Lesson 1 – Why Biblical Theology?
Text: II Timothy 3:16; Hebrews 1:1-2; 4:12; Psalm 36:9; 119:129-131

"The true expositor of the Christian scriptures
is the one who waits in anticipation toward
becoming the interpreted rather than the interpreter."
(Brevard S. Childs)

Imagine someone recommending a Dickens novel to read – perhaps *Bleak House* or *Little Dorrit*, certainly two of his greatest – but also recommending that you start the novel about three-quarters of the way in. Or, even more odd, recommending that you use the index to read everything pertaining to John Jarndyce (*Bleak House*), first, and then every page on which Skimpole figures, followed by repeated searches for all mention of Esther Summerson, Richard Carstone, Ada Clare, and Sir Leicester and Lady Dedlock. It should be obvious that neither of these methods is the way one should read a novel. The first procedure would certainly inform you as to how things turn out, though you would have no knowledge as to what 'things' turn out so. The second would provide a thorough analysis of the characters, though only in their singular behavior, but provide no indication of the story's plot or how the characters interact with one another and the over-arching storyline. Considering the ridiculous notion of reading a novel in either of these ways, it is remarkable how often the Bible is read in both manners.

To be sure, the Bible is not a novel; it is not a work of fiction. Yet it is a story, a narrative that spans the entirety of created time and space. Christians hold the Bible to be the inspired word of God, yet see no problem with publishing the New Testament and Psalms as if they comprised the entire book. It is considered a worthy evangelistic effort to export such truncated 'Bibles' into countries inimical to the Gospel, or to leave them in hotel rooms in hopes a life-weary traveler will find Christ and salvation. As the New Testament constitutes less than a quarter of the Christian Bible, the analogy of reading just the last 25% of a novel holds, improved only slightly when the Psalms are added. It seems evident by this process of publication, that many modern churches consider the Bible to consist of *two* stories – the *old* one and the *new* one – and only the new

one really matters. One does wonder what role the Psalms are to play in this configuration.

The second method of reading - researching each character individually through the pages of the whole novel - is the hermeneutic of Systematic Theology. By this method, the theologian traces the contours of individual doctrines through the pages of Scripture, collating the data into credal form but also separating it from the overall context of God's self-revelation in His Word. While there is little justification for the first, partial reading of either a novel or the Bible, there is actually some justification in each for this second procedure. In the case of the novel, such a reading would be the way in which an actor would 'learn the character' that he or she will be portraying in a stage or film adaptation of the novel. For the systematic theologian, this method of researching the Scriptures is in line with the scientific procedure of 'classification,' of joining together diverse textual material under the headings of *justification*, or *eschatology*, and so forth. But neither the actor nor the systematic theologian will be remotely successful in his endeavor *if he does not read the whole story*. The characters of the novel only have dimension in relation to the whole storyline, and the doctrines of the Bible are only meaningful in relation to the full counsel of Scripture.

This argument makes an assumption, or several assumptions, that have come under increasing attack within professing Christianity since the Enlightenment of the 17th and 18th Centuries. The first is that the Bible *does* contain a coherent storyline and is not two different books, an 'Old' Testament and a 'New' Testament. Within conservative evangelicalism there are, of course, disagreements as to just what that storyline is and how it is to be read. On the one hand, Dispensationalism presents the Bible more as an anthology of short stories, as it were, each representing a unique dispensation of God's redemptive plan and history. Covenantalism, on the other hand, emphasizes the continuity of the storyline between the testaments to the point that plot development is

all but lost.[1] Yet each, deriving as they do from the conservative wing of 'Christendom,' treat the Bible as essentially a cohesive revelation from God.

The second basic assumption is that the Bible is worth the effort necessary to read more than the last quarter and to read it in keeping with its own storyline and development. In other words, Holy Scripture comprises much more than the New Testament and Psalms, and is far more than just a mine full of dogmatic gems and ores. The worth of effort stems from the belief that the Bible is indeed the *self-disclosure* of God, of His nature and attributes, and of His plan and purpose with relation to His Creation, not least of which His image-bearer, Man. This belief is not as common as it once was within broad Christianity, with the result that the study of the Bible has undergone a massive change over the past two to three centuries. Conservative believers have taken refuge in hermeneutical systems and dogmatic creeds, the Bible becoming more a source of proof-texts than a cohesive, coherent 'story.'

But even if we grant the premise that the Scriptures contain such a cohesive storyline, a 'meta-narrative,' we are still faced with the question of 'which Bible?' Few would argue that the New Testament can really stand alone, even if comfortingly joined by the Psalms, though many act as though this were true. But beyond this there is the question of *canon* – which books of the Christian Bible are 'scripture'? We will see in this study that modern rationalism has effectively removed the boundaries of canon – whether Jewish, Roman Catholic, or Protestant – and has opened the field of 'biblical' studies to include any and all writings from the 'biblical' era. The issue has become a matter of 'religion' and not of revelation, with any and all historical contributions of equal validity. This is, of course, a departure from the principle of divine inspiration and represents the liberal perspective on Christianity, the Bible, and indeed, God. Still, modern conservative thought has largely been formulated *in response* to these liberal perspectives and not always from Scripture itself. Systematic Theology, also known as

[1] Please recognize that the language being used here is in no way meant to imply the Bible is merely a piece of literature; it is simply a continuation of the analogy with the novel.

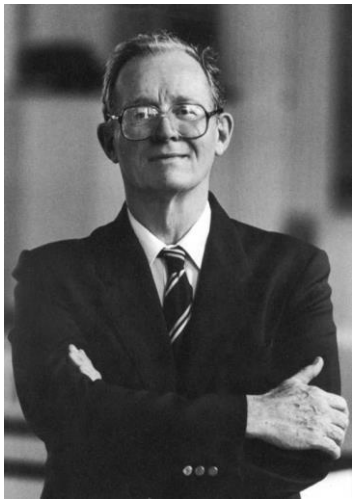
Dogmatics, has tended to double-down on credal formulations, giving little attention to the overall meta-narrative of the Bible.

It must be further admitted that the Bible does not read anything like a novel. Not only do we have to determine which books are canonical, we find that the various groups associated with Scripture – again, Jewish, Roman Catholic, and Protestant - do not put the canonical books in the same order. If we settle on an order, we then find that historical books are interspersed with wisdom literature, that prophecy combines the literary forms of prose, poetry, and at times, most distressing, apocalyptic. As a work of literature, the Bible can be said to have one author as well as many authors. Thus, not only do we have to examine the concept of *canonicity* but also that of *inspiration*. It is undeniable that some books of the Old Testament especially, but also the New, seem to align more closely and clearly to what we perceive to be the overall message of Scripture, the 'arc of revelation,' as it were, than other. Are some books of the Bible 'more inspired' than others? By this is meant, are there some books of the Bible more important than others, which is practically the same meaning. It is a historical fact that not all books of the Bible were treated equally within the church, Martin Luther doubting the canonicity of at least the Epistle of James and the Apocalypse of John. Therefore, any consideration of a 'global' approach to Scripture must deal with the issue of canon and canonicity.

On this score, and in keeping with the introductory nature of this chapter, it is important to note that the very concept of a *unifying theme* linking the Old and New Testaments into a cohesive whole has been seriously debated, with perhaps only a bare majority – and often only a significant minority – of biblical scholars agreeing that such a theme does exist. In the modern era, theological studies of the Old Testament are common, as are theological studies of the New Testament. Less common by far are theological studies of the *Bible*, both testaments as a whole. We will have occasion to note the impact both of Enlightenment rationalism and of the theory of Evolution on this phenomenon. Certainly, among conservative evangelicals, there is this somewhat atmospheric perspective that one God inspired the entire Bible, though in practical teaching,

preaching, and application this is hard to discern. The 'unifying' theme settled on by conservatives over the past two centuries has fallen into one of two camps – either Dispensationalism or Covenantalism.

As noted above, the first of these treats the Bible more as a compendium of shortish stories rather than a contiguous whole, with the entre self-disclosure of God being delivered in seven, hermetically-sealed 'dispensations' or eras of human history. According to this view, what occurred or was written and promised in one dispensation cannot be applied to a different dispensation, though this principle is very difficult to consistently apply. On the other side, Covenant Theology sees the various covenants as the unifying theme of God's revelation, from the 'Adamic Covenant' – which is inferred rather than explicitly established in Scripture – to the New Covenant. The major covenantal mountain peaks, of various heights, that lie between these two are the Noaic, the Abrahamic, the Mosaic, and the Davidic, each providing an expansion in the revelation of the divine plan for redemptive history. But can the Old and New Testaments be connected or unified via a single concept like dispensations or covenants? Certainly, both are biblical terms, but are they unifying themes? Brevard Childs argues, "There is no one overarching hermeneutical theory by which to resolve the tension between the testimony of the Old Testament in its own right and that of the New Testament with its transformed Old Testament."[2] Childs maintains that each testament both stands on its own witness and interrelates necessarily to the other.


Brevard S. Childs (1923-2007)

> The Old Testament bears its true witness as the Old which remains distinct from the New. It is promise, not fulfilment. Yet its voice continues to sound and it has not been stilled by the fulfilment of the promise…[T]he New Testament makes its own witness. It tells its own story of the new redemptive intervention of God in Jesus Christ. The New Testament is not just an extension of the Old, nor a last chapter in an epic tale. Something totally new has entered in the gospel. Yet the complexity of the problem arises be-

[2] Childs, Brevard S. *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press; 1992); 78.

> cause the New Testament bears its totally new witness in terms of the old, and thereby transforms the Old Testament.[3]

The discipline dedicated to unraveling the interwoven themes and complexities of revelation in and between the Old and New Testaments is generally know as Biblical Theology, the subject of our current study. Biblical Theology, by that name, is a relatively modern discipline within the theological arts, the phrase having been first coined, as far as we know, in the 17th Century by German pietists reacting against the developing scholasticism with the Lutheran confession, as well as rationalists reacting against rigid credal formulations of Lutheranism. Both groups, otherwise quite diverse, wanted a more 'biblical' theology, though each defined the adjective quite differently. Indeed, the pietistic and the rational strands of the 17th and 18th Century Enlightenment would fuel two diametrically-opposed conceptions of 'Biblical Theology.' Nonetheless, the discipline can only be traced historically to the post-Reformation era, particularly in the German states.

> There is general agreement that Biblical Theology as a discrete discipline with the field of biblical studies is a post-Reformation development. Although the Bible was much studied earlier, it is argued that during the period of the early and medieval church the Bible functioned within a dogmatic ecclesiastical framework in a subservient role in order to support various traditional theological systems.[4]

The concept of 'Biblical' Theology itself is somewhat controversial in that it seems to imply that there are Christian theologies that are not 'biblical.' This, of course, has been maintained throughout the history of the church, and not merely against doctrinal systems deemed heretical by ecumenical councils. Covenantal theologians, for instance, do not believe that Dispensational theology is biblical – at least not in a full, comprehensive sense. But for the most part, these disagreements are based on the *arrangement* of biblical material, the classification of texts under the different theological headings. In other words, these controversies exist in the realm of *Systematic* Theology,

[3] *Ibid.*; 77-78.
[4] *Ibid.*; 4. Many would argue that the Bible continues to be used this way.

though they certainly constituted different understanding of the biblical message. The fact of the matter is the phrase 'Biblical Theology' does not comprise a universally agreed upon content; theologians debate the meaning of the discipline as well as whether it actually constitutes a *theology* at all. Charles Scobie writes, "Examination of the various uses of the term, however, quickly reveals widespread disagreement regarding its meaning. 'Biblical Theology,' as J. L. McKenzie (1974) has said, 'is the only discipline or sub-discipline in the field of theology that lacks generally accepted principles, methods and structure. There is not even a generally accepted definition of its purpose and scope.'"[5] This might not seem to bode well for this current study!

The problem is further exacerbated by the fact that modern Biblical Theology derived primarily from the milieu of the rationalistic Enlightenment, an intellectual movement not famous for Christian orthodoxy. The age of Deism, the 18th Century was full of efforts to 'rationalize' Christianity – to make it 'reasonable' as the Enlightenment philosophes defined reasonable. "The rationalists for the most part demanded that revelation submit to the bar of reason as they understood it."[6] At the very heart of this rationalism was the belief that 'modern' man had achieved a position with respect to Reason that was not only far above the ancients, but had little need of their counsel. Not willing, however, to entirely dispense with the great philosophers – Plato and Aristotle for the Greeks, Cicero for the Romans – the Enlightenment intellectuals sought to modernize the ancient writings; Moses, Jesus, and Paul were subjected to the same rigor. The study of the Bible, therefore, became a historical one more so than a theological one, and Christian theology was then modified to fit the 'discoveries' of the 'historical-critical method' of biblical hermeneutics. The Bible became little more than an object of literary analysis, with an emphasis on the textual characteristics, the historical content, and the ancient religious beliefs of the various books and authors. Much of conservative Biblical Theology since the 18th Century has been a reaction against rationalism.

[5] Scobie, Charles H. H. *The Ways of Our God: An Approach to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; 2003); 3.
[6] *Ibid.*; 17.

J. P. Gabler (1753-1826)

Leading this reaction from within the Enlightenment era itself, is the man often credited as essentially the 'father' of modern Biblical Theology, at least from a more conservative perspective, Johann Philipp Gabler, a German Protestant theologian and the first professor of Biblical Theology at the University of Altdorf. Indeed, it is the title of his inaugural address at the university that is considered to be the genesis of Biblical Theology as an independent theological discipline. Gabler's inaugural address focused on Biblical Theology as a discipline distinct, though not independent of, Systematic or Dogmatic Theology, as indicated in the oration's title: "An Oration on the Proper Distinctions between Biblical and Dogmatic Theology and the Specific Objectives of Each." Gabler represents the many theologians (and pastors) over the past three hundred years who have tried vainly to unite the 'new knowledge' of the Enlightenment and other philosophical movements with the biblical foundation of Christian orthodoxy. Scobie writes, "An examination of the address itself shows that Gabler identified himself among those 'devoted to the sacred faith of Christianity,' who 'profess with one united voice that the sacred books, especially of the New Testament, are the one clear source from which all true knowledge of the Christian religion is drawn.'"[7]

Gabler inadvertently set Biblical Theology on a dangerous and unproductive course, however, by differentiating between 'true' biblical theology (*wahre*) and 'pure' biblical theology (*reine*). Scobie offers this summary of Gabler's division, "Stage one is the historical study of the OT and NT and of the individual authors and periods [this constituted Gabler's *true* biblical theology]. But this was to be followed by a second stage consisting of 'a careful and sober comparison of the various parts attributed to each testament,' with the purpose of distinguishing those opinions 'which have to do

[7] Scobie; 15.

with the unchanging testament of Christian doctrine, and therefore pertain to us directly.' [this second stage constituted the *pure* biblical theology of Gabler's estimation]."[8]


Gotthold Lessing (1729-81)

This separation of the historical from the practical played directly into the hands of the Enlightenment divorce between the past and the present, according to the dictum established by Enlightenment philosophe, Gotthold Lessing, that a 'broad ugly ditch' existed between the 'contingent truths of history' and the 'eternal truths of reason.' Lessing's ditch was insurmountable, meaning that one could not derive truth from history, least of all religious history such as the Bible. By linking the historical analysis of Scripture with the more practical, applicational, and more generally understood as theological sense of the Scripture, and making the latter contingent upon the former, Gabler inadvertently encouraged what would become a liberal divorce of biblical history from biblical theology, a divorce which split the proverbial baby of Biblical Theology into two irreconcilable branches. This divorce, coupled in the 19th Century with the expanding theory of evolutionary development, would lead to the 'History of Religion' approach to Biblical Theology, an approach that Gabler likely never intended. "This approach that led to the history of religions school and that is so influential to this day is in fact different from what Gabler himself advocated."[9]

Another result of the Enlightenment/Evolution intellectual milieu was the further separation of Biblical Theology between the Old Testament and the New Testament, with the explicit 'recognition' among continental, British, and American scholars that the two testaments could not be organically connected. Brevard Childs notes in regard to this division, "The significance of this move not only reflected the growing complexity of the discipline, but far more importantly the growing conviction that the historical discontinuities between the testaments defied all attempts to maintain a tradi-

[8] Scobie; 15. Bracketed comments added.
[9] *Ibid.*; 16.

tional canonical unity."[10] It is now commonplace even among conservative biblical scholar to publish separate 'Biblical Theologies' of the Old Testament or the New Testament, rare to find one, like Childs', that deals with both. We will have occasion to investigate this phenomenon further in the section on canon and canonicity.

To continue the current sad regression of biblical studies down the path of liberalism in the 19th Century, we need to spend a little more time on the still-prevailing concept of 'History of Religions.' This theological school, developing out of the University of Gôttingen in the late 1800s, combined the disciplines of Historical Criticism with that of Biblical Theology, resulting in a firmly-committed liberal deconstruction of any doctrinal or canonical linkage between Christianity and the text of the Old Testament. This school of biblical thought synthesized a historical-critical analysis of the text, particularly the text of the Old Testament, with the idea of societal evolution as manifested in the evolutionary development of religion. Archaeology, which started in the 19th Century and grew to a major academic discipline by the turn of the 20th, furnished an amazing amount of ancient material and textual data that opened a window on the religious and social practices of ancient peoples long considered legendary (*i.e.,* the Hittite empire). Combining this new data with the new evolutionary philosophy, and the critical deconstruction of such Old Testament mainstays as the Pentateuch and the Book of Isaiah, liberal theologians constructed a 'progressive' evolution of human religion and then proceeded to insert the biblical text into their new framework. Scobie summarizes,

> The progress of historical research in the nineteenth century had increasingly drawn attention to diversity and to development within both OT and NT, while the newer views on authorship and dating seemed to provide a secure basis for the tracing of such development. A spate of archaeological discoveries (that continues to this day) produced a mass of material relating to the ancient Near East and the Greco-Roman world. For many, these discoveries appeared to call in question the uniqueness of biblical faith. Babylonian creation myths and law codes, Jewish apocalypticism, Hellenistic mystery religions, and pre-Christian Gnosticism were all seen as providing striking parallels to the biblical material that could no longer be studied in isolation. A climate was created

[10] Childs; 5.

> that strongly favored a comparative approach in which biblical religion is but one among many.[11]

It is hard to overstate the impact and influence of the History of Religions school upon 20th Century biblical studies, an impact only tentatively resisted toward the latter part of that century and the early 21st. Evolutionary thought is now so ingrained within Western society, both at the academic and the pedestrian levels, that it just seems all so reasonable that the Jewish monotheistic religion evolved from even more ancient pagan polytheism or animism, and then subsequently underwent further evolution in Christianity, which continues to evolve from a doctrinal, historically-based *salvation* religion to a more socially and ecologically-oriented *moralism*. This is no mere history lesson; this is the world in which the modern church lives, the worldview of modern public education at all levels, the milieu in which modern believers read, interpret, and apply their Bibles. Many professing believers consider themselves to be 'in the spirit of Jesus' when they downplay doctrine in favor of 'love.' Within 'Christian' academia the situation is grave; any approach to biblical studies that seeks to restore the singularity of the biblical faith is met with rejection. Again, Scobie:

> The history of religions approach was dominant up the First World War, and it continues to this day to be a major force in biblical studies, particularly in academic circles It is associated with the movement in Europe of a considerable portion of biblical studies from the theological seminary to the university, and also, especially in North America in the second half of the twentieth century, with the blossoming of university departments of religious studies. While it is difficult to generalize, it often seems to be an underlying assumption that such an approach, unfettered by any Christian dogmatic presuppositions, is somehow objective and neutral and thus the only one that is possible in scholarly and academic circles.[12]

Thus far the negative development of Biblical Theology. Given the wholesale abandonment of Scripture as in any way 'inspired,' coupled with the deconstruction of the Bible into different authors at different times than anyone prior to the 19th Century

[11] Scobie; 20.
[12] *Ibid.*; 21.

ever considered, all of which in some way or another coming under the rubric of 'Biblical Theology,' one might reasonably ask, 'Why study Biblical Theology at all?' Primarily because it is absolutely essential to study it, but to do so correctly. And by 'correctly' is meant, of course, *believingly*. With that presupposition, it remains to explain why Biblical Theology is the only real defense against theological scholasticism, a phenomenon usually associated with Roman Catholicism, but which more than adequately describes what happened to Protestant theology in the generations following the 16th Century Reformation. Scholasticism in any form is an investigative paradigm that departs from the source material – in this case the Bible – and emphasizes analysis and debate over progressive dogmatic formulations that claim to best represent the original material. Infamous for the probably-apocryphal medieval question, 'How many angels can fit on the head of a pin,' scholasticism was condemned by the first and second generation Reformers. However, as Protestant theologians collated their doctrines into creeds and confessions, debates within the Protestant denominations raged more and more over the content of those creeds, leading to an effective scholasticism within the Protestant theological community. Biblical Theology is considered by many to be indispensable in reversing this trend, as, if it had been carefully followed and applied, it would have prevented it in the first place. Therefore, in spite of the dangers, and the historical realization of those dangers, associated with Biblical Theology within professing Christianity (and recognizing that the same dangers face Systematic/Dogmatic and Historical Theology as well), we turn to the conservative approach to Biblical Theology.

Within the Reformed communion, the name most commonly associated with Biblical Theology is that of the first man to hold that chair at Princeton Seminary, Geerhardus Vos. Vos' influential book, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments*, is itself an expansion foreshadowed by his inaugural address, "The Idea of Biblical Theology as a Science and as a Theological Discipline." As this long title indicates, Vos recognized the

Geerhardus Vos (1862-1949)

very real need to *defend* his new place within the theological faculty of 'Old Princeton,' with its august legacy of systematic theologians, including Archibald Alexander, Charles Hodge, Archibald Alexander Hodge, and Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield. By the time of Vos' ascension to the new chair of Biblical Theology, in 1892, the negative trajectory of Biblical Theology, rehearsed above, was very well established. In reading his inaugural address, one get the impression that Vos recognized that perhaps not all the faculty of Princeton appreciated the introduction of Biblical Theology within the theological curriculum at the seminary. Vos, however, was convinced of its merits and would spend the next thirty-nine years teaching it at Princeton.

In his inaugural address, Vos focuses on both his definition of Biblical Theology and its interaction with the other branches of the theological curriculum, of which he mentions four: *Exegetical, Historical, Systematic* or *Dogmatic*, and *Practical*. He places Biblical Theology in the first branch, Exegetical. "Biblical Theology is that branch of Exegetical Theology which deals with the process of the self-revelation of God deposited in the Bible."[13] The emphasis that drives Biblical Theology is the reality that God's revelation of His nature and of His purpose for Creation and Man did not come at one time or in one event, but rather unfolded over the course of biblical history. "It has not completed itself in one exhaustive act, but unfolded itself in a long series of successive acts."[14] This pattern of divine revelation is, of course, marked out to us by the author of the letter to the Hebrews.

> *God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son.* (Hebrews 1:1-2)

Vos sought to reclaim a *believing* form of Biblical Theology within a world and church largely given over to evolutionary thought in theology no less than biology. He condemned the divorce between history and application, the notion that mankind has evolved in his social interactions, including religion, and that past religious texts hold

[13] Vos, Geerhardus *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; 1991); 5.
[14] *Idem.*

no authority, and little value, for the present. Vos writes, "The rationalistic brand of Biblical Theology, at the same time that it stresses the historical, declares its product religiously worthless."[15] He goes on,

> This is shown in the extent to which, at the present time, the treatment of Biblical Theology is influenced by the philosophy of evolution…Religion, it is held, began with animism; next came polytheism, then monolatry, then monotheism. Such a view, of course, excludes revelation in every legitimate sense of the word. Making all things relative, it leaves no room for the absoluteness of the divine factor.[16]

Perhaps the key insight that Vos offers in the introductory section of his text is the relationship between the biblical record and history itself, a topic that will recur often in this study. It is commonplace among Reformed theologians to bifurcate history into general and 'salvation' or 'redemptive,' and thus to circumscribe the biblical narrative to the latter. The very term 'salvation history' if almost a shibboleth among modern Reformed biblical scholars, and Vos himself tends to fall into this paradigm in his textbook. But early on he hits the nail on the head with a simple statement, "The process of revelation is not only consistent with history, but it becomes incarnate in history."[17] To be sure, Vos is primarily emphasizing the fact that God's ultimate self-disclosure was in the Incarnation, the Word become flesh, and it is possible that he says more than even he realized with this statement. But it is the true genius of Biblical Theology to recognize that the divine self-disclosure is universally comprehensive with respect to all of Creation, and thus certainly all of human history. This is how the apostle viewed matters as he reflects in Romans 8 on the universality of both the corruption due to sin and of the redemption brought by the Lord Jesus Christ. In a truly *biblical theological* passage, Paul writes,

> *For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into*

[15] *Ibid.*; 10.
[16] *Ibid.*; 11.
[17] *Ibid.*; 6.

> *the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now.* (Romans 8:19-21)

Paul is not exercising poetic licenses here, nor is he romantically expanding biblical revelation to encompass all of Creation. He is merely listening to the echoes of such Old Testament passages as Psalm 19, that resound with the voice of Creation within the self-disclosure of God.

> *The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork.*
> *Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night reveals knowledge.*
> *There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard.*
> *Their line has gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.*
> (Psalm 19:1-4)

Passages like these bring us to the heart of the definition and purpose of Biblical Theology as well as to the relative relationship between Biblical Theology and Systematic or Dogmatic Theology. This all lies in the recognition that the self-revelation of God has not been given in a collation of dogmatic texts or moral principles. The nature of God, for instance, is nowhere outlined in any detail of His attributes. In one place we read of His holiness, in another His love, and in another His omniscience, and so forth. Sound doctrine, as well, is not given in distinct chapters or books dealing with justification, for instance, or with eschatology. Rather the whole – both the self-disclosure of God and His revelation of the divine purpose and goal of Creation – is woven into the unfolding history of Creation itself, and of Man in particular. Vos is correct, though incomplete, in his summary definition of Biblical Theology, "Biblical Theology, rightly defined, is nothing else that *the exhibition of the organic progress of supernatural revelation in its historic continuity and multiformity.*"[18] This definition is a description of Biblical History; Biblical Theology is a great deal more.

[18] Vos, Geerdhardus "The Idea of Biblical Theology as a Science and as a Theological Discipline"; in *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing; 1980); 15.

Lesson 2 – New Testament View of the Old
Text: John 1:1-14; Romans 10:1-11; Galatians 3:8

"Only readers made competent by the Spirit
can throw back the veil and perceive the sense of Scripture."
(Richard B. Hays)

Conservative Christians point to II Timothy 3:16, one of their most familiar verses, to prove that the Bible is the 'inspired Word of God,' which indeed it does. Paul leaves no room for any other authority in the believer's life but Scripture, *"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."*[19] Most believers are aware that the phrase *by inspiration of God* is but one word in the Greek, one of Paul's famous contractions, *theopneustos* (θεοπνευστος), meaning 'God-breathed.' This passage is rightly enlisted in support of a high view of Scripture in the Church, though in practical application most believers take it out of context. This is by no means to imply that the passage itself is not 'God-breathed'; it is only to recognize that at the time that Paul wrote it, II Timothy was not within the canon of Scripture. Wayne Meeks notes, "That the Christian movement existed once without the canon which later became constitutive of it is a fact whose hermeneutical significance has not, even now, fully impressed itself on our theology."[20]


Wayne Meeks (1932-2023)

Richard Hays ponders the academic question as to whether Paul himself realized that what he was writing was 'Scripture.' Certainly we have evidence that Peter thought so (*cp.* II Peter 3:16), but the most that we hear from Paul is that he considered that he had the Spirit of Christ (I Cor. 7:40). We also know from Paul's own writings that he penned other letters, probably many other letters, that were not preserved for

[19] II Timothy 3:16-17
[20] Quoted by Richard B. Hays *"Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press; 1989); 5.

the Church in the canon of the New Testament. Hays considers, "Paul did not think of himself as a writer of Scripture; he was writing letters to fledgling churches, interpreting Scripture (by which he meant the texts that Christians later began to call the 'Old Testament') to guide these struggling communities as they sought to understand the implications of the gospel."[21] Certainly believers across the centuries have viewed Paul's writings as inspired and authoritative, and did so even during his lifetime, but the notion of canon is a bit trickier than that, as we will see in our next lesson. It is impossible to argue that in his second (that we have) letter to Timothy, the apostle was referring to his own letters when he penned this famous passage. No, he was referring to the Hebrew Scriptures, those which Timothy *"had known from childhood"* and were *"able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus."*[22]


Richard B. Hays (*b.* 1948)

The point of Meeks' comment, and of Hays' assertion, is that the historical reality of church history shows that the New Testament, which derived from its inspired authors own reading and interpretation of the Old Testament, has largely *replaced* the Old Testament as the primary witness of divine revelation and authority. There is a sense in which many believers view the New Testament as so comprehensive in its treatment of what is 'important' in the Old Testament, that the latter is no longer practically authoritative in matters of faith and practice. But this is certainly not how the apostles, and by extension, the early Church, viewed the Old Testament; for them there were no other Scriptures but those of Israel. Hays maintains that believers must learn again to read the Old Testament as Paul and Peter and John read them in order to truly understand what Paul and Peter and John consequently wrote. "Paradoxically, we learn how rightly to read Paul's letters as Scripture only by first reading them as not-Scripture and attending

[21] *Idem.*
[22] II Timothy 3:15

to how he read the Scripture that he knew."[23] That, largely, is the role of Biblical Theology.

Another perspective is to consider that the revelation of God in the Bible was not given as a compendium of moral principles or systematic dogmatic precepts. As important as these are – and any seminary curriculum will indicate just how important they are thought to be – they are *derived* from Scripture at best; they are not presented in unequivocal clarity in a systematic way. This largely accounts for the incredible disagreement among rabbis as well as Christian theologians with regard to pretty much every point of dogmatic religion. This, consequently, is a source of consistent criticism from unbelievers with regard to the 'inspiration' of Scripture: why do God's followers disagree so thoroughly, so minutely, and so vigorously on so many points within the religion they claim to share? This is by no means to suppose that Biblical Theology will result in a blessed, ecumenical harmony among all professing believers worldwide. Such a paradise is perhaps not possible while *"we see as in a mirror, dimly."* It is, however, to propose that a greater and more consistent focus on the whole 'arc of revelation' stands a far better chance of alleviating bitter disagreement than the traditional method of doubling down on dogmatic formulations. Vos writes, "Biblical Theology relieves to some extent the unfortunate situation that even the fundamental doctrines of the faith should seem to depend mainly on the testimony of isolated proof-texts."[24]

The encouragement toward dogmatics, or Systematic Theology as it is most commonly known within Reformed circles, is the human tendency toward classification and summary. To return to the analogy of literature from the previous lesson, this tendency is what motivates the publishing of SparkNotes (Cliff Notes for Boomers). These are, of course, summaries of the books that students are supposed to read for their various literature classes, highlighting the 'important' points and character traits that are the usual material for exams. The analog within Christian theology is the confession, creed, or catechism. Learned scholars have culled Scripture to bring together the 'im-

[23] Hays; 5.
[24] Vos, *Biblical Theology*; 17.

portant' points of doctrine considered most necessary, into one summary document to which the faithful can turn, rather than to Scripture itself, to learn what is to be believed among them. Historically, however, creeds and confession have not been enough but have then produced commentaries on themselves – a *Commentary on the Heidelberg Confession*, for instance, or, probably the most famous example of scholasticism in the Middle Ages, Lombard's *Sentences.* Lombard's work, a compilation of 'sentences' commenting on various themes of Scripture, is perhaps the first systematic textbook in church history and was standard within theological schools for centuries after its publication. It was also considered among the Protestant Reformers as the foundation of the scholastic method that they so vigorously opposed.

Scholasticism itself is simply the 'teaching of the schools,' not at all unlike the different rabbinic schools of the Second Temple era that vied for adherents and disciples during Jesus' and Paul's day. As a methodology, though, it developed into a layered process of commenting on a previous scholars comments, again not unlike the "*Rabbi Eleazar said that Rabbi Jose said…*" of the Mishnah. With each accretion of commentary, maintained the Reformers, theology moved farther away from Scripture, becoming encased within a scholastic shell which, eventually, became impenetrable to the Word of God itself. But Protestantism has not been immune from this same tendency toward scholasticism, and within a generation of the Reformation the advent of confessions and catechisms arrived, followed in subsequent centuries by commentaries on those confessions, such as Herman Hoeksema's *The Triple Knowledge: An Exposition of the Heidelberg Catechism* published n 1970. Seminaries devoted curricula to the study of the dogmatics adhered to within the denomination; students often required to have more dexterity within the creed than within the Bible. Toward the end of the 19th Century, George Gilbert maintained, "The movement of the Reformers was soon paralyzed on its biblical side. Doctrinal discussion carried on in the spirit and with the apparatus of scholasticism absorbed the attention of theologians."[25]

[25] Gilbert, George H. "Biblical Theology: Its History and Its Mission, I" *The Biblical World* Vol. 6 No. 1 (Jul. 1895); 12.

Throughout church history, whenever believers perceived that the vital part of Christianity was being lost through scholastic theology, the common response has been a shift toward *pietism* and away from *doctrine*. It is chronically maintained, in the face of ever more virulent dogmatic debates, that what matters is the 'inner life,' the 'life of the Spirit,' or even the 'baptism of the Holy Ghost.' These periods have historically been of much shorter duration than the underlying dogmatic current within the various denominations, though pietism or its equivalent has been experienced by every doctrinal community within Christianity. The result has been something of a pendulum movement between 'doctrinal purity' and 'spiritual life.' In its more static form, this phenomenon is represented on one side by Reformed Theology and on the other by Pentecostalism.

It is hard to imagine that the apostles would have wholly supported either side against the other, the notion that the life of the Church is a zero-sum game in which there is either doctrinal purity or spiritual vitality, but that the two could not coexist. There is no tension between true doctrine and true spirituality in the New Testament, perhaps because the writers understood, from their immersion in the Old Testament, that the knowledge of God (true spirituality) was the knowledge of truth. The event of Christ's life, work, death, and resurrection did not lead the apostles to the development of a new religion, nor to the formation of a 'systematic' theology that explained everything that had happened. Rather, God's intervention in the affairs of Israel through her promised Messiah – whom they recognized to be Jesus – was seen by the disciples through the lens of their Scriptures, the Christian 'Old Testament.' Yet many readers of the New Testament across the past two millennia have pondered just how the authors of the gospels and epistles (and not least the Apocalypse of John) used the Old Testament to explain and defend their 'new' faith. It must be admitted that many of the allusions and direct citations of the Old Testament in the New, do not seem to follow from the Old Testament verse itself or from its context. What was required, and provided through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, is what Richard Hays refers to as 'the conversion of imagination,' whereby the revelation of the Old Testament was now seen and

interpreted in the light of the 'Christ event,' resulting in the canon of the New Testament. Hays writes provocatively, "True interpretation depends neither on historical inquiry nor on erudite literary analysis but on attentiveness to the promptings of the Spirit, who reveals the gospel through Scripture in surprising ways."[26] Such a statement may very well make the believer uncomfortable, but it really is no more shocking than Paul's assertion that *"we have the mind of Christ"* or John's contention that *"we have no need of any to teach us."* Indeed, it is of the essence of conservative, orthodox Christianity to consider that the New Testament writers were themselves guided by such promptings – they were *inspired*, breathed into – as they considered their Scriptures in light of the Christ event.

Thus a very brief summary of what is a complex concept. An example of the problem might help here. In the Matthean account of Jesus' childhood, when recounting how his parents were forced to flee to Egypt in order to avoid the murderous wrath of King Herod, their return to Judea is announced by Matthew as the fulfillment of the words of Hosea, "*Out of Egypt I have called My Son.*"

> *When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called My son.*
> *As they called them, so they went from them;*
> *They sacrificed to the Baals, and burned incense to carved images.* (Hosea 11:1-2)

Matthew's reference to this passage is in no uncertain terms with regard to the prophetic correlation,

> *When he arose, he took the young Child and His mother by night and departed for Egypt, and was there until the death of Herod, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet, saying, "Out of Egypt I called My Son."* (Matthew 2:14-15)

The word Matthew uses, translated 'fulfilled,' is a common term in the New Testament to indication complete accomplishment, *plairōthā* (πληρωθῃ). But the text of Hosea is clearly referring to something God had already done, the bringing of Israel out of Egypt in the Exodus. No one within the Jewish community would have viewed Hosea

[26] Hays, *Echoes*; 156.

11:1 prophetically; no one would have been looking for the 'fulfillment' that Matthew associated with Jesus' family coming back to Judea from their temporary exile in Egypt. Matthew hears an echo in Hosea 11 that the original prophet and audience did not hear, and perhaps did not, humanly-speaking, even intend. We do not conclude, however, that Matthew was simply cherry-picking a passage from his 'Bible' that seemed to fit well with the narrative of Joseph & Mary's return from Egypt. This is precluded again by the formula, "*that it might be fulfilled the word which was spoken by the Lord through the prophet.*" On the one hand, we can readily understand that Matthew views Jesus as the singular embodiment of Israel, and could see in Hosea 11 a foreshadowing of Jesus' return with His parents from Egypt. On the other, it is not as easy to see the latter event as the *fulfillment* of the former passage.

This is just one of many in which the New Testament writer finds prophetic significance in passages from the Old Testament that do not appear to contain that prophetic content within their own time frame and context. Even more pervasive is the allusive aspect in which the New Testament authors speak in the terminology of the Old Testament, effectively reconfiguring the Old Testament passage or book in the light of the Christ-event. Again, a classic example of this indirect incorporation of the Old Testament into the New is the Prologue of John's Gospel.

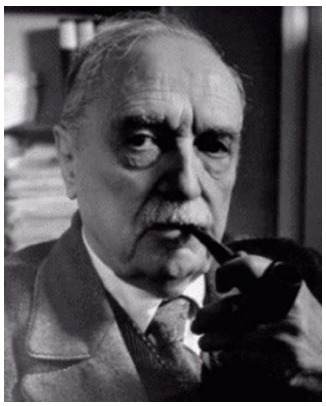
> *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made.* (John 1:1-3)

The first two words of John 1:1 are identical to the first two words of Genesis 1:1 as found in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the Septuagint (LXX): *en archai* (ἐν ἀρχῇ). This verse is hermeneutically significant in that it illustrates the manner in which the New Testament authors read and interpreted their Old Testament Scriptures in the light of the coming of Messiah. It is undeniable that John intended his readers' minds to immediately transport to Genesis 1:1 with these opening words, and thus to continue reading about Jesus through the lens of Creation. Without using the formulaic

'as it is written,' or *'that the Scriptures might be fulfilled,'* John accomplishes the same effect: transforming the Creation account itself into a prophetic word, the fulfillment of which is at least partially seen in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. Paul performs the same transformative hermeneutic, though in a different context, in II Corinthians 4, agreeing with John that the entire Creation event may now be seen as prophetic of the Christ event.

> *For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*
>
> (II Corinthians 4:6)

Paul's freedom in using Old Testament passages as citations or allusions in his letters has caused many within the Higher Critical school of 19th Century Germany to conclude that canonical integrity was not of importance to the apostle. The same derogatory claim would apply to the other authors of the New Testament; Paul just seems to be the lightning rod for liberal critique. "According to this view, Israel's Scripture was not a formative factor in [Paul's] theology; he merely seized upon it to illustrate aspects of a (Christian) belief system that he already held on grounds extrinsic to his interpretation of Scripture."[27] What makes this phenomenon of critical dismissal important today is the fact that a very large segment of academic Christianity, even within otherwise conservative communions, has adopted the same critical method and consequently fails miserably in modern interpretations of Pauline literature. The pervasive presence of the Higher Critical hermeneutic is further reason why a solid Biblical Theology is so important for the Church today, and always. Representative of this school is Rudolf Bultmann, perhaps the most influential German theologian of the 20th Century, with the probably exception of Karl Barth (who was, however, Swiss). Bultmann held that "Paul was seeking to give expression to the kerygman [*preaching/message*] through mythological language and symbols that were only provisionally adequate vehicles for



Rudolf Bultmann (1884-1976)

[27] *Ibid.*; 7.

it Israel's Scripture occupies no privileged role in this scheme; in no sense is the Old Testament a material source for Paul's theology."[28] This remarkable claim – remarkable in light of Paul's own consistent dependence on the Old Testament – is corroborated by a quote from Bultmann that sadly represents conventional wisdom among modern biblical scholars – and too often, unknowingly, among average Christian readers – again highlighting the critical (pun intended) need for a solid Biblical theological approach to Scripture.

> To the Christian faith the Old Testament is no longer revelation as it has been, and still is, for the Jews. For the person who stands within the Church the history of Israel is a closed chapter…Israel's history is not our history, and in so far as God has shown his grace in that history, such grace was not meant for us…The events which meant something for Israel, which were God's Word, mean nothing more to us…To the Christian faith the Old Testament is not in the true sense God's Word.[29]

Hays rightly comments, "It is extremely difficult…to see how such conclusions can be drawn from reading Paul's letters."[30] Yet it remains true that Paul's usage of the Hebrew Scriptures is such as almost to invite such sweeping rejections as Bultmann's, or to view Paul's hermeneutic as 'allegorical' or 'rabbinic.' "One frequently finds Christian commentators explaining away their embarrassment over some piece of fanciful Pauline exegesis by noting solemnly that his is midrash, as though the wholesome Hebrew label could render Paul's arbitrariness kosher."[31] The reality is that the apostle utilized the Old Testament in a manner that was deeply offensive to his countrymen, at least to those who persisted in unbelief. "A man who writes, 'neither circumcision nor uncircumcision matter, but new creation,' has moved dramatically outside the hermeneutical conventions of first-century Judaism and arguably to the periphery of the sumbolic world of Israel's Scripture."[32] Readers of the New Testament, not merely the Paul-

[28] *Idem.*
[29] Qupted by Hays, *Echoes*; 7-8.
[30] *Ibid.*; 8.
[31] *Ibid.*; 13.
[32] *Ibid.*; 157.

ine corpus, must wrestle with the fact that its authors were steeped in the Hebrew Scriptures, but utilized them in a very unconventional manner.

It should be apparent to anyone who compares the way in which the New Testament uses the Old, that the authors did not follow a rigid, literal hermeneutic of chapter-and-verse prooftexts. One often hears that this is because they were inspired, but that is special pleading. How are uninspired readers supposed to read their Old Testaments in the way that the New Testament authors did? And if we cannot do so, is it then possible to really understand what the New Testament is teaching? Perhaps it is rather that believers should listen to the way in which the New Testament hears the echoes of the Old, and to listen for the same sounds. "Line-byline decoding of the Bible – practiced in different ways by the Qumran covenanters and by Philo – is not Paul's characteristic style of exposition. Rather, if our analysis is correct, he allows Scripture to echo into the text of his letters in such a way that the echoes suggest patterns of meaning wider than his own overt interpretive claims…Echoes linger in the air and lure the reader of Paul's letters back into the symbolic world of Scripture."[33]

Does this mean abandoning the Reformed tradition of historical-grammatical hermeneutics? 'Echo' hermeneutics does indeed seem to encourage an 'open spirit' approach to Scripture, devoid of historical setting, grammatical structure, and context. But this is to move from one extreme to the other. The point is not to abandon the historicity of the Old Testament writings, nor to ignore the grammar and context of those passages, but rather to attempt to read them as the New Testament authors did. This starts by recognizing that Bultmann, for all his famed erudition, was profoundly wrong. The writers of the New Testament by no means abandoned either the history or the Scriptures of their people; Israel's heritage was their heritage, and the seedbed of the Church. Indeed, so far from jettisoning Israel's history and sacred writings, Paul and his colleagues recognized in the person of Jesus Christ the full and final completion of both that history and those Scriptures. Time itself concentrated into "*the fulness of time,*" and everything before and everything after must now be seen through the lens of the Christ

[33] *Ibid.*; 155.

event. This meant that the Hebrew Scriptures, so far from being abandoned or rejected, were understood in a new and comprehensive light. "When Scripture is refracted through the hermeneutical lens provided by God's action in the crucified Messiah and in forming his eschatological community, it acquires profound new symbolic coherence."[34] For Paul, as an example, the historical narrative of the lives of Abraham and Sarah, the progenitors of the chosen people, takes on a new and deeper meaning, one that does not deny the historicity or historical impact of the patriarchs, but rather now views it through the lens of the coming of Messiah, Abraham's seed. In another passage that must have both astonished and infuriated Paul's unbelieving countrymen, he transforms the age-old story of that first covenant family.

> *Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise, which things are symbolic. For these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar — for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children — but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all.* (Galatians 4:21-26)

Consider what the apostle does in this passage. He inverts the historical situation completely, now linking *the Jerusalem that now is* – that is, the unbelieving world of Paul's Jewish brethren – with *Hagar*, effectively transferring unbelieving Israel out of the family of Isaac and into the family of Ishmael. But believers, Jew and Gentile alike, are the true children of Sarah, the children of promise. Paul admits, in this passage, to allegorizing the historical narrative, yet uses definitive terminology similar to Matthew's *that it might be fulfilled* with respect to Joseph's return from Egypt: *These things are symbolic…For these are two covenants…* Paul is not using the familial tensions of Abraham to illustrate a point about the gospel; no, he is declaring that Abraham's family itself was a symbol of what was to become of both Israel and the Gentiles as a result of

[34] *Ibid*.; 169.

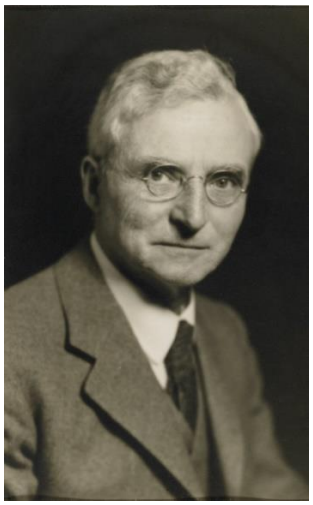
the gospel, which he remarkably says was preached to Abraham beforehand (*cp.* Gal. 3:8).

Richard Hays focuses on the impact of the Old Testament – which was, at the time of Paul's writings, simply the Hebrew Scriptures – in his thought-provoking book, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*. But what Hays emphasizes with regard to the Pauline corpus of the New Testament is, by his own admission, true of all the New Testament authors. The idea of 'echoes,' borrowed by Hays from the realm of literary analysis, addresses the fact that the New Testament writers did not mine their Scriptures – our 'Old Testament' – simply to find proof-texts or appropriate wording or phrases to bolster a completely different argument from the original source. The New Testament authors were so immersed in their Scripture, and the symbolic world that it created in their minds and culture, that their presentation of the gospel – the culmination and fulfillment of the covenant promise – resonated with both explicit quotations and, perhaps even more so, with Scriptural allusions. Hearing the echoes of the Old Testament in the writings of the New is, perhaps, the essence of Biblical Theology. It is, however, a hermeneutical method that takes practice, the training of one's ears to hear not only the sound of the echo, but to also discern its Scriptural notes. This tendency has been reinforced unwittingly by the very fact that we view the Bible as 'divided' into two 'testaments,' Old and New. This connotes the idea that the latter in some way 'replaces' the former or, at least, that the 'new' is to be preferred to the 'old.' One cannot read the New Testament with any degree of comprehension and arrive at the conclusion that the New Testament authors sought to distance themselves from the Old Testament (also keeping always in mind the anachronistic nature of assigning 'New' and 'Old' to the time of the New Testament writings). Peter Stuhlmacher writes, "The New Testament cannot (and does not want to be) understood without the Old. It at no time attempts to replace the 'Holy Scriptures.' It only wants to testify to God's definitive revelatory act in


Peter Stuhlmacher (*b.* 1932)

and through his one and only Son Jesus."[35] The challenge to Biblical Theology, again, is to read the entirety of Scripture the way the authors of the New Testament read what we now call the 'Old Testament.' To give away the punchline perhaps too early, the two essential poles around which this true hermeneutic orbit are (1) the centrality of the Person and Work of Jesus Christ to the entire revelation of Scripture, both Old and New Testaments, and (2) the illumination and guidance of the indwelling Holy Spirit by which, John assures us, *"you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him."*[36]

That Jesus forms the center of the interpretive world for the New Testament authors should go without saying, but the fact remains that even the momentous Christ-event is often, if subconsciously, viewed as a *starting* point rather than a historical center. C. H. Dodd, whose work in the 20th Century was very instrumental in the modern development of Biblical Theology, writes, "the earliest thinkers of Christianity declared that in the ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ this act of absolute judgment and absolute redemption had taken place. This complex event therefore becomes the centre from which the whole history of the people of God, both backwards and forwards in time, is to be understood, and ultimately the history of mankind."[37]


C. H. Dodd (1884-1973)

But even when the centrality of Jesus to all of history is acknowledged, it is not always acknowledged in hermeneutical studies (nor even in hermeneutics itself) that the leading of the Holy Spirit is every bit as essential. The role of the Holy Spirit is indispensable to our understanding both how the New Testament authors read and interpreted their 'Holy Scriptures,' and in the formation of the canon of Scripture itself. Biblical Theologies and studies in 'Canonics' since the Enlightenment have attempted to

[35] Stuhlmacher, Peter *How To Do Biblical Theology* (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick Publications; 1995); 6.
[36] I John 2:27
[37] Dodd, C. H. *According to the Scriptures* (London: James Nisbet and Company Ltd.; 1961); 130.

rationalize both the hermeneutic of the New Testament writers and the very formation of the canon with which they worked, and of which their writings subsequently formed a part. Stuhlmacher summarizes this second aspect, the formation of the canon, in most modern treatments of the subject, referring to "the perpetuation of the false impression that the Old and New Testaments were united into the one Christian canon only at a later date and could only be held together through the clamp of Christian doctrine."[38] Obvious on the surface, yet so often overlooked and neglected, is the fact that the meaning of the New Testament flows out of and is inseparable from the meaning of the Old Testament. That, in a nutshell, is the work of Biblical Theology.

Thus Biblical Theology, as a provisional definition, is the hermeneutical task of reading the Scriptures in the manner of the writers of the New Testament itself. This means, as noted above, hearing not only the 'messianic prophecies' of the Old Testament, but the cacophonous echoes of the Hebrew Scriptures in the teachings of Jesus, the writings of the Synoptics, the gospel, letters, and apocalypse of John, the epistles of Paul, and not least the anonymous letter to the Hebrews. Richard Longenecker, in his *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*, surveys the manner in which the Old Testament – 'Holy Scripture' – was used by Jesus in His teachings as well as the apostles, including Paul, and the early Church fathers. He writes, "we must abandon the mistaken ideas that the New Testament writers' treatment of the Old Testament was either (1) an essentially mechanical process whereby explicit 'proof texts' and exact 'fulfillments' were brought together, or (2) an illegitimate twisting and distortion of the ancient texts."[39]


Richard Longenecker (1930-2021)

This statement covers the two extremes of modern biblical exegesis with regard to the New Testament usage of the Old Testament. This first is descriptive of modern *conservative* exegesis, utilizing the Old Testament as a field from which to harvest verses

[38] Stuhlmacher; 2.
[39] Longenecker, Richard *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publichisng Company; 1999);; 186.

and passages in order to defend the messianic claims of Jesus. To be sure, Old Testament books such as the Psalms and Proverbs are used for ethical instruction and devotional material, but the primary *hermeneutic* of Old Testament exegesis is fairly accurately described as 'proof-texting.' As this is the primary hermeneutic of the modern conservative Church, it is assumed that this was the primary hermeneutic of the New Testament authors and of the early Church. But, as we will see through the ensuing study, this approach is stunted at best; at worst it serves only to distort and confuse the New Testament message.

The second approach is characteristic of modern *liberal* Christianity and its associated biblical scholarship. Denying any reality to the advent of a fulfilled Judaism in Jesus Christ and His Church, liberal scholars maintain a 'history of religions,' evolutionary approach to their assessment of the New Testament use of the Old Testament. In other words, the authors of the New Testament books – and supremely Paul – were self-consciously inventing a new religion, Christianity, in the midst of an old one, Judaism. To put it in today's parlance, they had an agenda, and that agenda justified whatever use they desired of the 'Holy Scriptures' of their people. There is a certain plausibility in this claim, since it is quite clear that many of the New Testament citations and allusions differ either in wording or in context (or both) from the original text. But to claim that the New Testament authors played fast and loose with their Holy Scriptures is a serious charge and one that delegitimatizes their writings completely. Simply put, if the authors of the New Testament documents exercised this type of exegesis they were, as are all who have done so since, malpractitioners, not agents of divine revelation.

