

ἀληθείας | "Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth" 2 Tim. 2:15

Alētheias

A Journal of Biblical Studies, Theology, and Ministry

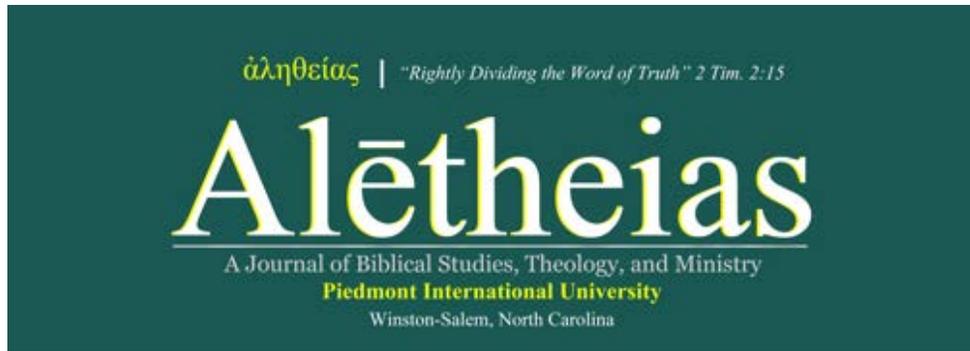
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The *Aletheias* editorial board welcomes manuscripts submitted by Piedmont faculty, graduate students, and alumni. Original research articles are also welcome from friends of Piedmont whose submissions meet the publication standards. Policies and guidelines are specified in the "*Aletheias* Instructions for Contributors." The editorial board reserves the right to reject manuscripts that do not meet the *Aletheias* standards.

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EDITORIAL: UNLEASHING FAITH

Barkev S. Trachian, Ph.D.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The theme for this academic year at Piedmont International University is “Unleashing Faith.” In announcing this powerful challenge in August 2016, Dr. Charles Petitt, our president, encouraged the University family to seek God’s vision, God’s direction, and God’s power in 2016-2017. As a driving force of our efforts in the Lord’s work and a mandate to impact the world for Christ, this impassioned commitment to the divine call energizes us in sharing the light of the magnificence of Jesus Christ in a dark world. To promote the theme of PIU for this year in theological research circles, the editors of *Aletheias* have chosen for this issue the theme “Unleashing Faith.”

II. TWO PERSPECTIVES ON UNLEASHING FAITH

Faith manifests itself on dual perspectives in the life of a believer: as confessional belief and as experiential commitment. Both are essential for spiritual victory. Standing firm on the authority of God’s infallible Word, a child of God can confess, “I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day” (2 Tim. 1:12). Also responding to God’s voice in personal encounters with Him through prayer and study of God’s Word, a believer receives the divine call and supernatural enablement to “unleash faith.” A believer can accomplish God’s will because “Faithful is He that calleth you, who also will do it” (I Thes. 5:24). Unleashing faith is wholly based on the faithfulness of God in the life of a Christian whose will is consecrated to God.

It is very fitting that these two perspectives of “unleashing faith,” the confessional and the experiential, are clearly emphasized at Piedmont International University. The founder of Piedmont, Dr. Charles Stevens, “during the course of his long years of ministry... developed an unshakeable, unequivocal confidence that the Bible was the eternal Word of God..., and he developed strong convictions, many of which came through long periods of intense and

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sometimes painful struggles.”¹ Dr. Stevens often spoke and wrote about the following four theological essentials for training of students at Piedmont Bible College: Exegesis: Interpreting the Bible, Evangelism: Sharing the Gospel, Ecclesiology: Building the Local Church, and Eschatology: Expecting the Lord’s Return.² These four emphases taught by the founder of PIU are still the thrust of the educational process at the University.

We live in a globalized society. Cultural interaction is no longer a periodic, rare occurrence requiring long-range planning and major strategizing. International activities occur within our geographical and social environment regularly. Modern technology has made the globe our neighborhood. What is the role of faith in a world of reduced social, ethnic, and cultural restraints? How can we share the gospel with a society in which the cultural forces, technological advances, and the ever-present media are absorbed in producing men and women in their own image.³ Unleashing faith is necessary to meet this pressing challenge.

Confessional Beliefs

God has always protected His Word. When some men who came from Judea taught that circumcision was necessary for salvation; the apostles and the elders of the church came together and wrote letters correcting the soteriological error (Acts 15). Following the New Testament era the Apostles’ Creed emphasized the basic doctrines underscoring the centrality of Christology. The Creed emphasized Christ’s deity, His virgin birth, His substitutionary atonement, His bodily resurrection, and His return.⁴ This Creed was further strengthened by the Nicene Creed, which asserted the complete deity of Christ.⁵

During the Protestant Reformation in the 16th century, Martin Luther declared his commitment to the core doctrines of faith as follows: the authority of Scripture, the virgin birth, the deity of Christ, the substitutionary atonement, the bodily resurrection, and the return of

¹ William Thompson, *In All Things... The Life and Ministry of Charles H. Stevens* (Greenville, South Carolina: Truth Publishers, 2011), 319-320.

² Charles H. Stevens. “The Hallmark of Piedmont.” *Daybreak*, November-December, 1967, 2-3.

³ Michael McDuffes, “Precious Living Truths,” in John Koessler, ed., *Foundational Faith* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2003), p. 206.

⁴ Thomas H.L. Cornman, “Laying the Foundation,” in John Koessler, ed., *Foundational Faith* (Chicago: Moody Press, 2006), 22-26.

⁵ Phillip Schaff, ed. *The Creeds of Christendom*, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983) 27-29.

Christ.⁶ The key issue for the leaders of the Reformation was determining the fact that the Bible was the foundation and authority, not the church. The Holy Spirit provides the guidance for understanding the biblical text.

The five essentials declared at the Niagara Bible Conference in 1897 are considered by many conservative theologians as core beliefs: the authority of the Scripture, the deity of Christ, the virgin birth, the substitutionary atonement, the bodily resurrection and physical return of Christ.⁷ This list has been revised multiple times since the 1897 conference while retaining its core tenets. George Dollar lists the following as a clearer presentation of the Niagara statement: The inspiration of the Bible, the depravity of man, redemption through Christ's blood, the true church made up of all believers, and the coming of the Lord to set up His Kingdom.⁸ A believer's faith is firmly anchored in the everlasting Word of God. "The grass withereth, the flower fadeth; but the Word of God shall stand forever" (Isa. 40:8). Confessional beliefs are an essential aspect of faith. We need to unleash our faith.

Experiential Commitment

Confessional faith must find expression in action. Obedience is a necessary consequence of belief. "Faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone" (James 2:17). Paul commends the Colossian believers for their faith. This commendation was the direct result of Colossian believers' vibrant testimonies illustrating their faith in action, thus unleashing their faith. The Word of God presents three aspects of faith as experiential commitment in Hebrews chapters 10 and 11: the declaration of faith (10:38-39), the description of faith (11:1), and the demonstration of faith (11:2-40).

The Declaration of Faith (10:38-39)

On the dismal eve of Israel's captivity, God reminded the Prophet Habakkuk; "The just shall live by his faith" (Hab. 2:4). This truth about the importance of "unleashing faith" is emphasized three times in the New Testament: Romans 1:16, 17; Galatians 3:10, 11; and Hebrews 10:38, 39. In Romans Paul applies this concept to salvation, and in Galatians he uses it in reference to

⁶ Paul Althaus, *The Theology of Martin Luther* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966) 202.

⁷ Thomas H.L. Cornman, *Ibid*, 41.

⁸ George Dollar, *A History of Fundamentalism* (Greenville, SC.: Bob Jones University Press, 1993), 72-73.

justification. The reference in Hebrews deals with the believer's walk. The emphasis in Hebrews 10:38-39 is on faith in the context of boldness of testimony while a believer waits for the return of Christ. This "wait" requires patience. The reward of boldness with patience is receiving the promise of the coming of the Lord. Luther taught his students in Wittenberg when he was going through extreme ecclesiological pressure that a believer who relies on Christ through faith, is "carried on the shoulders of Christ."⁹ "Faith gives substance to the unseen realities."¹⁰ This divine protection is a blessing that comes through faith. The directive in 10:38-39 is followed by heroic examples of Old Testament saints who comprise the great hall of fame in Chapter Eleven.¹¹

The Description of Faith (11:1)

The author of Hebrews describes faith as "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1). The word "substance" used in the KJV is replaced by the term "gives substance" in the NEB. According to Kent Hughes, both are objective uses of the concept. Hughes adds that many other translations, including RSV, ASV, and the NASB, use the subjective translation as "assurance" or "the guarantee." Hughes further observes, "Actually, the objective and subjective...are not at odds because genuine faith does bring an assurance of what we hope for that is solid and substantive."¹² A believer who exercises faith has both a future certitude and a present, visual evidence. William Lane comments, "Faith celebrates now the reality of the future blessings which make up the objective content of Christian hope."¹³

The second half of verse 1 describes the certitude of what we do not see. This assurance is based on the evidence that faith provides. Faith makes the future available in the present view. The eyes of faith enable a believer to see God's marvelous spiritual order. Are you living in future certitude by faith? The heroes of faith could go through amazing experiences because they could see the future.

⁹ Raymond Brown, *The Message of Hebrews* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1982) 195.

¹⁰ John Phillips, *Exploring Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1988) 148.

¹¹ R. Kent Hughes, *Hebrews Vol. II* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 1993) 61.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ William Lane, *Hebrews: A Call to Commitment* (Peabody, MA; Hendrickson, 1988) 149.

The Demonstration of Faith (11:2-40)

Having declared the importance of faith and described it, the writer of Hebrews demonstrates the unleashing of faith in Hebrews 11:2-40. First, he refers to the creation as revealed to us in the Word of God and understood by faith (11:2). Abel unleashed faith by offering an acceptable sacrifice (11:4). Enoch preached about the judgment of the Lord (11:5). Noah took God at His Word and built an Ark (11:7). Abraham left his native country and went where God directed him. His faith in God led him to place his son Isaac on the altar of sacrifice (11:8-10). These examples and many others listed in the “honor roll of faith” illustrate the power that the Lord provides for unleashing faith. “Faith gives to all the invisible truths of revelation a real sustenance in our minds and enables us to act in regard to them as if they were present.”¹⁴ These heroic saints believed God, obeyed His Word, and unleashed their faith, looking forward to the Lord’s coming in fulfillment of His promise. We hear their appeal! Can we on this side of the resurrection do any less? Hebrews 11:40 reminds us that “God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.” According to the Word of God, “The elders obtained a good report” by unleashing faith (11:2). The admonition to us is to “unleash faith” for the glory of God.

III. IN THIS ISSUE

The contributors to this issue of *Aletheias* represent various segments of the Temple Baptist Seminary family, including faculty, administration, board of directors, and students. The articles analyze the theme of “unleashing faith” in a panoramic periscope of biblical and theological concepts as well as in personal commitment and global ministry. The goal of this effort is to inform and to challenge the readers to a deeper understanding of faith and to a stronger commitment to God’s service.

Our president, Charles Petitt, opens this issue with an insightful sermon on the one thing without which we cannot please God: faith.

Larry Tyler’s article on “An Analysis of Abraham’s Faith in Genesis 15:6 and its use by Paul and James in the New Testament” illustrates how Abraham serves as a paradigm of the believer and his faith as a paradigm of Christian faith. What concepts does the author of Hebrews use to

¹⁴ Joseph Augustus Seiss, *Lectures on Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book Neuse, 1954), 318.

demonstrate the unleashing of faith? Through a scholarly analysis of numerous monographs, essays, and commentaries, Mel Winstead brings to our attention the doctrinal depth and the hortatory nature of this amazing doctrine. Cameron Cloud uses Habakkuk's experience to illustrate the biblical concept of theodicy. The article shows how the assured believer can be empowered to unleash his/her faith to a questioning world.

Does unleashing faith extend into the social world of our current culture? In an insightful analysis of the opportunities before the church today, Tim White shows that while the commission of the church is not pursuing social justice, a biblical application of social justice can be an effective means to gaining an opportunity to fulfill the Great Commission. In an encouraging sermon, Rev. Jeff Clawson assures us from Acts 17 that when faced with his limits, a believer can experience the limitlessness of God.

How did the non-Israelites come to a personal relationship with the Lord without having to come to Jerusalem? Howard Owens illustrates the evangelistic impact of Israelites proclaiming the name of the Lord in pagan cultures. The conclusion is that Gentiles heard of the Lord through faithful messengers among them. Pastor Eric McConnell invites us to enter into the world of Psalm 3 to arm ourselves with the confidence that no obstacle is insurmountable when unleashed faith is evident in a believer's life. The blessing of unleashing faith through counseling is illustrated by Thomas Gentry. He reminds the readers that based on the biblical message, the work of the ministry is the responsibility of every believer as he or she unleashes faith. In a convicting article Mark Scott contrasts the lack of groups of men with the faith of three women who believed in YHWH illustrated in the ministry of Elisha. This issue of *Aletheias* closes with a moving narration by Sychellus Wabomba Njibwakale of a rebellion against a church in Kenya by a group of young people and the use of the instrument of unleashing faith by the church leaders in guiding these young people back to the church fellowship. Thank you for reading this issue of *Aletheias*.

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UNLEASH FAITH

Charles Petitt, D.D.*

I. FAITH AND RISK

Have you ever tried or wanted to try skydiving? It sounds like an exciting adventure but can be an expensive form of recreation. In addition to airplane rentals and professional fees, equipment can include everything from goggles, to jumpsuits, to cameras. But even those who have never attempted parachuting nor have any intention of seeking this kind of an adventure, agree that there is one piece of skydiving equipment that is in a category all by itself. The parachute!

Other equipment may enhance the skydiving experience, but forgetting to strap on your GoPro or failing to buy an expensive jumpsuit won't kill you. However, if you forget your parachute, it is impossible to have a great skydiving experience. According to a Fox News story from June 8, 2008, "A 29-year-old man leaped out of a plane at 10,000 feet with a camera but no parachute ... His body was found next to a house with a damaged roof, police said. ... [This man], who was observing on the flight, followed an instructor, a student and a videographer out the door, wearing no skydiving gear, officials said."¹

Many things may enhance the skydiving experience, but this poor guy had forgotten the one thing in a category all by itself, the one thing without which it is impossible to have a successful skydiving experience. He had forgotten his parachute.

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¹ Associated Press, "Man on Skydiving Trip Dies After Jumping Without Parachute," Fox News, June 8, 2008, accessed February 26, 2017, <http://www.foxnews.com/story/2008/06/08/man-on-skydiving-trip-dies-after-jumping-without-parachute.html>.

There are many things in the Bible that can enhance the Christian experience and a believer's relationship with God, but one thing is in a category all by itself. It is the only thing in the entire Bible about which the Scriptures say, without this, it is impossible to please God. Hebrews 11:6 says, "without faith it is impossible to please him."

But this Hebrews 11 kind of faith is likely very different from what usually comes to mind when someone hears the word "faith." In American culture faith is often equated with religion. A person of faith is a religious person. A faith-based initiative is something conducted under the auspices of a church or religious group. Even in our churches faith is often limited to trusting God, believing in Jesus, and obeying the Scriptures. While the kind of faith discussed in Hebrews eleven is no less than those three, it is certainly more. Trusting God, believing in Jesus, and obeying the Bible are foundational. After all, Romans 10:17 says that "faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God," and the Bible repeatedly teaches that faith in Christ is necessary for salvation.

However, the Hebrews 11 kind of faith that is integral to pleasing God moves the believer from passive to active. There is a very important conjunction in verse 6, "He that cometh to God must believe that he is, **and** that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him."

Someone can lie in bed and believe that God is. He wouldn't need to raise his head from the pillow to have a deep conviction that God is real and Jesus Christ is exactly who He claimed to be. A Christian can sit on a church pew and believe that the Bible is God's inspired Word. Those are not unimportant, but they are before-the-conjunction aspects of the Hebrews 11 kind of faith.

Contrast that with the person who has a pleasing-God-kind-of-faith. This person gets out of bed and off the pew and goes out and does something with faith that requires diligently seeking God. James clearly teaches that faith that is not dead does stuff. What do these after-the-conjunction, diligent seekers look like? The rest of the chapter answers that question by giving example after example of the heroes and heroines of faith from the Old Testament.

They were all people of action who stepped out by faith to accomplish something for God. None of them were noted for being religious or sitting passively by and just mentally believing things in their hearts. Not only were they people of action, but usually their actions were risky. Risk-taking is a common denominator among most of the people mentioned in the chapter.

Consider Noah who is listed in the very next verse following the statement about diligent seekers. It had to be risky for Noah to spend such a significant portion of his life building a huge ship many miles from the ocean. What if it didn't rain? That ark would have become a huge monument to his stupidity, and he would have wasted one hundred and twenty years of his life.

Abraham is listed next, and it had to be extremely risky for him to leave his extended family and place of security to head out for a promised land that he had never seen. It was also risky for him to take his son of promise and prepare to offer him as a sacrifice.

Consider others mentioned in the chapter. How risky was it for Moses to take on Pharaoh and the Egyptian military, or Rahab to aid and to abet Israeli spies, or Gideon taking on an army of thousands with only three hundred soldiers? This willingness to take risks is why they needed

faith. The great missionary to China, Hudson Taylor, once said, “Without risk there is no need for faith.”²

David is also mentioned in the text, and he may have been the biggest risk taker of all because he had no clear command from God to take on Goliath. You will not find a single verse in the Bible where God says, “David, thou shalt challenge this blasphemous giant with thy sling.” David stepped out by faith simply because he saw a cause worthy of the risk. And make no mistake. The risk was very real.

Not only was there no command from God ordering David to fight this giant, but there was no promise of protection either. David was confident that God would be with him, but there is no record of a promise from God that he would survive the fight. Not everyone who steps out by faith enjoys immediate protection, and the chapter includes those who stepped out by faith and were injured or even killed.

It had to be risky for a teenage boy to take on a giant almost twice his size, likely trained and experienced in warfare, and armed to the teeth. This willingness to step out and take a risk is what makes God smile. David’s faith was a stark contrast to King Saul’s and the faith of all the Israelite soldiers who were shaking in their armor. They may have had before-the-conjunction-faith. They likely believed that God existed, but that was the extent of their faith. I can imagine them sitting down and saying, “We believe in God. We believe in the Scriptures. But that giant is really big!”

² Hudson Taylor quoted in AJ Gibson, "Hudson Taylor on Extreme Risk," To Every Tribe, August 18, 2010, accessed February 26, 2017, <http://www.toeverytribe.org/2010/08/hudson-taylor-on-extreme-risk/>.

David fights the status quo of passive faith. He stands up and says, “Is there not a cause?” “Is our great God and His great name not worthy of some risk?”³ And God smiled and decided to include him in the Hebrews 11 list of people who made Him glad. God is pleased when one of His children is willing step out by faith and take risky steps for Him and His glory. You can almost hear God say about David, “I like that boy.”

This willingness to trust enough to take a risk seems to make earthly fathers happy as well. I remember when my daughters were young and encouraging them to jump from a raised platform into Dad’s waiting hands. The risk in jumping those few inches was very small, but there was a hint of danger. Dad was happy when his children trusted him enough to take the risk and make the leap. That’s the kind of faith that makes God happy as well.

II. FAITH AND VISION

There is a second reason to have a Hebrews 11 kind of faith. Not only does it touch God’s emotions resulting in His happiness, it also touches His will resulting in incredible action. In response to their faith, the chapter rehearses several amazing things God empowered people of faith to do. Among these were the ability to understand the unfathomable (v.3), survive the unthinkable (v. 7), do the impossible (v. 12), and see the invisible (v. 27).

Seeing the invisible is another common denominator in this amazing chapter. Verse one says “faith is the evidence of things not seen.” Do not misunderstand this. The passage is not saying that these are things that cannot be seen, but only that they are not normally seen, or seen by others, or seen through natural eyes. The reality is that the people of faith saw things very

³ I Sam. 17:29

clearly, and their risky steps for God were evidence that they had seen something others had not yet seen.

The irony is that a chapter which begins with a verse that includes the words “not seen” is a chapter full of people seeing things. The words see, looked, seen, etc. are woven throughout the chapter. Noah could see a future flood that other had not seen yet (v. 7), Abraham saw a future city (v. 10), the patriarchs saw the future fulfillment of promises (v. 13), etc. God gave them a vision of the future so that they had eyes of faith to see down the road what others could not see. Another example is Joseph, who could see an exodus that was still hundreds of years in the future (v. 22).

We see in verse 1 that faith enables the child of God to treat the invisible as if he/she could see it (evidence of things not seen), and to treat the future as if it is now (assurance of things hoped for). Those who are still hoping for something know that it hasn't happened yet and that it is still in the future, like the young couple eagerly planning their upcoming wedding or a college senior planning for graduation. Their current actions demonstrate that they are anticipating a future event and are taking steps toward it right now.

Abraham stepped out believing he would reach a promised land. Noah began building an ark so that he would be ready when the flood came, but the flood was still one hundred and twenty years out when he wrote out the plan, cut down the first gopher tree, and started milling the first beam. The event was way out there in the distant future, but Noah was already taking steps. His massive construction project was powerful evidence that he could see what others could not, and that he was dealing with the future well in advance. Faith enables the believer to treat the future as if it's now, and to treat the invisible as if he/she could see it.

All of this begs some important questions that should be asked of each believer. What will you see? What outreach to the lost, or ministry to the church, or worthwhile cause, or closer walk with God, or meaningful sacrifice, or life direction does God want from you? What dream or vision of the future will God give you to inspire you to take risky steps of faith for Him and His glory? These are important questions, because no one will ever do the impossible until he sees the invisible.

Unfortunately, people with secular dreams often seem to understand and harness the power of vision better than God's people do. There are endless examples like John F. Kennedy's unbelievable 1961 vision to put a man on the moon by the end of that decade. Two years after his bold speech proclaiming this incredible vision, President Kennedy was dead, but his dream was alive and well and continued to inspire not only the space agency but an entire nation. Six months before the decade ended, on July 20, 1969, the vision was realized as Neil Armstrong became the first man to step foot on the moon.

Look back in history or even around us today at those men and women who are considered outstanding in their fields, and there is usually one quality they possess that sets them apart from others. They are the people with a dream. Look at the inventors, the explorers, and others who have accomplished great things. What is the common denominator? At some point in time they were captured and captivated by a dream which became the driving force in their lives so that they had the ability to accomplish goals that seemed just out of the reach of others who were just as talented. Having a vision meant they were able to see in their mind's eye the way they wanted something to be.

On August 28, 1963, Martin Luther King, Jr. stood in Washington, DC and gave his “I Have a Dream” speech. He said, “I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. I have a dream today. I have a dream that one day... little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers. I have a dream today.”⁴ Only five years later, on April 4, 1968, Martin Luther King, Jr. was killed, but his dream was alive and well and continues to positively impact civil rights across America and beyond.

Now, if visionary people can accomplish these kinds of secular things by pursuing their dreams, how much more should God’s people be able to accomplish God’s work for God’s glory through faith in the God of the impossible! This truth again begs some important questions that should be asked to every serious believer. What will you see? What is your dream? Where will the eyes of faith lead you? What is your vision of where God might want you to be next year, or five years, or twenty years down the road?

III. FAITH AND PLANNING

A traveler is more likely to reach a destination if he or she has one. And a traveler with a destination is more likely to reach it by following a map or GPS directions than by just wandering aimlessly. Likewise, those who have accomplished their visions all share the following formula. After seeing in their mind’s eye the way they wanted something to be, they

⁴ University of Groningen, "Martin Luther King's I Have a Dream Speech August 28 1963," American History: From Revolution to Reconstruction and Beyond, last modified ca. 1994, accessed February 26, 2017, <http://www.let.rug.nl/usa/documents/1951-/martin-luther-kings-i-have-a-dream-speech-august-28-1963.php>.

then did the really hard work of carefully thinking through the major incremental goals, mapping out the steps, and writing out the plan.

In his book, *What They Don't Teach You in the Harvard Business School*, Mark McCormack tells about a study conducted on students in the 1979 Harvard MBA program. In that year, the students were asked, "Have you set clear, written goals for your future and made plans to accomplish them?" Only three percent of the graduates had written goals and plans; thirteen percent had goals, but they were not in writing; and eighty-four percent had no specific goals at all. Ten years later the members of the class were interviewed again, and the findings were astonishing. The thirteen percent of the class who had goals were earning, on average, twice as much as the eighty-four percent who had no goals at all. And what about the three percent who had clear, written goals? They were earning, on average, ten times as much as the other ninety-seven percent combined!

Despite many such success stories for planners, most people do not have clear, measurable, time-bounded goals toward which that they are working. And even if they do have clear goals, they are unlikely to have committed them to paper in a written plan. The biggest difference between vision and mere fantasy is a plan.

John F. Kennedy's vision to put a man on the moon would have forever remained a fantasy apart from intricate planning on NASA's part. And the Bible is rife with stories of visionaries who made plans. Joshua's plans for conquering the Promised Land have been studied in military schools. Nehemiah had a vision of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, and he made careful plans that included doing thorough assessment, securing adequate resources, setting up a

leadership structure, delegating assignments, etc. Noah knew what anyone who has ever built anything from a doghouse to a spaceship knows. It doesn't happen without a plan.

Solomon was granted wisdom from God which allowed him to make amazing plans for national infrastructure and even the building of an amazing temple. The apostle Paul never used his energies haphazardly, but chose to focus on influential cities like Ephesus and had a plan to invest in training those with high influence potential. Jesus not only had a clear plan for his life, death, resurrection and future kingdom, but he also shared several parables about planning. Examples would include the wise and foolish builders, a king planning for battle, and a builder counting the costs.

Like a traveler hoping to reach a distant destination without a map or a GPS, people who have dreams without written goals and plans are unlikely to accomplish much. They can count on being at the same place next year that they are today. Again, the biggest difference between vision and mere fantasy is a plan.

IV. FAITH AND ACTION

Why is this Hebrews 11 kind of faith so rare? Likely because it stands in direct contrast to our natural inclination for security and the tendency to live in the past instead of the future. Most people are normally risk averse and tend to prefer clinging to what they do not want to lose instead of going for what they could gain.

I once illustrated this point during a chapel service at Piedmont International University by auctioning off a twenty-dollar bill and selling it for sixty-seven dollars to willing bidders! Before the auction began the audience was told that the twenty would be sold to the highest bidder. If the highest bidder bid only three dollars, then that person would get a twenty for only

three dollars. Three rules were explained to the audience. 1) The bidding would begin at one dollar and would increase by one dollar increments. 2) The bidders would have to have the money with them if they wanted to bid. 3) The second highest bidder would have to pay whatever he/she bid but would get nothing.

They were told that if the auction ended at three dollars, the high bidder would pay three dollars and would get a twenty, but the person who had bid two dollars would have to pay two dollars and would get nothing. The audience was also warned, “Do not get into this auction today unless you are absolutely willing to be the second highest bidder, because someone in this room is going to end up being the second highest bidder and you are not going to be happy.”

The auction started at one dollar, and there were lots of hands in the air. Bids came in quickly and soon it was up to ten dollars, but lots of people were now dropping out. No one wanted to be the second highest bidder. Before long the high bid was up to nineteen dollars with only two guys left. The one who had bid eighteen dollars was now thinking, “Uh-oh, I should have figured this out a little sooner. If I stop now I’m going to have to pay eighteen dollars and will get absolutely nothing.”

He then concluded that it would be better to break even than lose eighteen dollars, so he bid twenty! The guy who had bid nineteen was now thinking, “Uh-oh, I should have figured this out a little sooner. If I stop now I’m going to have to pay nineteen dollars and will get absolutely nothing.” He then concluded that it would be better to lose one dollar than lose nineteen dollars, so he bid twenty-one. Those two continued to bid back and forth until they were at thirty-three and thirty-four dollars.

That's when the guy who had bid thirty-three dollars ran out of money. He later told me that he would have likely bid to a hundred dollars if he had had the money. At the end of the auction one young man handed me thirty-four dollars and I gave him a twenty. The other handed me thirty-three dollars and got nothing. (For the record, the guilt did get to me and eventually I gave their money back.)

Here is the point of the auction illustration that I shared that day. "Up until this auction reached twenty dollars, you were bidding in hopes of making a profit. You were trying to gain something. But, after the bidding passed twenty dollars, you were no longer bidding to try to gain something but to try to avoid losing so much. Too many of you are going to go through life like that ... always working hard to avoid losing instead of seeking what God would have you gain ... always clinging to what used to be instead of what can be ... always focusing too much on where we were instead of where we need to go."

This approach might seem easier, less risky, and not so messy, just like the rearview mirror is usually a lot cleaner than the car windshield. But, if you try to drive by staring only at that clean rearview mirror and avoid looking through that messy windshield, you are going to wreck. It is good occasionally to glance at the mirror to see what is behind you, but if you want to successfully go forward, you must look at where you are trying to go more than where you have been. Yes, it may be messier, but you have to look forward to go forward.

That is what the Hebrews 11 kind of faith is all about. It has a lot to do with seeing the future, developing a vision, setting incremental goals, and doing the really hard work of writing out a plan. Faith then takes those first risky steps forward with confidence in God while being completely yielded to His will.

V. FAITH AND JESUS

Does this kind of faith always lead to earthly success and victory? Is the vision always accomplished? Does the dream always come true? After all, the chapter includes numerous stories of great outcomes. Enoch was translated. Noah completed the ark. Abraham reached the promised land. Moses led the Israelites out of bondage. David killed Goliath. Gideon defeated the Midianites.

But the chapter also tells of those who were tortured, imprisoned, and even killed in horrible ways. No one had a dream to one day be stoned to death or sawn in half, but that is what happened to some who took risky steps for God. And if they could talk to us right now they would say that they are now glad it happened. Yes, the pain was real and the experience was horrifying, but just one second on the other side in the presence of a happy, smiling God made that experience seem like nothing compared to an eternity with the well-pleased Lord of Lords.

Romans 8 uses the analogy of a woman in labor to illustrate this contrast between present suffering and future glory. As a father, I witnessed this illustration first hand by being a coach in the delivery room when my younger daughter was born. I felt helpless as my dear wife experienced growing discomfort and desperately wished I could do something to help as I saw her face grimace in pain and felt her hand clutching mine so tightly. Unfortunately, the waves of pain only became more frequent and grew even more intense.

Then the baby was born. Tiffany was wrapped in a blanket, and I laid her down on her mother's chest. Mom's face was now totally different. Gone were the expressions of pain and in their place was sheer radiance. Her face was now like the face of an angel, full of joy and love and beauty as she beheld the face of her newborn baby. Yes, the pain from a few minutes ago

was very real, but that was nothing compared to this incredible new life so full of wonder and joy.

That is a powerful picture of the person of faith who steps out for God but experiences disappointment, failure, pain, or even death. Just one second on the other side and the words “well done!” from the lips of our Lord will make all of that seem like nothing compared to eternity with Jesus Christ.

Speaking of Jesus Christ, Hebrews 11 flows into Hebrews 12 which continues the section on faith. “Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.”

The cross was not the ultimate goal of our Lord Jesus. The ultimate goal was the joy He would experience when it was all over and He was seated at the right hand of the throne of God. The cross was something He had to endure en route. Humans cannot understand the extent of the horrors that Jesus endured at Calvary. We cannot fathom what it was like for the Creator to be killed by the created. We may be able to describe the terrors of flogging and crucifixion, but a breach in the godhead is unfathomable by mere mortals. For all eternity there had been a dance of love between the Father and the Son. Jesus said as much in John 10:30, “My Father and I are one.”

Yet, there on Calvary's cross the Father turned away as the sins of the world were poured out on the Son, and Jesus cried out, "My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me?"⁵ For the first and only time in all eternity, the godhead was ripped apart as Jesus paid the penalty for our sins. Then He died and was buried, and for three days the universe seemed to hold its breath.

Then a glorious resurrection brought Jesus back from the dead, and forty days later He ascended back to Heaven having accomplished His redeeming purpose and paving the way for Holy God and sinful man to be reconciled. The universe has never seen a reunion that remotely compares to the reunion when the Father welcomed home His Son.

That was the dream. That was the vision. The cross was just the necessary price He had to pay to get there. "Who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."⁶

This all brings us to the place where the rubber meets the road in your life. What will you see? Where will the eyes of faith lead you? What vision will God give you that will inspire you to write out a plan and take risky steps for God and His glory? How will you unleash faith to please Almighty God?

⁵ Mk. 15:34

⁶ Heb. 12:2

AN ANALYSIS OF ABRAHAM'S FAITH IN GENESIS 15:6 AND ITS USE BY PAUL AND JAMES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Larry A. Tyler, Ph.D.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Gen. 15:6 is referred to as an analogy by some of the writers of the New Testament. They consider Abraham's faith as an appropriate paradigm for their readers. These writers see in the New Testament the consummation of the realities enunciated in Gen. 15:6. Paul cites this verse in his letter to the Romans and in his letter to the Galatians. James also quotes it in his epistle. Therefore, it is significant to note this passage because both Paul and James relied heavily upon it to declare their messages.

Underlying the Word of God, which is the object of a believer's faith, is a right relationship with God. However, before we can have a right relationship with God, we must be declared righteous by God. In the New Testament, God has revealed His plan to reconcile sinful humanity to Himself by means of the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Belief in God's Word is essential then, as the means by which God's grace might be offered to mankind. In the Old Testament God has provided examples of those who believed God's Word. Abraham is one of those examples. It was his faith in God's Word that is highlighted. He had a right relationship with God due his unshakable faith. This study aims to analyze Abraham's faith, and God declaring him righteous in Gen. 15:6. Abraham's faith will first be examined in its Old Testament context, and then an examination will follow to see how the New Testament writers used it as an example to emulate.

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II. GRAMMATICAL, SYNTACTICAL, SEMANTICAL, AND LITERARY ANALYSIS OF GENESIS 15:6

Literary critical discussions of Gen. 15 have traditionally found elements of both *J* and *E*. “Arguments in favor of two sources here include the twin self-introduction of God in vv. 1, 7, and the double response by Abram vv. 2–3, 8.”¹ These older critics argue that the contrast between Abram’s faith in verse 6 and his doubt in verse 8 is seen to support two sources.

More recent scholarship has moved away from the *JEDP* hypothesis. John Sailhamer maintains, “The picture of the narratives of Genesis . . . is that of a carefully wrought account of Israel’s early history fashioned from the narratives and genealogical tables of Israel’s own ancestral archives.”² Gordon Wenham argues that the supposed evidence for separate sources can be explained better in terms of Hebrew literary conventions.³ Kenneth Mathews argues for the literary independence of Genesis 15 and writes that the “structural and thematic features, rather than the splicing of two literary sources, best explain the parallels and the (apparent) disjunctures between the two halves.”⁴

Gen. 15:6 begins with the verbal clause “And he believed in the Lord” (וַיִּשְׁמַע אַבְרָם בְּיְהוָה). The narrator’s use of the verb וַיִּשְׁמַע (W+Qatal+X) at this point in the narrative suggests that it functions as background information for the covenant God was about to enter with Abram mentioned later in chapter 15. The narrator was “setting the record straight: Abraham had

¹ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, Vol. 1, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Waco: Word Books, Publisher, 1987), 326.

² John H. Sailhamer, “Genesis” in *Genesis-Numbers*, Vol. 2, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* ed. Frank E. Gaebelain (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990), 5.

³ Wenham, 326.

⁴ Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, vol. 1B, *New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2005), 159–60.

believed in Yahweh and had been accounted righteous. . . . Only after he had been counted righteous through his faith could Abraham enter into God’s covenant.”⁵ This conclusion is supported by the Hebrew grammar. The *wāw consecutive* represents an action as the direct, or at least temporal, consequence of a preceding action.⁶ “The point appears to be, therefore, that Abraham’s trusting response to God’s promise in 15:4-5 is one notable example of the response to God that consistently characterized his life, evident already in Gen. 12:1-4; 13:14-17.”⁷

The meaning of the Hebrew verb *אָמַן* conveys the idea of “standing firm.”⁸ The following preposition “in” (*בְּ*) indicates the person in whom the subject is standing firm, namely the Lord. It is necessary to go back to Gen. 15:3 to find the antecedent to the subject “he.” Doing this, one finds that Abram is the antecedent of the subject and the Lord is the person in whom Abram is standing firm. In this context, the clause means essentially that Abram was standing firm in the Lord.

The context of the entire chapter, Genesis 15, reinforces this idea. In verse one “the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward.” What was Abram afraid of, and what reward did God have in mind? It becomes apparent in Gen. 15:2 that Abram had become anxious about the unfulfilled promise of an heir. In Gen. 12:2a God had promised Abram, “I will make you a great nation.” Gen. 12:7 states, “Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, ‘To your descendants I will give this land.’”

⁵ Sailhamer, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, 129.

⁶ A. E. Cowley, *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910), 133n.

⁷ Willem A. VanGemeren, *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis*, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), 432.

⁸ Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, Charles A. Briggs, *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1999, 1906), 53.

Abram's wife, Sarai, had been obviously childless for many years. Therefore, Abram feared the final outcome of God's promise.

Abram raised questions in verses two, three, and eight, in chapter 15 that appear to reinforce the idea that such a fear lay behind God's words of comfort. "Abram said, 'Lord God, what will You give me, seeing I go childless'" (15:2)? Then he said to God, "Look, You have given me no offspring." Finally in response to God's reassurance (15:5) that Abram's descendants would inherit the Land of Promise he says, "Lord, God, how shall I know that I will inherit it" (15:8)? "Not only do his questions betray the fear that lay within him, but also the Lord's continued assurances point in the same direction. . . . When Abram speaks he gives expression to questions that appear to reveal doubt. On the other hand, when, in the narratives, he is silent, his actions always exhibit faith."⁹

Some believe the clause "And he believed in the Lord" does not primarily provide insight into the internal response of Abram. Instead the verb translated "he believed" has a "delocutive function." It describes a circumstance in which he openly declared his "Amen" to the promise of God.¹⁰ According to this view, context and grammatical construction of the Old Testament suggest occasions in which a particular phrase may refer to a spoken formula or stock phrase that has been verbalized.¹¹ Consequently the narrative proceeds in a straightforward manner; God promises, Abram declares his "Amen," and the Lord pronounces him righteous. Therefore, Gen.

⁹ Sailhamer, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 128-29.

¹⁰ Meredith G. Kline, "Abram's Amen" *The Westminster Theological Journal* 31 (Nov. 1968), 1-11, referenced in O. Palmer Robertson, "New Covenant Expositions of an Old Covenant Text" *The Westminster Theological Journal* vol. 42 (Spr. 1980), 263.

¹¹ Delbert R. Hillers, "Delocutive Verbs in Biblical Hebrew" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 86 (1967), 320-24, referenced in O. Palmer Robertson, "New Covenant Expositions of an Old Covenant Text" Vol. 42 (Spr. 1980), 263.

