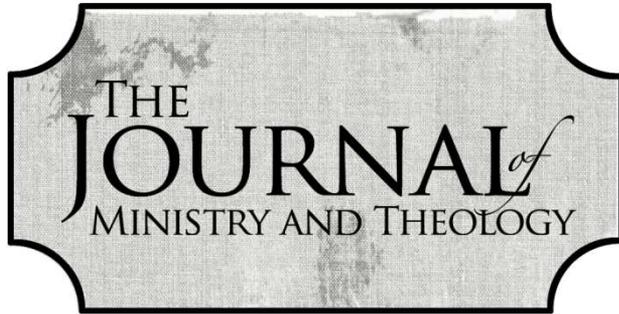


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# THE JOURNAL OF MINISTRY AND THEOLOGY

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2 Timothy 2:2

*And the things that you have heard from me  
among many witnesses, commit these  
to faithful men who will be able  
to teach others also.*

## 400 Years of the KJV

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**Baptist Bible Seminary**  
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### INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

There is very little neutrality regarding the King James Bible.<sup>2</sup> Is the King James Version of the Bible the “noblest monument of English prose,” the “‘very greatest’ literary achievement in the English language”?<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was first presented as a Faculty Forum paper at Baptist Bible Seminary on November 28, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Actually the term “the King James Bible” needs clarification since there is no *one* King James Bible; there are many variations, all of which go by the same designation. I cannot catalog the diversity in this paper. In addition to the half dozen revisions in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, culminating in the 1769 edition by Blaney, there are at least five different *categories* of KJV editions in print today “all with the same general content, but none completely identical with the others in technical details” (Jack Lewis, “The King James Bible Editions: Their Character and Revision History,” ch. 7 of *Translation That Openeth the Window: Reflections on the History and Legacy of the King James Bible*, ed. David Burke, 87–119 [Atlanta: SBL, 2009], 109. For the details of these five categories, see 110–13. The entire chapter discusses the history of the various editions since 1611).

<sup>3</sup> Sentiments cited, but not necessarily endorsed, by Alister E. McGrath, *In the Beginning: The Story of the King James Bible and How It Changed a Nation, a Language, and a Culture* (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 1.

Or is “the AV 1611 King James Bible ... God’s final authority for mankind today.... the crowning work of the Holy Spirit insofar as Bible preservation goes”? Is it “a perfect Book that, though written with paper and ink, was inspired by the breath of God, preserved in perfection by the power of God”?<sup>4</sup>

Or was “the forcible replacement from 1611 of the remarkable, accurate, informative, forward-looking, very popular Geneva Bibles at the time of their greatest dissemination and power, with the backward-gazing, conservative KJV ... one of the tragedies of western culture”?<sup>5</sup>

Personally, I would not endorse any of those opinions. Since, however, 2011 was the 400th anniversary of a widely used translation, it is worth assessing where the KJV fits in the history of God’s work in our world.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The two preceding statements are simply random examples of what can be found on many web sites and in numerous tracts and (cheaply printed) books churned out by devotees of the KJV only (KJVO). (Regarding the use of “cult” terminology, see n.86.) Both of these examples come from Kyle Stephens, “The Issue Is Final Authority,” <<http://www.biblebelievers.com/Stephens002.html>> (accessed 13 January 2012). Stephens is no particular authority and is not, so far as I know, a leader among the Ruckmanites; he’s just one of the first that came up on a Google search. I will have a little bit to say about the KJVO mentality a bit later in the paper, but that is mostly a curious side note that I do not deem worthy of much attention. For more information and a careful critique about this perspective, see James White, *The King James Only Controversy: Can You Trust Modern Translations?* 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2009).

<sup>5</sup> David Daniell, *The Bible in English: Its History and Influence* (New Haven, CT: Yale U P, 2003), 442.

<sup>6</sup> This paper is in no way exhaustive; entire books, some of them quite large, have been written on the subject. (A few such books will be referenced in the footnotes.) In particular, I will not include any discussion of the fascinating details of the printing of the KJV in its multiple editions, its unique editions (and errors), or its textual basis (generally known to reflect a very limited and late view of MS evidence in the NT—but that is all which was known at the time; see William W.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The King James occupies a unique place in history: the history of the English language, the political history of England and Scotland, and the history of the church in England.<sup>7</sup> Too often translations in general and the KJV in particular are not considered in light of their historical, cultural context. Factors to which we may be inclined to give great significance may have arisen for very different reasons than we suspect from our

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Combs, "Erasmus and the Textus Receptus," *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 1 [1996]: 35-53, <<http://www.dbts/journals/1996/ERASMUS,PDF>> [accessed 5 January 2012]; and idem., "Errors in the King James Version?" *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 4 [1999]: 151-64, <<http://www.dbts.edu/journals/1999/Combs.pdf>> [accessed 5 January 2012]). Likewise the effects of KJV typography in various printings (e.g., the later omission of Preface, omission of the original textual notes, versification, etc.) are not discussed, though such considerations are important. I have not documented as much of this paper as I normally would since I am often rehearsing material that is widely known, though much of it may be new to some readers. The related bibliography is extensive and likely most sentences written here could be documented from many different sources. I have sometimes followed the general sketch of McGrath's history; other times, that of Nicolson.

<sup>7</sup> There seems to be no end of historical treatments, either of England and Europe in general or of English church history. A few of the more notable works that cover the relevant period include the following. Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, *Cambridge History of Europe: Early Modern Europe, 1450-1789* (Cambridge U P, 2006); Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Christianity: The First Three Thousand Years* (New York: Viking, 2010); idem., *The Reformation* (New York: Penguin, 2005); Kenneth Latourette, *The Thousand Years of Uncertainty: A.D. 500 to A.D. 1500*, vol. 2 of *A History of the Expansion of Christianity*, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1966) and vol. 3, *Three Centuries of Advance: A.D. 1500–A.D. 1800*; Leo Solt, *Church and State in Early Modern England, 1509–1640* (New York: Oxford, 1990); and Susan Doran, *Princes, Pastors, and People: The Church and Religion in England, 1500–1700* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

viewpoint four centuries removed. Few today know much about the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

### Development of English as a Language

The origins of English as a language may be traced to the mid-fifth C. AD, though our earliest written sources date only to the late seventh C.<sup>8</sup> The history of our language is generally cataloged as consisting of Old English (prior to 1100), Middle English (1100–1450), and Modern English (since 1450). Thus despite a common misconception, the King James Version is not written in Old English, but is instead “Modern”—though that does not mean it is not archaic in many respects by contemporary standards.

During the early history of the language, English was used only by the residents of England, at the time only a small nation with little foreign influence. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the *lingua franca* of Europe was French. French language and culture were at the apogee of their influence. Even in England, the upper class spoke French by preference in contrast to the peasants and serfs who used English, a language viewed as adequate for everyday concerns, but lacking, it was thought, the sophistication necessary for diplomacy, philosophy, and religion. The late fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries were years of increasing nationalism across Europe, accompanied by the rise of regional languages. Both French and Latin (the language of church and academy) began to wane in importance. As a result, a significant development in English society took place in the late sixteenth C.: “the remarkable rise of confidence in the English language.... What was once scorned as the barbarous language of ploughmen became esteemed as the language of patriots and poets—a language fit for heroes on the one hand, and for the riches of the Bible on the other.”<sup>9</sup> The end

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<sup>8</sup> For one of many histories of the English Language, see Robert McCrum, William Cran, and Robert MacNeil, *The Story of English* (New York: Viking, 1986).

<sup>9</sup> McGrath, *In the Beginning*, 24–25.

of the Hundred Years War (1453) between England and France and the rise of England's maritime might under Queen Elizabeth (see below) established the respectability of English. This was the necessary prerequisite to an English translation of the Bible.

### **Theological Setting of Early Seventeenth C. England**

At this same time another revolution was sweeping Europe. This one was not linguistic, but theological. The Reformation was a diverse movement with multiple roots. To simplify considerably, Erasmus (1466–1536) was one of the key precursors. Though he remained within the Roman Catholic Church all his life, he wrote vigorously in support of reform. One of his basic premises was that Scripture must be accessible to ordinary people in their own language: "I would to God that the plowman would sing a text of the Scripture at his plow and that the weaver would hum them to the tune of his shuttle."<sup>10</sup>

A slightly younger contemporary, Martin Luther (1483–1546) sparked the first break with Rome by nailing his famous 95 *Theses* to the Wittenberg Castle Church door in 1517. Luther's ideas spread rapidly, in part because he chose to write in German rather than only in Latin; he intended to address ordinary Christians, not just fellow scholars. Key to his reforms was giving the people the Bible in their own language. No longer would church services be conducted in Latin that was unintelligible to the masses, but in the German they could understand. Though Luther was best known for his proclamation of justification by grace alone, "the key to the reform and renewal of the Church was to put the Bible into the hands of lay people."<sup>11</sup> Luther practiced what he preached: he

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<sup>10</sup> Erasmus, cited by Tony Lane, "A Man for All People: Introducing William Tyndale," *Christian History* 6.4.16 (1987): 7. Tyndale would later echo Erasmus' sentiment when he said to an English cleric, "If God spare my life, ere many years pass, I will cause a boy that driveth the plow shall know more of the Scripture than thou dost" (qtd. in Lane, "Tyndale," 7).

<sup>11</sup> McGrath, *In the Beginning*, 55.

translated the Bible into German (1534). Calvin (1509–64) likewise wrote not only in Latin, but also in French to make his teaching accessible to common people.

The Reformation spread across Europe, eventually reaching England, though the break from Rome was occasioned, not by theology and reform, but by the domestic and political problems of King Henry VIII. The details need not detain us here, but the Pope's refusal to grant Henry's divorce and the threat of excommunication if he did, resulted in the Church of England's separation from Rome. The English Church did so only as a result of the political mandates dictated by the king. The exigencies of the split did, however, result in greater toleration of "Lutheran" ideas. As McGrath observes, "In the end, the English Reformation has to be recognized as an act of state.... Luther's Reformation was conducted on the basis of a theological foundation and platform. The fundamental impetus was religious ... and theological.... In England, the Reformation was primarily political and pragmatic."<sup>12</sup>

Regardless of the nature or motives of this "reformation," it did establish the conditions necessary for the English translation of the Bible. The process was not as easy or direct as in Germany, but it eventually resulted in a common language Bible published with the permission and authorization of the church.

### **Political Setting of Early Seventeenth C. England**

The history of England is a component necessary to understand the origins of the English Bible, though the summary here is highly selective.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>13</sup> In addition to McGrath's useful summary of these events, see also Adam Nicolson, *God's Secretaries: The Making of the King James Bible* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003). Nicolson's history is much more detailed and also more florid, written with less sympathy to theological matters, but providing an interesting historical/political perspective.

### ***Historical Summary***

Following Henry VIII, the next British monarch was his son, Edward VI (1547), followed in 1553 by his half-sister Mary Tudor, best known as “Bloody Mary,” the Catholic queen who attempted to reverse the reforms of her father and brother. Many Protestants fled to Europe for safety at this time. Mary died after only five years and was succeeded by her sister Elizabeth in 1558. This began one of the longest reigns in English history; Queen Elizabeth I was monarch of a golden age that lasted until 1603 when she died at age 69. Under her rule England emerged as a major world power, defeating the Spanish Armada in 1588. This not only established England’s military and naval capabilities, but also confirmed England as a Protestant country. (The goal of Spain had been to invade England and restore Catholicism.)

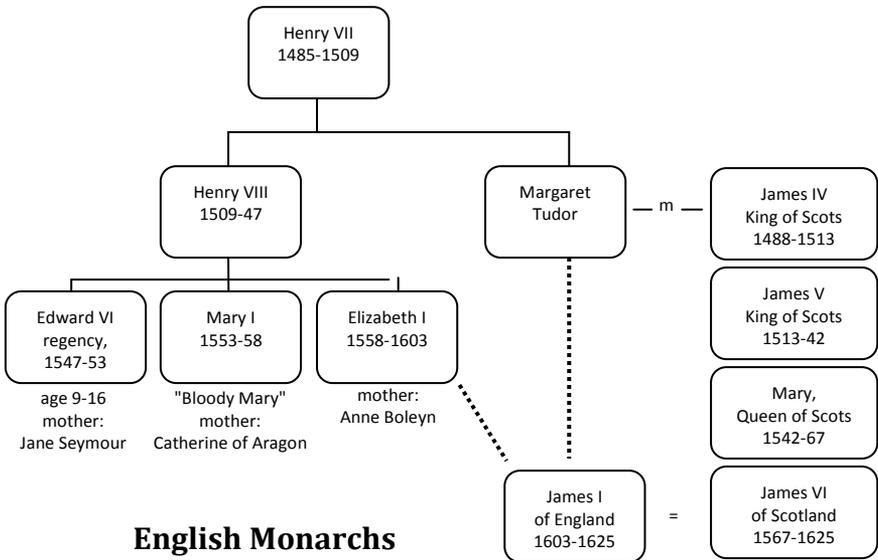
Elizabeth brokered the “Elizabethan Settlement of Religion” in which Protestant and Catholic factions in the Church of England reached a compromise.<sup>14</sup> The result was an uneasy peace in the church, and many differences were only suppressed, not resolved. Though the church remained officially Protestant, many practices of Catholicism were retained including formal vestments and a prayer book containing Catholic elements such as kneeling for communion and the sign of the cross, among others. This was also the beginning of the Puritan movement which resolutely opposed such practices. “By the end of Elizabeth’s long reign, the most serious religious tensions within England no longer had anything to do with those between Protestants and Catholics. The new battles concerned two different styles of English Protestantism—Anglicanism and Puritanism.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> The Settlement was, to Elizabeth, a useful political tool. “In private, Elizabeth initially seems to have seen religion as a matter of no great importance, provided that it did not interfere with national life” (McGrath, *In the Beginning*, 125).

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 134. It is this unique history that accounts for much of the diversity in Anglicanism today with both “high church” (those

Since Elizabeth never married, the question of succession was a vexing one. She chose not to announce her successor until hours before her death. Since the royal succession was familial, it was necessary to retreat up the family tree to find another branch with a worthy successor. Although there were several possibilities, Elizabeth settled on her cousin, James VI, King of Scots. James Stuart’s grandmother, Margaret Tudor, was the wife of James IV, King of Scots. She was also the sister of King Henry VIII (Elizabeth’s father). At the time of his ascension to the English throne in 1603 as James I, at the age of twenty he had been king of Scotland in name for nearly sixteen years and had exercised his authority as king for three. (He had succeeded to the Scottish throne when he was not yet two, the government being conducted by regents until he was seventeen.)



**English Monarchs  
of the 16th Century**  
(Dates are years of reign)

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elements with Catholic roots) and “low church” (of Puritan origin) practice.

In April 1603, while still enroute to London from Scotland, James was courted by many factions, each vying for preferential treatment from the new king. Nicolson writes,

The Puritan reformists within the Church of England saw the new reign as a chance for a new start. One of their secular leaders, Lewis Pickering, had already buttonholed the king in Edinburgh, and on James's way south a petition had been presented to him, signed it was said by a thousand ministers, asking for a reformation of the English Church, to rid it of the last vestiges of Roman Catholicism and to bring to a conclusion the long rumbling agony of the English Reformation.... It was clear to the reformists that a full Reformation had never occurred in England. Now, perhaps, at last, with a Scottish king, well versed in the ways of Presbyterianism..., there was an opportunity to turn the Church of England into a bona fide Protestant organization, as purified of Roman practices as those on the continent of Europe. This Millenary Petition, named after its thousand signatures, was the seed from which the new translation of the Bible would grow.<sup>16</sup>

James, however, had some ideas very different from the Puritan expectations. True, he had been king in Scotland where the Reformation had been extensive under John Knox. The Scottish Presbyterian Church had left no remnants of Catholicism, and James had been tutored for his role as king by George Buchanan, one of the leading intellectuals of the Reformation. But James had been disenchanted with the Presbyterianism of Scotland. His major complaint was that it was a republican movement, not a monarchical one. The Divine Right of Kings was explicitly rejected by the new Scottish church and as a result, the king's position was a difficult one. The standard Bible in Scotland (and also, except among the church hierarchy, the most popular in England) was the Geneva Bible—a Bible filled with notes opposing “Tyrants” who claimed divine right. Sitting on the weakest throne in Europe without financial resources or military might and constantly afflicted by the Scottish Church, James viewed the English throne as like Paradise. In England the

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<sup>16</sup> Nicolson, *God's Secretaries*, 34.

king had real power and was backed by the powerful bishops of the Church of England.

The struggle between the reform-minded Puritans and the established church had been kept in check by the iron hand of Elizabeth who did not allow for any dissension. The goal was religious stability and anything that might result in an imbalance was opposed by the Queen and the church authorities. These issues, however, were bubbling just below the surface and burst forth when she died. Though there were many other issues that had been held in check by Elizabeth, it is the question of religion that is directly relevant to our present concerns.

### ***James Stuart As a Person***

Though some people assume that the KJV was translated by King James, that is not the case, though, interestingly, he might have been one of the few English monarchs who could have done so. Intellectually James was one of the most capable people who sat on the English throne and perhaps among the best of all Europe, “an intellectual of European standing,”<sup>17</sup> and was known in his own lifetime as “a living library and a walking study.”<sup>18</sup> He spoke and wrote at least Greek, Latin, French, and English and also knew Hebrew, Spanish, and Italian. He was a writer and is the only English monarch to have his collected works published (1616, ed. James Mountagu).<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>18</sup> Cited by Donald Brake, *A Visual History of the King James Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011), 83.

<sup>19</sup> James’s works includes *The Essayes of a Prentise in the Divine Art of Poesie*, (also called *Some Reulis and Cautelis*), 1584; *His Maiesties Poeticall Exercises at Vacant Houres*, 1591; *Lepanto*, poem; *Daemonologie*, 1597; *The True Law of Free Monarchies*, 1598 (his defense of the Divine Right of Kings doctrine); *Basilikon Doron*, 1599 (advice to his son on how to be king); *A Counterblaste to Tobacco*, 1604; *An Apologie for the Oath of Allegiance*, 1608; and *A Premonition*

He has been described as “ugly, restless, red-headed, pale-skinned, his tongue ... too big for his mouth, impatient, vulgar, clever, nervous.” He was a passionate huntsman, spending large portions of his time in the hunt.<sup>20</sup>

### English Bibles Earlier Than KJV

There were many English translations that preceded the KJV.<sup>21</sup> This discussion can touch on only the three that were the most directly influential on the KJV, intended explicitly intended to be a revision, not a new translation.

#### *Tyndale*

The first printed New Testament in English was the work of William Tyndale and published in 1526 in Germany. Tyndale had left England in 1524 for Europe since it was neither legal nor safe to print an English Bible in England. A second edition followed in 1534. He was a good scholar and his pioneering efforts had a lasting impact. Large portions of his work are included, word-for-word, in the KJV. He was betrayed in 1535 and imprisoned in Brussels. A year and a half later, on October 6, 1536, Tyndale was strangled at the stake and burned.

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*to All Most Mightie Monarches*, 1609. He also wrote translations of some of the Psalms (I assume from Hebrew, but I have not been able to document that assumption), a paraphrase of some chapters of Revelation, and a meditation on sections of 1 Chronicles 15–25.

<sup>20</sup> Nicolson, *God's Secretaries*, 3.

<sup>21</sup> For the history of the Bible in English, see especially F. F. Bruce, *History of the Bible in English: From the Earliest Versions* (New York: Oxford U P, 1978); Jack P. Lewis, *The English Bible from KJV to NIV: A History and Evaluation*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991); S. L. Greenslade, ed., *The Cambridge History of the Bible: The West from the Reformation to the Present Day* (Cambridge U P, 1963); and Daniell, *The Bible in English*.

Tradition records his famous last words: “Lord, open the King of England’s eyes!”

Even before Tyndale’s death a complete English Bible had been published in October 1535: Miles Coverdale’s revision of Tyndale’s NT and completion of the OT which Tyndale had begun. It was two years later before a Bible appeared with the “King’s most gracious licence”: Matthew’s Bible—a Tyndale/Coverdale text, also printed abroad, but legally imported, sold, and used in the English churches.<sup>22</sup>

### ***Geneva Bible***

A translation of the Bible was published in Geneva in 1560 by religious refugees from the Marian persecutions. The NT was, once again, a revision of Tyndale’s work. It is distinctive for using Roman type rather than the traditional black letter; it also introduced verse numbers for the first time in a printed Bible. Equally significant with the translation itself were the extensive marginal notes, prefaces, illustrations, and annotations; this was the first “study Bible.” These notes reflected the theology of Geneva (i.e., John Calvin’s) as well as very explicitly rejected the Divine Right of Kings. Notes such as these became the primary reason that the Bible was both so popular among ordinary Christians and also so hated by the hierarchy of the Church of England and by King James.

### ***Bishops' Bible***

The next significant Bible in the Tyndale line was the Bishops' Bible, published in 1568. The primary impetus for this translation was the dislike by the authorities of the Geneva Bible. Archbishop Matthew Parker’s solution to the Geneva problem was to produce a translation which would have none of the objectionable features. The work was done by Church of

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<sup>22</sup> “Thomas Matthew” was the pseudonym used on the title page; it was the work of John Rogers who later became the first of over three hundred martyrs under Bloody Mary in 1555.

England bishops, thus the name. It was a revision of the Great Bible of 1539.<sup>23</sup>

The Bishop's Bible was acknowledged by everyone to be not as good as the Geneva Bible..., but the Bishop's Bible was the official Bible and as such had to be respected. Its language was heavy with latinisms and strange phraseology, loathed by the Puritans..., and avoided phrases ... which the bishops thought vulgar. But that was its problem. The Bishop's Bible was too elevated for its own good, cloth-eared and inaccessible.... Pompous, obscure and often laughable, it was never loved.<sup>24</sup>

Since the Geneva Bible was prohibited from being printed in England at the time, all copies had to be imported from the Continent and were thus more expensive than the locally printed Bishops' Bible. That was part of the strategy to deprecate the Geneva edition. "But official opposition to the Geneva Bible could not prevent it from becoming the most widely read Bible of the Elizabethan, and subsequently, Jacobean, era." The reading public "obstinately kept on buying the Geneva Bible."<sup>25</sup> A decade later, due to shifting power in the Queen's court, permission was granted to English printers to produce Geneva Bibles. In the last twenty years of the sixteenth C. there were a total of fifty-eight editions of the Bible published in England; seven of the Bishops' Bible and fifty-one of the Geneva. "There was no doubt about which version had secured the loyalty of English Protestants, whatever senior church

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<sup>23</sup> The Great Bible was also the work of Coverdale, this time a revision of the Tyndale/Coverdale text done at the request of King Henry VIII through the mediation of his chief adviser, Thomas Cromwell.

<sup>24</sup> Nicolson, *God's Secretaries*, 73.

<sup>25</sup> McGrath, *In the Beginning*, 127, 125.

figures had to say about it.... By 1600, the Geneva Bible had become the Bible of choice of English-speaking Protestants.”<sup>26</sup>

## THE KJV AS A TRANSLATION

### Occasion of the KJV

As noted above, it was events related to the Millenary Petition that resulted in the King James Version.<sup>27</sup> To address the concerns of the Puritans, the newly crowned King James convened the Hampton Court Conference in January 1604.<sup>28</sup> The Puritan party had high hopes that James would prove responsive to their demands for reform, after all, he had been king of Scotland with her Presbyterian, reformed church. The Anglican bishops, however, were uneasy at the uncertain prospects of a new king with a Presbyterian background. The stage was thus set for a showdown at Hampton Court.

Both parties should have known the direction that James would take. He had previously published two books which clearly stated his convictions on the matter: *The True Law of Free Monarchies* (1598) was his defense of the doctrine of the Divine Right of Kings, and *Basilikon Doron* (“The Gift That Belongs to a King,” 1599) set forth his theory of royal governance.

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>27</sup> I recommend the following video as an accurate depiction of these issues: *KJB: The Book That Changed the World, The Amazing Tale of Birth of The King James Bible*, presented by John Rhys-Davies (Lionsgate, 2010).

<sup>28</sup> In addition to the accounts given in McGrath and Nicolson, see also A. Kenneth Curtis, “The Hampton Court Conference,” ch. 5 of *Translation That Openeth the Window: Reflections on the History and Legacy of the King James Bible*, ed. David Burke (Atlanta: SBL, 2009), 57–71.

The simple fact of the matter is that James had not the slightest intention of promoting a Puritan or Presbyterian agenda in England. He thoroughly detested what he had seen in Scotland, and did not wish to encounter the same difficulties in England. He much preferred the Anglican system of church government, seeing the institution of episcopacy as a safeguard to the monarchy.<sup>29</sup>

The conference consisted of the king and his privy council who would hear the arguments, more than a dozen bishops and deans on one side, and the four Puritans who were invited to represent their side. The proportions were obviously slanted toward the bishops and against the Puritans. The details that were discussed are largely irrelevant for our present purposes.<sup>30</sup> The bishops were rebuked by the king in some ways, but he largely sided with their perspective. The Puritans were slapped down in nearly all their appeals. The king realized, however, that he had to give them something so that the conference would not be considered a farce. His choice in this regard was to endorse a suggestion made by the Puritans that “one only translation of ye byble to be authentically and read in ye churche.”<sup>31</sup> Although the bishops immediately protested such an idea (as they did every Puritan proposal at the conference),<sup>32</sup> the king seized on the idea. The Puritan suggestion is not specific; whether they hoped for a revision of the Geneva Bible (their preferred translation) or would be content with a revision of the Bishops’ Bible is not clear. At the least it was a criticism of

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<sup>29</sup> McGrath, *In the Beginning*, 140.

<sup>30</sup> For accounts of the proceedings, see McGrath, *In the Beginning*, 156–61 and Nicolson, *God’s Secretaries*, 44–61.

<sup>31</sup> Cited in slightly different forms by both McGrath (161) and Nicolson (57). The “ye” in the quote is an older English form of “the.”

<sup>32</sup> “If every man’s humour might be followed, there would be no end of translating,” was the reply of Richard Bancroft, Bishop of London. As Nicolson points out, that was “the voice of the instinctive authoritarian, happier with the status quo than with any possible revision of it” (57).

the Bishops' Bible. It mattered little. James's response set the agenda: he had never seen, he said, a well-translated English Bible—and the Geneva was the worst. The result was the following directive:

A translation be made of the whole Bible, as consonant as can be to the original Hebrew and Greek, and this to be set out and printed, without any marginal notes, and only to be used in all churches of England in time of divine service.<sup>33</sup>

### **Nature of the KJV**

King James designed the process to be followed for the translation and working with Richard Bancroft (who shortly after became Archbishop of Canterbury), drew up a list of fifteen translation principles.<sup>34</sup> A few are worth noting here. The first rule specified that the Bishops' Bible was to be followed and altered as little as possible. The third stipulated that traditional vocabulary was to be used (e.g., *church* and not *congregation*). The sixth forbid marginal notes except where necessary to explain Hebrew or Greek words. The fourteenth listed five translations whose wording was to be used if it was deemed more accurate than the Bishops' Bible: Tyndale, Matthew, Coverdale, Whitchurch, and Geneva.

The important preface of the translation, "The Translators to the Readers," describes the goal of the translators: "We never thought ... that we should need to make a new Translation, nor yet to make of a bad one a good one..., but to make a good one

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<sup>33</sup> The directive can be found in a number of sources including, Bruce, *History of the Bible In English*, 96.

<sup>34</sup> There is a copy in the University Library, Cambridge, with the title, "The rules to be observed in translation." A transcription of the full list of fifteen rules can be found in McGrath, *In the Beginning*, 173–75.

better, or out of many good ones, one principal good one.”<sup>35</sup> In order to “make a good one better,” the fifty-four translators were divided into six “companies” which met beginning in the summer of 1604, two each at Oxford, Cambridge, and Westminster.<sup>36</sup> Three worked on the OT, two on the NT, and one on the Apocrypha. The actual work, of which we have only scraps of information regarding the actual process, was completed in the spring of 1611.

The result of the rules and process put in place by the king was to produce a very traditional translation.

KJV was born archaic: it was intended as a step back.... The reasons for making KJV look back were three-fold: first, it was intended to reset the standard of the solid middle-of-the-road Anglican establishment.... Second, Latinity, rather than contemporary English, was thought to bring with it the great

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<sup>35</sup> “The Translators to the Reader” has not been included in printings of the KJV in several centuries. That is a shame since it contains much helpful information. In addition to facsimile editions of the 1611, this preface can be found several places including an annotated edition with a modern translation in Erroll F. Rhodes and Liana Lupas, eds. *The Translators to the Reader: The Original Preface to the King James Version* (New York: American Bible Society, 2000); as an appendix to David Burke, ed., *Translation That Openeth the Window: Reflections on the History and Legacy of the King James Bible* (Atlanta: SBL, 2009), 219–42; also as an appendix to Daniell, *The Bible in English*, 775–93; in print or ebook, “Original Epistle of the Translators to the Reader, with Notes” in F. H. A. Scrivener, *The Authorized Version of the English Bible (1611), Its Subsequent Reprints and Modern Representatives*, 265–304 (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, print: 2010; digital, 2011). The text can also be found online at <<http://www.ccel.org/bible/kjv/preface/pref1.htm>>.

<sup>36</sup> The number specified was fifty-four, but there is some question if the full number was met. Others besides the official translators were probably also involved. See McGrath, *In the Beginning*, 178–82, for details. Biographical sketches (some none too flattering!) of many of the translators are scattered through Nicolson, *God’s Secretaries*, 99–104, 125–36, 154–72, 187–215.

weight of the authority of the past.... There is a third, more fundamental, point. The world is divided into those who think that sacred Scripture should always be elevated above the common run—is not, indeed, sacred without some air of religiosity, of being remote from real life, with a whiff of the antiquarian: and on the other side those who say that the point of the Incarnation was that God became man, low experience and all, and if the Greek is ordinary Greek, then ordinary English words are essential.... In the earlier years of the seventeenth century, the weight of high Anglican politics was heavily on the side of increasing, as it was thought, a worshipful distance.<sup>37</sup>

Since each of the five supplemental translations listed was a revision of a preceding one (except for Tyndale), this gave the earliest work the greatest weight: Tyndale's where complete (the NT and part of the OT) and Coverdale where it was not. The voice most commonly heard in the KJV is not that of the seventeenth-century translators or even of the Bishops' Bible which was the formal basis of the revision, but that of a man who lived seventy years earlier who was considered a heretic and outlaw in his day. That is high commendation for the abilities of this pioneer whom C. S. Lewis judges to be "the best prose writer of his age."<sup>38</sup> Though estimates have varied, one recent study concludes that 83% of the KJV text is Tyndale.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Daniell, *The Bible in English*, 441–42.

<sup>38</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Literary Impact of the Authorized Version* (London: Athlone P, 1950; repr., Philadelphia: Fortress, 1963), 13.

<sup>39</sup> John Nielson and Royal Skousen, "How Much of the King James Bible Is William Tyndale's?" *Reformation* 3 (1998): 49–74, as summarized by Daniell, *The Bible in English*, 448. An older evaluation concluded that "approximately 60 per cent of the text of the English Bible had reached its final literary form before the King James version was produced" (Charles C. Butterworth, *The Literary Lineage of the King James Bible, 1340–1611* [Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1941], 230). Butterworth has estimated that of this 60 percent about 18 percent can be traced directly to Tyndale, 13 percent to Coverdale, and 19 percent to the Geneva Bible (231). "The chief place of honor is

Much of the indebtedness is found in the vocabulary used; the syntax is at times more heavily influenced by the Bishops' Bible—another factor which contributes to the “KJV’s more subtle sense of distance.”<sup>40</sup> Some of these relationships may be seen in the following samples.

**Matt 16:3**

- Tyndale: ye can discern ye fassion of the skye: and *can ye not discern ye signes of the tymes?*
- Geneva: ye can discern the face of the skie, and *can ye not discern the signes of the times?*
- Bishops': ye can discern the outwarde appearaunce of the sky: but *can ye not discern the signes of the tymes?*
- KJV: ye can discern the face of the sky; but *can ye not discern the signs of the times?*

**Rom 6:23**

- Tyndale: For the rewarde of synne is deeth: but *eternall lyfe is the gyfte of God* thorow Iesus Christ oure Lorde.
- Geneva: For the wages of sinne is death: but *the gift of God is eternall life*, through Iesus Christ our Lord.
- Bishops': For the rewarde of sinne is death: but *the gyfte of God is eternall lyfe*, thorowe Iesus Christe our Lorde.

