk in the Spirit so as to have the firstfruits of that inheritance (the kingdom of God) now. If there is a future in which Jesus will reign on the earth in righteousness, justice, and peace, the Christians – and especially Grace believers! – should be people of uprightness, working for justice and peace, doing the 'good works' that God has prepared for them to do.

The second eschatological conclusion revisits the initial problem of retrenchment in our Grace theology, namely the relationship of the Church and Israel. It seems clear Paul expects believers, based on his language of inheritance, to have an inheritance that includes rule and reign in God's kingdom on this earth. And it is not beyond the realm of possibility or imagination to think this might include a shared rule and reign with a renewed, restored Israel. What might this look like? We can only speculate – but we can have educated speculations that are perhaps more grounded in the biblical language than in our traditional division of Church and Israel as 'heavenly people' and 'earthly people,' respectively. My argument is that it would serve our eschatological imaginations much better to be biblically informed, especially if it were by an eschatology that bore fruit in our lives as those who would inherit the kingdom of God.

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JESUS, THE BRIDEGROOM (MARK 2:18-22)

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INTRODUCTION

In Mark 2:18-22 (Luke 5:34/Matt 9:14-15) Jesus refers to himself as the bridegroom and his own ministry as a wedding banquet. This saying appears early in all three Synoptic Gospels and indicates the ministry of Jesus was different than two other forms of Second Temple Period Judaism, the ministry of John the Baptist and the Pharisees. In Mark 2:13-15 Levi responded to the call of Jesus hosting a joyous celebration and meal which includes Jesus, tax collectors, and sinners. When the Pharisees question Jesus' behavior in eating with sinners and failing to fast as they do, Jesus simply points out he has not come to call the righteous to repentance, but sinners (2:16-17). When Jesus is asked why he does not fast like the Pharisees or disciples of John, he says it is not appropriate for the "sons of the bridegroom" to fast while the groom is still with them (2:18-20).

While the bridegroom saying is often dismissed as a prediction of the resurrection by the early church, it is the contention of this paper that the bridegroom saying is consistent with the metaphor of God as the spouse of Israel in the Hebrew Bible and Second Temple Period. Jesus' words resonate with these traditions as he claims to be the bridegroom. I will begin with a brief survey of the use of the marriage metaphor in the Hebrew Bible, then examine how Jesus picks up this metaphor in the bridegroom saying in Mark 2:20.

MARRIAGE METAPHOR IN THE HEBREW BIBLE

There are an impressive number texts in the Hebrew Bible which describe the relationship between God and Israel in terms of a marriage. Beginning with Hosea, this marriage ended in separation or divorce because of the infidelity of the wife, Israel. However, the eschatological age will be a time when the marriage between God and Israel will be renewed. The unfaithful wife will be restored to her former position because her sins have been forgiven and the marriage covenant has been renewed. As E. Ben Zvi commented, the marriage metaphor became "a way to shape, imagine, express and communicate" an understanding of the nature of God's relationship with his people.[1] If the coming age is comparable to a restoration of a marriage relationship, then it is natural to combine the imagery of a joyous celebration (an eschatological banquet) with the marriage metaphor. Commenting on the messianic banquet in the Dead Sea Scrolls (1QSa), Cross states that a "whole kaleidoscopes of ideas . . . were woven into an apocalyptic fabric."[2] Cross has in mind the nations streaming to Zion to join Israel as they are fed and nourished on "the height of Israel." I would further suggest the restoration of marriage between Israel and God is another element of that "apocalyptic fabric."

Covenant and Marriage

There is a natural connection between a covenant relationship and a marriage relationship which may account for the overlap of metaphorical fields in the biblical material. That a marriage is a form of a covenant is important, but more critical to the development of the metaphor of a marriage is the fact that the covenant between God and Israel was based on חֶסֶד (*hesed*), covenant faithfulness. Since it is natural for a covenant relationship to be understood in terms of a marriage, a broken covenant relationship is easily understood in terms of marital unfaithfulness and divorce. Israel's lack of חֶסֶד (*hesed*) is portrayed as

[1] E. Ben Zvi, "Observations on the Marital Metaphor of YHWH and Israel in Its Ancient Israel Context: General Conclusions and Particular Images in Hosea 1.2," *JSOT* 28 (2004): 363-84; Phillip J. Long, *Jesus the Bridegroom: The Origin of the Eschatological Feast as a Wedding Banquet in the Synoptic Gospels* (Eugene, Ore.: Pickwick, 2013).

[2] F. M. Cross, *The Ancient Library of Qumran* (3rd ed; Sheffield : Sheffield Academic, 1995), 78.

a woman who breaks her marriage vows to become a prostitute. Given the practices of ancient patriarchal cultures, the reaction of the faithful spouse to the breach of marriage vows is often brutal and frequently described in scholarship as misogynist. The force of the metaphor is the horror of Israel's unfaithfulness and says nothing about the way women ought to be treated.

The Lord will certainly be faithful in keeping the covenant, but his partner has been unfaithful. The covenant between God and his people is called a "covenant of love" in Deut 7:7-16.[3] As R. P. Carroll comments, the marriage metaphor "works very well for describing the history, however imaginary, of a community because marriages often start well and then turn sour."[4]

New Covenant and New Exodus

Holladay and McKeating have pointed out strong connections between Hosea and Jer 31. In Jeremiah, there is a "fresh betrothal" and a "new covenant."[5] Since a marriage is a specialized form of covenant, it is not surprising to see the metaphor return in Jeremiah's famous description of the New Covenant. The language of a "new covenant" appears in Hos 2:22-23 and Jer 31:27-28, 31-34. The metaphor is appropriate since the establishment of a New Covenant with the House of Israel and Judah will be an occasion for great joy and celebration, qualities normally associated with a wedding. In addition, Jer 31 contains a clear "return from exile" theme which can be described as a new Exodus.[6] What is

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[3] This is a hendiadys: "a loving covenant" or "a gracious covenant." E. H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy* (NAC 4; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001), 181. Compare also Neh 9:32, God keeps "his covenant and his steadfast love."

[4] R. P. Carroll, *Jeremiah* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986), 120.

[5] Holladay, *Jeremiah 2* (Hermeneia. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 47. McKeating, *The Book of Jeremiah* (*The Book of Jeremiah*. London: Epworth, 1999), 156. Ezekiel can describe this new covenant in terms of a new heart, Ezek 18:31. The influence of Hosea on the New Covenant text has been noticed as early as F. Giesebrecht, *Das Buch Jeremia* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1907).

[6] A. J. O. van der Wal, "Themes from Exodus in Jeremiah 30-31," pages 559-66 in *Studies in the Book of Exodus: Redaction, Reception, Interpretation* (ed. M. Vervenne; Leuven: Leuven University, 1996). B. Becking disagrees the New Exodus is the "basic element" in Jer 30-31, arguing instead that the "passionate and changeable God" is the foundation for understanding the pericope. Becking, *Between Fear and Freedom: Essays on the Interpretation of Jeremiah 30-31* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 273-83. These two are not necessarily opposed to one another if one recognizes elements of a marriage metaphor in

remarkable is the amount of overlap between the marriage metaphor and the new Exodus motif.

The prophets often predict Israel will return to the wilderness where the Lord will treat the nation as he did in the first Exodus.[7] This "return from exile" is therefore both a New Exodus and a restoration of a marriage relationship. Isaiah 62 is perhaps the clearest example of the marriage metaphor being used for the eschatological age. In fact, Isa 62 certainly echoes the use of the marriage metaphor from Isa 40-55, but re-applies the metaphor to a renewed hope for the end of the exile. Darr observed there are three principle motifs in Isaiah 62: renaming, coronation and marriage imagery. These three interweave to create a scene of joy, reconciliation, and possibilities of new life. God and Zion are not just to be reconciled, the family is to be restored and the Lord will rejoice over his bride.[8]

Anderson also draws attention to the renaming and wedding imagery in the chapter.[9] He observes that in Isa 62:4, Zion, personified as a woman, is renamed Lady Zion and will no longer be called Forsaken or Desolate, but rather Hephzibah and Beulah. Both are actual names of women in the Hebrew Bible, but here are to be taken in contrast to the former names. Renaming is often associated with a covenant relationship[10] and in Isa 4:1 a renaming occurs in a marriage context in order to take away the reproach of the woman's poverty and desolation. While it is possible the renaming ceremony envisioned here is a

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Jer 30-31. God can be described as a "passionate God" as he recalls his people from the wilderness in a New Exodus because the overall metaphor is a restoration of a marriage relationship. The metaphors of the wilderness and marriage combine even here in Jer 30-31.

[7] Deuteronomy 32:13-14 is a description of the care the Lord has provided for Israel. She has been fed with plentiful food, a list which includes meats and wine. Both Manna and quail were seen as "miraculous" food provided by God for his people in the wilderness.

[8] Darr, Isaiah's Vision, 203.

[9] T. D. Andersen, "Renaming and Wedding Imagery in Isaiah 62," *Biblica* 67 (1986): 75-80. Whybray agrees, "the restoration of Zion and her new status are described in familiar terms of marriage." Whybray, *Isaiah 40-66*, 247.

[10] In Gen 17 Abram and Sarai are renamed in the context of a covenant renewal. In Gen 35:28 and 35:10 Jacob is renamed as Israel. It is possible that Nebuchadnezzar renames Mattaniah as Zedekiah in 2 Kgs 24:17 in order to demonstrate Zedekiah's new loyalties. Andersen, "Renaming and Wedding Imagery in Isaiah 62," 76.

coronation, it is better to see this as a wedding ceremony.

Summary

From the few examples surveyed in this section, it is clear a marriage metaphor was often used to describe God's relationship with his people in the Hebrew Bible. The marriage ended in disaster because Israel was an unfaithful spouse. But in the eschatological age, God will restore Israel to her former position and create a new covenant with her. God in fact does a miracle by restoring the faithless bride to her virgin state and re-wedding her in the coming age. By describing himself as a bridegroom, Jesus stands in this prophetic tradition describing the eschatological age as a wedding celebration and himself as the bridegroom in Mark 2:19-20.

IS THE BRIDEGROOM SAYING A CREATION OF THE CHURCH?

The bridegroom saying is regularly dismissed as a creation of Mark reflecting the situation of the Church in the latter half of the first century.[11] Older commentators described the three analogies used in this pericope (a wedding, patched cloth, and wineskins) as independent sayings which were remembered without any specific context. C. S. Mann, for example, considers this section as "an almost perfect example of what happens to an oft repeated story in the process of oral transmission."[12] The Gospel of Mark places the sayings in the context of Levi's banquet in order to highlight his theological purpose; that the Christian church was "new wine" which replaced the old order of Judaism.[13]

The Early Consensus

In the first half of the twentieth century, most scholars were suspicious that Mark 2:20 was a creation of the later Church. J. Jeremias, for example, rejected the authenticity of Mark 2:20 because he understood the departure of the

[11] R. Funk, and R. Hoover, The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus (New York: Macmillan, 1993) 47-9.

[12] C. S. Mann, *Mark* (AB 2; New York: Doubleday, 1986), 233.

[13] Nineham, *The Gospel of St. Mark* (New York: Seabury, 1963), 104.

bridegroom as an allegory for Jesus' death and resurrection.[14]Jeremias was certainly correct when he states that the phrase "while the bridegroom is still with them" is a circumlocution for "during the wedding." Mark 2:19 by itself simply says that it is not appropriate for someone to fast during a wedding. It is just as meaningless, says Jeremias, for the disciples of Jesus to fast when they "are already in full enjoyment of the New Age!"[15] He concludes that v. 20 is in contradiction to v. 19a since v20 is an allegorical allusion to the death of Jesus, the "time when the bridegroom is taken away." It must, therefore, be a creation of the early Church.

There are three explanations offered for the creation of this saying by the early Church. First, the prediction of the "removal of the bridegroom" is dismissed because it comes too early in the Gospel of Mark to be a prediction of Jesus' death.[16]It is true that in Mark's Gospel Jesus does not clearly predict his death until after Peter's confession in 8:27. In addition, the verb ἀπαίρω (*apairō*) is thought to have violent connotations. Cranfield, for example, suggested John's disciples were mourning the recent death of their teacher, so the verb has the implication of "taken away to be executed."[17]

Second, the saying appears to be a justification for fasting after the resurrection. When the bridegroom (Jesus) is taken away, then it is appropriate to fast. For some scholars, Mark's community had given up regular fasting and the saying was inserted at this point to encourage a return to the practice.[18]On the other hand, Jesus' well-known reputation for not fasting may have been a

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[14] J. Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (Tr. S. H. Hooke; New York: Scribners, 1955), 42, n. 82. Idem., "νύμφη," *TDNT* 4:1101. Jeremias also points out that the image of the Church as a bride is "commonplace" in early church literature, but Jesus "prefers to compare the saved community to the wedding guests." *Parables of Jesus*, 42, n. 83.

[15] Ibid., 42, n.82.

[16] R. Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition*, (New York: Macmillan, 1963), 19.

[17] C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Gospel of Saint Mark* (1959), 11; F. C. Grant, pages 7:675-6 in "The Gospel according to Mark" in *Interpreter's Bible* (New York: Abingdon, 1951).

[18] D. E. Nineham, *The Gospel of Mark,* 102, following Wellhausen and Weiss. Rawlinson tentatively suggested that the early church practice of fasting on Wednesday and Friday (*Didache* 8:1) may in part be modeled on this saying since it was on Friday that the "bridegroom was taken from them." A. E. J. Rawlinson, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (London: Methuen, 1925), 30

problem for some Christian communities, so the author of the Gospel created the saying to explain why Jesus did not fast as the Christians did.[19]

Third, the use of the metaphor of a bridegroom reflects later Church theology.[20]Christ as the Bridegroom coming for his Bride is indeed found in late first-century texts (Rev 19:6-8). This was Jeremias's point and it is regularly repeated. Citing Jeremias, G. Bornkamm stated that "only the later Church has thus applied the picture of the (heavenly) bridegroom to Jesus."[21]

Response to Objections

In response to these arguments, there is no evidence that Jesus did not predict his death other than an *a priori* dismissal of such predictions. In addition, Mark 2:20 is far from a detailed prediction created by the later Church. It is vague and does not clearly indicate how the bridegroom will be removed. The verb ἀπαίρω (*apairō*) does not necessarily connote "taken by force."[22] It is used in Acts 1:9 for the ascension, for example. The word appears in the LXX some 166 times, almost for departing from a location. Only LXX Isa 53:8 can be construed as a death.[23] In fact, a wedding naturally concludes with the departure of the bride and groom, signaling the end of the wedding feast.

Second, it is not at all clear why anyone in the later Church would need a justification to fast. By the end of the first century, as *Didache* 8 makes clear, Christians did in fact fast. But there is neither justification given for the practice in Didache nor any early Church writing based on Jesus' words in Mark 2:20. If the saying was created to justify fasting, it seems to have been poorly received. The writer of *Didache* 8 does not need to justify the common practice of fasting, only to separate Christian fasting from that of the "hypocrites" by

[19] R. Batey, *New Testament Nuptial Imagery* (Leiden: Brill, 1971), 39.

[20] Hurtado suggests that v. 20 may be an editorial comment from the Gospel writer. There are many such statements in Mark's gospel (7:11; 19; 34, for example), but they normally appear as explanations of particular Jewish practices or Aramaic words with which Mark's readers may have been unfamiliar. L. W. Hurtado, *Mark* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1989), 46.

