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Editor

Kenneth W. Yates

Associate Editors

Robert N. Wilkin

Shawn C. Lazar

Layout

Shawn C. Lazar

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THE HEALING OF BARTIMAEUS (MARK 10:46-52), PART 1

KENNETH YATES

Editor

I. INTRODUCTION

In a recent article in this journal, I argued that when Jesus used spittle to heal a blind man in stages in Mark 8:22-26, it was a picture of the “blindness” of the disciples. They did not understand what following Jesus meant. The use of the spittle indicated that what Jesus was about to say to them about this topic was disgraceful and disgusting in their eyes. That is the only miracle in the NT where Jesus spits in the face of a person. Such actions, in the first century, were shocking.¹

That is also the only healing Jesus performs in stages. The man is not healed all at once, but in stages. The eyes of these disciples would also be opened in stages.²

The spittle healing of Mark 8:22-26 also begins what can be called the discipleship section of Mark, which runs through Mark 10:52.³ The ending of this section also involves the healing of a blind man—Bartimaeus. Both healings are illustrations of discipleship.

It is not surprising that blindness would be used to describe the disciples in a spiritual sense. In Mark 4:11-12 the Lord uses lack of sight to describe spiritual blindness. Immediately before the healing at Bethsaida the Lord tells the disciples that they are blind. Clearly this is a metaphorical blindness. It will be maintained that the two healings that begin and end the discipleship section are pictures of the metaphorical blindness of the disciples.

¹ Kenneth Yates, “Jesus’ Use of Spittle in Mark 8:22-26,” *JOTGES* 54 (Spring 2015): 3-15.

² Elliott S. Johnson, “Mark VIII.22-26: The Blind Man from Bethsaida,” *NTS* 25 (1978-79), 383; Adelo Y. Collins, *Mark: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2007), 394.

³ John D. Grassmick, “Mark,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, eds. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983), 138.

Understanding these two healings as having metaphorical significance is not reading one's theology into the text. Jesus used miracles to teach deeper spiritual realities. In the Gospel of John the Lord tells us specifically that a healing of blindness had that very purpose. After healing a blind man in John 9, at the conclusion of the chapter Jesus gives the significance of that healing. He has a conversation with the Pharisees:

And Jesus said, "For judgment I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind."

Then some of the Pharisees who were with Him heard these words, and said to Him, "Are we blind also?"

Jesus said to them, "If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you say, 'We see.' Therefore your sin remains" (John 9:39-41).

Here, the reader sees that the healing of this blind man is an illustration of the fact that there are people who are blind, that is, they do not "see." But Christ came so that they might see. This is a clear reference to coming to faith in Him as the Messiah. In addition, there are those who think they see (in this context the Pharisees), but in reality are blind. There is a spiritual blindness on all unbelievers (2 Cor 4:4). When a person comes to faith in Jesus Christ for eternal life, that blindness is removed. In John 9 Jesus was telling the Pharisees they were blind because they thought they had spiritual sight in trying to receive eternal life through good works. They needed to recognize their blindness by seeing who He was and believe in Him.

It is also not surprising that in John's Gospel the blindness in question is one addressed to unbelievers. John's Gospel was written to unbelievers for the purpose that they would look at the miracles Jesus performed, see that He is the Christ, and come to faith (John 20:30-31). The healing of this blind man is the sixth sign in the book. The unbeliever could say, when considering what Jesus did, that he had been blind about who Jesus is.⁴

⁴ Robert N. Wilkin brings up some interesting points about this healing in the Gospel of John. After Jesus heals the blind man and Jesus meets him after he was kicked out of the Sanhedrin, the two have a conversation (John 9:37-38). The man says that he believes in Jesus, but unlike in the evangelistic encounters in John, Jesus does not mention eternal life to this man. These verses are also the only place in John where anyone worships Jesus. These facts lead Wilkin to suggest this man was already a believer, before he met Jesus.

It will be argued below that Mark is written to believers. If that is the case, and John is written to unbelievers, it is completely expected that pictures of blindness can refer to different types of blindness. Believers can also be blind to spiritual realities.

In the discipleship section Jesus tells the disciples three times what following Him involves (8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34). The things Jesus says are shocking. The idea that Jesus was going to be crucified was unacceptable. Each time, the disciples are “blind” to what he is saying. They need to have their eyes opened. The healing of the two blind men form an *inclusio* and ties the section together.

A number of questions need to be asked about these things. What does discipleship mean? Is it the same thing as being eternally saved? If the blind man in Mark 8 is a picture of the disciples, were they saved? Is the teaching in the discipleship section addressed to believers or unbelievers?

II. THE SPIRITUAL CONDITION OF THE DISCIPLES

When we try to determine the spiritual condition of the disciples, we must ask if they knew if Jesus was the Messiah. John tells us that the one who believes that Jesus is the Christ (the Messiah) has eternal life (John 20:30-31). As the Christ, He is the one who gives that life to all who believe in Him for it.

Some maintain that in the Gospel of Mark we are told that the disciples did not know that Jesus was the Messiah until Peter’s confession in 8:29. It is held by many that the disciples were not believers through much of the Gospel. For example, their fear and ignorance about the identity of Christ during the storm on the sea in Mark 4:35-41 leads some to say they were not believers at this stage of Jesus’ ministry.⁵ They

He was an example of an OT saint who believed in the *coming* Messiah. See Robert N. Wilkin, “The Gospel According to John” in *The Grace New Testament Commentary*, vol. 1, ed. Robert N. Wilkin (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2010), 417. In any case, the blindness of this man and his subsequent healing is a picture of spiritual blindness in the Pharisees.

⁵ Jack D. Kingsbury, *Conflict in Mark* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1989), 105; Ernest Best, “Discipleship in Mark: Mark 8:22-10:52,” *SJT* 23 (1981): 326; R. A. Culpepper, *Mark*, Smyth and Helwys Bible Commentary, ed. R. Scott Nash (Macon, GA: Helwys, 2007), 221.

are still “blind” about these things immediately before Peter’s confession, and are even described as having hearts that are hardened (8:17-18). Throughout the discipleship section they only gradually begin to understand who Jesus is. The more radical holders of this view would go as far as to say that Jesus Himself only gradually understood this fact.⁶

Related to this line of thought was the idea expressed by the famous work of William Wrede at the beginning of the 20th century. He suggested that the identity of Jesus’ Messiahship in the Gospel of Mark cannot be determined by the historical veracity of Mark’s account, but by the thought-world of Mark. Mark wants to say that the Messiahship of Jesus can only be understood *after* the cross. Therefore, it was a “secret” until then.⁷ So, for Wrede, even after the confession of Peter in 8:29, the disciples do not understand that Jesus is the Christ.⁸

This, however, is not Mark’s view of the disciples. Even in the beginning of the book we see that the disciples believed that Jesus was the Messiah and followed Him (1:14-20). He gave them authority over demons (3:15) and sent them out to preach the coming of the kingdom and to heal (6:7-13). The Lord also made a distinction between the Twelve and those who were “outside” (4:11).

The disciples knew that Jesus was the Messiah. Peter’s confession simply vocalizes what they have known for some time. The Gospel of John makes it clear that the disciples believed in Him as the Messiah very early in Jesus’ ministry (John 1:42-49). In other words, they were believers and had eternal life. This is critical. If the discipleship section, which begins with the blind man at Bethsaida and ends with the healing of blind Bartimaeus, is directed to the disciples, and if these healings of the blind are a picture of the disciples, the whole section is addressed to people who already have eternal life. Believers can be “blind.” To put it another way, Mark is writing to believers. Discipleship is not the same thing as “becoming a believer.” There is a difference between having eternal life and being a disciple of Christ. This should prevent us from being inconsistent in understanding the teachings found in this section and the two healings.

⁶ Hiekkki Raisanen, *The Messianic Secret in Mark’s Gospel*, trans. Christopher Tuckett (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1990), 39-41.

⁷ William Wrede, *The Messianic Secret* (Cambridge: James Clark, 1971), 129.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 104, 113.

III. INCONSISTENCIES IN MARK 8–10?

Some writers exhibit inconsistencies in interpreting the discipleship section of Mark. Part of this inconsistency, no doubt, arises from the fact that many do not make a distinction between believing in Jesus Christ for eternal life and following Him in discipleship. However, if there is a distinction, the disciples do not need to “see” that Jesus is the Messiah. They already see that. They do need to see what following Him means.

This inconsistency causes some to see in this section of Mark some teachings addressed to unbelievers, and some teachings as addressed to believers. The same thing is true in regard to the healing of the blind men. Grassmick, for example, believes that the healing of the two blind men are pictures of the disciples, but that at least in the case of Bartimaeus the healing illustrates how one obtains eternal life.⁹ When the Lord teaches about what it means to follow Him in 8:31, it refers to how one obtains eternal life. However, in the other two instances (9:33-35; 10:41-44) it is addressed to believers and deals with greatness in the kingdom.¹⁰

Lane and Hiebert show the same inconsistency in regards to Jesus’ teaching about His crucifixion and the cost of following Him. The same is true concerning the two healings. The blind man at Bethsaida is a picture of the disciples (believers). Bartimaeus is an illustration of the unbelieving religious leaders.¹¹

Ryle shows the implications of this inconsistency. He also believes that in the discipleship section sometimes Jesus is telling the unbelieving readers the requirements for eternal life and sometimes he is telling believers how to be great in the coming kingdom. He maintains that both healings deal with how to obtain eternal life. Bartimaeus is an illustration of the fact that obtaining eternal life involves the unbeliever recognizing their deplorable state and the need to persevere.¹²

⁹ Grassmick, “Mark,” 155.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 141-42, 146, 154.

¹¹ William L. Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 287, 309, 382, 389; D. Edmond Hiebert, *Mark: A Portrait of the Servant* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974), 201, 210, 256, 261, 265.

¹² J. C. Ryle, *Mark: Expository Thoughts on the Gospel* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1993), 117, 124, 135, 159, 163.

One can see here that how one interprets the healing of Bartimaeus can impact how he presents the gospel. Does a person have to be aware of his “deplorable state” in order to obtain eternal life. Does one have to persevere in order to obtain it? If one sees Bartimaeus as such an illustration it is easy to come to these conclusions. Eternal life is not received as a free gift by faith in Christ alone, but by our willingness to follow Christ in discipleship.

However, there is no need to hold to these inconsistencies. It is much better to see the teachings of Christ on the cost of following Him, in all three instances, as being addressed to believers and not as the cost for obtaining eternal life. Bartimaeus, like the blind man at Bethsaida, also is a picture of what the believing disciples need to “see.” To argue these points, one must look at the context.

IV. CONTEXT

The first eight chapters of Mark contain many miracles. Starting in 8:22, however, the number of miracles decreases substantially. The healing of Bartimaeus is the last healing in Mark. In the section from 8:22–10:52 teaching, and not miracles, is the emphasis.¹³ Specifically, it deals with teaching on discipleship. Best makes the comment that everything in the section relates either to the Person of Christ or discipleship.¹⁴

It is noteworthy that the two miracles that begin and end this section of diminishing healings both involve the healing of a blind man. Not only do these similar healings form an *inclusio*, certain words are found in both and tie the healings and unit together. Both begin with the words “*kai erchontai eis*” and contain the words *tuphlos* and *anablepō*.¹⁵

These two healings also both function as transitional hinges in Mark’s Gospel. The first healing marks the transition from Christ’s ministry in Galilee to His journey to Jerusalem. The healing of Bartimaeus marks a transition from the journey itself to His entry into the city.¹⁶

¹³ Vernon K. Robbins, “The Healing of Blind Bartimaeus,” *JBL* 92 (1973): 224.

¹⁴ Ernest Best, “Discipleship in Mark: Mark 8:22-10:52,” *SJT* 23 (1981): 324.

¹⁵ J. F. Williams, “Other Followers of Jesus: The Characterization of the Individual from the Crowd in Mark’s Gospel” (PhD diss., Marquette, 1992), 227.

¹⁶ Augustine Stock, “Hinge Transitions in Mark’s Gospel,” *BTB* 15 (1985): 27-29. Evans takes a different view and says that the healing of Bartimaeus begins the next section in the Gospel, where Jesus meets His fate. Even this view makes a connection between the healing of Bartimaeus and the Passion week. See Craig A. Evans, *Mark*

Between the two healings, Jesus is on the way (on the “*hodon*”) to Jerusalem. As mentioned above, He is on His way to die, and three times He tells His disciples this fact. Within the section, there are instructions to the disciples concerning Christ’s fate. There are three predictions of the passion (8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34) and instructions to the disciples on how they should respond in light of it, and what discipleship looks like. Five times before the healing of Bartimaeus, Mark tells us Jesus is on the *hodon* to this destiny (8:32; 9:33, 34; 10:17; 10:32). In the last instance, Mark specifically states He is on the “road” going up to Jerusalem. Being on the “road” is connected with each of the three times Jesus says He will be crucified.¹⁷ As Jesus rides the donkey into Jerusalem, Mark tells us that the people were throwing branches and their clothes on the “road.”

As will be seen, the word “road” occurs twice in the healing of Bartimaeus. Being on the road with Jesus, in the context of discipleship, is connected with this blind beggar.

Connected with this is the idea of “following” Christ. The concept, and the very word itself (*akoloutheō*) is also often repeated in the section [8:34 (twice); 9:38; 10:21, 28, 32]. It also occurs in the healing of Bartimaeus (10:52).

Mark, then, relates discipleship to the passion of Christ. Discipleship means “following” Christ on the “road” to the cross. These ideas are found in the healing of Bartimaeus. This healing occurs at the end of the section of discipleship, immediately before the Lord enters Jerusalem to meet that fate.¹⁸

Specifically, the Lord wants the disciples to understand that the “road” of discipleship and “following” Jesus involve a life of hardship and is costly. A disciple must be willing to give up everything, including his own life (8:35; 10:19). He must become like a child in status, and not seek greatness as defined by the world, in order to serve others (9:35; 10:44). Much confusion and inconsistency in interpreting this section of Mark would be avoided if we simply realized that these things *cannot* refer to receiving eternal life. The reception of eternal life is free and

8:27-16:20, vol. 34A, Word Biblical Commentary, ed. Ralph P. Martin (Nashville, TN: Word, 2001), 126.

¹⁷ Best, “Discipleship in Mark: Mark 8:22-10:52,” 328.

¹⁸ Paul J. Achtemeier, “And He Followed Him: Miracles and Discipleship in Mark 10:46-52,” *Semeia* 11 (1978): 115.

costs nothing (Eph 2:8-9; John 4:10). In this section of Mark, which deals with discipleship, Jesus is instructing His disciples about something that is extremely costly.

It is noteworthy that the two healings of the blind men, healings that begin and end this section on discipleship, occur after the Lord rebukes His disciples. Both in 8:17-21 and 10:42-45 the disciples do not have a clear understanding of what discipleship means. One might say they were “blind.”

Specifically, in the verses immediately before the healing of Bartimaeus, the Lord tells the disciples they need to serve others, just like He came to do (10:42-45). The reason He gives them this instruction is because they were trying to be great by taking advantage of each other. They were seeking others, even within the group of disciples, to serve them. Christ’s first coming was characterized by humble submission to God and service to others. This submission led Him to the cross.¹⁹ They will be asked to take the same attitude if they want to “follow” Him. Their path may take them to the same destination. This is a costly proposition indeed. As in the case with all Jesus’ predictions of His upcoming death, this teaching was shocking.

Even though they are believers and had eternal life, they were blind to these things. They thought they were going to Jerusalem to reign with Christ (10:37). They thought Jesus was going to be installed as the King. Instead, Jesus is talking about His crucifixion and the heavy costs of following Him on the path He is going. Like the healing of the blind man that begins the section, it was like they had been spit in the face.

Through the discipleship section of Mark, the Lord tries to cure the disciples of their blindness. These attempts end at the account of Bartimaeus. Bartimaeus is a picture of what the disciples need to see. He is one who clearly sees what discipleship means.

If the above discussion is correct, we would expect that Bartimaeus was a believer. In the first verses of the account, all indications point to this conclusion.

¹⁹ David K. Lowery, “A Theology of Mark,” in *A Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, ed. Roy B. Zuck (Chicago, IL: Moody, 1994), 74.

V. THE SPIRITUAL CONDITION OF BARTIMAEUS (MARK 10:46-48)

A. INTRODUCTION TO THE ACCOUNT

Some form critics seem to recognize that the account of the healing of Bartimaeus is used by Mark to make a spiritual point. They point out that the healing itself is not the emphasis. Even though a miracle is clearly performed here, and form critics recognize the category of “miracle story,” this miracle is different. Usually there is a dramatic word spoken or some kind of gesture accompanying the miracle. In addition, there is often the mention of astonishment on the part of those who witness it. None of those things occur here. It seems that Bartimaeus, not the miracle, is the emphasis. Because of these things, Steinhauser refuses to even call it a miracle story.²⁰

Achtemeier and Stein both agree that the miracle is not the main point and the emphasis is on the beggar. They label it a “call” story since Bartimaeus follows the Lord. Bartimaeus is specifically named. He is put forth as one of exemplary character.²¹

If indeed the point of the healing of Bartimaeus is to offer a picture of discipleship, all of these things would be expected. Mark wants his readers to consider what this man represents.

B. A TRANSLATION

In the first three verses of the account, the reader meets Bartimaeus. There are things in these verses which will be dealt with in part 2 of the article. Here, the emphasis will be on the picture of Bartimaeus’ spiritual condition. When he meets Jesus, is he a believer or not?

Verse 46: And they came to Jericho. And as He was going out²² from Jericho, along with His disciples and a large

²⁰ Michael G. Steinhauser, “The Form of the Bartimaeus Narrative (Mark 10:46-52),” *NTS* 32 (1986): 583.

²¹ Robert H. Stein, *Mark*, Baker Exegetical Commentary, ed. Robert W. Yarbrough and Robert H. Stein (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2008), 491; Achtemeier, “And He Followed Him,” *Semeia* 11 (1978): 115.

²² The change from third person plural to singular is typical of Mark. Collins, *Mark: A Commentary*, 508.

crowd, the son of Timaeus,²³ Bartimaeus, a blind man begging,²⁴ was sitting by the road.

Verse 47: And having heard that it was Jesus the Nazarene,²⁵ he began to cry out and to say, “Son of David, Jesus, have mercy on me.”

Verse 48: And many were rebuking him, in order that he might be silenced. But he cried out much more,²⁶ “Son of David, have mercy on me.”

One could give a simple outline of the account of Bartimaeus. If so, verses 46-48 could be called “Bartimaeus’s call to the Lord.”

C. BARTIMAEUS’ CALL TO THE LORD (10:46-48)

In these verses, the Lord enters Jericho. While He is leaving the city, Bartimaeus calls upon Him. If Mark is using Bartimaeus as an illustration, it is clear he is an illustration of one who believes in Jesus.

1. Verse 46.

The opening phrase *kai erchontai eis Ierichō* takes the reader back to 8:22 and the healing of the blind man at Bethsaida that begins with the same words. The account of Bartimaeus forms an *inclusio* with the

²³ It is not clear whether the name was originally Greek or Semitic. The common Greek name is accented on the first syllable, not the second. Henry Swete argues for a Semitic origin, *The Gospel According to St. Mark: The Greek Text with Introduction, Notes and Indices* (London: MacMillan, 1913), 242. Wellhausen, however, suggests that the origin is Greek and that *timai* is the Semitic abbreviation of the original *timotheos*, Julius Wellhausen, *Das Evangelium Marci Ubersetzt Und Erklart* (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1903), 85.

²⁴ The majority of manuscripts have the participle *prosaĩtōn* instead of the noun *prosaĩtēs*. The Alexandrian witnesses support the noun. Metzger says that the participle replaced the noun because the noun is a rare and late Greek word. If one accepts the Majority Text he could easily argue here that the participle is the original. Here is an example where Metzger adopts the Alexandrian witness but not with a great deal of confidence. Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (United Bible Societies, 1971), 108.

²⁵ The article would normally go with the proper name, but with a substantive in apposition the article goes with the noun in apposition. A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1934), 760.

²⁶ *Pollō* is a dative of measure, and when combined with *mallon* means “much more.” Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar: Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 167.

previous healing and provides the conclusion of the section that began in 8:22.

Part of the vividness of Mark's account is seen in the fact that Mark gives the name of the blind beggar. His name is given as *huios Timaiou, Bartimaios*. This is the only Gospel that names the blind man. In addition, this is the only time in Mark where the person who is healed is named. This may link Bartimaeus with discipleship because perhaps his name was known because he had become a disciple of the Lord.²⁷ In simple terms, this beggar was known in the early church. One could assume he was part of that church. He was not somebody who simply experienced a healing and was never heard of again.

If Mark's main interest in this pericope is discipleship, it would also explain why neither Matthew nor Luke mention his name in the parallel passages. In addition, in Mark, disciples are named when Jesus calls them.²⁸

Usually, when Mark uses an Aramaic name, he places it first. Here, he places it after the Greek phrase. The use of "bar" (=son of) suggests a Jewish and Palestinian context.²⁹ Johnson says this points to a very early oral tradition behind this account and supports its authenticity.³⁰ France suggests that there may even be a stronger emphasis on discipleship by the name given. The rare way of expressing the beggar's name implies that the father of the beggar was known and may also have become a follower of the Lord.³¹

Mark tells us that Bartimaeus is a blind beggar that is sitting by the *hodon*. In one sense, the word is not figurative. Sitting by the road would have been a good place for a beggar to position himself as religious pilgrims would have been travelling that road. They were on their way to Jerusalem for the religious feast of Passover. In theory, they would have been in a generous mood towards the less fortunate.³²

²⁷ I. V. Olekama, *The Healing of Bartimaeus in the Markan Context* (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 1999), 87.

²⁸ Williams, "Other Followers of Jesus: The Characterization of the Individual from the Crowd in Mark's Gospel", 230.

²⁹ Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner, 1971), 90. Jeremias states that the rare word for rabbi in v 51 and the use of the title "Son of David" in vv 47-48 point to the same conclusion.

³⁰ Johnson, "Mark 10:46-52: Blind Bartimaeus," 193.

³¹ France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 423.

³² Stein, *Mark*, 194.

It is also true, however, that *hodon* in this verse has a figurative meaning. It forms an *inclusio* with the same word in the last verse of the pericope (v 52). At the end of the pericope it relates to following Christ—following Christ on the road to Jerusalem. Here, in v 46, Bartimaeus is sitting by the road. He is a marginalized member of society.³³ He is a blind beggar. People are passing him by. Christ has just said that He has come to serve others (vv 42-45). Bartimaeus is an example of such a person.

2. Verse 47.

While sitting by the road as it led out of Jericho, Bartimaeus hears the noise of the large crowd that is following Jesus as it enters the other end of the city. No doubt he asks a bystander what the noise means and is told that Jesus the Nazarene has entered into the city.

This verse and the ones that follow clearly show that Bartimaeus has heard of Jesus. He has heard of his healing abilities. A man in his physical condition would probably never have an opportunity to gain an audience with Him. This would be his only chance to be healed.³⁴ Bartimaeus cannot see Him and has no way of knowing when He will pass by.

As a result, he begins to cry out to get His attention. To get His attention, he calls him by the double vocative *huie David Iēsou*, showing that he knows exactly who he is addressing. This is another example of the vividness of the account since the second vocative is unnecessary. It points to an emphatic, emotional address that an eyewitness would have remembered.³⁵

There is wide disagreement among scholars as to the significance of the title “Son of David.” One issue is whether it was a messianic title. Another issue is what type of messiah the Jews in the first century anticipated.

Cranfield is one who holds that it was not a Messianic title but a polite address to somebody who was descended from David, or who was a devout Israelite. He feels the title only later became a Christian

³³ Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 329.

³⁴ Lenski, *The Interpretation of Mark's Gospel*, 470.

³⁵ Wallace, *Greek Grammar: Beyond the Basics*, 71.

designation for the Messiah.³⁶ Chilton claims that in the first century one could be called “Son of David” without being considered the Messiah.³⁷ Duling maintains that for the first century Jew the title was ambiguous.³⁸ Achtemeier says that the title was unimportant for Mark’s purposes. It was simply a part of the original tradition the writer received. For Mark it simply meant that the person was worthy to follow.³⁹

The pseudepigraphal Psalms of Solomon, which dates from the first century BC, contains the title “Son of David” as Messianic.⁴⁰ Lohse says that the title sprung from the OT titles “sprout of David” and “shoot of David” in Isa 11:10 and Jer 23:5. The idea of a future ruler from the lineage of David was indeed widely held among the Jews in the first century based upon 2 Sam 7:12-16.⁴¹

The title “Son of David” is also used in the OT Apocrypha as a designation for the Messiah.⁴² Perhaps most importantly, in Mark 12:35, the Lord shows that at least the scribes of His day associated the Messiah with the title “Son of David”.

If Bartimaeus recognized Jesus as the Messiah, what kind did he expect Him to be? Some maintain the Jews of the first century looked for a miracle-working Son of David based upon certain beliefs concerning Solomon. Solomon was a son of David that performed miracles, especially exorcisms.⁴³ In contemporary literature Solomon is called the Son of David and called upon to have mercy on an elderly man who is being oppressed.⁴⁴ Josephus also records the idea that Solomon was known in Josephus’ day as a miracle worker.⁴⁵ Qumran literature also

³⁶ C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Gospel According to Mark*, Cambridge Greek Commentary, ed. C. F. D. Moule (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1972), 345.

³⁷ Bruce D. Chilton, “Jesus Ben David: Reflections on the Davidsohnfrage,” *JSNT* 14 (1982): 99.

³⁸ Dennis C. Duling, “Solomon, Exorcism, and the Son of David,” *Harvard Theological Review* 68 (1975): 235.

³⁹ Achtemeier, “And He Followed Him,” 124.

⁴⁰ *Psalms of Solomon* 17:21-32.

⁴¹ E. Lohse, “Son of David,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 8 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1968), 480.

⁴² 2 *Esdras* 12:32.

