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ZANE HODGES: THE NEW TESTAMENT SCHOLAR WHO ACTUALLY STUDIED THE NEW TESTAMENT

BY BOB WILKIN

Editor

Editor's note: Zane Hodges went to be with the Lord on November 23rd, 2008, evidently due to several heart attacks. The following article is a slightly modified version of an article I wrote for a proposed festschrift for him, which hopefully will be released soon.

I. INTRODUCTION

Dr. Art Farstad, Zane Hodges, and I used to have lunch one or more times each month for years. Art called them our troika meetings. Troika is a Russian loan word. In Russian it refers to a vehicle drawn by three horses abreast. In English troika refers to any grouping of three.

I loved our troika meetings. Zane and Art would say the most amazing things, whether about theology, grammar, lexicography, or whatever. The puns were fast and fascinating.

Art once told a semi-joke that Zane knew, but which I didn't. In fact, even after he told the story, I didn't get it until he explained it.

Art told of a retiring NT scholar. This man had a Ph.D. in NT Greek and exegesis. He had taught the New Testament for 40 years. When asked at his retirement if he had any regrets, he said, "I only regret that I never really studied the New Testament."

"What? I don't get it," I said to Art. "If he was a New Testament scholar, surely he studied the New Testament."

Art told me that the point is that most NT scholars are experts in what others say about the NT and in extra biblical literature that might shed some light on the NT itself. However, most NT scholars rarely truly study the NT itself.

Here I was enjoying lunch with the two NT scholars who indeed actively studied the NT (and the OT) for themselves every day of their lives. I realized how blessed I was that I needed to have such a joke explained.

Zane Hodges was my mentor essentially since I met him in January of 1980 in his class on Hebrews until he went to be with the Lord on November 23, 2008. It is a delight to share some insights into my mentor and friend.

II. VIEWING TEACHING AT DTS AS TENTMAKING!

During my seven years at Dallas Theological Seminary (1978-85), I learned that Professor Hodges, as I called him then, viewed teaching at DTS as his tentmaking work. He taught to make enough money to live on so that he could minister free of charge in a small Hispanic mission church in Dallas (called Victor Street Bible Chapel today).

I was amazed by this conviction. Most of the faculty viewed their teaching at DTS as their ministry. Any church work they did was secondary at best. But not Zane.

The church in which Zane ministered for over 45 years was very small, under 75 people most Sundays. If he had desired, Zane easily could have pastored much larger churches. He could have had much more prestige and arguably influence and impact. But he never viewed it that way.

Zane never felt that the goal was to have a large congregation. He believed the goal was to minister faithfully where you are. Victor Street Bible Chapel saw hundreds, if not thousands, come to faith in Christ over the years of Zane's ministry there. Victor Street Bible Chapel produced many solid disciples of Christ, some of whom remain there and others who attend other churches around the country. These people, of whom I am one, are some of the fruit of Zane's ministry.

III. TURNING DOWN A DOCTORATE

When I was completing my master's program, I planned to go on for doctoral work. Professor Hodges discouraged me from this. It was his philosophy that doctorates were not only unnecessary, but they were dangerous. He didn't explain why. Later I learned some of his reasons.

He was influenced by his Plymouth Brethren (PB) background. In PB circles, people rarely get doctorates. In those circles no one is called

Reverend or Doctor. Often, as is the case at Victor Street, there is no “Pastor,” and no one is ordained for ministry. They simply recognize “approved workmen.”

Another reason for his reluctance, I believe, is because he felt that advanced degrees can feed the ego and hinder our ability to humbly minister.

At the time, my first thought was to go to Europe to get a doctorate. However, my wife, Sharon, absolutely did not want to go. (Today she says she’d love to go to Europe!) I later discovered that a very high percentage of those who go to Europe for doctorates come back with a dramatically changed view of the Scriptures. Many buy into the liberal methodologies they are forced to learn and use there. I realize now it is a great thing Sharon didn’t want to go overseas.

While I was in the doctoral program at DTS (I didn’t follow Zane’s advice, but I took it to heart), I learned that Zane had been approached by Dr. Jacob Van Bruggen about receiving a doctorate from his school in Holland. Dr. Van Bruggen indicated that his publication of *The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text* was such a wonderful achievement that it warranted a doctorate. While Zane would have had to do more work on textual criticism to receive the doctorate, it would have been easy and fun for him.

Zane turned this down. He didn’t want a doctorate, even if it took very little time or extra effort. Indeed, I believe he would have turned one down if it required him no time and no extra effort. He just never felt it was a good thing. While I saw the situation somewhat differently, I greatly admired his stand. He was the best professor I had at DTS. And yet he was about the only one without a doctorate.

IV. A METHOD OF EXEGESIS THAT REALLY WORKS

During my years at DTS a rather mechanical method of exegesis was in vogue. We were taught to diagram, paying special attention to structural markers. We read all the major commentaries and grammars on our passage. We did word studies and text critical studies. Then we put it all together.

I spent 50 hours on my first exegetical paper. Later I was able to do an exegetical paper in half that time.

That method had much to commend it. It did result in a good grasp of a passage for the person who already was well grounded theologically. However, it was a cumbersome method that didn’t transfer well into the

real world. Few of us have 25 hours to exegete a passage and then spend 5 or 10 more hours to convert the exegesis into a sermon.

But Zane had a different method. His method didn't ignore the technical things we had been taught. But it included some other tools I had been overlooking. And it led to an ability to exegete much faster because the emphasis shifted from the commentaries and lexicons and grammars to the text itself. It is amazing how much light the Bible sheds on commentaries! One need not spend as much time in the commentaries if he spends sufficient time in prayer, meditation, and study of the actual text.

It wasn't simply that Zane's method was faster. It was also much more effective and much more enjoyable. I delight to this day in studying the Word of God because of the method Zane taught me.

Zane taught that we were to pray and ask God to open a passage to us. He pointed to many passages in Scripture that indicate we will only grasp God's Word if God opens it to our understanding (e.g., Ps 119:18; 26-27, 33-34, 66-68, 73, 124-125, 169; Luke 8:18; 19:26; 24:32, 45; John 2:24). This was so obvious. Yet I had not been praying and asking God to open His Word to me. I had thought it was a more or less mechanical process and if you just practiced the right techniques you'd grasp the meaning. Zane taught me that there is a spiritual component to exegesis.

As part of the spiritual component, he also taught us to meditate on the text. One of our assignments was to sit and look at the text and think about it. Ask questions of the text. Look for repeated words and phrases. We weren't to try to answer these questions or look things up in concordances or the like. We were just to look at and think about the text. This too was a novel approach. But, of course, it is a very Biblical one.

I remember one assignment in which we were required to stare at a passage (Acts 20:7-12) for, as I recall, 30 minutes. We were to think about the passage and not to write anything. That process brought the passage to life. I recently heard one of my friends, David Renfro, a fellow Dallas graduate, who team teaches a Bible study with me, say that those meditation assignments by Zane had a profound impact on him as well.

In Professor Hodges' classes I wrote shorter exegetical papers. They required less time. And yet I found I gained as much or more from these shorter papers. Later, when I went into the ministry, I was grateful for a method that allowed me to enjoy exegeting a passage and to do so in a

shorter amount of time. I found I rarely had 25 hours to exegete a passage I was preaching on Sunday or teaching during the week.

V. A LEADING NEW TESTAMENT TEXTUAL CRITIC

I was trained in the eclectic approach to textual criticism. But I took a doctoral course on textual criticism by Zane Hodges that changed my perspective. He made a convincing case for that the majority of manuscripts on any given book carry the correct readings for all passages.

Zane Hodges and Art Farstad came out with their *Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text* in 1982, the year I received my Th.M. This was a major publication requiring untold tens of thousands of hours of work from them and the legion of others they enlisted to help them in the task.

I know that most NT scholars are not persuaded by Zane's view of textual criticism. However, in NT circles there is great respect for him both as a NT scholar in general, and as a leading textual critic in particular.

Zane's view was not merely some academic concern. I have come to see that his interest in NT textual criticism stemmed from his high regard for the Lord and for His Word. If God gave mankind His Word, would He not also preserve it? Would He not oversee the copying process to the extent that His Word was not lost (as critical text scholars say happened to the ending of Mark's Gospel, for example)? Would He not make sure that future generations via study (cf. Heb 11:6) would be able to ascertain the original text? And wouldn't He preserve the correct reading in the majority of manuscripts rather than in just three manuscripts that contradict each other repeatedly (as the Critical Text theory essentially argues)?

Until I adopted Zane's majority text position, I always had nagging doubts in my mind about the validity of some of the canons of NT textual criticism. Why is a shorter reading to be preferred over a longer? Why is a harder reading to be preferred over a less difficult reading? Why should a few manuscripts from the third and fourth centuries (manuscripts which disagree with each other literally thousands of times) take precedence over hundreds of manuscripts (which were possibly copied from third century manuscripts) from later centuries? There seemed to be much more subjectivity in the eclectic method than in the majority text position of Zane Hodges.

VI. A LEADING SCHOLAR ON NEW TESTAMENT SOTERIOLOGY

When I took my first class from him, I had no idea that he was an expert in soteriology. He taught NT exegesis. My experience had been that such men knew theology, but that their heart was not afire with evangelism. I found in Professor Hodges an evangelist who happened to teach exegesis.

Before or during my seminary days Zane wrote several outstanding works that were either directly on soteriology (*The Gospel under Siege*) or which dealt with eternal rewards but had a lot of soteriological discussion (*The Hungry Inherit*, and *Grace in Eclipse*).

In 1990, while he was on the board of my ministry, Grace Evangelical Society, he came out with his book *Absolutely Free! A Biblical Reply to Lordship Salvation*. It was a response to the Lordship Salvation position and especially to John MacArthur's 1988 book, *The Gospel According to Jesus*. At our winter board meeting that year the other GES board members begged him to drop the chapter on repentance. In that chapter he argued that repentance is not a condition of eternal life. They said it would ruin his book. He insisted on keeping that chapter in the book. Today many think that the view he advocated is the Free Grace view on repentance. While it isn't yet the view, it is amazing how many people have come to adopt this position, myself included.

Around the turn of the century (2001), he came out with a book called *Harmony with God*. While ostensibly about repentance, it has a wonderful discussion of forgiveness. Here he breaks new ground of what forgiveness is. He sees repentance as a fellowship issue, not a relationship issue. While all Christians have eternal life, only some have experiential or fellowship forgiveness (cf. 1 John 1:9).

I came to seminary with a zeal for evangelism and the need for clarity between evangelism and discipleship. Zane Hodges stoked the flames of my passion.

VII. A PIONEER ON THE DOCTRINE OF REWARDS

The Hungry Inherit was his first book. Later came another book on rewards, *Grace in Eclipse*. His works on rewards have influenced a generation.

When I came into my first class with him, I had just come to believe in eternal rewards. But I still thought this theme appeared rarely in the

Bible. In his instruction on Hebrews, Zane seemed to see the doctrine of rewards as the controlling theme. I questioned this, asking if rewards were not largely restricted to two passages in 1 Corinthians. I smile now remembering his response. “Well, no, Bob. The doctrine of eternal rewards is on practically every page in the New Testament.”

I’ve come to see he’s right. Before taking my first class from him, the doctrine of rewards had little practical impact on my daily life. While I expected Christ’s imminent return, I was not focusing on that on the Judgment Seat of Christ. My aim in life was not to have Christ’s approval and to hear Him say, “Well done, good servant.” But that all changed after that course in the Spring of 1980. From then on I’ve lived for the Lord’s approval and His “Well done, good servant.” Zane’s teachings on rewards had a very positive impact on my service for Christ.

VIII. A NEW TESTAMENT SCHOLAR HEAVILY INFLUENCED BY THE OLD TESTAMENT

Dr. John Sailhammer is one of the leading OT scholars in the world today. Yet I remember talking with him in the late eighties when Zane and I spoke at a brown bag at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School where John was teaching. John said that Zane taught him more about OT exegesis, and particularly exegesis of narrative literature, than anyone else at DTS.

I’ve been a member at Victor Street Bible Chapel since the early nineties. It is not a stretch to say that I heard as much preaching and teaching from Zane on OT texts as NT ones. He taught through 1-2 Samuel and 1-2 Kings. I remember a fantastic message on Psalm 45. He taught from the OT as much or more than he did the NT.

He had an amazing grasp of the OT. I believe that gave him an even better grasp of the NT as well.

IX. ONE WHO USED COMMENTARIES AND OTHER EXTRABIBLICAL SOURCES VERY CAREFULLY

Zane Hodges did not suggest that we eliminate the studying of commentaries, grammars, and lexical sources. He was one who read just about everything! What he did suggest was that we must consult them

critically and that we must remember that prayer and meditation are more important steps in the process.

There is a great danger in exegesis of adopting widely held views. Admittedly, this allows us to feel safe since we have a lot of company in our view. It also tends to deflect criticism when we preach and teach. However, we are accountable to the Lord for what we believe and preach and teach. If what we are teaching is popular, but wrong, we will regret ever having taught it, regardless of how well received our messages were (Jas 3:1).

Zane Hodges and Dr. Allen Ross (Professor in OT exegesis when I was at DTS) both warned about this in their classes. When talking about the writing of theses and journal articles, Dr. Ross warned us to base our exegetical conclusions on what the textual evidence shows, not on our predetermined conclusions. He lamented the fact that in his opinion most evangelical scholars simply manipulated the data to make it conform to their expectations. He rightly called this dishonest. We are to let the textual evidence guide us to the conclusion the Lord intends, which may well not be the conclusion we expected and certainly not necessarily a popular conclusion.

When teaching on the saying in Jas 4:4 that “friendship with the Lord is enmity with God,” Zane suggested that as future teachers and preachers we should be very careful not to allow our exegesis to be determined by the views of the majority of well respected scholars. He said that if we wanted to be well regarded scholars in the world of biblical scholarship, then we would of necessity have to capitulate to unbiblical methodology and conclusions. The result would be enmity with God. He warned that friendship with the world of scholasticism was not a worthy exchange for loss of God’s friendship.

There is help to be found in the commentaries and other extrabiblical sources. However, much if not most of what we find there is wrong. We must realize that we are not in a jewelry store. We are instead in a field where we are searching for diamonds in the rough.

This reminded me, of course, of Art’s quip about the NT scholar who never really studied the NT. Zane and Art taught that we must be careful to relegate commentaries and other extrabiblical sources to secondary roles in our exegetical work. We must critically evaluate what we read and only keep that which is clearly borne out by the Word of God. And this process, too, must be bathed in prayer.

X. THINGS I LEARNED FROM HIM

Over the years I learned that Zane mentored many in the ministry, not just me. I would often be unable to reach him at his office because he was on the phone with a pastor needing help for his sermon or a theologian needing counsel about a theological puzzle.

Zane often went to Huntsville, Texas—a six hour drive round trip—to visit a prisoner on death row. Zane mentored this man via the mail and in person too.

While each one he mentored has a story to tell, I'll share with you some things I learned from him even after my seminary studies ended.

When I received my doctorate in NT, I thought I was well grounded theologically. While I knew I had a lot to learn, I thought the things I did know were solid and correct. Little by little God used Zane to show me that some of the things I was convinced were right were actually wrong. I think that by sharing just some of these, you will gain some insight into this man's influence. And keep in mind that he has an equal influence in the lives of hundreds of others who are in ministry today.

A. ISAIAH 7:14

I learned at DTS that this verse had dual fulfillment. A child was born in Isaiah's day as a sign for people in that day. Why a natural birth of a child would be a sign in that day was never clear to me. But the idea is that the virgin birth was probably not in Isaiah's mind. The Holy Spirit, however, knew this had another fulfillment in relation to Mary and Jesus.

I remember talking about this with Zane one day. He said, "Yes, that is possible. But why would we assume what is essentially a liberal position that undercuts the prophetic nature of Scripture? Why not see only one fulfillment? Is that not what a reading of Matthew 1 suggests? Does Matthew give even a hint of any earlier fulfillment of that verse?"

I don't remember whether my understanding changed that day or shortly thereafter. But I came to believe that Isaiah was writing specifically about the Messiah. Years after that I read a fuller explanation by Dr. Arnold Fructenbaum that completely cleared up the passage for me. But I gained the basic understanding from some questions Zane asked me casually while we were standing by our cars one day.

B. DOUBLE FULFILLMENT

This led me to wonder about the whole issue of double fulfillment. Current Bible scholars see double fulfillment everywhere. Zane suggested to me that we shouldn't see double fulfillment unless the Bible gives us strong indication that this is the case. That makes lots of sense. But I had bought into that position while rushing through seminary.

C. REPENTANCE

Zane was my first reader on my doctoral dissertation on repentance in the NT. I defended basically a modified form of the change-of-mind view of Chafer and Ryrie. I indicated that many texts on repentance concerned turning from sins, but never in salvific contexts. However, I did find a number of places in which I thought *metanoēō* and *metanoia* were used in salvific contexts. There I felt they referred to calls to change one's mind about Christ, that is, to believe in Him for eternal life.

Five years after my dissertation was accepted, Zane wrote Absolutely Free! and taught that repentance is always turning from sins and never is a condition of eternal life. It took about seven years, but I repented of my view of repentance! All the verses I thought were in salvific contexts (e.g., Acts 2:38; 2 Pet 3:9) I came to see were not.

D. ASSURANCE AND FAITH

In a series at Cypress Valley Bible Church (then Believer's Bible Church) in Marshall, Texas, Zane spoke on saving faith and assurance. I wasn't present to hear it. But I received the messages on tape. I found these messages fascinating. Typically I listen to messages once only. But I listened to these tapes over and over again.

After about five times of listening to the tapes, I had a good grasp of what he was saying. And the material convinced me thoroughly. Prior to listening the idea that assurance was of the essence of saving faith was something I was familiar with, but did not accept. After listening, I fully grasped and accepted it. In addition, I gave up the idea of faith as a decision and came to see it as a persuasion caused by the evidence.

E. GOD OPENING PEOPLE'S HEARTS (ACTS 16:14)

The Reformed understanding of Acts 16:14 always struck me as deterministic. Then Zane shared with a view that really made sense. No one comes to faith before God removes a veil from their eyes (2 Corinthians 3-4; Luke 8:12-13; Acts 16:14). But in some if not many cases, we have a part in influencing God to open our hearts/eyes. The one who responds

positively to the light he has will get more light (Acts 17:27; see also Acts 10 and Cornelius). Lydia is a perfect example of this as she was a God-fearer who was at the place of prayer when God brought Paul and Silas along and then opened her heart to their message.