[21] G. Bornkamm, *Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: Harper, 1969), 203, n. 30.

[22] S.v., BDAG. France thinks the word suggests force. France, *Mark* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2002), 140.

[23] Edwards draws a parallel to Isa 53:8, but does not use the Greek text to support the potential allusion to the suffering servant. Edwards, *Mark* (PNTC; Grand Rapids, Mich,: Eerdmans, 2009), 91.

recommending Wednesday and Friday fasts.

The third objection is based on a lack of "Messiah is the bridegroom" texts in the Second Temple Period. This objection has some weight, but Jesus is not claiming to be the Messiah here, but rather the bridegroom. He is the one inviting people into a joyous feast which celebrates the coming of the kingdom of God at the end of the age. Jeremias noticed this as well, "It could be that the saying has originally nothing whatever to do with the bridegroom/Messiah allegory; the choice of metaphor is simply due to the common comparison of the age of salvation with a wedding."[24] The metaphor of a bridegroom is therefore appropriate in this case, and invokes the marriage metaphor so common in the Hebrew Bible as described briefly in the first part of this paper.

It is possible to argue for the authenticity of the saying based on the so-called criterion of embarrassment. John Meier suggested a saying or activity of Jesus may be considered more likely authentic if it was something the later Church could have found embarrassing, such as Jesus refusing to fast (or worse, that he was accused of being a glutton or drunkard, Matt 11:19 / Luke 7:34). If there is anything historical Jesus scholars agreed on, it is that Jesus ate and drank with sinners.[25] This was controversial enough among the Pharisees, but even some of the followers of John the Baptist question this regular practice of Jesus. Wright, for example, considers the fact that Jesus welcomed "sinners" into table-fellowship a "fixed point."[26] Jesus' reputation for feasting with disreputable people is well-known from every layer of Gospel tradition.

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[24] Jeremias, *TDNT* 4:1103.

[25] J. B. Modica,"Jesus as Glutton and Drunkard: The 'Excesses' of Jesus," pages 50-73 in *Who Do My Opponents Say That I Am? An Investigation of the Accusations Against Jesus* (ed. S. McKnight and J. B. Modica. LNTS 327; London: T& T Clark, 2008); J. D. Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994), 69.

[26] Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 267. Wright points out that the definition of a rebellious son in Deut 21:18-21 is "a drunkard and glutton." This pair of words appears in Prov 23:20-21 and 28:7, defining a "fool." LXX Deut 21:20 has the noun οἰνοφλυγέω; Matt 11:19 has οἰνοπότης.

Summary

As C. S. Mann said, suggestions that this verse was created to support the ascetic practices of the early church is to "strain out a gnat."[27]There is no reason for the early church to defend fasting as a practice even if Jesus was well-known for his feasting. If the Gospel writer wanted to insert a prediction of Jesus' death, he could have been far more explicit. The verb simply does not refer to a violent death. It is therefore best to consider Mark 2:20 as authentic, although it is not clear that the metaphor of a bridegroom ought to be taken as a messianic reference. Was Jeremias correct when he said the saying only refers to the departure of the bridegroom at the end of the wedding? In order to answer this question, I now will examine the saying in the context of Mark's gospel.

THE CONTEXT OF THE BRIDEGROOM SAYING

The Synoptic Gospels regularly describe Jesus as sharing meals at three important points in his ministry. At the beginning of his public ministry he hosts a meal at the home of Levi, eating and drinking with sinners. Jesus describes this joyous celebration as a wedding and himself the bridegroom. Later in the Gospel of Mark Jesus hosts a meal in the wilderness in which a huge crowd shares bread and fish miraculously provided (Mark 6:30-43 and 8:1-13). This meal evokes the wilderness tradition, but also eschatological banquet texts. Finally, Jesus hosts a final Passover meal just before his crucifixion during which he refers to eating in the coming Kingdom of God. All three synoptic Gospels include these events with very little variation.

In Mark 2:18-22, Jesus describes his table fellowship as a joyous wedding feast. Fasting is associated with mourning, so the natural contrast to a fast of mourning is a wedding feast. Other than the Day of Atonement, the Law does not require fasting. However, Zech 7:5, 8:19 indicates Israel observed fasts to commemorate the fall of Jerusalem (the tenth of Tebeth) and destruction of the Temple (the ninth of Ab).[28] Jeremiah described this coming destruction as a silencing of joy and the mirth of weddings (Jer 7:34, 16:9, 25:10). But when the Lord restores the fortunes of Israel, the joy of the bride and groom will be

[27] Mann, *Mark*, 234.

[28] Lane, *Mark*, 108, n. 57. Hare suggests the fasting of John the Baptist and the Pharisees ought to be seen in the light of national repentance. D. R. A. Hare, *Mark* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 41.

restored (Jer 33:11).

Using the same metaphor, Jesus says it is inappropriate to fast and mourn because the bridegroom is still present. Jesus places himself in the role of bridegroom and his disciples are the "friends of the bridegroom." While the groom is present, the appropriate behavior is joy and feasting.[29]

It is important to observe here that Jesus is not necessarily equating his role as Messiah with the metaphor of bridegroom, as is frequently assumed.[30] Anderson makes this point, saying that Jesus is merely making a contrast between his disciples (who are feasting) and the disciples of John (who are fasting).[31] Cranfield suggests the disciples of John the Baptist are fasting because of the recent death of John. This would explain the contrast between wedding and funeral imagery in the saying without assigning the saying to the later Church.[32] But as Gundry comments, this trivializes the issue since the main problem is regular fasts, not an occasional fast in at the time of a death.[33]Taylor sees the bridegroom as messianic language, but Jesus "only silently implies" that he is the Messiah.[34]

In summary, this saying emphasizes the contrast between Jesus' present ministry and a future time when the bridegroom will be taken from his disciples.

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[29] 1 Macc 9:37-39 is one of the few descriptions of a wedding celebration in the Second Temple Period. The procession is described as "tumultuous" (θρόος), a term which includes musical instruments, "tambourines and musicians." This wedding party was ambushed and the sounds of the wedding turned to mourning, the musicians began to play a funeral dirge (θρῆνος). The cognate verb is used in Matt 11:17 / Luke 7:32, describing the contrast John the Baptist and Jesus.

[30] For the view that Jesus is equating the Messiah and the bridegroom, see Swete, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, 44. Commenting on the Lukan version of this saying, Green says the bridegroom "draws on an eschatological symbol for divine visitation," citing Isa 54:5-6, 62:4-5 and Jer 2:2. J. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1997), 249. See also J. H. Ebeling, "Die Fastenfrage (Mark 2.18–22)," *TSK* 108 (1937): 382-96.

[31] H. Anderson, *Mark* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: 1976), 107.

[32] C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (Cambridge: CUP, 1959), 111.

[33] Gundry, *Mark,* 135.

[34] V. Taylor, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 210. Swete thought Jesus is alluding to Hosea. Swete, *Gospel According to St. Mark*, 44. Mann also hears echoes of Hosea, Isa 54:4, 62:4 and Ezek 16. Mann is not sure, however, if Jesus is explicitly proclaiming himself to be the Messiah. Mann, *Mark*, 233.

While the image of "Messiah as bridegroom" is indeed unknown in Second Temple Period literature, the idea that a re-gathered Israel will travel through the wilderness to renew her (marriage) covenant with her God is an important image in the Hebrew Bible. Jesus is not necessarily saying he is the Messiah, but that his ministry is in some way celebrating that renewal of the original relationship between God and his people. If table fellowship is in fact part of Jesus' kingdom initiation, then it is not at all unusual he would describe that table fellowship as a wedding celebration.

THE BRIDEGROOM AS AN ESCHATOLOGICAL FIGURE

However, if this saying is eschatological, then Jesus is placing himself in the place of the Lord as bridegroom, calling Israel to repentance. H. Riesenfeld argues that the image of Jesus as a bridegroom in Mark 2:20 may very well go back to Jesus himself since the metaphor of a marriage is common in the Hebrew Bible (citing Ps 45, Hos 2 and Ezek 16).[35] Riesenfeld's topic is the use of allegory in the Parables, specifically the parable of the Ten Virgins (Matt 25:1-14). Like many other writers in the late twentieth century, Riesenfeld is reacting against the idea that parables do not have any allegorical context at all. Riesenfeld points out that in Mark 2:1-12 Jesus forgave sin, which only God can do. In Mark 2:20 he applies a metaphor from the Hebrew Bible which is associated with God to himself to explain his ministry of table fellowship.[36]The implicit claim to be the bridegroom is another element of the the description of who Jesus is in the greater context of Mark's gospel.

An additional factor in reading Mark 2:20 as eschatological is the phrase "the day is coming." By using the future of ἔρχομαι (*erkomai*) Jesus seems to be moving from his present activity as the host of a meal where sinners share table fellowship with him to the eschatological age. The future this verb does not appear often in the New Testament. The phrase appears in both the synoptic parallels to Mark 2:20 (Matt 9:15; Luke 5:35), and in three parallel texts in the Olivet Discourse (Mark 13:6; Matt 24:5 and Luke 21:6, 8). In John 11:48 the future of ἔρχομαι is used to describe the future coming of Rome to destroy Jerusalem. Finally, it appears in 2 Peter 3:3 to describe the coming of scoffers

[35] H. Riesenfeld, *The Gospel Tradition* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970), 153. Cf. R. Dunkerley," "The Bridegroom Passage," *ExpTim* 64 (1953): 303-4.

[36] H. Riesenfeld, *The Gospel Tradition*, 153-4.

"in the last days." The form appears in the LXX in Deut 28:15, 45, both describing the (future) coming of the curses of covenant, and in Isa 7:19 to describe coming judgment at the hands of the Assyrians. The only other time the form is used in the LXX is *Wis.Sol* 4:20, a description of coming judgment. *4 Ezra* 4:48 is a remarkable parallel to the Olivet Discourse. After a description of the time of coming apocalyptic judgment, Ezra asks his angelic visitor if he will be alive until "those days" (although ἔρχομαι is not used). Like Jesus' response to his disciples, the angel can only tell Ezra part of the signs of the times, the rest he does not know (v. 52).

In fact, the phrase "in those days" regularly refers to the eschatological age in the Hebrew Bible. Jeremiah 3:16-18 uses the phrase twice with reference to the time when Jerusalem will be called the throne of God and the nations will make a pilgrimage to the city. In v. 18 the Lord himself rules over the united Israel and Judah. This language is used again in Jer 31:31: the "days are coming" (present tense of ἔρχομαι to describe a future event). In those days God will make a new covenant with both Israel and Judah. The Lord declares that Israel broke the old covenant, "even though I was a husband to them" (v.32). This is a clear example of the marriage metaphor used to describe the future eschatological age.

In summary, it is therefore at least plausible Jesus is speaking of a future time when he would be taken from the feast. It is also likely he intended to allude to the New Covenant passage in Jeremiah. This is an intentional echo of the marriage metaphor as found in other contexts. Yet there is nothing here in Mark 2:20 which can be described as a "Messiah as bridegroom" metaphor. Jesus is not calling himself the Messiah in Mark 2:20. If Jesus is making an allusion to the marriage metaphor of the Hebrew Bible, then he is referring to himself the bridegroom of Israel. This is an important observation because the two sayings, following in both Mark and the synoptic parallels, are sometimes construed to mean that the "old covenant" of Judaism has been replaced by the "new covenant" of Christianity.

MARK 2 AND REPLACEMENT THEOLOGY

Mark 2:21-22 forms a conclusion to the larger unit of 2:13-22. While there is no grammatical reason to see a break between verse 20 and 21, scholars rarely relate the bridegroom saying and the new wine saying.[37]Gundry, on the other hand, describes Jesus as using three metaphors to reply to the question of fasting, a wedding, a cloth, and new wine.[38]The metaphor of a wedding can be extended to proper clothing for a wedding (Matt 22:10-14) and abundant wine at a wedding (John 2:1-12). It is inappropriate for a person to patch clothing or store wine in these ways, the result will ruin the clothing or wine-skin. Likewise, one who mourns at a wedding celebration ruins the celebration.[39]

The saying in v. 21-22 has often been taken to mean Christianity is superior to Judaism and will replace it.[40] But this reads far too much into Jesus' metaphors and is implicitly supersessionist. First, the contrast is not only between Jesus and the Pharisees. The disciples of John the Baptist are also questioning Jesus on fasting. The point of the metaphor is not replacement of old things with new, but rather appropriate behavior when the bridegroom is present.[41] Second, the image of new wine is suggested by the context of a feast at the beginning of a new age. When Hosea describes the restoration of the marriage of Israel, the wife is given vineyards (2:14-15]) and the Lord will cause the earth to produce grain and תִּירוֹשׁ (*tirosh*), "new wine." New wine is associated with the eschatological age in Joel 2:24 and it is the wine served in the messianic banquet in the Dead Sea Scrolls (1QSa).

In fact, the eschatological banquet text in 1QSa sheds some light on the metaphor of "new wine" in Mark 2. The participants in the meal in 1QSa are

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[37] For example, Taylor, The Gospel According to Saint Mark, 212.

[38] Gundry, *Mark*, 131; cf., Funk and Hoover, *The Five Gospels*, 49.

[39] *GThomas* 47 has a similar saying, although the point is that new wine ought to go into new wineskins, old wine into old wineskins.

[40] Jeremias, Parables, 117-8. So too Hurtado, who sees the metaphors as pointing out how "inappropriate the beliefs and practice of the past are not when the kingdom of God is already approaching." L. Hurtado, *Mark*, (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1989), 46. To a lesser extent, Allison sees this saying as a clear indication that "Jesus was conscious of a changing in the times." D. C. Allison Jr., "Jesus and the Covenant," pages 61-82 in *Studies in the Historical Jesus* (Edited by C. A. Evans and S. E. Porter; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1995), 71.

[41] Gundry, *Mark*, 138.

seated according to their rank, with the Messiah of Israel at their head. After the Messiah blesses the food, they drink new wine and eat the first-fruits of the bread. At the last supper Jesus eats with his twelve disciples, a number invoking the twelve tribes of a reconstituted Israel. Jesus indeed blesses the bread and wine, although there is no reference to sharing these among the participants at Qumran. It is likely that תִּירוֹשׁ (*tirosh*) was used in 1QSa because this is the wine set aside for the priests in the first fruits offering.[42]The meal at Qumran was to celebrate the coming of the Messiah, so also in the Last Supper. Jesus declares to his disciples the New Covenant is imminent and that he will not drink wine again until he drinks it "new" in the Kingdom of God. Like the Qumran community, Jesus' celebration of Passover is an anticipation of the coming eschatological age.

There is therefore no reason to read these metaphors in Mark 2:21-22 as allusions to a future replacement of the Jews as God's people with the Gentile church. Jesus is not declaring Judaism is obsolete with these metaphors.[43] He is, however, declaring his ministry and his followers are in some ways like a new patch of cloth or a new wine. If there is any "replacement" in these metaphors, it is the replacement of those who expected to participate in the kingdom (Pharisees, teachers of the Law) with those who had no such expectation (tax collectors, prostitutes, and other sinners). But both the excluded and included groups are still Jewish.