Most readers of the New Testament, if they listen to the text as they read it, will realize that neither of these extreme positions does justice to the text of the New Testament itself. It is the case, rather, that the authors of the New Testaments narratives, epistles, and apocalypse viewed what we call the Old Testament in a more atmospheric, environmental manner, not simply as a source for citations considered solely to bolster a particular New Testament, 'Christian' argument. Again, we cannot lose site of the impact of the Person and Work of Jesus Christ, nor of the outpouring and indwelling of

the Holy Spirit sent from Christ, on the manner in which the New Testament writers interpreted both the Holy Scriptures and their own works. But at this point we are simply disabusing the notion that they employed either a mechanical or an imaginative hermeneutic in their exegesis of the Old Testament. Again, Longenecker:

> What we have in the preaching and writings of the early apostolic band indicates that the apostles were not as much interested in commentaries on the biblical texts or the application of principles to issues of the day as they were in demonstrating redemptive fulfillment in Jesus of Nazareth. Accepting the messiahship and lordship of Jesus, and believing that in his teaching and person was expressed the fullness of divine revelation, they took a prophetic stance on a revelatory basis and treated the Old Testament more charismatically than scholastically.[40]

At the root of the New Testament perspective on the Old Testament is, simply, *history*. Unlike the post-Enlightenment denigration of and divorce from history, the apostles understood that history itself was part of the self-disclosure of the God of Israel, both the history of His people and of all humanity. Faith was inseparable from historical events as well as from the revelation that both recorded and, in some measure, explained those events. What we are referring to in this study as the 'arc of revelation,' is nothing less than the integration of God's self-disclosure not only in Creation but also in His sovereign oversight, guidance, and even intervention in Creation's history. To understand the New Testament authors' perspective on the Old Testament, and thus to deepen our own understanding of the New Testament itself, requires at least an appropriation of the historical perspective of those authors. Dodd writes of the New Testament writers,

> They interpret and apply the prophecies of the Old Testament upon the basis of a certain understanding of history, which is substantially that of the prophets themselves…History, upon this view, or at any rate the history of the people of God, is built upon a certain pattern corresponding to God's design for man His creature. It is a pattern, not in the sense of a pre-ordained sequence of inevitable events, but in the sense of a kind of master-plan imposed upon the order of human life in this world by the Crea-

[40] Longenecker; 191.

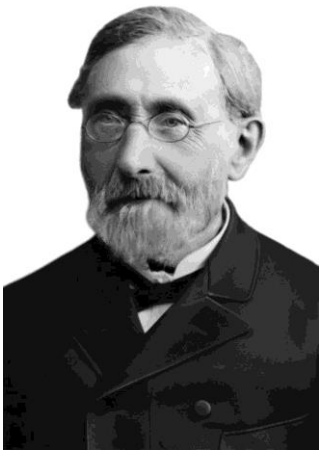
> tion Himself, a plan which man is not at liberty to alter, but within which his freedom works.[41]

The essence of Biblical Theology is, again, to read the Scriptures in the manner that the apostles and early Church read the Scriptures. For the most part, this meant the assemblage of books now known as the Old Testament, although it is evident from within the New Testament that the early believers considered the writings of the apostles to be 'canonical.' So immersed were the New Testament authors in the atmosphere of the Holy Scriptures – of the covenant relationship between Yahweh and Israel and the historical outworking of that relationship – that their own writings really cannot be fully grasped without approximating their own perspective. Again, this means learning to both listen for and discern the echoes of the Old Testament in the writings of the New. This hermeneutic will neither be an imaginative reconfiguration of the Old Testament text, nor a rigidly literalistic interpretation. There is evidently a great freedom of interpretation employed by the Spirit-filled and Spirit-led authors of New Testament Scripture. Dodd summarizes, "In general, then, the writers of the New Testament, in making use of passages from the Old Testament, remain true to the main intention of their writers. Yet the actual meaning discovered in a given passage will seldom, in the nature of things, coincide precisely with that which it had in its original context. The transposition into a fresh situation involves a certain shift, nearly always an expansion, of the original scope of the passage."[42] To read the whole Bible in this manner is at least one goal, and perhaps the most important goal, of Biblical Theology.

[41] Dodd; 128.
[42] *Ibid.*; 130.

Lesson 3 – The Canon of Scripture
Text: II Peter 1:16–21; 3:15-16

"The role of councils, therefore, was not so much to decide the canon as to confirm decisions about the canon already reached in other ways."
(Roger Beckwith)


Heinrich Graetz (1817-91)

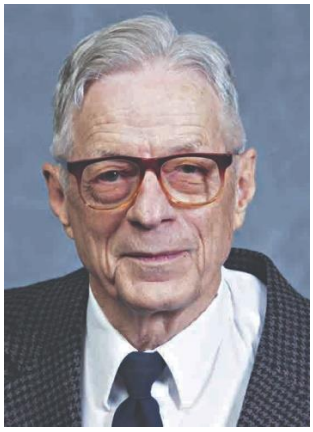
Toward the end of the siege of Jerusalem, during the First Jewish War of AD 63 – 70, an influential rabbi by the name of Jochanan ben Zakkiai apparently despaired of the situation within the walls of Jerusalem and arranged for the public notification of his own death. Consequently, his disciples received permission from the Roman general (later emperor) Titus to remove Jochanan's body from the city in a wooden coffin, or so the story is repeated by the Prussian Jewish historian Heinrich Graetz in his three-volume *History of the Jews*. One wonders at the veracity of the story, as later Jochanan (resurrected?) requests of Vespasian permission to open a rabbinic school in the coastal village of Jabneh, or Jamnia. Permission granted (the Romans were always looking for cooperative Jews, like the famous historian Josephus, and were very liberal in their support of such 'allies'). Jochanan not only establish a rabbinic school at Jabneh, a *beth ha-Midrash*, but also a parallel Sanhedrin, a *beth Din*, to the Great Sanhedrin in Jerusalem. Over the former Jochanan was the 'dean of faculty'; over the second, the *nissi* or president. As Jerusalem was soon to fall to the Roman forces, this seemingly innocuous establishment of a school and executive council in Jamni (the more common reference in later literature), took on disproportionate significance in subsequent Jewish history. Graetz writes, "Jabne by this means took the place of Jerusalem and became the religious national center of the dispersed community."[43]

Jamnia would be the scene of several illustrious rabbis of the post-Jerusalem Jewish world, including R. Gamaliel II and R. Akiba, the latter being an instrumental agita-

[43] Graetz, Heinrich *History of the Jews*, *Volume 2* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America; 1893); 325.

tor for the Second Jewish War, for which role he was executed by the Romans after that bloody conflict.[44] But to the modern biblical scholar, Jamnia is significant for its alleged Synod, ca. AD 90, at which the Hebrew canon was declared. "Later on these Halachas (*i.e.,* the books of Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon) were included in the collection (Canon) of the Holy Writings, after which the Canon was completed and several writings in the Hebrew language were rejected as Apocrypha such as the proverbs of Sirach, the first book of the Maccabees, and several others."[45] Thus it has become conventional wisdom in modern biblical studies to claim the Synod of Jamnia (Jabneh) as the authority behind the canon of the Old Testament. The problem is, that events did not happen in remotely that fashion.

In the first place, there is no evidence at all that a special synod was convened at Jamnia to discuss the canon of the Hebrew Scriptures. The extant writings show that such discussions – the 'inspiration' of this or that book – happened frequently in both the rabbinic school, which met daily, and the Sanhedrin, which met less frequently, perhaps only once per year. Even the term 'synod' is anachronistic, being a development of the Christian Church in the early Middle Ages. Jack P. Lewis notes that, while the words 'council' and 'synod' are acceptable English renderings of the relevant Hebrew terms used to describe the meetings at Jamnia, "sixteen hundred years of ecclesiastical usage and twenty-one ecumenical councils have given these latter words certain ecclesiastical connotations of officially assembled authoritative bodies of delegates which rule and settle questions. These titles are not appropriate for Judaism."[46] Lewis points out that debate concerning the canonicity of this or that book from the Hebrew Scriptures, and those of the so-called Apocrypha, continued for centuries after the alleged 'Synod' of Jamnia.


Jack P. Lewis (1919-2018)

[44] It was Akiba who proclaimed the Jewish rebel leader Simon as 'bar Kochba' – Son of a Star, referencing the prophecy of Balaam in Numbers 24. Akiba affirmed Simon as the promised Messiah. The Second Jewish War is also known as the Bar Kochba Revolt.
[45] Graetz; 344.
[46] Lewis, Jack P. "What Do We Mean by Jabneh?"*Journal of Bible and Religion*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (April, 1964); 128.

Around the same time as Rabbi Jochanan and associates were establishing Jabneh as a center of Jewish life and learning, the former Jewish general, Flavius Josephus, was writing his famous histories. In addition to these, Josephus also wrote apologetical works defending Judaism and the Jewish way of life in spite of the actions of 'a few' rebels. In his *Against Apion*, Josephus provides one of the earliest Jewish testimonies concerning the content of the Hebrew Scriptures.

> For we have not an innumerable multitude of books among us, disagreeing from and contradicting one another, [as the Greeks have,] but only twenty-two books, which contain the records of all the past times; which are justly believed to be divine; and of them five belong to Moses, which contain his laws and the traditions of the origin of mankind till his death. This interval of time was little short of three thousand years; but as to the time from the death of Moses till the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia, who reigned after Xerxes, the prophets, who were after Moses, wrote down what was done in their times in thirteen books. The remaining four books contain hymns to God, and precepts for the conduct of human life. It is true, our history hath been written since Artaxerxes very particularly, but hath not been esteemed of the like authority with the former by our forefathers, because there hath not been an exact succession of prophets since that time; and how firmly we have given credit to these books of our own nation is evident by what we do; for during so many ages as have already passed, no one has been so bold as either to add any thing to them, to take any thing from them, or to make any change in them; but it is become natural to all Jews immediately, and from their very birth, to esteem these books to contain Divine doctrines, and to persist in them, and, if occasion be willingly to die for them.[47]

In light of the Jamnia theory, it is significant to note that Josephus sets the chronological boundaries of Holy Scripture from 'the time of Moses till the reign of Artaxerxes king of Persia.' This fits in with the tradition that Ezra, the priestly scribe who accompanied the returned exiles from Babylon during the reign of Artaxerxes, wrote some of the Holy Writings (*i.e.,* Chronicles) and annotated/collated the rest. To Josephus, then, as to probably most first-century Jews (including, probably, the rabbis of Jamnia), the Holy Writings that would become the Christian's Old Testament were established as 'canon' some five centuries before Christ. The fact that Josephus names

[47] Josephus, *Against Apion* 1.8 Josephus, Against Apion Book I (earlyjewishwritings.com). Accessed 29July2024.

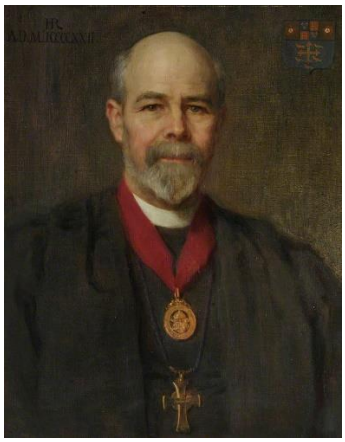
twenty-two books, instead of the thirty-nine books of the Christian Old Testament, is not significant, as he would have counted the double books – I & II Samuel, I & II Kings, etc. – as single, Ruth as attached to Judges, Esther to Nehemiah, Lamentations to Jeremiah, and the twelve Minor Prophets as one scroll.

The period of inspiration according to Josephus is also significant as to its reason – 'there hath not been an exact succession of prophets since that time.' This statement does indicate a Jewish doctrine of inspiration, since it was uniformly held that the God of Israel spoke to and through His prophets.

> *Surely the Lord GOD does nothing,*
> *Unless He reveals His secret to His servants the prophets.*
> *A lion has roared! Who will not fear?*
> *The Lord GOD has spoken! Who can but prophesy?* (Amos 3:7-8)

This view of the necessity of the regular and successive prophetic ministry for the authentication of Scripture continued as the basis of canonicity within the Jewish rabbinic community long after Josephus and long after Jamnia. "In the Babylonian Talmud, completed by about A.D. 550, we read, 'Our Rabbis taught: Since the death of the last prophets, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, the Holy Spirit departed from Israel,' so that inspiration was thought to have ceased long before the beginning of the Christian era."[48]

The point of this analysis into the canon of the Old Testament is to show that the idea of inspiration - of 'canon,' though that is a later word – is nebulous and fluid. Modern rationalist thinking, denying the miraculous of divine revelation, demands the religious act of an authoritative council of synod declaring that these books are 'Scripture' and those are not. The modern effort to rationalize 'Holy' writings was led by H. E. Ryle, the liberal Anglican bishop of Exeter and son of


Herbert E. Ryle (1856-1925)

[48] Newman, Robert C. "The Council of Jamnia and the Old Testament Canon" *The Westminster Theological Journal* Spring 1976; 320.

J. C. Ryle. Ryle adhered to the history of religions school and considered the Hebrew Scriptures to be the product of religious evolution. He "distinguishes three canons corresponding to the three sections in the Talmud: the first is the Law, finally fixed shortly before 432 BC; the next is the Law and the Prophets, established by 200 BC…and the last is the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings as we have them today, which canon was practically completed before 100 BC, but not officially recognized until about AD 100."[49] This is rationalism, pure and simple; the denial of inspiration and the Enlightenment conclusion that the Scriptures could only have been the product of human religion, evolving over time. "Denying that claims of God's miraculous intervention in the inspiration of such books are subject to historical investigation, this view sees the canonicity of the Old Testament merely as the result of a belief in inspiration which grew up around each book in the centuries after its publication."[50] Ryle, like the generality of his colleagues in the 19th Century, approached the issue from the perspective of what 'could not be' – that is, a God who actually communicates verbally with man, rather than interacting with either the biblical documents themselves or, perhaps more importantly, the extant writings of those Jews and Christians who believed those documents to be the oracles of God.

One of this latter groups was Rabbi Jochanan ben Zakkai, who we met earlier. Jochanon is credited with a phrase, generated in a debate with some Sadducees regarding the inspiration of a particular book, that sheds tremendous light on the concept of inspiration in the Second Temple Period. That phrase is: "defiles the hands." The question put in regard to a particular writing is whether or not it 'defiles the hands.' In other words, does the reading of the book make one's hand unclean? On the face of it, this sound like there is something wrong with the book, that it would 'defile' one's hands by the touch. But a closer understanding of the laws of clean and unclean reveals that the hands are defiled *because the book is holy*, or, in other words, inspired by God's Holy Spirit. The defilement does not derive from the object touched but by the fact that the

[49] Newman, 321. The reference to AD 100 is to the approximate date of the 'Council' of Jamnia, which Ryle accepted as both valid and authoritative within the Jewish community.
[50] *Idem.*

person touching it is unholy, the act of touching a holy thing renders the person unclean and necessitates ritual cleansing. "These books that we would call canonical or scriptural were held by the rabbis to confer uncleanness on the hands of those touching them."[51] This issue is dealt with in the Mishnah, a collection of rabbinic teaching and case law judgments dating from the late 2nd Century and probably reflecting the views of men like Rabbi Jochanan of Jabneh. Yadaim 4.6 does recall a famous argument between Jochanan and some Sadducees in Jerusalem.

> The Sadducees say, 'We cry out against you, O ye Pharisees, for ye say, 'the Holy Scriptures render the hands unclean' [and] 'The writings of Hamiram[52] do not render the hands unclean.' Rabban Johanan b. Zakkai said, Have we naught against the Pharisees save this! – for lo, they say, 'The bones of an ass are clean, and the bones of Johanan the High Priest are unclean.' The said to him, As is our love for them so is their uncleanness – that no man make spoons of the bones of his father or mother. He said to them, Even so the Holy Scriptures: as is our love to them so is their uncleanness; [whereas] the writings of Hamiram which are held in no account do not render the hands unclean.[53]

This statement is about as clear as most of the Mishnah, meaning not very; the logic is circular and not very convincing. Jochanan measures the 'uncleanness' – the *canonicity* – of a book by the measure of his love for it, which is a very meager yardstick. But worse, he would undoubtedly say that his love for the book *is due to* its having been inspired by God, its being holy. Circular and subjective reasoning aside, Jochanan's response does illustrate the canonical issues regarding the Hebrew Scriptures during and after the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70. In short, there was general agreement as to which books 'rendered the hands unclean,' at least among the Pharisaic sect that tended to constitute the rabbinic schools. Yet even with this general consensus there was disagreement, not so much in terms of books 'outside' the canon being added in as to book within the canon that were suspect. "Among the books for which we have rabbinical discussions of canonicity none is more prominent than Ecclesiastes. Next in frequency

[51] Newman; 337.
[52] Widely considered to be an Aramaic or Hebrew transliteration of the ancient Greek writer, Homer, or possibly a more general reference to the 'books of the heretics.'
[53] Mishnah, translated by Herbert Danby, *Yadaim 4.6* (Oxford: Oxford University Press; 1985); 784.

of discussion is Song of Songs. Several others are discussed in a single passage (though not necessarily only once in rabbinic history): Ruth, Esther, Proverbs, and Ezekiel."[54]

This historical situation shows that two seemingly incompatible ideas coexisted among the rabbis: first, a devout view regarding the sanctity and inspiration of Scripture – that which 'rendered the hands unclean' – and second, a vigorous debate as to the inclusion of what are today considered mainstream biblical books into that category of Scripture. One might understand the questions surrounding such books as Esther, in which the name of God is not mentioned even once, or of Ruth, considering she was a Moabitess, or Song of Solomon because, well, it is a bit strange; but Ezekiel? Proverbs? There does not appear to be any point in rabbinic history when the final list of canonical books was 'authoritatively' pronounced; not at Jamnia nor anywhere else. Yet the average orthodox Jew, and certainly the rabbis, *knew* those books – settled, according to Josephus, from the time of Ezra – that were 'in,' with the ongoing debate always centered on whether some books that were 'in' should be 'out,' never that some that were 'out' should be 'in.' The process was by no means as straightforward as modern scholars assume; no councils, no authoritative pronouncements by priest or king as to which books 'defiled the hands' and which did not. Lee Martin McDonald summarizes the history of the canon of the Hebrew Scriptures accurately: "There is considerable fluidity throughout the history of the Hebrew Bible, from its development, when the primary story that gave rise to the Jewish people was transmitted initially by memory, to the time when no other books were seriously considered for inclusion."[55]


Lee Martin McDonald (*b.* 1942)

The testimony of the New Testament writers confirms both the sanctity and the vagueness of the Jewish perspective on Holy Scripture during the Second Temple period. For instance, Jesus Himself refers to the Hebrew Scriptures under the threefold divi-

[54] Newman; 336.
[55] McDonald, Lee Martin "Fluidity in the Early Formation of the Hebrew Bible" *Hebrew Studies*, Vol. 61 (2020); 73.

sion so often found in rabbinic and later biblical writings, "*Then He said to them, 'These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me. And He opened their understanding, that they might comprehend the Scriptures.'*"[56] With the slight variation of listing the Psalms, this is the 'TaNaKh,' the *Torah* or Law, the *Nevi'im* or Prophets, and the *Ketuvim* or Writings. This threefold division of what Jesus immediately calls 'Scripture,' has a tremendous amount of history behind it. The problem, though, is that it is not always used and, worse, the same books are not put in the same categories by different writers. Jesus Himself had just before, on the road to Emmaus, reasoned with the doubting and distressed disciples, "*beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.*"[57]

The threefold division of Law, Prophets, and Writings does not break out in any standard form. Josephus, for instance, in his diatribe against Apion, notes the five books of Moses, the 'Pentateuch,' but then delineates thirteen books of the prophets, with the remaining four (of his total of twenty-two), "contain hymns to God, and precepts for the conduct of human life."[58] Books that to modern readers appear to be historical narrative – Joshua and Judges, for example – are consistently listed among the Prophets, whereas an undeniably prophetic book, Daniel, is contained among the Writings. The modern Hebrew Bible ends with II Chronicles, but it is evident that this is incorrect, as the book ends abruptly with a passage that is then repeated almost verbatim in the opening verses of Ezra (a book that was often included with Chronicles in the enumeration of the Hebrew Scriptures).

II Chronicles 36:23

Thus says Cyrus king of Persia:
All the kingdoms of the earth the LORD God of heaven has given me. And He has commanded me to build Him a house at Jerusalem which is in Judah. Who is among you of all His people? May

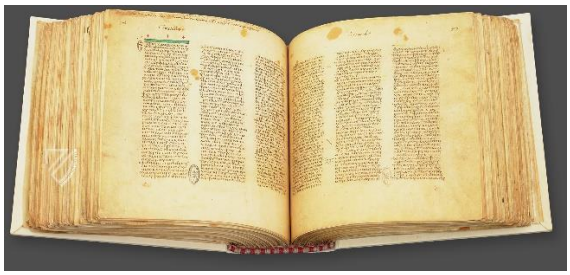
Ezra 1:2-3

Thus says Cyrus king of Persia:
All the kingdoms of the earth the LORD God of heaven has given me. And He has commanded me to build Him a house at Jerusalem which is in Judah. Who is among you of all His

[56] Luke 24:44-45
[57] Luke 24:27
[58] See above, page 35.

the LORD his God be with him, and let him go up!

people? May his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem which is in Judah, and build the house of the LORD God of Israel (He is God), which is in Jerusalem.



Codex Vaticanus (*ca*. 4th Century AD)

The order of books in the Hebrew Bible did not take on much significance in the era of scrolls, as each scroll was an individual book or part of a book (or several books, as with the Minor Prophets which were typically included on one scroll). The codex, or bound assemblage of various individual books and direct ancestor of the modern book, did not make an appearance until the first century before Christ. At the time the codex was a novelty and apparently no one considered that it would be helpful, much less necessary, to keep the order of the scrolls consistent as they were transformed into a bound codex. The lack of consistency in the ordering of the books of the Hebrew Scriptures seems to justify Roger Beckwith's comment, "The term 'canon,' when applied to the collection of books and not to the list, expressed the vital fact that the books rightly included in the collection form a 'rule' for the faith and practice of God's people."[59]

F. F. Bruce (1910-90)

The word 'canon' is a transliteration of the Greek word *kanōn* (κανων) which means a 'rod' or 'measuring stick,' a common method for measuring length and distance in the ancient world. From the straightness and set measurement of the rod, the word came to mean a 'standard,' which is how it is used with reference to Scripture. In the history of the struggle over which books are to be included and which are to be excluded, the word 'canon' has come to represent an authorized list of books deemed to be inspired. F. F. Bruce gives the classic modern view of the term. "In a Christian context, we might define the word as 'the list of the

[59] Beckwith, Roger *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; 1985); 65.

writings acknowledged by the Church as documents of the divine revelation.'"[60] This definition betrays Bruce's traditionalist ecclesiology, as he assigned the Church as the authoritative determiner of canonicity. This is the same reasoning that assigns the determination of the canon of the Old Testament, the Hebrew Scriptures, to the 'Synod' of Jamnia, an event that most contemporary scholars agree never happened, at least not in the sense of later, Church 'synods.'

The history of the New Testament canon is no less lacking in authoritative councils or synods than that of the Old. In the 2nd Century, Marcion (*c.* 85 – 160) challenged the Christian community to consider its 'canon' by dismissing the Old Testament and most of the New, with the exception of the Pauline corpus. "Marcion is the first person known to us who published a fixed collection of what we should call New Testament books. Others may have done so before him; if so, we have no knowledge of them. He rejected the Old Testament, as having no relevance or authority for Christians; his collection was therefore designed to be a complete Bible…Not only did Marcion regard Paul as the only faithful apostle of Christ, he maintained that the original apostles had corrupted their Master's teaching with an admixture of legalism. Not only did he reject the Old Testament, he distinguished the God of the Old Testament from the God of the New."[61] Such an attack on both the Hebrew Scriptures and the majority of the 1st Century writings already considered authoritative almost uniformly within the Christian community, could not go unanswered. Marcion's views motivated a bevy of 'lists' from the 2nd through the 4th Centuries, setting forth the 'catholic' perspective on canon.

Contemporary with Marcion, Melito, bishop of Sardis (d *c.* AD 180), confirmed the authority and value of the Hebrew Scriptures to the Christian community by listing his enumeration in a letter to a friend. Again, the exact number of his list differs from others due largely to the habit of combining some of the books that are now listed separately in our Old Testaments.

[60] Bruce, F. F. *The Canon of Scripture* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press; 1988); 17.
[61] Bruce; 134-35.

> Having learned accurately the books of the old covenant, I set them down and have sent them to you. These are their names: Five books of Moses – Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, Leviticus, Deuteronomy. Joshua, the son of Nun, Judges, Ruth, four books of Kingdoms, two books of Chronicles. The Psalms of David, the Proverbs of Solomon (also called Wisdom), Ecclesiastes, the Song of Songs, Job. The Prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, the Twelve in a single book, Daniel, Ezekiel Esdras.[62]


Muratori (1672-1750)

Also contemporary with Marcion is the Muratorian Fragment, dated to around AD 170 and named for the priest and historian Ludovico Antonio Muratori, who discovered the fragment in the Ambrosian Library in Milan and published it in 1740. The fragment makes no reference to Marion, but it is only a fragment; the content of the rest of the document, and therefore the context of what we have extant, is lost. The list is very similar to our current New Testament, but with some interesting differences, again showing the fluidity of the process. The list begins with the Gospel of Luke, but this is probably because the first two gospels, Matthew and Mark, are contained in the portion of the document that is torn away.[63] The Gospel of John is followed by the Acts of the Apostles, then by the Pauline Epistles from Romans to Philemon, in the order that we now find them. Hebrews, James, I & II Peter, and at least II & III John are missing; I John is listed as a 'probable' due to the corruption of the document. Oddly for the time, both Jude and the Apocalypse of John are on the list, and the author included the apocryphal works, the Apocalypse of Peter and the Wisdom of Solomon. The *Shepherd of Hermas*, considered canonical by other 2nd Century writers, is rejected in the fragment as being ineligible due to its recent date. The compiler's reasoning provides some indication of what constituted 'canonicity' in the post-apostolic Church.

[62] Melito, Bishop of Sardis, *Letter to Onesimus*. Nicene and Ante-Nicene Fathers, Ser. II, Vol I: The Church History of Eusebius.: Chapter XXVI (sacred-texts.com). Accessed 01August2024.
[63] This is almost certainly the case as the writer refers to Luke as 'the third book of the gospel.'

> But Hermas wrote the Shepherd very recently, in our times, in the city of Rome, while bishop Pius, his brother, was occupying the [episcopal] chair of the church of the city of Rome. And therefore it ought indeed to be read; but it cannot be read publicly to the people in church either among the Prophets, whose number is complete, or among the Apostles, for it is after [their] time. [64]

This passage indicates two very strong perspectives on canonicity as early as the mid-2nd Century. The first, that the prophetic voice had been silenced, much as the uniform rabbinic opinion held it to be after the days of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. As Peter notes in his second epistle, divine Scripture is a *prophetic* function, not merely a matter of religious inspiration or ecstasy.

> *For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For He received from God the Father honor and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain. And so we have the* ***prophetic word*** *confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; knowing this first, that no* ***prophecy of Scripture*** *is of any private [j]interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but [k]holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.* (II Peter 1:16-21)

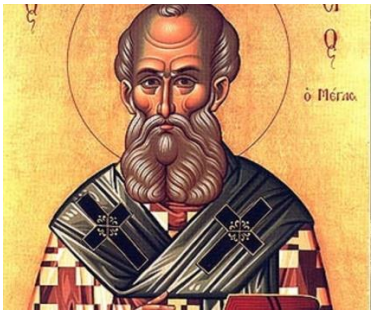
It is a very narrow view that interprets Peter's words as referring only to *messianic* prophecies in the Old Testament. While it is indeed possible to read the phrase "*prophecy of Scripture*" as 'prophecies that are in Scripture,' it is also grammatically correct to read it as 'prophecy, that is, Scripture,' and this latter view is how the early Church considered not only the Scriptures of the Old Testament, but those writings that were forming the New Testament. But by the middle of the 2nd Century it was widely considered that the spirit of prophecy had again ceased. This would, of course, fit in well with the opening lines of the letter to the Hebrews.

> *God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son…* (Hebrews 1:1-2a)

[64] The Muratorian Fragment (earlychristianwritings.com). Accessed 01August2024.

The second important criterion alluded to in the Muratorian fragment is the concept of *apostolicity*. The Shepherd, while a worthy brother whose writing is well worth study, is not an apostle, nor is he the legate or companion of an apostle, "nor among the Apostles, for he is after their time." In an interesting note relative to the modern usage of creeds and confessions in Reformed liturgy, it seems apparent that the early Church distinguished between one's private reading and that which was permissible in the corporate worship setting. Of the *Shepherd,* the fragment notes, "it ought indeed to be read; but it cannot be read publicly to the people in church." Public reading of Scripture, as enjoined by Paul to Timothy (I Tim. 4:13) seems in the Muratorian fragment to be limited to the Prophets and the Apostles. The former most likely has reference to the Hebrew Scriptures, though it could also apply to those who were known to be prophets in the early Church. The latter must refer to the disciples of Jesus Christ whose writings would form the New Testament. What is significant for this study in canonicity is the fact that such distinctions among writings was acknowledged in the early Church, without the authoritative stamp of council or synod.

The high point of New Testament canonization is ascribed almost universally to the 4th Century Alexandrian scholar Athanasius, the defender of the full deity of Jesus Christ against Arius at the Council of Nicæa in AD 325. Athanasius went on to serve a long and tumultuous session as bishop of Alexandria, from which position he wrote an annual encyclical setting the date for the next Easter. In one of these festal letters, in AD 367, Athanasius sets out a list of canonical books from both the Old and the New Testaments, being "the first writer known to us who listed exactly the twenty-seven books which traditionally make up the New Testament in catholic and orthodox Christianity, without marking any distinction among them."[65] He did not, however, list the New Testament books in the order that has become standard in Christian Bibles of all denominations, placing Hebrews within the Pauline corpus, between II Thessalonians


Athanasius (296-373)

[65] Bruce; 209.

and I Timothy. He also places the General Epistles between the Acts of the Apostles and the Pauline epistles.

> Again it is not tedious to speak of the [books] of the New Testament. These are, the four Gospels, according to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Afterwards, the Acts of the Apostles and Epistles (called Catholic), seven, viz. of James, one; of Peter, two; of John, three; after these, one of Jude. In addition, there are fourteen Epistles of Paul, written in this order. The first, to the Romans; then two to the Corinthians; after these, to the Galatians; next, to the Ephesians; then to the Philippians; then to the Colossians; after these, two to the Thessalonians, and that to the Hebrews; and again, two to Timothy; one to Titus; and lastly, that to Philemon. And besides, the Revelation of John.[66]

Similar to the Muratorian fragment, Athanasius also takes on other writings that were viewed as canonical by some, even many, in the Church. To the *Shepherd of Hermas*, Athanasius adds *The Teaching of the Twelve* (aka 'Didache'), the *Wisdom of Solomon*, and several other well known also rans, while roundly condemning the balance of the apocryphal writings as heretical.

> But for greater exactness I add this also, writing of necessity; that there are other books besides these not indeed included in the Canon, but appointed by the Fathers to be read by those who newly join us, and who wish for instruction in the word of godliness. The Wisdom of Solomon, and the Wisdom of Sirach, and Esther, and Judith, and Tobit, and that which is called the Teaching of the Apostles, and the Shepherd. But the former, my brethren, are included in the Canon, the latter being [merely] read; nor is there in any place a mention of apocryphal writings. But they are an invention of heretics, who write them when they choose, bestowing upon them their approbation, and assigning to them a date, that so, using them as ancient writings, they may find occasion to lead astray the simple.[67]

Athanasius does not develop his criteria of canonicity via any mention of Prophets or Apostles, he merely speaks of the canon as 'fountains of salvation,' whereas other writings, by implication, are not. This is a very inexact measure which is not amenable

[66] Athanasius, *Easter Letter AD 367*. Athanasius: Easter Letter of A. D. 367 | Page 1 of 1 (scrollpublishing.com). Accessed 03August2024.
[67] *Idem.*

to modern rationalism, yet appears to be the historical reality of canonicity for both the writings of the Hebrew Scriptures and those of the Christian New Testament.

> These are fountains of salvation, that they who thirst may be satisfied with the living words they contain. In these alone is proclaimed the doctrine of godliness. Let no man add to these, neither let him take ought from these. For concerning these the Lord put to shame the Sadducees, and said, 'Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures.' And He reproved the Jews, saying, 'Search the Scriptures, for these are they that testify of Me.'[68]

Athanasius did not 'authorize' the canon of the New Testament; he merely listed those writings that were 'catholic,' or universal within the Church. But his list did not command universal support, especially with reference to the Apocalypse of John, which was rejected by many, and the Pauline authorship of Hebrews, which was doubted by many. Contrary to many modern rationalists, the canon of the New Testament was determined by an authoritative statement of the Church – whether by Bishop or Council – to no greater extent than the 'Synod' of Jamnia had determined the canon of the Hebrew Scriptures. Early councils of the Church did not deal with the issue of canon at all; not until the Council of Laodicea in AD 363 was a list presented among the decisions of the council. It is interesting, however, that the list of New Testament books is presented as the last entry of the Council of Laodicea, leading many scholars to consider it a later addition perhaps influenced by Athanasius' festal letter of AD 367. In any event, the conciliar list omits the Apocalypse. Later councils would include the Apocalypse but place Hebrews outside the Pauline corpus, as it is in our modern Bibles. In all, however, it is evident that these councils were not *determining* the canon of Scripture as much as *acknowledging* those books long recognized as inspired.

> Not until the middle of the 4th cent. was it considered necessary for any general pronouncements on the subject of the canon to be made at church councils. It did not happen, in fact, until nearly three centuries of church usage had virtually fixed the canon. In spite of the variety of churches, subjected as they were to different influences and each exercising independent judgment regarding the separate books, the area of common agreement was remarkable. It may have been some considerable time before the matter

[68] *Idem.*

> of the inclusion of the minor Catholic epistles and the Apocalypse was settled, but the cautious way in which these books were received is a fitting testimony to the vigilance of the churches. There is a list affixed to the canons of the Council of Laodicea (A.D. 363), although it has been suggested that the list may have been added later. It contains all the books except the Apocalypse. It is this omission that distinguishes it from the list in Athanasius' Easter letter. Thirty years later the Council of Hippo in Africa agreed to a list identical with that of Athanasius. At Carthage four years after that (A.D. 397) another canonical list was agreed upon which comprised all the NT books. Augustine was present at this council. It should be noted that in this list there was reluctance to class Hebrews as written by Paul. This council marks the fixing of the NT canon until the time of the Reformation, when certain problems concerning it were reopened. But during the Middle Ages there are hints here and there of questionings.[69]

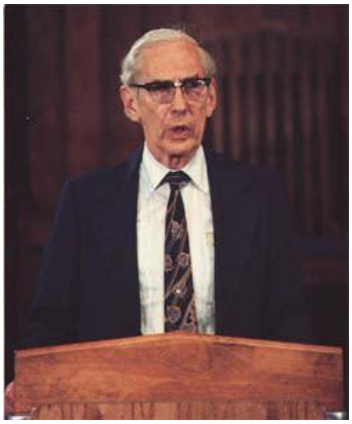

Martin Luther (1483-1546)

The situation of the New Testament canon remained quiescent through most of the Middle Ages but erupted again at the time of the Protestant Reformation. Martin Luther famously labeled James, 'an epistle of straw.' In the table of contents of his German translation of the Bible, Luther listed the standard twenty-seven books of the New Testament, but kept four of them noticeably separated at the bottom: The Epistles of Hebrews, James, and Jude as well as the Apocalypse of John. The other books are numbered, 1 through 23; these four do not have numbers, clearly indicating Luther's doubts as to their place in the canon. Luther's perspective is somewhat unique in the history of the canon, as he establishes a two-tiered New Testament with twenty-three 'upper tier' and four 'lower tier' books. Up to this point, the general view was either in or out – a book was part of the canon or it was not. As noted above, Athanasius made no distinction among the twenty-seven New Testament writings he considered canonical. Luther's treatment of the four 'lower tier' books illustrates the continuation of the relative ambiguity that has historically been associated with both the 'canon' (remembering that the word was not used until the 4th Century) of the Hebrew Scriptures and the writings of the New Testament. While accepting the whole in generality, there seemed to be no qualms among both rabbis and

[69] The Canon of the New Testament - Encyclopedia of The Bible - Bible Gateway. Accessed 03August2024.

reformers in questioning this or that book individually. By what criteria, then, may we say that James is canonical and the Didache is not?

R. Laird Harris, in his excellent text *Inspiration and Canonicity of the Scriptures*, provides a very thorough historical survey of the material briefly recounted in this lesson. From this survey, Harris concludes that the fundamental criterion for canonicity for both the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament writings was the recognized authority of their authors, recognized, that is, as coming directly from God. "The view of the determining principle of the canon expressed previously may be summarized by saying that the canonicity of a book of the Bible depends upon its authorship. If the book was in the Old Testament, the people of the day accepted it because it was written by a prophet. If it was a part of the New Testament, it was recognized as inspired if it had been written by an apostle – either by himself or with the help of an understudy or amanuensis."[70] Harris' view is standard among Reformed scholars, but it suffers from the same lack of direct historical evidence as pretty much all other theories. In a word, there are no explicit statements that this or that book of either Testament is to be received as canonical simply because it was written by a prophet or an apostle. Even Peter's attestation concerning the writings of Paul do not put the cart in front of the horse: Paul's writings are not claimed to be Scripture because Paul was an apostle, they are simply declared to be among the rest of Scripture on other, though recognizable, grounds.


R. Laird Harris (1911-2008)

> *Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless; and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation – as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures.* (II Peter 3:14-16)

[70] Harris, R. Laird *Inspiration and Canonicity of the Scriptures* (Greenville, SC: A Press; 1995); 285.

Harris gives a fair amount of space to another theory of canonicity, though ultimately rejecting it as insufficient. This theory is the 'inward testimony of the Holy Spirit.' Harris maintains that this inner testimony is sufficient to attest to Scripture as a whole, but insufficient to decide the fate of individual books. He argues that the theory, popularized by John Calvin at the time of the Reformation, was largely a reaction against the Roman Catholic view that the canon exists by the authority of the Church. Harris quotes Calvin copiously, showing that while the Genevan Reformer did indeed counter the Romish view of ecclesiastical authority, he also developed the testimony of the Spirit on independent grounds.

> …the testimony of the Spirit is more excellent than all reason. For as God alone is a fit witness of himself in his Word, so also the Word will not find acceptance in men's hearts before it is sealed by the inward testimony of the Spirit. The same Spirit, therefore, who has spoken through the mouths of the prophets must penetrate into our hearts to persuade us that they faithfully proclaimed what had been divinely commanded.[71]

The French Confession of 1559, influenced by Calvin, expresses this sentiment in no uncertain terms.

> We know these books to be canonical, and the sure rule of our faith, no so much by the common accord and consent of the Church, as by the testimony and inward illumination of the Holy Spirit, which enables us to distinguish these from other ecclesiastical books upon which, however useful, we cannot found any article of faith.[72]

Harris, after quoting Reformed luminaries and confessions in support of Calvin's perspective, ultimately rejects it on the ground that the Bible nowhere explicitly states that canonicity is derived from inward spiritual witness. But it is also nowhere stated in the Bible that canonicity required authorship by either a prophet or an apostle. Ezra was a scribe, not a prophet; the book of Hebrews is assigned to the apostle Paul only on the basis of apostolicity as a requirement for canonicity, on internal evidence it could not have been written by Paul. Mark and Luke, neither of whom were apostles, are jus-

[71] Calvin, John *Institutes of the Christian Religion: Volume I*, (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press; 1960); I.VII.4; 79.
[72] Schaff, Philip *The Creeds of Christendom* (New York: Harper & Brothers; 1919); 361-62.

tified on the basis of being closely associated with an apostle: Peter for Mark, and Paul for Luke, though there is no evidence that either gospel writer composed his work either under the auspices, much less the direction of, their respective apostle.

Harris succumbs to the basic modernist and rationalist need (though he was neither a modernist nor strictly a rationalist) to define canonicity in at least quasi-scientific terms. In this way, as modern evidentialist apologetics go, the believer may be able to convince the unbeliever of the divine origin and inspiration of Christianity's holy writings. But the overwhelming testimony of canonical history declares all such rationalistic attempts to define and describe the canon to be failures, their insufficiency differing only in degree from one another. Calvin is surely correct when he rejects this apologetic approach to Scripture, asserting instead (and again) the prior necessity of regeneration.

> Therefore Scripture will ultimately suffice for a saving knowledge of God only when its certainty is founded upon the inward persuasion of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, these human testimonies which exist to confirm it will not be vain if, as secondary aids to our feebleness, they follow that chief and highest testimony. But those who wish to prove to unbelievers that Scripture is the Word of God are acting foolishly, for only by faith can this be known.[73]

Thus it is critical in the pursuit of Biblical (or any other) theology that we resist even evangelical rationalism, neglecting the essential role of the Holy Spirit to illuminate the Word of God to our understanding, whether in individual passages or the broad scope of revelation. Brevard Childs is certainly correct when he says, "The Christian doctrine of the role of the Holy Spirit is not a hermeneutical principle, but that divine reality itself who makes understanding of God possible."[74]

[73] Calvin, *Institutes*, I.VII.13; 92.
[74] Childs; 87.

Lesson 4 – Biblical vs. Systematic Theology
Text: II Peter 1:16–21; 3:15-16

"To let the image of God's self-revelation in the Scriptures mirror itself as fully and clearly as possible to his mind, is the first and most important duty of every theologian."
(Geerhardus Vos)


Archibald Alexander (1772-1851)

In his inaugural address as the newly appointed (and first) professor of Biblical Theology at Princeton Theological Seminary, Geerhardus Vos gave an apologetic for Biblical Theology itself, in distinction and defense of Systematic Theology. He has his task cut out for him, as Princeton in the late-19th and early 20th Centuries had acquired a reputation for dogmatic excellence within the Reformed Tradition. This tradition began in the year of the seminary's founding, 1812, with the appointment of Archibald Alexander as the professor of Systematic Theology. Alexander was succeeded by his former student, Charles Hodge, whose three-volume *Systematic Theology* has been a standard of Reformed Theology for over a hundred years. But to show just what sort of institution Vos was breaking into, Hodge was succeeded by his son, *Archibald Alexander* Hodge. Surely Vos was facing a tough audience as he tried to justify the new chair in Biblical Theology at Princeton. One can hear Vos' trepidation,

> Although not a new study, yet Biblical Theology is a new chair, in this Seminary; and this fact has determined the choice of the subject on which I purpose to address you. Under ordinary circumstances, the treatment of some special subject of investigation would have been more appropriate, and perhaps more interesting to you, than a discussion of general principles. But Biblical Theology being a recent arrival in the Seminary curriculum and having been entrusted to my special care and keeping, I consider it my duty to introduce to you this branch of theological science, and to describe, in general terms at least, its nature and the manner in which I hope to teach it.[75]

[75] Vos, *Redemptive History*; 3-4.

Certainly one source of Vos' concern, other than the hallowed reputation of his new school in the realm of Systematic Theology, would have been the fact that the modern version of Biblical Theology, indeed the only historical version called by that name, originated in Germany in the 18th Century, as we have seen in an earlier chapter (*cp.* p. 8). J. P. Gabler, the 'father' of modern Biblical Theology, was himself the first professor of that subject at the University of Altdorf, and his inaugural address foreshadows that of Vos at Princeton a little over a hundred years later. By the late 19th Century, however, the liberal reputation of German theology, including that of Gabler, was deeply suspect by American Reformed scholars, one of the last bastions in Protestant Christianity against the tide of liberal higher criticism. As we have seen earlier, Gabler's unfortunate definition of Biblical Theology played into the hands of unbelieving higher critics, and was eventually fodder for the History of Religions School, all of which both Geerhardus Vos and his colleagues at Princeton would have anathematized. Gabler insisted on a thoroughly objective, historical approach to Biblical Theology, an approach that neutered biblical study with respect to the development of dogmatics. James Barr summarizes Gabler's perspective: "Doctrinal (in his words dogmatic) theology was didactic and philosophical: it taught what was to be believed. While doctrinal theology used the Bible and depended on it, it had to be influenced also by other factors, such as philosophy and church tradition. Biblical theology was historical; it concerned what the biblical authors in their own time believed."[76] This was in keeping with the prevailing, Enlightenment divorce of history from reason – Lessing's ugly ditch – but resulted in a view of Biblical Theology that was little more than antiquarian literary analysis. Vos certainly did not share Gabler's approach.


James Barr (1924-2006)

Yet Vos was not untouched by the Rationalism that flowed from the Enlightenment into the Church, even the Reformed branch of the Church. He takes pains in his address to establish Biblical Theology as a *science*, something that theologians of his era

[76] Barr, James *The Concept of Biblical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press; 1999); 62.

were desperate to do, as Theology, once the Queen of Sciences, had been demoted in many instances to little more than a chambermaid in the universities. Early in his address Vos states,

> Every discussion of what is to be understood by Biblical Theology ought to proceed from a clear understanding of what Theology is in general. Etymology, in many cases a safer guide than *a priori* constructions, tells us that Theology is *knowledge concerning God*, and this primitive definition is fully supported by encyclopedic principles. Only when making Theology knowledge concerning God do we have the right to call it a separate science…As in general science is bound by its object and must let itself be shaped by reality; so likewise the classification of sciences, the relation of the various members in the body of universal knowledge, has to follow the great lines by which God has mapped out the immense field of the universe.[77]

Vos was, of course, 'preaching to the choir' as he spoke to his fellow faculty members at Princeton, though the taint of liberalism was beginning to enter even that august institution. Where Vos shined in his address was in his assertion that there is no other reliable data concerning the 'knowledge of God' than the divine self-revelation in the Bible, the object of Biblical Theology. "Here it is God who takes the first step to approach man for the purpose of disclosing His nature, nay, who creates man in order the He may have a finite mind able to receive the knowledge of His infinite perfections…Strictly speaking, therefore, we should say that not God in and for Himself, but God in so far as He has revealed Himself, is the object of Theology."[78] Without specifically addressing the phenomenon, Vos tacitly rejected the concept of 'Natural Theology' that had been so influential among Enlightenment thinkers, the idea that nature itself bore infallible witness to 'Nature's God.' Nature does indeed bear testimony to it Creator, as Paul clearly establishes in Romans 1, but its witness is incomplete, suitable only to render man 'without excuse.'

> *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because what may be known of God*

[77] *Ibid.*; 4
[78] *Ibid.*; 5. Vos does not explain how the 'infinite perfections' of God can be understand by a creature with 'a finite mind,' but this was a speech, and orators have been known to say things that sound good but are not quite clear.

> *is [e]manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.* (Romans 1:18-21)

In his textbook, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments*, Vos sets out his view of the 'science' of Theology existing in four major branches of study: "The usual treatment of Theology distinguishes four departments, which are names Exegetical Theology, Historical Theology, Systematic Theology and Practical Theology."[79] Vos' career was an effort to introduce Biblical Theology into this common scheme, placing it within Exegetical Theology, which he defines as dealing "with God under the aspect of Revealer of Himself and Author of the Scriptures It is naturally divided into two parts, of which the one treats of the formation of the Scriptures, the other of the actual revelation of God lying back of this process."[80] Historical Theology dealing with the development of dogma within the Church, and Practical Theology pertaining primarily to homiletics (preaching) and ethics, Exegetical Theology (and Biblical Theology within it) was left facing off primarily against Systematic Theology – as it was in Gabler's day, it remained in Vos'.

It may be a provocative way of putting the contrast between Biblical Theology and Systematic Theology to say that the former is an act of God, the latter an act of man, but, properly explained, the contrast has merit. For starters, *both* theological studies are performed by men and are therefore fallible. Both deal in classification – Biblical Theology by *themes*; Systematic Theology by *categories* or *doctrines*, and these acts of classification are done by men. Still, Biblical Theology, dealing as it does with the actual self-disclosure of God in the Scriptures, is oriented closer to revelation as an act of God. Systematic Theology, the classification of revelation into dogmatic categories, is not a direct product of Scripture but rather an academic, though valuable, work of man. Systematic

[79] Vos, *Biblical Theology*; 4.
[80] Vos, *Redemptive History*; 6.

Theology produces the *pattern of sound words* that Paul admonishes Timothy to hold fast.[81] Vos succinctly contrasts the two studies,

> The specific character of Biblical Theology lies in this, that it discusses both the form and contents of revelation from the point of view of the revealing activity of God Himself. In other words, it deals with revelation in the active sense, as an act of God, and tries to understand and trace and describe this act, so far as this is possible to man and does not elude our finite observations In Biblical Theology both the form and contents of revelation are considered as parts and products of a divine work. In Systematic Theology these same contents of revelation appear, but not under the aspect of the stages of a divine work; rather as the material for a human work of classifying and systematizing according to logical principles. Biblical Theology applies no other method of grouping and arranging these contents than is given in the divine economy of revelation itself.[82]

This is a concise and accurate statement, but it should be unpacked as its brevity might lead to misunderstanding and undervaluing Systematic Theology as a 'human work.' The purpose of Systematic Theology is to place the revelation of Scripture into logical categories, *patterns of sound words*, primarily for the purpose of teaching. Systematic Theology leads to catechisms, creeds, and confessions, statements of 'what we believe.' This process, in Theology no less than Biology or Chemistry, must follow some logical presupposition as to the framework of classification, especially as the data is not biological or mineral, but the living Word of God. "The simple fact that it is the task of Systematic Theology to reproduce revealed truth in such form, shows that it does not possess this form from the beginning. The self-revelation of God is a work covering ages, proceeding in a sequence of revealing words and acts, appearing in a long perspective of time. The truth comes in the form of growing truth, not truth at rest."[83] One way of looking at the matter is that the Systematic theologian looks at the Bible as a finished product, the entirety of the canon of Old and New Testament completed, whereas the Biblical theologian seeks to trace the progressive nature of divine revela-

[81] II Timothy 1:13
[82] Vos, *Redemptive History*; 6-7.
[83] *Ibid.*; 7.

tion through the Bible as a historical act of God. It will be argued in this study that the latter process is vitally necessary if the former is to yield correct and profitable results.

Among those who accepted Biblical Theology as a valid field of theological study – and this group was by no means coextensive with all theologians – there has been a perennial debate as to the relative position of Biblical versus Systematic Theology in terms of importance and influence in and over the Church. Gabler's emphasis on Biblical Theology as an objective, *historical* study translated into a subordinate role vis-à-vis Dogmatics. Systematic Theology, by its nature as normative – what the Church is to believe – is bound to be the more influential of the two in that it is Systematic Theology that produces the catechisms and creeds and confessions then used within the liturgical life of the Church. In other words, individual members of any given denomination often have more and more consistent contact with the *dogmatics* of the denomination than even with the Bible itself. Barr notes, "On the one hand it is recognized that normative status and prescriptive function belong to doctrinal theology, while the scope of biblical theology lies within the historical thinking of the biblical writers in their own time; on the other hand there is an expectation that the work of biblical theology will somehow produce insights of maximal theological status and authority."[84] In reality, however, Systematic Theology often moves along under its own steam without much if any assistance from Biblical Theology.


