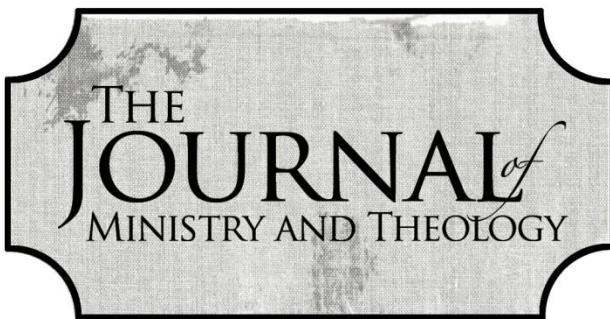


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2 Timothy 2:2

*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.*

The Foundational Gifts of Apostle and Prophet in Ephesians

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INTRODUCTION

Cessationism vs. Continuationism

Nothing has divided the church of Jesus Christ more than different views on spiritual gifts. Christians hold to cessationism or continuationism (sometimes called the Charismatic movement).¹ Some cessationists believe that all of the spiritual gifts have ended. Other cessationists believe that there are permanent spiritual gifts and temporary spiritual gifts today. The foundational gifts of apostles and prophets along with their miraculous gifts (tongues, healing, and miracles) were for the apostolic age of the first century AD church. Cessationists believe that there are no apostles or prophets today. John was the last apostle to live, and he wrote the last New Testament book: the book of Revelation. John warned about adding to the book of Revelation. The NT canon is closed. It took the church many years to recognize that there were only 27 inspired books in the NT canon. Cessationists emphasize that the church does not need any further revelation from God. There are no prophets today being given by the risen Christ to his church. The sign gifts of miracles, healing, and tongues have ceased. Cessationists are not against miracles and healing. God still performs miracles today. God still heals people in answer to prayer and in his providence. But God sometimes chooses not to heal his people who call on him for healing (i.e., Joni E. Tada).

¹ Wayne Grudem, ed., *Are Miraculous Gifts For Today?: Four Views* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996).

Cessationists believe that the miraculous sign gifts of tongues, healing and miracles have ceased.²

Continuationists differ as well on their views of spiritual gifts. Pentecostals believe that speaking in tongues is the sign of the baptism of the Spirit which they think all Christians should pray for and seek after their conversion. Charismatics do not think that every Christian should speak in tongues, but they believe that tongues can be a private prayer language to enhance one's spiritual life. The Third Wave (Wimber; Deere) taught that signs and wonders authenticate the truthfulness of the gospel and provide opportunities for the lost to see the power of the gospel.

Apostles

An “apostle” (*ἀπόστολος*) was a messenger, a delegate, envoy.³ The word *apostle* is used in the NT to refer to the twelve men chosen by Jesus to follow him: Simon Peter, Andrew, James the son of Zebedee, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, Matthew, James the son of Alphaeus, Lebbaeus also called Thaddaeus, Simon the Canaanite, and Judas Iscariot (Matt 10:2-4). All of these men were with Jesus during his ministry and were sent out by him to do miracles and preach the gospel of the kingdom to Jews in Israel (Mark 6:7; Luke 9:1-6; Matt 10:1). The risen Lord Jesus Christ appeared to all of these men (except for Judas) and gave them the Great Commission to go into all the world and make disciples (Matt 28:16-20; Luke 24:36-53). The apostles were to be Christ’s witnesses in the world (Acts 1:8).

After the death of Judas, Peter explained the qualifications of an apostle to the 120 who met in the upper room for the 10 days between Christ’s ascension and the day of Pentecost. An apostle had to have been with Jesus from the baptism of John and he

² Robert Gromacki, *The Modern Tongues Movement* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1967) wrote a detailed exposition of the biblical use of tongues and critiqued the modern Pentecostal/Charismatic movement.

³ BDAG, 122.

had to have seen the risen Jesus. After prayer, Matthias was chosen by lot over Joseph called Barsabbas. Both Matthias and Barsabbas were qualified to be apostles, but only Matthias was numbered with the eleven other apostles (Acts 1:20-26).

Paul called James (the Lord's brother) an apostle (Gal 1:19). James became a believer after he saw the risen Jesus (1 Cor 15:7).

Paul identified himself an apostle in his epistles (Rom 1:1; 11:13; 1 Cor 1:1, 9:1f, 15:9; 2 Cor 1:1; Gal 1:1; Eph 1:1; Col 1:1; 1 Tim 1:1, 2:7; 2 Tim 1:1; Titus 1:1). Paul saw the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus (1 Cor 9:1; 15:8). Paul insisted that he was an apostle because he was directly commissioned by the risen Christ to preach the gospel to the Gentiles (Rom 1:1, 5; 1 Cor 1:1; Gal 1:1, 15; Eph 3:1-13). Paul did not appoint himself to the position of apostle. He was chosen by the Lord Jesus Christ to be his apostle.

In the list of spiritually gifted leaders for the church, Paul placed apostles as first on the list: "And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues" (1 Cor 12:28). Paul also placed apostles first on the list in Ephesians 4:11: "And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers."

The apostles wrote some books of the NT. Matthew wrote the gospel of Matthew. John wrote the gospel of John, 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, and the book of Revelation. Paul wrote Romans-Philemon. Peter wrote 1 and 2 Peter. James saw the risen Christ and wrote the epistle of James.

The apostles performed signs and wonders (miracles) in the early church (Acts 2:43; 2 Cor 12:12). The apostle Peter raised a lame man (Acts 3:1-11) and raised Dorcas from the dead (Acts 9:36-42). The apostle Paul also raised a lame man (Acts 14:8-12) and raised Eutychus from the dead (Acts 20:7-12).

The apostles preached the gospel and helped to establish churches. The apostle Peter preached the gospel in Jerusalem and 3000 Jews were converted, baptized, and joined the church in Jerusalem (Acts 2). Peter preached the gospel to the Gentile centurion Cornelius and his household, and they were

converted (Acts 10). The apostle Paul preached the gospel in a synagogue in Antioch in Pisidia (Acts 13:15-41) and to Greek philosophers in Athens (Acts 17:16-34) and started churches in Galatia, Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Corinth, and Ephesus during his three missionary journeys (Acts 13-20).

The apostles had authority over local churches. The first Christians were committed to the apostles' doctrine (Acts 2:42). Peter announced God's judgment on Ananias and Sapphira who lied to the apostles about how much money they gave to the church in Jerusalem (Acts 5:1-11). Paul told the church of Corinth to discipline a sinning member (1 Cor 5).

The word "apostle" (*ἀπόστολος*) is also used to refer to those who were sent on a mission by a local church. The little a "apostle" in this sense is a missionary. Barnabas was an apostle who along with Paul was sent out by the church at Antioch on the first missionary journey (Acts 14:14). Andronicus and Junia are called apostles (Rom 16:7). Epaphroditus was an apostle (messenger) sent by the church at Philippi to help Paul in Rome (Phil 2:25). Paul identified a group as apostles (messengers) of the churches (2 Cor 8:3).

Prophets

A prophet (*προφήτης*) was "a person inspired to proclaim or reveal divine will or purpose."⁴ Prophets were spokesmen for God who gave new revelation from God to the church. Prophets had the gift of prophecy for the purpose of edification, comfort, and encouragement of the early church during the time before the completion of the NT (1 Cor 14:3, 31). NT prophets communicated mysteries of God and revelation from God (1 Cor 12:10; 13:2; 14:6, 22, 30-31). Prophets predicted the future (1 Thess 3:4; 4:6, 14-18; Gal 5:21). Agabus was a prophet who predicted a famine in Israel that came to pass (Acts 11:27-28). As a result of Paul's ministry in Ephesus some former disciples of John the Baptist were converted, spoke in tongues, and prophesied (Acts 19:6). Some prophets were women: the four

⁴ BDAG, 890.

daughters of Philip (Acts 21:9). The prophets were to judge one another's prophecies so no false teaching/prophecy would be permitted in the church (1 Cor 14:29-30). The church was not to despise prophecies but to test them (1 Thess 5:20-22).

APOSTLES AND PROPHETS IN EPHESIANS

The spiritually gifted leaders called “apostles” and “prophets” appear together in three texts in Ephesians: (1) Apostles and prophets are the foundation of the church which is compared to a temple (Eph 2:20). (2) Apostles and prophets received the revelation of the mystery by the Spirit that saved Gentiles would be co-heirs and of the same body of Christ with saved Jews (Eph 3:5). (3) Apostles and NT prophets are among spiritually gifted Christian leaders (which include evangelists and pastors and teachers) given to the church to equip the saints for the work of ministry and the building up of the body of Christ (Eph 4:11-12).

Apostles and Prophets in Ephesians 2:20

19 Ἄρα οὖν οὐκέτι ἔστε ἔξεινοι καὶ πάροικοι ἀλλὰ ἔστε συμπολῖται τῶν ἀγίων καὶ οἰκεῖοι τοῦ θεοῦ, 20 ἐποικοδομηθέντες ἐπὶ τῷ θεμελίῳ τῶν ἀποστόλων καὶ προφητῶν, ὃντος ἀκρογωνιαίου αὐτοῦ Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ, 21 ἐν ᾧ πᾶσα οἰκοδομὴ συναρμολογουμένη αὐξεῖ εἰς ναὸν ἄγιον ἐν κυρίῳ, 22 ἐν ᾧ καὶ ὑμεῖς συνοικοδομεῖσθε εἰς κατοικητήριον τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν πνεύματι.

“Now therefore you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.” (NKJV)

Context of Ephesians 2:20

In Ephesians 2:1-10 Paul shows how God solved the problem of spiritual death. God made spiritually dead Gentiles to be alive in Christ (2:1-10). Salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. In Ephesians 2:11-22 Paul shows how God solved the problem of spiritual distance. God made far-off Gentiles near through the death of Christ on the cross (2:11-22).

Paul tells the Ephesians to remember their past separation from Christ (2:11-12). Paul tells the Ephesians to realize the reconciliation accomplished by Jesus Christ on the cross (2:13-18).

In Ephesians 2:19-22 Paul emphasizes the changed identity for saved Gentiles. Saved Gentiles are no longer strangers (to the covenants of promise) and foreigners (outsiders in relation to Israel) (2:19). They are fellow citizens with the saints (Jewish believers) (2:19). Saved Gentiles are members of the household of God (2:19). Saved Gentiles are now part of the holy temple in the Lord (a picture of the universal church). They are like “stones” being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Jesus Christ being the chief cornerstone (2:20).

The Identity of the Apostles and Prophets in Ephesians 2:20

Who are the apostles and prophets in Ephesians 2:20? Bible teachers differ on their interpretations. I believe that the apostles in Ephesians 2:20, 3:5, and 4:11 were capital “A” Apostles rather than little “a” apostles. Paul emphasized that the Apostles made up the foundation of the early church (2:20) and received the revelation regarding the mystery (3:1-5).

Some Bible teachers of the past (Chrysostom, Theodore, Calvin, Lenski) identified the prophets in Ephesians 2:20 as OT prophets. The prophets referred to in Ephesians 2:20 are NT prophets. First, the word order argues for NT prophets. Notice that Paul wrote “apostles and prophets” and not “prophets and apostles.” Second, the OT prophets did not receive the revelation of the mystery regarding the church. Paul makes it

plain that the mystery was not revealed in the past ages to the sons of men. Third, Paul wrote that the risen ascended Jesus Christ gave the apostles and prophets to the church (Eph 4:11). OT prophets could not be the prophets of Ephesians 4:11 because they lived prior to the birth, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus and prior to the birth of the church on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2).

Wallace writes,

If the OT prophets are in view, then obviously two distinct groups are meant. But if NT prophets are in view, this would favor the apostles as being a subset of the prophets. In favor of this second view: (1) If OT prophets were in view, it seems unnatural that they would be mentioned second. (2) Whenever apostles are in a TSKS plural construction they always come first and the semantic value of the construction involves the first group as a subset of the second. (3) Since the picture of a building which apparently consists of the true Church is what is being described here, and since the apostles and prophets are viewed as foundational to this building, it seems hardly conceivable that OT prophets would be in the author's mind here. (4) The same construction occurs in 3:5 in which it is declared that the mystery has now been revealed 'to his holy apostles and prophets'; thus, the NT prophets are clearly in view there. Since the context is still about the foundation and beginning of the Church, it would be consistent for the reference to be about the same group of prophets in both 2:20 and 3:5. Our conclusion, then, is that Eph 2:20 speaks of 'the apostles and [other] prophets.'⁵

The Relationship of Apostles and Prophets to Foundation in Ephesians 2:20

There are three possible grammatical syntactical options for the genitives "of the apostles and prophets" and their relationship to the word *foundation* in Ephesians 2:20:

⁵ Daniel Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 284-86.

- (1) Possessive genitives: The apostles' and prophets' foundation.⁶
- (2) Subjective genitives: The foundation laid down by the apostles and prophets.⁷
- (3) Genitives of apposition: The foundation consists of the apostles and prophets.⁸

The third view is most consistent. Christ as a person is the cornerstone. The apostles and prophets as people make up the foundation. And the saints as people make up the “stones” in the building built on Christ and the apostles and prophets. In the metaphor of the church described as a temple, the apostles and NT prophets would make up the foundation. Hoehner writes, “In the end, it seems best to view these genitives as appositional, indicating that the apostles and prophets are the historic persons who first formed the universal church.”⁹

No attempt should be made to make all the foundation passages in the NT agree. At Caesarea Philippi, Jesus predicted that he would build his church on this rock (Matt 16:18). Scholars differ in their views on the meaning of “this rock.” Jesus was referring to himself or to Peter’s confession that Jesus is the Christ. The Matthew text does not teach that the church is built upon Peter. And the text cannot be used to argue for apostolic succession with Peter being the first pope.

⁶ Henry Alford, *The Greek New Testament* (London: Rivingtons, 1871), 3:100. But Ellicott points out that this view would mix up the foundation and cornerstone (53).

⁷ Charles Ellicott, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians* (London: Longmans, Green, 1884), 53. But Hoehner points out that Ellicott is inconsistent to make Christ personal and the apostles and prophets impersonal by saying that they refer to the teachings about Christ (398).

⁸ Klyne Snodgrass, *Ephesians*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 137.

⁹ Harold Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 399.

The building metaphor is used to describe Paul's planting a church in Corinth. The apostle Paul called himself a master architect and builder who laid the foundation of the church at Corinth (1 Cor 3:10). Paul said that Jesus Christ was the foundation that he laid (1 Cor 3:11). Paul warns the builders who follow him in their ministry at Corinth about building upon the foundation of Christ with gold, silver, and precious stones and not wood, hay, and straw. The building materials refer to the works of the pastors of the church of Corinth because Paul later states that the works of the laborers will be evaluated on the (judgment) day, a reference to the judgment seat of Christ.

The specific details of the building metaphors in Matthew 16 and 1 Corinthians 3 are different from those in Ephesians 2. In Matthew 16, the Lord Jesus Christ is the rock foundation on which the universal church is built. In 1 Corinthians 3, the Lord Jesus Christ is the foundation on which the local church in Corinth is built. In Ephesians 2, the Lord Jesus Christ is the cornerstone and the apostles form the foundation of the temple (a picture of the universal church). In Matthew, Christ is the builder of his church. In 1 Corinthians, Paul is the master architect who laid the foundation and the pastors of the church of Corinth are the builders. In Ephesians 2, God is the builder of the new temple (the universal church). The Gentile Christians have been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets. The building is still going up. God fits Jewish and Gentile Christians together (Eph 2:21) and is building them together for a dwelling place of God by the Spirit (Eph 2:22).

Grudem's View: The foundation is the Apostles who are also prophets

In his book *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today*, Wayne Grudem argues that Ephesians 2:20 teaches that the church is built on the foundation of the apostles who were also prophets.¹⁰ Grudem believes that Ephesians 2:20 indicates

¹⁰ Wayne Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* (Westchester, IL: Crossway Books, 1988), 57.

that the foundation of the church is found in one group of men: the apostle-prophets. The apostle-prophets wrote the NT. He does not think that there is any need for additional scriptural revelation today since we have the completed NT canon.¹¹

Grudem thinks that NT apostles (the apostles who were also prophets) were counterparts to the OT prophets and spoke the very words of God. He writes,

We all agree that these prophets are ones who provided the foundation of the Church and therefore these are prophets who spoke infallible words of God. . . . Whether we say this group was only the apostles, or was a small group of prophets closely associated with the apostles who spoke Scripture-quality words, we are still left with a picture of a small and unique group of people who provide this foundation for the Church universal.¹²

But Grudem distinguishes between two types of prophecy in the NT: authoritative prophecy given by the apostle-prophets and non-authoritative prophecy given by congregational prophets in the local churches (i.e., prophecy in Corinth). Grudem says that the congregational prophets did not speak the very words of God. He states that "prophecy in ordinary New Testament churches was not equal to Scripture in authority but was simply a very human sometimes partially mistaken report of something the Holy Spirit brought to someone's mind."¹³ Grudem claims that "there is little if any evidence for a group of prophets in the New Testament churches who could speak with God's very words (with absolute divine authority that could not be questioned) and who had the authority to write books of scripture for inclusion in the New Testament."¹⁴ Grudem

¹¹ Grudem argues for the sufficiency of scripture in appendix C of his book *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today*.

¹² Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 10-51, n4.

¹³ Wayne Grudem, *Gift of Prophecy*, 14.

¹⁴ Ibid., 25.

believes that some Christians are still being given the gift of prophecy today, but the prophecies given in the local church do not have the same authority as Scripture and may even contain errors in them.

Critique of Grudem's View

There are several problems with viewing apostles and prophets in Ephesians 2:20 as one group: the apostle-prophets. First, Paul distinguishes between the apostles and prophets in Ephesians 4:11: "And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers." Paul also distinguishes between apostles and prophets in 1 Corinthians 12:28-30: "And God has appointed these in the church: first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, administrations, varieties of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all workers of miracles? Do all have gifts of healings? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?"

Second, the Granville Sharp rule is a Greek grammatical argument against Grudem's view. The Granville Sharp rule states that when two nouns are connected by *kai* and the article precedes only the first noun, there is a close connection between the two. The Granville Sharp rule applies only to personal nouns in the same case that are singular in number. Since apostles and prophets are both plural, the Granville Sharp rule does not apply. Therefore, the apostles and prophets could not refer to one group. If Paul wanted to show that the apostles and prophets were one group, he could have done so by inserting a clause: the apostles who are also prophets.

Wallace writes,

This text has become something of a theological lightning rod in conservative circles in America in the past several years, largely due to the work of Wayne Grudem. Grudem argues that the apostles and prophets are identical here. This is essential to his view of NT prophecy: on the one hand, he holds to a high view of scripture, viz., that the autographs are inerrant; on the other hand,

he believes that non-apostolic prophets both in the early church and today mixed error with truth. If in Ephesians 2:20 the Church is built on the foundation of apostles and other prophets, then it would seem that Grudem either has to deny inerrancy or affirm that non-apostolic prophets only spoke truth (and were thus on par with OT prophets). Hence, he spends much ink arguing that in this text the prophets are identical with the apostles, while elsewhere in the NT the prophets are a separate class of individuals. This distinction allows him the luxury of embracing an inerrant NT while admitting that today's prophets (as well as first century non-apostolic prophets) can commit error in their predictions. We must refrain from entering into the larger issues of charismata and fallible prophecy in our treatment of this text. Our point is simply that the syntactical evidence is very much against the "identical" view, even though the syntax has been the primary grounds used in behalf of it. As we have seen, there are no clear examples of plural nouns in TSKS fitting the 'identical' group in the NT, rendering such a possibility here less likely on grammatical grounds. The strongest possibilities are either that two distinct groups are in view or the apostles are seen as a subset of the prophets.¹⁵

Ruthven's View: The foundation is the apostolic and prophetically inspired confession

Charismatic theologian Jon Mark Ruthven has written on "The Foundational Gifts of Ephesians 2:20" in his third appendix in his book *On the Cessation of the Charismata*.¹⁶ Ruthven writes, "This appendix would suggest that the foundation of Eph.2:20 represents the recurring apostolic and prophetically inspired foundational confession as Peter's great confession (Mt.16:16-19) which is revealed to and confessed by all Christians at all times."¹⁷ He also writes: "the foundation of the

¹⁵ Daniel Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 284-86.

¹⁶ Jon Mark Ruthven, *On the Cessation of the Charismata* (Tulsa, OK: Word and Spirit Press, 2011), 203-19.

¹⁷ Ibid., 209.

apostles and prophets symbolizes a way by which everyone on earth may enter into God's temple/kingdom/covenant/citizenship/household, that is by the Spirit revealed confession of Jesus Christ.”¹⁸

Ruthven says that the cessationist argument by analogy fails because (1) the foundation indicates a pattern to be replicated, not a generation frozen in time; (2) the foundation represents both Christ himself and the recurring apostolic and prophetically inspired foundational confession as Peter's great confession; (3) traditional Protestantism sees a NT apostle as a sixteenth-century pope rather than an ongoing ministry function within the church; (4) the cessationist metaphor is an illogical question begging move, confuses the death of early apostles and prophets with the death of their gifts; and (5) the metaphor is destroyed if Christ the cornerstone is the capstone or long high cornerstone holding the walls together like intersecting fingers who is also in contact with each stone.¹⁹

Arguments against Ruthven's View

(1) Ruthven claims that Ephesians 2:20 is a pattern to be replicated. But nowhere in Ephesians 2:19-22 does Paul give an imperative to show that Christians must follow the example of Peter in Matthew 16 and confess that Jesus is the Christ. The apostles and prophets formed the foundation in that they wrote the NT Scriptures (cf. 2 Tim 3:16-17; 2 Pet 1:19-21).

(2) Ruthven is wrong to state that the foundation of the church in Ephesians 2 is a person (Christ) and a confession (Christians today must make the same confession about Christ that Peter made in Matthew 16 and the apostles and prophets made). Ruthven has taken Peter's confession of Jesus being the Christ in Matthew 16 and read it into his interpretation of Ephesians 2:20.

(3) The early church did not see the apostle as a pope figure. First, there was a group of apostles who led the early church and

¹⁸ Ibid., 211.

¹⁹ Ibid., 203.

not just one man (the pope) as in the Roman Catholic Church. Second, the apostles did have authority over the local churches but with the death of the apostles that authority came to an end. There are no apostles today. Those who claim to be apostles do not meet the major qualification of an apostle. They have not seen the risen glorified Jesus Christ (though some have claimed to do so).

(4) John was the last apostle and prophet. He wrote the book of Revelation around AD 95 from the island of Patmos. He warned that nothing should be added to his final book (Rev 22:18-19). With the completion of the NT canon (books written by the apostles and NT prophets), there was no further need for the foundational gifted leaders of the apostles and prophets.

(5) Jesus Christ is the chief cornerstone in God's temple (2:20). The cornerstone was set before the foundation was laid. The cornerstone was the measure for the rest of the building. The cornerstone was the key stone to holding the building together. The cornerstone was the first stone set in the foundation of the building.

Lenski writes, "The cornerstone was set at the corner of a wall so that its outer angle became important. The angle of the cornerstone governed all the lines and all the other angles of the building. This one stone was thus laid with special, sometimes with elaborate ceremonies."²⁰

The word ἀκρογωνιαῖος is used in Isaiah 28:16 (LXX) and it is referred to as a sure foundation: "Therefore, thus says the Lord God: Behold, I lay in Zion a stone for a foundation, a tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation...."

The Essenes who lived in Qumran viewed the "cornerstone" of Isaiah 28:16 as a foundation stone (1QS 9.5). The rabbis viewed the stone that was on top of the temple mount as a foundation stone. This stone took the place of the ark in the second temple according to the Mishnah (Yoma 5.2; Leviticus Rabbah 20.4).

²⁰ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians, to the Ephesians, and to the Philippians* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1961), 400.

Since the church is described as an unfinished building that is growing, it is more consistent to view ἀκρογωνιαῖος as the cornerstone which is part of the foundation rather than a capstone used to complete the building.

Apostles and Prophets in Ephesians 3:5

Τούτου χάριν ἐγὼ Παῦλος ὁ δέσμιος τοῦ Χριστοῦ [Ιησοῦ] ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν τῶν ἐθνῶν 2 - εἴ γε ἡκούσατε τὴν οἰκονομίαν τῆς χάριτος τοῦ θεοῦ τῆς δοθείσης μοι εἰς ὑμᾶς, 3 [ὅτι] κατὰ ἀποκάλυψιν ἐγνωρίσθη μοι τὸ μυστήριον, καθὼς προέγραψα ἐν ὀλίγῳ, 4 πρὸς ὃ δύνασθε ἀναγινώσκοντες νοῆσαι τὴν σύνεσίν μου ἐν τῷ μυστηρίῳ τοῦ Χριστοῦ, 5 ὃ ἐτέραις γενεαῖς οὐκ ἐγνωρίσθη τοῖς νιόις τῶν ἀνθρώπων ὡς νῦν ἀπεκαλύφθη τοῖς ἀγίοις ἀποστόλοις αὐτοῦ καὶ προφήταις ἐν πνεύματι, 6 εἶναι τὰ ἔθνη συγκληρονόμα καὶ σύσσωμα καὶ συμμέτοχα τῆς ἐπαγγελίας ἐν Χριστῷ Ιησοῦ διὰ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου, 7 οὗ ἐγενήθην διάκονος κατὰ τὴν δωρεάν τῆς χάριτος τοῦ θεοῦ τῆς δοθείσης μοι κατὰ τὴν ἐνέργειαν τῆς δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ.

For this reason I, Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus for you Gentiles—if indeed you have heard of the grace of God which was given to me for you, how that by revelation He made known to me the mystery (as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ, which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of His promise in Christ through the gospel, of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power. (Eph 3:1-7)

Paul was a prisoner of Christ Jesus for the Gentiles (3:1)

Ephesians 3:1 begins with the words Τούτου χάριν which are translated “For this reason.” Ephesians 3:1-13 is a unit of thought. Ephesians 3:1 is an epanalepsis. Paul breaks off his flow of thought and adds a long parenthesis (Eph 3:2-13). He resumes the thought again in Ephesians 3:14 with Τούτου χάριν.

Paul was the prisoner of Rome. He had appealed to Caesar (Nero) and was taken to Rome in chains. But Paul did not view himself as the prisoner of Rome, but the prisoner of Christ Jesus. Paul viewed Christ Jesus as sovereign over his circumstances. Paul explained the purpose of his imprisonment—for the Gentiles. Paul desired that the Gentiles hear the good news of the gospel.

***Paul was a steward of the grace of God given to him for them
(3:2)***

Ephesians 3:2 begins the protasis. Paul begins with a conditional clause “If indeed you heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which was given to me for you.” This conditional clause is a first class condition which means that the Ephesians had already heard and knew this fact. The apodasis is found in Ephesians 3:13: “Therefore, I ask that you do not lose heart at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.” Paul did not want the Gentile believers in Ephesus to be discouraged because he saw the end result of his tribulations: it was for their glory.

God gave Paul a dispensation or stewardship of grace (3:2). Paul was given grace for service. Paul saw himself as a steward of God’s grace. God in his sovereignty saved and called Paul to take the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 9:1-19; 1 Tim 1:12-13; Rom 15:15-16; 1 Cor 4:1; 9:16-17; Gal 2:9). The Ephesians knew that Paul was made a minister for the Gentiles.

Paul was a recipient of the mystery (3:3)

The mystery was made known to Paul by revelation. Paul received direct revelation from God about the mystery. Paul does not specifically tell us the time when he received this revelation. It may have been when he was in Arabia (Gal 1:17) after his conversion experience on the road to Damascus (Acts 9). Paul wrote, “But I make known to you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I

neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through revelation of Jesus Christ" (Gal 1:11-12).

Paul uses the word *mystery* (μυστήριον) twenty-one times in his epistles.²¹ What is the meaning of the word *mystery*? A mystery is God's secret which is hidden from human reason and revealed by God in his time.²²

O'Brien reveals the cultural background behind the word *mystery*:

The situation of perceived demonic hostility in western Asia Minor may have provided a partial motivation for Paul's emphasis on the cosmic aspect of the mystery in Ephesians. It could have stood in deliberate contrast to the Lydian-Phrygian "mysteries" which were so popular, so as to be a polemic against the possible influence of these mysteries in the churches. According to PGM I.128-32 a pagan mystery initiation involved receiving "the lord of the air" (cf. Eph 2:2) as the indwelling deity! The mystery revealed in Ephesians, however, was the opposite of the pagan mysteries. Christ bringing "all things" under his head implied the impending doom of the so-called deities invoked in magic and the mystery religions. It is inadequate to claim that the content of the mystery in Ephesians is defined solely in terms of God's acceptance of the Gentiles and their union with Jews on an equal footing in Christ (Eph 3:3-4). Christ is the starting point for a true understanding of the notion of "mystery" in this letter, as elsewhere in Paul. There are not a number of "mysteries" with

²¹ What are some of the mysteries revealed by Paul in his epistles? The mystery of lawlessness is that the tendency to break God's moral laws is prevalent in society and is being restrained by the Spirit of God in the church (2 Thess 2:7). The mystery of the Rapture is that Jesus Christ will come back for the church and some Christians will not die (1 Cor 15:51-57). The mystery of Israel's partial blindness is that right now most Jews do not believe in their Messiah Jesus. This has happened until the complete number of elect Gentiles have come to faith in Jesus as Messiah (Rom 11:25). The mystery of the indwelling Christ is that Jesus Christ lives inside each Christian (Col 1:27). The mystery of godliness is that God became incarnate in the person of Jesus Christ (1 Tim 3:16).

²² BDAG, 662.

limited applications, but one supreme “mystery” with a number of applications (Caragounis).²³

Paul revealed the mystery in his letter to the Ephesians (3:4)

The means by which the Ephesians can understand Paul’s insight into the mystery was by reading the first part of his letter. Paul had previously discussed the mystery of God’s sovereign will (his decree): that in the dispensation of the fullness of times God would gather together in one all things in Christ (Eph 1:9-10). Jesus Christ already is the sovereign Head of the universe and he has been given as head of the church (Eph 1:19-23). But all things have not yet been brought under his lordship. This will happen in the dispensation of the fullness of times (a reference to the future millennial kingdom; cf. 1 Cor 15:20-28). Paul also emphasized in the first part of Ephesians that God created in himself one new man (a reference to the universal church) from the two (saved Jews and saved Gentiles) and made peace through the cross of Christ (Eph 2:15).

The mystery was not revealed in past ages but was now being revealed by the Spirit to his holy apostles and prophets (3:5).

The Spirit revealed the mystery to the apostles and prophets (3:5)

The mystery was not revealed in other ages to the sons of men. If one reads through the OT, he or she will not find the doctrine of the church. The OT prophets predicted the first coming of Messiah, the tribulation period, the second coming of Messiah, and the millennial kingdom, but they did not prophesy about the church. The OT prophets predicted Gentile salvation and blessing (Gen 12:3; 22:18; 26:4; Amos 9:12), but they did not predict that saved Gentiles and saved Jews would make up one body: the church.