CONCLUSION

In the bridegroom saying in Mark 2:19-20 Jesus describes his practice of open fellowship as a wedding banquet which is hosting as the bridegroom. His emphasis on the joy of feasting in contrast to gloom of fasting stands on the foundation of the New Covenant in Jeremiah 31. The image of Israel as God's spouse in the Old Testament provides a rich background for understanding Jesus' self-description as a bridegroom inviting people to participate in a wedding banquet. The people participating in the joyous meal in Mark 2 are

[42] G. J. Brooke argued that Jesus was arguing against the practice of the Qumran community in 11Q19 (Temple) 19:11-21. The scroll mentions new wine but it is in the context of the first-fruits celebration rather than a wedding celebration. G. J. Brooke, "The Feast of New Wine and the Question of Fasting," *ExpTim* 95 (1984): 175-6.

[43] Hare, *Mark*, 41.

celebrating the restoration of Israel's marriage at the end of the Exile.

Mark presents Jesus as hosting meals as a regular part of his ministry. This table fellowship was open to all without regard to social standing or ritual purity. In doing so he confused the disciples of John and angered the Pharisees. Yet this part of his ministry was so important that he develops a reputation as a "drunkard and glutton." Perhaps this is the most pastoral element of Mark's banquet theme. Since Jesus was inclusive, so too the Church of Mark's day should welcome those on the fringes of society. If the traditional view of Mark's gospel as the preaching of Peter has any merit, it may not be coincidental that Peter is described as reaching out to the fringes of Judaism in Acts 9-12 (Tabitha, Aeneas, Simon the Tanner, and Cornelius the God-Fearer). He is continuing the type of table fellowship he shared during the ministry of Jesus.

For Mark, Jesus' practice of table fellowship is a demonstration of how Jesus saw himself and his mission. As the bridegroom, Jesus is the host of an eschatological banquet at the inauguration of the New Covenant.

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RIGHTLY DIVIDING E.W. BULLINGER: THE MOST INTRIGUING STORY NEVER TOLD

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INTRODUCTION

There can be little doubt E.W. Bullinger (EWB) is one of the most polarizing figures in the history of dispensational Bible study. Why does the mere mention of Bullinger's name incite such a visceral reaction in some quarters of the evangelical world, including within the Grace Movement? In the one hundred years since his death in 1913 he has been called a heretic, ultradispensationalist, and a dispensational faddist. Who was this controversial figure? Is all this hype surrounding the writings of EWB justified? Besides being able to list such errors as conditional immortality, starting the Church in Acts 28, or dividing Paul's epistles into two different groups with respect to Acts 28, how much is really known about the historical development of EWB's theology? Even amongst mid-Acts Pauline dispensationalists who comprise the Grace Movement and vehemently object to EWB's position on the origin of the Church, is there any real understanding of the evolution of his thinking? Has anyone ever studied EWB's writings through the prism of historical theology in an attempt to ascertain what EWB taught and WHEN he taught it? As with most men, EWB is remembered for where he ended up and not the journey which led him there.

It is this journey we are interested in here. After reading and analyzing the

works of EWB in their chronological order, a most fascinating story emerges. As the calendar turned from the 19th to the 20th century, EWB could rightly have been called a mid-Acts dispensationalist according to today's terminology. By the year 1900, EWB had enunciated almost every major doctrinal position upon which the Grace Movement in the United States would be based some forty years later. How then by the end of his life and career, only thirteen years later, does EWB go down in history as the father of Acts 28 dispensationalism? Why did Bullinger change his mind? What were the factors influencing his thinking? Who else if anyone was involved in influencing him? The answers to these questions comprise one of the most interesting and intriguing stories never told within the history of dispensational theology.

Beginning to tell this story is the goal of this essay. In this article we will survey the major dispensational writings of EWB between 1887 and 1892 in an attempt to establish a baseline understanding of his early dispensational thinking. Then we will seek to show that by the year 1900, EWB had enunciated all the major tenets of a mid-Acts dispensational position which later came to characterize the Grace Movement. Moving forward from 1900 we will present a narrative that establishes how and why EWB changed his mind theologically and came to articulate the Acts 28 position before his death in 1913.

TEN SERMONS ON THE SECOND ADVENT (1887)

In 1877, Bullinger ascended to prominence within the Anglican Church via the publication of his *A Critical Lexicon and Concordance to the English and Greek New Testament*. A landmark achievement in its own right, the *Lexicon and Concordance* touched off the ministry for which he would be remembered most, his writing ministry. Four years later, on August 17, 1881 Bullinger received a letter from the Archbishop of Canterbury notifying him that the Church of England was set to confer upon him the Degree of Doctor of Divinity on account of his work on the *Lexicon and Concordance*. The Doctor of Divinity was conferred August 31, 1881 and followed up by a congratulatory letter from Queen Victoria on September 9. These events propelled Bullinger to national notoriety within Victorian Era Britain.[1]

At the time of his honors, Ethelbert had been serving as Reverend for the Parish of Walthamstow since January, 1875. The degree to which he was sought

[1] Juanita Carey. *E.W. Bullinger: A Biography* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel), 59-62.

after as a speaker outside of his parish on account of his newly found popularity is difficult to determine. What can be said for certain is that the first known sermons he gave outside his Parish occurred in November, 1887 at St. Ebbe's Church in Oxford. Between November 21-25, Bullinger preached ten sermons on prophetic subjects.[2] His notes for those messages were published the following year (1888) in a single volume titled, *Ten Sermons on the Second Advent* (*TSSA*). It is with these sermons our investigation into the dispensational teaching and development of EWB begins.

Juanita Carey, Bullinger's chief biographer, notes this series of sermons became the foundation of his tenets on biblical prophecy, the Second Coming, the difference between the kingdom and the church, the criteria for identifying the Bible's three main people groups, "the Jews, the Gentiles, and the church of God."[3] In the notes for the eighth sermon, "The Second Advent in Relation to The Gentile," Bullinger discusses the need to rightly divide the Word of truth in accordance with this three-fold division. Bullinger argues that the Church, by and large, has not rightly divided the word of truth in seeking to join together that which God has put asunder. The failure to rightly divide with respect to these three people groups is the source of the confusion within the Church. Seeking to give the Church what God promised Israel, while ignoring her curses, "Practical Religion . . . confused the Church with the world so completely, that one cannot tell the difference between the worldly Church and the religious world; or see where the one begins and the other ends,"[4] according to Bullinger.

In 1887, Dr. Bullinger was teaching the source of the Church's utter confusion was found in conflating Israel and the Church. It is important to note he was making this argument for decades before the same subject was taken up by Bultema, O'Hair, Stam, Baker, and the other founders of the Grace Movement in the first half of the 20th century.[5] The fifth sermon, delivered by Bullinger at Oxford was titled "The Calling and Hope of the Church of God." It argues that the Church was untrackable in the Old Testament and that the body of Christ was the subject of the mystery first made known to the Apostle Paul. These untrackable or unsearchable riches are contrasted with the searchable

[2] E.W. Bullinger. *Ten Sermons on the Second Advent* (New York: Cosimo), Preface.

[3] Carey. *Bullinger*. 94.

[4] E.W. Bullinger, Ten Sermons on the Second Advent, 124.

[5] See J.C. O'Hair's *The Unsearchable Riches of Christ* from 1941 among other titles.

riches revealed through the writings of the prophets. Bullinger asserts that Gentile salvation and blessing through Israel is known and spoken of by the Old Testament prophets. However, God's reconciling Gentiles to himself apart from Israel was heretofore unknown by the prophets and unrevealed in the Scriptures. For purposes of precision and historical documentation, given how often Bullinger has been misrepresented and misunderstood, it is important to consider his early exposition of Ephesians 3 in his own words:

> "In our text (Eph. 3) he calls it 'the unsearchable riches of Christ' . . . There are riches in Christ which we may call the searchable riches, such as the revealed prophecies and promises concerning Him, which could be searched and understood by the Prophets who wrote them. But there were others which they could not search. They were unsearchable . . . [expounds upon the use of the Greek word in the NT]. . . So here in our text, the word does not mean that which cannot be understood, if found; but that which cannot be traced, or followed out. These untrackable riches of Christ which the Prophets could not trace out, are not merely the blessing of the Gentiles as such, as might be inferred from verse 6. That was never any secret. It was revealed from the beginning to Abraham that 'in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed' (Gen. xii. 3): 'All the nations of the earth shall be blessed through him' (Abraham) (Gen. 18:18). Many prophecies reveal this truth of which aged Simeon testified when he spoke of Christ as 'a light to lighten the Gentiles and the glory of Thy people Israel' (Luke 2:32). These untrackable riches of Christ, therefore, were not merely the blessing of Gentiles, as such, by and by, but the taking out of a people from among them now (Acts xv. 14) to form the one body in Christ, the mystery of the Church. This is what had, until now, been hidden, and what had now been specially revealed to St. Paul. In testimony of this, note the following Scriptures: (quotes Rom. 16:25-26, Col. 1:24-27, Eph. 3:2-11) . . . Now the Old Testament Prophets knew nothing of all this. They looked as it has been said from the one hilltop of Christ's 'sufferings' to the other hill-top of His 'glory,' but the valley that lay between was unknown. They could not track it, and all its mines of wealth were unexplored. The Spirit, by Peter, refers to this when he says (I Pet. 1. 10-12) . . . But when Christ had been rejected, when atonement had been made, then the message of reconciliation could be sent forth. Then, and not till then, was that which

> had been 'hid in God' and 'kept secret from the beginning of the world,' made known. Then 'the eternal purpose of God' was revealed, and the riches of the valley (this present interval between the sufferings and the glory) were laid bare, that 'pilgrims and strangers,' who now are passing through it, may trace and search them out. And who are these pilgrims and strangers? They are those who once were dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1), but who have been 'quickened together with Christ' (2:5), and saved by grace (2:8), and made fellow heirs with Christ (2:6), 'members of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones' (5:30-32). This is the great mystery concerning Christ and His Church."[6]

While this lengthy quotation is important in establishing a baseline understanding regarding Bullinger's early teaching on the Church, it makes no assertion as to when the Church began. In fact, nowhere within *TSSA* are there any statements regarding the timing of the Church's origin. There is no evidence regarding whether or not at this point in his career EWB held to the Acts 2 origin of the Church; however, it is important to note that J.N. Darby argued forcefully for the notion that the Church was a unique Pauline revelation while still maintaining the body of Christ coming into existence at Pentecost.[7]

Regarding Bullinger's teaching on the Church, it would be distorting to not comment on his early misgivings regarding the subjects of water baptism and the Lord's Supper. Chapter One, "The Importance of Prophetic Study," puts forth the notion that the neglect of the church to study major Bible doctrines such as the Second Advent in favor of more minor subjects such as baptism and Lord's Supper is evidence that the modern church was departing from the faith. While he does not come out forcibly against the practice of these two ordinances, Bullinger cites statistical information regarding the frequency of their appearance within the text of the New Testament as evidence of the undue stress placed upon them by the organized church.[8] Specifically he states, "From

[6] Ibid., 67-72. Due to the confines of space we have significantly paired down this important quotation. Interested parties are encouraged to read the quotation in its entirety. A free downloadable PDF copy of *Ten Sermons on the Second Advent* is available on the internet.

[7] See J.N. Darby's The Rapture of the Saints and the Character of the Jewish Remnant.

[8] "Baptism is mentioned only 19 times in 7 epistles (the noun 5 and the verb14), and it is not once named in 14 out of 21 epistles; and as for the Lord's Supper there are not

the prominence given to it by man, one would image the New Testament to be filled with it."[9] In time, these early misgivings would develop into the rejection of both these ordinances for the Church.

Multiple times in *TSSA*, Bullinger addresses the subject of the catching away of the body of Christ, an event that he clearly believed would occur prior to the Tribulation. The fourth chapter, titled "No Millennium Without Christ" offers the fullest treatment of this subject. Arguing the onset of the tribulation signified the beginning of "the end," EWB teaches clearly that the Lord will have already "commenced his Descent to gather his Saints unto Himself, and meet them in the air. Before the breaking of a single 'Seal' (Rev. 6) . . . The 'beginning' of these awful scenes is the moment of the Church's deliverance."[10] By making a distinction between Christ coming "FOR his Saints" i.e., the Rapture, and Christ coming "WITH his Saints" at the Second Coming, EWB's explanation has much in common with Plymouth Brethren eschatological teachings popularized by J.N. Darby, William Holden, William Trotter, and C.H. Mackintosh among others.[11]

Despite clearly teaching that the catching away of the Church would occur before the tribulation and that this event constituted the hope of the Church,[12] Bullinger's explanation is a bit confused and inconsistent. Like the Plymouth Brethren expositors before him, Bullinger's teaching regarding the timing of the Rapture is muddled by his mixing of Pauline texts with passages from the Gospels and the book of Revelation. While he saw the church as a unique Pauline revelation he does not follow through with this principle consistently when expounding upon the end of this dispensation. For example, he equates 1Thess 4:16-17 where Paul speaks of saints being "caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air," with Luke 21:36 where Christ speaks of people who will be "accounted worthy" to "escape these things that shall come to pass" upon the earth.[13] There is an underlying tension here that

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more than three or four references to it in the whole of the New Testament. In 20 (out of 21) of the Epistles it is never once alluded to!" Ibid., 7.

[9] Ibid., 7.

[10] Ibid., 61.

[11] "The 'beginning' of the Tribulation marks the time when the Lord will thus come FOR His Saints; and the height and end of it marks the time when He will appear in glory WITH all His-Saints." *Ten Sermons and the Second Advent*, 62-63.

[12] See Chapter 6, "The Churches' Motive For Service," 82-99 for details.

[13] Ibid., 62.

Bullinger was either unaware of in 1887/88 or did not yet know how to solve. In short, Bullinger's early expositions regarding the timing and details of the Church's catching away lack the clarity and precision of his later treatment. At the time *TSSA* was published, EWB taught the apostle John was referring to the Rapture of the church in Rev 4:1 with his statement, "come up hither."[14] Later in his ministry when he wrote *The Apocalypse or, The Day of the Lord* (*Commentary on Revelation* new title), Bullinger argued that the catching up of the church occurred before even one word of Revelation was fulfilled and that Revelation 4:1 had nothing to do with the church of this dispensation.[15]

Any survey of *TSSA* would be incomplete without out noting Bullinger's complete advocacy for the premillennial return of Christ. The entirety of Chapter Three, "The Second Advent Pre-Millennial," is devoted to setting forth this subject. After acknowledging that all Christians generally agree Christ is coming again and that when he does it will be a time of universal blessedness, he concedes there is not universal agreement regarding the time of his coming. Arguing from the perspective of church history, Bullinger maintains that early Christians knew nothing of the terms "pre" or "post"—millennial. Rather they looked for Christ to come first and did not conceive of a millennial framework apart from the second coming of the Lord. For example, Bullinger states, "They looked for a person not a Millennium without Him."[16] In attempting to prove his point that "the Pre-millennial Advent of Christ is the truth of the Bible,"[17] EWB assembled and expounded upon thirteen prophetic texts from the Old Testament. After doing so he concluded, "it is in fact impossible to produce a Scripture which speaks of Millennial blessing, where the immediate context does not connect it with preceding judgment, or with the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ."[18]

In summation, *TSSA* comprises Bullinger's earliest known dispensational teaching and establishes a baseline from which one can measure his theological development over time. Aside from his misgivings regarding baptism, the Lord's Supper, and lack of clarity on the historic origin of the Church, Bullinger's dispensational thinking at this stage in his ministry had much in

[14] Ibid., 61.

[15] E.W. Bullinger, *The Apocalypse or, the Day of the Lord* (1902), 2-3.

[16] Ibid., 37.

[17] Ibid., 39.