G. Ernest Wright (1909-74)

That this is so is evident from the common usage of language, for when one considers the word 'theology,' one normally thinks of doctrine and dogma and not necessarily of the Bible. A 'theologian' is, again typically, viewed as someone who studies and formulates doctrine, usually in a seminary or other place of 'higher learning,' and rarely from a pulpit. This is remarkable and sad, that the majority of people, including believers, should think of 'the knowledge of God' as something other than what God has revealed of Himself in His Scriptures. George Ernest Wright commented on this phenomenon in the

[84] Barr; 62.

mid-20th Century in his monograph, *God Who Acts*. He opens the book by stating that the very word 'theology' must be "rescued from the exclusive and private use of the systematic theologians."[85] Wright goes on,

> To most of them [*i.e.*, the systematic theologians], as to most others, it has meant propositional dogmatics, stated as abstractly and universally as possible and arranged in accordance with a preconceived and coherent system. Obviously, the Bible contains nothing of the sort; in fact, its writers seem completely uninterested in this type of discussion. As a result, there has been a tendency to disparage the Bible and to assume that since it belongs to a pre-logical age, it cannot be allowed to speak in its own way. Instead, it must be systematized, else its witness for the modern Church will be ineffectual.[86]

Wright is very negative on systematics, but with good cause. It can be argued that every form of scholasticism and every resultant dilution of the faith, has resulted from the systematic organization of theological or religious 'data' according to a preconceived scheme, a scheme that was itself in error. "But to systematize it has meant that one has attempted to organize its data by means of a pattern of thought foreign to its own nature, i.e., by means of the rubrics of propositional theology."[87] This may be the fundamental contention of Biblical Theology against the Church's age-old dependence on Systematic or Dogmatic Theology: the latter is simply not how the Bible was written, not how God disclosed both His Person and His will to His people. Wright lays charge against this dependence on dogmatics, "The Biblical writers were uninterested in ideas in the sense that we are. They were not primarily systematic teachers of religious ideas. Are we to assume, then, that Biblical theology is solely a modern discipline which we seek to impose on a literature that is devoid of any *primary* interest in it?"[88]

Wright does admit, as he should, that the categories of systematic theology have been both necessary and useful to the building up of the Church. A classic example is the Nicean defense of the full deity of Jesus Christ via the introduction of the Greek

[85] Wright, G. Ernest *God Who Acts* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company; 1952); 11.
[86] *Idem*.
[87] *Idem*.
[88] *Ibid*.; 37.

philosophical terms *ousia* and *homoousios*. These terms helped the Church elucidate a difficult theological issue, one that the early believers had struggled with for two centuries: the Doctrine of the Trinity. On the use of Greek philosophical terms within Christian dogmatic declarations, Brevard Childs writes, "No one would defend the terminology of *homoousios* as biblical, but the theological question is whether it is a faithful rendering of the biblical witness in the light of the proposed alternatives. Torrance has made the excellent point: 'Far from imposing an alien Hellenism on the Gospels, the terms *ousia* and *homoousios* were adapted to allow the evangelical witness and teaching of the New Testament to come across without distortion through an alien framework of thought."[89] But the point remains, as Wright makes it, that the Bible does not speak of the Trinity in terms of 'being' (*ousia*) and 'same being' (*homoousios*) versus 'similar being' (*homoiousios*). The dogmatic terms came into the Church's conversation on the basis of the biblical witness as to the divine nature of both the Father and the Son (and, later, the Holy Spirit) while also reflecting the same biblical witness as to their distinct personalities. Hence the dogmatic principle of the Trinity is derived from the biblical narrative and not imposed upon it.

This is a historical example of the relationship between Biblical Theology – though it was not called that at the time – informing Systematic Theology, the cart was in proper relation to the horse. In the millennia since, however, the Church has more often had the cart in front of the horse, with Systematics or Dogmatics driving the team. At times there was not even a horse involved…just the cart of dogmatics. We must be continually reminded that this is not how the Bible itself was written, which means that it was not how God willed to disclose Himself and His plan and purpose for His Creation. "The rubrics of systematic theology are too abstract and universalized to fit the Biblical point of view. The exclusive use of them must of necessity compel us to do violence to that standpoint, to omit large sections of material or at east to arrange them in such a way that their proper interrelation is obscured."[90]

[89] Childs; 482.
[90] Wright; 37.

The work of Athanasius at the Council of Nicæa is also an example of the basic nature of the development of dogma: *polemics*. For the most part, the doctrines of Christianity have been hammered out on the anvil of controversy and heresy. This is true even in the letters of Paul in the New Testament; much of what the apostle wrote was in response to error and false teaching. Athanasius was combatting the heretical teachings of the Arians, who denied eternal deity to the person of Jesus Christ, claiming that 'there was a time when he was not.' It was contended at that time and has been since, that Athanasius developed a Greek philosophical construct of a triune Godhead in order to defend the Church's deification of Jesus after His death. It cannot be denied that dogmatics have, at times, been done for exactly that motive, to defend an *a priori* position. But biblical scholarship in the 1,700 years since Nicæa has largely concluded that Athanasius simply employed the terminology of his time to describe what the Scriptures teach concerning the essential nature of Jesus as both fully human and fully divine. But the point here is that Athanasius did not have the luxury of developing his formulation of the Godhead in the quiet of his study, far from the tumult of religious conflict. Rarely, if ever, has dogmatic theology been done is such an irenic setting. The Westminster Assembly was convened in the midst of the English Civil War and was largely an effort to bring the Scottish Presbyterians into the conflict on the side of Parliament. This is not to say that the conclusions of these councils and assemblies were thereby in error; it is only to state the historical reality that the most common setting for doctrinal development in the history of Christianity has been doctrinal conflict.

This reality has two implications. The first, and most obvious, is that such theological formulations forged in the fires of conflict do not always accurately reflect biblical teaching. Errors are made when tempers are hot, and it is simply naïve to think that neither Athanasius nor Arius had tempers. Theologians do not enter a state of spiritual equanimity and pacifism when they sit down to write their dogmatic creeds and confessions. Doctrines may indeed be developed that are effective in the general defense of a biblical truth, though they themselves may not be biblically true. This fact is illustrative of the reality that dogmatics are a human process, not an inspired revelation. As in all

human thought, passions do impact the results and heated debate is never done with pure objectivity. But 'the ends justify the means,' and when basic orthodoxy has been successfully defended, no one is interested in parsing the new doctrinal formulations to extract the precious from the vile – it all stands for posterity as a comprehensive whole.

This leads to the second impact of polemical dogmatics. That is the tendency to view the dogmatic 'victory' as itself a new camp, a new fortress of orthodoxy that is itself to be defended. The Athanasian formulation did not carry all before it; Athanasius himself spent the rest of his long life defending the Nicæan decision, while much of the actual professing Church continued to follow after Arius. Each successive defense of biblical doctrine, with its inevitable mixture of unbiblical points, takes the Church that much farther away from the Bible itself, and the disciples and successors of an Athanasius become defenders of their teacher rather than of the Word. People become Athanasians, or Lutherans, or Calvinists rather than Bereans. The Creed or Confession becomes the citadel, and officers of individual congregations take their office upon subscription to this or that confession or creed, to abide by and to defend it. Considering the biblical admonition against vows, why does it not concern us that we are requiring vows concerning uninspired documents?

In summary, the nature of dogmatic development in the midst of polemical conflict brings undue focus on the doctrine itself rather than the Scriptures from which the doctrine allegedly flows. The combatting of error is necessary, to be sure, and many of the doctrines that have been developed in defense of biblical truth are accurate to Scripture and should be honored as beneficial renderings of Truth. The Church need not reinvent the wheel every generation. However, in the spirit of the Renaissance, every generation of the Church ought to go back *ad fontes,* to the sources, which in the case of Systematic Theology is the Bible. This is the role of Biblical Theology, and it is indispensable to the health of the Church in every generation. Childs sees Biblical Theology as a bridge between biblical exegesis and doctrinal formulation.

> It should be repeatedly emphasized that the theological reflection of Biblical Theology on Christology is neither a substitute nor a rival to the task of historical and dogmatic theology. Rather, the major function of Biblical Theology is to provide a bridge for two-way traffic between biblical exegesis and systematic theology's reflection on the subject matter…Biblical Theology performs a positive role in the ongoing task of testing the church's theological reflections on Christology in its creeds and dogmas in the light of the full biblical testimony.[91]

What is the sad reality of church history is that the creed and confessions are rarely, if ever, tested against the full biblical testimony. Indeed, they become the documents against which orthodoxy is subsequently tested. Again, this is not to jettison all creeds and confessions and to start from scratch in every generation. But it is to think critically and biblically – and it is Biblical Theology, done correctly, that teaches us to think biblically – about the doctrines that we hold to be true, to *search the Scriptures to see if these things be true.* "It is not a faithful response for the church simply to entrench its position by absolutizing the traditions of the past. Conversely, it is equally a danger uncritically to embrace every wind of cultural change as liberating."[92] This stabilizing and reorienting role belongs to Biblical Theology.

This work by Biblical Theology is paradigmatic. As previously noted, any systematizing of data requires an *a priori* determination of categories and classification criteria. The classification of animals done by Charles Darwin made sense in his time, but after the discovery of DNA, Darwinian analysis became archaic and obsolete. Classification based on external similarities gave way to a deeper reality on the cellular level. This biological phenomenon is analogous of doctrinal systems that are found wanting on account of insufficient understanding of the biblical data, needing a fairly complete overhaul. Another analogy, however, is that of the Periodic Table of the Elements, developed in the 19th Century by Dmitri Mendeleev. Using, like Darwin, the external characteristics of substances, Mendeleev classified elements into a table. In doing so, he actually predicted the discovery of several elements for which there were blanks on his table. Later discoveries of the presence and behavior of the sub-atomic particles, partic-

[91] Childs; 481-82.
[92] *Ibid*.; 483.

ularly electrons via Quantum Atomic Theory, subsequently changed the format of the Periodic Table but did not change the fundamental relationships between the elements on Mendeleev's original chart. In the same manner, Christian doctrine benefits from continued study of the Bible in its form and arrangement so that improvements can be made without altering the basic structure of the doctrines themselves. In this manner, Biblical Theology has the critical task of correcting and/or enhancing the Church's doctrinal statements, being closer to the text of Scripture and, theoretically, unimpacted by controversy or philosophical presupposition. Childs believes the task of the dogmatic theologian to be essentially impossible without the necessary contribution of Biblical Theology: "In sum, without the prior theological reflection of Biblical Theology on the nature of the one divine reality manifested in Jesus Christ, it is virtually impossible for dogmatic theology to make sense of the bewildering exegetical complexities arising from biblical exegesis."[93]

The issue here is not the difference between a *fallible* systematic paradigm by which doctrine is developed versus an *infallible* biblical theological framework. The reality is that both works are done by fallible humans; neither will result in a perfect and comprehensive interpretation of Scripture. Just as the Bible does not come with its own 'system' outlined and ready to be filled in with doctrinal points, so also it does not present to us the warp and woof of its literary and revelational structure. We must *do* Biblical Theology no less that we must *do* Systematic Theology. Vos notes in his *Biblical Theology*, "The fact is that Biblical Theology just as much as Systematic Theology makes the material undergo a transformation."[94] The importance of Biblical Theology vis-à-vis Systematic or Dogmatic Theology, then, is that it is the work that establishes and confirms the framework for developing doctrine; at least that is the work it is meant to do.

This is to say that both branches of theology are necessary for the health of the Church, but that one does have logical priority over the other. There is, of course, no guarantee that a sound Biblical Theology will result in a sound Systematic Theology,

[93] *Idem.*
[94] Vos, *Biblical Theology*; 16.

but it is hard to imagine arriving at a biblically-correct doctrinal system when one's system is itself not biblical. Being the theology closest to the Bible as we have it – the *canon* of Scripture, both Old and New Testament – Biblical Theology establishes the foundation of all theological thought that is subsequently and consequently built upon it. Dogmatic structures that have no Biblical Theology beneath them are castles built on sand. James Barr notes that "Doctrinal Theology states, clarifies and illuminates the faith of the church today. Biblical Theology concerns itself with the theology of the Bible itself."[95] The problem with Barr's analysis, as with so much of modern Christian thinking, is the implication that there is a necessary conflict between the Bible and today, that 'today's theology' and 'the Bible's theology' need not be coextensive. This perspective is the subtle but pervasive result of Enlightenment liberalism, and is wrong.

Barr's perspective is common and unfortunate. Scholars have adopted Biblical Theology as a branch within seminary curricula, but have failed to recognize any inherent unity between it and Dogmatics, simply because they commonly believe that one is historical (and therefore rigidly immovable) while the other is dynamic, subject to the 'needs' of the contemporary situation. Lessing's ditch looms before us: What can the theology of the biblical time and culture say to the time and culture of the modern world? Even conservatives are having a hard time answering this question; most would agree in some measure with Barr's assessment.

> Biblical Theology has the Bible as its horizon: its source material is the biblical text, its subject is the theology which lies behind or is implied within the time and culture of the Bible…Doctrinal Theology, however much it works with the Bible and acknowledges the Bible as authoritative, is not primarily *about* the Bible; it is primarily about God and its horizon is God. Its task is to elucidate, explain, and make intelligible and consistent the regulative principles which influence or control the actions and speech of the religious community.[96]

There are several facets of this quote that should be disturbing to a believer. First, the separation Barr makes between the Bible as 'horizon' and God as 'horizon,'

[95] Barr, *Biblical Theology*; 6.
[96] *Ibid*. 74.

indicating that there is another sextant than the Bible by which we can take readings of God. Sadly, however, Barr's comment is descriptive of much of dogmatic theology over the ages, too often aligning the instrument with some point other than God's self-disclosure in his Work – either some philosophy, or some 'felt need' or cultural demand. This segues into a second problem with Barr's comment, the fact that at the end of the day it is not God, really, that is the horizon for much of Dogmatic Theology, but rather the 'religious community' and its changing 'needs' from generation to generation. This is not, perhaps, what Barr means by this statement, but his association between the knowledge of God and the 'actions and speech of the religious community' is sadly very descriptive of the sensitivity of doctrinal theology to the demands of the congregation, which are themselves very much influenced by the prevailing culture.

The truth is that the self-revelation of God in His Word is timeless and transcends culture. Indeed, God's self-disclosure encompasses all time no less than it creates time. The literary structure of the Bible, if it can be said to have just one structure, is that of an arc of revelation that moves from Creation to Consummation, and all to the glory of the Almighty and only God. Dogmatic systems in general have undoubtedly been beneficial to the Church, though not all; some have been quite damaging. But none can stand alone without constant critical analysis against an ever-refined Biblical Theology in order to make sure the system of doctrine still aligns with the arc of revelation. George Wright is perhaps too complimentary of all dogmatic systems, but he makes the point clear enough, "Consequently, we must say that static, propositional systems are those which the Church itself erects by influence from the Biblica writings. The systems are very good and very important, but we cannot define the Bible by means of them."[97] We can only define the Bible by means of itself, and that is the task of Biblical Theology.

[97] Wright; 35.

Lesson 5 – Canonical Theology
Text: John 5:39 - 47

"The relationship assumed to exist between the Old and New Testaments today is the result of an inadmissible abstraction."
(Peter Stuhlmacher)

Indicative of the varied definitions of Biblical Theology over the past few centuries is the publication of numerous individual Biblical Theologies of the *New Testament,* or of the *Old Testament* as distinct from the New. The titles of these works clearly and strongly illustrate the prevailing view within contemporary Christianity that the Bible is comprised of *two* separate 'Bibles' – the Old Testament (often viewed as the Bible of Israel's past) and the New Testament (or 'the Bible of Christianity').[98] Gregory Beale, in the opening paragraph of his *A New Testament Biblical Theology*, makes the point with emphasis, "My attempt in this book is not to write a NT theology but rather a NT *biblical* theology."[99] The designation of *New Testament* or *Old Testament* on a Biblical Theology indicates a very different understanding of the science of Biblical Theology than the one pursued in this study.


G. K. Beale (*b.* 1949)

The problem lies in the use of the term 'biblical.' It means, of course, 'pertaining to the Bible.' Thus the only way it can pertain to *either* the Old Testament *or* the New Testament is if these two sections are themselves 'Bibles' rather than two parts of *one* Bible. This is, to be sure, somewhat of an issue of semantics, as many scholars use the word 'biblical' with reference to each testament standing alone as well as to the combined Christian Bible. Beale, to his credit, is not attempting to divorce the New Testament from the Old; quite the contrary, in fact. "The approach of this book overlaps with that of a whole-Bible biblical theology in that it addresses more directly the theological storyline of the OT."[100] Beale's approach, as indicated by his Table of Contents, is to

[98] *Cp.* Stuhlmacher; 2.
[99] Beale, G. K. *A New Testament Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic; 2011); 1.
[100] *Ibid.*; 5.

trace several New Testament themes in light of inaugurated eschatology – the advent of the New Creation in the present age through the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. In spite of the book's title, Beale does spend the first 180-plus pages discussing the relationship of Old Testament revelation to the New Testament writings, especially as the earlier canon reflects eschatological hope of which the advent of Jesus and the Spirit is the inaugurated fulfillment. He begins, however, from the fulfillment and works back to the prophetic, seeking to understand how the New Testament writers, with transformed understanding, mediated the eschatological promise and hope of redemption through the finished work of Jesus Christ. "The main theological categories for the tracing of OT and NT theology therefore arise not first from considering the categories of systematic theology but from attempting to trace the respective canonical storylines in the two Testaments."[101]

Beale's work is worth the effort in its own right; perhaps the title *New Testament New Creation Theology* might have got his particular approach better. Be that as it may, this discussion of the title versus the plan of the book is intended to show the inherent difficulties that have always attached to the 'Biblical Theology' label. For the most part throughout the modern history of Biblical Theology, books have indeed been distinguished between *Biblical Theology* of the Old Testament or *Biblical Theology* of the New Testament, with far less integration between the two then is found in Beale's work. Brevard Childs, who advocate 'canonical' theology rather than 'biblical,' purposefully avoided the dichotomy between Testaments with his title: *"Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments*. Other recent authors simply leave out any reference to either Old or New Testament, like James Barr's *The Concept of Biblical Theology* (1999) and Charles Scobie's *The Ways of Our God: An Approach to Biblical Theology* (2003). The general consideration is that the Old Testament and the New Testament are so different in all aspects – literary, historical, and theological – that it is impossible to consider the two together in one Biblical Theology. Stuhlmacher comments, "it has become standard procedure in exegetical scholarship to work with the Old and New Testaments separately

[101] *Ibid.*; 6.

and to discuss the question concerning the unity of both testaments in the one Christian canon only on special occasions. This development is as understandable as it is regrettable."[102]

The reason for this separation is manifold, but it stems primarily from the pervasive belief that the actual *religions* of the two Testaments are fundamentally different, a conclusion that has largely come about *because of* the separation of the two Testaments in theological study. As we saw in the lesson on Canonics, there has been a strong tendency within Church history, and especially in the centuries since the Enlightenment, to attribute the canon of Scripture to the authoritative and official voice of the Church as an institution. Continued division of labor within seminaries, separating Old Testament studies from New Testament studies (and usually associating Christian theology with the latter), has perpetuated the feeling of artificiality with regard to the overall canon of the Christian Bible. Stuhlmacher considers that this phenomenon "encourages a perpetuation of the false impression that the Old and New Testament were united into the one Christian canon only at a later date and could only be held together through the clamp of Christian doctrine."[103]

During the latter half of the 20th Century, however, there was within biblical scholarship a greater recognition that the years of higher criticism, form criticism, and text criticism were largely unproductive and wasted. The continual dissecting of the biblical writings, Wellhausen's Documentary Hypothesis, and the imaginative creation of anonymous redactors and the famous Q source of the New Testament gospels, all failed to grasp one very obvious fact: the canon of Scripture has at all times been what the faithful community considered to be both inspired and authoritative. This was true for the believing Jewish community as well as for the believing Christian churches. Scobie writes,

> The focus of literary studies shifted dramatically from the 1940s on with the rise of the New Criticism, which urged that the object of study must be the text itself. As soon as a

[102] Stuhlmacher, *How To Do Biblical Theology*; 1.
[103] *Ibid.*; 2.

> literary work is written down, copied, and circulated it attains a life of its own, and can and should be studied quite independently of the historical circumstances which gave it birth…Generally speaking…the shift to a focus on the text itself has provided a very welcome corrective in biblical studies. In fact, the most significant form of reaction against historical criticism as it is generally practiced is seen in those who advocate *the final form of the biblical text* as the true object of study.[104]

This development is, of course, independent of the phenomenon of separation between the Old and New Testaments, but the two concepts are nonetheless related. Recognizing that it is the text of Scripture as it came to be considered authoritative in both the Jewish and the Christian settings, has a tendency to *unite* the two Testaments rather than to divide them, especially as we remember that the Holy Scriptures to Jesus and to the apostles were none other than the Hebrew Scriptures. The concept that ties all of these different paths and diversions back together is, again, the concept of the Canon – in its entirety and not as two canons for two different peoples and religious traditions. Thus, instead of continuing to use the confusing name of *Biblical* Theology, scholars, taking the lead from Brevard Childs, have increasingly used the phrase *Canonical* Theology. It is not likely that this name change will stick across the wide spectrum of biblical studies, but it makes an important and unifying point and deserves consideration.

One of the first things to note about Canonical Theology is that it has been subjected to Enlightenment liberalism no less than any other form of theology. Childs, for instance, is no conservative evangelical and his writings should be read with care. Nonetheless, this New Criticism is somewhat of an admission of defeat for the older Higher Criticism and its liberal associate criticisms. If not actual defeat, the new emphasis on the traditional canon of Scripture is an admission that the liberal, critical method was the path of unbelief, rejecting as it did the age-old testimony of both the believing Jewish and, subsequently, the believing Christian communities. Childs, though still holding fast to the liberal notion that the formation of the canon was a long editorial process, yet sees that what was vitally important was not the mechanical or technical

[104] Scobie; 34.

assembly of the writings, but their immediate recognition by the believing community as authoritative, and authoritative because from God. "Because the traditions were received as religiously authoritative, they were transmitted in such a way as to maintain a normative function for subsequent generations of believers with a community of faith."[105] As we have seen earlier, this baseline, normative canon was already firmly in place for the Jewish faith in Jesus' and Paul's day, and was as firmly in place with respect to the 'New' Testament by the second century, if not sooner. The authority of the documents resided in the documents themselves, as a whole, without any division between 'Old' and 'New.'

> The modern theological function of canon lies in its affirmation that the authoritative norm lies in the literature itself as it has been treasured, transmitted and transformed – of course in constant relation to its object to which it bears witness – and not in 'objectively' reconstructed stages of the process. The term canon points to the received, collected, and interpreted material of the church and thus establishes the theological context in which the tradition continues to function authoritatively for today.[106]

Childs' approach to Biblical Theology is surely correct, or at least far more correct that the purely historical approach of Gabler or the deconstructive approach of the higher critics. We have seen that the canon of Scripture was not announced by ecclesiastical officialdom, whether by an individual or a synod or council. It was, rather, *recognized* by the believing community in essentially the exact same form as we have it today in our Bibles. "The whole point of focusing on scripture as canon in opposition to the anthropocentric tradition of liberal Protestantism is to emphasize that the biblical text and its theological function as authoritative form belong inextricably together."[107]

From a historical canonical perspective, then, academic scholarship is finally coming around to recognize what the believing community has always known: the canon of the Hebrew Scriptures were the foundation of the *ex post facto* revelation of the Advent of Israel's Messiah, which revelation was soon recognized to be the canon of the

[105] Childs; 70.
[106] *Ibid*. 71.
[107] *Ibid.*; 72.

New Testament, the New *Covenant*. There was no official pronouncement to say that 'these thirty-nine books of the Hebrew Scriptures shall henceforth and forevermore be deemed 'the Old Testament,'' nor any such *a priori* determination with regard to the writings of our New Testament. The authority of each Testament, and the continuity between them, was the work of the Holy Spirit within the community of faith. "The juxtaposition of the two testaments to form the Christian Bible arose, not simply to establish a historical continuity between Israel and the church, but above all as an affirmation of a theological continuity. The church not only joined its new writings to the Jewish scriptures, but laid claim on them Old Testament as a witness to Jesus Christ."[108]

Of particular note with regard to the Church's adoption of the Hebrew Scriptures is the fact that what came to be called the Old Testament was incorporated into the preaching and teaching of the Christian community *without redaction*. This observation should be a death blow to the Higher Criticism camp, convinced as they are that even within the Jewish community a great amount of editing and redacting took place. Yet the Hebrew Scriptures entered into the daily (and especially weekly, liturgical) use of the Christian community without any such amendment or modification. Childs makes this point, though he does not develop it in relation to the liberal view.

> A most striking feature in the juxtaposition of the two testaments is actually the lack of Christian redactional activity on the Old Testament…There was no attempt made to christianize the Old Testament through redactional changes, for example, by bracketing the Old Testament books with parts of the Gospels, or by adding Christian commentary, features which are present in both the apocryphal and pseudepigraphical literature. Rather the collection of Jewish scriptures was envisioned as closed and a new and different collection began which in time evolved into the New Testament.[109]

The Hebrew Scriptures were ready to hand for the apostles and teachers of the early Church, mainly because they were intended by God to be so. The modern Church's tendency to neglect and ignore the Old Testament is, as Stuhlmacher notes, the result of an 'untenable abstraction,' that Christianity is, in fact, a new religion. Un-

[108] *Ibid.*; 73-74.
[109] *Ibid.*; 75.

less we somehow force a historical division between the earliest development of the Church, including the ministry of those who wrote the books of the New Testament, we cannot escape the historical fact that the 'Old Testament' was the Bible of Jesus, of Paul and Peter, and of the earliest congregations of believers. It must remain today no less a part of our Bible than the New Testament that was then being written. "Thus the time has come for Christian theology to reflect upon the fact *that the Old and New Testaments have belonged together in a most intimate way since the beginning of the Christian Church. They belong together to such a degree that the testimony of the New Testament cannot be adequately understood without the Old and the exegesis of the Old Testament remains incomplete without taking the New into view.*"[110] Childs points out the strength of a *canonical* approach to Biblical Theology in taking both Testaments seriously *in themselves* rather than subordinating one to the other,

> The significance of emphasizing the continuing canonical integrity of the Old Testament lies in resisting the Christian temptation to identify Biblical Theology with the New Testament's interpretation of the Old, as if the Old Testament witness were limited to how it was once heard and appropriated by the early church…Both testaments make a discrete witness to Jesus Christ which must be heard, both separately and in concert.[111]

From what has been said thus far, it might seem as if it would be a good idea just to publish the Bible without the division between the two testaments – just one bound copy of Scripture from Genesis to Revelation. Some have advocated this, and some publishers have done this, but it is a step too far. While determining correctly the relationship between the two parts of the Christian Bible is perhaps the greatest theological challenge facing the Church today, this does not mean that the two parts do not actually exist as 'dispensations' of revelation; they do. "At the heart of the problem of Biblical Theology lies the issue of doing full justice to the subtle canonical relationship of the two testaments within the one Christian Bible."[112] As noted above, the Old Testament is promise; the New, fulfilment. To combine the two testaments would be to conclude

[110] Stuhlmacher; 2. Italics original.
[111] Childs; 77-78.
[112] *Ibid.*; 78.

that the New Testament is merely the 'last chapters' of the one story, but the history of revelation, with its four-hundred-year gap in the prophetic word, shows that this is not the case. "The New Testament makes its own witness. It tells its own story of the new redemptive intervention of God in Jesus Christ. The New Testament is not just an extension of the Old, nor a last chapter in an epic tale. Something totally new has entered in the gospel."[113]

In terms of methodology, therefore, the first step in the practice of Biblical or Canonical Theology is the re-awareness of the integral place of the Old Testament in true Christian theology. For many this means almost a fresh start in terms of reading their Bible, rejecting the marginal proof-text notes or the 'study Bible' outlines that fill our English Bibles and digging anew into the text of the Old Testament Scriptures. This should not be done, of course, to the neglect of the New Testament, nor is it simply an individual quest to learn more about the history of the Jewish religion. Biblical or Canonical Theology is a community effort, not simply a more rigorous Bible reading program. Canonical Theology, because of the vast material in both Testaments, becomes itself a reflective function of the church as every believer reads his or her Bible (and not just the New Testament and Psalms) and the community in conversation reflects on the increasing resonance of echoes between the two parts of the one Bible.

The concept of a 'reading community' is really not at all foreign to the intention of the apostles in forming the various Christian communities throughout the Mediterranean world of the 1st Century. It is indeed arguable whether they had any concept of a 'clergy' within the Church who would be solely responsible for internalizing and disseminating biblical truth to the congregation; that is a sad development of the post-apostolic age. Rather we should see the approved behavior of the Bereans as exemplary for all congregations. Paul's audience in Berea did not simply 'take it on faith' that what he was saying about Jesus was true, nor did they receive his message with hostile suspicion, but being "*more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were*

[113] *Idem.*; 78.

so."[114] The Scriptures these Bereans searched, of course, were those of the Hebrew Bible, our Old Testament. Paul implies his expectation that the entire congregation of Corinth would be reading their Scriptures when he compares the new situation in Christ with the 'veil' that still lies over the minds of the unbelieving Jews.

> *Therefore, since we have such hope, we use great boldness of speech — unlike Moses, who put a veil over his face so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the end of what was passing away. But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken away in Christ. But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart. Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.*
>
> (II Corinthians 3:12-18)

By implication and parallelism, we can understand *'reading the Old Testament'* as the same as *'turning to the Lord'*; the unbelieving Jew who has not turned to the Lord, continues to read his Old Testament with a veil of ignorance over his eyes; the believer in Jesus Christ has that veil removed. To be sure, the demographics of the early congregations undoubtedly contained believers who were illiterate, or at least functionally so, as full literacy was not characteristic of the Roman world. Knowing that there were "*not many wise according to the world, not many noble, not many mighty,*" Paul exhorted Timothy to "*give attention to reading,*" undoubtedly the reading of Scripture.[115] Communal reading of the Scriptures has always been the greatest defense against subjective interpretation, especially that committed by the authoritative teachers of the congregation. It is significant that, as we learned in an earlier lesson, the canonicity of a particular book was determinative as to whether it could be read liturgically in the assembly, or was simply to be read privately (if at all).[116] Stuhlmacher observes, "For the New Testament authors, the natural environment for such biblical interpretation is the Church of

[114] Acts 17:11
[115] I Timothy 4:13
[116] See above, page 44.


N. T. Wright (*b.* 1948)

Jesus Christ, which is filled with the Spirit."[117] Frankly, had Christian congregations not assigned the task of exegesis to a clergy, it is unlikely that major heresies would have infiltrated the Church nor that anyone would have found the need of creeds and confessions as a substitute defense. Hays writes, "Thus, this sort of interpretive task calls for close attention and discernment by the reader, or more precisely, by the reading community. The danger of rampant subjectivity and misinterpretation is very great."[118] N.T. Wright puts the matter more succinctly, "Theology is an every-member activity."[119]

Symbolic World

It has been noted that Biblical Theology lacks a universally accepted methodology or framework. In other words, scholars do not agree on just *how* to do it. Since the scope of Biblical Theology is much greater than exegesis of individual passages or even whole books of the Bible, its methodology does not fit into the classic historical-grammatical model, or any other model, for that matter. Its hermeneutics is one of *reading*, but also of *listening*, listening to the text of the whole Bible to discern the echoes of both previous and later revelation resounding within each and every narrative, every promulgation of law, every psalm and proverb, and even in the challenging apocalyptic literature like Ezekiel and Revelation. Perhaps if there is a methodology for Biblical or Canonical Theology, it must take the form of principles rather than precepts. Certainly, among the first of these principles is that of Typology. But Typology itself is a largely misunderstood and often neglected branch of hermeneutics, due primarily to the historical reality of its abuse, especially in the early church and by such exegetes as Origen. The Protestant Reformers largely avoided any typology that was not explicitly set forth

[117] Stuhlmacher; 66.
[118] Hays, *The Conversion of Imagination*; 29.
[119] Wright, N. T. Lecture delivered March 21, 2014, "How Paul Invented Christian Theology." Lecture: "How Paul Invented Christian Theology" from N.T. Wright | Lanier Theological Library Accessed 18August2024.

as such by the writers of the New Testament. Patrick Fairbairn, in his classic *Typology of Scripture*, describes the general reticence of conservative biblical scholars to participate in this dangerous and often-imaginative practice. "The Typology of Scripture has been one of the most neglected departments of theological science. It has never altogether escaped from the region of doubt and uncertainty; and some still regard it as a field incapable, from its very nature, of being satisfactorily explored, or cultivated so as to yield any sure and appreciable results."[120] Fairbairn evidently did not share this reticence, as he proceeds to fill two volumes with his interpretations of typology in Scripture. He is cautious, though, and generally follows the Reformation line of seeing typology only where the New Testament specifically calls it out. "It is held, first, that in the character, action, or institution which is denominated the *type*, there must be a resemblance in form or spirit to what answers to it under the Gospel: and secondly, that it must not be *any* character, action, or institution occurring in the Old Testament Scripture, but such only as had their ordination of God, and were designed by Him to foreshadow and prepare for the better things of the Gospel…The former must not only resemble the latter, but must have been *designed* to resemble the latter."[121]

Patrick Fairbairn (1805-74)

The caution reflected in Fairbairn's comment is due the fear of descending from *typology* into *allegory*, an imaginative hermeneutic generally rejected by the Reformers (though practiced frequently by Luther). The fear of allegorical exegesis remains today, as this quote from a recent article on the Ligonier Ministries website shows, "Typological interpretation can be problematic because too many people call what they are doing typology when they are really employing allegory. Thus, it is generally wise to stick to the typologies explicitly revealed in Scripture."[122] The thought behind such statements,

[120] Fairbairn, Patrick *Typology of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications; 1989); 1.
[121] *Ibid.*; 46; italics original.
[122] "Typology versus Allegory"; Typology Versus Allegory | Reformed Bible Studies & Devotionals at Ligonier.org | Reformed Bible Studies & Devotionals at Ligonier.org. Accessed 18August2024.

if there be any other thought than fear, is that what the inspired apostles were permitted to do under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, average believers are not permitted to do. But this logic would also limit the scope of evangelical preaching to no more than we have in the way of sermons from the apostles, for preaching is also a mine field of potential heresy. Still, it remains an important question for every believer as to whether he or she is qualified to recognize types in the Bible that are not explicitly called out as such in the New Testament. No doubt caution is in order; the question is whether that caution should extend to prohibition.

The article on Typology in the more recent *Dictionary of the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* is more bold. The authors seek to understand the manner in which the authors of the New Testament understood and employed types, with the implication that modern believers are capable of seeing the same typological development in Scripture.

> Typology is the study of patterns (types) in the Bible that escalate over time until they find their intended fulfillment in Christ and his church. Like seeds planted in the soil of the OT, biblical types are persons, places, events, and institutions that develop across redemptive history until they reach full flower in God's climactic revelation in Christ. God designed types as a form of revelation to prepare the way for his Son, and in the fullness of time, biblical types are an important way NT authors demonstrate that Jesus is the Christ.[123]

The comment that types 'escalate over time' is significant, as it shows that biblical types are not static over the course of revelation, but are dynamic and often multifaceted. It must be noted that biblical types were not intended as illustrations, but as prophetic symbols, even a symbolic world in which revelation progresses and advances along with the 'escalation' of the types. This is to say that the core of the symbol – for example, *Creation* or *Exodus* – remains present but the elaboration of the symbol grows as it interacts with both the intervention of God in and through the history of God's people. "Typology is not merely the simplistic correspondence between two episodes of

[123] Beale, G. K., D. A. Carson, Benjamin L. Glass, and Andrew David Naselli, *eds*. *Dictionary of the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic: ; 2023); 852.

Scripture – an occasional literary feature of biblical stories. Instead, typology is part of the framework of Scripture; typology is often how the biblical authors make theological claims."[124] Typology, then, must be recognized as an integral part of the very literary structure of the Scriptures, especially the Old Testament, so that we can begin to understand how the New Testament writers interpreted their Scriptures in light of the Messiah. In other words, these authors – almost all Jewish – lived in a world filled with over a millennia of symbolism, of persons, events, and rituals that were steeped in greater meaning than the person, event, or ritual itself. Whether circumcision or the Sabbath, the Exodus or the Exile, Creation itself and Creation's God – all composed a symbolic world in which the writers of the New Testament lived, in and through which they interpreted the Christ-event from their own Holy Scripture. Hays, referring to the writings of Paul, writes, "It would therefore by highly artificial to suppose that Scripture plays an important role in Paul's though only in those cases where he quotes a text explicitly. There can be no serious doubt that Scripture shapes his symbolic world in a more pervasive manner."[125]

Did the writers of the New Testament exhaust the symbolic universe of the Hebrew Scripture? Those, like Calvin and Fairbairn, who urge a strict limitation on typological interpretation to only those symbols explicitly unveiled in the New Testament would answer 'yes.' It is the safe course to leave all typological interpretation to the inspired writers; it is the course of objective truth and away from subjective allegorizing. But such a hermeneutic is untenable, even for those who seek to hold fast. Several examples should suffice to show that there are a multitude of Old Testament symbols – or, at least, a vast scope of the 'escalating' symbols through the Old Testament – that are not explicitly unpacked in the New Testament.

The first is the life of Joseph, favorite son of Jacob/Israel. The trajectory of Joseph's life – from beloved of his father to betrayed by his brethren to ultimate exaltation at the right hand of Pharaoh – seems to bear a very strong parallel to the earthly life of

[124] *Idem.*
[125] Hays, *The Conversion of Imagination*; 28.

Jesus himself. To be sure, to make too much of the parallel does bring the danger of allegorizing. But to fail to see the symbolic nature of Joseph's life, even to the smallest details of his favored robe and his new name, is to leave the symbolic world of biblical history. Perhaps there is no harm in refusing to see the connection between Joseph and Jesus, to refuse to consider Joseph as type simply because the New Testament nowhere speaks of him as one; but there is a loss of depth in reading the narrative of Joseph's life as typological and prophetic of the life of Jesus the Messiah.

A similar comment can be made with respect to Job, whose story descends into one of 'wisdom' that it is not easy to discern. We read in the New Testament of the 'patience of Job,' but often fail to discern much patience in Job's monologues. Is the purpose of the book nothing more than that God can do what He wills? That God need not explain Himself to His creatures? Or is the life and suffering of Job also symbolic as well as historical? Again, there is no explicit mention of Job in the New Testament other than the enigmatic reference to his patience. But it may very well be that the vocalization of the suffering of a righteous man – for Job was a righteous man, God said so Himself – stands in for the One who *"like a lamb before his shearers, did not open His mouth."*[126]

Finally, there is the *Shekinah*, the visible presence of Yahweh's glory, that descended upon the tabernacle of Moses in the wilderness and on the Jerusalem Temple built and dedicated by King Solomon. The tabernacle disappeared and the Temple was destroyed, and the Lord gave graphic awareness through Ezekiel that His glory had departed from His house. But He also promised through the same prophet that the *Shekinah* would return. Did it ever return to the rebuilt temple after the Exile? Did Herod's massive renovation of that temple stimulate the coming of the glory of Yahweh to dwell once more in His house in Jerusalem? The Second Temple Jews would answer to a man, 'No!' Indeed, the lack of the *Shekinah* was one of the five things missing from the temple, rendering it both liturgically and redemptively incomplete. In other words, the Jews of the Second Temple era *knew* that God had not returned. But what of Pentecost?

[126] Isaiah 53:7

Does not the "*tongues as of fire*" descending on the assembled disciples in the temple represent the glory and Spirit of Yahweh returning to His Temple, the Body of Christ?[127] No New Testament passage says as much, but if this is not the case then the *Shekinah* has still not come, and Ezekiel's prophecy is yet unfulfilled. The Dispensationalist will agree with this, but the clear teaching of the New Testament concerning the true Temple of Yahweh as the Body of Christ, His Church, points in the direction of the *Shekinah* having returned on that first Christian Pentecost.

The process and practice of Biblical or Canonical Theology is that of learning to recognize the symbolic world of the Hebrew Scriptures and, consequently, understanding better how the New Testament authors saw and interpreted the Christ-event through those Scriptures. To be sure, typological hermeneutics must be done with care – hence the reading as a community function and not an individual one – but it is necessary for the richness of God's self-revelation in the Old Testament to be seen in the writings of the New Testament. There is a process going on within and through the process of revelation recorded in written Scripture. That sounds like a very dangerous statement, but all that is meant is that there is more to Scripture than even the original authors knew or understood. They were writing God's revelation for their time and for their people in that time. But they were also participating – knowingly or not, we cannot tell – in the broader revelation of God concerning the ultimate purpose and end of all things, manifested ultimately in Jesus the Messiah. To borrow the terminology of the author of Hebrews, the writers of Old Testament Scripture were given 'parts and portions,' yet these parts and portions contributed symbolically to a unified whole that pointed to and culminated in God's Son.

So much more might be said of even these three examples, not to mention the symbolic world of the tabernacle itself, the sacrificial system, or the Sabbath. Indeed, regarding the latter, the writer of Hebrews tells us of the "*sabbath rest that remains*" for the people of God, but then gives frustratingly little description of that rest. Yet it is tied

[127] The very public nature of the narrative in Acts 2 may indicate that the disciples were assembled in a very public place, and no longer in the upper room; they may have been gathered in Solomon's Portico as was their habit probably from the time when Jesus walked with them.

inextricably to our great High Priest who has entered into the Holy of Holies for us, once for all, tying the symbolism of the Sabbath with that of the tabernacle/Temple, and even Creation itself. The authors of the article on Typology in the *Dictionary* are certainly correct when they say, "Typology is a vast subject."[128]

How do we avoid the trap of allegorizing? The key is to recognize that biblical revelation has what the authors of the article on Typology in the *Dictionary* call a 'grain.' This is analogous to the grain of a piece of wood, and to work *with* the grain is to enhance the wood; to work *against* the grain is to ultimately deface and destroy it. So also with the symbols of Scripture; they must be read and interpreted *with the grain*. The grain, of course, is the overall redemptive trajectory that culminates in the advent of Jesus Christ. The realization of the 'escalating' symbolism of Scripture cannot be attained until the final antitype is realized, as has now been historically realized in Jesus Christ. The symbolism remains in Scripture; it was not exhausted by the New Testament authors; it remains the proper reading of Scripture today.

> Typological retrospection in the NT is not an imposition of the author on the OT text but a Spirit-led unfolding of the true meaning of the OT. Similarly, typological reading today, modeled after the Scripture's own pattern, is not a rereading of the OT in light of the fullness of God's revelation in Christ. Typological reading, if it is even best to call it that, is not an interpretive 'method' but an effort to understand Scripture according to authorial intent and on its own terms.[129]

[128] *Dictionary*; 852.
[129] *Ibid.*; 859.

Lesson 6 – The Meaning of 'Meaning'
Text: Galatians 4:21-26; II Corinthians 3:1-6

"Intelligence forces interpretation on us."
(Morton W. Bloomfield)

It was the best of times; it was the worst of times. It was the third century from the birth of Christ. Christianity was spreading throughout the Roman Empire like wildfire and the Christian congregations were organizing into episcopal diocese. To be sure, the Church had not yet been institutionalized as it would be in the fourth century and beyond, but it was getting its feet firmly planted in the Mediterranean world, and succession of bishops within the regional diocese provided for continuity of doctrine and teaching. At the same time, however, the social structure of the Roman world was beginning to crack from the top. There were thirty-six emperors during the period from AD 193 to 305, with few of these surviving more than a year and one lasting only twenty-seven days. The empire was locked in almost constant civil conflict as legions loyal to one imperial contender fought those loyal to another with every succession of the purple. One relief valve in this political tension was the persecution of Christians, often blamed as 'atheists' for the turmoil afflicting the empire, and often hounded into exile or death for their faith. Bishops were the prime targets, the logic being that if the head is cut off the body will die. But it did not turn out that way; the Church continued to flourish even with the loss to martyrdom of such eminent bishops as Cyprian of Carthage in AD 258. In just over a half century from Cyprian's death, persecution of Christians would be outlawed by the Augusti Constantine and Licinius (Edict of Milan, AD 313).

The purpose of this brief summary of the 3rd Century is merely as background for the hermeneutical developments of the same period. The study of Scripture, both of the Old Testament and the New, grew apace with the growth of the Church; doctrine was considered an extremely important matter in all regions of the spreading faith. The intellectual development of this period concentrated into hermeneutical schools located in two cities: Alexandria in Egypt and Antioch in Syria. For several centuries afterward,

the Alexandrian School and the Antiochene School came to represent the polar opposite hermeneutical methods of Allegory and Literalism, methods that remain the opposite ends of the hermeneutical pendulum to this day. Although both schools were devoted to the study of Scripture, they were not without presuppositional bias: the Alexandrian School was enamored with Greek philosophy, especially that of Plato and Pythagoras, while the Antiochene School was enamored with anything that was not from the Alexandrian School. As with the hermeneutical methodology, this bias also continues.

The more original of the two schools, Alexandria, is widely considered the Christian birthplace of the allegorical hermeneutic, though it may well have been derived from the Jewish practitioner of the allegorical art, Philo of Alexandria, who was roughly contemporary with Jesus and Paul. Philo, a devout Jew who staunchly defended the divine origin and authority of the Torah, was also strongly influenced by Platonic philosophy and incorporated the dualism of matter versus spirit into his biblical exegesis. "For Philo, the Bible was like a human being; it had a body (i.e., a literal meaning) and a soul (an allegorical meaning)."[130] Philo is an excellent example of two hermeneutical phenomenon common in Second Temple Judaism, and that have also influenced Christian exegesis from that time to this. The first is the unintended influence of alien philosophies upon biblical interpretation. Richard Longenecker writes of Philo, "Philo was the inheritor of Stoic and Platonic ideas. And while a severe critic of the content of these philosophies, he – whether consciously or unconsciously – used their basic categories in the presentation of what he believed to be the truth of the Jewish Torah."[131]

The second phenomenon of biblical interpretation is that of attempting to bring the biblical message 'up to date.' It may seem odd for 21st Century believers to realize that a 1st Century Jewish scholar would do such a thing, but in reality the world of 1st Century Alexandria was perhaps as different from Moses' day, as the world of 21st Century evangelicalism is from the time of Jesus and Paul. Every generation seems almost incomprehensibly different even from the generation immediately preceding. Hence

[130] Klein, William M., Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard, Jr. *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Dallas: Word Publishing; 1993); 26.
[131] Longenecker; 30.

the concept of nostalgia and the phrase, 'the good ole days.' Thus, it is a common temptation within every generation of biblical scholarship not only to incorporate the latest in hermeneutical science, but also to modify the resultant message to 'better fit' the contemporary audience. To some extent this is both unavoidable and benign. Often, however, the message is contorted beyond recognition. Philo's allegorizing hermeneutic presents a timeless caution with regard to – some would say a prohibition of – symbolic interpretation of Scripture. Again, Longenecker, "In his endeavor to vindicate Jewish theology before the court of Greek philosophy and in his desire to contemporize the sacred writings so as to make them relevant to present circumstances and experience, Philo usually treated the Old Testament as a body of symbols given by God for man's spiritual and moral benefit, which must be understood other than in a literal and historical fashion."[132]


Origen (185-254)

It is difficult to determine whether there was any direct methodological connection between the Jew Philo and the Christian Origen, famous (and infamous) for his allegorical hermeneutic. It is likely that the influence of Greek philosophy was particularly strong in Alexandria, the base of operations for both men, leaving its impact on Origen as it did on Philo. "Historically, the allegorical method as the West knows it, was developed in Alexandria to interpret 'properly' Homer."[133] On the other hand, Origen may have simply ad-opted and adapted the exegetical methodology of his predecessor and teacher, Clement, who also adopted the allegorical method in his catechol teaching. Walter Kaiser writes, 'it was Clement of Alexandra and Origen who in effect institutionalized this allegorical method in the late second century and early part of the third century."[134] But it is certainly Origen with whom the method is associated within Christian exegesis, both in his own time and ever since. Among Reformed evangelicals, Ori-

[132] *Ibid.*; 31.
[133] Bloomfield, Morton W. "Allegory as Interpretation" *New Literary History*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (Winter, 1972); 301.
[134] Kaiser, Walter C., Jr. *Toward and Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House; 1981); 58.

gen is *persona non grata* because of his allegorical hermeneutics. Kaiser quotes Martin Luther with approbation in regard to allegorizing, "Luther's clear…affirmation that the single meaning of the text is the only proper basis for exegesis marked another new impetus in Biblical interpretation. His comments on the allegorical method were just as strong as they were clear. Said he characteristically, 'Origen's allegories are not worth so much dirt,' for 'allegories are empty speculation…the scum of Holy Scripture'…'Allegory is a sort of beautiful harlot, who proves herself especially seductive to idle men.'"[135] Significantly, however, Kaiser almost immediately notes that Luther and Calvin "were not always successful in their own practice of their principles," meaning that these two great Reformers (and Luther especially) often employed the very same allegorical hermeneutic they professedly despised.

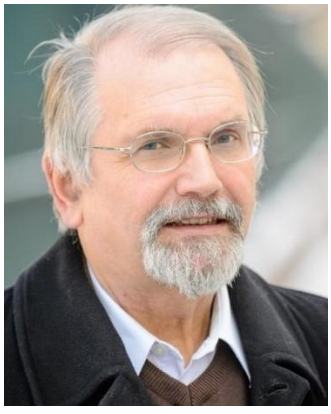

Walter Kaiser (1933-2023)

Is there a middle ground? Must the exegete choose between the 'allegory' of Origen and the 'literalism' of Luther? Are all 'symbolic' or 'typological' hermeneutics doomed to descend into the harlotry of allegorizing? To some extent the matter does come down to definitions: What *is* allegory? What constitutes a *literal* interpretation? On the face of it, we can be sure that the New Testament writers *did not* interpret their Old Testament in a literal manner, if by 'literal' we mean an exact correspondence between the words used and the meaning rendered. The examples of *non*-literal use of the Old Testament by New Testament writers are legion. As a single example, no one would consider Paul's allusion to the water-producing rock in I Corinthians 10 represents a *literal* interpretation of the Old Testament passage.

> *Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ.* (II Corinthians 10:1-4)

[135] *Ibid.*; 60-61.

Morton Bloomfield writes, "In the Christian interpretation of history, particularly Old Testament history, going back to the New Testament itself, we find typological or figural allegory (a type of prophetic allegory), in which events have an eschatological or future meaning. Sacred History is a progressive fulfillment of what is latent or obscurely indicated earlier."[136] It is often argued that Paul was allowed to do this because he was inspired, and there is some truth to that statement, though the counter argument is that believers have the same Holy Spirit dwelling within and enlightening them as did the apostles. Inspiration rendered the canonical writings of the New Testament authors infallible, but it did not (so far as we can tell) uniquely direct their interpretive methodology. But perhaps a better way of considering this objection is that, by employing the symbolic world of the Old Testament (and the New, for that matter), modern exegetes are not seeking to see *more* than the authors of the New Testament saw; they are only seeking to see *more clearly* what they saw. It is not, nor should it be, the desire of typological hermeneutics to develop novel and fanciful interpretations of Old Testament passages, as Origen (and Luther) too often did, but rather to hear the echoes of divine revelation in the New Testament quotations and allusions to the Old Testament, as well as to hear more clearly the symphony of divine revelation in the Old Testament as the score has been completed by the New.