⁴³ Loren Fisher, “Can This Be the Son of David,” in *Jesus and the Historian*, ed. F. T. Trotter (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1968), 85.

⁴⁴ *Testament of Solomon* 20:1.

⁴⁵ Josephus, *Ant.* 8.2.5.

indicates that the Messiah would be a miracle worker that healed the wounded, gave sight to the blind, and even raised the dead.⁴⁶

Based upon these references, Duling says that Bartimaeus' cry of "Son of David" meant that he was calling for a great miracle worker like Solomon, who would have mercy upon him and cure his blindness.⁴⁷ In his cry, Bartimaeus was not thinking of a conquering Messiah or a Messiah that one was to follow.

The other view of the title "Son of David" refers to a nationalistic Messianic king. The Psalms of Solomon say that the Son of David will be a king who rules Israel, will judge the nations, and crush Israel's enemies. This is the type of Messiah he would be.⁴⁸

Based upon the strong emphasis on discipleship in this section of Mark, it is unlikely that Bartimaeus only looked for a healing from Jesus. Stein points out that the vocative "Jesus" in this account, Mark 1:1, and Peter's confession in 8:29 equates the title "Son of David" with the title "Christ."⁴⁹ There was clearly a Jewish expectation of a kingly Messiah. It is not surprising that Bartimaeus had heard of the healings that Jesus performed, since that knowledge was extensive among the Jews (1:32-34; 2:1-2; 3:20; 4:1-2, 36; 5:21-34; 7:24-30).⁵⁰ Bartimaeus' request in this pericope shows he had indeed heard. If Bartimaeus saw Jesus as the kingly Son of David as well, it would not be a stretch for him to combine the idea of a kingly and miracle-performing Messiah. The OT speaks of the blessings of the kingdom, which includes the blind receiving their sight (Isa 29:18; 35:5; 61:1).⁵¹

When one considers the connection of this healing with Jesus' immediate entry into Jerusalem that follows, the evidence strongly suggests that Bartimaeus' address of Jesus as the "Son of David" means he believed Him to be the Christ. *This is the first time in the Gospel of Mark that He is addressed by this particular title.* When He arrives in Jerusalem the people proclaim the coming of the kingdom of David (11:10). The section of discipleship (8:22-10:52), which the healing of Baritmaeus concludes, begins with Peter proclaiming that Jesus is the Christ (8:29).

⁴⁶ Scroll 4Q521 (Messianic Apocalypse).

⁴⁷ Duling, "Solomon, Exorcism, and the Son of David," 246-48.

⁴⁸ *Psalms of Solomon* 17:21-40.

⁴⁹ Stein, *Mark*, 495.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ Olekama, *The Healing of Bartimaeus in the Markan Context*, 71.

That proclamation was also tied with a healing of a blind man. It is not surprising that the end of the section would also involve a proclamation that Jesus is the Messiah. Evans and Edwards both conclude that the title has an unmistakable messianic ring.⁵² Cranfield and Bock take this idea a step further. If the title “Son of David” was not a common title for the Messiah in the first century, then Mark’s point might be that Bartimaeus, even though blind, had more sight than those who could see.⁵³

3. Verse 48.

In this verse, Bartimaeus calls Jesus *the Son of David* a second time. All the time, people are trying to silence him. It is significant that it is the crowds (*polloi*) and not Christ, that try to rebuke Bartimaeus in order to silence him. Previously in Mark, Jesus is the one who rebukes others and tells them to be silent. The verb *epitimaō* occurs in 1:25, where the Lord rebukes the demons and tells them to be silent. The demons call the Lord “Jesus,” the “Nazarene,” and the “holy one of God,” all of which have parallels with this passage. In 3:12, a demon calls Him the Son of God and Christ rebukes him and orders him not to make Him known. In 8:30, after Peter says He is the Christ, the Lord “rebukes” the disciples and tells them not to tell anybody about Himself. This, then, is the first time in Mark that Christ does not rebuke somebody who publicly says that He is the Messiah.⁵⁴

We also see here, with Bartimaeus, that there is not a call to be silent about Jesus’ Messiahship. This is due to the fact that the Lord is approaching Jerusalem where He will declare Himself as the Messiah in the context of suffering.⁵⁵ In any event, Bartimaeus, in the Gospel of Mark is a blind man who sees better than anybody we meet in the Gospel. He knows that Jesus is the Son of David. If he is an illustration of anybody, he is an illustration of a believer.

⁵² Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 330. See also Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 129.

⁵³ Cranfield, *The Gospel According to Mark*, 346; Darrell L. Bock, *The Gospel of Mark*, Cornerstone Biblical Commentary, ed. Philip W. Comfort (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2002), 496.

⁵⁴ John N. Suggit, “Exegesis and Proclamation: Bartimaeus and Christian Discipleship,” *JTSA* 74 (1991): 59.

⁵⁵ France, *The Gospel of Mark*, 424.

VI. CONCLUSION

A believer is someone who believes that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of David. Bartimaeus believed that. He believed that *before* he was healed of his blindness. But there is a spiritual blindness, as it relates to discipleship, that a believer can have. The disciples in Mark had that problem. In the next article, it will be seen that Bartimaeus does not have that problem. Unlike the blind man at Bethsaida, and the disciples themselves, he is one who sees clearly.

JEWISH GENIUS AND THE EXISTENCE OF GOD

SHAWN C. LAZAR

Associate Editor

“I will insist that the Hebrews have done more to civilize men than any other nation. If I were an atheist, and believed in blind eternal fate, I should still believe that fate had ordained the Jews to be the most essential instrument for civilizing nations. If I were an atheist of the other sect, who believe, or pretend to believe, that all is ordered by chance, I should believe that chance had ordered the Jews to preserve and propagate to all mankind the doctrine of a supreme, intelligent, wise, almighty Sovereign of the universe, which I believe to be the great essential principle of all morality, and consequently of all civilization.”

–John Adams

Second President of the United States¹

I. INTRODUCTION

Arguments for the existence of God have progressed beyond the ability of ordinary people to understand them. The scientific and philosophical arguments can be so sophisticated it often takes a PhD in both fields to even understand what is being said, let alone determine which arguments are true.

Is there a practical, easily understood, argument for the existence of God?

I believe there is, and it lies in the Jewish people.

It has been widely observed that the Jewish people are truly exceptional. John Adams noticed it in the quote above. And in his essay, “Concerning the Jews,” Mark Twain made a similar observation:

¹Quoted in Herbert Friedenwald, “Adams, John,” *The Jewish Encyclopedia*. See <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/767-adams-john>. Accessed February 24, 2016.

If the statistics are right, the Jews constitute but one per cent of the human race...Properly the Jew ought hardly to be heard of. He is as prominent on the planet as any other people, and his commercial importance is extravagantly out of proportion to the smallness of his bulk. His contributions to the world's list of great names in literature, science, art, music, finance, medicine, and abstruse learning are also away out of proportion to the weakness of his numbers.

Twain noted that while competing civilizations such as the Egyptians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, and Romans “filled the planet with sound and splendor” only to later vanish, the Jew, by contrast,

saw them all, beat them all, and is now what he always was, exhibiting no decadence, no infirmities of age, no weakening of his parts, no slowing of his energies, no dulling of his alert and aggressive mind. All things are mortal but the Jew; all other forces pass, but he remains. What is the secret of his immortality?²

Twain raised an interesting and controversial question about the phenomenon of Jewish exceptionalism. With respect to their modest population, the Jews are vastly overrepresented in every major field of human achievement. What is the explanation for their prominence? And what is the significance of it, if any?

I will argue that Jewish exceptionalism provides us with concrete evidence for the existence of the God of Israel.³ I call this “The Argument from Jewish Genius,” or more broadly, “The Argument from Jewish Exceptionalism.” My argument will proceed in this way.

First, I will establish that, according to the OT, God has both chosen the Jews and promised to bless them.

Second, I will show the OT presents evidence for God's existence based on what He has done in and through Israel.

Third, I will show that the kind of blessings God gave to the Jews in the OT are evident today.

² Mark Twain, “Concerning the Jews,” in *Collected Tales, Sketches, Speeches, and Essays: Volume 2: 1891–1910* (New York, NY: Library of America, 1992), 370, emphasis added.

³ But this argument may also serve as corollary evidence for those Christians who believe, as this author does, that God still blesses the Jews as a uniquely chosen people (e.g., Christian Dispensationalists).

Finally, I will conclude that positing the existence of Israel's God is a reasonable explanation of the evidence.

II. BIBLICAL EVIDENCE THAT GOD CHOSE THE JEWS

There is little controversy that the Jews have historically claimed to be God's chosen people with a special claim to His blessing. That belief is written across the OT.

For example, we read that God chose the Jews out of all the nations of the earth:

“For you are a holy people to the Lord your God, and the Lord has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples who are on the face of the earth” (Deut 14:2).

They were chosen despite, or precisely because of, their apparent insignificance:

“The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the Lord loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt” (Deut 7:7-8).

In addition, this relationship was not meant to be temporary, but everlasting:

“And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you in their generations, *for an everlasting covenant*, to be God to you and your descendants after you” (Gen 17:7, emphasis added).

Moreover, God promised to bless the Jews, and through them, to bless the whole world:

*“I will make you a great nation;
I will bless you
And make your name great;
And you shall be a blessing.*

I will bless those who bless you,
 And I will curse him who curses you;
*And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed*⁴
 (Gen 12:2-3, emphasis added).

Suffice to say, there is more than ample evidence to show that, according to Jewish self-understanding, Israel's God exists, chose the Jews, and promised to bless them. Those are significant claims. If God existed, you would expect there to be evidence He has kept those promises. We will look at some such evidence in Section IV. However, in the next section, we will examine the kind of evidence used by the OT writers to prove God's existence. This will help us to know what kind of evidence to look for in our own day.

III. OLD TESTAMENT EVIDENCE FOR GOD'S EXISTENCE

It has often been noted that you cannot find philosophical arguments for God's existence in the OT.⁴ But it is a mistake to assume the OT makes no arguments for God's existence at all. In fact, the OT presents some very concrete evidence in defense of the existence of Israel's God. The OT writers believed the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob could, and would, demonstrate His existence to the Gentile nations (and to unbelieving Jews) *through His dealings with Israel*. That is to say, the apologetic evidence was Israel-centric.

A. EGYPT AND THE PROMISED LAND

To the OT writers, perhaps the greatest proof of God's existence was the Exodus, when God delivered the Hebrews from the experience of Egyptian slavery.

In Deuteronomy 4, Moses recounted the story of Israel's rebellious history and appealed to their recent escape. Moses thought the Exodus experience should have convinced Israel to believe in the Lord and to be faithful to Him:

“Has any people heard the voice of God speaking from the midst of the fire, as you have heard it, and survived? Or has

⁴ For example, Brian Davies, *Thomas Aquinas on God and Evil* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011), 121.

a god tried to go to take for himself a nation from within another nation by trials, by signs and wonders and by war and by a mighty hand and by an outstretched arm and by great terrors, as the Lord your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes? To you it was shown *that you might know that the Lord, He is God*; there is no other besides Him” (Deut 4:33-35, emphasis added).

Moses believed this evidence should have been enough to convince the Israelites to believe in God and to be faithful.

After the Exodus from Egypt, Israel wandered in the wilderness for forty years before finally entering the Promised Land. To do that they had to cross the Jordan River, which was overflowing. In a striking parallel with the parting of the Red Sea, we read that God also parted the Jordan River allowing Israel to once again cross over on dry land (Joshua 3). Joshua thought this miracle was convincing proof of God’s existence. “By this you shall know that the living God is among you,” he told them (Josh 3:9). And Joshua expected the Gentile nations to come to the same realization:

“For the Lord your God dried up the waters of the Jordan before you until you had crossed, just as the Lord your God had done to the Red Sea, which He dried up before us until we had crossed; *that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the Lord is mighty*, so that you may fear the Lord your God forever” (Josh 4:23-24, emphasis added).

In point of fact, some Gentiles *did* come to believe in Israel’s God. For example, when the Israelite spies were sent to Jericho, they were protected by Rahab, a prostitute. She explained how she came to faith in Israel’s God after hearing about the Exodus:

“I know that the Lord has given you the land, and that the terror of you has fallen on us, and that all the inhabitants of the land have melted away before you. For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, and what you did to the two kings of the Amorites who were beyond the Jordan, to Sihon and Og, whom you utterly destroyed. When we heard it, our hearts melted and no courage remained in any man any longer because of you; for the Lord your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath” (Josh 2:9-11, emphasis added).

B. MILITARY VICTORIES

Military victories are another OT proof for God's existence. The most famous example would be David defeating Goliath. David expected the Gentiles to realize that, if he beat Goliath, then Israel's God was real:

Then David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with a sword, a spear, and a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have taunted. This day the Lord will deliver you up into my hands, and I will strike you down and remove your head from you. And I will give the dead bodies of the army of the Philistines this day to the birds of the sky and the wild beasts of the earth, *that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel*" (1 Sam 17:45-46, emphasis added).

Similarly, when Israel was threatened by the Assyrians, King Hezekiah prayed for their deliverance, expecting it would prove to the world that Israel's God was the only true God:

"Now therefore, O Lord our God, I pray, save us from his hand, *that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that You are the Lord God, You alone*" (2 Kgs 19:19, emphasis added).

C. ANSWERED PRAYER

A final typical category of OT proof for God's existence is answered prayer. For example, Solomon prayed that God would use the newly built Temple to prove His existence to the Gentiles by answering their prayers:

"Also *concerning the foreigner* who is not of Your people Israel, when he comes from a far country for Your name's sake (for they will hear of Your great name and Your mighty hand, and of Your outstretched arm); when he comes and prays toward this house, hear in heaven Your dwelling place, and do according to all for which the foreigner calls to You, *in order that all the peoples of the earth may know Your name, to fear You*, as do Your people Israel, and that they may know that this house which I have built is called by Your name" (1 Kgs 8:41-43, emphasis added).

We also have the famous example of Elijah, who challenged the prophets of Baal to a contest, to see which god would send fire to consume an

animal sacrifice. Elijah hoped the people would know that Israel's God was real. After Elijah won the contest, the people did confess their faith in Israel's God:

“O Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, today *let it be known that You are God in Israel* and that I am Your servant and I have done all these things at Your word. Answer me, O Lord, answer me, *that this people may know that You, O Lord, are God*, and that You have turned their heart back again.” Then the fire of the Lord fell and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. *When all the people saw it, they fell on their faces; and they said, “The Lord, He is God; the Lord, He is God”* (1 Kgs 18:36-39, emphasis added).

Lastly, consider the case of Naaman, a commander in the Syrian army who was desperate to be cured of leprosy. Naaman went to see the prophet Elisha who instructed him to immerse himself in the Jordan River. When Naaman came up out of the water completely cured, his faith was dramatically changed:

When he returned to the man of God with all his company, and came and stood before him, he said, “*Behold now, I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel; so please take a present from your servant now*” (2 Kgs 5:15, emphasis added).

In sum, answered prayer was thought to be evidence for the existence of Israel's God and a reason to believe in Him.

D. SUMMARY

The point of this section has been to show that the OT writers understood the importance of proving God's existence, and they expected to do so, not based on abstract philosophical arguments for generic theism, but based on God's interventions in and through His people, the Jews.

This raises the question: Is there comparable, contemporary, evidence that God is still acting on behalf of the Jewish people? Is there anything so noteworthy about the Jews, that God's existence would be the best explanation for it?

IV. THE MODERN PHENOMENON OF JEWISH EXCEPTIONALISM

If Israel's God *did not exist*, you would expect the Jews to be no more or less significant than any other ethnic group of comparable size. However, if Israel's God *did exist*, you would expect them to have nothing less than a worldwide influence. Which option is best supported by the evidence? Are the Jews ordinary or exceptional?

This section will argue the Jewish people are clearly exceptional.

Despite the fact that Jews make up just 3% of the US population, and 0.2% of the world's population (for an approximate total of 13,854,800 souls⁵) their influence and achievements far exceed the modest size of their population. As Charles Murray writes, there is an "extravagant overrepresentation of Jews, relative to their small numbers, in the top ranks of the arts, sciences, law, medicine, finance, entrepreneurship, and the media."⁶ This extravagant overrepresentation is persuasive evidence for the existence of Israel's God.

Consider several OT paradigms of Jewish blessing that are still evident today.

A. JEWISH GENIUS

1. King Solomon and Jewish intelligence.

The Jewish reputation for intelligence has a long history, beginning, perhaps, with King Solomon. His collection of Proverbs has been studied by millions of people for thousands of years, and stands as one of the paradigmatic examples of ancient wisdom literature. We read that Solomon acquired his wisdom as a gift from God (1 Kgs 3:5-9) and became the wisest man who ever lived (1 Kgs 4:29-34). His reputation attracted the attention of the Queen of Sheba who came to see for herself whether the rumors were true. Notice how Solomon's gift of wisdom had an apologetic effect on her:

"It was a true report which I heard in my own land about your words and your wisdom. Nevertheless I did not

⁵ Sergio Della Pergola, "World Jewish Population, 2013," p. 4. See <http://www.bjpa.org/Publications/downloadFile.cfm?FileID=18230#page=1&zoom=auto,0,849>. Accessed December 11, 2013.

⁶ Charles Murray, "Jewish Genius," in *Commentary Magazine* (April 2007). See: <http://www.commentarymagazine.com/article/jewish-genius>. Accessed February 15, 2013.

believe the reports, until I came and my eyes had seen it. And behold, the half was not told me. You exceed in wisdom and prosperity the report which I heard. How blessed are your men, how blessed are these your servants who stand before you continually and hear your wisdom. *Blessed be the Lord your God* who delighted in you to set you on the throne of Israel; because the Lord loved Israel forever, therefore He made you king, to do justice and righteousness” (1 Kgs 10:6-9, emphasis added).

The Queen recognized that Solomon’s gift was so unusual it must have had a divine origin. Despite being a Gentile, she confessed her faith in Israel’s God.

2. Modern Jewish genius.

Skeptics will dismiss as pure myth the claim that a Jewish king was the wisest man in the world. And yet, ironically, if those same skeptics were asked to name the most intelligent person of the modern era, many would cite Albert Einstein, the famed Jewish physicist.

What’s even more striking is that Einstein is only one example of the widely acknowledged phenomenon of Jewish genius,⁷ as confirmed by modern intelligence tests.⁸

In his article, “Jewish Genius,” Charles Murray documents the overrepresentation of Jews among those with exceptionally high IQs.⁹ Murray informs us that IQ tests are normed at 100, while the Jewish mean has been measured between 108 to 115¹⁰, putting them in the 75th percentile. The number of Jews with IQs of 140 or higher is nearly six times the number for the Gentile population.

This has been confirmed by a number of studies conducted in English and American schools. An IQ test conducted on Californian children from the 1920’s found that 10.5% of those scoring 135 or higher were

⁷ Mark Twain’s quote about Jewish achievement could be replicated in the works of Lord Ashley, the Count de Gobineau (1853), Francis Galton (1869), John Fraser (1915), Joseph Jacobs (1919), and Thorstein Veblen (1919). See Richard Lynn, *The Chosen People: A Study of Jewish Intelligence and Achievement* (Whitefish, MT: Washington Summit Publishers, 2011), 3-5.

⁸ For a list of such quotes see Lynn, *The Chosen People*, 2-5.

⁹ Murray, “Jewish Genius.”

¹⁰ Steven Pinker, “The Lessons of the Ashkenazim: Groups and Genes,” *New Republic Online* (July 26, 2006). See http://pinker.wjh.harvard.edu/articles/media/2006_06_17_thenewrepublic.html. Accessed online December 13, 2013.

Jewish. A survey of IQ scores done in London schools around the same time found that Jewish students scored nearly fifteen IQ points higher than non-Jews.¹¹ A 1954 study in the New York public school system identifying all the children with IQ's of 170 or higher found that twenty-four of the twenty-eight children were Jewish.¹² When the SAT has only two parts and 1600 possible points, Jews had an average SAT score of 1161 (compared to the US average of 1020).¹³ Fully 1/4 of white Americans with IQs above 145 are Jewish.¹⁴

Put bluntly, intelligence tests have shown that God's chosen people *are the world's smartest ethnic group*.¹⁵

3. *The academy.*

Intelligence is a substantial determinant for success in other areas of life and the academy provides an example of how a high IQ has translated into Jewish overrepresentation in education.

For example, in turn-of-the-century Vienna, Jews comprised 40% of all gymnasium graduates, 1/3 of all students at the University of Vienna, and 17% of all Austrian university students.¹⁶ Before WWII, in Hungary and in the former Soviet Union, 1/4 of all university students were Jews.¹⁷

Jewish predominance in the academy was so prodigious it gave rise to the so-called "Jewish Quotas," where many universities in Europe and America (including Harvard), limited the number of Jewish students allowed to be enrolled.

When the quotas were struck down, Jewish overrepresentation in the academy once again became pronounced. For example, in America, 30% of Ivy League faculty and 23% of their student bodies are Jewish,¹⁸ while in 2009, four out of eight Ivy League schools had Jewish Presidents.

¹¹ Jon Entine, *Abraham's Children: Race, Identity, and the DNA of the Chosen People* (New York, NY: Grand Central Publishing, 2007), 300.

¹² Murray, *Human Accomplishment*, 292.

¹³ Entine, *Abraham's Children*, 295-96.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 302.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 296, 301.

¹⁶ Yuri Slezkine, *The Jewish Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 49.

¹⁷ Entine, *Abraham's Children*, 297.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 296.

4. *The professions.*

This emphasis on education is reflected in the Jewish presence in professions such as medicine, engineering, law, and journalism.

On the one hand, Jews have had a long history in such professions. As Richard Lynn notes, they were well known as “doctors, astronomers, and officials” in the courts of Baghdad, Cordoba, and in the Ottoman Empire.¹⁹ But the extent of Jewish predominance in these professions is supported by modern record keeping.

So, for example, in turn-of-the-century Vienna, 62% of the lawyers, 50% of the doctors and dentists, 45% of the medical faculty, and 25% of the total faculty, were Jewish.²⁰

Similarly, in the Soviet Union, in 1939, 20% of physicians and scientists were Jews.²¹ To take Leningrad as one example, in 1939, Jews made up 69.4% of all dentists, 58.6% of all pharmacists, 45% of all doctors, 34.7% of all legal consultants, and 31.3% of all writers, journalists, and editors.²²

5. *The sciences.*

Jewish achievements in the natural sciences have likewise been extraordinary. Although there is relatively little evidence of Jewish achievement in the era between AD 1150–1492,²³ this is probably due to the severe legal restrictions that barred Jews from many occupations.²⁴ However, once those legal exclusions were lifted in the 1800s, the proportion of significantly gifted Jewish scientists grew exponentially.

From 1800 to 1950, nearly 30% of all significant scientists were Jewish. Between 1951 and 2000, 29% of all Nobel Prizes in the Sciences

¹⁹ Lynn, *Chosen People*, 21–24.

²⁰ Slezkine, *Jewish Century*, 50.

²¹ Entine, *Abraham’s Children*, 297.

²² Slezkine, *Jewish Century*, 224.

²³ Charles Murray reports upon a study done by historian George Sarton, who surveyed the top scientists in the world, from the years 1150 to 1300. Of the 626 names, 95 were Jews, though only two (Montaigne and Spinoza) warrant mention in most histories. See Murray, *Human Accomplishment* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2003), 275. By contrast, Raphael Patai estimated that Jews were overrepresented among gifted scientists by a factor of 32/1 during AD 1150–1300 and by a factor of 18/1 from AD 1000–1492, though Lynn doubts that Jewish contributions to science during this period are as notable as Patai assumes. See Lynn, *Chosen People*, 7.

²⁴ Murray, *Human Accomplishment*, 276.

were won by Jews.²⁵ Likewise, Jews won 25% of all the Fields Medals for Mathematics and 37.5% of the Wolf Prizes in Mathematics.

How is it possible for such a small ethnic group to gain roughly 1/3 of the scientific world's most prestigious prizes?

6. *Worldview.*

Lastly, consider how many Jewish thinkers have given birth to ideas, philosophies, and religions that have changed the course of world history.

Just think of the cumulative influence of Abraham, Moses, Jesus, the Apostle Paul, Marx, Freud, and Einstein. Is there any corner of the world that has not been changed—for good or for ill—by the teachings of these Jewish men?

What is the explanation for this Jewish genius, and the worldwide extent of its influence? Is it the result of blind chance? Or is it evidence of something—or Someone—more?

B. JEWISH WEALTH

From Shakespearian tragedies to wartime propaganda posters, everyone is familiar with the stereotype of the wealthy—and greedy—Jew.²⁶ While the stereotype is loathsome, the OT does make it clear that wealth was a part of God's blessing to His people.²⁷ It also makes clear that this wealth would have apologetic value, by serving as a sign to unbelieving Gentiles:

“The Lord will command the blessing upon you in your barns and in all that you put your hand to, and He will bless you in the land which the Lord your God gives you...
So all the peoples of the earth will see that you are called by the

²⁵ Ibid., 282.

²⁶ Slezkine mentions how most socialist Jewish memoirists “remembered struggling with the twin evils of tradition and ‘acquisitiveness.’” As far as they were concerned, the Jewish tradition was about acquisitiveness, and acquisitiveness stripped of the Jewish tradition was distilled capitalism, i.e., “practical, real Judaism.” (*Jewish Century*, 153). Thomas Cahill remarks how the story of Abram's journey to the Promised Land mentions the wealth he had accumulated in Haran and how Abram cleverly increased his possessions through a deception involving his wife and Pharaoh. See *The Gift of the Jews: How a Tribe of Desert Nomads Changed the Way Everyone Thinks and Feels* (New York, NY: Nan A. Talese, 1998), 60, 66-67.