[18] Ibid., 46.

common with his Plymouth Brethren (Acts 2) forebears and contemporaries. Over time this would change. The following is a listing of the key points in the early dispensational thinking of EWB outlined in this foundational work:

- Clear difference/distinction between the Jews, the Gentiles, and the Church of God.
- Failure by the professing church to rightly divide between these three people groups was responsible for the confusion plaguing Christendom.
- The body of Christ i.e., the Church, was the subject of the mystery revealed to the apostle Paul and is therefore "untrackable" in the Old Testament prophets.
- Makes no assertion as to the historic origin of the Church.
- Questions the emphasis of the modern church upon baptism and Lord's Supper, arguing these are minor subjects when compared with other larger and neglected topics i.e., the Lord's second advent.
- Clearly teaches the pre-tribulation rapture of the church and distinguishes between the Lord's coming FOR his saints (catching up) and WITH his saints (Second Advent).
- Demonstrates tension in explaining the nature and timing of the rapture by equating Pauline texts with passages in the Gospels and Revelation.
- Firmly argues for the premillennial second advent of Christ as both the historical view of the Church and the proper interpretation of Scripture.

THE KINGDOM AND THE CHURCH OR THE SEVEN PARABLES OF MATTHEW XIII (1892)

The Kingdom and The Church (*TKTC*), published in 1892, is the next book of dispensational significance to appear from Bullinger's pen. The years between 1888 and 1892 were relatively merger in terms of literary output. During this period Bullinger published no book length works, limiting himself to four pamphlets comprised of notes from public addresses and four collections of hymns. In addition, Bullinger served as the editor for Thomas Boys' *A Key to Psalms* in 1890. [19]

[19] Carey, *E.W. Bullinger: A Biography*. 236. Bullinger's writings between 1888 and 1892 include the following in chronological order: *God's Purpose in Israel: In History,*

The publication of *TKTC*[20] further developed ideas which first appeared in *TSSA* as well as introduced some new thinking into the thought stream. Dr. Bullinger begins *TKTC* with reiterating more forcefully his comments about man not seeking to "join together" what God has "put asunder," thereby stressing the absolute necessity of "rightly dividing the Word of truth." Expanding upon his initial distinction between the Jews, the Gentiles, and the church of God, Bullinger draws a "line of separation" between priest and presbyter, law and grace, the old and new natures, standing and state, professors and possessors, salvation and rewards, first and second resurrection, Christ' coming forth and unto, and finally between the kingdom and the church. Regarding this last distinction he states, "Nowhere are they said to be the same; nowhere are the terms used synonymously: God has separated them. It is a pure assumption on the part of man (not to say disobedience to God's plain command), which has made him join them together, and has thus led to so much error, and to so many mistakes."[21]

As the title suggests, the bulk of *TKTC* is taken up with delineating how these two aspects of God's plan are separate from each other. For Bullinger this originates with defining his terminology beginning with "The Kingdom." According to EWB, "The Kingdom is that which forms the great subject of the Old Testament promise and prophecy. The Kingdom that was offered and presented to Israel by the Lord Jesus in the Gospels is the same Kingdom which we see set up with divine judgments and power in the prophecies and visions of the Apocalypse."[22] In short, the establishment of God's kingdom on earth through the instrumentality of the nation of Israel is the central theme and goal of prophecy.

Type and Prophecy (1889), *The Name of Jehovah in the Book of Esther* (1889), *Fifty Original Hymn-Tunes* (1889), *Hymns for Bible Readings* (1889), *Hymns on the Second Advent* (1889), *The Inspiration and Authority of Holy Scripture* (1890), and *The Spirits in Prison: An Exposition of I Peter 3:17-4:6* (1891)

[20] In addition to The Kingdom and the Church, 1892 also witnessed the publication of three additional pamphlets: Christ's Prophetic Teaching in Relation to the Divine Order of His Words and Works, The Ways of God in Grace, Illustrated by the Ways of God in Creation, and The New Creation and the Old: The Ways of God in Grace taken from a lecture Bullinger gave at the Mildmay Prophecy Conference in London in June, 1892.

[21] Bullinger, *The Kingdom and the Church*, (1892), 2.

[22] Ibid., 2.

In contrast, "the Church of God" the chief subject of the New Testament, comprises the "unsearchable riches of Christ" and was untrackable by the prophets who searched diligently in vain, according to I Peter 1:11, to ascertain the interval of time between "the suffering of Christ and the glory that should follow."[23] The reason of this being the Church was a mystery "specially revealed to the Apostle Paul, and by him to the Church." He was singled out and chosen to be the medium of this new revelation of what up to that moment had been 'kept secret since the world began,' 'hid in God' . . . that Jews and Gentiles, on being born of the Spirit, should cease to be Jews and Gentiles, as to their standing . . . and form a new hitherto unknown company called 'the Church of God,' 'the Body of Christ'.[24] While this technically is not new information in EWB's thought stream, it does represent an advancement over earlier definitions of the Church in so far as it is precise in recognizing the church as a unique Pauline revelation, wholly unknown to the sons of men before it was revealed to Paul. In another place Bullinger speaks of the fact that the "parenthetical interval" between the First and Second Advents was kept a secret from the Old Testament prophets. These two entities "the kingdom" and "the church" are to never be joined together without "serious loss of sense and truth," according to Bullinger.[25]

In a section titled "The Kingdom and the Church in the New Testament", Bullinger sets forth eleven facts for properly understanding the Kingdom and the Church in the New Testament. Unfortunately, space will not permit an exhaustive discussion of all eleven facts, however, the following concepts were deemed too important in terms of understanding Bullinger's thought development to omit:

- The Church is spoken of as being "BUILT" rather than "SET UP." "The word "build" is found twenty-four times in the New Testament, and is never used in connection with the Kingdom. On the other hand, the word used for the Kingdom, "set up," is never found in connection with the Church of God."[26]

[23] Ibid., 3.
[24] Ibid., 3.
[25] Ibid., 3.
[26] Ibid., 4.

- Words used by men in common speech in reference to the Kingdom such as "extension" or "advancement" are foreign to the Word of God. Likewise, expressions such as "heirs of the kingdom," "children of the kingdom," "receiving the kingdom," or "entering, seeing, and inheriting the kingdom" are never used in relation to the Church.[27]
- "The Kingdom, once it is set up on the earth, will be an "everlasting kingdom;" but the Church will be removed from earth as soon as it is completed." No Scripture reference is given by EWB to support this curious statement.[28]
- Point nine is another curious statement for which no reference is given: ". . . the privilege of the Church will be to reign with Christ; but the subjects of the kingdom will be reigned over and ruled by Christ and His Church."
- The kingdom and the King are the greatest subject of the Bible. In discussing the need to rightly divide between the various phases or stages in the unfolding of the Kingdom he mentions a break in the continuity of the Kingdom found during the present interval or parenthesis covered by the epistles. Most importantly he speaks for the first time about the "Acts of the Apostle being transitional" although he does not elaborate on what this means.[29]

A fair analysis of this section of *TKTC* leaves one sensing much tension in Bullinger's thinking on these subjects at this point in his career. While he argues for the absolute separation of the kingdom and the Church, some of his comments demonstrate certain interactions or points of connection between them. It appears in 1892 Bullinger had yet to articulate how both the kingdom and the Church work together in accomplishing the greater singular eternal purpose of God of centering all things in Jesus Christ.[30]

The final and most lengthy section of *TKTC* contains Bullinger's exposition of the parables of Matthew 13. This article's limited space dictates that we limit our comments to only those sections which advance our understanding of EWB's emerging dispensational framework. Unequivocally, Bullinger maintains

[27] Ibid., 4.

[28] Ibid., 4.

[29] Ibid., 5.

[30] Ephesians 1:10.

the subject of the parables is the kingdom and not the Church. In Bullinger's thinking, these seven parables of the kingdom "must be interpreted by what is written in the Law and Prophets according to the Scriptures and quite apart from the subsequent revelation in the Epistles addressed to the Church." This is because the Church, "which is the subject of the present dispensation," had not yet been revealed while Christ was on earth. Consequently, the seven parables of Matthew 13 reveal aspects of the kingdom of God heretofore unknown or kept secret, and not the Church of this present "dispensation of grace."[31]

It is within this context that Bullinger articulates his clearest dispensational scheme to date:

> All the seven parables must be interpreted of the Kingdom. The period covered by them runs from the first proclamation of the Kingdom by John the Baptist until the formal withdrawal by God in the Acts of the Apostles. After which there is a break while it is in abeyance and the Church is being taken out. Then (after the Church shall have been caught up, according to special revelation in I Thess. 4:14-16) these parables take up the Kingdom again until it is finally established according to the counsels of God.[32]

This quotation contains two significant advances in clarity over what he wrote in *TSSA*. 1) Bullinger notes that the proclamation of the kingdom that began with John the Baptist was formally withdrawn at some point in Acts. These statements manifest the notion, in rudimentary form, that God's dealings with Israel needed to be suspended before the Church could be formed. 2) Unlike in *TSSA*, Bullinger notes especially that the catching up of the Church is "according to special revelation." These statements coupled with ones made in *TKTC* make it reasonable to understand Bullinger to be saying that the "catching up" of the Church is part of the special revelation committed to the apostle Paul. This understanding is further witnessed by the fact Bullinger never cites passages from the Gospels or Revelation when speaking about the rapture as he did in *TSSA* some four years earlier.

Building upon the notion that the kingdom testimony ceased at some point

[31] Ibid., 7-9.

[32] Ibid., 9.

during the book of Acts, EWB concludes that water baptism stands in connection with the preaching of the kingdom of God. On this point Bullinger states, "so long as the 'Gospel of the Kingdom' was the subject of testimony, ordinances and signs accompanied it."[33] By following Paul's baptism practices in the book of Acts and applying his principle of strict separation between the kingdom and the Church, Bullinger concludes "the public preaching of the kingdom ends with Acts 19:20. Not until after this (Acts 20:28) are believers spoken of as "the Church of God:" nor is the "the blood of Jesus" mentioned as purchasing that Church."[34] At this point in the narrative it appears as though Bullinger is arguing for an Acts 19/20 origin for the Church the body of Christ, which coincidently is very similar to the first "mid-Acts" view articulated by J.C. O'Hair in *God's Reign of Grace for the Human Race*.[35] Unfortunately, further matters become complicated when Bullinger writes the following regarding the parenthetical nature of the current dispensation: "the gap or parenthesis begins towards the close of the Acts, and is marked internally by the solemn and formal repetition of Isaiah 6 in Acts 28."[36] The statement that "the preaching of the Kingdom ceases there (Acts 28),"[37] is in tension with the comments noted above from page 12.

A possible Acts 28 bent is also observable when one considers Bullinger's exposition of the Parable of the Great Supper.[38] In expounding this parable Bullinger applies aspects of it to Paul's ministry during the book of Acts, thereby indicating the secret of the Church was not revealed until the later portion of Acts.[39] At least three things are clear from these observations: 1) these seemly contradictory statements made within two pages of each other

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[33] Ibid., 12.

[34] Ibid., 12.

[35] *God's Reign of Grace for the Human Race* was written during a nine month window after the final issue of *Bible Study for Bereans* in July, 1937 but before the publication of *The Dispensational Razzle Dazzle* in April, 1938. It is in *God's Reign of Grace* that O'Hair first argues the Church began before Paul wrote Romans i.e., somewhere around Acts 20.

[36] Ibid., 14.

[37] Ibid., 14.

[38] It is important to note at this stage in his ministry EWB made no attempt to reconcile events recorded in the book of Acts with statements made in the Pauline Epistles.

[39] See explanation of these to two parables on pages 12 and 13.

demonstrate a man whose thinking was in transition as he was reasoning through the implications of his dispensational scheme; 2) while some of the comments are very Acts 28-sounding, particularly on page fourteen, they are far from articulating a mature Acts 28 view; and 3) Bullinger appears to have rejected the standard Acts 2 position articulated by his Plymouth Brethren forebears and contemporaries. In fact, we are aware of no written statements by Bullinger that he ever held that the church began on the day of Pentecost.

Finally, in his explanation of the Parable of the Tares, which he believes "passes over the present interval while the Kingdom is in abeyance, and takes up the harvest at the end of the age,"[40] Bullinger argues that the so-called Great Commission in Matthew 28 does not comprise the Church's "marching orders" or commission. Bullinger asserts the commission of Matthew 28:19-20 applies to the end of the age and therefore was never fully carried out by the Twelve Apostles. Moreover, since that age (the kingdom) was interrupted by the revelation of the mystery concerning the Church, the so-called Great Commission awaits a future completion. According to Bullinger, "through not 'rightly dividing the Word of Truth,' Christians have misunderstood the terms of the commission as supplying their own marching orders for this present dispensation."[41]

In the end, *The Kingdom and The Church* (1892) bears witness to important subtle advancements in EWB's dispensational thinking over *Ten Sermons on the Second Advent* (1887). However, the groundwork laid in 1887 served as the foundation for these steps forward in both thinking and messaging. The following is a summation of advancements observable in *TKTC*:

- The kingdom is the subject of Old Testament promise and prophecy and is completely distinct from the Church of God— the chief subject of the New Testament.
- More precise wording regarding the Church being a unique Pauline revelation.

[40] Ibid., 14.

[41] Ibid., 15.

- The kingdom offer to Israel that began with the preaching of John the Baptist is formally withdrawn at some point towards the end of the book of Acts. As noted above there is tension in Bullinger's comment regarding when this actually happened during the Acts chronology.
- The passage on the catching up of the Church in I Thessalonians 4 is described as comprising part of the "special revelation" committed to Paul.
- The so-called Great Commission of Matthew 28 does not comprise the commission of the Church of this dispensation.

At this stage in his career it seems fair to characterize Bullinger's dispensational paradigm as in process. While he never advocates for the traditional Acts 2 position popularized by the Plymouth Brethren, neither can he accurately be described as being fully mid-Acts or Acts 28. There are however, many ideas present in Bullinger's early dispensational writings which would later be championed by the founders of the Grace Movement in America.

THE MYSTERY: SECRET TRUTH REVEALED (1895)

A few years later, with the publication of *The Mystery: Secret Truth Revealed* in 1895 many of these preliminary ideas came into sharper focus. In this work, EWB forcefully argued that rightly dividing between prophecy and mystery freed the Church from the manmade tradition that the body of Christ began on the day of Pentecost. Arguing the traditional view on the Church's origin was destitute of scriptural authority, EWB states that Pentecost had nothing to do with the Church of this dispensation.[42] Moreover, in 1895 Bullinger asserted Acts 13 was "an important dispensational chapter," arguing that Paul's statement in Acts 13:46, "lo, we turn to the gentiles" was an "epoch making statement."[43] The Old English word "epoch" carries the following meanings according to *Webster's 1828 Dictionary*: 1) In chronology, a fixed point of time, from which succeeding years are numbered; a point from which computation of years begins; 2) Any fixed time or period; the period when anything begins or is remarkably prevalent. In other words, EWB viewed Paul's statement in Acts

[42] E.W. Bullinger, *The Mystery: Secret Truth Revealed* (1895), 51-52.

[43] Ibid., 50.

13:46 as the time when the Church began and a new series of events commenced. *The Mystery* draws the dispensational boundary line in Acts 13 not Acts 2 or Acts 28 which ironically was the exact position adopted by J.C. O'Hair prior to his death in 1958.