²³ P. T. O’Brien, “Mystery” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, eds. Gerald Hawthorne, Ralph Martin, Daniel Reid (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 623.

The mystery has now been revealed by the Spirit to his holy apostles and prophets. God the Father revealed the mystery of Christ by the Spirit to his apostles and NT prophets. The instrumental use of the preposition ἐν gives the means by which the mystery was revealed. The mystery was revealed by the Spirit = Holy Spirit.

Jesus predicted to his disciples in the Upper Room Discourse the revelatory ministry of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit would “bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you” (John 14:26). The apostles Matthew and John were able to remember the words of Christ when they wrote their gospels. The Holy Spirit would “guide you into all truth” and “tell you things to come” (John 16:13). The Holy Spirit was involved in revealing truth to the apostles and NT prophets as they wrote the New Testament. Peter later wrote, “Knowing this first that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private origin, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet 1:20-21).

What is the significance of the ως clause in Ephesians 3:5? What is the nature of the comparison? Is it a comparison of degree or kind? The comparative ως can be used to compare either degree or kind. Here is an illustration that I use with my students: (1) a comparison of degree: “You are as good a student of the Scripture as I am” (meaning that we are both good students of the Scriptures) or (2) comparison of kind: “You are not a seminary professor as I am” (meaning that you are not a seminary professor at all).

Amillennialists believe that the comparison in Ephesians 3:5 is one of degree. They believe that the mystery was revealed in the OT but not to the degree that it is revealed in the NT. Oswald Allis attacked the premillennial view of the church as a “mystery parenthesis.” He says that Paul never viewed the church as unrevealed in the OT.²⁴ Allis argues that the comparative particle ως is used restrictively here. He concludes that the mystery was not made known as fully or clearly as it is

²⁴ Oswald Allis, *Prophecy and the Church* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1947), 90-110.

today. Allis believes that the comparison is one of degree of revelation.

Dispensational premillennialists believe that the comparison in Ephesians 3:5 is one of kind. This is a descriptive use of ὡς. The mystery was never revealed in the other ages (OT time period), but it is now revealed to God's holy apostles and NT prophets (in the NT time period).

in other ages	was not made known	to the sons of men
now	has been revealed	to His holy apostles and prophets

The mystery was not made known in other ages to the sons of men. The sons of men may refer to OT prophets (view of Bengel) or the elect servants of God (view of Barth). But Hoehner says that the word is never used in the plural of OT prophets and should be viewed as a reference to human beings.²⁵ But the mystery is now revealed to God's holy apostles and prophets (in the NT). God has revealed his secret to the apostles and NT prophets.

The context argues for a comparison of kind and not degree. Ephesians 3:9-10: "... the mystery which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church." The mystery was hidden in God (in his sovereign decree). It reveals the manifold wisdom of God (cf. 1 Cor 2). This wisdom of the mystery is now made known by the church. The church is to proclaim the mystery of Christ to the world.

Cross references show that God has revealed the previously hidden secret. First Corinthians 3:7-8 says, "But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory, which none of the rulers

²⁵ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 438.

of this age knew for had they known they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.” The crucifixion of the Lord of glory is a part of this mystery. The rulers of this age (Caiaphas, Pilate, Herod Antipas) did not know the hidden wisdom of God. Romans 16:25b-26a says, “The mystery kept secret since the world began but now made manifest.” Colossians 1:26 says “the mystery which has been hidden from ages and from generations but now has been revealed to His saints.”

Paul defines the mystery (3:6)

Paul defines the mystery in Ephesians 3:6: “that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs, of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ through the gospel.” The mystery is that through the gospel saved Gentiles are heirs together with saved Jews in the church. They are co-members of the body of Christ. Both saved Gentiles and saved Jews are God’s inheritance (Eph 1:11) and have been given the Holy Spirit as a guarantee of their future inheritance (Eph 1:14). Unbelievers do not have an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God (Eph 5:5).

The mystery is that saved Jews and saved Gentiles share together in the same promise in Christ Jesus. The promise refers to the Holy Spirit who is given to each person who trusts in Jesus Christ as personal Savior (cf. Acts 1:4).

Paul Benware writes,

The church, then, is a partaker of the spiritual blessings of the new covenant, enjoying regeneration, the forgiveness of sin, and the presence and ministry of the Holy Spirit. The church is primarily Gentile in its makeup—those who have been graciously grafted in by God until their number is completed. Multitudes of Gentiles experience the wonderful blessings of the new covenant. But the church is not national Israel, the people with whom God made this covenant. The church does not and cannot fulfill the new covenant. Its fulfillment awaits the arrival of Jesus the Messiah. When He returns at the Second Coming, all the spiritual and material blessings promised Israel will be received.²⁶

²⁶ Paul Benware, *Understanding End Times Prophecy* (Chicago: Moody P, 1995), 73.

APOSTLES AND PROPHETS IN EPHESIANS 4:11-13

11 Καὶ αὐτὸς ἔδωκεν τοὺς μὲν ἀποστόλους, τοὺς δὲ προφήτας, τοὺς δὲ εὐαγγελιστάς, τοὺς δὲ ποιμένας καὶ διδασκάλους, 12 πρὸς τὸν καταυτισμὸν τῶν ἁγίων εἰς ἔργον διακονίας, εἰς οἰκοδομὴν τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ, 13 μέχρι καταντήσωμεν οἱ πάντες εἰς τὴν ἐνότητα τῆς πίστεως καὶ τῆς ἐπιγνώσεως τοῦ νιοῦ τοῦ Θεοῦ, εἰς ἄνδρα τέλειον, εἰς μέτρον ἡλικίας τοῦ πληρώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ,

“And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” (NKJV)

Christ has given gifted Christian leaders to the church (4:11)

The ascended Christ has given gifted men (apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers) to the church. Christ is the he (*αὐτὸς*) who gave some to be leaders. Christ is the one who descended into the lower parts of the earth and ascended far above all the heavens (4:9-10). The purpose of Christ’s ascension is that he might fill all things. The risen, exalted Christ is the one who distributes the spiritual gifts. The Greek verb *ἔδωκεν* translated “gave” is used in the other texts related to spiritual gifts (Rom 12:3, 6; 1 Cor 12:7-8).

The ascended Christ has given apostles and prophets to the church. Notice that Paul distinguishes between apostles and prophets in Ephesians 4:11. Though some apostles were chosen before the death and resurrection of Jesus, they were not given to the church until after Christ’s death, resurrection and ascension. This is a strong argument that the church did not begin until Pentecost. Since the prophets were given to the church, these men must be NT prophets and not OT prophets.

Christ has given evangelists (*εὐαγγελιστάς*) to the church (4:11). Evangelists announced the good news to lost people. Philip was a NT evangelist who preached the gospel in Samaria (Acts 8:5) and to the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:35). Paul told

Timothy to do the work of an evangelist (2 Tim 4:5). Evangelists are Christian leaders who tell lost people the gospel. The work of an evangelist is to preach the gospel that Jesus Christ died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins and rose again to give eternal life and forgiveness of sins to all who trust in him alone for salvation (Luke 24:45-49; 1 Cor 15:1-11). An evangelist also equips Christians to share the gospel with lost people. He trains people in how to share their testimony or how to give a gospel presentation.

Christ has given pastors and teachers to the church (4:11). Pastors (*ποιμένας*) are shepherds of local churches. A pastor leads the flock by his godly example, feeds the flock the word of God, intercedes for the flock, cares for his flock, and protects his flock (cf. 1 Pet 5:1-3). Paul commanded the Ephesian elders at Miletus to “shepherd the church of God” (Acts 20:28).

Teachers (*διδασκάλους*) are those who accurately explain the truths of God’s word to Christians (1 Cor 12:28; Rom 12:7; 1 Tim 2:7; 2 Tim 1:11). The word teachers occurs fifty-nine times in the NT and seven times in Paul’s letters (Rom 2:20; 1 Cor 12:28-29; Eph 4:11; 1 Tim 2:7; 2 Tim 1:11; 4:3). Teachers use their spiritual gift of teaching in the church to clearly and accurately communicate the truths of the Bible in such a way that people learn and apply the truth to their lives.

Pastors and teachers are two groups who are joined together. Debate has occurred through the centuries as to whether they represent two groups (pastors and teachers) or one group with a combination of two gifts (pastor-teachers). The Greek construction (article-noun-καὶ-noun) is not a Granville Sharp rule since the nouns are in the plural, but the Greek construction shows that pastors are a subset of teachers. All pastors are teachers, but not all teachers have to be pastors.²⁷

The risen ascended Jesus Christ has given gifted spiritual leaders to the church to equip the saints for the work of ministry and the building up of the body of Christ (Eph 4:12).

Why did the ascended Christ give gifted spiritual leaders to the church? There are three major views regarding the

²⁷ Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 284.

responsibilities of the apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastors and teachers in Ephesians 4:11-12. The relationship of the prepositions πρός, εἰς, εἰς in Ephesians 4:12 determine the interpretation of the verse and its relevance for a biblical philosophy of ministry.

- (1) Christian leaders do all three things: equip the saints, do the work of the ministry, and edify the body of Christ
The first view is that the Christian leaders do all three aspects of church work. They equip the saints. They do the work of the ministry. They edify the body of Christ. The Greek prepositions πρός, εἰς, εἰς are interpreted as semantically parallel in this view.
- (2) Christian leaders equip the saints to do the work of ministry and to edify the body of Christ
A second view is that the gifted leaders equip the saints to do two things: to do the work of ministry and to edify the body of Christ. Christ gave the church gifted leaders for the purpose (πρός) of equipping the saints. The saints then are responsible to do the work of ministry and build up the body of Christ. The Greek prepositions εἰς .. εἰς are displayed as semantically parallel and modify equipping the saints.
- (3) Christian leaders equip the saints to do the work of ministry which results in the body of Christ being edified
A third view is that gifted leaders equip saints to do the work of the ministry which results in the edifying of the body of Christ. Christ gave gifted leaders for the purpose (πρός) of equipping the saints. The purpose (εἰς) of the leaders equipping the saints is for the saints to do the work of the ministry. The purpose/result (εἰς) of the saints doing the work of the ministry is the body of Christ will be edified. This is the strongest interpretation.

The Meaning of Equipping

The word “equipping” (*κατάρτισμόν*) in Ephesians 4:12 only occurs once in the NT as a noun. The verb *κατάρτίζω* means to put in order, to restore to a former condition, to mend, prepare, to complete, to furnish, and to perfect.²⁸ Equipping involves repairing and preparing Christians for ministry. It refers to restoring something to its original condition, or its being made fit or complete. The word was used of fishermen who mended their nets (Matt 4:21). The word was also used of doctors who set a broken bone (Apollonius, Citiensis 1.1,2; 2.1, 4; 3.4; 4.2). Spiritual Christians have a responsibility to “restore” Christians who have fallen into sin (Gal 6:1). Equipping involves “repairing” spiritually broken Christians (2 Cor 13:11).

Equipping involves preparing Christians for service. First Thessalonians 3:10 says that Paul prayed “exceedingly that we may see your face and perfect what is lacking in your faith.” Equipping involves a personal ministry of teaching the word to God’s people and helping them know what they believe and how to behave. Second Corinthians 13:9 says, “For we are glad, when we are weak and you are strong. And this also we pray, that you may be made complete.” The word “complete” is the same word as equip. Second Timothy 3:17 says that the word of God “equips” us for every good work. Pastors and teachers prepare Christians for ministry by preaching and teaching the word of God (2 Tim 4:2). Hebrews 13:21 says that God can “make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.”

The time during which the risen Christ gives gifted leaders to the church is until the church reaches maturity (Eph 4:13).

The risen glorified Christ gives his church apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastors and teachers “till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” Christ desires that his church be unified and mature. When does the church reach this goal?

²⁸ BDAG, 526.

The church reached a level of maturity at the end of the first century with the completion of the NT canon. So the foundational gifts of apostle and prophet are no longer needed since the NT canon is complete and sufficient for salvation and spiritual growth. The risen glorified Christ continues to give the spiritual gifts of evangelists, pastors, and teachers to the church since the church has not yet reached complete unity and maturity.

In 1 Corinthians 13:11 Paul wrote, “When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child, but when I became a man, I put away childish things.” The analogy could be applied to the spiritual maturity of the church. When the church was a child (first century) the church spoke as a child (spiritual gift of tongues), understood as a child, and thought as a child (knowledge and prophecy as spiritual gifts). But when the church became a man (at the end of the first century with the completion of the NT canon), the church put away childish things (there was no further need for the spiritual gifts of tongues, prophecy and knowledge = revelation knowledge).

Lincoln writes,

$\tau\acute{e}λειος$ has the nuance of mature rather than perfect (cf. also 1 Cor 2:6; 14:20; Heb 5:14), while $\alpha\nu\delta\rho\alpha$ denotes here an adult male, a full-grown man. The emphasis is on the mature adulthood of this person in contrast with the children to be mentioned in the next verse. The Church, which has already been depicted as one new man in Christ (2:15) is to attain to what in principle it already has in him—maturity and completeness. . . . The standard for believers’ attainment is the mature proportions that befit the Church as the fullness of Christ. Again, we should recall that this is a continuation of the discussion of Christ’s gifts and that is through his gifts of ministers that Christ enables the Church to attain to the complete realization of what it already is. Ministers are important for the period of the “not yet” in which the Church has to be helped to progress toward the eschatological goals of unity and maturity.²⁹

²⁹ Andrew Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1990), 256-57.

Hoehner writes,

Thus Christ gave foundational gifts in order to prepare all the saints in ministry to edify the body. Further, the corporate body is to reach or attain the unity of faith and the knowledge of God, to a mature person as a corporate entity, and to Christ's full stature. This can be accomplished because believers who function in the body have the foundational gifts to prepare them and also because each individual believer has been given a gift in measure (v.7). Hence, if every individual believer allows the Spirit to use that gift to the measure given to him or her, then all the body of Christ will grow to the measure of Christ's full stature.³⁰

The church has not yet reached complete unity of the faith, knowledge of the son of God or complete maturity. The church will reach this state at the rapture of the church. Since the church has not yet reached this state, then the risen Christ must still be giving gifted Christian leaders (evangelists, and pastors and teachers) to the church. Cessationists and continuationists agree that the ascended Christ is not giving apostles today. They would disagree about whether the ascended Christ is giving prophets to the church today.

CONCLUSION

As a cessationist, I believe that the gifts of apostle and prophet were foundational to the church. The texts in Ephesians are key texts to argue for the fact that the gifts of apostle and prophet are no longer needed. The apostles and NT prophets formed the foundation of the early church (2:20). The apostles (including Paul) and NT prophets received the revelation of the mystery by the Spirit and wrote down that revelation in the NT (3:5). The ascended Christ gave the church apostles and prophets in the first century until the church reached a level of relative maturity by the end of the first century (4:11-13). The ascended Christ continues to give the

³⁰ Hoehner, *Ephesians*, 558.

church evangelists and pastors and teachers until the church reaches complete maturity—at the rapture of the church.

The Theological Method of Charles Caldwell Ryrie

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INTRODUCING CHARLES CALDWELL RYRIE

If one were asked to list the most influential theologians of the twentieth century, certain theologians would be sure to make the cut. Charles C. Ryrie is one such theologian. Walter Elwell would certainly agree. In his edited work, Elwell's *Handbook of Evangelical Theologians*, Ryrie is included as one of the thirty-three most influential theologians of the twentieth century.¹ He has indeed had a significant influence on the broader evangelical movement in general and conservative evangelicalism in particular, and has had an even greater sway upon evangelicals who are dispensational.

Need for this Study

Ryrie's influence in American evangelicalism has certainly been felt, but his impact is not limited to North America. By virtue of the students he has taught, who teach and preach in nearly every country of the world, and his books, which have been translated into a multitude of languages,² his impact has been felt globally. Apart from a few relatively brief biographical sketches, little has been written about him and even less about his theological method. These factors warrant further

¹ Ellwell, Walter, ed. *Handbook of Evangelical Theologians*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993.

² *Basic Theology* alone has been translated into twenty-one languages.

investigation into the life, writings, hermeneutic, and theological method of the theologian, Charles Caldwell Ryrie.

Purpose for this Study

The purpose of this study is not merely to write a biographical sketch of the life of Ryrie, or even to understand his body of work (although this study will certainly attempt to do both). This article will seek to investigate the life and writings of Charles C. Ryrie with the purpose of understanding the hermeneutic he used, and the theological method he implemented, resulting in the theological system for which he is known.

Method of this Study

This study will begin with an investigation into the formative years of Ryrie's childhood, his education, and the influential figures in his life. Next, an examination of the important roles in which Ryrie functioned will take place. He will be examined from the standpoint of a tenured professor, prolific writer, bold pioneer, ardent apologist, and ordained minister. After such a study is complete, a discussion of his pre-understandings will be included and special attention given to his hermeneutical principles. Consideration will also be given to his integration of the Old and New Testaments. Time will then be devoted to Ryrie's integration of biblical truth with other academic disciplines, followed by an analysis of possible interpretive motifs employed by Ryrie and a defense given for the one in which this writer believes is most reflected in his writings. Ryrie's views on the related disciplines of biblical studies will be addressed, and this article will conclude with a summary section that articulates Ryrie's theological method as perceived by this writer.

RYRIE'S EARLY LIFE AND EDUCATION

It is incredible that so many systematic theologies have been read without the reader knowing much about the authors' personal lives. It seems only logical that prior to reading a theological work, one would want to better understand the theologian behind it. For good or bad, humans are a composite of their experiences, culture, teachers, and influencers. While some theologians are able to move beyond the views handed down to them, others are not. Still others are fortunate to have been handed down a truly biblical framework and are able to build on such a foundation and advance that theological system. Ryrie is one such theologian. Ryrie's strong theological heritage set him on solid ground to take evangelicalism and more specifically dispensational evangelicalism onward. To understand Ryrie's theological method, it is of special worth and interest to study the most formative years and experiences in his life.

His Early Life

Charles Ryrie was born into the God-fearing home of John Alexander and Elizabeth Caldwell Ryrie in 1925. Ryrie was raised in Alton, Illinois, a town located just across the Mississippi River from the city of St. Louis (where he was born). His father was a banker, and Charles believed he would continue the family banking business one day, but God had other plans. Young Ryrie was a fifth generation attendee of the First Baptist Church of Alton, Illinois.³ This church was a member of a denomination that is now known as American Baptist. It was here, at the age of five, Ryrie came to faith in Jesus Christ. Ryrie recollects concerning his church experience, "It was not liberal

³ Darrell Goemaat and Kevin Mungons, "Have Something to Say, and Say It Clearly," *Baptist Bulletin*, <<http://baptistbulletin.org/?p=1347>> (accessed 12 October 2012).

but not particularly deep.”⁴ When asked if First Baptist Alton had a futuristic interpretation of Scripture, Ryrie stated that it did; however, “prophecy was incidental. No particular doctrine stands out.”⁵

In 1942, at the young age of sixteen, Ryrie graduated from high school, just six weeks following the attack on Pearl Harbor. He was the valedictorian of his class and earned a 96.8 grade point average.⁶ Despite young Ryrie’s being the valedictorian, his father felt he still needed to improve upon his study skills prior to entering college. At his father’s direction, Ryrie attended a boarding school for one semester, Stony Brook School in Long Island, New York.⁷ Frank Gaebelein, editor of *Our Hope* magazine, and son of Arno Gaebelein,⁸ was the headmaster at Stony Brook.

⁴ Charles C. Ryrie, telephone interview by author, November 6, 2012, audio recording, from Tóalmás Hungary; interviewee Dallas, TX.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Darrell Goemaat and Kevin Mungons, “Have Something to Say.”

⁷ Stony Brook School was an all-boys college prep school, established in 1922 with the motto “Character before Career,” (<www.stonybrookschool.org/about/school-mission> [accessed 16 November 2012]). It has since chosen to admit female students as well.

⁸ Arno Gaebelein was a prominent prophecy speaker and dispensationalist. He was also the Associate Editor of the Scofield Reference Bible and editor of *Our Hope* magazine, which his son Frank edited thereafter. Scofield has been given much credit for popularizing dispensationalism, via his study bible. Yet, a reading of personal correspondences between Arno Gaebelein and Scofield points to Gaebelein as the source of much of its eschatological content. Scofield writes to Gaebelein, “My beloved Brother: By all means follow your own views of prophetic analysis. I sit at your feet when it comes to prophecy and congratulate in advance the future readers of the Reference Bible on having in their hands a safe, clear, sane guide through what to most is a labyrinth” (letter, dated 29 April 1931; quoted in Michael Stallard, *The Early Twentieth-Century Dispensationalism of Arno C. Gaebelein*, [Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellin,

His Higher Education

After a semester of studies at Stony Brook, at Gaebelein's recommendation, Ryrie followed in the footsteps of his older brother and enrolled at Haverford College, located just outside of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Haverford was a Quaker school. It was there that Ryrie enrolled in the mathematics program with a view to enter the banking business upon graduation. He was planning to begin his profession at his family's bank.⁹

After a conversation with Lewis Sperry Chafer, Ryrie's life direction dramatically changed from banking to full-time Christian service. Prior to graduating from Haverford, Ryrie applied and was accepted at Dallas Theological Seminary (DTS from this point forward). Enns states in his short biography of Ryrie, "After attending Dallas for two years he petitioned Haverford to grant him his diploma on the basis of his studies at Dallas. (Haverford had made similar allowances for medical students.) Haverford agreed, conferring the baccalaureate degree in June 1946; and Dallas Seminary awarded him a Th.M. in May 1947."¹⁰

Ryrie's Th.M. thesis was entitled, "The Relation of the New Covenant to Premillennialism." His Th.D. dissertation would later build upon the foundation of this study.

Having a great respect for the scholarship of Carl F. Henry, who came from the Northern Baptist denomination himself, and understanding the benefits of obtaining advanced degrees from different institutions, Ryrie began to make plans to study at Northern Baptist Theological Seminary. Henry eventually

2002], 99). Ryrie recalls just once having heard Arno speak at the commencement service of Stony Brook (phone interview). While Ryrie did not sit under the teaching of Arno personally, he certainly was influenced by this early and influential dispensationalist through the teaching he passed on to his son Frank.

⁹ *This Is Dallas* 46, no. 1 (Jan./Feb., 1970), un-numbered pages 3-4.

¹⁰ Paul P. Enns, "Charles Ryrie," in *Handbook of Evangelical Theologians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993). In Logos Bible Software.

departed from this denominational school to join others in founding Fuller Seminary in Pasadena, California. Due to the uncertainty of who would replace Henry, Ryrie chose instead to return to DTS and work on a Th.D.¹¹ Ryrie completed his Th.D. in 1949. His dissertation was titled and later published as *The Basis of the Premillennial Faith*.

Ryrie's studies did not stop at this terminal degree. He also earned a Ph.D. from the University of Edinburgh. There he studied under notable scholars, among others, J. H. S. Burleigh, Matthew Black, and Thomas Torrance.¹² Burleigh and Black served as advisors in his dissertation work.¹³ Interestingly, his

¹¹ Ryrie, interview, November 6, 2012.

¹² Thomas Torrance was an ordained minister in the Church of Scotland and is regarded by some as one of the most important theologians of the twentieth century. Torrance studied under Karl Barth and built upon Barth's views.

During Ryrie's Ph.D. studies Ryrie was exposed to pure Barthianism straight from one of Barth's own students. Rather than becoming a follower of Barth himself, Ryrie became more convinced of his own understanding. It was this exposure to Neo-Orthodoxy that led Ryrie to write, *Neo-Orthodoxy: What It Is, and What It Does* (Chicago: Moody, 1956). Ryrie writes, "Too few conservative pastors and laymen have been able to study something concise, non-technical, but accurate on this subject" (*Neo-Orthodoxy*, 10). In this book Ryrie helps the pastor and lay person alike understand the complexities and pitfalls of Neo-Orthodoxy. Ryrie did not pull any punches. In one place he states concerning Neo-Orthodoxy, "A theological hoax—that's how one might describe Barthianism. . . . It has been hailed as the new or neo-orthodoxy; in reality it is nothing but a false or pseudo-orthodoxy" (*Neo-orthodoxy*, 9-10). It is important to note that Ryrie was virtually untouched by the destructive teachings of Torrance and other liberal scholars under whom he studied for his Ph.D. Ryrie's theological foundation had already been well established and therefore he successfully navigated through the waters of liberalism without being shipwrecked by them. For these reasons, it is notable that none of the aforementioned scholars of Edinburgh will be listed amongst the most influential or even secondary influencers upon the life and theology of Charles C. Ryrie.

dissertation topic was one of particular interest to conservatives, but was read, advised, and accepted by relatively liberal professors. One notable instance that illustrates these professors' liberal leanings was the request of Black, done in a gracious manner: "Rather than writing 'the Bible says,' would you be willing instead to write, 'Paul says?'"¹⁴ Ryrie acquiesced to this request since (1) it did not require any compromise of his theological position and (2) it was an accurate statement. Ryrie earned his Ph.D. in 1954. His dissertation was later published by Moody in 1970 as *The Role of Women in the Church*.¹⁵

INFLUENTIAL INDIVIDUALS IN THE LIFE OF RYRIE

Every prominent theologian in history is regarded as significant because their teachings, writings, speeches, sermons, and/or personal conversations have in one way or another had a profound impact upon the lives of their students, readers, and acquaintances. In the same way, theologians have been influenced through not only events, books, and educational institutions, but people. Ryrie is no exception. Key individuals in Ryrie's life had a profound impact upon him and his theology. They served as role models, confidants, teachers, and guides to help in the formation of Charles Ryrie, the theologian. Three primary influencers will be discussed in greater detail and three secondary influencers will be referenced in a more cursory manner.

¹³ Charles C. Ryrie, *The Role of Women in the Church*, 2nd ed. (Nashville: B & H Publishing Academic, 2011), xv.

¹⁴ This is a paraphrase by Ryrie from his recollection of a discussion he had with Matthew Black. Ryrie repeated this conversation that he had with Black in a personal phone interview conducted with the writer of this paper on 6 November 2012.

¹⁵ The rights to this book were purchased, and it was republished by B & H Publishing Group in 2011.

The Influence of Ryrie's Father

Mr. Ryrie, Charles's father, played a significant part in the spiritual birth, growth, and guidance of his two sons. He led both Charles and his brother to the Lord. Ryrie does not recall whether it was the kindergarten or the first grade, when in his own words, "We had just started school, and we were at home at the time, and there is no question in my mind that was the time I received the Lord."¹⁶ Ryrie's father taught a Sunday school class, and for a while he was also a Sunday school superintendent. Speaking respectfully of his father, Ryrie states, "Looking back, I believe he was a Spirit—capital 'S,' self—small 's,' taught person of the Bible. . . . He read the right books. . . . Chafer was a big influence in his life. . . . Most of his spiritual growth was as an adult."¹⁷ Ryrie, the father, also taught a home-based Bible class "before they were popular."¹⁸ Even as a child Charles had an aptitude for learning and a desire to understand the deeper truths of the Scripture. Ryrie recalls,

Once in a while, if I promised to obey, I was allowed to sit in on the home [Bible] class. . . . I remember once he [Ryrie the elder] was teaching that little book by Scofield called, *Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth*. It had not only eschatology in it, but the two natures, judgment. . . . I do remember sitting in on some of the nights where he was teaching that book.¹⁹

There can be no doubt that Ryrie's early years were heavily influenced by his father, his teachings, his modeling, and certainly his guidance.

¹⁶ Ryrie, interview, November 6, 2012.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

The Influence of Frank Gaebelein

As mentioned previously, Charles Ryrie spent one semester at Stony Brook School to prepare for college. It was here that Ryrie came into contact with Frank Gaebelein, the founder and headmaster of the school.²⁰ Gaebelein also had a significant impact on Ryrie. Gaebelein taught Romans, a senior-level Bible class. When asked if Gaebelein had a big influence upon him, Ryrie stated, "Oh yes. . . . Dr. Frank Gaebelein was very involved with us students. It was only a male school in those days. . . . Dr. Gaebelein taught senior Bible, he taught the book of Romans and I remember a lot from that class. . . . He always presided and often spoke in chapel."²¹ Ryrie also recalls correspondence with Gaebelein which was the impetus for his writing of *Dispensationalism Today*:

In the 1960s the Scofield Bible was being revised; Dr. Gaebelein was the editor. He wrote me a letter. I was at Dallas at that time. [This was during his first stint as a professor of theology, prior to becoming president of Philadelphia College of the Bible, which is now called Cairns.] He said, "I think you should write a book on dispensationalism. The Scofield Bible revision will be out and it would be great to have around the same time a book like that." He said, "I will promise to write the forward." So, that is what really urged me to write what was called *Dispensationalism Today*. It came out before the [New] Scofield Reference Bible because the Scofield was delayed. He wrote the forward, and of course it was revised and is now just called *Dispensationalism*. But he had a major part in that.²²

Gaebelein influenced Ryrie in the classroom as a teenager, advised him in selecting a college, and years later encouraged

²⁰ Cheryl L. Fawcett and Jamie Thompson, "Frank E. Gaebelein," <http://www2.talbot.edu/ce20/educators/view.cfm?n=frank_gaebelein#bibliography> (accessed 16 November 2012).

²¹ Ryrie, interview, November 6, 2012.

²² Ibid.

Ryrie to write what would amount to be, one of the most important and influential books on the subject of dispensationalism.

The Influence of Lewis Sperry Chafer

While Gaebelein certainly had a significant influence upon Ryrie early on and years later, there is one man who had a more profound impact upon Ryrie and his theology than Gaebelein. That man was Lewis Sperry Chafer. Chafer's contact with Ryrie and influence was over a long time period. Chafer's influence on Ryrie was not limited to his seminary years, but also during his college years, as a teenager at Stony Brook, and even as a young child.

As a Child

Ryrie's grandfather, a widower, lived with Ryrie's family when Ryrie was a child. Lewis Sperry Chafer was friends with Ryrie's grandfather. When Chafer would come to speak at a Brethren assembly in St. Louis,²³ he would often stay in their home. Ryrie fondly recalls his early memories of the Chafers, "He was quite a musician. He was a tenor; Mrs. Chafer was an alto. I do have vivid memories of the two of them sitting at a piano in my folk's home and singing duets."²⁴ From a very early age Ryrie was exposed to one of the great movers and shakers of evangelicalism. When asked by this writer if he understood the significance of having Chafer in his home, Ryrie responded, "Yes, I had an appreciation and knowledge for who he was, I think very much so." From a very early age, Ryrie was influenced by some great minds and dispensational teachers of the Bible. It is also interesting to note, that at the time of his ordination, when asked by those sitting on his ordination council why he attended DTS²⁵ he answered, "I didn't know of any other seminary."²⁶

²³ Darrell Goemaat and Kevin Mungons, "Have Something to Say."