²⁷ A blessing that has, tragically, led to murderous resentment throughout history. Sadly, the same could be said of all the blessings mentioned in this article. I believe that anti-Semitism has been prevalent throughout history precisely because the Jews have been resented for their tremendous achievements.

name of the Lord, and they will be afraid of you. The Lord will make you *abound in prosperity*, in the offspring of your body and in the offspring of your beast and in the produce of your ground, in the land which the Lord swore to your fathers to give you” (Deut 28:8, 10-11, emphasis added).

Just so, we read that Abraham was wealthy (Gen 13:2, 6), as was Jacob (Gen 30:43), and few could match the tremendous wealth of King Solomon who was “richer and wiser than any other king in the world” (2 Chron 9:13-14, 22).

Once again, skeptics will be tempted to dismiss these accounts of prodigious Jewish wealth as myth. Was a Jewish king really the richest man in the world? However, these same skeptics would also admit that the wealthiest families and individuals in the world are disproportionately Jewish.

1. Average household incomes.

Not every single Jewish individual or family is wealthy. However, on average, Jews are wealthier than Gentiles. For example, according to the Jewish Federations of North America:

More than one-third of Jewish households (34%) report income over \$75,000, compared to 17% of all U.S. households. Proportionally fewer Jewish households (22%) than total U.S. households (28%) report household income under \$25,000. The current median income of Jewish households is \$54,000, 29% higher than the median U.S. household income of \$42,000. In 1990, the median income of Jewish households was \$39,000, 34% higher than the median income of \$29,000 for all U.S. households.²⁸

2. The super-wealthy.

The evidence for Jewish financial blessing becomes more obvious among the super-rich. For example, just as Einstein’s name has become synonymous for genius, the Rothschild family has become synonymous

²⁸ “NJPS: Education, Employment and Income,” <http://www.jewishfederations.org/page.aspx?id=46193>. Accessed February 15, 2013.

for great wealth. In the 19th century, they were the wealthiest family in the world.²⁹ And they were not alone.

In 1908–11, 31% of Germany's richest families were Jewish. In 1912, 20% of all British and Prussian millionaires were Jews.

In Hungary, the numbers were even higher with 71% of the richest taxpayers being Jewish.

An Australian "Rich List" from 1986 showed that of the 200 Australians worth \$100 million or more, 50 were Jewish.³⁰ And while Jews make up just 0.5% of Australia's population, they make up half of its billionaires.³¹

In 1987, 23% of the Forbes 400 were Jewish, while between the years 2009 and 2012, that percentage rose as high as 35%.³²

Suddenly, the stories of King Solomon's prodigious wealth seem modest by comparison.

3. *Jewish financiers.*

It is commonly known that in the Middle Ages Jews were forbidden by law from practicing a wide range of trades, with the notable exception of money-lending. But even though they went into the financial sector as a matter of necessity, Jewish pre-eminence in banking is still impressive.³³

Interestingly enough, God's blessings upon His chosen people included the promise that they would be wealthy enough to lend to all and borrow from none:

"The Lord will open for you His good storehouse, the heavens, to give rain to your land in its season and to bless all the work of your hand; *and you shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow*" (Deut 28:12, emphasis added).

²⁹ Slezkine, *Jewish Century*, 48. See also Frederic Morton, *The Rothschild: Portrait of a Dynasty* (New York, NY: Kodansha International, 1962), 57.

³⁰ Lynn, *Chosen People*, 36.

³¹ See <http://www.haaretz.com/jewish-world/jewish-world-news/australian-jews-may-top-forbes-rich-list-but-20-live-on-poverty-line.premium-1.491484>. Accessed February 15, 2015.

³² Ranging from 29%–35%. See <http://racehist.blogspot.com/2013/04/2012-forbes-400-by-ethnic-origins.html>. Accessed Feb 09, 2014.

³³ Lynn, *Chosen People*, 13.

If Israel's God does not exist, you would not expect Jews to be very well-known in the money-lending world. However, if Israel's God does exist, you would expect there to be evidence of an international (i.e., "many nations") Jewish presence in banking. Where does the evidence point?

As it happens, Jewish exceptionalism in the world of finance is well known and amply documented.

In the middle of the 19th century, a third of France's banks were run and owned by Jews (despite only being 0.2% of the population).³⁴

In Germany, from 1819–1900, half of all bankers were Jewish, despite only being 1% of the population.³⁵ In early 19th century Germany, 30 out of 52 private banks in Berlin were owned by Jewish families. And during the Weimar period, Jews held 80% of the positions in the stock exchange, 43% of the leading banking positions,³⁶ and owned almost half of all private banks.

In the 1920s, Hungarian Jews owned 85% of the banks and financial institutions in that country.³⁷

In Vienna at the end of the 19th century, all banks but one were administered by Jews.³⁸

In St. Petersburg, between 1881–1915, 43% of the stockbrokers, 41% of the members of the stock exchange, and 40% of the bank managers, were Jewish. The Jews were overrepresented with respect to their population by a factor of 20 to 1.³⁹

Closer to our own time, a third of the Federal Reserve chairmen have been Jewish, including the current chair, Janet Yellen.

And one needs only to mention names of such firms as Goldman Sachs, Lehman Brothers, Bear Stearns, Citigroup, and Salomon Brothers, all of which were founded and run by Jews, to recognize their extraordinary prominence in the money-lending sector.

³⁴ Ibid., 120.

³⁵ Ibid., 136.

³⁶ Ibid., 142.

³⁷ Ibid., 49.

³⁸ Slezkine, *Jewish Century*, 47.

³⁹ Lynn, *Chosen People*, 219.

4. *Jewish philanthropy.*

It is also worth noting that Jewish people are not only among the wealthiest in the world, they are also among the most charitable. A *Business Week* article from 2007, "The 50 Most Generous Philanthropists," noted that 38% were Jewish.

5. *Summary.*

The evidence of Jewish wealth and influence in the financial world is extraordinary. The question is, what explains it? Is all of this evidence purely accidental, the product of entirely natural forces? Or is it evidence for the existence of Israel's God?

And if God did want to prove His existence by financially blessing His chosen people, how much wealthier and influential would Jews have to be in order for agnostics to recognize the divine origin of their blessings?

C. JEWISH MANAGEMENT

The Bible tells some impressive stories about Jews becoming political leaders in foreign lands, often against overwhelming odds.

For example, Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers, only to rise up the ranks of Egyptian society to become deputy Pharaoh. Joseph's success was so evident that his master, Potiphar, recognized the Lord's hand in it (Gen 39:2-6), and Pharaoh himself acknowledged the divine origins of Joseph's blessings (Gen 41:38-42). In other words, Joseph's political success had an apologetic value.

Joseph's story is typical of many other OT examples of Jews rising to positions of great prominence in Gentile governments (e.g., Moses as Pharaoh's adopted grandson, Esther as a Queen of Persia, and Daniel as chief governor of Babylon).

Once again, skeptics will dismiss these kinds of stories as exaggeration or self-serving myth. They will say it is impossible to believe that Jewish people came to such prominence. And yet, ironically, many of these skeptics will also work for Jewish employers, or Jewish companies, in countries with prominent Jewish politicians.

Indeed, contemporary evidence of Jewish management both in government and in business amply testifies to the authenticity of those Biblical accounts.

1. Political influence.

Despite being a persecuted minority in Gentile countries, Jews have often risen to hold prominent political positions.

For example, in the UK, even though Jews were forbidden from becoming members of Parliament for most of the 19th century, Nathan Meyer, of Rothschild fame, became Baron Rothschild in 1885, making the family part of British aristocracy. Benjamin Disraeli became Prime Minister from 1874–1880. And in 2010, 24 out of 650 seats in the House of Commons were held by Jewish MPs.

Likewise, France has had at least six Jewish Prime Ministers, including Léon Blum, René Mayer, Pierre Mendes-France, Michel Debré, Laurent Fabius, and most recently Nicolas Sarkozy. Besides these were numerous Jewish deputies to parliament and generals.⁴⁰

The Jewish political influence in Russia is most evident during the Bolshevik Revolution, when, in the First and Second Congress of Soviets, Jews made up 40% and 31% of the delegates respectively, along with 25% of the Party's Central Committee. And the first two heads of the Soviet State were Jews (Lev Kamenev, and Yakov Sverdlov).⁴¹

In the US, in 2014, eleven senators and twenty-one representatives were Jewish. And in the 2016 election cycle, Bernie Sanders ran for the Democratic nomination for President.

2. Business.

Jewish achievement in business is just as impressive as in other fields of human accomplishment.

In 1895, 59.8% of all business proprietors in Germany were Jewish.⁴²

In 1917, 90% of all Hungarian industry was owned by Jews,⁴³ as were 50% of all company directors.⁴⁴

In 1988, 41.7% of the major, and 18.1% of the minor, professional and managerial positions in France were held by Jews.⁴⁵

To give just a hint of the influence of Jews on modern business, consider that many of the top technology firms in the world today were

⁴⁰ Lynn, *Chosen People*, 121.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 221.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 137.

⁴³ Slezkine, *Jewish Century*, 48.

⁴⁴ Lynn, *Chosen People*, 43.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 125.

founded, co-founded, or managed by Jews. These include: Intel (Andrew Grove); Google (Sergey Brin); Oracle (Larry Ellison); Ebay (Jeff Skoll); Dell (Michael S. Dell); and Facebook (Mark Zuckerberg).

Jews also serve as CEO's of 15% of America's largest companies, including Citicorp, Merrill Lynch, AIG, Lowe's, American Express, Time Warner, Toys R Us, Hewlett-Packard, Home Depot, and New York Life Insurance.⁴⁶

3. *Summary.*

Anyone familiar with the political and business worlds should have little trouble recognizing the prominent Jewish presence within them. Even the hardened skeptic should admit that Jewish exceptionalism in those spheres puts the Biblical stories of Joseph, Moses, Esther, and Daniel in a very plausible light.

The question is, what accounts for this? Are these Jewish achievements yet another coincidence, in what is becoming a long series of coincidences? Or is it part of a historical pattern, seen since ancient times, of God's singular blessing upon His chosen people?

D. RETURN FROM EXILE AND THE MODERN STATE OF ISRAEL

The OT appealed to the Exodus and the entry into Canaan as proof of God's existence. Are there any modern parallels to those events?

The most obvious example would be the reestablishment of Israel as a state in 1948.

The prophets looked to a time when the Jews would return to the Promised Land. For example, here is a selection from Isaiah:

Then it will happen on that day that the Lord
 Will again recover the second time with His hand
 The remnant of His people, who will remain,
 From Assyria, Egypt, Pathros, Cush, Elam, Shinar,
 Hamath,
 And from the islands of the sea.
 And He will lift up a standard for the nations
 And assemble the banished ones of Israel,
 And will gather the dispersed of Judah
 From the four corners of the earth...
 "Who has heard such a thing? Who has seen such things?
 Can a land be born in one day?

⁴⁶ Pease, *The Golden Age of Jewish Achievement* (Sonoma, CA: Deucalion), 193.

Can a nation be brought forth all at once?
(Isa 11:11-12; 66:8).

Jeremiah even hints at the apologetic nature of this regathering, saying the Lord will be known for bringing the Jews back to Israel:

“Therefore behold, days are coming,” declares the Lord, “when it will no longer be said, ‘As the Lord lives, who brought up the sons of Israel out of the land of Egypt,’ but, ‘As the Lord lives, who brought up the sons of Israel from the land of the north and from all the countries where He had banished them.’ For I will restore them to their own land which I gave to their fathers” (Jer 16:14-15).

Can such a thing happen? As Isaiah asked, can a nation be brought forth all at once? It can, and it did. Many people—both Jews and Christians—believe these prophecies were fulfilled on May 14, 1948, when the modern state of Israel was “brought forth all at once” and recognized as such by the United Nations.⁴⁷ The hand of God was seen as the driving force behind that momentous event. As one Rabbi remarked,

God has performed an awesome miracle in our day—greater, Jeremiah the Prophet wrote long ago, than even the events of the Exodus—by gathering up the Jews of many nations, allowing us to reclaim our land, bestowing us with a united capital of Jerusalem and giving us the opportunity to practice Judaism in its natural habitat.⁴⁸

Of course, skeptics will deny the re-establishment of Israel has any prophetic significance. But even they should still admit the establishment of Israel as a State after nearly 2000 years, eerily harmonizes with the Biblical drama of Israel’s relationship to the Promised Land, and her prophesied return.

Once again, is this really just another coincidence, or is it more evidence for the existence of Israel’s God?

⁴⁷ For example, Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *The Footsteps of the Messiah: A Study of the Sequence of Prophetic Events* (San Antonio, TX: Ariel Ministries, 2004), 99-104; cf., Gary Frazier and Jim Fletcher, *Miracle of Israel: The Shocking, Untold Story of God’s Love for His People* (Green Forest, AR: New Leaf Press, 2016), 185; John Hagee, *Can America Survive?: 10 Prophetic Signs That We Are The Terminal Generation* (New York, NY: Howard, 2010), 107; John F. Walvoord, “The Amazing Rise of Israel!” *Moody Monthly* (October 1967).

⁴⁸ Stewart Weiss, “In Plain Language: Who is a ‘Good’ Jew?” *The Jerusalem Post* (12/6/2014). <http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Columnists/In-Plain-Language-Who-is-a-good-Jew-358152>.

V. CONCLUSION

Anyone looking for concrete evidence that God exists need only look at the Jewish people.

The empirical evidence—a fraction of which has been presented here—overwhelmingly shows that God’s chosen people are the smartest, richest, most accomplished ethnic group in the entire world. Jewish achievements in science, finance, politics, and business (to say nothing of literature, music, and religion), have literally enriched all of human culture.

Just as God promised, the Jews have been a blessing to the world.⁴⁹

These facts must be accounted for.

Believers will see the evidence of Jewish exceptionalism as a clear confirmation of their belief in Israel’s God.

Skeptics will dismiss this evidence and appeal to completely naturalistic explanations.⁵⁰ They will say that Jewish genius, and the attending benefits, are the product of purely natural forces, and not the result of divine blessing.⁵¹

Other people will find it hard to accept such a long line of coincidences. They will resist dismissing the evidence too easily. At the very least, they will admit that the existence of Israel’s God is a reasonable explanation for Jewish exceptionalism.

I am reminded of an anecdote told about Benjamin Disraeli, the Jewish Prime Minister of Great Britain, who was asked if he knew of any infallible proof of God’s existence. He is supposed to have answered, “The Jew, sir, the Jew.”⁵²

I have come to the same conclusion.

⁴⁹ I would add that the greatest blessing of all is how the Jewish people gave us the Messiah, Jesus, who promised everlasting life to all who would believe in Him for it (John 3:16; 3:36; 5:24; 6:35).

⁵⁰ For example, see Gregory Cochran, Jason Hardy, Henry Harpending, “Natural History of Ashkenazi Intelligence.” See <http://web.mit.edu/fustflum/documents/papers/AshkenaziIQ.jbiosocsci.pdf>. Accessed March 15, 2016.

⁵¹ If so, they must answer Alvin Plantinga’s evolutionary argument against naturalism. Plantinga argues that, given both evolution and naturalism, there is a very low probability that our cognitive faculties would be reliable (let alone capable of genius). See *Naturalism Defeated?: Essays on Plantinga’s Evolutionary Argument Against Naturalism*, ed. James K. Beilby (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002).

⁵² Likely apocryphal. See Stephen R. Haynes, *Reluctant Witnesses: Jews and the Christian Imagination* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 58-59.

At the beginning of this article I quoted Mark Twain as asking, “What is the secret to [the Jews’] immortality?” Maybe the answer was never meant to be a secret. Certainly, the OT writers thought it was obvious. The Jewish people have prospered through the ages against overwhelming odds, because they are chosen and blessed by the living God.

“SALVATION” IN THE BOOK OF PHILIPPIANS

ROBERT C. SWIFT

Flower Mound, TX

I. INTRODUCTION

One of the distinguishing marks of the Free Grace movement is that it often challenges traditional understandings of certain Biblical passages. Of course, some maintain that such “novel” interpretations cannot be correct. The question is often why past interpreters have not understood these passages in a Free Grace framework. Free Grace proponents respond by saying there *have* been those in the past who held these views, but were often a minority. And more importantly, the final determination of the Bible’s meaning is the Bible itself, not long-held traditions.

Such is the case with the meaning of the word “salvation” in the book of Philippians, particularly in 2:12. In this verse, Paul says:

Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.

It is extremely common for commentaries to say that “salvation” (*sōtēria*) in this verse refers to eternal salvation, that is, salvation from hell. Even though there are some minor differences in detail, most commentators believe that works are necessary for entrance into the eternal Kingdom of God, as a scan of Evangelical writings bears out.¹

¹ Gordon D. Fee, *Philippians*, IVP Series (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1999), 104-105; R. Kent Hughes, *Philippians: The Fellowship of the Gospel* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 98-99; Bonnie B. Thurston and Judith M. Ryan, *Philippians and Philemon*, Sacra Pagina Series (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2005), 70, 94; Peter T. O’Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 278-79; John MacArthur, *The Gospel According to the Apostles: The Role of Works in the Life of Faith* (Nashville, TN: Word Publishing, 2000), 54, 182. Fee and Hughes do point out that this is a corporate salvation and

In the book of Philippians, this view of salvation is said to find support in Phil 1:6. The Apostle Paul states,

Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform *it* until the day of Jesus Christ.

This verse is also often held to refer to eternal salvation.² When these two verses are combined, it is said that Philippians teaches that works are necessary for eternal life, and that God will empower genuine believers to do them. God begins the work of eternal salvation and will bring it to its successful completion by accomplishing godly deeds in the life of the believer.

Zane C. Hodges, on the other hand, gives a Free Grace perspective on these verses. He points out that Phil 1:6 is not talking about the good work of eternal salvation, but the good work the Philippians did in monetarily helping Paul in his missionary work.³ In Phil 2:12, the salvation spoken of refers to exemplifying Christ-likeness with one's life, especially in the midst of a corrupt, perverted world (2:15). This is not automatic, but requires works. These works achieve and maintain unity, the overarching subject of chapter two. And in Phil 3:20-21 the achievement of steadfastness (the subject of Phil 3:1-4:1) is enabled and sustained by walking in undistracted pursuit of an undistorted, distinctively Christian, perfection. The eager expectation (*apekdechometha*) of Christ's transformative coming in glory (3:17-21) is the key to such a walk. The destruction (*apōleia*) of 3:19 clearly recalls and gives definitive resolution to the *endeixis apōleias* that the reader's opponents are assured of in 1:28. Notice that both *sōtēria* and *sōtēr* are precisely fitted into their local contexts and bear meanings crafted to fit the specific deliverance (unity or steadfastness) in view in each place.

not individualistic. They are an example of those who maintain that this verse is also speaking about the spiritual health of the church as a whole at Philippi. The fact remains, however, that faith in Christ, which brings eternal "salvation," is expressed in obedience.

² MacArthur, *Gospel*, 24; Hughes, *Philippians*, 98. Hughes specifically makes the connection between Phil 1:6 and 2:12.

³ Zane C. Hodges, *The Gospel Under Siege: A Study of Faith and Works* (Dallas, TX; Redencion Viva, 1981), 88-92. However, I do disagree with Hodges that the monetary gift to Paul is in view here. To me it seems more natural to regard the genitive in the phrase *tē mneia hymōn* in Phil 1:3 as objective, denoting Paul's remembrance of them in prayer rather than the Philippians' remembrance of Paul through the gift. Hodges did regard this as a legitimate free grace view as well.

In this article, I would like to consider the meaning of *sōtēria* in Philippians. When one looks at the occurrences of the theme of salvation in the book at least two things stand out. The first is that it always points to the future. That is, it is a salvation not yet accomplished. Neither Paul nor the Philippians possess it. At the time of writing, they were all "unsaved" in the sense of the salvation being spoken of.

This leads to the second point. In every occurrence of "salvation" in the book, its exact and specific meaning must be determined in close connection with the specific context in which it occurs. The violation of this principle seems to be the chief reason for most of the confusion about the term. In fact, a main contention of this study will be that no two occurrences of the term "salvation" bear quite the same meaning in the letter. Each occurrence bears a meaning unique to its context that is singularly appropriate to the spot in which it is used. If the meaning of "salvation" has the general sense of "deliverance," the precise form, meaning, and nature of that deliverance is a bit different in each of the contexts in the Epistle.

In determining the meaning of "salvation" in Philippians, then, we must look at the context. A major part of doing so is to consider the theme and structure of the book as a whole.

II. THE THEME AND STRUCTURE OF PHILIPPIANS

As is the case with the meaning of the word "salvation" in the book of Philippians, there is also, to a large degree, much agreement about the theme and structure of the book.⁴

The consensus of the majority is that no such theme or structure exists.⁵

⁴ I have written on this subject in the past. Much of the information that follows is found in previously published work. For those interested, an expanded discussion can be found in two such works. See, Robert C. Swift, "The Theme and Structure of Philippians," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 141 (Jul-Sep 1984): 234-54; Robert C. Swift, "The Theme and Structure of Philippians," in *Vital New Testament Issues: Examining New Testament Passages and Problems*, ed. Roy B. Zuck, vol. 8 (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2006), 171-87.

⁵ Robert Jewett, "The Epistolary Thanksgiving and the Integrity of Philippians," *Novum Testamentum* 12 (1970): 49.

While there are a few exceptions, most commentators feel that it is difficult to find a main theme. In broad terms, there have been three responses to the problem. Some have maintained that Philippians is an emotional letter in which Paul quickly moves from one subject to another and therefore has no central idea or structure.⁶

Others take a redactional approach. They say no central theme or structure appears because Philippians is not a single book. Instead, it consists of two or more separate letters that have been put together in an attempt to appear as one.⁷

Some attack the issue from a form critical viewpoint. Philippians is indeed a unity, but it has the structural elements of a Pauline letter form. While this view does see unity in the letter, it denies any development of a central theme or line of argument. Instead the letter is forced to adhere to a specific form.⁸

All three of these views of Philippians attempt to find a structure of the book based on criteria other than the development of a central theme by using a point-by-point argument of the book itself. It is my contention that Philippians does indeed have a central theme, and that Paul's development of this theme generates an epistolary structure that is logical, systematic, and obvious.⁹

A. THE OVERALL STRUCTURE OF PHILIPPIANS

Philippians begins with a salutation in 1:1-2, followed by the prologue in 1:3-11, which is the first major division of the book. In the prologue Paul sets forth the central theme of the letter and introduces other motifs he will develop later.

⁶ John Eadie, *A Commentary on the Greek Text of the Epistle of Paul to the Philippians* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1896), xxxi; William Hendriksen, *Exposition of Philippians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1962), 37-38; Ralph P. Martin, *The Epistle of Paul to the Philippians: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1959), 43.

⁷ For discussions of this view, see Jewett, "Thanksgiving," 40-49; Ralph P. Martin, *Philippians*, New Century Bible (London: Oliphants, 1976), 10-22.

⁸ Martin, *Philippians* (1976), 10-22; John Lee White, *The Form and Function of the Body of the Greek Letter: A Study of the Letter-Body in the Non-Literary Papyri and in Paul the Apostle*, Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1972); Robert W. Funk, "The Letter: Form and Function," in *Language, Hermeneutic, and the Word of God* (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1966), 250-74.

⁹ Swift, "Theme," *BibSac*, 236.

In 1:12-26, we find what can be called a biographical prologue. It is both biographical and a prologue because it deals with Paul's own circumstances and is closely tied with the prologue of 1:3-11. It forms a bridge between the prologue and the main body of the epistle.

The main body runs from 1:27-4:9. This is followed by an epilogue (4:10-20). This epilogue balances the prologue. Philippians then closes with another salutation and blessing in 4:21-23.¹⁰

B. THE PROLOGUE AND INTRODUCTION OF THEME

The prologue, as is the case with other Pauline letters, contains a thanksgiving (1:3-6). Others have recognized that in his thanksgivings Paul gives the reason why he writes the letter as well as introduces the contents of the letter. Indeed, the Apostle can use this portion of the letter to introduce the main theme of the book.¹¹ This is what we find in Philippians.

In vv 3-4, Paul says he thanks God for the Philippian believers. In v 5, however, he emphasizes one thing for which he is particularly thankful, i.e., the Philippians's partnership in the gospel. Paul will develop this later and it is the major theme of the letter.

Only by understanding this can 1:6 be properly understood. Verse 6 does not guarantee that genuine believers will continue in good works. It does, however, provide a summary statement of the whole letter.¹²

The Philippians have been a partner with Paul in the gospel. Paul is confident that God will continue this work in them so that they may be even more effective partners in the gospel. This work would bear fruit from the time of Paul writing the letter to them until the Day of Christ. With its connection with v 5, v 6 refers to the perfecting of the Philippians' "partnership" (*koinōnia*) since they are "partners" (*koinōnoi*) in the gospel.

This explains the "good work" of v 6. It is not the good work of giving each individual believer at Philippi eternal salvation. Neither is v 6 to be understood in some general sense of doing good works. It specifically

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Paul Schubert, *Form and Function of the Pauline Thanksgivings* (Berlin: Topelmann, 1939), 24; Hans Conzelmann, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, s.v. "ευχαριστω [*eucharisteō*], ευχαριστια [*eucharistia*], ευχαριστος [*eucharistos*]," 9 (1974): 412; Jewett, "Thanksgiving," 53.

¹² A recent convert to this view is Bonnie Thurston, *Philippians*, 52.

refers to the perfecting of the Philippians as workers for the gospel and the perfecting of their works in the cause of the gospel. The reference to the “Day of Christ Jesus” is a reference to the outcome of this work at the Judgment Seat of Christ, which is a judgment that deals with rewards, not the issue of whether a person has eternal life or not. Paul repeats this eschatological reference in v 10.¹³

The thanksgiving of vv 3-6 introduces the main theme of Philippians. It is their partnership in the gospel, and the letter develops this theme by discussing God’s perfecting them and their work for the gospel. This discussion will deal with their development as “partners” in the gospel. This development will result in temporal fruitfulness as well as eternal rewards.