By focusing solely on where Bullinger ended up in his career and failing to understand him through the prism of historical theology these points and many more were missed by the founders of the Grace Movement. The writings of O'Hair, Baker, Stam and others all presented EWB as a fixed constellation in terms of his dispensational understanding. In hindsight, understanding the movement exhibited by Bullinger in his dispensational thinking would have been a tremendous aid to the founders of the Grace Movement when the charges of Bullingerism began to roll in during the 1930s and 40s. While it is only speculation, one would expect that insights gained from understanding the historic Bullinger would have aided the founders of the Grace Movement in presenting a more nuanced defense of the Grace Theology against their many critics.

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A PHILOSOPHY OF MINISTRY

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Architecture fascinates me. The way a building is designed and how each little detail is important intrigues me. You start with a foundation and build from there. After the foundation is set, the real design begins. From there the building takes form and becomes the place it is designed to be. In the same way, a biblical philosophy of pastoral care is like architecture. It must begin with a strong foundation of who you are as a minister and the type of community you create in the church. After this foundation is set, the many different facets of pastoral care can be added on. Visits, weddings, funerals, counseling, social media, and discipline can be carried out to minister in the church. Then when all these are carried out, people can look and see the beauty of it— that the church is being shepherded by the pastor.

At the foundation of my philosophy of pastoral care lies the purpose. This is so important because when the foundation is not set firmly, problems ensue. Take the Leaning Tower of Pisa as an example. The foundation on which it was built shifted over time and brought the whole tower to a tilt. In the same way, pastoral care will be shaky at best if it is built on a poor foundation. It has many facets to it and it can be done beautifully; however, it needs to begin with a firm foundation.

For me, the purpose of pastoral care begins with Acts 20:28: "Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood." In this passage Paul is saying farewell to the Ephesian leaders and

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leaving them with some final advice. He tells them after he departs there will be "fierce wolves" who come and attack the flock and drive them away. In this context, Paul gives them verse 28, telling them to watch over the flock. But it is interesting that in this verse, the first thing he says is to pay careful attention to yourselves! It starts with taking an honest look at yourself and your relationship with Christ. Not only that, but you have to watch yourself first to make sure you are not drawn away or deceived. It can be easy to say pastoral care is all about the flock, but a pastor cannot care for the flock if he himself is in dire need and not cared for. Therefore, my philosophy begins with letting God care for me through his Word, through prayer, and through other people.

Acts 20:28 then moves to caring for the flock. This is the imagery of a shepherd watching over his flock, making sure every need is taken care of and also that any danger is averted. This is a big responsibility as it is the Holy Spirit puts the pastor in charge of this ministry. This verse also adds that it is with Jesus' blood the church has been obtained, placing even more responsibility on the pastor to care for the flock. This is not just another verse describing the responsibility of pastors; it is a verse that shows the true weight of such a calling. Paul is very upfront and direct with the Ephesian leaders in charging them with this responsibility—a responsibility that rings true for pastors even today. The purpose for pastoral care is to tend to the flock because Jesus obtained it through His blood, and we are to keep it for Him. This is the foundation my philosophy of pastoral care can be built on.

The foundation is built, but before reaching the first floor, there needs to be a way to get up there. In buildings, that is the function of a staircase. In this philosophy of pastoral care, knowing who you are and your personality as it relates to other people is the staircase. Every pastor is different, as every person God creates is different. This means every pastor will relate to and care for his church differently. There is not simply a manuscript for pastors to follow in caring for their church. That is why you need to understand yourself, your personality and your preferences.

A helpful tool for understanding your own personality as it relates to ministry is the Keirsey-Temperament Sorter Test. For me, this test showed I am an introvert—I perceive things through sensing, am both a thinker and a feeler, and that I am much quicker to judge than to perceive. This means I need time alone to recharge, especially in ministry. But at the same time, I need to flex and make an effort to be more outgoing to reach those who need that energy. This also means I lean toward being more rigid and factual in my decisions,

comments, and lifestyle. Knowing these things will help bridge the gap between me and people so I can care for them, because knowing yourself is like a staircase that links the basement to the first floor.

Now we arrive where all the action happens, the first floor. Next to the foundation, this is the most important part of a building. This is where people enter and leave. It is the first look people get, and they judge the entire building based on that first impression. Therefore, the first floor must be made attractive, causing people to stay. Regarding pastoral care, I believe the first floor is the community.

Andy Stanley points out that "environments are the messages before the message" (Stanley 157). To care for the flock is to put them in an environment in which they can thrive. No shepherd leads his flock to a dry, dangerous, cold field that puts his flock in harm's way. A good shepherd will bring his flock to a safe, green pasture so they can grow and prosper. In the same way, the best way for a pastor to care for his congregation is to create an inviting community that goes deeper than the surface and has a healthy mixture of grace and truth.

Generally, it is fair to say people crave community. "We want to belong to a community, to be intimate with people, to enjoy each other. It's what we're made for" (Crabb 89). God designed us that way, in His likeness (Gen 1:27). The Trinity shows us through the interactions of the Father, Son, and Spirit why we have a desire for deep relationships rather than relationships that simply skim the surface. We desire to go past the daily "how are you" and instead relate with each other on a deeper level. This being what people want, I believe a pastor should strive to create that kind of community at church. So many problems and sins can be solved and overcome through a good community. But what does a good community look like? In his book *The Safest Place on Earth,* Eugene Peterson describes a good spiritual community. He says (and I wholeheartedly agree) that we need people in churches to turn their chairs toward each other. We need to step out of our own individualistic lifestyles and face each other. We need to realize none of us are perfect, and we need to drive through the fear of letting others see our own imperfections. This starts with the pastor. He needs to live by example in letting people see he is not perfect, and that being real and honest with others is rewarding in the end.

I believe pastors need to create communities that promote both grace and truth. Churches need to practice grace with people where grace is found, but also in balance with truth where truth is found (Stanley 75). Jesus was the perfect example of this (John 1:17). He gave grace to people, but he also pointed out the

truth and was not scared to say it. Similarly, we need to be bold enough to point out the truth in ourselves and in others. We need to create a community that is not scared of being found out. Instead, we need to create a community that is scared of hiding sin for fear of stagnancy. We simply need to confront sin and embrace brokenness.

At the same time, we need to create a community that practices grace with others as grace is defined. This does not mean we let things go ignorantly. "Grace doesn't dumb down sin to make it more palatable" (Stanley 75). There are certainly times discipline is needed, but there are also times where grace is in effect. Although this will never seem fair, it is what Jesus did and it is what the church can be doing to create a spiritual community. Truthfully, communities especially in churches are very messy. People are not perfect and no community will be perfect, but I would suggest we embrace messiness and brokenness. I suggest we face each other, confront sin, and help each other overcome sin.

I believe pastors need to adorn this first floor of community with brokenness. As we do that, people will begin their journey toward a deeper relationship with God. As they are on this journey, pastors should come alongside them and serve as spiritual directors. "Spiritual directors are men and women who know the Spirit…and can see into the workings of the human soul and can direct it toward its end" (Peterson 182). Pastors should be directing their flock to Christ, because Christ should be their ultimate goal.

In order to build this first floor of community, pastors need to be living a lifestyle that encourages community. I believe this means a pastor should do everything he can in order to bring people into the community. Any small comment or action can either encourage people to enter in or can have the power to drive them away. Take "small talk" for example. Although most would say they do not enjoy small talk, often times we must first engage in small talk before getting into more profound conversations. Not many will open up their heart to you the first time they meet you. That is why I think the ability to use small talk in church is important. "If pastors belittle it, we belittle what most people are doing most of the time, and the gospel is misrepresented" (Peterson 122). To establish community, pastors should use small talk to draw people in and then point them to God. This can be done at any time, even on Sunday morning. I believe part of a pastor's work is to be engaging with people on Sunday, not just during the sermon. The pastor needs to be present with the people. People will sense if you are really present in the situation or if you are thinking over the sermon you are about to give. There are so many opportunities

for the pastor to talk with people and by doing so create a spiritual community.

There are several ways a pastor can create a spiritual community that embraces brokenness. I think of it as the furniture of this first floor of community. Like mentioned before, it starts with the pastor and his lifestyle and effort, but it can also be done through implementing small groups. Small groups will connect people and put them in a setting where they can share how they really are doing and what they really need. Although this is not the pastor directly caring for his congregation, setting those up for people will do more than a pastor might be able to do himself. In truth, I think there are innumerable ways a pastor can care for his congregation. Depending on the needs and situations of people, the duties of a pastor might change, but I believe it starts with forming a spiritual community that allows people to thrive in their relationship with Christ and others.

With the foundation and first floor built, we can now move to the upper floors. In my philosophy of pastoral care, these are the intentional things such as visitations, counseling, funerals, weddings, and even involvement in social media. These things being done consistently and with poise can make all the difference in people's lives. These things can be hard for pastors because it requires so much time, which is not something pastors have to spare, but that is part of ministry; it is not always convenient or easy. However, these are great opportunities to point people to Christ and help them grow closer in their relationship with God.

"You cannot win souls or shepherd the flock simply by sitting behind a desk or standing behind the pulpit" (Sugden 90). A shepherd cannot sit in his house while tending to his flock. He has to be out there with his flock in order to care for it. Similarly, pastors need to go out to where the people are in order to truly care for them. This is called visitation. James describes pure religion as one that goes out and visits the needy (James 1:27). Jesus says when we visit and care for the needy, we are in essence visiting and caring for him (Matt 25:43). The Bible is clear that we need to be going out and caring for those who are in need.

I believe pastors should make it part of their routine to visit people every week. Whether the person is in a nursing home or playing in a football game, a visit from their pastor will mean a lot to them. The pastor's presence alone can have a greater impact than a Sunday sermon. Even though the visit might not be more than an hour, a lot can be communicated and displayed in that time. A pastor who gets involved in the daily lives of those in their congregation will be given much more attention and will be much more effective in his ministry.

Visiting people when they are in the hospital is also a great way to care for your congregation. In those times they need support and encouragement, which can be provided by simply visiting them. Although simply being there is very important and effective on its own, more can be done to minister to the people. First, visits need to be surrounded by prayer. Pastors need to realize that with their own strength they can only do a little, but relying on God they can do much in the lives of those they are visiting (Oden 58). Prayer before, during, and after a visitation aligns our hearts with God and allows us to point others to Christ. Among other things, I think it is important to keep visits short, being sensitive to the other person's schedule and feelings. Although doing visitations might seem strange at first, I think it is something that is learned and improved upon with experience. Pastors who take part in these things will find them very rewarding.

Counseling, another upper floor to my philosophy of pastoral care, is a large part of a pastor's ministry. Counseling takes many forms, as people come in with a wide variety of problems or issues. In counseling, you need to set up boundaries for who you counsel and how long you will counsel them in order to save yourself from any harm. I have also learned there are some issues within the counseling realm you do not know how to handle, much less counsel about. In those cases, it is appropriate to send those people to a professional counselor. Many times, counseling will be in the realm of resolving problems (in relationships, personal life, or work life) and dealing with grief. In all of these I think it is important to listen well in order to address the problem and support the person. I also think it is important to use God's Word to speak truth into people's lives in counseling. In dealing with grief, show them God is compassionate, he understands our sufferings, and he can bring comfort in all situations (2 Cor 1:3-11). In dealing with any problem, show them that God gives peace to those who pray to him and trust in him (Phil 4:6-7).

Another floor of this philosophy of pastoral care has to do with funerals and weddings. Both of these events are crucial points in someone's life. A wedding or funeral done well will mean a lot to a family, but at the same time a wedding or funeral done poorly will drive a family away. Starting with funerals, there are many needs that can be met through a proper funeral. Funerals can give a safe environment to grieve, establish a place of memories, and establish a time to face reality. Pastors need to allow the family to grieve. In fact, it is biblical to grieve, as Jesus grieved for Lazarus. I think pastors need to help families go through the process of grieving while reminding them that we who are believers find hope in our future resurrection together when Jesus comes for the believers

(1 Thess 4:13-18). During the funeral process, it is important to remember your role as the pastor—to support the families in any way. One pastor named Paul Walker said, "Sometimes they want me to simply be there with them" (Miller 89). Once again, a pastor's presence is of utmost importance.

On the more positive side are weddings. Weddings are meant to be joyous occasions, to be meaningful and celebratory. "The Christian wedding is a worship celebration" (Miller 60). To be a part of the process that unites two believers is a privilege. I think in these the pastor should be prepared to run the wedding as smoothly as possible. In reality, most of the work comes before the wedding with marriage counseling and wedding arrangements. It is the pastor's duty to help prepare the couple for marriage and encourage them into their future together.

The building that is my philosophy on pastoral care is now complete. It has been built and is up and running, but I think there are still a couple things a pastor needs to be doing in caring for his congregation. The first is staying connected with people. In this day and age, social media is a must for those who want to stay plugged into what is going on. Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram are the mainstream choices among the many social media systems. I believe these can be a great tool for pastors (or anyone in the church) to connect with people and stay updated with their lives. It can even be a way to draw people in. "We reach wide so with some we can go deep" (Maxwell 37). Social media is an opportunity to reach a wide variety of people, so why not use it? By reaching more people and drawing them in, we can then plug them into the church and connect them with the community. This can be illustrated as the sign outside the building that draws people in. It also keeps the pastor connected so they can know how to appropriately care for their congregation.

The final way I believe a pastor can care for his congregation is through implementing church discipline. Think of this as the security system of the building. Galatians 6:1 says, "Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness." It is a Biblical mandate to try and restore believers, and church discipline can be an effective way to do this. Ephesians 4:12 says to 'equip' the believers, which in the Greek gives the idea of putting something back to its original setting. When people sin it affects more than just one person, and the pastor is in a position to address those situations. This is the idea of a shepherd who watches over his flock and protects it against wolves and even from attacks within. Because, like mentioned before, when people get together things can get messy. But I believe it is the role

of the pastor to confront the messiness when needed. When divisiveness appears, when false doctrine is heard, when power struggles happen, and when people simply disrupt the fellowship, the pastor should step in and implement discipline. Matthew 18 gives us the model of this discipline. I think a pastor should attempt to follow the method described in Matt 18. Pastors need to have a written document in the church constitution describing the church discipline and what they will do in problematic situations. This will guard the pastor and the church from any lawsuit and confusion. Church discipline, like the security system of the building, guards the church from any attacks on the outside, but also has a strong, protective pulse on what is happening on the inside.

All in all, my philosophy of pastoral care is rooted in Scripture where it says that pastors are to be shepherds caring for the flock. Like constructing a building, it begins with the foundation which is the purpose of being the shepherd who is responsible for God's flock. It continues with the first floor, which is spiritual community formed through embracing brokenness and directing people towards each other and God. From there, the upper floors are built, which are the pastoral responsibilities such as visitation, counseling, weddings, and funerals. Connecting all of these floors are the staircases which are your personality, how you relate with people, and how to use all of that to reach the congregation. On top of all that, there is the security system, church discipline, that keeps the place healthy and in order. With all of these things, the building is complete and safe. Unlike the Leaning Tower of Pisa, it is laid upon a strong foundation and displays its beauty for all to see and enjoy. It is my belief if a pastor follows these principles drawn from architecture, his church will radiate beauty and it will be a place people can enjoy and thrive in their relationship with God. What pastor would refuse that?

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PROBLEMS NOT SOLVED BY DISPENSATIONAL INTERPRETATION

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We are often prone to over-simplify and to exaggerate. In defending the dispensational interpretation of the Scripture it has been claimed that this system of study clears up every seeming contradiction in the Scripture and is the answer to every cult and ism and every ill that affects the Church today. Since so much has already been written from this point of view, it will not be my purpose to explore this side of the truth further, other than to say that in the above statement the word many should be substituted for every in each case. The types of problems which are cleared up by a dispensational approach are those especially which related to religious practices and the content of evangel.