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undoubtedly Tyndale's. It was he who gave to our biblical speech its organic features, shaping it out of the language of his time. He not only put the English Scripture into print, but cast its translation into such a form of words that we can instantly recognize it as the basis of our own version, regardless of the changes it endured at the hands of subsequent translators.... To Tyndale we owe the tone of simple earnestness, the plainness of speech, and the economy of words, that characterize so much of our Bible. He set the general standard to which the later versions adhered. Had he lived longer, no doubt we should have owed him more, for he left his work unfinished” (Butterworth, *Literary Lineage*, 233).

<sup>40</sup> Daniell, *The Bible in English*, 447.

KJV: For the wages of sin is death; but *the gift of God is eternal life* through Jesus Christ our Lord.

**1 Tim 3:3**

Tyndale: not dronke no fighter *not geve to filthy lucre:* but gentle abhorrynge fightyng abhorrynge coveteousnes

Geneva: Not giuen to wine, no striker, *not giuen to filthy lucre,* but gentle, no fighter, not couetous,

Bishops': Not geuen to ouermuch wine, no striker, *not greedy of fylthy lucre:* but gentle, abhorryng fyghtyng, abhorryng couetousnesse:

KJV: Not given to wine, no striker, *not greedy of filthy lucre;* but patient, not a brawler, not covetous;

**James 5:11**

Tyndale: *Ye have hearde of the pacience of Iob* and have knowen what ende the lorde made.

Geneva: *Ye haue heard of the patience of Iob,* and haue knowen what ende the Lord made.

Bishops': *Ye haue hearde of the patience of Iob,* and haue knowen what ende the Lorde made:

KJV: *Ye have heard of the patience of Job,* and have seen the end of the Lord;

Although not listed as one of the versions to be used for comparison, it is evident that the translators also made considerable use of the Roman Catholic Douai-Reims version which had been completed in 1610. (The NT had previously appeared in 1582.) This was especially true of vocabulary and explains why the KJV has more Latinisms than its predecessors—another factor contributing to its archaic sound.<sup>41</sup> In contrast to the wide variety of styles in Scripture,

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<sup>41</sup> S. L. Greenslade, "English Versions of the Bible, 1525–1611," ch. 4 of *The Cambridge History of the Bible: The West from the Reformation*

“bending the English toward Latin can lead to a flattening ... a recognisable KJV tone, from Genesis 1:1 ... to Revelation 22:21.... It is sonorous, orotund, high-sounding, a general style that make it difficult to stoop to the commonplace.”<sup>42</sup>

Another significant, archaizing element of the KJV was the use of grammatical forms that were already obsolete in 1611. This can be seen in the use of *thee/thou*, the old verb endings *-est/-eth*, and the lack of the word *its*.<sup>43</sup>

In early Middle English—long before 1611—*thee/thou* (nom/acc) was the singular form of the second person pronoun; the plural was *ye/you* (nom/acc). During the medieval period, however, the influence of French resulted in very different usage as *you* came to be used as equivalent to the French *vous*. This had significant ramifications since French practice at the time was to use the plural form only in address to social *superiors*. As a result, the English singular *thee/thou* became the normal forms for family use, to address children, or with social *inferiors*. “To address another as ‘thou’ was thus to claim social superiority over him or her. There is considerable evidence that, at least in certain circles, it was used as a form of studied insult.”<sup>44</sup> However, this use had disappeared from English by 1575, *you* being the normal form of second person address regardless of to whom one was speaking. The only probable reason for the older *thee/thou* forms being retained is that the translators were instructed to change the Bishops' Bible (and the older translations used for comparison) as little as possible.

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*to the Present Day*, ed. S.L. Greenslade, 141–74 (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1963), 167; on the Douai-Reims translation see *idem.*, 161–63.

<sup>42</sup> Daniell, *The Bible in English*, 441. *Orotund*, in case you're wondering, means “imposing, pompous, pretentious.”

<sup>43</sup> McGrath, *In the Beginning*, 265–76, discusses this at length with many examples. The brief summary above is based on McGrath.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 266.

The result was the maintenance of obsolete forms and their retention in religious contexts even after the language at large had ceased to do so, “creating the impression that religious language was *necessarily* archaic.”<sup>45</sup> This also had an impact on related verb forms. Once English had standardized on an undifferentiated *you* (nom and acc, sing and plural), the verb forms *-est/-eth* (second and third person singular) also changed. The second person ending *-est* was dropped and the third person *-eth* changed to *-s*. The older forms were retained in the KJV for the same reason as the older pronouns: linguistic conservatism despite contemporary usage.

The situation with the word *its* is a bit different. In older forms of English the possessive pronoun *its* did not exist. Instead *his* was used for both forms that we know as *his* and *its*. That is, *his* was “semi-generic,” used for both masculine and neuter (*her* was feminine). At the beginning of the seventeenth C. *its* was beginning to come into common use, but had not yet become normative. This left the KJV translators with a quandary. Introducing *its* would violate the “don’t change it” mentality, but retaining *his* as a neuter would be confusing to many readers. Their solution (if a clumsy workaround is a solution!) was to rephrase the neuter possessive forms of *him* with *thereof*. The KJV uses *its* only once (Lev 25:5, “that which groweth of *its* own accord”). Instead we read such clumsy statements as “two cubits and a half shall be the length thereof” (Exod 25:10) where we might say “Two cubits and a half shall be *its* length” (ESV), or in even more natural English, “two and a half cubits long” (NIV), which, interestingly, was also the choice of the Geneva Bible “two cubites and an halfe long” (as well as Tyndale and Bishops’). Occasionally, however, the neuter use of *his* was retained, resulting in very odd statements such as “if the salt have lost *his* savour” (Matt 5:13).

The effect of these decisions was that “the King James Bible would actually have been perceived to be slightly old-fashioned

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 269.

and dated even from the first day of its publication.”<sup>46</sup> Indeed, “its English was in fact a form that no one had ever spoken.”<sup>47</sup>

### Reception of the KJV

The publication of the KJV in 1611 was almost a non-event; it was hardly noticed. As Nicolson phrases it, “the book crept out into the public arena.”<sup>48</sup> It was not even registered as a new book; it was considered to be a revised edition of an existing one (the Bishops' Bible), so it was not even listed on the official Stationers' Register, the equivalent of a Library of Congress listing today. For thirty years it was largely ignored. The recorded responses that we do have are generally negative. It was said, e.g., that “many places which are not falsely may yet be better rendered.”<sup>49</sup>

The most dramatic reaction was that of Hugh Broughton, perhaps the most capable Hebrew scholar of his day. He had a

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<sup>46</sup> McGrath, *In the Beginning*, 276.

<sup>47</sup> Nicolson, *God's Secretaries*, 227. The English of the KJV was not as far removed from contemporary, seventeenth C. English as one of its more recent descendants, the NKJV, is to twentieth/twenty-first C. English. It has been said of the language of the NKJV that “the voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau!” (H. F. Peacock, “Review of *The New King James Bible New Testament*.” *Bible Translator* 31 [1980]: 339). Likewise, “The NKJB is in a style never used naturally by English-writing people at any time or any place. It is a curious mixture of Jacobean style with glosses of twentieth-century vocabulary” (J. Lewis, *The English Bible*, 350).

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> McGrath, *In the Beginning*, 276, apparently quoting Henry Jessey (mid seventeenth C.?) who was “noted for his competence in sacred languages.” Also the title of a 1659 work by Robert Gell is indicative of some scholarly opinion at the time (it was 800 pages long!): *An Essay toward the Amendment of the Last English Translation of the Bible: Or a Proof, by Many Instances That the Last Translation of the Bible May Be Improved.*

liability: it was well known that he could not work with anyone else. As a result he was not selected to serve on any of the OT translation companies. His response to the finished product was perhaps predictable, sour grapes from a scholar offended that his genius had been ignored:

The late Bible ...was sent to me to censure: which bred in me a sadness that will grieve me while I breathe, it is so ill done. Tell His Majesty that I had rather be rent in pieces with wild horses, than any such translation by my consent should be urged upon poor churches. ... The new edition crosseth me. I require it to be burnt.<sup>50</sup>

Likewise the Pilgrims, who sailed to the New World less than ten years after the KJV was published, would have nothing to do with the new translation. They carried the Geneva Bible with them to Plymouth.<sup>51</sup>

Despite yawns in 1611, eventually the KJV became *the* Bible of the English-speaking world. The reason for its initial dominance was largely political and can be traced to the influence of one man: William Laud, Archbishop of Canterbury (1633–45). Under James's successor, his son, King Charles I (r. 1625–49), the goal of the Church of England under Laud's leadership was to bring about conformity. The continued popularity of the Geneva Bible with its notes regarding the rights of kings was preventing the unity desired by crown and church. This and other issues would shortly precipitate the English Civil War (1642–1651) which pitted Royalist against

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<sup>50</sup> *A Censure of the Late Translation*, 1612, cited by F. F. Bruce, *The English Bible: A History of Translations* (New York: Oxford U P, 1961), 107.

<sup>51</sup> Many years ago I had my ears "scorched" on the horrors of the "new translation" by a young man role-playing a Puritan ordination candidate in the re-created Plymouth colony. He had studied his seventeenth C. counterpart very well and knew what the Puritans thought of the KJV. The Geneva Bible which lay on the kitchen table in front of him was the Word of God, not that high church production.

Parliamentarian, Anglican against Puritan. On the excuse of patriotism and concern for the English printing industry, Laud managed to have the Geneva Bible declared unpatriotic and banned its import. (Its printing had been banned in England in 1616, so copies had all been imported.) Though the official reasons given for the ban were patriotic and economic, it was well known that the real reason was the dislike for the Geneva notes and the desire to establish the KJV. “Laud’s action proved highly effective. The flow of the subversive text into England was staunch.... As a result, the King James Bible enjoyed a new commercial success—the word ‘popularity’ was not yet apposite.”<sup>52</sup>

With the English Civil War (1642–51) and the birth of the Commonwealth era of English history (1651–60), it appeared likely that the KJV would dwindle and the Geneva Bible would once again become dominant due to its preference by the Puritans. Surprisingly, that did not happen. Scholars are not sure why. One possible explanation is that King James Bibles were now available in editions that also contained the notes from the Geneva Bible—the best of both worlds.<sup>53</sup>

The English Commonwealth, however, was short-lived. The Puritan experiment with political power was not successful and the backlash which followed the death of Oliver Cromwell restored the monarchy, bringing Charles II home from exile as the new king. That was the death knell for the Geneva Bible, which was too closely associated with the Puritan party. The KJV experienced the opposite fate: “it was associated with the authority of the monarch at a time when such authority was viewed positively.”<sup>54</sup> The Act of Uniformity of 1662 mandated

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<sup>52</sup> McGrath, *In the Beginning*, 284.

<sup>53</sup> Perhaps printing Geneva notes with a KJV text did not run afoul of the prohibitions of printing or selling “the Geneva Bible” in England; after all, “it’s a KJV!” Entrepreneurs were as good at finding loopholes in the laws then as now!

<sup>54</sup> McGrath, *In the Beginning*, 289.

the new edition of the Book of Common Prayer (1662) and required that all political officials and ministers subscribe to the doctrines and ceremonies in it.<sup>55</sup> Since it was based on the KJV, the two books became the twin pillars of the newly established Restoration.

Since that time the KJV has been able to bask in the praises of nearly all English-speaking Christians—and even nonchristians. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries accepted this translation without serious question to the point where there was never any “competition” from rival translations.<sup>56</sup> It became *the* English Bible of poet and peasant alike. “The Bible [and particularly the KJV] had joined the Ancients, Homer, Virgil and Horace especially, as the educated man’s reasonable authority.”<sup>57</sup> Pastors, politicians, philosophers, poets, entrepreneurs, managers, workers, housewives, and children knew only the KJV. “Readers were increasingly from all classes: book buyers were less and less assumed to share an elitist classical education.”<sup>58</sup> It could be assumed that when anyone was quoting the Bible, it was the King James.<sup>59</sup> Not until

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<sup>55</sup> For a summary of the political decisions and results at this time, see Daniell, *The Bible in English*, 487–88.

<sup>56</sup> There *were* other translations. In the eighteenth C. there were close to fifty translations of all or part of the Bible, but none of these ever gained any traction in the market. Some have estimated that since the time of Tyndale there have been about 3,000 new translations of all or some part of the Bible, 1,500 of them in the twentieth C. For details, see Daniell, *The Bible in English*, 604 (eighteenth C.), 769 (for the entire period).

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 488.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 499.

<sup>59</sup> Roman Catholic versions never had this sort of influence that Protestant Bibles had due in part to Roman views of vernacular translation and the quality of versions available at the time. This has changed somewhat in the last half century.

the late 19th century was there any serious work toward a revision that was sufficiently different to warrant a new name: the (English) Revised Version (RV) of 1885 (and with minor modifications of the RV, the 1901 ASV in America).<sup>60</sup> The RV never really caught on; scholars appreciated the significant advances on several fronts, but it never became the Bible of church and people. Not until the mid-twentieth century did the flood gates of viable competition emerge,<sup>61</sup> but that is another story.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> There had been a number of revisions of the KJV since 1611, but none of sufficient significance to be classified as new translations. There are several different forms of “the KJV” in circulation today. Most are the 1769 edition by Thomas Blaney.

<sup>61</sup> The reasons for the flood of commercially viable translations in the twentieth C. are multiple. The technological ability to produce more copies (both in print and digitally) is in play along with the related commercial forces. Advances in our knowledge of the biblical languages and the biblical world certainly reached critical mass by that time. Social changes that encouraged diversity and individuality also blend into this picture. Although postmodern pluralists, at least of the “hard” variety, have little use for the Bible, the social ethos that has been spawned by their thought has rubbed off on many Christians with the resulting attitudes supporting the proliferation of both multiple new base translations and derivative “study Bibles.” (One expects to see the next catalog advertising *The Left-Handed Plumbers Study Bible for Gen-X Democrats in Arkansas!*)

<sup>62</sup> For an evaluation of some of the more significant new translations, see my reviews: “The English Standard Version New Testament: A Review Article,” *JMAT* 8, no. 2 (2004): 5-56 and “An Evaluation of the 2011 Edition of the New International Version,” *Themelios* 36, no. 3 (2011): 415-56. Earlier versions of both reviews can be found at <<http://www.ntresources.com/BibleVersions.htm>>.

### INFLUENCE OF THE KJV

One purpose for an “anniversary assessment” of a translation is to inquire regarding the significance of that work. What difference has it made? What value does it have for today? The KJV in particular has attracted some grandiose statements in that regard, ranging from those who consider it the only Word of God in English, to others who glory in its perceived poetic or literary qualities. Jeffrey, e.g., can gush that

this is the sort of power that makes for poetry, and for inner music, clarity of phrasing, rhetorical repetition, parallel, and emphasis; there is nothing yet like unto it for a translation that *sounds* like the voice of God.... This, though its flower fades, is still the translation that moves a writerly heart to exaltation.<sup>63</sup>

His words are not exceptional; it has been a frequent theme for several centuries.<sup>64</sup> Even the translators of the RV of 1885 are careful to commend the version they revised (though some of this may have been intended to avoid offending KJV patrons):

We have had to study the great Version carefully and minutely, line by line; and the longer we have been engaged upon it the more we have learned to admire its simplicity, its dignity, its power, its happy turns of expression, its general accuracy, and, we must not fail to add, the music of its cadences, and the felicities of its rhythm. To render a work that had reached this high standard

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<sup>63</sup> David Jeffrey, “Habitual Music: The King James Bible and English Literature,” ch. 11 of *Translation That Openeth the Window: Reflections on the History and Legacy of the King James Bible*, ed. D. Burke, 181–97 (Atlanta: SBL, 2009), 194.

<sup>64</sup> See also some of the statements quoted in the introduction of this paper. C. S. Lewis, *Literary Impact*, 14, says, with pointed understatement, that there has been “a little exaggeration” regarding the influence of the KJV.

of excellence still more excellent, to increase its fidelity without destroying its charm, was the task committed to us.<sup>65</sup>

Claims of influence, however, need to be examined more closely. I say that *not* because I think that God has not used the KJV in a mighty way—he clearly has done just that—but because we too often confuse *use* with *influence*, the fruit with the root.

One of the most perceptive examinations of the question of influence comes from the pen of C. S. Lewis.<sup>66</sup> The most basic principle to establish in this regard is that the literary effect of any good translation must be more indebted to the original than to everything else.<sup>67</sup> That is, the major contributing factor in considering influence is the Bible, not to any one translation of it.<sup>68</sup> No translation, no matter how polished and poised, can have any significant impact unless it translates *something* that is worth translating.

A religion is a revelation or it is nothing. The King James Version, so praised since the eighteenth century for being wonderful literature, is that, certainly, but properly something different. It is the Word of God in English—not exclusively..., but as fine a piece of work as we shall find.... The great love it has received is justified by its mastery of the craft of the declaration of an incarnate God,

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<sup>65</sup> Introduction to the (English) Revised Version, 1885.

<sup>66</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Literary Impact*. I have generally followed Lewis in this section.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>68</sup> I use “Bible” here of the text, the somewhat abstract (at least in English) entity which comprises the record of God’s revelation, in contrast to the multiple concrete representations of that text in any particular language.

who is at the same time sharing both ordinary life, an astoundingly strange.<sup>69</sup>

Too often the KJV *as a translation* has been credited with various forms of influence when it is really the biblical message—Scripture—that deserves the credit.<sup>70</sup> The fact that there was no other commercially available translation for nearly three centuries and none that ever gained widespread use for another three-quarters of a century means that any impact that the Bible has had in our world has, of necessity, been the KJV. Had any other decent translation been designated by the political process (which is what brought the KJV to prominence—see above) as the “chosen” version, whether Tyndale or Bishops’ or Geneva, the result would likely have been very nearly the same. Granted, it was by God’s providence that the KJV was, indeed, the version used, but that does not logically result in the conclusion that it was inspired or the best possible translation or the only translation that could have achieved the results that did flow from more than three centuries of nearly exclusive use. Were exclusive use the criteria of “God-blessedness,” then we would be forced to concede that position to the Latin Vulgate.

We should begin a consideration of influence by defining just what we mean by that word. Lewis proposes that it should be understood to mean that which “prompts us to write in a certain way.” He contrasts *influence* with *source*, which is that which “gives us things to write about.” That the Bible (i.e., not the KJV *per se*, but the more fundamental category of Scripture as a text) “is a *source* of immense importance is obvious.” Although many discussions of the influence of the KJV endeavor to portray its impact in the field of literature, Lewis argues that

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<sup>69</sup> Daniell, *The Bible in English*, 428.

<sup>70</sup> Daniell is a refreshing exception to the general trend to credit influence to the KJV as such. He spend nearly three hundred pages tracking the influence of the Bible on art, science, and literature over the past four centuries, but his theme is clearly the influence of *the Bible*, not the influence of the KJV (see *The Bible in English*, 461–733).

“the huge mass of biblical material in our literature has no place in an account of the influence of the Authorized Version considered as a book.” That is, the content could come from any translation. Just because English literature abounds with quotations from the Bible does not say anything about the influence of the KJV, even if those quotations come from that translation. It was simply the standard version in use. Such quotations depend for their effectiveness on having a different “feel” from the author’s own words.<sup>71</sup>

The real influence of the KJV is the use of that translation’s vocabulary that has become a natural part of our own language and writing (more on that below). Claims that the KJV has influences, e.g., the “rhythm” of English seem to Lewis “to be very hard to detect. Its rhythms are in fact extremely varied, and some of them are unavoidable in the English language.... The influence of rhythm, isolated from imagery and style, is perhaps” says Lewis, “an abstraction.” Imagery probably has had considerable influence on English, but it would be difficult to prove, “nor, in this sphere, would it be easy to distinguish the biblical influence from that generally Mediterranean and ancient influence which comes from the classics as well as the Bible.”<sup>72</sup>

Even style is not as notably influenced as one might think. Bunyan is a good example in this regard. He is often treated as the classic example of the influence of the KJV, “but this impression is really due to the fact that [he is] to us rather rustic and rather simple in syntax. To that extent any unlearned author of Bunyan’s time would be bound to remind us of the Bible whether he had ever read it or not.” It is not the KJV that serves as the influence on Bunyan; “his prose comes to him ... from the fireside, the shop, and the lane.” As he uses various bits of biblical imagery, it appears to be at the level of word or phrase, “the rest of the sentence comes from Bedfordshire.” Of course, “without the Bible he would not have written *Pilgrim’s*

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<sup>71</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Literary Impact*, 15–18, *passim*.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 18–21, *passim*.

*Progress* at all..., but its style might have been much the same without the Authorized Version.”<sup>73</sup>

Lewis suggests that the view of the KJV as having heavily influenced the English language is due to the Romantic movement which developed in the eighteenth century. Prior to this, the Bible was viewed as an integral part of life, not as a foreign book to be studied as literature. Only when more and more people have ceased to view the Bible as a sacred book has “the Bible as literature” become a popular approach, but “those who read the Bible as literature do not read the Bible.”<sup>74</sup>

What of the future? The more secular our culture becomes (a process that has accelerated since the mid-twentieth C.), the less popular will be the Bible as literature for the simple reason that fewer and fewer people ever read the Bible. To regress by a century and take a Romantic view of the Bible is not particularly helpful. If anything, we ought to move back another century or two and attempt to re-emphasize Scripture as a sacred text that is integral to life. As Lewis says, if “the Bible, apart from its sacred character, appeals most easily to a Romantic taste, we must expect to find it neglected and even disliked in our own age.”<sup>75</sup>

Lewis thinks that it is “very unlikely that the Bible will return as a book unless it returns as a sacred book.... Unless the religious claims of the Bible are again acknowledged, its literary claims will, I think, be given only ‘mouth honor’ and that decreasingly.” The Bible is “a book so remorselessly and continually sacred that it does not invite, it excludes or repels, the merely aesthetic approach. You can read it as literature only by a *tour de force*. You are cutting wood against the grain, using a tool for a purpose it was not intended to serve. It demands incessantly to be taken on its own terms: it will not continue to

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<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 25–26.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 27–30, *passim*.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

give literary delight very long except to those who go to it for something quite different.”<sup>76</sup>

Having sketched a somewhat negative perspective on the literary influence of the KJV (or at least one considerably more restrained than more common views), it needs to be pointed out that Lewis has not argued for no influence, only for less influence than is often perceived. As noted above, the primary influence on English, whether in everyday usage or in literature, is at the level of word and phrase. We can document a number of distinctive terms and phrases that originated with the KJV. Were we to include the translations that preceded it, the list, of course, would be longer. Though the KJV may have been the vehicle through which some “Tyndalisms” and “Genevanisms” were popularized, credit should go to the origin rather than a later user.<sup>77</sup>

Phrases that have been attributed to KJV coinage include the following, arranged from those most frequently cited in later English to those less cited.<sup>78</sup> (*Citation* does not mean a conscious quotation from the Bible, but merely the use of the phrase.)

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<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 32–33, *passim*.

<sup>77</sup> The following phrases that have been attributed to the KJV by Brake, *Visual History*, 240, are actually from older translations: “fell flat on his face,” Num 22:31 (Tyndale, Geneva, Bishops’); “a man after his own heart,” 1 Sam 13:14 (Geneva, Bishops’); “the land of the living,” Job 28:13 (Geneva); “pour out one’s heart,” Psalm 62:8 (Geneva, Bishops’); “Pride goes before a fall,” Prov 16:18 (Geneva, Bishops’).

<sup>78</sup> This list is given in Adam Nicolson, “The Bible of King James,” *National Geographic* (Nov. 2011): 49–51 as an Ngram constructed with a Google Books Ngram data set of 2.4 million words from English language books published over the last 200 years. The list of eighteen phrases that originate with the KJV is apparently from David Crystal, *Begat: The King James Bible and the English Language* (New York: Oxford U P, 2010), though I have not been able to verify that. Several others are included in the list, but there are only very minor differences from either the Geneva Bible or the Bishops’ Bible. These include 1 Kings 19:12, “a still small voice”; Matthew 6:20, “But lay up

Job 19:28, the root of the matter	Josh 23:13, know for a certainty
Luke 18:16, suffer little children	Acts 12:18, no small stir
Luke 4:8, get thee behind me	Isa 2:4, beat their swords into plowshares
2 Cor 12:7, a thorn in the flesh	Eccl 12:12, much study is a weariness of the flesh
2 Sam 1:19, how are the mighty fallen	Eccl 3:1, to every thing there is a season
Acts 17:6, turned the world upside down	Jer 2:12, be horribly afraid
Gen 4:16, east of Eden	

Some of these seem ordinary enough that they could easily originate as independent creations, e.g., “the root of the matter,” “east of Eden,” “know for a certainty” (cf. the expression “know for a fact”), and “be horribly afraid.” Others appear to be sufficiently unique that the origin of the phrase may indeed be credited to the KJV. The more likely of these might include “suffer little children” (though at an earlier stage of English when *suffer* was more commonly used to mean “to permit,” this may not have been the case), “get thee behind me,” “turned the world upside down,” and “beat their swords into plowshares.” These are also sufficiently familiar and specific as to immediately associate the original context of the saying for anyone who has read the Bible with reasonable care.

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for yourselves treasures in heaven”; Titus 1:15, “Unto the pure all things are pure.” One included is identical with the Bishops’ Bible: Isaiah 38:1, “Set thine house in order.”

## MINISTRY CONSIDERATIONS INVOLVING THE KJV TODAY

Perhaps one of the more important topics when considering the significance of the KJV after four centuries is the impact of continuing to use a translation that is now quite long in the tooth. Closely related is the need, still encountered far more frequently than one might expect, to minister in a context where the KJV has been the only translation used and continues to be used by choice, despite the alternatives that are available. (In this section I often use second person to speak directly to seminary students and the concerns they face in their future ministry.)

### Ministering in a Traditional, KJV Setting

It is still, surprisingly to some, fairly common for seminary graduates to find their first ministry in a church that has a tradition of using the KJV. These are not “KJV Only” (KJVO) churches who are convinced that the KJV is the only choice that God allows (churches holding that position rarely call seminary grads as their pastor!). Rather these are churches who have simply always used the KJV. In many such cases a young pastor who finds himself in that sort of setting is following a much older pastor who has had a long, faithful ministry in the same church—a pastor who received his training (whether seminary, Bible college, or institute) when there were no viable alternatives to the KJV.<sup>79</sup> Such men have merely continued to

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<sup>79</sup> Pastors now reaching retirement, in their late 60s or early 70s, were largely trained in the early 1960s. At that time *none* of the modern translations was available. The only translation of significance other than the KJV was the 1901 ASV, but that translation never had a following of any size due primarily to the exceedingly awkward English found in it. Scattered individuals used it, but I am not aware of any church that adopted it as their standard (though there may have been a few) or of any reference materials or curricular options based on the ASV. There were a few commentaries that used the ASV (or RV) as their base text.

use the translation they know best and the one that their people used. One might wonder how much consideration has been given to the wisdom of this choice and the advantages of using a translation that is both easier to understand (by an order of magnitude!) as well as more accurate and reliable. But second-guessing one's predecessor is not productive; you will have to begin with what you find and build from there.

Should you find yourself in this sort of situation, you will need to proceed carefully and (most importantly) slowly. I am assuming that in almost every case a church would be better off with a modern translation, but no pastor, especially a young one, dare impose his choice on a church by fiat. The pastor does not have that sort of authority (1 Pet 5:3). He must rather lead the church to understand the need for and the wisdom of a change.<sup>80</sup> This requires careful teaching and preparation. The teaching needs to unpack the biblical absolutes in regard to bibliology as well as their implications as it relates to translation.<sup>81</sup> Once that framework is in place, then the rudimentary aspects of textual criticism need to be addressed focusing primarily on the history of the biblical manuscripts.

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<sup>80</sup> By "lead" I emphatically do *not* mean, "announce the change and then convince them that they should get on board." That is dictatorship, not leadership.

<sup>81</sup> Most Americans have zero knowledge of what is involved in translation. As a result they are often snookered by well-intentioned, but poorly informed advocates of certain rigid approaches to translation. It is often claimed, for example, that verbal plenary inspiration demands a formal equivalent translation method. I have addressed that in some detail in "Verbal-Plenary Inspiration and Translation," *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 11 (2006): 25-61. For helpful resources regarding translation theory, see first of all Gordon Fee and Mark Strauss, *How to Choose a Translation for All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007) which is accessible to the average reader; more technical resources important for the pastor include G. Scorgie, M. Strauss, and S. Voth, eds. *The Challenge of Bible Translation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003); and Moisés Silva, *God, Language and Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990).

(The technical aspects of the discipline are not necessary for most people, though the pastor needs to have some familiarity with the issues.) At that point the “KJV debate” will also need to be addressed.<sup>82</sup> Likewise, the history of the Bible in English should be explored; most church folk have no idea of how the Bible came to be in English and some even think that the KJV was the form in which God originally gave it to Moses and Paul!

A key part of the preparation that goes beyond teaching is familiarity. Many people who have only ever used one translation, especially if that is an old translation like the KJV, tend to react to a modern translation because “it doesn’t sound like the Bible.” Teaching alone will not adequately address this perception. People need to be exposed to a new translation, hearing it read orally, having the opportunity to read it for themselves (without having to spend money to buy a new translation). This can be done over a period of a year or two through consistent, extensive, systematic Scripture reading in the regular services of the church. Initially a pastor might well announce that the Scripture readings for the next month will be from “translation x,” even though the regular preaching series remains based on the KJV. If the selected Scripture is also provided in printed form, hearers can follow along and compare with their KJV.<sup>83</sup> In due time a short message series might be

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<sup>82</sup> For the average reader some of the more helpful works include Paul Wegner, *The Journey from Texts to Translations: The Origin and Development of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), which deals with both OT and NT issues; for the KJV debate, the best starting point is D. A. Carson, *The King James Version Debate: A Plea for Realism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979).

<sup>83</sup> Ideally, make inexpensive editions of entire Bible books available. Some publishers have such editions available; others will grant permission to reproduce portions, especially if it is in connection with a church making a decision regarding the use of a particular translation. Printing just the Scripture reading for the day in a bulletin or other handout is not as effective, and projecting it on screen could even be counterproductive since in that format there is nothing for

announced as using a new translation (and provided a printed edition of the text for that series), then reverting to the KJV for the next. When preaching from the KJV, the pastor will find it helpful to explain some verses by saying something to the effect, “The way we’d say this today is...,” and then giving the same verse from, say, the NIV. (Whether it is explicitly identified as being from the NIV may depend on the setting! In some contexts that might not be helpful in the early stages.) Gradually increasing exposure to a new translation in this way will do much to smooth a transition.

In the interval, a young pastor, especially one who has not grown up with the KJV and has little exposure to its cadences, will likely need to practice reading the KJV text orally so that he is not an embarrassment in the pulpit. By that recommendation I am, of course, assuming that the pastor *will* adapt to his new setting and continue using the translation that has been in use for many years. In a new pastorate, preaching and Scripture reading must initially be done from the KJV (or whatever translation is in common use).<sup>84</sup> The most egregious error a new pastor can make is to assume that he can continue using his own preferred translation with no consideration for those to whom he ministers. It is not the place of this paper to address the question of how to help a church decide which translation is best; the pastor should not assume that his personal preference during seminary will be the best choice for every church in

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people to take home with them. They need to have access to larger chunks of text that they can read and study on their own.

<sup>84</sup> There are occasionally (but rarely!) situations in which a church has been dealing with the translation question before calling a new pastor, either on their own, or under the direction of an interim pastor. That scenario, of course, would substantially modify some of the advice offered here. In such situations the most important thing for the new pastor to figure out is what the course of that discussion has been and where the church presently is in terms of their decision process—and their preparedness to make a wise decision.

which he might minister.<sup>85</sup> The pastor is always in a better position to adapt to a church than the reverse.

Through the entire process, whether that be two years or five, the pastor must be careful in how he handles the authority question. The last thing one wants to do is to create an atmosphere in which people think that they can no longer trust their Bible. Running roughshod over the KJV, speaking of it in denigrating terms, or mocking its obscure passages is neither appropriate nor wise. It is the Word of God. It was a very fine piece of work for the early seventeenth C., and it has been used as an effective vehicle of God's revelatory message for centuries. A pastor's goal ought to be helping his flock discover a Bible that is *more* helpful to them, which communicates God's truth more clearly and effectively, not running down the precious book they have known and used for many years. The "Word of God" is that which says in words what God wants said; it does not establish strict parameters in which only one translation is privileged to carry that moniker. Any translation which faithfully communicates God's revelation should be respected as authoritative.