15:6 would not appear as an interruption of the narrative which represented the theological analysis of the narrator.¹²

The ending clause of Gen. 15:6, “He reckoned it to him for righteousness” (וַיַּשְׁקֶה לֵאמֹר בְּרִשְׁוֹתָאֵלֹהִים) introduces the first time the term “reckoned” (בַּשָּׂה) appears in scripture. The verb with an impersonal direct object “righteousness” means “charge to” one’s account.¹³ In this construction “reckoned” is used to assign a specific moral or spiritual value to Abram’s actions with which Yahweh is highly pleased. “The construction of the clause and the subsequent usage of the term with the pentateuch justifies a rather specific understanding in the sense of ‘account to Abram a righteousness that does not inherently belong to him.’”¹⁴

Critics of this view, such as Von Rad, argue that “reckon” derives its particular nuance in this passage from priestly usage, and that the dealings between God and Abram reside in the cutting out of the priestly mediation: “There is no cultic intermediary, no priest to speak as the mouthpiece of Yahweh.”¹⁵ His conclusions rest on a reconstructed *Sitz im Leben* that draws on Lev. 7:18b and Ezek. 18:5-9. Thus Von Rad concludes, the former does not refer to “righteousness” and the latter does not use “reckon.”¹⁶

Not all commentators agree on the subject of the verb “reckon” (בַּשָּׂה). Is it Abram since he was the subject of the preceding verb or by inference is it God? “The sequence of the verbs

¹² Robertson, 263.

¹³ Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, Charles A. Briggs, *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1999, 1906), 363.

¹⁴ Robertson, 265.

¹⁵ Gerhard von Rad, *Critique in Oeming*, 129, referenced in Vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1997), 753.

¹⁶ VanGeneren, Vol. 3, 753.

favor Abram, the preceding subject, but the context favors God. The latter view also has the support of tradition and some fine exegetical arguments” (cf. Johnson).¹⁷

Elsewhere in the Pentateuch the term “reckon” (בָּשָׂה) is used to indicate that a person may be considered something that he himself is not. In Gen. 31:15 Leah and Rachel were “reckoned” to be strangers by their father although they were his own daughters. Num. 18:27, 30 reveals the tithe of the Levite is “reckoned” as the corn of the threshing-floor and as the fullness of the winepress, although it is obviously not these things. Their tithe functioned in a substitutionary capacity. Lev. 7:18 envisions a situation where righteousness could be “reckoned” to a person even though the person is an admitted sinner.¹⁸ In view of these verses it seems appropriate to understand Gen. 15:6 in terms of God accounting Abram as righteous even though the patriarch himself is unrighteous.

Wenham comments that “righteousness” (צְדָקָה) within the Pentateuch always applies to human activity. “In legal contexts the righteous are those who should be acquitted by the judges (e.g., Deut. 25:1). Thus in the spiritual realm the righteous are those acquitted by God, those who are saved” (Ps. 1:6; 75:11, etc.).¹⁹ He further comments that “righteousness” normally is defined in terms of moral conduct. “God himself is frequently called ‘righteous’ (e.g., Deut. 32:4; Ps. 7:10[9], 12 [11] and righteousness might well be paraphrased as God-like, or at least God-pleasing, action.”²⁰

¹⁷ VanGemeren, Vol. 2, 306.

¹⁸ Robertson, 265.

¹⁹ Wenham, 330.

²⁰ Ibid.

III. THE NEW TESTAMENT USE OF GENESIS 15:6

The New Testament's treatment of Old Testament passages do not settle questions of text-critical nature. When a New Testament writer quotes from the Old Testament, his primary concern is its application to a particular circumstance. Therefore, a certain liberty is exercised so that the passage cited accomplishes the purpose of the New Testament writer. It is not unusual then to see the New Testament writer focus on a particular aspect of the meaning of an Old Testament text. In light of this a quotation of an Old Testament text does not necessarily resolve all questions related to the exegesis of that text. Moreover, the usage of the Old Testament text by one writer of the New Testament does not absolutely control the manner in which another New Testament writer uses the same text. The significance of any Old Testament text may have various applications all of which may be valid in the framework of the Old Testament text.²¹

Gen. 15:6 is quoted in the New Testament by Paul in his letters to the Romans and the Galatians. Additionally James quotes the verse in his epistle. It is important to note that these New Testament writers relied heavily on this verse.

Looking first at Romans Paul wrote, "Does this blessedness then come upon the circumcised only, or upon the uncircumcised also? For we say that faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness" (Rom. 4:9). This question addresses whether the blessing of forgiveness of sins (Rom. 4:7-8) is to benefit only those who are circumcised or is this blessing also for the uncircumcised. Paul then asks, was this faith reckoned to Abraham for righteousness "while he was circumcised or uncircumcised?" Answering his own question he says, "not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised" (Rom. 4:10). Paul indicates faith had already been reckoned to Abraham as righteous before being circumcised. Thus, his circumcision was "a seal

²¹ Robertson, 280-81.

of the righteousness of faith which he had while still uncircumcised” (Rom. 4:11). One should note that the word faith” (τῆς πίστεως) is in the genitive case thus indicating it to be the source of the righteousness reckoned to Abraham. Doug Moo explains the term “seal.” He writes “Paul uses the word to denote something that ‘confirms’ the truth or reality of something else, . . . Abraham’s circumcision confirms his righteous status, a status that was his by virtue of his faith.”²² Paul now comes to his main point. Abraham possessed a faith that was reckoned to him for righteousness before circumcision so that he might be the father of all those who believe though they are uncircumcised” (Rom. 4:11b). Moo states, “Paul depicts Abraham as the spiritual father of all believers, both Gentiles and Jews. . . . because Abraham believed while uncircumcised, he is the father of Gentile believers; because he believed and was also circumcised, he is qualified to be the father of all Jewish believers.”²³

In Gal. 3:6, Paul again quoted Gen. 15:6 to show that faith was the instrument through which Abraham was reckoned to be righteous. Here Paul wrote, “Just as Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness” (καθὼς Ἀβραὰμ ἐπίστευσεν τῷ θεῷ, καὶ ἐλογίσθη αὐτῷ εἰς δικαιοσύνην). Paul introduces this quotation with the correlative conjunction “just as” (καθὼς) which links the faith of Abraham with the faith of the believers in the churches of Galatia. Timothy George aptly summarizes, “He was saying in effect, that just as the Galatians had trusted God’s Word, which they heard through Paul’s preaching, so also Abraham believed

²² Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 269.

²³ Ibid.

what God said and was counted righteous, just like the Galatians, through the ‘hearing of faith,’ not by the doing of deeds.”²⁴

Using Abraham as the example, George points out three important principles about faith while looking at both Galatians 3 and Romans 4. First, faith excludes boasting. “Just prior to quoting Gen. 15:6 in Rom. 4, Paul made this very point. If indeed, Abraham had been justified by works he would have had reason to boast. Yet this is precisely what Abraham could not do because God called him, as Paul would show later in Gal. 3, four hundred thirty years before the law was given, even twenty-nine years, according to the reckoning of the rabbis, before the sacrifice of Isaac.”²⁵

Second, faith transcends reason. “In Rom. 4 Paul gave the example of Abraham’s trust that God would fulfill his promise to give him descendants as numerous as the stars in the heavens or the sands along the seashore even when he and Sarah were well past the normal age of childbearing. When reason would have counseled doubt and despair, Abraham ‘was fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised’” (Rom. 4:21).²⁶

Third, faith issues in obedience. Dr. George here addresses the presumed contradiction between Paul’s writings on faith and James. “As is well known, Luther criticized James as ‘a right strawy epistle’ that was hardly worthy to be included in the canon since it contradicted Paul in ascribing justification to works. . . . Calvin contended that James’ intention was not to show the source or manner of one’s attainment of righteousness but simply to stress a single point, that

²⁴ Timothy George, *Galatians*, vol. 30, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 219.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 221.

true faith is confirmed by good works. Thus, Ernst Käsemann agrees with Calvin and rightly portrays Paul’s understanding of faith when he writes, “Faith is constituted by the fact that with the preaching of the gospel the Lord who is the basis of the gospel comes upon the scene and seizes dominion over us. . . . Faith is living out of the word which bears witness to his lordship, nothing more and nothing less.”²⁷

James in his epistle relates Gen. 15:6 to Abraham’s offering of Isaac in Genesis 22. He states, “Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the alter? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect” (James 2:21-22)? James’s first question was rhetorical. Therefore, the answer is “yes” because he was willing to offer Isaac on the alter (Gen. 22:1–18), It would be preferable to translate the Greek verb ἐδικαιώθη as “he was vindicated” instead of “he was justified” since Abraham already appears to be a believer in Gen. 12, and he is reckoned to be righteous in Gen 15:6. Arnold Fruchtenbaum states, “While Paul states that Abraham was justified by faith in Romans 4:3 and Galatians 3:6, his reference is to Abraham’s initial justification described in Gen. 15:6 when Abraham believed in God’s promises. But Jacob/James’ reference is to God’s pronouncement in connection to Abraham’s *act* of faith, or *work* of faith in Genesis 22:1–18. By this work of being willing to offer Isaac, his justified state was vindicated.”²⁸ This is James’ point, Abraham was willing to offer Isaac on the alter, and this act was evidence that his faith was genuine.

In James 2:22, the author notes that this act of offering Isaac perfected Abraham’s faith. Fruchtenbaum believes this is James’ primary focus. He states,

²⁷ Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 108.

²⁸ Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Hebrews, James, I & II Peter, Jude*, Ariel’s Bible Commentary: The Messianic Jewish Epistles (Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries, 2005), 257.

the very point is that his faith existed before the act. Otherwise, the act could not have perfected his faith. His faith, already present, was further strengthened, perfected, or *matured* through the act. The word *made perfect* means literally “was perfected.” The Greek means “to bring to an end” or “to bring to its goal.” The word is in the Greek passive tense, which indicates it was God Who brought Abraham’s faith to its goal through this experience. By this action, Abraham’s faith was fully proved.²⁹

James further adds (2:23) that Gen. 15:6 was fulfilled by Abraham’s act of being willing to offer Isaac. Therefore, in this way, James is interpreting Gen. 15:6 as predicting Abraham’s faith being perfected. As a result, Abraham “was called the friend of God.

IV. CONCLUSION

Is Abraham a paradigm of the believer and is his faith a paradigm of Christian faith? There is no question that Paul and James use Abraham as a prototype and pattern of a believer. But is it going a step too far to say his faith is a paradigm of Christian faith? This conclusion, however, seems justified by the evidence.

What was the object of Abraham’s faith? Was not his faith based on God’s Word and thus God himself? Did not God promise Abraham that in him all the nations would be blessed? Therefore did not Abraham believe in a future coming messiah that would come from his seed? The answer is found in John 8:56 where Jesus states, “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day, and he saw it and was glad.” Jesus is God’s ultimate “Yes” to the promises.

²⁹ Ibid.

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THE SALVATION OF THE FAITHFUL IN THE LETTER TO THE HEBREWS: A LITERARY AND SEMANTIC ANALYSIS

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I. INTRODUCTION

This essay will explain how the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews demonstrates the unleashing of faith through select terms and concepts. Research on the Epistle to the Hebrews has yielded numerous monographs, essays and commentaries concerning its literary structure, its doctrinal depth, and its hortatory nature.¹ Scholars have chosen to analyze the author's use of the Septuagint,² others have noted its literary koine syntax,³ and others have analyzed the variegated themes in the epistle.⁴ From the first verses where God the Son is exalted in all His preeminence

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¹ See David J. MacLeod, "The Doctrinal Center of the Book of Hebrews," *BibSac*. July-September (1989): 291-300; Victor (Sung-Yul) Rhee, *Faith in Hebrews. Analysis within the Context of Christology, Eschatology, and Ethics* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), Melton Winstead, "An Integration of Biblical Theology and Some Tools of Discourse Analysis. Hebrews 8:6-13 as a Case Study," *Christian Apologetics Journal* (Spring 2013): 65-85, among many others.

² See Introduction to L.D. Hurst, *The Epistle to the Hebrews. Its Background and Thought* (Cambridge University Press, 1990); David Wallace, "The Use of Psalms in the Shaping of a Text: Psalm 2:7 and Psalm 110:1 in Hebrews 1," *Restoration Quarterly*. 41-50. Generally speaking, Moffatt comments on "the Hellenistic dialect founded on the LXX . . .," James Moffatt, *The International Critical Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986), lxiv.

³ Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 30. See also James Hope Moulton, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1949), 18, 20. Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament*. (New York: Doubleday, 1997) submits: "By all standards this is one of the most impressive works in the NT. Consciously rhetorical, carefully constructed, ably written in quality Greek, and passionately appreciative of Christ, Heb offers an exceptional number of unforgettable insights that have shaped subsequent Christianity." (683).

⁴ Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 2001), ch. IV; See introduction of Donald Guthrie, *The Letter to the Hebrews An Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids: MI: Eerdmans, 1990); Ch. 18 in Leon Morris, *New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Academic Books, 1990); Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1996), ch. 32.

to the interpretive hotbed of chapter 6 to the sacrifice of praise demanded of believers in chapter 13, Hebrews has filled the minds, pens, and pulpits of countless fans.

This study is an inductive look at the development of the doctrine of salvation in the book of Hebrews utilizing the tools of **semantic field analysis, literary structure analysis, as well as grammatical considerations.** The two lexemes σώζω (“to save”) and σωτηρία (“salvation”) will be the primary words under scrutiny. These two terms have been chosen because, as will be seen, they have a wide distribution throughout the epistle and describe the doctrine in its most general terminology – “salvation.” The concept of salvation will of necessity include other terms, phrases, and expansions of the two base words.

The methodology applied here will be to examine the semantic field of the terms in the verses that contain σώζω or σωτηρία, and to examine other terms which are related conceptually to the two base terms found in this epistle (ἀπολύτρωσις – “redemption”, περιποίησις – “saving, preservation”, καταφεύγω - “flee, take refuge”, κατάπαυσις – “rest”, and ἰλάσκομαι – “propitiation”).⁵ Literary features, structural markers, and syntax will be observed as well as. Finally, we will draw whatever conclusions might obtain and in doing so will have demonstrated the robust nature of this sort of exegesis and the depth of saving faith as portrayed by the apostle.

Σωτηρία⁶ as a noun and σώζω as a verb are translated in the English simply as “salvation” and “save,” respectively. For this reason, coupled with the fact of the terms’ usage in four of the

⁵ LNLEX, BibleWorks6, 2004. (Louw and Nida, henceforth “LN.”)

⁶ Hebrews’ terminology concerning the concept of salvation is broad yet is apparently focused on σωτηρία. This conclusion is drawn from the fact that σωτηρία is found seven times and is distributed from the outset of the epistle (1.14) to near the end (11.7). Admittedly, σωτηρία is rivaled in number of occurrences by both κατάπαυσις and κληρονόμος. Κατάπαυσις is limited however, to chapters three and four; κληρονόμος, while distributed in the letter more than κατάπαυσις, is not mentioned until chapter six. These two words no doubt are part and parcel to the theme of salvation as well as are some others such as ἀπολύτρωσις, περιποίησις, καταφεύγω, ἰλάσκομαι, ἐλπίς,

five sections of the epistle,⁷ it should be the starting point for a discussion of the “salvation” concept in Hebrews. Of course, the concept of salvation is far-reaching in Hebrews as it entails the theologically weighty term ἀπολύτρωσις (“redemption”; 9.15), the intensified use of fleeing or taking refuge (καταφεύγω – 6.18), ἰλάσκομαι, the large section on the OT sacrificial system as it pertains to the work of Christ (chapters 7-10), etc. Obviously, the doctrine of salvation is magnanimous, so it is incumbent in a study of this size to somewhat limit the scope. Since the terms σωτηρία and σώζω capture the concept in general terms, we will focus primarily on these two lexemes.

II. SEMANTIC FIELD ANALYSIS

Definition and Usage

Our first term, σώζω, can have the definition “to rescue from danger and to restore to a former state of safety and well being - 'to deliver, to rescue, to make safe, deliverance.’”⁸ Louw and Nida term this domain as “to cause to be safe, free from danger.”⁹ This field refers specifically to physical salvation from whatever danger or malady or predicament in which one might find himself. Another use of σώζω is “to cause someone to experience divine salvation - 'to save.’”¹⁰ This domain is that which means “to save in a religious sense”¹¹ and is the same subset

ἀναφέρω, and possibly the concepts of evpaggelia and sacrifice (described by three different words – θυσία, προσφορά, and ὀλοκαύτωμα.)

⁷ These four “sections” are delineated by David Black as 1) 1:5-2:18, 2) 3:1-5:10, 3) 5:11-10:39, and 4) 11:1-12:13 (David A. Black, “Hebrews 1:1-4: A Study in Discourse Analysis.” *Westminster Theological Journal* 49 (1987): 175-94). The lexemes under discussion are found in all four of these major sections in Hebrews.

⁸ LN, 21.18.

⁹ Ibid., 21.17-21.24.

¹⁰ Ibid., 21.27.

¹¹ Ibid., 21.25-21.32.

under which σωτηρία falls. It is this sense of saving in a religious sense that we are concerned with.¹²

One interesting note about the second term, σωτηρία is the two different senses that LN assign to the term. Both fall within the rubric of being saved in a religious sense. However, LN shows that one meaning is “a state of having been saved”; the other meaning is “the process of being saved.”¹³ Most students will notice the obvious difference here between state and process.¹⁴ Of the seven uses of σωτηρία and the two mentions of σφζω, all six of the mentions of σωτηρία in Hebrews refer to the “state” of salvation, with the possible exception of the 6:9 reference. The one use of σφζω that refers to the saving in a religious sense, seems also to refer to the state, rather than the process, of salvation. One initial question worth considering based on this idea is Why does the author of Hebrews use the terms in contexts that refer to the state rather than the process of salvation, as other NT epistles do? What is driving our author to hone in on this particular notion? Is he being only descriptive and not prescriptive? These are questions that perhaps will be answered as study of the salvation concept continues.

Clustering

One further note on the field analysis is enlightening before we turn to the actual passages in which our paradigm words σφζω and σωτηρία are found. This last notion concerns the clustering of most of our conceptually related words. First of all, though not in the same literary

¹² Other terms which come under the same general domain “danger, risk, safe, save” are: ἀσφαλής (“pertaining to a state of safety and security, and hence free from danger - 'safe, safely, secure, securely.'”), φεύγω (“to be- come safe from danger by avoiding or escaping - 'to escape, to avoid.'”), καταφύγω (“to become safe by taking refuge - 'to flee to safety, to take refuge.’”), LN, 21.1-21.32.

¹³ LN, 21.26.

¹⁴ LN explain: “Although it is difficult and sometimes impossible to determine whether σωτηρία refers to the state of being saved (21.25) or the process of being saved, in some languages it is obligatory to choose one or the other meaning.”, 21.26.

section as the others, καταπαύω is clustered in Hebrews chapters three and four. Of the eleven mentions of the term, all eleven are found in chapters three and four. Secondly, the other term (the first being the one just mentioned) that rivals σωτηρία in number of appearances (other than those used for “sacrifice”) is κληρονόμος (“heir”) clustered with three appearances in the 5.1-10.39 section of Hebrews. Next, the one use of ἀπολύτρωσις is also found in this same section. The equally demanding term περιποίησις is also found here – 10.39 (the last verse in this section of the literary ordering). Fifth, the one religious use of σώζω is found in 7:25, in the midst of this central portion of the epistle. Three of the four uses of ἀναφέρω are also located in this literary corral of salvation terminology. Seventh, καταφεύγω is found in 6.18. Eighth, besides the indirectly related concepts of ἐπαγγελία (“promise”) and ἐλπίς (“hope”), both of which have the vast majority of their mentions show up in this section, the three terms used for “sacrifice” (θυσία, προσφορά, ὀλοκαύτωμα), with the exception of four instances, show up in the 5.11-10.39 section. The other seventeen instances are found within the literary parameters of this section. Finally, σωτηρία is found twice in this section, but (as mentioned earlier), its use is spread throughout four of the literary sections. It seems, based upon this brief analysis of the distribution of the terms employed as part of the salvation concept, the writer of Hebrews centralizes his argument, at least to some degree, in the middle section (5.11-10.39) of the book. In this way, we learn that faith is unleashed by the apostle in the central and large section of the letter thereby demonstrating his concern for the topic.

III. STRUCTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

The epistle has apparently been arranged structurally into an introduction, four or five major sections, and a conclusion. Many scholars have published on the literary structure of

Hebrews,¹⁵ but most of the discussion is far beyond the scope of this paper. However, a few considerations should be presented.

Commentators and scholars do not agree on a chiasmic structure of the epistle. Based upon my study of the salvation language delineated above, there seems to be an obvious arrangement of the material so that the concept of salvation is heavily centralized in the middle section of the letter. While some might say that this climax was not purposeful, it cannot be denied that the distribution of the conceptually related terms is located primarily in the section 5:11-10:39.

At the same time, it also cannot be denied that the chiasmic structuring does not demand a one-genre description of the book. Many have called it a homily; some have declared it to be theological / ethical piece¹⁶; others have seen it as merely epistolary in form; still others have noted a zigzag, or back and forth pattern of doctrinal and exhortational sections.¹⁷ A.T. Robertson called it an epistle “of a very peculiar kind.”¹⁸ Robertson also gave as good a description of Hebrews as anyone: “. . . It begins like a treatise, proceeds like a sermon, and

¹⁵ George H. Guthrie, *The Structure of Hebrews. A Text-linguistic Analysis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998); David Alan Black, “The Problem of the Literary Structure of Hebrews: An Evaluation and a Proposal,” *Grace Theological Journal* 7.2 (1986): 163-177; David Alan Black, “Literary Artistry in the Epistle to the Hebrews,” *Filologia Neotestamentaria* 7 (1994): 43-52; William L. Lane, *Word Biblical Commentary Hebrews 1-8* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1991), xlix-li; Albert Vanhoye, *Structure and Message of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1989); “Discussions Sur la Structure de l’Épître aux Hébreux,” *Biblica* 55 (1974): 349-380. James Swetnam, “Form and Content in Hebrews 7-13,” *Biblica* 55 (1974): 333-348.

¹⁶ Donald Guthrie mentions the “connection between the doctrinal and ethical aspects . . .” Donald Guthrie, *The Letter to the Hebrews*, 57.

¹⁷ For Kistemaker it is a mingling of “doctrine and pastoral admonition”, Simon J. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary. Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1985), 4; for George Guthrie, it is an “interworking of theology and exhortation,” George H. Guthrie, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary*, Vol. 4 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 7.

¹⁸ A.T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament, Vol 5 John / Hebrews* (Nashville: Broadman, 1960), 328.

concludes like a letter.”¹⁹ The only problem with this description is that it does not explain the many literary features²⁰ that the author seems to have also employed in writing his theological preaching-type letter.

The literary structure should be delineated further since we are using the structure as a kind of base of operations with the previously exposed semantic field analysis imbedded. From W. Wrede’s work in 1906²¹ to George Guthrie’s text-linguistic approach (1998),²² the structure has been studied by many theologians with a variety of conclusions. Some linguistic minded scholars have even proposed a structuring of announcements in the epistle wherein the author announces a theme and then explores it in the following verses.²³ Black has performed extensive examinations with some very enlightening results. He finds in Hebrews the use of euphony, and a peculiar diction, syntax, and composition.²⁴ Some of the examples of these stylistic tools are as follows: euphony – the alliteration in chapters 1:1; 2:1-2; 3:1; 4:3; 7:3, 26; 9:27; 10:33; 12:11; 13:19; diction – connotative and denotative levels of words, metaphors, symbols, and images; syntax – use of the period (long) sentences in Greek; and composition – inclusions, antitheses, transitions, and chiasm.²⁵

¹⁹ Ibid., 328.

²⁰ Black, “Literary Artistry in the Epistle to the Hebrews,” *Filologia Neotestamentaria* 7 (1994): 43-52.

²¹ Wrede, cited in Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 689.

²² George H. Guthrie, *The Structure of Hebrews. A Text-linguistic Analysis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998).

²³ Black, “The Problem.”

²⁴ Ibid., 44.

²⁵ Black, “Literary Artistry”, 44-50.

There is of course a variety of opinions and declarations on the structure of Hebrews.²⁶ Not only do we have the observations by Black and others on the literary artistry of the epistle, but there is at the opposite swing of the pendulum, those like James Moffatt who does not give formal divisions in his commentary on Hebrews because, he writes, “The flow of thought, with its turns and windings, is best followed from point to point.”²⁷ Moffatt also mention that it was “artificial” to divide up Hebrews into a formal outline.²⁸ He might be correct, but after the examination we looked at earlier on the distribution of the semantically related salvation terms, noting the coddling of a vast number of these terms in chapters 5-10, we must ask whether or not Moffatt’s comment is too generalized and should be nuanced, based on closer observation.

A recent commentator, Craig R. Koester, has noted the three major structural proposals for Hebrews.²⁹ He mentions the five-fold structure proposed by Vanhoye, and he lists Attridge, Benetreau, Casalini, Ellingworth, Lane, D.A. Black, Bruce, and MacLeod as those following Vanhoye’s suggestion. The second approach yields three main sections ending with “call[ing] the listeners to faithfulness.”³⁰ Koester names Weiss, Hegermann, and Michel as those subscribing to this structure. Finally, Koester proposes his own background by suggesting a classical rhetorical approach which employs an exordium (1:1-2:4), proposition (2:5-9),

²⁶ For a socio-anthropological perspective, see Dunnill, who suggests in his socio-anthropological context that “Hebrews does contain . . . stories, but the centre of its interest . . . is not in this but in its use of sacrificial symbolism.” John Dunnill, *Covenant and Sacrifice in the Letter to the Hebrews* (Cambridge, 1992), 48. See also Craig R. Koester, *Hebrews. A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 83-84.

²⁷ James Moffatt, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1986), xxiv.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, xxiii-xxiv.

²⁹ Koester, 83-84.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 83.

arguments (2:10-12:27), peroration (12:28-13:21), and epistolary postscript (13:22-25).³¹ As for our study on the concept of salvation, no structure need be *a priori* secured. This is the case because in any scenario, the section comprising chapter five through ten of Hebrews sanctifies itself with its theology of salvation as we have seen inductively to be the case (referring specifically to the salvation concept.) We now turn to an exegesis of those passages that contain our two chosen forms of the *σαγ root,³² σῶζω and σωτηρία.

IV. EXEGETICAL / SYNTACTICAL EVALUATIONS

Σωτηρία

1:14. After the author has compared the Son to the angels, he writes: “Are they not all ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation?” With this he has made his first mention of the term salvation, yet this is not his first mention of the concept. The concept seems to have been introduced in 1:3 where he says the Son “had made purification of sins.”³³ This act, as synonymous with Jesus’ cross-work shows another aspect of the atonement in general, and salvation specifically. The rest of verse 3 says that the Son sat down, the act of which connotes the finishing of a task. The author of Hebrews will expand upon this later in his epistle.

Since the writer begins with the notion of making a purification of sins, and then in v. 14 mentions those who will inherit “salvation,” it follows that he knew his audience would, to some

³¹ Ibid., 83-84.

³² Bruce M. Metzger, *Lexical Aids for Students of New Testament Greek* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1997), 67. Metzger classifies words according to their roots. Σῶζω and σωτηρία are from the same root.

³³ J. Schneider sees salvation in Hebrews as having begun in 1:1 with the proclamation of Christ. “Redemption” in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*. Vol. 3, ed. Colin Brown. Exeter: Paternoster, 1978, 216.

degree, be cognizant of the doctrine of salvation already.³⁴ Along with this concept is the “inheriting” of this blessing. He did not say that the angels would minister to all people, only a certain group – those who will inherit salvation. An inheritance is given to children or descendants. LN define “inheriting”: “to receive something of considerable value which has not been earned.”³⁵ On the notion of inheriting as a part of the concept of salvation, note Romans 8:17 and later on in the book of Hebrews.³⁶ The concept of salvation for the writer of Hebrews then, entails the purifying of sins by Jesus Christ and the idea that it is an inheritance, to be finally consummated in the future.³⁷

2:3. This next occurrence of σωτηρία is quoted in its extended context for ease of explanation and comprehension.

For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away *from it*.² For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty,³ how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard,⁴ God also testifying with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will.

The initial word in this passage reaches back to the prior one, 1:14. Therefore, what the author has to say at this point comes because there are angels from God involved. But these are not the only ones in the cloud of witnesses. The “word” of salvation mentioned here was spoken by the Lord Jesus and then by the apostles. The writer states further though, that God testified with them by signs, etc., surely referring to the work of the apostles as they were commissioned as

³⁴ Donald Guthrie notes “It may seem strange that no definition of salvation is given, which suggests that the readers already knew what was meant”, 79.

³⁵ LN, 57.131.

³⁶ Donald Guthrie, 80.

³⁷ Robertson, 341.

recorded in the long ending of Mark and in Acts. Caird observes that the writer was making a connection with the OT (Deuteronomy 19.15) so as to present evidence that the salvation message indeed had two or three witnesses . . .³⁸ Westcott raises an interesting concept here in light of the superiority of Christ and the fact that He has a better name than the angels. Westcott believes, and rightly so, that the word, the Gospel itself, is better than the old covenant. He comments: “The superior authority of the Gospel is shewn in three points, in its original announcement, in its convincing proclamation, and in the manifold divine attestation to its truth.”³⁹

In this second use of σωτηρία, the author adds a new dimension to his contribution to the doctrine of salvation. He warns that every transgression received a just penalty. To complete the warning, he asks “How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?” Montefiore comments: “Our author does not here define just what it is from which his readers might not be able to escape . . . but from the context it is obvious that he means escape from the nemesis of retribution.”⁴⁰ Therefore, salvation includes an element of warning. John 3:16 illustrates it as well.

2:10. “For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to perfect the author of their salvation through

³⁸ G.B. Caird, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 158.

³⁹ Brook Foss Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1892), 39.

⁴⁰ Hugh Montefiore, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (London: Adam & Charles Black., 1964), 52. Oberholtzer, Thomas Kem. “The Eschatological Salvation of Hebrews 1:5-2:5.” *BibSac* January-March 1988. 83-97. In 2:1-5 – Oberholtzer sees an “inclusive” we in this section (93). Furthermore, he states: “When a person broke the Law, the retribution received was not loss of salvation. Instead he lost temporal blessings and was disciplined. . . . While showing the inviolability of the Mosaic Law, Hebrews 2:2 is not addressing the subjects of soteriology and eternal life.” (94-95). A new issue brought about here is that σωτηρία here pertains to eschatological salvation “since it is a part of the topic pertaining to ‘the world to come, concerning which we are speaking’” (95). “Neglect of this eschatological salvation . . . may result in individual temporal discipline similar to that experienced under the Old Covenant (2:2). (97). Oberholtzer’s point is twofold. First, salvation here is eschatological. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, the retribution is the loss of earthly, temporal blessings. . .

sufferings.” The new information added to the concept of salvation in this verse is that 1) it has an “author”, 2) the saved are “sons” who will be brought to glory, and 3) the author should be “perfected . . . through sufferings.” The author has just been named. It is none other than Jesus (v.9). His “sufferings” was the suffering of death (v.9); the author was no doubt using metonymy here to connote all that was involved, i.e., the beatings, the crowns of thorns, etc.; hence, the plural “suffering” in verse 10.

The notion of the sons who are brought to glory is an interesting one indeed. The “sons” explain the “everyone” of v. 9.⁴¹ A question that arises is why did the Son need to be perfected in order to save the sons? Thomas Long answers: “The Preacher considers Jesus to have been “without sin” (4:15), so there is no idea here of an impure Jesus being morally perfected. Rather, the idea is that Jesus was made “fit” vocationally and functionally, not morally.”⁴² Since Jesus is the author or “leader,” one is reminded of Jesus’ own declaration in John 10:4: “When he puts forth all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice.”⁴³ Kistemaker remarks that

It was God’s will that his Son had to suffer in order to effect the salvation of many sons. And when the Son completed his suffering, he became the founder of their salvation. He received the appointment to lead the elect out of a life of slavery in sin to a life of eternal happiness in which they are considered sons and heirs with Christ.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Kistemaker, 70.

⁴² Thomas Long, *Hebrews. Interpretation A Biblical Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1997), 41. Long goes on to give a great analogy: “The image is something like a machinist fabricating a part, fashioning it to fit perfectly and to perform its function. When the metal is shaped just right and the edges smoothed just so, the machinist can exclaim, “Perfect!” What is meant is the part not only fits just right, it will also perform its job to specifications.” That it was not “moral” is contested by Koester, *Anchor*, 226 and also W. Robertson Nicoll, 290.

⁴³ Cleon Rogers, Jr. and Cleon Rogers, III, *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 520.

⁴⁴ Kistemaker, 70. Kistemaker also notes an insightful “transposition” of “many sons to glory” / “their salvation” and “the author’s suffering” / his perfection”, 71.

So for the author of Hebrews, Jesus is the leader or even founder, or originator.⁴⁵ Rogers submits that the term ἀρχηγός was used in Greek literature of a “. . . hero who founded a city, gave it its name, and became its guardian.”⁴⁶ Here, however, he intimates it is simply “a leader who opens up a new way.”⁴⁷

5:9. In this passage, salvation is now described as “eternal.” The text reads: “And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation.” Αἰτιος is to be translated the “cause” or “author.”⁴⁸ One exegete connects Jesus being the author of *eternal* (αἰωνίου) salvation with Jesus’ *eternal* (τὸν αἰῶνα) priesthood of v. 6.⁴⁹

Guthrie expounds on this eternal theme. He writes: “He speaks of eternal judgment (6:2), eternal redemption (9:12), the eternal Spirit (9:14), eternal inheritance (9:15), the eternal covenant (13:20). It is obvious that he wishes to lay foundations which are permanent, contrasting with the ever-changing scene of any earthly priesthood and method of approach to God. There is something stable and enduring about the salvation which Jesus Christ provides.”⁵⁰ This comment enlivens our study of the salvation concept. The author alerts us that salvation is

⁴⁵ Koester, Anchor, 229.

⁴⁶ Rogers, 520. Julius J. Scott, Jr., “Archegos (ArchgoV) in the Salvation History of the Epistle to the Hebrews.” <http://www.wheaton.edu/DistanceLearning/Arch-heb.htm.1-8.9/30/2005> writes: “*Archegos*, as a title for Jesus appears only four times in the NT, twice each in Acts (3:15; 5:31) and Hebrews (2:10; 12:2). Nevertheless, it seems that both linkages and affinities with other terms and concepts may make it part of one or more theological “packages” which could extend its influence beyond that indicated by mere occurrence count.” (1). Quoting James P. Martin, Scott submits that archegos “is closely associated with the early church’s understanding of faith within Salvation History (Heilsgeschichte). It identified Jesus, as archegos, as standing at the central point of Salvation History ‘which opens up the future to the completion of God’s purpose’ while, as the same time, proclaims his unique role in the past and present of both history and the experience of the Christian community.” (1).

⁴⁷ Rogers, 520.

⁴⁸ Abbott-Smith, G., *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999), 15.

⁴⁹ W. Robertson Nicoll, *The Expositor’s Greek New Testament*, Vol. IV. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1951), 290.

⁵⁰ Donald Guthrie, 132. Guthrie adds that this notion can be compared to John’s use of eternal life.

eternal as is Christ's priesthood, as is the Spirit, as is the covenant. Though this may play into the scheme of the doctrine of eternal security, it does not seem to be a major tool for that system since it is not the main point being made here. That Jesus is the cause or source *of* the salvation seems to be the main point. This point then would look ahead to the fact that He is the one who can save forever (7:25), and hearkens back to Jesus' own words in John 14.6 that He is the way, etc.

One phrase that must not be left out of the discussion of 5:9 is that He became the author to "those who obey Him." The practicality of obedience cannot be discussed without an understanding of what this obedience means for a believer. The phrase "those who obey Him" surely extends from the Son's obedience just mentioned in the previous verse (v. 8). It also, according to Montefiore, shows the both the universality ("all"), and the limitations of salvation (those who obey.)⁵¹ Another scholar sees the issue as also being the scope of salvation. "Obedience in that sense involves a complete acceptance of the divine will. As far as Christians are concerned this sums up a man's response to God's provision of a means to salvation. . . ."⁵² Westcott notes that "In this connexion, continuous active obedience is the sign of real faith."⁵³ This notion would certainly hold since endurance and the continuous nature of faith is seen throughout the epistle (ch. 6 especially.)

6:9. "But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you, and things that accompany salvation, though we are speaking in this way." This passage which begins in v. 4

⁵¹ Montefiore, 100. Montefiore quotes Spicq as saying "Christ, who asked to be saved from death, by his death obtains the salvation of men. Having learnt to obey, he saves those who obey."

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Westcott, 129.

has caused quite a stir over the years for theologians.⁵⁴ There is no paucity of literature or scholarly tussling over the interpretation of this passage. The current study does not intend to

⁵⁴ See Craig R. Koester in Jan G. van der Watt, ed. “God’s Purposes and Christ’s Saving Work According to Hebrews” in *Salvation in the New Testament. Perspectives on Soteriology*. Leiden: Brill, 2005 361-387 on Hebrews 6:4-6: “By refusing to restore apostates, God permits their decision to stand and thereby allows the relationship to be terminated.” (378). Also, “The warning disturbs while the promise assures, but they serve the same end, which is that the readers might persevere in faith and so receive the salvation that God alone can provide.” (379). But his wording “. . . and so receive . . .” make it seem as though salvation will only come by our persevering . . .

For the “conditional” position see Scot McKnight, “The Warning Passages of Hebrews: A Formal Analysis and Theological Conclusions.” *Trinity Journal* (1992) 21-59. As for McKnight’s argument, one must first understand his presuppositions. He delineates four views concerning the spiritual state of the “believer” in the warning passages. One McKnight calls the hypothetical view – true Christians cannot commit the mentioned apostasy and so be eternally damned (32). The second is the “phenomenological-false believer view – those who do commit the sin are not genuine believers (23). Third, McKnight’s choice, is the phenomenological-true believer view – believers who “can genuinely commit the sin” and “. . .so is eternally condemned” (24). The fourth view is the covenant community view – that the warnings are not to individuals, but to the community. (25). In his conclusions McKnight states: “I am contending that the book of Hebrews does teach conditional salvation but that the condition is a condition taught throughout the whole Bible.” (55). In each of the “condition” phrases McKnight says, “there is a present reality, the continuance of which is dependent upon perseverance. If that person does not persevere, there will be a cessation of that former reality.”(57). Finally, “In Hebrews, final salvation is not unconditional. It is conditional, and that single condition is persevering faith” (59).

For a contrariwise view, see Randall Gleason in his comments on Hebrews 10:26-31 (Randall C. Gleason, “The Eschatology of the Warning in Hebrews 10:26-31,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 53.1 (2002): 97-120): “The absence of NT damnation terminology in Hebrews calls into question the widely held assumption that the author’s purpose was to warn his readers of eternal judgement. Furthermore, to limit the warnings to a distant future judgement overlooks its nearness and diminishes its relevance to the first-century audience facing the dangers arising from the first Jewish revolt . . . These conclusions are confirmed by a close examination of the OT texts cited or alluded to in Hebrews 10:26-31. Rather than eternal destruction, the OT examples warn of physical judgement coming upon Israel because of physical judgement.” (97). On

v. 27 Gleason says “A close examination of the context reveals that Isaiah’s warning corresponds well to the threats facing first-century Jews living in the land of Israel.” (114).