²⁴ Ryrie, interview, November 6, 2012.

Although, a member of a Northern Baptist Church, Ryrie was so influenced by Chafer, Scofield, and other dispensationalist teachers that Dallas Theological Seminary was the only seminary he considered.

As a Teenager

The influence of Chafer continued beyond Ryrie's childhood. As referenced above, Ryrie's father enrolled Charles at Stony Brook School for a semester. Chafer, because of his prominence in the evangelical community, received an invitation from Stony Brook School to attend its graduation ceremony. Ryrie surmises that Chafer must have thought he personally sent the invitation. In response to what Chafer thought was an invitation directly from young Ryrie, Chafer wrote a personal letter to Ryrie which included an encouragement about ministry involvement, "I don't know what you are going to do with your life, but there is not much competition in the field of having experts in the knowledge of the Word of God."²⁷ Although, this was not the time Ryrie committed to full-time Christian service, Chafer's words left a strong impression upon young Ryrie.²⁸

As a College Student

Ryrie stated, "Chafer is the reason I am in the ministry."²⁹ It was a personal meeting with Chafer at the request of Charles Ryrie that would be life-changing and would re-direct the

²⁵ The question implied some dissatisfaction that he did not attend a Northern Baptist denominational school, of which the church was a member.

²⁶ Ryrie, interview, November 6, 2012.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

course of Ryrie's life. While Ryrie was attending Haverford College, he read in the local paper that Chafer was nearby, conducting a week-long series of messages at a church in the area. Ryrie went to hear Chafer speak, hoping to arrange some personal time with him. After the Sunday night service, Ryrie approached Chafer and asked if he could provide him some of his time. Chafer agreed. Later in the week, they met at the hotel in which Chafer was staying, Robert Morris Hotel, in downtown Philadelphia. Ryrie stated, "That night I felt a call to ministry. . . . We talked and prayed. I date that night as two things, a dedication of life and call to Christian service."³⁰ That was April 23, 1943.

As a Seminary Student

While Chafer invested into many young men who were training for ministry, few, if any, had a longer history than Ryrie had with Chafer. Despite this fact, Ryrie recalls, "We were all Chafer's boys and as much as possible we were treated as such."³¹ While at DTS, Ryrie sat under the teaching of Lewis Sperry Chafer. In his words, "I was influenced on his position and insistence on grace and grace alone."³² Ryrie remarked that one of the predominant teachings of Chafer was in the area of grace. What do his former students remember about his teaching? "Almost anyone who had him as a teacher, what would they answer, almost uniformly grace."³³ Chafer's teaching

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Charles C. Ryrie, Video interview, Evangelical Free Alliance, <<http://vimeo.com/19816195>> (accessed 13 October 2012).

³³ Ibid.

and insistence upon grace can be evidenced in many of Ryrie's later writings.³⁴

The Influence of Various Other Individuals

John Alexander Ryrie, Frank Gaebelein, and Lewis Sperry Chafer all had a profound impact upon the spiritual formation, biblical foundation, hermeneutical understanding, and theological method of Charles C. Ryrie. They by far had the most significant influence upon Ryrie, the theologian. Yet, Ryrie cites three other individuals who had an important influence upon his life. While in college Ryrie would often take the train into Philadelphia to sit under the teaching of the famous Presbyterian dispensationalist, Donald Grey Barnhouse. Barnhouse was the pastor of the Tenth Presbyterian Church.³⁵ The teachings of Barnhouse added to Ryrie's dispensational understanding of Scripture.³⁶ While President of Philadelphia College of Bible, Clarence Mason, Dean and Professor, was a great source of help and encouragement to Ryrie. In a lighthearted manner, Ryrie stated, "I don't think I would have survived without his help."³⁷ A third notable figure was the famous preacher and friend W. A. Criswell. Criswell was an

³⁴ While these teachings are prominent in many of Ryrie's writings, it is most noticeable in his books *The Grace of God; Balancing the Christian Life*, especially chapters four and seventeen, "The Old and the New," and "Must Christ be Lord to Be Savior?" and in his book, *So Great a Salvation*.

³⁵ Ryrie, interview, November 6, 2012.

³⁶ By the time Ryrie exited his teenage years, he had already been influenced by three very prominent dispensationalists: Chafer, Gaebelein, and Barnhouse and two of the most important dispensationalists of the early twentieth century: Lewis S. Chafer and Arno Gaebelein (through the teachings of his son, Frank). Ryrie had the perfect theological pedigree to eventually become one of the foremost defenders and articulators of dispensationalism.

³⁷ Ibid.

influential Southern Baptist and a dispensational premillennialist. Ryrie attended and taught at First Baptist Dallas, where Criswell pastored for nearly 50 years.

RYRIE'S ACADEMIC AND MINISTERIAL CAREER

Charles Ryrie had a long, influential academic and ministerial career that spanned several decades and has had a lasting impact. His influence was significant and opportunities of ministry varied. He taught at five institutions (four of higher education as well as one church). As a young man he became president of a Bible college. Yet, he is most noted for his prolific writing career, in which he was both a pioneer in many of his writings as well as an apologist defending various positions of theology.

Ryrie, the Professor and President

Ryrie began his academic career the summer following his graduation from DTS with a Th.M. He taught that first summer at Midwest Bible and Missionary Institute.³⁸ In 1949, after completing his Th.D. at DTS, Ryrie was invited to teach at Westmont College and eventually became the Department Chairman of Biblical Studies and Philosophy.³⁹ Ryrie went there to teach Bible and mathematics. When he arrived, he was made Associate Professor of Greek and Bible. In 1950 the president was dismissed. Two-thirds of the faculty tried to force the board to keep the president. Although Ryrie felt pressured, he did not join the dissenting faculty.⁴⁰ The teachers involved were terminated by the board. To fill the void felt by this large departure, Ryrie took on the additional responsibilities of Dean

³⁸ Midwest Bible and Missionary Institute eventually became part of Calvary Bible College.

³⁹ This was a professional advancement opportunity for Ryrie that developed out of an unfortunate faculty departure.

⁴⁰ Ryrie, interview, November 6, 2012.

of Men and Chairman of the Department of Biblical Studies and Philosophy.⁴¹

Shortly after the death of Chafer, Ryrie's mentor, Ryrie was invited to teach at DTS as a part-time faculty member. During this time he was also completing his Ph.D. dissertation. This part-time position developed into a full-time position on the faculty of the Systematic Theology Department. Ryrie remained at DTS for five years, when he accepted the invitation to become the president of Philadelphia College of Bible in 1958.⁴² Ryrie was just 33 years of age when he accepted this position. He remained president until 1962. When asked how he would describe this time period in his ministry, Ryrie stated, "A very happy time. I liked teaching college age kids. I liked teaching them because that is where many of them are making many life decisions."⁴³ Ryrie made it a personal goal to speak once a week in chapel unless he was out of town. His book *Making the Most of Life* was the product of those chapel messages.

In 1962, Ryrie returned to Dallas Theological Seminary to become the Chairman of Systematic Theology and the first Dean of Doctoral Studies. Ryrie retired in 1983, and until recently, continued to teach as an adjunct faculty member at various schools, as well as a guest speaker in churches and conferences around the world.

Ryrie, the Prolific Writer

Charles Ryrie has written a total of thirty-two books that have sold more than 1.5 million copies worldwide.⁴⁴ This does

⁴¹ Enns, *Handbook of Evangelical Theologians*, electronic edition.

⁴² Philadelphia College of Bible changed its name to Philadelphia Biblical University and most recently is now called Cairn University.

⁴³ Ryrie, interview, November 6, 2012.

⁴⁴ John D. Hannah, *An Uncommon Union: Dallas Theological Seminary and American Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 264.

not include the Ryrie Study Bible which has sold 2.6 million copies alone.⁴⁵ In an interview with the *Baptist Bulletin* when asked, "How did you develop your ability to explain things in simple language that a layperson can understand?" Ryrie responded, "It's the way the gift of teaching or exhortation is worked out in me: conciseness.... On the human side, I think it is because off and on through the years, I've taught children."⁴⁶

Not only is Ryrie a prolific writer, but his writings are diverse in their scope. As one might expect of a professor of systematic theology, Ryrie has written the most in this area: *Basic Theology*; *Survey of Bible Doctrine*; *Dispensationalism*; *The Holy Spirit*; *Come Quickly Lord Jesus*; *The Best is Yet to Come*; *The Basis of the Premillennial Faith*; *The Final Countdown*; *What You Should Know About the Rapture*. He has also written in the area of contemporary issues: *The Role of Women in the Church*, *Neo-Orthodoxy*, *What You Should Know About Social Responsibility*, *Biblical Answers to Tough Questions*, and *Biblical Answers to Contemporary Issues*. Ryrie composed exegetical works and commentaries on Thessalonians, Acts, Revelation, and a work on the miracles of Christ. He has written on Christian living: *Balancing the Christian Life* and *Making the Most of Life*. He contributed to a history of the English Bible, *Let It Go Among Our People*. He has also written a handful of works of a very practical nature including two books on object lessons, a book about sitting on a non-profit board, and a book about communicating Bible doctrine in practical manner. He has even written what is classified as juvenile reading: *The Young Christian's Introduction to the Bible*. Ryrie has written in seven vastly different areas, and his impact with the pen is immeasurable.

In an academic world where many professors are most concerned with acceptance amongst their peers, Ryrie wrote at a level understandable by academics, pastors, and the layperson. He never lost sight of the fact, that although we need strong academicians, seminaries and Bible colleges are intended

⁴⁵ James Vincent, *The MBI Story: The Vision and Worldwide Impact of Moody Bible Institute* (Chicago: Moody, 2011), n.p.

⁴⁶ Darrell Goemaat and Kevin Mungons, "Have Something to Say."

to train leaders of the church. His *Basic Theology* textbook has been translated into twenty-one different languages and is used in Bible institutes, colleges, and seminaries around the world.

When discussing the creation of the *Ryrie Study Bible*, Ryrie states, "When I was working on the Study Bible, I thought of the people in home Bible classes."⁴⁷ The *Ryrie Study Bible* was finished in 1978 and then revised with 2000 additional notes in 1995. When Ryrie first began his interest in writing, he asked Philip Howard, editor of *Sunday School Times*, "Dr. Howard, how do you learn to write?" The answer to this question would stay with Ryrie. Howard stated, "Have something to say and say it clearly." Paul Enns rightly concludes,

Dr. Ryrie is especially gifted in his ability to clarify profound theological truths in simple precise language. He has enabled people to understand biblical truth that they would otherwise not readily comprehend and in this he has made an inestimable contribution to the Christian world.⁴⁸

This is also evidenced in Ryrie's own words, concerning the need for popular-level writings on neo-orthodoxy, "The difficulty is that too few conservative pastors and laymen have been able to study something concise, nontechnical, but accurate on this subject. To help meet this need is the purpose of this book."⁴⁹

Ryrie's writings are characterized by not only clarity but also charity. In the same work just referenced, Ryrie states, "May God give us discernment of the issues at stake, clear understanding for the truth, wholehearted committal to the authority of the Bible, God's Word, and deep conviction of heart to speak the truth in love."⁵⁰ Ryrie's writings always come

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Paul P. Enns, "Charles Ryrie," in *Dictionary of Premillennial Theology*, ed. Mal Couch (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1996), 67.

⁴⁹ Charles C. Ryrie, *Neo-orthodox*, (Chicago: Moody, 1956), 10.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 62.

across with kindness. One example can be found when he references the convoluted thinking in gospel tracts, “I list them without documentation since the point is not who said these but what was said, and to illustrate how varied and confusing these statements are.”⁵¹ The clearest example of charity in his writings is regarding the lordship salvation debate. While John MacArthur and Zane Hodges continually list names and groups, mischaracterize each other, make straw-man arguments, and overstate their own arguments, Ryrie refrains from such behavior. Unless one reads the footnotes, the reader is not likely to know that there is even a debate taking place. Even when Ryrie is diametrically opposed to a particular view, he still maintains his composure and even presents his opponents positively. Ryrie speaks of Barth as a “Christian Gentlemen” and points to the good that he has done as well as the bad.⁵²

Ryrie, the Pioneer

Ryrie possessed a great knack for sensing what evangelicalism required. He wrote several works that blazed a new trail or met a need, even before that need surfaced. Ryrie’s Ph.D. work on the subject of women’s role in the church is a case-in-point. Dorothy Patterson also recognizes this aspect to Ryrie’s ministry in her forward of Ryrie’s book. She states, “Again, Ryrie finds himself in the role of a prophetic scholar engaging in cutting-edge debate over a question that really had not been asked when he first penned this work as his doctoral dissertation in the mid-twentieth century, nor was the issue really of importance when Moody Publishers first issued his monograph on the subject.”⁵³

⁵¹ Charles C. Ryrie, *So Great a Salvation: What It Means to Believe In Jesus Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1989), 23.

⁵² Ryrie, *Neo-orthodoxy*, 21-24.

⁵³ Dorothy Patterson, foreward to *Role of Women in the Church*, Charles Ryrie (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2011), xii.

Ryrie's *Dispensationalism Today*, written in 1965, was also a significant ground-breaking work that helped define the term dispensationalism and respond to many false characterizations of it. It has become a classic and is still the go-to reference work on the subject.

The *Ryrie Study Bible* is another example of a work that set the stage and tone for generations to come. Ryrie wrote his study Bible prior to the popularity of study Bibles. At the time there were just a handful of options; now there are hundreds of varieties, but only a few that have sold more in number than the *Ryrie Study Bible*.

Ryrie's work on neo-orthodoxy was a work done at a popular level. Ryrie saw the great need of providing answers to the questions surfacing not only in academia but in the church at large. Ryrie was indeed a pioneer in many of the subjects in which he wrote.

Ryrie, the Apologist

Ryrie's writing career often involved defending orthodox positions and dispensational perspectives. He became an able spokesman and apologist of conservative evangelicalism in responding to the teachings of neo-orthodoxy and the inerrancy of Scripture. He became the defender of the historical understanding of women's role in the church. Ryrie wrote to guard against abuses of the gospel. He became the capable representative of historic dispensationalism. He also became an ardent defender of a plain interpretation of Scripture, which has a wide range of implications relating to creationism, Israel, the church, the covenants, and prophetic literature, just to name a few.

In several of his writings, Ryrie lists arguments made against his views and systematically rebuts them. In *Inerrancy* Ryrie lists three "excuses" against inerrancy.⁵⁴ In *So Great a*

⁵⁴ Charles C. Ryrie, *What You Should Know About Inerrancy*, (Chicago: Moody, 1981), 21-26.

Salvation, he speaks of “straw men arguments,”⁵⁵ and in *Dispensationalism* he speaks of the many different “attacks” of those opposing dispensationalism.⁵⁶ Ryrie engages in issues that he deems especially important with wide-ranging implications. When he saw a lot at stake, he stepped in to provide clarity of the real issues and a defense of his positions from a biblical perspective, built upon a high view of Scripture. Regarding inerrancy, he gives the analogy of dominoes. He believes if inerrancy is “knocked over” it will have a huge “domino effect.”⁵⁷

Ryrie responds with a very serious and strong tone to those views outside of orthodoxy because he recognizes the threat level to be great. Ryrie recognizes neo-orthodoxy as a clear and present danger to evangelicalism. This is seen in his statement, “A theological hoax—that’s how one might describe Barthianism, that theology which calls men to the Word of God, stemmed from the writings of Barth and Brunner.”⁵⁸ Ryrie sounds the alarm and proclaims the dangers of what he calls a “false or pseudo-orthodoxy.”⁵⁹ Ryrie also records the pervading influence of Barthianism/neo-orthodoxy in seminaries and as a result, churches pastored by graduates of such seminaries. He states, “Too many are too quick to whitewash schools and men who still speak of regeneration, inspiration, the authority of the Word, etc., and too few have investigated what is really meant by those terms. The danger of such is like quicksand.”⁶⁰ Ryrie points out that the danger of neo-evangelicalism is even greater because within it is some good along with the bad: “But it is this good which is like a smoke screen to some evangelicals, and there is abroad the feeling that perhaps, after all, Barthianism

⁵⁵ Ryrie, *So Great a Salvation*, 29-33.

⁵⁶ Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 12-16.

⁵⁷ Ryrie, *What You Should Know About Inerrancy*, 9-11.

⁵⁸ Ryrie, *Neo-orthodoxy*, 9.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 10.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

isn't so bad, and we shouldn't criticize it so harshly because it has done some good.”⁶¹ Ryrie points out the great dangers neo-orthodoxy does to Scripture: “The damage that liberalism has done to the Bible can never be estimated, and this is what neo-orthodoxy sides with.”⁶²

As an apologist Ryrie does a masterful job of pointing out fallacious logic. This can be seen in his work on neo-orthodoxy.

[Neo-orthodoxy] speaks of important and real truths about God, sin, man, and the cross. But, because of neo-orthodoxy's acceptance of the liberal view of the Scriptures, the truths are based on nothing more than good stories, which may contain a grain of truth, but which also are greatly embellished. Original sin is the truest thing in the world, but the account of it in Genesis is only a story. The resurrection of Christ is the truest thing in the world, but the Gospel accounts of it are: hopelessly garbled. Christ is the Bread of Life, but of course, not one word of the Gospel of John is historical.⁶³

Ryrie is also skillful in synthesizing the theological teachings of others in an understandable fashion, and then explaining the dangers that may result. Continuing with neo-orthodoxy as an example, “To sum up: their doctrine includes orthodox terminology built on liberal exegesis; it attempts to have inspiration without infallibility, and authority without actuality. What kind of Bible is that?”⁶⁴

Ryrie, the Ordained Minister

Charles Ryrie was ordained by the First Baptist Church of Alton, Illinois, in 1947. This was the church where he grew up

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid., 45.

⁶³ Ibid., 60.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 48.

and his parents attended until 1949. His parents eventually left that church over the fundamentalist-modernist controversy. They joined Brown Street Baptist Church, which was a member of the General Association of Regular Baptists. Much of John and Elizabeth Ryrie's Sunday school class left with them.

While Ryrie's greatest influence was with the pen, he also had a substantial ministry at First Baptist Church in Dallas, Texas, as well as an itinerate preaching/teaching ministry in various churches around the United States. Ryrie taught a Sunday school class of over 100.⁶⁵ Before each quarter he also taught the curriculum to the other Sunday school teachers. At one point, he also conducted a junior church, but not in the sense that most think of it today. It was a church for teenagers who were in the ninth through twelfth grade. They had a separate service for these young people. For a while he was preaching to 200-300 teenagers. During this time-frame Ryrie did not do much traveling. However, upon retirement from DTS he had more opportunities to preach and teach in the United States and in the church abroad.

RYRIE'S "FIRST THEOLOGY"

In his book *First Theology*, Kevin J. Vanhoozer addresses the question of which doctrine(s) comes first in the study of systematic theology. Does the study of the doctrine of God take priority, or does the doctrine of the Bible primary? What is "first theology"? Vanhoozer states, "It is difficult to talk of God without appealing to the Bible, just as it is difficult to treat the Bible as Scripture without appealing to God."⁶⁶ Vanhoozer goes on to argue, one must handle God, the Bible, and hermeneutics as one problem, as "first theology." What is Ryrie's approach and how does it affect his theological method?

⁶⁵ *This is Dallas*, 46, no. 1 (Jan./Feb., 1970), un-numbered pages 3-4.

⁶⁶ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *First Theology: God Scripture & Hermeneutics* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 16.

The organization of Ryrie's *Basic Theology*⁶⁷ would seem to point to the study of God, as Ryrie's first theology and the study of bibliology and hermeneutics as a close second. In the prolegomena section of his book, Ryrie, like Vanhoozer, declares a very close connection between the study of God and the study of the Scriptures: "The Trinitarian believes God is Triunity. That is a belief gleaned from the Bible. Therefore, he also believes the Bible to be true."⁶⁸ In the same section, Ryrie calls the truthfulness of Scripture to be the "basic presupposition,"⁶⁹ which would argue for bibliology as his "first theology." Ryrie states, "The theist believes there is a God. He mounts confirmatory evidence to support that belief, but basically he believes."⁷⁰ It is safe to say, that the study of God and the Bible in Ryrie's view must also be treated together. However a systematic theology book, by necessity, requires one to be treated first, accounting for the study of God voiced before bibliology.

Ryrie's View of God

As stated previously, Ryrie presupposes that God exists as a triune God who has revealed himself in the Scriptures. Although God is transcendent and not completely comprehensible, he has chosen to allow us to know him, although not completely.⁷¹ Ryrie believes, along with conservative evangelicals, that God has revealed himself to all mankind through the conscience and through the requirements of the law written on their hearts. Ryrie also believes God has revealed his nature and purposes to

⁶⁷ The first section in Ryrie's *Basic Theology* following the prolegomena is the doctrine of God and then the doctrine of Scripture.

⁶⁸ Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1986), 16.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 16.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid., 25.

man progressively in Scripture and through the use of language.⁷² Ryrie adheres to the orthodox teachings regarding the person and nature of God.

Ryrie's View of the Bible

One's view of Scripture has a profound impact upon one's theological method. Ryrie presupposes Scripture to be the inspired, inerrant word of God. He has complete confidence in the biblical record as absolute truth. In Ryrie's book on Inerrancy, he seeks to harmonize Scripture, starting with the presupposition that it is without error and all apparent contradictions can be explained. With this starting point, he is able to answer the attacks of errantists, who claim there are two contradictory accounts of creation, ask where did Cain get his wife, point to contradictory accounts of Goliath's death, see contradictions in numbering, argue that the statements regarding the mustard seed are scientifically false, and argue for discrepancies regarding Judas's death.

Ryrie concludes,

Those represent passages currently being used as illustrations of errors... reasonable explanations are at hand. We need not conclude that errors are present in the text except for, possibly, occasional copyists' errors. How one views those suggestions will be a reflection of one's underlying confidence, or lack of it, in the Bible itself.⁷³

Ryrie does not regard the copies of Scripture to be inerrant, just the original writings. Ryrie argues that "errancy feeds on itself. If all the words cannot be trusted, then one may tend not to do careful exegesis and therefore either ignore or refuse to accept a perfectly proper grammatical explanation. . ."⁷⁴ Ryrie

⁷² Ibid., 26-27.

⁷³ Ibid., 88-89.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 94.

further states, “All of them [problem passages] do have reasonable explanations.”⁷⁵ Elsewhere Ryrie states, “If someone comes to the Bible expecting or allowing for error, he can make a case for an errant Scripture. But if he comes expecting the Bible to be inerrant, he can find plausible solutions, and even if he cannot honestly accept any of the suggested solutions, he can still believe that the Bible is inerrant and that we simply don’t yet have enough facts to solve some of the problems.”⁷⁶ Ryrie’s view leaves room for the unknown, “You can believe there are errors, or you can believe that there would be perfect resolution if all the facts were known.”⁷⁷ Ryrie’s observations make clear the implications these foundational presuppositions have on one’s interpretations and by *de facto* on one’s theological method. Ryrie’s theological method begins with a presupposition that the triune God of the Bible exists, and he has revealed himself in the inspired, inerrant Scriptures.

Ryrie’s Hermeneutic

It is not possible to overemphasize the importance of hermeneutics as it pertains to one’s theological method. Ryrie’s definition of hermeneutics appears in typical Ryrie fashion, succinct and efficient: “the study of the principles of interpretation.”⁷⁸ One’s hermeneutic adopted and applied will by necessity affect one’s theological method, and in turn one’s interpretation. Therefore, it is helpful to first assess Ryrie’s hermeneutical principles in understanding his theological method.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 100.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 98.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 99.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 110.

Historical-Grammatical Reading of Scripture

Ryrie consistently applies a literal hermeneutic in interpreting Scripture. Ryrie argues that this is the second *sine qua non* of dispensationalism and is the basis for the distinction between Israel and the church.⁷⁹ This is often called the “historical-grammatical” hermeneutic. Other words used in place of literal are normal or plain. Ryrie states, it “might also be called plain interpretation so that no one receives the mistaken notion that the literal principle rules out figures of speech.”⁸⁰ Ryrie argues for the plain reading of Scripture from the nature of God’s revelation:

God intended you to understand what the Bible teaches. This does not mean that you will comprehend all its truths at first reading or even in a lifetime, but it does mean that you can expect to learn a great deal. God used language which He meant to be taken just as normally and plainly as the words in this book.⁸¹

Ryrie consistently applies this same literal hermeneutic to the book of Revelation. He explains how a literal hermeneutic can allow for symbolism:

The concept of a literal interpretation always raises questions since it seems to preclude anything symbolic, and the book obviously contains symbols. Perhaps saying “normal” or “plain” interpretation would be better than “literal,” since futurists do recognize the presence of symbols in the book. The difference between the literalist and the spiritualizer is simply that the former sees the symbols as conveying a plain meaning.⁸²

⁷⁹ Ibid., 40.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 80.

⁸¹ Ryrie, *A Survey of Bible Doctrine* (Chicago: Moody, 1972), 9-10.

⁸² Ryrie, *Revelation*, 9.

In other words, every symbol has a literal referent, whereas the allegorizer/spiritualizer feels no impetus in find a referent.

Ryrie provides three rationales for an historical-grammatical hermeneutic. The first line of argumentation is regarding the nature of language:

If God be the originator of language and if the chief purpose of originating it was to convey His message to humanity, then it must follow that He, being all-wise and all-loving, originated sufficient language to convey all that was in His heart to tell mankind. Furthermore, it must also follow that He would use language and expect people to understand it in its literal, normal, and plain sense. The Scriptures, then, cannot be regarded as an illustration of some special use of language so that in the interpretation of these Scriptures some deeper meaning of the words must be sought.⁸³

Ryrie's second line of argumentation for a historical-grammatical hermeneutic rests on the example of fulfilled OT prophecies. He argues that the prophecies concerning the birth, life, and death of Jesus Christ were fulfilled literally and precisely; therefore prophecies which have yet to be fulfilled should also follow this model.⁸⁴ His third reason: it is the only means for objectivity. If the Scripture is not to be interpreted literally, then there can be as many interpretations as there are people.⁸⁵ In his view, dispensationalism is the by-product of the literal interpretation of Scripture and the dispensationalist is the most consistent in the application of the historical-grammatical hermeneutic. Ryrie states, "If literalism is the valid hermeneutical principle then that is an approach to the Scriptures which if consistently applied can only lead to

⁸³ Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 81.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 82. These same three rationales are also articulated in Ryrie's *Basic Theology*, although arranged in a different order (*Basic Theology*, 113-14).

dispensational theology.”⁸⁶ Ryrie repeats, “As basic as one believes literal interpretation to be, to that extent he will of necessity become a dispensationalist.”⁸⁷

It does not take much investigation to find Ryrie’s understanding of general hermeneutics or his consistent application of these rules to prophecy. In *The Basis of the Premillennial Faith*, Ryrie gives three general principles of interpretation. In *Basic Theology*, Ryrie adds a fourth.

(1) *Interpret grammatically.* There is no more basic rule of interpretation than this. The interpreter must begin his work by studying the grammatical sense of the text, determining the exact meaning of the words according to the linguistic usage and connection.

(2) *Interpret according to the context.* The Bible is not a book of words or verses put together without any relation to one another. Therefore, the context, which includes both the immediate context and the wider scope of the section or book, must be studied in order to see the relation that each verse sustains to that which precedes and to that which follows.

(3) *Compare Scripture with Scripture.* This principle of interpretation... not only uses parallel passages in Scripture but also regulates the interpretation of each passage in conformity with the whole tenor of revealed truth.... The application of this principle of hermeneutics means the harmonization of Scripture. An obscure or seemingly contradictory passage cannot invalidate a doctrine clearly supported by this principle of the analogy of faith.⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Ryrie, “The Necessity of Dispensationalism,” *BSac* 114, no. 455 (July 1957): 249.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 250.

⁸⁸ Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 36-37.

(4) *Recognize the progressiveness of revelation.* To be able to interpret plainly consistently, it is imperative to recognize that revelation was given progressively.⁸⁹

Ryrie also clearly states what he believes to be the principles of interpretation that should govern the understanding of prophetic literature.

(1) *Consistency in principle.* Prophecy is not a special case in that it demands special hermeneutics if such a system contradicts the basic principle of literal interpretation.

(2) *Compare prophecy with prophecy.* Every prophecy is part of a wonderful scheme of revelation, and this entire scheme as well as the interrelationship between the parts must be kept in mind.

(3) *Interpretation differs from application.* Interpretation is one; application is manifold. The primary aim of the interpreter is, in every case to discover the true and only interpretation. . . . There is a secondary application, but not interpretation."

(4) *Figurative language.* The use of figurative language does not compromise or nullify the literal sense of the thing to which it is applied. Figures of speech are a legitimate grammatical usage for conveying a literal meaning.

(5) *Law of fulfillment.* In the interpretation of unfulfilled prophecy, fulfilled prophecy forms the pattern. . . . In other words look at how God has fulfilled prophecy in the past to see how he will in the future.

(6) *Law of double fulfillment.* Often a prophecy may have a double fulfillment, one being in the immediate circumstances and another in the distant future.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 114.

(7) *Law of time relationship.* Two or more events of a like character may be described in a common profile.⁹⁰

In Ryrie's commentary on the book of Revelation he consistently adheres to the hermeneutical principles outlined above. Concerning the fourth principle listed above, figurative language, he states, "The difference between the literalist and the spiritualizer is simply that the former sees the symbols as conveying a plain meaning."⁹¹ And regarding his first principle, consistency in principle, he clarifies, "The futurist does not deny the presence of symbols in the book, nor does he claim to be able to explain every detail with certainty. But he does insist that the principle of plain interpretation be followed consistently throughout the book."⁹²

It is significant to note that the principles outlined above are recorded in Ryrie's early writings,⁹³ yet he adhered to these principles of hermeneutics consistently throughout the body of his work. Ryrie's *Basic Theology* printed in 1986, although organized differently, is nearly the same in content. Ryrie's summary on the subject of hermeneutics is also a helpful conclusion to this discussion:

It is God who desired to give man His Word. It is God who also gave the gift of language so He could fulfill that desire. He gave us His Word in order to communicate, not confound. We should seek to understand that communication plainly, for that is the normal way beings communicate.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ Ibid., 40-45.

⁹¹ Charles C. Ryrie, *Revelation* (Chicago: Moody, 1968), 9.

⁹² Ibid., 10.

⁹³ *The Basis of the Premillennial Faith*, while printed in 1953, was based on his Th.D. dissertation at Dallas Theological Seminary.

⁹⁴ *Basic Theology*, 115.

Ryrie's historical-grammatical hermeneutic plays a major part in his theological method.