### **Ministering to Extreme, KJVO Cult Followers**

I will say less about the KJVO cult than could be said,<sup>86</sup> partly because that is not the purpose of this paper, but also because

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<sup>85</sup> A great many seminarians seem to prefer NASB since it sounds so much like the first-year-level translation that they have learned to produce in Greek and Hebrew classes!

<sup>86</sup> I use the term *cult* advisedly to describe the extreme position of "KJV Onlyism" which adamantly refuses to countenance even the possibility of any other English translation being the Word of God, viewing all other versions as perversions. The most rabid fringes of this cult argue for the direct inspiration of the KJV to the point that it is used to correct the Greek and/or Hebrew originals since the KJV represents "advanced revelation." But even those who do not follow Peter Ruckman's extremes in this regard may well belong to a cultish version of the position. I *do not* include under the cult label those who

there is little that can be said, that is, little that can be said to such people since they are generally not interested in listening to any perspective other than their own. They have adopted an absolutist, black and white, “my way or the highway” mentality that books no variation. The desire is likely (at least in many cases) a positive one: the identification of one, invariant final authority. Failing to understand the nature of Scripture and indeed the very nature of language or the historical process by which God’s revelation has been given and transmitted, they lock into a simplistic, absolutist authority claim. Misguided? Yes, but at least they have a commitment to God’s authority. The likelihood that many can be led out of their (often innocent) delusion is, unfortunately, very, very low. They have been taught that there can be no variation, so even considering factual matters which suggest that their confidence might be misplaced is too threatening for many such people to handle.

In more than forty years I have encountered many such folks, but only once have I met someone convinced of a KJVO position who was willing to consider the possibility that he was wrong. The first time I met this young engineer, a recent university graduate, he was busily “correcting” the *New Scofield* he had received for Christmas, crossing out all the changes from the KJV and writing in the correct words that had been relegated to the margin. Over the course of the next year as we talked though the issues a rather remarkable transformation took place, as remarkable as it is rare. He later went to seminary and today has been a (non-KJVO) pastor for many years.

More often (thankfully!) I have met people who have always used the KJV and have been leery of new translations, not because they have been caught in the cultic approach, but

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argue for a Majority Text position (that position is, I think, faulty, but it can be argued in an academically credible way) or even those who attempt to defend a TR-only position so long as they acknowledge that other English versions are credible. Nor do I include those who are “KJV only” (note the small “o”!) by preference or tradition. Many such people “use only the KJV,” but do not base it on theological arguments for the superiority of the translation and may even acknowledge that modern translations are acceptable; their preference is the KJV.

simply from lack of information. These are usually sincere Christians who need to be taught. For these folks, the approach described above is often liberating. Whether in my pastoral years, teaching in a local church on a regular basis, or conducting weekend seminars on the English Bible, I have had many, many appreciative comments and even gotten thank-you cards and letters afterward. Perhaps surprisingly, in twenty years of occasional weekend seminars I have never had one “blow up in my face.” That is not to say that there have not been some interesting discussions at the door or across the dinner table afterward, but I’ve never suffered verbal abuse in local churches. If presented carefully, the subject *can* be handled profitably and productively.

When encountering someone who has been caught up in the cultic version of “KJV Onlyism,” often as visitors to your church, you need to be honest and firm. Such people are either church tramps, constantly seeking the perfect church which “really believes the Word of God,” or have just moved into the area and are seeking a hospitable church home. They can become the source of dissension in a church if they attempt to “evangelize” others. No pastor likes to discourage visitors, but when the KJVO cancer is diagnosed, better to be blunt and advise them that their aberrant view is just that, aberrant in the history of the church, and that they are not welcome to spread such views in the church. Some will stay, especially if they find a good, solid Bible-teaching ministry. So long as they do not become troublemakers, hope and pray that they will eventually come to understand the issues. If it happens (as it may), it will not be a quick transition. The biblical advice that is appropriate here is 2 Timothy 2:14–26. “Warn them before God against quarreling about words; it is of no value, and only ruins those who listen.” Always remember that the pastor, as “the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Opponents must be gently instructed, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth.”

### Ministering to Those “Who Knew Not King James”

At the other end of the spectrum are younger folks who did not grow up with the KJV as did most of those in my generation. This has become an increasingly common phenomenon as the KJV has been receding into the background of (at least American) church life.<sup>87</sup> This raises several issues. For one, seminary graduates are less likely to have any familiarity with the KJV than in the past.<sup>88</sup> The implications of the foreignness of a translation that is the preferred translation of many of the older folks to whom they will minister, indeed of some entire churches where they may minister, is significant. As noted above, this may well require young pastors to spend studied time gaining the familiarity that many of their flock will take for granted. It may seem awkward to preach from an archaic translation, but if you are concerned to minister to people where they are, then it requires a willingness to adapt if necessary. Whatever you do, don't make an issue of it or comment disparagingly regarding that with which you are unfamiliar.

A different situation involves ministering to younger members of the church family who either struggle understanding the KJV (if that is still the standard translation in

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<sup>87</sup> The NIV has been the best selling English translation since the late 1980s and other translations (e.g., NLT, ESV, and HCSB) have become very popular in recent years. As of the December, 2011 listing of the Christian Booksellers Association, the top 10 Bibles in units sales in the US are as follows (in order): NIV, KJV, NKJV, NLT, ESV, HCSB, NIV, NASB, Message, and CEB. The list is available online at <[www.cbaonline.org/nm/documents/BSLs/Bible\\_Translations.pdf](http://www.cbaonline.org/nm/documents/BSLs/Bible_Translations.pdf)>.

<sup>88</sup> In teaching first-year Greek over the past twenty years I have often used the phrase, “I hear the King's voice ringing in my ears” when a student was explaining a verse based on what they had memorized (almost always, in years past, from KJV) rather than demonstrating that he understood the grammar and syntax before him. In more recent years my comment has often received blank looks since very few seminary students have ever read the KJV.

the church) or who are baffled by older folks who still use the KJV. The first is trickier to handle since you do not want to undermine the church's standard Bible. It will hopefully be possible to encourage younger folks to use a more suitable Bible for their own reading and study, but that could prove volatile in some churches. If there is sufficient liberty, then it might be feasible for younger adult classes to use a different translation. Shifting a children's Sunday School program to a different translation could be more challenging simply because that often involves curriculum issues with broader implications. In any event encourage the younger generations not to be critical of older folks who are committed to their familiar "Bible of the heart." Help them understand the history behind Bible translations, the long legacy of the KJV, and the need to respect their seniors' choices. Do not allow well-intentioned younger members to stampede a simple majority of the church family into demanding that the KJV be abandoned. This must be an "all-church" decision, and those older folks must be as involved in a decision to change as the "young bucks." That will take time and patience.

Part of the pastor's teaching ministry should involve more than Bible exposition. Although exposition is the heart of biblical ministry, the pastor should also help his people understand the bigger picture of just what church is. Too often contemporary culture views itself as "the final word" and the ultimate paragon of theological and churchly wisdom, failing to realize that the church was not invented yesterday. We may think that our way of doing church is the obvious right way—a "no brainer." Yet without a knowledge of church history many mistakes will be made that have already been made (at least once!) during earlier centuries. Though church history lectures ought not replace biblical exposition on Sunday mornings, a wise pastor will strategize how he will weave church history into the ongoing ministry of the church, both from the pulpit and in other venues. That might mean that the pastor will need to plan some study of the subject into his weekly schedule since too often church history is given short shrift in seminary

curricula or by students who do not appreciate its importance.<sup>89</sup> There are many possible options, whether planning to observe Reformation Day in the fall, using bulletin inserts, including sermon illustrations from church history, using the many DVDs available which dramatize key figures and events in the history of the church, including vignettes from church history as short “extra” features in church services, or offering classes in a training hour.<sup>90</sup>

## CONCLUSION

We ought to be thankful for the King James Version. It was a good piece of work that God has used for many centuries. Though it is no longer as effective in communicating the message of divine revelation, that is not due to its deficiencies, but to the changes in our own language over the course of 400 years. No translation can serve forever. Some are effective for

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<sup>89</sup> Even those of us whose seminary training may have included eight or more hours of church history (as BBS used to require) find that there is much that we do not know. Balancing a curriculum is a constant struggle, and students need to realize that there will still be a great deal to learn after they graduate. The very word *seminary* implies that conclusion. If I may engage in a bit of diachronic trivia (yes, I know, that’s dangerous!), a seminary is a place where seeds are planted, not where fully mature, fruit-producing plants are grown. (The English word *seminary* comes from late Middle English, “denoting a seed plot,” ultimately from Latin *seminarium*, “seed plot.”)

<sup>90</sup> As an example, I once taught a four-week short course for the young adult class in my church. The occasion was a controversy that developed in that class regarding some aspects of ecclesiology— aspects that necessitated understanding a wide span of church history to understand the issues. I was recruited and granted a short sabbatical from my regular class to walk the class through the theological *and historical* field into which the class had wandered. The entire class agreed that they knew nothing about the church earlier than their lifetime. The cause for their original consternation over doctrine was obvious.

relatively short periods of time, some for longer. Thus far no other English translation has had the longevity of the KJV, but then most of the current versions are not yet a half century old and several of the most popular have less than a decade of use. Whether any of these will still be in use in future centuries is unknown. At least at the present no one of them has displaced all others as did the KJV in the seventeenth C.; that may or may not ever happen again. A single-version situation is not necessarily ideal in any event. Though churches are wise to have a standard translation, Christians need to learn to use several complementary translations for study purposes.

Though I have spoken of the limits of the KJV in the pages above and have also commended modern translations, that should not be taken as speaking against the KJV. As one of my respected seminary professors said many years ago, to speak against the KJV is like speaking against God. That is not to say the King James is divine or divinely authorized. It is neither. When we discuss the benefits of the newer translations, we need not denigrate the old. We can be thankful for the work and fruits of the 1611 revisers just as we can for the work of Jerome or Wycliffe or Tyndale or Casiodoro de Reina (the sixteenth C. "Father of the Spanish Bible"), even though none of their translations is well suited or in some cases even intelligible in America today. Thank God for the men and women who have devoted their lives (and in some cases, *given* their lives) to making the Word of God available in English.

# **Illumination: What is the Role of the Holy Spirit in Interpretation?**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

What is the role of the Holy Spirit in biblical interpretation today? Most evangelicals assume that the role of the interpreter in Bible study is to discover the author's intended meaning as expressed in the biblical text.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, the interpreter follows an interpretative procedure in order to attempt to discover the textual meaning. However, a question arises at this point: Is the utilization of a procedure sufficient to enable the interpreter to arrive at the author's intended meaning? Can the interpreter discover this meaning on his own? Or does he need some help from the Holy Spirit (hereafter HS) to get the meaning? Does the HS have a role in the interpreter's quest to discover the original meaning?

If the HS does have a role in the pursuit of meaning, what is that role? Does he guide the interpreter to a true meaning of a biblical text? Does he enable the believer to have special insight so that he or she can comprehend the meaning of a text? Should the interpreter pray that the HS help him or her to discover the meaning of a text? Or does the HS help the believer to accept and/or apply the meaning of the text only?

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<sup>1</sup> The purpose of this paper is not to define, discuss, or defend the author's intended meaning as the goal of interpretation. For a helpful treatment of this goal of interpretation, see Elliott E. Johnson, *Expository Hermeneutics: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 23-30 and Jeannine K. Brown, *Scripture as Communication: Introducing Biblical Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 22-23.

The question relating to the role of the HS in interpretation is quite important. The answer to this question will affect the way in which interpreters approach a text in at least three ways. First, the answers may affect preparation. Does the believer expect help from the HS as he or she prepares? Second, the answers may affect prayer. Does the interpreter pray before, during, and/or after preparation, and for what does he or she pray? Third, the answers will affect preaching/presentation. Does the interpreter present the interpretation with dogmatic certainty or with conditional certainty?

There are different answers to these questions among evangelicals. Many evangelical interpreters think that the role of the HS in interpretation is to help the interpreter understand the meaning of a text. These interpreters think that illumination of the HS “is needed if man is to understand the meaning of the Bible and be certain of its truth.”<sup>2</sup> They say that the HS “brings to the Christian greater cognitive understanding of the biblical text” through illumination when he or she interprets Scripture.<sup>3</sup>

There are interpreters who think that “there is an internal working of the HS, illumining the understanding of the hearer or reader of the Bible, bringing about comprehension of its meaning, and creating a certainty of its truth and divine origin.”<sup>4</sup> These interpreters regard “illumination” as the special guidance which the HS gives to Christians to help them understand the meaning of the Bible. Here illumination refers to the work of the HS in “elucidating some passage of the Bible to a person while studying.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, Volume 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 247.

<sup>3</sup> Robert L. Plummer and Benjamin L. Merkie, *40 Questions about Interpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2010), 144.

<sup>4</sup> Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1:247.

<sup>5</sup> W. Randolph Tate, *Interpreting the Bible* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006) 175.

These interpreters hold to the view of illumination which “teaches that the HS does a supernatural work of grace in the believer’s mind and life, making possible the understanding of the Scripture He has inspired.”<sup>6</sup> This work of grace happens when the Scripture is read or heard.<sup>7</sup> These interpreters propose that illumination is “the work of the HS as he opens one’s spiritual eyes to comprehend the meaning of the Word of God.”<sup>8</sup> “It refers to the ministry of the HS helping the believer to understand the truth of the Bible.”<sup>9</sup> These argue illumination is the “ministry of the HS in enlightening the believer, enabling the believer to understand the Word of God.”<sup>10</sup> According to this view the Spirit “is available to help believers ascertain the correct meaning of the Bible’s statements, commands, and questions.”<sup>11</sup> To these interpreters illumination is “indispensible for discerning the true meaning of the Spirit-breathed Scripture.”<sup>12</sup> Accordingly, interpreters should pray that the HS would give them illumination and thereby help them to

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<sup>6</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Evangelical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 33, 52.

<sup>7</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *The Concise Dictionary of Christian Theology*, rev. ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 96.

<sup>8</sup> John MacArthur Jr., *Rediscovering Expository Preaching* (Dallas: Word, 1992), 103.

<sup>9</sup> Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1986), 116.

<sup>10</sup> Paul Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology* (Chicago: Moody, 1989), 637.

<sup>11</sup> Roy B. Zuck, “The Role of the Holy Spirit in Hermeneutics,” *BibSac* 141, no. 562 (April-June 1984): 120.

<sup>12</sup> Fred H. Klooster, “The Role of the Holy Spirit in the Hermeneutic Process: The Relationship of the Spirit’s Illumination to Biblical Interpretation,” in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, & the Bible*, ed. Earl D. Radmacher and Robert D. Preus (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 452.

understand rightly when they interpret Scripture.<sup>13</sup> This view of illumination could be called the “meaning-view” since its adherents think that the HS helps the Christian interpreter understand the meaning of the Bible.

However, there are interpreters who understand illumination differently. They hold that illumination means that the HS assists the believer in applying the textual meaning. They think that the HS provides a “dynamic comprehension of the *significance of Scripture* and its *application to life*.”<sup>14</sup> They hold that “one of the unique roles of the HS is to convict, convince, and arouse sluggish hearts by applying the truths perceived in the text of Scripture to the lives of individuals.”<sup>15</sup> They think that the HS “opens the reader’s minds and hearts so that the words can produce all their intended effects.”<sup>16</sup> Those who understand illumination in this way accordingly think that “to pray that the HS would help us recognize the truth of the text (its significance) or to show which of the implications<sup>17</sup> apply

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<sup>13</sup> Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 645.

<sup>14</sup> William W. Craig, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, rev. and updated ed. (Nashville: Nelson, 2004), 139.

<sup>15</sup> Walter C. Kaiser and Moises Silva, *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics*, rev. and expanded ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 218.

<sup>16</sup> Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in this Text? The Bible, the Reader, and the Morality of Literary Knowledge* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 428.

<sup>17</sup> An implication is a meaning in a text of which the author was unaware but which nevertheless falls within the author’s intended meaning; see Robert H. Stein, *A Basic Guide to Interpreting the Bible: Playing by the Rules* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 26-27, 35-43.

particularly to us and our situation (divine guidance) is both appropriate and devout.”<sup>18</sup>

There are still other interpreters who think that the role of the HS in interpretation is to enable them to accept or welcome the meaning expressed in the text. These think that the “basic thrust of the HS’s illuminating or enlightening work relates primarily to our *welcoming of the truths* rather than our *understanding* of them.”<sup>19</sup> They propose that the role of the HS is “to change the heart of the interpreter, so that he loves the message” that the textual meaning conveys.<sup>20</sup> These interpreters “look to God to enable them to have and maintain that humble and contrite spirit that will welcome what the Bible teaches.”<sup>21</sup>

What then is the role of the HS in interpretation? Does he help the interpreter to ascertain the meaning of a text, to apply the meaning of a text, or to accept the meaning of a text? Which role is correct? Are all roles correct? Is a combination of roles correct? The answer to this question and related questions is important to the interpreter. As stated earlier, the answer will affect interpreters in at least three ways.

This paper will look at various passages which some think teach that the HS is somehow involved in interpretation. These are passages which proponents of the traditional view of illumination think support their position. The purpose of this study is to discover their meaning and whether they teach anything about the role of the HS in interpretation. This paper

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>19</sup> Walt Russell, *Playing With Fire: How the Bible Ignites Change in Your Soul* (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 2000), 63.

<sup>20</sup> Daniel P. Fuller, “The Holy Spirit’s Role in Biblical Interpretation,” in *Scripture, Tradition, and Interpretation: Essays Presented to Everett H. Harrison by His Students and Colleagues in Honor of His Seventy-Fifth Birthday*, ed. W. Ward Gasque and William Sanford LaSor (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 190.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 197-98.

does not intend to present a detailed study of the passages, but rather an initial consideration of them.

## JOHN 14:26

### Contention

Jesus here promises his disciples that the Father will send them the *παράκλητος* who will teach them all things and cause them to remember all things which Jesus said to them. Some writers think that this promised HS's "teaching-work" relates to interpretation and is available to all believers at all times. Millard J. Erickson suggests that this verse shows that the "HS's ministry involves elucidating the truth." He adds that his promise was "not restricted to merely the first hearers, for they involve promises claimed . . . by the whole church throughout all time. It is logical to conclude that teaching regarding the Spirit's ministry are for us as well."<sup>22</sup> Stephen J. Nichols writes that this passage relates "specifically to the ministry of the HS as our teacher."<sup>23</sup> Craig S. Keener thinks that "John intends this promise for his readers, not just for Jesus' first hearers."<sup>24</sup> Wayne Grudem refers to this verse as showing that an aspect of the HS's revealing work "is teaching certain things to God's people and illumining them so they can understand things."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Erickson, *Theology*, 250-51.

<sup>23</sup> Stephen J. Nichols, "The Holy Spirit, Our Teacher," in *Basic Theology Applied*, ed. Wesley Lewis et. al. (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1995), 221.

<sup>24</sup> Craig S. Keener, *3 Crucial Questions about the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 144.

<sup>25</sup> Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 644. Grudem does say that Jesus promised this teaching function especially to his disciples (644-45).

## Content

Jesus is about to leave the eleven disciples and return to his Father. Therefore, he prepares them for their future ministry apart from him. In the course of Jesus' "preparation-discourse" (13:31-16:33) he promises the disciples that the Father will send them the *παράκλητος*. This *παράκλητος* will teach the disciples all things and cause them to remember all that Jesus taught them (14:26). When we look at this promise, we need to notice (1) to whom Jesus gave the promise, (2) why Jesus made the promise, (3) what the promise involved, and (4) when the promise becomes effective.

First, Jesus makes the promise to the eleven disciples. The plural pronoun<sup>26</sup> indicates that Jesus gives this promise to the group. The disciples are the historical recipients of the promise. Judas has left, and Jesus is encouraging the remaining eleven: this promise is part of his instructions to them. He has already promised the disciples that the Father would send the *παράκλητος* who would be with them (14:16-17). He then repeats the promise and adds that the *παράκλητος* will have a teaching and reminding ministry to them. This promise refers to an enabling work which the HS will accomplish in them.

Second, Jesus gives the promise to the eleven because he is leaving them. He makes the promise because he is going to the Father and will no longer be with them. He is preparing his disciples for his departure and their time on earth apart from his physical presence. Because Jesus is about to leave the disciples, he encourages the disciples so that they might not be troubled. This promise is part of his encouragement. Jesus' promise concerns the disciples' future ministry when he is no longer with them. Since Jesus will not be with them in person, the Father will send the *παράκλητος* to help<sup>27</sup> the disciples.

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<sup>26</sup> Greek ὑμᾶς.

<sup>27</sup> This verb assumes "helper" as the translation of *παράκλητος* in this verse. Because *παράκλητος* is a difficult word to translate, many writers simply translate it as "Paraclete." For translating it "helper,"

Third, Jesus promises the disciples that the *παράκλητος* will teach and remind<sup>28</sup> them of everything that Jesus had taught them. “Teach” and “remind” are closely related in this promise.<sup>29</sup> There is little or no distinction between them.<sup>30</sup> They are activities of equal status.<sup>31</sup> Teaching and reminding<sup>32</sup> are most likely viewed as a single entity.<sup>33</sup> Thus the teaching and reminding should probably be seen as two ways of speaking the same thing.<sup>34</sup> When the HS enables the disciples to recall what Jesus said to them in the past, he then teaches them what they

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see Barnabas Lindars, *The Gospel of John*, NCBC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 478-79. Andreas J. Kostenberger, *John*, ECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004) translates it “another helping presence” (434).

<sup>28</sup> Greek *ὑπομνήσει* which means “cause to be in the mind in a time subsequent to earlier experience or awareness” (Danker, *Lexicon*, 365-66).

<sup>29</sup> The use of *καί* (“and”) between the two nouns constrains the connected verb to be closely associated with the preceding verb (Runge, *Grammar*, 26).

<sup>30</sup> Kevin Titrud, “The Overlooked KAI in the Greek New Testament,” *Notes on Translation* 5, no. 1 (1978): 8-9.

<sup>31</sup> Stanley E. Porter, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Sheffield, England: JSOT P, 1994), 211.

<sup>32</sup> Rodney A. Whitacre suggests that “in John, to remember something means both to recall it and to understand it” (*John*, IVPNTC [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999], 364). Gary M. Burge writes that “the concept of ‘remembering’ occurs multiple times in this Gospel and is linked to the ‘misunderstanding’ of the disciples” (*John*, NIVAC [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000], 399).

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

<sup>34</sup> Whitacre, *John*, 364. He suggests translating the clause as “that one will teach you everything, that is, he will remind you of everything which I said to you.”

remember. The παράκλητος' teaching work is limited, since he teaches the disciples only what Jesus has already said to them. This specific subject matter that the παράκλητος teaches the eleven historicizes and limits the scope of the promise. The παράκλητος does not bring qualitatively new revelation to the eleven, but he evidently completes, fills out earlier revelation which Jesus gave to the disciples.<sup>35</sup> Jesus does not explain the nature of or reason for the παράκλητος' teaching, but we can assume that this "teaching ministry" was significant.

Fourth, the promise will become effective sometime in the disciples' future. The Father will not send the παράκλητος to the disciples until after Jesus goes to the Father and no longer remains with them. Sometime after Jesus departs, the "teaching-work" which he promised the disciples will take place.

### Conclusion

Jesus promised this "teaching-work" to specific recipients—the eleven disciples; for a specific reason—he was leaving them to return to the Father; for a specific purpose—to teach the disciples what Jesus had said to them, and for a specific time—after Jesus returns to the Father—when the eleven will be without him. The specificity of this "teaching-work"—the recipients, the reason, the content, and the effective time—seems to limit this promised work to the disciples. Also the subject matter which the παράκλητος will teach the disciples appears to place the "teaching-work" in a historical context which limits it to the disciples. Jesus said things to the disciples when he was with them that they needed to recall and understand. Consequently, Jesus promised them that he would send the παράκλητος to them who would both cause them to remember what Jesus had said to them and teach them what Jesus had said to them.

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<sup>35</sup> D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 505.

### **Contribution**

The specificity of the nature and object of the promised ministry limits the promise to the disciples only. First, the nature of the ministry involves both teaching and causing to remember. These are connected activities which are so closely related that they might be considered one activity. Second, the object of the ministry is specific material which Jesus had already communicated to the disciples. Therefore, the HS's ministry involves teaching about and causing to remember a specific body of historical material. The promised ministry is limited to the disciples in their historical situation. The historical specificity of the disciples' situation and Jesus' promise make this a non-repeatable situation.

Consequently, this promise cannot apply to subsequent believers and their interpretation of the Bible. Jesus said nothing to subsequent believers of which the HS needs both to remind them and teach them. (If the HS teaches subsequent believers, as some propose, we might infer that he must also cause them to remember something.)

Jesus did not say anything personally to subsequent believers which subsequent believers need help to remember and to interpret. As McCartney and Clayton note, "This passage says nothing about the HS enabling 'us' to remember or understand everything the earthly Jesus said."<sup>36</sup>

### **JOHN 16:13**

#### **Contention**

Jesus now tells the disciples that when the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide them in all truth. The proponents of the traditional view understand this HS "guiding-work" which Jesus

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<sup>36</sup> Dan McCartney and Charles Clayton, *Let the Reader Understand: A Guide to Interpreting and Applying the Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1994), 76.

promised to the eleven disciples to relate “to the ministry of the of the HS in helping the believer to understand the truth of the Bible.”<sup>37</sup> Charles C. Ryrie thinks that the presence of the HS “in the believer guarantees the availability of this ministry to all believers.”<sup>38</sup> Robert L. Thomas thinks that this verse contains “the promise of the Spirit to the believer to illuminate Scripture.”<sup>39</sup> Robert L. Plummer writes that this verse implies that “all Christians are assured of the supernatural presence of the HS, who will teach them and protect them from all error.”<sup>40</sup> Interestingly, however, Roy B. Zuck recognizes that this promise was addressed specifically to the disciples, but thinks that “all believers may be similarly guided into the truth about Christ.”<sup>41</sup> Gary M. Burge argues that the promise of this verse is extended to every Christian.<sup>42</sup> At least we see that the final two interpreters distinguish between original and subsequent audiences, an observation which is interesting from the perspective of this paper.

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<sup>37</sup> Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 116.

<sup>38</sup> For example Ryrie writes that John 16:12-15 teaches several facts about illumination and that the HS illumines the meaning of the closed canon (through study and meditation); see *Basic Theology*, 116. Millard J. Erickson uses John 16:13-14 to say that the HS leads believers into truth (*Christian Theology*, 3:874).

<sup>39</sup> Robert L. Thomas, *Evangelical Hermeneutics: The New Versus the Old* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002), 123. Thomas understands illumination to function “in connection with man’s ability to understand what is written.”

<sup>40</sup> Plummer and Merkle, *40 Questions*, 180.

<sup>41</sup> Roy B. Zuck, *Basic Bible Interpretation* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1991), 24.

<sup>42</sup> Burge, *John*, 446. See also Philip Wesley Comfort, *I Am the Way* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 136-37.

## Content

In this part of his “preparation-discourse” (16:12-13) Jesus promises the disciples that when the Spirit of truth (the παράκλητος)<sup>43</sup> comes, he will guide them in<sup>44</sup> all truth. By making this promise to his disciples, Jesus continues to prepare his disciples for his departure. He still has many things to say to them, but they are not able<sup>45</sup> to bear them at this time. The verb “to bear”<sup>46</sup> means literally to carry an object from one place to another.<sup>47</sup> However, this literal sense does not fit here. Alternatively, Jesus uses it in the figurative sense of carrying something or *enduring*<sup>48</sup> something. Although Jesus has more to

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<sup>43</sup> Jesus does not use the name παράκλητος in this promise but it is obvious that he is referring to him.

<sup>44</sup> For a discussion of the minor textual variant in this verse, ἐν or εἰς, see Roger L. Omanson, *A Textual Guide to the Greek New Testament: An Adaptation of Bruce M. Metzger’s Textual Commentary for the Needs of Translators* (Stuttgart, Germany: Deutsche Biblegesellschaft, 2006), 203; Beasley-Murray, *John*, 268; Carson, *John*, 539. This paper assumes that ἐν, “in,” is the preferred reading. For the view that εἰς is the preferred reading see J. H. Bernard, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel according to St. John*, Vol. II, ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1928), 509-10 and Barnabas Lindars, *The Gospel of John*, NCBC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 504. However, ἐν and εἰς are often confused in Hellenistic Greek, indicating little sense of difference in meaning.

<sup>45</sup> Greek δύνασθε which has the sense “be capable for doing or achieving” something (Danker, *Lexicon*, 102).

<sup>46</sup> Greek βαστάζειν.

<sup>47</sup> BDAG, 171; EDNT, 1:208.

<sup>48</sup> C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel according to St. John* (London: SPCK, 1958), 407; J. H. Moulton and G. Milligan, *Vocabulary of the Greek Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997), 106. For this meaning see Acts 15:10; Galatians 5:10; Revelation 2:2.

say to them, they are not capable of “carrying” it. The new revelation would be burdensome for them. Jesus does not give the reason for their inability to bear more teaching, nor does he explain “bearing.” He simply says that this inability prohibits Jesus from saying more to the disciples at this time.

Since the disciples are presently unable to bear what Jesus has yet to say to them, the HS will guide<sup>49</sup> them in all truth when he comes. This guidance is necessary because of the disciples’ present inability to bear additional teaching from Jesus. However, when the HS’s “guiding-enablement” takes effect, the disciples will evidently be able to bear the “truth” into which the HS will guide them. “Guide” means literally to help someone reach a destination<sup>50</sup> and refers in everyday usage to someone guiding someone to another place.<sup>51</sup> Here it seems to mean guiding the disciples into truth as a specific destination. Jesus does not define “truth.” Rather, he simply says that this truth concerns future things which the disciples cannot presently bear. Consequently, this promised guidance will take place in the future.

### Conclusion

Jesus’ earlier promise concerned the HS reminding and teaching the disciples of that which Jesus had already taught them. This promise concerns the HS guiding the disciples concerning that which Jesus has yet to teach them. Since the disciples are unable to bear more revelation which Jesus wants yet to give to them, Jesus promises them that the HS will give that revelation to them. Thus Jesus ensures that his revelation for the disciples will be completed. As the HS completes that revelation, he will guide the disciples in all truth.

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<sup>49</sup> Greek ὁδηγήσει.

<sup>50</sup> Danker, *Lexicon*, 246. See Matthew 15:14; Luke 6:39; Revelation 7:17.

<sup>51</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Acts*, ECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 342.

This promise also contains explicit and implicit specificity. Explicitly, it was given to a specific group, at a specific point of time, and concerning specific material. Implicitly, the promise was given for a specific purpose. First, it was given to the disciples at a specific time. Second, it was given when they were unable to bear any additional revelation which they needed to know. Therefore, because the disciples needed to know this revelation, Jesus promised to give it to them through the HS. Third, this promise also concerned specific material which the HS would receive from Jesus and give to the disciples. Fourth, the promise was given to complete Jesus' revelation to the disciples. This promised activity was necessary for the disciples to receive and understand complete revelation from Jesus. The HS would give the disciples specific guidance relating to a specific body of truth. This specificity historicizes and therefore limits the promise to the disciples. Their situation requires this promised work of the HS. Jesus made the promise because of the disciples' situation. It was thus a "situation-promise." Jesus' promise was the solution for their situation. The disciples' situation was unique to them and required a specific promise.

### **Contribution**

The specificity of the time, material, and purpose makes this a non-repeatable situation which restricts Jesus' promise to the disciples and precludes subsequent Christians. First, subsequent believing interpreters do not receive revelation from Jesus (as the disciples did) so there is not a time when they are unable to receive more revelation from him. Second, there is, therefore, no need for Jesus to promise them future revelation. Third, subsequent interpreters have complete revelation in the Scriptures. They do not need the HS to give them and guide them in additional information. Consequently, this promise cannot apply to Christians as they interpret the Bible. These Christians are not in the unique situation as the disciples were and therefore, do not need the same promise.