F. NO ONE SEEKS GOD (ROMANS 3:11)

Zane also gave a cogent explanation of Rom 3:11, “No one seeks God.” He explained that this statement must be understood as from the perspective of humans left to our own initiative. We have other texts like Acts 17:27 or the conversion of Cornelius that show that the unregenerate sometimes do seek God. The simple yet profound solution is that no one seeks God except in response to the prior wooing of the Holy Spirit (John 16:9-11).

G. SUMMARY

I could give many other examples. The point is this. Zane continued to have a profound influence on my thinking and teaching and writing for decades after I completed my seminary studies under him.

And I am far from the only one. I know of four DTS graduates, Rene Lopez, Al Valdez, Bob Bryant, and Dan Hauge, who for years spent an hour a week or more talking with Zane on the phone. They asked him questions and got his feedback.

I know of many others who called Zane from time to time for theological help and personal counseling as well.

Not only did he teach thousands of young men during his 27 years at DTS, but since 1986 when he stopped teaching there, he continued to instruct myriads of people for the remaining 22 years of his life.

XI. CONCLUSION

No pastor, theologian, missionary, or layperson (for we are all to minister) should be in the position at the end of his life where he reflects, “I regret I never really studied the Bible.” We should want to please God and to do that we must be a men and women of God. To do that we must be students of His Word. If that means that some scoff at our supposed lack of scholarship, so be it. If that means we are never regarded as erudite theologians, fine. What we should really care about is not the opinions of men, but the opinion of the God-Man, the King of kings and Lord of Lords. What should matter most is what our Savior, the One who gave His life for us, thinks of our lives. Oh that we might hear the Lord Jesus say, “Well done, good servant.”

Zane Hodges more than anyone I know exemplified such a man. In the nearly 30 years I knew him, his focus was on the soon return of Christ and on gaining His approval. He was more than a mentor for me. He was a model of what an overcoming Christian is like. I thank God that He allowed me to be influenced by this great man of God. Should the Lord tarry, I hope to be able to be a faithful steward of what Zane taught me. I realize that he has not stopped laying up treasure in heaven. Those of us who have been influenced by him will cause more deposits in Zane's heavenly account if we continue on in what he taught us (cf. 2 John 8; Phil 1:6).

Finally, I'm glad he is my friend. I hope he will invite me over to his kingdom castle to enjoy some hidden manna and fruit from the tree of life.

MIRACULOUS SIGNS AND LITERARY STRUCTURE IN JOHN'S GOSPEL

ZANE C. HODGES

President
Kerugma Ministries
Mesquite, TX

This article, based on Zane's second conference message at the 2008 GES national conference, was completed before he went to be with the Lord on November 23rd, 2008.

I. INTRODUCTION

In the first article we examined the literary purpose of the Last Discourse, found in John 13-17. We proposed that the Discourse should be viewed as an encomium whose aim is evangelistic. The closest analogue that I know about in Greek literature is the Platonic dialogue called the *Phaedo*.

But we have not yet said enough about the literary milieu into which John sent his Gospel. We want to try to do that today. In order to do this, we first need to think a little bit about the author.

II. THE SON OF ZEBEDEE

I accept the ancient tradition that John the son of Zebedee was the author of the Fourth Gospel. The author was also one and the same as the disciple who leaned on Jesus' breast in the Upper Room.¹ Let's think about him for a moment.

According to Matt 4:21-22, Jesus called James and John while they were "in the boat with Zebedee their father," and they promptly "left the boat and their father" to follow Jesus. Now some might think that these two boys ran out on their dear old Dad!

Dry your tears. Mark 1:20 informs us that they "left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants." The Greek word for *hired*

¹ Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.* 3.1; Eusebius, *H. E.* 3.24 and 5.8.

servants is the plural of *misthōtos*. It the equivalent of our word “employees.” Zebedee didn’t really need the boys, since he had employees.

When we come to the Gospel of John, we are told a most interesting fact. When Jesus was arrested, we read this in John 18:15-16:

And Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did [the other] disciple. Now that disciple was known to the high priest, and went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest. But Peter stood at the door outside. Then the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to her who kept the door, and brought Peter in. [NKJV, except bracketed words.]

In all probability, “the other disciple” is the author. *But what is this?* The son of an obscure Galilean fisherman is known to the high priest? He is so familiar with the servants that he talks one into letting Peter into the courtyard? What’s going on here?

Here’s my suggestion. Zebedee was not a backwoods yokel from the sticks up in Galilee. On the contrary, he was a successful entrepreneur who was in the fish business. He had ships that worked for him on the Sea of Galilee (including Peter and Andrew’s ship) and his fish graced the markets in both Galilee and in Judea. I further suggest that he was a resident of Jerusalem and that his wealth permitted him to move in the best social circles there.

In his classic book, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus*, Joachim Jeremias observes:

From time immemorial Jerusalem had attracted the wealth of the nation—merchants, landowners, tax-farmers, bankers and men of private means. Several members of the Sanhedrin came from these circles. . . . Jerusalem merchants dealing in grain, wine and oil, and wood, who belonged to the Council between AD 66-70, are mentioned in rabbinic literature . . .²

Of course, the best social circles in Jerusalem included Caiaphas the high priest and his father-in-law Annas. As Jeremias also notes:

The house where lived the ex-high priest Annas, father-in-law to the officiating high priest, to whom John says Jesus was first taken after his arrest (John 18:13), had a spacious court

² Joachim Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus: An Investigation into Economic and Social Conditions during the New Testament Period* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, rev. ed. 1967), pp. 95-96.

(John 18:15). A woman doorkeeper (John 18:16) and other servants belonged to the household (John 18:18 . . .). According to tradition there was great luxury in the houses of the high-priestly families . . .³

Since Annas is called "high priest" by John in 18:19; 22, the reference in 18:15 is probably to Annas rather than to Caiaphas. John's social connections were with the household of Annas.⁴

The repeated references to "Judeans" (*Ioudaioi*) in the Fourth Gospel is consistent with the suggestion that Zebedee's family resided in Jerusalem. Thus John, as he grew up, had more than once been to the residence of the high priest and, as a kid, had probably played in the courtyard. The servants knew him, just as did the high priest.⁵

I find additional confirmation of my suggestion in a remarkable incident recorded in the Synoptics, but not in John. John's mother once brought her two sons, James and John, to Jesus seeking to guarantee their preeminence in the coming kingdom. She even kneeled to Him and asked for a promise that her sons would sit on His right hand and on His left in His Kingdom (Matt 20:20-23). Now if you ask me, that sounds a lot like a high society lady who knew a thing or two about social climbing. She's aiming for the top.

If my hypothesis is correct, it is extremely likely that before Zebedee allowed his sons to get involved in his fishing business, he saw to it that they got an education. To do this, he might well have hired tutors. Or he

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 96, 97.

⁴ It is plausible, however, that, when Annas sent Jesus "bound to Caiaphas" (18:24), we should not infer a separate household. Caiaphas was married to Annas' daughter (18:13) and may well have lived in the same residence as his father-in-law. In that case, the description of Caiaphas' house that Jeremias deduces from the Synoptic accounts is a description of one and the same household. Cf. Jeremias, *Jerusalem*, pp. 96-97.

⁵ For what it is worth, in his very recent book, Bauckham states: "I take the view of many other scholars that the Gospel's portrayal of the beloved disciple makes most sense if he was not one of the Twelve, not one of the innermost disciples who traveled around with Jesus, but a disciple resident in Jerusalem, who hosted Jesus and his disciples at the Last Supper and took the mother of Jesus into his Jerusalem home." Richard Bauckham, *The Testimony of the Beloved Disciple: Narrative, History, and Theology in the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), p. 15. We only need to drop Bauckham's distinction between the son of Zebedee and the beloved disciple to produce a position identical with the one I postulate in this paper.

might have sent his sons to join other children from well-to-do families in private schooling sessions.

It is not too far fetched to suggest that John might have attended a small school conducted by a *grammaticus* in the high priest's own household. A *grammaticus* was a teacher of language and literature. Gaius Octavius had one long before anyone knew he would become the Emperor Augustus.⁶

Or perhaps Zebedee hired tutors for James and John. Philip of Macedonia had done that for Alexander, and one of the three he employed was a pretty fair tutor. His name was Aristotle.⁷

Of course, any tutor worth his salt would have introduced Zebedee's boys to classical Greek literature. The chances are excellent they did reading in Homer, in Plato, in Aristotle, maybe also in Xenophon and Aristophanes, etc. Training in rhetoric and in philosophy would have been part of such an upper class education.

We have no reason to suppose that when John wrote the Fourth Gospel he was reaching *way over his head* trying to communicate with a literate audience. That doesn't make sense. When John the son of Zebedee began to follow our Lord, I think he had already received a neat education. Jesus planned to use *all* of that in the years that lay ahead.

After all, the most reliable tradition is that John lived into the reign of Trajan (98-117 AD).⁸ His Gospel is a tremendous literary triumph. For centuries, readers have loved to read it and scholars have loved to analyze it. Thousands and thousands of articles and books have been churned out to comment on the Fourth Gospel. If you want to talk about literary success, you can't do much better than that.

III. THE GENRE OF JOHN'S GOSPEL

In the course of his education, in all probability John was introduced to a type of literature that was called *bioi* (from the Greek word *bi-os*, meaning "life"). We would call this *biography*. There were many *bioi*

⁶ Anthony Everitt, *Augustus: The Life of Rome's First Emperor* (New York: Random House, 2006), pp. 13-14.

⁷ On Alexander's tutors, see Paul Cartledge, *Alexander the Great: The Hunt for a New Past* (New York: The Overlook Press, 2004), pp. 82-84.

⁸ Irenaeus, *Adv. Haer.*, 2.33; Eusebius, *H. E.*, 3.23, 31.

in circulation in John's day.⁹ And as it turned out, the first Christian century was a *great* century for the production of biography.

Some years ago, Paul Murray Kendall observed that the first Christian century "gave birth to the three first truly 'professional' biographers—Plutarch and Suetonius . . . and the historian Tacitus."¹⁰ But biography had a long history dating from the poet Ion of Chios in the 5th century BC.

Kendall also has fittingly said, "the two greatest teachers of the classical Mediterranean world, Socrates and Jesus Christ, both prompted the creation of magnificent biographies written by their followers."¹¹ Plato's *Apology* and his *Phaedo*, as we have seen, are biographical dialogues related to Socrates. There, Plato "brilliantly re-creates the response of an extraordinary character to the crisis of existence."¹² Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, of course, are biographies focused on Jesus Christ.

We have already noted that Plato's *Apology* and *Phaedo* concentrate on the last days of Socrates. The *Phaedo* takes place on his very last day, while the *Apology* is his defense before the Athenian jury that condemned him. That defense took place nearly a month before his execution. In the case of Jesus, the historical sequence was different. First there was His last meeting with His closest disciples (John 13-17). But subsequently that very night, Jesus is arrested, tried, executed the following morning and buried that same day. In John's Gospel this is chapters 18-19.

You will notice, of course, that John spends a lot of time on these two events, which are, (1) Jesus' final conversation with His friends (John 13-17); and (2) Jesus final confrontation with His enemies (John 18-19). I want to suggest that the effort John makes to describe these

⁹ Bauckham, *Beloved Disciple*, pp. 17-18, observes: "Both Lincoln and Keener acknowledge the landmark significance of Richard Burridge's work on Gospel genre, which has convinced many, perhaps most, Gospels scholars that to their contemporary audiences the Gospels would have been recognized as lives (*bioi*) of Jesus, i.e. belonging to the broad generic category of Greco-Roman biography." Cf. also Andrew T. Lincoln, *The Gospel According to Saint John*, Black's New Testament Commentaries (New York: Hendrickson Publishers, and London: Continuum, 2005), pp. 14-17.

¹⁰ Paul Murray Kendall, "Biographical Literature," in *The New Encyclopedia Britannica: Macropaedia* (1975) 2:1011.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 2:1010-1011.

¹² *Ibid.*, 2:1011.

scenes in detail is harmonious with the practice of biographers before and during the first Christian century. Let's consider this for a few minutes.

IV. DEATH SCENES IN ANCIENT BIOGRAPHY

At this point we need to recall the request that Echecrates made to Phaedo which resulted in the dialogue that followed.

Echecrates: I wish you would be kind enough to give us a really detailed account—unless you are pressed for time.

Phaido: No, not at all. I will try to describe it for you. Nothing gives me more pleasure than recalling the memory of Socrates, either by talking myself or by listening to someone else.

Echecrates: Well, Phaedo, you will find that your audience feels just the same about it. Now try to describe every detail as carefully as you can.¹³

Here, obviously, Echecrates is a stand-in for the upper class hearer or reader whose social set is gathered to listen perhaps to a professional lector starting to read Plato's dialogue. This pleasurable occasion must not be spoiled by some brief and superficial account. Echecrates wants details.¹⁴ Phaedo promises to provide something that can be enjoyed. He loves talking about Socrates.

When one considers other instances of ancient biography, it is obvious that the ancient reader/hearer savored details. That is especially clear, I think, when it comes to accounts of a person's death.

Plutarch was the most prolific biographer that the first century AD produced. He was born in AD 45, only a few years after the crucifixion of our Lord. His birthplace was at Chaeronea in Boeotia in central

¹³*Phaedo*, translated by Hugh Tredennick, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato Including the Letters*, eds. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton: University Press, 1961; 7th rep. ed. 1973), p. 41.

¹⁴The words of Echecrates, "a really detailed account," translate the underlying Greek phrase *ως σαφιστατα* (from *σαφης*, "clear," "plain," "distinct") and "as carefully as you can" translate *ως αν δυνα ακριβεστατα* (cf. *ακριβως* in Luke 1:3). See *Plato's Phaedo*, with Introduction and Notes by John Burnet (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925), 58d.1 and 58d.8-9.

Greece. Plutarch received training in philosophy at Athens and taught that subject later at Rome. The Emperor Trajan granted him consular rank and later Hadrian gave him a procuratorship in Greece. He wrote in Koine Greek.

Plutarch's monumental accomplishment in the field of biography is the multi-volume work that we know as *Parallel Lives*. The series contains 46 biographies, mostly broken up into pairs with one member of the pair being a Greek person and the other member a similar Latin individual. The last four lives, however, are single. The purpose of the *Parallel Lives* was not simply to retail historical facts, but to offer moral examples and/or moral warnings.

The list of the subjects of these biographies is quite long and I won't bore you with the whole list. But the list includes such pairs as: Solon and Publicola; Themistocles and Camillus; Pericles and Fabius Maximus; Lysander and Sulla; Dion and Brutus. You get the idea.

Picking somewhat at random, Plutarch's narrative of the death of Cicero is illustrative of my point. Plutarch's account can be said to run from chapter 46-49 of his life of Cicero.¹⁵ Plutarch recounts how Cicero was betrayed by Octavian, whom he had helped to gain political power. Octavian resisted, but eventually gave in to, the demands of Antony and Lepidus that Cicero be proscribed—that is, designated for execution.¹⁶

When news of the proscription reached Cicero at his country home in Tusculum, he and his brother Quintus decided to flee to a sea coast residence Cicero had at Asturia. They then planned to sail to a place called Brutus in Macedonia, but Quintus later got cold feet and left Cicero, only to be killed not long after by his own servants. Cicero sailed from Asturia and reached Circaeum. But instead of sailing on at once, as his servants urged, he went ashore and walked a hundred furlongs *back* toward Rome!¹⁷

Listen now to Plutarch's account of Cicero's irresolution:

¹⁵ All quotations are drawn from *Plutarch's Lives*, vol. 7: *Demosthenes and Cicero; Alexander and Caesar*, trans. Bernadotte Perrin, The Loeb Classical Library, ed. G. P. Gould (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1919; rep. ed. 1986).

¹⁶ Plutarch, *Cicero* 46.1-6.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 47.1-5.

But again losing resolution and changing his mind, he went down to the sea at Asturia. And there he spent the night in dreadful and desperate calculations; he actually made up his mind to enter Caesar's house by stealth, to slay himself upon the hearth, and so fasten upon Caesar an avenging daemon. But a fear of tortures drove him from this course also.¹⁸

Cicero now sails off to a summer villa he had at Caieta. But as he sailed, "a flock of crows flew with loud clamor towards the vessel of Cicero as it was rowed toward land; and alighting at either end of the sail-yard, some cawed and others pecked at the end of the ropes, and everybody thought that the omen was bad."¹⁹

It *was* bad! At the end of this remarkable story, we eventually find the assassin Herennius overtaking Cicero in his litter and:

Cicero, perceiving him, ordered the servants to set the litter down where they were. Then he himself, clasping his chin with his left hand, as was his wont, looked steadfastly at his slayers, his head all squalid and unkempt, and his face wasted with anxiety, so that most of those that stood by covered their faces while Herennius was slaying him. For he stretched his neck forth from the litter and was slain, being in his sixty-fourth year.²⁰

Do you see what I mean? This is a very detailed account. Plutarch, of course, didn't see it happen and doesn't scruple to pass on whatever details had reached him in one way or another. He himself would probably not have vouched for the absolute truth of every detail in his narrative. But this is what readers wanted.

Now observe this important fact. Plutarch paired the Latin orator Cicero with the Greek orator Demosthenes.. A brief section of comparison follows these two parallel lives. Whereas he has praise for Demosthenes' death, he has this to say about Cicero's death:

¹⁸ Ibid., 47.6-7.

¹⁹ Ibid., 47.8.

²⁰ Ibid., 48.4-5.

And after all the one [i.e., Cicero] is to be pitied for the manner of His death—an old man ignobly carried up and down by his servants, trying to escape death, hiding himself from those who were coming after him not much in advance of nature's summons, and then beheaded . . .²¹

In short, in his death, this famous personality is anything but a hero. In the manner of his end, there is little if anything to admire.

V. THE DEATH OF JESUS THE CHRIST

John the son of Zebedee, of course, was an eyewitness to the events recorded in John 13 through 19. He makes sure his unconverted readers know this, by inserting himself from time to time into his account. He need not rely on hearsay as Plutarch must often have done. He saw all this happen.

John was with Jesus in the Garden when He was arrested. Jesus inquires, "Whom are you seeking?" and when told, "Jesus of Nazareth," He boldly replies, "I am He" (John 18:4-5). Further, He intercedes for the release of His disciples: "I have told you that I am He. Therefore, if you seek Me, let these go their way" (18:8). There is no cowardice here.

Not long after that, John is inside the courtyard of the high priest. He is probably not warming himself, like Peter, before a fire. No doubt he is within earshot when Jesus responds to Annas' questions about His disciples and His doctrine.

