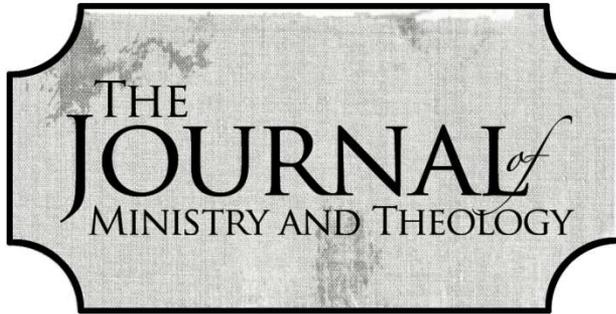


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THE JOURNAL OF MINISTRY AND THEOLOGY

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2 Timothy 2:2

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

Rod Decker (1952–2014)

Kevin Mungons
Editorial Manager
of Integrated Marketing Communications
Moody Global Ministries
Chicago, Illinois

Rod Decker¹ was strong enough to finish two books and send them to the printer last winter—strong enough to write the introductions, strong enough to sign them the way he signed the others:

Soli Deo Gloria

With a sharp mind trapped inside a body that was slowly shutting down, Rod suffered through the roughest winter of his life. Unable to return to his classes at Baptist Bible Seminary, he invested his remaining energy writing at home, confined to a chair by the fire, warmed by wood he had chopped ahead of time. He was ready for what he called the “inescapable reality” of death.

“I’ve been ‘terminal’ for over 60 years,” he said with typical humor and theological precision.

Eight years earlier he had built his house across the road from the farm where he grew up. Despite his growing reputation as a NT Greek scholar, he never strayed too far from his rural roots.

“God took a farm boy and placed him in the ministry, eventually into graduate studies, and then into the classroom to train young pastors,” Rod had said, summarizing his life as “grace from the beginning.”

¹ This article was first published in the *Baptist Bulletin* (Schaumburg, IL: July/August 2014) Used by permission.

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Rod Decker, author, seminary professor, and an internationally known NT scholar, died on May 25, 2014. He was 61.

“He always cared about others more than himself, always deflected praise, and always gave God glory,” says Mark McGinniss, a faculty colleague who had seen the *solī Deo gloria* in action.

Rod grew up on a farm near Tunkhannock, PA, the son of Pastor Victor and Agnes Decker. His father, a 1952 graduate of Baptist Bible Seminary, was pastor of Osterhout Bible Church. Rod came to Christ at age five through the influence of his mother.

In 1970 he showed up on BBC’s campus wearing his blue corduroy Future Farmers of America jacket. He had planned to study forestry until a traveling missionary suggested he try Bible college for a year. Decker stayed on, took his first Greek class from Bob Williams, and discovered his natural affinity for languages. He would continue to study with Bill Arp and Ken Brown.

In 1974 he graduated from the pastoral studies program and married his wife, Linda, on June 15 (his parents’ 25th wedding anniversary). Then Decker continued in Baptist Bible Seminary’s MDiv program, graduating in 1978. There he was mentored by Richard Engle, who joined the faculty after ten years of pastoral ministry. “I saw a blend of the Biblical languages, theology, and ministry, which convinced me that if I was serious about Scripture, I had to be serious about the Biblical languages,” Decker said.

After ordination at Osterhout Bible Church, Decker served as pastor of Fellowship Baptist Church, Glen Mills, PA. His life direction changed after a conversation with Jack Jacobs, former head of BBC’s Bible department, who had recently transitioned from a teaching ministry to pastoral ministry. Jacobs saw a young, gifted scholar and offered advice that was exactly opposite of his own path. He suggested that Decker leave the pastorate for additional education and an eventual teaching ministry.

Decker enrolled in the ThM program at Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary and graduated in 1980. During his Detroit

years he ministered with Pastor Tom Swedberg at Calvary Baptist Church, Ecorse, MI. After graduation, he was pastor of Wahjamega Country Church, Caro, Mich., for eight years, then joined the faculty of Calvary Theological Seminary, Kansas City, MO.

Decker discovered that the world of NT studies was shifting—young scholars were changing the way biblical Greek was taught and used. His own education had begun in an era that emphasized definitions, grammatical parts of speech, and word studies. Preachers who were reared in this teaching tradition would engage the Greek text long enough to extract simple devotional insights from words like *agape* and *ecclesia*. But such approaches did not lead to a full understanding of the text's central idea.

So Rod Decker's classroom approach changed as he steered students away from what he called the "golden nuggets" approach (a name popularized by a long-running *Moody Monthly* column, "Golden Nuggets from the Greek New Testament"). After enrolling in Central Baptist Theological Seminary, Decker found a kindred spirit in Ed Glenny, who became Decker's dissertation adviser.

By the time Decker graduated from Central in 1998, he had returned to Baptist Bible Seminary, where he would spend the rest of his teaching career. He wrote prolifically and began to sketch out ideas for a new Greek textbook that would reflect his inductive, reading-based approach to Greek study.

Strongly influenced by the methods of Moisés Silva and D. A. Carson, Decker came to advocate an approach he called *grammatical minimalism*, placing the least weight on the individual grammatical pieces and the greatest weight on statements in their context. But as this transformation was occurring, Decker found himself outflanked by another problem—churches did not necessarily expect their pastor to have competent Greek skills. Seminaries were dropping language courses in favor of more "practical" subjects.

"Rod stands out as an unusually gifted and diligent teacher in a technically challenging discipline," says James Ernest, senior

acquisitions editor at Baker Academic. “At a moment when many seminaries and denominations are giving up on expecting ordinands to become competent in either Hebrew or Greek, Rod’s first-year Greek textbook will be a critically important new tool in the hands of those who refuse to abandon that undertaking.”

Decker’s ideas—“a blend of the Biblical languages, theology, and ministry”—were demonstrated during decades of church ministry. During the Kansas years the Deckers were members of Faith Baptist Church, Lee’s Summit, MO. Returning to PA, they joined Heritage Baptist Church of Clarks Summit, then helped plant North Valley Baptist Church, Mayfield, PA. When Rod’s parents grew older, he purchased a few acres of the family farm and moved back to Tunkhannock, joining Northmoreland Baptist Church, where he taught the adult Sunday School class.

His blog, ntresources.com/blog, became the connecting point for his two worlds of scholarship and church ministry. While it would become one of the most popular websites for beginning Greek students, its origin was less auspicious. Workers were painting the hallway outside Rod’s office and took down his infamous bulletin board. Then the seminary leadership kindly suggested the eclectic *mélange* of papers and notes had grown “aesthetically unpleasing.” So the hallway bulletin board never returned, but Rod started what he called his “bulletin blog” for students of NT Greek.

Decker was a member of the Evangelical Theological Society, where he frequently presented papers at regional and national meetings. He also participated in the Dispensational Study Group, Bible Faculty Leadership Summit, Society for Biblical Languages, and the Council on Dispensational Hermeneutics. His final two books (*Mark: A Handbook on the Greek Text* and *Reading Koine Greek*) will be released this fall.

Rod is survived by his wife, Linda; three adult children, Rob, Rachel, and Ryan; and twelve (going on thirteen) grandchildren.

Enjoying a small surge of energy in May, Rod posted a few articles of encouragement to others who struggled with death and dying.

“In the big picture I can say with all confidence that I am not afraid to die. My Savior has conquered death: ‘Death has been swallowed up in victory’ (1 Corinthians 15:54, NIV, fulfilling the promise of Isaiah 25:7, 8). Although death came into our world through Adam, the sure promise of resurrection comes through Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:20–22).”

“Death is not the end. Although my body will be buried in the earth one day, I will be very much alive.”

The Collected Writings of Dr. Rod Decker

*Dr. Jon Pratt
Vice President of Academics
and Professor of New Testament
Central Baptist Theological Seminary
Plymouth, Minnesota*

NT/KOINE GREEK GRAMMAR

***Reading Koine Greek: An Introduction and Integrated Workbook.*
Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014.**

Summary: “This in-depth yet student-friendly introduction to Koine Greek provides a full grounding in Greek grammar, while starting to build skill in the use of exegetical tools. The approach . . . emphasizes reading Greek for comprehension as opposed to merely translating it. The workbook is integrated into the textbook, enabling students to encounter real examples as they learn each new concept. The book covers not only New Testament Greek but also the wider range of Bible-related Greek (LXX and other Koine texts).”¹

***“The Function of the Imperfect Tense in Mark’s Gospel,”* *The Language of the New Testament: Context, History and Development*, ed. Stanley Porter and Andrew Pitts, 347–64.
Studies in the Language of the New Testament, Brill Linguistic Biblical Studies. Leiden: Brill, 2013.**

Summary: The imperfect tense as used by Mark introduces indirect discourse and records offline information. This finding has implications for translation and exegesis.

¹ <www.amazon.com>

“The Grammar of Christology.” Bible Faculty Summit, July 2010, Maranatha Baptist Bible College, Watertown, WI, July 2010.

Summary: It is important to distinguish between semantics and pragmatics when discussing the usage of tense, particularly when discussing the use of the imperfect tense in Mark.

“Adapting Technology to Teach Koine Greek,” *Studying the Greek New Testament: Papers from the SBL Greek Language and Linguistics Section*. NT Monographs 11. Edited by S. E. Porter and M. B. O’Donnell, 25-42. Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2009.

Summary: This essay seeks to “demonstrate some of the potential benefits in adapting current technology for use in teaching Greek on the one hand, and, on the other hand, to suggest a few of the pitfalls that might be encountered by those who choose to explore such means” (26).

***Koine Greek Reader: Selections from the New Testament, Septuagint, and Early Christian Writers*.** Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007.

Summary: “Providing graded readings in Koine Greek from the New Testament, Septuagint, Apostolic Fathers, and early creeds, this unique text integrates the full range of materials needed by intermediate Greek students. Its many features include four helpful vocabulary lists, numerous references to other resources, assorted translation helps, a review of basic grammar and syntax, and an introduction to BDAG—the standard Greek lexicon.”²

² Ibid.

“Practical Participles.” Unpublished paper, 2006.

Summary: Provides an overview of the form and function of participles in the Greek NT.

“An Introduction to the Middle Voice and Deponent Verbs in Light of Current Study.” Unpublished paper, 2005. “First written for use in an exegesis of Mark class” at BBS.

Summary: This discussion of the middle voice argues that attention should be placed upon the meaning of the middle voice. The question regarding deponency is actually irrelevant.

Revision of Chapter 15: Introduction to Verbs from William Mounce, *Basics of Biblical Greek: Grammar*, 2nd ed. November, 2003.

Summary: “This material replaces key sections of ch. 15 of Mounce (2nd ed.) to provide more technical terminology, to clarify a few key points, and make a few changes where I happen to disagree with Bill.”³

***Temporal Deixis of the Greek Verb in the Gospel of Mark in Light of Verbal Aspect.* Studies in Biblical Greek 10, ed. D. A. Carson. New York: Peter Lang, 2001.**

Summary: “Temporal Deixis of the Greek Verb provides a detailed grammatical study of the Greek verb in the Gospel of Mark focused on the question of temporal reference. Following the theory of verbal aspect proposed by several recent scholars, this study distinguishes between aspect and *Aktionsart*, semantics and pragmatics. It argues that temporal reference is not grammaticalized by the tenses of the Greek

³ <ntresources.com>; Editor’s note: an “*” indicates a quote from Dr. Rod Decker’s blog: ntresources.com.

verb. Instead, *Koine* Greek indicates these relationships through contextual means (temporal deixis). The full temporal range of usage of the verb in Mark's gospel is examined, deictic indicators are catalogued, and selected passages are used to illustrate the ways in which time is indicated. This linguistic study provides a basis for more accurate exegesis of the text of Mark and other similar writings."*

"Verbal Aspect in Recent Debate: Objections to Porter's Non-Temporal View of the Verb." Evangelical Theological Society, Eastern Region Annual Meeting, Philadelphia Biblical University, Langhorne, PA, March 30, 2001.

Summary: This article answers the typical objections raised against Porter's non-temporal view of the verb, concluding that "Of the objections that have been raised against Porter's tenseless view of the Greek verb, none is unanswerable. Many of these arguments do not pose major obstacles to the theory."*

"Syntax of Preposition > *kaiv* Constructions." Unpublished preliminary draft, October, 1998.

Summary: Contains search data from Accordance (v 3.5) regarding the syntactical pattern noted in the title of this article. How significant is the inclusion or omission of the preposition in the second position? Tentative conclusions are provided.

"The Use of εὐθύς ('immediately') in Mark." *Journal of Ministry and Theology* 1, no. 1 (1997): 90-121.

Summary: An excerpt from *Temporal Deixis* in which the various uses of εὐθύς in Mark are explained.

“The Semantic Range of $\nu\upsilon\nu$ in the Gospels as Related to Temporal Deixis.” *Trinity Journal* 16 ns (1995): 187-217.

Summary: A survey of the uses of $\nu\upsilon\nu$ showing that it is a useful deictic indicator in determining temporal implicature in the gospels. “This validates Porter’s point that the tenses may not be assumed to grammaticalize any specific temporal relationship but rather depend on pragmatic factors to indicate temporal implicature” (211).

SEMANTICS, EXEGETICAL METHOD, TRANSLATION

“Markan Idiolect in the Study of the Greek of the New Testament,” in *The Language of the New Testament: Context, History and Development*, ed. Stanley Porter and Andrew Pitts, 43–66. *Studies in the Language of the New Testament*, Brill Linguistic Biblical Studies. Leiden: Brill, 2013.

Summary: A study of Markan idiolect (the linguistic system of an individual speaker) and its implications for grammar and exegesis, NT textual criticism, the synoptic problem, and literary styles of NT Greek authors.

“400 Years of the KJV.” *Journal of Ministry and Theology* 16, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 5–49.

Summary: A study of the history of the KJV, its qualities as a translation, its influence, and ministry considerations involving its use in ministry today.

“Verbal-Plenary Inspiration and Translation.” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 11 (2006): 25-61.

Summary: A study of the terminology used in describing inspiration and translation, showing how this knowledge

relates to the bibliological and methodological issues faced in Bible translation.

“What Does a Translator Have to Offer the Reader?” A Response to Dr. C. John Collins ‘What the Reader Wants and the Translator Can Give: 1 John As a Test Case’. Evangelical Theological Society, Northeastern Regional Meeting, Mid-America Baptist Seminary, Northeast Campus, Schenectady, NY, April 1, 2006.

Summary: This essay takes exception to Collins’s use of “essentially literal” and “dynamic equivalency” language in describing translation technique.

“World Ministry: Translation and Training for the Two-Thirds World.” *Journal of Ministry and Theology* 9, no1 (Spring 2005): 72-89.

Summary: A discussion of Bible translation as it relates to missionary translation and training. There is a need for contemporary translations and revisions, for trained national leaders and translators, and for greater flexibility in translation models.

“World Ministry: The ESV as a Window into Translation and Training for the Two-Thirds World.” Bible Faculty Summit, Piedmont Baptist College, Winston-Salem, NC, July 2004.

Summary: This article discusses translational issues surrounding the ESV as a window to the significant factors involved in providing effective translations in foreign contexts.

La Biblia en Nuestro Idioma. Lima, Peru, SA, Seminario Teologico Bautista, 2004.

Summary: An expanded edition of *The English Bible* in Spanish.

“As the Verb Turns—And Other Grammatical Revolutions Too With an Excursus on Ἐκκλησία.” Bible Faculty Leadership Summit, Maranatha Baptist Bible College, Watertown, WI, July 2003.

Summary: A study of two current areas of Koine Greek language study that merit attention: methodology in studying words and verbal aspect.

***The English Bible.* Kansas City: Calvary Theological Seminary, 1993.**

Summary: A presentation of the theological and practical need for translation of the Bible, including a survey of the history of the English Bible. The conclusion states, “We dare not bury our head in the sand and pretend that we are communicating the Word of God when the people to whom we minister cannot understand the message” (36).

BOOK REVIEWS

“An Evaluation of the 2011 Edition of the New International Version.” *Themelios* 36, no. 3 (2011): 415–56.

Summary: A thorough overview of the NIV11 providing a discussion of the controversy surrounding its publication, the changes that were made from the NIV84 edition, and the gender language used.

“Evaluating the NIV 2011.” *The Baptist Bulletin*, September/October 2011, 18–22.

Summary: A shortened version of the *Themelios* article. “[The NIV11] is an improvement of an otherwise fine translation” (22).

“Reflections on the Fantasy Trilogy *His Dark Materials* by Philip Pullman, Better Known from the Film Title, *The Golden Compass.*” Faculty Forum, Baptist Bible Seminary, February 4, 2008.

Summary: This is a 33-page review of the trilogy, using worldview questions to analyze the books. This review provides a very helpful paradigm for how to think critically about books and movies from a Christian perspective.

“The English Standard Version New Testament: A Review Article,” *Journal of Ministry and Theology* 8, no. 2 (Fall 2004): 5-56.

Summary: This paper provides a detailed overview of the ESV and suggests some improvements for the anticipated revision in 2009. “If the translation team (smooths out some rough spots and inconsistencies), the ESV stands to be a very serviceable translation for many years to come” (31).

Review of *Mastering New Testament Vocabulary through Semantic Domains* by Mark Wilson with Jason Oden. *Journal of Ministry and Theology* 7, no 2 [Fall 2003]: 127-30.

Review of Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, rev. & ed. F. W. Danker, 3d ed. (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 2000). *Journal of Ministry and Theology* 5, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 121-23.

Summary: This is a short review of the most significant Greek lexicon available in English. “Buy BDAG (sell your car if necessary!) and learn to use it. You will not regret your purchase” (122).

“Review Article: Mari Olsen, *A Semantic and Pragmatic Model of Lexical and Grammatical Aspect*. Outstanding Dissertations in Linguistics. New York: Garland, 1997.” *Journal of Ministry and Theology* 2, no. 1 (1998): 110-20.

Summary: The work by Olsen provides a “rigorous linguistic description of both aspect and time.” But it does not intersect

much with the exegetical work required by students of NT Greek.

“Middleton in Miniature” A Synopsis of Part 1, Chapters 1–3 of: Middleton, Thomas Fanshaw, *The Doctrine of the Greek Article Applied to the Criticism and Illustration of the New Testament*, ed. H. J. Rose. New edition. London: Rivington, 1833.” Feb 27, 1995.

Summary: A review of the work Rod calls one of the greatest discussions of the Greek article ever written.

“The Poor Man’s Porter.” October, 1994.

Summary: A 30– page condensation and summarization of *Verbal Aspect in the Greek of the New Testament, with Reference to Tense and Mood*, by Stanley E. Porter (New York: Peter Lang, 1993).

“Review of Raske’s *Grammatical Blueprint Bible*, volumes reviewed: Genesis 1-11; Ruth; Aramaic sections of OT; James; Johannine Epistles.”

Summary: Reviewed with Alan Ingalls and includes this statement: “The following is a joint review that is intended more as a caution than as a recommendation.” And this one: “Raske’s extensive diagramming of OT texts demonstrates finally and conclusively the uselessness of diagramming in Hebrew.” *

“Review of the *Bible Version Debate*, original edition.” *

“Review of *Biblical Greek Language and Lexicography: Essays in Honor of Frederick W. Danker*, ed. Taylor, Burton, and Whittaker. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004. *

“Review of Lars Rydbeck, “On the Question of Linguistic Levels and the Place of the New Testament in the Contemporary Language

Milieu." *In the Language of the New Testament: Classic Essays.* JSNT supp. series #60. Edited by Stanley E. Porter, 191-204. Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991. *

HERMENEUTICS

"The Use of the OT in the Introduction to Mark's Gospel." Bible Faculty Summit, Bob Jones University, July 2008, Greenville, SC.

Summary: Mark's usage of Malachi and Isaiah in the introduction of the gospel demonstrates Mark's goal of pointing to Jesus' identity as Son of God; he does so without any alteration of the meaning or referent of the OT texts.

"A Response to W. Edward Glenny at the Dispensational Study Group at the ETS annual meeting, "Gentiles and the People of God: A Study of Apostolic Hermeneutics and Theology in Acts 15," Washington, DC, November 2006.

Summary: This article provides a summary of agreements and disagreements with Ed Glenny's paper. Rod concludes that he cannot agree with one of Glenny's assertions that the church is part of the renewed Israel.

"Dispensationalism." In *Encyclopedia of the Great Plains*, ed. David J. Wishart. Lincoln, NE: U of Nebraska P, 2004.

Summary: A short description of dispensationalism and the churches and institutions in the Plains which are known for supporting it.

"Twisted Text? The New Testament's Uses of the Old." Faculty Forum, Baptist Bible Seminary, November 6, 2002.

Summary: This article discusses the various approaches suggested in regard to how the NT authors use the OT with an extended discussion of typology.

“Realistic or Historical Narrative?” *Journal of Ministry and Theology* 4. no. 1 (Spring 2000): 52-81.

Summary: A study of the implications and value of literary criticism for those who take a conservative view of the historical truth of the Bible.

***Contemporary Dispensational Theology.* Kansas City: Calvary Theological Seminary, 1992.**

Summary: This book explains the classic, modified, and progressive forms of contemporary dispensationalism.

NT BIBLICAL THEOLOGY AND EXEGESIS

***Mark: A Handbook on the Greek Text*, 2 vols. Baylor Handbook on the Greek New Testament series, ed. Martin Culy. Waco, TX: Baylor U P, 2014.**

Summary: “While the Gospel of Mark has a longstanding reputation as having some of the simplest Greek in the New Testament, Rodney J. Decker proves that even this ‘simple Greek’ is challenging and thought provoking. *Mark 1–8* and *Mark 9–16* entice readers to engage fully with the text and its intricacies. Decker provides helpful guidance regarding Mark’s distinctive use of Greek and the role that verbal aspect plays in the structuring of the text. When read alongside commentaries on Mark, this handbook will encourage a further understanding of Mark’s views on who Jesus was and what Jesus expects of his followers.”⁴

“Mark and Miracle (Mark 16:17-18).” Council on Dispensational Hermeneutics, Baptist Bible Seminary, Clarks Summit, PA, September, 2013.

⁴ <www.amazon.com>

Summary: Assuming a second century date for the long ending of Mark, this article shows that the person who added this material “did not have a good grasp of NT theology.” Among other observations that can be made from this person’s addition, “it appears . . . likely that the miracles of the NT era have already ceased by [the] middle of the second century.”

“A History of Interpretation of ‘That Which Is Perfect’ (1 Cor 13:10).” Council on Dispensational Hermeneutics, Baptist Bible Seminary, Clarks Summit, PA, September 2013.

Summary: Originally written as a doctoral paper in 1994, this paper provides a history of the interpretation of 1 Corinthians 13:10 and argues for the eschatological view rather than the canon or church maturity view often used by cessationists.

“The Church Has a Direct Relationship to the New Covenant.” In *Dispensational Views of the New Covenant: 3 Views*. Edited by Mike Stallard, 194–222. Schaumburg, IL: Regular Baptist Books, 2012.

Summary: The title of the article adequately describes the argument of the essay which deals with Hebrews 7-10 in particular as it relates to this issue.

“The Rehabilitation of Heresy: ‘Misquoting’ Earliest Christianity.” *Journal of Ministry and Theology* 13, no. 1 (2009): 30–63; 13, no. 2 (2009): 56–95.

Summary: This two-part article summarizes the work of Walter Bauer and a modern follower of Bauer (Bart Ehrman) and shows how Bauer’s theory of early Christian origins is flawed. A defense of the historical accuracy of the New Testament is also provided.

"The Miracle of Immanuel." Sermon preached at Baptist Bible Seminary Chapel, December 18, 2007.

Summary: This sermon provides a helpful interpretation of Isaiah 7 and how this passage is used typologically by Matthew in the virgin birth prophecy.

"A King's Ransom: The Cross in Mark's Gospel, Mark 15:22-39." Sermon preached at Baptist Bible Seminary Chapel, March 22, 2005.

Summary: Christ gave his life to set many free.

"Studies in Hebrews." 6-part series, *Journal of Ministry and Theology*. Part 1: "The Original Readers of Hebrews," 3, no. 2 (Fall 1999): 20-49; Part 2: "The Intentional Structure of Hebrews," 4, no. 2 (Fall 2000): 80-105; Part 3: "The Warnings of Hebrews 3-4," 5, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 5-27; Part 4: "The Warning of Hebrews 6," 5, no. 2 (Fall 2001): 26-48; Part 5: "The Exhortations of Hebrews 10:19-25," 6, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 44-62. Part 6: "Trampling the Son of God Under Foot: The Warning of Hebrews 10:26-31," 6, no. 2 (Fall 2002): 30-39.

Summary: This series of articles explores introductory issues related to Hebrews as well as a treatment of several of the warning passages in the book.

***The Dictionary of Premillennial Theology*, ed. Mal Couch. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1997. (3 Articles: "new covenant, theology of"; "new covenant, dispensational views of"; and "people of God.")**

Summary: "New Covenant, theology of" gives a general overview of the OT and NT teaching on the New Covenant. "New Covenant, dispensational views of" discusses the four major dispensational views and supports the idea that the church has a preliminary part in the New Covenant; "People of God" discusses the OT and NT uses of this phrase and states

that the church is included in the people of God on the basis of their participation in the New Covenant.

“Preaching Jesus to Skeptics.” Faculty Forum, Baptist Bible Seminary, 1997.

Summary: An overview of The Jesus Seminar and the response conservative Christians should provide.

“‘Filled with the Spirit’ Ephesians 5:18-20: Preliminary Notes on a Disputed Passage.” Unpublished paper, December, 1996.

Summary: “It would seem that understanding the Lord’s will (17b) is nicely paralleled by being filled with the Spirit (18b), especially if that is to be understood in terms of the Spirit’s ministry using the Word of Christ—the Scriptures in the believer’s life (Col 3)—through which the Lord’s will is known. (The parallel would be much less distinct if a subjective, experiential work of the Spirit were in view, i.e., the traditional Keswick view.)” *

“Philippians 2:5–11: The Kenosis of Christ.” Unpublished Paper, May 1996.

Summary: “The incarnation of Jesus Christ is often described in terms of the “kenosis” (usually translated “to empty”)—a term that comes from the Greek word κενόω in Philippians 2:5-11. This article summarizes the semantics and theology of the text from the perspective of evangelical theology, concluding that Jesus did not “empty” himself of anything. Rather Paul’s statement refers to Jesus—who was and is fully equal with God in nature—veiling his pre-incarnate glory and voluntarily humbling himself by accepting existence in the form of humanity for the purposes of providing salvation.” *

“The New Covenant and the Church.” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 152 (July-September 1995): 290-305; 152 (October-December 1995): 431-56.

Summary: These articles discuss the dispensational views of the understanding of the New Covenant and its relation to the church and argue that the church participates in the blessings of the New Covenant today.

“Anger and Sin.” Unpublished paper, no date.

Summary: A short summary of the interpretive options and issues surrounding Ephesians 4:26.

SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

“Meaning in Suffering.” *The Baptist Bulletin*, July/August 2014, pp. 64-66.

Summary: Rod argues for a theistic view of suffering and reminds us that “Christians rest in the confidence of a loving God Who will one day deliver the world from suffering.”

“Self-Defense and the Christian.” Read at Baptist Bible Seminary Chapel, April 2014.

Summary: This article provides a biblical theology of self-defense and supports the idea that Christians should defend themselves when attacked.

“If You Meet the Undertaker Before You Meet the “Uppertaker”: A Christian View of Death, Dying, and Funerals.” Faculty Forum at Baptist Bible Seminary, March 12, 2007.

Summary: A theology of death, dying, and funerals which serves as a “prequel” to the essay on cremation.

“Is it Better to Bury or to Burn? A Biblical Perspective on Cremation and Christianity in Western Culture.” *Journal of Ministry and Theology*, part 1: 11, no. 1 (2007): 24-48; part 2: 11, no. 2 (2007): 38-76.

Summary: This study reviews the biblical, theological, and cultural aspects of cremation and concludes, “It would appear that the wisest decision most compatible with Christian theology and the most effective in terms of Christian witness is, at least in the West, inhumation” (71).

“Revising the Nature of Biblical Revelation: A Critique of Stanley Grenz’s Proposals,” *Journal of Ministry and Theology* 8, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 5-36.