## LUKE 24:45

### Contention

Some writers think that this verse supports the role of the HS in interpretation as enabling the interpreter to comprehend the meaning of the Bible. Referring to this verse, John MacArthur Jr. writes, "The disciples grasped the meaning of the Old Testament only after Jesus 'opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.' For believers today it is the Spirit of Christ that provides comparable understanding."<sup>52</sup> Just as Jesus opened the mind of the disciples to understand the Scriptures, the HS opens the mind of interpreters today that they might know the meaning of the Bible. Robert L. Plummer, who writes that illumination means that "the Spirit brings to the Christian greater cognitive understanding of the biblical text," advocates that this verse supports this doctrine of illumination.<sup>53</sup>

### Content

While Jesus was eating with his disciples after his resurrection, he reminds them that "these happenings, specifically the resurrection, represent the outworking of the things I taught you."<sup>54</sup> "His life has been the outworking of Scripture."<sup>55</sup> He tells them that everything that was written about him in the Scriptures must be fulfilled. He then opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.

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<sup>52</sup> MacArthur, *Preaching*, 102-3.

<sup>53</sup> Plummer, *40 Questions*, 144-48.

<sup>54</sup> *Luke: An Introduction and Commentary*, rev. ed., TNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 373.

<sup>55</sup> Darrell L. Bock. *Luke*, IVPNTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994), 387.

When looking at the content of this verse, we need to answer four questions: (1) What did Jesus do? (2) To whom did Jesus do what he did? (3) When did Jesus do what he did? (4) Why did Jesus do what He did? First, Jesus opens the disciples' minds. This means he causes them "to be willing to learn and evaluate fairly."<sup>56</sup> "Minds"<sup>57</sup> means *understanding* and refers to the disciples' "capacity to comprehend or discern what Jesus says to them."<sup>58</sup> "What the disciples could not grasp before the crucifixion and resurrection now becomes clear."<sup>59</sup> They were unable to do this without Jesus' enablement.

Second, Jesus opens the understanding of the eleven disciples who were gathered in Jerusalem. This point is obvious but important. When Jesus appeared to these disciples, they were startled and afraid and thought they were seeing a ghost. Third, Jesus opened the disciples' minds after his crucifixion and resurrection and before his ascension. Fourth, he opened the minds of the disciples so that they might understand <sup>60</sup> the OT. "Understand"<sup>61</sup> means to "grasp the significance"<sup>62</sup> of something. It means "to have an intelligent grasp of something that challenges one's thinking or practice."<sup>63</sup> It involves employing

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<sup>56</sup> Johannes P. Louw & Eugene A. Nida, eds., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domains*, 2nd ed. ( New York: United Bible Societies, 1988). 1:332.

<sup>57</sup> Greek νοῦς.

<sup>58</sup> Danker, *Lexicon*, 243.

<sup>59</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 9:51-24:53* , BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 1937.

<sup>60</sup> The construction τοῦ συνεῖναι indicates purpose.

<sup>61</sup> Greek συνίημι.

<sup>62</sup> Danker, *Lexicon*, 341.

<sup>63</sup> BDAG, 972.

one's capacity for understanding and thus arriving at insight.<sup>64</sup> It focuses on getting or having insight into something. Jesus enabled the disciples that they might grasp the significance of the OT. When Jesus opened the disciples' minds, they were able to grasp the significance of the OT.

Close consideration of the content of this verse leads to three additional questions: (1) What do the disciples need to "understand" about the OT? (2) Why do the disciples need to understand the OT? and (3) Why do the disciples need Jesus' enablement to "understand" it?

First, the disciples need to know that Jesus' suffering and resurrection fulfill OT predictions about the Messiah. This pericope has three sequential parts: Jesus' first speech (44), Luke's comment (45), and Jesus' second speech (46-49). Prior to his first speech, Jesus appears to the eleven disciples in his post-resurrection body. He shows them his hands and feet and asks for and eats a piece of broiled fish. This is followed by Jesus' first speech to the disciples.

In his first speech Jesus tells the disciples that what was written about him in the OT had to be fulfilled. Then<sup>65</sup> Jesus opens the disciples' minds that they might understand the Scriptures. After Jesus opens their minds, he speaks to them again. Jesus' "mind-opening" and his speech are closely connected.<sup>66</sup> The two activities are basically a single entity.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>64</sup> Louw and Nida, *Lexicon*, 1:380.

<sup>65</sup> Greek τότε which indicates that the narrative-development is temporal in nature and introduces the next significant development in the storyline; see Stephen H. Levinsohn, *Discourse Features of New Testament Greek: A Coursebook on the Information Structure of New Testament Greek*, 2nd ed. (Dallas: SIL, 2000), 97 and Runge, *Grammar*, 38.

<sup>66</sup> Iver Larsen, "Notes on the Function of γάρ, οὖν, μέν, δέ, καί, and τέ in the Greek New Testament," in *Notes on Translation* 5, no. 1 (1991).

<sup>67</sup> Titrud, "Overlooked," 10.

In this second speech, Jesus gives needed insight to his disciples. He tells them that Jesus' suffering and resurrection were two elements of God's plan for the Messiah. By telling them this, he gives his disciples a review of the gospel material predicted in the OT,<sup>68</sup> and explains the OT in terms of its fulfillment in Jesus.<sup>69</sup> Jesus thus enables the disciples to understand now "all of the Scriptures in light of Christ's full mission."<sup>70</sup> Because Jesus opened their minds, the disciples are now able to perceive or grasp that certain OT prophecies were about the Messiah and were fulfilled in Jesus.<sup>71</sup>

Second, after the disciples understand that the OT prophecies about the Messiah were fulfilled by Jesus, they are ready to go and proclaim repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Because of Christ's death and resurrection, the disciples are now able to proclaim repentance for forgiveness of sins to all the nations. Jesus appoints the disciples as witnesses to testify about his death and resurrection. "The disciples were not just proclaimers of Jesus' message but eyewitnesses who were to share their personal experience of the risen Christ."<sup>72</sup>

The disciples are to be witnesses to the salvation which Christ has brought, and they need to grasp the significance of Jesus' death and resurrection to be witnesses. Therefore, Jesus opened their minds that they might be able to grasp this significance. He also tells his disciples that their future ministry is to preach repentance and forgiveness of sins to all nations.

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<sup>68</sup> Walter L. Liefeld and David W. Pao, "Luke," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 352.

<sup>69</sup> I. Howard Marshall, *Commentary on Luke*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 905.

<sup>70</sup> Grant R. Osborne, *The Resurrection Narratives: A Redactional Study* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 130.

<sup>71</sup> Marshall. *Luke*, 905.

<sup>72</sup> Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 621.

Jesus opened the minds of the disciples to understand the OT predictions about his sufferings and resurrection so the disciples could be effective witnesses.

Third, we need to look at the context of Luke to see why the disciples needed enablement to understand these OT predictions. Luke records that Jesus tells his disciples three times that he will suffer many things which will result in his death and resurrection (9:22; 44; 18:32-33). After he mentions two of these occurrences (9:45; 18:34), Luke comments that the disciples did not understand<sup>73</sup> Jesus' prediction or anything about Jesus' prediction because it had been hidden from them. Concerning their lack of understanding, Darrell L. Bock writes, "The point is not that the saying was utterly incomprehensible to them. The picture of the Son of Man's betrayal is a perfectly comprehensible idea. Matthew 17:23 says that the disciples were distressed. In other words, they got the message, but they could not comprehend how this could take place in the context of God's plan for his chosen one."<sup>74</sup>

It is very telling that Peter got the specific message. After Jesus predicted at a different time that he would suffer, be killed, and be raised, Peter rebuked him and said that this would not happen to him (Matt 16:22; Mark 8:32). Thus the disciples, including Peter, got the meaning of Jesus' prediction, but they did not grasp the complexity of the prediction.

The complexity of Jesus' prediction was concealed from the disciples.<sup>75</sup> Luke writes that God hid the message from the disciples in order that they might not perceive it (Luke 9:45), and they did not grasp it (Luke 18:34). Since the disciples did not grasp the complexity of Jesus' predictions, they most likely

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<sup>73</sup> Greek συνίημι which Luke uses (24:45) to indicate the purpose for which Jesus opened the disciples' eyes.

<sup>74</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, ECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 889.

<sup>75</sup> The passive periphrastic "was hidden" (ἦν παρακεκαλυμμένον) indicate divine action; see Marshall, *Luke*, 394.

did not grasp the complexity of the OT message concerning his suffering and resurrection. Therefore, the disciples needed Jesus to open their minds in order to grasp the OT complexity about Christ's suffering and resurrection. For this reason Jesus enables the downcast disciples to understand<sup>76</sup> the Scriptures and to grasp the fact that his sufferings were predicted in the OT and therefore were foreordained by God.<sup>77</sup> Jesus gave the disciples the spiritual capacity to understand the real meaning of the Scriptures.<sup>78</sup>

It seems, therefore, that "understand" (Luke 24:45) means "to perceive" in the sense of grasping the complexity and significance of Jesus' death and resurrection. Jesus enabled the disciples to have the capacity to comprehend or discern in order that they might have insight into the message of the OT predictions about Jesus' suffering and resurrection. He enabled them to grasp that these predictions were fulfilled in Christ according to God's plan.

### Conclusion

This enabling ministry of Jesus is both personal and specific. Jesus personally opened the minds of the disciples. And this ministry was given (1) to a specific group—the disciples who were a confused group, (2) at a specific time—after the death and resurrection and before the ascension of Jesus when he would return to his Father, (3) for a specific purpose—to give the disciples insight into Christ's fulfillment of OT predictions concerning his suffering and death as being God's foreordained

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<sup>76</sup> It is informative to note that verb form which occurs in 24:45 "to understand" (συνιέναι) comes from the same verb (συνίημι) as the verb form which occurs in 18:34 in "did not understand" (συνήκαν). This means that the meaning of the verb is the same in both occurrences.

<sup>77</sup> *DNTT*, 3:132.

<sup>78</sup> Norval Geldenhuys, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966), 641.

plan for his life, (4) a specific reason—God had hidden the complexity of Jesus’ death and resurrection from the disciples, and (5) for a specific result—that the disciples might be effective witnesses of Jesus’ death and resurrection to the nations.

This was a specific ministry which was prompted by a specific situation. It was a situation-prompted ministry. Since Jesus was about to return to his Father, he needed to prepare the disciples to witness concerning his life and ministry. Consequently, since the disciples were unable to comprehend the complexity of Jesus’ death and resurrection, Jesus needed to help them fully understand that what happened to him was the fulfillment of OT prophecies about the Messiah. As a result of Jesus’ opening their minds, the disciples proclaimed repentance for forgiveness of sins to all the nations.

### **Contribution**

The personal nature and multifaceted specificity of Jesus’ enabling ministry limits it to the eleven disciples. Jesus does not minister personally in this way to subsequent believers. And there is no indication that this ministry was transferred to the HS that he might accomplish it among Christians. Also, this enabling ministry does not seem to be necessary for subsequent Christians since they do not share a similar situation with the disciples. Subsequent believers have the NT to help them understand the complexities of Jesus’ death and resurrection as they concern the OT. Since the NT explains these complexities, they are not hidden from them. They are not called to be—and cannot be—witnesses of Jesus’ death and resurrection as the disciples were. Since Jesus’ ministry did not give the meaning of the Scriptures to the disciples, this passage does not teach the “meaning-view” of illumination.

## 1 JOHN 2:20, 27

### Contention

MacArthur defines illumination as the work of the HS “that opens one’s spiritual eyes to comprehend the meaning of the Word of God.” He believes that 1 John 2:20, 27 teaches that the HS provides illumination for believers.<sup>79</sup> Thomas suggests that this anointing mentioned in these verses frees the interpreter from misinterpretations and enables Christian interpreters to “have access to what may be called divinely enabled objectivity” in handling Scripture.<sup>80</sup> Plummer adds that that these verses teach that “all Christians are assured of the supernatural presence of the HS, who will teach them and protect them from error.”<sup>81</sup>

### Context

In the first of these verses John tells his readers that they have an anointing<sup>82</sup> from the Holy One, and consequently<sup>83</sup> they all know<sup>84</sup> the truth.<sup>85</sup> John emphasizes that his readers all know

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<sup>79</sup> MacArthur, *Preaching*, 103-4.

<sup>80</sup> Thomas, *Hermeneutics*, 52-53.

<sup>81</sup> Plummer, *40 Questions*, 180.

<sup>82</sup> Greek χρῖσμα.

<sup>83</sup> The conjunction “and” (καί) joins the two clauses so closely that they are basically one entity.

<sup>84</sup> The reading “you all know” seems to be more likely than “you know all things,” although both readings have decent documentary support and are exegetically defensible; See Philip W. Comfort, *New Testament Text and Translation Commentary: Commentary on the Variant Readings of the Ancient New Testament Manuscripts and How They Relate to the Major English Translations* (Carol Stream, IL:

the truth, even though the secessionists apparently are claiming to be the ones who have it. John adds that since this anointing abides in them, they do not need anyone to teach them (2:27). His readers need no one to teach them since the anointing teaches them about all things.

### Content

Four questions emerge as we look at this passage: (1) What or who is the “anointing”? (2) What does the “anointing” teach the readers which resulted in them knowing the truth? (3) How does that which the anointing taught the readers relate to interpretation? (4) Does that which the anointing taught John’s readers apply to Christians today? The answers to these questions come from studying the content of these verses in their context.

John has just finished telling his readers not to love the world or the things in the world because the world is passing away. In contrast to the one who loves the world, the one who does the will of God remains forever. He then warns his readers that many antichrists<sup>86</sup> have come into world, showing that it is the last hour. He then speaks to the readers’ situation. Some professed believers, who were part of the readers’ Christian

Tyndale House, 2008), 775. It seems likely that πάντα (“all things”) replaced πάντες (“all know”) in order to provide a direct object for οἴδατε (“you know”) since it is unusual for this verb not to have an object (Omanson, *A Textual Guide*, 505). For the view that “you know all things” is preferred; see Colin G. Kruse, *The Letters of John*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 103.

<sup>85</sup> The words “the truth” are not in this verse, but do occur in the following verse.

<sup>86</sup> John uses this term to refer to the heterodox ex-members of his own community who were denying the true identity of Jesus who were leading others astray (Stephen Smalley, 1, 2, 3 John, rev. ed., WBC [Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2007], 96).

community, went out from them.<sup>87</sup> These “antichrists” separated<sup>88</sup> themselves from John’s readers. They left the community because they did not belong to the community. When the secessionists left the community, it became quite clear that they did not belong to the community.

At this point in his letter, John tells his readers that they have an anointing.<sup>89</sup> The emphatic pronoun<sup>90</sup> heightens the distinction between those who departed and those who remain. The readers have an anointing; those who left do not. This is an important point in John’s response to his readers’ situation.

John views the anointing<sup>91</sup> as beneficial. It refers to a special endowment and refers to the Paraclete that Jesus promised to his disciples. Just as the Paraclete enabled the disciples for a specific task in their situation, in the same way the indwelling HS also enables John’s readers for a particular task. The HS which they have most likely comes from Jesus.<sup>92</sup> John’s point seems to be that his readers have the HS who will enable them

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<sup>87</sup> The fronting of ἐξ ἡμῶν (“from us”) makes it prominent.

<sup>88</sup> The phrasing ἐξ ἡμῶν indicates separation.

<sup>89</sup> Although many translate the καί which begins the sentence as an adversative conjunction, “but,” it may function adverbially marking what follows with prominence (Titrud, “Overlooked,” 4, 18). See also Martin M. Culy, *1, 2, 3 John: A Handbook on the Greek Text* (Waco, TX: Baylor U P, 2004), 50-51. It may be translated “moreover” (Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, 99).

<sup>90</sup> John writes, “You have an anointing” and puts emphasis on “you.”

<sup>91</sup> Greek χρῖσμα.

<sup>92</sup> That the “Holy One” is Jesus is the view of most scholars. See Daniel L. Akin, *1, 2, 3 John*, NAC (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001), 118-19. For the view that the Holy One could be Christ, God, or the HS; see Robert W. Yarbrough, *1-3 John*, ECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 150-51.

in this specific situation which relates to the departure of some from their community.

As a result<sup>93</sup> of possessing the anointing, all<sup>94</sup> John's readers know the truth. Having an anointing and knowing the truth are closely related elements.<sup>95</sup> John twice tells his readers that they know the truth and adds that they also know that no lie is of the truth. He refers to a specific lie—denying that Jesus is the Christ—which is not of the truth. By denying that Jesus is the Christ, those who have departed refute Jesus' messiahship. Consequently, they deny that Jesus is the anointed Son of the Father. This is the distinction between John's readers and those who left the community. The readers accept the truth of the confession which those who left deny. Therefore, the issue is not the meaning of the confession (*Jesus is the Christ*); it is accepting the meaning as truth. Those who left the community know the meaning of the confession; they refuse to accept it as truth. If they did not know the meaning, they would not be able to deny it. By way of contrast, because the readers have the HS, they are able to acknowledge the confession as truth. This anointing is present in those who have not seceded from the community, and it enables them to detect the doctrinal error of the heretics

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<sup>93</sup> Καί introduces the result of their having an anointing; see Kevin Titrud, "The Function of καί in the Greek New Testament and an Application to 2 Peter," in *Linguistic and New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Discourse Analysis*, ed. David Alan Black (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 257.

<sup>94</sup> This assumes that πάντες is the correct reading. For a discussion of the variant see Omanson, *A Textual Guide*, 505 and Matianne Meye Thompson, *1-3 John*, IVPNTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1992), 77.

<sup>95</sup> Καί ("and") functions to express such a close relationship between the conjoined constituents ("having" and "knowing") that they are often perceived as a single entity. See Titrud, "Function," 247.

who have left the community.<sup>96</sup> Consequently, this anointing enables them to recognize the truth and refuse falsehood.<sup>97</sup>

John instructs his readers about this anointing ministry of the HS because those who left them are trying to deceive them concerning Jesus being the Christ. This is the situation which the rest of the passage addresses. John reminds his readers that they<sup>98</sup> have received an anointing<sup>99</sup> which remains in them so that they do not need anyone to teach them. This anointing teaches them all things, which understood in this context, refers to correct teaching about Jesus. Since the HS teachers the readers “all things” about the person of Christ, they are able to reject the denial that Jesus is the Christ, God’s Son come in the flesh.<sup>100</sup> John is not denying the place and importance of human teachers. (John himself, in fact, is teaching through this letter.) Rather, this “no-teaching” statement must be understood in the situation of potential deception which the readers are facing.

The readers do not need additional revelation about Jesus being the Christ. Consequently, the secessionists cannot teach the readers anything about the person of Jesus Christ. Instead they are to let the correct teaching about Jesus as Messiah which they heard from the beginning remain in them. They do not need those who left them to teach them something other than

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<sup>96</sup> Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, 99.

<sup>97</sup> F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 76.

<sup>98</sup> John writes, “You have received an anointing” and makes “you” emphatic.

<sup>99</sup> *Kaí* which begins this sentence functions adverbially marking prominence for what follows. It may be translated “moreover.” It adds a strong reason for not being deceived (I. Howard Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 162).

<sup>100</sup> Colin G. Kruse, *The Letters of John*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 108.

what they had already been taught about Jesus and his messiahship. They do not suddenly need new teaching about Jesus, such as the secessionists are offering.<sup>101</sup>

Consequently, the HS enables John's readers to discern whether or not what they are hearing conforms to what they heard about Jesus in the beginning. Therefore, the anointing helps them sift out and accept what is true.<sup>102</sup> The HS, who dwells in them, continually endows them and enables them to stand firm against the deceivers and to discern heretical error.<sup>103</sup>

### Conclusion

John writes to a specific group of people: believers who (likely) live in or around Ephesus. His readers are in a specific situation: professing believers have separated from them and are attempting to deceive them concerning the person of Jesus. These secessionists want John's readers to deny that Jesus came in the flesh. The readers have a specific problem: they are struggling concerning the truth about Jesus. Therefore, John provides the answer to their struggle: the HS who dwells in them will assure them that that which they heard about Jesus in the beginning is true. John does not say how the HS does it, only that he does it. The anointing of the HS is the answer to their specific situation-problem. The HS is an abiding situation-provision. Therefore John's answer is historically bound.

### Contribution

Although John is addressing his readers' specific situation and problem, both the situation and the problem are *repeatable*.

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<sup>101</sup> Thompson, *1-3 John*, 82.

<sup>102</sup> R. Schnackenburg quoted in Marshall, *Epistles*, 163.

<sup>103</sup> D. Edmond Hiebert, *The Epistles of John: An Expository Commentary* (Greenville, SC: Bob Jones U P, 1991), 122.

Subsequent believers may face the same situation and problem. Subsequent professing believers may (and do) believe false doctrine about Christ and may (and do) attempt to get believers to believe that false doctrine. Consequently, these believers may (and do) struggle concerning the truth about Jesus. They may question whether that which they learned about Jesus is true. Since subsequent Christians may face the same situation and problem, John's answer is applicable to them. This ministry of the HS is not limited to John's readers. The HS continues to assure believers somehow, in some way, of the truth of what they believe.

## 1 CORINTHIANS 2:14

### Contention

Paul tells the Corinthian readers that the natural man cannot understand the things of the Spirit. Many interpret this statement to mean that apart from the illumination of the HS, a person cannot "understand" the meaning of biblical texts. Concerning this statement MacArthur writes, "It is impossible to properly understand God's objective revelation in Scripture apart from the illuminating work of the HS. No clear understanding of Scripture leading to powerful preaching is possible without the Spirit's work of illumination."<sup>104</sup> Illumination is necessary because of the noetic effects of the fall.<sup>105</sup> Erickson writes, "Illumination is necessary because of sin's effect on the noetic powers of human beings."<sup>106</sup>

Does this mean that the unbeliever is unable to understand the meaning of the Bible since he or she does not experience this ministry of the Spirit? According to some writers unbelievers can understand the meaning of the Bible to some degree. Ryrie

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<sup>104</sup> MacArthur, "Preaching," 102.

<sup>105</sup> Plummer, *40 Questions*, 146.

<sup>106</sup> Erickson, *Evangelical*, 33.

writes that unbelievers “may achieve a high level of understanding of the Bible.”<sup>107</sup> Plummer thinks that unbelievers “can understand portions of Scripture,” and this “points to God’s common grace in giving all humans (regenerate and unregenerate) rational minds.”<sup>108</sup> He adds that unbelievers’ “intermittent correct readings of the Bible testify to the clarity of God’s revelation.”<sup>109</sup> Evidently, these writers think that the unbeliever is able to understand the meaning of some Scripture sometimes.

### Content

Paul writes that the natural<sup>110</sup> or unsaved person<sup>111</sup> does not receive Paul’s message because it is foolishness to him. Paul refers to a person who depends on human faculties without the aid of the HS.<sup>112</sup> This type of person does not receive<sup>113</sup> Paul’s preaching. “Receive” emphasizes the passive attitude of

<sup>107</sup> Ryrie, *Theology*, 116.

<sup>108</sup> Plummer, *40 Questions*, 147.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Greek ψυχικός.

<sup>111</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 116 and F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, NCB (London: Olyphants, 1971), 41.

<sup>112</sup> David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 1001.

<sup>113</sup> The present verb form δέχεται is gnomic which denotes a general, timeless fact. See Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 135. The sense is that he will never welcome them. See Richard A. Young, *Intermediate New Testament Greek: A Linguistic and Exegetical Approach* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 110.

receiving<sup>114</sup> and frequently has the component of enthusiastic acceptance.<sup>115</sup> Paul simply writes that unbelievers do not *welcome* the wisdom of God revealed in Spirit-taught words. The implication is not that these persons are simply incapable of understanding, but that they reject the understanding because they do not have the help of the HS.<sup>116</sup>

Paul then explains<sup>117</sup> to the Corinthians that the natural man does not welcome God's revealed wisdom because it is foolishness<sup>118</sup> to him.<sup>119</sup> "Foolishness" expresses the idea of stupidity, mindlessness, nonsense, silliness.<sup>120</sup> Because God's revelation is folly to him, he does not welcome it.

Paul adds that the natural man does not have the necessary capacity<sup>121</sup> to know them. Because he is unable to know them, the natural man does not welcome them. His inability to know is closely associated<sup>122</sup> with his judgment that they are foolishness

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<sup>114</sup> *DNTT*, 3:744.

<sup>115</sup> Danker, *Lexicon*, 88.

<sup>116</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 116.

<sup>117</sup> The conjunction γάρ ("for") introduces material which provides an explanation for the previous assertion; Runge, *Grammar*, 52.

<sup>118</sup> Greek μωρία.

<sup>119</sup> At this point Paul changes the focus the unregenerate man to foolishness; see Levinsohn, *Discourse Features*, 39.

<sup>120</sup> SPICQ, *TLNT*, 2:540.

<sup>121</sup> Greek δύναμαι which signifies being "capable of doing or achieving" (Danker, *Lexicon*, 102). The present verb form δύναται is a gnomic present expressing a general, timeless fact. The idea is that he is never able to know them.

<sup>122</sup> The conjunction καί ("and") constrains the inability to know to be closely associated with thinking them to be foolish.

and gives a second reason for his not welcoming them. It is not that the natural man does not want to know them; rather, he is unable to know<sup>123</sup> them. The emphasis is on his inability. “Know” has the idea of grasping and understanding the object perceived by the mind.<sup>124</sup> Because the things of the Spirit are foolishness to the natural man, he is unable to form the right judgment or draw the right conclusion about them.<sup>125</sup> And because he is unable to understand it correctly, the unbeliever rejects God’s revelation. If he was unable to know the meaning of the revelation, the unbeliever would not reject it. Cognition results in rejection. Consequently, the unregenerate man is not able to respond positively to the things from the Spirit.<sup>126</sup>

The unsaved man is not able to understand God’s revelation because it is spiritually discerned. His inability to discern<sup>127</sup> spiritually provides the cause for the natural man’s inability to understand. It means to investigate or examine in a judicial sense which results in a judgment. “To discern” is used here with the sense of being able to make appropriate judgments.<sup>128</sup> Because the unsaved man cannot make a correct assessment about God’s revelation, he cannot understand it. The truths of God are spiritually<sup>129</sup> discerned. The HS enables a person to make right judgments about God’s truth so that he can understand it. The unbeliever without the Spirit cannot do that.

<sup>123</sup> Greek γνῶναι.

<sup>124</sup> *DNTT*, 2:391.

<sup>125</sup> Danker, *Lexicon*, 80.

<sup>126</sup> Ciampira and Rosner, *1 Corinthians*, 135.

<sup>127</sup> Greek ἀνακρίνω.

<sup>128</sup> Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 117. See also Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 273.

<sup>129</sup> Greek πνευματικῶς which designates “by means of the Spirit” (Fee, *1 Corinthians*, 117).

### **Conclusion**

The structure of this verse makes Paul's argument clear. Paul gives his proposition: the natural man does not welcome the things of the Spirit. This requires a reason why the natural man does not welcome them. Paul gives two closely related reasons: (1) they are foolishness to him and (2) he is not able to understand them. His second reason explains the first one. Because he is not able to understand the realities of God's revelation, it is foolishness to him. (If he does not understand the meaning of God's revelation, he is not able to consider it foolishness and reject it.) He then says why (cause) they are not understandable and therefore foolishness: they must be spiritually evaluated. Since the natural man does not have the Spirit, he is unable to evaluate correctly God's revelation of which he knows the meaning. Consequently, he judges them to be foolish and rejects them.

Conversely, the Holy Spirit enables the believer to evaluate correctly God's revelation of which he knows the meaning. Therefore, he is able to understand (assess, appraise, and evaluate) what he knows so that it is not foolishness to him. Consequently, he welcomes the truth of what he knows. Thus the ministry of the Spirit concerns enabling the believer to welcome or accept God's revelation.

### **Contribution**

Paul is not addressing a specific situation with specific circumstances. Rather, he is explaining the response of the natural man who hears the Word of God and understands its meaning but does not welcome or accept it because it is foolishness to him since he does not understand its realities. He does not have the Spirit to help him make correct judgments about what he hears and of which he knows the meaning. This passage does not teach that the Holy Spirit helps the interpreter understand the meaning of the Bible. Rather, it teaches that the Spirit helps the believer welcome or accept the truth of God's revelation. Since this is a timeless teaching, it is applicable to subsequent believers.

## 2 TIMOTHY 2:7

### Content

Although this verse does not mention the HS, nevertheless, it may contribute to a proper understanding of the role of the HS in interpretation. Paul does not want Timothy to be ashamed of him because he is in prison. Instead, he wants him to be strengthened in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. To encourage Timothy to be strong, he instructs him through three metaphors—the soldier, the athlete, and the farmer—three metaphors that emphasize that Timothy’s work will be strenuous, requiring labor and suffering.

Therefore, Timothy must (1) endure hardness as good soldier, (2) compete according to the rules as an athlete, and (3) have first share of the crops as a farmer. Paul then commands Timothy to think about the metaphors which he has just written (2:3-6). As Timothy thinks about these metaphors, the Lord will give him understanding in them. Stott interprets, “What Paul here expresses is a promise, and not merely a wish.”<sup>130</sup> So Paul alerts Timothy to pay attention to what he has just written.

He commands<sup>131</sup> Timothy to think about<sup>132</sup> the three metaphors he has used to encourage him. “Think about” means “to reflect upon, contemplate”<sup>133</sup> with the sense “to think over

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<sup>130</sup> John R. W. Stott, *Guard the Gospel: The Message of 2 Timothy* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1973), 59.

<sup>131</sup> It is a specific command which is an order for action to be done in this particular instance; see Buist M. Fanning, *Verbal Aspect in New Testament Greek* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990), 327-29.

<sup>132</sup> Greek νοέω which has the basic sense “to give thought to” (Danker, *Lexicon*, 242).

<sup>133</sup> William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, WBC (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 511.

and so come to a right understanding.”<sup>134</sup> Paul wants Timothy to *begin* and *continue*<sup>135</sup> to reflect upon what he has just written. Timothy should make it his habit to think about what Paul is writing to him.<sup>136</sup> Paul explains to Timothy that he needs to think about the metaphors because the Lord will give him understanding when he does.

This promise<sup>137</sup> depends on Timothy’s pondering what Paul has written. The Lord’s help in understanding comes as Timothy thinks about the metaphors. The verb “understand”<sup>138</sup> means insight into something or proper understanding of something.<sup>139</sup> The related verb means “to have an intelligent grasp of something that challenges one’s thinking or practice.”<sup>140</sup> It simply means “putting things together.”<sup>141</sup> The Lord will give Timothy insight so that he can put the principles of Paul’s teaching together with the different situations which arise in his life so that he will be a good minister.

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<sup>134</sup> I. Howard Marshall, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999), 731.

<sup>135</sup> The imperative νόει (“think about”) has an ingressive-progressive force. It stresses both the inception and progress of the thinking commanded. See Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 721.

<sup>136</sup> Fanning, *Verbal*, 333.

<sup>137</sup> The future tense indicates something that will take place or come to pass.

<sup>138</sup> Greek σύνεσιν.

<sup>139</sup> *EDNT*, 3:305.

<sup>140</sup> *BDAG*, 972.

<sup>141</sup> Luke Timothy Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 367.

Elsewhere Paul commands the Ephesians to “understand the will of the Lord.”<sup>142</sup> Paul’s use of “understand” in his command to the Ephesians is similar to Paul’s promise to Timothy since the readers already *know* the Lord’s will. Paul wants Timothy and the Ephesians to move from the theoretical to the actual. Paul does not have in mind a simple intellectual understanding of the Lord’s will. “Understand” signifies “to understand, comprehend, grasp”<sup>143</sup> and goes beyond simple cognitive awareness to applied knowledge.<sup>144</sup> This understanding is more than just the understanding of facts; it is an intelligent grasp of knowledge that has resulting consequences.<sup>145</sup> Paul wants the Ephesians’ understanding of the Lord’s will to lead to right conduct. They need to take pains to apprehend the Lord’s will and act accordingly.<sup>146</sup> This insight is necessary since true understanding of the Lord’s will does not remain merely theoretical, but instead involves actual practice.<sup>147</sup>

### Conclusion

There is an important biblical balance in this verse. Paul instructs Timothy. Timothy must then reflect on the apostle’s

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<sup>142</sup> Συμβίετε (Eph 5:17)

<sup>143</sup> *EDNT*, 3:307.

<sup>144</sup> Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians*, ECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 347.

<sup>145</sup> Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 698.

<sup>146</sup> E. K. Simpson and F. F. Bruce, *Commentary of the Epistles to the Ephesians and Colossians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 124.

