

Journal of the
GRACE EVANGELICAL SOCIETY
“Faith Alone in Christ Alone”

VOLUME 28

Spring 2015

NUMBER 54

Jesus’ Use of Spittle in Mark 8:22-26

Editor

3-15

**Will the Bad Deeds of Believers Be Considered at the
Judgment Seat of Christ**

Robert N. Wilkin

17-36

Dating the New Testament

Frank Tyler

37-50

The Transfiguration of Christ

S. Lewis Johnson

51-61

**Pre-Reformation Belief in Eternal Security: The Word
of Faith We Preach Is Near (Romans 10:8)**

John H. Niemelä

63-80

Book Reviews

81-101

Journal of the
GRACE EVANGELICAL SOCIETY
Published Semiannually by GES

Editor
Kenneth W. Yates

Associate Editors
Robert N. Wilkin
Shawn C. Lazar

Layout
Shawn C. Lazar

Manuscripts, book reviews, and other communications should be addressed to GES, Director of Publications, P.O. Box 1308, Denton, TX 76202 or submissions@faithalone.org.

Journal subscriptions, renewals, and changes of address should be sent to the Grace Evangelical Society, P.O. Box 1308, Denton, TX 76202 or email ges@faithalone.org. Subscription Rates: single copy, \$9.25 (U.S.); 1 year, \$18.50; 2 years, \$35.00; 3 years, \$49.50; 4 years, \$62.00; \$13.50 per year for active full-time students. Please add \$4.50 per year for shipping to Mexico and Canada and \$8.50 per year for all other international shipping. New subscriptions, 1 year, \$9.25; gift subscriptions, 1 year, \$9.25.

Purpose: Grace Evangelical Society was formed “to promote the clear proclamation of God’s free salvation through faith alone in Christ alone, which is properly correlated with and distinguished from issues related to discipleship.”

Statement of Faith: “Jesus Christ, God incarnate, paid the full penalty for man’s sin when He died on the Cross of Calvary. Any person who, in simple faith, trusts in the risen Christ as his or her only hope of heaven, refusing to trust in anything else, receives the gift of eternal life which, once granted, can never be lost.”

Third-class postage has been paid at Dallas, Texas. Postmaster: Send address changes to Grace Evangelical Society, P.O. Box 1308, Denton, TX 76202

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
©2015 Grace Evangelical Society
ISBN: 978-0-9883472-9-8

JESUS' USE OF SPITTLE IN MARK 8:22-26

KENNETH YATES

Editor

I. INTRODUCTION

Recently, I read a thesis done in 1999 on Jesus' use of spittle in the healing of the blind man in Mark 8:22-26. The author of the thesis is Sarah Bourgeois and it was completed at Dallas Theological Seminary.¹

This healing in Mark is interesting for a couple of reasons. One is that this is the only place where Jesus heals a person in a two-stage process.² The first part of the miracle took place "out of the town" (Mark 8:22). After Jesus "had spit [*ptusas*, temporal participle] on [or, into] his eyes and put His hands on him, He asked him if he saw anything" (Mark 8:23). The man answers that he can only see in an incomplete manner: "I see men like trees, walking" (Mark 8:24). The Lord then lays His hands on him again and then he is completely healed of his blindness.

This account is also interesting because it is only one of three times in which Jesus uses spittle in a healing. The other two are Mark 7:31-37 and John 9:6. Not only is the use of spittle rare in such healings, this account in Mark 8 is the only time the Lord is specifically said to spit into a person's face/eyes.³

¹ Sarah L. Bourgeois, "Mark 8:22-26: Jesus and the Use of Spittle in a Two-Stage Healing" (Th.M. thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1999).

² The healing of the blind man in John 9 is not a two-stage healing. Jesus applied mud to the man's eyes and he was not healed until he washed it off. However, the healing was completed all at once, and not in stages.

³ In the John 9 passage, Jesus spits on the ground. In the Mark 7 passage it does not say where Jesus spit. However, the most natural understanding is that He spit on His finger and then touched the man's tongue with the spittle. In this way, Jesus applied His spit to the man's tongue. See Adelo Y. Collins, *Mark: A Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2007), 370 and William Hendrikson, *The Gospel of Mark* (Edinburgh: Butler & Tanner, 1975), 303.

These facts raise a number of questions. Why did Jesus use spittle in this miracle? How might a first-century observer view such a thing? Why did Jesus heal the man in stages? In this article, I will summarize the conclusions of Bourgeois's thesis in these areas. Even though she did not address the application of her findings from a Free Grace perspective, her conclusions, if accurate, do have a bearing on issues such as a proper understanding of the Gospel and discipleship. In the last half of this article, I will discuss these applications.

II. THE USE OF SPITTLE IN THE ANCIENT WORLD

Bourgeois devotes a chapter to how spittle was viewed by the ancient world.⁴ She discusses the topic from a variety of sources, including Persian, Greek, and Jewish writers that date from the sixth century BC through NT times. Some of these sources indicate that spitting in public was considered impolite and beneath the dignity of somebody in leadership. Spitting in somebody's face was a sign of utter rejection.⁵

Among the Greeks, spitting was seen as a means to ward off evil spirits or appease the gods. It was a superstitious practice. It could help in the healing of certain diseases since the gods could be won over by this action. The act of spitting to bring good luck could involve spitting into one's "bosom."⁶

Non-Jewish sources speak of the fact that spittle had certain healing qualities. The Roman writer Pliny the Elder, writing in the first century, says that spittle can help heal certain skin diseases. Two other second-century writers agree.⁷

Pliny also lists other ailments that spittle can help cure. These include epilepsy, neck pain, and numbness in the limb. However, the spit is not applied to the area affected. In the case of neck pain, the spittle should be applied to the knees. For a numb limb, it should be spit into the

⁴ Bourgeois, "Mark 8:22-26," 8-33.

⁵ Xenophon, *Cyropaedia* 8.1-42; Sophocles, *Antigone* 1230, as cited by Ibid.," 9-12.

⁶ Pliny, *Natural History* 28.7.35-36; Lucian, *The Ship or the Wishes* 15, as cited by Ibid., 15-18.

⁷ Pliny, *Natural History* 18.2.8-9; 28.6.30-31; Galen, *On the Natural Faculties* 3.7.163; Celsus, *De Medicina* 5.28.18, as cited by Ibid.

bosom or placed on the eyelid. Also, spitting on the ground can increase the potency of any healing remedy.⁸

Of particular interest is the healing of certain eye conditions with spittle. Pliny also says that spittle can help in this area. Saliva, if applied to the eyes in the morning, can act as an eye ointment. As Bourgeois points out, however, Pliny does not say how the spittle is applied to the eyes or even whose spittle it is. In other places, Pliny intimates that spittle is more effective if it comes from somebody who is fasting. By fasting he means the spittle comes from somebody before he has eaten that day. It is important to note, however, that this is not a parallel with the healing in Mark 8. In Pliny's account, the spittle must be placed in the eyes over a long period of time. In addition, it does not heal. It only provides relief.⁹

The first-century Roman historian Tacitus records a well-known incident of spittle healing a blind man. A citizen living in Egypt asked the visiting Roman emperor Vespasian if the emperor would apply spittle to the blind man's cheek and eyes to cure his blindness. No doubt this was due to the fact that the emperor was seen as in some sense divine. The emperor asked his physicians if such a cure would be possible. The physicians said it was possible since the man was not completely blind. Tacitus says the emperor granted the man's request and that the healing took place. However, this example is not a good parallel with Mark 8. The emperor does not spit in the man's eye. There are also elements of magic involved in it.¹⁰

Bourgeois also points out that this account of Vespasian argues against the view that the use of spittle to heal was considered normal in the first century. Vespasian at first considers the man's request as being ridiculous.¹¹ This was not the norm, but a supernatural, magical event.

⁸ Pliny, *Natural History*, 28.7.35-38.

⁹ Ibid.; Bourgeois, "Mark 8:22-26," 14-18, 38.

¹⁰ Tacitus, *Histories* 4.81.

¹¹ Bourgeois, "Mark 8:22-26," 40.

III. SPITTLE IN JEWISH SOURCES

Bourgeois has a fairly lengthy discussion on how Jewish sources, such as the OT and Apocrypha, treat spittle.¹² An important point to notice is that *at the time of Christ, there is no evidence that the Jews saw spittle as having healing properties*. It is only in later writings, such as the Talmud, that one finds instances of using spittle to heal.

At the time of Jesus, accepted Jewish writings such as the OT see spittle as something that is offensive. Spitting at somebody was seen as an offensive act. If a man did not marry his dead brother's childless widow, she was to spit in his face (Deut 29:5). Spitting in somebody face was a great disgrace (Num 12:14; Job 17:6; 30:10; Isa 50:6).

The first-century Jewish historian Josephus tells us that one religious group, the Essenes, were careful not to spit when others were around. At Qumran, there was a thirty-day punishment meted out if somebody in the assembly spit in the presence of others.¹³

In other writings, spittle was seen as a metaphor for something that had little value.¹⁴ In Leviticus, to be spit upon by certain people made one unclean. These included those who had a discharge. The person spat upon had to wash their clothes and bathe themselves.¹⁵ Later Jewish writings interpreted this to include menstruating women. It is important to notice that spittle in and of itself was not unclean. It depended upon from whom the spittle came.

What is significant about the first-century Jewish sources is that Jesus is the only person who uses spittle in a healing process. The other references concern uncleanness or giving offense. Spitting on somebody was a sign of disrespect and a sign of disgrace.

For Bourgeois, the critical element of the Jewish sources is that at the time of Jesus, the Jews did not see spittle as a means to heal.¹⁶ She takes issue with Lane's comment that the use of spittle and the laying on of hands to heal was a common occurrence in Jewish literature.¹⁷ The use of spit in the eyes is not found until later Jewish writings, where it is

¹² Ibid., 20-32.

¹³ Josephus, *J.W.* 2.147; 1QS 7.13, as cited by Ibid., 30.

¹⁴ 4 Ezra 6:36; Sirach 26:22.

¹⁵ See, for example, Lev 15:8.

¹⁶ Bourgeois, "Mark 8:22-26," 31.

¹⁷ William Lane, *The Gospel According to Mark* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 285.

used to heal eye scabs. However, even in these later instances, the saliva is placed in the eyes and one does not spit in the eyes of the person in need of healing.

IV. MARK 8 AND THE SYNOPTIC PROBLEM

As Bourgeois points out, this account of Jesus' healing by using spittle is sometimes used in the Synoptic debate.¹⁸ Some who believe that Mark was written first argue that Jesus' action of spitting in the man's face was seen as offensive. The account (as well as the account in Mark 7:33-36) is not found in Luke and Matthew supposedly because Luke and Matthew wrote later and took the offensive accounts out. They wanted to make their Gospels less offensive for the readers, and therefore clean up Mark's rough edges. Thus, the use of spittle in Mark 8 argues that Mark was written first.

Farmer, however, argues that Jesus' actions are not offensive. Farmer believes that Matthew was the first Gospel written. What Jesus does in Mark 8 by spitting in the man's eyes is not offensive, but the normal way of healing in that day.¹⁹

However, the issue might have nothing to do with the Synoptic problem. The use of spittle by Jesus in Mark 8 could very well be offensive and yet have nothing to do with which Gospel was written first. Mark may have had a particular purpose in including this offensive detail. In that case, Matthew and Luke did not have the same purpose and therefore did not include it.

V. JESUS' USE OF THE SPITTLE

As stated above, particularly in Jewish writings, spittle was not used for healing purposes. In none of the ancient literature do we find a parallel with Jesus' healing here in Mark 8. It also needs to be noted that the text itself suggests that the spittle was not what healed the man. Jesus spit once, but laid hands on the man twice. It seems that the spittle was not to be seen as what healed the man, but the touch of the Lord. It was only after the laying on of the Lord's hands the second time did

¹⁸ Bourgeois, "Mark 8:22-26," 45.

¹⁹ William R. Farmer, *The Synoptic Problem: A Critical Analysis* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1964), 166-67.

the healing take place. What is also interesting is that Jesus does not explain the use of spittle to the man or the disciples. The context must determine the meaning of the spittle.

Carson suggests that the use of spittle by Jesus here is a theological statement. Spittle was considered a contaminant and Jesus uses it as a source of blessing. Only in the hands of an important person could such a thing be possible. It is similar to Jesus' touching of a leper. Such contact did not pollute Jesus, but instead caused healing.²⁰

The problem with this view is that, as discussed above, spittle in and of itself was not considered a contaminant. Jesus was not considered a person with a discharge who produced unclean spittle. Keener points out that spittle was considered disgusting. This seems to find more support in the view of spittle in the first-century sources.²¹

Bourgeois states that the more important question to ask is: How did the people who witnessed Jesus spitting in the man's eye interpret such an event? As mentioned above, there are examples in the OT of spitting in somebody's face. It was always a sign of public disgrace. In addition, spitting in the presence of others was considered disgusting in Jewish sources as well.²²

Jesus' spitting into the face/eyes of this man would have been seen as both disgraceful and disgusting. The answer to why Jesus did this is found in the larger context. Bourgeois is one of many that see this healing of the blind man in light of the rest of the book of Mark. Her findings support the fact that the healing is a picture of the disciples.²³

Many have noted that this healing of the blind man is an illustration of the disciples. The two-stage healing is a parable of the disciples in Mark. They are "blind" about Jesus. They only have a partial understanding of the One in whom they have believed. They will also go through a two-stage "healing" in their understanding of Him.²⁴

²⁰ D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 364.

²¹ Craig Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, New Testament Edition (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 156; Bourgeois, "Mark 8:22-26," 57.

²² *Ibid.*, 58.

²³ *Ibid.*, 59.

²⁴ Elliott S. Johnson, "Mark VIII.22-26: The Blind Man from Bethsaida," *NTS* 25 (1978-79), 383; Ernest Best, *Mark: The Gospel as Story* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1983), 67-68; M. Eugene Boring, *Mark: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster, 2006), 233; R. Alan Culpepper, *Mark*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentary (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys, 2007), 283; D. Edmund Hiebert, *Mark: A Portrait of the Servant*

Even though Peter and the disciples do not have a clear picture of the kind of Messiah Jesus would be, and what His mission involved, they were still believers in Him. They knew He was the Messiah. John makes it clear that they believed He was the Messiah early in His ministry (John 1:41-50). They already had eternal life, as the purpose of the Gospel of John states (John 20:30-31). Peter confirms that faith in Mark 8. Mark's point here in Mark 8 was not that the disciples were not eternally saved. It was also not the case that Jesus was keeping His Messiahship a secret. They "saw" who Jesus was and they believed that. However, they needed to see something shocking and disgraceful about the One in Whom they had already believed.

VI. JESUS' "DISGRACEFUL" TEACHING

Bourgeois's thesis does an outstanding job of pointing out that the spitting in this man's face is best understood as a disgraceful and disgusting act. It also contributes to the idea that this is a picture of the disciples' understanding of Jesus.

After the healing of the blind man at Bethsaida, Jesus begins His journey to Jerusalem. In Jerusalem, He will be rejected by the nation of Israel and crucified. The journey to Jerusalem in Mark 8:27–11:1 is known as the discipleship section of Mark. In this section, Jesus teaches His disciples what awaits Him in Jerusalem and what it means to follow Him.

It is clear in this section that the disciples do not understand that Jesus is going to be crucified. Three times in this section Jesus tells them this is what is going to happen (8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34). Each time He does so the disciples show that they do not understand.

(Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1974), 200-201; Collins, *Mark*, 394; C. S. Mann, *Mark*, AB, vol. 27 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1986), 336; Joel Marcus, *Mark 8–16*, The Anchor Yale Bible, vol. 27a (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009), 597-600; Robert A. Guelich, *Mark 1–8:26*, WBC, vol. 34a (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1989), 379; John R. Donahue and Daniel J. Harrington, *The Gospel of Mark* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2005), 258. Guelich notes that this is a common understanding of the healing, even though he does not accept it because he sees the miracle as occurring where it does in Mark simply due to the author's redactional activity. Hiebert says it is clear that Jesus is using the miracle as an illustration because He purposefully heals the man in stages. He shows that this is on purpose when He asks the man if he sees anything. Jesus had never asked a question like that before. Donahue and Harrington say it is not only an illustration for the disciples, but the reader as well.

The disciples think that when Jesus gets to Jerusalem He is going to reign. Part of their misunderstanding is that they think that when they get to Jerusalem Jesus will dole out positions of authority (10:37). For the disciples, following Jesus means glory, power, honor and riches.

The first time Jesus tells the disciples that He will be crucified in Jerusalem is in Mark 8:31. Mark tells us that the Lord “began” to tell them this. It is very instructive that He tells them immediately after Peter, speaking for the group of disciples, confesses that Jesus is the Christ (8:29).

Immediately before this confession is the healing of the blind man at Bethsaida. The man is healed in stages. It is unacceptable to suggest that Jesus was unable to heal the man completely the first time because of the difficulty of the healing. As God, Jesus did not need two attempts to complete the healing.

It is also unacceptable to suggest that Jesus could not heal the man completely the first time because of the man’s lack of faith. Throughout Jesus’ ministry the Lord healed large numbers of people. Certainly some of them had doubts, but it was never a problem in the healing process.

Bourgeois’s thesis certainly helps in understanding that in the first century spittle was not seen as having healing properties. This was not the purpose of the spittle. We are probably also on the wrong path to see the spittle as entering into the world of the blind man. The purpose of the spittle was not so the blind man could feel what was going on.

We should certainly reject the idea that the spittle was used in some superstitious or magical way. Jesus was not doing something so that the people would interpret it as appeasing the gods.

Instead, these events picture the disciples. When Peter confesses that Jesus is the Christ, he reflects the “sight” of the disciples. With Peter’s confession they show that they “see” this truth about Jesus. As stated above, they were believers in Him and had eternal life. There is no Messianic secret.

However, they needed to see something else. In this sense, their sight is only partial. They are like the blind man when Jesus placed His hands on him the first time.

They need to have “sight” about something else. They will only see this later. Only then will they see what they need to see, and see clearly. It concerns the mission of Jesus. They will come to this sight in stages.

What they do not see clearly is what Jesus teaches them in this section. It is that He is going to suffer and die. When Jesus first tells the disciples this, Peter rebukes Him (8:32).

When Jesus says He is going to be rejected and die, it is a shocking statement. For Peter and the other disciples, it is a disgraceful thing to suggest that the Christ would meet this kind of fate. Such a death was disgraceful in the extreme, reserved for the worst of criminals. That is not what the disciples thought awaited Him in Jerusalem.

If Bourgeois's thesis is correct that in first-century Israel Jesus' spitting in the eyes/face of the man would have been considered shocking and disgraceful by the disciples, it would be a great illustration of what Jesus immediately tells them. Spitting in the face of somebody was like a slap in the face. Jesus' statement that He would be killed in Jerusalem was also like a slap in the face. They had just said He was the Christ. The idea that the long awaited Messiah would become a curse by crucifixion was disgraceful.

These things would explain this unique healing by the Lord. It is the only time Jesus spits into somebody's face and the only healing done in stages. Both the spittle and two-stage healing fit the context of Mark as well as gives the reader a graphic illustration of the disciples.

But this shocking revelation by the Lord does not only concern Himself. It has a direct application to the disciples. If they want to follow Christ, they can expect the same experience of suffering and hardship. This would also be shocking.

VII. A CALL TO FOLLOW CHRIST

After telling the disciples that He is going to suffer and die, the Lord then gives them the opportunity of following Him (8:34-38). Since He is going to the cross in the supreme act of self-denial, He tells them that if they follow Him they must also take up their crosses and deny themselves. Like Him, they must give up their lives.

In other words, the shocking, disgraceful revelation of the Lord about His immediate future applied to them. These men, who thought they were soon to be powerful and rich and obtain positions of glory and honor, were told that if they follow Him the same disgraceful fate awaited them. Such a prospect concerning themselves would also have been shocking.

Mark wants the reader to see that the shocking and disgraceful aspects concerning the actions of the healing of the blind man of Bethsaida were also related to the costs of following Christ. The disciples did not see clearly what following Him involved. When Christ tells them what will happen to Him, He is in the process of healing their “blindness” about what it means to *follow* Him.

For readers of the *JOTGES*, this brings up an extremely important point. How does discipleship, or following Christ, relate to the gospel? Jesus places a great price on following Him. The costs are high and the demands shocking. But must one pay this price in order to have eternal life?

VIII. THE MEANING OF DISCIPLESHIP

In Mark 8, Jesus not only makes a startling statement about what awaits Him in Jerusalem, He also makes a startling statement about what it means to follow Him (Mark 8:34-38). It is a serious mistake to equate following Jesus with becoming a believer. When one believes in Jesus for eternal life they receive it as a free gift. The NT makes this clear in such passages as Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus in John 3 and the woman at the well in John 4, as well as His words to Martha in John 11:25-26. Paul says the same thing in Eph 2:8-9. However, following Jesus, as He makes clear in this passage, is very costly.

Many, however, do not make this distinction.²⁵ They say that all believers are disciples of Jesus. All of them follow Him. All of them pay that price. MacArthur clearly states this. With passages such as Mark 8:34-38 in mind he states that eternal salvation is only for those who forsake everything. He further states that this discipleship is part of saving faith.²⁶

This understanding of discipleship is usually just assumed, if not explicitly stated. Marshall, in discussing discipleship, equates it with

²⁵ I remember when I first heard teaching on this passage in Mark 8. I was in seminary and the professor rightly pointed out that the healing of the blind man was a picture of the disciples. However, it was not made clear whether the disciples needed to receive eternal life or if the Lord was teaching those who were already believers (and thus already had eternal life) what He would demand of the believer who followed Him.