Israel and the Church

It is not accidental that Ryrie's principles of hermeneutics were explored prior to investigating his understanding of Israel and the church. The hermeneutical principles articulated above affect Ryrie's view regarding Israel. As indicated previously, one of Ryrie's three stated *sine qua non* of dispensationalism is a literal hermeneutic. A second *sine qua non* is maintaining a distinction between the church and Israel. Ryrie states, "The one who fails to distinguish Israel and the church consistently will inevitably not hold to dispensational distinctions; and one who does will."⁹⁵ Ryrie goes on to articulate his position regarding Israel: "Israel does not replace the church, they are two separate people groups with two clearly delineated purposes."⁹⁶ Ryrie also points out that this is not odd, for in fact God has a purpose for angels and nations that continue into the New Jerusalem and even has a plan for those who reject him.

In *The Basis of the Premillennial Faith*, Ryrie clarifies that a premillennialist interprets the promises made to Abraham and David literally and that those promises were (1) unconditional and (2) have, or will have, a future fulfillment.⁹⁷ Ryrie goes on to state, "In no sense have these promises made to Israel been abrogated or fulfilled by the church, which is a distinct body in this age having promises and a destiny different from Israel's."⁹⁸ Ryrie sees an inconsistency in how others see the church as replacing Israel. In Ryrie's estimation, they do not consistently apply the rules of hermeneutics:

⁹⁵ Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 39.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ryrie, *Basis of the Premillennial Faith*, 12.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

If one interprets literally, he arrives at the premillennial system. . . . There is no disagreement over the fundamental rules of interpretation. . . . The disagreement is in the interpretation of prophecy. The amillennialist's answer is special hermeneutics which are special in the sense that they contradict all regular hermeneutical principles. The premillennialist's answer includes some special considerations in interpreting prophecy. . . while at the same time being harmonious with the basic principles of hermeneutics.⁹⁹

Ryrie also writes on the distinction between Israel and the church in his article "The Mystery in Ephesians 3." In this article, Ryrie argues forcefully from the meaning of *mystery*. He begins by arguing that the classical Greek usage of the *musterion* is something that was hidden or was a secret.¹⁰⁰ He goes on to argue that the biblical usage is similar:

The idea of a mystery being something secret in Old Testament times but revealed in the New Testament is clearly seen in a passage like Colossians 1:26. . . . Thus the concept of a mystery is basically a secret which only the initiated share. This includes two ideas: (1) a time when the secret was not known followed by a time when it became known; and (2) deeper or higher wisdom which is revealed to the one initiated into an understanding of the mystery. . . . In other words, the mystery concerns Jews and Gentiles as joint-heirs, in a joint-body, and joint-sharers of the promise in Christ. That the mystery contains the fact that Gentiles are included in God's plan of redemption is clear, and most non-dispensational writers stop at this point. But is this all there is to the mystery? If so, there is little mystery in that, for the Old Testament made this clear (Gen. 12:3; Isa. 42:6-7). If this is the mystery then Paul was wrong to label it a mystery, for it is neither something new nor some higher truth. The heart of the mystery is that there would be a "joint-body" for Jews and Gentiles.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Ibid., 47.

¹⁰⁰ Charles C. Ryrie, "The Mystery in Ephesians 3," *BSac* 123, no. 439 (January 1966): 25.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 27.

In the aforementioned article, Ryrie articulates the argument of the covenant theologian, who tries to point to the significance of the “as” in Ephesians 3:5 to indicate there was some revelation of the church in the OT. Ryrie concisely and systematically defuses their argument by contending the following:

- (1) The parallel passage, Colossians 1:26, does not include the word “as” and unequivocally points to nothing being known in the Old Testament.
- (2) If “as” does show comparison, it does not necessarily follow that that the church was present in the Old Testament.
- (3) The Greek word “as” has several meanings.
- (4) One meaning that does not contradict, but rather harmonizes with Colossians 1:26, is the adjectival or declarative use, in which case the “as” clause would simply add additional information.¹⁰²

After arguing for the distinction of Israel and the church on the basis of the meaning of “mystery,” Ryrie proceeds to argue for the distinction on the basis of the beginning of the church as recorded in the book of Acts. Ryrie points out that even after Jesus’ resurrection, he spoke of the church to be yet future.¹⁰³ Ryrie concludes,

Therefore the inescapable conclusion is that the body of Christ did not come into existence until the day of Pentecost when the first members of the body were joined to the risen Head. . . . If by

¹⁰² Ibid., 29.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

stretch of the interpretive imagination the body could be said to have existed before Pentecost, then it was without a head.¹⁰⁴

Ryrie also argues for the distinction of the church from Israel on the basis of the “new man” in Ephesians:

That body-church is called a ‘new-man’ (Eph 2:15), not a continuation or remaking of Israel, but something new and distinct from the Israel of the Old Testament. . . . Just as the redeemed before Abrahams’ day (like Enoch and Noah) were not a part of Israel, so the redeemed of this age are not either.¹⁰⁵

There is no ambiguity in the writings of Ryrie. He consistently and regularly maintains that Israel and the church are two unique entities with two unique plans and purposes of God.

Opposition to “Complementary Hermeneutics”

In recent years, theological and hermeneutical shifting has taken place within some dispensational circles. This shifting has been labeled progressive dispensationalism, led by Darrell Bock and Craig Blaising, among others. Their theological conclusions move the parties involved closer to the covenant camp, and causes a blurring of the lines between Israel and the church. This shift has significant theological implications, and is the result of adopting a new hermeneutic.

Progressive dispensationalists argue for “complementary hermeneutics,” or what they might call an “enhancement” of biblical truth. According to them, “In making complementary additions, . . . it does not jettison old promises. The enhancement is not at the expense of the original promise.”¹⁰⁶ Ryrie is not

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 27-28.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 28.

¹⁰⁶ Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock, *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: The Search for Definition* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 392-93.

satisfied with the progressive dispensationalists' theological conclusions or the hermeneutic upon which it is based. He argues that the complementary hermeneutic of the progressive dispensationalist "allows the New Testament to introduce changes and additions to Old Testament revelation."¹⁰⁷ He concludes that such a significant departure from the normal dispensational hermeneutic results in dispensationalists and even non-dispensationalists to rightly conclude that the progressive dispensationalist should no longer be classified as dispensational.¹⁰⁸ This is certainly the case if Ryrie's three *sine qua non* are legitimate definitive characteristics of dispensationalism. In Ryrie's view the "enhancement" of OT revelation spoken of by the progressive dispensationalists equals a change of OT revelation. If Christ is ruling on the throne of David currently, as the progressives contend, then the literal meaning and understanding of the original audience has been neglected and has been replaced by an "enhanced" meaning. The complementary hermeneutic, according to Ryrie, is an inconsistent one that incorporates a spiritualized meaning "here" along with the literal meaning "not yet."

Ryrie reminds his readers of the dangers of this view: "Are there limits on the use of a complementary hermeneutic, and, if so, how are these limits to be determined and by whom?"¹⁰⁹ His point is clear; the complementary hermeneutic results in the loss of all objectivity. Ryrie's statement in *Basic Theology* is helpful: "If one does not employ normal interpretation, then objectivity is lost to the extent that he does not use it consistently. . . . [This] results in different, inconsistent, and often contradictory interpretations."¹¹⁰ The hermeneutic of the progressive dispensationalist has no limiting criteria to protect from the abuse of Scripture and violence committed to the text.

¹⁰⁷ Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 164.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 162.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 175.

¹¹⁰ Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 113.

Typology

Typology is an interesting, challenging subject with a wide-range of treatment. There are those who could be classified as “hyper-typers” who see types and anti-types in nearly every object, person, and event in Scripture. Then there are those who will only acknowledge types expressly stated in the Scripture. Ryrie holds to a mediating position. He sees a type as “a divinely purposed illustration which prefigures its corresponding reality. This definition not only covers types which are expressly designated so by the New Testament (e.g., 1 Cor. 10) but also allows for types not so designated (e.g., Joseph as a type of Christ).”¹¹¹ While Ryrie does not require that every type or anti-type be identified as such by the biblical authors, he does imply that there must be clear indicators in the text to point to it being “divinely purposed.” In other words, a type cannot be determined arbitrarily. Ryrie points to the Feast of Pentecost as a good example of a type not expressly stated in Scripture, but the similarities cannot be overlooked and must have been divinely intended, “for although there is a clear type-antitype relationship, not all the details of the Old Testament feast find a corresponding reality in the events recorded in Acts 2.”¹¹²

Ryrie goes on to state,

The phrase “divinely purposed” should guard against an allegorical or pseudo-spiritual interpretation of types which sees chiefly the resemblances between Old Testament events and New Testament truths to the neglect of the historical geographical, and local parts of those events.¹¹³

Ryrie’s view prevents a too constrictive view of types, while at the same time, maintains criteria that avoids the excesses of a liberal treatment of types.

¹¹¹ Ryrie, “Significance of Pentecost,” 330.

¹¹² Ibid., 330.

¹¹³ Ibid.

Ryrie consistently and judiciously applies the historical-grammatical hermeneutic to all of Scripture, including prophetic literature. These hermeneutical convictions are one of the key components of his theological method, and in his own words, “As basic as one believes literal interpretation to be, to that extent he will of necessity become a dispensationalist.”¹¹⁴ It is Ryrie’s hermeneutic that leads him to be a dispensationalist. It causes him to see a distinction between Israel and the church. It results in his rejection of “complementary hermeneutics.” It results in his careful handling of typology, and it influences virtually every interpretive decision he makes, including how to integrate the Old and New Testaments.

RYRIE’S INTEGRATION OF THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENT

How important is progressive revelation to interpretation? How do the NT authors use the OT? How is one to interpret the covenants? One’s answers to these questions demonstrate their integration of the Old and New Testaments.

Progressive Revelation

Ryrie explains that acknowledging progressive revelation is a recognition “that God’s message to man was not given in one single act but was unfolded in a series of successive acts and through the minds and hands of many men of varying backgrounds.”¹¹⁵ Ryrie maintains that the student of the Bible must carefully observe the progressive nature of revelation. He contends that the dispensational perspective promotes a careful study of progressive revelation. In fact, only the dispensationalist does justice to progressive revelation in his view. He states, “Dispensationalism alone has a broad enough unifying principle to do justice to the unity of the progress of revelation on the one hand and the distinctiveness of the

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 250.

¹¹⁵ Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 31.

various stages in that progress on the other.”¹¹⁶ In a journal article entitled “The Necessity of Dispensationalism,” Ryrie points out the failures of covenant theology and accuracies of dispensational theology in handling accurately progressive revelation:

Covenant theology, then, because of the rigidity of its unifying principle of the covenant of grace can never show within its system proper progress of revelation. Dispensationalism, on the other hand, can and does give proper place to the idea of development. Under the various administrations of God different revelation was given to man, and that revelation was increasingly progressive in the scope of its content. Though similarities are present in various dispensations, they are part of a true development and not a result of employing the unifying principle of the covenant of grace. The particular manifestations of the will of God in each dispensation are given their full yet distinctive place in the progress of the revelation of God throughout the ages. Only dispensationalism can cause historical events and successions to be seen in their own light and not to be reflected in the artificial light of an overall covenant. Therefore, a correct philosophy of history with its requirements of a proper goal, a proper unifying principle, and a proper concept of progress is best satisfied by the dispensational system. Like the approach of Biblical distinctions, the approach through the proper concept of the philosophy of history leads to dispensationalism.¹¹⁷

According to Ryrie, progressive revelation does not mean that new revelation may completely change the meaning of something previously revealed, rather it brings additional understandings about God, His plans and purposes. Progressive revelation “may add to it or even supersede it, but it does not contradict it.”¹¹⁸ Progressive revelation never changes the meaning of church, kingdom, or Israel. Each new dispensation

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 32.

¹¹⁷ Ryrie, “Necessity of Dispensationalism,” 249.

¹¹⁸ Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 81.

has ingredients of newly and progressively revealed truth under which each person is responsible to operate.

The New Testament Authors' Use of the Old

How do the NT authors quote and illustrate from the OT? This is a subject that is difficult and hotly debated. Ryrie makes a significant observation: "We must remember that most often the New Testament uses the Old Testament prophecies literally and does not spiritualize them."¹¹⁹ Ryrie counts only seven examples "at most," which are spiritualized.¹²⁰ He goes on to say, "Hardly ever do New Testament writers not use the Old Testament in a historical-grammatical sense. . . . The rule is that they interpreted the Old Testament plainly; the exceptions are rare and typological."¹²¹ Ryrie believes, as do many other conservative scholars, that it was the prerogative of the apostles to do such. Since readers are not inspired by God nor have apostolic authority, they cannot add new meaning to an OT passage. Ryrie states,

The Holy Spirit has the right to tell a New Testament writer to use an Old Testament quote with a different or new meaning. That does not give me the right to do that, because I am interpreter not an author. . . . You have to distinguish between what a writer of Scripture can do in his writing and what I cannot do in my interpretation.¹²²

Ryrie finds the best explanation of the NT authors' use of the Old to be sourced in the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. He wisely reminds the interpreter that he has no such liberty.

¹¹⁹ Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 115.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ryrie, interview, November 6, 2012.

The Abrahamic and Davidic Covenants

One's "First Theology," especially pertaining to one's hermeneutical presuppositions, will by necessity impact the discussion of the covenants found in Scripture. Is the Abrahamic covenant eternal? Is it understood to be fulfilled spiritually, or should it be understood as promise not yet realized, and therefore requiring a future fulfillment?

Ryrie's hermeneutical commitments lead him to conclude that Abraham understood the promise of God to involve a literal land from the Nile to the Euphrates (Gen 15:19), a literal line of descendants, and a blessing upon and through his line. This covenant which in its plain understanding has not been fulfilled, and is not fulfilled in the church. One cannot take the NT and read it back into the OT. This would be a contradiction of what the Abrahamic covenant meant to its original readers, and it would do violence to the text. Ryrie states, "The Scriptures clearly teach that this is an eternal covenant based on the gracious promises of God. There may be delays, postponements, and chastisements, but an eternal covenant cannot, if God cannot deny Himself, be abrogated."¹²³ Ryrie believes that the Abrahamic covenant is not conditional (as some covenant theologians say), nor is it spiritually received (as other covenant theologians argue). Ryrie makes a persuasive point, "Hundreds of years after Solomon's time the Scriptures still abound in promises concerning future possession of the land. This must prove that God and His prophets realized, whether the amillennialist does or not, that Solomon had not fulfilled the Abrahamic Covenant."¹²⁴

The Davidic covenant, according to Ryrie, is also an unconditional covenant which has yet to be inaugurated. It seems apparent to him and other classic dispensationalists that this is the case. Ryrie does not believe that Jesus has begun his reign in a spiritual way. In response to the progressive dispensationalist, Ryrie states,

¹²³ Ryrie, *Basis of the Premillennial Faith*, 53.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 61.

The writer of Hebrews plainly declares that Christ “sat down at the right hand of the throne of God,” not the throne of David (12:2). That does not deny that our Lord has all authority in heaven and earth or that He rules in the world and in the church; rather, it denies that He is ruling on David’s throne now and that the Davidic covenant has already been inaugurated. To conclude otherwise confuses the various rules in the Bible.¹²⁵

Ryrie consistently applies his historical-grammatical hermeneutic to the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants. He seeks to interpret literally and consistently, and interprets the text in light of how Abraham and David understood them in their original situation. The NT does not re-interpret the OT but rather helps to understand the implications of previous revelation. It builds upon it and clarifies it, and does not contradict it.

The Mosaic Covenant

While Ryrie understands the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants to be unconditional and permanent, he finds good reason to interpret the Mosaic covenant as conditional and temporary. Ryrie applies his historical-grammatical hermeneutic here as well. Concerning its conditional nature, he believes there were clear statements of contingency. If you do this, . . . you will be blessed; if you do that, . . . you will be cursed.

Concerning its temporal nature Ryrie states, “This passage [2 Corinthians 3:7-11] says that the Ten Commandments are a ministration of death; and furthermore, the same passage declares in no uncertain terms that they are done away (v.11).”¹²⁶ In his work on biblical theology, Ryrie writes, “The principal point of the writer is plain: these Jewish believers [recipients of the book of Hebrews] were to look no longer to

¹²⁵ Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 169.

¹²⁶ Charles C. Ryrie, “The End of the Law,” *BSac* 124, no.495 (July 1967): 243-44.

the Mosaic covenant with its services and priesthood, for now they had something better in Christ.”¹²⁷ Yet, even with a plethora of statements speaking of the end of the law, some try to separate the law into three parts and argue that the “moral law” is still in effect. He contends, “It is not uncommon in Christian theology to say that the judgments and ordinances are done away for the believer, but not the Decalogue. This is unscriptural, to say nothing of being illogical, in view of the unitized construction of the law.”¹²⁸ Ryrie argues for the entire law being abrogated: “A cursory glance at the record of the giving of the law in the book of Exodus will show that the law was given to Israel as a unit.”¹²⁹ Ryrie argues that it is one unit because (1) The Jews saw no distinction, (2) Exodus records the laws with no breaks between the Ten Commandments and the rest of the laws, (3) the commandments from each section were equally binding, and (4) James says to break one of the laws is to violate all of them (James 2:10).¹³⁰

Once again, Ryrie consistently applies a historical grammatical hermeneutic to the text, unhindered by theological baggage that accompanies many confessions or denominations established on the teachings of their respective founders (i.e., Calvin, Wesley, Luther). He allows the progressive revelation of the NT to give further insight into what the OT had already predicted (Jeremiah 31).

The New Covenant

The way one interprets the new covenant often shows the interpreter’s theological presuppositions. It certainly shows his hermeneutical approach to the integration of the Old and New Testaments. Ryrie points out the amillennialist’s interpretation of the book of Hebrews concerning the new covenant. The

¹²⁷ Ryrie, *Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, 248.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 58.

¹²⁹ Charles C. Ryrie, *The Grace of God* (Chicago: Moody, 1963), 57.

amillennialist believes the new covenant will be fulfilled by the church, despite the original promise in Jeremiah 31 being made with Israel and “thereby obviating the need for a future millennial age.”¹³¹ Ryrie finds this interpretation unsatisfactory and an inconsistent use of the historical-grammatical hermeneutic.

Ryrie sees a need to accept the new covenant promise of Jeremiah 31 to be literally understood as the original readers would have interpreted it. In a footnote on Jeremiah 31 in his study Bible he speaks of the new covenant: “It will be made in the future with the whole nation of Israel (Jer. 31:31); it will be unlike the Mosaic covenant in that it will be unconditional (Jer. 31:32); its provisions will include (1) a change of heart, (2) fellowship with God, (3) knowledge of the Lord, and (4) forgiveness of sins.”¹³²

We see that Ryrie is not willing to avert an OT meaning with a supposed NT one. In his perspective, the NT has a priority over the OT in that it helps to clarify and builds upon the incomplete OT revelation, but it does not change it. It gives further details but does not controvert it. In his *Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, Ryrie lists three possible interpretations held to by premillennialists, which do not require obviating the literal future earthly reign of Christ.¹³³ The three views on the new covenant listed by Ryrie include (1) the church receiving the blessings of the new covenant with Israel, (2) the new covenant is with Israel only, but the church receives promises based on the blood of Christ, or (3) two new covenants, one with Israel (yet future) and one with the church. At the time of the writing of his work on biblical theology in 1959, Ryrie held to the third view, “The New Covenant under which the Church is blessed is not the same as that which Jeremiah promised for that is yet to be fulfilled to the house of Israel and the house of Judah as

¹³¹ Ryrie, *Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, 249.

¹³² Charles C. Ryrie, *The Ryrie Study Bible*, (Chicago: Moody, 1986), 1058.

¹³³ Ryrie, *Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, 249.

prophesied.”¹³⁴ It appears that by 1986, the date in which *The Ryrie Study Bible* came out, Ryrie adopted a variation of the first or second view above, “Christ’s blood is the basis of the new covenant (Matt. 26:28); Christians are ministers of it (2 Cor. 3:6); and it will yet have an aspect of its fulfillment in relation to Israel and Judah in the millennium (as predicted in Jer. 31:31-34).”¹³⁵ What can be seen from these quotations and the body of Ryrie’s work is that he desires to honestly grapple with the text, seeking to interpret the pertinent Scriptures in a way that maintains the authorial intent of both the New and Old Testament writers without obfuscating either of them.

RYRIE’S INTEGRATION OF BIBLE TRUTH WITH OTHER ACADEMIC DISCIPLINES OUTSIDE OF THE BIBLE

It is no secret that those who are scholars of the Bible and those who are experts in other disciplines often come to contradictory conclusions. How does one resolve these tensions? Ryrie gives some insightful thoughts on this subject.

Inspiration and Inerrancy of Scripture as a Starting Point

In an interview with the writer of this paper, Ryrie puts his finger on what appears to be the source of the problem resulting in discrepancies between biblical scholars and experts of other disciplines.

I think in the academic world, the attempt to integrate biblical truth with other disciplines is difficult and very often not successful. . . . The reason is often because you cannot find the sociologist or psychologist or archeologist who has a knowledge of

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ This quotation is taken from the footnote of *The Ryrie Study Bible* on Hebrews 8:6, found on page 1675.

the Bible. He does not have time to be trained in the Bible like he does in his field.¹³⁶

Ryrie proceeded to share an example of a college professor who had successfully integrated biblical truth into his secular teaching; the key to his success was that he knew the Bible almost as well as he understood biology. Unfortunately, this example seems to be the exception and not the norm.

When integrating the Bible with other disciplines, Ryrie's starting point is unashamedly the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture. He has absolute confidence in the biblical record as absolute truth. In his own words, "If the Bible says something about [any given subject], then that is the standard."¹³⁷

Others have a starting point that other "sciences" are truth and the Scripture must be interpreted in light of "scientific" discoveries. Concerning the creationism vs. theistic evolution debate, Ryrie articulates,

Since the Bible and Christ Himself attest to the truthfulness of the account [creation story], since the Bible itself has been shown to be true in other areas (particularly in the matter of fulfilled prophecy), and since the data of the theory of evolution is built on circular arguments, is full of gaps, and requires an element of blind faith to believe, the choice of what to accept about creation should not be difficult.¹³⁸

Later Ryrie states, "Although the Bible is not a textbook of science, when it records a scientific fact it speaks of that fact with infallible authority just the same as with matters of 'faith and practice. . . . One cannot hold to inspiration and infallibility of certain parts and only the inspiration of other parts.'"¹³⁹

¹³⁶ Ryrie, interview, November 6, 2012.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Charles C. Ryrie, *Biblical Answers to Tough Questions* (Fort Worth, TX: Tyndale Seminary, 2008), 141.

¹³⁹ Charles C. Ryrie, "The Importance of Inerrancy," *BSac*, 120, no. 478 (April 1963):141.

Ryrie's position can be summarized: the Scriptures are the only source of absolute truth and therefore any other "science" or other source of truth must be carefully interpreted in light of the Bible. Problems or contradictions can be explained, either as a misunderstanding of the text of Scripture or a faulty conclusion of the other sciences.

Dealing with Apparent Contradictions with Other Sources of Truth

Ryrie focuses an entire chapter in *Basic Theology* to address "problem passages." Here he starts from a perspective that the Bible is an inspired and inerrant book, and all apparent contradictions can be explained. If there is a "contradiction," there is an explanation, and it never is that the Bible is wrong. Concerning the question of early man,

It is the allegation of evolution that man is very old and that he has evolved from prior brute forms. In contrast the biblical account of creation insists that Adam and Eve were the first human beings, that they were sinless, that they subsequently sinned, and that the resultant effect on the entire race has been one of degeneration.¹⁴⁰

Ryrie proceeds to question the fossil theory with skepticism, showing major problems in their theory: (1) the dating of fossil remains are based on circular reasoning, (2) the radiometric and fluorine methods of dating do not date the fossils absolutely, and (3) there is not one fossil record of intermediate forms to substantiate their theory.¹⁴¹ Christians are often ridiculed for believing in Christianity and are accused of faith as being their crutch. Ryrie agrees, "Seldom is creationism presented as a plausible explanation; rather it is protracted [sic] as an emotional, unscientific, blind faith."¹⁴² Ryrie goes on to

¹⁴⁰ Charles C. Ryrie, "The Bible and Evolution," *BSac* 124, no. 493 (January 1967): 70.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Ibid., 72.

reason that “science” also accepts some concepts by faith with no definitive proof: The evidence of those who would explain life’s origin on the basis of the accidental combination of suitable chemical elements is no more tangible than that of those people who place their faith in Divine Creation as the explanation of the development of life.¹⁴³

Ryrie makes a strong and logical case for the biblical record and against the evolutionary hypothesis. He sees inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture as foundational to all investigation. He contends, “To acknowledge the divine-human authorship of the Bible resulting in its total inerrancy is analogous to the orthodox doctrine of the person of Christ.”¹⁴⁴ The inspiration of Scripture is just as foundational to Christianity as the deity of Christ. The Bible is the only absolute standard and can be trusted. All other findings, all other sciences, must be subjected to theology, the “queen of sciences.”

RYRIE’S CENTRAL INTERPRETIVE MOTIF (UNIFYING PRINCIPLE)

Is it necessary for every theologian to have a central interpretive motif? Erickson argues in the affirmative, “Each theologian must decide on a particular theme which, for her or him, is the most significant and helpful in approaching theology as a whole.”¹⁴⁵ While many theologians may find it helpful, a list of theologians could be supplied whose interpretive motif (if they have one) is indistinguishable. Finding an interpretive motif or unifying principle in Ryrie’s writings would be most helpful in attempting to identify and explain Ryrie’s theological method. There are certainly reoccurring themes and subject

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Charles C. Ryrie, “Important Aspects of Inerrancy,” *BSac* 136, no. 541 (January 1979): 24.

¹⁴⁵ Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 80.

matters in the writings of Ryrie, but do they rise to the place of a unifying principle?

Grace

As developed in the section of this article entitled, *Ryrie, the Prolific Writer*, Charles Ryrie has written on a wide range of subjects that cross over many different disciplines, and various target audiences. However, few subjects have been more developed than that of grace. Ryrie wrote an entire book called *The Grace of God*. The importance of the subject is seen in Ryrie's own words: "The concept of grace is the watershed that divides Roman Catholicism from Protestantism, Calvinism from Arminianism, modern liberalism from conservatism."¹⁴⁶ And again, "Christianity is distinct from all other religions because it is a message of grace. Jesus Christ is the supreme revelation of God's grace; salvation is by grace; and grace governs and empowers Christian living. Without grace Christianity is nothing."¹⁴⁷

In addition to the book cited above, Ryrie has written a second book defending his view of grace, *So Great Salvation*. Ryrie responds to the lordship accusation that his view is "cheap grace." Ryrie argues that grace is not cheap, rather it is expensive: "It is free to the recipient but costly to the donor."¹⁴⁸ The great significance of the subject of grace in the mind of Ryrie can be felt by his words:

What could I possibly offer that would help meet my need? To offer the years of my life is to offer something very imperfect and something which can do nothing to forgive sin. To vow my willingness to change is to affirm something I will not consistently

¹⁴⁶ Ryrie, *Grace of God*, 11.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 9.

¹⁴⁸ Ryrie, *So Great Salvation*, 17.

keep; and even if I could, it would not remove the guilt of my sin.¹⁴⁹

Ryrie has given much time in his writings, interviews, and lectures to discuss the ramifications of grace. Undoubtedly the importance of this subject matter was impressed upon him by his mentor, Chafer. In Ryrie's own words, "I was influenced on his position and insistence on grace and grace alone."¹⁵⁰ If the measure of a good teacher is passing on his views to his students, Chafer was a success, and in turn Ryrie is too, for Ryrie has left an indelible mark upon the countless men who sat in his classroom and countless individuals who have read his works.

Ryrie also includes a section in his *Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, with the title, "*Biblical Theology Fosters a Deep Appreciation of the Grace of God*." In this section he argues that the unfolding progressive revelation causes one "to stand in awe of the fullness of God's grace, compared to that which was made known in the Old Testament."¹⁵¹

Although the subject of grace is very important to Ryrie and is found in many of his writings in one manner or another, it does not impact all of his writings, nor does it tie all of his writings together in a unifying way. For these reasons, the subject of grace falls short of his central motif.

God's Purpose: The Glory of God

The glory of God is a good candidate for Ryrie's interpretive motif. In *Dispensationalism* Ryrie criticizes the view of many covenant theologians that the redemption of the elect is the unifying principle of human history. Ryrie gives three arguments against such a unifying principle: (1) Scripture itself

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 41.

¹⁵⁰ Ryrie, interview by the Evangelical Free Alliance, <<http://vimeo.com/19816195>>.

¹⁵¹ Ryrie, *Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, 23.

points to the purpose of salvation as the glory of God; (2) all theologians recognize that God has plans for other created beings, not just humanity; (3) God's kingdom program, although it includes and requires the salvation of man, is not limited to it.¹⁵² In other words, the redemption of the elect is too narrow of a unifying principle and incapable of including beings such as angels, or God's kingdom program. While not minimizing the importance of salvation, Ryrie states, it "is but one facet of the multifaceted diamond of the glory of God."¹⁵³

In this same discussion, Ryrie seems to make his unifying principle clear, the glory of God,

The dispensationalist sees a broader purpose in God's program for the world than salvation, and that purpose is His own glory. For the dispensationalist the glory of God is the governing principle and overall purpose, and the soteriological program is one of the principal means employed in bringing to pass the greatest demonstration of His own glory.¹⁵⁴

He makes a similar statement to the one cited above regarding the need to have a broader and more inclusive interpretive motif than covenant theology has, "for the dispensations reveal the glory of God as He manifests His character in the differing stewardships given to man."¹⁵⁵ Ryrie sees each dispensation as a means to bring about God's glory on earth.

¹⁵² Ryrie, *Dispensationalism*, 94.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 93.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 94.

God's Purpose for Human History: The Establishment of his Theocratic Kingdom

The glory of God, as articulated above, and in Ryrie's own words, appears to be his interpretive motif. He aptly argued that the salvation of mankind is too narrow of a primary purpose. Salvation of man is indeed too limited of a unifying principle. The glory of God is certainly a unifying principle. All creatures were created to bring glory to God. Scripture indicates that God is jealous and deserves all the praise and glory. However, the glory of God seems too broad of an interpretive motif. Using such a broad interpretive motif provides many interpretations of various passages of Scripture and provides very few limiting implications. This writer contends that Ryrie's interpretive motif is the following: God's purpose for human history, the establishment of his theocratic kingdom. Ryrie's dispensational framework points to the culmination of human history in the theocratic kingdom; where man will finally accomplish God's intended purpose for him as indicated in Genesis 1:26-27. In Ryrie's words,

God does have various ways to manifest His glory, redemption being one—a principal one but not the only one. The various economies with their stewardship responsibilities are not so many compartments completely separated from each other but are stages in the progress of the revelation of the various ways in which God is glorified. And further, dispensationalism not only sees the various dispensations as successive manifestations of God's purpose but also as progressive manifestations of it. The entire program culminates, not in eternity but in history, in the millennial kingdom of the Lord Christ. This millennial culmination is the climax of history and the great goal of God's program for the ages.¹⁵⁶

Movement towards the theocratic kingdom and its final culmination is indeed the heart of dispensationalism, and the focal point of so much of Ryrie's writing. It becomes the lens

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, 95.

through which Ryrie sees and interprets Scripture as well as the course of events in human history. He states, “Dispensationalism sees the unity, the variety, and the progressiveness of this purpose of God for the world as no other system of theology.”¹⁵⁷ Using one of Ryrie’s routine tools of clarity is helpful at this point. In summary, it is best to see Ryrie’s interpretive motif as: God’s purpose for human history, the establishment of his theocratic kingdom.