1. Dispensationalism does not answer a rationalistic approach to the Bible. Dispensationalism presupposes the verbal and plenary inspiration of the Scripture, and can only answer the problems of those well hydrated subscribe to this high view of the Scripture. Our proofs for inspiration come from every dispensational section of the Bible. There is no difference between the claims of the Scripture writers on this point, regardless of whether they are Old Testament prophets or New Testament apostles. Therefore unorthodox views of inspiration cannot be answered by dispensationalism.

It is true that dispensationalism can satisfactorily explain the differences between the teachings of Jesus and the Twelve and those of Paul, which the

rationalist might claim are antagonist and contradictory, and this solution might lead an honest mind to a more orthodox view of the Scriptures. But the basic problem of the rationalist, unbelief, is not solved by dispensationalism. Neither is the Neo-orthodox view of inspiration and revelation answered by dispensationalism. Explaining the unique Pauline revelation to such a person would be of no help in persuading him that the Scriptures rear-ended objectively the Word of God, and not that in a purely subjective sense they may become the Word of God in an individual's existential experience. It should be noted that Roman Catholics and Seventh Day Adventists hold an essentially orthodox view of the Scriptures. If one may hold a correct view of the Scriptures apart from dispensationalism, then dispensationalism in itself is not essential to that view, nor can it answer the aberrations of unbelief.

2. Dispensationalism does not help in solving the difficulties between science and the Bible. The main area of difference here is with the origin of the earth and of life upon the earth, and all of this antedates the first dispensation. Many dispensationalists hold to the gap theory between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2, which, if true, explains many of the fossils as belonging to a prior creation, but the gap theory itself is not a dispensational subject. If one believes that man has evolved from some lower form of life, no amount of dispensational teaching can persuade him otherwise. If one believes that man has been on earth for close to two million years, as many paleontologists and geologists believe, the truth of the mystery provides no answer to this problem which becomes more acute as science progresses.

3. Dispensationalism cannot solve the problem surrounding many seeming contradictions in the Scripture. There are numerical discrepancies which are adduced by critics against the inerrancy of the Bible, as in I Kings 9:28 where it is stated that Hiram sent Solomon 420 talents of gold and in II Chronicles 8:18, where the figure is 450 talents; or as in II Samuel 24:9 where it is stated that there were in Israel 800,000 men in the army and in Judah 500,000 men, whereas I Chronicles 21:5 reports the same numbering as consisting of 1,100,000 in Israel and 470,000 in Judah; or as in the case of the number of souls of the house of Jacob who came into Egypt, Genesis 46:27 gives the number as 70, whereas Acts 7:14 gives the number as 75. These and other seeming discrepancies in numbers have been satisfactorily accounted for, but not upon dispensational grounds.

There are numerous seeming contradictions between the accounts of the four Gospels. For example, in the narrative relating the healing of the blind men

at Jericho Matthew 20:30 states that there were two blind men, whereas Mark 10:46 and Luke 18:35 speak only of one blind man. Further, Matthew and Mark both sate that the healing occurred as Jesus departed from Jericho, whereas Luke states that it happened as Jesus draw night to Jericho. No dispensational explanation could help solve a seeming contradiction of this nature, but there are means of satisfactorily reconciling such difficulties.

Then there is the matter of quotations from the Old Testament. For example, Matthew 27:9, 10 states: Then was fulfilled that which was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying, And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him that was valued, whom they of the children of Israel did value; and gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord appointed me. However, we search in vain to find these words in Jeremiah's writings. We do find in Zechariah 11:12-13 somewhat similar words: So they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver, and cast them to the potter in the house of the Lord. Again the dispensational principle is of no help with this type of problem. Jeremiah spoke many things which were not written in his prophecy. No doubt oral tradition attributed these words to Jeremiah, and while there is no doubt that Zechariah's prophecy refers to the same event, Matthew does not quote Zechariah. Gaussen quotes Whitby to the effect that St. Jerome indicates that there was still extant in his time an apocryphal book of the prophet Jeremiah in which was found every letter of the words quoted by St. Matthew (L. Gaussen, *The Origin and Inspiration of the Bib*le, 217).

Our purpose in this brief article has not been to disparage or belittle the results of dispensational interpretation, but rather to point out the fact that Dispensationalism does not and cannot solve every seeming contradiction in the Bible. The dispensational approach to Biblical interpretation is essential to a proper understanding of Scripture, but there are many other principles and areas of knowledge which are also of vital importance to the student of the Word.

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BOOK REVIEWS

Donaldson, Alistair. *The Last Days of Dispensationalism: A Scholarly Critique of Poplar Misconceptions*, by Eugene Ore.: Wipf and Stock, 2011. Pp. i-xv, 1-160; Bibliography.

Alistair Donaldson is Lecturer in Biblical Theology and Biblical Studies at Laidlaw College, Christchurch, New Zealand. His critique of dispensational theology stands in the line of reformed critics who began attacking dispensational theology just after 1940 and from whom he draws ideas and support. He frequently cites eight to ten well known reformed anti-dispensationalists whose explicit intent is to counter this theology as judged by their titles and statements of purpose. He also makes use of a larger group of reformed writers whose titles and interest are more toward defending and re-articulating reformed covenant theology and its biblical and exegetical underpinnings. These writers also discuss dispensational theology and premillennialism negatively, but are often more structurally biblical theology-like in intent and method. Donaldson's theological resources also include most of the prominent dispensationalist writers since about 1930, concentrating on what he thinks of as "normative" popular dispensationalism. It is with these that he is most irritated. Unfortunately, he takes little account of more recent major works of the "progressive" dispensationalists and other moderate revisionists of the last three decades. His interactions are with the Scofield Bible—Dallas Seminary tradition of the twentieth century's middle years.

The reason for this limitation on dispensationalist sources is that Donaldson considers this tradition led astray by "popular misconceptions" which distort biblical theological concepts and are harmful to the thinking of their constituencies; even more, such misconceptions undermine traditional Reformed theology. He considers this popular "classical dispensationalism," as it is called by some analysts, extremist in its ideas and practice of reading and interpreting Scripture, especially its bent toward writing popular, alarming eschatology. A particular object of Donaldson's disgust is the *Left Behind* novels based on dispensationalist concepts. This series, however, is only the most extreme fruit of main line dispensationalism; the thinking of even in its more sober expositors is also misguided according to Donaldson. Its misconceptions and distortions

focus on six main aspects: its hermeneutics; its separation of Israel and church; its idea of the kingdom of God; the rapture and tribulation doctrines; the millennium; and the idea of a heavenly church. Dispensationalist readers will recognize these topics as the perennial subjects of Reformed criticism. This agenda is identified in Donaldson's chapter titles. The details of his complaints are necessarily selected and limited for purposes of this short review.

The first three complaints and alternatives are about the present. (1) Dispensational theology claims it alone follows a *consistent literalism* in biblical interpretation. Donaldson thinks consistent literalism is impossible to sustain, that the language of apocalyptic and eschatology is governed by images drawn from and about present life, and that because of the complexity of images, dispensational interpretation is forced to hedge as Charles Ryrie does, for example, in discussing "the Israel of God" (Gal 6:16) as Christian *Jews*. By this view Ryrie is "betraying the demands of his literal principle (p. 17)." In addition, New Testament writers themselves do not interpret the Old Testament literally. (2) Dispensational theology reads "Israel" as the ethnic entity only, and identifies the political state of Israel with fulfilled prophecy, thus investing it with divine sanction whereas the historic view is that the church, not the state of Israel, is the continuation of God's redemptive plan (p. 42). Since Jesus is the true Israel and its fulfillment, his church is the same. Mainline dispensationalists fail to recognize a contingency of faith in claims as to who is the true people of God, and modern Israel does not meet this contingency. (3) Dispensational theology's view of the kingdom is decidedly literalistic (p. 71), and "bifurcating"—the kingdom of God is now; the kingdom of heaven is the future millennium, for example. Donaldson complains such distinctions break up the singular unity of the kingdom. Instead, viewing the kingdom as "one unified story of God's redeeming work (p. 74)," is the only right way to understand the kingdom, even though he thinks it is never really defined in the New Testament.

A second group of distorted ideas belongs to the future. (4) The rapture and revelation are not two distinct events since "The traditional and historic view of the Christian church is that the return of Christ occurs as a single event (p. 101)." A serious implication of the future rapture, tribulation and kingdom sequence, he thinks, is the suggestion that Jesus in failing to establish the literal kingdom at his first advent also failed to put an end to sin, thus contradicting the promise of Daniel 9:24 that Messiah would "finish transgression (pp 107)." Dispensational theology also destroys the fulfillment of the Olivet Discourse prophecies of Jerusalem's destruction in 70 A.D. by forwarding this prophecy's

fulfillment to the future. (5) There can be no future millennial kingdom because ". . . Christ . . . being the fulfiller of Israel's Old Testament institutions, ceremonies, promises, and prophecies," is also "the one in whom the kingdom has already come (p. 129)." Thus there is no need for any future millennial kingdom. Beside, Revelation 20:1-6 mentions only a thousand year reign, but nothing of any future Israel, Jews returning to their land, reinstated sacrifices, Jerusalem as the center of world government, or any other of the ideas dispensational theology associates with the future millennium. Revelation is so full of symbols that it is "hermeneutically inappropriate" to assume a non-symbolic meaning of the thousand years (p. 134). (6) The rapture idea leads to the church's permanent eternal life in heaven, not on earth, as part of dispensational theology's mental culture of heavenly escapism—the counterpoint of its earth-hate. The Bible rather appears to think of a new heavens and *new earth* on which dwells righteousness. Donaldson calls for a whole new "earthing" of Christian eschatology where redeemed humanity will fulfill its creaturely mandate to rule the earth. This is the biblical hope for a wholly "new creation."

Despite its purpose to exploit for critical purposes some of the worst distortions of the older dispensationalism, this book has some merits. It is well-written and edited, except, of course, for the usual trivial smattering of technical writing errors. Donaldson expresses himself forcefully and colorfully. He musters Reformed theology's traditional arguments against dispensational theology with skill and persuasive expression. He is thoroughly versed in Reformed theology's literature and the details of its nearly three-quarter century struggle against dispensational theology. It is also a merit of his study that he succinctly crystallizes the old and middle dispensationalists' main lines of thought and argument, and shows how a few of their more questionable formulations actually lead to other distortions. This rigorous examination of the opponent's inner logic in certain details is impressive. It should please his Reformed comrades; but it should also give dispensational theology's leaders fodder for their own rethinking process which does in fact continue in their literature. Having said this much, the weaknesses of the argument are also striking.

The book has many such limitations. (1) Donaldson's decision to attack an older and very limited form of dispensationalist thinking during a roughly fifty-year period extending to about 1990 makes the book's aim too limited to be a serious treatment for more recent dispensationalists; limiting his frame of

reference in this way is justified by attempting a lethal blow against its still popular acceptance among a limited public and equally limited group of scholarly promoters. This format wrongly ignores aspects of corrective revision by more recent dispensationalist writing. (2) The study massively over-generalizes about New Testament fulfillments of Old Testament prophecy, thereby engaging in extreme already-fulfilled first advent realities by arguing that God poured total fulfillments into Jesus' earthly mission. This habit of Reformed criticism is especially egregious when one looks at both already-and-still-future texts on the kingdom in the Gospels. Contrary to the critique, these texts balance the "already" but "not yet" visible messianic kingdom prophecies and their New Israel-centered focus—a both-and, not and either-or process of fulfillment. (3) Donaldson erroneously imputes to dispensational theology misleading ideas, for instance, about the rapture, tribulation and kingdom, by incorrectly suggesting it believes Jesus failed to establish the kingdom and end sin. This logic follows from failure to recognize that the victory over sin was extended by divine intent into several phases of the kingdom's salvation covering both present and future. (4) By arguing for virtually total fulfillment of all kingdom prophecies in both Jesus' first advent and the consequent church, the book virtually dissolves the earthly flow of the Bible's socio-biblical eschatology. Instead of drastic and nearly total first advent fulfillment, for example, of the end of sin or resurrection or "subjection" of all things, major elements of the biblical future are explained away in the name of genre and linguistic image studies which he faults dispensational theology for ignoring or literalizing.

All forms of dispensational theology, including those not within Donaldson's purview, will have to view this critique as mostly inadequate, just as it has done with the whole Reformed opposition. But it should not dismiss substantial criticisms of points on which it actually does need correctives. Nor have the developments in progressive dispensational theology solved all its internal problems. Grace believers too should not imagine their major corrective insight—the continued offer of the kingdom to Israel in Acts 1-11—to have already resolved all issues and problems. Chief among the problems needing much more work is the re-study of the kingdom of God in the New Testament.

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McKnight, Scot and Joseph B. Modica, editors. *Jesus is Lord, Caesar is Not: Evaluating Empire in New Testament Studies*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2013. 224 pp. Pb; $22.00.

This collection of essays is an introduction to the "anti-imperial" or "Empire Criticism" approach to the New Testament from a decidedly evangelical perspective. These sorts of approaches have been around for a number of years, but evangelicals have been slow to interact with them. This volume of essays is a first step toward bringing some of the value of studying Empire to a more conservative audience.

As McKnight and Modica comment in their introduction, one of the problems with some of the work done on anti-imperial rhetoric is it ends up sounding "too much like one's personal, progressive, left-wing, neo-Marxist, or whatever, politics" (19). This sounds something like the standard criticism of the nineteenth century "lives of Jesus" movement; all of those studies turned Jesus into a nineteenth century Protestant German liberal. McKnight admits that Empire studies grew in popularity during the Bush administration and many were not-so-veiled attempts to criticize growing fears of an "American empire." But I can see how an ultra-conservative reader of this book in 2013 could easily import their own fears of "big government" demanding complete loyalty. It would be a simple matter for me to hear "anti-imperial rhetoric in the New Testament" as talking about "my government."

But that is not the point of *Jesus is Lord*, and that is certainly not the value of Empire studies for understanding the New Testament writers. In my approach to the New Testament, context is everything—especially historical context. Most Bible readers do not have a firm grasp of Roman history in the first century. For most Christian readers, the word "Lord" means Jesus, and "gospel" is "how I get saved." But in the Roman world of the first century, those words carried some political overtones that could be considered radical when applied to someone other than Caesar.

The first two chapters attempt to set the stage for the rest of the book. In fact, these two chapters account for about one quarter of the total page count of the book. In the first chapter, David Nystrom surveys Roman Imperial ideology and the imperial cult. By the first century, the Roman Empire was a vast, socially stratified entity that was thought to have been ordained by the gods themselves. Augustus used both patronage and religion to solidify his power base as emperor. Worship of the idea of Rome and the emperor as a deity was

common in the very regions where Pauline Christianity took root— Ephesus and the Asia Minor.