²⁶ John MacArthur, *The Gospel According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 78, 135. In this issue of *JOTGES*, Jerry Patillo gives a Biblical interpretation of Mark 8:34-38 in his article on the “salvation of the soul.”

an initial coming to Jesus that involves obedience.²⁷ In relation to Mark 8:34, Lane states that following Christ is a commitment that *all* Christians have and distinguishes them from those who do not recognize who Jesus is.²⁸ However, the disciples knew who Jesus was.

Toussaint is a little ambiguous about whether being a disciple is equivalent to being a believer. In discussing the parallel passage in Matthew, where Jesus calls His disciples to follow Him, Toussaint says that the “disciples must endure suffering, and when the Son of Man comes in His glory, they will be rewarded.” However, he does not say what the reward involves, whether it is simply entering the Kingdom or being rewarded in it.²⁹

It is difficult to determine Bourgeois's view of discipleship. It is not the point of her thesis and she is certainly limited by space. She correctly points out that the disciples do not understand exactly what kind of Messiah Jesus will be. They do not understand that He will suffer and die. Such a misunderstanding makes *discipleship* impossible (italics mine).³⁰ However, she does not say whether in her view the disciples are believers, and thus have eternal life, even though they have this misunderstanding.

If one is to understand the meaning of Jesus spitting into the eyes of the blind man, he or she must understand the difference between being a believer and being a follower of Jesus. Bourgeois makes a strong case for concluding that Jesus' actions in healing the blind man would have been seen as disagreeable and disgraceful in the first century. It also strongly appears that it is a picture of the disagreeable statement He makes about following Him. His future is a disgraceful one. But it is also clear that Jesus says that those who follow Him face the same fate.

This would have been shocking and disagreeable to the disciples. But the same is true for anybody who follows Christ. The costs are great. They are shocking. They can involve giving up one's family and even life itself.

But we cannot equate that with believing in Him for eternal life. The costs for believing in Him are nothing. There is nothing shocking about

²⁷ I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1978), 275, 592.

²⁸ Lane, *Mark*, 307.

²⁹ Stanley D. Toussaint, *Behold the King: A Study of Matthew* (Portland, OR: Multnomah Press, 1980), 208.

³⁰ Bourgeois, “Mark 8:22-26,” 59.

that. There is nothing that results in disgrace by believing in Him. That future is one of eternal life in the Kingdom.

Peter was already a believer when he rebuked the Lord when He told him that He was going to die. That was not the question. The question now was whether Peter and the others would join in the suffering and disgraceful path the Savior was going to travel.

IX. CONCLUSION

Bourgeois makes an important contribution to the meaning of the whole discipleship section of Mark. When Jesus spit into the eyes of the blind man at Bethsaida such actions would have stood out. It was not the normal practice of Jews in the first century to spit in the eyes of a blind person to heal such blindness. There is not a single parallel in any extant writings of healing this way. Only in later Jewish writings is saliva applied to sick body parts to help in some way. Even in these later cases, the sick person had saliva applied and was not spit upon. It is interesting that of the three times Jesus uses spittle in a healing, this is the only time He actually spits into the face of the person.

Howard agrees with this assessment. Even though many commentators point to the example of Vespasian, accounts in Pliny, and a few other instances, they are not parallel. These examples are different and include such things as magic, evil spirits, and the saliva of snakes.³¹

Instead, the action of the Lord was shocking. The spittle is not to be seen as something that heals. It was a disgraceful act. The Lord was about to give the disciples shocking news. He was to die a disgraceful death. In the first century, death on a cross was the height of disgrace.

Like the healing of the blind man, the disciples did not see these things clearly. What Jesus says is repulsive to them. They would come to this understanding only later, even though they already saw that Jesus was the Messiah.

The Lord was calling the Twelve to follow Him on the path of disgrace. They were challenged to take up their own crosses. The costs involved in such a decision were extremely high. The idea that such a cost was involved in following the King was shocking. Following the Messiah was thought to bring honor and glory in this world.

³¹J. K. Howard, "Men as Trees, Walking: Mark 8.22-26," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 37 (1984): 165, n6.

It is of utmost importance, however, not to conclude that one must pay those costs in order to be spiritually saved. There is a difference between being a believer and being a disciple. Eternal life is a free gift through faith alone. When most Christians come to faith, they are like the Twelve. They believe in Jesus as the Christ. In Him one receives eternal life. It is only later that they understand the high costs of discipleship. Their eyes are first opened to who Jesus is. He is the one who gives eternal life to anybody who believes in Him for it. Later, if they are properly taught, their eyes are open to the costs of discipleship. They, like Peter and the others, are like the blind man at Bethsaida.

Such costs are, at first sight, shocking. But as Free Grace theology has rightly noted, they have nothing to do with the reception of eternal life as a free gift. Indeed, the Lord Himself tells us in the discipleship section of Mark that those believers (who already have eternal life) who pay these costs will be rewarded in the Kingdom for taking up their cross and following Him (Mark 8:35; 9:35; 10:43-44). Such a believer will be great in the Kingdom. The shocking news the disciples received after the shocking actions of the Lord in the healing of the blind man contained demands of high costs for the believer in Jesus Christ. But such costs are worth the price. Once one sees these things clearly, the proper decision becomes obvious.

WILL THE BAD DEEDS OF BELIEVERS BE CONSIDERED AT THE JUDGMENT SEAT OF CHRIST?

ROBERT N. WILKIN

Executive Director
Grace Evangelical Society

I. INTRODUCTION

God makes an amazing promise to anyone who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ: “Their sins and their lawless deeds I will remember no more” (Heb 10:17; cf. Jer 31:34). And again,

You, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross (Col 2:13-14).

The forgiveness of sins is one of the most blessed teachings of Scripture. Indeed, the more one matures in the faith, the more he or she appreciates this doctrine. For with increasing maturity comes an increasing awareness of our sins and shortcomings.

It is wonderful to realize that “He remembers our sins no more” and that “As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us” (Ps 103:12). He has hidden our lives with Christ (Col 3:3). We are perfected forever in God’s sight (Heb 10:10, 14).

Most people in Christianity today do not believe that the Judgment Seat of Christ (henceforth, the Bema) is a separate judgment for Christians to determine eternal rewards. Rather, they think the Bema

(2 Cor 5:9-11) is another name for the Great White Throne Judgment (Rev 20:11-15).

For example, in a recent four-views book to which Thomas Schreiner and I contributed chapters, he criticizes me for distinguishing between these two judgments:

If his kind of dispensationalism collapses, so does Wilkin's interpretation. I don't have space to unpack all that could be said here. But it must be said that the dispensational reading offered [by Wilkin] is artificial and strained. When I first encountered solutions like Wilkin proposes regarding the judgment, I found it impossible to remember in the judgment passages whether the judgment of believers or unbelievers was in view.¹

And most are convinced that at that judgment, which they call *the final judgment*, everyone will be judged according to their works and those whose works are good enough will obtain what they call *final salvation*. Schreiner says, for example,

Some worry that the necessity of good works for final salvation denies the grace of the gospel, but we must be careful that we are not more Pauline than Paul! Paul did not think that his words [in 1 Cor 6:9-11] contradicted the gospel of grace (see again Titus 2:11-12).²

Free Grace believers, however, see the Bema as a separate judgment. They are convinced that no Christian will be judged to determine his eternal destiny as the Lord promised in John 5:24: "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life."³ Three promises are made here using three verb tenses. The believer *has*, present tense, everlasting life. The believer *has passed*, past tense, from spiritual death into everlasting life. And the believer *shall not*, future tense, come into judgment concerning his eternal destiny. All three of these promises concern eternal security. If a believer

¹ Thomas R. Schreiner in *Four Views on the Role of Works in the Final Judgment*, ed. Alan P. Stanley (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 52. See also p. 60 where Schreiner specifically says that "the Great White Throne [Judgment] of God" and "the judgment seat of Christ" are "one judgment" and "both clearly have in view the judgment of believers."

² *Ibid.*, 85.

³ *Ibid.*, 25-50 (my chapter).

were to be judged concerning his eternal destiny, then the Lord lied in John 5:24.

Many Free Grace believers have concluded, from the verses dealing with forgiveness that I cited above, that when the Lord evaluates our Christian lives at the Bema He won't take their sinful deeds into account. After all, He doesn't even remember them. He couldn't bring them up if He wanted to, for He no longer is aware they even exist. Forgiveness means no future accountability concerning bad deeds, they reason.

While we would all prefer that our bad deeds be excluded from evaluation, there is ample Biblical evidence that they will be considered. If this is true, then we ought to be aware of it and live in light of it.

My first two points (II and III below) do not prove that our bad deeds will be considered at the Bema. Rather, *they show that it is not impossible that they will be considered*. After showing it is possible they will be considered, we will consider seven proofs that they will.

II. FORGIVENESS DOESN'T EXCLUDE ACCOUNTABILITY

One way in which we know that it is at least possible that our bad deeds will be judged at the Bema is because forgiveness does not exclude accountability.

A. Forgiven People Need Forgiveness: 1 John 1:9

First John 1:9 is widely recognized as a key progressive sanctification verse.

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Believers need to be honest with God concerning their sins if they are to remain in fellowship with Him. According to 1 John 1:9, only if we, as born-again believers, confess our sins do we receive forgiveness for those sins and cleansing from all unrighteousness (including sins which we are not aware of).

It is clear that the positional forgiveness all believers have doesn't exclude the need to confess known sins to receive fellowship forgiveness.

B. Forgiven People Experience God’s Judgment for Their Sins: 1 Cor 11:30

The Corinthian church was made up mostly of immature Christians. Paul called them “babes in Christ” (1 Cor 3:1-3). Believers in that church were guilty of immorality, divisions, envy and strife, taking each other to court, and getting drunk at the Lord’s Supper, to name just a few of their sins. Concerning this latter matter Paul said, “For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep” (1 Cor 11:30). The word used here for *sleep* (*koimaō*) has a technical meaning in its figurative uses. Whenever it is used figuratively in the NT, it always refers specifically to the death of believers.⁴

Clearly God was aware of the sin of the believers in Corinth. After all, He had Paul record their sin permanently in Scripture for all to read! Surely it is impossible to say that forgiveness eliminates accountability here and now. And if God is aware of our sins and holds us accountable for them now, then it is at least possible that He will hold us accountable for them at the Bema.

Some hold the view that the sins of believers will be brought up at the Bema, but only *unconfessed* sins. However, that position, while appealing, lacks sufficient Biblical support.

III. CONFESSION OF SINS DOESN’T ELIMINATE ACCOUNTABILITY

A second way in which we know that it is at least possible that our bad deeds will be judged at the Bema is because confession of sins does not eliminate accountability.

A. Confession of Sins Doesn’t Eliminate Accountability Now

David’s confession of his sin of adultery and murder (2 Sam 12:13) did not eliminate temporal accountability (2 Sam 12:14–24:25). While confession can result in a lessening of the consequences, as it did in David’s case, it does not eliminate all consequences.

⁴ The other figurative uses of *koimaō* are Matt 27:52; John 1:11; Acts 7:60; 13:36; 1 Cor 11:30; 15:6, 18, 20, 51; 1 Thess 4:13, 13, 15; 2 Pet 3:4. The lone possible exception is 1 Cor 7:39.

Let's say a believer robbed a bank and confessed the sin to the Lord. But then he was arrested by the police for the crime. What would happen? He would be tried for robbery! Clearly the fact he confessed the sin to God would not eliminate accountability now. If there was enough evidence to prove he did it, then he'd be off to prison, even though he might well be in fellowship with God.⁵

And if confession doesn't eliminate accountability now, it at least allows for the possibility that there will be accountability at the Bema.

B. There Is No Promise that Confessed Sins Will Never Be Considered at the Bema as Deeds (Not as Sins)

It has often been said to be impossible to prove a negative. How, for example, can a man prove that he never yelled at his wife? The best he could do would be to prove that he didn't yell at her on a particular date when he was out of town and away from any phone.

In one sense it is impossible to prove that there is no promise that confessed sins will never be brought up at the Bema. To do that would require walking through every verse in the Bible.

However, the Bible is a unique book. Since Scripture cannot contradict itself, if there are indeed Scriptures that indicate that our bad deeds will be considered at the Bema, then this proves that there is no promise to the contrary. The analogy of faith guarantees it. As we shall soon see, there are a number of passages in Scripture that make it clear that our bad deeds, confessed or not, will indeed be considered at the Bema.

I have studied all of the supposed texts that might be brought forward as promises that our bad deeds will not be considered at the Bema. And there are none that stand up under careful scrutiny. I challenge each reader to reexamine any passage that they may have thought promised that our bad deeds won't be evaluated at the Bema.⁶

⁵ A few years after graduating from Dallas Theological Seminary in 1982, I learned of a number of DTS graduates who were in prison in Huntsville, TX for major crimes. One fellow graduate joked, "There are so many DTS grads in prison in Huntsville that we could have alumni meetings there."

⁶ I distinguish between *sins* and *bad deeds* because the NT does as well. While all sins are bad deeds, we are told specifically that our bad *deeds* will be judged at the Bema (e.g., 2 Cor 5:10). Nowhere are we told that our *sins* will be judged at the Bema. All our deeds will be judged, "whether good or bad." In most cases, bad deeds are also sins. But at the Bema these deeds are not evaluated as sins. They are evaluated in terms of what the deeds did in terms of our relation with and service to Christ. For example, Ted Haggard, the head of the National Association of Evangelicals, was recently forced to resign his

Let's now turn to the direct Scriptural evidence that the bad things we have done as believers, confessed and unconfessed, will be evaluated at the Bema. There are seven proofs (A-G below).

IV. DIRECT SCRIPTURAL EVIDENCE THAT THE BAD DEEDS OF BELIEVERS WILL BE EVALUATED AT THE BEMA

I have divided the evidence into seven categories: 1) *All* things which have been done will be exposed, not just some; 2) The fact that some will experience negative emotions and a bad “grade” at the Bema could only be true if our sins were considered; 3) Warnings not to sin because the Bema is coming soon prove all our sins will be considered; 4) The fact that many sins are reported forever and publicly in Scripture proves that sins will be evaluated; 5) The nature of a bema, or judgment seat, proves that our sins will be considered; 6) The fact that everything we have done, “whether good or bad” (2 Cor 5:10), shows that our bad deeds will be considered; 7) The sowing and reaping principle requires that *whatever* we sow, that we will also reap (Gal 6:7).

A. *All* Things Will Be Revealed

The first proof is quite powerful. If everything which has been done will be revealed, then obviously our bad deeds will be evaluated.

Paul spoke of the Bema in 1 Cor 4:1-5. His concluding words there are quite revealing concerning the question before us. He says,

Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the heart. Then each one's praise will come from God.

The believers in Corinth were judging Paul, Apollos, and Peter. They felt they were qualified to evaluate these men. Yet Paul says that the judgment of the leaders, like that of all believers, awaits the Lord's return. Until then the readers were to stop judging Paul, Apollos, and Peter. Alan Johnson comments, “So the Corinthians are to stop judging

position with the organization as well as from his church in November of 2006 because a homosexual affair became public knowledge. If he is a believer, he will be judged for that work at the Bema. Since that work caused much negative press for the cause of Christ, it will surely be a bad thing/deed at the Bema.

their leaders and comparing them to one another, boasting in one and despising another.”⁷

The Lord Jesus *will bring to light the things hidden by darkness* (my own translation). The things hidden by darkness need not refer to bad deeds. It refers to all which is hidden. But it surely *includes* bad deeds. Ciampa and Rosner write, “The judgment that will accompany that ‘revelation’ (1:7) will be far more searching than any human could ever hope to achieve.”⁸ And it is those things which He will “bring to light.” Paul is warning the believers in Corinth, and ultimately all believers. The things we do “in secret” will be brought to light by the Lord Himself when He comes. There are no secrets with God. He sees all. And He will one day reveal all as well. There will, of course, be praise at the Bema. Those worthy of praise will then receive it from the Lord Jesus. However, there will also be shame and rebuke, as we will soon see.

Paul’s teaching is based upon teaching by the Lord. For example, the Parable of the Four Soils is followed in Luke by a warning:

“No one, when he has lit a lamp, covers it with a vessel or puts it under a bed, but sets it on a lampstand, that those who enter may see the light. For nothing is secret that will not be revealed, nor anything hidden that will not be known and come to light. Therefore take heed how you hear. For whoever has, to him more will be given; and whoever does not have, even what he seems to have will be taken from him” (Luke 8:16-18).

Who is the one who lights the lamp and puts it out in the open, not under a bed? Clearly this is the Lord Himself. Believers need to take heed how they hear because “nothing is secret that will not be revealed, nor anything hidden that will not be known and come to light.”

Notice how absolute these statements are. *Nothing* is secret that will not be revealed. Nor is there *anything* that will not be known and come to light. There is no wiggle room here. All deeds, including sins confessed or unconfessed, will be revealed. That is why we need to take heed how we hear.

⁷ Alan F. Johnson, *1 Corinthians*, IVP Series (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2004), 79.

⁸ Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, Pillar NT Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 173.

B. Negative Consequences at the Bema

The second proof is that there will be negative consequences at the Judgment Seat of Christ. If the only consequences at the Bema were positive, then it might be possible that our bad deeds would not be considered. However, if *any* of the consequences are negative, then this can only be because bad deeds are considered.⁹ There cannot be any negative consequences for good works we have done. That would be unjust of God. Only bad works can result in negative consequences.

1. *There will be shame at the Bema.*

In the theme verse of John's first epistle, written to mature believers (cf. 2:12-14), John writes:

And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming.

John pictures two possible experiences at the Bema. One is positive and is described by the word "confidence." The other is negative and described by the word "shame." A believer could not be ashamed before Christ because of his good deeds. He could only be ashamed because as a result of not abiding in Christ his deeds were sinful.

The Lord Jesus taught John this. After Peter's great confession of Jesus as the Christ, he turned right around with a great blunder. He actually rebuked the Lord Jesus for saying He was going to Jerusalem to be put to death (Mark 8:32). Jesus took that occasion to teach *the disciples* about the costs and rewards of discipleship. He ended by saying:

"For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him the Son of Man also will be ashamed when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels."

At the very least, this *includes* believers. After all, these remarks are a result of believing Peter being "ashamed" of Jesus' words regarding

⁹ Some might argue that there could be shame if a believer had very little to show in the way of good works, even though no bad works were brought to light. Yet things we fail to do are called *sins of omission*. Thus if the Lord revealed that there were months or years when a believer had been out of fellowship with Him and had few if any good works during that time, He would be revealing that bad deeds had occurred, even if there was no mention specifically of what happened during that time.

His imminent death. However, these words actually only include believers. For unbelievers cannot be ashamed of Christ and His words. Only someone who believes in Him and has kinship with Him could be ashamed of Him. In the NT, the Greek word *epaischunomai* always refers (excluding Luke 9:26, which is a parallel passage and hence open to question) to believers who are or are not ashamed of God (or their works) or of God Himself either being ashamed or not ashamed of believers (cf. Rom 1:16; 6:21; 2 Tim 1:8, 12, 16; Heb 2:11; 11:16). It is never used of an unbeliever.

2. *There will be disapproval at the Bema.*

The A in AWANA stands for *Approved* in the expression “*Approved Workmen Are Not Ashamed.*” It is drawn from 2 Tim 2:15. One option for a believer is to receive the Lord’s *approval* (*dokimos*, Rom 14:18; 16:10; 1 Cor 11:19; 2 Cor 10:8; 13:7; 2 Tim 2:15; Jas 1:12), His “Well done, good servant” (Luke 19:17). The other option is that a believer will receive *disapproval* (*adokimos*). Paul feared this very thing: “But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified [*adokimos*]” (1 Cor 9:27). There cannot be disapproval for good works done. Disapproval can only result from sinful things that were done.

It should be noted that some would dispute that disapproval and shame can only result from sinful things that have been done. Some argue that a believer might experience shame and disapproval not because of bad deeds, but because of *worthless* deeds. Worthless deeds, they suggest, are either good deeds done with wrong motives or are morally neutral deeds (like hunting, fishing, golfing, and tennis).

John MacArthur takes this view:

The use of the word **bad** does not indicate that believers’ judgment is a judgment on sin, since all their sin has already been judged in Christ. The contrast between **good** and **bad** is not one between moral good and moral evil. **Bad** does not translate *kakos* or *ponēros*, the words for moral evil, but *phaulos*, which means “worthless,” or “useless.” Richard C. Trench writes that *phaulos* “contemplates evil under another aspect, not so much that either of active or passive malignity, but that rather of its good-for-nothingness, the impossibility of any true gain coming forth from it” (*Synonyms of the New*

Testament [Reprint; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983], 317). *Phaulos* describes those mundane things that inherently are neither of eternal value nor sinful, such as taking a walk, going shopping, taking a drive in the country, pursuing an advanced degree, moving up the corporate ladder, painting pictures, or writing poetry. Those morally neutral things will be judged when believers stand before the judgment seat of Christ. If they were done with a motive to glorify God, they will be considered **good**. If they were pursued for selfish interests, they will be considered **bad**.¹⁰

The problem with this suggestion is that wrong motives are themselves sinful. Greed, jealousy, envy, covetousness, and the like are all motivating factors and all are sin. A pastor, for example, can work hard to prepare a good sermon because he is jealous of another pastor in town whose church is a bit larger. Or a televangelist might work long hours because he covets fancy houses and cars and even air-conditioned doghouses!

Or, some might say that believers will receive disapproval and shame because of an abundance of morally neutral deeds that result in the person having a paucity of good works. For example, it isn't sin to read good literature, but a believer who reads the classics 18 hours a day will not have time left to assemble with other believers, pray, share his faith, love others, etc. That is true. But that is also sin. When we fail to do things God has told us to do, then we commit sins of omission.