<sup>147</sup> Ernest Best, *Ephesians*, ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark: 1980), 506.

teaching. Since Paul wants him to think about his teaching, Timothy must understand its meaning. (The meaning of the metaphors is not difficult). Timothy's responsibility is to apply his mind to Paul's word. As Timothy thinks about Paul's words, the Lord will give him understanding concerning them. The Lord will show Timothy how the teaching relates to his life and ministry. He will give him the significance of Paul's teaching as Timothy contemplates the meaning of Paul's words.

For Timothy to minister as Paul desires, two processes are necessary, the one human and the other divine. Timothy must reflect on Paul's teaching, listening to it carefully, and then apply his mind to it. It is through this process that the Lord will give him understanding in it.<sup>148</sup>

### **Contribution**

Most likely the Lord gives understanding to Timothy through the HS. If so, is it possible then that this ministry is illumination? Additionally, is it possible that this procedure is the balanced study procedure for subsequent believers? (The believer interprets a passage, ponders its meaning, and the Spirit gives illumination concerning its significance). If so, is this the means and meaning of Holy Spirit illumination? This possibility might be worth thinking about.

## **CONCLUSION: THE ROLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN INTERPRETATION**

These verses do not appear to teach that the Holy Spirit "does a supernatural work of grace in the believer's mind and life, making possible understanding of the Scripture that He has inspired."<sup>149</sup> The specificity of the Spirit's ministry of teaching, causing to remember, and guiding that Jesus promised to the disciples is limited to the disciples. Likewise, the specificity of

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<sup>148</sup> Stott, *2 Timothy*, 59.

<sup>149</sup> Erickson, *Evangelical*, 33.

the enlightening ministry of Jesus when he explained the complexities of his death and resurrection are also limited to the disciples. Conversely, a close reading of 1 John demonstrates that the Spirit's confirming ministry for John's readers is timeless and repeatable and applicable to subsequent believers. Likewise, the Spirit's accepting ministry for the Corinthian believers is general and repeatable and applicable to subsequent believers.

In this vein, may we study the Scriptures carefully to discover the author's intended meaning, seek to determine its significance, and commit to do the Word of God.

# ***Love Wins* by Rob Bell: A Biblical and Theological Critique**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Rob Bell is a well-known pastor, popular conference speaker, and author who until recently served as the founding and lead pastor of the Mars Hill Bible Church in Grandville, Michigan. In a recent interview with *Christianity Today*, Bell announced that he is leaving this megachurch of over 10,000 to follow a “calling to share God’s love” in new ways. He attended both Wheaton College and Fuller Seminary and has published numerous popular articles and books (e.g., *Velvet Elvis*, *Sex God*, *Jesus Wants to Save Christians*, and *Drops Like Stars*), and he is part of the larger postconservative project to post-modernize the Christian faith.

Rarely has a book created such a response so quickly. Even before *Love Wins* was published<sup>1</sup>, Bell’s *vimeo* introductory video was widely viewed. A number of high-profile bloggers and scholars criticized Bell’s *vimeo* video and upcoming book as promoting a kind of universalism. Bell’s supporters alleged that his antagonists were shortsighted, mean spirited and violated the sense of Matthew 18:15-17 for not personally discussing their concerns with Bell. A number of very good reviews have

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<sup>1</sup> Rob Bell, *Love Wins: A Book about Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person who Lived* (New York: HarperOne, 2011). References to this book appear parenthetically in the text.

been published<sup>2</sup> along with thousands upon thousands of blogging comments as well as a number of books (e.g., *God Wins: Heaven, Hell, and Why the Good News is Better than Love Wins*, by Mark Galli; *Christ Alone* by Mike Wittmer; *Erasing Hell* by Francis Chan and Preston Sprinkle)—all directly addressing Bell's book, *Love Wins*.

This paper will primarily focus on Bell's postconservative theological method along with a brief survey of the book.

### BELL'S THESIS AND CONCLUSION

Bell states that he wrote the book for “those everywhere, who have heard some version of the Jesus story that caused their pulse rate to rise, their stomach to churn, and their heart to utter those resolute words, ‘I would never be a part of that’” (viii). He explains that this stomach-churning view entails that a “select few Christians will spend forever in a peaceful, joyous place called heaven, while the rest of humanity spends forever in torment and punishment in hell with no chance for anything better” (viii) and that this version of hell is not central to Christianity (viii). Bell clarifies that his book is not simply addressing a method of evangelization but is about the gospel and the afterlife.

Bell clearly rejects the mainline orthodox view of eternal torment when he writes that it is “misguided and toxic and ultimately subverts the contagious spread of Jesus message of love, peace, forgiveness, and joy that our world needs desperately to hear” (viii). Bell explains that he wants to introduce the readers to the “ancient ongoing discussion surrounding the resurrected Jesus in all its vibrant, diverse, messy, multivoiced complexity” (xi). Unfortunately while Bell

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<sup>2</sup> E.g., Glenn R. Kreider, review of *Love Wins: A Book About Heaven, Hell, and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived*, by Rob Bell, *BSac* 168 (July-Sept 2011): 353-56. And Kevin DeYoung's full-review article entitled, "God Is Still Holy and What You Learned in Sunday School Is Still True: A Review of *Love Wins* by Rob Bell," <thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/kevindeyoung> (accessed 17 January 2012).

advocates his own view and allows for other views in this “ongoing discussion,” he dissuades and disallows the mainline orthodox view of hell as being part of that “complex conversation.”

Bell’s thesis is that God continues to extend his loving invitation of salvation into the afterlife for those who have died without Christ. According to Bell, individuals who are suffering in hell will have multiple opportunities to respond to God’s love. While Bell does not technically and explicitly affirm or deny a classic form of universalism and while he does affirm that some people may exercise freedom to remain in hell, he also posits that hell may be eventually emptied through this ongoing afterlife invitation; thus, he does embrace a form of universalism.

Shortly before the book was published the Mars Hill Bible Church posted a *Love Wins Commentary* which states the focus of the book:

God’s love is central to our beliefs and practices. It starts with love and ends with love. We embrace the reality of God’s love being bigger, broader and more all-encompassing than our humanity can understand and will accomplish more than we could ever imagine. . . . Love is central to God’s character and nature and *Love Wins* helps us re-imagine the expansiveness of God’s love. . . . In *Love Wins* Rob is promoting the idea that perhaps God’s invitation extends into the life to come and may exist for all to accept that invitation.<sup>3</sup>

The *Love Wins Commentary* then compares and contrasts what they nuance as Pluralist Universalism (which they claim to deny) with what they label as a Christian/Hopeful Universalism:

**Pluralist Universalism** [emphasis his] believes that everyone who ever lived will be saved, regardless of that person’s religious faith. This is what most people think of when they hear the term

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<sup>3</sup> *Love Wins Commentary* at <<http://marshill.org/>> (accessed 15 July 2011).

universalism. Most Christians, including Mars Hill and Bell, reject this position.<sup>4</sup>

**Christian Universalism** believes in all the classic evangelical and orthodox doctrines [Trinity, creation, sin, atonement, salvation through Christ alone, grace alone, faith alone, the return of Christ] {bracketed information theirs} and also in hell. But, one's eternal destiny is not fixed at death so that those in hell can repent and trust in Christ, and in the end all will make this decision without coercion.

**Hopeful Universalism** is very similar to Christian universalism. It too believes in all the classic evangelical and orthodox doctrines. The difference is that hopeful universalism does not claim certainty that all will be saved. It leaves room for the possibility that some may reject God's invitation for all eternity yet with the hope that all might be saved.<sup>5</sup>

Bell and the publisher promote the book by saying that “Rob Bell addresses one of the most controversial issues of faith—the afterlife—arguing, would a loving God send people to eternal torment forever...? With searing insight, Bell puts hell on trial, and his message is decidedly hopeful—eternal life doesn't start when we die; it starts right now. And ultimately, Love Wins.”<sup>6</sup> In a clear caricature of the mainline orthodox position of eternal death, Bell's picture and quotation appear on the back cover sharing that

God loves us. God offers us everlasting life by grace, freely, through no merit on our part. Unless you do not respond the right way. Then God will torture you forever in hell.” [followed by] “Huh?”

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<sup>4</sup> This category is really artificial since Bell argues in his book that people who have different faith commitments to non-Christian religions can still repent and believe during the afterlife.

<sup>5</sup> *Love Wins Commentary*.

<sup>6</sup> <<https://www.rob主bell.com/lovewins/>> (accessed 15 October 2011).

Clearly Bell presents his thesis as more than simply a *possibility* that the salvation invitation *may* extend into the afterlife.

Later in the chapter, “Does God Get What God Wants?” Bell argues that

many people find Jesus compelling, but don't follow him, because of the parts about “hell and torment and all that.” Somewhere along the way they were taught that the only option when it comes to Christian faith is to clearly declare that a few, committed Christians will “go to heaven” when they die and everyone else will not . . . . no looking back, no chance for a change of heart, make your bed now lie in it . . . forever . . . . Telling a story in which billions of people spend forever somewhere in the universe trapped in a black hole of endless torment and misery with no way out isn't a very good story. . . . In contrast, everybody enjoying God's good world together with no disgrace or shame, justice being served, and all the wrongs being made right is a better story. (110-11)

Bell attempts to support his thesis through (1) provocative and aggressive *question-asking*, (2) through false theological and exegetical analogies, and (3) through anecdotal stories of how the mainline orthodox position is offensive to the nature of God's love and love for people thus reducing the mainline orthodox position to subjective sentimentalism.

## **BASIC VALIDATION OF ANY THEOLOGICAL METHOD**

A model for theological method is necessary since the Scripture is progressively revealed and no one topic is fully addressed by any one author. Any valid theological model must be minimally measured by the following components, and Bell's book fails in each case:

*Canonical:* Is first priority and authority given to the canonical books of Scripture over personal experience, personal sensibilities, other writing, general revelation, speculation, etc.?<sup>7</sup>

*Comprehensive:* Is all biblical teaching on a topic examined with greater weight given to the clearest and most definitive passages, or are selective/vague passages used in a mere proof-texting manner?

*Consistent hermeneutical approach:* Is the interpretive philosophy consistently used within the theological method or does the hermeneutical philosophy vary from topic-to-topic, passage-to-passage, covenant-to-covenant, etc.?

*Congruency:* Does the method allow for both harmony, complexity, and tension without direct contradiction or does the theological method contain or create direct internal contradictions and/or forced harmonization to remove complexities so as to alter the author's meaning of Scripture?

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<sup>7</sup> Any serious theological reflection and method must focus on the author's meaning of what was revealed. Deuteronomy 29:29 says, "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law." The biblical authors directed believers to focus on what was revealed and to avoid speculation and divination to acquire what was not revealed. Many times interpreters ask the wrong question or the right question in the wrong way about a particular subject matter or text which creates difficult interpretive issues. Similarly in the Great Commission, Jesus commanded, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you" (Matt 28:19-20). All that Jesus commanded entails both what Jesus himself taught as well as what Jesus continued to teach (through the Spirit) to his apostles since the Apostles were agents of the Scripture (1 Cor 14:37; 1 Thess 4:15; 2 Pet 3:2; Rev 1-3). The task then of the Great Commission actually necessities that believers collect, summarize, and teach all that the Scripture says about various issues (This section is partially adapted from Grudem's *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994], 21-38).

*Coherence:* Does the theological model demonstrate a logical ordering of investigation providing greatest weight to didactic teaching noting the “prescriptive vs. descriptive” or the “is vs. ought,” and does the model reveal clear steps of investigation.

*Call of Response/Application:* Does the call for response(s) relate to the verbal meaning of the Scriptural truth/passage that is being considered and does the call of response reflect the specificity of the truth/passage? The call for response or significance of Scripture is always controlled by the authorial meaning of Scripture; hence the degree to which a pronouncement, pattern, or principle transfers into the contemporary setting is carefully evaluated. The *degree of transfer* is the degree to which the target audience is similar to or different from the originally intended recipients.

When evaluating any theological method or truth assertion, we should also surface the components that should not just be used. These components include “the book created healthy discussion” or “I connected to some of the stories in the book” or the “author is a good communicator” or “the author raised some good issues” or “the book progressed a dialogue.” Ultimately any truth assertions or thesis must be evaluated by the *canonical, comprehensive, consistent hermeneutical, congruent, coherent, call/response test of Scripture*. Jesus and the apostles repeatedly referred people back to the Scriptures as an absolute authority which they assumed could be read and understood regardless of one’s culture filters or personal stories.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> As an example, believers are enjoined to compare teachers and their message with the revealed truth of the Scriptures (Matt 24:24-25; 2 Thess 2:1-5; 1 John 4:1-6; 2 John 9-11). Paul admonishes Titus about men “who turn away from the truth” (Titus 1:14). In each case the apostolic deposit of truth is to serve as the measurement and not personal sensibilities. Paul warns that Satan can transform himself into an angel of light and deceive others through false apostles and deceitful workers (2 Cor 11:13-14); thus the Scriptures always served as the final arbiter of truth and error. Such certainty and authority exists that false teachers are to be silenced and removed from the assembly (1 Tim 4:1-3; 2 Tim 2:14-19). Whether Paul stood before the

## SUMMARY COMMENTS REGARDING THE BOOK

Prior to discussing Bell's theological method, I will make some summarizing comments.

**First, Bell's thesis is a double-edged sword that reveals insurmountable spiritual problems.** If his thesis is correct that people will have multiple opportunities to respond to God's love while in hell, then the so-called toxic damage caused by the mainline position on eternal death is reversible and should be more tolerated by Bell. After all as Bell alleges, everyone will have multiple opportunities in the life-to-come to respond to Jesus and everyone must include those who were exposed to this so-called toxic mainline position. On the other hand, however, if the mainline orthodox position is correct (as it is), then individuals have opportunity only in this lifetime to respond to the gospel and their afterlife is then a fixed destiny. If Bell is genuinely concerned about the correct teaching on the

Sanhedrin council, Felix (Acts 24), or Festus (Acts 25), the Areopagus (Acts 17:16-34), he presented the gospel in a clear, authoritative, and persuasive manner. In Titus 1:9, Paul said the church leader should hold "fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, that he may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict."

God's speech entails disclosing truth that was unknowable or even unimaginable but now knowable through his disclosure. And the Scripture writers affirm that even after these mysteries were made known through verbal revelation, the readers of that verbal revelation could understand and adhere to them in a non-provisional manner. Some of these revealed mysteries were to serve as the very foundation of communities. These verbally revealed mysteries were to preside over any other knowledge claims (no matter how deep seated); thus Scripture was to serve as objective adjudicators over against one's own biases, pre-understandings, prejudices, false prophets who could perform great signs, and even angels (Gal 1:1-6). This view of truth is very different than Bell's and the postconservatives' calling for an open, tolerant, safe exploration of Jesus leading which results in a journey of trusting the mysteries of God.

afterlife, one would think that he would be at least open to true dialogue regarding the default, mainline orthodox historical position since it is by far the safest position. But instead he disallows this position while entertaining several other extreme positions.<sup>9</sup> As the final and ultimate support of his own position that his Christian/Hopeful universalism view is most likely correct and that the traditional view of hell is most certainly incorrect, he appeals to the notion of trust and mystery. He asserts we simply need to trust God regarding this mystery as he writes,

Will everybody be saved, or will some perish apart from God forever because of their choices? Those are questions, or more accurately, those are tensions we are free to leave fully intact. We don't need to resolve them or answer them because we can't, and

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<sup>9</sup> Kevin DeYoung correctly surfaces this issue: "Instead of summoning sinners to the cross that they might flee the wrath to come and know the satisfaction of so great a salvation, *Love Wins* assures people that everyone's eternity ends up as heaven eventually. The second chances are good not just for this life, but for the next. And what if they aren't? What if Jesus says on the day of judgment, "Depart from me, I never knew you" (Matt 7:23)? What if at the end of the age the wicked and unbelieving cry out, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb" (Rev 6:16)? What if outside the walls of the New Jerusalem "are the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood" (Rev 22:15)? What if there really is only one name "under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12)? And what if the wrath of God really remains on those who do not believe in the Son (John 3:18, 36)? If *Love Wins* is wrong—if the theology departs from the apostolic good deposit, if the biblical reasoning falls short in a hundred places, if the god of *Love Wins* and the gospel of *Love Wins* are profoundly mistaken—if all this is true, then what damage has been done to the souls of men and women?" Kevin DeYoung, "God Is Still Holy," 20.

so we simply respect them, creating space for the freedom that love requires. (115)

Bell attempts to support this idea of trusting in a mystery through allusions to Romans 16 and Ephesians 3. He argues that the mystery in Ephesians 3:1–7 is a reference to Jesus who takes his role seriously in saving and rescuing everybody and who cannot be contained in any cage, especially the cage “called Christianity” (150-51). The *Love Wins Commentary* concludes similarly by saying, “*Love Wins* also points to the hope of humanities restoration as a possibility while leaving room for all kinds of interpretations of the future. All the different views of the future have elements of speculation in them and *Love Wins* points to the need to embrace that mystery. . . .”<sup>10</sup> In Ephesians 3:1–7, Paul clarifies that this “mystery is *that* the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel” (ESV). Paul further claims that this mystery was revealed to him by direct revelation and that it could be understood by reading his letter.<sup>11</sup> The notion of mystery in the NT refers to revealed truth that was otherwise unknowable and not formerly revealed.

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<sup>10</sup> *Love Wins Commentary*.

<sup>11</sup> Notice how the mystery, which was foundational and fundamental to the NT community, was a result only of direct revelation. Paul says he (and a unique group of others—apostles and prophets) received it by revelation (divine disclosure). Paul directs the Ephesian believers to read what he (Paul) had received. Paul assumes that his verbalizing the mystery in no way detracted from or accommodated what God had revealed. Further, he assumes that the Ephesian believers could read and understand this verbal revelation. The sense of knowability and authority is further heightened by the understanding that this verbal revelation (Jew-Gentile unity in Christ) was fundamentally a new and different truth for both the Jews and the Gentiles. In that day’s milieu, the Jews and Gentiles could not have been more situated in their cultural and social views of separation and divisiveness (even hatred) toward one another. This verbal revelation was to erupt into and usurp their situatedness. Indeed, this revealed mystery was to serve as a most basic, doctrinal formulation of the new

These revealed truths provide an actual real justified knowledge of the truth. Conversely Bell completely redefines mystery to make it mean the exact opposite from its NT sense as he suggests that mystery is unknowable.

Bell writes that he is opposed to categories, biases, labels, and assumptions regarding Jesus so that everyone can “celebrate him as the way, the truth, and the life, at the same time respect the vast, expansive, generous mystery that he is” (160). Unfortunately Bell distorts the true depth, paradoxes, and complexities of Scripture through his humanly distorted and contrived explanations. He uses his postmodern epistemological-hermeneutical methods to strip away the wonderful paradoxes and complexities of Scripture. God defines himself as both a loving/ merciful and as a wrathful/ judging God, though Bell refuses to accept other disclosed attributes. In many respects he mirrors the modern rationalist’s method of mere human-centered logic of which he is so critical.

As an example, Scripture clearly teaches that God’s justice will be revealed in the final judgment (1 Pet 1:17) and the entire world will be held accountable. For this reason every mouth will be closed. The entire world will realize their accountability before God (Rom 3:19). No one will be able to claim their judgment is unfair as they kneel before a holy God. Yet Bell disagrees and conjectures that if the punishment is eternal for *simply not believing the right way*, then God is somehow unjust or unfair or unloving. He places his conjecture above clear revelation. He redresses the old argument that eternal punishment is unfair because of the apparent disproportion between temporary sin resulting in eternal punishments. As Grudem points out, this argument wrongly speculates that we

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community! In Galatians 1:6-24, Paul again asserts divine disclosure for his teaching and establishes his divine disclosure as objective criteria for all other gospels. There is no sense of provisionality but rather a sense of objectivity and certainty. This sense of objective certainty in Galatians 1:6-24 is so objective and so certain that it can adjudicate angelic messengers as well as Paul himself.

know the extent of evil done when sinners rebel against God.<sup>12</sup> Further this argument presumes that sinners will not continue to offend God by their nature thus deserving on-going punishment in hell. Why not simply prioritize what the Scripture has clearly revealed regarding God's nature and eternal death while also acknowledging whatever God has disclosed is correct and whatever he does (or will do) is correct and allow any paradoxes to stand. Then simply admit that ultimate resolutions to some questions or ambiguities remain hidden in the mind of God. Instead Bell prioritizes his speculative questions over and against clear teaching of Scripture.

After acknowledging that the human heart rebels against a notion of future punishment, Hodge correctly concludes that the issue of eternal death can be decided by divine revelation alone:<sup>13</sup> "No one can reasonably presume to decide how long the wicked are to suffer for their sins upon any general principles of right and wrong."<sup>14</sup> He continues, "What the infinitely wise and good God may see fit to do with his creatures . . . is not for such worms of the dust as we are to determine."<sup>15</sup> Thus he concludes, "If we believe the Bible to be the Word of God, all we have to do is to ascertain what it teaches on this subject, and humbly submit."<sup>16</sup>

In like manner, Erickson addresses this issue with the same conclusion:

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<sup>12</sup> Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1151.

<sup>13</sup> Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology* (repr., Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 3: 870-71.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 870.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

What kind of God is it who is not satisfied by a finite punishment, but makes humans suffer forever and ever? This seems to be beyond the demands of justice . . . . The punishment seems to be out of all proportion to the sin, for presumably, all sins are finite acts against God. How does one square belief in a good, just, and loving God with eternal punishment? The question must not be dismissed lightly, for it concerns the very essence of God's nature.<sup>17</sup>

Erickson raises a key point that Bell refuses to acknowledge. This issue cannot be addressed apart from a thorough understanding of the nature of God, mankind, and sin found in the Scriptures. Erickson later concludes, "Whenever we sin, an infinite factor is invariably involved. All sin is an offense against God, the raising of a finite will against an infinite being. It is failure to carry out one's obligation to him to whom everything is due."<sup>18</sup>

Instead of addressing the nature of God as defined by all of his attributes and the actual nature of sin, Bell simply creates clever questions to obscure the meaning of clear Scripture passages into a form of unknowable faith-mystery. In essence Bell is asserting that personal belief base upon personal faith-mystery. Then Bell seeks to explain, to categorize, to harmonize, and to reconcile these alleged Scriptural conflicts and questions to support his view.

Bell does not hold his views because of a commitment to the meaning of Scripture but because he holds to postmodern epistemology leading to a postmodern theological method, as will be shown. All he can actually do is collapse any objective notion of "the faith" or "religious truth" or "religious knowledge" or "doctrine" regarding hell and the gospel into a mere subjective expression of one's personal faith. This is why he will speak of the gospel story, Jesus' story, God's story, his story, the

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<sup>17</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 3: 1239.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

vast mysteries of God, one's faith journey, etc., though he never defines or nuances the meaning of the gospel, etc.

**Secondly, while Bell harshly criticizes the mainline orthodox view, he never accurately defines, portrays, nor nuances the view but simply dismisses the mainline orthodox view through misrepresentation.** While positing that "discussion [dialogue] is divine" (ix), he complains that some "communities don't permit open, honest inquiry" (ix) as he appeals for an open, safe, honest dialogue, though he refuses to dialogue with the real positions of the orthodox view. Hence Bell is disingenuous in his claims for an open ongoing conversation.

**Third, while Bell cites and alludes to many Scripture references in his book and says he wants to answer questions (19), he does not cite nor allude to a number of major/chair Scriptures used to support the mainline orthodox position.** Some of these passages are in the immediate context of passages which he does cite in arguing for his own view. This is a very serious omission that reveals a disingenuous effort on Bell's part. Just a few of these key passages that Bell excludes include Daniel 12:1-13; John 3:18-21; 5:24; 2 Thessalonians 1:9; Revelation 14:11; 20:10; 21:8, 27; 22:3, 14-15, 18-19.

**Fourth, Bell appeals to ridiculous proof texting of passages, novel interpretations of Scriptures and theology to support his own position.** Perhaps some of the most serious and glaring examples include:

(1) **His insistence that God is only a God of Love** (John 3:16) and that God is everyone's Father while refusing to acknowledge that God is also a holy judge (John 3:18-20; 5:24) along with his portrayal of sin only as social evils; this reveals a major bias on his part. Bell repeatedly argues that God's nature is defined by love while ignoring or misstating God's other attributes. Not surprisingly, he further disassociates God's love with any type of atoning sacrificial work of Jesus. Indeed, God is love and love is an essential attribute of God (1 John 4:8; John 3:16, etc.). Does this attribute of love define God more fundamentally than other essential attributes? God is also light (1 John 1:5) and God is Spirit (John 4:24) and God is jealous

(Exod 34:14) and holy (Isa 6:3). To deny or so minimize other attributes is to simply recreate God into a god of one's own imagination completely apart from God's own self-disclosure. Bell rhetorically asserts that the mainline orthodox view of God being both love and holy, etc. and the mainline view of eternal death portrays God as an arbitrary, capricious, cruel, mean, vicious tormenter.<sup>19</sup>

**(2) His insistence that since eternal life starts in this life with salvation then hell also starts in this life prior to salvation. He then concludes that since one can come to God's love in this "hell-life" that one can come to God's love in the next "hell-life" (i.e., afterlife).** Regarding hell in this life he writes, "Hell is our refusal to trust God's retelling of our story" (170) and "we create Hell wherein every time we fail to trust God's retelling of our story" (173). He writes, "There are all kinds of hell because there are all kinds of ways to reject the good and the true and the beautiful and the human now, in this

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<sup>19</sup> Bell writes, "Millions have been taught that if they don't believe, if they don't accept in the right way according to the person telling them the gospel, and they were hit by a car and died later that same day, God would have no choice but to punish them forever in conscious torment in hell. God would, in essence, become a fundamentally different being to them in that moment of death, a different being to them *forever*. A loving heavenly father who will go to extraordinary lengths to have a relationship with them would, in the blink of an eye, become a cruel, mean, vicious tormenter who would insure that they would have no escape from an endless future of agony. If there was an earthly father who was like that, we would call the authorities. If there was an actual human dad who was that volatile, we would contact child protection services immediately. If God can switch gears like that, switch entire modes of being that quickly, that raises a thousand questions about whether a being like this could ever be trusted. Let alone be good. Loving one moment, vicious the next. Kind and compassionate, only to become cruel and relentless in the blink of an eye. Does God become somebody totally different the moment you die? That kind of God is simply devastating. Psychologically crushing. We can't bear it. No one can. . . . That God is terrifying and traumatizing and unbearable" (173-75).

life and so we can only assume we can do the same in the next" (79). He concludes that rejection and acceptance of God's love in this hell-life then parallels a rejection and acceptance of God's love in the afterlife. He argues that since eternal punishment does not give God glory that "no one can resist God's pursuit forever, because God's love will eventually melt even the hardest of hearts" (108).

The notion of God's wrath is absent in his book most likely since Bell refuses to acknowledge the penal view of the substitutionary atonement. He writes, "Many have heard the gospel framed in terms of rescue. God has to punish sinners, because God is holy, but Jesus paid the price for our sin, so we can have eternal life . . . [which he alleges can] subtly teach people that Jesus rescues us from God . . . We do not need to be rescued from God. God is the one who rescues us from death, sin, and destruction. God is the rescuer" (182). He then caricatures the correct view of substitutionary atonement as creating a kind of institutionalized, paranoid, sin-management system with a violent God that creates fearful, tense, worrisome, paralyzed, catatonic followers (183-85).

Bell portrays a modified view of the *Christus Victor* view of the atonement which manifests God's love as he argues that Jesus gained victory for everyone by demonstrating God's love. From this model Bell then argues that salvation is not a personal response of faith in Jesus as a wrath-bearing substitute for our sins. Salvation according to Bell is simply to acknowledge that Jesus demonstrated cosmic love (135-36). So Bell presents the gospel as acknowledging the story of God's love, not as personally receiving God's gracious gift of salvation.

While Bell does acknowledge a future hell of punishment, he portrays hell only as a temporary disciplining, pruning, correcting process. When describing the sheep-goat judgment in Matthew 25, he writes that the goats go to a place or period of pruning, a time of trimming, or an intense experience of correction (91). In many respects he broadens the Roman Catholic view of purgatory to include all of humanity.

He does admit that the term "hell" is appropriate since the term does reveal a violent serious consequence for those who "reject the good and true beautiful life that God has for us" (93).

Notably Bell does not accurately describe any notion of God's wrath or God's sensibilities being offended by his creation.

(3) **His incredulous appeal to the description of New Jerusalem with its "open gates" in Revelation (21:25).** Bell speculates that the gates are "always open" because new citizens from hell will always be entering into the city to be reconciled to God throughout the eternal state. He ignores Revelation 21:8, 27; 22:3, 14-15, 18-19 that clearly demonstrate the city's open gates imply security since those outside the city (as portrayed in the lake of fire) cannot enter into the city, having had their eternal destination determined in this life. In reviewing Bell's use of Scripture, Kevin DeYoung accurately writes,

What Bell does with Sodom and Gomorrah should make even his most ardent supporters wince. Really, you have to wonder if Bell has any interest in being constrained by serious study of the biblical text. In one place, Bell argues from Ezekiel 16 that because the fortunes of Sodom will be restored (Ezek 16:53), this suggests that the *forever* destiny of others might end in restoration (84). But it should be obvious that the restoration of Sodom in Ezekiel is about the city, not about the individual inhabitants of the town who were already judged in Genesis 19. The people condemned by sulfur and fire 1,500 years earlier were not getting a second lease on postmortem life. The current city would be restored. And besides, the whole point of Sodom's restoration is to shame wicked Samaria (Ezek 16:54) so that they might bear the penalty of their lewdness and abominations (Ezek 16:58). This hardly fits with Bell's view of God and judgment. If that weren't bad enough, the other discussion on Sodom is even worse. Because Jesus says it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for Capernaum (Matt 11:23-24), Bell concludes that there is hope for all the other Sodoms and Gomorrahs (85). Bell takes a passage about judgment—judgment that will be so bad for Capernaum it's even worse than God's judgment on Sodom—and turns it into tacit support for ultimate universalism. Jesus' warning says nothing about new hope for Sodom. It says everything about the hopelessness of unbelieving Capernaum.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Kevin DeYoung, "God Is Still Holy," 10-11.

Another example of this proof-texting occurs as Bell de-contextualizes and misapplies OT covenant passages relating to Israel. He cites passages which refer to the covenant promises of Israel's partial or eschatological final restoration (Ezek 36-37; Isaiah; Jer 5; Lam 3; Hosea 14; Zeph 9; Zech 10; Mic 7; Malachi) to support his view of ultimate reconciliation between God and all humanity. However, he ignores that these covenant promises are predicated upon personal faith and repentance by Israel in an historical time period.

If Bell is genuinely concerned about the truth of the Scripture and an accurate understanding of the afterlife, then one would think that he would minimally interact with the key arguments and supporting Scriptures used by the mainline orthodox position. Further one would think that Bell would exercise some sense of reasonable interpretation to support his position.

It is this inconsistency in his thesis and his theological method that ultimately reveals his a priori commitment to his certainties of postmodern theories. As will be shown, Bell must create an interpretive position that allows for "ongoing discussion . . . [with] multi-voiced complexity" (xi). His book illustrates he is more committed to alleged dialogue than to any appropriate use of Scripture, and this commitment to alleged dialogue even transcends a balanced commitment regarding the teaching on the eternal destiny of individuals.

## POSTCONSERVATIVE OVERVIEW

In summary, *postmodernism is a mood and movement which necessarily and minimally requires a continual process of reinterpreting and provisionalizing all knowledge.*<sup>21</sup> This creates

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<sup>21</sup> The term *Postconservative* was first given prominence by Roger Olson who identifies the term *Postconservative* describing a "new mood arising within North American evangelical circles." Roger E Olson, "Postconservative Evangelical greet the Postmodern Age," *Christian Century*, 112 (May 3, 1995), 480. Olson claims the following

an ethos and *norm* which does not speak of *The Truth* but rather personal knowledge and only *perspective of truth* or the *meaningfulness or impact of truth*. Thus a truth assertion is measured by how it functions. Many posit that everyone (including the Scripture authors) operates from his or her own presuppositional, cultural lenses and filters which to some extent distorts the very reality the person sought to present; hence *all knowledge of truth can be held only provisionally since no one can accurately portray true reality*. Thus central to the very idea of postmodern structure is the “inadmissibility of any universal claim that is applicable and binding on all everywhere.”<sup>22</sup>

Professing Christian postconservatives like Bell believe that one of the primary filters that create this provisional status entails language. They allege that since human language

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characteristics of a postconservatives: (1) thoroughly and authentically evangelical; (2) generously orthodox; (3) belief in experience rather than doctrine as the enduring essence of evangelical Christianity; (4) discomfort with foundationalism; (5) interest and passion in dialogue between diverse groups of theologians; (6) broad and inclusive view of evangelicalism; (7) relational view of reality; (8) inclusivity attitude towards salvation (Roger E. Olson, “Postconservative Evangelical Theology and the Theological Pilgrimage of Clark Pinnock,” in *Semper Reformandum: Studies in Honour of Clark H. Pinnock*, ed. Stanley Porter and Anthony R. Cross (Carlisle, England: Paternoster, 2003), 36. Also see An “Introduction to Postconservative Evangelicalism and the Rest of this Book” by Justin Taylor in *Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times*, ed. Millard J Erickson, Paul Kjos Helseth, Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 1-32. Interestingly, Eugene H Peterson, who endorses Bell’s book on the inside book cover, writes that Bell does not compromise “an inch of evangelical conviction.”