Summary: This paper stresses the importance of propositional revelation and the danger to Christianity of approaches like Stanley Grenz’s which undermines and dismisses the foundational nature of truth found in the Bible.

“The Pluralistic Predicament.” Bible Faculty Leadership Summit, Faith Baptist Bible College and Seminary, Ankeny, IA, July 26, 2001.

Summary: This study discusses issues related to the modern question of truth and religious pluralism in the postmodern era and draws out the implications of this reality for Christians who embrace the truth of Scripture.

“A Biblical Theology of Ascriptive Glory.” ThM Thesis, Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, 1981.

Summary: The purpose of the thesis is to answer two questions related to “glory.” First, what does the word “glory” mean? Second, how may the believer give glory to God?

PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

“Praying for the Terminally Ill.” Written with Linda Decker. *The Baptist Bulletin*, July/August 2014.

Summary: Rod and Linda provide spiritual insight and practical advice on the power of prayer.

“The Courage to Live—The Courage to Die.” Written with Mark McGinniss. *The Baptist Bulletin*, March/April 2014, 24-26.

Summary: Both men discuss the difficult physical situations God has appointed for them. Both express hope in the promises of God to help them endure to the end.

“Preaching and the Biblical Languages: Garnish or Entrée? Mellon or Mantra?” Council on Dispensational Hermeneutics, College of Biblical Studies, Houston, TX, September 2012.

Summary: A proper use of biblical languages is necessary in preaching.

“Respecting the Text.” Empire State Fellowship of Regular Baptist Churches, November 6, 2003, First Baptist Church, Schenevus, NY, November, 6, 2003.

Summary: The proper hermeneutical approach is crucial for accurate and effective preaching ministry.

“Communicating the Text in the Postmodern Ethos of Cyberspace: Cautions Regarding the Technology and the Text.” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 5 (Fall 2000): 45-70.

Summary: This article examines the effects of technology on the individual and in regard to worship in the church. And it

provides several suggestions regarding the communication of God's Word in the Information Age.

“It is Because of Him’: 1 Corinthians 1:17-2:5.” Sermon preached at Baptist Bible Seminary chapel, Fall 1996.

Summary: Discusses the importance of a proper approach to ministry in a postmodern world.

***The Expositor’s Toolbox.* Co-edited with James Raiford. Kansas City, MO: Calvary Theological Seminary, 1992.**

Summary: A survey of books on commentaries, theology, and preaching deemed essential for expositors of the Word.

“Polity and the Elder Issue.” *Grace Theological Journal* 9 (1988): 257-78.

Summary: “Any conclusions regarding the function of elders in local churches must take into consideration church polity. Several lines of reasoning suggest that final ecclesiastical authority is vested in local congregations. First, apostolic authority in church matters did not extend beyond the original apostles. Second, several theological principles indicate the importance of every believer in the decision making process of a local congregation. Also, there are several NT examples of churches making decisions corporately. Finally, NT instruction regarding church polity does not contradict these lines of reasoning” (257).

Has the Modern State of Israel Solved the Jewish Question?

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INTRODUCTION

Sometimes, the obvious truth needs to be said out loud once again. Political and theological shackles sometimes cloud one's observations in a direction that is untenable and at times shocking. With this in mind, this article seeks to highlight the details of the "New Anti-Semitism" primarily for conservative, Bible-believing Christians who need to be aware of these developments. The truth lies before the world in almost every newspaper issue as the current political nation of Israel is attacked from all sides. Revealing the facts honors those who are persecuted.

PERSPECTIVES ON THE JEWISH QUESTION

Theodore Herzl and the Modern Zionist Movement

Just what is the "Jewish Question"? In 1896 Theodore Herzl, the father of modern Zionism, couched the definition in terms of persecution:

The Jewish question still exists. It would be foolish to deny it. It is a remnant of the Middle Ages which civilized nations do not even yet seem able to shake off, try as they will. They certainly showed a generous desire to do so when they emancipated us. The Jewish question exists wherever Jews live in perceptible numbers. Where it does not exist, it is carried by Jews in the course of their migrations. We naturally move to those places where we are not

persecuted, and there our presence produces persecution. This is the case in every country, and will remain so, even in those highly civilized—for instance, France—until the Jewish question finds a solution on a political basis. The unfortunate Jews are now carrying the seeds of Anti-Semitism into England; they have already introduced it into America.¹

Later Herzl goes on to describe the conundrum in even starker terms:

Everything tends, in fact, to one and the same conclusion, which is clearly enunciated in that classic Berlin phrase: “Judens Raus” (Out with the Jews!)

[S]hall [sic] now put the Question in the briefest possible form: Are we to ‘get out’ now and where to?

Or, may we yet remain? And, how long?”²

Herzl’s analysis revolves around the dilemma of assimilation. If Jews kept their unique customs and emphasized their ethnic identity, they were persecuted. If Jews tried to assimilate to the cultures around them, they were persecuted. What way existed to move out of the circle of discrimination? In essence, from this point of view, the Jewish Question is primarily anti-Semitism.

Herzl’s proposed solution is that Jews must have their own political state and national existence. He naively believed this would end most, if not all, anti-Semitism: “But the Jews, once settled in their own State, would probably have no more enemies. As for those who remain behind, since prosperity enfeebles and

¹ Theodore Herzl, *Der Judenstaat (The Jewish State)*, trans. Sylvie D’Avigdor (n.p.: American Zionist Emergency Council, 1946), 5. Herzl’s original publication was in German in 1896. Its subtitle was “Proposal of a Modern Solution for the Jewish Question.”

² *Ibid.*, 10.

causes them to diminish, they would soon disappear altogether.”³ A cursory look at the current geo-political state of affairs in the Middle East shows glaringly that these early hopes of the modern Zionist movement have not been realized.

Adolph Hitler and the Final Solution

Hitler’s Nazi Germany remains in Western culture, and perhaps the whole world, the premier example of governmental brutality and genocide. The reputation is overwhelmingly deserved so that Hitler becomes the “whipping boy” or “by-word” that is invoked when various proponents want to put down their enemies through a guilt-by-association argument. Relative to the Jews in Europe, Hitler’s view is the exact opposite of what Herzl understands. Herzl looked at what others were doing to Jews. Hitler looked at what he thought Jews were doing to the nations in general and to Germany in particular. In perhaps the most explicit reference to the “Jewish Problem,” Hitler addresses the Jewish Question in a political speech in January 1939:

And one other thing I wish to say on this day which perhaps is memorable not only for us Germans: In my life I have often been a prophet, and most of the time I have been laughed at. During the period of my struggle for power, it was in the first instance the Jewish people that received with laughter my prophecies that someday I would take over the leadership of the state and thereby of the whole people, and that I would among other things solve also the *Jewish problem*. I believe that in the meantime that hyenous laughter of the Jews of Germany has been smothered in their throats. Today I want to be a prophet once more: If international-finance Jewry inside and outside of Europe should succeed once more in plunging nations into another world war, the consequence will not be the Bolshevization of the earth and thereby the victory

³ Ibid., 47. To be fair to Herzl, he goes on to say that Jews in their own nation would continue to have enemies like all nations, but it would be impossible after that to scatter the Jews all over the world. In essence, he viewed this as an end to the “wandering Jew” and the end of the Jew himself carrying persecution with him as was stated above.

of Jewry, but the annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe (emphasis added).⁴

Thus, Hitler believed the essence of the Jewish problem was Jewish influence over the finances of the world. Beyond that he saw Jewish influence and leadership in the rise of communism. The answer to this “Jewish Problem” was clear—the final solution could only be found in the destruction of the Jewish people.

One cannot relegate such thinking by Hitler to bombastic political jargon gearing up the nation for war in 1939. In *Mein Kampf* (1925), the future Führer sets his eyes on the extermination of the Jewish people at the outset. He comments,

The folkish state, a general picture of which I have attempted to draw in broad outlines, will not be realized by the mere knowledge of what is necessary to this state. It is not enough to know how a folkish state should look. Far more important is the program for its creation. We may not expect the present parties, which after all are primarily beneficiaries of the present state, to arrive of their own accord at a change of orientation and of their own free will to modify their present attitude. What makes this all the more impossible is that their real leading elements are always Jews and only Jews. And the development we are going through today, if continued unobstructed, would fulfill the Jewish prophecy—the Jew would really devour the peoples of the earth, would become their master.⁵

It is not clear whether Hitler’s understanding of Jewish prophecy is talking about Bible passages or *The Protocols of the*

⁴ Adolf Hitler, Speech on January 30, 1939; cited in Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the Jews* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1961), 257. For analysis of how this speech by Hitler was received by other Nazi leaders, see Michael Burleigh, *The Third Reich: A New History* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000), 339-42.

⁵ Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1971), 452.

Elders of Zion.⁶ Either way he sees the Jews as attempting to force their will upon the peoples of the world. His solution to this problem is to eliminate them. He goes on to add, “For it will take a struggle, in view of the fact that the first task is not creation of a folkish state conception, but above all elimination of the existing Jewish one.”⁷

Hitler’s views never diminished over time. The day before his suicide in his Berlin bunker, he wrote a final political testament to his belief, a kind of letter left for the German people:

It is untrue that I or anyone else in Germany wanted the war in 1939. It was desired and instigated exclusively by those international statesmen who were either of Jewish descent or worked for Jewish interests....Centuries will pass away, but out of the ruins of our towns and monuments the hatred against those finally responsible, whom we have to thank for everything, international Jewry and its helpers, will grow....

Moreover, I do not wish to fall into the hands of the enemy who requires a new spectacle organized by the Jews for the amusement of their hysterical masses.

I have decided therefore to remain in Berlin and there of my own free will to choose death at the moment when I believe the position of the Führer and Chancellor itself can no longer be held.⁸

To the bitter end, Hitler fanatically believed against all evidence that the Jewish Question was the problem that the Jews caused the world through their domination of it. Thus his struggle was against the Jews. Herzl would have been mystified having witnessed the massive persecution of the Jews in his day; he saw the problem as the refusal of other peoples to respect the

⁶ Ibid., 307-308. Hitler clearly acknowledges his belief that the *Protocols of the Elders [Wise Men] of Zion* is an accurate document.

⁷ Ibid., 453.

⁸ Adolf Hitler, “Political Testament,” April 29, 1945; cited in Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the Jews* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1961), 635.

Jews as equal people. In all of this, the thoughtful Christian with his Bible in his hand might suspect the satanic designer behind the curtain.

David Baron

Although Herzl's position is to be respected in spite of its naiveté and Hitler's approach is to be despised for its utter lack of human decency, the presentation of David Baron strikes a chord of biblical delight. Baron was a Jew converted to the Christian faith who was also a contemporary of Herzl. At least six years before Herzl writes *The Jewish State*, Baron speaks at the summer Bible conferences common at Northfield, Massachusetts, in 1890.⁹ In response to a request he writes down one of his messages, which is published in book form under the title *The Jewish Problem: Its Solution*.¹⁰

For Baron the "Jewish Question" is the sad condition of the Jews currently scattered among the Gentile nations (the Diaspora). Remember that there is no national Israel when his book was published. However, at the outset of the first chapter entitled "The Jewish Problem," Baron frames the question in terms of the lack of a national restoration which has been predicted in Scripture. In dealing with hermeneutics, he correctly rejects interpretations of this restoration of Israel that either affirm the church takes over the promises in an allegorical or spiritualized way or that the restoration simply means the future

⁹ The Northfield Conferences had as a focal point the personality of D. L. Moody when he was alive. Moody is buried in Northfield. The conferences appear to have begun in the 1880s. Many personalities from the Niagara Bible Conference were frequent speakers. Many of the speakers in their beliefs would be consistent with the theological position known today as dispensationalism.

¹⁰ David Baron, *The Jewish Problem: Its Solution, or, Israel's Present and Future* (London: Morgan & Scott, n.d.). In later editions, Baron apparently adds some statements about the young and growing Zionist movement, although he does not specifically name Herzl.

coming of the Jews into the church.¹¹ The only accurate conclusion that is possible is that Israel will yet be restored to its land; the Jews will have a homeland. The God who scattered the nation will bring them back to the land, and they shall have their nation again (Jer 31:7-10).

The solution for Baron is a biblical resolution. The “Jewish Problem” of scattered Jews will be ended when the Messiah Jesus returns to set up his kingdom. The “iron yoke of Gentile oppression was not to last forever.”¹² There is to be a future and final gathering or re-gathering of the Jews to their homeland in Palestine. With carefully crafted wording, Baron notes what many sensationalists have unfortunately left unsaid since the formation of the modern state of Israel in 1948: “Now, supposing that since these inspired announcements by Amos and Jeremiah there had already taken place a hundred dispersions and a hundred restorations, we would still be justified in believing in yet another gathering, after which there should be no more scattering.”¹³ Thus, while the ongoing nature of Israel’s possession of the land is a question mark, when Messiah returns, the ultimate national restoration will begin under His watchful care. To be sure, Baron acknowledges in much detail that the Jews will experience the greatest of persecutions when the tribulation period comes.¹⁴ Nonetheless, the ultimate end of the converted nation is secure as promised by God, who will solve the Jewish question of history.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 12ff.

¹² *Ibid.*, 19.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 25. Baron is dealing with Jeremiah 31:31-34 and Amos 9:14-15 in this quotation. In the entire section of the book he also adds other passages such as Ezekiel 37:24-28.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 26-31.

The Unloving Scourge of Anti-Semitism in Christendom

What is unfailingly true is that the Jews scattered throughout the world since the earliest days of the church have suffered and continue to suffer great persecution from those who dislike them including professing Christians. The hateful focus on the Jews at times has a surreal quality. Hence, the inclusion of Christians in the list of persecutors is unsettling for those who accept the concept of Christian love taught by Jesus and the future of national Israel as given by the prophets and the apostles.

Early Church

As early as Ignatius, the notion of the Jews as the “Christ-killers” was presented. Rausch reports that on “his way to martyrdom by the Romans in the early second century, Ignatius, the famed Bishop of Antioch, claimed that Satan ‘fights along with the Jews to a denial of the cross’ and ‘if any one celebrates the Passover along with the Jews, or receives emblems of their feast, he is a partaker with those that killed the Lord and His apostles.’”¹⁵ Ambrose, influencer of Augustine, complains about the building of a synagogue under government sponsorship. He shockingly admits, “I declare that I set fire to the synagogue, or at least that I ordered those who did it, that there might not be a place where Christ was denied.”¹⁶

¹⁵ David A. Rausch, *Building Bridges* (Chicago: Moody, 1988), 113. The two citations from Ignatius can be found at Ignatius, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, IV & XIV, respectively. In the sections to follow on the history of Christian anti-Semitism, the outline of Rausch will largely be followed.

¹⁶ Ambrose, *Letters*, XL.8. See Ambrose of Milan, “The Letters of St. Ambrose,” in *St. Ambrose: Select Works and Letters*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. H. de Romestin, E. de Romestin, and H. T. F. Duckworth, vol. 10, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1896), 441. See also the comments by David

In the early church, perhaps the most heinous anti-Semitic comments are found in the sermons of John Chrysostom. In a series of sermons entitled *Eight Orations Against Judaizing Christians* (387-388), the preacher strongly exhorts his congregation with anti-Jewish rhetoric:

What is this disease? The festivals of the pitiful and miserable Jews are soon to march upon us one after the other and in quick succession: the feast of Trumpets, the feast of Tabernacles, the fasts. There are many in our ranks who say they think as we do. Yet some of these are going to watch the festivals and others will join the Jews in keeping their feasts and observing their fasts. I wish to drive this perverse custom from the Church right now But now that the Jewish festivals are close by and at the very door, if I should fail to cure those who are sick with the Judaizing disease. I am afraid that, because of their ill-suited association and deep ignorance, some Christians may partake in the Jews' transgressions; once they have done so, I fear my homilies on these transgressions will be in vain. For if they hear no word from me today, they will then join the Jews in their fasts; once they have committed this sin it will be useless for me to apply the remedy.¹⁷

In even stronger language, Chrysostom goes on to add: "But the synagogue is not only a brothel and a theater; it also is a den of robbers and a lodging for wild beasts...But when God forsakes a people, what hope of salvation is left? When God forsakes a place, that place becomes the dwelling of demons."¹⁸ It is hard to imagine any more antagonistic language. While describing the Jews and their religious practices in the most degrading ways, the famous preacher concludes they have no hope and are seemingly

Rausch, *Building Bridges*, 118. Ambrose ministered in the late fourth century.

¹⁷ John Chrysostom, *Eight Orations Against Judaizing Christians*, Homily 1.I.5.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.III.1.

controlled by Satan. The words of those such as Ignatius, Ambrose, and Chrysostom could be multiplied many times over in the Christian literature of the past.

Middle Ages

Rausch makes the astonishing (but generally accurate) claim, “So horrid was the persecution by Christian Byzantines that the Jewish communities welcomed the rise of Islam in the seventh century and its rapid victories over Christian lands.”¹⁹ While this may be overstatement to some degree, the reality is a far cry from the current twenty-first century dilemma that the Jews face with radical Islam as their greatest enemy.

If the spirit of the early Middle Ages was dangerous to Jews, the later Middle Ages only increases in its anti-Semitic intensity. In fourteenth-century Catholic Spain

...Ash Wednesday of 1391 saw the bloody sacking of the Jewish section of Seville, despite the efforts of the civil authorities to quell the berserk mob. An orgy of bloodletting and destruction spread like wildfire over the whole of Spain, presenting Jews—despite the civil power—with the cruel alternative of baptism or death. In many towns the whole community was exterminated, their quarter was everywhere left in ashes, and before the wave had spent itself as many as fifty thousand were dead.²⁰

Jews were exiled from England (1290), France (1306 & 1394), and Germany during this era.²¹

Rausch writes, “When the Black Death epidemic occurred from approximately 1348-1351, the Jewish community was blamed for the plague, and was massacred and evicted in many

¹⁹ Rausch, *Building Bridges*, 121-22.

²⁰ Frederick M. Schweitzer, *A History of the Jews Since the First Century A.D.* (New York: Macmillan, 1971), 105.

²¹ Rausch, *Building Bridges*, 125.

European towns and villages. Hatred of the Jew permeated medieval society.”²² Schweitzer gives perhaps the saddest commentary on such events in a professing Christian culture from a Catholic point of view when he says that “we are presented with the paradox of a theology that is right and a history that is wrong.”²³

Reformation

If the evangelical Christian expects the history of the Reformation to deliver him from the accounts of such atrocities to the Jews, he will be greatly disappointed. The example of Luther, whom even the Nazis quoted with appreciation from time to time,²⁴ serves as a warning to all Christians. Luther initially revolted against the history of medieval persecution of the Jews. He wrote a pamphlet entitled *That Jesus Christ was Born a Jew* (1523) in which Luther presented a sympathetic posture toward the Jews. However, when the Jews continued to reject the Protestant gospel, Luther eventually turned on them twenty years later. In a scathing and ungodly work of hate, *On the Jews and Their Lies* (1543), Luther appears to be as clear as Hitler:

- Therefore be on your guard against the Jews, knowing that wherever they have their synagogues, nothing is found but a den of devils in which sheer selfglory, conceit, lies, blasphemy, and defaming of God and men are practiced most maliciously and vehemingly on them.
- Moreover, they are nothing but thieves and robbers who daily eat no morsel and wear no thread of clothing which they have not stolen and pilfered from us by means of their accursed usury.

²² Ibid., 125-26.

²³ Schweitzer, *History of the Jews*, 13.

²⁴ Rausch notes that Julius Streicher, one of Hitler’s henchmen, cited Luther in his defense at the Nuremberg trials (*Building Bridges*, 135).

- Accordingly, it must and dare not be considered a trifling matter but a most serious one to seek counsel against this and to save our souls from the Jews, that is, from the devil and from eternal death.

- First to set fire to their synagogues or schools and to bury and cover with dirt whatever will not burn, so that no man will ever again see a stone or cinder of them. This is to be done in honor of our Lord and of Christendom, so that God might see that we are Christians, and do not condone or knowingly tolerate such public lying, cursing, and blaspheming of his Son and of his Christians.

- Second, I advise that their houses also be razed and destroyed. For they pursue in them the same aims as in their synagogues. Instead they might be lodged under a roof or in a barn, like the gypsies.²⁵

The atrocities that have occurred because of these statements would no doubt amaze the great Reformer of Germany today.

Post-Reformation

The eighteenth-century Enlightenment brought hope to the Jews as the idea of emancipation of the Jews grew. Though negative in many ways, the French Revolution of 1789 was a positive symbol to the Jews (since it cast off Catholicism in France) and Napoleon later became a kind of hero to the Jews since his victories throughout Continental Europe led to better conditions for the Jews.²⁶

However, the fragile optimism was easily displaced. In 1791 the Pale of Settlement began for Imperial Russia. In this arrangement, Jews were limited as to where they could live. Beginning around that time, pogroms or uprisings against Jews

²⁵ This list of excerpts can be found at the Jewish Virtual Library, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/anti-semitism/Luther_on_Jews.html> (accessed 18 March 2014).

²⁶ Abram L. Sachar, *A History of the Jews* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968), 278-84.

occurred in Odessa, Kiev, Warsaw, Bagdad, Damascus, Wales, and Argentina.²⁷ If the Enlightenment was a success in the world, this massive persecution of Jews (occurring before Hitler came on the scene, but culminating in the Holocaust) cast doubt on how to define that success. It was certainly not from the Jewish point of view. Persecution was the norm. It was this culture in which Herzl pondered the Jewish Question and gave as his answer the cause of Zionism.

THE NEW ANTI-SEMITISM

If we are to measure the success of Zionism's attempt to end anti-Semitism, we must examine at least two things: (1) the bridge or transition document of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*; and (2) the current state of anti-Semitism.

The Protocols of the Elders of Zion

Brooks calls this document the "Bible of Anti-Semitism."²⁸

He goes on to describe the problem with the Protocols in this way: "After being thoroughly discredited as a base forgery and for some years being considered a dead issue, the rise of the Nazis to power in Germany caused these strange documents again to be circulated as evidence that the Jews of the world were plotting the destruction of Gentile civilization."²⁹ This text purported to be a Russian writing by one Serge Nilus around the turn of the twentieth century.³⁰ Rausch described the significance of *The Protocols* in this way:

²⁷ Ibid., 309-22.

²⁸ Keith L. Brooks, *The Jews and the Passion for Palestine in the Light of Prophecy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1937), 51.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ The actual publishing date seems difficult to determine as sources conflict. Ariel said *The Protocols* were published in Russia in 1903, but probably originated in the 1890s (Yaakov S. Ariel, "American

The *Protocols* are of Russian origin and are the alleged secret proceedings of a group of Jews plotting to destroy Christianity, challenge civil government and disrupt the international economy in an effort to control the world. This document added to the anti-Semitism prevalent in the world, and when Henry Ford's *Dearborn Independent* published excerpts of the *Protocols*, it gave anti-Semites in America another torch in their parade of anti-Jewish propaganda.³¹

Thus, the documents are generally conceded to be a convenient fiction by serious-minded scholars.

Of particular note is the observation that anti-Semites are still using the *Protocols* to attack Jews. Such persecution using the *Protocols* as rhetoric most often appears to be aimed at national Israel more than individual Jews. For example, Article 32 of the Charter of the Islamic Resistance Movement (known popularly as HAMAS) states

The Islamic Resistance Movement calls upon the Arab and Islamic people to work seriously and constructively in order not to allow that horrible plan to be carried out and to educate the masses of the dangers of withdrawal from the struggle with Zionism. Today it's Palestine and tomorrow it will be another country, and then another; the Zionist plan has no bounds, and after Palestine they

Premillennialism and its Attitudes Towards the Jewish People, Judaism and Zionism, 1875-1925," [Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1986], 262). Note that these details were left out of the publication of Ariel's dissertation in the book form (*On Behalf of Israel*, 111). Timothy Weber dated the document's Russian origin as 1901 (*Living in the Shadow of the Second Coming: American Premillennialism 1875-1925* [New York: Oxford UP, 1979], 185). Gaebelein himself dated *The Protocols of Zion* as 1905 ("Current Events and Signs of the Times," *Our Hope* 27 [November 1920]: 297). Information along with some of the wording for this section of the paper is taken from Michael D. Stallard, *The Twentieth-Century Dispensationalism of Arno C. Gaebelein* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 2001), 37-38.

³¹ David Rausch, *Arno C. Gaebelein 1861-1945: Irenic Fundamentalist and Scholar* (New York: Edwin Mellen, Press, 1983), 130-31.

wish to expand from the Nile River to the Euphrates. When they totally occupy it they will look towards another, and such is their plan in the "Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion." Their present is the best witness on what is said.³²

The focus on Zionism is clear. The truth of the Protocols is assumed. The current activity of national Israel is thought to be militaristic. Such a conclusion is laughable. National Israel has shown great restraint and has given the Sinai back to Egypt numerous times. Hence, the irrational nature of anti-Semitism aimed at Israel should be obvious.

The Current State of Anti-Semitism

Anti-Semitism has not decreased in the world because of the creation of the modern state of Israel. Instead, the river of persecution has continued with increase and some nationalistic twists. Zuckerman notes that the "new anti-Semitism is not exclusively hostile to this or that individual Jew, or to Judaism. It is directed primarily against the Jewish collective, the modern State of Israel."³³

Formally, this truth was demonstrated by United Nations General Assembly Resolution 3379 on November 10, 1975.³⁴ This resolution clearly associates racism with Zionism. It references

³² "The Charter of the Islamic Resistance Movement (HAMAS) of Palestine," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 22 (Summer 1993): 132, <<http://www.palestine-studies.org/files/pdf/jps/1734.pdf>> (accessed 19 March 2014).

³³ Mortimer B. Zuckerman, "The New Anti-Semitism: Graffiti on the Walls of History," *UN Chronicle* 34, no. 4 (2004): 36.

³⁴ United Nations General Assembly Resolution 3379, November 10, 1975; Thirtieth Session; 83-84, <http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/3379%28XXX%29&Lang=E&Area=RESOLUTION> (accessed 19 March 2014).

the “unholy alliance between South African racism and Zionism.” The nations of the world should work to end “colonialism, neo-colonialism, foreign occupation, zionism, *apartheid*, and racial discrimination in all its forms.” The resolution also refers to the “racist régime in occupied Palestine” and condemns Zionism “as a threat to world peace.” Finally, this General Assembly Resolution “[d]etermines that zionism is a form of racism and racial discrimination.” One of the implications of such a statement is that dispensationalists, who are Christian Zionists who believe Israel has a right to the land, would be considered racists. This evil resolution was happily overturned by the General Assembly in December 1991.

The unending and frustrating Arab-Israeli conflict, which began in earnest between the two World Wars and explodes dangerously when Israel declares independence in 1948, highlights the fact that most Arab leaders have no interest in making permanent peace with Israel.³⁵ Over and over, Israel has faced threats. The nation was attacked the day after declaring independence. There is the scuffle with Egypt in 1956. The Six-Day War in 1967 gave the miracle of Israel’s existence when faced with overwhelming numbers in the opposition. Israeli athletes were murdered by Palestinians at the Munich Olympics in 1972. Egypt and Syria attacked Israel in the Yom Kippur War in 1973. Attempted hijackings against Israeli citizens culminated in the fascinating rescue at Entebbe in Uganda (1976). The First Lebanon War in 1982 was Israel’s response to the Palestinians who had found refuge in Lebanon and attacked Israel from that safe haven. More recently the Intifada (uprising) of 2000-2005 saw the increase of suicide bombers and other nonconventional approaches against Israel. During all of these activities of war there are peace treaties that are signed that apparently do not have any meaning. The current Iranian threat and the PLO’s refusal to acknowledge Israel’s right to exist show that a national

³⁵ A standard work on the Arab-Israeli conflict from Israel’s point of view is by the sixth president of Israel, Chaim Herzog, *The Arab-Israeli Wars: War and Peace in the Middle East from the War of Independence through Lebanon* (New York: Vintage Books, 1984).

form of anti-Semitism has become the new norm for such hateful persecution of the Jews. It is Israeli military strength (with help from the United States) that has prevented her destruction.