RYRIE’S VIEW OF RELATED DISCIPLINES WITHIN BIBLICAL STUDIES

In his works, *Basic Theology* and *Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, Ryrie articulates the distinguishing markers of biblical, historical, and systematic theology as well as the significance of exegesis. In Ryrie’s view all these disciplines are necessary and helpful, while he also articulates a priority and precedence in which they should occur.

Introductory Studies

Ryrie gives his readers a glimpse of his theological method and the order in which he believes the theological process ought to transpire. Ryrie begins with studies of introductory issues. He articulates,

The results of the investigations of New Testament introduction are for the most part merely assumed and not reiterated in a work on Biblical Theology. However, since Biblical Theology cannot do without the critical investigations of introduction, the latter must precede the former, and to some extent must be included in it.¹⁵⁸

Ryrie sees the importance of developing a solid understanding of these introductory issues because it is upon

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ryrie, *Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, 15.

the foundation of these conclusions that exegesis and biblical theology is built.

Exegesis

According to Ryrie, out of all the disciplines mentioned above, exegesis and biblical theology have the closest connection because biblical theology builds immediately upon exegesis.¹⁵⁹ A theologian who focuses on the task of biblical theology must carefully exegete Scripture. And exegesis must follow the historical-grammatical hermeneutic.

Biblical Theology

Ryrie contends biblical theology “deals systematically with the historically conditioned progress of the self-revelation of God in the Bible.”¹⁶⁰ Ryrie breaks this definition into four parts: (1) as other areas of theology, biblical theology ought to be systematic, although not necessarily adhering to the same categories of systematic theology; (2) it involves the historic situation of the writer and the recipients, which compels him to write; (3) it studies the progressive nature of revelation; and (4) it finds its source in the Bible. Ryrie points out, “Strictly speaking Biblical Theology is foundational to Systematic Theology.”¹⁶¹ Biblical theology involves the investigation of parts of Scripture, a particular author’s writings, or a particular period of time.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 16.

¹⁶⁰ Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 14, and *Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, 12.

¹⁶¹ Ryrie, *Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, 17.

Systematic Theology

Ryrie notes that many do not understand the distinction between systematic and biblical theology.¹⁶² Both should be systematic and both should be biblical. Ryrie gives a clear statement about the priority of theological disciplines in his view: "Logically and chronologically Biblical Theology should take precedence over Systematic Theology, for the order of study ought to be introduction, exegesis, historical backgrounds, Biblical Theology, and finally Systematic Theology."¹⁶³ This statement is very significant as we evaluate Ryrie's theological method. Ryrie uses the illustration of a flower: biblical theology is the petals that make up the flower, and systematic theology is the blossom as a whole.¹⁶⁴ Systematic theology takes the work done in biblical theology, correlates and systematizes it to understand what the complete canon of Scripture says on a category of theology.

Historical Theology

Ryrie values historical theology. He sees it as an aid for students to better understand theology as a whole and avoid the mistakes of the past. He says it "focuses on what those who studied the Bible thought about its teachings either individually or collectively as in the pronouncements of church councils."¹⁶⁵ While Ryrie speaks of the significance of historic theology, no mention is given as to its place in the chronological order of the biblical disciplines.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 18.

¹⁶⁵ Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 13.

A SUMMARY OF RYRIE'S THEOLOGICAL METHOD

Erickson acknowledges that doing theology is an art and not just a science, and that rigidity in one's sequence cannot always be maintained.¹⁶⁶ However, after making such qualifications he clearly argues that a logical process is essential to doing theology: "Procedures need to be spelled out... there must be a... logical order of development."¹⁶⁷ Because Ryrie is a prolific writer, much of his material is available for examination and his theological method can be determined. This writer's synthesis of Ryrie's theological method can be seen in Figure 1. Here is the precedence of the various logical and chronological steps within his theological method as perceived by this writer:

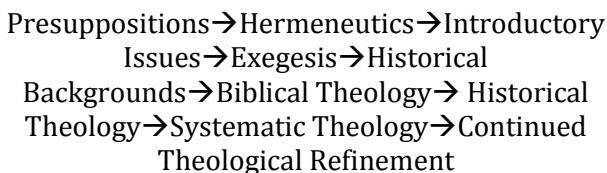


Figure 1: Priority and Sequence of Ryrie's Theological Method

Ryrie unashamedly begins with a set of presuppositions. Certainly many of these presuppositions were handed down to him from his father, Gaebelein, and Chafer, among others. But ultimately he came to embrace these presuppositions as his own. He presupposes the existence of God. He presupposes that God is the triune God of the Scripture and that this triune God has made himself known to his creation through the special revelation recorded in Scripture. He also presupposes that the Scriptures are inspired and inerrant in the original autographs.

¹⁶⁶ Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 70.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

Ryrie indicates that he does accrue “confirmatory evidence” to support his presuppositions, but ultimately he believes.¹⁶⁸

Once acknowledging his preunderstanding, developing a solid hermeneutic is the next step in Ryrie’s theological method. As a young boy, Ryrie was taught the historical-grammatical method, although he may not have been familiar with the term. His father passed on the teachings of Scofield and Chafer. Frank Gaebelein taught Charles Ryrie using a plain hermeneutic, and Ryrie heard the great preaching of the famous Presbyterian dispensationalist Donald Grey Barnhouse. Ryrie had a great theological pedigree upon which he advanced the cause of dispensationalism and the plain, normal, literal hermeneutic. Ryrie’s theological method was profoundly influenced by his hermeneutical allegiances.

Investigating introductory issues is the third step in Ryrie’s theological method. Although not much time is given to the subject of introductory issues in the writings of Ryrie, he clearly understood the importance of the author and dating of books to a proper exegesis, biblical theology, and ultimately systematic theology of Scripture.

After a careful study of the introductory issues, Ryrie moves on to exegesis of passages of Scripture. He applies the historical-grammatical hermeneutic in his exegetical process. The product of this exegetical step is essential to his biblical theology.

The fifth step of Ryrie’s theological method involves a study of historical backgrounds. This writer found nothing else stated concerning historical backgrounds or the rational for its placement before biblical theology apart from the one quotation referenced above.¹⁶⁹

After doing an exegesis of the texts of Scripture and a study of the historical background, the sixth step in Ryrie’s method is biblical theology. Here Ryrie takes all that is learned in his exegesis and then studies the theology of particular authors and/or particular periods of time. This is done with an emphasis upon the progress of revelation.

¹⁶⁸ Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 16.

¹⁶⁹ Ryrie, *Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, 17

It is not clear as to where historical theology should be placed in Ryrie's process. This writer chooses to place it before Systematic Theology as another tool to establishing good theological conclusions, but it could possibly be placed afterwards to serve as a validation/check of his theological conclusions.

Systematic theology is nearly the final step. Taking all the exegesis and biblical theology done with a solid hermeneutic, Ryrie then correlates and systematizes what the entire Bible says about various categories of theology.

The final step is theological refinement. The theologian should always be willing to go wherever the text leads. This should be the case for every theologian, that he is continuously assessing his system and his understanding of Scripture in light of a greater and growing knowledge and understanding of the text. This can be seen in the example cited previously regarding the new covenant.¹⁷⁰ Theological refinement should never stop. A theologian is always learning more and seeking to incorporate it into his theological understanding.

Charles Caldwell Ryrie is indeed one of the most influential theologians of the twentieth century. He has made a profound and world-wide impact on evangelicism as a tenured professor and president, as a bold pioneer, as a prolific writer, as an ardent apologist, and as an ordained minister. He is known as a careful, consistent, and cautious interpreter of Scripture. He is an exegete who is honest with the text and humble in his presentation of it. His writing style contains great clarity and charity. And he is a theologian who is enamored by the grace of God, who desires for the glory of God to be known. For these reasons and more, Charles C. Ryrie's theological method is worthy of further investigation, consideration, and replication.

¹⁷⁰ It appears that Ryrie came to one conclusion in 1959, at the time of the writing of his *Biblical Theology*, but after further study, contemplation, and knowledge of Scripture, theological refinement took place in his understanding of the new covenant as articulated in the footnotes of the *Ryrie Study Bible* in 1986.

Canaanite Child Sacrifice, Abortion, and the Bible

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INTRODUCTION

History is replete with civilizations that have held morally repugnant attitudes concerning infants and children. The Nazis carried Jewish children off to killing fields and the gas chambers at Auschwitz. The Aztecs and Mayans sacrificed both children and adults to their gods. Exposing an unwanted child to the elements or wild animals was a common practice throughout the Greco-Roman world. The Carthaginians of North Africa sacrificed their infants and children to pagan gods over a period of several centuries.

Old Testament passages referring to child sacrifice are both numerous and dreadful. The Israelites, delivered from the bondage of Egypt by the mighty hand of Yahweh, the Lord of heaven and earth, did not simply engage in idolatry. They were guilty of adopting the ghastly Canaanite practice of child sacrifice. In some cases, they attempted to attach this practice to worship of the Lord (Ezek 23:39). In others, they rejected Yahweh worship altogether and fully turned themselves over to the idols of Canaan (2 Kgs 17:14-17). Kings Ahaz and Manasseh, the “shepherds of Israel,” even burned their own sons in the fires of sacrifice (2 Chr 28:2-3; 33:6). Certain Israelites stood by and did nothing (Lev 20:4-5). Despite manifold warnings and admonitions from the Lord (Deut 12:29-31; 18:10), the Israelites persisted. As a result, God brought dreadful judgment upon their entire nation (Jer 19:3b-6).

The present author has several purposes in mind in writing this article. First, this article will attempt to connect the practice of child sacrifice at ancient Carthage to the Canaanite mainland, both culturally and geographically (near and in Israel proper).

This will be done through archaeological evidence and the testimonies of ancient authors. This evidence offers apologetic support for the veracity of the biblical references, which will also be discussed. Second, this paper will discuss recent scholarly attempts to deny that child sacrifice took place at Carthage, a position that the author believes is without warrant. Third, this article will survey the unnerving parallels between child sacrifice and modern-day abortion. Lastly, this article will touch upon several biblical and non-canonical texts that speak to the moral status of the unborn child.

Child Sacrifice at Carthage

The ancient city of Carthage, North Africa (modern Tunisia), began as a fledgling Phoenician colony and grew into one of the most prosperous and prominent city-states of the ancient world. Its influence and role in central Mediterranean history is often obscured by the legacy of the Greeks and the Romans. Known for resisting the Romans during the Punic Wars, the city's infamous military commander Hannibal was a nemesis of Rome for several decades. Most notably, Carthage has the ignominious reputation for performing large scale-child sacrifice over a period of several centuries.¹

Carthage was settled by the Phoenicians in the latter part of the ninth century BC.² Their place of origin was the Lebanese coast of Phoenicia, which was predominantly Canaanite during

¹ Lawrence Stager and Samuel Wolff, "Child Sacrifice at Carthage: Religious Rite or Population Control?" *BAR* 10, no. 1 (January–February 1984): 31–51; P.G. Mosca, "Child Sacrifice in Canaanite and Israelite Religion: A Study in Mulk and MLK" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1975).

² Chronological details on the founding of Carthage can be found in Rodger C. Young and Andrew E. Steinmann, "Correlation of Select Classical Sources Related to the Trojan War with Assyrian and Biblical Chronologies," *Journal for the Evangelical Study of the Old Testament* 1, no. 2 (2012): 227–8, 16n, <jesot.org/issues/1-2-2012> (access 28 July 2013).

the second millennium BC.³ Near the beginning of the Iron Age (ca. 1200 BC), the Phoenicians had taken control of the region.⁴ Scholars call the Lebanese coast Phoenicia, the name given to the region by the Greeks from their word for "purple." The ancient world's purple dye industry developed from extracting a fluid from a Mediterranean mollusk, the murex. The Phoenicians developed this industry and specialized in shipping this very valuable commodity all over the Mediterranean world. There are many connections between Israel in the OT and the Phoenician territories, notably, the cities of Tyre and Sidon.⁵

Like any nation or people group inhabiting a new territory, the Phoenicians brought their Canaanite ancestral beliefs and practices along with them when they settled at Carthage. Several lines of evidence demonstrate that one of these distinctive practices was child sacrifice. Numerous biblical texts refer to this horrific Canaanite practice taking place in Canaan as early as the fifteenth century BC. One of the earliest references is found in Deuteronomy 12:31:

You shall not worship the Lord your God in that way, for every abominable thing that the Lord hates they [the Canaanites] have done for their gods, for they even burn their sons and their daughters in the fire to their gods.

Several centuries later, despite persistent warnings, God judged his people for sacrificing their own children to the gods of Canaan in the Hinnom Valley, located on the south side of Jerusalem (Jer 7:30-32).

The open air sanctuary where child sacrifice took place was known as the *tophet* (תּוֹפֵת), which is typically understood to

³ Gary Byers, "The Biblical Cities of Tyre and Sidon," *Bible and Spade* 15, no. 4 (Fall 2002): 107-8.

⁴ Stager and Wolff, "Child Sacrifice," 36.

⁵ For more on these connections, see Byers, "Biblical Cities," 107-10.

mean “roaster” or “place of burning.”⁶ Modern scholars have given the name *tophet* to places where they believe child sacrifice took place around the Mediterranean rim, mostly famously, at Carthage.⁷ The evidence indicates that the Phoenicians brought this barbaric practice to Carthage from Canaan, and therefore, evidence of child sacrifice at Carthage provides evidential support for the historicity of the biblical accounts which mention such sacrifices. Even though Carthage is geographically removed from Canaan (1400 miles or so), it is not religiously or culturally removed.

The Critics

In the past thirty years or so, several scholars have attempted to discredit or diminish the historicity and extent of the practice of child sacrifice at Carthage. In an attempt to restore the historical reputation and heritage of his country, Tunisian scholar M'hamed Hassine Fantar has vociferously argued that charges of Carthaginian child sacrifice are “propaganda.” Because Carthage was definitively defeated and destroyed by the Romans in 146 BC, Fantar contends that the Romans distorted history “to show us as barbarians . . . to justify their own barbarity.” Roman historians he considers to be more credible, such as Polybius and Livy, do not mention these

⁶ Found in 2 Kings 23:10, Jeremiah 7:31-32; 19:6, 11-14. An alternative form, *tophet*, (תָּפֵת) is used in Isaiah 30:33 in a judgment oracle against the Assyrians. Several scholars believe the vowels of the Masoretic Text deliberately imitate the pejorative Hebrew term for shame (תְּפִתָּה), or spit (תְּפִתָּה) from Job 17:6. For more on this, see: J. Andrew Dearman, “The Tophet in Jerusalem: Archaeology and Cultural Profile,” *JNSL* 22, no. 1 (1996): 60, 4n. Overall, there is uncertainty amongst scholars about its ultimate etymology.

⁷ *Tophets* have also been discovered at Pozo Moro in Spain, Hadrumetum in North Africa, on the small island of Motya off Sicily, and at Nora, Sulcis, and Tharros on Sardinia (Shelby Brown, *Late Carthaginian Child Sacrifice and Sacrificial Monuments in Their Mediterranean Context*, *JSOT/ASOR Monograph Series* 3 [Sheffield, England: Academic P, 1991]).

practices at Carthage. This argument from silence demonstrates, in Fantar's estimation, that child sacrifice did not occur there. Fantar has also argued that the extensive child burials unearthed at Carthage occurred because of notoriously high infant mortality rates in antiquity.⁸ Italian scholar Sergio Ribichini supported Fantar's argument, claiming that the *tophet* at Carthage was "a child necropolis designed to receive the remains of infants who had died prematurely of sickness or other natural causes, and who for this reason were 'offered' to specific deities and buried in a place different from the one reserved for the ordinary dead."⁹

Thus, after finding this kind of support from other scholars, Fantar concludes,

Carthaginians did not sacrifice their children to Ba' al Hammon in the Tophet. This open air site . . . was a sanctuary presided over by Ba' al Hammon and his consort, Tanit . . . To this sanctuary came grieving parents, who gave their children back to Ba' al Hammon and Tanit.¹⁰

University of Pittsburgh physical anthropologist Jeffrey Schwartz has recently quasi-joined Fantar's camp, casting further doubt on the notion that child sacrifice took place at Carthage. Schwartz diminishes the extent and volume of sacrifices that took place there, rather than denying their

⁸ Fantar's position is further expressed in an online interview: Andrew Higgins, "Carthage Tries To Live Down Image as Site of Infanticide," *Pittsburgh Post Gazette*, <<http://www.post-gazette.com/stories/news/world/carthage-tries-to-live-down-image-as-site-of-infanticide-584235/>> (accessed 14 February 2013).

⁹ Sergio Ribichini, "Beliefs and Religious Life" in *The Phoenicians*, ed. Sabatino Moscati (New York: I. B. Tauris, 1988), 141. According to Fantar, Moscati is the scholar who first caused him to doubt that child sacrifice had taken place at Carthage.

¹⁰ M'hamed Fantar, "Were Living Children Sacrificed to the Gods?" *Archaeology Odyssey* (November-December 2000): 30.

historicity fully.¹¹ His primary arguments are not oriented around defending Tunisian history and impugning alleged Roman historical revisionism. Rather, they are based on his interpretation of the anthropological evidence uncovered at Carthage.

Schwartz published reports that contend that large-scale child sacrifice did not take place at Carthage and that the cemetery discovered there is primarily filled with infants who died of natural causes. In his 2010 report, Schwartz's team claimed that its scientific examination of the remains of 348 cremated babies found in urns from the *tophet* at Carthage indicated "that most infants perished prenatally or very shortly after birth and were unlikely to have lived long enough to be sacrificed."¹² Further, based upon the tooth remains of 50 cremated children, Schwartz and his team concluded, "26 individuals died prenatally or within two weeks of birth."¹³ The remaining 24 were older infants. Schwartz continues,

Our study emphasizes that historical scientists must consider all evidence when deciphering ancient societal behavior. The idea of

¹¹ "An alternative hypothesis acknowledges that while the Carthaginians may have occasionally sacrificed humans, as did their contemporaries, the extreme youth of Tophet individuals suggests these cemeteries were not only for the sacrificed, but also for the very young, however they died." Here, Schwartz is admitting that child sacrifice did take place at Carthage, at least in part. Schwartz's full technical report is available online: Jeffrey H. Schwartz, Frank Houghton, Roberto Macchiarelli, and Luca Bondioli, "Skeletal Remains from Punic Carthage Do Not Support Systematic Sacrifice of Infants," *PLOS One*, <<http://www.plosone.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pone.0009177>> (accessed 14 February 2013).

¹² "Pitt-led Study Debunks Millennia-old Claims of Systematic Infant Sacrifice in Ancient Carthage," *EurekAlert* 17 February 2010, <http://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2010-02/uop-psd021710.php> (accessed 14 February 2013).

¹³ Ibid.

regular infant sacrifice in Carthage is not based on a study of the cremated remains, but on instances of human sacrifice reported by a few ancient chroniclers, inferred from ambiguous Carthaginian inscriptions, and referenced in the Old Testament. Our results show that some children were sacrificed, but they contradict the conclusion that Carthaginians were a brutal bunch who regularly sacrificed their own children.¹⁴

Additionally, Schwartz has stated, "Very young Punic [Phoenician] children were cremated and interred in burial urns regardless of how they died."¹⁵ He also claimed that his team disproved the commonly held theory that only first-born males were sacrificed. His team's study of pelvic bones from the burial urns from the Carthage tophet proved that "38 pelvises came from females and 26 from males."¹⁶ In a September 2012 interview, Schwartz again reiterated his position: "It's all very great, cinematic stuff, but whether that was a constant daily activity—I think our analysis contradicts that."¹⁷

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid. "Punic" is the term the Romans used for the Phoenicians. It should be noted Schwartz cannot attribute the *cause* of death based on the skeletal remains alone.

¹⁶ Ibid. Billington responds to the first-born male assertion by Schwartz: ". . . it has long been known that the infants found in the tophet at Carthage were both male and female, and thus Schwartz's team does not provide any truly new information on this subject. However, the fact that Schwartz's study identified 38 females and only 26 males in 70 studied urns from the Carthage tophet may be significant. It suggests that the Carthaginians may have practiced some sort of selection process. If so, it would disprove Schwartz's conclusion that most of these infants died natural deaths" (Clyde Billington, "Carthaginian Baby Burning Reportedly Debunked," *Artifax* 25, no. 2 [Spring 2010]: 18).

¹⁷ Tia Ghose, "Ancient Baby Graveyard Not for Child Sacrifice, Scientists Say," Live Science, <<http://www.livescience.com/23298-carthage-graveyard-not-child-sacrifice.html>> (accessed 14 February 2013).

The implications from this line of argumentation are somewhat obvious for biblical studies: if one can discredit the historicity of child sacrifice at Carthage and its ancestral connections to the same type of brutal practice in Canaan/Phoenicia, then one might argue that the portrayals of child sacrifice in the OT are fictitious or exaggerated.

RESPONSE TO FANTAR AND SCHWARTZ

There are a number of serious and insurmountable difficulties associated with Schwartz's and Fantar's arguments and analyses.

The Historical Sources

First, Fantar's zeal to redeem his country's reputation may be admirable, but it actually serves to undermine his case. Demeaning rhetoric concerning the motives of Roman and Greek historians without a shred of proof is not convincing, and then selectively appealing to other Roman historians who do not mention child sacrifice is problematic at best. One can easily see that this appeal is both inflammatory and an erroneous argument from silence. Schwartz falls into the same trap, stating, "Some of this [the historical records] might have been anti-Carthaginian propaganda."¹⁸ The historical record contains multiple sources from varied cultural backgrounds and time

¹⁸ Ibid. Enemies have used atrocities as propaganda against each other throughout world history. Consider the Soviet execution of over 4000 Polish officers in the Katyn Forest during WWII. The Nazis used this grisly discovery against the Soviets as propaganda. The Nazi accusations actually turned out to be true, while the Nazis themselves were guilty of even greater atrocities. It is entirely plausible that the Romans, who were guilty of their own barbarities, were actually reporting the truth about Carthaginian child sacrifice. Propaganda is not always necessarily false.

periods that testify to the realities of Carthaginian child sacrifice. These include: (1) Late fourth century BC Greek author Kleitarchos;¹⁹ (2) first-century BC Greek historian Diodorus Siculus;²⁰ (3) second-century AD Greek author Plutarch;²¹ (4)

¹⁹ "Out of reverence for Kronos [the Greek equivalent of Ba'al Hammon], the Phoenicians, and especially the Carthaginians, whenever they seek to obtain some great favor, vow one of their children, burning it as a sacrifice to the deity if they are especially eager to gain success. There stands in their midst a bronze statue of Kronos, its hands extended over a bronze brazier, the flames of which engulf the child" (translated by P. G. Mosca, 22).

²⁰ "They also alleged that Cronus had turned against them inasmuch as in former times they had been accustomed to sacrifice to this god the noblest of their sons, but more recently, secretly buying and nurturing children, they had sent these to the sacrifice; and when an investigation was made, some of those who had been sacrificed were discovered to have been supposititious. When they had given thought to these things and saw their enemy encamped before their walls, they were filled with superstitious dread, for they believed that they had neglected the honours of the gods that had been established by their fathers. In their zeal to make amends for their omission, they selected two hundred of the noblest children and sacrificed them publicly; and others who were under suspicion sacrificed themselves voluntarily, in number not less than three hundred. There was in their city a bronze image of Cronus, extending its hands, palms up and sloping toward the ground, so that each of the children when placed thereon rolled down and fell into a sort of gaping pit filled with fire" (Diodorus Siculus, *The Library of History*, Book 20, 14:4-7, Loeb Classical Library, 1954, 153).

²¹ "No, but with full knowledge and understanding they themselves offered up their own children, and those who had no children would buy little ones from poor people and cut their throats as if they were so many lambs or young birds; meanwhile the mother stood by without a tear or moan; but should she utter a single moan or let fall a single tear, she had to forfeit the money, and her child was sacrificed nevertheless; and the whole area before the statue was filled with a loud noise of flutes and drums [so that] the cries of wailing should not reach the ears of the people" (Plutarch, *On Superstition*, Loeb Classical Library, 1928, 2:495).

church father, Tertullian of Carthage (AD 160-225);²² (5) church father, Eusebius of Caesarea (AD 263-339).²³

These various historians, from different eras and cultures all reported that the Carthaginians sacrificed their children to their gods. Are we to believe that they all invented these horrific fictions to impugn the reputation of the Carthaginian people?²⁴ The charge seems rather incredible on the face of it.

²² "In Africa, infants used to be sacrificed to Saturn [the Latinized equivalent of Ba'al Hammon], and quite openly, down to the proconsulate of Tiberias, who took the priests themselves and on the very trees of their temple, under whose shadow their crimes had been committed, hung them alive like votive offerings on crosses; and the soldiers of my own country are witnesses to it, who served that proconsul in that very task. Yes, and to this day that holy crime persists in secret..." (Tertullian, *Apologeticus*, 9:1-3).

²³ Eusebius refers to a list of historical sources, with which the contemporary reader was presumably aware, to point out the errors of paganism, which often endorsed the practice of both adult and child sacrifice. Quoting Philo Biblius, he writes: "It was a custom of the ancients in the great crises of danger for the rulers of a city or nation, in order to avert the general destruction, to give up the most beloved of their children for sacrifice as a ransom to the avenging daemons: and those who were so given up were slain with mystic rites. Kronos, therefore, whom the Phoenicians call El, who was king of the country, and subsequently, after his decease, was deified and changed into the star Saturn, had by a nymph of the same country called Anobret an only-begotten son (whom on this account they called Jeiid, the only-begotten being still so called among the Phoenicians); and when extreme dangers from war had befallen the country, he arrayed his son in royal apparel, and prepared an altar and sacrificed him" (Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica*, Trans. E. H. Gifford, Chapters 15-16, 1903).

²⁴ Clyde Billington makes this additional suggestion: "As you note, the Greeks and Romans frequently exposed unwanted children, i.e., put them outside the wall of the city to die. This was a regular practice at Sparta where each child was inspected by the state, and if defective, exposed. What the Greeks and Romans saw as strange was not that the Phoenicians/Canaanites killed babies, but rather that they sacrificed them in religious rituals to deities. In other words, Greek and Roman criticism of the Carthaginians was not moral--i.e., the

Archaeological and Biblical Data

Funerary stelae. Harvard archaeologist Lawrence E. Stager has refuted Fantar's (and now Schwartz's) position primarily as a result of his excavation work conducted at Carthage in the 1970s under the auspices of the University of Chicago's Oriental Institute.²⁵ His most widely circulated work is the article which he co-authored with Samuel R. Wolff, "Child Sacrifice at Carthage: Religious Rite or Population Control?"²⁶

The engravings found on the funerary stelae at Carthage are devastating to the skeptical position. Under the stelae are urns containing the burnt remains of the children. It is estimated that there are tens of thousands of them. Inscribed on many of the stelae is a certain Semitic inscription, *mlk*, which may have a very close connection to the OT. Hebrew, like other Semitic languages, was originally written without vowels.²⁷ Based on epigraphical studies by Paul Mosca,²⁸ these Semitic inscriptions

murder of babies--but theological, i.e., that the crazy Carthaginians believed that the gods wanted such sacrifices" (email message to author, 26 February 2013).

²⁵ Stager (along with Joseph Greene) and Fantar engaged in a debate ("Were Living Children Sacrificed to the Gods?" *Archaeology Odyssey* [November-December 2000]: 28-31). Their opposing viewpoints are spelled out in an online forum: Phoenicia.org, "Child Sacrifice: Children of Phoenician Punic Carthage Were Not Sacrificed to the Gods," <<http://phoenicia.org/childssacrifice.html>> (accessed 14 February 2013).

²⁶ Stager and Wolff also cite other scholars who hold the general view of Fantar and Schwartz ("Child Sacrifice," 38).

²⁷ Vowel points were added by the Masoretes in the seventh to tenth centuries AD, and are not part of the original, God-breathed text of the OT.

²⁸ Mosca, "Mulk and MLK," 1975.

have been translated as *mulk*. Stager explains the meaning: “*Mulk* is a technical word in Semitic for a *live sacrifice* fulfillment of a Tophet vow, just as other Semitic words are used to indicate cereal offerings and other kinds of animal sacrifices.”²⁹ The Semitic inscription *mlk* is compelling evidence that the children were still alive when they were brought to the sacrificial ritual, verified by the historical sources previously cited.³⁰

These inscriptions reveal a glaring logical inconsistency in Fantar's and Schwartz's arguments. A child who had already died due to natural causes would hardly be a “sacrifice” when being brought to the fires. This amounts to nothing more than a cremation ceremony, hardly an adequate sacrifice to be given in exchange for a vow. Since the child was already deceased, the parents could manipulate the god to grant them favor, giving nothing but a dead body in return. Anyone who has prayed to a “god” should immediately recognize such a formulation as absurd. This inscription from Carthage serves our point: “To our lady, to Tanit, the face of Ba’al, and to our lord, to Ba’al Hammon,

²⁹ Stager and Wolff, “Child Sacrifice,” 45 (emphasis added).

³⁰ It is not fully clear whether the children were first killed on the altar, and then burned, or if they actually perished in the fire itself. Billington suggests, “Bodies that are burned with blood still in them will produce a black char on the burned bones. There is no black char found on any of the bones of these children,” (Clyde Billington, “Scientist Says Tophets Were Not For Sacrificed Babies,” *Artifax* 27, no. 4 [Autumn 2012]: 14). De Vaux argues that slaughter preceding the cremation “has been well established by J. Guey in *Mélanges D’archéologie et D’histoire*, 1937, pp. 94-99” (Roland de Vaux, *Studies in Old Testament Sacrifices* [London: Univ. of Wales, 1964], 81). Ezekiel 16:20-21 may indicate that the children were first killed, *then* put in the fire: “And you took your sons and your daughters, whom you had borne to me, and these you sacrificed to them to be devoured. Were your whorings so small a matter that *you slaughtered my children and delivered them up as an offering by fire* to them?” (emphasis added). The *slaughtering* and *delivering up* could be acts that occur in succession, since the verbs are connected with a *waw consecutive*. Verse 21 reads: *וְתַשְׁחִטִּי אֶת־בָּנֵי וְתַהֲנִים בְּהַעֲבֵיר אֶת־תְּמִם*.

that which was vowed. . . because he [the deity] heard his voice and blessed him.”³¹

Hundreds of these funerary stelae at Carthage are inscribed with the images of the goddess Tanit, and her consort, Ba'al Hammon. Tanit is represented on many of the Carthaginian stelae with an upraised hand(s) or triangles with extended lines and circles that represent upraised hands. Ba'al Hammon is typically represented by a disk and crescent.³² Some stelae are inscribed with both vows and the iconography of Tanit and Ba'al Hammon. We shall return to the significance of these inscriptions in a moment.