On v. 29: “. . . the severity could refer to a physical punishment greater in degree or force than that previously experienced by the OT examples. This meaning corresponds well to the historical setting of Hebrews in light of the unprecedented suffering experienced during the Jewish war as noted by Josephus.” (117). Finally, “Just as God physically judged his people when they lapsed into unbelief in both the OT and NT, he may likewise severely punish his people today when they disregard their confession of faith in Christ and drift away from his life sustaining presence.” (120).

McKnight seems to be off base on a couple of issues. 1)even in Paul – see Romans 7 – he had a struggle in his spiritual walk, but never a concern that he was going to be eternally condemned for it. 2) Other NT passages – namely John 10:27-29, note the *ouv mh. avpo,lwntai*; Eph. 1.13, the extent of the sealing; and Rom. 8:1, the no condemnation status. 3) theologically – what is salvation? – change of heart & etc. 4) Hebrews theologically – context and OT quotes = physical destruction – see I John. 6:9-12: Keathley states: “But he is confident that this will not be the case with these readers, and he exhorts them to be diligent in their faith and to follow the example of the

settle the interpretation once and for all, but we need only to engage the passage as far as we can to see the implications and additions for an understanding of salvation.

One obvious implication is that there are things that “accompany salvation.” Another observation is that since the author is convinced of “better things” of his readers, then the tenets of vv. 4-5 are not necessarily parts and parcels of salvation. Being enlightened, tasting the gift, and being made partakers & etc., whatever these things mean, might not mean salvation. If this initial assessment is true, salvation involves something better, something more abiding, something more solid. What is it?

It would seem that this something more is endurance. The context readily agrees. Verse six mentions falling away, and then comes an analogy – vv. 7-8.⁵⁵ Then v. 9 begins “But, beloved, we are convinced of better things concerning you . . .” Moffatt intimates here that the writer was encouraging the believers by sharing with them “. . .that he still believes in them.”⁵⁶ Moffatt goes further to suggest that the preacher has confidence in the Hebrew Christians because of “their good record of practical works,”⁵⁷ referring to v. 10, τοῦ ἔργου ὑμῶν καὶ τῆς ἀγάπης. Koester agrees in the confidence motif as he finds the basis for it in the following verse –

old testament saints.” Hampton Keathley, IV, “The Argument of Hebrews,” Biblical Studies Press 1997. <http://www.bible.org>, 5.

⁵⁵ A seemingly clear and sensible interpretation is given by Koester: “The ‘superior things that belong to salvation’ recalls that in the analogy of the field, soil that produced thorns and thistles would be cursed, while soil that produced useful vegetation would be blessed. The warning of judgment pertained to the apostasy described in 6:4-6, while the blessing applies to people like the listeners. . .”, 324.

⁵⁶ Moffatt, 83. Others propose that encouragement is the motive here: Brenda B. Colijn winds up quoting Osborne in saying “the major soteriological purpose of the epistle is not warning but encouragement.” In “Let Us Approach’: Soteriology in the Epistle to the Hebrews,” JETS 39/4 (December 1996): 571-586. <http://newfirstsearch.oclc.org/WebZ/ImageFT?cmd=print&sessionid=sp02sw05-34834-ee>. 9/29/2005, 17.

⁵⁷ Moffatt, 83.

God's justice (v.10.) Salvation now has expanded its roots to demand endurance by the means of encouragement.

9:28. “so Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without *reference to sin*, to those who eagerly await Him.” Up to now, the author of this magnificent epistle has given the readers the concept of σωτηρία in terms of inheritance, warning, obedience, eternity, and endurance. His use of σωτηρία has continued to expand and expose a theme. The theology of salvation thus far is that it is a gift. There was also a warning involved. Obedience has a part to play as tensile as that might at first seem. Furthermore, salvation is an eternal gift. It is also related to endurance, which also seems to be a sub-theme in Hebrews. Now, with 9:28, Christ's sacrifice is explicitly in view.

This passage dilates the doctrine of salvation by its use of two compounds of φέρω - “offered up” (προσφέρω) and “bear” [the sins] (ἀναφέρω), the notion of a second appearing, and the notion of eagerly awaiting. The passage is at the mountaintop of the section of the sacrifice of the body of Jesus. Christ is said to have been offered to bear sins. Sins that had separated man from God (Isa. 59:2; Rom. 5:12), sins that were not His own (2 Cor. 5:21; I Peter 2:22; Heb. 7:26). This very phrase “bear the sins” is the soul of the atonement.⁵⁸ Salvation is now shown as part of a broader concept. It is also to be taken as the outworking of the intertrinitarian transaction of the atonement. The “many” shows the particularity of the atonement.

A second appearing is referenced here in 9:28 as well. But the wording is a little awkward. Who is it that will be “without reference to sin”? Christians or Christ? One proposal is

⁵⁸ Hurst notes points of contact with the Paul with the concept of “waiting” – Romans 8:19, 23, 25 and I Cor. 1:7 (108); he notes points of contact with Peter on the bearing of sins in I Peter 2:24: “and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross . . .” (126).

that since Christ has always been without sin, it does not refer to Him.⁵⁹ Neither does it seem sensible to refer it to Christians but rather that “. . . Christ will no longer have to combat sin and sinners,” and “. . . it is not for the atonement of sins that He will return.”⁶⁰ Another solution is Nicoll quoting Vaughan: “There may be an allusion to the reappearance of the High Priest after the solemn ceremonial in the Holy of Holies on the day of atonement to the anxiously waiting people.”⁶¹ With this last comment Kistemaker concurs:

Last, the Levitical high priest, after performing his duties in the inner sanctuary reappeared to the people he had represented before God. But when Jesus returns from the heavenly sanctuary, he comes to restore his people by granting them the gift of salvation.⁶²

Salvation then, as represented by σωτηρία is inclusive of Christ’s substitutionary atonement and will be culminated at the reappearing for those eager for their inheritance. This final note gives the reader a sense of expectancy!

11:7. “By faith Noah, being warned *by God* about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.” This instance of σωτηρία does not *prima facie* refer to salvation in a religious sense (or, spiritual salvation.) At first glance it seems to refer only to Noah preserving his family from the flood waters. The verse in which our term is imbedded sheds new light as we look at a few other terms. The notion of condemnation is present as the writer is making an analogy for the spiritual world from the material world. Thus, salvation in a religious sense is commented upon or at least hinted at. Also interesting is the term

⁵⁹ Jean Hering, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*. Transl. A.W. Heathcote and P.J. Allcock. (London: Epworth Press, 1970), 84.

⁶⁰ Hering, 84. Nicoll agrees that it is not as a sin offering that Christ reappears, 341.

⁶¹ Nicoll, 341.

⁶² Kistemaker, 267.

“heir” (κληρονόμος) which has already been noted in this study as a member of the salvation concept corpus in this epistle.⁶³ Furthermore, the writer uses both the term “righteousness” (about which we have not heretofore made comment) and “faith” (another related theme.) Therefore, this passage has something to say even if it has nothing to add about salvation. It does at least hint at a reiteration of the truth of condemnation (and deliverance from that condemnation).

It should also be noted that the concepts of warning and obedience are present as they have also been part and parcel of the salvation concept, as we have discovered. Warning is explicit as the text says that Noah was warned by God. Obedience is a little more implicit, as it must be found in the OT passage from which this truth came. Genesis 6:22 reads: “Thus Noah did; according to all that God had commanded him, so he did.”⁶⁴ Again, we see that obedience was a concern for the author of Hebrews in his discussion and development of the salvation concept.⁶⁵

Σώζω

7:25. The term σώζω is used in Hebrews only in chapter 7 (other than the physical deliverance referred to in 5:7). “Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.” This verse is predicated by the ὅθεν with the fact that Jesus differed from the earthly priests in that He lives eternally so

⁶³ William Lane, *World Biblical Commentary. Vol. 47b Hebrews 9-13* (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1991), 341.

⁶⁴ F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 292. Lane agrees with the obedience issue: “By his obedience response of faith to the sober warning . . .” (340.)

⁶⁵ Koester mentions Noah’s obedience when he says that Noah “. . . showed his negative judgment upon the world by *acting on* the basis of the divine word . . .” (483, emphasis added.) Interestingly, since it has been mentioned as part of the salvation concept, Koester also sees here the perseverance / endurance motif: “His example encourages listeners to persevere in the hope of righteousness . . .” (483.)

that He may continually save the persons whom He is saving. His priesthood is permanent (v.24); therefore he is able to “save forever.” The usage here of σωτηρία hearkens back to 5:9 where it was there dubbed “eternal salvation.” Here the saving act can be done as a matter of perpetuation. His intercession is to remind the Father of the transgressor’s sacrifice, which vicariously, through individual faith, was made through (and by) Jesus.

Some Bibles read the term παντελής as “completely” or “forever.” Nicoll comments that the term is “Not to be referred merely to time as in Vulgate “in perpetuum.”⁶⁶ BDAG also did not seem to be very comfortable with translating the word as “completely” as it only comments that: “The Armenian version understands σώζειν εἰς τὸ παντελές δύναται in this sense; so also many more recent interpreters, such as Bengel, Bleek, Riggenbach.”⁶⁷ As mentioned above however, taken with the preceding verse, the term is contrasted with the fact that the earthly priests did not live forever. The issue was a temporal one, not a qualitative one (though that aspect would surely be true as well.) Koester conflates the two thoughts with these words: “The salvation provided by Christ is everlasting precisely because it is complete.”⁶⁸

V. CONCLUSION

The author of Hebrews used many terms and related semantic fields to develop his theology of salvation. He used the terms ἀναφέρω, ἀπολύτρωσις, ἐλπίς, ἐπαγγελία, ἰλάσκομαι, κατάπαυσις, καταφεύγω, κληρονόμος, περιποίησις, sacrifice (θυσία, προσφορά, and ὀλοκαύτωμα) to discuss particular aspects of atonement and salvation. The author seems to have chosen the terms

⁶⁶ Nicoll, 316.

⁶⁷ Bauer, Walter. *A Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament*. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich (trans.) Revised and augmented by F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker from Walter Bauer’s Fifth edition, 1958. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979, 608. Abbott-Smith makes an interesting remark. He stated that perhaps in Heb. 7:25, παντελής is used in a temporal sense, meaning “finally.” (336), which translation would work well with the consummative aspect of salvation.

⁶⁸ Koester, 365.

σωτηρία and σώζω as a normative or generalized term to show further particular aspects of the *state* of salvation. These two terms, though, are part of a much broader concept which included eschatology, sacrifice, endurance, obedience, security, propitiation, atonement, and the cleansing of sins . . . The author was not only artistic in his structure and well-versed in OT economy and lingo; he was also capable and careful in developing a theology (albeit partial) of salvation.

Salvation in Hebrews is an eschatological one. It is also one that demands endurance. Yet it is one that is eternal and secure in its nature, being that it is a gift (an inheritance); Christ's perpetual intercession assures it; the author was convinced of his audience's participation, and the consequences of falling away are compared in the arguments to the physical (not spiritual) destruction of the OT people of God. Salvation for the author of Hebrews is not a conditional one, but a living, enduring, and secured one.

Furthermore, the literary techniques of the author offer a homily rich in imagery and one that is highly structured. The author's choice of terms to discuss the topic of salvation was well-devised. He used certain terms and semantic domains to express each nuance or aspect of the doctrine of salvation.

One final note should be shared concerning the use of σωτηρία. The author distribution of the term throughout the document was by design and tethered to several concerns. One is the eschatological nature of salvation. It is a promise for the future; yet it is a *rest* that has been entered. As for this "rest", an interesting aside from LN is the differentiation between καταπαύω and ἀναπαύομαι. The former term means "to cease one's work or activity, resulting in a period of rest - 'to rest, to cease from work.'"⁶⁹ Καταπαύω and κατάπαυσις appear to differ in meaning from

⁶⁹ LN, 23.81.

ἀναπαύομαι and ἀνάπαυσις (23.80) in that the emphasis of καταπαύω and κατάπαυσις is more upon the cessation of activity resulting in rest rather than upon the mere restorative character of rest.⁷⁰ Αναπαύομαι is used in Matthew 11.28 and so there Jesus says that “in the midst of your activity of serving Me, I will rest you.” However, the author of Hebrews is saying one has received a cessation-of-work-status in their entrance into God’s rest. The rest is one that is given, secured, and persevered in (note the ἀλλὰ in 10:39: “*but* [we are] of those who have faith to the preserving of the soul.”).

The author was also concerned to show the eternal nature of salvation and the security of salvation. Furthermore, he needed to encourage his readers in their circumstances and even go so far as to warn of God’s discipline and of their loss of temporal blessings. In so doing, sanctification in Hebrews is mitigated through the terms σώζω and σωτηρία. Finally, Hebrews portrays salvation both as safety in the midst of condemnation from God toward the unregenerate (11:7), and as a perpetual state procured by Jesus’ incessant intercession (7:25). Salvation is secure and is lively. In this way, saving faith is unleashed and explained in the letter to the Hebrews.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

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UNLEASHING FAITH IN THE PRESENCE OF EVIL: THEODICY IN THE PROPHECY OF HABBAKUK

H. Cameron Cloud, Ph. D.*

I. INTRODUCTION: “HOW LONG, O LORD?”

“Why do bad things happen to good people?”

“If God loves us, how can he justify allowing (or sending) the sometimes overwhelming difficulties we face?”

“How can there be a good, all-powerful God that allows evil in His world?”

"I came to think that there is not a God who is actively involved with this world of pain and misery -- if he is, why doesn't he do something about it?"¹

The question has been posed in many forms. It has been asked specifically by theists as well as atheists, and generally by anyone who has suffered. Following Epicurus, David Hume expressed it: “Is God willing to prevent evil, but not able? then he is impotent. Is he able, but not willing? then is he malevolent. Is he both able and willing? whence then is evil?”² Among the prophetic books of the Hebrew Old Testament, the writings of Habakkuk stand alone as an example of a prophet of Yahweh who posed this very question to his deity. As a theodicy, Habakkuk does not provide a logical explanation of evil to answer the unbeliever.

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¹ Bart D. Ehrman, *God's Problem* (New York: HarperOne, 2009), 128.

² David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, ed. Martin Bell (London: Penguin, 1990 [1779]), 108-9.

Habakkuk is a worshiper of Jehovah and a faithful prophet. God's answers to the prophet's questions are suited to those posed by a heart of faith rather than of unbelief. This dialogue details a spiritual progression in the heart of a believer - moving from questioning an apparent contradiction between God's character and His conduct, to a trusting understanding of His sovereignty.

The divine response to Habakkuk's inquiry enlightens us to the truth of the righteous character of God and informs our response as His worshippers. It provides one of the rare moments of direct and explicit revelation regarding the question of evil.

This article will seek to examine the theodicy of Habakkuk. It will begin with a summary of theodicy in general, develop an understanding of the theodicy of Habakkuk in the context of his contemporary Old Testament Theology, and conclude with a valid, Scriptural theodicy based upon God's response to Habakkuk. This theodicy allows us to freely and boldly unleash our faith in a world which increasingly denies that a good God exists.

II. DESCRIBING THEODICY

Definition

Theodicy is formed from two root words meaning "God" and "just." The dictionary defines it as a "Defense of God's goodness and omnipotence in view of the existence of evil."³ Since this field of study often involves a logical justification for belief in God in addition to

³ Merriam Webster Online Dictionary, accessed at <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/theodicy> 16 December 2016. It is a "modification of French *théodicée*, from *théo-* the- (from Latin *theo-*) + Greek *dikē* judgment, right."

“defending”⁴ God, a more specific definition would involve attempts “to justify or defend God in the face of evil.”⁵

Audiences

Theodicies are generally targeted at four audiences:

- 1) Atheists who reject the existence of God or who charge believers with being irrational
- 2) “Moral” atheists who find the notion of God repugnant because of the amount of evil and suffering
- 3) Theists who are troubled by the problem
- 4) Sufferers of all kinds – atheists or theists⁶

An assessment of theodicy requires distinguishing between these groups because various social, historical, and philosophical contexts require different assumptions, theories and explanations of evil. The immediate and extended audience of the theodicy of Habakkuk - Habakkuk and the righteous remnant of Judah - fall in the latter two categories.

Presuppositions

The study of theodicy requires certain monotheistic presuppositions about the existence and nature of both God and evil. Other religions and belief systems can have such distinct views of these two topics that this problem does not exist in their framework.⁷ Polytheistic, atheistic, and non-theistic worldviews approach both issues quite differently. Mitchell notes that the very

⁴ It should be noted here that while a theodicy does indeed *defend* God, a distinction can be made between an theodicy and a defense. A defense does not require proof that the arguments are true, merely to show that the reasons why God allows evil are plausible. This distinction is drawn by Alvin Plantinga, *God, Freedom and Evil*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 26-29. Essentially, a defense, "shows at most that the critic of theism has failed to make his case. A theodicy, on the other hand, attempts to show that God *is* justified in permitting evil." Nash, *Faith and Reason*, 188.

⁵ Phillip Irving Mitchell. *Theodicy: An Overview*, accessed at <http://www3.dbu.edu/mitchell/theodicy.htm> 20 December 2016, 1.

⁶ Mitchell, 3.

⁷ John G. Stackhouse, *Can God Be Trusted?* (Downers Grove, ILL: Intervarsity Press, 2009), 22.

concept of theodicy is an issue that is “within and surrounding monotheism.”⁸ The concepts of good, evil and God are essentially those addressing the God of the Bible.

The nature of evil is especially important to our understanding of theodicy. Philosophers generally delineate two types of evil: Moral evil resulting from human action or inaction, and natural evil which is consequent of natural occurrences apart from human choices.⁹ The theological foundation upon which one is building largely determines his approach to this distinction and its consequent nuances.

When discussing the nature of evil there are two important points to be considered. The first is avoiding the reification of evil. When one makes the statement, "Why did God create evil?" He is guilty of this fallacy. Essentially, he is describing an abstraction as a reality. The second issue is distinguishing between subjective evil and objective evil. Worldviews which define evil as simply something that is contrary to my preference or opinions are essentially establishing a subjective evil. That which is evil to one is not necessarily evil to another. Despite our culture's frequent assertions that evil is indeed subjective, there remains a sense that there is objective evil. This is demonstrated when an act is universally decried as an evil act. We are then acknowledging that there is an innate evil in such actions that is objective. In Habakkuk's writing the evil he both observes and anticipates is objective in nature.

III. HABAKKUK'S THEODICY

As a theodicy, Habakkuk does not provide a logical explanation of evil to answer the unbeliever. Its argument is not a general response applicable to the various non-theistic

⁸ Mitchell, 2.

⁹ Ronald H. Nash, *Faith & Reason: Searching for a Rational Faith*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 179.

objections. A number of solutions have been proposed to resolving the dilemma of an omnipotent, omnibenevolent God who allows evil, but for the study of Habakkuk these may be limited to those addressing the questions of a theistic believer. Resolving these questions of faith frees the believer to confidently unleash his faith in a world filled with evil, pain, and suffering.

The story of Habakkuk is that of a servant of Jehovah and his internal struggle with a perceived incongruity between God's revealed nature and His observed actions. It depicts a spiritual transformation in the heart of a believer, as Habakkuk moves from questioning an apparent contradiction between God's character and His conduct, to a trusting understanding of his sovereignty. This spiritually developmental experience is instructive for believers faced with similar struggles.

IV. EXAMINATION OF HABAKKUK

Habakkuk 1:1-11

Habakkuk opens with a dialogue between the prophet and Jehovah. The use of first person singular verbs and pronouns clearly identifies Habakkuk as the speaker, and the second person singular indicates that Jehovah is the addressee.¹⁰ To the prophet, it seems as if God is indifferent to the sin prevalent in Judah. The nation was in rapid moral decline. The historic reforms of Josiah were forgotten, and Jehoikim was leading the nation toward disaster.¹¹

“O LORD, how long shall I cry, and you will not hear” (1:2)! With this question, Habakkuk bridges prophetic utterance with wisdom speculation.¹² As Bullock notes, “It was a

¹⁰ Marvin A. Sweeney, “Structure, Genre, and Intent in the Book of Habakkuk,” *Vetus Testamentum*, XLI, 1 (1991), 66.

¹¹ Warren Wiersbe, *Wiersbe Bible Commentary: Habakkuk*, (Colorado Springs: David Cook, 2007), 1470.

¹² Carl E Armerding, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Daniel and the Minor Prophets*, Frank E. Gaebelein, gen. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 494.

new dimension of prophetic thought. The prophets had spoken to Israel about Yahweh's demands, but Habakkuk spoke to Yahweh about Judah's dilemma."¹³ It is through this internal dialogue with God that Habakkuk communicates with the people.¹⁴ God's answer is not merely communicated to Habakkuk, it is for the nation as well.

“O LORD, how long?” Habakkuk perceived God as indifferent to the sin that he was forced to see day after day. “Why do you show me iniquity, and cause me to behold grievance” (1:3)? The prophet issues four separate complaints: There were people raising up strife and contention, God's law was ignored, the wicked were oppressing the righteous, and God had not responded to Habakkuk's prayer regarding it all.¹⁵ Whether the oppressors were a foreign power or, as is more likely, this describes a domestic oppression, the prophet's contention remains unchanged: Evil exists in the world of a righteous God.¹⁶

God promises an answer to Habakkuk's question, but it is not what the prophet expected. In fact, God reveals that His answer will be such that, “You will not believe, though it be told you” (1:5). Divine justice would come upon the sins bothering Habakkuk, but they would come through the Chaldeans (1:6). The Chaldeans were “a bloody and ruthless people who have no respect for the moral law”, and this characterization is verified in God's description of what they would do when they came upon the land (1:7-11).¹⁷ Instead of resolving the conflict in

¹³ C. Hassell Bullock, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophetic Books*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1986), 175.

¹⁴ Leon J. Wood, *The Prophets of Israel*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979), 326.

¹⁵ The debate over the identity of the oppressors, while of note, is not relevant to the discussion at hand.

¹⁶ Michael Thompson, “Prayer, Oracle and Theophany: The Book of Habakkuk,” *Tyndale Bulletin*, 44:1 (NA 1993), 34-35.

¹⁷ Gleason Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 397.

Habakkuk's mind, the Divine response served only to widen the incongruity between God's actions and what Habakkuk knew to be true about His character.

Habakkuk 1:12-17

Habakkuk continues his quest by now posing a second question to God. God's plan to use the Chaldeans as the instrument of His justice exposes an apparent inconsistency with His holy nature. The eternity, holiness, and righteousness of the Lord (1:12-13) are all seemingly incompatible with His use of an unholy people to mete out holy justice on His covenant people. How can a holy God not merely *allow*, but *use* an unholy instrument?

Habakkuk's theology is made clear in his opening statement from verse 12. Jehovah is eternal ("everlasting"), Holy ("mine Holy One"), sovereign ("ordained," "established"), and almighty ("O mighty God"). Through the use and repetition of God's names in this verse, he seems to be emphasizing the nature of God. This is particularly of note in the use of God's covenant name, Yahweh (יהוה) twice, as Habakkuk reminds God of His relation to the people of Israel.

The prophet's quandary is more than a national or philosophical question, it is personal and theological as well. The Hebrew prophets understood well that God would work through the surrounding empires. Over a century before Habakkuk, Isaiah had observed God's chastening hand through the incursions by foreign powers.¹⁸ But the limitations of the divine nature always governed this action. How could a God like this use a people like the Babylonians? He is "of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on iniquity," so how can He allow the "wicked to devour the man that is more righteous than he" (Habakkuk 1:13, KJV)? This is the ultimate

¹⁸ Thompson, 37.

question addressed by theodicy. How can a good and powerful God allow, or in this case allow and use, evil?

Verses 14-17 describe the Babylonians and their brutality. Like fishermen rejoicing over their catch, they are glad over those they take captive. Noting their trust in their own power, Habakkuk describes them as they “sacrifice to their net and burn incense to their drag” (1:16). There seems to be no end as they “empty their net,” and “continually slay the nations” (1:17). Not only are they vicious, their idolatrous religion is linked with this mentality (1:11, 16). They boastfully worship the violent means by which they successfully dominate their conquests and attribute their military strength to the power of their deity. For the Chaldean, violence is a virtue, and war is worship.

Habakkuk 2:1-20

After presenting his case, Habakkuk mounts his figurative “watchtower,” vigilantly alert for God’s promised explanation (2:1). He prepares his next answer as he anticipates God’s response to his seemingly undeniable argument. He does not have long to wait. God answers in verse two with a vision for the prophet to record.¹⁹ He commissions Habakkuk to write the vision so that a messenger will be able to deliver it to the people promptly.²⁰ He assures him that, though it will take time, what He is revealing “will surely come, it will not tarry” (2:3).

The assurance of this response (2:4-20) is anchored in three significant promises. The first is given in verse 4, faith will be justified: “The just shall live by faith.” The second comes in verse 14, the Lord will be glorified: “The earth shall be filled with the glory of the LORD.” The

¹⁹ This command reminds us that this dialogue is the vehicle of God’s revelation to His people. His answer is not merely for Habakkuk alone, it was for the righteous remnant of Israel struggling with the same questions.

²⁰ Sweeney, 71.

third is found in verse 20, the Lord is exalted: “The LORD is in His holy temple.” These affirmations form the basis of the divine response to the problem of evil.

While the just are promised hope, multiple “woes” are simultaneously pronounced on the wicked (vv. 6-19). The identity of the oppressor addressed is uncertain, but the context seems to indicate that these are directed toward the Chaldeans.²¹ Regardless of their identity, the most descriptive part of the warning is that they are the ones “whose soul is not upright.”

Habakkuk 3:1-19

In this final chapter Habakkuk transitions from discourse with the Lord to prayer and praise to Him. This authenticity of this chapter is sometimes debated, but there is no solid reason to exclude it from the original form of the book. There are lament elements in the first two chapters that are similar to that of the psalms.²² Further, a prayer and declaration of worship is the logical conclusion of the progression of Habakkuk’s experience. That a psalm should be included in this prophecy is fitting thematically, theologically, and contextually.

The prophet begins (vv. 1-4) by acknowledging the sinfulness of his people. The nation and its leaders (princes, judges, prophets, and priests) had all trampled the divine law (vv. 3-4). Man’s sinfulness is sharply contrasted with the justice of “the just LORD” (v. 5). God commands His servant to wait patiently for His action which will come in due time. He describes a future day when all the people will worship and serve the LORD (vv. 9-13). The Lord will bring ultimate justice and will dwell with his people.

²¹ Sweeney, 78.

²² Thompson, 42.

V. THE ILLUMINATION OF HABAKKUK

Asking Questions

It is a common misconception that people of faith never ask God questions. Habakkuk makes it clear that this is incorrect. Along with Job and Asaph, he demonstrates that those who trust in God can, and do not hesitate, to ask questions.

The distinction should be made between questioning God and asking questions of God. Questioning God implies doubt that God is at work, and knows what He is doing, or even exists. Asking questions of God implies faith that God exists, is at work, and knows what He is doing. Man has something to learn, even if he does not see or understand it yet. In fact, if God is using circumstances to teach and develop us, it might be argued that believers are sinning more by mute, ignorant endurance than by asking and seeking to discover the point of their experience.

A purposeful instructor has a specific intent for their means of instruction. Students who do not understand the lesson are missing that intent. Those who refuse to seek understanding will persist in ignorance.

When the teacher assigns a task, there will undoubtedly be students who do not understand, but are content to remain in their ignorance. They may even accuse the teacher of being unfair in assigning the project. Others may simply suffer in silence. They have reached the conclusion that they should not, or cannot, ask questions so they mutely endure through the task. They complete it as ignorant of the teacher's intended lesson as they were when they began. A few will trust that the teacher has an intended lesson and be willing to take the risk of raising their hand and questioning the teacher regarding the element they do not understand. These are the students who fulfill the intended purpose of the instructor. Only those who seek to grasp the

truth and meaning being communicated are submitted to the purpose of the teacher, even if such comprehension requires the risk of asking questions.

Flawed Perception

The problem in Habakkuk's dialogue does not lie in his knowledge of God. The statements he makes are all accurate and true. They are theologically sound. God is indeed sovereign, holy, eternal, and righteous. The disparity here is between the character of God as He has revealed Himself, and His conduct as man perceives Him. Like Job, Habakkuk's understanding was not incorrect, it was incomplete. God uses the process of this exchange to develop within Habakkuk a greater and clearer understanding of Himself.

There is no inconsistency between God's action and His character. If it seems to be so, the problem is not with God, but with our incomplete understanding of Him. The events we experience can become God's instrument of instruction. The process of revelation and illumination that Habakkuk experienced can be instructive to believers encountering the same dilemma. The divine response is fourfold: theological, soteriological, eschatological, and doxological. This response shapes a valid theodicy for the believer.

Theological Response

It is of note that the divine attributes of which Habakkuk was aware - eternity, holiness, and sovereignty (1:12-13) are the basis of the answers God would give His prophet in the remaining portion of the book.

The Eternity of God "Are you not from everlasting" (1:12)? God is eternal, and His work is often trans-generational. He has a plan, but it is a long term plan.²³ A proper theodicy for the believer therefore involves patience. The ultimate consequences that explain God's actions now

²³ Martin Lloyd-Jones, *From Fear to Faith*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982), 23.

may not come soon, or even in a lifetime. God required Habakkuk to be patient for both His answer and His purpose in His work with Israel.

The Holiness of God “Holy One.” Habakkuk addresses God by this name, then reiterates the attribute by stating, “You are of purer eyes than to behold evil, and cannot look on iniquity” (1:13). God’s holiness will not allow Him to tolerate sin. This initially caused uncertainty in Habakkuk because it seemed He had allowed it to continue. The condemnation of the oppressor in the vision in chapter 2 finds both its cause and source in this attribute, making it clear that God’s holiness will ultimately be vindicated. Coupled with His eternity, this vindication may not come when desired or expected, but it will come.

The Sovereignty of God “Ordained; established.” Habakkuk acknowledges the sovereign work of God through the Chaldeans, yet he struggles with the ramifications of this truth. God’s final promise in answer is a reaffirmation of His sovereignty, “the LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him” (2:20). This verse, which alludes to the heavenly dwelling place of God, sets the stage for the demonstration of God’s sovereignty over the world described in chapter 3.²⁴ Sweeney sees this as the prevailing theme of the book. “The two parts of the book . . . constitute a Prophetic Affirmation of Divine Sovereignty and Justice, the purpose of which is to convince its audience that YHWH is maintaining fidelity in a crisis situation.”²⁵

Rather than correcting Habakkuk’s theology, God’s theodicy simply amplifies the truths he was already aware of. The prophet correctly understood God’s attributes, but in a limited way. God’s discourse with him was the process by which He expanded Habakkuk’s knowledge and reaffirmed the truth about Himself.

²⁴ Thompson, 41.

²⁵ Sweeney, 81.

Soteriological Response

“The just shall live by his faith” (Habakkuk 2:4b, KJV). Though judgment would come, God reminds Habakkuk that those who suffer oppression because of their faithfulness would persevere through the coming invasion.²⁶ The remnant of the faithful would “live” by their “faith.”

This statement is quoted three times in the New Testament (Romans 1:17; Galatians 3:11; Hebrews 10:38) as evidence of justification by faith. Though Habakkuk’s understanding would have been more general in nature, the Christological nature of this promise is difficult to miss.²⁷ Theodicies have rarely addressed this approach to the problem of evil. Stackhouse notes, however, “If the Christian religion has something distinctive, let alone convincing, to say about the greatest of all problems, the problem of evil, it ought to say so fundamentally by reference to Jesus.”²⁸

This Christological approach to theodicy draws the focus of the response to the person of God in Jesus Christ. It is a Gospel-centered response. The faith that justifies is placed in a person who is more than simply a messenger, role-model, teacher, or martyr. It is founded in the Word, the visible expression of the image of God. It is in the person of Jesus that God identified with the suffering of humanity, experienced their pain, demonstrated His goodness, forever resolving the root of evil through the Atonement. This divine response to evil is the ultimate expression of God's goodness. As John Stott writes,

I could never myself believe in God, if it were not for the cross In the real world

²⁶ Roy B. Zuck, ed., *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*, (Chicago: Moody, 1991), 414.

²⁷ R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 937.

²⁸ Stackhouse, 115.

of pain, how could one worship a God who was immune to it? I have entered many Buddhist temples in different Asian countries and stood respectfully before the statue of Buddha, his legs crossed, arms folded, eyes closed, the ghost of a smile playing round his mouth, a remote look on his face, detached from the agonies of the world. But each time after a while I have to turn away. And in imagination I have turned instead to that lonely, twisted, tortured figure on the cross, nails through hands and feet, back lacerated, limbs wrenched, brow bleeding from thorn-pricks, mouth dry and intolerably thirsty, plunged in God-forsaken darkness. That is the God for me! He laid aside his immunity to pain. He entered our world of flesh and blood, tears and death. He suffered for us.²⁹

It is this affirmation of faith as the distinguishing characteristic acknowledged by God that underscores the theodicy here. Despite outward appearances, the faithful have a hope that exceeds any evil they may experience in this life. This hope is not founded on their relative goodness or evil, but on their faith. The sinful men (of whatever degree) will justly and deservedly reap the consequences of their sin, but those with justifying faith will reap the blessedness of that faith. This promise of ultimate “rightness” allows a clearer understanding of current evil.

Eschatological Response

“The earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD” (Habakkuk 2:14). The primary implication of this promise has not yet been fulfilled and is obviously referring to the future Messianic kingdom. This aspect of Habakkuk’s theodicy is essentially an eschatological hope, that is, God has promised that evil and suffering are only for a finite time and all will be restored in the end. It holds the future hope that God will “judge, compensate and/or at least put into perspective this present world’s evil.”³⁰

²⁹ John Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1986), 335-36.

³⁰ Mitchell, 10.

Doxological Response

“The LORD is in his holy temple” (Habakkuk 2:20). The final statement of God’s personal theodicy is His glory. This is the ultimate answer to the “evil” problem. While this might seem at first glance to be an example of simple fideism, it is more.³¹ Theodicy of faith and trust does not allow for understanding. Nor is it a disavowal of theodicy. This response is an understanding that finds its basis on the character, nature, and person of God.

Through the exercise of His sovereignty, the ultimate duty of creation (“let all the earth keep silence before him”) is to honor and reverence God. His residence in heaven (“in his holy temple”) is significant of His glory and the reverence humanity owes to Him. The final word of theodicy is that God is sovereignly working to bring about the greatest glory to Himself. Though He has offered an explanation to Habakkuk (and through him, to us), the final response of man is to be reverent and worshipful before Him.

VI. HABAKKUK’S RESPONSE

God’s answer to Habakkuk’s questions provokes the appropriate response. He has been transformed through the process of inquiring into the nature and person of God. Habakkuk’s transformation is about more than just an increase in knowledge. It is about a deepening of his awareness of God and the worship that springs from that. Worship that rises merely from a sense of obligation is inferior to worship that springs spontaneously from a heart in awe of the reality of God.

Habakkuk’s response is a psalm of praise that magnifies the greatness and power of Jehovah. His conclusion is that circumstances will no longer determine his worship. Though the

³¹ Mitchell, 11.

enemy would invade, crops would fail and the herds would be eliminated, the prophet declares, “Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation” (Habakkuk 3:18, KJV).

VII. CONCLUSION

Having established a response to the question of evil from the message and experience of Habakkuk, we may conclude by evaluating its validity. What is necessary for a sound theodicy?

David Blumenthal has suggested three essential characteristics:

“A good resolution, it seems to me, should meet three criteria as fully as possible. First, it should leave one with one's sense of reality intact. It should affirm what one knows to be the facts, no matter how unpleasant they may be. Second, it should leave one empowered within the intellectual-moral system in which one lives. It should allow one to live the basic truths by which one orders one's life, no matter how counter-intuitive these truths may seem. And, third, it should be as intellectually coherent as possible. In the matter of theodicy, this means that a good argument does not deny reality as it can be -- evil; nor does it deny the basic structure of the religious world -- a good God; and, it does not leave one unduly torn by contradiction and incoherence.”³²

As the theodicy found in the book of Habakkuk is directly from God Himself, it is not necessary to judge the theodicy by these standards. It is, however, helpful to gauge our understanding of it by them. In each case, the criteria can be answered in the affirmative.

By its foundation in the personal experience of the prophet and in the revealed nature of God, the defense tells the truth about reality. It affirms the basic truths of God's power and goodness. Finally, it is an intellectually coherent response to the demands of the question.

The ultimate answer to the question of evil is found in faith that God will act according to His character. The questioning believer must be patient and trusting. It is by this perseverant faith that justification and salvation will come. It is through the process of revelation that a more comprehensive understanding, reverence, and consequently worship, of God will develop within

³² David Blumenthal, “Theodicy: Dissonance in Theory and Praxis,” *Concilium*, 1 (1998) 95.

our hearts. It is with this deepened understanding that the assured believer can be empowered to unleash his/her faith to a world which is asking the same question.

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UNLEASHING FAITH AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Tim White, D. Min.*

The Black Lives Matter movement is a social justice issue. The President's executive order to pause the resettlement of refugees in America is another social justice controversy. The "Social Justice Warriors" movement is one response to these social justice disputes. Is social justice the mission of the church? Is social justice a biblical principle? Is it the responsibility of the Christian to right all the social injustices that plague our neighborhoods or nation? Is it the mission of God's people to address and fix racial bigotry, human trafficking, immigration and refugee controversies, hunger, poverty, child abuse, gender inequalities, workplace discrimination, environmental hazards, and corporate greed? The position of this article is that social justice is not the mission of the church, but a biblical social justice is one important means by which believers can have an opportunity to fulfill the mission of the church. The mission of the church is to make disciples as commanded by Christ in Matthew 28:19-20.

One danger the church must avoid is allowing social justice to morph into the social gospel. At the turn of the 20th century Walter Rauschenbusch who pastored in Hell's Kitchen in Manhattan became the Father of the Social Gospel. Tim Keller in his book *Generous Justice: How God's Grace Makes Us Just* advocates social justice but warns against the social gospel. Keller noted that,

Walter Rauschenbusch in his *A Theology for the Social Gospel*¹, in chapter 19, "The Social Gospel and the Atonement," rejects the theory of penal substitution and depicted Jesus's death as revealing the social injustice of this world, as well as the sacrificial,

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¹ Rauschenbusch Walter, *A Theology for the Social Gospel* (New York, The Macmillan company, 1917).

unselfish generosity that must be our operating principle if we are to heal the world of its evil.²

This rejection of Jesus's vicarious death for the sins of the world renders the Social Gospel a false gospel. According to Jim Wallis, editor of *Sojourners*, the church's mission is social justice. The ministry and the magazine *Sojourners* on his website are committed to "racial and social justice, life and peace, and environmental stewardship."³ Jim Wallis and Albert Mohler debated the subject: "Is Social Justice an Essential Part of the Mission of the Church?" at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School on October 27, 2011. Mohler argued the negative that the mission of the church is the proclamation of the good news of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jim Willis took the positive. Jim Wallis was asked, "What is the good news in Luke 4:18?" In Luke 4:18, Jesus declared, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor." So when Wallis was asked what is the good news in Luke 4:18? Wallis answered, "Health Care."⁴ Albert Mohler adamantly disagreed.