<sup>22</sup> Jon Hinkson and Greg Ganssle, “Epistemology at the Core of Postmodernism: Roty, Foucault, and the Gospel,” in *Telling The Truth: Evangelizing Postmoderns*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000), 85.

(actually the very fabric of language)<sup>23</sup> is constructed by a particular culture/society, then any truth assertion (including doctrine and Scripture) is actually a cultural expression particular to one social-culture group. They assert, "How can finite language express the infinite?" Thus communities are trapped in their own linguistic world. Knowledge of truth then is viewed more as a creation of emotions and values as embedded in a community's linguistic construction. For this reason dialogue in community is essential to more fully understand these embedded social and cultural norms.

When the postconservatives speak of human limitation of language, they clearly include the nature of all Scripture. Two

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<sup>23</sup> David Williams describes what he refers to as the intellectual framework that gives the language of truth so much intuitive force though these intellectual commitments are what are being challenged in today postmodern culture. He writes, "To get a handle on the language of truth, we begin by recognizing that for a great many philosophers in history of Western thought, language in general was taken to be primarily concerned with describing *reality* [emphasis mine] . . . many believed that the primary function of language is to 'represent' the world. Such an understanding of language gives primacy to literal language over metaphorical language . . . Such an understanding of language is tied together with a whole lot of interrelated ideas: *reality* is equivalent to the way things are apart from any particular knower; *knowledge* is contained in linguistic descriptions of that reality, untainted by subjective features of any particular knower; and *truth* is what obtains when you have a correspondence between those linguistic descriptors and reality. In this system each component part reinforces each other part to construct a tightly knit intellectual framework" (David Alan Williams, "Scripture, Truth and Our Postmodern Context," in *Evangelicals & Scripture: Tradition, Authority and Hermeneutics*, ed. Vincent Bacote, Laura C. Miguez, and Dennis L. Okholm (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 230-33. Later Williams argues that the concept and construct of *metaphor* is best to describe how language works and the best carrier of the notion of truth (234-243). He does not mean a metaphor here as a simple linguistic device to denote similarities but rather as an entire structural framework to conceptualize our thinking (232-33).

leading postconservatives, Franke and Grenz, forcefully assert that each person (including the authors of Scripture) operates from his own linguistic limiting grid. In their book *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context*, they write, "The simple fact is we do not inhabit the 'world-in-itself' . . . we live in a linguistic world of our own making . . . human reality is 'socially constructed reality.'"<sup>24</sup> John Franke forcefully asserts that all who "hold confessional statements in an absolutist fashion and claim such statements teach the 'system' of doctrine contained in Scripture . . . can hinder the ability to read the text and to listen to the Spirit in new ways."<sup>25</sup> Grenz posits that certainty of truth has only future orientation as he writes, "Until the eschaton, truth will by its own nature always remain provisional and truth claims contestable."<sup>26</sup>

Since postconservatives deny access to true reality, then dialogue is used as an essential tool to construct reality for each community. Accordingly, since all knowledge can only be held provisionally (not with certainty) subject to continual revision, then tolerance, discussion, dialogue, etc. are held as the loftiest of virtues. Those who hold a truth claim with certainty are then viewed as impeding this process of dialogically and verbally constructing a perception of reality and thus are often portrayed as divisive and mean-spirited.

Professing Christian postconservatives do not want complete moral relativism so they construct a three-way dialogical theological method/model. The model asserts that communities must self-dialogue with the Scriptures, dialogue with church history, and dialogue with contemporary culture in

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<sup>24</sup> Stanley Grenz and John Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in the Postmodern Context* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2001), 53.

<sup>25</sup> John Franke, *The Character of Theology, An Introduction to Its Nature, Task, and Purpose* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 135.

<sup>26</sup> Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 20.

discerning God's truth for that community. This three-way dialogue along with the Holy Spirit's help is posited to provide the boundary hedge for Christianity to remain Christian.

As a result the postconservatives tend to define the nature of Scripture as an inspired narrative or inspired stories of communities working out their own faith in their own culture from their own perspective. This narrative is told with human culturally limited perspectives. The model asserts that Scripture is a witness (story) to the revelation of Christ though Scripture itself is not revelation. Hence a difference exists then between the Scripture and the actual Words/Revelation/intent of God. Moral commands and doctrines in Scripture are more of a human author's partially distorted view on a matter rather than God revealing God's truth and reality. Therefore they contend that community (not doctrine) primarily preserves Christianity.

Scripture is viewed as a *horizontal mechanism to help that community have dialogue/ discussion in creating their own view of reality*. Thus each group can share, shape, and participate in its own story or narrative with itself and stay in dialogue with itself though it must not assert its interpretation on another community. Dialogue then is critical since the dialog process constructs a view and perspective of reality.

This separation between the Scripture and God's revelation and the need for everyone to participate in dialogue then creates a need to have the Holy Spirit speak in a new, fresh, and mystical manner within each community. The real authority resides in the community where dialogue is the foundational core value.<sup>27</sup> Hence great emphasis is then placed upon the

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<sup>27</sup> The implications of postconservatism are indeed far reaching: (1) there are multiple sources for truth, none of which have inherent authority to critique another. Scriptural authority is denied and theology then becomes an ongoing conversation between Scripture, tradition, and culture. In many ways the authority of community presides over the Scripture. Thus arguing that it is better to speak about what is true or knowledge, than to speak of truth; (2) it rejects the Scriptures as the sole foundation for theology; (3) it severs the authority of God from the authority of his word and severs God's revelation from the Scripture; (4) and it importantly asserts that

Spirit to guide and assist in this dialogical process along with the notion of mystery.<sup>28</sup>

To avoid complete mysticism and relativism, Franke and other postconservatives must maintain a *norming norm*. Thus to find a *norming norm* (not *The Norming Norm*), they must sustain at any cost a three-way conversation between Scripture, church tradition, and culture. Without this dialogue their *norming norm* is lost. Hence the singular authority of Scripture is rejected. This view is a fundamental and serious departure from the conservative evangelical view of Scripture and interpretation. It is a denial “that Scripture is first-order language and thus the final, sufficient authority for all Christian faith and praxis. For them, Scripture is authoritative because it is the vehicle through which the Spirit speaks, yet in the Spirit’s appropriation of Scripture, the Spirit’s intention is *not* simply and totally tied to the author’s intention in the text.”<sup>29</sup> It is true that we as theologians function at a second level, though it is also true that Scripture itself provides first level doctrinal truth as well as first level theologizing of that doctrinal truth in a prescriptive manner.<sup>30</sup>

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language does not correspond to reality hence the erroneous idea reigns that God completely accommodates himself to human situatedness and finiteness. Thus Scripture expresses human thinking and no one-to-one correspondence exists between revelation and Scripture.

<sup>28</sup> In actuality this approach of separating the revelation of God from the Scripture of God is a form of older neo-orthodoxy which diminishes the intent of the human author.

<sup>29</sup> R. Scott Smith, *Truth and the New Kind of Christian: The Emerging Effects of Postmodernism on the Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), 46.

<sup>30</sup> Paul Helm, “No Easy Task,” in *Reforming or Conforming: Post-Conservative Evangelicals and the Emerging Church*, ed. Gary L. W. Johnson and Ronald N. Nash (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 100-101.

Paul did not simply say to believe in Jesus or that we need to simply love God or to walk the journey of faith or to tell our story. The apostles also theologically and authoritatively nuanced the meaning of these imperatives based upon the absolute theological indicative realities of what Christ accomplished for us. In this postconservative model then, Scripture serves at a *functional level*, not a *Scriptural foundational level*.<sup>31</sup> Truthfulness is then oftentimes measured

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<sup>31</sup> Stephen J. Wellum disapproves of the Franke/Grenz, postconservative thesis as he writes that postconservatives “are convinced that evangelicals need an alternative way of viewing the nature of theology in light of postmodernism’s rejection of epistemological ‘foundationalism’ for a more ‘chastened rationality.’” For them, this entails that theology must employ a nonfoundationalist epistemology, which adopts a combination of coherentism, pragmatism, and the later-Wittgenstein’s notion of language-games. In addition, Grenz and Franke develop the insights of Wolfhart Pannenberg (i.e., truth as historical and eschatological) and George Lindbeck (i.e., theological statements are not “true” in the sense that they say anything about a reality external to language, rather they are rules of grammar establishing the grammar of Christian thinking, speaking, and living). **Thus according to the post-modern view, theological statements are not making “first-order” truth claims (i.e., asserting something about objective reality); instead they are “second-order” assertions (i.e., rules for speech about God);** (emphasis added). Within this understanding of the nature of theology, Grenz and Franke assert that what is “basic” for theology is not *sola Scriptura*, but what they label “the Christian-experience-facilitating interpretative framework” which consists of three sources—Scripture, tradition, and culture—and ultimately the Spirit who speaks through these three sources to the church today. In their proposal for understanding the nature of theology, Grenz and Franke are clearly distinguishing themselves from historic evangelical theology and especially what has been meant by *sola Scriptura*, namely, that Scripture is first-order language and thus the final, sufficient authority for all Christian faith and praxis. For them, Scripture is authoritative because it is the vehicle through which the Spirit speaks, yet in the Spirit’s appropriation of Scripture, the Spirit’s intention is *not* simply

and understood by its functional (pragmatic) or inner-narrative (coherent) use as opposed to any kind of foundational nature.

In sum then the postconservative model uses the Scripture to provide a general framework to create/sustain communal dialogue so the community can then express/create their own perception of truth and reality as the Spirit guides them.

Scripture is read theologically (not as 1<sup>st</sup> order doctrine) as a means to maintain and facilitate community. By way of contrast, the conservative model asserts that God did indeed superintend the human authors of Scripture to give us a real and accurate knowledge of true reality (not an exhaustive knowledge) in spite of living in a fallen and sinful world. As a result the task of theology is to extract, systematize, articulate, and conform to those truths found in the Bible.<sup>32</sup>

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and totally tied to the author's intention in the text. Hence, reminiscent of Karl Barth, they are reluctant to posit a one-to-one correspondence between the Word of God and the words of scripture (“The Emerging Consequences of Whose Ideas,” <[http://sites.silaspartners.com/CC/article/0,,PTID314526%7CCHID598014%7CCIID2249680,00.html#grenz](http://sites.silaspartners.com/CC/article/0,,PTID314526%7CCHID598014%7CCIID2249680,00.html#grenz;)> (accessed 15 October 2008).

<sup>32</sup> A proposition is generally understood as the meaning of what is true or false as expressed in a declarative type statement (minimally a proposition is the content of a declarative statement that is true or false) and the meaning is not located in time or culture. The meaning transcends any time and culture and as such this meaning can be expressed in a variety of languages in a transcultural manner. *Propositional Revelation asserts that revelation discloses truth in a cognitive manner that is not reducible to any one personal experience. In other words Propositional Revelation is timeless and not limited, reducible nor defined by personal experience.* Thus propositional revelation entails the truth or falsity of truth based upon the intent of the speaker. Propositional theology means that God’s revelation can be formulated in propositions however imperfectly. Nash correctly emphasizes that propositional revelation express the conviction that “God’s revelation [is] a disclosure of truth . . .” at cognitive and informational level (Ronald H Nash, *The Word of God and the Mind of Man: The Crisis of Revealed Truth in Contemporary Theology* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan 1982), 50.

Further this model asserts that the author's intent in writing can be known in varying degrees and that Scripture teaches fundamental and foundational doctrinal components of Christianity identified as "the faith"<sup>33</sup> which if altered leads to apostasy. Hence "the faith" possesses a type of literary clarity and objectivity<sup>34</sup> which defines and preserves Christianity. This model also generally posits that orthodoxy along with a genuine, personal-faith response is the only sound basis for orthopraxy.

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<sup>33</sup> Arndt and Gingrich define this sense of "the faith" as "that which is believed, *body of faith/ belief/ teaching* [emphasis his]" and that this "objectivizing of the term . . . is found as early as Paul. . ." and "is interpreted by this way by many" (Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed., rev. F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker [Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2000], 820). A few examples of this objective sense of "the faith" appear in Romans 1:5; Galatians 1:23; 3:23-25; 1 Timothy 1:19; 4:1, 6; 6:10, 21; 2 Timothy 2:18.

<sup>34</sup> One's personal faith is grounded in *the objective faith* revealed in Scripture regarding the Person and work of God in Christ. This objective body of truth is knowable to the extent that it is fully discernible, definable, and preservable and that it can adjudicate counter views. Thus *the objective faith* stands as a criterion over all of mankind" (David Mappes, "The Nobility and Knowability of Truth: Part 1," *JMAT* 12 (Spring 2009): 28.

When most evangelicals (and I) use the phrase *objective faith*, they are not advocating a sense of Enlightenment foundationalism that results in a complete neutral, comprehensive indubitable objective knowledge that leads to the impossibility of doubt (i.e., what is alleged as Cartesian foundationalism). For more extensive discussion on matters of *the faith* containing propositional verbal truth assertions as well as the importance of living faithfully see the following recent articles: "A New Kind of Christian: A Review" by David A Mappes in *BSac* 161 (July-September, 2004): 289-303; "The Nobility and Knowability of Truth: Part 1" by David Mappes in *JMAT* 12 (Spring 2009): 64-105 and "The Nobility and Knowability of Truth: Part 2" by David Mappes in *JMAT* 13 (Fall 2009): 1-22.

A number of underlying assumptions include the existence and knowability of a real God who has made himself known to mankind both personally and propositionally and that human beings, created in the image of God, are capable of appropriating and apprehending this divine truth.

## **BELL'S POSTCONSERVATIVE THEOLOGICAL METHOD**

Bell clearly adheres to this postconservative view that all knowledge (including the writers of Scripture) is culturally limited and situated by culture. He does not believe that doctrine has a first order defining role in Christianity. As one example in his book *Velvet Elvis*, he argues that if he found out the doctrine of the virgin birth was not true but rather that the gospel writers had mythologized their views of Jesus, his faith would not be altered at all.<sup>35</sup> In fact, Bell argues that the incorrectness of doctrine would actually strengthen his faith and not weaken his faith since he would be further anchored in Jesus rather than a doctrine. In his book, he dismisses the foundational nature and even importance of the incarnation, substitutionary atonement, and inspiration of Scripture. For Bell any type of absolute doctrine is an impediment to dialogue. Regarding the nature of inspiration, Bell asserts that the Bible is simply a collection of stories that teach us about what it looks like when God is at work through actual people. He argues that the Bible has the authority only because it contains stories about people interacting with the God who alone has all authority<sup>36</sup> and that real authority is in the Spirit. He avers that the Scripture alone cannot be our guide since “we got the Bible from the church voting on what the Bible even is.”<sup>37</sup> Thus Bell

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<sup>35</sup> See Rob Bell, *Velvet Elvis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan 2005), 26-28.

<sup>36</sup> Bell, *Velvet Elvis*, 65

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 65

states that when he affirms “the Bible as God's word, in the same breath I have to affirm that when those people voted, God was somehow present, guiding them to do what they did. When people say that all we need is the Bible, it is simply not true. In affirming the Bible as inspired, I also have to affirm the Spirit who I believe was inspiring those people to choose those books.”<sup>38</sup> Notice Bell’s commitment to the ongoing authoritative

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 68. This definition of inspiration by Bell is simply unorthodox. Indeed the Scriptures present themselves as the primary and priority source of truth which can be understood and should be used to critique all truth claims—they are not simply a story of how God’s authority was manifest in a past community. Scripture self-witness teach that God worked through human agency to produce a fully inspired, infallible, and inerrant Scripture (2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:20-21; 2 Pet 3:15-16). Verbal inspiration asserts that the authors recorded God’s intended word through their own words and personalities (Mark 12:36; 1 Cor 14:37) so that their writings indeed were God’s words. God providentially prepared mankind through their situationalism (Gal 1:15; Jer 1:5) to write the Scriptures as the human authors were superintended by the Holy Spirit (2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:20-21). As just one of many, many examples, note how Luke confirms that the Holy Spirit (who is God) is still considered the author of the Scripture even though the Scripture came through David (human agent). In Acts 1:16, Luke writes, “Brethren, the Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit foretold by the mouth of David concerning Judas.” Biblical authority and truth flow from the nature of God. Since God himself breathed Scripture (2 Tim 3:16), the author’s meaning in the text itself has the exact authority which God intends. There is no hint of a separation between the Scripture and God’s Word or no implication that the Scripture as God’s word is a very human word about God. The biblical understanding of verbal inspiration (God-breathed) necessitates the authority of God in the text. The degree to which the meaning of the Scripture applies and relates to the reader is another issue. Clearly the imperatives in 2 Timothy 3:16 (teaching, reproof, correction, and training) along with the imperatives in 2 Timothy 4:2 (reprove, rebuke, exhort) illustrate that the Scriptures possess a supreme and absolute authority which is derived from inspiration (see David A. Mappes, “A New Kind of Christian: A Review” *BSac* 161 [July-September 2004]: 295-99).

guiding ministry of the Spirit and his commitment to the nature of Scripture as mere descriptive stories of God at work in the lives of believers.

### **BELL'S METHODOLOGY OF QUESTION-ASKING IN *LOVE WINS***

Bell asks over 350 questions regarding the traditional view of the gospel, the nature of God and the nature of eternal death. Very few of these questions are designed to surface the verbal meaning of the text. As in his other books, he writes with a personable, aggressive, provocative, and even pejorative questioning tone and rarely answers his own questions. Rather, he uses these questions to overwhelm the reader and build a cumulative case that the mainline orthodox view is simply indefensible thus leaving an attractive option for his own view. He creates false analogies and false contradictions within the biblical text with his questions as he artificially isolates one passage from another so that the reader is overwhelmed with the impossibility of answering his questions.

As an example, when demeaning the notion that salvation entails having a “personal relationship with Christ” Bell writes,

So that's it . . . the heart of the Christian faith [so] why is it that no one used that phrase until the last hundred years or so? And that question raises another question. If the message of Jesus is that God is offering the free gift of eternal life through him—a gift we cannot earn by our own efforts, works, or good deeds—and all we have to do is accept and believe, aren't those verbs? And aren't verbs action? Accepting, confessing, believing—those are things we do. Does this mean, then, that going to heaven is dependent on something I do? How is any of that grace? How is that a gift? How is that good news? (10-11).

Are these really good questions? Does the verbal aspect of “accepting, confessing, and believing” within Johannine or

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Pauline literature really depict a works-based salvation? Would Paul or John agree that these are interesting questions?

In discussing the unchanging nature of God's purpose and will (Heb 6) Bell refreshingly writes that God can communicate his clear intention. He then argues that God's clear intention is expressed in 1 Timothy 2 ("God wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth"). He then concludes with a series of questions as he writes, "Will all people be saved, or will God not get what God wants?" Does this magnificent, mighty marvelous God *fail* [emphasis his] in the end?" (98-99).

Why does Bell affirm Hebrews 6, that God's intention are clearly known regarding his unchanging purposes (98), but then construct such a superficial and artificial question regarding 1 Timothy 2? This is bewildering. If Paul says that "God wants all people to be saved" and hence according to Bell then "all people will be saved," then why does Bell state elsewhere that some people may choose to remain in their hell-afterlife and not be saved? He provides no interpretative nuance to the meaning of 1 Timothy. This ultra-simplistic approach is not the approach that Bell takes when referring to social sins as he refers to war, rape, injustice, division, disgrace, oil spills, oppression, institutional injustice, etc. (36-38). Bell does not address these social evils with such a simplistic formula that since God gets what He wants in the recreation of the earth, then He gets what He wants.

In other arguments to support his notion of afterlife salvation, Bell completely de-contextualizes the Scripture. In citing Malachi he writes, "Do we not all have one Father? Did not God create us?" and he cites Paul in Acts 17, "We are God's offspring" and says the Scriptures "constantly affirm we're all part of the same family," and he then cites Psalm 65 as teaching that "all people will come' to God" and Isaiah 52 "All the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God" to support his view (98-99). Amazingly he cites Philippians 2:10-11 (every knee will bow before Jesus) to surmise that Jesus "doesn't give up until everything that was lost is found" arguing that Philippians 2:10-11 teaches his form of universalism (100-101). He concludes by asking another question: "Is God our friend, our provider, our protector, our father—or is God the kind of judge who may in

the end declare that we deserve to spend forever separated from our Father?" (102).

In discussing the image of God, he conjectures what he claims is an *interesting question* when he writes, "Is there a possibility that, given enough time, some people could eventually move into a new state, one in which they were in essence 'formerly human' or 'posthuman' or even 'ex-human'?" (105-6). Is this really an "interesting question"?

Scripture provides many examples of questions that are not helpful but indeed harmful. The authors of Scripture sometimes rebuke/refute a *question-asker* if their questions demean or distort what God has revealed about himself. One only need consider the first question in Genesis 3:1 when the serpent asked "Has God said?" or Pharaoh's question of "Who is the Lord?" or the murmuring questions of "Has the Lord only spoken through Moses?" (Num 12:2). As Paul constructs his argument in the book of Romans, he engages with an imaginary objector to his views. In discussing God's sovereign election, Paul portrays this imaginary objector as saying, "Why does He still find fault? For who resists His will?" thus implicating God as doing evil (Rom 9:19). Paul's response is instructive when he writes, "Who are you, O man, who answers back to God?" (Rom 9:20).

Bell is not simply asking genuine questions to help his reader understand the Scripture. But rather he is teaching and making assertions through this method of *question-asking* that directly challenges the knowability and authority of Scripture. These questions are similar to questions of the false teachers in 2 Peter 3:3 who asked, "Where is the promise of His coming?" implying that Jesus would not return, thus denying future judgment. Peter instructs the church to pay attention to the words spoken beforehand by the prophets and apostles (2 Pet 3:2).<sup>39</sup> Or consider Paul's instruction to Timothy to guard what

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<sup>39</sup> Observe how these verbal promises and declarations from God which came through human instrumentality were to be viewed with more certainty than the existential realities the readers were facing. Their community entailed false teachers (chap. 2) who denied the

had been entrusted to him and avoid empty chatter and false arguments of what is falsely called knowledge (1 Tim 6:20).

Bell posits question after question to promote sheer speculation. This sheer speculation has a two-fold affect. First, it creates the impression that the mainline orthodox view must answer all his questions before it can be held as a legitimate view. And second, his *question-asking* reinforces his ultimate position to simply trust and *dialogue* concerning this mystery. Earlier comments by both Peter and Paul are instructive to this method of endless *question-asking* methodology which misrepresents and creates doubt and ultimately subverts the knowability of the Scriptures.

In conclusion, any serious theological reflection and method must focus on the author's meaning of what was revealed. Deuteronomy 29:29 says, "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law." The biblical authors directed believers to focus on what was revealed and to avoid speculation in seeking what was not revealed. Our theological method should always allow a *canonical, comprehensive, consistent hermeneutical, congruent, coherent, call/response use of Scripture* to frame the questions

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second coming of Christ by asking questions. Peter's description in chapter 2 and comments in chapter 3 entails an historical overview of God's past acts of judgment that transcends human ability to access and validate the truthfulness of these judgments apart from the OT text. Thus Peter refers to past actions such as judgment and imprisonment of angels, preservation of Noah, judgment of Sodom and Gomorrah, preservation of Lot, and judgment of Balaam all in Scripture. These past actions of God's judgment then are the basis for the promise of future judgment at the return of Christ. The reader could validate neither facts of the past nor future judgment, though nonetheless readers were (and are) to allow the verbal promises of God to interpret and adjudicate the false teachers as well as their own lives. This does not speak of provisionally held doctrines nor does it suggest all questions of an objector need be answered prior to holding to the authority of Scripture.

we bring to the Scripture so as to better understand the authorial intent.

### **GENERAL STATEMENT ON THE NATURE OF ETERNAL DEATH**

In general, historical evangelicals have believed that the believers in Jesus Christ will consciously enjoy God's presence and goodness (Luke 23:43, cf. 2 Cor 12:3-4; 2 Cor 5:8; Phil 1:23; 1 Thess 5:10; Rev 6:9-11; Matt 17:3; 22:32; Rev 14:13) and the wicked will consciously and eternally experience torment and wrath (Isa 14:9-11; Luke 16:23-25; 2 Pet 2:9; Matt 25:46; 2 Thess 1:9; Rev 14:11). This eternal death is both eternal in duration and in consequence.

When a believer in Jesus Christ dies, he or she enters into the immediate presence of the Lord (Acts 7:55-59; 2 Cor 5:8) while the unbeliever will be immediately banished away from the presence of the Lord into a place of conscious torment (Luke 16:23-28; Matt 10:28). Both the believer and unbeliever await future bodily resurrection (1 Thess 4:13-18; Rev 20:1-5). New Testament believers will receive their glorified bodies at the rapture (1 Cor 15:35-49) and dwell with God forever while the unrighteous will be resurrected at the great white throne judgment and be consigned to irrevocable, conscious punishment in an eternal lake of fire (Rev 20:10-15; 2 Thess 1:9-10; Matt 25:31-46).

The same term *eternal* is used in describing the length of the destiny of the wicked as well as in describing the life of the believer in Jesus Christ (e.g., John 3:16) as well as in describing God himself (e.g., 1 Tim 1:17). And the phrase "forever and ever" used in describing the torment of the wicked is identical with that used to describe God (Rev 4:9-10). One's eternal destiny is made in this life on the basis of responding to Jesus Christ through faith alone (John 3:18, 36; 5:24); this faith-decision is not made in the after-life. The future day of judgment simply publicly reveals one's destiny.

Hell is an actual place of eternal, conscious punishment. The NT portrays the destiny of the wicked in an actual place as much

as the destiny of the righteous is portrayed in an actual place. This place of the wicked is referred to as *gehenna* (usually translated "hell"; Matt 18:9; Mark 9:43, 45, 47). The word is most-likely a transliteration of the Aramaic *gēhinnām*, which is from the Hebrew *gē hinnōm*, valley of Hinnom) and portrays a powerful word picture of the place of final punishment because of its OT and cultural associations. The valley of Hinnom runs west and south of the site of ancient Jerusalem. In the OT this valley was the location of a shrine where human sacrifices were offered to the pagan god Molech. During Josiah's reign he eliminated this practice and desecrated this place (see 2 Kings 23:10; Jer 7:31-32.). Later this valley became the place where the refuse and trash of the city was burned. By the first century B.C. *gehenna* had taken on the metaphorical sense of the place of future punishment by fire. The notion that hell is a real place is further supported by the notion that it will house both body and soul (Matt 10:28).

Hell involves punishment and not corrective action (Matt 25:46). The various figures of speech used to describe hell and eternal death reinforce the reality of horror and punishment as opposed to a mere correcting process. It is referred to as a "furnace of fire" (Matt. 13:42; 50); a "lake of fire and sulfur" (Rev. 19:20; 20:10, 14-15; 21:8), and many times the word "fire" is modified by such terms as eternal, unquenchable, etc. (Matt. 18:8-9; Mark 9:43,47-48; Rev. 14:10-11). It is also described as "outer" and "black darkness" (Matt. 25:30; Jude 13). Hell is directly associated with God's wrath and anger (Rom. 2:8; cf. John 3:36); torment (Rev. 14:10-11); weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt 13:42; 25:30); the absence of any rest (Rev 14:11); This condition is described as destruction or perdition (Matt 10:28; John 3:16; 10:28; Rom 2:12; 1 Cor 1:18; Phil 3:19; 2 Pet 3:7). Many of these passages contains either the verb *apollumi* or the noun *apōleia* (destroy, perish; destruction, perdition). These terms refer to the ruin and loss that comes with separation from God as opposed to any type of annihilationism.

Hell will be an eternal state of death. The fire of Gehenna is said to be unquenchable in Mark 9:43-48; cf. Isaiah 66:24. The "worm" of the wicked is said to not die, Isaiah 66:24; Mark 9:48 and the smoke of the torment of the lost is said to "go up forever

and ever" in Revelation 14:11. This same phrase is earlier used in portraying God in Revelation 4:9 where He is said to "live forever and ever." The final condition of the wicked is called a "second death" (Rev 20:14; 21:8) since it is the exact opposite experience of the righteous. When a believer dies there is no more death, only life. Conversely, when an unbeliever dies, there is no more life, only death.

# **The Fall and the Problem of Millions of Years of Natural Evil**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

A very controversial issue within the church today involves the question of millions of years of animal death, disease, predation, extinction, and other natural evils such as earthquakes, tornadoes, hurricanes, and tsunamis.<sup>1</sup> Can this evolutionist view of the history of natural evil be harmonized with the Bible? In particular, is the Bible's teaching on the fall of Adam and its consequences and on the character of God compatible with millions of years of natural evil?

Prominent New York pastor and author Tim Keller states the problem this way in a recent white paper for the theistic evolutionist group, *Biologos Forum*.

One of the greatest barriers to belief in God is the problem of suffering and evil in the world. Why, people ask, did God create a world in which violence, pain, and death are endemic? The answer of traditional theology is—he didn't. He created a good world but also gave human beings free will, and through their disobedience and 'Fall', death and suffering came into the world. The process of evolution, however, understands violence, predation, and death to be the very engine of how life develops. If God brings about life through evolution, how do we reconcile that with the idea of a

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was presented at the annual conference of the International Society of Christian Apologetics on April 29, 2011, at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, NC. This is a revised and expanded version.

good God? The problem of evil seems to be worse for the believer in theistic evolution.<sup>2</sup>

In his article Keller provides no real solution to this serious problem for his theistic evolution view. But careful attention to the Bible's teaching on the fall and its consequences as well as on Christ's redemptive work in response to the fall requires Bible-believing Christians to reject the idea of millions of years of natural evil before Adam. The character of God also militates against this evolutionary view of earth history.

### **NATURAL EVIL BEFORE THE FALL?**

Evolutionists say that during the course of millions of years, death, bloodshed, suffering, disease, and extinction—directionless natural processes of change in living creatures—eventually led to man's existence. The late evolutionary astrophysicist Carl Sagan said, "The secrets of evolution are time and death: time for the slow accumulation of favorable mutations, and death to make room for new species."<sup>3</sup>

The fossils, which the evolutionists say represent millions of years of history, are not simply a record of life, but also of death. Creatures are not buried where they lived and in most cases not even where they died. They are buried where they were buried, usually by catastrophic flood waters. And in many places around the world we see evidence of massive and violent carnage in fossil graveyards containing hundreds of thousands or even millions of former living creatures packed in high concentrations.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Tim Keller, "Creation, Evolution, and Christian Laypeople," p. 2, <[http://www.biologos.org/uploads/projects/Keller\\_white\\_paper.pdf](http://www.biologos.org/uploads/projects/Keller_white_paper.pdf)> (accessed 27 April 2011).

<sup>3</sup> Carl Sagan, *Cosmos*, Episode 2, "One Voice in the Cosmic Fugue," 5 October 1980.

<sup>4</sup> John Whitcomb and Henry Morris, *The Genesis Flood* (Phillipsburg, PA: P & R, 1961), 154-68; and Andrew Snelling, *Earth's*

So, whether Christians believe in Neo-Darwinian evolution, or they believe that God supernaturally created different kinds of plants and animals occasionally during the course of millions of years, they are still adopting an evolutionary view of death and natural evil when they accept millions of years.

But the biblical teaching on death is very clear and consistent from Genesis to Revelation. Genesis 1 says six times that during creation week God called the creation “good.” When he finished creation on Day 6, he called everything “very good” (Gen 1:31). That “very good” state is reflected partially by the fact that man, land animals, and birds were originally vegetarian, according to Genesis 1:29-30. In fact, Genesis tells us that man was not given permission to eat meat until after the flood (Gen 9:3). Given the connection between man and land creatures in 1:29-30, this would add further support to the idea that land creatures were vegetarian before the fall. Another indication of the nature of the “very good” original creation is that the first thing God describes as “not good” is simply that Adam was alone (Gen 2:18). If that is “not good,” how could millions of years of death and other natural evil be called “very good”?