Tibor Fabiny (*b.* 1955)

But what of the 'letter' of the Scriptures, do we simply ignore what is written in our search for the 'deeper meaning'? This is also a major objection to typological hermeneutics, and it also has merit. On the basis of his Platonic views, Origen considered that there were three layers of meaning in a passage of Scripture: "(1) the literal-historical sense, corresponding to the 'body'; (2) the moral-psychological sense, corresponding to the 'soul'; (3) the spiritual-allegorical-mystical sense, corresponding to the 'spirit.'"[137] Hungarian Luther scholar, Tibor Fabiny,

[136] Bloomfield; 308.
[137] Fabiny, Tibor "The Literal Sense and the 'Sensus Plenior' Revisited" *Hermathena*, No. 151 (Winter 1991); 10.

notes that the Protestant Reformers – especially Luther – reacted strongly against Origen's layered approach to the text, but also that they did not really avoid the same conclusion. He refers to an exchange between Luther and Erasmus regarding the 'plain sense' of Scripture. "Luther believed in the 'plain sense' of Scripture and found that the 'Holy Spirit is the plainest writer and speaker in heaven and earth.' Erasmus, however, asked 'if it is all so plain, why have so many excellent men for so many centuries walked in darkness?'"[138] As it turns out, Luther – and many Reformers of his time and conservative evangelicals since – framed his opposition to allegorical/symbolic hermeneutics by redefining the *sensus literalis* – the 'literal sense' – as including within itself the 'figurative' or 'prophetic' sense, the *sensus literalis propheticus.*[139] By this sleight of hand, Luther incorporates the spiritual meaning of the Old Testament passage into the literal text of the passage, by virtue of its Christological focus and import, and by the illumination of the Holy Spirit. "The distinction for Luther is not the spirit *and* the letter but the spirit *in* the letter. 'The spirit turns into he letter, but the letter must in its turn constantly become its spirit again.'"[140] This interchange between 'letter' and 'spirit' echoes, of course, Paul in II Corinthians 3,

> *Do we begin again to commend ourselves? Or do we need, as some others, epistles of commendation to you or letters of commendation from you? You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men; clearly you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart. And we have such trust through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.* (II Corinthians 3:1-6)

But the assumption that the 'spirit' exists within the 'letter,' and thus the *sensus literalis* is correctly interpreted if viewed as prophetic in relation to the coming of Jesus Christ, does not translate into an objective hermeneutic free of imagination. Luther

[138] *Ibid.*; 12.
[139] *Idem.*
[140] *Idem.* The quotation is not from Luther himself, but from Gerhard Ebeling *Luther: An Introduction to His Thought.*

himself, believing that he could find Jesus on every page of the Old Testament, often developed fanciful 'prophetic' meanings for texts in which the prophetic meaning was anything but obvious on the surface. This is nothing other than the problem of trying to understand, and perhaps imitate, the way in which the New Testament writers re-interpreted Old Testament passages to prophetically reference Christ, in spite of the fact that the Old Testament passage itself does not bear that 'literal' sense. The pendulum swing between the allegorical hermeneutic on the one hand, and the literalist hermeneutic on the other, has been nothing more than the perennial attempt to answer the question, 'What does this passage *mean*?'

Shifting our focus back to the allegorical method, consistently rejected and even abhorred by evangelicals since at least the Protestant Reformation, we are still faced with the difficulty of definition. In a literary sense, allegory may mean nothing more than the imaginative application of a text to the contemporary readership. "Allegory, in this sense, is the method of modernization, that which has made, makes or keeps modern those literary documents of the past which can bear such a load of continued interpretation."[141] Literary critics and professors thus allegorize whenever they seek to apply the 'principles' of *Great Expectations* or Dante's *Divine Comedy* to their current readers or students. Preachers often do the same when sermonizing on biblical passages, especially those from the Old Testament. Bloomfield supports this form of allegory as necessary, "Allegory is, in this sense, that which conquers time, that which perpetually renews the written word. The age that does not need, or thinks it does not need, the past does not need this kind of allegory."[142]

This is, however, not the sense of the word as employed by Origen and the Alexandrian School. The allegorical hermeneutic of the early Church was far more imaginative, though usually circumscribed by the desire to find Christ in the Old Testament passage under consideration. Thus the *Epistle of Barnabas* sees the cross of Christ both in Moses' outstretched arms during the battle with the Amalekites and in the bronze ser-

[141] Bloomfield; 301-302.
[142] *Ibid.*; 302.

pent lifted up before the congregation of Israel in the wilderness. At least the latter one has New Testament warrant in John 3:14. Other examples (indeed, most examples) are more fanciful and harder to accept. "Consider, for example, the interpretation that Barn. 7-8 gives the OT ritual of the red heifer (Num. 19). Typical of allegory, it draws great spiritual significance from the details of the procedure. So, the writer says the red heifer represents Jesus, and the children who sprinkle its ashes 'are those who preach to us forgiveness of sins…to whom he [Jesus] entrusted the authority to proclaim the gospel.'"[143] Perhaps the most damning characteristic of allegorical interpretation is that no two exegetes discern the same allegorical 'meaning' from the same text.

Yet allegory itself is not to blame, for it is sometimes intentional. Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* and *Holy War* are both intentionally allegorical, as is Paul's interpretation of the family of Abraham as recorded in Galatians 4. Against any literal reading of the Abrahamic narratives, Paul asserts that the characters in the family drama are 'symbolic,' and then proceeds to turn traditional Jewish perspective completely on its head. Sarah and Isaac, always viewed by Jews as representative of their nation as God's people, are, in fact, symbolic of believers, both Jew and Gentile. The unbelieving Jew, and the city of Jerusalem to which he looks as the center of Yahweh's kingdom and the heart of His people Israel, is really the antitype to Hagar, the slave, and her son, Ishmael. The Greek word Paul uses in verse 24, translated 'symbolic' by the NASB, is *alleigoroumena* (αλληγορούμενα), which is, of course, transliterated to 'allegory.' It is safe to say that no Jew had ever interpreted the history of Abraham's family in this manner, and equally safe to say that no unbelieving Jew would have accepted Paul's interpretation. But it is also reasonable to say that even believing Jews, upon reading Paul's allegorizing interpretation in Galatians 4, would likely have scratched their heads and wondered, 'Where did you get that, Paul?' Note that the apostle does not simply claim


John Bunyan (1628-88)

[143] Klein, *et al*; 32.

'inspiration' or 'apostleship' as the authority behind his radical reconfiguration of the historical narrative; there is no 'You must believe this because I am an apostle.'

> *Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons: the one by a bondwoman, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the freewoman through promise, which things are* ***symbolic****. For these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar — for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children — but the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all.* (Galatians 4:21-26)

On the one hand, it is safer to restrict such interpretations to those who we recognized as having the inspiration of the Spirit governing and controlling their exegesis. On the other hand, we who also have the same Spirit indwelling us, and who *"have no need of any to teach"* us, ought to be able to see how it is that Paul arrived at this interpretation, knowing that no such indication of meaning can be found in the surface, literal reading of the associated Old Testament text. We can see the historical characters, yes., and we can see from the literal text the struggle that developed between Sarah and her 'son of the promise,' Isaac and the maidservant Hagar and her son, Ishmael. Pauls' allegorical interpretation does not reimagine the historical setting regardless of the radical meaning he attributes to the characters. There is a sense, clearly, that Paul's interpretation is *in* the Old Testament text, but that does not immediately make it clear just how Paul teased it out." The problem of the allegorical level, or allegory as interpretation, lies essentially in the literal level. Meaning in many senses is intertwined with the literal level…In fact, the basic role of hermeneutics is to distinguish the literal level from the signification level, in order finally to bring them together again if necessary."[144] But is this something the Church can do safely? Bloomfield quotes C. S. Lewis, "No story can be


C. S. Lewis (1898-1963)

[144] Bloomfield; 314.

devised by the wit of man which cannot be interpreted allegorically by the wit of some other man…Therefore the mere fact that you can allegorize the work before you is of itself no proof that it is an allegory."[145]

Herein lies the danger of the allegorical hermeneutic, and why it has been so assiduously avoided by conservative evangelicals for generations. How can the Church avoid subjective, imaginative, and ultimately fanciful interpretations of passages under the guise of 'allegory'? That this method produced numerous incorrect and downright ludicrous interpretations of passages from both the Old and the New Testaments, stands as a perpetual warning of such free-wheeling exegesis. Bloomfield hints at the solution, "Now, works can certainly have a plethora of significations, but cannot have an infinity of significations if we are concerned with the historical situation. If we are not, then any work can mean many things – but the historical truth acts as a sobering force. It is not satisfying to feel that anything can mean anything."[146]

To review the dilemma: we know that the passages that we read in the Old Testament have a deeper or fuller meaning than the surface words indicate, a fact illustrated time and time again by the usage made of the Old Testament by the authors of the New Testament, but also by the usage of the Old Testament within itself. Events and persons take on larger significance and deeper meaning as revelation progresses, and we are not always able to discern the interpretive mechanism by which these deeper significations are teased out of the original. Because we acknowledge Scripture to be the inspired Word of God, the revelation of His nature and His purpose, we recoil from the notion that later writers are simply allegorizing the earlier passages; we perceive that the meaning drawn out of the passage by a later, inspired writer is somehow contained within the passage itself, is part of the *sensus literalis*, the literal sense of the text. Paul Ricouer, the 20th Century French philosopher, spoke of this phenomenon as 'textual in-


Paul Ricouer (1913-2005)

[145] *Ibid.*; 311.
[146] *Idem.*

tentionality.' Fabiny writes, "The essence of Ricouer's new theory of interpretation is that the text itself has intention: the text speaks, the text orients our thought. Interpretation is not an act on the text but the act of the text. Therefore it is more proper to speak about 'textual intention' rather than 'authorial intention.'"[147]

***Sensus Plenior*:**


Raymond E. Brown (1928-98)

In the mid-1960s, Catholic biblical scholar Raymond E. Brown popularized a hermeneutical middle ground, called the *sensus plenior*, or 'fuller sense/meaning.' Brown was seeking a compromise between the literalist and the allegorist/typological schools, believing both to be wide of the mark. His summary definitions of the 'literal' meaning as "The sense which the human author directly intended and which his words conveyed,"[148] is both conventional and illustrative of the problem of the New Testament usage of Old Testament passages. It has never taken a multi-degreed Bible scholar to see that the 'literal' sense, by this definition, by no means exhausts the meaning of the text. Thus Brown goes define the 'spiritual' or 'typical' sense of the passage as "the deeper meaning of the 'things' written about in the Bible when they are seen to have foreshadowed future 'thing' in God's works of salvation."[149] Unless we conclude that the New Testament authors had no regard for the integrity of the Old Testament – a conclusion that no one who holds to the inspiration of the New Testament could make – then there must be some sense in which the literal and the spiritual/typological meanings are contained in the selfsame passage. This is the *sensus plenior*, the 'full' or 'fuller' sense of the text. Longenecker writes, "In actual fact, there appear to be numerous cases of *sensus plenior* in the New Testament – that is, of instances where Scripture is cited in a manner that goes beyond a literal sense, or beyond what can be determined by the rules of historical-critical exegesis to have been the Old Testament

[147] Fabiny; 16-17.
[148] *Ibid.*; 11. Quoting from *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*.
[149] *Idem.*

author's message for his time."[150] Peter notes in his epistle that the fullness of meaning was not given to the prophets, but awaited the fullness of time, the Christ-event, to reveal the fullest sense of the Old Testament text.

> *Of this salvation the prophets have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven – things which angels desire to look into.*
>
> (I Peter 1:10-12)

Canon as Context:

The *sensus plenior* also incorporates the undeniable *progression* of revelation as Scripture unfolds. Previous revelation is not abrogated or rendered obsolete by newer revelation, but is rather incorporated into the new without losing its historical and revelatory character. The 'literal' sense of Scripture thus matures as revelation progresses, culminating, of course, in the ultimate revelation of and through God's Son. "The fuller sense of Scripture is the literal sense that is pregnant with a future. The prophet does not simply 'foresee' the future; for him all futurity is within the 'thing,' but this is understood only later on the basis of the progressive revelation of God."[151] Douglas A. Oss ties together the concept of the *sensus plenior* with the reality of the unified canon of Scripture,

> Since the canon of Scripture is a unified literary work, the *sensus plenior* of a given text is simply that which emerges when the text is subjected to the light of all of biblical revelation. Thus the use of *sensus plenior* as a hermeneutical method does not involve allegorization or eisegesis, but involves discerning in a text all the strata of meaning that the canonical context warrants. The progress of revelation dictates that the meaning of scriptural texts became deeper and clearer as the canon unfolded. The exegete, by considering the Bible as an integrated whole, reaches a fuller understanding of individual texts

[150] Longenecker; xxxiii.
[151] Fabiny; 18.

> of Scripture. That fuller understanding involves strata of meaning, all of which the author expressed, whether or not he intended to express them.[152]

"All strata of meaning that the canonical context warrants." This is where Biblical or Canonical Theology enters into hermeneutics. In order to discern the fuller meaning of Old Testament texts, one must be able to bring to bear *the full counsel of God* as contained in the fullness of His revelation.[153] The concept of the *sensus plenior* – the 'fuller' sense of a passage – protects the exegete from allegory so long as the limiting scope of the exegesis is the canon of Scripture. Oss writes, "A proper *sensus plenior* must be distinguished from allegory. The method does not consist of unbridled, imaginative exegesis and the reading into a text of symbolic meaning that has no biblical basis."[154] Oss maintains that the *sensus plenior* hermeneutical method does not derive new meanings from passages, but rather unlocks the layers of meaning present in the passage with the key of continuing, progressive revelation. These layers, or strata, of meaning are contained within the original passage by virtue of the fact that God is the Author of the unified canon, and it was His intention that the fuller meaning of any given passage would be revealed through progressive revelation of further Scripture. Again, Oss,

> *Sensus plenior*, here defined, refers to the recognition of the canon of Scripture as a single and unified literary work. Because it is one book, no part of the book can be properly understood apart from the whole. Therefore, reflection on the whole Scripture becomes a vital and central aspect in the hermeneutical process. And one's understanding of a passage will be deeper and clearer as the result of being seen in the light of the whole. This may included levels of meaning that were not part of the conscious intention of the human author, but are included in the expressed meaning of the publicly accessible text and which are part of the canonical context…Thus a biblically based *sensus plenior* considers a given text in the light of the fulness of revelation.[155]

To say that one may only interpret a passage by the historical-grammatical method, within its own immediate context and according to its own wording and syn-

[152] Oss. Douglas A. "Canon as Context: The Function of the *Sensus Plenior* in Evangelical Hermeneutics" *Grace Theological Journal*, Vol. 9 (1988); 105.
[153] Acts 20:27
[154] Oss; 106-107.
[155] *Ibid.*; 107.

tax, is to elevate the human author above the divine. Full understanding of any passage, if it is even possible to attain, must take into account the unfolding of the meaning of that passage through further, progressive revelation. Acknowledging God as the divine Author should convince us that the fullest meaning was *intended* in the earliest revelation – not *new* meaning into *old* texts, but unfolded meaning from the same original thought. Oss provides an excellent example through the Second Commandment, the prohibition against the worship of idols. His analysis is worth quoting at length as it does quite ably illustrate the principle of both *sensus plenior* and the canonical context of every text of Scripture.

> The example of the second commandment in Exod. 20:4 will serve well. It reads, 'You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down and worship them.' In its historical significance this commandment is probably addressing religious syncretism, or the worship of pagan deities. However, upon reflecting on the canonical context, one discovers that the concept of idolatry is expanded, and other dimensions of meaning for the commandment emerge. Eph. 5:5 indicates that immorality, impurity, and greed constitute idolatrous behavior. Elsewhere as well, these three sins are identified as idols or considered as idolatrous behavior (e.g., Col. 3:5, I Cor. 5:10; 6:9, 1 Pet. 4:3). Even more profound a connection is seen in the simple command, 'Keep yourselves from idols' (1 John 5:21), where John summarizes his entire discussion concerning the things of God and the things of this world. His juxtaposition of the two realms clearly indicates that they are mutually repugnant, and so he says not to love the world or the things of the world (2:15). Functioning as a conclusion, the phrase 'Keep yourselves from idols,' summarizes all that John meant when he gave the instruction not to love the world. In light of the canonical context, then, the second commandment has far-reaching meaning in the present.[156]

The *sensus plenior* provides a hermeneutical method by which we may recognize the influence of the symbolic world of Scripture on the authors, both Old and New Testament, without falling into the subjectivity of allegorical interpretation. By consulting the canon as the ultimate context of all Scripture – yet without ignoring the immediate context and grammar of the individual passage – we may begin to see how later revela-

[156] *Ibid.*; 126.

tion opens up the deeper meaning of earlier passages, meaning that is not foreign to the original passage but is latent. "Progressive revelation and the formation of the canon contribute to the perspective that the Bible is a single literary work produced ultimately by a single divine author."[157] The concept of *sensus plenior* also helps us see the manner in which the New Testament authors used their Hebrew Scriptures, our Old Testament, in ways that clearly departed from the original text as it is written but, we must insist, never departed from the divinely-intended meaning within that text. For them, of course, the canon was not yet complete. But the Christ-event was before them as a historical reality, and now all Scripture – once seen only in *parts and portions through the prophets* – received its full and final exposition. "Moreover, the methods of the NT writers are an important consideration in this matter. They did not hesitate to make these kind of canonical connections…For the NT authors, the person of Jesus Christ was the final revelation that clarified all previous revelation."[158]

We must be clear on the meaning of the *sensus plenior* in light of the context of canon. Unlike allegory, the text does not yield up imaginative and unrelated meanings – a 'spiritual' meaning with no evident connection to the literal sense of the passage. The meaning of the Second Commandment is not departed from as further revelation shines greater light on just what constitutes idolatry, that meaning is expanded and deepened. "There is no 'added' knowledge, only strata of knowledge already present in the canon. Thus one can affirm both the historical meaning and the *sensus plenior* without reading into the author's expressed meaning something that is distinct from it."[159]

This is the greatest fear among evangelical biblical scholars, that by diverting in any manner from the historical-grammatical exegesis, within the immediate context of the passage, one risks departing from exegesis and entering *eisegesis* – reading *into* the text rather than *out of* the text. *Sensus plenior*, however, does not depart from the historical-grammatic hermeneutic. It does, however, give further consideration to the passage

[157] *Ibid.*; 112.
[158] *Ibid.*; 117.
[159] *Idem.*

in its *canonical context*, a perfectly valid thing to do – even a *necessary* thing to do – if we believe that the entire Bible is ultimately the work of one Author, God. Only in this manner can we avoid serious problems and inconsistencies within the individual passages themselves, such as the promise of a continual Davidic dynasty found in II Samuel 7,

> *When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his Father, and he shall be My son. If he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men and with the blows of the sons of men. But My mercy shall not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I removed from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before [e]you. Your throne shall be established forever.* (II Samuel 7:12-16)

Evangelicals have performed amazing hermeneutical and exegetical gymnastics in various attempts to somehow show that there was no interruption in the Davidic line, when it is most obvious historically that the line *did not* continue as is apparently promised in this covenant. Solomon, the one who would build the Temple intended by his father David, later attached conditions to the covenant – the condition of continued obedience on the part of the king, a condition that was not met. But it is clear that the Davidic Covenant in this passage in II Samuel is deeper than the earthly kingdom it seems to speak of as perpetual and inviolate. We understand now, through the revelation of Jesus Christ, what the deeper meaning of II Samuel 7 really is, and was. "But the *sensus plenior* in this example, which is made plain in the light of Christ, can certainly be said to reside 'in' the expressed meaning of the discourse. Any claim of normativeness for the 'literal' meaning creates grave problems for our understanding of God's promises. He must have meant all along that these promises would be fulfilled in Christ, and therefore the meaning based on the canonical context must be 'in' the text."[160]

The use of the *sensus plenior* hermeneutic is not entirely straightforward, and the danger exists of departing from the historical-grammatical meaning of the passage in an

[160] *Idem.*

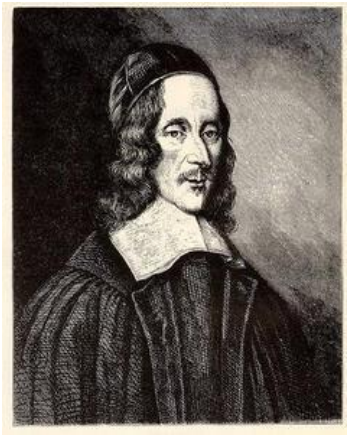
attempt to 'find Jesus' in it, a departure that necessarily introduces 'meaning' that cannot be derived from the original text. However, if the symbolic world of Scripture is considered within the overall limitations and context of the canon, we can begin to see more clearly the textual connections both within the Old Testament and between the two Testaments, just as the writers of the New Testament did. The earlier texts establish the symbols that then become typological concepts around which further divine revelation orbits and develops, leading ultimately to the supreme antitype, the Lord Jesus Christ. As long as the analysis and connection of such types are contained within the context of Scripture, and are not imaginative or fanciful, such connections are themselves canonical and intended by the divine Author of all Scripture. "The canonical context is the criterion for determining the validity of this [typological] aspect of *sensus plenior*. If, after a grammatical-historical exegesis is carried out on the related pericopes, a typological correspondence is determined to exist within the canon, then its significance should be recognized as canonical."[161] This is the exegetical function of Biblical or Canonical Theology.

[161] *Ibid.*; 121.

Lesson 7 – Hearing the Echoes – Part 1
Text: Galatians 4:21-26; II Corinthians 3:1-6

"Paul repeatedly situates his discourse within the symbolic field created by a single great textual precursor: Israel's Scripture."
(Richard B. Hays)

OH that I knew how all thy lights combine,
And the configurations of their glorie!
Seeing not onely how each verse doth shine,
But all the constellations of the storie.
This verse marks that, and both do make a motion
Unto a third, that ten leaves off doth lie:
Then as dispersed herbs do watch a potion,
These three make up some Christians destinie:
Such are thy secrets, which my life makes good,
And comments on thee: for in ev'ry thing
Thy words do finde me out, & parallels bring,
And in another make me understood.
Starres are poore books, & oftentimes do misse:
This book of starres lights to eternall blisse. (George Herbert, *Holy Scriptures II*)[162]


George Herbert (1593-1633)

It is unusual to find the essence of a theological science contained within a few stanzas of a poem, but Anglican priest George Herbert's *Holy Scripture* does just that for the science of Canonical Theology. Speaking of individual verses and passages in the Bible as 'lights' and 'starres,' Herbert longs to the 'constellations' of them, the manner by which each verse and each passage (and, we may say, each book) takes its place in the canonical whole, even arranged, as it were, in so many constellations that present to him a glorious panorama of 'eternall blisse.' There is no evidence that Herbert was a biblical theologian – he entered the ministry rather late in life, and died very early at age 39. But he seemed to get the gist, at least in this poem, of the biblical or canonical theologian's perspective and, as maintained thus far in this study, the perspective that the New Testament authors possessed. Perhaps we

[162] George Herbert: The Holy Scriptures I & II (1633) (ccel.org). Accessed 31August2024.

may borrow from Herbert's poetic imagery to say that the goal of Canonical Theology is to better and more consistently recognize the biblical constellations, and consequently to navigate the other theologies more 'biblically.'

The concept of 'canon as context' discussed in the last lesson introduces the nuts and bolts of Canonical Theology: hearing the echoes of Scripture in Scripture. This is not a practice open to the higher critic, since that that field has occupied its time and efforts with dissecting the existing canon, delaying the authorship of its book for centuries, and otherwise attempting to 'scientifically' destroy the canonical faith held by Jews through the Second Temple period, and Christians from that first Pentecost in Jerusalem. The consensus opinion of liberal scholarship is that the Bible we have. Both Old and New Testaments, is a late production of the religious communities involved and by no means a divine self-disclosure over fifteen hundred years in the giving. Brevard Childs, himself a product of liberal Christian scholarship, recognized the vacuousness of this approach, and the undeniable reality that neither the Jewish community nor the Christian *ever* recognized its canon as anything other than divinely authored and authoritative. Frankly, any other 'Bible' is not worth studying at all.

But one who reads the Bible as we have it, hears the echoes. Within the Old Testament itself and from the New Testament back to the Old, the 'intertextuality' of Scripture is undeniable. That word, 'intertextuality,' is a modern one, and is as slippery as most modern terms. It is borrowed from literary studies where it originated in the famous work of Julia Kristeva in the late 1960s. The term was intended to describe the interrelation of all texts to all other texts, whether as source material, borrowed, or simply influenced. The concept is not as new as the term, as liberal biblical scholars in the 19th Century considered much of the Old Testament, especially the cosmology and law portions, to have been borrowed from earlier Near Eastern literature. Kristeva's work was influential in biblical studies (she is not a biblical scholar by any means) largely due to the concurrent shift in biblical studies to-

Julia Kristeva (*b.* 1941)

ward a more literary approach. Kristeva's article appeared in 1968; Childs' seminal *Biblical Theology in Crisis*, the book in which he first set forth the 'canonical' hermeneutic, in 1970. Childs did not take his canonical approach from Kristeva; rather, there was in those years a movement within literary criticism, biblical and otherwise, toward treating a literary text as a whole, rather than the previous practice of dissection. Intertextuality, then, is at its most basic the recognition that within any given culture there will be a lexical and textual atmosphere in which all literature in that culture lives and moves. This may reflect events or persons important to that culture; it certainly embraces documents and writings developed within the culture. Intertextuality, then, is the phenomenon by which any culture develops its own literary language from within, subsequent authors borrowing or echoing earlier authors as all draw from the same textual cultural universe. Applying the principle to biblical studies, Richard Hays writes,

> The phenomenon of intertextuality – the imbedding of fragments of an earlier text within a later one – has always played a major role in the cultural traditions that are heir to Israel's Scriptures: the voice of Scripture, regarded as authoritative in one way of another, continues to speak in and through later texts that both depend on and transform the earlier.[163]

The benefit of the term comes from its etymology: inter-text signifying the interrelating of different texts, or the sharing of thought and expression from text to text across genre and across time. In actual usage, however, the term is too broad and vague; Kristeva herself recognized this feature of the term she coined, and came to prefer *transposition* as more accurately describing her intentions. Be that as it may, the concept of intertextuality reminds the reader in any culture and of any genre, that literature within that culture is not created in a vacuum; there is a living interaction between the communicative media within the culture that is recognized, borrowed, transformed within itself. To some extent, therefore, a literary text cannot be properly understood outside of the intertextuality of its cultural heritage. "Broadly speaking, intertextuality

[163] Hays, *Echoes*; 14.

refers to theories that understand that a text can only be understood within its larger network of interconnected relations with other texts."[164]

Within biblical studies, intertextuality has been somewhat further defined as 'inner-biblical exegesis – when a later passage transforms the meaning of an earlier one, and 'inner-biblical allusion,' where an earlier text is re-employed by a later writer without any attempt to modify the meaning of the earlier text. Russell Meek writes, "The primary difference in these two methodologies is that inner-biblical exegesis argues that the receptor text has in some way modified the source text, whereas inner-biblical allusion argues that the receptor text alludes to the source text with no attempt at modification."[165] Hays maintains that Paul largely employed 'inner-biblical exegesis,' though of course the apostle never called it that. "To read Paul against this background of 'inner-biblical exegesis' is to understand his place in the stream of tradition in a new way. He saw himself as a prophetic figure, carrying forward the proclamation of God's word as Israel's prophets and sages had always done, in a way that reactivated past revelation under new conditions."[166] The modern terminology is meant only to help us understand better the hermeneutics employed by the writers of the New Testament. It is to recognize the 'symbolic world' that the New Testament authors inhabited, and within which they thought and wrote, was powerfully influenced by the Hebrew Scriptures, the Old Testament. "Paul repeatedly situates his discourse within the symbolic field created by a single great textual precursor: Israel's Scripture."[167] Limiting his discussion to the Pauline literature, Hays, summarizes the impact of intertextuality on the apostle's writings,

> The vocabulary and cadences of Scripture…are imprinted deeply on Paul's mind, and the great stories of Israel continue to serve for him as a fund of symbols and metaphors that condition his perception of the world, of God's promised deliverance of his people, and of his own identity and calling. His faith, in short, is one whose articulation is inevi-

[164] *Dictionary of the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*; 684.
[165] Meek, Russell L. "Intertextuality, Inner-Biblical Exegesis, and Inner-Biblical Allusion: The Ethics of a Methodology" *Biblica*, Vol. 95, No. 2 (2014); 290.
[166] *Echoes*; 14.
[167] *Ibid.*; 15.

> tably intertextual in character, and Israel's Scripture is the determinant subtext that plays a constitutive role in shaping his literary production.[168]

Intertextuality is a scholarly concept of limited benefit to actual exegesis. *That* later texts draw from earlier texts does not necessarily provide the methodology by which the reader can *discern* such intertextuality. The concept is more cultural and sociological than it is hermeneutical, and so we need to break it down further. This is what the terms 'inner-biblical exegesis' and 'inner-biblical allusion' attempt to do, but they are a bit cumbersome as catchphrases. The *Dictionary of the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* breaks the concept of intertextuality down into three distinct aspects, presented in descending order of clarity: *quotation, allusion,* and *echo.* The first of these is self-explanatory, the second two are somewhat more nuanced. Together, however, they seem to plumb the depths of intertextuality both within the Old Testament and between the New Testament and the Old.

Intertextuality: Quotations

It would seem that direct citations of the Old Testament by the New are both self-explanatory and exegetically simple. For the most part, they are, with roughly two-thirds of the quotations introduced by a 'quotation formula' such as *"as the Scriptures proclaim,"* or *"as it is written."* However, that leave a third of the New Testament citations of the Old Testament as lacking any direct introduction, a situation complicated by the fact that the citations are often not verbatim from either the Septuagint or the Hebrew Bible. Therefore, even quotations as an example of intertextuality often require further exegetical analysis. Still, direct citations remain the most explicit reference from one section of Scripture to another.

> Quotation stands as the most explicit end of the continuum among the three literary modes of reference…A quotation is an author-oriented, intentional, and overt act. An unintentional quotation is an oxymoron An author creates a quotation when he or she chooses a selection of text from a prior author and embeds it into his or her own in an

[168] *Ibid.*; 16.

> explicit and direct attempt to have the reader recognize the embedded material and then the selection in its *new context.*[169]

In modern writing there is a phenomenon called plagiarism, the practice of citing another writer's work without credit. Any such citation is to be credited by a footnote or endnote, or some other form by which the current writer gives credit where credit is due (more importantly, perhaps, is to not take credit where it is not earned). But citations or introductory formulae are not merely to give the original author credit, but to express a current thought in the words of another deemed either more eloquent or more authoritative, or both. "Yet the NT authors hold a view of the OT that shapes their quotations of that corpus. They understand the OT to be sacred writings, inspired by God himself, and thus to be authoritative and normative. Its epic story is the true story of the whole world, its writings are divine self-disclosure, and its laws are just and true and to be fully obeyed. It is therefore unsurprising that the NT authors often quote Scripture to appeal to divine authority in order to provide support for a point being made in the new context."[170]

As noted above, New Testament quotations from the Old Testament usually – two-thirds of the time, roughly – employ an introductory formula that links the citation with the Hebrew Scripture, sometimes even to the particular author. Christopher Beetham, the author of the essay on "Quotation, Allusion, and Echo" in the *Dictionary*, discusses at length the frequency with which such introductory formulae are used. He concludes, "The hard data from the NT suggest that, in general, its authors employed a quotation formula when they wanted to ensure that the reader would recognize and understand that the text that followed (or immediately preceded) was a quotation of a prior text."[171] This seems both straightforward and somewhat obvious, if only the New Testament data did indeed support Beetham's summary conclusion. In fact, even quotation or introductory formulae do not always help the reader know exactly what is being quoted, from where it is being quoted, and/or the sense the New Testament author

[169] *Dictionary*; 685. Italics original.
[170] *Ibid.*; 687.
[171] *Ibid.*; 686.

is intending to make with the quotation. There are, in fact, four different categories of Old Testament quotations in the New Testament within the two-thirds introduced by some recognizable quotation formula.

1. Quotations that are clear and relatively clearly understood.
2. Quotations that are clear but not clearly understood.
3. Quotations for which there is no obvious referent in the Old Testament.
4. Quotations introduced but for which there is no associated quotation.

The **first** of these is by far the easiest for the New Testament reader both to recognize and to follow, even though the original text may not carry the New Testament meaning on its surface. For instance, Peter's usage of the prophecy of Joel 2 to describe the phenomenon witnessed by the crowd on Pentecost is about as straightforward as a quotation can be. Introduced by the formula, "*but this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel,*" Peter proceeds to quote very accurately from Joel 2:28-32.

Acts 2:17-21

And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God,
That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh;
Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
Your young men shall see visions,
Your old men shall dream dreams. And on My menservants and on My maidservants
I will pour out My Spirit in those days;
And they shall prophesy.
I will show wonders in heaven above
And signs in the earth beneath:
Blood and fire and vapor of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood,
Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD.
And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the LORD Shall be saved.

Joel 2:28-32

And it shall come to pass afterward
That I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh;
Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
Your old men shall dream dreams,
Your young men shall see visions.
And also on My menservants and
on My maidservants
I will pour out My Spirit in those days.

And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth:
Blood and fire and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood,
Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the LORD.
And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the LORD Shall be saved.

Peter adds one note to the prophecy from Joel, perhaps by way of explanation or perhaps quoting a different manuscript of the prophet: "*And they shall prophesy*" in verse

18. This modification of the original text, if indeed it is a modification, has no effect on our understanding both of the referenced text and its application to the current situation.

There are other citations in this category that are slightly less defined in that the source of the Old Testament quote, or its author or prophet, is not given. An example of this sub-type is Paul's concatenation of several Old Testament passages joined together in Romans 3 to illustrate with divine authority the totally depraved nature of man. Introduced with a much more generic, "*as it is written,*" Paul then draws from various Psalms.

> *There is none righteous, no, not one.*
> *There is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God.*
> *They have all turned aside; they have together become unprofitable;*
> *There is none who does good, no, not one.*
> *Their throat is an open tomb; with their tongues they have practiced deceit;*
> *The poison of asps is under their lips, whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness.*
> *Their feet are swift to shed blood;*
> *Destruction and misery are in their ways;*
> *And the way of peace they have not known.*
> *There is no fear of God before their eyes.* (Romans 3:10-18)

The **second** category of quotations is that which includes clear citations of an Old Testament passage or verses, but with an unclear application to the current situation. This is not to say that the connection between the New Testament passage and its Old Testament referent is non-existent, only that it is not readily apparent when one goes back and reads the Old Testament citation in its context. Perhaps the most famous example is one we have referred to already: Matthew's use of Hosea 11 with reference to the child Jesus being brought back from Egypt to Israel by his father, Joseph. Again, the introductory formula is quite expansive: "*that what was spoken of by the Lord through the prophet might be fulfilled, saying, 'Out of Egypt did I call My Son.'*"[172] In the same pericope in Matthew 2, we have another specific and introduced prophecy, this time from Jere-

[172] Matthew 2:15.

miah, applied by the gospel writer to the slaughter of the infants in the region of Bethlehem by Herod,

> *A voice was heard in Ramah,*
> *Lamentation, weeping, and great mourning,*
> *Rachel weeping for her children,*
> *Refusing to be comforted, because they are no more.* (Matthew 2:18)

A comparison of the context from Jeremiah 31, from which this prophecy is taken, shows that the connection between the two texts is not clear. The original speaks of Ramah, a city in the northern kingdom of Samaria (which had long since been carried off into exile by the time of Jeremiah) and of Rachel, Jacob's beloved wife, whose connection with Ramah is indeterminate. Bethlehem, where Jesus was born and where Herod carried out his campaign of infant extermination, is in the south of Judah and has no connection to either the tribe of Ephraim (mentioned in Jeremiah 31) or Rachel. The citation is easy enough to find; the meaning that Matthew derives from it, not so much. Yet we recoil from the idea that Matthew played fast and loose with Scripture, employing unwarranted imagination in pulling from the prophet Jerremiah to show 'fulfillment' in the life of Jesus Christ. There must be something behind this reference, like the timeless enmity of this world's leaders to the plan and people of Israel's God, and especially the enmity between the Seed of Woman and the seed of the serpent, here represented by Herod.

The **third** category enters into the more difficult realm of introduced quotations, as the citation listed does not then correspond to any passage in our Old Testament. There are numerous examples, one from the same gospel of Matthew and the same chapter, where Matthew writes,

> *But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning over Judea instead of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. And being warned by God in a dream, he turned aside into the region of Galilee. And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophets, 'He shall be called a Nazarene.'* (Matthew 2:22-23)

There is no such prophecy in the Hebrew Scripture, whether from the prophets or from any other portion of the text. Some have theorized that Matthew is quoting from another document no longer available to us. This, however, is at best an argument from silence. It also falls short of what we do know about the canon of the Hebrew Scriptures at the time of Christ - none of the known 'also-rans' in terms of Jewish writings of the earlier period, have any reference to the Messiah being a Nazarene. Another option is that Matthew is employing a play on words, associating the word for 'Nazarene' (*natzōraios*) with the Hebrew word, *netzer*, which means 'Branch.' This, then, might be a reference to Isaiah 11 where the Messiah is prophesied as a "*Shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a Branch from his roots.*"[173] As a biblical citation, this explanation would be, to say the least, somewhat obscure. It is not followed by many scholars.

Others have read into Matthew's reference that Jesus was a *Nazarite*, which is quite different from a Nazarene. Furthermore, Jesus was not a Nazarite as He did drink wine and He did touch dead bodies. Surely the proper exegesis of this difficult reference cannot rest on the similarity of words.

Perhaps the most appealing option also comes from Isaiah, this time from Isaiah 53 where we read of the Messiah as a man "*despised and forsaken.*" In support of this interpretation, we have Nathaniel's apparently widely held opinion of Nazarenes: "*Can anything good come out of Nazareth?*"[174] Apparently it was a further humiliation that the Lord of Glory not only took upon Himself human flesh, but that the place that was to be associated with His name was itself a mean and lowly village among the towns of Israel; the reference to *Jesus of Nazareth* was not merely a geographical marker, it was a statement of derision. Matthew Henry writes, "*Galilee lay far north; Samaria lay between it and Judea; thither they were sent, to Nazareth, a city upon a hill, in the centre of the lot of Zebulun; there the mother of our Lord lived, when she conceived that holy thing; and, probably, Joseph lived*


Matthew Henry (1662-1714)

[173] Isaiah 11:1
[174] John 1:46

there too, Thither they were sent, and there they were well known, and were among their relations; the most proper place for them to be in. There they continued, and from thence our Saviour was called Jesus of Nazareth, which was to the Jews a stumbling-block, for, Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?"[175]

Another of this type of introduced quotation is found in John 7, where Jesus calls men to Himself at the Feast of Tabernacles.

> *On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water." But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.*
> (John 7:37-39)

The reference is obscure enough that John the author of the gospel, felt the need to provide an explanatory parenthetical note. The problem with the citation is that, again, there is no Old Testament passage that directly corresponds to it. The closest seems to be the vision of the new temple in the prophecy of Ezekiel, which would, of course, tie in with the Johannine theme of Jesus as the true Temple (*cp.* John 2:19-21).

> *Then he brought me back to the door of the temple; and there was water, flowing from under the threshold of the temple toward the east, for the front of the temple faced east; the water was flowing from under the right side of the temple, south of the altar. He brought me out by way of the north gate, and led me around on the outside to the outer gateway that faces east; and there was water, running out on the right side. And when the man went out to the east with the line in his hand, he measured one thousand cubits, and he brought me through the waters; the water came up to my ankles. Again he measured one thousand and brought me through the waters; the water came up to my knees. Again he measured one thousand and brought me through; the water came up to my waist. Again he measured one thousand, and it was a river that I could not cross; for the water was too deep, water in which one must swim, a river that could not be crossed. He said to me, "Son of man, have you seen this?" Then he brought me and returned me to the bank of the river.* (Ezekiel 47:1-6)

[175] Henry, Matthew *Commentary on the Whole Bible*. Matthew 2 Commentary - Matthew Henry Commentary on the Whole Bible (Complete) (biblestudytools.com). Accessed 02September2024.

The setting of the quotation, with Jesus standing in the midst of the festive crowd and 'crying out,' reminds us of Isaiah 55, which might also be the referent for the quotation in John 7:38.

> *Ho! Everyone who thirsts, Come to the waters;*
> *And you who have no money, Come, buy and eat.*
> *Yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.*
> *Why do you spend money for what is not bread, And your wages for what does not satisfy?*
> *Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, and let your soul delight itself in abundance.*
> *Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear, and your soul shall live;*
> *And I will make an everlasting covenant with you – The sure mercies of David.*
>
> (Isaiah 55:1-3)

Other candidates include two from Zechariah,

> *In that day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin and for uncleanness.* (Zechariah 13:1)

> *And in that day it shall be that living waters shall flow from Jerusalem,*
> *Half of them toward the eastern sea and half of them toward the western sea;*
> *In both summer and winter it shall occur.*
> *And the LORD shall be King over all the earth. In that day it shall be –*
> *"The LORD is one," And His name one.* (Zechariah 14:8-9)

Thus we see that the idea of a river forms a complex of thought – a symbolic world – from which Jesus draws (pun intended) as He cries out to the assembled crowd in Jerusalem. We will have occasion to study this motif in more detail, as the 'river' starts (biblically) in Eden and ends in the New Jerusalem. From the perspective of the methodology of quotations, we see in this example that even an introduced citation may not be from any one particular verse but rather may refer to a complex of Old Testament passages that form around a central symbol.

Examples abound of this sub-category of introduced quotations in the New Testament; a couple more will suffice to describe the phenomenon and to briefly point the way forward exegetically. This one is from Paul's letter to the Ephesians, where the

apostle is exhorting the congregation to live in a manner appropriate to their new calling in Christ, and not to fall back into the darkness of their former ways.

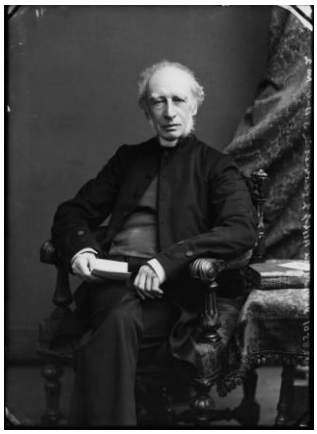
> *For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth), finding out what is acceptable to the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret. But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light. Therefore He says:*
>
> *"Awake, you who sleep, Arise from the dead,*
> *And Christ will give you light."* (Ephesians 5:8-14)

Again we have an introduced ("*Therefore He says…*") quotation that has no referent in the Old Testament. We know that Paul is citing an Old Testament reference because he uses the same introductory formula in Ephesians 4:8 followed immediately by a quotation from Psalm 68:18.[176] Never mind the fact that, in the Ephesians 4 citation, Paul rearranges the Old Testament quote – that is a matter for later study – the case still remains that in the quotation in 5:14 there is no known referent. If Paul does not quote exactly from an Old Testament passage, he may be *alluding* to Isaiah 60, which has similar language and a similar setting with regard to the darkness of the world.

> *Arise, shine; For your light has come!*
> *And the glory of the LORD is risen upon you.*
> *For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and deep darkness the people;*
> *But the LORD will arise over you, and His glory will be seen upon you.*
> *The Gentiles shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.*
>
> (Isaiah 60:1-3)

Charles Ellicott does not allow the reference, writing in his commentary, "But no scriptural passage can be adduced which, with the fullest allowance for the apostolic freedom of quotation, comes near enough to be a satisfactory original of this passage. The nearest is Isaiah 60:1, "Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord

[176] The introduction is slightly different. In 4:8, the pronoun is neuter – *Therefore it says* – whereas in 5:14 it is masculine – *Therefore He says*.


C. J. Ellicott (1819-1905)

is risen upon thee;" and this is certainly very far off indeed."[177] Ellicott rejects attempts to modify Isaiah 60 with Isaiah 26:19, though it more clearly uses the term, 'Awake!'

> *Your dead shall live;*
> *Together with my dead body they shall arise.*
> *Awake and sing, you who dwell in dust;*
> *For your dew is like the dew of herbs,*
> *And the earth shall cast out the dead.*

He eventually concludes that Paul is not quoting Scripture at all in this passage, nor from any apocryphal writing of which We are aware. "Hence we are driven to conclude that the quotation is not from Holy Scripture. Yet the very form shows that it is from something well known. An apocryphal quotation is imagined by some, but with no knowledge of any quotation at all resembling it. Others have supposed it a traditional saying of our Lord (like Acts 20:35); but the form seems decisive against this. On the whole, it seems most likely that it is from some well-known Christian hymn."[178]

But are we indeed forced to this conclusion? The introductory formula, *prima facie*, points us to the Old Testament. Rather than concluding that Paul is unaware that what he then writes is nowhere found in the Hebrew Scripture, it seems better to understand the reference, again, as an amalgam of Old Testament *thought*, represented by several actual passages but informed even more by Old Testament *theology*. John Calvin, in his commentary on the verse, introduces the possibility that Paul is incorporating a saying of Jesus, recorded in John 5, where the Lord says, "*Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear shall live.*"[179] This is a significant thought, as it shows Jesus incorporating the earlier passages from Isaiah into His own life and ministry, and shows Paul recognizing the statements of our Lord as themselves canonical. Calvin writes in regard to Ephesians 5:14, " Wherefore he saith. Interpreters are at great pains to discover the passage of

[177] Ellicott's *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, Ephesians 5:14 Commentaries: For this reason it says, "Awake, sleeper, And arise from the dead, And Christ will shine on you." (biblehub.com). Accessed 02September2024.
[178] *Idem.*
[179] John 5:25

Scripture which Paul appears to quote, and which is nowhere to be found. I shall state my opinion. He first exhibits Christ as speaking by his ministers; for this is the ordinary message which is every day delivered by preachers of the gospel. What other object do they propose than to raise the dead to life? 'The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live'"[180]

Finally, James 4 presents us with one last example of this sub-group of introduced citations,

> *Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures. Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, "The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously"?* (James 4:1-5)

Once again we have an explicit introductory formula, "*the Scripture says…*" followed by a quotation for which there is no referent in the Old Testament (or any known referent in the apocryphal writings, either). There is no comfortable solution with this particular verse, as there are really no Old Testament passages that come close to what James writes here. Alec Motyer writes in his commentary on James, "Most commentators hold that James is using the formula *the Scripture says* to refer to what is in fact not a direct quotation but a concise summary of the mind of Scripture on this point."[181] The verse is further complicated by the fact that we really do not know whether James is referring to the Holy Spirit (as the New King James version assumes with its capital 'S') or the human spirit within believers (or even all mankind) For our purposes in this particular lesson, this verse in James shows (1) that even citations with a specific introductory statement might not guide us to the appropriate place in the Old Testament, and (2) even if we can formulate a referent for the citation, that does not always unlock the passage exegetically.

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[180] Calvin's *Commentaries*. Ephesians 5 Calvin's Commentaries (biblehub.com). Accessed 02September2024.
[181] Motyer, Alec *The Message of James* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press; 1985); 148.

The **fourth** and final sub-category of quotations from the New Testament probably should not be considered quotations at all, except for the use of the introductory formulae. These are references to the Scriptures that are not accompanied by any actual quotation. Classic among these is I Corinthians 15, itself a masterpiece of Pauline defense of the resurrection and of the overarching redemptive plan of God. Paul introduces this mini-treatise with another defense of his gospel,

> *Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you – unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.* (I Corinthians 15:1-4)

This seems to be a 'global' citation rather than a particular one. Paul's "*according to the Scripture*" is similar to his salutation in Romans 1,

> *Paul, a bondservant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated to the gospel of God which He promised before through His prophets in the Holy Scriptures, concerning His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, who was born of the seed of David according to the flesh, and declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.*
> (Romans 1:1-4)

Passages like these which use introductory formulae in a global manner, show us the perspective of the writers of the New Testament with respect to the Hebrew Scriptures. Theirs was not a pedantic obligation to quote 'chapter and verse,' but rather a pervasive, atmospheric relationship with the self-disclosure of Israel's God in what we now call the Old Testament. Introductory formulae, we have seen in this lesson, do not always point to a specific Old Testament text and, when they do, do not always treat that Old Testament text in what we might consider a straightforward manner. It may be that introduced quotations, especially those of the third and fourth sub-groups, would be better termed 'allusions' or even 'echoes' rather than quotations. Be that as it may, the New Testament usage of introductory formulae shows us that the New Testament

writers were so steeped in their Hebrew Scriptures that even allusions or echoes were so vivid to them as to warrant an *"as the Scriptures say."*

The sheer volume of 'quotations' in the New Testament confirms this conclusion. According to the Nestle-Aland critical Greek New Testament, there are 355 quotations in the New Testament with reference to the Old.[182] This number does not include allusions and echoes, to which we will turn our attention in the next lesson. But the large number of quotations alone should be sufficient to show how influential the Hebrew Scriptures were to the thought world of the New Testament authors. Childs summarizes his own *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* by stating,

> The Christian canon consists of two different, separate voices, indeed of two different choirs of voices. The Old Testament is the voice of Israel, the New that of the church. But beyond this, the voice of the New Testament is largely that of a transformed Old Testament which is now understood in the light of the gospel…The formation of a Christian canon has not resulted in the stifling of Israel's witness to God and his Messiah, but rather has enhanced the need…The Old Testament serves within the canon, not just as background, nor as the first stage within the trajectory, but as Israel's voice of direct discourse proclaiming the promise.[183]

[182] *Dictionary*; 685.
[183] Childs; *Biblical Theology*; 722.

Lesson 8 – Hearing the Echoes – Part 2
Text: John 1:1-14; Romans 9:1-4

"The alluding text is mostly understandable without the marker of the allusion, but its interpretation becomes richer if the allusion is actualized."
(Maarten Menken)

One of the positive developments in biblical studies over the past thirty or forty years has been the recognition, or perhaps rediscovery, of the fact that the Bible is itself a literary work. It is by no means *merely* a literary work, but it is literary and possesses the characteristics of a piece of literature. This reality is still sometimes considered a dangerous concept – the thought being that if the Bible is a literary work it is somehow less the Word of God. That does not follow. Standard hermeneutics recognizes the different *genre* within the Bible – narrative, chronicles, poetry, etc. – each of which is a *literary* style; there is no reason to view the whole as less literary as the parts, and equally no reason to view a literary reading of the Bible as detracting from either its divine inspiration or its authority. The purpose of Canonical Theology is less to develop a new theological curriculum to run alongside Systematic, Exegetical, Historical, and Practical Theologies, than to recover a canonical approach to *reading* the Bible – to read it as the disciples did. Stephen Dempster recommends an "appreciation of the text as a literary whole, a redemptive story that aims at the restoration of a lost destiny for the human race and creation."[184]


Stephen Dempster (*b.* 1956)

Dempster makes a valid point with regard to the manner in which the Bible has been treated since the Reformation, if not since the 2nd Century. The Bible has been analyzed and systematized; it has been dissected and subjected to 'higher criticism,' but, as Dempster notes, "We have been so eager to *interpret* the Bible that we have sometimes forgotten to *read* it."[185] The goal of Canonical Theology is to recover not only a literary

[184] Dempster, Stephen G. *Dominion and Dynasty: A theology of the Hebrew Bible* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press; 2003); 25.
[185] *Ibid.*; 24. Dempster is actually quoting here from Edwin M. Good, *Irony in the Old Testament.*

reading of the Bible, but such a reading that recognizes the full canon as the context for each part. In other words, to regain sight of the forest in spite of the individual trees of each biblical book, and the even smaller trees and shrubs of theological formulations. It is the contention of Canonical Theology that reading the Bible as a unified whole will enhance the understanding of each part, and will make the reading more enjoyable. Dempster quotes a leading Hebrew scholar, Robert Alter, "Subsequent religious tradition has by and large encouraged us to take the Bible seriously rather than to enjoy it, but the paradoxical truth of the matter may well be that by learning to enjoy the biblical stories more fully as stories, we shall come to see what they mean to tell us about God, man and the perilously momentous realm of history."[186]


Robert Alter (*b.*1935)

This is not to say that no one in the Church has read the Bible in a literary manner since the 1st Century. It is, however, to say that the emphasis over the past several centuries – first the Reformation as it countered the tendentious Scripture reading of the Roman Catholic Church, then the Enlightenment with its emphasis on human reason as the arbiter of biblical truth, to the modern 'fundamentalist' return to a more robust trust in the inerrancy and inspiration of Scripture, and final to neo-orthodoxy and its attempt to find 'existential truth' within the text of the Bible – has been to focus so much on this or that passage or book as to lose sight of the unified whole of the self-revelation of God in Scripture. Dempster calls this phenomenon 'hermeneutical myopia' a near-sightedness that is not bad in and of itself, but can lead and has led to a loss of the 'big picture.' Again, this is not something new, as hermeneutics texts have long recognized the different literary genre in the Bible, and the fact that these different genre demand different interpretive methodology. 'Canon as Context' is merely taking a necessary step back and seeing the panoramic view of the whole of Scripture – from the *parts and portions* to the final revelation from and of God through His Son (Heb. 1:1-2).