The mission of the church is not social justice but the church should practice a biblical social justice as one of many methods to fulfill our mission of making disciples. For example, our church feeds the hungry every week to provide an opportunity to give them the gospel. Feeding the hungry should not be practiced because it is trendy today but because James 2:14-17 and many other Scriptures teach the church to care for the needy.

The mission statement for the non-profit COAT (Community Outreach for Archdale and Trinity) in our area includes ministering to over 500 needy families in Archdale and Trinity,

² Timothy Keller, *Generous Justice: How God's Grace Makes Us Just* (Penguin Books, 2012), 188.

³ "About Us | Sojourners," accessed January 1, 2017, <https://sojo.net/about-us>.

⁴ "Is Social Justice An Essential Part Of The Mission Of The Church?," accessed December 2, 2016, <http://henrycenter.tiu.edu/resource/is-social-justice-an-essential-part-of-the-mission-of-the-church/>.

including a food pantry as well as utility and rental assistance. These are social justice issues. We are happy to help these families, but our mission is not social justice excluding the gospel.

How is social justice defined? Social justice is organizing a people to correct social injustices in the community, state, nation, or even the world. This attack on social injustices is both positive and negative. Positively, it is ministering to what has been called “the quartet of the vulnerable”⁵ in Zechariah 7:10: “Oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, the stranger (immigrant or refugee), nor the poor.” Negatively, it is delivering the oppressed and stopping the oppressor. For example, social justice is rescuing victims of human trafficking and stopping the slave trading traffickers.

In addition to defining social justice, the form of social justice this author is advocates must be identified. The term social justice is neutral and interpreted differently. There is a secular social justice, a misinformed Christian social justice, and a biblical social justice. This article will address these three forms of social justice.

I. SECULAR SOCIAL JUSTICE

First, there is secular social justice. There are positive secular social justice agencies like the many non-profit organizations that are helping the vulnerable. We can partner with these agencies. There are other extreme social justice movements about whom we should be wary. An example is the Social Justice Warriors movement which is driven by political correctness. If someone breaks the beliefs of these social justice warriors, one finds that they declare war and come after a person through social media, etc. Just because Social Justice Warriors in the opinion

⁵ Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Justice: Rights and Wrongs* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 75.

of this writer take extreme positions on social justice issues does not mean that we who would disagree should be unsympathetic to those involved in the issues.

The Blacks Lives Matter movement is a Social Justice Warrior example. BLM seeks to reform a failing public education system for African Americans and works to provide safe and affordable housing. There are other goals for which BLM advocates. Black Lives Matter, therefore, is not a single-issue movement. The most well-known advocacy of BLM is the targeting of police violence against black people.

Do black lives matter? Yes! Is there a need for police reform? Yes! Are there good cops who risk their lives to save black lives? Yes! Is the war on cops the solution? No! This author has read or listened to prominent black pastors, black scholars, and to both black Christian and secular journalists to try to understand this complicated social justice issue. Every contributor to this article on the subject of Black Lives Matter that the author has quoted is African American. The author wanted to hear what African Americans are saying about Black Lives Matter.

The views on Black Lives Matter are obviously varied even among Christians. The view of some is that there are distinctions that need to be made. One distinction is between the principle that black lives matter and some of the movement's belief system which includes ideology, goals, and presuppositions. The Black Lives Matter founders affirm their thirteen guiding principles on their website.⁶ Some of these guiding principles are admirable and need to be affirmed by all, such as, Diversity, Loving Engagement, Empathy, and Black Families. Others are unbiblical: Queer Affirming and Transgender Affirming.

⁶ "Guiding Principles | Black Lives Matter," accessed February 19, 2017, <http://blacklivesmatter.com/guiding-principles/>.

There are now more than thirty Black Lives Matter chapters in the United States, and one in Toronto. . . . Prospective chapters must commit to the organization’s guiding principles. These are laid out in a thirteen-point statement.⁷

This does not mean these thirteen guiding principles are the views of all individuals in the Black Lives Matter movement. Christian black leaders such as Thabiti Anyabwile, Dr. Carl Ellis, Jr., and Voddie Baucham make this distinction between the truth that black lives matter and some of the movement’s ideology.

A common weakness mentioned by some is the focus by Black Lives Matter’s focus on black lives taken by white police officers and not on the black lives taken by blacks. For example, John McWhorter, a black journalist with *The Daily Beast*, wrote: “Black people in poor neighborhoods are in vastly more danger of being killed by young black men than the occasional bad cop.”⁸ Seattle Seahawks’ cornerback Richard Sherman similarly said:

From personal experience living in the “hood, living in the inner city, you deal with things — you deal with people dying,” Sherman said. “I dealt with a best friend getting killed, and it was two 35-year-old black men. There was no police officer involved, there wasn’t anybody else involved, and I didn’t hear anybody shouting ‘black lives matter’ then.

“And I think that’s the point we have to get to,” he continued. “We need to deal with our own internal issues before we move forward and start pointing fingers and start attacking other people — to solidify ourselves as a people and to deal with our issues. I think as long as we have black-on-black crime and one black man killing another, if black lives matter, then they should matter all the time.”⁹

⁷ “Where Is Black Lives Matter Headed? - The New Yorker,” accessed February 20, 2017, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/03/14/where-is-black-lives-matter-headed>.

⁸ “The Daily Beast,” accessed December 17, 2016, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2015/09/28/black-lives-matter-is-living-in-the-past.html>.

⁹ “Seattle Seahawks’ Richard Sherman Addresses ‘Black Lives Matter’ after Post Falsely Attributed to Him - Seattle Seahawks & NFL News,” accessed February 21, 2017, http://blog.seattlepi.com/football/2015/09/16/seattle-seahawks-richard-sherman-addresses-black-lives-matter-after-post-falsely-attributed-to-him/?utm_medium=twitter.

While this is the view of some African Americans concerning Black Lives Matter, it has also been documented that the black community is actually more concerned about intracommunal crime than racial injustice from the police. YouGov surveyed 1,000 Americans and asked, “What do you think is a bigger problem for black Americans, violence in the black community often known as black on black crime, or racial injustice in the criminal justice system?” The majority of African Americans, 42 percent, stated crime in their neighborhoods was the bigger problem and 36 percent said that racial injustice in the criminal justice system was the bigger problem.¹⁰

Another important question to answer is, “Why is there black on black crime?” The answer is for the similar reason there is white on white crime.

Black people aren't uniquely predisposed to commit crimes against each other; crime is generally just racially segregated, based on a number of factors, including that most people commit crimes against people they either know or live near. According to the FBI's 2014 Uniform Crime Reports, close to 90 percent of African-American homicides were committed by other African Americans, while the majority (82 percent) of white American homicide victims were killed by other white people.¹¹

There is a tragic history to Black Lives Matter. Just read about or watch the movies on the Mississippi Burning in 1964 when 3 civil rights workers were murdered for educating blacks in order to register blacks to vote and help them pass the prejudiced literacy tests. Deputy Sheriff Cecil Price, who also was a KKK member, burned down a black church where this education of blacks was happening. He later arrested the three civil rights workers: Michael Schwerner, Andrew Goodman, and James Chancy. After holding the three on false charges for seven hours and refusing to give them their one phone call, Sheriff Price released them after dark. He then

¹⁰ “YouGov | Black Americans Divided on Violence within Black Community,” accessed February 16, 2017, <https://today.yougov.com/news/2016/04/23/black-lives-matter-movement/>.

¹¹ “Why ‘black-on-Black Crime’ Isn’t a Valid Argument against Criticizing Police Brutality - Vox,” accessed February 20, 2017, <http://www.vox.com/2016/7/12/12152772/rudy-giuliani-black-on-black-crime-police>.

pursued them and pulled them over, and along with other Klan members shot and killed the three civil rights workers.

We must confess that black people have been oppressed going back to the days of slavery and then following the Civil War during the Jim Crow era when blacks allegedly were separate but equal. This era was followed by racist housing policies with the redlining policy. One can read Ta-Nehisi Coates's article entitled, "The Case for Reparation" in *The Atlantic* for a history of racism. We have sinned against blacks and God who created them in His image. More of us need to do what the Southern Baptists did in 1995 when they publicly apologized for their bigotry and vowed to "eradicate racism in all its forms" from its ranks.¹²

One black pastor, Mika Edmondson, addressing this issue at *The Gospel Coalition* stated that when it is said that black lives matter, it is not meant that only black lives matter but that black lives matter too.¹³ This is true. Black pastor, Voddie Baucham, also writing for *The Gospel Coalition* his "Thoughts on Ferguson" candidly advised black Christians how to personally deal with the strong racial tensions that are dividing our nation. Baucham, who has both been wrongly profiled by white policemen and accosted at gunpoint by a black robber, wrote:

As a father of seven black men, I tell them to be aware of the fact that there may be times when they may get a closer look, an unwelcome stop, or worse. However, I do not tell them that this means they need to live with a chip on their shoulder, or that the world is out to get them. I certainly don't tell them that they need to go out and riot (especially when that involves destroying black-owned businesses). I tell them that there are people in the world who need to get to know black people as opposed to just knowing "about" us. I tell them that they will do far more good interacting with those people and shining the light of Christ than they will carrying picket signs. I tell them, "Never avenge yourselves,

¹² "Southern Baptist Convention > Resolution On Racial Reconciliation On The 150th Anniversary Of The Southern Baptist Convention," accessed December 9, 2016, <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/899>.

¹³ "Is Black Lives Matter the New Civil Rights Movement?," accessed January 15, 2017, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/is-black-lives-matter-the-new-civil-rights-movement>.

but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay'" (Rom. 12:19).¹⁴

Black pastor Dr. Tony Evans, after Ferguson, wrote a *Washington Post* article entitled "Christians Should Put Their Faith Above Their Race and Culture." This article was based on a sermon he preached in which he communicated that the lives matter controversy must be put under the umbrella truth that every person is made in the image of God.

We have voices about which life matters. All life is created in the image of God. All lives matter. However, underneath the banner that God has created all people in his image, there are inequities that must be addressed. For example, the life of the unborn matters. And so there is this on injustice in the womb. But that injustice in the womb must be under the umbrella that all life matters. Black lives matter, as a subset of all lives matter. So any injustices to a particular group must be addressed specific to that group but under the banner that all life is created in the image of God.¹⁵

May God help Christians, as Tony Evans preached, to view every social justice issue through the lens of God's Word not our prejudice or particular view of political correctness.

II. CHRISTIAN MISINTERPRETATION OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

In addition to a secular misunderstanding of social justice, there is a Christian misinterpretation of social justice. Gary North and Gary DeMar in the Christian Reconstruction Movement take social justice to another level. They teach that the church should practice social justice to reconstruct society in order to bring in the kingdom. The author, in this section, will demonstrate that Christian Reconstructionists misinterpret social justice because they advocate misinterpret the Cultural Mandate, the Law of Moses, and Millennial promises.

¹⁴ "Thoughts on Ferguson," accessed January 18, 2017, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/thoughts-on-ferguson>.

¹⁵ "Christians Should Put Their Faith above Their Race and Culture, the Rev. Tony Evans Says - The Washington Post," accessed January 27, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2016/07/21/christians-should-put-their-faith-above-their-race-and-culture-the-rev-tony-evans-says/?utm_term=.5f30ff5ee6fe.

Gary North writes that the church should provide, “health care, education, welfare, social security, and many other social needs.”¹⁶ He explains how this social reform can happen:

Every revolution needs slogans. Here is mine: politics fourth. First, comes personal faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Second, comes Church renewal. There can be no successful reformation of society without first beginning a reformation of the Church. Third, comes family renewal. This involves pulling your children out of public schools. Fourth, comes local politics. At a minimum, this would involve public protests against abortion. From there we go to state and national politics.¹⁷

Therefore, all Christians who have not pulled their children out of public schools or protested at abortion clinics are not, according North, fulfilling God’s mission. Charles Ryrie calls this movement theonomy¹⁸ and defines theonomy as the state of being governed by God.¹⁹ This governance by God is through the Law of Moses. This social reform of society based on Genesis 1:28 is called the Cultural Mandate. Interpreting the Cultural or Creation Mandate as operative today, however, is incorrect.

God gave Adam dominion over all creation before the Fall into sin according to Genesis 1:28 when God said, “subdue it and have dominion over.... the earth.” This is why Christian Reconstruction is also called Dominion Theology.²⁰ This truth is similarly stated in Hebrews 2:5-8a. The Fall, however, changed everything. Because of the man’s Fall into sin, man does not now have dominion over creation. The same mandate is repeated after the Fall in Genesis 9:1

¹⁶ Gary North and Gary DeMar, *Christian Reconstruction: What It Is, What It Isn't* (Tyler, Tex: Inst for Christian Economics, 1991), 126.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 124, 125.

¹⁸ Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology: A Popular Systematic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth*, New Edition edition (Chicago, Ill: Moody Publishers, 1999), 231.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 515.

²⁰ North and DeMar, *Christian Reconstruction*, 65.

without the commands “subdue” and “have dominion over.” The author of Hebrews also marks this change in Hebrews 2:8b: “But now we see not yet all things put under him.”

Gary North and Gary DeMar in their book *Christian Reconstruction* quote Genesis 1:28 as the basis for Christian Reconstructionism several times but never Genesis 9:1 nor Hebrews 2:5-8 which record God’s reversal of man’s role because of his rebellion against God.

What about the modern slavery issue in light of the Christian Reconstructionism? What is the church’s responsibility for this social injustice? There are more slaves today with human and sex trafficking than before the Civil War. Free the Slaves²¹ reports there are 21 million slaves today who are forced to work without pay. In April, 2014, it was reported that forty people had been arrested for human trafficking in North Carolina, including thirty in Winston-Salem.²² Tragically, children and young people are bought or kidnapped for prostitution.

How did the apostle Paul respond to the slavery issue in the Roman Empire? He advised slaves and their masters how to treat each other as Christians. Why did Paul not raise the inhumane treatment of slaves who were equally made in the image of God?

Homer Kent writes that slavery in the Roman Empire could be considerably harsher than under the Mosaic Law. However, one must not generalize from the cases of outrageous abuse which have been publicized, and erroneously suppose that such were typical of first-century practice.... The difference between an average urban slave and a poor freeman was more a matter of principle than of practice.... Such slaves functioned as clerks, accountants, doctors, nurses, teachers, advisors, musicians, and artists. For various reasons, therefore, a poor freeman might sell himself into slavery in order to better his status.²³

²¹ “Free the Slaves,” accessed November 28, 2016, <http://www.freetheslaves.net/>.

²² “40 People Arrested across NC for Human Trafficking | myfox8.com,” accessed November 9, 2015, <http://myfox8.com/2014/04/17/30-people-arrested-in-winston-salem-for-human-trafficking/>.

²³ Homer A. Kent, *Treasures of Wisdom: Studies in Colossians and Philemon* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Pub Group, 1978), 156, 157.

Also, Paul indirectly dealt with slavery by winning slaves and their masters to Christ and then encouraging the masters to free their slaves (Philemon 15-21).

Are Christians against human and sex trafficking? Absolutely! While abolishing human and sex trafficking is not the mission of the church, Christians still can get involved in this social justice issue in order to do the mission of the church which in part is to witness and win the lost to Christ. The mission, however, is not the reconstructing of society by the abolition of slavery.

How does The Christian Reconstruction Movement propose reconstructing society? By placing our nation under the Law of Moses. Not just the Moral Law but under also the Civil Law of Moses with capital punishment for a multitude of sins. Reconstructionists espouse “the continuing validity and applicability of the whole law of God including the Mosaic case laws as the standard by which individuals, families, and civil governments should conduct their affairs.”²⁴

This use of the law, according to Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce Demarest in their *Integrative Theology*²⁵, means capital punishment for a rebellious son (Deut 21:18-21), witchcraft (Ex 22:18), bestiality (Ex 22:19), adultery (Lev 20:10), homosexuality (Lev 20:13), and blasphemy (Lev 23:16).²⁶ According to Christian Reconstruction Movement the Law is a means of sanctification.²⁷ Paul wrote clearly in Romans 6:14 that believers are not under the

²⁴ North and DeMar, *Christian Reconstruction*, 82.

²⁵ Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce A. Demarest, *Integrative Theology*, Three Volumes in One edition (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 1996).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 352.

²⁷ North and DeMar, *Christian Reconstruction*, 105.

Law. North and DeMar say Romans 6:14 is prohibiting the law as a means of salvation.²⁸ Paul's intention by making this statement in Romans 6:14 is not salvation but sanctification. Paul says earlier in Romans 6 to Christians, "yield not to sin." The context is sanctification. In Galatians, Paul argues that the Law is not a means of justification (Galatians 3, 4) nor a means of sanctification (Galatians 5, 6). The means of sanctification according to Paul is yielding to the Holy Spirit, not placing yourself under the law (Galatians 5:16-23). Under the law in the Old Testament adulterers were stoned, but in this church age according to 1Corinthians 5, adulterers are church disciplined not stoned.

The Christian Reconstruction Movement is postmillennial in believing that the church will bring in the kingdom not only through the gospel but through social and political activism.²⁹ The Biblical teaching is that Christ brings in His pre-millennial kingdom according to Revelation's chronological outline: Second Coming to earth in Revelation 19 and the 1000-year millennial reign in Revelation 20 and the New Heaven in Revelation 21, 22.

The Christian Reconstruction Movement is joined by Prosperity Gospel advocates in believing that the kingdom is now with the prosperity promises of the millennium being presently experienced.³⁰ "Kingdom Now" is the Prosperity Gospel wing of Christian Reconstruction Movement. A proof text referenced by Gary North and Gary DeMar is Isaiah 65:17-25. These millennial promises of prosperity include long life as before the flood. How can this longevity of life become a present reality according to Christian Reconstruction? The

²⁸ Ibid., 100, 102.

²⁹ Ibid., 59, 60; 127.

³⁰ Ibid., 127.

reconstructing of society will include better medicine, health care, and technology, so that these millennial prosperity promises come to pass now.

Wayne Grudem, referring to passages like Isaiah 65, correctly teaches that these promises in Isaiah will be fulfilled in the future millennium because they are not being fulfilled today nor will they be fulfilled in eternity:

Several Old Testament passages seem to fit neither in the present age nor in the eternal state. These passages indicate some future stage in the history of redemption which is far greater than the present church age but which still does not see the removal of all sin and rebellion and death from the earth.³¹

Christian Reconstructionism is a misinterpretation of social justice because of a misinterpretation of the Cultural Mandate, the Law of Moses, and Millennial promises.

VIII. BIBLICAL SOCIAL JUSTICE

Third, there is Biblical social justice. The definition of social justice states that this advocacy is accomplished both positively and negatively by organizing a people to correct social injustices in your community, state, nation, or even the world. This attack on social injustices is both positive and negative. Positively, it is ministering to what has been called the quartet of the vulnerable. Negatively, it is delivering the oppressed and stopping the oppressor. There are two words for justice in the Old Testament that convey this two-fold positive and negative meaning of social justice. The word *mishpat* emphasizes the negative side of social justice when the oppressor is punished. It is going after the bad guys. The other word, *tzadeqah*, stresses the

³¹ Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England : Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 1994), 1127.

positive side that does right for the needy. It distributes to the vulnerable what is necessary for life.³²

Both of these words are found in a profound statement of Old Testament ethics and Biblical social justice practiced by Job. Job's accusers had wrongfully indicted Job of oppressing the needy in Job 22:5-9. Job defends himself in 29:12-17 and uses both Old Testament words for Biblical social justice. He used *tzadeqah* translated "righteousness" and *mishpat* translated "justice" in 29:14. Job testified how he practiced *tzadeqah* or positive social justice with the needy in 29:12-16:

Because I delivered the poor who cried for help, and the fatherless who had none to help him. The blessing of him who was about to perish came upon me, and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy. I put on righteousness [tzadeqah], and it clothed me; my justice [mishpat] was like a robe and a turban. I was eyes to the blind and feet to the lame. I was a father to the needy, and I searched out the cause of him whom I did not know (ESV).

In 29:17, Job spoke of practicing *mishpat* or the negative side of social justice in punishing the oppressor: "I broke the fangs of the unrighteous and made him drop his prey from his teeth."

In Job 31:9-28, Job again defends himself against the charge of not helping and defending the marginalized, but he also exposes his motive. His motive was not a secular motive of simply assisting his fellow human or citizen. His drive was honoring God by lifting up the needy because one day, Job would give an account to God. If he did not minister to the needy, he would be sinning against His creator who was also the creator of the poor, widow, the hungry, and the fatherless.

³² Keller, *Generous Justice*, 7.

The mission for the church is the Great Commission commanded by Jesus in Matthew 28:19, 20. The focus is on making disciples who give out the gospel to their communities, work places, families, and classrooms. They also stand up for justice in all of those arenas because God is just and the justifier of those who believe the gospel. They should be involved in helping needy families and victims of trafficking and other social injustices as a means to fulfilling the Great Commission.

Peter wrote in 1 Peter 3:15 that we should “be ready always to give an answer to every man that asks you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.” Are people asking why Christians do what they do because of their lives and also their involvement in social justice? How has church been involved in social justice? While social justice is not mission of the church, the church practice a Biblical social justice as a means of getting the gospel out which is the mission of the church.

One Biblical social justice method is ministering to the refugees as a mission field that God has brought to the church’s communities. It is hard for believers to sympathize who have been spared the horrors of escaping their country because of persecution and leaving behind all of their possessions and in many cases their dead families, to sympathize. Watching the *Lost Boys of Sudan* video can help raise the awareness of this social injustice of human tragedy.

Messengers at the SBC's annual meeting in St. Louis, Missouri approved Resolution 12, titled "On Refugee Ministry."

That we affirm that refugees are people loved by God, made in His image, and that Christian love should be extended to them as special objects of God's mercy in a world that has displaced them from their homelands. That we encourage Southern Baptist churches and families to welcome and adopt refugees into their churches and homes as a means to demonstrate to the nations that our God longs for every tribe, tongue, and nation to be welcomed at His Throne ... Resolution 12 also called for governing authorities to

implement the strictest security measures possible in the refugee screening and selection process, guarding against anyone intent on doing harm.³³

As Resolution 12 stated, our government should do all it can to deter terroristic refugees and immigrates intent on doing the USA harm, but then the church should also minister to refugees who have fled from terrorism. Once refugees have been fully vetted, the church should step up and reach out with the love of God.

The Bible says much about refugees. The Bible mentions “stranger, foreigner, resident alien, sojourner, or immigrant” ninety-two times. One of the references is Deuteronomy 10:17-19. There are many immigrants or refugees in the Bible. Jacob fled his homeland under the threat of violence from his brother, Esau (Gen. 27: 42–44). Moses fled from Egypt to Midian, initially, because Pharaoh sought to kill him (Ex. 2: 15). David escaped persecution on multiple occasions to the land of the Philistines, where he sought asylum under King Achish (1 Sam. 21: 10; 27: 1). The prophet Elijah evaded the persecution of the evil King Ahab and Queen Jezebel by traveling out into the wilderness (1 Kings 19: 1– 4). Jesus, Mary, and Joseph were forced as refugees to flee a tyrannical government (Matt. 2:13– 15).³⁴

Joseph was a blessing to Egypt when he was forced to immigrate there. So many immigrants have also blessed America. Sergey Brin immigrated to the United States with his family from the Soviet Union at the age of 6 in 1979. Sergey Brin and Larry Page co-founded Google in 1998 when they were students at Stanford University. One billion people a day search for information on Google.

³³ “Southern Baptist Convention > On Refugee Ministry,” accessed January 15, 2017, <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/2273/on-refugee-ministry>).

³⁴ Stephan Bauman et al., *Seeking Refuge: On the Shores of the Global Refugee Crisis* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2016), 18.

Persecution drove believers from their homes in Acts 8:1-5 to spread the gospel. Refugees who are believers take the gospel with them to the host nations. The believers who come to America come as persecuted believers who love the Lord.

Why should Christians minister to refugees? Because all people are created in the image of God (Gen 1:27). Jesus died for all people (John 3:16). Because the Bible teaches one to help persecuted believers. The New Testament commands us “to entertain strangers.... remember them that are in chains, as chained with them; and them who suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body” (Hebrew 13:2, 3). Paul wrote to all believers in Galatian 6:10 that they should “do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers” (Gal. 6: 10). Jesus taught there will be a special reward for believers who help persecuted believers in Matthew 25:32-46.

Why should Christians minister to refugees? Because many refugees are unsaved and need the gospel. One report revealed that 361 unreached people groups live within the boundaries of the United States. More than any other country.³⁵ That opportunity is not an accident. Scripture declares that God “makes nations great, and destroys them; he enlarges nations, and disperses them” (Job 12: 23).

Jesus in His great commission to the church commanded “make disciples of all nations” (Matt. 28:19). The arrival of immigrants into our communities has brought “all nations” to our doorsteps. This movement of people is an act of God’s providence: the God who made all people also “determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live . . . so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him” (Acts 17:26-27, NIV).

³⁵ Ibid., 30.

While economic and sociological reasons drive people's desire to migrate, God has sovereignly superintended this movement of people to America so that they might come into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ and follow him as disciples.

Missiologist Timothy Tennent, has noted that the percentage of immigrants in North America who either arrive as or become Christians is significantly higher than the Christian share of the native-born US population. They are more sensitive to the gospel than natural-born gospel-hardened neighbors.³⁶

Who are believers going to live with and worship with for all eternity in Heaven? White English-speaking Americans? No! Other believers, to quote Revelation 7:9, from every tribe, tongue, nation, and language.

Christ in the Great Commission commands the church to "make disciples" by winning the sinner, baptizing the new convert, and then teaching the convert to observe all things whatsoever Jesus taught. What did Jesus teach? Jesus taught the unconverted must believe the gospel to be saved, but then as believers feed the hungry, clothe the naked, visit the prisoners, and take in the strangers (Matthew 24:31-46). He also said the Spirit of the Lord is upon me to preach the gospel to the poor. The Great Commission from our Savior is the mandate that drives what believers do as a church, and His example showed believers that they must use a Biblical social justice as a means of not only helping the hurting, but making disciples for His glory.

³⁶ Ibid., 35. Kindle Electronic Edition

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THE GIFT OF LIMITS

Jeff Clawson*

I. INTRODUCTION

We are living in a day in our country and culture when there is as much uncertainty and fear as any time this generation has ever known. It is a generation of rhetoric. Truth has been relegated to post-modern relativity while political leaders have learned, since truth is relative, if you repeat something enough times, someone will believe it to be true—even when the person declaring it knows it to be false. What is all this causing? More than a divided country, it is also causing an unwillingness to try. Why? Because, in our day, if you try to do anything worth doing, it will be adjudicated in the court of public opinion, which for many is a frightening prospect.

What we are realizing today is that the fear in our culture is creating an unwillingness to try; and an unwillingness to try will eventually lead to an inability to succeed—all from a mindset of fear.

Whether the above paragraphs resonate with you or not, certainly you know and understand fear. We all have it. I think most of us have fear for the reasons stated above. We all fear different things in different ways in this life. For that fear God has given all mankind an interesting and unusual gift.—“the gift of limits.”¹

“The gift of limits” presses against what some preach in popular Christianity today and also against what many Christians believe. For many, Christianity has been reduced to a set of

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¹ Peter Scazzero. *Emotionally healthy spirituality: Unleash a Revolution in Your Life in Christ* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2006), 52. I am indebted to Scazzero for the phrase “gift of limits” though topically we are using it in a different context.

precepts that interpret faith in God as something to help mankind to be successful and to succeed in anything man tries. That sounds good, but it is simply not true.

Paul actually lived and preached a different truth. Paul declares both through his life and words that God will purposefully and graciously let us come to the end of our limits—the end of ourselves. Through circumstances and seasons, God will allow us to come to the end of ourselves which will force us to reach for Him. The implications of this promise are spectacular. Paul broaches this truth at the Areopagus in Athens.

In his speech at the Hill of Ares found in Acts 17, Paul talks of the limitations that man has on them and that God placed those limitations upon man deliberately. In his recognition that the Areopagites were both religious and idolatrous, Paul tells the philosophers that God has placed upon their lives a way that they can find Him. That way is limitations.

Paul tells his audience that though they do not know Him, God created them. In His creation of them, along with all mankind, God “determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place” (Acts 17:26). Paul is telling them that they will have seasons of life, life-span, and times when they will only be able to go so far. This is true for all of us. I believe that of which Paul is speaking is simply that we, by God’s design, will all eventually come to the end of ourselves and our abilities. Why would God do this to us? Punishment? No, actually it is grace.

Paul continues to tell them the reason for these limits. He says God limits men, “that they should seek God, and perhaps feel their way toward Him.” The language of this verse is describing anxiously groping in the dark and searching for help.² The best part of this is that Paul

² William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 1098. “ἄρα γε ψηλαφήσειαν αὐτὸν” - “perhaps feel their way toward him...” ἄρα is a usually untranslatable conjunction that denote anxiety.

describes the outcome of this groping and reaching, which is to “find Him. Yet he is actually not far from any of us” (Acts 17:27).

When I am completely up against my limits, and I am anxious, and I am reaching in the dark as far as I can, suddenly it is there that I can find God—both His presence and His working. In addition, I find he was never very far away!

Being a Christian then does not mean that I will be able to do anything to which I set my mind. Though I am a follower of Jesus Christ, I still will have times and attempts in life at which I will fail. If Paul believes this, then “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me,” cannot mean what so many people today think it means (Philippians 4:13). If God will purposely and providentially allow me to come to the end of myself, Paul must have meant something different with that verse.

II. BENEFITS OF LIMITS

Before I come to a conclusion on this, let me first explore some of the benefits of limits. As I come to the end of myself and find God in my reach, it exposes some other blessings along with it.

Limits expose the weaknesses in that to which I am clinging.

Luke records how Paul points this out to the philosophers he is addressing. First, that the Areopagites are “very religious” (Acts 17:22). Our limits expose the weakness of our religiosity. God gives us limits to make sure we do not jump through our religious hoops in hope to somehow please God. Trying to keep God pleased by religion so he will not punish us is a severe misunderstanding of the cross. Our limits keep the cross in view. When the cross stays in view,

γε is an emphatic addition. The word *ψηλαφήσειαν* means “to touch by feeling, to look for someth. in uncertain fashion, *to feel around for, grope for.*”

we are consistently reminded of the fact that God poured all of His wrath for our sin on the Son, thereby crushing the need for religion.

Secondly, limits expose the weakness of our personal abilities. Paul explains this as he explains that God is not “served with human hands, as though he needed anything” (Acts 17:25). This speaks directly to the fact that being a Christian is not a guarantee of success in everything we try to do. Sometimes God lets us fail. In doing so, God by His grace exposes that there are weaknesses to our personal abilities. When we find we are unable and seek God, even in frustration we find God *is* able.

Lastly, limits expose the weakness of what I cling to that are cultural norms. Paul points out that the Athenians were clinging to things that were the cultural norms for strength and mooring. Paul explains that “we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone...” The words “to think” in verse 29 come from the Greek word νομίζω, which means “to follow or practice what is customary.”³ Their idols were their customary comforts. Needless to say, in our twenty-first century culture we have many customary comforts on which we rely for strength and encouragement. Today it can be anything from likes and followers on social media, to binging on Netflix, to pain killers, food, or many other things we rely on for comfort today. Our limits expose how weak all these things are compared to God. When we come to the end, when we can no longer find comfort, then by God’s design, we will reach for help and find Him without having to search very far.

³ William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, and Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 675.

Limits grow my faith

Every person on earth has two choices—either to try to live by faith in one’s self or by faith in God. You cannot do both. That is why it is important to understand that God never meant Christianity to cause a Christian to believe that everything he does or tries will work. God will always be working in our lives to help us live the way he demands we live, and he makes but one demand—by faith (Romans 1:17).

This is why limits are an act of grace. When we come to the end of ourselves, we are forced to look for help outside of us. When we have exhausted all other options, all of our customary comforts, we are left to grope in the dark; and by God’s grace, that is when our faith in Him grows—we find Him.

Limits grow my ability to see God work (again).

If the above is true, it makes since that we may find ourselves up against our limits more than once in this life. For Paul it was many, many times. You can find a list of some of these times in 2 Corinthians 11. Earlier in 2 Corinthians Paul explains what the gift of limits did for him:

“For we do not want you to be unaware, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. *But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. he delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will deliver us again*” (2 Corinthians 1:8–10).⁴

Every time Paul came to the end of himself, he found God was there to deliver him, and Paul learned to believe the next time God would deliver him *again*.

⁴ Emphasis mine

III. CONCLUSION

Paul understood the gift of limits very well because he found himself up against his limits many times. When he was preaching at the Areopagus, he was not only sharing theological truth but also practical experience. It is important we remember that Paul was just as human as you and I. Because of this, I am convinced that when Paul wrote Philippians 4:13 he was not thinking the way so many Christians do today when they apply this verse. He did not mean because he was a believer that he could do anything to which he set his mind. He was basing it upon the gift of limits that he learned through his entire ministry.

I am not saying that Paul was not very spiritual, but Paul himself admitted that he struggled just as much as you and I do (Romans 7:18-20). When Paul went through the struggles, persecutions, and trials of his ministry, I believe many times he found himself at the end of his limitations, which is why he speaks about the gift of limits the way he does.

When Paul wrote Philippians 4:13, it comes at the end of a section of Scripture that was deeply personal for Paul. I am convinced that couched in Philippians chapter 4 are truths that Paul had been repeating and preaching to himself during many times of struggle. Verses such as 6 and 7, when Paul states, “be anxious for nothing” come from Paul struggling with his own anxiety. In this Paul is reminding himself that his anxiety will melt away, and he will know God’s peace when he prays and makes his requests known to God (Philippians 4:6-7). In the same way in verse eight, Paul explains how to keep the negative reel of thoughts that we all can have running in our minds from sending us into depression—especially during seasons of difficulty.

When Paul under inspiration wrote the above verses he wrote Philippians 4:13 as well, which he did sitting in a jail. It is ironic that he is writing to the churches in Philippi. It was in Philippi that Paul experienced both persecution and an incredible miracle of deliverance that came

with it (Acts 16:16-34). However, this time, as he sits in jail Silas is not present, they are not singing hymns, there will be no earthquake shaking to open the cell doors and no dropping off of the shackles. There will be no jailer and his family converted, nor a celebration of baptism because of their faith. It is in this moment that Paul wrote such a powerful and pivotal verse.

When Paul wrote these incredible words, he was not speaking about being successful in everything he tried, and he was not speaking about doing things well. He was saying that because of the many times in his ministry that he came to the end of himself, and the many times he experienced God's mercy, he learned something. Every time Paul reached and groped in the dark, he found out that God was "not far" from him but ever so close. Paul knew that because of that truth he could even sit in prison without any hope or thought of rescue. Paul, based upon everything he knew about this truth of the gift limits, was saying, "because of what I know, I can even do this!"

Paul knew by experience, and through theological truth, that when faced with his limits, he would experience the limitlessness of God.

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UNLEASHING FAITH AMONG THE NATIONS: CASE STUDIES OF CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Howard D. Owens, Ph. D.*

Righteousness always has been by faith, and faith always has come by hearing God's Word. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews asserted that "the men of old gained approval" by faith, and that without faith, they could not please God.¹ Paul explained that righteousness was credited to Abraham and David, because of their faith, and that faith came by hearing the Word of God.² How, therefore, did the nations—the peoples foreign to the people of Israel—hear God's Word for this righteousness rendering faith to be engendered in them during the dispensations and under the covenants of the Old Testament? These peoples did hear God's Word for the opportunity to put their faith in the Lord for righteousness, and faith was unleashed among the nations of the world. They did not come to Israel to hear of the Lord. Messengers from Israel went to them with God's Word.

Explicit evidence of such a missionary enterprise, however, is missing in the books of the Old Testament. The absence of this evidence has caused reputable missiologists and theologians to restrict the hope of the nations learning of the Lord to their coming to Jerusalem.³ Given this restricted hope of salvation for these nations and the growth of pluralism, Clark Pinnock sought a

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¹ Heb. 11:1, 6.

² Romans 4, Rom. 10:17, and 2 Tim 3:15.

³ Walt C. Kaiser, Jr. has summarized the early debate, from 1896 to 1973, regarding whether Israel was to have an active missionary role or a passive and attractational role. Walt C. Kaiser, Jr., "The Great Commission in the Old Testament," *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 13, no. 1 (Jan. – Mar. 1996): 3-4.

basis for a "wider hope" that non-Jews too were being reconciled to the Lord. He proposed that people could be saved, without consciously hearing the Word of God and having an accurate understanding of who the Lord is. Other scholars would differ with Pinnock. They would argue that a basis exists for a "wider hope" for salvation among the Gentiles, who learned of the Lord and His Word, through the communication of the Lord's Word by a variety of messengers, who traveled beyond the borders of Israel.

The explicitness of Scripture on a particular subject is a function of the purpose for which it was written. The books of the Old Testament were not written as missionary literature, with perhaps the exception of Jonah, like the New Testament books were.⁴ Given the Israel-centric focus of the Old Testament and the apparent lack of explicit missionary commands and missionary accounts, the natural conclusion would be that the unbelieving Gentile peoples would come to Israel to learn of the Lord.

Implicit evidence of missionary activity, however, is present in the Old Testament. J. Herbert Kane acknowledged the implicitness of missions in the Old Testament "doctrine of universalism."⁵ It is also implied in the narratives of the Old Testament. For example, the Queen of Sheba came to Solomon, because she had "*heard* about the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the Lord."⁶ From whom did she hear? Moses assumed that the nations would learn of the Lord. Moses instructed Israel to keep and do "the statutes and judgments" of the Lord, "for

⁴ H. Rzepkowski argued that "the decisive difference between the Old and the New Testament is mission. The New Testament is essentially a book about mission." H. Rzepkowski, "The Theology of Mission," *Verbum SVD* 15 (1974): 80, quoted in David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 17.

⁵ J. Herbert Kane, *Christian Missions in Biblical Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1976), 17.

⁶ 1 Kings 10:1 (NASB), emphasis added. If not otherwise specified all quotations are from the New American Standard Bible.

that is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who *will hear* all these statutes and say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’”⁷ Moses assumed that messengers would go out to the nations, and that at least some members of these people groups would be reconciled to the Lord through a personal relationship with Him. This is the goal of the missionary task—to proclaim the name of the Lord.

The thesis that messengers went out from Israel during the times of the Old Testament will be tested with a study of cases where Gentiles heard the Lord’s Word. Researchers in the past have searched for the formal sending of missionaries to the nations to communicate God’s Word during this period. Given the absence of explicit reports of such activity, scholars deny that the knowledge of the Lord was transmitted from Israel to the nations via a formal missionary enterprise. They explain that the nations came to Israel to hear of the Lord; that missions was centripetal.⁸ Given the absence of missional mechanisms, scholars have been tempted to concede the requirement that people know and call consciously on the Lord to be justified in the Old Testament.