Zuckerman, referencing the Israeli literary giant Amos Oz, shows the shift that has taken place based upon graffiti found in Europe:

The insight of Amos Oz, a liberal Israeli writer, is pertinent. He is haunted, he said, by the observation that before the Holocaust European graffiti read, "Jews to Palestine," only to be transformed in modern times into "Jews out of Palestine." The message to Jews, Oz said, is simple: "Don't be here, and don't be there. That is, don't be."³⁶

The change in the form of anti-Semitism could not be stated more strongly. While it is impossible to suggest there is no persecution of Jews elsewhere in the world, the record shows that the nation of Israel in Palestine has become the new locus for anti-Semitic rhetoric and violence.

CONCLUSION

The modern state of Israel has not solved the Jewish Question. The summary given above shows that Herzl's dream was against all hope. Is there any expectation of an elimination of anti-Semitism in the foreseeable future? Biblical teaching shows that Satan will severely persecute Jews during the last half of the tribulation period (Rev 12); it is highly unlikely that the world will self-correct on the matter. The dispensational Gaebelein, after making a trip to Germany in 1937, returned with stern warnings of the coming holocaust. He was able to believe in the severity of Hitler's hatred largely because he believed in a coming tribulation period as predicted in the Bible, a time of Jacob's trouble which would engulf a re-gathered Israel.³⁷ Gaebelein's

³⁶ Zuckerman, "The New Anti-Semitism," 36. The reference by Amos Oz is from *How to Cure a Fanatic* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2010).

³⁷ See Stallard, *Gaebelein*, 47-49.

perspective on the Jewish Question was closer to the biblical Baron than to the secular Herzl and was far removed from the pagan Hitler. In outlining the ultimate hope for Israel and the solving of the scattered Jews who suffered, he bypassed the Zionist hope for a home in Palestine in the present evil age. Herzl had argued for a political solution. Instead, Gaebelein offers a spiritual answer, God's Final Solution:

There is but one answer to all these questions concerning the promised hope for Israel, for the nations of the earth and for all creation. That answer is:

The Lord Jesus Christ.

He alone is the only answer, the completest answer, the never-failing answer to all our questions. But what do we mean when we give His ever blessed and adorable Name, the Name above every other name, as the only answer? We do not mean that the answer is a practical application of the principles of righteousness declared by the infallible teacher in the sermon on the mount. We do not mean the practice of what has been termed the golden rule. We do not mean a leadership of Jesus. We do not mean that these questions will be answered by future spiritual revivals, nor do we mean that a blasted Western civilization, misnamed Christian, will influence heathen nations to accept Christianity and turn to God from their idols. The sorrowful fact is that what military Christendom has done and is doing, and the shameful failures of Western civilization, has been a curse to heathen nations.

What we mean, the only answer, the completest and never-failing answer to all our questions, is

The Glorious Reappearing of the Lord Jesus Christ

This future event will answer every question, solve every problem which humanity faces today, and all the existing chaotic conditions, and bring about that golden age of which heathen poets dreamed, which the Bible promises is in store for the earth.³⁸

³⁸ Arno C. Gaebelein, *Hope of the Ages* (New York: Publication Office "Our Hope," 1938), 71-72. To defer ultimate hope to the second coming

of Christ is not to diminish personal responsibility of Christians today in dealing with anti-Semitism. There are some general avenues of response: (1) Christians should not practice anti-Semitism or any form of racist actions; (2) Churches should include a proclamation opposing anti-Semitism in the church's doctrinal statement; and (3) Christians should generally be pro-Israel without being anti-Arab or "Israel, right or wrong."

Israel: Her Past, Present, and Future in Romans 9–11

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INTRODUCTION

The general theme of the book of Romans is the revelation of the righteousness of God (Rom 1:17). All men, both Jews and Gentiles, stand in need of divine righteousness. All are morally guilty before the just God of the universe because all are under sin—under its penalty, power, and effects (Rom 3:9–19). All manifest their enslavement to sin by their rejection of truth that God has revealed in the created world, in the image of God within man, and in the Holy Scriptures (Rom 1:18–3:20).

All men, both Jews and Gentiles, cannot do anything to merit the righteousness of God. Rather, all must admit their moral guilt and condemned state before God. When that confession occurs, then sinners are in a position to hear the good news—the gospel, wherein Christ satisfied the righteous demands of God for sin through his redemptive death on the cross and his victorious resurrection from the dead (Rom 1:16; 3:21–31). Any person, either Jew or Gentile, can receive the righteousness of God by faith in Jesus Christ. After a believing sinner has received the righteousness of God, he is justified, or declared to be righteous by God (Rom 3:21–5:21).

In the first eight chapters of Romans, the Jewish apostle, Paul, argued that believing sinners can trust God through Jesus Christ for deliverance from the penalty of sin (justification), for victory over the power of the sinful disposition (sanctification), and for ultimate liberation from the effects of sin demonstrated in human's mortal, corruptible bodies (glorification).

In the next three chapters (Romans 9–11), Paul relates the redemptive program of God for believers to his covenant promises to the nation of Israel. The main issue is this question: How can believers trust God to complete his redemptive plan for them when he has not yet finished his covenant program for Israel? Can there be an eventual loss of salvation through believers' personal moral failure and unbelief? Has Israel lost its promised future?

"The gifts and calling of God are without repentance" (Rom 11:29 KJV). No genuine believer will ever lose the divine gift of salvation and righteousness received by faith in Christ. Nothing will ever sever him from "the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 8:38–39). In like manner, God will complete every unconditional promise to the real Israel because Israel is "beloved for the fathers' sakes" (Rom 11:28). Eternal security for the believer is inseparably connected to the assured future of Israel. To deny one truth is to deny the other; to affirm one means to affirm the other.

PART 1—ISRAEL: BLESSED YET UNSAVED (Romans 9:1–5)

Concern for Israel's Salvation (9:1–3)

Paul was an Israelite (Rom 11:1; Phil 3:5). He loved his people, Israel. But he also had a heavy emotional and spiritual burden for the nation. He shared his concern: "I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, by kinsmen according to the flesh" (Rom 9:2–3). Paul believed he was in a right relationship with God before he placed his trust in Jesus Christ as his Messiah and Savior, but he was mistaken. By the grace of God, he was convicted of his unbelief and experienced spiritual conversion.

He knew the great majority of the Jewish people were like he was before his genuine birth into the family of God. He knew the Jewish people were trying to satisfy the righteous demands of

God through their own self-righteous efforts. They were religiously zealous, but apart from biblical understanding (Rom 10:23). Thus, Paul prayed that Israel might be saved (Rom 10:1).

In fact, Paul asserted that he would be willing to spend eternity in hell if his loss of salvation would result in the total salvation of Israel. Paul's wish was sincere, yet hypothetical. No believer can lose his righteous standing before God. And no believer can bear the eternal condemnation of another person, and certainly not of an entire nation. Paul's disclosure, however, revealed his passionate love for his people.

To affirm the authenticity of his concern, Paul gave three exclamations for his truthfulness: (1) "I say the truth in Christ"; (2) "I lie not"; (3) "my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit" (9:1). Paul knew that his readers would have difficulty accepting his spiritual concern for Israel. He used the best language possible to manifest that his inner feelings were completely free of deceit and falsehood.

The Privileges of Israel (Rom 9:4–5)

Israel is a distinctive nation. God gave them special advantages. Paul listed nine.

First, the people are known as Israelites (Rom 9:4). They take their name from one of the three patriarchs, namely Jacob. God changed the name of Jacob to Israel (Genesis 32:28). Thus, the name was divinely given. The names of the twelve sons of Jacob thus became the names for the twelve tribes of Israel.

Second, Israel possesses the adoption (Rom 9:4). God told Moses to return to Egypt and to say before Pharaoh: "Thus saith the LORD, Israel is my son, even my firstborn" (Exod 4:22). Adoption is a legal term. God legally put Israel into the privilege of covenant sonship. As the legal firstborn son among the nations of the earth, Israel was to serve as the theocratic nation through whom God would administer his royal dominion over all of the nations.

Third, Israel had the glory (Rom 9:4). This term refers to the manifested presence of God. He revealed his local presence to

Israel by the pillar of a cloud during the day and a pillar of fire during the night (Exod 13:21–22; 16:10). The two pillars led Israel during their wilderness wanderings. Later, the glory of the Lord filled Solomon’s temple (1 Kgs 8:11).

Fourth, God established unconditional covenants with Israel (Rom 9:4). God said to Abraham: “And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed” (Gen 12:2–3). The Abrahamic covenant, later reiterated to Abraham (Gen 13:14–17; 15:18–21; 17:1–8), gave to his physical descendants, specifically the nation of Israel, the eternal ownership of the land between the Euphrates River and the river of Egypt.

God also gave to the nation the Land covenant (Deut 30:1–10), the Davidic covenant (2 Sam 7:4–17), and the New covenant (Jer 31:31–37; Ezek 36:22–32).

Fifth, God gave to Israel the law (Rom 9:4). At Sinai, God delivered those regulations which would govern the moral, civil, and religious life of the nation (Exod 19:1–20:26; Deut 5:1–33).

Sixth, Israel enjoyed the privilege of religious service toward God (Rom 9:4). The complex system of animal, bird, grain, and drink offerings and sacrifices could be conducted only by the high priest, the priests, and the Levites through the divinely given order at the prescribed time and place.

Seventh, God gave the promises of the coming Messiah–Redeemer to Israel (9:4). The Savior was to be human (Gen 3:15), a descendant of Abraham (Gen 12:1–3), of the tribe of Judah (Gen 49:10), a greater son of David (2 Sam 7:4–17), and also divine (Ps 110:1).

Eighth, God constantly identified himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Rom 9:5; cf Exod 3:6). These fathers, known as the patriarchs, establish the covenant relationship between God, the heavenly Father, and the people of Israel.

Ninth, Israel produced the Savior of both the nation and the families of the earth (Rom 9:5). That Redeemer is none other than Jesus Christ, God manifest in the flesh. Paul wrote, “Of whom

(Israel) as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed forever” (Rom 9:5). Jesus Christ is the promised son of David, the son of Abraham (Matt 1:1). The Messiah had to be both divine and human. He had to be one person with two natures, divine and human. Israel was privileged to be the nation through which God would superintend the human ancestry of the Messiah.

In spite of these privileges, Israel needed to be saved. All peoples need to receive the righteousness of God which comes only through faith in the saving God (Gen 15:6; Hab 2:4).

PART II—ISRAEL: ELECT OR NON-ELECT (ROMANS 9:6–13)

Does God always keep his word? Yes, he does. Then why does Israel not experience the reality of the covenant promises that God made to her? Why is Israel still in a state of unbelief?

Two Foundational Principles (Rom 9:6)

First, God always keeps His word (Rom 9:6a). Paul wrote, “But it is not that the word of God has taken no effect” (Rom 9:1a). No promise of God has ever failed. God is both omniscient and omnipotent. He is sovereign. No person can frustrate his divine purpose.

God said concerning himself, “I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, ‘Saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure’” (Isa 46:9–10). Later, he added, “Indeed I have spoken it: I will also bring it to pass. I have purposed it; I will also do it” (Isa 46:11).

Whenever humans analyze history and prophecy, they must never conclude that God’s word has been in error. God will fulfill every unconditional promise he has made to Israel and to the Church.

Second, all of the physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob do not constitute the genuine Israel (Rom 9:6b). Paul wrote,

“For they are not all Israel who are of Israel” (9:6). The phrase “who are of Israel” refers to those people who can trace their family ancestry to the patriarchs of the nation. Mere ethnic identification with Abraham is not a sufficient basis to receive all of the covenant promises given to Abraham.

Earlier in the epistle, Paul wrote, “For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh, but he is a Jew who is one inwardly, and circumcision is that of the heart, in the Spirit, not in the letter; whose praise is not from men but from God,” (Rom 2:28–29). Christ affirmed that his critics were the descendants of Abraham, but he denied that they were the real children of Abraham (John 8:37–39). In fact, he asserted that their father was the devil (John 8:44).

These descriptions by Paul and Christ are consistent with the history of Israel. Should the wicked, idolatrous kings of Israel and Judah be recognized as the true Israel who would receive both the spiritual and materialistic blessings of the covenant promises? Certainly not! In the OT era, there was a vast difference between the true Jewish believer and the apostate, idolatrous Jewish unbeliever.

Two Key Illustrations (Rom 9:7–13)

First, Ishmael or Isaac (Rom 9:7–9). The first child born to Abraham was actually Ishmael whose mother was Hagar (Gen 16:1–16). However, God had determined that the rightful heir to the Abrahamic covenant promises would be Isaac, born of Sarah, the lawful wife.

Paul thus observed,

Nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham: but, “in Isaac your seed shall be called.” That is, those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed. For this is the word of promise: “At this time I will come and Sarah shall have a son.” (Rom 9:7–9)

Ishmael had a genetic, ethnic connection to Abraham, but that fact did not establish him to be the sole heir or even one of the

heirs. He was actually a child of the flesh. He was the product of the merger of Abraham's human effort, prompted by Sarah and the submission of Hagar.

Paul used the historical birth accounts of Ishmael and Isaac to form a spiritual allegory (Gal 4:19–31). His conclusion was that it is impossible to be born of two mothers at the same time. Sarah represented the promise received by faith alone in the provision and power of God. Hagar symbolized the self-produced works produced by a legalistic conformity to the Mosaic law.

The Scriptures teach that humans receive the righteousness of God by faith apart from physical ancestry and legalistic obedience. It was so with Abraham. He believed in the Lord, and he accounted it to him for righteousness (Gen 15:6). Earlier in this epistle, Paul wrote, “For the promise that he would be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith,” (Rom 4:13).

Isaac was the child of promise received by faith alone through the proper mother, namely Sarah. On the other hand, Ishmael was the child of the flesh. Both sons were physically related to Abraham, but only Isaac received the covenant blessing.

Second, Esau or Jacob (Rom 9:10–13). Isaac and Rebekah had twin sons, the elder Esau and the younger Jacob. God, however, chose Jacob to be the heir of the covenant promises earlier given to Abraham and Isaac. Esau, who became the father of the Edomites, thus stood outside of the true Israel even though he was a physical descendant of both Abraham and Isaac.

Paul wrote,

And not only this, but when Rebekah also had conceived by one man, even by our father Isaac (for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls), it was said to her, “The older shall serve the younger.” As it is written, “Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated.” (Rom 9:10–13)

God's choice was based upon his sovereign elective will. He chose before the boys were born. He chose before they had done any good or evil works.

God's word has come to pass. His covenant promises are always kept to those whom he has chosen. The covenant promises, therefore, were given to elect Israel or to those Israelites whom God chose to salvation. The elect are known because they are the ones who believe the promises of God. They receive the righteousness of God by faith, even as Abraham did.

Non-elect Israel is composed of those who can trace their genetic ancestry to Abraham but who, like Ishmael and Esau, are not children of promise. They were not chosen by God to receive the promises. They manifested their lack of faith by their persecution of the divinely chosen heirs.

**PART III—HARD QUESTIONS
AND DIFFICULT ANSWERS
(Romans 9:14–24)**

God chose Jacob rather than Esau (Rom 9:10–13). God selected Isaac rather than Ishmael (Rom 9:7–9). God covenanted with Abraham to be the father of the elect nation of Israel (Rom 9:4–5). Historical and theological truth has demonstrated that God, out of his sovereign purpose, has chosen some to salvation, but not others. In anticipation of objection to this divine action, Paul asked two rhetorical questions.

Is God Unjust? (Rom 9:14–18)

Paul wrote, “What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God?” (Rom 9:14). His answer was clear: Certainly not! God is just in His being, and he always acts justly. Through his redemptive death on the cross, Jesus Christ satisfied the righteous demands of God for the penalty of sin. On that basis, God can remain just and justify anyone who places his faith in Christ Jesus (Rom 3:25–26). If Christ had not died, then God in his justice would have condemned all men because all men are “under sin” (Rom 3:9). God's elective purpose, rather, manifests his mercy and grace. Paul then quoted a statement that God made to Moses, “I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and

I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion” (Rom 9:15; cf. Exod 33:19). Divine mercy and compassion are expressions of God’s sovereign choice. No person deserves divine mercy, and no person can do anything to merit it. Paul added, “So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy” (Rom 9:16). God is under no obligation to show mercy to anyone. Neither human desire (“him who wills”) nor human effort (“him who runs”) moves him to select. God acts; he does not react. His redemptive choice is unconditional.

Paul then quoted a statement made by God to the Egyptian Pharaoh, “Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might show my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the land” (Rom 9:17; cf. Exod 9:16). God elevated a sinful person out from a fallen human race and idolatrous nation to the position of the highest ruler in Egypt and in the Middle East. Pharaoh had the opportunity to glorify God and to bless the covenant nation of Israel, but he refused to do so. God knew about this rejection, and said to Pharaoh through Moses, “As yet exaltest thou thyself against my people, that thou wilt not let them go?” (Exod 9:17). God then manifested his power by pouring out his plagues of wrath against the Egyptians, by delivering Israel out of her bondage, and by causing other nations to know that the God of Israel was the one and only true God of the universe (Josh 2:8–14).

Paul then concluded his argument, “Therefore hath He (God) mercy on whom He will have mercy, and whom He will He hardenth” (Rom 9:18). All humans deserve the wrathful judgment of God. Whenever God wills to have mercy on an undeserving sinner, that sovereign action reveals his redemptive grace. Rahab, the harlot of Jericho, experienced that merciful touch. On the other hand, God can will to harden a sinner who deserves divine wrath. For example, Pharaoh expressed his moral rebellion and lost human condition when he hardened his own heart in the face of the displays of divine power (Exod 8:15, 19, 32). Thus, when God willed to harden Pharaoh (Exod 9:12; 10:1, 20, 27), God simply confirmed Pharaoh in his unbelief and allowed him to suffer the consequences of his sinful choices.

Is God Unfair? (Rom 9:19–24)

Paul put it this way: “Thou wilt say then unto me, ‘Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will?’” (Rom 9:19). At issue here is the execution of the divine will, and the human perception of that execution. Paul anticipated a human protest against the actions of God's sovereign will—the election of some to salvation and the hardening of others to retribution. In either case, the critics would claim that God's will was being carried out.

Paul's reply was direct, “Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, ‘Why hast thou made me thus?’ ” (Rom 9:20). The contrasts are obvious: between man and God, between the creature and the creator, and between the clay and the potter. God is God; thus he can will to do anything that he pleases. Man is man; thus he cannot dictate to God what the Almighty can or cannot do. Another question followed, “Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor?” (Rom 9:21). All humans constitute the clay. They are of the same lump. They all belong to a fallen human race. They are all under sin—unrighteous, guilty, and deserving of eternal wrath (Rom 3:9, 10, 19). If God chooses to shape a sinner into a son of God, a vessel for honor, he has that prerogative. If God chooses to shape a sinner into a vessel for dishonor, he also has that prerogative. In the first illustration, the sinner gets what he does not deserve; in the second, the sinner gets that he deserves. God can receive praise from both the saved person and the unsaved person. Both salvation and judgment bring glory to him. The psalmist said, “Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee” (Ps 76:10).

Paul then raised this lengthy question:

What if God, willing to show His wrath, and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction; and that He might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had afore prepared unto glory, even us, whom He hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles? (Rom 9:22–24)

All unsaved men, the vessels of wrath, are prepared for destruction in that destruction is the necessary consequence of sin. Earlier Paul wrote, “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 6:23). God does not predestine a morally neutral person to condemnation. However, he has determined that sinners will pay for their sin and their rejection of divine truth. God manifests his longsuffering toward sinners in that he puts up with their rebellion throughout their earthly experiences. On the other hand, the saved are the vessels of mercy, the ones who will share in the eternal glory of Christ. Both Jews and Gentiles, being human and fallen, deserve divine wrath. However, in his mercy, God has called both Jews and Gentiles to himself through justifying faith in Jesus Christ. God is the savior of all who believe; God is also the judge of all who reject.

PART IV—ISRAEL: NATION OR REMNANT? (Romans 9:25–33)

In this section, Paul demonstrates that only the believing remnant within the nation of Israel constituted the real covenant people. The basis of their spiritual acceptance before God is the same as that for believing Gentiles. Thus, the genuine family of God in this dispensation is made up of believing Jews and believing Gentiles who together are formed into one body, the true church (Eph 2:11–22). Both believing Jews and believing Gentiles are divinely called (Rom 9:24), the “vessels of mercy which [God] had prepared beforehand for glory” (Rom 9:23).

Prediction of the Remnant (Rom 9:25–29)

Paul selected three portions of OT prophecy to show that they are not all Israel which are of Israel (Rom 9:6). The first passage is from Hosea and the next two are from Isaiah.

Hosea ministered at the time of the divided kingdom, during the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah, and also during the reign of Jeroboam, king of Israel. God directed

Hosea to marry Gomer so that his marriage would symbolize the spiritual adultery of the land (Hos 1:23). To this union, three children were born: Jezreel, Lo-Ruhamah, and Lo-Ammi (Hos 2:4–8). The meanings of the children's names depicted God's relationship to Israel. Jezreel meant “scattered,” Lo-Ruhamah meant “no mercy,” and Lo-Ammi meant “not my people.” God said that he would bring an end to the northern kingdom of Israel (Hos 1:4), that he would no longer have mercy on the house of Israel (Hos 1:6), that Israel would no longer be his people (Hos 1:9), and that he would no longer be their God (Hos 1:9). These prophecies were fulfilled when the Assyrians conquered the northern kingdom of Israel in 722 BC and scattered many of its inhabitants.

Paul used this historical background to show the spiritual truth that God would take his people out of those who previously were not his people. This reality could only be applied to the believing remnant within Israel and in an extended way to believing Gentiles. Both groups were once unsaved, but through divine grace and human repentant-faith, both have become his people.

Here is the quotation from Hosea: “I will call them My people, which were not My people. And her beloved, which was not beloved. And it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, you are not My people, there they shall be called the children of the living God,” (Rom 9:25–26; cf. Hos 2:20; 2:23).

Whereas Hosea basically ministered to the northern kingdom of Israel, Isaiah primarily declared his messages to the southern kingdom of Judah (Isa 1:1). He described the nation thusly, “Ah, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a seed of evildoers, children that are corrupters; they have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked the Holy One of Israel unto anger, they are gone away backward,” (Isa 1:4). God subsequently judged his people by allowing the Babylonians to destroy the southern kingdom in 586 BC.

In the midst of his predictions of judgment, Isaiah declared this message of hope, “Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, a remnant shall be saved; for He

will finish the work and cut it short in righteousness, because a short work will the Lord make upon the earth" (Rom 9:27–28; cf. Isa 10:22–23). The contrast is between the sand of the sea (the great number of racial Jews) and the remnant (the small number of believing Jews who will experience the righteousness of God.)

Isaiah then praised the gracious preservation of Israel by God, "Except the Lord of hosts had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah" (Rom 9:27–28; cf. Isa 1:9). The two wicked cities of the Jordan plain suffered total permanent destruction in the days of Abraham and Lot. Nothing remained and no one survived.

God, however, did not judge the two kingdoms of Israel and Judah in like manner. In his sovereign grace, he preserved a seed. That seed goes beyond the obvious survival of physical Jewry to the divine calling of a believing remnant within Israel. Later on, Paul will argue, "Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace" (Rom 11:5).

Basis for the Remnant (Rom 9:30–33)

The approach to God is the same for both the Gentile and the Jew. The means of securing a righteous standing before the God of holiness has always been the same for Israel and all other nations. It is the procedure which Abraham followed: "And he (Abraham) believed in the Lord, and He counted it to him for righteousness" (Gen 15:6). Abraham knew that he could not do anything to merit the imputation of divine righteousness. Rather, as a guilty, undeserving sinner, he placed his trust in Jehovah—God who alone could save and forgive him. Abraham received the gracious gift of a righteous standing before he was circumcised and before the law was given to Moses.

In this age, both Gentiles and the remnant within Israel have come to God on the same basis—unconditional faith in God part from human effort. Paul knew that truth, and thus argued, "What shall we say then?" (Rom 9:30). The contrast is now between believing Gentiles and unbelieving Jews. Why is it true in this

present dispensation that more Gentiles are saved than Jews? From Abraham to Jesus Christ, that situation was reversed. In the OT era, there were more righteous, saved Jews than Gentiles. What makes the difference? Two reasons are given.

First, the Gentiles received the righteousness of God by faith in total dependence upon the gracious provision of God (Rom 9:30–32). Israel, however, sought to gain divine righteousness through outward conformity to the Law of Moses in total dependence upon the ability of self to do so.

Paul wrote, “That Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith. But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith but as it were by works of the law” (Rom 9:30–32). Israel had the advantage of receiving the law of Moses directly from God (Rom 3:1–2; 9:4). God never gave the law so that men would try to keep it in order gain salvation. God gave the law to show men how holy he is and how unrighteous men are. The Law was designed to create a conviction of moral inadequacy with man. In its moral blindness and hardness, Israel refused to acknowledge their insufficiency.

Second, Israel stumbled over the provision of the divine human Messiah who alone could save them (Rom 9:33). Paul wrote, “For they stumbled at that stumbling stone; as it is written, ‘Behold, I lay in Zion a stumbling stone and rock of offense, and whosoever believeth on Him shall not be ashamed,’” (Rom 9:32–33; cf. Ps 118:22). In their attempt to work for their salvation, Israel tripped over the provision of the Messiah to do that work for them. To the child of God today, whether Jew or Gentile, Peter can say, “Unto you therefore which believe He is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner” (1 Pet 2:7).

PART V—ISRAEL: RIGHTEOUS BUT UNSAVED (ROMANS 10:1–13)

Paul loved his people, the nation of Israel. He had a burden for them. Earlier, he confessed that he had great sorrow and continual grief in his heart over the nation (Rom 9:3). He now expressed his heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel (Rom 10:1). He wanted his Gentile brethren in the family of God to see the longing of his heart (Rom 10:1; 11:13). He wanted them also to agonize in prayer for his beloved nation.

Israel's Spiritual Condition (Rom 10:1–3)

Paul described the spiritual condition of Israel in five ways.

First, Israel was unsaved (Rom 10:1). The apostle's prayer was that they may be saved. Both Jews and Gentiles are all under sin if they have not received God's gracious provision of redemption through Jesus Christ (Rom 3:23).

Second, Israel had a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge (Rom 10:2). She was sincere in her religious devotion, but she was sincerely wrong. The nation actually reflected Paul's past spiritual condition. Paul gave this testimony before the Jews in Jerusalem, "I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day (Acts 22:3). Paul's zeal for God, Israel, and the Mosaic Law caused him to persecute Christians and to vote for their deaths" (Acts 22:4; 26:9–11). He further stated, "And profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers" (Gal 1:14).

Third, Israel was ignorant of God's righteousness (Rom 10:3a). They were ignorant of the fact that the OT taught that men received the imputed righteousness of God by faith apart from the work of the law (Rom 3:20–22; cf. Gen 15:6; Heb 4:2). They were ignorant of the magnitude of God's gracious provision of redemption. They were ignorant, not because they were not told,

but because they chose not to learn. When Paul analyzed his faulty zeal, he confessed, “Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious; but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief” (1 Tim 1:13). In like manner, Israel's ignorance manifested her lack of faith.

Fourth, Israel was seeking to establish their own righteousness (Rom 10:3b). Human pride and self-sufficiency provide the basis of a self-produced righteousness. Again, Israel was ignorant of Isaiah's clear statement: “But we are all like an unclean thing, And all our righteousness are as filthy rags” (Isa 64:6). Can any person, by his own attempts, create a righteous standing whereby God will sense an obligation to receive him? Absolutely not.

Fifth, Israel had not submitted to the righteousness of God (Rom 10:3c). To be saved, one must be humble not proud. God's plan for man to receive God's righteousness calls for man to trust what God has provided and done. Humans submit to the righteousness of God when we humbly accept by faith God's gracious gift of forgiveness and redemption. In faith, humans admit that they cannot do anything to merit God's favor.

Israel, however, refused to repent in spite of the appeals of both John the Baptist and Jesus Christ. Christ himself said to Jerusalem, the personification of the Jewish people, “How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!” (Matt 23:37). Christ pronounced judgment upon the cities of Galilee because they refused to repent (Matt 11:20).

Righteousness: of Law or of Faith? (10:4–13)

In this section, Paul put forth seven characteristics of the faith which appropriates the righteousness of God.