Jesus is not intimidated by the circumstances and He replies, "I spoke openly to the world. I always taught in the synagogues and in the temple, where the Jews always meet, and in secret I have said nothing. Why do you ask Me? Ask those who have heard Me what I said to them. Indeed they know what I said" (18:19-21).

Immediately, Jesus is slapped by a servant. No doubt Annas was offended, but Jesus is not intimidated by this influential man. Annas does not get deferential treatment.

Neither does Pontius Pilate in the record of John 18:28-19:11. Particularly impressive is the exchange in 19:8-11. When Pilate asks, "Where are You from?" Jesus gives him no answer. The following exchange then occurs (19:10-11):

²¹ Plutarch, *Comparison of Demosthenes and Cicero*, 5.1.

Pilate: Are You not speaking to me? Do You not know that I have power to crucify You, and power to release You?

Jesus: You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above. Therefore the one who delivered Me to you has the greater sin.

Instead of flying into a rage, Pilate—John tells us—sought to release Jesus (19:12). Pilate is impressed. So no doubt are John’s readers. After all, this was the Prefect of Judea whom Jesus has just described as powerless!

In the account of the actual crucifixion in John’s Gospel, it is noteworthy that John ignores the two thieves who reviled Jesus, and there is no cry of desolation (“My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”). Instead, there is a stress first of all upon His Messianic claim to kingship. The Fourth Gospel *alone* records the objection by the Jews to Pilate’s inscription above the cross. The inscription read, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews.” Pilate refuses to soften this down to accommodate the Jewish objections. (19:19-22).

Even in His death, the claim that Jesus is the Christ was out there for all to see!²² The readers could not fail to notice.

The death scene is then concluded by two incidents that fulfill Scripture (the gambling over His garments and the offer of sour wine to drink:19:23-29). In between these incidents is a touching manifestation of Jesus’ humanity and compassion. John *alone* records that Jesus on the cross thinks of the future welfare of His mother and commits her to John’s care. On the view I have suggested, Mary would have been cared for in the substantial Jerusalem residence of John’s wealthy father, Zebedee.

Here, then, is this wonderful Person whose very clothes are being dispersed among the soldiers who crucified him. And although His body was racked with thirst, not to mention pain, He is concerned for the

²² For the identification of the title “King of the Jews” with the designation “Christ,” see the helpful article by Herbert W. Bateman IV, “Defining the Titles ‘Christ’ and ‘Son of God’ in Mark’s Narrative Presentation of Jesus,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 50 (3, September 2007): 537-59; esp. 540-45.

mother He loved. As a result of His concern, she will be comfortable for the rest of her life!

John's original readers will feel the impact of this entire scene. The Person on the cross is no mere man. He is the Christ, the King of the Jews.

VI. MIRACULOUS SIGNS AND LITERARY STRUCTURE

Many evangelicals read the Last Discourse (John 13-17) and the Trial and Crucifixion Narrative (18-19) *with their eyes closed*. It's hard to read with your eyes closed, but many of us manage it quite well. We are especially guilty of this in John 13-19.

The material in these chapters is *so* familiar to us, and the parallels in the Synoptics are *so* familiar, that we have stopped listening to John's text. I want to repeat that. In John 13-19 we have stopped listening to John's text. We read into it our previous knowledge, and our theology, and our own ideas. And we fail to understand what John is really doing.

Let me suggest, therefore, that taken together the Last Discourse (13-17) and the Trial and Crucifixion (18-19) are two parts of a single larger unit. Taken together, they are intended to reinforce the claim of this book that Jesus is the Christ. The manner in which Jesus handled His approaching betrayal, and then the way He passed through His trial and death, is extremely impressive. All of this is eloquent testimony to the fact that Jesus is everything John claims Him to be.

Literate people in John's day would get the message that John intends them to get from chapters 13-19. These chapters reinforce the claim John is making for Jesus. Like all the rest of the Fourth Gospel, these chapters invite the reader/hearer to *believe*.

But note well. This large unit from 13 through 19 is also a preamble to the final miraculous sign in this book. That sign, as indicated already by 2:18-19, was the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.²³ In John,

²³ Despite 2:18-19, the fact that the resurrection is part of a unified series of signs has been lost on many commentators on John. Under the spell of the tradition of treating the trial, death and burial scenes in the four Gospels as separate literary units, commentators have missed John's integration of 13:1-20:29 into the overall structure of the main body of the Fourth Gospel. Thus Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (New York: Doubleday, 1997) sharply separates "1:19-12:50 Part One: The Book of Signs" from "13:1-20:31 Part Two: The Book of Glory," p. 334. This analysis is not challenged by

of course, Jesus raises *Himself* from the dead. Jesus prophesied that in John 10:17-18:

Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father.

If time permitted—which it does not—I could carry you through the entire Fourth Gospel and try to show you a simple fact about its literary structure. Starting in 2:1 with the first sign, and extending through 20:29, all the non-miraculous narrative and discourse material serves the purpose of either preparing for, or illuminating the meaning of, the eight signs around which the book is structured. That is *emphatically true* of the material we have looked at in my talks yesterday and today.

The superlative self-assurance that Jesus manifests in chapters 13-19, His selfless love for His own, His courage while on trial, His compassion on the cross, and everything else, are preparatory. These chapters *prepare* the reader for the astounding fact that Jesus rose from the dead. Though many might doubt that fact, as Thomas did, Thomas is at last convinced. His confession, “My Lord and My God” (20:28) is followed by the last words of the main body of this book. Jesus says in 20:29:

Maloney in the posthumous volume, Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to the Gospel of John*, edited, updated, introduced and concluded by Francis J. Maloney (New York: Doubleday, 2003). See the chapter, “The Outline of the Gospel,” pp. 298-315. The approach simply reflects the older view, e.g., of C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: University Press, 1953), pp. 289-291. Nothing much has really changed in the massive 2-volume commentary of Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, 2 vols. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003). Keener’s breakdown of 13:1-20:31 seems very traditional: “Farewell Discourse (13:1-17:26)” [see 1:xviii] and “The Passion and Resurrection (18:1-20:31)” [1:xxi]. See also 2:1167 and 1210-12. There is no apparent sense of structure here. However, Bauckham, *Beloved Disciple*, p.88, is definitely in the ballpark when he says, “John 20:30-31 speaks of the written narrative of chapters 2-20, which it concludes: the narrative of Jesus’ signs, which the author has written so that his readers/hearers may believe. The seventh [*sic*] of these signs, the climactic and preeminently important one (cf. 2:18-19), which alone enables believing perception of Jesus’ full significance, seems to be his death and resurrection.”

Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed.
Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.

To his unconverted readers in Ephesus, therefore, John is saying this: You didn't see any of this, but I did. You are blessed if you believe. And what is that blessing? John 20:30-31 expresses it—the blessing is *eternal life*!

FULL ASSURANCE

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I. INTRODUCTION

It is widely known that the doctrine of assurance of salvation is at the center of the debate between Reformed and Arminian theologies on one side and Free Grace (FG) theology on the other. When stating the Grace Evangelical Society's *raison d'être*, this affirmation was included:

The assurance of eternal salvation is based only on the promises God makes in His Word that everyone who trusts in Jesus Christ alone possesses eternal life. Good works, which can and should follow regeneration, are not necessary to a firm assurance of eternal life even though they may have a secondary, confirmatory value.¹

This formulation of the doctrine of assurance is a hallmark of FG theology. If this formulation is abandoned, the entire theology collapses. Thus FG proponents have clarified and defended this crucial doctrine even when besieged by Reformed or Arminian scholars.


To this point the debate about assurance has been largely confined to questions about the grounds of assurance² and how assurance intersects

¹ Arthur L. Farstad, "An Introduction To Grace Evangelical Society And Its Journal" *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*, 1:1 (Autumn 1988), 7.

² When reduced to clear and simple propositional statements, Reformed theology posits sanctified living as the grounds of assurance. The position is more nuanced than that, of course. Those who defend the Reformed position will assert that the regenerate believer will *necessarily and without fail* manifest the regenerate nature in sanctified living. Sanctified living is proof of a regenerate nature and, *ergo*, evidence of God's elective intent. Arminianism posits sanctified living as the means by which our salvation is preserved. While there is a distinction between the two views the Reformed position sees sanctification as *proof* of salvation whereas the Arminian position sees it as *preservation* of salvation there is no material difference. Only those who persevere in sanctified living have any grounds for assurance of their salvation.

faith.³ The relationship between assurance and sanctification has received less attention.⁴ This is unfortunate because assurance is a rich doctrine with broad implications beyond certainty about the believer's eschatological fate. Assurance intersects doctrines as diverse as boldness in prayer,⁵ confidence to approach God,⁶ courage in the face trial,⁷ and perseverance motivated by hope.⁸ Clearly, assurance is a significant component in the believer's sanctification.

This paper will argue that there is a *fuller assurance* all believers may acquire subsequent to salvation; it is in addition to the *initial assurance* all believers experience in justification.⁹ Colossians 2:1-3 and 4:12 will be examined in support of this argument.

In this paper the term "full(er) assurance" will not indicate greater intensity or degree of faith. It will indicate either additional information which is believed or additional evidence which confirms faith. In the first case, the one possessing full assurance believes *other things* in addition to the promise of salvation. In the second,  certainty rests on additional evidence learned after believing. Both cases increase the likelihood of continuing in sanctified living.

II. FULL ASSURANCE IN COLOSSIANS

The translations of Col 2:2 and 4:12 use the expression "full assurance."

A. COLOSSIANS 2:2

For I want you to know what a great conflict I have for you and those in Laodicea, and *for* as many as have not seen my face in the flesh,² that their hearts may be encouraged, being

³ The FG position has been an echo of Calvin's view that assurance is of the essence of faith. Assurance and faith are both seen as synonyms for *certainty*.

⁴ This is no doubt due to the fact that FG proponents find themselves waging a pitched battle over the doctrine in its relationship to justification.

⁵ 1 John 3:22.

⁶ Hebrews 10:21, compare Exod 3:5.

⁷ 2 Corinthians 12:9-10, Eph 6:10.

⁸ Hebrews 6:11.

⁹ I have chosen the phrase "that all believers experience" carefully. It reflects my view that assurance, conviction and faith are either essentially synonymous, or that their fields of meaning are largely convergent in the matter of the faith that results in justification.

knit together in love, and *attaining* to all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the knowledge of the mystery of God, both of the Father and of Christ,³ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.¹⁰

Before focusing on the phrase “all riches of the full assurance of understanding”¹¹ in order to explore its relationship to sanctification, we must first observe the immediate context.

1. Paul sought full assurance for the Colossian believers.

By beginning verse 1 with the word “for,” Paul transitions from a general statement about his apostolic ministry (1:24-29) to his struggle on behalf of the Colossian believers. Verse two states that the purpose of the struggle was to strengthen their hearts.

Paul struggled so that the Colossian believers would be strengthened. This is the meaning of the phrase “that their hearts may be encouraged.”¹² When translating the Greek verb *parakaleō* modern English Bibles prefer the word “encouraged” while earlier translations prefer “comfort.”¹³ It is doubtful that Paul had either comfort or encouragement in mind. There is no mention that the Colossian believers were subject to persecution which would have called for comfort. Nor is there any suggestion that they were discouraged, which would have called for encouragement. Dunn’s comment is convincing.

Given the train of thought running through to 2:5, there is probably an implication that with such “full assurance” in their understanding of this mystery, the attractiveness of the “seductive speech” of other religious philosophers (2:4) will be all the less.¹⁴

¹⁰ Unless otherwise noted all quotations will be from the NKJV.

¹¹ Concatenative genitives can be somewhat complicated. Each succeeding genitive depends on its predecessor, making for a sometimes convoluted analysis.

¹² “Being knit together” (Gr. *sumbibasthentes*) is usually treated as an adverbial participle of means, modifying the verb *parakaleō* because it does not agree in gender with “heart” (Gr. *kardia*) or in case with “their” (Gr. *autōn*). Grammatically it might be a nominative *ad sensum*, stating an additional purpose of Paul’s struggle.

¹³ The Greek verb *parakaleō* in the passive voice (as here) often has the idea of *giving comfort* (KJV, ASV) or *encouragement* (so NKJV, ESV, NASB, NIV).

¹⁴ James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1996), 131.

In light of Paul's warnings "lest anyone should deceive you with persuasive words" (2:4) and "let no one cheat you of your reward" (2:18) and his admonition "as you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him" (2:6), it appears Paul was concerned lest they be fooled by false teaching and led into behaviors unfitting for believers. Abbot says, "It was not consolation that was required, but confirmation in the right faith."¹⁵ Paul wanted to make sure that they continued in sanctified living based on correct biblical doctrine.

After establishing the fact that he struggled to strengthen the Colossian believers in sound doctrine and sanctified living, the apostle then explains how this strengthening would occur.

The Colossian believers would be strengthened by gaining "riches." The intricate phrase "*attaining* to all riches of the full assurance of understanding" is subordinate to Paul's statement of purpose; it explains what must happen in order for them to be strengthened. The NKJV translators inserted the word "attaining" to clarify a prepositional phrase which indicates movement.¹⁶ We are strengthened as we move toward "riches" (*ploutos*).

The riches are "full assurance." The prepositional phrase "of the full assurance" can be understood as describing the "riches" in several ways, but two interpretations are most likely. It either describes the *source* of the riches ("the riches which *come from* full assurance") or it *specifies* the riches ("the riches which *are* full assurance").¹⁷ Since either option makes good sense in the context, syntax does not determine the correct interpretation. Given the relative rarity of the genitive of source, the

¹⁵ T. K. Abbott, *The Epistles to the Ephesians and to the Colossians* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1897), 238.

¹⁶ The Gr. preposition *eis* here probably retains a spatial nuance, suggesting direction toward a goal, EDNT 1:389. The goal is often a state of being, BAGD, 229. This tells us that "full assurance" is a goal toward which believers move. It is thus different from and in addition to the initial assurance which is a component of saving faith.

¹⁷ Here the expegetical infinitive "of the full assurance" gives a specific example of the larger and somewhat ambiguous head term, "the riches." In other words, certain riches are available to the believer, among which is "full assurance." To possess full assurance is to possess "riches."

epexegetical genitive is preferred.¹⁸ The riches Paul wanted for the Colossians are “full assurance.”

Full assurance arises from insight into God’s mystery. Reading the phrase “of understanding” as reference to the source of full assurance makes good sense in this context. Full assurance comes from understanding (Gr. *súnesis*) or comprehending¹⁹ God’s mystery.²⁰ Concerned for their sanctification, Paul adjures these believers to seek the wealth of conviction that results from greater insight into God’s mystery.²¹

The question naturally arises as to what Paul may have meant by his use of the term *mystery*. Mystery is probably not a technical term always pointing to the same referent.²² Elsewhere it pertains to a “joint-body” comprised of Jews and Gentiles²³ who share in the inheritance on an equal basis (Eph 3:3-6); to Israel’s partial hardening in this dispensation (Rom 11:25-26); to the summation of all things in Christ (Eph 1:9-10); to the Church as the Bride of Christ (Eph 5:32); to the Rapture of the Church (1 Cor 15:51); and to other previously unknown truths. The mystery in Col 2:2 probably looks back to the earlier use of the term in 1:26-27, which refers to the resurrected Christ dwelling with the

¹⁸ According to Wallace the genitive of source is relatively rare in the New Testament, but his test of supplying the paraphrase “derived from” seems to work nicely in this verse. Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament*, electronic edition (Garland, TX: Galaxie Software, 1999).

¹⁹ Louw-Nida 32.6. EDNT suggests that the word, which appears 7 times in the NT, usually refers to God-given insight.

²⁰ This is an objective genitive.

²¹ Peter T. O’Brien, *Colossians, Philemon* (Dallas: Word Publishers, 1982), 93.

²² S. Lewis Johnson, “Studies in the Epistle to the Colossians Part V: The Minister of the Mystery” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 119:475 (Jul – Sep 1962), 231-32 may be friendly to the notion that the term isn’t a technical term but one whose specific referent is defined by context. He observes that *mustērion* is simply a truth which is unknowable apart from divine revelation. The content of the revelation, the mystery, is determined in the context. I find myself resisting the temptation to load the term with theological freight drawn from other texts which were unavailable to the Colossian readers.

²³ Charles Ryrie, “The Mystery in Ephesians 3” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 123:489 (Jan-Mar 1966), 127.

believers.²⁴ If so, Paul was urging the believers to obtain the wealth of conviction that comes from understanding that Christ dwells with them. This was *additional information* they were to incorporate into their faith subsequent to having believed in Christ for salvation. By doing so, they would improve their chances of persevering in sanctified living.

This brief analysis of Col 2:2 results in several preliminary conclusions. First, this passage has sanctification in view. Second, sanctification is strengthened by gaining full assurance. Third, full assurance stems from understanding Christ's presence among believers. Fourth, full assurance attenuates the likelihood of being defrauded and increases the likelihood of continued sanctified living.

Before pressing on to Col 4:12 let's briefly examine the lexical meaning of the noun "full assurance" and its related verb "to be fully assured" and then observe their usage in biblical contexts to see if they can bear the weight that the argument in this paper places on them.

2. "*Full assurance*" points to "*certainty*" and "*evidence which justifies certainty*." The noun "full assurance" is relatively infrequent, appearing in only three other verses outside of Colossians.²⁵ The verb "to fully assure" appears only six times in the New Testament.²⁶

Let's first look at the uses of the noun "full assurance" (*plērophoria*). The semantic range for the noun encompasses the concepts of "fullness" and "certainty."²⁷ The lexicons favor "full assurance" and "certainty" as the primary dictionary definition. BAGD lists this first yet concedes that "the meaning fullness is also possible."²⁸ "Complete certainty" is listed as the only semantic domain for the word in Louw Nida.²⁹ Although the dictionaries and lexicons provide a helpful starting point, context is always the final arbiter of word meaning. The challenge in each context is to determine which semantic field the author had in mind when using the word.

²⁴ The "in you" here probably means "among you" or "in your midst," cf. BAGD, 258. This verse vaguely echoes the exhortation of Heb 6:11 to persist in sanctification until our hope is realized.

²⁵ 1 Thessalonians 1:5; Heb 6:11, 10:22.

²⁶ Luke 1:1; Rom 4:21, 14:5; Col 4:12; 2 Tim 4:5, 17.

²⁷ EDNT, 3:107.

²⁸ BAGD, 670.

²⁹ LN, I:370.