If the main theme of the book is introduced in the prologue, it would not be surprising if other motifs in the book are found there as well. In vv 7-8 Paul connects what he says with the main theme of the book. He calls himself a “fellow partner” with the Philippians (*sugkoinōnous*, v 7). Both Paul and believers at Philippi are recipients of the enabling grace and power that God gives to those who confirm, defend and even suffer for the gospel.¹⁴ This idea of being a fellow partner with the Philippians in this work is brought out in the biographical prologue that follows the prologue.

Other motifs in the prologue that are found in the rest of the book include the idea contained in the verb “to think” (*phroneō*, v 7). It is found in 2:1-5; 3:15, 19; 4:2, 10 and refers to a mind-set that expresses itself in right action. This is necessary for those who want to progress toward perfection in the cause of the gospel.

In v 7 Paul also makes the point that when working for the gospel one can expect hardships. He is experiencing them and so are they (2:30). The phrase “the defense and confirmation of the gospel” also suggests hardship especially in light of the discussion in chapter three, where Paul experiences hardships as they relate to defending both the gospel and the appropriate lifestyle against false teachers.

¹³ Swift, *BibSac*, 237-38.

¹⁴ H. A. W. Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistles to the Philippians and Colossians, and to Philemon*, trans. John C. Moore, preface and supplementary notes by Timothy Dwight (New York, NY: Funk & Wagnalls, 1889), 16.

In v 8, Paul longs for them. This implies not only a desire for them but also a joy at their progress. The theme of joy runs throughout the letter (1:9-11, 25, 27f; 2:2, 12-18; 3:16f; 4:17).

In vv 9-11, Paul prays for them. But this prayer is related to the theme. He wants them to have an intelligent and discerning love. If they are going to be effective “partners” with God in the gospel they must be motivated by love, unlike the self-seeking believers in 1:15-18. It is to be a love that grows in the knowledge of practical wisdom. This kind of love will be able to “discern what is best” in that it will be able to understand the best things to do to advance the gospel in different circumstances. It is this loving and wise discernment that Paul himself models in vv 12-26, the biographical prologue. First, he displays it in discerning his present circumstances. They have advanced the gospel and emboldened the saints sympathetic to him (vv 12-18a). Second, in vv 18b-26 he discerns his best future orientation: What is best for Christ; what is best for himself; and what is best for the Philippians.

This kind of lifestyle and motivation will render one “without offence.” This is best taken in the sense of not causing others to stumble.¹⁵ If so, it teaches the necessity of Christian unity in the work of the gospel. This will become especially important in Paul’s discussion in chapter two.

Verse 11 ends with an eschatological statement. If the Philippians are perfected in their work in the gospel, they will be filled with the fruit of righteousness. This will result in glory to God. Even today, the work of the Philippians and Paul, “fellow partners” in the gospel, is bearing fruit. Paul’s point is that their work will continue to bear fruit until the Day of Christ.

C. THE BIOGRAPHICAL PROLOGUE (1:12-26)

In this section, Paul uses his own experiences as an example of the theme of the book of Philippians. He shows how the principles for effective partnership in the gospel are working out in his difficult circumstances. Therefore, this section is closely related to the prologue.

We read, for example, of the advancement of the gospel (cf. vv 12, 25). Paul also exhibited the virtues he mentions in the prologue (vv 9-11) in the circumstances of his imprisonment (v 13).

¹⁵ Timothy Dwight, in Meyer, *Philippians*, 50.

In vv 12-18, Paul “discerned what is best” as it relates to the advancement of the gospel (v 10). His imprisonment has furthered the spread of the good news (vv 13-14). Even in the midst of opposition, Paul has the wisdom (c.f. v 9) to discern what was the most important thing (v 18). Paul was also able to discern what was best in regards to his own desires and that of the Philippians’ progress in the faith.

In v 19, we encounter the first occurrence of the word “salvation” in the book. In light of the prologue, as well as the next verse, the salvation spoken of is that Christ might be magnified and greatly exalted in Paul’s body, whether by life or death. This is Paul’s desire, whether he dies in prison or is released.¹⁶ This would happen through the power of the Holy Spirit and the prayers of the Philippians, who were fellow partners with Paul in the work of the gospel (v 7).

Paul was able to “discern what was best” by putting his desire to go be with the Lord aside, realizing that he would have more fruit in his ministry if he remained alive. He put his desires aside in the interest of others (v 10).

This biographical prologue not only continues the main theme as presented in the prologue. It also points forward to the rest of the letter. In furthering the work of the gospel (vv 23-26) Paul is following the example of Christ, as he will set forth in 2:5-11. He lays aside his privileges in order to serve others in this work.

D. THE BODY OF THE LETTER (1:27–4:9)

In the body of letter to the Philippians, Paul expands on the theme. There is an introductory paragraph (1:27-30), the central section (2:1–4:1), and a concluding paragraph (4:2-9). In each of these sections, Paul discusses two subjects—unity and steadfastness. These two things are necessary if they are going to successfully further the work of the gospel.

¹⁶Hodges, *Gospel*, 90-94. There are those who are not Free Grace proponents that have recognized that the meaning of “salvation” here is understood in light of v 20, or at least is compatible with it. It does not refer to eternal salvation. See, Meyer, *Philippians*, 58; William Hendrikson, *Exposition of Philippians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1962), 74.

1. *The introductory paragraph.*

This section starts off with Paul's desire that the Philippian believers conduct themselves in a "manner worthy of the gospel of Christ."¹⁷ To do so they will need unity and steadfastness. They are to strive together to advance the gospel. God gives the grace to do so, even in the midst of difficulties. If they did so, like Paul, they could experience "salvation." This is the second occurrence of the word and must be understood in the same general sense as the salvation Paul confidently expects in v 19.¹⁸ The gospel would advance and Christ could be relied upon to provide grace in the midst of persecution by opponents. Since the destruction of their enemies is signified here, this probably anticipates the full and final deliverance described in 3:20-21.

Their suffering in v 30 is suffering they encounter as partners in the work of the gospel. This is exactly the reason Paul was suffering. They are indeed "fellow partners" in this work.

2. *The central section.*

Chapter two discusses unity. Steadfastness is dealt with in 3:1-4:1. The readers are to be unified based upon an attitude of humility (2:1-4). This humility is based upon looking out for the interests of others, an idea Paul discussed in 1:22-26.

In the famous *kenosis* passage of 2:5-11, Christ is presented as the example for the believer to follow. He was humble and met the needs of others by sacrificing himself. The Philippians will succeed as fellow partners in the gospel if they adopt the same mind-set.

In 2:12-18 we find the third occurrence of the word "salvation." The Philippians are to "work out" their "salvation." Verse 13 tells us that God is the One who enables this to happen. But what does "salvation" mean?

Salvation here means achieving a unity based on the example of Christ (vv 1-11). Negatively, it means doing "all things without murmuring and disputing" (v 13), which Paul has implied in 2:3. If they will do these things they will be pure and spotless and their witness will shine forth in a dark world (2:15). The idea of holding fast the Word of Life (v 16),

¹⁷ T. E. Pollard, "The Integrity of Philippians," *New Testament Studies* 13 (1966): 65. Pollard sees this as the primary reason Paul writes the book.

¹⁸ Dwight, in Meyer, *Philippians*, 58; Martin, *Philippians* (1976), 85.

is related to walking worthily of the gospel. Disunity will extinguish the testimony of a church. A true gospel witness demands a true gospel lifestyle. This wins approval in the Day of Christ (v 16). This view of salvation here fits perfectly with the other two occurrences of the word in the book of Philippians.

In 2:17-30, Paul gives three examples of those who have that attitude. He gives himself as such an example, as well as Timothy and Epaphroditus. All three are working out their salvation in the work of the gospel based on service to the Lord and concern for others. Epaphroditus is called a “fellow worker” and “fellow soldier” in the work of the gospel (v 25).

Chapter 3 takes up the issue of steadfastness in the midst of difficulties. This is a topic Paul has already introduced in 1:7, 28-30. Specifically, chapter three deals with steadfastness against false teaching. It will be achieved by the undistracted pursuit of undistorted, truly Christian, perfection (3:12-16). In 3:1, Paul speaks of joy. The idea of joy and standing against opposition to the gospel go hand in hand. We saw these ideas earlier in the book (1:19, 28-30; 2:17f).

3. The concluding paragraph.

Paul instructs two particular women at Philippi to have unity (4:2f). The theme of the epistle—partnership in the gospel—is mentioned in 4:3. The Philippians are to have peace and freedom from anxiety (4:4-9), not in a general sense but in the midst of the difficulties they face in their work in furthering the gospel.¹⁹

The Philippians, as partners in the gospel, can have joy (4:4) in the midst of those who oppose the gospel. The Lord is near (v 5) and this is a source of comfort. With His coming there will be relief and the reception of benefits (3:20-21). In addition, the prospect of “salvation” should be a source of joy. As a result of all these things, they can be steadfast in their work for the gospel.

In this concluding paragraph we see the same theme as in the other sections of the main body of the letter of Philippians. If the Christians at Philippi were to be perfected in their partnership for the gospel, they needed to conduct themselves worthy of the gospel. They need to have unity and be steadfast in the face of opponents of the gospel.

¹⁹ Martin (1976), *Philippians*, 154.

It appears that those who maintain there is no structure in the letter are mistaken.²⁰ There is a central theme and a clear systematic structure throughout. The meaning of “salvation” in Philippians can only be understood in light of these things. Each occurrence of the term is uniquely nuanced to fit its specific place in each context where it occurs. The article to follow this one will demonstrate this claim by a more detailed analysis of the conclusions stated here in a more summary form.

E. THE EPILOGUE (4:10-20)

The epilogue of Philippians supports the idea of an intentional epistolary structure to the book as a whole. It balances the prologue of 1:3-10. The prologue spoke of the sharing of the Philippians in the work of the gospel. Here, Paul gives a specific example—their most recent financial gift to Paul.

The prologue and epilogue contain four elements that bind the book together. The first is the idea of partnership (*koinōnia*; 1:5; 4:15), which refers to the giving of money by the Philippians for Paul’s missionary endeavors. The second is the Philippians are fellow sharers in this work (1:7; 4:13). The third idea is that they have been a part of this work since the beginning (1:5; 4:15). The final idea is that Paul and the Philippians feel the same way towards each other (1:7; 4:10).²¹ The idea of partnership in the gospel dominates both the prologue and epilogue, as well as the whole book.

F. CONCLUSION

With the above structure, it seems evident that Philippians has a message. That message is that Christians should walk worthy of the gospel if they expect to further the work of the gospel. The power of such a walk, combined with such a message, can make an immeasurable impact in the world.²² It also challenges a common way of looking at the word “salvation,” especially in Phil 2:12.

²⁰ Eadie, *Philippians*, xxxi.

²¹ William J. Dalton, “The Integrity of Philippians,” *Biblica* 60 (1979): 101.

²² Swift, *BibSac*, 250.

III. THE THREE OCCURRENCES OF “SALVATION”

As the above discussion points out, the word “salvation” occurs three times in the book of Philippians (1:19, 28; 2:12). In view of the theme and structure of the book, it is difficult to understand how one could conclude that the word means salvation from hell. The same could be said about the “good work” that God has done through the believers at Philippi in Phil 1:6. With the close connection between the prologue and the epilogue of the book, including the repetition of words and themes, the good work refers to their participation in the advancement of the gospel.

It appears that the first occurrence of the word “salvation” does not present a problem (1:19). It is clear that Paul is not referring to salvation from hell in this verse since his “salvation” depends upon the prayers of others. It is for this reason that some English translations translate the word “deliverance.” Even those who understand “salvation” as referring to eternal salvation in the other instances often recognize it does not in the case of Paul’s personal circumstances.²³

If one did not consider the structure and theme of the book, the second occurrence of “salvation” could possibly refer to eternal salvation (1:28). One could say that when a believer faithfully suffers for Christ and endures such suffering, it is an indication of their future, eternal salvation. The world sees the power of Christ to bring them through their suffering. That same power will save them eternally. However, this interpretation ignores the close connection between the “salvation” of the Philippians and the “salvation/deliverance” of Paul in 1:19. In light of this close connection and the theme of the book, the salvation in both cases refers to advancing the gospel in the midst of the similar, but not exact, circumstances Paul and the Philippians find themselves in. In Paul’s case, God will enable him to magnify Christ whether he lives or dies. In the case of the Philippians, God will grant whatever grace is necessary to allow them to triumphantly endure whatever persecution

²³Jacobus J. Müller, *The Epistles of Paul to the Philippians and to Philemon* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1955), 57; J. A. Motyer, *The Message of Philippians: Jesus Our Joy* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1984), 84; R. Kent Hughes, *Philippians: The Fellowship of the Gospel* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), 57. Hughes and Motyer say the meaning is very broad and includes the trials believers goes through, although they do not clearly state their views. Müller is clearer and prefers the translation “deliverance.”

opponents throw their way. As Paul counts on a "deliverance" appropriate to his sufferings for the gospel, so the readers can with equal confidence and assurance count on a gracious "salvation" in whatever circumstances arise as they, like Paul, strive together to advance the gospel. The salvation spoken of here is *circumstantial* and *situational*, clearly and without doubt having nothing to do with Paul's or the reader's eternal destinies. In fact, if their eternal destinies were not already secure, Paul could not be confident of either his or their circumstantial salvation. Paul's assessment of his options in 1:21-23 makes this absolutely clear. Any doubts Paul may have are about his short term circumstances, not about his eternal future. The same is true of the Philippians in 1:28. A *circumstantial* salvation assumes the already existing reality of a secure *eternal* salvation. The eternal salvation must predate and underlie the circumstantial and situational one. As Paul discerns his options, he is confident that they who share the same outlook as he does will also "discern what is best" among the options facing them.

Of course, the third occurrence of the word "salvation" in Philippians is the one most often believed to refer to eternal salvation (2:12). Paul tells the Philippians to work out their salvation with fear and trembling. Just a moment's reflection should prohibit us from understanding the word in this way. Our eternal salvation does not depend upon our work. The child of God has assurance of salvation from the moment of faith based upon the sure promises of Christ. There is nothing there to "fear and tremble" about.

The answer, of course, is to understand the word "salvation" in a similar, but not exact, way as it is understood in the other two instances in the book. If the Philippians were unified in their advancement of the gospel and walking in a worthy manner, they would experience "salvation" in the sense that the gospel would go forth, in the midst of trying circumstances and Christ would be effectively testified to by unified, loving Christians.

All of this fits well with the theme of the book. But more can be said about "working out" one's salvation.

IV. THE MEANING OF “WORKING OUT”

One of the corollaries of the view that “salvation” means eternal salvation from hell in 2:12 is that the verb “work out” means that a believer will act in a way that reflects that he is eternally saved. They live in such a way that they demonstrate that they have this salvation.²⁴ The consensus translation of the verb seems to indicate this. It is translated as “working out” in all the major translations (e.g., NIV, NASB, NAS, ASV, NET, KJV, and HCSB). With this translation one gets the impression that believers are to show or work out what they already have. The New Living Translation reflects this understanding by translating it, “show the results of your salvation.”

The verb in question is *katergazomai*. To translate it as “working out” probably suggests a meaning to the English reader that is not accurate. BDAG lists four meanings of the verb.²⁵ Two of the meanings are rare and do not relate to any view of how it is used in Phil 2:12. The other two are very relevant.

One major use of the verb means to “bring about a result by doing something.” It means to achieve something. BDAG lists twelve examples in the New Testament. The second major meaning is similar and means “to cause a state or condition” or to produce something. BDAG lists nine examples of this usage in the New Testament.

These usages do not indicate that one works “out” what is already there, in order to reveal it. Instead they mean to work “for” something, that is, to create it or bring it about. One does not produce or create his eternal salvation. But one does, working jointly with God (2:13), achieve the salvation spoken of here!

Paul simply cannot be talking about our eternal salvation here. Instead, he is saying that if the Philippians want to be fellow partners in the work of the gospel it will take work. They must be unified in the work of the gospel. They must do all things without grumbling and arguing (2:14). They must work “for” these things else the veracity of their testimony to the truth of the gospel is compromised.

²⁴ MacArthur, *Gospel*, 182; Müller, *Philippians*, 91; Motyer, *Philippians*, 128; Hughes, *Philippians*, 99; D. A. Carson, *Basics for Believers: An Exposition of Philippians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1996), 62.

²⁵ Walter Bauer, W. F. Arndt, F. W. Gingrich, and F. W. Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 531.

These are all difficult things to do. This is especially the case when believers, like those at Philippi, were experiencing various difficulties. But with the power that God supplies, He would “save” them through these things so that the gospel would go forth and Christ would be proclaimed. The church would escape the ravages of disunity and remain “lights in the world.” Paul has deliberately nuanced *sōtēria* to precisely fit the subject he is discussing—unity. That certainly fits both the theme and structure of Philippians. He does this not only here, but in each place the term occurs in the book.

V. CONCLUSION

Our traditions can be a good thing. However, beliefs based upon our traditions can be a negative thing if we do not allow the Bible to challenge what they say. Such is the case with the meaning of “salvation” in the book of Philippians.

Many have become accustomed to believe that when Paul says that God has begun a good work in us and will complete it he is speaking about our eternal salvation. Then, when he says that we are to “work” out (or for) our salvation he is referring to the same thing. Such an understanding often springs from a view that either does not believe Philippians has a theme or structure or ignores the possibility that it does.

From at the least the days of J. B. Lightfoot, most commentators do not see any significant exegetical problems in the passages that deal with “salvation” in the book of Philippians. Lightfoot called the readings in these passages as obvious.²⁶

The “obvious” meaning of salvation in the Epistle—that it means salvation from hell—ignores the context of each occurrence and the book as a whole. Peter Phillips points out the danger of such an approach. He says that commentators are too eager to leave the text in front of them and to look for interpretive help from definitions and meanings gathered from *other* texts or from elsewhere in the *same* text before such a step is justified in the process. This is a subtle form of eisegesis.²⁷ I sug-

²⁶J. B. Lightfoot, *Saint Paul's Epistle to the Philippians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1953), vii-viii.

²⁷Peter M. Phillips, *The Prologue of the Fourth Gospel: A Sequential Reading* (London: T. & T. Clark, 2006), 27-28.

gest this is a major problem in the interpretive tradition of Philippians. Tradition tells us that “salvation” means something somewhere else, so it must mean that in Philippians. Also, it must bear this single meaning at every place in Philippians. This can lead to interpretive errors of major consequence.

Related to this are two linguistic traps about which James Barr warns interpreters. The first is “illegitimate identity transfer.” To explain this trap, Barr says that an object may be signified by word “*a*” or by word “*b*.” This does not mean that *a* means *b*. The identity of the object to which different designations are given does not imply that these designations have the same semantic value.²⁸

This fallacy can also occur when a word, like “salvation,” has a wide range of meanings. To assume that one meaning fits all occurrences of the word is to commit illegitimate identity transfer. This appears to be what has happened in the traditional understanding of “salvation” in the commentary tradition of Philippians.

A second fallacy is one Barr calls “illegitimate totality transfer.” This occurs when the dictionary definition of a term, which is derived from a study of all of its usages, is without flexibility read into a particular and singular occurrence of the term. This may not convey the precise meaning of the term in *that* context.²⁹ This also is a common problem with the word “salvation” in Philippians.

When we take a close look at structure and context in Philippians we find that the theme of the book is the advancement of the gospel. Paul wants the believers at Philippi to work for the advancement of the gospel. There is a “salvation” or deliverance that comes with that. This salvation will result in a church that is unified and living in such a way that enables the good news to be advanced despite any and all opposition. In a similar but slightly different context, this is the “salvation” Paul wanted for himself. He also wants the Philippians to experience “salvation” in this sense when it comes to those who oppose their work. In each occurrence of the theme, the basic meaning is deliverance, but the context determines the exact meaning. In every case it was a salvation that none of them possessed at the time Paul wrote the book and thus could not be eternal salvation from hell, which they *already* possessed.

²⁸ James Barr, *The Semantics of Biblical Language* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 217-18.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 218.

BELIEF AS A COGNITIVE PHENOMENON, ESPECIALLY IN REGARD TO SALVATION: AN EXPANDED DISCUSSION

RICHARD M. BIERY

M.D., MSPH

The BroadBaker Group, Kansas City, MO

I. INTRODUCTION

Careful thinking requires careful use of language. This article is an exercise in carefully understanding and using the language of *belief*. Correctly understanding the nature of belief is vital to good soteriology and theology, because the doctrine of salvation by faith apart from works has so often been challenged by redefining faith to include doing good works.¹ Hence, this paper will explain and defend a Free Grace approach to belief.²

II. AVOIDING THE DANGERS OF SLOPPY THINKING CONCERNING BELIEF

Generally, a *proposition* is an assertion about something, and the context normally will tell us whether the speaker intends it as a truth statement or a hypothetical one. As used here, a proposition is an assertion that something is true or that it conforms to reality.

¹ For example, while it has been common since the early church to wrongfully add works (Law) to faith for salvation (e.g. Paul's strong condemnation in Galatians), modern examples include a kind of back door approach that redefines faith by including works. See Zane C. Hodges, *The Gospel Under Siege: A Study on Faith and Works* (Dallas, TX: Redencion Viva, 1981), 4-6.

² This article was prompted by remarks made by Dr. Robert Wilkin while discussing saving faith at the 2004 Grace Evangelical Society National Conference. It supports and follows the line of logic and concepts expressed in those remarks.

Both Biblically and in the vernacular, to *believe* is to be convinced or persuaded that a proposition is true. There is no difference between believing something in the Biblical sense and believing something in the secular sense.³ We believe propositions, and our belief system is fundamentally propositional.⁴

Belief is classed as a mental event that produces a new state of mind, perspective, or attitude toward the proposition as to its truth.⁵ It is not a decision, but something different than a decision⁶ and, therefore, neither is it an “act of the will.”⁷ In neuroscience studies, the “aha” of a new belief occurs in a different part of the brain than decision activity.⁸ We cannot, by will, decide to believe things we are not convinced are true or know are not true. We can, however, change our *willingness* to believe it. This is an important difference.

Also, since we become aware of it as having happened in our thinking, (i.e., our state of opinion has changed), and not the result of a willful decision, we perceive it as a passive mental event. We use expressions such as “the light went on,” or “I saw the light,” to try to express our experience of realizing that we have come to believe that something is true. This realization or recognition may occur immediately upon seeing and believing. Or we may realize that we have come to believe something upon later reflection.⁹

Other terms we (and the Bible) occasionally use for believing are *accept* and *receive*. For example, we say, “I accept that,” meaning precisely that we believe it. We don’t commonly use *receive* in that way,

³ Gordon Clark, *Faith and Saving Faith* (Jefferson, MD: Trinity Foundation, 1983).

⁴ A proposition here is a statement regarding a state of being or action, usually for consideration.

⁵ *Webster’s Dictionary*, 3rd ed., s.v. “belief.”

⁶ While Webster calls it a “feeling,” it is also called a “state of mind,” which, I think, is technically a more accurate term because the use of the term “feeling” introduces emotion, a separate event in our mind. Unfortunately the term “state of mind” inadequately describes our conscious cognitive state when we realize we believe something. It is, indeed, close to a feeling, like a light bulb going on or an “aha, I see; I’m convinced.”

⁷ This paper will elaborate on reasons why belief, as narrowly defined here, is not a decision.

⁸ Brain activity studies have mapped the phenomenon known as insight, “aha,” realization, discovery, etc., to a complex series of brain states tying it to the right temporal and amygdala, not the frontal lobe.

⁹ C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy: The Shape of My Early Life* (Orlando, FL: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1955), 224. Lewis recounts how he discovered he had come to believe in Jesus Christ on a bus.

but John 1:12 uses it to mean *believe* (in Jesus Christ). Fortunately, John goes on and defines it in the same verse to leave no doubt about his use. John defines *receive* as *believe*.¹⁰

The risk with using *accept* and *receive* as synonyms for *belief* is that they have other definitions which can be illegitimately imported into our definition of faith in order to prove that believing is a decision, willful act, or even a commitment. For example, someone might reason that *accepting* something is like *taking a gift*. And since taking a gift clearly involves an action of our will to accept the gift being offered, and if *accepting* is a synonym for *believing*, then believing must also involve the will. This form of argument commits the fallacy of equivocation by confusing two different definitions of the word *accept* (as a synonym for *faith* or as a conscious action).

In its simplest meaning as translated in the Bible, the term *faith* is generally used as the noun form of *believing*.¹¹ But *faith* in English can also be nuanced to mean something more. Thus, it is open to equivocation. So for now, we will stick to *belief* as the noun form of *believing something*.

Expressed in the obverse, belief is freedom from doubt concerning a specific proposition. If we doubt, then we do not have confidence that the proposition is true. The two states of doubt and confidence are mutually exclusive. Rather, a *different* proposition is believed expressing some level of uncertainty. Doubt and belief regarding the same proposition are mutually exclusive and cannot logically be held simultaneously.

Doubt about a proposition means that a different proposition is actually believed. For example, if you doubt the proposition *the Earth is 6000 years old*, you may actually believe a different proposition such as *the Earth is older than 6000 years*, or *the Earth is probably billions of years old*, or *the Earth is probably not 6000 years old*. Doubting a proposition means moving from one proposition to believing another. If a new proposition is believed it is clear that one doubts the original proposition and does not have confidence in it.

¹⁰ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of John's Gospel* (Columbus, OH: Lutheran Book Concern, 1942), 59-63.

¹¹ *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, 4th rev. ed. (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago, 1979), 816-18.

A. BELIEF HAS BOTH A SCOPE AND SIZE COMPONENT, AS WELL AS A SIGNIFICANCE

The *size* component of belief involves an inference, small or large, from where the evidence leaves off and the proposition's truth is believed. It is the span of the amount of remaining unsupported belief (or faith) between where the evidence, as we perceive it, takes us and the proposition is believed to be true. The amount of evidence needed to believe the proposition is not the same for every person (see figure 1).