First, faith achieves the desired end of the law (Rom 10:4). Paul wrote, “For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believeth” (Rom 10:4). Christ was the object to whom the law pointed. There was no power in the Law to produce the necessary righteous standing before God. The law

revealed the moral inadequacy of man. The law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith (Gal 3:24). The righteousness of the law is found within those individuals who walk according to the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:4).

Second, faith does not assist God in the making of his provision of salvation (Rom 10:5–7). The righteousness of the law begins and ends with the attitude and actions of man. Paul quoted Moses, “Which if a man do, he shall live in them” (Rom 10:5; cf. Lev 18:5). In legalism, man alone bears the responsibility for the provision of his own salvation.

In contrast, the righteousness of faith affirms that only God can provide salvation and prescribe the means by which one can obtain it. Paul then freely quoted from Moses to show that the land of Canaan was given to Israel by divine promise and provision, not by the self-produced righteousness of the nation (see Deut 9:4–6; 30:12–14). In fact, Moses reminded them, “Understand, therefore, that the Lord thy God giveth thee not this good land to possess it for thy righteousness; for thou art a stiff-necked people” (Deut 9:6). Israel gained the land by obedient faith in God’s promise and enablement. In like manner, genuine faith does not cause God to provide and apply salvation; rather, it humbly accepts him whom God has provided as the Savior of the world.

Third, faith accepts the proclaimed word of salvation (Rom 10:8). As they anticipated entrance into Canaan, the nation heard the words of Moses (Deut 30:14). The message of obedient faith was both available and accessible to them. They had no excuse for not knowing. Paul then equated that truth with the word of faith which we preach. Saving faith in Jesus Christ is inseparably joined to historical truth and genuine interpretation and application of that truth. Faith has substance and content. It has direction. And it must be declared to those who need to hear.

Fourth, only faith in Jesus Christ secures personal salvation (Rom 10:9–10). What must a person do to be saved? Listen to Paul’s declaration, “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised

him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Rom 10:9–10). Confession and belief are soteriological Siamese twins. The heart and mouth complement each other. Christ said, "For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh" (Matt 12:34). There is no hint in this passage that a person could conceivably believe without confession or confess without believing. In genuine salvation, a person confesses what he believes and he believes what he confesses.

Fifth, faith is confident (Rom 10:11). The Scripture says: "Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed" (Rom 10:11; cf. 9:33; Isa 28:16). Christ is the cornerstone which the builders rejected. Genuine faith is proud to name the name of Christ. It is never embarrassed. It will be eternally and completely accepted by the Father. Nothing will be able to take away the confidence of a child of God who has put his complete trust in Jesus Christ rather than in his futile attempts at self-righteousness.

Sixth, faith is the one means for all (Rom 10:12). Paul wrote, "For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek; for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him" (Rom 10:12). God has only one provision of salvation—found in his son, Jesus Christ, and in his redemptive death and resurrection. And he has only one means for all—both Jew and Gentile—to come to him (see Rom 3:22–23).

Seventh, faith means to call upon Jehovah—God for salvation (Rom 10:13). Paul now quoted from the OT prophet Joel, "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the LORD shall be delivered" (Joel 2:32). The name of God stands for all that he is (his essence) and all that he does (his acts). God alone is the redeeming God. God alone is the covenant-keeping God. God alone keeps his promise.

VI—ISRAEL: REJECTION OR ELECTION (ROMANS 10:14–11:6)

God will save all, both Jew and Gentile, who call upon him. In salvation, there is no discrimination (Rom 10:12–13). God is rich toward both groups of the human race.

Rejection of the Gospel by the Nation of Israel (Rom 10:14–21)

Unfortunately, Israel rejected God's gracious offer of salvation. Neither the majority nor a large minority received the righteousness of God by faith. Paul proved this evaluation by a series of logical, rhetorical questions with answers taken from the OT.

First, Israel received the missionary message (Rom 10:14, 15). In a series of four questions, Paul presented the cause–effect sequence in true gospel proclamation, “How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent?” (Rom 10:14–15).

Paul followed the progression of effect back to cause: calling–believing–hearing–proclaiming–sending (by God, obviously). Warren Wiersbe stated, “This passage is often used as the basis for the church's missionary program, and rightly so, but its first application is to the nation of Israel.”¹ The context supports his conclusion. Paul then quoted a passage which is found in two OT books: “How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things” (Rom 10:15). In Nahum 1:15, the good news was the announcement that God would destroy Nineveh and the Assyrian Empire. In Isaiah 52:7, the verse anticipated the re–gathering of Israel to her land and the reign of the Messiah. In Paul's application of the principle, the

¹ Warren Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary: New Testament* (Colorado Springs, CO: Cook Communication, 2001), 548.

good news was the offer of righteousness and judicial peace through faith in Christ.

Second, Israel did not obey the gospel (Rom 10:16). To obey the gospel and to believe the gospel are equivalent phrases. God has commanded all to repent (Acts 17:30). Paul commended the Roman believers, "But God be thanked, that ye were servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you" (Rom 6:17).

Paul quoted Isaiah to prove that Israel did not believe "Lord, who hath believed our report?" (Rom 10:16; Isa 53:1). The apostle John applied this verse to Israel who rejected the evidence of Christ's miracles (John 12:37-41). This verse from Isaiah opens up the greatest messianic chapter in the entire OT. Philip demonstrated to the Ethiopian eunuch that the person mentioned in Isaiah 53 was the Jewish Messiah; namely Jesus Christ (Acts 8:30-35).

Third, Israel heard the truth (Rom 10:17, 18). It is clear that saving faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God (Rom 10:17). The question was obvious, "But I say, have they not heard?" (Rom 10:18). The answer was direct, "Yes, verily" (Rom 10:18). To prove his answer, Paul quoted from Psalm 19, "Their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world" (Rom 10:18; cf. Ps 19:4). That psalm shows that God has revealed truth about himself in the world of nature (Ps 19:6). This truth, called general revelation, is available to all men everywhere. In addition, the psalm points to truth that God has revealed in the Law; namely the OT (Ps 19:7-11). This truth, called special revelation, was entrusted to the nation of Israel. Israel had an advantage over the Gentiles in that it possessed the oracles of God (Rom 3:2). To Israel of his day, Jesus Christ said, "Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me" (John 5:39).

Fourth, Israel knew the truth (Rom 10:19, 20). Paul asked, "But I say, did Israel not know?" (Rom 10:19). The answer expected is that they did know. To prove his point, Paul quoted from the Torah, written by Moses, "I will provoke you to jealousy by them that are no people, and by a foolish nation I will anger you" (cf.

Deut 32:21). Israel was the nation which knew that the righteousness of God came by faith. The Gentiles constituted a non-nation which did not have this understanding. Regardless, the Gentiles believed, and Israel did not. God sovereignly purposed to use this response to stir up non-repentant Israel.

Furthermore, Paul supported his conclusion with a reference to Isaiah, “I was found of them that sought me not; I was made manifest unto them that asked not after me” (Rom 10:20; cf. Isa 65:1). The Gentiles neither sought God nor asked for him, yet God, in his merciful grace, saved them.

Fifth, Israel did not respond to God’s invitation (Rom 10:21). Paul wrote, quoting again from the prophet Isaiah, “But to Israel He saith, all day long I have stretched forth My hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people” (Rom 10:21; cf. Isa 65:2). The day refers to the ongoing offer of salvation, “Thus saith the Lord; in an acceptable time I have heard thee, and in a day of salvation I have helped thee” (Isa 49:8). Paul quoted that verse, then added, “Behold, *now* is the accepted time; behold now is the day of salvation” (2 Cor 6:2; emphasis added). Throughout the history of Israel, God extended his hands in salvation to them, but they remained disobedient and contrary. Christ himself lamented, “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!” (Matt 23:37).

Election of the Remnant by God (Rom 11:1–6)

Paul then gave this challenging question, “I say then, hath God cast away His people?” (Rom 11:1). Has God permanently and totally rejected Israel to the extent that he will no longer keep his covenant promises to her? Has he withdrawn his offer of righteousness by faith in the Messiah to every individual Jew? Has he turned exclusively to the Gentiles in this age? The answer to all of those questions is a firm *NO*; certainly not! (Rom 11:1).

First, Paul gave two illustrations to show that God has always had a believing remnant within Israel in spite of her national

unbelief (Rom 11:1–4). Paul cited himself as a believing Jew in this present age, “For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin” (Rom 11:1). The apostle did not surrender his Jewishness when he became a believer in Jesus Christ. He was proud of his racial and religious ancestry (cf. Phil 3:4–6).

Paul then affirmed this key doctrinal statement, “God hath not cast away His people which He foreknew” (Rom 11:2). All believers are chosen or elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father (I Pet 1:2). All foreknown, chosen believers are likewise predestined to be conformed to the image of Christ, called, justified, and glorified (Rom 8:29–30). In eternity past, God sovereignly knew believers as his own distinctive people even before he worked out his redemptive purpose in time in their individual lives.

In like manner, God knew Israel as his beloved, chosen, covenant nation even before he promised Abraham or redeemed Israel from her Egyptian bondage (Deut 7:6–10). Thus, both elect Israel and elect believers, both Jewish and Gentile, can be confident that God will never cast them away.

The second illustration shows that there were 7,000 believers within the idolatrous northern kingdom of Israel even though Elijah thought that he was the only one (11:2–4).

Second, Paul then argued that God had a believing remnant within Israel in the present age (Rom 11:5–6). Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace (Rom 11:5). Within the church, the body of Christ, God has bonded believing Jew and believing Gentile into one entity. God is saving Jews today, even though the nation as a whole has rejected Jesus Christ.

This election is out of divine grace, totally undeserved by anyone. Paul said, “And if by grace, then it is no more of works; otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then it is no more grace, otherwise grace is no longer grace” (Rom 11:6). Neither Jew nor Gentile can do religious works to gain the righteousness of God. Salvation is a free gift, based upon trust in the giver of that gift, not a reward for meritorious effort.

**PART VII—THE REJECTION OF ISRAEL
AND THE ACCEPTANCE OF GENTILES
(Romans 11:7–24)**

In this section, Paul contrasted the divine rejection of unsaved Israel with the divine acceptance of Gentiles. He also continued the difference between the saved remnant within Israel and the unsaved majority of Jews in this present age. In so doing, the apostle described Israel's spiritual condition in four ways.

Israel Has Been Blinded or Hardened (Rom 11:7–10)

The nation, “as a whole, hath not obtained that which he seeketh for” (Rom 11:7). Israel sought the full blessings of God through the Abrahamic covenant (Gen 12:1–3), but she did not obtain them because she sought them on the basis of self-produced righteousness. However, the elect within the nation obtained the spiritual blessings of the Abrahamic covenant because those Jews received the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ alone. In contrast, the rest were blinded (Rom 11:7) because they rejected Jesus Christ as their promised Messiah.

To support his presentation of the spiritual blindness of Israel, Paul referred to three passages from the OT (Rom 11:8; cf. Deut 29:3–4; Isa 29:10, and 11:9–10; cf. Ps 69:22–23). The first two show that hardening involves spiritual drowsiness, blindness, and deafness. God hardened the nation because of its hypocrisy. That reason can be seen in these words from Isaiah, quoted later by Jesus Christ and applied to his ministry, “Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honor me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men” (Isa. 29:13; cf. Matt 15:7–9).

The third passage shows that the divine provision for Israel (their table) became a basis of judgment for the nation because it did not respond in faith and thanksgiving to God. Their advantage increased their moral accountability. Their rejection of Christ at

his first advent caused their back to be bowed under the weight of their guilt and national punishment.

The blindness of Israel in this present age simply has continued the blindness of the nation in the OT era.

Israel Has Stumbled and Fallen (Rom 11:11–14)

Paul then asked this rhetorical question, “I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall?” (Rom 11:11). The question implies a negative answer, and the apostle responded with his own cry of protest, “*God forbid!*” When Israel rejected Jesus Christ as its Messiah, did it suffer a permanent, irreversible fall? Did God replace Israel with the church in his creative, redemptive purpose? Are all of the covenant promises given to Israel being spiritually fulfilled in the church? All of the answers to those questions are *NO!* God is not through with his ancient covenant people. But, in his wisdom and sovereign power, God can use the fall of Israel to accomplish his ultimate purpose.

First, the rejection of Christ by Israel led to his crucifixion and resurrection, the very basis for salvation to the Gentiles_ (Rom 11:11). God said to Abraham, “And in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed” (Gen 12:3). That spiritual blessing is a provision for both Jews and Gentiles. In this present age, more Gentiles than Jews have received the blessings of divine forgiveness and imputed righteousness.

Second, God can use the salvation of Gentiles to provoke Israel to jealousy (Rom 11:11). Isn't it strange that Gentiles can know more about the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob than the actual physical descendants of the patriarchs?

Third, God will enrich the world in the future through the fulness of Israel's blessings (Rom 11:12). Paul wrote, “Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fulness?” (Rom 11:12). Paul anticipated a greater spiritual blessing for the Gentiles in the future because he knew that God would one day fulfill all of his promises to the nation of Israel. That future day

will occur when Christ returns to establish the Davidic, millennial kingdom on the earth.

Fourth, Paul, an apostle and a Jew, knew that his major ministry was to the Gentiles (Rom 11:13). Nevertheless, he wanted to use the salvation of Gentiles as a means to bring jealousy to the Jews and to save some of them in this age (Rom 11:14). The few Jews who are saved in this age constitute the elect within Israel and are part of the true church, the spiritual body of Christ.

Israel Has Been Cast Away (Rom 11:15)

Paul wrote, “For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the death?” (Rom 11:15). At the cross, God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses to them (2 Cor 5:19). The crucifixion and resurrection of Christ introduced a new era in God's creative–redemptive plan: the fullness of the Gentiles (Rom 11:25). The church, although composed of both believing Jews and Gentiles, has a majority membership of Gentiles (Acts 15: 14–18).

The casting away of Israel is temporary, however. A day will come when God will accept the nation. When Christ returns to the earth, all Israel will be saved (11:26). At that time, God will raise the righteous dead of the OT period (Dan 12:2–3).

Israel Has Been Broken Off (Rom 11:16–24)

Israel enjoys a distinctive, sanctified position before God. According to the law of the heave offering (Num 15:17–21), the presentation of the firstfruit meant that the entire lump belonged to God. According to the Feast of Firstfruits (Lev 23:9–14), God sanctifies the whole when he accepts the part.

Using these analogies, Paul probably identified the lump and the branches with the entire nation of Israel (Rom 11:16). The firstfruit and the root probably refer to Abraham, the father of Israel, as the first one to receive the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant (Gen 12:1–3).

In the OT period, the olive tree was often a symbol of Israel (Jer 11:16–17; Hos 14:4–6). In this context, the olive tree seems to represent all of the blessings contained within the Abrahamic covenant. Many Jews, representing the natural branches because of their physical relationship to Abraham and the other patriarchs, were broken off because of their unbelief (Rom 11:17; 19–20). In contrast, the saved Gentiles, as symbolized by the branches of the wild olive tree, were grafted into the cultivated olive tree because of their faith in Jesus Christ (Rom 11:17, 20). The Gentiles became and with them partook of the root and fatness of the olive tree in that they entered into the spiritual blessings of the Abrahamic covenant extended to all of the families of the earth (Rom 11:17; cf. Gen 12:3).

The breaking off of the natural branches (Israel) and the grafting in of the wild branches (Gentiles) occurs only during the present church age, an intercalation in God's prophetic program for Israel (Dan 9:24–27; 16:18). For Israel, the spiritual dilemma is only partial because Jews are being saved in this age of Gentile spiritual blessing. For Israel, it is also temporary because God will graft the natural branches back into the cultivated olive tree when Christ returns to the earth.

Paul argued that Israel only needs to believe in order to be restored to national and spiritual blessing. He wrote, "And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in; for God is able to graft them in again" (Rom 11:23). Later, he added, "How much more shall these, which be the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?" (11:24).

Thus, Israel's present spiritual condition is partial and temporary. Israel will be restored to complete and permanent blessings after the present era of Gentile salvation has run its course. Israel will be saved when the promised Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, returns to the earth.

PART VIII—THE FUTURE SALVATION OF ISRAEL (Romans 11:25–36)

Israel's future is bright, not bleak. In fact, her tomorrow will be far more glorious than her past. In this final section of the three–chapter exposition of the divine program for Israel, Paul exalted God for his manifestation of his gracious wisdom.

Israel's Blindness (Rom 11:25)

Paul wrote, “For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in” (Rom 11:25). This present age is the church age (Matt 16:18). It is a mystery in that it was not revealed in past ages. It is an intercalation into God's prophetic program for Israel (Dan 9:24–27). It is an insertion between the first sixty–nine weeks and the seventieth week, as described by Daniel.

This present church age is also called the fullness of the Gentiles. It is the time when God has visited the Gentiles to take out of them a people for his name (Acts 15:14). Christ is presently building his church, made up of believing Jews and believing Gentiles, merged into one spiritual body (Eph 2:11–22). Although Jewish believers composed the majority in the early days (see the book of Acts), they are now a small minority within the 2000–year development of the true church. The fullness of the Gentiles will end when the last Gentile is saved in this present age and the church will be raptured into the presence of Christ (1 Thess 4:13–18).

In this age, Israel's blindness is partial (in part) because some Jews have believed in Jesus Christ as their Messiah. Her blindness is also temporal (note the time word “until”) in that this will end at the rapture and in the subsequent seven–year period, the fulfillment of Daniel's seventieth week (Dan 9:24–26), climaxed by the return of Jesus Christ to the earth.

Israel's Messiah (Rom 11:26, 27)

After this church age, Israel will be saved by the coming of her promised savior. Paul wrote, "And so all Israel will be saved, as it is written, 'The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob'" (Rom 11:26). Israel will not find political or spiritual deliverance within her own efforts or from outside nations. Her help will come from a single person, namely the promised Messiah, Jesus Christ.

This OT quotation (Isa 59:20–21) complements other predictions of the coming Messiah. Jehovah God said, "And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication, then they will look on Me whom they pierced" (Zech 12:10). In that day, the Messiah will destroy the political foes of Israel (Zech 14:1–4). Christ himself said that Jerusalem would remain desolate until she sees him and shouts, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord" (Matt 23:39).

Paul earlier said that they are not all Israel who are of Israel (Rom 9:6). All Israel, thus, will be saved in that the elect, saved Jews within ethnic Israel will compose the true Israel who will be delivered when Christ returns to the earth. Ezekiel declared that God would purge out the rebels within Israel before he would redeem and restore Israel to the land (Ezek 20:34–38).

When Christ returns, he will forgive the sins of Israel as he bestows the blessings of the new covenant upon his covenant people (Rom 11:27; cf. Jer 31:31–37).

Israel's Election (Rom 11:28, 29)

Paul made this distinction between Israel's practice and her position, "Concerning the gospel they are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers" (Rom 11:28).

In this present age, Israel as a whole has opposed the outreach of the gospel into the Gentile world. In that sense, Israel has been an enemy to the gospel. Paul personally was evidence of

that truth because he “persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it” (Gal 1:13). Paul gave this indictment of his Jewish opponents: They “killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets, and have persecuted us; and they do not please God and are contrary to all men, forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they may be saved, so as always to fill up the measure of their sins” (1 Thess 2:15–16). If any people deserved to forfeit the blessings of God because of their hostile rejection of the gospel, it was the Jewish people.

However, God’s future salvation of Israel is not based upon her past or present unbelief. Rather, God has chosen Israel to be his distinctive covenant people because he has set his love upon her through his unconditional promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Moses wrote,

For you are a holy people to the Lord your God; the Lord you God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the Lord loves you and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers. (Deut 7:6–8)

God always keeps his word. He is faithful to his promises. As Paul wrote, “For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable” (Rom 11:29). God does not give and later take back. The future salvation of elect, ethnic Israel is as secure as the immutability of God (Num 23:19; Mal 3:6).

Israel’s Reception of God’s Mercy (Rom 11:30–32)

Saved Gentiles “were once disobedient to God” in their unsaved days (Rom 11:30). At that time, they were “without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world” (Eph 2:12).

The Gentiles, however, obtained divine mercy through the disobedience of Israel (Rom 11:30). Israel, the builders, rejected the stone, namely Jesus Christ (Matt 21:42). As a result, the crucifixion and subsequent resurrection of Christ became the chief cornerstone, the foundation stone for the building of the true church in which Gentile believers compose the majority.

God will use the mercy given to Gentile believers to bring mercy upon Israel (Rom 11:31). The reason is clear: “For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all” (Rom 11:32). This divine principle is also clear; through human disobedience God can manifest his divine mercy. Out of love and grace, God withholds from men, both Jews and Gentiles, what they deserve. Earlier, God said, “I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy” (Rom 9:15; cf. Exod 33:19).

God thus will sovereignly use the salvation of Gentiles in this present church age to bring about the salvation of Israel in the seven-year period prior to the return of Christ to the earth (Dan 9:24–27).

Israel’s God (Rom 11:33–36)

In praise and worship, Paul exclaimed, “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out” (Rom 11:33). Only God could purpose and complete such a complex, paradoxical program for both Israel and the church. Only he could work in and through the action of men, both good and evil, to accomplish his ultimate goal—his own glory and the blessing of his people. No creature could improve upon God’s eternal counsel (Rom 11:34–35).

God alone deserves all the glory for the present salvation of Jews and Gentiles within the true church and for the future salvation of his covenant people, Israel. Paul appropriately ended this section, “For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen” (Rom 11:36).

The Fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant

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INTRODUCTION: THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT

Dispensational premillennialists understand the importance of the Abrahamic covenant to premillennialism.¹ John Walvoord, for example, wrote:

It is recognized by all serious students of the Bible that the covenant with Abraham is one of the important and determinative revelations of Scripture. It furnishes the key to the entire Old Testament and reaches for its fulfillment into the New. In the controversy between premillenarians and amillenarians, the interpretation of this covenant more or less settles the entire argument. The analysis of its provisions and the character of their fulfillment set the mold for the entire body of Scriptural truth.²

Charles Ryrie wrote,

The interpretation of the Abrahamic covenant is a watershed between premillennialism and amillennialism. The question concerns its fulfillment. All agree that certain aspects of it have

¹ This article was originally presented at The Council on Dispensational Hermeneutics at Calvary Theological Seminary, Kansas City, MO, on September 17, 2014.

² John Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Dunham, 1959), 139.

been fulfilled. But all do not agree on the fulfillment of other aspects of it, particularly the land promise.³

J. Dwight Pentecost wrote,

This covenant has a most important bearing on the doctrines of eschatology. The eternal aspects of this covenant, which guarantee Israel a permanent national existence, perpetual title to the land of promise, and the certainty of material and spiritual blessing through Christ, and guarantee Gentile nations a share in these blessings, determine the whole eschatological program of the Word of God. The covenant becomes the seed from which are bought forth the later covenants made with Israel. The essential areas of the Abrahamic Covenant: the land, the seed and the blessing are enlarged in the subsequent covenants made with Israel.⁴

The Abrahamic covenant is developed in these unconditional covenants: Land, Davidic, and New. The land promise of the Abrahamic covenant is developed in the Land covenant (Deut 30:1–10). The seed promise of the Abrahamic covenant is developed in the Davidic covenant (2 Sam 7:18–16). The blessing promise of the Abrahamic covenant is developed in the New covenant (Jer 31:31–40).

What is the Abrahamic covenant? What promises did God make to Abraham? Has God fulfilled his promises in the Abrahamic covenant already? What is the relationship of the church to the Abrahamic covenant? Will the land promise be fulfilled for the nation of Israel in the future millennial kingdom? This article will attempt to answer these questions.

First, this article will survey the promises made by God to Abraham and their fulfillment. Second, various amillennial views on the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant will be

³ Charles Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Chicago: Moody, 1999), 526.

⁴ J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1958), 71.

defined and critiqued. Finally, various premillennial views on the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant will be defined and critiqued (covenant premillennial view, progressive dispensational view, and traditional dispensational view).

GOD'S PROMISES TO ABRAM BEFORE THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT (Genesis 12–13)

God promised to bless Abram and make him a blessing (Genesis 12:1–3)

Now the Lord had said to Abram, “Get out of your country, from your family, and from your father’s house to a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation. I will bless you and make your name great. And you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen 12:1–3).

God appeared to Abram in Ur of the Chaldees and commanded him to leave his country, his family, and his father’s house and go to a land that God would show him. God made several promises to Abram in his initial call recorded in Genesis 12. The “I will” statements of God show God’s intention to bless Abram and make him a blessing to the world.

First, God promised to make Abram a great nation. God started to fulfill this promise when he gave Abram and Sarah a son: Isaac. The nation of Israel is that great nation descended from Abram, Isaac, and Jacob.

Second, God promised to bless Abram. God blessed Abram with livestock, silver, and gold (Gen 13:2). Abram and Lot could not live in the same area because “their possessions were so great” (Gen 13:6).

Third, God promised to make Abram’s name great. God kept his promise. Abraham is the father of the faithful. Abraham is revered by three great religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

Fourth, God promised to bless those who blessed Abram and to curse him who cursed Abram. God blessed Abram’s nephew

Lot with great possessions (Gen 13). God cursed Pharaoh for taking Abram's wife into his harem (Gen 12). Throughout history nations that have blessed Israel have experienced God's blessing (America). Nations that have cursed Israel and the Jews have experienced God's curse (i.e., Nazi Germany).

Fifth, God promised to bless all the families of the earth in Abram. The universal blessing promise finds its fulfillment in Jesus Christ—the Seed of Abram (Gal 3:16).

The literal fulfillment of the personal promises of God to Abram show that God will literally fulfill the national promises he made to Abram later in the Abrahamic covenant (Gen 15).

God promised to give Abram's descendants the land after Abram obeyed the call of God (Genesis 12:4–7)

So Abram departed as the Lord had spoken to him and Lot went with him. And Abram was 75 years old when he departed from Haran. Then Abram took Sarai his wife and Lot his brother's son and all their possessions that they had gathered and the people whom they had acquired in Haran and they departed to go to the land of Canaan. So they came to the land of Canaan. Abram passed through the land to the place of Shechem as far as the terebinth tree of Moreh. And the Canaanites were in the land. Then the Lord appeared to Abram and said, "*To your descendants I will give this land.*" And there he built an altar to the Lord who had appeared to him. (Gen 12:4–7; italics added)

Abram obeyed this command of God in stages. First, he left his country Ur of the Chaldees. He took his wife Sarai, his father Terah, and his nephew Lot and journeyed to Haran (Gen 11:31).

The writer to the Hebrews says,

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise (Heb 11:8–9).

Abram did not leave his father's house until his father Terah died in Haran (Gen 11:32). Abram left Haran and came to the land of Canaan (Gen 12:4). He traveled through the land to Shechem (Gen 12:6). The Lord appeared to Abram and gave this promise to him: "To your descendants I will give this land." Abram worshipped the Lord by building an altar to the Lord at that place (Gen 12:7).

It is important to see that God made a promise to Abram about the land (Gen 12) before God confirmed the promise with a covenant (Gen 15).

**God promised to give Abram and his descendants
the land and to multiply his descendants
(Gen 13:14-16)**

God promised Abram the land again after Abram allowed Lot to choose where he wanted to live:

And the Lord said to Abram after Lot had separated from him, 'Lift your eyes now and look from the place where you are—northward, southward, eastward and westward; *for all the land which you see I give to you and your descendants forever.* And I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth; so that if a man could number the dust of the earth, then your descendants also could be numbered. (Gen 13:14-16; italics added)

**God promised to give Abram innumerable descendants
(Gen 15:1-6)**

God told Abram that his reward would be great (15:1). Abram thought Eliezer of Damascus (his servant) would be his heir since he was childless (15:2-3). God told Abram that Eliezer would not be his heir but that his own son would be his heir (15:4). God told Abram to look to heaven and see if he was able to number the stars (15:5). God promised Abram that his descendants would be innumerable (15:5). Abram believed God's promise and God imputed righteousness to Abram (15:6).

**GOD'S PROMISES TO ABRAM IN THE ABRAHAMIC
COVENANT AND THEIR FULFILLMENT
(Gen 15:13–16)**

God identified himself as the LORD who brought Abram out of Ur of the Chaldeans to give him the land as his possession (15:7). Abram asked God about how he would know the land would be his (15:8). God told Abram to bring a three-year-old heifer, three-year-old female goat and a three-year-old ram, a turtledove, and a pigeon (15:9). Abram then cut these animals in half, but he did not cut the birds in half (15:10). Abram drove away the birds of prey (vultures?) (15:11). Abram fell into a deep sleep at sunset (15:12). A great darkness fell on Abram (15:12).