Molech. Molech (**מָלֶךְ**) appears in a number of places in the OT, mostly in connection with child sacrifice (Lev 18:21; 20:2-4). There is a strong argument to be made that Jephthah’s infamous vow and subsequent sacrifice of his daughter was influenced by the cult of Molech (Judg 11:29-40).³³ Solomon became ensnared by foreign gods, erecting high places in honor of both Chemosh and Molech (1 Kgs 11:7). Stager and Wolff suggest the possibility that Molech, also mentioned in Jeremiah 32:35 and 2 Kings 23:10, may be better translated as *mulk*. The same Hebrew consonants (**מָלֶךְ**) that appear in the biblical texts commonly translated as “Molech” are the same Semitic consonants found on the funerary stelae at Carthage, *mlk*.³⁴

³¹ Stager and Wolff, “Child Sacrifice,” 46.

³² Ibid.

³³ John Roskoski, “Jephthah’s Vow: A Corruption of Yahwism in the Era of the Judges,” *Bible and Spade* 25, no. 1 (Winter 2012): 23-28.

³⁴ The Hebrew word for king, *melech* (**מֶלֶךְ**), is spelled with the same consonants, **מָלֶךְ**. A number of commentators believe that *molech* is a deliberate pejorative whereby the vowel pointing for the Hebrew word *shame* (**מִשְׁׁמֵן**) is placed on the consonants in the same manner as *tophet*. See also footnote #6. For further analysis, sources and discussion concerning the meaning and translation of **מלך**, see Dearman, 60, 5n; 69-71. Interestingly, the LXX translated **מלך** as Μολοχ in some places (Jer. 32:35) and as “king” βασιλεὺς (1 Kgs 11:7) in

Along the same lines, John Roskoski suggests the relationship between the deity Molech and the sacrificial term *mlk* are the result of metonymy:

Metonymy is a figure of speech in which a name, or noun, is used instead of another. It is a figure of relationship. Therefore, the name of a person, or deity, can be placed by metonymy for something which stands in special relation to them. The name "Molech" had a special connection to human, particularly child, sacrifice. This would lead to the conclusion that "molech" was originally the name of the horrific deity and, later, was made to mean, or substitute for, the actual sacrifice. Essentially, Molech gave his name to the ritual sacrifice.³⁵

Recall that this *mlk* sacrifice at Carthage refers to a living sacrifice of either a child, or animal substitute. And interestingly, the presence of animal remains at Carthage, which appear to have occasionally substituted for children, is consistent with the assertion that the tophet at Carthage was not a regular cemetery, but a sanctuary for ritual sacrifice and interment, contra the claims of Fantar and Schwartz. Billington concludes,

. . . a small minority of urns in the Carthage tophet contains the bones of cremated sheep. These were unquestionably animals offered as religious sacrifices. The very presence of these sacrificed animals very strongly suggests that the tophet at Carthage was only used as a burial site for victims of religious sacrifices.³⁶

Ba'al. Ba'al (בָּאֵל) appears throughout the OT with a variety of meanings and in various contexts. Most broadly speaking, it can mean "lord" or "master." However, its primary identification

others. Μόλοχ appears only once in the NT, mentioned by Stephen in Acts 7:43.

³⁵ Roskoski, "Jephthah's Vow," 27.

³⁶ Billington, "Carthaginian Baby Burning Reportedly Debunked," 18.

is with Semitic/Canaanite deities, typically thought to be in control of certain localities or regions. For example, the Ba'al of Tyre was Melkart (son of El), the Ba'al of Carthage was Ba'al Hammon, and the Ba'al of the Philistine city of Ekron was Ba'alzebub ("Lord of the Flies").³⁷ OT references to the plural *Ba'alim* likely refer to these Canaanite deities in general (cf. Jdg. 10:6).³⁸

To connect the dots a little more definitively, the prophet Jeremiah closely interrelated the high places of *Ba'al*, the term *Molech*, and child sacrifice: "They built the high places of Ba'al in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, to offer up their sons and daughters to Molech... (Jer 32:35)." ³⁹

The remains of thousands of incinerated children were buried at Carthage under the aforementioned funerary stelae with Semitic inscriptions that refer to living sacrifices, *mlk*. In Jeremiah 32:35⁴⁰ child sacrifice is directly associated with *Ba'al* worship and *Molech*, which can then be connected to the *mlk* inscriptions.

We should also examine the spiritual dimension of this practice, drawing on the broader teaching of Scripture. The

³⁷ J. D. Douglas and Merrill Tenney, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, ed. Moises Silva (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 149-52. For a brief survey and additional references pertaining to the Canaanite religious pantheon, see Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2008), 178-80.

³⁸ Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, 180.

³⁹ Child sacrifice is not explicitly connected to Ba'al in every context mentioned in the OT. There is not "one fixed formula" in the OT describing child sacrifice. Rather, it is presented in a variety of ways and contexts (Dearman, "Tophet in Jerusalem," 62).

⁴⁰ Jeremiah 19:4 also connects Ba'al to child sacrifice: ". . . and because they have filled this place with the blood of innocents, and have built the high places of Baal to burn their sons in the fire as burnt offerings to Baal, which I did not command or decree, nor did it come into my mind."

Psalmist parallels demons and the idols of Canaan in the practice of child sacrifice, where the idols are most certainly a reference to the Canaanite *Ba'alim* (Ps 106:36-38), the “snares” which God repeatedly warned the Israelites about.⁴¹ This particular passage instructs us theologically, revealing that the ultimate prevaricators responsible for deceiving human beings into murdering their own children are demons.⁴² Satan is the ultimate inspiration of all the manifestations of the murderous *Ba'alim*, whether in Carthage, Jerusalem, or in modern-day abortion clinics.

Based on these insights, it is appropriate to connect the *Ba'alim* found in the OT and the Ba'al Hammon inscriptions found at Carthage. While we cannot be dogmatic, the totality of the overall biblical and archaeological evidence certainly lends merit to connecting them together.⁴³

Zarephath. In 1974, an ivory plaque measuring 2 x 1.3 inches was discovered at the excavations at the Phoenician city of Sarepta (biblical Zarephath).⁴⁴ This discovery, dated to the seventh century BC, was reported by Bryant Wood as follows:

In the 1971 season a small shrine dating to the Iron Age (1200-600 B.C.) was discovered at Zarephath. This was the first

⁴¹ Ezekiel 23:39 also connects idols to child sacrifice: “*For when they had slaughtered their children in sacrifice to their idols, on the same day they came into my sanctuary to profane it*” (emphasis added; cf cf. Ezra 20:31).

⁴² The term “demon” - *תָּמִיד* is rarely used in the OT (cf. Deut. 32:17). The Apostle Paul warns the church, “. . . what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be participants with demons” (1 Cor 10:20).

⁴³ Dearman, “Tophet in Jerusalem,” 67, 14n.

⁴⁴ It is indeed ironic that evidence for an idol which inspires and encourages the sacrificial murder of children was discovered in the same city where Yahweh raised a young boy from the dead through the prophet Elijah (1 Kgs 17).

homeland Phoenician shrine to be found. In 1974, excavations in the shrine produced an assortment of votive objects and cultic equipment, including figurines, carved ivory, beads, masks, amulets, cosmetic equipment and saucer lamps. Among the objects found in the shrine was an ivory plaque with an inscription on it. The plaque was probably originally fastened to a wooden statue.

The four-line inscription of the plaque, written in ancient Phoenician characters, reads "This statue made (by) Shillem, son of Mabaal, son of Inai for Tanit-Ashtart." This is the oldest reference to Tanit found to date and it identifies the shrine and cultic objects as dedicated to Tanit and another Phoenician deity, Ashtart or Astarte, goddess of fertility. Astarte [Ashtoreth] is mentioned in the Bible at a number of places, e.g., Judges 10:6, 1 Kings 11:5, 33 and 2 Kings 23:13.⁴⁵

Additional artifacts with the sign of Tanit on seals, lead weights, and bullae have been made since the Sarepta discovery along the Phoenician coast at sites such as Acco, Tel Dor, and Ashdod Yam. The symbol of Tanit was also discovered on dozens of pottery figurines dated to the fifth century BC in a Carthaginian shipwreck at Shavei Zion, off the coast of Israel, north of Acco.⁴⁶ With these discoveries, definitive connections between Tanit at Carthage and Tanit-Ashtart in the Phoenician homeland were verified in the archaeological record.

Ashkelon. Located on the southern coast of Canaan, the city of Ashkelon has had a significant 4000+ year history. The Canaanites built an enormous fortification system there in the

⁴⁵ Bryant G. Wood, "Evidence of Child Sacrifice Found At Zarephath," *Bible and Spade* 4, no. 1 (Winter 1975): 23. For further information on this discovery, see James B. Pritchard, *Recovering Sarepta, A Phoenician City* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1978).

⁴⁶ Efraim Stern, "Goddesses and Cults at Tel Dor," in *Confronting the Past: Archaeological and Historical Essays on Ancient Israel in Honor of William G. Dever*, ed. Seymour Gitin (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbraun's, 2006), 177-8.

Middle Bronze period (2000-1550 BC).⁴⁷ A Philistine stronghold during most of the Iron Age (1200-587 BC), it was destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar around 604 BC. Eventually, the Persians (538-332 BC) ruled Ashkelon, delegating the task of administration to the cooperative Phoenicians.⁴⁸ During this period, Phoenician culture was pervasive in Ashkelon. Archaeological excavations have revealed Phoenician pottery, inscriptions, and symbols of Tanit, all dated to the fifth century BC.⁴⁹ The Tanit cult continued to persist for many centuries in Ashkelon, as her symbols even appear on coins down into the Greco-Roman period. Stager reports,

Tanit appears together with Roman emperors and empresses on second and third century A.D. coins minted in Ashkelon. . . . She is identified in Greek as *Phanēbalos*; this is a transparent Greek transcription of *pane Ba'al*, or "Face of Ba'al," a favorite epithet in the Phoenician and Punic languages for Tanit, known from hundreds of inscriptions found at Phoenician Carthage.⁵⁰

Given these various discoveries, there should no longer be any doubt about the connection between Tanit at Carthage and

⁴⁷ Lawrence A. Stager, "When Canaanites and Philistines Ruled Ashkelon," *BAR* 17, no. 2 (March-April 1991): 26.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Lawrence A. Stager, "Why Were Hundreds of Dogs Buried at Ashkelon?" *BAR* 17, no. 3 (May-June 1991): 28, 37.

⁵⁰ Lawrence A. Stager, "Eroticism and Infanticide at Ashkelon," *BAR* 17, no. 4 (July-August 1991): 42. Evidence for wide-scale infanticide was found in an Ashkelon sewer. Patricia Smith and Gila Kahila report on this grisly discovery: "Excavation of the Roman-Byzantine sewer system associated with the bathhouse at Ashkelon revealed the skeletons of nearly 100 infants. . . . While it is conceivable that the infants found in the drain were stillborn, their number, age and condition strongly suggest that they were killed and thrown into the drain immediately after birth," (qtd. in Stager, "Eroticism and Infanticide," 47, sidebar).

Tanit-Ashtart in the Canaanite mainland. Similar to the inscriptions at Carthage, the author of Judges put the names of *Ashtarte* and *Ba'al* together long before that city was even established: "The people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and served the *Baals* and the *Ashtoreth*. . . . And they forsook the LORD and did not serve him" (Judg 10:6; cf. 2:13).⁵¹

Hazor. The city of Hazor was one of the most significant and important cities in Canaan. Besides Jerusalem, it is the largest archaeological site in Israel. It is massive in size, exceeding 200 acres, which explains why Joshua 11:10 refers to it as "the head of all these kingdoms" (cf. Josh 11:1-5, 10-13; Judg 4:2). Located in Israel proper, archaeologist Yigael Yadin discovered several stelae from Late Bronze I (ca. 1425-1400 BC) during his excavations at Hazor in the 1950's. One of the stelae revealed a relief with two upraised hands, with a disk and crescent at the top, predating the Carthaginian versions by several centuries. Yadin believed that the hands, disk and crescent represent the same gods, concluding, "It is quite clear that the Punic culture preserved elements of the Phoenician culture, and the latter was definitively influenced by Canaanite elements, similar to the ones uncovered at Hazor."⁵² This archaeological evidence from the Canaanite city of Hazor provides more powerful evidence

⁵¹ Second Kings 23:13 refers to "Ashtoreth, the abomination of the Sidonians." Sidon is located about 25 miles north of Tyre in the Phoenician mainland. It should be noted that, similar to *Tophet* and *Molech*, a number of scholars also believe *Ashtoreth* is also deliberately pointed with the vowels of *shame*) (*תָּשְׁׂׂרֵף*).

This might account for the slight variation in spelling between the OT references and the extra-biblical sources (John Day, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan* [New York: Sheffield Academic, 2002], 128-30).

⁵² Yigael Yadin, "Symbols of Deities at Zingirli, Carthage and Hazor," in *Near Eastern Archaeology in the Twentieth Century: Essays in Honor of Nelson Glueck*, ed. James A. Sanders (Garden-City, NY: Doubleday, 1970), 199-231.

connecting the Carthaginian/Phoenician deities to Canaan/Israel, and the Bible.

Tyre. The American University of Beirut published a study in 1991 analyzing artifacts and remains discovered in Tyre that may point to child sacrifice. Of interest are two cinerary urns whose closest parallel, according to the authors, were found in the Carthaginian *tophet*, dated to the eighth century BC. Several of the urns contained human bone fragments, many of which appear to have been incinerated at high temperatures, although the evidence is extremely fragmentary. Multiple stelae have been discovered and examined as well. While scholars ought to be cautious since this material was accidentally discovered there during a construction project, further research may provide more definitive evidence placing an actual *tophet* in the prominent and important biblical city of Tyre, right in the Canaanite/Phoenician homeland.⁵³

The possibility of a Tyrian *tophet* is intimated by Roman historian Quintus Curtius Rufus. In his *History of Alexander the Great*, he documents Alexander's infamous siege of Tyre in 332 BC. Rufus reports that during the siege, the elders of Tyre seriously contemplated reinstituting the sacrifice of children to their gods in order to avert the disaster which was falling upon them. Although they eventually abstained, the testimony of Rufus discloses another historical connection to child sacrifice in the Canaanite mainland.⁵⁴

The Anthropological Data

Stager and a team of other scholars have recently published their own analysis of the cremated remains from the burial urns at Carthage. Their in-depth study indicates most of the infants died during a very limited lifespan range, 1-1.50 months,

⁵³ Helga Seeden, "A Tophet in Tyre?" *Berytus* 34, (1991): 39-82, <<http://almashriq.hiof.no/ddc/projects/archaeology/berythus-back/berythus39/seeden-tophet/>> (accessed 14 February 2013).

⁵⁴ Quintus Curtius Rufus, *History of Alexander*, 4.3.23.

dispelling the argument that the *tophet* at Carthage was just a regular cemetery, filled with thousands of children who died of natural causes. They state,

The argument for infant sacrifice depends largely on a skewed age profile, and age is not easy to determine. The authors approach this [age determination] problem with a battery of new techniques, showing that in the Tophet of Carthage the majority of the infants died between one and one and a half months.... The age profile of the Tophet infants is markedly different from that expected in the case of death from natural causes.⁵⁵

Stager et al., also note an important methodological error in Schwartz's analysis, which depended on less reliable bone remains rather than infant dental remains:

Our findings for the Carthage Tophet are similar to those reached by previous studies carried out primarily on the dentition [dental remains] (Gejvall 1949; Richard 1961). The one divergent opinion is that of Schwartz *et al.* (2010) who examined many of the same Carthage Tophet infants described in this study, but *used cranial bones for age estimations*. This may have caused them to err by underestimating the extent of the shrinkage [due to intense heat from the fire], *especially in the youngest individuals with the most fragile bones, since they are less reliable for age estimation than teeth*.⁵⁶

There is always a degree of uncertainty involving such scientific studies, especially since the human remains were subjected to intense heat and are thousands of years old. Nonetheless, when scholars consider the totality of all the evidence, the sacrificial interpretation of the anthropological remains at Carthage has a far greater likelihood of being correct.

⁵⁵ P. Smith, G. Avishai, J. A. Greene and L. E. Stager, "Aging Cremated Infants: The Problem of Sacrifice at the Tophet of Carthage," *Antiquity* 85, no. 329 (September 2011): 859, 871.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 868 (emphasis added).

Contemplating this anthropological data, the archaeological evidence, the testimony of ancient authors, and the biblical texts, one can confidently conclude that child sacrifice not only took place at Carthage, but in Canaan and in Israel as well.

PARALLELS BETWEEN CHILD SACRIFICE AND MODERN ABORTION

A number of eerie parallels exist between the ancient practice of child sacrifice and modern-day abortion. The discussion here will be brief.⁵⁷

Crisis or convenience. At Carthage, the main reason for sacrificing a child was to avert potential dangers in a crisis or to gain success through fulfilling a vow. These individual crises are exemplified by a corporate crisis at ancient Carthage. Siculus reported that the Carthaginians tried to avert a calamity from a foreign enemy by publicly sacrificing several hundred children. The emergency did not abate, and it was subsequently discovered that a number of wealthy Carthaginians had purchased children from poor people and sacrificed them instead of their own. In effect, they were attempting to "fool" the gods. Since the crisis was not averted, they panicked and subsequently sacrificed two hundred of their *own* children, while approximately three hundred adults sacrificed themselves as well.⁵⁸

Like contemporary rationales for abortion, socio-economic concerns also played a role in the decision to sacrifice a child at Carthage.⁵⁹ Today, abortion often occurs because the pregnancy

⁵⁷ For further parallels and more in-depth discussion, see Andrew White, "Abortion and the Ancient Practice of Child Sacrifice," Associates for Biblical Research, <<http://www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2012/01/05/Abortion-and-the-Ancient-Practice-of-Child-Sacrifice.aspx>> (accessed 20 February 20, 2013).

⁵⁸ Diodorus Siculus, *The Library of History*, Book 20, 14:4-7, Loeb Classical Library, 1954, 153. See footnote #20 for the full quotation.

⁵⁹ Stager and Wolff, "Child Sacrifice," 50-51.

is unexpected, and a plethora of fears about the future often govern the decision to terminate the child. Even worse, some people simply see the child as an intrusion into their self-serving lifestyle and an obstacle on their road to success. Instead of turning to the Creator for deliverance from a crisis pregnancy, modern people turn to their own autonomy and the self-worshipping ideology of modern society that has made abortion easily available to the common citizen.

Sexual promiscuity. Leviticus 20:1-5 prohibits child sacrifice and the immediate context also deals explicitly with sexual immorality (Lev 19:20, 29; 20:10-21), connecting the two closely together. The results of such illicit unions would inevitably bring about pregnancies, and the unwanted child could easily be disposed of through sacrificial rituals.

Cultic temple prostitution was an integral part of Canaanite religion and closely tied to child sacrifice. The Canaanites dramatized their mythologies through ritualized enactments:

The ritual . . . centered in sexual activity, since the rainfall attributed to Baal was thought to represent his semen dropping to earth to fertilize and impregnate the earth with life just as he impregnated Asherah, the goddess of fertility, in the myth. Canaanite religion was thus grossly sensual and even perverse because it required both the services of both male and female cultic prostitutes as the principal actors in the drama.⁶⁰

Similarly, Western culture is awash in fornication and adultery, and sexual promiscuity is exalted as both desirable and virtuous. The result has been millions of unplanned pregnancies outside the covenant of marriage. Over 80% of all abortions in the U.S. are performed on unmarried women.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Merrill, *Kingdom*, 180.

⁶¹ Center for Disease Control and Prevention, "Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report," <http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/ss6108a1.htm?s_cid=ss6108a1_w> (accessed 14 February 2013).

Undoubtedly, rebellious Israelite men had encounters with prostitutes, and many of them ended up pregnant. Modern men often pressure women to have an abortion and abandon the women to bear the consequences of their deviant sexual practices.

Population control. According to Stager and Greene, the estimated population of Carthage at its peak was probably around 250,000. Agricultural capability in the era of Carthage seems to have been inadequate for a population of that size, and the evidence seems to indicate that the child sacrifice increased and reached its peak at the same time.⁶² Today, abortion is sanctioned all around the world, and even encouraged by some societies as a means of population control. In China, Communist party agents actually impose great social and economic pressure on couples to abort their offspring if they already have one child.

Handicapped children. Evidence from Carthage shows parents would sometimes sacrifice a so-called “defective child” with the hope that they would later receive a healthy one as a substitute. In one chilling inscription, a man named Tuscus says that he gave Ba’al “his mute son Bod’astart, a defective child, in exchange for a healthy one.”⁶³ Today, if doctors believe a child in-utero has medical problems, the parents are often advised to terminate the pregnancy, sometimes with an inordinate deal of pressure. To carry to term and raise a “defective” child is not expected of the parents, since doing so would be considered “burdensome.”⁶⁴

⁶² Stager and Wolff, “Child Sacrifice,” 51.

⁶³ C. Kennedy, “Queries/Comments,” *BAR* 10, no. 3 (May-June 1984): 20, citing J. Fevrier, “Une Sacrifice d’Enfant les Numides,” *Annuaire de l’Institut de Philologie et d’Histoire Orientales et Slave* (Bruxelles 13), 1953.

⁶⁴ B. Vautier argues that non-personhood “has extended into the special care nursery . . . [with] involuntary euthanasia for disabled newborns. These physicians have publicly justified allowing death as a ‘management option’ when the ‘hope of meaningful personhood is absent’. Fetal life has failed the personhood test . . . simply by default” (B. Vautier, “Definition of Death,” *Dignity and Dying* [Grand Rapids:

"Civilized" advancement. Lastly, Carthage was a thriving civilization, and at its height, the archaeological evidence indicates that child sacrifice reached its apex. The flourishing of abortion in modern and advanced America, like child sacrifice in ancient Carthage at the height of its prominence, is an unmistakable parallel.

Dr. John Currid, a participant in the excavations at Carthage, provides an appropriate summation:

It is interesting to note that of all the societies I have studied, primitive cultures have little evidence of abortion or infanticide; they are primarily the practices of the higher cultures of antiquity. It seems to me that the only enlightening difference between our societies and Carthage of old is that we have sanitized the process. We do not offer our children to some idol; we destroy them in a hospital, in a most orderly and hygienic fashion. Ours are sacrifices of convenience without any façade of religious motivation. *In truth, we are merely unmasked Carthaginians.*⁶⁵

THE BIBLE AND THE PRACTICE OF ABORTION

The Christian who takes seriously the authority, inerrancy, and infallibility of the Bible must reckon with the obvious teaching of Scripture concerning the beginning of human life and the value God places on human beings created in His image. Many professing Christians have taken the position that abortion is a private and personal matter, or that a fetus is not human until it reaches some particular state of development, or Christians should not be focused on changing public policy with respect to abortion (after all, politics is a "dirty business"). When taken in its totality, the biblical testimony is clearly in opposition to these positions.

Paternoster, 1996], 99). Thanks to John Roskoski for this source and quotation.

⁶⁵ John Currid, "Abortion: Child Sacrifice Today?" *Bible and Spade* 25, no. 1 (Winter 2012): 13-15 (emphasis added).

*Conception is a gift from God.*⁶⁶

The LORD visited Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did to Sarah as he had promised. And Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age at the time of which God had spoken to him. (Gen 21:1-2)

And Isaac prayed to the LORD for his wife, because she was barren. And the LORD granted his prayer, and Rebekah his wife conceived. (Gen 25:21)

Then God remembered Rachel, and God listened to her and opened her womb. She conceived and bore a son and said, "God has taken away my reproach." (Gen 30:22-23)

...in due time Hannah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Samuel, for she said, "I have asked for him from the LORD." (1 Sam 1:20)

But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. (Luke 1:13)⁶⁷

God is the Creator of the Unborn.

Your hands fashioned and made me... Remember that you have made me like clay... You clothed me with skin and flesh, and knit me together with bones and sinews. (Job 10: 8a, 9a, 11)

Did not he who made me in the womb make him? And did not one fashion us in the womb? (Job 31:15)

For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from you, when I was

⁶⁶ Also, Genesis 5:3; 18:9-15; 29:31-35; Judges 13:2-3.

⁶⁷ Also, Luke 1:26-38 concerning the birth of the Lord Jesus himself.

being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them. (Ps 139:13-16)

Now the word of the LORD came to me, saying, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.” (Jer 1:4-5)

As you do not know the way the spirit comes to the bones in the womb of a woman with child, so you do not know the work of God who makes everything. (Eccl 11:5)

Thus says the LORD who made you, who formed you from the womb and will help you.... (Isa 44:2)⁶⁸

Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me. (Ps 51:5)⁶⁹

And I [Paul] was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers. But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone. (Gal 1:14-16).

The Unborn Responds to God

... for he will be great before the Lord... and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb. Lk. 1:15

And when Elizabeth heard the greeting of Mary, the baby leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit, and she exclaimed with a loud cry, “For behold, when

⁶⁸ “Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, who formed you from the womb...” (Isa 44:24a).

⁶⁹ Note that only a human being who is alive can be sinful.

the sound of your greeting came to my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy." (Luke 1:41-44)

*Prohibitions against Unlawful Killing*⁷⁰

Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image. (Gen 9:6)

You shall not murder. (Exod 20:13)

Then the king of Egypt said to the Hebrew midwives, "When you serve as midwife to the Hebrew women and see them on the birthstool, if it is a son, you shall kill him, but if it is a daughter, she shall live." But the midwives feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt commanded them, but let the male children live. (Exod 1:15-18)

When men strive together and hit a pregnant woman, so that her children come out, but there is no harm, the one who hit her shall surely be fined. . . . But if there is harm, then you shall pay life for life. (Exod 21:22-23)⁷¹

This biblical data unequivocally teaches us the following:

(1) God is the Creator of all human life.

⁷⁰ See also Amos 1:13 and 2 Kings 8:12 concerning pregnant women.

⁷¹ For an exegetical study of this passage which argues that the fetus in the womb is considered by God to be a human life at any stage of development, see Meredith Kline, "Lex Talionis and the Human Fetus," *JETS* 20, no. 3 (1977): 193-201. For an alternative interpretation of the *talion* formula that ultimately arrives at the same conclusion concerning the moral status of the unborn child, see Matthew Flannagan, "Feticide, The Masoretic Text, and the Septuagint", *WTJ* 74, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 59-84. Also, Russell Fuller, "Exodus 21:22-23: The Miscarriage Interpretation and the Personhood of the Fetus," *JTS* 37, no. 2 (June 1994): 169-84.

- (2) Human life begins at conception, and all people are sinners from conception.
- (3) God distinguishes between children inside and outside the womb, but considers them both equally human.⁷²
- (4) The taking of life in the womb or outside the womb with prior deliberation (which is the case with an abortion) is tantamount to murder.
- (5) The fetus is to be afforded legal protection by civil authorities.⁷³
- (6) It is appropriate to disobey civil authorities if one is being ordered or coerced into unlawfully killing a child, whether born or unborn.⁷⁴

Some professing Christians tend to focus on the fact that there is not specific mention of abortion in the Bible, and therefore, we do not have warrant to oppose it. Technically

⁷² Kline calls this “a continuum of identity” (*Lex Talionis*, 200).

⁷³ The context of Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2:13-17 indicates that the governing authorities are supposed to approve of good conduct, not legislate, advocate, and promote laws and public policies that allow citizens to freely commit legalized infanticide. Christians ought to recognize legalized abortion as an “impious decree.” Calvin writes, “With what conscience will they [civil magistrates] subscribe *impious decrees* with that hand which they know has been appointed to write the acts of God? In a word, if they remember that they are the vice regents of God, it behooves them to watch with all care, vigilance, and industry, that they may in themselves exhibit a kind of image of the Divine Providence, guardianship, goodness, benevolence, and justice” (cf. 1 Kgs 12:28-30; Hosea 5:11, 13; John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion: Of Civil Government*, 4.20.6).

⁷⁴ Romans 13:1-7 teaches that we are to submit to the civil authorities, but the command is not absolute when other biblical data are considered. This admonition by Paul is hedged by extreme circumstances, such as (1) The midwives' disobedience of Pharaoh to kill the firstborn sons in Exodus 1:15-18; (2) Daniel's disobedience of King Darius in Daniel 6:6-13; (3) Peter and the apostles' disobedience of the Sanhedrin in Acts 5:29; (4) Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego's disobedience of Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 3.

speaking, this lack of mention is correct. However, the above passages certainly demolish such a superficial, intellectually lazy, and morally suspect argument.

Two ancient Jewish authors reveal the moral revulsion of ancient Judaism toward abortion and infanticide, which stood in stark contrast to the pagan world around them. Josephus writes:

The [Mosaic] Law . . . forbids women to cause abortion of what is begotten, or to kill it afterward; and if any woman appears to have done so, she will be a murderer of her child, by killing a living creature and diminishing human kind.⁷⁵

Pseudo-Phocylides, a Jew living in the first-second century AD, also wrote,

“Do not apply your hand violently to tender children” and “Do not let a woman destroy the unborn babe in her belly, nor after its birth throw it before the dogs and the vultures as a prey.”⁷⁶

Meredith Kline provides us with an excellent summary, an indictment on modern America, and, by inference, an indictment on members of the church who cooperate or partner with any ideology that endorses abortion:

The most significant thing about abortion legislation in Biblical law is that there is none. It was so unthinkable that an Israelite woman should desire an abortion that there was no need to mention this offense in the criminal code. . . . The Middle Assyrian laws attest to an abhorrence that was felt for this crime even in the midst of the heathendom around Israel, lacking though it did the illumination of special revelation. For in those laws a woman guilty of abortion was condemned to be impaled on stakes. . . .

It is hard to imagine a more damning commentary on what is taking place in enlightened America today than that provided by

⁷⁵ Josephus, *Contra Apionem* 2.202.