1 Thessalonians 1:5 employs the term to refer to evidence that accompanied the gospel proclamation: “For our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Spirit and in *much assurance*, as you know what kind of men we were among you for your sake.” The Holy Spirit’s power was supplemented with “much assurance.” This “much assurance” was the godly conduct of Paul and his cohorts. Their godly lives offered the Thessalonians additional grounds of certainty.³⁰

Hebrews 6:11 reads “we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the *full assurance* of hope until the end.” This text comes at the end of a lengthy exhortation that began at 5:11, urging the readers to remain confident in Christ.³¹ The readers are being urged to manifest diligence in sanctified living until their hope is fully realized.³² Here the word conveys the sense of “fullness” or “fulfillment” rather than “certainty.”

Hebrews 10:22 exhorts us to “draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith.” Because our High Priest mediated the New Covenant for us (9:15), entered the Holy Place with his own blood to obtain our redemption (9:12), and cleansed us for service (9:14) once and for all (10:11-14), we enter the presence of God boldly (10:19) with unwavering steadfastness (10:23). This is a direct application of our High Priest’s sacrifice to the believer’s daily life. A clear understanding of what our High Priest accomplished provides the ability to remain loyal to him regardless of circumstances.³³ In this context the word shares the same meaning Paul had in mind when he wrote Colossians 2:2. It points to

³⁰ “In full assurance” is a metonymy of the effect where the effect (certainty) is put for the cause (the evidence). Chapter 2 outlines Paul’s conduct which gave them *additional reason* to believe the gospel claims thus constituting a “fuller assurance.” The adverb *kathōs* may be understood in one of two ways here. It may bear a causal force to indicate that their knowledge of Paul’s character (“what kind of men we were”) increased their certainty about the truth of his message. It might also serve a comparative function to indicate a direct relationship between their degree of knowledge of Paul’s character and their certainty about the truth of his message.

³¹ William L. Lane *Hebrews 1-8* (Dallas: Word Books, 1991), 145.

³² Thomas Kem Oberholtzer, “The Warning Passages in Hebrews - Part 3: The Thorn-Infested Ground in Hebrews 6:4-12” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 145 #579 (July - September 1988), 327.

³³ W. L. Lane, *Hebrews 9-13* (Dallas: Word Books, 1991), 286.

certainty based on keen understanding that increases the likelihood of continued sanctified living.

The verb “to fully assure” (plērophoreō) also has two primary fields of meaning. “Fill (completely)” is listed as the first definition in the lexicons.³⁴ “To convince fully” or “to be convinced” is listed as an additional definition. Again, the challenge is to determine which meaning is indicated by the term in its contexts.

Either definition makes good sense in Luke 1:1, and both find support among the commentators. The NKJV’s “inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set in order a narrative of those things which *have been fulfilled* among us” is accompanied by an alternate reading of “*are most surely believed.*” The perfect passive participle is easily understood as pointing to the achievement of prophetic events in accordance with God’s plan. Read in this way, Luke’s use of the perfect tense signals events that have been brought to a successful conclusion.³⁵ The passive voice suggests that God has been at work in these events.³⁶

Therefore, Luke was primarily concerned with events that Jesus began³⁷ and continued to push forward through time through the Church³⁸, it is most likely that this text refers to the fulfillment of prophecy.

There is less support for the alternate meaning which reads this as a reference to the disciples’ settled conviction³⁹ that the facts purported about Jesus are true.⁴⁰ The Wycliffe Bible Commentary notes that “the phrase may mean ‘things fulfilled,’ but has the sense of ‘things that are taken for granted as true,’ or ‘the acknowledged facts of the case.’⁴¹

Romans 4:21 is very helpful when trying to understand the meaning of *plērophoreō*. Speaking of Abraham’s faith in God’s promise of many descendants, it reads:

³⁴ BAGD, 670; EDNT, 3:107; Liddell and Scott, 647.

³⁵ John Noland, *Luke 1-9:20*, (Dallas: Word Books, 1989), 7.

³⁶ I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 41.

³⁷ Note his emphasis in Acts 1:1 on “all that Jesus began to do and to teach.”

³⁸ Darrell F. Bock, *Luke, Volume 1* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1994), 56.

³⁹ So the perfect tense.

⁴⁰ This is within the semantic range of the term.

⁴¹ C. F. Pfeiffer and E. F. Harrison, *The Wycliffe Bible commentary: New Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1962).

¹⁹ And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb. ²⁰ He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, ²¹ and being *fully convinced* that what He had promised He was also able to perform. ²² And therefore "it was accounted to him for righteousness."

Romans 4:3 says Abraham "believed God."⁴² He accepted God's promise as true.⁴³ But Abraham's certainty was challenged by the facts at hand. Although God had promised innumerable descendants (Gen 12:2, 15:5), his wife was barren, he thought himself incapable of fathering children, and he had no heir. Had Abraham focused⁴⁴ on these facts, his faith may have "weakened," allowing doubt about God's promise. But he refused to dwell on these things. As a result, Abraham's faith was "strengthened."⁴⁵ Because Abraham refused to give way to doubt, God met his faith with a gracious gift of greater confidence.⁴⁶ This introduces the idea that faith waxes and wanes, depending on which facts are the object of our focus. Conviction weakens when we focus on facts that seem contrary to God's promises. It strengthens when we focus on the God who promises.

Romans 14:5 expands the field of meaning of *plērophoreō* to the issue of Christian liberty. Once again the verb means "to be convinced." The weak in faith were regenerate believers who believed the gospel promises for justification, but they were not convinced that Jesus had delivered them from dietary and calendar laws.⁴⁷ Although their salvation was secure, their sanctification was in jeopardy because they lacked knowledge which would have produced fuller assurance.

⁴² *Pisteuō* plus the dative.

⁴³ Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 196.

⁴⁴ "Consider" (Gr. *katanoēō*) conveys the idea of careful observation, often accompanied by thoughtful consideration. BAGD, 415.

⁴⁵ The aorist passive here conveys the idea of "being caused to have ability." Louw-Nida 74:6.

⁴⁶ Abraham was made strong because of his faith, but it was God who made him strong. See Morris, *Romans*, 212; James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8* (Dallas: Word Books, 1988), 221; Rene Lopez, *Romans Unlocked* (Springfield, MO: 21st Century Press, 2005), 96. The point is helpfully illustrated in Gen 18:14. There the Lord asks Abraham, who once again voices his doubt about a male heir, "Is anything too hard for the Lord?" Then the Lord affirms his promise once again.

⁴⁷ Marshall, *Romans*, 477.

Second Timothy 4:5, “fulfill your ministry” and 2 Tim 4:17, “that the message might be preached fully through me” use the word to refer to complete accomplishment. Paul instructed Timothy to complete all his ministry duties (v 5) and finds comfort in the fact that he had been faithful in completing his.⁴⁸

Several conclusions about the word group and Paul’s meaning in Colossians 2:2 are evident. This brief survey justifies the conclusion that “certainty” and “evidence which justifies certainty” are attested fields of meaning. In Heb 10:22 this certainty rests on a clear understanding of the work of Christ. Abraham’s certainty (Rom 4:21) was based on his knowledge of God’s ability to keep his promises in spite of circumstances. The Thessalonian believers (1 Thess 1:5) found additional certainty in Paul’s sanctified life.

Thus, it is fair to say that Col 2:2 teaches that believers are more likely to persevere in sanctified living if they gain full assurance by increasing their understanding of God’s mystery.

B. COLOSSIANS 4:12

Paul again posits “full assurance” as the source of sanctified living, rather than vice versa, in Col 4:12: “Epaphras, who is *one* of you, a bondservant of Christ, greets you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.”⁴⁹ Epaphras “struggled” in prayer in behalf of the Colossians just as Paul did (2:1). The desired end⁵⁰ of his prayer was that they might be “made to stand”;⁵¹ that is, they might be established and therefore fixed in place.⁵² The place in which they stand is signaled by the prepositional phrase “in all the will of God,” suggesting that sanctification is in view once again. The adjective “perfect” (Gr. *teleios*) and the participle “complete” (Gr. *plērophoreō*) probably function as object complements, defin-

⁴⁸ The “fulfillment” in 2 Tim 4:17 probably refers to the fact that Paul had been commissioned with the task of appearing before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel with the gospel (Acts 9:15) and had faithfully discharged that task. See George King, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, 470.

⁴⁹ The NKJV “complete” is unfortunate; it should probably read “fully assured.”

⁵⁰ *Hina* + subjunctive signals the purpose or goal of his prayer.

⁵¹ The passive voice indicates that the “making to stand” is accomplished in them by God.

⁵² BAGD, 382.

ing or describing what kind of people those who are made to stand become.⁵³

The first complement, “perfect,” is the easiest to understand. The term appears in Col 1:28 where Paul states that his goal was to present every man as mature. McDougall observes, “If Paul in Col 1:28 used *teleios* to depict ‘maturity’ as a goal of his ministry in each person’s life, it is arguable that he would use it the same way in Col 4:12 as he expresses in prayer his [sic] prayer for them.”⁵⁴ Like Paul, Epaphras was solicitous of their sanctification.

“Complete” is an unfortunate word choice by the NKJV translators. Mention of Epaphras’ labor (*agōnizomai*) reminds the reader of Paul’s conflict (*agōn*) in their behalf (2:1). We preserve Paul’s careful parallel between his ministry and that of Epaphras by maintaining related fields of meaning for the verb in 4:12 and the cognate noun in 2:2.⁵⁵

Thus, Col 4:12, like 2:2, establishes a causal connection between full assurance and sanctification. Mature believers who are fully assured stand firm in God’s will. Colossians 2:2 explains that greater knowledge about Christ’s relationship to them is the source of full assurance.

⁵³ I offer this observation tentatively because the syntax is far from lucid. We have an adjective (“perfect”) and a nominative, passive participle (“complete”) which could be a predicate nominative construction, but for the lack of an equative verb. Wallace notes that in the passive voice certain transitive verbs may function in that capacity and *EDNT* observes that Paul often uses *histēmi* as the functional equivalent of a stative verb, but stringing two bare possibilities together doesn’t inspire a lot of confidence. Even though the syntax may barely allow *teleios* and *plērophoreō* to function as predicate nominatives, it is hard to see how they might equate with the implied subject of the verb. But there is also risk in reading this, as I do here, as an object complement. The problem, of course, is that the participle is in the nominative case rather than the accusative. But functionally this seems to make the most sense to me. As object complements, they tell what the believer who has been made to stand become – mature and fully convinced.

⁵⁴ Donald G. McDougall, “Cessationism in 1 Corinthians 13:8-12” *The Masters’ Seminary Journal* 14:2 (Fall 2003), 203.

⁵⁵ Contra O’Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, 254 and Martin, *Colossians and Philemon*, 133-34.

II. CONCLUSION

If these observations in Col 2:2 and 4:12 are correct and if the survey of how the salient terms are used in biblical context is accurate, then we can feel confident in the following conclusions.

First, full assurance does not refer to a greater intensity or higher degree of faith than initial assurance but rather to a broader field of things believed. Faith does not come in degrees; one is either persuaded that biblical assertions are true or not. Second, initial assurance is believing the promise of salvation, but full assurance is believing additional truths. As our understanding of Christ grows, our assurance becomes fuller because we become certain of more biblical truths. Third, full assurance is not guaranteed. It is obtained through study and reflection. In this regard, it differs from the initial assurance that all believers experience. Fourth, since full assurance was a serious apostolic concern, the ministry of prayer and doctrinal teaching is a grave pastoral responsibility.

A. AN ILLUSTRATION

Luke 7:36-50 illustrates the distinction between assurance and full assurance. In this story the woman who anoints Jesus' feet is a penitent sinner who approaches the Lord at a banquet. Her gestures of public humiliation and loving attendance upon his feet reveal her faith in Jesus. She recognizes that Jesus is her savior.⁵⁶ Since Luke builds his story on the principle that faith in Jesus is required for the forgiveness of sins, we are safe in presuming that this woman's sins were forgiven *before* she approached the Lord. Furthermore, she was already assured that her sins were forgiven because she was convinced that the promise of forgiveness was true.

And yet the Lord granted her fuller assurance in the form of an additional reason to believe. Not only had she heard his preaching to the crowds and believed the general promise of forgiveness promised to all who believe, now she had the words of Jesus spoken directly to her.

The knowledge of her forgiveness was hardly equal, however, to direct assurance that her sins had been forgiven; here is the value of Jesus' personal word to the woman at v 48. This personal word of Jesus to the

⁵⁶ John J. Kilgallen, "Forgiveness of Sins (Luke 7:36-50)" *Novum Testamentum* 40 (April 1998), 108.

woman represents a degree of clarity, assuredness about her state which excels the knowledge she had by trusting; now she most clearly knows!⁵⁷

B. THE FINAL WORD

Assurance is the possession of all believers who are convinced that the gospel promise is true. Full assurance is reserved for those who gain a deeper understanding of Christ or who gather additional reasons to believe. Those who are fully assured are more likely to remain steadfast in their daily walk with Christ.

⁵⁷ Kilgallen, 110.

SHOULD PRETRIBULATIONISTS RECONSIDER THE RAPTURE IN MATTHEW 24:36–44?

Part 3 of 3

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I. INTRODUCTION

The previous two articles of this series have contended that Matthew presents Jesus' answer to the disciples' two questions (Matt 24:3) in a chiasmic structure. In vv 4–35, Jesus answered the second question, "What will be the sign of Your coming and of the end of the age?" (v 3b). His answer revealed new prophetic truth about the future seventieth seven (week) of Daniel (vv 4–28). It is only after the Great Tribulation with all its telltale events that Jesus will be manifested to the entire world (vv 29–31). In vv 32–35, Jesus clearly taught that the nearness of His return to earth could be known in the same way that the spring budding of a fig tree is the announcement that summer is near. But the evidential happenings that lead to the Second Coming of Christ in Matt 24:29–31 cannot be harmonized easily with Jesus' description of His Parousia in Matt 24:36–44. The transitional nature of v 36 has been discovered to be the solution to this dilemma.

Beginning at v 36, the Lord addressed the first question of the disciples ("When will these things happen?" v 3a). Since v 36 is introduced by the specialized Greek phrase, *peri de*, the verse shifts the perspective slightly. Jesus now declared that the coming of "that day," the day of the Lord, could not be known. Jesus also paralleled His Parousia with the unexpected, sudden arrival of the flood (vv 37–39). Basing their prophetic understanding on the teachings of Jesus in the Olivet Discourse, Paul and Peter declared that the day of the Lord would come suddenly at a time of "peace and safety" (Paul's wording in 1 Thess 5:1–4). At the time leading up to the day of the Lord, scoffers will question the promise of Christ's return because they see no evidence of His coming

(2 Pet 3:3–4). Peter informed his readers that such mockers have purposefully forgotten the divine judgment of the flood (2 Pet 3:5–10). But believers will be rescued from the tribulation like Noah was delivered from the flood (2 Pet 2:4–9). Also, from Peter’s inspired typology of 1 Pet 3:20–21, it was concluded that Noah and the ark prefigure the church (and its rapture), not the rescue of the Jews (and/or Gentiles) at the close of the tribulation period.

II. WHO IS TAKEN (MATT 24:40–41)?

Most pretribulationist scholars understand the word “taken” (“one will be taken,” vv 40–41) to refer to people taken in judgment at the end of the tribulation, not people taken in rapture before the tribulation.¹ This conclusion is drawn from the preceding context that says, “the flood came and took them all away” (v 39). While these scholars recognize that the Greek word for “took” in v 39 (*airo*) differs from the Greek word for “taken” in vv 40 and 41 (*paralambanō*), they insist that the “taking” in both cases is for judgment. In their thinking, the only possible rapture in vv 40–41 would be a posttribulationist rapture, and a posttribulationist rapture must be rejected based on other clear passages.

Posttribulationists, on the other hand, have no problem finding a rapture in Matt 24:40–41. For them, however, the rapture in vv 40–41 must be one and the same with the Second Coming of Christ in vv 29–31, i.e., posttribulationist. But posttribulationist chronology of the Discourse overlooks the transitional nature of the *peri de* at v 36. If the transition is embraced, a pretribulationist rapture in these verses becomes theologically and exegetically reasonable. The events of vv 36–44 are separated logically and contextually from the events of vv 29–31.

It was Jesus, not Paul, who first revealed the rapture of the church. Kim demonstrates that the teaching of Paul in 1 Thess 4 originates with Jesus. “Just as Paul based the instruction now recalled in 1 Thess 5:2–7 (‘through the Lord Jesus’) on Jesus’ teaching, recognized by its many

¹ John F. Walvoord, “Christ’s Olivet Discourse on the Time of the End, Part IV: How Near Is the Lord’s Return?” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 129 (January–March 1972): 27–28; Paul D. Feinberg, “The Case for the Pretribulation Rapture,” in Gleason L. Archer et al., *Three Views on the Rapture: Pre-, Mid-, or Post-Tribulationist?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 230–31; Renald Showers, *Maranath: Our Lord Comes!* (Bellmawr, NJ: Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, 1995), 179–80.

echoes of that teaching, so also in giving a new instruction in 1 Thess 4:13–18 on the fate of the Christian dead ‘in the word of the Lord,’ he bases it on Jesus’ teaching so that it too contains many echoes of that teaching.”² Besides the brief teaching of the rapture in John 14:1–3, Matt 24:37–44 contain the most likely teachings of Jesus on which Paul could have based his own doctrine about the pretribulational rapture.³

In light of the transition at v 36, the reasons put forward by posttribulationists for seeing a rapture in vv 40–41 can now be turned in support of a pretribulational rapture. Gundry states,

Two different words appear for the action of taking, *airō* (v 39) and *paralambanō* (vv 40, 41). The same word could easily have been employed had an exact parallel between the two takings been intended. Instead we have the employment of another word which only two days later describes the rapture (John 14:3) . . . The apostles would naturally have associated the two expressions. Jesus probably so intended, else He would have drawn a distinction . . . In light of this, the change from *airō* to *paralambanō* indicates a change in topic and connotation: the former term refers to judgment similar in unexpectedness to the Flood, the latter to reception of the saints at the rapture to be forever with their Lord (Cf. 1 Thess 4:17; John 14:3).⁴

It is generally agreed that *paralambanō* carries the meaning, “to take to or with [oneself].” The thought is always one of accompaniment, usually in a positive sense, i.e., for close fellowship.⁵ But of the forty-nine

² Seyoon Kim, “Jesus, Sayings of,” *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 477.

³ In Gundry’s view, the Olivet Discourse is the central portion of revelation on which his posttribulational doctrine is built. He argues that pretribulationists must look to other passages to demonstrate a pretribulation rapture. Robert H. Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 129. This series of articles contends that the pretribulational rapture teaching of Paul can also find its central portion of revelation in the Discourse.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 138.