**God predicted that Abram's descendants would be sojourners
and servants in a strange land for 400 years
(Gen 15:13)**

“Then He said to Abram: Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs and will serve them and they will afflict them four hundred years” (Gen 15:13). Jacob and his family moved to Egypt 430 years before the Exodus (1876 BC according to Merrill; Gen 46; Exod 12:40). The Israelites became servants of the Egyptians for 400 years from 1846 to 1446 BC. Pharaoh set taskmasters over them to afflict them with their burdens (Exod 1:11): “The Egyptians made the children of Israel serve with rigor. And they made their lives bitter with hard bondage in mortar, in brick and in all manner of service in the field. All their service in which they made them serve was with rigor” (Exod 1:13–14). Stephen referenced the fulfillment of this promise in his defense before the Sanhedrin (Acts 7:6).

**God promised to judge the nation that enslaved them
(Gen 15:14)**

“And also the nation whom they serve I will judge” (Gen 15:14). God sent ten plagues on Pharaoh and the Egyptians: (1) the Nile River was turned to blood (Exod 7:14–25), (2) frogs (Exod 8:1–15), (3) gnats (Exod 8:16–19), (4) flies (Exod 8:20–32), (5) death of livestock (Exod 9:1–7), (6) boils (Exod 9:8–12), (7) hail (Exod 9:13–35), (8) locusts (Exod 10:1–20), (9) darkness (Exod 20:21–29), and (10) death of Egypt’s firstborn (Exod 11:1–12:30).

**God promised to deliver Abram’s descendants
out of slavery (Gen 15:14)**

God said, “Afterward they shall come out with great possessions” (Gen 15:14). The book of Exodus reveals how God delivered Israel from bondage in Egypt:

Now the children of Israel had done according to the word of Moses and they had asked from the Egyptians articles of silver, articles of gold and clothing. And the Lord had given the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they granted them what they requested. Thus they plundered the Egyptians . . . Now the sojourn of the children of Israel who lived in Egypt was 430 years. And it came to pass at the end of the 430 years—on that very same day—it came to pass that all the armies of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt (Exod 12:35–36, 40–41).

**God promised Abram that he would die
in peace at an old age (Gen 15:15)**

“Now as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age” (Gen 15:15). Later Moses wrote, “This is the sum of the years of Abraham’s life which he lived: one hundred and seventy five years. Then Abraham breathed his last and died in a good old age, an old man and full of years, and was gathered to his people” (Gen 25:7–8).

**God promised that Abram’s descendants would come back to the
promised land in the fourth generation
(Gen 15:16)**

“But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete” (Gen 15:16). Joshua led Israel into the promised land in the fourth generation from the time of Israel’s enslavement in Egypt (1406 BC). A generation was viewed as 100 years. The return to the promised land was delayed because it was not yet time for the Amorites to be judged for their sins (immorality and idolatry).

The Abrahamic Covenant Ceremony (Gen 15:17–18)

“And it came to pass when the sun went down and it was dark that behold there appeared a smoking oven and a burning torch that passed between those pieces. On the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram.” (Gen 15:17-18a)

The Lord in a theophany (a smoking fire pot⁵ and a flaming torch) passed between the pieces of the cut animals while Abram was asleep. God alone passed between the cut pieces of the sacrificed animals. This shows that the Abrahamic covenant is a unilateral covenant and not a bilateral covenant.

Weinfeld argues that the Abrahamic covenant was an unconditional “covenant of grant.”⁶ God alone was accepting

⁵ Wenham comments on the smoking fire pot: “Since it is used for baking the Hebrew word may be translated oven but modern ovens are so different that this is rather misleading. The term seems to have been used for a large earthenware jar. The dough stuck to the side and was then baked by putting charcoal inside the jar or putting the jar near the fire. Smoke and fire are symbolic of the presence of God (Exod 13:21; 19:18; 20:18). (Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*. Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 1 [Waco, Texas: Word, 1987], 332).

⁶ “In its original setting the promise of the land was unconditional, although it presupposed—as we have indicated—loyalty and the fulfillment of some obligations and duties (see Gen 18:19; Ps 132:12);

responsibility to fulfill the covenant promises, to Abram. Abram was a recipient of the covenant promises but he was not placed under any obligation for God to fulfill his promises to him.

Jeffrey Niehaus believes that the Abrahamic covenant was conditional because he said it has the structural elements of a second millennium BC suzerain vassal treaty but that it also contains a grant of lands to conquer.

The fact that the land had to be conquered if it was to be possessed constitutes another problem for Weinfeld's approach. The examples of the "covenant of grant" which he adduces are all royal grants of land to people (citizens, vassals) who have in effect earned such a gift by their loyalty to the king. In such cases no warfare is required for the grantee to possess the land. He simply walks in it, as it were, and enjoys ownership of it. The fact that Israel will have to conquer the land in order to possess it marks a major difference between the covenants of grant in the ancient Near East and Conquest commission implied in the Abrahamic covenant ... the gift of the land to Abram by the Lord in Genesis 15 requires that the land be conquered if it is to be possessed, as subsequent revelation makes clear. In other words the realization of the gift of land turns out to be conditional.⁷

Abraham earned the gift of land by his obedience to the call of God to go to a land that God would show him. Just because the Abrahamic covenant has some structural elements similar to a suzerain vassal treaty (historical prologue) does not mean that it is a suzerain vassal treaty like the Mosaic covenant. The fact that Abraham did not walk with God between the sacrificed animals shows that God alone was taking responsibility for fulfilling the covenant promises. The fulfillment of the covenant

the covenant of promise itself was never formulated as conditional" (M. Weinfeld, "The Covenant of Grant in the Old Testament and in the Ancient Near East," *JAOS* 90 (1970), 184–203).

⁷ J. Niehaus, "God's Covenant With Abraham" *JETS* 56.2 (June 2013): 267.

promises would not depend upon the obedience of Abraham. The Abrahamic covenant is an unconditional covenant of grant, not a suzerain vassal treaty.

Victor Hamilton says that God was not placing himself under any kind of potential curse by passing through the pieces of the sacrificed animals: "Instead, what one finds here is that the slaying and arranging of the animals is simply a sacrificial practice by means of which a covenant is ratified."⁸

Hasel states, "The killing and sectioning of the animals by Abram is a sacrificial preparation for the subsequent divine ratification of the covenant by Yahweh who in passing between the pieces irrevocably pledges the fulfillment of his covenant promise to the patriarch."⁹

Wenham agrees with Hasel: "It is not a dramatized curse that would come into play should the covenant be broken, but a solemn and visual reaffirmation of the covenant that is essentially a promise."¹⁰

Walton writes,

Texts from Mariand Alalakh feature the killing of animals as part of the ceremony of making a treaty. In these texts, walking through this sacrificial pathway can be seen as a symbolic action enacting the treaty as well as a curse on the one who violates the promise. This sort of explanation is less satisfactory in Genesis 15 because it is unclear what significance a self-curse can possibly have for God. Abram's driving away the birds of prey is identified as symbolic of future protection from Israel's enemies provided by

⁸ Victor Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 1-17*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 433.

⁹ Gerhard F. Hasel, "The Meaning of the Animal Rite in Genesis 15" *JSTOT* 19 (1981): 70.

¹⁰ G. Wenham, "The Symbolism of the Animal Rite in Genesis 15: A Response to G. F. Hasel" *JSTOT* 22 (1982): 136.

Abram's faith. In the last analysis there are no parallels to this ritual that fully clarify it for us.¹¹

Wenham writes,

The Sinaitic and Deuteronomic covenants were agreements imposing obligations on both God and Israel: their closest extra-biblical analogy is found in the ancient international treaties made by great powers with their vassals. This covenant with Abraham is different: it is a promissory oath made by God alone. Weinfeld (JAOS 90 (1970), 184–203; TDOT, 2:270–272) says the nearest parallel to this form is the royal land grant made by kings to loyal servants. These grants of land were typically made to a man and his descendants in perpetuity. In form and content they thus run in parallel to the patriarchal promises.¹²

**God promised the land to Abram's descendants
(Gen 15:18–21)**

“On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram saying *“To your offspring (seed) I give this land from the river of Egypt to the great river – the river Euphrates”* (Gen 15:18; italics added). The Lord identified the inhabitants of the promised land: “Kenites, Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Girgashites and the Jebusites” (Gen 15:19–20).

This is the first time the boundaries of the promised land are given in the Bible. Dispensational premillennialists believe that Israel has never possessed at one time all of the land promised to them by God in the Abrahamic covenant. So they believe that there must be a future fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant land promise for Israel.

The river of Egypt is the promised land's southern border. There is debate regarding “the river of Egypt.” Ryrie believes it

¹¹ John Walton, *Genesis*. The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 423.

¹² Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 333.

is a reference to the Nile River¹³ while Hamilton and Wehnam say that it refers to Wadi el-Arish (which is east of Nile River).¹⁴ The Euphrates River is the promised land's northeastern border.

THE PROMISES OF THE LAND TO ABRAHAM, ISAAC AND JACOB AFTER THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT

God again promised the land to Abraham and his descendants (Gen 17:5–8).

No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you; and kings shall come from you. And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and your descendants after you. *Also I give to you and your descendants after you the land in which you are a stranger, all the land of Canaan, as an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.* (Gen 17:5–8; italics added)

God promised to make Abram fruitful and make nations come from him. Abraham is not only the father of the nation of Israel, he is also the father of the Arab peoples (from Ishmael as well as the sons from his wife Keturah—cf. Gen 25:1–4).

¹³ Ryrie says in a footnote on Genesis 15:18–21, “The word for river refers to a large river. A different word meaning a stream is used for a wadi, which does not always have water in it” (Ryrie Study Bible, 27).

¹⁴ Hamilton writes, “The river of Egypt (see Num 34:5; Josh 15:4 which use *nahal* instead of *nahar*) is not the Nile but the modern Wadi el-Arish, the dividing line between Palestine and Egypt” (Victor Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 438). Wenham also believes that the river of Egypt refers to Wadi el-Arish (*Genesis 1-15*, 333).

God promised that kings would come from Abraham. Jacob made a prediction about his son Judah: “The scepter shall not depart from Judah. Nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh comes. And to Him shall be the obedience of the people” (Gen 49:10). The word “Shiloh” means “whose it is.” The Messiah who had the right to the scepter would come from the line of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Judah. Later God promised David in the unconditional Davidic covenant that one of his descendants would sit on the throne and rule Israel forever (2 Sam 7:12–13). Jesus is the king of Israel who fulfills the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants. The angel Gabriel told Mary about her son Jesus: “He will be great and will be called the Son of the Highest, and the Lord God will give Him the throne of his father David. And he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end” (Luke 1:32-33). Mary responded in worship to the angel’s announcement, praising God for fulfilling the Abrahamic covenant through Jesus: “He has helped his servant Israel in remembrance of his mercy. As He spoke to our fathers to Abraham and to his seed forever” (Luke 1:54–55).

God promised to establish his covenant between himself and Abraham and his descendants. God said that the Abrahamic covenant is an “everlasting covenant” (Gen 17:7). God also promised the land of Canaan to Abram and his descendants as “an everlasting possession” (Gen 17:8). Renald Showers states two guarantees of the Abrahamic covenant: “The Abrahamic covenant guarantees Israel permanent existence as a nation and it guarantees Israel permanent ownership of the promised land.”¹⁵

The word “everlasting” shows that the Abrahamic covenant is unconditional. The word “everlasting” would not have been used if the Abrahamic covenant were conditional. In that case if Israel disobeyed God’s commands, then they would forfeit what God promised. Since Israel has never possessed all of the land

¹⁵ Renald Showers, *There Really Is A Difference: A Comparison of Covenant and Dispensational Theology* (Bellmawr, NJ: Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, 1990), 69.

promised to Abraham and his descendants, there must be a future fulfillment for this promise. Later the psalmist would say of the Lord,

He remembers His covenant forever, the word which He commanded, for a thousand generations. The covenant with which He made with Abraham, and His oath to Isaac and confirmed to Jacob for a statute, to Israel as an everlasting covenant, saying, "To you I will give the land of Canaan as the allotment of your inheritance." (Ps 105:9-11)

**God promised the land, multiplied seed and blessing
to Abraham's son Isaac (Gen 26:3-5)**

God promised the land to Abraham's son Isaac and not to Ishmael. God said,

Dwell in this land and I will be with you and bless you; *for to you and your descendants I give all these lands*, and I will perform the oath which I swore to Abraham your father. And I will make your descendants multiply as the stars of heaven; *I will give to your descendants all these lands*; and in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed because Abraham obeyed My voice and kept my charge, My commandments, My statutes and My laws. (Gen 26:3-5)

**God promised the land, multiplied seed
and blessing to Jacob
(the father of the nation of Israel)
(Gen 28:3-4; 13-14; 35:11-12; 48:3-4)**

Isaac blessed deceptive Jacob rather than Esau. He said,

May God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful and multiply you, that you may be an assembly of peoples; and give you the blessing of Abraham, to you and your descendants with you, *that you may inherit the land in which you are a stranger, which God gave to Abraham.* (Gen 28:3-4; italics added)

At Bethel God renewed the Abrahamic covenant with Jacob: I am the LORD God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; *the land on which you lie I will give to you and your descendants.* Also your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth; you shall spread abroad to the west and the east, to the north and the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed. (Gen 28:13–14)

God renewed the covenant with Jacob again after he returned to Bethel and built an altar. God said, “I am God Almighty. Be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall proceed from you and kings shall come from your body. *The land which I gave Abraham and Isaac I give to you; and to your descendants after you I give this land*” (Gen 35:11–12; italics added).

Jacob rehearsed for Joseph the Abrahamic Covenant before blessing his two sons Ephraim and Manasseh:

God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan and blessed me and said to me, “Behold, I will make you fruitful and multiply you, and I will make of you a multitude of people and *give this land to your descendants after you as an everlasting possession.*” (Gen 48:3–4; italics added)

AMILLENNIAL VIEWS ON THE FULFILLMENT OF THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT

Amillennialists differ on the time of the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant. Some amillennialists (Riddlebarger, Allis) believe that the Abrahamic covenant has already been fulfilled by Israel in the past. Some amillennialists (Pieters) believe that the Abrahamic covenant is being fulfilled today by the church. Some amillennialists (Hoekema) believe that the Abrahamic covenant will be fulfilled by the church in the future eternal state.

Amillennial View: The Abrahamic Covenant land promise was fulfilled in the time of Joshua. (Riddlebarger)

Joshua 21:43–45 says,

So the Lord gave to Israel all the land of which He had sworn to give to their fathers, and they took possession of it and dwelt in it. The Lord gave them rest all around, according to all that He had sworn to their fathers. And not a man of all their enemies stood against them; the Lord delivered all their enemies into their hand. Not a word failed of any good thing which the Lord had spoken to the house of Israel. All came to pass.

Before he died, Joshua said,

Behold this day I am going the way of all the earth. And you know in all your hearts and in all your souls that not one thing has failed of all the good things which the LORD your God spoke concerning you. All have come to pass for you; not one word of them has failed. (Josh 23:14)

Kim Riddlebarger writes, “This promise of a land was fulfilled when Joshua led the people of Israel back into Canaan.”¹⁶

Israel took possession of the land during the time of Joshua and experienced peace for as long as their leader lived. But the first chapter of Judges records what happened in Israel after the death of Joshua. Various tribes of Israel failed to take the land allotted to them (Judg 1:19, 21, 27, 29, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36). The struggle of the twelve tribes to possess the land after Joshua’s death shows that the Abrahamic covenant was not completely and finally fulfilled in the time of Joshua.

Nehemiah commented on how Israel possessed the land in the time of Joshua (cf. Neh 9:24–25). But Nehemiah wrote that Israel’s disobedience led to God delivering Israel into the hands

¹⁶ Kim Riddlebarger, *A Case For Amillennialism: Understanding the End Times* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 46.

of their enemies (Neh 9:26–27). Kaiser writes, “The emphasis of Joshua 21:44–45 was on the promised word which had not failed Israel, nor would it. But whether any given generation remained in the land has depended on whether it has set a proper value on God’s promised inheritance.”¹⁷

Ryrie writes,

God had kept his promise to give Israel the land of Canaan as recorded in Genesis 17:8. It is true that the Israelites had not yet fully conquered it, but God had told them they would do so gradually. See note on Deuteronomy 7:22. The promise of Genesis 15:18–20 involving a larger territory will be fulfilled in the Millennium.¹⁸

Donald Campbell writes,

Some theologians have insisted that the statement in Josh 21:43 means that the land promise of the Abrahamic covenant was fulfilled then. But this cannot be true because later the Bible gives additional predictions about Israel possessing the land after the time of Joshua (e.g. Amos 9:14–15). Joshua 21:43, therefore, refers to the extent of the land as outlined in Numbers 34 and not to the ultimate extent as it will be in the messianic kingdom (Genesis 15:18–21). Also though Israel possessed the land at this time it was later dispossessed, whereas the Abrahamic Covenant promised Israel that she would possess the land forever (Genesis 17:8).¹⁹

¹⁷ Walt Kaiser, “The Promised Land: A Biblical–Historical View,” 307.

¹⁸ Charles Ryrie, *Ryrie Study Bible*, 366.

¹⁹ Donald Campbell, “Joshua” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, eds. Roy Zuck and John Walvoord (Wheaton: Victor, 1985), 364–65.

Amillennial View: The Abrahamic Covenant land promise was fulfilled in the time of David–Solomon (Allis).

First Kings 4:21, 24 says,

So Solomon reigned over all kingdoms from the River (Euphrates) to the land of the Philistines, as far as the border of Egypt. They brought tribute and served Solomon all the days of his life...For he had dominion over all the region on this side of the River from Tiphseh even to Gaza, namely over all the kings on this side of the River; and he had peace on every side all around him. And Judah and Israel dwelt safely, each man under his vine and his fig tree, from Dan as far as Beersheba, all the days of Solomon.

First Kings 8:65 says, “At that time Solomon held a feast and all Israel with him, a great assembly from the entrance of Hamath to the Brook of Egypt, before the LORD our God, seven days and seven more days—fourteen days.”

Oswald Allis writes:

The question naturally arises whether or to what extent the Abrahamic covenant has been fulfilled....This would indicate that the promise was regarded as fulfilled in this respect in the golden age of the monarchy. That it was so fulfilled is confirmed by the words of Heb 11:12. As to the land, the dominion of David and of Solomon extended from the Euphrates to the river of Egypt (1 Kings 4:21), which also reflects the terms of the covenant. Israel did come into possession of the land promised to the patriarchs. She possessed it, but not for ever. Her possession of the land was forfeited by disobedience, both before and after the days of David and Solomon.²⁰

Notice that the borders of Solomon’s kingdom were from the northeastern border of the River (Euphrates) to the land of the Philistines and as far as the border of Egypt. It does not say that

²⁰ Oswald Allis, *Prophecy and the Church* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1964), 57–58.

Solomon ruled to the river of Egypt. Second, Solomon's kingdom did not include the land of the Philistines (modern Gaza strip) which was also included in the borders of the promised land given in the Abrahamic covenant. Third, the promised land was not totally possessed by the Israelites as it says the kingdoms brought tribute and served Solomon. Finally, ancient Phoenicia (part of the promised land) was never ruled by Solomon.

Fruchtenbaum argues that even though David and Solomon conquered their enemies the land was still possessed by their enemies and not by Israel:

While David and Solomon extended Jewish control close to the borders of the Promised Land, it was not total since Phoenicia (Lebanon) retained its independence to the very end. Even if Phoenicia had fallen, it would not have fulfilled the covenant promises for with David and Solomon most of the non-Jewish territory, such as Syria, Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia, etc. was merely under military control and they had to pay tribute (1 Kgs 4:21) which could hardly be considered a fulfillment of a promise that concerned actual possession and settlement in the land and not merely military control.²¹

Walvoord points out that later prophecies in the prophetic books regarding the future possession of the land argues against the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant land promise during the days of Joshua and/or David and Solomon:

If its promises regarding the land were fulfilled in Joshua's time or in Solomon's, why do the Scriptures which were written later still appeal to the hope of future possession of the land? Practically every one of the Major and Minor Prophets mention in some form the hope of future possession of the land. All of them were written

²¹ Arnold Fruchtenbaum, "The Land Covenant" in *Progressive Dispensationalism: An Analysis of the Movement and Defense of Traditional Dispensationalism*, ed. Ron Bigalke, Jr., (New York: UP of America, 2005), 98.

after Solomon's day. This is an obvious rebuttal to the amillennial position.²²

Amillennial View: The Abrahamic Covenant is fulfilled today by the Church (Pieters).

Pieters believes that the church replaces Israel and inherits the spiritual blessings of the Abrahamic covenant. He writes,

Since the Christian church is now the Seed of Abraham under the New Covenant, all the promises of God to his people must be understood as her heritage, and all the prophecies concerning Israel not yet fulfilled and still to be fulfilled must be fulfilled in her; leaving nothing at all of either promise or prophecy for those who are merely descendants of Abraham after the flesh.²³

Michael Vlach summarizes various forms of replacement theology:

Some replacement theologians prefer the title "fulfillment theology" in describing their view of Israel's current and future role in relation to the church. Since supersessionism is a term that describes both replacement theology and fulfillment theology that term can be used interchangeably with replacement and fulfillment terminology in describing various forms which the two theologies may take. Supersessionism is the view that the NT church is the new and/or true Israel that has forever superseded the nation Israel as the people of God. It may take the form of punitive supersessionism, i.e. God is punishing Israel for her rejection of Christ. Or it may be in the form of economic supersessionism, i.e. it was God's plan for Israel's role as the people of God to expire with the coming of Christ and be replaced by the church. The final form of supersessionism is structural supersessionism, i.e. the OT Scriptures are largely indecisive in formulation of Christian conviction about God's work as

²² John Walvoord, *Millennial Kingdom*, 178.

²³ Albertius Pieters. *The Seed of Abraham* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950), 121.

consummator and redeemer. Strong supersessionists hold that Israel has no future in the plan of God, but moderate supersessionists see a divine plan for the future salvation of the Jews as a group, but not their national restoration to the promised land. This last view holds that Israel is the object of God's irrevocable gift of grace and calling, but that such a role guarantees them no national blessing as the OT promised. It assures them only of becoming part of the church as the people of God.²⁴

What New Testament texts show that God is not finished with Israel?

Matthew 19:28: "So Jesus said to them, 'Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of his glory, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.'" Jesus predicts that he will sit on the throne of his glory (the Davidic throne) in the regeneration (a reference to the millennial kingdom). At that time the disciples will sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel. This NT verse shows that the nation of Israel will exist in the future millennial kingdom and will be divided into twelve tribes.

Luke 22:29-30: Jesus said: "And I bestow upon you a kingdom, just as My Father bestowed one upon Me. That you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel." Jesus predicts that the disciples will enter and enjoy the kingdom. Jesus predicts that the disciples will dine with him in his kingdom. Jesus also predicts that the disciples will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel in his kingdom. This verse shows that the twelve tribes of Israel must be in existence in the coming kingdom.

Acts 1:6-7: "Therefore when they had come together, they asked Him, saying 'Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?' "It is not for you to know times or seasons

²⁴ Michael J. Vlach, "Various Forms of Replacement Theology," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 20, no. 1 (Spring 2009), 57.

which the Father has put in His own authority.” The disciples of Jesus anticipated the restoration of kingdom to Israel after the resurrection of Jesus. Jesus did not say that the disciples were wrong in anticipating a kingdom. He said that their timing was off. The kingdom is future and not present.

Has the church replaced Israel so that Israel has no future in the plan of God? No. Paul wrote that the covenants and the promises are given to the Israelites (Rom 9:4).

Romans 11:1: Paul wrote, “I say then, has God cast away His people? Certainly not. For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin.” Paul argues that God is not finished with his people Israel. Paul uses himself as example A to show that God is not finished with Israel. Paul was a Jewish Christian. Paul claimed to be an “Israelite” and of the “seed of Abraham.” Paul is an example of a physical–spiritual Jew. He is a physical descendant of Abraham, and he also had the faith of Abraham.

Paul argues that the natural branches (the Jews) have been cut off so that the unnatural branches (the Gentiles) could be grafted to the olive tree (the place of blessing of the Abrahamic covenant). God is able to graft them in again (Rom 11:23).

Romans 11:25–26: Paul wrote, “For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in. And so all Israel will be saved.” During the present time many Jews are spiritually blind and have not received Jesus as their Messiah. Blindness has happened in part since some Jews have received Jesus as their Messiah. During the present time many Gentiles are being saved. All Israel will be saved in the future at the second coming of Jesus to earth (cf. Zech 12:10–13:2).

Amillennial View: The Abrahamic Covenant will be fulfilled as the Church (made up of OT and NT saints) inherits the world in the eternal state—the new heavens and new earth (Hoekema).

Hoekema writes,

Prophecies about the restoration of Israel may also be fulfilled antitypically—that is, as finally fulfilled in the possession by all of God’s people of the new earth of which Canaan was a type. The Bible indicates that the land of Canaan was indeed a type of the everlasting inheritance of the people of God on the new earth. In the fourth chapter of the book of Hebrews the land of Canaan which the Israelites entered with Joshua is pictured as a type of the Sabbath rest which remains for the people of God. From Hebrews 11 we learn that Abraham, who had been promised the land of Canaan as an everlasting possession, looked forward to the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God (v.10). This future city, then, will have to be the final fulfillment of the promise to Abraham that he would everlastingly possess the land of Canaan. What can this future city be but the holy city which will be found on the new earth? From Gal 3:29 we learn that if we are Christ’s then we are Abraham’s seed, heirs according to promise. Heirs of what? Of all the blessings God promised to Abraham, including the promise that the land of Canaan would be his everlasting possession. That promise will be fulfilled for all of Abraham’s spiritual seed (believing Gentiles as well as believing Jews) on the new earth. For if it is true, as we saw, that the church is the New Testament counterpart of Old Testament Israel, then the promises given to Israel will find their ultimate fulfillment in the church.²⁵

Hoekema believes that the OT says nothing about a millennial reign of Christ. He thinks that the phrase “new heavens and new earth” used by Isaiah in Isaiah 65:17-25 and 66:22-23 refers to the eternal state. Hoekema argues that since

²⁵ Anthony Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 211.

the same phrase is used in Revelation 21:1 it must refer to the eternal state.

Hoekema argues that the word “everlasting” in the Abrahamic covenant promises suggests a fulfillment in the eternal state rather than just the millennial kingdom proposed by premillennialists.

Critique of Hoekema

God says,

For behold I create new heavens and a new earth; and the former shall not be remembered or come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create. For behold I create Jerusalem as a rejoicing. And her people a joy. I will rejoice in Jerusalem, and joy in my people. The voice of weeping shall no longer be heard in her, nor the voice of crying. No more shall an infant from there live but a few days; nor an old man who has not fulfilled his days. For the child shall die one hundred years old, but the sinner being one hundred years old shall be accursed. They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for as the days of a tree so shall be the days of My people. And My elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labor in vain, nor bring forth children for trouble. For they shall be the descendants of the blessed of the Lord and their offspring with them. It shall come to pass that before they call I will answer and while they are still speaking, I will hear. The wolf and the lamb shall feed together; The lion shall eat straw like the ox. The dust shall be the serpent’s food. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, says the Lord. (Isa 65:17–25)

Various OT texts reveal conditions that are part of the millennial kingdom on earth but not part of the new heavens and new earth in the eternal state. Isaiah 65:17–25 and 66:22–24 reveal conditions that cannot be part of the eternal state. These descriptions require an intermediate kingdom prior to the eternal state.

Isaiah states that the child will die one hundred years old and the sinner being one hundred years old shall be accursed

(Isa 65:20). The death of children at 100 years old shows the longevity of life in the millennial kingdom. This verse also shows that King Jesus will judge those unbelieving children of the tribulation saints who physically survive the tribulation period and enter the kingdom in their physical bodies.²⁶ Physical death will not happen in the new heavens and new earth. John wrote, “There will be no more death” (Rev 21:4).