Furthermore, Isaiah 11:6-9 and 65:25 shed light on the meaning of “very good.” These passages speak of a future state of the creation when the wolf will graze and lie down with the lamb, the lion will eat grass like the ox, and the child will play with a cobra. These creatures that are now dangerous carnivores “will not hurt or destroy” (11:9) and “will do no evil or harm in all my holy mountain, says the Lord” (65:25). The scene in view is one of complete peace and harmony. For some animals to hunt and kill other animals is described as hurting, destroying, and doing evil. Given this language, is it really possible that carnivores would be destroying other animals (whether healthy or diseased) and earthquakes, tsunamis, hurricanes, and asteroid impacts causing animal death and extinction would be happening for hundreds of millions of years in God’s “very good” creation before Adam sinned?

Someone might object that Genesis 1:29-30 does not explicitly mention sea creatures. And since many sea creatures (such as sharks) eat other sea creatures, this means there was death in the oceans before the fall and so there could have been animal death on the land, too. But this argument fails for several reasons.

First, it does indeed seem correct to say that verses 29-30 specifically refer only to land creatures. These verses are speaking of the sixth day of creation and the focus is on man and land animals, which were made with Adam and Eve on that day. Also, the fish of the sea are mentioned in verse 28, along with birds and land animals, as part of man's dominion, but the fish are not mentioned again in verse 30. Additionally, man is told to eat from "every plant yielding seed that is on the surface of all the earth, and every tree which has fruit yielding seed," which clearly points us to the plants that God created on the dry land on day 3. The reference to "every green plant" in verse 30 surely points back to the same plants in verse 29. Therefore, we cannot dogmatically say *based solely on these two verses* that no sea creature was a carnivore before the fall. However, we also cannot say with any confidence that this means that some sea creatures were carnivores. That is an argument from silence. Also, what these sea creatures eat in this present post-fall world is not proof of what they must have eaten in the pre-fall creation.

Furthermore, since Genesis 1:29-30 indicate that neither Adam and Eve nor the land animals and birds were carnivorous before the fall in the "very good" creation, it seems very reasonable (apart from any explicit biblical evidence to the contrary) to conclude that sea creatures were also not carnivores in that "very good" creation. There seems to have been plenty of plant life in the oceans before the flood, as evidenced by the fact that most oil apparently comes from marine algae, zooplankton, and phytoplankton.<sup>5</sup> Seaweed

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<sup>5</sup> <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Petroleum>> (accessed 6 February 2012). Creation geologists think there are good reasons to conclude that oil was produced as a result of billions of these creatures

would also be plenteous (which can be a source of food even for many land animals).<sup>6</sup> Based on how the Bible defines “living creatures” (*nephesh chayyah*), we would conclude that neither algae nor phytoplankton nor zooplankton are living creatures, and therefore eating them would not constitute carnivorous behavior or death.<sup>7</sup> We would conclude the same about krill and many marine invertebrates.<sup>8</sup>

But evidence of carnivorous behavior is found in the fossil record, for example, one fish fossilized in the stomach of a larger fish. There is also evidence of land carnivores in the fossil record. This includes one creature fossilized in another creature’s stomach (e.g., a bird in the stomach of a dinosaur) or teeth marks in bones or the tooth of one animal in another creature’s bone.<sup>9</sup> This death must have occurred after the “very good” creation was cursed at the fall of Adam.

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being buried in the Flood. See Andrew Snelling, *Earth’s Catastrophic Past* (Dallas TX: ICR, 2009), 2:965-76.

<sup>6</sup> John Woodmorappe documents that carnivores can adjust to a vegetarian diet. See his *Noah’s Ark: A Feasibility Study* (Santee, CA: Institute for Creation Research, 1996), 167-68. He documents that among land animals moose, buffalo, elephants, sheep, and rabbits have been observed to eat seaweed.

<sup>7</sup> James Stambaugh, “‘Life’ According to the Bible, and the Scientific Evidence,” *Technical Journal* 6, no. 2 (1992): 98-121, <<http://www.answersingenesis.org/articles/tj/v6/n2/life>> (accessed 6 February 2012).

<sup>8</sup> The huge baleen whales have these creatures for their diet: see <<http://www.seaworld.org/infobooks/baleen/dietbw.html>> (accessed 6 February 2012).

<sup>9</sup> See for example, Ryan McClay, “Dino Dinner Hard to Swallow?” <<http://www.answersingenesis.org/articles/2005/01/21/dino-dinner-swallow>> 21 January 2005 (accessed 6 February 2012). A secular report with a picture is at <<http://www.livescience.com/3794-dinosaur-fossil-mammal-stomach.html>>, 12 January 2005 (accessed 6 February 2012). This article discusses evidence that a crocodile ate hadrosaurs and turtles: <<http://www.livescience.com/8111-ancient->

But since sharks, lions, and many other creatures have sharp teeth, strong jaws, and other features that were well designed for capturing and killing other creatures, and other creatures have amazing defense structures and behaviors, does not this prove that many creatures were carnivores right from the beginning? No, it is a demonstrable fact that creatures that are normally carnivores can survive on a vegetarian diet.<sup>10</sup> Also, to change herbivores into carnivores, God would not have needed to have made changes to body parts. We know now that much of the genetic code that used to be called “junk DNA” has a regulatory role controlling the function of other genes. By his curse in Genesis 3, God could have simply “turned on some genetic switches” so that creatures’ behavior was changed.<sup>11</sup> Using a computer metaphor, God did not have to change the hardware of creatures, but only turn on some of the software that he had built into the creatures at the beginning (but left in the “off” position) with the foreknowledge that man would sin and God would curse the creation.<sup>12</sup> This is not a wild idea, for it

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reptile-dined-dinosaurs.html>, 18 March 2010 (accessed 6 February 2012). See also Freya Boardman-Pretty, “First Evidence that Dinosaurs Ate Birds,” 21 November 2011, <<http://www.newscientist.com/article/dn21182-first-evidence-that-dinosaurs-ate-birds.html>> (accessed 29 November 2011).

<sup>10</sup> David Catchpoole, “The Lion that Wouldn’t Eat Meat,” *Creation*, March-May 2000, 22-23 (<<http://creation.com/the-lion-that-wouldnt-eat-meat>>), discusses a lion born in America on a farm that lived for nine years and thrived on a vegetarian diet. Also, in discussing how carnivores survived when they came off the ark at the end of the flood, John Woodmorappe documents that carnivores can adjust to a vegetarian diet. See his *Noah’s Ark: A Feasibility Study* (Dallas, TX: Institute for Creation Research, 1996), 167-72.

<sup>11</sup> See Tom Hennigan, Georgia Purdom, and Todd Charles Wood, “Creation’s Hidden Potential,” *Answers* 4, no. 1 (Jan-Mar 2009), 70-75, <<http://www.answersingenesis.org/articles/am/v4/n1/hidden-potential>> (accessed 6 February 2012).

<sup>12</sup> For a further discussion of a creationist perspective on defense and attack features in animals see, Ken Ham, ed., *The New Answers*

is implied by God's judgment of Adam and Eve. Eve had increased pain in childbirth and the bodies of Adam and Eve began to suffer from processes that would eventually lead to death. Yet there is no reason to think that their body structures were significantly modified (or new body parts added) when God judged them.

Some Christians object to the young-earth view on death by saying that since people and animals ate plants, this shows that there was death before Adam. However, according to Genesis 1 and other Scripture passages, plants are not living in the same sense as people, animals, and birds are. Plants are never called "living creatures" (*nephesh chayyah*), as people, land animals, birds, and sea creatures are called (Gen 1:20–21, 24 and 30; Gen 2:7 and 19–20; Gen 6:19–20 and Gen 9:10–17).<sup>13</sup> So then, biblically speaking, plant "death" is categorically different than animal or human death.<sup>14</sup> Since according to Genesis 1 animals were not carnivores in the pre-fall "very good" world, we would expect that other natural evils (animal disease and death, earthquakes, volcanoes, etc.) came after the fall as well. The rest of the Bible confirms this expectation.

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*Book, Vol. 1* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2006), 259–70, <<http://www.answersingenesis.org/articles/nab/origin-of-attack-defense-structures>> (accessed 6 February 2012).

<sup>13</sup> See Michael Todhunter, "Do Leaves Die?" *Answers Magazine*, October–December 2006, 10–13, <[www.answersingenesis.org/articles/am/v1/n2/do-leaves-die](http://www.answersingenesis.org/articles/am/v1/n2/do-leaves-die)> (accessed 6 February 2012). See also James Stambaugh, "Creation's Original Diet and the Changes at the Fall," *TJ* 5, no. 2 (1991): 130–138, <<http://www.answersingenesis.org/articles/tj/v5/n2/diet>> (accessed 6 February 2012).

<sup>14</sup> Job 14:7–12 is the only place in the OT where plants are said to die (using the Hebrew word *mut*), but the passage makes it very clear that the "death" of a tree stump is very different from the death of a man. See also John 12:24. See further James Stambaugh, "Whence Cometh Death? A Biblical Theology of Physical Death and Natural Theology," in Terry Mortenson and Thane H. Ury, eds., *Coming to Grips with Genesis* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2008), 373–98.

When Adam and Eve sinned, it resulted in the judgment of God on the whole creation, not just man. Instantly Adam and Eve died spiritually, evidenced by their hiding from God (Gen 3:8). But they also began to die physically, as Paul clearly teaches in Romans 5:12 and 1 Corinthians 15:21-22. In the latter passage he says, “For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.” That Paul had physical death in mind is seen from the context in both chapters. Paul links the death that Adam brought into the world through sin to the bloody death of Jesus for sin and the bodily resurrection of Jesus from the grave to give believers resurrection life and, in the future, immortal bodies that will never die physically.

But in Genesis 3 we also see that God’s judgment affected the non-human creation. The serpent, which Satan used to deceive Eve, was cursed, resulting in a physical transformation of some kind, either morphological or behavioral, as it began to crawl on its belly (Gen 3:14). Since the same verse says that other animals were also cursed with the serpent,<sup>15</sup> it is reasonable to conclude that they also were altered physically in some way, either morphologically or at least behaviorally.<sup>16</sup> Eve

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<sup>15</sup> Some translations say that the serpent was cursed “more than” (NASB, HCSB, NKJV, and NLT) the other animals, whereas other translations (KJV, ESV, and NIV) have “above.” Both ways of translating the Hebrew word *mikal* imply the same meaning, namely that both the serpent and the animals were cursed, but the serpent more so. There is nothing in the context that requires the meaning that the serpent was cursed in contrast to or exclusively apart from any other animals. The same Hebrew word is used in Genesis 3:1 and there is no reason to think that the serpent was the only clever creature rather than being cleverer than other creatures.

<sup>16</sup> This should not be considered an act of creation, per se, as Genesis 1 describes, for God had finished his creation activities by the seventh day (Gen 2:1-3). Rather this was an act of judgment on the existing creation. We cannot know for sure what God did because Scripture is silent about this detail. But the text is clear that physical changes of some kind took place in the lives of animals, Eve, and Adam. From what we are learning about genetics today, it seems very

was changed physically so as to have increased pain in child-birth (Gen 3:16).<sup>17</sup>

Also, God cursed the ground itself. The text is clear: "Then to Adam He said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat from it'; Cursed is the ground because of you; In toil you will eat of it All the days of your life." (Gen 3:17)

It does not say that *Adam* would curse the ground later because of his future sinful activities, but rather that *God* cursed the ground at that moment because of Adam's past sin of obeying his wife's command instead of God's command about the forbidden fruit. That this understanding of Genesis 3:17 is correct is confirmed by Lamech's statement 1000 years after Adam at the birth of Lamech's son, Noah (Gen 5:29). Lamech said, "This one will give us rest from our work and from the toil of our hands arising from the ground which the LORD has cursed." In Hebrew the words for "ground" and "curse" are exactly the same as those used in Genesis 3:17. Genesis 3 continues in verses 18-19: "Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; And you will eat the plants of the field; By the sweat of your face You will eat bread, Till you return to the ground, Because from it you were taken; For you are dust, And to dust you shall return."

One evidence of this curse on the ground was that thorns and thistles "shall" grow for you and you "will" eat the plants as a result of sweaty labor. While there is no reason to think that

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reasonable to think that God "switched on" some regulatory genes in the DNA that were created in the "off" position (so that in God's foreknowledge of the fall, they would be ready for use in his curse), in order to affect these changes. An analogy could perhaps be when Jesus cursed the fig tree (Matt 21:19) and it withered and when God made Moses' hand leprous and then healthy again (Exod 4:6-7).

<sup>17</sup> All pain is not evil, as anyone who has do physical exercise to be healthy knows. A little bit of pain is good to help us discern our surroundings and keep us from injury. It was increased pain in child-birth that was part of God's judgment.

that the garden of Eden was exempt from this curse,<sup>18</sup> God is primarily referring to the ground outside the garden, from which Adam was taken and to which Adam and Eve were expelled and in which they would battle thorns and thistles (Gen 3:23).

The whole earth was cursed again at Noah's flood, which destroyed the surface of the earth (including the garden of Eden<sup>19</sup>), just as God said in Genesis 6:13. And after Noah's sacrifice, God promised that he would never again destroy every living thing. Genesis 8:22 says, "The LORD smelled the soothing aroma; and the LORD said to Himself, 'I will never again curse the ground on account of man, for the intent of man's heart is evil from his youth; and I will never again destroy every living thing, as I have done.'" This again confirms the interpretation of Genesis 3:17 above: "curse" here in 8:22 is the translation of a different but synonymous Hebrew term to the one used in 3:17, but the Hebrew word for "ground" in 8:22 is the same as in 3:17.

So, as in the case of the fall, God did not judge only man in the flood. The non-human creation also was judged. Because of man's wickedness, millions of land animals and birds perished. With tsunamis set off by the fountains of the great deep

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<sup>18</sup> The angels assigned to guard the entrance to the garden (Gen 3:24), were there not to keep Adam from enjoying thornless ground, but to prevent him and Eve from gaining access to the tree of life.

<sup>19</sup> This is why we cannot find the garden today. The description given in Genesis 2 does not fit any location on earth. Genesis says a river flowed out of the Garden and divided into four rivers, two of which are called "Tigris" and "Euphrates." But these are not the same as the rivers by the same name in Iraq. Those two rivers in Iraq start in very different places in the mountains of Turkey and eventually join each other as they flow into the Persian Gulf. The names are the same as the two rivers in Genesis 2 no doubt for similar reasons that there is a Moscow, Russia, and a Moscow, Idaho, USA or there is Birmingham, England, and Birmingham, Alabama, USA or that there is a city named Aurora in many states in America. Identical names do not mean identical or even similar geographical locations.

breaking open (Gen 7:11),<sup>20</sup> millions of sea creatures would have also died as they were washed up on the land or buried in sediments coming off the land. The massive flooding would have also ripped up all the land vegetation.

This connection of God's judgment of man with the suffering and death of non-human creatures associated with man is seen elsewhere in Scripture as well. For example, the first recorded animal death is implied by Genesis 3:21, when God made coats of sin as a covering for Adam and Eve. This seems the most logical explanation for how Abel knew to sacrifice animals from his flock for his sin (Gen 4:4), which the first explicit description of animal sacrifice in the Bible. The whole later sacrificial system of Israel shows that God used the death of innocent animals ("without blemish") as a covering for sin. Accepting millions of years of animal death before the fall breaks asunder this connection between animal death, sin, and restoration of man's relationship with God.

In Deuteronomy 28:15-68, God threatened to curse the land, the crops, and the livestock of the Jews, as well as judging the people themselves because of their disobedience. This threat was executed many times in Israel's history as the people rebelled against God. Again, the text is clear that these were curses that the Lord would bring on the nation in judgment, not something the Israelites themselves would do to their land, crops, and animals because of their bad farming practices or animal husbandry.

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<sup>20</sup> The Hebrew word translated "broken up" (KJV, or "burst open" in NAS) is used in Numbers 16:31 to refer to a small earthquake, in Judges 15:19 to the breaking of rock, and in Zechariah 14:4 to the dividing of a mountain into a huge valley. So this word is loaded with geological significance and indicates enormous tectonic upheavals on the pre-flood ocean floor, which would have caused massive tsunamis. Imagine tsunamis like the one in Japan in March 2011, occurring all over the earth for months. Add to this the fact that earthquakes often trigger volcanoes and we can readily see that the flood was a world-changing catastrophe of incredible violence and destructive power.

Similarly, in 2 Chronicles 7:12-14 we read that God's blessing or judgment on the land is conditioned on Israel's obedience:

Then the LORD appeared to Solomon at night and said to him, "I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for Myself as a house of sacrifice. If I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or if I command the locust to devour the land, or if I send pestilence among My people, and My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin and will heal their land."

The book of Jonah indicates that God's threatened judgment of Nineveh would also include the death of the people's animals (Jonah 4:11). Other verses that speak of God's curse on the land, animals, and plants because of human sin include Jeremiah 7:20 and 12:4, Haggai 1:9-11, and Malachi 3:9-12 and 4:6.

In the NT, we see again this connection between the sin and redemption of man and the corruption and liberation of the non-human creation. Paul tells us in Romans 8:19-23, that presently the whole creation groans in slavery to corruption and futility, waiting for the final act in the redemption of Christians—giving them immortal resurrected bodies.

For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly 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 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 together until now. And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.

Most commentators in the history of the church have identified this subjection of the creation to futility and corruption with God's curse at the fall. This is understandable since it is the only interpretation that really makes sense

exegetically and theologically.<sup>21</sup> The reference to “pains of childbirth” points to God’s judgment of Eve. The liberation of the creation is linked to the final redemption of Christians, and therefore it is most reasonable to conclude that the bondage of the creation is linked to the fall of man which necessitated redemption. This conclusion is reinforced by the fact that in Romans 5:12, Paul has already established the fundamental importance of the fall with regard to the gospel. Also, there is nothing in Genesis 1 that would lead us to think that the creation was at that time already in bondage to corruption. Finally, it is contrary to the nature of God to think that God created the non-human creation enslaved to futility and suffering from the very beginning and then pronounced it all “very good.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> See Henry B. Smith, Jr., “Cosmic and Universal Death from Adam’s Fall: An Exegesis of Romans 8:19-23a,” *Journal of Creation* 21, no. 1 (2007), 75-85, <<http://creation.com/cosmic-and-universal-death-from-adams-fall-an-exegesis-of-romans-819-23a>> (accessed 6 February 2012). For a briefer discussion, see Douglas Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 513-14; Thomas Schreiner, *Romans* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), p. 435; and John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), pp. 301-302.

<sup>22</sup> Denis Alexander (prominent theistic evolutionist in the UK), *Creation or Evolution: Do We Have to Choose?* (UK: Monarch Books, 2008), 269-70, argues that Isaiah 24-27 is what Paul is alluding to in Romans 8. He says this because in the Isaiah passage we see the suffering of the earth due to God’s judgment of man’s sin, the personification of creation’s response to the judgment, the promise of God’s glory being revealed, the present waiting of the righteous in hope, the use of the birth-pang imagery, the defeat of death, and the possibility of life before death. Several things can be said in response. First, there is no obvious link to Isaiah 24-27 in Romans, whereas Paul has already made a very clear link to Genesis 3 in his discussion of Adam and the origin of death in Romans 5. Second, there is no specific act of human sin in Isaiah 24-27 that would result in God’s judgment on creation. Third, Genesis speaks of the curse on the animals and land in chapters 3 and 8. And in Genesis 5:29, Lamech explicitly refers to this curse at the birth of Noah. Also, Deuteronomy 28 speaks of the

When that future redemptive event happens at the return of Jesus Christ, we will see the “restoration” and “redemption” of “all things” to a state similar to but even better than the pre-fall world, according to Acts 3:20-21<sup>23</sup> and Colossians 1:15-20.<sup>24</sup> Then there will be no more carnivorous behavior among animals (according to Isa 11:6-9) and no human disease, suffering, or death (according to Rev 21:3-5) because there will be no more curse (according to Rev 22:3).<sup>25</sup> The curse came

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curse on Israel’s land, crops, and animals, which happened numerous times in Israel before Isaiah’s day as a result of Israel’s disobedience. So, the curse on creation alluded to in Romans 8 cannot be what Isaiah 24-27 refers to. Finally, the connection between man’s sin and God’s judgment on the earth and the birth-pang imagery we find in Isaiah 24-27 is preceded historically by the mention of these things in Genesis 3. So, Isaiah is clearly dependent on Genesis, not vice versa. Alexander (PhD in neurochemistry) is Director of the Faraday Institute for Science and Religion, at St. Edmund’s College, Cambridge University in England.

<sup>23</sup> “and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, Whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things, about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient times” (NASB).

<sup>24</sup> “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 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. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. For it was the Father’s good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven” (NASB).

<sup>25</sup> I am inclined to think that Isaiah 11:6-9 (like Isa 65:24-25) refers to the literal 1,000-year millennium right before the eternal state begins. But, even if that is wrong, clearly the passage is speaking of a future state of affairs that is very different from the present, for it will be a time when the knowledge of the Lord will fill the earth as the

upon the creation at Adam's fall and will be removed at the Last Adam's second coming. At that time there will also no longer be even the possibility of sin, so it will be an even better world than the pre-fall "very good" creation.<sup>26</sup>

This understanding of the cosmic impact of the final redemptive work of Christ is the orthodox Christian view, as the systematic theology texts of Wayne Grudem and Millard Erickson affirm, though sadly they both have accepted millions of years of natural evil in the creation before the fall.<sup>27</sup>

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water covers the seas, which certainly does not describe our present world. In that righteous world both man and the animals will be significantly changed in behavior, though still recognizable as the creatures we know today. Surely in the eternal perfect state this changed behavior in the animals will continue. We have no biblical reason to think carnivorous behavior will return to the creation in the eternal state. The point is that carnivorous behavior is part of the fallen world, not the period before the fall or after the return of Christ, when the knowledge of the Lord and holiness will indeed fill the earth.

<sup>26</sup> Three considerations point to the impossibility of sin by the redeemed in the eternal state. First John 3:1-3 says that by fixing our hope now on Christ it has a purifying effect (our increasing sanctification) and then one day when we see him, we shall be like him, who is sinless and incapable of sin. In 2 Peter 3:13 we are told that believers are "looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells." Finally, in Revelation 21 and 22, in the new heavens and earth, there will be no more sickness, suffering and death because there will be no more curse. The unredeemed sinners will have already been cast into the lake of fire.

<sup>27</sup> See Terry Mortenson, "Systematic Theology Texts and the Age of the Earth: A Response to the Views of Erickson, Grudem, and Lewis and Demarest," *Answers Research Journal* 2 (16 December 2009):175-99, <<http://www.answersingenesis.org/articles/arj/v2/n1/systematic-theology-age-of-earth>> (accessed 6 February 2012).

### Some More Objections

A few objections have been raised to this view of there being no natural evil before the fall. One relates to the verbs used in Genesis 1:26 and 28. Here we are told that man was created to rule or have dominion (*radah*) over the sea creatures, birds and land animals.<sup>28</sup> *Radah* does not necessarily mean abusive rule or that the ruler is having resistance from that which he rules. It can reflect a benevolent, peaceful rule.<sup>29</sup> And that sense is consistent with the context in Genesis 1. The rulership of man over creation is part of God's blessing on man and is a reflection of God's rule over his creation, which is benevolent, not abusive or oppressive. Man is to be sub-regent under God's ultimate rule, and so by implication man's rule or dominion should be benevolent, not abusive. As Proverbs 12:10 teaches us, "a righteous man has regard for the life of his beast, but the compassion of the wicked is cruel."

Furthermore, the use of *radah* in these verses tells us nothing about the nature of the creatures that Adam and Eve were to rule. Some sea creatures and most birds and land animals which man rules over today are vegetarian and not dangerous to man. In everyday life, man rules over (through domestication) many herbivores: camels, cows, water buffalo, horses, pigs, sheep, goats, elephants, chickens, turkeys,

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<sup>28</sup> The Hebrew word translated rule (*radah*) in Genesis 1:26 and subdue (*kabash*) in Genesis 1:28 are not the same verb translated as rule/master (*mashal*) in Genesis 3:16 and 4:7. *Mashal* can have a positive sense of ruling benevolently (e.g., Gen 1:18, 2 Chron 7:20) but also an oppressive sense (e.g., Prov 28:15 and here in Gen 3:16 and Gen 4:7). So, context determines the sense intended in any particular verse.

<sup>29</sup> See, for example, Leviticus 25:43, 46, and 53, where "with harshness" modifies *radah* to give the idea of abusive rule. In 1 Kings 5:16 and 9:23 we have no reason to think that Solomon's work-force supervisors had to rule harshly because of violent or dangerous workers. The same applies to Benjamin being a ruler over the other tribes of Israel (Ps 68:27). Of course, *radah* can also have the sense of ruling firmly over those who oppose the ruler (e.g., Ps 110:2).

parakeets, etc., and man does not need to rule them in an abusive manner to be in control. Even dangerous animals like lions and sharks and crocodiles can be ruled in a non-abusive manner.

In Genesis 1:28 man is commanded to subdue (*kabash*) the earth. The text does not say that man should subdue the animals. *Kabash* means to take complete control of something, to make it subservient. The fact that God uses a different verb (*radah*) and to refer to man's "rule" over the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and everything that moves on the earth, strongly suggests that "subdue" relates to the non-living creation and "rule" relates to the living creatures. But nothing in the context warrants reading into "subdue it [the earth]" the idea that the creation had been filled with natural evil (death, disease, extinction, asteroid impacts, tsunamis, etc.) for millions of years prior to man. Man cannot really do anything about that large-scale natural evil even today with all his technologies. In the "very good" pre-fall creation, "subdue" need not mean any more than take control of the non-living resources of the earth and harness or manage them for the good of man. In modern terms it is a mandate to do science and develop technology, even as the early descendants of Adam mined ores, manufactured metals, and developed musical instruments, which undoubtedly involved much experimentation and observation (Gen 4:22).

In Genesis 2:5 and 15 we read that Adam was to "cultivate" (*'abad*) the ground. Then after the fall, Adam was sent out of the Garden to cultivate (*'abad*) the ground (Gen 3:23). Would not this imply that the creation was the same before and after the fall? No, because the ground was cursed at the fall and thorns began to grow thereafter (Gen 3:17-18). But why would the ground need to be cultivated in a "very good" creation? Several reasons come to mind as possibilities: to aerate the soil for greater plant growth, to thin out vegetation to allow each plant more space for growth, to keep good plants from growing in undesirable places, and to move plants to creatively make new plant arrangements in parts of the garden where there was open space. So the word "cultivate" does not prove that there

were thorns and thistles and natural evils in the Earth outside the Garden of Eden or even inside the Garden.

Genesis 2:8 says, “The LORD God planted a garden” (NIV) within the existing creation. If the creation were already “very good,” it has been objected, why wasn’t it already as pristine as any garden could possibly be? Evidently God felt the creation outside his new garden needed some work. Hence, it could not have been “perfect.” In reply, the text indicates that God created the garden as a limited area in which to test Adam’s obedience. So, the presence of the special garden in a “very good” creation with no animal predation, disease, thorns, natural disasters, etc., is not a logical problem. Conversely, it is not logically or biblically necessary to conclude that the existence of the garden must imply that the world outside the garden was like today’s world, full of animal death, disease, predation, and natural disasters. Yes, “some work” was needed outside the garden: cultivation and care (Gen 2:5, 15). But this in no way implies millions of years of natural evil.

So, to accept millions of years of animal death, disease, and extinction along with hurricanes, earthquakes, tornadoes, and other natural evil before the creation and fall of man not only contradicts and destroys the Bible’s teaching about creation week and the fall, but it also undermines the Bible’s teaching regarding the full redemptive work of Christ.

Some important questions follow from the Bible’s teaching on the pre-fall creation and the post-fall curse. If God cursed the earth with thorns after Adam sinned (as Gen 3:18 says, “both thorns and thistles [the ground] *shall* grow for you”), then why do we find fossil thorns in rock layers which the evolutionists claim are about 350 million years old?<sup>30</sup> If the millions of years

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<sup>30</sup> Wilson N. Stewart and Gar W. Rothwell, *Paleobotany and the Evolution of Plants* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP, 1993), 172-76. It shows fossilized thorny plants (*Psilophyton crenulatum*) found in the Devonian formation, which the evolutionists date at 345–395 million years BP (before present).

are true, then God lied about the thorns and thistles.<sup>31</sup> Conversely, if Genesis 3:18 is true, then the evolutionist claim about millions of years must be a lie.

Another question must be considered. Did arthritis, gout, rickets, viruses, malaria, and cancer exist in the “very good” world before man sinned? If the evolutionists’ dating methods are correct, the answer must be “yes,” because many kinds of disease have been found in animals in the fossil record,<sup>32</sup> including arthritis, abscesses, and tumors in dinosaur bones dated to be 110 million years old. A researcher of these bones tells us that “diseases look the same through time ... it makes no difference whether this is now or a hundred million years ago.”<sup>33</sup> There is also considerable evidence of rickets, syphilis,

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<sup>31</sup> God would not necessarily need to create thorns de novo at the fall. He may have simply “switched on” some already created genetic information to cause plants to grow thorns and have other characteristics that would be needed for the post-Fall world. See Ginger Allen, “Thorns and Thistles: Defense and Survival Adaptations,” 27 April 2011, <<http://www.answersingenesis.org/articles/aid/v6/n1/thorns-thistles>> (accessed 6 February 2012).

<sup>32</sup> See Rush K. Acton, “Bone Disease Simulating Ancient Age in ‘Pre-Human’ Fossils,” <<http://www.icr.org/article/bone-disease-simulating-ancient-age-pre-human-foss/>> (accessed 6 February 2012); “Researchers Find 19 Million-year-old Genomic Fossils of Hepatitis B-like Viruses in Songbirds,” 28 September 2010, <[www.physorg.com/news204883317.html](http://www.physorg.com/news204883317.html)> (accessed 6 February 2012); Juan Carlos Cisneros et al; “Spondylarthritis in the Triassic,” 14 October 2010, <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2954804/> (accessed 6 February 2012); “Gout Found on T. Rex Hands,” <[www.enchantedlearning.com/subjects/dinosaurs/dinos/trex/Trexgout.shtml](http://www.enchantedlearning.com/subjects/dinosaurs/dinos/trex/Trexgout.shtml)>; and “Malaria Documented in Fossilized Mosquitoes Dated to be 30 Million Years,” see <<http://www.nobelprize.org/educational/medicine/malaria/readmore/history.html>> (accessed 6 February 2012).

<sup>33</sup> Anonymous, “Saurian Sore,” (*Discover*, Oct 1998, 26). Because the diseases look the same, medical schools are beginning to have their students study cancer in dinosaur bones so as to become more skilled in diagnosing cancers in humans. See Heather Whipps, “Dinosaur

dental disease, cannibalism, and other diseases in human fossil bones that evolutionists date to be tens or hundreds of thousands of years before any biblically plausible date for Adam.<sup>34</sup> If the Bible is true, then those dates are false, and there was no pre-fall death and disease.

Furthermore, evolutionists insist that over the course of a half billion years there were five major extinction events or periods, when 65–90 percent of all species living at those particular times went extinct.<sup>35</sup> They also claim many lesser extinction events or periods. If this was the way the creation was for millions of years, then what impact on the creation did the fall and curse have? None. Contrary to what the Bible teaches, the fall would have only caused spiritual death in man.

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Tumor Studied for Human Cancer Clues,” 3 April 2006, <[www.livescience.com/4013-dinosaur-tumor-studied-human-cancer-clues.html](http://www.livescience.com/4013-dinosaur-tumor-studied-human-cancer-clues.html)> (accessed 28 April 2011).

<sup>34</sup> Marvin Lubenow, “Pre-Adamites, Sin, Death and the Human Fossils,” *Creation Ex Nihilo Technical Journal* 12, no. 2 (1998), 222–32.