3. There will be rebuke at the Bema.

Some regard the third servant in the Parable of the Minas as representing an unbeliever. After all, he is rebuked by Christ, hearing these words:

Out of your own mouth I will judge you, you wicked servant. You knew that I was an austere man, collecting what I did not deposit and reaping what I did not sow. Why then did you not put my money in the bank, that at my coming I might have collected it with interest? (Luke 19:22-23).

¹⁰ See "Will God Punish the Evil Deeds of Believers? (2 Corinthians 5)" at <http://www.gty.org/resources/print/bible-qna/BQ041813> (emphasis his).

And then the Lord said, “Take the mina from him, and give it to him who has ten minas.” This rebuke and removal of the mina suggest that this person was not a believer.

For example, John Martin writes concerning the third servant in Luke 19:20-26:

Matthew related that the third servant was thrown out of the kingdom (Matt. 25:30). This indicates that this servant really belonged to the group of people who did not want the king to reign over them (Luke 19:14).¹¹

On the other hand, there are good reasons to see this man as a believer. He is called a servant (of God). Unbelievers are not servants of God. He is entrusted with money, representing talents, time, and resources, to invest for the Lord. Unbelievers are not expected to invest anything for the Lord. They lack the Spirit of God and can't invest at all (John 15:5).

The judgment of the first two servants clearly pictures the Bema, where only believers are to be judged (2 Cor 5:10). Since the third servant is judged with them, so much so that his mina can be given to the first servant standing nearby, he too is at the Bema and is a believer.

And, contra Martin's suggestion, he is contrasted with “those enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them” (v 27). After the judgment of the third servant ends, we read these words, “but bring here those enemies of mine, who did not want me to reign over them, and slay them before me.”

Clearly, the third servant is not one of those who is slain (representing eternal condemnation, evidently). Both at the start of this parable (cf. vv 13-14), and at the end, the third servant is set apart from unbelieving Israel.¹²

There can be no rebuke if bad deeds are not evaluated. Failure to invest one's life for Christ at a minimum involves lots of sins of omission. Wasted potential is sin. Failing to produce good works that God intended involves sins of omission.

¹¹ John A. Martin, “Luke,” *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Grand Rapids, MI: Victor Books, 1983), 253.

¹² What Martin did was reverse the analogy of faith. Luke 19:16-26 is clear and simple. Matthew 25:14-30 is not as clear and is not as simple. The outer darkness is the darkness outside the brightly lit wedding festivities. The Lord did not cast the unprofitable servant “out of the kingdom” as Martin suggests. Instead, He cast him out of the celebration. The analogy of faith would say that the third servant in Luke 19:16-26 is clearly a believer and thus so too is the third servant in the Parable of the Talents.

C. Warnings Not to Sin Because the Bema Is Coming

The third proof that the bad deeds of believers will be considered at the Bema is found in warnings not to sin. In Rom 14:10, Paul warns the believers in Rome not to sin because the Bema is coming:

But why do you judge your brother? Or why do you show contempt for your brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.¹³

Paul then went on to say, “So then each of us shall give account of himself to God” (v 12). One reason we shouldn’t judge our brother is because that is the Lord’s job. Another reason is because *we* will be judged for showing contempt for our fellow Christians.

James makes this point clearly:

Do not grumble against one another, brethren, lest you be judged. Behold, the Judge is standing at the door! (Jas 5:9)

Now, if our sinful deeds are not to be judged at the Bema, then what is James’s point? His point is meaningless if only our good deeds will be considered.

D. Believers’ Bad Deeds Recorded in Scripture

The fourth proof is that the bad deeds of believers are recorded in Scripture.

If our bad deeds won’t be brought up at the Bema, then why are the bad deeds of some believers recorded in Scripture?

It is inconceivable that Ananias and Saphira will not be judged for lying to the Holy Spirit. Or Demas for having forsaken Paul in his time of great need. Or Solomon for ending his life as an idolater. Or David for committing immorality with Bathsheba. Or Nadab and Abihu for offering up strange fire at the inauguration of the Mosaic covenant. Why would these events be recorded forever in Scripture, yet not be considered in the judgment?

In my reading of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles it has struck me that the Lord made many summary judgments of the kings and put them in the Bible for all to see:

¹³ The majority of manuscripts read *ta bēmata tou Christou*, the Judgment Seat of Christ.

Solomon did evil in the sight of the Lord, and did not fully follow the Lord, as did his father David (1 Kgs 11:6).

Go, tell Jeroboam... You have done more evil than all who were before you, for you have gone and made for yourself other gods and molded images to provoke Me to anger (1 Kgs 14:7, 9).

Asa did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, as did his father David (1 Kgs 15:11).

He [Nadab] did evil in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the way of his father [Jeroboam], and in his sin by which he made Israel sin (1 Kgs 15:26).

And he [Jehoshaphat] walked in all the ways of his father Asa. He did not turn aside from them, doing what was right in the eyes of the Lord. Nevertheless the high places were not taken away, for the people offered sacrifices and burned incense on the high places (1 Kgs 22:43).

He [Jehoram] did evil in the sight of the Lord, but not like his father and mother [Ahab and Jezebel]; for he put away the sacred pillar of Baal that his father had made" (2 Kgs 3:2).

While we might question whether some of these kings were regenerate, surely no one would question Solomon's spiritual condition. He was the author of several books of Scripture. He was one of the greatest kings of Israel until his many wives led his heart astray.

It should be noted that the judgment is not merely good or bad. There are shades of both good and bad indicated.

E. *Bema* Refers to a "Judgment Seat"

The fifth proof is the meaning of the word *bema*. It occurs elsewhere in Scripture besides the two uses of the term for the future judgment of believers (in Rom 14:10 and 2 Cor 5:10). The first NT reference concerns Jesus' appearance before Pilate at his *bema*.

Pilate's judgment seat was certainly not a place exclusively reserved for the giving out of rewards. It was a place of judgment. Criminals were judged and sentenced by Pilate at this place. The Lord Jesus Himself was judged and sentenced to death by Pilate at his judgment seat.

Similarly, Paul appeared before Gallio's bema (Acts 18:12). Paul had been accused by Jews of preaching a religion contrary to the Jewish law (Acts 18:13). Gallio judged Paul and found him not guilty. He decided that Paul was preaching a form of Judaism, not something antithetical to it.

Some have argued that the Judgment Seat of Christ will be like a rewards platform at the Olympics. Well, there will be rewards given out; that is true. However, it is misleading to think of it *only* in that light. Jesus' Bema won't merely be a time of rejoicing. There will be shame, disapproval, and rebuke too. Believers will be judged and recompensed according to their deeds, "whether good or bad."

F. Bad Deeds Will Be Recompensed at the Bema (2 Cor 5:10)

The sixth proof is the most direct. In 2 Cor 5:10 Paul specifically said, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad." Notice the words *whether good or bad*" (emphasis added). Tasker comments:

Some commentators stress the seeming inconsistency between the doctrine of justification by faith alone and the doctrine of verse 10 that Christians, no less than non-Christians, will be finally judged by their actions. This stressing of seemingly opposite emphases is, however, of special value to the Christian and prevents him from underestimating his moral obligations.¹⁴

Kruse, in the most recent Tyndale commentary on 2 Corinthians, similarly says:

What then does Paul have in mind here when he speaks of receiving *good or evil* according to what a person *has done in the body*? It is a recognition that God will evaluate the lives and ministries of his children and reward those who have acted faithfully, while those who have not will suffer the loss of any reward.¹⁵

¹⁴ R. V. G. Tasker, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, TNTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1963), 83.

¹⁵ Colin G. Kruse, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, TNTC (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 118, italics his.

A paragraph later Kruse adds, “All this means that what believers do in this life has serious implications.”¹⁶

The word *bad* (or *evil*) here is seemingly insurmountable problem for those who believe we will not be accountable for our bad deeds. They must somehow eliminate the connotation that the deeds are bad.

The suggestion is sometimes made that the Greek word used here, *phaulon*, does not mean *bad*, but instead *worthless*. For example, P. E. Hughes says that worthless is “the proper meaning of *phaulon*.”¹⁷

Similarly David K. Lowery says, “Their **good** deeds will evoke one response (cf. 1 Cor. 4:5; Eph. 6:8) and the **bad** (*phaulon*, ‘worthless’) will evoke another (1 Cor. 3:15; Col. 3:25).”¹⁸ In this understanding of *phaulon* the contrast is not between good and bad deeds, but between good and worthless deeds.

In this view bad deeds will not be considered. Worthless deeds are not bad deeds. They are simply deeds that lack enduring value. For example, while our recreational activities may have limited eternal value, too much time spent golfing, hunting, skiing, fishing, watching television, and so forth can be rightly seen as worthless, but not bad.

There are two major problems with this view.

First, the Greek word here is probably not *phaulon*, but *kakos*. The Majority Text reads *kakon*. Not only do the majority of manuscripts read *kakon*, but so do leading Critical Text manuscripts B and p⁴⁶. *Kakos* always means *bad* or *evil* in the NT. If God has preserved His Word in the majority of manuscripts, which is a reasonable assumption in my estimation, then there is no question but that the meaning of the word here is *bad*.

Second, even if the correct reading is *phaulon*, it still means *bad* in this context (indeed, as we shall see, in every NT use). The word *phaulos* in the NT always means *bad*, especially when it is contrasted with *agathos* or *kalos*. Outside of this passage, *phaulos* is used four times in the NT.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1962), 181.

¹⁸ David K. Lowery, Jr., “2 Corinthians,” *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, New Testament, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck (Grand Rapids, MI: Victor Books, 1983), 566, emphasis his. Lowery went on to add, “Salvation is not the issue here. One’s eternal destiny will not be determined at the judgment seat of Christ. Salvation is by faith (Eph. 2:8-9), but deeds issuing from that faith (1 Thess 1:3) will be evaluated.”

“Everyone practicing *evil* [*ho phaula*] hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed” (John 3:20; compare v 19, “because their deeds were *evil* [*ponera*]”).

“And [they will] come forth—those who have done good [*ta agatha*], to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil [*ta phaula*], to the resurrection of condemnation” (John 5:29).

In all things showing yourself to be a pattern of good works [*kalōn ergōn*]...[showing] sound speech that cannot be condemned, that one who is an opponent may be ashamed, having nothing *evil* [*phaulon*] to say of you (Titus 2:7-8).

“For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil [*phaulon*] thing are there” (Jas 3:16).

It can easily be seen that none of the other uses of *phaulos* in the NT is translated *worthless*. I found no translation that translates *phaulos* as worthless in these passages. The NASB, NIV, RSV, NKJV, KJV all have *evil* or *bad* in all four places, with the exception of the RSV which reads *vile* (which is hardly a softer translation) in Jas 3:16.

In fact, even though in 2 Cor 5:10 the NASB, NIV, and RSV are all translating the Critical Text, which has the word *phaulon*, they read either *bad* (NASB, NIV) or *evil* (RSV) here as well. If *phaulon* means *worthless* in 2 Cor 5:10, why is it that none of the major English translations have that translation in that passage, or in any of the passages where *phaulos* is used in contrast to *agathos*?

All of our deeds, good and bad, will be considered by Christ at the Bema. And this is completely consistent with the Biblical principle that “whatever a man sows, that he will also reap,” which we will now consider.

G. Whatever We Sow, We Reap (Gal 6:7)

The seventh proof that the bad deeds of believers will be considered at the Bema is the principle of sowing and reaping. In the concluding part of the applicational section of Galatians, Paul warned his readers in light

of Christ's imminent return not to "grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart" (Gal 6:9). Verse 7 is a powerful statement on accountability:

Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.

In the context, the sowing and reaping do not refer to rewards and discipline *in this life*. Rather, as v 9 makes clear, Paul is thinking of the Lord's return and the need to persevere to receive eschatological rewards.

If we do not reap any consequences at the Bema for all of the bad deeds we have done in this life, then this principle is not true. At that time, we will not reap anything for bad deeds we have done. We will only reap something for the good things we have done.

Paul makes it clear in context that he has both sowing to the Spirit and sowing to the flesh in mind. Concerning the latter he wrote: "For he who sows to the flesh will of the flesh reap corruption" (v 8a). Oppositely, "he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life" (v 8b). Anytime that everlasting life is spoken of *as a possible future experience*, then eternal rewards, that is, *fullness of everlasting life*, is in view (compare Matt 19:29). As Paul made clear in Eph 2:8-9, no one has everlasting life (as a present possession, Eph 2:5) as a result of works, that is, as a result of sowing.

V. APPLICATION: KNOWING THIS IS A POWERFUL MOTIVATION TO GODLINESS

If we know this to be true, then surely it should motivate us not to do things of which we would be ashamed at the Bema. Most of us are kinder and more polite to our spouses, for example, in public than in private. Yet if we live in light of the fact that we are under scrutiny by God even in the privacy of the home or automobile, we will be better spouses. Imagine how our behavior would improve if we lived each moment in light of Christ's soon return, knowing that nothing we do is truly private. There are no secrets with God.

I am aware of a psychological objection. Wouldn't this cause people emotional problems? Don't people need to have time when they can relax?

Well, relaxing is one thing. Sinning with impunity is another. Yes, God allows us time to rest. However, He tells us to make no provision for the flesh.

If accountability were psychologically bad for us, then the Bible wouldn't teach accountability. But it does repeatedly. Accountability is psychologically refreshing. It is good to know that God cares. It is good to know that He is watching.

When I was a child, I knew that my parents cared very much how I behaved. I knew that I was accountable to them. When my behavior was bad, my parents judged me and I felt shame and the sting of rebuke. When my behavior was good, my parents judged me and I felt joy and the warmth of praise. I wanted to please my parents, not disappoint them. I wanted praise, not rebuke.

I remember sometimes doing things which I thought were totally in secret. Yet somehow my parents usually found out what I had done and called me on the carpet for it. I learned to live in private as though my parents saw *all* I did. Since I knew my parents loved me (and who loves us more than God?), I was not psychologically damaged by this accountability. Indeed, it gave me comfort because I knew what was expected of me. I knew the boundaries and was glad, most of the time, to have them.

What of the things we all have done in the past for which we are now ashamed? If we have confessed them (and made restitution if necessary), then we should be about laying up eternal rewards. We should not grow weary while doing good. Past sins are far from the whole story. Our good deeds will not be forgotten either!

There is not space to develop a theory of rewards and the Bema here. However, three points can be summarized.

First, all treasure we lay up in heaven is safe and secure. The Lord said that "neither moth nor rust destroys" treasure deposited there, and that "thieves do not break in and steal" such treasure (Matt 6:19-21). The moment we do a good deed with a right motive, our eternal trust fund grows by one deposit. No past or even future failures can change that.

Second, those who persevere in their Christian profession without disqualifying themselves with the sins of the vice lists (e.g., Gal 5:19-21), will rule with Christ forever (2 Tim 2:12). God highly rewards perseverance.

In December 1998, I attempted my first marathon, the Dallas White Rock Marathon. I finished and for my efforts received a special finisher's medal and t-shirt. Since then I've completed four others, including one in December of 2014. I'm proud of having completed five marathons. I hope to complete more. But I still vividly remember one I did not finish.

In February 1999, I attempted my second marathon, the Fort Worth Marathon. However, a foot injury caused me to drop out after 10 miles. There was no shirt and no medal that time.

Only those who persevered all the way to 26.2 miles received the perseverance prizes. So it is in the Christian life. Past successes do not guarantee the perseverance prizes. Past failures don't rule them out either (though they can diminish the degree of rulership and other rewards; compare Luke 19:17, ten cities, and 19:19, five cities). Finishing well is vitally important in the Christian life. It is never too late to return from the far country and get right with the Father.

Third, whenever we are merciful to others now, we store up mercy for ourselves at the Bema. Zane Hodges comments:

Mercy, of course, is equally important for the believer today. In fact, we may be called upon to learn this quality through times of stress and difficulty. But in the end, it will be worthwhile when we stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ. "For," as James informs us, "judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment" (Jas 2:13). And although our eternal salvation is not at issue in any way at the Judgment Seat of Christ, no Christian who knows his own heart and life will want a judgment that is "strictly by the book"! But the only way to store up mercy for the Judgment Seat is this: we must *be* merciful.

We should therefore seize every opportunity that life offers us to show mercy to others. By so doing we will make the Judgment Seat of Christ an easier experience than it will be for Christians who are harsh, judgmental and unkind to their fellow human beings. A kinder, gentler way of life ought to be the goal for all of us who know and love our merciful Savior. And it is from Him alone, and not from any human friend, that true mercy can be learned.

As the Lord Jesus Himself said, “Blessed are the merciful,
for they shall obtain mercy.”¹⁹

While being merciful to others won’t eliminate our bad deeds, it will lessen their impact. On the other hand, if we have not been merciful to others, then we guarantee ourselves the strictest of judgments.

There really are no secrets with God. Our lives are open books to Him. The heart of eschatology is accountability. Christ is coming again not only as our Savior, but also as our Judge. May we live moment by moment in such a way that we will hear Him say, “Well done, good servant.”

¹⁹ Zane C. Hodges, “The Life of David (Pt 6): Running to a Friend (1 Samuel 20:1-17),” *Victory in Christ* (Winter 1999), 6. Italics his.

DATING THE NEW TESTAMENT

FRANK TYLER

Evangelist
Port Angeles, WA

I. INTRODUCTION

Some view the Gospel accounts, especially the Gospel of John, as historically unreliable, second-century documents edited by either second-century Christians or the church. Regarding the four Gospels, an Islamic scholar writes:

As such, the gospels, which purport to relate the life, history, and sayings of Jesus, were a relatively late development in early Christian literature. ...In fact, throughout the first half of the second century CE, the alleged words of Jesus as recorded in the various gospels were seldom regarded as authoritative.¹

A professor emeritus of Jewish studies at Oxford writes:

The four Gospels are conceived as accounts conveying the life story and the message of Jesus. In their final version, that is to say in the form in which they have reached us, the aim of these Gospels was to transmit, not the report of a chronicler, but the doctrinal message of the early church. Their purpose was primarily didactic, not historical.²

¹ Jerald F. Dirks, *The Cross and the Crescent* (Beltsville, MD: Amana, 2001), 58, 124. "They [Christians] understand only what they have been taught to understand in Sunday School, decade after decade, with additional Sunday morning sermons further setting limits on the subject."

² Géza Vermes, *The Authentic Gospel of Jesus* (London: Penguin, 2004), x-xii. By "didactic," Vermes means "moral instruction." Vermes dates Mark at AD 70, just after the destruction of Jerusalem; Matthew and Luke between AD 80 and 100; and John at

Regarding John's Gospel this same scholar decries traditionalists who:

...cannot swallow the view that the so-called Gospel of John is something special and reflects not the authentic message of Jesus or even the thinking about him of his immediate followers, but the highly evolved theology of a Christian writer who lived three generations after Jesus and completed his Gospel in the opening years of the second century AD.³

As Christians, the certainty of our faith depends upon the utter reliability of God and His Word. The testimony of eyewitnesses in God's Word and the Holy Spirit convinces us that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. From this conviction, we believe, or take our Lord at His Word, when He promises us everlasting life.⁴ Sadly, one very popular atheist dismisses the Bible "...as a reliable record of what happened in history, and I shall not consider the Bible further as evidence for any kind of deity."⁵

Ever since the nineteenth century, scholarly theologians have made an overwhelming case that the gospels are not reliable accounts of what happened in the history of the real world. All were written long after the death of Jesus,

AD 100-110. Vermes dates the gospels after the destruction of the Temple and denies Jesus' claim of deity as the Son of Man: "From the completion of Daniel in 160 BC to the time of the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 the extant Jewish literature contains no evidence that the expression 'son of man' was used as a title, identifying the holder of a religious office (such as Messiah, Judge, etc.)." In explaining the Matthew 16 Son of Man passage, Vermes leaves out v 17, where Jesus blesses Peter. Likewise, he fails to include vv 18-19, the prophecy of His coming church, as one of the key points of Jesus' teaching to His disciples regarding the Son of Man: "...there is no evidence to support the idea that the foundation of the church was among the major concerns of Jesus" (pp. 17-18, 236, 365).

³ Géza Vermes, *The Changing Faces of Jesus* (New York, NY: Penguin, 2000), 8. (See also, *The Authentic Gospel*, xii.)

⁴ Clearly, my gospel statement reflects the purpose of John's Gospel (John 20:30-31). However, the importance of eyewitness testimony in ascertaining truth is not restricted to the Biblical witness. Years ago, while riding my bicycle through Santa Ana, CA, I happened upon the scene of an automobile accident. An officer arrived to take a report and asked me: "Did you see the accident from start to finish?" As I replied, "No, I heard the accident and then looked to see the wreck," he put his pen down, thanked me and told me I was free to go. Only an eyewitness, one who saw the accident from start to finish, could bear witness of the event in a court of law. Despite what some scholars might like, no record exists of anyone believing Jesus' promise of eternal life and not receiving it. Tragically, what all born again believers know with perfect assurance by faith, unbelievers will discover for themselves at the Great White Throne.

⁵ Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (New York, NY: First Mariner, 2008), 122.

and also after the epistles of Paul, which mention almost none of the alleged facts of Jesus' life. All were then copied and recopied, ...by fallible scribes who, in any case, had their own religious agendas.⁶

Are the Gospels first-century, eyewitness accounts of Jesus' life and ministry? Or, are they second-century accounts written and edited by either a second-century Christian or the church? If the latter, it casts doubt on using the Gospel of John as an authoritative source for presenting the gospel of eternal life today. Thankfully, we can look at the Word of God itself to answer the question.