The tribulation saints who survive the tribulation period will have to rebuild houses and plant vineyards after the devastating judgments of the tribulation period (cf. Rev. 6–19). Isaiah 65:21 says, “They will build houses and inhabit them; they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit.” Believers will not have to build houses in the eternal state because we will be living in the Father’s house which has many rooms (John 14:1–3), also called the New Jerusalem (cf. Rev. 21–22).

Tribulation saints who survive the tribulation period will marry and have children in the millennial kingdom. Isaiah predicted, “They shall not labor in vain, nor bring forth children for trouble; for they shall be the descendants of the blessed of the Lord and their offspring with them” (Isa 65:23).

Isaiah 66:22–24 says,

For as the new heavens and the new earth which I will make shall remain before me,” says the Lord. “So shall your descendants and your name remain. And it shall come to pass that from one New Moon to another, and from one Sabbath to another, all flesh shall come to worship before Me,” says the Lord. “And they shall go forth and look upon the corpses of the men who have transgressed against me for their worm does not die and their fire is not quenched. They shall be an abhorrence to all flesh.

Isaiah 66:23 says that all people will come to worship the Lord each new moon and Sabbath. This is a millennial scene. It

²⁶ Only believers (tribulation saints) will enter the millennial kingdom after the judgment of the nations by King Jesus (Matt 25). Their children will still need to trust in King Jesus as their Savior. Apparently some will reject Jesus as Savior and King. Their judgment shows that the age of accountability in the millennial kingdom will be 100 years old!

cannot be a scene from the eternal state in the new heavens and new earth. Revelation 21:23 states that there will be no need for the sun or the moon in the eternal state. The last verse of Isaiah is a strange one. Will believers look at corpses in the eternal state when they go to worship the Lord? No. This must be a millennial scene. Millennial saints will see the corpses of people who refuse to believe and worship the Messiah: King Jesus.

Feinberg writes,

Hoekema's view of history is not redeemable by the postulation of a new earth because the goal of history (the new heavens and new earth) is beyond history. The reason that a premillennialist can genuinely be optimistic about history in spite of the spread and intensification of evil is that he believes that God will make an incursion into history and establish his kingdom on this earth. Thus, while the course of human history apart from the visible establishment of God's kingdom will see the intensification of opposition to God, history will also see the righteous rule of God's king.²⁷

New Covenant Theology: The Abrahamic covenant has a physical fulfillment of the land promise for Israel as Israel conquered the land under Joshua. The Abrahamic covenant has a spiritual fulfillment of the land promise in a spiritual rest for believers (Steve Lehrer, Tom Wells, Fred Zaspel)

Lehrer believes that the land promises of the Abrahamic covenant were already fulfilled historically "by the time of the conquest of the land of Canaan under Joshua."²⁸ New Covenant Theology teaches that the "Abrahamic Covenant contains both the Old and New Covenants. The Old Covenant is the physical fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise and the New Covenant is

²⁷ Paul Feinberg, review of Anthony Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, *Trinity Journal* 1 (Spring 1980): 108.

²⁸ Steve Lehrer, *New Covenant Theology: Questions Answered* (n.p: Steve Lehrer, 2006), 32.

the spiritual fulfillment.”²⁹ Tom Wells says that the OT and NT writers “read the terms of the Abrahamic covenant in two different ways.”³⁰ OT writers saw the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant for Israel. NT writers saw the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant for the church. Citing Josh 21:43–45 and Heb 11:8–9 and 39–40 Wells writes, “Everything is fulfilled in Joshua; nothing is fulfilled in Hebrews. Clearly they are reading the evidence from different perspectives.”³¹

Bill Barrick has written an excellent analysis of New Covenant Theology:

Though New Covenant Theology (NCT) has positive aspects such as an insistence on a biblically based theology, several aspects of the system are not so positive. For example in pursuing a middle course between Dispensationalism and Covenant Theology its theologians rely on a strained view of Dispensationalism and adopt an interpretive methodology called supersessionism. A noteworthy omission in NCT’s listing of covenants is the Davidic. To a degree, NCT agrees with Dispensationalism on the Noahic and Abrahamic covenants, but the system fails to grasp the thematic continuity of the OT covenants. Instead, NCT stresses discontinuity as the defining characteristic of a covenant because of the biblical contrast of the Old and New Covenants, and follows a redemption, fulfillment, and kingdom hermeneutic rather than a literal, normal or plain hermeneutic. NCT and Dispensationalism agree on the centrality of the Abrahamic Covenant in the theology of the OT, but NCT sees one kind of fulfillment of that covenant’s land promises in the days of Joshua. It understands the spiritual aspects of the Abrahamic Covenant as ultimately fulfilled in the Messiah and the possession of the promised land as ultimately fulfilled in a spiritual rest. The system holds that the gospel was not clearly revealed before the coming of Christ. The system takes the Old Covenant as fulfilling the physical parts of the Abrahamic

²⁹ Ibid., 36.

³⁰ Tom Wells, *New Covenant Theology: Description, Definition, Defense*. (n.p.: Tom Wells, Fred G. Zaspel, 2002) , 60.

³¹ Ibid., 61.

Covenant and the New Covenant as fulfilling the spiritual parts. NCT holds that the Israelites redeemed from Egypt were physically redeemed, but not spiritually redeemed because the Mosaic Covenant was based on works. This leads to the strange position that OT saints were not saved until after the death and resurrection of Christ. NCT thinks that the Davidic Covenant was fulfilled in the death and resurrection of Christ and fails to allow for the NT teaching of a future kingdom. With all its positive features, NCT misses vital points featured in the OT covenants.³²

Progressive Covenantalism: The Church inherits the world in the eternal state because of its connections to Jesus, who is Lord of the whole world (Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum).

Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum in their book *Kingdom Through Covenant* view the land of Israel as a type of the future new heavens and new earth. They write, "The land promise of the Abrahamic Covenant must also be understood in terms of what preceded it, namely, the covenant of creation. When this is done, there is further biblical warrant to view the land as a type or pattern of the entire creation."³³

They write,

Within the Old Testament and especially in prophetic anticipation, the "land" of Israel is identified with the new creation associated with the inauguration of the new covenant age... The New Testament announces that the inheritance of the "land" is fulfilled in our Lord Jesus Christ, who brings to completion all of the

³² Bill Barrick, "New Covenant Theology and the Old Testament Covenants" *The Master's Seminary Journal* 18, no 1 (Fall 2007), 165–80.

³³ Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 709.

previous covenants (along with their types and shadows), and who in his cross work inaugurates the new creation.³⁴

It is important to note that in this entire discussion of what Christ has accomplished in his new covenant work, there is little evidence that the land promise finds its Christological fulfillment in terms of a specific piece of land given to national Israel. The story line of Scripture simply does not move back in this direction. Rather, the entire New Testament instead announces that in Jesus, the last Adam and true Israel, our inheritance is nothing less than the new creation...Christ who is Lord over the whole world, inherits as a result of his work the entire world. He is the Messiah of Israel, but his rule extends far beyond the borders of the original promised land (e.g. Phil 2:10; cf. 1 Corinthians 22–23; Eph. 1:10). This way of thinking of the fulfillment of the land promise in Christ is confirmed by other important New Testament texts (Rom 4:13; Eph 6:3; and Heb 3:1–4:13; 11:8–22). For example, in Rom 4:13, Paul is clear that Abraham did not view the land promise as referring merely to a small piece of Palestinian territory but ultimately saw it as a type and pattern of the entire world. Or, in Eph 6:3, Paul can quote the fifth commandment (which clearly pertains to the land of Canaan in its Old Testament context) and now expand it to the entire earth.³⁵

Another crucial text which also makes this same point, similar to what Paul says in Rom 4:13 is Heb 11:8–22. There the author contends that Abraham’s inheritance ultimately was not the land of Canaan but a heavenly inheritance linked to the New Jerusalem and the new creation.³⁶

Given how the biblical covenants unpack the theme of land it should not surprise us how the entire story line ends in Revelation 21–22. In the final chapters of Scripture the consummated state is pictured as rest in terms that recall Eden of old, yet far greater. In

³⁴ Ibid., 713.

³⁵ Ibid., 714.

³⁶ Ibid., 715.

this new creation, we have the geographical boundaries of Eden (“the land”) expanded to the entire creation, which is also beautifully described in the dimensions of the Holy of Holies, signifying God’s covenantal presence throughout the entire creation, not just in the limited dimensions of the Old Testament tabernacle/temple. In this vision of the new heavens and new earth, God’s people take up residence in God’s presence, a residence described as the antitypical fulfillment of the Old Testament land. In fact, in this final vision we discover our final inheritance—what Abraham is said to have looked for—namely, a city whose builder and maker is God and a creation that is full of God’s glory.³⁷

Michael Vlach gives a detailed review and critique of the book *Kingdom Through Covenant*.³⁸ Vlach points out that Gentry and Wellum fail to make significant comments about key NT texts such as Matthew 24–25, Luke 1–2, Acts 1–3, Romans 9–11 and Revelation 19–20. In Luke 1:32–33 the angel Gabriel told Mary that Jesus’ coming is linked to the Davidic covenant and a kingdom reign over national Israel. Zacharias referred to both the Davidic and Abrahamic covenants as evidence that Israel would be saved and rescued from her enemies (Luke 1:67–74). Peter tells the leaders of Israel that they are still “sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, ‘And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed’” (Acts 3:25).

PREMILLENNIAL VIEWS

Premillennialists believe that the Abrahamic covenant will be finally fulfilled in the future millennial kingdom. The Lord Jesus Christ will return to earth in power and great glory before he establishes his kingdom on this earth (Rev.19). At this time

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Michael J. Vlach, “Have They Found a Better Way? An Analysis of Gentry and Wellum’s *Kingdom Through Covenant*, *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 24, no. 1 (Spring 2014), 5–24.

the promises of the Abrahamic covenant will be finally and totally fulfilled.

Covenant Premillennial View: The Abrahamic covenant will be fulfilled as the Church (made up of OT and NT saints) inherits the world in the future millennial kingdom (Fuller).

Fuller writes,

When New Testament saints are perfected at the resurrection then Old Testament saints will be resurrected and perfected as well (Heb 11:40). So the manifold wisdom of God (Eph 3:10), which was manifest when Gentile believers were included in the church as well as Jews, will be evident from the final glorified state of all the saints. Since Old Testament saints (mostly Jewish) are going to be made perfect along with New Testament saints, the group that will emerge at this perfecting will be an enlarged church which shows the manifold wisdom of God in among other things, having Jews and Gentiles on the same footing.³⁹

Fuller thinks that Israel will be saved at the time of Christ's premillennial second coming and that the Jews will then be part of the church. He sees Israel and the church enjoying the same blessing in the millennial kingdom:

But any thought of such a division of blessings must be rejected on the basis that Gentiles are joint heirs (Eph 3:6) and share the fat root of the olive tree (Rom 11:17)... But also since believers are going to reign with Christ during the millennium, they will no doubt have access to Palestine and will surely be a part of those who will sit at table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. (Matt 8:11)⁴⁰

³⁹ Fuller, *Gospel and Law: Contrast or Continuum?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 196.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 192.

Critique of Fuller

Hebrews 12:23 presents a problem for Fuller's view of an enlarged "church" in the millennium and eternal state. "But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of righteous men made perfect." In the New Jerusalem distinctions are made between the residents. The church is distinguished from the spirits of righteous men made perfect (a reference to OT saints). Hebrews 11:40 states, "God provided something better for us (the church) so that apart from us they (OT saints) should not be made perfect."

Fuller thinks that Christians (NT saints) will be resurrected at the same time as OT saints as he holds to a post-tribulation rapture of the church. Dispensational premillennialists argue for a pre-tribulation rapture of the church (1 Thess 4:13-18; 1 Cor 15:51-58; Rev 3:10). Christians who have died will be resurrected before the tribulation period. Old Testament saints and tribulation martyrs will be resurrected at the end of the tribulation period when the Lord Jesus Christ returns to earth in glory (Dan 12:13; Rev 20:4).

One problem with the post-tribulation rapture view is that if the church is raptured at the end of the tribulation, then no one would enter the millennial kingdom with physical bodies. What nations would Christ rule with a rod of iron (Rev 19:15)? Fuller believes that unbelievers enter the millennial kingdom. He says, "If Christ can work to convert rebels after he has returned to earth, then unbelievers can enter the millennium and be saved after they respond favorably to Christ."⁴¹ Fuller does not give any scripture to support his assertion. Matthew 25:31-46 states that when Christ returns all the nations will be gathered before he and he will separate the sheep from the goats. The sheep (Gentile believers from the tribulation period) will enter the

⁴¹ Ibid., 188.

millennial kingdom in their physical bodies and enjoy the blessings. The goats (Gentile unbelievers from the Tribulation) will be sent away into eternal punishment. Unbelieving Gentiles who survive the tribulation period will not enter the millennial kingdom in their physical bodies.⁴²

Fuller gives these arguments for his view: (1) The church is not unique because the Holy Spirit indwelt men in the OT in the same way that he indwells believers today (Num 27:18; Col 1:27). (2) Ephesians 3:5 indicates that the mystery of Jew-Gentile equality in the church was not made known in the Old Testament to the extent that it is now made known in the New Testament.

The following arguments answer the arguments given by Fuller in his book. First, John 14:17 indicates that the relationship of the Holy Spirit to men in the OT was different from the relationship that the Holy Spirit has to believers today. Colossians 1:26 also states that the mystery (Christ in you) was hidden from past ages and generations. Second, the comparative adverb “as” in Ephesians 3:5 can be taken grammatically as descriptive (a comparison of kind) instead of in a restrictive (a comparison of degree) sense. Fuller understands the mystery as partially revealed in the OT and fully revealed in the New. Dispensational premillennialists understand Ephesians 3:5 to teach that the mystery was not known in the OT, but was revealed by the apostles and NT prophets in the NT. Ephesians 3:9 indicates that Paul was called to reveal the dispensation of the mystery (the church age).

⁴² Gary Gromacki, “A Critique of the Use of Galatians 3 in the Theological Systems of A. Pieters, D. Fuller and A. Hoekema” (Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1984), 52.

Progressive Dispensationalist View: The promises of the Abrahamic covenant are fulfilled in Jesus, the seed of Abraham. The new covenant is the form in which the Abrahamic covenant will be fulfilled (Bock/Blaising).

Bock and Blaising believe that the Abrahamic covenant promises are fulfilled in Jesus. "From the standpoint of the New Testament the promises of Abraham are being and will be fulfilled through the Christ, who is proclaimed as Jesus . . . God blesses Christ, the seed of Abraham, the seed of David, and all those of Abraham and of the nations of the earth who are in Him."⁴³

The New Testament gives the good news concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a descendant of David, to whom the grant covenant of David has been confirmed. He has been anointed by the Holy Spirit, raised up even from the dead, declared to be Son of God, being made Lord and Christ as He has been enthroned at the right hand of God, becoming the highest of the kings of the earth. In receiving Davidic blessings, he has become the heir of the blessings promised to Abraham, and He mediates those blessings to others, both from Israel and from the nations, as they are blessed in Him.⁴⁴

Bock writes,

It is important to note that the blessing which Paul has in mind in Galatians 3 is the reception of the Holy Spirit (see 3:2, 5; 4:6) and the gift of righteousness (3:21–22). These are in fact new covenant blessings, but Paul presents them as blessings of the Abrahamic covenant. Again, this shows that the new covenant is the form in which the Abrahamic covenant will be fulfilled. It is also important to note that Paul, just like Peter, sees the Abrahamic covenant blessing mediated in stages which are tied to the history of Christ.

⁴³ Craig Blaising and Darrell Bock, *Progressive Dispensationalism* (Grand Rapids: Bridgepoint Books), 190.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 210.

The stages distinguish not only between degrees of blessing but also between different kinds of blessing. Thus Peter spoke of the restoration of all things predicted by the prophets at the future coming of Christ. This certainly includes the national promises to Israel, since these promises are included in “all things predicted by the prophets.” Paul likewise spoke of the salvation of all Israel at the coming of Christ (Rom 11:26).⁴⁵

The emphasis in progressive dispensationalism is on the present fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant for the church. Bock and Blaising say that “the new covenant is the form in which the Abrahamic covenant will be fulfilled.” They believe that Jesus sits on the Davidic throne in heaven and mediates the spiritual blessings of the Abrahamic covenant to the church (the Holy Spirit and the gift of righteousness). Traditional dispensationalists argue that Jesus sits on the Father’s throne in heaven and will sit on the Davidic throne in the millennial kingdom (Rev 3:21; Matt 19:28; 25:31). In their book *Progressive Dispensationalism*, Bock and Blaising mention the “national promises to Israel,” but they do not focus on the fulfillment of the land promise for saved Israel in the millennial kingdom.

Traditional Dispensationalist Premillennial View: The Abrahamic Covenant will be fulfilled by saved Israel in the future millennial kingdom. Saved Israel will inherit the promised land in the millennial kingdom. (Walvoord; Pentecost; Ryrie; Johnson; Gromacki)

Ryrie believes that the Abrahamic covenant promises will literally be fulfilled in the future for Israel. He writes,

Israel is promised permanent possession of the land and permanent existence as a nation. This is based on the unconditional character of the covenant. Since the Church does not fulfill the national promises of the covenant, these promises

⁴⁵ Ibid., 191.

await a future fulfillment by the nation Israel. Other Scriptures were cited to show that the Lord has promised a future restoration of the nation and a return to the land. Thus, the unconditional, partially fulfilled Abrahamic covenant becomes an important plank in the solid basis for the premillennial faith.⁴⁶

Arguments for an Unconditional Abrahamic Covenant

The Abrahamic covenant is called eternal. In Genesis 17:7–8 God promised Abraham that the covenant he established with him will be an everlasting covenant and the land of Canaan will be given to him and to his descendants for an everlasting possession. David praised God that the covenant made with Abraham was confirmed to Israel as an everlasting covenant (1 Chron 16:17). The word “eternal” rules out the possibility that Israel because of disobedience could abrogate the covenant.

The covenant ceremony of Genesis 15 was unilateral and not bilateral. God alone passed through the pieces of the sacrificed animals. Abram was asleep when God passed through. God alone made the promise regarding the land. Abram was a recipient of the promises of the covenant. The fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant is not dependent upon the obedience of Abram or his descendants.

The Abrahamic covenant is a covenant of grant and not a suzerain–vassal treaty. Weinfeld writes,

The structure of both types of these documents is similar. Both preserve the same elements: historical introduction, border delineations, stipulations, witnesses, blessings and cursings. Functionally, however, there is a vast difference between these two types of documents. While the treaty constitutes an obligation of the vassal to his master, the suzerain, the “grant” constitutes an obligation of the master to his servant. In the grant the curse is directed towards the one who will violate the rights of the king’s vassal, while in the treaty the curse is directed towards the vassal

⁴⁶ Charles Ryrie, *The Basis of the Premillennial Faith* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1953):74–75.

who will violate the rights of the king. In other words, the grant serves mainly to protect the rights of the servant, while the treaty comes to protect the rights of the master. What is more, while the grant is a reward for loyalty and good deeds already performed, the treaty is an inducement for future loyalty. The covenant with Abraham, and so the covenant with David, indeed belong to the grant type and not to the vassal type.⁴⁷

Fruchtenbaum writes,

It must be stressed that, although a covenant may be made at a specific point of time, it does not mean that all provisions of the covenant go immediately into effect. Some do, but some may not for centuries. The Abrahamic covenant is a good example. Some of God's promises did go immediately into effect, such as providing for Abraham's physical needs in the land, his change of name and circumcision. Others were fulfilled only in the near future. For example, Abraham was promised a son through Sarah, but had to wait twenty-five years before that promise was fulfilled. Other provisions were fulfilled only later in Jewish history, such as the Egyptian sojourn, enslavement, and the Exodus (400 years later), which was also part of the covenant. Finally, other provisions are still future, never having been fulfilled, such as Abraham's ownership of the land and Israel's settlement in all of the Promised Land. It is important to note that although a covenant is made, signed, and sealed at a certain point of history, this does not mean that all the promises or provisions go immediately into effect. It should come as no surprise that not all of the provisions of the unconditional Jewish covenants are presently being fulfilled to, in or by Israel today. This is not necessary for the covenants to still be in force. Nor is this a valid reason to teach that the church has taken over these covenants or that they are now being fulfilled to, in, or by the church.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ M. Weinfeld, "The Covenant of Grant in the Old Testament and in the Ancient Near East," *JAOS* 90 (1970): 185.

⁴⁸ Arnold Fruchtenbaum, "Where Are We Now? The Prophetic Plan of the Abrahamic Covenant" in *The Fundamentals for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Mal Couch (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2000), 162–63.

The Mosaic covenant did not change the unconditional nature of the Abrahamic covenant. Paul writes, “And this I say, that the law, which was four hundred and thirty years later cannot annul the covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ that it should make the promise of no effect” (Gal 3:17). The Mosaic covenant (the Law) did not nullify the Abrahamic covenant (the promise). What was the relationship of the conditional Mosaic covenant to the unconditional Abrahamic covenant? The Mosaic covenant defined the means by which each individual generation of Israel could enjoy the blessings of the unconditional Abrahamic covenant. When Israel disobeyed the law, they were disciplined by the Lord. The ultimate discipline was Israel’s removal from the land.

The book of Hebrews declares the Abrahamic covenant to be immutable:

For when God made a promise to Abraham, because He could swear by no one greater He swore by Himself saying Surely blessing I will bless you and multiplying I will multiply you and so after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. For men indeed swear by the greater and an oath for confirmation is for them an end of all dispute. Thus God, determining to show more abundantly to the heirs of promise the immutability of His counsel, confirmed it by an oath, that by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we might have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us. (Heb 6:13–18)

Premillennialists argue that God has not yet kept his promise to Abram to give him and his descendants all of the promised land. Since God cannot lie, He must keep his promise.

**Seed of Abraham:
Who will inherit the promised land?**

The promise of the land was made to Abraham and his descendants. Who are the seed of Abraham? Amillennialists believe that seed of Abraham refers to the church (believers

who have the faith of Abraham). Dispensational premillennialists distinguish four different possible meanings of the “seed of Abraham” in the Bible.

First, the seed of Abraham can refer to the physical descendants of Abraham. Ishmael and Isaac were the physical sons of Abraham by different women. Ishmael was the physical son of Abraham and Hagar (Sarah’s concubine) and the father of the Arab peoples. Isaac was the physical son of Abraham and Sarah and one of the fathers of the Jewish people. Before Isaac was born, God made it clear that he would establish his covenant with Isaac and not Ishmael. “Sarah your wife shall bear a son and you shall call his name Isaac: I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his descendants after him...But my covenant I will establish with Isaac” (Gen 17:19, 21). So the Arab peoples who currently live in the Middle East cannot claim to be owners of the promised land. God made his covenant with the physical descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob: the nation of Israel.

Second, the seed of Abraham can refer to physical/spiritual seed of Abraham=saved Jews. Not all Jews were spiritually saved. Israel was an elect nation but not all Jews were elect (spiritually saved). Many Jews in Jesus’ day thought that they would inherit the kingdom. But John the Baptist told the unrepentant Jews, “Brood of vipers. Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance and do not begin to say to yourselves we have Abraham as our father. For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones,” (Luke 3:7–8). The Jewish leaders said to Jesus, “Abraham is our father. Jesus said to them, “If you were Abraham’s children, you would do the works of Abraham,” (John 8:39). Jesus told the unrepentant Jewish leaders that they were of their father the devil (John 8:44). Paul wrote, “For they are not all Israel who are of Israel, nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham but in Isaac your seed shall be called” (Rom 9:6–7). Within the elect nation of Israel there are saved and unsaved Jews. Dispensational premillennialists believe that only saved Israel

will inherit all the promised land in the future millennial kingdom. Unsaved Jews will not enter the millennial kingdom.

Third, the seed of Abraham can refer to Jesus Christ. Paul wrote, "To Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He does not say and to seeds as of many but as of one, and to your Seed, who is Christ," (Gal 3:16). Ultimately, the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant come to those who are related by faith to Jesus Christ, the seed of Abraham. The seed promise of the Abrahamic covenant was developed in the unconditional Davidic covenant. God promised King David that a descendant of his would sit on his throne and rule over Israel forever. Jesus Christ is the physical son (descendant) of David will sit on the Davidic throne and rule over Israel in the future millennial kingdom.

Fourth, the seed of Abraham can refer to the spiritual descendants of Abraham = saved Gentiles who have the faith of Abraham. Paul identified the saved Galatians as spiritual sons of Abraham. "Those who are of faith are sons of Abraham" (Gal 3:7). "So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham" (Gal.3:9). "And if you are Christ's then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to promise" (Gal 3:29). Saved Gentiles will reign with Jesus Christ in the millennial kingdom. They are heirs of the universal blessings of the Abrahamic covenant but not of the land promise which is specifically for the physical/spiritual seed of Abraham (saved Jews).

**Land: Will saved Israel inherit the promised land
in the future millennial kingdom?**

Dispensational premillennialists believe that saved Israel will inherit the promised land in the future millennial kingdom.

Pentecost wrote,

... because of the rejection of the offered kingdom, God brought the Gentiles into the place of blessing, which program continues throughout the present age. When that program ends, God will inaugurate the theocratic kingdom at the return of the Messiah

and fulfill all the covenanted blessings. Thus, throughout the New Testament the kingdom is not preached as having been established, but is still anticipated.⁴⁹

Elliott Johnson writes, “Therefore all covenant agreements with Israel will be inaugurated in fulfillment when Israel receives the One whom they crucified—the Son of David, the Son of Abraham—when He returns (Zech 12:10).”⁵⁰

The land promise of the Abrahamic covenant was developed in the Land Covenant found in the book of Deuteronomy. The book of Deuteronomy was a second law or restatement of the Sinaitic covenant for the generation of Israel about to enter the promised land under Joshua. It is a Suzerain-Vassal treaty (a conditional covenant). The nation of Israel would experience blessing for obedience and cursing for disobedience. If Israel obeyed God’s laws they would enjoy blessing in the land (Deut. 28:1-14). If Israel disobeyed God’s law, they would experience the curses (including locust judgments, invasion by foreign nations and the final judgment of deportation from the land) (Deut 28:15-68).

God made a promise to Israel that if Israel repented and returned to the Lord that the Lord would gather Israel from the nations and they would possess the promised land (Deut 30:1-6). Dispensational premillennialists believe that in the future Israel will repent at the second coming of Messiah Jesus to the earth at the end of the tribulation period (Zech 12:10-13:2). God will circumcise the hearts of the repentant Jews to enable that future generation of Israel to inherit the land and blessings associated with it in the kingdom (Deut 30:6). God will fulfill his new covenant promises to Israel at this time (cf. Ezek 36:25-26; Jer 31:31-34). Since the saved Jews will have the law written on their hearts, they will be enabled to obey the Lord in the

⁴⁹ J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come*, 468.

⁵⁰ Elliott Johnson, “Covenants in Traditional Dispensationalism” in *Three Central Issues in Contemporary Dispensationalism*, ed. Herbert Bateman IV (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999), 155.

kingdom. The final fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant is guaranteed because God will change the hearts of the Jews and they will trust in Jesus as their Messiah (Rom 11:26-27).

Ezekiel predicted that God would give the promised land as an inheritance to Israel. Ezekiel 47:13: "Thus says the Lord God: "These are the borders by which you shall divide the land as an inheritance among the twelve tribes of Israel. . . ." Ezekiel 47:13-29 gives the borders of the promised land in the millennial kingdom. Ezekiel 47:29 concludes, "This is the land which you shall divide by lot as an inheritance among the tribes of Israel and these are their portions," says the Lord God."

Amos predicted,

Behold the days are coming, says the Lord, 'When the plowman shall overtake the reaper and the treader of grapes him who sows seed; the mountains shall drip with sweet wine and all the hills shall flow with it. I will bring back the captives of my people Israel; they shall build the waste cities and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and drink wine from them; they shall also make gardens and eat fruit from them. I will plant them in their land and no longer shall they be pulled up from the land I have given them, says the Lord your God. (Amos 9:13-15)

Jews who trust in Jesus as their Messiah and survive the tribulation period will enter the millennial kingdom and inherit all of the land promised to Abraham in the Abrahamic covenant. They will rebuild the waste cities (cities that have been destroyed during the tribulation period) and inhabit them. God will plant Israel back in their land.