⁷⁶ Pseudo-Phocylides, 150, 184–85.

this legal witness out of the conscience of benighted ancient paganism!⁷⁷

The New Testament and Abortion

The Christian who erroneously tries to separate the OT from the NT misses the unmistakable fact that the moral content of the OT legislation under Moses has not been abrogated by the mission of Jesus and the apostles. *The Westminster Confession of Faith* 19:5 summarizes this well:

The moral law binds all people at all times to obedience, both those who are justified and those who are not. The obligation to obey the moral law is not only because of its content, but also because of the authority of God the Creator, who gave it. In the gospel, Christ in no way dissolves this obligation, but greatly strengthens it (MESV).⁷⁸

We can conclude from the content of Scripture that moral admonitions found in the law of the OT are still binding on the Christian. An abortion would fall under the sin of murder, which is expressly forbidden in the NT (Matt 5:21, 19:18; Mark 10:19; Luke 18:20; 1 Tim 1:8-11; Rom 1:29, 13:9; Jas 2:11).

The Didache

While the NT, like the Old, does not directly mention abortion,⁷⁹ one of the earliest documents of church history

⁷⁷ Kline, *Lex Talionis*, 193, 200-201.

⁷⁸ Romans 13:8-10; Ephesians 6:2; 1 John 2:3-4, 7-8. James 2:10-11; Matthew 5:17-19; Romans 3:31; James 2:8.

⁷⁹ An interesting proposal has been put forth by Brewer concerning the apostolic decree of Acts 15: 28-29. He states, "This paper argues that the Apostolic Decree refers to infanticide when it condemns 'smothering' (*pniktoçv*)—a rare word which is used especially with regard to killing infant animals—not 'strangling,' which is a very difficult way to kill an animal." For more, see his proposal in

explicitly mentions the practice, and condemns it. *The Didache*, also called the *Teaching of the Twelve Apostles*, is a late first-century AD Christian document and is one of the earliest non-canonical Christian texts known to exist.⁸⁰ For a period of time, some church fathers considered it to be part of the NT canon. It was previously known only through secondary sources, such as Eusebius's *Ecclesiastical History*. Approximately the size of the epistle to the Galatians, it contains three main sections, primarily dealing with Christian ethical conduct.

Chapter two contains a list of prohibitions, clearly derived from Old and New Testament ethical admonitions. Of particular interest is *Didache* 2:2, which states,

You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not corrupt children, you shall not fornicate. You shall not steal. You shall not practice magic. You shall not mix poison. You shall not murder a child, *whether by abortion or by killing it once it is born*.

Several important observations should be made from this important text. First, we clearly see that the earliest Christians recognized that a child's life should be protected, whether inside or outside the womb. Second, there is no distinction made concerning personhood; both are equally human. The Greek term used here for child is *τέκνον*, commonly found in the NT, and referring to children of varying ages. The non-canonical *Epistle of Barnabas* (19:5) contains almost identical phraseology.⁸¹ The early church properly recognized the unborn

David Instone Brewer, "Infanticide and the Apostolic Decree of Acts 15," *JETS* 52, no. 2 (2009): 301–21.

⁸⁰ For more extensive detail on the *Didache*, see Hubertus van de Saadt and David Flusser, *The Didache: Its Jewish Sources and Its Place in Early Judaism and Christianity* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2002). See also Kurt Niederwimmer and Harold W. Attridge, trans. Linda M. Maloney, *The Didache: A Commentary* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1998).

⁸¹ "Do not abort a fetus or kill a child that is already born. . . . For they love what is vain, and pursue a reward, showing no mercy to the

child as a τέκνον, and so should we. Third, the writer uses distinct terms to distinguish the act of killing the child inside or outside the womb. For the child outside the womb, the common NT Greek term for killing is used, ἀποκτείνω. For killing the unborn child in the womb, the specific Greek term used is φθορᾶς, which is often translated as corruption, ruin, or decay (cf. Rom 8:21).⁸² Ancient writers such as Josephus, Plutarch, Philo, and Clement of Alexandria use this particular term to describe ancient abortion as well.⁸³

The author of the *Didache* no doubt mentions abortion and the killing of infants because of their prevalence in the ancient world. The medical risks associated with aborting a child in the womb were great, yet there was still a willingness to commit such a dangerous and horrific act.⁸⁴ Killing a newborn through abandonment or suffocation was much more common.

Consider, for example, an excerpt from a letter from a certain Hilarion to his “sister” (i.e., his wife), in which he tries to manage family life while earning a living in the distant metropolis of Alexandria:

Hilarion to his sister Alis, many greetings, likewise to my lady [his mother] and Apollonarion [likely his son]. Know that we are still even now in Alexandria. Do not worry if they all come back and I stay in Alexandria. I urge and beg you, be concerned about the child and if I receive my wages soon, I will send them up to you. *If*

poor nor toiling for the oppressed; they are prone to slander, not knowing the one who made them; murderers of children and corruptors of what God has fashioned” (*Epistle of Barnabas* 19.5; 20.2).

⁸² φθορᾶς and its variations are found in numerous ancient writings, most having negative connotations of death, destruction, ruin, decay, etc. (*TDNT*, 9:93-106).

⁸³ Niederwimmer and Attridge, *Didache*, 89-90, 15n.

⁸⁴ For an in-depth study of ancient abortion see Konstantinos Kapparis, *Abortion in the Ancient World* (London: Gerald Duckworth, 2002).

by chance you give birth, if it is a boy, let it be, if it is a girl, expose it. You have said to Aphrodisias, “Do not forget me.” How can I forget you? So, I urge you not to worry.⁸⁵

Discovered amongst thousands of other papyri in the late nineteenth century at Oxyrhynchus, Egypt, this letter exemplifies alarming ancient attitudes towards infants and children. Note the casual and flippant way in which the father discusses family business, *tells the mother to expose the baby*, and then returns to other business concerns.

We can only imagine the millions and millions of similarly casual conversations taking place in the present day, whereby an abortion is flippantly and casually considered. These modern conversations mirror the same kinds of malevolent sentiments found in this disturbing ancient letter.

CONCLUSION

The archaeological record and the historical sources support the assertion that child sacrifice took place at Carthage on a large scale in antiquity. The Phoenicians were Canaanite, both in their origin and cultural practices. Attempts to overturn this understanding of the archaeological record are extremely problematic. The Carthaginian *tophet* and related archaeological finds in the Levant affirm the historicity of the OT passages. The OT testifies explicitly that child sacrifice was taking place in Canaan as early as the fifteenth century BC, was continued down through several centuries by the indigenous Canaanites not driven out during the conquest, and tragically adopted by the Israelites during the Judges and Kingdom periods. The direct result was the wrathful judgment of God upon the nation of Israel.

Further, the totality of biblical evidence is indisputable in its presentation of human life beginning at conception as a creation

⁸⁵ *POxy* 744, The Oxyrhynchus Papyri (emphasis added). The Greek word for “expose” ἔκβαλε, is used here, which often means “cast out” in the NT (έλαν ἦν θήλεα ἔκβαλε). Cf. Matthew 9:25, 34; 21:12, 39; 25:30; Luke 9:40; 11:20; John 2:15.

of God, that abortion and infanticide are synonymous with murder, that the practice of abortion was condemned by both Judaism and the early church, and that is morally incumbent upon the modern church to oppose abortion, whether in private discussions or as a matter of public policy.

Forty years have now passed since abortion was legalized in America. Since then, over 55 million unborn children have perished at the secularist and autonomous altar of self, a death toll that now exceeds the casualty numbers of the Second World War. Despite intense opposition to abortion by various cultural forces, the anti-Christian death cult continues to grow louder and louder and more evil. The modern spirit of arrogant, self-centered and god-like human autonomy is exemplified by these terrifying sentiments recently published on Salon.com by Mary Elizabeth Williams. With a breathtaking arrogance echoing Nazi Germany's Nuremberg Laws, Williams states,

Here's the complicated reality in which we live: **All life is not equal.** That's a difficult thing for liberals like me to talk about, lest we wind up looking like death-panel-loving, kill-your-grandma-and-your-precious-baby storm troopers. Yet a fetus can be a human life without having the same rights as the woman in whose body it resides. She's the boss. Her life and what is right for her circumstances and her health should automatically trump the rights of the non-autonomous entity inside of her. Always.⁸⁶

In an evil candor rarely seen from the provocateurs of all things anti-Christian, Williams goes on to enlighten the reader that the child inside his/her mother's womb is "a life worth sacrificing."⁸⁷

Considering God's attitude of wrathful anger towards the Israelites when it came to child sacrifice, do Christians really

⁸⁶ Quoted in Henry B. Smith Jr., "Unmasked Evil from the Modern Day Cult of Molech," Associates for Biblical Research, <<http://www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2013/02/01/Unmasked-Evil-From-the-Modern-Day-Cult-of-Molech.aspx>> (accessed 7 March 2013).

⁸⁷ Ibid.

think our nation (and the church) is exempt from wrathful, divine displeasure when we defend, support, or ignore the practice of legalized infanticide? Christian Americans in particular, with the infallible guide of God's special revelation, and the freedom to worship the Lord Jesus with nominal persecution, ought to know better. We will be held to a higher account on the day of judgment.

It is my sincere hope that the reader will be motivated to humbly ask God what actions he or she might take in good Christian conscience concerning abortion in the present day, which is plainly and unequivocally a modern-day manifestation of child sacrifice. May we repent and turn from any semblance of cooperation with the modern day cult of Molech, and hear and apply the command of the Spirit of Christ through Paul: "Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them" (Eph 5:11). May we also pray for our churches, ourselves, and our nation, that we might have the moral courage to oppose this malignant and malevolent modern-day child sacrifice.

Is Isaiah 9:10 a Secret Foreshadowing of Divine Judgment on America?

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INTRODUCTION

The most dangerous sign in biblical studies is the mathematical equal sign (=).¹ One example of what makes its use so perilous is when someone takes a verse or two from the Bible (usually an obscure passage from the OT²) and a supposed equivalent counterpart in contemporary society and states unequivocally that “A=B!”, where A is from the OT and B is its supposed equivalent counterpart in contemporary society. Subsequently, this algebraic equation becomes the basis of a run-away “theological” bestseller.

¹This article was originally written for and delivered as a Faculty Forum paper at Baptist Bible Seminary on March 21, 2013.

²Even Jonathan Cahn includes a dialogue between his main characters to note the obscurity of Isaiah 9:10:

(The Prophet) The word is from the Bible . . . from the book of Isaiah . . . the ninth chapter . . . Isaiah 9:10.

(Kaplan) Isaiah 9:10. So it's known.

(The Prophet) Not really. It's a very obscure verse. Even most of those who read the Bible every day would have little idea it even existed.

(Jonathan Cahn, *The Harbinger: The Ancient Mystery that Holds the Secret of America's Future* [New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011], 49).

This is the equation applied by Messianic Jew, Jonathan Cahn,³ in *The Harbinger: The Ancient Mystery that Holds the Secret of America's Future*. As of January 2013, it was on *The New York Times* Best Seller List for trade fiction for the fifty-fifth week.⁴ According to *Christian Retailing* it is the longest running Christian title on the *NY Times* Paperback Trade Fiction list. On Amazon it ranked #24 in its Top 100 books, #13 in Religion & Spirituality, and #4 in Theology.⁵ As of January 2013 it had sold over 1 million copies and had been reprinted fifteen times.⁶

Cahn's foundational premise is that there are nine harbingers or warnings in Isaiah 9:10 that correspond to what has happened in America beginning with the terrorists' attacks on 9/11. These harbingers are a foreshadowing of coming divine judgment. He shares these harbingers through a fictional novel about which he admits, "What you are about to read is presented in the form of a story, but what is contained within the story is real."⁷ In the novel there are three characters: Ana Goren, a high power journalist; Nouriel Kaplan, the receiver of

³ Pastor/Rabbi Cahn ministers at the Jerusalem Center/Beth Israel congregation in Wayne, NJ. His ministry website is "Hope of the World" (<<http://www.hopeoftheworld.org/>> [accessed 29 January 2013]).

⁴ The New York Times, "Best Sellers: Paperback Trade Fiction," 29 January 2013. <<http://www.nytimes.com/best-sellers-books/trade-fiction-paperback/list.html>> (accessed 29 January 2013).

⁵ "Amazon Best Sellers," <http://www.amazon.com/gp/bestsellers/books/12449/ref=pd_zg_hrsr_b_2_3_last> (accessed 29 January 2013). In the Religion & Spirituality and Theology categories its Kindle edition is actually #3 directly behind the paperback and Kindle editions of *Proof of Heaven: A Neurosurgeon's Journey into the Afterlife* by Eben Alexander (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2012).

⁶ Christian Retailing, "'The Harbinger' Achieves 'New York Times' Milestone," 7 January 2013. <<http://www.christianretailing.com/index.php/newsletter/latest/25174-the-harbinger-achieves-new-york-times-best-seller-milestone>> (accessed 18 March 2013).

⁷ *Harbinger*, v.

these “divine revelations”; and the “Prophet” who leads Kaplan to the meaning of the divine truth of Isaiah 9:10 as it specifically relates to America. While these characters are fiction, it is clear that Jonathan Cahn is Nouriel (Barry/Baruch) Kaplan. He is the one who makes known the “secret message” of Isaiah 9:10 to America. The novel’s fictional prophet in a twisted echo of Jeremiah 36 (cf. Jer 45:1) declares, “So you must go and make known the message, to give them the warning and the hope. Take what you wrote down at my dictation, and let it be known. You are the *sofer*, the one who must make it known.”⁸

The setting for the novel is modern-day New York City. The entire book is Kaplan’s dialogue with the mysterious Prophet or sharing what he learned from his numerous meetings with him with the hardened journalist, Ana Goren, who moves from skeptic to enthusiastic believer.⁹ The book covers twenty-two chapters. The first four chapters introduce the characters and set the stage for the mysterious revealing of each harbinger (chapters 5-13). Generally, the last seven chapters explain what happens to the nation that does not heed the warning signs of Isaiah 9:10. In the final chapter, borrowing from the watchman on the wall motif of the prophet Ezekiel, Kaplan is commissioned to make the divine secret of Isaiah 9:10 known to all. Cahn is on his way of accomplishing his “commission.” His book is a bestseller. He has been interviewed by a number of people including popular conservative radio host Glenn Beck.¹⁰

⁸ Ibid., 247.

⁹ One is led to believe that Cahn wants his readers to identify with Ana on her reluctant yet persistent movement to the “truth.” For the purpose of this presentation, I will skip any review of the actual writing of the book except to say it is an easy read that is predictable in its plot. However, the transmission of Cahn’s revelation of Isaiah 9:10 in a novel is creative and does communicate his point well. The employment of the fiction genre probably contributes to the popularity of the book.

¹⁰ “Glenn Beck,” Tuesday, June 26, 2012. Beck believes Cahn’s message “rings true.” Becks asked his viewers to pass the interview on to all their friends (<<http://www.glenbeck.com/2012/06/26/>>)

Recently Cahn was the keynote speaker at The President's Inaugural Breakfast for President Obama's second term.¹¹

It is Cahn's misuse of "this equals that" in regards to Isaiah 9:10 that raises cause for concern. I would agree with Cahn that there is much wrong with America and her sins have, I suspect, risen up before God much like Nineveh's (Jon 1:2). However, I would disagree with his hermeneutics and his application of this OT verse. To argue that Isaiah 9:10 is somehow a secret and mysterious pattern divinely revealed to Cahn that demonstrates that what was true of ancient Israel is equally true of modern day America since September 11, 2001, is to fall victim to the danger of using the = sign in theology and thus an improper interpretation and application of the biblical text. While I applaud his courage in denouncing our country's sins and calling her to repentance,¹² it is illegitimate to use Isaiah 9:10 and say "this equals that!" No matter the importance or the necessity of repentance, a message of impending judgment must be based on accurate exegesis and legitimate application of the biblical text for today.

CAHN'S NINE HARBINGERS OF ISAIAH 9:10

The key to Cahn's book is the nine harbingers. Cahn believes these are warnings of divine judgment to modern America in the

harbinger-author-on-gbtv-were-going-to-get-stronger-without-correcting-our-course/> [accessed 29 January 2013]).

¹¹ Presidential Inaugural Breakfast January 22, 2013. See his address at <<http://promisebook.net/category/history-2/>> (accessed 1 February 2013). In this address he reiterates his book's message: the same nine harbingers that were revealed in Isaiah 9:10 are present in America today; thus America is under God's divine judgment. Except for his use of his "equal sign theology," most of us would agree with his message of America's need for repentance, the need for biblical obedience in the U.S. government, and the need for Jesus.

¹² See Cahn's address at the Presidential Inaugural Breakfast, January 22, 2013. See footnote 11.

same manner that Isaiah 9:10 functioned as a warning of judgment to Israel in eighth century BC:

(Kaplan) "So it was originally given to Israel, but now it is given as a sign to America?"

(The Prophet) "Yes. So if that same prophetic message, that same warning of judgment, once given in Israel's last days, should now manifest itself in America, it will be a sign—a sign that America is now the nation that once knew God but then fell away and is now in danger of judgment and now given warning in a call to return."¹³

Their conversation continued:

(The Prophet) ". . . The Nine Harbingers—each one joined to the ancient prophecy, each one join to this word, each one carrying a revelation. If these harbingers of Israel's judgment should now reappear, along with this prophetic word, then the nation in which they appear is in danger."¹⁴

Speaking of the importance of the connection of the harbingers with Isaiah 9:10: "(The Prophet) 'Yes. It's the key [Is 9:10] that unlocks each of their mysteries and joins them altogether. Each of the harbingers is connected. Each, when joined together with the other eight, forms a prophetic message.'"¹⁵

It is these nine harbingers from Isaiah 9:10 plus selected modern-day events in the United States since 9/11 that creates Cahn's equation that just as God's covenantal people, Israel, suffered at the hands of Assyria for their disobedience in 722 BC, so too will America suffer if it does not give heed to these nine dire warnings.

¹³ *Harbinger*, 49.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., 50.

The First Harbinger: The Breach

Without biblically referencing the concept (even from Isaiah 9:10), Cahn believes that a “hedge of protection”¹⁶ was divinely lifted from Israel because of their sin against God. With that lifting, they suffered a “breach” in their defenses which allowed the Assyrians to rain destruction on them beginning in 732 BC.¹⁷ The Prophet of Cahn’s novel states,

The Breach. The nation that had long known blessing and security witnesses the failure of its defenses. Its walls of protection are broken through, its national security is breached, and illusion of invincibility shattered. The days of the Harbingers begin.¹⁸

In response Kaplan asks, “And this has something to do with America?”

The Prophet responds,

America was the most blessed nation on earth, its blessing shielded by a powerful hedge of national protection. As its founders had foretold, if the nation follow the ways of God, it would be blessed not only with prosperity and power but also with peace and security.¹⁹

This breach is, according to Cahn, the first harbinger or warning of greater judgment to come happened to America on September 11, 2001. Again, the Prophet explains,

The First Harbinger, the Breach. The nation that had so long known the blessing of peace and security witnesses its walls of

¹⁶ Ibid., 27

¹⁷ Ibid., 27, 29.

¹⁸ Ibid., 29.

¹⁹ Ibid.

protection broken through as its defenses fail. On September 11, 2001, the walls of America's national security were breached.²⁰

Cahn does make a valid point of a "hedge" being lifted in Israel's situation. Comparing Israel to a vineyard God did promise to remove the "hedge" so Israel, his vineyard, would suffer destruction because of her disobedience (Isa 5:5-6).²¹

While it is true that Israel, as God's vineyard, did enjoy his protection based on their covenant relationship (Deut 28:7) and it was ultimately removed completely with the exile of the southern kingdom, there is no such relationship to suggest that America enjoys the same divine protection. To employ the equal sign between Israel and the United States is to have an equation without biblical warrant. The Bible gives no evidence of any nation outside of Israel (cf. Ps 147:19-20) enjoying a covenantal relationship with God. On the contrary nations were blessed (or cursed) as they related to Israel (Gen 12:1-3).²² While America has been blessed, it is theologically inaccurate to say that blessing equals covenant.

Under the same warning Cahn also employs the equal sign incorrectly when he states that the terrorist attacks on 9/11 against the United States are equal to the Assyrian nation's threat and eventual destruction of the northern kingdom in 722 BC. On September 11 a network of well-planned individuals, not a nation, carried out the terrible attacks against the United States. According to the cursings of the covenant, to discipline

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Cahn does not draw this biblical connection, however. Also see Job 1:10 and Hosea 2:6 for other references to "hedge" in relationship to some type of protection.

²² Proverbs 14:34 does state that, "Righteousness exalts a nation, But sin is a disgrace to *any* people." However, exalt does not equal blessing nor does it equal protection. Waltke states that it "describes a people in terms of their political and territorial affiliation" (Bruce Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs Chapters 1-15* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004], 611).

his nation God would use a fierce nation from afar (Deut 28:49-57), not individuals.

Even if one were to grant Cahn his argument concerning the “hedge of protection” being lifted from America, his assertion begs the question: why is 9/11 the breach? According to the FBI, the bombing of the World Trade Center, which killed six and injured more than a thousand in 1993, is considered the first breach of our shores by Islamic terrorist: “It was Friday, February 26, 1993, and Middle Eastern terrorism had arrived on American soil—with a bang.”²³ The reason this tragedy is not mentioned is because it does not fit the equation that Cahn imposes on Isaiah 9:10.

The Second Harbinger: The Terrorists

Cahn’s second harbinger might represent his most flagrant misuse of the equal sign. Without support Cahn believes the nation of Assyria during the eighth century BC “made terror into a science.”²⁴ Thus the Assyrians were the original “terrorists.” And since the 9/11 hijackers were “terrorists,” they are Assyrians!²⁵ With this equation Cahn establishes the relationship between the 9/11 terrorists and the Israel’s antagonist of Isaiah 9:10—the Assyrians!

(Kaplan) “So the Assyrians are the spiritual fathers of al Qaeda.”

²³ The FBI: Federal Bureau of Investigation, FBI 100: “First Strike: Global Terror in America,” <http://www.fbi.gov/news/stories/2008/february/tradebom_022608> (accessed February 1, 2013).

²⁴ *Harbinger*, 37. While it is well known that the Assyrians were brutally cruel in their warfare, it is doubtful they were practicing “terrorism” as defined today. See the OED, “terrorism” <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/199608>> or “terrorist” <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/199609>> (accessed 31 January 2013).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 39.

(Prophet) "Yes, and not only the spiritual.... The Assyrians were children of the Middle East so too the terrorists of 9/11."²⁶

The conversation continued with the Prophet making the connection that since Akkadian (the language of the ancient Assyrians) is close to Arabic, the Assyrians and the terrorists are basically equal.

(Prophet) "... and so when the leaders of al Qaeda plotted their attack on America, and as the terrorists communicated with each other on 9/11 to carry it out, they did so using words and speech patterns that mirrored those used by the Assyrian leaders and warriors as they plan and executed their attacks on Israel two and half thousand years earlier in 732 BC."

(Kaplan) "Like an ancient drama replaying itself in the modern world."²⁷

Later in the conversation:

(Prophet) "And who knows but that the veins of the 9/11 terrorists did not also flow with the blood of the ancient Assyrians?"²⁸

While Cahn poses this as a question, he wants his readers to answer in the affirmative: Assyrian blood does flow in the veins of the terrorists. But the terrorists were not citizens of Iraq nor did the blood of ancient Assyrians "flow in their veins." Nineteen

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., 40.

of the 9/11 terrorists were Saudi,²⁹ one was an Egyptian, two were from UAE, and one was Lebanese.³⁰

Cahn's linking of the Islamic terrorists of 9/11 with the ancient enemy of Israel, Assyria, is an equation that lacks any support whatsoever. Terrorists do not fight for any nation (never mind Assyria), and they are in no way connected to Assyria. When the facts are added together, Cahn's second harbinger simply does not add up.

The Third Harbinger: The Fallen Bricks

The third sign that judgment was coming was the sign of destruction, i.e., the fallen bricks:

(The Prophet) "When the Assyrian attack was over, the people of Israel surveyed the damage. What they found were the ruins of collapsed buildings, heaps of rubble and fallen bricks. *The bricks had fallen.... 'The bricks have fallen.'* The Third Harbinger: the Fallen Bricks."

(Kaplan) "Ground Zero."³¹

The problem with this harbinger is that there is no equality. In the Assyrian captivity the entire northern kingdom suffered deportation and ruin, not a single building complex in one city as on September 11.³² For Cahn it is simply enough in his math to have the "symbol of America's economic power—proud and

²⁹ USA Today, "World," 6 February 2002. <<http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/world/2002/02/06/saudi.htm>> (accessed 31 January 2013).

³⁰ "11 September 2001 Hijackers," <https://www.cia.gov/news.../DCI_18_June_testimony_new.pdf> (accessed 31 January 2013).

³¹ *Harbinger*, 51. Italics original.

³² The World Trade Towers in New York City are the focus of Cahn's argument. He leaves out the other attacks that happened that day presumably since they do not fit Isaiah 9:10.

majestic, towering" fall to make his equation work. The "ruin bricks" of eighth-century Israel equal the modern "bricks" of the Twin Towers in New York City, which should serve as a warning of judgment on America. However, the Assyrian assault on the northern tribes was a judgment from God, not a warning. It is because that kingdom did not heed the warning of the prophets that this terror ascended on the nation in the first place and it was complete (2 Kgs 17:1-18). Concerning the Towers as David James points out, "With no intent to minimize the tragedy in any way (9/11), it must be recognized that compared to the utter devastation in ancient Israel, there was relatively little destruction in New York City."³³ America did not suffer destruction of its nation like eighth-century-BC Israel did at the hands of the Assyrians.

Not to press Cahn's math too much and it may be a small point, but there were very few actual bricks (or masonry products) used in the construction of the Towers. According to David Biggs, WTC 1, 2, and 7 which collapsed "had few or no masonry components."³⁴ As a matter of fact, Biggs's article suggests that buildings with masonry components around the Towers fared better than buildings with newer building material that lacked bricks. Their bricks (and subsequently their buildings) did not fall.

While these similarities should, according to Cahn, cause concern for America, it is her response to the calamity that mirrors Israel's response as recorded in Isaiah 9:10 that should be more ominous. Here Cahn is correct: Israel's response was one of arrogance and pride. They missed the deeper meaning of the Assyrian threat, i.e., it was God's discipline on the northern kingdom. In the same way, according to Cahn, America missed the deeper meaning of the terrorists' attacks. Cahn believes that God was using terrorism of that fateful day to get the

³³ David James, *The Harbinger: Fact or Fiction?* (Bend, OR: The Berean Call, 2012), 89.

³⁴ David T. Biggs, "Beyond the Towers: Performance of Masonry," <http://www.cement.org/masonry/pp_fire_towers.asp> (accessed 5 March 2013).

country's attention to their spiritual state. The difficulty with Cahn's reasoning is that in Israel's day Isaiah (and other prophets) were commissioned by God to bring the message of warning of the Assyrians. It is clear that there was a deeper meaning to the foreign threat. Unfortunately in the United States, we have no Isaiah. There is no prophet warning us or telling us "this is that." Without a prophet's voice (and Cahn is not a prophet in the biblical sense), I am not certain that the terrorists' attack has a deeper message from God. The events of 9/11 could as easily be explained as the depravity of man expressed against mankind.³⁵

Many share Cahn's desire that America would recognize her need for God as in the days right after the disaster. But no matter how godly the desire it cannot and should not drive an exegesis of a biblical text. His present-day observations do not equal the context of the biblical text.

The Fourth Harbinger: The Tower

In light of 9/11 and the second line of Isaiah 9:10: "But we will rebuild . . ." Cahn has the prophet speak to Kaplan:

The Fourth Harbinger: In the wake of the calamity, the nation responds without repentance, humility, or reflection, but with pride and defiance. Their leaders vow, "We will rebuild." They pledge to rebuild bigger, better, taller, and stronger than before. . . . It will be their towering testament of defiance—the rebuilding of the fallen, and of the nation itself, the Fourth Harbinger . . . the Tower.³⁶

Cahn is correct concerning the biblical text. In its original context the line "we will rebuild" in Isaiah 9:10b is a boast. Watts notes, "The determination to 'tough it out' is bravado. . . . In some times and against some adversaries, it would have been

³⁵ In light of any disaster with the loss of life, Jesus' words of Luke 13:1-5 should be heeded.

³⁶ *Harbinger*, 61.

admirable. . . . In the face of God's announcement that the kingdoms were doomed, it was spiritually reprobate."³⁷

In Israel's case the boast "to rebuild bigger and better" is an empty one. It is fruitless since the destruction from God at the hands of the Assyrians will be so total that there will be no rebuilding.

With the boasting of ancient Israel in place, Cahn works to make America the other side of his equal sign in this harbinger: "So if the ancient mystery is joined to America, then somehow 9/11 has to be linked to the words 'We will rebuild.'"³⁸ And coincidentally for Cahn there is a connection. After 9/11 there were a number of politicians from the mayor of New York City to the president who "surprisingly" made the promise that America "would rebuild." Cahn footnotes each quotation "we will rebuild" to make his equation work: "(Prophet) 'One way or another, each leader would end up proclaiming the same words of defiance proclaimed thousands of years before by the leaders of ancient Israel.'"³⁹

Although Cahn wants the reader to believe that there is a direct equality between America and her rebuilding of the Towers after 9/11 with ancient Israel, none exists. First, in ancient Israel the people would understand exactly the reason for their destruction when it came (Isa 9:9). Commenting on Isaiah 9:9, J. Alec Motyer writes, "Will know . . . indicates awareness of exactly what is happening when the punishment falls. The word spoken and refused (cf. 28:10-13) becomes the same message turned to chastisement."⁴⁰ After 9/11 Americans

³⁷ John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 1-33*, WBC (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 182.

³⁸ *Harbinger*, 61.

³⁹ Ibid., 62. It is possible that the words of Isaiah 9:10 were never uttered by the people. As Watts notes, "Rather Isaiah uses them to convey the attitude which existed at the moment in the northern kingdom," (Watts, *Isaiah 1-33*, 252).

⁴⁰ J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1993), 107.

only knew that terrorists had attacked them. There is nothing in Scripture to indicate that a terrorist attack is a national rebuke by God.

Second, no parallel exists because Americans who said (and even promised) that we would rebuild were not acting out of defiance to God but to the terrorists who inflicted such harm. While some politicians even quoted this verse, not one was arrogant against God.⁴¹ It was simply resolve expressed in the face of such terrible attacks that were designed to bring a spirit of comfort to the nation—a getting back to normal. There may have been a certain amount of bravado that was aimed at the terrorist network that planned the attack that you cannot stop us. But it was not against God.