Judith Diehl's contribution to the book is the longest, and in many ways the most satisfying. She begins by surveying some of the same history as Nystrom, but then touches on the potentially anti-imperial elements of the Gospels, Acts, and Paul. In the second part of the chapter, she describes several sub-disciplines that are often allied with Empire studies (for example colonialism, social gospel, patronage, post-colonialism) and shows how these theoretical methods may shed some light on the text. Certainly patronage is a major factor in the problems at Corinth, but even Paul's description of the return of Jesus as *parosuia* might be seen as a contrast to the glorious arrival of an Emperor. In the third section of the chapter, Diehl surveys literary approaches that are often a major component of Empire studies. She first describes how symbolism might be construed as subversive language and then gives a few examples of how this works. The most obvious place to find symbolic language which is almost certainly subversive and anti-imperial is Revelation 18. She calls apocalyptic "protest literature" (73) and shows how "John creatively convinces his audience that there is only one authority in the world that is worthy of human devotion and service, and it is not the Roman emperor" (76).

Three chapters are devoted to Empire Studies in the Gospels. First Joel Willits interacts with David Sim (*Apocalyptic Eschatology in Matthew*) and the wealth of material produced by Warren Carter on Matthew. Willits thinks these studies are valuable, but that ultimately they do not contribute much to the interpretation of the Gospel of Matthew. Post-colonialism, for example, is not "a very reliable method for interpreting ancient texts" (93). "It is the Jewish Scriptures [which] provided the larger story in which Matthew's Jesus fits" (96).

Dean Pinter's chapter on Empire in Luke asks two questions. First, does the Gospel of Luke indicate antagonism or rivalry toward the Empire? Despite the fact Luke refers to Jesus as both Lord and king, he never actually creates an antithesis between the two (110). It is not as though Jesus is presented as an up-and-coming rival to the Roman Empire, but rather that Caesar is a rival to Jesus; it is Jesus who is the true Lord and Savior and Caesar is challenging his supremacy (111). What I found disorienting about this chapter is that the focus is solely on the Gospel of Luke, bracketing out the book of Acts (although there is a nod to the second half of Luke's work in the conclusion to the chapter). I would rather have had had a longer chapter on Luke and Acts as a whole, or maybe a third chapter trying to integrate the material in some way.

Christopher Skinner begins his chapter on John in the imperial context by pointing out that in comparison to the synoptic Gospels, there is far less interest in Rome and far more interest in presenting a "theology of Jesus." What makes John of interest is the consensus view that he wrote from Ephesus toward the end of the first century. Again Warren Carter has written a monograph on *John and Empire* (T&T Clark 2008), so Skinner must interact with his arguments. In the end, Skinner states that Carter "tries to do too much history with too little evidence" (124).

Drew Strait takes on the problem of Acts and Empire. The topic is difficult primarily because most commentators find a very positive view of Rome in Acts. Strait examines this consensus view as well as recent challenges and concludes Luke is not openly critiquing Caesar, and that a critique of the Empire was not his purpose in writing Acts. Jesus is the Lord of all in Acts, and there are some indications the preaching of the Gospel is a challenge to Rome (Thessalonica, Acts 17), but that is not the purpose of the book. This conclusion is good, but here is where I would have liked to have some synthesis (or dialogue) between this chapter by Strait and Pinter's on Luke. Can the sort of language found in the birth narratives, for example, help us understand the more positive view of Rome in Acts?

Jesus is Lord has three chapters on Paul. Michael Bird discusses Romans, a letter that uses language like gospel, Savior, and Lord frequently. As Bird points out, these were not "Christian words" in the middle of the first century. But Paul was not "consumed with political activism" (148), and much of Paul's language for salvation is drawn from the Septuagint (149). The book of Romans is a theological document describing God's righteousness as available for both Jew and Greek. If there are socio-political dimensions to Romans, it is because "Israel's faith was always socio-political" (161).

Lynn Cohick focuses her chapter on Philippians. Several factors make Philippians fertile ground for Empire studies. First, inscriptional evidence indicates the imperial cult was present in first century Philippi (169). Second, there is a great deal of citizenship language in Philippians as well as the usual "Jesus is Lord." Third, there are studies on Philippians that describe Paul as "colonialist and imperialist" as well as those who see Paul as critiquing the Empire (N. T. Wright). Like Bird, Cohick concludes that if Paul is anti-imperial, it is part of his Jewish context. Certainly there is a challenge to the power of Rome, but that is not very different than any Jew living in the middle of the first century.

Allan Bevere contributes a chapter on Colossians. He states clearly in the first line of the chapter that the theme of empire is not central to Colossians or Philemon (183). His main dialogue partner in the chapter is Brian Walsh and Sylvia Keesmaat's *Colossians Remixed: Subverting the Empire* (InterVarsity, 2004). This popular book takes the opposite view—that Colossians is deliberately subverting Empire and Paul is decidedly anti-Rome. Perhaps the most important text in Colossians for the Empire theme is Col 2:15: Christ has disarmed the rulers and authorities, making a public example of them. These statements sound like imperial language: defeat and humiliate the enemy and a triumph in Rome. Bevere finds it hard to believe the original readers would have understood the language as anti-imperial. Like Bird and Cohick, Bevere grounds Paul's views in his Jewish worldview, especially Exodus language. But Exodus is not about liberation from political enemies (Egypt or Rome), but the liberation of Gentiles who now share in the inheritance of Israel (191).

To a certain extent, I found the final chapter by Dwight Sheets disappointing. It is not that this chapter on Revelation and Empire is bad; on the contrary it is quite readable. What is disappointing is that it is a brief 12 pages. To almost everyone, Revelation is the one book where anti-imperial language is obvious. The topic is broad enough to merit an entire monograph; to dispatch it in 12 pages is frustrating. Sheets does set Revelation into the context of the end of the first century and interacts with challenges to the common view that Domitian was a tyrant who demanded worship. He agrees with recent studies which point out Asia Minor was not an oppressed territory, nor were Christians under significant persecution, either economic or social. Problems were internal and Christian apostasy was threatening the Church, although there was a threat coming from Rome. For Sheets, Rev 13:15 indicates John understood the direction the imperial cult was going and warned his readers of this coming threat.

In conclusion, *Jesus is Lord* is a stimulating book raising far more questions than it can answer. Most chapters are introductory and encourage the reader to study further on the topic. I find it interesting that several of the contributions conclude Paul is anti-imperial, but only because Israel's theology was always anti-empire, whatever the empire was. I would really like to see this developed, perhaps in a study of anti-imperialism in Jewish apocalyptic literature. There are a couple of things missing from this book. First, there is no chapter on the Gospel of Mark. Second, there is nothing on the Jewish Christian literature other than a few comments in Diehl's chapter. It is true there is little

Empire study done on these books, but Rome and Hebrews would make for an interesting study. Third, the chapter Revelation ought to have been longer since it is the best example of anti-imperial rhetoric in the New Testament.

Even with these criticisms, I enjoyed reading *Jesus is Lord* and look forward to integrating some of the insights into my Pauline Literature class this fall. Readers interested in setting the New Testament documents in the context of the Roman world will find this to be an excellent introduction to a growing topic. Since each chapter includes a bibliography, interested readers can find additional resources on the topic. The book might be a valuable text book in a New Testament course since it does attempt to read the Scripture against an appropriate cultural background and (potentially) throw some light on difficult passages to apply to modern Church and State issues.

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Hellerman, Joseph H. *Embracing Shared Ministry: Power and Status in the Early Church and Why it Matters Today*. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2013. 313 pp. $17.99.

In a time when politics and religion collide in a fierce battle, Joseph H. Hellerman, Professor of New Testament Language and Literature at Talbot School of Theology, has produced a book that speaks to the heart of the many issues that plague the local church today: power and authority. Hellerman urges pastoral leaders to wield power and influence with the gentle and nurturing hands of the Savior. He roots this assertion in a careful treatment of how Paul handles these issues in light of Roman stratification or socio-economic power structures. This is where the book shines as a great resource for local pastors. For those who are not familiar with Roman society, it is a warm and welcoming introduction; for those seasoned vets in Greco-Roman studies, it is a refreshing reminder and highlights the important findings and implications of recent scholarship.

In *Embracing Shared Ministry*, Hellerman divides his book into three sections: 1) Power and Authority in the Roman World, 2) Power and Authority in the Early Church, and 3) Power and Authority in the Church Today. In the first section, Power and Authority in the Roman World, he discusses the

importance of status in Roman society. Rome is divided into two classes: Elites and non-elites (27). The Elites hold all of the power and affluence in society. The people who populate this social class are senators, military commanders, and wealthy patrons. Because of the intense stratification between the haves and have-nots, honor and title are central to consolidating power (34). Non-elite members, comprised of everyone else, are forced to pay homage to these Elites by virtue of the fact they hold no social capital. The way to gain power, if you are in the Elite class, is to exercise political clout by building statues and other services in honor of those higher in order to gain their favor (55). Hellerman likens this strive for greater honor to what has been called the American Dream, the hope of gaining more money (56). In America, income is the gauge that is used for whether a person is living well, whereas in Rome, honor is how Elites distinguished themselves from the masses. Instead of buying a Lamborghini, Romans built impressive structures of either themselves or important political figures. This is the worldview Paul addresses in his letters: "self-promotion, honor-seeking, and the abuse of authority flies in the face of Paul's vision for power relations in the church (99)."

In the second part, Power and Authority in the Early Church, Hellerman highlights the stark contrast between Roman society and Paul's ministry. He does so by paralleling Paul's ministry in Philippi with how Paul portrays Jesus in Philippians 2 (116). Jesus did not exploit his status as equal with God (Phil. 2:6), but suffered (2:8), and in being humiliated was vindicated as Lord (2:9-11); in the same way Paul refused to exploit his citizenship, but willingly suffered humiliation, and though he suffered, was restored by being recognized as a citizen (116). This goes against all Roman sensibilities. Even though he held status as a citizen, he allowed himself to be treated as a slave (117). In doing so, Paul exemplified Jesus' approach to power and authority in a very vivid and powerful way. Status was not to be used for personal gain and glory, such was the way of the Romans, but rather status is to be used to demonstrate selfless endurance for the sake of others, the way of Jesus, and the way of the cross (139). Jesus' challenge to social stratification is three-fold. On the first level, Jesus had status and everything anyone could ever dream to amount to in the Roman world: Godhood. On the second level, even though Jesus was equal to God, he forsook the status, going from the highest status possible and living that of the lowest: a slave. In doing so, Jesus did not just stop at slavehood, Jesus' assault carries a third and final weight to it, the humiliating death of the cross. That a man would take his status and for the sake of others

treat it as the lowest, was utterly insulting to the Roman mind, and the fact Paul had the guts to live this life on account of the gospel would have spoken volumes to those around him. Hellerman provides a powerful analogy when he describes several instances where church leaders start to resemble Roman senators and not Roman slaves (175).

Finally, in his last section, Power and Authority in the Church Today, Hellerman gives a staunch rebuke of church leadership and a passionate admonition to follow in the ways of Jesus and Paul. He starts this section with what he calls a "biting critique" against the CEO-structure of church leadership. The business model of church power, where the greatest amount of power is held by the "Senior Pastor" and the "Church Board," often with jealousy, does a poor job of conforming to how Paul envisions church life (210). It actually reverses the work of Christ and the power of Paul's polemic, and reverts back to the very honor system that Christ died to free his people from (257). The way back for Hellerman is to establish a community of pastor-elders where power is dispersed and handed to people dedicated to servitude instead of consolidated in one entity. This consolidating, much like Roman power, makes the goal of "cruciformity," the way of the cross, a lot harder, in Hellerman's estimates, to achieve. By giving the power to a group of, to maintain the metaphor, "slaves," Hellerman's model takes what was consolidated to one person and gives it to the congregation in a way modern church dynamics cannot allow for (268).

In conclusion, Hellerman sees a problem with church leadership and the power struggle that results looks stunningly like Roman society. Paul's charge against this way of life is equally potent now in the CEO-era church as it was to the Roman-era church. The problem Hellerman addresses is not a new problem. It is a problem that has plagued the church almost since its development into an institution. Church has always taken on the structure of the surrounding context. From the Apostolic-age and Roman Catholic Church Roman-esque hierarchy to the protestant bourgeoisie-esque power mongering, Hellerman seeks to provide a way around the pitfall of power stratification. This is a book that should be read at all levels of church ministry. It is a much needed reminder of what Christian ministry is truly about: allowing the transforming power of Christ to permeate his community and free people from the slavery of this world.

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Reeves, Rodney. *Spirituality According to Paul: Imitating the Apostle of Christ*. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2011.

"So what?" This is the question Rodney Reeves uses to start off his book, *Spirituality According to Paul*. The history of studying Paul, the renowned apostle to the Gentiles, is long and varied. Throughout the ages, countless scholars have dedicated their time to studying the life and works of this incredible man of faith. As enlightening as all of this research has been, Reeves acknowledges it is of little lasting value unless we can look all of it over and answer the questions, "so what?" and, "What difference does it make in our lives today?" In his book, Rodney Reeves does an excellent job of answering these questions by systematically explaining Paul's spirituality and then practically relating it to the lives of believers today.

Reeves' first task is to convince his readers Paul was a man worthy of imitation. What makes Paul so special? Reeves argues Paul serves as one of the finest biblical examples of what a believer's life should look like. To Paul, "the gospel of Jesus Christ was more than a message to preach; it was a way of life" (Reeves, 15). This is how all believers should live their lives; we can look to Paul as a guide for how to live out the gospel. Reeves explains Paul's whole life revolved around the idea of participating in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Reeves, 15). Imitating Paul is more than mimicking his actions, but rather it is submitting to the same Spirit and allowing Him to transform our lives into the same gospel story that was exhibited so vividly in Paul (Reeves, 16).

Throughout the core of the book he details how Christ's death, burial, and resurrection are portrayed in the life of Paul. I was rather intrigued with how Reeves equated being crucified with Christ with sacrificing for others, being buried with Christ with needing the church, and being raised with Christ with overcoming sorrow with hope (Reeves, 192). I have heard this kind of thing before, but Reeves explained it in a clear and refreshing way I found myself able to relate with in a more personal way. He made it clear that when an unbeliever looks at the life of a Christian they should see the gospel.

Reeves did an excellent job of relating Paul's life and experiences with issues we face in Christianity today. Reeves' wealth of knowledge on the subjects of Pauline theology and Greco-Roman culture and his personable writing style made his arguments both well-informed and easily applicable.

There were several topics Reeves discussed that I found to be particularly intriguing.

One element of Reeves' book I found to be especially valuable was his discussion about the cross. In the first century, the cross signified death. It served as the visual representation of pain and suffering. Unfortunately over the centuries, the meaning of the cross has been diminished. We like the crosses in our churches to look artistic and beautiful. It has become little more than a religious symbol. While many might look at the cross as a catchy logo for Christianity, Reeves insists this should not be the case. He argues that displaying a cross should signify an individual's dedication to the life and work of Christ – that they too live a "crucified life." Crosses should still symbolize death, specifically death to self. As Reeves puts it, whenever we see a cross on a church, we should be able to say with all seriousness that "dead people live there" (Reeves, 22). This is no small thing. By exhibiting the cross, believers are in effect "[pointing] to a broken-down, beaten and bruised man and [saying] with admiration, 'I hope my life turns out like this'" (Reeves, 32). This adds a level of seriousness to Christianity we often overlook. The life of a Christ-follower is not easy; rather it is one where we are called to take up our cross daily and follow Christ (Luke 9:23).