⁵ Gerhard Delling, “*paralambanō*,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 4:13; B. Siede, “*lambanō*,” *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 3:751.

uses in the NT, Sproule has listed seven that may be used in an unfriendly way, five in Matthew (4:5, 8; 12:45; 27:27).⁶ Burer narrows the list of negative uses in Matthew to one. He observes that *paralambanō* is

used by Matthew sixteen times in his Gospel. It is used twice in chap. 1 to refer to the positive event of Joseph taking Mary to be his wife (1:20, 24) and four times in chap. 2 to mean “take to safety” (2:13, 14, 20, 21). Seven other occurrences have a neutral meaning of “take with/along” and refer simply to accompaniment (4:5, 8; 12:45; 17:1; 18:16; 20:17; 26:37). The sole reference that can be taken negatively is in 27:27 where the guards take Jesus into the palace to beat and mock him. It is within the general contours of Matthew’s use to see *paralambanō* as having a positive nuance here [Matt 24:40–41]. Thus those who are taken would be taken for salvation.⁷

Burer’s word study is helpful. But context must also be a determining factor. Some see the context in Matt 24:39–41 to be focused on judgment. But this is only partially correct. The Parousia is also mentioned in the context (vv 37, 39) and either the one taken or the one left could satisfy the stress on judgment. In fact *aphiēmi* (“to leave,” vv 40, 41) takes on the meaning of “abandon” in its recurrent use with personal objects in Matthew (Matt 4:11, 22; 8:15; 13:36; 19:29; 22:22, 25; 26:56, etc.).⁸ This impact of *aphiēmi* as it relates to personal objects is brought out in how a spouse might abandon his or her partner (1 Cor 7:11–13), how the Good Shepherd will not abandon His sheep (John 10:12), and how the Father has certainly not abandoned the Son (John 8:29). If these uses can be allowed to set the pattern, *aphiēmi* could hardly be used of what the Father or the Son do with believers at the final return of Christ to the earth.⁹ Other than Matt 24:40–41, there are no other passages in

⁶ The others are Luke 11:26; John 19:16; Acts 23:18; John A. Sproule, “An Exegetical Defense of Pretribulationism” (Th.D. dissertation, Grace Theological Seminary, 1981), 60.

⁷ Michael H. Burer, “Matthew 24:40–41 in the NET Bible Notes: Taken for Salvation or Judgment?” posted August 4, 2004, http://www.bible.org/page.asp?page_id=1587.

⁸ Cf. Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3:383.

⁹ Nolland remarks, “The potentially negative nuances of which ‘left’ (*aphiēmi*) is capable (‘left out’) make it more likely that being taken off to salvation is intended....” John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 994.

the NT that use *aphiēmi* to express what the Lord will do to or for believers (Jew or Gentile).¹⁰ Just two days after the Discourse, Jesus used *aphiēmi* of what He would *not* do to the disciples: “I will not leave [*aphiēmi*] you as orphans; I will come to you” (John 14:18).

If the one “taken” is taken away for judgment, it is peculiar that a word characterized by personal accompaniment is employed while the one “left” to enter the kingdom is described with a word frequently used for the forsaken. Brown observes the use of *aphiēmi* in Matt 23:38 for the judgment of the temple. Drawing on this use, he concludes that the uses of the word in 24:40–41 serve to warn those who are unprepared like in the days of Noah that they will be forsaken in judgment like the temple.¹¹

A few pretribulationists have felt the weight of the natural sense of *aphiēmi* (“leave, abandon”) and *paralambanō* (“take along, take with”). Burer, a professor at Dallas Theological Seminary and assistant editor for the New English Bible, does not commit to a pretribulationist rapture in Matt 24. Nevertheless, he argues against the predominant pretribulationist persuasion regarding the one “taken” in 24:40–41.

This is a case where one English word overlaps in sense with two different Greek words. Since they are different words, similarity in English translation has to be carefully sifted for interpretive value. (b) The imagery itself lends the most

¹⁰ Merkle argues that in Matt 24 and Luke 17, Jesus employed judgment and exile imagery drawn from the OT prophets. He examines several OT passages (Isa 3:1–3; 4:2–4; 39:6–7; Jer 6:1, 11–12; Zeph 3:11–13; 13:8) where the one taken is taken in judgment to Babylon, and the one left behind is left in Israel for blessing. Accordingly, he concludes this imagery favors interpreting the ones “left behind” as those who receive salvation. Benjamin L. Merkle, “Who Will Be Left Behind? Rethinking the Meaning of Matthew 24:40–41 and Luke 17:34–35,” (paper presented at the 60th Annual Evangelical Theological Society, Providence, RI, November 19–21, 2008). Several obstacles work against this interpretation: 1) neither *paralambanō* or *aphiēmi* are used even once in these contexts of the LXX, making the interconnection unlikely; 2) the immediately preceding context of Matt 24:40–41 does not suggest a parallel with the exile judgments of Israel but with the flood event; and 3) righteous Israelites were among both those “taken” in judgment to Babylon (e.g., Daniel and his three friends) as well as among those “left behind.”

¹¹ Schuyler Brown, “The Matthean Apocalypse,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 4 (1979): 16.

credence to the interpretation that those taken away are taken for salvation. In the original narrative about Noah, God was gracious to save Noah from judgment by taking him off the earth and placing him in the ark. He was “taken away” from the place where God’s judgment was poured out to a place of safety in the ark. Thus the reference to Noah lends more credence to the interpretation that those taken are taken for salvation.¹²

Glasscock, also a pretribulationist, puts forward the thought that the ones taken are believers, both Jews and Gentiles, who are gathered by the angels at the Second Coming of Christ described in 24:31. The ones left behind experience the judgments yet to come on the earth.¹³ Where these believers are taken is not specified.

The first edition of the New English Translation notes on Matt 24:40 states, “If the imagery of Noah and Lot is followed, the ones taken are the saved. Those left behind are judged.” Then it adds a qualification: “The imagery pictures the separation of the righteous and the judged (i.e., condemned) at the return of the Son of Man, and nothing more.”¹⁴ This adheres to the natural sense of the verbs *aphiēmi* and *paralambanō* while remaining uncommitted concerning a rapture or resurrection in the verses. Once again, if the transitional nature of v 36 is allowed its full force, the one taken is not taken for salvation at the Second Coming of Christ. The simplest interpretation is to see in *paralambanō* (“taken”) a reference to the pretribulational rapture of church saints.¹⁵ Two days after Jesus taught His Discourse on the Mount of Olives, He used *paralambanō* to depict the taking of believers in a pretribulational rapture

¹² Burer, “Matthew 24:40–41 in the NET Bible Notes.”

¹³ Ed Glasscock, *Matthew*, Moody Gospel Commentary (Chicago: Moody, 1997), 476–77. Glasscock cites as his source Pate’s treatment of Luke 17:26–37. C. Marvin Pate, *Luke*, Moody Gospel Commentary (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 332. A similar view is held by the Dutch scholar Gijs van den Brink, *The Gospel according to Matthew: A Commentary Based on the New International Version* (Vijayawada, India: Yesupadam, 1997); see comments on vv 41–42, <http://www.elim.nl/eng/nt/matt/mat24.htm>.

¹⁴ Cited in Burer, “Matthew 24:40–41 in the NET Bible Notes.”

¹⁵ It is rather interesting that one of the sixteen uses of *paralambanō* in Matthew is found in the context of the mention of the church (18:16 with 18:17). But there seems to be no relevance of this observation for the present discussion.

(John 14:3).¹⁶ Why resist that inference in Matt 24:40–41? Those abandoned are the unbelievers.¹⁷ The judgments of the day of the Lord come on them and they do not escape (1 Thess 5:3).

III. THE THIEF IMAGERY AND WATCHFULNESS (MATT 24:42–44)¹⁸

A. THE THIEF IMAGERY

Matthew 24:42–44 contains a short parable concerning the thief (v 43), framed by two similar exhortations to readiness or watchfulness (vv 42, 44). Surprisingly, pretribulationists have not been consistent in interpreting the thief analogy in eschatological passages (Matt 24:43; Luke 12:39; 1 Thess 5:2, 4; 2 Pet 3:10; Rev 3:3; 16:15).¹⁹ Sometimes it is viewed as leading to Christ's Second Coming (Matt 24:43; Rev 16:15) and at other times as announcing the imminent day of the Lord that immediately follows or is coterminous with the pretribulational rapture (2 Pet 3:10; 1 Thess 5:2, 4).²⁰

¹⁶ Delling links *paralambanō* in Matt 24:40–41 with John 14:3, taking both uses as an “acceptance into the kingdom of Christ.” Delling, “*paralambanō*,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 4:13

¹⁷ Partial rapturists interpret both those taken and those left as believers. D. M. Panton, *Rapture* (Miami Springs, FL: Schoettle, 1988), 16–24; Robert Govett, *The Prophecy on Olivet* (Miami Springs, FL: Schoettle, 1985), 107–8. This hardly follows the parallel of the Lord's Parousia with the days of Noah (a separation of the righteous [believers] and unrighteous [unbelievers]).

¹⁸ It is possible to begin a new unit of material in the Discourse at verse 42. Matt 24:42–25:13 forms an *inclusio* and a separate unit since 24:42 and 25:13 both read, “be on the alert, [then] for you do not know which [the] day” Also, the phrase in 25:13, “the day nor the hour,” takes the reader back to 24:36 forming a double *inclusio*. Hodges, *Jesus, God's Prophet*, 33–34, 42–43.

¹⁹ Matt 24:43 marks the second time Jesus used the thief imagery. The first is recorded in Luke 12:39, given just over three months before the Olivet Discourse.

²⁰ Cf. John F. Walvoord, *The Revelation of Jesus Christ* (Chicago: Moody, 1966), 238.

Both pretribulationists²¹ and posttribulationists²² apply the Matthean passage to the Second Advent. The thief (at night) figure is found in several eschatological passages, 1 Thess 5:2–4 and 2 Pet 3:10 being of capital importance for this study.²³ If the source of Paul’s teaching about the day of the Lord and the pretribulation rapture is Jesus’ eschatological teachings in the Olivet Discourse, a case for a consistent interpretation between Matt 24:42–44 and 1 Thess 5:1–11 is warranted. Kim notes, “It is widely recognized that verses 2 and 4 [of 1 Thess 5] echo Jesus’ parable of the thief (Mt 24:43 par Lk 12:39), especially as the metaphor of thief is not applied in an eschatological context in the OT and Jewish literature.”²⁴

A convincing connection between Matt 24:42–44 and 1 Thess 5:1–10 may be found by looking at Luke 21:34–36, a synoptic parallel to Matt 24:43–44. In this passage, at least six terms are discovered to be identical with those in 1 Thess 5:3–7, including “suddenly” (*aiphnidios*), “come” (*ephistēmi*), “escape” (*ekpheugō*), “the (that) day” (*hē hēmera* [*ekeinē*]), “watch” (*gregoreō*), and “drunkenness” (*methē*, Luke) or “be drunk” (*methuō*, 1 Thess 5).²⁵ Since the NT uses *aiphnidios* in only these two passages, this interconnection of Luke 21:34–36 (par Matt 24:42–44) with 1 Thess 5 is strengthened.²⁶

²¹ Walvoord, “Olivet Discourse,” 28–29; Thomas Ice, “(Part 35) An Interpretation of Matthew 24–25,” *Pre-Trib Perspectives*, <http://www.pre-trib.org/article-view.php?id=241>.

²² Douglas J. Moo, “The Case for the Posttribulation Rapture Position,” *Three Views on the Rapture*, 185; D. A. Carson, “Matthew,” *Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, 12 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 8:510.

²³ Second Peter 3:10 adds in the majority text *en nykti* following *kleptēs* and therefore contains the identical phrase to that in 1 Thess 5:2. If this reading is accepted, Jesus (Matthew and Luke), Peter, and Paul all mention the thief-at-night figure.

²⁴ Kim, “Jesus, Sayings of,” 476.

²⁵ Cf. C. H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom* (New York: Scribner, 1961), 123 n. 2. Perhaps the drunkenness of 1 Thess 5:6–7 may be found in the unfaithful servant of Matt 24:49. Waterman, “Source of Paul’s Teaching,” 111.

²⁶ Moo, “Posttribulation Rapture,” 185. Since Luke and Paul were traveling companions and well acquainted, this may explain their shared vocabulary and perspective in Luke 21:34–36 and 1 Thessalonians 5.

Concerning the thief analogy in 1 Thess 5, Showers notes, “A thief depends upon the element of surprise for success. He does not give his intended victims a forewarning of his coming. Paul’s point—the unsaved will be given no forewarning of the coming of the broad Day of the Lord—rules out any of the seals of Revelation as being forewarnings of the beginning of the broad Day [Daniel’s seventieth seven].”²⁷ One must ask why the thief imagery in Matt 24:43 cannot also be interpreted by the same logic that pretribulationists like Showers apply to the thief imagery of 1 Thess 5.

The Parousia of Matt 24:37, 39 cannot be preceded by any signs, not even the seal judgments of Revelation—or the signs of Matt 24:6–7, which parallel many of the seal judgments. There can be no forewarning if we are to honor the surprise element resident in the thief analogy in 24:43. A thief does not willingly signal his presence, but numerous tell-tale signs will precede Christ’s Second Coming at the climax of the tribulation.²⁸

Paul, Peter,²⁹ and John have based their figure of the thief on the parable of Jesus.³⁰ What is also interesting is that Rev 3:3 and 16:15 suggest Christ Himself comes as a thief, while 1 Thess 5:4 makes it clear the day of the Lord comes as a thief. The impression is that the two events are simultaneous. Similarly, 1 Thess 5 and its reference to the day of the Lord are juxtaposed with 1 Thess 4 and its discussion of the pretribula-

²⁷ Showers, *Maranatha*, 60.

²⁸ The Greek word *kleptēs* (“thief”) and the cognate verb *kleptō* (“to steal”) often can be distinguished from *lēstēs* (“robber”) in that the latter emphasizes violence while the former stresses secrecy. N. Hillyer, “Rob, Steal,” *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Colin Brown, gen. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 3:377.

²⁹ Peter’s use of the thief imagery in 2 Pet 3 “is almost certainly related to the parable of the thief (Mt 24:43 par Lk 12:39), for the image of a thief is found only in early Christian writings.” G. M. Stanton, “Jesus Traditions,” *Dictionary of Later New Testament and Its Developments*, ed. Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), 570.

³⁰ Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*, trans. S. H. Hooke (rev. ed., New York: Scribner, 1963), 50; Dodd, *Parables*, 133; J. K. Howard, “Our Lord’s Teaching Concerning His Parousia: A Study in the Gospel of Mark,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 38 (1966): 155.

tional rapture. The analogy of the thief equally points to the imminent day of the Lord and/or the imminent rapture of the church.³¹

Thomas is to be commended for his consistency in applying the thief imagery in all passages to the imminent return of Christ.³² He apparently sees the imagery as only illustrating Christ's coming in judgment for the unbeliever.³³ But any emphasis on judgment in the thief imagery is more adequately developed from the surrounding context rather than from the figure itself. After all, judging is not a primary design of thieves, whereas the element of surprise is.³⁴ Thieves do break in houses to steal, but the point of Jesus comparing Himself to a thief must be limited.³⁵ Nevertheless, according to the Lord's illustration if the homeowner had been alert, he "would not have allowed his house to be broken into" (v 43). The implication is that the believer who is unprepared for Christ's return will lose something of value (i.e., future rewards).³⁶

³¹ Turner writes, "There will be enough time before the end for the kingdom message to be preached throughout the world (24:14)." David L. Turner, *Matthew*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, ed. Robert W. Yarbrough and Robert H. Stein (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 572. If Matt 24:14 is not yet fulfilled (and it is not), then the verse becomes an added barrier to correlating 24:4–28 chronologically with the imminency described in 24:36–44.

³² "If one is to be ready for a thief's intrusion, one needs to be ready *all the time* (Matthew's language of the 'watch' draws into the field of imagery the possibility of 'night watchmen')" (italics added). John Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1993), 702.

³³ Thomas, "Imminence in the NT." See also Thomas, "The 'Coming' of Christ in Revelation 2–3," 166–69.

³⁴ In Mark's parallel account (13:34–35), the thief analogy is replaced by the parable of a homeowner who unexpectedly returns from a journey. While the homeowner calls his servants to account, judgment is not the only possible focus. The homeowner can reward as well as punish.

³⁵ E.g., Jesus is not intending that we think of Him as a lawbreaker; Blomberg, "Matthew," 367. Beale, commenting on Rev 16:15, says, "More likely the thief metaphor from the Gospel tradition is used not to suggest burglary but only to convey the unexpected and sudden nature of Christ's coming." G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 837.

³⁶ Hodges, *Jesus, God's Prophet*, 35. This is confirmed by the fact that 1) the only other uses of the verb *dioryssō* ("break in, dig through [the mud wall of a house]," Matt 24:43) in Matthew are in the Lord's teaching about treasures in heaven (Matt 6:19–20) where it is combined with "thief" (*kleptēs*); and 2) in one

First Thess 5:10 establishes the fact that some genuine believers may not be prepared for the Lord's Parousia when the pretribulation rapture takes place. In the passage, Paul unequivocally declared that, "whether we are awake [*grēgoreō*] or asleep [*katheudō*], we will live together with Him." Edgar has shown the legitimacy of interpreting this as "whether we watch or fail to watch, we will live together with Him."³⁷ This harmonizes with the understanding that the coming of Christ as a thief has relevance for the believer as well as the unbeliever.³⁸ Unpleasant but true, the call for watchfulness (Matt 24:42–43) is a command that can be neglected by genuine Christians.

B. THE USE OF *GRĒGOREŌ*

The verb *grēgoreō* ("to watch, be alert, be awake") appears in the Discourse three times (24:42, 43; 25:13). These are the first canonical

of the parallel accounts (Luke 12:36–40), Christ precedes the discussion of His coming like a thief who breaks into a house (v 40) by teaching about future rewards (vv 33–34). In that teaching He also refers unmistakably to a thief ("an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near," v 34). The thief imagery in v 40 picks up the thief imagery of v 34. For the believer, there is the irreparable danger of losing future rewards at the rapture.

³⁷ Thomas R. Edgar, "Lethargic or Dead in 1 Thessalonians 5:10?" *Conservative Theological Seminary Journal* 6 (October–December 2000): 36–51. This article is a revised version of Thomas R. Edgar, "The Meaning of 'Sleep' in 1 Thessalonians 5:10," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 22 (December 1979): 345–49. Cf. also Zane C. Hodges, "1 Thessalonians 5:1–11 and the Rapture," *Chafer Theological Seminary Journal* 6 (October–December 2000): 31–32; Paul N. Benware, *Understanding End Time Prophecy. A Comprehensive Approach*, rev. and expanded (Chicago: Moody, 2006), 267; Robert L. Thomas, "1 Thessalonians," *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, 12 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 11:285–86. An attempt to rebut this view is found in Tracy L. Howard, "The Meaning of 'Sleep' in 1 Thessalonians 5:10—A Reappraisal," *Grace Theological Journal* 6 (fall 1985): 337–49.