[186] *Ibid.*; 26.

The fundamental characteristic of reading the Text – as Dempster refers to it in distinction from the 'texts' – is to recognize the unity of Authorship of the Bible. Though there are many human authors, there is but one divine author, and that fact has been timelessly acknowledged by the community's recognition of the canon – first the Jewish community, then the Christian. The practical outworking of this reality is that the Bible is not a compendium of divine books, it is itself a divine Book, and thus has an inner coherence that transcends both the individual books and the two testaments into which Scripture has been divided. Again, this is not to say that the division between 'Old' and 'New' Testaments is itself invalid – there *are* two covenants, and the biblical record associated with each has its own voice. It is, however, to reiterate that the division between two testaments is not hermetically-sealed; there is clear and important communication and revelation that crosses the division in both directions. This is why we have spent so much time in discussing the formation of the canon, to show that it was an inner recognition by faith rather than an outward, official proclamation of religious authorities, whether Jewish or Christian. The *unity* of the Scriptures means a *unified* message. The parts can only be fully understood in relation to the whole.

To read the Bible in a literary manner also means more than recognizing the different genre within it, though this remains a very important facet of sound hermeneutics. Canonical Theology focuses on reading the Bible as a *literary whole*, which means learning to recognize the interconnectedness of the Text (again, borrowing from Dempster) through quotations, allusions, and echoes. There is, of course, a tacit assumption here that we can know with certainty the chronology of the different parts of the Bible, in particular the chronological *order* in which they were written. We must acknowledge that we do not have full assurance of this. Unlike the higher critics, we fully accept the chronological priority of the Pentateuch. But that does not give us infallible knowledge as to the chronological order of, for instance, the Prophets or the Gospels. Because of this, we cannot say with full assurance that a particular text is *primary* with respect to another, say, *within* the Old Testament itself, or the New Testament itself, though we

affirm that the Books of Moses have chronological priority over the Prophets and the Writings, and that the entire Old Testament has chronological priority over the New.

The chronological order of the books of the Bible is not as important as it may appear to be. In spite of the fact that these books are found in different order within different listings over the course of both Jewish and early Christian history (though there has never been any doubt as to the chronological priority of the Pentateuch), that fact has never diminished the canonicity of the whole being fully accepted by the community. This reality is also due to the integral unity of the whole due to the fact that is has one Author behind its many authors. Therefore, we find that the 'intertextuality' of the Scripture works in a manner that is not tied to chronological order of authorship. It is *one unified narrative* from start to finish, and thus we find, as we do in nature, echoes that 'resound' from text to text without a clear idea as to the original, for the original is God.

This concept of the 'direction' of references and connecting lines within the overall Scripture comes to the forefront in the next two facets of 'intertextuality' – *allusion* and *echo*. As we saw in the last lesson, quotations usually are accompanied by an introductory formula, though we also saw that this introduction does not always help us identify the original text. With allusion and echo the markers are less clear, and it must be stated up front that recognizing the markers is by no means essential to understanding the passage under consideration. As Maartin Menkin says regarding allusion, "The alluding text is mostly understandable without the actualization of the allusion, but its interpretation becomes richer if the allusion is actualized."[187] Menkin uses the overly technical term 'actualized'; what is meant is simply that the reader is able to recognize the allusion, to identify its 'marker.' This ability is not entirely necessary to understand the passage being read, though it is necessary to realize the fullness of meaning that the author put into that passage. It is not a theological science; it is more of an art of reading that comes by realizing that such allusions are there, and by reading and rereading the

[187] Menkin, Maartin J. J. "Allusions to the Minor Prophets in the Fourth Gospel" *Neotestimentica*, Vol. 44, No. 1 (2010); 70.

Bible over and over again. It is not unusual to recognize additional plot features and interconnecting allusions when rereading a Dickens novel or a comedy or tragedy by Shakespeare; continued reading of the Bible is certainly no different.

Allusions & Echoes

The use of allusion by an author is a means of bringing to mind a different text while not obtruding that text upon the current reading. The alluded text reflects meaning in a deeper hue and is not strictly necessary to the understanding of the text being considered. Menken writes, "A literary allusion is 'a device for the simultaneous activation of two texts.'"[188] This is a helpful quote in its use of the word 'activate.' The text being read is the 'alluding' text; its activation is merely the process of reading. The secondary, or 'alluded' text – triggered by a phrase, word, or event association – is activated when the original passage is recollected in the process of reading the current or alluding text. One clear example is the opening line of John's Gospel.

> *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.* (John 1:1-4)

No introductory formula is used here, only the exact same two words with which the Greek translation of Genesis 1 begins, *en archai* – 'in the beginning.' This is not a quotation but an allusion, the use of these two words in John 1:1 'activates' the same two words in Genesis 1:1, bringing the earlier text into the literary domain of the later one. It remains for the reader to decide just how much of Genesis 1 is on John's mind, and there is no 'rule' for this determination. Yet once the allusion is recognized, the reader listens for more connections. "In allusion, the author embeds a marker pointing to another, prior text, inviting the audience to recognize the marker, remember the other text's original context, and link the appropriate components that the new context requires to be fully understood."[189]

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[188] *Ibid.*; 70. Menken is quoting Israeli literary theorist Ziva Ben-Porat.
[189] *Dictionary*; 688.

In the case of John 1, the intertextuality continues with the mention of both life and light, with John 1:4 – *"In Him was life, and the life was the light of men"* – alluding to both Genesis 1:2 – *"And God said, 'Let there be light'"* as well as the specific creation of Adam in Genesis 2:7 – *"And God breathed into him the breath of life, and he became a living soul."* This activated complex of John 1 and the Creation account of Genesis 1 & 2 thus brings into view both Jesus as the Last Adam and the concept of the New Creation in Christ. Neither of these are explicit in the opening verses of John's Gospel, but are prominent in the background of John's writing and fundamental to a Second Temple understanding of the promised Messiah.

According to the *Dictionary of the New Testament Use of the Old Testament,* allusion, like quotation, is *intentional.* The author of the alluding text intends for his readers to 'activate' the alluded text, bringing into their minds the additional scope of the earlier text. "For allusion is in fact a specific and brilliant literary device that an author intentionally employs to evoke a prior text in a new context."[190] It is assumed by the author that the text to which he is alluding is sufficiently well known to his readers to be called to mind by even a word or two, as 'markers,' from the earlier text. *"In the beginning"* – a mere two words in the Greek – is more than sufficient to activate the Creation account and evoke in John's readers the Creation context within the new context of the Advent of Jesus the Messiah. It may be argued that this connection is not strictly necessary in order to understand the basic gist of John's prologue, but it is also hard to doubt the additional richness that activation of the alluded text brings to John's writing. At the very least, it shows that the Genesis passage was on the apostle's mind as he wrote the opening verses of his Gospel, and that alone justifies the reader to ask, why?

Another example of allusion is found within the Old Testament itself, the reference to the *"stump of Jesse"* in Isaiah 11:1.

[190] *Idem.*

> *There shall come forth a Rod from the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots.*
> *The Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon Him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding,*
> *The Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD.*
> (Isaiah 11:1-2)

Widely recognized both by Jews and by Christians as a messianic prophecy, the reference to the Branch is a common one in the Old Testament. The equation of that Branch with the *Rod from the stem/stump of Jesse* is, however, a poetic allusion to the promise that the Messiah would be the Son of David, whose father was Jesse. There is no quotation here and thus no introductory formula. The allusion marker is 'Jesse,' bringing the reader immediately to David's family, the family of Jesse, and then forward to the future condition of this family at the time of Messiah: *a stump*. The Davidic dynasty was still alive and well in Isaiah's day, with the righteous (though somewhat foolish and gullible) Hezekiah on the throne. That royal house, however, was going to be cut down, leaving only a stump remaining – no royal majesty remaining, just a stump. Yet out of that stump would arise the Branch who is the Messiah, the Son of Davind and the rightful King of Israel. All of this background is activated in Isaiah 11 by the marker, 'Jesse.'

Recognized allusions, therefore, enhance the reader's understanding of the author's writing, bringing to mental recognition a deeper awareness of the thought world of the author. Today, if someone uses the phrase, 'Trust, but verify,' in either a dialogue or in writing, any hearer who grew up during the Cold War would recall to mind the atmosphere of unsteady trust that existed between the United States and the Soviet Union for four decades in the 20th Century. The necessity for some measure of trust coupled with the existential danger if one side were to betray that trust (hence, 'verify') became an entire thought paradigm that may now be activated with a simple marker, 'Trust, but verify.' In the same manner, writers of both later Old Testament texts and the authors of the New Testament, were able, through the use of simple markers, to draw into the newer context the complexities of an older text. This did not deny the earlier text's meaning within its own, original context. It was rather a literary device that

allowed that meaning to grow deeper by incorporation into the later context. Yet it must be admitted that without an introductory formula, there is a certain degree of interpretive license, some might say subjectivity, in the recognition of allusions.


Andreas Köstenberger (*b.* 1956)

Andreas Köstenberger, co-author of *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation*, notes the hermeneutical challenge of biblical allusions. "In the case of allusions, the question of criteria arises. In the absence of an extended literal quote, how can we be sure that a given New Testament writer intended to cite an Old Testament text?"[191] As noted in an earlier lesson, subjectivity in interpretation can lead to unwanted allegory, to fanciful imaginations of biblical references and background meanings that are not justified by either the text under consideration in the New Testament or the alleged reference from the Old. We have noted that a valid allusion must be intentional, but this then requires some consideration of how such intent can be recognized. An example that might be considered borderline is found in the opening verses of Romans 9, where Paul is lamenting the unbelief of his fellow Israelites, his *'countrymen according to the flesh.'*

> *I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh…*
>
> (Romans 9:1-3)

There is no explicit Old Testament citation, certainly no introductory formula announcing the fulfillment of an Old Testament prophecy. On the face of it there appears to be no reference to the Old Testament even by way of allusion. Yet the phrase, *"I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ"* for unbelieving Israel does seem to allude to another man, equally vexed by the hard-heartedness of Israel: Moses. The Israelites had committed the great national sin, the making of the golden calf as an image

[191] Köstenberger, Andreas J. and Richard D. Patterson *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation: Exploring the Hermeneutical Triad of History, Literature, and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications; 2011); 705.

of Yahweh, while Moses was on Mt. Sinai receiving the divine Law. Yahweh's wrath burned righteously against His people, but like Paul so many centuries later, Moses stood in the gap, with his own soul.

> *Then Moses returned to the LORD and said, "Oh, these people have committed a great sin, and have made for themselves a god of gold! Yet now, if You will forgive their sin – but if not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which You have written."* (Exodus 32:31-32)

Romans 9 does not even contain the verbal equivalence of John's use of the same words as in Genesis 1:1. Yet there is a logical equivalence between Paul's almost wishing himself accursed and Moses' desiring that God *blot me out of Your book*. The connection is circumstantial rather than verbal; is that enough to constitute intertextuality? Is it enough to form an allusion? The circumstance in the earlier text is Israel gathered at Mt. Sinai, in the presence of God, to receive the Law at Moses' hand. The larger picture is the Exodus, as Israel has just been delivered from her generations-long bondage in Egypt. If Paul is alluding to the circumstance in which Moses interceded to Israel, then his own thought world encompasses the Christ-event as a second and last Exodus. Many consider the language Paul uses in Romans 8 to be 'exodus language,' with God delivering His people from the bondage of sin, ultimately leading them by His Spirit to the Promised Land of the New Earth. If the Exodus motif indeed underwrites Paul's conception of the work of Jesus Christ, and there is ample evidence to suggest that it does, then an allusion such as between Romans 9 and Exodus 32 would activate the former text – the narrative of Israel's initial rebellion against her delivering God – with the current context – the rebellious unbelief of Israel in the face of her risen Messiah. To be sure, recognizing the allusion is not essential to understanding the pathos of the apostle toward his unrepentant fellow Israelites, but such an allusion does deepen the meaning of the Pauline text, and sets the current deliverance of God in Christ in the same motif as the Exodus.

Yet is it also possible that Paul's verbiage in Romans 9 is more an *echo* than an allusion. The echo is the third of the intertextual devices that are or may be employed

by the New Testament writers with reference to the Old Testament (as well as by Old Testament writers within the Hebrew Scriptures). Richard Hays refers to the echo as the quietest of the possible intertextual devices – quotation, allusion, and echo. Using the metaphor of a sound echo, Hays writes, "The volume of intertextual echo varies in accordance with the semantic distance between the source and the reflecting surface. Quotation, allusion, and echo may be seen as points along a spectrum of intertextual reference, moving from the explicit to the subliminal. As we move farther away from overt citation, the source recedes into the discursive distance, the intertextual relations become less determinate."[192]

The wording here is a bit esoteric, perhaps, but the phenomenon that Hays is describing is something everyone has experienced: the farther away from the source one is, the fainter the echo. The same is true in Scripture: quotations typically announce themselves and allusions frequently employ 'markers' to give indication of their presence. Echoes do neither, and therefore are harder to hear or, upon hearing, harder to discern. "Echoes are the least explicit mode of reference in the 'rhetorical hierarchy' of quotation, allusion, and echo."[193] Another feature of natural echoes applies to literary echoes: resonance. Echoes bounce off of solid objects and reverberate, making it even more difficult to track the source as each reverberation joins back with another echo. So it is with Scripture, as the major motifs of divine revelation reverberate from the Pentateuch, rebounding against the Prophets, and even among the Prophets, and being picked up again in the Wisdom Literature, especially the Psalms. By the time the New Testament writers are providing their inspired testimony to the risen Lord Jesus, the echoes of the Hebrew Scriptures are resounding in their minds, and appear in their writings sometimes loudly, sometimes barely a whisper.

It must be said that, as the understanding of a passage is not dependent on tracking the allusive markers, even less so is hearing the echoes an essential part of interpreting a given passage. "A reader can overlook the presence of an echo but still grasp the

[192] Hays, *Echoes*; 23.
[193] *Dictionary*; 690.

author's meaning."[194] But echoes are a beautiful aspect of nature and they are a beautiful aspect of Scripture. Unlike quotations and allusions, echoes need not be intentional; indeed, they usually are not. When discerned, echoes reveal the biblical subconscious of the author, the manner by which his mind and heart are so formed and influenced by God's Word. "An author typically generates echoes in a text because his or her mind is saturated with the source text(s)."[195] It is not a conscious literary decision to employ an echo as it is with a quotation or even an allusion. Quotations are cited, usually with an introductory formula, and allusions often employ a marker phrase or even text to alert the reader of the alluded texts. Echoes, comments Richard Hays, are more 'recollections' than 'citations.'[196]

How, then, does the reader hear the echo? "Unlike allusions, echoes are by nature faint and subtle. An author must render an allusion sufficiently explicit for the audience to recognize the allusion, but echoes are more like whispers, understated and elusive."[197] The only way to hear the echo, then, is to be as steeped in the original texts as were the writers who are inadvertently and unintentionally using this rhetorical device. It is not a hermeneutical method that one may employ; it is the almost inevitable result of a regular and consistent reading of God's Word, the original Sound that continues to echo down through the entirety of progressive revelation, through the entire canon. Quotations and allusions point to specific texts with varying degrees of explicitness. Echoes dwell in the realm of the symbolic world created by the many motifs with which God has disclosed His purpose in His Word. An awareness of the importance of biblical events as symbols – symbols that both live on long past the event but also carry and intensive the divine meaning behind that event – will begin to tune the biblical reader's ears for the sound of echoes. Despite the subtilty of the echo, its discovery will amply reward the reader who slowly and progressively learns how to listen. It is too much to say that hearing the echoes is the *goal* of Canonical Theology, but not too much

[194] *Ibid.*; 691.
[195] *Idem*
[196] Hays, *Echoes*; 20.
[197] *Dictionary*; 691.

to say that it is a great benefit as it most fully manifests the unity of God's Word within its diverse and unique parts. Perhaps the echoes are the voice of the Holy Spirit, the Inspirer of all Scripture, whispering the same message through each author's work.

> Among the most important [advantage] is that discovery of an echo can unveil a vast textual and symbolic world lying behind and suffusing the new context of the echoing text…exploration of the original context of the echoed text uncovers unexpressed links of otherwise unnoticed insight that enhance and deepen a reader's understanding of the echoing text.[198]

Allusion and echo are best differentiated by example. Maarten Menken, in his article "Allusions to the Minor Prophets in the Fourth Gospel," analyzes a number of apparent references by John to several of the Minor Prophets, as indicated by the Nestle-Aland text of the Greek New Testament, the very popular *Novum Testamentum Graece* (NA). Menken's article does not deal with any Old Testament passages that are found in the Fourth Gospel with an introductory formula, something that John rarely used anyhow. Rather, the article reviews those passages in the Gospel of John considered by NA to contain an allusion to one of the Minor Prophets. This is not to say that John *only* referred to the Minor Prophets, only that Menken limited his own analysis to references to that corpus of Old Testament literature. Several of the examples will hopefully suffice to delineate between *allusion* and *echo*.

John 1:21 and Malachi 4:5

The passage in John's Gospel should be viewed in a larger pericope than Menken's analysis because it contains several allusions (again, Menken was limiting his article to references to the Minor Prophets). The context, of course, is the attempt by the religious leaders of Judaism to come to grips with the ministry and person of John the Baptist. Inquiring of John's authority to baptize, the priests and Levites reflect a common theological expectation with regard to the Coming One, the Messiah of Israel.

[198] *Idem*.

John's response is equally grounded in the Old Testament. The overall passage appears to contain two allusions and an introduced citation.

> *Now this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask him, "Who are you?" He confessed, and did not deny, but confessed, "I am not the Christ."*
> *And they asked him, "What then? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not."*
> *Are you the Prophet?" And he answered, "No."*
> *Then they said to him, "Who are you, that we may give an answer to those who sent us? What do you say about yourself?"*
> *He said: "I am 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Make straight the way of the LORD," ' as the prophet Isaiah said."* (John 1:19-23)

The first query, "*Are you Elijah,*" does not quote any particular Old Testament passage but does fairly clearly allude to Malachi 4:5 where the LORD promises to send Elijah to His people Israel, before

> *Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse.* (Malachi 4:5-6)

There is no introductory formula in John's account referring to Malachi, but the allusion is unmistakable. Yet more to the point of the analysis of literary devices in Scripture is the further reference to Deuteronomy 18 found in the question, "*Are you the Prophet?*" which the Baptist also denies.

> *I will raise up for them a Prophet like you from among their brethren, and will put My words in His mouth, and He shall speak to them all that I command Him. And it shall be that whoever will not hear My words, which He speaks in My name, I will require it of him.*
> (Deuteronomy 18:18-19)

This reference does not have quite so clear a marker (Elijah) as the first, but the mention of the 'Prophet' would have put Deuteronomy 18 immediately into the minds of the reader, at least the Jewish reader. John's answer to the priest and Levites, however, constitutes a full-on quotation, complete with introductory formula (though the formula *follows* the citation rather than actually introducing it). John rejects the identifica-

tion as Elijah or the Prophet, yet acknowledges his role as the one who goes before the Messiah, making His path straight.

> *The voice of one crying in the wilderness:*
> *"Prepare the way of the LORD; Make straight in the desert, a highway for our God.*
> *Every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill brought low;*
> *The crooked places shall be made straight and the rough places smooth;*
> *The glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together;*
> *For the mouth of the LORD has spoken.* (Isaiah 40:3-5)

In this dialogue between the priests and Levites on the one hand, and the Baptist on the other, we have a series of Old Testament allusions and citations that subtly but unmistakably outline a complex of ideas that constituted the messianic expectation of Second Temple Judaism. John does not take on the identity, even figuratively, of Elijah but nonetheless announces that he is the one of whom Isaiah prophesied, the one who would come before the LORD, preparing His way. Thus, John apparently understood his ministry to be, at least, in the spirit of Elijah though he knew that he himself was not the Old Testament prophet come back to life. This understanding of John's interrogation seems to set well with Jesus' own testimony concerning the Baptist, recorded by Matthew in his Gospel. In this passage, the first evangelist blends the allusions of Isaiah and Malachi into one 'quotation,' though without an introductory formula.

> *As they departed, Jesus began to say to the multitudes concerning John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? But what did you go out to see? A man clothed in soft garments? Indeed, those who wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I say to you, and more than a prophet. For this is he of whom it is written:*
>
> *'Behold, I send My messenger before Your face,*
> *Who will prepare Your way before You.'*
>
> *Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force. For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John. And if you are willing to receive it, he is Elijah who is to come. He who has ears to hear, let him hear!*
>
> (Matthew 11:7-15)

John 1:49 and Zephaniah 3:15

A seemingly innocuous meeting between Jesus and Nathaniel leads to Jesus' alarming assessment of the latter, *"an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!"*[199] Again, this is not an Old Testament quotation – no introductory formula is used and no specific Old Testament book is referenced. However, the idea of an Israelite in whom there is no deceit is the context of the prophecy of Zephaniah with respect to the *remnant*. Significantly, the passage from Zephaniah speaks of the ''Day,' undoubtedly the Day of the LORD, which corresponds directly with Jesus' advent and helps to explain His comment to Nathaniel.

> *The remnant of Israel shall do no unrighteousness*
> *And speak no lies, nor shall a deceitful tongue be found in their mouth;*
> *For they shall feed their flocks and lie down, and no one shall make them afraid.*
>
> (Zephaniah 3:13)

The obvious marker for this allusion is the word 'deceit' or 'guile.' Alone, this word might not trigger a connection with the prophecy of Zephaniah. This connection is established by Jesus' denomination of Nathaniel as *"an Israelite indeed."* Though not exactly corresponding to the 'remnant' of Zephaniah 3, the understanding that the remnant comprised *true Israelites* was strong within Second Temple Judaism, especially among such separatist groups as the Essenes of Qumran. By triggering this association, Jesus links His ministry – particularly the calling of His disciples – to the prophecy of Zephaniah as its fulfilment. Menken comments, "An allusion to Zeph. 3:13 makes sense: Nathaniel represents 'the remnant of Israel,' and more generally Jesus' disciples constitute the nucleus of the eschatological Israel, of which Jesus is the king."[200]

[199] John 1:47
[200] Menken; 73.

John 4:10 and Zechariah 14:8

The alleged reference is in the midst of the narrative of Jesus' dialogue with the Samaritan woman. The conversation is opened by the Lord provocatively through the mention of 'living water,' *apropos* to the setting of the meeting, Jacob's Well.

> *A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give Me a drink." For His disciples had gone away into the city to buy food. Then the woman of Samaria said to Him, "How is it that You, being a Jew, ask a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?" For Jews have no dealings with Samaritans. Jesus answered and said to her, "If you knew the gift of God, and who it is who says to you, 'Give Me a drink,' you would have asked Him, and He would have given you living water." The woman said to Him, "Sir, you have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep. Where then do you get that living water? Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it himself, as well as his sons and his livestock?" Jesus answered and said to her, "Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.* (John 4:7-14)

Does Jesus' mention of *"living waters"* constitute an allusive marker to Zechariah 14:8?

> *And in that day it shall be that living waters shall flow from Jerusalem,*
> *Half of them toward the eastern sea and half of them toward the western sea;*
> *In both summer and winter it shall occur.*
> *And the LORD shall be King over all the earth.*
> *In that day it shall be – "The LORD is one," and His name one.* (Zechariah 14:8-9)

This particular example is interesting and significant because it seems to fit within a broader stream (pun intended) of biblical references to rivers and flowing water, a motif that flows (again, intended) from Eden to the New Jerusalem, from Genesis to Revelation. It may even be that the prophecy of Zechariah is an example of intertextuality with Psalm 78, perhaps alluding to the gushing waters that came out from the Rock in the Wilderness.

> *He split the rocks in the wilderness, and gave them drink in abundance like the depths.*
> *He also brought streams out of the rock, and caused waters to run down like rivers…*

> *Behold, He struck the rock, so that the waters gushed out, and the streams overflowed. Can He give bread also? Can He provide meat for His people?*
>
> (Psalm 78:15-16, 20)

This is an amalgam of 'water' and 'river' quotes, but do they constitute an allusion? There is a significant difference in what Jesus says in John 4. In the Old Testament passages noted above, including Zechariah 14:8, the waters flow from someplace else – Jerusalem, or the Rock in the Wilderness – in John 4 the living waters flow from the person himself or herself. Jesus picks up this theme again in John 7 at the Feast of Tabernacles,

> *On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water."* (John 7:37-38)

This passage was considered in the previous lesson due to the introductory formula, *"as the Scripture has said,"* though which Scripture exactly is indeterminate. The reference in John 4 lacks any introductory formula, but it seems evident that the underlying concept is the same as in John 7, and as well in Psalm 78 and Zechariah 14. Menken rejects John 4 as an allusion to Zechariah 14, though he readily acknowledges the 'living waters' motif that runs through Scripture. "I conclude that there is no specific connection between John 4 and Zech. 14:8, and therefore no allusion in the former text to the latter."[201]

Menken's article, however, does not treat of the *echo* as it was not in the scope of his analysis. Perhaps Jesus' words to the Samaritan woman do not constitute an allusion, and the 'living waters' are not to be construed as a marker. This is a reasonable conclusion, given the frequency in which the motif of living or gushing waters, waters that give life, is found in the Old Testament. If John 4 is an allusion, to which of these many Old Testament passages is it alluding? One cannot be definitive. Yet in this case it appears that we have the rhetorical device of *echo*, as well as in John 7 even though

[201] Menken; 75.

the latter passage contains the introductory formula for a quotation. Ultimately, the motif to which all of these passages connect is that of the River of Life, first found in the Garden of Eden and finally and forever in the New Jerusalem.

Philippians 1:19 and Job 13:16

For our next example we switch to Richard Hays' *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* and to Paul's Epistle to the Philippians. It is widely acknowledged that this letter is the most irenic of the Pauline corpus: there were no theological or practical issues in Philippi that required intense polemical or retributive language on the part of the apostle. Hays notes that Paul's use of the Old Testament is far less explicit in Philippians than in any of his other letters, especially than Romans and Galatians. "In Philippians, exegetical exposition of the Old Testament plays no explicit role. Indeed, if we limit our consideration to quotations introduced with an explicit citation formula and exclude the instances of allusion and echo, this epistle of thanks and exhortation would appear to contain no Old Testament references at all."[202]

Hays surmises that the purpose of Paul's letter to this non-problematic church was to both inform them of his current imprisonment and to give his defense of the incarceration. Thus in the first chapter we read,

> *For I know that this will turn out for my deliverance through your prayer and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, according to my earnest expectation and hope that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ will be magnified in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.*
>
> (Philippians 1:19-21)

There is no obvious reference in this passage to a well-known Old Testament text, but Hays points out that the phrase "*turn out for my deliverance*" is, in the Greek, verbatim from Job 13:16. Though the English (NKJV) rendering of the passage in Job does not reflect the same translation as in Philippians 1:19, the Greek is identical in all respects relative to the phrase, "*turn out for my deliverance.*" Did Paul intend for this to

[202] Hays, *Echoes*; 21.

happen? There is no indication in Philippians that he did, no quotation formula and no clear and unmistakable marker – unless one can reasonably expect that his Gentile readers had memorized their Old Testaments so thoroughly as to have Job 13:19 at the forefront of their minds. Hays writes, "Paul echoes a fragment of voice from Job…The echo is fleeting, and Paul's sentence is entirely comprehensible to a reader who has never heard of Job."[203]

That this short segment of a sentence is indeed an echo is, however, supported by the circumstances connecting Paul and Job – the suffering of an innocent child of God. In the broader scope of Job 13, the protagonist is defending his own righteousness against the puerile indictments of his 'friends' that he must be suffering on account of some unconfessed sin. Job protests his innocence and states his confidence that the just God would, in the end, 'deliver' or 'save' him, vindicate him in the sight of his accusers (and, unknown to Job, vindicate him in the sight of his demonic accuser as well). Paul, too, is suffering unjustly, though of course the nature of the apostle's suffering is different than that of Job. "Paul the prisoner tacitly assumes the role of righteous sufferer, as paradigmatically figured by Job."[204] Paul's *"earnest expectation and hope is that in nothing shall I be ashamed"* is the same expression of confidence in a just Judge, as well as the injustice of his current sufferings, that is displayed by Job. The intertextuality is far too quiet to constitute an allusion, much less a quotation. But it is an echo, resonating from Paul's full and even subconscious awareness of the writings of the Hebrew Scriptures, even the seemingly less important Book of Job. Hearing this echo not only deepens the pathos of the apostle's letter to the Philippian church, but sheds further light on the meaning and significance of the Book of Job itself. In this Old Testament writing we hear the voice of righteous suffering, the supreme and unparalleled example of which, of course, is our Lord Jesus Christ.

[203] *Idem.*
[204] *Ibid.*; 22.

Lesson 9 – In the Beginning God Created…
Text: Genesis 1:1 – 2:25; Psalm 19:1-14; Isaiah 65:17-25; Revelation 21

"Serving like canonical bookends,
what God promises in Genesis 1-2
he declares fulfilled in Revelation 21-22."
(Edward W. Klink III)

We have been conditioned to think of the term 'exegesis' as something to be done to the text of Scripture, and that is a correct and practical definition. What does not often enter our minds is the concept that the biblical writers themselves did exegesis of the Scripture they had to hand. When the later Old Testament writers and prophets referred to the Pentateuch, for instance, and when the New Testament writers referenced the Hebrew Scripture, they often did so with modification and transformation of the original text. Not, as we have seen, in the manner of allegory (Galatians 3 being a notable exception, but the apostle informs his readers of what he is doing there), in which the meaning of the original text is essentially obliterated. Rather, in the sense of the expanding meaning of the original text, as a consequence of progressive revelation – the continuing acts of God calling for continuing exegesis of the earlier acts of God. Contrary to the Dispensational hermeneutic, the biblical writers very clearly viewed the expanding canon as continuous – the newer inspiration picking up on and expanding the older – until finally closed in the Person and Work (and Gospel) of God's Son. This phenomenon does not surprise us when we remember that the whole canon has but one Author; the same Holy Spirit inspired Paul and John as inspired Moses and David and Isaiah.

This phenomenon is what is meant by the common phrase, 'Scripture interprets Scripture,' though this phrase is often taken in a passive sense rather than an active one. It normally refers to the exegesis of a later passage, particularly a New Testament passage, by finding original and prophetic meaning in an older passage. But the active sense of the phrase means that Scripture is *interpreting* Scripture even as it is being written, the meaning of earlier passages is being expounded and expanded by later passages, both within the Old Testament and between the New Testament and the Old. The

actual direct revelation of God in Scripture comprises a remarkably small amount of the text of the canon, the vast majority of both Old and New Testament are composed of inspired commentary and meditation on these 'scattered diamonds' of direct revelation, as Vos calls them.

> The direct revelations of God form by far the smaller part of the contents of the Bible. These are but the scattered diamonds woven into the garment of the truth. This garment itself is identical with the Scriptural contents as a whole. And as a whole it has been prepared by the hand of God. The Bible contains, besides the simple record of direct revelations, the further interpretation of these immediate disclosures of God by inspired prophets and apostles.[205]

What this means in terms of Canonical Theology is the deepening of passage exegesis by the increasing awareness of the internal exegesis of Scripture upon itself, which is to be expected under the rubric of 'progressive revelation.' It is not too much to say that the entire Old Testament is but inspired commentary on the Pentateuch, and that the New Testament is the inspired commentary on the Old Testament. "Progressive revelation has long been used to refer to the internal organic growth of teachings within Scripture. In Scripture, 'the advance of revelation' extends from the beginning through 'all expansions of the original message of salvation' in many stages."[206] This being the case, Genesis seems a logical place for Canonical Theology to start, particularly the first three chapters. These constitute not merely the prologue to the Book of Genesis, or even to the Pentateuch, but rather to the whole inspired canon.

The act of Creation was in itself an act of Revelation. Creation is the answer to the age-old philosophical question, 'Why is there not nothing?' There is not nothing because God chose to reveal Himself, and the commencing act of that self-disclosure was Creation. "*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.*" That Creation was an act of divine revelation is expressly stated in at least two passages – Psalm 19 and Romans 1.

[205] Vos, *Redemptive History*; 20.
[206] Schnittjer, Gary Edward *Old Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic; 2021); xviii-Xix.

> *The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork.*
> *Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night reveals knowledge.*
> *There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard.*
> *Their line has gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.*
> *In them He has set a tabernacle for the sun, which is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber,*
> *And rejoices like a strong man to run its race.*
> *Its rising is from one end of heaven, and its circuit to the other end;*
> *And there is nothing hidden from its heat.* (Psalm 19:1-6)

> *For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse,* (Romans 1:20)

Creation as revelation-act sets a pattern in Scripture, whereby act and word are associated in the progressive process of divine self-disclosure. George Wright, in his influential monogram *God Who Acts*, offers a summary statement of his work in the Preface, "The conception of the pages which follow is that Biblical theology, while it is not propositional and systematic dogmatics, is nevertheless a defensible entity of its own kind, one that should influence the work of contemporary theologians more profoundly that it thus far has done. It is a theology of recital or proclamation of the acts of God, together with the inferences drawn therefrom."[207] As any knowledge of God must start with God disclosing Himself, it is imperative for our study to recognize that the foremost manner by which God has disclosed His nature and His will and purpose is through divine act, and the seminal act is, of course, Creation.


Edward W. Klink III (*b.* 1975)

Creation is not merely the Judaeo-Christian cosmology, its story of origins little different than that of the *Enuma Elish* of ancient Babylon, or the legend of Khepri among the ancient Egyptians. It *is* a cosmology, to be sure, but unlike the pagan myths, Creation immediately becomes both a symbol and a motif regarding the further revelation of God through the canon of both

[207] Wright, *God Who Acts*; 11.

Old and New Testament. Edward Klink writes, "The term *creation* likely elicits in the mind of most Christians the longstanding debates regarding the origins of the universe, or at least the topic that deals primarily with the beginning of all things. What this book wants to explain is that when the Bible speaks about creation, it is not just referring to the beginning of all things but also the end of all things, the new creation, and therefore *the goal of all things*."[208]

Klink's book is about Creation and New Creation and is part of the series entitled *Essential Studies in Biblical Theology,* edited by Benjamin Gladd. There is no attempt to declare Creation to be *the* theme of Scripture, or even the *most important* theme of Scripture. Rather, the series' aim is to "explore the central or *essential* themes of the Bible's grand storyline."[209] The ESBT is self-consciously patterned after the *New Studies in Biblical Theology,* edited by D. A. Carson[210], with the significance difference that the NSBT is more topical whereas the ESBT traces individual motifs of revelation through the progressive stages of divine revelation the canon of Scripture. One goal of such theological series, especially of the ESBT, is to elaborate biblically on the manner by which the *acts* of God become the *symbols* of His future acts and promises, all culminating in the advent of His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. There is no attempt to raise one motif over another, though the Scriptures themselves do seem to emphasize some more than others. Ironically, it does not appear that Klink's volume is the first in the ESBT series, but we begin with Creation simply because that is where God self-disclosure begins.

A word ought to be said concerning the historicity of the Creation account due mainly to the fact that it is popular even among professing believers to minimize the importance of taking the historical narrative of Genesis, especially the first three chapters, as historically accurate. This presents an excellent opportunity to further explain that understanding the divine acts as also *symbolic* by no means detracts from their historical reality; indeed, the symbolism loses all force if the act did not really happen. For instance, there is no theological reality in a New Creation founded on an original Crea-

[208] Klink, Edward W. *The Beginning and End of All Things* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press; 2023); 3.
[209] From the back cover, *The Beginning and End of All Things.*
[210] Both series are published by InterVarsity Press.

tion that never happened. This is not to say that believers need spend a great deal of energy trying to 'prove' the historical veracity of the Creation account, for which there is, of course, no archaeological evidence, for *"By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible."*[211] Yet due to the raging debate between Evolution and Creation (which is only now raging on the one side, Evolutionism having gained the status of 'scientific proof'), many professing evangelicals have abandoned the historicity of the Genesis account, preferring to say nothing rather than to commit to faith. This is not only *not* the pattern of true Canonical Theology, it is diametrically opposed to it. Creation thus presents the most graphic example of the principle that the *historical reality* of the event, the *act of God*, undergirds and validates the *symbolic importance* then attributed to that event. Truth has never been grounded in legend and myth. To reject and lose the historical reality of the acts of God recorded in the Old Testament is to lose historical Christianity as well. "Surely, if the New Testament is not proclaimed as the fulfilment of the Old, if the Gospel as proclaimed by Jesus and by Paul is not the completion of the faith of Israel, then it must inevitably be a completion and fulfilment of something which we ourselves substitute – and that most certainly means a perversion of the Christian faith."[212]

Creation as Motif

To understand more fully the symbolic importance of historical Creation, we need to ask of Scripture just why God chose to create in the first place. Puerile notions of loneliness or love are not worth considering, though sadly preachers have erroneously informed their congregations that God just could not get along without us. When we do consult God's own Word on the matter, we find that He created for no other reason than His will.

> *You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power;*
> *For You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created.*
>
> (Revelation 4:11)

[211] Hebrews 11:3
[212] Wright, *God Who Acts*; 17.

The importance of a canonical understanding of Creation is manifest in this fact, that God created the heavens and the earth for no other reason than the pleasure of His will. For a sentient divine Being, which we believe God to be, this means *purpose*, but purpose that originates solely in God but is reflected in Creation itself. In other words, as Creation is undeniably the beginning of divine self-disclosure - the stage, as it were, on which the rest of revelation will be set – we should listen for the allusions and echoes of Creation throughout Scripture as it *declares the glory of God*.

The Creation-oriented focus of divine revelation is, furthermore, a remarkable contrast to ancient paganism as well as modern materialism. The nature of paganism is to deify the experienced world; the testimony of Scripture with regard to Creation, is to glorify the Creator God. Modern Science, as materialistic in its essential epistemology as ancient paganism, attributes the mechanisms of Nature solely to 'natural laws'; there is no proclamation of divine glory. But the theme of Creation permeates the Bible as the firm foundation of *monotheism*: the God who created the heavens and the earth is the one, true God; there can be no others. Isaiah famously ridicules the pagan idols and their followers through comparison with Yahweh as the Creator of all things.

> *By the word of the LORD the heavens were made,*
> *And all the host of them by the breath of His mouth.*
> *He gathers the waters of the sea together as a heap; He lays up the deep in storehouses.*
> *Let all the earth fear the LORD; Let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of Him.*
> *For He spoke, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast.* (Psalm 33:6-9)

> *To whom then will you liken God? or what likeness will you compare to Him?*
> *The workman molds an image, the goldsmith overspreads it with gold,*
> *And the silversmith casts silver chains.*
> *Whoever is too impoverished for such a contribution chooses a tree that will not rot;*
> *He seeks for himself a skillful w workman to prepare a carved image that will not totter.*
> *Have you not known? Have you not heard? Has it not been told you from the beginning?*
> *Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?*
> *It is He who sits above the circle of the earth, and its inhabitants are like grasshoppers,*
> *Who stretches out the heavens like a curtain, and spreads them out like a tent to dwell in.*
> *He brings the princes to nothing; He makes the judges of the earth useless.*
>
> (Isaiah 40:18-23)

Unlike the ancient paganism that surrounded Israel, and unlike modern materialistic Science that permeates Western society and epistemology, the Biblical account of Creation presents Man with a Creator God to whom all beings are responsible. Childs writes of Isaiah's testimony, "If there had ever been uncertainty as to whether God was monotheistic, the prophet dispels once-and-for-all the thought in stressing the total supremacy of Yahweh."[213] The Creation motif has not received the emphasis that it deserves within Christian exegesis over the millennia, nor that which is justified by the emphasis placed on Creation, and Israel's God as the Creator, in Scripture. George Wright comments, "Of basic importance for the Church is the realization that Israelite faith as represented in the earliest as well as the latest literature was an utterly unique and radical departure from all contemporary pagan religions."[214]

Wright continues his discussion of the comparison of Israel's religion with ancient paganism by pointing out that the modern conception of paganism as superstitious and irrational is not supported by the historical evidence. We should remember that this same era of human history provided mankind with the Golden Era of Philosophy, the origins of a remarkably accurate Astronomy, and the 'wonders of the world' in human engineering and architecture. The pagan analysis of Nature was no less complex than the Hanging Gardens of Babylon or the Pyramids of Giza. "But in the ancient Near East, at least, polytheism was no primitive religion to be classified as merely one stage removed from animism and polydemonism…It was a highly sophisticated, organized and complex affair, in which the greatest intellectual achievement was the reduction of nature's vast plurality into an orderly and comprehensive system."[215] This is remarkably similar to modern, scientific materialism and into each pagan worldview – ancient and modern – the biblical revelation of one Creator God represents the divine challenge to human intellectual hubris.

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[213] Childs, *Biblical Theology*; 114.
[214] Wright; *God Who Acts*; 19.
[215] *Ibid.*; 19-20. Wright points out that "It is impossible on any empirical grounds to understand how the God of Israel could have evolved out of polytheism. He is unique, *sui generis*, utterly different." (21)

Creation, and God as Creator, thus pervades the revelation of Scripture, as it does the Man/Nature interface, as a constant challenge to every human being regarding the concepts of origin and destiny, a challenge that mankind has consistently avoided through both pagan polytheism and scientific materialism. Creation is therefore much more than a 'Let's get things started' doctrine of Judaism and Christianity; it is a resounding 'Who?' that constantly questions Man as to the meaning of all that is. Immanuel Kant, unable to bring himself to the admission of a universal God, nevertheless recognized the 'categorical imperative' under which all mankind exists. "The very nature of God's being places a tension at the heart of existence which destroys the natural man's integration of himself and his society in the rhythm of the kingdom of nature. The problem of life is not that of integration in the world. It is much deeper; it is the problem of obedience to the will of the transcendent Lord." The challenge of Creation, in one aspect of its presentation through the Scriptures, as it is from Him as the Maker of mankind that comes both salvation and judgment.

> *Woe to him who strives with his Maker!*
> *Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth!*
> *Shall the clay say to him who forms it, 'What are you making?'*
> *Or shall your handiwork say, 'He has no hands'?*
> *Woe to him who says to his father, 'What are you begetting?'*
> *Or to the woman, 'What have you brought forth?' "*
> *Thus says the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, and his Maker:*
> *"Ask Me of things to come concerning My sons;*
> *And concerning the work of My hands, you command Me.*
> *I have made the earth, and created man on it.*
> *I – My hands – stretched out the heavens, and all their host I have commanded.*
> *I have raised him up in righteousness, and I will direct all his ways;*
> *He shall build My city and let My exiles go free,*
> *Not for price nor reward," Says the LORD of hosts.* (Isaiah 45:9-13)

The lack of awareness within the Church of Creation as a motif of revelation has allowed believers to view the doctrine as less significant that other doctrines, like justification and sanctification. Evolutionary theory, and the confident pronouncements of modern Science, have eaten away at the faith by which the Church knows that *all things*

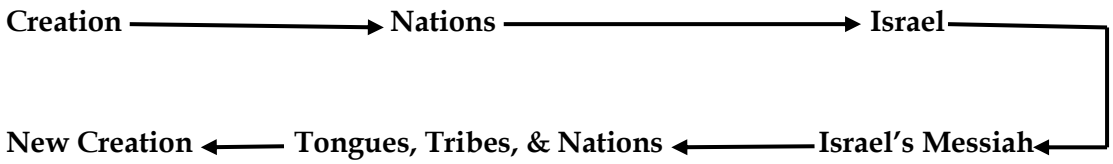
were created from nothing, replacing that faith with an emotional, utilitarian religion that gets people to heaven when they die. It can be argued that the general loss of belief in a literal, historical Creation lies at the base of the general neglect of the Old Testament as a whole, by modern, Western evangelicals. This phenomenon has exposed the modern Church to a resurgence of a form of paganism that masquerades as experiential religion that 'meets needs.' Within the remnant of conservative Christianity, the emphasis remains on 'getting people saved' and validating that salvation through a moral life with little or no awareness or concern about God's overarching purpose in Creation. George Wright's assessment, written in 1952, was prescient.

> The Church which lacks the Old Testament again becomes easy prey to paganism and cannot provide the answer or the hope for the present desperate dilemma of man. Thus, on the one hand, the Church today has tended to succumb to man's hope for integration, happiness and security in the world as it is. It has preached the Gospel as a new kind of paganism, the value of which is strictly utilitarian. Religion is good for us; it gives us comfort and peace of mind; it is the only hope for democracy; it alone can support the *status quo* and make us happy within it. Yet Biblical hope and pagan comfort are not the same thing…On the other hand, the Church has preached a Gospel of individual pietism and 'spiritual experience,' separated almost completely from the common life and from the historical programme of God as revealed in the Bible, while emphasizing and promising the immortality of the soul. It is not that these things in themselves are totally wrong in their proper setting, but here they are separated from the total Biblical context. As such, they are a reversion to pagan 'normalcy,' to an individualistic, self-centered, utilitarian worship which lacks historical grounding in election, promise and fulfilment.[216]

The biblical historicity of Creation established from the beginning of divine revelation the historicity of all God's acts. But it is important to note, as Wright does, that the historical acts of God do not stand as isolated interventions of divine power. Rather they constitute a 'programme,' a plan and purpose that moves forward through time (and progressive revelation) to fulfilment. In terms of Creation, that movement culminates in the New Creation, which is undoubtedly a coordinate theme within the canon. The overall outline of redemptive revelation originates in world history and culminates

[216] *Ibid.*; 26-27.

in world future. Revelation does not begin with the call of Abraham or with the Exodus and establishment of the nation of Israel, but rather with the creation of all things, including the nations of mankind. Speaking of the Hebrew Scriptures, the Tanakh, Dempster writes, "it begins with Genesis rather than Exodus, signifying that Israel's national history is subordinated to that of world history."[217] Childs also notes, "History according to Genesis did not begin with Israel, but with the preparation of the stage for world history."[218] Understanding this literary reality helps us to see that redemptive history is a 'bigger picture' than Israel, and that Israel is actually set within that larger scope, not outside it.



This overview of redemptive history should help to keep in view the purpose of God both in Creation and in Redemption, but it requires less a systematic reading of Scripture and more a literary reading. Dempster maintains that failing to see the Bible as a canonical whole, a piece of divine literature, causes us to lose sight of Scripture as "a redemptive story that aims at the restoration of a lost destiny for the human race and creation."[219] The fact that the Bible starts in a garden and ends in a garden is significant to Klink with regard to the overall thrust of the canon, "Serving like canonical bookends, what God promises in Genesis 1-2 he declares fulfilled in Revelation 21-22."[220]

Creation is the best place to start a canonical literary analysis of Scripture for the simple reason that it all starts there. By that is not meant merely that the origin of the universe is outlined in the biblical Creation account, though it most certainly is. Yet, "Creation is not simply one part of the biblical story or, as more commonly assumed,

[217] Dempster; 23.
[218] Childs, *Biblical Theology*; 107.
[219] Dempster; 25.
[220] Klink; 16.

merely the beginning of the story. Creation is *the* story the Bible tells, for the truth about creation includes all the purposes for which God made the world."[221] It has been cogently argued that the seed of the entirety of the canon may be found in the first three chapters of Genesis. There is, of course, the creation of the heavens and the earth and all that dwells in them. There is also the creation of man in God's image, as well as the first law, "*Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat.*" There is man and woman; there is a garden and a river of life that flows from it. We find here the institutions of labor, marriage, and the Sabbath, all of which expand with redemptive significance in the progress of revelation. There is exile and the (vague) promise of return, the *protoevangelium*. The literary structure of the first three chapters of Genesis forms the foundation for the entire symbolic world that then unfolds throughout the rest of the canon. There is arguably no symbolic motif of Scripture that does not find its root in Genesis 1-3.

That Creation itself is a biblical marker is made evident by the use of creation language in significant historical epochs in redemptive history. Noah, after the Flood, is commanded with the same terminology of Genesis 1, "*Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth,*"[222] and the identity of man as the divine image bearer is also reiterated through the prohibition against murder,

> *Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed;*
> *For in the image of God He made man.*
> *And as for you, be fruitful and multiply; bring forth abundantly in the earth*
> *And multiply in it.* (Genesis 9:6-7)

The account of God placing Adam in the Garden of Eden becomes the symbolic paradigm for God taking Israel out of Egypt and planting her like a vineyard in the Promised Land, though the end result in the latter instance was no better than the former. The land promised to Abraham and his descendants was, according to Deuteronomy, not like the land of Egypt, where crops were irrigated from the water of the Nile

[221] *Ibid.*; 12.
[222] Genesis 9:1

but was "*a land of hills and valleys, which drinks water from the rain of heaven, a land for which the LORD your God cares; the eyes of the LORD your God are always on it, from the beginning of the year to the very end of the year.*"[223] The language is not exact, but the echo can surely be heard between, for instance, Isaiah 5 and Genesis 2.

Genesis 2:8-9, 15

The LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed. And out of the ground the LORD God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil…. Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to ☐tend and keep it.

Isaiah 5:1-2

Now let me sing to my Well-beloved
A song of my Beloved regarding His vineyard:
My Well-beloved has a vineyard
On a very fruitful hill.
He dug it up and cleared out its stones,
And planted it with the choicest vine.
He built a tower in its midst,
And also made a winepress in it;
So He expected it to bring forth good grapes,
But it brought forth wild grapes.

The garden motif is separately pervasive in Scripture and will be treated on its own merit and prevalence, associated also with the 'river' motif that is so often joined with it. Additionally, there is the famous contrast between the 'city of Man' and the 'city of God' that moves from Eden, the garden, to Zion, the spiritual city, to the New Jerusalem come down from heaven. These are the arcs of revelation that move through progressive revelation and are associated, perhaps even begotten, one might say, by the overarching motif of Creation.

Focusing on that broader rubric, and leaving aside, for the time being, the coordinate theme of New Creation, let us consider a few of the allusions and echoes found in both the latter writings of the Old Testament as well as the writings of the New. For the most part these allusions and echoes speak of restoration, of a returning of things to the condition they were in at Creation, before the Fall. But one allusion, found in the Jeremiah, reaches back to the condition of 'things' before God spoke into the darkness and brought Light. The phrase *formless and void* is used in Genesis 1:2 to describe the state of things before the Word of God *created*.

[223] Deuteronomy 11:11-12

> *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.* (Genesis 1:1-2)

The Hebrew phrase translated 'formless and void' is *tohu v^{a}bohu* (תֹּהוּ וָבֹהוּ) and is only used in this combination in two places in the Old Testament, here in Genesis 1 and again in Jeremiah 4. In the first passage, the interpretation is difficult as it may indicate a condition of chaos and disorder existing prior to the divine word/act of Creation, or it may be a picturesque manner of describing 'nothingness,' out of which God created all things. In any event, the parallel description in Genesis 1:2 is helpful, "*and darkness was on the face of the deep.*" 'Darkness' is not a positive thing and will be immediately dispersed by Light in verse 3. Hence *formless and void* is a condition of non-being, of non-Light and, as it were, non-Creation. It is the opposite of the created order, the *cosmos*, that God speaks into existence in the following verses of Genesis 1. Interestingly, the vision given to Jeremiah, in the context of severe judgment upon Israel, seems to speak of a return to the pre-Creation chaos and desolation of *tohu v^{a}bohu*, as the phrase is again used. The context surrounding this usage in Jeremiah leaves no doubt of the allusion to Genesis 1,

> *I beheld the earth, and indeed it was* ***without form, and void****;*
> *And the heavens, they had no light.*
> *I beheld the mountains, and indeed they trembled, and all the hills moved back and forth.*
> *I beheld, and indeed there was no man, and all the birds of the heavens had fled.*
> *I beheld, and indeed the fruitful land was a wilderness, and all its cities were broken down*
> *At the presence of the* LORD*, by His fierce anger.* (Jeremiah 4:23-26)

The judgment of the LORD is presented as a reverse Creation, a returning of things to the point just prior to God saying, "*Let there be Light.*" The entire Creation imagery is invoked in this Jeremiad, and the ongoing rebellion of God's people will result in a taking away, as it were, the entire grace of Creation and the created order. Ellicott comments on the passage in Jeremiah, "The goodly land of Israel was thrown back, as it

were, into a formless chaos, before the words 'Let there be light' had brought it into order."[224] Matthew Poole adds, "the land was so squalid and so ruined, that he fancieth it to be like the first chaos, for which reason possibly he calls Judea the earth, in allusion to Genesis 1:2; and herein implying that Judah's sins were such, that they had even overturned the course of nature, being laid waste and desolate, not of inhabitants only, but of all things that might tend either to ornament or use, without men, without houses, without fruits, without beasts or birds for food or service."[225]


Matthew Poole (1624-79)

What is common to most evangelical commentaries is the recognition of Jeremiah's allusion to Genesis 1:2 and to the pre-creation condition of formlessness and darkness, a terrible and graphic symbol of judgment by the LORD.