OT Jewish saints will be resurrected at the second coming of Messiah Jesus and will inherit the land. God promised Daniel that he would die but then be resurrected to enter into rest and receive his promised inheritance at the end of the age: "But as for you, go your way to the end; then you will enter into rest and rise again for your allotted portion at the end of the age" (Dan 12:13).

Jews who are martyred for their belief in Messiah Jesus and their refusal to take the mark of the Beast in the tribulation

period will be resurrected and reign with Jesus during the millennial kingdom. They will reign over cities in the promised land (Rev 20:4).

CONCLUSION

This article has shown the importance of a literal interpretation of the Abrahamic covenant to a defense of premillennialism. Traditional dispensationalists argue that God has fulfilled some promises of the Abrahamic covenant in past history, but God has not fulfilled every promise that he made to Abraham in the Abrahamic covenant. There has never been a time in history when Israel possessed all of the land promised to them by God in the Abrahamic covenant (Genesis 15). God will fulfill his covenant promise to Abraham in the future at the second coming of Jesus Christ to earth. The Jews will trust in Jesus as their Messiah. "All Israel will be saved." God will forgive the sins of his people. Saved Jews will inherit all of the land promised to Abraham and his descendants in the Abrahamic covenant (from the river of Egypt to the Euphrates River). All the nations will be blessed as a result of King Jesus reigning over the world from Jerusalem during the millennial kingdom.

Preaching the Song of Songs

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INTRODUCTION

To introduce the topic of this article,¹ I would like to propose a multiple-choice test. There is only one question. It has six possible choices.² Which of these choices would be a legitimate **and** literal application of these various verses from the Song of Songs to a contemporary audience in your church?

A. Preaching on 7:8: “But let us for the time being understand ‘palm tree’ to mean the cross, an interpretation that both makes plain sense to the unprejudiced mind and points to a hidden profundity of unfathomable Wisdom.”

B. Preaching on 8:6-7: “This strong, enduring love is presented in a context that includes marriage, but it is broader still.... For the Christian, Jesus is our Model of love.... The One who loves all and gave himself for us sets the bar for love in our relationships.”

C. Preaching on 7:10: “‘I am my beloved’s and his desire is toward me.’ Every doubt and fear is gone. She has found her satisfaction in him and he finds his in her. What a wonderful picture of communion between the Christian and his Savior.”

D. Preaching on 7:9: “In the morning the ‘sleepers’ will awake to see the blossoms that signal new life in the spring, even as divine love (8:6)—manifest most fully in the spring

¹ This article is a revision of a paper delivered at the Council on Dispensational Hermeneutics, Houston TX, November 2012.

² Each choice is from reputable scholar and is documented.

time resurrection of Jesus Christ at Easter, celebrated with flowers that adorn the chancel—brings new and eternal life.”

E. Preaching on 4:12-5:1: “In biblical context, a garden can also suggest Eden. We are not living there now. The fall has damaged sexuality.... Yet love and sex are still gifts from the Creator, and a good marriage is like sneaking back into paradise. Similarly, in the overall story of the Bible, the gospel restores believers to a superb garden, a new Eden with ‘no more curse’ (Rev 22:3).”

F. Preaching on 7:1-4: “Sexual intimacy can and should continue to increase throughout marriage. In contrast to what contemporary culture supposes, sexual intimacy is not just the special prerogative of the young, but should bring increasing delight over time. As a couple comes to know one another better, they learn to enjoy each other more.”

Before we review your choices, how did you decide which was an appropriate application? How did you decide which were incorrect? I would suggest that your answer is contingent to your understanding of preaching that has as its foundation a literal hermeneutic **AND** a literal application.

Choice A is incorrect because it derives from a nonliteral hermeneutic and produces a nonliteral application. While John of Ford (12th century) may have been a believer, he was neither a believer in nor a practitioner of a literal hermeneutic or a literal application of the biblical text. His allegorical hermeneutic drove his allegorical application.³

Choice B: While Jesus is always a safe bet for the correct answer in Sunday School, this choice is unfortunately incorrect. Jerry Gladson chose a literal hermeneutic to understand the Song of Songs, but his application (even though it included Jesus) broadened way past the intent of Solomon when he penned those

³ Richard A. Norris Jr., ed. *The Church's Bible: The Song of Songs: Interpreted by Early Christian and Medieval Commentators* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 263.

words of chapter eight.⁴ Since Jesus is not mentioned as a model of love in the Song, it is difficult at best to see this as an accurate and literal application.

Choice C: It is difficult to criticize a fellow dispensationalist and one who began his preaching career at age thirteen, but this selection is also incorrect. While the beloved Brethren pastor, H. A. Ironside, stated that he was looking at the Song “from a dispensational standpoint,”⁵ he fell into the applicational trap of “typifying”⁶ its message and disregarded any literal application of this love poetry.

Choice D: Christopher Mitchell unapologetically understands not just the Song but all OT revelation through a Christological lens: “All of the OT revelations of God’s gracious love point toward and are fulfilled by Christ. Therefore a Christological hermeneutic is appropriate for the interpretation of all the OT Scriptures as well as the NT.”⁷ While there is much to appreciate in Mitchell’s 1300 page tome, his present day allegorical reading is at odds with a literal hermeneutics and subsequent literal application. This makes this choice an incorrect one as well.

Choice E: Grenville Kent is one of the few who when he penned a book on preaching the OT actually offered a message outline on the Song. Choice E were his reflections based on his

⁴ Jerry Gladson, *The Strangest Books in the Bible: Preaching from the Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and Esther* (Bloomington, IN: Xlibris, 2010), 40.

⁵ H. A. Ironside, *Song of Solomon Revised Edition* (Neptune: NJ, Loizeaux, 1999), 64.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁷ Christopher W. Mitchell, *The Song of Songs* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2003), 5. The answer choice is from page 1093–94.

message, “I Dig Your Garden.”⁸ While I appreciate Kent’s cute title and his bravery on preaching this ancient love poem and his desire “not to strain the text,” his reflections burden the literal application considerably when he writes: “It is better, in my opinion, to let the Song be what it is—a human love poem—and then make broad comparisons with the human relationship with God.”⁹ This “broadening” which sounds spiritual actually stretches a legitimate, literal application of this section of Scripture past its breaking point. Thus, those who hold to the model of dispensational preaching must reject this choice.

Choice F: Daniel Estes’ insights on 7:1-4 make this the correct answer for this passage. Estes added nothing more to his literal explanation of these verses. He did not enhance his application with a “broadening” of its application to include the NT, or with an inclusion of Jesus, or with an appeal to a supposed deeper meaning of her “navel,” or with a “clearer” vision of a very sensual, dancing, possibly naked Shulamite through a Christological lens. He began with a literal hermeneutic and ended with a literal application—nothing more and certainly nothing less.

Naturally an evaluation of these choices is based on one’s understanding of literal preaching **and** application. Preaching that is both literal in its interpretation and application to a contemporary audience should be one that surfaces the intended (single) meaning of the human author through a literal, historical, grammatical understanding of a passage **AND** that same meaning surfaced in the text is applied to the contemporary audience.

Preaching that keeps both of these literal aspects in view is a must. As our multiple choice test showed, preachers and scholars can read and study the Song literally, but they do not believe that

⁸ Grenville J. R. Kent, “Preaching the Song of Solomon,” in *Reclaiming the Old Testament for Christian Preaching* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2010), 139.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 133.

a literal application exhausts all other meanings (i.e., non-literal) of the text.

While there are certainly more than one legitimate contemporary application of a biblical text, if however, the application drifts from the single meaning of the biblical author, then the application no longer matches preaching that is both literal in its interpretation and literal in its application. In addition, there is no guarantee that a literal reading or even a literal interpretation will produce a literal application. There are at least two models of preaching the Song that proclaim they follow a literal hermeneutic but are guilty of much more than literal application of the text.

MODERN DAY MODELS OF PREACHING AND APPLYING THE SONG OF SONGS

While many pastors shy away from preaching the Song,¹⁰ those who do attempt to expound it, generally fall into one of four

¹⁰ Estes observes, “At the same time that the scholarly literature on the Song has multiplied, the book has been virtually ignored in the preaching and teaching of the church” (Daniel Estes, “The Song of Songs,” in *Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs* [Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2010], 267). Richard Hess, who himself wrote a commentary on the Song for Baker in 2005, observed in an interview in *The Washington Post*, that he “has never heard a sermon on it” (Adelle M. Banks, “Falling in Love with the Erotic Song of Solomon: Tiny Book in Hebrew Bible Seldom Addressed from the Pulpit,” *The Washington Post*, February 11, 2006. <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/02/10/AR2006021001870.html>> (accessed 5 July 2012). In the same article Michael Duduit, editor of *Preaching* magazine, states that he does not recall ever receiving a sermon on the Song in twenty years.

While we would debate the degree (and accuracy) of exposition in their preaching, there are some notable exceptions: See Mark Driscoll’s 2008, 10-part sermon series on the Song of Solomon entitled: “The Peasant Princess” <<http://marshill.com/media/the-peasant-princess/sermons>>. Tommy Nelson wrote a book based on his popular

models of interpretation and application of this biblical love poetry.

1. Non-Literal Hermeneutic and Non-Literal Application

This model is normally associated with the likes of Bernard of Clairvaux¹¹ who practiced an allegorical interpretation and application that was the standard interpretative practice of the ancient and medieval church. Although many have jettisoned this model, it still has its adherents today. In his expository commentary on the Song, John Phillips writes, “Those who dislike typology and symbolism will never feel at home with the Song of Solomon. In this book we find some of ‘the deep things of God.’”¹² Expounding 7:4b-5, Phillips writes, “Here again we must go beyond Solomon and his flatteries to the spiritual lessons that underlie his words, lessons that become plain only when we look

conferences on the Song of Songs: *The Book of Romance: What Solomon Says About Love, Sex and Intimacy* (Nashville: Nelson, 1998). David Jeremiah has published a new book which is based on a sermon series he did at his church in San Diego: *What the Bible Says about Love, Marriage & Sex: The Song of Solomon* (San Diego: Turning Point, 2010).

¹¹ Bernard (c. 1090-1153) wrote 86 sermons on the Song to his brother monks at Clairvaux in northeastern France. His last three sermons were an exposition on Song of Songs 3:1. Samuel J. Eales, trans and ed. *Song of Solomon by Bernard of Clairvaux* (1895; repr., Minneapolis: Klock Klock, 1984).

¹² John Phillips, *Exploring the Love Song of Solomon: An Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2003), 9. Also see Stephanie Paulsell who teaches the practice of ministry at Harvard Divinity: “If we are to recover the Song of Songs as a text of devotion in our day, it will be by taking Origen’s words to heart” (“Faith Matter,” *Christian Century* [September 22, 2009]: 22).

away from the Shulamite to the church.”¹³ Origen would be proud.¹⁴

2. Literal Hermeneutic and Non-Literal Application

In helping pastors preach this problematic book, John Richardson seemingly rejects the allegorical interpretation as a basis for preaching. “The Allegorists were wrong only, and yet crucially, in that they tried to avoid the erotic offense of the Song.”¹⁵ This statement tips his hand to his preaching model. While he recognizes the need to understand the Song as a song and understand its use of metaphor and the lack of cultic references, his application is inconsistent with his literal reading of the text. He writes to preachers, “If our analysis is correct, then in our preaching we should rather take up and extend this theme as pointing to the Covenant relationship with God and his people, for whilst the Song of Songs is certainly a celebration and endorsement of human eroticism it is surely also in some sense a sacralization of it.”¹⁶ Richardson’s wish to help pastors preach

¹³ Ibid., 200.

¹⁴ Origen would also be proud of Robert Jenson, who in his commentary designed for teaching and preaching warns, “The commentary to follow will be prudent—insofar as this is possible with the Song—and assume only the less radical dissent from current opinion; that is, we will suppose that the canonical Songs solicits allegory.... Of the intent of whoever definitely made the Scripture of the Song, we can be more certain: they intended the Song to be about Israel and the Lord” (“Song of Songs,” in *Interpretation* [Louisville: John Knox P, 2005], 10–11).

¹⁵ John P. Richardson, “Preaching from the Song of Songs: Allegory Revisited,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 21 (July 1997): 257.

¹⁶ Ibid. The theme Richardson is building from is the covenant: “The reference to Jerusalem reminds us that it is *the* land which is in view—the land which God promised to Abraham, which is one pole of

this is commendable. However, it is difficult to follow his exegetical gymnastics. How does his literal observation lead to such a non-literal application?

More recently in the *Journal for Preachers*, Martin Copenhaver expounds, “Even after such thorough allegorization, one cannot escape the impression that the author of the Song of Solomon actually was doing what he appeared to be doing—namely, celebrating human love with poetry, reveling in romance and sexuality.”¹⁷ While Copenhaver did not expound any particular text of the Song, taking him at his word his observation places him in the literal interpretation camp. However, as he concludes by applying the Song, he writes, “When we love one person that way, that one special person, we catch a glimpse—just a glimpse but a glimpse—of how God feels about each and every one. And that, I think, is the biggest reason why the Song of Solomon, this passionate ode to romantic love, made it into our Bibles.”¹⁸ To make the application that this Song is a “glimpse” of God’s love for people, is to glimpse an application that has no connection with a literal reading of this poem.

From his message on the Song, James Harnish explains, “But there is behind that obvious interpretation, the spiritual truth that we dare to believe that our sexuality is a human, physical expression of the spiritual relationship which God intends to have with His people.... Wouldn’t you like to sing about your relationship with God with this poet, ‘He brought me to his banquet hall and raised the banner of love over me?’”¹⁹ The short

the Covenant promise and which is both a fulfillment and foretaste of the eschatological hope. This is the cultic and theological centre of the Song of Songs” (256).

¹⁷ Martin B. Copenhaver, “Reveling in Romance,” *Journal for Preachers* (Lent 2011): 36.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 39.

¹⁹ James A. Harnish, “Human Sexuality: The Sensual Christian (Song of Solomon)” *Preaching.com*,

answer is no. To “sing” Harnish’s application is to “literally” sing off key.

3. Literal Hermeneutic, Literal Application, and Something More

Arguably this model may be the most prevalent for modern day pastors and scholars who seek to both understand and apply this love literature to a contemporary culture. Here, interpreters practice a literal hermeneutic, but the literal reading does not exhaust other possible meanings or applications of the text. Richard Hess speaking of 4:1-5:1: These verses “bring together an epicurean delight that exults in the senses and pleasure of the physical world. More than any text in the Bible, these verses reject the suppression of physical pleasures as though in themselves somehow evil or unworthy of God.”²⁰ This is both a literal interpretation **AND** literal application of these verses especially in light of 5:1e-f. However, he continues, “The erotic pleasures of sexual love are not capitulations to sin. They instead are the most excellent sign in this world pointing to the joys that God has in store for those who love him (1 Cor 2:9).” Tangent to this application he adds, “As a couple’s desire grows with their love, so the believer’s desire for God enflames the divine love that knows no consummation in this world, but becomes only better

<<http://www.preaching.com/sermons/11567227/>> (accessed 18 June 2012). In the same vein, David Rigg concludes his sermon on Song 6:11-7:9 by stating, “It is not enough for Christians to just say ‘no’ to sin. We first must say ‘no’ to the environment which prompts and encourages it! In order to avoid sin, you must avoid the enticement to sin. The Shulamite apparently learned how and when to say ‘no’ to the enticement of sin” (“Song of Solomon #15,” *SermonCentral.com*, <<http://www.sermoncentral.com/sermons/song-of-solomon-15-david-rigg-sermon-on-promises-of-god-114221.asp>> (accessed 28 June 2012).

²⁰ Richard S. Hess, *Song of Songs* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 158.

and better.”²¹ Even if one could argue that sex points to a believer’s reward in heaven (one cannot) or that a believer’s love for God grows in relationship to his desire for his spouse (not necessarily), there is nothing in the lines of the Song that could possibly make these literal applications of this biblical text.

Graeme Goldsworthy in his chapter, “Preaching from the Wisdom Literature,” offers this observation to preachers: “One thing is clear: the perspective of the book on human love is realistic. It extols the mystery and pleasures of love freely expressed and yet without a hint of salaciousness.” He then offers a concluding admonition for preaching any wisdom text: “The Christian preacher has great flexibility in dealing with a series of text from any one book, provided the treatment of the text is true to their significance in the frame work of the whole book.”²² To grant the benefit of the doubt to Goldsworthy, that sounds like a literal hermeneutic and application. But he adds something more in the following sentence: “The ultimate concern of the preacher should be to preach the meaning of the text in relation to the goal of all biblical revelation, the person and work of Christ.”²³ While Jesus is omnipresent, he is not in the Song and thus should not be in a literal application that seeks to reflect a literal exposition of the single meaning of this biblical wisdom text.

Rightly rejecting the allegorical view, popular pastor David Jeremiah writes, “The presence of symbolism doesn’t override literal meaning.” But then he seems to contradict his position by continuing: “In other words, we *can* read the book as a symbolic poem about Christ, but we should primarily read it at face value: as a song of love—romantic and emotional and sexual—between

²¹ Ibid., 250. This application concerns his theological implications for 8:5–14.

²² Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 194.

²³ Ibid.

husband and wife.”²⁴ This dynamic is illustrated in his observation of 4:16 & 5:1. Speaking of the physical intimacy the couple is enjoying in these verses he writes, “This is a perfect image, a kind of momentary paradise at the center of the book and at the center of marriage. It even hints symbolically of eternity in which Christ and His bride have finally been united in the ultimate paradise.”²⁵ Jeremiah provides a clear example of a literal reading with a literal application **AND** something more than the original author intended.²⁶

²⁴ David Jeremiah, *Love, Marriage & Sex*, 14.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 163.

²⁶ Also see Douglas Sean O’Donnell’s article which was written to provide directions to “those of us who preach, to navigate through the often dark (but oh so beautiful!) waters of Solomon’s Song (“The Earth is Crammed with Heaven: Four Guideposts to Reading and Teaching the Song of Songs,” *Themelios* 37 no. 1 (April 2012), <http://thegospelcoalition.org/themelios/article/the_earth_is_crammed_with_heaven_four_guideposts_to_reading_and_teach/> (accessed 28 June 2012). As a senior pastor, O’Donnell concludes, “This Song is God’s provision to sustain loving marriages and renew loveless ones. It is his provision for increased intimacy that reflects the intimacy of Christ’s love for the church, an intimacy that makes the world turn its head to view marriage and say, ‘So, that’s the gospel. What must I do to be made *wise* unto salvation?’” While Ephesians 5:32 reflects such intimacy, there is no such indicators of the gospel reflection in the Song.

Since the delivery of this paper in October 2012 at the Council on Dispensational Hermeneutics, O’Donnell has published a book in the Preaching the Word series from Crossway: *The Song of Solomon: An Invitation to Intimacy* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012). After a short introduction to the book he provides nine preaching messages that cover the entire Song.

In an article designed for those who preach the Song based on the Lectionary, Nancy deClaisse-Walford offers three understandings of the Song: “As a simple erotic love song built on the model of other erotic love songs from the ancient Near East? A love song that celebrates the sexual love of one human for another? YES. As an allegory for the love

4. Literal Hermeneutic, Literal Application, and Nothing Else

In this model the preacher or commentator follows an exegetical method that follows a grammatical, historical, literal hermeneutic **AND** expounds an exposition and application of the text that is faithful to the meaning of the original author without any other appeal. In *Preaching Hard Texts of the Old Testament*, Elizabeth Achtemeier writes after hearing an allegorical sermon on the Song (2:8-13), “Most profitably, however, the text should be interpreted for what it is—a young man in spring, calling out his fair beloved to accompany him to the hills.”²⁷ While I may not agree with every application Achtemeier draws from the text, she does so without any spiritualization or typology or non-existent intertextuality.

Although they provide only three paragraphs on the Song in their “Preaching Psalms and Wisdom Literature,” Terry Carter, J.

of God for humanity? As the love of God for Israel? As the love of Jesus for the Church? YES. As a glimpse of Eden redeemed? A place where the created good is celebrated? YES, by all means, YES” (“An Introduction to the Song of Songs,” *RevExp* 105 (Summer 2008): 389). For a similar application see Eugene Peterson, *The Message: Wisdom Books* (Colorado Springs: Nav Press, 1996), 376.

Although he rejects an allegorical reading and recognizes the abundance of sermonic material, Robert Longacre remarks, “Even as we reject the allegorical interpretation of this book..., we recognize in the book the presence of a powerful *symbol*.” For Longacre this symbol, “affirms that human love as God intended it finds its fulfillment in eternity where people no longer marry or are given in marriage” (“An Ancient Love Poem: The Book of Canticles,” in *A Mosaic of Languages and Cultures: Studies Celebrating the Career of Karl J. Franklin*, ed. Kenneth A. McElhanon and Gerard P. Reesink [SIL e-Books 19: 2010], <<http://www.sil.org/silepubs/abstract.asp?id=52526>> [accessed 28 June 2012], 200).

²⁷ Elizabeth Achtemeier, *Preaching the Hard Texts of the Old Testament* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1998), 117.

Scott Duvall, and J. Daniel Hays rightly recognize that the “Song of Songs speaks openly and joyfully of human sexuality.”²⁸ They reject an allegorical interpretation and suggest that the book demonstrates how a wise person loves their spouse. While I would argue with Carter that this is the “interpretative key” for this wisdom book, it is, however, a literal interpretation of the book with an accompanying literal application: nothing more and nothing less.

While not sharing how he would preach the text, G. Lloyd Carr’s commentary is a straightforward, literal interpretation of the Song. He does offer however, what direction he would and would not take in application when he writes, “The Song is presented simply as an account of the relationship between the lover and his beloved. Nor is there any indication in the New Testament that the Song has a Christological interpretation or application.”²⁹

²⁸ Terry G. Carter, J. Scott Duvall, J. Daniel Hays, *Preaching God’s Word: A Hands-on Approach to Preparing, Developing and Delivering the Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 277.

²⁹ G. Lloyd Carr, *The Song of Solomon* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1984), 31. Also see Cheryl Exum, *Song of Songs* (Nashville: Westminster John Knox, 2005). And Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Preaching and Teaching from the Old Testament: A Guide for the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005). It should be noted that Kaiser has only one page on preaching the Song and without warrant finds the “hermeneutical clue” for this poem in Proverbs 5:15-23 (94). However, he does advocate preaching this song literally.

I would have liked to include Dan Estes’s commentary, “The Song of Songs,” in this section as well since he writes, “The contents of the book indicate it is intended to celebrate human love within the parameters of God’s design” (302). However, when he expounds on bellies, navels, and breasts in his explanation of 7:1–10, he somehow moves from the intimacy of the couple to Paul knowing Christ in Philippians 3:10! This is disappointing in an otherwise very good and very literal commentary (398).

In Craig Glickman's popular exposition there is no appeal to allegory, spiritualization, or to the gospel. Glickman simply reads the Song in its plain sense and suggests the following application:

The lovers of the Song helps us see not just what our partners should *be* like, but what our relationship should *feel* like: The role of emotion, longing, and sexual attraction; the foundation of friendship, respect, and commitment; the experience of intimacy, certainty, and forgiveness.³⁰

KEYS TO PREACHING THE SONG OF SONGS

While I disagree with Rabbi Saadia who suggest the interpretation of the Song "resembles locks to which the keys have been lost," I would offer that to preach this Song the expositor needs to possess certain "keys" ³¹ to unlock an exposition which practices a literal hermeneutic which should lead to a literal application. While these "keys" do not guarantee such an application, they may provide the most likely access to a literal utilization of this Song for a contemporary audience.³²

³⁰ Craig Glickman, *Solomon's Song of Love* (West Monroe, LA: Howard, 2004), 14.

³¹ These "keys" do not negate the importance of other necessary steps in exegesis such as translating this poetic text. I would suggest that these are additional. Other articles that offers various "guides" to help pastors use Solomon's Song, see Douglas Sean O'Donnell, "The Earth is Crammed with Heaven: Four Guideposts to Reading and Teaching the Song of Songs." Also, Greg W. Parsons, "Guidelines for Understanding and Utilizing the Song of Songs," *BibSac* 156 (Oct 1999): 419-22.

³² Although it is outside the scope of this paper, I would suggest that there are at least three reasons why the Song of Songs is not preached literally:

1. It is easier to "type, allegorize, or find Jesus" in the Song than to struggle with its interpretation and preaching the likes of chapter seven literally.

Key #1: Classify the Genre as Wisdom Literature

It is clear from 1:1 that this “poem” is actually a song. As such, we can understand it without its music as a lyrical love poem. But this lyrical love poem also can be classified as wisdom literature. Child’s notes, “The Song of Songs was to be heard along with other portions of Israel’s scripture as a guide to wisdom.”³³ This genre designation is important as it sets the direction to understand how the pastor can approach this book. As wisdom literature it offers no imperatives or appeals to the law, but instead paints a picture of how wise people should function in this sometimes-dangerous area of passion and desire. As this book is preached as wisdom literature it should replicate in wise married hearers the desire to be like this couple. On the other hand, wise singles who hear its message understand the need to wait until one is married to share in its intimacies although their bodies may be saying otherwise.

Key #2: Understand that “Bellies Mean Bellies and Breasts Mean Breasts.”

What do pastors do when they encounter navels, bellies, and breasts in the biblical text on a Sunday morning? We take a deep breath and explain these intimate words within the literal, grammatical, historical context in which they are found. To suggest an allegorical or typological meaning for various body parts that are potentially uncomfortable to mention from the

2. Expectations are such that if we are “truly” Christian every message will end in Jesus or at least the message will have some connection with him.

3. Many are following the crowd of contemporary preaching that is “Christ-centered or gospel-centered.” A preacher is not “hip,” “cool,” or horrors, not “cutting edge” if he is not preaching like “everyone” else.

³³ Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 578.

pulpit is to open the possibilities that these words mean everything and thus mean nothing at all.

Key #3: Appreciate the Poetic Use of Metaphors and Similes

Arguably no other book in either canon contains the amount of sensual imagery that the Song includes. To communicate his message the poet employs numerous metaphors and similes throughout his poem. It is this plethora of figurative language that seemingly conceals the book's meaning for a contemporary audience. To explain how "your two breasts are like fawns, twins of gazelles" (4:5) proves frustrating to scholars and many times embarrassing to pastors.

Besides the sheer number of metaphors and similes, is the issue that these literary devices are historically and culturally conditioned. That "your hair is like a flock of goats" (4:1) and "your nose is like the tower of Lebanon" (7:4) hardly communicate desirability in Western culture! Although these similes may not express our standard of feminine beauty, it is clear that the poet utilized these culturally conditioned figures of speech for that purpose. So, although we may not be able to explain (or appreciate) completely the beauty of a female nose compared to a tower, we do understand the rhetorical function of the simile.

The Song is a garden orchard filled with literary devices, and a wise pastor needs to be brave enough to walk his people through such greenery and stop and appreciate their use. Although a pastor may not be able to detail every aspect of the comparison within a particular simile or metaphor, he should be able to recognize the function of each literary device within its context.³⁴

³⁴ For instance explaining the metaphor "your eyes are doves" is elusive—in which way are her "eyes doves"? By color? By their fluttering like a dove's wings? We are uncertain. However, it can be noted that within the context this metaphor is intended to show the complete desirability of the woman.

Key #4: Acknowledge Solomon's Role

Having to explain the presence of Solomon, a man with seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines, in a book that extols a monogamous relationship causes even the heartiest of pastors to tackle 1 Chronicles 1–8 instead! Solomon is indeed this song's most controversial character. But what kind of character? Is he the author, the male lover, the amour in a three-way love affair, or something else?

Solomon does pose some significant interpretative questions; however, none of the proposed solutions negate a literal reading and application of the Song. I would suggest that (1) Solomon is the author of this Song who wrote better than he lived and (2) he is not the male lover nor does he have a voice in the Song (he is only spoken to in 8:12. There he is the foil for the couple who enjoy each other exclusively while the king has his hordes of women (i.e., Baal-hamon—"master of many").³⁵

Key #5: Identify the Main Voices

Since the Song is not a narrative nor are its main characters historical,³⁶ there is a need to identify the "voices" of the Song and not its characters. In this poem we do not really see the characters in action—because the Song is a fiction and not actually happening—we simply hear their voices. But we hear these speeches in such detail that we have their actions painted on our mental stage.