The purpose of this study contrasts with the studies of the past. Its purpose is to analyze cases where Gentiles heard of the Lord and called on Him because of messengers who were among them. This centrifugal missionary activity will be evidenced by the responses of the hearers. In some cases, the messengers are like the wind, whose effects alone are evident. In other cases, the messengers are known.

⁷ Deut. 4:6, emphasis added.

⁸ Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God’s People: A Biblical Theology of the Church’s Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 128-147. Andreas J. Köstenberger and Peter T. O’Brien, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 30, 34-36.

God's Word and the explanation of the means that He provides for salvation must not be altered for consolation and to gain a "wider hope." As Paul wrote in the New Testament, so it was true in the Old Testament, "How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard?"⁹ Many more peoples heard and believed than once was conceived! Faith was unleashed among the nations in ways never imagined.

I. THE CENTRIPETAL SCHOOL

Several reputable researchers see the nations coming to Israel to learn of the Lord and His Word in the Old Testament, instead of citizens of Israel going to the nations to communicate the Word of the Lord. They justify their conclusions for the following reasons: God's separation of Israel from the Gentiles, Gentiles were incorporated themselves into Israel, God's prescriptions to approach Him only by means of the liturgy and sacrificial system of the Temple, and the prophesied eschatological ingathering of the nations at Jerusalem. Given these emphases of the Old Testament, they argue that no evidence exists for centrifugal missions at this stage of salvation history.

First, Israel was separated from the nations beginning with God's call to Abraham to leave his family in Mesopotamia and to go to the land that God would show him. R. Bryan Widbin, who is one of the proponents of centripetal missions in the Old Testament, explained that God's call to Abraham to leave his country, relatives, and father's dynasty was "an order by Yahweh to get out of the world" instead of merely to leave Mesopotamia.¹⁰ Graeme Goldsworthy would add that the only relationship between Israel and the surrounding nations

⁹Rom. 10:14.

¹⁰ R. Bryan Widbin, "Salvation for people outside of Israel's covenant," in *Through no Fault of their Own: The Fate of those who Have Never Heard*, ed. William V. Crockett and James G. Sigountos, James G. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1991), 75. Gen. 12:1-3, Acts 7:2-4.

was that of adversaries.¹¹ Israel, therefore, was not to engage them via decentralized missionary activities. The nations had to come to Israel to learn of the Lord.

Widbin seemed to exaggerate the separation of Abraham and Israel from surrounding peoples. He referred to the separation as “a barrier” between them and other nations. He, however, acknowledged that Israel was not barred from “international travel and commerce,” and added, “There was always a lively interchange with all sorts of people. In addition to contacts within her own Canaanite milieu, Israel had impressive links to the megacultures of Egypt and Mesopotamia, among others.”¹²

The second justification for centripetal missions was the numerous Gentiles, who were incorporated into Israel. The movement of missions in the Old Testament was toward Israel and not outward to the nations, by the naturalization of individual foreigners into Israel and by the gathering of whole nations into Jerusalem in the last days and at the beginning of the new creation.¹³ These authors did not explain by what means of communication these people learned of Israel and the Lord before being incorporated. While Köstenberger and O’Brien did discuss the repentance and the confessed faith of the sailors bound for Tarshish with Jonah, they did not elaborate on the implications of this case and synthesize this case with their thesis for centripetal

¹¹ Graeme Goldsworthy, “The Great Indicative: An Aspect of a Biblical Theology of Mission,” *The Reformed Theological Review* 55, no. 1 (January 1996): 6.

¹² Widbin, 73.

¹³ Köstenberger and O’Brien, 30, 34-36. They listed well-known examples of incorporated Gentiles, the multi-cultural multitude from Egypt, Rahab and her family, and Ruth. Goldsworthy included Moses’ Midianite wife and added that these incorporated Gentiles were “not trophies of evangelistic effort.” His conclusion may depend on what one means by “evangelistic effort.” Goldsworthy, 6. This provision for the incorporation of Gentiles into Israel may have been the rationale for the Judaizers in the New Testament who created the debate about the need for circumcision for incorporation into the Church, which was resolved at the Jerusalem Council. The conclusion of the Council was that Gentiles were not obliged to become Israelites by circumcision to be justified and incorporated into

missions in the Old Testament.¹⁴ These authors considered favorable contacts that Israel had with other nations and how members of Israel interacted with the nations as ambassadors, merchants, sailors, and slaves, and their potential influence on the nations. They, however, did not consider the implications of Gentiles in the Old Testament who confessed the Lord's name and who were not incorporated into Israel, i.e., Queen of Sheba, king of Tyre, Naaman the Assyrian general, and the sailors of Jonah's ship to Tarshish.¹⁵

The third reason that the nations had to come to Israel to be blessed in Abraham was God's prescriptions to Israel to only approach Him via the sacrificial system at the Temple in Jerusalem. Goldsworthy built his thesis on the preeminence of the liturgy of the Temple for any approach to worship the Lord. He argued "Only Yahweh is God and he has chosen to bring a people to Himself and to reconcile them to Himself by means of the cult of Israel, which has the temple and the sacrificial system as its centre."¹⁶ Its absence prior to its construction and after its destruction, however, did not preempt justification by faith in the Lord.

The fourth reason to limit missionary activity in the Old Testament to centripetal missionary efforts are the numerous prophecies regarding the nations coming to Jerusalem in the last days. Köstenberger and O'Brien articulated well this position, while citing the work of other seminal authors. They explained that the prophecies regarding the salvation of the nations in the Old Testament are only fulfilled later and not during the days of the Old Testament. God, and not

the Church. In fact, one could argue that they never were required to be citizens of Israel to be reconciled to their Creator and God. Acts 15.

¹⁴ Köstenberger and O'Brien, 45.

¹⁵ Widbin, 73, 77, 79.

¹⁶ Goldsworthy, 9.

Israel, is the chief cause behind the nations coming to Jerusalem and not any program implemented by Israel. For Köstenberger and O'Brien, the prophecies of the Old Testament are centripetal, not centrifugal, in nature. The nations come to Israel. Israel does not go to them.¹⁷ They, like Goldsworthy, could not accept an Old Testament cross-cultural outreach, because it would "pre-empt the great ingathering of the eschaton."¹⁸ Such an outreach would not pre-empt this final fulfillment any more than the missionary outreach of the New Testament, except that Goldsworthy argues that Christ presents a dilemma as He now is the temple and that believers are the temple through their "union with Christ."¹⁹ These prophecies maintain their significance, for worldwide evangelism that has occurred since Pentecost and up to the present, as any Old Testament cross-cultural outreach, still anticipates the eschatological ingathering.

Israel's primary missionary activity in the Old Testament was to be--to live out God's standards--and not to go to the nations to teach his standards to them. Prominent missiologists have argued for this passive missionary assignment for Israel. J. Herert Kane argued that the emphasis in the Old Testament for Israel was "on presence, not proclamation. Israel by her very presence in the world was a witness to the one true God, Creator of heaven and earth and Judge and Ruler of the world. In this passive way she was fulfilling her 'missionary' role."²⁰ Christopher Wright also concluded that "God's mission involves God's people living in God's way in the sight of the nations."²¹ Wright, therefore, imagined the peoples of the world coming

¹⁷ Köstenberger and O'Brien, 42.

¹⁸ Goldsworthy, 9.

¹⁹ Goldsworthy, 13.

²⁰ Kane, 25-26.

²¹ Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 470. Wright elaborates later on the topic. He wrote, "Israel definitely had a sense of mission, not in the sense of *going* somewhere but of *being* something." Wright, *The Mission of God*, 504.

to Israel instead of Israelite missionaries going to the nations. One passage that Wright uses to illustrate the attraction of the nations to Israel is Solomon's prayer of dedication for the Temple.

Solomon prayed

As for the foreigners who do not belong to your people Israel but have come from a distant land because of your name—for they will hear of your great name and your mighty hand and of your outstretched arm—when they come and pray toward this temple, then hear from heaven, your dwelling place. Do whatever the foreigners ask of you, so that all the peoples of the earth may know your name and fear you, as do your own people Israel, and may know that this house I have built bears your Name (1 Kings 8:41-43).²²

Solomon prayed this prayer, because he assumed that foreigners would “hear” of the Lord's name, strength, and interventions on behalf of Israel, before approaching the Lord at the Temple in Jerusalem. How would foreigners hear, if someone was not going out from Israel, whether an Israelite or a foreigner, to the nations to communicate to them at least the Lord's activities, if not the very words of the Lord? The progression seems clear. The foreigner hears of the Lord before coming to and praying at the Temple.

A key reason that these researchers do not see centrifugal missions in the Old Testament is their definition for missionary activity. Kane explained, “If by ‘mission’ is meant the crossing of political and cultural boundaries to take the message of the one true God to those who know nothing about Him, then, with the exception of Jonah, we will not find much about ‘mission’ in the Old Testament.”²³ Köstenberger and O'Brien also argued, “To contend that Israel had a missionary task and should have engaged in mission as *we know it today* goes beyond the evidence.”²⁴ David J. Bosch also saw no evidence of a centripetal mission enterprise in the Old

²² Wright, *The Mission of God's People*, 133-134.

²³ Kane, 17.

²⁴ Köstenberger and O'Brien, 35. Emphasis added.

Testament based on a “traditional understanding of missions as the sending of preachers to distant places.” He, however, challenged this understanding of mission as he sought to propose a 21st century mission paradigm to address the malaise of the late 20th century.²⁵ He regrettably did not read the Old Testament with the same level of objectivity.²⁶ A contemporary or contextualized model of “proclaiming God’s name and his saving purposes in Christ” should not be used as a criterion for identifying missionary activity, at least in the Old Testament, where Christ is not incarnated and exercising an earthly ministry. Models of proclamation may vary from context to context.²⁷ What could be discovered if the criteria was not a contemporary model of mission, but any means by which the name of the Lord was proclaimed?

Another reason that the centripetal approach to missions is advocated by these scholars is that no mission commission has been identified in the Old Testament. George Peters, who argued well for the universal scope of the Old Testament, explained that Israel “was not commissioned to go to the nations to proclaim the revelational truth committed to God’s people. . . . In regard to methodology, the Scriptures prescribe a twofold way—the *centrifugal* and the *centripetal*. It must be recognized that the Old Testament is wholly built around the latter method, whereas the New Testament enjoins the former method.”²⁸ Instead, and unrecognized by advocates of centripetal missions, the messengers of God’s name were rarely officially sent in the Old Testament. Walt Kaiser observed, “Peters linked the word *send* with the New Testament’s

²⁵ David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 17.

²⁶ Girma Bekele, “The Biblical Narrative of the *Missio Dei*: Analysis of the Interpretive Framework of David Bosch’s Missional Hermeneutic,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 35, no. 3(July 2011): 155.

²⁷ Köstenberger and O’Brien, 21-22.

²⁸ George W. Peters, *A Biblical Theology of Missions* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1972), 21.

definition of missions. Therefore, he unnecessarily eliminated other, legitimate indications of the concept of missions from the older testament.”²⁹ Instead one finds that their sending and going are implied when the biblical writers explain that God’s intent was to be known by all peoples, or when they attest to peoples having heard of the Lord’s actions and His Words. The evidence for centrifugal missions is not explicit, but implicit.

II. THE INCLUSIVISM SCHOOL

The absence of explicit evidence of a missionary enterprise in the Old Testament has given missiologists and theologians reason to restrict the hope of the nations learning of the Lord and His Word to their coming to Jerusalem. Gentiles, therefore, “Have been marginalized by the progress of the spread of the gospel through no particular fault of their own,” argued Clark H. Pinnock.³⁰ The absence of this evidence also has caused missiologists and theologians to entertain and even to promote the validity of philosophical pluralism--“the position that denies the finality of Jesus Christ and maintains that other religions are equally salvific paths to God.”³¹

Pinnock responded to the challenge of philosophical pluralism to defend the pertinence of the gospel and the view that one must consciously put his or her faith in Jesus Christ before the end of this mortal life.³² He wanted to maintain the “finality of Christ” and extend the hope of salvation among peoples who have never heard of Jesus Christ.³³ His proposal, however, is no

²⁹ Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Mission in the Old Testament: Israel as a Light to the Nations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 35.

³⁰ Clark H. Pinnock, “The Finality of Christ in a World of Religions,” in *Christian Faith and Practice in the Modern World: Theology from an Evangelical Point of View*, ed. Mark A. Knoll and David F. Wells (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1988), 162.

³¹ Pinnock, *Wideness*, 15.

³² *Ibid.*, 7, 14-15.

³³ *Ibid.*, 12.

less unorthodox than philosophical pluralism, for he proposed that people could be saved, without a faith consistent with God's Word. One basis for his conclusions is the absence of explicit reports of formalized missionary activity in the Old Testament, and yet the piety of non-Jews is depicted positively.³⁴

Pinnock sought to develop a response to adherents of philosophical pluralism, who would question Jesus Christ as the unique way of salvation, and explain how people could be saved without hearing God's Word and responding to it with faith in Christ in this life based on God's love. He rejects the idea that God's grace is restricted to the few men and women who have had access to the canonical revelation of God. He is optimistic that more human beings will be reconciled to their creator as a function of their faith response to God's revelation of Himself in creation—general revelation—and ultimately based on Jesus Christ, the unique mediator between God and man.³⁵

He argues that general revelation is sufficient to engender in its recipients a salvific faith response to God, and that God would grant them an eventual encounter with Jesus Christ, whether in this life or after death.³⁶ To defend his appeal he listed the examples of Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Melchizedek, Jethro, Job, Abimelech, Balaam, Naaman, Ethiopians, Nebuchadnezzar, and the sailors of the ship that carried Jonah away from Nineveh.³⁷ He argued

³⁴ Pinnock, *Wideness*.

³⁵ Pinnock, "Finality," 152; and *Wideness*, 11-15.

³⁶ Pinnock, "Finality," 165.

³⁷ Pinnock, "Finality," 159-163; and *Wideness*, 22, 26. He also considered Cornelius the Roman Centurion. He is not included in the list above given the scope of this paper being limited to the spread of God's Word in the Old Testament. Pinnock considers Cornelius as another example of a saint, who only benefitted from general revelation. Luke classifies him as a God-fearer, with his household, and who prayed and gave gifts to the Jews (Acts 10:2, 22). Cornelius benefitted from more than general revelation, for he knew that a Jew was not to "associate with a foreigner" (Acts 10:28). And while Cornelius needed to hear the message Peter had to transmit, he was privy to the

that God approved the faith of these men, though they had not received God's Word—His special revelation. He accused evangelicals, who seek to maintain that all people must hear God's Word—special revelation—in this life, to have ignored these examples of the sufficiency of general revelation.³⁸ If he faults these evangelicals for restricting the numbers of people who would be saved given the need to understand God's special revelation, he fails to see the extent to which God's Word may have spread at this time in history.

God's Word, His special revelation, is not only transmitted in literal form. It is also communicated orally. His special revelation is not only stored in written form. It is also recorded in the memories of people, who know it, and transmit it orally. For example, no record exists of the stories of Genesis in written form, though they may have existed. Special revelation may not have existed in written form until Moses began writing the Pentateuch. At the time of Melchizedek, therefore, special revelation at least existed in the oral traditions passed by the descendants of Adam and Eve to subsequent generations. God's revelation, which included His covenant with the patriarchs, continued through Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who passed it to their sons. This transmission, like Genesis 1-11, was at least oral, and finally recorded literally by Moses.³⁹

God's Word—special revelation—is never communicated in its entirety. It is communicated as excerpts by His people, who transmit it to men and women who will perish

same revelation that Timothy had as a child—revelation sufficient to give one “the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim 3:15). For another discussion of the value of Cornelius' faith before hearing of Jesus Christ. See D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Pub. House, 1996), 306-307.

³⁸ Pinnock, “Finality,” 160, 163. Pinnock, *Wideness*, 12, 27.

³⁹ Peters, 84, 99-100, 110.

without it. As a general principle of communication, David Hesselgrave explained that “on any given occasion, the missionary delivers only a partial message. . . . [And to] attempt to communicate all of the essentials of the gospel . . . results in information overload and may result in a gross misunderstanding of the gospel.”⁴⁰

At the same time peoples of oral cultures “consider a point much better communicated if it is embedded in a story instead of being expressed as an abstract principle. That fact also implies that the westerner needs to take his time in conversation. To be in a hurry to get one’s point made is considered discourteous and possibly unintelligent.”⁴¹ The main point is couched in the particulars of the lives of the patriarchs, and the particulars of their lives are the context of the main point. While all of God’s Word is not communicated in its entirety, larger amounts of content would be communicated in an oral culture as stories are related in their entirety with essential points transmitted within the contexts of this story. In the case of God’s special revelation, which at least existed in oral form before Moses recorded it, essential points like the “seed of the woman” and “the seed of Abraham” would have been consistently transmitted to allow listeners to respond with a righteousness engendering faith. Old Testament saints, such as Abraham, Melchizedek, Jethro, Job, and Abimelech, therefore, were not responding to God based only on general revelation. They benefitted from God’s special revelation as it existed in their day, albeit in oral form.⁴²

⁴⁰ David J. Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally* (Grand Rapids, MI: Academie Books, 1991), 152.

⁴¹ Winfried Corduan, *Neighboring Faiths: A Christian Introduction to World Religions* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 157.

⁴² Carson argued, “Most of the pre-Christ believers are those who enter into a covenantal, faith-based relationship with the God who had disclosed himself to them in the terms and to the extent recorded up to that time. . . . Inclusionists who draw a parallel between modern non-Christians who have never heard of Christ and such Old Testament believers overlook the fact that these believers on the Old Testament side were responding in faith to

The debate between centripetalists and centrifugalists needs to be re-examined to respond to inclusivists like Pinnock. Such a response could increase one's optimism for the salvation of the men and women, who would never journey to Jerusalem to learn of the Lord and His Word, and yet who would understand enough of God's Word—even enough of the Old Testament—to respond to Him in faith for their justification. Pinnock challenged the student of the Scriptures to let the Scriptures be the authority of his or her beliefs and not an earlier understanding.⁴³ One's interpretation is distinct from God's Word, and God's Word, if it is the authority, must always trump one's interpretation.

To allow this examination to be as free as possible from existing understandings of missions, a broader definition of missions needs to be used than a contemporary understanding of the cross-cultural ministry of formally sent professional missionaries. The search of the Old Testament could be guided by the following question: By what means—by whom—is the proclamation of God's name to the Gentiles accomplished?

III. THE CENTRIFUGAL SCHOOL

Walter C. Kaiser and H. Cornell Goerner are proponents of the thesis that Israel was to undertake a centrifugal missionary role in the days of the Old Testament. Kaiser attracts responses from proponents of centripetal missions, and Goerner “provided the most comprehensive argument for understanding *ethnos* as being ‘tribe’ or ‘people’ rather than

special revelation, and were not simply exercising some sort of general ‘faith’ in an undefined ‘God.’” Carson, *Gagging of God*, 298.

⁴³ Pinnock, *Wideness*, 27.

geopolitical nations,” according to D. A. Carson.⁴⁴ Kaiser and Goerner argue that Israel was tasked with the responsibility to make the Lord known from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth.⁴⁵ They trace the aspects of this missionary program throughout the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms.

In the Law, according to Kaiser and Goerner, Moses underscored God’s universal vision by demonstrating the common origin and tragic moral dilemma of all men and women.⁴⁶ God, therefore, called and chose Abraham to be the conduit for the rescue of all humanity. Goerner referred to the Abrahamic Covenant as “the method by which God has been dealing with the human race from that day (about 2000 B.C.) until the present time.”⁴⁷ Kaiser referred to the Abrahamic Covenant as “a divine program to glorify the Lord by bringing salvation to all on planet earth.”⁴⁸ Henceforth, the descendants of Abraham were to be the channels of God’s blessing to the nations.⁴⁹ Kaiser’s thesis was that “the role assigned to Israel . . . was to share actively with others the Man of Promise who was to come.”⁵⁰ This man was the “seed of the woman,” who would crush Satan’s head, in Gen. 3:15; God Himself, who would “dwell in the tents of Shem,” in Gen. 9:27; and the “seed of Abraham,” in whom all families and all nations

⁴⁴ D. A. Carson, “Matthew,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 596. Some of the respondents to Kaiser are Köstenberger and O’Brien, 35, n.18; and 44-45, n. 34; and Wright, *Mission*, 502-504; 519, n. 25.

⁴⁵ Kaiser, *Mission*, xiii-xiv, 33-36, 55-64. H. Cornell Goerner, *All Nations in God’s Purpose: What the Bible Teaches about Missions* (Nashville: Broadman, 1979), 43.

⁴⁶ Kaiser, *Mission*, 1-7; Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. *The Promise-Plan of God: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 35-51; and Goerner, 2-4.

⁴⁷ Goerner, 4.

⁴⁸ Kaiser, *Mission*, xix.

⁴⁹ Kaiser, *Mission*, xix; Goerner, 4-9 and 12-16.

⁵⁰ Kaiser, *Mission*, xiii-xiv.

would be blessed, in Gen. 12:3 and 15:22.⁵¹ Ultimately Kaiser sees God’s covenant with Abraham as a “divine program to glorify the Lord by bringing salvation to all on planet earth.” He added, “Indeed, here is where mission really begins in a formal way. Here is the first Great Commission mandate of the Bible.”⁵²

In Exodus, God revealed His plan to make of His chosen people “a kingdom of priests” who would mediate His standards and His blessing to the other nations. As priests, all Israel, even after the designation of the Levites as the priestly class of Israel, was “to be a witness to the nations.”⁵³ Moses gave stipulations for the treatment of foreigners who would join the Israelites in Leviticus.⁵⁴ These stipulations are an indication of the nations’ incorporation into Israel—a hallmark of the centripetal position. One also could understand these stipulations as the accommodations to be made in view of a centrifugal mission effort, by which the nations would know God’s name, one of the expected results of the plagues on Egypt, and learn of God’s statutes.⁵⁵ The nations learned of the power of God, when they heard of the plagues, and they learned of His Word, by which faith and justification come, when they heard of His statutes.

In the second portion of the Jewish Scriptures, the Prophets, the Lord continued to reveal His vision for Israel to make Him known to the nations. Kaiser’s argument hinged on how one should understand the number of the term “Servant of the Lord” found in several of Isaiah’s

⁵¹ See Kaiser, *Mission*, 2-7; and Kaiser, *Promise*, 35-57.

⁵² Kaiser, *Mission*, xix.

⁵³ Kaiser, “Commission,” 4.

⁵⁴ Kaiser, *Mission*, 13-18; Kaiser, *Promise*, 68-100. Goerner, 12-16.

⁵⁵ Kaiser, *Mission*, 13. Exod. 7:5 and 9:14-15; Deut. 4:5-8.

prophecies.⁵⁶ He posited that the term evoked a singular person and a plural body. He wrote that the “Servant of the Lord” was “the One, who is the representative of the whole (i.e., the Messiah), and a reference to the whole group that belongs to that single whole or corporate term (i.e., Israel).”⁵⁷ Kaiser concluded that God intended that Israel take an active missionary role in witnessing to the nations of God’s faithfulness. Goerner highlighted how Jeremiah was called a “prophet to the nations,” and how Ezekiel explained that the return of the exiled Jews was to demonstrate the glory of God to the nations.⁵⁸

The student of Scripture can understand the active missionary role that God reserved for Israel through the story of the reluctant prophet, Jonah. Kaiser defended the missionary purpose of Jonah, arguing that God rebuked the prophet for his hesitancy to obey his commission and for his lack of compassion for a people of a different culture than his own.⁵⁹ All missionaries should emulate God’s concern for all peoples and shun Jonah’s chauvinism. The universal scope of God’s plan to bring all ethno-linguistic groups to Himself is reiterated in the other prophets as well.

The third section of the Old Testament was the Psalms. The psalmists continued to explain God’s design to save some men and women from each of the people groups of the world. The psalmists repeated God’s intention to use Israel to transmit to all nations His desire to bless them. Kaiser understood the writers of the Psalms to exhort all Israelites to declare the Lord’s

⁵⁶ Isaiah 4:1; 41:8-9; 42:1, 6; 43:1; 44:21; 44:6; 44:2, 24; 49:1, 3, 6; 51:4.

⁵⁷ Kaiser, *Mission*, 56.

⁵⁸ Goerner, 31-33.

⁵⁹ Kaiser, *Mission*, 65-74; Goerner, 29-30.

deeds to all peoples.⁶⁰ Kaiser's discussion of the missional nature of some of the Psalms could be his strongest argument for centrifugal missions in the Old Testament. Kaiser found a missionary commission in Psalm 96. He explained,

Psalm 96 is another of the great missionary psalms, for the anonymous author orders the Jewish audience not only to 'sing to the Lord' but also to 'proclaim his salvation day after day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples (Ps. 96:2-3). . . . The Hebrew word for 'proclaim' . . . is the Old Testament equivalent of the New Testament *euangelizomai*, "to bring good news," "to announce glad tidings," or "to announce the gospel."⁶¹

This is an imperative—a commission—minimized or even overlooked by the centripetal school and the inclusive school.

A final argument for centrifugal missions in the Old Testament is related to the numerous "texts about knowing."⁶² Rahab and the Canaanites are examples of how the nations learned of the power of God and the Word of God.⁶³ God had said that He sent the plagues on Egypt "in order to show my power and in order to proclaim my name through all the earth."⁶⁴ Rahab and probably her family put their faith in the Lord after hearing this news, while the Canaanites in general rejected what they had learned of the Lord.⁶⁵ Joshua recognized that the crossing of the Jordan River served a missional purpose and a tactical purpose for the settlement of Canaan. David knew that his defeat of Goliath would serve God's missional purposes along with the

⁶⁰ Kaiser, *Mission*, 35.

⁶¹ Kaiser, *Mission*, 32.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 19.

⁶³ Josh. 2:10-14, 9:9-10.

⁶⁴ Exod. 9:16.

⁶⁵ While the Gibeonites decided to deceive the Israelites, after hearing of the Lord's works, and the Israelites failed to consult the Lord regarding their request for peace, the Gibeonites demonstrate their submission to what they knew of the Lord by their actions. They could have challenged militarily Israel and the Lord like other nations. The Canaanites in general, therefore, are contrasted with the Gibeonites in this affair. Josh. 11:19-23.

military challenge that the giant presented Israel. ⁶⁶ The assumption in each of these cases is that a messenger would communicate these events to the intended audiences, “all the earth” or “all the peoples of the earth.”⁶⁷

IV. CASE STUDIES OF CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION

Saints of the Old Testament assumed that messengers would go out from Israel to the nations to tell them of the Lord. Some of these messengers may be discovered studying the following cases: Rahab in Jericho, Ruth in Moab, the Gittites of David’s army, Hiram king of Tyre, Namaam the Assyrian general, and the sailors who navigated Jonah’s boat toward Tarshish. None of these Gentiles came to Jerusalem to hear of the Lord. They heard first of the Lord from messengers, who were with them.

Rahab the harlot is an example of faith for the writers of the New Testament. She is presented in Heb. 11:31 and in Jam. 2:25 as a woman saved by faith. She exhibited her faith by her actions, hiding the two spies on her roof top, and by her following confession: “The Lord your God, *he is God in heaven above and on earth beneath.*”⁶⁸ Her confession in Jericho was a confession that Moses had taught the Israelites earlier on the Plains of Moab in Deuteronomy. He had taught the Israelites, “Know therefore today, and take it to your heart, that the Lord, *he is God in heaven above and on the earth below; there is no other.*”⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Kaiser, *Mission*, 19-21. Josh. 4:24, 1 Sam. 17:46.

⁶⁷ Another example of an implied mechanism of communication is when “the Canaanite, the king of Arad who lived in the Negev in the land of Canaan, heard of the coming of the sons of Israel.” Num. 33:40.

⁶⁸ Josh. 2:11 (emphasis added).

⁶⁹ Deut. 4:39 (emphasis added). While the prepositions “beneath” and “below” vary in the NASB, both confessions end with the same preposition in the original, *מִתַּחַת*.

Rahab probably did not hear this confession, by going to the Israelites. God had explained to Moses that the signs in Egypt were to demonstrate that He alone was God and “to proclaim [his] name through all the earth.”⁷⁰ Rahab had said that the people of Jericho had heard of all that the Lord had done for Israel in Egypt.⁷¹ Anonymous messengers must have gone out to explain to the people of Jericho God’s actions on behalf of and His Words to Israel. Because of these messengers, Rahab had the faith of Abraham, and joined His people spiritually and physically.

Egyptians possibly were these messengers. Moses reasoned with God not to destroy Israel for their desire to return to Egypt, because he knew that God’s reputation among the Canaanites would be undermined by His apparent failure to deliver the Israelites into the Promised Land. Moses explained that the Egyptians would tell the Canaanites of the Lord’s apparent failure to deliver Israel from Egypt.⁷² The Egyptians already may have reported the events of the Exodus. They also knew His Word, because some Egyptians obeyed His Word to protect themselves and their livestock from the prophesied plagues that inflicted Egypt. They may have transmitted these Words to Rahab and the people of Jericho.⁷³

Ruth, the Moabite, did not learn of the Lord by coming to Israel. Elimelech and Naomi, who would become her in-laws, were forced to dwell as refugees in Moab with their sons, when Israel was suffering from a famine. After Elimelech died, his sons wedded Moabite women. The

⁷⁰ Exod. 9:14, 16.

⁷¹ Josh. 2:10.

⁷² Num. 13:13-19.

⁷³ Exod. 9:20-21. W. Ross Blackburn, *The God who Makes Himself Known: The Missionary Heart of Exodus*, New Studies in Biblical Theology, 28, ed. D. A. Carson (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 49-50.

sons then died leaving their wives childless. Naomi bid her daughters-in-law not to follow her to Israel and to find Moabite husbands.⁷⁴ Ruth refused and confessed,

Do not urge me to leave you or turn back from following you; for where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. Thus may the Lord do to me, and worse, if anything but death parts you and me.”⁷⁵

Naomi, her husband, or their son must have taught Ruth of the Lord, unless she already knew Him. She could not have made this well-known confession otherwise. Walt Kaiser wrote that the Book of Ruth "teaches . . . the blessing of God, the reward for all deeds of kindness (*hesed*), the inclusion of the Gentiles in the blessings of the gospel, even in the promised Davidic line, and the works of God's providence.”⁷⁶ None of this would have happened for Ruth, if someone in Elimelech's family had not taught Ruth about their God. While Ruth eventually was incorporated into Israel, a centripetal mission concept, she learned of the Lord by centrifugal messengers.

The Gittites are another group of Gentiles to hear of the Lord from a centrifugal messenger, who may have been David. David fled from Saul to take refuge in Gath (the hometown of Goliath).⁷⁷ From Gath, six hundred men joined him and served in his army.⁷⁸ One of these men was Ittai, a commander of the army. He refused to abandon his king when David was fleeing his son Absalom, and made the following Ruth-like confession: “As the Lord lives,

⁷⁴ Ruth 1:1-13.

⁷⁵ Ruth 1:15-17.

⁷⁶ Kaiser, *Promise Plan*, 112.

⁷⁷ 1 Sam. 27:1-7. The missional purpose of David's encounter with Goliath is often overlooked. David explained his goal in defeating Goliath was to demonstrate to all the earth “that there is a God in Israel” (1 Sam. 17:46).

⁷⁸ 1 Sam. 27:1-3, and 2 Sam. 15:18-19.

and as my lord the king lives, surely wherever my lord the king may be, whether for death or for life, there also your servant will be.”⁷⁹

David was aware that all peoples needed to know the Lord. When he dedicated a tent that he had made for the Ark of the Covenant, he exhorted:

Sing to the Lord, all the earth;
Proclaim good tidings of His salvation from day to day.
Tell of His glory among the nations,
His wonderful deeds among all the peoples.⁸⁰

These imperatives can hardly be taken as looking toward the days of the Church or the last days. David exhorted that the world of his day know the deeds of the Lord. David could have been the messenger. He assumed messengers would tell the world of the God in Israel because of his defeat of Goliath. He later had to flee Saul for his life and must have been a messenger to the people of Gath, so that at least this group of six-hundred men turned in faith to the Lord.

David and Solomon, or at least their ambassadors, were messengers to Hiram the king of Tyre. Hiram volunteered to help Solomon with the building of the Temple by sending materials and laborers, after he heard of Solomon’s anointing as king, and because of his previous friendship with David.⁸¹ Solomon and Hiram communicated via messengers to coordinate this help from Tyre. Solomon sent the following message to Hiram:

You know that David my father was unable to build a house for the name of the Lord his God because of the wars which surrounded him, until the Lord put them under the soles of his feet. But now the Lord my God has given me rest on every side; there is neither adversary nor misfortune. Behold, I intend to build a house for the name of the Lord my

⁷⁹ 2 Sam. 15:21.

⁸⁰ 1 Chron. 16:24.

⁸¹ 2 Sam. 5:11-12, 1 Kings 5:1-12.

God, as the Lord spoke to David my father, saying, “Your son, whom I will set on your throne in your place, he will build the house for My name.”⁸²

Hiram knew of David’s desire to build the Temple and he knew why God did not permit him to build it. Solomon prefaced his request for help from Hiram with his testimony of the Lord’s faithfulness to him, the Lord’s covenant with David, and the fulfillment of God’s prophecy that he would build the Temple.

His testimony includes the personal name for God, the Lord (YHWH), and proof of the veracity of God’s Word with the fulfillment of His prophecy for David. At least implicitly, Solomon wanted the king of Tyre to know the Lord personally and to come to faith in Him, because of the Lord’s Word. Hiram responded by blessing the God of Israel and calling on Him by His personal name, “Blessed be the Lord today, who has given to David a wise son over this great people.”⁸³

The conversion of Naaman is another case study of how a person transfers his religious allegiance to the Lord, after hearing of the Lord from a messenger. The biblical writer commented that the Lord had already worked through this Assyrian general to achieve His purposes. His biggest need was to be healed of leprosy. An anonymous Israeli slave girl suggested that he see the prophet, Elisha. The prophet asked the general to simply enter the waters of the Jordan River. Naaman hesitated to obey at first. When he finally dipped himself in the river, he was healed of the disease. He reacted by confessing and having the following discussion with the prophet:

⁸² 1 Kings 5:2-5.

⁸³ 1 Kings 5:7. Tyre is later judged by the Lord, for they had “forgotten the covenant of brotherhood.” The covenant between Hiram and Solomon, could be this covenant of brothers (Amos 1:9), and Jesus Christ gave a better estimation of Tyre and Sidon than certain Galilean villages, who had not repented upon seeing His miracles,

“Behold now, I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel; so please take a present from your servant now.” But he said, “As the Lord lives, before whom I stand, I will take nothing.” And he urged him to take *it*, but he refused. Naaman said, “If not, please let your servant at least be given two mules’ load of earth; for your servant will no longer offer burnt offering nor will he sacrifice to other gods, but to the Lord.”⁸⁴

Ironically Elijah had chastised the king of the Northern Kingdom in the opening chapter of 1 Kings with this rhetorical question, “Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going to inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron?” This Aramean general proved to have a better faith than the king of Israel, when he confessed, “I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel.” His faith only was possible because of this slave girl from Israel.

Jonah is the most cited example of a classic missionary in the Old Testament. His example is not stellar, because of his reluctance to go to Nineveh. He nonetheless serves as an example of a missionary, whom the Lord sent to another nation to preach repentance. Jonah is also an example of an unofficial “missionary,” while he was fleeing God’s commission to go to Nineveh, because he was a witness to men to whom he was not officially sent.

While he was headed to Tarshish by boat, a storm struck, and the sailors called out to their gods for help.⁸⁵ When the storm did not abate, and when they realized Jonah was not praying, they beseeched him, “Call on your god. Perhaps your god will be concerned about us so that we will not all perish.”⁸⁶ The men cast lots to discover who was to blame for the storm, and Jonah was designated. When the men asked him what he had done, he confessed, “I am a

because they would have repented. Could His expectations of the people of Tyre and Sidon be based on this potential faith of these cities during this time period, if not of this Gentile king? Luke 10:13-14.

⁸⁴ 2 Kings 5:15-17.

⁸⁵ Jon. 1:5.

⁸⁶ Jon. 1:6.

Hebrew, and I fear the Lord God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land.”⁸⁷ The men were astounded, because Jonah had already told them that he was "fleeing from the presence of the Lord.”⁸⁸

The men threw Jonah overboard at his request in order that the storm would pass. Before they threw him overboard, they prayed to the Lord to forgive them of this act, and after they threw him overboard they prayed to the Lord, they feared Him, they called on Him, and they made sacrifices and made vows to the Lord.⁸⁹ Their response is later repeated by Jonah, who called on the name of the Lord, pledged to make sacrifices to Him and to keep His vows.⁹⁰

While Jonah originally was sent to preach repentance to the Ninevites, his flight toward Tarshish brought him in contact with these sailors. He did not deny his relationship to the Lord and he identified Him as the "God of heaven" and the creator of the land and the sea. He told them of his disobedience and accountability to the Lord. They believed Jonah. They recognized their accountability to the Lord, they committed themselves to Him with sacrifices and vows, and they “called on the Lord.”⁹¹

V. LESSONS FROM THE CASE STUDIES

From each of these case studies of cross-cultural communication, conclusions can be made regarding the means by which the name of the Lord was proclaimed and the results of this

⁸⁷ Jon. 1:9.

⁸⁸ Jon. 1:10.

⁸⁹ Jon. 1:14-17.

⁹⁰ Jon. 2:2, 9.

⁹¹ Jon. 1:14. Köstenberger and O'Brien, 45.

communication (Table 1). The Gentiles of these cases heard the Word of the Lord—special revelation—by means of different messengers. They confessed the personal name of the Lord and demonstrated their faith by particular actions. Not all of them were incorporated into Israel. Incorporation, while a characteristic of centripetal missions, was not always the result of these cases of mission efforts in the Old Testament.

Gentile	Messenger	Confession	Incorporation
Rahab	Egyptians?	The Lord your God	Yes
Ruth	The Family of Naomi as Refugees	Your God, my God . . . may the Lord do to me	Yes
Ittai	David as King	As the Lord lives	Apparently
Hiram King of Tyre	David and Solomon, as Kings, or Ambassadors	Blessed be the Lord	No
Namaan	Slave Girl from Israel	Vowed not to sacrifice to other gods, but to the Lord	No
Sailors for Tarshish	Jonah	They called on the name of the Lord	No

Table 1: Means of Proclaiming the Name of the Lord

The first lesson from these case studies is that the missionary activity did not entail the formal sending of missionaries to proclaim God’s name to the world. This enterprise was accomplished with a variety of lay messengers, who communicated God’s Word to the peoples that they encountered on their journeys no matter the reason for leaving home. God’s missionary activity through His people must always be centrifugal—decentralized—not centripetal. These evangelistic efforts, albeit individual, do not pre-empt the global evangelism of the last days or

an eschatological ingathering of the nations to the prophesied temple. The peoples of this age would not have come to faith in the Lord without messengers going to them.