Though *'formless and void'* can be used in reference to divine judgment, it is the *restoration* of Creation that forms the more frequent use of allusion and echo in Scripture. This leads, of course, to the biblical teaching on the New Creation. But this is a study of intertextuality, and the New Creation is itself a teaching and doctrine of Scripture that culminates the trajectory of the Creation account. What concerns us here is the symbology that Creation instills into the literary atmosphere of the canon, manifested in such remarkable gospel passages as II Corinthians 4:6, a clear and stunning allusion to Genesis 1:3,

> *For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*
>
> (II Corinthians 4:6)

'Light shining out of darkness' is a allusive marker for the opening act of God in Creation. Darkness covered the face of the deep, and God said, 'Let there be Light.' Thus we may find that references to a coming Light, though they may not use the ter-

[224] Jeremiah 4:23 Commentaries: I looked on the earth, and behold, it was formless and void; And to the heavens, and they had no light. (biblehub.com). Accessed 23September2024.
[225] *Idem*.

minology of Genesis 1 nor cite the passage directly, are in fact echoes of the great opening scene of Creation. There can be little doubt that Paul intended this connection when he wrote the verse references above, no more than that John intended an allusion to Genesis 1:1 with the opening words of his Gospel. But the allusive characteristic of Creation as a powerful symbol of divine action sheds light (pun intended) on other passages as well, though they are more subtle perhaps than II Corinthians 4:6. Some examples:

> *Arise, shine; for your light has come! And the glory of the LORD is risen upon you.*
> *For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and deep darkness the people;*
> *But the LORD will arise over you, and His glory will be seen upon you.* (Isaiah 60:1-2)

The context of these verses confirms the allusive character of the reference, as it deals with the restoration of the nations to God through Israel and particularly through Israel's Messiah. "*The Gentiles shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising.*"[226] This is, of course, a reversal of the scattering of the nations in Genesis 11, a situation immediately addressed by the initial calling of Abram, recorded in Genesis 12. Thus the restoration of the Gentiles to God is a common theme of God's redemptive story, for they are also part of the created order. The Light of Christ shining is the ultimate fulfilment of the Light that shone on Creation's first day.

> *Nevertheless the gloom will not be upon her who is distressed,*
> *As when at first He lightly esteemed the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali,*
> *And afterward more heavily oppressed her, by the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan,*
> *In Galilee of the Gentiles.*
> *The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light;*
> *Those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death, upon them a light has shined.*
>
> (Isaiah 9:1-2)

Who is this one of whom the prophecies speak? He who is "*the light of the world,*" another unmistakable echo of the Creation account with shades of Isaiah 9 blended in,

[226] Isaiah 60:3

> *Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life."* (John 8:12)

It is remarkable that modern liberal scholarship, professing to be evangelical, can call into doubt the New Testament witness to the deity of Jesus Christ. On the crassly literal basis that Jesus never explicitly said, "I am God," – at least not in any passages that liberals allow to be authentically Jesus' words – the conclusion is made that the deity of Christ is a later Christian construct, though why a monotheistic religion would consciously fabricate such a seemingly convoluted doctrine as the Trinity is never answered. The conclusion is not deductive but *a priori*; a divine Christ does not fit with the liberal Christian agenda of human rationalism. But the biblical testimony cannot be reasonably doubted, especially when one listens to the echoes of Creation. For instance, and but one instance, hear the one Creator God echoed with respect to Jesus Christ in Colossians,

> *He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.* (Colossians 1:15-17)

The marker of allusion here is 'creation,' but the clause in which this word is first found might be misunderstood to mean that Christ Himself was a creature. Paul clarifies through the use of three prepositions – *by, through,* and *for* – by which the apostle removes any reasonable doubt as to the ultimate deity of Christ. The echo of Creation is employed in a clear statement of that deity: *all things* were created *by* Him; they were created *through* Him as the instrument of the divine creative act; they were created *for* Him, above whom there is no one and nothing. Albert Barnes writes in his *Notes*, "There could not possibly be a more explicit declaration that the universe was created by Christ, than this. As if the simple declaration in the most comprehensive terms were not enough, the apostle goes into a specification of things existing in heaven and earth, and

so varies the statement as if to prevent the possibility of mistake."[227] Yet the assurance of this doctrine is established not merely by the apostle's words, but by the manner in which he echoes the Creation account of Genesis 1, attributing to Jesus Christ what is there spoken of God.


Jeannine K. Brown (*b.*1961)

New Testament echoes of Creation are not equally 'loud,' but the literary symbology of Light does pervade Scripture, and the reader should always be listening for the echo of Genesis 1:3, "*And God said, 'Let there be Light'*" which was both a historical reality and a symbolic act of God As far as echoes and allusion go, one would expect to find a more consistent record of intertextuality with the Creation account in a book that begins with the same words, "*In the beginning,*" as does Genesis. Jeannine K. Brown, in her article, entitled, "Creation's Renewal in the Gospel of John," argues that such an intertextual relationship does, in fact, exist between the Fourth Gospel and the first book of the Bible.

The basic premise of Brown's article is the realization that the advent of Christ and the entire Christ-event signifies fundamentally a *renewal* of Creation which is the inauguration of the New Creation. This is the evident allusion in the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel, but is subtly present elsewhere within the book itself. As stated earlier, the opening verses of the Gospel of John are not merely a catchy 'hook' to reel the reader in; they are the initial statement of at least one central theme of the entire Gospel. Paul Minear writes, "This poet, in crafting the Prologue, had one eye fixed on the Genesis account of creation…and the other eye fixed on the stories about Jesus."[228] Brown adds,

[227] Colossians 1:16 Commentaries: For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities-- all things have been created through Him and for Him. (biblehub.com). Accessed 24September2024.
[228] Minear, Paul Sevier *Christians and the New Creation: Genesis Motifs in the New Testament* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press; 1994); 83.

> The evangelist cites the first words of Genesis 1 from the LXX, *ἐν ἀρχῇ* ('in the beginning') and by so doing evokes the story of creation as the starting place for his Gospel about Jesus. Not only does John introduce the themes of life and light (ζωή and φως [1:4-5]), which are clearly derived from Genesis 1 (vv. 3, 14, 20, 24 LXX), but his use of λόγος evokes the recurring Genesis language of 'God said' in the creative activity [Gen 1:6, 9, 14, 24, 26, 28 LXX].[229]

The Prologue of John's Gospel is certainly one of the most important examples of allusion or echo in the Scripture, and is illustrative of the importance of learning to see and hear these intertextual connections between the New Covenant and the Old. Brown continues, "That the evangelist chooses to begin here points to the centrality of creation as the context from which he will tell his story of Jesus. By evoking this context, John signals that the Jesus story will illuminate the ongoing story of God's creation and provide its culmination."[230] Continuing the work of God is thus heard in several of Jesus' statements concerning His own ministry.

> *Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work."*
> (John 4:34)

> *For this reason the Jews persecuted Jesus, and sought to kill Him, because He had done these things on the Sabbath. But Jesus answered them, "My Father has been working until now, and I have been working."* (John 5:16-17)

John is clearly placing Jesus' work and words into the context of Creation, the 'work' from which God rested on the seventh day, but as even the rabbis contended, He continues to do throughout time. No longer the work of *creatio ex nihilo*, but the work of sustaining the universe *by the word of His power* – another divine description of Jesus.[231] In John's Gospel, however, the emphasis is upon Jesus' work in *restoring* Creation, the works that He does consistently manifesting not only His divine power but also the turning back of the consequences of sin. Commentators typically note seven 'signs' recorded by John in the Fourth Gospel, beginning with the miracle at the wedding of Cana

[229] Brown, Jeannine K. "Creation's Renewal in the Gospel of John" *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. 72, No. 2 (April 2010); 277.
[230] *Idem.*
[231] Hebrews 1:3

and ending with the raising of Lazarus. Each of these signs shows some aspect of the curse o Genesis 3 reversed in Jesus, whether the abundance of wine and food (feeding the five thousand) or the reversal of death, the ultimate consequence of the Fall.

The idea of creation renewal finds its most powerful statement in John's Gospel in Chapter 20 when Jesus is gathered with His disciples. In an enigmatic statement, John records, "*And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'*"[232] Standing alone, the verse seems to conflict with Luke's account of the day of Pentecost. But when the echoes of Genesis and Creation are heard, the passage clearly alludes to Genesis 2:7 and the formation of Adam by God into 'a living soul.'

> *And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.* (Genesis 2:7)

This connection should be evident even in the English translation, but is made more sure when one considers the form of the Greek, 'to breathe,' that John uses. It is both an unusual word for the action and the same word that is used in the Greek translation (LXX) of Genesis 2:7. Brown comments, "Given that *emphusaō* (ἐμψσὰω) is a rather unusual term, the evangelist's use of it here clearly echoes the first story of human enlivenment in Genesis 2. Thus, 'John wants us to see here an act of creation,'"[233] This interpretation of the 'breathing' action in John 20 loops the narrative back around to the Prologue in Chapter 1, where we are firmly planted in the symbolic world of the historical Creation, and presented with the Logos in whom and by whom all things were created, who is Himself Light and Life, the Life that is the light of men, Jesus Christ.

[232] John 20:22
[233] Brown; 282, quoting John W. Pryor, *John, Evangelist of the Covenant People.*

Lesson 10 – …And It Was Very Good
Text: Genesis 9:1-17; Isaiah 5:1-7

"Our conceptual world is constructed around an infrastructure of basic perceptions,
the latitude and longitude of our mental maps,
and these perceptions resist change."
(Paul S. Minear)

"When we all get to heaven, what a day of rejoicing that will be!" So goes the line of one well-known hymn, and the thought of countless others. At one time, at least, it was a fairly standard evangelistic opening line to ask if a person knew that they would go to heaven if they died that night. In Frank Capra's *It's a Wonderful Life*, the hapless Clarence is the spirit of a deceased man trying to turn a good deed so that he can get his wings in heaven and become an 'Angel, First Class.' Although getting our theological view of the life hereafter from a mid-20th Century Hollywood producer might be better than from 21st Century social media, it is still not a good idea. But Capra's film is not the *source* of modern, Western Christianity's wrong thinking on the afterlife, it is merely a *symptom*. While it may often be heard at a funeral, "He's in a better place," few give much thought to where or what that place may be. Conventional thought is that the believer goes to heaven when he or she dies, end of story. Many would be surprised at how little the Scriptures actually speak of 'heaven,' and further by the fact that when they do, it is never in regard to where believers go when they die. Klink writes, "in contrast to all the emphasis many contemporary Christians place on heaven as a final destination, the topic of heaven is hardly a blip on the radar of the biblical plot."[234]

Where did this understanding come from? In one sense, from a truth. It is true that Paul speaks of *"going to be with the Lord"* when he leaves this earthly life. In his letter to the Philippian church, the apostle openly ponders his own fate, *"But I am hard pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better.*[235] And to the Corinthians he writes, *"we are of good courage, I say, and prefer*

[234] Klink; 151.
[235] Philippians 1:23

rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord."[236] The visions of the Apocalypse also contribute to the notion that believers will go to heaven after death. When John is caught up into heaven in the vision of Revelation 4, he beholds a multitude of souls that had been delivered *"from every tongue, tribe, and nation"*[237] as well as the souls of the martyrs *"who had been slain because of the word of God and because of the testimony which they had maintained."*[238] It seems evident that there is a place that the souls of departed believers go upon the death of the body, a place that might be called 'Paradise' or, in a manner of speaking, 'heaven.' But the complete testimony of Scripture is that this place is temporary, as indicated by the cry of those martyrs, *"How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"*[239] In response to this cry, the martyrs are *"given a white robe"* and *"told that they should rest for a while longer."*[240]

Perhaps the deeper influence on the thinking of modern, Western evangelicals with regard to the 'location' of the hereafter is the philosophy of Plato, which had an undeniable influence on the early Church as well as a periodic influence in the subsequent millennia. The fundamental thought of Platonism is that of dualism – that the universe is divided into 'spirit,' which is essentially good, and 'matter,' which is essentially evil. The physical body is matter and is thus inherently worthless, or worse. It is because of this philosophical mindset that the philosophers on the Areopagus scoffed at Paul when he announced the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.[241] To the Platonist there is no value to the physical body; indeed, it is a prison for the soul. This dualism crept into Christian thinking early on in the Church's history – Augustine himself was a Neoplatonist – and the idea of a physical afterlife began to fade. Not that orthodoxy ever flat out denied the doctrine of bodily resurrection; theologians and preachers just did not seem to know what to do with it.

[236] II Corinthians 5:8
[237] Revelation 7:9
[238] Revelation 6:9
[239] Revelation 6:10
[240] Revelation 6:11
[241] Acts 17:32

This philosophical shift was reinforced in the 19th Century by the Arminian evangelistic theories and practices of Charles Finney and his disciples. The emphasis of Christian evangelism for the past two hundred years is 'getting the sinner to heaven when he dies.' Dispensationalism adds to the mix, convincing untold millions of believers that their destiny is to escape wrath through the Rapture, to be "*caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord, and thus we shall always be with the Lord.*"[242] It is assumed here that 'being with the Lord' and 'caught up in the clouds' are geographically coextensive – that we will be with the Lord Jesus Christ 'in the clouds,' in other words, in heaven. This interpretation is based on a faulty understanding of the main verb in the passage, *to meet*, but it is theological untenable from a broader perspective: mankind was not intended for heaven but for this earth. This is established by the 'bookends' of Scripture – Creation in Genesis 1 & 2 and the heavenly Jerusalem in Revelation 21 & 22. The similarities between John's description of the heavenly Jerusalem in the closing chapters of Revelation are undeniably reminiscent of the opening chapters of Genesis. But what is significant for the current discussion is the *trajectory* of the heavenly city – *it comes down out of heaven from God*.[243]

This is the New Heaven and the New Earth, the first of each having passed away.[244] But it is also the Bride of Christ, "*adorned for her husband,*" as well as the New Jerusalem – all images that John employs to describe the indescribable, and to do so in terms of the first Creation. We will have occasion to investigate John's panorama further in this study, but it should be sufficient at this stage to see that *heaven* is not man's ultimate destiny, rather the *new earth* with which God's heaven will be in inseparable harmony. From the perspective of Canonical Theology, this means that the Creation is far from being merely 'the beginning,' it is also the teleological pointer to the end. Beale writes, "On the basis of the presupposition that the entire canon is the inspired database of God's revelation, the two bookends of Gen. 1-3 and Rev. 21 interpret everything between them. That means that the biblical material between these two poles is to be read

[242] I Thessalonians 4:17
[243] Revelation 21:10
[244] Revelation 21:1

not only in the light of its origins in Gen. 1-3 but also in view of its goal in Revelation."[245] Klink adds, "As the biblical story comes to a close, the end becomes visibly realigned with the beginning. Rather than Genesis as merely an explanation of the past (how the world started), it is more accurate to see it also as a pronouncement of the future (where the world is going)."[246]

One branch of modern Christian scholarship took Platonism so far as to conclude that, at the end of the age, this earth and the current heavens will be annihilated, completely destroyed. Again, there appears to be some scriptural warrant for such a conclusion, as Peter does speak of destruction in his second epistle, and the apostle Paul speaks of the form of this world *"passing away."* Neither of these references demands the interpretation of annihilation, and Peter's discussion moves immediately into the coming of the new heavens and new earth.

> But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, on account of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning and the elements will melt with intense heat. But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells.
>
> (II Peter 3:10-13)

To be sure, Peter's language does seem to indication a complete destruction and doing away with the present space-time universe that had its start in Genesis. But harmonizing the various places in the canon of Scripture that refer to the New Earth, either explicitly by name or implicitly by description, will show that what God has intended is not the formation of a brand new heaven and earth framework, but the restoration and purification of this one. Peter himself, in his first epistle, refers to the destruction of the world through the Great Flood, in which only eight humans were delivered. To use Paul's terminology, the *form* of the antediluvian world did indeed pass away, but the

[245] Beale, *Theology*; 59.
[246] Klink; 150.

earth itself remained. And while it is hard to conceive of such a cataclysmic burning as described in II Peter 3 as being anything other than complete annihilation, one must consider the whole counsel of Scripture, and keep in mind Paul's perspective on the yearning of this created order for redemption.

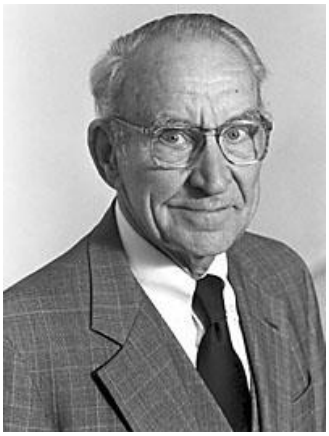
> *For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revelation of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but because of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth until now.* (Romans 8:19-22)

It is hard to imagine Paul thinking that the creation is eagerly awaiting its complete annihilation. No, the creation that was subjected to futility on account of man's sin is the same creation that will be released from that bondage into the glory of the children of God. Rather, it is the consistent testimony of Scripture, as one follows the symbolic world created by the historical events, that the 'very good' Creation that God made in the beginning would purposefully be restored, even better. There is a tremendous amount of meaning packed into the closing words of Revelation 21:1, "*And I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away,* ***and there was no longer any sea****.*"[247] The salvation of sinners is indeed an important characteristic of the revelation of God's glory through both Scripture and history, but it is not the be-all and end-all of that revelation. "Revelation is actually a subset of the larger movement from creation to new creation. Protology (first things) and eschatology (end things) serve as a frame for soteriology (the redemption of all things), reflecting the nature of God's creation project and the goal for all creation."[248]

It is often said that the first three chapters of Genesis form a Prologue to the entire Bible, both Old and New Testaments. The major components of the story of redemptive history are indeed contained in Genesis 1-3, and the rest of Scripture unfolds, elaborates, and consummates the events recorded in mankind's earliest history. For

[247] Revelation 21:1
[248] Klink; 156.

many believers, however, reorienting their understanding of the Bible – of God's overarching plan and purpose for His own glory – requires nothing short of a Copernican Revolution, a paradigm shift in biblical perception. Paul Minear's comments is apropos, "Our conceptual world is constructed around an infrastructure of basic perceptions, the latitude and longitude of our mental maps, and these perceptions resist change."[249] Yet it must be clearly stated that no paradigm shift ought to be made unless warranted by Scripture. That God's plan and purpose for His glory is oriented along the lines of Creation/New Creation – the restoration of the 'very good' Creation of Genesis 1 and 2 – must be established from Scripture itself in order to justify reorientation of perception. This is what Canonical Theology endeavors to do, at least with regard to the motif of Creation in Scripture.


Paul S. Minear (1906-2007)

Fallen, but not Forsaken

Many, if not most, of the motifs and themes that thread through the canon of Scripture are somehow associated with the narrative of Creation and the Fall in Genesis 1-3. An exposition of those three chapters is beyond the scope of this study, but consideration of just two verses will set the stage for the unfolding of revelation from Genesis to Revelation. The first of these verses is Genesis 1:31 and the second is Genesis 3:15.

> *And God saw all that He had made and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.* (Genesis 1:31)

As simple as this verse is in terms of what it says, the modifier *'very'* is extremely profound. Typical Reformed exegesis of the verse will note the shift from *'good'* to *'very good'* after the creation of man in the divine image, which is certainly true so far as it goes. One must consider that, with God as Creator, there is nothing 'bad,' and the gra-

[249] Minear, Paul Sevier *Christians and the New Creation: Genesis Motifs in the New Testament* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press; 1994); 62.

dation between 'good' and 'very good' is not so much the quality of that which has been created as its suitability to the divine purpose for creation. The 'very good' of Genesis 1:31 does not mean that what had been created prior to the creation of man was of less worth or 'goodness,' but that it was as yet incomplete until the creation of man in the image of God. This does, of course, mean that the motif of Man is a very important one in Scripture, but it does not allow us to denigrate God's other works of Creation as of no importance to Him. That the rest of Creation is of great value to God, though incomplete without man, is perhaps the primary reason for the 'second' Creation account in Genesis 2, where focus is placed on another biblical motif: the *Garden*. *"And the LORD God planted a garden toward the east, in Eden; and there He placed man whom He had formed."*[250] A garden prepared for man by God will be a recurring theme as we trace the ways of God with His people through the canon of Scripture, complete with life-giving fruit tree(s) and a river, additional motifs that arc through the whole of revelation. The garden and man – the earth and humanity – are integrally united in Creation, and, as Paul makes clear in Romans 8, they will be as well in the New Creation.

This is to say, in general terms, that Creation – *this* Creation – matters to God and is indispensable to His purpose to glorify Himself through the works of His hands. Even fallen and corrupt, the created order continues to proclaim the majesty of God, and *"Their line has gone out through all the earth, and their utterances to the end of the world."*[251] Man drowns out this testimony in the cacophony of his own cares and sins, but the regenerate ear should begin to hear the faint proclamations of Creation to her Maker. Certainly this was Paul's understanding of the overall ministry of Jesus the Messiah, *"For by Hiim all things were created both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all things have been created by Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together."*[252] Creation has been subjected to futility on account of man's Fall, but God has not forsaken it and fully intends to restore it through Jesus Christ.

[250] Genesis 2:8
[251] Psalm 19:4
[252] Colossians 1:16-17

That this was the divine intention from the beginning is evident in Scripture, especially in the *protoevangelium*, Genesis 3:15, where the promise of ultimate victory is first announced, immediately after Adam's Fall. The verse must be kept in its context, for the promise is couched in the midst of curses. To the woman is the curse of pain in childbirth; but the human race will continue through her and from her will come the promised Seed who will vindicate God's glory and redeem Man. To the man is the curse of toil, but the earth will yield a harvest and mankind will survive – *seedtime and harvest* will continue until such time as the consummate victory is won. To the serpent is the curse of abasement and eventual destruction by the Seed of Woman,

> *And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed.*
> *He shall crush you on the head, and you shall bruise Him on the heel.*
>
> (Genesis 3:15)

Christopher Bettham writes, "God ordains perpetual war between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent and intimates that humanity will once again rule the world, dethroning the usurper."[253] This verse becomes a dominant thought through the rest of the Old Testament, starting almost immediately, though subtly at first. After Cain murders Abel, another son is born to Adam and Eve and, remarkably, the child is named by the mother. "*And Adam had relations with his wife again, and she gave birth to a son, and named him Seth, for, she said, 'God has appointed me another offspring in place of Abel, for Cain killed him.'*"[254] It is indeterminate whether Seth is the third child of the first parents; we know that other sons and daughters were born to them and the Bible is not particular about filling in all of the lineage of any person. Seth may have been the next son born, or he may have been a son in whom Eve recognized something pertaining to the promise. In support of the latter interpretation, we read, "*Then men began to call upon the name of the LORD.*"[255] Though the NASB renders the word 'offspring,' both the

[253] Beethan, Christopher A. "From Creation to New Creation: The Biblical Epic of King, Human Vice-Regency, and Kingdom"; *From Creation to New Creation: Biblical Theology and Exegesis*, Daniel M. Gurtner & Benjamin L. Gladd, eds. (Peabody, MA: Hendrikson Publishing; 2013); 241.
[254] Genesis 4:25
[255] Genesis 4:26

Hebrew and the Greek of Genesis 4:25 have the same word, 'seed,' as in Genesis 3:15. That Eve named Seth, instead of Adam, is perhaps a faint echo of the promise of Genesis 3:15, with the reference to Cain's murder of Abel the contrary remembrance of the effects of the curse on mankind. If an echo, it would fit the context, but it remains a faint one.

A stronger echo is found a few generations later - ten, to be exact - from Adam inclusive. This brings us to Noah, but particularly to what his father, Lamech, said about this son,

> *Now he called his name Noah, saying, 'This one shall give us rest from our work and from the toil of our hands arising from the ground which the LORD has cursed.'* (Genesis 5:29)

There is no mistaking the allusion, stronger than an echo and marked by the words 'ground' and 'curse,' to Genesis 3:17-19. But what is significant is Lamech's consideration that Noah - who would indeed turn out to be a major player in the unfolding drama of redemptive history, though not exactly in the manner Lamech had hoped – would be the 'Seed of Woman' who would reverse the curse and restore Creation to its pristine condition of fruitfulness without strife and toil. Perhaps both Eve and Lamech spoke better than they knew; perhaps both were given prophetic insight into the significance of their respective sons. In any case, the promise of redemption through a 'Seed of Woman,' a *human being*, guided the faithful thoughts of those who *'called on the name of the LORD'* even before the Great Deluge.

That event of course, is the first loud echo of the promise of the restoration of Creation, though it accompanies another recurring theme: judgment and destruction. The situation is, of course, well-known: humanity's sin had reached such a pitch that God determined to wipe mankind from the face of the earth, save for the family of righteous Noah. Beetham notes that the Flood was itself a 'de-creation,' returning the earth to its primeval chaos of water. "God de-creates the earth, reversing the creation process of Gn1 by opening creation's floodgates above and below to deluge the earth

and return it to its primordial chaos."[256] What is significant in terms of the promise of Creation's restoration is the terminology used by the LORD after the flood waters had receded. There is first the divine covenant with Creation, echoing both the curse and the promise against the ground in Genesis 3:17-19. The Flood did not wash away human sin and guilt, and God acknowledges that "*the intent of man's heart if evil from his youth.*"[257] The curse upon the land was not removed through Noah, in spite of Lamech's hope, but the promise of continuing fruitfulness of the earth, and thereby the continuing survival of the human race, is bound up in the 'Noaic' Covenant.

> *While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest*
> *And cold and heat, and summer and winter,*
> *And day and night shall not cease.* (Genesis 8:22)

The circumstances surrounding this restart of Creation, this time through Noah, are recognizably similar to the Creation account of Genesis 1. There is the command to "*be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth*"[258] accompanied by the supremacy of Man over the rest of the created order, though this time not in harmony but in fear. Also echoed here in God's new instructions, as it were, to the 'second' Adam, Noah, is the all-important statement that mankind remains the image-bearer of the Creator,

> *Whoever sheds men's blood, by man his blood shall be shed.*
> *For in the image of God He made man.* (Genesis 9:6)

The conditions of Creation are undeniably altered, yet the position of Man in Creation remains unchanged, the Creation ordinances as well as the Fall's effects and curses continue unabated. What is significant in this study is the fact that it was *this* earth that was to be repopulated after the Flood, and the one now charged with this task is not a new human but a descendant of Adam (and Eve), notably through Seth and not Cain. "The waters have a dual function in that the simultaneously cleanse and

[256] Beethan; 242
[257] Genesis 8:21
[258] Genesis 9:1

destroy. They destroy humanity but cleanse the surface of the land and prepare it for the act of new creation."[259] The subsequent narrative of Genesis, through Chapter 11, serves to prove that man's fallenness also remains, hardly diminished by the Flood (though a Flood Account seems to be a common feature of the literature of all the ancient civilizations of the Near East). Another motif appears in these chapters, that of the 'City of Man versus the City of God,' that begins with the descendants of Cain and Seth and continues throughout the whole canon.

Even after the Flood, the idea of Eden remained fixed in the human psyche and is probably the original source of the many 'Golden Age' legends of ancient literature. The echo of God's Creation was heard even by those who did not walk with God to describe any territory that was especially fertile and well-watered. Thus, when Abram's nephew Lot looked at the valley of the Jordan, it was to him *"like the garden of the LORD"* though the sequel of that story proves that Lot should have chosen a less fertile but more holy dwelling.[260]

The motif of the restoration of Creation shifts into that of the land as the inheritance of God's people, through the covenant God made with Abraham. Little is said about a New Creation in the Abraham narratives, but the echoes of the Creation account can still be heard. The nations and peoples of the world are not forgotten, but will be blessed through Abraham, whose 'seed' is evidently the 'Seed of Woman' promised in Genesis 3:15. Another subtle but significant echo is found in the renaming of Abraham's wife, Sarai, to Sarah, accompanied by the promise that she would become *a mother of nations*.[261] This may be an allusion to Adam's naming of his wife, Eve, *"because she was the mother of all the living."*[262] Theologically, of course, we will learn from Paul that all true believers in Jesus Christ are the true seed of Abraham, whose spiritual mother is Sarah.[263]

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[259] Beetham; 243.
[260] Genesis 13:10
[261] Genesis 17:16
[262] Genesis 3:20
[263] *Cp.* Galatians 4:21-31

Yet even with the shift to the land, the language of Creation continues in the promulgation of the Abrahamic Covenant. Abraham becomes another 'Adam' in the lineage of the Seed, as in the covenant he is given promises of 'fruitfulness' that recall the Creation Mandate of Genesis 1:28, "*Be fruitful and multiply.*" Only now the fruitfulness moves from imperative to promise, as in Genesis 17,

> *Now when Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him,*
> *'I Am God Almighty. Walk before Me and be blameless.*
> *And I will establish My covenant between Me and you*
> *And I will* ***multiply you exceedingly****.'*
> *And Abram fell to his face and God talked with him, saying,*
> *'As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be Abram, but you shall be called Abraham,*
> *For I will make you the father of a multitude of nations.*
> *And I will make you* ***exceedingly fruitful****, and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come forth from you.'* (Genesis 17:1-6)

This covenant promise of fruitfulness is repeated in Genesis 17:20 and is later repeated to Abraham's grandson, Jacob, first from Jacob's father, Isaac in Genesis 28:3 and then from God Himself in Genesis 35:11. The promise commenced in reality, not in the Promised Land but in Egypt, after Jacob went down to Egypt with his family, in order to live with his son, Joseph, "*Now Israel lived in the land of Egypt, in Goshen, and they acquired property in it and* ***were fruitful and began to be very numerous****.*"[264] This baby boom, as it were, continued after the death of Joseph and came to present the Egyptians with a challenge, "*And Joseph died and all his brothers and all that generation. But the sons of Israel* ***were fruitful and increased greatly, and multiplied****, and became exceedingly mighty, so that the land was filled with them.*"[265] This is not to imply that Egypt was Eden; far from it. But the allusion to Eden, triggered by the markers 'fruitful' and 'multiply,' while the children of Israel were in Egypt, anticipates another allusion and another motif: that of the *Garden*, for Israel's God was, in fact, preparing a garden or a vineyard for His people in Canaan. In due time He would transplant His people there in a manner similar to the

[264] Genesis 47:27
[265] Exodus 1:6-7

language of Genesis 2:8. As we should now expect, the biblical language of the Promised Land is often couched in Edenic terminology; it is a land *'flowing with milk and honey.'*. This shows us that at least one purpose for God's choosing and establishing Israel from among the nations is that of *re*-creation, in type rather than in fulness, though the fulness would indeed be inaugurated in and through Israel. Beetham writes, "The intentional use of the language of the original Gen 1 viceregency mandate and its application to the patriarchal family further demonstrates that God's original creation intentions have been concentrated in and are being accomplished through the seed of Abraham."[266]

Another interesting echo from the same time period is found in the Book of Job. Though the date of authorship of the book is indeterminate, it is widely believed that the leading character, Job, was a near contemporary of Abraham. He was not, however, among the lineage of Abraham, the lineage of the 'seed.' Still, his knowledge of God and his faithful righteousness before God prove that, along with Melchizedek, Job represents a remnant of God-fearing men from the lines of Japheth and, perhaps, even Ham. In light of the current focus on the restoration of the Creation, Job's famous statement concerning the resurrection is pertinent.

> *For I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth;*
> *And after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God.* (Job 19:25-26)

This passage is not an allusion; there are no markers that tie it to an earlier passage. Even as an echo the direction of the sound is indeterminate, for it speaks in terms of bodily resurrection, something that has not yet been broached in progressive revelation up to Abraham's time. Job's mention of seeing God "*in his flesh*" even after his "*skin is destroyed,*" is resurrection language. But significant to the current focus is the location of Job's visitation – he knew that his Redeemer would one day stand "*on the earth.*" This is reasonably associated with the very next clause: that Job's vision of God would be in his resurrected body, here on earth. Considering the poor state of his health, Job had

[266] Beetham; 246.

every expectation of imminent death, but seemed to have no concept of 'going to heaven when he died,' though his righteousness was witnessed by none other than God Almighty. No, Job's hope and expectation was to see his Lord with resurrected eyes, here on the planet that was created for him and for his fellow human beings.

This passage from Job has been hotly contested in modern, liberal scholarship, even as early as the 17th Century, with the objection that a man of the ancient world could not have known of such sublime theological concepts as the resurrection. Matthew Poole, in his commentary on the passage, deals with this objection by showing the lasting impact of the protoevangelium of Genesis 3:15. Poole writes, "How is it credible that Job, in those ancient times, and in that dark state of the church, should know these great mysteries of Christ's incarnation, and of the resurrection and life to come?" and answers, "The mystery of Christ's incarnation was revealed to Adam by that first and famous promise, that *the seed of the woman* should *break the serpent's head*, **Genesis 3:15**; which being the only foundation of all his hopes for the recovery and salvation of himself, and of all his posterity, he would doubtless carefully and diligently teach and explain it, as need required, to those that descended from him."[267] Considering this passage from Hebrew Wisdom Literature, is will not be surprising to find the resurrection and the New Creation tightly linked in the New Testament writings.

Elsewhere in the Wisdom Literature we hear constantly of the divine Creator and His Creation, but only faintly about the restoration of that Creation. Psalm 104, for instance, poetically rehearses the establishment of the earth by God (vv. 5-9) and His continued care for the earth and its inhabitants (vv. 27-30). Toward the end of this psalm, having recounted verse-by-verse the Creation work of God, the psalmist gives a doxology that can only be meaningful with reference to the restoration of Creation from the corruption due to sin.

> *Let the glory of the LORD endure forever. Let the LORD be glad in His works* (Psalm 104:31)

[267] Job 19:25 Commentaries: "As for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, And at the last He will take His stand on the earth. (biblehub.com). Accessed 04October2024.

It is eminently reasonable to conclude that the works in which the LORD will be glad are the very same works that He declared to be *very good* at the end of Creation week.

In the prophetic literature, the restoration of Israel is often promised in terms of a reversal of the curse on Eden, with the same language of fruitfulness and fecundity and also of a peacefulness within the created order not seen since before Adam fell. Isaiah 11 is an example of this hope of new creation, recognizable as such even though the phrase itself is not used. Significant in this passage is the mention of the "*shoot from the stem of Jesse,*" tying the promise of renewed Creation with the restoration of the Davidic royal line in the Messiah. After describing the restored royal reign of the Messiah, the Isaianic prophecy continues,

> *And the wolf will dwell with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the kid,*
> *And the calf and the young lion and the fatling together, and a little boy will lead them.*
> *Also the cow and the bear will graze; their young will lie down together;*
> *And the lion will eat straw like the ox.*
> *And the nursing child will play by the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child will put his hand on the viper's den.*
> *They will not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain,*
> *For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.*
>
> (Isaiah 11:6-9)

Amos speaks in similar language, though emphasizing more the fruitfulness of the earth rather than the peacefulness of its creaturely inhabitants. The passage in Amos comes at the very end of a seriously distressing diatribe against the inveterate sinfulness of Israel and all her neighbors, with the associated judgments of God upon them. The context is, as often in the Minor Prophets, the 'Day of the Lord' (*cp.* Amos 9:11) and the language reiterates the centrality of the Davidic house. Though Amos does not quote from Genesis, the echoes are still fairly loud.

> *'Behold days are coming,' declares the LORD, 'When the plowman will overtake the reaper and the treader of grapes him who sow seed. When the mountains will drip sweet wines, and all the hills will be dissolved. And I will restore the captivity of My people Israel, and they will rebuild the ruined cities and live in them. They will also plant vineyards and drink their wine, and make gardens and eat their fruit.* (Amos 9:13-14)

The only explicit reference in the Old Testament to the New Heavens and the New Earth is in Isaiah 65 and 66. The language is reminiscent of the Creation account and will be echoed in the closing chapters of the Bible, in Revelation 21 & 22, with regard to the New Jerusalem.

> *For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth;*
> *And the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind.*
> *But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create;*
> *For behold, I create Jerusalem for rejoicing, and her people for gladness.*
> *I will also rejoice in Jerusalem, and be glad in My people;*
> *And there will no longer be heard in her the voice of weeping and the sound of crying.*
> (Isaiah 65:17-19)

> *'For just as the new heavens and the new earth which I make will endure before Me', declares the LORD, 'So your offspring and your name will endure. And it shall be from new moon to new moon, and from sabbath to sabbath. All mankind will come to bow down before Me,' says the LORD.* (Isaiah 66:22-23)

One of the reasons that Isaiah chapters 40 – 66 are called the 'Book of Comfort'- aside from the fact that Isaiah 40:1 cries out, "*Comfort, O comfort My people,*" is the promise of restoration from exile and return to a fruitful, peaceful land that is woven through the chapters. The essential feature of the reversal of the effects of the curse of Genesis 3 echoes in Isaiah 43,

> *Do not call to mind the former things, or ponder things of the past.*
> *Behold, I will do something new, now it will spring forth; will you not be aware of it?*
> *I will even make a roadway in the wilderness, rivers in the desert.*
> *The beasts of the field will glorify Me; the jackals and the ostriches;*
> *Because I have given waters in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert,*
> *To give drink to My chosen people.*
> *The people whom I formed for Myself, will declare My praise.* (Isaiah 43:18-21)

The promise of the restoration of Creation, of Eden, is increasingly associated with an idealized Jerusalem, which will become in the New Testament the 'New Jerusalem' of Revelation. This again echoes the prophetic testimony, for example, in Zechariah. In a passage that is also reflected in I Corinthians 15, we read,

> *And the LORD will be king over all the earth; in that day the LORD will be the only one, and His name the only one All the land will be changed into a plain from Geba to Rimmon south of Jerusalem; but Jerusalem will rise and remain on its site from Benjamin's Gate as far as the place of the First Gate to the Corner Gate, and from the Tower of Hananel to the king's wine presses. And people will live in it, and* ***there will be no more curse****, for Jerusalem will dwell in security.*
>
> (Zechariah 14:9-11)

Restoration of Eden and reversal of the curse are consistent themes in both the pre- and post-exilic prophets, as return from exile and re-establishment in the land serve foreshadow the inauguration of the New Creation in the Messiah. With regard to Isaiah, Beale writes, "The return from exile is prophesied as an eschatological period when new-creational conditions will exist on the earth. The idea of the new creation is not anomalous within the book but rather is a natural part of a broader theme of new creation woven throughout chapters 40-66…that explain the restoration of exiled Israel as a new creation or at least integrally relates the two concepts of restoration and creation."[268]

The anticipation of Israel's God coming finally to end her exile and to restore the Davidic monarchy and the true and cleansed Temple continued unabated during the intertestamental period, with increasing evidence in the apocalyptic writings that this divine intervention would be in terms of 'new creation.' Childs notes, "Increasingly in Jewish apocalyptic writings the hope of a new creation was developed and expanded so that almost every reference to the past became an expression of the future."[269] One of the most influential of the apocalyptic literature on the thought of Second Temple Judaism, and likely on the apostle Paul, is I Enoch, where we read,

> In that day shall the Elect One sit upon a throne of glory; and shall choose their conditions and countless habitations (while their spirits within them shall be strengthened, when they behold my Elect One), shall choose them for those who have fled for protection to my holy and glorious name. In that day I will cause my Elect One to dwell in the midst of them; will change the face of heaven; will bless it, and illuminate it for ever. I will also change the face of the earth; will bless it; and cause those whom I have elected

[268] Beale; 81.
[269] Childs; 393

> to dwell upon it. But those who have committed sin and iniquity shall not inhabit it, for I have marked their proceedings. My righteous ones will I satisfy with peace, placing them before me; but the condemnation of sinners shall draw near, that I may destroy them from the face of the earth.[270]

New Testament Echoes of Restored Creation

We saw in the previous lesson how the theme of Creation carries on into the New Testament, with the introduction to John's Gospel being a verbatim quote of the opening verses of Genesis. The association of Jesus Christ and especially His resurrection, with the New Creation prophesied in the Old Testament, is largely the theological contribution of Paul, though it is certainly present also in John and Peter. Childs notes, "In the New Testament Paul appears to be the first who interpreted the resurrection of Christ as God's fulfilment of the promise of a new creation. The new age which broke with the resurrection of Christ could only be compared to a new creation: 'the old has passed away, behold, the new has come.'"[271] The theme of the New Creation is so interwoven in Paul's writings that it would be well beyond the scope of this lesson to recount each passage and follow each thread. The two most important ones, perhaps, treat of the individual (II Corinthians 5) and the created order (Romans 8).

> *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.* (II Corinthians 5:17-19)

> *For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now.* (Romans 8:19-22)

[270] I Enoch 45:3-5. Chapter 45 [SECT. VII.] – The Book of Enoch (book-ofenoch.com). Accessed 06October2024.
[271] Childs; 393-394.

Paul brings together the destiny of the individual as well as that of the created order, in I Corinthians 15, where we read of Jesus Christ as the first fruits of the New Creation. Though Paul does not use the phrase 'New Creation' in the passage, it is impossible to miss the note of restoration and recapitulation of the 'old' creation in the consummated work of Jesus Christ.

> *For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming. Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. For "He has put all things under His feet." But when He says "all things are put under Him," it is evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted. Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all.* (I Corinthians 15:21-28)

John does not lag far behind Paul in New Creation orientation, though what he writes in that regard is often a more subtle echo of the Old Testament data. Except, of course, the vision of Revelation 21 and 22, which is unmistakably couched in Edenic terminology. The motif of Creation/New Creation and of the City of God/Jerusalem coalesce in the opening description of this final vision of the Apocalypse and of the canon of Scripture.

> *Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God.*
>
> (Revelation 21:1-3)

We also have in this passage the 'bride' – the bride of Christ – identified a few verses later as the New Jerusalem, in a manner not unlike Paul's allegorical exegesis of Abraham's family in Galatians 4. The people of God – the nation of Israel and the Church of Jesus Christ – form another motif within Canonical Theology, to be investigated separately in another lesson. Yet though we pull these strands apart for closer

study, we must not lose the impact of their interwoven character, especially as the tightly woven strand is ultimately the Person and Work of Jesus Christ.

What concerns us in this particular lesson is the language of the early chapters of Genesis, and specifically the Edenic terminology and descriptions, that John envisions of the New Heaven and New Earth, the New Jerusalem. This comes out strongly in Revelation 22,

> *And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever.* (Revelation 22:1-5)

The river, the tree of life (though now more than one, and all along the central boulevard), the removal of the curse and replacement of the sun and moon by the glory of the throne of God (Who, by the way, now dwells permanently and uninterruptedly with mankind), are all features of the New Jerusalem that derives from the Creation account Furthermore, the viceregency of Man is reiterated here, "*and they shall reign forever and ever.*" Revelation 21 and 22 bring the canon full circle, and farther. Creation is restored, but improved. Thus Klink correctly notes, "In a sense, if Genesis 1-2 offered a forward look at the meaning and purpose of creation, Revelation 21-22 offers a backward look at the consummation of everything God intended and perfected."[272] Genesis 1-2 and Revelation 21-22 do in deed 'bookend' Scripture, providing a first motif within Canonical Theology. "Therefore, what begins in Gen. 1-3 and is developed throughout the rest of the biblical canon finds its climax in Rev. 21-22, which recapitulates Gen. 1-3 and portrays the goal that the last Adam and his people have finally attained…everything in the biblical canon should be seen to have its roots in Gen. 1-3 and to move toward its final goal in Rev. 21."[273]

[272] Klink; 157.
[273] Beale; 176-177.

Lesson 11 – The Image in the Temple
Text: Genesis 1:27-28; Psalm 8; Romans 5:12-21

"Adam is the alpha-point in the history of redemption while Christ is the omega-point of redemptive history."
(Geoff Thomas)

In the ancient world, a temple was the dwelling place of a deity among those who worshipped him or her. The various parts of the structure had significance, but none was more important than the 'sanctuary,' or, as in the tabernacle in the wilderness, the Holy of Holies. This was the inner sanctum, the place even within the temple where the deity most especially lived. And in that place, representative of the pagan gods though not of the God of Israel, was found the 'image.' It is said that the Roman general Pompey was nonplussed when he entered behind the veil of the Temple in Jerusalem only to find an empty room, a room without either furnishings, food, or an image of the Jewish god. Indeed, their lack of any tangible image for their deity made both Jews and, later, Christians seem to be atheists in the eyes of surrounding pagan culture. Remarkably, the making of an image for Israel's God is expressly forbidden in the Ten Commandments, and idolatry became one of Israel's most heinous sins. The rabbinic literature is consistent in viewing Aaron's manufacture of the golden calf to have been, as it were, the primal sin of the nation.

But is it true that God's Temple had no image in its sanctuary? Yes, of course, if what is meant is a figurine made of gold or silver, but, No, if one reads Genesis 1:27 in the proper, Temple context.

> *So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.* (Genesis 1:27)

Genesis 2 goes on to tell us that God set Man in the midst of the Garden that He had made, as it were, in the sanctuary of the Temple that God had built, the Temple of the Cosmos. Man was at the center as the image in the Temple. But more, for just as the deity was always considered to 'reign' from his or her temple – as we see of Artemis in

Ephesus – so also God intended to rule from Eden, *through His image, Man*. The verse immediately following the *imago Dei* verse makes this clear.

> *Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth* ***and subdue it****; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that* [h]*moves on the earth."* (Genesis 1:28)

In the modern, man-centered Western world in which even evangelical Christianity has imbibed too much of the self-centeredness and self-absorption of the surrounding culture, it may be dangerous to speak of Man as the 'Center of Creation.' But he is, as Scripture testifies in many places, certainly none more poignantly than Psalm 8.

> *What is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him?*
> *For You have made him a little lower than the angels,*
> *And You have crowned him with glory and honor.*
> *You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands;*
> *You have put all things under his feet,*
> *All sheep and oxen – even the beasts of the field,*
> *The birds of the air, and the fish of the sea that pass through the paths of the seas.*
>
> (Psalm 8:4-8)


Karl Barth (1886-1968)

Karl Barth was frequently misunderstood when he spoke of God 'becoming God for Man,' but the 20th Century Swiss theologian was careful to describe the process as an exercise of God's free and sovereign will and as an act of unmitigated love. In his *Church Dogmatics*, Barth writes of God's Creation, "And what He finally and supremely created was man. With the realization of man all creation received its culmination and meaning. When man had been realized before Him, God ceased from His work of creation. He halted at this boundary. He was satisfied with what He had created and had found the object of His love."[274] Surely Barth's conclusion is justified by the shift in the quality assessment by God of His Crea-

[274] Barth, Karl *Church Dogmatics* III.1 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark; 1958); 217.

tion, when He made Man in His image, from 'good' to 'very good.' The Temple of God's dwelling with His Creation was completed, and the image was placed in its sanctuary.

> *Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it.*
> (Genesis 2:15)

It bears repeating here, though a further investigation is beyond the scope of this lesson, that the phrase '*tend and keep*' is later used to describe the daily functions of the Aaronic priesthood in the tabernacle. This further confirms the conclusion that the Garden of Eden was, indeed, a Temple of the living God. Man's function as the priest of God's Creation-Temple is an important theme of Scripture, but here the intent is to analyze Man in and of himself and particularly the evident arc of revelation between the 'First' Adam and the 'Last' Adam, between the first Man and the Son of Man, Jesus Christ. But before embarking on that investigation, and sadly, the question must be asked as to whether Adam was a historical figure at all. It should be stated first and foremost that this question is by no means justified by the text of Scripture, throughout which Adam is taken as nothing other than the very first, historical man. For instance, the genealogies of Chronicles and Luke both trace their respective lineages to Adam.[275] The Chronicler's account starts with Adam matter-of-factly: "*Adam, Seth, Enosh…*" whereas Luke's ends, most significantly, with "*…the son of Adam, the son of God.*"

No, the question as to the historicity of Adam (and Eve) derives only from modern evolutionary thought, and the sad acquiescence of professing evangelicals to the 'proved science' of 'common descent.' The essence of the 'common descent' view is that all modern human beings are genetically descended from a *community* of similar organisms, who are themselves descended from other organisms back the evolutionary 'chain.' An online Biology Dictionary provides this definition:

> Common descent is a term within evolutionary biology which refers to the common ancestry of a particular group of organisms. The process of common decent involves the

[275] *Cp.* I Chronicles 1:1 and Luke 3:38

> formation of new species from an ancestral population. When a recent common ancestor is shared between two organisms, they are said to be closely related. In contrast, common descent can also be traced back to a universal common ancestor of all living organisms using molecular genetic methods. Such evolution from a universal common ancestor is thought to have involved several speciation events as a result of natural selection and other processes, such as geographical separation.[276]

Fundamental to this perspective is the denial that modern man *did* descend from an original couple, Adam and Eve. Professing believers have tried to synthesize modern evolutionary 'science' with the biblical testimony of the divine creation of Man – *i.e.*, 'Adam' – by God in His image. Some have resorted to Theistic Evolution, the idea that God used the processed of molecular, biological evolution to bring about His purposes in Creation. It is impossible to derive Theistic Evolution from either the simplest or the most complex reading of the Creation Account in Genesis 1 and 2. Furthermore, Theistic Evolution is not a view that is ever likely to be accepted by neo-Darwinian evolutionist scholars. Philosophy professor Garrett DeWeese writes, "it is not at all clear that theistic evolution is consistent with the Neo-Darwinian Synthesis as commonly understood. This is because Darwinian (or naturalistic) evolution is purposeless, unguided, unplanned, while theistic evolution necessarily includes some degree of divine planning and guidance."[277] Perhaps for this reason Theistic Evolution has never gained much traction among biblical scholars uncomfortable with a historical Adam.

The more common approach, therefore, has been to relegate Adam to the realm of 'metaphor' or 'mythological character' used by such biblical writers as Paul to illustrate a point with regard to the origin of sin in the world. Paul, in Romans 5, seems to link Adam quite clearly with the advent of sin into the human race, whether one views the result of Adam's Fall as *original corruption* or *original sin*, the two most common evangelical interpretations of Paul's treatise. But Original Sin does not sit well with the modern mind, no better than an Original Man sits with modern evolutionary science.

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[276] Common Descent - Definition, Theory, Examples, Quiz | Biology Dictionary. Accessed 22October2024.
[277] DeWeese Garrett W. "Paul, Second Adam, and Theistic Evolution" *Creation Research Institute Article ID: JAF2376*; June 15, 2016. Paul, Second Adam, and Theistic Evolution - Christian Research Institute (equip.org). Accessed 22October2024.

"Historically, the primary reason to weaken or deny the analogy [*i.e.*, between Jesus Christ and Adam] has been to avoid doctrines of inherited or imputed guilt and/or corruption. More recently the motive has been the incompatibility of a literal Adam with evolution."[278]

The issue of the historicity of Adam touches upon the perennial problem of the contemporaneity of Scripture: how does one interpret the Bible in light of the prevailing culture, framework of contemporary knowledge, and, in the more modern sense, Science? Christianity as anti-intellectual is a stereotype sadly earned in many circles, though many of the earliest modern scientists were so because of their belief in a Creating and Organizing God. Christianity has all too often failed at one extreme or the other: either circling the wagons and denying the findings of science on the basis of a particular biblical interpretation, or reorienting biblical interpretation itself according to the latest discoveries of Science. The most famous example of the former is the Church's rejection of the Copernican planetary model as set forth by Galileo; of the second the widespread adoption of Evolution by modern liberal denominations.