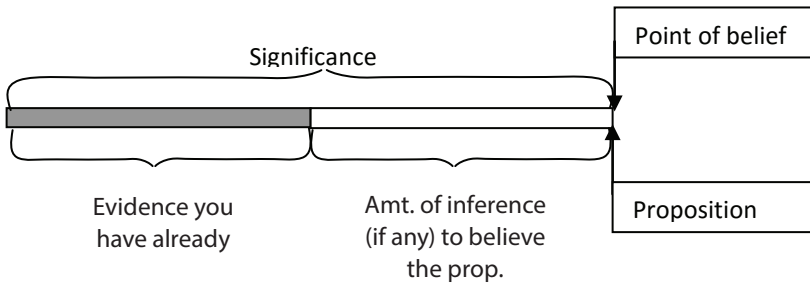


Fig.1

It is difficult to find a good term for this intuitive or instant mental acceptance from evidence to belief, since the belief itself is in the final proposition. Some call this the “faith” component. This is fine as long as meanings are clear. However, this usage can lead to a wrong idea of faith. If *faith* is the noun form of *believe*, we would simply mean, “I have faith the proposition is true.”

A Biblical example would be Abraham. He believed God’s promise to give him many descendants, including the Messiah.¹² He later also believed God concerning the resurrection of his son if sacrificed.¹³ These are two dramatically different propositions that carry vastly different emotional consequences for Abraham. It is likely that Abraham believed the first proposition more easily (and was justified), but took several years of experience with God to be able to believe and act upon the second.

Different propositions have different levels of significance for us.

¹² H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis* (Columbus, OH: The Wartburg Press, 1942), 478.

¹³ F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 304.

Some propositions have *little* significance for us, such as a news story about a minor incident in a distant country. Nevertheless, if the event seems highly improbable we may still doubt it and therefore not believe it. This would involve a small significance but a large inference.

Some propositions have *moderate* significance for us, such as believing that one type of dish detergent is better than another. In that case we may require a higher degree of evidence to believe it.

Lastly, some propositions have *major* significance for us, as when a belief can possibly affect our life such as trusting that an airplane will take us to Malaysia without crashing in the ocean. Another example would be a proposition that impacts our economic well-being.

An additional observation should be made here. We cannot always forecast how much evidence it will take to result in our believing! We learn about or observe evidence, and then, *viola!*, we become convinced. We start reading something and a few sentences of content may “tip” us into believing. The amount of evidence required to tip us probably depends to some degree on our attitude and temperament (and our reliance, of course, on the testimony and/or evidence). Are we open? Are we normally skeptical? As discussed later, our attitude toward the proposition greatly affects the amount of evidence we require. We may even volitionally reject evidence contrary to what we want to believe or continue believing (an aspect of a cognitive bias called the confirmation bias).

The *size* of the belief required and the *significance* it has for us are independent of each other. We may, in fact, have to infer further to believe something of little consequence because the evidence is weak or we distrust it, then we have to infer to believe something of great import but with a great deal of supporting evidence. That is why millions of people get on airplanes every day (and some get on in spite of their doubts).

B. THE STRENGTH OF BELIEF

Occasionally, one will read that *strength* is an aspect of believing. “How *strong* is your belief?,” we might ask. When it comes to belief, the Bible (particularly the Book of John, which focuses on saving belief)

knows nothing of “strength” in this way.¹⁴ One either believes a proposition or not.

We develop the idea that beliefs come in degrees of strength because people often characterize their believing—say in the supernatural, or in UFOs—as believing it strongly or weakly. They might say, “I *mostly* agree with you, but...” What they are actually revealing is that they do not believe the proposition in question, but actually believe a different, lesser, or weaker, proposition. For example, instead of believing the proposition, “*The supernatural exists*,” they are stating that they believe a different proposition, such as, “*The supernatural may exist*.”

Much more consequential and serious is the fact that if one introduces the idea of strength into Biblical belief in Jesus Christ for eternal life, one has introduced a profound theological (and philosophical) problem. Biblical belief is treated as bivalent. Does it exist or not? However, the notion of strength turns belief into a sliding scale from weak to strong. And if beliefs can be weaker or stronger, this obscures the condition of salvation. For even if we believe the only condition of eternal salvation is faith, if faith comes in degrees of strength we will wonder, “Was our belief strong enough?” And therefore, “How likely is it that we are truly saved?”

A careful reading of the book of John reveals no such concept as strength regarding saving belief in Jesus Christ. John is very consistent. People believed or they did not. One does not see such an idea as intellectual faith or spurious belief.¹⁵

Another factor that may give the impression of strength of belief is compound or complex propositions—propositions with several simpler propositions imbedded and which must be believed. This can result in someone saying, “I mostly believe what you are saying, but...” or “I largely agree with you, but...” This sounds like a strength statement, but what is occurring mentally is the acceptance of *most* of the sub-propositions but not *all* of them. Therefore, the solution to a better understanding of the person’s belief is to break the proposition into its components and find which of the sub-propositions are not yet believed.

¹⁴ All uses of *believe* in John are free of such modifiers. Mathew 17:20 (mustard seed metaphor) is referring to the size of the proposition to be believed, not the size of the faith. See Bob Wilkin, “Should We Rethink the Idea of Degrees of Faith?,” *JOTGES* (Autumn 2006): 11-12.

¹⁵ Zane C. Hodges, *Absolutely Free: A Biblical Reply to Lordship Salvation, Second Edition* (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2014), 25-39.

Another way of attempting to introduce the idea of strength into belief is the argument that belief is always probabilistic. This also makes belief into a sliding scale, and falls victim to the Fallacy of the Beard,¹⁶ and profoundly undermines assurance.

A continuum, whether of works *or* of faith, introduces unavoidable and crippling uncertainty into one's confidence of eternal life. It is more reasonable to argue both logically from God's character, His love and grace, and generally from Scripture, (even aside from clear salvation passages), that God wants His children to know that they are His. The contrary introduces a grey zone into assurance. This seems illogical, even incoherent, given our view of God's love and grace (see for example John 20:31 and 1 John 5:13). Furthermore, the saving proposition is extremely simple and uncomplicated, indeed the simplest possible. Uncertainty of one's status is not part of either Jesus Christ's rhetoric or of the gospel. The message is consistently one of certainty. What must I do to be saved? Believe.

In other words, because He loves us, God wants His children to know that they are His with all the wonderful consequences of that assurance. Introducing a soteriology of uncertainty of being God's child undermines all motives, even love! What is actually going on in terms of defining saving belief is that a *different* proposition is being smuggled in, a proposition of probability. We are not convinced the offer is true, but we believe there is a certain probability of it being true.

C. BELIEF AND THE WILL

I have noted earlier that belief itself is not an act of the will. However, we *can* and *do* exercise our attitude and our will regarding the amount of evidence we permit into our belief system. This, in turn, affects the degree of doubt remaining. Thomas is an example of one requiring a great deal of evidence. At least some of the other disciples accepted simple testimonies, while Thomas required personal (and extensive)

¹⁶ See <http://www.logicallyfallacious.com>. Accessed January 12, 2016. The Fallacy of the Beard involves the question, "How many whiskers does it take to make a beard?" Using this fallacy is an extremely useful test of *any* soteriology. Simply put, does the means of salvation in the proposed soteriology introduce a continuum as a condition —is it subject to the Fallacy of the Beard by introducing things like repenting, committing, yielding, confessing, strength of faith, endurance, good works, a list of things to believe, etc.? All are subject to the Fallacy and involve profound uncertainty. Many people combine several of these as requirements for salvation, compounding the uncertainty! This causes people to ask how much faith does it take to have faith.

evidence (seeing and touching) before he thought his doubts would be conquered.

It is important to note that *wanting to believe* something is not the same as *believing* it. However, *wanting to believe* something is true opens us up to evidence and arguments as to the validity of a proposition, such as the reality of UFOs or that God truly loves us and offers us eternal life.

We continue to seek confirmatory evidence for our beliefs (and avoid or ignore contradictory evidence). If we have purchased a car because we believed it was the right choice of the alternatives, we'll continue to be alert for further supporting evidence, such as paying closer attention to ads or others who believe as we do, etc. The problem with weak evidence is that it makes us more vulnerable to contrary evidence that may persuade us to believe a different proposition. We believe the proposition but know the weakness of its defendability (which is a different proposition!).

Note again, belief is not an act of the will. But what *is* subject to will is our management of the evidence allowed into our mind to permit us to become convinced. We can refuse to acknowledge clear evidence that contradicts our belief, either by not seeing it as contrary, and refusing to make the inference. We rationalize contrary evidence in order to handle the cognitive dissonance it would create.

However, all belief is potentially defectable, given sufficient contrary evidence permitted into the belief system (the evidence and the resultant belief in the proposition), for good or bad. Thus, belief, our actions, our attitude, and evidence (or truth) constitute a dynamic "closed loop system," reinforcing each other.

D. BELIEVING LARGER PROPOSITIONS

Beliefs are interconnected. We build propositions one upon another, creating a propositional hierarchy. Foundational propositions allow us to make inferences to higher propositions, leading to an ever-larger conceptual scope of beliefs. Believing a proposition and having it confirmed acts as evidence for a conceptually larger proposition. At some point we create and/or believe the larger proposition.

For example, we may believe what someone says when he agrees to meet at a certain time and place. We may not be ready to believe the larger proposition that the person is more generally reliable. But after

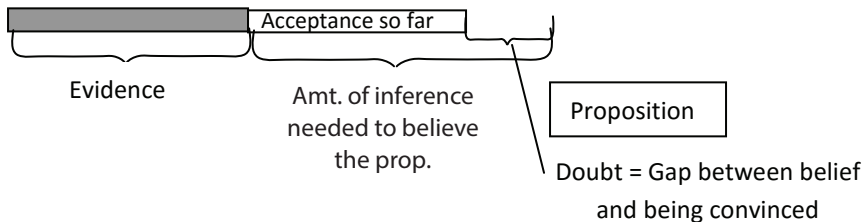
repeated experiences with the person's behavior we come to believe the higher or larger proposition that the person is reliable or trustworthy—at least as to keeping appointments. Since it is a dependency hierarchy, defecting from a lower proposition (perhaps caused by a person not keeping a promise) causes those above to collapse.

This helps explain a couple of puzzling Bible passages that seem to suggest the individual wants their belief “strengthened.” There are at least two ways of interpreting their request. There is either the desire for more supporting evidence to something already believed, or, more likely, help in believing even greater propositions that are not yet believed.

E. DOUBT AND WORRY

Failing to be convinced is doubt. Doubt is the gap between the extent we are inclined to believe versus being finally convinced of the proposition's truth.

As noted earlier, the degree of doubt can vary. It can be fueled by contradictory evidence, or by refusing to accept the evidence at hand.



Worrying is not the same as doubting. Worrying is being anxious due to doubt. We cannot worry about the truth of our belief without doubt being present.

For example, we can doubt our ability to defend our belief (and worry about it) and still believe the proposition. On the other hand, we *can* doubt a proposition but not worry about it, particularly if the proposition at stake is of little consequence. Of course, we also can worry in situations not due to doubt at all but due to certainty (e.g., that there are landmines between us and our objective). The doubt comes in regarding our safety, not our belief.

This writer believes we can manage our worry. This is especially important when we are not in control of the outcome. As noted earlier, doubt is, to some degree, subject to our will via how we handle truth/evidence. We can make ourselves “open,” teachable, etc., to receive

new evidence or not. An example of this is the willful blindness of the Pharisees about Jesus in the face of overwhelming evidence.¹⁷ We therefore manage our inclination toward belief by managing the evidence or reasoning that reduces (or increases) our doubts.

III. BELIEF AND THE SOVEREIGNTY OF GOD

Some may ask at this point, “Where is God in this?” How does God influence or draw us to faith? Clearly, according to Scripture, He does so.

God draws us to Himself by revealing truth to our minds. God is in the truth-revealing business because truth (especially Biblical truth) produces belief. The Bible uses the metaphor of light to show that God illumines our minds with truth. God gives truth to the truth-seeker and occasionally, for reasons of His own, seems even to pry a person open to receive His truth. The clearest example of this is perhaps Saul’s encounter with the Lord on the road to Damascus.¹⁸ But we remain accountable for our beliefs (and how we handle truth). As noted earlier, belief, truth, and our willingness to be open to the evidence form a system. God interacts within that system to move us towards belief, but without removing our accountability.

IV. BELIEF AND ACTION

How do our beliefs relate to how we act? Many people assume that there is a linear connection between belief and behavior, where one always leads to the other. But reality is more complicated than that relationship suggests.

Belief does not necessarily result in action, but it can. We can act consistently with our beliefs. But we can also act consistently with a proposition that we actually doubt (or we can intentionally be hypocritical). In that case, our action does not mean we believe the proposition, but that we are willing to act in spite of our present state of doubt. When we act upon a proposition we doubt, we are expressing our hope,

¹⁷ H. A. Ironside, *Addresses on the Gospel of John* (New York, NY: Loizeaux Brothers, Inc., 1954), 411.

¹⁸ W. O. Carver, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1916), 92-93.

not our belief. This is a common experience. We often urge people to try something with the hope they will have a confirmatory experience that will result in their believing the proposition. For example, companies will often give out free samples of their products in the hopes you will try it and believe their claims.

The converse of the above is also true. People can be willfully doubtful by refusing to accept or trust evidence and thus to believe. Certain Bible passages suggest this perspective. Jesus non-critically invites Thomas to overcome his doubts (concerning whether Jesus was truly raised to life in the flesh and not some spirit form) and to see additional evidence such as touching the nail and spear marks on His body. This led to what Van Doren calls the greatest confession of Christ in the Scriptures.¹⁹ Thomas could have willfully refused to even consider the evidence in order to sustain his disbelief.

It is conceivable and possible that a person may believe a proposition to be true and not act on it. This failure to act may not be related to doubt. We may believe a plane can transport us but it isn't going where we want. We may trust someone but not want what they offer. Action takes will, and the will to act could be lacking for a variety of reasons such as fear, laziness, selfishness, or emotional cost.

For example, Abraham could have refused to sacrifice Isaac, not because he disbelieved God, but because he was repulsed by it or didn't want to hurt Isaac. His *obedience* pursuant to his faith was at stake, not necessarily his *belief*. When Abraham acted he no doubt demonstrated both his faith and his obedience. By the way, he could have obeyed *in spite* of doubt. Note again that belief and action are not necessarily dependent on one another. We obey people all the time in spite of our doubt. Motives to obey can involve more than just belief (e.g., such as having a gun at our head).

Since belief-linked *action* is not required for eternal life,²⁰ actions regarding our Christian faith may follow other propositions. These actions are in the realm, therefore, of obedience or faithfulness. If we believe that love for the brethren is a desire of Christ's and we decide to act on that belief (enabled by the Holy Spirit), we manifest or demonstrate our belief in that proposition. Otherwise, that belief is dead, un-motivating,

¹⁹William H. Van Doren, *Gospel of John: Expository and Homiletical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1981), 1380.

²⁰Joseph C. Dillow, *The Reign of the Servant Kings* (Haysville, NC: Schoettle Publishing Co., 2006), 135.

or ineffective (though the proposition may yet be believed). Others can't see it. It doesn't move us to action. Action in this context takes both motive (another subject) as well as belief. The point of James in his epistle is that faith that is followed with action is confirmed or ratified to others, (or "justified" using James' language, not Paul's, since they use the term differently) by the action.²¹

Some beliefs are not useful until appropriated by action. For example, we may believe in the aforementioned aircraft. The belief is nonproductive until we appropriate the benefit of that belief through getting aboard. *Eternal life is not like that*. God is the One producing the effect of our belief (i.e., eternal life). The action is His, not ours. Scripture makes that clear over and over.²² Its benefit is effected, or realized, at the time of believing the proposition. John says that the believer has, as a present reality already, eternal life in places like John 3:36 and 5:24.²³ Thus, the metaphor of trusting a chair by sitting in it (acting) or trusting to be carried over Niagara Falls by a tight rope walker whom we trust is able to do so by getting on his shoulders (acting) are misleading metaphors and inaccurately represent saving faith.

V. THE SEMANTICS OF BELIEF

In today's language, the proposition that we "believe someone" versus the one that we "believe *in* someone" are significantly different propositions.

Believing *in* a person generally implies we trust him or have faith in him as a consistently reliable person. It forecasts our belief in the person's future behavior. We come to believe in someone generally because a series of preceding propositions concerning the reliability of the individual have proven true, such as in the case of Abraham regarding God mentioned earlier. Thus we would say, using the terminology here, that believing in someone or trusting them is a higher level, or more complex, proposition. It enfolds conceptually lesser propositions that we additionally believe and often have validated from either our experience

²¹ See Thomas Constable's discussion on James, especially James 2:21, at www.sonlight.com. Accessed Dec 19, 2015.

²² Zane C. Hodges, *The Hungry Inherit* (Dallas, TX: Redencion Viva, 1997), 134. This is the essence of the Grace message of the free gift of eternal life upon believing in Jesus.

²³ Barclay M. Newman and Eugene A. Nida, *A Handbook on the Gospel of John* (New York, NY: United Bible Societies, 1980), 105, 158.

or others' testimony. Thus, the validation of lesser propositions becomes evidence for the larger one.

However, concerning Biblical, and especially Johannine usage, believing "in Jesus" means believing the proposition regarding His Messiahship and that eternal life is the accompanying gift to the believer.²⁴ We only need to look at Jesus' dialogue with Martha in John 11. He affirms that he is the resurrection and life and that believing in Him results in the same. He then asks her the content of the proposition she believes about Him. She replies that she believes it.

What is the semantic or linguistic relationship between believing, trusting, and faith?

As our usage has suggested above, this depends on how the terms are used. Believing (or belief) is generally the most propositionally precise terms in current English usage. It usually points to a specific proposition, although the proposition may be conceptually either large or small.

Trust and *faith* are usually used for more complex or higher propositions and could intimate a decision or an act of the will, depending on how they are used. *Trusting* often, or usually, implies a high order belief (but need not). It is usually in reference to a thing, a person, or a concept (or principle such as scientific law).

We could say, for example, that we are trusting Jones to be on time, meaning we believe he will be on time. However, we tend to use the latter phrase over the former in that more specific construction of a belief. We tend to use *trust* to indicate a higher order reliance on someone or something (i.e., that they are *reliable* or *trustworthy*). Consequently, if someone says they trust Christ, we need to ask, "For what?" in order to establish the accuracy and extent (or significance) of the propositions they believe. Is it for healing? Is it for wealth or needs met? Or is it for their eternal life? Or all three?

Trusting in someone can carry the connotation that we are relying on them (pursuant to our belief in the proposition concerning their reliability). We are depending on them relative to the belief proposition—that they will be on time, or that they will complete the job assigned, and our well-being, to that extent, is dependent on them for that fact. Here, too, the English language permits us to say we can decide to *act trustingly* (we "trust") while still having doubt—not total assurance.

²⁴ Robert N. Wilkin, "The Gospel According to John," in *The Grace New Testament Commentary* (Denton, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2010), 476.

In the executive world we use *trust* this way all the time. For example, we assign a job, not totally convinced of the capacity of a new subordinate. However, their knowing of our trust acts as an incentive that improves their trustworthiness. In English we might also say that *we have faith in them* or we have *put our faith in them*.

The tricky aspect surrounding this use of *faith* and *trust* for our expression of our action is that our will is involved. We place our dependence on them for something. Note this might be independent of the belief proposition we hold. We could doubt and still assign the responsibility. *Believe* is therefore the more precise term. Be careful how *faith* and *trust* are used and ask for clarity. Note that belief in someone's reliability concerning something *automatically* results in our dependence or reliance. There is no act of the will. The results are simply expected *as part of the content of our belief*. Thus, eternal life is an inherent expected result of believing in Jesus.

In the book of Hebrews we are told that Israel was condemned to wander in the wilderness 40 years because of lack of faith (or trust) in God. They were expected, by the time they reached the land of Palestine from Egypt, to have had sufficient experience with God's provision to also trust Him to be with them in confronting the enemies waiting for them in the Promised Land. Their fearfulness and timidity was due to lack of belief in the, by then, larger proposition that God would care for them, protect them, and go before them regarding their enemies. They disobeyed because they did not believe or trust God (and consequently perished in the wilderness). In fact, Hebrews 3 explains that their general attitude of distrustfulness led to hardened rejection of even considering evidence to the contrary.

As used today, *faith* often suggests an even higher conceptual belief proposition. We refer to one's faith as commonly meaning an entire *system* of belief propositions. Or we can narrow the meaning to the way *trust* is used—faith in someone or something, or even more narrowly to mean faith that Jones will be on time. However, we tend not to use it in that manner. Therefore, understanding accurately a reference to one's faith requires the question, "Faith in what or whom?"

Furthermore, we can say that we believe Jesus heals, and yet not believe He heals in every situation. Thus, we can legitimately *situationally* doubt (or have uncertainty) while believing in the general proposition. We can trust airplanes in general, but not trust this particular flight, say

due to weather, since more is involved in the particular proposition than simply trusting an airplane.

VI. THE DEFECTABILITY OF FAITH

Can belief be abandoned? Absolutely. Belief is defectable. We do it all the time due to new evidence or better reasons to believe something else. A belief, therefore, though genuine at the time, may be fragile or easily abandoned if the size of the inference has been large or the evidence weak. Wrong belief can be difficult to abandon as well and take a large amount of contrary evidence.

John the Baptist appears to have come to doubt his original belief about Jesus Christ while in prison and sought more confirmatory assurance from Him (Matt 11:2). John had such a high view of Jesus in Matt 3:11-14. Now, he questions Him, almost certainly because of his experiences in prison and the fact that there were no signs of the judgment John said Jesus would bring upon the wicked (Matt 3:10).²⁵

When the father of the possessed child said in Mark 9:24, “Lord, I believe; help my unbelief,” he could have meant several things. What is certain is that he did not contradict himself. He may have believed one proposition about Jesus (e.g., His ability to heal) but not believed yet a greater proposition (e.g., His ability to cast out a demon or His Messiahship) and wanted more evidence. Alternatively, he, in fact, could have believed Jesus *could* heal him but was not certain He *would*. Or he may have wanted to believe even greater propositions. These are all different propositions. What does seem evident was that he was asking for more assurance (evidence) in support of a proposition he wanted to believe yet did not.²⁶

Defecting from a belief means abandoning one proposition and believing another. For example, as discussed above, an individual may initially believe in a young earth creation (i.e., *the Earth is around 6000 years old*). But he may later “defect” from that belief by doubting. Doubting the proposition, *the Earth is about 6000 years old*, does not mean that he simply believes in nothing. Rather, He believes a *different* proposition (e.g., *the Earth is much more than 6000 years old; or the Earth*

²⁵ Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, The New American Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1992), 185.

²⁶ Wilkin, “Degrees of Faith,” 5-7.

is probably not 6000 years old; or the Earth is probably billions of years old). The new proposition believed may be a probabilistic one.

Such “migration” of our belief from proposition to proposition is common. The more we expose ourselves to contrary evidence, and not balancing it with supporting evidence, the more a change in our propositional belief is likely. In truth-seeking we must be open to truth, both confirmatory and negative. But Scripture, correctly understood, trumps other forms of evidence.

One more observation needs to be addressed. If the inference required to get from evidence to belief in the proposition is large, and yet we believe it anyway, we may be concerned about our ability to defend that belief. But our confidence (or lack thereof) in our ability to defend our belief is a different proposition than the belief in need of defense. The doubt here is not regarding the belief but the ability to defend it. To mitigate that doubt, we seek supporting arguments and evidence. This will both narrow the belief “gap” (the “inference” presently required) and change the proposition about our ability to defend it. Again, as discussed above, because of the cognitive dissonance humans tend to do this automatically.

VII. CONCLUSION

This article supports the idea that eternal life as offered by Christ depends on belief in the proposition that He grants it to the believer at the point of belief. Scripture, as well as semantic and contextual logic, support the argument that the heavenly consequence is immediate adoption into God’s family (with its attendant eternal life), and that eternal life is truly eternal, and therefore lasting, from the point of belief. It is not dependent on a “committed” belief, on an on-going belief, or a constant renewal of belief in the proposition. As Jesus told the woman at the well, one drink of the living water resulted in a life that would never end. Did she believe *that* proposition?

SO YOU MAY COME (OR CONTINUE?) TO BELIEVE (JOHN 20:31)

JOHN H. NIEMELÄ

President
Message of Life
Bennett, CO

I. INTRODUCTION

John 15:16 should be seen as a multi-generational evangelism-focused Great Commission verse, anticipating the purpose statement. This verse aligns with the evangelistic purpose of the book as a whole (John 20:30-31). Jesus says,

“You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go forth and bear a great harvest (*karpos*), and that your harvest (*karpos*) should abide (*menō*), so that whatever you ask the Father in My name [especially, enablement for a great harvest], He would give you.”¹

Sixteen of the 121 NT uses of *menō* (*abide*) appear in John 14–15. The first fifteen clearly refer to a particularly close relationship between (1) members of the Trinity with each other, or (2) a special relationship that is potential for believers—which some believers enjoy with the Lord. From this consistent usage within 38 verses (John 14:10–15:16), Jesus’ reference to the “great harvest” that is to “abide” in 15:16 would most naturally refer to new generations of believers who, in turn, ought to learn to abide. Included here is the idea that believers who are currently abiding in the Lord are to have a role in the harvest of the next generation of believers. Apparently, the early church took this Great Commission to heart and had a series of bumper crops.

¹ All Scripture translations (unless otherwise noted) are by the author.

The desire to proclaim the good news of eternal life to unbelievers also relates to the purpose of the Gospel of John. This requires identifying the audience of the book correctly.