The second lesson from these case studies is that these Gentiles evidenced a personal relationship with the Lord by confessing His name. In each of these cases, these Gentiles addressed God with His personal name, YHWH—the Lord. Their confession of His personal name is a hint at a personal relationship with Him. Kaiser explained, “The Old Testament is careful about the times it chooses to refer to Yahweh. That name was reserved for those who had a personal relationship to Him, otherwise Elohim was accurate enough.”⁹² Their conversion is further evidenced by their actions. Rahab hid the spies. Ruth left her people and was naturalized as a citizen of Israel. Ittai and his men joined forces with David, the arch enemy of their people. Naaman vowed to offer burnt offerings to the Lord.⁹³ The sailors for Tarshish made sacrifices and vows to the Lord. These Gentiles were saved by their faith, and their faith was evident by their actions.

The third lesson from these case studies is that these Gentiles had to hear the Word of the Lord to call on Him. While these women and men had to understand God’s Word—special revelation—from the mouth of a follower of the Lord, optimism for the salvation of the Gentiles is not restricted. A “wider hope” is possible. Faith was unleashed among the Gentiles by messengers like these, who went out from Israel.

God's revelation throughout the Scriptures is consistently monotheistic and antithetical to inclusivism or philosophical pluralism. God wants to be known. He has revealed Himself

⁹² Kaiser also underlined that Elisha, by refusing to be remunerated for the miracle, did not allow Naaman to think he had been healed on any other grounds than the grace of God. Kaiser, *Mission*, 46.

⁹³ 2 Kings 5:17-18.

through His creation and through His Word, and He uses messengers to communicate His Word. With Rahab as an example, her confession was infused with special revelation as a mirror image of the confession that Moses taught the Israelites. The Gentiles of these cases also addressed God by His personal name, Yahweh, or Lord. Jesus Christ, God incarnate, was accused of blasphemy for appropriating this name for Himself in John 8:48-59.⁹⁴ One could argue that the object of her faith was the pre-incarnate Christ, the seed of the woman and the seed of Abraham.⁹⁵

The final lesson from these case studies is that no formal mission structures were evident in these cases. This was a lay movement, which must be rediscovered today. While some evidence exists for the presence of mission structures in the New Testament, the remarkable absence of Pauls' exhortation to obey Christ's commissions has incited a debate about the place of missions for local Christians in Paul's mind.⁹⁶ Köstenberger and O'Brien did not feel that Paul intended for Christians to duplicate his approaches without exception. They wrote, "Paul is not suggesting that they should engage in the same wide-ranging, apostolic ministry in which he has been involved; but each *in his or her own way and according to their [sic] personal gifts* was to have the same orientation and ambitions as Paul himself, that is, of seeking by all possible means to save some."⁹⁷ These cases from the Old Testament are similar accounts of ambassadors or

⁹⁴ Note especially John 8:58-59.

⁹⁵ For further discussion of this topic see Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., "Is it the Case that Christ is the Same Object of Faith in the Old Testament?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 55, no. 2 (June 2012): 291-298.

⁹⁶ Regarding mission structures, see Ralph D. Winter, "The Two Structures of God's Redemptive Mission," in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*, ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Press, 2009), 244-253; Arthur F. Glasser, "The Apostle Paul and the Missionary Task," in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader*, ed. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Press, 2009), 149-153; Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Paul and the Early Church*, vol. 2, *Early Christian Missions* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2004), 1425-1445. Regarding the Great Commission and the Apostle Paul, see P. T. O'Brien, *Gospel and Mission in the Writings of Paul: An Exegetical and Theological Analysis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1995), 109-131; and Schnabel, 1451-1459.

⁹⁷Köstenberger and O'Brien, 196.

merchants, refugees or slaves, and kings or sailors, who communicated “*in his or her own way*” portions of God’s Word with whomever they found themselves in the world.

VI. CONCLUSION

The implication of each of these cases is that the message of the Lord was going out from Jerusalem and that people of the nations were becoming his followers without coming to Israel. In each case, the non-Israelites came to have a personal relationship with the Lord. Rahab made Moses’ confession of God’s uniqueness as her own. Ruth committed herself to the Lord, the God of her in-laws. Ittai, if not also the other Gittites who joined David, based his allegiance to David on his faith in the Lord, and used His personal name. Hiram demonstrated his allegiance to God by helping Solomon build the Temple and by using God’s personal name. Naaman confessed his faith in the God of Israel by using His personal name. The sailors bound for Tarshish sacrificed and made vows to the Lord. None of these Gentiles would have come to faith in the Lord, had an Israelite not been among them and proclaimed the name of the Lord to them.

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THE SLINGS AND ARROWS OF OUTRAGEOUS FORTUNE: AN EXEGETICAL STUDY OF PSALM 3

Eric M. McConnell*

I. INTRODUCTION

When listing the various components of the gospel armor, the Apostle Paul describes one object that was to be utilized to quench fiery arrows hurled by the enemy, the shield of faith. The shield as a metaphor representing divine protection is used many times within the canon of Scripture. The shield metaphor carries with it the idea that the people of God often experience overwhelming opposition, but that God Himself supplies the needed protection to His children to survive attacks directed at them. The protection afforded by the Lord is never intended as a purely defensive action; rather, divine deliverance enables further warfare and victory in accordance with God's plan. This truth is alluded to in Paul's admonition in I Corinthians 15:58, "Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord." (KJV)

The challenge for believers in Christ to live with unleashed faith echoes from the pages of Scripture. Living with unleashed faith begins with an understanding that the Lord's protection, as exemplified in the shield metaphor, enables the servant of God to live with bold faith— faith that abandons the natural fears and qualms that so easily ensnare the servant of God as he is faced with doubt, fear, and opposition. Such faith is described in many of the Psalms, particularly in Psalm 3. David faced intense conflict from the hands of his enemies, but he

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experienced immeasurable blessing from the hand of God as he chose to trust in the Lord. This article will explore David's robust faith as it relates to the shield metaphor used in Psalm 3.

II. DAVID'S CONCERN: THE DREADFULNESS OF THE ENEMY

To be, or not to be- that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them. To die- to sleep-
No more; and by a sleep to say we end
The heartache, and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to. 'Tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wish'd. To die- to sleep.
To sleep- perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub!¹

In perhaps one of the most well-known soliloquies in classic English literature, Hamlet contemplates the concept of mortality and the desirability of death in the face of the numerous points of grief and turmoil that he had faced. It is apparent that this fictional Danish king had struggled with conflict to such an extent that he considered that death would be a welcome relief to the problems that he was facing. This circumstance is not unlike the struggle that David had experienced in the events precluding Psalm 3. As Hamlet was a royal figurehead dealing with unrest in his kingdom and personal life, David also was experiencing unrest in his own circumstances.

The Superscript: Backdrop of the Psalm

The first verse of the Hebrew text of Psalm 3, which is the superscript of the psalm in English translations, indicates the background occasion of this writing,

¹ Shakespeare, William, *Hamlet*.
http://www.opensourceshakespeare.org/views/plays/play_view.php?WorkID=hamlet&Act=3&Scene=1&Scope=scene, Act 3, Scene 1.

“A Psalm of David in his flight from the face of Absalom his son.”
(Superscript to Psalm 3, Author’s Translation)

This Psalm attributes the authorship to David, but not all scholars agree with the veracity of this claim; “Commentators have long debated the translation of the lamed preposition which traditionally has been taken to designate the authorship of the psalms... The overtly negative reaction to these headings as marks of authorship is part of the general skepticism of the antiquity of the Psalms themselves.”² However, allowing the text to stand on its own merit, there is no reasonable objection to holding to the Davidic authorship of this Psalm. There are no grammatical or internal textual reasons to doubt the authorship; rather, there are multiple examples, both biblical and external from a variety of ANE sources, that demonstrate the usage of the *lamed* prefix (ל) to show authorship, such as its usage in various Semitic dialects, including Arabic, and specifically, its usage in Habakkuk 3:1.³

Although several psalms of David mention his conflict with Saul, the conflict with Absalom is unique to Psalm 3, and possibly Psalm 63, as noted in the classic commentary by Keil and Delitzsch; “It is therefore all the more easy to accept as tradition the inscription: when he fled before Absalom, his son. And what is there in the contents of the Psalm against this statement?”⁴ Furthermore, the backdrop of the occasion of writing is vividly described in the prescript. The *qal* infinitive construct translated *in his flight* (בְּפָרְחוֹ) indicates that this psalm was composed by the king during his swift journey away from the palace in Jerusalem as Absalom and his minions were approaching with their diabolical plan to overthrow David.

² Allen P. Ross, “Psalms” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), I, 782.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Carl Friedrich Keil & Franz Delitzsch, “Psalms” in *Commentary on the Old Testament*, (N.P., 1854-1889), www.studydrive.org/commentaries/kdo/psalms-3.html, (accessed September 20, 2016), n.p..

The Enemies of Psalm 3 in Light of the Enemy Motif in the Psalter

David was experiencing a vicious threat that originated within his own household; one could consider an attack from within one's own family, especially from one's own son, to be the ultimate betrayal and the most unimaginable scenario. It is no small wonder that David responded with such a statement of despair in the introductory statements of this psalm;

*“Yahweh, how have my enemies increased! Many rise up against me.
Many are saying to my soul, ‘There is no salvation for him in God.’ Selah.”
(Psalm 3:1-2, Author’s translation)*

Verse two contains (הֵיךְ), a word that is usually understood as an interrogative pronoun. However, this word does not exclusively function as an interrogative; it may also be used in certain passages as an adverbial exclamation.⁵ The entry in BDB for this word spans more than two pages, and one stated use of this word is as an exclamatory adverb with adjectives and verbs.⁶ Because it is attached to the verb *increased* (רָבַח), it is best translated as the exclamatory adverb, *how*. It is quite clear that David is using this word choice in order to emphasize the overwhelming nature of the attacks that he was experiencing during the conflict between David and his son.

David was a man of war. He had felt opposition and aggression from multiple fronts throughout his life. David weathered attacks from foreign combatants, such as the numerous Philistines he had battled. He had faced attempted executions from Saul, the king whom he had faithfully served. He had even experienced bitter disdain from his own wife Michal, which came as a result of David's ecstatic worship of God when he successfully brought the ark of God to

⁵ The NET Bible, (Biblical Studies Press, 1996). <https://net.bible.org/#!/bible/Psalms+3>, (accessed September, 20, 2016).

⁶ Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and C.A. Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1906), 553.

Jerusalem. In spite of the many conflicts that David had experienced, the grueling conflict between him and his son had no parallel with any other circumstance in David's life. He understood that the impending battle against Absalom and his forces was necessary, but he was careful in his instructions to his soldiers.

The specific details given by the king were an attempt to preserve the life of his son by insisting on the avoidance of lethal force toward his son (II Samuel 18:5). David's plight with various enemies is a common theme in the Psalter; the enemies are not only understood as the oppressors of the psalmist, but they are often understood as the enemies of God.⁷ Another example is found in Psalm 57; the first verse in the Hebrew text indicates the occasion of writing; "To the chief Musician, Altaschith, Michtam of David, when he fled from Saul in the cave." (KJV) The psalm continues by describing the nature of the enemies that were setting their hands against him; "My soul *is* among lions: *and* I lie *even among* them that are set on fire, *even* the sons of men, whose teeth *are* spears and arrows, and their tongue a sharp sword." (Psalm 57:4, KJV)

The various figures and metaphorical images used by David in the Psalms reveal his propensity for poetic reflection concerning events in his own life. His experiences were used for illustrative purposes when describing both times of struggle and times of victory. For example, one may discern parallels that he drew when composing Psalm 23 between the love and tender care that he had displayed for his own sheep and the gracious provision given to him by the Lord. Likewise, perhaps David's brush with a vicious wild beast came to his mind when he

⁷ Erhard S. Gerstenberger, "Enemies and evildoers in the Psalms: a challenge to Christian preaching." *Horizons In Biblical Theology* 4-5, no. 2-1 (December 1982): 61-77. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost* (accessed September 20, 2016), 64.

described his enemies using the fitting zoomorphism *lion*. The imagery of lion-like enemies is found in multiple psalms (10:9, 17:12, 22:13-16); thus, the idea of ravenous, bloodthirsty instigators was common in David's contemplations as he dealt with a number of different combatants. The way that David describes the enemies in Psalm 3 correlates closely with many other psalms in which he describes his struggle with those who stood against him (22:7-8, 35:15).

The struggles that David experienced were not unlike those that the servant of Christ experience. It is not at all uncommon to experience opposition, and even oppression at times, when one determines to serve God. The apostolic affirmation that such a plight is not uncommon for those who serve the Lord is found in I John 3:13; "Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you" (cf., John 15:18, II Timothy 3:12). In spite of all affliction and turmoil, the follower of God may boldly face his struggles; the Lord enables victory as His servants rest in His provision and protection.

III. DAVID'S CONSOLATION: SECURITY FOUND IN THE LORD

On August 2nd, 1990, the forces of Iraq invaded Kuwait, beginning an unprovoked conflict that caused shock and outrage throughout the world. Two chief individuals at the Pentagon during this time, Colin Powell and Dick Cheney, believed that the mobilization of American forces in response to this aggression should be "...massive and swift, not gradual."⁸ With some forces being mobilized within 24 hours of the Iraqi aggression, Cheney marveled at the swiftness of the deployment of soldiers on the ground, along with enormous resources that were available to the mission in such a short time; "It is a truly impressive phenomenon," he

⁸ B.W. Nelan, and W. Dowell, "Ready for action." *Time* 136, no. 21 (November 12, 1990): 26. *Business Source Premier*, EBSCOhost (accessed October 4, 2016).

says, ‘when the President signs off on the deployment, and you give the orders, and boom, within three months there are 180,000 people plus 7 billion lbs. of equipment, hundreds of aircraft, tanks, all that combat power represented in Operation Desert Shield, halfway around the world.’”⁹ The military operation was appropriately named *Operation Desert Shield*, as their goal was to set up a line of defense in order to shield Kuwait from further aggression.

The Shield: Safety Found in the Lord

Just as the United States set out to shield Kuwait from the hostile forces of the enemy, David experienced stout and impenetrable protection from the Lord, his Shield. In the third verse of this psalm David expresses the security that He was afforded by God:

“But You, Yahweh, are a shield about me, my glory, and you cause my head to lift.”
(Psalm 3:3, Author’s Translation)

There is a notable change in David’s demeanor as he turns his eyes from the oppressive enemy and begins to focus on the nature of God. Waltke notes, “But you, *I AM* (*w^eattâ yhw*) is the unequivocal mark of the change from lament to confidence. It signals the change from the exposed king’s portrayal of the surging enemy to expression of buoyant confidence....”¹⁰ Here David uses great imagery to describe the virtues of placing one’s trust in Yahweh.

This light shield, (גִּלְדָּן), was used by the Hittites, Phoenicians, Philistines, and Israelites, and it stands in contrast with the larger shield, (קַשָּׁת), which was a shield designed to cover the entire body.¹¹ Waltke describes the shield (גִּלְדָּן) and its significance in Scripture; “The *mâgēn*, a light, round shield that is made of wood or wicker and covered with thick leather rubbed with oil

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Bruce K. Waltke, "Psalm 3: A Fugitive King's Morning Prayer," *Crux* 44, no. 1 (2008 2008): 2-13. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost (accessed September 20, 2016), 7.

¹¹ Albrecht Oepke, “Thureo” in Gerhard Kittel and G.W. Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1964), vol. V, 312-313.

(cf. Is 21:5) to preserve it and to make it glisten, and is carried by the light infantry to ward off the enemy's sword, spear, or arrows, is frequently employed to describe God's presence in warding off a foe's attack."¹² Oegden commented, "In the OT Yahweh intervenes with His weapons on behalf of the upright against ungodly foes (Ps. 35:1 ff.). He also holds the shield of the righteous, wields his sword for him, and shoots his arrows (Ps. 7:11 ff.). His faithfulness is a shield and buckler" (Ps. 91:4).¹³

David's psalms are replete with imagery richly describing the protection afforded by Yahweh. Various motifs of protection are used in various passages. For example, Kelly understands the *city of God* in Psalm 46 as the source of divine refuge for the psalmist.¹⁴ Perhaps one of the most vivid examples of protection imagery is found in Psalm 18:2, where multiple metaphors of God's protection are used by the psalmist; "The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold" (ESV). It is as if the psalmist is using every example of robust strength from ancient warfare to describe the protection that comes from Yahweh. Likewise, Psalm 84:11 states, "For the LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good *thing* will he withhold from them that walk uprightly." (KJV) David understood the Lord's presence in the life of His faithful servants to include protection afforded by the Lord and the outpouring of God's blessings as a reward for upright living.

¹² Waltke, 8.

¹³ Oepke, TDNT, V, 297.

¹⁴ Sidney Kelly, "Psalm 46: a study in imagery." *Journal Of Biblical Literature* 89, no. 3 (September 1970): 305-312. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost (accessed October 1, 2016), 308.

The shield metaphor to demonstrate Yahweh's protection is not limited to Psalm 3; it is used multiple places elsewhere in Scripture. The Lord spoke directly to Abraham, comforting him with the promise, "Fear not, Abram, I am thy shield, *and* thy exceeding great reward" (Genesis 15:1, KJV). Also, Deuteronomy 33:29 states, "Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the LORD, the shield of thy help..." (KJV)

Divine protection is often described within the canon of Scripture in militaristic terms, and there are many parallels in Ancient Near Eastern literature; "The idea that man is secure and invincible because of weapons given him by deity is very old. Often connected with magic, it finds reflection in the myths of various peoples. It takes on new content in the OT where it is related to the omnipotent and holy God."¹⁵ An Egyptian text is cited by Brunner as a similar example of the physical protection referred to in Psalm 3; lines iv through vii of the Egyptian text read, "(iv) God is the protection of my life. (v) Amun is behind me (i.e. is my protection); I fear nothing, for Amun is strong. (vi) There is no real refuge for my heart outside Amun. (vii) It is the protection of my life to serve Amun."¹⁶

The ANE parallel use of similar imagery is striking, but not surprising. David was writing this psalm within his own ANE context, and he was using literary methods that would be familiar within this culture to describe his innermost thoughts. His reliance on Yahweh as his protection in this psalm is consistent with David's enormous faith described throughout his life. At the contest with Goliath in I Samuel 17, David remarks, "... who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?" Azzan Yadin-Israel adheres to a

¹⁵ Oepke, TDNT, V, 297.

¹⁶ Hellmut Brunner, "Egyptian Texts," in *Near Eastern Religious Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, The Old Testament Library, edited by Walter Beyerlin (1-67). (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978), 42.

final composition date of I Samuel within the zenith of the Persian empire, and he argues that this classic biblical narrative is Israelite *collective memory*, or a fantastic recollection of ancient history that was based on actual events that evolved as various redactions took place throughout generations.¹⁷

Yadin-Israel argues that the final form of David and Goliath's battle recorded in Scripture was similar to the Greek *μονομαχία* (contest of champions), and was therefore influenced by Greek literature.¹⁸ The scope of this article would not allow for a full examination of the flaws in the critical assumptions made by Yadin-Israel, but a distinction between the narrative in I Samuel and the Hellenistic contest of champions is clearly discernible. David's courage had a greater motivation than nationalistic pride; he saw the conflict between the two armies, along with the blasphemies that were hurled across the battlefield, as an affront to the living God. The victory that Yahweh would bring through David would demonstrate His supremacy above all other gods; David declared, "Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied." (1 Samuel, 17:45, KJV) While Goliath was using a mighty physical shield, David shunned Saul's royal armor because God's protection was more than sufficient as a safeguard.

David's victory in I Samuel 17 follows the same pattern that David describes in Psalm 3:3. As a result of trusting in God's protection, David received blessing from God (*my glory*), and he placed his courage and confidence in God (*the lifter of my head*) rather than placing his

¹⁷ Azzan Yadin-Israel, "Goliath's armor and Israelite collective memory." *Vetus Testamentum* 54, no. 3 (2004 2004): 373-395. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost (accessed September 20, 2016), 377-378.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 387.

confidence in physical means of warfare. This parallel displays that there is a common theme of trust and dependence on God in David's victories. There was not a newfound faith and confidence that David gained in his conflict with Absalom. Rather, he had learned to rest in the provision given by His God from the days of his youth. About the confidence displayed by David in Psalm 3, Ross wrote, "In the face of such antagonism, David found comfort in God's character. Using the metaphor of a shield, he said that God was the true Source of his protection (in spite of their taunts). The psalmists often spoke of God as a shield to depict His protection...."¹⁹

Those who live with unleashed faith do not seek the path of least resistance in their service to God. On the contrary, such faith is hinged on an understanding that in spite of the inevitable challenges that the Christian will face, God is faithful to shield His people from anything or anyone that would dare to hinder the work of the Lord from being fulfilled. The believer may grow in his boldness and confidence in God as he sees this scriptural principle of protection fulfilled in his life.

Rest: Security Enabled By the Lord

The motif of rest enabled by the Lord is prevalent throughout the Old Testament. Although the Sabbath was instituted as a day of rest and worship, rest from labor was not the primary idea conveyed by the rest motif in the Old Testament.²⁰ Several suggestions for the interpretation of the rest motif include an exclusively literal understanding of the possession of Canaan, a typological representation of the divine kingdom and/or the rest found in heaven, as

¹⁹ Ross, "Psalms" in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, I, 793.

²⁰ Gnana Robinson, "The idea of rest in the Old Testament and the search for the basic character of Sabbath." *Zeitschrift Für Die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 92, no. 1 (1980 1980): 32-42. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost (accessed October 7, 2016), 42.

well as an eschatological view that looks to a future possession of the land by Jesus and His followers.²¹

It may be observed that there are various forms of rest described within the Old Testament. For example, a contrast may be drawn between the concept of rest found in Deuteronomy 12 and the rest described in Isaiah 32. Deuteronomy 12 places an emphasis on blessing through a strict adherence to the statutes and judgments given by God, including full obedience to the conquest initiative mentioned in verses 2-4. Isaiah 32:17-18 emphasizes *peace* and *quiet resting places*. While the focal point in Deuteronomy 12 is on diligence and boldness in response to the commands of God, there is a sense of finality in the work that is accomplished by the king who “shall rule in righteousness” in Isaiah 32:1. The Isaiah passage looks to a future dispensation, where peace and rest from the heavy burden of the Law is found during the reign of the Messiah.

In light of New Testament teaching, particularly in Matthew 11 and Hebrews 3, the rest motif is linked with Moses and David, and it has Christological implications; ultimately, rest is found in the finished work of Christ.²² The link between the OT and NT descriptions of the rest motif centers on the idea that the servant of God hands all of his concerns over to the Lord. Whether these needs are the pressing physical need of deliverance or the need for spiritual salvation, the faithful servant simply waits and rests on the Lord.

²¹ George Wesley Buchanan, *The Anchor Bible* (1st Ed., vol. 36), *To the Hebrews*. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1972), 64-65.

²² John Laansma, "I Will Give You Rest': The Background and Significance of the Rest Motif in the New Testament." *Tyndale Bulletin* 46, no. 2 (November 1995): 385-388. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials, EBSCOhost* (accessed October 7, 2016), 388.

The fact that David was able to sleep during his conflict with Absalom is indicative of his complete trust in God in spite of persecution (Psalm 127:2). This gift of rest from the Lord hinged on David's humble cry to his Sustainer in verse 4. His recognition of his own weakness and his need for God's provision is tied to his heartfelt prayer and the Lord's benevolent response.

*“(With) my voice I cried unto Yahweh, and He answered me
from His holy mountain. Selah.
I myself lied down and I slept; I awoke because Yahweh sustained me.”
(Psalm 3:4-5, Author's translation)*

Waltke notes, “The significance of the Hebrew tenses in these verses are open to different interpretations, but it seems best with Delitzsch to understand verses 4, 5, 6 as reference to the present, past, and future respectively.”²³ Waltke's translation reads, “(4) I cry aloud to *I AM* and he answers me from his holy hill. (5) I lay down and slept; I awoke because *I AM* sustains me. (6) I do not fear the tens of thousands of troops who are drawn up against me on every side.”²⁴ Contrasting with this view of translation, Ross commented on the translation of the verbs in verses four and five; “The Hebrew tenses in these verses are difficult to translate. Though they may be rendered by the English present tense, it is probably better to translate them as past tenses: I cried to the LORD and He answered me.”²⁵

It is the author's view that beginning with the third verse, it is best to translate in the present tense because of the direct address to Yahweh. However, as the psalmist turns back to personal reflection in verses four and five, it is best to understand his statement concerning his

²³ Waltke, 7.

²⁴ Waltke, 2.

²⁵ Ross, “Psalms” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, I, 739.

prayer and the resulting sleep that he received as a past reflection. Verses four and five seem to note a cause and an effect. David called to God, and God heard him. Being comforted that the Lord heard his prayer (Isaiah 59:1), he was then able to lie down in peaceful rest. David's solace mirrors the promise declared in Isaiah 26:3; "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee." (KJV)

While verses four and five contain David's reflection on the past, verse six contains a hopeful declaration of the psalmist's faith that will be exhibited in the face of any future oppression. It is notable that the victory and sustenance that he had experienced in the past would serve as a catalyst to an even greater faith as he faced similar trials in the future. This message is a tremendous encouragement for the child of God; ruminating on the provision of God that one has experienced in the past will serve as strong motivation to walk by faith going forward, no matter what the future might hold.

IV. DAVID'S EMPOWERMENT: BLESSING AND VICTORY BESTOWED BY THE LORD

In the midst of David's challenges and struggles, he remained steadfast in his faith in God and in his expectation that God would prepare a table before him in the midst of his enemies. As a result of his faithfulness, David was richly blessed by the Lord. Although the psalm opens with a dreary tone, one may see a shift in the tone as the psalmist ruminates on the victories that God had enabled him to have.

The Futile Undertaking of Attacking the Lord's Anointed

*I shall not fear multitudes of people round about who take a stand against me.
Arise, Yahweh, save me, my God, because you have caused all my enemies to be struck (upon)
the cheek; the teeth of the wicked you have shattered.*

(Psalm 3:6-7, Author's Translation)

In verse 6 David expresses firm confidence in spite of the possibility of facing a multitude of combatants, and verse 7 describes the sure fate of all of his enemies. Verse 7 also describes David's greatest tactic of warfare; he cried out for God to arise as the mighty Warrior and give the victory. David's request "save me" is translated from (הוֹשִׁיעֵנִי) a hiphil imperative, indicating that his physical salvation is a causative action by Yahweh, just as the smitten cheek of the enemy is caused by the Lord.

Verse 6 ends with an acknowledgment that the teeth of the wicked have been shattered. The harsh image of the consequence of the ungodly is not unlike the cries of the psalmist in the imprecatory psalms, where the psalmist's thoughts regarding his enemies led him to call out for justice and vengeance to be experienced by the oppressor (i.e., Psalm 58:6). The desire for justice to be served is not without parallel in the New Testament; Paul wrote, "If any one has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed. Our Lord, come!" (I Corinthians 16:22, ESV). Day wrote, "When justice is trampled, vengeance is required. Specifically, in the presentation of the canon, the enactment of God's vengeance is coupled with his character as just and holy and his claim as world sovereign. Indeed the Scriptures do not equivocate in their proclamation of Yahweh not only as Warrior, but also as Judge and King."²⁶ The judgment upon the enemies of David in this verse, which included the large number of soldiers that Absalom had gathered against his father, is justified, as there is a parallelism that links the *enemies* with *the wicked* in verse 7.²⁷

Judgment by the Lord may be seen as a divine fulfillment of God's plan by removing those who stood in opposition of God's holy standard and will. As harsh as these judgments

²⁶ John Nathan Day, "The Imprecatory Psalms and Christian Ethics." Order No. 3022979, Dallas Theological Seminary, 2001. In PROQUESTMS ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/251731884?accountid=165104>, 7.

²⁷ Waltke, 10.

might seem at times, they are executed by the decree of a holy and just God. Day comments, "... the vengeance of God on his enemies is the necessary obverse of the deliverance of his people from their enemies."²⁸ This enablement for victory by removing all hindrances to the servant of God is a common theme in both Testaments (Jos. 6:20, Jer. 1:19, Rom. 8:31, I Jn. 4:4). Just as the walls of Jericho tumbled before the army of Joshua, there is no obstacle that can prevent the faithful servant from accomplishing God's will.

The Assured Blessings Upon God's People

"Salvation belongs to Yahweh; Your blessing is upon your people. Selah."
(Psalm 3:8, Author's Translation)

As the theme of salvation is once again explored by David, he concisely declares that it belongs to Yahweh (לַיהוָה הַיְשׁוּעָה). This same statement, "Salvation belongs to the LORD" was made by Jonah in Jonah 2:9. Whether it is physical or spiritual deliverance described, it originates with, is accomplished by, and is given by the Lord alone. "Ross observes, "His conclusion is didactic. Deliverance comes from the LORD. God's people should pray to Him under similar circumstances, so that they may share this blessing. So the psalm instructs those who are in the midst of danger to trust in the Lord for protection while they sleep."²⁹

The psalmist's concluding thought dealt with Yahweh's blessing being upon His people. This truth of Israel's possession of His blessing is based on the concept of the covenant between Yahweh and His chosen people. About the concept of blessing, Mitchell wrote, "The factor that makes a blessing a blessing is the relationship between God and the person blessed. God blesses

²⁸ Day, 179.

²⁹ Ross, "Psalms" in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, I, 793.

because of his favorable attitude toward a person or group of people.”³⁰ Listing all manners of physical blessing available to the people of God, Deuteronomy 28:2 states, “And all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the LORD thy God.” (KJV) The blessing of God’s people was understood to encompass all matters of life, and it also allowed the people of God to understand that all of their enemies would be subdued before them as they honored God with their obedience.

V. CONCLUSION

This psalm summarizes a very difficult chapter in David’s life; not only was he the target of an unholy mutiny, this conflict was coming from his own son, Absalom. However, in spite of the vile and outrageous attacks that he had experienced, he received a decisive victory from the hand of God because the Lord was his Shield. The security provided to him by God instilled confidence within the innermost part of his being. The servant of the Lord may receive great comfort from the timeless message found in this psalm; one’s circumstances may increasingly worsen, but no difficulty or obstacle is insurmountable when strong, unleashed faith is evident in the believer’s life.

³⁰ Christopher Wright Mitchell, “The Meaning and Significance of ‘BRK’ ‘To Bless’ in the Old Testament.” Order No. 8402848, The University of Wisconsin - Madison, 1983. In PROQUESTMS ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/303186325?accountid=165104>, 322.

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UNLEASHING FAITH BY BEARING ONE ANOTHER'S BURDENS: AN EXPLORATION OF THE BIBLICAL RATIONALE FOR AND PRACTICE OF CHRISTIANS HELPING CHRISTIANS THROUGH LAY COUNSELING MINISTRIES

Thomas J. Gentry II, D.Min.*

I. INTRODUCTION¹

Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in the spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ . . . And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.²

Fellowship in Christ Church (FICC) averages seventy-five regular attendees in Sunday morning worship, is served by a full-time pastor and a volunteer staff, and has an annual budget of approximately \$100,000.³ From January 1 to December 31, 2016, FICC's pastor conducted 394 counseling conversations (averaging more than one per day), and provided oversight to seven trained lay counselors who conducted 184 additional counseling conversations. Combining both of their totals, the pastor and lay counseling team at FICC engaged in 578 counseling conversations in 2016. Compare those numbers to 2015, during which time FICC did not have a team of trained lay counselors, and there is a significant difference. From January 1 to December

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¹ This research represents, in part, an adaptation of portions of the researcher's unpublished Doctor of Ministry Project Report, submitted in November 2015 to the faculty of the Temple Baptist Seminary at Piedmont International University, Winston-Salem, NC.

² Galatians 6:1-2, 9-10. Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are taken from *The Holy Bible, New King James Version*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982).

³ These totals reflect the situation at FICC as of December 31, 2016; the author of this article is also the pastor of FICC.

31, 2015, FICC's pastor conducted 335 counseling conversations, and, in the absence of a trained lay counseling team, there were no documented lay counseling conversations.⁴ The increase in total counseling conversations from 2015 to 2016 is 243, or 72.5%.

What is the likely reason for the increase in counseling conversations at FICC? While ministry needs can vary from year to year, and such variation could impact counseling needs, the primary difference between FICC in 2015 and 2016 lays in the introduction of a lay counseling ministry. Rather than conducting all the counseling himself, FICC's pastor trained seven others as lay counselors, thereafter releasing them to counsel others. This decision to utilize lay counselors is, in this researcher's estimation, the primary reason for the increase in counseling conversations at FICC from 2015 to 2016. By including lay counseling in the ministry at FICC, the pastor focused primarily, but not exclusively, on counseling scenarios requiring greater expertise than lay counselors provide, and the lay counselors offered, in addition to serving those referred to them by the pastor, a trained presence within the broader congregation that resulted in several documented instances of problems being addressed by lay counseling before they rose to the level of requiring the pastor's attention.⁵ Lay counseling at FICC became an extension of the pastor's ministry, demonstrating the impact of the laity in helping others.

The following research provides a rationale for lay counseling ministries in the local church. Two questions provide the framework for the discussion. 1) What is the rationale for lay counseling? To answer this question, the place of the laity in counseling is explored, and the principles of Christian counseling are examined. 2) How does a church implement a lay

⁴ This is not to say, however, that the lay people did not engage one another in offering some form of biblical counsel, but there were no trained lay counselors or formal oversight or documentation during this time frame.

⁵ There were at least ten such instances at FICC during 2016.

counseling ministry? This question involves a discussion of the practice of lay counseling, and a brief consideration of the preparation of lay counselors. Research findings will suggest that lay counseling ministries, due to both their biblical basis and their practical benefits, are a powerful means to unleashing faith in the local church by providing an important avenue of ministry multiplication for pastors and the congregations they serve.

II. WHAT IS THE RATIONALE FOR LAY COUNSELING?

The Place of the Laity in Counseling

Discussing the place of the laity in counseling begins with an examination of the Bible's teaching about the role of the laity in Christian ministry, in general, and in counseling others, specifically. The biblical basis is followed by a practical justification for lay counseling.

The Teaching of the Bible about the Laity in Counseling Regarding the place of the laity in biblical counseling, consider the following relevant instances in Scripture: Moses' encounter with Jethro in Exodus 18:1-27; Jesus' sending of the seventy in Luke 10:1-20; Paul's teachings in Galatians 6:1-2, and Ephesians 4:11-16; and the teaching in Hebrews 10:23-25.

In Exodus 18:13-27, Moses's father-in-law, Jethro, counsels Moses to enlist the aid of numerous men from among the tribes of Israel in order to help Moses in giving judgment and counsel to the people. Doing so was the first step in initiating Israel's earliest law court system.⁶ In directing Moses to this shared approach to ministry, Jethro declares in 18:17-18 that Moses' practice until then of handling the judgment and counsel himself was "not good." Jethro recognized that continuing to do so would lead to exhaustion for both Moses and the people. However, if Moses would follow Jethro's advice to select others to help in giving judgment and

⁶ Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, vol. 2 of *The New American Commentary*, E. Ray Clendenen and Kenneth A. Matthews, eds., (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2006), 11258-1136, Kindle.

counsel, the outcome would be two-fold. One, Moses would endure, and two, the people would “go to their place in peace” (18:23). This is another way of saying that the people would receive appropriate judgment and counsel for their issues. Stuart notes that the proof of the validity of Jethro’s argument that Moses needed additional help was the concern that both Moses and the people would “wear [themselves] out” (18:18). This indicated that Moses’ decision to act alone was leading to delays and frustration.⁷

In terms of the question of the laity in biblical counseling, Jethro’s advice to Moses provides an Old Testament example of the role of the specially selected leadership (i.e., Moses) being joined by the laity (i.e., men from each tribe) in the ministry of giving judgment and counsel. By doing so, they were providing the help needed to aid with ministerial longevity, as well as decreased frustration among the people in need.

In Luke 10:1-20, Jesus sends out seventy people on a mission of preaching, healing, and exorcising throughout the towns of Israel. There is no indication in the text of any special qualifications in order to be one of the seventy, other than being a follower of Jesus and a willingness to engage others in ministry⁸ While not specifically mentioned as a task of the seventy, it is reasonable to conclude that counseling occurred, insofar as the tasks of preaching, healing, and exorcising imply offering counsel to others in the process of meeting their needs. Each of these activities requires an awareness of the person in need and a willingness to address those needs in a manner consistent with Jesus’ message of the kingdom of God (cf., 10:9). Thus, in the example of Jesus and the seventy sent on mission, the interdependence of the specially

⁷ Stuart, *Exodus*, 11298, Kindle.

⁸ Stein concludes that the seventy were chosen as representative of each of the nations of the world (cf. Gen. 10:1-32). Jesus’ choice of this number pointed toward the church’s evangelistic mission to the nations that would commence at Jesus’ ascension (cf. Matt. 28:18-20). Robert A. Stein, *Luke*, vol. 24 of *The New American Commentary*, David S. Dockery, ed., (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1992), 8850-8875, Kindle.

called and anointed for ministry (i.e., Jesus) and those willing to serve as his representatives among the people in need (i.e., the seventy) is demonstrated. Both came together to accomplish the ministry to the people.

In Galatians 6:1-2, Paul encourages the more mature believers to aid those who have become “overtaken in any trespass,” commanding that Christians are to “bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” What Paul calls for in this instance is not limited to the ministry of those who pastor and teach, but includes any “who are spiritual” (6:1). This description, based on the preceding context of 5:22-25, relates to any Christian who bears the fruit of the Spirit. Therefore, Paul teaches that healthy Christians (i.e., those who are “spiritual”) are to seek the restoration (6:1) of those struggling with sin. McKnight states, “what we find here, then, is an interplay between two themes: personal responsibility and mutual accountability—both emerging from the context of communal strife.”⁹ That an attempt at restoration amidst communal strife includes counsel is self-evident, given that the meaning of “restore” (from the Greek *katartizo*) is to mend, restore, and equip; these actions require personal engagement, helping to expose error and to redirect thought and conduct by sound instruction.¹⁰ This is the essence of giving counsel, and in this instance, such essential counsel is part of the ministry among believers related to bearing one another’s burdens. Further, Paul, as especially called to the apostolic ministry, in giving this Spirit-led directive, is enlisting the aid of the Galatian laity in providing such counsel.

⁹ Scot McKnight, *Galatians*, a vol. of *The NIV Application Commentary*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 5493, Kindle.

¹⁰ Spiros Zodhiates, ed., *The Complete Word Study New Testament*, (Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 1992), 914.