II. RESTING ON JESUS AND HIS WORD

Not surprisingly, the Bible vigorously disputes the errors perpetrated by Dirks, Vermes, and Dawkins. Consider 2 Pet 1:16-21:

For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For He received from God the Father honor and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain. And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

Clearly, the Apostle Peter never conceives of the prophetic word as an edited account, let alone a second-century account (2 Pet 3:14-16). For that matter, neither did the Apostle John (1 John 1:1-3), the Apostle Paul (2 Tim 3:16-17), the Apostle James (Jas 1:17-21), nor the author of Hebrews (Heb 4:12-13). To our great satisfaction as Christians, each of these passages from God's Word corrects the error of all three of the

⁶ Ibid., 118. Dawkins writes about his frustration with the Christian Fundamentalists: "The Afghan Taliban and the American Taliban are good examples of what happens when people take their scriptures literally and seriously," (Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 326). You and I might wonder how anyone can discover the beauty of God's creation, yet fail to seek after the very Creator who delights in revealing Himself through His creation.

forementioned apologists. No doubt, to the unbeliever, this evidence seems a circular argument: “The NT is not an unreliable second-century account edited by either a second-century Christian or the church, because the NT says as much.” Although you and I comfortably rest on God’s Word to correct this error, we ought to understand the futility of making this kind of argument to unbelievers. Knowing from Scripture that all three apologists err differs from correcting that error in a manner understandable for the unbeliever. We require a very different approach, but one that still rests upon Jesus and His Word.

Some, even within Christendom, argue individual dates of writing for each NT book solely from an historical perspective. In his commentary on John, the noted Catholic scholar Raymond E. Brown illustrates the difficulties with this approach: “We pointed out above that the historical tradition that we have posited behind the Fourth Gospel was most likely formed before 70, and that several decades probably elapsed between the formation of this tradition (Stage 1) and the final redaction of the Gospel (Stage 5).”⁷

Clearly, any approach based upon history alone allows for multiple stages to reach a hypothetical final stage. Brown concludes with stage five. Like the crosshairs on a range finding scope, this paper aligns Christ’s prophecy in AD 33 concerning the Temple’s destruction with its historical fulfillment in AD 70. Regardless of how many redactors scholars may or may not postulate, no NT writer (whether Jewish or Gentile) would fail to record this momentous event and prophetic fulfillment if it had already occurred. When the crosshairs of Christ’s prophecy and the historical event of the Temple’s destruction meet, even hypothetical redactions must be reasoned in light of the AD 70 destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple.⁸

⁷ Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John I-XII*, AB, vol. 29, ed. William F. Albright and David N. Freedman (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1966), lxxxiii. Interestingly John writes, “Now there is at Jerusalem by the sheep market a pool, which is called in the Hebrew tongue Bethesda, having five porches” (John 5:2). The verb “is” is in the present tense implying his account was written historically before Jerusalem’s destruction. How does the evidence redact?

⁸ Although scholars argue from historical evidence when they assign specific dates about when the authors of Scripture wrote their accounts, they must take into account the range of AD 33 to 70. Jesus predicted the destruction of the Temple in 33 and it fell in 70. If one concludes that a book’s message would be enhanced by the inclusion of the destruction of the Temple, *if it had already occurred*, it must be seriously considered that the book was written prior to that destruction. The same would be the case if the book implies that the Temple was still standing.

One argument for a first-century date for the Gospels is about silence. The silence is deafening.

III. A DEAFENING SILENCE

To understand the silence of the NT in general, and the Gospels in particular, concerning the destruction of the Temple, we need to look at the timeline. This involves Jesus' prediction, and the fulfillment of that prediction.

A. Jesus Prophesied the AD 70 Destruction (AD 33)

As He approached the city for the last time before going to the cross, Jesus prophesied over Jerusalem:

Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it, saying, "If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation" (Luke 19:41-44).

In AD 66, the nation of Israel revolted against Rome.

B. Rome Destroyed Jerusalem (AD 70)

Historians record the fulfillment of our Lord's prophecy in great detail. A simple Internet search reveals the salient points.

During the long siege a terrible famine raged in the city and the bodies of the inhabitants were literally stacked like cordwood in the streets. Mothers ate their children to preserve their own strength. The toll of Jewish suffering was horrible but they would not surrender the city. Again and again they attempted to trick the Romans through guile and perfidy. When at last the walls were breached Titus tried to preserve the Temple by giving orders to his soldiers not to destroy or burn it. But the anger of the soldiers against the Jews was so intense that, maddened by the resistance they encountered, they disobeyed the order of their general and set fire to the Temple. There were great

quantities of gold and silver there, which had been placed in the Temple for safekeeping. This melted and ran down between the rocks and into the cracks of the stones. When the soldiers captured the Temple area, in their greed to obtain this gold and silver they took long bars and pried apart the massive stones. Thus, quite literally, not one stone was left standing upon another. The Temple itself was totally destroyed, though the wall supporting the area upon which the Temple was built was left partially intact and a portion of it remains to this day, called the Western Wall.⁹

Only 37 years after Jesus' prophecy, Rome removes the focal point of Jewish religious, social and political life, the Temple, and in large measure closed the door for Christians to evangelize within Jerusalem.

The primary historian of this event, an unbelieving Romanized Jew named Josephus, wrote this eyewitness account. By and large, it agrees with the above quote on the nature of the tragedy that befell the Jewish nation:

The total number of prisoners taken during the war was 97,000, and those who died during the siege 1,100,000. The greater part of those were of Jewish blood, but not natives of the city, because just before the siege, people had flocked into Jerusalem from all parts of the country for the feast of Unleavened Bread.¹⁰

Imagine the response within the larger Jewish community, both in the outlying areas of Israel and in the larger Roman Empire, when family members and friends failed to return from the Feast of Unleavened Bread. The news of the siege and destruction of Jerusalem swept through the Jewish and Christian communities like an open prairie fire carried forth by the embers of a horrific tragedy.

C. The Significance of Fulfilled Prophecy (Even Today)

Jesus *wep*t over the city of Jerusalem for good reason. The coming loss of life and the vastness of destruction would have a dramatic effect on

⁹ <http://www.templemount.org/destruct2.html>

¹⁰ Flavius Josephus, *Josephus: The Essential Writings*, trans. Paul L. Maier (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 1988), 367. Thankfully, scholars cannot write this event off as a Christian conspiracy.

Western civilization. It would result in difficulties for the Jews that are with us even today.¹¹

Contemporary Jewish scholarship rightly seeks to understand what it means to be Jewish in light of this AD 70 destruction. Consider Frederic Raphael's *A Jew Among Romans*, published in 2013:

In Josephus's eyes, God was a moral enforcer, not a celestial croupier. It followed that Jerusalem would never have fallen, on any occasion, if He had not had reason to withdraw His sympathy. Why would the God of the Hebrews turn His face from His chosen people?¹²

In his concluding chapter the author writes:

In that sense, Arnold Toynbee's reference to Judaism as a fossil religion' had petty pertinence. Freud put a more generous face on it in August 1938, when he wrote his daughter Anna: 'the only possession [the Jews] retained after the destruction of the Temple, their scripture... the Holy book and the intellectual effort applied to it... kept the people together.' These are singular words from the author of *The Future of an Illusion*. Even the avowedly irreligious sage, on his way to exile, seems to say that, for the Jews at least, the future lies in the past.¹³

Following the Simon Bar Kokhba revolt in AD 132, which followed the destruction of the Temple, the Romans audaciously renamed the nation of Israel, Palestine. Just as the name Palestine endures to this day, so too the significance of AD 70 remains a major focal point of Jewish life.

The destruction of the Jewish Temple not only fulfilled Jesus' prophecy, but also radically changed the face of both Judaism and Christianity. However, no book of the NT records the fulfillment of this prophecy. If

¹¹ Clearly, the Jewish people suffered persecution throughout their history prior to AD 70. However, this affliction proved particularly long lasting, for Israel would not reestablish itself as a nation until 1948. This proved to be costly, since Jews had nowhere to immigrate during the Holocaust. This resulted in the death of six million Jews. Even today, virulent anti-Semitic hatred surrounds Israel. Perhaps both historical events (the destruction of the Temple and the Holocaust) parallel each other like threads in the fabric of anti-Semitism.

¹² Frederic Raphael, *A Jew Among Romans: The Life and Legacy of Flavius Josephus* (New York, NY: Pantheon, 2013), xx-xxi.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 299.

these books were written in the second century, this is very difficult to understand.

D. The Lack of NT References to the Destruction of Jerusalem

The absence of any Scriptural record of Jerusalem's destruction in AD 70 stands out, especially when one considers that there were ample opportunities to include Christ's fulfilled prophecy in very powerful and meaningful ways in Scripture. Redactors could easily have included this event in Acts, Hebrews, or Revelation.

Acts. Like a stone thrown in a pond, the evangelistic witness of Acts follows a pattern of concentric rings going forth from the center *in Jerusalem...to the ends of the earth*, (Acts 1:8). Luke's account closes with Paul under house arrest in Rome calling the leaders of the Jews together (Acts 28:17). Do Paul's words to these leaders, regarding the events underlying his presence in Rome, hint of the destruction of Temple? Absolutely not. If the events of AD 70 had already transpired, Paul cannot reason with his audience to gain their ear based upon *the hope of Israel* (Acts 28:20), for that hope is nothing less than the restoration of the *kingdom to Israel* (Acts 1:6, cf. 3:18-21). Likewise, note the response of the Jewish leaders:

We neither received letters from Judea concerning you, nor have any of the brethren who came reported or spoken any evil of you. But we desire to hear from you what you think; for concerning this sect, we know that it is spoken against everywhere. (Acts 28:21)

Is there a hint of AD 70 in their response to Paul? Not even a scintilla. If these events transpired after AD 70, Paul would have reasoned even more powerfully with the Jewish leaders in Rome based upon Jesus' fulfilled prophecy (Luke 19:41-44). Likewise, those addressing Paul would likely acknowledge such a well-known event as a part of an ongoing dialogue with *this sect...that...is spoken against everywhere*.

At the time of their meeting with him, the Jewish leaders in Rome reject Paul's message. Luke closes his account:

Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord

Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him.
(Acts 28:30-31)

If Luke, or any supposed redactor, knows of the destruction of the Temple, how does he fail to include it in an account specifically structured around Jesus' command in Acts 1:8: *But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth?*

Imagine reading a history of World War II that fails to record D-day only to continue reading and discover the writer neglected to include the battle for Stalingrad as well. No reader should trust such an account as an accurate portrayal of World War II. If Luke or a supposed redactor wrote Acts after the events of AD 70, the fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy becomes the logical and very powerful culmination for the book of Acts. Moreover, failing to include this event would bring the historicity of Luke's account into serious question.

Hebrews. Although written by an author one generation removed from the Apostles (Heb 2:3), this epistle begins with a very dramatic exposition of Jesus' person and ministry reminiscent of the Apostle John's Gospel account:

God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high...(Heb 1:1-3)

In writing to an audience of Jewish born-again believers, what better way to demonstrate the truth of Jesus' person and prophetic ministry to Israel, than to reason from the AD 70 destruction of the Temple, the fulfillment of His prophecy in Luke 19:41-44? Yet, throughout this epistle, dedicated to showing the superiority of Christ's person and ministry, the author makes no such mention.

Consider the author's description of the Temple priesthood in offering gifts and sacrifices in Hebrews chapters 8 and 10:

For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices. Therefore it is necessary that this One also have

something to offer. For if He were on earth, He would not be a priest, since there are priests who offer the gifts according to the law (Heb 8:3-4).

And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool (Heb 10:11-13).

In both of these passages, the author refers to the Temple priesthood in a manner suggesting they engage in sacrifice and offering at the time of his writing. Likewise, consider the conclusion to the book of Hebrews:

We have an altar from which those who serve the tabernacle have no right to eat. For the bodies of those animals, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned outside the camp. Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate. Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach. For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come. Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name. But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased (Heb 13:10-16).

The author juxtaposes the believer's *sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips...outside the camp*, with the continuing Temple sacrifice of unbelieving Jews, *for here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come*. Indeed, following AD 70, neither Temple worship nor Jerusalem existed, yet the author of Hebrews makes no mention of this destruction or Jesus' fulfilled prophecy (Luke 19:41-44) as an object lesson.

One of the major points of the book of Hebrews is that the OT system of sacrifices, and the tabernacle/temple associated with it, were passing away. It was a shadow that was replaced with the New Covenant. It is extremely difficult to understand how the author could not mention the destruction of the Temple if he wrote after AD 70.

Even if we suppose that a redactor wrote the epistle of Hebrews, the author gains nothing by failing to report the fulfillment of Jesus'

prophecy. Quite to the contrary, to knowingly fail in declaring such an important event would likely disqualify this epistle from consideration not only by his immediate audience of born-again Jews, but also by those later entrusted with forming the canon of Scripture.

Revelation. Perhaps most telling of all the NT writings, Revelation begins:

The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His servants—things which must shortly take place. And He sent and signified it by His angel to His servant John, who bore witness to the word of God, and to the testimony of Jesus Christ, to all things that he saw (Rev 1:1-2).

Three elements come together in the Revelation of Jesus Christ: 1) this particular revelation originated with God the Father and was given to Jesus in order to give to His servants; 2) the content of this revelation *must shortly take place*; 3) the Apostle John received this testimony from angels and bore witness to three things: a) *the word of God*, b) *the testimony of Jesus Christ*, and c) *all things that he saw*. In a nutshell, John records an authoritative, imminent, and inclusive revelation from God the Father and His Son Jesus that contains no mention of the monumentally important AD 70 event being fulfilled.

Of particular interest, Revelation chapters 2 and 3 address seven churches, all in Asia Minor, to which Jesus explicitly instructs John to, *write the things which you have seen, and the things which are, and the things which will take place after this* (Rev 1:19). Given the nature of His warnings to these churches, the fulfillment of His prophecy (Luke 19:41-44) and subsequent destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem would stand out as a definitive object lesson for each of the churches of Asia Minor. Ironically, scholars debate whether the Revelation of Jesus Christ of *the things which must shortly take place* (Rev 1:1): 1) foreshadows the events of AD 70 in fulfillment of His prophecy in Luke 19:41-44; or 2) prophesies end time events of a greater tribulation beyond the destruction of the Temple. Clearly, in His Revelation, Jesus never mentions AD 70 as an event already transpired.

IV. CONCLUSION AND APPLICATION

This consideration of Acts, Hebrews, and Revelation suggests that no NT writer or supposed redactor would fail to record the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. Each of these books could, just as easily as not, incorporate an exposition of Jesus' prophecy and the AD 70 destruction. In some cases, such mention would greatly strengthen the argument of the author.

If Luke does not mention the events of AD 70 in the book of Acts, should you and I expect the Gospel accounts of the prior events of Jesus' ministry to include a record of them? Not likely. If the author of Hebrews identifies himself as one generation removed from the Apostles (Heb 2:3) and does not mention the destruction of the Temple, should we expect earlier writings from the Apostles to reveal this event? Not likely. If the Revelation of Jesus Christ does not record the fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy regarding this destruction, should we expect to find any NT record of its fulfillment? Again, not likely. If the AD 70 destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem was a "minor" fulfillment of prophecy, these contingencies might remain, in a cursory sense, mere improbabilities. However, as NT scholar A.T. Robinson indicates, the sheer magnitude and significance of Jesus' prophecy and its fulfillment makes its absence from Scripture the elephant in the room for all scholars desiring to date the NT after AD 70.

One of the oddest facts about the New Testament is that what on any showing would appear to be the single most datable and climactic event of the period—the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70, and with it the collapse of institutionalized Judaism based on the temple—is never once mentioned as a past fact.¹⁴

Robinson dates all four of the Gospels between AD 40–65 and writes: "The notion that all the Pauline epistles, with the theology they imply, were prior to all the gospels, with the theology they imply, is not one that we should derive from the documents themselves."¹⁵ It should be noted that Robinson was not a conservative "traditionalist," but a liberal theologian.

¹⁴ John A.T. Robinson, *Redating the New Testament* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1976; Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2000), 13

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 352.

Thankfully, the elephant in the room for some scholars remains an anchor of truth for every born-again believer in Jesus. *The authors of the NT wrote their accounts prior to AD 70, precluding any second-century authorship.* The silence concerning the events of that time is truly deafening.

Many unbelievers discount the Gospel accounts as late secondary witnesses to the events of Jesus' person and ministry. I found this out firsthand during a conversation I recently had. My wife and I were discussing the Bible in a shop that sold spices. The owner of the shop listened to our conversation and said that there was no way we could believe the Bible. He said the NT was written by the church over a century after the facts. As a result, the Gospels are nothing but hearsay and not a reliable witness of what Jesus said or did.

I responded to the owner of the shop with points discussed in this article. His view expressed a common misunderstand among many Biblical scholars. However, if we look at Luke 19, we find Jesus weeping over Jerusalem and prophesying about the city's coming destruction. This day of devastation arrived almost 40 years later. Josephus, a contemporary of these events, estimates that because the siege took place during the Feast of Unleavened Bread, well over a million people perished.

I asked the man what he thought happened when the visitors to Jerusalem failed to return home after the festival. The repercussions of this event are still felt among the Jewish people to this very day, roughly 2000 years later. In addition, this destruction fulfilled a major prophecy spoke by Jesus. The amazing thing is that nowhere in the NT do we find any mention of this fulfillment or destruction of Jerusalem.

If the books of the NT were written after these events, even by redactors in the second century, wouldn't there be a mention of these events? This is especially the case when such fulfillment would support the argument of the books. But the silence of these events in the NT stands out.

I went on to explain to him that as Christians we believe the testimony of God's Word with perfect confidence in the work of our Lord and Savior on the cross. Jesus, the crucified and resurrected Christ, has taken away the sins of the world and given us eternal life by simply believing in Him for it. We share this good news with perfect assurance in His simple promise of life: *Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life* (John 6:47).

With that, my wife reached into her purse, pulled out a *Living Water* Gospel of John, and handed it to him. We told him that the Gospel of John is an eyewitness account of Jesus and His crucifixion. His words in the book are the record of that eyewitness. If this man believed the promise of eternal life that Jesus repeatedly gave in the book for those who believed in Him, he would know for sure he had it.

Sadly, in the days ahead, the arguments of unbelieving scholars are likely to gain even more strength. They will continue to impact people like the owner of this shop. However, as born-again believers we know for sure that the Gospel of John was penned not by a second-century writer, but by an eyewitness of Jesus' ministry. Therefore, we should take notice of Paul's counsel to Timothy: "For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind" (2 Tim 1:7).

THE TRANSFIGURATION OF CHRIST

BY S. LEWIS JOHNSON¹

I. INTRODUCTION

The transfiguration of Jesus Christ is one of the most astonishing and perplexing of His earthly experiences. It is the one occasion in which the bright beams of His divine glory blazed through the sackcloth covering of His humanity. It is somewhat strange, then, that commentators and preachers, usually gushing blathers, have become as Peter who “wist not what to say” (Mark 9:6).

It is also surprising to discover the omission of the theological significance of the transfiguration in the standard systematic theologies. This fact I discovered through personal experience some years ago. During a series of meetings for the ministry of the Word in the state of Pennsylvania, I had occasion to do some of my first work on this event. I asked permission of the pastor of the church in which the meetings were being held to use his very fine library, in which were a number of the standard sets, such as those of Charles Hodge, William G. T. Shedd, A. H. Strong, and others. I was not a little chagrined to learn that the transfiguration was almost completely neglected. Not a single one of the authors I consulted discussed the theological significance of that event. I was particularly embarrassed to find out that the systematic theology of Lewis Sperry Chafer, one of my own teachers, contained only unimportant references to the event and no real treatment of it. Not long ago I made mention of my experience in Pennsylvania to a group of earnest Christians in a home Bible class in Dallas, and after the meeting one of the couples came to me and said that, although they had

¹ Editor's note: S. Lewis Johnson, who died in January 2004, taught at Dallas Theological Seminary from 1950–1977, and later at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. This article originally appeared in the April–June, 1967 edition of *Bibliotheca Sacra*. Except for changes in format and the two editor's notes, it appears as it was originally published. Used with permission.

been members of evangelical churches for years, they had thought that the word *transfiguration* referred to the ascension of Christ! They added that they had never heard a sermon on the event, a sentiment that I have heard expressed many times after I have preached on the subject.

It is only natural, then, to wonder a little at this neglect. Why has so little attention been given to the transfiguration? Perhaps, in the first place, it has not been thought to be as vital an event as the other crises in His life on the earth. I think that all students of His life will agree to some extent with this opinion. The transfiguration is surely not as vital as the death and resurrection of Christ. Nor can we accord it the same significance as the incarnation. I am not so sure, however, that it is not as important as the temptation, and I think it is definitely as vital as the ascension. I cannot believe, therefore, that the unimportance of the event is the reason for its neglect in theological discussion.

In the second place, it has been suggested that the event is one that does not have “any direct bearing on human experience,”² that is, it is an impractical event. We are able to see the practical significance of the events such as the temptation, with its signal lesson of the importance of the Word of God, and the agony, with its message of the imperative need of obedience to the will of God, but what is the practical meaning of the transfiguration? What does it say to us that affects our life in the here and now? This viewpoint has contributed without question to the slighting of the transfiguration, but I hope to show that this is a serious misunderstanding of it. The transfiguration has a deep practical relevance to the life of the Christian.

I am inclined to think that the real answer to the neglect of the transfiguration is to be found in a third consideration. In the words of Clow:

The story strains our faith and baffles our imagination. The shining of the face and the glistening of the garment present little difficulty. But the visitors from the world beyond, and the voice out of the cloud, provoke us to question whether the scene was a vision or a reality to mortal sense. Expositors love the easy way as much as others, and so they willingly turn aside from mystery to dwell upon the carpenter’s shop, to enforce the parables by the seashore, and to expound the Sermon on the Mount.³

² W. M. Clow, *The Secret of the Lord* (New York, NY: Hodder & Stoughton, 1910), 166.