Another point Reeves made very well was how un-American the gospel is. In America we put so much value on safety and security. We strive to have the best military, the best medical care, and the most rights and liberties on the planet. This may result in happy citizens, but it makes for lousy Christians. True Christianity is all about sacrifice. Paul talks about how believers should offer up their bodies as "living sacrifices" (Romans 12:1). "Jesus taught us that the only way to live is to learn how to die, a little every day" (Reeves, 40). The American emphasis on personal comfort and safety is completely incompatible with biblical Christianity. Another example of this can be seen in the value American culture places on personal strength and success. We live in a society where the strong are supposed to rise to the top. Reeves uses the life of Paul to show how, in Christianity, the converse is true. He claims "Paul was convinced that weak believers reveal the strength of Christ's cross better than anyone" (Reeves, 50). Being a Christian is all about humility and relying on Christ, not personal success and self-sufficiency.

I was also impressed with the discussion of Christianity's need for community. This is another area in which we as Americans struggle. The value we place on personal independence makes it difficult for us to acknowledge our

need for community. Reeves makes it clear this kind of behavior would not have sat well with Paul. In fact, Reeves says "Paul worked with the presumption that none of us can be Christians by ourselves" (Reeves, 100). No believer is an island. We need each other. The body of Christ cannot function properly when its members try to operate independently from one another.

Paul recognized the incredible importance of the church. He saw it as the one place where individuals could be transformed into one cohesive entity that would serve the purpose of proclaiming Christ in unity and love. (1 Corinthians 12:12-14). Unfortunately, the church often does not look that way. Indeed, "sometimes the world appears more unified than the church" (Reeves, 104). We seem to have a different denomination for every possible theological variance. We argue tirelessly about which group properly interprets the more difficult passages of Scripture. Social media quivers at the ferocity of our lengthy disputes! Yet how many of us have stopped to think about how much damage we are doing to the cause of the gospel? We are in danger of generating too much drama for even secular America to be interested in. What a sad reality, and the exact opposite of what Paul desired for the body of Christ (Titus 2:10). The church would be so much more effective if we could put aside our differences and serve Christ together. I love how Reeves puts it: "Wouldn't it be great if all churches had the exact same sign? Then the unmistakable impression travelers get would be: 'Look. The church meets there…and there…and there…even there'" (Reeves, 105). Think of how much more attractive the gospel of Christ would appear if all of His followers served Him as one unified body.

These are just a few of the points I thought Reeves made very well in his book. His explanation of Paul's life and theology painted a clear picture of how we should live as Christians today. Reeves did an excellent job of showing the importance of living the "crucified life," as well as what it means to be a living sacrifice. Reeves has written an excellent book that I would readily recommend to others.

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Bird, Michael F. *Are You the One Who Is To Come?* Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2009. 207 pp. Pb. $24

Some scholars argue Jesus himself did not intend to call himself a messiah, or even that he denied being the Messiah. Anything that might be taken as "messianic claim" is dismissed as a secondary addition to the text by the early church as they told and re-told the story of Jesus in the light of their belief in the resurrection. The "post-Easter" Jesus became the Christ. By the time the Gospels were written, a belief that Jesus was the Messiah had taken root and the story of Jesus was written in a way to make him into a messiah. But the "Real Jesus" himself never claimed to be the Messiah.

Michael Bird addresses this question in *Are You the One to Come*? He states at the very beginning of the book that "the historical Jesus understood his mission, ministry, vocation…in messianic categories" (11). The first chapter of the book provides a short orientation to previous scholarship on Jesus as the Christ. Bird observes the "well-word position" that Jesus never claimed to be the Messiah is not as strongly held as it once was, primarily as a result of the so-called "Third Quest" for the historical Jesus (27). I would add here the research into the Second Temple Period initiated by the New Perspective on Paul. In the last 50 years, scholars like E. P. Sanders and N. T. Wright have explored the diversity of Jewish beliefs, including their messianic expectations. What Bird attempts to do in this book is to argue that Jesus saw himself in Second Temple Period messianic categories. The source of the Christology of the early church was Jesus himself.

Bird's second chapter surveys messianic expectations in the Second Temple Period. This is a very broad topic since the primary literature from the period illustrates a variety of expectations. He begins by tracing the development of messianic ideas through the Hebrew Bible, then shows how these expectations were sometimes enhanced by the translations of the Hebrew Bible into Greek and Aramaic. Citing Numbers 24:7 as an example, Bird argues the translators of the LXX "created Messianism" by combining texts to create an exilic hope for national deliverance (45). In order to show that messianic expectations were high in the first century, Bird lists and briefly describes how the Qumran Community interpreted the messianic texts from the Hebrew Bible and how some of these texts were used by "messianic pretenders" both before and after Jesus. This trajectory from the Hebrew Bible through the Second Temple period provides the context for Jesus' messianic self-understanding.

Chapters three and four are subtitled: "a Role Declined?" and "a Role Redefined?" In the third chapter, Bird examines the evidence often used to argue Jesus did not claim to be the Messiah, primarily the post-resurrection faith that developed into the Christology of the Church and the "Messianic Secret." But if Jesus did not claim to be the Messiah, there is no good explanation for the sign on the cross, "King of the Jews." This seems to imply Jesus was in fact claiming something that could be understood as messianic.

Chapter four is the heart of the book. Here Bird looks at the evidence from the Gospels that Jesus' whole career was "performatively messianic" (78). By this he means Jesus did not necessarily claim to be the Messiah, but rather that he acted out the sorts of things expected by the Messiah. I expected the chapter to discuss Jesus' miracles as a sign of the new age, or the feeding of the 5000 as an enactment of the Good Shepherd image, the triumphal entry and Temple action, or even table fellowship as a messianic banquet (which Bird does mention several times in the chapter). Rather than a catalog of "performative acts," Bird first has an excellent discussion of Jesus' self-reference as the Son of Man, a saying of Jesus. He argues persuasively that the title is drawn from Dan 7:14, but also that Jesus combined that title with the "smitten shepherd" metaphor in Zechariah 13:7. Jesus as a suffering Messiah is the means by which Jesus enters into eschatological suffering on behalf of others.

Second, Bird argues Jesus is not just the Son of Man, but he is the anointed Son of Man. After has been active for some time, the imprisoned John the Baptist asks if Jesus is the "One Who Is To Come." Jesus' response is an allusion to a series of texts from Isaiah describing the messianic age as a time when the blind will receive sight, the lame will walk, the lepers are cleansed, etc. Here Jesus answers John's question "obliquely but affirmatively" (101). Bird then shows that these sorts of messianic expectations were present at Qumran (4Q521) "despite the protests of several scholars" (103). In fact, this chapter concludes with a short survey of the "I have come" sayings in the Gospels.

Third, Jesus' preaching of the Kingdom of God implies the presence of a king, and in much of the literature of the Second Temple period, the "dividing line between king and Messiah is very thin" (105). Returning to the sign on the cross, it seems obvious Jesus must have preached something that caused the Romans to treat him as a rebel, or a supposed "King of the Jews." There are many allusions to David and Solomon as well that support the claim that Jesus

thought of himself as a King/Messiah.

I suspect some readers will take issue with these three points since they are embedded in the teaching of Jesus. The Son of Man sayings are often rejected by historical Jesus scholars (especially in the more extreme practice of the Jesus Seminar). The same is true for the programmatic statement in Luke 4; critical scholars will deny Jesus could read and that Luke created the whole scene to portray Jesus as a "scholar" who reads and interprets Scripture. Bird does not get too distracted by "authenticity" questions, but he makes some use of the "criteria of authenticity" (e.g., multiple attestation, p. 109). The classic historical Jesus scholar is not going to like this since he uses the criteria to show the sayings are likely authentic. At the same time, the use of these criteria is falling out of favor with some scholars.

In the fifth chapter, Bird addresses the difficult problem of a crucified Messiah. Even Peter had a difficult time reconciling Jesus' claim to be the Messiah with Jesus' insistence he would go to Jerusalem and be crucified. When Peter makes his climactic confession in Mark 8:27-30, Jesus does not correct him by denying he is the Messiah. Rather, he provides further definition of what the Messiah's mission will include when they finally arrive in Jerusalem. Here Bird examines the anointing at Bethany, the Triumphal Entry, and the Temple action as performative messianic claims. The arrest, trial, and crucifixion are only explicable if Jesus had claimed something messianic in that last week (if not his whole career to that point). In the final part of this chapter (and anticipating his final chapter), Bird argues the earliest followers of Jesus remembered Jesus' life and teaching after his death and resurrection and began to re-tell the story of Jesus as the "anointed one" who fulfills the prophetic plan of Isaiah in his ministry (146). Jesus was never remembered as a martyr, but rather a crucified Messiah—something that simply does not appear in any strand of Second Temple period Judaism.

The last chapter of the book is a brief sketch of "messianic Christology." This chapter is not a Christology in the traditional sense, but rather a set of implications drawn from the previous study. If Jesus did indeed claim to be Israel's Messiah, then he did so "from Israel and to Israel." Jesus cannot be understood properly outside of the context of the story of the Hebrew Bible.

In conclusion, this book appeared while I was working on my dissertation on the messianic banquet, so I quickly read through the book looking for material I could use in that project. Much of the material in the first few chapters was familiar since I was working through similar issues. The book

would make an excellent college or seminary textbook in a Gospels class since it does an excellent job describing the variety of messianic expectations in the Second Temple Period. It is not overly technical, although some of the details from the Dead Sea Scrolls might be overwhelming to some readers. The footnotes provide a rich bibliography for readers who desire to dig deeper into messianic expectations in the Second Temple Period.

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Parr, Steven R. *Sunday School That Really Excels*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Kregel, 2013. 204 p., pb. $14.99.

I grew up during a time when Sunday school was very important to the life of my home church. It seemed as though we were bursting at the seams, with annual campaigns, special programs, and a bus ministry all contributing to its success. How times have changed in so many of our churches! In the churches I have served while in ministry, the Sunday school has not enjoyed the same victories. Most of the time, it seemed as though we were struggling to maintain, let alone grow. What could we do differently in order to flourish or could it be, God forbid, that it was time to invest our efforts in other ministries?

Sunday School That Really Excels was an anthology edited by Stephen Parr, Vice President of Staff Coordination and Development of the Georgia Baptist Convention. The book was written to inspire pastors and local church congregations by telling success stories in a variety of ministry settings. It should be noted, however, that this book was not really intended to share a blue print for how we could be successful in organizing and promoting Sunday school. For those best practices, you would need to read Parr's first two books in this series, *Sunday School That Really Works* and *Sunday School That Really Responds*. Still, there are some excellent principles in this latter text worthy of consideration and perhaps some sobering self-examination by those of us charged to lead Sunday schools in our churches.

As noted, *Sunday School That Really Excels* is a collection of success stories. There are at least three important caveats to note. First, many of the ideas and examples in the text focused on the adult Sunday school. Perhaps there

could be some lessons for teachers and leaders for any age. However, that did not seem to be the purpose of this book. Second, there is a decidedly strong North American flavor to the text. There should be little doubt that the American evangelical church has an historic interest in the Sunday school may not be shared by other countries and cultures. This is acknowledged in the first chapter, which contains an interview with Dr. Thom Rainer, the author of many wonderful books on church renewal. The third caveat is that while this book was published by Kregel Publications, its editor and contributors are all from leaders of the Southern Baptist Convention, its churches, publishing arm (Lifeway Christian Resources), or its seminaries. The publisher especially has a vested interest in the success of the Sunday school as it is a major producer and supplier of curricula for the denomination. None of these caveats, however, diminishes from the important lessons that can be learned from this text, but they do help us understand the mindsets of those who contributed to the publication of this book.

In *Sunday School That Really Excels* Parr illustrates some principles of excellent Sunday school programs in a variety of contexts. The local contexts differ from chapter to chapter for doing Sunday school such as rural ministry, small congregations, multicultural communities, or churches in "the middle of nowhere. Other chapters focus on Sunday schools excelling in a particular situation, such as an established ministry, a declining ministry, or a church in the midst of crisis. Two chapters described specific strategies, including Towns' Friend Day and the Southern Baptist Convention's Excel-erate training seminar. The reader regardless of denomination will find himself or herself identifying with many of these situations and thus glean some benefit from the text.

There are several key principles in this text that are important to the success of the Sunday school. First, like any other ministry, the Sunday school cannot thrive without effective leadership that must be empowered and provided with the necessary resources. Several chapters also reinforced the need for the pastor to be a strong advocate for the Sunday school and its importance to that congregation. In fact, it was considered by many to be one of the strongest determining factors in the success or failure of the Sunday school. A second intriguing proposition is that the primary purpose of Sunday school is assimilation, not education or fellowship. For many of the contributors, Sunday school was the means by which people were connected to the local church, first through evangelism and continuing on to community and service. In fact, service outside of the typical classroom setting was celebrated as people

connected with one another and then to the needs of their neighbors. As such, how the class was structured was important to its success. Besides the teacher, several churches identified different coordinators for ministry, outreach, and prayer who were part of every adult class. These leaders met regularly to pray and strategize together. For them, the Sunday school called for their commitment and heartfelt devotion, far beyond what I have witnessed in many congregations. Another important principle was that the Sunday school was thought by many to be a strategy, not a program. That distinction between form and function is important in that the purposes for the Sunday school could not be bound to a specific time on a Sunday morning. That is why two of the chapters made it a point to describe how Sunday school related to small group ministries, not as enemies but rather as complementary strategies that churches could use in the discipling process. Each church must decide for itself as to what strategies work most effectively for its congregation and ministry setting.

All in all, *Sunday Schools That Really Excels* is worth reading. I would note that after reading the entire book more than once, I am surprised that there was no contribution from Ken Hemphill, author of *Revitalizing the Sunday Morning Dinosaur—A Sunday School Growth Strategy for the 21st Century* who currently serves as national strategist for Empowering Kingdom Growth for the Southern Baptist Convention. While not as inspiring as the stories in Parr's text, Hemphill confronted many of the same issues and offered specific strategies for church leaders who believe in the importance of the Sunday school. To receive the greatest benefit from Parr's book, I would also recommend reading the first two books in this series, *Sunday School That Really Works* and *Sunday School That Really Responds*. That would help those of us who are convinced of the importance of Sunday school by providing us with an action plan to promote Sunday school as an important part of our church and ministry.

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EDITORIAL POLICY

Following the lead of the original *Grace Journal of Theology*, the present *Journal* is intended to stimulate constructive thought, awareness, devotion and practice in matters of ministry, biblical, theological and dispensational studies. This does not mean that every article must create controversy or offer some unique idea in the history of Christianity.

The *Journal* will publish articles and reviews of merit with preference of acceptance given to credentialed and experienced writers. Articles are to be well researched, documented and relevant to the objectives of the *Journal*. Publication decisions will be made based on the consensus of the editorial committee.

TYPES OF ARTICLES

- A full article will be between 4000 and 6000 words including footnotes. This type of article may cover a theological or biblical topic, including issues related to dispensationalism (but not limited to dispensational either). Articles on pastoral theology are encouraged.
- A "short note" on a text or topic will be between 1000 and 2000 words. This is a less ambitious topic than a full article and may offer a suggestion for solving a problem of biblical interpretation, a word study, or theological reflection.
- Book reviews will be about 1000 words. A good book review accurately summarized the content of the book and offers a respectful critique. Reviews should check with the editor before writing a review.

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- All articles are to be in English and submitted by email attachment. Please use Word or convert your file to .doc or .rtf format. Do not submit articles in .pdf format.
- All submissions ought to be double spaced and using Times New Roman, 12 point. For Greek and Hebrew, use a Unicode font (Times, for example). Transliteration of Greek or Hebrew is acceptable.

- Use footnotes rather than endnotes.
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- Include a cover page with author's name, article title and a brief abstract of the article (less than 250 words).

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