³⁵ For a fuller treatment of Solomon's role see my article "What Is He Doing in that Book?" Solomon's Role in the Song of Songs," *The Journal of Ministry & Theology* (Fall 2008).

³⁶ Longman writes, "The man and the woman of the Song are not historical personages but rather poetic types, and as such the poet invites the readers to identify with them. In this way, the work encourages intimate passionate love" (*Song of Songs*, 62).

There are four voices in the Song of Songs. The female lover has the dominant voice. She speaks the majority of the time, which is consistent with other ANE love literature. The second voice is the male lover. The third voice is a collective unit known as the daughters of Jerusalem. They function to allow the reader to hear the inward thoughts of the woman when her male beloved is absent. Their conversation is always with the woman. The fourth and final voice in the Song is the unidentified speaker of the admonition of 5:1: “Eat, friends; Drink and imbibe deeply, O lovers.” I would suggest that this anonymous voice is the poet’s/narrator and as such he speaks for God.³⁷ In speaking for God he declares that sexual passion and intimacy within a heterosexual marriage are to be enjoyed with his blessings. This is a message that literally needs to be preached today.

Key #6: Recognize the “Absence” of God

The Song, along with Esther, enjoys the intriguing status of being the only two books in the Bible that do not mention God. While God’s providence is visible all over Esther, there is no overt evidence of God in the Song. This divine absence leads some scholars to suggest that there is not much theology in these verses, which in turn leads pastors away from preaching it!³⁸

However, God’s overt absence is not an oversight but a necessity. Richard Davidson observes the lack of references to God and remarks, “It is understandable that in a time of pagan fertility cults, when the very air was charged with the divination of sex, the divine presence/voice would have to be muted in the

³⁷ For a detailed argument for this position consult: Mark McGinniss, *Contributions of Selected Rhetorical Devices to a Biblical Theology of the Song of Songs*, (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 139–223.

³⁸ Paul House, “Song of Solomon is artistically and thematically lovely but not particularly theologically enriching” (*Old Testament Theology* [Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1998], 469).

context of sexuality.”³⁹ It is not that this book lacks a theology proper due to the “absence of God,” it is simply proper theology to “exclude” God so that the concept of “sex” is not embodied with the sacred.

Key #7: Suggest an Overall Structure

The structure of the Song is a vexing question. While current scholarship is moving away from the general narrative plot arrangement of “Courtship, Marriage, Post Honeymoon,” there is no scholarly consensus on how this poem moves from 1:2 to 8:14. This inability to understand its structure and movement hinders pastors from wanting to preach this portion of the Bible. It is difficult to expound a particular section of the Song when one does not have a handle on the whole.

I would suggest the Song moves through seven cycles that repeat four themes: separation, desire, obstacle, and union.

	1 st Cycle	2 nd Cycle	3 rd Cycle	4 th Cycle	5 th Cycle	6 th Cycle	7 th Cycle
	1:2- 2:7	2:8- 17	3:1-5	3:6- 5:1	5:2- 7:11	7:11- 8:4	8:5-14
Thematic elements							
Separation	1:2	2:8- 9	3:1	3:6- 11	5:2- 6:1	8:3	8:13- 14
Desire	1:2 -4	2:10- 14	3:2-3	4:1-7	5:4- 16	7:11- 12	8:6-7
Obstacle	1:5-6	2:15	3:1-3	4:8	5:3-6	8:1	8:8-12
Union	1:7- 2:3a	2:15	3:4	4:9- 5:1d	6:2- 7:9	7:11- 8:2	8:5-7
Transition	2:3b- 7	2:16- 17	3:5	5:1e- f	7:10	8:4	

As one looks at the whole book something fairly interesting about one aspect of the structure of the Song becomes evident. The four themes stay in the same general order throughout the first five cycles. There is a slight switch in the sixth. However, in

³⁹ Richard Davidson, *The Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), 622.

the last cycle the themes of union and separation are completely reversed. This reversal plays to the main theme of the book. It is a book that has no ending: there is a constant desire to be together.

Key #8: Develop a Purpose Statement

To preach the Song literally the pastor must understand the author's purpose for this book to his original audience. I suggest the Song of Songs is a love song centered on a single couple who revel in their strong desire for each other. Through the use of intimate dialogue this twosome shares their yearning to be together when separated and passionately enjoy each other when they are in each other's presence. While the garden motif reminds the reader of the Garden of Eden, this garden is post-fall, and there are obstacles they must overcome to be together. Through the use of highly charged sexual imagery that is clothed in Hebrew poetry, this fictitious couple invites every married couple who is wise to enjoy their own celebration of love. However, at the same time the Song recognizes the intensity of sexual desire and cautions wise single people not to arouse or awaken this emotion until the proper time, that is, marriage.

There is a great need in evangelical churches for married couples and single individuals to have access to this divine wisdom in the area of physical intimacy. But where will believers get this wisdom if pastors are not preaching it and/or are not preaching **and** applying it literally?

Key #9: Ascertain the Song's Relationship with NT

There is none!

Many point to Ephesians 5:32 and its context as a link with the Song because of its theme of marriage and one flesh. However, the purpose of the Song of Songs is not to extol

marriage,⁴⁰ or even the concept of becoming one flesh. The main purpose of the Song of Songs is to demonstrate the dynamic of desire: the interplay of absence and presence.

If there was an intended intertextual link with the Song, Paul could have easily quoted it. But instead he cited Genesis 2:24, thus creating a stronger intertextual thread between Genesis 2 and Ephesians 5. No clear linkage exists between Ephesians 5:32 and the Song of Songs.⁴¹

Key #10: Exercise the Courage to Preach the Whole Counsel of God

This book is the only book in the entire Bible that has somehow been stamped with a PG-13 or even R rating and thus has not seen the light of many Sunday morning pulpits. Yet, I have read the Song of Songs in a number of translations and have not found one that directs preachers not to preach this book on Sunday mornings because of its erotic vocabulary! Unfortunately, that is the case and many times even at the direction of scholars!⁴²

⁴⁰ Although, the couple is married in the entire Song.

⁴¹ There is no linkage with John's gospel either. Ann Roberts Winsor believes that through a midrash reading of the Song of Songs with the fourth gospel along with the appearance of such common words as "oil," "garden," "turning," "hair," and "king" (to name but a few) in both books produce an intertextuality that was readily identifiable by John's original audience. She further observes that this intertextuality sheds light on the meaning of certain sections of his gospel! Her argument is unconvincing and has not been advanced to my knowledge (*A King Is Bound in the Tresses: Allusions to the Song of Songs in the Fourth Gospel* [New York: Peter Lang, 1999]).

⁴² For example Jerry Gladson cautions, "The Preacher would be well advised to proceed with caution in such an approach, however, perhaps utilizing this text and topics for a special occasion rather than the regular worship service" (*The Strangest Books in the Bible*, 36). David Hubbard observes, "Preaching on the Song in most

Duane Garrett cautions, “A final question is whether the Song should be preached (as in sermons) or taught (as in Bible studies). Probably the pastor will find it more appropriate to teach the Song in a Sunday night or week night series instead of preaching it on Sunday morning.”⁴³ It is somehow permissible to share this salacious song alone with married or engaged couples, but it is considered unsavory to unpack its metaphors or preach chapter 7 during a Sunday morning service.⁴⁴ This is a self-imposed restriction and not a biblical one. Pastors need to starch their backbones (and with advance warning) preach the whole

congregational settings is difficult. The language is so frank and the theme so specialized that the message would probably not minister effectively to the entire church” (*The Communicator’s Commentary: Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon* [Dallas: Word, 1991], 260. In recognizing the need to share the message of the book, Greg Parsons suggests using the Song in couples, college or high school classes, counseling, a wedding sermon, or with one’s own spouse—but not on a Sunday morning (“Guidelines for Understanding and Utilizing the Song of Songs,” 419-22). While I agree with the caution and understand the difficulty the Song presents in preaching, I cannot believe God put a book in the Bible that he would not want preached to all, especially in light of its message to single people. I do not read of the same angst among scholars in preaching the book of Proverbs (especially chapter 5)!

⁴³ Duane A. Garrett, “Preaching Wisdom,” in *Reclaiming the Prophetic Mantle: Preaching the Old Testament Faithfully*, ed. George L. Klein (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 121–22.

⁴⁴ See John MacArthur, “The Rape of Solomon’s Song, Parts 1-4,” (April 2009) <media.sermonaudio.com/mediapdf/417091244255.pdf> (accessed 20 April 2009). In this Internet post, MacArthur is vehemently reacting to Mark Driscoll’s literal preaching of the Song in Edinburg, Scotland.

Speaking of the Song’s figurative language MacArthur states, “It speaks in secret terms about that which should be kept secret” (Part 2, Wednesday, April 15, 2009). Following his line of reasoning, no biblical metaphors should be unpacked or explained for the congregation.

counsel of God even the Song of Songs on Sunday mornings. To do less is for God's people to miss an opportunity to hear God's word on a topic that is literally talked about everywhere but the church.

CONCLUSION

So how are ministers of God's word to handle a text that sings the beauty of bellies, navels, and breasts? Literally! They are called to preach it—on a Sunday morning—as God intended—with a literal, grammatical, historical hermeneutic that yields a literal application that is true to the meaning as stated by the author and one that is communicated in a manner that edifies and exhorts its hearers to wise living. Anything less (or more) would not be true biblical preaching.

The Importance of Using Properly Weighted Scholarly Material

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During the early years of the fundamentalist-liberal controversy, the defining issue entailed who had the *correct view of truth and how respective camps could validate their view of the truth*. The conservatives clearly prevailed. Today the issue is much more sophisticated and entails *if truth can be known and to what extent and how it can be known*. These issues today entail epistemology, ontology, the nature of Scripture and the very meaning of meaning.

In 1976 Carl F. H. Henry articulated serious problems with the postmodern views of linguistics and truth as he wrote:

Never in the past have the role of words and the nature of truth been as misty and undefined as now. Only if we recognize that the truth of truth—indeed the meaning of meaning—is today in doubt, and that this uncertainty stifles the word as a carrier of God’s truth and moral judgment, do we fathom the depth of the present crisis. . . . The breakdown of confidence in verbal communication is a feature of our times.¹

¹ Carl F. H. Henry, *God Revelation, and Authority: God Who Speaks and Shows—Preliminary Considerations* (Waco, TX: Word, 1976), 1:24. Later in 1995, Henry identified anti-modern views which were leading to use of postmodern ideology (Carl F. Henry, “Postmodernism: the New Spectre?” (*The Challenge of Post Modernism: An Evangelical Engagement*, Ed. Dave Dockery [Grand Rapids, IL: Baker Books, 1995], 34–52).

In similar vein Al Mohler opines that:

I fear there are some who wish to say less, to embrace the themes of the postmodern movement and the postmodern mood in such a way as to create a new paradigm for evangelicalism. This new trajectory would be de-propositionalized, so epistemologically nuanced that it would have us embrace a queasy postmodern uncertainty about the very certainties that have defined the evangelical movement We would thus become liberals who arrive late and there would be no methodological controls at all upon what would be acceptable among us.²

If language is denied the ability to carry authorial meaning then the very notion of Biblical inspiration and doctrine itself is in jeopardy. In recent years, I have spent considerable time analyzing and responding to the post-conservative views of epistemology, ontology, the nature of Scripture and theological

² R. Albert Mohler, "Truth and Contemporary Culture," in *Whatever Happened to Truth?*, ed. Andreas Kostenberger (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), 71-2.

method.³ The following chart and footnote sources⁴ provides a helpful comparison between postmodern assertions and an

³ See the following recent articles and papers by Mappes: “A New Kind of Christian: A Review,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 161 (July–September, 2004): 289–303; “The Nobility and Knowability of Truth: Part 1,” *The Journal of Ministry and Theology* 12 (Spring 2009): 64–105 and “The Nobility and Knowability of Scripture: Part 2,” *The Journal of Ministry and Theology* 13 (Fall 2009): 1–22; “Humility and Tolerance: Exploring their Biblical, Theological, and Cultural Expression” presented at the Faculty Forum of Baptist Bible Seminary, Clarks Summit PA, October 25, 2010; “Current Trends in Hermeneutics and Theology: Certainty and Simplicity,” *Paraklesis* (Summer 2010), 1, 6; “What is Faith in Luke 18:1–8” *Bibliotheca Sacra* (July–September 2010), 292–306; “The Nobility and Knowability of Scripture: An Overview of Contemporary Postmodern Challenges to the Nature, Authority, and Knowability of Scripture” presented at the Authentic Church GARBC National Conference, at Baptist Bible College, Clarks Summit, PA June 26, 2012; “Love Wins by Rob Bell: A Biblical and Theological Critique,” *The Journal of Ministry and Theology*, (Spring 2012) 87–121; “How to Think about and Practice Theology,” *The Journal of Ministry and Theology*, (Spring 2014), 65–85.

⁴ Some of the earlier outstanding publications, which surfaced from the ICBI meetings, also interact with these issues of the nature of truth and its knowability: *Inerrancy* ed. Norman L. Geisler (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan/Academi, 1980); *Challengers to Inerrancy: A Theological Response*, Eds. Gordon Lewis and Bruce Demarest (Chicago: Moody, 1984); *Scripture and Truth*, eds., D. A. Carson and John Woodbridge (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan/Academi, 1983); *Hermeneutics, Authority and Canon*, eds. D. A. Carson and John Woodbridge (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan/Academi, 1986); *The Foundation of Biblical Authority*, ed. James Montgomery Boice (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan/Academi, 1978); *Evangelicals and Inerrancy: Selections from the Journal of Evangelical Theological Society.*, ed. Ronald Youngblood (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984); *Biblical Errancy: An Analysis of Its Philosophical Roots*, ed., Norman L. Geisler (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan/Academi, 1981); *Biblical Authority: A Critique of the Rogers/McKim Proposal* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan/Academi, 1982); *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, & the Bible: Papers from the ICBI Summit II*

(Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan/Academi, 1984); *Applying the Scriptures: Papers from the ICBI Summit III* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan/Academi, 1987).

Some of the more recent publications are also very helpful in addressing the post-conservative questions and assertions include: Douglas Groothuis, *Truth Decay: Defending Christianity Against the Challenges of Postmodernism* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity press, 2000); *Whatever Happened to Truth?*, ed. Andreas Kostenberger (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005); *Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times*, eds. Millard J. Erickson, Paul Koss Helseth, Justin Taylor (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004); David Wells, *Above All Earthly Powers: Christ in a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005); *Reforming or Conforming: Post-Conservative Evangelicals and the Emerging Church*, ed., Gary L. W. Johnson and Ronald N. Nash (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008); *E3: Evangelicals Engaging Emergent*, eds., Williman D. Henard and Adam W. Greenway (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2009); Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority: God Who Speaks and Shows—Preliminary Considerations* (Waco, TX: Word, 1976); D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996); *The Supremacy of Christ in a Postmodern World*, eds., John Piper and Justin Taylor (Wheaton, ILL: Crossway books, 2007); R. Scott Smith, *Truth and the New Kind of Christian: The Emerging Effects of Postmodernism on the Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005); Paul Koss Helseth, *Right Reason and the Princeton Mind: An Unorthodox Proposal* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Puritan & Reformed, 2010); Vern Sheridan Poythress, *In The Beginning Was The Word: Language A God-Centered Approach* (Wheaton: IL, Crossway, 2009); Mark D. Thompson, *A Clear and Present Word: The Clarity of Scripture* (Downers Grove: IL, Intervarsity Press, 2006); D. A. Carson, *Christ and Culture Revisited* (Grand Rapids: MI, 2008); Kevin DeYoung and Ted Kluck, *Why We're Not Emergent: By Two Guys Who Should Be* (Chicago: Moody, 2008). G. K. Beale, *The Erosion of Inerrancy in Evangelicalism: Responding to New Challenges to Biblical Authority* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008); Norman L. Geisler and William C. Roach, *Defending Inerrancy: Affirming the Accuracy of Scripture for a New Generation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011); James K Hoffmeier and Dennis R Magary, eds., *Do Historical Matters Matter to Faith: A Critical Appraisal of Modern and Postmodern Approaches to Scripture* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2012);

appropriate weighted conservative response and rebuttal. Every Pastor is called to shepherd and protect the Lord’s flock. I hope these resources will help you.

The following chart illustrates the *appropriate weighted scholarly material* in evaluating and rebutting the Post-conservative assertions and questions.

Post-conservative Assertions	Conservative Response
Stanley Grenz, <i>Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era</i> (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000)	<i>Reclaiming the Center: Confronting Evangelical Accommodation in Postmodern Times</i> , eds. Millard J Erickson, Paul Kjos Helseth, Justin Taylor (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2004)
Stanley Grenz and John Franke, <i>Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in the Postmodern Context</i> (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2001)	<i>Paul Kjos Helseth, Right Reason and the Princeton Mind: An Unorthodox Proposal</i> (Phillipsburg, NJ: Puritan & Reformed, 2010)
John Franke, <i>The Character of Theology, An Introduction to Its Nature, Task, and Purpose</i> (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005)	Vern Sheridan Poythress, <i>In The Beginning Was The Word: Language A God-Centered Approach</i> (Wheaton: Crossway, 2009)
John R. Franke, <i>Manifold Witness: The Plurality of Truth</i> (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2009)	Mark D. Thompson, <i>A Clear and Present Word: The Clarity of Scripture</i> (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2006)

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<p>Brian McLaren, <i>A New Kind of Christian: A Tale of Two friends on a Spiritual Journey</i> (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass; A Wiley Imprint, 2001)</p>	<p>R. Scott Smith, <i>Truth and the New Kind of Christian: The Emerging Effects of Postmodernism on the Church</i> (Wheaton: Crossway, 2005)</p>
<p>Roger Olson, <i>Reformed and Always Reforming: the Postconservative Approach to Evangelical Theology</i> (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007)</p>	<p>Gary L. W. Johnson and Ronald N. Gleason, eds., <i>Reforming or Conforming: Post-Conservative Evangelicals and the Emerging Church</i>, (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2008)</p>
<p>Kenton L. Sparks, <i>God's Word in Human Words: An Evangelical Appropriation of Critical Biblical Scholarship</i> (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2008)</p>	<p>James K Hoffmeier and Dennis R Magary, eds., <i>Do Historical Matters Matter to Faith: A Critical Appraisal of Modern and Postmodern Approaches to Scripture</i> (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2012)</p>
<p>Peter Enns, <i>Inspiration and Incarnation: Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament</i> (Grand Rapids: Baker 2005)</p>	<p>G. K. Beale, <i>The Erosion of Inerrancy in Evangelicalism: Responding to New Challenges to Biblical Authority</i> (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008)</p>
<p>Crystal L. Downing, <i>How Postmodernism Serves (My) Faith: Questioning Truth in Language, Philosophy, and Art</i> (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2006)</p>	<p>Norman L. Geisler and William C. Roach, <i>Defending Inerrancy: Affirming the Accuracy of Scripture for a New Generation</i> (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011)</p>
<p>Popular books by such authors Brian McLaren, Leonard Sweet, Tony Jones, Doug Pagitt, Rob Bell, etc.</p>	<p>Kevin DeYoung and Ted Kluck, <i>Why We're Not Emergent: By Two Guys Who Should Be</i> (Chicago: 2008).</p> <p>Andreas Kostenberger, ed., <i>Whatever Happened to Truth</i>, ed., Andreas (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2005).</p>

Together: Networks and Church Planting. Marcus Bigelow and Bobby Harrington. Irvine, CA: Stadia/Self-published, 2011. 228 pages. \$14.95.

Two leaders with Stadia, a national church planting network associated with the independent Christian Church/Church of Christ, show how their movement has successfully planted hundreds of new North American churches through national (macro), regional and local (micro) networks of partnering churches. This book fills an important need in planting literature by carefully describing how church planting through supportive, decentralized networks place church planters in the best position to succeed. To get a broader view of how networks work, the authors researched ten of the more successful church planting networks in North America and share insights gleaned. They also include an interview with Dr. Ed Stetzer and give three helpful samples in their appendix: a church planting network coach agreement, a memorandum of understanding with partner churches, and a church planter expectations document. The biblical principles and key practices described in this 228-page paperback are readily transferable to denominations and associations of churches that hope to revitalize their church planting efforts. The key, they show, is building close relationships among pastors and churches who can then partner together to initiate, coach, and oversee church planting projects.

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Leading Church Multiplication: Locally, Regionally and Nationally. Tom Nebel and Steve Pike. St. Charles, IL: ChurchSmart. 2014. 262 pages. \$20.00.

This is a solid resource that will inform and inspire leaders who recruit, train, and coach others to plant churches. Written by two veteran denominational leaders, this book focuses on three key areas: foundations for building a church planting culture in an organization; essential planter support systems; and leader strategies, landmines, and booby traps to avoid. This is possibly the first resource written specifically for movement and denominational leaders who are tasked with seeing new churches started. Nebel is a seasoned leader with Converge (formerly the Baptist General Conference) and Pike with the Assemblies of God, both groups that have had much success in North American planting. They have much to teach us. Nebel and Pike reveal valuable lessons they have learned as they led fruitful church planting movements within their denominations over the past twenty years.

They address vital questions such as “How do you create a culture through your public communications? What is the role of partnership? How do you cast vision in a way that reinforces your direction? How do you maintain church planting and organizational momentum?” Their wisdom is reflected in the breadth of the questions they tackle. If your role includes the oversight of church multiplication, this practical book is one you need to read, digest, and apply.

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BiVo: A Modern Day Guide for Bi-vocational Saints. Hugh Halter. Littleton, CO: Missio Publishing, 2013. 150 pages. \$10.99.

This is a small book (150 pages) packing a big and provocative message. Halter is a founding planter of Adullam, a congregational network of missional communities in Denver, and also a consultant/ leader in the Missio network. This volume builds a strong case for church planters to consider being “tentmakers” who are on mission with Christ. But it is also written, as its subtitle reads, “Leveraging All of Life into One Calling,” for any lay person desiring to make a difference. The author contends that with the declining economic climate of the United States, more and more of God’s people—especially leaders—will need to simplify their lives and live bi-vocational lives, supporting themselves through “secular” employment. Rich benefits: less consumer Christianity, more intentional missional living, the people of God practicing the priesthood of all believers, more funds freed up for investing in the community and evangelism. At times Halter oversells his case and misinterprets some scriptures, but all in all, this is a good book which will challenge conventional thinking about how Christians do Great Commission ministry.

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The Case for the Psalms: Why They are Essential. N. T. Wright. New York: HarperOne, 2013. 200 pages. \$17.36.

Better known for his controversial work in the NT, the former Bishop of Durham and now chair of NT and Early Christianity, University of St. Andrews, Scotland, N. T. Wright offers personal reflections on the book of Psalms in his newest publication. “Reflections” is an accurate description of this work since admittedly, Wright is not an OT scholar nor an expert in the psalms. However, it is clearly evident that his consistent exposure to these prayers through his Anglican tradition and his own time spent in these ancient songs have created a sacred place for the Psalter in his life and faith. While these poems hold a special place for him, he believes the church has forfeited their beauty and value. Once considered the “daily lifeblood of Christians” (1), the psalms have been reduced to “filler” in church services. Wright pleads to recapture the importance of the psalms as well as their use in the daily life of the church and her people. With these ancient hymns in their proper place, they have the ability to transform one’s worldview (7).

Following the introduction, the book consists of five chapters with an afterword by the author. The book concludes with an acknowledgement and two–page scripture index. Since it is not an academic work nor a commentary, there are no footnotes or bibliography. There is no discussion of introductory matters for the entire Psalter or individual psalms—although Wright notes in passing that he does not believe one can prove “that any of the psalms go back to King David himself, but one cannot prove, either, that none of them do” (9). He interprets the psalms in their canonical context as well as from a second–temple perspective (14). He also exhorts readers to “sing” these hymns Christologically as well as pneumatologically (110). His observations are not based on in-depth exegesis or detailed exposition of any one psalm. His plea finds its voice in his own simple contemplation on large sections of the psalms as they illustrate his three main ideas. He believes the “Psalms invite and sustain multiple levels of reading” (33). Although the original

music has been lost to these ancient songs, Wright often advocates singing them (28, 35, 72).

In chapter two, he introduces his controlling motifs of the next three main chapters (3–5): “The psalms invite their singers, as they always have, to live at the crossroads of time, space, and matter.” These “crossroads” are between “our time” and “God’s time,” “our space” and “God’s space,” and “the created order . . . as we normally perceive it” and “how that creation will be “filled afresh,” “with the grandeur of God” (21).

In chapter three, Wright develops his “crossroad of time” imagery. He suggests that as one allows the psalms to engage the reader in the present time, the reader stands at an intersection between time past in which God has worked and future time when God will work again. Wright does not elaborate on the nature of this “future” time. At this crossroad of time, one is able to stand firm in the present trouble because God has worked to deliver his people in the past and will work for his people in the future as well. “We can somehow stand firm in the present because YHWH is coming—to judge the earth; he will judge it with righteousness, and the peoples with his truth” (73).

In chapter four, he explores his “crossroad of space.” In the OT God’s space was in the Temple as evidenced in the psalms and, according to Wright, enhanced by the Torah, where the worshipper could experience God outside that sanctuary (102). Moving into the NT, Wright sees God’s presence in believers themselves through the Spirit.

The psalmists’ multilayered vision of sacred space has become a reality and is to become so yet more fully, through the very things that the psalmists themselves promised: coming of the Messiah and the transformation of human hearts and lives by the personal presence of God himself (115).

In chapter five, Wright explains his “crossroad of matter.” At this intersection, the reader stands between the original creation that “reveals God’s power and glory and the new creation that will be flooded, saturated, with God’s presence and glory” (136). “There is, of course, a constant tension in the psalms between the

celebration of creation the way it is and the longing for YHWH to come and put it all right at last" (139).

There are a few nuggets of wisdom in these chapters. For instance, in speaking of Psalm 2 and other royal psalms Wright observes, "This is a theme that we can't do without but that often, in our culture, we don't know what to do with" (44). In acknowledging that most of God's creation sing their creator's praise, Wright recognizes "only humans, it seems, have the capacity to live as something other than what they are (God reflectors, image bearers)" (120).

However, I have a difficult time navigating Wright's crossroads. For instance, while I appreciate his appeal to "time" in Psalms 90, 102, and 103 in chapter three, "At the Threshold of God's Time," I found myself lost at his "time crossroad." My disorientation is due to the fact that he includes portions of other psalms that do not seem to relate to time—God's or ours. Others may find these crossroads motifs helpful, but they do not resonate with me nor do they buttress Wright's plea to make the melody of these ancient songs my own.

As one who teaches the psalms and finds my own voice in them, there were a few times I nodded my head in agreement with Wright: "Sing these songs, and they will renew you from head to toe, from heart to mind. Pray these poems and they will sustain you on the long, hard but exhilarating road of Christian discipleship" (35). At other times, I scratched my head in bewilderment: "They (Psalms) call us to live at the intersection of sacred space, the temple and the holy land that surrounds it, and the rest of human space, the world where idolatry and injustice still wreck their misery" (91). Or speaking of Psalm 92, "The changes described there are not, as we might say, merely spiritual transformations but transformations of character that actually affected the matter of the human being" (158). On a number of occasions I found myself shaking my head in disagreement: "The picture of the sower (Ps 126:5–6) looks back to the ancient prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah and on, of course, to one of Jesus's greatest parables (Mark 4.1–20)" (187).

The chapter that best makes Wright's case is his afterword, "My Life with the Psalms." In these testimonies, one feels the

deep, abiding connection Wright has had with these poems from his youth. To say these prayers simply touched his life is not quite accurate enough. These prayers seemed to inform and give voice for his response to life. From a near-bus crash while riding a bike (174) to his rugby-playing days (“Be gracious to me, O God, for people trample me” [Ps 56:2:]) (175), Wright found a psalmic melody for each situation. It is listening to one who has made these ancient prayers his own, that the reader may be moved to want to experience the psalms for one’s self.

Wright presents a worthwhile case: to return the psalms to their rightful place in the life and worship of the church and her saints. However, most of the evidence he employs to advance his argument is not compelling. It is more likely that the reader will be motivated to experience these prayers more by Wright’s experience with them than by his imaginative crossroads of space, time and matter motifs.

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