³ *Ibid.*, 166-67.

The reference to the expositors and commentators reminds me of a sentence a well-known preacher often utters at points of difficulty in exposition: “We now look at a passage which is the despair of the commentators, but when I think of the commentators, there occurs to my mind the words of the prophet, ‘All we like sheep have gone astray!’”

Probably then the mysterious nature of the transfiguration does explain the inattention given the event. It does not, however, excuse it. The New Testament writers themselves accord it an important place in their work. Each of the Synoptics contains a fairly full account of the experience. While John does not mention it, Peter mentions it in both of his letters (cf. 1 Pet 5:1; 2 Pet 1:15–21) and makes it the basis of a significant exhortation in his last reference to it. This striking crisis in our Lord’s life, therefore, is worthy of careful attention, and we hope to give it some of this attention in the following paragraphs. The basis of our study will be the text of the seventeenth chapter of Matthew’s Gospel.

II. THE CHANGE IN THE LORD

And after six days Jesus takes with him Peter, and James, and John his brother, and brings them up into a high mountain apart. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone as the sun, and his garments became white as the light (Matt 17:1-2).

In the quietness of Caesarea Philippi and the shadow of snow-crested Mount Hermon Peter’s confession of the Messiahship and Sonship has signaled the end of Jesus’ ministry to the multitudes. The die has been cast; the nation has not responded to its Redeemer’s ministry. And so Jesus takes three of his intimates, Peter, James, and John, to a spur of Hermon, about fourteen miles north of Caesarea.⁴ It is Luke who informs us that He went up to pray (cf. Luke 9:28). The content of the prayer is not hard to imagine. He has just announced and begun to teach the disciples that He must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the hands of the Jewish authorities and be killed, and on the third day rise from the dead. The prayer is undoubtedly made in the light of

⁴ The altitude of Mount Hermon, 9200 feet, fully meets the demands of the adjective *hupsēlon* (AV, “high”). The early church traditionally placed the event on Mount Tabor, and eventually erected there monasteries and churches—three of the latter to correspond to the three tabernacles which Jesus refused to allow Peter to construct! Cf. Richard Chevenix Trench, *Studies in the Gospels* (London: Macmillan, 1878), 199-200.

the passion (cf. Matt 16:21). The transfiguration, then, appears to be the answer of the Father to the prayer of the Son—a prayer that will ultimately find its deepest expression on the cross, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Matt 27:46). The answer of the Father is not the removal of the cross; that cannot be prevented. It is rather a revelation of the glory of the kingdom to come, designed to encourage the Son as He moves toward His atoning sufferings.

The fact that Jesus was transfigured *as He prayed* is a fact of some practical importance. If the temptation account illustrates the importance of the Word of God in the believer’s life, the transfiguration illustrates the fact that communion with God produces transformation of life. This truth finds expression throughout the Word of God (cf. Exod 34:29–35; Ps 34:5) and is given its doctrinal foundation by Paul in the memorable words of 2 Corinthians 3:18: “But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord the Spirit.”⁵

The word used by Matthew to describe the transfiguration is *metamorphoō* (AV, “transfigured”). Derived from *morphē*, meaning *form*, *shape*, or *appearance*, it refers to an inward spiritual change. In philosophical language the *morphē* often referred to the specific character or essential form of a thing, and this is its force in the compound verb the evangelist uses. It is, of course, beyond us to describe adequately the change in the appearance and form of our Lord, but it is necessary to stress that the transformation was not simply outward in character. In Luke’s words, the fashion of our Lord’s countenance became “different” (*heteron*; AV, “altered”). Matthew, however, goes beyond the face, or countenance, of Jesus and says, “He was transfigured” (italics added). The transformation touched the inner man, the form, the nature—a kind of foregleam of the glory of the resurrection body perhaps.

Matthew does not neglect to mention the transformation of the face, for he adds, “and his face did shine as the sun” (17:2). This is the outward expression of the inward change. Just as the impurities of the body often appear as blemishes on the countenance, so the glory of the transformation of the inner man has its counterpart in the shining face.

⁵ Editor’s note: S. Lewis Johnson was not a proponent of Free Grace Theology. However, this statement could certainly be used to support a Free Grace view of sanctification. As written, Johnson does not state that such transformation is automatic in the life of the believer. He says, “communion with God produces transformation of life.”

Finally, Matthew mentions the change in the garments. The transfiguration touches the soul, the face, and the clothes. Communion ennobles all, not only the inner and outer man, but the gestures, the gifts, the courtesies, the manners—all the habits of life. While the practical application is obvious, it is well to remember that the believer's transformation is not completed until the conditions of 1 John 3:1–2 are met.

III. THE CONVERSATION WITH MOSES AND ELIJAH

And behold, there appeared to them Moses and Elijah, talking with him (Matt 17:3).

The persons. Two witnesses now cross the path of our Lord as it leads Him to Jerusalem. The two men are leading figures in the unfolding drama of the ages. One of them is the personification of the law of God, while the other is perhaps the greatest of the prophets. The law and the prophets testify of Him!

The purport (cf. Luke 9:31). According to Luke, the subject of the conversation on the mount is His “decease” (*exodos*), which He is to accomplish in Jerusalem. The exodus there will be a greater one than that from Egypt, fraught with greater spiritual consequences. Then will come to pass that to which the deliverance from Egypt pointed.

This conversation speaks a significant word on topics which have been discussed down through the ages. First, there is an answer to Job's query, “If a man die, shall he live again?” (14:14). Men have always sought to seize every hint and probability that nature might give to indicate that life survived the grave. But with only the dim light of nature before us and faced with the tragic human experience of death and decay, there is no certainty. When, however, the light of divine revelation shines upon the human predicament, there comes assurance and confidence. The simplest believer may climb far beyond the brilliant Socrates who, in the *Phaedo* with his cup of hemlock to come, has so appealingly and loftily argued for a life to come. Elijah and Moses are, though unseen, with us still.

In addition, it is just possible that the incident tells us much more than that there is a life beyond the grave. It surely stresses the fact that the life beyond the grave is a conscious life. It may also point to the fact

that the dead are conscious of the living. We do not wish to press the point, but even Bunyan, who showed a wise reserve regarding the life to come, referred to Enoch, Moses, Elijah, and others looking from above the gate. Consciousness of human events might seem to rob the dead of their happiness and bliss, until we realize that God knows and sees and is still perfect in His peace. The reason is that He knows the end of the human events; He sees them in their final significance. Can we not posit something of the same for those who are with the Lord?

IV. THE COUNSEL OF PETER

And Peter answered and said to Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here; if you will, I will make here three tabernacles, one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah (Matt 17:4).

The counsel that comes from Peter at this point is not only not infallible, it is senseless and sinful. It is true that he seemed to sense such value in the present situation that he wished it prolonged. Mark, however, points out that fear called forth the saying (cf. 9:6), while Luke claims that he did not know what he was saying (9:33). There is a proverb which has an appropriate application to Peter, "Speech is silvern, but silence is golden." But his words are not only senseless, they are positively sinful. In effect, they would turn Him from His destined earthly goal, the cross. Our Lord thinks so little of the suggestion that He does not answer it. There is One, however, who does.

V. THE CLOUD AND THE VOICE

While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and, behold, a voice out of the cloud, saying, "This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased; hear him." And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face and were exceedingly afraid. And Jesus came and, having touched them, said, "Arise, and be not afraid." And lifting up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only (Matt 17:5-8).

It is the Father who interrupts Peter's senseless rambling babbling. The voice from the cloud unites the Psalms (2:7), the prophets (Isa 42:1),

and the law (Deut 18:15) in an authoritative testimony to His Sonship and Messiahship. The voice is similar to the voice that shattered the heavens at the baptism. That voice, however, was directed primarily to

Jesus, confirming Him in His understanding of His office. This one is directed primarily to the disciples, confirming the testimony that Peter has just given by divine revelation (cf. Matt 16:16-17).⁶ In other words, the baptism is the confirmation of the Messiahship to our Lord, while the transfiguration is the confirmation of the Messiahship to the disciples. He is the King (Ps 2:7) who shall do the work of the Suffering Servant of Jehovah (Isa 42:1–53:12), and it is to Him that we must listen, not fallible Peter, for He is the Prophet who is greater than Moses (Deut 18:15-18).

We began this study by suggesting that the transfiguration is one of the most astonishing and perplexing of the earthly experiences of Jesus Christ. We pointed out that its theological significance has been glaringly overlooked by most systematic theologians. Therefore, we must now ask ourselves the question: What is the meaning of this event? I am suggesting a number of things.

First, the transfiguration is the *authentication* of the Son as Messiah by means of the voice that came from the excellent glory. While rejected by men, He is accepted by the Father and confirmed in His Messianic office. The path to its ultimate glorious future passes by Golgotha's brow.

Second, the transfiguration is the *anticipation* of the kingdom that is to come upon the earth. In fact, it is a kind of prelude and pledge of it. Now, the justification of this statement brings us to the discussion of a statement which is absolutely vital to a proper understanding of the event. The statement is one which precedes each of the accounts of the transfiguration, and it is the clue to the theological significance of the incident. In the Gospel of Matthew it is found in this form: "Verily I say to you, There are some of the ones standing here who shall by no means taste⁷ of death until they see the son of man coming in his kingdom" (16:28). The interpretations that have been put upon these words

⁶ C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1959), 294.

⁷ The subjunctive of emphatic negation, found here, is very emphatic. While it is true that it is not so strong a construction in the New Testament as it is in classical Greek, it still must be admitted that it is the strongest form of prohibition in the New Testament. It is confined largely to Old Testament citations, the sayings of our Lord, and the Apocalypse. The expression here lays a great deal of stress on the fact that physical death shall not intervene between the present moment and the vision of the Son in His

might fill a book, but it would be very poor fare. For example, Professor Dodd, in reasoning that is extremely weak grammatically, has referred the statement to the coming of the kingdom in the earthly ministry of Jesus. The disciples would awake to the fact that the kingdom had come before they died.⁸ Others have suggested that Jesus was referring to the resurrection, a view that fails to explain the force of the word *tines* (AV, “some”). M’Neile refers the words to Pentecost as the beginning, but not the completion, of their fulfillment.⁹ This, too, cannot explain the *tines*. Other views are that the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 is meant, or the life of God in the church.¹⁰ Of remaining views one can say something very similar to that which Professor H. A. A. Kennedy used to say when he wished to ridicule fancy theories constructed upon insubstantial bases: “I need hardly remind you, gentlemen, that for these fantastic conclusions there is not a shred of evidence in the New Testament. The most charitable judgment that can be passed on this preposterous book is that its author is slowly drifting towards imbecility.”¹¹

There can hardly be any doubt that the statement of Jesus refers to the transfiguration. In the first place, the careful notation of time in the first verse of chapter seventeen indicates that the author regarded the following account as the fulfillment of the words of Jesus. In the second place, the verb *idōsin* (AV, “see”) is in harmony with the transfiguration event.¹² In the third place, it handles nicely the word *tines* (AV, “some”), which is a feature of the account common to all the Synoptics. As Plummer

kingdom. Cf. Nigel Turner, *Syntax, A Grammar of New Testament Greek*, ed. James Hope Moulton (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1963): 3:95-96.

⁸ His reasoning includes the following questionable points: (1) *idōsin* refers to intellectual perception instead of physical sight (but this verb is explained by the words *emprosthen autōn* [v. 2] *ōphthēsan* [v. 3], *eidon* [v. 8]). (2) *elēluthian* [Mark 9:1] is to be taken as referring to an action that is past, or complete, before the time of their perception. That is all well and good, for the perfect tense would indicate that its action does precede the perception. But Dodd goes on to make the fatal blunder of claiming that the action must be complete at the time Jesus was speaking. This the Greek tense does not say at all, as a neophyte would know. The perfect merely means that, when some see the kingdom, they will see it as a kingdom that has come (notice the anarthrous construction). Cf. C. H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom* (New York, NY: Scribner, 1961), 53f.

⁹ Alan Hugh M’Neile, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1955), 248.

¹⁰ Vincent Taylor, *Jesus and His Sacrifice* (London: Macmillan, 1937), 8-9.

¹¹ Cf. A. C. Craig, *Preaching in a Scientific Age* (London: SCM, 1954), 40-41.

¹² The question of whether the event was only a vision, or something really seen in some physical sense is another matter. The use of the word *horama* in 17:9 is not decisive for it may refer to something seen in an ordinary way (cf. Cranfield, *op. cit.*, p. 294).

remarks, “No interpretation can be correct that does not explain eisin tines, which implies *the exceptional privilege of some, as distinct from the common experience of all.*”¹³ In the fifth place, it is in agreement with the apostolic commentary in 2 Peter 1:16–18. In this passage Peter plainly links the kingdom with the transfiguration as *the prophetic word made more sure*. He claims that he has made known “the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” to his readers, and that his presentation of it is not based upon fables but upon his personal experience in the mount of transfiguration. Therefore, because the Old Testament promises of the kingdom have now been seen fulfilled in that vision, the word of prophecy is “made more sure” (cf. 1:16–18). Peter further refers to the event in 1 Peter 5:1, and in this text he claims to be a partaker already of the glory that is to be revealed at the manifestation of the Shepherd (5:4).¹⁴ Finally, with this view most of the Fathers agree. The transfiguration, then, is a foretaste and a foreshadowing of the Messianic kingdom to come and, thus, a convincing pledge of its consummation *according to its Old Testament terms of description*.¹⁵ It fell to the lot of Peter, James, and John—the “some” of our Lord’s words—to have this inestimable privilege of sharing in the Messianic glory before its time.

Third, the transfiguration is an *illustration of the inhabitants of the kingdom to come*. On the mount were Jesus, who is the Messiah; Peter, James, and John, the representatives of the theocratic nation. With Him were Moses, a saint who died, and Elijah, a saint who was raptured without dying, the two together representing the two types of believers in the church of Jesus Christ (cf. 1 Thess 4:13–18). At the foot of the mountain there was the multitude, but the identity of the multitude is difficult to ascertain. If its character were Gentile, the illustration would be complete. The opposite may be more accurate, however, and perhaps it is well. Illustrations at best are inadequate in setting forth truth, and this one must not be pressed beyond reason. The leading features of it

¹³ Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Luke* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1902), 249–50.

¹⁴ Peter’s words in 1 Peter 5:1 have been misunderstood by many. The word *koinōnos* (AV, “partaker”) refers to the time of writing, not to the future. The *glory* shall be revealed, but Peter is already a partaker of it—by reason of his experience on the mount. Selwyn has correctly rendered the clause: “who have also *had experience* of the glory that is to be revealed” (italics mine). Cf. Edward Gordon Selwyn, *The First Epistle of St. Peter* (London: Macmillan, 1947), 228.

¹⁵ It should not be necessary to say that our Lord and Peter could only have meant this.

are credible, I believe. The kingdom is the kingdom of the Messiah, who rules with His church and His nation over the nations of the earth.

Fourth, the transfiguration is also an *illustration of personal resurrection*. In the marvelous change that came over the Lord there is an indication of the change that is to come over the ones who belong to Him. As Paul expresses it, when He comes He “shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation, that it may be conformed to the body of his glory” (Phil 3:21). His appearance “in glory” (Luke 9:31) anticipates our appearance with Him “in glory” (Col 3:4).

Fifth, the transfiguration—and this is the use Peter makes of the event—is *the confirmation of Old Testament prophecy*. That which formerly was known by faith, the promises of the Scriptures concerning the Messianic kingdom, is now known by sight also through the transfiguration. Therefore, the apostle wrote: “And we have the word of prophecy made more sure,” and then adds the appropriate exhortation which logically follows. “Whereunto ye do well that ye take heed” (2 Pet 1:19).

Sixth, the transfiguration is *a proclamation of the costliness of His sacrifice for sin*. Although Jesus Christ was the only man who ever in His own merit gained and possessed the right to enter the presence of God, He nevertheless renounced any right He may have possessed in order to fulfill the Scriptures and die for men. With the examples of Moses, a man buried by God Himself, and Elijah, who brilliantly entered heaven by horses and chariot of fire with a whirlwind nigh at hand, Jesus, nevertheless, left the glory a second time for us men and our salvation. He did not wish His crown without its jewels, and in a few days this same divine Lord is seen crying out in the agony of desolation, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (27:46). Oh! the costliness of the offering for sin!

Seventh, as a converse of this truth, the transfiguration is also *the evaluation of the strength of His passion for souls*. The perplexity of the transfiguration has been resolved in a deeper understanding of its relationship to the kingdom of the Messiah, but the perplexity of the love of God’s Son for sinful men has only increased. What an apt phrase is that of the Greek liturgy, “His unknown sufferings,” for who can understand how much He cares? We stand amazed in the presence of Jesus the Nazarene and sing with a fervor produced by His lovingkindness,

“Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.”

PRE-REFORMATION BELIEF IN ETERNAL SECURITY: THE WORD OF FAITH WE PREACH IS NEAR (ROMANS 10:8)

JOHN H. NIEMELÄ

Professor of New Testament
Rocky Mountain Seminary
Denver, CO

I. INTRODUCTION

A godly man advised me in 1975, as my theological library was starting to build, “A minister should have a library of many books, but should ultimately have a library of one Book.” This paraphrases John Wesley, “Let me be *homo unius libri* (a man of one book).”¹ Sometimes, the need for specialized fields interferes. As Old and New Testament departments tend to become territorial, so also NT and Church History people often do the same. An inter-disciplinary approach is often preferable.

Church historians focus on post-apostolic documents and NT specialists emphasize the NT. New Testament textual critics consider documents of both eras (the first-century NT in its context and extant copies—dating from the post-apostolic era).

My contention is that church historians and NT textual critics can benefit each other in analyzing the theology of the post-apostolic church. How so? Traditionally, investigations into the theology of this era have focused on documents *authored* after the first century. However, textual

¹ The advice derives from John Wesley, “Preface” in *Sermons on Several Occasions* (1771; reprint, New York, NY: Lane & Tippett, 1844), 1:6, “At any price, give me the book of God! I have it: here is knowledge enough for me. Let me be *homo unius libri*.”

criticism emphasizes post-apostolic *copying* of works *authored* in the apostolic era. These include continuous-text manuscripts, lectionaries, and versions (translations to other languages).²

The following citation by David Anderson exemplifies asking about the theology of the post-apostolic church from a church-history standpoint. Most would view the following as an accurate assessment of the documents of that period.

But we have no written record of anyone (from AD 100 to AD 1500)³ teaching forgiveness of post-baptismal sins⁴ once and for all at the point of faith in Christ.

An inter-disciplinary approach reaches a different conclusion. The written record of teaching believer-security in the post-apostolic era must not exclude the NT. Even during the twenty-first century, do we not say, “The Bible teaches...?” When thinking back to the period between the close of the NT and today, we would still say, “In Rom 10:8 Paul teaches (present tense)...” Consider the words of Zane Hodges, as he translates and expounds that verse:

10:8. But what does it (the righteousness which is by faith) say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” — that is the word of faith which we preach.

What then does Paul’s gospel (“the righteousness which is by faith”) actually say? Unlike the statements of unbelief that he has just rejected (vv 6-7), the word of faith Paul preached presented something quite near at hand and readily available...

To express this concept Paul utilizes terminology found in Deut 30:14. Perhaps again he draws verbatim upon his Greek translation of the Torah except that he drops the Greek word *sphodra* (“exceedingly”; [Heb, *m^eōd*]).

² The development and spread of lectionaries (the focus of this article) is not controversial in textual criticism.

³ David R. Anderson, “Is Belief in Eternal Security Necessary for Justification?” *CTSJ* 13 (Spring 2008): 49. The time frame of his inquiry is “from AD 100 to AD 1500,” e.g., from the close of the NT to the Reformation.

⁴ *Ibid.* *Post-baptismal sins* is a red herring. Augustine, *Enchiridion*, ch. 18, para. 67, says that some argued for some degree of security. (Augustine does not critique eternal security, but rather a view only slightly less insecure than his own). The real issue is that Jesus paid sin’s death penalty on the cross, irrevocably promising everlasting life to believers. That message has always been near to all (cf. the exposition of Rom 10:8 in this article).

However, the reference in Deuteronomy is to the fact that Israel already had the law. Therefore, the individual Israelite could recite it (LXX: *en to stomati sou*, in your mouth), remember it (LXX: *en tē kardia sou*, in your heart)...⁵

Now, Paul wrote Romans sometime between late November of AD 56 and late February of AD 57.⁶ However, he cites Deuteronomy (written almost 1500 years earlier)⁷ to prove that God's word was still accessible to them, making the first-century Romans accountable. May I be so bold as to ask, "Will Christ accept the excuse, 'God's word was too far from me,' as legitimate at the Great White Throne?" Of course not.⁸

The following is the thesis of this article: *We have a written record indicating that Jesus Christ's irrevocable guarantee of everlasting life to everyone who would believe His promise was clearly proclaimed throughout large geographic regions in many languages ever since Jesus Himself proclaimed that message.*

Romans 10:8 is no less true for the church than it was for Israel (to whom and about whom Romans 10 speaks). Paul could tell Israel that the OT still remained accessible to them, so they could not escape responsibility for his message to them. Similarly, despite the passage of almost two thousand years, the NT has always been accessible. People are accountable for its message, even today.

When considering writings about the message of life, we must not inadvertently elevate man's ephemeral writings above the Bible. The written record for the church age has always included God's living and abiding word that continues to be translated, copied, and distributed.

⁵ Zane C. Hodges, *Romans: Deliverance from Wrath*, ed. Robert N. Wilkin, Introduction and selected notes by John H. Niemelä (Corinth, TX: Grace Evangelical Society, 2013), 297f.