<sup>35</sup> The names and approximate evolutionary dates of the supposed five major extinction events are these: Late Ordovician (440 Million Years Ago, 100+ families of marine invertebrates perished, <[www.park.org/Canada/Museum/extinction/ordmass.html](http://www.park.org/Canada/Museum/extinction/ordmass.html)> (accessed 11 Aug. 2009); Late Devonian (365 MYA, 70% of marine invertebrates perished along with other marine life, <[www.park.org/Canada/Museum/extinction/devmass.html](http://www.park.org/Canada/Museum/extinction/devmass.html)> (accessed 11 August 2009); Permian-Triassic (245 MYA, greatest mass extinction event, 90% of marine species and 70% of land vertebrate species went extinct); <[http://www.sciencedaily.com/articles/p/permian-triassic\\_extinction\\_event.htm](http://www.sciencedaily.com/articles/p/permian-triassic_extinction_event.htm)> (accessed 6 February 2012), Late Triassic 210 MYA, at least 50% of species went extinct, <[www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Triassic%E2%80%93Jurassic\\_extinction\\_event](http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Triassic%E2%80%93Jurassic_extinction_event)> (accessed 11 August 2009); Cretaceous-Tertiary (65 MYA, second largest mass extinction, 85% of all species, including all dinosaurs).

See <[www.park.org/Canada/Museum/extinction/cretmass.html](http://www.park.org/Canada/Museum/extinction/cretmass.html)> (accessed 11 August 2009). The Canadian web site bases its information on Steven M. Stanley (a leading evolutionist), *Extinction* (New York: Scientific American Library, 1987).

In fact, we can go further and say that if the millions of years of death, disease, and extinction really did occur, then that “very good” creation of Genesis 1 was considerably *worse* than the world we now inhabit where occasionally habitats are polluted or destroyed, and a few creatures are brought to extinction due to human sin. We have never seen in human history the kind of mass-kill, extinction events that the evolutionary geologists say occurred before man came into existence (unless, that is, we accept the global flood of Noah’s day; but old-earth proponents reject the idea that Noah’s flood was global).

Thinking in a logically consistent manner, we must rule out Noah’s flood as a global flood, if we accept the millions of years as fact. The reason is this. The same scientific establishment that dogmatically states that the geological record reflects millions of years of history also insists that there is no geological evidence of a global flood, in human history or before man. To accept what the secular geologists say about the first point but to reject what they say about the second point is inconsistent. But to believe in a global flood that occurred about 4000 years ago and left no lasting erosional and sedimentary geological evidence while believing that the geological effects of lesser floods occurring millions of years ago survived the ravages of time and Noah’s flood until our day is most unreasonable. So we must decide: either we believe God’s Word about a global flood or we believe in millions of years. We cannot consistently or logically believe in both.

So, if the millions of years really happened, then the fall actually improved the world from what it was like in the “very good” pre-fall creation. In this case, the curse at the fall should actually be viewed as a great blessing!

We simply cannot legitimately argue what the pre-fall creation was like on the basis of our experiences and observations in this present fallen world. We must draw all our conclusions from Scripture. But no statement in the Bible supports the notion that God’s “very good” creation was subjected to futility and in bondage to corruption involving millions of years of animal death, disease, predation, and extinction, along with natural evils such as tsunamis, hurricanes, volcanoes, and asteroid impacts.

I conclude then that if the Bible's teaching on death, the curse, and the final redemptive work of Christ is true, as it surely is, then the millions-of-years idea must be a grand myth, really a lie, and one of the greatest deceptions designed (by men or demons) to destroy faith in the Bible and the gospel. Conversely, if the millions of years of natural evil really happened, then the Bible's teaching on these subjects must be utterly false. But if so, this turns the gospel into the greatest deception, which in turn has great implications for the character of God, to which we now turn.

### THE NATURE OF GOD

Closely related to this issue of death is the incompatibility of the idea of millions of years with the character of God, as revealed in Scripture.<sup>36</sup>

The events of creation in Genesis 1 were clearly miraculous. God spoke and things immediately came into existence. God did not speak and then wait millions of years for things to happen. The emphatic repetition in Genesis 1 of the phrases "let there be" or its equivalent (10 times), "and it was so" (7 times), "God saw that it was good" (7 times) and "there was evening and there was morning, the Xth day" (6 times) strongly indicates this.

It is also clear in Genesis 1 that God supernaturally created the first plants, sea creatures, birds, land animals, and the first human couple because the description of those events is stated in a way that contrasts with the description of how other such creatures would come into existence after the original ones. The first creatures were the result of supernatural creation, the later ones were produced by natural procreation—i.e., by the natural growth of seeds in the fruit of the first plants or by the sexual reproduction of the first animal and human pairs.

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<sup>36</sup> I am indebted to Dr. David Fouts, whose lecture at a technical creation conference a few years ago first drew my attention to many of the points presented here. At the time he was an Old Testament professor at Bryan College in Tennessee.

Psalm 33:6-9 emphasizes this miraculous and instantaneous nature of the divine acts of creation when it says, "By the word of the LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of His mouth all their host. ... 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." Likewise, the miracles of Jesus, the Creator who became man, show that when God speaks, the non-human creation responds immediately; all the miracles of Jesus were instantaneous in effect.

These facts support the conclusion that all the divine acts in Genesis 1 were essentially instantaneous or occurred in a miraculously short period of time, on the respective days they are reported to have occurred. Conversely, there is nothing in the text that indicates that God required or used thousands or millions of years to accomplish his objective in each act of creation.

Some questions follow from these observations. If the gap theory is true in placing millions of years between Genesis 1:1 and 1:2, then what kind of God is it who would create the earth and all forms of life, except man, and then let them live and die for millions of years or die in a supposed flood associated with Satan's fall (a flood for which there is no biblical evidence) before he recreated the world in six literal days with man in it and with creatures very similar to the ones he had already destroyed prior to man?<sup>37</sup> What kind of God would create like this?

If the day-age view or framework hypothesis or any other old-earth interpretation of Genesis is true, then what kind of

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<sup>37</sup> The late paleontologist at Harvard, Stephen J. Gould, said that there were two characteristics of the fossil record: abrupt appearance and stasis. That is, the first time a creature appears in the lowest rock layer, it is appears fully formed and fully recognizable. As we come up through the rock record it remains essentially the same (except for variation within the kind, such as size, shape of a body part or length of hair). See Stephen J. Gould, "Evolution's Erratic Pace," *Natural History*, 86, no. 5 (May 1977), 12-16. This amazing similarity (often almost identical) between fossil creatures and their living representatives has been illustrated in beautiful photography in Carl Werner, *Living Fossils* (Green Forest, AR: New Leaf P, 2009).

God is it who would create the earth instantly and then leave it covered with water for millions of years and then create dry land and plants and let them produce for millions of years before he made the sun or sea creatures, birds, land animals, and people, many of which use the plants for food? And what kind of God would make the sun, moon, and stars for the purpose of enabling man to measure the passage of time, but then wait billions of years before he made man to measure those years, seasons, or days by the movement of the heavenly bodies? Is any of this consistent with the wise God revealed in Scripture?

Or if we reject the order of events in Genesis 1 and say that the evolutionary order of appearance of the different creatures and the time-scale are correct, we have other theological problems. What kind of God would create the earth 4.5 billion years ago and let it exist for one billion years before he made the first microscopic creatures (protozoans<sup>38</sup>) and then wait another 2.9 billion years before he made the first metazoans<sup>39</sup> and then wait another 625 million years before he made Adam and Eve, who were the ultimate goal and pinnacle of his creation and who were made to rule over all the animals, most of whom lived and died before Adam and Eve were created?<sup>40</sup> Again, is this way of creating consistent with the wisdom and omnipotence of God as he is revealed in Scripture?

And if God really created creatures in the order and over the long time-scales that evolutionists claim, does this not make God

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<sup>38</sup> Protozoans are microscopic animals made up of a single cell or a group of more or less identical cells and living in water or as parasites, including ciliates, flagellates, rhizopods, or sporozoans.

<sup>39</sup> Metazoans are all animals whose bodies, originating from a single cell, are composed of many differentiated cells arranged into definite organs.

<sup>40</sup> For an explanation of this evolutionist view of history (where the earth's 4.5-billion-year history is represented as a 24-hour clock); see Kenneth R. Miller and Joseph S. Levine, *Biology* (Boston: Pearson Education, 2010), 543.

a deceiving liar or at least a very incompetent communicator when he inspired Moses to write the Genesis 1 account of the order of his creative acts?

If an old-earth creationist does not accept the order of things coming into existence in the evolutionary story, but only accepts the millions-of-years time-frame, then he is being very selective about what he will accept from the mainstream scientific majority just as he is selective about what to accept from the Bible. But this is inconsistent, since there is no *scientific* reason to accept the millions of years and at the same time to reject the order of events in the evolutionary story. If the order is rejected for *biblical* reasons (and there are good biblical reasons for doing so<sup>41</sup>), then there is no consistently biblical reason to accept the “scientific” claim of millions of years.

Furthermore, as we noted before, at the end of creation week God called everything that he had made “very good.” But could the God of Scripture really describe as “very good” a fossil graveyard of thousands of feet of sedimentary rocks covering the whole earth and containing billions of fossils of former living things? Could he really call cancer (as seen in dinosaur bones) “very good”? Could he call thorns and thistles “very good” when in Genesis 3 he says they are the result of His curse? If God called all this death “very good” and if God told Adam that thorns were a consequence of his sin, when in fact they existed

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<sup>41</sup> Some have claimed that the order in Genesis fits amazingly well with the order “discovered by science.” See for example, Norman Geisler and Peter Bocchino, *Unshakable Foundations* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House, 2001), 172-74. But this claim will not stand after careful attention is given to the details of Genesis 1 and the details of the order in the evolution story, which Geisler and Bocchino have failed to do. For example, according to Scripture, earth was created before the sun, moon and stars, plants were created before sun, moon and stars, all land plants were created before any sea creatures, and birds were created before dinosaurs (which as land animals were created on day 6, after the birds on day 5). These and other contradictions in order between Genesis and evolution are explained in Terry Mortenson, “Evolution vs Creation: The Order of Events Matter!” <<http://www.answersingenesis.org/articles/2006/04/04/order-of-events-matters>> 4 April 2006 (accessed 6 February 2012).

long before he was created, then again God lied or he is totally incompetent in his use of language. But the biblical God is the God of truth, and as the Author of all language, he is fully capable of saying exactly what he means. It is Satan who is a liar and a master deceiver (John 8:44, Rev 12:9).

Additionally, if God created through a process (either progressive creation or theistic evolution) that involved millions of years of death, then he is very different from the God revealed in the post-fall world. The God of the post-fall world commanded his people (the Israelites) to take care of their animals and give them a day of rest (Exod 20:10 and 23:12). The post-fall God commanded the Israelites to help lost or trapped animals (Exod 23:4-5). *That* God told them not to be cruel to their animals, such as muzzling an ox while it was threshing (Deut 25:4). The post-fall God says that “a righteous man has regard for the life of his beast, but the compassion of the wicked is cruel” (Prov 12:10). *That* God says in many passages that he cares for the creatures of the earth in His fallen, cursed creation (Ps 104:14-16 and 27-28; Ps 145:14-16; Ps 147:9; Jonah 4:11; Matt 6:26; Lk 12:24).<sup>42</sup>

It has been objected that the same God ordered the Israelites to slaughter every breathing thing, including animals, in various instances (e.g., Deut 13:7-18, 1 Sam 15:3). But the difference is that these were acts of divine judgment (to be executed through faithful Israelites) on wicked idolatrous

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<sup>42</sup> It might be objected that animals live and die today, and it is not equated with divine cruelty. So, why could not that be the case in the pre-fall world? I would reply that animal death today is not as God intended originally because it is an aspect of God’s just judgment of his creation (which is now in bondage to corruption: Rom 8:19-23) on account of the rebellion of his highest creation, man. But in light of God’s prophecies about the future state when animals will not be carnivores or dangerous to man (Isa 11:6-9 and 65:24-25), it is clear that the present state of affairs is not as God wants it to remain. Also, the fossil record does not speak of animals dying of old age. It speaks of massive, catastrophic death, even burial alive, of billions of creatures (which is not happening even in today’s post-fall creation). Finally, the problem is having all this carnage in a creation which was not cursed but which God called “very good.”

people. Their animals perished just as did the animals living at the time of the judgment of Noah's flood. Neither of those situations is like the situation we have in the Genesis 1 "very good" creation or in the normal course of God's care for animals and his commands for godly believers to treat their animals well.

If millions of years of death, disease, and massive extinction really occurred, then God is like the wicked man of Proverbs 12:10 and he was doing exactly the opposite of what he told the Jews to do. So then, those who accept of millions of years are assaulting (no doubt unconsciously and unintentionally) the character of Almighty God.

If God created over those millions of years, then he clearly was not intelligent enough and powerful enough to create a world right in the first place. Either he lacked the sovereign power to control his creation so that it did not destroy most of his previous work or he intentionally created obstacles to hinder himself from accomplishing his intention of making a very good world. And then all along the way he kept making creatures very similar to the creatures that he had just destroyed either by intention or by incompetence and impotence. What a monstrous God this would be! He would be less competent than the most incompetent engineer or construction worker. And he would be grossly unjust and unrighteous compared to the God of Isaiah who said that when the knowledge of the Lord fills the earth, animals will not hurt or kill each other or people (Isa 11:6-9, 65:24-25).<sup>43</sup> Such a cruel, bumbling, and weak God could not be trusted and would not be worthy of our worship.

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<sup>43</sup> It might be objected that God brought about the death and extinction of animals during the flood, which is in the post-fall period when God demonstrates care for the animals. So, why could not that be the case in the pre-fall period? The reason is that the death and extinction during the flood were part of God's curse on the earth at the flood (Gen 8:21), but God never cursed his creation in the "very good" pre-fall creation week.

And if these millions of years of death really occurred, then God's curse on creation really did nothing to the non-human creation, and therefore his promises about the future cannot be trusted. In fact, in this case none of his Word can be trusted.

This point has not escaped the notice of non-Christians. The evolutionist philosopher, David Hull, is one of many opponents of Christianity who could be cited. In his review of Phillip Johnson's book *Darwin on Trial* (1991) in the prestigious science journal *Nature*, Hull remarks on the implications of Darwinian evolution for the nature of God. But his comments equally apply to all old-earth views, even if we reject Darwinism as the explanation for the origin of the various life-forms. Hull reasons:

The problem that biological evolution poses for natural theologians is the sort of God that a Darwinian version of evolution implies. ... The evolutionary process is rife with happenstance, contingency, incredible waste, death, pain and horror. ... Whatever the God implied by evolutionary theory and the data of natural history may be like, he is not the Protestant God of waste not, want not. He is also not a loving God who cares about his productions. He is not even the awful God portrayed in the book of Job. The God of the Galápagos is careless, wasteful, indifferent, almost diabolical. He is certainly not the sort of God to whom anyone would be inclined to pray.<sup>44</sup>

As I discuss in my book *The Great Turning Point: The Church's Catastrophic Mistake on Geology—Before Darwin* (2004), many Christians in the early nineteenth century raised biblical, theological, philosophical, and scientific arguments against the old-earth geological theories that were developing at that time. These authors collectively became known as the "scriptural geologists." One of them, an Anglican minister named George Bugg, reasoned this way in his 2-volume work in 1826:

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<sup>44</sup> David Hull, "The God of the Galápagos," *Nature* 352 (1991), 485–86.

Hence then, we have arrived at the wanton and wicked notion of the Hindoos, viz., that God has '*created and destroyed worlds as if in sport, again and again*'!! But will any Christian Divine who regards his Bible, or will any Philosopher who believes that the Almighty works no 'superfluous miracles,' and does nothing in vain, advocate the absurdity that a wise, just and benevolent Deity has, 'numerous' times, wrought miracles, and gone out of his usual way for the sole purpose of destroying whole generations of animals, that he might *create others* very like them, but yet differing a little from their predecessors!!<sup>45</sup>

Similarly, the atheist French biologist and Nobel laureate Jacques Monod said, "The struggle for life and elimination of the weakest is a horrible process. ... I am surprised that a Christian would defend the idea that this is the process which God more or less set up in order to have evolution."<sup>46</sup>

Only young-earth creationism gives us a view that is consistent with the glory, wisdom, power, holiness, truthfulness, and omniscient intelligence of the God revealed through the pages of Scriptures. As the Bible presents them, the doctrines of death and the nature of God are utterly opposed to the millions-of-years view. If we believe the Bible's teaching on death, redemption and the character of God, then we must completely reject all old-earth views being advocated by Christians.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> George Bugg, *Scriptural Geology* (London: Hatchard & Son, 1826), 1: 318-19

<sup>46</sup> Jacques Monod (French atheist and Nobel prize-winning biologist), "The Secret of Life," an interview with Laurie John on Australian Broadcasting Co. Network, 10 June 1976, shortly before his death, quoted in Henry Morris, *The Bible, Science and Creation* (El Cajon, CA: ICR, 1991).

<sup>47</sup> For a historical analysis of Luther's, Calvin's, Wesley's, and the nineteenth-century Scriptural geologists' views on this subject in comparison to the views of old-earth proponents in the early nineteenth century, see Thane H. Ury, "Luther, Calvin, and Wesley on the Genesis of Natural Evil: Recovering Lost Rubrics for Defending a Very Good Creation" in Terry Mortenson and Thane H. Ury, eds., *Coming to Grips with Genesis* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2008),

On a practical note, in our ministry to others, if we accept millions of years of natural evil, then we cannot deal effectively with people who are suffering greatly in the aftermath of events such as the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, the 2011 earthquake/tsunami in Japan, and the horrendous series of tornadoes ravaging the southeast United States in April 2011. If these kinds of events were part of the “very good” creation in Genesis 1, then they are not evil but rather good and cannot be called “natural disasters,” as every human calls them. But again, how can we trust a God who calls them “very good”? How can that be any comfort to those people who are so deeply grieving the loss of everything, including loved ones, in such events?

ID leader William Dembski recognizes the serious challenge of trying to be faithful to the Bible’s teaching on the fall while at the same time embracing millions of years. His recent book, *The End of Christianity: Finding a Good God in an Evil World* (2009), is a valiant attempt to resolve the conflict by arguing that the millions of years of natural evil did occur before the fall but are the consequence of the fall as God in his foreknowledge of the fall worked preemptively, just as Jesus was “slain before the foundation of the world” and his redeeming death applied retroactively to people who lived and died before he died in time-space history. Dembski helpfully exposes the fatal weaknesses of many other old-earth theodicies. But his own proposal is equally fatally flawed for exegetical, theological and logical reasons, Tom Nettles from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and I have argued elsewhere.<sup>48</sup>

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399–424. Ury shows that the implied character of God arising from old-earth views is historically unorthodox in the church.

<sup>48</sup> Terry Mortenson, “Christian Theodicy in Light of Genesis and Modern Science: A Young-Earth Creationist Response to William Dembski,” *Answers Research Journal* 2 (2009): 151-67, <[www.answersingenesis.org/contents/379/arj/v2/Dembski\\_Theodicy\\_Refuted.pdf](http://www.answersingenesis.org/contents/379/arj/v2/Dembski_Theodicy_Refuted.pdf)> (accessed 6 February 2012). See also Tom Nettles, Review of William Dembski’s book *The End of Christianity* (2009), *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 13, no. 4 (Winter 2009), 80-85, <[www.sbts.edu/resources/files/2010/02/sbjt\\_134\\_book\\_reviews.pdf](http://www.sbts.edu/resources/files/2010/02/sbjt_134_book_reviews.pdf)> (accessed 6 February 2012). David Allen, a theology professor and

Since writing that book where he advocates that Noah's flood was not global but was localized in the Mesopotamian Valley, Dembski has apparently changed his mind about the flood.<sup>49</sup> But if he now accepts Noah's flood as global, then he has no basis for trusting the evolutionary geologists regarding the age of the earth or dating methods, because a global, catastrophic, year-long flood, as described in Genesis, would produce the kind of fossil-bearing sedimentary rock record like we see on every continent. In this case, the whole reason for Dembski's theodicy vanishes.

### CONCLUSION

The Bible clearly teaches the young-earth creationist view of Genesis 1–11. The belief in a literal six-day creation about 4000 years before Christ and a global flood and no death or natural evil before the fall was the almost universal belief of the church for 1800 years. Progressive creationism and theistic

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dean at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, where Dembski is a professor, wrote a response (with a foreword by Paige Patterson, president of Southwestern) to Nettles's review, February 2010, <[www.baptisttheology.org/documents/AREplytoTomNettlesReviewofDembskisTheEndofChristianity.pdf](http://www.baptisttheology.org/documents/AREplytoTomNettlesReviewofDembskisTheEndofChristianity.pdf)> (accessed 6 February 2012). Nettles posted an insightful response to Allen, "Nettles reply to Allen Mar 2010" in <[wwwFOUNDERS.org/blog/2010/03/tom-nettles-responds-to-paige-patterson.html](http://wwwFOUNDERS.org/blog/2010/03/tom-nettles-responds-to-paige-patterson.html)> posted 23 March 2010, with an introduction by Tom Ascol, Executive Director of Founders Ministries (accessed 6 February 2012). The blog comments after Nettles's response are enlightening.

<sup>49</sup> His retraction is in an article by David Allen, a theology professor and dean at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary: "A Reply to Tom Nettles' Review of William A. Dembski's *The End of Christianity: Finding a Good God in an Evil World*," The Center for Theological Research, February 2010 <<http://www.baptisttheology.org/documents/AREplytoTomNettlesReviewofDembskisTheEndofChristianity.pdf>> (accessed 6 February 2012); pages 8-9 of the Reply, pages 10-11 of the web document.

evolutionism in all their various forms (day-age view, gap theory, framework hypothesis, analogical days view, local flood view, etc.) are recent and novel interpretations that will not stand up to scrutiny with an open Bible.<sup>50</sup>

Prominent historian of science and former creationist Seventh Day Adventist turned agnostic Ronald Numbers recognizes the problem that so many Christians overlook or deny. He put it this way:

For creationists, history is based on the Bible and the belief that God created the world 6,000-10,000 ago. ... We humans were perfect because we were created in the image of God. And then there was the fall. Death appears and the whole account [in the Bible] becomes one of deterioration and degeneration. So we then have Jesus in the New Testament, who promises redemption. Evolution completely flips that. With evolution, you don't start out with anything perfect, you start with primitive little wiggly things, which evolve into apes and, finally, humans. There's no perfect state from which to fall. This makes the whole plan of salvation silly because there never was a fall. What you have then is a theory of progress from single-celled animals to humans and a very, very different take on history, and not just human history.<sup>51</sup>

So, what is at stake in this issue of death and other natural evils before the fall? Nothing less than the character of God, the authority, reliability, and perspicuity of his Word, and the truth of the gospel. While the age of the earth is not a salvation issue,

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<sup>50</sup> Mortenson and Thane H. Ury, *Coming to Grips with Genesis: No old-earth creationist or theistic evolutionist can responsibly ignore this work by fourteen evangelical theologians*. The first three chapters deal with church history and the rest of the book is an in-depth biblical defense of young-earth creationism. The book is intended as a primary or supplementary textbook for seminary and bible college courses. But the editors and authors worked hard to make the arguments understandable to serious-minded lay people.

<sup>51</sup> Ronald Numbers, quoted in Gwen Evans, "Reason or Faith? Darwin Expert Reflects," 3 February 2009, <[www.news.wisc.edu/16176](http://www.news.wisc.edu/16176)> (accessed 18 June 2010).

it is a gospel issue. It is not necessary to believe in a young earth and global flood to be saved. We only need to believe in Jesus as Savior and Lord to be saved. But the acceptance of millions of years of natural evil in the non-human creation undermines the reliability and authority of the Bible that gives us the gospel and destroys the whole reason for the gospel and Christ's final redemptive work.

It is only because the scientific majority claims that millions of years is scientific fact, that old-earth creationists and theistic evolutionists reject what the Bible plainly teaches about the origin of natural and moral evil and the age of the creation. Among the many examples I could give,<sup>52</sup> Pattle Pun, biology professor at Wheaton College, reasons,

It is apparent that the most straightforward understanding of the Genesis record, without regard to all of the hermeneutical considerations suggested by science, is that God created heaven and earth in six solar days,<sup>53</sup> that man was created in the sixth day, that death and chaos entered the world after the Fall of Adam and Eve, that all of the fossils were the result of the catastrophic universal deluge<sup>54</sup> which spared only Noah's family and the animals therewith.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> See Terry Mortenson, "Why Christian Leaders and Scholars Don't Believe Genesis," 31 May 2010, <[www.answersingenesis.org/articles/2010/05/31/why-dont-many-christian-leaders-and-scholars](http://www.answersingenesis.org/articles/2010/05/31/why-dont-many-christian-leaders-and-scholars)> (accessed 6 February 2012).

<sup>53</sup> Creationists are careful not to call them "solar days" because the sun was not created till Day 4. But all six creation days were literal days, just like our 24-hour days today.

<sup>54</sup> No informed young-earth creationist attributes "all the fossils" to Noah's flood. Creationist geologists are not unanimous about where the pre-flood/flood boundary and the flood/post-flood boundary are in the rock record. But most would say that the *majority* (not all) of the fossilized creatures were buried during the flood, while some fossils are in pre-flood sediments and others are in post-flood sediments as a result of localized catastrophes.

Pun says that the young-earth view is the most straightforward understanding of Genesis. But it simply cannot mean what it says because of the majority view in science. Ironically, he does not apply this thinking in regard to the origin of Adam and Eve: he believes the Bible and rejects what the majority of anthropologists say about the evolution of man from ape-like creatures. Such an inconsistent hermeneutic does not impress or persuade skeptics.

William Dembski also is candid about why he does not accept young-earth creationism. He writes,

The young-earth solution to reconciling the order of creation with natural history makes good exegetical and theological sense. Indeed, the overwhelming consensus of theologians up through the Reformation held to this view. I myself would adopt it in a heartbeat except that nature seems to present such strong evidence against it. I'm hardly alone in my reluctance to accept young-earth.<sup>56</sup>

However, it is not "nature" that presents evidence for millions of years and against a literal understanding of Genesis 1-11. It is rather the scientific majority's *naturalistic interpretation* of *some* of the observations of nature that leads to this conclusion,<sup>57</sup> as Dembski himself makes clear elsewhere in the same book. He writes,

A young earth seems to be required to maintain a traditional understanding of the Fall. And yet a young earth clashes sharply with mainstream science. Christians, it seems, must therefore

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<sup>55</sup> Pattle P. T. Pun, "A Theory of Progressive Creationism," *Journal of the American Scientific Affiliation* (March 1987), p. 14.

<sup>56</sup> Dembski, *End of Christianity*, 55.

<sup>57</sup> See Terry Mortenson, "Philosophical Naturalism and the Age of the Earth: Are They Related?" *The Master's Seminary Journal*, 15, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 72-91, <[www.answersingenesis.org/docs2004/naturalismChurch.asp](http://www.answersingenesis.org/docs2004/naturalismChurch.asp)> (accessed 6 February 2012).

choose their poison. They can go with a young earth, thereby maintaining theological orthodoxy but committing scientific heresy; or they can go with an old earth, thereby committing theological heresy but maintaining scientific orthodoxy.<sup>58</sup>

Similarly, in a 2009 interview on Canadian TV, William Lane Craig explained why he rejected the 6000-years age of the universe taught in Scripture: "I don't think it's plausible. The arguments that I give are right in line with mainstream science. I'm not bucking up against mainstream science in presenting these arguments. Rather I'm going with the flow of what contemporary cosmology and astrophysics supports."<sup>59</sup>

But if we are going to give arguments in defense of Christianity that are "right in line with mainstream science" and will not "buck up against" what the majority of contemporary scientists say regarding the age of the creation and death and other natural evil in the non-human creation before Adam, then to be consistent we should reject the Bible's teaching about the virgin birth and resurrection of Jesus because mainstream biology says that virgins do not have babies and dead men do not rise from the dead. But then to be truly consistent, we should reject the whole Bible and abandon the Christian faith, because "mainstream science" (i.e., the evolutionist majority) rejects the miracles, the gospel, the return of Christ, and the new heavens and new earth. Otherwise we are being arbitrary about which parts of the Bible we believe and which parts we will not believe.

However, a large and growing body of scientific evidence shows that both evolution and millions of years are religiously and philosophically motivated myths masquerading as proven scientific fact.<sup>60</sup> The majority of scientists that make up

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<sup>58</sup> Dembski, *End of Christianity*, 77.

<sup>59</sup> Craig was interviewed by Christian Canadian TV talk-show host, Michael Coren on 6 February 2009, <[www.youtube.com/watch?v=IQoLg7w-\\_4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IQoLg7w-_4)> (accessed 6 February 2012).

<sup>60</sup> Terry Mortenson, "'Deep Time' and the Church's Compromise: Historical Background" in Mortenson and Ury, eds., *Coming to Grips*

mainstream science are simply wrong about evolution and the age of the creation. Sadly, judging from the texts, footnotes and bibliographies in the writings of most old-earth proponents (whether Bible scholars or scientists) in the church, such Christians seem seriously ignorant of this wealth of scientific evidence in confirmation of the young-earth creationism taught in the Bible.

Furthermore, the literal history of Genesis 1-11 is absolutely foundational to the truth of the rest of the Bible and the gospel itself. Taking these early chapters of Genesis in any other way undermines the reliability and authority of God's Word, which is what people must believe to be saved: "Faith comes from hearing and hearing by the Word of Christ" (Rom 10:17).

Over the past 200 years the various compromises with evolution and millions of years of natural evil have done incalculable damage to the spiritual health and evangelistic and missionary efforts of the church. That compromise is one of the greatest reasons that Western Europe is now appropriately labeled "post-Christian" and is arguably the toughest mission

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*with Genesis* (2008), 79-104; Andrew Snelling, *Earth's Catastrophic Past* (El Cajon, CA: ICR, 2009), 2 volumes. With a PhD in geology and field work on most continents, Snelling follows the line of argumentation in *The Genesis Flood* [1961] by Whitcomb and Morris though in his 1100 pages he significantly expands, revises, and updates the geological arguments; Andrew Snelling, *Geology: A Biblical Viewpoint on the Age of the Earth* (5-DVD set of lectures); Michael Oard and John Reed, eds., *Rock Solid Answers* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2009, which is the work of nine creation scientists dealing with fourteen of the most common geological objections raised against the young-earth view); Jason Lisle (PhD in astrophysics), *Taking Back Astronomy* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2006); Jason Lisle, *Distant Starlight: Not a Problem for a Young Universe*, DVD; Danny Faulkner (PhD in astronomy), *Universe by Design* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2004); Gary Parker, *Creation: The Facts of Life* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2006); Roger Patterson, *Evolution Exposed: Biology* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2006); John Sanford (PhD in plant genetics, researcher at Cornell University), *Genetic Entropy and the Mystery of the Genome* (Lima, NY: Ivan P, 2005).

field in the world. And Britain and America are rapidly approaching that same spiritual state.

Pertinent to our topic, Martin Luther is reported to have said,

If I profess with the loudest voice and clearest exposition every portion of the truth of God except precisely that little point which the world and the devil are at the moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing Christ. Where the battle rages, there the loyalty of the soldier is proved and to be steady on all the battle fronts besides, is mere flight and disgrace if he flinches at that point.<sup>61</sup>

Christian apologists and theologians must defend not just theistic creation (that God is the Creator) and the miracles and resurrection of Jesus, vital and true as those biblical teachings certainly are. But they must teach and defend all of the truth of the biblical revelation given to us by the only true God, who is the Father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Otherwise, they are not truly, fully *Christian* apologists or fully faithful Christian theologians. The truth we must defend includes the Bible's teaching on the initial "very good" creation, the subsequent fall and curse on the whole creation, the global year-long catastrophic flood, and the future redemption of the whole non-human creation along with the resurrection of the redeemed to eternal life and the resurrection of unrepentant sinners to eternal death in hell. God has spoken plainly and inerrantly in his word. Will we believe and defend his truth from the very first verse?

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<sup>61</sup> Quoted in Francis Schaeffer, *The Great Evangelical Disaster* (Eastbourne, UK: Kingsway, 1985), 50-51. Schaeffer cited the source as *Weimar Ausgabe Briefwechsel* 3, 81f. But the German there does not contain anything that precisely matches the quotation above. However, the statement certainly sounds like something Luther could have said. See Bob Caldwell, "If I profess': A Spurious, if Consistent, Luther Quote?" *Concordia Journal* 35, no. 4 (Fall 2009): 356-59, <<http://deimos3.apple.com/WebObjects/Core.woa/DownloadTrackPreview/csl-public.1572099114.01572099121.2724072047.pdf>> (accessed 30 November 2011).