Citing 1 Thess 5:10 as his chief example, Lövestam incorrectly concludes, "Regarding the New Testament in this respect there may be places where *grēgorein* in metaphorical sense can hardly be interpreted in more ways than one." Evald Lövestam, *Spiritual Wakefulness in the New Testament* (Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1963), 6.

³⁸ Although it seems to be of little value, one of the central words for the rapture (*harpazō*, 1 Thess 4:17) is used elsewhere of a thief carrying away property (Matt 12:29).

uses of the word in the NT; Luke 12:37 is the first chronological use. There are twenty-three uses of the word in the NT.³⁹ Eleven of the twenty-three uses are in the imperative mood, with several other constructions implying a command.⁴⁰ Also, eleven of the uses are in contexts where “sleep” is the contrasting concept to “watch.”⁴¹ Since “those who sleep do their sleeping at night” (1 Thess. 5:6) and thieves break in at night, “night” is also a common theme found in contexts with *gregoreō*. This is not because the Lord will literally return in the rapture at night. Night in these passages is symbolic of the present evil age to which the Lord will return.⁴² Additionally, the nighttime helps express the element of uncertainty and surprise in the rapture. Lövestam insists that *gregoreō* is better understood by the English “wakefulness” because of its consistent con-

³⁹ Luke 12:39 in the majority text is included in the twenty-three uses in the NT; otherwise, there are twenty-two uses. Metzger reasons that the addition of *egregoresen an kai* (“he would have kept watch and . . .”) to Luke 12:39 was a scribal assimilation to Matt 24:43. Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994), 161–62. But if this is an assimilation to Matt 24:43, one might expect the same scribe also to assimilate *touto de* (“but this”) to *ekeino de* (“but that”), *hora* (“hour”) to *phylakē* (“a watch [at night]”), *aphēken diorygēnai* (“to allow to be dug into”) to *eiasen diorychthēnai* (“to permit to be dug into”), and *ton oikon to ten oikian* (two different words for “house”), all in the same verse.

⁴⁰ E.g., the hortatory subjunctive is used in 1 Thess 5:6. Also, Mark 13:34 has *tō thyrorō eneteilato hina gregore* (“[he] commanded the doorkeeper to stay on the alert”). Revelation 3:2 employs a periphrastic imperative with the participial form of *gregoreō*. In Col 4:2, *gregoreō* is a participle modifying an imperative. Nützel says that the verb belongs mostly to exhortations: J. M. Nützel, “*Grēgorēō*,” *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 1:264.

⁴¹ Matt 26:38–45 (*katheudō* [“to sleep”] in vv 40, 43, 45; *gregoreō* in vv 38, 40, 41); Mark 13:34–37 (*katheudō* in vv 36; *gregoreō* in vv 34, 35, 37); Mark 14:34, 37–38, 40–41 (*katheudō* in vv 37 [2xs], 40, 41; *gregoreō* in vv 34, 37, 38); 1 Thess 5:6–10 (*katheudō* in vv 6, 7, 10; *gregoreō* in vv 6, 10). It may also be significant for Luke’s themes that the incident of Eutychus “sinking into a deep sleep” (*katapheromenos hypnō bathēi*) while listening to Pauline truth (Acts 20:9) is shortly followed by the warning of the Ephesian elders that they must “watch” (Acts 20:31) or keep alert for false teaching (20:29–30).

⁴² Cf. Lövestam, *Spiritual Wakefulness in the New Testament*, 85, 107.

trast to a spiritual “sleep” that surrenders to and is absorbed by the present age.⁴³ Nützel states that it means properly, “not sleep.”⁴⁴

Six of the twenty-three total uses address the need of the disciples in Gethsemane to stay alert to spiritual drowsiness in light of temptations soon to come (Matt 26:38, 40, 41; Mark 14:34, 37, 38). Four other uses call for vigilance against false teaching (Acts 20:31) or satanic attack (1 Pet 5:18), vigilance in prayer (Col 4:2),⁴⁵ and vigilance in general (1 Cor 16:13). The remaining thirteen uses (over half of the uses) are all set in eschatological contexts.⁴⁶ Apart from two Pauline uses (1 Thess 5:6,

⁴³ Ibid., 106.

⁴⁴ Nützel, “*Grēgorēō*,” *Exegetical Dictionary*, 264.

⁴⁵ Col 4:2 could be categorized with Acts 20:31 as a warning against the present danger of false teaching. “It is also tempting, particularly given the threat of heresy implied in Colossians 2, to interpret Paul’s exhortation as a call for spiritual vigilance against the inroads of false teaching.” James P. Sweeney, “The Priority of Prayer in Colossians 4:2–4,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 159 (July 2002), 327. Alternately, it could be classed with 1 Pet 5:18 as a warning against impending satanic attack. The parallel passage to Col 4:2 is Eph 6:18, which employs the synonym *agrypneō* (“be alert, keep watch”) and climaxes the exhortation to put on the armor of God so as to fight against the devil (Eph 6:11–17).

⁴⁶ Other verses beside the thirteen may be considered eschatological. 1) First Cor 16:13 has the rapture teaching within its surrounding context (1 Cor 15:52; 16:22). But most see a more general admonition in 1 Cor 16:13. Cf. Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 827; A. C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 1336. 2) Some scholars understand *grēgorēō* in Colossians 4:2 to have eschatological overtones. E.g., James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 262. O’Brien goes so far as to say that although the immediate context of Col 4:2 is not about the Parousia, from other passages “it seems justifiable to assume that the concept of wakefulness had an eschatological character.” Peter T. O’Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco: Word, 1982), 238. 3) Brown understands *grēgorēō* in Mark 14:34, 37, 38 to draw on the eschatological parable of Mark 13:34, 35, 37. The three exhortations to watch in Mark 13 parallel the three times Jesus returns to the disciples to find them sleeping in Gethsemane. Just as the crucifixion was Jesus’ final trial on earth for which He needed to watch, so either an imminent martyrdom or the Parousia will be the

10), all other eschatological uses (eleven out of thirteen) are found on the lips of Jesus, with seven uses in the Synoptics and three in Revelation (Rev 3:2, 3; 16:15). This is strong evidence that Paul borrowed the term from the Lord.⁴⁷ Ten of the thirteen eschatological uses show up in connection with the thief imagery. In the remaining three eschatological uses, where Matthew's Olivet Discourse has the unexpected thief, Mark's parallel account (Mark 13:33–37) employs the illustration of a homeowner who unexpectedly returns from a journey.⁴⁸

Imminence appears to be a common accompaniment to the use of *gregoreō*. In the case of Gethsemane, temptation was imminent for the disciples ("Behold, the hour is at hand," Matt 26:45).⁴⁹ In Acts 20:31 alertness was essential because Paul predicted that as soon as he would

disciples' final test for which they need to watch. R. E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah*, 2 vols. (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 1556–57.

⁴⁷ "In the Gospels, the Lord calls the disciples to shun 'sleep' by being 'alert' so that they do not fall into temptation (Matt. 26.40–41; Mark 14.37–38; Luke 22.45–46) and so that they may be ready because they do not know the hour of the coming of the Lord (Mark 13.32–37). The same complex of ideas appears in this section of 1 Thessalonians, which suggests that the source of the instruction is the teaching of Jesus himself." Gene L. Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 238.

If Paul in 1 Thess 4–5 borrows from Jesus' eschatological teachings, including the Lord's teachings on moral watchfulness, then an even more convincing proof is made for taking *gregoreō* in 1 Thess 5:10 to describe faithful versus unfaithful Christians, not Christians who are physically alive versus physically dead (e.g., as held by F. F. Bruce, *First and Second Thessalonians*, Word Biblical Commentary [Dallas: Word, 1982], 114). Cf. also footnote 37 above. BDAG list their final definition of *gregoreō* as "to be alive (opp. to dead...)." But 1 Thess 5:10 is the only verse from all of Gr. literature that they mention for this definition. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, rev. and ed. Frederick W. Danker, trans. Walter Bauer, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), s.v. *gregoreō*, 207–8. This limitation is admitted by Green, *Letters to the Thessalonians*, 244.

⁴⁸ Thomas also understands Mark 13:33–37 (a parallel to Matt 24:43–44) as teaching imminence. Thomas, "Imminence in the NT," 195.

⁴⁹ Nolland holds that the intended sense of *gregoreō* in Matt 26:38 is the same to that in 24:42, 43; 25:13, i.e., spiritual (not physical) watchfulness. Nolland, *Gospel of Matthew*, 1098.

leave, false teachers would begin an attempt to infiltrate the Ephesian elders (vv 29–30). Peter instructed his readers to watch since Satan may attack at any moment (1 Pet 5:18). Similarly, there are no forewarnings to temptation in general, so vigilance is always an appropriate response (Col 4:2; 1 Cor 16:13). Therefore, there is a suggestion of imminence in most if not all the noneschatological uses of *gr̄egoreō* as well.

These factors lead to the logic of constructing a consistent and unifying use of *gr̄egoreō* in all thirteen eschatological passages. Ladd faults pretribulationists for applying the command for watchfulness sometimes to Jews of the Tribulation and Second Coming (Matt 24:43; Luke 12:37–39; 21:36), but other times to the church and the rapture (1 Thess 5). He argues that the commands to watch in Matt 24:43—agreed by pretribulationists to be a watching for the posttribulational return of the Lord—need to be used to interpret passages like 1 Thess 5:7–8.⁵⁰

Although reasoning from a posttribulational persuasion, Ladd is perhaps correct in calling for a consistent use of *gr̄egoreō*. If pretribulationists agree that 1 Thess 5 uses *gr̄egoreō* to instruct believers of the NT church to “stay alert” for the coming pretribulational rapture, then isn’t it logical that Jesus could have utilized the same word in the same way in the Olivet Discourse? If Paul in 1 Thess 4–5 has brought over from the Olivet Discourse Jesus’ teaching concerning other pretribulational matters, he has also brought over Jesus’ concern regarding alertness for His imminent (pretribulational) return resident in the verb *gr̄egoreō*.

The chart below depicts visually how the thirteen eschatological uses of *gr̄egoreō* coordinate with verses that mention the unexpected thief or the unanticipated return of the homeowner.⁵¹

Watchfulness and the Thief Imagery The Thirteen Eschatological Uses of <i>gr̄egoreō</i>		
Use of <i>gr̄egoreō</i>	Use of Thief Imagery	Use of Returning Homeowner Imagery

⁵⁰ George Eldon Ladd, *The Blessed Hope* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1956), 114–17.

⁵¹ “A connection exists between the imagery of the thief and the idea of watchfulness in the New Testament.” Lövestam, *Spiritual Wakefulness in the New Testament*, 95.

Matt 24:42, 43; 25:13	Matt 24:43	
Luke 12:37, 39	Luke 12:39	
Mark 13:34, 35, 37		Mark 13:34–35
1 Thess 5:6, 10	1 Thess 5:2, 4	
Rev 3:2, 3	Rev 3:3	
Rev 16:15	Rev 16:15	

A “pop quiz” is a good reason for a student to be ready (i.e., to “watch”) at all times. But what student prepares “at all times” for a final exam not scheduled to take place until after all class sessions are completed? In like manner, the imminence in the thief imagery cannot apply to the appearance of Jesus “immediately after the tribulation of those days” (Matt 24:29).⁵² “Watching” or “alertness” is more fully appropriate for an imminent, pretribulational return of the Lord than for a post-tribulational, nonimminent coming of Christ.⁵³

The regular use of *gr̄egoreō* with the thief imagery and the imminent return of a homeowner in eschatological contexts intimates the need for a consistency of interpretation. Since in most contexts and especially eschatological contexts *gr̄egoreō* stresses imminence, the use of *gr̄egoreō* is most appropriate for the pretribulational rapture of the church, not a post-tribulational return of Christ.⁵⁴

⁵² It is an interesting observation that in the sections of the Olivet Discourse describing the signs of the final coming of the Lord (Matt 24:4–35), the verb *gr̄egoreō* does not appear. There either the imperative of *horaō* (“See! Look at!” Matt 24:6; Luke 21:29) or of *blepō* (“Watch out!” “Be on guard!” Matt 24:4; Mark 13:5, 9, 23, 33; Luke 21:8) are used. In fact, Matt 24:4 marks the first use of the imperative of *blepō* in the NT and six of the ten uses of the imperative of *blepō* are found in the Olivet Discourse. However, *blepō* may be appropriate for either the rapture or the second coming (cf. Mark 13:33 where both *blepō* and *gr̄egoreō* appear in the warning about the imminent return of the Lord).

⁵³ The synonymous verb *agrypneō* (“be alert, keep watch”) used in parallel passages to the Olivet Discourse (Mark 13:33; Luke 21:36) is also used in contexts describing imminency.

⁵⁴ Besides Matt 24:42, 43, two other passages containing *gr̄egoreō* may be thought to appear in posttribulational (or nonimminent) contexts: Matt 25:13 and Rev 16:15. In Rev 16:15, the parenthetical nature of the remark together with the similarity of themes to chapters 2–3 suggest the apostle John is addressing the imminence of the coming hour of trial and pretribulation rapture in light of the final devastations of Armageddon. Cf. Thomas, *Revelation 18–22: An Exe-*

IV. OBJECTIONS TO A PRETRIBULATIONAL RAPTURE IN MATTHEW 24:36–44

A. THE OLIVET DISCOURSE IS FOUND IN THE GOSPELS

Some pretribulationists reason, “since the Olivet Discourse is found in the Gospels then it would be logical that passages such as Matt 24:37–44 . . . are not referring to the rapture; rather they are dealing with the second coming of Christ.”⁵⁵ Following this line of logic, John 14:3, a well-known reference to the rapture in the Gospels, should not exist. As a pretribulationist, Ware rightly concedes that the presence of the Discourse in the Synoptics cannot prove or disprove the church is in the Tribulation.⁵⁶ Neither can the presence of the Discourse in the Synoptics prove or disprove that the rapture is prophesied in the Discourse.

getical Commentary (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 267. However, Thomas maintains that the warnings surrounding the thief illustration in Rev 16:15 are used by Jesus to encourage believers to “make their calling and election sure.” Other explanations of the warnings are more likely, i.e., warnings about the loss of future rewards for the unfaithful Christian. “Exhortations to vigilance presuppose that Christians are always in danger of reducing their full commitment to God through Christ and of allowing themselves to be seized by things of lesser value.” Nützel, “*Grēgorēō*,” *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, 265.

Regarding Matt 25:13, Lövestam writes, “The exhortation to keep awake, in v. 13, cannot be linked to the use of the sleep and wakefulness motifs in the parable (vv. 5–7). There it is said that all the virgins went to sleep, without this being presented as something blameworthy.” Lövestam, *Spiritual Wakefulness in the New Testament*, 121. Therefore, Matt 25:13 may reflect a similar perspective as Rev 16:15—an exhortation to the church about the rapture in light of a parable about the final coming of Christ. This may be supported by the double *inclusio* in the verse that takes the reader back to 24:42–43 and 24:36 (see footnote 17 above). Another option may be that the parable describes a general need for readiness at the Lord’s return, whether for the rapture or the Second Coming. The later seems to be held by Hodges, *Jesus, God’s Prophet*, 38–43.

⁵⁵ Ron Bigalke, “Consistent Pretribulationism and Jewish Questions of the End,” unpublished paper presented at the 2002 Pre-Trib Study Group, available at <http://www.pre-trib.org/article-view.php?id=121>; cf. also Bigalke, “The Olivet Discourse: A Resolution of Time,” *Conservative Theological Seminary Journal* 9 (spring 2003): 111.

⁵⁶ Bruce A. Ware, “Is the Church in View in Matthew 24–25?” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 138 (April–June 1981): 162–63.

B. THE CHURCH IS NOT ADDRESSED IN THE OLIVET DISCOURSE

Pretribulationists have objected to a posttribulation or a pretribulation rapture in Matt 24 based on the fact that Israel, not the church, is addressed in the Discourse. But both posttribulationists and pretribulationists need to recognize that to find the rapture of church saints in Matt 24:36–44 does not require that the church will go through the tribulation or that the rest of the Discourse (e.g., Matt 24:4–28) describes the experience of the church.

Most of the arguments surrounding the presence or absence of the church in the Discourse are inconsequential and do not help decide in favor of a posttribulation or pretribulation rapture.⁵⁷ For example, it is not weighty to suggest that the repeated emphasis on how one should live in light of eschatological events proves that the church must be addressed in the Discourse.⁵⁸ Nor can it be argued that the Jewish elements in the Discourse are a description of Jewish church saints.⁵⁹ There are no exclusively church teachings in the Discourse.⁶⁰ Yet this too does not conclusively establish the absence of the church in the Discourse. All things being equal, pretribulationists must admit to a draw on such points. Ware concedes this: “Undoubtedly Jesus *could* have been addressing Christians [church saints] in His warning, but He could equally have been addressing Jewish nonchurch tribulation saints [original emphasis].”⁶¹

Pretribulationists also grant that the disciples could equally represent Israel or the church depending on the context.⁶² For example, in most pretribulation schemes, the disciples represent national Israel in the

⁵⁷ For arguments suggesting the church is present in the Discourse and will experience a posttribulation rapture, see Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation*, 132–35. A response to Gundry is found in Ware, “Is the Church in View in Matthew 24–25?” 158–72. More recent posttribulation arguments for the church being addressed in the Discourse are presented by Moo, “Posttribulation Rapture,” 190–96. These are countered by Feinberg, “Pretribulation Rapture,” 229–31.

⁵⁸ Contra Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 569.

⁵⁹ Contra Gundry, *The Church and the Tribulation*, 132.

⁶⁰ Ware, “Is the Church in View in Matthew 24–25?” 164–65.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 165.

⁶² Larry D. Pettigrew, “Interpretive Flaws in the Olivet Discourse,” *The Master’s Seminary Journal* 13 (fall 2002): 180; John F. Walvoord, *The Blessed Hope and the Tribulation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), 86.