⁶ Cf. Niemelä, "Introduction," in Hodges, *Romans*, 17f.

⁷ Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, NAC, vol 4, ed. E. Ray Clendenen (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 22f.

⁸ Romans 1 indicates that (even prior to written revelation) man has always been without excuse. Romans 1:24, 26, and 28 say concerning those who reject what truth has been revealed to them (either through nature or through the word), "God turned them over (*paredōken autous ho Theos*)." I believe the converse is also true: God enlightens even more truth to any who respond well to the light that they have received. That, of course, does not predict how they will deal with additional light given to them.

II. THE NEW TESTAMENT REMAINS NEAR TO MAN THROUGH TIME

The point of Rom 10:8 rests on the continued availability of the OT in Paul's day. If he were here today addressing twenty-first century people, he would say that God's word remains near to us. Does anyone imagine that he would have given a pass to those living before the printing press or before the Reformation?

This article will consider how widely available the NT was during the pre-Reformation era. Christendom used creative measures to disseminate God's word extensively. Those methods were capable of overcoming:

1. Rampant illiteracy rates,
2. The high cost of books, and
3. Latin Church services despite widespread ignorance of that language.

I will discuss these objections before taking a more detailed look at the evidence itself.

A. Overcoming Low Rates of Literacy

William Harris summarizes his analysis, "The likely overall illiteracy level of the Roman Empire under the principate is almost certain to have been above 90%."⁹ His estimates seem reasonable. High illiteracy rates might seem an insurmountable obstacle, but they are not. The ability to read will not prove to be the decisive issue.

B. Overcoming the High Costs of Books

Prior to the printing press, books were extremely expensive. People who know the exorbitant cost of ancient books often view it precluding ordinary people from access to the Bible. The following section shows that cost was prohibitive, but Christendom worked to overcome the problem.

⁹ William V. Harris, *Ancient Literacy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 22-23. He documents his arguments from many directions, but his reference to the 1871 census of Sicily serves as a check, "...typical of an early-modern setting would be Sicily and Sardinia in 1871, with 79% male and 91% female illiteracy (Sardinia showed 81% and 92%)." The fact that this article accepts, rather than disputes, a low rate of literacy allows this section of the article to be brief.

1. *The prohibitive cost of books.*

My dissertation devotes an appendix to the scroll versus codex issue.¹⁰ It is common knowledge that the printing press drastically reduced book prices. However, few know that (for books with large numbers of copies) codex copies were much cheaper than scroll copies. T. C. Skeat, a noted papyrologist, calculated the savings of 26%,¹¹ because both sides of codices were used. Rarely, were scrolls inscribed on front and back.¹² By contrast, though, codex-books regularly have writing on both sides of the page.

How significant would a 26% cost savings be? Skeat estimates an uninscribed eleven foot (340 cm.) standard-scroll costing 1.4 drachma (≈ 1.4 denarii) at the time of the NT.¹³ A denarius was a laborer's daily wage. By illustration, a ten-hour workday at \$10.00 per hour with no overtime pay would equal \$100.00. An eleven-foot scroll would cost \$140.00 ($1.4 \times \100.00). Luke's Gospel would require a thirty-two foot papyrus scroll.¹⁴ Such a scroll would require 3.4 eleven-foot standard scrolls (3.4 standard scrolls \times \$140.00). This equals \$476.00 of papyrus for a scroll holding Luke's Gospel.

In addition, of course, one must pay the scribe. Utilizing Skeat's figures, copying Luke's Gospel would cost \$327.00.¹⁵ Combining these, a completed scroll of Luke would cost \$803.00.

¹⁰ John H. Niemelä, "The Synoptics and Scrolls," in "The Infrequency of Twin Departures: An End to Synoptic Reversibility?" (Ph.D. diss., Dallas Theological Seminary, 2000), 401-39. The codex is the modern form of a book. Prior to binding, the folded sheets of a four-sheet codex would look like: <<<<. Codices consist of superimposed folded-sheets. A newspaper is a codex that lacks a binding.

¹¹ T. C. Skeat, "The Length of the Standard Papyrus Roll and the Cost-Advantage of the Codex," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 45 (1982): 169-75. Specialists in the field accept his estimated 26% cost saving.

¹² An upside-down scroll would resemble the index-fingers pointing at each other (☞☛). When right-side-up, the flat surface would rest in the lap. By placing one hand across both rolled portions (one on the left and one on the right), the scribe can easily write on the flat portion with the other hand. However, an upside-down scroll (as depicted) would present real challenges for writing. This is why hardly any scrolls were inscribed on the reverse.

¹³ Naphtali Lewis, *Papyrus in Classical Antiquity* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1974), explains the laborious process of making papyrus writing material. Also, a government-controlled cartel kept prices high.

¹⁴ Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 3rd ed. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1992), 5f. Cost figures derive from Skeat, "Advantage," 171f.

¹⁵ Skeat, "Advantage," 173-75.

As Luke covers one-seventh of the NT, the cost of an entire NT would have been about \$5,621 in today's dollars. An entire Bible would have cost around \$24,893 today. A complete Bible may now sell for under \$25.

Such costs were clearly prohibitive.

2. *The codex was a partial solution.*

Utilizing Skeat's 26% cost reduction figure (which excludes binding expense), a codex of Luke would cost \$594.00; the NT \$4,158; the entire Bible \$18,414. That was still pricey for small congregations of poor people. In earlier times, more than one congregation may have shared their manuscripts of various NT books.¹⁶

Early non-Christian Greek papyri were almost exclusively in scroll form. For the first century AD, 100% of known secular Greek papyri are scrolls; for the second century, 98%; and for the third, 87%.¹⁷ By contrast, of 172 Christian papyri from various centuries, only fourteen were scrolls (8%).¹⁸ Of the fourteen Christian scrolls, twelve were OT manuscripts, only two were NT. Roberts and Skeat note, "...in the pagan world of the second century the codex has barely a foothold. In the contemporary Christian world the position is very different..."¹⁹

My dissertation argues that the codex is a publishing tool, not an authorial one.²⁰ An author would need to recognize (while inscribing the left-sides of sheets) the midpoint of a yet unfinished book. Then he would switch to the right side of each sheet. Thus, copyists (not authors) faced the challenging prospect of creating codices. Without going into detail, the process was difficult, only applied to repeatedly-copied books. Christianity was highly motivated to multiply copies of the NT. The huge volume of copying explains why the church regarded the

¹⁶ John H. Niemelä, "Evidence for a First-Century 'Tenement Church,'" *JOTGES* 24 (Spring 2011): 102-104, argues that the Roman church (when Paul wrote Romans) consisted of at least fifteen congregations. A condensed form of that argument appears in Niemelä, "Introduction," in Hodges, *Romans*, 15-17. Sharing of Biblical mss. would be a reasonable way to control costs.

¹⁷ These figures derive from C. H. Roberts and T. C. Skeat, *The Birth of the Codex* (London: Oxford University Press, 1983), 37. As a simplification, centuries I-II and II were treated as century II. Likewise, centuries II-III and III were grouped as century III.

¹⁸ Roberts and Skeat, *Birth*, 38f.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 38.

²⁰ Niemelä, "Infrequency," 430.

cost-savings worth the effort. Fewer copies of non-Christian writings did not justify use of the codex. Early non-Christian codices are rare, but Christian ones are common.

3. *Drawing the right inference.*

High costs of books combined with low literacy rates might cause some to surmise that most NT copies both originated and remained in monasteries. Let us reflect on this briefly. About 5,000 Greek NT manuscripts have been found and about 8,000 Latin ones.²¹ They come from different centuries. Even allowing for a reduction in cost as parchment and paper came into use, those manuscripts represent a large fortune. Today, books are cheap. Middle-class ministers can afford a thousand or more books in their personal libraries; professors often have significant collections of expensive scholarly tomes on their shelves. Most of the cited works in this article lie on my shelves. One of my hobbies is to collect Greek NTs and synopses. My collection of these is more complete than many seminaries. Some of my books may rest unopened for a year or longer, until needed. Somehow, though, it is not plausible that monasteries could afford to fill up bookshelf after bookshelf with Biblical manuscripts. Since they were hand-copied and expensive, Bibles were produced for study, not for shelving in collections. In other words, thousands of manuscripts show a recognized need for Bibles to study, despite steep prices.

This argument extends further, however. Edwin Yamauchi points out that modern scholarship only sees the tip of the archaeological iceberg. He describes a fraction of a fraction:

1. The Fraction that Has Survived...
2. The Fraction that Has Been Surveyed...
3. The Fraction that Has Been Excavated...
4. The Fraction that Has Been Examined...
5. The Fraction that Has Been Published.²²

²¹ Totals include both non-continuous lectionaries and continuous-text manuscripts in Greek and Latin.

²² Edwin M. Yamauchi, *The Stones and the Scriptures*, Evangelical Perspectives, ed. John Warwick Montgomery (Philadelphia, PA: Lippincott, 1972), 8. This cites his table of contents (omitting its page references).

The total number of Greek and Latin Biblical manuscripts produced greatly exceeded the 13,000 that modern scholars have published. This fact strengthens the argument that no one could afford to collect large numbers of Biblical manuscripts that merely remained on bookshelves. Copies that were produced would have been read, not just shelved.

Furthermore, as noted, virtually all NT manuscripts were codices. The codex was a publishing tool, so the following early papyri each represent one member of a larger production run: p³² (Titus), c. 200; p⁴⁶ (Paul + Hebrews), c. 200; p⁵² (John), c. 125; p⁶⁴ (Matthew), c. 200; p⁶⁶ (John), c. 200; p⁷⁷ (Matthew), second/third centuries; p⁹⁰ (John), second century. If one were to posit conservatively that each were part of a production-run of ten, these seven manuscripts would point to seventy copies.

The correct inference would seem to be that far more than 13,000 Greek and Latin manuscripts were produced, despite their cost. In addition, it makes no sense to posit that copies merely ended up in libraries. Costly copies were made to be studied, not to rest on shelves.

C. Latin Church Services in Non-Latin Areas

Both William Tyndale (1494-1536) and Martin Luther (1483-1546) were justly famous for translating God's word into the vernacular. Of course, Johannes Gutenberg invented the printing press before their births. That innovation enabled multiplying copies economically, helping to make their translations famous.

However, many other translations preceded those of Tyndale and Luther. The hierarchy of western Catholicism is often seen as the whole picture. However, translations like the Gothic targeted Ostrogoth and Visigoth peoples, who lived in areas dominated by the Latin mass. For some locales, finding ministry in one's own vernacular was not hard. In others, it was. Surviving materials on some versional translations is scant. However, extant evidence suggests that a strong desire existed in many locales to translate the NT into the vernacular.

The following lists twenty-seven translations for which manuscript evidence exists. How many other translations existed cannot be determined. Each version represents significant effort to make the message accessible. For a number of languages, both continuous manuscripts and lectionaries are extant. Each of the languages has extant continuous manuscripts.

- Anglo-Saxon²³
- Arabic²⁴
- Armenian (continuous and lectionaries)²⁵
- Caucasian Albanian²⁶
- Coptic (continuous and lectionaries)²⁷
 - Sahidic
 - Achmimic
 - Sub-Achmimic
 - Middle-Egyptian
 - Fayummic
 - Boharic
- Ethiopic (continuous and lectionaries)²⁸
- Georgian (continuous and lectionaries)²⁹
 - Early Georgian
 - Revised Georgian
- Old High German³⁰
- Latin (continuous and lectionaries)³¹
 - Old Latin
 - Vulgate
- Nubian (continuous and lectionaries)³²
- Old Church Slavonic (continuous and lectionaries)³³
 - Bohemian
 - Croatian
 - Serbian
 - Bulgarian
 - Russian

²³ Bruce M. Metzger, *The Early Versions of the New Testament: Their Origin, Transmission, and Limitations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 443-55.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 257-68.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 153-81.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 282.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 99-152.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 215-56.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 182-214.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 455-59.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 285-374.

³² *Ibid.*, 268-74.

³³ *Ibid.*, 394-442.

Sogdian (continuous and lectionaries)³⁴

Syrian (continuous and lectionaries)³⁵

Old Syriac

Peshitta

Philoxenian

Palestinian Syriac

III. SUMMARY OF RESPONSES TO OBJECTIONS

It is true that low rates of literacy, high cost of books, and language differences all complicated reaching people with the NT itself. However, it is also clear that Christianity's rapid adoption of the codex sought to make copying cost-effective. Yamauchi cautions that only a fraction of a fraction of the original data appears in published form. Huge quantities of manuscripts existed besides those known to scholars. Yet, it is highly doubtful that many merely sat on shelves. Biblical books were copied, based on demand by their readers.

In addition, much effort at translating the NT into various foreign languages occurred. Many copies of those manuscripts went forth.

Christendom during the centuries before the printing press expended much money in the Middle Ages on questionable projects (e.g., building cathedrals). Yet, that is (to some degree) balanced by expenditures on translating and copying the NT. From my perspective, church history catalogues many lost opportunities on a host of issues. However, one bright spot in the midst of it was that Biblical translation and copying of manuscripts continued through the ages.

The astute reader may now perceive that this article has answered objections, without yet offering a positive case. One might observe that few could read and fewer could afford to own a NT in their vernacular. How, then, could this article possibly argue its thesis? That thesis is:

We have a written record indicating that Jesus Christ's irrevocable guarantee of everlasting life to everyone who would believe His promise was clearly *proclaimed* throughout large geographic regions in many languages ever since Jesus Himself *proclaimed* that message.

³⁴ Ibid., 279-81.

³⁵ Ibid., 3-98.

The operational word is *proclaimed*. The following discusses the widespread practice of reading portions of the Bible in worship services according to a lectionary calendar.

IV. SYSTEMATIC PUBLIC READING OF SCRIPTURE

It will be maintained that people did hear the message of life through the public reading of the Bible. To accomplish this, I will give a general discussion of lectionaries, the need they met, their relation to Rom 10:8, how to assess their impact, and certain implications.

A. General Discussion of Lectionaries

Seminary graduates and people familiar with liturgical churches³⁶ will associate this topic with lectionaries. The UBS Greek NT always gives a nod to Greek lectionaries.³⁷ From the standpoint of determining the text, no major text-critical view emphasizes lectionaries.³⁸ Thus, prior to researching for this article, my acquaintance with them was limited. Admittedly, a myriad of abbreviations in Greek within the collation section of the book on lectionaries by Colwell and Riddle involved a learning curve.³⁹

³⁶ My ancestry is $\frac{7}{8}$ Finnish and $\frac{1}{8}$ Swedish, so I was raised Lutheran. Each service had a lection (reading) from the Gospels, one from the Epistles, and another from the OT. The readings were calendar-based. Please note, despite arguing that lectionaries played a vital role in earlier centuries, my philosophy of Bible reading within church is not lectionary-based nor is it religious-calendar based.

³⁷ Barbara and Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M. Martini, and Bruce M. Metzger, eds., *The Greek New Testament*, 4th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft/United Bible Societies, 1993), lump lectionaries under one label, Lect. Lumped listings (e.g., Byz or Lect) indicate editorial disinterest in such texts.

³⁸ Kurt and Barbara Aland, *The Text of the New Testament*, 2nd ed., trans. Erroll F. Rhodes (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), say, "...for New Testament textual criticism, so far as the original text and its early history is concerned, nearly all of the approximately 2,300 lectionary manuscripts can be of significance only in exceptional cases." Hodges and Farstad, *Majority Text*, discuss continuous-text manuscripts, but never mention lectionaries.

³⁹ Ernest Cadman Colwell and Donald W. Riddle, *Prolegomena to the Study of the Lectionary Text of the Gospels*, vol. 1 of *Studies in the Lectionary Text of the Greek New Testament* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1933). The collations stipulate how much of John's Gospel was read each year in the *Mēnologion*, the calendar of fixed-day feasts (e.g., Christmas was always December 25) and in the *Sunarxion*, the calendar of movable-day feasts (e.g., Easter falls on different dates). These two calendars combined the civil and religious calendars each year, determining which passages to read each day.

Three sets of lectionaries existed (Gospels, Acts and Epistles, OT). This article focuses on readings from John in Gospel lectionaries,⁴⁰ because John's Gospel emphasizes the message that gives eternal life. Over 93% of the text of John was read during the year. Ninety-four of John's 100 uses of *pisteuō* (believe) were included. Some vital passages, such as John 3:16 and 5:24 came up more than once during the year.

Besides Greek, lectionaries are extant in Armenian, Coptic, Ethiopic, Georgian, Latin, Nubian, Old Church Slavonic, Sogdian, and Syriac. Other versions may have existed.

B. The Need That Lectionaries Met

The regular reading of Scripture during worship initially led to special-purpose manuscript features. Then lectionaries developed as an entirely new class of manuscripts.

New Testament manuscripts are quite different from edited Greek texts. The reader may consult Codex Mosquensis (K^{ap} 018), a well-preserved Majority Family manuscript that illustrates how much we take punctuation and word-spacing for granted.

Finding the right place to start each of three readings for any church service would not have been easy.

⁴⁰ During the religious calendar (starting at Easter), these passages in John would be read: 1:1-17₈₅, 18-28*₈₅, 35-52₈₅, 44-52₁₁₇; 2:1-11₈₆, 12-22*₈₅; 3:1-15₈₅, 16-21₈₆, 22-33*₈₆; 4:5-42*₈₈, 46b-54₈₇; 5:1-15*₈₇, 17-24₈₆, 24-30₈₆, 30-6:2*₈₆, 5-14₈₈, 14-27a₈₆, 27-33*₈₇, 35-39₈₇, 40-44*₈₇, 48-54*₈₇, 56-69*₈₇; 7:1-13*₈₇, 37-52*₉₁; 8:1-11+13₃, 12-20₈₇, 21-30₈₈, 31-42a₈₈, 42-51₈₈, 51-59₈₈; 9:1-38₈₉, 39-10:9₈₈, 10-16+12₈, 17-28a₈₉, 27-38*₈₉; 11:1-45*₁₁₈, 47-54*₈₉; 12:1-18₁₁₈, 14-21₁₂₇, 17-50₁₂₀, 19-36a₈₉, 36-47₉₀, 13:1-11₁₂₁, 3-17₁₂₂, 12-17*₁₂₁, 31-18:2₁₂₂, 14:1-11a₉₀, 10b-21₉₀, 27-15:7₉₀, 9-16₁₁₇, 17-16:2₈₇, 2b-13a₉₀, 15-23₉₀, 23-33a₉₀; 17:1-13₉₀, 18-26₉₀; 18:1-28₁₂₃, 28-19:16₁₂₃, 16-37₁₂₅, 31-37₁₂₆, 38-42₁₂₅; 20:1-10₁₂₇, 11-18₁₂₇, 19-25_{85b}, 19-31_{86b}, 19-31₁₂₇; 21:1-14₁₂₇, 14-25₉₁. This listing is in John's order, not calendric order. Asterisks show skipped verses. Subscript numbers are page references to Colwell and Riddle, *Lectionary*, where the reading appears. The collations are full of abbreviations in post-NT Greek, so many terms may be unfamiliar. Most entries are from the *Mēnologia*, but those with a plus sign (+) are supplemental, from the *Sunaxion*. Seventy-six verses are omitted (8.6% of John's 879). Only six of John's 100 uses of *pisteuō* (believe), 2:23f; 3:36; 6:47; 7:31; 10:42 are omitted. Most of John and most message-of-life passages were read each year.

beginning of the passage as might seem to be necessary when it was detached from the preceding context. Thus the church came to have lectionaries or lesson books.⁴²

C. Lectionaries in Relation to Romans 10:8

Earlier, this article discussed three objections to a written record existing to address the issue raised in Rom 10:8: The NT (including Christ's irrevocable promise of life) remains accessible to man through the centuries. Literacy levels were low, Bibles were prohibitively expensive, and language barriers existed (especially when the western Church used Latin). For most people, hearing someone read Scripture was their only contact with the Bible.

Having considered how expensive books were at the time of the NT, it is striking that 2445 ancient Greek lectionaries have been published in modern times.⁴³ Lectionaries originated because the apostles had emphasized Scripture reading:

Paul urged Timothy, "Until I come, attend to reading, to exhortation, to teaching" (1 Tim 4:13).

Revelation 1:3 blesses both reader and hearers, "Blessed be the one who reads and those who both hear the words of the prophecy and keep those things written in it, for the time is near."

The practice continued after the close of the NT. Justin Martyr, Apology 1:16, wrote of sections from the apostles or prophets being read during church services.

D. How Can One Assess Scripture's Impact?

The foregoing demonstrates that the NT was widely available, whether as manuscripts to be studied (and proclaimed) or lectionaries to be read aloud to congregations. How, though, can one determine whether people heard and remembered the Scripture that was read?

⁴² Bruce M. Metzger, "Greek Lectionaries and a Critical Edition of the Greek New Testament," in *Die Alten Übersetzungen des neuen Testaments, Die Kirchenväterzitate und Lektionare*, ed. K. Aland, Arbeiten zur Neutestamentlichen Textforschung, vol. 5 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1972), 479f.

⁴³ The official printed list of lectionaries is: Kurt Aland, Michael Welte, Beate Köster, Klaus Junack, *Kurzgefasste Liste der griechischen Handschriften des neuen Testaments*, 2nd ed., Arbeiten zur neutestamentlichen Textforschung, vol. 1 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1994). The print edition has not been updated since 1994. The most current listing (February 2015) from INTF shows lectionary 2445 as the latest catalogued lectionary manuscript: See http://www.uni-muenster.de/NTTextforschung/KgLSGII2010_02_04.pdf

Patristic writings may enable an indirect method of assessment. Those post-apostolic authors often arranged their writings around a multitude of Scripture citations and allusions. Generally, the writings treated the Biblical texts as proof for assertions. Logically, these references could only be persuasive to readers that: (1) also regarded the references as authoritative, and (2) had familiarity with Biblical texts.