In Ephesians 4:11-16, Paul describes the gracious gift of leaders given by Jesus to his church. These include apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastors and teachers, given “for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry,” (Eph. 4:12). While some have argued that the language of 4:12 intends to communicate two separate activities of these leaders, the first being to equip the saints, and the second being to conduct the work of the ministry, the argument to the contrary is stronger.¹¹ Cochran argues that Paul’s word choice and word order support the idea that the work of the ministry is exactly what the saints are being equipped by the leaders to do. Cochran states that “the interpretation that places the pastor/teacher in the primary role of equipping the saints for ministry is in harmony with the context of this passage. A summary of Ephesians 4:7-12 shows that God has given grace for Christian service to all the Christians while grace to equip others for service is given to some...of whom pastor/teachers are numbered.”¹²

Further, even if the distinction between equipping and the work of ministry exists, the question remains as to what the saints in this instance are being equipped to do, if not ministry. There is no conception of self-serving Christian life in the New Testament. Jesus models what Christians are to emulate, namely the giving of self in service to others. Thus, even if Paul has a distinction in mind, the equipping of the saints is an equipping unto service to others. This is, in itself, an expression of ministry. However, given the argument of Cochran above, which finds support also in Hoehner, Paul’s teaching in Ephesians 4:12 is that the saints are to be equipped in

¹¹ See Andrew Lincoln, *Ephesians*, vol. 42 of the *Word Biblical Commentary*, Bruce Metzger, ed., (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1990), 253-255.

¹² Danny R. Cochran, “An Evaluation of the Moody Bible Institute Ministry Based Partnership as a Ministry Training Tool,” DMin thesis project, Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, 2004, 19. <http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/doctoral/237/.html>. Accessed May 30, 2015.

order to fulfill the work of ministering.¹³ As Bruce states, “the gifts enumerated in verse 11 do not monopolize the Church’s ministry; their function rather is so to help and direct the Church that all the members may perform their several ministries for the good of the whole.”¹⁴ It seems reasonable to conclude, therefore, that equipping laity to give biblical counsel to those within their various spheres of influence is in keeping with the apostolic and, ultimately, the Holy Spirit’s intention in Ephesians 4:11-12.

In Hebrews 10:23-25, the writer gives one of seven warning exhortations regarding the need to remain faithful to Jesus, rather than returning to their former practice of Judaism (cf. 2:1-4; 3:12-13; 4:11-13; 6:1-8; 10:35-39; 12:25).¹⁵ The passage exhorts the body of believers to do two things specific to the idea of giving biblical counsel. First, 10:24 calls on the group of believers to give focused attention to one another (i.e., “let us consider” from the Greek *katanoeo*), with the intended outcome of “to stir up” (i.e., to incite or provoke; from the Greek *paroxysmos*) “love and good works.”¹⁶ Second, 10:25 continues to urge the group to engage one another by remaining in fellowship, therein “exhorting” one another (i.e., speaking alongside one another; from the Greek *parakaleo*) in anticipation of Christ’s return (i.e., “as you see the Day approaching”).¹⁷

¹³ Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 579.

¹⁴ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Ephesians*, (Bath: Creative Communications, 2012), 1429, Kindle.

¹⁵ George H. Guthrie, *Hebrews*, a vol. of *The NIV Application Commentary*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 361-371, Kindle.

¹⁶ Spiros Zodhiates, ed., *The Complete Word Study Dictionary, New Testament*, (Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 1993), 1122.

¹⁷ Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study New Testament*, 3870.

Taken together, these two directives from the writer of Hebrews reveal an intention that the members of the congregation would be involved in one another's lives. They would do so for the sake of helping one another grow and persevere in their faith. As Guthrie states, "this passage calls this community of Christ-followers to a life of mutual encouragement...believers are to rivet their attention on the need for conscious activities of encouragement among those in the Christian community."¹⁸ This example of the writer enjoining the group to help one another, is another instance where the specially called (i.e., the writer of Hebrews) works with the laity (i.e., the recipients) to accomplish the shared task of giving biblical counsel.

In summary, the Bible provides five points of instruction regarding the role of the laity in giving counsel. First, giving counsel requires the interdependence of the specially called and ordained, and the laity (cf. Ex. 18:13-27). Second, the primary prerequisite of those who would aid the specially called and ordained in the ministry of counseling is that they remain aware of the needs of those around them. They must be willing to address those needs according to Jesus' teaching (cf. Luke 10:1-20). Third, all believers are to "bear one another's burdens," a calling that carries with it the requirement to help restore others through giving counsel (cf. Gal. 6:1-2). Fourth, Jesus gave the gift of pastor and teacher to the church in order to equip it to do ministry, reasonably including the giving of biblical counsel as part of that ministry (cf. Eph. 4:11-16). Fifth, believers are to be involved in each other's lives for the sake of growth and perseverance in the faith; this includes exhorting one another with biblical counsel (cf. Heb. 10:23-25).

A Practical Justification for Lay Counseling In addition to the biblical teaching, there are three practical justifications related to the role of the laity in counseling. First, not all counseling is a matter of set, formal appointments with the pastor in order to address specific counseling

¹⁸ Guthrie, *Hebrews*, 7089, Kindle.

concerns. Much of the counseling that occurs in a congregation occurs informally in the context of relationships between believers. Jan and Martha fellowship over coffee on Tuesday; in their conversation Jan reveals she is struggling to overcome a particular temptation, and Martha listens and encourages Jan to remain faithful, even offering a few suggestions for dealing with temptation. What is this interaction called? It is called informal counseling, where one believer engages and encourages another. Although the counseling situation was impromptu, it need not be uninformed, insofar as a lay counselor training program can equip Martha with tools to help Jan and others as she interacts with them and has opportunity to give counsel. Thus, the reality of informal, impromptu counseling occurrences provides a legitimate reason to equip laity with counseling skills; the question is not whether lay counseling will occur, but will it be rooted in biblical truth and an effective approach?

Second, the reality of limited budgets and personnel constraints in most congregations places heavy burdens on the pastor and staff to provide more ministry than is sometimes humanly possible. In this scenario the pastoral team may unintentionally harm their ministry reputation as needs go unaddressed; further, there are some needs that are placed on the pastoral team that do not necessarily require their attention or input. A lay counselor ministry is one practical way to alleviate such problems. For example, in this author's experience with pastoral counseling from July 1, 2014 to June 30, 2015, he engaged in 362 counseling conversations. Of those 362, 119 related to one of three issues that could have been addressed by competent lay counselors: twenty-eight focused on discerning God's will; forty-one focused on overcoming temptation; and fifty focuses on resolving basic interpersonal conflict. While it is not that this author did not want to help the 119 people represented by these categories, it is true that his limited ministry time and energy might have been expended in other areas if lay counselors had

engaged some or all of these situations. There are limits to what a pastor and staff can do, and lay counseling is one way to address some of the complications posed by such limits.

Third, with the proliferation of small group ministries in churches of all sizes, the role of the small group leader will invariably require some form of lay counseling.¹⁹ Small groups provide a helpful venue to cultivate community in an informal setting that is, due to its limited size, also conducive to more openness and sharing between group members. It is not practical or necessarily advisable, however, to try to have a trained pastoral staff member leading each group; but it is possible to train every small group leader or other group member in the basics of Christian counseling so that they may better serve the needs of the group. In this researcher's own congregation there is a requirement that every small group has at least one trained lay counselor, even if that person is not the group leader; doing so helps the small group continue to develop community as they learn to "bear one another's burdens" (Gal. 6:2) in the giving and receiving of sound counsel.

The Principles of Christian Counseling

Moving from the discussion of the place of the laity in counseling, consideration turns to the principles of Christian counseling. First, a survey is provided of the biblical teaching regarding the foundations (explicit and implied) for Christian counseling. Second, a brief defense is presented for an integrationist approach to Christian counseling.

Biblical Foundations for Christian Counseling Five passages provide the gist of the discussion related to the principles of Christian counseling. The passages are 2 Timothy 3:16-17 related to biblical authority and sufficiency; Genesis 1:26 related to God's image and likeness in

¹⁹ For a helpful discussion of the role of small groups in community-building, and their applicability to churches of all sizes, see Jeffrey Arnold, *The Big Book on Small Groups*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1992).

humankind; Romans 7:13-25 related to the depravity of humankind; Ephesians 2:8-9 related to God's design for the salvation of humankind; and Romans 12:1-2 related to Christian discipleship and sanctification.

Paul's words in 2 Timothy 3:16-17 are a central passage regarding the Bible's authority and sufficiency in counseling. Paul speaks first of the Bible's inspiration in 3:16a, explaining that "all" of it is "given by inspiration of God." In this way, Paul establishes a basis for the verbal, plenary inspiration of Scripture, "clarify[ing] the extent and focus of inspiration beyond that of general ideas" to each word.²⁰ Paul explains in 3:16b the two areas in which Scripture is "profitable," the first being "for doctrine [and] reproof," and the second being "for correction [and] instruction in righteousness." The former speaks to Scripture's role in teaching right belief and in correcting wrong belief; the latter speaks of its role in correcting wrong actions and in teaching right actions. In this manner, Paul describes the Scriptures as given from God to address authoritatively both beliefs and actions. Liefeld comments that "to affirm the inspiration of Scripture and the importance of strong doctrinal teaching, therefore, has strong implications both for the correction of error and the pursuit of good works."²¹

Continuing in 3:17, Paul speaks of Scripture's sufficiency for making "the man of God complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." While it may be argued that this passage is specifically directed to church leadership (i.e., "the man of God"), it would be unreasonable to conclude that Scripture does not also have the same impact on the laity. Rather, Scripture makes the Christian (leader and laity) complete and equipped to do the good works God prepares them

²⁰ Walter L. Liefeld, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*, a vol. of *The NIV Application Commentary*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 5279, Kindle.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 5711, Kindle.

to do (cf. Eph. 2:10). This, as discussed above, includes providing biblical counsel to one another.

Related to God's image in humankind, Genesis 1:26 reveals that humankind has been made in the image (i.e., *tselem* in Hebrew, meaning resemblance) and likeness (i.e., *demuwth* in Hebrew, meaning similitude) of God.²² Taken together, image and likeness communicate similar concepts in different words. God's intention in making humankind was to create little images of himself, his "royal representatives...to rule the earth in his place," to represent him throughout his creation.²³ This is a significant, foundational idea for Christian counseling, insofar as it assumes this worldview by recognizing that both counselor and counselee are image and likeness bearers of the one true God.

On the one hand, this serves as a reminder that there is a sacredness to the task of interaction with one another in giving and receiving counsel. On the other hand, the distinction between God and his creature, as emphasized in the fact that humankind is not God, but made in his image and likeness, serves as a reminder that there is an inherent finitude to the counseling process. Neither counselors nor counsees have within themselves an unlimited capacity or resource. As creatures they are necessarily dependent.

In regards to the depravity of humankind, Romans 7:13-25 provides Paul's autobiographical explanation of the challenge posed by sinful human nature. Even though made in his image and likeness, humankind chose to disobey God (cf. Gen. 3:1-6). The result is that all humanity is now subject to sin and the judgment it brings (cf. Rom. 3:23; 6:23). The impact of

²² Warren Baker, *The Complete Word Study Old Testament*, (Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 1994), 2310, 2358.

²³ Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1—11:26*, vol. 1A of *The New American Commentary*, E. Ray Clendenen and Kenneth A. Mathews, eds., (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1996), 4033, Kindle.

this for counseling is tremendous, rendering the process fraught with external and internal difficulties, such as those described by Paul in Romans 7:13-25.

Regardless of whether one interprets Paul's teaching in this passage as speaking of his condition prior to or after conversion, the text is relevant to counseling. This is true, primarily, since Paul's description of the struggle to overcome sin is a process, and victory is impossible without Jesus. These ideas of change through a process and victory only in Jesus are foundational to Christian counseling.

A few highlights from the passage reveal the difficulty Paul describes. In 7:8, Paul describes sin as producing "all manner of evil desire" within him, having "deceived" and "killed" him (7:11). What Paul describes is concupiscence, the innate struggle (since the fall of Adam and Eve) of desiring what is contrary to God's best, and the outcome realized by pursuing such desires, which is death. Regarding sin's ability to turn the good law of God into something bad, Schreiner states that "the nefarious character of sin is illustrated in its ability to turn a good thing, the law, to an evil purpose."²⁴

Paul goes on to describe the frustration created by this concupiscence, stating that "what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do" (7:15). What Paul describes is the heart of Christian counseling's dilemma in light of the effects of depravity, at least for the Christian. The dilemma involves wanting one thing, and choosing another. Further, in the midst of this struggle, Paul realizes that "evil is present" (7:21), constantly warring against what is good. Further still, evil is working through sinful human nature (7:23), exacerbated by the external (and good) "law of God" (7:22). Paul's only hope, and

²⁴ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, a vol. of the *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, Moises Silva, ed., (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998), 27117, Kindle.

the only hope for anyone, is a recognition of both the inability to win this battle alone (7:24), and a reception of the deliverance available through Jesus Christ alone (7:24-25).

Concerning God's design for the salvation of humankind, Ephesians 2:8-9 provides a helpful summary of the process by which God accomplishes the deliverance described in Romans 7:24-25. As Paul states, salvation is "by grace...through faith" (2:8). In these words are revealed salvation's source (the grace of God; cf. John 3:16-17), and its securement (receiving God's grace by faith; cf. Rom. 10:9-10). To clarify that the resulting salvation is no mere human accomplishment, Paul further explains that "it is the gift of God, not of works" (2:8-9).

Regarding this passage, Bruce declares that "this is one of the great evangelical summaries of the New Testament. Our salvation springs solely from God's grace and is appropriated by us through faith alone."²⁵ This is the gospel, which lies at the heart of Christian counseling. While God created humankind in his image and likeness, their depravity and its resultant struggle with concupiscence and the sin and death it brings, has left them without hope, aside from the gospel of God's grace in Jesus Christ.

As for God's design for Christian discipleship and sanctification, Romans 12:1-2 describes the interrelationship between the will and the mind in the process of learning to follow and become more like Jesus. Paul calls Christians to "offer [their] bodies a living sacrifice" (12:1), thereby describing what is the proper response to the God's grace in one's life (cf. Rom. 11:28-36). Thus, a decision of the will is required, but so is a mental process of "renewing [the] mind," as described in 12:2. This renewal results in transformation in godliness rather than conforming to the world, and in discerning the will of God. This is the fundamental process by

²⁵ Bruce, *The Epistle to the Ephesians*, 774, Kindle.

which Christian counseling occurs. The counselor calls the counselee to choose to become a living sacrifice unto God, seeking a renewed mind, in order to know and do God's will, rather than being "conformed to the world," (12:2).

In summary, the Bible's teaching related to the principles of Christian counseling reveals the following. First, the Bible is the authoritative and sufficient Word of God, providing the counselor the basis for addressing both doctrine and conduct (cf. 2 Tim. 3:16-17). Second, God created humans in his image and likeness. This implies a sacredness to the counseling process, as well as a creaturely limitation within both counselor and counselee; neither counselor nor counselee have the unlimited capacity or sufficiency of their Creator (cf. Gen. 1:26). Third, humankind's depraved nature, and its attendant concupiscence, engenders an ongoing struggle for the counselee and counselor; sin works against and within people, deceptively and continuously, with the only hope of deliverance found in Jesus Christ (cf. Rom. 7:13-25). Fourth, God's plan of salvation is wholly of grace, through faith, in Jesus Christ (cf., Eph. 2:8-9). Fifth, in the process of discipleship and sanctification, the will and the mind relate inseparably, requiring a continual self-sacrifice to God and an intentional renewing of the mind (cf. Rom. 12:1-2).

In Defense of an Integrationist Approach to Counseling Although Christian counselors are agreed upon the value of the Bible for counseling, not all agree on how the Bible is best used. Some urge what may be called a Bible-only approach, concluding that little if anything from the areas of psychological or psychiatric theory and practice serves to help the Christian counselor; the Bible and the Bible alone is sufficient. Some affirm an integrated approach to Christian counseling, wherein the Bible is certainly involved, but theories and practices from other areas may also aid in the counseling process. Before considering how Paul's preaching in Athens in

Acts 17 lends credence to the integrated approach to counseling, which best represents the view of this researcher, a review of the work of David Powlison, an advocate of the Bible-only approach, is presented, followed by a review of the work of Harry Shields and Gary Bredfeldt, advocates of an integrated approach.

Powlison argues that the primary concern relative to the principles of Christian counseling is to establish correct presuppositions about three things.²⁶ The first presupposition is the ultimacy and authority of Scripture in determining every aspect of who receives counsel, who gives counsel, and how to conduct counseling. The second presupposition is the Godward reference in every action by the counselee. All actions and issues proceed through the grid of how God is honored or dishonored, meaning that in many instances, an evaluation of counselee concerns is made primarily in light of sin. The third presupposition is that any personal application given in counsel should conform to the first presupposition, giving preeminence to Scripture as the sufficient source for every aspect of the counseling relationship.

Powlison's emphasis is two-fold. First, to affirm the centrality of the Bible and what it says for counseling. Second, to deny any validity to secular theories associated with psychology and psychiatry, since they are presuppositionally flawed. Powlison states that "for counseling worthy of the name Christian, the functional control of Scripture must be active, giving us the controlling ideas and categories with which we approach the data of real life."²⁷

Shields and Bredfeldt come to the discussion of principles of Christian counseling from an integrationist perspective, rather than the Bible-only approach of Powlison. Their goal is to

²⁶ David Powlison, "Which Presuppositions: Secular Psychology and the Categories of Biblical Thought," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 12, no. 4 (1984 1984): 270-278.

²⁷ Powlison, "Which Presuppositions," 278.

counsel under the authority of Scripture, but not to exclude insights from the social sciences regarding human personality.²⁸ Their starting point is the authority of Scripture, which provides an understanding of humankind as both “wonderfully created” and “broken and hurting.”²⁹ Therefore, though not exclusively so, the Bible provides the only true starting point to assess the condition of the counselee. There may be, however, value in some psychological theories, insofar as they are consistent with Scripture.

Shields and Bredfeldt’s approach relies heavily upon Scripture, while appreciating certain extra-biblical concepts. The following question helps summarize their approach: “Is there a way to tap the many sources of human knowledge and use those understandings in ministry while, at the same time, remaining true to God’s Word?”³⁰ Shields and Bredfeldt’s answer is in the affirmative, which means the principles of Christian counseling are biblically based, though not necessarily found only in the Bible.

To summarize, Powlison advocates reliance upon the Bible, although in a way that excludes any role for extra-biblical theories. For Powlison, such theories proceed from presuppositions contrary to biblical presuppositions. Shields and Bredfeldt offer an integrated approach to the principles of Christian counseling, preferring to bring all counseling under the authority of Scripture. Shields and Bredfeldt do not insist, however, that Scripture explicitly states every principle or practice used in counseling.

²⁸ Harry Shields and Gary Bredfeldt, *Caring for Souls: Counseling Under the Authority of Scripture*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 2001).

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 36.

³⁰ Shields and Bredfeldt, *Caring for Souls*, 212.

This researcher concludes that the view of Powlison and others who advocate an exclusive use of Scripture has the appearance of honoring the place of Scripture. However, this author concurs with Shield and Bredfeldt that to counsel under Scripture's authority does not exclude a place for secular counseling theory and practice. Being under Scripture does not demand doing only those things explicitly stated in or implied by Scripture. There is room for the benefits of common grace to apply in the counseling process. In defense of this integrated position, consider Paul's own practice of evangelism in Athens. The rationale for applying Paul's evangelistic approach to counseling is two-fold. First, evangelism is a form of counseling, insofar as it involves identifying a problem (i.e., sin and separation from God) and applying a solution (i.e., the gospel) that involves the counselor (i.e., sharing the gospel) and the counselee (i.e., hearing the gospel) in a conversation (i.e., the evangelistic encounter). Second, Paul's approach to evangelism reveals his appreciation for and use of extra-biblical areas of learning (i.e., philosophy and natural theology) in his interaction with others.

In Acts 17:15, Paul arrives in Athens and begins his usual ministry of going first to the Jews and then to the Gentiles (see Rom 1:16-17).³¹ After a time of interaction with the Jews in the synagogue and the Gentiles in the marketplace (17), Paul is invited to appear before the Areopagus to explain the message he was proclaiming in the marketplace, a "new doctrine" that brought "strange things to [their] ears" (19-20). The audience he faced in the Areopagus was composed of at least "Epicurean and Stoic philosophers" (18), as well as other "Athenians" and "foreigners" who "spent their time in nothing else but to tell or to hear some new thing" (21). Into this context steps Paul, who proclaims a message that yields one of three responses (32, 34):

³¹ The information presented here regarding Paul's evangelism in Athens is adapted from research previously presented by this author to Dr. Paul Hartog for THEO 705, Critical Concepts in Apologetics, at Piedmont International University, Winston-Salem, NC, in July 2016.

1) some mocked him, 2) some expressed interest in hearing more at a later time, and 3) some joined with Paul and believed.

What was it that Paul preached? In the last portion of his message (30-31), Paul makes explicit claims to the coming judgment through Jesus Christ, which judgment God assured by raising Jesus from the dead. This portion of the message is explicitly Christian in its content, and would qualify as special revelation. However, the majority of the message Paul preaches in Athens is not special revelation. Out of ten verses in Paul's message (totaling 269 words), eight deal with themes from general revelation (218 of the 269 words); by this reckoning, the vast majority of Paul's evangelistic message in Athens draws from general revelation.³² What, exactly, does Paul say about general revelation? Here is a list of the topics, by verse, that Paul addresses. While there may be difference in how each verse/topic is identified, the general revelatory gist is clear throughout the passage, as demonstrated in these ten instances.³³

1. The human sense of the divine (*sensus divinitatis*): "in all things you are very religious" (22-23)
2. God is creator: "who made the world" (24)
3. God is sovereign: "Lord of heaven and earth" (24)
4. God is not an idol: "does not dwell in temples," is not "worshiped with men's hands" (24-25)
5. God is the source of all life: "gives to all life, breath, and all things" (25)
6. God is the origin of all people/nations: "made from one blood every nation" (26)
7. God is personal/directs history: "has determined their preappointed times" (26)
8. God is immanent: "not far from each one of us" (27)

³² It is certainly possible that Paul's message included other words that were not recorded by Luke, but the portion that made it into the text of Acts is clearly weighted in the direction of general revelation. It appears from the flow of the text that Paul's mention of the resurrection brought such a reaction that his message was interrupted. However, there was still evangelistic fruit. While the text does not clearly explain the conversions, it is reasonable to conclude that those who converted upon hearing Paul on Mars Hill had already heard some of his teaching in the marketplace, since the Mars Hill message did not include the complete gospel.

³³ This list is original to this author, as he is unaware of any other examples attempting to isolate/identify the general revelatory elements in Paul's message. This is not to say, however, that such a list does not exist elsewhere. Further, this author recognizes that there may be other ways to classify the general revelatory components of Paul's message; what is given here is only one possibility.

9. God is the source and sustainer of all life: “in Him we live and move and have our being,” and “we are also His offspring” (28)

10. God is not an idol: “we ought not to think the Divine Nature is like . . . something shaped by art and man’s devising” (29)

Not once in these ten instances does Paul say anything that is overtly Christian or that is beyond the scope of general revelation. Paul’s message up to verse 30 is what might be described as general revelation through a gospel lens. To paraphrase, Paul’s message from general revelation is that who the Athenians seek in worship is the God who created and is the Lord of the world and all in it, but who is not worshiped in a temple like an idol; rather, he desires a relationship with all, and has directed human affairs in such a way that all who seek him will find him. It is only after Paul lays this general groundwork that he moves into special revelation, calling attention to the judgment and the resurrection of Jesus.

While it certainly appears that Paul uses general revelation in this message to the Athenians, some do not believe Paul was intending to build from general revelation to a natural theology that would segue to the gospel. Polhill, for example, argues that Paul’s language in the first eight verses of the message is primarily drawn from the Old Testament, rather than general revelation.³⁴ There are two problems with Polhill’s approach. First, the Old Testament does not include the quotations Paul makes from pagan poets in verse 28; therefore, even if Paul did rely on some Old Testament material he certainly did not rely exclusively on the Old Testament. Second, even Polhill acknowledges that Paul, in his attempt to reach the Athenians, has a clear “ring of Greek philosophy” in his words.³⁵ To borrow from the pagans and to sound like the pagans leads to a reasonable conclusion that Paul was intentionally borrowing from and

³⁴ John B. Polhill, *Acts*, vol. 26 of *The New American Commentary*, (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1992), 369-370.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 370.

appealing to a common knowledge among the pagans. No doubt he had an influence from the Old Testament, as his mind was steeped in its content, but that is not the same as saying that his message was drawn from the Old Testament and not general revelation.

What is the significance of Paul's practice in Athens for Christian counseling? Paul did not limit his understanding of his audience to what the Bible specifically taught; he borrowed from both philosophy and natural theology to gain insight into and connect with his audience. This is the essence of the integrationist approach to counseling, insofar as any source that is helpful and true (i.e., consistent with Scripture) is utilized in the counseling process. This is also the gist of what Shields and Bredfeldt are expressing in their commitment to counsel under the authority of Scripture, but not necessarily exclusively from its pages.

Summary

This first section of research sought to answer the question: What is the rationale for lay counseling? In answer to this question, the place of the laity in counseling was established as the biblical teaching was explored, revealing that the laity are expected to engage in the work of ministering to others through giving counsel as an expression of life in Christian community. Three areas of practical justification for lay counseling were also presented, emphasizing that ministry constraints, the reality of informal and impromptu conversations among believers, and the dynamics of small groups make lay counseling an important consideration for effective ministry. Additionally, the principles of Christian counseling were drawn from the Bible and explained, and a defense of an integrationist, rather than a Bible-only approach to counseling was presented based on the ministry of Paul in Athens. The second section of research will consider how a church may implement lay counseling, first discussing the practice of lay counseling, and concluding with the preparation of lay counselors.

VI. IMPLEMENTING LAY COUNSELING MINISTRY IN A CHURCH

The Practice of Lay Counseling

Understanding the practice of lay counseling begins with a consideration of the biblical teaching about the practice of counseling, evaluating both explicit and implied biblical teaching about the subject. This is followed by a discussion of the value of a solution-focused approach to lay counseling, including an overview of its fundamental components and an example of how it might be used in counseling.

The Teaching of the Bible about the Practice of Counseling Three passages are helpful in order to understand the Bible's teaching regarding the practice of Christian counseling: Jesus' interactions with Nicodemus in John 3:1-21; the Samaritan woman in John 4:1-26; and the model of Paul's instruction in his epistles.

Jesus' interaction with Nicodemus in John 3:1-21 provides an example of Jesus giving counsel. The importance of the interaction for Christian counseling consists in Jesus' approach to and the substance of his conversation with Nicodemus. The setting is nighttime, and Nicodemus, a leader in Jewish religious life, comes to Jesus with a statement about the work Jesus was doing (3:1-2). Jesus responds to Nicodemus with a provocative statement about being "born again," (3:3). Nicodemus asks Jesus another question (3:4), and Jesus answers with more provocative responses related to being born again (3:5-8). Jesus and Nicodemus proceed in this dialogical manner involving questions and answers that are direct and spiritually compelling (3:9-21).

Jesus hereby demonstrates an approach to counseling that is conversational. The counselor makes intentionally provocative statements for the sake getting to the heart of the counselee's need, responding each time based on what the counselee says. Regarding the

significance of such statements and questions, Borchert states that “at this point [in the narrative] the reader of John should be reminded of the importance of the questions Jesus asks of people. These questions are a significant feature...at decisive points in the story.”³⁶ The substance of the counsel Jesus gives is rooted in God’s revelation (i.e., Jesus is the Son of God, and what he speaks and does is based on what the Father reveals to him; cf. John 5:16-23). The conversation is also challenging and direct (3:10), and hopeful in its outcome (3:16-21). However, the hopefulness does not detract from the reality that change is required on the part of the counselee (3:18b-20).

Jesus’ interaction with the Samaritan woman in John 4:1-26 is similar to his interaction with Nicodemus. Jesus has a conversation with the woman (4:7), utilizing statements and questions of spiritual significance in order to get to the heart of her need (4:10, 13-14, 17-18, 21-24). Borchert states that “Jesus confronted the woman with her life...Jesus spelled out clearly her ethical problem.”³⁷ The substance of his counsel is God’s revelation (4:10, 14, 21-24, 26). It is both challenging and hopeful (4:10, 14, 16-18, 22, 25-26), and it calls for change on the part of the counselee. Specifically, Jesus exposes the woman’s marital situation in the context of exposing her spiritual situation. The result is that the woman and many in her city come to faith in Jesus, which implies their repentance (cf. John 4:39-42).

In Paul’s model of instruction in his epistles, observe the following. First, Paul seeks to establish friendly rapport with the recipients of his letters by expressing genuine concern and love for them (e.g., Rom. 1:7-12; 2 Cor. 2:2; Phil. 1:1-11). Second, Paul immediately makes clear what issue or concern he has with the recipients (e.g., 1 Cor. 1:10-17; Gal. 1:6-10; 2 Thes.

³⁶ Gerald L. Borchert, *John 1--11*, vol. 25A of *The New American Commentary*, E. Ray Clendenen and David S. Dockery, eds., (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1996), 4525, Kindle.

³⁷ Borchert, *John 1--11*, 5152, Kindle.

2:-11). Third, Paul ordinarily presents his content in the following manner. Doctrine is first, and practical application is second. Examples of this order of presentation include Romans, with the transition from doctrine to practical application found in 12:1; Ephesians, with the transition in 4:1; Philippians, with the transition in 2:12; and Colossians, with the transition in 3:12.

Thus, these passages support an approach to Christian counseling that involves a dialogue-driven delivery of spiritual truth that is both challenging and hopeful. It is rooted in the revelation of God, and engages others with genuine love and concern by addressing substantive issues as soon as possible and following doctrinal content with practical application.

A Solution-Focused Approach for Lay Counselors Building on the biblical basis for the practice of Christian counseling, the focus now shifts to a solution-focused approach to counseling others. The work of Gary Oliver, Monte Hasz, and Matthew Richburg, operating from an integrationist perspective, is helpful in understanding the basic concepts involved.³⁸ Oliver, Hasz and Richburg present a counseling method that is distinctive in three areas. First, it occurs in a few sessions, and is, therefore, called “brief therapy.” Second, it is structured around a solution-focus that seeks to find ways to move forward in new behaviors and experiences, without spending much time on past issues or motivation. (This is not to say the past is unimportant, nor that it is never discussed. The focus, however, is on moving toward a future solution.) Third, the solution-focus revolves around the counselor asking variations of these four questions: 1) On a scale of one to ten, with ten being best and one being the worst, what number are you in relation to (whatever issue is being discussed)?; 2) Can you remember a time when your number was better?; 3) If you woke up tomorrow and realized God had performed a miracle

³⁸ Gary J. Oliver, Monte Hasz, and Matthew Richburg, *Promoting Change through Brief Therapy in Christian Counseling*, (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1997).

overnight in relation to your issue, what would you notice was different?; 4) What is one specific and measurable thing you can do, regardless of what others might do, to help improve your number (from the first question) by one point on the scale between now and the next counseling meeting?³⁹

An example of a solution-focused approach utilizing these four questions is as follows. Since this is only an example, the conversation described is short and to the point; in a real situation there would be other dialogue.

(LC = Lay Counselor; C = Counselee).

LC = I am glad to talk with you. What is on your mind?

C = Well, I am struggling with the temptation to lose my temper every time I have a disagreement with my wife.

LC = I see. On a scale of one to ten, with one being the best and ten being the worst, how severe is the temptation you are facing? (This is the first question.)

C = I would say it is a seven, and I fear it is getting worse every day.

LC = I am sorry to hear that, but I do believe God can help you. Can you remember a time when this temptation was not so severe? If so, what was the number then? (This is the second question.)

C = I remember a time when I was rarely tempted to this type of anger. I would say the number was a three out of ten.

LC = Think with me for a minute. If you woke tomorrow and realized that God had performed a miracle in your life while you were sleeping, and this problem was resolved, what would your life look like? Be specific. (This is the third question.)

C = I would be at peace, and my wife would be able to talk to me without fear of an outburst. I would be in prayer and Bible reading again on a regular basis, and I would not worry about money all the time.

LC = Well then, you do have an idea of what you would like to see your life look like. That is good. Just one more question.

C = Okay.

LC = What is one specific and measurable thing you can do, regardless of what others might do, to help improve your number from seven to six between now and the next time we talk? (This is the fourth question.)

C = Well, I could . . .

³⁹ As adapted by the Army Chaplain School, Fort Jackson, SC. This author received instruction in brief therapy and the use of these questions in August 2010, while attending the Army Chaplain Basic Officer Leadership Course, Class 10-02.

The lay counselor would also include relevant Scripture passages and helpful principles, as well as the offer to pray with the person. However, based on this brief dialogue one can see the flow of the solution-focused approach.

The benefits of the solution-focused approach are four-fold. First, it aligns with the biblical practice of counseling with questions and through directed statements. Second, it focuses on moving toward new behaviors, attitudes, and relationships without overemphasizing or minimizing the past. Third, it is fairly simple to remember, insofar as a lay counselor need only retain four basic questions that can help guide any discussion. Fourth, rather than being overly-direct in the process, the counselor helps facilitate the counselee's own discovery of the solution to their given situation; at each point along the way the counselor may interject relevant content, but the work of change is a synergy between the Holy Spirit and the counselee.

The Preparation of Lay Counselors

What about the preparation of lay counselors? The answer to this question begins with a survey of key biblical texts regarding the explicit and implicit expectations placed upon those who prepare and are prepared for Christian service; the discussion concludes with a suggested model for preparing lay counselors.

The Teaching of the Bible about Counselor Preparation Regarding the preparation of Christian counselors, consider the following passages: Jethro's advice to Moses in Exodus 18:13-27, Jesus' instructions to the apostles and others gathered in Acts 1:1-8, and Paul's instructions to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:1-2.

Two points derived from Jethro's advice to Moses in Exodus 18:13-27 are important for the preparation of counselors. First, counselors must be trained and evaluated relative to the

content and character required to give aid in counseling. Jethro tells Moses to teach the people, leading them by his own example in word and deed (18:20). By doing this, Moses would be able to recognize those he should select to assist him in giving counsel. Moses would recognize them by giving special consideration to their ability, reverence for God, commitment to truth, and holiness of life (18:21). Stuart explains that what Moses did, in part, made a clear distinction between those who would counsel and judge in Israel, and those who did so in the surrounding nations. Whereas the latter were often corrupt and held their positions due to inheritance rather than character, the requirement of character among those in Israel would set them apart.⁴⁰ Thus, with the content taught, and the character confirmed, the counselors were ready to assist with giving counsel.

The second point of importance in Jethro's advice to Moses is that the counselors, having been taught proper content and confirmed regarding their character, are to be given the opportunity to engage in counseling others (18:22). This occurs with a view to the difference between what counseling cases Moses will handle, and the matters the trained lay counselors will handle (18:22, 26). While not all will counsel every concern, all will help counsel.

Regarding Jesus' instructions to the apostles and others gathered in Acts 1:1-8, three considerations are important for the preparation of Christian counselors. First, those who receive the commission of Jesus in Acts 1:8 are those who have a solid foundation in the fundamentals of who Jesus is and what his purposes are (1:3). This implies the necessity of making sure counselors are rooted in the basics of the Christian faith before engaging in specific counselor training and practice.

⁴⁰ Stuart, *Exodus*, 11313-11329, Kindle.

Second, those Jesus sends out as his representatives must be empowered by the Holy Spirit in order to accomplish the mission (1:8). Polhill states, “The endowment with the Spirit is the prelude to, the equipping for, mission.”⁴¹ In terms of its applicability to preparing Christian counselors this example of receiving power from the Holy Spirit is a reminder of the impossibility of the task apart from God’s empowerment. It is also a reminder of the necessity of living in dependence on the Holy Spirit’s power.

Third, those who serve must be willing to follow direction to include tactical and strategic considerations (1:8). The tactic is to be witnesses. The strategy is to do so beginning in familiar areas, and moving to more difficult areas (e.g., moving from “Jerusalem,” a familiar area, to eventually go to the “ends of the earth,” a more difficult area; cf. Matt. 28:18-20). This relates to preparing counselors insofar as their preparation must be specific in its tactical expectation. There is also a strategic structure in its outworking. Counselors, for example, begin with specific topics of expertise, and follow a strategy of working in comfortable areas until the confidence comes to work in areas that are more difficult.

Regarding Paul’s instruction to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:2, two points bear on the preparation of Christian counselors. First, Paul told Timothy to take what he had learned from Paul, and to commit those things to others (2:2). Counselor preparation also involves teaching, but not merely the delivery of content. Paul taught Timothy in both doctrinal content (cf. 1:13, “the pattern of sound words”), and in the application of that content in areas such as worship (cf. 1 Tim. 2:1-15), and the selection of leaders (cf. 1 Tim 3:1-13). This implies that Paul’s instructional model with Timothy was a mixture of listening and applying. In preparing biblical

⁴¹ John B. Polhill, *Acts*, vol. 26 of *The New American Commentary*, David S. Dockery, ed., (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1992), 2212, Kindle.

counselors, this means that the preparation includes both lecture (listening), and role-playing or something similar (applying).

The second point in Paul's instruction to Timothy is Paul's expectation that, after Timothy teaches someone, he will then employ them in the work of ministry (2:2). As Lea states, "Paul charged Timothy to send on faithfully the message he had received. Timothy was not to be an innovator of religious novelties but was to show loyalty and commitment to the gospel message."⁴² This applies to preparing biblical counselors insofar as those who are prepared through listening and applying should be engaged in sharing what they learn with others. This occurs through the actual practice of counseling, as well as in helping train other counselors.

To summarize, the biblical passages related to the preparation of counselors reveals the following. First, counselors are to be trained and evaluated regarding the content of counseling and the character of the counselors (cf. Ex. 18:20-27). Second, those who are trained in counseling must have a solid foundation in the basics of who Jesus is, and what his purposes are, as well as the indwelling of and reliance upon, the Holy Spirit (cf. Acts 1:1-8). Third, counselors are to be trained in both the tactics of how to counsel, and the strategy of where and when to counsel (cf. 2 Tim. 2:2). Fourth, training counselors requires both teaching and praxis, and must lead to the opportunity for the trained lay counselor to engage in counseling opportunities as part of their continued development (cf. Ex. 18:22, 26; 2 Tim. 2:2).

A Suggested Model for Preparing Lay Counselors There are probably as many ways to prepare lay counselors as there are pastors and churches in need of lay counseling. What is suggested here is based on this researcher's experience with training lay counselors in his own

⁴² Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin, Jr., *1, 2 Timothy and Titus*, vol. 34 of *The New American Commentary*, David S. Dockery, ed., (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1992), 5088, Kindle.

congregation; this model has the benefit of having been tried and found reasonably successful in equipping and engaging lay counselors, and it is fairly easy to replicate. Assuming there is agreement among the church's leadership regarding the legitimacy and importance of training lay counselors, and a willingness to allow them to serve as such, here is a four-step model for preparing lay counselors.⁴³

First, prayerfully recruit potential lay counselors by identifying existing and emerging lay leadership within the congregation. These are not necessarily the only ones who will be trained, but this is a good starting point. Explain to these recruits that they will be trained in the principles and practice of Christian counseling as an extension of the pastoral counseling ministry of the church, and that their focus will primarily be on informal and impromptu counseling conversations, as well as referrals they may receive from the pastoral staff. If they are still interested after a time of prayer and discernment, then proceed to the next step.