Olivet Discourse, but two days later in the Upper Room Discourse, they represent the future members of the church.⁶³ Since the disciples can represent either, the issue must be settled by the Discourse content, paragraph by paragraph.⁶⁴

Many pretribulationists understand Matt 24:4–8 or 24:4–14 to prophesy the present interadvent age.⁶⁵ Under this interpretation, instructions in these sections like “See to it that no one misleads you” (v 4) would be addressed to the disciples as representatives of the church. To be consistent, any pretribulationist holding this position could not reject out-of-hand a reference to the church in vv 37–44. As mentioned above, to declare that the Discourse cannot pertain to the church because its focus is strictly Jewish is indeterminative. For most pretribulationists, 25:31–46 comprises a judgment or deliverance of Gentiles (or Gentiles and Jews) at the Second Coming. These exegetes do not reason that since Israel is the focus of the Discourse, Gentiles are excluded from 25:31–46. Consequently, it is also deficient to reason that the church is excluded from the Discourse because the Discourse concentrates on Israel.

As discussed in the first article in this series, some pretribulationists understand v 36 as addressing only the time up to the rapture. But after the rapture of the church, believers will clearly know the time of Christ’s coming.⁶⁶ If this interpretation is accepted, pretribulationists cannot exclude the church as nowhere addressed in the Discourse.

⁶³ E.g., Thomas, “Imminence in the NT,” 196.

⁶⁴ Walvoord, *Blessed Hope*, 86.

⁶⁵ Understanding vv 4–14 as the interadvent age are David L. Turner, “The Gospel of Matthew,” *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary*, Philip W. Comfort, gen ed. (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2005), 11:305, 308; Pettigrew, “Olivet Discourse,” 175. A sample of those who hold that vv 4–8 describe the present age but that Jesus turns to the future tribulation at v 9 are Lewis Sperry Chafer, *Systematic Theology*, 8 vols. (repr.; Dallas: Dallas Theological Seminary, 1978), 5:120–25; Carl Armerding, *The Olivet Discourse of Matthew 24–25 and Other Studies* (Findlay, OH: Dunham Publishing, 1955), 14–17. Walvoord holds that both the present age and the tribulation are described in general terms in the 24:4–14 unit. John F. Walvoord, “Christ’s Olivet Discourse on the Time of the End. Part II: Prophecies Fulfilled in the Present Age,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 128 (July 1971): 209.

⁶⁶ See John F. Hart, “Should Pretribulationists Reconsider the Rapture in Matthew 24:36–44? Part 1,” *Journal of the Grace Theological Society* 20 (spring 2008): 63.

C. THE DISCIPLES COULD NOT HAVE UNDERSTOOD THE DOCTRINES OF THE CHURCH OR RAPTURE

It is traditionally held by pretribulationists that the disciples would not be able to understand the distinction between the pretribulational rapture and the posttribulational Second Coming.⁶⁷ Also, Jesus would not be answering a question that was not asked by the disciples (Matt 24:3). “But the point is that the disciples were not asking anything about the church or the rapture. They knew next to nothing about either one.”⁶⁸ But if Jesus is introducing new prophecy unrevealed in the OT, this objection is mitigated.

It is a questionable hermeneutical procedure to limit exegesis and divine authorial intent (especially in prophecy) to what the readers or hearers could have understood fully at the time of writing (cf. 1 Pet 1:10–11; Dan 12:4).⁶⁹ The apostle John makes several references to new truths that the disciples did not understand until after the resurrection (John 2:19–22; 12:16). Are there valid reasons for not applying this perspective to the doctrines of the church and the rapture as introduced by Jesus?

Surprisingly, it is Matthew alone among the Gospels that introduces the term “church” (Matt 16:18; 18:17). Since the disciples did not understand the new doctrine of the church yet they are introduced to it in Matt 16 and 18, could they not be introduced to the pretribulational rapture of the church in Matt 24 and yet not be expected to fully comprehend it until later?⁷⁰ In fact, only a few days later in the Upper Room Discourse,

⁶⁷ Walvoord, *Blessed Hope*, 88

⁶⁸ Pettigrew, “Olivet Discourse,” 180.

⁶⁹ Fee and Stuart write, “A text cannot mean what it could not have meant to its [human] author or his readers.” Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth: A Guide to Understanding the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 60. While there is some truth in this assertion, qualifications are necessary in light of passages such as the 1 Pet and Daniel references. Cf. Robert D. Culver, “The Difficulty of Interpreting Old Testament Prophecy,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 114 (July 1957): 205.

⁷⁰ Walvoord feels this reasoning goes against seeing the rapture here: “[The disciples] did not even comprehend the concept of the church at this time, even though it had been announced. How could they be expected to understand the distinction between a pretribulation rapture and the posttribulational second coming....” Walvoord, *Blessed Hope*, 88. But if the disciples did not comprehend the concept of the church even though it had been announced, why is it impossible that the Lord would introduce the concept of the rapture even though the disciples would not comprehend it at first? Perhaps the Lord did not expect

Jesus introduces the rapture to His disciples (John 14:1–3). Pretribulationists find no difficulty in accepting here a new revelation for the church, even though the disciples could not fully comprehend church truth at this time.

D. LUKE 17:37 CONFIRMS THAT THE ONE “TAKEN” IN MATTHEW 24:40–41 IS TAKEN FOR JUDGMENT

Luke 17:34–36 parallels Matt 24:41–42 about one who is “taken” and one who is “left.” But in Luke 17:37, the disciples ask the brief question “Where, Lord?” Jesus replies with the proverbial statement, “Where the body is, there also the vultures will be gathered.” Some pretribulationists believe this verse confirms their interpretation in the Olivet Discourse that the one taken from the field or bed is taken in judgment.⁷¹ As such, they read the question, “Where are they taken for judgment, Lord?”⁷² However, the question could just as easily be understood, “Where are they taken for deliverance, Lord?” or “Where are they left for judgment, Lord?” Commentators such as Nolland favor the former⁷³ and Geldenhuys the latter.⁷⁴

Without excluding a possible allusion to judgment, a better suggestion is that the disciples meant, “Where are You to be revealed, Lord?” This understanding of Luke 17:37 fits the parallel passage in Matt 24:28 where the proverbial saying applies exclusively to the Parousia (24:29–31). Marshall believes that Luke 17:37 refers back to v 23 (“Men will tell you, ‘There He is!’ or ‘Here He is!’”), not the immediately preceding

the disciples to understand at that moment. After all, Christ could not come again until He died, was resurrected and ascended, and the prophesied NT church (Matt 16:18) had begun. Then they would be expected to understand.

⁷¹ Pettigrew, “Olivet Discourse,” 188; Bigalke, “The Olivet Discourse,” 130. Cf. Charles C. Ryrie, *The Ryrie Study Bible* (Chicago: Moody, 1978), note at Luke 17:37.

⁷² John A. Martin, “Luke,” *Bible Knowledge Commentary, New Testament Edition*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1983), 249; Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 9:51–24:53*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 1438.

⁷³ Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, 862–63.

⁷⁴ Norval Geldenhuys, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 442, 445.

context.⁷⁵ Verse 37 acts as a climax for the whole sermon and appears to summarize the broad central theme of Christ's return.⁷⁶ As such, the proverbial saying about the vultures expresses the truth that "the world unmistakably will know...where the Son of Man returns."⁷⁷ While the idea of judgment may be included in the disciples' question of Luke 17:37, the verse and its context do not confirm unequivocally that the one who is taken is taken in judgment.

V. CONCLUSION

It is the contention of this study that pretribulationists should indeed reconsider the rapture in Matt 24:36–44. All pretribulationists agree that according to John 14:3, Jesus was the first to predict the surprise snatching away of the church. If the proposal of this study is exegetically and theologically sound, then it is time that pretribulationists credit the Lord of the Parousia with a more extensive role in originating and predicting the "blessed hope" than we have given Him.

⁷⁵ I. Howard Marshall, *Commentary on Luke*, New International Greek Testament Commentary, ed. I. Howard Marshall and W. Ward Gasque (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 669.

⁷⁶ Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, The New American Commentary, David S. Dockery, gen. ed., vol. 24 (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 441.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.* Cf. also Pate, *Luke*, 333.

**A REVIEW OF ALAN P. STANLEY'S
*DID JESUS TEACH SALVATION BY
WORKS? THE ROLE OF WORKS IN SALVA-
TION IN THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS***

(Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2006)

BY BOB WILKIN

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I. INTRODUCTION

The title of the book certainly grabbed my attention. Regardless of what answer Stanley gave to the question, this is a work I considered a must read.

When I discovered that the book is actually the author's doctoral dissertation, and that his dissertation was done at my alma mater, Dallas Theological Seminary, in the New Testament department, I was even more enthusiastic about reading it.

The subtitle alerts the reader to the fact that the stress in the work will be the Synoptic Gospels, not the Gospel of John and not the NT epistles. However, as one would expect in a scholarly work, Stanley comments fairly often on how what he sees in the Synoptics is consistent with his understanding of the epistles and John.

Stanley's answer is more or less Yes. The author is trying to avoid saying that Jesus taught salvation by works even as he asserts that the Lord indeed taught salvation by works.

II. HIS THESIS: MILD WORKS SALVATION

Readers who recall the first edition of John MacArthur's work, *The Gospel According to Jesus*, will recall that every ten pages or so he would give disclaimers that somewhat called into question the harsh statements he'd made until that point. It was reasonable to conclude, as many of us did at the time, that he meant what he said and his disclaimers were simply evidence of his discomfort with the practical problems associated with his view. Subsequent works, such as *Hard to Believe*,

have shown that he indeed meant what he said. No longer does he see the need to give disclaimers.

The reader of Stanley will find disclaimers, though to a much lesser degree. Stanley's thesis is that the Lord Jesus clearly and often taught salvation by works in the Synoptic Gospels. Yet occasionally Stanley will adopt a sort of theological doublespeak as he gives disclaimers. Here is an example:

First, Jesus understands salvation to be more than just an historical entry point. Salvation is submission to God's rule—His kingdom—now and entrance into His eschatological kingdom or eternal life in the future. Thus where Paul is primarily speaking out against *pre*-conversion works Jesus is endorsing *post*-conversion works. Therefore passages that appear to contradict Paul do not in fact contradict him at all.

Second, since the works that admit one into the kingdom are post-conversion works they are also necessarily produce or enabled by the power of God...

Third, it follows that for Jesus, works are the evidence of one's relationship to God (Matt 7:15-23)...However, this does not mean that every so-called good work is worthy of eternal life (cf. Matt 7:22-23) lest anyone think they can deceive God. This is the reason why only Jesus will judge humanities' works (cf. Matt 7:1). People may deceive people but they will not deceive God (Gal 6:7-8).

Fourth, even though works are necessary for salvation Jesus and the Synoptic writers do not mean sinless—or even something similar—perfection...Righteousness is being viewed as a *pattern of life*. In other words momentary lapses into anger, impatience, un-forgiveness, etc. do not exclude one from the kingdom as if what was required was letter of the law type "perfection" in every sense of the word... (Stanley, pp. 335-36).

Note that works are both a condition of entrance into the kingdom and evidence that one currently has a relationship with God. In addition, the evidence is not convincing. No one can know whether he indeed will enter the kingdom until he is judged by Jesus.

I never found a single sentence where Stanley stated his thesis. This is how I would state his thesis, based on my reading of his book, in just one sentence: While pre-conversion good works are not required, endur-

ing, post-conversion, God-empowered good works are conditions of eternal life and only God knows who will meet that condition.

Here's another way I'd state my understanding of his thesis: it is impossible to be sure of one's own eternal destiny, or the eternal destiny of friends and loved ones, since it is impossible for humans to know how Jesus will evaluate our lives until He actually does so.

If that seems a bit discouraging, Stanley never lets on that someone might find such a way of thinking the least bit depressing. Indeed, he seems to feel that God is being exceedingly gracious in that what is required is merely *a pattern* of righteous deeds and that momentary lapses into things like anger, impatience, and un-forgiveness do not automatically condemn one to hell.

Thus, while salvation is by works, it is certainly not by anything close to perfect works. God's grace means that even sinful believers can enter the kingdom provided that the Lord Jesus concludes at the final judgment that their lives had been characterized by righteous deeds.

III. THE STRENGTHS OF HIS WORK

Extensive bibliographic references. Though I have read most of the books and other resources that he cites, I have not read all of them. I found a handful of books and articles that I now consider must reading. By itself this makes the book worth purchasing for anyone in full-time ministry.

Superb footnotes. Studies show that only 1% of all readers actually read footnotes. That would be a big mistake with this book. Much gold is buried in the notes. I went to the index and looked up every reference he made to Zane Hodges, Jody Dillow, Charlie Bing, and myself. I found this to be a very helpful way of seeing what he thinks of our position. I found that he understands what we are saying, but doesn't find it persuasive. If you get this book, be sure to at the least look up what he has to say about the writings of Zane Hodges and Jody Dillow. Better yet, read all the footnotes.

Candid admissions. Even though there are times when what he writes seems to be hedging and doublespeak, there are plenty of times in the book when he makes candid admissions. For example:

There are, in my view, passages that appear to teach the eternal security of believers...We might say that He knows who are His. However, there are also passages—especially John 15:1-6; 1 Corinthians 15:2; Colossians 1:13; Hebrews 3:6,

14—that teach the possibility of forfeiting salvation through lack of endurance. These passages appear to teach anything but eternal security. However, in these instances the perspective in view is not God’s but ours. The NT writers do not know for sure who are God’s. Hence in a pastorally appropriate way they urge their readers on to endurance (Stanley, p. 327, emphasis added).

That gives us a lot to work with. For example, is it true that the NT writers do not know for sure who are God’s? If so, what did Paul mean in Phil 4:3 when he said that the names of Clement and the rest of his fellow workers “are in the Book of Life”? Could there be any doubt that Paul knew that Clement and Timothy and Titus and Silas and Barnabas and Luke and Aquila and Priscilla and Apollos were eternally secure?

In the Pastoral Epistles Paul called Timothy his true son in the faith (1 Tim 1:2; 2 Tim 1:2). He called him a “man of God” (1 Tim 6:11). He said that the Holy Spirit dwelt in Timothy (2 Tim 1:14). He calls Titus, “a true son in our common faith” (1:4).

We might also discuss the pastoral value in threatening born-again people with hell unless they endure in faith and good works. We might discuss how salvation might be eternally secure from God’s perspective, yet from our perspective be forfeitable.

A candid admission like this would make for fantastic discussion in Bible college and seminary classes, in Sunday School classes, and in discipleship groups.

Here’s another example of a candid admission:

When judgment day comes (Matt 7:22-23) it will not be sinners who enter into the kingdom but the *righteous*. This distinction is important to make for it is only once anyone is in a relationship with Jesus that they are able to produce the kind of righteousness required to make it into the eschatological kingdom (i.e., post-conversion works). This does not mean that one is self-righteous but neither does it mean that one simply has righteousness as a gift from God (Stanley, p. 328, emphasis his).

Again, there’s much we could discuss here. Post-conversion personal righteous works are required to enter the kingdom. Why are these not “self-righteous”? The fact that God enables us to do these good works does not mean that we have nothing to do with producing them. Notice that Stanley says God makes us “able to produce the kind of righteous-

ness required." He doesn't produce those righteous deeds automatically in us. This righteousness is not simply "a gift of God." Some Reformed expositors attempt to say that since God enables the works, then the works themselves are a gift of God too and that the righteousness is thus a gift of God. Stanley openly admits that we must utilize the ability that God gives us and we must produce righteousness if we are to make it into the kingdom.

Excellent indexes. The Scripture and subject indexes are excellent. They make this work a nice reference tool. Pastors who are speaking on a text can easily find out what Stanley says about it. It is also easy to see what Stanley thinks about various authors and subjects.

IV. THE WEAKNESSES OF HIS WORK

Surprisingly little exegetical work done. This is a common problem today and is no way unique to this author. Seminaries are now teaching that Bible scholars need to be experts in what other Bible scholars say. Thus exegetical discussions today are primarily made up of the author interacting with the views of leading scholars on the passage he is discussing. Stanley does this throughout the book. Instead of interacting primarily with the words and phrases of the text, Stanley interacts primarily with the way other scholars understand various texts. It is hard to find places where he lays out a passage and discusses it.

Of course, we in the Free Grace movement have been spoiled with the writings of men like Hodges and Dillow. They lay out a text and clearly explain the evidence that reveals what it means. Unfortunately, that is not found in this work except in occasional comments that are not backed up.

Here is an example. When criticizing the view of repentance put forth by Hodges, Dillow, and me, he cites Acts 17:30, "God commands all men everywhere to repent." He also wonders about the Synoptic Gospels, "Do they not have a say on the matter? Both the Rich Young Ruler and the Jewish lawyer asked very similar questions to what the Philipian jailer (see v. 29). Should these passages not also have a bearing on how we understand what one must do to be saved?" (p. 230 n. 60). Note that he doesn't tell how the questions are similar and how they are different. He doesn't state what indicates that Acts 17:30 is being given as a condition of eternal life. Admittedly, this is in a footnote. But this is the same sort of discussion that occurs in the text all the time. Indeed, this

footnote runs almost a third of a page, and if it were in the same size font as the text, would take up half a page.

Failure to adequately present the evidence for the Free Grace explanations. As the example just cited shows, Stanley doesn't present the evidence for the Free Grace explanations of texts, that is, the evidence against his position. He merely states the Free Grace interpretation and then rejects it. To be fair he should give extensive treatment of the Free Grace evidence and then refute that very evidence. This he does not do.

Proclaiming outright works salvation. As I showed above, he openly admits that he is teaching salvation by post-conversion righteous works. Failure to endure in such works will result in the forfeiture, to use his word, of eternal life/justification/salvation. I characterize his position as mild works salvation. But mild or strong, it is clearly works salvation that Stanley believes Jesus taught. The book answers its title with a guarded Yes. Jesus taught salvation by works.

Little effort to harmonize his conclusions with Jesus' teachings in the Fourth Gospel. I found this especially troubling. If John's Gospel is the only evangelistic book in Scripture, then why didn't Stanley attempt to harmonize his conclusions with it? Actually Stanley says on several occasions that he intentionally was not discussing John's understanding of this question. For example when discussing Zane Hodges's view of discipleship, he says, "The evidence that Hodges marshals in support of a distinction between a disciple and a Christian comes exclusively from outside of the Synoptic Gospels and mostly that of John...His reasons for denying any affiliation between discipleship and salvation are that the conditions for discipleship conflict with John's view of salvation. *I cannot take the time or space to go into John's soteriology*; my point here is simply that the use of the term *mathetes* in the Synoptic Gospels does not support Hodges' contention" (p. 228 n. 46, emphasis added). I should note that he does cite verses in John's Gospel in the book. His Scripture index has 2.5 pages of citations from John. However, there are 14 pages of citations from the Synoptics. And the citations from John are almost exclusively mere mentions of passages. There are no discussions anywhere in the book of passages from the Fourth Gospel.