But the concern that we have in this study does not touch upon the 'science' of Evolution; rather it impinges upon the theology of Scripture. DeWeese brings the two issues together in his article, setting forth the principle of 'ingression' with regard to either a theological dogma or a scientific theory. "One very important consideration must be the degree of ingression of a particular claim in science or theology. The degree of ingression may be evaluated by asking how dramatically the discipline would be changed if the belief were discarded."[279] Of course, Evolution is very important to modern Science, especially the branches of Biology and Genetics. The question is, how important is the belief in Adam as a real, historical figure to the general doctrine of Christianity? Modern liberal scholars claim that the biblical view of Adam as the first human being is not 'deeply ingressed,' in other words, we can discard that belief without doing harm to the general framework of Christian doctrine. Though few have

[278] DeWeese *op cit.*
[279] *Ibid.*

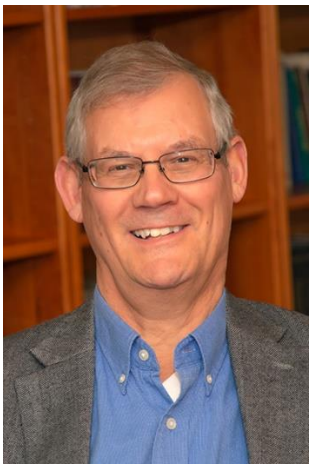
thought matters through in this light, many professing believers have arrived at this conclusion. Evolution is too central to modern Science; to abandon it would be to abandon scientific (often viewed as 'true') knowledge altogether. Consequently, a real, historical Adam is concluded to be merely a product of the ancient system of beliefs, having no basis in modern, scientific fact, and no significant bearing on the structure of Christian doctrine. But is this so? If both the Evolution of Science and the literal Adam and Eve of the Bible are equally ingressed, then we must conclude the two views to be mutually incompatible, and decide the issue based on priority: Science vs. Biblical Witness.

While there are many passages one can turn to that refer to Adam as a literal, historical individual, the *locus classicus* is Romans 5:12-21, with a significant assist from I Corinthians 15:21-22.

> *Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned— (For until the law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come. But the free gift is not like the offense. For if by the one man's offense many died, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many. And the gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned. For the judgment which came from one offense resulted in condemnation, but the free gift which came from many offenses resulted in justification. For if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.) Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous. Moreover the law entered that the offense might abound. But where sin abounded, grace abounded much more, so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.* (Romans 5:12-21)

What happens to Paul's logic here if Adam was not a real, historical figure? Paul's argument hinges on interpreting 'sin' and 'death' as powers that 'enter' into God's Creation 'through one man,' to be conquered by 'righteousness' entering as well 'through one man.' It is exegetically and logically unacceptable to make the first 'man'

a 'concept' without making the second man the same. If sin and death either exist as a natural part of humanity, or evolve somehow into the human psyche, then it is illegitimate to consider righteousness and life as anything other than a concept that also evolves within humanity. Of course, this idea of ethical evolution is the basic teaching of liberal Christianity, though few within that camp would deny the existence of a historical Jesus. Douglas Moo writes in his commentary on Romans 5, "For Adam and Christ are too closely compared in this passage to think that one could be 'mythical' and the other 'historical.' We must be honest and admit that if Adam's sin is not 'real,' then any argument based on the presumption that it is must fall to the ground."[280] DeWeese adds, "If Adam is not the progenitor of H. sapiens, then the doctrine of the fall as it has been understood in Christian theology for two thousand years is false, and the entrance of sin into humanity remains a mystery."[281]


Douglas Moo (*b.* 1950)

DeWeese concludes "Hence we have two interpretive traditions regarding original sin: inherited corruption and inherited guilt, both have strong support in the history of orthodox Christian theology. And both seem to demand a literal Adam."[282] As Paul's argument in Romans 5 is deeply ingressed in Christiann doctrine – the doctrine of original and indwelling sin on the one hand, and that of the redeeming righteousness of Christ on the other – the view that the first 'Adam' was merely a convenient mythological figure conjured up to help 'explain' human sin, is ultimately destructive of any biblical doctrine of either sin or salvation. It should not be surprising, then, to realize that Christian denominations that have abandoned a historical Adam have also lost any biblical sense of either sin or salvation. "Sin is no longer a matter of 'human fallenness.' It is a matter of 'human givenness.' It means that sin is simply a part of what it means to be

[280] Moo, Douglas *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; 1996); 325 n53.
[281] DeWeese, *op cit.*
[282] *Ibid.*

human."[283] The most common result of such an evolutionary accommodation is to view salvation as ethical and social improvement, and Jesus as the supreme historical example of both. But biblical Christianity will always conclude the most obvious reading of both Genesis 1 and 2 and Romans 5, that Adam was as real a human being as was Jesus Christ. Geoff Thomas summarizes, "We will not understand our plight, our sin and guilt, the reality of justification, and the hope of resurrection without taking into consideration our union with our father Adam and what happened to the human race."[284]

For the purposes of Biblical Theology, and a canonical reading of Scripture, we now investigate the premise that the Last Adam was already considered and encompassed in the First Adam – that the creation of Man as a single, historical figure was divinely intentional of the redemption of Man through another single, historical figure, and that a canonical reading will trace the arc of revelation between the two Adams. There are many ways of testing this hypothesis as one follows each characteristic of the First Adam to its ultimate culmination and perfection in the Last Adam. The two that we will investigate in this lesson are (1) the *Image within* and (2) the *Reign over* Creation.

Man, the *Imago Dei*

The seminal passage with regard to the *imago Dei* is, of course, Genesis 1:26-27.

> *Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.* (Genesis 1:26-27)

Grammatically, there is in this passage a very significant shift in the way in which the ongoing work of Creation is recorded. Mark Mangano writes, "Taking center stage in this theatre is mankind, the crescendo of God's creative activity. In Genesis 1:26, the initial verse in the narration of humankind's creation, the shift from the jussive ('Let there be') to a cohortative ('Let Us') is clue enough that something momentous is

[283] Thomas, *op cit.*
[284] *Ibid.*

being narrated."[285] A great deal has been written and no doubt will be written, about what exactly the 'image of God' pertains to in the composition of Man. The text is remarkably silent on the matter, and the rest of Scripture sheds little additional light.


Richard Middleton (*b.* 1955)

Some scholars are convinced that man's rational capacity is the key; others focus on man's creative abilities; while others emphasize man's possession of spirit as well as a physical body, that he is a composite creature. Richard Middleton refers to the common "claim that the precise meaning of the *imago Dei* is unspecified in the biblical text (or at least unattainable by the interpreter)."[286] Among the many different views, however, that of the physicality of Man is scarcely represented. That man has a physical body is generally considered somewhat insignificant, merely the container in which the *imago Dei* was to be placed. The minimizing of human physicality is understandable, at first blush, on the basis that God is spirit and has no physical form (*cp.* Deuteronomy 4:12).

Physicality, however, turns out to be a very important aspect of the *imago Dei*, as can be derived not only from the seminal text in Genesis 1, but also the arc of revelation concerning the First and Last Adams. To work from back to front for a moment, we have the enigmatic quote by the author of the letter to the Hebrews,

> *Therefore, when He came into the world, He said:*
> *'Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You have prepared for Me.*
> *In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You had no pleasure.'*
> *Then I said, 'Behold, I have come –*
> *In the volume of the book it is written of Me – to do Your will, O God.'*
>
> (Hebrews 10:5-7)

The reference, of course, is to the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, "*When He came into the world.*" The quotation does not have an introductory formula, but it is easily tracea-

[285] Mangano, Mark J. *The Image of God* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America; 2008); 1.
[286] Middleton, J. Richard *The Liberating Image* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press; 2005); 44.

ble to Psalm 40, yet with a twist that makes it a 'category 2' from our previous list – quotations that are clear, but not clearly understood. Consider the referent text,

> *Sacrifice and offering You did not desire; My ears You have opened.*
> *Burnt offering and sin offering You did not require.*
> *Then I said, "Behold, I come; in the scroll of the book it is written of me.*
> *I delight to do Your will, O my God, and Your law is within my heart."* (Psalm 40:6-8)

The author of Hebrews has substituted, it would seem, the phrase *"a body You have prepared for Me,"* for the original, *"My ears You have opened."* The discrepancy is not so mysterious: the author chose to quote Psalm 40 from the Greek Septuagint (LXX) rather than the Hebrew text. The point is that he did so for a reason, and was able to do so because the third-century BC translators of the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek somehow rendered the phrase *"a body You have prepared for Me"* with no reference to the piercing or opening of the ears. To our purpose, however, what is important is the reference *to a body*, a body prepared by God to be taken up by His Son, Israel's Messiah and the world's Savior. But *when* was this body prepared?

Conventional wisdom holds that Jesus became Man simply because Adam was a man, and Adam's progeny – the human race – was in need of redemption. In other words, the physicality of Adam, and humanity through him, is the cause of the Incarnation, God becoming Man. But that is putting the cart before the horse, for if Christ *"was slain before the foundation of the earth,"* then His physicality was already presupposed in the ternal counsel of the Godhead, before Adam was formed from the dust of the earth. It is rather the case that Adam was formed from the prototype, the eternally-predestined Son of Man, Jesus Christ. This is analogous to the tabernacle, which was constructed as a replica of the heavenly sanctuary (*cp.* Hebrews 8:5). Canadian anthropologist Arthur Custance considers the importance of the physicality of Adam frequently in his excellent and thought-provoking *Doorway Papers*. The formation of Adam looked forward to the *"coming into the world"* of Jesus, and the body of


Arthur Custance (1910-85)

Adam was especially prepared to accommodate the future body of Jesus Christ, the God-Man. Custance writes, "The Incarnation and the Crucifixion are…the cause of all that is related to the planning of the natural order and of the creation of man as its most important member."[287]

Evidence of the importance of human physicality is found in the earliest statement of the *imago Dei* in Genesis 1. The statement of creation of Man in the image of God is presented in three couplets,

> *So God created man in His own image;*
> *In the image of God He created him;*
> *Male and female He created them.*
> (Genesis 1:27)

The structure is poetic with two parallel couplets followed by a third. In Hebrew poetry, a third couplet is never merely a restatement of the previous two, but is always an expansion on the thought. In this case, the 'him' of the second couplet is expanded and explained into 'male and female.' The close association of this phrase *'male and female'* to the *imago Dei* certainly seems to indicate that the distinction of Man into two sexes is essential to the meaning of the *imago Dei* itself. It is significant to note that the words used in this phrase are not *man and woman*, but *male and female* – the same words used to describe the animals that Noah was to bring on the ark. In other words, the meaning is "biological, not social."[288] 'Man and Woman' will not appear until the parallel Creation account in Genesis 2, where the *imago Dei* is not mentioned. Thus we must conclude that the biological physicality of male and female are essential component parts of the *imago Dei*, even though God Himself does not possess a body and is neither Male nor Female in the created sense of those terms.

The phrase *"male and female He created them"* is anticipatory of the next verse, in which Man is given the commandment to *"Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth."*[289]

[287] Custance, Arthur C. *Noah's Three Sons* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan; 1975); 234.
[288] Middleton; 50.
[289] Genesis 1:28

But it may also be anticipatory of much, much more, not least the 'body' that was prepared for the Messiah. Reproduction, in and of itself, is not essential to the *imago Dei*, as God Himself cannot 'reproduce.' We might say, as many have, that the essential meaning of the *imago Dei* is 'functional,' – not so much what Man *is* as what he is intended *to do* – to reproduce, fill the earth, and subdue it. This is true as far as it goes; but it does not go far enough.

In some way human physicality is itself part of the purpose of Creation, tied in with the intended redemption of Creation by God having come in a human body. Adam was not created as were the angels, purely spiritual beings without normal visibility. Rather, as Middleton notes, "visibility and bodiliness may well be important for understanding the *imago Dei* and that this dimension of its meaning should not be summarily excluded from consideration."[290] The physical dimension of the *imago Dei* cannot look *backward* to God Himself, since He has no form or body, and therefore must look *forward* to the Incarnate Son, the Son of Man and the Seed of Woman. The mention of *'male and female'* so closely tied to the description of Man created in the image of God, should encourage us to pay closer attention to the physical dimension of human existence as we read through the Scriptures. This is especially true in the immediate context of the creation of the *imago Dei* – Genesis chapters 2 and 3. With the formation of Woman out of Man, and then the Fall and promise of redemption, we begin the trajectory of meaning of the physicality of the *imago Dei*. Just to peak again at the end, consider Paul's assessment of Jesus Christ, *"in whom all the fulness of deity dwells in bodily form."*[291]

Genesis 2 also emphasizes the material aspect of Man's nature: he is formed from the dust of the earth. He is, as Paul puts it, *"earthy"* (*cp.* I Corinthians 15:47). Woman's formation from the side of Man is itself significant for the future purpose of God, specifically the 'mechanics,' so to speak, of the Incarnation. Custance points out that Eve's having been taken from unfallen Adam – a removal of something from Adam that then forms the distinct femaleness of Eve – is deeply significant, for it provides a connection

[290] Middleton; 25.
[291] Colossians 2:9

to Adam that bypasses the imminent fallenness due to sin. Though Eve herself sinned (and sinned first), Scripture does not speak of death entering into the world through her but through Adam. This is to say that Eve's sin had consequence for Eve herself; Adam's sin had consequence for his entire progeny. Custance concludes that the female ovum is not the vehicle of the transmission of sin, but rather the male sperm is. He writes of, "The taking of Eve out of unfallen Adam that she (and those who followed her) might become a vehicle for the physiological requirement for that body which was accordingly perfectly 'prepared' for Him."[292]

The Virgin Birth is, without doubt, a miracle. But it is a miracle that aligns itself with the unfolding purposes of God, connecting the promise of the Seed of Woman with the conception of Jesus in Mary's womb. Contrary to the erroneous Roman Catholic doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, by which Mary herself was conceived without sin in her mother's womb, the sinlessness of the child in her womb was actuated by His conception by the Holy Spirit, rather than by her betrothed husband, Joseph.[293] The transmission of the fallen nature of Adam was therefore bypassed, and the child could most properly be prophesied as the 'Seed of Woman.' Yet, as Eve was taken out of unfallen Adam, Jesus was thereby equally a descendant of Adam, and most properly referred to as the 'Son of Man' and the 'Last Adam.'

Thus the physicality of Adam leads directly to the body prepared for the Messiah, the Incarnation. Mangano quotes Alec Motyer, "We would have to say that there is a visible 'form' which is specially and exactly appropriate to the invisible glory of God. In this 'form' man was created."[294] More could be said concerning the importance of the visible, physical body with respect to the Crucifixion, and certainly the Resurrection as *'first born from the dead'* promises the continued physicality of mankind beyond the judgment. Each of these perspectives on the *imago Dei* as a physical creation develops its own trajectory of revelation through the Old Testament and into the New. One in

[292] Custance, Arthur C. *The Virgin Birth and the Incarnation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan; 1976); 381.
[293] Article 491 of the *Catechism of the Roman Catholic Church* states, "Through the centuries the Church has become more aware that Mary, 'full of grace; through God, was redeemed from the moment of her conception. That is what the dogma of the Immaculate Conception confesses." *Imprimi Potest*, Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger (April 1995).
[294] Mangano; 5.

particular, however, has a unifying effect on them all – that of the "*fullness of deity dwelling in Christ bodily.*" From the announcement of the virgin birth to the exclamation of the Roman soldier at the cross, the New Testament is at pains to display Jesus as the man in whom the image of God was most profound, most perfect. This means that Jesus is also the most profound, most perfect image of Man – the Last Adam being the heavenly prototype of the First Adam, is thereby much greater than the first. This is why Custance can write, "the clearest picture of Adam is not to be found in Genesis at all, but in the New Testament."[295]

Let us trace the overall trajectory again, in summary and with Scripture. The first man was created in the image of God, formed bodily from the dust of the earth as a replica, so to speak, of the "*body prepared*" for the promised Messiah, Jesus. The path to the fulfillment of that promise was secured though the forming of Eve *from out of* unfallen Adam rather than as a separate 'Man' from the dust. This both connected Eve to Adam and disconnected her from his seed, preserving the seed of woman inviolate unless corrupted through the male seed. Thus the descendants of Adam did not merely reproduce *after their kind*, as is said of the animal world, but rather *in his image*. So Scripture speaks of Adam's son, Seth.

> *This is the book of the genealogy of Adam. In the day that God created man, He made him in the likeness of God. He created them male and female, and blessed them and called them Mankind in the day they were created. And Adam lived one hundred and thirty years, and* ***begot a son in his own likeness, after his image,*** *and named him Seth.* (Genesis 5:1-3)

The physicality of man as the *imago Dei* is preserved as to its importance, by the divine proscription of murder, a passage that also repeats the command to *'be fruitful and multiply.'*

> *Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed;*
> *For in the image of God He made man.*
> *And as for you, be fruitful and multiply;*
> *Bring forth abundantly in the earth and multiply in it.* (Genesis 9:6-7)

[295] Custance, *Virgin Birth*; 371.

From the call of Abram to the Babylonian Exile, the lineage of the promised Seed is detailed – first narrowed through Isaac and Jacob, then the tribe of Judah (though that particular echo pertains more to the royal aspect of the *imago* Dei). In this narrative, the barrenness of Sarah (as well as her advanced age) and of Rebekah reiterate both the important role of the Woman in the promise as well as the divine power behind the promise. Within the tribe of Judah, the lineage is further constructed to the family of Jesse, to his youngest son, David. One of this line, King Hezekiah, wept bitterly when informed by the prophet Isaiah that his days had been cut short and he was to die. Although the text does not give the reason for Hezekiah's sorrow, a little math will show that his sone and heir, Manasseh, was not yet born. Had Hezekiah died, the line of the Davidic Messiah would have been broken.

The same prophet Isaiah delivers the famous prophecy concerning Immanuel, which means 'God with us.' The prophecy itself demands a near-term fulfilment as it is linked with the defeat of two enemy kings who stood against Judah. Furthermore, the language within the prophecy does not demand interpretation as 'virgin,' as the Hebrew word may mean simply a 'young maiden.'[296] Nonetheless, Isaiah 7 has justifiably been long viewed as Messianic and, in particular, an echo of the promised Seed of Woman to be born of a virgin, born without sin. Certainly Matthew makes the same connection in Matthew 1:22-23, where he declares the prophecy of Isaiah 7 fulfilled in the birth of Jesus. Additional justification for this interpretation is the close connection between the prophecy of Isaiah 7 and that of Isaiah 9. The emphasis on a promised child is what places these prophecies within the same arc as Genesis 3:15 and Colossians 2:9.

> *Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel. Curds and honey He shall eat, that He may know to refuse the evil and choose the good. For before the child shall know to refuse the evil and choose the good, the land that you dread will be forsaken by both her kings.* (Isaiah 7:14-16)

[296] The near-term fulfillment of the prophecy may have been the birth of Ahaz' son and heir, Hezekiah, or the birth of the prophet's own son, recorded in Isaiah 8 in similar language to Isaiah 7 (*cp.* Isaiah 8:4).

> *For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given;*
> *And the government will be upon His shoulder.*
> *And His name will be called*
> *Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*
> *Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end,*
> *Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom,*
> *To order it and establish it with judgment and justice*
> *From that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.*
>
> (Isaiah 9:6-7)

The culmination of this trajectory is, of course, Jesus "*coming into the world*" in the "*body prepared*" for Him. Born of woman without the participation of man, Jesus exactly fulfills the *protoevangelium* of Genesis 3:15. More than even that, however, He being the eternal Son of God exactly fulfills the *imago Dei* in which Adam was first created. "As the personal revelation of God, Christ is 'the objectivization of God in human life, the 'projection' of God on the canvas of our humanity, and the embodiment of the divine in the world of men.'"[297] Perhaps the two passages that encompass both the visible physicality and the perfect divine image of Jesus are Philippians 2 and Hebrews 1.

> *Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.*
>
> (Philippians 2:5-8)

> *God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power…*
>
> (Hebrews 1:1-3a)

Both of these passages, representing many others, also touch upon the reigning aspect of the *imago Dei*, drawn as well from Genesis 1:26-28. Man was created to rule over God's Creation, a responsibility abdicated by the First Adam through his sin, but exactly and fully accomplished by the Last Adam, who was the divine prototype of the first. To that 'royal' aspect of the *imago Dei* we turn in our next lesson.

[297] Mangano; 171. Quoting Ralph Martin from his commentary on Colossians and Philemon.

Lesson 12 – The King in Zion
Text: Genesis 1:27-28; Psalm 2; I Corinthians 15:20-28

"[It] cannot be said that Israel regarded God anthropomorphically, but the reverse, that she considered man as theomorphic."
(Gerhard von Rad)

We have already noted that the narrative of Man's creation *"in the image of God"* is quite lacking in a description or definition of that image. Theologians have tended to focus on *character* in attempting to define the *imago Dei*, but that might be not only pure speculation – lacking any definitive statements in the text – but also overlooking what the text does actually say. It appears from the text in Genesis 1 that the 'definition' of the image of God in which Man was created is more *functional* or *purposeful*, than character oriented. This is not to say that the *imago Dei* has nothing to do with the physical and spiritual composition, as it were, of Man. It is only to note what does appear from the text to be, at the very least, a major component of that image.

> *Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that [a]moves on the earth."*
>
> (Genesis 1:26-28)


G. C. Berkouwer (1903-96)

Rather than saying anything about what the *imago Dei* looks like, or even acts like, the text tells us what it is purposed *to do* – *"to have dominion"* and *"to subdue."* Another word for 'dominion' is, of course, 'rule' – Man was created in the image of God *to rule* over the Creation God had made. G. C. Berkouwer writes, "We should not describe the image of God in terms of nature or qualities, but in terms of calling., The image of God does not refer to a static, ontic state, but to

man's service, man's fulfilling his calling"[298] he 'second' Creation Account in Genesis 2 contains a similar *functional* description of Man's creation, with *"tend and keep"* replacing *"rule and subdue."*

> *Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it.*
> (Genesis 2:15)

Theologically, this biblical phenomenon of God creating Adam to *rule over* Creation is referred to as the *coregency* of Man with God. The creation of Man in the image of God, and his commission by God to rule and subdue and to tend and keep God's Creation, cannot be interpreted in a deistical manner as if God then abdicated His own sovereign dominion over Creation in favor of Man's rule. Rather it is the case that Adam was to rule over God's Creation *in the presence of God*. Man is, therefore, *co*regent, not sole ruler, a very significant clarification. Middleton thus notes that "the *imago Dei* designates the royal office or calling of human beings as God's representatives and agents in the world, granted authorized power to share in God's rule or administration of the earth's resources and creatures."[299]

The simple and obvious meaning of an 'image' is something visible that stands in the place of an original. This visibility is at the heart of the *imago Dei*, as Berkouwer notes, "The word 'image' implies 'making visible.' God has given man the task of 'representing Him on earth through being in His image.'"[300] We might say, looking ahead to the trajectory of this lesson, that Adam was 'the image of the invisible God,' though not the *exact* image. Gerhard von Rad, contemporary with Berkouwer, echoes this emphasis on function rather than nature in the *imago Dei.* Von Rad concluded that, "the purpose of this image of God in man, that is the function committed to man in virtue of it, namely, his status as lord in


Gerhard von Rad (1901-71)

[298] Berkouwer, G. C. *Man: The Image of God* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; 1969); 54.
[299] Middleton; 27.
[300] *Idem*.

the world…God set man in the world as the sign of his own sovereign authority, in order that man should uphold and enforce his – God's – claims as lord."[301]

Many scholars of Ancient Near Eastern religion and politics have noted that the 'image of God' is a motif not limited to the biblical writings of the Old Testament. Indeed, the identification of the king or pharaoh as the image of a god, or gods, is very common in both Egyptian and Babylonian records. Liberal biblical scholars argue that this phenomenon of the 'royal image' in ancient Egyptian and Babylonian documents and epics was borrowed by the writer of Genesis (which they do not hold was written by Moses). It should be apparent, however, when the biblical text is compared to the ancient pagan texts, that it far more likely the traditions stem from a common ancestor – indeed, the Genesis account as the common ancestor – rather than that the biblical writers borrowed from their pagan neighbors. Richard Middleton provides a helpful summary of the archaeological discoveries regarding the 'image' in Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) chronicles. Of the four categories into which Middleton divides the archaeological examples, two are most significant for a study of the Genesis text.

The first is the tendency for ancient rulers to erect statues of themselves in distant parts of their domain, as 'representative' of their suzerainty over the territory even in their absence. Middleton writes, "A third set of possible parallels to the biblical *imago Dei* is the common practice of ancient Near Eastern kings setting up images or statues of themselves in lands where they were physically absent as a symbol of their rule over these lands."[302] The statue that Nebuchadnezzar erects of himself (and, note, demands his subjects to worship) is of this same type of representative rule. The modern version of this phenomenon would be the tradition of having a portrait of a nation's king or president hanging in a prominent place in the ambassador's office in a foreign land. Early Christian writers noticed the similarity between the royal pur-


Theodore (AD 350-428)

[301] Von Rad, Gerhard *Old Testament Theology; Volume 1* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers; 1962); 146.
[302] Middleton; 104.

pose of the *imago Dei* in Genesis 1, and the ongoing practice of kings and emperors erecting images in their own honor. One Church father, Theodore of Mopsuestia, writes, "After having built a city the king erects a statue to be honoured by the citizens. So God after having finished the creation set man as His image that all creatures in rendering service to him should pay honour to their Creator."[303]

Of course, the difference between a statue of the king or emperor in a distant part of his domain, and the *imago Dei* of Genesis 1, is the simple fact that the latter is *living*. The statues could never be more than a reminder of the authority and power of the distant king, and of the fact that this king would come with his armies to quell any rebellion in his realm. But the statue itself could not rule; the *imago Dei* of Genesis 1 was purposed to do just that, to rule. This fact is also represented in the Ancient Near Eastern documents, as the pharaohs of ancient Egypt and the kings of ancient Babylon were often referred to, and often referred themselves as, the embodiment of the god(s). The language of the ancient texts are often eerily familiar to readers of the Bible. One stella contains this accolade from the Egyptian god Amon-Re to Pharaoh Amenhotep III, "You are my beloved son, who came forth from my members, my image, whom I have put on earth. I have given to you to rule the earth in peace."[304] Often the name of the king would include the name of the nation's titular god, again a reminder to the citizens of that kingdom that their king was the bodily presence of their god. Middleton writes, "the most common designation seems to be the image of Re (the primary name for the sun-god, national deity of Egypt), but the pharaoh is also commonly called the image of Amon-Re, Horus, Atum, and Amon."[305]


Amenhotep III (*d.* 1353 BC)

Even the briefest survey of the archaeological data will show why many biblical scholars draw a direct line of parallel between the Ancient Near Eastern royal examples of the 'divine image' and the account of the *imago Dei* in Genesis 1. But while the paral-

[303] Quoted by Middleton; 104.
[304] *Ibid.*; 109.
[305] *Idem.*

lel is intriguing, there is such a radical difference in the Genesis version as to deny any conclusion of causality between the pagan practices and the Mosaic record. This difference is nothing less than the complete democratization of the image – *all* mankind is created, and reproduced, in the *imago Dei*, it is not a designation of the king alone. Christopher Beetham, in his article titled "From Creation to New Creation: The Biblical Epic of King, Human Viceregency, and Kingdom," writes, "Genesis 1 thus reflects an Ancient Near Eastern worldview but transforms it with the innovation of a democratization of the image to assert that God created not only powerful kings but all humanity as the image of God. The upshot is that all humanity was created for viceregency over the earth on behalf of God."[306]

It might be argued that Genesis 1:28 commissions Adam as the viceregent over God's newly created order, sort of the first king of the human race. But it soon becomes evident that the *imago Dei* is the inherited trait of all of Adam's offspring, not merely – and perhaps we might say 'least of all' – his 'royal heirs.' For instance, it is not Adam's firstborn, Cain, who is referred to in image terminology, but rather a later son, Seth. The language is, of course, slightly different as Seth is born in the image of his father Adam, but as Adam was created in the image of God, it has been uniformly recognized as the hereditary passing along of the status from father to son.

> *This is the book of the genealogy of Adam. In the day that God created man, He made him in the likeness of God. He created them male and female, and blessed them and called them Mankind in the day they were created. And Adam lived one hundred and thirty years, and begot a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth.* (Genesis 5:1-3)

Later, after the Great Flood, the status of *imago Dei* is again given to all mankind that would descend from the 'new' Adam, Noah. This is an important passage in that it shows that in spite of mankind's fallenness and wickedness which brought about the Deluge as punishment and cleansing, the *imago Dei* remains as the essential attribute of

[306] Beetham, Christopher A. "From Creation to New Creation: The Biblical Epic of King, Human Viceregency, and Kingdom" in *From Creation to New Creation: Biblical Theology and Exegesis*, Daniel M. Gurtner & Benjamin L. Gladd, eds. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishing; 2013); 239.

humanity. The similarity in language with Genesis 1:28 is intentional, as the character of viceregent still pertains to mankind even after the judgment of the Flood.

> *Whoever sheds man's blood, by man his blood shall be shed;*
> *For in the image of God He made man.*
> *And as for you, be fruitful and multiply;*
> *Bring forth abundantly in the earth and multiply in it.* (Genesis 9:6-7)

Such democratization of the image of God is unknown in the ancient world, even in the republics of Athens and Rome. The idea of all men being created in the divine image was never maintained by either the priesthood or the philosophers of the ancient world; it was entirely unique to the Hebrew Scriptures. This phenomenon cannot be attributed to a strange political anomaly among the Hebrew people, for the Israelites were not a democracy at any time in their history, and less a republic than Ancient Athens. This democratization of the *imago Dei* is strong evidence that the Mosaic record is not borrowed from the ancient pagan worldview, but represents an original intent that was later perverted within the nations of fallen humanity. Commenting on Genesis 1:26-28, Middleton concludes, "The syntax…points to 'rule' as the *purpose*, not simply the consequence or result, of the *imago Dei*."[307]

Significant to this study, however, is the fact that God created a being – Man – to rule in His place (and presence) upon the earth. Batholomew and Goheen write, "From this it should be clear that the fundamental similarity between God and humanity is humankind's unique vocation, its calling or commissioning by God himself. Under God humanity is *to rule* over the nonhuman parts of creation on land and in sea and air, much as God is the supreme ruler over all."[308] Though the word 'kingdom' is not used in Genesis 1, it is undeniably implied by the exercise of 'rule.' Genesis 2 teaches us that the first identification of the kingdom is 'garden,' and the primary means by which Man was/is to exercise his viceregency is to 'tend and keep.' The biblical and divine notion of kingly rule is later embodied symbolically in David, the Shepherd-King, but its origi-

[307] Middleton; 53.
[308] Bartholomew, Craig G. and Michael W. Goheen *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic; 2004); 38.

nal form was that of Gardener. This dual motif of shepherd and king will recur throughout the Old Testament, culminating of course in the Good Shepherd, who is the King of kings. But its echo can be heard quite loudly, for instance, in Ezekiel 34,

> *Therefore thus says the Lord GOD to them: "Behold, I Myself will judge between the fat and the lean sheep. Because you have pushed with side and shoulder, butted all the weak ones with your horns, and scattered them abroad, therefore I will save My flock, and they shall no longer be a prey; and I will judge between sheep and sheep. I will establish one shepherd over them, and he shall feed them – My servant David. He shall feed them and be their shepherd. And I, the LORD, will be their God, and My servant David a prince among them; I, the LORD, have spoken.*
>
> (Ezekiel 34:20-24)

Following the trajectory of shepherd-king, an undeniable component of the *imago Dei*, through the Old Testament, we find two notable examples of men called by God from pastoring the flocks. Moses, who shepherded the flocks of his father-in-law Jethro, and David, who shepherded the flock of his father Jesse. Neither man shepherded his own flocks, but those of his father, and from this occupation each was called to shepherd God's flock, Israel. Each was a king, though only David held that as a title. In Moses' case, the role of shepherd is made clear when pleads with the LORD to appoint a successor for him to lead the nation into the Promised Land.

> *Then Moses spoke to the LORD, saying: "Let the LORD, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation, who may go out before them and go in before them, who may lead them out and bring them in, that the congregation of the LORD may not be like sheep which have no shepherd."* (Numbers 27:15-17)

The connection between royal power and the shepherd's care continues in Israel with the calling of David by the nation to be the king of their united tribes.

> *Then all the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron and spoke, saying, "Indeed we are your bone and your flesh. Also, in time past, when Saul was king over us, you were the one who led Israel out and brought them in; and the LORD said to you, 'You shall shepherd My people Israel, and be ruler over Israel.'" Therefore all the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron, and King David made a covenant with them at Hebron before the LORD. And they anointed David king over Israel.* (II Samuel 5:1-3)

Yet even as the nation of Israel was clamoring for a king that they might be like the nations around them, God's word made it clear that what they desired was evil, that their king would indeed make them like the nations around them – a people oppressed by a worldly lord.

> *But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, "Give us a king to judge us." So Samuel prayed to the LORD. And the LORD said to Samuel, "Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them. According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt, even to this day – with which they have forsaken Me and served other gods – so they are doing to you also. Now therefore, heed their voice. However, you shall solemnly forewarn them, and show them the behavior of the king who will reign over them."* (I Samuel 7:6-9)

This statement, "*they have not rejected you, but Me from reigning over them,*" touches both upon the creation of Man in the image of God as viceregent over Creation as well as the eschatological promise that God would one day rule over His people, and they would one day willingly accept His reign. David becomes the type of that king whom the LORD chooses, a "*man after God's heart*" in the fullest sense, of whom the psalmist writes, contrasting worldly kings with God's king.

> *Why do the [a]nations rage, and the people plot a [c]vain thing?*
> *The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together,*
> *Against the LORD and against His Anointed, saying,*
> *"Let us break Their bonds in pieces and cast away Their cords from us."*
> *He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall hold them in derision.*
> *Then He shall speak to them in His wrath, and distress them in His deep displeasure:*
> *"Yet I have set My King* on *My holy hill of Zion."* (Psalm 2:1-6)

Nowhere is the royal-shepherd motif stronger than in the Psalms, though it is hardly weak anywhere in the Old Testament. There is, of course, the echo of the creation of man in the image of God in Psalm 8, already noted previously. But in light of the eschatological hope of Israel, there are also such passages as Psalm 24 and the *King of Glory*. Note how the psalm orients itself around the work of God in Creation. From

there it moves through the covenant promises with Jacob/Israel and culminates with the herald of the King of Glory, the promised king of whom David was but a type.

> *The earth is the LORD's, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein.*
> *For He has founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the waters…*
> *…Lift up your heads, O you gates! And be lifted up, you everlasting doors!*
> *And the King of glory shall come in.*
> *Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty,*
> *The LORD mighty in battle.*
> *Lift up your heads, O you gates! Lift up, you everlasting doors!*
> *And the King of glory shall come in.*
> *Who is this King of glory? The LORD of hosts,*
> *He is the King of glory.* (Psalm 24:1-2, 7—10)

The most frequently quoted Psalm in the New Testament also focuses on the coming King, though Psalm 110, as it were, mixes its metaphors. The 'speaker' is David, the lord of Israel, but the coming King is both higher than David and of a different order, a priest-king of the order of Melchizedek.

> *The LORD said to my Lord,*
> *"Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool."*
> *The LORD shall send the rod of Your strength out of Zion.*
> *Rule in the midst of Your enemies!…The LORD has sworn and will not relent,*
> *"You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek."* (Psalm 110:1-2, 4)

This combining of the two anointed offices of Israel, priest and king, is reinforced in the post-Exilic prophet Zechariah, continuing the trajectory of expectation with regard to a coming king who, we are beginning to learn, with also be a unique specie of priest. Zechariah himself picks up on the 'Branch' prophecy from Isaiah, and exegetes the earlier prophetic word under the guidance and inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

> *Behold, the Man whose name is the Branch! From His place He shall branch out,*
> *And He shall build the temple of the LORD; Yes, He shall build the temple of the LORD.*
> *He shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule on His throne;*
> *He shall be a priest on His throne, and the counsel of peace shall be between them both.*
> (Zechariah 6:12-13)

Passages such as these were sufficient to convince the Second Temple Jews that the time had come for the promised 'son of David' to arrive, overthrow the Romans, and take up his place again on his throne in Jerusalem. Jesus challenged this expectation, however, again in relation to Psalm 110.

> *While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, saying,*
> *"What do you think about the Christ? Whose Son is He?"*
> *They said to Him, "The Son of David."*
> *He said to them, "How then does David in the Spirit call Him 'Lord,' saying:*
> *"The LORD said to my Lord,*
> *'Sit at My right hand, till I make Your enemies Your footstool'"?*
> *If David then calls Him 'Lord,' how is He his Son?" And no one was able to answer Him a word, nor from that day on did anyone dare question Him anymore.* (Matthew 22:41-45)

Jesus is driving at something here that the Pharisees fail to see, but it is something that the Old Testament has foreshadowed in such references as that of the coming Davidic king being "*a priest according to the order of Melchizedek.*" There was another aspect to the coming King that needed to be recognized alongside the Davidic trail, that is the prophetic identity of the 'Son of Man.' This motif ties the promised King with the first ruler of Creation, Adam, who was given authority in the presence of God over the entirety of the created order. Even the angels, though not mentioned in Genesis 1, are subordinated to Man in Psalm 8. So while the Jews of the Second Temple era fixated on a Davidic king who would bring them political deliverance from the tyranny of Rome, God's plan called for a King who would be both Davidic and Adamic, who would bring deliverance not only to Israel but to the entire Creation. Perhaps ironically, the strongest Old Testament witness to the 'Son of Man' as the supreme ruler of the universe is found in the same book from which the Jews derived their earnest expectation of His coming in the days of the Roman Empire – the Book of Daniel.

In Daniel 7 the protagonist is given a disturbing vision of four beasts that come up out of the sea (called the 'Great Sea,' itself an allusion to the *formless and void* condition at Creation). The identity of the beasts – world empires – is parallel to that of Daniel's divinely-inspired interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's statue dream in Daniel 2, so

we know that the promised deliverance would come in the days of the fourth beast, graphically described in a manner that only characterizes the Roman Empire. Yet in the horrible days of this fourth empire-beast comes One to whom ultimate power and authority will be given.

> *I was watching in the night visions,*
> *And behold, One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven!*
> *He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him.*
> *Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom,*
> *That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him.*
> *His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away,*
> *And His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed.* (Daniel 7:13-14)

Following the parallel between the visions of Daniel 7 and Daniel 2, we must conclude that the "*One like the Son of Man*" is also the "*stone but without hands.*"

> *And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever. Inasmuch as you saw that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold – the great God has made known to the king what will come to pass after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation is sure.* (Daniel 2:44-45)

There can be no doubt that this passage in Daniel is messianic, nor that it speaks of the ultimate Ruler who would crush the world empires and establish the kingdom of God on earth forever. That is how it was interpreted in Second Temple Judaism; that is really the only way in which it can be interpreted. The title 'Son of Man,' then, is significant within the overall messianic prophetic corpus of the Old Testament.[309] For instance, Psalm 80 yearns for the deliverance of Israel, the vineyard planted by the LORD – an allusion to the Garden of Eden in which God placed Man – that had been burned to a crisp under the divine judgment of Israel's rebellion and sin. Here as in Daniel, deliverance is through a 'Son of Man' who is God's right hand. The two messianic motifs of

[309] The term in the Hebrew is *bar-Adam* (בן־אדם), literally 'Son of Adam.'

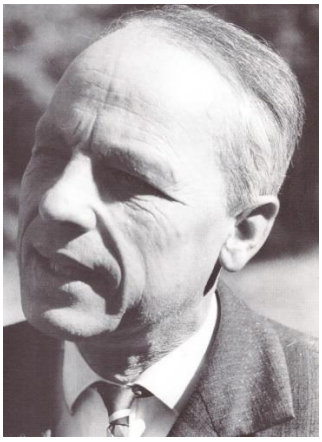
'the Branch' and 'the Son of Man' – Davidic and Adamic Christology, we may say, are contained in this one psalm.

> *Return, we beseech You, O God of hosts;*
> *Look down from heaven and see, and visit this vine*
> *And the vineyard which Your right hand has planted,*
> *And the branch that You made strong for Yourself.*
> *It is burned with fire, it is cut down; they perish at the rebuke of Your countenance.*
> *Let Your hand be upon the man of Your right hand,*
> *Upon the son of man whom You made strong for Yourself.*
> *Then we will not turn back from You; revive us, and we will call upon Your name.*
>
> (Psalm 80:14-18)

Notice here that it is the same 'right hand' that planted the vineyard Israel who is also the 'Son of Man' who will bring Israel deliverance. This is nothing less than the echo of the royal commission of Adam when created in the image of God, as well as the prophetic promise of the promised King in whom all things were created, the true Once and Future King, as it were. Thus the allusion in Psalm 80 and Daniel 7 is not to the *protoevangelium*, in which the Redeemer is termed the 'Seed of Woman,' but rather to the creation of Man in the image of God, and the promise that it would be the 'Son of Man' – the last Adam – who would take up forever the royal office that was originally entrusted to Adam. It bears noting here that the *nature* of the rule of this promised Son of Man is in keeping with the occupation of David before his anointing – as a Shepherd (*cp.* Psalm 80:1).

Modern scholars resist the association of the 'Son of Man' passages in the Old Testament with any messianic pretensions, noting that the former phrase is never used as a 'title' for the Messiah. This reflects a narrow hermeneutical perspective that fails to trace the arc of revelation as it progresses along the 'Son of Man' motif. It is true that the phrase is most often used in the Old Testament with reference to the prophet Ezekiel – eighty-nine times the prophet is addressed by God as "*son of man.*" It is also true, as Pierson Parker notes in his essay, that otherwise the phrase is most often used poetically and in parallel with the simple word "*man.*" Parker writes, "It appears frequently in

poetry, always as a parallel with 'man.'"[310] Yet even these poetic couplets of 'man' and 'son of man' are themselves echoes of both the creation of Adam and the reproduction of his image in his son, Seth. In other words, the trajectory of redemptive history shows all along the way that the ultimate deliverance would be by *a man*, a *son of man.* Therefore such passages as Psalm 8, where the psalmist wonders that God should take note of *"man"* and of *"the son of man"* are not merely poetic repetition, but the ongoing trajectory of the lineage of Man. What such passages as Psalm 8 and Daniel 7 do teach us is that the ultimate governance of God's Creation will be restored to its original office-holder and king, *the Son of Man*, Jesus Christ.


Eduard Schweizer (1913-2006)

While it may be admitted that the usage of the 'Son of Man' terminology in the Old Testament is not definitively messianic (though it is very hard *not* to see Daniel 7 as messianic), when one gets to the New Testament all doubt should be put to rest. This is, of course, what one should expect with progressive revelation: the latter writers are interpreting the earlier passages, and the primary interpreter is Jesus Himself. Eduard Schweizer, by no means a conservative evangelical scholar, notes that the phrase 'Son of Man' is used almost exclusively in the New Testament by Jesus, contrasted by the fact that the Lord never uses the title 'Christ' with reference to Himself. Schweizer writes, "The term [*i.e.,* 'Son of Man'] is to be found some 80 times in the NT and with just one exception only in the words of Jesus…The contrary can be stated with regard to the term 'Christ,' which occurs a great many times in predications of the church or in statements of other people talking about Jesus, but practically never in his mouth."[311] This comment is in line with the 20th Century liberal view that Jesus never acknowledged himself to be the Chrit, the Messiah, but that view frankly does not fit with the context of the passages in which Jesus refers to himself as the 'Son of Man.' Though Jesus did not refer to himself *explicitly* as the Christ, one can-

[310] Parker, Pierson "The Meaning of 'Son of Man' *Journal of Biblical Literature* Vol. 60, No. 2 (June, 19410: 151.
[311] Schweizer, Eduard "The Son of' Man" *Journal of Biblical Literature* Vol. 79, No. 2 (June 1960); 119.

not miss the messianic overtones, and even direct parallels, between the 'Son of Man' passages and the very messianic office that the liberals claim Jesus denied. It is rather the case that Jesus employed the specific denomination, 'Son of Man' – His most common self-referent – in reference to the original Creation account of the creation of Man in the image of God, and with reference to the dominion over Creation that Adam abdicated, and that Jesus was sent to reclaim.

The classic passage in the Synoptic Gospels with regard to these two phrases – 'Son of Man' and 'Christ' – appearing, as it were, side-by-side, is the narrative of Peter's confession in Matthew 16.

> *When Jesus came into the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, saying, "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" So they said, "Some say John the Baptist, some Elijah, and others Jeremiah or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?"*
> *Simon Peter answered and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."*
> *Jesus answered and said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not [g]prevail against it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth [h]will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." Then He commanded His disciples that they should tell no one that He was Jesus the Christ.*
>
> (Matthew 16:13-20)

Schweizer takes the common liberal position that Jesus neither confirms nor denies Peter's identification of Him as the Christ, a position that is in complete ignorance of the text. Schweizer writes, "I am almost convinced that the story of Peter's confession is right at least to the extent that Jesus neither denied nor accepted the title Christ, but corrected it by the statement that the Son of man had to suffer and to be rejected."[312] This is amazing, given that Jesus responds to Peter by saying, "*flesh and blood have not revealed this to you…*" Revealed what? That Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God." What the Matthean passage does do is unite the self-designation of Jesus as the 'Son of Man' with the confession of Peter of Jesus as the Christ.

[312] *Ibid.*; 121.

Pertinent to the discussion of the 'royal' aspect of the *imago Dei* in Adam, and by extension in the 'Son of Man,' are passages such as Matthew 12 that show Jesus seemingly disregarding the Sabbath, at least as far as the scribes and Pharisees observed it. In one instance Jesus' disciples are plucking grain on the Sabbath, on another Jesus himself heals on the Sabbath. Jesus rebukes the hypocrisy of the Pharisees and more: He places Himself as 'Lord' of the Sabbath.

> *But He said to them, "Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him: how he entered the house of God and ate the showbread which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests? Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath, and are blameless? Yet I say to you that in this place there is One greater than the temple. But if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of Man is Lord [b]even of the Sabbath."* (Matthew 12:3-8)

This passage should be read as well alongside Mark 2:27, "*The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.*" Both passages allude to the Creation account of Genesis 2, the first divine rest after the six days of creation. Between the two passages, however, Jesus makes a distinction between 'man,' for whom the Sabbath was made and not vice versa, and 'the Son of Man,' who is himself *Lord* of the Sabbath. Another passage in which the 'Son of Man' has manifestly *royal* connotations' is Luke 17.

> *Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, "The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!' For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you." Then He said to the disciples, "The days will come when you will desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see it. And they will say to you, 'Look here!' or 'Look there!' Do not go after them or follow them. For as the lightning that flashes out of one part under heaven shines to the other part under heaven, so also the Son of Man will be in His day. But first He must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation. And as it was in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man: They ate, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. Likewise as it was also in the days of Lot: They ate, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built; but on the day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. Even so will it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed.*
>
> (Luke 17:20-30)

Jesus' self-identification as the Son of Man finds its climax both historically and eschatologically in His teachings on the 'end times.' Here we see the Adamic vicere-gency of Man with God consummated with the Son of Man sitting on the divine throne with the God of Israel, all authority having been given to Him, as in Daniel 7. This Old Testament passage is loudly echoed in Jesus' words in Mark 13. Mark's rendition of the lengthier Olivet Discourse from Matthew. Once again Jesus associates the Christ with the Son of Man within the same context of the consummation of the ages (or, perhaps, the preliminary judgment of the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70).

> *But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars of heaven will fall, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds with great power and glory. And then He will send His angels, and gather together His [h]elect from the four winds, from the farthest part of earth to the farthest part of heaven.* (Mark 13:24-27)

Jesus' response to the Sanhedrin was not mistaken by the Jewish leaders, who fully understood Jesus' claim to equality with God, something modern liberal scholars cannot grasp.

> *And the high priest stood up in the midst and asked Jesus, saying, "Do You answer nothing? What is it these men testify against You?" But He kept silent and answered nothing. Again the high priest asked Him, saying to Him, "Are You the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" Jesus said, "I am. And you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven." Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "What further need do we have of witnesses? You have heard the blasphemy! What do you think?"*
>
> (Mark 14:60-64)

> *As soon as it was day, the elders of the people, both chief priests and scribes, came together and led Him into their council, saying, "If You are the Christ, tell us." But He said to them, "If I tell you, you will by no means believe. And if I also ask you, you will by no means answer Me or let Me go. Hereafter the Son of Man will sit on the right hand of the power of God."*
>
> (Luke 22:66-69)

The leaders of Israel considered Jesus' statement to be blasphemy, for He was making Himself equal with Yahweh. In other words, they fully understood the import of the Son of Man being seated at the right hand of power, that Jesus was "*the Son of the*

Blessed" and therefore Creation's Lord. Daneil 7 presents *"one like a son of man"* coming before the Ancient of Days to receive ultimate dominion, power and authority greater than that of the most awesome world empires. Jesus, of course, fulfills this prophetic vision through His resurrection, as He says to His disciples, *"All authority has been given to Me in heaven and one earth."*[313] The Son of Man, the God of Israel incarnate, is once again enthroned as the King of Creation, viceregent to the Father not only as Himself divine, but now as conquering Man. N. T. Wright quotes contemporary British theologian Christopher Rowland, "the Son of Man is in fact the embodiment of the person of the Ancient of Days. In other words, the original scene in Daniel 7, where two figures exist alongside each other in heaven, is changed so that the vice-regent, the Son of Man, takes upon himself the form and character of God himself."[314] This wonderful juxtaposition of the Son of Man – heir to Adam as viceregent – and God upon His throne, is beautifully proclaimed by Paul in I Corinthians 1., Though the phrase Son of Man is not used, the meaning is still apparent. Jesus Christ *fulfills* the purpose and function of the *imago Dei,* to *rule* over God's redeemed Creation.


Christopher Rowland (*b.* 1947)

> *But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming. Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. For "He has put all things under His feet." But when He says "all things are put under Him," it is evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted. Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all.* (I Corinthians 15:20-28)

[313] Matthew 28:18
[314] Wright, N. T. *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press; 1996); 625. Wright is quoting from Rowland's *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity.*

Lesson 13 – Death Reigned…
Text: Genesis 2:8-17; 3:1-7; Romans 5:12-21

"The parallel in the language used for Adam and Christ suggests that death's reign did not replace Adam's reign but was a manifestation of the transformed nature of Adam's reign."
(Roy E. Ciampa)

Among the many logical weaknesses of the theory of Evolution, perhaps the greatest is the continued reality of death among all living organisms on earth. Given that the primary criteria for a 'successful' mutation is generational continuance, does it not seem strange that no living organism has evolved immortality? More to the point, the organisms that seem to have the longest lifespans – some even approaching 'immortality – are among the 'simplest' forms known: microorganisms, sponges, and fungal colonies. Man, the epitome of the evolutionary scale, has one of the shortest lifespans of all. Thus it appears that the process of evolution, as widely taught and believed, has resulted in shorter lifespans, which seems counterintuitive by the theory's basic premise. The bigger question, and unanswerable by means of evolutionary thought, is where death came from in the first place. Evolution holds that many of the 'successful' mutations are so because they somehow protect the organism from fatal danger, but there is no accounting for the reality of death itself, especially that of 'natural' death.

The believer, of course, can answer the question, "Whence Death" from the Scriptures, which teach us that "*the wages of sin is death.*"[315] This perspective begins where everything else begins, in Genesis 1 – 3. There we find the prohibition given to Adam against eating of the 'Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil,' and of Adam's violation of this seemingly simple commandment, an action known as 'the Fall.' The connection of human mortality, as well as the corruption and death inherent in the world, to Adam's primal sin is a settled tenet in orthodox theology – usually dealt with under the Anthropology section ("Man and Sin") of Systematics. Rarely, however, is the topic dealt with from the perspective of Biblical or Canonical Theology, tracing the arc of revelation along the motif of 'Life and Death.' Paul does this in Romans 5, with a

[315] Romans 6:23

tantalizing parallel between the first Adam and the last Adam, Jesus Christ. This crucial passage is rarely considered in light of the canonical trajectory of biblical teaching on Life and Death, and on the 'two' Adams.