Writings that refer many passages in this way presuppose a fairly extensive awareness of Biblical passages.⁴⁴ Let us consider the frequency of NT citations and allusions in two ways.

First, NT textual critics devote much attention to references to the NT by both Greek and Latin patristic writers. Consider lists of fathers that appear in text-critical works.⁴⁵ Furthermore, various handbooks of textual criticism devote much space to explaining all the benefits and pitfalls of using patristic evidence. References to the NT abound in patristic writings.

Second, the *Apostolic Fathers* in the Loeb Classical Library (LCL) lists 943 references to the Bible. The 499 NT references come from every book except Philemon and 3 John. The 444 OT references are from twenty-six books.⁴⁶ LCL volumes are small, so the print area of the Greek text is only 3" × 4½". Each volume has Greek on even-numbered pages and English on facing pages. Thus, Greek occupies 368 small pages; English also fills 368 pages.⁴⁷ In sampling several pages, the average line has about seven Greek words. The theoretical maximum number of lines on a page is thirty-two (but no page has that many lines). This would yield 224 Greek words per page. Nine hundred and forty-four Biblical allusions in 368 pages of 224 words per page would be one allusion every eighty-seven words. In reality, the frequency is higher, because each page has less than thirty-two lines of Greek. Clearly, the various apostolic

⁴⁴ The argument does not demand that either the church father or the reader of his work correctly interpret a passage. It only requires general familiarity with many passages.

⁴⁵ Aland, *et al.*, *Greek New Testament*, cites evidence from 116 Greek fathers and 73 Latin ones; 189 total.

⁴⁶ *The Apostolic Fathers with an English Translation*, 2 vols., ed. and trans. Kirsopp Lake, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; London: Heinemann, 1912–13). The "Reference Index [to Scripture]" appears on pp. 2:391–96. The totals omit twenty-three references to the Apocrypha.

⁴⁷ Volume 1 has 409 pages; vol. 2 has 396. The Greek text occupies only 368 small pages between the two volumes. Title pages, introductions, English translations, and the Scripture index fill the rest of the pages.

fathers expected familiarity with a wide range of Scripture (referring to fifty-one of sixty-six books).

My argument is not that the post-apostolic writers always interpreted Scripture correctly. The point is that they assumed widespread familiarity with large portions of the Bible within their readership. Such a picture is consistent with the thesis of this article, that familiarity with the Bible was widespread. The NT encouraged public reading of Scripture. The creation and multiplication of lectionaries in Greek and in other languages shows that public reading of Scripture was widespread. Familiarity with the Bible (presupposed by post-apostolic patristic writers) indirectly supports the contention that public reading of Scripture was widespread.

E. Implication with Regard to the Message of Life

Everyone is familiar with Martin Luther vowing to Saint Anna that he would become a monk after almost being struck by lightning. While a monk, the impossibility of measuring up under a works system caused him to despair. To other monks and aspiring monks in the university he seemed exemplary, but he knew differently. He threw himself into studying and teaching, to no avail. Then, one day he read Rom 1:17. Pondering that passage changed everything for him.⁴⁸ His rejection of his old view did not come through a sermon or a post-apostolic book, but by God's Word. The issue is *Sola Fide* (by faith alone), *Sola Scriptura* (by Scripture alone). Romans 10:17 says, "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."

V. CONCLUSION

John Wesley was right. Christians should be *populus unius libri* (people of one Book). Unfortunately, when we look at a period of time within church history (e.g., AD 100–1500), we might overemphasize the documents authored after the close of the NT. In keeping with our acceptance of *Sola Scriptura*, *let us not assume that the voice of Scripture*

⁴⁸ People want to pinpoint when someone like Luther passed from death to life. Such a question is above my pay grade. My point is that God's word (not some other person) shed enough light that Luther saw the falsity of his prior understanding. John 6:45's explanation of v 44 is crucial:

(6:44) No one can come to Me unless the Father...draws him...

(6:45) The one who hears

was muffled in the pre-Reformation era. Romans 10:8 told Israelites that they were accountable to the word that they had heard and could even quote—even though Deuteronomy was written 1,500 years earlier. Paul’s point applies equally to people in AD 800, AD 1500, or today.

We have seen that God’s Word went forth throughout the ancient world, despite low literacy rates, the high cost of books, and language barriers (e.g., the Latin mass). God’s Word went forth in continuous-text manuscripts and in lectionaries written in Greek and many other languages. The existence of thousands of lectionaries establishes that the Word was read publicly.

How, though, does one assess whether that proclaimed word was heard? Patristic writers cited Scripture after Scripture from all over the OT and NT. Their use of the Bible assumed a broad familiarity with it and a recognition of its authority. The very nature of post-apostolic writings strongly suggests that the word not only went forth, but was heard.

Elijah complained, “The children of Israel . . . have killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left” (1 Kings 19:14). The LORD corrected him, “Yet I have reserved seven thousand in Israel, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him” (1 Kings 19:18). We must guard against an Elijah-complex in reflecting on the pre-Reformation era. Unfortunately, since starting seminary in 1981, professors, seminarians, pastors, and congregants often have said in my hearing that grace was absent for 1,400 years. For years I lacked a good response.

Amazingly, an interest in textual criticism led to confidence on this topic. Lectionaries offer an insight into what was proclaimed before any sermonizing began. Eternal security by faith-alone in Jesus-Christ-alone was widely proclaimed by Scripture during those 1,400 years. Pertinent passages about Jesus and His irrevocable promise of everlasting life to believers were read aloud in far-flung places. It is true that post-apostolic/pre-Reformation works seconding absolute security have not yet surfaced. Even so, God’s irrevocable guarantee of life did not cease going forth.

Let us be *populus unius libri*. *Sola Scriptura* and *Sola Fide* need to be more than theological catchwords. As in the book of Acts, the word went forth *unhindered* (Acts 28:31, the last verse in Acts). As Isa 55:11 affirms, God’s Word never returns to Him void:

So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth;
It shall not return to Me void,
But it shall accomplish what I please,
And it shall prosper *in the thing* for which I sent it.

BOOK REVIEWS

Killing Jesus: A History. By Bill O'Reilly and Martin Dugard. New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company, 2013. 293 pages. Hardcover, \$28.00.

This book is part of the “killing” series of books written by O'Reilly and Dugard, about the deaths of famous people. Previous titles are: *Killing Lincoln*; *Killing Kennedy*; and *Killing Patton*. They have been extremely popular. In fact, at the time of this review *Killing Jesus* is being made into a movie. Many of the readers are evangelicals.

Neither O'Reilly nor Dugard are Biblical scholars. O'Reilly is a well-known cable news commentator and Dugard is a New York Times best selling author.

The book is not written as a theological treatise, and the authors make it clear that they are only trying to tell the “truth” about important people and that they are not trying to convert anybody (p. 3). The subtitle of the book supports this conclusion. They simply want to look at the life and death of Jesus from a strictly historical viewpoint.

Both authors identify as Catholic (p. 2). In addition, they do use the Scriptures throughout the book. While they seem to respect the integrity of the Gospel accounts, they would not be classified as those who believe the Scriptures are inspired and without error. For example, they say that the Gospels were first oral histories and that this may account for the discrepancies in them. In the Gospel of John, the cleaning of the Temple is at the beginning of Jesus' ministry, but in the other Gospels it is at the end. The authors, however, say that this may not be a discrepancy since there may have been two cleansings (p. 126). Another possible discrepancy is that there were two Bethlehems and that some maintain Jesus was born in the one in Galilee and not the one described in the Gospels. But the authors say they favor the traditional site (p. 8).

In the book, the authors never state that the Scriptures are in error. They follow the general outline of the Gospels. However, they are also careful not to explicitly state that miracles take place. The book ends with the death of Jesus. On the Sunday morning after the resurrection, the body of Jesus is not in the tomb and has never been found. O'Reilly

and Dugard imply that the disciples did not take the body since they were all afraid and in hiding (p. 259). The reader is left to ponder why the tomb is empty. They also state that there were “rumors” that Mary was a virgin when Jesus was born and that the church has maintained that she was as well (p. 79).

Perhaps the closest they come to stating a miracle took place is when they state that Jesus knew He was going to die. Jesus also knew that the Temple was going to be destroyed. In discussing the fact that no bones were broken during the crucifixion, which as Bible readers know was a fulfillment of an Old Testament prophecy, they say that this was “extremely unusual” (p. 250). The authors say that when it comes to the healings done by Jesus, even unbelievers must admit that something extraordinary happened (p. 271).

The Gospel is not given in the book. However, the authors do discuss that Jesus told Nicodemus he must be born from “above.” Being born from above would result in being “judged kindly by God.” Then the book quotes how Jesus said the words of John 3:16, with its promise of eternal life (pp.127-28). This is probably the closest the book comes to the Gospel. The authors, however, never state that Jesus’ death was one of substitutionary atonement or that it was ordained by God for the sins of mankind.

The emphasis in the book seems to be on Jesus’ message of love. If the authors of the book were to give the Gospel of Jesus, it would probably be that. In fact, the book is dedicated to “those who love their neighbors as themselves.”

Those who deny the inspiration of the Scriptures or the claims of Jesus will say that the authors are too conservative. Those who hold to a conservative view of Scriptures will say that they are too liberal. The authors would say that the book should be judged as a historical book.

Perhaps the hardest part in judging the historical value of the book is that there are few footnotes. It is difficult to determine when primary sources are used. It is also difficult to determine when these primary sources are correct. As a result, there are many statements in the book that are hard to verify. For example, it is stated that Jesus was scourged with a different kind of whip to ensure that He did not die (p. 242). In addition, Peter was crucified upside down (p. 263). When Jesus calls the Pharisees a brood of vipers it was in response to the widespread belief in

the first century that vipers killed their mothers in the act of birth and Jesus was calling the Pharisees parent murderers (p. 206).

The book does refer to a statement by Josephus that Herod Antipas lost his kingdom because God punished him for killing John the Baptist (p. 152). But was this the writings of Josephus or the writings of a later Christian editor? Eusebius, writing in the fourth century, says that the victim of scourging had his inner organs exposed and that Pilate committed suicide (pp. 235, 266), but can we accept these statements as true, or were they traditions present in the days of Eusebius?

The authors give a very detailed account of the medical problems of Herod the Great. He had an inflamed big toe, gout, kidney problems, worms, sexually transmitted diseases, gangrene, and maggots (p. 12). But once again, it is impossible to verify in the book if these things were historically accurate or from where the authors got this information.

However, even if one cannot verify certain details, the historical picture of the book is helpful. The authors describe the world in which Jesus lived. It was a cruel world governed by immoral people, both Jewish and Roman. It was full of political intrigue. From a strictly historical perspective, this contributed to the death of Jesus.

The book places the blame of Jesus' death on the Jews. While the Romans did not tolerate rebellion, they did not see Jesus as a threat. The Jewish leaders, however, did. They feared Jesus would cause an uproar among the people and the leaders would lose their positions of authority.

These things can also be used to explain why the masses of people were attracted to Jesus. They longed to be released from those who oppressed them. They would have appreciated the fact that Jesus overturned the tables of the moneychangers because they had been cheated by them for years. O'Reilly and Dugard suggest that Herod Antipas does not want to condemn Jesus because he still remembers what he did to John the Baptist and doesn't want to condemn another "holy" man. Pilate doesn't want to execute Jesus because the average Jew might revolt and that would look bad for him back in Rome (pp. 237, 241).

It is clear in these examples that the authors of this book often use the history of the period as they see it to get into the minds of the people in the account of Jesus. The reader will have to determine how valid each example is. However, it appears that the general picture they paint agrees with the New Testament. As a result, it might help in giving possible explanations to certain events and the motives behind certain

actions. In addition, many people in evangelical churches are reading it and it is helpful to understand what they are reading.

The book is best classified as a historical novel. It is easy to read and follow. It is a fun book to read as well. For all of these reasons, I recommend the book.

Kenneth W. Yates

Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

Dictionary of Paul and His Letters: A Compendium of Biblical Scholarship. Edited by Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid. Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993. 1067 pp. Hardcover, \$60.00.

This dictionary has substantial entries on numerous topics in Paul's letters. For example, the entry on *baptism* is over 600 words, while the entry on *Ephesians* is over 1000 words long.

The *Dictionary* is broadly Evangelical, with a slight Reformed bias on topics that would be of most interest to *JOTGES* readers. But there are surprising Free Grace insights here and there.

For example, the entry on *Apostasy*, written by J. M. Gundry-Volf, says that Paul taught that salvation cannot be lost and verses dealing with disapproval may have to do with disapproval of one's service to God:

Some texts seem to reveal Paul's apprehension that his own conduct will in some way disqualify him from final salvation. Yet Paul can express confidence of his final salvation (Phil 1:21, 23). It is God's approval of his apostolic service that he does not take for granted. "Lest...I might become disqualified [*adokimos*]" at 1 Corinthians 9:7 probably refers to Paul the apostle instead of Paul the Christian (cf. 1 Cor 3:13-15). For when Paul uses the language of testing (*dok-*) of himself, it always has to do with divine approval of his apostolic service. Paul seeks to avoid divine disapproval as an apostle by subduing his body through the giving up of his rights (to food and drink, pay, a wife) (p. 42).

However, Gundry anchors the believer's assurance of salvation on the fact of election and predestination, not on the promise of eternal security. She says that people who fall away from the faith, or who act unethically, "may call into question the genuineness of one's profession of faith" (p. 43).

Similarly, in his article on *Judgment*, S. H. Travis affirms that Paul taught a judgment according to works, but does not seem to recognize that it occurs at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Instead, Travis places the judgment according to works at the Last Judgment, where "professing Christians [who] persistently did evil rather than good [will] show themselves not to be Christians and to be in danger of condemnation at the final judgment" (p. 517).

R. M. Fuller's article on *Rewards* recognizes that Paul taught that believers will have different degrees of eternal happiness, but fails to connect that truth with the Bema.

Generally speaking, the authors interact with higher-critical scholarship and seem to generally prefer conservative conclusions in a lukewarm way. For example, in his article on *Ephesians*, C. E. Arnold discusses the possibility that it was not actually written by Paul and weakly concludes that such arguments are not strong enough to overturn the traditional belief in Pauline authorship (p. 242).

Although theologically uneven, this book covers a tremendous amount of territory on virtually every aspect of Paul's theology, including overviews of each letter, Paul's missionary journeys, how Paul used the OT, and almost every major theological topic he addressed. This would be a helpful reference tool for discerning believers.

Shawn Lazar

Associate Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

Only One Way?: Reaffirming the Exclusive Truth Claims of Christianity. Edited by Richard Phillips. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2006. 151 pp. Paper, \$12.99.

This book consists of six chapters by six different authors. All come from a Reformed background and the material in the book was originally presented at the 2005 Philadelphia Conference on Reformed Theology.

It is in response to the cultural shift going on in Western Civilization from modernity to postmodernity. The central feature of postmodernity is its “espousal of relativism in matters of truth” (p. 13).

The six chapters cover various truth claims of Christianity. The first deals with Christianity’s claim to be true and other religions false. The second chapter addresses the claim that there is one God and the third that there is one savior. Chapter four discusses the proposition that God’s Word is true. The topic of the fifth chapter is that there is one people of God, while that of the last chapter is that there is one Gospel.

For readers of the *JOTGES*, most would probably consider when the authors allow certain aspects of their Reformed theology to govern their statements to be the weakest part of the book. One author states that confession with the mouth is part of the Gospel (p. 37) and another agrees (p. 80). Another seems to equate the wrath in the book of Romans as part of the message of the Gospel of eternal salvation (p. 71), and that the salvation in Hebrews 2:3 is a reference to eternal salvation as well (p. 77). The author of the chapter on the Gospel makes it clear that he feels fruit bearing and conduct are necessary for eternal salvation (p. 130). Dispensationalists will not agree with the Reformed view that God has not created two groups of people, the descendants of Israel and the church (p. 110).

The chapter on the Gospel attempts to take away the “tension” in the Bible between a salvation by grace through faith alone and the need for good works. There is a recognition that all Christians sin (p. 133), so how can a believer be sure that he is a good tree that produces good fruit (Matt 7:17-20)? The book of 1 John is the book that most clearly reveals this tension. D. A. Carson, the author, says that John says that if we are not obedient to Christ, we are not Christians, and that those born of God do not sin (p. 139). Carson answers the tension by saying that the calls for good works are not statements, but commands (p. 141). Nobody fulfills commands perfectly. Unfortunately, to this reviewer, this does not solve the “tension.”

Fortunately, these references are, with the exception of the last chapter, only a minor part of the book. The vast majority of the book deals with issues of which readers of the *JOTGES* will agree. There is indeed a major cultural shift going on that attacks the truth claims of Christianity.

David Wells uses the account of Paul at Mars Hill in Acts 17 and argues that our day is very similar. The intellectuals on Mars Hill saw as valid the claims of many gods. Paul, however, points them to the true God. All others are idols. Christ is the one who will judge the world, as His resurrection shows (Acts 17:31, p. 36). We should engage our postmodern world as Paul did.

Peter Jones points out that postmodernism brings with it a spirituality that celebrates subjective experience and moves away from a religion that has transcendent meaning (p. 48). There is a rise in Europe of pagan spirituality and a demise of Christianity.

Richard Phillips states that the doctrine of salvation by faith alone is a major difference between Christianity and neopagan postmodernity (p. 64). He agrees with Jones that the postmodern viewpoint suggests we should engage in mysticism. But the mystic experiences of today are simply a modern day return to paganism (p. 67). Phillips points out that the problem with mankind is not the lack of tolerance, but sin.

Philip Ryken writes that there is not a single major doctrine of the Christian faith that is not under attack by postmodernism. But the greatest attack is on the Christian claim that some things are true and others are false. Postmodernism has greatly impacted the church. A recent survey says that only nine percent of evangelical students believe in anything called “absolute truth” (p. 84). He correctly states that if there are no absolute statements, then not even the postmodern insistence on tolerance can be called an absolute (p. 93). The answer to postmodernism by the Christian community should be to be a community in which not only the truth is proclaimed, but one in which love for one another is evident (p. 106). The postmodern world would then see the truth of Christianity in action.

Even the chapter on the Gospel has things in it of which the readers of the *JOTGES* will agree. Christianity offers just one Gospel and this is “irritating” to the pluralistic nature of postmodernism (p. 127). One of the purposes of the Sermon on the Mount is that we cannot justify ourselves by good deeds (p. 137). If John is giving tests for eternal life in 1 John, we are all excluded (p. 139).

Of course, the writers of this book would not give a Free Grace presentation of the Gospel. However, they are correct in saying that if we take a high view of the claims of Christianity, our view of the Scriptures, God, the Gospel, and the Church will run counter to the philosophy of

this age. It is impacting the churches we all attend. There is apologetic value to this book. It also reminds us of the changes taking place. For these reasons, I recommend the book.

Kenneth W. Yates
Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

God's Providence: He Cares for You. By Mark J. Lenz. Milwaukee, WI: Northwestern Publishing House, 2000. 146 pp. Paper, \$14.50.

In *God's Providence: He Cares for You*, Mark J. Lenz explains the doctrine of providence in a way suitable for an Adult Bible Study class.

The book is written in a personal style, with direct addresses to the reader. It seems to have grown out of a pastoral need to help Christians understand and trust in God's provision during times of trouble. "God doesn't promise you a trouble-free life," Lenz explains in the introduction, "but he does promise that when troubles come, he will care for you" (p. 11).

Lenz's presentation of God's providence can be summarized under three headings: *secondary causes*, *concurrence*, and *contingency*.

First, God works through *secondary causes*. God exercises His care of the world using things and agents in the world. For example, God provides a roof over your head, but not by dropping a pre-fab home from the sky. Instead, He uses secondary means such as carpenters, electricians, plumbers, and heating specialists. Likewise, God protects our neighborhoods through police officers (pp. 51-52). He also feeds us through farmers, millers, bakers, delivery men, and grocers. Lenz challenges us to look at the network of provision in our lives in light of God's providential care, so that we recognize that He is ultimately behind it all, working through the people and things around us as secondary causes: "We are the ones who move, who place one foot in front of the other. We are the people who exist. But unless God were the primary cause, we could not live or move or exist for a moment" (p. 53).

Second, Lenz says that, as part of His providence, God *concur*s with creation. "God is completely separate from everything he has made. Yet nothing can happen without his concurrence" (p. 34). Lenz says that everything happens because God allows it to happen. This is even true

of evil. That does not mean God is the author of evil. On the contrary, Lenz points out that God forbids evil (the Ten Commandments), prevents evil (Gen 20:6), uses evil for good (Gen 50:20), and permits it (Prov 1:31). But God concurs with evil in the sense that He makes the actions possible, without agreeing with the evil itself. He puts it this way: “we must conclude that God went along with those actions only to the extent that they were actions, not that they were evil” (p. 71).

Third, Lenz says that God uses *contingency* to care for creation. This means that God rarely intervenes in a direct and miraculous way. The classic case would be an illness. If we get ill, it would be wrong to expect to be instantly healed by God without availing ourselves of physicians and medicines, because our healing is contingent on using the means that God provides, and He has provided us with doctors and medicines: “When we are seriously ill, we need to go to a doctor. We need to take seriously the remedies our doctor suggests” (p. 84). Also, Lenz counsels us to take advantage of the other means God provides to prolong our life, such as eating well, exercising, being obedient, and avoiding danger. Doing these things can lead to God prolonging our life (e.g., Exod 20:12), while disobeying God can lead to a shortened life (e.g., Gen 38:7). Likewise, what holds true for physical healing also holds true for spiritual healing. It too is contingent on using the means God uses to feed our souls, which for Lenz, include baptism, communion, and the Word (pp. 86-89). If we don’t avail ourselves of those means God has provided, we will be spiritually sick.