There are two pages devoted in this book to the use of the words *save* and *salvation* in Johannine literature (pp. 154-155, with four lines flowing onto p. 156). However, John rarely used those words in his Gospel. A better line of enquiry would have been what John said one must do to have everlasting life. There are two paragraphs on eternal life in

this section, however, even this truncated discussion fails to hone in on the condition of eternal life in John. His understanding of John seems to be that the one who believes in Jesus has the possibility of eternal life presently in a qualitative sense: "Qualitatively life is a present possibility for those who believe in Jesus" (p. 154). What he means by *possibility* is not explained. However, he then goes on to discuss "the quantitative element of [eternal] life." His concluding sentence in this section explains how one gains *quantitative* eternal life: "The destiny for those who overcome (nikao) is [eternal] *life* (Rev 2:7, 11; 3:5 cf. 2:17, 26; 3:12, 21; 21:7)" (p. 156, emphasis his).

V. CONCLUSION

While I am abhorred by the thesis of this book, I highly recommend it to well grounded believers. This is not a book for new believers. Anyone who is not well versed in Free Grace theology would do well to stay away from this book until he is well versed. However, for the person who knows our issues well, this book is a wonderful resource.

Essentially this book shows where current scholarship is going. Calvinism is going a long way towards Arminianism. We've seen this coming before in other works (e.g., Schreiner and Canaday's, *The Race Set before Us*).

It is nice to see the issues put this baldly.

This book is well written, easy to follow, and irenic in tone.

Enjoy.

BOOK REVIEWS

Faith Undone: the emerging church...a new reformation or an end-time deception? By Roger Oakland. Silverton, OR: Lighthouse Trails Publishing, 2007. 261 pp. Paper, \$12.95.

A few years ago I spoke at a conference. One of the fellow speakers was Roger Oakland. I was impressed then with what he said about the influence of postmodernity in Evangelicalism.

Oakland has done a tremendous job of unmasking the emerging church movement. His answer is that it is an end-time deception, not a new reformation as they like to claim.

JOTGES readers should be warned that this is not a Free Grace author. While he rarely gets into what one must do to have eternal life, when he does, his comments are typically fuzzy. Several times he refers to receiving Jesus as Lord (pp. 92, 112, 119) or as Lord, Savior, and Master (pp. 168, 169). He seems to view Rev 3:20 as an evangelistic verse and inviting Jesus into one's life as a condition for eternal life. Yet once he points out that we justified by faith alone (p. 123), without bringing in things like repentance or commitment. He does cite Eph 2:9 and salvation being not of works (p. 168).

This book is must reading for any pastor, elder, deacon, missionary, or parachurch worker. I highly recommend it.

Robert N. Wilkin

Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

Denton, Texas

Jesus the Evangelist: Learning to Share the Gospel from the Book of John. Richard D. Phillips. Orland, Florida: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2007. 185 pp. Hardcover,

Jesus the Evangelist is a delightful and challenging combination of reformed theology and evangelism from the heart of a thoughtful and passionate pastor.

Within GES circles most would question anything delightful coming from reformed theology. Most Reformed theologians hold to an understanding of predestination that creates tension between God's sovereignty and evangelism: If God chooses or predestines all men—either to be eternally condemned or saved—it is “wrong or pointless to labor in evangelism” (p. 168). The beauty of Phillips' work resides in his willingness to confront this dilemma: “Having written this book to stress biblical evangelism, this is obviously not my view. And in light of our studies in John's Gospel, it is equally obvious—and far more important—that this was not Jesus' view” (p. 168) Phillips states: “It is my hope that studying the biblical approach to evangelism afresh will help bring much-needed reform to our gospel witness” (p.3).

Jesus the Evangelist does not delve into the whole of John's account, but instead focuses on chapters 1, 3 and 4: Likewise, the book is divided into three corresponding parts: 1) “The Witness of John the Baptist and the Calling of the First Disciples: *Biblical Principles of Evangelism*” (pp. 7-56); 2) Jesus' Witness to Nicodemus: *The Theology of the Gospel* (pp. 58-107); and 3) Jesus' Witness to the Samaritan Woman: *Jesus' Practice of Evangelism* (pp. 108-157). While this kind of synthesis can be helpful, Phillips' work fails to comprehend the whole of John's account as a carefully integrated testimony structured around eight carefully chosen signs designed specifically to persuade that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, who gives life in His name to those, who believe in Him (John 20:30-31 and 21:24-25). This failure creates challenges for the book.

As Wilkin, Hodges and Niemelä have consistently taught: Christians should witness to many things about Jesus, but in their words and actions addressed to the unbeliever, they must prioritize their efforts and never lose sight of the sine qua non or purpose of God's message for the unbeliever—“life in His name” (John 20:30-31). Consider the follow excerpt from Phillips:

We tell people what the early church enshrined in the Apostles' Creed: that Jesus

Christ is God's only Son and our Lord; that He was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary; that He suffered under Pontius Pilate; was crucified, died, and was buried; that he experienced death for three days and then rose from the grave; that He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; and that from there He will come to judge the living and the dead. These make up a Christian witness. (p. 12)

Amen! Yet, where in this "Christian witness" is the gift of eternal life clearly revealed?

When Jesus spoke with Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman, He focused on eternal life. Regarding Jesus' words in John 4:10, Phillips makes some challenging statements regarding the gospel (p. 117 & 123).

Is the gift a multifaceted offering composed of: 1) Christ's blood to wash away

sin; 2) the indwelling Holy Spirit; 3) life beyond the grave; but most of all 4) Christ, Himself, God of His people Israel? Or, is the gift eternal life to those who partake of the living water? Is it sufficient to know the gift of life and Jesus "as the One who brings it"?

Phillips is a thoughtful and passionate pastor, who is willing to depart from many within reformed theology regarding the practice of evangelism. However, believers ought to measure their personal testimony in light of the authoritative, unimpeachable, eyewitness testimony God gives in John's Gospel. The consistent sine qua non and purpose to which John testifies is that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, who gives eternal life to those, who believe in Him (John 20:30-31 and 21:24-25). The work of evangelism requires believers to place first things first: For this reason John's witness must be the Christian's witness to the unbeliever as well. *Jesus the Evangelist* is both delightful and challenging!

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In Christ: Position & Identity Unparalleled, Considered Exegetically: Colossians 2:3-3:4. By Ron Merryman. Orland, Florida: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2007. 185 pp. Hardcover,

Finally someone has written a book on the church age believer's position and identity in Christ! While not very long (only 30 pages; 43 pages including the appendices) it packs a punch. I am not aware of any other book written specifically on this topic; so this is one everyone should want in their library.

The author introduces the topic by stating that position and identity in Christ (positional truth) are one of two critical truths for new believers to help them through life. I would not limit this to new believers. All believers should be taught and reminded of positional truth.

As the title suggests the author covers his topic exegetically by examining Col. 2:3-3:4. Those who like an expository and exegetical style will appreciate what the author has done. Consequently, the author's approach is less likely to lead to taking passages out of context, which happens too often in topically oriented books.

While the book contains many points, there are several that stand out. First, positional truth is unique to the church age. It is a privilege that we have today what those of the Old Testament did not. We are brought into living union with Christ through the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. The author clearly explains the truths of this Baptism, even devoting an appendix to it. Grace is communicated throughout the book emphasizing the fact that believers contribute nothing to the marvelous privileges given by God in Christ. Towards the end, the author writes, "One cannot improve upon the completeness that God provides in Christ, but this does not prevent humans from trying...."

The book includes six appendices, all related to positional truth. For amateur Greek enthusiasts like me, the appendix on periphrastic participles will delight. There is also a study exercise and brief discussion of Christ's present Session.

A lot of debate about the assurance of eternal life has occurred in the free grace camp of late. While this book does not address assurance directly, it does address it implicitly. The Baptism of the Holy Spirit and the believer's union with Christ presents a firm basis for eternal security and assurance of eternal life. We can be sure we have eternal life if we know that we are in union with Christ and the union can never be broken or dissolved.

The author concludes with an exhortation to keep seeking the meaning and significance of our (believer's) identity and position in Christ. I agree and I highly recommend this book.

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Unlocking Wisdom: Forming Agents of God in the House of Mourning. By James Reitman. Springfield, Missouri: 21st Century Press, 2008. 352 pages. Paper, \$19.95.

As I recently made my way through Jim Reitman's new book, I was often reminded of Mortimer Adler's dictum that a good book is known by its need to be read again. I am looking forward to the challenge of a second reading; because of its depth, *Unlocking Wisdom* will likely repay several more times through!

The depth of the book should not however discourage a first attempt; gems scattered along the way make a first perusal very much worthwhile. While Reitman, Adjunct Professor at Denver Seminary, accomplished M.D. and ethical writer, must labor to bridge the considerable cultural distance between the biblical books covered in this commentary, Job and Ecclesiastes, and the current reader, he succeeds admirably. Some sample "first-read" insights:

This "two for the price of one" commentary notes the remarkable comparisons between the two wisdom books. By itself, the section covering these correspondences makes the book a worthy purchase.

Unlocking demonstrates a clear progress of thought, worthy of its inspired subject, in the book of Ecclesiastes. Reitman shows conclusively that Ecclesiastes is not a "patchwork quilt" of wisdom sayings, as the book is often understood. I came away from even the first reading with a sense that I actually understand Solomon!

I counted dozens of defenses, grounded in close analysis of the text, against scholarly "cheap shots" often directed at Job and Ecclesiastes.

The book sets a standard in its effort to highlight the relationships and contributions of the sections of the Biblical books. The argument of

the text is arranged explicitly, so the student is not left to intuit how the author sees these relationships and contributions.

On *Job*, Reitman dispenses skillfully with various oversimplifications about the argument (e.g., the problem of suffering of the just), and his very plausible case for “*Job as the Agent of God*” makes satisfying sense of the turns in plot at the end.

Fortunately for the student who will be looking again at the book, these (and numerous other) insights are cast in very clear prose (only exception: a very few editing irregularities, such as an unorthodox capitalization following semicolons). Other benefits to the serious student include the book’s inclusion of downloadable charts, and its forthcoming Libronix electronic format version. Its scholarly competence, however, is not beholden. It strikes new ground frequently, yet bases its departures convincingly in the text. But while *Unlocking* manifests current Hebrew scholarship, it does not absolutely require technical skills in order to profit the diligent student.

Reitman’s argument will be especially interesting to readers of this *Journal*. He finds in *Job* and *Ecclesiastes* many intriguing correspondences with a grace theological perspective (e.g., the foundations of a rewards theology in his “agency” motif; likewise a case for justification by faith alone). Numerous footnotes acknowledge authors *JOTGES* readers will know. But Reitman does not give the impression of being a systematician; the book is completely at home in the progressive revelation offered by these books in their OT settings.

The book closes with some plausible suggestions for use of *Ecclesiastes* in discipleship with men. To this reviewer, the book will also be indispensable for professional exegetes. Its primary use, however, should be to help remove any intimidation *Job* and *Ecclesiastes* might pose to those pastors who would not deny their congregations the riches of these inspired—and inspiring—constituents of the canon of Scripture.

Lon Gregg

Director of Chaplains
Denver Rescue Mission

Escape. By Carolyn Jessop with Laura Palmer. New York: Broadway Books, 2007. 413 pp. Cloth, \$24.95.

The author, Carolyn Jessop, tells an amazing story of her escape, both physically and spiritually, from a polygamous cult, the Fundamental Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (FLDS).

At age 18 she was given in marriage to a 50-year-old man, Merrill Jessop, who already had three wives. She had eight children by him over the next 17 years. During this time her husband accumulated more wives.

The author endured lots of abuse from her husband and from her “sister wives” during her 17 years of marriage. After she escaped with her children, she had to fight a tremendous battle to keep her children, and her sanity.

While there is no evidence in the book that the author has come to faith in Christ, this book is well worth reading for many reasons. It is a book about marriage and parenting. It is an overcomer story. And it gives clues about how to help reach a person locked into a cult mentality.

Carolyn Jessop’s former husband Merrill Jessop is now the head of the FLDS group in Texas that is at Yearning for Zion ranch. Former head of the FLDS, a man much discussed in the book, and one with whom the author had several tumultuous encounters, Warren Jeffs, is now in prison after being on the FBI’s ten most wanted list.

I highly recommend this book. It is well written and hard to put down. On a recent flight back from Tampa to Dallas I was reading the book as my wife was napping next to me. She awoke and started reading over my shoulder. After a page or two Sharon took the book from me and proceeded to read it during the rest of the flight and then till midnight after we got home. She loved it. You will too.

Robert N. Wilkin

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PERIODICAL REVIEWS

“Justification by Faith is the Answer: What is the Question?” Stephen Westerholm, *CTQ* (70, 2006).

In this most interesting article the author speculates on what question is posed by the New Testament (mainly Pauline) message of justification by faith in Christ. The author introduces his subject by citing the works of two others who have posed the question. One argues that Paul’s writings cannot be ripped out of their first century context and, consequently, the question is dealing with the place of Gentiles in the church and plan of God. The opposing view is the one offered by Augustine and his followers, including Martin Luther, who pondered, how can I find a gracious God? The author distills this into the following: Justification by faith is the answer, but what is the question? Certainly by seeking to understand questions New Testament authors sought to explain aids in our understanding of scripture.

To find his answer the author surveys most of the New Testament, focusing primarily on Paul’s writings. The point of the survey is to determine whether there is a consistent message in regard to justification. The author shows that there is. He then turns and focuses significant attention on Galatians and Romans since these epistles are rich in justification truth. His conclusion is what we would expect: justification is by faith and not by works.

The author concludes that the question on the minds of those in the first century is no different from those at any other time, namely, how can sinners find a gracious God?

GES readers will likely enjoy this article since it approaches the topic of justification in an unusual but enlightening way. The article is a good general discussion of the issue. However, he does not refine his message to faith alone in Christ alone so one may wonder whether the faith he prescribes is exclusive.

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“Jesus’ Great Grandmothers: Matthew’s Four and More”

Irene Nowell O.S.B., *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* (70, 2008): 1-15.

The examples of women in the Bible reveal the sometimes extraordinary and yet very practical manner in which our Lord uses women to accomplish His purposes. In her article, “Jesus’ Great- Grandmothers: Matthew’s Four and More,” Irene Nowell O.S.B. seeks to discover meaning in the lives of mothers within the Bible as a source of hope for women today.

According to Nowell, “We look to genealogies to tell us who we are and where we came from. ...What if Matthew’s four—Tamar, Rehab, Ruth, Bathsheba—remind us to look at all women in the line that leads to Jesus? What happens if we consider these four not as distinct from the others but as representative of them (p. 1)?”

1) What was Matthew’s purpose in recording Jesus’ genealogy? Matthew introduces his genealogy: “The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham:” (Matt 1:1)¹ According to Matthew’s genealogy only the males begot, Isaac begot Jacob.” (Matt 1:2) Notice the pattern, subject/verb/direct object: Isaac, who is the direct object that Abraham begot (Abraham begot Isaac), becomes the subject who begot Jacob (Isaac begot Jacob). Regardless, Matthew records a distinctly male genealogy demonstrating that Jesus is Israel’s rightful Messiah, “the Son of David, the Son of Abraham:”

2) What relationship do women like Jezebel, Athaliah, and others have with the Messianic line? Tamar, Rehab, Ruth, and Bathsheba are honored for their faith and remembered as recipients of God’s grace by inclusion in Matthew’s account. On the other hand, Jezebel, the wife of Ahab, slaughtered the prophets of God, while Athaliah murdered grandsons in the Messianic line. Is Lot’s wife an example of faithfulness or a statue of salt? Two of Israel’s greatest enemies, Ammon and Moab, came forth from Lot’s

¹ All Scripture quotations are from the New King James Version (Nashville: Nelson, 1982).

drunkenness with his daughters. Matthew does not include such women in a genealogy designed to demonstrate the Messiahship of Jesus, but Nowell includes these ungodly women in her matrilineal genealogy.

3) How can mortal women (or men) guarantee our future? Whether male or female none of those mentioned in Matthews's genealogy guarantee Israel's future: Only the object of his genealogy guarantees our future, the perfect God/Man, Jesus, the Messiah! Likewise, only Messiah gives eternal life to individuals who believe in Him. The very truth purposed in Matthew's genealogy is lost in Nowell's genealogy—Jesus is Israel's rightful Messiah, "the Son of David, the Son of Abraham."(Matt 1:1)

Nowell's desire to make the lives of women in the Bible relevant to women today is very commendable, but the manner in which she chooses to demonstrate this relevance is questionable in that she contradicts Matthew's purpose for his genealogy. Ironically, Nowell misplaces the Messianic Hope for the future of Israel and humankind in a flawed matrilineal genealogy: "These women are courageous, hospitable, and creative, and they have risked life and reputation to ensure our future (p. 15)." Only the One true Messiah guarantees the future of Israel and all those who believe in Him for eternal life.

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"Who's Your Daddy? Gendered Birth Images In the Soteriology of the Epistle of James (1:14-15, 18, 21)," William R. Baker. *EQ* (79.3, 2007).

Those who have an interest in the Epistle of James may find this essay of interest. The author sets out to look at the soteriology of James without addressing the charges that have been made historically against it; i.e. justification by faith alone; general lack of theology. Rather, the author seeks to understand salvation as used in James solely from the context of the epistle. The author's approach is interesting, but may cause some to balk for taking an allegory too far.

The author's main premise is that the birth principle found in James 1:14-18 answers the question about what James means by salvation. While most in the free grace camp will generally agree with the author's treatment of these verses, the allegorical application to salvation and the remainder of the epistle is pressed too far. While the author is correct in saying, "James first introduces its concept of salvation in 1:14-15, 18, 21, which sets the stage for everything else that follows," his analysis of what follows is allegorical instead of exegetical.

In pursuit of his allegory, the author blurs the distinction between truths related to becoming a child of God and spiritual growth. While the author clarifies that James was written to believers, he also treats the term salvation in a soteriological sense. This may betray the author's own view of soteriology as some of his comments suggest. For example, on several occasions the author explains that the condition for becoming born again is to believe and *submit* to God, his will, or the Gospel.

The author's own conclusion sums up the essay nicely:

A cohesive picture of the unique salvation world of the Epistle of James is achieved by taking the images of birth the author has provided that lead to a person's death in 1:14-15 in order to fill in the mirrored images of 1:18 and 1:21 that lead to salvation. What emerges is a multi-generational allegory in which the union of a person with Desire births Sin who births Death, while the union of the Word of Truth (the gospel) with a person births a Christian who births Salvation.

If you can tolerate an allegorical approach, you may find this article interesting and thought provoking.

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