But for Cahn it is not the attitude behind the words or even the manner in which they are spoken that indicts America. On the contrary, listen to Cahn's Prophet: "These are prophetic reenactments or prophetic manifestations, . . . Those involved act unwittingly, without realizing what they are doing, as representatives of a nation, agents of a national spirit."⁴²

The reason Cahn can argue that the politicians are acting defiantly even though they do not express it or act that way is because of his definition of rebuilding versus defiance. To rebuild for Cahn means to replace "brick with brick."⁴³ This is seemingly acceptable. But if one were "to boast of rebuilding

⁴¹ Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle was one who quoted Isaiah 9:10 in a speech on the Senate floor the day after the 9/11 attacks ("Tom Daschle Speech," YouTube Video, <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ukYiWd3T9sk>> [accessed 6 March 2013]).

It should be mentioned that the speechwriters who pulled this verse for inclusion in Daschle's "rebuilding" speech proved that they were not theologians or even close readers of the context of Isaiah. At the conclusion of his speech the majority leader implored, "God bless the people of America." This hardly sounds like boasting.

⁴² *Harbinger*, 63.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 64.

stronger and greater,” this is “defiance.”⁴⁴ Since a number of prominent people voiced that the Towers should be made stronger, better, and even larger, America is acting like Israel, arrogantly and boastfully. Thus they are under the same judgment as ancient Israel. To make his point, Cahn quotes from three commentaries on Isaiah. However, each commentary is accurate as it relates to Isaiah 9:10, but they do not speak of America at all. But Cahn builds his calculations to look that way.

Cahn’s math looks like this:

- (1) To rebuild bigger, better, etc.= defiance
- (2) Israel vowed to rebuild bigger, better, etc.=defiance
- (3) America vows to rebuild bigger, better, etc. =defiance

While I agree his point about Israel is correct (#2) because it is stated clearly in the text, his first point (#1) has no support in logic or the Bible.⁴⁵ But with this improper premise (#1), he leads his reader to a miscalculation as it concerns America (#3).

To draw his connection between eighth-century-BC Israel with the Towers tighter, Cahn needs to appeal to the Septuagint. Cahn’s referencing the LXX is due to its addition of the phrase, καὶ οἴκοδομήσωμεν ἐαυτοῖς πύργον, “and let us (Israel) build a tower.” The MT has no evidence of such a reading and there are no textual issues with Isaiah 9:10 (9:9 Heb). While this LXX reading is convenient with this harbinger, it creates a problem for Cahn later with his sixth and seventh harbingers.⁴⁶ If Cahn were to adopt the LXX reading, he would have Israel cutting trees. But in the following harbingers he needs to have the trees

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ I doubt that people who need to rebuild after Hurricane Sandy are not thinking of building stronger and higher! They are not boasting in that thinking. They are only trying to protect their property from the next hurricane. To do less would be irresponsible.

⁴⁶ *Harbinger: Fact or Fiction?*, 95.

cut down by an enemy and not Israel.⁴⁷ So he will refer back to a translation based on the MT. Here Cahn seems to pick and choose a reading based on the equation he is attempting to prove equal.

The Fifth Harbinger: The Gazit Stone

In this harbinger Cahn makes the case that instead of rebuilding with simple mud bricks, ancient Israel would rebuild with gazit stone. The verse does call the replacement material for, לְבָנָה (brick), גָזִית, (gazit). BDB offers a gloss as hewn stone.⁴⁸ In this Cahn is correct: “לְבָנִים גָפְלוּ וְגָזִית נִבְנָה” Isaiah 9:10 (NIV) The bricks have fallen down, but we will rebuild with dressed stone.”

In the context Israel is boasting that even if Assyria were to topple their inferior mud brick dwellings and walls, they would rebuild with the sturdier hewn stone to thwart any further destruction.

To draw the connection between Cahn’s fifth harbinger and Ground Zero, he cites the Freedom Stone, which was the corner stone of the rebuilding of the Towers. It was a carved 20-ton piece of granite. Because it was a hewn stone and was used in the rebuilding, it forms the bedrock of his fifth harbinger: “(Prophet) ‘On Ground Zero the American leaders declared that they too would *rebuild with quarried stone*.’”⁴⁹

Cahn builds this harbinger on shaky ground. In the original context based on the pride of the northern kingdom, all the mud bricks that were destroyed would be replaced with much stronger quarried stone. On the site of Ground Zero the only quarried stone that was mentioned was a cornerstone. And the purpose of its inclusion was not to build better and stronger but to have it as a testimony of those who lost their lives and the

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ BDB, 159. HALOT glosses it as “dressed stone,” 186.

⁴⁹ *Harbinger*, 74.

ideals of freedom.⁵⁰ To have one hewn stone placed symbolically in a building is a far cry from having every stone be of that same quality as ancient Israel's pride had promised. If one places Cahn's fifth harbinger on one side and the facts on the other, it is clear that they are not equal.⁵¹

The Sixth Harbinger: The Sycamore

Isaiah 9:10, "The sycamores have been cut down...."

In this harbinger Cahn believes that the sycamore trees act as a sign for the fall of America:

(Kaplan) "And what message does the sign of the Sycamore hold for America?"

(Prophet) "It's a sign of a fall. . . . of a cutting down. . . . an uprooting. . . an end. When it appeared in ancient Israel, it prophesied the nation's downfall and the end of its kingdom."

(Kaplan) "And now it reappears for America. . . ."⁵²

Across the street from the Ground Zero is St. Paul's Chapel. In the yard of St. Paul's on the morning of September 11, 2001, stood a sycamore tree. As a result of the devastation, this sycamore died and was subsequently replaced.

Because this lone sycamore was "cut down" in a terror attack and the sycamores were cut down during the Assyrian invasion of Israel, Cahn has another equation in place which makes it look as though Isaiah 9:10 must be speaking of America.

⁵⁰ The inscription on the stone reads, "To honor and remember those who lost their lives on September 11, 2001, and as a tribute to the enduring spirit of freedom," <<http://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/freedom-tower-cornerstone-rocked-betrayal-article-1.346705#ixzz2Ms3cVRsq>> (accessed 7 March 2013).

⁵¹ Later Cahn allegorizes the "hewn stones": "The hewn stones of America's recovery were primarily economic" (*Harbinger*, 139).

⁵² *Ibid.*, 84.

Unfortunately, as James notes, the sycamore of the Middle East and of the eastern United States are “not botanically related.” While they share the same name (in English), the sycamore of Israel were fruit bearing while the sycamore in the United States is not.⁵³ James also points out there was more than one sycamore that was cut down in ancient Israel. At Ground Zero there was only one, not many. There is not a one to one correspondence.⁵⁴

Plus, Isaiah is employing parallelism to draw the reader not to the usual mud bricks used for building or to the common sycamore that armies would cut down for their invasion, but to the valuable material Israel would use as replacements in their pride. According to Watts, “In short, Israel could, by her own resilience and resourcefulness, turn disaster into accomplishment.”⁵⁵ Isaiah 9:10 is not a prophecy to be fulfilled but a declaration of the arrogance of a stubborn people who knew they were under the judgment of God (Isa 9:9).

The Seventh Harbinger: The Erez Tree

In this next warning Cahn recognizes that Isaiah 9:10 speaks about sycamore trees being replaced by cedar or erez trees. From this he builds his case that just as Israel promised to replace sycamores with the erez in eighth century BC, so America has replaced the lone sycamore tree it lost on 9/11 with a cedar as well. However, the replacement tree at St. Paul’s was not a cedar of the Middle East variety but a 21-foot Norway

⁵³ James, *Harbinger: Fact or Fiction?*, 99.

⁵⁴ This is not the only tree lost in the horrific events of 9/11. According to the Glenn Collins sixty-eight trees were lost in Liberty Plaza Park across from Ground Zero. Unfortunately, I cannot determine the species of these trees (“A Return Engagement for Ground Zero Oasis,” NY Times.com [July 23, 2005], <<http://www.nytimes.com/2005/07/23/nyregion/23park.html?pagewanted=all>> [accessed 7 March 2013]).

⁵⁵ Watts, *Isaiah 1-33*, 252.

spruce.⁵⁶ This is not an issue for Cahn since he simply broadens the definition of cedar to its family, *pinacea* (or pine family), and since the cedar and spruce are in the same scientific family, therefore a spruce tree equals the eretz tree of Isaiah 9:10.

(Prophet) “The same message it carried to ancient Israel. The Ground Zero Tree of Hope was a sign, as it was proclaimed to be, but not of the hope they proclaimed. Instead, it was a sign of a nation’s defiant rejection of God’s call to return.”⁵⁷

It is true that Israel’s boast in Isaiah 9:10 is that they would replace the common sycamore trees with the much more valuable and sturdy cedar (erez) trees. And although destruction was at their door, Israel believed as Motyer observes, “Not only will the set-back be overcome but the future will outshine the past as *dressed stone* and cedars surpass (mud) *bricks* and (common sycamore) *fig-trees*.⁵⁸ But that is not the reason for the replacement of the spruce at St. Paul’s. The Tree of Hope was planted, not in an attitude of defiance, but in prayer.⁵⁹ Even if one were to grant Cahn’s equality between a

⁵⁶ Trinity Wall Street.org, <<http://www.trinitywallstreet.org/search/fee18993b72e6976a48839b1be6283f0>> (accessed 7 March 2013). According to Glenn Collins, other trees lost at 9/11 have been replaced with fifty-four honey locusts at Liberty Plaza Park (“A Return Engagement for a Ground Zero Oasis”). Steve Strunsky reported that a pear tree that survived the 9/11 attacks has been replaced on the Memorial site along with a number of white swamp oak trees. None on the site are cedars (“Despite Hurricane Irene, 9/11 Survivor Tree Emerges Unscathed,” NJ.com <http://www.nj.com/news/index.ssf/2011/08/despite_hurricane_irene_911_su.html> [accessed March 7, 2013]).

⁵⁷ *Harbinger*, 95.

⁵⁸ Motyer, *Prophecy*, 107.

⁵⁹ The tree lighting ceremony that commemorated the replacing of the sycamore with the Tree of Hope, a Norway spruce, at St. Paul’s “began with a prayer service in the chapel which was filled to capacity.” The service ended with closing prayers as well. There was

spruce and cedar, the attitude of the people is diametrically opposite.

Cahn also insists that the eretz tree needs to be planted in the same location as the felled sycamores. However, it does not follow from this verse that the eretz tree needs to be planted in the same spot as the sycamore,⁶⁰ nor is there anything inherent in the verb *khalaf* that suggests as Cahn states, the word means “to replace, to plant in the same place of another.”⁶¹ On the contrary BDB glosses נָלַף as “change for better,”⁶² which fits the context of the verse and the parallelism with hewn stone and cedar trees. Location is not the issue in the verse; quality is the focus. As James notes, “Once again, there is no amazing prophetic coincidence. There is no match. There is no parallel. And there is no harbinger.”⁶³

The Eighth Harbinger: The Utterance

In Cahn’s next-to-last harbinger he believes the utterance of Isaiah 9:10 had to be made in the capital city of Samaria.

(Kaplan) “So Samaria was the nation’s capital city, the seat of its government, the city of kings and its official. For the vow to matter, it had to be spoken by the leaders; it had to be the nation’s

no defiance to be noted in the service. The purpose of the tree: “The Tree of Hope was planted on November 22 as a “reminder of our shared commitment to affirming the power of love in the face of tragedy” (Trinity Wall Street, “Decorating Ground Zero’s Tree of Hope,” <<http://www.trinitywallstreet.org/news/articles/decorating-ground-zeros-tree-of-hope>> [accessed 12 March 2013]).

⁶⁰ *Harbinger*, 94.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² BDB, 322.

⁶³ James, *Harbinger: Fact or Fiction?*, 109.

official response. . . . It's the key. The vow has to be proclaimed in the capital city.”⁶⁴

Based on Cahn’s hermeneutics, one can guess what he discovers to build his equation between Samaria and the United States. Cahn found that on September 11, 2004, then vice-presidential candidate, John Edwards, quoted Isaiah 9:10 as part of his remarks to the Congressional Black Caucus Prayer Breakfast in Washington, DC.⁶⁵ Thus Edwards fills the prophetic role: “(Kaplan) ‘According to the mystery, it would have to involve at least one leader, one who could speak on behalf of the nation.’”⁶⁶

The difficulty with Cahn’s math with this harbinger is that if the verse must be uttered by a national leader (and there is no indication in the context that it must), John Edwards as a candidate was not speaking for the country. In that capacity he is simply a citizen running for a public office. He may have spoken for his party and/or for himself, but he had no authority to speak for the government.

Contextually another problem with his argument is that Isaiah 9:10 is uttered by a group and not an individual: “But we will rebuild. . . we will replace. . . .” Isaiah 9:10 is meant to communicate the attitude of the collective northern kingdom to the threat of the Assyrians not simply one individual. Even the preceding verse attributes the hard-heart to “all the people... Ephraim and the inhabitants of Samaria.” There is nothing in these verses to limit the sentiment to the king and his officials.

⁶⁴ *Harbinger*, 101.

⁶⁵ Again, this is not a good biblical text to use if the context is understood. Also, as James points out in reviewing the speech, Edwards was not expressing defiance against God. On the contrary, James lists a number of times that Edwards references God and prayer. (*Harbinger: Fact or Fiction?*, 110-11).

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 106.

Another difficulty that continually surfaces in Cahn's book is his labeling of Isaiah 9:10 as a prophecy: "(Kaplan) 'But it's a prophecy of judgment....'"⁶⁷

It is clear from the text of Isaiah 9 that verse 10 is a descriptor of the attitude of the people (cf. 9:9), not a prophecy of what will happen. On the contrary 9:10 did not come to pass. There was no replacing the mud bricks or the sycamores. Since Israel did not heed God's warning from the prophet, they suffered terribly and completely at the hands of the Assyrians in 722 BC. There was no rebuilding.

The Ninth Harbinger: The Prophecy

In this harbinger Cahn finds a restatement of Isaiah 9:10 on the political landscape of the United States. The message is no longer for Israel but for America. On the morning of September 12, 2001, Senate majority leader Tom Daschle offered a joint resolution which included Isaiah 9:10. For Cahn, this is further proof of divine judgment on America:

(Kaplan) "The majority leader of the United States Senate was publically pronouncing judgment on America."

(Prophet) "Blindly, he replied, having no idea what he was pronouncing. As far as he knew, he was only delivering an inspiring speech."

(Kaplan) "But unknowingly playing his part in a prophetic mystery."⁶⁸

In that speech Cahn believes that Daschle offered a prophetic word for America. Finding an equality with Caiaphas's prophecy by virtue of his office as high priest in John 11, concerning Jesus dying for the nation, Cahn asserts that Daschle prophesied by virtue of his office:

⁶⁷ *Harbinger*, 107.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 117.

(Prophet) "It wasn't the man—it was the office he held. He was speaking, as the Gospel puts it, 'not of his own initiative,' but prophesying by virtue of his office, as the chief representative of the nation."

(Kaplan) "So the Senate leader was prophesying by virtue of his office?"

(Prophet) "By virtue of that office, he became the instrument...to deliver a prophetic word."⁶⁹

What's more, Cahn believes that Daschle spoke under the inspiration of God: "(Prophet) '...even a politician, well-meaning or not, may speak under the inspiration of God.'"⁷⁰

How do we know that Daschle was speaking under the inspiration of God?—because he intended to give an inspiring speech!

(Kaplan) "Inspiration, I said. Didn't he use that word in the speech?"

(Prophet) "He did.... He used it to introduce the prophecy."⁷¹

In addition Cahn allows for inspiration to move beyond the biblical text. Speaking of inspiration he has the Prophet tell the reader: "(Prophet) 'The word is defined as, "a supernatural or divine influence upon the prophets, the apostles, and the sacred writers, or upon men, to enable them to communicate divine truth.'"⁷²

It is clear that for Cahn Isaiah 9:10 is a divine, inspired word from God through the Senate majority leader and directly applicable to America: "(Kaplan) 'The majority leader of the

⁶⁹ Ibid, 118.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid., 119.

United States Senate was publically pronouncing judgment on America.”⁷³

Now Cahn recognizes that Daschle meant to provide comfort not judgment in his speech; however, since he quoted Isaiah 9:10 and then immediately declared, “That is what we will do,” it transformed the ancient words into a modern vow of national defiance just like that of ancient Israel. According to Cahn’s Prophet: “No longer was it an ancient vow of an ancient people. . . It was the *vow itself*. . . . The *we* of ancient Israel had transformed into the *we* of America.”⁷⁴

Besides the possible replacement theology,⁷⁵ there is no biblical support for such logic. It is clear from the context that

⁷³ Ibid., 117.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 120. Cahn observed these same words, “we will rebuild,” coming from the President Obama’s speech to a joint session of Congress (24 February 2009). To Cahn this is another witness that now even the president was voicing the so-called ancient vow (182-83). Cahn fails to observe, however, (1) how common this expression is especially when one wants to rebuild something that was broken (in this case this the economy) and (2) that נִבְנָה “we will build,” is also found in Song of Solomon 8:9; Ezra 4:2, 3; 2 Chronicles 14:6; 1 Kings 3:2, 6:7; Numbers 32:16; Genesis 11:4. With Cahn’s logic I could as easily make the case that the President was alluding to Song of Solomon 8:9: “If she is a wall, We shall build on her a battlement of silver. . . .” But I will not: to maintain the President’s authorial intent and my own integrity.

⁷⁵ In an interview with Gary Stearman of *Prophecy in the News*, Cahn states that he does not believe in replacement theology and that those who accuse him of holding such a position have misunderstood him. While he denies the position, his words lead easily to such a conclusion (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Nl74s40wQ0> [accessed 13 March 2013]). In a response to his critics where he rejects replacement theology without much detail, he states that he believes that America “parallels” ancient Israel and God deals with America in the same way as he did with Israel because the Puritans made a covenant with God (“Jonathan Cahn Responds to Critics,” December 23, 2012 <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bMnraI7H08o>> [accessed 18 March 2013]).

while Isaiah 9:10 is a statement that reveals Israel's arrogance, it is not even a prophecy for ancient Israel. John Oswalt observes,

In a typically Isaianic touch, their attitude is described in a brief quotation (v. 9 [Eng 10]) which gives the reader a better estimate of the Israelite's essential self-confidence. . . . But their self-confidence is misplaced, for they are about to run headlong into the God they have ignored as he musters their ancient enemies against them.⁷⁶

Speaking of Isaiah 9:10, Oswalt also mentions that contrary to Cahn, "It is not necessary to assume that there had been any specific time when these words had actually been said in Israel."⁷⁷ It is Isaiah's way to communicate the heart of the people to God's discipline at the hands of the Assyrians.

While Israel's attitude proved to be their undoing, there is no prophecy in this verse that must be filled (or was fulfilled)—never mind a so-called prophecy being "transformed" to another nation.

It is unfortunate that Daschle and others would take Isaiah 9:10 so badly out of context. But a misapplied ancient text hardly makes for a contemporary prophetic word. A poor speechwriter is not the making of a biblical prophet or an inspired text.

CONCLUSION

While the nine harbingers take up approximately 100 pages of Cahn's work and provide the foundation for his book, there are an additional 100 pages. Chapters 14 through 22 concern

⁷⁶ John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 1-39* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), 251.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 252. Also Geoffrey Grogan, who believes the words of "verse 10 can be taken literally or figuratively" ("Isaiah," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Proverbs-Isaiah*, rev. ed., ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland [Grand Rapids: Zondervan], 532).

the second round of judgments on America. Certain current events are these second judgments. Cahn continues connecting these current events with Isaiah 9:10 and 9/11:

(Prophet) “It all goes back to prophecy...everything—the collapse of Wall Street, the rise and fall of the credit market, the foreclosures, the defaults, the bankruptcies, the government takeovers—everything—politics, foreign policy, world history—everything that happened after.”⁷⁸

He continues to build these “connections” with his “this equals that.” For instance, (1) America’s rebuilding on Ground Zero, establishing the Department of Homeland Security, wars in Iraq and Afghanistan were all attempts “to defy the first calamity” and “was doing exactly as ancient Israel had done in Isaiah”;⁷⁹ (2) Wall Street is symbolically equal to the sycamore tree of Isaiah 9:10. It was cut down and so was Wall Street in 2008;⁸⁰ and (3) The inauguration of the American government under Washington is a type of Solomonic dedication of the

⁷⁸ *Harbinger*, 129.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 137. The appeal of Cahn’s book is that at first glance a number of his coincidences do have a feel of “how could that be? God must be behind these.” But a closer read reveals that his foundations for the coincidences are questionable to begin with or he stretches some facts to make the coincidences fit his argument. For a good critical engagement of these chapters see David James, *The Harbinger: Fact or Fiction?*

David James reports on his blog that he has been threatened with legal action by lawyers representing the publisher of *The Harbinger* and author Jonathan Cahn for copyright infringement (Dave James, “Threatened Lawsuit by *The Harbinger* Publisher & Author,” at “The Alliance for Biblical Integrity,” January 31, 2013. <<http://www.biblicalintegrity.org/blog/2013/01/31/threatened-lawsuit-harbinger-publisher-author/>> [accessed 18 March 2013]).

⁸⁰ Ibid., 148-49.

Temple.⁸¹ All these events and more have their connection to 9/11 or Ground Zero itself and thus with Isaiah 9:10.

While we may wince (or worse) at Cahn's hermeneutic, we must remember that Cahn is motivated by the pervasiveness of sin he sees in this country. He believes that Hell is real and sinners of all nations are destined for that judgment. They need to be warned that they need Jesus. However, to see Isaiah 9:10 as some "mystery" that has been revealed to him that now applies directly to America is to build an equality that simply is not true. As David James states in his conclusion, "Cahn has departed from a literal, grammatical, historical hermeneutic in favor of looking for hidden mysteries while engaging in allegorical interpretation and untenable speculation."⁸² God is certainly able to judge America in any way he chooses and with various instruments. But a literal reading of Isaiah 9:10 does not lead one to believe that this is that.⁸³

⁸¹ Ibid., 200-201.

⁸² James, *Harbinger, Fact of Fiction?*, 202.

⁸³ Although not in his book, Cahn's driving premise for his book is based on three assumptions: (1) God judges nations; (2) God warns before he judges; and (3) God acts consistently with his word. This is the pattern Cahn observes in Israel and he now sees the same divine pattern repeating itself in America ("Jonathan Cahn Responds to his Critics," <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bMnraI7H08o> [accessed 18 March 2013]).

Life's Biggest Questions: What the Bible Says about the Things that Matter Most. Erik Thoennes. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011. 176 Pages. \$12.99

Reducing complex and difficult theological constructs and questions to core understandable bite size nuggets is no easy task. Often these theological issues are simply minimized, portrayed as unattainable and unimportant or they are so distorted that readers simply give up further reflection.

Thoennes has written a very accessible, interesting introductory book that allows the Scriptures to speak to core issues. Essentially this book serves as a very basic introduction to categories of systematic theology. The book is composed of sixteen chapters overviewing topics such as the existence of God, loving God, God's revealing of Himself, the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, what is humanity, what is sin, etc. Each chapter starts with a pithy quote followed by a general introduction. Then a brief overview of a core doctrine is provided with key passage. Each chapter concludes with a scripture and meditations section followed by application/ discussion questions and suggested resources for further study.

The book is a refreshing theologically conservative gateway into core doctrines for the Christian Faith. The author responsibly models a conservative hermeneutical and theological method that differentiates between essential, absolute doctrines vs. lower level doctrines held by degrees of conviction vs. simple opinions (p35). He also advocates the basis of theology as exegesis of the biblical text which then formulates a biblical theology from which systematic theology evolves. So the book does generally portray a balanced doctrinal taxonomy and consistent methodology. As an example in the chapter "How Will It all End," Thoennes correctly presents the second coming of Jesus Christ as a sudden, personal, bodily, visibly world-wide return as Christ will reign in His full majesty and power (165). He then provides a very brief one-page description summarizing the various eschatological millennial positions though not advocating one view above another. The strength of this chapter is his scriptural portrayal of the centrality of the return of Jesus Christ while the

weakness of course is to not further nuance Christ's return and millennial kingdom.

This book uses non-technical vocabulary and also provides a very good Scripture index. I recommend the book for some entry level survey courses along with adult and even high school church ministry settings and various Bible study settings. The book would also be good discipleship tool for newer believers and even a book an entire church could easily read through together.

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Thinking About Christian Apologetics: What It Is and Why We Do It. James K. Beilby. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011. 214 pages. \$17.00.

"This is not a typical apologetics book," begins Beilby (9). "Those who are looking for responses to objections to Christianity or arguments for Christianity should look elsewhere" (9). One could term this volume as a venture in meta-apologetics (31). Topics include "the nature and goals of apologetics, different approaches to apologetics, objections to the idea or practice of apologetics, and how apologetics should be done" (9). Throughout the text, key terms are italicized, and each chapter ends with a list of important concepts. The volume concludes with a valuable bibliography, narrowed down to book-length studies relevant to contemporary apologetics written in English (185-199). The work could be used suitably for "an introductory apologetics course" (10).

Beilby maintains that "apologetic success is best understood as faithfulness to Jesus Christ" (22). Apologetics "cannot compel belief in Jesus Christ" (25) and it "cannot create faith" (26). Beilby also reminds readers that the apologetic endeavor is often targeted at struggling believers rather than unbelieving skeptics. "Internal apologetics is not only more common than external apologetics; it is usually more fruitful" (28). Furthermore, "Apologetics can (and often does) take place within a believer's own mind" (29).

"There is no formal system or theory of apologetics found in the Bible," claims Beilby (13). The Bible "does not provide specifics on how apologetics should be done" (13). He asserts that Christian apologetics concerns the "core Christian beliefs" (19). "Items on this list include the existence of God, the deity of Jesus Christ, the affirmation of God as Trinity, the claim that God created all that exists outside himself, the assertion of human sinfulness, the atonement of Jesus Christ and undoubtedly more" (19). Undoubtedly, this "more" should include the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Beilby emphasizes that what is being defended is Christianity, not some "slice of Christianity" such as a particularized approach tied to a specific theological system (20).

Yet some integration with a more developed theology seems unavoidable. Beilby himself comments, "Only a theologically well-grounded, confident faith can engage in apologetics" (34). If this is true, one could assume that one's theological framework affects how one approaches and implements the apologetic task (cf. 78). If meta-apologetics is the study of "methods, concepts, and foundations of apologetic systems and perspectives" (88), it would seem that some theological commitments are inescapable. For example, one's view of the fallen human person (including one's view of depravity and the noetic results of the fall) probably influences how one understands the nature of apologetics (c. 141-142). Beilby himself acknowledges the importance of integrating one's pneumatological tenets with one's apologetic approach (91).

Although Beilby seems to downplay the theological disputes of the Reformation (55), significant theological differences surfaced through debate. One's systematic theology *does* affect one's assessment of the apologetic endeavor. For instance, for Luther "human reason is idolatrous and liable to create a god of our liking" (56). Similarly, Calvin stressed that "the sinfulness of humanity" makes "our attempts at knowledge of God invariably idolatrous" (57). "Sinful humans obfuscate the image of the holy God with an idol of their own imagination" (57). Calvin focused his apologetic theology through the "spectacles of Scripture" (57), and he espoused doctrines of a *sensus divinitatis* and a *testimonium spiritus sancti internum* (57-58). Both Luther and Calvin distinguished between the magisterial and ministerial use of reason and supported the latter (58).

Chapters two and three provide a history of Christian apologetics. The narrative manifests that "every historical context brings certain apologetic advantages and certain apologetic disadvantages" (82). Beilby claims that "Eusebius and Athanasius played significant roles in bringing Arian theology for consideration at the Council of Nicaea" (43). Yet it is unclear whether Eusebius of Nicomedia or Eusebius of Caesarea was intended (seemingly the latter, but his theological position was ambiguous), and Athanasius was probably not as influential at the Council as portrayed by later traditions. The section on late antiquity might have addressed the critical

apologetic interaction with Islam in a more direct and thorough manner (cf. 62). Beilby implies that the seventeenth-century (as well as eighteenth-century) burgeoning of new learning was self-labeled as “the Enlightenment,” although the label was not attached until the eighteenth century in particular. Many readers may be pleased that Pascal’s creative reflection receives more attention than merely a summary of his famous (and properly disputed) “wager” (66-69).

The closing pages of chapter four describe postmodernism as “a mixed blessing for apologetics” (84) and lament how apologetic works have “largely ignored” the globalization of Christianity (85). “In fact, crosscultural apologetics is probably the single most important task of apologetics for the twenty-first century” (131). Beilby defines postmodernism as “a loss of confidence in the modern project and its attempt to formulate perfect, indubitable answers to the questions humans ask” (125). Not all forms of postmodernism are manifestations of relativism, and postmodern emphases do not necessarily destroy epistemology. “Knowledge is perspectival, not impossible; human knowledge is limited, not non-existent” (127). Postmodernism can even engender a positive level of intellectual humility (127).

Beilby questionably labels Cornelius Van Til as a “fideist” (89). At the same time, Beilby acknowledges that rigid categorizations of apologetic approaches have “proved to be problematic” (93). His own taxonomy focuses upon “three broad argumentative strategies”: evidentialist strategy, presuppositionalist strategy, and experientialist strategy (96). He disputably claims, “it is also probably safe to say that presuppositionalism has enjoyed a majority within evangelicalism” over the last fifty years (102). And he provocatively asserts, “But it is not at all obvious that he [Barth] would quarrel with certain kinds of presuppositional apologetics” (114).

Chapter six addresses biblical and theological objections to apologetics. Although the Scriptures do not teach a “formal system of apologetics,” this fact “does not suggest that it is a task that should be rejected” (138). Beilby acknowledges that revisionist apologists “have been willing to remove or modify

aspects of the faith in order to broaden its appeal" (148). He also acknowledges that "Intellectual arrogance is the Achilles' heel of the apologist, and the tendency toward it must be first acknowledged and then fought" (152). Nevertheless, a proper apologetic remains a valid Christian undertaking. "To abandon apologetics is to abandon the enterprise that animates religious people the world over: to find the truth and to live in its light the best we can" (156).

Beilby recognizes that some Christians "have practiced apologetics in both ineffective and inappropriate ways," and so he seeks to explain "doing apologetics well" in chapter seven (a highlight of practical material within the book). Along the way, Beilby supports a chastened "correspondence theory of truth," employing the analogy of a map's relationship to the actual lay of the land (160-161). Both fideism and rationalism are "seductive" (163). However, their "supposed advantages" come at "a high cost" (163). Intellectual arguments have a valid role to play (166), yet the apologist must recognize that there are affective as well as spiritual and intellectual causes of unbelief (170-171). Speaking and being understood are not the only facets of the apologetic endeavor, which also includes listening to and understanding others (180). "If an apologist is a person of character, then the character itself functions as a kind of an argument for the truth of Christianity" (175). Moreover, "one of the most important things Christian apologists can do is help non-Christians realize that not all Christians are like their negative stereotypes" (182). As a parting example of Beilby's sensible approach, he reminds readers that even a sense of humor sometimes helps. He wisely admonishes, "Take the gospel seriously, not yourself" (177).

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