II. EARLY CHRISTIANITY SPREAD RAPIDLY (UNTIL CONSTANTINE'S AD 313 EDICT OF MILAN)

Acts reports that the church from the very beginning grew dramatically. In Acts 2:41, 3,000 new believers were added to the church. The Lord added daily to their number. In 4:4, 5,000 more were added. When Paul wrote the book of Romans, in AD 56-57, Rome had at least fifteen congregations.²

Less than a decade later, in AD 64, significant numbers of Christians in Rome accounts for Nero blaming them for the fire that destroyed the city. In AD 112, Pliny the Younger complained to the Emperor Trajan that Christians were everywhere throughout the Empire.³ The proliferation of Christianity made legalizing the religion politically expedient for Constantine in AD 313.⁴

Christianity multiplied under persecution, but stagnated as it slid into complacency as the State Church.

III. THE GREAT OMISSION (LOSING SIGHT OF THE GREAT COMMISSION TO EVANGELISM)

Don Richardson laments the Great Omission that has characterized Christendom ever since the Council of Nicea in AD 325 (shortly after Constantine legalized Christianity):

² John H. Niemelä, "Introduction," *Romans: Deliverance from Wrath*, by Zane C. Hodges, ed. Robert N. Wilkin (Corinth, TX: GES, 2013), 16f. Cf. John H. Niemelä, "Evidence for a First Century 'Tenement Church,'" *JOTGES* 24 (Spring 2011): 99-116.

³ Pliny the Younger, "Letters," trans. Betty Radice in *Pliny: Letters and Panegyricus*, LCL (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London: Heinemann, 1915), 10:96:9.

⁴ Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History* (Princeton, NJ: University Press, 1996), 7, posits a 40% rate per decade for early Christianity. (He documents Mormonism's rate for 100+ years as 43% per decade.) He underestimates numbers in AD 40 and overestimates for AD 350 (almost 34 million). Even at 20% per decade, his argument that Christianity's rapid growth precipitated legalization (rather than vice versa) would be quite plausible. It aligns well with data in the preceding notes.

...the Church Fathers' mission-less Creeds served as "pocket Bibles"⁵ for millions of Christians who had no access to Scripture. Mission-less Creeds thus misrepresented the Bible by telling Christians many wonderful truths to believe but saying absolutely nothing regarding what God *might want them to do* to advance his [future] kingdom [by evangelizing now!]⁶

One might imagine that the Reformation, which viewed *faith alone* as important, would urge believers to share the message of life with unbelievers. Such an expectation would be wildly over-optimistic. The Great Omission still plagues us; early Christianity obeyed John 15:16, but we have not. It is hardly surprising that Christendom ignores or misinterprets John's purpose statement, John 20:30f:

Thus Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which have not been written in this book. But these *signs* have been written so you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing, you may have life by His name.

John, then, actually is a book designed for evangelizing unbelievers and expressly says so, even though many deny this. Is it surprising that leaders of Christendom, characterized by the Great Omission for the past 1,700 years, would want to re-interpret a passage (John 20:31) that relates to Jesus commissioning not only the apostles, but every generation following them, to evangelize?⁷ Scholars are the ones who write commentaries. How many of them champion evangelism in general or the evangelistic use of John's Gospel? How many actually tell unbelievers about Jesus? Luke Timothy Johnson shows no interest in evangelism, he suggests that John 20:31 is John's call to believers to "go on believing," not his challenge to unbelievers to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God so that they might have life in His name:

... if it [*believe* in John 20:31a] is present tense, then the phrase would read, "that you might go on believing," and

⁵ Literacy rates were low, but the ninety-five word Nicene Creed could be memorized. Richardson's point stands despite his *seeming* assumption that the masses could read.

⁶ Don Richardson, *Heaven Wins: Heaven, Hell and the Hope of Every Person* (Ventura, CA: Regal from Gospel Light, 2013), 188. Bracketed words are added, clarifying my understanding of his somewhat vague wording.

⁷ Not all holding this view minimize evangelism, but those not evangelizing would welcome it.

the purpose would be reinforcement and encouragement. The present tense is the reading better supported by the manuscript evidence, and the whole tenor of the Gospel suggests *less a document for proselytism than one of propaganda for the converted...* the very movement of the story corresponds to the perceptions of a community that defined itself through *opposition to unbelievers*, and that *the complex coding of the narrative prohibits understanding by... [them]* (emphasis mine).⁸

If God were incapable of persuading people through signs, would not Saul of Tarsus have dismissed his miraculous encounter with Jesus? He would have continued terrorizing believers. Christianity's message would not have "grown and multiplied" in the face of persecution as Acts asserts it did (Acts 12:24).

Instead, the Apostles (including Paul) went forth, tirelessly proclaiming the message of life, despite all opposition. Soon after Apostles came to a locale, as discussed above, churches were planted, and new believers told unbelievers the message of life. Christianity mushroomed. Luke Timothy Johnson epitomizes the Edict of Milan's great failing. Christianity began looking for excuses not to share the message of life with a lost and dying world.

Not surprisingly, Christianity wants to reinterpret the book that indicts its failure to "go forth and bear a great harvest" (John 15:16). But if the naysayers are right, what explains Christianity's rapid growth in its first three centuries? Remember that prior to Jesus' resurrection, the Apostles hid behind locked doors. Jesus' message of life (as exemplified by John's Gospel) gave these men something worth sharing, as well as something worth dying for. Their zeal for carrying the message that was soon written in John's Gospel underlies the rapid growth of early Christianity.

⁸ Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation*, 3rd ed. (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 2010), 467f. The bracketed "them" replaces Johnson's wordy code-speak ("those who do not share the symbolic system and convictions of the community"). Much of academia claims that John writes to the "Johannine Community" which supposedly shared his views. No, John wrote to a different "community," one that did not yet believe his views about Jesus. Treating Johnson's presuppositions would be a whole article in itself.

IV. THE CASE FOR JOHN ADDRESSING UNBELIEVERS

Before listing the main planks of this article, it is vital to summarize the different views concerning the make-up of the original audience of the Gospel of John. The pertinent part of the purpose statement in John 20:31 reads:

“These [signs] have been written that you may believe.”

Many mistakenly assume that John consistently uses the present tense for ongoing action that has already-begun. No, even if 20:31a had used a present (it does not), the book would still be evangelistic. Many recognize this, but others still claim:

A present tense would mean that believers continue believing to *keep* life by Christ’s name.⁹

An aorist tense would mean that unbelievers come to believe to *acquire* life by Christ’s name.

This article responds to those denying John’s evangelistic purpose. Their denial arises from two errors: (1) their acceptance of a present tense in 20:31a and (2) their misinterpretation of it.

A. BOTH THE MAJORITY TEXT AND THE CRITICAL TEXT HAVE AN AORIST SUBJUNCTIVE IN JOHN 20:31A

The first argument (pp. 78-81) is that both the *Majority Text* and the Critical Text (if manuscript evidence is properly understood) support the aorist. The second argument (pp. 81-86) is that the present tense, even for those accepting that reading, should be understood as *coming to believe*. Finally, taking John 20:31 to address believers involves a revisionist re-interpretation of all eight signs in John’s Gospel (pp. 86-87).

Each is a stand-alone argument. Thus, if the text has an aorist (argument 1), the view that the audience of John is believers would be untenable. Second, if Johnson and others misinterpret John’s use of present tense verbs in purpose clauses, that would be fatal as well. Finally, the view would be false if it puts John 20:31 at odds with how John uses signs throughout the book.

⁹ Variations in expressing the purpose clause exist among those viewing a present here as *continue to believe*.

Even accepting one stand-alone argument would nullify Johnson's theory. The first point is that the majority of Greek manuscripts, as well as the most highly regarded Alexandrian manuscripts, of John 20:31 have an aorist tense for *pisteuō*.

Even if a reader chose to skip the first argument (pp. 78-81), the second (pp. 81-86) or third (pp. 86-87) would make a sufficient case by themselves. Let us first consider the textual issue briefly.

Technically, this is not a *Majority Text* versus Critical Text issue. The aorist appears in the *Majority Text*^{1st-2nd eds.} and both Greek texts of the *Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft* (German Bible Society): Nestle-Aland (N-A)^{26th-28th eds.} and United Bible Societies (UBS)^{1st-5th eds.}¹⁰ However, N-A and UBS barely whisper their preference for the aorist.

1. *High confidence in the aorist reading by the Majority Text.*

The siglum **M** here indicates that von Soden's *I*-text agrees with the Majority Family (which is united).¹¹ Wilbur Pickering asserts that 99½% of all manuscripts agree with the *Majority Text*'s aorist form.¹²

2. *Tentative acceptance of the aorist reading by N-A and UBS.*

These texts place the aorist in brackets: *pisteu[s]ēte* (*pisteusēte* would be aorist; *pisteuēte* would be present). Three features show that N-A/UBS slightly prefer the aorist:

a. Each places evidence for the aorist where accepted readings normally appear. N-A always puts the *txt* (text) reading last, as the original

¹⁰ Although this reading remains the same in each edition of each text (UBS, N-A, and the *Majority Text*), their appendices did change. Thus, referencing several editions is useful: Barbara and Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M. Martini, and Bruce M. Metzger, eds., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, 26th-28th eds. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1979-2012); Barbara and Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M. Martini, and Bruce M. Metzger, eds., *The Greek New Testament*, 1st-5th eds. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1966-2014); Zane C. Hodges and Arthur L. Farstad, *The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text*, 1st-2nd eds. (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 1982-85). I may cite a specific edition of N-A or UBS because prefaces and appendices become more detailed in later editions. Shortened edition-specific references list the edition number (e.g., UBS^{5th}).

¹¹ Hodges and Farstad, *Majority Text*, xxi, explains that this symbol is used only if von Soden's *I*-text (the so-called Western Text) aligns with the Majority; otherwise **M** appears.

¹² Wilbur N. Pickering, *The Greek New Testament According to Family 35* (N.p.: n.p., 2014), 228, n. 5 (his apparatus for John 20:31).

reading. UBS puts evidence favoring its preferred reading first. Both N-A and UBS list the aorist in 20:31 as the favored reading.

b. In explaining their use of single-brackets, N-A says, “The reading given in the text [not merely relegated to the apparatus] shows the preference of the editors.”¹³ Their text reads *pisteu[s]ēte* (aorist), so the present *pisteuēte* appears in the apparatus, but *not* in the text. Thus, the editors of the N-A (and UBS) prefer the aorist.

c. Bruce Metzger wrote a commentary (on behalf of his fellow UBS editorial committee members) explaining their textual decisions. He writes concerning *pisteusēte* in John 20:31:

20:31 *pisteu[s]ēte* {C}
Both *pisteuēte* [present] and *pisteuēte* [aorist] have notable early support...the Committee considered it preferable to represent both readings by enclosing *s* within square brackets.¹⁴

The {C} rating means that three of five members of the Committee voted for the aorist in John 20:31.¹⁵ The next section will show why N-A/UBS should increase their confidence level for the aorist to at least a {B} and remove the brackets.

3. *The manuscript evidence.*

Of the three texts cited so far (UBS, N-A, and *MajT*) only the *Majority Text* accurately reflects the reading of a key Alexandrian manuscript, P⁶⁶. The following comes from its apparatus for John 20:31. Note the parentheses around manuscript P⁶⁶ and *vid* [= *videtur* = *apparently*].

John 20: 31 πιστευητε (P^{66vid}) ϳ*B vs ϳIAC, [Cr]

Everyone familiar with P⁶⁶ recognize that the first three letters of the form *pisteuō* are lost and that only two letters are completely visible. This is why all apparatuses append *vid* to P⁶⁶ here. Why does the *Majority Text* use parentheses? “If a manuscript cited is enclosed by parentheses—as (ϳ) or (B)—this means that the manuscript exhibits an orthographic

¹³ N-A^{28th}, 54*, offers a more detailed explanation of brackets than its sister text UBS^{5th} does.

¹⁴ Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994), 219f.

¹⁵ I considered all 1,431 textual problems listed by UBS^{4th} and can (when only two variants appear) determine the Committee’s vote tally. Usually, when three or more readings appear, only two receive votes, so vote tallies are generally discernible there also.

[spelling] variation of the reading with which it appears.”¹⁶ Now, the INTF (*Institut für Neutestamentliche Textforschung* = Institute for New Testament Textual Research), which is responsible for producing the UBS/N-A texts, lists the actual reading as: *[pis]teuētai*.¹⁷ Letters enclosed by brackets are completely absent. Those with dots underneath are partially missing. Every transcript I have seen lists the endings as *-tai*, not as *-te*. The *Majority Text* encloses **P⁶⁶** in parentheses because *pisteuētai* only partially agrees with *pisteuēte*.

Enclosing this in parentheses states a truth (it differs from *pisteuēte*), but more can be said. The scribe (of **P⁶⁶** or of the manuscript from which he copied) may have repeated the ending of the verse’s first verb: *gegraptai* (have been written). The scribe of **P⁶⁶** (and the scribe of manuscript Θ) attached the same *-tai* ending here also. Now, his text would read:

But these have been written [*gegraptai*] so that they might be believed [*pisteuētai*], [namely,] that...

By enclosing **P⁶⁶** in parentheses, the *Majority Text* suggests that the scribe may have intended to write *pisteuēte*, but wrote *pisteuētai* accidentally. However, three facts suggest that the scribe wrote what he actually meant:

- A. Manuscript Θ also has *pistuētai* (present passive), which has the same ending as *gegraptai*,
- B. Manuscripts L, N, and W also have nonsensical forms (aorist middle) with the same ending as *gegraptai*,
- C. The reading of Θ and the apparent reading of **P⁶⁶** (*pisteuētai*) are present passive. A present passive would make sense in this context.

Therefore, if looking at this problem from an Alexandrian prioritist’s standpoint, the elimination of **P⁶⁶** and Θ as favoring *pisteuēte* (the present active subjunctive form), the level of confidence in the aorist would necessarily increase, perhaps to {B}.

¹⁶ Hodges and Farstad, *Majority Text*, xviii.

¹⁷ A photo of the section of **P⁶⁶** appears in W. J. Elliott and D. C. Parker, eds., *The Papyri*, vol. 1 of *The New Testament in Greek IV: The Gospel According to St. John*, ed. by the American and British Committees of the IGNT, NTTTS, vol. 20, ed. B. M. Metzger and B. D. Ehrman (Leiden and New York, NY: Brill, 1995), 409. A link (<http://nttranscripts.uni-muenster.de/AnaServer?NTtranscripts+0+start.anv>) shows the INTF’s transcription, after the reader selects the manuscript (**P⁶⁶**) and the passage (John 20:31).

Similarly, the Greek texts of Joseph Vogels and Hermann von Soden unequivocally favor the aorist active subjunctive, as does the *MajT*. These editors recognized the weak support for the present tense. Both Vogels and von Soden were Alexandrian prioritists.

Both *Majority Text* and Critical Text advocates should accept the aorist. This is a stand-alone argument. Those pushing for a present tense here recognize that the aorist would preclude seeing believers as the intended audience.

Though a aorist would be fatal, a present would be a hollow victory. Only rarely do present subjunctives mean “continue what you are already doing.” See the next argument.

B. EVEN IF A PRESENT SUBJUNCTIVE HAD BEEN USED, IT WOULD MEAN COMING TO BELIEVE, NOT CONTINUING TO BELIEVE

My research examined every use of *hina* (*that*) in John’s five NT books. My analysis included both the *Majority Text* and UBS/N-A.¹⁸ As a cross-check, I also consulted every Johannine use of *hina* discussed in A. T. Robertson’s *Word Pictures*.¹⁹

The focus was to isolate passages that closely resemble John 20:31a, the key passage of this article. The criteria are:

1. The verb must be a **present subjunctive**. Twice (John 3:17b and 12:47a) forms appear that could either be present or aorist subjunctives. The possibility that these are aorists required their omission.
2. The present subjunctive **must not be negated**. Negatives complicate the interpretation of *verbal aspect*. Sufficient non-negated examples exist without these.
3. Each must be in a **purpose clause controlled by *hina***. Most purpose clauses are chronologically subsequent (a few—e.g., John 3:15f—only have logical subsequence) to the controlling clause. In this way, purpose *hina*-clauses can differ from other *hina*-clauses, so restricting analysis

¹⁸The *Majority Text* has 248 uses. UBS and N-A have a few less, due to omission or substitution.

¹⁹I consulted volumes 4 and 6 of A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, six vols. (Nashville, TN: Broadman, 1932). He favored the Westcott-Hort text, so he omits some uses of *hina*.

to purpose clauses focuses upon passages that are truly analogous to John 20:31a.

Forty-one qualifying present subjunctives appear in John's writings in the *Majority Text*.

1. Robertson insists that present subjunctives mean "keep on..."

A. T. Robertson was a pioneering New Testament Greek grammarian. His pronouncements carry weight in scholarship today. Unfortunately, his wordiness sometimes causes readers to draw incorrect conclusions from his words. Before delving into some of his writings, a simple math problem illustrates a comparable interpretive ambiguity.

An algebra quiz contained the following problem:

$$x^2 = 4. \text{ Solve for } x.$$

A student answered $x = 2$, and when it was marked "incorrect," he complained. The teacher responded, "You failed to mention that x could also be -2 , so your answer is wrong."

Similarly, when Robertson renders various present subjunctives in purpose clauses with, "...so you would keep on ___ing," many interpreters assume that he means, "...so you would not stop what you are *already* doing." Even when recognizing that the purposed action had not yet begun, he still says, "...so you would keep on ___ing."

Let me illustrate: A penniless university student saying, "I study hard now so I might keep on earning a six-figure income until retirement," his prosperity has not yet started. The New Testament also uses present subjunctives for yet-to-begin purposed actions.

As with algebra, we often quickly embrace one interpretation before even realizing that better solutions may also exist.

2. Two possible meanings for "...so you would keep on ___ing."

John 15:16a says:

"You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that [*hina*] you should go forth [present subjunctive] and bear [present subjunctive] a great harvest, and that your harvest should abide [present subjunctive]..."

The purpose for Jesus choosing His disciples was so they would (1) go forth, (2) bear a great harvest, and (3) that the harvest would abide.

Now, consider Robertson's discussion of this verse:

Note three present active subjunctives with *hina* (purpose clauses) to emphasize **continuance** (*hupagēte*, **keep on** going, *pherēte*, **keep on** bearing fruit, *menēi*, **keep on** abiding), not a mere spurt, but permanent growth and fruit bearing [emphasis mine].²⁰

Theoretically, two interpretations of the three "keep on..." phrases are possible. The first is that even before Jesus chose the Twelve, they were already (1) going forth, (2) bearing fruit, and (3) and their fruit was already abiding. Theoretically, Robertson could be interpreted to say that the Twelve started these activities before Jesus called them.

However, no one would seriously contend that: (1) going forth, (2) fruit-bearing, and (3) abiding fruit predated Jesus choosing and appointing them. Despite the present subjunctives, Jesus chose and appointed them so these actions would *begin* (and then continue). Of course, He desired continuation of these actions (once begun). Robertson surely meant begin and then continue.

3. Robertson on John 20:31.

Robertson's rendering of the present tense that appears in the Westcott-Hort text is not as clear as it might initially seem: "*That ye may believe (hina pisteuēte)*. Purpose with *hina* and the present active subjunctive of *pisteuē*, 'that you may keep on believing.'"²¹

Yes, "keep on believing" characterizes how Robertson handles present tense verbs. His words do not, however, signal whether he viewed the original readers as believers or unbelievers. In context he suggests that the readers were unbelieving heretics (Cerentians or Docetists):

The man named Jesus is identical with the Messiah (the Anointed One) as opposed to the Cerentian separation of the Jesus of history and the Christ (*aeon*) of theology. And the Docetic notion of a phantom body for Jesus is also false.²²

Robertson appears to have viewed John's readers as unbelievers (entrenched in Cerentianism or Docetism, post-apostolic heresies akin to Gnosticism). Surely, no one would imagine him classifying Cerentians

²⁰ Robertson, *Word Pictures*, 4:261.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 4:317.

²² *Ibid.*

or Docetists as believers. Thus, adding brackets to his words would clarify his meaning: “that [once you come to believe in Jesus as the Christ, the Son of God] you may [then] keep on believing.”²³

Robertson is rightly regarded as a Greek expert. My Advanced Greek Grammar students are expected to read his grammar *carefully*. Few people read entire sections (he was verbose), so he might well protest (if he were alive), exclaiming, “Readers seem to miss my point.” Indeed, imagined support by Robertson could well be the catalyst for the John-addresses-believers notion. Would it not be tragic, if the theory arose from misunderstanding what *Word Pictures* says.

4. Forty-one Johannine non-negated present subjunctives.

Thirty-five of John’s forty-one non-negated present subjunctives in purpose clauses (85%) are a consequence of the controlling verb:

John 3:15b, 16b; 4:36; 5:23, 40; 8:6; 9:39a; 10:10d-e;
13:15; 14:3, 16; 15:2, 16a, 16c; 16:4, 24, 33; 17:11, 13b,
19, 21b, 22, 23a-b, 24b, 26; 20:31b; 1 John 1:4; 2:28a;
2 John 1:12; Rev 3:18e; 12:6, 14.

Only four of the forty-one (10%) consider continuation of a purposed action that had already begun: John 5:20; 1 John 1:3; 5:13a-b.

Two of the forty-one (5%) are ambiguous and could arguably refer to either of the previous categories: John 6:28; 3 John 1:8.

One should not argue that a present subjunctive in John 20:31a would *require* (or even *expect*) the idea of *continue to believe*. Only a few contexts exist where the purpose is for an already-begun action to continue (that is, not to cease). However, those arguing for the *continue-to-believe* interpretation of John 20:31a base the assertion upon accepting the present-tense reading (a variant lacking stellar support, as shown earlier),²⁴ not from contextual necessity. Thus, the argument could end here. However, this article’s third argument will demonstrate a context-based reason for understanding 20:31a as *come to believe*.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Cf. pp. 77-81 above.

5. *Forty-one Johannine non-negated present subjunctives in purpose clauses mean “coming to [do something].”*

Space does not permit examining each verse. However, they break down into three categories: places where the verb means “start doing something” (most of the uses), simply “keep on doing something,” or contexts in which either of those senses is possible.

Two places allow either possibility: John 6:28 (“What should we do that we may begin to work [or keep on working] the works of God”); and 3 John 8 (“We ought to receive such, that [*hina*] we may become [or may keep on being] fellow workers”).

Four non-negated present subjunctives in John refer to continuing to do something which was already being done: John 5:20 (“The Father... will show Him greater works *than* these, so [*hina*] you may keep on marveling”); 1 John 1:3 (“What we have seen...we declare to you, that [*hina*] you also may continue to have fellowship with us”); 1 John 5:13a (“These things I have written to you who believe...that [*hina*] you may continue to know that you have eternal life...”); and 1 John 5:13b (“These things I have written to you who believe...that [*hina*] you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God”).

The remaining thirty-five²⁵ of the forty-one uses of the non-negated present subjunctive in John’s writings all refer to the *start* of doing something which lasts. In each case it is preceded by an action that leads to the abiding result.

For the sake of space, four passages will illustrate this usage. In John 3:15-16 the one who starts believing in Jesus (*hina pas ho pisteuon*) *has everlasting life which cannot be lost*. Everlasting life starts at the moment of belief and that life lasts forever.

In John 4:36 the Lord said that the one who starts reaping (*ho therizon*)...gathers fruit for everlasting life “that [*hina*] both he who sows and he who reaps *may continue to rejoice* together.” This rejoicing starts at the Judgment Seat of Christ and it will continue forever thereafter.

A final example is John 5:23. The Father has granted all judgment to His Son so “that [*hina*] all might begin to and continue to honor the Son.” This honoring of the Son will begin at the time of judgment and it

²⁵ Thirty-five uses refer to starting to do something before continuing to do it: John 3:15, 16; 4:36; 5:23, 40; 8:6; 9:39a; 10:10d-e; 13:15; 14:3, 16; 15:2, 16a-c; 16:4a, 24, 33; 17:11, 13, 19, 21b, 22-24 [four uses], 26; 20:31b; 1 John 1:4; 2:28; 2 John 12; Rev 3:18e; 12:6, 14.

will continue thereafter. The Great White Throne Judgment (Rev 20:11-15) will result in every knee (without exception) bowing to the Son.

6. *Summary of John's usage of present subjunctives in purpose clauses.*

Eighty-three percent involve a yet-to-begin purposed action. Thus, even if one were to accept the present tense in John 20:31 (not a good idea), John's usage of present subjunctives weighs heavily toward the meaning of *come to believe* (not continue to believe).

Those arguing for the continue-to-believe approach in John 20:31 have wrongly regarded an appeal to textual criticism and an interpretation of a present tense as sufficient. The article could end here, but another argument carries the whole issue forward to a new level.

C. ALL EIGHT SIGNS LED PEOPLE TO FAITH IN CHRIST

John 20:30-31 says:

Thus Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which have not been written in this book. But these *signs* have been written so you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing, you may have life by His name.

John expounds eight signs. Seven are found in the first eleven chapters, balanced by the supreme sign (the cross and resurrection). Consider the statement, "These signs have been written [perfect tense] so you may believe..." Jesus did each of those signs so people present with Jesus when He did the signs might come to believe. John wrote those same signs (at various points in his Gospel) for his readers, so they might also come to believe.

Let's assume that John wrote chapters 1-5 during week one; chapters 6-10 in the second; 11-15 in the third; and 16-20 in the fourth. The perfect tense in 20:31a ("these [signs] have been written) would refer to signs that he had written weeks earlier. His perfect tense would refer quite naturally to what he had written previously. This is important, because Jesus performed those signs to prompt unbelievers to believe in Him. Would anyone claim that He turned water to wine to prevent believers at the wedding from defecting from their faith? Of course not. Jesus purposed each sign to lead people to believe. John recorded eight

signs that Jesus purposed evangelistically with a parallel purpose—to persuade unbelieving readers.