> *Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned — For until the law sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who had not sinned according to the likeness of the transgression of Adam, who is a type of Him who was to come. But the free gift is not like the offense. For if by the one man's offense many died, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many. And the gift is not like that which came through the one who sinned. For the judgment which came from one offense resulted in condemnation, but the free gift which came from many offenses resulted in justification. For if by the one man's offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.* (Romans 5:12-21)

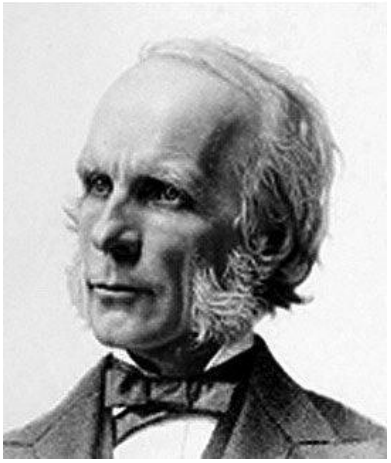

Thomas Schreiner (*b.* 1954)

Typical exegesis of this passage focuses on the advent of death into God's perfect Creation as a result of Adam's rebellion and sin. The primary issue is usually the nature of 'all sinning' in Adam: *"because all sinned"* and the associated doctrines of Original Sin and/or Original Corruption. Thomas Schreiner, for instance, comments, "The latter part of verse 12 is the subject of intense discussion regarding the relationship between Adam's sin and the rest of humanity."[316] The emphasis in interpretation has been on the nature of the relationship between Adam as the first man, his primal sin, and the subsequent corruption (and universal death) of all his descendants (save one). Thus Luther points out the important difference between 'sin' as an individual act of ungodliness, and 'sin' as Paul is treating here in Romans 5. Quoting Augustine approvingly, Luther writes, "It is certainly obvious that the personal sins, in which only those are involved as sinners who have com-

[316] Schreiner, Thomas *ECNT: Romans* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books; 1998); 273.

mitted them, are one thing, and that the one sin, in which all are involved as sinners in so far as all have been this one man, is another thing."[317]

This is exegesis in support of doctrine, and it is correct and valuable as such. The doctrine, again, is that of the universal reality of human fallenness; the biblical basis is the sin of Adam at the very first. This doctrine is vital to our proper understanding of sin as more than just individual transgressions, but as a power that has come to exercise dominion over both mankind and Creation itself. So, from the perspective of Systematics, we benefit from the insight of William G. T. Shedd, for instance, who writes, "The object of the parenthetical digression in verses 13 and 14 is to prevent the reader from supposing from the statement that 'all men sinned' that the *individual* transgressions of all men are meant, and to make it clear that only the one first sin of one first man is intended."[318] Thus far the systematic or doctrinal reading of Romans 5, as well as other passages such as I Corinthians 15, validates the indispensable doctrine of Original Sin (and Corruption). What does a canonical reading yield? Nothing less than the apostle's inspired view of the grand conflict of the ages, the clash of kingdoms that, as far as Man and Creation are concerned, commenced in Eden in Genesis 3.


William G. T. Shedd (1820-94)

The trigger in Romans 5 for a canonical investigation of death's entry into Creation is not a quotation formula, though any reader knows that Paul is alluding to the Fall narrative in Genesis 3. Yet the apostle does not employ any particular word or phrase to activate that earlier text besides the common awareness his readers would have had concerning Adam's sin and its consequences. Rather, the word that triggers a canonical perspective is one often overlooked by commentators: *reigned*. In the midst of the unmistakable contrast between the first and the last Adam there is another stark contrast between two dominions, two reigns: the *reign of death* (verses 14, 17 & 21) and

[317] Luther, Martin *Lectures on Romans* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press; 1961); 170.
[318] Shedd, William G. T. *Commentary on Romans* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House; 1980); 133.

the *reign of life* (verses 17 & 21). "Paul introduces a theme almost unique in his writings, but very important within early Christianity: the clash of the kingdoms…Paul does not speak here of the kingdom of Satan, but instead personifies 'sin' and 'death,' speaking of each as 'reigning.'"[319]

It is all too common to view Pauls' use of the word 'reign' as figurative language, to show that every human being came under death's 'dominion' as a result of Adam's sin. This is indeed true, but it fails to take full account of the apostle's overarching perspective regarding the *rule* of Creation, a theme that we have seen is integral to the concept of Man created in the image of God. Therefore, it is necessary to trace the canonical trajectory of both Life and Death not merely as states of being, but as powers or realms of rule and dominion, one the dominion of Sin, the other of Righteousness. Recognizing this biblical motif will open many other Scriptural passages that have often been viewed only within the immediate context and only from the viewpoint of dogmatics. We begin this phase of our study with Death, though it was Life that came first, due to the historical fact that this is where the conflict was joined.

The Two Trees of Eden

The so-called 'Second' Creation account of Genesis 2 – too often viewed as a different source material than Genesis 1 – actually serves as the necessary setting for the drama of obedience (rather, disobedience) of Genesis 3. The shift in emphasis from the days of Creation to the Garden, sets the stage for the probation of Adam with regard to the two trees. The text,

> *The LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed. And out of the ground the LORD God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.* (Genesis 2:8-9)

Knowing the story, we naturally expect the prohibition with regard to Adam eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil to follow, but the narrative is seem-

[319] Wright, N. T. *Romans* (Nashville: Abingdon Press; 2002); 524.

ingly interrupted by a section concerning the river of Eden that fed the four major rivers of the created world.

> *Now a river went out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it parted and became four riverheads. The name of the first is Pishon; it is the one which skirts the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold. And the gold of that land is good. Bdellium and the onyx stone are there. The name of the second river is Gihon; it is the one which goes around the whole land of Cush. The name of the third river is Hiddekel; it is the one which goes toward the east of Assyria. The fourth river is the Euphrates.* (Genesis 2:10-14)

The apparent incongruity of this passage in the midst of the 'tree' narrative is just that, apparent. As will become apparent through the rest of Scripture, the river of Eden is nothing less than the River of Life, capitulated in Revelation 22. Furthermore, the four rivers that branch off this Edenic river are most likely the four ancient rivers – Nile, Indus, Tigris, and Euphrates – around which four of the oldest human civilizations sprang up. Thus the *'healing of the nations'* in Revelation 22 ties in directly with the original topography of the Garden.

> *And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.* (Revelation 22:1-2)

The Genesis 2 narrative then returns to the matter of the two trees, the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

> *Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."* (Genesis 2:15-17)

A very interesting and hopefully beneficial discussion concerning the nature of these two trees – especially the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil – is sadly beyond the immediate scope of this study, though not beyond the scope of Biblical Theology. It must suffice to (1) deny the ridiculous objection that God did not want Man to

know the difference between Good and Evil (this, by the way, was the serpent's insidious argument), and (2) that the *manner* by which Man comes to know good and evil is what is at stake here, not the knowledge itself. Both points are debatable, and have been debated; the focus of this lesson is on the violation of the prohibition and the consequent impact upon Man.

The 'interruption' of the Garden text by the description of the rivers is also very important to the overall narrative of the Fall. The branching of the River of Eden into four rivers seemingly beyond Eden itself tells us the geography of the world as first created. It also speaks of the venue in which Man, as the *imago Dei* and viceregent of God over Creation, was to exercise his shepherding dominion. These four branches, one of which still retains its original name, Euphrates, quite possibly represent four of the oldest civilizations known from the Ancient Near East. The connection is tenuous, to be sure, considering that the Flood intervened between the narrative of Genesis 2 and the building of these ancient human societies, but it may indeed be significant tat the greatest of the ancient empires in that region of the world arose along the four major rivers 0 Euphrates and Tigris, Nile, and Indus. Again, there is no conclusive evidence linking these four with those mentioned in Genesis 2 beyond one of them retaining the same name. The only point being made here is that it is apparent that Adam's viceregency extended beyond Eden, and that the divine commission to "*subdue the earth*" meant the extension of the human race beyond the Garden. But what was to be the nature of this extended human reign? Clearly the historical reality did not match the creational ideal. Genesis 3 is the reason why.

But Genesis 3 must be read in connection with the two chapters before it, understanding that the probation that Adam stood with regard to the two trees he did in the capacity as both proto-human and divine viceregent. Adam represented, in the most comprehensive manner imaginable, the entire human race (except for his wife, Eve) when he was placed in the Garden as the *imago Dei*, and as such he also fully represented human dominion over Creation. It was in this capacity as representative Man and representative King that he fell, a truth that powerfully colors the nature and impact of


Roy E. Ciampa (*b.* 1958)

that fall. Thus, as Roy Ciampa notes in his essay analyzing Paul's reflection of Genesis 3 in Romans 5, "Paul has concluded either that humanity has abdicated the throne and transferred its authority to a reign of sin and death or that humanity continues to reign but, having chosen the route of sin and death, can do no other than extend a reign marked by sin and under death rather than the reign of righteousness and life intended by God."[320] In other words, the Fall of Man recorded in Genesis 3 was not merely the introduction of mortality into the human race, but the giving over of God's 'very good' Creation to the rule of 'sin and death.' The language is not simply metaphorical; Sin and Death are to be understood as powers, powers that have usurped dominion over Creation on account of Adam's abdication of his royal commission. Paul Minear adds, "In Paul's world, death was visualized not primarily as something that happened to individuals (as to Adam in Genesis 5) but as a universal and ultimate enemy, one of he rulers competing with God for control over creation It was lasting proof of Adam's obedience to the serpent rather than to God, an instrument of captivity to God's permanent enemy."[321]

That Man did not cease to be viceregent seems to be indicated by the retention of the *imago Dei* and the continued mandate, after the Flood, given to Noah in the language of Genesis 1 – 2.

> *So God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them: "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be on every beast of the earth, on every bird of the air, on all that move on the earth, and on all the fish of the sea. They are given into your hand.* (Genesis 9:1-2)

Thus, what happened in the Garden, as recorded in Genesis 3, was a quantum shift in the very nature of the relationship not only between Man and God, but between God and Creation as well as Man and Creation. A third character also enters into the

[320] Ciampa, Roy E. "Genesis 1-3 and Paul's Theology of Adam's Dominion in Romans 5-6" in *From Creation to New Creation*, Daniel M. Gurtner & Benjamin L. Glass, eds. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers; 2013); 111.
[321] Minear; 78.

picture, though his relationship vis-à-vis Man and Creation is not explicitly defined in the text: the serpent, whom traditional Christian interpret identifies with the fallen angel, Satan. In the Genesis 3 narrative, he is portrayed as *"the most subtle of God's creatures"* and as the smooth-talking deceiver who leads Eve, and then Adam, down the path of rebellion culminating in their fall. What did he gain from this perversion of truth and corruption of God's viceregent? Considering the event from a canonical perspective, perhaps the answer to this can be best seen in the reverse – the temptation of Christ in the wilderness. The third and last of the temptations hurled at Jesus by Satan is a bold display of attempted usurpation, undoubtedly similar to what the serpent perpetrated against the first Adam (and failed to successfully pull off against the last Adam).

> *Again, the devil took Him up on an exceedingly high mountain, and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And he said to Him, "All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me." Then Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.'"*
>
> (Matthew 4:8-10)

Adam retained the *imago Dei* and nominal authority over God's Creation, but in his rebellion he abdicated rule to the serpent who at that point in history became *"the ruler of this world"*[322] and *"the prince of the power of the air."*[323] It is certainly the case that Satan did not possess such authority when he first encountered Adam and Eve in the Garden, for it is certain from the text of Genesis 1 & 2 that such authority had been given to Adam. We have also seen that the restoration of this legitimate authority of Man over God's Creation is at the very heart of God's redemptive plan, centering on the Son of Man, who will receive *"dominion and glory and a kingdom."*[324] The concept, then, of the reign of death and the usurped dominion of Satan come together in Hebrews, combining both the abdication and consequent bondage of humanity with the usurpation of the wily serpent, within the glorious context of the last Adam's victorious redemption.

[322] John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11
[323] Ephesians 2:2
[324] Daniel 7:14, *cp.* Matthew 28:18

> *Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.*
>
> (Hebrews 2:14-15)

In this light of rebellion and abdication, rather than merely disobedience and sin (which the eating of the forbidden fruit most certainly was), lends additional light to the often misunderstood narrative of the temptation of Eve in Genesis 3. That the serpent's words were directed to Adam's wife rather than to Adam has usually been taken to mean that Eve was alone, but there are several indications that this was not the case. First, the serpent uses the second-person *plural* pronoun when he deceitfully outlines the 'benefits' of eating the forbidden fruit: *"For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."*[325] Furthermore, as Eve takes the fatal plunge, the narrative places Adam by her side,

> *So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate.* (Genesis 3:6)

The phrase 'with her' most likely means more than the fact that Adam was in the Garden with her, but rather that he was physically present with her during the serpent's temptation. Bob Gonzales writes, "the prepositional phrase describing Adam as 'with her' often connotes mutual participation and sometimes implies physical proximity."[326] The nature of Adam's role as the viceregent of Creation, and the nature of that role as tending and keeping – *i.e.,* shepherding – all but necessitates the conclusion that Adam did not abandon his wife to conduct this insidious interview alone. Rather, what is to be gleaned from the narrative is that the Fall, for all of its meaning and impact for individ-

Robert Gonzales (*b.* 1963)

[325] Genesis 3:4; also 3:1, 5
[326] Gonzales, Robert Jr. *Where Sin Abounds* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock; 2009); 35.

uals humans beginning with Adam and Eve, also represents the point at which the role of viceregent to the Creator was abdicated to the serpent, himself a creature.

The behavior of the first Adam is, of course, reversed by the behavior of the last Adam. Contrary to Satan's deceptive lies, God did not wish to deny 'the knowledge of good and evil' from His supreme creation, Man. Rather, He intended for that knowledge – *wisdom,* as Eve herself recognized as she surveyed the forbidden fruit (*cp.* Gen. 3:6) – be obtained in the proper manner, as will become evident through the rest of Scripture, "*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.*" "Yahweh Elohim desired his vassal-son to obtain the wisdom that the tree of knowledge symbolized. But the vassal-son must acquire this wisdom 'in the fear of the Lord' and in obedience to God's commands."[327]

As we read and reread the Fall narrative in Genesis 3, we do so from the standpoint of thousands of years of human mortality as well as earthly corruption and futility. In other words, we naturally interpret 'death' in terms of what we have experienced and are destined to experience. But such could not have been Adam's perspective as he listened to the serpent weave his web of lies. It is evident that there must have been some conception of the meaning of 'death' as meaning something negative, something alien to the created Garden in which Man was placed, but as of yet no experiential knowledge of death existed. Knowing, as we now do, that Adam's physical death was delayed for almost a millennium from the time of his Fall, we conclude that the term 'death' contained far more than the cessation of physical life. It is not unreasonable to say that the balance of Scripture spends a fair amount of time defining that 'far more.'

The immediate effect of the Fall was, of course, separation from God – and that from both sides. Adam and Eve became afraid of God and hid from Him; God, in turn, expelled the first couple from the Garden in an act of judicial grace – preventing Adam from eating of the Tree of Life and living forever in his fallen state. This physical and spiritual separation between God and His viceregent forms the backdrop as well as the

[327] *Ibid.*; 33.

plot of the ensuing drama of revelation as well as the metanarrative of the entirety of human history, properly understood.

> *Then the LORD God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever" – therefore the LORD God sent him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken. So He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life.*
>
> (Genesis 3:22-24)

The awareness in the Old Testament of the meaning of death is itself progressive, as manifested by a shift in terminology from 'died' to 'slept.' Of Adam himself we read, *"So all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years; and he died."*[328] And this formula repeats itself for the progeny of Adam, as recorded in Genesis, all the way to Joseph. By the time of David, however, death (at least of the righteous) is considered in terms of 'sleep' or 'rest,' *"When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom."*[329] There is no explicit causal connection between sin and death in the Old Testament narratives, but the theme of separation from Israel's God does pervade the writings. Death, and the abode of the dead, Sheol, are associated with ungodliness and stand against the righteous, as in David's psalm of deliverance in II Samuel 22.

> *The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer;*
> *The God of my strength, in whom I will trust; my shield and the horn of my salvation,*
> *My stronghold and my refuge; my Savior, You save me from violence.*
> *I will call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised; so shall I be saved from my enemies.*
> *When the **waves of death** surrounded me, the **floods of ungodliness** made me afraid.*
> *The **sorrows of Sheol** surrounded me; the **snares of death** confronted me.*
> *In my distress I called upon the LORD, and cried out to my God;*
> *He heard my voice from His temple, and my cry entered His ears.* (II Samuel 22:2-7)[330]

[328] Genesis 5:5
[329] II Samuel 7:12
[330] This song is essentially repeated in Psalm 18.

The structure of verses 5 and 6 provide what constitutes an Old Testament theology of death. The verses are in a chiastic parallel format, with the first and last couplet – the *waves of death'* and the *'snares of death'* standing as synonymous expressions of David's ultimate enemy: Death. This parallelism is mirrored by the two inner couplets – the *'floods of ungodliness'* and the *'sorrows of Sheol.'* Sheol, the abode of the dead, is not a place 'where righteousness dwells,' to somewhat anachronistically quote Peter from his second epistle. Consistent in the Wisdom Literature is the view that God is not worshipped in Sheol, that the dead do not sing or praise the LORD there. Death is presented as separation from the God of Israel.

> *Will You work wonders for the dead? Shall the dead arise and praise You? Selah*
> *Shall Your lovingkindness be declared in the grave?*
> *Or Your faithfulness in the place of destruction?*
> *Shall Your wonders be known in the dark? And Your righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?*
> (Psalm 88:10-12)

> *The heaven, even the heavens, are the LORD's; but the earth He has given to the children of men.*
> *The dead do not praise the LORD, nor any who go down into silence.*
> *But we will bless the LORD from this time forth and forevermore.* (Psalm 115:16-18)

The conception of death in the Old Testament Wisdom corpus is clearly antithetical to the worship of Jehovah: Death is equivalent to Silence; Life to Praise. Qohelet sees Death as the great equalizer, and the power that renders all that a man does in this life as *'vanity.'*

> *Then I turned myself to consider wisdom and madness and folly;*
> *For what can the man do who succeeds the king? – only what he has already done.*
> *Then I saw that wisdom excels folly as light excels darkness.*
> *The wise man's eyes are in his head, but the fool walks in darkness.*
> *Yet I myself perceived that the same event happens to them all.*
> *So I said in my heart, "As it happens to the fool, it also happens to me,*
> *And why was I then more wise?" Then I said in my heart, "This also is vanity."*
> *For there is no more remembrance of the wise than of the fool forever,*
> *Since all that now is will be forgotten in the days to come.*
> *And how does a wise man die? As the fool!* (Ecclesiastes 2:12-16)

Yet this does not mean that the grave and Sheol are places beyond God's knowledge or sovereignty. The modern caricature of the devil as the 'manager' or proprietor of Hell is as blasphemous as it is unbiblical. Death does not hide a man from his Maker though it renders him mute as to His proper praise. Job exalts the Creator God, while mocking the puerile theology of his so-called friends.

> *The dead tremble, those under the waters and those inhabiting them.*
> *Sheol is naked before Him, and Destruction has no covering.*
> *He stretches out the north over empty space; He hangs the earth on nothing.*
> *He binds up the water in His thick clouds, yet the clouds are not broken under it.*
> *He covers the face of His throne, and spreads His cloud over it.*
> *He drew a circular horizon on the face of the waters, at the boundary of light and darkness.*
> *The pillars of heaven tremble, and are [b]astonished at His rebuke.*
> *He stirs up the sea with His power, and by His understanding He breaks up [c]the storm.*
> *By His Spirit He adorned the heavens; His hand pierced the fleeing serpent.*
> *Indeed these are the mere edges of His ways, and how small a whisper we hear of Him!*
> *But the thunder of His power who can understand?* (Job 26:5-14)

The psalmist echoes the thought of the omniscience and omnipresence of God, poetically declaring that neither heaven (*shemaim* – שָׁמַיִם) nor 'the grave' (*sheol* – שְׁאוֹל) make any difference to God or to His knowledge of every man. The separation that Sheol brings between man and God is, therefore, one way.

> *Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence?*
> *If I ascend into heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there.*
> *If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,*
> *Even there Your hand shall lead me, and Your right hand shall hold me.*
> *If I say, "Surely the darkness shall fall on me," even the night shall be light about me;*
> *Indeed, the darkness shall not hide from You, but the night shines as the day;*
> *The darkness and the light are both alike to You.* (Psalm 139:7-12)

The main question scholars ask regarding the Old Testament perspective on death is whether there is any hope for the dead, any prospect of rejoining the living. Annihilation of the soul is not a biblical view at any point, but what is the future of the departed soul? Andrew Key considers the 'early' Hebrew testimony – and by 'early' he is following the critical 'documentary' perspective on the dates of the canonical books – to offer little or no hope to the dead.

"The Hebrews never considered death as the complete annihilation of the person. Existence in Sheol is pictured as life at its lowest intensity, but it is, nevertheless, to be contrasted to death as nothingness. The dead are viewed most generally as having a feeble existence in which all that belongs to life ceases except existence itself."[331] There are indeed passages that seem to indicate that the grave is the permanent abode of the dead with no hope or chance of again seeing the light of the surface lands. Job is an interesting example of a righteous man's meditation on death, and that from the perspective of one who anticipated its very near occurrence.

> *My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle, and are spent without hope.*
> *Oh, remember that my life is a breath! my eye will never again see good.*
> *The eye of him who sees me will see me no more;*
> *While your eyes are upon me, I shall no longer be.*
> *As the cloud disappears and vanishes away, so he who goes down to the grave does not come up.*
> *He shall never return to his house, nor shall his place know him anymore.* (Job 7:6-10)

David, as well, exhibits a sense of the permanence of death when informed of the demise of his son by Bathsheba,

> *So David arose from the ground, washed and anointed himself, and changed his clothes; and he went into the house of the LORD and worshiped. Then he went to his own house; and when he requested, they set food before him, and he ate. Then his servants said to him, "What is this that you have done? You fasted and wept for the child while he was alive, but when the child died, you arose and ate food." And he said, "While the child was alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, 'Who can tell whether the LORD will be gracious to me, that the child may live?' But now he is dead; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me."*
> (II Samuel 12:20-23)

Proverbs compares the ways of the immoral woman as those that lead to death; the avoidance of her and all she represents leads conversely to life. Death and life are contrasted starkly, though it remains the case that every man must die – even the righteous. Consider the contrast in Proverbs 2 in the light of the 'reign of death,' the reality that death has dominion over all the sons of Adam. A cursory reading might lead to the conclusion that obedience and wisdom will result in immortality, but that is nowhere

[331] Key, Andrew F. "The Concept of Death in Early Israelite Religion" *Journal of Bible and Religion*, Vol. 32, No. 3 (Jul. 1964); 242.

taught in Scripture. Yet life is the reward of faithfulness, and the death the inevitable penalty of immoral behavior.

> *To deliver you from the immoral woman, from the seductress who flatters with her words,*
> *Who forsakes the companion of her youth, and forgets the covenant of her God.*
> *For her house leads down to death, and her paths to the dead;*
> *None who go to her return, nor do they regain the paths of life –*
> *So you may walk in the way of goodness, and keep to the paths of righteousness.*
> *For the upright will dwell in the land, and the blameless will remain in it;*
> *But the wicked will be cut off from the earth, and the unfaithful will be uprooted from it.*
>
> (Proverbs 2:16-22)

This is the consistent testimony of Wisdom writings as they flesh out, so to speak, Moses' admonition just before Israel entered the Promised Land. Speaking of the commandments that Yahweh had promulgated for the nation through him, Moses challenges the nation to be obedient, which is the same as 'choosing life.'

> *See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil, in that I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments, that you may live and multiply; and the LORD your God will bless you in the land which you go to possess. But if your heart turns away so that you do not hear, and are drawn away, and worship other gods and serve them, I announce to you today that you shall surely perish; you shall not prolong your days in the land which you cross over the Jordan to go in and possess. I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live.*
>
> (Deuteronomy 30:15-19)

There is a certain irony in this section of Deuteronomy, as Moses himself was knowingly approaching his own death: knowing that he was about to die, he exhorts the people to 'choose life.' Certainly, one aspect of 'choosing life' comprises continued habitation of the land as the consecrated people of God, but surely such a 'national' life is not the goal of the biblical teaching. It would be an exegetical stretch to interpret the promised circumcision of the heart as a national operation, as Moses predicates true life on such a circumcision earlier in the same chapter. The passage is set in contrast to the earlier comment regarding Israel's lack of such a heart. The upshot of these passages, as

well as the entirety of biblical teaching on the matter, is that the knowledge and worship of God is the true definition of life.

> *Yet the LORD has not given you a heart to [a]perceive and eyes to see and ears to hear, to this very day.* (Deuteronomy 29:4)

> *And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul,* ***that you may live****.* (Deuteronomy 30:6)

The rest of the Hebrew Scripture is devoted to the unfolding of this very principle – that man fallen in sin does not have the heart to love the Lord God, the only true God, with all of his heart, and soul, and mind, and strength – and therefore he cannot *live* until that divine operation, the circumcision of the heart, is performed. Paul echoes this in Romans 2, and Jesus himself succinctly states the matter in His High Priestly Prayer in John 17, "*And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.*"[332] Jesus promised *'rivers of living water'* and *'life more abundantly'* to His followers; yet from His day to the present all have died. Considering

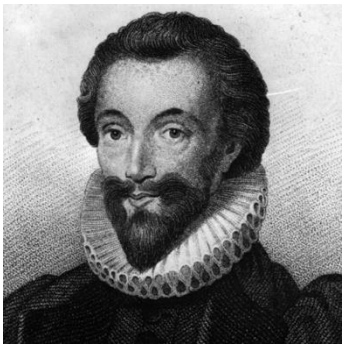

John J. Collins (*b.* 1945)

the description of the grave in Scripture – a place of silence without the praise of God – there seems to be something seriously missing in the equation. The wise man meets the same fate as the fool; both descend into the suspended animation, as it were, of Sheol, seemingly never to rise again. If wisdom leads to life, where is this life? "The traditional belief in a shadowy survival in Sheol or the netherworld is maintained, but such an anemic existence is not considered 'life' in any meaningful sense of the word."[333] This apparent dead end (pun intended) is actually the inexorable logic of revelation that must lead - progressively, to be sure – to the hope and promise of resurrection and of a New Creation. "*God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.*"[334]

[332] John 17:3
[333] Collins, John J. "The Root of Immortality: Death in the Context of Jewish Wisdom" *The Harvard Theological Review* Vol. 71, No. ¾ (Jul. – Oct. 1978); 181.
[334] Matthew 22:32

Lesson 14 – In Him Was Life…
Text: John 1:1-4; 5:25-29; I Corinthians 15;13-19; Daniel 12:1-3

"Death radically puts in question the taken-for-granted, 'business-as-usual' attitude in which one exists in everyday life."
(Peter Berger)


John Donne (1571-1631)

"Each man's death diminishes me, for I am involved in mankind; send not to know, therefore, for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee."[335] In his famous poem, the English poet John Donne contemplates the communal significance and impact of death, observing that "no man is an island," and that union of the human race under its Creator God unites all men and every man in the various stages of each man's life: birth, baptism, death. The point may be overstated by Donne, but that is often the nature of poetry. The point does remain that the common practices and institutions of everyday life (and death) link humanity by ties of tradition and custom, varying from culture to culture and from age to age, but remarkably similar across region and time. Of all of the 'passages' in life, none is more significant to the structures of human society than death. John Collins writes, "death radically challenges *all* socially objectivized definitions of reality – of the world, of others, and of the self. Death radically puts in question the taken-for-granted, 'business-as-usual' attitude in which one exists in everyday life."[336] Collins is merely echoing the conclusion of Qohelet in the Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes, in which the Preacher laments the seeming meaningless of all endeavor in life, considering the reality that every man's life, and his works, will end in the same manner: death. "In short, death is a threat to the meaningfulness not only of the individual life, but of the common enterprise of society and, indeed, of any attempt, social, religious, or philosophical, to perceive reality as a coherent and purposeful order."[337]

[335] Donne, John *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions:* Meditation XVII. John Donne. Meditation 17. [No man is an island... For whom the bell tolls, etc.]. Accessed 08December2024.
[336] Collins; 177.
[337] *Idem.*

This phenomenon of meaninglessness is certainly not a regular topic of social conversation, even at funerals. Yet it is the subject of sociological studies to investigate just how powerfully death impacts social institutions, mores, traditions, and rituals. Peter Berger, a leading 20th Century social philosopher, focuses on the phenomenological influence of the universal reality of death in his *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*, first published in 1966. Berger's premise in this classic work is the undeniable reality of death as the final act of any man, or any society's 'work.' The opening sentence of *The Sacred Canopy* sets the universal backdrop against which death exercises its inexorable sway. "Every human society is an enterprise of world-building. Religion occupies a distinctive place in this enterprise."[338] One of religion's most important – if not the *most* important – sociological functions within any human culture is to condition mankind to live in the face of inevitable death, and to continue 'world-building' in spite of the inescapable reality of death. Religion, Berger would assert, is what compelled multiple generations of architects, carpenters, and stone masons to labor on a medieval cathedral, knowing that the actual use of the building would be several generations away. There are other institutional mechanisms within the human societal 'world-building' that are geared primarily toward the reality of death as the full stop: endowments, libraries and museums, and the like, give a certain 'immortality' to the benefactor. Even legislation and art are means by which a given society lives on, as it were, generation after generation. But it stands to reason that among all of these social institution, religion would be the one most focused on, and hopefully most adept at, the universal problem of death.


Peter Berger (1929-2017)

In reality, however, all such efforts to societal continuity are little less than a finger in the dike. Benjamin Franklin once opined that the only sure things in life are death and taxes, and the latter one is by no means an assured thing, so long as the estate has a

[338] Berger, Peter L. *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Anchor Books; 1990); 3.

good accountant.[339] Berger writes, "Death presents society with a formidable problem not only because of its obvious threat to the continuity of human relationships, but because it threatens the basic assumptions of order on which society rests."[340] To a large extent, the human function, so to speak, of religion is to attempt to bring order to human life, threatened as it is with the chaos of universal and, for most of history, imminent death. Modern attempts to replace religion with science only intensify the problem: if the world is nothing more than material – swirling atoms and random collisions – then meaning in life is even more chimerical. Indeed, 'meaning' in the world of a Stephen Hawking is itself a meaningless word.

It is probably for this reason, at least, that religion will never disappear from human society no matter what 'gains' materialistic science makes in its crusade to divest the universe of any spiritual significance. Man, being a creature both physical and spiritual, will always need a 'cosmic' framework in which to orient his and his society's life. "Religion legitimates social institutions by bestowing upon them an ultimately valid ontological status, that is, by *localizing* them within a sacred and cosmic frame of reference."[341] No problem presents itself more powerfully to human society, or any religion than the reality of death, and it is an interesting sociological study to evaluate the various world religions with regard to their view of death. It does not appear that any *religion* (as opposed to a moral philosophy) treats death as the end of existence, though that existence might be in another dimension, or return to this world in another form. On the one hand, death may be a cycle of life until eventually ending in a complete loss of awareness – 'nirvana' – or it may be continued existence in a state of being far less sensual, and far less societal, than life on this earth. In any event, a particular society's view on the nature of death, and of existence after death, is always a fundamental tenet of that society's religion. "Insofar as the knowledge of death cannot be avoided in any society, legitimations of the reality of the social world *in the face of death* are decisive re-

[339] The famous quote is found in a letter written by Franklin to Jean-Baptiste le Roy in regard to the recently promulgated U. S. Constitution. Earlier versions of the same are found in Daniel Defoe (1726) and Christopher Bullock (1716).
[340] Berger; 23.
[341] *Ibid*.; 33.

quirements in any society. The importance of religion in such legitimations is obvious."[342]

Modern treatments of the sociological aspects of human religion teach that all religious perspectives on death are equally valid and equally false. Certainly adherents of the various world religions do not agree with this assessment, and certainly Christians cannot agree with it either. There is a fundamental link between 'meaning of life' and the reality of death, a link that is forged by the religion of every human society. The point is undeniable that, while they all may be wrong, the cannot all be right. Thus the treatment of death is a key criterion by which any religion must be measured. "Every human society is, in the last resort, men banded together in the face of death. The power of religion depends, in the last resort, upon the credibility of the banners its puts in the hands of men as they stand before death, or more accurately, as they walk, inevitably, toward it."[343] In light of Berger's sociological assessment, consider again the words of the Letter to the Hebrews,

> *Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.*
>
> (Hebrews 2:14-15)

But what can be said of a 'solution' to the problem of death, if death remains? Or if the dead remain dead? This, ultimately, is the litmus test of any religion; certainly it is an important question to place before the religion of Scripture. Does death have the final word? As Paul would say, "*May it never be!'* The issue for canonical theology is to recognize and trace the *theology* of death, to make the connection between death and sin that the apostle sees so clearly in, for instance, Romans 5. Before we trace this path, it may be worth the time to investigate just why it is that Scripture is not immediately clear on the theology of sin and death, why do we find such seeming hopelessness in the Old Testament writings with regard to death and Sheol, a place of darkness where

[342] *Ibid.*; 43-44.
[343] *Ibid.*; 51.

God is not praised? No explanation is given in the text, so any theory must be viewed as conjecture. But within that caveat, it seems that the apparent permanence of death – though, it must be remembered, not *non-existence* – is not immediately explained in order that the reader might learn to recognize the inexorable power of *life*. This is most poignantly seen in the many contrasts between life and death both in the Torah and in the Wisdom writings: to obey the commandments of Yahweh is *life* and *length of days*; to disobey is shame, exile, and death. Wisdom sets before a man the path of *life*, but death is the end for the fool. "The correlation of wisdom and life is a fundamental component of 'reality' in the wisdom tradition."[344] The pursuit of wisdom, which we early learn begins with the fear of the LORD is set before the reader as a challenge, a challenge, sadly, that few will take up. But uniformly the reward for pursuing wisdom in the fear of Jehovah is spoken of in terms of longevity, security, and freedom from fear and evil. Proverbs opens with this comparison between Wisdom and Folly, Life and Death.

> *Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the LORD,*
> *They would have none of my counsel and despised my every rebuke.*
> *Therefore they shall eat the fruit of their own way, and be filled to the full with their own fancies.*
> *For the turning away of the simple will slay them,*
> *And the complacency of fools will destroy them;*
> *But whoever listens to me will dwell safely, and will be secure, without fear of evil.*
>
> (Proverbs 1:29-33)

Over every such promise of 'life and length of days,' however, there hangs the inevitable reality of death, a fact that seems to mock the very promise that Scripture holds out to the faithful and obedient, and consequently *wise*, man. This creates an inner struggle – a struggle that underlies the book of Ecclesiastes – to make sense out of the reality of death in the light of the promise of life. Human society's institutional, traditional, and ritual legitimation of death may bring a greater sense of order to the passing of generation after generation, but the glaring dichotomy remains: the promise of *life* that seems to end forever in *death*. Collins writes, "It was not enough that there be order

[344] Collins; 180.

in the world. That order must also fulfill the promise of wisdom for human fulfillment."[345]

The biblical description of Sheol, then, categorically *does not* offer the answer, for if this is the *life* finally granted to the wise man, the promise becomes a cruel joke. To repeat Collins' assessment of the Old Testament witness concerning the grave, it is such "an anemic existence" that it "is not considered life in any meaningful sense of the word."[346] The silence of Sheol and the lack of praise toward God among those who go down to the grave cannot constitute the *life* promised as both the fruit and the reward of true wisdom. One might paraphrase the apostle here: "If we have pursued wisdom in the fear of the LORD in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied." This paraphrase is apt, for the passage in reference is dealing with the answer to the conundrum: the resurrection.

One notable exception to the apparent permanence of Sheol is found in David's michtam of Psalm 16, where the psalmist expresses firm confidence in the security of his flesh. The psalm is, of course, a messianic prophecy and Peter makes the point in his first sermon (*cp.* Acts 2) that David's body remained in the tomb and did undergo decay. Still, Psalm 16 is an early and rare example of Sheol *not* having the last word.

> *Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices; My flesh also will rest in hope.*
> *For You will not leave my soul in Sheol,*
> *Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.*
> *You will show me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy;*
> *At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.* (Psalm 16:9-11)

The Old Testament presentation of Sheol, the pit, the grave, or Hades is not given from the perspective of human life merely, but more so from the perspective of man's relationship to God. For the wicked, death is justified and even sought for by the righteous who are persecuted by them, though even here it is the enmity of the wicked toward God that underlies the imprecator psalms. For the righteous, however, Sheol rep-

[345] *Ibid.*; 179.
[346] *Ibid.*; 181.

resents separation from God and the prospect of that separation being permanent. Richard Middleton writes, "While the numerous Old Testament references to Sheol, the grave, or the pit present a somewhat inchoate picture of a shadowy or diminished existence in the underworld…one thing is clear: there is no access to God after death."[347] Death is presented as the final separation from God which began with the first couple being expelled from the Garden, no longer able to enjoy uninterrupted fellowship with their Creator.

Yet in the very light (darkness?) of this negative assessment of death as the impenetrable veil between man and God, Scripture continues to exhort the righteous to obedience and wisdom in this life. "This negative view of the afterlife paradoxically serves a positive function in the Old Testament: it emphasizes that earthly life is what really matters. It is in present history and in our concretely this-worldly context that we are called to serve God and experience the blessings that God has for us."[348] Thus a tension is developed in the canon: the reality of ultimate death and separation from God in Sheol is set against the admonition to live in faithful obedience and worship to God, with the expectation of ultimate blessing and reward. This tension is most poignantly displayed by Asaph in Psalm 73, in which the psalmist laments the seeming carefree life of the wicked, for whom "*there are no pangs in their death.*"[349] The psalmist enters the sanctuary of the LORD and perceives the ultimate destiny of the wicked. He also is encouraged and reinforced in his faith, and speaks of the righteous life as one that enjoys the presence of God *forever*.

> *Nevertheless I am continually with You; You hold me by my right hand.*
> *You will guide me with Your counsel, and afterward receive me to glory.*
> *Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You.*
> *My flesh and my heart fail; but God is the* [g]*strength of my heart and my portion forever.*
>
> (Psalm 73:23-26)

[347] Middleton, J. Richard *A New Heaven and a New Earth: Reclaiming Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic; 2014); 133.
[348] *Ibid.*; 135.
[349] Psalm 73:4

The Old Testament Scriptures progressively reveal the 'glory' of which Asaph speaks in Psalm 73, the ultimate hope of the believer. The first to develop the line of thought that will eventually coalesce into the promise of resurrection is Isaiah who prophesied during the latter period of the Divided Kingdom, around the time of the Assyrian deportation of the Northern Kingdom. The Babylonian Exile is looming for Judah due to her ongoing rebellion against God, an exile that will be viewed in Ezekiel as a valley of dry bones. *i.e.,* death. Yet the LORD promises life for His people Israel, and restoration and hope and blessing even greater than at the time of the Exodus, for this time death itself will be defeated.

> *And in this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all people*
> *A feast of choice pieces, a feast of wines on the lees,*
> *Of fat things full of marrow, of well-refined wines on the lees.*
> *And He will destroy on this mountain the surface of the covering cast over all people,*
> *And the veil that is spread over all nations.*
> ***He will swallow up death forever,***
> *And the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces;*
> *The rebuke of His people He will take away from all the earth;*
> *For the LORD has spoken.* (Isaiah 25:6-8)

That this glorious event does not pertain merely to a spiritualized existence in heaven is asserted by the reference to *all the earth* in verse 8; this is the promise of worldwide restoration and the reversal of the curse of the Fall. This is the New Earth, and unending physical life belongs to the unending physical Earth in its restored state. This theme continues in Isaiah 26 where the prophet laments with the psalmist the apparent triumph of the wicked over the righteous. The conclusion of the matter, however, is also encouraging, as with the psalmist, with perhaps the earliest canonical description of bodily resurrection.

> *Your dead shall live; together with my dead body they shall arise.*
> *Awake and sing, you who dwell in dust;*
> *For your dew is like the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead.*
>
> (Isaiah 26:19)

The Babylonian Exile was for Israel far more than a repeat of the bondage of Egypt before the Exodus, it was nothing less than national death. The vision of the glory of the LORD departing from the Temple in Jerusalem is tantamount to the spirit leaving the body in physical death. Thus the image in Ezekiel 37 of the Valley of the Dry Bones is almost uniformly interpreted as, at least, *national* resurrection. But there appears to be more to the vision than simply the restoration of national Israel to the land. Consider first the attitude of the faithful among the exiles regarding their situation,

> *Then He said to me, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They indeed say, 'Our bones are dry, our hope is lost, and we ourselves are cut off!'* (Ezekiel 37:11)

Restoration of Israel to the land would indeed be like a revivification, a rising from the grave. But the vision speaks more particularly of the grave, not merely of the nation's loss of sovereignty (which, by the way, Israel would not regain immediately upon return from the Exile). Indeed, return from the Exile is presented as more than a second Exodus; it is life from the dead.

> *Therefore prophesy and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: "Behold, O My people, I will open your graves and cause you to come up from your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. Then you shall know that I am the LORD, when I have opened your graves, O My people, and brought you up from your graves. I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken it and performed it," says the LORD.* (Ezekiel 37:12-14)

It is in Daniel that we find the strongest reference to bodily resurrection. In Daniel 12 we read of a vision of the end of days and the opening of the 'books' first referred to in Daniel 7, as the *one like a Son of Man* approaches the Ancient of Days. These are parallel visions, linking together bodily resurrection with restored rule. Consider the flow of the prophecy along its high points.

> *I watched till thrones were put in place, and the Ancient of Days was seated;*
> *His garment was white as snow, and the hair of His head was like pure wool.*
> *His throne was a fiery flame, its wheels a burning fire;*

A fiery stream issued and came forth from before Him.
A thousand thousands ministered to Him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him.
The court was seated, ***and the books were opened****.* (Daniel 7:9-10)

I was watching in the night visions, and behold, One like the Son of Man,
Coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days,
And they brought Him near before Him.
Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom,
That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him.
His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away,
And His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed. (Daniel 7:13-14)

The interpretation of this vision is then given to Daniel, with the conclusion of dominion being restored not only to the *One like the Son of Man*, but to His saints as well.

But the court shall be seated, and they shall take away his dominion,
To consume and destroy it forever.
Then the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven,
Shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High.
His kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him.
(Daniel 7:26-27)

This theme is taken up and expanded in Daniel 12, the reference to the 'books' tying the two visions together.

At that time Michael shall stand up,
The great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people;
And there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation,
Even to that time.
And at that time your people shall be delivered, every one who is found written in the book.
And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life,
Some to shame and everlasting contempt.
Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament,
And those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever.
(Daniel 12:1-3)

The combination of these prophetic passages from Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel should be read in the light of the opening chapters of Genesis. The connection is made explicit through the use of the word 'dust,' from which Adam was formed in Genesis

2:7. But the larger picture is that of the restoration of human viceregency under the kingship of God, the divine commission that was abdicated by Adam and usurped by the serpent. This contrast is seen between the wicked and oppressive ruling empires of the world – the 'beasts' of Daniel's vision – and the irenic and righteous rule of the Son of Man and the saints of the Most High God. This is nothing less than the reversal of the Fall and the restoration in the New Earth of the order of things originally intended at Creation. "The point is that whereas in the present the oppressive rulers of the world persecute the righteous, in the future there will be a great reversal: the oppressive will be judged, and the righteous will receive the kingdom that is rightfully theirs."[350] This is the inexorable logic of Creation and of Man as the *imago Dei*: visible, physical viceregency; Resurrection and Rule. "Resurrection and rule go hand in hand when God restores his people."[351]

It is with this expectation of eventual restoration to life and rule that we approach the New Testament revelation, and with it the ever clearer biblical teaching concerning the resurrection. It did not take long for Jesus' disciples to betray their Second Temple expectation both of the messianic rule and the joint regency of His people. The mother of James and John advocates on behalf of her sons,

> *Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Him with her sons, kneeling down and asking something from Him. And He said to her, "What do you wish?"*
> *She said to Him, "Grant that these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on the left, in Your kingdom."* (Matthew 20:20-21)

The error here was not in the fact of viceregency, but in the nature of it. The Old Testament prophecies, especially those of Daniel, ought to have been sufficient for the Jews in Jesus' day to realize that the nature of the messianic kingdom could not possibly be similar to that of the rulers of this world, the oppressors of God's people. But furthermore, there is the connection in the Old Testament between the reversal of death and the restoration of rule: the latter could not come about until the former was accom-

[350] Middleton, *New Heaven*; 140.
[351] *Ibid*.; 143

plished. This is the logic of Genesis 1 – 3, a logic that is then unfolded through the Hebrew Scriptures. Thus Jesus spoke as much of His death as He did of His kingdom, though His disciples did not understand. They expected an immediate, if not smooth, transition from the current situation under Roman rule to the glorious restoration of independent Davidic rule in Israel. The Romans, however, though being the fourth beast of Daniel, were not the real enemy. Thus Jesus promises His disciples that restored viceregency, but only in the 'regeneration.'

> *So Jesus said to them, "Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.* (Matthew 19:28)

The allusion in this passage to Daniel 7 should be unmistakable, thus putting the reader of Matthew 19 back into the entire resurrection-and-rule complex of Daniel. Middleton summarizes, "In fact, wherever we find language in the New Testament of the saints ruling, reigning, judging, or otherwise exercising authority, including references to thrones or crowns, we are moving in the conceptual field of the eschatological kingdom of God, which is the promised inheritance of God's people."[352] Still, it should be noted that the mature development of bodily resurrection, while strong in the Second Temple era, was not held by all. Speaking of the doctrine of the resurrection, N. T. Wright comments, "By the time of Jesus it was, in fact, a topic of controversy among different Jewish parties, with the conservative Sadducees rejecting it, the more radical Pharisees embracing it, and other Jewish groups and individuals remaining ambiguous or opting for some form of Platonism."[353] Famously, the Sadducees disingenuously used the resurrection, which they did not believe in, to trap Jesus, and their interchange with Him is significant to our proper understanding of resurrection as a biblical doctrine. Matthew records the attempted trapping of Jesus by the Sadducees in regard to the Levirate marriage. They propose a situation in which seven brothers have the same

[352] Middleton, *A New Heaven*; 145.
[353] Wright, N. T. "Death, Resurrection, and Human Destiny in the Bible" in *Death, Resurrection, and Human Destiny: Christian and Muslim Perspectives* David Marshall and Lucinda Mosher, eds. (Washington: Georgetown University Press; 2014); 3.

woman as wife, all dying before a child is born. Their disingenuity appears as the whole matter is posed as Torah case law, "*In the resurrection, whose wife is she.*" Jesus' answer cuts to the chase, "*You are mistaken, understanding neither the Scripture nor the power of God.*"[354]

> *Jesus answered and said to them, "You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels of God in heaven. But concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God, saying, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living."* (Matthew 22:29-32)

Jesus' answer with regard to the resurrection – which, of course, was the primary point of the Sadducees case – is not a direct quote from an Old Testament text establishing the bodily resurrection as a biblical doctrine. He does not quote Isaiah or Daniel or Ezekiel, but rather the Pentateuch, thus grounding the truth of the resurrection in Torah, which was viewed by the Sadducees as the most important part of the Hebrew canon (the Sadducees, for instances, rejected the canonicity of Daniel). The reference to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob invokes the covenant that God made with these patriarchs, a covenant of promise that neither Abraham, nor Isaac, nor Jacob experienced the fulfillment of in their lifetimes. Jesus notes that the Scriptures proclaim God as the God of the patriarchs, not in the past tense but in the present. The point Jesus is making here is that God's promises to the patriarchs will be fulfilled for the patriarchs; they continue to live in His presence and will again live in bodily form forever. The Lord's rebuke of the Sadducees is fundamental, "*You are mistaken, understanding neither the Scriptures nor the power of God.*"

The Sadducees, who focused their studies on the Pentateuch, ought to have recognized the inexorable logic of Creation/New Creation and of the Viceregency of Man as the Image of God. The restoration of the Davidic king to Israel (also something the Sadducees rejected, but on more political and pragmatic grounds) was also to be the restoration of Man as viceregent over all Creation. Indeed, the latter function was prior

[354] Matthew 22:29

to and encompassed the former. More and more Jews understood this phenomenon of promise during the Second Temple era, and the early Christians recognized the beginning of the fulfillment of this promise with the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Considering the views of the early Christians, Wright notes,

> Their claim was that, in and through Jesus, Israel's God had become king of the whole world. With Jesus' resurrection, then, the early Christians believed that the world was, as it were, under new management, though the style of that management was unlike anything imagined before. When Paul concludes his greatest argument, he quotes Isaiah 11 to this effect, referring to Jesse, the father of King David, and seeing the coming Messiah as his 'root,' the one who sustains his whole family: 'There shall be the root of Jesse, the one who rises up to rule the nations, the nations shall hope in him' (Rom. 15:12). Rising and ruling go together.[355]

The connection between resurrection and rule continues in the *locus classicus* of the doctrine in the New Testament, I Corinthians 15. The apostle establishes his belief in the bodily resurrection of Jesus as both *"according to the Scriptures"* and as essential to the faith.

> *For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time.* (I Corinthians 15:3-8)

> *Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty. Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up – if in fact the dead do not rise. For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.* (I Corinthians 15:12-19)

[355] *Ibid.*; 5.

In these passages Paul establishes the historical reality of Jesus' resurrection as well as the theological necessity of it. Pertinent to our tracing of the arc of revelation concerning this doctrine, however, is what the apostle has to say concerning the result of Jesus' resurrection vis-à-vis the Creation: the resurrection of Jesus Christ has inaugurated the restoration of the human viceregency that Adam abdicated.

> *But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming. Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. For "He has put all things under His feet." But when He says "all things are put under Him," it is evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted. Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all.* (I Corinthians 15:20-28)

Echoes from the Old Testament are almost cacophonous in this passage. There is the allusion, of course, to Psalm 110, "*The LORD said to my Lord, 'Sit at My right hand until I make all you enemies a footstool for your feet.'*"[356] But the reference to "*all things placed under Him*" also echoes the Creation Mandate of Genesis 1:26-28 as well as the prophetic and messianic vision of Daniel 7:13-14. Even Psalm 8 can be heard if one listens carefully, "*You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands; You have put all things under his feet.*"[357] The coming together of so many passages in exposition of the historical event of the resurrection of Jesus, brings the arc of revelation to its fulfillment in Christ, and confirms the principle that resurrection and rule are inseparable.

The passage that perhaps most succinctly pulls together not only the biblical logic and expectation of resurrection, but also the entire scope of revelation from Genesis 1 – 3 to the consummation of the ages, is Romans 8. Nowhere else in Scripture is the overarching theme of Fall and Restoration, for all of Creation and not merely mankind,

[356] Psalm 110:1
[357] Psalm 8:6

so powerfully, yet briefly, stated. The word 'resurrection' is not used, but one can hardly mistake the meaning of the phrase 'redemption of the body' as being one and the same thing.

> *For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body.* (Romans 8:18-23)

Paul teaches in this passage that Creation itself continues to yearn for the return of the propre viceregency of Man. This restoration of human rule over Creation will be, of course, centered in the Son of Man who is also the Son of God, Jesus Christ. But as we observed in the democratization of the *imago Dei* in Genesis 1, Creation knows itself and its destiny to be bound up with all mankind, and earnestly desires the revelation not merely of Christ, but of the sons of God, the redeemed *in* Christ. This brings us full circle, with the original blueprint for Creation's order reestablished in the Seed of Woman, the Last Adam whose personal victory over Death resulted in His exaltation as King over all Creation – *all authority has been given unto Me in heaven and one earth.* This event is the firstfruits from the dead, promising within itself the culmination both of the bodily resurrection of the saints of God and the restoration of the legitimate viceregency of Man over Creation. This trajectory of Life-Death-Life is the grand arc of canonical revelation. Only in its light and along its path can the rest of Scripture be properly interpreted.