Lenz concludes the book by saying that “the doctrine of providence is a very comforting doctrine” not least because it directs our attentions away from our real problems, “to God and his concern for me” (p. 133). I was comforted by this book. Lenz does a good job of warning against the kind of “rollercoaster” spirituality that always to always to God to provide through extraordinary miracles, experiences, and signs (that never seem to come). Instead, he challenges us to see the true comfort of recognizing God’s provision through very ordinary means. I recommend this book.

Shawn Lazar

Associate Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

The New Evangelicals: Expanding the Vision of the Common Good. By Maria Pally. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011. 268 pp. Paper, \$20.00.

Marcia Pally is a professor at New York University. In this book, she makes the case that there is a growing tendency among American evangelicals to move more toward the left in their political leanings. These “New Evangelicals” generally maintain a stress on individual salvation and freedom of conscience, but they combine it with the performance of good works in society at large. She claims these people are distributed across Protestant denominations and make up roughly 25% of the population (p. 22).

In the past, evangelicals have solidly sided with the Republican Party. New Evangelicals still generally support the Party but they are willing to deviate in certain areas. Evangelicals have realized that their allegiance to the Party have caused them to become part of the state apparatus and made them complicit in supporting unjust wars and government lies. This has led the New Evangelicals to look at each issue by itself. In many issues, they support the Democratic Party. However, a strong shift to the Democratic Party in elections is unlikely because of evangelical opposition to abortion and a preference for small government (p. 27).

She interviews Richard Cizik, the former vice president of the National Association of Evangelicals, who says that the New Evangelicals are antimilitaristic, anti-consumeristic, and focus on poverty relief, immigration reform, and environmental protection (p. 17).

The New Evangelicals support a “liberal” democracy. This means that they hold to a strict separation of church and state. Everybody has the freedom of conscience to worship as they see fit. The state is also responsible for the just treatment of all people. In the past, they feel that the Republican Party has sought for support from evangelicals by promoting the Christian religion. Government should not do that. This has left other religions out. New Evangelicals recognize that if we argue that a Christian pharmacist should not have to sell medicine that causes an abortion, a Muslim storeowner should not have to sell pork.

Pally interviews many of these New Evangelicals in her book. They are from various denominations and Christian organizations. They are diverse in their beliefs. One pastor proudly proclaims that his church has ministries that deal with substance abuse, cancer care, foster

children, the homeless, offers free food, helps the deaf in the community as well as people struggling with homosexuality (p. 4). Another says that Christianity is not about personal salvation, but in giving and serving others, and seeing what you can do (p. 5).

The cultural shift in American has caused attitudinal shifts among evangelicals in things such as sex and global connectedness. New Evangelicals, for example, are much more accepting of homosexual rights and marriage (p. 229). They are much less judgmental about such things.

Another factor in this shift was the younger Bush's presidency. Many evangelicals saw that they supported his policies, especially torture and an unjust war, and they realized they acted against the teachings of Jesus and that being tied with government so closely cannot be the "godly way" (p. 21).

Older evangelicals were associated with opposition to abortion and gay marriage, supported laissez-fair capitalism, and were judgmental towards others. This judgmental attitude was reflected in their insistence upon personal salvation as well as morality. This attitude goes back to the turn of the twentieth century. Evangelicals felt that the social gospel did not spend enough time on saving souls. The rise of dispensationalism, premillennialism, and the holiness movement all directed Christians to look at the world to come, and not this present world. (pp. 53-54)

But there is an earthquake occurring in the evangelical world. Younger evangelicals are not interested in winning elections, but making a difference around the world. Even organizations like Dallas Theological Seminary and the Southern Baptist Convention are joining the green movement. Some evangelicals are working with the pro-abortion Planned Parenthood in order to help poor women have fewer abortions by combating things like poverty (pp. 99-101).

New Evangelicals see Jesus as a society builder. If we follow the teachings of Jesus seriously, lives of service and sacrifice will change the world. We can accept Jesus as savior, but godly love, expressed in service to others and the world, can change things (pp. 130-32)

Concern for the environment among New Evangelicals is a view that not only moves away from dispensational teachings, but also sees creation as something that Christians have a "stewardship" for. The stopping of global warming is a Christian imperative (pp. 221-22).

The book does not deal much with the gospel. One New Evangelical says she is troubled by the idea that if you don't believe in Jesus you are going to hell. The God of love created us with so much diversity. We shouldn't just cross people off who don't believe in Jesus (p. 9). Patty would admit that not all New Evangelicals would state it this way. However, it is clear that this growing movement would put much less emphasis on doctrinal clarity and evangelism.

I recommend this book. The various interviews make it very easy to read. Many would agree that the church in America has often become too entwined with the Republican Party. There is a change occurring in Protestant churches. Many are alarmed when they see how the next generation of those within Christendom sees things like the Gospel and certain moral issues. In many instances, there seems to be a shift from a focus on the world to come to this present world. We need to be aware of what is happening. This book gives a glimpse of this shift.

Kenneth W. Yates

Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

God at Work: Your Christian Vocation in All of Life. By Gene Edward Veith. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2002, 2011. 176 pages. Paper, \$15.99.

In *God at Work*, Gene Edward Veith introduces the Lutheran doctrine of vocation and thereby presents a different way of understanding the meaning and purpose of the Christian life.

The term "vocation" comes from the Latin *vocatio* meaning "calling." The medieval church thought of vocation in a strictly monastic sense. The only God-given callings were to become a nun, monk, or a priest. Every other way of life was thought of as being of lesser importance.

Luther changed that perspective by drastically expanding the nature of God's calling. He taught that not every God-given vocation was explicitly pastoral (e.g. the calling to be a pastor, missionary, or teacher). Even the most mundane of "wordly" vocations were given to us from God and could accomplish an important spiritual work (p. 19). According to Luther, ordinary human labor (which the church had implicitly

denigrated) could be spiritually satisfying and fulfilling because peasants, craftsmen, doctors, bakers, fathers, mothers, and children all had their proper vocation from God. A pastor preaching from the pulpit was no more spiritual than a father changing a diaper. Both activities pleased God and served His purposes:

Now you tell me, when a father goes ahead and washes diapers or performs some other mean task for his child, and someone ridicules him as an effeminate fool, though that father is acting in the spirit just described and in Christian faith, my dear fellow you tell me, which of the two is most keenly ridiculing the other? God, with all his angels and creatures, is smiling, not because that father is washing diapers, but because he is doing so in Christian faith. Those who sneer at him and see only the task but not the faith are ridiculing God with all his creatures, as the biggest fool on earth. Indeed, they are only ridiculing themselves; with all their cleverness they are nothing but devil's fools (Martin Luther, "The Estate of Marriage").

Although Luther's emphasis on the spiritual benefit of ordinary human work was itself a major transformation of the medieval approach, Luther's understanding of how God's providence was accomplished through our ordinary vocations was even more radical.

Many people have an overly supernatural view of how God operates in the world. They think that God only rarely intervenes in human affairs, usually through miracles. Otherwise, God seems absent. But Luther's doctrine of vocation brought God down to earth. Instead of rarely acting in the world, Luther taught that God was continuously working in and through our normal lives. He challenged people to see that God accomplishes His providential care for the world through our vocations (p. 23). According to Luther, vocation is a "mask of God." That is to say, God hides Himself in the work that we do. It is not obvious that is God is at work. But no matter how mundane our vocations may appear, God uses it work out His purposes.

To take just one example, consider how this changes the meaning of modern medicine. There are many religious groups who consider it a lack of faith to take someone to see a doctor. They want God to heal, and they understand God's healing solely in miraculous terms. Even Evangelicals who are cessationists often think that being healed through normal medical practices is somehow less wondrous and spiritual than

experiencing a healing during a revival meeting. But on the Lutheran view, this whole approach to miracle healing vs. modern medicine is tantamount to superstition. Once we understand that ordinary vocations are callings from God and that He uses them to accomplish His purposes, we will see modern medicine as part of God's providential care for the world. If a Pentecostal wants the gift of healing, he will fast, pray, repent, and implore God to give it to him. If a Lutheran wants the gift of healing, she will go to school to become a nurse or a doctor.

What holds true for healing is also true for most other vocations. God provides for us through ordinary means. Instead of speaking to us through eerie voices and visions, He uses Bibles and pastors who teach us His Word. Instead of dropping our daily bread from the sky, God feeds us through farmers, millers, bakers, and grocers. Instead of shirts and pants magically appearing in our closets, God clothes us through our employers, tailors, and department stores. If we are disappointed when we do not see miracles, it is not because God is absent from our lives, but because we lack the faith to see God at work in the ordinary things (p. 26).

This is a powerful book. It serves as a strong antidote to the danger of over-spiritualizing the Christian life. There are chapters describing what vocations are, God's purpose for them, and about how to discover the vocations we have as workers, family members, citizens, and church members. I personally benefited from reading it. As a new father, I was concerned that all the time I had to spend with my newborns was taking away from more "spiritual" pursuits like studying the Bible, spending quiet time with God, and writing theology. But Veith encouraged me to see that taking care of my children is one of my vocations from God and it is spiritually valuable in its own right. God is using me to care for my wife and children, and using them to minister to me. Being spiritual does not mean having to choose devotionals over diapers. Both are from God. Highly recommended.

Shawn Lazar

Associate Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

Faith Alone: The Condition of Our Salvation: An Exposition of the Book of Galatians and Other Relevant Topics. By Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, San Antonio, TX: Ariel Ministries, 2014. 144 pp. Paper, \$13.00.

Fruchtenbaum heads Ariel Ministries in San Antonio, TX. He has long championed what he calls Israelology, the study of the place of Israel in the Scriptures.

This book is partly a brief commentary on Galatians (pp. 1-72), partly a detailed proof that “the Israel of God” in Gal 6:16 refers to believing Jews, not to the Church as Replacement Theology argues (pp. 60-71), partly an explanation of why believers are no longer under the Law of Moses but are instead under the law of Messiah (pp. 73-90), and partly a defense against any additions to faith alone in Christ alone as the sole condition for everlasting life (pp. 91-134).

JOTGES readers will enjoy his explanation of Gal 5:19-21 (p. 53) and Gal 6:7-9 (p. 58). And they will applaud his discussion of false additions to faith as the sole condition of everlasting life.

Fruchtenbaum shows that Yahweh (YHWH) in the OT sometimes refers to the Lord Jesus (pp. 103-105), whom he routinely calls Yeshua.

I highly recommend this book in spite of the fact that it is a bit disjointed (commentary + related articles) and that it is a very small book. There are enough excellent insights given to make it well worth owning and reading carefully.

Robert N. Wilkin
Associate Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

The World Needs Monasticism. By Father Benedict. Blanco, TX: New Sarov Press, 1993. 36 pp. Paper, \$4.95.

Father Benedict was one of the founders of The Christ of the Hills Monastery in Blanco, TX, which belonged to the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia but has since closed down. In the booklet, *The World Needs Monasticism*, Father Benedict argues that monasticism is a prophetic witness to the world, a “purifying fire” for the Church, and a living witness of the “idea of the deification of man” (p. 6). The presence of monastics calls all Christians “to holiness, to repentance,”

and if we are not called to become monks ourselves, we are at least called to take on

the monastic practices of repentance for our sinfulness, discipleship to holy Spiritual Fathers, regular attendance at Divine Services and fervent prayer, especially the Jesus Prayer. We must open ourselves totally to the search for God through fasting, the transforming power of prayer, and the soaking up of the Holy Fathers—through monastic discipline that will lead us to an enlightened understanding of the Fathers of the Church (pp. 6-7).

Of the utmost importance is complete obedience to a Spiritual Father. “To attempt to advance in monastic life without complete obedience to the Spiritual Father is to run the risk of falling prey to vainglory, delusion, and the loss of one’s soul” (p. 14). That obedience can even extend to not taking a glass of water without the blessing of one’s Spiritual Father (p. 12).

According to Benedict, our eternal salvation depends on such obedience, including life-long repentance, discipleship, commitment to celebrating the feasts and festivals of the Orthodox Church’s liturgical calendar, prayer rules, and any number of acts of obedience to a Spiritual Father. As the author assures us, “The system works!” (p. 14).

This booklet takes on a chilling light when you find out that Father Benedict (real name was Samuel A. Greene, Jr.) was convicted of indecency with a child and confessed to his parole officer that he had sexually abused boys over a 30 year period. He committed suicide in 2007.

In light of Father Benedict’s crimes, the following sentence is absolutely skin crawling: “We should also encourage parents to make sure, as far as possible, that their children are exposed to monastic witness, even if this means pilgrimages over great distances to go to monastic centers where they can experience the reality of monastic life” (p. 35). Sadly, for the children who met Father Benedict, that meant exposure to sexual abuse.

Father Benedict claimed that asceticism works. He was dead wrong. The entire booklet can be read as cautionary tale against legalistic views of salvation.

Following God’s law has never saved anyone or made them better people (Rom 3:20; Gal 2:16). Preaching rules, regulations, and laws does not bring life, but death (2 Cor 3:6-9). It sounds good, though. It

sounds and looks very spiritual to follow complex rules of obedience. But as Paul warned the Colossians, although lifestyles such as monasticism have “a reputation of wisdom by promoting ascetic practices, humility, and severe treatment of the body, *they are not of any value in curbing self-indulgence*” (Col 2:23 HCSB, emphasis added). Asceticism does not work as advertized.

Contrary to what Father Benedict said, we will never be saved by following rules like “Only drink water with someone’s blessing.” Nonsense. There is only one way to have eternal life: believe in Jesus for it (John 3:16). As the Lord told the woman at the well:

“Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life” (John 4:13-14).

We shouldn’t place our hope of salvation in following laws or doing good works. Our only hope is that God justifies ungodly people who believe in Jesus (Rom 4:5). The world doesn’t need monasticism. It needs faith.

This booklet is not recommended.

Shawn Lazar
Associate Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

The Gift of Assurance. David J. Engelsma. South Holland, IL: Protestant Reformed Church, 2009. 61 pp. Paper, free upon request (\$1.00 each suggested donation for additional copies).

Engelsma is a five-point Calvinist. For 25 years he pastored two different Protestant Reformed Churches (1963-1988). Then he taught theology and Old Testament for 20 more years at Protestant Reformed Seminary (1988-2008).

In spite of all this, or possibly because of it, Engelsma sees a tremendous need among modern Calvinists to return to a Biblical understanding of assurance of everlasting life.

The positives of this booklet are many. First, the simple fact that Engelsma points out that lack of assurance is a problem is terrific.

Second, he defends the position that assurance is certainty. Third, he shows that assurance is of the essence of saving faith from Scripture (pp. 20-39) and from Calvin and the Heidelberg Catechism (pp. 15-18). Fourth, he calls the Puritan doctrine of assurance “unbiblical” (p. 25), “wretched” (p. 31), “heretical mysticism and spiritual rubbish” (p. 41), “illusory, deceiving, and perilous” (p. 42), and “forever instilling doubt” (p. 53).

There are a few minor negatives. First, the verses which Engelsma uses to prove that assurance is certainty and is of the essence of saving faith are not always the best ones to prove the point (e.g., Rom 8:16). It would have been better if he had primarily used passages from John’s Gospel. However, he does cite many verses on justification by faith alone, which proves his point well. Second, while he rejects seeking for feelings or looking at one’s works for assurance, he does suggest that lack of assurance may result if a believer is “not living a holy life, because of worldliness, or yielding to some temptation to sin” (p. 51).

I love this quote: “Assurance of salvation, therefore, is the expected, normal spiritual condition and state of mind of every regenerated, believing child of God. Assurance is not unusual, extraordinary, or remarkable in the congregation of believers and their children” (p. 19).

I also found this to be excellent: “It is no more possible for a sinner to be justified by faith without assurance of justification, salvation, and the love of God than it would be for a condemned criminal to depart the courtroom in which he had just heard a favorably disposed judge acquit him without knowing that he was acquitted and that the judge was gracious” (p. 35).

I highly recommend this booklet.

Robert N. Wilkin

Associate Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

Making Heretics: Militant Protestantism and Free Grace in Massachusetts, 1636–1641. By Michael P. Winship. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002, 2014. 322 pages. Paper, \$32.50.

This book recently came out as a paperback. In it, Winship deals with what is commonly called the “antinomian” controversy of the Puritans

in the Massachusetts colony in the seventeenth century. He prefers to call it the “free grace” controversy, and suggests that it was the most important event of that century in the American colonies.

Clearly this history would be of interest to many readers of the *JOTGES*. The losing side of the controversy called it the “legalism” controversy and claimed that their opponents were heretics for saying that obedience to God’s laws would save them (p. 1).

Winship maintains that the controversy cannot be understood simply as a religious debate. It also involved politics and strong personalities. John Cotton and Anne Hutchinson, leaders of the free grace side, were supported by Henry Vane, the ex-Governor of the colony. This caused the dispute to become visible. The opponents of the free grace side wanted to use the power of the state to purge those with whom they disagreed (pp. 7-9).

Assurance was a hot topic of debate in the controversy. Some theologians in England in the late sixteenth century said assurance was of the essence of saving faith and that sanctification sprang from assurance (p. 14). The Puritans, such as William Perkins and Richard Rogers, said that many did not have assurance and it could be found through hard work and visible piety. Those that had doubts should pursue sanctification more fervently. Over time, they began to trust their good works in order to save themselves (p. 16).

The Puritans held that doubts and fear about one’s salvation were good things and a mark of godliness (p. 17) A leading opponent of the free grace movement said one could conclude he was spiritually saved if he was convinced he was not actually saved but genuinely desired Christ to deliver him. Unfortunately, one hears similar things today when it comes to assurance.

This lack of assurance among the Puritans had the practical affect of lay people coming to the pastors to find assurance. Ministers would tell them what they needed to do to find this assurance, which included a commitment to the community of believers. Some parishioners complained that this was the same thing they saw in Catholicism, where the people go to the priests to gain a measure of assurance. Interestingly, Winship points out that this was a departure from the original Reformers.

Other Puritans said that assurance was the result of the witness of the Holy Spirit. Some Christians had this witness while others did not

(p. 22). This led some parishioners to seek assurance through a kind of mystical/charismatic inner witness and communion with the Holy Spirit. The reliance on the ministry of the Holy Spirit led into other kinds of error. The opponents of the free grace movement worried that assurance of salvation would lead to moral laxity and charismatic revelations.

Winship says that the issues over free grace and assurance were very complicated. There were free grace lay people who attended churches where the pastors taught contrary doctrine. In addition, mainstream puritan ministers differed on these issues between themselves (p. 26).

John Cotton came from England in 1633 and brought with him a form of free grace theology. Christians received assurance through the promise of Christ, but the Holy Spirit would give a more complete assurance. It appears that Cotton taught a kind of gradual assurance. At first, the mainstream Puritans were tolerant of free grace views even though they were uncomfortable with the teaching (pp. 35-36).

Anne Hutchinson arrived a year after Cotton. Prior to her arrival, she had struggled with assurance but realized that when she lacked assurance and looked at her sanctification to obtain it she had turned from grace to works to save her. Winship says that even though she was misunderstood, and many today would question the leading of the Holy Spirit in her life, Hutchinson did not receive “immediate” or “extra-scriptural” revelations from God. Like Cotton, she was more or less accepted at first (pp. 40-42).

Hutchinson and others on the free grace side did rely on “revelation” from the Spirit. However, this revelation would come from the Scriptures. God would emphasize a verse to a person, and the verse would speak of grace. This would be taken as a sign that God was telling them they were saved.

Vane was the one who brought the free grace issue to the forefront. He encouraged Hutchinson in her beliefs. Winship points out that just as in the mainstream camp, there were differences of opinion among free grace adherents as well. We cannot speak monolithically about either group. Hutchinson, for example, had strange beliefs. These included that the physical body itself would not rise (pp. 50-55).

Before it became a controversy, Hutchinson was tolerated because she and her free grace people were outwardly godly. The vast majority of people did not understand the differences in theology. In addition,

Hutchinson had a fairly large number of what could loosely be called followers. Winship says that some even saw the differences as healthy as it caused Christians to search the Scriptures for clarity. The differences were generally seen as petty (p. 62).

Hutchinson was eventually brought up on charges, put on trial, and excommunicated. However, even after the trials, there were differences of opinion. The controversy went on for at least three more years (p. 211). Some even in the mainstream did not think the issues were very serious. Some of those who were excommunicated started their own churches. Some of those opposed to free grace theology began to emphasize even more strongly the necessity of good works for salvation and assurance.

Winship strongly believes that the problem came to the forefront because political people like Vane and a popular preacher like Cotton became involved. Cotton was popular in both the colonies and England as a speaker. After the controversy, he once again enjoyed that status.

The book is informative because it shows that a theological debate can have others factors driving the controversy. For instance, Vane was involved politically both in the colony and in England. It may be that his support of Hutchinson was based partially on political considerations. Winship believes that Puritanism was flexible enough to allow theological differences and that these other factors dictated what happened.

For the readers of the *JOTGES*, this book shows that the issues of assurance and the essence of saving faith are not things that only recently appeared on the theological scene. It is safe to say that people in Christendom have wondered about these things from the very beginning. Winship reminds us that even in theological controversies it is possible that people have various motives. The book is very well annotated. It is not an easy read because it deals with many different people and different intrigues. It also uses many quotes using seventeenth century English. Since Winship deals with motives, not all historical scholars agree with his findings. However, the book is extremely interesting and deals with issues near and dear to those who are involved in the Free Grace movement. I highly recommend the book.

Kenneth Yates

Editor

Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society