John did not record the signs to prevent believers from abandoning their faith. Such a misinterpretation does not square with the evangelistic purpose of each of the eight signs in context.²⁶

A few words should be said about Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus, Peter, John, Mary Magdalene, and Thomas. All these had believed Jesus' promise of everlasting life before the cross. However, they all fade into John's background as one looks at what Jesus' cross and resurrection accomplished. The issue here is still focused on reaching unbelievers, as the tone of the Last Discourse demonstrates.²⁷

D. THE LITERARY DESIGN OF JOHN SHOWS THE PURPOSE IS EVANGELISTIC

John 20:31 immediately precedes the Epilogue (John 21). It forms an *inclusio* with John 1:11-13 that is within the Prologue (John 1:1-14). Thus, John 20:30-31 should not be seen as merely finishing out the discussion with Thomas. It is the purpose for the whole book.

As we look at the eight signs within John's narrative, each sign focuses on bringing people to believe in Jesus for life everlasting. John urges the

²⁶ It is important to anticipate two possible objections: (1) some signs do not mention people who were present believing, (2) only the Twelve were present for Jesus walking on the Sea of Galilee (6:19-21).

1. The issue is not whether John mentioned people believing. Neither is the issue whether there were people who came to believe (unmentioned by John). If Jesus purposed a sign to present evidence to unbelievers that could conceivably persuade them, that sign had an evangelistic purpose. None of the signs was purposed to prevent believers from defecting from the faith.

2. John 6:19-21 might seem problematic, because only the disciples were present. However, it is important to note something miraculous besides Jesus walking on the water. Verse 21 says that He transported the disciples across the sea immediately to their destination (Capernaum). The next day kingmakers who crossed the sea and interrupted Jesus' teaching were astounded that He had eluded them and reached Capernaum before them (6:25). Despite not seeing Jesus after He went up the mountain alone (6:15), they recognize that something unusual had happened. Jesus rebukes them for not seeing a vertical significance in His signs (6:26). Those who see no evangelistic purpose in the sign of 6:19-21 miss something significant (pardon the pun).

²⁷ Cf. John H. Niemelä, "Jesus Props Up Unfruitful Believers (John 15:2-3)," *GIF* 29 (Mar-Apr 2014). Cf. also Zane C. Hodges, "Introducing John's Gospel [Part 1]: In The Upper Room with Jesus The Christ," *JOTGES* (Spring 2008): 29-43; and Zane C. Hodges, "Introducing John's Gospel [Part 2]: Miraculous Signs and Literary Structure in John's Gospel," *JOTGES* (Autumn 2008): 15-27.

readers to respond by believing in Jesus Christ, as many did when Jesus actually performed those signs.

V. CONCLUSION

Christianity for the past 1,700 years has perpetuated the Great Omission. It has ignored or even denied the evangelistic purpose of John's Gospel (John 20:30-31), reinforced by John's own Great Commission (John 15:16). Jesus said:

“You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go forth and bear a great harvest [*karpos*], and that your harvest [*karpos*] should abide [*menō*], so that whatever you ask the Father in My name [especially, enablement for a great harvest], He would give you.”

That is the one Great Commission passage that is explicitly evangelistic and which points to succeeding generations abiding (as the foundation for great harvests of the next generation and the next).

As we look at the first three centuries of Christianity, the growth rate was phenomenal. But Constantine's Edict of Milan spawned complacency and the Great Omission. Ever since, Christendom has run away from evangelism. It is no surprise that scholars attempt to remove evangelism from John's Gospel. Luke Timothy Johnson basically pronounced evangelism impossible, thinking that John and the Apostles urged everyone to hide in air-raid shelters. However, all the Apostles diligently spread the message of life at great personal risk. So did their followers. Grass-roots evangelism is the only way to explain the rapid growth of Christianity in the first three centuries.

We have refuted the supposition that textual criticism leads to the present tense in John 20:31a. It does not. Whether one holds to the *Majority Text* or to the *Critical Text*, the best reading is the aorist. Even the UBS/N-A texts agree, but some of their evidence (namely P⁶⁶ and Θ) does not belong as evidence for the other main reading.

We also saw that 85% of John's present subjunctives in purpose clauses refer to not-yet-begun purposed actions. That strikes at the heart of the contention of those who claim that the present tense would supposedly demand *continue to believe*.

Finally, one can look at each of the eight signs in their contexts in the Gospel. John's reason for having written each sign was to persuade unbelievers.

We need to act like we are in the good-old days (the first three centuries of Christianity). Each one of us can give Gospels of John to unbelievers and talk with them about Jesus Christ. We also can provide Gospels of John to believers and encourage them to use them in ministry to unbelievers.

John wrote his Gospel so that people would come to believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, so that by believing this, they may have life in His name. God gave it to us for that reason. He (through messengers) sought to communicate that message.

The model that Jesus expresses in John 15:16 is that believers who abide in the word are able to share the word. Some who hear the word-based message of life believe (resulting in a new generation of believers). Those new believers are to abide in the word and share the word-based message of life with others. John 15:16 is the multi-generational evangelistically-focused Great Commission for the Great Harvest. John wrote so people might acquire everlasting life by believing Jesus Christ for His promise of life.

REVIEW OF ALLAN CHAPPLE'S “JESUS’ INTERVENTION IN THE TEMPLE: ONCE OR TWICE?”¹

ROBERT N. WILKIN

*Executive Director
Grace Evangelical Society*

When our journal first started we had a section in which we did journal reviews. However, over time we followed the lead of many journals and stopped doing journal reviews.

This article by Allan Chapple is so timely and well-written that it demands a special review.

I. FOUR POSSIBLE VIEWS EXPLAINED

The author begins by laying out four possible explanations of the fact that John reports a cleansing of the temple at the start of Jesus’ ministry and the Synoptics report a cleansing near the end of His ministry. It should be noted that Chapple is not restricting himself to options that are consistent with a high view of Scripture. He is simply laying out four possible views, which are:

- The Lord only cleansed the Temple once, near the end of His ministry (the majority view).
- The Lord only cleansed the Temple once, at the start of His ministry.
- The Lord never cleansed the Temple.
- The Lord cleansed the Temple twice, at the start and near the end of His ministry (Chapple’s view).

¹ Allan Chapple, “Jesus’ Intervention in the Temple: Once or Twice?” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 58/3 (2015): 545-69.

II. DEMONSTRATING THAT THE ACCOUNTS ARE DIFFERENT

Rarely do interpreters compare accounts in order to see if they are the same account or different accounts. Most NT scholars today believe that the Gospel writers were very free in their reporting of history so that they felt free to change what Jesus said, including even changing the meaning of what He said. Thus when it comes to two different accounts of the cleansing of the Temple, they would have little problem holding that the two accounts report the same event, but with the authors altering some of the details.

Chapple, however, believes that if the details do not line up, then there must have been two cleansings of the Temple. Here are some of the differences Chapple cites (pp. 547-58):

- “They locate the event at opposite ends of Jesus’ ministry.”
- “There are only five words in common between the accounts.”
- John reports five features not found in the Synoptics: “the sheep and oxen; the whip; the word *kermatistēs* for money-changers; the “pouring out” of the money; and the command, “take these things away.”
- “Only the Synoptic account has a reference to Jesus prohibiting the carrying of vessels through the Temple area (Mark 11:16).”
- In the Synoptics Jesus quotes both from Isaiah and Jeremiah “to explain his actions, but in John Jesus does not quote any scriptural text.”
- “In the Synoptics Jesus is objecting to dishonest conduct, but in John to the provision of animals and money-changing as such.”
- Only in John is there a confrontation between Jesus and the Judeans immediately after the cleansing.
- The Temple logion [saying] is uttered by Jesus in John 2:19. But in Mark, it is uttered by false witnesses (Mark 14:58) and scoffers (Mark 15:29). Of course, if at the start of His ministry Jesus spoke of the destruction of the Temple and His raising it up in three days, then it would make sense that others would mockingly cite that saying at a later point. But if He never said that, then how could others cite it later?

Chapple makes this excellent point:

Comparing the two accounts (Mark and John) in this way makes it clear that despite many claims to the contrary, they have not much in common, and a great many differences. The most likely explanation for such a combination is not that two independent sources are reporting the same event from different perspectives, but that two different events are being reported (p. 550).

III. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF AN EARLY CLEANSING IN JESUS' MINISTRY

Chapple rejects “the widely held view that John had theological reasons for moving this event to the beginning of Jesus’ ministry” (p. 551). After discussing a place in which Matthew gives the readers “a rough idea of when certain miracles occurred,” he says,

To bring forward to the beginning of Jesus’ ministry an event that occurred only at the end—and, what is more, an event that played a significant part in bringing his ministry to an end—is not at all the same kind of thing. This does not give us just a rough idea of what happened; it gives us the wrong idea (p. 551).

He also makes this excellent point: “If John feels free to move the Temple story, why not the Lazarus story instead? Or what about [moving forward] chapter nine, with Jesus giving sight to a blind man and being opposed by self-styled ‘disciples of Moses’?...And so we could go on” (p. 553).

It is good exegetical practice to ask why a Gospel writer included a given incident in his Gospel. After having concluded that John is reporting an event that actually occurred at the start of Jesus’ ministry, Chapple goes a step further and asks why he chose to report this incident of the early cleansing of the Temple.

Seven reasons are given by the author as to the significance of an early cleansing of the Temple by Jesus.

First, the Judeans said to Jesus, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?” (John 2:20). Chapple points out that construction of the Temple began in 18/17 BC. Forty-six years later would be “around AD 28,” which would be at the start, not the end, of Jesus’ ministry.

Second, at the start of Jesus' ministry He made "indirect and enigmatic reference[s]" (p. 554) to His approaching death (cf. John 2:18-21; compare Matt 9:15; Mark 2:20; Luke 5:35). But during His final week in Jerusalem "his references to his approaching death are much less indirect" (p. 554).

Third, Chapple points out that in John 5:18 the Judeans "sought all the more [*mallon ezētoun*] to kill Him." The words all the more imply that there had been an earlier incident which had led them to wish to kill Him. That incident most likely would be Jesus' claim that the Temple was His Father's house (John 2:16).

Fourth, the Synoptics report (e.g., Mark 3:22) that there was "very strong Jerusalem-based opposition to Jesus not long into His Galilean ministry" (p. 556). The early cleansing of the Temple explains what led to that early opposition.

Fifth, Jesus' lament over Jerusalem at the end of His ministry (Matt 23:37-39) shows that He had visited Jerusalem and the Temple and had sought to bring the city to faith in Him earlier in His ministry (p. 557). This too supports an early Temple cleansing.

Sixth, there was a "disagreement between the witnesses at Jesus' trial before the Sanhedrin...over what he actually said about the temple" (p. 557). Chapple says, "This is much more likely if they are referring to something he said a couple of years before, but difficult to understand if the words in question were spoken only a few days previously" (p. 558).

Seventh, the author points out that the authorities respond much differently to the cleansing in John 2 than the later cleansing in Mark 11. In the first cleansing they ask for a sign (John 2:18). But in the later cleansing "they have determined to get rid of Jesus (Mark 11:18)" (p. 558). The second cleansing reads like "the final showdown." The first does not.

IV. JESUS' MISSION TO ISRAEL ARGUES FOR AN EARLY CLEANSING

In this section, Chapple argues that since Jesus' ministry was to the people of Israel, it was fitting that He would begin His ministry in Jerusalem, the political and religious capital of Israel. "In view of Jerusalem's fundamental role in Jewish life and hopes, would it not make good sense for Jesus to launch his mission there?" (p. 561).

This extended statement is well worth citing in full:

In a symbolic way both [the early and later temple cleansings] shut down the operations of the Temple cult in a display of messianic authority. The climactic intervention in the Synoptics does so to signal the downfall of the Temple in the judgment that is soon to fall upon Israel. But in John's account, Jesus is putting himself at the center of Israel's life, as the Messiah and the Father's Son. His words and deeds indicate that his death and resurrection will mean the end of the Temple and its sacrifices and will mark him out as the eschatological Temple. All of this is said and done in an indirect and veiled way that fits an early stage in his ministry. Such an inaugural visit to Jerusalem and the Temple makes a good fit with what we know of Jesus' messianic vocation and mission to Israel (p. 566).

V. ANSWERING OBJECTIONS TO AN EARLY CLEANSING

Chapple states that "the arguments against the early Temple event are not persuasive" (p. 567). He considers three objections.

First, some say that "Jesus would not have been able to intervene like this when he was largely unknown and without popular support, since those who were affected by his actions would have resisted him strongly" (p. 567). The author counters:

Those affected by what he did would have been too surprised and then too distracted to turn on him. He would only have faced resistance if he attempted to shut down their activities rather than just disrupting them. But this was no takeover bid, no occupation of the temple: 'it was a prophetic or symbolic act, limited in area, intent, and duration' (p. 567).

Second, some argue that "the Temple authorities would have taken strong measures to put a stop to his activities" (p. 567). Chapple counters that the authorities were not that strong and that "this view overlooks the fact that what happened was not a major upheaval, like a riot. It would have been over quickly, and would have left no significant damage" (p. 568).

Third, if Jesus had cleansed the Temple once, He would have been unable to do it a second time “because the authorities would ensure that it was not repeated” (p. 558). Chapple points out that “if there were two such events, they were separated by several years. During that interval Jesus visited Jerusalem a number of times, without engaging in any disruptive activity of this kind” (p. 558).

VI. CONCLUSION

Chapple summarizes the major points of his argument:

We have argued that the Synoptic and Johannine accounts are simply too different to be versions of the same event... The common explanations for John’s relocation of this event are not very persuasive... We have considered seven pieces of evidence that fit an early Temple event... We have pointed out the weaknesses of the arguments that have been advanced against an early Temple event (p. 569).

Chapple’s article is a very artful defense of inerrancy. He never even uses the term *inerrancy*. He never chides those who disagree with him with having too broad a view of inerrancy. He simply gives objective reasons why two cleansings of the temple best fit the data of the NT.

This article is excellent. It is a must-read for anyone who has an interest in NT interpretation and in inerrancy. I highly recommend it.

BOOK REVIEWS

Philippians: Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament.
By Joseph H. Hellerman, Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman
Publishing Group, 2015. 297 pp. Paper, \$29.99.

The book of Philippians is of interest to readers of the *JOTGES* because of certain verses that are often taken to indicate that works are either necessary for eternal life or are required to prove one has been eternally saved. This commentary by Hellerman addresses these issues.

As the subtitle indicates, there is a heavy emphasis on the Greek of the text. The author discusses each verse and breaks down each verse into Greek phrases. There is a Greek exegetical outline of each verse as well. While this may scare off some readers who do not know Greek, the author discusses each phrase in a way that is easy to understand. Even so, the discussion is generally technical and the beginning Bible student may find it difficult to follow.

Hellerman discusses the different views of the passages and how recent scholarship understands them. The good news is that, as a general rule, he shows that the common Lordship understanding of certain verses in Philippians is not the only alternative. The bad news is that when given the different options, he usually opts for the Lordship view.

There are a number of relevant passages in Philippians associated with Free Grace theology and the discussions on these verses might determine the value of the book for readers of the *JOTGES*. In 1:5, Hellerman says that the “fellowship in the Gospel” is not a reference to the eternal life possessed by the Philippians, but of their participation in the work of evangelism (p. 24). In the same discussion, he says that the “good work” in 1:6 includes the idea of evangelism but has a broader meaning as well. He does this with very little discussion and concludes that this work does not simply mean their work in advancing the Gospel but also includes their final glorification (p. 25).

It is interesting to note that Hellerman sees a theme in the book of Philippians that is related to 1:5. That verse forms a bookend with

4:10-19. This ties the book together around a theme of advancing the Gospel. To this reviewer, that is the key to understanding 1:6.

While recognizing that “salvation” in 1:19 does not refer to eternal life, he says that it does in 1:28. This view is significant because in both cases this salvation is the result of some effort on the part of either Paul or the Philippians. He recognizes that these interpretative decisions are difficult, but believes that in the case of 1:28, the meaning of the term is determined by 1:6. While there are options, how one determines the meaning in one verse will determine the meaning in another. However, Hellerman is not consistent, as his understanding of 1:19 indicates.

Another commonly used verse in Philippians is 2:12. There, Paul says that the Philippian believers must “work out” their salvation. Hellerman says that the term “salvation” can either mean eternal salvation or have a “sociological” meaning. The latter would mean Paul is talking about ethical salvation that relates to the advancement of the gospel through ethical living and the “relational health of the church at Philippi” and not eternal salvation (pp. 130-31). Hellerman finds support in the context of 1:27–2:18 for such a view of salvation.

Hellerman also points out that recent scholarship recognizes that the idea of working out one’s salvation with works has difficulties with Paul’s teaching about justification in the books of Romans and Galatians. Although the discussion allows for a non-traditional view of salvation in 2:12, in the end Hellerman believes that the word involves both eternal salvation and the outworking of that salvation in the believing community at Philippi.

Perhaps the most disappointing discussion concerns 3:11, where Paul says that he hopes to attain to the resurrection of the dead. Hellerman believes that Paul is talking about eternal salvation here, and once again Hellerman recognizes that this at face value contradicts Paul’s assurance of resurrection in other places. As in 2:12, he takes a view that combines two views. He says that Paul is saying that in order to be resurrected a believer must be conformed to the death of Christ. However, Paul is humble enough to recognize that salvation is a gift from God and he “dare not presume on this divine mercy” (pp. 191-92). It is difficult for the reviewer to see how this does not destroy the assurance of one’s salvation. Unfortunately, unlike with his discussions on the meaning of the word “salvation,” Hellerman does not mention other possibilities here. This is the only place Paul uses this word for “resurrection,” a point

that Hellerman notes. Other options would include the idea that Paul is referring to a life that either pleases Christ at the Bema or one that is victorious over the flesh in this life.

The value of this commentary is that Hellerman recognizes that the book of Philippians as a whole at least challenges common views of theology. There is an emphasis in Philippians on the advancement of the gospel in evangelism. To Hellerman, this does not mean that the common views are incorrect, but in these areas he gives food for thought. Throughout the commentary Hellerman gives resources for further study. At least in the area of the meaning of “salvation” in Philippians, such resources may be helpful. While not written from a Free Grace perspective, the commentary can be of use in some areas. It is of value for those who want to see how some who are not Free Grace struggle with what seem to be inconsistencies in Paul’s writings on salvation and assurance. For those, I recommend this commentary.

Ken W. Yates

Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

***Refreshing Grace: God’s Will, Our Will, in Focus.* By John Correia. Phoenix, AZ: Biblical Framework Press, 2012. 192 pp. Paper, \$14.99.**

One of the solutions to reconciling God’s sovereignty and human responsibility in salvation is the doctrine of middle knowledge, sometimes known as “Molinism” after Luis de Molina, who first articulated the idea. John Correia’s *Refreshing Grace* is a popular introduction to that subject.

In the first chapter, Correia introduces some ground rules for having a profitable debate over God’s sovereignty and man’s free-will in salvation.

In the second chapter, he summarizes the five points of Calvinism, where God determines every aspect of salvation, including which individuals will have eternal life (pp. 30-34). Correia points out some of the strengths of Calvinism. These include its emphasis on the greatness of God. He also points out some weaknesses, such as the implication that God is the author of sin. Correia also says the doctrine of unconditional election undermines assurance because “If someone can *think* they are saved but might fall away later and prove that they never really *were*

saved, then any assurance of salvation is elusive at best and impossible at worst” (p. 52).

In the third chapter, Correia outlines the five points of Arminianism. He makes the important observation that the center of Arminian theology is God’s goodness, not man’s free-will, because man’s free-will is a consequence of the goodness of God (pp. 59-60). Correia suggests Arminianism has several weaknesses, such as implying that salvation is by works and undermining assurance (pp. 90-91).

In chapter five, Correia presents the middle knowledge view of election and predestination. According to this view, God elects individuals to salvation while preserving their free-will in choosing to believe. How? By knowing what free creatures would decide in any given situation.

For example, imagine that God wants you to become a farmer. And imagine that, because He has middle knowledge, God knows that if you are given a toy tractor for your fifth birthday, you will decide to become a farmer. However, He also knows if you are given a G.I. Joe instead, you will decide to become a soldier instead of a farmer. So in order for God to fulfill His plans, He arranges for you to get that tractor, and you freely decide to become a farmer. God gets His way without violating your free-will.

The same principle is supposed to apply to salvation. According to middle knowledge, God chooses to elect some people to salvation, and then brings about the circumstances where God knows they will freely choose to believe. As Correia explains,

God has the ability to know exactly what every creature *will* do in any given situation and with any given set of motivation, and can therefore choose to create the world in which their meaningful decisions carry out His sovereign will without having to coerce them to choose what He wants (p. 115).

In sum, Correia finds Molinism convincing (p. 174). It is a good option for Free Grace theology. In this reviewer’s opinion, Molinism does not overcome any of the difficulties raised against Calvinism.

Imagine that a woman named Paula does not come to faith in Jesus for eternal life in this world. Why doesn’t she?

The Molinist would say it was Paula’s own fault for not coming to faith. She was free to believe, and she freely chose not to believe. Hence, Correia writes, “If they resist, then their failure to trust Christ is because

of their own resistance and they are responsible for their own damnation” (p. 124). So the reason why Paula does not come to faith is because she resisted God’s grace.

But does that make sense in the Molinist view? Why wouldn’t God have created a world where Paula is put in a set of circumstances where she *does* freely come to believe in Jesus? Correia is forced to say it must be because there was no such world: “none of those who are lost would have come to faith in Christ *in any other possible scenario*” (p. 130, emphasis added).

I find that unbelievable. How can it be possible for a creature with the freedom to either believe or not believe in Jesus to reject Him *an infinite number of times*? Shouldn’t a wise God know how to convince a person to believe in Jesus, in at least one possible world? If so, why not create that world so Paula can believe and be saved? And if God knows that Paula will never believe, why create her? It seems that, in creating Paula, God is neither good, nor merciful, nor just, nor wise.

Another objection against Molinism is that it makes the fundamental assumption that God elects individuals to eternal life. In my opinion, the Bible contains no such teaching. There are dozens of verses that describe how God chooses people, places, and things *to service*, but no verse teaches He elects individuals *to eternal life*.

Even though I find Molinism unconvincing, I recommend *Refreshing Grace* as a popular introduction to the doctrine of middle knowledge. Correia has written an irenic book. He goes out of his way to put a positive spin on his presentations of Calvinism and Arminianism to promote real dialogue. Even those who disagree will find there’s much to think about.

Shawn Lazar

Associate Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

***Grace, Salvation, and Discipleship: How to Understand Some Difficult Bible Passages.* By Charles C. Bing. NP: Grace Theology Press, 2015. 290 pp. Cloth, \$17.00.**

Charlie Bing has written a book that is extremely helpful in explaining many difficult passages.

There is a Scripture Index, which is very helpful. It makes it easy to find what Bing says about a given passage.

There is no Subject Index, which is slightly disappointing. However, this is a minor drawback.

After an introduction to what he calls “Understanding the A Truth B Truth Distinction,” Bing walks through the NT, with chapters on the Synoptic Gospels, John’s Gospel, Acts, Paul’s epistles, Hebrews, the epistles of James, Peter, John, and Jude, and Revelation. He concludes with a chapter entitled, “Making Biblical Distinctions Count.” This layout is helpful. He covers major tough texts in all NT books.

The “A Truth B Truth Distinction” got a bit old for me. I imagine the words *A Truth* and *B Truth* must occur over 500 times in the book. On many pages you’ll find those expressions four times or more. As an example, in Chapter 8 alone there are 17 pages out of 51 (that is, one in three) in which those expressions occur four or more times on one page (pp. 143, 146, 147, 148, 151, 158, 162, 163, 164, 171, 173, 177, 179, 181, 184, 187, 193).

Here is an example of the cumbersome expression, “The B Truth interpretation is an encouragement for us as believers to endure suffering...” (p. 180). It would be much clearer and less jarring if he simply mentioned the passage he was discussing: “Philippians 1:27-28 is an encouragement for us as believers to endure suffering.”

There are no footnotes or endnotes in this book. That is disappointing since the reader would be helped to see books by others which advocate the positions Bing takes. It would also be helpful if Bing indicated authors who influenced his thinking on various passages.

Here are just a few of his discussions of tough texts that I found to be outstanding: Matt 7:15-20 (pp. 67-68); Matt 7:21-23 (pp. 68-70); Matt 11:28-30 (pp. 73-74); Matt 16:25-26 (pp. 77-78); John 2:23-25 (pp. 116-17); John 3:36 (pp. 119-20); John 8:30-32 (pp. 124-26); John 12:42-43 (pp. 128-29); Acts 8:17-24 (pp. 137-39); Rom 6:17 (pp. 147-48); 1 Cor 9:27 (pp. 163-64); 2 Cor 13:5 (pp. 168-170); Gal 6:7-9 (pp. 173-75); Phil 2:12 (pp. 180-82); Col 1:21-23 (pp. 184-86); 2 Tim 4:7-8 (pp. 192-93); Heb 5:9 (pp. 200-201); Heb 6:4-8 (pp. 201-203); Jas 5:19-20 (pp. 217-18); 2 Pet 1:10-11 (pp. 222-24); 2 Pet 2:1-22 (pp. 224-27); 1 John 5:16 (pp. 236-38); Jude 24 (pp. 239-40); Rev 3:5 (pp. 244-46); Rev 3:20 (pp. 247-49); and Rev 20:11-15 (pp. 249-50).

The person who is looking for explanations of tough texts now has another helpful resource from a Free Grace perspective.

There are three areas of disagreement, however.

First, Bing says, “The present tense of ‘believing’ [pisteuō, in John 20:31] shows that *sanctifying faith must continue* [emphasis added] after initial justifying faith in order to *experience* [emphasis his] the new life that was received” (p. 115). He also has a heading entitled, “Keep on believing for eternal life” (p. 132), which he says means that “a person must keep on believing in order to experience the eternal life they received when they believed in Jesus as Savior” (p. 132).