Second, identify a curriculum for training the counselors that either the pastoral staff will deliver or that an outside trainer will provide. There are several options for curriculum, but this researcher has found that something that can be delivered in a seminar setting (e.g., a Friday evening and a Saturday morning) is generally well-received. Further, if at all possible, the lead pastoral counselor in the church (e.g., the pastor) needs to either deliver the curriculum or make sure he clearly supports its content and delivery; remember, lay counseling is an extension of the pastor's ministry. Key components of the curriculum include much of what has been discussed above regarding the place of the laity in Christian counseling, as well as the principles and practice of such counseling.

⁴³ The exact model used by this researcher is available in either outline/Power Point form, or as a seminar conducted on site. Contact this author at gentryt@piedmontu.edu for more details.

Third, provide a period of assessment during which the effectiveness of the curriculum is evaluated after it has been delivered. For example, have a follow-up discussion with the trainees at one month, three months, etc. to determine how much of the curriculum they are integrating into their lay counseling. Keep accurate notes of this information, as it will provide key data regarding counseling trends in the congregation, and may help direct future ministry concerns (e.g., sermon series, additional counselor training).

Fourth, offer additional/advanced lay counselor training, seeking to develop some of the counselors into trainers; this allows the pastor to duplicate his training abilities, and helps ensure ongoing counselor participation. This researcher's goal for his congregation is to offer at least two counselor training groups per year, one beginning and one advanced. Counseling needs are not likely to diminish, so prepare for additional opportunities to utilize lay counselors.

Summary

This section of the research considered the practice and preparation of Christian counselors. The practice of Christian counseling was first viewed through the biblical lens, and it was discovered that both Jesus and Paul had an interrogative, dialogical approach to counseling based on addressing substantive personal issues with the hope of the gospel message. Additionally, the practice of Christian counseling involving the integration of Scripture and relevant data from fields such as psychology and psychiatry was defended, urging that counseling be conducted under the authority of Scripture. The preparation of lay counselors was also considered from a biblical perspective by evaluating relevant Old and New Testament passages, and a simple plan for training counselors was suggested.

VII. CONCLUSION

Every congregation of the Church that Jesus founded has counseling needs; such is the result of life in Christian community as believers learn to “cast off the works of darkness, and . . . put on the armor of light” (Rom. 13:12). How will pastors and pastoral staffs effectively provide such counsel, especially in situations where resources and personnel fall short of the needed ministry? The preceding research considered this question, concluding that within the Body of Christ there is a powerful weapon available to assist in the area of pastoral counseling, made available by unleashing the faith of the laity through lay counselor training and utilization.

Regarding the place of the laity in Christian counseling, research suggests that the biblical message is clear: the work of the ministry is the responsibility of every believer, and there are practical reasons why this is so. Likewise, research demonstrates that the principles of Christian counseling derive from Scripture’s ultimate oversight, as it is the lens through which psychology and other disciplines are viewed and brought into the service of the Christian counselor. Further, the biblical witness speaks to the practice of Christian counseling, revealing the importance of intentional questions and dialogical interaction; and the solution-focused model of counseling provides an accessible, easy-to-learn approach for clergy and laity alike. Finally, a consideration of the preparation of lay counselors teaches that the Bible informs both the expectations for lay counselors and the overall tactics and strategy needed to counsel others. The concluding portion of the research made four practical suggestions for training lay counselors in the local church. The culmination of this research brings about one final question: will pastors, their staffs, and the churches they serve recognize the great need for learning to “bear one another’s burdens” (Gal. 6:2), and unleash the faith of the laity to help in doing so through lay counseling ministries?

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WIDOWED, SONLESS, AND ORPHANED

Mark Scott*

I. INTRODUCTION

The books of Kings are not a common place to visit in the Hebrew Bible if one is seeking patterns of faith from the time of the division of the monarchy onward. Examples of faith are more readily apparent in the Psalms, the patriarchs, Proverbs, Daniel, or the latter portion of Isaiah. Yet, God's faithful individuals appear in unlikely places and become prominent by the uniqueness of their faith and witness in crooked and perverse generations. Narrative sections often highlight faith by the use of literary tools such as contrast, intertwining characters and using verbal, dramatic, or situational irony to illustrate. This portion of the Elisha narrative utilizes "surprise and the dynamics of recognition" which Sternberg¹ describes as a literary tool where events may be disordered then unpredictably reordered to create suspense and curiosity.

The Hebrew Bible abounds in narrative. Some content is didactic, such as the instructions for the construction of the Tabernacle, but even the laws of the Pentateuch are given in the context of conversation between YHWH and Moses, which he is given to pass on to the people. Editorial comments may guide the reader. Some actions clearly conform to and others violate divine commandments. At other times, the reader is left to draw conclusions from the impact of an event upon its participants or the community in the form of principles or proverbs rather than clear prohibitions or precepts. Examples include the episode of Jephthah and his daughter, or David and his proposed retaliation against Nabal's insult. Both involve behavior with potentially

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¹ Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Indiana Literary Biblical Series).

negative consequences, but the author does not provide an analysis of the events described. This is a challenge in the narrative genre compared to didactic New Testament epistles. A proper understanding of these narratives will take into account Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) culture and values with a view toward God's selected people and His work in history through them.

II. PHILOSOPHY OF APPROACH

This paper will contrast the lack of faith (or trust in false gods) of groups of men with the faith of three different women who believed in YHWH as evidenced in the ministry of Elisha. Doubt or unbelief were intertwined with trust and dependence. The unnamed women (the widow of a son of the prophets, the Shunammite, and Namaan's servant) stand out in quiet distinction to the evil and idolatry at the time of Jezebel and Athaliah, both of whose deaths occurred during Elisha's lifetime. Their faith also magnifies the faithfulness of God to His people (the 7000 who had not bowed to Baal) while affirming and validating women as Jesus later did when He acknowledged and affirmed them. This is not, on the other hand, an exhaustive review of Elisha's ministry, but primarily of selected events that confirmed his status as a prophet of YHWH.²

Following the notable ministry of Elijah, the author also sought to demonstrate and validate Elisha's prophetic calling as YHWH had done with Joshua after Moses,³ and with

² The two prominent, unbelieving women in Kings are infamous in Jewish history—Jezebel and Athaliah. They embodied and fostered the spiritual deterioration of both Israel and Judah. The portrayal of the three anonymous females provides hope for both the ancient and the modern reader that not only will judgment be visited upon persistent sin, but also that daily faithfulness and quiet confidence in God will not go unnoticed in one who turns to YHWH and away from Baal.

³ Many parallels exist between Moses/Joshua and Elijah/Elisha. Both experienced public miracles of YHWH against Israel's enemies and against unfaithfulness among the people of Israel. 1) The successor lived under the shadow of his predecessor. 2) He entered his role with fear knowing he needed to experience God's presence and enablement. 3) Both Joshua and Elisha experienced the hand of God confirming them in the work to which He had appointed them. YHWH clearly intervened in both men's lives and ministry to confirm His presence and authorization of their leadership.

Samuel after Eli. “The writer of Kings crafts his account to argue that God’s judgment is just. Israel and Judah got what they deserved.”⁴ In so doing, the writer highlighted God-fearing Israelites like the vinedresser Naboth, the prophet Obadiah in Ahab’s court, the widow of Zarephath, and these three women.⁵ Elisha also needed YHWH’s encouragement as he faced the prospect of stepping into Elijah’s shoes and was granted the request for a double portion of the Spirit of Elijah.⁶

III. PRELIMINARY MIRACLES

In contrast with Ahab who forsook YHWH, but in keeping with the promise made in 1 Kings 6:13, Elisha repeated YHWH’s words (אֶעֱזֹב), that He would not leave his master as Israel and their king had left YHWH for other gods,⁷ but the sons of the prophets left Elisha. Repeating a numeric theme,⁸ fifty men of the sons of the prophets followed the Elijah and Elisha to the Jordan at a distance to watch them.⁹ Elisha’s final request (אֶלֵּי בְרוּחֶךָ פִּי־שְׁנַיִם גָּא וְיִהְיֶה) is for a “mouth / portion of two of your spirit upon me” to be granted by Elijah. Elisha may have had Deut. 21:17 in mind which uses the same phrase in the context of a double portion to be given to the unloved firstborn son. It acknowledges his need in face of his coming ministry that would

⁴ Mathewson, *The art of preaching Old Testament narrative.*, 97.

⁵ The confrontation on Mount Carmel and Elijah’s subsequent struggle demonstrated the extent to which Israel had become like her ANE neighbors. Elijah needed to be encouraged as he faced the task of representing YHWH seemingly alone. God gave it to him (1 Kings 19).

⁶ The precise number of miracles varies according to how they are reckoned (one miracle versus two when fire devours a company of fifty twice or when YHWH provided water for three kings to prevent dehydration in the desert and to frighten the Moabite army by the sight of blood). Nonetheless, the number attributed to the latter is approximately double.

⁷ This principle reappeared with the Shunammite woman who would not leave Elisha.

⁸ Two captains of fifty came to bring Elijah to the king (2 Kings 1) and Obadiah’s hiding 100 prophets in a cave by fifties (1 Kings 18:15)

⁹ Unlike the end of Moses’ life on earth (Deut. 34:6) when YHWH buried him in an unknown location in Moab, Elijah’s end was to be witnessed (and not suicidal as he had stated after fleeing Jezebel). He performs his final miracle of parting the water with his mantle and asks Elisha what he wishes from YHWH.

begin as soon as his master was taken away and that it was God who was behind the ministry of his master.

By faith, Elisha performed his first miracle by parting the waters,¹⁰ but the sons of the prophets did not respond in faith. Rather than becoming angry, Elisha permitted their futile trip and patiently awaited their return letting them learn from their own foolish action.

At this point, another group of men came with a request. The reader is not told that these men were more spiritual than the dubious sons of the prophets, but they presented a physical need which required a miraculous answer. Jericho is not far from the mouth of the Jordan River which empties into the Dead Sea. The second miracle involved the healing of water and land (מְשַׁבֵּלֵת רְצוּחָא רְעִים הַמַּיִם) that is inferior in quality or bad in its kind (BDB) and bereft of produce. Perhaps alluding to the ground being cursed in Genesis, YHWH provides a solution involving salt, perhaps even from the Dead or Salt Sea. Elisha adds it to the springs making it immediately, and for the future, productive for food and agriculture.

Elisha still faced an uphill struggle as a prophet whose authority was not fully accepted. When Elisha departed the Jordan valley, he had to ascend to Bethel. On his prior trip through the area, he had been hurriedly descending with Elijah. Now, he was alone and new to his prophetic responsibility. At Bethel, Elisha met a group of young men¹¹ who derisively opposed him, heaping shame in the form of verbal insults. The episode has triggered criticism from many quarters. Kaiser says, “‘Little children’ is an unfortunate translation. The Hebrew expression (קְטַנִּים נְעָרִים) is best rendered ‘young lads’ or ‘young men.’ From numerous examples where ages

¹⁰Bergen, *Elisha and the End of Prophetism (The Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies)*. Bergen notes geographical chiasm in this movement of Elijah and Elisha from Bethel to Jericho to the Jordan, across, then of Elisha back to Jericho and Bethel.

¹¹“Children,” 2 Kings 2:24

are specified in the Old Testament, we know that these were boys from twelve to thirty years old.”¹² He cites Genesis 22:12; 37:2; 1 Samuel 16:11–12; and 1 Kings 20:14–15 as examples of this term applied to men of shepherding and military service combat age. However, by comparison, when placed alongside the first two captains of fifties who demand Elijah’s presence before King Ahaziah, this miracle brings the guilt of the insulting behavior at Bethel (and rejection of YHWH) to the same level of severity as that of Ahaziah’s captain and messengers.

Elisha is ascending (עָלָה) to Bethel when the young men urge him to “go up baldhead” (קָרַח עָלָה), perhaps in contrast to Elijah with whom he had gone down. The author also contrasts the men mocking (יִתְקַלְסוּ) with a similar Hebrew word for Elisha’s response of turning, looking, and cursing (וַיִּקְלָלֵם) them. YHWH responded by sending not one, but two she bears which attacked and (וַתִּבְקַעְנָה) “clave, cut in pieces, tore open” (BDB) demonstrated their actions to be an affront to Him (Deut. 21:18–21). Divine judgment came upon the young men and publicly honored Elisha in the eyes of those in Bethel.¹³

In the fourth miracle, Jehoshaphat repeats his performance in the plot as the foil calling the king of Israel to seek the advice of the LORD through one of his prophets. Elisha responds by providing the miracle of military deliverance for King Jehoram of Israel, King Jehoshaphat of Judah, and the king of Edom. Jehoshaphat, a good king, did as he had with Ahab and asked (הֲאִין הֲאִין) (לִי־הוּא נְבִיאָא פֶּה), “Is there no prophet of YHWH by whom they may ask YHWH for a solution?” Elisha recognized his faith in asking for YHWH’s intervention and gave it. The author moved

¹²Kaiser, Davids, Bruce and Brauch, *Hard Sayings of the Bible*.

¹³Elisha did precisely what the men had taunted him to do—he went up to Mount Carmel.

from this event to the accounts of the three faithful women who followed the pattern of the king of Judah.

IV. WIDOWED

The first woman of faith comes to Elisha (probably at a campus of the school of the prophets). It is possible that Elisha returned from the coalition war to Carmel, Jezreel, Bethel, or Jericho, or that these incidents occurred earlier and are placed here for thematic purposes. Each demonstrates admirable and undaunted faith in the midst of various distressing scenarios. The prophet's physical location is not disclosed, but the widow of 2 Kings 4 knows his whereabouts.

The unnamed widow arrives in a predicament which rendered her highly vulnerable in her society. She is a widow of a man in ministry, although the exact role of the sons of the prophets is unclear. Likely, they were teachers. Some may have been priests (1 Samuel 19:20). Elijah had been their mentor, teacher, and example, and this woman recognized Elisha to be Elijah's equal in capacity. In addition to being bereft of companionship and provision through her late husband, she now faced destitution and loss of her two sons who remained her only means of sufficient support.¹⁴ Rather than despairing as the king had done in the previous pericope, she turns to the prophet with her need implying confidence in YHWH to provide through Elisha. In a theme carried over from the confederacy of kings for whom (אֶלְיָהוּ וְיִשְׂרָאֵל) the land was filled with water, he commands her to ask ("borrow" in KJV) for herself (שָׁאֵלָה לְנַפְשָׁהּ)

¹⁴Davis, Ken. "Mentoring Church Planters." *Journal of Ministry and Theology* 14, no. 2 (Fall 2010): 27. [accord://read/JMAT-2012#22942](http://read/JMAT-2012#22942). "OT usage bears out that these men were not their physical descendants but groups of prophets normally affiliated with a prominent prophet like Samuel, Elijah, or Elisha (cf. 1 Sam 10:5-10, 19:20; 1 Kgs 18:4, 20:35; 2 Kgs 4:1, 38-44; 5:22; 6:1; 9:1). While linguistic and textual evidence is insufficient to dogmatically state there was a professional training institute for these younger seers, there is evidence that they were disciples of the seasoned men brought together for informal and periodic training. The senior prophets (Samuel, Elijah, Elisha) were evidently preparing them to become prophets as their lifework. 'Sons of the prophets' in these OT contexts most certainly does not mean 'children of the prophets' but likely has the connotation of an organized occupational grouping. The Hebrew phrase 'sons of' can mean 'members of a guild of' (BDB)."

vessels from her neighbors from which she would pour her one remaining pot of oil until all the others were full (תלאָן). The armies had been required to dig trenches which YHWH filled with water for sustenance. The armies participated in preparation for the miracle that YHWH gave.

This woman also prepared ahead of time for the coming miracle. The process of asking for vessels gave her the opportunity to tell others what Elisha had said and what she anticipated YHWH was going to do. She and her sons were willing to work in anticipation of what YHWH promised through the mouth of Elisha. This resulted in direct blessing to the woman and her sons, testimony to the creditor for whom she could pay her debt, additional sustenance for the future, and glory to God as she returned the vessels and told and retold the story. Included among her neighbors would have been followers of both Baal and the true God, YHWH. Elisha also received the blessing of having God use him to bless the woman and her family. Her grief was not necessarily diminished, but she and her community had been given new hope for the future because of YHWH's care in the present. She may have known David's words in Psalm 37:25, "I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread." Additionally, her sons would have had this story to repeat for the rest of their lives. The pericope of this widow's faith and her encounter with Elisha ended on an upbeat climax with an uncommon event and a joyful outcome in a predominantly negative book.

V. SONLESS

When the author introduced the second woman of faith, Elisha had come to be cast in a better light in the narrative. The characters were beginning to rely upon him instead of doubting or tentatively wondering if anyone could follow in Elijah's footsteps. Honor, a semitic value, contrasted with shame at points earlier in the narrative, came upon Elisha in the next saga while he went about his routine duties. The miracles with the three women parallel those with the men

geographically and in broadening circles from those close to the prophet's small circle of influence to national and international levels (ABCA'B'C'). It gave the reader or listener a sense of anticipation of God preparing something greater—doing a work that would even touch the nations (Gentiles).

And the day happened that Elisha passed over to Shunem (translation mine). Instead of meeting a mocking mob of males, he meets (גְּדוּלָה אִשָּׁה) a prominent or great woman. She may have been younger than the widow with two sons in the first story. She appears to be a woman of energy and means with a husband of like character. She immediately shows herself to be gracious and hospitable, similar to Ruth or the woman of Proverbs 31 who was independently capable, but certainly not like the queen, Jezebel. The author states that she was strong, or prevailed (וַתְּהַוֶּקֶן) upon Elisha to stop and eat with them, not once, but on what came to be a regular basis. She was as hospitable to Elisha as the young men had not been in their mockery and derision of him. Goodness shines like a bright light in the midst of evil. Her actions interpret themselves as the young men's actions had done without editorial comment leaving the reader to draw conclusions. Her initial interaction with the prophet sets up the expectation of something positive based upon the experience of the widow and oil.

A notable difference between the first woman and the second is that this Shunammite appears strong and without need. She has enough abundance to be able to share and proactively provides for the itinerant prophet. Like the widow, and against the backdrop of the young men and the bears, she stands out as a godly anomaly in a nation predominantly given over to Baal worship.

In the process of repeated meetings, she comes to recognize that Elisha is a holy man of God. One might think at this point that she has an ulterior motive in her hospitality, but a righteous man or woman of such character can act out of purer motive than selfishness. She is never presented as desiring a gift in return. Adding to the reader's expectation, she not only feeds Elisha who appears to be established in his itinerant ministry traversing the nation from Jericho to Carmel, but she also opens her home and builds the original prophet's chamber in an ideal location on the wall of their home overlooking the Jezreel valley and cooled by the natural breezes. The text does not inform us, but she probably also accommodated Elisha's servant, Gehazi.

2 Kings 4:11 introduces us to the first hint of a twist in the plot. The author repeats the phrase (שָׁמָּה בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא בָּא) “and the day happened that he came there” (translation mine). Nothing in the text stands out except its mere simplicity. Elisha had apparently been moved by looking upon the woman and considering what he might do to demonstrate his gratitude. Her blessing upon him had touched his heart, and he wished to show tangible gratitude. His curse upon the young men had emanated from the treatment he had received; this expenditure from her and her husband motivated his gratitude. What could this woman need who has provided so much? Returning to a condition that has occurred and will recur later with this woman, YHWH has not yet revealed to Elisha what the Shunammite needs. Elisha summons her through his servant, Gehazi. It is difficult to detect from the text whether Gehazi was interpreting for Elisha or whether the Shunammite, humbled by the knowledge that the holy man of God has requested her presence, does not interact directly with Elisha, but with his servant. She has expected no gift from him when he inquires as to her need, offering to speak for her to the king or leader of the army.

Her response may be taken as abrupt—(יִשָּׁבֶת אֶנְכִי עִמִּי בְּתוֹךְ וְהָאֵמֶר) I live among or have my own people. It hints that she has everything she needs and does not need his favor. On the other hand, it may be a proper semitic response to decline his first inquiry expecting that he will ask again. She may have simply felt that asking for a favor was inappropriate since it had not been the motivation for her kindness. In any case, she evidently leaves his presence, and Elisha consults Gehazi for more ideas. The answer surprises the reader and appears to be knowledge with which Elisha may have been unaware. KJV states that she has no child, but NAS and the MT state (אֵין־לָהּ בֵּן) that she has no son. Her husband may have been somewhat older, and she was perhaps nearing menopause judging from her response. She may have accepted that YHWH was not going to give her a son and had already blessed her sufficiently. 4:16 gives another hint that the narrative may take an unexpected turn when she implores Elisha as a man of God not to lie to her. Despite her objection, he prophesies that she would embrace a son at that season that Elisha predicted, and she goes on to conceive and give birth to a son.

At this point the phrase appears for the third time with the Shunammite. First, the day happened that Elisha passed by Shunem when she first fed him. Then, the day happened when he came to the prophet's chamber, stayed, and prophesied the birth of a son. Finally, the seemingly mundane phrase occurs again after a number of years when the boy has at least reached adolescence and goes out to his father at harvest time. This third time that the day happened, the miracle boy seems to fall prey to his mother's fear that she had spoken before his conception. Like the gang of young men who had died at the hands of the bears, the Shunammite boy also dies, but his death lacks the guilt and punishment of the others.

The reader who reads on and sympathizes with the mother's grief and frustration with Elisha may be tempted to forget YHWH's promise of the double portion to Elisha, or 1 Kings 17

when the distraught widow of Zarephath had similarly lost her son following Elijah's miracle of meal and oil. The Shunammite woman was not likely to be one of any less faith and persistence than her counterpart in Elijah's ministry. Her earlier need for nothing (since she dwelt among her own people) could not be met by her community. If she had ever been self-sufficient, this event obliterated any remnant of self-reliance.¹⁵ If Elisha could prophesy a son, then she believed he could restore his life. She even speaks as if she holds him responsible for knowing this would happen, or he could have prevented it by leaving her as she had been. Had she not stated as much? Yet YHWH was teaching both her and the prophet a lesson in trust.

She approached Gehazi and Elisha in distress. God had not revealed to Elisha the source of her trouble prior to her coming (2 Kings 4:26). The MT in 4:27 uses the same verb it had when she first caused him with strong words to stop for a meal—(קָרַחְתִּי) she strongly clung to his feet. He wisely allowed her to speak and express all that had happened.

She had left her dead son on the bed in the prophet's chamber and proceeded with haste and without interruption to meet Elisha at Carmel. Once Elisha knew what had happened, he commissioned Gehazi to proceed with the same haste the mother had had in coming to Carmel. With his staff, he was to revive the boy, but when he arrives in Shunem, he is incapable. The suspense had now built to the point that the only hope appeared to be a miracle from YHWH through Elisha. The mother echoed the words Elisha had used as he descended from Gilgal to Bethel to Jericho. "As the LORD liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee." Her words

¹⁵ Her husband seemed to accept the death of their boy without objection (Job 1:21). Why bother the prophet without a good reason? Her good reason lay in her confidence in YHWH manifested through his prophet.

and Elisha's words would remind later readers that those words also applied to Israel's relationship with YHWH who alone could revive a dead nation.¹⁶

Like some of Jesus' later miracles, the Shunammite boy's resuscitation required two steps. First Elisha warmed the cold, dead body by laying upon him until the child became warm. The text does not explicitly state that he prayed, but he returned from the room, walking in the house, then returned to lie again upon (הִנָּעַר), when the youth sneezed and opened his eyes. Gehazi called the mother who graciously accepted her son alive. She appropriately bowed in gratitude and took her son from Elisha's chambers back to their home below. This episode apparently also restores their relationship, for he later advises her to leave Shunem with her family for the duration of the coming seven year famine. Her family later goes to Philistia based upon Elisha's advice and returns as a testimony to the king of what God had done through Elisha. Like the first woman who had the testimony of debt relief and who kept her sons, the second woman took the testimony of her son and his resurrection to a foreign people, then returned to witness to the king of Israel (2 Kings 8:1-6).

The third woman of faith began her life in Israel but, as a spoil of war for Namaan the Syrian/Aramean general, she became a servant exiled outside her homeland. Prior to introducing the woman in Syria, the narrator returns to God's provision through daily sustenance and introduces a theme that will be repeated in following chapters—בָּאָרֶץ וְהָרָעָב—the famine was in the land. YHWH provided during this famine and would later provide through the vehicle of Israel's enemy—Aram. Thus, the scene is set for the third woman.

¹⁶ Ezekiel later echoed the same concept from Babylon to the exiles perhaps recalling Elisha.

VI. ORPHANED CAPTIVE MISSIONARY

The final female enters Kings in an insignificant role in the foreign, enemy country of Aram / Syria as a slave. She was neither a relative of the faithful sons of the prophets nor a prominent person living near the capital in Samaria. The reader knows nothing of her background or family, but her confidence in the prophet implies that she came from a home that followed YHWH or at least respected the prophet. She is introduced almost incidentally after Naaman, her master. We previously examined the great woman of Shunem. Now we meet a great man (גִּדְיוֹלָאֵשׁ), in the army of Aram named Naaman. The great woman's hidden condition had emerged later, i.e., barrenness. One need not wonder for long if there might be some unexpected descriptor of this great man by whom YHWH had given Aram victory over Israel.¹⁷ The statement is made in apposition to his military stature—(מִצַּרְעַת הַיָּל גִּבּוֹר) a valiant warrior, leper. YHWH had given him both military victory and the humbling disease of leprosy. In a quiet turn of events resulting from his occupation, YHWH also granted him a young woman (קִטְנָה נֶעֱרָה). The term parallels its use for the son of the Shunammite and for the young men judged by the bears as Elisha ascended. It means “small, young, or unimportant” (BDB) and contrasts the role of the slave woman to that of her mistress' husband, the great warrior (2 Kings 5:1) by whom YHWH had given deliverance to Syria from Israel. Understood against the background of Naaman and his wife whom she served, there is both a play on words and on roles.

The enslaved prophetess makes a statement that carries the message of YHWH's prophet in Israel to the highest level of Syrian power. (אֲתוּ יֵאָסֶף אֲנִי בְּשִׁמְרוֹן אֲשֶׁר הִנָּבִיא לְפָנַי אֲדֹנָי אֱהִי.) “Would

¹⁷ Incidentally, the author's comment clarifies for the Israelite that while they were God's people, YHWH was not unequivocally, in every circumstance, working on their behalf in a manner of their choosing. He could as easily choose to use another nation to reprove them in His sovereignty.

that my lord were before the prophet which is in Samaria. Then he will remove him from his leprosy.” Her master is great, but so is the prophet of YHWH in Samaria. She may have remembered that Moses had called out to YHWH to heal Miriam’s leprosy (Numbers 12).¹⁸ The king of Syria errs by presuming that the king of Israel is sovereign over the prophet, Elisha, so he sends emissaries to Samaria. He sends appropriate gifts for the favor requested, but his confidence is as misplaced as is the resulting despair of the king of Israel. Both men miss the prophetic message of the young woman, but Elisha does not. She knows that there is a prophet in Israel. Elisha commands the king to send Naaman to him so that he might know what the king of Israel has forgotten.

The story moves from the insignificant young woman back to the great man. Naaman stands in the same place (at least figuratively) as the Shunammite woman at the door of Elisha’s house. Naaman proceeds from the king of Israel (whom he has conquered in battle) to a prophet who speaks to him through a messenger. The great warrior is humbled by the prophet of God who commands him to wash seven times in the Jordan. Naaman does not doubt the ability of YHWH, but he is infuriated by Elisha’s methodology. Does not a man of his stature warrant a great miracle worthy of his position? Naaman’s greater need than removal of leprosy was humility before the face of YHWH and his prophet. In his rage, he asks the rhetorical question about the superior quality of the Syrian rivers, but even he knows that those rivers had not healed him. In his angry reflection, his servants quietly persuaded him to reconsider. Somehow, YHWH conquered Naaman’s spirit. He submitted to his servants and YHWH’s prophet and washed in

¹⁸ Bergen, *Elisha and the End of Prophetism (The Library of Hebrew Bible/Old Testament Studies)*, 114. “Her belief in the power of the prophet extends at least to his ability to cure Naaman of his leprosy. The readers’ willingness to believe the word of this girl is heightened by the immediate action taken by Naaman. If a foreign army commander is willing to believe this statement, how much more easily should readers accept it! . . . The message to readers is to recognize the specific duties assigned to each category of people: kings reign, prophets heal. . . . It is Elisha himself who reminds the king that it is prophets who heal.”

the muddy river seven times. He did as the Ninevites and Nebuchadnezzar would later do. He acknowledged YHWH as supreme (אִם-בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל יֵשׁ בְּכָל-הָאָרֶץ אֱלֹהִים אֲיִן כִּי יִדְעֵתִי הַנְּהַגָּא).

Naaman had come and stood before Elisha as a proud man and was commanded by a servant. He returns to stand before Elisha face to face in repentance and humility seeking counsel. Elisha sends him home in peace with blessing. The message of the servant woman to Naaman's wife had accomplished that for which YHWH had sent it. For Naaman, the series of events was a comedy in which YHWH received the glory. Naaman's miracle became Gehazi and his progeny's judgment when he received the former's leprosy.

The miracle performed upon Naaman extended to his family in Syria and to the messenger who had proclaimed it. His Samarian female servant received a master now dedicated to YHWH (2 Kings 5:17–19).

VII. CONCLUSION

Faith is clearly present in 2 Kings in both men and women during the ministry of Elisha. The author shows YHWH's continued faithfulness to Israel despite the unfaithfulness of her kings under the ministry of Elijah then under Elisha. The author used a variety of literary techniques to enhance the selection of historical events in such a manner as to clearly demonstrate the negative direction that the nation and individual Israelites were moving in following the ways of their neighbors and leaving YHWH. At the same time, the remnant is clearly apparent with both men and women, but the latter are presented as those who trust in ways that later readers could emulate. The three females through their circumstances bring glory to God, not to themselves, and receive God's blessing in response to obedience when they unleash their faith. They fulfill the aspiration of Psalm 67:7 that "All the ends of the earth shall

fear him.”

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THE REBEL IS CONQUERED AND MADE STRONG: RECOUNTING HOW THROUGH UNLEASHING FAITH A CHURCH IN KENYA MADE THE YOUTH MINISTRY STRONG AFTER REBELLING

Sychellus Wabomba Njibwakale *

I. INTRODUCTION

In the last quarter of the twentieth century, Friends church in Kenya witnessed a wave of revolution from the youth wing. As was from other denominations, where the young people rebelled from the traditional churches and formed new ministries, the youth in the Friends church rebelled from within. Christian education in the 20th century and beyond has changed. There is need for the leaders to rethink how the stakeholders should educate youth leaders concerning their ministry. In everything to be done successfully, the key virtue is strong unwavering faith. Unleash faith has power that takes away obstacles which hinder any success. Guided by the potency of the Word of God, and the assurance of the love of Christ as well as the Holy Spirit, unleashing faith works in the same way. Unleashing faith keeps obstacles far, clearing any doubt of fear and unbelief, while paving the way for the leaders to work smoothly.

The question is how do the Friends church keep the youth ministry strong and maintain the youth in their local congregations? This article suggests some measures that helped the Friends church establishment to retain the youth as members as well as keeping the youth ministry strong.

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II. THE NECESSITY OF YOUTH MINISTRY

The youth are leaders of tomorrow's church. As such, to be effective future leaders, they are to be part and parcel of the current church congregation and leadership team. In this respect, the presence of the youth ministry as part of the larger local congregation is essential for the individual spiritual and social development of middle, high school, and college/university students. It also helps the growth of young adults who are young parents with their children as well as the church at-large. God, in his own plan, has used young people to fulfill his purposes on earth, for instance, Jeremiah (Jer. 1:5), David (1 Sam. 16:12–13), Timothy (1 Tim. 1:2–3), Mary to name but a few.

To be clear, when referring to the youth ministry in Friends church in Kenya, the reference is to those individuals between the ages of 15 years through 35 years. This article focuses on the ministry of this age bracket; although, when adjusted, the measures for this kind of ministry are also applicable to the children's ministry.

In Matthew 18:1–5; 19:14, Jesus had special time for children. Any church that welcomes children or young people, welcomes Jesus too. The youth have a deep thirst for the Word of God, and without conducive environment for the youth as well as children to learn the Word of God and hear about Jesus and his mighty works, they will be found in the world of confused dilemmas. The world is full of glittering things. It is full of people who have no direction in life for lack of Christ's teaching. The result of such environment is a generation of curses and communities who are surrounded by hell (Rom 1:21–32).

The safe place for the youth is an effective, strong youth ministry where the Word of God is taught and applied in their day-to-day activities. In schools and colleges the youth are involved

in various social and academic societies. But at home the youth ministry is to nurture and prepare these young people for the service of God's kingdom as future leaders and parents. It is in this youth ministry that the youth are disciplined and shown how to be Christian, and eventually lead others to Christ.

Our young people are perishing, and we cannot sit back to watch them go astray. When we lose them, the Church is lost. The goal here is to investigate the measures which are biblically-based and that can help pastors and para-church educators to use to spread the truth of God's Word. This work is out of personal life experience as a youth who grew up in the Church, and as a youth leader as well as a pastor in both urban and rural area churches. The goal is to see that the young people become a role model for the community now and in future.

III. MEASURES FOR A STRONG YOUTH MINISTRY

A Clear Intention Of The Youth Ministry

The youth are fragile and delicate members of the church. At the same time, the youth are strong-energetic members of the church. As such, the good intention among the church members and especially the pastor can transform these fragile, yet strong energetic members into a strong youth church. The youth are very observant and keen on what is being said. How the youth are viewed and how their duties are defined, determine their presence now and in the future. Good intentions are to be applied with proper biblical understanding of the youth and their roles in the established congregation. Otherwise, lack of a clear, and positive intention for the youth in the church, creates a gap which may not be filled. A clear intention for the youth will definitely attract them to the church.

Vision And Mission Statement

The vision and mission statement of the church and the pastor should be the backbone of the youth ministry. It should be on the church bulletin board as well as in the Sunday bulletin to be read by everybody. It is not just to be a human statement, but a statement that is God driven and fit into the monthly minutes as discussed in the church throughout the year. In his book, *Beyond the Classroom*, Sandidge writes, “The mission statement is a vision of where the African-American church is headed. It informs others about the pastor’s beliefs, ministry, and mission and provides information about the pastor’s future personal and communal growth.”¹ When the vision and mission statements are clear, they help the pastor and other stakeholders to plan their activities well. The calendar of activities not only focuses on the youth as learners but on the entire youth ministry team.

The Spirituality Of The Team Leader

In his book, *Strategies for the Director of Christian Education*, Sandidge instructs the leaders that they provide a service for the Lord in what they are doing in the youth ministry.² A youth leader just like any other servant of God, must know Jesus as a personal savior. The leaders should be guided by the Holy Spirit in whatever activities they undertake either personal or for the church. One should live a life of prayer, have devotional time for one’s life and the life of God’s flock entrusted to him.

A youth leader gives direction for the youth ministry in all activities. As one leads from the front, youth will follow his example. Once the youth discover that the pastor and other leaders are committed for their welfare and their families, they will follow without feeling

¹ Oneal Sandidge, *Beyond the Classroom* (Nashville, TN: Sunday School Publishing Board, 2001), 47.

² Sandidge, *Strategies for the Director of Christian Education* (Nashville, TN: Sunday School Publishing Board, 2001), 87.

coerced. A successful youth leader is one who is a servant of both God and the people he is serving. A successful team leader does not work alone. The leader is surrounded by others who are like-minded in the same ministry. Morgan and Steven state that “Lone Ranger can easily lose sight of the mission. Since there is no organizational or relational connection to the overall mission of the church, it is easy to get lost in the micro-purpose of the ministry and forget the macro-vision of the organization.”³

When a question is asked who is a successful leader? The answer will always point to that person with a large number of followers. This may not be wrong in itself, but not always right when referred to ministry. An increase in number if equals to spiritual growth, that is viable success. The leader trusts God in the high numbers of his ministry as well as what God is doing spiritually in the life of these youth in attendance. Carol recounts that “I feel that a smaller youth group enables you to know each student in a more personal way and you can be much more involved in their daily lives.”⁴ High numbers are good and help to expand ideas, but the quality of those numbers should supersede the numerical.

IV. ACTIVITIES TO KEEP THE YOUTH MINISTRY STRONG

As stated earlier, the young people are strong and energetic. They are innovative and creative, not easy to settle at one place for long doing one activity. As such, the youth ministry is a ministry with activities. A few activities are here mentioned that make the youth ministry strong.

³ Tony Morgan and Tim Steven, *Strategic Volunteers: Empowering People for Ministry* (Loveland, C. G: Group,2005), 136.

⁴ Stephanie Carol, *Ninety-nine Thoughts for Smaller Church Youth Workers* (Loveland, C. G: Group, 2011), 12.

Formation Of Cell Groups

A cell group is a small group of seven members or below that meets in a designated day and time for prayer and Bible study (2 Tim. 2:15). Rick Lawrence, in his book, *Jesus-Centered Youth Ministry*, suggests two questions to be asked of your students: “Who do I say Jesus is? Who does Jesus say I am?”⁵ It is very important to determine one’s need, because this strengthens the relationship between the leader and the youth. In Bible study, allow the students to suggest topics for discussion/study. To empower the students, let the students have a name of their cell group since there are more than one cell group in the ministry. Carol writes, “If it looks like you just threw things together for your students, it will come across that way and they will respond accordingly.”⁶ In the formation of cell groups, separate girls from boys. Girls may feel freely to talk about their social and spiritual life when they have a female leader.

Worship Leader

During worship service, let the youth lead exercising their gifts in singing, ushering, praying, testifying, Scripture reading, and speaking. All these make them feel it is their service. As much as the youth are encouraged to attend the entire church activities, the elders are also encouraged to attend the youth service and know what happens in the youth ministry. The youth ministry is to plan for the Vocational Bible study, short-term and long-term mission trips, and plan the budget and present it to the church for perusal.

The youth leader should be informed of the current issues and what goes on in neighboring churches. The leader should be in constant devotion as God guides in everything the youth leader plans. It is important that the activities planned for his church are not the same as what is happening in the other churches. To keep the biblical-tradition of the church is important;

⁵ Rick Lawrence, *Jesus-Centered Youth Ministry* (Loveland, CG: Group, 2014), 74–75.

⁶ Carol, 6.

having a clear purpose of the measures employed is critical to the health of the youth ministry. Everything done in a biblical way is important to support the whole cause of the youth ministry.

V. CONCLUSION

These few sentiments have helped youth ministry to grow in some churches, especially the Friends church in Kenya. The reader can borrow something out of these to use in the formation of youth ministry. With the breadth and depth of this article, the reader may wish to read more for a better understanding of the pros and problems of the youth ministry. Paul writes in Philippians 4:13 that “I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me” (KJV). With Jesus we can do everything. In Colossians 3:17 Paul says, “And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him” (KJV). The Lord who sends, also equips. May this article be an inspiration to the youth leaders as they endeavor to serve as future church leaders.

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