However, John 20:31 uses an aorist tense of *pisteuō* (*pisteusēte*), not a present tense. See the discussion by John Niemelä on pp 77-86 of this issue. But even if John 20:31 used the present tense of *pisteuō*, it cannot both mean that one who believes at that moment has everlasting life and that one must continue to believe to experience that life. And it is not true that if one continues to believe in Christ, he is necessarily progressing in sanctification. One must not only believe, but also obey, to grow (cf. Jas 2:1-13, 14-26).

Second, Bing suggests that the purpose of John’s Gospel is both evangelism and discipleship (p. 115) and that the Synoptic Gospels have “an implicit and partial purpose” “to bring people to faith in Jesus Christ” (p. 115). This is a dangerous position in my estimation. If John’s Gospel is not the only evangelistic book in the Bible, then it makes it more difficult to counter Lordship Salvation since it derives its understanding of the condition of everlasting life from the Synoptics and the epistles.

Third, Bing argues that repentance is a change of mind *and a change of heart* and that it is sometimes a condition of everlasting life (pp. 51-52). Bing says, “While I believe that in the New Testament it [repentance] is sometimes used to describe *the change of heart indicated by saving faith*—for whenever one believes in Jesus Christ as Savior, he has changed his mind or heart about something—(e.g. Luke 5:32; 24:47; Acts 11:18; 17:30, 34; 2 Pet. 3:9), many times it is used as B Truth either applied to Israel...or to believers for their sanctification” (p. 52, emphasis added). To say that a change of heart is required to be born again opens the door to confusion. Does this mean that one must be willing to turn from his sins? What must he change his heart about? A change of heart is a vague concept and it tends to imply some sort of decision to change one’s behavior.

Finally, one thing missing from Bing's excellent work is a statement or defense of assurance being of the essence of saving faith. While there are a number of statements where he says that one must believe in the person, provision, and promise of everlasting life (e.g., pp. 45, 145, 249), there is no explanation of what believing the promise of everlasting life means in terms of assurance.

I recommend this book for well-grounded believers. It is an excellent resource on tough texts. However, due to the three concerns mentioned above, I do not recommend it for new or poorly taught believers.

Robert N. Wilkin

Associate Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

***Modern Version Failures.* By Charles Kriessman. Collingswood, NJ: The Bible For Today Press, 2014. 146 pp. Paper, \$14.00.**

This publication by a member of the Dean Burgon Society (DBS) is reviewed because of concern for the doctrine of inerrancy as it relates to the multiplicity of Bible translations. English Bible versions differ not only because of translation methodology but also by the chosen underlying original language texts. Presently, I lean toward the Majority Text following the arguments by Hodges, Pickering, G.H. Clark, and W.G. Crampton while also recognizing that there are many scholarly brothers who advocate the Critical Text. The translations that are surveyed by Kriessman are not ones based on the Majority Text, but it appears that he would find it as deplorable as he finds the Critical Text.

As a layman, I had hoped that this book would provide some concrete examples of deliberate doctrinal perversions occurring in the more popular Bible translations. Unfortunately, this book is itself a failure with regards to honesty and objectivity by alleging that all modern Bible versions inevitably lead to heterodoxy.

For a relatively short book, an inordinate amount of time is spent on "the battle for the mind" and "the whole armor of God." This seems to be included for the purpose of filler and does not leave much space for the author to accomplish what he claims he will do—that is, analyze and assess major textual and doctrinal errors contained in four modern Bible versions (NIV, NASB, ESV, and CEV). It should be noted also

that there are numerous grammatical errors in the book, some of which are glaringly obvious (pp. 30, 36, 55, 79, 89, 91, and 95). The sentence structure is often cumbersome and weak arguments are overcompensated for by exaggeration and extremism. Also, some historical data and pertinent quotes lack documentation (pp. 91, 94, 105).

Kriessman's contention is basically that "corrupt" Greek manuscripts utilized in modern Bible translations diminish the veracity of some doctrinal proof texts and subsequently open the door to neo-orthodoxy, postmodernism, and heresy. But in his many verse-by-verse comparisons he merely rehashes many of the same arguments and "just-so" statements purported by many other KJV/*Textus Receptus* defenders over the years.

While there are some modern Bible versions that should be rejected for their blatant doctrinal corruptions (*The Message*, for example), the existence of modern translation errors and corruptions does not constitute a positive argument for the KJV, nor does it guarantee that "doctrinal failure" will result when consideration is given to any particular textual variant. Any English translation is still a translation, and even the underlying Greek text of the KJV has its own problems.

Kriessman does not engage the textual issue to a great degree other than to repeatedly insist that the *Textus Receptus* and the King James Bible are "doctrinally second to none" (pp. 80, 107), "unsurpassed" (pp. 81, 97, 106), "unexcelled in doctrine" (p. 81), "the best" (pp. 82, 96, 100), "supreme" (pp. 84, 96), "superior" (pp. 95, 97, 98, 110), and "unequaled" (pp. 99, 101, 109). The fact is, textual criticism and translation methods are subjects far more complex than Kriessman cares to admit, having already made up his mind that any deviation from the King James and the "traditional text" will inevitably result in "doctrinal failure" (p. 3). This is an oft-repeated assertion by the DBS, and Kriessman is perpetuating this charade. He makes many unqualified and extreme statements that should cause any reader to be wary of his position. One example should suffice: "What is being taught in the colleges and seminaries about the textual issues are total lies. The thoughts of the hearts of those teaching are only lies. The thoughts of the hearts of the students coming out are only lies" (p. 10).

Kriessman's sweeping generalization in asserting that all that is being taught in seminaries on textual criticism are "total lies" obviously cannot be sustained unless Kriessman is omnipresent and can see and hear what every professor is teaching at all times in every classroom. He likewise

claims for himself the attribute of omniscience when he informs us that the thoughts of the professors' hearts and those of their students "are only lies." Let us be reminded that only God knows the thoughts of the human heart (Jer 17:9-10). The book's credibility is tainted by such unsubstantiated claims and lack of sufficient documentation.

Many of Kriessman's arguments rest on the assumption that the authentic text is confirmed by its support of a particular doctrine. But this is the reverse of how one must proceed. We do not decide which Greek text is most reliable based on its conformity to orthodoxy. On the contrary, we get our theology from the plain words of Scripture, not Scripture from theological *a priori* arguments. Obviously, we would have no theology at all if God did not first provide us with special revelation from which exegesis can proceed. This is a major flaw in his reasoning.

To his credit, Kriessman rejects the heretical views of Peter Ruckman and Gail Riplinger concerning inspiration. He rightly maintains that only the autographs were divinely inspired (p. 48), and that the doctrine of inspiration does not apply to any translation (p. 49). He devotes almost an entire chapter as well as an appendix to denouncing the Ruckman/Riplinger position on the supposed "inspiration of the KJV." But if Kriessman is dogmatic that only the autographs are inspired then why does he automatically categorize every other English translation as inferior to the KJV simply because it is not identical to the KJV? If it is admitted that inspiration does not apply to the KJV, then it cannot follow that all modern versions are failures merely on account of their deviation from the KJV. Irrationality and circularity undermine Kriessman's thesis, since any modern version is eliminated out of hand even if it constitutes a legitimate translation using Kriessman's preferred texts (i.e., the Masoretic and *Textus Receptus*).

Despite the few legitimate criticisms of some modern Bible translations, there are numerous additional errors in the book which cannot be covered here. I do not recommend this book to anyone looking for help in the Bible version debate.

Nick Sabato
Bayside, NY

***Kept for Jesus: What the New Testament Really Teaches about Assurance of Salvation and Eternal Security.* By Sam Storms. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2015. 203 pp. Paper, \$15.99.**

Storms is the senior pastor of Bridgeway Church in Oklahoma City, OK and holds a PhD from the University of Texas at Dallas. He is also the president-elect of the Evangelical Theological Society. As one interested in Free Grace issues, the title of this book immediately caught my eye.

In the book, Storms says that he is writing the book to challenge what Arminians and “antinomians” say about the assurance of salvation. In reality, the book does not really address the “antinomian” view in any detail (however, he does say that sin in the life of the believer does not really involve the loss of rewards), but heavily interacts with the Arminian one. Storms comes from a Reformed perspective on this subject which says that eternal life cannot be lost, but if somebody is truly born again he will “persevere in faith unto life’s end, even though that perseverance may be a bit bumpy and inconsistent” (p. 15). Storms says that the true believer will never utterly abandon Christ. He wants the Arminian to understand that he cannot lose his salvation (p. 17).

The book is definitely irenic in tone. Storms is not argumentative. By all indications, he holds out the possibility that Arminian (and antinomian) adherents can be truly saved, even if their views on assurance are wrong. In others words, his position on the gospel and assurance is a matter of Christian growth. He primarily wants Arminian believers to experience the joy of assurance of salvation (p. 17).

Philosophically, Storms is a strong believer in eternal security. He says that the Gospel of John in places like 6:37-44 and 10:27-30 teaches it. He uses many verses to try to make his case. Romans is a book that proclaims the assurance of salvation. Paul does that in Rom 5:6-11; 8:1, 28-39 (pp. 59-85). Storms adds, however, that verses such as these also teach that God will never allow the true believer to leave or forsake Him either.

In a large section (pp. 133-73), Storms deals with texts that the Arminian claims teach that a believer can lose his salvation. He deals with them and concludes that there are other options for each one. We cannot be dogmatic on certain options, but since the Scriptures clearly

teach in other places that one cannot lose his salvation, these passages cannot be teaching that we can.

It is interesting that in James 5, Storms takes the position that the death of the sinning person there refers to sin in the life of a true believer. A Christian can commit sin to the point of physical death but does not lose salvation.

In this vein, he says that God may discipline believers physically to *prevent* the loss of salvation. God did that in the case of the believers at Corinth in regards to the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11) and the husband and wife in Acts 5. God will not allow a true Christian to apostasize or to fall into patterns of sin incompatible with being a child of God. In those instances He will take their lives before these things happen (pp. 95-97).

As expected, coming from a strong Reformed position, Storms says that if a person does live a life of consistent sin he should in no way feel he is eternally saved. Turning from sin is a requirement for salvation. Along with this repentance is the requirement for feeling sorry for your sins. He seems to indicate that an antinomian, one who has assurance but does not have conviction of sin, may have committed the unpardonable sin since his heart has become hardened over time to his sin (p. 30).

Storms maintains that we should never give assurance to anybody who lives in unrepentant sin (p. 25). Matt 7:15-20 shows that a true Christian will reveal it by the fruit of their actions (p. 30).

For Storms, the parables of the four soils and the vine and the branches show that there are false and temporary faiths that do not save. In them, we see that true faith involves repentance, brokenness over sin, humility, perseverance, good works, and a gradually transformed life. In addition, such a faith is sincere, involves a love for Christ, and a passion to follow Him. True believers will also abide in Christ's word, bearing fruit until the end. While a Christian can have doubts and struggle with sin, they will never abandon their confidence in Christ. (pp. 41-49).

There are those who claim to be believers but are not according to Storms. The people in John 2:23-25, the false teachers of 1 John 2:19, and Simon in Acts 8 are examples.

There are other indications of a true faith according to Storms. The believer is one who prays without ceasing, is embedded in the Christian community, worships Jesus in all of life, and lives with a sense of mission

with Him every day. If there is an absence of these things we cannot be sure of our salvation (p. 57ff).

In a great example of doublespeak in a book where Storms wants to give the readers the joy of assurance, he says that doubt and uncertainty can be a good thing. If we are certain of our salvation (a reference to the antinomian?) it can lead to arrogance and pride. However, we cannot let that doubt “cripple” us (p. 71). He later says that based upon 2 Cor 13:5 we should examine ourselves to see if we are saved. We do that by asking ourselves if we are submitting to the teachings of the Bible and if we have sorrow over our sins or are indifferent and rationalize them. These things show us if we are saved or not. However, we should not be morbidly obsessive in examining ourselves. On the other side, we shouldn’t be indifferent towards such self-examining either (pp. 116-17).

In a continuation of such doublespeak, Storms says that full assurance is possible, but it involves a degree of certainty. Our assurance will depend upon the depth of our understanding the things of God. Full assurance can grow (pp. 72-73). To this reviewer, these statements are self-contradictory.

Storms also appeals to many other verses to say that if you don’t persevere in good works and faith, you were never saved in the first place. These include Paul’s discussion of the olive tree in Romans 11, 2 Tim 2:11-13, and the warning passages in Hebrews. First John teaches that when a true Christian sins they will have conviction, grief, misery, and brokenness, which will lead to repentance. The person who commits the sin unto death in 1 John 5:16-17 describes a person who only claims to be a Christian, although Storms says this is a perplexing text and is open to other interpretations (p. 187).

At the conclusion of the book Storms says we must persevere in faith to enter heaven. God will preserve us in our faith even when we doubt and wander, and we will never completely fall away. If we or somebody else wanders away we must admit that we don’t know if they are going to heaven or not. If they come back, they were saved, if they don’t, they weren’t. Then he says we should have “unbelievable joy and comfort” in these facts (p. 190-91). It is hard for this reviewer to see how this is the case. Since a professed believer can wander away in the future, none of us can know if we will return if we do. Thus, we can never have assurance.

It is a good thing that Storms recognizes that the Bible teaches the eternal security of the believer. In addition, at times he uses the analogy of faith to interpret some passages that seem to teach the loss of salvation and concludes that they cannot be teaching that. However, what an irony that he wants to give assurance of salvation to his readers on one hand and with the other hand takes it away. His theology will give nobody assurance of salvation. Nobody can know if they will keep the long list of requirements that Storms says we need in order to know if they are truly saved. Nobody can know if they will do it until the end of their lives. In a further twist of irony, he wants to change the minds of the Arminian readers and winds up in the exact same place they find themselves. Without a life lived in obedience to Christ, however that is defined, a person winds up in hell. Since Storms wants to give assurance of salvation, and this book does not do that, I cannot recommend the book.

Ken W. Yates

Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

***A Theology of Mark's Gospel: Good News about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God.* By David E. Garland. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015. 651 pp. Cloth, \$44.99.**

David Garland teaches at Truett Theological Seminary at Baylor University.

This beautiful and massive book is a Biblical Theology of Mark and not a commentary. The difference is that unlike in his commentary on Mark (The NIV Application Commentary on Mark), Garland does not walk his way through Mark's Gospel passage by passage. Instead, Garland has chosen ten theological issues which Mark discusses and he tells us all that Mark has to say about that subject in the entire Gospel. The ten issues are Christological titles (Chapter 4), enacted Christology (Chapter 5), the presentation of God (Chapter 6), the kingdom of God (Chapter 7), the secrecy motifs (Chapter 8), the theology of discipleship (Chapter 9), the requirements, costs, and rewards of discipleship (Chapter 10), mission (Chapter 11), the theology of atonement and salvation (Chapter 12), and eschatology (Chapter 13).

There are three introductory chapters (Chapters 1-3) and a concluding chapter in which Garland considers whether Mark's Gospel ends at Mark 16:8, whether it was lost, or whether the longer ending (Mark 16:9-20) is original.

JOTGES readers will want to know that Garland is not a Free Grace advocate. In his discussion of salvation and discipleship he indicates that following Christ is a condition of everlasting life. However, unlike many, he does not belabor the point. He doesn't seem to have an axe to grind. He simply observes what the text says and interprets it through a standard grid.

This book is a mine of outstanding statements for the person willing to do the necessary spade work. The Scripture index at the back makes it fairly easy to find out where Garland discusses a given passage. It may involve looking at four or five different pages on which he discusses a given passage before you find the place where he gives the primary discussion. But once you do, it is worth the search.

The following are examples of statements by Garland or by people he cites which I found very helpful. "John the Baptist is Jesus' forerunner in more ways than one. He paves the way in preaching repentance to Israel, in his conflict with the powerful, established order, and in his suffering and death. John's arrest is the first hint that the coming of God's kingdom will be resisted. Those who are faithfully obedient to God will suffer for their faithfulness" (pp. 104-105).

Concerning Mark 10:45 and Jesus' saying that "the Son of Man [came]...to give His life a ransom for many," Garland says, "Paul's discussion of the repercussions of Adam's trespass and Christ's obedience in Rom 5:12-19 uses 'many' and 'all' interchangeably. In the same way, 'the many' in Mark 10:45 likely represents the sum total of humanity" (p. 478). For further support he here points the reader to the article in TDNT on *polloi* by Joachim Jeremias.

Speaking about Jesus' call to deny oneself, take up his cross, and follow Christ in order to gain one's life, Garland writes, "Their ultimate gain comes with present pain. Suffering and hope in God paradoxically belong together" (p. 447). While he understands the ultimate gain to be entering the kingdom and not eternal reward, the quote is still fantastic. I plan to use it.

Chapter 4, dealing with Christological titles in Mark (pp. 225-260) is excellent.

I recommend this Biblical theology of Mark for well-grounded believers. It is an excellent resource. I think that educators and pastors will find a wealth of very helpful material here.

Robert N. Wilkin
Associate Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

Evidence for the Rapture: A Biblical Case for Pretribulationism.
John Hart, editor. Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2015. 276 pp.
Paper, \$19.99.

John Hart is a Professor of Bible at Moody Bible Institute. He has taught at MBI for over thirty years. He is the editor of this work as well as one of its authors.

In addition to Hart, the authors include Robert Thomas, Michael Ridelnik, Andy Woods, Glenn Kreider, Nathan Holsteen, Michael Vanlaningham, Kevin Zuber, George Gunn, and Michael Svigel.

My favorite chapter, Chapter 2, is worth the price of the book. That is Hart's discussion of the Rapture in Matthew 24. Most Dispensationalists do not think that the Rapture is in Matthew 24.

Indeed, George Gunn in this very book says that there are only three passages in the NT which discuss the rapture in detail: John 14:1-3; 1 Cor 15:51-54; and 1 Thess 4:13-18 (pp. 99-100). Gunn does, however, suggest a fourth major rapture passage is Phil 3:20-21 (p. 101). Clearly he does not consider Matt 24:36-44 to be a rapture passage. That Hart allowed an implicit dig against his own view in this book he edits is a credit to him.

Hart makes a very compelling case, providing nine rock-solid proofs (pp. 51-65). And as one typically finds in Hart's writings, he has lots of outstanding footnotes (72 footnotes which run over five pages long in small print, pp. 66-71).

I also really liked the first chapter, the one on imminence by Robert Thomas. While many Dispensationalists today believe that there are signs of the Rapture, Thomas makes a great case for the fact that there are no signs of the Rapture. He also does a great job of showing why various views of "imminence" are illogical and are really evasions of what imminence means (e.g., pp. 33-34).

The other eight chapters were helpful. Of those chapters I found the chapters by Holsteen (on *apostasia* in 2 Thess 2:2) and by Svigel (on Rev 12:5) as the most interesting and engaging.

Despite Gunn's claim of only three or four NT passages which discuss the rapture in detail, the other authors in this book find scores of passages supposedly dealing with the rapture. While I am convinced that Matt 24:36-44 is a pre-trib rapture passage, I am open but not yet convinced that the rapture is found in 2 Thess 2:2, the seven letters of Revelation 2-3, and Rev 12:5. Some of the authors in this book may try a bit too hard to find the rapture in passages which really aren't talking about it.

One final point that might interest *JOTGES* readers: Gunn in his discussion of John 14:1-3 cites Barbara Rossing as saying concerning 1 Thess 4:13-18, "Yes, to be sure, Paul says people will be snatched up in the air to meet Jesus, but *it [sic] never says that Jesus turns around, switches direction and goes back up to heaven for seven years. They have to insert that. They have to make that up because it's not in the text*" (cited on p. 101, emphasis his). Gunn then responds, "In fact, with the exception of John 14, no major rapture passage (1 Cor. 15:51-54; Phil 3:20-21; 1 Thess 4:13-18) explicitly mentions the return to heaven. Only John 14 specifically describes the return to heaven as the final venue of the rapture event" (p. 101).

But does John 14:1-3 actually describe "the return to heaven"? Gunn thinks that passage does in the words, "I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:3). The third heaven is not specifically mentioned there. The point is that believers will be with Jesus and will be *wherever He is*.

Zane Hodges held the view that at the rapture believers meet Jesus in the air and that they spend seven years with the Lord there, in the atmosphere surrounding the earth (probably in a different time-space dimension). Then at the end of the seven years the believers, who were with Christ the entire seven years, now continue to earth with Him. They spend the 75 days between the end of the Tribulation and the start of the Millennium on earth with the Lord. They spend the Millennium on earth with the Lord. Then after the destruction of the heavens and the earth, they spend eternity with Him on the new earth. Hodges held the view that neither Jesus nor believers return to the third heaven after the rapture. Maybe a return to heaven does occur at that point. But

John 14:1-3 doesn't say that. Nor does 1 Thess 4:13-18; 5:1-11; 1 Cor 15:51-54; Phil 3:20-21; or Matt 24:36-44.

I recommend *Evidence for the Rapture*. The chapters by Hart and Thomas make it one of the best books on the Rapture available today.

Robert N. Wilkin

Associate Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

***If Grace Is True: Why God Will Save Every Person.* By Philip Gulley and James Mulholland. San Francisco, CA: Harper, 2010. 256 pages. Paper, \$14.99.**

The authors are liberal Quaker ministers. Though the book is co-authored, they write in the first-person singular. As the subtitle indicates, they argue for universalism. "I believe God will save every person" is the book's constant refrain (p. 10). "Hell will be empty," they insist (p. 162).

The book's main strength is the clarity of the writing, and the honesty of their struggle with difficult questions about God's love, grace, and the reality of hell.

For example, they tell the story of Sally, whom one of the authors met while conducting her daughter's funeral. The little girl drowned in a pool while Sally was passed out drunk.

At first, the author's opinion of Sally was extremely low. When she confessed to feeling abandoned by God and no longer having any reason to live, he reluctantly told her that God loved her, but did it "through gritted teeth" (p. 3). In reality, he despised her for neglecting her daughter. But when Sally herself died five years later, and the author learned more about her, his attitude changed.

Sally had been abandoned by her parents at the age of three. After marrying young, she was then abandoned by her husband, with three kids to care for. Drugs, alcohol, poverty, and a series of abusive boyfriends led to a steep decline until she hit rock bottom with her daughter's tragic death. But after the funeral, Sally turned her life around. Over five years she got a job, bought a house, and made peace with her family. Shortly before she died, she told her son she was thinking of finding a church.

When the author was asked to conduct her funeral, he didn't know what to say. Where did Sally go when she died?

The traditional Evangelical response was grim. “Having never accepted Christ, Christ wouldn’t accept her. She was doomed to hell” (p. 4). But he couldn’t bring himself to believe that. God had been working in Sally’s life. “In clear response to our prayers, she had been drawing close to God. She’d turned from the path of destruction. She’d been asking, seeking, and knocking. I couldn’t believe God would invite Sally to his home, then slam the door as she stood at the threshold. It seemed a cruel joke” (p. 5). After coming so far, would God really damn Sally to hell?

After meditating on the story of the Prodigal Son, and seeing the unreserved love of the father for the prodigal, he concluded that God must have welcomed Sally home, and she must ultimately be saved.

Unlike other books on universalism, the authors admit their argument is not based on Scripture, so much as on their experience.

As Quakers, they believe that God guides each individual through an Inner Light. While Evangelical Quakers believe the Inner Light can never contradict Scripture, liberal Quakers, like the authors, believe it can correct, improve, or expand upon Scripture.

The second chapter, “Trusting Our Experience with God,” defends prioritizing our spiritual experiences over Biblical revelation. As an example of what they mean, they appeal to Peter’s vision of a sheet full of animals being lowered from heaven. This vision led Peter to reject Biblical, rabbinic, and otherwise traditional teaching about the separateness of Jews and Gentiles, and he consequently took the gospel to Cornelius. As the authors interpret it, “Peter’s story...encouraged me to base my faith on my experiences with God” (p. 26). Scripture matters, but it cannot ultimately confine what God may choose to reveal to us. “I am...grateful I’ve been freed from my need to confine God within the boundaries of my tradition and my interpretations of Scripture” (p. 26). Hence, like Peter, Gulley and Mulholland admit their beliefs are contrary to certain Scriptures, but insist they agree with others (p. 36).

The authors chide “defenders of Biblical inerrancy” for claiming that “infallible Scripture is the only safe guide in our search for truth” while forgetting the Bible contains numerous stories of God speaking to people in dreams, visions, and appearances. Why deny God still acts in that way? “God didn’t fall silent with the last chapter of Revelation. He continues to reveal himself” (pp. 37-38). And what God is revealing today is that everyone will be saved in the end.

The authors prioritize Jesus' commands, stories, and examples of love. If a belief does not comport with the primacy of love as they have experienced it, they reject that belief. For example, since the authors cannot imagine how hell can comport with a loving, forgiving God, they reject it.

The full consequence of the authors' fatal error of prioritizing experience over Scripture, becomes apparent by the end of the book when they openly reject Jesus Himself.

They deny that Jesus is divine (p. 125), that His death was a payment for sin (p. 138), that He is the only means of salvation (p. 142), and finally, that the Gospels give us an accurate portrayal of Jesus at all (p. 154).

Essentially, the authors have gone beyond receiving extra-Biblical revelation to make a religion of their own devising. Although they claim to be primarily inspired by the "life and stories of Jesus," that clearly isn't true, since Jesus is our principle teacher about the reality of hell (e.g., Matt 13:41-42, 49-50; Mark 9:43, 48-49). You cannot have one Jesus, without the other. If you are going to pick and choose, why have Jesus at all? You have just become your own Messiah.

Experience is a fickle thing and should not be determinative for theology. If, for example, Sally had judged God by her experiences, what would she have concluded? Maybe she would have concluded that God abandoned her. Sally's painful experiences might have led her to emphasize Jesus' teachings about hell and judgment, and reject His teachings about love and forgiveness. "Weighing those stories on the scale of judgment finds them wanting," she might have concluded.

Instead of judging their experiences in the light of Scripture, the authors did the reverse. *JOTGES* readers will not find their arguments compelling. Because they raise good questions about how to reconcile God's love with the reality of hell, this book is recommended for mature believers only.

Shawn Lazar
Associate Editor
Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society